A CONSULTATIVE CONFLICT-RESOLUTION MODEL: BEYOND ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE-RESOLUTION

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Abstract

In this article, the authors use the consultative intervention model to offer a critique of institutionalized mediation. The three defining features of the consultative intervention model are that it is proactive, unity centered, and educative. Conventional mediation is shown to be insufficiently concerned with these three features and structured in a manner that is antithetical to some aspects of the consultative worldview. If concerns about worldview and unity are to be integrated into our conflict resolution practice and lexicon, the willingness to experiment extensively with new processes and to abandon negative aspects of existing modes is required.

Conflict–resolution processes are multilayered. On the surface these processes comprise of a set of skills and steps that combine to form a particular design toward a particular end. When we speak of mediation, for example, we typically talk in terms of the skills of intervening, listening, and being neutral, and of steps including opening statements, brainstorming, and caucusing. Below this surface level there exists a realm of mental constructs and perceptions that shape the choice of skills and steps, as well as their integration and application. The attitude toward the structure of reality, the purpose of life and existence, and the appropriate forms of action frame and help to shape the process. Even deeper under the surface is the realm of context; conflict-resolution processes are born within and arise out of specific historical, cultural, and social contexts. Often, in fact, they are the product of multiple contexts and traditions.

This multidimensional reality of mediation is often implied but is not explicitly emphasized. We tend to remain particularly focused on the surface layer (skills and steps) often at the expense of developing a deeper understanding of the larger implications and significance of our actions and participation. This approach makes sense given the emphasis on praxis that has dominated much of the contemporary study of conflict resolution. In a world with a burgeoning "cult of efficiency," there is little time, space or

tolerance for looking deeply below the surface, especially when the surface seems to work, is popular, and has a growing and deserved positive reputation (Stein, 2001).

Nevertheless, there are costs for focusing primarily on the surface level. First, it obfuscates the political dimensions of advocating and participating in particular conflict-resolution processes by making them appear as neutral. Conceived of as a set of skills and steps, mediation does not appear to connote any particular set of social meanings, and participation in it does not necessarily imply advocacy or consent to a particular political position. However, mediation carries with it a unique worldview that is the product of particular contextual realities, and as such participation within it positions one as an unconscious advocate of a perhaps undesirable political stance. One clear example of this is the debate over the effect of the use of alternative processes on the securing of rights for minorities and legally or socially disadvantaged groups. The use of alternatives potentially privatizes conflicts where there exists a significant public interest that could have a potentially significant impact on the development of law and policy. Second, focusing on the surface level makes processes appear as static and ahistorical, or more precisely, beyond history. The reality of mediation in the contemporary world is that it is the product of both a general and specific dynamic process of historical, cultural, and social evolution. The general process is one of a gradual, growing rejection of violence and authoritarianism as appropriate approaches to resolving human conflict, and a movement toward themes of consensus and peace. The specific process is that of a change within the political and legal cultures of many parts of the world in the second half of the twentieth century and a concomitant expansion in our understanding of psychological and social dynamics of conflict and violence.

In another article (Danesh and Danesh, 2002), we discuss the consultative intervention model, which reflects three main postulates that we consider important for conflict resolution: (1) conflict-resolution practices reflect particular worldviews; (2) worldviews exist in a gradual, evolutionary process; and (3) some worldviews are more prone to conflict and violence, while others to unity and peace. This has led us to design and practice a new method of conflict resolution—called Conflict-Free Conflict Resolution or CFCR—that is a conscious attempt at the construction of a consultative process.   This article explores the implications of the consultative intervention model for conflict-resolution practice. Critiques of institutionalized mediation are interspersed but not exhaustive: the three defining features of the consultative intervention model—that is, proactive, unity centered, and educative—are largely missing from the predominant mediation model.

Proactive Conflict Resolution

We have to resolve conflicts every day of our lives. Typically, these conflicts are resolved informally, without the intervention of any third party or process, and in such

instances we do indeed often see the proactive effects of our earlier conflict- resolution experiences: we are more patient and understanding; show greater foresight and knowledge; and are more attuned to how to defuse situations satisfactorily before they become heated. This informal, autonomous, and diffuse way human beings learn how to resolve their conflicts is crucially important for any family, workplace, or community. By contributing to the development of socially shared meanings and norms about how the conflict will be dealt with, it allows for a basic culture of civility and unity to exist, by contributing to the development of socially shared meanings and norms about how conflict will be dealt with.

