

Expanding Restorative

A Sequel to *Defining Restorative* (2013)*

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* *Defining Restorative* is available at <https://banr.foundation/defining-restorative>

I wrote *Defining Restorative* while I was still president of the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) graduate school. At the time my purpose was largely operational—to provide the hundreds of staff at IIRP and at Community Service Foundation and Buxmont Academy, the IIRP’s model programs for troubled youth, and our thousands of trainees and students from around the world with a clear and consistent terminology and explanation of restorative practices that would help them in their daily work (Wachtel, 2013a).

Now, in 2024, I offer *Expanding Restorative* as a sequel. While restorative practices have demonstrated their efficacy in dealing with wrongdoing and conflict in a wide variety of settings, from schools and workplaces to treatment and justice settings—circles and conferences are still too limited in scale to address our society’s greatest challenges.

I originally presented the *restorative practices continuum* (Figure 1) in 1999 at an international restorative justice research conference in Australia. The paper, “Restorative Justice in Everyday Life: Beyond the Formal Ritual,” described the conflict resolution and community-building strategies that we employed in our schools, group homes and treatment programs for delinquent and at-risk youth. Our practices ranged from informal exchanges between individuals, prompted by affective statements and questions, to more formal practices such

as problem-solving groups, circles, restorative justice conferences and family group conferences (Wachtel, 1999).

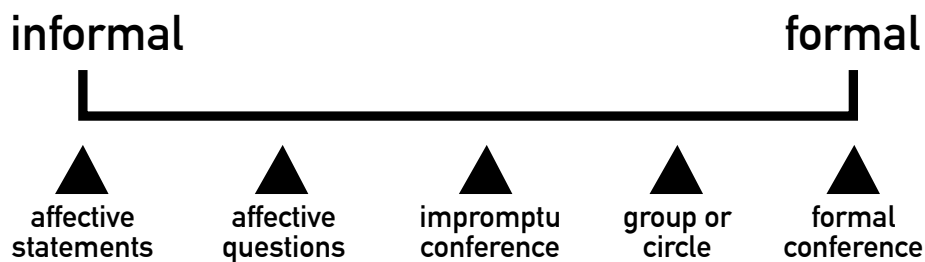


Figure 1. Restorative Practices Continuum

What set me apart from the criminologists at the restorative justice conference was that I defined “restorative justice” as a subset of what I called “restorative practices.” While our model youth programs very occasionally employ a formal restorative justice conference or family group conference, we routinely use a variety of proactive and informal restorative practices to build relationships and a sense of community that helps to prevent conflict and wrongdoing.

I returned from Australia determined to start a global organization to promote restorative practices. The next year I incorporated the IIRP and planned to make it both an accredited master’s degree-granting graduate school and a worldwide training organization.

In 1999 we also began a multi-year evaluation of our youth programs in Pennsylvania, USA, which produced remarkably positive outcomes—most notably *more than halving criminal re-offending rates* among the almost four thousand young people who participated in our programs from 1999 to 2007 (McCold, 2008).

Since then IIRP has been actively involved in providing training and graduate education in restorative practices—working with individuals and groups from schools, youth programs, workplaces and other organizational settings.

However, in recent years I have learned about participatory processes, such as *community processing* and *citizens’ assemblies*, that reliably operationalize problem-solving and conflict resolution on a larger scale than could ever be accommodated in a circle or a formal conference—involving hundreds and sometimes thousands of participants.

Like most people, I am dismayed by the growing political dysfunction in democracies around the world and by the complex disputes that plague our businesses, institutions, economies and nations. Might these new processes serve to widen the scope of the restorative practices continuum from micro to

macro—so that we can address wrongdoing, resolve conflicts and make challenging decisions at every level of society?

To explore the concept of “expanding restorative” I will first review a supporting framework of concepts that help us to better understand restorative practices: the *social discipline window*, the *fundamental hypothesis*, a *blueprint for community* and *fair process*. Then I will expand on this framework by making the case for the use of macro processes that involve hundreds or even thousands of people to address large-scale wrongdoing, disputes and decision-making. I will lastly present two ideas that further expand on that restorative framework: 1) Habermas’s (1987) concept of the “lifeworld versus the system” is useful in understanding how restorative practices can counteract the collapse of family and community caused by the industrial revolution (Harari, 2014) and 2) my own construct, “The Six Facets of a New Reality,” offers a conceptual map to address a wide variety of societal needs.

Social Discipline Window

The social discipline window (Figure 2) is a concept with application in any setting where people have authority—from parents of families to presidents of nations. It describes four basic approaches to maintaining social norms and behavioral boundaries in any setting. The four are represented as different combinations of high or low control and high or low support. The restorative domain combines both high control and high support and is characterized by doing things **with** people, rather than **to** them or **for** them. The word “control” has negative connotations so that some people prefer a word like “challenge” as the counterpoint axis to the “support” axis.

There is strong research support for the efficacy of a restorative approach to social discipline that balances *challenge* and *support*—called an “authoritative” approach (not to be confused with “authoritarian”) by Diana Baumrind in her highly regarded work on parenting (2013). Numerous parenting studies have shown that children do better when they are raised by authoritative parents and “are generally happy, capable, and successful” (Muraco et al., 2020).

