Walking the Talk: Collaborating and Thriving in an Adversarial Culture

By John P. Glaser

jandcglaser@compuserve.com
or
jpglaser@prodigy.net
University of La Verne

There is an important link between deep change at the personal level and deep change at the organizational level. To make deep personal change is to develop a new paradigm, a new self, one that is more effectively aligned with today's realities. This can occur only if we are willing to journey into unknown territory and confront the wicked problems we encounter….This tortuous journey requires that we leave our comfort zone and step outside our normal roles. In doing so, we learn the paradoxical lesson that we can change the world only by changing ourselves. This is not just a cute abstraction; it is an elusive key to effective performance in all aspects of life.

Robert Quinn
Deep Change (1996).

Abstract

Years of cultural conditioning have trained us to respond to conflict from a "closed" perspective in which we are either competitive or self-protective against the possibility that others will exploit us. This habit can be problematical for transformational leaders who recognize that it is easier to get their own needs met when someone is not actively opposing their efforts.

It is possible to nurture habits of collaboration in a traditionally adversarial world by finding ways for the system and its key actors to foster an "open flow of information" that encourages more productive responses to conflict and a reframing of customary organizational interactions and functions. There are specific habits and behaviors that can be mindfully cultivated by organizational leaders in order to ensure that they are maximizing their ability to collaborate without worsening the risks of exploitation by those who are more inclined to compete.

Introduction

The story line is a familiar one–an organization experiences and responds to conflict. Perhaps the faculty senate is caught in a power struggle with the college president. Or the general manager

discovers that her vision of employee involvement is being undermined by autocratic middle managers. It may be manifest in an adversarial labor relationship in which the union and management are locked in a seemingly intractable battle over wages, benefits, or power.

This is the stuff of sensational headlines and the fodder for "Monday morning quarterbacks." Everyone loves a great battle, with winners and losers–heroes and goats. These are the predicaments that test the mettle of a leader, and generally these inevitable, and often unanticipated "opportunities" make the difference between success and failure of his or her leadership. And as high as these stakes may be, many leaders allow the culture to program their responses to conflict, rather than following their own beliefs, values, and goals.

The Argument Culture –"Closed" Approaches to Conflict and Communications

The net effect is the evolution of an embattled way of life for most organizational leaders. We see every conflict-laden situation as a test to be won or lost with our self-esteem, if not our livelihoods, hanging in the balance. Deborah Tannen (1998) describes the phenomenon in vivid detail as the "Argument Culture" in her book of the same name. Her premise is that media and popular culture keep us pitted against one another in a seemingly iron grip of competition, even when our needs might best be addressed through cooperation.

Many of us in our "enlightenment" understand these dynamics and resolve to behave differently. But it is the nature of our basic survival instincts as well as our culture that we have a tendency to behave defensively and competitively, even when we profess or aspire to do otherwise. This phenomenon has been characterized by Argyris (1993) as Model I behavior. He asserts that most leaders aspire to being capable learners and to having their organizations learn effectively. However, many of our systems and our actions serve to inhibit learning. We have the capacity to prevent many of the disasters that ultimately enfold us, and yet we often tend to overlook the data when more compelling organizational objectives come along. I have adapted the following "governing values" of that defensive Model I Behavior from Argyris, as well as from Hargrove (1995):

1. Achieve my intended purpose (separateness).

2. Maximize winning by advocating my positions.
3. Suppress negative feelings (avoid vulnerability).
4. Seek unilateral control of self and others.
5. Perform (avoid looking bad).

Argyris and Schon (1974) developed this concept as "mystery and mastery" because it has the fundamental effect of keeping information hidden in order to gain the greatest possible advantage. The trouble is, of course, that, when information is not accessible, collaboration or cooperation is less likely. We often model this phenomenon in our conflict workshops by asking participants to think of a conflict-laden situation from their own experience that didn't go well and by asking them to describe the attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics that contributed to the negativity. The following descriptors are typical of what participants submit:

Angry or emotional	Closed	Pushing away
Tactical	Withholding	Argumentative
Fearful	Defensive and attacking	Sarcastic
Resentment	I'm right/You're wrong	Positional

These "closed" qualities are characteristic of Model I behavior, and anyone is susceptible to them if they haven't thoughtfully and methodically cultivated a different way of acting that promotes a greater degree of openness. In fact, those closed behaviors are habits that will die hard even when efforts are made to instill different values.

