

UC San Diego

Conflict Case Studies

Title

Case Study #3: Negative Intergroup Influence

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CIAS WORKING PAPER
Cover Sheet

Readers are encouraged to send comments and critiques directly to the author. Because of this text's deliberate "one-of-a-kind" format, detailed page-by-page comments and questions are welcome. This paper presents Case Study #3, in a series of case studies for a future conflict resolution textbook. An "Introduction to Conflict Case Studies" is also available to guide use. The text has been successfully piloted with several international classes. Those, who benefit most, stress the importance of carefully studying the introduction. Because the case study format is intentionally unique, written in an interactive and non-linear workbook style, unlike many introductions, the information provided is required for understanding. The introduction is so critical to effective use, the most important paragraphs are repeated at the beginning of each case study. Confused readers are encouraged to read the "Introduction to Conflict Case Studies" in its entirety.

Readers report rich reward when they approach the case studies in the interactive workbook style recommended, and, for example, take time to reflect on questions; add their own opinions and interpretations. They also do the activities, applying conflict research, theory and approaches presented, to case study and personal experience. Their main challenge is accepting that thorough analysis and practice can take a lifetime.

The author is particularly interested in comments that will help instructors and individual users around the world fully understand and effectively use the text's curriculum for important social change. For example, would you suggest an instructor's guide?

Please also let the author know what you appreciated most and would like to see "more of" in future texts. These case studies are part of a larger vision for evaluating and sharing effectiveness with leading non-violent peace and conflict resolution efforts. The author would appreciate hearing your "success stories" and the most troubling challenges (including ethical and cultural) that you face. Thank you and best wishes.

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Title: **Holding These Truths: Empowerment and Recognition in Action (Applied ethics & diverse cultural perspectives for advanced conflict resolution)**

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“Introduction to Case Studies”: Excerpts

At each case is a story, describing or based on actual events and circumstances, that is told with a definite teaching purpose in mind and that rewards careful study and analysis...

In the real world, the solutions to complex problems cannot be found in textbooks nor will everyone agree on the “right answers” to difficult questions. The case method prepares learners for a world that demands critical thinking skills and the ability to create convincing arguments, often with little time and incomplete information.

Laurence E. Lynn Jr. *Teaching & Learning With Cases* (1999).

Readers may feel somewhat disoriented, confused, and, even a little anxious, when they first read case studies, especially if they are accustomed to texts that present information in a linear logic. In the latter, points are described step-by-step and connected with explanations.

Here, however, each case study deliberately goes back and forth between describing 1) important case study facts, 2) conflict and resolution theory, 3) ethical perspective, 4) cultural views, 5) questions for the reader, and 6) application --- opportunities for reader analysis. No explanation is provided; so readers are likely to miss valuable learning unless they carefully read and respect the interactive suggestions. The reader is expected to develop her or his own thinking by, for example, actively asking: What is the possible connection or relevance of this information? What do I think? What are my reasons? What options exist there? What criteria do I propose for evaluating alternatives?

(I)ntermediaries can learn from experiences in dealing with past conflicts, but there is no model that can be applied to all cases. The unique features of each must be examined carefully and adjustments in strategy made throughout the process, which is invariably complex and sensitive.

Olara A. Otunnu & Michael W. Doyle, *Peacemaking and Peacekeeping for the New Century* (1998).

WHAT TO DO WITH MISSING OR VAGUE INFORMATION

Case studies are often open-ended, or incomplete, to emulate real life ambiguity and complexity, and help users develop critical thinking and confidence required in the face of challenge and uncertainty---particularly these cases. These are concept, principle and process application cases, rather than decision-forcing, policy making or illustrative cases. For readers new to case studies, decision-forcing cases require actual decision, with simulated pressure. Lynn, *supra*. Policy making cases direct the creation of framework or processes for policy making. Illustrative cases record historical success and failure. Application cases, however, focus on increasing student skill, without necessarily requiring decision. Decision-forcing, policy making and illustrative cases necessarily contain more descriptive and substantive detail than application cases. *Id.*

These cases are deliberately even more open-ended than many application cases, with sparse facts, for several reasons. First, they intend to teach and guide advanced conflict resolution skills, including the ability to identify important information gaps and “fill them” through, for example, framing excellent questions and acute observation. In real circumstances, particularly complex

ones, conflict intervenors, like detectives, face many unknowns. They must be willing and have the courage to navigate uncharted waters. Oftentimes only seasoned judgment (their own and respected colleagues) is available for determining whether understanding is sufficient.