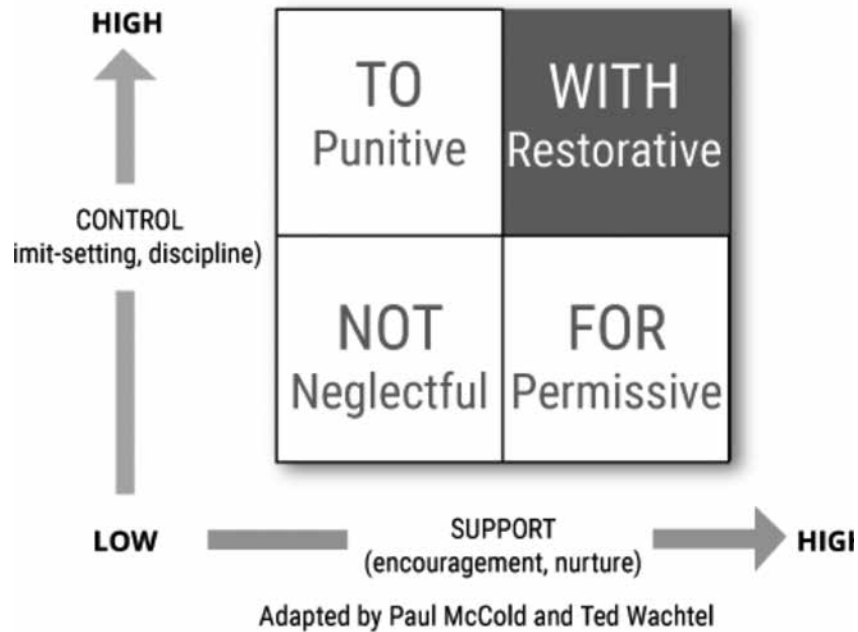


Figure 2. Social Discipline Window

Fundamental Hypothesis

My colleagues and I at the IIRP highlighted a fundamental unifying hypothesis for restorative practices—that “human beings are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes in their behavior when those in positions of authority do things *with* them, rather than *to* them or *for* them.”

This hypothesis maintains that the punitive and authoritarian *to* mode and the permissive and paternalistic *for* mode are usually not as effective as the restorative, participatory, engaging, authoritative *with* mode (Wachtel, 2005). The “with” word is the key criterion in determining whether a practice is truly restorative or not.

While physicists are still searching for a unified “theory of everything” to explain the physical universe, the fundamental hypothesis of restorative practices suggests a potential “theory of everyone” to explain the human universe.

Blueprint for Community

My most important new learning in recent years is that all types of restorative practices—no matter how large or small—establish emotional bonds among the participants.

Restorative processes provide people with an opportunity to express themselves honestly even when in disagreement with others. Civility is possible

because when people express their negative emotions in a safe setting—that immediately reduces the intensity of those feelings.

Whether in a classroom incident between two children, a workplace circle, or a citizens' assembly deciding an emotional policy issue—people are more cooperative and more likely to bond when they feel heard.

In September, 2017 Oprah Winfrey convened a contentious meeting of voters from Western Michigan—seven Clinton supporters and seven Trump supporters—to discuss their political differences. Despite difficult conversations, when Winfrey reconvened the opposing groups a few months later they had socialized and developed friendships. Frank Luntz, the pollster who chose the group members remarked, “What I liked about it is that they came to respect each other, appreciate each other, and live each other’s lives to some degree so that they could empathize” (Winfrey, 2018).

In *Facing the Demons*, an Australian documentary film about a restorative conference, the parents of the young man who had been murdered in a bungled armed robbery reached out to the mother of one of the offenders after the conference. They thanked her for attending despite the shame she felt for her son’s role in the crime and established a relationship where none had existed before (Ziegler, 1999).

Psychiatrist Donald Nathanson, the late director of the Silvan S. Tomkins Institute, explained that it is through the mutual exchange of expressed affect that we build community, creating the emotional bonds that tie us all together (Nathanson, 1998). His mentor Silvan Tomkins (1962,1963,1991) said humanity has evolved to have nine affects to experience the expression of emotion:

- Two positive affects that feel pleasant (enjoyment-joy, interest-excitement);
- One affect so brief that it has no feeling of its own (surprise-startle);
- Six affects that feel dreadful (shame-humiliation, distress-anguish, disgust, fear-terror, anger-rage, and dismell).

Tomkins defined most of the affects by pairs of words that represent the least and the most intense expression of a particular affect. *Dismell* is a word Tomkins coined to describe “turning up one’s nose” in a rejecting way.

Nathanson, influenced by Tomkins, asserted that we are hardwired with all of these affects to conform to an internal “blueprint for community.” He said that human relationships are best when there is 1) free expression of affect or emotion, 2) albeit minimizing negative expression, 3) while maximizing the positive, 4) but always allowing for free expression.

Legislatures in democracies everywhere allow for free expression of emotion. However, professional politicians often don't pay attention to the crucial need for "minimizing negative expression." Legislatures have become humanity's most toxic communities—with increasingly outrageous behavior driven by lust for re-election, money and power.

In stark contrast, citizens' assemblies whose members are chosen by democratic lottery succeed in "minimizing negative expression." Participants are usually pleased and report that the deliberative process is "difficult"—"not a walk in the park"—but it is "respectful" and "congenial" and "an expression of the will of the people" (Chalmers, 2018; Healthy Democracy, 2022).

Fair Process

When authorities do things *with* people, whether reactively—to deal with crisis—or proactively, the results are better. This fundamental thesis was evident in a popular *Harvard Business Review* article about the concept and related research which showed how *fair process* achieved effective outcomes in business organizations.

The three principles of fair process are:

- *Engagement*—involving individuals in decisions that affect them by listening to their views and genuinely taking their opinions into account.
- *Explanation*—explaining the reasoning behind a decision to everyone who has been involved or who is affected by it.
- *Expectation clarity*—making sure that everyone clearly understands a decision and what is expected of them in the future (Kim & Mauborgne, 2003).

