

INTRODUCTION

This Handbook is an expanded and revised version of one originally published in 1997 but its origins go back well beyond the 1990's to the beginnings of academic efforts to establish both a discipline and a practice of conflict analysis and resolution. In other words, to the start of the movement to link theories about the origins and dynamics of social conflicts – particularly protracted and violent ones – to practical interventions aimed at finding lasting, non-violent solutions to such contests.

In some ways, the book is the result of more than thirty years of academic research, originally of an abstract and theoretical kind but increasingly, since the 1980s, involving a variety of interventions into protracted, deep-rooted conflicts, made at least partly with the objective of testing out the usefulness of that theoretical work. The basic ideas about “conflict resolution” it presents largely grew out of the collaborative efforts of a research group, which began its work in the mid-1960's at University College, London, being then officially entitled 'The Centre for the Analysis of Conflict', and known to its members as 'CAC'.

1. Origins

CAC was formed in 1966. Around that time, the political and social sciences were undergoing a 'behavioral' revolution, which threw into question many of the assumptions that had previously led people to regard conflict, violence and warfare as inevitable. Its members were all social scientists, but trained in different disciplines and sharing a conviction that prevailing ideas about social and international conflict were inadequate in some cases and, in others, just plain wrong. Within this generally critical framework, members of the Centre attempted to promote three objectives:

- (1) To improve understanding of conflict and in particular the politics of conflict.
- (2) To develop contacts between academics and political decision-makers, so that new theories could reflect real-world experience.
- (3) To create stronger ties between theory and practice, so that the ideas of social science could become relevant and usable.

Early studies led to a series of tentative propositions, on the basis of which later, practical work evolved. Primarily, it seemed then - and it still seems - that the shared features of conflict, at all levels of human society, were more significant than the differences, although there were many of those. Common patterns were displayed, both within and between such disparate categories as interpersonal disputes, community strife, rebellion against authority, and even coercion between states. In other words, although differences existed, generalisations and – hence - general theories about conflict were not merely possible, but helpful.

Turning from conflict to its various 'opposite' conditions, existing insights from the social sciences into stability, peace, justice, progress and legitimized authority demonstrated that a significant growth of knowledge was producing images of a peaceful society in ever-increasing variety and complexity. It became apparent that, however repetitive the pathologies of destructive conflict might be, the physiology of a healthy human society could take on many different shapes. Theories of conflict, then, could be cautiously employed in the search for remedies and solutions. *A priori* blueprints for peaceful societies could not. Scholars and researchers might be able to illuminate or understand a conflict, but *only the parties could finally resolve it*.

At that time, then, there seemed a real possibility that academic thinking about the nature of protracted conflict might be useful to the leaders of parties actually in conflict. There must be some knowledge and some processes that would help to alleviate the waste, misery, destruction and death so often caused by violent conflict in all its forms. What seemed to be needed was a modified version of 'mediation'.

Work then developed through library research, field expeditions, discussions with scholars in Britain and other countries and, eventually, practical initiatives. Early experiments involved some immersion into real world, ongoing conflicts, often by visiting the scene of the action and inviting spokesmen for mutually hostile parties to participate in “academic seminars”.

Slowly, it began to be recognised that conflict *analysis* and conflict *resolution* were closely inter-connected aspects of the same activity: the thorough analysis of a conflict is the first, major step towards its resolution. The analytical seminars held at CAC came to be called *problem solving workshops*, while the modified form of mediation developed in such meetings became the *facilitation* of conflict resolution. The workshops were *analytical*, in that the initial task for those involved was to analyse and understand the conflict, and *collaborative* because they involved adversaries jointly in a search for solutions

2. Difficulties and Dilemmas

By the early 1980s, the characteristics of *collaborative, analytical problem solving* [CAPS] as an alternative to traditional mediation had become sharp and clear. Ideally, and to be fully effective, problem-solving initiatives needed to take place early in the development of a conflict, not delayed until the hostile parties had soured their relationship by acts of violence, damage and sacrifice. The aim, at best, was the avoidance of violence, not its mitigation. To be seen as relevant, problem solving needed to be pro-active and constructive, not merely passive and bland. To be acceptable to the parties in conflict, the initiative also needed to be genuinely neutral, at least in the sense that it had to be non-judgmental, non-partisan and, above all, non-coercive. To have lasting benefit, collaborative analytical problem solving needed to be continuously involved, through all the phases of a process of conflict resolution, including the follow-up period in the aftermath of any agreement.

