

Dan Yankelovich

Here are some random impressions of the workshop, as of the morning after:

My dominant impression is a highly favorable one of the participants, whom I felt were uniformly warm, receptive, open and interested in one another, perhaps even more than in the subject of the workshop

The conversation was not always easy to follow because participants spoke at a level of abstraction that presupposed a shared frame of reference which some of us (the deliberative democracy folks) did not, in fact, share. But, nonetheless, a great deal got through. We learned that: the conflict resolution field enjoys a well established practice, in which participants have great confidence. Theory, however, has not kept pace with practice.

The conflict resolution participants take their commitment to achieve practical results very seriously.

Considerable overlap exists between the two fields, sufficient to warrant a single theory that will embrace both.

The purposes of the two fields are sufficiently different that methods correct for one may not be correct for another (e.g., separating dialogue from decision-making).

A unified theory is needed in order to explain and rationalize the differences in practice.

If and when the two fields are unified in both theory and practice they will provide our society with a powerful means of correcting the serious defects of our system of representative democracy. Winning acceptance and correcting these defects will, however, prove quite difficult, because carving out a cogent role for the public voice will be interpreted by those in positions of power as an unnecessary distraction at best and at worst a usurpation of their power. It would therefore be naïve to expect quick transformation in governance, but it may not be naïve to hope that acceptance will come eventually as a new generation is exposed to the possibilities of creating a society in which elites are not a class apart utterly disconnected to the general public, thereby undermining the promise of genuine democracy.

I enjoyed the workshop and particularly enjoyed the people. Dan Yankelovich