



ATTRACTORS
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Every month **Attractors** shares tips and tools from human systems dynamics.
In this month's edition, Glenda Eoyang reflects on

JOURNEY PAST CONFLICT

Schoolyard bully . . .
Bulldozing boss . . .
Irate customer . . .
Irritable, though significant, other . . .
War-dependent industries. . .
Political rivals . . .
Religious and cultural militants . . .

What can the theory and practice of human systems dynamics contribute to the journey toward peaceful and productive engagement?

On April 21 through 23, HSD Institute will host a time of learning and inquiry as people explore their own options for action to move from destructive conflict to productive engagement. Royce Holladay, Vic Ward, and Lois Yellowthunder will lead the way as a community comes together to explore the human systems dynamics of peaceful engagement. The lessons will be many, and they will include:

Peace travels across levels. Individual, couple, family, neighborhood, community, nation, world—every level has known and can know the destruction of conflict as well as the fruits of peace. Disruption at any of these levels influences stability of levels above and below. Peace at any encourages peace in all.

Peace is a dynamic pattern. We define a pattern as “Similarities, differences, and relationships that have meaning across space and/or time.” Seen as an emergent pattern, the search for peace boils down to three, rather concrete, questions:

- What are the similarities that encourage (or force) us to interact with each other?
- What differences between us are significant enough to warrant our shared attention?
- What are the historical or current relationships that inform our actions?

Answers to these questions frame options for action to move beyond current conflict. Increase, decrease, or refocus the similarities and differences. Strengthen, weaken, or redirect the relationships. Of course the process isn't quite as easy as it sounds. We think of five phases of action that help move individuals and groups toward more peaceful engagement.

Awareness. We are too often inured to violence. Our culture embeds destructive conflict in popular entertainment, media, and common figures of speech. Before we can overcome the forces of violent conflict, we have to become conscious of its presence and influence on our day-to-day lives. HSD encourages an inquiry stance in which each of us strives to be aware of and to challenge our own and others' assumptions.

Analysis. We cannot begin to take intentional action to influence the patterns of conflict until we have some understanding of the dynamics that shape and are shaped by those patterns. Our understanding must progress beyond simple dichotomies like “us/them” or “good/evil” before we can imagine creative options for action. HSD introduces the CDE Model that defines three conditions for self-organizing systems. These conditions provide an analytical frame to help understand the dynamics of conflict without demonizing any of the players.

Engagement. Seeing and understanding are only the beginning of the journey past conflict. To influence patterns and shift them toward nonviolent relationship, we have to engage with others. After considering our options for action, we choose. We act. We observe the results of our actions, and we choose again. HSD calls this cycle of engagement the Adaptive Action Process because it enables individuals, groups, and communities to learn new ways to become more fit for survival.

Transformation. There is a part of the peace-making journey that is beyond prediction or control. We call that stage *transformation*. This is the stage where the massively entangled, self-organizing systems shift their patterns. Individuals have new insights and make new choices. Groups shift their focus toward shared concerns rather than divisive issues. Communities redirect their energies toward growth and opportunity for all, rather than fear and defensiveness for some. No intervention can be proven to “cause” transformation in human systems. Things that work one time and in one place may be totally ineffective at another time and place. Instead of promising power and control, HSD helps us set the conditions for transformation, and it teaches us to observe and encourage changes in the pattern as they emerge.

Sustainability. The long-term success of the journey past conflict depends on new patterns that are sustainable. The best outcomes are situations where the new similarities, differences, and relationships are productive and self-reinforcing because they do not depend on external investment. Principles of HSD suggest some specific factors that contribute to sustainable patterns in human systems. Each factor introduces practical options for action to establish sustainable patterns of peace on the other side of destructive conflict.

As students and teachers of human systems dynamics, we engage in an on-going inquiry about the theory and practice of peace. In April, we will invite others into the dialogue, share our emerging learnings, frame new and more powerful questions, and shape individual and shared action to see and influence patterns toward peace.

If you would like to join us or to hear more about this journey, please contact us by phone or on-line.

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