Sustainable Relationships

Sustainability in the Organization and Community thorough Dialogic Interactions

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"…There is no effort nobler than the attempt to hold on to a shared dream. When a city takes upon itself the task of improving its quality of life, when it respects all its inhabitants, when it respects the environment, when it prepares for the coming generations – then the residents participate in the responsibility for implementing their mutual goal. This shared goal is the only way to hold on to that shared dream…"
Architect Haimi Lerner, Mayor of Coritiva, Brazil, at the beginning of the 1970

Drawing upon the author's eclectic experience as a scholar and practitioner, the article examines theories, approaches, and stories to discuss the fundamental role of quality relationships for dealing with conflict constructively, and promoting sustainable organizations and communities. Sustainability, which is an approach mainly used to effectively deal with environmental issues, is applied in the social context. Additionally, three pertinent conditions are underscored for promoting *sustainable relationships* while reducing conflict destructiveness. The conditions are vital for establishing dialogue as a way of being on the personal and organizational levels.

Organization – A Prevailing Discourse

A few months ago I met the City Manager of one of the largest cities in Israel. For many years he has led unprecedented urban growth and transformation on multiple levels including economic, cultural, educational, and social. It was also important for him to improve connection with residents by promoting residents' accessibility to information, reduced bureaucracy, direct contact with the mayor, and residents' inclusion in decision-making. However, the City Manager expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of discourse and cooperation with residents. Discourse, he said, was mostly adversarial despite those efforts. Aggressively trying to promote their own interests, residents were fighting, urging the municipality to find instant solutions to local problems. A discourse of 'us' and 'them' was common in which residents constantly complained about local issues such as lighting at the entrance to their neighborhood, crossroads, public parks, or irrigation problems. While the City Manager wished to support healthy collaborations through residents' involvement in decision-making, interactions were often polarized and residents frequently rejected municipality management. The municipality often has found itself on the defensive. The situation whereby neighborhood representatives didn't wish to return empty-handed to their eagerly awaiting constituency members often created a 'war zone' with a municipality that was trying to act upon annual plans and was unable to change priorities and respond to residents' short term demands.

This story demonstrates a fragmented social reality, which is dominated by adversarial discourse and aggressive behaviors. When different stakeholders do not see an entire picture and a common goal, conflicts could become destructive, trapping the relationship in stalemate with no progress toward a new, improved reality. Such interactions are characterized by defensive reactions. Despite the mutual desire to cooperate, the municipality and the residents were unable to establish a culture of constructive communication. Instead of sharing thinking and actions, and promoting positive change, people were bickering and resisting each other, while each group defensively clinging to its preconceived positions. When people are reacting automatically in a defensive manner, they are likely to reach impasse and perpetuate a destructive reality.

The aim of this article is to suggest an alternative approach for constructing healthier, sustainable social interactions that foster transformation, and a genuine experience of cooperation. Three major aspects are emphasized for creating productive interactions: a) Recognizing the potential of conflict as an opportunity for growth; c) Acknowledging the "other" as a whole human being; and d) Constructing a dialogic reality. Conjointly, they are suggested to advance sustainable relationships.

The article challenges the traditional "realistic" approaches of community construction, which emphasize a vertical axis of power and hierarchy (Weber, 1949; Parsons, 1951; Simmel, 1955; Coser, 1956), while promoting a horizontal approach of relationship building among the actors in a community.

The Experience of *Presence* in the Modern Community–Is It Possible?

People strive to be genuinely present, to be spontaneous, experience a feeling of belonging, and influence their surroundings. These basic needs were more easily attained in pre-historic times (Fromm 1992). Today, in large urban communities, the feeling of genuine presence and influence one's environment have become more challenging. Modernity has amplified alienation and people experience a lesser sense of kinship.

High competition and the use of power that are major players in Western culture, attests to the individual's difficulty to become noticeable in large systems. The growing reliance on power may reflect the feeling of helplessness in modern life. We live in large cities, work in giant organizations, and are surrounded by huge systems and complex communication networks that shape our future. In Marxist and neo-Marxist approaches, from Gramsci, Adorno, Marcuse and Arendt, to post-structuralists such as Foucault, Baudrillard, Lyotard and Deleuze, the use of force reflects people incapability to influence their surrounding without power. As appeared in the municipal example, a catch-as-you-can attitude became the norm. Assuming that they are not genuinely heard, interest groups are trying to get the largest slice of the cake without being committed to others. If there is no commitment of the authorities towards them, they do not see themselves committed to the authorities. Interactions are habitually perceived as a zero sum game in which winning is at the others' expense. The game becomes an aggressive battle for survival.