We found a great example of this in a public sector client that had asked us to support their labor relationship. They had been struggling with the effects of a dramatic restructuring in which they were striving to become a flatter and leaner, team-based organization in order to ensure their competitiveness in an industry that has been seeing some strong pressures to privatize. They quickly discovered that their labor relationship was inconsistent with the collaborative structures they had implemented, and the conflict in the labor relationship was threatening to undermine the entire organizational restructuring effort. Regular interactions between the union leadership and top management were often highly adversarial. The union was perceived by management as continuing to engage in provocative confrontations with management and its governing body, and management was seen by the union as continuing to cling to unilateral power. Even after a successful intervention in which the habits triggering those perceptions were acknowledged and commitments were put in place to ensure that partnering could become a reality, there has been some backsliding as each party wrestles with efforts to keep their behavioral agreements. Rather than describing the behavior openly and rationally when it occurs, both sides tend to operate in an action-reaction cycle that spins them back into those old power based habit patterns. It is not uncommon for those whose dominant conflict style is competitive, or "win-lose," with a high degree of concern for personal goals and minimal concern for the relationship, to seek to cultivate a strategy that is more "synergistic" or collaborative (Hall, 1969) and (Blake and Mouton, 1965). However, it takes great mindfulness to keep those old, grooved behaviors from taking over. The antidote is to focus on a set of strategies that by design are intended to maximize the focus on achieving personal goals, as well as maintaining the relationship. Those strategies seem counter-intuitive to anyone who has become habituated by our adversarial culture. They are based on an ability and willingness to open up to become vulnerable, and to develop strategies of inquiry that lead to discovery of effective ways of satisfying, not only your own interests, but those of "the other party" as well.

On Organizational Learning: Moving Toward More "Open" Interactions

Argyris (1993) identified Model II behaviors as those intended by design to keep an individual mindful during times of high conflict. The following governing values are also adapted from his work and from Hargrove's (1995):

1. Creating shared meaning (relatedness).

2. Balancing advocacy and inquiry; informed choices.

3. Vigilant monitoring to detect and correct error.

4. Maintaining and inspiring joint commitment to the cause.

5. Learning (being good allows me to look good).

The focus of Model II theories is on the development of mechanisms for reflection and improvement. This concept has resonated through the work of Senge (1990) and other popular leadership writers and has evolved along with the disciplines of personal and organizational learning. Argyris describes the impact of Model I behavior as producing a "limited learning system." The effect is one in which individual and organizational development is impeded. When it does occur, it is generally single-loop learning (Figure 1), which is based on incremental improvement or doing the same thing better.

While any kind of continuous improvement is generally desirable, the development of a "learning system" occurs when there is a genuinely open flow of information with behaviors that ensure that there will be an authentic causal analysis of what can be improved in the system. This is the "double loop-learning" that is illustrated in Figure 1 below. Single loop learning focuses on doing the same thing better. Double loop learning involves reframing to consider whether a completely different approach will produce a more satisfactory outcome. For example, I used to spend many hours in single loop learning about how best to trap or otherwise attempt to rid my yard of the gophers who were eating our vegetables. Eventually I engaged in double loop learning to reframe the search to protecting the vegetable garden, rather than eliminating the gophers. I ended up installing underground fences which produced a better outcome that included leaving the gophers in peace. On an individual level, this necessarily involves cultivating an ability to learn to do new things, generally by creating shared meaning around the data (what's happening or what already happened) in order to "reframe" the situation by rethinking the context that led to the outcomes that will be changed.
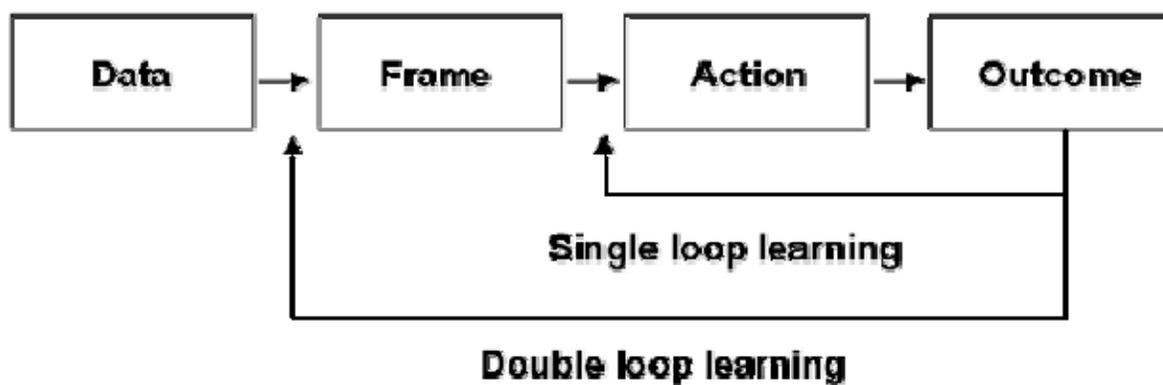

