

Staying With Conflict (14SP NDR 612)

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Spring 2014

Monday, March 3, 4p-7p
Wednesday, March 5, 3p-7p
Thursday, March 6, 4p-7p

Monday, March 24th, 4p-7p
Tuesday 25th, 3-6 pm
Wednesday, March 26th, 3-7 pm

Syllabus

Overview

We think of conflict as a linear process requiring effective resolution. But the most important conflicts in people's lives do not end--they endure in one form or another, sometimes for many years. This presents both a major challenge and a major opportunity for conflict interveners, including mediators, advocates, coaches, managers, and systems designers. By restricting our goal to resolution we often fail to address the most serious struggles in people's lives. Yet disputants usually come to conflict specialists because of a concern about an immediate problem. This presents the intervener with a vital challenge. How can they help clients deal with their immediate concerns but also prepare them in a meaningful way for the long term challenges that they face?

In this course, we will look at the most significant conflicts we face and consider how to intervene in them when we know that they will not end. We will look at the specific elements of conflict that disputants bring to interveners and consider how to work on both the transient and enduring elements of these conflicts.

I will specifically work with students on how to reconstruct conflict narratives so that the enduring element is framed clearly and constructively, how to deal with the powerful tendencies to avoid conflict that in fact often exacerbate conflict, how to establish durable communication procedures, how to understand and assist people through the inevitable power struggles that are part of long term conflict, and how to understand agreements as a platform for ongoing conflict.

We will discuss expanding our goals from a focus on prevention, management and resolution to an emphasis on anticipation, engagement and support and we will consider

the implications of this for our role in conflict and for how we present ourselves and market our services. We will consider the range of roles that conflict interveners play in long term conflict, and we will specifically consider third party, ally, and system roles.

Overview of Assignments

Students are asked to select a particular long term conflict (one they have personal knowledge about or one that can be researched). They will be asked to prepare a brief memo/presentation on this conflict for the second week of class, analyzing the conflict and outlining the different “faces” of this conflict as described in the course text. This should be prepared to as if you preparing it for those involved in the dispute who might have to decide whether to engage in a conflict engagement process. You will then discuss this in class.

Discussion questions will be posted on Blueline before the first class and in between the two sessions. All students are asked to respond at least twice (and preferably more) to each question, once by way of an initial posting, once by way of a response to someone else’s posting. The first posting will be due about one week before our first class.

Students will also be asked to write a final paper, (10-12 pages) discussing options for intervention in an enduring conflict. You may use the same conflict that they chose to write about for their first paper, but you may chose a new assignment as well.

See below for a further discussion of the presentation and the paper.

Key Learning Objectives

- To consider how to work with people and systems involved in long term conflicts that are unlikely to be resolved
- To take an in depth look at the concept of constructive conflict engagement and to consider how to apply this to different conflict situations
- To consider how to translate this potential into practical interventions in serious, long term conflicts
- To develop an expanded understanding of the potential role of conflict specialists beyond the traditional role of the third party conflict resolver

Readings

The text for the course is:

Staying With Conflict: A Strategic Approach to Ongoing Disputes, Bernard Mayer (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Wiley, 2009).

Students are also asked to read:

The Third Side: Why We Fight and How We Can Stop, William Ury, (New York: Penguin, 1999)

Chapters 4, 7 and pp 199-205 (Chapter 6) from: *Beyond Neutrality: Confronting the Crisis in Conflict Resolution*, Bernard Mayer (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Wiley, 2004). *Beyond Neutrality* is required reading for Conflict Engagement and Leadership (NDR 622). If you have already taken this course, please review these chapters. If not, please read them (and you will have a head start on your reading for NDR 622).

Coleman, P. Bui-Wrzosinska, L. Vallacher, R., Nowak, A. "Protracted Conflict as Dynamical Systems", pp 61-74, in Schneider, A, Honeyman, C. (eds) *The Negotiator's Fieldbook*, American Bar Association 2006.

Since this class is taught on an intensive format, students are asked to complete *The Third Side*, the preface and first three chapters and chapter 9 from *Staying With Conflict*, and the chapters from *Beyond Neutrality* before the first class and the rest of the readings before the second week of classes.

Assessment

Assessment will be 50% by class participation including on-line discussions, 15% by memo/presentation, and 35% by final paper.

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 effective conflict engagement. Attendance at all classes is essential. Assessment of your class participation includes active participation when role-playing and during in-class exercises, evidence of preparation, interest and enthusiasm, contributions to discussions, active and engaged participation in on-line discussions, and encouragement of the learning of others including thoughtful critiques of others' contributions. Surfing the web, checking messages, emails or social media, and texting during class is not conducive to effective participation and is distracting to others. I ask that everyone refrain from this during class.

I will be posting discussion topics prior to our first class meeting in March and between our two weeks of class. All students are required to contribute to each discussion topic as often as possible but at a minimum, at least twice, once with an original post and once with a response to someone else's post. Failure to complete at least two substantive posts for each question will be considered non-completion of this assignment. Please post your first comment within three days of the question being posted, and your first response within five days. My goal is for these to have rich discussions that further all of our thinking about enduring conflict. I also invite students to pose any questions or relevant

topics concerning about which you would like to get a discussion going. I will participate in these as well.

A note on grading papers—I am looking for creativity, thoughtfulness, and a clear application of the concepts from the readings and the class presentations and discussions. I also expect the writing in these papers to reflect graduate level standards.

