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**PAVING THE WAY TO PEACE: WHAT SORT
OF ENVIRONMENT AND MINDSETS ARE
ESSENTIAL? INTRODUCING THE PEACE-
ORIENTED MINDSET CONCEPT**

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ABSTRACT

Addressing peace and conflict issues is entering a field with well-established knowledge (e.g., Barash & Webel, 2014; Diehl, 2006; Dugan, 1989; Jeong, 2018; Paffenholz & Reychler, 2007). Narrowing down, the premise of looking at peace and conflict through the lens of dynamical theory is a recent focus of the 21st century (see: Lemos et al., 2013, 2018; Taylor et al., 2004; Vallacher et al., 2010, 2012). Moreover, the dynamical approach sheds some light on the crucial role of the conflict environment (Bar-Tal, 2007; Bartoli et al., 2010; Lederach, 1996, 2003; Miall, 2004).

However, there is a gap in analyzing peace and conflict dynamics from the point of view of the psychology of peacemakers. The key question is what sort of mindsets are aimed at restoring, sustaining, or preventing peace.

This article characterizes the manifestation of peace/conflict dynamics and provides an overview of the modern approach to analyzing the peace/conflict milieu. This leads to the concept of circumventing the essence of a conflict and, instead, identifying alternative peace-enforcing attractors (e.g., social capital). Next, the concept of the power of “weak” influence, i.e., cultural and economic bottom-up initiatives that develop peace-sustaining ambience, is presented.

Finally, the notion of the peace-oriented mindset (POM) of people contributing to peacemaking is introduced, illustrated by real-life examples and followed by proposing methods for its assessment.

Keywords: Conflict; peace; dynamical approach; complex systems; prevention

Paving the Way to Peace: What Sort of Environment and Mindsets are Essential? Introducing the Peace-Oriented Mindset Concept

Ryszard Praszkiar

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Conflict Per Se and Its Milieu

Social conflict phenomena may be viewed as an emergent property of a complex system, and as such, they are heterogeneous and varied (Lemos et al., 2013; Lemos, 2018). This indicates that conflict is embedded in the dynamics of societies, communities, groups, and even families—although not necessarily active or visible, but rather, in some cases, latent and lurking.

The kernel of conflict may differ from its context, e.g., a teenager exploring their own independence and separation from their family may create a series of conflicts around various day-to-day issues; however, the essence is the exploration of borders and one's own self-reliance. This is obvious and happens in most of families, though the positive or negative consequences are determined not by the core conflicting issues, but by the family's atmosphere and their relationships at large.

Across societies, conflicts (e.g., over communal issues) may have constructive or destructive consequences, depending on people's approaches and relationships, i.e., on the characteristics of relationships, the quality of networks, and the variety of bindings—features determining the way conflict is resolved.

Hence, the conjecture is that the essence of conflict results in understanding that its destructive or constructive outcomes is not its pivot; instead, it is the milieu that is essential.

Environment Matters

Intractable conflicts in societies lead to developing a specific socio-psychological infrastructure, which includes collective memory, an ethos of conflict, and collective emotional orientations. This “around-the-conflict environment” becomes, over time, a key factor reinforcing, in a feedback loop, the core conflict (Bar-Tal, 2007).

From this perspective, the essential challenge is to transform the socio-psychological context so that it becomes a peace-enforcing environment (Lederach, 2003); this means transforming the environment whilst reaching beyond the sole conflict itself (Miall, 2004).

For example, Dr. Yehudah Paz, from the high-level conflicted Negev area in Israel, indicated

that people become used to living in a conflict environment; they stabilize mentally, as well as economically, around the conflict.

When peace is suddenly “given” from outside, people feel lost and disempowered in the new, unknown, non-conflict environment, and they may tend to revert to the well-known conflict situation. This indicates restraining from direct conflict resolution attempts prior to environment transformation, so that the environment can support and sustain peace, instead of tending to relapse.¹

This approach supports the notion of “conflict transformation” rather than “conflict resolution,” including the social, economic, and cultural context (Lederach, 1996, 2003). Instead of approaching the peace process head-on and confronting the core conflicting issues, the solution would be to circumvent the conflict and buildup a new, supportive environment (Praszkie et al., 2010).