Figure 1

This requires implementing habits and practices in which the members of the organization get together regularly for reflection and learning. In these instances, the leader, who must fill the role of "learner in chief" for the organization, should model the expectation that everyone will expect to emerge from these sessions seeing the world differently. As Schrock-Shenk (1999) describes it, this means learning to move from "self absorption to recognition" of a broader perspective and more diverse set of organizational needs.

Another of our clients is a public-sector utility with an organizational culture that stresses the high task orientation of their engineering function. A new general manager recognized the need to attend to the people functions of the organization. Much time and effort was devoted to the development of a leadership vision that would have everyone who served in a leadership capacity focus on what the collective leadership should look like. Predictably, they have discovered that old habits die hard, and they have needed to engage in ongoing reflective conversations analyzing the extent to which they are making the desired transformations from an authoritarian to a collaborative culture. The general manager modeled the learning that was expected by asking the rest of the managers and supervisors: How am I doing in implementing our desired vision? What should I be doing differently? What support do you need in order to do your part in helping us to become the more collaborative organization that we aspire to be? He has also made it clear that he genuinely intends to act on the result, and that he expects similar questions to be asked of line employees throughout the organization.

Openness as a Strategic Approach to Conflict and Communication

We have discussed openness and learning as a generically more useful approach to conflict than closed and protective behaviors described by Model I. This raises the question of whether or not it is possible to cultivate personal practices that are consistently open without risking exploitation at the hands of others who engage in more adversarial behavior. The answer is an unqualified yes, **if** it includes careful and mindful inquiry, and **if** the individual(s) engaging in that inquiry is(are) adequately protected against the effects of "untrustworthy" behavior.

In this context, there are several closely related strategies to ensure that a willingness to collaborate does not inadvertently cause the collaborator to be exploited. The first strategy is to attempt to demonstrate the mutual interdependence between the parties, that is showing the potential "exploiters" that their interests will be better met through collaboration, rather than competition. The second strategy is to know what each party will do if a collaborative agreement cannot be reached. Fisher and Ury (1981) dubbed this the "Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement" (BATNA), and it protects against accepting an unfavorable solution and passing up one that is better than what would happen if there were no agreement.

For example, a city was meeting with an important developer (who also operated the largest mall in town) and a major retail tenant to attempt to reach an agreement on a design dispute. The planning commission was unanimously opposed to the developer's current plan, and the city council was likely to vote 3 to 2 on an appeal, with the outcome in doubt about which way that vote would fall. We started the meeting by naming this likely scenario of what would happen if

our collaborative efforts failed, and the city staff acknowledged that the retailer could take the desirable project and it's revenues to a nearby city. We also discussed the likelihood that the fates of the developer and the city would be inextricably linked regardless of the outcome of this issue, and that it would be a far more efficient and effective process if we could decide together how to resolve the dispute.

