A conflict zone is an energy zone. Imagine a hostile situation between two spaceships in a Star Trek show. Both are setting up force fields and energy shields to protect themselves. Closer proximity intensifies the mistrust. Picture how these invisible walls and zones of energy are constantly connected to sources, that is, to energy-generating devices within each spacecraft. There’s a lot of drama here which is very familiar to us, and it makes for great narrative content. Now translate these fields and shields of energy to an escalating conflict between two people. One person may be focusing on maintaining a protective barrier; the other, while holding up their own barrier, may be concentrating their efforts on breaking through to reach the other person. But what really are these barriers? And what exactly is the source of these forces that extend outwardly from each person?

James O’Dea, author of the bestselling book *Cultivating Peace: Becoming a 21st Century Peace Ambassador,* has suggested that “how we process energy in stressful, charged or conflicted situations remains largely ignored.” He notes how advanced research in neuroscience and mind-body health have taught us how negative triggers for fight-and-flight reflexes operate in our brain, and how empathy and compassion can reverse neuron-built ruts that would otherwise keep us alienated from threatening people. One could add to this the research by showing how higher levels of heart-felt forgiveness is associated with lower anxiety and stress in cardiac patients. Interpersonal, bioenergy studies have also been advancing research that recognizes the human heart as a generative source of energy. And yet, for all of this pioneering work, research on human energy dynamics is vastly an unexplored territory.

Working within his own limited and theoretical framework, O’Dea maps out an “energy management style” typology to advance an understanding of how people engage what

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mediators commonly call ‘negative energy’ in conflict. He identifies the Energy Blocker, the Energy Bouncer, the Energy Sponge, and the Energy Zapper, all relatively negative styles which stand in contrast to the ideal of the Energy Transformer, the person who mindfully accepts and then redirects negative energies toward positive outcomes.5 “Learning to recognize our own style,” writes O’Dea, “allows us to make conscious choices and develop strategies for skills enhancement. Equally, becoming adept at observing other people’s styles is key to devising a successful conflict resolution strategy.”6

In the same vein as O’dea’s exploratory framing of energy dynamics, this article will present additional ways for understanding the energy of conflict and conflict resolution. It also serves as a sequel to my initial article on conflict energy that explored shifts in resolution processes through the movement of stored energy to released energy to transformed energy.7 While the main focus here is not on the empirical and psychological phenomena of human-generated energy, this article does presume that energy dynamics in the realm of interpersonal conflicts are far more than metaphoric. Again, research on the human heart is reinforcing this intersecting study of metaphoric heart-language and actual heart-dynamics. This applies not only to the negative forces that characterize an unresolved conflict, but also to the positive forces that characterize aspects of a mediated dialogue process. As mediators and facilitators of ADR and restorative processes develop fuller understandings of these dynamics, this perspective may serve to improve some practices for helping clients, especially in the context of promoting relational restoration through transformative and humanistic frameworks of mediation.8

How do we talk about human energies that are invisible to the human eye? One pathway into this discussion can be found in the Chinese martial arts of Qigong and Tai Chi. These ancient practices posit a chi or life-force energy within the human body. Western perspectives may cast a skeptical eye on the realness of chi (or qi), yet while new research on monitoring the effects or presence of chi/qi are still debated, many

6 Ibid. O’Dea.
examiners would be reluctant to reduce it all to the realm of symbol and metaphor. Similar to this is the Japanese martial arts tradition of Aikido, which literally means “the way of blending energies.” Just as movements are designed to resolve the physical contest that one encounters with a martial arts opponent, the same cooperative principles can be effectively applied to the realm of resolving human conflicts. Parallel to this is the way many alternative health therapies function according to the mapping of bodily energies. Again, practitioners in the fields of alternative dispute resolution and restorative justice are benefiting from a similar awareness of human energies. Whether these energies are negative or positive, mediators and facilitators can learn to recognize these forces as having a reality no less than magnetic fields, radio waves, and wifi frequencies, all of which are invisible. Future research will likely serve us better when our understanding sharpens around the way human energy fields work. Just because something is not fully explainable, like gravity, it does not follow that it does not exist or that useful theories cannot be advanced.

