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Resolutionary Change:
The Art of Awakening Dormant
Faculties in Others

A Response by
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> *"For you who will to work with he who guides the future of mankind, bring forth spirit potential within yourself and so achieve the power to awaken dormant faculties in others. Cultivate the seed points; foster forces of development; and recognize that which is of the future."* ~ *Rudolf Steiner (source unknown)*

1. Introduction

The dilemma with change is that everyone likes to talk about it, but very few have insight into their own willingness to change, let alone their ability to influence change. Those who see the need for change often want others to change first. That applies to adversaries and onlookers, but also to analysts and practitioners. Why is this the case? Mitchell rightly points out that our present state of knowledge "offers little in the way of practical guidance to anyone seeking to initiate or reinforce resolutionary change processes" (Mitchell 2005, 21).

Guiding future discussions in search of "practical guidance", Mitchell, in his concluding remarks, asks three key questions, which can be summarised as follows:

1. What changes will clearly indicate that the adversaries in a protracted conflict are likely to be receptive to suggestions about alternative, nonviolent methods of fulfilling their interests and entering into a new relationship with their adversary?

2. How to best carry out a systematic analysis to distinguish between tractable and intractable factors in order to focus on effective change efforts?

3. How to construct an environment in which people in conflict can safely explore new ideas towards a better future?

The first question has to do with the question *when* to act and the last two with *how* to act. In an earlier section of his essay Mitchell discusses the question *who* needs to act (18-21).

In this article I will attempt to take up Mitchell's challenge to reflect on lessons from the field that may offer insights into the practical aspects of stimulating social change in developmental ways. In particular, I would like to reflect on the third question and also explore the questions *where* to begin and *how to measure the safeness* of the environment that we seek to construct. I share his belief that people do learn and can change (17, 22) but there has to be an attitude of openness to risk, honest examination of, and applications of, the lessons in practice. Lederach (2002, 99) urges us to pay much more attention to the development of "*process and learning-based* indicators rooted in an *explicit* exploration of the change theory", rather than relying on the rhetoric of peace and gauging change by means of outcome indicators.

This essay starts with stating a few assumptions that are the basis of our approach. It then explores a development framework in an effort to answer the question how to measure the quality of safe spaces and processes that happen in those spaces.

2. Key Assumptions

1. *Conflict is a necessary and inevitable dynamic in all human relationships.* It can have positive outcomes, depending on the ability of adversaries to achieve "dynamic stability" (Mitchell, 4) – a well-known concept in engineering sciences. It is used to describe the ability to achieve stability amidst various dynamics or forces. Designers of boats, aeroplanes and 4x4 vehicles, for example, anticipate and expect turbulence and friction. Their designs include mechanisms and components that will ensure maximum stability under varying circumstances. Nonviolent conflict, unlike violent conflict, should neither be avoided nor discouraged.

2. *Conflict transformation is a skill and an art.* Successful peacebuilders have developed skills that are strengthened by intuition and imagination in the same way as Amerindians in the Amazon region developed coping mechanisms that cannot simply be taught to outsiders. Amerindians, like many other first peoples, are artists whose intuition, sharpened senses and an ability to "know the forest" inform and shape their survival skills. Having navigated the creeks and rivers for centuries, even children have an ability to read the riverbed under the water by watching the surface. The implication for change processes is that those who seek to intervene will have to learn the art and skill of listening from those who read the forest and the rivers before they attempt to construct an environment for change.

3. *Resolutionary change is as much a matter of attitude as it is of knowledge and skills.* Even if it were possible to know everything about change and conflict – its nature, formation, escalation, mitigation and resolution or transformation – practitioners might still find themselves frustrated by the absence or direction of change, because they are often unaware of their own habits and attitudes. If, for example, agents of change behave as drivers rather than enablers – a point Mitchell alludes to on page 19 – they are most likely contributing to the escalation of conflict. Or, if the prevailing attitude is that people are the problem instead of understanding that people are never the problem, the problem is the problem – a key principle of David Epston and Michael White's Narrative Therapy concept (1990) –, interveners will continue to face resistance. Or, if the prevailing perception is that conflict is bad, few will find the courage to get involved in constructive ways.

4. *It is possible to design and facilitate safe spaces that build mediative capacity* (Lederach 2002). This happens through listening that leads to the development of relationships that can sustain social change. I will return later to how this is to be done.

