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**Working Paper**

## Glocal Dialogue Transformation through Transcultural Communication

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**Glocal Dialogue**  
**Transformation through**  
**Transcultural Communication**  
Kazuma Matoba  
NOTA DI LAVORO 74.2003

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KNOW – Knowledge, Technology, Human Capital

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# **Glocal Dialogue- Transformation through Transcultural Communication**

## **Summary**

This paper addresses the role of dialogical communication in acculturation efforts within organizations and regions, especially during periods of transition, mergers, technological innovations, and globalization. This optimal communication mode can be achieved through a “dialogue process” proposed by David Bohm and developed by Peter Sense at MIT, Boston. The “dialogue process”, as an integral part of intercultural communication training, aims at promoting dialogue competence for intercultural communication in which man can learn how to better deal with their own stereotypes of other cultures and eventually acquire a generally de-stereotyping style of communication. It has tried out in a small city in Germany, since April 2002. About 25 citizens of the city are taking part in this dialogue process. The empirical part of this study tries to describe the socio-psychological transformation of the dialogue-group.

**Keywords:** Dialogical communication, Transcultural communication, Acculturation process, Sociopsychological transformation

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# GLOCAL DIALOGUE

## TRANSFORMATION THROUGH TRANSCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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This paper addresses the role of dialogical communication in acculturation efforts in organizations and regions during periods of transition, merger, technological innovation, and globalization. This communication mode can be achieved through a *dialogue process*, proposed by David Bohm (1996) and developed by Peter Senge, William Isaacs and Freeman Dhority at MIT, Boston. The *dialogue process*, as an integral part of communication training, aims to promote dialogue competence for intercultural communication. In a company situation participants in the *dialogue process* as a intercultural communication training learn how to better deal with their own stereotypes of other cultures and eventually learn a style of communication that is not so stereotypical. A *dialogue process* in a society, that aims to promote dialogical communication between a dominant group and an acculturating group on the local level, could stimulate the acculturation process on the global level, hence *glocal dialogue*. The glocal dialogue has been tried out in City W, a small city in Germany, since April 2002. About 20 residents of the city are taking part in this *dialogue process*. The participants include Germans (as the dominant group) and people from Arab nations, Turkey, India, Japan, and Croatia (as an acculturating group) who are willing to transform the culture of the city (regional acculturation). The aim of this study is to describe the socio-psychological transformation of the dialogue group.

### 1. Introduction

Cultures converge through cultural change and acculturation. Today's globalization encourages cultural convergence by acculturation, or the result of intercultural contact and communication. In theory, two cultures that are in contact may influence each other equally. In practice, however, one of the cultures tends to dominate the other. An acculturation process involves three functional groups: a dominant group, an acculturating group and an acculturated group. The acculturating group prompts the acculturation process by coming into direct contact with the dominant group. The mode of communication between the two groups influences the process as well as the result of the acculturation, namely, the changes made in the cultural/social system. I believe that dialogical communication between a dominant group and an acculturating group can promote a well-balanced convergence of cultures. Buber (1958) and Yoshikawa (1987) propose the theory of dialogical communication and try to define dialogue competence in such a way that could then, in the long run, contribute to a fruitful discussion of the ethics of intercultural communication. Such a discussion is also necessary to help us guard against a total, culture-specific, moral relativism.

A dialogical communication can proceed successfully if participants are sufficiently competent in skills such as openness, sincerity, attentive listening etc. Some of the skills may be affected by socio-cultural differences and the dialogue competence of an individual may be biased by socio-cultural norms and values.

In the following I present literature review, followed by the description of the project in City W, and lastly conclusion.

## **2. Globalization and development**

### **2.1 Economic development**

The economic situation in the world today finds a large discrepancy between the developed countries and the developing countries. The world's economic system has produced debt of more than US\$1.5 trillion that the developing countries currently bear. Every month, the system adds over US\$7.5 billion to their burden. There is the large difference of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross National Product (GNP) between the developed countries, or the economically dominant group, and the developing countries, or the economically dominated group. As Falk (1999) points out, this situation will deteriorate further at alarming pace and scale, if the transnational market forces continue to practice 'globalization-from-above.'

