



HUMAN SYSTEMS
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Change the World

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We think of conflict as a pattern of human interaction that emerges as similarities, differences, and connections among people as they live, work, and play together. To expand this HSD perspective, think about conflict as a complex pattern that exhibits certain characteristics. For instance, patterns of conflict emerge from multiple, unpredictable, and often unknown forces. Those patterns are formed by high levels of diversity or difference within the system. Additionally, in these patterns, there is no clear cause/effect relationship in any one incident; all that has come before can influence what is happening now.

We often work with people whose most challenging issues are rooted in some form of conflict that plays out at many scales throughout the system. The challenges currently faced by many of our societal institutions emerge, at least in part, from such complex patterns of conflict. As we look around us at the number of institutional-level conflicts that keep us stuck, we see education, governmental systems, traditional business and industry structures and cultures, changing roles and expectations for labor unions, and a number of other significant challenges that are creating conflict at all scales in today's landscape.

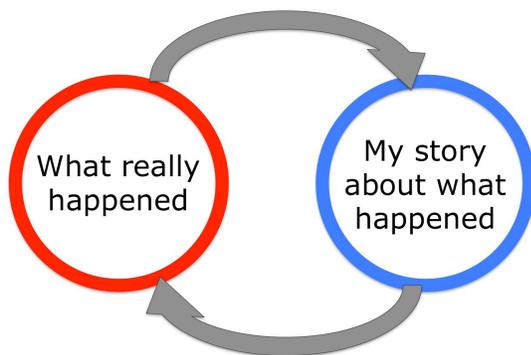
Consider current challenges in the health care field. At the individual level, conflicts emerge over treatment decisions, cost considerations, personal preferences and expectations. At the organizational level, conflicts over salary, role, authority, costs, and problem solving approaches are only a fraction of the issues that have to be negotiated on a daily basis. Even at the institutional level, differences over issues such as ethics, access, approaches, and economics create turbulence across the entire system. At larger scales environmental racism, social determinants of health, and public policy reveal conflict patterns.

In every single case, at each scale of the system, there are facts about the reality of a situation--What happened? When did it occur? Who is involved? At the same time individuals and groups create their own perceptions about what those issues are and how they came about. The conflicts that keep the system stuck result from tension that emerges when those differing stories "bump" up against each other.

There is no magic pill that will cure all the ills of the institution of health care (no pun intended). And as long as individuals, groups, and communities remain locked inside their stories, unable to engage in discourse across their differences, then the entire field will remain stuck.

Nothing is intractable.

As HSD Professionals, we work with large organizations and systems to support them in building the capacity to see, understand, and influence patterns to move the system toward greater fitness.



Conflict Circles

One model we use to help clarify and shift patterns of conflict came to us from Landmark Education. It reminds us that any conflict is rooted in the difference that exists between our personal stories and the facts of what really happened. In that model, depicted here, each person can tell his/her story, in relation to the facts. The people who are in conflict can find their way to a shared understanding of their differences--and find a way to move forward.

It's a relatively simple thing to think about and unbraided conflict when there are a couple of people involved, or even when there are small groups. In the complex landscape of health care today, however, those conflicts and differences are so huge and the constituencies so numerous and diverse that there is no one answer to "fix" it. That's when we need a more explicit picture that helps people see the complexity, understand some of the impact of that complexity, and engage in dialogue that moves them toward shared action.

This month's Change the World modifies the picture a bit to invite people into inquiry about what the multiple different stories represent, how they have an impact on each other, and how they form barriers or bridges to movement toward patterns that are fit for the purpose of the greater whole.

Whether you are in health care, education, government, or any other sector where large-scale differences have you stuck in patterns of conflict, engage others in inquiry.

- ▶ In individual groups, you can fill in the center circle:
 - ▷ What really happened? What are the facts of the situation?
 - ▷ What might be possible inside those facts?
 - ▷ Who is likely to feel the impact of those facts?
- ▶ Then each group can begin to explore its own stories about those facts.
 - ▷ How do we, individually or as a group explain or describe what happened? How do we make sense of the event/situation we face?
 - ▷ What questions would be asked of others to gain greater clarity or to better understand, based on our own interpretation?

- ▶ The next step is to then sit down together to explore others' stories, invite additional groups to share their stories, and ask their questions. Together you can inquire into the possibilities from the different perspectives and explore the barriers and bridges to building a shared reality.

Give it a try and let us know what you learn. Be in touch.

Royce



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Shared Conflict Stories



Invite others in to tell their stories and to explore how you all can explore the differences in light of the facts.

- ▶ What are the possibilities?
- ▶ What are the barriers?
- ▶ What are the bridges?

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Nothing is intractable.

Change the World: Conflict and Stories
April 2016
Page 4