Moreover, this approach enables perceiving and approaching the conflict dynamics as an opportunity for creating constructive change and development (Lederach, 2003). In lieu of this, the relevant question is what sort of environment supports peace and—at the same time—reinforces growth.

Social Capital

Along these lines, several case studies (Praszkie et al., 2009; Praszkie & Nowak, 2012a) have confirmed that it is foundational to build trust, cooperation, and vibrant networks—the three factors that make up social capital. Indeed, research has confirmed that some individuals, called social entrepreneurs, pursue their mission, whatever it may be, through building social capital first, usually over some simple issues, bonding conflicted groups around an easily achievable and profitable goal (Praszkie et al., 2009). This means that they create a new, cooperative, trustful environment, often circumventing areas of conflict (Praszkie et al., 2010).

For example, a Canadian medical doctor, Dr. Arnold Noyek, launched teams of common Israeli–Arab medical students in the Middle East so as to prevent child diseases. This professional cooperation engendered trust and, as a consequence, mutual friendships, leading to a feedback loop of better cooperation (Noyek et al. 2005). Dr Noyek’s team published, in one of the most respected medical journals, *The Lancet*, an exceptional article not about

¹ **From an interview with Dr. Yehudah Paz led by Ryszard Praszkie, 29 August 2009.**

medical issues, but about cooperation between conflicted groups, titled “Promoting Arab and Israeli cooperation: Peacebuilding through health initiatives” (Skinner et al., 2005).

Out of the various delineations of social capital (see: Lin, 2001; Portes, 1998), the one that is probably the most concise and at the matter of heart definition is that social capital appears when a person’s family, friends, and associates constitute an important asset, one that can be called on in a crisis or enjoyed for its own sake (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000).

Social capital is predominantly perceived as an important value, both for individuals (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Burt, 1997, 2001; Coleman, 1988) and for groups or societies (Fine, 2001; Praszkiec et al., 2009; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000).

The Dynamical Perspective: Social Capital as an Alternative Attractor

One of the concepts in the dynamical perspective is that of an *attractor*, which represents potential states to which a system’s behavior converges over time. In other words, it simply attracts the system’s actions, so that even very different starting states tend to evolve toward the subset of states defining the attractor (Vallacher et al., 2010, 2012). A case study may serve as an illustration:

Dr. Yehudah Paz, Israel

Dr. Yehudah Paz’s² core conviction is that mere conflict resolution is not enough, as peace leaves a void, which is very often difficult to bear for people used to war, especially if they see no other prospects. Based on this philosophy, he involves partners drawn from clashing groups in profitable joint ventures; through cooperating in these ventures, Jews and Arabs experience the great benefits that ensue from joining forces. Dr. Paz’s ideas for joint ventures result in peace, opening new prospects based on trust and success. Not only do new enterprises appear, but a secondary effect is the empowerment of women, who find themselves at the forefront of building a new economic development of their families and communities. The joint Israeli–Arab approach is reflected in the structure of his organization, which is jointly led by two groups of women: Arab and Israeli.

Families benefit from the new economic ambience and become advocates for peace, as only peace guarantees further development. In light of this, by building bubbles of trust and cooperation, Dr. Paz is also preventing the potential outbreak of dormant conflicts between the two communities (from: Praszkiec & Nowak, 2012b).

² See: <http://www.nisped.org.il/>.

Following the dynamical peace and conflict theory (Vallacher et al., 2010, 2012), the attractor involved may be illustrated by the metaphor of a ball falling into a hole (see Figure 1). An outer force (e.g., governmental projects or conflict resolution attempts) is needed to sustain the ball in the upper position (i.e., to mitigate conflict); when the force is removed, natural homeostatic mechanisms cause a setback to the initial state of equilibrium. In a natural way, after an adequately long time, regardless of the action taken, the system has a natural tendency to return to the initial state (equilibrium).

