**Strategy in a Four-Dimensional Space**

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**Introduction**

**Four Overarching Ideas:**

1. **Strategy, ‘4-d’, space**
2. **Complex Systems, Live Field**
3. **Game Theory, Flex Points & Optimization**
4. **Paradoxical Pairs**

**Four Focus Areas:**

1. **Groupings**
2. **Specialties**
3. **Perspectives**
4. **Phases**

**Four Overarching Ideas**

**Idea One: Strategy, Four-Dimensional Space**

**Strategy**

Choose the strategy that best suits the situation (like AI). The situation includes all the people involved (clients and professionals); the legal, financial, parent and psychological matters. Like in sports, a harder game may requires more preparation and strategy.

**Four-Dimensional**

A metaphor for ‘going meta’ or ‘out of the box’. May involve paradox (contradiction or seeming contradiction or both/and or multiple perspectives). Less black and white, less ‘in the box’.

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| ***Examples of Three-Dimensional vs. Four-Dimensional Thinking*** | |
| 3-d | 4-d |
| Newton  Time and space are constant | Einstein  Time and space fluctuate |
| Ethno-centrism | Diversity of perspective |
| Objective truth, black and white  Singular truth | Subjective objectivity, shades of gray  Contradictory perspectives can both be true |
| Client has feelings about psychotherapist, Therapist’s feelings are caused by client’s feelings | Therapist and client co-create a live field that is interactive with both as a third entity |

**Space**

Allowing space for freedom, flex, possibilities, creativity, ‘out of the box’ solutions. Sometimes good to think about how to construct a solution (positive). Sometimes good to think about preserving space for an emergent solution (negative). Conflict may collapse space.

**Idea Two: Complex Systems, Live Field**

**Complex Systems**

Like the weather, a complex model that approximates the most notable dynamics within a complex, highly interactive system.

**Live**

At certain times, especially in a larger collaborative meeting, and as with improv or a jam session, the live moment is a one-time opportunity and cannot be repeated. This lends pressure but also potential freshness and opportunity. How we show up is key (like in a big game)—ideally ‘relaxed alert’, ‘in the zone’.

**Field Effects**

Whichever grouping is present creates its own field, it’s own dance, it’s own dynamic. The constituents co-create the field and in turn, the field affects the constituents—sometimes in powerful ways like a rip tide. Professionals try to regulate this from inside the fields they participate in.

**Idea Three: Game Theory Plus, Flex Points, Optimization**

**Game Theory Plus**

As in economics, using simple premises to see how actors will act. But humans are more complex, so have to add the twists and turns of psychology, conscious and unconscious intent, real and seeming contradictions.

**Flex Points**

Like a Venn Diagram, need some stretch-ability in the clients (and team) to help find overlap. As with stretching a budget—we can save some money here and some money there too—we want to find whatever ‘stretch capacity’ is in the system and be warming that up from early on in the process—not waiting until a conflictual situation has hardened.

**Optimization**

Looking for ‘zones of potential overlap’ rather than exploring solutions where the potential is much less (unless left with no other options). If the system has been optimized for flex points and the case has been optimized for likely zones of potential overlap, possibilities emerge. Even so, may have find every last bit of stretch that the system has to offer.

While much has been made of how crisis and stress can lead to a stiffening, low bandwidth, reactivity, destructiveness—sometimes ‘optimal stress’ incubates an option that less stress might not have provided; sometimes crisis forces a paradigm shift.

Stretch to convergence might sometimes be stress to convergence--or stress-de-stress pulsing. Know when to stay in stress and when to rest.

**Idea Four: Paradoxical Pairs**

**Simplicity & Complexity**

Capture just enough complexity that are not oversimplifying, being overly reductive; simplify enough that can chart a course and not become lost in the complexity. Better to cast the net wide and hold the complexity, learn what is most salient, boiling down to essentials rather than over-simplify prematurely and be prey to blind spots.