I wanted more specifics about the original conflict to begin with, but I also understand that some of that ambiguity is simply how one has to enter conflict scenarios. We will probably never hold all the pieces of information when we start. Discovery is part of the process. This is definitely a powerful process. (Anonymous student)

Second, responses to complex ethical and cultural dilemmas are dynamic and evolving; not solutions to be described or finalized, with simple logic or reference to expert authority. As one student commented, these are the questions with “no answers.” They require extended, perhaps life-long, reflection and dialogue, and, most importantly, consciousness of real world consequences, after attempted practice. Readers should feel no pressure to reach conclusions or provide answers. Questioning, reflection, discussion and awareness are the desired results.

(P) eacemaking is marked by experimentation. There is no right way to go about creating peaceful communities and a peaceful world. Working for peace will differ according to context.

Herr & Herr, *Transforming Violence: Linking Local and Global Peacemaking* (1998).

With cultural issues, majority and minority are used to avoid the stereotyping that unfortunately still too often accompanies specific labels. The open-ended cases allow readers to introduce, discuss and show their own cultural experiences and preferences with each other. With my students, this has been a much appreciated opportunity to create multicultural community and interdisciplinary dialogue, in relatively low-risk environments (at least in contrast to discussions in the heat of conflict.)

In my last multicultural conflict resolution class at the University of California, Berkeley, more than eighty percent of my students identified with one or more minority groups within and outside the United States. Several have dual citizenship. They are citizens of Argentina, Australia, Belize, Bulgaria, China, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Finland, French Polynesia, India, Iran, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Romania, Thailand, Turkey, and more than forty additional countries.

Everyone attempts to identify, describe and explain their own cultural experience, assumptions, values and preferences as they participate in conflict resolution process. Ideally, the result is truly inclusive. At least, participants are empowered.

The ideal response is like one elicited with a Hmong student. One of the case studies resonated with her experience in the United States as a first generation immigrant and the first member of her family to feel comfortable speaking English. As a result, she spoke in great detail about her family's many cultural challenges and conflicts.

Readers are invited to reference and consider their own life experience with conflict whenever analyzing and discussing case studies. This engagement raises readers to the level of “peer partners” or “experts” with cases, and prepares them for whole-hearted participation in future role-play simulations.

The text is written so that no particular background or training is required or has an advantage. This is important with multicultural dialogue, where members of various cultural groups may be sensitive to others "speaking for them." Others may simply stay quiet in the presence of authority. Still others might react with offense, angry accusation and heated debate. None of these responses promote the open, reflective and inclusive dialogue and learning desired here.

Once again, the purposes of this collaborative partnering are to fully engage readers in true *to-life* dynamics and maximize development of advanced skill and awareness. Unlike simpler negotiation exercises, where participants can begin with a factual, even mathematical, formula, for resolution, complex intergroup exercises require participant creativity, prolonged discussion, initiative and persistence. Developing necessary skills and attitudes may be the most realistic and important outcomes with complex, tough case studies.

These case studies have been field-tested with many different groups, ages eighteen to sixty, representing diverse groups within and outside the United States, and a wider range of interests, disciplines and professions. They include peace and conflict studies, social welfare, various sciences, public health and policy, psychology, pre-medical, nursing, law, environmental and development studies, engineering, ethnic and area studies, education, communications, business and political science. The issues raised in these cases are relevant and meaningful to most, partially because the detail provided is only what is essential to introduce issues for exploration. More technical detail risks excluding less knowledgeable participants and narrowing the audience, while "cluttering" the ethical and cultural issues shared across the conflict resolution continuum.

Readers are free to adapt the cases to their own interests through integrating their knowledge and experience, or researching topics of interest. Some students have done interviews regarding culture, conflict and values. Others incorporate library and internet research.

