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LONERGAN'S PHILOSOPHY OF INSIGHT AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR CONFLICT

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ABSTRACT: In this essay, the author discusses the *Insight approach to conflict and mediation*. Grounded in Bernard Lonergan's philosophy of insight, the Insight approach moves away from objective prescriptive conditions of conflict analysis and intervention toward subjective elicitive intercessions where conflict behaviour is rooted in the discernment of threat followed by the decision to defend against the threat. The skills used in this approach enable people to dig below the surface of conflict to explore the knowing, valuing and deciding beneath it. The transformation that happens is produced through a dynamic, interactive, and emergent pattern of learning that produces new insights; insights that facilitate critical thinking, cooperative dialogue and new relations. The Insight method supports today's peacemaking challenges by broadening personal acts of meaning and shifting interpersonal and intergroup mind-sets into more humanizing interactions where conflict solutions grow out of the process itself. Changing personal acts of meaning has social currency because thinking differently renders the resolve to seek new interactions that can change interpersonal relations and social structures thus allowing differing beliefs and values to co-exist in relative peace.

RÉSUMÉ : Dans cet essai, l'auteur examine l'approche Insight dans la résolution des conflits et la médiation. Basée sur la philosophie de Bernard Lonergan, l'approche Insight s'éloigne des conditions prescriptives objectives d'analyse et d'intervention dans les conflits pour aller vers des intercessions subjectives d'élicitation où la gestion des conflits est enracinée dans l'identification de menaces, suivie de la décision de se défendre contre celles-ci. Les compétences utilisées dans cette approche permettent aux personnes de creuser sous la surface du conflit pour explorer les savoirs, les jugements de valeur et les processus décisionnels sous-jacents. La transformation qui s'ensuit est engendrée par un modèle d'apprentissage dynamique, interactif et émergent qui engendre de nouvelles perspectives ; perspectives qui facilitent la réflexion critique, le dialogue coopératif et de nouvelles relations. La méthode Insight

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soutient les défis contemporains de résolution de conflit en élargissant les actes de sens individuels et en transformant les façons d'être interpersonnelles et intergroupes en interactions plus humanisantes où les solutions aux conflits découlent du processus lui-même. Changer ses actes de sens individuels facilite les interactions sociales puisque modifier ses façons de penser fait montre de sa détermination à rechercher de nouvelles interactions qui peuvent changer les relations interpersonnelles et les structures sociales, permettant ainsi à différentes croyances et valeurs de coexister dans une paix relative.

The *Insight approach to conflict and mediation* has gained prominence as an account of how conflicts are caused and how to solve them[1]. The Insight approach was first articulated in the early 2000's by Kenneth Melchin and myself, Cheryl Picard, after using Bernard Lonergan's theory of Insight[2] to examine a simulated mediation involving an interpersonal workplace conflict. The outcome of this research helped formulate the key ideas and applications of this novel approach to thinking about and intervening in conflict[3]. Our book *Transforming Conflict through Insight*[4] provides a theoretical guide to conflict practitioners and to students of conflict, while my companion book, *Practicing Insight Mediation* offers a practical guide, concrete skills and examples to help mediators transform difficult conflictual behaviours and interactions into less problematic situations.[5] In later years, Priceextrapolated Lonergan's method in theology, in particular his data of consciousness, to more fully articulate the *method* Insight practitioners use to analyze conflict behaviour.[6] Price explains the *Insight method* as "a pattern of related and recurring operations that guides and directs the flow of our consciousness toward critically grounded discoveries and explanations"[7]. His account and illustration of the Insight method helps conflict practitioners pay attention to what is going on in their minds as a way to help them elicit what is going on in the minds of conflicting parties.

1 Santiago MADRID LIRAS, "Why a fourth mediation model: opportunities and integration of the insight mediation model?," in *Revista de Mediación* 10 (2018) 1-9.

2 Bernard LONERGAN, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*. (*Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, 3; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, [1957] 1992).

3 Cheryl PICARD – Kenneth MELCHIN, "Insight Mediation: A Learning Centered Mediation Model," in *Negotiation Journal* 23 (2007) 35-54.

