

## Conflict Management

E59.1815.001

MW 2:00pm - 03:15pm 194M 204

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Office hours: by appointment at Cubicle 1 on 7th floor of MCC Dept: T/R 11:00 AM

### Course objectives

Conflict is commonly viewed as negative situation to be avoided at all costs. Yet, conflict, if done productively, can also be an opportunity to set things right, to achieve mutual understanding and even reconciliation. But the effective management of conflict is not necessarily easy. Perhaps this is why the Chinese characters for conflict are "danger" and "opportunity."

In this course we'll learn to more effectively manage conflict: mitigating dangers and taking advantage of opportunities. The objectives of this course are for you to learn:

How researchers conceive of conflict: theories, types, and causes;

Communication skills for effective conflict management: from confrontation through reconciliation;

An understanding of how larger contextual factors influence conflict.

### Texts

Dudley D. Cahn, Ruth Anna Abigail

Managing conflict through communication

ed=3 p=Pearson Education a=Boston y=2007 r=20070817

This is referred to as CA#, where "#" corresponds to a chapter number.

Complementary

Guy Burgess, Heidi Burgess

Beyond Intractability

or=Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado a=Boulder y=2007

Key Concepts

### Course requirements

Statement on Academic Integrity

"... Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do, from taking exams, making oral presentations to writing term papers. It requires that you recognize and acknowledge information derived from others, and take credit only for ideas and work that are yours."

**Confidentiality:** since this is a course about conflict it is possible we will touch on controversial issues, or we might share information not otherwise disclosed in everyday conversation. No one is required to share personal details, but if you choose to do so in a class assignment and are not comfortable discussing it, write "PERSONAL" on the top of your paper. (This won't affect your grade.) Or feel free to change or obscure information. In our discussions we should be respectful of what others choose to share. We must balance applying what we learn to difficult issues encountered without judging the people involved. We can ask or consider what alternatives might be employed without telling someone what they should've done. Assessment of academic performance is strictly based on the rubric below: a good or poor grade reflects the quality of understanding, analysis, and writing demonstrated and is not a judgement on the character or virtue of the people involved.

**Absence and late policy:** In order to accommodate the inevitable cold or subway jam three "freebies" are given in attendance. Class starts promptly and three late arrivals count as an absence. Beyond that absences or late assignments will affect the final grade.

**Attendance:** Your participation and attendance are expected; this entails coming to class on time, with the readings or any other assignments completed. Conspicuous lack of participation will be counted as an absence.

**Reading:** Thorough coverage of the week's required reading in advance of class is of utmost importance. Because I prefer to focus class time on discussing what is novel or confusing to the class, I do not spend a lot of time summarizing the reading. You will have already read the material and should be prepared to offer insights,

questions, critiques, and examples. Also, I do not assign an excessive amount of reading so if you're unfamiliar with basic background information, check the available resources! And feel free to ask for clarification in class. All questions are welcome and a really good question is one of the best contributions you can make.

In-class presentation: Students will be presenting based on their assignments; these are intended to provide material for us to reflect upon and apply what we learn; the second presentation only will be graded.

Papers: There are roughly 6 small assignments, including a take-home final. All papers should demonstrate a close reading of the required texts, exhibit a method of critical analysis, and substantiate concepts and cite sources where appropriate.

## Grading

### Formula

- 10pts Attendance and participation
- 10pts Conflict definition and types
- 10pts Socio-psycho dynamics (Film analysis)
- 15pts Conflict process and behaviors
- 05pts Presentation
- 10pts Apology and reconciliation
- 20pts Cross-cultural, intra-cultural or gender
- 20pts Take-home final exam

range	A	B	C	D	F
+		87-89	77-79	67-69	
	>=94	84-86	74-76	64-66	
-	90-93	80-83	70-73		=<63

### Rubric

In this class' grading scheme, a "B," for example, is not a subtraction from an initial state of an "A," but rather recognition of good and thorough work.

A = Excellent. Writing demonstrates impressive understanding of readings, discussions, themes and ideas. Written work is fluid, clear, analytical, well-organized and grammatically polished. Reasoning and logic are well-grounded and examples precise.

B = Good. Work demonstrates a thorough and solid understanding of readings, discussions, themes and ideas. Written work is clear and competent, but is somewhat general, a bit vague, or otherwise lacking in precision. While analytical, writing presents more description than analysis. Arguments are solid but not thoroughly original or polished.

C = Fair. Work demonstrates a somewhat fragmented understanding of readings, discussions, themes and ideas. Shows acquaintance with readings and ideas, but not intellectual engagement. Written work is choppy and argument somewhat difficult to follow, examples are vague or irrelevant, and ideas are imprecise. Work veers toward underdeveloped ideas, off-topic sources or examples, personal anecdotes, creative writing, memoir, etc.

D = Unsatisfactory. Work demonstrates little understanding or even acquaintance with readings, discussions, themes and ideas. Written work is choppy, fractured and unclear. Argument follows little logical development, or work presents little discernable argument whatsoever.

F = Failure / Unacceptable. Work does not demonstrate understanding of topics, ideas and readings. This is also the grade for work not submitted and plagiarized work.

