TAKING RECOGNITION SERIOUSLY: SOCIAL ONTOLOGY OF TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICE

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1. Introduction

The relationship between **conflict** and **"recognition"** constitutes one of the central themes of Transformative approaches to mediation and other interventions (Bush & Folger, 2005). While the significance of recognition as an element of the dynamic triad **empowerment** – **recognition** – **transformation** is often highlighted in the literature, the conceptual and philosophical foundation of "recognition" frequently remains overlooked (cf. Ikäheimo & Laitinen, 2007). This chapter seeks to address this gap and offer a systematic account of the concept of recognition, rooted in its theoretical background in the works of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Axel Honneth, Heiki Ikäheimo, or Arto Laitinen – and framed within the practical context of Transformative approach (Bush & Folger, 1994, 2005).

The first part of the chapter focuses on the methodological and theoretical background. I will be particularly emphasizing the importance of enriching transformative practice theory with a philosophically grounded concept of recognition. In this context, I introduce the central question:

How and why does a nuanced philosophical concept of recognition apply in conflict situations, and how can understanding it enhance Transformative practice?

I will build on this aim by reviewing existing **theories of recognition** developed within the framework of social philosophy (Honneth, 1996; Ikäheimo, 2022d; Laitinen, 2002, 2011). Consequently, the second part of the chapter will systematically introduce various levels and forms of recognition (descriptive, institutional, and intersubjective) and illustrate how they intersect with key concepts of the transformative approach (Bush & Folger, 2005).

In the third part, I will conduct a detailed analysis of texts in the field of the transformative approach and compare them with philosophical sources. This analytical and comparative approach will help uncover how and why Transformative theory implicitly engages with the concept of recognition and how a clear understanding of recognition might enhance it both methodologically and practically.

The fourth part of the chapter applies the findings to specific cases in **mediation** or **facilitation**, illustrating how an understanding of the different dimensions of recognition can foster mutual respect in practice and contribute to genuine change in **communication** between conflicting parties (Bush & Pope, 2002; Laitinen, 2002). In conclusion, this section demonstrates that the dialectic of empowerment and recognition (Bush & Folger, 2005) gains new depth through philosophical anchoring, explaining why the Transformative approach focuses on restoring human **dignity** and **autonomy**, setting it apart from other conflict resolution models.

This chapter provides a comprehensive and systematic perspective on understanding, organizing, and methodologically applying the concept of recognition in Transformative practice. I believe this theoretical-practical connection clarifies why recognition is not just a gesture of goodwill, but a crucial element in fostering profound, ethically grounded shifts in mediation and other forms of conflict resolution.

2. Beyond Respect: Exploring the Complex Dimensions of Recognition in Transformative Practice

In the Transformative conception of conflict resolution developed by Bush and Folger (1994, 2005), the concept of recognition plays an important role. At first glance, it may seem that to "recognize the other" is merely to show courtesy or nod to their arguments. However, a deeper examination of philosophical discussions (Habermas, 1993; Hegel et al., 1979; Honneth, 1996, 2020; Ikäheimo & Laitinen, 2007) reveals that recognition is a far more complex phenomenon, encompassing the fundamental human need to be acknowledged as a worthy being, as well as the social structures and institutions that shape our relationships with one another.

In the Transformative theory of Bush & Folger (2005), **'recognition'** is a fundamental pillar alongside **'empowerment'**. In simple terms, the Transformative approach to conflict resolution explores how participants gradually perceive themselves not only as individuals but also through the perspectives of others, which leads to **shifts** in their attitudes. The idea that such a "rebuilding" of interactions is difficult has been systematically examined by theorists acknowledged beyond the mediation field, particularly Heikki Ikäheimo (2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d) and Arto Laitinen (2002, 2010, 2011).

These authors emphasize that 'recognition' encompasses multiple forms, dimensions, and levels:

- **Psychological** (internal self-esteem and willingness to perceive the other as a valuable being),
- **Intersubjective** (how others treat our status and rights in particular),
- **Institutional** (whether society formally grants me dignity and rights, such as legal personhood or civil rights).

This deepens the awareness that recognition is not a one-off act (*"Yes, I respect you"*) but rather a complex web of attitudes, interactions, and rules where the individual and the "other" intersect to shape a shared reality (Ikäheimo, 2010, 2022d; Laitinen, 2002). In times of dispute or conflict, this network is often disrupted; hence, one of the goals of Transformative practice is to restore the quality of the interaction so that both parties can experience genuine (and not merely formal) recognition (Bush & Folger, 2005).



Figure 1: Dimensions of Recognition in Conflict Resolution

This section aims to highlight the **philosophical development** of the concept of recognition within the framework of Bush and Folger's theory. I will begin by introducing selected ideas of recognition articulated by Axel Honneth, Heiki Ikäheimo, and Arto Laitinen. Simultaneously, I will emphasize how they distinguish among different levels, functions, and degrees of reciprocity in recognition. Particularly, I will shed light on why even a Transformative mediator, facilitator, or conflict coach should acknowledge that the **"recognition of the other"** is far from trivial and cannot be overlooked. This understanding will deepen insights into transformative theory, which seeks to restore the quality of interpersonal interaction not only

by concentrating on agreement but, more crucially, through empowerment and recognition (Bush & Folger, 2005; Laitinen, 2011).

Recognition is never a one-way or purely declarative gesture. On the contrary, its core lies in **reciprocal attitudes** that grasp both the **psychological**, **social**, and **institutional** levels of human life (Ikäheimo, 2022d; Laitinen, 2002). From this perspective, it becomes clear that even in contentious or conflictual situations, there is more at stake than simply resolving a practical problem. Thus, transformative practice recognizes the profound potential when the parties "recognize" each other as persons, and this entails not only basic respect but often a new vision of what the other can contribute or truly needs (Bush & Folger, 2005). This is why it is essential to introduce the reader to the concept of recognition in detail and to demonstrate that behind the apparent "simplicity" (recognize/not recognize) lies a complex structure. In the following sections, I will discuss this structure and explain how the authors of the Transformative approach engage with it.

3. The Concept of Recognition in Transformative Theory

Recognition in Transformative theory, as presented by Bush & Folger, Folger & Bush, Della Noce, Bush & Pope, and others, is based on the assumption that conflict serves not only to find agreement but also to fundamentally transform the quality of the interaction between the parties (Bush & Folger, 1994, 2005; Bush & Pope, 2002; Della Noce, 1999; Folger & Bush, 1994). In this view, recognition is the moment when one party ceases to see the other merely as an object of strategic action and begins to reflect on its perspective and understand its situation. Simultaneously, this process is supported by the idea that people have a natural ability to shift from a protective stance to a more **open**, **empathic interaction** once they feel more confident in their own **goals** and **identity** (Della Noce, 1999). Therefore, the transformative approach contrasts with the more traditional problem-solving method. In the latter, empathy is often reduced to a tool for advancing one's own interests, while in a relational framework, it gains genuine moral value. In Transformative theory, recognition is viewed as a voluntary step that occurs when one party in a conflict realizes that accepting the other party's perspective is not merely a transactional advantage but can lead to a profound transformation of negative emotions into **mutual respect** (Bush & Folger, 1994). Thus, alongside empowerment, recognition is one of the pillars that facilitate human growth and transformation in interactions. Once a person can more accurately define their own needs, they can also develop cognitive empathy and focus on the other, not only to negotiate better but to truly understand the reasons and goals that motivate the other person's actions (Della Noce, 1999; Bush & Pope, 2002). This shift in understanding conflict explains why transformation can extend beyond merely addressing tangible issues. The process

of recognition enables an expanded perspective that incorporates human elements previously given minimal weight in the instrumental model. Therefore, Della Noce (1999) shows that **empathy**, conceived as authentic concern for the other, fosters a long-term transformation of communication patterns rather than just a short-term calming of heated conflicts. If parties reach this level, significant shifts in the quality of their interaction can take place, redistributing not only tangible goods but also strengthening their mutual trust.

Bush and Folger (1994) emphasized early on that the potential for conflict exists not only in achieving compromise but also in the capacity of parties to uncover deeper opportunities for cooperation after mediation concludes. Alongside empowerment, recognition serves as a key principle supporting this objective. This creates a framework in which conflict is viewed not merely as a source of harm but also as a significant opportunity for **human development** (Della Noce, 2003). Practices such as mediation, dialogue, and coaching, rooted in these principles, can effectively counter criticisms that depict these practices as inevitably coercive or manipulative (Hedeen, 2005; Herr, 2005; Semple, 2012).

In a Transformative conception, each party is viewed as an entity capable of accepting or rejecting the other party's empathetic recognition without compromising their autonomy. If she chooses to embrace the other party's perspective, it is because she feels both strong and open enough to engage in dialogue. This voluntariness embodies an ethical dimension of recognition, returning the conversation to its potentially liberating function.

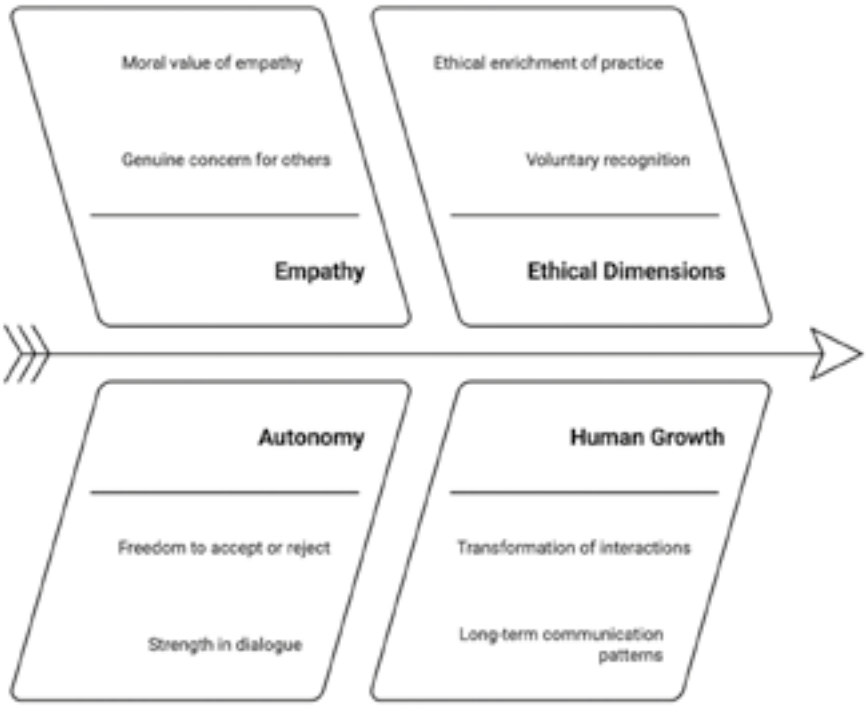


Figure 2: Understanding Recognition in Transformative Theory

3.1 A Connection Between Empowerment and Recognition

I have already suggested that the Transformative approach is not merely about resolving a specific dispute but about 'transforming' the quality of the interaction between the parties (Bush & Folger, 1994). Even in the earliest foundational texts on the Transformative understanding of conflict and conflict interventions, one can find the idea that there is a connection between the two dynamic phenomena at the core of this entire conception: empowerment and recognition.

