

# Intentional Relationship in Cohousing Communities

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# Intentional Relationship in Community

- Values
- Culture
- Communication and Conflict
- Leadership

# Intentional Values

What are values, visions, dreams, and hopes that are guiding you in your community journey?

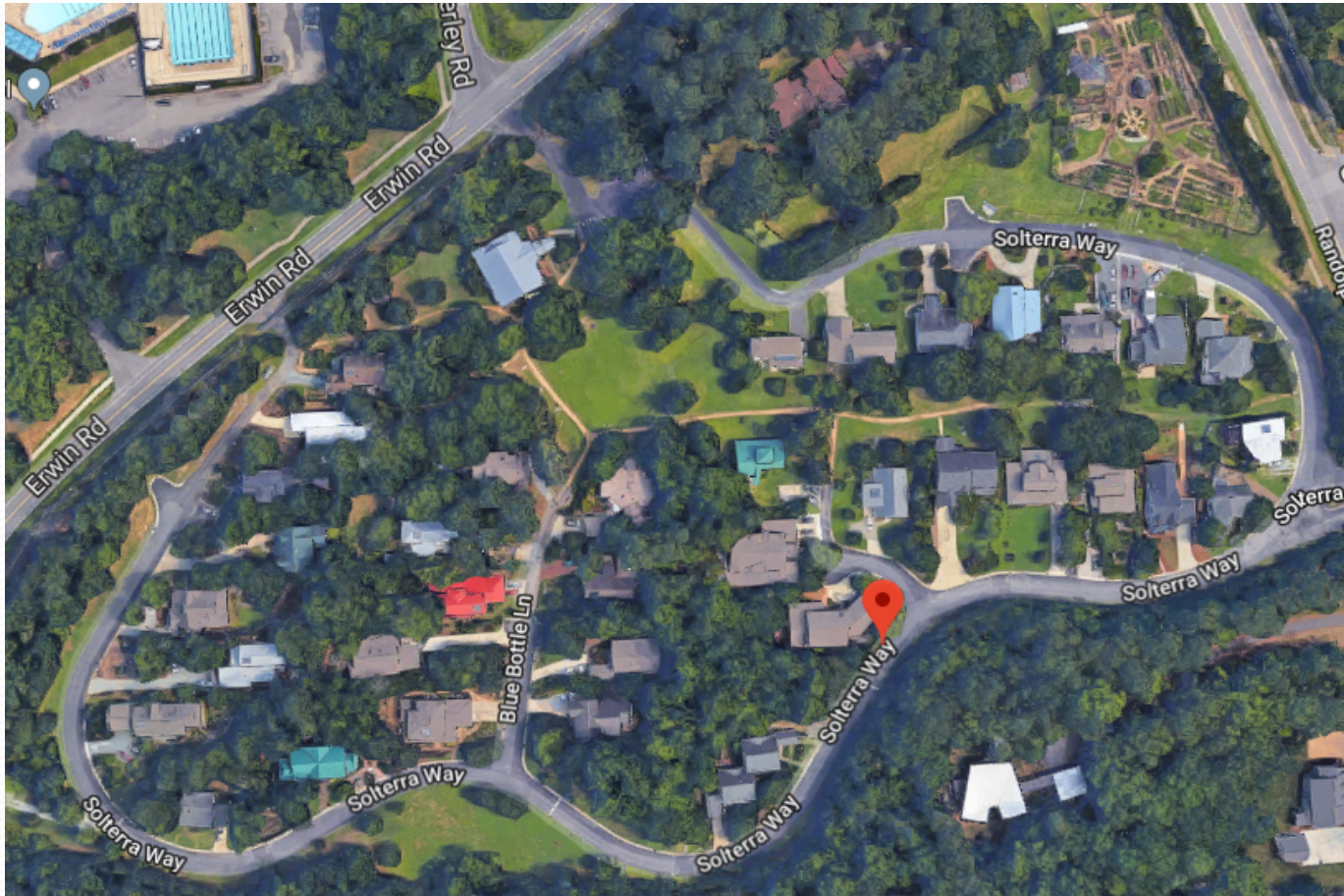


Earth From Space – Apollo 17  
NASA Langley Research Center

12/7/1972

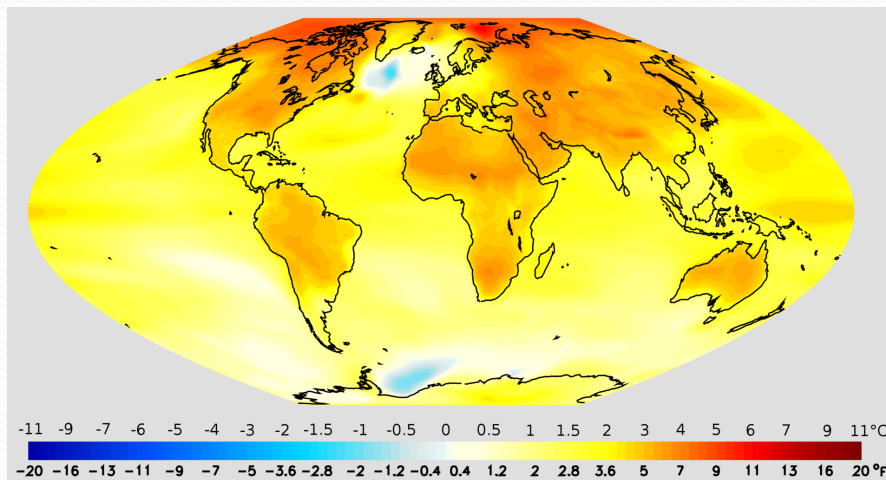
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# Community in Context: Where are You at?