### **2.2 Human development**

People in the developing countries are forced either to accept this economic imbalance and abandon human development that is available to the dominant group, or to escape from this situation and emigrate, if financially possible. People in developed countries face a multicultural society in which they have to live together with immigrants from the developing countries. In a multicultural society, those who are willing to exchange information and to communicate with strangers have a good chance of developing their communication competence. On the personal level, therefore, the diversity in a multicultural society should be viewed as a positive asset to human development.

### **2.3 Economic development and multicultural environments**

Increasing rates of migration have brought about a change in the structure of multicultural societies. The International Conference on the Dialogue of Civilizations at the United Nations University (2001) reports that:

Changes in the ruling elites tended to affect the distribution of power within these multicultural societies, but did not change the basic pattern of multicultural coexistence coupled with the strive of the dominant culture to impose its values and norms on the minority groups. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, the ever-accelerating speed of globalization, facilitated by the spread of modern transport and communication technologies, has profoundly changed the framework of multicultural societies.

The globalization of markets and information networks has made consumption patterns and mass- and sub-culture more uniform. The standardization of every-day culture helps migrants to access materials and information from their native countries more easily, and, as a consequence, helps them preserve their native culture. Globalization has produced two developments seemingly moving toward the opposite directions: an increasing uniformity of every-day culture on the one hand, and a drive to retain elements of individual cultures on the

other hand. We are now confronted with a paradigm shift from integrating minority cultures into the mainstream culture to equally accommodating the values and norms of all cultural groups within the framework of a given society.

### 3. Globalization and acculturation

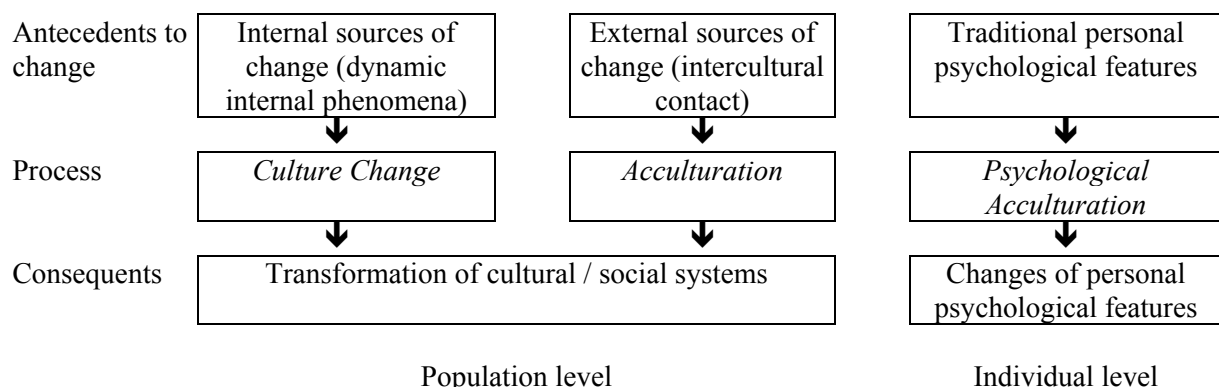
Recent theoretical developments in anthropology seek to explain contemporary processes of cultural globalization and transnational cultural flows. The aim of this line of research is to understand and explain how dominant cultural forms are invented, imposed, reworked, and transformed.

An acculturation process involves three functional groups: a dominant group, an acculturating group, and an acculturated group. The acculturation occurs when individuals of the acculturating group come into direct contact with the dominant group. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries Europeans and native people came into direct contact. This contact began at first between the dominant European groups such as colonial governments, missionaries, and teachers and the acculturating native groups such as co-workers in governments, churches, or pupils in schools. Those acculturating groups could influence the lives of others from the same culture (the acculturated group).

The characteristics of the dominant group from culture A and the acculturating group from culture B are important to examine. Berry (1989:238) argues that acculturation phenomena vary depending on the purpose of the dominant group (colonization, enslavement, trade, military control, evangelization, or education, for example) and on whether the acculturating group voluntarily initiates the contact with the dominant group or whether it is forced to do so.

Cross-cultural psychology observes two levels of acculturation: the population level (ecological, cultural, social, and institutional) and the individual level (the behaviors and traits of individuals). Graves (1967, cited in Berry 1989:234) calls the acculturation at the individual level ‘psychological acculturation,’ or “the change that an individual experiences as a result of being in contact with other cultures and a result of participating in the process of acculturation that one’s cultural or ethnic group is undergoing.” The psychological acculturation is realized in such areas as the individuals’ behavior, identity, values, and attitudes. At the population level, Berry (1989) makes a distinction between culture change and acculturation depending upon whether sources of change are internal or external. Dynamic changes from within such as an innovation, a discovery, or a major ecological disaster bring about a culture change, whereas acculturation occurs externally by contact with other cultures (Fig. 1).