Understanding Conflict Resolution as a Storyline

If we consider how every human conflict has a narrative structure like a story, we can map conflicts according to a series of rising crises which ultimately reach a climax. After the peak climax there is a relaxing of plot elements which were formerly in tension with each other or knotted up together. The French word for this post-climax period in a story is the denouement which literally means ‘an untying’. This same progression of plot elements is often traceable in conflicts and resolution processes that climax in a shift experience for the parties involved. Without this shift, parties in conflict simply cannot conclude their process, literally, in Latin, to completely shut or close a process. Significant in this narrative framework for understanding conflict and resolution is the language of movement. Nothing in a good story remains static; there has to be the dynamism of change, of things moving from one scene to another. Plot elements are not still but rather ‘at work’, which brings us straight to the root meaning of the Greek word energos: active, working.


By adding energy language to this discussion, we can begin to see some strong connections between the way fictional stories and resolution processes operate. One could say that a story’s plot thickens as negative energies within and between parties intensify and collide. The same ‘thickening’ happens between people who experience an emotional separation due to the escalation of tensions or the reverberation of harms. All of the rubbing caused by unmet needs, misunderstandings, miscommunications, and the resulting mistrust creates a new storm-system of excess negative charge. As warm and cold air masses collide with each other, lightning and thunder add to the drama. It is no different with interpersonal conflict. Oppositional rubbing leads to outbursts of fight or flight reactions. Sometimes the very manner in which people respond to a conflict situation can make matters worse than make it better. From all of this friction phenomena we can see the parallel between a story’s rising action and the way a conflict can escalate over time.

Stories, however, are also built around the clash between protagonist and antagonist forces. This means that elements of positive energy, such as a hero’s moral character, are also mixing in and colliding with all of the other negative elements. This complexifies the story, and without this mixture you would not have a story. You could not, for example, sustain a story where equally immoral and dubious characters perpetually clash with each other. Every story, as seen best in every narrative myth, requires that opposites find some sort of way to be mediated with each other in order to bring about a new and better result. A story’s climax is basically the point where the mediation between protagonistic and antagonistic forces are resolved in such a way that antagonistic forces are no longer in a threatening position to cause more trouble. Understandably, the final lead-up to a climax typically involves an intensification of energies that are released and then transformed. And we all know when a climax has taken place because we can immediately sense how things can relax and settle down once again. Resolution, in this context, is essentially a ‘dissolution’ of negative forces. In other words, resolving is dissolving, just as we use the word ‘dissolve’ when powder seemingly disappears in a liquid container.

While all good stories pass through a climax to some sort of resolution, not all human conflicts end up with good resolution. This is where stories separate from actual human life and human history. When a major conflict happens, like World War 1, the lack of good resolution at the point of climax can sow the seeds of future conflicts, like World War 2. Practitioners of conflict resolution processes are keenly aware that not every case leads to a complete and peaceful outcome. When they do not end well, facilitators and mediators can palpably feel the residue of remaining negative energies in their own bodies after the parties leave the room. A heaviness remains for all who were involved.
in the dialogue precisely because the negative forces that were expressed were not fully dissolved. Sufficient transformation did not happen, and the future will be affected by the lack of peace within and between people. In brief, the past continues to hold sway over the present. In light of this, it could be said that a good and successful resolution process is one where the negative energies have been sufficiently dissolved and dissipated so that they do not resurface later and stimulate future problems.

Fortunately, the majority of dialogue processes assisted by facilitators and mediators do reach positive outcomes. If it were not so, third-party helpers would not be able to sustain the practice of helping other people in conflict; they would simply absorb too much negativity and get, as the phrase goes, “burnt out.” But again, in the majority of cases involving safe, constructive dialogue, the negative presence of walls eventually gives way to the positive presence of bridges; where people once felt separated from each other, they now experience a new sense of connection. The main focus of the remainder of this article, therefore, is to examine the dynamics of a positive transformation of negative conflict energies through safe, constructive, facilitated dialogue. I will first describe more about the way negative energies are generated in a conflict situation. Next will follow the way mediation and facilitated dialogue allows for negative and positive energies to mix and mediate with each other. And thirdly, I will show how and why the nature of positive energies is geared to overcome all aspects of negative energy dynamics. Throughout all of these discussions the extended metaphor of electrical energy will be used, and by the end we will consider how invisible energies in the human heart are operative well beyond a metaphoric level.