4 Cheryl PICARD – Kenneth MELCHIN, *Transforming Conflict through Insight* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

5 Cheryl PICARD, *Practicing Insight Mediation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).

6 Jamie PRICE, "Method in Analyzing Conflict Behaviour: The Insight Approach", in *Revista de Mediación* 11 (2018) 1-9.

7 PRICE, "Method in Analyzing Conflict Behaviour," 9.

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What I think is particularly noteworthy about the Insight approach is that it moves away from contemporary individual-focused and often prescriptive responses to the analysis and intervention of everyday conflict. Instead, its elicitive and emergent intercessions provide important insights into what individuals are doing both individually and relationally when they make decisions to engage in, and then to disengage from, conflict behaviours. The Insight approach is important for present day conflict challenges in that it links intrapersonal and interpersonal meaning sets to a method of conflict intervention in which solutions are able to grow out of the process itself. When individuals and groups learn to talk about what matters to them in non-threatening ways it can be transformative: "*if you don't have to fight me, you can listen to me*; *if you listen to me, you can change your mind about me*."

In this essay, I recount the story of how examining a video-taped simulated mediation of an interpersonal workplace conflict situation using Lonergan as the primary conversation partner, and using a practice-to-theory and theory-to-practice research strategy, led to thinking about conflict and conflict resolution as a process of learning. It was this research that led to formulating the *Insight approach to conflict and mediation*. The story is important to Lonergan scholars because it provides a concrete example of how Lonergan's work has been successfully used to address the problem of everyday conflict; as such it can help other scholar-practitioners unravel the complexity of, and create strategies for, dealing with the array of social problems that arise in our conflict ridden world.

The story of the Insight approach begins in early 2000 when two friends and colleagues, Ken Melchin, a Lonergan scholar, and myself, an experienced conflict practitioner and scholar, agreed to jointly purse the questions: *what are people doing when they are in conflict, and what are mediators doing to help them*? What we discovered was the value of Lonergan's theory of insight in understanding the transformative learning process that goes on within conflicting parties and within those who help parties deal with everyday conflicts.

As a result of our early investigative work, and the ongoing work of others, those interested in conflict and its resolution have begun to conceive that conflict behaviour is relational, dynamic and rooted in the discernment of threat followed by a decision to defend against the threat. Viewing conflict behaviour as defending from threat promotes the idea that incompatible goals[8] and basic human needs[9] do not on their own necessitate conflict; incompatible differences

[8] Roger FISHER – William L. URY, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement without Giving In* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1981).

[9] John BURTON, *Conflict: Human Needs Theory* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

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and needs can exist without conflict arising. In contrast to defining conflict as arising from disagreements about opposing needs and interests, the Insight approach contends that conflict is about *learning*, and that conflict resolution happens through a dynamic interactive pattern of learning aimed at generating insights about how individual actions in relation to those of others can both create and resolve conflict. By focusing on this dynamic pattern of learning, parties become freed from having to defend against others and as a result they re-gain their ability to engage in critical thinking and cooperative dialogue.

How Does Lonergan Inform What Insight Conflict Practitioners Do?

It is Lonergan's theory of "knowing" that most informs the practice of the *Insight approach to conflict and mediation*. As I understand it, knowing is a structure of functionally interrelated parts that involve experiencing, understanding, judging and deciding. It is a normative, obligatory, and complicated process that explains how as humans we strive to make sense of, and verify, our hearing, seeing, feeling, memory and imagination in order to make decisions on how best for us to act on what it is we know.[10] It is this structure of knowing that undergirds everything that Insight conflict practitioners do.

Insight practitioners are taught to help conflicting parties understand themselves in relation to others by noticing patterns of interaction and raising curious, non-judgmental questions about the meaning behind these actions. They attentively listen to parties, deepen the conversation between them, and verify understanding about how what matters to each party feels threatened, and how these threats have led to actions to protect what matters to them. Learning more broadly and deeply about something that is genuinely cared about generates the curiosity within parties to know more about the matter itself and about those involved with it. It is from knowing more that decisions emerge about how to engage in less conflictual ways of interacting.