While empowerment refers to enhancing the ability of parties in a conflict to articulate and promote their goals or wishes, recognition signifies a shift towards **perceiving** and **respecting** the other party. Bush and Folger (1994) point out that in the traditional approach to mediation, known as "problem-solving," the focus is often on helping the parties clarify their interests. In contrast, the Transformative model places the consideration of the 'other' at the center, representing an explicit

move toward empathic or, at the very least, open insight into the goals and perspectives of the opposing party.

The concept of Transformative practice suggests that empowerment and recognition are interrelated and can mutually reinforce each other (Bush & Pope, 2002). According to Della Noce (1999), one must first have a sufficient sense of confidence and clarity regarding one's own goals and limitations to be receptive to the other party's perspective. This **"self-confidence"** lies at the core of empowerment; only with it can authentic recognition take place.

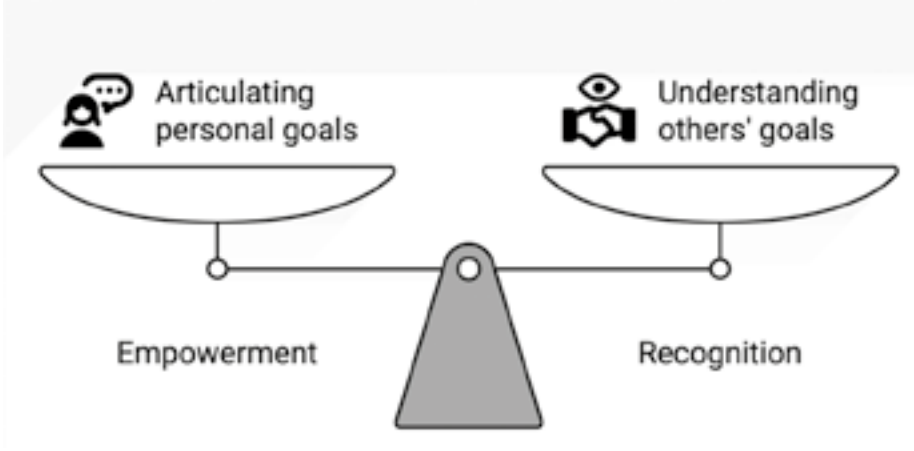


Figure 3: Balancing Empowerment and Recognition in Conflict Transformation

If a party feels insecure, it tends to act defensively. However, if a party becomes stronger – that is, empowered – there is an opportunity to shift the focus to the other party. In this regard, Bush and Folger (1994) discuss how a 'mature' or transformed perception of conflict always incorporates both elements. One not only knows what he or she wants but also considers the other's perspective without viewing it as a threat.

Della Noce (1999) clarifies that empowerment and recognition are not linear processes that occur in the specific order of "first empowerment, then recognition." Although it is often argued that empowerment is a prerequisite for recognition, even minor signs of recognition can contribute to empowering a party, as they perceive the other as responding in a supportive manner. This mutual empowerment (Bush & Pope, 2002) can be described as a **'virtuous circle'**: a small gesture of recognition can lead to greater self-confidence, which in turn fosters a willingness to empathize and engage in further forms of recognition.

The relationship between empowerment and recognition forms a fundamental axis of conflict transformation. Once participants develop both elements, a deeper transformation occurs not only in "what is being resolved" but also in "how it is being resolved." This confidence in one's ability to make decisions and articulate

needs (empowerment), coupled with genuine regard for others (recognition), enables parties to transcend the purely transactional level of conflict (Della Noce, 2003). While empowerment ensures that parties do not resign themselves and their interests, recognition allows them to escape isolated self-absorption. Together, this creates a condition in which conflict becomes an opportunity not only for seeking concrete agreement but also for fostering human relations and social consciousness.

4. The Concept of Recognition

Although Transformative theory highlights two key dynamics – empowerment and recognition – much of the literature has concentrated on empowerment, while recognition has garnered less attention. This emphasis on empowerment can be attributed to its strong association with **self-determination**, a core principle of mediation (Bush, 2025; Coben, 2004; Welsh, 2017). Therefore, I will now shift my focus to the second pillar: **recognition**.

Because the English word "recognition" can be understood in various ways, it is important to clarify its main forms. In my examination of this concept, I found that authors such as Hegel, Rovane, Gilbert, Searle, Habermas, Scanlon, and Honneth each developed distinct perspectives on recognition (Gilbert, 2007; Habermas, 1993; Hegel et al., 1979; Honneth, 1996; Rovane, 2015; Scanlon, 2000; Searle, 2010).

4.1 Taxonomy of the Concept of Recognition

In the previous section, I outlined why engaging with the concept of recognition in Transformative conflict resolution theory can be enriched by a broader philosophical view (Bush & Folger, 2005). I will now present a simple taxonomy that illustrates the different levels and meanings of "recognition." Some of these relate directly to how people treat each other during face-to-face interactions. This **"intersubjective"** level is at the heart of the Transformative approach. Although other meanings exist – such as recognition in the sense of "identifying someone or something" – they are less relevant to interpersonal dynamics encounters.

4.2 Layers of Recognition: From "Recognizing" to "Forming a Personal Relation"

Scholars frequently discuss various layers or types of recognition (Ikäheimo, 2010, 2022d; Laitinen, 2002, 2010, 2011). Below are six categories that clarify how

recognition supports Transformative conflict theory and influences the way individuals in conflict relate to one another.

4.2.1 Descriptive (Identifying) Recognition

This first level involves recognizing or identifying someone or something, such as realizing, *"I recognize that the person across the street is my neighbor."* Although this basic **awareness** is necessary for any interaction, it has a limited impact on the emotional or ethical quality of the interaction (Laitinen, 2010). The Transformative approach is less concerned with whether the parties know each other's identities and more focused on how they perceive each other's dignity and perspective (Bush & Folger, 2005).

4.2.2 Recognition of Normative Content (Rules, Values, Reasons)

This level involves accepting a principle or rule as valid. For example, *"I recognize that this legal norm is binding"* or *"I recognize that helping others is morally good."* In the Transformative approach, the focus is not on whether parties adhere to legal frameworks. Such concerns are more typical of an evaluative model of mediation (Brzobohatý, 2024; Folger, 2020). Instead, Transformative mediation encourages parties to be open to values, such as **solidarity**, that they have not previously considered. Even then, the primary focus remains on how people connect with each other rather than on whether they follow the rules (Ikäheimo, 2022d).

4.2.3 Institutional Recognition

This third level refers to accepting a specific status or role within an **institutional structure** – for instance, *"I recognize that you are my superior according to our company's hierarchy."* (Searle's "status function") (Laitinen, 2011). Although status positions can influence conflicts, Transformative practitioners generally aim to assist participants in changing their interactions, rather than merely reinforcing existing power dynamics (Bush & Folger, 2005; Ikäheimo, 2010).

4.2.4 Recognition as an Intersubjective Attitude Toward the Person

This level is central to the Transformative model. It involves viewing the other as a whole person with dignity, needs, and the right to influence the quality of the interaction. In other words, *"I not only recognize you as a person, but I also respect your right to speak, and I care about what you express and feel."* (Honneth, 1996; Ikäheimo, 2010). When individuals in conflict adopt this attitude, they begin to listen to one another and acknowledge each other's perspectives (Bush & Folger, 2005). This mutual recognition transforms the conflict by fostering **empathy** and **genuine connection**.

4.2.5 Multidimensional Forms of Relational (Intersubjective) Recognition

Building on the fourth level, this includes additional aspects such as love and care (an emotional dimension), respect and esteem (upholding each other's rights and dignity), and valuing contributions (appreciating each other's role in resolving conflicts or strengthening the community) (Honneth, 1995; Ikäheimo, 2022d). Transformative theory emphasizes that true recognition is not merely formal (*"I let you speak"*) but also involves genuine concern for the other's well-being and appreciation for their contributions (Bush & Folger, 2005; Laitinen 2011).

4.2.6 Reciprocal (Dialogical) Recognition vs. Unilateral Recognition

Here, the question is whether one person recognizes the other but does not receive the same in return (*"I respect you, but you ignore me"*), or whether both people recognize each other in a mutual, reflective manner (Laitinen, 2002). In Transformative practice, an ultimate shift occurs when both parties accept each other's importance and voice. (Bush & Folger, 2005) While unilateral recognition can initiate a positive change in attitude, mutual recognition is often necessary for lasting change in the quality of interaction.

Table 1: Layers of Recognition

Level	Recognition Type	Description	Implications for Transformative Conflict Resolution
I	Descriptive (Identifying) Recognition	Basic awareness of someone or something (e.g., recognizing a neighbor). It involves identifying an individual without significant emotional or ethical impact.	Serves as a necessary starting point; however, it does not deeply affect the quality of interactions in conflict situations.
II	Recognition of Normative Content (Rules, Values, Reasons)	Acceptance of a principle or rule as valid (e.g., a legal norm or a moral value).	Encourages openness to values beyond established rules, shifting focus from mere compliance to connecting on a relational level.
III	Institutional Recognition	Acceptance of a specific status or role within an institutional framework (e.g., recognizing someone as a superior).	Acknowledges power dynamics and roles; transformative practice aims to change interaction patterns rather than simply reinforcing existing hierarchies.

Level	Recognition Type	Description	Implications for Transformative Conflict Resolution
IV	Intersubjective Attitude Toward the Person	Viewing the other as a whole person with inherent dignity, needs, and the right to contribute. This includes listening, empathy, and a genuine acknowledgment of the other's perspective.	Central to Transformative practice; this attitude fosters empathy and genuine connection, transforming conflicts by recognizing mutual human value.
V	Multidimensional Relational (Intersubjective) Recognition	Builds on Level IV by integrating aspects such as love, care, respect, esteem, and appreciation for the other's contributions.	Moves beyond formal recognition to embody genuine concern for the other's well-being, essential for deep and lasting relational transformation.
VI	Reciprocal (Dialogical) Recognition vs. Unilateral Recognition	Examines whether recognition is mutual (both parties recognize each other) or one-sided (only one party acknowledges the other).	Mutual recognition is key for lasting change, as it ensures balanced, reflective interactions, while unilateral recognition may trigger initial change but is less stable.

These six levels indicate that intersubjective attitudes and actions, particularly levels 4 to 6, are essential for Transformative conflict resolution. This is where the most significant change occurs, because participants:

- Recognize one another as individuals deserving of dignity and the right to make independent choices (respect, esteem).
- Value each other's perspectives and well-being.
- Acknowledge that everyone has something to contribute to the shared experience.

Although formal status (level 3) can be important in workplace or family conflicts, Transformative practitioners understand that individuals can move beyond simply insisting on their formal positions. (Ikäheimo, 2010; Laitinen, 2011) Likewise, recognizing shared moral or legal principles (level 2) can occur when parties redefine or clarify the values they wish to uphold, such as open communication. However, according to Bush and Folger, the essence of transformation lies in the actual **interactions between specific individuals**, where shifts in self-awareness and mutual perception can change the entire atmosphere of the conflict. (Bush & Folger 2005)

Recognition is not merely a single act but rather a process that evolves from *"I know who you are"* to a deeper emotional or ethical perspective – *"I care about you and value your contribution."* A Transformative approach emphasizes each person's freedom to step out from behind their barriers, to genuinely "see" and hear one another, and to work toward a higher level of mutual recognition (Bush & Folger, 2005).

