

Topics in Conflict Resolution: Intractable Conflict CRES 4410

Fall 2015

Final Syllabus – Updated Sept 9, 2014

Instructor: Heidi Burgess

Time: 2:00 - 4:50 Wed, Sept 16 - Oct 14 (5 weeks)

Location: Sturm 490

"Office" Location: Sturm Lobby and Skype

"Office" hours: By appointment

Other contact information: I am often available by phone at my Boulder office: 303-492-1635 when I am not at DU, and my email address is heidi.burgess@colorado.edu (I don't think I have a du email address anymore.)

I move around a lot, so email is usually the best way to reach me.

Course Description:

This course is about the biggest problems facing our communities, our nation, and our world today. Ones that quickly come to my mind—and probably yours—are the economy (jobs, deficits, budgets, debt ceilings, housing, poverty, etc.), security (freedom from the fear of war and/or terrorism, as well as unmet fundamental needs), social services (health care, education, the justice system, etc.), racial issues (racial profiling and police brutality; immigration issues, and the environment (particularly climate change, energy and resources, and air and water quality, etc.).

Our communities, our nation, and the world have proven remarkably unable to “solve” any of these problems. Why? I assert it is because they are all underlain by a more fundamental problem—the inability to constructively deal with difficult and intractable conflicts. These conflicts prevent us, as individuals, our governments (at all levels), and our commercial and civil society organizations, from making wise decisions or taking effective action that will address any of these pressing problems. We are stuck, in almost every case, in what William Zartman calls a “hurting stalemate” where combatants battle each other instead of the problem, and we all go down the drain together.

While “traditional conflict resolution” which, somewhat ironically, was named 30 years

ago “ADR” for “alternative dispute resolution,” is well able to settle or resolve a vast majority of “tractable” conflicts and disputes, there are a significant number of really difficult problems that seem largely unresponsive to standard ADR techniques. In a provocative new book, Columbia professor Peter Coleman asserts that these are the “5% conflicts” – the 5% that he (and I) call “intractable.”

Many mediators purposely shy away from these conflicts. Several years ago, the predecessor to the Association for Conflict Resolution then called SPIDR (Society for Professionals in Dispute Resolution) put out a “definitive” (for the time) handbook on mediating environmental conflicts. A large part of the handbook was spent explaining which conflicts could be mediated and which not. SPIDR members were advised to avoid the ones that were unlikely to respond positively to mediation because it would be a waste of everyone’s time, and a threat to the mediators’ (and the field’s) reputations. If it can’t be mediated, the implication was, stay away from it!! Unfortunately, in much conflict resolution scholarship and practice, this attitude has changed remarkably little.

That advice long intrigued me, and like an adolescent who refuses to listen to her parents, I was drawn toward such conflicts. If they can’t be mediated, doesn’t that suggest we ought to be doing something else? What? Is there really no solution but to suffer through? Will we ever be able to get to the other side of these conflicts? At what cost?

Along with several colleagues, I have been studying intractable conflicts for over 25 years. My contribution to the field’s knowledge on this topic is a vast website called Beyond Intractability (www.beyondintractability.org), which I co-directed and co-edited with my husband Guy Burgess. Put together in the early 2000s with over 400 experts on intractable conflict, this website sought to be the “state of the art” statement about how these conflicts are different from more tractable conflicts, and what can be done to confront them constructively. This website is now being updated, but much of the material on it is still as applicable today as it was 8 years ago when it was released.

We will be investigating some of the key ideas from that website, as well as the new and challenging ideas from several conflict and complexity theorists. By comparing the insights from all of these sources, we will investigate how intractable conflicts are different from other conflicts. We will then consider what we, as individuals, communities, and societies are going to have to do if we want to successfully approach *any* of these conflicts, and hence be able to tackle *any* of the pressing social problems facing the world today.

Course Design and Expectations:

This is a course that requires active student involvement. Although there will be some lectures, most of the class time will be spent in discussions and exercises to enable you to engage directly with the ideas being taught. Students will be expected to:

- Attend all classes unless they have been excused because of illness or another valid reason.
- Do all the readings before class and prepare answers to the discussion questions by noon Monday during weeks 2, 3, and 4. Then be ready to respond to at least 3 of your peers' posts by class time on Wed.
- Participate actively in face-to-face discussions and in-class exercises
- Work with a team of 2-3 people to complete three conflict maps with annotations about a particular intractable conflict (details below)
- Present these maps in class during week 4
- Write a policy brief by yourself, based on that conflict map, using ideas drawn from the readings and applied to your conflict (details also below).
- Present your policy prescriptions in class during week 5

Readings:

We are using a combination of online readings which are posted below on the weekly descriptions. Pdfs of book chapters will be available on Blackboard; other readings are links to online resources.

Written Assignments:

- **Reading Reflections.** By 9 am Tuesday morning before class on weeks 2, 3, and 4, I would like everyone to prepare a 1-2 page (250-500 words) set of reading reflections and discussion questions illustrating
 - your reactions to the readings including comments about what is useful or confusing—and why.
 - Aspects of these readings which you think would be interesting to discuss as a group (aim for at least 2 of these per week)
 - Ways in which you see these ideas applying to other conflict theories and practical approaches and
 - how these ideas might play out in the “real world” – either in the context of the conflicts you are studying for your term project, or in other conflict contexts.
 - Submit your reflections to the discussion board, so that everyone can see what everyone else is thinking. You will not be able to see others' posts, however, before you post your own, so you don't have to struggle to come up with “unique” ideas.