The Generation of Negative Energies

If positive human energy is akin to the Chinese concept of *chi*, a positive life-force, perhaps negative human energy can be thought of as a type of death-force. The first has creative and healing possibilities within it, and the second has destructive and wounding possibilities. The word ‘toxic’ is increasingly being used in the context of negative energies. Toxicity connotes the deadening of that which has been steeped in toxins. In past centuries, people understood this matter in terms of poisons; in our day it is mostly a matter of harmful chemicals. In human interactions, toxicity has to do with changes within emotional states that deaden rather than enliven the things to which it comes into contact. In his book, *Dancing with the Energy of Conflict and Trauma*, Mark Umbreit explains how “intense conflict and trauma within ourselves, with others, and even within communities and nations can become highly toxic, harmful to our health,
and at times lead to violence and bloodshed.”

He goes on to talk about how people can live with the “toxic residue of conflict,” and he suggests how toxins, like metastasizing cancer cells, can spread outwardly and affect wider realms with *dis-ease* and destruction. Here we have a picture of toxicity multiplying in the context of negative emotions which are marked more by death-forces than life-forces. Supporting this are neurological and cardiological studies that not only show how negative rumination and stress affect a person’s well-being, but also show the converse, namely how empathy and forgiveness are associated with greater health and well-being.

But how is it that emotional states can *become* toxic in the first place? And how is that emotionally-laden toxicity can spread from one person to another? Future research will surely shed more light. At this point, we do know that when young children grow up in interior spaces continually filled with adult-generated tensions, hostilities, and anger, that these children cannot help but absorb the residue of this negative atmosphere, not unlike breathing in secondary smoke. “The effects (upon children) of marital conflict (and discord) is well documented.”

Most forms of psychological trauma involve negative influences moving through atmospheres of patterned repetition. Sustained proximity within a negatively charged zone, even when a perpetrator is not in that space, certainly brings about the absorption of negativity into the traumatized person. We may not have a full explanation for what is happening on a bioenergy level, but few would deny the long-term and deadening impact that such absorption has on a person. It is worth noting here that the Latin root for *impact* means ‘to un-peace’. Toxified trauma robs a person of inner peace and balance; for obvious reasons, pathways to healing are also long-term and complex, requiring positive supports for longer periods of time.

Conflict zones have similarities to trauma zones in that the sourced-out negativity from certain people can have an effect on other people. While there is a continuum of conflicts stretching from the minor nuisance or irritation to the major clash or repeated crime, every type of conflict is first energized within the brains and hearts of human beings. Negative forces find patterned repetition both cognitively and emotionally, and from these generative sources (recall the machinery in sci-fi spacecraft), energy fields are set in motion that no longer move only within a person but also between persons. One simple reason that human beings do not like conflict is due to the inner discomfort of being in these interpersonal ‘air zones’ of unresolution. Excess negative energy truly

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rubs off on people and sticks to them like bits of paper charged with static electricity. Even people who are not directly involved can sense such tension zones and they usually prefer to avoid them. The residual spill-over, indeed, the toxicity which does not promise life but produces death, is carried and conveyed by the parties at varying degrees, creating a natural resistance for those parties to come together for conversation. Two negatively charged objects will always repel each other. At this stage, one can study the various default response types that each person has along the Fight or Flight continuum. As noted above, these conflict response types can also involve various “energy management styles.”