One of the stories Kim and Mauborgne shared from their research illustrates the potential of fair process. Troubled Siemens Nixdorf Information Systems had cut 17,000 jobs by 1994, when the new CEO held a series of urgent meetings, large and small, and personally explained to the company's remaining 32,000 employees the bleak outlook and the need to make deep cuts. He asked for volunteers to come up with ideas to save the company. The initial group of 30 volunteers grew to 9,000 employees and managers who met mostly after business hours, often until midnight.

They offered their ideas to executives, who could choose to fund them or not. Although 20 to 30 percent of their ideas were rejected, the executives explained the reasons for their decisions, so people felt the process was fair.

"Fair process builds trust and commitment, trust and commitment produce voluntary cooperation, and voluntary cooperation drives performance, leading

people to go beyond the call of duty by sharing their knowledge and applying their creativity” (Kim and Mauborgne, 2003).

By the next year, the company was operating in the black again and employee satisfaction had doubled, despite the drastic changes underway. It was one of the most remarkable company turnarounds in European business history.

The collaborative effort of thousands of employees who helped save the company provides a real life demonstration of the “wisdom of crowds.”

Wisdom of Crowds

A recurring demonstration of the wisdom of crowds is seen on the popular television game show *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire*. If a question is too difficult, a player can ask the audience to help them decide which of four answers are correct. Audience members vote individually and their votes are totaled and displayed. Usually one answer is most popular and that is the one that a player usually chooses. Ninety-one percent of the time the crowd has chosen the correct answer (Surowiecki, 2004).

The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many Are Smarter Than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economies, Societies and Nations was named “best business book” of 2004 by both *Forbes* and *Businessweek*.

James Surowiecki opens his book with the story of British scientist Francis Galton who in 1906 came face to face with the “wisdom of crowds” at a country fair contest in which individuals tried to guess the weight of an ox, hoping to win a prize. Galton analyzed the data from the contest tickets and came to a truly remarkable realization. No one’s guess, no matter how expert that person might be, was as accurate as the collective guess of the crowd. The average of the 787 guesses from the crowd proved to be perfect—1198 pounds.

Surowiecki cites many other examples—such as guessing the number of jelly beans in a jar—where the collective group is almost always more accurate than any individual. His most remarkable anecdote describes the recovery of the USS Scorpion, a nuclear submarine that sank in 1968 and was found five months later by compiling a series of collective guesses leading to a spot 220 yards from the missing submarine in a 300 square mile search area.

The wisdom of crowds is much more than collective guessing. It relies on the ability of large groups of people to collaborate, share information and make decisions together. My most important takeaway from *The Wisdom of Crowds* is a checklist of five conditions essential to good large group decision-making:

1. An agreed-upon process for turning a group of individual private judgments into a collective decision.
2. Timely access to reliable information.

3. Diverse perspectives.
4. Independence of judgment.
5. Decentralized decision-making.

Using these criteria I realized that the legislative systems in the U.S. (and likely in most democracies) contradict all five of those conditions:

1. Party politicians manipulate legislative and election rules so that there is no *agreed-upon process* for making collective decisions.
2. *Information* is politicized and not subject to reasonable standards of truth.
3. Most congressional and state legislators are white male lawyers or business people over fifty—obviously lacking *diverse perspectives*.
4. U.S. political party officials called “whips” actively oppose *independence of judgment* for any legislators in their party.
5. Allowing *decentralized decision-making* would jeopardize the party leaders’ control of the legislative machinery—and the financial rewards it brings them.

If we cannot rely on professional politicians—do ordinary people have the wisdom to make important policy decisions? A growing body of evidence says, “Yes—under the right conditions.”

James Fishkin at the Deliberative Democracy Lab of Stanford University “has stimulated more than 150 Deliberative Polling® experiments in over 50 countries and jurisdictions” (Deliberative Democracy Lab, 2024).

Fishkin’s “deliberative poll” is different from traditional polls that ask unprepared people to respond to issues they may not understand or even recognize. Instead, hundreds of randomly selected individuals are first polled by telephone on the issues they’ll be facing and then invited to participate in person. In advance of the event, they get a briefing book representing varied perspectives on the issue, with the opposing experts agreeing on the fairness of the briefing book before it is finalized.

Over one or more days people meet in large and small groups, hear experts with conflicting perspectives, ask questions, have discussions and ultimately respond to the same poll for a second time. An individual’s choices are not revealed, only the overall outcomes.

After years of research Fishkin concluded: “The public is very smart if you give it a chance... If people think their voice actually matters, they’ll do the hard work, really study their briefing books, ask the experts smart questions and then make tough decisions. When they hear the experts disagreeing, they’re

forced to think for themselves. About 70 percent change their minds in the process” (Klein, 2010).

We have underestimated the collective wisdom of humanity. IIRP president Linda Kligman pinpointed our society’s glorification of top-down decision-makers when she observed: “The corollary to underestimating people is prizing the few” (2020). I fear that we concentrate too much power and reward in too few hands and underutilize the intelligence, ingenuity and integrity of “ordinary” people from all walks of life.

Restorative Processes

In contrast to more directive counseling, mediation or judicial processes, restorative processes are *facilitative*. Participants are responsible for the outcome, not the “facilitator” who is responsible for the process.

Using restorative processes, those in authority facilitate settings where students, clients, employees or citizens work out their own conflicts and solve their own problems at every level of society—as suggested to the courts decades ago by eminent criminologist Nils Christie (1977). He said that courts steal people’s conflicts, but citizens would benefit by resolving their own conflicts whenever possible.