4.3 The Origin of the Concept of Recognition

Studying sources on Transformative theory and practice reveals that understanding the origins of the concept of recognition in conflict resolution is a challenging task. This paradox is notable, as it has been one of the most scrutinized phenomena in **social philosophy** in recent decades (cf. Busch & Zurn, 2009; Cooke, 1997; Fraser, 2000; Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Habermas, 1993; Hobson, 2003; Honneth, 1996, 2020; Pippin, 1989; Smith & Deranty, 2012; Taylor, 1979, 1995; Thompson, 2006; Williams, 1997). Furthermore, the roots of reflection on recognition can be traced back to European philosophical discourse as early as the 18th century within the French, English, and German philosophical landscape.

In contemporary discourse, Transformative mediation theory often distinguishes itself from other conceptualizations of conflict, particularly "problem-oriented" or "directive" models (Bush & Folger, 1994, 2005; Brzobohatý, 2024; Folger, 2020). One of its fundamental assumptions is that individuals in conflict do not merely seek the resolution of a superficial dispute but pursue a deeper **moral transformation** of their interactions, characterized as a renewal or a new quality of mutual recognition. However, in the Anglo-Saxon (Hume, Smith) and French (Rousseau, Sartre) traditions, the concept of recognition typically emerges within the context of psychological or social processes that have a somewhat different focus compared to the moral theory of conflict espoused by the Transformative approach. Therefore, I now draw upon a recent analysis by Axel Honneth (2020) and his emphasis on the Kantian-Hegelian lineage (Kant – Fichte – Hegel) to elucidate why this 'German' philosophical path of recognition provides a foundation better suited to the moral theory of conflict integral to Transformative practice.

5. Moral Conflict Theory and the Need for Mutual Recognition

The Transformative approach perceives conflict primarily as a crisis in interpersonal interaction; that is, a condition in which the moral and communicative bond between the parties is broken (Bush & Folger, 1994, 2005). The idea is that in conflict, individuals lose both their sense of autonomy (empowerment) and their ability to view the other from a more human, holistic perspective (recognition). Transformative theory emphasizes that restoring these two components – **autonomous self-determination** and **openness to the other** – Is a key goal of this approach (Bush & Pope, 2002). Recognition thus becomes fundamentally a moral category: it enables the parties not only to see each other as "equal human beings" but also to affirm that each possesses a legitimate right to make decisions regarding their own needs and interests.

A moral theory of conflict assumes that conflict is not merely psychological or strategic (i.e., not just about advancing goals) but fundamentally undermines interpersonal dignity and equality. The influence of the German philosophical tradition (Kant, Fichte, Hegel), which systematically interprets recognition as essential for developing autonomous yet mutually respectful actions, is quite evident here (Honneth, 2020).

Honneth (2020) points out that in French philosophy (e.g., Rousseau), recognition is often viewed negatively as a prerequisite for social acceptance that can lead to alienation from oneself. Rousseau's concept of *amour propre* illustrates the desire "to be valued by others," while highlighting the pathological consequences: the individual becomes estranged from his or her own authenticity under the pressure of the desire for recognition (Honneth, 2020). Similarly, in Sartre and Althusser, recognition appears more as an imposition of a role or status that can distort a person (Althusser et al., 2014; Sartre, 2006 in Honneth, 2020). While this perspective is valuable for exploring the dangers of manipulation and distortion in interactions, it cannot be utilized to develop a positive moral theory of conflict. Rather, the transformative approach focuses on restoring or deepening mutual human dignity, rather than merely exposing its illusiveness.

The British empirical or moral psychological tradition (Hume, Smith), in contrast, regards recognition primarily as a form of social control and sympathy; individuals conform to social standards to gain praise or avoid scorn (Hume & Mossner, 1985; Smith & Sen, 2009). These theories illustrate how norms or rules are internalized within a community (Smith's metaphor of the "neutral observer"). However, in contexts where I seek to emphasize mutual equality and moral empowerment, this perspective is lacking. The British view focuses on the pursuit of praise rather than the concept of collective and equal norm-making.

In the German (Kantian-Hegelian) tradition, I begin with the assumption that human beings are free and autonomous in the sense that they can act according to moral law or rational principles (Kant, 2015). However, the development of this autonomy cannot occur in isolation. In his moral philosophy, Immanuel Kant established **respect** (Achtung) for others as a prerequisite for applying one's own moral law (Kant, 2015; Honneth, 2020). Thus, he is the first to demonstrate the moral obligation of recognition (respect for others as beings capable of reason), which aligns more closely with the needs of Transformative theory (which emphasizes the restoration of moral interactions and shared responsibility) than with French or British lines of thought.

Transformative theory seeks for parties in conflict to recognize each other as free and equal actors, capable of (1) articulating their own goals and (2) listening to and valuing the needs of the other party (Bush & Folger, 1994, 2005). This perspective redefines **conflict** as a **collaborative moral effort** to repair and restructure the interactions (Della Noce, 1999). As Honneth (2020) argues, a similar emphasis in modern conflict theory aligns with the notion that recognition is not merely an emotional appeal for appreciation (as in French *amour propre*) nor simply a tool

for socialization (English *sympathy*) but rather the foundation of a morally understood encounter. From the perspective of Transformative theory, recognition must be viewed as a moral interaction that shapes our mutual freedom and is rooted in the principle of equal respect. As I will demonstrate below, this is where the contributions of Fichte and Hegel, building upon Kant, become relevant (Honneth, 2020). Recognition, in this context, is also not just a psychological reward but a prerequisite for the parties in conflict to acknowledge one another as creators of shared rules and values. Without this idea – that all parties recognize each other as equal and morally free – a Transformative approach could not fully develop its moral theory of conflict and effectively work towards restoring mutual dignity.

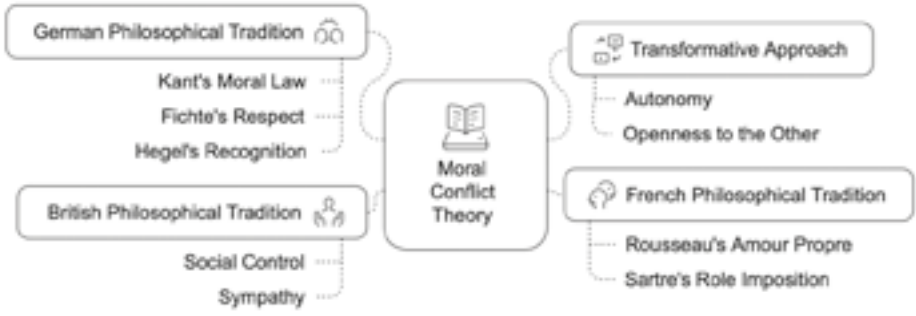


Figure 4: Moral Conflict Theories

6. Recognition in Fichte

I find the German philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte's idea particularly relevant here. He argues that recognition – being called to understand ourselves as free and rational beings – is essential for actually becoming free and rational (Ikäheimo, 2022b). According to Fichte, freedom (and therefore autonomy) cannot be gained simply by reflecting on ourselves. It requires **interaction** with another free being who "summons" me (Aufforderung) and recognizes my capacity to act (Fichte in Ikäheimo, 2022b).

In the context of Transformative theory, this insight indicates that individuals in conflict do not develop their self-concept in isolation; rather, it is shaped by their interactions. When one party experiences indifference, insults, or repeated attacks on their right to speak, they may ultimately feel "defeated" or "humiliated" and respond defensively or aggressively (Honneth, 2020). A Transformative practitioner who sees the importance of recognition in Fichte's sense understands the need to create an environment where each person is seen and valued as a complete individual, rather than merely a "target" for the other side (Bush & Folger, 1994; Bush & Pope 2002).

Fichte's notion of **"summoning"** (Aufforderung) as a normative communicative act establishes a clear connection to the Transformative approach (Ikäheimo, 2022b). He explains that individuals achieve freedom and autonomy, specifically through interactions with someone who "challenges" them to act freely (Ikäheimo, 2022b). In mediation, for instance, this can be observed in several situations ways:

1. **Establishing conditions for mutual "summoning."** The Transformative mediator enables a setting where both parties recognize that they are not merely passive recipients of information or solutions. Instead, each side is "invited" to determine how to consider the other's viewpoint and respond to their needs and perspectives (Fichte in Ikäheimo, 2022b).
2. **Encouraging free decision-making.** Following Fichte's idea, summoning is not about forcing action; it is about providing the opportunity for free agency (Ikäheimo, 2022b). The mediator helps each party understand that they can choose to act or refrain from acting (Bush & Folger, 1994, 2005). Each individual begins to perceive themselves as genuinely capable of making choices.
3. **Fostering recognition and empowerment.** Once parties feel acknowledged as "free and capable beings" within the conversation, the cycle of weakness and self-absorption can start to transition into a cycle of "empowerment" and "recognition" (Bush & Pope, 2002; Honneth, 2020).

Fichte's concept of summoning someone as a free actor does not involve pressuring that person into a specific response. Instead, it offers them an opportunity to act (Ikäheimo, 2022b). This perspective aligns with the Transformative approach, which respects each party's autonomy at all times (Bush, 2010; Bush & Folger, 1994, 2005, 2015; Simon & West, 2022). The mediator's role is to facilitate clearer and more respectful communication between the parties, enabling them to recognize their shared responsibility for the outcome of their negotiation rather than causing harm to one another.

6.1 An Illustrative Examples of Fichte's Recognition in Conflict

6.1.1 Recognition in the Family Context

Consider, for instance, a family dispute between a teenage child and a parent. The conflict may begin with the parent feeling powerless: the child does not follow the rules, lies, and avoids responsibility. The child is frustrated because he or she feels that the parent is not listening properly and is being too authoritative. From Fichte's perspective, both parties fail to recognize one another. The parent does not recognize the child's potential for freedom (*"You are not yet able to make decisions for yourself"*), while the child does not recognize the legitimacy of the parent's authority (*"You only order me around, but you don't understand me"*).

A Transformative mediator, inspired by the concept of "summoning", seeks to restore the ability of both parties to perceive each other as acting freely (Fichte in Ikäheimo, 2022b; Bush & Pope, 2002). Through reflection and summarization, they encourage both parent and child to express themselves and to recognize that their perspectives are valid. In this manner, there is a summoning to responsibility: the parent begins to recognize that the child has the capacity to reflect on consequences, and the child, in turn, discovers that the parent is not merely a "directive figure" but also a receptive partner (cf. Honneth, 2020).

6.1.2 Recognition in a Corporate/Business Context

A similar principle can be applied in the corporate context. An employee who proposes an innovation feels that management does not take him seriously, which leads to feelings of being unrecognized (cf. Fichte's emphasis on "understanding oneself as a free being" only through recognition by others: Ikäheimo, 2022b). Conversely, the supervisor may believe that the employee does not recognize broader constraints or financial limits.

The Transformative mediator, aware of the Fichtean idea that the more freedom (even potential) the other is granted to act, the more he or she perceives themselves as a co-author of a possible solution, facilitates the discussion so that both supervisor and employee can hear each other as equals (Ikäheimo, 2022b; Bush & Folger, 1994). In this scenario, both the manager and the employee recognize that they have the agency to decide how to design a new project. This boosts motivation to pursue a realistic agreement, for instance.