Being a small cog in a vast economic mechanism, Fromm (1992) suggested that the perception of modern people self-realization is an illusion, as the self is actually weakened and it's presentation is reduced to a tiny particle of a person's whole – merely rationalism and willpower while neglecting other parts of a complete person. People react to others' expectations, and have became slaves to industry, technology, and opulence created by their own hands. In this context they seem to be afflicted with loneliness and alienation aggravated by competitive and instrumental relationships. People in postmodern society are heavily conditioned by others rather than acting spontaneously upon their own authentic desires and talents. A remedy to this condition may be a conscious environment of those tensions that supports its participants' growth and experience of authentic presence as complete human beings. However, can people develop their multifaceted selves without separating themselves from an environment that is prominently following rigid norms and social rules? Can people develop their whole uniqueness while creatively participating in their community? Can individuals realize their whole self without becoming alienated and isolated? Is it possible to fulfill one's desires without losing healthy social connection?

I propose that not only can individuls develop their whole selves without losing their connection with others but that quality and genuine interactions with others are prerequisite for healthy personal growth, spontaneous connectedness and transformation. This claim concurs with Fromm: "*If man realizes himself in spontaneous action, thus connecting with the world, he stops being an isolated atom. He and the world become part of one wholeness… when he can live, neither by force nor as an automaton, but with spontaneity, the doubts disappear. He becomes aware of himself as an active, creative individual, thus acknowledging that there is one meaning for life: to live it.*" (1992, p. 174).

I propose that a supportive environment that recognizes those challenges may promote an individual sense of *presence* and the creative involvement of diverse populations (Peleg-Baker & Zichlinskey, 2007). Establishing a dialogic environment is likely to bring about effective results through multiple voices. The question is what is a dialogic environment, and how can it be constructed in reality full of

complexity and diversity? Is it feasible for diverse communities to encourage multiple voices? Is constructive discourse possible in conditions of great diversity and multiple conflicting interests?

The Conditions for Sustainable Interactions

Human reality is filled with conflictual interactions, not merely due to different cultures. Conflict is part of life; it is inevitable. Conflict is nourished by diversity and change; a natural process and an inseparable part of living. While conflict is inevitable, weak systems that are incapable of coping with it are preventable. Conflict is a source of pain, and could generate destruction and frustration. However, conflict is key for human growth and development (Tjosvold, 1991; 2008). The question thus becomes how to navigate conflict for our benefit? How human divergence could be directed to a creative experience for the benefit of all? How can we build upon our different views to share meaning and work together effectively? It is challenging. People tend to cling to their preexisting notions even in the face of contradicting information. One reason is because people try to defend their identity- "who they are" by attaching to their ideas and beliefs. People beliefs are a major component of their identity. Contradicting evidence of one's belief may present a threat to one's identity. People are afraid that by giving up their notions they will lose an important source of their identity, so, to keep this source they become defensive. This human inclination keeps people from benefiting from differences and disagreements. Rather than embracing dissimilar opinions and use them for learning and growth, people become defensive, fiercely protecting their identity. Helping people to overcome from their automatic habit of reacting defensively requires extra attention.

Three considerations are proposed here to help people constructively deal with differences to enable building transformational sustainable relationships: *1. The value in conflict*- the importance of understanding and recognizing the opportunity in conflict for healthy and abundant life; *2. The Value of fully accepting people*- recognizing people as a whole, not only for their positive qualities, strengths, or achievements, but also accepting others for their different opinions, weaknesses, and limitations; and *3. The pivotal role of a nurturing environment*- an environment that foster dialogic interactions where people feel safe to be spontaneous and genuine even in the face of contradictions and differences. Such an environment is likely to encourage people to let go of their preexisting opinions and becoming more open to build upon their differences.

1. Conflict is vital for experiencing creativity and constant growth. Since disagreements tend to initially evoke discomfort people reject them and automatically avoid or fight back. However, understanding the temporary discomfort involved in conflict, but its long-term benefit will allow a change in mindset, which is likely to result in constructing a positive experience. Failing to recognize conflict as beneficial may result in dealing with it as a disturbance, leading to distress and a negative interactions (Peleg-Baker, 2005a).