There was also the question of who could conduct problem-solving exercises, and where. From the CAC experience it seemed as if academic conflict analysts, working from their own educational institutions, might well optimise conditions. A university's everyday processes of research and commentary on society and its problems can, and sometimes do, sound early warning bells about impending conflict. Social change, incompatible pressures and rising tensions could be monitored and analysed. In principle, at least, academics could turn out to be ideal facilitators because they were expected to try - even if they often failed - to suppress their private wishes in favor of dispassionate theories and formal techniques of analyzing 'the facts'. Social science, with its systematic observations of the properties common to all conflict situations, could serve as the basis for constructive comments on any given conflict - though the comments should be about processes and ideas, not about values or 'solutions'. A campus could be an ideally neutral setting in which to discuss hostile relationships, because the 'ivory tower' atmosphere could help to set its inhabitants apart from the passions inevitably felt close to the core of a conflict. Nowadays, of course, a whole set of professional - and, in some cases commercial - institutions have developed, offering facilitation and problem-solving services, while conflict-resolution practices have become much in demand with international organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the Organization of American States (OAS), as well as in some diplomatic services.

Over this early 'development' period, the CAC group encountered difficulties, objections and problems, both in developing basic ideas and then putting them into practice. Most were obvious to us, and others were pointed out when various members of CAC began to publish the results of our work. [See Burton 1969; and 1972; De Reuck, 1974]. Three criticisms, in particular, were of concern then, and remain contentious.

The first criticism is that peace and justice contradict each other. A conflict, at any level in society, usually involves a struggle for some form of "justice". Stop it before it has run its course, and that act of intervention merely extends the domination of those who originally were dominant or who were winning at that particular time. This means that both traditional mediation and problem solving run the danger of being conservative activities; they tend to support whichever party is more powerful at the outset.

The second criticism is that collaborative, analytical problem solving denies the reality of conflict, by laying too much stress on misperception and subjectivity. It cannot allow for the genuine, objective and inevitable clashes of interest that are a natural part of the human condition. In other words, at least some conflicts are, by their very nature, irresolvable so that problem-solving approaches are doomed to failure. [This issue is taken up again and discussed at some length in the first Chapter of this Handbook.]

A third criticism is that any problem-solving approach amounts to little more than "appeasement" wrapped up in fancy academic language. Its message to decent, law-abiding citizens, it is argued, is that they should simply give in to aggression and violence, even on the part of unrepresentative minorities.

These are powerful objections, and they have been taken seriously throughout the history of the CAC group. Certainly, nothing in this Handbook is intended to brush them aside. But they do relate to the position from which this work started in the 1960s and 1970s, not to the present state of knowledge in the field of conflict analysis and resolution. Later research and writings from CAC members and others have discussed them in detail (Banks, 1984; Mitchell, 1981; Burton, 1987). The ground is gone over yet again in the first three chapters of this present work, which deal with the philosophy and methodology of problem solving.

In short, it seems reasonably clear that most of these criticisms are simply mistaken and based upon misconceptions about what problem solving seeks to do. [See the early debate between Yalem, (1971) and Mitchell, (1973)]. But discussions about these and many other contentious issues continue to reverberate throughout the field of conflict analysis and resolution - and are likely to do so for some time to come.

However, most are not arguments against the possibility and desirability of mediation or analytical problem solving as such. Instead, they should be seen as cautions about the necessity of doing it properly, with due concern for clearly understood values, with exceptional care about the non-directive role of third parties, and with the greatest possible sensitivity to what is at stake for those involved in the struggle.

Chapters 1, 2 and 3 outline some of the reasoning that has led to the conclusion that these objections can be overcome. The Handbook, however, is not intended to supply full-scale justification for a problem-solving approach, either philosophically or empirically. It has a separate function to fulfill - as a straightforward guide to processes and techniques for those wishing to apply the problem-solving method to actual conflict situations.

3. Developments

While the CAC group in London was developing its initial ideas and taking some careful steps towards implementing them, parallel developments were taking place elsewhere, all of which had major impacts on the development of theorising about conflicts and on the practice of conflict resolution. In retrospect, three broad trends can be discerned. In three separate but mutually connected arenas.

First, thinking about conflict resolution, conflict management or alternative dispute resolution (ADR) experienced a boom during the 1980's and 90's, in terms both of its literature and its practical application in many countries. As the bibliographies in this work indicate, the past twenty five years have witnessed the maturing of conflict analysis as an inter-disciplinary field. There has been a considerable output from sociology, combined with the flowing of contributions in social psychology and psychotherapy, substantial work in political science and anthropology, successful commercialization in business studies, and even some serious interest within the conservative redoubt of academic international relations.