Figure 1: Culture change and acculturation, based on Berry (1989)



Different ‘acculturation attitudes’ bring about different types of acculturation. Berry & Kim (1988) point out four varieties of acculturation. Acculturation attitudes are “the way in which an individual (or a group) of culture B wishes to relate to culture A” (Berry 1998: 244). ‘Integration’ occurs when an individual in culture B wishes both to maintain his/her own cultural identity and characteristics and to maintain relationships with other groups. ‘Assimilation’ is achieved when one does not wish to maintain the identity of his/her own culture and seeks, instead, daily interaction with culture A. Maintenance of values of one’s original culture and avoidance of interactions with other cultures lead to ‘separation’. Little interest in maintaining one’s own cultural identity and in interacting with other groups results in ‘marginalization’ (Fig. 2).

Figure 2: Four varieties of acculturation, Source: Berry & Kim (1988:245)

Acculturation attitudes of culture B		Is it considered to be of value to maintain cultural identity and characteristics?	
		Yes	No
Is it considered to be of value to maintain relationships with other groups?	Yes	<b>Integration</b>	<b>Assimilation</b>
	No	<b>Separation</b>	<b>Marginalization</b>

These four varieties of acculturation can be observed both at the population and individual levels. The population level is further classified into the organizational, regional, national and global levels. At the organization level, mergers and acquisitions of companies striving for the acculturation process can result in integration, assimilation, or separation. At the regional level, the migration followed by acculturation can result in integration, assimilation, separation, or marginalization.

#### 4. Diversity communication

Since the end of the cold war, societies in the world have become more culturally diverse. Some primary schools in Germany, for example, have multicultural classes with members of more than four cultures, such as those from Germany, Turkey, Russia, and Poland. As a multicultural society, one must be able to integrate seemingly contradictory values of people from other cultures and to transform them into complementary parts of an integral whole. The integration and transformation are important parts of the process of growth toward a ‘dialogical mode of communication’ (Yoshikawa 1987:320) in which one learns to overcome prejudice and negative stereotypes towards other cultures.

##### 4.1 Intercultural communication

Yoshikawa (1987:320) classifies intercultural communication by modes of the relationship between culture A and B into four types: the ethnocentric, control, dialectical, and dialogical modes.

###### (A) Ethnocentric mode

“The ethnocentric mode implies that A perceives B only in A’s own frame of reference and that B is a mere shadow of A. The cultural integrity of B’s culture, its uniqueness, and differences are simply ignored. Communication is one sided, and feedback is rendered ineffective by well-known psychological processes of selective attention, selective perception, and selective retention.”

###### (B) Control mode



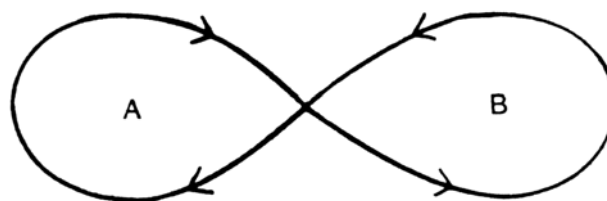
“The control mode implies that B is A’s scrutiny. B is perceived and manipulated as a thing or an object for A’s purpose. B’s cultural uniqueness and differences are recognized, but they are manipulated in order to achieve A’s objectives. This is a form of manipulative communication.”

(C) Dialectical mode

The dialectical mode of communication has three potential outcomes. The prime motive of A and/or B is fusion: (i) As A’s thesis meets B’s antithesis a new synthesis will be created which is unique and transcends the differences of both A and B which are lost in a new culture C.; (ii) A fuses into B and loses its own identity to become part of B.; (iii) A coerces B to become a part of A. All three outcomes are result of fusion-oriented communication.