2. People. Acknowledging the value of conflict is necessary but insufficient for constructively engage with diversity. For people to feel comfortable in cooperating, it is as important to receive recognition, to fully and unconditionally be legitimized for their uniqueness and idiosyncrasy as whole human beings. Accepting the "other" as a complete person is most challenging in situations of disagreements. Recognizing others as complete human beings regardless of their status or accomplishments means relating to them with dignity. Schlenger proposes three meanings of respect (2000). One meaning is *Dignity-based*- treating the "other" with *dignity*, accepting others as equal to us as human beings regardless of variances such as different opinions, thoughts or deeds, or different status or achievements. *Dignity-based* is compared to the second meaning of respect: *appreciation-based*, which relies on respecting others for their achievements or deeds. For example, the respect we give a successful student or a celebrity. The third meaning of respect is *honor-based*, which is associated with seniority or higher status such as the respect given to a teacher, senior executive or a king. Dignity is the only one of the three manners of relating to others that is unconditioned and granted on the basis of equality rather than difference. We relate to others with dignity merely

because they deserve it as human beings. A similar idea is Buber's view of human dialogue (1980). Relating to the "other" with dignity is viewed as genuine reciprocal relationship, which he names *I - Thou* relationship. Rather than relating to the other as *I-It*, namely, using the other for ones' purposes, we construct **I-Thou** relationship, described, "*True life is a meeting*". Buber views genuine relationships on the basis of equality. When exercising *I-Thou* relations, we accept the other as a whole, and as equal fellow human being. Although the other may be different in her opinions or beliefs, she is equal to us as a human being. In **I-Thou** relationships we do not look down or up at others, judge them, or use them for our purposes. Rather, we accept them for what they are.

3. Dialogic Reality. A dialogic reality ensures that the above two aspects: perceiving conflict as an opportunity, and treating people as whole human beings with dignity, are sustained through systemic social structures, organizational frameworks, and processes. In a dialogic reality that encourages those two dimensions, dialogue becomes *a way of life*. Genuine encounters on the basis of inquiry and a desire to learn become increasingly automatic while defensive reactions and polarizations are minimized. A dialogic reality addresses basic human needs: recognition, appreciation, meaning, and a feeling of belonging. When these needs are addressed, people less tend to defend their identity, and are open to others' perspectives and ideas.

The necessity of these conditions for promoting sustainable organizations asks for reexamining the role of leadership. Promoting a fresh perception of conflict as an opportunity, nurturing a perception of legitimizing people as a whole with dignity, and constructing a dialogic context may be today's key leadership responsibilities. These three aspects are essential for generating creative cooperation, effective decision-making and organizational growth grounded in multiplicity of ideas and interests.

Back to the municipality story, to realize management's aspiration for genuine dialogue with residents, it is essential to ensure that aspirations are fully reflected in actual daily practices. First, as the community leaders, management should serve as a role model in treating residents, co-workers, and external partners with dignity as well as legitimizing differences in the organization. Moreover, it is critical that city leaders construct a *dialogic reality* through promoting organizational systemic structures and processes to strengthen cooperation within a culture of mutual respect and trust. To walk the talk all municipal everyday activities should tightly correspond with the organization leaders' intentions.

Within a *dialogic reality*, an *organic consciousness* is constructed recognizing the interdependency among its participants where organizational stakeholders function as one. It is contrary to a more common organizational reality of *mechanistic consciousness* (Adizes, 2004b), which lacks the necessary internal cohesion and recognition in the interdependency among all participants, thus, pushing each stakeholder to function in isolation. An organic organization acts as an integrative entity, ensuring long-term effectiveness and efficient endeavors. On the contrary, mechanistic system needs external involvement in order to fix a problem, as parts function separately rather than as components of a whole. The municipal example of the city wishing to include residents in its activities but struggling to create meaningful dialogue with them, demonstrates an organization where each group operates in isolation to achieve their own interests, each may not see itself as part of an entire integrative urban system. In such reality, there is a need for external intervention to connect all the parts together.

