

Dynamics of Conflict and Conflict Intervention (NDR 624)

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Three Credits

Overview:

In this course, we will examine the fundamental nature of conflict. We will explore how we can understand the way conflict arises, the patterns it follows, the different levels at which it gets expressed, and the different ways in which people, communities, organizations, and societies explain and approach conflict. We will consider a range of theoretical approaches to conflict and conflict intervention, and we will look at particular dynamics that define the way in which conflict plays out. Special consideration will be given to how conflict is defined by the interplay of power, communication, culture, and systems.

Specific attention will also be given to the dynamics of interpersonal and inter-group communication. We will look at the barriers to effective communication that are characteristic in conflict, the ways in which productive communication can be established, and different cultural approaches to communication in conflict.

Students are asked to choose a particular conflict that they wish to investigate using the concepts presented in the class and to come to the class prepared with some knowledge about the substance of the conflict. They can use this conflict as the basis for their paper or they may choose a different one. This conflict can be a public policy, organizational, community, commercial, international or interpersonal dispute. Students may choose to use conflicts that they are personally involved in, but this will require that they move beyond their own personal perspective or the desire to justify their own stance or actions.

Since this class is taught on an intensive format, students are asked to complete the basic text, *Dynamics of Conflict*, and the "Conflict Analysis" chapter before the first day of class. A second assigned book, *Difficult Conversation*, will need to be completed before the third class (Thursday, October 16). Other readings can be completed in accordance with the timing presented in the relevant readings after each class outline below. In addition, all students are expected to participate in an on-line discussion forum that will begin in September and take place throughout the semester.

Specific Objectives:

- To gain an overview of the major theories of conflict and conflict intervention
- To understand the elements, causes, and nature of conflict

- To look at what motivates people and groups in conflict.
- To consider the different levels at which conflict plays out for participants
- To examine the different ways in which people engage and avoid conflict
- To understand how communication processes can escalate conflict or help it play out in a more constructive fashion
- To understand how people construct narratives that sustain them in conflict and how these narratives can evolve in a more constructive way.
- To consider different cultural variables that affect conflict and the cultural presumptions embedded in resolution processes
- To look at the dynamics of power and the impact it has on conflict
- To consider the essential nature of conflict intervention processes, including negotiation, mediation, and third party decision making
- To apply these concepts to particular conflicts of interest to students

Readings

The text for this course is *The Dynamics of Conflict: A Guide to Engagement and Intervention, 2nd edition*, Bernard Mayer (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Wiley, 2012).

In addition:

Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most, Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen (New York: Viking, 1999).

“Conflict Analysis”, by Julie Macfarlane, Chapter One in *Dispute Resolution: Reading and Case Studies, 3rd Edition*, Julie Macfarlane, editor (Toronto: Emond-Montgomery, 2010). Several of the readings in this chapter are from the previous edition of the class text. Needless to say, you can skip those sections. This chapter will be available for purchase as part of the course material.

From *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*. Edited by Morton Deutsch and Peter T. Coleman, editors, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Wiley, 2000)

“Cooperation and Competition,” by M. Deutsch

“Power and Conflict,” by P. Coleman

“Culture and Conflict,” by P. Kimmel

Review (if you have already taken NDR 692C) or read. “Ten Beliefs that Get in Our Way”, Chapter 4, “Conflict Resolution and Society”, Chapter Five, and “The Conflict Specialist,” Chapter 7, “Conflict as a Complex Adaptive System,” pp. 199-205, from *Beyond Neutrality, Confronting the Crisis in Conflict Resolution*, Bernard Mayer (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Wiley, 2004).

Note: I will post the section on “Conflict as a Complex Adaptive System” on Blue Line. The chapters from *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution* and *Beyond Neutrality* and the

“Conflict Analysis” chapter from the Macfarlane book will be available through the E-reserve system of the Creighton library. *Dynamics of Conflict* and *Difficult Conversations* will be available from the Creighton bookstore.

I suggest below which readings will be relevant to which class, but, as mentioned above, I ask that students read *Dynamics on Conflict* and the “Conflict Analysis” chapter prior to the first class and *Difficult Conversations* by the third class (Monday, November 3).

Assessment

Assessment will be 45% by final paper, 25% by class participation, 20% by contributions to Blue Line discussions, 10% by completion or a set of questions on readings. Attendance at all classes is essential.

Paper

Students are required to prepare a 12-15 page paper (double spaced, 12 point font) examining a conflict utilizing the concepts presented in class and discussed in assigned and supplemental readings. Papers should include a list of references using an appropriate format. It will be important to make use of the readings from class and additional sources as well. I am less interested in suggestions for how a conflict should be resolved (although procedural recommendations are appropriate) than in a clear and well constructed discussion of the dynamics of the conflict. As a general rule, successful papers will explore a few concepts in depth rather than covering many frameworks briefly. I will be available by phone and email (See above) to consult on the paper—or any other matter relevant to this course-- and will be available for in-person individual meetings from October 13-16, November 3-8, and November 20-22. Paper due date: by the end of the day Sunday, December 6. Please submit your papers electronically (preferably in Word) to berniemayer@creighton.edu.