Solterra Community, Durham, NC

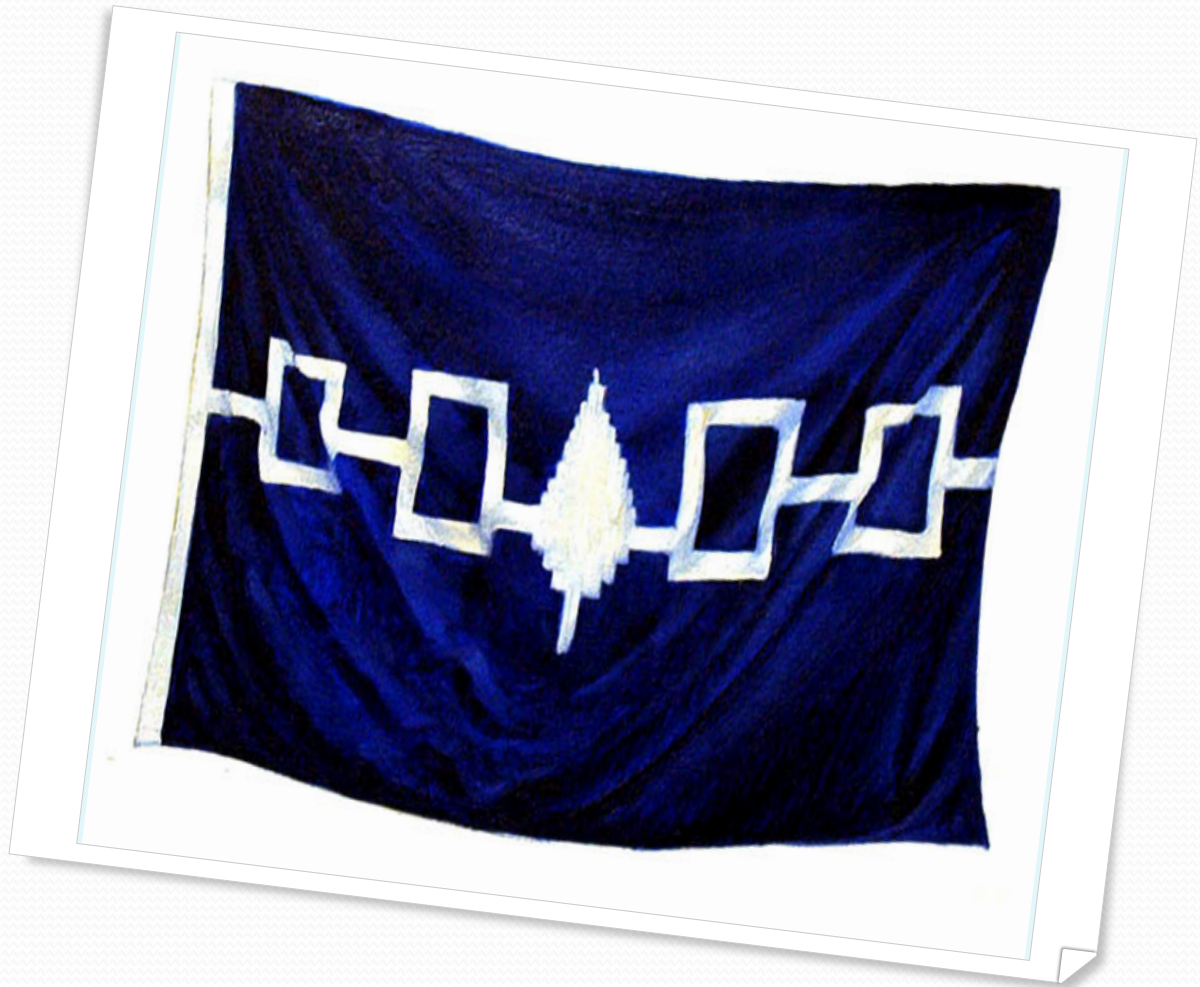
# Global Impact



- Our actions are no longer simply local in effect and consequence
- Human environmental impact can change human and non-human life forever
- “Sustainability concerns the welfare of other stakeholders who become impacted by our actions—the welfare of people and other species distant in time or space.” (*Sustainability*, Thiele, pg. 3)

## Seventh Generation

“In every  
deliberation, we  
must consider  
the impact on  
the seventh  
generation.”  
Great Law of the  
Iroquois



# Sustainability

Leslie Paul Thiele

“Sustainability is an adaptive art wedded to science in service to ethical vision . . . Sustainability is the practice of satisfying current needs without sacrificing future wellbeing by preserving core values and relationships while managing the scale and speed of change.” (*Sustainability*, p. 4)