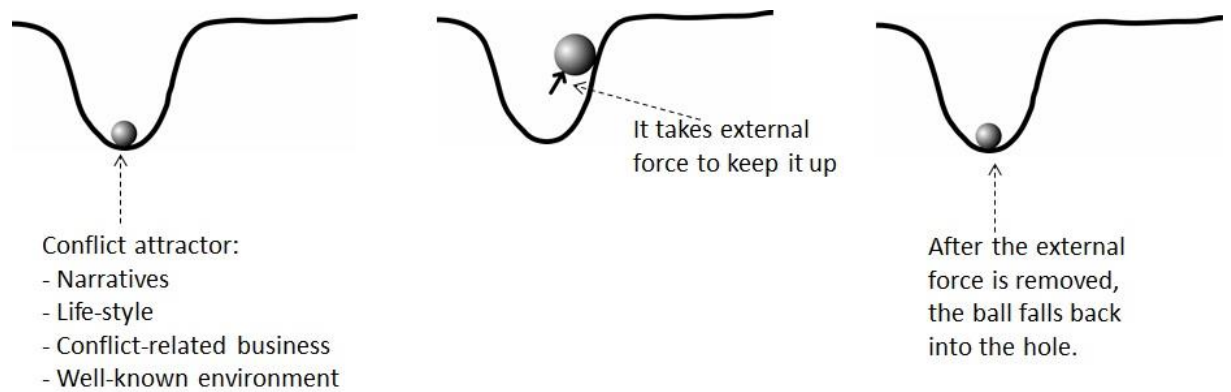


Figure 1. The negative attractor causes the system to relapse, regardless of the actions taken.

Dr. Yehudah Paz’s approach (as well as Dr. Arnold Noyek’s, mentioned above), instead of focusing on the conflicting issues (pushing the ball up), is aimed at building a new attractor (see Figure 2).

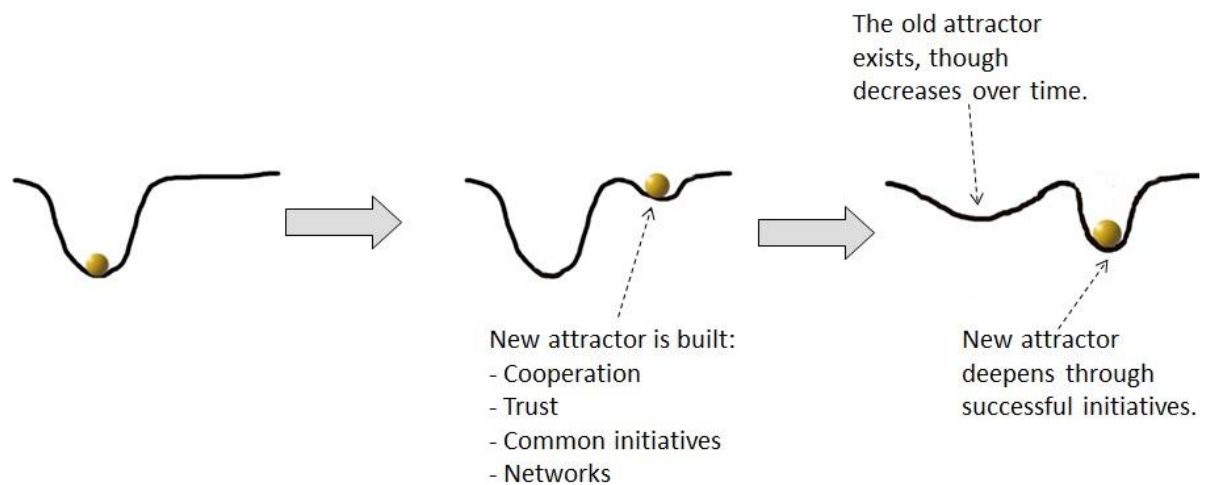


Figure 2. The positive attractor deepens over time, whereas the destructive attractor, circumvented and not addressed, automatically decreases.

The new attractor, i.e., cooperation, trust, new friendships, and networks, all contribute to building social capital—the environment-transforming factor. Social capital sustains peace, as in peace ambience, through which multiple benefits are achievable.

INDIVIDUAL APPROACH TO CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

The examples of Dr. Arnold Noyek and Dr. Yehudah Paz (and of many other social entrepreneurs; see: Praszkiec et al., 2009; Praszkiec & Nowak, 2012a, 2012b) show that there must be a specific peacemaking-driven mindset. This sort of mindset seems foundational for building peace, understanding the critical role of the environment, willing to contribute to conflict transformation (instead of resolution), identifying alternative attractors (enabling the initiation of social capital), and preventing/sustaining peace.

