

Stereotyping, Bias, and Prejudice in Conflict Resolution

By Kenneth Cloke

*"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that.
Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."*

Martin Luther King, Jr.

*"The interpretation of our reality through patterns not our own
only makes us ever more unknown, ever less free, ever more
solitary. . . "*

Gabriel Garcia Marquez

*"The ideal of a single civilization for every one, implicit in the
cult of progress and technique, impoverishes and mutilates us."*

Octavio Paz

"The same law for the lion and the ox is oppression."

William Blake

An Introduction to the Topic

1. When we think of prejudice, bias and stereotyping, we usually think of racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, and similar prejudicial attitudes.
2. More broadly, these forms of bias can all be regarded as sharing a hostile, aggressive, adversarial attitude toward differences and diversity.
3. More broadly still, we can recognize that prejudice, bias and stereotyping are neurophysiological responses to perceived threats, that they are simply the natural functioning of the amygdala, with its ability to hijack the prefrontal cortex.
4. As a result, it is now possible for us to understand that prejudice, bias and stereotyping are simply elementary aspects of ordinary conflict responses that are present, sometimes in miniature, in every conflict.
5. We can therefore incorporate into conflict resolution technique all the ideas and methods developed in response to prejudice generally.

Assumptions about Conflict, Stereotyping, Prejudice and Bias

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1. More formally, the nature, extent, depth and character of conflict resolution is determined, in the first instance, by the nature, extent, depth and character of the conflict it seeks to resolve.
2. Every conflict, without exception, gives rise to stereotyping, bias and prejudice, yet these have not been carefully studied or implemented.
3. The greater the conflict, the more distorted the stereotype and the more entrenched the bias and prejudice against one's opponents.
4. The main roles of stereotyping, bias and prejudice in conflict are to:
 - Discourage others from supporting or empathizing with one's opponents, or seeing them as complex and vulnerable
 - Punish opposition, disrespect or dissent, and reinforce loyalty
 - Make one's opponents feel bad and cause them to lose power, behave badly, or lose balance and perspective
 - Point indirectly, in a camouflaged and subconscious way, to the issues that have to be resolved for the conflict to be resolved

What is Prejudice?

Prejudice is pre-judgment based on incomplete information. It is a devaluation of someone who is different based not on who they are, but on hostile assumptions about who they are. It is a justification for acting selfishly based on an idea of innate inferiority. It is a combination of adversarial acts, closed mindedness, closed heartedness, lack of empathy, and negative feelings, leading to a deterioration in self-esteem and loss of the ability to learn or become close to another person, and therefore to discover diverse parts of ones self.