We can now distinguish two general sources of negative energy with destructive emotive content. The first is the long-term excess negative charge that is stored within people like chemicals in a battery. Past harms that leave people with trauma and with either repressed or ruminative memories can remain lodged deep within the human soul and influence how people navigate subsequent harms and conflicts. The second source is the short-term excess negative charge that results from immediate experiences of conflict. Rather than being like a battery that stores up a charge that can be preserved for later uses, this kind of charge is more like the static electricity one builds up by rubbing their feet on a carpet and then having the capacity to send out a small spark-shock to another person or object. The rubbing that happens between people on an interpersonal level can happen by a number of friction-oriented dynamics: frustrated expectations, unmet needs, clashing personalities, miscommunications, and opposing positions and demands. Think, for example, of an email exchange you had with someone that resulted in one or both of you feeling offended by the other. Just from the way words were selected, the rubbing dynamic of an email exchange created an imbalance between you and the other person that was felt deep in the heart. The resulting excess of negatively charged particles had enlivened a new force of electricity that was just waiting to find a new home.

Long and short-term sources of negative energy, while being distinguishable, can also merge together. In fact most conflicts that are marked by high intensity and rapid escalation typically involve both sources since there is often a common resonance between past historical harms and present interpersonal rubs. The voltage of the battery, so to speak, is added to the build-up of immediate static charge, allowing for a greater release, indeed, a greater ‘zap’ of loose, unprotected energy. This itself creates a more threatening situation, and that is why some people have quick Fight or Flight instincts. We have all been in situations where someone’s response to a tense moment seems way out of proportion to what the incident itself would call for. Chances are, the reactive person’s default way of responding was conditioned by their protective reflex to prevent further pain, as this pain resonated with a deeper history of pain. The more electrified a situation is, the more it is likely drawing its current from past voltage.
sources that are still ‘alive’. Over time, people grow into patterned reactions to conflict as a way to cope, and this, through repetition, reinforces the neurological wiring that makes for default-level response types which happen without much thinking.

Given the way excess charge can build up within a person and at times be released in ways that causes more harm than good, it is no surprise that most people avoid the prospect of resolving matters face-to-face with another person. Just as two negatively charged objects will repel each other in a classroom science experiment, so two people who have been negatively charged from a series of ‘rubs’ will prefer to pull away from each other. If we imagine again the spacecrafts that meet each other in a hostile manner, the inner enginery of both spacecrafts are busily generating the necessary energies that extend beyond themselves in order to protect themselves. Human hearts may very well be sources for energy forces that thrust outwardly to shield one’s own interests and to threaten the interests of another party. And on a large scale, are not most wars the result of two groups that have experienced a series of intense rubbings that leads to a Fight-reflex response? One irony in fights and wars, at any level, is that the initial dynamics of both sides being repelled by each other leads to a subsequent coming together, and yet such a coming together is anything but a chance for mutual cooperation and a win-win outcome.

How Mediation Combines Negative and Positive Energies

Human resistance toward dealing with conflict in direct, healthy ways is amazingly counterbalanced with human resilience toward seeking out resolution processes. Mediators and facilitators, of course, believe in this human will to transcend difficult situations and to work things out in ways that leaves everyone feeling better. They believe in the power of storytelling and empowerment-based dialogue processes, and thus they frequently voice the adage, “Trust the process.” By understanding the energy dynamics that parties bring with them to the dialogue process, third-party practitioners can have better intuitions and skills for working with the parties and for introducing and inviting positive energy sources into the process. In fact, the whole concept of creating a safe space in which parties can have constructive conversation is all about tracking the the negative energy fields and shields that are operative, along with tracking the prospective positive energy sources that can enter into the zone of interaction. This is precisely why preparation meetings prior to joint meetings are never to be taken for granted. Mediators track all energy dynamics as a way to monitor the safety and pace of a resolution process.

It was mentioned above that conflict can create an excess charge of negativity in the same way that your body takes on an excess charge when you rub your stocking feet
on a carpet. (And the more you rubbed, the greater the shock you could give to someone else when you touched them on the skin!) Given the unpredictability of live shocks between two parties in conflict, a mediator serves to mitigate this zap-factor. In fact, third-party neutrals are not only neutral because of their impartiality or their disinterest in outcome content. They are also neutral in the same way that a third wire is neutral in a cord to an electric appliance. Without that third wire, a faulty skill saw, for example, could send out loose electricity straight to the holder of the saw. That would not be a safe situation! In a mediation context, we might even say that an overly charged emotion that gets loose can really ‘zap’ someone. But when there is a third wire in place, that loose electrical energy can get rerouted in a safer manner. It can get grounded out in the earth. For this reason we call that third wire the “ground wire.”