When conflict moves beyond this microcosmic level and requires outside intervention, the issue of whether the conflict-resolution experience has a proactive effect is more complex. The term proactive has not been used extensively in conflict-resolution literature. We use the term "proactive conflict resolution" to stress the orientation that engagement in conflict-resolution processes should significantly re-order the future intensity and incidence of conflict for the parties. In our usage, the term "proactive" connotes the creation of a state of unity in which the appearance or repetition of conflict is increasingly unlikely. This is somewhat distinct from a preventative orientation that stresses preventing an intensification of a pre-existing conflict, or the re-appearance of a specific set of conditions likely to give rise to a conflict. One notable example of existing literature that touches on similar themes is John Burton's concept of "provention" (Burton, 1990).

What would a proactive effect look like? There are three main possibilities. First, a disputant could leave a conflict-resolution process better insulated against the harms related to being involved in conflict. Disputants could have a better understanding of how to deal with the psychological and physical toll that conflict can have on individuals, their relationships, and their lives. Second, a disputant could leave a process better prepared to avoid recurrence of conflict. In other words, disputants may learn how to downsize and manage their conflicts effectively so that disputes can be effectively dealt with prior to requiring outside intervention. There are a range of skills disputants may learn from being involved in the process that can help them outside of it, including how to manage the emotional dimensions of the conflict, how to identify their true objectives, and how to listen and communicate more effectively. Third, a disputant may learn how to approach situations in a way that significantly lessens the appearance of conflict in the first place. This learning might be rooted in skills development, but it also rests upon a shift in how individuals understand and conceive of the dynamics of their relationships with others.

It remains empirically uncertain and nebulous to what degree participation in contemporary processes of conflict resolution, most notably mediation, has these proactive effects. It is a difficult issue to study empirically, and the field of conflict resolution is still young in its use of a variety of research methods and techniques.

It is a fair observation, however, that institutionalized mediation is not structurally designed to have these proactive effects. For a conflict-resolution process to be a

proactive agent in the terms described above, it requires that the potential extra-dispute positive outcomes be consciously engaged with and addressed within the mediation process itself. Conventional mediation has often been criticized for failing to do so. It tends toward narrowing the conflict to a set of practical and often material specifics that are discrete and manageable. Other values of participation, such as the potentially positive proactive effects, are often subordinated to the overriding objective of a particular, neat and efficient outcome to the specific dispute. There is nothing innately wrong with this valuing. When people go to mediation to resolve conflict, their prime objective is to settle the issues before them and move on with life. Institutionalized mediation attempts such resolution. Nonetheless, there are limitations associated with this narrow focus.

First, to the degree there is an assumption that within a process we can only have one or the other—either quick, efficient resolution of a narrowly construed dispute or a conscious engagement with potentially proactive outcomes—this is a falsity. In other words, such an attitude sells mediation and conflict-resolution processes short. The hard work of engendering within individuals the needed awareness and consciousness of the relationship between their particular conflict and how mediation contributes to its resolution, and the role and place of conflict in their lives is an issue that can be addressed structurally and stylistically without eroding the possibilities for quick and efficient outcomes. Transformative mediation can be recast in these terms: a response to the inappropriately drawn line between the inner life of disputants and the external goal of resolving a social conflict. Transformative mediation removes this line by inviting inner reflection into the process, in particular reflection on the nature and meaning of relationships. This refocusing is accomplished not through collapsing mediation into psychoanalysis, but by changes to the objectives and approach of mediation and concomitant shifts in the style of the mediator that have the effect of orienting the disputants to additional outcomes other than primarily distributive ones.

Second is the issue of the meaning of "resolution" of a conflict. The narrow construction of "resolution" in conventional mediation ignores the primary lesson of our model that suggests both the intensity of the appearance of conflict and the ways of pursuing conflict resolution are tied to one's worldview. Certain worldviews are more prone to conflict, while others are not, meaning that the potential for a process to be a proactive agent depends upon the worldview according to which it operates and how it interacts with the worldviews of the disputants. Proactive conflict- resolution requires somehow making participants aware of this connection between their worldview, the conflict they are in, and how that conflict is resolved. Only when this awareness occurs is the potential for long-term positive effects fully maximized. It is important to note as well the relationship between worldview, resolution, culture, and context. Bonta comments that in "small-scale" societies the tendency toward peaceful conflict resolution "is based, primarily, on their world-views of peacefulness—a complete rejection of violence" whereas "the Western world-view boils down to an acceptance of the inevitability of

conflict and violence" (1996: 404). The implication is that in cross-cultural contexts engagement at the level of worldview is required in order to give meaning to the idea of resolution. At the same time, historically predominant patterns of cultural bias and difference often result in the subordination of resolution to existing power structures and differentials. As "we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals" (Lorde, 1984: 115), the result is that "familiar cultural images and long-established legal norms construct the subjectivity and speech of socially subordinated persons as inherently inferior to the speech and personhood of dominant groups… . These conditions…undermine the capacity of many persons in our society to use the procedural rituals that are formally available to them" (White, quoted in Fox, 1996: 105). The possibilities of meaningful change-oriented discourse is thus lessened and devalued by the relationship of worldview, power, and culture.