Memo and Paper

Students are required to prepare two papers/submissions:

1. A presentation in the form of a brief memo or proposal for intervention which presents a brief analysis of an actual conflict and specifically addresses the six “faces” of conflict as described in the text. This memo can also suggest alternatives for intervention depending on which aspect is considered to be the most important. You should write this as if you were preparing it for one or all the parties involved in the conflict in order to assist them in deciding what next steps they might want to take. The presentation/memo should be brief (that is all disputants are likely to read), no more than 3-4 double spaced pages. Part of the challenge here is to find a way of making a concept that may be abstract for many (enduring conflict) practical, tangible, and accessible. If instead of a paper you would prefer to prepare a presentation in PowerPoint or some other presentation format, that is fine with me. Please submit this to me electronically (to berniemayer@creighton.edu) by the end of the day on March 21st.
2. A 10--12 page paper (double spaced) discussing an enduring conflict that in some significant respects is not amenable to resolution in the short term. This paper should include a discussion of why your chosen conflict is enduring, what might be needed to promote a “constructive engagement process,” and what interventions might assist in this respect. You may use the same conflict that you used your presentation for, but you do not need to. This paper will be due by end of the day on April 17th. Please submit electronically in Word to berniemayer@creighton.edu. I am open to a wide variety of alternative formats and approaches to this paper. For example, if instead of writing a final paper, you want to create a video or audio documentary of an enduring conflict, please discuss with me. I would be very open to this.

I am available for phone, Skype, or email consultations on your papers, presentations, or any other questions about the content of this course, and I will be available for in person meetings during the weeks when class is held.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Monday, March 3, 4:00—8:00 pm

Focus: The challenge, limits and potential of the conflict resolution field.

- Course overview
- Review of On-line discussion
- The crisis and potential of the conflict resolution field
- Limiting assumptions
- What people want in conflict, what conflict specialists offer
- The Six Faces of Conflict
- Characteristics of effective conflict engagement
- Critiques of conflict resolution
- The “recurrence”—opportunity or fantasy?
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Relevant Reading:

The Third Side: Parts 1 and 2.

Staying With Conflict, Preface, Chapters 1-2

Wednesday , March 5, 5:00—7:00 pm (Joan Sabott, guest instructor)

Focus: Conflict engagement—the central focus of the conflict specialist

- “Deeply rooted” conflicts
- Strategies for staying with conflict
- The challenge of avoidance, the power of engagement
- Lessons in avoidance from Washington
- Reflective exercise on avoiding, engaging, and letting go
- Exercise in conflict engagement (hassle lines)

Relevant Reading:

The Third Side, Part 3 and Conclusion

Staying with Conflict, Chapter 3

Thursday, March 6, 4:00—8:00 pm

Focus: New roles for conflict resolvers

- Paradoxes of enduring conflict: from climate change to warring parents
- Avoidance, engagement, and race: America’s iconic conflict.
- The limits of neutrality--moving beyond the third party neutral role.

- The third side and the conflict specialist
- The Conflict Ally
 - Conflict coaching
 - Collaborative advocacy
 - Organizer
 - Strategist
- The System Intervener
 - Ombudsman
 - Designer
 - System Manager
 - Case Manager
 - Evaluator
 - Trainer
- Case Application: To coach, to mediate, to advocate or to organize (Cadillac Man)

Relevant Reading:

Beyond Neutrality, Chapters 4 and 7
The Third Side: Part 3 and Conclusion
Staying With Conflict: Chapter 9

Monday, March 24, 4:00—7:00 pm

Focus: Communication and Conflict Narratives in Enduring Conflict

- Review and Preview
- Review of on-line discussion
- Reviewing the “six faces”
- Presentation of student memoranda I
- Conflict narratives and the framing of long term conflict
 - Case example: the War on Terror (Drugs, Poverty,)
 - Types of reframing (the four levels of reframing)
 - Lessons from California (Erin Brockovich)
 - Reframing exercise
- Communication
 - The case of Art and Bill
 - Building the conflict loop
 - Structures of communication for ongoing conflict

Relevant Reading:

Staying with Conflict: Chapters 4-5

Tuesday, March 25, 3:00—6:00

Focus: power and escalation in enduring conflict

- Discussion of student memoranda II
- Communication II: negotiation the non-negotiable (“bargaining with the devil”)
- The sustainable use of power
 - The nature of power in enduring conflict
 - Using power constructively
 - Escalation and de-escalation (escalating constructively)
- Case example: an educational dispute
- The role of agreements in enduring conflict
 - “Cajoling, persuading, pleading”
 - Seizing the moment or going for the deeper issue (Israel and Palestine)
 - Exercise in arriving and using agreements in enduring conflict (Singh/Hilltop)

Relevant Reading:

Staying with Conflict: Chapters 6-7

Wednesday, March 26, 3:00—7:00 pm

Focus: A systems approach to enduring conflict

- Conflict as a complex adaptive system
 - Dynamic systems
 - Complexity and conflict
 - Conflict intervention as a negative feedback loop
 - Case application
- Discussion of student memoranda III (if needed)
- Sustaining people through long term conflict
- Conflict intervention and society: social change and social control
- Discussion of final paper
- Reflective exercise: a return to the faces of conflict
- Final thoughts and review

Relevant Reading:

Beyond Neutrality, Chapter 6, pp 199-205

Staying With Conflict, Chapters 8, Epilogue