Loggerhead Sea Turtle

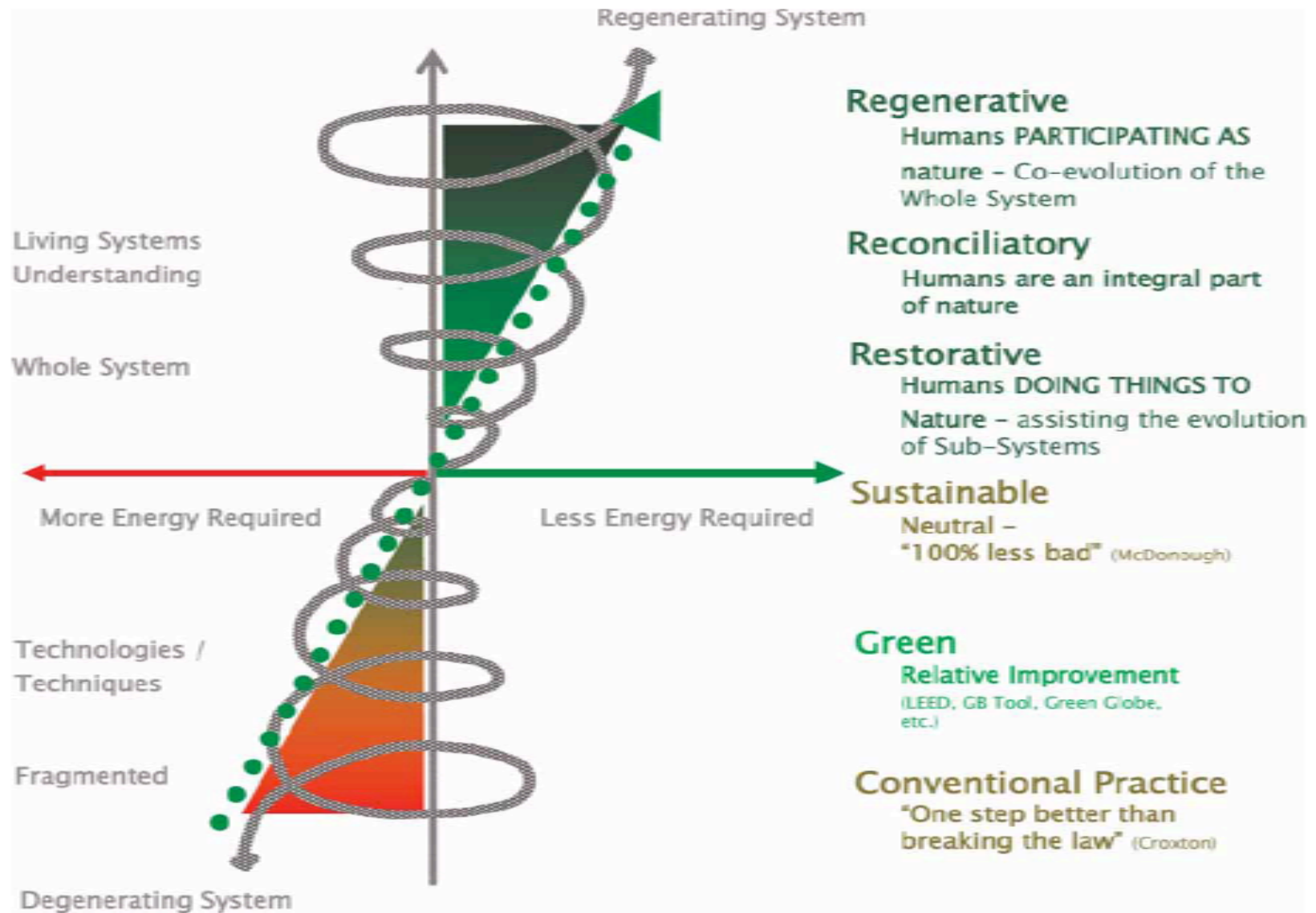


# Regenerative Sustainability

Aims to create the *conditions* and *capacities* for a healthy, thriving, and abundant future for *all life*.

Views humans as interconnected with natural and social systems.

Sees humans as intimately connected to larger ecological wholes—e.g., watershed, bioregion, planet, universe.



From Reed (2007)

# Intentional Values: Recommendations

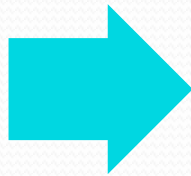
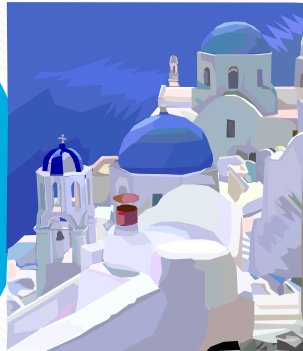
- The primacy of relationship--to self, others, and earth
- Paradigm of Healing, Restoration, and Regeneration
- Social and Ecological Sustainability
- Justice, Equity, and Fairness
- *Go for it—serve the world with a BIG Vision and Mission*



# Intentional Culture

Community: “the most expensive personal growth and social change workshop you’ll ever take”

