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An Integral View

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"Fight or flight"...you probably remember those two alternatives for responding to conflict from your initial introduction to human behavior. Starting in 1966, I had facilitated a number of conflict management laboratories and teambuilding projects before I discovered there are more options. The height, depth, and breadth of my integral map of conscious options has gradually evolved over the intervening years to identify and include first 15, later 21, and still later 40 useful options (Johnston, 1972; 1979; 1980; 983).

My latest map of conscious options for empathically responding to conflict is the result of new research through which I have uncovered 56 choices (Johnston 2009). These options can be consciously used for health or for ill for coping with conflict depending on the social situation in which the option is applied. If viewed positively, all kinds of conflict in human affairs may be perceived as providing loving sparks of integral healthful life and an opportunity for soul development as well as greater effectiveness in empathetically responding to conflict.

Self-managing our responses to conflict in conscious, centered, balanced, healthful, empathetic ways is recommended as a beneficial goal for self-transforming and developing individuals, partnerships, families, groups, communities, cultures, humanity-at-large and our ecosystem.

This expanded integral map of conscious options for empathetically responding to conflict is founded on these five basic hypotheses:

First: I hypothesize the Great Ultimate Mystery, presumably our Source, supports healthful levels of conflict, as well as harmony and love. Both provide the energy and spark of creative evolutionary life. It follows, if the Great Ultimate Mystery loves conflict It-She-He loves both/all sides of the conflict.

Second: “There will probably always be conflict to some degree or another throughout human affairs and our ecosystem if for only the reason that when one entity is hungry another is thirsty, when one wants to rest, another wants to be active, when one wants to go left another wants to go right, when one is satisfied another is dissatisfied. The issue, therefore, is not conflict per se, but how we respond to it” (Adapted from Riane Eisler, 1991).

Third: If one perceives temporal events from her or his freest inner place of transparent, centered, balanced, timeless awareness of the “Great Ultimate Mystery,” every perception is an interdependent option, every interpretation of every perception is an interdependent option, and every response to every interpretation is an interdependent option with caveats and consequences for more or less good or ill (Johnston, 1980).

Fourth: Whenever we set out to realize an intention, goal or objective we can expect to meet these three entities: a friendly supportive entity; a neutral fence-sitting entity and/or an entity who more or less opposes the intention (Johnston, 1980).

Those three entities may be *controllable*, e.g. our responses to them; *influenceable*, e.g. our political representatives; or they may be so large, intelligent, fast and elusive they are *beyond our control and influence* -- we can only resign ourselves to adapting to them, e.g. volcanoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, etc (Johnston, 1980).

Fifth: Positive emotions undo the cardiovascular effects of negative emotions. When people experience stress from conflict, they show increased heart rate, higher blood sugar, immune suppression, higher secretion of the biochemicals cortisol and norepinephrine, and other adaptations optimized for immediate action. If individuals do not regulate these changes once the stress is past, they can lead

to illness, coronary heart disease, and heightened mortality. Both lab research and survey research indicate that positive emotions help people who were previously under stress relax back to their physiological baseline (Sears, 1999).

In other words, research evidence shows effective conflict management results in healthful levels of biochemicals such as cortisol and adrenalin caused by stress and higher secretions of dopamine, endorphin, and serotonin levels which promote a healthful positive outlook on life, enhance the immune system, and generally slow deterioration of one's body.

On the following page is a 'map of consciousness' presenting seven 'families' of eight options each for responding to, self-managing, and facilitating responses to conflict. Feel free to add your own. More options may be created by combining two or more. *Theoretically*, there is no "right or wrong" option. *Practically*, what makes an option "right or wrong" depends on whether it is one's *intent* to choose the healthiest option available for the situation at hand: individually, socially and ecosystemically.

The List of 56-Plus Options for Empathetically Responding to Conflict ~ An Integral View

COMPETE	EXPLORE	EXPERIMENT	TEAM-UP	TRANSCEND	AVOID	RESIGN
My facts are right, You are wrong	Take a look at the cutting edge	Stick toe in, test the water	Win-win -- what best meets goals of our team?	Disidentify with and rise above attachments	Scary situation, I'm getting out of here fast	Oh well, this too shall pass
I win, you lose	Conduct a search for a viable answer	Reality-check assumption(s) in the laboratory of daily experience	Empathize with and try to understand each other	Just relax and float on top of it all ('law of reversed effort')	Let him or her take the blame for me	It's not very important anyway
Let's make it a friendly game of	Further investigate the facts we	Conduct a triple-blind study of _____	Look for common ground	Take criticism seriously but not personally	Don't listen to them -- stonewall	Fate will out . . . I surrender to forces beyond

	have					my control
My beliefs are right, yours wrong	Conduct a survey of _____	Try out a new option for managing conflict	I'll give a little if you give a little	Go to the mountain top to survey options	Let an impartial expert decide	Turn my other cheek
My group is smarter and more skillful than yours	Re-open the case and take a new look	Conduct a longitudinal study of _____	Let's agree to disagree and move on as friends	Keep options open pending new developments	What problem?	You're my superior, I'll go by your decision
I feel threatened, its my territory -- keep out!	Go into the issues in greater detail	Expose a group of people to new idea to obtain their feedback	Forgive each other and communicate adult-to-adult	Transcend, own, and self-manage all options	If I can't have my way I'll take my marbles and go home	They are doing the best they can considering their circumstances
Unhealthful bacteria make me sick . . . kill 'em!	Brainstorm for additional alternatives	Observe behavior for affect/effect of new education method(s)	But for the luck of the draw each of us could have been the other	Each of the nine intelligences* is due equal respect	Couldn't care less	I give up . . . there isn't anything else I can do
Give me liberty or give me death!	Search for new knowledge	Classify species observed in their natural habitat	Let's make love not war	View things as parts of a whole system	Sorry, I have to leave for another . . .commitment	C'est la vie!
Caveat	Caveat	Caveat	Caveat	Caveat	Caveat	Caveat
If overused or misused <i>competing</i> may result in unnecessary harm to self, others, or both	If overused or misused <i>exploring</i> may result in enjoying the sights at the expense of desired results	If overused or misused, <i>experimenting</i> may result in misleading results	If overused or misused <i>teaming-up</i> (collaborating) may result in loss of ability to make individual decisions	If overused or misused <i>transcending</i> may result in loss of grounding for negotiating practical affairs	If overused or misused <i>avoiding</i> may result in loss of ability to be effective in the give and take of life	If overused or misused <i>resigning</i> to conditions may result in getting unnecessarily trampled by events in life

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Related Readings

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About the Author

Robert Wayne Johnston, PhD has been a pioneer theorist and practitioner in consciousness expansion, integral self-management, creative leadership, and organization transformation and development since 1966. Working as both an internal and external consultant, he specialized in guiding top managements of small to large non-profit and Fortune 500 companies through the process of starting-up corporate-wide organization development projects from scratch. Concurrently, he was curriculum consultant and adjunct professor teaching human behavior in organizations in two graduate schools of business. Profiled in *Organization Transformation Theorists and Practitioners*, he has published widely and made numerous presentations at conferences.

During the ten years before retiring, he changed somewhat the focus of his vocation to introduce his innovative in-depth transformational self-management processes in psychiatric and traumatic brain injury rehabilitation. Now an active retiree, Bob has been giving back to society by doing mostly volunteer consulting work in the areas of self-management for healthful aging and creative leadership for non-profit local, state, and national councils on aging, and the White House Conference on Aging. He founded the Institute of Noetic Sciences Community Group in Amherst, Massachusetts.

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