Secondly, on the organizational side, mediation and the many techniques associated with its use in interpersonal and intergroup disputes (such as conciliation, counseling, arbitration, reconciliation and reparation) have rapidly become institutionalized, initially in Europe and North America but now globally. The use of these approaches is now widely established in the areas of family breakdown, community conflict, race relations, environmental dispute resolution and industrial strife. A strong institutional thrust has been given to the movement with the emergence to public prominence of such bodies as ACAS (the national Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) in the U K, and of the American Arbitration Association, the Federal Conciliation & Mediation Service, and the Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution in the USA. Professional associations have been set up to encourage research, communication and publicity, such as the British Mediation UK, the American Association for Conflict Resolution (ACR), the Alliance for Conflict Transformation and the Alliance for International Conflict Prevention and Resolution.

In other regions of the world - Africa, Latin America, Asia, the Middle East - interest has been aroused in alternative, non-coercive processes of conflict resolution, often with a corresponding move to re-discover and utilize traditional and indigenous means of dealing with conflicts, rather than rely on 'imported models'.

Most of these developments are, of course, strictly domestic. They are ways to deal with conflict within the state, where the mediatory effort is often initiated by government itself, takes place (usually) within a supportive framework of law and order, and can generally count on the reinforcement provided by a network of shared values. But the vision of the CAC group was always that the scope of conflict resolution, in its collaborative, analytical problem-solving form, could be extended much farther, from the domestic realm to transnational and international disputes. In this arena, too, there are signs that progress is being made, despite the generally primitive nature of international relations. Initially, these signs mostly appeared in the world of ideas rather than the world of practice, but in the past two decades they have spread into the border zone between ideas and practice: the zone where new institutions are created. Conflict research and resolution institutes, both official and unofficial, have been established, sometimes with government support, in a number of countries. Initiatives took place first in Scandinavia in the 1960s, and have spread to other parts of Western Europe, to Canada, South Africa and Australia, and to the USA where the federal government established the United States Institute of Peace in 1984 and, within the State Department itself, the Office for Conflict Management and Mitigation, established in 2004. In 1993 the Organisation of African Unity established its own conflict-resolution department or 'mechanism', and this tradition has been passed on to the recently established African Union, with its Peace and Security Council. The Department of Political Affairs at the UN is currently developing alternative conflict resolution processes under the Secretary-General's policy of encouraging conflict prevention through peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding

Thirdly, similar signs of growth are evident in the realm of practice. While CAC's practical experience as conflict 'intervenor', (or 'consultants' or 'facilitators') grew, it became evident that this was part of a broad, global movement that sought to apply a range of innovative and basically 'non-directive' techniques to coping with human conflicts at all levels of society, from the inter-individual to the international. CAC's analytical, problem solving approach had things in common with the kind of 'process consultation' practiced in organizations by such pioneers as Richard Walton, or Robert Blake and Jane Mouton; or with Roger Fisher and Bill Ury's ideas about 'principled negotiation'; or with the techniques of 'facilitated dialogue' developed by Jim Laue and his colleagues at the University of Missouri; or with the whole range of processes that emerged in the 1980s under the now familiar title of 'ADR'. Most strikingly, a very similar approach appeared to have been used in the informal dialogues between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) that took place in Norway during 1993, leading to the Israel/PLO Accord on Gaza and Jericho and in a number of other resolution processes employed in trying to resolve protracted and dangerously violent conflicts.

It still seems to be the case that the CAC problem solving "model" does have some major differences with many others (perhaps mainly because of the nature of the conflicts to which it has been applied) but also that there are certainly common principles and aims involved, as well as parallels, if not precise similarities, of technique. Hence, the principles, practices and skills described in this Handbook are very broadly applicable to a wide range of third party 'intervenor' processes, so the book can usefully be employed by people using a variety of facilitative procedures and techniques.

4. Pedagogy

Currently, one common belief among the bulk of researchers, consultants and facilitators is that the skills of a successful third-party intervenor and facilitator can be learnt and taught. Not everyone has to go through the long drawn out (and often difficult) business of learning through twenty years' experience of practical intervention as a practising third party. Hence, in the mid-1980s when the original "London Group" at CAC had moved on from the original centre in London an effort was made to draft collectively what was intended to be a straightforward guide to procedure for those wishing to apply collaborative problem-solving methods to ongoing conflicts, especially those that were complex and protracted. (The underlying *theory* is explored at length in publications listed in the bibliographies, which an interested reader can consult.)

At the same time as this work of drafting a practical guide began, many of the original CAC group began to plan and teach practical, skill-development courses for the students at a wide variety of colleges and universities. Often, these began as extensions of short training courses that had begun to be widely used on the 1980's so as to develop an extensive cadre of trained community mediators and facilitators to deal with local disputes. Of necessity, there had to be training materials for these courses much of which had to consist of realistic and practical for exercises to help students develop their own skills and approaches to conflict resolution.

