

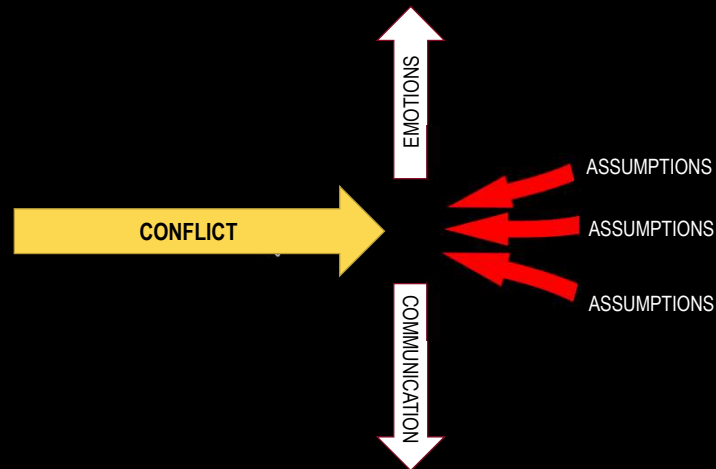
# Barrier Blasting:

## Identifying and Overcoming Barriers to Relationship Repair



Welcome to Barrier Blasting: Identifying and Overcoming Barriers to Relationship Repair. This module is based on Lengelle & Meijers' (2009) Transformation Through Writing model. They have done extensive research on how this model can be used to guide individuals in processing difficult personal or workplace events, work through high emotions, and identify and address barriers that are keeping them stuck from moving forward. I will provide a list of references at the end this module if you would like to read more of their research

## Consequences of Conflict



» CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE



In an earlier module, we discussed how high emotions, assumptions, and negative filters can stand in the way of relationship repair and we discussed some strategies for addressing these. The problem is that we are not always aware that these barriers are present, or if we are aware that these barriers exist, we may find it difficult to identify what these barriers are.



Image by 00luvicecream from Pixabay

I experienced this myself. the months preceding the pandemic, I had gone through two very difficult experiences. The first was related to my work, and the second to a personal relationship. I had done some work to address the issues and repair the relationships, but I did still feel that I was stuck. I knew that there were still assumptions and negative filters at play, but I was struggling to identify what they were.



Image by Neel Shakilov from Pixabay

In my situation, the work that I did using this model was extremely helpful. It allowed me to identify and address barriers. I was able to become “unstuck”. I was able to not only move forward in repairing the relationships, I also felt that the work I did allowed me to better understand exactly what had happened during those earlier difficult times so that I could act preventatively in the future. My goal in this module is to guide you through a series of exercises intended to help you identify and address elusive barriers that are standing in the way of relationship repair and potentially also better understand your own current circumstances.

Please note that I am not a counsellor, or a therapist and I am not claiming that this process can replace either of those resources, rather, I am sharing a process that benefitted me and which has benefitted others and which I hope may benefit you. As we begin, I will also clarify that although this process was designed to center around writing, for some, writing is not an accessible tool. For this reason, I will be suggesting other possible options throughout the module.