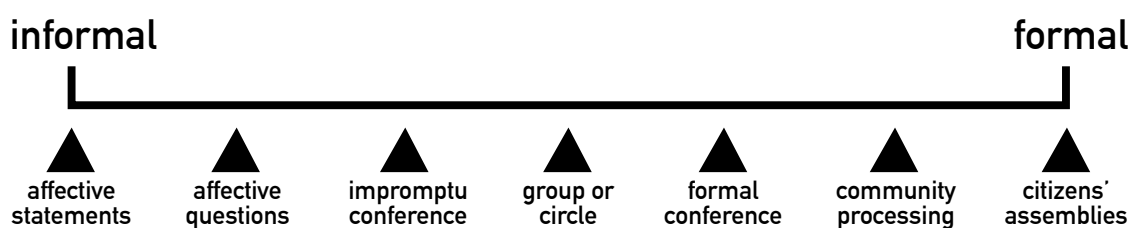


Figure 3. Expanded Restorative Practices Continuum

Restorative practices range from informal to formal. Moving from left to right on the continuum, as restorative practices become more formal, they tend to involve more people, require more planning and time, and are more structured and complete. Although a formal restorative process might have dramatic impact, informal practices have a cumulative impact because they are part of everyday life (McCold & Wachtel, 2001).

A teacher in a classroom might employ an affective statement when a student has misbehaved, letting the student know how he or she has been affected by the student’s behavior: “When you disrupt the class, I feel sad” or “disrespected” or “disappointed.” Hearing this, the student learns how his or her behavior is affecting others (Harrison, 2007). Or that teacher may ask an affective question—“Who do you think has been affected by what you just did?”

and then follow up with “How do you think they’ve been affected?” or “What will you do to make things right?” In answering such questions, instead of simply being punished, the student has a chance to think about his or her behavior, make amends and change the behavior in the future (Morrison, 2003).

Asking several affective questions of both the wrongdoer and those harmed creates a small impromptu conference. If the circumstance calls for a bit more structure, a circle can quickly be created.

Informal restorative practices dramatically reduce the need for more time-consuming formal restorative practices. Systematic use of informal restorative practices creates what might be described as a restorative milieu or community—an environment that consistently fosters awareness, empathy and responsibility in a way that has proven to be far more effective in achieving social discipline than our current reliance on punishment and sanctions (Wachtel, 2013b).

On the “Expanded Restorative Practices Continuum” (Figure 3) I have identified a limited number of restorative processes, from micro to macro, that I view as most helpful in implementing restorative practices in the widest variety of settings and with the highest levels of participant engagement and empowerment. There are also worthy restorative processes that I did not include as examples in this version of the restorative continuum.

Community Processing

Community processing is one of the practices that makes it possible to expand the restorative practices continuum—by dealing with issues that are too large for circles or formal conferences.

Community processing solves complex disputes involving multiple parties and divergent interests. The process starts with a situational analysis to clarify the different interests and check which groups are involved. In the preparation stage individual parties are engaged face to face.

During the next step all parties enter a guided conversation that moves from individual interests to common interests and proposed solutions. Boundaries and limitations to the plan’s framework are made clear to all.

Community processing can last for a few hours up to a whole day, depending on the situation. For very large groups facilitators work with inner and outer circles, remote contributors and audiovisual tools so that everyone can follow the discussion and participate.

After community processing, participants receive a report of the whole process and the plan in the agreed form. There is also a final evaluation with everyone involved (Siegers, 2024).

In a well-known example of community processing, 650,000 residents of Friesland, a Dutch province, were dismayed when Sionsberg Hospital went bankrupt, disrupting their regional healthcare. Anke Siegers, who originated “community processing,” was hired to mediate among the interest groups because there was a crisis and no apparent solution. She insisted that the process not be merely advisory, but that stakeholders who participated would make the decisions and finalize the legal agreement—not politicians.

In December 2014, Siegers and her colleagues prepared 2300 people to participate in a decision-making process and in January 2015 defined 22 interest groups based on identified needs and values, including the hospital administration, insurance companies, local government, staff and community. Twenty-two representatives, one from each group, were the negotiators but they could leave to caucus with their respective groups as needed, then return to the meeting. Approximately 16,000 people were able to follow the process by livestream.

After a 14-hour marathon negotiation, the group signed off on a detailed plan. The transparency and participatory nature of the process prevented resistance to the final agreement and the hospital reopened with almost universal support—a remarkable outcome in a world where conflicting views are rarely reconciled in a satisfying way (Siegers, 2024).

Citizens’ Assembly

The citizens’ assembly’s members, who sometimes number in the hundreds, are selected by democratic lottery (also called *sortition*). The process expands the restorative practices continuum by making large group decisions at a local, regional or national level.

Citizens’ assemblies are a form of “deliberative democracy” that have most notably been used at a national level by Ireland to effectively decide extremely contentious issues—from abortion to same-sex marriage to climate change—issues that elected Irish politicians feared and avoided (Chalmers, 2018; Wachtel, 2020).

In Malawi citizens’ assemblies have been employed at a local level to give people from all walks of life the authority to monitor and confront the corrupt use of community development funds (Chalmers, 2023).

All the processes that I call “citizens’ assemblies” choose their members through democratic lottery although they might serve varied purposes. Some practitioners prefer other terms besides “assembly” to name their approach to deliberative democracy, such as *lottery-selected panels* (Healthy Democracy, 2017) or *deliberative polls* (Fishkin, 2018).

Some have suggested the use of democratic lottery to replace the election of members of legislatures, parliaments and councils that would largely end the role of professional politicians as our primary decision makers. The Sortition Foundation in the United Kingdom, which runs citizens' assemblies for governments, has advocated for the replacement of the non-representative House of Lords with a truly representative House of Citizens (Hennig, 2017).

Many onlookers are skeptical because they doubt that groups of "ordinary" people can make effective decisions and fear that such groups could devolve into mobs. Yet ordinary people selected by democratic lottery routinely serve on juries and make crucial decisions such as taking liberty or life itself from their fellow citizens (Wachtel, 2020).