Some Research on Prejudice

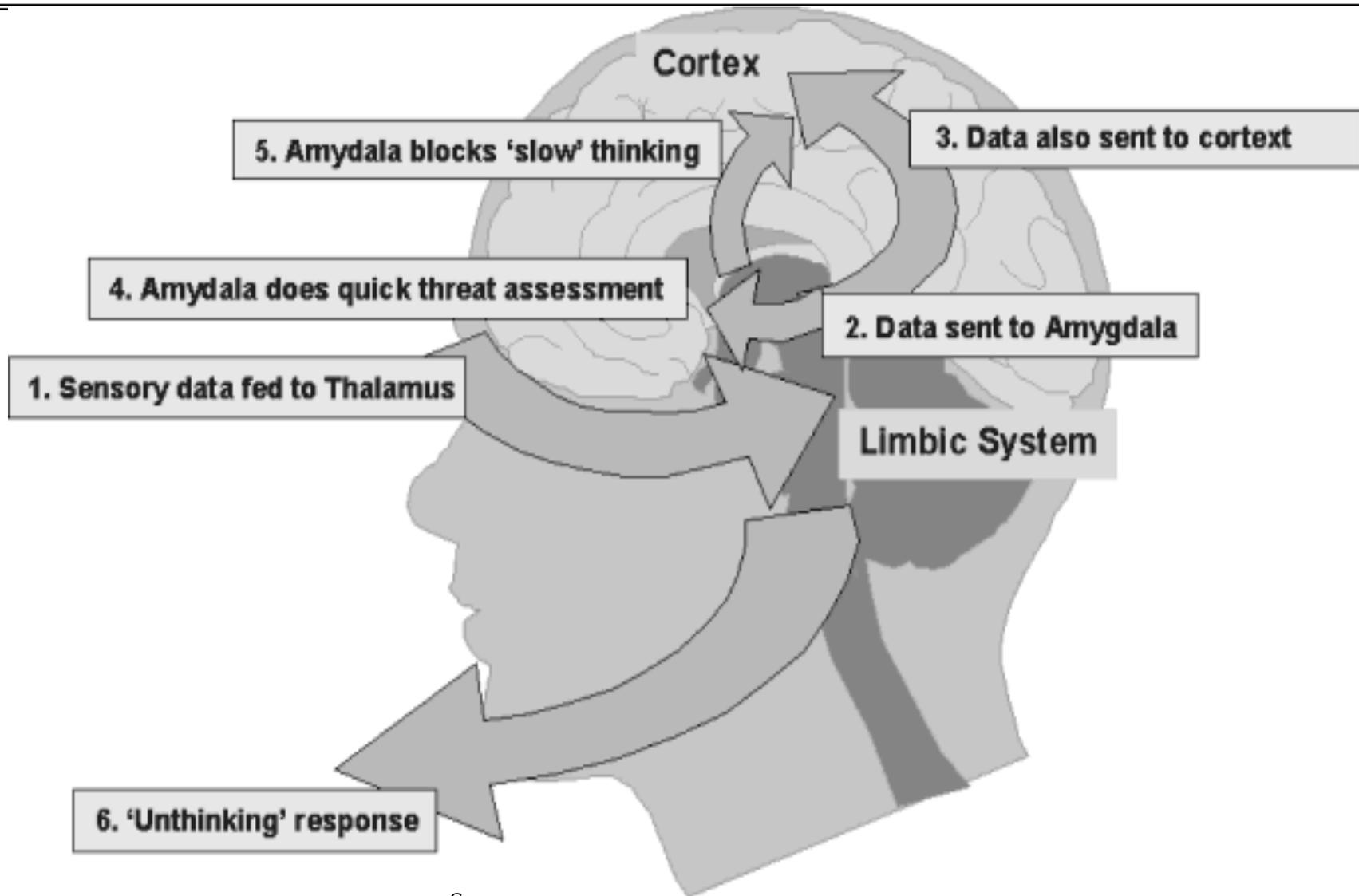
- We think of acts of prejudice as emanating from prejudiced attitudes, but recent research shows that racist behavior to some extent flows from our *beliefs* about prejudice.
- White people who believe that prejudice is a fixed trait – that it can't change during a person's lifetime – act more prejudiced toward Black people and are less interested in chatting with a member of an opposite race and are more anxious and unfriendly during interracial conversations, even if they are unprejudiced by implicit and explicit measures.
- A Stanford University team headed by Priyanka Carr found, however, that convincing people that prejudice is a fluid trait, which a great deal of research supports, caused discriminatory or biased behavior to reduce or disappear. Carr commented, "We can change the discussion about prejudice and fuel a lot of positive behavior."

How “Negative” Emotions are Triggered

- Sensory information from primary receptors in the eye, nose, ear, and other organs travel along neural pathways to the limbic forebrain.
- These stimuli are evaluated for emotional significance. Research by Joseph E. LeDoux has demonstrated that auditory fear conditioning involves the transmission of sound signals through an auditory pathway to the thalamus, which relays this information to the dorsal amygdala.
- The amygdala coordinates a “relevance detection” process that is rapid, minimal, automatic, and evaluative.
- Emotions are then activated in the subcortical thalamo-amygdala pathway and relayed from the thalamus to the neocortex for cognitive appraisal and evaluation.
- In some cases, the same information is simultaneously sent to the neocortex for slower processing, creating a dual, two-circuit pathway that permits reason to override an emotional response.

The Conflict Response

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Source:

<http://changingminds.org/images/amygdala.gif>

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The Dark Side of Oxytocin

- Oxytocin encourages trust, but can also make a highly suspicious person more uncooperative and hostile.
- A study of 14 people with borderline personality disorder showed that oxytocin led more volunteers to suspect a partner of bad intent.
- Oxytocin also magnified men's memories of their mothers as being supportive or not. Those with good maternal relationships remembered their mothers as more caring and supportive after receiving oxytocin, while those whose early home life was troubled remembered their mothers as being less caring.
- While oxytocin increases bonding and trust of one's own group, it can lead to greater suspicion of outsiders and members of other groups, in sync with social biases.