5. *There is no substitute for local ownership.* The value of outsider assistance in cases of deep-rooted and protracted conflicts is undisputed, but those who seek to help will find that the extent to which people own the design and outcome of transformation processes from the inception determines the likelihood of sustainability of those efforts. History has shown that peace agreements born as a result of local stakeholders receiving "peace sperms" from foreign donors do not last. The

DNA of resolutionary change needs to match the DNA of the primary role players. Those who seek to assist in change processes can, at best, be midwives who assist the parents to give birth to and nurture new life.[1]

6. *Change is in the first place (but not only) a personal or individual matter.* Changed individuals have the potential and responsibility to influence relationships, sub-systems, systems, policies, institutions and transformative processes.

7. *People in conflict, if given an opportunity and support, have a great deal of resilience and dormant faculties.* Nicaraguan psychologist Martha Cabrera (see references, no date) describes the "multiple wounds phenomenon" that has social, political and personal dimensions. Unhealed hurts of the past cause people to develop an inability to embrace change. Multiply wounded societies have capacities to change, but these capacities will only become active if there are spaces where the wounds of the past are recognised and dealt with. Those who partner with people in pain are often guilty of either ignoring the wounds, or dysfunctional rescuing. Assistance should therefore always aim to awaken those dormant faculties, stimulating imaginative instinct, resilience, commitment and care, in the belief that hope generates energy to take the next step.

8. *Process is as important as outcome.* Building cohesion, like development, cannot consist of a series of unrelated activities. Activities or content ("the strategic what") need to be designed and executed with and by key role-players ("the strategic who") in unison with a unifying vision and empowering process ("the strategic how").

Let us explore how these assumptions are translated into a framework and from there into practice.
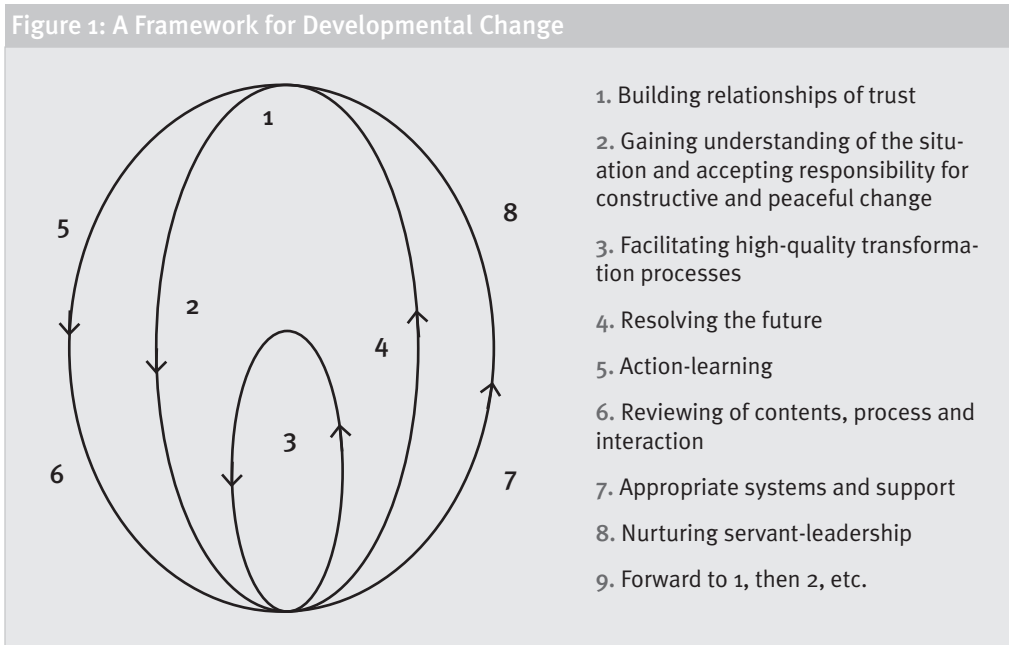
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3. A Framework for a Developmental Approach to Change

A developmental approach is one that respects the rights and abilities of people to exercise constructive control and ownership of processes that affect them, and facilitates such control and ownership. Such an approach focuses on supporting people to "cultivate the seeds"; to "recognise that which is of the future", as Steiner says; and to take incremental steps towards building and guiding one another to a future that will be free from those obstacles that block self-fulfilment.