6.1.3 Recognition in a Community Dispute

In a community where residents argue over shared spaces (e.g., noise, garden maintenance), one group may impose its views on the other, thereby denying it the "authorship" right to co-determine norms (Fichte in Ikäheimo, 2022b). Consequently, the other group feels like an object rather than an equal contributor.

Here, the Transformative facilitator employs techniques that empower the parties to take an active voice (Cleven & Saul, 2024). Fichte's perspective posits that one actualizes freedom and rational action only when one is summoned and simultaneously recognizes others as rational. This understanding emphasizes the importance of continuously highlighting the space for all parties in dialogue to gradually assume the role of "co-creators of the rules" (Ikäheimo, 2022b). Once the "summoned" group feels that its contributions are valued, it gains confidence and becomes willing to change how it engages with others, potentially leading to an agreement.

6.2 Fichte's Summoning to Freedom as a Foundation for Recognition in Transformative Practice

Fichte's main idea is that recognition (Anerkennung) makes a person "real" by summoning (Aufforderung) them to act as a free and rational being. (Ikäheimo, 2022b) In Transformative practice, this perspective is reflected in the emphasis on recognition and empowerment. (Bush & Folger, 1994; Honneth, 2020) A practitioner who understands this concept aims to help participants in conflict see each other as co-creators of a shared solution, rather than as passive objects. This happens when they renew:

- **Empowerment:** Each party rediscovers their ability to see options and make decisions.
- **Recognition:** Each party realizes the other also has freedom and reasons worthy of respect.

When both elements are present, the interaction can shift from defensiveness and blame to genuine attempts at understanding and acknowledging the other's voice. (Della Noce, 1999; Bush & Pope 2002)

6.3 Fichte's Interpretation of Recognition and Why It Matters

Fichte identifies two levels at which recognition can "oscillate." (Ikäheimo, 2022b)

Theoretical vs. Practical:

Merely knowing that another is a rational being differs from genuinely engaging in a manner that respects their reasoning and freedom. (Ikäheimo, 2022b)

Attitude vs. Treatment:

Believing in another's equality on an internal level is not the same as acting in ways that genuinely grant them equality. (Ikäheimo, 2022b)

For a Transformative practitioner, this has two main implications:

i. It is not enough to say, "Yes, I consider him a fellow human being with equal rights." This must also reflect in how I communicate – whether I listen, avoid ridicule, and respect his dignity.
ii. Even ceasing certain actions (for instance, not correcting or interrupting the other) can be a form of recognition if it stems from genuine respect. (Ikäheimo, 2022b)

6.4 Recognition as Co-Authorship

In a Transformative practice setting, we often observe genuine recognition when parties adopt what can be called an "authorial approach" to crafting an agreement. They communicate – step by step – that they are willing to negotiate shared norms of interaction together. This fosters a relationship of "co-authorship," where both sides acknowledge that the terms of their coexistence arise from mutual co-creative effort rather than unilateral imposition. (Ikäheimo, 2022b)

Fichte's argument that human freedom and rationality become real only through another person's recognition offers valuable guidance for transformative work (Bush & Folger, 1994, 2005; Honneth, 2020; Ikäheimo, 2022b). In practice, this means the practitioner helps conflict parties rediscover and affirm their own **sense of agency** in each other. It goes beyond merely stating, *"You have something to say, too."* Instead, it requires genuine recognition – listening and responding in ways that demonstrate true engagement. Consequently, individuals can begin to let go of self-defeating or hostile strategies and become equal "co-authors" of potential agreements.

From a Transformative perspective, Fichte's insight emphasizes that recognizing others as free and capable is essential for enhancing how people relate to one another. Only by "summoning" each other to responsible action can they transcend mere opposition and achieve a deeper transformation in their interactions.

Fichte emphasizes the "summons to freedom" and demonstrates that people can fully develop their autonomy only in relationships (Ikäheimo, 2022b). This concept, which posits that freedom and rationality are shaped through the recognition of the other person, paves the way for Hegel's notion, which extends beyond personal interaction to encompass social norms and institutions (Siep, 2010).

While Fichte emphasizes that one becomes a self-conscious agent through another person, Hegel argues that recognition must also encompass a broader institutional and social framework where individuals share rules, roles, and care for one another (Ikäheimo, 2022c). This shifts recognition from an individual's invocation of freedom to a larger system in which not only legal or role-based but also value and care bonds are formed between individuals (Siep, 2010).

7. Recognition in Hegel

I identify two main aspects of Hegel's view of recognition: a **"vertical"** dimension that refers to officially granted statuses, such as citizenship or legal marriage, and a **"horizontal"** dimension that focuses on how individuals perceive and acknowledge one another on a **person-to-person** level (Ikäheimo, 2022c). The horizontal dimension itself divides into two varieties. The first involves purely **interpersonal recognition**, encompassing love, respect, or esteem that isn't tied to formal

institutions (Ikäheimo & Laitinen, 2007). The second variety of horizontal recognition is "norm-mediated," meaning that a person is recognized as having certain rights and duties. This norm-mediated version can occur through either official institutions or informal social practices (Ikäheimo, 2022c).

7.1 Purely Intersubjective Recognition

When Hegel discusses purely intersubjective recognition, he describes a process that exists solely between two (or more) individuals, without relying on established social norms or institutions (Ikäheimo, 2022c; Siep, 2010). Like Bush and Folger, Hegel approaches the social world through a moral theory of conflict, distinguishing between the "realm of the spirit" and mere nature (Ikäheimo, 2022c; Siep, 2010). He elucidates that humans differ from animals in our ability to interpret and shape our world through collectively accepted norms – rules and obligations, as well as shared values and a concern for each other's well-being (Ikäheimo, 2022c). Thus, our relationships and interactions are not merely biological connections; they encompass both **axiological** (value-based) and **deontological** (rule-based) dimensions (Ikäheimo, 2022a; Laitinen, 2002; Ikäheimo & Laitinen, 2007).

7.2 The Deontological Dimension (Authority and Rules)

The deontological aspect of recognition involves living within a social and institutional framework, one that establishes **norms**, **rules,** and **roles** (Laitinen, 2002; Ikäheimo, 2022c). It also encompasses **authority, respect**, and sometimes entails "obedience" or acceptance of another's legitimate power (Ikäheimo & Laitinen, 2007). Recognizing someone in this manner means honoring their right to decide or lead, whether that authority arises from the law, a managerial role, or a social agreement. According to Hegel's famous "master and slave" scenario, rejecting all shared norms (*"No one can tell me what to do!"*) would render any cooperative effort impossible (Siep, 2010; Laitinen, 2011).

In conflict situations, a person may crave acknowledgment of their authority or right to make decisions. For instance, at home: *"I have the right to decide what our children can and cannot do,"* or in the workplace: *"I understand that, since you're the manager, you have the final say."* In a Transformative conflict setting, relational weakness can arise from uncertainty about one's authority; one might feel inferior if not recognized as having the legitimate power to set the terms of discussion (Ikäheimo, 2022a). Conversely, relational self-absorption occurs when someone demands deontological recognition only for themselves (*"I have the right to decide!"*) while denying that the other side also deserves a say.

7.3 The Axiological Dimension (Values)

The axiological dimension of recognition emphasizes that people are not indifferent to one another and relates to **values**, **care**, **love**, and the degree to which I notice and consider the other person's **welfare** (see Ikäheimo, 2022c; Laitinen, 2011). It represents a form of recognition that expresses concern for the well-being of others. In interpersonal conflict, it reflects how genuinely interested I am in how the other feels, what they are experiencing, whether they are well or suffering, and whether I value their well-being or needs as highly as my own (Ikäheimo & Laitinen, 2007). When someone observes that a colleague is tired and offers to help, when a team leader considers a subordinate's personal situation, or when a parent cares for a child, each of these actions exemplifies axiological recognition (Laitinen, 2002). For Hegel, this aspect is crucial because it illustrates humanity as a community of beings who share certain values and support one another in them (Siep, 2010). Without this "care," interactions would deteriorate into a mere formal structure of "who commands whom" and would lose the profound meaning of human coexistence (Ikäheimo, 2010).

Thus, through the lens of Transformative conflict theory, relational weakness can be observed as submission (*"Let the other person be comfortable, even if doing so suppresses my own needs."*), which can sometimes signify a lack of self-awareness or a desire to avoid conflict at the cost of self-sacrifice. Relational self-absorption, then, means, in axiological terms, *"I primarily care about my own well-being; your well-being comes second."* This reflects a failure to regard the other person as an equal with inherent value, instead seeing them as a means to one's own ends (cf. Laitinen, 2002; Ikäheimo, 2022c).

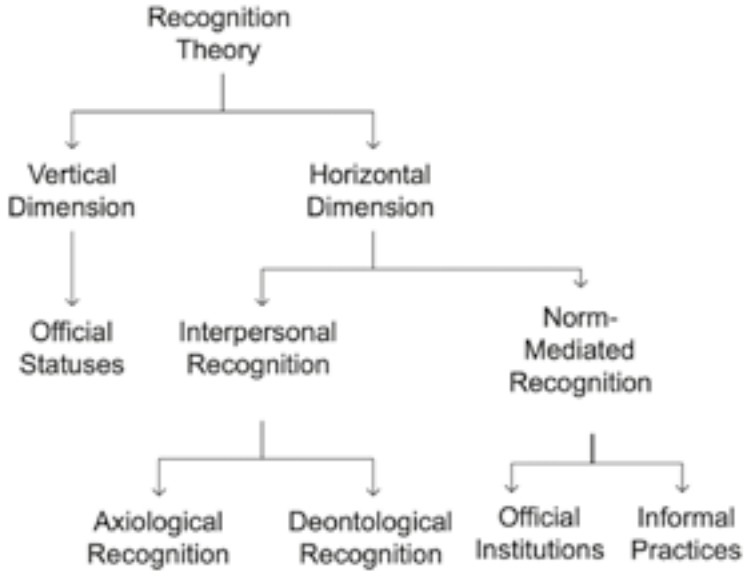


Figure 5: Hegel's Dimensions of Recognition

7.4 Implications for Transformative Practice

A Transformative practitioner focuses on promoting shifts in the empowerment and recognition of the parties (Bush & Folger, 1994, 2005; Bush & Pope, 2002). If he or she recognizes that the conflict occurs on a deontological or axiological level, he or she can:

7.4.1 Identify Signs of Weakness in Both Dimensions

a) Deontological weakness: the party fails to assert its legitimate claim or role. It may require greater confidence or for the other person to recognize his or her voice or authority (Bush & Folger, 1994, 2005).
b) Axiological weakness: the party retreats and neglects itself because it does not regard its own interests as equally important (Bush & Pope, 2002).

7.4.2 Identify Instances of Self-Absorption in Both Dimensions

a) Deontological self-absorption: the party aims to have the "last word" and disregards the other's claim to decision-making, as the manager downplays the employee's contribution (Bush & Folger, 1994; Folger & Bush, 1994).
b) Axiological self-absorption: the party unilaterally pursues his or her own convenience or gain ("I don't care how you feel, as long as I get what I want") (Bush & Folger, 2005).