The following story illustrates the difference between mechanic and organic consciousness. Recently I called the office of a City Manager. The first person that picked up the call responded "You've reached the wrong department." The call was immediately terminated. My second attempt encountered a tired voice: "This is the Accounting Department." The call was cut. Only in my third attempt, an employee in the Sanitation Department explained, "We are going through changes to improve our phone service." and forwarded me to the proper extension. The last worker related to the situation and the organization in an integrative manner. In her efforts to assist me, she forwarded my

call, and made sure I was not cut off. While doing that, she actually served as an integrator, trying to maintain the system as a whole even during a transitional period. Clearly she did not see her department as isolated but rather recognized the interdependency among all departments, and between me, the customer, and the municipality. Her resourceful management contributed to the organization's efficiency: she took responsibility and prevented further anger and waste of my time.

It seems that the existing relationships between the municipality and the residents perpetuate an interest-based communication, and a feeling of separateness. Hierarchical realities tend to endorse competition, and promote winners-losers relations. The system operates in a closed manner in which the identity of each stakeholder is established through the opposition toward other groups. Consistently nurturing a *dialogic reality* by changing the mindset, and organizational structures is likely to transform organizational interactions toward realizing municipality goals and establishing more cooperation between the different groups and the municipality.

Respect and Trust

Adizes (2004a) emphasizes the need to establish mutual respect and trust as a condition of directing conflict in a constructive direction. He advises that an organization that has no trust and respect towards the other in disagreements is dysfunctional. In a context, which rewards mutual respect and recognition of the other, conflict will inspire new ideas and creativity. In this environment, people can learn from differences and cooperate in making the decisions and implementing them.

If an atmosphere of mutual respect enables the voice of differences for reaching effective decisions, efficient implementation of those decosions requires, according to Adizes (2004a), mutual trust**.** Mutual trust is build upon a mutual understanding that despite the immediate conflict of interests, all stakeholders share common long-term goals. It is important that all stakeholders recognize the win-win potential for all. Usually there is no situation when everyone's interests can be simultaneously met in the short-run. Win-win is measured in the long run rather than in the short run. Future common goals provide conflicting parties with the necessary confidence that even if their immediate needs are not promptly met; cooperation is for the benefit of all partners for the long-run. Referring to the opening example, mutual trust among the city's stakeholders could take place when all recognize their common goals, for example, aspiring for a safe or clean city, or ensuring systemic long term planning. Recognizing common goals will ensure all groups cooperation in solving immediate problems, even if they are not directly relevant to all parties. Working together towards a common goal ensures a give-and-take relationship: today I address the other's needs, and tomorrow the other will help me. Mutual trust is the basis for the success of any relationships: in the family, among friends and business partnerships. It is only through the recognition of the long-term mutual benefit that groups with incompatible interests will cooperate in the short term.

"Sustainability" in a Social Context

S*ustainability* invites us to think systemically. It is defined in various ways but often it emphasizes the need of ensuring today's quality of daily life while not compromising the well-being of future generations (http://www.iisd.org/sd). *Sustainability* accentuates the necessity to answer present needs while making sensible use of the environment and natural resources without damaging prospects for future generations. The assumption is that every daily act anywhere – at home, at work, or at school, accumulates into a large transformation of the environment for the benefit of all. In this article I apply the term *sustainability* in the social context. It is suggested that dialogic realities ensure sustainable communities of optimal prosperity and well-being for the long-run. *Sustainable relationships* guarantee transformation and on-going formation of new realities in an open, creative manner. Taking the relationships perspective does not eliminate the individual, but rather it focuses on the relationships between the individual and the community. Emphasizing relationships is necessary for fostering organizations' sustainability. Organizations or communities will thrive only if they cultivate healthy relationships.

In his book *New Rules for the New Economy* (1999) Kevin Kelley describes the centrality of relationship: "*The atom is the icon of the 20th century. The atom whirls alone. It is the metaphor for individuality. But the atom is the past. The symbol for the next century is the net. The net has no center, no orbits, no certainty. It is an indefinite web of causes. The net is the archetype displayed to represent all circuits, all intelligence, all interdependence, all things economic, social, or ecological, all communications, all democracy, all families, all large systems, almost all that we find interesting and important. Whereas the atom represents clean simplicity, the net channels messy complexity*."

Relationships are symbolizing the transition from individualistic focus to the complexity of relating, akin to Buber's perspective on the nature of affinity among people. Only the human species among all creatures live within a "world" – complete wholeness of people and their environment.