Commentary is provided throughout the cases to help readers consider, apply and integrate relevant interdisciplinary approaches to and diverse perspectives regarding conflict resolution. An attempt is made to highlight and introduce some of the richest resources for advanced practice from a practitioner perspective. Commentary, questions and exercises are interwoven throughout the cases, rather than at the end, to further engage readers, simulate real world reflection and analysis, and guide readers in regular application of conflict theory, research and material *---also* habit and practice of advanced intervenors, popularly called reflective practice.

Like the cases, commentary is provided without explicit guidance or explanation. Readers are encouraged to continue proactively developing their own questions and thinking as they would in real circumstances, imagining ways of connecting the commentary to case material. At the very least, articulating one or more questions, regarding how the material relates to the case study, will engage the reader in necessary critical thinking, initiative and information gathering. The more complex the case, the more important these skills become.

In some ways, conflict resolution cases are analogous to business administration cases. Unlike law or medical cases, business and conflict cases lack a well-defined professional knowledge base and formal logical processes for application.

Business case analysis may draw on virtually the entire body of knowledge of behavior and social science and may make use of it in virtually limitless variety of ways. Originally, cases were just about anything... faculty could find to provide a basis for provocative discussion... (T) here reasoning process is more experiential and associative, involving pattern recognition and intuition, than it is logical reasoning, as in the teaching of law, or scientific reasoning.

Lynn *supra* at 10-11 (citing Christensen with Hansen 1987, 25). (“In less institutionalized domains, such as administration, social work, planning and education, the question of what constitutes “essential knowledge” is far less clear; indeed, it may be difficult to rule out any but the most esoteric or specialized knowledge as relevant to practice. In such domains, “structuring” a well-defined body of knowledge is a less essential skill than identifying knowledge potentially relevant to resolving the problem at hand. *Id.*.)

SECTION II: DESTRUCTIVE DYNAMICS OF CONFLICT ESCALATION & RESPONSE

Case Study Topics (In Order Presented)

Mediation

Impartiality

Ensuring Complete, Accurate Interest Identification (Party Review)

Protest as Conflict Intervention

Vilifying/Demonizing “The Other”

Truth telling

In/Out Group Dynamics (Social Identity Theory — Possible Cultural Encouragement)

Defining & Identifying Important (Inter) Groups (Influence)

Approach to Conflict Metaphor

Commonalities (Shared Interest Identification)

Trust building

Disclosure & Awareness: Johari Window

Unspoken Communication

Recognizing Early “Warning Signs”

Authenticity: Congruence

(Importance of Seeking Feedback)

Case Study #3: Negative Intergroup Influence

Background Your new client is an international religious organization; a popular weekend destination for residents of an nearby cosmopolitan center. Hundreds from around the world seek membership every year. Many spend weeks to months in residence volunteering meal preparation, cleaning and other chores.

Several long-term residents are accomplished professionals with Ivy League degrees. For example, the head of the legal department is Stanford and Harvard degree holder, from a prominent line of judges and civil rights leaders.

All seem eager for close community and inspiration. You see devoted service. The stated purpose is spiritual growth.

The community is lovely —physically and socially. It's in resort country. Food is organic vegetarian prepared by gourmet chefs. The most recent holistic health practices are available. Pictures of radiant smiles and hugs fill brochures. You hear talk of miracles, e.g. healing from cancer, the spiritual leader appearing in dream to give comfort and guidance.

You are an attorney and alternative dispute resolution professional hired by the organization's legal department to assist with legal work. You are pleased. This contract presents a special opportunity to combine religious ideals with professional work.

CONFLICT PROCESS

... (The 1970s and 1980s saw an extraordinary growth in the development of conflict resolution procedures in the United States ("alternative dispute resolution") and in their application to family, school, neighborhood, commercial, administrative, legal and public policy settings... rooted in a deep strain of anti-formalism running throughout the nation's history... Historically, citizens have relied less on law than on community and religious institutions to settle conflict and promote community social values. E. Franklin Dukes, *Resolving Public Conflict: Transforming Community and Governance* (1996).

More Background Your enthusiasm quickly turns to shock and disbelief, however. The head of the legal department hands you financial documents showing gross illegalities. For years the religious leader has received a salary thousands of dollars beyond legal parameters for non-profits and lavish lifestyle assets --- a vacation home in the South Pacific and a Rolls Royce.