It seems that this approach requires two capabilities: Building social capital and facilitating the peace process.

Individual Capabilities for Building Social Capital

Social capital is an unquestionable value; however, there seems to be a void and a need for identifying what sort of characteristics are involved and how to measure an individual's propensity for developing social capital.

A previous study documented (Zabłocka, Praszkiec et al., 2016) that the social capital-building property consists of sub-categories: Trust, cooperation, and a sense of support (i.e., personal networks). Along these lines, a 15-statement questionnaire (scored using a five-point a Likert-scale) for measuring an individual's propensity for building social capital was constructed and positively validated (see Appendix 1).

*Individual Skills for Peacemaking: Peace-Oriented Mindset (POM)*³

It seems that the foundation for the POM is accepting and embracing contradictions (see: Praszkiec & Munnik, 2021), as contradictions are the natural manifestations of conflict situations. This relates not only to balancing one's own and others' perspectives, but also to

³ Section developed with the assistance and contribution of Paige Munnik, University of Buckingham.

enjoying the tension engendered by contradictions (as opposed to Festinger’s reduction of cognitive dissonance principle; Festinger, 1957). This positive tension often serves as a fulcrum for inspiration and innovation.

We hold that the POM is not sheer open-mindedness, as this may lead to also absorbing deviant ideas (Kruglanski & Boyatzi, 2012); nor is it compromising one’s own values—these may remain firm, despite allowing and comprehending the points of view of others.

The working definition may hence be that it is the propensity for detecting peace options in real or potential conflict situations, and for identifying bridge-building avenues. This predisposition leads to taking actions aimed at restoring and/or preventing peace. This is achieved through comprehending the diverse points of views of the key players involved.

This definition indicates two categories and six sub-categories:

Cognition: Awareness of possible peace options and tolerant to the diversity of beliefs.

Seeing opportunities for peace, even in the most protracted, intractable, and seemingly insurmountable conflict situations.

- (1) Driven to understand the points of view of others, even if they are in opposition to one’s own beliefs.
- (2) Cognizant that considering other points of view does not equate to shattering one’s own convictions.

Action: Readiness for taking actions aimed at restoring and/or preventing peace

- (3) Determined to build bridges between conflicted groups or individuals.
- (4) Driven to conflict prevention in situations where conflict is looming/lurking.
- (5) Joining peacemaking groups or organizations.

Along these lines, below is a proposition for assigning 18 statements to the two categories and six sub-categories:

	Categories	Sub-categories	Statements
1	Cognition	Seeing opportunities for peace, even in the most protracted, intractable, and seemingly insurmountable conflict situations.	I can come up with an appropriate solution for a conflict situation.
2			I can design an appropriate reconciliation process for a conflict situation.
3			I can think of innovative ways to build trust and understanding between individual parties of a conflict.
4			Driven to understand the points of view of

5		others, even if they are in opposition to one's own beliefs.	I like to hear about others' perspectives without passing judgement.
6			Understanding the viewpoints of the key players involved in a conflict situation is important for conflict resolution.
7		Cognizant that considering other points of view does not equate to shattering one's own convictions.	I can retain my own point of view when debating with someone that holds a different perspective.
8			I can maintain my own convictions, even when they differ to the majority.
9			Listening to others' viewpoints without losing sight of one's own convictions is important for creating peace.
10		Determined to build bridges between conflicted groups or individuals.	When I see conflicted people or groups, I feel a calling for building bridges.
11			Opposing groups should find some neutral fields of cooperation.
12			I regularly think about how to foster trust between conflicted groups.
13	Action	Driven to conflict prevention in situations where conflict is looming/lurking.	I try to keep the situation peaceful when conflict is possible.
14			I can sense cues of lurking conflict.
15			Indications that a conflict is looming make me think of how to prevent its outbreak.
16		Joining peacemaking groups or organizations.	Peacemaking is not for lone rangers—one should cooperate with others.
17			It is best to join a peacemaking organization instead of acting singlehandedly.
18			Peacemaking power lies within teams.