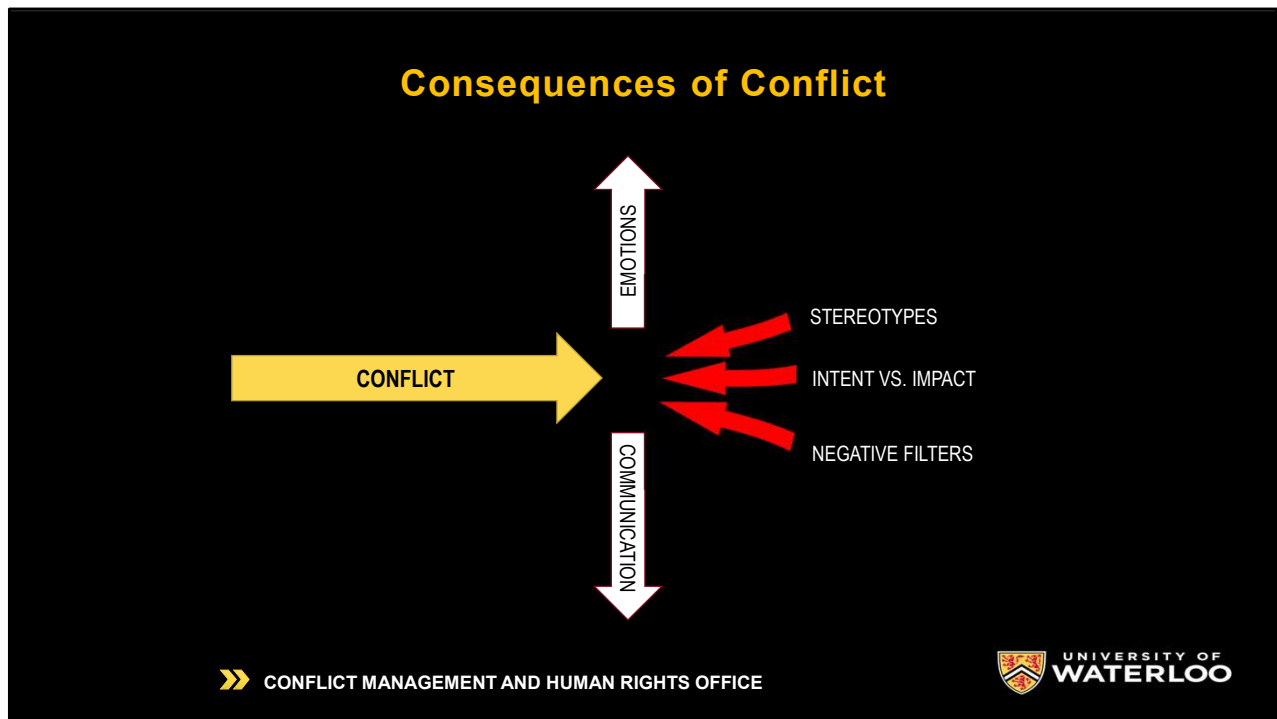


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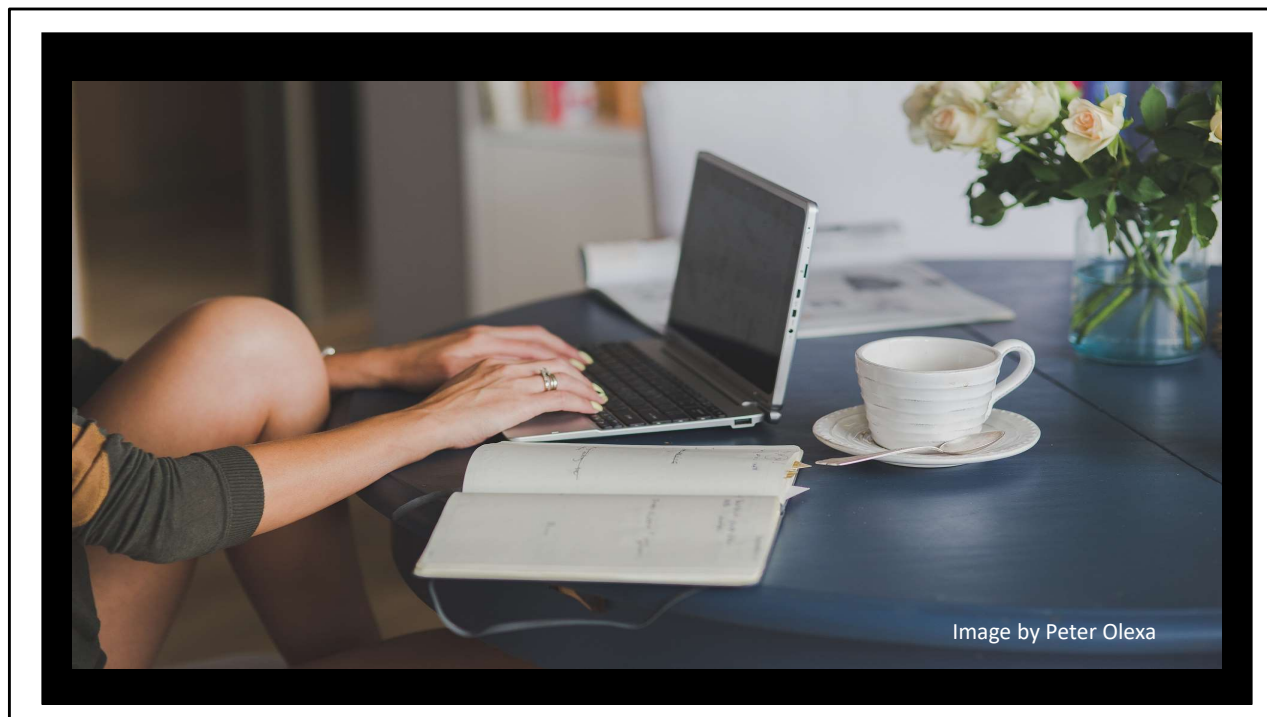


Image by Peter Olexa from Pixabay

This module is intended to be a self-directed, self-paced unit that you can work through as you have time and as you are ready. Completion of this module is not necessary to continue on in the Maintaining Effective Relations microlearning series. You can still benefit greatly from the subsequent modules even if you set this unit aside to complete later or decide that it is not right for you at this time. Alternatively, you may choose to begin this module and proceed with the microlearning sessions as well, completing both concurrently. Either way, this module is here for you to complete if and when you feel you have the capacity and motivation.

Before I go on to describe what that will look like, I want to provide you with a better understanding of the model upon which the unit is based.