Both the developer and the tenant were feeling the pressure of their own planning and construction timelines, and they were tempted to end the negotiations on the design and to take their considerable economic and political clout directly to the city council. But they agreed that their longer-term relationship interests were, in fact, better met by continuing to work with staff, and an outcome was reached that was acceptable to everyone. The same openness and rationality that can make someone feel weak or vulnerable can also serve as a strength to keep power players in the conversation and working toward collaborative outcomes.

A third technique for protecting against untrustworthy behavior is to negotiate compliance-prone agreements with built-in accountability. We often hesitate to ask for assurances out of fear that a request for protection in an agreement undermines trust. In fact, assurances can actually build the trust because they ensure that agreements will be kept. That's the reason that banks expect their loans to be secured with real property. Similarly, in negotiating a landmark labor-management agreement in an organization that had been characterized by a mistrustful labor relationship over time, we built specific commitments into the agreement on when the parties would meet to renegotiate if the projections or assumptions that drove the agreement proved to be inaccurate. This ensured that neither party nor their skeptical constituencies needed to worry about whether the others would keep the spirit of the pact and went a long way to improve the trust.

Dealing With Positionalism

One of the distinguishing qualities of competitive, win-lose behavior is an inclination to see the world from a positional perspective. Positionalism can be defined as a tendency to approach a problem with a single mindset and with a strong bias toward a particular solution. This predisposition to a given option tends to impede collaborative problem-solving because of a closed orientation toward what will work. An antidote to this fixation on how things should be done has been known for the better part of a century, thanks to the work of Mary Parker Follett, whose concepts of "revaluation" and integration were popularized worldwide nearly sixty years later in *Getting To Yes* (Fisher & Ury, 1981). Follett (1925) pointed out that we naturally go through a process of "revaluing our desires" as we evolve throughout our lives, as, for example, what happens when a child loses interest in one desire in favor of another. When this process flows naturally in response to conflict, interests begin to fit together so that all of the core needs find their way into a final solution.

This provides a critical insight for anyone who aspires to become more collaborative and less adversarial in his or her approach to conflict and communication. This involves mindfully responding to conflict and positionalism in oneself or others by thoughtfully inquiring into the nature of the interests that are motivating each of the parties to the issue and thoughtfully analyzing any positions to discover the interests that lie beneath. A reflective analysis of the

interests or underlying motivations should lead like a red carpet to a set of options that show promise of elegantly, or at least acceptably, meeting all of the needs.

Using Inquiry to Move Toward Openness and Vulnerability

Goleman (1995) has described what happens to us physically when we experience conflict. Chemicals begin to flow through our system triggering fight or flight symptoms that contribute to the argument culture described above. So when we most need to communicate reflectively to discover and "revalue" our interests, we are most inclined to be closed and self-protective. We see this continually when "talks break down" in any kind of sensitive negotiation. Figure 2 below has been adapted from Isaacs (1999) to convey this phenomenon. The path to a deep level of collaboration and co-creation is through a process of reflective analysis–a thorough and thoughtful reflection of how **I** need to be prepared to see the world differently if **we** are to become successful collaborators.