7.4.3 To Assist Parties in Understanding Their Actual Needs (Empowerment)

a) The mediator can use reflection to clarify: *"So, Paul, you are saying that you feel unrecognized in your position and that your opinion is not respected?"* (deontological level) (Bush & Pope, 2002; Della Noce, 1999).
b) Or, *"More and more often, Lucia, you express concern about whether Paul understands how much this hurts you and how crucial it is for you not to feel like you are merely a tool"* (axiological level) (Bush & Folger, 1994, 2005).

7.4.4 Encourage a Move toward More "Unconditional" Recognition

a) Conditional recognition means, *"It only makes sense to care about you to gain something,"* or *"I accept your authority only to avoid losing something."*
b) Unconditional recognition signifies a higher level of recognizing the other as important in his or her own right (Laitinen, 2011). The practitioner can check in by asking, *"Are you interested in hearing more about the other party's perception of your true value, or is that not important right now, and do you prefer to continue the conversation in a different direction?"* This question opens up space for genuine empathy and respect (Ikäheimo & Laitinen, 2007; Bush & Pope, 2002).

Table 2: Manifestations of weakness and self-absorption in relation to the dimensions of conflict

Dimension	Weakness (lack of empowerment)	Self-absorption (lack of recognition)
Deontological (rights, claims, roles)	Party fails to assert legitimate claim or role; lacks confidence or voice recognition	Party insists on having the "last word," disregarding other's claims and decision-making authority
Axiological (values, interests, importance)	Party neglects own interests, believing they aren't equally important	Party pursues own gain or convenience, indifferent to the other's feelings or interests

7.5 An Illustrative Examples of Hegel's Interpersonal Recognition in Conflict

7.5.1 Family Cottage Dispute

Consider a disagreement between two siblings regarding the family cottage:

Deontological level: one sibling believes he holds the "primary right" to make decisions since he has invested more in the cottage and feels disrespected by the other as the "rightful owner." The other sibling perceives that the older brother "outranks" him and denies him the opportunity to co-determine.

Axiological level: one sibling feels that the other does not respect the emotional significance of the cottage, which is tied to their childhood memories, while he himself views it purely from a financial perspective. The other sibling, in turn, perceives that *"you are merely asserting your own sentiments, but you do not consider whether I have the funds for repairs or if I want to enjoy the cottage with my family."*

A Transformative mediator can help each sibling recognize when they feel ignored (in a deontological or axiological sense) or when they are neglecting each other. Additionally, the mediator can encourage both siblings to establish their own discussion rules, allowing them to share authority and relevant rights while also respecting their values and emotions. In this way, conflict can be transformed into a deeper understanding of one another (Honneth, 2020; Bush & Folger, 2005).

7.5.2 Workplace Dispute

In a similar vein, it is possible to envision applying Hegel's conceptualization of recognition to a workplace conflict involving a team leader, Karl, and his subordinate, Alice, who are caught in a prolonged dispute. Karl believes that Alice fails to meet deadlines and does not follow team rules (i.e., the deontological level), while Alice feels frustrated by Karl's disregard for her family circumstances and personal needs (i.e., the axiological level). The argument intensifies as both parties perceive that the second dimension remains unaddressed. Without recognizing both levels, the colleagues become adversaries (see Laitinen, 2011).

The mediator helps the parties understand why issues of authority and rules are so important to them (deontological dimension) and how essential it is for them to feel that the other party recognizes them as individuals with distinct values and needs (axiological dimension) (Ikäheimo & Laitinen, 2007; Bush & Pope, 2002).

7.6 Why the Axiological and Deontological Dimensions Matter in Transformative Practice

A Transformative practitioner can identify where conflicts "break down" in the dialectical relationship (an interactional crisis) between self-absorption and recognition, offering assistance to the parties in restoring mutual understanding and clarifying the structures of agreement. This new arrangement can be both formally enforceable and meaningfully human (Bush & Folger, 1994, 2005).

Distinguishing between the value-caring (axiological) and norm-binding (deontological) dimensions of interpersonal interactions clarifies why attempts to change interaction or cooperation can fail if either dimension is overlooked (Ikäheimo, 2022c). The deontological dimension of recognition in a Transformative approach emphasizes the existence of rules, norms, and authority: who is entitled to what? What about respect and authority? In contrast, the axiological dimension of recognition pertains to values, feelings, empathy, and how individuals wish each other well (Honneth, 2020). Both dimensions can be explored, for example, in summaries or through advanced reflection, as described by colleagues in this book (see also Bush & Pope, 2002; Della Noce, 1999).

In interpersonal conflicts, the two dimensions are often intertwined, and transformative practice can help parties recognize the type of recognition they seek from one another, as well as whether they lack recognition on all levels (Laitinen, 2011). Understanding when there is weakness or self-absorption in the deontological or axiological dimensions enables practitioners to be sensitive to the parties' perspectives and concerns, fostering empowerment and mutual recognition. This allows for a shift in conflicting interactions toward deeper and less contingent recognition (Bush & Folger, 1994, 2005).

7.7 Constitutive and Responsive Conceptions of Recognition

Hegel introduces another perspective to Transformative theory by distinguishing between **constitutive** and **responsive** conceptions of recognition (Ikäheimo, 2010). Rather than opposing views, these approaches complement one another. Hegel emphasizes that individuals continually form their identities in relation to others (Laitinen, 2002). This **constitutes** the core aspect of recognition: I define myself partly by how others accept or reject me in a given role. However, Hegel also insists that this process should not be merely mechanical or based on fear or utility. In **responsive** recognition, I value others for their inherent worth rather than as a means to an end. This "higher" recognition entails genuinely taking the other person seriously and acknowledging them as my equal (Honneth, 2020; Ikäheimo, 2010). I will explore both levels in greater detail.

7.7.1 The Constitutive Conception of Recognition

Hegel's key idea is that recognition (Anerkennung) does not merely "grant a title" to someone who is already a complete individual. Rather, recognition is a constitutive process: I shape my sense of self precisely through how others recognize or fail to recognize me (Laitinen, 2002; Ikäheimo, 2010, 2022c, 2022d). My identity and values develop based on whether others treat me as valuable or disregard me (Laitinen, 2002).

Thus, recognition is not merely a response to qualities that already exist ("You are a free being, and I acknowledge it"). It actively **creates statuses and roles** that would not otherwise emerge (Laitinen, 2002; Ikäheimo, 2010, 2022c, 2022d). For example, in Hegel's master–slave metaphor, a master who "recognizes" the slave, even if this begins as purely instrumental, helps define both the slave's role and the meaning of "authority" (Siep, 2010; Laitinen, 2011). As the two individuals interact, each gains a transformed sense of identity: the master may come to consider the slave's well-being, and the slave may become aware of his own worth. This process shapes the sense of "I" through ongoing exchanges of recognition. In transformative practice, this concept is crucial for understanding how relational weakness or self-absorption can emerge and subsequently change (Ikäheimo, 2010).

Hegel describes three idealized stages in which consciousness evolves from perceiving others as mere objects to recognizing them as full subjects who shape one's own inner experience or psychic constitution (Laitinen, 2002; Ikäheimo, 2010; Ikäheimo, 2022c; Ikäheimo, 2022d):

a) Primitive Confrontation

People initially encounter each other as "desiring subjects" who may compete for resources or resist one another. This initial interaction remains a form of recognition, as each person realizes that the other is alive and possesses independent interests (Laitinen, 2002). It "shocks" me out of the belief that I am the sole center of the world (Ikäheimo, 2010; Ikäheimo, 2022c).

b) The Relationship of "Master and Slave"

This second stage involves recognizing each other in a more extended, yet still self-centered, manner. One assumes the role of "master" (authority), while the other takes on the role of "slave" (subordinate), based on their mutual perceptions: the master sees the slave as a servant, and the slave perceives the master as a figure whose orders must be obeyed (Siep, 2010; Laitinen, 2002, p. 468). Each partially acknowledges the other's perspective but prioritizes personal gain – either power or survival (Ikäheimo, 2010; Ikäheimo, 2022c).

c) Truly Personifying Recognition

At the highest stage, I recognize the other unconditionally, with both love (valuing their well-being – that is, axiological recognition) and respect (validating their independent authority – that is, deontic recognition) (Laitinen, 2002; Ikäheimo, 2010; Ikäheimo, 2022c). I no longer subordinate the other's perspective to my own but recognize them as an equal center (Ikäheimo, 2010; Ikäheimo, 2022c). Fundamentally, this also changes me: I treat others quite differently, which simultaneously transforms my inner psychological landscape. I am no longer merely a self-sufficient individual who manipulates or retreats; I have become a being open to "two perspectives" (Laitinen, 2002).

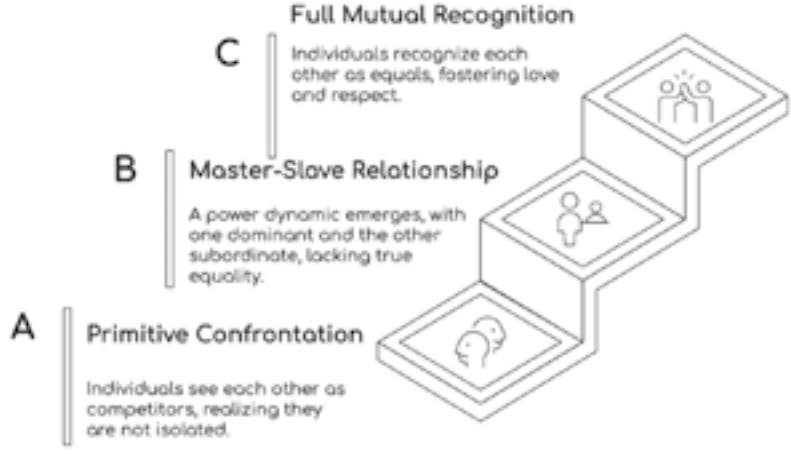


Figure 6: Journey to Mutual Recognition

By progressing through these stages, I undergo a **psychological transformation** from prioritizing immediate desires (stage A) or narrow self-interest (stage B) to a more genuine openness to another person's viewpoint (stage C) (Ikäheimo, 2010; Ikäheimo, 2022c; Ikäheimo, 2022d). The term "constitutive" emphasizes that recognition actively shapes each individual's status and **self-concept** (Laitinen, 2002; Ikäheimo, 2022c; Ikäheimo, 2022d). Our roles and identities are not fixed before the encounter; they emerge from how we perceive and acknowledge one another (Honneth, 2020; Laitinen, 2011).

For Hegel, this constitutive aspect carries significant philosophical and social implications (Siep, 2010). The notion that individuals "create" one another through recognition elucidates how human society – referred to by Hegel as the "realm of spirit" (Geist) – comes into existence (Laitinen, 2002; Ikäheimo, 2010; Ikäheimo, 2022c; Ikäheimo, 2022d). It transcends mere tolerance or utility, involving an active acceptance of others as independent **sources of meaning**. This enables human interaction to rise above basic biological needs, evolving into a genuinely moral and spiritual existence (Siep, 2010). Hegel essentially foresees a central idea that Bush and Folger later investigate: conflicts remain at an "animal" level unless we address each other's deeper needs. Our capacity to view the world through a moral lens is what renders us fully human (Bush & Folger, 1994; Ikäheimo, 2010).