Institutionalized mediation, by not promoting this conscious interaction at the level of worldview, can therefore have the unintended consequence of normalizing particular attitudes toward the meaning and nature of conflict. In some subtle respects it could be said that conventional mediation actually encourages more social conflict, increasing resort to third-party intervention, as opposed to developing the life skills and worldview needed for autonomous construction of more peaceful lives. A central feature of institutionalized mediation that encourages these effects is its narrowing of the conflict to make it manageable—a process that also has the effect of decontextualizing the conflict. Baruch-Bush and Folger (1994: 61) write that "bargaining mediators address interests that are mostly viewed as problems; they narrow concerns, keep tight control over interaction, and move steadily toward solutions that are mutually acceptable" and link this "bottom-line thinking" to the negation of the role that deeper emotions and a complex history play in shaping a conflict.

This minimalist account of conflict sends a message to disputants that conflict is an unavoidable social reality, part of the fabric of social relationships, and something to be responded to by a focus on a distributive outcome--while reinforcing a sense that the conflict is not deeply rooted in individual concepts of the world, of others, and of notions of acceptable behavior, ideas, and attitudes. A potential effect of this sense over the long-term is that an ethical distance arises between individual self-awareness, growth, and transformation on the one hand, and social situations and relationships that result in conflict on the other. In so doing, the line between individual choices and internal processes, and the conflicts involving them may get increasingly obfuscated. In this reality, conflict becomes easier to enter into, and third-party intervention will be called upon more frequently. The minimalist meaning of conflict gets translated into a set of social norms that discourage self-management of conflicts and encourage third-party intervention. Contrary to popular conflict-resolution discourse, in this reading of conventional mediation, it is potentially a significant force of individual disempowerment.

There is a simple social observation that drives this critique of institutionalized mediation and the argument for a focus on proactive conflict resolution: While there is tremendous growth in the study, use, and training in alternative methods of conflict resolution, people tend to feel that their lives and the communities in which they live are less peaceful and more conflict ridden. This paradox suggests that we are not doing nearly as much as we could in exploring how conflict resolution takes place and affects society-at-large. The worldview of the consultative intervention model suggests that the route to a proactive practice of conflict resolution is one that places proactive outcomes on an equal level with the finite outcomes of a process and that the pathway to doing so is through conscious engagement with participants about these possible effects. The specific ways in which the consultative intervention model would go about accomplishing this engagement are encapsulated in the argument for educative and unity-centered conflict resolution.

Educative Conflict Resolution

The link between conflict resolution and worldview established in our model raises difficult and intriguing questions for the practice of conflict resolution. The pervasiveness and complex map of worldviews within any attempt to resolve a conflict— as the disputants, the intervener, and the process each carry with them worldviews— suggests that results of resolution attempts may be significantly shaped by how the various worldviews have interacted and been understood. At the same time, it presents the necessity to review and examine how conflict-resolution processes currently engage with the question of worldview and the possibilities of how processes might accomplish this engagement.

Conventional mediation is not designed to engage at the level of worldview. In its conception as "negotiation carried out with the assistance of a third party" (Goldberg, Sander, and Rogers, 1992: 103), mediation maintains the primary commitment to disputant autonomy present in negotiation. This commitment to disputant autonomy has been largely conceived in wholly subjective and individualistic terms. Autonomy is seen as rooted in the individual choices being made by a disputant concerning her or his interests and goals in engaging in the process. One scholar summarizes that "according to conventional wisdom, the implicit purpose of negotiation is to serve one's interests" (Fox, 1996: 95–96). Further, "power [is] conceived as the ability to alter outcomes according to one's preferences and builds from a baseline in which negotiators presumably feel entitled to develop and use such preferences" (Fox, 1996: 96). As a popular conflict- resolution text puts it, "Negotiation is a basic means of getting what you want from others. It is a back-and-forth communication designed to reach an agreement when you and the other side have some interests that are shared and others that are opposed" (Fisher, Ury, and Patton, 1991: xvii).