Physical  
Infrastructure



Cultural  
Infrastructure



Community

# Cultural Infrastructure

Governance  
System

Conflict  
Policies

Legal  
Structure

Local,  
Regional  
Networks

Vision,  
Mission,  
and Values

Social and  
Work Life

Ownership  
Model

Leadership

# A Bridge from Competitive to Cooperative Culture



- Values Shift:  
Community,  
Sustainability, Justice
- Cooperative  
Governance System
- Collaborative Skills
- Facilitation Skills
- Steward Leadership
- Feedback Systems
- Conflict Tools



# Collaborative Skills

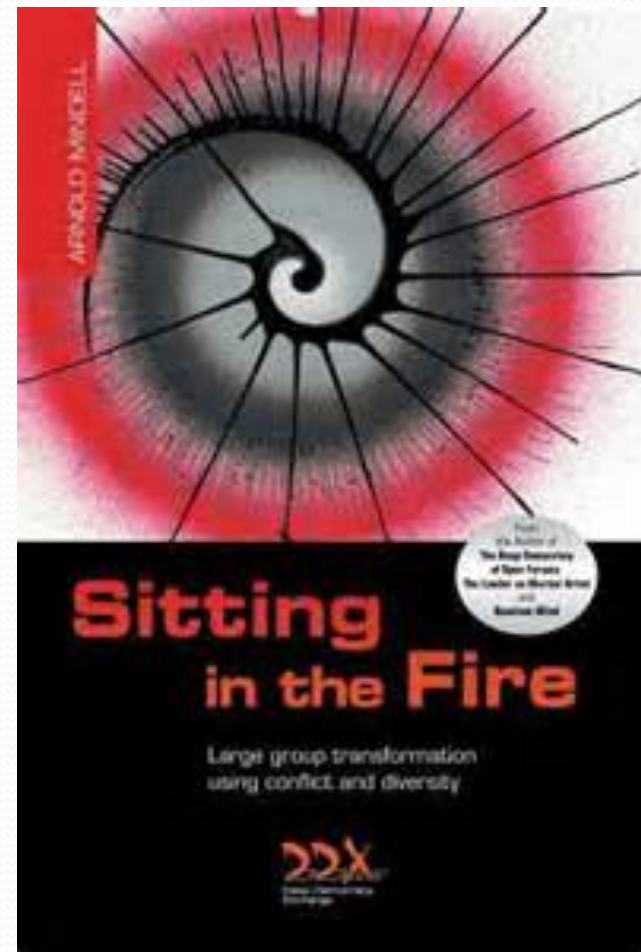
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- ☐ SELF-AWARENESS
- ☐ EMOTIONAL INTELLIG
- ☐ SELF-EXPRESSION
- ☐ LISTENING
- ☐ EMPATHY
- ☐ EQUITY AND JUSTICE
- ☐ RESEARCH/OBSERVE
- ☐ CREATIVITY
- ☐ UNCERTAINTY
- ☐ COMMON GOOD
- ☐ DECIDING TOGETHER
- ☐ GROWTH + HEALING
- ☐ FEEDBACK

# Community: Opportunities for Personal Growth and Social Change

“Community is the worst  
problem you will ever  
have, and also your most  
sacred teacher.”

--Arnold Mindell, *Sitting  
in the Fire*



# Intentional Culture: Recommendations



The Power of Community, Photo by Vikash Kumar

- Culture Change: From Competitive to Cooperative
- Including all Voices
- Sharing Responsibility
- Gratitude and Appreciation
- Personal and Group Transformation