7.7.2 An Illustrative Example of Constitutive Conception of Recognition in Practice

A Disagreement Between Two Close Friends About Their Collaboration on a Joint Project

Consider two friends, John and Peter, who decide to collaborate on a project, such as creating a comic book or a blog. Initially, they appear to share the same motivation, vision, and desire to collaborate. However, over time, a dispute arises between them, centered on differing views regarding their roles and contributions. John feels he bears the primary creative burden; he believes he generates most of the ideas and needs Peter to recognize his authority in matters of content and style. Conversely, Peter believes he organizes the entire project, including agreements with the graphic designer and communication with external collaborators, and manages the administration, which John tends to underestimate and take for granted. This conflict can be interpreted through Hegel's constitutive conception of recognition: each friend seeks affirmation of their significance and authority while assigning the other a status that seems convenient or natural (Laitinen, 2002; Ikäheimo, 2010; Ikäheimo, 2022c).

In the initial stages, John and Peter may adopt a "primitive/natural" stance, in which each emphasizes his own key contributions to consciousness while acknowledging the other's complementary role. For example, John asserts, *"You are merely the manager; I am the one who creates the entire concept. I can replace your work, but not myself."*

Peter replies, *"Without my contacts and organization, you would have achieved nothing. Communicating with a graphic designer and meeting deadlines would have required a superhuman effort!"*

Each acknowledges the other partially (they need each other), but mainly from an instrumental perspective: the other serves merely as a tool for achieving one's own goals. This creates an interaction reminiscent of Hegel's metaphor of master and slave: John sees himself as the "creator" (master of ideas) and regards Peter as an

executive force to control. Peter regards John as an "artist" who is skilled yet easily replaceable by someone else, considering himself a practical "organizer" (master of factual power).

Consequently, neither feels fully recognized as independent and worthy partners (Bush & Folger, 2005). Each scenario reduces their roles to limited dynamics (master/slave, creator/assistant) assigned by the other. Their self-concepts shift amid this conflict; John feels hurt for not being acknowledged as an artistic soul, while Peter experiences feelings of being slighted.

Constitutive Element: The Mutual Formation of Their Own Identities

The Hegelian "constitutive concept" is evident in the fact that John is not only the creator from the beginning; his perception of himself as the "chief creative" reinforces and reflects the notion that Peter, while relying on his ideas, does not grant him a privileged position in practice. John asserts an even stronger claim to creative absoluteness precisely because he feels undervalued.

Peter takes on the role of manager, considering himself the de facto "indispensable guarantor of functioning." In a similar vein, John's lack of appreciation for Peter's work adds to this situation: the less recognition Peter receives, the more deeply he feels that the project would "fail" without him.

Thus, their self-concept (identity) is not fully internally fulfilled but is co-created by the tensions in which each tries to prompt the other to recognize their status. The result is a clear polarization: John emphasizes his "credo as an artist," while Peter highlights his "immense organizational skill."

The Path to "Fully Personifying" Recognition: Transformation Through Mutual Understanding

If John and Peter avoid the instrumental *"I need you, but..."* in the next conversation (e.g., in mediation), they can move to a higher level of recognition.

John discovers that Peter is not merely fulfilling official formalities; he is also creatively managing promotion, finances, and networking. John recognizes that this is not just a mechanical service but a genuine value that he cannot provide alone. He recognizes Peter as an indispensable partner with a distinct perspective.

Petr begins to realize that John contributes not only his visual and literary creativity to the project but also vital enthusiasm and artistic influence, without which the project would lack originality. He comprehends that this isn't about "who gets the credit"; rather, John's vision is an indispensable component. They view him as a free creative authority with equal rights to make decisions.

This fosters a more unconditional form of recognition: *"I recognize you not out of necessity or fear, but because I see you as an equal bearer of value and authority."* Simultaneously, both individuals emerge enriched: John's self-esteem is rooted in a profound sense of appreciation, which Peter recognizes wholeheartedly. In turn,

Peter develops a sense of significance that is not merely technical (*"I can manage paperwork"*) but is also recognized internally from John's perspective.

Hegel's constitutive conception is exemplified through John and Peter, as their self-perception and mutual roles do not develop in isolation; rather, they shape one another. In the conflict over who holds the "main merit," both their differences – in establishing the roles of master/slave or creator/organizer – and the potential to reach a higher plane, where they both recognize themselves as full personalities, are actualized. This supports Hegel's thesis that individuals' identities are not merely given but are formed through interactions, particularly those intensified by conflict, which provide an opportunity to transition from instruments of self-interest to genuine respect and shared authority (Bush & Pope, 2002).

From the perspective of a Transformative approach to conflict resolution, a new understanding of the relationship between empowerment and recognition emerges. From a specific viewpoint, it is indeed true that a certain degree of recognition is a necessary prerequisite for human empowerment (Della Noce, 1999, 2003). This claim does not undermine the assumption that humans possess certain capacities (rational, moral, etc.). However, it emphasizes that only social and dialogical affirmation can truly activate and advance these capacities. In other words, to genuinely feel and act as an autonomous and respected actor, I must experience a moment in which the other party seriously acknowledges my potential as a person. In this way, the Transformative approach intersects with the idea that recognition represents a transition from potential to actual personhood. This transformation, occurring in the interactive environment of mediation or dialogue, is both a prerequisite and a consequence of the profound changes these practices facilitate in the realm of recognition.

7.7.3 A Responsive Conception of Recognition

I see another important perspective in Hegel's work: recognition as a **response** to the concrete qualities or traits of another person. Recognition here is not just a label I assign to someone; it is an **inner reaction** that arises from what I notice in the other (Ikäheimo, 2010; Laitinen, 2002; Ikäheimo, 2022c; Ikäheimo, 2022d). This reaction can be triggered by the other person's independence, vulnerability, or any other characteristic that I see as worthy of my attention.

a) In the most **primitive phase**, I respond solely to the fact that the other person is standing in my way. This initial "shock" signifies that I've come across someone who won't simply yield to my desires. At this stage, recognition is purely causal: "I see you as an obstacle because you resist me" (Laitinen, 2002).
b) In the **master–slave** metaphor, I observe more intricate reactions. The slave obeys the master out of fear, which constitutes a "normative" response: the master's commands appear threatening. Meanwhile, the master also relies on the slave and must ensure that the slave's basic needs are met so he can continue working. However, both sides primarily act out of **self-interest** – the slave aims

to survive, and the master seeks to have his work completed (Siep, 2010; Laitinen, 2002).

c) Only when I attain **full personifying recognition**, involving love and respect, do I respond to the other's needs or authority because I see them as inherently valuable, not merely beneficial to me. I might observe someone's vulnerability or autonomy and respond with genuine care or true respect for their right to make decisions. I do this not out of fear or calculation, but because the other's dignity compels me to respond (Laitinen, 2002; Ikäheimo, 2022c; Ikäheimo, 2022d).

In other words, "responsive" recognition means that there is always something in the other person – resistance, needs, or authority – that prompts me to acknowledge them. Over time, this can evolve from basic self-interest (*"I see you as a threat or tool"*) to genuine empathy and respect (*"I value you for who you are"*) (Honneth, 2020).

7.7.4 An Illustrative Example of the Responsive Conception of Recognition in Practice: The Conflict Between Local Residents and Ukrainian Refugees

Imagine a small village where several families fleeing the war arrive following the outbreak of conflict in Ukraine. Some long-time residents welcome them, while others respond with resentment, fearing the rising costs of village maintenance, shifts in local culture, and the general "arrival of foreigners." Consequently, a communal dispute arises between some of the older residents and the newcomers.

Phase One: The Initial Shock

The first phase of conflict interactions between long-time residents and refugees is characterized by initial "shock" and resistance (Laitinen, 2002). Many indigenous people, who have lived in the village for decades, view the newly arrived Ukrainians as intruders of their customs. Their initial sense of recognition resembles resentment, as they simply realize that a stranger is bothering or altering the dynamics of their village (e.g., dealing with accommodation issues, agendas at the authorities, etc.). Families from Ukraine feel unwelcome, despite the municipality officially providing assistance. Their initial reaction reflects a basic survival instinct – seeking shelter, work, and access to healthcare.

At this early stage, the two groups recognize each other only in passing: the old villagers realistically note the presence of foreigners who cannot be overlooked, and the Ukrainians recognize that the municipal authorities (mayor, councilors) hold the power to make decisions. However, it is merely a "shock," a mutual realization that the other side exists and poses some resistance or demands a response.

Phase Two: Instrumental or Conditional Recognition

In the further development of interactions that do not spiral into a destructive conflict, the interactions may become cautiously cooperative, though for strategic reasons. Thus, a relationship resembling "master and slave" in Hegel's metaphorical terms, driven by self-interest or concern, gradually develops. The natives may be cautiously respectful of the newcomers to avoid increasing social tension. *"If we treat them badly, human rights organizations may oppose us, and the municipality will lose subsidies..."* They can also assist Ukrainian families instrumentally, helping them find jobs and advising them about kindergartens for their children, mainly to ensure that the newcomers integrate smoothly and do not create problems. This concern stems from a desire for peace and prosperity for the locals.

Newcomers, on the other hand, recognize the authority of the mayor and the village councilors, fearing that without their assistance, they will not receive social benefits or housing. They adhere to local community norms and traditions mainly to avoid alienating their neighbors, but they do not regard this as 'legitimate' or 'nice'; instead, it is a strategic concession.

In this "middle" phase, both sides recognize each other reactively, primarily because it makes their lives easier. The natives do not feel genuine respect or cordial friendliness toward the refugees; instead, they adhere calculatingly to a certain standard of decency. Refugees must accept the natives' orders or recommendations to thrive in the local community, leading to fearful obedience.

Phase Three: Fully Responsive Recognition

In the fully "responsive" or altruistic level of recognition, the interactions between the two groups may eventually shift toward complete personifying recognition, which Hegel characterizes as love and respect. The indigenous people begin to appreciate Ukrainian families because they perceive in them genuine human stories and values. For instance, when they collaborate on a cultural event or assist in repairing a public space, human bonds form. They no longer recognize them merely "to keep the peace" but because the well-being of others holds intrinsic value. The refugees, in turn, come to realize that the locals possess traditions and a sense of belonging that they value. They begin to respect local authorities because they view them as legitimate (e.g., they understand that the mayor is genuinely seeking harmony in the village, not merely asserting his power). It is, therefore, not a matter of necessity but of respect for the distinct community.

At this stage, respect and care transcend self-interest; instead, a genuine attentiveness to the other as a person emerges. In its fully developed form, a community becomes a place where both groups share respect and consideration for each other's welfare, achieving this without mere calculation or coercion. This 'higher' stage exemplifies selfless appreciation, as I respond to the other not out of obligation

but because their needs and perspective genuinely appeal to me (Laitinen, 2002; Ikäheimo, 2010).

7.7.5 How Can Understanding Responsive Recognition Benefit a Transformative Practitioner?

A Transformative approach seeks to enhance the quality of interaction between parties by fostering empowerment and recognition (Bush & Folger, 1994, 2005; Bush & Pope, 2002; by analogy cf. Honneth, 2020). The concept of **responsive recognition** indicates that recognition does not emerge "out of thin air" but is a response to something substantial from the other party (Della Noce, 1999; Laitinen, 2002; Ikäheimo, 2010; Ikäheimo, 2022c; Ikäheimo, 2022d). This offers several important insights for mediators, facilitators, or coaches.