Dilemmas with this model are increasingly being noted. Like the traditional concept of negotiation as a whole, the place of autonomy within it stresses self-interest at the expense of social context. "The dominant paradigm is overly simplistic" in that "it relies too much on the assumption that negotiators are always trying to maximize their self-interest. It ignores the social context of negotiation, overlooking such important phenomena as social norms, relationships between negotiators, group decision processes, and the behavior of third parties" (Pruitt and Carnevale, 1993: 8). It has been noted that "[t]he fixed-pie perception is the belief that one's own interests are completely opposed to those of the other party" (Thompson, Valley, and Kramer, 1995: 468). This "fixed-pie bias" is so entrenched that "when negotiators are provided with information designed to refute the fixed-pie perception, many continue to persevere in this belief" (Thompson and DeHarpport: 1994 referenced in Thompson, Valley, and Kramer, 1995: 468–69).

Autonomy, in other words, is better construed as a function of context. It is a relational and reflexive phenomenon. One's autonomy will be heightened in some relationships and lessened in others, depending on the patterns of interaction with the various participants involved. How one person perceives and expresses his or her autonomy may impact upon the degree of another's autonomy and how it is expressed as well. At the same time, autonomy has an objective dimension. In some contexts and surroundings, the autonomy of similarly situated individuals will be understood and expressed with the same degree of depth and intensity, and in a similar manner, because the context promotes and structures that response. One study of the treatment of low-income persons in court-sanctioned negotiation processes noted the following:

> In the sanction effect, tenants are punished for exercising self-agency assertively. In the subversion effect, tenants assert their interests, but their efforts are rebuffed or ignored. Because direct use of self-agency was ineffective, tenants often distort their agentic expression in order to protect their most fundamental interest— shelter. In the silencing effect, people of authority refuse to speak directly to tenants, confirming and reinforcing tenants' lack of self-agency (Fox, 1996: 105).

The challenges posed by this contextual understanding of autonomy for conventional mediation are well highlighted through the lens of worldview. Certain worldviews tend more to submission and others to assertive self-expression. As well, modes and styles of communication are shaped by the worldviews animating them. The individualistic autonomy inherent within the current models of negotiation and conventional mediation are, as such, biased toward a particular worldview and thus favor disputants who primarily conceive of and respond to the world as a power struggle. In this respect, mediator neutrality is anything but neutral. It favors, though unintentionally, certain disputants and disputing behavior over others.

The response of the consultative intervention model to these dilemmas with contemporary mediation practice is actively to conceive of conflict-resolution processes as learning zones. Specifically, engaging in a conflict-resolution process should furnish

the participants with an opportunity for learning about self, others, and the way conflicts emerge. Allowing this learning to occur will have two potential effects: first, it may facilitate a proactive conflict-resolution practice because it will engage the disputants in conscious reflection; and second, it may facilitate a more harmonious, meaningful process with better outcomes because disputants will be reflecting upon the nature of conflict and their conflicting behavior in the context of trying to settle the specific matter before them.

Process as a learning zone could mean many things, and some of the options one can imagine would be quite unrealistic and ineffective. The purpose is not to turn a conflict-resolution process into a training seminar. Nor is to become a lecture or a therapy session where individuals explore the deeper recesses of their psyche. All of these other approaches to learning replace the resolution aspect of the process as opposed to deepening and augmenting it. Our vision of process as a learning zone has three aspects: worldview self-education; education as challenge and transparency; and education and unity.

Worldview Self-Education

Disputants in a conflict-resolution process should be given the opportunity and encouraged to become aware of and reflect upon their own worldviews, the predominant worldviews that exist, and their connection to conflict and conflict-resolution processes. The argument that supports the utility of this approach can be expressed in a very straightforward manner: Certain worldviews are more likely to facilitate quicker, more peaceful, and more satisfactory outcomes than others. The challenge for disputants is to become aware of how their worldview affects the attempts to resolve the present conflict, and why and how certain other behaviors and approaches may be justified if they wish to attempt resolution.

There are many ways within a process to effect such a form of educative self-reflection. Transformative mediation tries to accomplish self-reflection by making apparent and primary moments of other-centeredness and self-awareness as these get expressed through the process. Our understanding of the consultative intervention model is that the encouragement to educative self-reflection should be more conscious and explicit. For example, opening monologues need not be constrained to outlining a generic description of a process and clarifying financial or other ancillary issues. Rather, an opening monologue could extend to a form of more substantive engagement simply by offering disputants an explanation for the rationale underlying the process in which they are about to engage. Such an explanation could include a statement of the connection between worldview and conflict resolution, the predominant matrix of worldviews present, and the need to be aware of these perspectives as disputants attempt to communicate to pursue a solution. This opening engagement then becomes a template for later intervention and further educative effects. When the process stalls or breaks down, a

resort to further, more explicit education may be welcomed by the disputants and may be an avenue toward disputants' finding a way to keep the process moving.