Delving more deeply into what it is that Insight practitioners do brings to the fore three aspects of Lonergan's philosophy of knowing: 1) learning involves our minds in a number of operations that involve more than the exchange of information; 2) feelings carry values that contain relational and individual ideals and that relational values are stronger than individual ones; and, 3) expanding what is known can happen by deepening the learning

[10] Brian Cronin, *Foundations of Philosophy: Lonergan's Cognitional Theory and Epistemology* (Nairobi: Consolata Institute of Philosophy Press, 1999).

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conversation. In the remainder of this essay I will further discuss the definition of conflict on the Insight approach and then consider these three aspects of Lonergan's view.

Insight advocates define conflict as "apprehensions of threat that trigger *defend responses*". Over time, these defend responses become defend *patterns* of interaction that trigger, escalate and sustain conflict. Not surprisingly, then, an Insight practitioner's attention is "focused on defensive responses [especially defend patterns of interaction] to apprehensions of threat, rather than on action as intent to meet needs or interests."[11] The intervener's aim is to uncover and deepen understanding on what is known about the link between feeling threatened and parties defending behaviours. To do this, the intervener engages conflicting parties in learning conversations aimed at altering parties' experiences of threat. This in turn frees parties from having to focus on defending themselves, thus, making space for them to consider if, and how, to respond to each other in less threatening ways.

Insight practitioners focus these learning dialogues on questions that come from genuine wondering about how those involved in conflict construe, interpret, make meaning, and act on their life experiences and relationships. They seek to dispel inaccurate knowing by engaging parties in dialogues that help them break through their existing perspectives and attitudes so as to help them reflect on, and question, what is important to them, and why. In answering questions such as these new insights are produced; insights that expand parties' views of themselves and each other. In other words, learning conversations generate new knowing for parties. It is from knowing more that conflicting parties are able to re-evaluate their situation and assess the value of altering the threat-based negativity of their interactions. When the interiority of conflict behavior is engaged, insights are generated, learning happens, minds change, and new possibilities for interacting differently emerge. The insights produced through learning conversations have the power to alter the status quo and allow fundamentally different values to co-exist without conflict. In this way learning changes the learner and transforms relations.

Lonergan's work on insight helped Ken Melchin and me recognize how key a role learning played in shifting conflicting parties from intransigence to cooperation. Working with Ken helped me to understand that when we actually come to know something there is more going on in our minds than the passive reception of information; in fact our minds are engaging in a non-linear and ongoing process of asking and answering questions. This process involves four groups of operations: 1) experiencing and noticing

[11] PICARD, *Practicing Insight Mediation*, 15.

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2) understanding and insight 3) judging and verifying 4) valuing and deciding.[12] It was from overlaying the process of learning with the mediation process that the building block for Insight mediation began to emerge. What follows is a description of how these four groups of operations have come to inform and shape the *Insight approach to conflict and mediation*.

"Lonergan's method of knowing, or self-appropriation, is a method that focuses on getting insights into insight."[13] It is a method that involves reflecting, questioning, analyzing, confirming and acting on our understanding of ourselves as we go about our day-to-day lives. In founding the Insight approach, Ken and I took this concept of learning and articulated a distinct process of mediation that would help conflicting parties surface their experience, understanding, judging, and deciding as a method for them to generate new insights that could have potential to transform their current and future conflict relations.

The literature describes insights as those moments when the proverbial light bulb goes off; an experience familiar to us. Insights, according to Lonergan scholars, are said to be answers to questions that are actively pursued through questioning. These answers often catch us unaware. Almost always they leave us with an experience of being transported from a place of confusion to one of comprehension. In this way, insights not only create new thoughts they also create feelings, which often change us to the extent that we cannot go back to our earlier state of not knowing. In addition to integrating these aspects of insight into the practice of Insight mediation, we also incorporated Lonergan's idea that insights are cumulative and "laden with meanings that are the result of the direct insights from the past."[14] This led us to query the types of questions commonly asked by conflict interveners trained in other models. What became obvious was the extent to which their questions focused on uncovering conflicting issues and competing interests. Our work on insight led us to shift the mediators' focus of inquiry to understanding the links between parties' conflict behaviours and what think they know. Paying attention to patterns of interactions rather than individual desires and needs is supported by the interpretive worldview that human beings are social actors responding to their environment, cultures, and relationships.[15]

In Insight mediation, the first operation of learning, *experiencing and noticing,* actively seeks to help parties understand their own as well as each other's threat experience and subsequent response as reflected in their feelings

[12] MELCHIN – PICARD, *Transforming Conflict*, 56.
[13] MELCHIN – PICARD, *Transforming Conflict*, 50.
[14] MELCHIN – PICARD, *Transforming Conflict*, 58.
[15] PICARD, *Practicing Insight Mediation*, 49.