(D) Dialogical mode

Figure 3: Dialogical mode



Source:Yoshikawa (1987:321)

“A does not appear in its wholeness in isolation but rather in relationship to B. While A and B are separate and independent, they are simultaneously interdependent. This type of paradoxical relationship is explained in terms of Buber’s (1958) concept of dialogical relationship. The cultural integrity of A and B and the differences and similarities of A and B are recognized and respected. The emphasis is on wholeness, mutuality, and the dynamic meeting of A and B. Even in their union, A and B each maintains a separate identity.” (Fig. 3)

The present global exchange of information supports the notion that the dialogical mode of communication is an effective way to integrate and transform cultures not by assimilation or reducing differences but, rather, by gaining deeper understanding of and appreciation for diversity.

## 4.2 Communication and acculturation

The mode of communication between a dominant group from culture A and an acculturating group from culture B is determined by the purpose of the contact between the two cultures. European countries that colonized African nations between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries communicated with native people in the ethnocentric and control modes. During the same period, the Catholic Church with the mission to evangelize the native people of Africa also used in their communication the ethnocentric and control modes. So far as the communication remains in the ethnocentric and control modes, culture A and B cannot exchange information and cultural values equally and understand each other. Their communication is so one-sided that the dominant group from culture A and the acculturating group from culture B cannot be integrated equally. They remain separated, or otherwise, the acculturating group is forced to assimilate to the culture A.

When two business people from two different cultures interact, they bring their own backgrounds with them, but they also step outside their own cultural and business environments and create a new mutual context (Bolten 1999). Bell (1992:452) calls this new context ‘transactional culture.’ Let’s suppose that financial managers from a Japanese firm

and a German firm discuss financing options of a joint venture. Their negotiations will be more successful if they have an understanding of each other's cultural and business backgrounds. If they can understand each other's cultural differences, they can find a new way, or a transactional culture, that is acceptable to both parties. Interactions in a business context such as this cannot be achieved in the ethnocentric and control modes. Although in reality the control mode is used in many business interactions and results in an unequal relationship, ideally, the communication should be in the dialectical mode. This is characterized by cooperation, symmetry, clarity, egalitarianism, mutuality, harmony, openness, consensus and agreement.

Senge (1990) and Nonaka/Takeuchi (1995) present a hypothesis that the communication mode can influence the way of acculturation in a monocultural context. Matoba (2002) suggests that in intercultural situations the dialogical communication mode can contribute to *transcultural communication*; diverse values of people and cultures could be integrated and transformed into complementary parts of an integral whole.

### 4.3 Cultural convergence through globalization

Kincaid (1979, 1982, 1987) applies the basic idea of *entropy* of thermodynamics to the human communication and proposes the 'convergence theory' of communication. Entropy, first proposed in 1850 by a German physicist Rudolf Clausius, is a measurement for the degree of a system's disorder. When heat is added to a system that had been held at a constant temperature, the entropy changes according to the change in energy, the pressure, the temperature, and the volume. Its magnitude varies from zero to the total amount of energy in a system. Entropy in a popular and non-technical sense is a measurement of the chaos or randomness of a system. The higher the entropy is the more random, disorganized, disordered, dissimilar, and independent the events are. In contrast, the lower the entropy is, the less random, the more organized, ordered, similar, and interdependent the events are.

The basic assumption of the 'convergence theory' is that "the communication process results in a change in the statistical distribution of the beliefs, values, and behaviors of a culture" (Kincaid 1987:212). Furthermore, Kincaid/Yum/Woelfel/Barnett (1983) describe the fundamental principle of communication as follows:

In a closed social system in which communication is unrestricted among its members, the system as a whole will tend to converge over time toward a collective pattern of thought of lower entropy. [...] In a closed social system with no communication among its members, the system as whole will tend to diverge over time toward a collective pattern of thought of greater entropy. (212)

According to this principle, "if communication is unrestricted, a common culture will result, that is, a convergence among the members in terms of their beliefs, values, and behaviors" (Kincaid 1987:216). An unrestricted flow of information is possible in symmetrical conversation where no participants have power over the others. This conversation is, according to Linell (1990), dialogical, collaborative and integrative in nature and can influence the beliefs, values, and the behaviors of the participants positively. Such a conversation can produce the high degree of connectedness of human relationships in the communication network, which can be correlated with the degree of convergence in an institution. Rogers & Kincaid (1981)'s study of the family planning communication networks in Korea supports this theoretical proposition. The degree of connectedness in communication networks in Korean villages was found to be correlated with the degree of convergence in terms of the village women's attitudes and knowledge about family planning.