**Structure & Freedom**

Building the structure of boundary, containment, foundation, path, scaffolding—provides what is needed for freedom. Too much structure controls and congests; not enough is chaotic, directionless, disorganized. The sweet spot works with both in the rich realm of in-between. Metaphor of a dancer’s anatomy of bone and muscle that is nevertheless supple and fluid. Metaphor of a soft-style martial artist (taiji) where a thousand repetitions allows for graceful, spontaneous, precise movement. Build the particular structure that this particular case needs.

**Active & Passive**

Active, guiding, nudging, exploring vs. giving space. As in complexity theory, can have passive attractors, like magnetic field effects around which movement occurs—a case of non-doing affecting doing. Consider I Ching hexagrams where the right thing in one instance is the wrong in another: to push through, to wait in silence.

**Planned & Unplanned**

Plan for what is most likely, plan for other possibilities, be ready when the unplanned emerges. Planning is optimal readiness but not overdone in a way that constricts, not underdone where can’t capitalize on an ephemeral opportunity.

**Four Focus Areas:**

**Groupings: Self, Dyad, Small Group, Big Group**

**Specialty Areas: Psychology, Parenting, Legal, Financial**

**Perspectives: Professional—Client; Client—Client; Team—Client ; Team—Couple**

**Phases: Initial, Preparation, Negotiation, Finishing Up**

**Focus Area One: Groupings**

**Groupings One: Self (Client, Professional)**

Each person in the collaborative, whether professional or client, has their own individual personality, psychology, motivations, proficiency, flexibility, self-awareness, etc. While we are all relational beings, as existentialists say, we are also separate—and in a way, isolated—individuals. As such we are (an encapsulated, atomistic) ‘system within a larger system’ or a ‘self within the system’. The main relationship at this level is ‘self to self’.

The role of client and the role of professional is the prominent function of the self within the system of collaborative divorce.

Professionals sometimes approach their role ‘with professionalism’, that is, more as persona than person, perhaps not looking to explore more human and vulnerable feelings that come up in a case.

Clients may do the opposite, arriving at the divorce in a raw state, though they might do well to study the collaborative role as if it were an important—if temporary—job.

A divorcing client in individual therapy may benefit from a focus on one’s feelings. But some therapists, hearing only one side of the story and not understanding the nuances of a collaborative process, may amplify distortions, misunderstand the collaborative process, and offer misguided divorce advice.

**Internally Clear**

Assisting clients to uncouple from each other and from their dysfunctional marital dynamic is a usual, central task for the facilitator and for the team as a whole.

Professionals can ‘check-in’ with their feelings so they don’t ‘charge the field’ with unhelpful feelings.

Strategy in a four-dimensional space has many moving parts. These are difficult to track if one is not clear oneself.

In a professional, charged feelings left unexamined and not worked through introduce a problematic variable that the rest of the team must now keep track of, resulting in less flex and less free space in the collaborative.

**Intuition**

An intuition or gut feeling might be an inner voice expressing wisdom from a different, perhaps unconscious part of self. Such information can be extremely helpful, revealing aspects that might otherwise remain hidden.

Some feelings that seem like intuitions are actually projections or distortions, perhaps reflecting anger, fear, bias, etc., not truth. Inner exploration can discern which of these is occurring.

Problematic feelings, when they arrive, can feel like a pain, a bother, a burden—a kind of obstacle to be worked through. But sometimes they bring our attention to something important, perhaps even a kind of primal, unconscious communication from the client. In other words, our issue likely sheds light on their issue or the reason we are struggling in how we attend to this case.

**Breaking the Fourth Wall**

An age-old theater convention is to pretend an invisible transparent wall that separates actors from the audience as if the latter is outside looking in. By contrast, if the actor speaks directly to the audience, it breaks this convention, it pierces this wall.

In a similar way, as professionals, sometimes it is worth breaking outside of the role, the persona to perceive our own feelings more fully—or those of our clients (if that is not usual for us)—or to address what is happening in another professional, which can sometimes feel taboo.