See Understanding Assessment Feedback for how this is reflected in feedback. The Student Evaluation guidelines further address attendance, preparation, curiosity, retention, attitude, and talent.

Students will often ask if I grade on a curve. If everyone did excellent -- something I would like to see and help make happen -- that would correspondingly be reflected. However, assessed grades typically follow a "curved" distribution: typically some work is excellent, a minority is unsatisfactory, and most is quite good.

## Assignments

All assignments are due at the start time of class on specified date. They must be double-spaced and typed; such a page has roughly ~250 words. Page limits specified are minimums, though "more doesn't necessarily mean better." The use of key terms and concepts, if not trivial, should be substantiated or briefly explained in some way rather than vaguely mentioned in passing. This then sometimes means paraphrasing or quoting from a text, and these should be appropriately cited. You may choose the format (e.g., MLA, APA, Chicago) but

excessive or gratuitous excerpts can be a detriment. (The goal is not to have, say, 4 references and two quotes, but to exercise and engage concepts so as to demonstrate an understanding.) Imagine you are writing an illustrative exemplar for future students who are not yet as familiar with the material as you.

### 1. Conflict, its definition, and types

Consider the situation that has been problematic to you. In your essay address the following questions:

How does the situation map to the definitions we encountered? Has your view of this conflict, or in general, changed after our readings?

How would you characterize this conflict according to what we've learned (e.g., unproductive, displaced, important, tangible, etc.)?

What do you think some of the sources of this conflict might be?

How did you attempt to address this issue, and what worked well or what problems would you like to be able to address better in the future?

(Due Sep 23 04; ~2 pages)

### 2. Socio-psycho dynamics

Choose a film that illustrates either an interpersonal or social conflict. Briefly identify the sources of conflict (e.g., different types of (in)tangible issues) and consider how social-psychological issues contribute to the dynamics (i.e., f.a.e., reactive devaluation, competition, etc.) -- as discussed in class and from Kahneman and Renshon (2007). What might have been done to mitigate these escalating dynamics? (Make use of specific dialogue if you can.)

A few films in which conflict is prominent include:

John Sayles

Matewan

y=1987

David Mamet

Glengary, Glen Ross

y=1992

Sidney Lumet

Twelve Angry Men

y=1957

(Due Oct 05; ~2 pages)

### 3. Conflict process and behaviors

Consider a conflict of concern to you and identify some of the behaviors that were exhibited, and the ones that could be applied now, in the context of the conflict process. Behaviours might include those from the conflict escalation cycle, confrontation response skills, Gibb's supportive or defensive climates, and/or Sillars' collaborative tactics.

(Due Oct 19; ~4 pages)

### 4. Apology and reconciliation

Compose a one page Letter of Apology you would like to send or receive. Employ the steps of explaining (your role and the situation) without justifying/excusing, identifying the transgression's impact, offering an immediate solution and assurances for the future. In your second page, I would like you to reflect on the experience, making use of the texts if appropriate, and the steps you employed -- or did not. Did you gain any insights into the conflict or into reconciliation?

(Due Nov 11; ~2.5 page)

## 5. Student choice

Write an essay exploring conflict, such as with respect to the issues of cross-cultural, intra-cultural, or gender.

For example, with respect to intra-cultural we learned that Wikipedia's collaborative culture promotes positive approaches to interaction and conflict (e.g., "good faith" versus Godwin's Law). Consider a social context in which you find structural or cultural influences on conflict. For example, in July 2006 Nicholas Barthas blew up his Manhattan townhouse rather than lose it in a divorce proceeding that had lasted for years. New York is the only state in the country that does not permit "no-fault" divorces: former partners must find fault with one another in an (already) adversarial legal system. It is argued that this contributes to the estrangement and animosity divorcees feel towards one another and further damages their family.

Anemona Hartocollis, Cara Buckley

Real Estate and Rubble: When Marriages Go Awry

j=The New York Times m=July 12 y=2006 r=20071112

Identify a similar case or larger issue where social structure and culture further productive or unproductive conflict behaviors. What is the conflict? What resources and norms are available to participants that amplify or mitigate successful conflict? What is the effect, or which behaviors are affected (e.g., attitudes or communications)?

Use one outside source. Feel free to send me a one paragraph proposal until Nov 23: try to identify your topic/question, your likely argument, and the concepts and readings you will likely employ.

(Due Dec 02; ~4 pages)

## 6. Take-home final

(Due Dec XX; ~4 pages)

## Best Practices

Balance in discussion

Some thoughts on presenting

## Resources

NYU

Accessing materials: PDFs kept on Blackboard require you to log in there first; other resources may be accessed off-campus via the library proxy.

Learning Resources

Writing Center

Religious Holiday Policy

## Classes

### Background

Introduction

What is the structure of the course and how might we begin to think of conflict?

### Sep 09 Wed

Syllabus

CA1

Conflict

Right off the bat, what are some of the ways we can effectively respond to conflict?