When creating the questionnaire, some statements were reversed (for the sake of methodological correctness) and all items were then randomized. Next, the clarity of the statements was verified through a round of online feedback.⁴ Appendix 2 shows the final scale.

CONCLUSIONS

It seems important to supplement the lacuna in the field of identifying the individual traits that foster a peacemaking orientation. This paper is the first step, paving the way for further studies: Validating the questionnaire and applying the validated version to larger (representative) samples of the society and different segments of this sample (e.g., verifying the conjecture that women have a higher POM level than men).

The next round may include identifying potential correlations between the POM and other properties, e.g., empathy, ambiguity tolerance, paradox mindset, possibility, and

⁴ The addressees were iASK research fellows and professors; seven responses received.

divergent thinking.

The results of these studies may help to identify youth leaders who would make good peace ambassadors. It may also help to find similarities or differences between various societal groups, e.g., verifying the conjecture that the POM level is higher within social entrepreneurs than business entrepreneurs.

Finally, correlations with other personality traits may inform guidelines for training future peacemaking leaders.

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APPENDIX 1. THE PROPENSITY FOR BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL SCALE

The Propensity for Building Social Capital Scale (Zabłocka, Praszkie, et al., 2016) is as follows:

1	I usually trust people.	1 2 3 4 5
2	It's better to work alone than in a team.	1 2 3 4 5
3	I agree with the saying: the only person you can depend upon is yourself.	1 2 3 4 5
4	People are more devoted to work when they are working in a team.	1 2 3 4 5
5	There are people I can rely upon to help in various situations.	1 2 3 4 5
6	You can gain more by working on your own instead of working in a team.	1 2 3 4 5
7	I can count on others in difficult situations.	1 2 3 4 5
8	There are people whom I can tell almost anything.	1 2 3 4 5
9	I believe that if I was in trouble then others would abandon me.	1 2 3 4 5
10	I have many friends that I can count on.	1 2 3 4 5
11	In general, people only care about themselves.	1 2 3 4 5
12	There are situations when I would want to talk with someone, but there is no one to talk to.	1 2 3 4 5
13	People tend to be nice only when they want something from me.	1 2 3 4 5
14	If working in a team some people don't feel responsible for the results	1 2 3 4 5
15	Team-working brings more benefit than working individually.	1 2 3 4 5

APPENDIX 2. THE POM SCALE (BETA V02)

Ryszard Praszkie and Paige Munnik (Assistant).

The POM scale after reversing some statements (marked *), shown in a randomized order.

1	Debating with others helps me see the world from a different perspective.	1 2 3 4 5
2	I think that one cannot predict a conflict before it breaks out.*	1 2 3 4 5
3	Opposing groups should focus on solving the problems around which their conflict(s) revolve.*	1 2 3 4 5
4	Listening to others' viewpoints without losing sight of one's own convictions is important for creating peace.	1 2 3 4 5
5	I think that the power of peacemaking lies within teamwork.	1 2 3 4 5
6	I feel helpless when I see groups in conflict.*	1 2 3 4 5
7	I can think of innovative ways to build trust between individual parties of a conflict.	1 2 3 4 5
8	I try to keep peaceful any situation in which conflict could arise.	1 2 3 4 5
9	Indications that a conflict is looming make me think of how to prevent its outbreak.	1 2 3 4 5
10	Individual initiative is the most important in peacemaking.*	1 2 3 4 5
11	I can design an appropriate reconciliation process for a conflict situation.	1 2 3 4 5
12	I can maintain my own convictions, even when they differ to the majority.	1 2 3 4 5
13	I am easily able to tell whether people are right or wrong just by listening to them.*	1 2 3 4 5
14	It's difficult for me to come up with an appropriate solution for a conflict situation.*	1 2 3 4 5
15	It is best to join a peacemaking organization instead of acting singlehandedly.	1 2 3 4 5
16	Ideas for conflict resolution are usually unrelated to understanding the arguments of the parties involved.*	1 2 3 4 5

17	I regularly think about how to foster trust between conflicted groups.	1	2	3	4	5
18	I usually adopt another's point of view after listening to them.*	1	2	3	4	5

* Inverted.

The statements from the table in the main article were taken and randomized in the following order:

Randomized, with some inverted	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Original (pp. 5.6)	4	1	8	0	3	5	6	7	2

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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