To initiate change is the easy part. To sustain it is much harder. It requires people to work in partnerships on present challenges in the context of lessons from the past with a view to ensure a better future. It requires comprehensive design and specific processes; a balance between short-term goals and longer-term outcomes; commitment to local ownership of process and contents; genuine consultation and participation; a focus on being a presence instead of bringing new "tools"; a strategic approach instead of ad-hoc tactical interventions; movement towards interdependence as opposed to dependence or independence; and movement beyond awareness to change in behaviour. It also requires attention to mechanisms, management, support and continuous evaluation.

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1. Compare this approach with what Bishop Paride Taban of Southern Sudan once described to me in the early 1990s as the peaceworkers' frustration with the "peace vultures" – those organisations and people specialising in conflict that soar the skies in search of conflict on which they feast like vultures on a carcass. Once they spot other vultures circling elsewhere, they fly away to feast on the next conflict, leaving behind dry bones and no capacity.

The following framework, in part based on the original development framework designed by the Community Development Resource Association (CDRA 1999/2000), captures these principles in a logical but free-flowing form. It helps us to see change as part of an interconnected circular movement with no beginning and no end. The separate stages are elaborated further below.

Figure 1: A Framework for Developmental Change

1. Building relationships of trust

2. Gaining understanding of the situation and accepting responsibility for constructive and peaceful change

3. Facilitating high-quality transformation processes

4. Resolving the future

5. Action-learning

6. Reviewing of contents, process and interaction

7. Appropriate systems and support

8. Nurturing servant-leadership

9. Forward to 1, then 2, etc.

3.1 Building Relationships of Trust

Change and conflict, like development, are about people, not things. Every effort, therefore, to effect resolutionary change has to begin with substantial investments in building trust with and between people. Change agents should expect mistrust and should not assume that their role as interveners is understood and welcomed. Building trust is a long process that requires one-on-one discussions with the "strategic who", consistency, transparency, solid processes, regular feedback, non-partisanship, information and knowledge sharing. Trust generates energy to change. Mistrust closes down the spaces for change.

3.2 Gaining Understanding of the Situation and Accepting Responsibility for Constructive and Peaceful Change

Although there is no question about the value of analysis by outsiders, there is often not enough effort to assist adversaries to share their own analysis and understanding. Too often outsider experts produce reports after "consultations" that cause additional strain on the time and energies of people who are already over-burdened, and too seldom do they verify their findings with those who provided the information in the first place. Facilitation of change processes requires skilful listening and sharing that will enable those who are affected to gain new perspectives and joint understanding of what needs to change, why, how and when. Adam Kahane (2004, 103) sums it up as follows: "In order to solve tough problems, we need more than shared new ideas. We also need shared commitment. We need a sense of the whole and what it demands of us."

Once relationships are strong and people understand and own the problems, processes and desired outcomes, they are much more likely to accept responsibility for constructive and

peaceful change. It has been said so many times, but it is worth repeating: There is no substitute for commitment and ownership by those who are directly involved in the process.

3.3 Facilitating High-Quality Transformation Processes

In spite of all the knowledge in the field of change, and more specifically of organisational development processes, the issue of poor facilitation is probably the most important barrier that frustrates effective change. It unfortunately happens in so many instances that people who hold power and who are not necessarily the best facilitators are taking on facilitation roles to the detriment of generative dialogue. Based on the work of Otto Scharmer, Steve Waddell (2005), co-director of the Generative Dialogue Project, describes generative dialogue as a "conversation that brings forth creative energy and collective intelligence out of a personal sense of connection to the whole." This type of dialogue that facilitates change is unlikely to happen when tough leaders lead tough discussions in debating styles. Those who facilitate should know that good facilitation processes result in participants' co-owning, co-designing and implementing necessary changes to agendas, processes and interactions. In short, facilitation of conflict transformation is about remodelling identity that enables us to replace old patterns with new ones. Conflict transformation is a by-product of new thinking (attitudes, insights and understanding) that results in new behaviour.

3.4 Resolving the Future

New thinking and new behaviour generate energy to resolve the future. Change is always about the future. But the future holds on to the past, refusing to let go of collective memories that shaped mindsets and behaviours. In a sense the future does not have to let go of the past. It can connect to the past by re-membering the parts into a new wholeness that is characterised by positive peace and justice. The miracle of South Africa's peaceful transition to democracy was that the same people who were mourning the loss of life, dignity and opportunities were the architects of a common future that promised to protect future generations against human rights abuses. It was only after South Africans reached agreement on the future that they engaged in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings. Facilitation of change processes makes it possible for people to find inspiration in imagining and working together towards a future that connects us to our past in a transformative way.