Your research and confirms suspicions. Such behavior, despite the lush lifestyles of many religious communities, would be problematic if seen by the Internal Revenue Service.

You decide to share your concerns. You prepare and distribute a legal memorandum to the board of directors, describing potential personal liability.

A director asks you to scrutinize your concerns with organizational leadership. Mediation is a possible step. Reports from your meetings follow.

CONFLICT/MEDIATION PROCESS

(Mediation) is generally defined as the intervention in a negotiation or a conflict of an acceptable third party who has limited or no authoritative decision-making power. This person assists the... parties in voluntarily reaching a mutually acceptable settlement of the issues in dispute.

Christopher Moore, *The Mediation Process: Practical Strategies for Resolving Conflict* (1996).

Cultural Perspective

...In civil law the keyword is “mediation”. Mediation means “Vermittlung”, derived from *medium*, the middle. A mediator is a person standing in the middle between two disputing parties and is mediating between them, hence trying to reach an understanding without going to court. This has nothing to do with private arbitration... The difference is considerable (s) in case the arbitrator decides just like a court... The mediator however does not decide, but rather attempts to guide the disputing parties to a mutual agreement... (i.e.) the parties themselves... decide the dispute.

(The negotiating state. 1999. *Die Zeit*. Thanks to former student Anja Zuckmantel for her translation and contribution.)

APPLICATION

- **Note: Readers unfamiliar with some of the technical terms, e.g. arbitration, mentioned here may be somewhat confused when reading this case, but there is no need to understand all technical terms to complete the case study activities. All essential information is provided.**
- **Readers interested in learning more, however, may wish to start creating lists of: 1) questions of interest, 2) friends and acquaintances who know more about topics of interest, and 3) other research resources.**

Questions

- **Is it appropriate for the organization's whistleblower to investigate? Mediate?**

Pro

Con

Ethical Perspective

Even where there is not a personal relationship, **the mediators sometimes shares... class or group identification --- race, sex, religion, class --- with one of the parties**, which might lead the other party to question the mediator's impartiality.

Robert Barach Bush, *The Dilemmas of Mediation Practice: A Study of Ethical Dilemmas and Policy Implications* (1992).

Cultural Perspective

In some cultures an unknown “outsider” would not be asked to investigate or mediate. Intervention only occurs with well-known elders and authorities.

- **Discuss.**

Investigator Two of your closest friends, along -timer resident and regular guest, stop returning your calls. You see one. She “looks right through you.”

Questions

➤ How would you respond?

Executive Director You see the organization's finances as ordained by your religious leader, the sole reason you exist. Laws have been successfully disregarded in the past. Environmental regulations could not be satisfied in a recent expansion. Your organization's primary concerns are its religious mission and survival. Man-made laws sometimes seem irrelevant; other times impractical for a young growing organization. If you can successfully avoid them, why not?

You resent an "outsider" criticizing and presuming that he is in a position to offer advice. Apparently he does not appreciate how special your organization and its leadership are. Only extraordinarily spiritual devotees (members of the long-time inner circle) can influence decisions here.

APPLICATION

➤ As you read each party's perspective, create an in-depth list of that party's interests (spoken and unspoken). See cases 1 and 2 for explanation and guidance.

➤ Position(s)

➤ Interests

➤ Questions

Factfinding

Ethical

CONFLICT/MEDIATION PROCESS

When listening to perspectives regarding conflict, skilled third party intervenor stake detailed notes and create lists of interests, like the one above; then review lists with parties, once interests appear complete, to verify that lists are complete and accurate. Listeners often say something like "Please correct me if I'm wrong," or ask "Anything else you'd like to add?"

From my experience, parties who perceive that they have had an opportunity to express everything that concerns them at the beginning of the conflict resolution process and feel deeply heard, in all the important details, are quite ready to move forward and are less likely to repeat themselves later. *Note:* An hour or more may be needed by each party before feeling fully heard.

Financial Director/Advisor to Religious Teacher Privately you are angry that this outsider has seen your financial records. You believe your religious leader is entitled to every penny you give him and his family. He is one-of-a-kind, devoting everything to a community of floundering human beings. He has personally changed your life.

This troublemaker is just one more example of human delusion, thinking that laws apply to such a rare person and indulging in the inferior practices of criticism and blame. If only he were spiritually evolved, you would not be meeting.