# Intentional Communication and Conflict

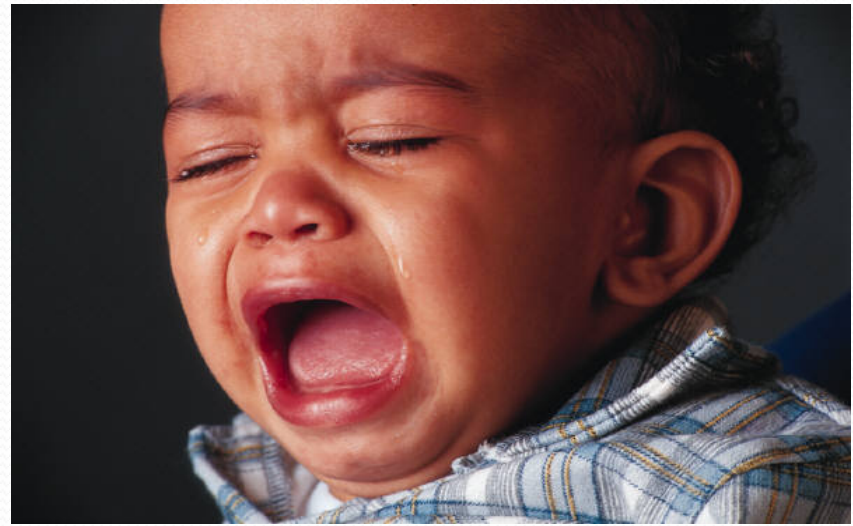
Building Skills and Capacities for Sitting  
in the Fire