Restorative practitioners have learned through decades of practical experience that—under the right conditions—we ordinary people are capable of achieving remarkable outcomes. Well designed deliberative processes provide those "right conditions" and dramatically improve the way human beings interact and communicate—replacing the angry and competitive language of adversarial processes with information exchange and purposeful conversation. They foster mutual understanding, still allowing for respectful disagreement, through large group participatory learning and decision-making (Wachtel, 2022).

A pivotal issue in the advent of citizens' assemblies and community processing is whether their deliberations will be advisory or decisive. Anke Siegers says we must shift from the *old route* where the small group decides for the large group—to the *new route* where decision-making is widely shared (Siegers, 2016).

Restoring the Lifeworld

What problem are we trying to solve with restorative practices? What are we trying to "restore?"

Historian Noah Yuval Harari, in his bestselling book *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, argues that the most momentous social upheaval to ever befall humankind was "the collapse of the family and the local community and their replacement by the state and the market."

"As best we can tell, from the earliest times, more than a million years ago, humans lived in small, intimate communities, most of whose members were kin...They glued together families and communities to create tribes, cities, kingdoms and empires, but families and communities remained the basic building blocks of all human societies. The Industrial Revolution, on the other hand, managed within little more than two centuries to break these building blocks into atoms" (Harari, 2014).

Jürgen Habermas, eminent social theorist and philosopher, described this upheaval as “the colonization of the *lifeworld* by the *system*.” He juxtaposed the two words, *lifeworld* and *system*, to represent two competing but related explanations of how society operates (Habermas, 1987). The system is modern society with its administration, laws, politics, economy, organizations and paid professionals, while the lifeworld is the network of relationships among family and friends who, unlike those in the system, look out for each other not because they are paid—but because they care (Früchtel, Burns, 2009). Habermas has long asserted that the modern *system* of governance and enterprise has pushed aside and diminished the *lifeworld* of family, friends and community.

It’s hard for those of us who live in the 21st century to appreciate how completely business and government have usurped the role of the family. “Most people worked in the family business—the family farm or the family workshop—or they worked in their neighbors’ family businesses,” wrote Harari. “The family was also the welfare system, the health system, the education system, the construction industry, the trade union, the pension fund, the insurance company, the radio, the television, the newspapers, the bank and even the police... When a person fell sick, the family took care of her. When a person grew old, the family supported her, and her children were her pension fund. When a person died, the family took care of the orphans” (Harari, 2014).

Restorative practices have the potential to bring the lifeworld into the system. From circles to citizens’ assemblies, restorative practices bring meaningful lifeworld conversations and relationships to system environments.

A friend of mine was skeptical until she experienced her first circle with others in her workplace. She exclaimed that she learned more about her colleagues in that one circle than she had during several of years of working with them.

Instead of expelling several high school seniors and banning them from their graduation ceremony for a foolish year-end prank, an emotional restorative conference held the wrongdoers accountable and decided how the young men would repair the harm—but also successfully addressed the students’ *lifeworld* need to restore their relationships with their parents and school staff.

A family group conference eliminates the need for the government to take a child out of her home because the extended family builds a plan that satisfies concerns for the child’s wellbeing.

A simple morning check-in circle at work or school can, for example, help others understand why you are having a bad day and allows them to adjust and support you.

A participant in a national deliberative poll said the experience didn’t change his political views but he learned to understand people with opposing

positions. He still keeps in touch with a Trump supporter whose views, he says, were softened by the event (*Now This News*, 2020).

Sam Kaner, author of the popular *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-making*, observed: "The key differentiating factor in the success of an organization is not just its products and services, not just its technology or market share, but the organization's ability to *elicit, harness and focus the vast intellectual capital and goodwill* resident in its members, employees and stakeholders" (Kaner, 2011).

That's what restorative practices do—they elicit, harness and focus our collective intellect and goodwill.

Toward Restorative Community

At the IIRP conference in Manchester, U.K. in 2005 I proposed that the next step in the restorative practices movement was "developing restorative community" (Wachtel, 2005). I started my keynote with a vision of what I felt was a possible reality:

- Imagine a community where people routinely confront one another for their inappropriate behavior and where wrongdoers are expected to reflect on what they have done, whom they have harmed and how they have harmed them, and then suggest how they can repair that harm.
- Imagine a community where people routinely run circle groups for themselves and their peers to help manage behavior and even deal with chronic issues, like substance abuse.
- Imagine a community where managers earnestly solicit employees' views in making decisions, explain decisions when they are made and clearly spell out their expectations.
- Imagine a community in which those in authority actively engage families and sometimes extended families in critical issues, such as setting goals for treatment or deciding where an abused young person should live or planning how to support a family member in maintaining sobriety.
- Imagine a community where people minimize gossip and try to deal with concerns and conflicts in an honest and direct fashion.

At the risk of sounding naïve and utopian, I was merely reporting what the 250 employees and 500 students in our three organizations—Community Service Foundation, Buxmont Academy and the IIRP—had observably achieved, albeit with varying degrees of fidelity.

Twentieth-century innovator Buckminster Fuller advised, “You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.”

Restorative community is a new model that arises when you achieve a critical mass of restorative practice in a particular setting, so that it produces significant positive outcomes.