➤ **Position(s)**

➤ **Interests**

➤ **Questions**

Factfinding

Ethical

Various Community Members You do not want to hear complaints about your beloved organization. You are quite happy “not knowing.” If someone has a problem, it’s theirs alone. (They should quit whining, acting like victims)

➤ **Position(s)**

➤ **Interests**

➤ **Questions**

Factfinding

Ethical

Long-Time Community Member You are not upset with the investigation. You do not need to be upset. You know your religious leader and community quite well and trust they are outside; even above, the laws and rules that apply to ordinary people.

➤ **Position(s)**

➤ **Interests**

➤ **Questions**

Investigator Despite criticism, you proceed, believing you have an ethical responsibility to raise concerns with all lawyers and managers accountable for the organization’s finances. You try to inform as many members of the community as possible.

One of the lawyers shares that his wife has been sobbing hysterically “for some unknown reason” off and on for weeks. Another community member says she feels compelled to break community rules, is self-critical and feels unworthy of remaining in the community.

APPLICATION

- Imagine yourself an outsider learning of this community for the first time. Through the eyes of a true outsider and neutral, review ethical issues and identify possible cognitive and perceptual distortions.

Ethical “Red Flag” Indicators (to be investigated)

Good Faith

Bad Faith

Note to Reader: These cognitive and perceptual practices are introduced and explained in case #2.

- Denial and Other Selective Perception
- Minimizing, Rationalizing and Excusing Own Behavior
- Simple Dichotomous Thinking: “Black/White,” “Either/Or,” “Right/Wrong,” “All/Nothing,” “Us/Them”
- Imagine yourself an insider sobbing hysterically “for no reason” or shamefully “acting out.” What’s happening? How do you explain, explore?
- What are some of your personal reactions (possible red flag indicators) when something is wrong? Do you respect them? Discount as crazy? “Self-destruct?” Commit to discovering underlying reasons and important insights? How? If we do not respect our own intelligence and wisdom, whose?
- Propose empowered response and self-care for

Outside Whistleblower

Struggling Insider

Case Progression: Those interviewed decided to protest outsider interference.

Questions

- What do you think of protest? Under what circumstances is protest justified, even ethically required? South Africa apartheid? Corporatedumping of toxins? Outline your thinking.

Case Progression: Protest literature “demonizes” the Internal Revenue Service as “the evil enemy,” with vilifying, attacking labels, factual distortion that exaggerates, and fabricates, the other’s misbehavior. Protestors describe the investigation with words like “vicious attacks,” “brutal,” “covert,” “violent,” and “harassing,” concerns as “misleading propaganda,” and themselves as “peaceful,” “silent” and “unselfish.”

Questions

- **Is deliberate deceiver intentional aggression ever justified by conflict circumstances, context or history? Do the ends of conflict justify aggressive means? Violence? Discuss.**

Ethical Reflection

In my teaching ethics of conflict resolution and communication for six years, I am intrigued by students' predictable response to discuss issues of truth telling. They regularly present themselves as concerned, even outraged, by others' dishonesty, while committed to, even convinced, of their own distinction --- that they are more honest than others.

I wonder if the dynamics of truth telling parallel those of conflict, whether we exaggerate and project weakness on to others, while ignoring, denying and discounting our own. Are we defending the important self-image that we are honest at the expense of our awareness and the truth required for moral acts?

See Harriet Lerner, *The Dance of Deception* (1993) (an important discussion of oppression and truth telling.)

Conflict Theory

The tendency to see the world in an us-versus-them framework is well documented... There is an in-group-out-group bias in which we hold less favorable opinions about groups to which we do not belong, while holding more favorable opinions about groups to which we do belong... According to social identity theory... we use group membership as a source of pride and self-worth... to feel such pride, however, we must assume that our group is, in fact, superior... [leading] us to inflate the positive aspects [of our group] and belittle [others].

David W. & Frank P. Johnson, *Joining Together: Group Theory and Group Skills* (6th ed., 1997).

With intergroup dynamics, it is helpful to explore the concept of "a group." For discussions and activities here, "group" encompasses any and all groups with power and influence in the circumstances at stake.