3.5 Action-learning

The way to improve what we are doing is through continuous action-learning. Action-learning can be described as an "upward spiral of learning and increasingly effective action" (Taylor, Marais and Kaplan 1997, 3).

Figure 2: Action-learning

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The spiral comprises four elements: action, reflection, learning and planning. The action-learning methodology values the experience and knowledge of participants and develops people's insights and good judgement. The past cannot be changed, but reflecting on the past is necessary to expand the range of insights that could inform the way we approach the future. Reflecting on the action-learning process in reverse order, one can say that successful implementation (*action*) is dependent on good *planning*. Good planning draws on *lessons* learned, which is the result of thorough *reflective evaluation* on the *action*.

3.6 Reviewing of Contents, Process and Interaction

As a result of asking the right questions in the action-learning methodology, it is now possible to review the quality of the what (content), the how (process) and the who (the strategic partners) *with* partners instead of *for* them. Typical guiding themes are strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats at the physical, procedural, relationship, cultural and identity levels.

3.7 Appropriate Systems and Support

Facilitation of transformational processes should ensure that developmental change is supported by appropriate systems and mechanisms. Appropriate systems and support would constitute those support systems that enhance self-sufficiency and a sense of interdependence instead of dependency and reliance on outsider inputs and maintenance. Any support needs to enhance sustainable and locally owned systems in coordinated and collaborative manners.

3.8 Nurturing Servant-Leadership

Success of initiatives always depends on the quality of leadership. The paradigm of "good leadership" is culturally bound and should be carefully examined. In some cultures leaders have to be seen to be "strong" and "firm", while in other settings leadership depends much more on presence and wisdom.

When access to people depends on one or two leaders only, those leaders may use their gate-keeper positions to enhance their own status and power among their followers. It is therefore important to have strong relationships with a number of key leaders in relevant sectors who collectively have the potential to construct "mediative spaces".

The challenge is to help nurture facilitative and mediative leadership styles instead of dominating styles; leaders who listen first instead of speaking first; visionaries instead of blamers; magnanimous leaders instead of vindictive leaders; empowering leaders instead of "absolute" leaders; and leaders whose aspirations are aligned with the values of justice, peace and nonviolence. They are the "strategic who" that need to drive and implement resolutionary change processes (Lederach 2001).

Servant-leaders – a term coined by Robert Greenleaf – may or may not hold formal leadership positions. They encourage and model collaboration, trust, foresight, listening, and the ethical use of power and empowerment. Lederach's description of the qualities of "voicewalkers" (2005, 167-168) captures the aspirations of resolutionary change agents:

> "They don't confuse their job or activities with who they are as people. They don't confuse getting credit with success, or recognition with self-worth. They don't confuse criticism for an enemy. They don't confuse truth with social or political power. They don't confuse their work with saving the world. They don't confuse guilt with motivation…It is not so much what they do as who they are that makes a difference. They listen in a way that their own agenda does not seem to be in

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the way. They respond more from love than fear. They laugh at themselves. They cry with others' pain, but never take over their journey. They know when to say no and have the courage to do it. They work hard but are rarely too busy. Their life speaks."

Servant-leaders lead the process to begin another cycle of the framework, starting with a focus on relationships… and so the cycle continues.

But how does one move from this understanding to the practice of constructing spaces safe enough for key role-players to explore and risk new alternatives? This is the essence of Mitchell's last question.

4. Practical Guidance to the Architecture of Safe Spaces

How can knowledge of the need for, and theories of, change help to thaw frozen seeds in hearts and minds so that they germinate into new life? What attitudes, behaviours and skills are necessary to form partnerships that help everyone in the relationship move from a feeling of disempowerment to empowerment; from fear of the unknown to a willingness to let go of the past and present? Who needs to do what in order to help create spaces in which people regain the courage to take steps towards the transformation of relationships and perceptions despite a history of pain and mistrust? While the technical details and taste of each architect may differ from conflict to conflict, there is one common denominator: through respectful listening.

4.1 Respectful Listening

While mediating a land claim in the Kalahari desert, I once visited a farmer whose farm was far away from the rest. It was a long and hot journey through inhospitable terrain. He was one of the stakeholders who opposed the land claim by the San people. I expected a hostile reception, because everybody in the area knew him as a difficult person. The opposite was true. This man started the conversation by saying: "For twenty five years I tried to tell people our point of view and nobody wants to listen. You go to meetings and all you find is that you are spoken to. You, sir, a stranger, are the first person to come to my place, sit on my veranda, drink my coffee and listen to how we feel." It took almost one year to convene the first multi-stakeholder forum on the claim. Everybody predicted chaos "because this is what normally happens when we discuss land issues". Once again the opposite was true. After the two-day meeting of more than two hundred people, participants were elated. "It was the first time that we were able to engage each other without fighting." The reason for this was that all the stakeholders came to the session knowing that they were well understood and listened to in the preparation phase. They had little anxiety about the agenda and process, because they participated in the design of the forum.