**Groupings Two: The Dyad**

**(Professional-Client, Client [2], Lawyer [2], Neutral [2], Lawyer-Neutral)**

**Professional-Client**

Each professional attempts to build rapport with the client. Each pairing, based on role and personalities, is unique.

**Neutral-Neutral**

Neutrals often relate well because of their shared role, their neutrality and their ‘both-sides’ view. They may feel similarly burdened to keep the collaborative viable and can provide valuable mutual support around this while also strategizing as a ‘team within a team’ regarding what to do about this.

**Lawyer-Lawyer**

Lawyers may relate well because of their shared role too as well as their similar expertise and background. On the other hand, if their clients are conflictual, they may also come into conflict. If they have different views of the case, of their clients, of the law regarding substantive matters of the case, or of how collaborative should generally be practiced, this may generate friction.

In moments of challenge, professionals sometimes pair off—neutral with neutral and lawyer with lawyer. This natural tendency has its place so long as other communications within the team can also regularly occur.

**Lawyer-Neutral**

This pairing can be complementary and opposite (advocacy vs. neutrality), but sometimes challenging if the lawyer struggles to balance advocacy with collaboration or if the neutral struggles to maintain neutral objectivity or if the case takes on litigation dynamics.

**Client-Client**

Though divorce is about uncoupling, the clients remain a historical couple. They can also connect as co-parents and clients. This paired unit can reconstitute at different moments in ways that are both helpful or unhelpful. Clients may inflect their unity to critique the team, for example, constructively for a needed reset or destructively to externalize blame.

**Groupings Three: Professional Team**

The professional team is an important entity since it develops and implements strategy like the captain and crew of a boat. Challenges can arise if professionals are too busy to schedule or plan, or if their views of the case or of collaboration are too divergent.

**Team Cohesion**

In a challenging divorce, discord between the clients may filter into the team and threaten to pull it apart. The more divided the couple, the more unified the team must be.

In response to this situation, some collaborative lawyers may be tempted, as if by reflex, to respond in a more litigation-like manner. If both lawyers do this, the case may drift in the direction of positional bargaining and litigation settlement negotiation.

If one lawyer maintains a more collaborative stance while the other does not, the former may be at a distinct disadvantage. If this dynamic cannot be remedied by intervention—by a neutral, the other lawyer, or the rest of the team—the resulting asymmetry between the lawyers can also tug on the neutrals, threatening to pull them out of center as they attempt to rebalance the field.

Symbolically, one may imagine a cohesive team as a complete circle, and a team that lacks cohesion as an interrupted circle.

**Groupings Four: The Collaborative Whole**

The collaborative group in its entirely—the professionals and the clients—is subject to all the usual tensions and dynamics of any group. Into the soup pot are poured everyone’s personality, historical dynamics of the couple and the team, and the hot spice of divorce. The large group can replay some portion of the pre-set dynamics from a smaller subset, as when the team plays out tensions or patterns introduced by the couple. The larger group can also create a new culture all its own, with its own dynamics—positive or negative. These evolve (or devolve) over time and are easier to shape in the beginning, before they become strongly established.

When the whole group is in harmony, the field is alive with possibility and space is not only preserved but can open up.

When the group is in disharmony, defenses come into play, such as avoidance, externalization of blame, ‘the best defense is a good offense’, etc. Some professionals may agonize over the increasing difficulty of the case; others may simply shrug their shoulders wishing to wash their hands of it, perhaps secretly hoping for termination.

In challenging situations, the team does well to reinforce cohesion and revisit their strategy in light of what is occurring—the sooner, the better.

A problem client can create difficulty for the rest of the group, and for that person’s lawyer in particular. A strong team can face this issue forthrightly and share the burden of response, so as not to drain all of that lawyer’s capital with their client. A weak team may not be able to navigate this situation in a coordinated fashion, in which case divisions ensue and the case may crumble. In some situations like this, a lawyer may argue points to the team as if in front of a judge.