Grounding, as term, can have great relevance to the field of conflict resolution. We already use this term as a synonym for being centered or fully present in the here-and-now. But the electrical reference adds a great deal to the term. To begin with, the very structure of mediation and facilitated dialogue processes are designed to ground out discharges of unpredictable negative energy. These are like safe guards that help clients know they can enter hard, emotional conversations without greater harm being done. But ultimately, mediators themselves serve as human ground wires to ensure safe, constructive conversation. Just as two negative objects naturally repel each other, so oppositely charged objects will attract. And once those oppositely changed objects connect, there is a transference of excess negative charge to the positively charged object. This creates a type of equilibrium among the charges, and reduces the chance for a loose charge to arc outward and do some harm. Mediator presence and expertise, taken together, amount to a positively charged source of energy that creates an attraction for people in conflict. Through initial communications and preparation time, the interaction between mediators and overly-charged parties will begin to diminish the zap-factor as the negative charge is increasingly grounded out.

One component of positive energies is trust. It is not so much that mediators give trust to parties at the front-end of resolution or healing processes. Rather, by grounding out some of the negative emotional energies, mediators, as they meet separately with each party, help to create more space in which lost trust can be regained. This is not, initially, trust in the other party but rather trust in the mediator and mediation process. Bit by bit, a credit of trust begins to offset the natural debit of trust caused by the conflict. Later on in the joint dialogue context the parties can draw upon this bank account of stored up trust as a way to slowly apply it toward each other. This kind of direct, party-to-party trust-building, however, can only happen when there is a secure supply of positive trust-energy within reach. We are back to the concept of mediators creating a safe place as a primary function of their role rather than being in charge of mending things for the
parties. And this safety is predicated on good preparation, assuming that the highest
goal of mediation is transformative, dialogue-driven conversation between parties.

Other positive energy elements are also stimulated in parties by mediators during
preparation time. Authentic and deep listening on the part of mediators can often create
a positive contagion that leads participants to live into higher levels of listening than they
might otherwise reach. Honesty and openness with one’s sharing and storytelling begin
to widen as the ventilation of past experiences is met with new validation. A mediator’s
general optimism for how things will turn out can also stimulate the positive energy of
hope that helps parties to advance through the process. But throughout all of this
layering up of positive energies, there is still a dissonance dynamic within a party
between negative perceptions and positive possibilities. Due to their understandable
cautions, parties need be convinced within themselves in order to proceed into a process
where they will truly feel vulnerable and not be in full control. In this light, one of the
most positive sources of energy is the courage one has to go forward.

Attention to this mixing of negative and positive forces is critical for the way mediators
assess the readiness of parties to have a joint session. One way to think about the
pivot-point between preparation time and joint dialogue time is that each person, in their
own way, has taken on a sufficient amount of positive energies and has expended a
sufficient amount of negative energies in order to accept the calculated risk of meeting
the other party face-to-face. These sufficient amounts will certainly vary from person to
person, and good mediators will be keenly aware of these variances. One thing this
means is that each party is at a stage where they are still bringing a remainder of
negative energies into the joint session. This stands to reason. Mediators who are alone
with individual parties can never resolve things as deeply as empowered conversations
between actual parties. This parallels the limits of counseling and psychotherapy. The
mystery of transformative mediation is that the negative energy dynamics generated by
the parties can only fully be reversed when the parties, together, experience their own
direct opportunity for grounding out the negatives and taking on the positives.

Joint Meeting Dialogue Dynamics in Mediation

If a mediation process amounts to the balancing of negative charges that were first
generated by a dispute or harm situation, and secondly, if part of the magic of mediation
is in the self-determination of parties who voluntarily choose to work things out
themselves in a safe setting, then it follows that the real work of energy transformation
happens in this joint context. There is something powerful about the way a face-to-face
encounter serves to dispel the potency of negative charge and allows for positive, healing charges to gain the upper hand. Research supports how the majority of communication content in human dialogue is actually nonverbal. This is not to diminish the importance of verbal exchange. It is, rather, to highlight how the physical proximity of human hearts and the visual messaging of tone and body language truly makes all the difference in the world. Think back to the email strife example and consider how a face-to-face encounter can easily diffuse the tensions that were generated by the verbal communication precisely because email communication lacks most aspects of nonverbal communication. When it comes to deep resolution you cannot separate out human bodies from the process.