This means cultivating a personal approach to conflict that allows us to remain open and vulnerable, despite the fact that the natural, genetically transmitted response would otherwise bring us to fight or to flee. This involves developing mindful habits that perform the function of keeping us rational, or maintaining a detached distance when we're communicating in situations that would otherwise be likely to pull us into an adversarial spiral.
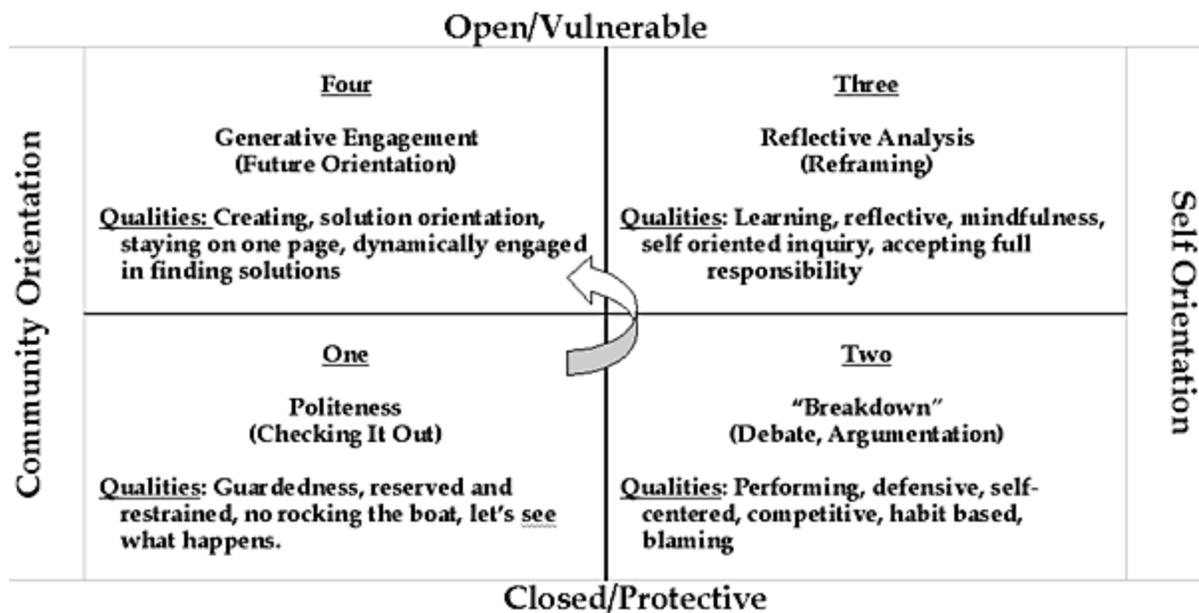
Adapted from Isaacs (1999).

Figure 2

The process of inquiry reflects a conscious commitment to actively seek out the data that enables the parties in conflict to create shared meaning rather than to advocate positions based on differing perspectives and assumptions about the nature of the world. It also allows individuals to

engage in double-loop learning in order to reframe the conflict in a way that causes the "reframer" to approach the conflict more productively. Individuals who tend to have a high task/low people focus need to cultivate positive inquiry behaviors that will provide the information that is needed for effective learning. This can involve retraining your ear to listen more deeply to conflict for a different kind of meaning, just as it is possible to learn to listen to a certain kind of music, for example jazz, classical, or rock and roll with the finely tuned ear of an expert. Figure 3 below summarizes what inquiry behaviors look like from both positional and collaborative perspectives.

This means that when we most feel like defecting from an interaction and fighting (or fleeing) we most need to stay in the conversation and dig (or inquire) for the perspective of our apparent antagonists. When I am asked to mediate or assist in workplace conflicts, my primary task is to create a "safe" container that de-escalates the situation enough that people can stay in the conversation and absorb one another's perspective without defensiveness or blame. Sometimes that involves specialized ground rules. In one case, we had a self-professed "hothead," who admitted that he had a tendency to stomp off in anger when the group was in conflict. We created a ground rule that stipulated that anyone could get up and leave the room to "cool off," but everyone would pledge to come back to the group until the situation was resolved. He never needed to leave, but the ground rule gave him the safety net he needed to commit to the conversation.

INQUIRY BEHAVIORS

Collaborative Intent	Positional Intent
• Asking	• Giving in
• Clarifying	• Capitulating
• Reflecting their interests	• Going along reluctantly
• Openness	• Acquiescing
• Cooperation	• Interrogating
• Probing for interests	• Defensive questioning
• "Yes, and...."	• "Yes, but...."
• Checking for understanding	• Asking for offers

• Compassion • Listening to their "story" **Searching Together Behaviors**	• Begging **Defensive, Separating Behaviors**

Figure 3

Using Inquiry to Reframe Positions to Interests

I often hear the complaint that the reason someone is at an impasse on a given issue is because of "the other guy's" positionalism. The fallacy behind this statement is that positions usually lead directly to interests, which can be revealed through diligent inquiry. So I don't mind when I hear a position because it generally gives me the means to discover the common ground that will lead us to integrative solutions. For example, we worked with high school staff members who were at odds with one another concerning the student schedule. Some wanted to adopt a new schedule for the school day that has been gaining popularity across the country, while many others wanted to keep the old schedule intact. A thoughtful unpacking of each perspective led to a complex array of pedagogical interests that led the action team to propose an elegant new schedule that offered a great deal of flexibility to teachers, and, if fundable, promises to meet everyone's needs more effectively.