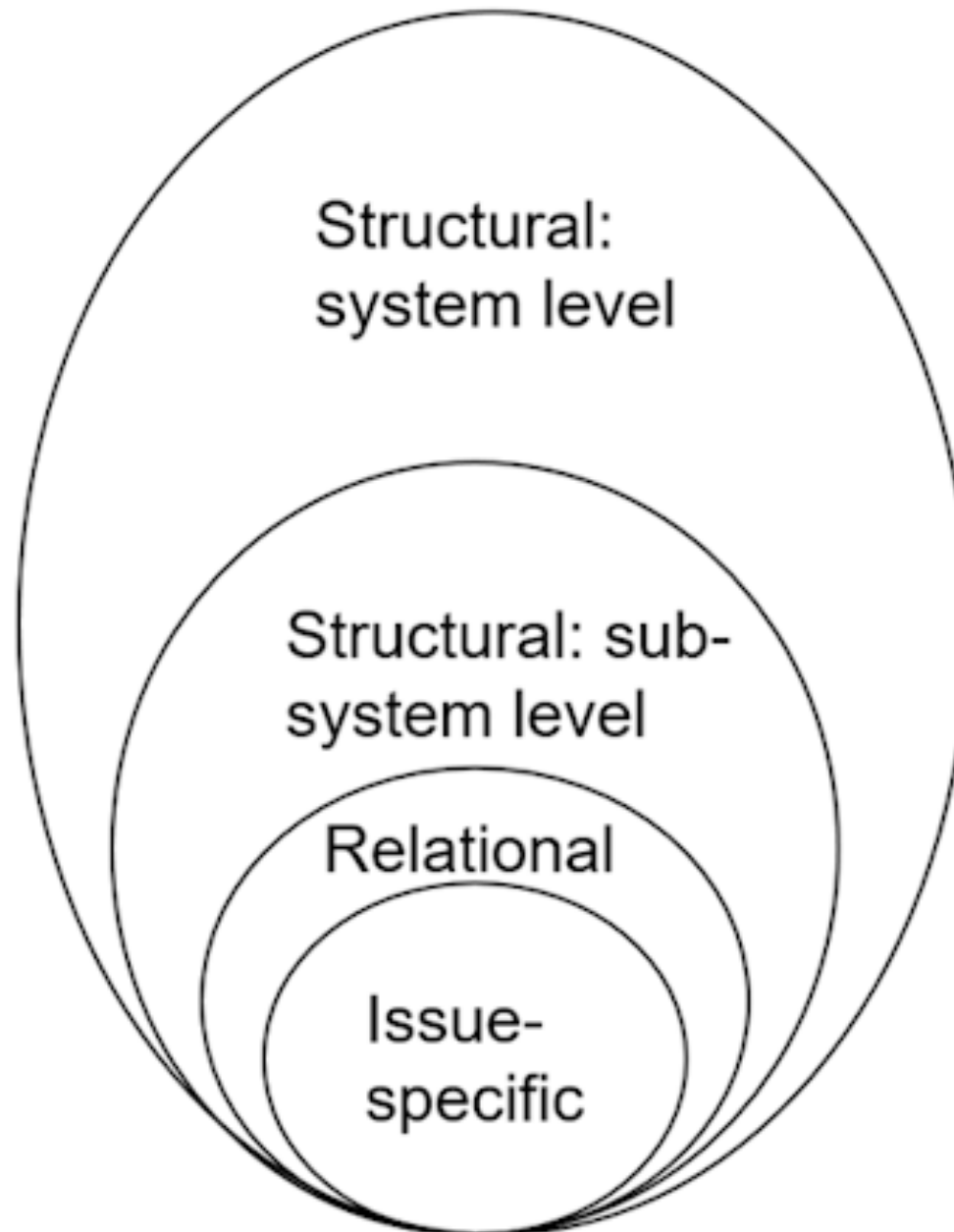
# Conflict: Definitions

- **Impediment** to reaching agreements; **disruptive** to peaceful relationships; **motivation** for improvement (Butler)
- **Disagreement in groups**; inevitable; fueled by personal baggage; can indicate **high energy** and creativity within group (Hunter/Bailey/Taylor)
- Disruption in the natural flow of relationships; **normal** part of life; **motor for change** (Lederach)
- A dynamic where there are at least two different viewpoints and at least one non-trivial **emotional charge** (Schaub)
- **Perceived incompatibility** of goals or needs (Pruitt)

# Sources of Conflict

- Unmet Needs
- Unacknowledged Feelings
- Disempowerment/ Exclusion
- Different views or values
- Personal Life Changes
- Group Life Cycle
- Attachment to Identity





A Nested  
Model of  
Conflict  
*Maire  
Dugan*

# Getting Stuck in Conflict Hell

- Misperceiving Threat Level
- Good vs. Bad thinking
- Labeling, diagnosing, and categorizing others
- Moralizing Judgments
- Insults
- Shaming and Blaming
- Criticisms
- Simple Stories
- Victim Thinking
- Replaying Old Stories and Dynamics



Illustration by Herrad of Landsberg

# Getting Unstuck



Photo by David Lloyd

- See Common Humanity: The Other's Feelings and Needs are as Important as My own
- Recognize Limits of our Stories
- Empathy and Compassion
- Gratitude for the Other: Nurture and Repair Relationship
- Taking Full Responsibility for our part
- Grieving and Healing Old Wounds
- Find Common Values and Goals: Identify a Future to co-Create

Can we cultivate  
*new responses* to  
threats/conflict?

Curiosity

Opportunity

Compassion

Serenity

Befriending

Welcoming



Buddha shows Kindness to Nalagiri, the  
angry elephant

# Conflict Tools



- 4-Step Non-Violent Communication
- Reflective Listening
- Circle Process
- Learning Conversations
- Restorative Circles and Restorative Justice
- Heart Circle/Sharing Circle
- Story Circles
- Dialogue Method

# CONFLICT TOOLS: *Disclaimer*

- Whatever tools groups adopt, they will require much effort and practice to make them your own, and group commitment to integrate them into the community culture.
- E.g., buying a paint brush doesn't make me a painter, or my community an Artistic Community