Today's economic growth has brought us globalization of communication that we experience daily. Multicultural cities bring us cultural diversity, which enables us to communicate with strangers from other cultures. This has a positive effect on us that helps us free ourselves from our own cultural conditioning, our limited values, beliefs, and behaviors. The dialogical mode of communication, with its less restrictive flow of information, can contribute to this positive process of intercultural communication and cultural convergence. This process would result in acculturation, or integration, which seems to be comparable to the transition from higher to lower entropy.

## **5. Transcultural communication**

### **5.1 Culture: diversity and unity**

Yoshida (1995: 136) regards 'cultural diversity,' 'human unity,' and 'interdependence' as basic principles of an intercultural communication. Maintaining these three concepts in intercultural contact situations, however, is very difficult. Cultural relativism, the notion that cultural differences and diversity must be recognized, is significant in the sense that it opposes ethnocentrism and Euro-centrism. I believe, however, that it is important to find universal principles hidden behind cultural uniqueness, without which we cannot establish principles to realize the unity of human communities.

In the process of acculturation, especially with the dialectical or dialogical mode of communication between dominant groups of culture A and acculturating or acculturated groups of culture B, both cultures spontaneously influence one another to some extent and reevaluate themselves. In principle, therefore, a universal principle on which all cultures are based should work in such an acculturation process. Yoshida (1995) points out that we do not need to find this cultural universality outside of our culture. We must search for this cultural universality within our own cultures. By doing so, we will be able to find cultural rules that determine how each culture expresses the cultural universality and that will also enable us to appreciate cultural diversity. Culture in his eyes, therefore, can exist in unity as well as in diversity.

### **5.2 Transcultural communication and third-culture-building**

Maruyama (1991:70), based upon Merleau-Ponty (1945), argues that one can recognize the cultural universality by changing the patterning of cultural conditioning. Intercultural communication which can promote to change the patterning of cultural conditioning enable us to recognize the cultural universality. I call this intercultural communication for this special purpose *transcultural communication*.

According to Shuter (1993), the 'third-culture-building model' assumes that participants in the process of intercultural communication should and can develop a third culture by mutually negotiating their cultural differences. Chen and Starosta (1998:134) add that this negotiation process involves the mutual effort to adapt to the values of one another and reconfigure their cultural identity. This model seems to be adequately suited to the explanation and understanding of the dynamic nature of intercultural communication processes. A third culture, according to Casmir (1997:109), "would represent an expression of mutuality which can be understood, supported and defended by all who shared in its development." This mutuality is beneficial to all those who have a part in developing it. In the process of building a third culture all participants are expected to bring their own schemata to any given communication process. It can be expected that "transformation or change of

culture can be and is brought about by dialogue to organize and reorganize chaotic environments” (Casmir 1999:112).

I set up a theoretical hypothesis that the transcultural communication, if the dialogical mode of communication is used there, could propel the establishment of a third-culture.

## **6. Glocal dialogue**

As today’s world becomes more globalized, we interact with one another at both global and local levels through global economy, telecommunication, religions, and migrations. The globalization, through a multiple process of intellectual, technological and physical migration, has brought us the feeling that we are connected with others in the world. It has also brought us, however, an uneven distribution of wealth at both the global as well as the local levels. Efforts have been made to address this issue. The United Nations, for example, held a session called the “Dialogue of Civilizations” in order to open and develop an intercultural dialogue (c.f. United Nation University 2002). On the local level, civic dialogues have taken place since the idea of ‘dialogue process’ by David Bohm was highlighted in the last decade (c.f. Ellinor/Gerard 1998, Hartkemeyer/Hartkemeyer/Dhority 1998, Huang-Nissen 1999, Isaacs 1999, Yankelovich 1999, Saunders 1999). A civic dialogue on the local level can be called ‘glocal dialogue’ because global issues are projected on the local level and become local issues.

### **6.1 Dialogue competence for transcultural communication**

One who sincerely practices the dialogue skills and behaviors in the *dialogue process* as defined by and applied in the communication training of Hartkemeyer/Hartkemeyer/Dhority (1998) can attain a high level of dialogue competence. In their intercultural communication and interaction, people with limited dialogue competence tend to categorize, discriminate and exclude members of different cultures and other culturally defined groups within a diversified population (e.g., groups defined by gender, age, sexual orientation, race, etc.). The dialogue process, as an integral part of communication training, aims to promote dialogue competence for transcultural communication. Through this process, professional trainers and facilitators as well as other participants (such as staff in an organization) may learn how to better deal with their own stereotypes of other cultures and eventually learn a style of communication that is not so stereotypical.