These tools work far closer to home. I found that I became a much happier father with teenaged daughters once I was able to reframe my own time-honored fatherly control needs related to their dating lives. I realized that my interests in their safety, health, and happiness, as well as their having a positive life-long relationship with their father and learning to take responsibility for their own lives, could best be met by giving up control through compliance-prone agreements. Openness and vulnerability to new ways of seeing the world frequently lead to satisfying new discoveries about how to resolve thorny old problems.

Advocating through Interests

Communication is never complete until each perspective has been heard and understood, which involves spending some time advocating your own stuff, as well as attempting to understand theirs. Once even the most passionate, difficult people have felt understood, thanks to your own active inquiry, they are generally prepared to listen to your perspective. This means giving the data and information that is necessary to convey your perspective. It also requires a willingness and ability to describe what are popularly known as the "undiscussables" or the "elephants in the parlor" without blame or attribution. Finding a way to talk openly and rationally about

uncomfortable topics is essential to the process of creating shared meaning and in the process creating a common understanding from which conflict can be addressed in a variety of ways.

Once again, interests provide a useful way to advocate one's perspective in a rational and non-confrontational way. By being firm in our underlying motivations, but flexible about how we meet them, we create the same climate of inquiry that allows potential antagonists to join together in search of solutions that promise to meet everyone's needs acceptably. I described my own fatherly positionalism above in which I felt inclined to declare to my two daughters back when they were teenagers, "No dating until you're eighteen." After rational reflection, however, I can reframe that declaration to advocate for my true interests. For example, "I need to see a dating policy that gives me peace of mind, so that I know you'll be safe, that you'll learn to make responsible decisions, and that our relationship will be preserved and enhanced in the process." A conversation of this importance also needs to address the high stakes elephants that are milling about this issue, namely related to sexuality. Failure to do so leaves to chance the possibility that teenagers and parents will be on the same pages in such a critical issue. While there is no guarantee that an open and thoughtful conversation will produce an agreement, there is a much greater likelihood that there will be an agreement than if there is no conversation at all. The advocacy behaviors that are associated with both collaborative and adversarial approaches are listed below in Figure 4.

Searching for Solutions by Staying on the Same Page

While it is possible that a conflict can be resolved simply by understanding the perspectives and creating shared understanding of what the data means to the parties in the conflict, in most cases additional steps are needed to reach resolution. At this point, a process decision is made whether the nature of the conflict merits more traditional problem solving or a pointed process intervention such as norming or role analysis technique, which are described in detail by Harvey and Drolet (1994). The key to any conflict intervention, no matter what approach is used, is that the parties stay on one page, and do not resort back to positionalism by advocating competing solutions.

ADVOCACY BEHAVIORS

Collaborative Intent	Positional Intent
• Describing	• Commanding
• Accepting	• Imposing
• Naming	• Making offers
• Informing	• Blaming
• Identifying your interests	• Attacking

• Giving constructive feedback • Telling your "story" • Making thinking visible • Generating ideas • Expressing feelings **Searching Together Behaviors**	• Trading • Manipulating • Accusing • Criticizing • Defending **Defensive, Separating Behaviors**

Figure 4

Any solution option that is considered should be crafted with the purpose of satisfying the express interests of each party. The more interests that are satisfied, the more elegant the option. For example, a large school district was audited by the state and was found to be awarding salary credits to teachers in a manner that was inconsistent with state law. Rather than pointing fingers of blame at a variety of individuals, many of whom were no longer even part of the equation, the union and management leadership set to work with the state and an accredited university to rectify the problem. The result was an innovative staff-development program that offered opportunities to earn graduate credits and degrees taught by local educators right in the district. There were no grievances or legal proceedings, despite the fact that hundreds of teachers faced a significant financial impact because of the crisis.