Education as Challenge and Transparency

There are some unintended and inappropriate connotations associated with the use of the term "education" in this context. People do not come to conflict-resolution processes to be educated, and it is presumptuous to assume that individuals whom one has typically never met are in need of any form of education. However, the point is not for the intervener to become an educator. If this were to occur, conflict resolution would typically not be successful. What educates in this model is the process itself. The process should reinforce self-reflection and other-centered understanding at the level of worldview. This result can be achieved by recognizing that self-education occurs in the context of challenge and engagement, not indulgence and excessive comfort. People who are driven to evaluate themselves and their approach to an issue typically do so because they have been offered a vision of alternative choices about how the situation can be dealt with and given the opportunity to make their own choices.

In the context of our model, the challenge to be offered to disputants is quite straightforward. First, it must be clearly stated that worldviews, approaches to resolution of conflict, and outcomes are all interrelated. Second, the process must be transparent and make clear the worldview underlying the approach to conflict resolution that is being offered to disputants. Making these points is ethical, fair, and educative. It invites introspection on how individuals go about resolving conflicts and the role of their worldviews in those choices, and welcomes them to evaluate whether it is possible and equitable for them to proceed in the process the intervener is offering.

Education and Unity

This challenge and transparency in the consultative intervention model will always revolve around the issue of unity. The consultative process challenges disputants to explore how they can build a degree of unity in the situation before them and to conceive of the outcome of the process as one of building a more stable and substantive basis of unity between them. As such, a consultative process will invite disputants to view their particular conflict from the matrix of disunity–unity. The role of unity is discussed further in the next section of the article.

Combining these three components of conflict-resolution processes as learning zones, the vision of what a consultative process must do becomes obvious. It should invite participants consciously to reflect on the range of predominant worldviews and the relationship of those worldviews to approaches to resolving conflict. It should challenge them to conceive and act within the process according to the worldview of the consultative intervention model or another mode that is also centered on unity.

Unity-Centered Conflict Resolution

Thus far it has been argued that the consultative intervention model implies the efficacy of proactive and educative processes of conflict resolution. An understanding of these proactive and educative dimensions of conflict resolution is, however, incomplete without a full understanding of the core element of the consultative intervention model— unity. The worldview of unity as proposed in the developmental paradigm of conflict resolution offers a severe critique of alternative dispute-resolution models. This critique becomes more apparent when viewing conflict resolution as a group decision-making process and noting the relationship between truth seeking and conflict resolution.

Conflict Resolution as a Group Decision-Making Process

Part of the evidence that the consultative intervention model preoccupation with unity is not substantially represented in contemporary conflict-resolution processes is the actual language and modalities used within these other processes. Almost without exception, the language and behavior employed in contemporary processes are that of division, separation and conflict. We speak of "parties" or "disputants" and emphasize "positions" and "interests," while looking for ways to "intervene" in the conflict. It is, of course, hard not to speak in these terms, especially in cultures where conflict-resolution processes are employed against a backdrop of adversarial adjudicative processes.

Nonetheless, this terminology should be recognized for what it is—a choice. Further, it is a choice that reinforces a particularly individualized understanding of conflict resolution that in turn reinforces the process as one of bargaining to an outcome. It highlights the sense that the conflict is something that occurs between individuals and groups, and as such intervention is something that occurs in the space in between two otherwise discrete and separated lives. Partially, this division is reflected in the language of intervention itself. Mediators are taught to focus on the "level," "target," "focus," and "intensity" of the intervention that is required in a particular conflict (Moore, 1996: 76– 77). In this interventional model, mediators are taught to focus on "changing the substance or content of the dispute. The mediator may look for ways to explore data, to expand the number of acceptable options on the negotiation table, to narrow the choices when the parties are overwhelmed with possibilities, or to integrate proposals made by the disputants" (Moore, 1996: 77). It is the job of the mediator to help individuals avoid the "particular idiosyncratic problems that are pushing the parties toward impasse" and focus them instead on an institutionalized model that aims at resolving the specific differences between them (Moore, 1996: 76).