**Focus Area Two: Specialties**

**(Psychology, Parenting, Law and Finances)**

**Psychology**

**Psychological Assessment: Client**

Personality

Mental health

Executive function

Broad goals (for process, for outcome)

Interests

Relational capacity

Relational dynamics

**Collaborative Capacity**

Other-oriented/Self-orientated

Control-oriented/Flexible

Positive/Negative

Kind/Harsh

Patience/Impatience

Perspective-taking/Lack of perspective-taking

Passive/Active

Realistic/Unrealistic

Victim/Solid

**Theme Cards**

Key themes about the client, the couple and the case can guide us forward. These are *simple* guideposts or reminders about what’s occurring within this *complex* arena, providing direction for understanding and intervention. Often these psychological issues play out in whatever areas are most resonant: psychological (process), parenting, legal, financial.

**Staying in the Lane of Reason**

Does the client stay in the lane of reasonable, relying on solid legal advice and common sense provided by the lawyer and the team? Does the client resist good guidance, insisting on going one’s own way and looking to others outside the collaborative circle, such as a Greek chorus or another lawyer? Does the client attempt to take over the process in an unhelpful way?

**Parenting**

Relationship with children—and other parent’s

Willingness to share residency, to accept near symmetry

Compatible styles

Trust in other parent

Communication ability

Extended family

Accept/Antagonize

Age of children

**Legal**

Separate property

Business

Preferred legal method

Honesty

Litigation

Collaborative law

Trust

Fairness

Legalistic

**Relationship to Framework of the Law** (clients, but also professionals)

Formula-based, follow law

Bottom-up (budget-based)

Flexible vs. rigid

Controversial areas

Idiosyncratic view

Anti-cash flow/Full cash-flow

I worked for this/I am owed

I deserve to cohabitate/marry without a loss of maintenance

**Financial**

Maintenance

Child support

Money managing skills

College

Retirement

Pension

Loans

Debt tendencies

Income

Child needs

Child lifestyles in each household

Family money

Budget

Expectations

Entitlement

Work ethic

Lifestyle pre-/post-divorce

Career

Partner help

Feelings about financial future

Relationship to money

**Focus Area Three: Perspectives**

(**Professional—Client, Client—Client, Team—Client, Team—Couple)**

**Professional-Client**

With the lawyer, the perspective is often strongly client-centric, by design.

As an advocate who meets individually with only one client, it may be difficult to see both sides.

Neutrals have an excellent opportunity to see both sides.

*Clients may appreciate of a neutral:*

That you understand the spouse:

“You know my spouse and how difficult they can be.”

That you can push back on them:

“I guess you’re right. He didn’t mean what I thought. It’s just how he talks.”

That you can make helpful recommendations

“Thank you, this might work better.”

*Clients may not appreciate in a neutral:*

That some discretion may be maintained

“Did he admit to you that he’d had an affair? He won’t tell me. Did he tell you?”

That support is offered in both directions, that neutrality is maintained

“I’m sure she told you all the same old stuff, blah, blah, blah. Whatever.”

“He can be very convincing. Everybody believes his lies. You probably are too.”

**Client-Client (Couple)**

The view that each spouse has toward the other.

May be positive—negative—black and white OR in-between—ambivalent—both/and

Feelings may be symmetrical or complementary asymmetrical or simply different

May be shifting from old marital pattern toward a new divorced pattern—or no pattern

One or both may want to stay in the old system albeit now divorced (positive or negative)

One may wish to hold on to an old system dynamic, the other ‘not playing’

Both may shift to something new and related or something new relatively unrelated

Some still have longing and hurt

Perhaps moving toward ‘better to be free of this’, ‘did me a favor’

May trust in certain ways, not in others

Previewing that perspective may ease—or in tough negotiation, may worsen

(1) during divorce (later stage)

(2) after divorce completed

Sometimes a healthy shift occurs from externalizing blame to mutual accountability

Any clarity or moving through may help recover some of what was previously good

Reducing tension toward the spouse can free up space—mental/emotional, past-present-future

**Team—Client**

When there is good team coherence, the professionals may converge toward a similar recognition of the client issues presented in the case. This opens space for effective, unified team strategy. In this circumstance, all professionals hold an innate respect for the unique advocacy relationship of each lawyer-client pair, even in the case of a problematic client.