The responsive model of recognition enables Transformative practitioners to identify signs of weakness and self-absorption, determining whether parties are responding primarily out of self-interest (e.g., to avoid conflict), fear, or if a deeper sense of empathy and mutual respect is emerging (Bush & Folger, 1994, 2005). This approach enables mediators and facilitators to more effectively assess whether the parties require assistance in shifting their empowerment or recognition, or if a shift has already occurred when one party genuinely begins to care about what is important to the other.

If a Transformative practitioner assesses that he or she can support the parties in shifting their empowerment or recognition, he or she can offer, for example, a reflection that highlights moments when there is a hint of **"perceiving something in the other"** in the communication (Bush & Pope, 2002; Della Noce, 1999). The mediator or facilitator repeats the participants' words so that they can hear what they are saying and perhaps realize that they are discussing something that truly affects them regarding the other. Alternatively, a summary can be used to help the parties orient themselves to what has already been said on both sides, pointing out moments when the participants have touched on sensitive or valuable topics with each other. The check-in then provides participants the opportunity to recognize that, in light of their new understanding, they have the choice to change something themselves – for example, to consider what is important to the other or even to adjust their own position, just as they have the choice not to do so. In Transformative terms, this is not pressure to solve but an opportunity to recognize that the action is in their hands (Bush & Folger, 1994, 2005; Bush & Pope, 2002).

When a Transformative practitioner observes what triggers a response in another party, ranging from fear to genuine concern, they can assess in real time whether the participants' capacity for action increases (for example, by overcoming feelings of powerlessness and expressing their needs) as well as their sensitivity to the other party's perspective (Bush & Folger, 2005). This way, I can gauge whether the conversation is shifting from cautious or self-focused behavior toward a **genuine**

recognition of the other's worth or if communication remains confined to purely strategic concessions.

Understanding responsive recognition provides mediators or facilitators with the opportunity to help parties shift from instrumental or cautious attitudes, where others are primarily viewed through the lens of self-interest, toward deeper recognition, acknowledging others as entities with their own meaning. This transformation **improves the quality of interactions** over time. Individuals who genuinely respond to others, rather than merely tolerating or exploiting them, are better equipped to handle future challenges independently (Bush & Folger, 1994, 2005; Della Noce, 1999).

The ability of Transformative practitioners to perceive varying levels of responsiveness between parties, combined with reflection, summary, and timely check-ins, enables these parties to recognize their hidden attitudes, fears, and hopes. This nurturing leads to both empowerment (as individuals become aware of their own agency and choices) and recognition (as they cultivate compassion for one another), which are central goals in Transformative practice (Bush & Folger, 1994, 2005; Bush & Pope, 2002).

7.7.6 Employing the Responsive Recognition Model in Facilitated Dialogue

How can an understanding of the responsive concept of recognition translate into Transformative dialogue within the community between indigenous people and newcomers from Ukraine? Imagine a facilitator entering a community where some long-standing villagers define themselves in opposition to the new Ukrainian families. The facilitator engages in a series of conversations with various groups and individuals, helping everyone clarify **who needs to communicate with whom and about what** (Cleven & Saul, 2024). Consequently, the facilitator recognizes in advance that the conflict centers around shared concerns and differing cultures, but it also represents a situation where there exists a gradual scale of recognition, from mere calculated consideration to a profound acceptance of the intrinsic worth of others (Ikäheimo, 2010; Ikäheimo, 2022c; Ikäheimo, 2022d). Reflection, summarization, and check-ins can help uncover the moments when a 'real encounter' and fuller recognition occur.

A Transformative facilitator understands that the natives and Ukrainians may respond to each other conditionally (to avoid problems) or may begin to recognize the intrinsic dignity of the other party as well (Ikäheimo, 2010). When signs emerge in conversations indicating that someone feels genuine understanding or real respect, the facilitator can utilize:

(a) Reflection: *"You, Francis, express how important it is for you that Ukrainian families have their basic needs met – yet at the same time, it seems a bit unusual for you. Is that right?"*

This enables the old man to recognize that he is already integrating something he observes in the other party into his perspective and responding to it not just for his own benefit.

Or:

"Natasha, you mentioned that you felt comfortable at the end when the locals showed you around the nursery and assisted you with your shopping, but at the same time, you wonder if they were merely acting out of obligation, correct?" This highlights how these newcomers respond to what they perceive as either genuine or insincere concern.

(b) Summary: *"Some of you mentioned helping new families mainly to avoid problems or a bad reputation for the village, while others have indicated that they see potential benefits. One participant even noted that a Ukrainian family bakes excellently and looks forward to contributing positively to their shared experience."* In this way, participants orient themselves to their attitudes and those of others, discerning whether someone is beginning to respond more fully to the quality of others (e.g., *"It's fun to meet them at the playground"*) or if only fear of consequences remains.

(c) Check-in: Once the facilitator notices that some openness emerges in the discussion – where one party genuinely values the other rather than viewing them as a necessary evil – he or she offers a check-in, alerting the parties that they have the opportunity to decide how to address this change: *"It seems that you are now actually describing a new possibility for joint action. Is it useful for you to discuss it further, or do you need to focus on something else for now?"* This gives both old-timers and newcomers the freedom to choose whether they wish to explore this new, more responsive level. In doing so, the facilitator does not lead them to agree on specific actions but instead highlights the opportunity for them to shift their mutual recognition (Bush & Pope, 2002; Della Noce, 1999).

A **responsive** conception of recognition indicates that it is not merely formal. One party genuinely feels something for the other (e.g., gratitude, concern, admiration). A Transformative practitioner who is mindful of this helps individuals cultivate these deeper expressions, thereby enhancing empowerment (individuals realize they can act on new perceptions and beliefs) and recognition (their ability to see and reflect upon what others truly are increases) (Bush & Folger, 1994; Bush & Pope, 2002). Although the Transformative practitioner does not pose any substantive questions, he or she can name each shift or allow space for reflection, summary, and check-ins, enabling the parties to consciously integrate these insights into their actions.

The responsive model of recognition suggests that a person's inherent value provides a valid basis for treating them accordingly. In simpler terms, when we recognize value in someone or something, we have a prima facie reason to respect,

protect, or appreciate it (Laitinen, 2002, p. 468). Viewing a person as a person primarily relates to dignity; according to this 'value analysis', the mere fact that someone is a person compels us to acknowledge them as such through our actions and, when appropriate, through symbolic expressions.

Transformative theory emphasizes that this recognition is not only ethical but also has genuine **relational** effects (Folger & Bush, 1994; Bush & Folger, 1994; Cleven, 2025). It is not simply the case that the other must be respected because they are a person (although this is a valid ethical reason). Recognition can also transform the interactions and perceptions of the parties involved in a conflict. This aligns the transformative approach with a more "complicated" model, where recognition is not merely a one-time event (responding to the value of the person) but acts as a dynamic element that encourages deeper changes in mutual interactions and perceptions of self and others.

Transformative theory highlights the significance of **transferring recognition**, both as a response to one's worth and through mutual action and communication. This transfer occurs through explicit words (symbolic recognition) or genuine respect during conflict resolution (practical recognition) (Bush & Folger, 2005; Bush & Pope, 2002; Laitinen, 2002). Here, the responsive and constitutive models intersect: while recognition depends on the pre-existing value of the other person, its relational effects can foster new commitments during mediation or dialogue, encouraging the parties to engage with greater empathy and responsibility. In this way, recognition evolves from being merely a response to value into a driving force that transforms conflict into more open and respectful communication.

8. What Fichte and Hegel's Different Views on Recognition Mean for Transformative Practice

There are significant differences between Fichte's and Hegel's approaches to recognition, and these differences have practical implications for the application of transformative conflict resolution. According to Fichte, recognition is like a **harmonious call to freedom** (Ikäheimo, 2022b; Honneth, 2020). This idea allows practitioners to focus on helping people recognize each other in a way that brings out their potential without necessarily provoking direct confrontation. It fits a rather "harmonious" model of conflict resolution that, while sharing similarities with transformative practice, does not match it exactly (Folger, 2008). Such an approach emphasizes placing the parties in a state of "summoning" each other to greater self-awareness and growth without the need to provoke direct conflict.

Conversely, Hegel's conception, which involves a dialogical and **agonistic struggle** for recognition, argues that conflict is a vital component in achieving

deeper transformation. In this framework, parties must confront their differences and affirm their freedom and capacity to act through mutual confrontation. This suggests that the mediator or facilitator should not shy away from the presence of agonism or tension in Transformative conflict resolution. Rather, they should utilize these dynamics to help the parties develop a new understanding of themselves and their interactions (Siep, 2010; Ikäheimo, 2010, 2022c, 2022d). In transformative practice, this indicates that the practitioner does not need to downplay the conflict but should harness its dynamics to encourage deeper understanding and mutual affirmation of autonomy.

The process of transformation involves not only consensus building but also a shift in perspective, where individuals learn to perceive themselves and others as complete subjects who challenge one another to embrace freedom.

A Transformative practitioner, drawing on Hegel's dialogical conception, must be ready to view moments of conflict as opportunities for deeper mutual recognition (Laitinen, 2002). Thus, conflict is not inherently negative. Rather, it can serve as a catalyst that clarifies and strengthens the identity and freedom of both parties (Honneth, 2020; Bush & Folger, 1994; Bush & Pope, 2002). Conversely, relying exclusively on Fichte's harmonious perspective may lead to a form of mediation that fails to adequately acknowledge the inherent tensions and struggles for recognition, which are often vital drivers of radical transformation in interpersonal interactions (Folger, 2008; Ikäheimo, 2022c, 2022d). This does not imply that Fichte's notion of recognition lacks value in Transformative practice. Considering the absence of direct conflict among the people present in the room and the focus on recognition for personal development, his concept appears especially motivating for **transformative coaching**.

In contrast, Hegel's perspective serves as a reminder that tension itself can unveil new insights and encourage individuals toward greater autonomy and respect. Overall, these two views underscore the necessity for Transformative practice to consider both the peaceful and more challenging facets of recognition (Ikäheimo, 2010; Ikäheimo, 2022c; Ikäheimo, 2022d). By allowing parties to confront one another and share power, I support a process that fulfills each individual's **sense of freedom and identity**. (Laitinen, 2002; Bush & Folger, 2005)



Figure 7: Fichte's and Hegel's Conceptions of Recognition for Transformative Practice

9. Recognition as a Fundamental Element of Transformative Theory and Practice – Final Thoughts

When Transformative theory is grounded in a **moral theory** of conflict, an ethical dimension is always present, as ethics serves as a foundation for a theory of morality (Bush & Folger, 1994, 2005). Consequently, Transformative theory is typically characterized by a qualitative, ethical conception of recognition that emphasizes interactional shifts and transformations (Laitinen, 2002; Della Noce, 1999). However, the importance of an **ontological understanding of recognition** cannot be overlooked, as it enables deeper comprehension of the moral argument and provides insight into how recognition contributes to our essence as moral beings (cf. Ikäheimo, 2022d; Bush & Pope, 2002).