The first edition of this Handbook, then, was the outcome of this attempt to introduce a practical "training and skills development" component to some of the new courses in 'Conflict Analysis and Resolution' that increasingly began to be established in universities and colleges in the late 1980s and 1990s. Many of these were masters degree courses aimed at mature, or mid-career students who had some experience of the prevalence of conflict in their working and community lives, and the damage such conflict could cause if it took a malign turn and was not handled in a positive and productive manner.

The Handbook that eventually emerged was thus similar in intent to the many, practical training manuals that appeared in the mid-1980's (for example, Beer, 1986; Fitzduff, 1988), but with two major differences. The first was that the work focused on the analytical and practical skills that seemed invaluable in dealing with protracted, deep-rooted and violent conflicts involving whole countries, societies or communities, such as the Greek Cypriot/ Turkish Cypriot conflict on Cyprus, or the protracted intercommunity conflicts in Northern Ireland or in Sri Lanka. An underlying assumption was that conflict-resolution practices in such complex, protracted and frequently violent conflicts require a somewhat different approach to that appropriate for disputes between neighbours, or landlords and tenants, or even unions and management.

Secondly, the work was aimed at college and university students, and it assumed that learning, training and skills development could proceed at a slightly less hectic pace than that demanded of participants in a concentrated, two- to three-day workshop. The original Handbook assumed that those using it would have time to undertake background reading, as well as involve themselves in its various exercises and skills-building tasks. Perhaps more importantly, it also assumed that analysis and thinking are a central part

of any third-party intervention, and that both require some background familiarity with theories of conflict and its resolution.

Finally, it assumed that it would be possible, at some stage of the course, for those taking it to indulge in a number of continuous exercises, some lasting longer than the conventional weekend, in order to experience some of the practical problems of third-party facilitation, mediation or conciliation - problems of fatigue, planning and timing errors, non-availability of key participants, lack of crucial resources and many of the practical difficulties that have to be overcome in conducting a successful problem-solving exercise in the real world.

These assumptions have been carried over into this revised version of the original Handbook. The work can be used as a basis for introducing potential intervenors and facilitators very rapidly to some of the skills that are needed for planning, launching and conducting analytical problem solving initiatives. It can form the central focus of a short, weekend course. It can be mined for individual skills building exercises. However, it is best used as a component of a course that combines the study of theories of social conflict with the analysis of methods of conflict resolution and some experience of the practical application of such methods. The more time for thinking and reflection that accompanies the development and exercise of practical skills, the better.

5. Debts

As was acknowledged in the first version of this Handbook, a large number of people have contributed ideas, materials and models, starting with the original members of CAC and their many colleagues and collaborators. It seems unnecessary to repeat the long and distinguished list again in this revised work. Moreover, to add further names of those who have contributed significantly to this field in the last decade since the original version of the Handbook was completed would necessitate adding several pages to this already far-too-long introduction. However, special mention needs to be made of five friends and colleagues who have contributed thought, effort and practice to the field of conflict analysis and resolution much to the advancement of the field. Without the efforts of this quintet of scholar practitioners, the field would be less rich in ideas and challenges, less based upon multiple practical experiences of collaborative and analytical problem solving initiatives, less recognised and accepted by practitioners in governments, international organisations and foundations, and far less lively. Hence this second version of the Handbook is dedicated to Professor Herbert Kelman, in at the very beginning and still working as a distinguished scholar-practitioner; to Ambassador Hal Saunders and Ambassador John McDonald, who saw the potential of the approach from their original positions within traditional diplomatic systems; to Professor Ron Fisher, who continues tirelessly to promote the ideas and institutionalise the practice; and to Professor John Paul Lederach, who carries on with the practical work while worrying the field with new intellectual challenges so that it does not become too complacent. A pleasure to have worked with all of you.

Finally, it is also dedicated to my former students, many of whom have gone on to use at least some of these ideas and techniques in their work with governments, international non-governmental organisations, foundations, human rights organisations and universities throughout the world. All of them helped develop the ideas and the exercises contained in this second version of the Handbook, a work as much theirs as mine. It was the students at ICAR and other centres and universities who worked through the tasks contained in the following pages, grumbled about them, criticized them, suggested improvements, and threw several out as irrelevant. The work they have put in may have benefited themselves in making them more thoughtful and more sensitive intervenors; it has certainly benefited their teachers.

Christopher Mitchell

Institute for Conflict
Analysis and Resolution
George Mason University

July 2005.