More about the Dark Side

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- In a 2010 paper, Carolyn Declerck and colleagues at the University of Antwerp studied oxytocin's effects on participants who played an economic game. Pairs of subjects were introduced and over the course of the game, had to decide whether to cooperate or stab the other player in the back. Oxytocin made players more cooperative... In similar work, Carsten De Dreu and colleagues at the University of Amsterdam had people play as members of a team, and allowed participants to choose to be self-sacrificing for their collective cause. Again, Oxytocin increased self-sacrifice.
 - But if players had not met each other before a game, people were less cooperative and trusting. In the De Dreu study, people playing as a team were playing against another team. And those who had been spritzed with oxytocin became more preemptively aggressive against rival teams, even as they cooperated better with their partners. In another study, De Dreu found that oxytocin caused Dutch subjects to become more ethnocentric and hold more negative unconscious perceptions of Arabs and Germans.
 - [Professor Robert M. Sapolsky, "Peace, love and Oxytocin," Los Angeles Times, December 4, 2011]

Some Questions on Prejudice

- What prejudices do you have, or have had in the past?
- Where did they come from?
- What life experiences contributed to your ideas about other races, cultures, genders or groups?
- How do you feel about them today?
- Have your feelings or beliefs changed?
- How did they change? Why did they change?
- What prejudices do you currently have about others?
- What prejudices do you believe other groups have about you, or your race, culture, gender or group?
- What interests do believe you have in common?
- What might be done within your group to reduce prejudice against others?

Some Indicators of Prejudice

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- Prejudicial comments
 - Choice of a less qualified person for a job
 - Disrespect
 - Negative body language
 - Lack of listening or communication
 - Contradictory information or statements
 - Inadequate explanations for negative treatment
 - Lack of objective reasons for negative treatment
 - Personal slights without any reason
 - Lumping people together; as in: “all you ____’s are ____.”
 - Statements like: “You’re not like those others.”
 - Inability to recognize individual uniqueness.
 - Lack of acknowledgement
 - Inability to engage in personal sharing
 - Lack of responsiveness
 - Absence of eye contact
 - Avoidance
 - Sarcasm
 - Exaggerated politeness
 - Patronizing comments

How to Stereotype

1. Pick a characteristic
2. Blow it completely out of proportion
3. Collapse the whole person into the characteristic
4. Ignore individual differences and variations
5. Ignore subtleties and complexities
6. Ignore our common humanity
7. Make it match your own worst fears
8. Make it cruel

What Pushes Your Button?

- Behaviors we lack the skill to handle
- Behaviors we were not allowed to get away with or were punished for engaging in
- Behaviors we would secretly like to engage in ourselves
- Behaviors that elicit emotions we have walled up deep inside
- Behaviors we are vulnerable to because of someone in our family of origin
- Behaviors that reflect back to us a part of ourselves we don't like
- Behaviors we are still trying to overcome ourselves
- Behaviors we feel drawn to respond to in a way that would leave us vulnerable
- Behaviors we should have resisted earlier but did not
- Behaviors that force us to confront our own false expectations

Elements of Demonization

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- *Assumption of Injurious Intentions* - they intended to cause the harm we experienced
 - *Distrust* - every idea or statement made by them is wrong or proposed for dishonest reasons
 - *Externalization of Guilt* - everything bad or wrong is their fault
 - *Attribution of Evil* - they want to destroy us and what we value most, and must therefore be destroyed themselves
 - *Zero-Sum Interests* - everything that benefits them harms us, and *vice versa*
 - *Paranoia and Preoccupation with Disloyalty* - any criticism of us or praise of them is disloyal and treasonous
 - *Prejudgment* - everyone in the enemy group is an enemy
 - *Collapse of Neutrality and Independence into Opposition* - anyone who is not with us is against us
 - *Suppression of Empathy* - we have nothing in common and considering them human is dangerous
 - *Isolation and Impasse* - we cannot dialogue, negotiate, cooperate, or resolve conflicts with them
 - *Self-Fulfilling Prophecy* - their evil makes it permissible for us to act in a hostile way toward them, and *vice versa*

Pronouns and Conflict Resolution

<i>Pronoun</i>	<i>Form of Communication</i>	<i>Predictable Result</i>
<i>They</i> [Example: They are lazy and irresponsible.]	Stereotype	Prejudice
<i>You</i> [Example: You are lazy and irresponsible.]	Accusation	Counter-Accusation/ Denial
<i>He, She</i> [Example: He/She is lazy and irresponsible.]	Demonization/ Victimization	Blame and Shame/ Disempowerment
<i>It</i> [Example: There is a lot of work here – how shall we divide it so we pull our own weight?]	Objectification	Problem Solving
<i>I</i> [Example: I feel overworked and would like to take time off but won't let myself and am jealous when you do. / Could you give me a hand with this?]	Confession/ Request	Listening/ Responsiveness
<i>We</i> [Example: We haven't been clear about how to share our joint responsibilities. How would you suggest we share them?]	Partnership/ Collaboration	Consensus/ Ownership

Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement ¹⁷

1. *Rationalizing* the possible beneficial consequences of otherwise wrong behaviors that are imagined to outweigh their negative consequences. (“If I make enough money by doing this I can help people later.”)
2. *Obscuring* or lessening personal responsibility for participating in the wrongful activity. (“I just did what I was told.” “I just played a small part.” “Other people do the same thing, so why can’t I?”)
3. *Denying* the seriousness of harmful effects on others. (“He won’t mind.” “He’s going to be fine.” “It was only a small thing.” “He can claim it on his insurance.”)
4. *Blaming*, dehumanizing, or derogating the victim. (“He was stupid.” “She was a bitch.” “It served him right.” “She shouldn’t have ...”)
5. *Demonizing* the perpetrator. (“He is vicious.” “He’s not human.” “He should be shot.”)
6. *Magnifying* or exaggerating the harm that occurred. (“What he did [if a minor infraction] is intolerable.”)
7. *Distancing* or separating from both sides. (“A plague on both their houses.” “It has nothing to do with me.”)

(Based on work by Albert Bandura)

Moral Rationalizations

- *Moral Justification*: “He did it first.”
- *Euphemistic Labeling*: “All I did was ...”
- *Disadvantageous Comparison*: “He’s much worse than I am.”
- *Displacement of Responsibility*: “She made me do it.”
- *Diffusion of Responsibility*: “Everyone is doing it.”
- *Disregard/Distortion of Consequences*: “What I did wasn’t that bad.”
- *Dehumanization*: “He deserved it.”
- *Blaming the Victim*: “She was asking for it.”

(Based on work by Albert Bandura)

Some Prejudice Reduction Exercises (1) ¹⁹

1. *Introductions*: Ask people to turn to the person next to them and introduce themselves by describing their personal history and cultural background.
2. *Reclaiming Pride*: Ask participants to state their names, the groups with which they identify, and why they are proud to belong to them, as in “I am a _____, _____, _____, and _____,” listing different sources of identity.
3. *What’s in a Name?* In mixed dyads, ask people to describe the origin and meaning of their names and how they came by them.
4. *Storytelling*: Each person finds someone from a different group or culture and tells a story about what it felt like to grow up as a member of their group or culture.
5. *Assessing Group Identity*: Participants discuss what they get by identifying with a group, and what they give in return.
6. *Personalizing Discrimination*: In mixed dyads or small groups, participants describe a time when they felt disrespected or discriminated against for any reason, and compare their experiences.
7. *Reframing Stereotypes*: In mixed or self-same dyads, people describe the stereotypes and prejudices others have about their group while their partners write down key descriptive words and phrases, which they later compare and reframe as positive attributes.

Some Prejudice Reduction Exercises (2)²⁰

7. *Observing Discrimination*: In mixed dyads, participants describe a time when they witnessed discrimination against someone else. What did they do? How successful was it? What might they have done instead? What kept them from doing more? How could they overcome these obstacles?
8. *Owning Prejudice*: Participants in teams write down all the prejudicial statements they can think of, analyze them, identify their common elements, and read these elements out to the group.
9. *Overcoming Prejudice*: In dyads, participants describe a personal prejudice or stereotype they had or have, what they did or are doing to overcome it, then ask for and receive coaching, preferably from someone in that group, on what else they might do.
10. *Which Minority are You?*: Participants list all the ways they are a minority, report on the total number of ways, and discuss them.
11. *Explaining Prejudice*: Participants in self-same groups identify the prejudices and stereotypes other groups have of them, then explain the truth about their culture and answer questions others have about their group but were afraid to ask.
12. *A Celebration of Differences*: Participants are asked to stand and be applauded for their differences, in age, family backgrounds, skills, languages, cultures, and personal life experiences.