Usually two types of groups are involved. The destructive dynamics listed above apply to both in the same or similar ways. Both types must be considered when attempting constructive conflict process.

The first type includes groups to which we visibly belong --- within which or with which we participate. Examples include families, communities, employers, churches, government bureaucracies and other organizations that an outsider can observe as important in our lives.

These second type may or may not be so obvious. Its influence is nevertheless strong, perhaps stronger than the influence of the first type. This type includes historic, present and future affiliations with present influence. Culture, gender, class, generation, and political party are examples.

The groups most important for conflict analysis and intervention, visible or not, are those with the power to “bring out the best and the worst” in us through their support, example, and rewards. They powerfully influence conflict. While individual misperceptions and distorted thoughts hinder and harm, we are exponentially reinforced when a member of an important group, such as our parent, agrees with or otherwise encourages our error. Depending on the nature of the group and its authority, its support may inspire or demand a strong, wrong and dangerous self-confidence.

Ethical Perspective

(D)ialogue cannot exist without humility. The naming of the world, through which men constantly recreate the world, cannot be an act of arrogance... How can I dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never see my own? How can I dialogue if I regard myself as a case apart from other men --- mere “its” in whom I cannot recognize other “I”s? How can I dialogue if I regard myself a member of the in-group of “pure” men, the owners of truth and knowledge, for whom all non-members are “these people” or “the great unwashed”? How can I dialogue if I start from the premise that naming the world is the task of an elite?
Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968).

APPLICATION

- **Identify some of the groups with the most power and influence in your life.**
- **Recall times when you observed or participated in the destructive and counterproductive group practices introduced in case study #2.**
- **In/out group exclusion:**
- **Superiority/inferiority “storytelling:”**

Cultural Exploration

- **Consider your expectations and norms regarding conflict: how it should be approached. Do you have different rules for members of your groups when compared to those who do not belong to your groups?**

The following exemplify assumptions and approaches that encourage in/out group competition and conflict.

1. Loyalty is central to how I live my life.
2. Certain groups are superior to others.
3. The end justifies the means.
4. Caring for my family (community; company) is of utmost importance.

5. The expectations and rules within “my group” (e.g. family, culture, community) are different than what is expected when I interact with those outside “my group.”
6. I don't trust anyone who's not family.

➤ **Can you think of others?**

Ethical Exploration

- **How do you relate to religious/ethical perspectives? My students describe themselves along a wide and diverse continuum, including atheism, agnosticism, spiritualism and many religions.**
- **How would you describe yourself?**
- **My personal ethical perspective and criteria includes:**

Member--Board of Directors: You are not surprised. You have suspected problems for some time, but have not known what to do. Now you know you and the rest of the Board of Directors could be personally responsible.

Many people's lives, including those of your family, depend on the organization's future. You financially depend on the group, having given life savings and complete loyalty. It has been your sole employer for years. The religious leader asked you for vows of poverty and volunteer labor to better your spiritual condition.

You learned to live “on little.” If the community “goes under” with criminal charges, back taxes or bankruptcy, however, you do not know what you or your family will do.

Given your investment and commitment (spiritual and social more than material), you prefer trying face-to-face dialogue, negotiation, maybe even mediation. You agree that notifying and involving the Internal Revenue Service could be disastrous. You do not see any benefit, only harm, from legal proceedings.

- **Position(s):**
- **Interests:**
- **Questions:**

Factfinding

Ethical

Cultural Exploration

- **Prepare a presentation (visual image, auditory experience, such as music, descriptive poetry or essay --- see the example below) that symbolizes your perspective of and approach to conflict and its resolution. How do you describe cultural and other group influence? Who taught or showed you the most in your childhood? Who emulates your ideal?**

Cultural Perspective

CONFLICT ME TAPHOR SELMA OLSSON, JULY 1999

Maybe since I'm attracted by the idea of a connection between our souls and bodies I've chosen to symbolize my reaction towards conflict with that towards an allergy.

Mostly I'm very bad at noticing that I'm about to build up a powerful reaction against something or someone. Perhaps I can tell that something is wrong from those early signs of headaches and from sneezing a lot, especially at people who are close to me. Usually I repress these signs though and often it is only when someone else notices the red spots in my face that I will become really aware of the situation.