Most facilitated dialogue processes will stack the front-end with ease-building and trust-building elements as a way to mitigate the force of initial tensions. This includes small talk, preliminaries, ground rules, assurances, and forecasting statements, as well as finding common ground between the parties. Front-end storytelling and information sharing also fit in with an agenda to delay the naming and airing of the strongest negative elements. All of this essentially builds up a counter-balance of positive energies to match the inevitable airing of negative elements which include harm memories, grievances, positional clashing, and ongoing mistrust. When parties do not feel safe or comfortable with addressing each other directly at the front end, mediators then serve as direct conduits for the negative energy to be received and grounded out so that at some point parties can transition toward direct conversation with each other. This is where tracking party eye contact is a vital skill.

Another aspect to this overly cautious and guarded start scenario is that parties who feel a lot of blockage toward each other often need to first be heard well by the mediators before they can experience being heard well by the other party. Without the experience of being heard it is hard for anyone to hear something new and helpful. The communication dynamic of being heard is itself an interesting micro-example of how negative and positive energies swirl together to bring about a positive result. The desire to be heard stems from the fact that negative experiences and memories have stored up within a person to the extent that they are carrying what feels like an unjust load. A major motivation for sharing this burden (verbally) stems from the deeper wish for an equitable sharing of this burden (mutually). That is why people say things like, “I feel so much better now that I shared that.” Or “I feel so much lighter now for getting that off

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my chest.” If such sharing is understood and well validated (which is the equivalent to being heard well), then there truly has been a redistribution of the negative energies that one party had been bearing by themselves.

The mystery in all of this, however, is that in this divestiture of negative feelings and thoughts, there is actually a transformation of negative energies into positive energies. Again, if dialogue allows for safe and constructive expression of the negatives, this movement of communication coincides with the positive human elements of listening, understanding, respecting, caring, hoping, resolving, etc. As the negatives come out, they are now rubbing against a matrix of positive values that essentially neutralize the destructive or harmful capacities of these negative energies. Thoughts and feelings that had sustained grudges and grievances are disarmed. The venom of negativity is drained out. Parties sometimes are amazed when they take stock and realize that at some point in the mediation process the old feelings of mistrust and resentment are simply no longer there. They have vanished. Returning to our extended analogy of charged electrical energies that were once loose and ‘alive’ in the air, the excess negative particles have been absorbed by the nearby sources that were positively charged. A new equilibrium can now establish a mood of peace and stillness in the air.

What all of this means is that it is not only mediators who serve to ground out negative energies. The parties themselves can serve as grounding sources when they make statements to each other that validate the other’s past experiences and common humanity. This connectivity, based on the sharing of new content, creates a way for the electricity to have safe passage, indeed, to have safe conductivity as in a closed circuit that involves a circular movement electrical current. This is a picture of mutuality and reciprocity in sharp contrast to the oppositional dynamics of static electricity. There is no chance for lightning bolts which can unpredictably zap someone since the electrical current is now safely travelling in a controlled and guided setting that is characterized by cooperation rather than competition.

Once parties have mutually experienced this shift point of energies they can then proceed to talk about future matters. It is almost impossible to discuss solutions and reparations for a heated conflict until matters of the past have been settled and put to rest. If you think about it, the very reason why parties require third-party mediation in the first place is that they did not have the capacity amongst themselves to move directly to a solutions-based discussion. There was too much emotion in the way; too much loose electricity was preventing them from moving forward. They needed help to move forward, to move from the past to the future. In this light, successful mediation entails the uphill conversation of airing and diffusing the negative energies of both past and present in order for parties to cross over the summit of understanding, and thereby
proceed with the downhill conversation of addressing future, practical matters. Parties simply cannot constructively agree on the future if they haven’t reached sufficient agreement on the past.