At this point, one can appreciate the contributions of Transformative theory, which sees weakness and self-absorption as opportunities (Bush & Folger, 1994, 2005). Here, the ontological and normative significance of recognition as a chance to achieve a balance between self and other is most evident (Ikäheimo, 2010; Laitinen, 2002).

9.1 The Relationship Between Empowerment and Recognition

In discussions about human growth, ethics, and conflict resolution, the terms "empowerment" and "recognition" often arise. Empowerment generally refers to gaining a stronger sense of personal agency, while recognition involves acknowledging someone else's worth (Bush, 2025; Laitinen, 2002; Ikäheimo, 2022d). The transformative approach, as articulated by Folger and Bush, considers empowerment and recognition to be interconnected (Bush & Folger, 2005; Della Noce, 1999). During conflict, I observe that individuals only feel genuinely capable when they perceive that others regard them as competent. (Bush & Folger, 1994, 2005; Laitinen, 2002) Yet, recognition alone can seem hollow if a person cannot uphold their own dignity (Ikäheimo, 2010).

In this chapter, I have therefore focused on how empowerment and recognition co-create a fully realized personhood. In doing so, I draw on a multidimensional understanding of personhood that develops on several levels (Ikäheimo, 2022c). If any of these dimensions are neglected, a situation arises that can be described as **de-personification** – the reduction of the person to a mere "object" or incomplete entity (Laitinen, 2002; Ikäheimo, 2022d). In the context of Transformative practice, I highlight the importance of fostering both empowerment and recognition in mediation, coaching, or dialogue across all three dimensions of the human personality.

To understand the interplay between empowerment and recognition, we must view personhood as a layered construct (Ikäheimo, 2010). Human identity does not manifest in just one 'surface' dimension; rather, it arises in various aspects that correspond to different forms of recognition.

9.1.1 Dimension of Authority (Previously "Deontological")

Here, people need to feel that their views and roles are respected. Recognition signifies the psychological capacity of individuals to assert themselves as co-creators of norms and articulate moral demands (Laitinen, 2002; Ikäheimo, 2022c). On an intersubjective level, it is essential for each person to feel that their opinions and perspectives are respected and that they have the right to influence the creation of common rules (Ikäheimo, 2010). At the institutional level, any transformative practice constitutes a social institution, with recognition taking on an institutional form, specifically, as fundamental rights (notably the autonomy and dignity) that position individuals as equal partners (Siep, 2010). This goes beyond the mere interactional dimension of the participants in mediation or dialogue, as **recognition by Transformative practitioners** is critical. By relinquishing any authority to establish goals or cooperative frameworks, Transformative practitioners (including coaches) grant institutional recognition to their clients (Ikäheimo, 2022d). This is expressed either through a conditional hierarchical "attribution" of authority or through unconditional respect for their autonomy and moral equivalence (Laitinen, 2002). Within Transformative practice, the authority dimension is characterized by each participant having a voice that is genuinely valued (Bush & Folger, 2005). The practitioner does not operate as an authority "from above" but instead serves as a guide to the process, enabling the parties to clarify for themselves what norms, rules, and frameworks they consider legitimate and why (Ikäheimo, 2010).

9.1.2 Dimension of Value (Previously "Axiological")

People want to feel that they matter for who they are, not just for how they can benefit others. Recognition encompasses the psychological capacity within emotional and value dimensions, specifically **the ability to experience and express care and affection**, as well as to receive such care (Laitinen, 2002; Ikäheimo, 2022c). From an intersubjective perspective, every individual desires to be valued for their personal worth (Ikäheimo, 2010). The highest form of recognition manifests as unconditional care, where an individual's value is affirmed regardless of their usefulness to others (Laitinen, 2011).

At the institutional level, this aspect of recognition is once again evident in the actions of Transformative practitioners as they engage with clients. By viewing clients as individuals whose perspectives, experiences, and needs are significant, regardless of how much this aids in reaching an agreement or resolution, practitioners foster **empowerment through recognition**. From the perspective

of Transformative theory, it is essential to understand that conflict encompasses not only "facts and rights," but also emotional and value dimensions. We recognize clients as individuals with unique perspectives and needs, helping them feel emotionally heard and respected (Ikäheimo, 2022d; Bush & Folger, 2005). Recognizing others as possessing intrinsic value can often alleviate tension and create space for a deeper understanding of the other party's motivations and concerns (Laitinen, 2002; Bush & Folger, 2005).

9.2 The Transformative Role of Empowerment and Recognition

In Transformative practice, empowerment and recognition are viewed as two significant shifts that can help conflict participants reclaim their sense of dignity, control, and interpersonal connection (Bush & Folger, 2005). Importantly, empowerment and recognition are mutually constitutive; one cannot be achieved without the other if the outcome is genuinely lasting and meaningful (Bush & Pope, 2002; Ikäheimo, 2010; Ikäheimo, 2022c).

9.2.1 The Risks of Empowerment Without Recognition

Empowerment without recognition can easily devolve into **isolation** or **exploitation** (Ikäheimo, 2022d). Imagine a person who possesses sufficient authority to impose rules (authority dimension) but is not seen by others as intrinsically valuable (value dimension). In this scenario, an imbalance arises that may lead to arrogance, unchecked power, or alienation from others (Laitinen, 2002). In mediation, for instance, this is evident in situations where one party formally "wins" but lacks a genuine sense of appreciation from the other (Bush & Folger, 1994, 2005). Such an outcome does not truly resolve the conflict; it merely suppresses it superficially and can become a source of future disputes.

9.2.2 The Risks of Recognition Without Empowerment

Conversely, recognition without true empowerment leads to **passivity** and **subordination** (Ikäheimo, 2010). An individual whose contributions are valued but who lacks the ability to express his or her perspective, authority, or right to make decisions remains reliant on being "granted status" (Laitinen, 2002). In mediation, this imbalance becomes clear when a party, despite receiving a gesture or apology, feels "understood" yet lacks any real ability to influence future arrangements. While recognition is satisfying, the absence of genuine influence can create a sense of "false peace" (Bush & Folger, 2005; Della Noce, 1999; Ikäheimo, 2022c).

9.3 The Dialectic Between Empowerment and Recognition

A Transformative approach to conflict requires the **simultaneous growth of empowerment and recognition** (Bush & Folger, 2005; Bush & Pope, 2002). When a Transformative practitioner's actions are effective, parties begin to recognize not only their own rights and abilities to act but also the value of the other party and the potential for mutual benefit (Ikäheimo, 2011; Laitinen, 2002). Individuals who enter a conversation feeling marginalized or powerless often become empowered to express their needs and emotions as soon as they feel acknowledged (Bush & Folger, 2005). Consequently, their empowerment is legitimized and respected, which in turn enhances recognition of others (Della Noce, 1999; Ikäheimo, 2022d).

In a Transformative conception, empowerment and recognition cannot be viewed in isolation. They must develop simultaneously and reinforce one another, enabling individuals in conflict (and beyond) to attain a fuller sense of **human dignity** and **connection** (Bush & Folger, 2005; Ikäheimo, 2010). Without recognition, empowerment easily degenerates into mere power over others; without empowerment, recognition becomes an empty form of dependence or subordination (Laitinen, 2002).

As a result, all practitioners' efforts in this approach concentrate on improving these two aspects across both dimensions of personality (Bush & Pope, 2002; Della Noce, 1999):

- enhancing everyone's sense of **authority** and **voice**;
- enhancing everyone's awareness of **each other's value**.

When these two levels are harmoniously linked, conflict begins to transform from a dead end into a **catalyst for growth**, not only for the parties involved but also for the interactions and institutions within which the conflict occurs (Ikäheimo, 2022c; Siep, 2010). In this way, we reach a state where one is not merely a passive recipient of another's will or a temporary victor over an adversary but rather a fully realized individual who acts based on his or her own capacities and is respected and recognized by others in doing so (Laitinen, 2002; Ikäheimo, 2022d). This is precisely one of the key goals of Transformative practice as an approach to conflict resolution and human relations development (Bush & Folger, 2005; Bush & Pope, 2002).

10. Conclusion

A Transformative approach to conflict resolution demonstrates that recognition is not merely a formal gesture of respect or a strategic tool, but a dynamic process that

fundamentally impacts the quality of interpersonal interactions. As the theoretical reflections of Hegel, Fichte, Honneth, Ikäheimo, and Laitinen illustrate, recognition is deeply embedded in the ontology of social relations and plays a crucial role in how individuals shape their self-concept and their interactions with others.

From the perspective of Transformative theory and practice, recognition serves as a crucial pillar that enables more than just external conflict resolution. The central concept is that, in addition to empowerment, recognition creates a framework that transforms human interaction not only in the quest for agreement but also, more importantly, in its moral and relational aspects. This highlights the transformation emphasized by Bush and Folger (1994, 2005).

The Transformative approach assumes that individuals in conflict desire to be heard and recognized as dignified beings capable of contributing to a solution. Through various levels of recognition, from institutionalized statuses to the deepest intersubjective respect, the pathway opens for conflict to evolve from merely a struggle for resources into a space for mutual understanding and a reordering of the interactions.

Ideas and concepts from the traditions of Hegel and Fichte, such as the struggle for recognition and the pursuit of one's own freedom, illustrate that recognition is not merely a psychological need for humans. It also serves as a social and moral foundation that shapes our identity. A mediator or facilitator who understands this multilayered nature can work more sensitively with the areas and reasons why individuals lack recognition in conflicts, such as issues related to authority or care.

Empowerment is enhanced through a Transformative approach, especially when individuals recognize that their voices hold significance and are acknowledged by others. This recognition "lifts" people from feelings of powerlessness or self-absorption, allowing them to become the authors of their own decisions while also being respected partners. It is vital to maintain this interconnectedness to ensure that mediation or facilitation does not devolve into a technical or manipulative process.

Several lessons for Transformative practitioners emerge from this:

a) An approach focusing on the relational and moral aspects of conflict utilizes recognition as a genuine force facilitating transformation.
b) Reflection, summarization, and check-in techniques are then not mere "communication tools" but means of making visible and supporting the perception of the other as a being with its own meaning and legitimate perspective.
c) Understanding the philosophical roots of recognition – the struggle for recognition and the constitutive nature of interaction – helps avoid superficial "politeness" and grounds, for example, mediated conversations in genuine engagement with the ethical and ontological dimensions of conflict.

The essence of Transformative theory lies not in retreating from conflict, but in harnessing its potential for mutual change. Recognition energizes both an individual's inner strength (empowerment) and their openness to others, gradually forming the foundation for new trust and a more responsible way of coexistence.

From the perspective of a Transformative approach, recognition is essential. Without it, conflict communication would be confined to a mere dispute over self-interest. Recognition elevates the conflict to the realm of shared human dignity, creating space for genuine change in how we perceive ourselves, others, and the quality of our interactions.

The practical application of these ideas in mediation, facilitation, and coaching shows that achieving deep recognition and empowerment is not always a linear process. Although empowerment can often precede recognition of the other party, the reverse can also be true. Small steps towards recognition can build confidence and a willingness to act constructively. Thus, I can agree with Della Noce (1999), who speaks of a "virtuous circle" in which empowerment and recognition are mutually reinforcing, neither preceding the other.

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