Respectful listening is more than a technique. It is an attitude, a behaviour and a skill that creates safe spaces and mediative capacity. In these generative and nonviolent spaces the heartbeat of the root causes, expressed as unmet needs, is heard and amplified in "contradictory and conflictual relationships" (Clements 2002). Listening satisfies adversaries' needs for identity, understanding, participation and protection, for example. Listening makes it possible for people to

consider exploring mutually satisfying options because they know that their ideas have been heard and form part of the pool of alternatives that will be considered. My idea and your idea now become our ideas. Listening makes it possible to shift dynamics from *I* to *we*, and from *them* to *us*, because people know that they are well understood even though solutions have not been reached.[2]

Most often efforts to resolve conflicts get stuck at the level of facts (thoughts) and issues, manifesting in power struggles. In an effort to deepen our understanding of listening, I have in recent years developed the Five-Level Listening Model on the basis of the original three-level listening model promoted in the field of organisational development. To the original three levels – the head (*thoughts*), the heart (*emotions*) and the feet (*will/intentions*) – I have added the stomach (*needs and satisfiers*) and the clothes (*culture, beliefs* and *values*).

Figure 3: The Five-Level Listening Model

- Listening to the (head) **thoughts**: Can those who listen accurately reflect and paraphrase the thoughts of the others to the satisfaction of the speakers?
- Listening to the (heart) **emotions**: Does the process encourage the naming, recognition and expression of deep-seated emotions without apportioning blame? Can people hear the pain or joy and empathise with one another?
- Listening to the (stomach) **needs** and the chosen **satisfiers**: Do we help people to articulate their needs and the ways these needs are currently met or frustrated?
- Listening to the (feet) **intentions**: Do people express their intentions? Do we know what people want to do about the situation?
- Listening to the (clothes) **culture**: What are the underlying beliefs, shared knowledge and meaning people use to justify their perceptions and behaviour?

2. A practical example of how adversaries became partners is described in the story about a Guyanese Hindu religious leader of East Indian descent, Pandit Chrishna Persaud, who managed to establish relationships with people from African descent in a hostile environment (UNDP 2006).

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Respectful listening – and speaking – at all five levels is the unique feature of safe spaces, regardless of the context and culture. It is therefore possible to measure whether spaces are creative and safe in the same way as it is possible to measure when spaces are not safe.

4.2 Recognising Safe Spaces

Linking listening to needs, on the one hand, and developing a set of indicators that would help us to measure whether our listening has created safe spaces, on the other hand, is important. I find the ground breaking work of Chilean economist Manfred Max-Neef (1991) very helpful. Sharing their "revitalized capacity to dream", he and his colleagues developed a matrix of fundamental human needs and possible satisfiers. According to Max-Neef, every human being, regardless of age and culture, shares the same finite and classifiable system of interrelated and interactive (as opposed to hierarchical) needs. These needs are *subsistence*, *protection*, *affection*, *participation*, *understanding*, *leisure*, *creation*, *identity* and *freedom*. When needs are not met, people experience poverties, and each poverty generates pathologies. For example, poverties of subsistence, protection, understanding, participation, etc. lead to "collective pathologies of frustration", caused by unemployment, external debt, hyperinflation, fear, violence, marginalisation and exile – the fuel of destructive conflict. Needs do not change, but satisfiers of these needs do. Some satisfiers could actually be destroyers, for example, if war is chosen as a satisfier of the need for protection, freedom and identity. The satisfiers people choose are culturally and time-bound. (Culture is used in a broad sense of "the way we understand and do things around here".) Cultural change, therefore, is the consequence of exchanging traditional satisfiers for new or different ones. Expanding on Max-Neef's development concepts, one can argue that bringing about change in the way people respond to conflict requires spaces where people reflect on their needs, their chosen responses and possible alternatives. Those spaces, as we have seen earlier, need to be safe in order to build mediative and generative capacities.

