

Transforming Conflict

First UU Church of Davis, CA

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Assumptions

- ☐ **Conflict is a neutral and natural part of life**
- ☐ **Conflict exists because of the inevitable differences between us**
- ☐ **Our discomfort grows with our awareness of the depth of conflict**
- ☐ **Pain in conflict comes when we resist the learning or don't see a way toward it**

Why Transformation?

- ☐ **We are not in conflict because we are bad or have done something wrong: we are in conflict because we have something to learn.**
- ☐ **Different from Mediation or Resolution**
- ☐ **Can we envision conflict that is a “life-giving opportunity” to “reduce violence and increase justice” (John Paul Lederach)**
- ☐ **“Conflict opens a ...holy path toward revelation and reconciliation”**

Goals

- ☐ **To better understand our individual patterns / processes related to conflict**
- ☐ **To gain common skills and language for addressing issues with one another**
- ☐ **To empower ourselves and others to grow in courage to face problematic issues**

Developing Capacity

- ☐ **Capacity to See**
- ☐ **Capacity to Integrate**
- ☐ **Capacity to Engage Dilemmas**
- ☐ **Capacity to Make Complexity a Friend**
- ☐ **Capacity to Hear and Engage Voices**

Balance

- ☐ **“I” – Who am I? What do I need? What can I ask for? How am I responsible? How should I respond? What are my patterns?**
- ☐ **“We” - How do we stay connected? How do we challenge one another? How do we disagree? Who are we in conflict?**
- ☐ **“Larger Vision” – How do we reconcile our differences to serve a larger vision?**

Reflection

Think of a time when there was a conflict in your family of origin.

How did it make you feel?

What did you do?

Is it similar to what you would do now?

What Happens to our Bodies?

- ☐ **Amygdala – purpose is to scan for danger**
 - ☐ **Yes or no capacity**
 - ☐ **Quick, not accurate**
 - ☐ **Relies on generalizations & stereotypes**
 - ☐ **Imaginative gridlock**

FIGHT

to face any
perceived threat
aggressively



FREEZE

inability to
move or act
against a
threat



TRAUMA RESPONSES

FAWN

to please
someone
to avoid
conflict



FLOP

to collapse,
become
unresponsive,
or faint



to run away from
danger or threat

FLIGHT



Impact of Trauma

- ☐ **People with a history of trauma more likely to be triggered**
- ☐ **Intergenerational trauma**
- ☐ **Racialized trauma**

What Happens to our Bodies

- ☐ **Mammalian parts of the brain**
 - ☐ **Necessity of community**
 - ☐ **Social needs & social constraints**
- ☐ **Prefrontal Cortex**
 - ☐ **Provides hindsight, insight and foresight**
 - ☐ **Allows us to see beyond ourselves & be self-reflective**
 - ☐ **Evoke imagination & Regulate emotions**

The Ladder of Inference

A Conclusion
An Assumption
A Speculation
A Hunch
Observable Facts



Exercise - Dyad

Think of a conflict in your past that was challenging for you, not necessarily something you are involved in now. Describe it to your conversation partner. Again, note:

- What did it feel like in your body?**
- What role did you play in it?**

Listen for assumptions buried in the conflict your conversation partner describes.

Deep Listening

- ☐ **Listen to understand, not to prepare a response.**
- ☐ **Listening to understand does not require agreement.**
- ☐ **Concentrate on the other person's thoughts and feelings, not your own.**
- ☐ **Activate your holy curiosity about this person's interests.**

Interests vs. Positions

- ☐ **Interests are the needs, desires, concerns and fears that motivate us.**
- ☐ **An interest motivates a decision.**
- ☐ **Interests allow for connection.**
- ☐ **Positions are decisions you have made.**
- ☐ **Positions polarize.**

Balance of Inquiry & Advocacy

- ☐ **Good reflective listening creates a space for respectful inquiry**
- ☐ **Effective advocacy is built upon the values and interests you hear in inquiry**
- ☐ **Advocacy without inquiry creates defensiveness**
- ☐ **Inquiry without advocacy lacks leadership**

Exercise - Triad

Two people: pick a topic you care deeply about, discuss it with one another using both inquiry and advocacy.

Third person listens and reflects back when positions might have gotten in the way, or when sharing interests may have helped.

Triangles

- ☐ **Good triangles: distribute anxiety; natural human phenomena. Community is a system of interlocking triangles.**
- ☐ **Unhealthy triangles: attempt to shift responsibility for a fix to someone who is not involved.**
 - ☐ **“Secrets”, gossip, blaming, etc.**
 - ☐ **Patterns of “stuckness”**
 - ☐ **Not necessarily about the person but the system**

Self-differentiation

Is the capacity to be self-defining and in relationship.

