

## **System dynamics in Conflict management**

### **Negotiation- and Mediation constellations**

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Dealing with conflict and finding acceptable solutions for the party's involved means dealing with a complex field of system dynamic forces and searching patiently for a satisfying way out of a jungle of meanings, beliefs, judgements, emotions and interests. It is a very important job, for its super ordinate goal is to unify what has been separated, to reconcile people, organisations and cultures that have been fighting each other for shorter or longer time, sometimes over hundreds of years. The more overview the negotiator has over these system dynamic influences, and the more he or she is able to include what has been excluded till that moment, the more he or she has the power to create the right support and find acceptable solutions. The work with systemic constellations is an important contribution to increase awareness, to broaden perspective and to gain the trust, loyalty, and power that is needed to deal with conflict in a good way, as well for the negotiators as for the people they represents.

#### **System dynamics and conflict**

When two party's are in conflict with each other, they fight at the boundaries of both their systems. Each party has its own background, with specific members, subgroups, specific values, a specific history, specific pain and specific victims. Every single one of these aspects influences the system as a whole, and determines its movements, its growth and, in the end, its deterioration. Every single aspect needs its place, wants to be honoured and respected, wants to be in a good balance of giving and taking in relationship to the system it is part of.

When two systems (family's, organisations, cultures) meet, they can only integrate into a super ordinate system, when each of them acknowledges and honours the background, experiences and values of the other systems. Where that is not possible, conflict is born, repression, exclusion, and war are the result.

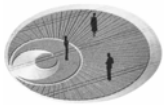
#### **Negotiations**

Negotiating means that persons or a group of people represent their system, move to the boundaries of their own system and communicate its wishes, needs and values to the other side.

On a deeper level one could say: the negotiators responsibility towards his people or organisation, is to communicate the important elements of the system to the other party, so that that party develops more acknowledgement, honour and respect and the way towards integration is paved.

The other way around, the negotiator needs to listen to the values, experiences, emotions, and needs of the other party and communicate those to his own background, in order to help his own system acknowledge, honour and respect the other system, thus paving the way from the other side.

The integration of human systems is a most difficult, delicate and in the same time necessary job for the further growth of the human race, and for building peace in the world. Therefore



the negotiator's job is one of great weight and needs much strength, patience, endurance and wisdom.

## **Reality**

The above described systemic frame for conflict management is an idealistic one. Reality is however, especially when two cultures meet, that the long history, the wars, the victims, the loosing of ground and all other facts that caused pain in the past and have build strong collective emotions on both sides, work their way through into every level of the negotiations. It would be presumptuous to have the idea that we can overcome these deep underlying conflicts in the negotiations. We can only face reality, and look for concrete solutions that very slowly build up a better understanding and integration of the two systems.

## **The attitude of the negotiator**

Therefore the negotiator needs a humble and in the same time persistent attitude. Humble means here: Knowing that he or she is only one person in an immense systemic force field and that his or her power reaches as far as the loyalty and support that is coming from his or her people. Although the chosen strategy can be as well mild or consenting, as aggressive or persisting, the inner attitude needs to be one with a great heart for all the people and emotions involved, for the historical aspects, for the feelings and values on both sides. Thus the negotiator gets the weight and the respect he needs to influence the conflict- situation.

## *Inclusiveness*

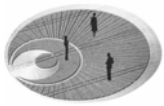
Inclusiveness means that we are able to have a broad perspective, see the people, the past, the feelings. Have our inner eyes on the everyone and everything that belongs to our system and to the other system, and to give it a place in our hearts. Of course this only possible until a certain limit. That limit however is very personal, and the more inclusive the negotiator is, the more power he'll gain. The contrary of inclusiveness is exclusiveness. People or facts that belong to system and its systems past and who are excluded, will keep on sabotaging the conflict solving process.

## *Honour*

Honour means that we honour the past of the other system, honour the losses and the pain, honour their value system, their religion, honour their wishes and needs, in the same way as we honours those aspects in our own system. We can acknowledge the differences, without judging them, and honour them. Honour does not mean that we have to agree. It means seeing things as they are and acknowledging them.

## *Balance*

In every human relationship there is a need for balance. The balance between give and take. A relationship can only develop, when both sides give and both sides take. When one side takes more then he gives, the relationship shall end soon. The same is however the case when one side gives more then it takes from the other side: also then the relationship cannot build up and shall die.



Specifically in conflict- management their need to be awareness about this balance between giving and taking. For solutions come forth out of preciously build relationships, the negotiator needs to manage this balance between giving and taking well.

## Solutions

In many conflict situations, and specifically in cross-cultural conflicts, solutions are not easy to find. They come however, when the constellation of both systems is right. That means that everything is in the right place, that the order is right and that we have found a good balance between giving and taking. Then solutions tend to present themselves in a very unexpected and unpredictable, surprising way. The art of negotiating and mediating lies for a large part in facilitating the right systemic constellation, in which solutions can occur.

## System constellations

As negotiators and mediators we see many aspects that influence our work, but there also many aspects we do not know. Therefore we can use the work with system constellations, to bring to light that aspect we did not see until now. For example, the constellation may bring to light places where we have excluded important elements in our minds and hearts, and reveal how we are in relationship to both the systems we are dealing with and whether this position is empowering is or blocking the way towards constructive solutions.

In systemic constellations work we choose representatives out of a group of participants, for different persons, organisations, historical facts, and other aspects that are important in the dynamics of the conflict-situation we are dealing with. We place these representatives somewhere in the room, so that we get a three-dimensional picture of the constellation of our situation. The distances between the representatives and the feelings they have give important information about the present situation, and offer potential systemdynamic solutions for the future. This work with systemic constellations, which is applied in family systems, organisational systems and cultural systems, is founded by the German psychotherapist Bert Hellinger, and is one of the most innovating methods for finding solutions in difficult systemdynamic conditions.

## Conclusion

Negotiation and mediation take place in extreme complex systemic contexts. The negotiator or mediator needs a good insight in and knowledge about the different systemic factors that influence his work. He needs to develop an attitude that supports his position in the field in a positive way and needs to be able to make the right systemic interventions at the right moment. Therefore negotiators and mediators need to be trained in a systemdynamic way of thinking and develop a systemic awareness, in which the work with system constellations can play an important role.

### *About the author:*

*Eelco de Geus* is counselor and consultant, trained in the fields of Transactional Analysis, Neuro Linguistic Programming, Communitybuilding and Systemdynamics. He created and facilitated trainingprogramms for large organizations, with the focus on leadership development, developing learning organizations and communitybuilding.

He is founder and leader of Institute for Systemdynamics & Dialogue in Vienna, in which family-, organizational and cultural constellations are studied and dialogue processes are facilitated. For information and contact: Institute for Systemdynamics & Dialogue Vienna, [www.systemaufstellungen.org](http://www.systemaufstellungen.org)