When a team can see couple dynamics clearly in a way that is not clouded by advocacy loyalty, the team is more protected against unconsciously playing these issues out in the collaborative (as a reiteration or echo of the couple’s dysfunctional dynamic).

The more the lawyers take sides and the less convergence that exists within the team view, the more must one default to a ‘agree to disagree’ model. The team can come to a similar view of what is occurring in a client without this necessarily disadvantaging that client or leading to a loss of advocacy.

There is a natural pressure for a lawyer to argue on behalf of their client to the team if that lawyer believes that the client is not being adequately seen, understood, respected, empathized with, etc.

**Couple’s View of Team**

Critical/Appreciative

Trusting/Untrusting

Chorus-influenced (may need to intervene)

Lawyers/Team as helpful/unhelpful

Time and cost factors—does this work, why did the cost increase?

Work to repair view if too distorted or damaged

If not reality-based criticism, understand where coming from, which may help improve

Negative view (externalizing team together) gives couple common enemy, false cohesion

If criticism not reality-based, careful not to ‘take the bait’, can put team in disarray

If criticism reality-based, careful not to disavow or lose credibility: no shame, own, improve

Remember couple hasn’t done this before, doesn’t know what it’s supposed to look like

When informing about the natural bumps in the process, couple may interpret this as cover

Try not to drop the ball in a serious way that invites frustrations

If team deemed dysfunctional (whether real or not), lose faith, anger shifts to team

**Focus Area Four: Phases**

(**Initial, Preparation, Negotiation, Finishing)**

A key zone for case strategy is to recognize and work with phases and timing. Waiting too long can lead to a lost opportunity. Moving too quickly may force the case into premature steps, positionality and impasse.

**Initial**

Key aspects of the initial phase are to orient clients to the process (including to begin gathering financial information), to address their current concerns (which may have been festering for some time), and to build rapport between clients and professionals as well as between professionals who haven’t worked together before.

Already at the initial phase assessment begins in earnest, and strategy follows immediately. Notable areas are the psychology of each client and the couple (and family) alongside potential challenging zones within legal, financial and parenting areas, noting how these may interact.

First attempts to address these issues as a team provide information about how well the team may come to a cohesive understanding or whether there are fault lines in the team as well.

**Initial Perspective**

Many studies have shown that in job interviews, an initial impression can form within minutes or even seconds and is the most critical aspect for whether one is hired. Intuition is helpful, but projection and jumping to (unfounded) conclusions is not, particularly when this is a pejorative picture of the other side.

For neutrals who meet with both clients early on, the adage ‘there are two sides to every story’ is borne out repeatedly. One story may seem credible until another credible story contradicts it. Only after meeting with both clients can one begin to grasp the whole. Being the sole advocate, lawyers do not have this same opportunity, though advocacy may allow a special kind of rapport.

Each professional gets different bits of information. This recalls the story about six blind men and the elephant. Feeling a tail, one says, “It’s a rope.” Another, touching the tusk, says, “No, it’s a saber!” The trunk seems a serpent; the side, a wall; the ear, a fan; and the leg, a tree trunk. Only in concert can the riddle be solved and the picture come into perception.

**Holistic Perspective**

After all the professionals have met with clients, a team meeting can accomplish two goals:

(1) fill in the gaps and round out the information about the clients, allowing for a more complete perspective;

(2) develop a strategic plan for the entire process, to be updated and refined as the case progresses.