The problems with this individual-centered model of mediation—its lack of concern for the on-going relationship between the individuals, its denial of the emotional and contextual nature of the conflict, and its inability to allow for broad interaction and understanding to develop—have been well discussed elsewhere (Baruch-Bush and Folger, 1994). One issue not stressed in these earlier critiques, however, is that conflict

resolution is almost inevitably a group process and exercise. Take, for example, a divorce mediation. Once the mediation process is engaged, it is constructively thought about in terms other than as two spouses engaged in a conflict seeking to resolve their dispute through third-party intervention. For the duration of the mediation a particular type of group has formed—made up of the mediator and the couple—which has its own dynamics, mode of communication, and challenge. Indeed, mediation could be helpfully construed as a group decision-making process. The empowering aspect of mediation is that it allows the disputants to choose the outcome, as opposed to adjudicatory processes where the outcome is imposed. However, the decision being made in mediation has to be made together, with the input of all the participants. It is a group decision in every sense of the term.

Group dynamics in mediation, however, have not been the subject of widespread study and analysis, and very little emphasis is placed on the group dimension of the process in the conventional models of the practice of conventional mediation. This is especially surprising given the practical utility that is offered by thinking about mediation in terms of a group process. For example, the Decision Emergence Theory identifies four phases a group passes through in reaching a decision: orientation, conflict, emergence, and reinforcement. Applying such a theory to mediation offers a precise set of insights into how the mediation model should look and what should occur at each step of the process. It also highlights the importance of the attitudinal, interpersonal, and identity factors that are relevant to any group faced with the task of making a decision (Fisher and Ellis, 1980). Further, the group decision-making model of mediation highlights a significant gap within most contemporary models of mediation—the absence of any form of group preparation for the task of resolving the conflict. It is perhaps a function of a mediator-centrism that there is much literature on how a mediator should prepare for a mediation, a little bit about how individual disputants should be prepared, and almost nothing on how the disputants as a collectivity—a group—should be prepared. The fact that the ultimate decision in a mediation, and the many smaller ones leading up to it, are often group decisions, suggests that a conflict-resolution model should orient individuals to the group nature of their task.

This research into group dynamics highlights as well the importance of conceiving of conflict resolution in terms of a unity-building process. It is a truism that the more united a group is going into a decision-making process, the easier the process will be. It is also obvious that people who have resorted to inviting intervention into their conflict could not likely be deemed "united" on any significant measurable scale. Within these two facts, however, one can identify the different map of conflict resolution that is provided when one thinks of it in terms of unity. From the mindset of unity, conflict resolution can be construed as a process of building points of unity between individuals. This mindset establishes a foundation for effective and efficient group decision-making on the more difficult and consuming issues. The purpose of a process as a whole in this vision is to help participants establish and become conscious of the points of unity that

exist between them, so that these points of unity may be the foundation not only for resolution but also for altering the inner and outer lives—and the worldview—of individuals and the communities in which they live.

It is helpful to take a snapshot of how processes work. Conventional mediation is usually constructed as a process of distillation or funneling from a broad base of information and ideas to a finite outcome. This distillation actually occurs twice within mediation: first with the facts and then with possible outcomes. The first part of a mediation process narrows the base of information provided by the disputants to a list of material facts, and the second part narrows the list of all possible agreements to, one hopes, a single agreement. The role of the mediator in this process is to be the agent of distillation and narrowing, and to ensure that a context exists which allows such distillation to occur in an environment of relative peace and efficiency. The interventions and input of the mediator are primarily, therefore, the undertaking of making resolution possible and manageable by helping disputants realize what should be deemed most important, relevant, and plausible. A pictorial image of the institutionalized mediation process could be as follows:

Pool of Information and Possible Outcomes

Mediator Distills Information and Possible Outcomes

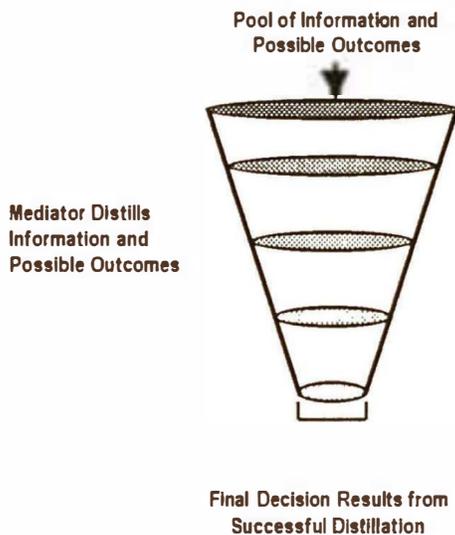**Final Decision Results from Successful Distillation**