The process of building a third culture is like climbing a mountain. When one reaches the top of the mountain, she/he sees that all paths from below lead to the same summit and that each path is different. This, in a way, is a process of liberating oneself from a limited perspective of communication. According to Hartkemeyer/Hartkemeyer/Dhority (1998), the dialogue competence necessary for building a third culture in transcultural communication is available only if all ten disciplines can be developed beyond their cultural determinations and limitations. These disciplines ask us

- (1) to assume the attitude of a learner,
- (2) to have a radical respect for the partner,
- (3) to be open,
- (4) to speak sincerely and be brief,
- (5) to listen to another person carefully,
- (6) to slow down when speaking,
- (7) to suspend assumptions and judgments,
- (8) to plead productively,

- (9) to have an inquisitive attitude,
- (10) to observe the observer.

Some of the ten disciplines may be affected by cultural, socio-cultural or psycho-cultural differences. The differences in communicative attitudes reflect the way in which communicative values and ethics are culture-specific. Thus, the universal dialogue competence can develop to different degrees under different cultural conditions and configurations.

## 6.2 Dialogue Process of Hartkemeyer/Hartkemeyer/Dhority (1998)

Dialogue process, according to Bohm (1996), is a multi-faceted process. His notion of dialogue process is more than a conversational exchange; dialogue process explores the manner in which thought is generated on an individual level and sustained on a collective level. Senge, et al. (1994) further developed Bohm's concept of dialogue process. Since then, dialogue process has been applied in various fields such as management research, conflict management, and communication training.

Building on Bohm's idea on dialogue process, Hartkemeyer/Hartkemeyer/Dhority (1998) developed methods to enhance the dialogue process. They state that the dialogue process works best with twenty to forty people seated facing one another in a circle. At least one or two experienced facilitators are essential. Their role is to point out situations that might seem to present difficult issues for the group to resolve. The dialogue process begins with a *check-in-round* where each participant sitting in a circle has a chance to speak what comes into her/his mind. The aim is to slow down the communication, to develop mutual trust, and to create a collective atmosphere. Secondly, each participant who wants to respond to what the previous speaker said takes a stone from the center of the circle and begins to speak. After her/his turn she/he puts the stone back. In this way, the dialogue process goes on for about 90 to 120 minutes without any specific topic for discussion. A long silence may occur. The dialogue process has two rules: (1) Speak sincerely!; and (2) Be brief! Hartkemeyer/Hartkemeyer/Dhority (1998) distinguish a goal-oriented (strategic) and a generative dialogue process. A goal-oriented dialogue process is a conscious and deliberate process; a topic is given and the goal is clear, which makes it easier for participants to understand one another. In the generative dialogue process, on the other hand, no particular topic or question is given at the beginning. It appears spontaneous during the check-in-round. This process may continue for a while or disappear quickly. The goal of the generative dialogue process is not to discuss an already announced topic, but to become aware of how people communicate with each other and deal with different ways of thinking and feeling.

Ellinor/Gerard (1998:157) recognize a basic developmental sequence that the dialogue process follows:

- I. "Pseudocommunity": Participants get to know each other and pay more attention to similarities than to differences.
- II. "Chaos": Participants explore their differences and are no longer content to agree with one another.
- III. "Emptying": Participants realize that collaboration might be beneficial after they begin to look for the group's collective identity.
- IV. "Community": Participants feel comfortable speaking freely with one another because they found their collective identity. They can benefit from their diversity.

This classification of group development stages correspond to what Scharmer (2000: 55) describes in terms of quality of communication: ‘talking nice’, ‘talking tough’, ‘reflective dialogue’ and ‘generative dialogue’. According to Scharmer (2000) that the conversation throughout the dialogue process moves from stage ‘talking nice’ to ‘generative dialogue’.