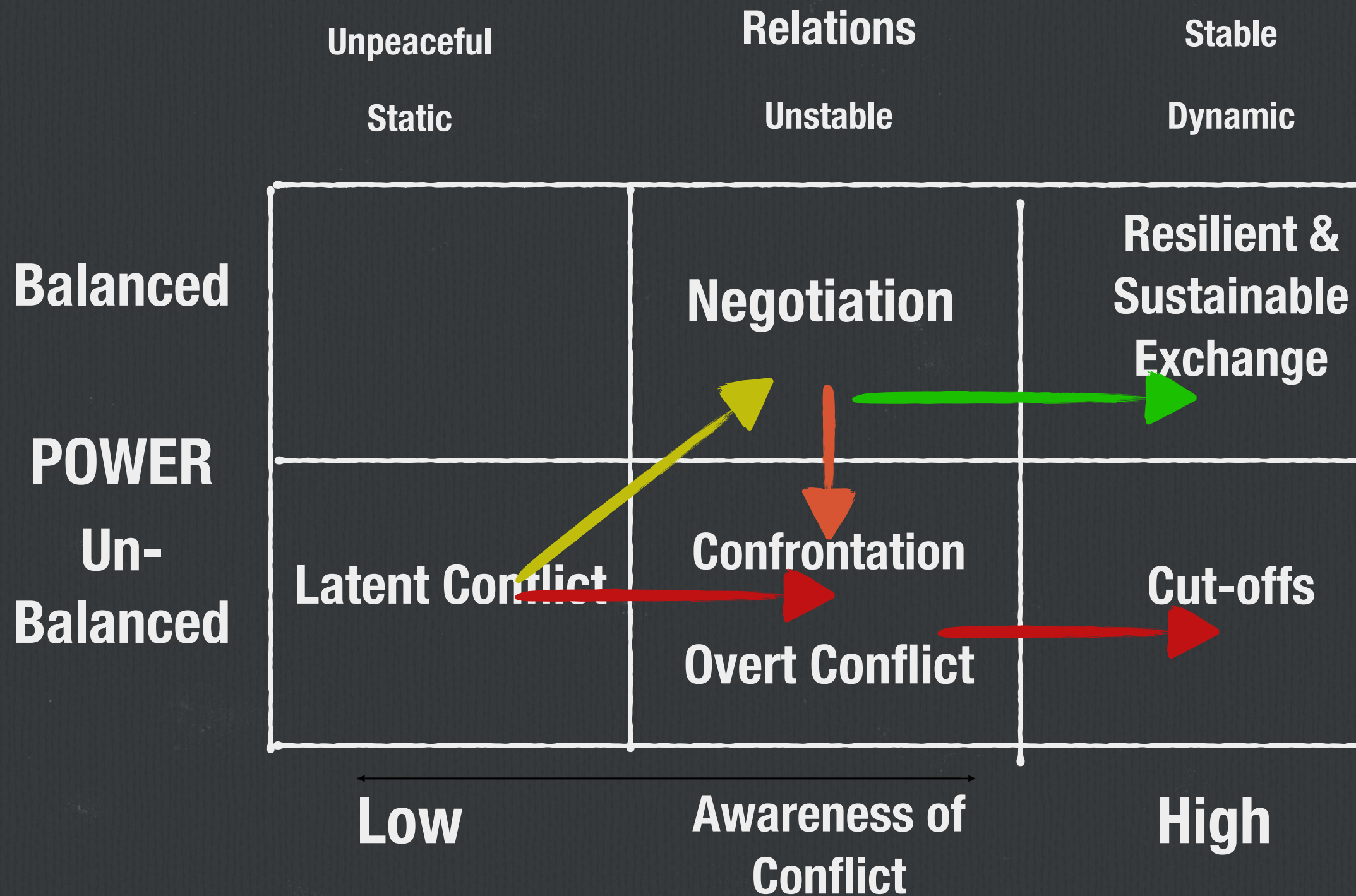
Awareness of self = self-defining

- ☐ **Boundaries: What is “mine” and what is “theirs”?**
- ☐ **I can only change myself.**
- ☐ **What are my values?**

Systemic Anxiety

- ☐ **Lack of appropriate boundaries**
- ☐ **Scapegoating**
- ☐ **Stuckness – repetition of problem**
- ☐ **Focus on the “fix” rather than the emotional system**
- ☐ **Inhibition of leadership**
- ☐ **Lack of imagination or creativity**

Congregational Dynamics



Exercise

In groups of 5, discuss a time in the life of the church that fits somewhere on this chart.

Congregational mis-steps

What *doesn't* work to reduce anxiety and nurture a sense of covenantal community.

- ☐ **“Confidential” surveys or questionnaires**
- ☐ **Large public “congregational” meetings**

Healthy Congregational Dynamics

- ☐ **Lowering Anxiety**

- ☐ **Covenantal dialogue rather than discussion**

- ☐ **Create time and space**

- ☐ **Collect broad information**

- ☐ **Builds Skills & Community**

- ☐ **Help people listen first**

- ☐ **Connections are found beneath disagreements**

- ☐ **Learn to question assumptions**

Powerful Questions

- ☐ **Stimulate reflective thinking**
- ☐ **Challenge Assumptions**
- ☐ **Generate energy and exploration**
- ☐ **Touch deeper meaning**
- ☐ **Evoke more questions**

Listening Circles

- ☐ **Dialogue not Debate**
- ☐ **Facilitated by trained facilitators**
- ☐ **Designed to surface issues**
- ☐ **Solutions must come after listening**
- ☐ **Builds community**

Intervention Strategies

- ☐ **Self-analysis**
- ☐ **Create holding container**
- ☐ **Take your time**
- ☐ **Encourage direct communication**

Purpose of the Church

- ☐ **What is the work?**
- ☐ **Who do we serve**
- ☐ **Why is it important**