There are several critical ground rules to ensure that the search for solutions keeps participants on a single page:

- No ownership–when a solution option is generated, it belongs to the entire group, rather than to an individual ("Charlie's option."). This prevents anyone from becoming so closely connected to an option that they feel honor-bound to advocate it to the bitter end.

- No evaluation–delay analysis of the possible solutions until after there has been a thorough search for possibilities. The rules of brainstorming apply to the search for a solution. Nothing will inhibit the search for solutions more than premature analysis of why an option won't work ("We already tried that" or "that won't work because…").

- No commitment–even if you're very comfortable with an option, avoid turning it into an offer. The parties to a conflict will quickly, and sometimes unwittingly, polarize if they fall back into the old habit of offer/counter-offer/acceptance. Every possibility should

remain viable until there is an opportunity to analyze them together against the interests of all the parties.

Working With Straw Designs

The secret to making the no-commitment rule work is learning to work with straw designs, a device that is simply created to keep the parties on one page rather than allowing them to separate positionally. Once there is a suitable array of options, then a structuring device is used to analyze the list, eliminate duplication, and get an indication from participants whether or not they are intrigued at the potential of each option or combination of options to satisfy the identified interests. In this process, we are making an effort to address all the interests, not just our own, simply because it is easier to get the other party to agree if their needs have been effectively addressed. Those options that have been shown to have great potential to satisfy the interests are marked to that effect. This process can be done very simply or with great sophistication, and there are many process-structuring techniques that can be adapted for that purpose.

The actual straw-design process involves the development of a group proposal that is designed to address all the interests. Again, the no-commitment rule must prevail in this process. In this case, the whole group, a committee, or an individual shapes a concept design around the most promising options, and includes additional creative work designed to address the more controversial issues. The straw design belongs to the whole group, and the questions that are asked at this point of the inquiry are:

- To what extent does this concept meet the express needs, and
- How can it be improved to better meet our needs?

Care is taken at this point to avoid asking if the concept is acceptable. Instead, the straw design is continually reworked through successive iterations until there is no more criticism. This can take anywhere from two or three drafts to several dozen or more, depending on the complexity of the issues and the emotionalism of the dispute. When all the criticisms have been resolved, the parties are asked if they can support the design.

During the last stages of the straw-design process, the parties need to turn their attention to how the concept can be made compliance-prone. This includes a clear understanding of the "W's"– who will do what, when, where, and how? Before the design can be approved, all of the key actors need to be able to have clarity on the particulars of the agreement so that they know with certainty that their interests have been well met. This also necessarily involves ample time to loop straw proposals back to constituencies for review and feedback, well ahead of the point at which agreement is imminent. In the case discussed earlier of the high school that was working on a new student schedule, the first straw design that was intriguing to the action team met with a great deal of useful criticism from the rest of the faculty. The design team went back to work on a completely different concept, which eventually met with a much more favorable response from their constituents.

The Importance of Reflection and Learning

Perhaps the most important ingredient in maintaining an approach to conflict that ensures that both the task and the people are well served is returning to the concept of learning, even after the conflict has been well resolved. For example, when we work with clients who have attempted to realign their organizations in response to difficulties, we invariably strive to include a reflection process in any straw design that we create.

The parties to a dispute are more comfortable saying yes to a solution if they know that there will be a meaningful opportunity to revisit and evaluate the outcome, and, more importantly, to improve it to better meet their needs over time. This means maintaining that posture of openness from the moment that the conflict is perceived even past the point at which an agreement is reached. The attitude of learning can prevail throughout the intervention process and ensure that a high task orientation does not need to compromise either the self-respect of the people or the ability of the individuals or organizations to learn and improve as they go along.

Including External Entities and Organizations in the Process and Outcomes

While the dynamics may change substantially, these approaches also apply to the task of addressing conflict with an external organization or entity. When a conflict extends beyond a leader's traditional span of control, it takes on political overtones that can significantly affect how one responds to the content. However, the approach should be consistent with the leader's fundamental commitment to openness, and a pragmatic understanding of the political nature of the conflict. As described above, this includes an honest analysis of what will happen if there is no agreement, and a resolve not to accept an outcome that doesn't improve on those unilateral alternatives.