Figure 1: Conventional Model of Mediation

As opposed to this model, the focus on group decision-making and unity implied by the consultative intervention model conceives of a conflict-resolution process in a multidimensional way. One dimension is parallel and analogous to the distillation processes of institutionalized mediation. At the same time, however, an expanding and broadening process is taking place. This broadening process is one in which small points of unity, which are encapsulated in small decisions along the way, are put to the service of creating an ever-broader basis of unity from which creative and harmonious outcomes can be pursued. In this vision, while an intervener is an agent of distillation, she or he is

also acting as an agent of unity. The practical implications of this additional role can be numerous, but at least include the intervener's identifying points of unity between disputants when achieved and reminding parties of these points and the work that has been done to accomplish them, when difficulties are encountered later. A pictorial image of a consultative intervention process is presented in Figure 2.

**Pool of Information and
Possible Outcomes**

**Consulting Body
Searches for
Points of Unity**

**Moderator Assists the
Consulting Body in its
Search for Points of
Unity**

**Expanding Points of Unity
Lay Foundation for Unity-Based
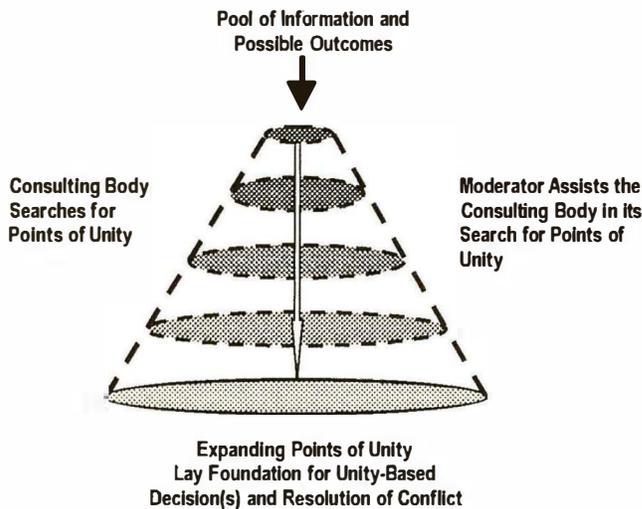Decision(s) and Resolution of Conflict**

Figure 2: Consultative Intervention Model

The value of this two-dimensional process (Figure 2), which stems from conceiving of the participants as being in a group, is that it attacks a situation of conflict in a multiplicity of ways simultaneously. Like institutionalized mediation, it manages and organizes the information and options, but at the same time it is developing an internal dynamic within the group that should make it progressively easier for the participants to reach a final resolution. Every point of unity that is achieved acts like a foundation on which the ultimate, most pressing differences can be leavened and molded into an agreement.

Further, conceiving of intervention as a process of broadening points of unity is the means through which processes can become importantly proactive and educative. Participants are exposed by the process to approaches and an understanding of how to work in groups and make decisions with others. At the same time, they are exposed to thinking about their own conflicts from the perspective of unity, which in itself can have the positive effect of reorienting individuals to the meanings of the conflicts in which they are engaged. Ultimately, individuals are being encouraged to view their own lives and the lives of the communities they are in through the lens of unity and, one hopes, to nurture a unified pattern of social life.

Conflict Resolution as a Truth-Seeking Process

The mature worldview of the consultative intervention model acknowledges the interrelatedness of self with others, the effects that one's decisions and actions have on those with whom one is in a relationship, and the reality that being in conflicts and resolving them is part of a larger social and political process of constructing healthy and enduring patterns of community life. This, of course, does not mean that individuals are expected to come to a resolution forum with the consultative worldview. Rather, the key issue is that the process itself be structured to reflect the mature worldview and that participants be made consciously aware of this structure so that they can (a) make an informed choice of whether to engage in the process or not and (b) be clear about the expectations as to their behavior in the consultative process. In a sense, therefore, a process should create a context in which participants are challenged, engaged at the level of worldview, encouraged to interact according to a mature worldview, and left free to choose to continue participation or not in full awareness of the type of undertaking in which they are engaged.

One key element of structuring a process to reflect the consultative intervention model is the issue of truth. We have long since abandoned the fiction of moral association of conflict resolution and ordering systems with the idea that they result in the appearance of truth. While Gandhi (1969: 6) embodied the maxim that "pursuit of truth did not admit of violence being inflicted on one's opponent", a predominant current worldview is that such truth-talk is itself a problem and does not contribute much to social order and peace. The idea of truth, like many things in the postmodern world, has been overtaken by intense debate and disagreement. In much religious, scientific, and philosophical discourse a commitment remains to the existence of objective and universal truths. However, this commitment is now coupled with aggressive schools of thought that question both the idea of truth itself and the utility of even employing such terminology. Truth-talk has also been a historical cause for oppression and subjugation, offering a framework for justifying particular social hierarchies and outcomes.