The Overcoming Nature of Positive Energies

We have seen how the real success of mediation is due to the way positive strengths within the parties conspire together to overcome the negative elements of a conflict. We have also recognized how mediators play a vital role at the front-end of a process by ensuring good preparation and by creating safe spaces for empowered conversation. Without these generative sources of positive energy, it is clear that the negative energies stemming from crime or conflict would not be able to be adequately nullified. But even in this party-empowerment context of mediation, it has been shown that what mediators bring with themselves to the table can make a difference in the success of a process. This has to do not only with skills and expertise but equally, if not more so, with mediator presence.

Author Henri Nouwen described hospitality as the “creation of free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place.”\textsuperscript{16} This concords well with the way mediators create space in which parties can enter and experience relational transformation. One reason mediator presence is never to be downplayed is that the creation of this free space is very much a factor of the way in which a mediator is present to the parties, not as someone to do the changing, but as someone who simply offers space. Hence there also has to be a type of space within the mediator which can be extended outward. This image fits very nicely with the scientific picture that positively charged objects actually have a deficiency of electrons whereas negatively charged objects have an excess of electrons. Positive objects, no less than positive mediators, attract excess negative charge and thereby ground it out so that change and equilibrium can happen.

Since the early 1990s, Mark Umbreit has developed the Humanistic Approach to Mediation and Dialogue in which he highlights a number of ways in which mediators can enrich or detract from the process, contingent on their own capacities for mindfulness, centeredness and compassion.\textsuperscript{17} At best, mediators do not only invite positive strengths to come out of the parties; they also embody positive strengths which present a

contagious influence on the overall movement of negative energies that can be overcome by positive energies. This has more to do with the concept of a mediator’s calming presence than many realize. Presence itself is powerful because of the emanation of positive intentions and hopes which flow out of the mediation. Umbreit also recommends a number of self-care activities that increase a mediator’s capacity to be a life-giving, healing presence. These include meditation, working with breath and body energy, relaxation exercises, and guided imagery.

Mediation practices emerging from this humanistic or human-centered framework fit very well with an approach that tunes into the energy dynamics of a resolution process. These practices include:

- building trust and rapport during preparation meetings
- removing one’s own mental clutter to be fully present
- taming the ego and seeking a nonjudgmental stance
- using ‘deep listening’ rather than ‘active listening’
- recognizing the language of the heart beneath the words
- conveying a non-directive approach to mediation
- encouraging direct, party-to-party conversation
- inviting storytelling with more depth than breadth
- honoring moments of silence

All of these practices are means for activating positive life-forces or what we have been calling positive energies that contribute to a conflict transformation experience. Note how they all share a common element of touching the deeper parts of our humanity. As such, they promise to be aids in helping clients to touch the deeper parts of their own humanity and, more importantly, the other’s shared humanity. In the final analysis, the humanization of a resolution process is simply a parallel way of understanding how energy movements are central to a resolution process. Human beings are capable of birthing destructive energies as well as birthing creative energies. People are also capable of enabling and experiencing profound shifts where negative energies are overcome by positive ones. As we better understand our human functions in a holistic way, where physical, emotional, spiritual, and cognitive dynamics all weave together,

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we will better understand how people carry inherent capacities to overcome the toughest of situations.

We are back to the human heart. The humanization of any resolution process is equivalent to the heartfulness of that process. Nothing tugs at us deeper than when we bear witness to the reconciling moment between two people who just had a heart-to-heart encounter. This is why apologies are so touching to hear and see. Apologies trigger deep emotions within us precisely because they represent, in condensed form, the transformation of negative energies into positive ones. Where there was once pain and grief in the human heart, now there is openness and relief. Someday it may be possible to monitor the actual frequencies of negative or positive ‘emotrons’ that are sent out by the human heart toward those who are nearby. Who knows what that will mean for the field of resolution work in decades to come? Meanwhile, mediators will continue to use the language of energy dynamics as they describe the deepest aspects of their work. Why is this? There simply is no better descriptive language at hand. Perhaps that alone should open us up all the more to the prospective way in which invisible energy forces, negative and positive, are operative in sustaining walls between people no less than creating bridges between them.