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and behaviours. Intentionally asking parties about their experience of threat, specifically about the threats to their cares, is consistent with defining conflict as "emanating from defend behaviours that are in response to apprehension of threat to what matters to individuals and groups". *Experiencing and noticing* also leads Insight practitioners to ask about interpretation and meaning-making more often than asking about issues and intent. Most notably, they ask about threats using a questioning skill known as "threat-based questions."[16] Threat-based questions are directed at surfacing interpretations and experiences of threat that would sound like: *What is it that worries you about his being late? What do you imagine will happen if this continues? What is it that you are trying to protect your children from? What makes her request so worrisome*? *What are the dangers of leaving things as they are?*

Not only are Insight mediators selective about the questions they ask, they also pay close attention to the non-verbal expressions within the mediation interactions. This is a skill we call "noticing"[17]. Noticing involves focusing(?) one's mind in order to pay close attention to both verbal and non-verbal interactions. Paying attention to non-verbal exchanges is not necessarily unique to the Insight approach, however, the focus on noticing patterns of interaction that block learning is distinct, especially interactions that reflect apprehensions of threat and defend responses. Defending behaviours can be as subtle as calmly re-explaining, repeating, or re-telling what has already been said, or, as obvious as strongly convincing, heated outbursts, being forceful, or withdrawing from the conversation. Statements such as: *yes, but*…, or *I do understand, however*..., are sure signs that learning pathways are blocked.

It is important to note that Insight mediators' interventions and questions are in response to the words and actions of the parties', not to what is in their own mind. They are not following prescribed steps nor acting in formulaic ways, and they deliberately do not lead the dialogue nor prescribe solutions. Instead, their interventions are informed by their theoretical and experiential knowledge that helps them predict why a particular question or intervention would be useful in that context and at that point in time. Insight mediators' actions are in response to, and in service of, the parties' own lines of curiosity. This way of interacting with parties is known as "responsive intentionality", and it is a core principle of the *Insight approach to conflict and mediation*.[18]

[16] PICARD, *Practicing Insight Mediation*, 136.
[17] PICARD, *Practicing Insight Mediation*, 43.
[18] PICARD, *Practicing Insight Mediation*, 31.

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Following on from noticing and surfacing the experience of parties, the Insight mediator helps parties more fully understand each other's experience. This leads us to the second level of learning, *understanding and insight*. This operation involves being genuinely curious about how parties are making sense of their interpersonal relations by asking questions that help them explain their thinking and behaviour to others, as well helping them surface their understanding of each other's conflict interactions. Seeking to help parties understand what each other thinks they know is intended to produce direct and inverse insights. Direct insights, according to Lonergan, expand or integrate what is already known, while inverse insights, or reverse insights as they are referred to in Insight mediation, lead to questioning the system of learning itself. One of the benefits of engaging in this line of questioning is that it helps surface incorrect assumptions and interpretations, thus allowing parties to notice them, and then correct them. This is why the process of Insight mediation is almost always held in joint session.

The third operation of learning in Insight mediation is, *judging and verifying*. It underpins the necessity of verifying interpretations and meaning-making throughout the learning dialogue. This is the skill of "verifying,"[19] because we know that interpretations are often incorrect, and that misinformation is intertwined in many conflict situations. This heightens the importance of being vigilant about confirming the accuracy of a party's understanding and meaning-making. It is especially is important for a mediator to verify when one conflict participant, having listened to the other participant, responds with something like, "*Ok, I get it now;* or, *I understand;* or*, I now see what is so annoying"* . Verifying can involve straightforward questions such as: *What is it that you now understand? What are you hearing him say? What meaning are you taking away from her explanation*? Verifying is generally followed by a confirming question to the speaker such as: *Has he heard you correctly? Is there anything missing from what she heard you say that you really want her to know*? *How does his summary concur with your explanation?*

The fourth operation of learning that informs the Insight approach to conflict and mediation incorporates *valuing* and *deciding*. Parties engaging in this operation take into account their new understandings and insights to help them weight the value of considering whether or not to change their behaviour. Valuing involves reflecting on how much of what is now known really matters; it involves asking ourselves a "*so what now*" question. Following from valuing is deciding, "*what will I do given what I now know about how*

[19] PICARD, *Practicing Insight Mediation*, 139.