As mentioned, positioning relationships at the center does not mean deserting the individual. Rather, it is suggested to examine the connections between the individual and the whole, much like the dual meaning of every organism as Arthur Koestler (1972) describes in the term of **Holon**. Holon represents both a whole and a part. It realizes both at the same time: the individual as autonomous, and the individual as being part of another whole - the environment. Therefore it continuously generates an identity along with developing a contextual identity. This approach reflects the dual view of evolution: variety and integration. Just as people are both autonomous wholes and members of a community, so is every group, a whole as well as part of a larger community – a society or a state. Failing to realize either role--individual or societal entity might result in an early demise. People are individual units within groups, which are part of independent communities, which dwell within sovereign states, which are located in continents, which compose this planet. This is like the atom, which is part of a molecule, which is part of a cell, which is part of an organism. Each Holon maintains its uniqueness through relating with the entire community in which it exists. Similarly to the concept of *organic consciousness* where there is a need for recognition of the interdependency among the parts to effectively function together in an integrative manner, here too, we need to recognize the association between the individual and the organization – the parts within the system are connected to each other, functioning as a whole.

In a sustainable municipality residents are actively involved the in decision-making and implementation processes on a regular basis. The individual develops a unique identity through relating to the community via a continuous dialogic process with members who share mutual vision. Conflicts are dealt with on a day-to-day basis rather than on a case-by-case manner. Handling conflicts on a daily basis means addressing them during the first stage, before crisis erupts and severe damage is inflicted. When dealing with conflicts on a case-by-case basis, conflicts are handled after escalation, when conflicts already have soaring costs and it may be impossible to be addressed constructively. Thus, cultivating *sustainable relationships* denotes a shift from back end to front end conflict management.

The Self-Organizing Component of Sustainable Organizations

Wilfred Pelletier, a Native American from the Ojibawi tribe, beautifully portrays an organic organizational process (1973, p. 199). He recounts an event where the council house needed to replace an old leaking roof. People spoke about the issue for a long time, until one morning one person climbed up on the roof and started to tear out the old tiles. After a while another man went by, asked about the situation, and continued on his way. A short while later he returned with tiles and tools and went up on the roof. By the afternoon a whole crew was working, with children and other community members assisting, serving food and drink. All were involved in the action with fun and laughter, and a few days later a party was organized at the Council House to celebrate the completion of the job. Pelletier says that no conference was called and no committee convened, and there was no guiding hand or a leader making a decision and starting the activity.

An organic self-organizing can also be seen from the perspective of complexity theories[1] (Briggs and Peat,1999). A complex system consists of a large number of agents carrying on many local interactions, with no higher authority dictating rules of behavior. While the system has certain rules it is at the same time in a constant state of emergence in a non-linear[2] and mostly uncertain and unpredictable fashion. Emergence is a central concept in complex theories describing the creation of compound patterns in the system, which are not based on any earlier plan. It is possible to see the event as a self-organizing process resulting from the quality of the relationships among the people in the tribal community. Replacing the roof started in an occasional discussion with unclear conclusion. The first person to climb up the roof inspired a change and the system reacted promptly. Later, a feedback process took place through which the entire community was swept in the creation of a new reality. Complexity theories provide a new perspective for understanding human processes, and how new realities are built. No single factor, leader, or event could by themselves explain or solve the complex realities we live in today. A simple linear model is insufficient as a comprehensive explanation. Focusing on networks, interactions, and connections in the human environment allows clarification of the relationships among the parts, their contexts, and the motives, which underpin their actions.

Native American communities are not unique in this pattern of self-organizing. Another contemporary example is the Internet as an organization constantly emerging among hundreds of millions of people. Unexpected interactions and countless gatherings form every day is an open system. The network has developed as a chaotic system without central control but collective patterns of activity emerge among autonomous individuals who are inseparable parts of the whole. Interactions among the different users, even those competing amongst themselves, exist within a collective context of cooperation. Unprompted and unplanned regulations surface within a system of shared interests and goals. Other excellent examples exist in sports such as football and basketball where interactions take place within a general context of cooperation – there are rules, constructions, players, tickets, etc. Many times we over-emphasize a competitive mind-set, when in fact, in many cases competition and cooperation are not conflicting terms, but complement one another. Collaboration does not have to mean losing certain degrees of freedom, but within this interactive experience there are hidden opportunities for discovery and development of new degrees of freedom.