How do we promote this phenomenon of restorative community and where might it be useful? You can start with a circle in your own family, among friends, in your classroom, in your workplace, in your community:

- A woman attending our graduate school reported that she had introduced check-in and check-out circles at gatherings of her female relatives. Her family loved the new ritual because it guaranteed that quieter individuals were not lost in the hustle and bustle of socializing and that everyone who attended had a chance to speak and be acknowledged.
- A former CSF Buxmont student who had participated in IIRP’s model programs was concerned about the conflicts at his workplace so he helped his employer resolve and avoid disputes by organizing circles.
- A teacher was frustrated by her school administrator’s lack of interest in restorative practices but was able to transform her own classroom community and help a few of her fellow teachers to do the same.
- A psychologist, during a challenging and violent era in Guatemalan society, founded an influential nonprofit organization to promote the transformational growth of leaders and their organizations through restorative leadership training (Tello, Garcia, & Coreas, 2023).

Of course, holding circles doesn’t guarantee a full-fledged restorative community but circles often provide the first step to “a sense of belonging.” In her book *Restorative Communities: From Conflict to Conversation*, journalist Kerra Bolton (2022) identified three essential elements of a restorative community: “I believe that creating a sense of belonging, providing a pathway to making decisions, and offering a sound process to resolve conflicts are vital to the success of a restorative community.”

She also suggested that restorative communities are likely to have at least two or more of the following characteristics:

- Decentralized power and participatory decision-making are sewn in the fabric of their organizational or community culture. It’s how they “do” things.
- Restorative practices are adopted in at least half of the six facets of so-

cietal needs: learning, governance, care, justice, enterprise, and spirit. [See Six Facets of a New Reality below.]

- Implementing restorative practices comes from the community. It isn't a government program subject to annual budgets and political whim.
- Restorative practices are cross-pollinated throughout the community. For example, police departments use restorative practices to engage the community, even in schools and neighborhoods where restorative practices are already embedded.
- There are regular and frequent opportunities to learn about or strengthen one's restorative practices knowledge through workshops and classes.

Bolton's book offers observational evidence of positive outcomes in restorative communities while three successive scientific studies by criminologist Paul McCold (2008) offered strong empirical evidence. At the time McCold said that he had not yet evaluated a youth program that could demonstrate its efficacy—until he studied three cohorts totaling almost 4000 delinquent and at-risk youth over eight years who were enrolled at CSF and Buxmont Academy, the IIRP's model restorative programs in Pennsylvania, USA.

McCold was surprised to find that participating in a "restorative milieu" produced reliable positive results—more than halving criminal re-offending. Additionally, measures of individuals' social attitudes became more positive the longer a young person was engaged in a restorative community.

Six Facets of a New Reality

Since stepping down as president of the International Institute for Restorative Practices in 2015, I have continued to explore possibilities for a new reality based on restorative practices—by founding the BANR (Building a New Reality) Foundation and establishing its website (www.BANR.foundation).

I created a conceptual diagram for BANR—a map of six facets of societal needs—to guide our efforts by allowing us to see where restorative practices have already been implemented and where new restorative projects might be useful. In using the map, I have yet to find a restorative project that doesn't fit in any of the six facets, so the diagram seems to have basic utility.

I identified a generic word for each of the facets: learning, governance, care, justice, enterprise and spirit. All six are essential to the health of any human society, although restorative practices are currently more developed in some facets than in others.



Figure 4. Six Facets of a New Reality (Wachtel, 2022)

I soon realized that we could use the map to delineate the proximity of any restorative project to either the lifeworld’s or the system’s values by positioning the lifeworld at the center of the six facets map and the system at its periphery. The lifeworld and the system represent the opposite ends of a continuum of societal values.

Restorative practices in public schools, for example, are operating at the outside edge of the learning facet because the environment reflects largely system values. Very few learning decisions are made “with” the learners and their families, but usually “to” or “for” them. Learning in public schools relies on compulsory attendance and a constrained choice of mandatory curricula.

On the other hand, North Star Self-Directed Learning for Teens in Sunderland, Massachusetts uses restorative practices—but in an environment closer to lifeworld values at the heart of the diagram. It serves homeschoolers and other young people who do not want to be in a school. All of the learning decisions are made with the learners and their families. The program relies on voluntary attendance and does not give grades—yet young people get involved and achieve (Danford, 2019).

The title of Howard Zehr’s seminal restorative justice book, *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice* (1990, 2015) suggested another idea. We can use each of the facets individually as a “restorative lens,” to look at the other facets in a new way. Many restorative practice pioneers have done just that:

- Although the European Forum for Restorative Justice was founded by criminologists, it has long included educators like Belinda Hopkins who has used a restorative justice lens in learning settings in the U.K. and elsewhere (Hopkins, 2004).
- Terry O'Connell helped a nursing home in Australia implement a restorative approach using a governance lens in a care setting, which gave residents dramatically more say in daily routine and freedom from the rigidity that characterizes so many care institutions (Wachtel, 2017).
- Bruce Schenk, the founding director of IIRP Canada, used a justice lens to look at spirit needs when he employed circles to deal with wrongdoing and conflict in church congregations (Wachtel, 2013b).
- Derek Miodownick at the Vermont Department of Corrections used a care lens to look at justice needs when he led the implementation of circles of accountability and support (CoSAs) to help incarcerated offenders successfully return to their home communities and avoid re-offending (Vermont Human Services, 2024).

I offer some thoughts below on each of the six facets. I tend to see the facets through a *restorative governance* lens because, to paraphrase the famous line from *The Lord of the Rings*, governance is “the one facet to rule them all” (Tolkien, 1954, 1955).

If we govern society restoratively, we will influence developments in all of the facets. The inherent inclusiveness of restorative practices, from micro to macro, taps the wisdom of crowds and improves decision-making in every facet of our society.

Learning Needs

My overarching hope for learning in a new reality is that freedom of education will soon stand alongside freedom of religion—fully recognized as a basic human right.

The reason that we face so many behavioral challenges in today's schools is that we have confused *learning* with *schooling*. Learning is too often defined by the number of years spent in schools and the number of diplomas collected. Informal learning, acquired through direct experience, and self-directed learning, driven by personal interest, are usually regarded as inferior to school learning (Wachtel, 1977, 2020).