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much this matters to me?" Before we take action, we take stock of how much our knowing matters; and we will act differently depending on how much something matters.. Over an extended time period, valuing certain actions over other actions forms within us unconscious patterns of expected, or normative, social relations that begin to influence our everyday decision-making and actions.

It is important to differentiate between holding individual *values*, and *valuing* what we know. Values are deeply held *beliefs* about what is right and good that motivate us to act in one way or another, whereas valuing involves discerning the *significance* of our values, feelings and actions. Early on in our work, Ken Melchin and I recognized the need to distinguish between Lonergan's use of the term "values" from its everyday and common usage in the mediation literature. We wanted to be sure to reflect the dynamic and relational nature of values and valuing from its more static understanding, and so we coined the term "cares" to more closely represent what Lonergan referred to as values. After using the concept of cares in my mediation practice and when teaching students to mediate, I began to comprehend that because it was threats, not cares, that produced conflict it would be more useful in mediation dialogues to focus on them *per se* than on an individual's cares. This was, and is, an important insight. To help us communicate that Insight practitioners need to focus on experiences of threat I dubbed the term "threat-to-cares". Understanding threats and cares in this way underscores the importance of connecting what people do with what they experience and value.

The concept of cares as we are using it in Insight mediation highlights the point that they exist at both an individual and at a relational level making it necessary to ask questions directed at each level. Learning conversations, thus, not only revolve around personal desires, needs, and interests at the individual level, but also at the relational level around patterns of interpersonal and social relations in which interests, needs and goals are pursued. Patterns of relations are about identity, roles, self-worth, culture, tradition, and so forth. The desire to be seen as "good"; for instance, a good person, parent, friend, worker, member, or other such kinship exemplify patterns of relation.

Insight practitioners also follow Lonergan in recognizing that not only are cares located at different levels, the levels of cares are hierarchical; for instance relational cares are stronger and more apt to be addressed before individual cares[20]. This is why it is common to discover that parties' actions express values and valuing for the form of relationship rather than for their individual interests or needs. It also helps explain why people will make

[20] PICARD, *Practicing Insight Mediation*, 46.

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sacrifices that set aside their personal interests to improve relations or retain an identity that matters to them. Knowing that cares are inclusive of our individual, relational and social ideals helps make sense of how we judge our own actions and the actions of others. Paying focused attention to the relational nature of interpersonal interactions and to the valuing of these interactions sets the Insight practitioner apart from those trained in other models of conflict resolution[21].

Lonergan's explanation of how cares function through feelings, and the way we use this concept to explain how conflict is dynamized, is another significant contribution made by the *Insight approach to conflict and mediation*[22]. Knowing that it is through our feelings that we come to realize that something important is happening helps us recognize that the stronger the feeling the more it matters and, thus, the more we need to attend to it. While many conflict professionals find it daunting when parties' emotions and behaviours become heated, escalated, or aggressive, Insight practitioners are trained to notice, ask about, and help parties learn from the emotion-laden aspects of these conflict interactions. Following Lonergan they argue that feelings arise from life experiences, and that they carry implicit, albeit often unconscious, narratives that shape a person's identity that in turn influence their actions. Knowing that feelings connote something of value invokes the Insight practitioner's curiosity about what it is that matters. Moreover, because they have learned that people in conflict can be overwhelmed by their feelings, they explore what feelings are about rather than suppressing them in fear that doing so may hinder resolution. To help them understand escalated feelings and heightened resistance they endeavor to discover what may have previously happened that is now creating certainty about the need to prevent something similar from happening now or in the future. Very often, it is this certainty of a dire past with its threats to what matters in the present that keeps parties locked in conflict. Uncovering this certainty involves discovering the threats-to-cares carried in parties' feelings. Knowing which cares are most at stake and how they manifest in feelings and behaviours is particularly helpful when resistance to change makes no sense or seems contrary to a person's best interests. Focusing on feelings to uncover threats is another distinguishing feature of the Insight approach.