**Preparation**

The second phase involves ongoing rapport-building, collecting financial information, and supporting and stabilizing further steps in the separation process, such as residency schedule and possibly securing a separate residence. On a practical level, completing the financial homework is significant so that the case does not drag unnecessarily. Often the most important aspect of this phase, however, is to make the internal mental-emotional shifts that allow for a more successful negotiation.

While negotiation is the most important moment in the collaborative, this preparation phase phase actually has more impact on how the negotiation will ultimately go. Think of athletes needing to train vigorously for an upcoming competition. The actual performance is critical—even more so the training that precedes it.

During this phase, the collaborative team of professionals needs to be careful not be lulled into complacency, let’s wait and see. Too often this approach misses the opportunity to assess, strategize, and intervene in ways that can change the outcome. If the team has done what is reasonable on the front end, then the next step is to see what presents itself.

**Plant Seeds**

Depending on the pace of the process, some seeds may need to be planted early enough so that they can sprout and grow and provide a harvest in time for negotiation. Waiting until after all the financial information has been gathered and double-checked might be too late. Some of the sprouts that need watering include identifying and continuing conversations about broad goals and interests as well as recognizing and attending to core themes. Other areas include ensuring adequate understanding of legal framework and the relationship of collaborative divorce to legal framework. Constantly encouraging an interest-based instead of positional approach is helpful, as is growing into acceptance of financial and legal realities and the fact that both parties must sign the final agreement. Many of the interventions at this stage are about flexing and freeing up space and practicing a posture of creative possibility.

**Corralling**

While we may prefer the image of an open field clients to freely explore and flow naturally toward reasonable solutions, some need firm guidance or even ‘corralling’ to move out of a stuck place of negativity and move toward a better mindset. The goal may not be as lofty as transformation; just letting go of enough emotional debris clear one’s head may be achievement enough. Some corralling may be needed in the heat of negotiation too, though best to make what progress one can ahead of time so as not to further load this phase, which normally presents plenty of challenges already.

**Negotiation**

Negotiation is ‘show time’, the big climactic moment of the entire collaborative process. If some agreements have already been reached, this makes for an easier process. Even so, one must pay attention to the timing for large items that balance or off-set each other so they are accomplished simultaneously or in short order. Having one client sit a long time in disadvantage until the other piece is evened out can invite difficulty.

Negotiation needs to be sure-footed so as to avoid backtracking that could unravel an agreement. Once entering the round of negotiation about bigger items, best to move most of these smoothly through. Otherwise, it’s as if one were standing with a heavy weight lifted above one’s head. Once achieved, that weight can be set down on the ground, everyone can breathe a sigh of relief, and after a brief pause, the collaborative can shift toward its final stage.

In some cases, tackling smaller items first, ‘low hanging fruit’, can set a positive precedent for reaching agreement. It creates good energy and warms up the bigger process to follow. In other cases, haggling over small items burns up capital that is needed for getting the big items resolved.

**Changing Places**

If one client from the start of the process appears ornery and unreasonable, and the other, more easygoing, somewhere before or after the negotiation process, they may change places—or both may become equally difficult. It’s as if the seemingly friendlier client tires of the vitriol and possibly of attempts to appease the other’s upset. Perhaps this dynamic persisted during the whole marriage, leading to a buildup of frustration and rage that can only be voiced now, if ever, given that the marriage is soon to end. Perhaps this explosion is what the more aggressive client wanted all along. A big reaction may seem to reveal what was hidden or withheld, for example, when a partner craves attention from an emotionally avoidant spouse.

In such cases, the former flexibility is replaced with rigidity, as if stretchy rubber now turns to stone. Optimizing flex points is often critical in tough cases, and these may seemingly disappear instantly. Good pacing may allow for big negotiation items to be achieved before this loss of plasticity. When this dynamic is recognized early on in a couple, the clock starts ticking to reach resolution if possible before this shift occurs. By the time the first tremors appear, it’s as if an inexorable countdown had already begun toward an eventual earthquake.