While I salute those who enjoy and thrive in schools, many young people do not. We must challenge the status quo and rethink whether compulsory schooling is the best approach for all children.

We have ignored the ancient adage, “You can lead a horse to water but you can’t make it drink.” The behavioral challenges in today’s schools arise largely because we are forcing so many young people to be somewhere they really don’t want to be—to the detriment of those who do.

North Star Self-Directed Learning for Teens, founded in 1996, is an exemplary model of an alternative to school. *Liberated Learners* is a network of more than a dozen centers across North America using the North Star model to support teens living and learning without school, with several more in development and planning (North Star, 2024).

Governance Needs

In a new reality the use of *democratic lotteries* will decrease the number of appointed and elected officials and increase the role of the wisdom of crowds in our democracies.

Our greatest problem with governance is that we confuse democracy with voting in elections. Elections have proved to be a chaotic and unreliable way of making crucial decisions. Election campaigns are usually funded by vast sums of money from individuals and organizations who want to influence legislators to their liking.

True representation, on the other hand, is the bullseye of democracy, achieved through the selection process originated in ancient Athens—choosing volunteer decision-makers by lottery.

Although not likely to be adopted as the method for selecting our legislators in the foreseeable future, we can immediately use democratic lottery to further authentic expression of the popular will. If political polarization keeps our elected representatives from dealing thoughtfully with local, regional and national issues—why don’t we give the citizenry a chance?

Not just citizens’ assemblies, but boards and commissions can be selected by democratic lottery—instead of partisan political appointment. The Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission (MICRC) was created in 2018 to end the practice of gerrymandering in the state by randomly selecting representation from Democrats, Republicans and independents who volunteer to serve (Williamson, 2023). A legal dispute arose challenging the revision of some of the voting districts that the MICRC defined in its first effort (Coleman, 2024) but the fundamental constitutionality of the Commission has been upheld by the Michigan Supreme Court.

A 2023 proposal to select the Santa Monica Airport Board by lottery failed when Santa Monica’s “City Council directed its staff not to pursue a lottery-selected panel process and to return to Council with a proposal for a traditional outreach process” (Richane, 2023). The obstacles that must be overcome are

skepticism about citizen decision-making and vested interests clinging to the “traditional” way of doing business.

Care Needs

Care in a new reality relies on meaningful engagement with individuals, families and communities.

We generally think of *care* as doing things *for* people, not *with* them. However, whenever people and their families have meaningful voice and choice within the process of care, they experience better outcomes. Even a simple mechanism for giving voice, such as an exit interview with nursing home patients and their families, has been shown to improve the quality of care (Braithwaite, 1993).

Our Community Service Foundation and Buxmont Academy youth care programs rely on authentic input from parents and their children in our treatment, educational and residential programs. Government regulations require parental involvement, but education and service plans are usually staff-generated and presented to families to accept and sign. CSF and Buxmont plans, however, are developed by the family and the client themselves with helpful templates and supporting information, and then presented by the family to the staff.

Carolyn and Tom Albright founded Ripple in 2006 as a community-focused Christian church serving inner city residents of Allentown, Pennsylvania. Their congregation has embraced restorative practices as a practical way to have a “ripple effect in our community.”

In 2015, before retiring from their leadership role, the Albrights asked Sherry Brokopp Binder to help them found RCI (Ripple Community Inc.) that now serves “over 150 Allentown residents, including people experiencing homelessness or housing instability, who are socially isolated, people living with significant trauma and mental illness, and the working poor.”

RCI has established the first permanent, community-supported housing program in Allentown with 19 affordable apartments and 12 more to be built in a former downtown church donated by its congregation. RCI also operates a day center that is open to the public so that “no one is ever left to face life alone.” They explain that through dialog and active listening they “apply the principles of Restorative Practices in all our work” (Ripple, 2024).

Justice Needs

Justice in a new reality employs restorative practices to reduce the impact of crime on victims and their communities of care and to reduce criminal re-offending.

We usually equate criminal justice with punishment—yet repairing the harm caused by a crime is a critical part of justice. The growing use of restorative justice provides an *alternative or supplemental* response to punishment that offers victims, offenders, and their families and friends the opportunity to talk with one another, in a safe setting, with a competent facilitator to organize the process.

There is a “growing discontent with conventional justice which is blamed for high incarceration rates, skyrocketing prison costs, and the disenfranchisement of both victims and offenders.” In general, restorative justice has been more extensively implemented in youth justice than in adult justice. However, New Zealand, a world leader in restorative practices for children and youth, also has one of the most well-developed restorative justice programs for adults (Pfander, 2020).

In non-criminal civil disputes mediation provides a less formal and non-adversarial approach to resolving disputes. In either case, justice in a new reality is guided by Nils Christie’s admonition that citizens should be involved in resolving their own conflicts whenever possible (Christie, 1977).

Enterprise Needs

A new reality in enterprise would include a more egalitarian approach both to management and to wealth, where the economy’s decision-making and its financial rewards are not so heavily concentrated in the hands of a few and more widely benefit humanity (Wachtel, 2021).

We typically think about enterprise where bosses manage by telling people what to do. However, there is growing evidence that when everyone in an organization is involved in decision-making the enterprise achieves better outcomes.

The Morning Star Company in California is a dramatic example of horizontal management—a workplace that has no supervisors. “Workers are encouraged to innovate independently, define job responsibilities themselves, and even make equipment purchasing decisions in consultation with experts.” Similarly, compensation is based on peer evaluations. Founded in 1970 by Chris Rufer while he was attending college in California, the company is now the world’s largest tomato processor with over a billion dollars a year in revenue (YouTube, 2013).