It is important to understand that cares have a narrative structure; a narrative that directs our attention, shapes our expectations of the future, and guides our actions. It is these narratives that form patterns of social relations such as

[21] PICARD, *Practicing Insight Mediation*, 52.
[22] MELCHIN – PICARD, *Transforming Conflict*, 85.

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those found in families, workplaces, and neighbourhoods, along with those carried in social traditions and cultural norms. Given that conflict often exists at the level of the relational, knowing that the narrative structure of cares holds expectations of social relations by assigning worth to what we and others ought to do is important for mediators.. It is this knowledge that leads Insight mediators to ask questions about the threats-to-cares operative in parties' feelings. They do this by deepening what is known about the links between parties' experiences, interpretations and actions. Doing this is reflected in the key Insight idea that "knowing comes from deepening the conversation".

Knowing Comes from Deepening the Learning Conversation

Deepening the learning conversation begins with curious questions that stem from genuine wondering. Deepening also happens when it is noticed that parties' interactions have become more defensive, escalated, or emotional. The practice of deepening involves a complex set of communication techniques and a great deal of patience and skill given that the longer people are in conflict the more certain they are of knowing each other as "the enemy". When this happens, information that may contradict one's perceptions is either dismissed or not heard because the parties are so sure they know all there is to know about each other's motives and intentions. Curiosity about others only returns when uncertainty about our own knowing emerges. The aim of deepening, then, is to expand upon what parties know about the deeper threats-to-cares and relations sustaining their conflict, and upon what they know about how they value these relations. To be sure, deepening is not a superficial conversation, but one that uncovers both our values and our valuing at the core of our very being.

Listening to the listener is a key communication skill used by Insight practitioners to confirm and deepen the accuracy of parties' knowing. Listening to the listener is in contrast to the common practice in conflict resolution work of actively listening to the speaker[23]. Focusing on what a listener has heard, and the meaning taken from what was said or done, surfaces mistaken knowing. Given that conflict behaviours are a response to interpretations, correcting mistaken knowing is a critical ingredient in motivating parties to engage in different interactions. Another important aspect of listening to the listener is that it can reveal when listeners' learning pathways are blocked. Being unable to repeat what a speaker has said is a good

[23] PICARD, *Practicing Insight Mediation*, 22.

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indicator that the intervenor has more work to do to reduce threats so curiosity can return. Listening to the listener can also help make sense of behaviours that previously made little or no sense to others. Further still, it keeps the intervener focused on the parties' narratives helping them to stay clear of any tendencies to problem-solve for the parties.

Deepening the learning conversation also involves Insight mediators in asking parties how each other's actions might have differed in order for them to be able to believe that causing harm was not each other's primary intent. This practice is linked to what Lonergan refers to as the relational level of value where expected, or normative, patterns of interaction are held. When sense is made of actions that previously could only be seen as intentionally harmful, or, that made little or no sense at all, powerful shifts in understanding are produced allowing a party's curiosity and listening to return. Curiosity and listening expand knowing; expanded knowing is what opens the space to build new relations and structures. The transformative nature of the Insight approach occurs when the knowing that created the conflict is disrupted and a new process for learning replaces it. When this happens, decisions to engage in less threatening ways of interacting that would never before be imagined become possible.

Deepening the learning conversation also requires that Insight practitioners be able to distinguish between what they describe as "threat-to-care stories" and "defend stories". Defend stories contain the rationale for people feeling threatened and justification for their conflict behaviours. To strengthen these stories, parties often confirm their impressions with others and come to mediation with well supported and well prepared defend stories aimed at convincing the mediator that the other is at fault. Often, they sound something like this: "*I was forced to react in this way." "She left me with no choice but to reach that decision." "It was his fault that this happened, I am the victim here" . "I have a file here to prove everything I am saying."* Defend stories are closed stories with no room for new information to take hold because of the certainty of knowing all that is needed to know. They are firmly held narratives located in second level relational values and social cognition that support the positions parties initially come to mediation with that "they are right and good" and the other is "wrong and bad". They are the stories that create, escalate and sustain conflict.