Some Prejudice Reduction Exercises (3)²¹

13. *Mock Conflict*: Participants demonstrate a typical cross-cultural conflict in a fishbowl, while observers describe their reactions and volunteers attempt to mediate.
14. *Offensive Remarks*: A volunteer starts to make an offensive comment while observers coach another volunteer on how to respond. Groups meet to identify “what I never want to hear again” about their group.
15. *Never Again*: Participants in self-same groups identify and communicate the comments and behaviors they never, ever want to hear again.
16. *Observing Cultural Bias*: As homework, participants are asked to collect examples of bias or prejudice in the media or in current events and share them.
17. *Social Change*: Participants discuss what they can do to change the prejudicial attitudes and behaviors of their family, friends, neighbors, co-workers and peers.
18. *Institutional and Political Change*: Participants discuss what their workplace organizations and social and political institutions can do to counteract prejudice, and what they can do to encourage them to change.
19. *What I Will Do*: Participants indicate one thing they learned or will do differently in the future to reduce prejudice and bias.
20. *Celebration*: Participants dance, sing and celebrate their diversity.

[Based partly on work by the National Coalition Building Institute]

What We Can Do About Prejudice

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- Be yourself. Be authentic.
 - Be fair and honest.
 - Don't treat others differently "because of" their race, sex, or culture.
 - Don't rely on the media in forming opinions of others.
 - Change your own behavior first.
 - Look at what your commitment is and what it should be.
 - Build institutional reinforcements to support diversity.
 - Report serious incidents.
 - Raise issues for discussion before something serious happens.
 - Post or circulate relevant articles, cartoons, etc..
 - Arrange for outside speakers to address meetings.
 - Join or organize a caucus or support group.
 - Seek public support for greater equality.
 - Encourage honest sharing about problems.
 - Hold meetings to discuss these problems.
 - Report on your experiences to others.
 - Find someone to discuss problems with for support.
 - Look for outside sources of support.
 - Educate yourself about others, and how they communicate.
 - Search for collaborative solutions that educate and involve others.

Ways of Responding to Prejudice (1)

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1. Walk away if necessary to calm down.
2. Analyze yourself and your reactions.
3. Think about how to help the other person.
4. Choose the right time and environment.
5. Meet one-on-one privately and listen.
6. Ask for permission to speak to the other person about it.
7. Be low-key and non-aggressive.
8. Don't shame or blame.
9. Be friendly and empathetic, yet honest and assertive.
10. Understand where it came from. Be hard on the problem and soft on the person.

Ways of Responding to Prejudice (2)

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11. Assume good intentions.
12. Share what it felt like to you.
13. Make “I” statements.
14. Suggest alternatives.
15. Ask what the other person intended.
16. State your disagreements openly.
17. Give examples of different experiences.
18. Ask whether the other person ever felt discriminated against or harassed for any reason. Ask for details.
19. Tell a story about a time when you felt discriminated or harassed.
20. Bring in a third party to help mediate the issue.

Questions on Culture and Conflict

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1. What is the meaning in your culture of:
 - silence?
 - public criticism?
 - physical contact?
 - yelling?
2. How is conflict handled in your culture between:
 - younger and older?
 - women and men?
 - siblings?
 - employer and employee?
3. How are negotiations conducted in your culture in terms of:
 - aggressiveness or collaboration?
 - communication of a “bottom line”?
 - consideration for unrepresented third parties?
 - compromise?
4. How are conflicts resolved in your culture in relation to:
 - roles of third parties?
 - overcoming impasse?
 - ritualizing the end of the conflict?
 - forgiveness and reconciliation?

Some Aspects of Culture (1)

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1. *Rules vs. Reality*

- What are the explicit rules?
- What are the implicit rules? What is the reality?

2. *Values, Success and Failure*

- What are the ideal values, concepts and beliefs? Which are real?
- How is success defined? How is failure defined?

3. *Heroes and Villains*

- Who are the positive role models? What did they do?
- Who are the negative role models? What did they do?

Some Aspects of Culture (2)

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4. *Rites and Rituals*

- What are the day to day routines or rituals?
- What do people stand for in ceremonies?

5. *Communication and Negotiation*

- What are the primary formal and informal means of communication?
- How is power communicated, organized and negotiated?

6. *Conflict and Collaboration*

- What happens when there is conflict?
- How does collaboration happen?

(Based partly on work by Deal and Kennedy in Corporate Cultures)

Changing Culture (1)

	Old Culture	New Culture
<i>Rules vs. Reality</i>		
<i>Values, Success and Failure</i>		
<i>Heroes and Villains</i>		

Changing Culture (2)

	Old Culture	New Culture
<i>Rites and Rituals</i>		
<i>Communication and Negotiation</i>		
<i>Conflict and Collaboration</i>		

“In a real sense all life is inter-related. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly . . . I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the inter-related structure of reality.”

Martin Luther King, Jr.