### Sep 14 Mon

Definition and types & S-TLC

CA2,3

### Sep 16 Wed

Options & strategies

CA4,5

Social Psychology

What psychological and social dynamics affect conflict?

**Sep 21 Mon**

Hawks and doves

CA8

Daniel Kahneman, Jonathan Renshon

Why hawks win

j=Foreign Policy m=January y=2007 r=20070108 15:10 UTC

Supplementary

Michelle Maiese

Entrapment (Sacrifice Trap)

bt=Beyond Intractability m=July y=2004

Cases

**Sep 23 Wed**

CASE

Due: Conflict, its definition, and types

**Sep 28 Mon**

CASE

Communication

What are some conflict options and styles for effective confrontation?

**Sep 30 Wed**

Confrontation

CA6

**Oct 05 Mon**

Conflict process

*Due: Socio-psycho dynamics (film analysis)*

CA9, CA12

**Oct 07 Wed**

Climates and environment

Jack R. Gibb

Defensive Communication

bt=Trust: a new vision of human relationships for business, education, family, and personal living  
p=Newcastle Publishing a=North Hollywood y=1991

CA10

In class exercise

**Oct 12 Mon**

Escalation and anger

CA11

**Oct 14 Wed**

Impression & nonverbal

Wikipedia

Nonverbal communication

or=Wikimedia y=2008 r=20080114 23:02 UTC

Malcolm Gladwell

The naked face

j=The New Yorker m=August 5 y=2002

viniweb

Do You Ever Yearn? Kramer and George talk

p=YouTube m=March 17 y=2007

In the exchange between Kramer and George we can see examples of kinesics (emblems, illustrators, affect displays, regulators, adapters), oculosics (cognitive, monitoring, regulatory, expressive), haptics (touch, proxemics), and paralanguage

### Oct 19 Mon

CASE

*Due: Conflict process and behaviors*

### Oct 21 Wed

CASE

Empathy and Listening

What role does empathy play in conflict?

### Oct 26 Mon

Milton J. Bennett

Overcoming the golden rule: sympathy and empathy

Wikipedia

Ethic of reciprocity

or=Wikipedia m=July 30 y=2009 r=20090731 17:18 UTC

### Oct 28 Wed

Marshall Rosenberg

Nonviolent communication: a language of compassion

ch=1 a=Encinitas p=PuddleDancer Press y=2003 r=20070116

Richard Salem

Empathic listening

bt=Beyond Intractability m=July y=2003

## Practice

Reconciliation

What about forgiveness and reconciliation?

### Nov 02 Mon

Apology & reconciliation

CA13

WikiHow

How to apologize

or=WikiHow m=December 6 y=2007 r=20071212

### Nov 04 Wed

Truth and reconciliation

Susie Linfield

Trading truth for justice? Reflections on South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission

j=Boston Review m=Summer y=2000

Negotiation

What makes an effective negotiator?

**Nov 09 Mon**

Negotiation

Irene Kim

Why cooperating wins: Reputations, expectations and the fine art of negotiation

j=Cornell Enterprise m=Spring y=2007

CA7

In class negotiation exercise

Mediation and arbitration

How can intermediaries help manage conflict?

**Nov 11 Wed**

Third parties

CA14

*Due: Apology and Reconciliation***Issues**

Intra-cultural

How does social structure and cultural norms shape conflict?

**Nov 16 Mon**

Neutrality

Joseph Reagle

Good Faith Collaboration

y=2010

I will email a PDF.

Cross-cultural

How does conflict arise when cultural boundaries are crossed?

**Nov 18 Wed**

Cross-cultural

Michelle LeBaron

Communication tools for understanding cultural differences

or=Beyond Intractability m=June y=2003

Culture-based negotiation styles

or=Beyond Intractability m=July y=2003

Gender

Gender differences can be a source of conflict and perhaps affect the way communication and conflict happens

**Nov 23 Mon**

Gender

Ira G. Parghi, Bianna Cody Murphy

Gender and conflict resolution and negotiation: what the literature tells us

or=Women and Public Policy Program at the John F. Kennedy School of Government y=1999  
r=20080114

Deborah M. Kolb, Judith Williams

Listening to women: new perspectives on negotiation

p=WomensMedia.com y=2003 r=20080114

A brief summary of the authors' arguments found in Shadow Negotiation

Media and groups

How can the media with which we communicate affect conflict?

Nov 25 Wed

NO CLASS

**Nov 30 Mon**

Media

Raymond A. Friedman, Steven C. Currall

Conflict escalation: dispute exacerbating elements of e-mail communication

j=Human Relations v=56 n=11 pp=1325-1347 y=2003

**Close**

Groups

**Dec 02 Wed**

Michelle Maiese

Destructive escalation

or=Beyond Intractability m=September y=2003

Cass Sunstein

Fragmentation and Cybercascades

p=The University of Chicago y=2004

Extracts from Republic.com on polarizations, cascades, and enclaves

*Due: Cross-cultural, intra-cultural or gender*

**Dec 07 Mon**

CASE

**Dec 09 Wed**

CASE

**Dec 14 Mon**

Conclusion

CAAfterward

Due: Take-home final