Using Max-Neef's list of human needs (the first column), I suggest the following matrix as a checklist to measure safeness of the spaces:

Table 1: Safe Space Indicators		
Need	**Goal**	**(Examples of) Indicators**
Subsistence	Freedom from want	• How will this initiative help to secure means for self-fulfilment? • Does fear of losing an income or livelihood play a role in people's participation?
Protection	Freedom from fear and abuse	• Do people agree to and respect the principles of engagement (ground rules)? • Does the process protect the weak against the more powerful?
Affection	Freedom from hate and rejection	• Are people respected and valued? • How does this initiative enhance dignity, teamwork and camaraderie?
Understanding	Freedom from ignorance and uncertainty	• How does the process encourage transparency and understanding? • Does everyone have equal access to information on contents and process?

Need	Goal	(Examples of) Indicators
Participation	Freedom from exclusion	• Does every affected person feel meaningfully involved in the design, execution and evaluation of the initiative? • Is this initiative non-discriminatory and inclusive?
Leisure	Freedom from stress and exhaustion	• Does the initiative renew people's energy or does it make their lives more stressful? • Does this initiative support people to break down complex issues into manageable strategies?
Creation	Freedom to be the architect of your own future	• How is this initiative building on people's imaginations and dreams? • Is this a collective effort to create something new and constructive? • Are new ideas welcomed without judgement?
Identity	Freedom to be proud of who you are	• Is everyone treated equally, valued, affirmed and respected for who they are? • Are people free to define themselves according to their own criteria?
Freedom	Freedom from coercion	• Does the process reward honest expression of ideas? • Is the process fair and non-partisan?

One would immediately recognise the interconnectedness of the different needs and indicators. The common denominator is the need for freedom from want and fear.

Returning to the issue of listening for a short moment, it is interesting to note that respectful listening is probably the most synergistic satisfier to all the needs in Max-Neef's list. When listening takes place, people will feel protected, understood, affirmed, less stressed, part of the creation of a new solution, free to be themselves, etc. The opposite is also true. When people do not feel listened to, most, if not all, of the needs are frustrated.

There are obviously many unanswered questions and undiscovered dynamics in so far as essential building blocks for safe spaces are concerned. One of the areas that need a lot of further investigation is Mitchell's first question on page 21: *"What changes will clearly indicate that the adversaries in a protracted conflict are likely to be receptive to suggestions about alternative, nonviolent methods of fulfilling their interests and entering into a new relationship with their adversary?"* In the Guyana experience of bringing parliamentary political parties together in a space that is free from political contest and tension, the metaphor of waiting for the "ripe moments" (Mitchell 2005, 19) is not helpful. It implies that someone else has to watch to recognise the moment of ripeness while the fruit passively and patiently waits for a process to unfold over which it has little or no control. Or even worse, it blames others for not being ready. Initiating change is more like knocking on doors to see who opens. Outsiders may take initiative by knocking on a closed door, but the owners decide whether to open the door or not. The initiative and the response are mutual. One only invites others in if it is safe to do so. You only venture to go outside if it is safe. Safeness is therefore determined to a large extent by the purpose of the knocking and quality of the conversation at the door. Those who knock ought to expect suspicion and even enmity. Those who are inside don't know what to expect. Respectful listening and respect for human rights are the key

to elicitive (remember that this originally means "to lead out") and generative conversations that lead to a change in attitude, perceptions and behaviour.

5. Conclusion

There is little doubt that the discussion above has not done justice to Mitchell's need for "clear, detailed and empirically supported answers" to his three questions listed at the beginning of this article. What has become clear, however, is that answers to these questions will have to be found in listening spaces that create empowering partnerships with key figures in conflicts. These key figures, as Mitchell rightly points out on page 22, have constraints of time, attention and freedom. These constraints are the surface. Under the surface lie deep needs for subsistence, leisure, affection, protection, participation, creation, understanding, identity and freedom. Only when key figures and support teams are able to recognise and express these needs as shared needs can meaningful progress be expected.

The time has arrived for change agents to wander with their partners, not as initiative takers (see Mitchell's list on page 20), but as accompaniers and walking partners whose conversations re-awaken people's energies and imagination. They are partners in the forest – fellow human beings. They will know the forest. They will navigate the rivers. Together they will transform competitive spaces into listening spaces; tactical planning into strategic planning; escalating dynamics into dynamic stability; and resistance to change into risk-taking for change.

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Elements of his life and work are described by Susan Collin Marks (2000) in *Watching the Wind: Conflict Resolution During South Africa's Transition to Democracy.* Washington, DC: USIP.

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See also...

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