## Transformation Through Writing Model



Adapted from Lengelle & Meijers (2009) and Lengelle (2018c)

The Transformation Through Writing model begins by describing how disruptive events can impact us. They refer to such an event as a “boundary experience”, an uncomfortable experience that is often accompanied by strong emotions and which may require us to re-examine our understanding of ourselves and our relationships with others. These may be working or personal relationships.

A “boundary experience” may leave us feeling confused and disorientated. It is not uncommon to also experience fear, sadness, anger or other strong emotions. We may begin to question our own abilities and lose confidence in ourselves. Tension in the graduate student/supervisor relationship could certainly be a boundary experience.

## Transformation Through Writing Model



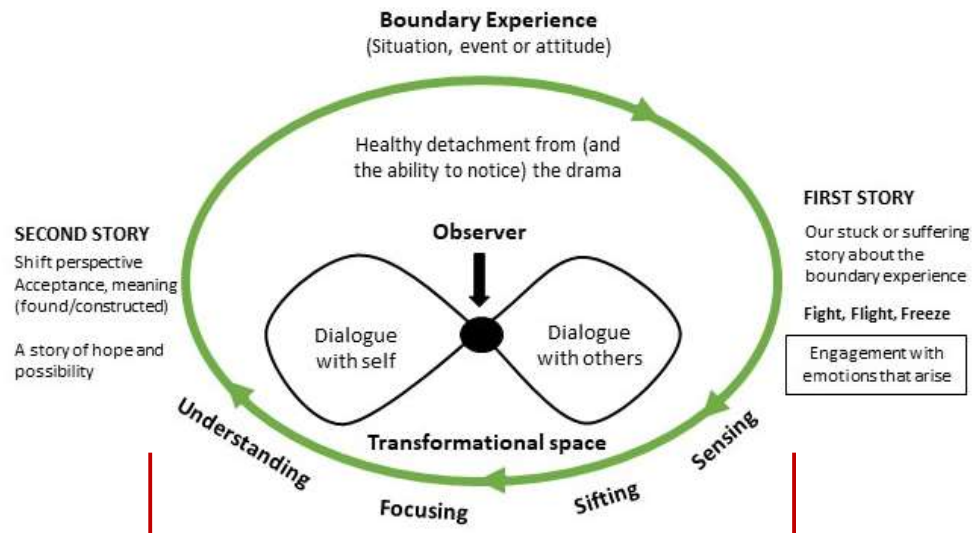
Adapted from Lengelle & Meijers (2009) and Lengelle (2018c)

Our gut instinct in encountering a boundary experience is often to fight, take flight, or freeze

Lengelle and Meijers (2009) refer to the work of a psychologist, Kellogg (1984), who describes how our minds respond to distressing events like a boundary experience. Kellogg indicates that while in this state of high emotions where we often only have fragments of the relevant information, our mind tries to make sense of the situation by creating a narrative. This "first story" is our brain's attempt to make sense of a disruptive experience, but it is often very limiting and unhealthy. This story is often full of assumptions about others motive and intentions. It is not uncommon to repeat this story over and over, leading to more negative emotions and the development of negative filters. We can easily become "stuck" here in a very destructive cycle of negative thinking and emotions.



## Transformation Through Writing Model



Adapted from Lengelle & Meijers (2009) and Lengelle (2018c)

Lengelle and Meijers (2009) propose a 4-step process that may enable you to transition away from this unhealthy “first story” and work your way into discovering a healthier and more empowering “second story”. The tool that they use to take you through these steps is writing. The exercises that make up this module will be designed to guide you through these four steps: sensing, sifting, focusing and understanding. Since writing is not an accessible tool for everyone, other options will be suggested as we go such as audio and video blogging.

## Transformation Through Writing Model



Adapted from Lengelle & Meijers (2009) and Lengelle (2018)

They describe how the process of writing, reading your writing and revising your writing can help you step away from the situation and see the circumstances and your response to the circumstance from more of a distance. This process of writing, reading, and revising can become somewhat like an internal dialogue and through this process, you may be better able to identify the assumptions you are making and the negative filters that are at work. You may also choose to share your writing with others. This is not required but can also potentially help you identify assumptions, negative filters and other barriers that are keeping you “stuck” in an unhealthy place.

## Transformation Through Writing Model



Adapted from Lengelle & Meijers (2009) and Lengelle (2018)

In my own situation, as I wrote and then later read my own writing, I began to identify untruths I was telling myself about myself and about others. As I revised my writing, I was able to address these untruths and as I did so, I was able to move away from my unhealthy first story to a healthier second story. This then put me in a much better place to move forward with relationship repair.

## **An invitation ...**

I mentioned that this module is based on courses that I took as part of my own graduate studies. I may not surprise you then to learn that I am carrying out some research of my own in this area. Please consider as you complete the module whether you would be comfortable sharing your feedback with me either through an online survey or through a one-on one interview or both. This is completely optional and any information that you share would be confidential.

## References

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As promised, here is the list of references. These are also listed on the downloadable handout associated with this module. In the handout, you will also find the instructions for accessing the LEARN site where the writing exercises are hosted.