State of shock. How will I handle this, especially now as this very important event is coming up? Make up my mind for some time although I know my friends will glance worriedly at me.

Deep inside I know it's more or less the same old grass allergy that has popped up again but instead of dealing with the thing once and for all, walking straight into a pharmacy asking for help, I will start to pity myself.

Rationally I know I can't blame it at the grass for simply being grass so instead I will blame my own body for being weak and stupid, along with my parents for passing on this awful inheritance.

This of course will make me feel even more shitty, the czemas will definitely grow much worse, no matter that I'm now desperately trying to avoid grass.

Probably I will now also put on some sunglasses and try to avoid people in general.

Then at last the situation will become unbearable and this is when I will pull myself together. Putting everything into perspective this might not be the end of the world after all.

Surprisingly enough, as a nature of things, confrontation will normally make me feel a lot better. Soon I'll start to notice that rapidly my czemas are going away. High on being well again I will laugh about the whole thing and my own reactions. As my skin heals I will probably forget about the whole thing.

However, somewhere I know that one day I will have to find a more permanent solution to my allergies....

Selma Olsson, 1999 (conflict resolution and pre-med student from Sweden)

CONFLICT/MEDIATION PROCESS

Interests are reviewed with each party after initial storytelling, to verify complete and accurate understanding. A natural next step is identifying party commonalities or shared interests. Some are obvious, stated in the same or similar language. Others require more reflection and analysis. With practice, mediators begin to quickly “see” subtle and unstated shared interests as well.

Recommended is listing all party interests side-by-side on a board or newsprint; visually connecting commonalities. Parties who feel deeply and accurately heard, perhaps for the first time, may enthusiastically assist and identify more. Necessary party collaboration begins.

This is a natural point for a mediator to ask and notice what seems and is most important to each party. Perhaps the mediator can identify party values. If so, detailed notes of what is most important help form evaluation criteria for later problem-solving.

APPLICATION

Values (What Is Most Important)

- **Executive Director:**
- **Financial Advisor:**
- **“Happy” Community Members/Protestors:**
- **Unworried Community Member:**
- **Concerned Board Member:**
- **Commonalities (Shared Interests and Values):**

APPLICATION

Students created this popular activity to confront destructive intergroup dynamics.

- Steps
 1. Identify one or more groups with which you do not identify; perhaps those you “like” to criticize and blame, e.g., Republicans or Democrats:
 2. List what you share with group(s) identified above:

Case Study Analysis: The concerned board member described above exemplifies a party with the potential to bridge groups and transform destructive intergroup (“us against them”) dynamics. Conflict parties who connect with all concerned, rather than take sides, can show groups what they share and how they might benefit from working together.

Conflict Theory

Going Further: Trust As An Essential Human Need in Democratic Conflict Process

Disclosure, or open sharing, of important information is necessary to some degree for effective conflict intervention. The Johari Window is a useful model for exploring dynamics of disclosure.

	The Johari Window	
	Known to Self	Not Known to Self
Known To Others	<i>OPEN</i>	<i>BLIND</i>
Not Known To Others	<i>HIDDEN</i>	<i>UNKNOWN</i>

Joseph Luft, *Group Processes: An Introduction to Group Dynamics* (2nd ed. 1970).

The Private (Hidden) Self shown in the bottom left hand corner is what is known to oneself but kept from others. Constructive conflict process requires encouraging this “private self” to disclose what is required for satisfactory movement forward.

In a survey of conflict process participants from the Balkans, Cameroon, Nepal and Ukraine, open, honest disclosure was one of the most important indicators of effectiveness or helpfulness. It was the most important criteria for parties to court -mandated mediation in Nepal.

Evaluating a facilitated retreat, participants from throughout the Balkans elaborate the benefits. With open disclosure, serious topics are discussed honestly and directly, leading to increased awareness of the most important issues.

Going Deeper: Building Trust Through Authenticity To Encourage Honest, Open Disclosure of What Is Most Important

Humanist psychologist Carl Rogers promoted authenticity, or sincerity, as a key to promoting growth. See, e.g., Carl Rogers, *The Characteristics of a Helping Relationship, How Can I Be of Help?* (1958). A stute party to conflict, particularly minority groups who have learned to be cautious and alert with majority groups, will observe behavior rather than listen to words in deciding whether to trust, and speak openly. Congruence between words and behavior is their test of authenticity.