Sometimes the best choice, if ready for negotiation, is to accomplish what one can while there is still bandwidth to do so, aiming to get the majority of big items completed. After the earthquake occurs, the capacity to compromise may itself be compromised and lead to impasse, brinksmanship and threats of litigation. In this circumstance, if most of the negotiation has been completed, a small remaining gap may be manageable, and a medium gap, just barely so. A large gap, on the other hand, may seem insurmountable.

The change may be healthy psychologically and long overdue. It may create trouble for the divorce, or conversely, help move the divorce to a better place. Intimations of whether it will help or hurt the process can also be surmised as the storm clouds begin to gather. Sometimes this energy needs to come into the room. The challenge in this situation is for conflict-avoidant professionals to give it the space it needs.

The pair may be in a homeostatic system, where the ‘heat’ on the thermometer must remain at 90 degrees. When one person stops heating the room to that level, it’s as if the other person is now unconsciously compelled to do so. In this case, it is as if they are taking turns. A skilled facilitator can often help shift this dynamic.

**Time**

Time is an oft-neglected but incredibly important area to consider in terms of assessment, strategy and intervention. Professionals do well to avoid unnecessary time problems which may stem from an overly busy practice, failure to schedule meetings in advance, or not giving the case adequate priority. If clients do not make time in their calendar or if they frequently cancel, this must be addressed. Ironically, even if clients contribute substantially to postponements, they still may be frustrated that the process is taking so long. If one client intentionally delays, this can be egregious to the other client and may contribute to termination.

Part of the purpose in developing a full strategic plan at the outset is to cope with the time factor effectively on the front end. If one waits until the problem is pressing, it may be too late. Paradoxically, time issues must often be remedied before one becomes acutely aware of them.

**Finishing**

If all goes well enough in the end, the case now steadily approaches its conclusion with the hard work already done, the last phase of finishing may simply involve smaller, practical items. A flurry of feeling may arise that the pace and space did not previously allow. As finishing is a transitional space, it can reflect last bits of unfinished emotional business or the jitters before stepping into the first official chapter of unmarried life.

One or two medium-level snags may appear. These may seem contrived, whether consciously or unconsciously, to register a residual emotion or slow the coming end and beginning. Or these snags may be no more than an oversight or coincidence, like the essential item one almost forgot when about to leave for a trip.

**End Fatigue**

Like in a thriller where the climactic struggle appears fully resolved, then surprisingly, the old threat rises one last time, so too the phase of finishing up may produce one last round of extraordinary difficulty.

The potential reasons for this are manifold. Fatigue can lead to mistakes, but also to short fuses. Sometimes amidst all the formal negotiation, an underlying level of big emotions was still waiting for expression or resolution. The feelings could be about loss, old wrongs, fear of the future, or about the divorce now feeling real. Whatever the reason, a volcano may start to erupt.

**Explosion**

Sometimes the team knows an explosion is coming, but does not have the means to prevent this. All one can do is roll with this circumstance, providing some support or containment, hoping that perhaps enough of the negotiation was prepared or completed to compel signing. In other cases, there may be an opportunity to work with this subterranean force and alleviate some of the pressure before the rest comes rushing out.

In the worst case, the explosion threatens to upend everything. Perhaps the emotions use this threat to express the intensity of their pain and to provoke strong feelings in the other.

Some version of this, along a gradient, is so common that the team is wise to prepare for it in general. If this comes to pass, naming and normalizing the issues may provide some relief. In other cases, attempting to talk this out will actually make matters worse, and it must be worked with in other ways that are more passive or understated than active and highly engaged.

The team can be tired at this point too and needs to be careful not to make mistakes. It is natural that a professional in a long, arduous case may simply wish for it to be over, but this can unconsciously lead to missteps that bring about that result. Mutual support and talking through the difficulties at this stage is essential. Strongly voiced threats or movements toward litigation need to be managed by the team, not the individual professional. In other words, one professional should not declare the case terminated until consulting with the team first.