## 7. Civic dialogue “Religions in dialogue”: City W, Germany

A civic dialogue took place once every month over a four-month period since April 2002 in City W<sup>1</sup>, a small city in Germany. The dialogue workshop was organized by a civic dialogue committee that consists of the city of W, Witten/Herdecke University, and the World Conference of Religion and Peace (WCRP). The workshop begun with some exercises at 19:00 and had a two hour-dialogue process ending at 22:30. Twenty residents of the city took part in this dialogue process. The participants included 13 Germans (as the dominant group), and 1 Croatian, 2 Turks, 2 Indians, 1 Iranian, and 1 Japanese (as an acculturating group). The City W office of the WCRP selected those participants on the basis of their religious belief, because the main topic of the civic dialogue was “Religions in dialogue.” They are Catholic, Protestant, Islam, Hindu, Bahai and Buddhist, and were interested in this topic.

Behind the civic dialogue committee’s choice on the topic is the uncertainty about today’s religious practices. Norms and values in today’s world are changing so rapidly that religious institutions seem no longer able to provide people with frames of reference that are sufficiently adequate and timely. This has resulted in a shift from believing in formalized religious principles to living by non-institutionalized belief systems. A dialogue among established religions, therefore, become necessary in order to create a new religious framework. This framework will enable the established religions to embrace the changing world and may contribute to the formation of a new world society. This dialogue should take place not only on the institutional level, but also on the individual level. The civic dialogue committee chose the topic ‘Religions in dialogue’ for its dialogue process because it believes religion is one of the factors for a successful cultural integration in the multicultural society. A dialogue between religions on the grassroots level is a first step toward a constructive transcultural communication.

After each dialogue process the facilitator asked the participants for classifying the dialogue process after the four stages of Scharmer (2000). In the following description of the civic dialogue, each dialogue process is labeled with ‘talking nice’, ‘talking tough’, ‘reflective dialogue’ or ‘generative dialogue’.

### 7.1 First dialogue process (April 24<sup>th</sup> 2002): ‘Talking nice’

Through communication, people can interact with each other and create something new together. This is the most important aspect of civic dialogue. Good listening is crucial to achieve this goal. The best training for good listening is to listen to others without interruption. One lets the other in a pair express how she/he sees and feels about a given topic (e.g., ‘What was the turning-point in your life?’) for about seven minutes. At this point, she/he simply tries to listen and understand the other without comments or criticism. Then, the pair switches places, and the first speaker will be the listener.

The first dialogue held in April focused on the self-awareness dimension of dialogue competence. The implementation of dialogic competent behaviors in the dialogue process requires self-awareness, the ability to monitor or to be aware of ourselves. The self-awareness

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<sup>1</sup> City W has a population of about 104,000 of which about 8,700, 8.4% of the total population, are foreigners. The unemployment rate of the city is 10.2%.

dimension can be attained by listening to others carefully and being sensitive to others' as well as their own expressions. In the dialogue process the facilitator proposed no theme. It was a generative dialogue process in which the participants had to listen to others very carefully so that they could find a theme agreeable for everyone. During the whole process the participants tried to find a common theme by proposing some topics, but could not find a theme in which all of them were interested. The communication in this dialogue process was very polite and superficial. Most of the participants agreed with categorizing this dialogue process as 'talking nice.'

## **7.2 Second dialogue process (May 15<sup>th</sup> 2002): 'Talking nice'**

The purpose of the second dialogue process was for the participants to learn how their behaviors could influence each other as well as the group dynamics. As the first time, there was no given theme (generative dialogue process). The conversation, therefore, proceeded at a slow pace, and as a result, the participants were conscious of when to speak.

After the dialogue process, the facilitator asked the participants how they knew when to speak during the dialogue process. They described that at a certain moment they felt an urge to speak. Knowing when to speak is the result of learning to listen both to oneself and to the others. The relation between the self and the group becomes clear if the individual moves beyond her/his perceived role and status, and if preconceived assumptions and judgments are abandoned (Ellinor/Gerard 1998:149).

The participants again could not find a common theme. This second dialogue process was also categorized as 'talking nice' because the participants recognized no difference between the first and the second dialogue processes in terms of the quality of communication.

## **7.3 Third dialogue process (June 12<sup>th</sup> 2002): 'Talking tough'**

The important goal in the third dialogue process was for the participants to share their subjective experiences with the others and try to understand how others from different cultures might feel and think. The facilitator proposed a theme "What is not God for us?" To encourage sharing their feelings, the facilitator tried to create a safe psychological climate by urging the participants to suspend judgment, avoid evaluation, plead productively, and speak sincerely.