Photo by Krestavilis

# Intentional Communication and Conflict: Recommendations



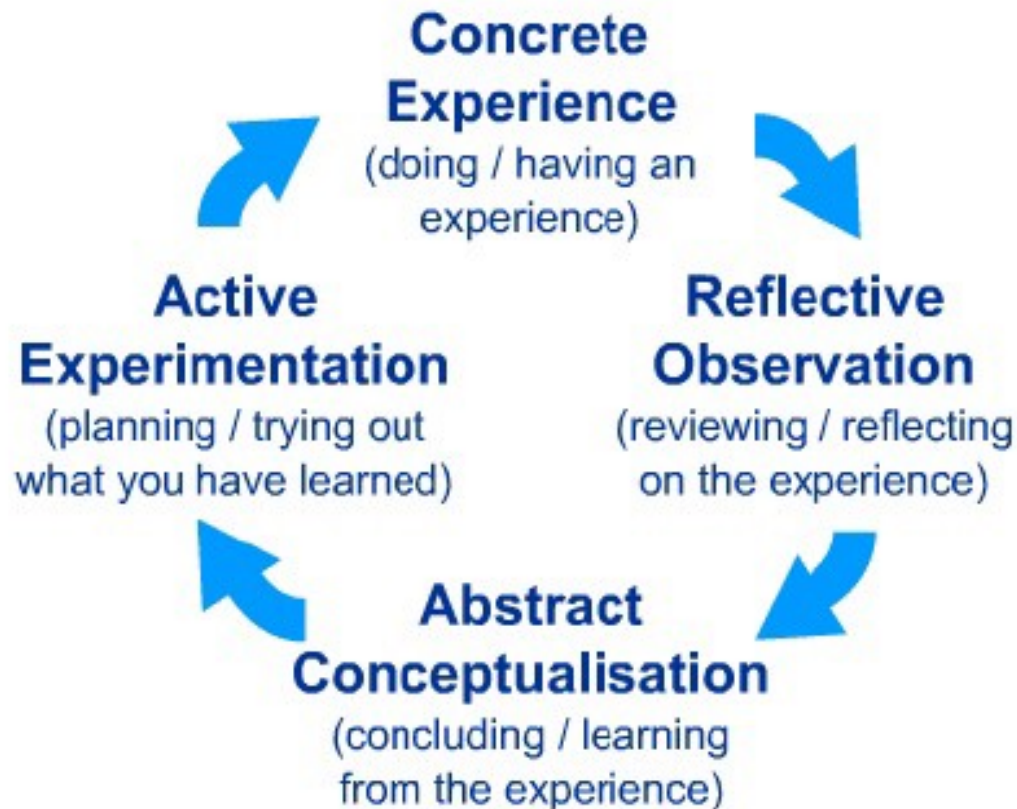
Painting by Gwendolyn Knight

- Compassion
- Listening
- Mutual Understanding
- Value Relationships
- Developing conflict skills, tools, capacities
- Feedback systems
- Seek Agreement to Work Conflict and Emotional Energy together
- Practice, Practice!!!

# Intentional Leadership

Shepherding Communities through  
Learning and Growth

# Kolb Learning Cycle



Kolb learning cycle image by Davies & Lowe



# Organizational Structure: Sources of Conflict

1. **Power overly centralized** in a rigid hierarchy
2. **Roles poorly defined:** overlapping responsibilities lead to tension and conflict
3. **Formal and informal roles at odds**—not clear who has authority (Note: what may appear as personality conflicts or power struggles may be a result of 1-3)
4. **Physical structure:** where does it encourage connections, where does it inhibit connections?
5. **Organizational Life Cycle:** challenges in different phases

# Group Life Cycle

## Bruce Tuckman

1. Forming
2. Storming
3. Norming
4. Performing
5. Adjourning/  
transforming/  
mourning (Tuckman +  
Jensen)

## Larry Greiner

1. Entrepreneurial Stage
2. Collectivity Stage
3. Delegation Stage
4. Formalization Stage
5. Collaboration Stage



## Experimental Practice

“The practitioner allows herself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which she finds uncertain or unique . . . . She carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation” (Schön, *Reflective Practitioner*, pg. 68).



# Intentional Leadership: Recommendations

- Patience in the face of uncertainty and change
- Serving the health and wellbeing of the whole and each member
- Acknowledging and honoring different perspectives
- Awareness of power and rank in the group dynamic
- Welcome constructive criticism and feedback
- Transparency and Shared Responsibility
- Awareness of Group Life Cycle

# Questions and Discussion