Enterprise in a new reality also represents a kinder, gentler capitalism in which the sole purpose is not only making as much money as possible for the company stockholders. That narrow goal has been challenged by B Lab, a nonprofit membership organization that initiated the *benefit corporation*, a key innovation in “a global movement of people using business as a force for

good.” Benefit corporations are not legally required to maximize profit but may balance that goal with other benefits for society (B Lab, 2024).

Ben and Jerry’s Ice Cream was one of the inspirations for B Lab’s founders. Since 1985, Ben and Jerry’s has donated 7.5 percent of its profits to charities and provides its employees with good salaries, profit-sharing, health club memberships, day-care service, and college tuition aid. The company seeks organic suppliers, uses environmentally friendly packaging and creates opportunities for economically depressed areas and disadvantaged people (Vincent, 2021).

Nonprofit corporations also play a growing role in building a kinder gentler capitalism. The concept of a company not operated for profit was once a novel idea but today nonprofits employ about ten percent of the American domestic workforce (McKeever & Gaddy, 2016).

Nonprofits are *not* a replacement for profit-making corporations, but they do things that people want done that profit-making corporations would not undertake. I have helped start and run nonprofit corporations (also called NGOs or non-governmental organizations) in several countries, for example, to conserve and protect open land from development, to provide services for delinquent and at-risk youth, to teach public schools how to reduce violence and to offer master’s degrees in “restorative practices.”

Since the 1970s U.S. charitable nonprofits have expanded their range of activities, operating social service programs at a local level that are often subsidized by state and federal government monies. Combined with the B Corps’ invention of the benefit corporation, both represent a kind of “hybrid capitalism” that addresses important societal needs.

Spirit Needs

Spirit needs are usually associated with religion, but they also encompass the life force that animates the bodies of living things, the enthusiasm that fans show toward their sports teams and the creative spirit of the arts.

FaithCARE, a part of Shalem Mental Health Network in Ontario, Canada, brings restorative practices to faith communities struggling with conflicts in their congregation, helping them resolve their issues through a series of open and honest conversations held in facilitated circles. As the FaithCARE website notes, “One of the mysteries of faith is that some of the most difficult, painful and damaging conflicts between people take place in church settings,” leaving “people hurt and embittered—perhaps even questioning their faith.”

Since 2007, FaithCARE facilitators have helped Ontario houses of worship, representing a variety of denominations, deal with a range of conflicts including situations of great intensity. Congregation members have expressed that “we

would not have been able to move from our pain and conflict to where we are now without the support of FaithCARE” (FaithCARE, 2018).

The Green Bay Packers football team is the only major sports franchise in North America whose fans own the team. Relying on the unshakable spirit of its fans, the Green Bay Packers football team has a base of support that securely anchors it to Green Bay, Wisconsin, a city of only one hundred thousand, while big cities with millions often see their sports teams move elsewhere, much to the consternation of local fans (Wachtel, 2016).

For the United States of America the phrase “the spirit of ’76” encapsulates the 1776 *Declaration of Independence* call for everyone’s right to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” It’s a spirit that keeps evolving and demanding ongoing definition. Nonetheless, this difficult-to-define *spirit* is almost universally valued among Americans—regardless of political persuasion.

Although you can’t physically see, taste, hear or smell spirit, you can feel it. Spirit represents the highest aspirations of humankind and provides the underlying motivation for a new reality that honors the worth of all human beings and infuses democracy into everyday life.

Revolution by Conversation

Elaine Shpungin (2011), in *Psychology Today*, predicted a “restorative revolution ... in the way we approach justice, transgression, punishment, crime and every day conflict among ordinary people ... a transformational, society-wide, lens-shifting, all-affecting revolution the scale of the 1960’s civil rights and women’s rights movements, a revolution in how we think about who we are and how we live, work, and love together.”

I founded the Building a New Reality Foundation (www.BANR.foundation) to thoughtfully promote just such a revolution—not *against* anyone but *with* everyone. A revolution by conversation. A non-partisan, evidence-based, experimental model to empower everyone with authentic voice, choice and responsibility—if you choose to participate.

Of course we cannot change human nature. Rather, we are trying to make our systems, protocols and rituals more effective in avoiding and resolving conflict. As Buckminster Fuller insisted, “We are called to be architects of the future, not its victims.”

Human beings have become so powerful that we are dangerous to ourselves and other living things. Our technology has given us awesome powers but our social skills have yet to catch up with our technical skills. Restorative practices have the potential to close that gap.

Ultimately it's all about relationships. Terry O'Connell reminds us: "We are social beings, hardwired for connection and deriving our identity through our relationships. Relationships are what matter in life."

He adds, "Our most fundamental human need is to be heard and understood—not to be right or wrong. The power of voice transcends the differences that individuals have in beliefs and opinions. Processes that employ open-ended Socratic questions provide voice for all involved and send a signal that each person's opinions matter" (O'Connell, 2024).

Our strategy is to build innovative models, assess the outcomes, make modifications as needed, tell the world about what we've learned and innovate further wherever we can.

However, you cannot build a restorative community if only done piecemeal, with an occasional restorative intervention. Restorative practices must be systemic, not situational. You can't just have a few people running conferences and everybody else doing business as usual. You can't be restorative with students but retributive with faculty. You can't have restorative police and punitive courts. To accomplish meaningful and lasting improvement, we must make restorative practices integral to each facet of our new reality (Wachtel, 1999).

Elaine Shpungin concluded her prediction of a restorative revolution by clarifying: "Not a solution to everything. Not panacea, utopia, peace and love for all. But a fundamental shift in the collective understanding of what might be possible."

Learn more at www.BANR.foundation

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