In contrast, threat-to-care stories are more open, less certain, and less judgmental. They are the narratives about what parties both understand and don't understand, feel and value. They are stories that reflect curiosity, uncertainty and confusion that would sound something like this: "*I have no idea what is behind his ridiculous behaviour but I would sure like to find out*." "*If I knew*

what was going on here I might be able to do something about it." "I trusted and supported them yet they went behind my back and complained, how can I make sense of this other than that they do not respect me?" Because of the vulnerability in revealing one's "true self", threat-to-care stories are not often openly shared, especially in conflict interactions. And even when they are shared, other parties rarely hear them because of the certainty they already know all there is to know. Anything that veers from what is now known, is perceived to be manipulative or deceitful and is thus rejected. Insight practitioners know that it is the threat-to-care stories that hold the potential to expand the learning needed to unlock the doors to change. Even when it is clear that parties strongly disagree with each other's beliefs and values through the mediation dialogue parties can come to understand and accept each other's value-laden fears as long as they do not threaten their own cares. After surfacing the cares that underlie parties' actions it is not uncommon to discover that parties are responding to experiences of threat more than they are intending harm.

To Sum Up

Lonergan's philosophy of insight is significant for conflict professionals because it provides them with a method to help conflicting parties discover what is known and unknown. Generating new insights that expand and verify what conflicting parties know enables them to change their minds, and to decide to interact in less threatening and conflictual ways, not only today but also in the future.

With its focus on expanding what is known through a relational, creative and flexible learning process, the *Insight approach to conflict and mediation* tackles the very foundation of conflict by teaching parties how to discern whether the pattern of their actions is fostering cooperation, or triggering defend reactions that are escalating and sustaining their conflict. Insight practitioners help disputing parties and groups become curious about the threats to each other's cares, because doing so produces insights that can shift parties from intransigence to critical thinking and collaborative engagement. This happens when parties no longer feel the need to focus their attention on defending their cares. Being freed from defending interactions allows conflicting parties to listen more intently to each other, thereby enabling them to notice and query erroneous information in a genuine, curious and non-judgmental way.

The Insight approach shows that cares are at the root of conflict not because they exist but because they are threatened. Insights produced through learning conversations help change the experience of threat by expanding

what is known about oneself in relation to others. The reduction of threat helps parties begin to consider, and decide, if and how to interact in less threat-producing ways. Focusing attention on reducing threats to foster change is particularly promising because of its applicability in an array of conflict contexts and levels.

The Insight communication and conflict skills that I have talked about in this essay are more than "soft" skills; they have the potential to change people. In addition, they are not limited to professionals working with parties in active conflict but are accessible to anyone. They are life skills that enable individuals and groups to dig below the surface of conflict to explore the knowing, valuing and deciding beneath it. This enables conflicting parties to be less reliant on professionals to help them continue engaging in conversations after their mediation sessions have ended.

I set out in this essay to explain that the Insight approach is a practice deeply embedded in Lonergan's theories of social action and knowing[24]. Current experiences of using the Insight approach confirm the merit of knowing conflict as emanating from defend responses to deeply held cares. In my experience, and in those of my Insight colleagues, even when conflict dialogues have reached a stage where it is clear that harm is intended, coming to understand that the conflict behaviour of others was intended to protect their cares is showing that minds can be activated to search for new and less harmful ways of interacting. The shift in thinking generated by new insights produces the possibility of new relations and the resolve to seek new interactions that allow differing cares to co-exist without threat and in relative peace. Changing personal acts of meaning has social currency that can help individuals and groups negotiate the challenges of a fast-paced globalized world. In this way the *Insight approach to conflict and mediation* is transformative; a possibility owing to Lonergan's philosophy of insight.

[24] Neil SARGENT – Cheryl PICARD – Marnie JULL, "Rethinking Conflict: Perspectives from the Insight Approach," in *Negotiation Journal* 27 (2011) 343-366.

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