Blue Line Discussions

I will periodically post discussion questions using Creighton University’s Blue Line technology. The first one will be posted in mid-September. All students are required to contribute to each discussion question at least twice, once with an original post and once with a response to someone else’s post, but preferably more often. Please post your first response within three days of the question being posted. My goal is for these to be rich discussions that further all of our thinking about conflict and that help people grapple with important issues related to negotiation and dispute resolution. Some of these questions will relate to specific readings. I also invite students to pose any questions or topics concerning conflict about which you would like to get a discussion going. I will participate in these as well. *Your participation in these discussions will be an important part of my assessment of your work. Last minute posts will not significantly contribute to the dialogue, and the frequency and timeliness of posts is therefore an important factor in how your contribution will be evaluated.*

Questions Concerning Reading

Subsequent to the first week of classes, I will be posting a few questions about the readings for this course. I will ask you to answer each question in no more than two paragraphs. My purpose is to make sure you understand key concepts from the readings. Your responses to these questions, should be submitted to be either by email or through Blue Line, will be due by the end of the day on Friday, October 31.

Class Participation

Active and thoughtful participation in class discussions and exercises is essential to the success of this class. I ask everyone to come prepared to participate in the spirit of honest, open and respectful dialogue that is at the core of good conflict engagement. Attendance at all classes is essential.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Summary Schedule:

September 15-October 12: On-line discussions

Oct. 13 (M), 4P to 8P

Oct. 16 (TH) 4P to 8P

October 17—November 2: On-line discussions and response to questions on reading

Nov. 3 (M) 4P to 8P

Nov. 6 (TH) 4P to 8P

Nov. 8 (SA) 9A to 4P

Nov. 9—19: On-line discussions

Nov. 20 (TH) 4P to 8P

Nov. 22 (SA) 9A to 4P

December 6 (SU) Final Paper due

Class One: (Monday, October 13, 4:00—8:00 PM)

Focus: Course Overview and Conflict Analysis

- Introductions and Course Overview
- Dimensions of Conflict
- Sources of Conflict
- The Conflict Process
- Other Conflict Variables

- Theoretical Traditions of Conflict Analysis
 - Case Application
- (View selections from *Qiu Ju*)

Relevant Reading

Dynamics of Conflict, Preface, Chapter 1 and 5
 “Cooperation and Competition”
 “Conflict Analysis, pp., 1-7, 80—94

Class Two: (Thursday, October 16, 4:00—8:00 PM)

Focus: Conflict Analysis, Continued, and the Individual in Conflict

- Review and Preview
- Levels of Conflict Motivation
- Attribution Theory
- Conflict Engagement and Conflict Avoidance: What we bring to conflict
- Naming, Blaming and Claiming
- Conflict Framing Exercise
- Escalation and De-Escalation
- The Conflict Cycle
- Case Application

(View selections from *The Sweet Hereafter*)

Relevant Reading

Dynamics of Conflict, Chapters 2, 6 (to p. 165)
 “Conflict Analysis, pp. 7—13, 21—37, 43--49

Class Three (Monday, November 3, 4:00--8 PM)

Focus: Communication in Conflict, Part 1

- Review and Preview
- Communication Strategies and Styles
- How People Communicate in Conflict
- Conflict Narratives and Conflict Framing
- The Communication Loop
- Naming, Framing, and Reframing

Relevant Reading

Dynamics of Conflict, Chapter 7
Difficult Conversations

Class Four (Thursday, November 6, 4:00—8:00 PM)

Focus: Conflict and Communication, Part II

- Constructing and Deconstructing Conflict Narratives
- Raising Difficult Issues
- Gender and Cultural Issues in Communication
- Three Conversations

Relevant Reading

Dynamics of Conflict, Chapter 7

Difficult Conversations

Class Five (Saturday, November 8, 9:00 AM -- 4:00 PM)

Morning session: 9 AM-12:30 PM

Focus: Negotiation, Power and Impasse

- Review and Reflections
- Integrative and Distributive Dimensions of Conflict
- Power Dynamics
- Understanding Impasse
- The Dynamics of Negotiation
- Negotiation Exercise

(View Selections from North Country)

Dynamics of Conflict, Chapters 3, 8, 9

“Conflict Analysis”, pp. 49--56

“Power and Conflict”

Afternoon Session: 1:15—4:00 PM

Focus: Conflict and Society

- Review and Preview
- The Social Function of Conflict
- Cultural Universals and Cultural Variables in Conflict and Conflict Resolution
- Conflict Resolution as Social Change and Social Control
- Staying with Conflict

Relevant Readings

Dynamics of Conflict, Chapters 4, 6—pp.165—181, and 12

“Conflict Analysis”, pp. 56--80

“Culture and Conflict”

“Conflict Resolution and Society”

Class Six (Thursday, November 20, 4:00—8:00)

Focus: Conflict Intervention

- Resolution, Transformation, Engagement: The Purpose of Intervention
- The Conflict Specialist
- The Conflict Specialist as ally
- The Conflict Specialist as systems intervener
- A Continuum of Intervention Processes
- What specialists offer and what disputants want

Relevant Readings:

“Ten Beliefs That Get in Our Way”

“The Conflict Specialist”

(View Selection from The Office)

Class Seven (Saturday, November 22, 9:00—4:00)

Focus: Third Party Roles and Conflict Resolution

- The Nature of Resolution
- Why People Resolve
- Mediation, Facilitation, Coaching
- Case Exercise 1
- Staying With Conflict

Lunch

- Case Exercise II
- Conflict as a System
- The Complexity of Conflict: Thirteen Days
- Discussion about paper
- Course Review and Next Steps

Relevant Readings

Dynamics of Conflict, Chapters 5 (review) and 7 (review), 10, 11

“Conflict Analysis” pp 94-97.

“Conflict as a System” (From *Beyond Neutrality*, pp 199—205,—posted on Blue Line)

(View Selections from 13 Days)