Summary and a Few Words About Dialogue…

For ages, human culture focused on hierarchy, power and competition, and hardly considered the need to cooperate and collaborate. Gradually, studies indicated a growing interest in and useful models of cooperating for the common good (Bower, 1998). Organizations, which still uphold hierarchical traditions, are sometimes perceived as bodies without soul, creativity or spirit. Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers propose: *"people want to love the organization they belong to… their school, organization, community and business. They have organized with the goal of creating a different world, but we take this creativity and institutionalize it. Our organizations lack the sensuousness and the vitality these people are seeking, "* 1996 p. 57).

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[1] Complexity theories are a collection of theories. There are three main approaches in complexity research: The Santa Fe Institute has been dealing with Complex Adaptive Systems for the past 30 years; Mittleton-Kelly's Complex Evolving Systems; and Holbrook's work with Dynamic Open Complex Adaptive Systems. In this article the term complex theories also includes the chaos theory.

[2] There is no simple linear connection of input with output. Constant forming creates many results, and each result has many reasons.

In this article I propose that nurturing dialogic interactions in organizations and communities is critical for their sustainability and prosperity. Healthy interactions promote individual and organizational vitality and creativity for the long term. The *Dialogic Experience* program, developed by Bar and Peleg-Baker, applied this approach in various schools at the Israeli education system. The program encourages a dialogic culture on a daily while basis emphasizing mutual commitment and reciprocal support among all stakeholders: teachers, principles, parents, and students. To create an organizational *dialogic reality*, the program supported participants in deepening a dialogic consciousness, pursuing the meaning of respectful relatedness and its realization, along with establishing structures and processes to support sustainable dialogic reality. Organizational structures and processes include a parliament institution where students and teachers organized and participated in decision-making processes on an on-going basis as equal partners, daily morning meetings to converse about current affairs, mutual generation of vision engaging all stakeholders, assigning teachers-mentors to small groups of students, and conflict resolution subsystems. Both components— change of mindset along with organizational structures complement each other in creating a vital *dialogic reality*. In an earlier article dealing with a system approach to conflict management, I proposed specific structures and processes to realize dialogic organization through conflict management subsystems (Peleg-Baker, 2005b). In a later article I proposed spaces enhancing creative organizations and positive interactions for improving dialogue in the organization (Peleg-Baker, 2007). Transformation relies on leading a change on both levels individual and organizational: through learning processes that encourage examining reality via different theoretical perspectives and comparing what is desired to what exists, as well as establishing complemented organizational structures.

Dialogue is not merely a discussion or conversation. It entails more than speaking, being kind or polite, tolerant or discursive. It is a way of thinking, a manner of relating to others- a way of life. Dialogue reflects an existential way of being; exploring reality with curiosity and wonder in an attempt to generate a new understanding and improved reality via relationships. Physicist David Bohm perceived dialogue as: " *a stream of meaning flowing among and through us and between us … a form of communication from which something new emerges*"(1996, p.7). He takes the process beyond discussion "*really means to break things up…discussion is almost like a ping- pong game, where people are battling the idea back and forth and the object of the game is to win or to get points for yourself …the basic point is to win the game. In a dialogue, however, nobody is trying to win. Everybody wins if everybody wins…a dialogue is something more of a common participation in which we are not playing a game against each other but with each other. In a dialogue everybody wins*"(Ibid).

Back to the municipal story, organizational interactions do not have to be adversarial, based on power and ego games. Residents' participation can create meaningful and genuine dialogue. In a multi-faceted and challenging era, a new understanding of our collective thinking and working is required. When a TV set malfunctions, it is repaired by replacing a broken part. In human settings, problems and conflicts are developed in a system in which there is no single malfunctioning part as all parts are interdepended and influence each other. Replacing one element with another will merely result in a temporary relief. In order to generate sustainable social systems, it is essential to focus on the way we relate to each other- the quality of our connectedness.

Erich Fromm views love as the center of mutual affinity: "*The awareness of (man's) loneliness and separateness, his helplessness while facing the forces of nature and society, all these make his separate existence into an unbearable prison. He would lose his mind unless he could free himself from this prison and reach out his hand, unite in one way or another with people, with the external world*" (2001, p. 16). It is our challenge today to overcome separateness, forego loneliness, and pursue the potential of our relationships. Conformity as a way of uniting is false and does not provide an answer to the existential human desire for unity. People need to express their distinctive spontaneous voice through quality interaction with others.

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