- Please read your peers' posts before class on Wed, so we can discuss them together.

2. Conflict Maps: You will work individually or with a team of 1 or 2 other students to investigate a particular intractable conflict, and try to apply the ideas from the readings and class presentations to create three conflict maps. This will involve four steps:

1. Choosing a conflict to focus on (hopefully this will happen in class during day 1) and doing background research on that conflict. (Weeks 1, 2, and 3)
2. Developing three conflict maps. (Weeks 2, 3, and 4)
 - a. The first should illustrate the primary parties and their attributes-- interests, needs, values, relationships.
 - b. The second should illustrate the conflict events that led to escalation or de-escalation.
 - c. The third should be a structures and transactions map. (Ala Ricigliano).
3. Annotate and document these maps by:
 - . Describing each element (boxes and lines) with a sentence or two explaining what it means
 - a. Documenting the source of information of any elements that are less than obvious. (If you say that two parties to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict are Israeli Jews and Palestinian Israelis, I would consider that "obvious.")
 - b. In addition to the annotations and documentation, write a 3-6 page analysis of the maps (1-2 double-spaced pages per map), identifying "hubs, loops, and energy in the system" (see Coleman page 137), potential "local actionables" (Coleman page 140), and (if present) dynamics that are already present to diminish the intensity of the conflict (Coleman page 141). Finally explain what the map says about the "attractor landscape." What dynamics are pulling the "ball" down into the "valley of intractability?" Are there other attractors in the system that might help "pull the ball out" if they were strengthened? OR use the Lederach approach to identify the "horizon of the future" and change processes.
 - c. This conflict map and analysis should be done in draft form and be ready for class presentation on week 4. A final, polished version with documentation should be ready to hand in on week 5, along with a policy brief, as described below.
 - d. If the maps and analysis are group activities, they can be graded in one or two ways (your choice). You can divide up responsibility and identify who did what (for instance, person A did map A and B, person B did map C and the analysis, in which case I will grade you on your portion), or you can work on the entire assignment together, in which case, I will grade you together. (This is your choice, but please be clear about which option you are choosing.)

4. **Policy Briefs:** Each person *INDEPENDENTLY* should then use the conflict maps to make two policy prescriptions, either for a leader on one side of the conflict, or an organization considering intervening as a third party in the conflict.
 - a. Each of these policy prescriptions should be written up in a 2-4 page brief (1-2 single spaced pages per idea)
 - b. Each should explain one disputant strategy or third party intervention option that could help
 1. reduce current tensions and/or
 2. lay the groundwork for more positive interactions between disputants over the long term and/or
 3. prevent future escalation of hostilities and thus, worsening of the conflict's intractability over the intermediate or long term.
 - c. Be ready to present **one** of your policy prescriptions in class during Week 5, and hand them in electronic form (maps may be paper-only if preferred), along with your final conflict maps and analysis before class as well.

All of these “deliverables” will enable you to “play with” the ideas from the readings and investigate their practical implications for the conflict of your choice. The emphasis here will be on converting theory to practice—examining how theory is used to create practical intervention strategies that are more likely to have constructive outcomes in conflicts that are unlikely to respond well to traditional ADR approaches.

So, to recap,

- There is optional reading for week one (although if you don't do it before class, you will still have to do it along with the required readings) for weeks 2-5.
 - Discussion board posts and responses to peers are due weeks 2, 3, and 4.
 - Conflict maps and analysis need to be ready to present in class during week 4, but don't need to be written up in final form until week 5.
 - Conflict maps, analysis, and policy prescriptions need to be finalized in writing and turned in electronically (except for the maps, which can be on paper) before class on week 5, and policy prescriptions will be presented in class that day as well.
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Grading Summary:

- Discussion board posts: 8% each and 24% total
 - Class participation: 16%
 - Conflict Map with Annotation, Documentation, and Analysis - 20%
 - Conflict Map presentation - 10%
 - Policy Briefs - 20%
 - Policy Brief presentation - 10%
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Preliminary Course Schedule:

Week 1: Sept 16

- **Topics:**
 - Examination of the concept of intractability
 - Sources/causes of intractability.
 - Introduction to BeyondIntractability.org
- **Reading Due Today:**
 - Optional: I realize that everyone may not be able to do reading before the class starts, but this class is so short I want to start quickly. If you have the opportunity to start reading before class, we will be discussing parts of Peter Coleman's book, *The Five Percent* today. (The introduction (pp 1-10), Introduction to Part I (pp. 12-14) and Chapter 2 (pp 26-46) (Chapter 1—pp. 15-25 is optional) pdfs of these chapters are posted in Canvas.
- **Written Assignments**
 - As soon as possible after the first class and for sure by 9 am Tuesday Sept 22, send me a ½ - 1 page description of your conflict topic and names of team members, if any, who you will be working with. If it is a huge, long-lasting conflict (such as Israel-Palestine) you might want to pick out one aspect to cover, focusing on a particular time frame (most recent Gaza war, since Israel left Gaza; or a particular issue (water, refugees) etc.)
 - Reading reflections are also due next week, but not this week.
- **Class Activities**
 - Introductions
 - Go over syllabus
 - Discussion of the concept of intractability
 - Continuum exercise
 - Break into groups, each group choose a conflict, try to list as many causes of that conflict's intractability as you can.
 - Compare causes between groups