The consultative worldview with its emphasis on unity appears, at first glance, to ignore the heated debates about notions of truth and to maintain a fidelity to the idea of objective and universal truths. This idea would be a misunderstanding. The notion of "truth" in a broad generic sense is innately relevant to unity discourse. A social condition of unity is always strongest when based on the broadest, most accurate base of information possible. To the degree that unity is built around deception, mistruths, or substantive misunderstandings, it is weak and prone to erosion and decay. In the consultative intervention model, therefore, it is incumbent that truth enters into the discourse and process of conflict resolution. The crucial question is how.

The minimalist approach is to equate truth with a concept of "fact" that accepts the account of something as a fact if it is based on as complete a degree of information as the participants are able to marshal. While this fact may not be logically or philosophically equivalent to a truth   indeed such a truth may not exist—using truth to describe factual

consensus rooted in a broad, shared base of information can serve as a motivation for the participants and as a source of justification and legitimation of the outcome.

This is especially true in a group-oriented process, which is how we have described consultative intervention model. In group decision-making, issues of trust or mistrust between the members must be consciously addressed and dealt with properly. In conditions of severe mistrust, where information is used as a weapon instead of as an engine for resolution, unity and efficient group decision-making are often impossible. This level of mistrust, unfortunately, is commonly found in situations of conflict—some might say it is an inevitable aspect of conflict. One avenue to nurturing at least a functionally plausible level of trust is by focusing participants on the idea that the most enduring and satisfactory solutions to conflicts are those rooted in the highest degree of truth—in this minimalist account meaning the broadest possible consensus on factual matters. The process should then be structured to encourage participants to lend their agency to expanding this base of truth, of consensus-based facts.

It is worth noting that there exists an important psychological dimension to making truth-talk an integral part of the conflict-resolution process. Individuals typically come to conflict situations internally conflicted about their own relationship to the truth. Individuals tend to be convinced that they have a monopoly on the truth; however, this commitment is thin and easily displaced as a falsity. Displacement can be a problem, however, because it can result in reactions that make effective resolution difficult— including disengagement related to loss of face, stubbornness, insistence on one's correctness, and blaming of the other participants and/or the intervener for exposing the individual to embarrassment. As such, if fidelity to one's own concept of the truth need be displaced, it should be accomplished in a way that positively reinforces engagement in the process of resolution, as well as exposing the individuals to possible positive learning. One way to accomplish this refocus is by orienting participants to truth itself—but to the truth as an evolutionary, shared, and composite entity, as opposed to a possessed and monolithic one. One's understanding of the truth, in this model, is always expanding, and in situations of conflict it requires engagement with the perceptions of the other participants in order to be expanded to its fullest. In other words, the process of conflict resolution can be described and introduced to participants as a collective truth-seeking exercise. From the outset, therefore, individuals are ideally placed within a context that encourages a slow increase in the degree of trust between the participants, reinforcing the ability for the individuals to agree on the truth of particular information and to form points of unity around them.

Beyond Mediation?

The argument has been that the consultative intervention model envisions conflict resolution as being proactive, educative, and unity centered. The discussion and examples

above should well establish our suggestion that contemporary models of the practice of mediation in particular conventional mediation—are neither designed nor preoccupied sufficiently with these themes. While other models show definite movement along these axes, none seems to us to be consciously and satisfactorily engaged at this level.

The consultative model reflects a gradual, evolutionary process. It requires individuals in the field of conflict resolution to engage with issues of worldview and unity—whether in practice or research—and to explore how their current practices could be informed by the consultative intervention model. We have been encouraged in this regard by our interactions with students, practitioners, and academics who have begun to challenge and explore how thinking about these issues might impact on contemporary mediation practice and theory, and who have identified the connection between the structure of mediation and the worldview it embodies. As well, there are a number of dynamic experiments underway in conflict-resolution practice, as well as an increasing recognition of the need to enhance the plurality of processes that are available and utilized. The essence of the current challenge, as far as we see it, is to recognize a condition of unity as the broader purpose of conflict resolution. This recognition, of course, does not deny the importance of a distributive outcome, nor does it contradict in anyway the transformative and healing goals that are the aims of some processes. These outcomes are all relevant and important to a consultative process, but they exist as elements of a broader pursuit of a condition of unity.

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