Almost all the participants contributed to the dialogue process by presenting their personal image of God, which led to a heated discussion between some Christian and Bahai participants. The opinion of the Croatian participant was very critical. His opinion, shaped by his experience with wars in his homeland, was quite different from others who had a dignified image of God. After his turn there was a long silence, and the dialogue process ended. After the dialogue process, some said that it was very difficult to dissolve differences and to change their own feelings. Others said they could appreciate how other participants saw and felt about the given theme. All the participants regarded the dialogue process as 'talking tough.'

## **7.4 Fourth dialogue process (July 10<sup>th</sup> 2002): 'Reflective dialogue'**

During the fourth dialogue process, the facilitator informed the participants that in order to interact dialogically with people from other cultures they have to reflect upon their own as well as others' cultural values, norms, customs, and social systems that the participants had expressed clearly during the previous dialogue process. Before the fourth dialogue process

began, the facilitator called participants' attention to the three important maxims for communication: to recognize, appreciate, and respect differences; to be honest by seeing things as they are rather than as we would like them to be; and to suspend judgment.

The theme the facilitator proposed was "What can we learn from other religions?" At the beginning of the dialogue process all the participants showed their interest in this theme and stated their opinions from their point of view. The turn from one participant to the next at the beginning was quick and smooth and the atmosphere was cordial for a while. Gradually, however, an imbalance started to appear in the dynamics. Some participants became more dominant by taking more turns than others and by pushing forward their own belief and their church to the group. Others showed their discomfort with non-verbal communication.

After a long period of silence, one participant praised very sincerely the opinions of the people who had been dominating the discussion. His sincerity impressed the group so much that they resumed further discussion without questioning which religions the participants had. They appraised the dialogue process as 'reflective dialogue.'

The four dialogue processes developed from the first stage 'talking nice' to the third stage 'reflective dialogue.' After four sessions, the participants gained a better understanding of different values and views on religion from others as well as from their own. Although the workshop took place only once a month and the participants did not see each other often other than the workshop, they reported that they could feel a natural urge towards coherence and connectedness. The reason of this quick development into the third stage may be that the topic 'Religions in dialogue' gave the participants an opportunity to speak sincerely and reflect on their faiths, beliefs and feelings.

## **8. Dialogue and transformation**

After the four workshops the civic dialogue committee decided to expand the civic dialogue group by inviting younger generations from the city. Witten/Herdecke University is planning to offer future workshops as a part of the curriculum in the department of social science. Starting October 2002, the civic dialogue group will receive 10 students who are interested in the acculturation process in the city. The University and the City's Council of Migration are planning to establish a facilitator training program for the participants. Those who have finished the one-year training program will organize and hold area workshops. The civic dialogue committee believes that through a positive acculturation process people can learn to understand and accept their foreign neighbors and learn to overcome discrimination and ignorance. Once they have reached this stage, i.e., once they have attained a high level of dialogue competence, they would have a positive influence on others in the community to build a third culture.

How many of dialogical competent inhabitants are enough to transform a society and to build a third culture? Rogers (1983) reports that when just 5% of a society accepts a new idea, it becomes 'embedded.' When 20% adopt the idea, it is 'unstoppable.' In the first phase, proponents of the new idea must work incessantly just to keep the idea alive. Work during this phase is often frustrating and seems not to add up. At this stage, however, people are open to new ideas and courageous enough to espouse them. As participants of the civic dialogue communicate dialogically and positive effects on society are evident, it may begin to gain social acceptability. Then, the structure of the third culture could begin to take shape and many people might appreciate the possible positive role of the civic dialogue process. The project, however, is far from finished to make firm conclusions about its effectiveness.

## **9. Perspective**



The civic dialogue in City W is just a beginning; it is only at the stage to train people to become facilitators with a high level of dialogue competence. In the field of communication science and organization theory there are some reports about social and organizational transformation through the dialogue process (c.f. Saunders 1999). These reports say that as more people adopt new ideas, the environment changes. But they could not develop an ideal method to measure the extent of the transformations. A public opinion survey can present the change of population's behaviors and beliefs, but cannot verify the correlation between the cultural transformation and the consequence of the dialogue process exactly. Therefore, the next step of the research is the development of an empirical method that will quantify how the participants of the civic dialogue can influence, relate to, and change the people around them. The ability to measure this influence and change is an indispensable condition for validating the value of the dialogue process.

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