- During the last hour of week 1, I will give you some time to discuss potential "focal conflicts"--meaning the conflict you want to focus on for the rest of the course. We will discuss options together, and I hope we will be able to choose topics and form teams during class.
 - If time, begin to develop a theory of why some conflicts are more or less intractable than others.
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Week 2: Sept. 23

- **Topics:**
 - Complex and complicated systems
 - Dynamics of intractable conflicts
 - Introduction to "traditional" conflict mapping
- **Reading & Watching Due This week (in time to write your reading reflection by noon Tuesday.)**
 - The Five Percent (Coleman) Introduction (pp 1-10), Introduction to Part I (pp. 12-14) and Chapter 2 (pp 26- 46) (Chapter 1—pp. 15-25 is optional) (if you hadn't done it before)
 - Ricigliano, Chpaters 2 and 6
- **Videos also due today:** I am teaching an online course on Intractable Conflicts at George Mason University which is also doing conflict mapping. I have created 3 videos for them to show them how it is done. Since you have very little time to learn this, I thought I'd share those videos with you too. They are posted on a server on Beyond Intractability and are password protected, using a password that corresponds to the GMU class. Since this syllabus is going to be publically posted, I won't post the password here, but I will give it to you in class and/or email it to you.
 - Conflict Mapping Part I -- [Video](#) | [PowerPoint](#) |
 - Conflict Mapping Part II -- [Video](#) | [PowerPoint](#) |
 - Conflict Mapping Part III -- [Video](#) | [PowerPoint](#) |
- **Written Assignments:**
 - Email confirmation of specific project topic with names of team member(s) due by 9 am Tuesday (Preferably much before then, so you can start working on background research right away.)
 - Reading reflections also due by noon Tuesday. Don't reflect on the videos, but come armed with questions about them (if you have them).
- **Class Activities:**
 - Discuss reading reflections.
 - Discuss mapping questions.
 - Compare systems-oriented approaches to conflict with more traditional approaches to conflict.

- Review of alternative approaches to conflict mapping and try doing a parties/interest map in class with your group. Share strategies.
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Week 3: Sept. 30

- **Topics:**
 - Conflict Mapping Continued
 - Theories of (or Strategies for) Change
 - **Readings Due This Week:**
 - Coleman Chapter 5 pp. 111-144 required, pp. 144-183 optional, but likely helpful for your policy briefs.
 - [Theories of Change](#) by Ilana Shapiro in *Beyond Intractability*.
 - [Strategies of Change](#) Burgess and Burgess
 - Pages 86-87 of Encouraging Effective Evaluation of Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Activities: Towards DAC Guidance by Mary Anderson, Diana Chigas, and Peter Woodrow, available at the OECD website: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/52/3/39660852.pdf>
 - **Written Assignments Due This Week:**
 - Second reading reflection due by noon Tuesday.
 - **Class Activities.**
 - Discussion of reading reflections
 - Practice events mapping
 - Discussion about theories of change, “analyzing your maps” and what this implies about intervention in intractable conflicts.
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Week 4: October 7

- **Topics:**
 - Conflict map presentations
 - Conflict Transformation (ala Lederach) vs. Systemic Peacebuilding (ala Coleman and Ricigliano)
- **Readings Due Today:**
 - "[Conflict Transformation](#)" by John Paul Lederach and Michelle Maiese.
- **Written Assignments Due This Week:** Reading reflections set 3 due by noon Tuesday
- **Class Activities**
 - Conflict Map Presentations
 - Discussion of Reading Reflections
 - Discussion of Lederach's "Big Picture" of Conflict Transformation
 - If time: in small groups: Apply Lederach's Theory of Conflict Transformation to your own cases

Week 5: Oct. 14

- **Topics:** Summing Up--What We Learned, What Questions We Still Have (Lots, I hope!)
- **Readings Due Today:** None
- **Written Assignments Due This Week:**
 - Final versions of your conflict maps (*electronic copies emailed before class*)
 - Final version of your conflict map annotation, documentation, and analysis (*electronic--by email before class--one person/group*. Be sure everyone's name is on the documents, however.)
 - Final version of your policy briefs (2 per person) (*electronic copies emailed before class, ready for presentation in class.*)
- **Class Activities:**
 - Policy prescription presentations.
 - Discussion of the benefits and limitations of Coleman's, Ricigliano's, and Lederach's approaches, and comparison of their approaches to (1) traditional mediation and other approaches designed for tractable conflict, and (2) dialogue, problem solving workshops, and other "traditional" approaches typically used for intractable conflicts.
 - Discussion of outstanding questions.