For example, we have worked for years with union-management relationships, and the key variable in ensuring that the relationship is successfully collaborative seems to be the ability of the parties and their constituencies to establish a genuine partnership. There is an increasing interdependence between organizations and their unions, and yet they continue to relate to each other from the context of the adversarial culture in which they evolved. Failure to understand and communicate about the separate and common interests inevitably leads to implementing power tactics that ultimately threaten the viability of both. This may require a cycle of reframing that runs deep in the organizational culture. One strike-prone labor relationship had cultivated a clear resolve to collaborate at the bargaining table, only to find that intent undermined by constituencies that expected a fight, and so constituencies positioned themselves accordingly and in this way tied the hands of their negotiators.

When the organizational relationships are this complex, then the organizational learning must become more systemic. We worked with one labor relationship that managed to survive such an adversarial uprising from constituents. Their response was to go to a place of greater openness. They scheduled a series of summit discussions involving broad representation of leaders from the union, management, and the board of directors. They took a deep look at the dynamics that were undermining their interests of becoming a transformational organization in their field and of ensuring excellent advocacy on all sides. While the learning and understanding that resulted

did not guarantee collaboration overnight, it helped to create a context that has led to increasing partnership and decreasing hostility over a period of years. Dealing with external organizations must involve a deeper resolve to create shared meaning on the vision and values that define the interdependence and to strive to implement those interests. This means that leaders not only worry about their own organizational needs and outcomes, but that there is a genuine and conscious intent to find solutions that respect and meet the separate needs of the external organization as well. We do this, not to be kinder and gentler leaders, but because it raises the probability that our own needs will also be met.

Rewiring the Adversarial Culture

Conflict is a normal and useful indicator that it is time for the individuals or organizations that are involved to change in response to a changing environment. Embracing it as a natural and healthy state is critical to dealing with it productively and with a minimum of stress. Invariably, when organizations we work with successfully resolve a situation that they felt was threatening to either the organization or the careers of key leaders, they end up feeling they are better off than they were before the conflict was even detected. By working together to find the best solution, rather than trying to impose favorite solutions on each other, they build a more positive relationship and quickly discover that it's easier to meet their own needs if someone isn't actively opposing them. As we move into a new era in which the survival of humankind will depend increasingly on our ability to solve difficult problems with elegant joint solutions versus fight-and-flight-based power, our leaders need to begin to practice and model a different set of approaches. If it doesn't begin with individuals willing to ensure that their practices are consistent with their beliefs, values, and desired outcomes, then it won't happen at all.

The attitudes necessary to collaborate and thrive in the adversarial culture are summarized below in Figure 5. A well-secured approach offers protection against those who thrive on the fight. An open, collaborative approach increases the likelihood that others will collaborate as well. Even those with the highest orientation to task and lowest orientation to people will tend to respond favorably when they realize that their needs will be well met by the collaborative process. At the heart of this approach is the cultivation of a deep capacity to listen, to hear, and to understand. Combining that capacity of understanding with an ability to break away from prior habits and constraints in order to generate new solutions and approaches equips us with a set of skills that will serve us well in almost any situation.

An Approach to Thriving and Collaborating in an Adversarial World

- Stay open and strive for learning. Name and address the "elephants."
- Protect against the effects of untrustworthy behavior. Create a container that includes all the stakeholders on the same "team," and that will be conducive to openly addressing and resolving conflict.
- Focus on interests, rather than positions.
- Use inquiry to discover their interests and to craft elegant solutions.
- Stay on the same page and move toward integration.

Figure 5

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Author Notes

John P. Glaser, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Organizational Leadership at the University of La Verne, and is senior partner in Glaser and Associates, an organizational consulting firm focusing on all aspects of workplace relationships.

John has worked with a wide variety of organizations throughout the United States and Canada. His degrees include a B.A. from Stanford University, an M.Ed. from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and an Ed.D. from the University of California, Berkeley.

Dr. Glaser can be contacted by email at jandcglaser@compuserve.com or jpglaser@prodigy.net