Following the Inner Track to Resolving Conflict Impasse

2018 Alberta Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Symposium

John Radford Ph.D. Psychology and Chartered Mediator
Conflict Impasse

- The essence of mediation is resolving conflict impasse.
- For decades we have engaged multiple methods to help parties break impasse.
- There is an inner world that if understood provides mediators with options for breaking the impasse and finding the unique path to resolution for each conflict.
- Let’s explore the world of inner conflict and identity as another tool to resolving conflict impasse.

Copyright 2018 Transpectives Consulting Inc.  
johnradford@transpectives.com
Traditional Remedies for Conflict Impasse

- Separate the person from the issue/principle
- Explore the payoffs and secondary gains from being in conflict
- Differentiate process, issue and image deadlocks
- Multiple equivalent simultaneous offers (MESOs)
- Reframe the disagreement and re-engage
- Address the cost of the deadlocked conflict
- Switch objective criteria
- Numerous others...........
When Traditional Remedies Don’t Work – Big Picture!

- Mediators not equipped with conceptual understanding and skills needed for engaging conflict in a complex dynamic world (Coleman, 2018)
- Globalization replaced by a strong return to nationalism
- Tolerance for diversity and difference is decreasing
- Social media with the propensity to receive what we like combined with marketing algorithms that tailor messages to fit what we like - capacity for conflict decreases

Copyright 2018 Transpectives Consulting Inc.
johnradford@transpectives.com
VALUING DIFFERENCE

HIGH

PERFORMANCE

PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

LOW

LOW

CONFLICT

HIGH

CAPACITY TO GAIN VALUE FROM DIFFERENCE

TOLERANCE FOR CONFLICT
When Traditional Remedies Don’t Work – Our Picture!

- When emotional intensity is strong
  - Anger
  - Bigotry
  - Shutdown
  - Stuck in conflict cycles
- It seems to be “all about ego!”
- When our intra-personal core identity struggle is triggered
Mediator Challenge of Intense Emotional Conflict

- We’ve learned that high emotions are a barrier to conflict resolution
- We are encouraged to manage our and the parties' emotions in conflict
- Understandably mediators avoid the black box of emotion associated with anger, bigotry, shutdown, etc.
- Exploring this black box is not only complicated but often triggers our own emotions!
Mediator Treasure Lies Behind Intense Emotional Conflict

- There is an inner track to conflict that often goes untapped by mediators
- Emotional triggers are the entry point into the under the surface world of identity and conflict
- Our own inner conflict is integral to understanding and engaging this conflict
- My challenge is to invite you into this inner track of conflict and share a few ideas and tools to get you going and wanting to explore more

Copyright 2018 Transpectives Consulting Inc. johnradford@transpectives.com
Unpacking Identity Conflict

- Conflict with another can trigger the inner identity conflict between core self and persona.
- Tension between the outer identity layers and evolving core self impacts capacity for change
ONION SKIN IDENTITY MODEL
“Who I am and Who I Need to Be for the Other”

Interplay between outer circles and evolving self provides the stimulus for change.
Understanding Identity as a Brain Processing Shift
How to Recognize Identity Conflict in Mediation

- The Tribes Effect – a divisive mindset that casts parties as inevitable adversaries (Shaperio, 2017)
- Efforts to involve parties in problem solving fail
- Trusted remedies for resolving conflict fail and often these attempts escalate the conflict
- The emotional reaction is significantly greater than the trigger
- The mediation feels stuck and going nowhere
How to Recognize Identity Conflict in Mediation

- The narrative about the problem/conflict appears to involve core self and persona tension for the person/s
- There are indications that core self is being triggered – insecurity or insignificance
- As mediator you are being triggered by the conflict
Using Identity Conflict to Break Impasse

- Explore beneath the substantive issues of precedents, policies and resources to the role of identity in these conflicts
- As mediators we delve beyond reason and emotion to identity – who you are, what you hold as important and how you construct meaning in your life.
ONION SKIN IDENTITY MODEL

“Who I am and Who I Need to Be for the Other”

Interplay between outer circles and evolving self provides the stimulus for change.
How to do Use the Inner Identity Track in Impasse

- Be curious about what is triggered
- What the identity story behind the trigger?
- Explore the link between identity conflict (Onion Skin) and position taken in the conflict
- Use identity to impact your systemic understanding of the conflict
- Relational Mapping is a useful tool here

Copyright 2018 Transpectives Consulting Inc.  
johnradford@transpectives.com
Relational Mapping - a Tool for Engaging Conflict Systemically
Relational Mapping - a Tool for Engaging Conflict Systemically

- Where, what, who is the leverage in the system for change?
- RM can be used for mapping conflict from one or multiple view points
- RM for intra-personal, inter-personal and systems conflict perspective
- RM for analysis or as method for facilitating conflict
Using Identity Conflict to Break Impasse

- As a rule explore identity conflict in side meetings respecting personal vulnerabilities
- Use questions rather than statements – “I noticed you … and wondered about the connection to …?"
- If an issue is identity linked respectful exploration can lead to other options in finding a way forward
Using Your Own Identity Conflict Trigger to Break Impasse

- The Mediator three step dance!
  - **Go In** – What got triggered for me?
  - **Go Up** – From a systemic birds-eye view what does my experience mean for leverage in the conflict impasse?
  - **Go Out** – Decide where and how to act in the conflict system
Mediation as Conflict Systems Analysis and Process Design

- “Mediation” limits the options for engaging the conflict system and change process
- Systemic conceptualization of the conflict guaranteed to increase mediator effectiveness
- Relational Mapping to determine leverage options
- Conflict process design – How and where do I next engage this conflict system for future focused leverage?
Our Conflict Inner Track

I am never afraid of the other’s judgment, only of having my own inner self judgment triggered by their judgment.

Kelly Bryson, 2002
**Essential Reading**

- **Neufeld, Viola (2017)** *Grateful for the Fight: Using inner conflict to transform yourself and your relationships*. Friesen Press, Victoria

- **Shapiro, Daniel (2017)** *Negotiating the Nonnegotiable: How to Resolve Your Most Emotionally Charged Conflicts*. Penguin Paperback, Boston

- **Coleman, Peter (2018)** *Conflict Intelligence and Systemic Wisdom: Meta-Competencies for Engaging Conflict in a Complex, Dynamic World*, *Negotiation Journal*, Harvard University.
Contact Information

John Radford, Ph.D. Psychology
Transpectives Consulting Inc.
johnradford@transpecives.com
#1700 1185 West Georgia Street
Vancouver, BC. V6E 4E6
1 604 7238022