Cultural Exploration

“Unspoken Communication”

Note: The following described different approaches to communication. Some who identify with these statements will do so in reference to the power dynamics described above; others will identify for cultural and personal reasons unrelated to the above discussion.

I understand, value and even expect acute attention to subtle communication.

Indirect, non-verbal communication is important.

I “listen” and communicate with my belly/gut.

I hint.

I communicate and problem-solve intuitively.

Silence speaks.

I am challenged when asked to express myself with words.

Do any of the above describe your approach to communication? Or perhaps you identify with the opposite: indirect communication frustrates and irritates me?

CONFLICT PROCESS

The Johari Window demonstrates the importance of seeking feedback about how others see us. Its blind corner represents what is not known to us but seen by others.

If we can successfully solicit feedback about how the “other” experiences and evaluates our trustworthiness, or the perceived congruence between what we say and what we do, we increase the likelihood of building trust and rapport needed for important conflict work.

Investigator: A community member confides that their spiritual leader is lonely.

As you leave the community and investigation, in your airport taxi, the driver shares local gossip that the leader is having more than one wild affair.

APPLICATION

➤ **Have you ever felt group pressure not to “see what you see,” “hear what you hear;” know what you know? Describe.**

Postscript: About three years after the above conversations, scandal was front-page national news. The concerned board member and other community member eventually confronted the (married) religious leader’s long-time and multiple sexual affairs with members of the community, including a prominent leader’s wife. A formal decision was made to ask the religious teacher to leave.

Several community members were shocked and devastated. Some left with the religious leader. Others stayed but felt angry and betrayed with the majority’s actions against the leader. Many, however, felt strongly that they had made the right decision and after an extended time of grief and struggle, managed to maintain their community with new leadership.

Note: This is a composite of more than one religious community (from different traditions, including Hindu, Buddhist and Roman Catholic.) The underlying facts, however, are the same or very similar.

Ethical Reflection

In my work with schools, conflict resolution and violence, I am disturbed, frightened and sickened with all too-common reports that no one “saw the signs;” most are shocked by tragedy. How does a concerned person reconcile these reports with not just one or two random signs but dense, blatant historical warning patterns and requests for help that were ignored or discounted until crisis?

This summer I heard an NGO-governmental organization professional, journalist and community member from the Balkans mention the potential of “early warning signs” for averting crisis. His and other community NGOs in the Balkans criticize international NGOs as unfortunately disconnected (“out of touch”) with the Balkans community --- often the “eyes and ears” of early warning signs.

Proposed Third Party Intervention or Competencies

Note to Readers: Complete citations are provided in earlier cases.

Professional Skills and Knowledge

1. Shares necessary information appropriately:

Describes the differences and similarities between mediation and other procedures for dispute resolution. CCMMO, *supra*; Model Standards, *supra*; SPIDR, *supra*.

Helps “the participant evaluate the benefits, risks and costs of mediation and the alternatives available to them. AFM, *supra*.

Relationship Skills and Knowledge

3. Promotes party recognition of each other as human beings despite their conflict. Model Standards, *supra*.

Problem-Solving Skills and Knowledge

2. Critically and impartially (e.g. regardless of authority, status) acknowledges and addresses destructive intergroup dynamics, including in/out group bias, dehumanization, dogmatism, prejudice, stereotyping and generalizing, displacement and scapegoating;

Ethical Decision Making and Values, Skills and Knowledge

Assessment and Creation of Appropriateness

Demonstrates adequate awareness and investigates potential and actual power imbalances and other conditions that must be addressed for mediation to be appropriate, i.e. to prevent party damage, exploitation or coercion --- psychological and physical. SPIDR, *supra*; Model S standards, *supra*; CCMMO, *supra*.

Ensures balanced negotiations and does not permit manipulative, intimidating or other negotiation techniques that evidence bad faith or pressures that jeopardize voluntary and informed decision making. AFM, *supra*; Model S standards, *supra*; see CCMMO, *supra*.

ROLE-PLAY SIMULATION



Cast of Characters

1. Legal Consultant/Investigator
2. Executive Director
3. Financial Director
4. Community Members
5. Concerned Board Member(s)