Crises and Opportunities:

Six Contemporary Challenges for Increasing Probabilities for Sustainable Peace

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Abstract

The news from the field of peace and conflict studies is mixed. It is evident that the increasing complexity, interdependence and technological sophistication of conflict, violence and war today introduce many new challenges to peace-keeping, making and building. However, it is also likely that these trends present new opportunities for fostering and sustaining peace. If our field is to capitalize on such prospects, it will need to more effectively understand and address several basic dilemmas inherent to how we approach our work. This paper outlines six contemporary challenges, and suggests some options for addressing them.

Keywords: Conflict resolution, peace, evidence-based practice, gender, systems.

Reports from the field suggest that the impact of our scholarship on conflict-resolution and peace practices over the past several decades is producing mixed results. The good news is that the international community recently experienced a dramatic increase in the number of wars ending through negotiation rather than through unilateral military victory (Ricigliano, 2012). In fact, these numbers flipped after the Cold War; by 2006, twice as many wars ended through negotiation than ended through military victory (Mason *et al.*, 2007). From 1988 to 2003, more wars ended through negotiation than had in the previous two centuries (United Nations [UN], 2004), and the introduction of peacekeeping troops after signed treaties has proven to have a substantial positive effect on the duration of peace agreements (Mason *et al.*, 2011; Quinn *et al.*, 2007). After peaking in 1991, the number of civil wars had dropped roughly 40% by 2003 (UN, 2004). This seems to indicate that local, regional and international peacemakers have an increasing positive influence on peaceful relations.

However, the bad news is that over 25% of the wars ending through negotiations relapse into violence within five years (Suhrke and Samset, 2007). In some cases, such as in Rwanda and Angola, more people were harmed and killed after peace agreements were ratified by the parties and then failed than before (Stedman *et al.*, 2002). And these failed-peace states can begin an unprecedented phase of downward spiral. States with civil wars in their history are far more likely to

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experience renewed violence (Mason *et al.*, 2007), and the longer such conflicts last, the greater the chances of recurrence of war (Collier, 2000; Zartman, 2005). Furthermore, after a high annual incidence of signed peace agreements during the 1990s and early 2000s (Harbom *et al.*, 2006), the number dropped dramatically from 10 annually to 1–2 between 2008 and 2011 (Wallensteen, 2011). Such low figures had not been recorded since 1987, before the end of the Cold War.

While it is hard to pinpoint the exact cause of these roller-coaster peace statistics, it is evident that the increasing complexity, interdependence and technological sophistication of conflict, violence and war today introduce many new challenges to peace-keeping, making and building. However, it is also likely that these trends present new opportunities for fostering and sustaining peace. Still, if our field is to capitalize on such prospects, it will need to more effectively understand and address several basic dilemmas inherent to how we approach our work. This paper outlines six contemporary challenges, and suggests some options for addressing them.

1.   Experience-Based or Evidence-Based?

In 2009, I organized a meeting of 20 conflict-management/peace-building practitioners and 20 complexity scientists (physicists, applied mathematicians, etc.) to discuss systemic approaches to conflict transformation in Nepal. The first day was a near-disaster. The divide between the hard-scientists studying complex systems and the practitioners applying systems-thinking with stakeholders on the ground was vast. The meeting quickly polarized into two equally proud and somewhat condescending groups. The peace-builders championed the use of complex-systems mapping with stakeholders, which the scientists described as uninformed 'performance art'. The scientists advocated for the use of evidence-based concepts, principles and methods, which the practitioners found overly abstract, obscure and impractical. And the problem was they were both right.

Our field is undergoing a science-practice crisis not unlike what the field of medicine underwent in 1910, when the scandalous Flexner Report revealed a vast drift between clinical science and medical practice (Carey, 2001). In the 1990s, an evaluation of the 18 mostly university-based Hewlett Foundation-funded Theory Centers that conduct research in the area of conflict resolution found that the work of most practitioners surveyed had been largely unaffected by the contributions generated by the various Centers (new theory, tactics, publications, etc.). At the same time, much of the research conducted at these Centers was found to be 'removed from practice realities and constraints'. Today as a result, many practitioners of conflict resolution dismiss the contributions of theorists and researchers, particularly when research findings challenge their own models or methods. At the same time, scholars often fail to utilize the expertise of skilled practitioners in their development of theory, and research studies often neglect what practitioners and policy makers want or need to know. This means that too few of the models studied systematically today are sufficiently informed by the practical realities of actual conflict, and that current practices employed in the field have

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been insufficiently informed by research, which could help determine if they actually do what we think they do and how to make them most effective.

This challenge is a reflection of the fact that scholars and practitioners tend to come from different disciplinary backgrounds, often have divergent goals (scholars tend to seek truths in patterns of data, and practitioners want to know what works now), have had vastly different formative experiences (labs vs. trenches), and therefore often hold widely different worldviews and speak incompatible languages (Deutsch, 2000). So what is a high-stakes field such as ours to do – depend on empirical science or informed practice?

The answer of course is both. It is critical that our field better organize to enhance the opportunities and quality of scholar-practitioner collaboration and dialogue in order to better capitalize on the context-specific process expertise of practitioners, while benefitting from the accumulated knowledge of seventy-plus years of increasingly sophisticated systematic research. How? Here are two examples: one from academia and one from the world of practice.

In response to the growing gap between theory and practice cited in the Hewlett report, our Center, the *International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution* at Columbia University, began convening an informal seminar with academics and practitioners on conflict resolution theory and practice. The lively (and tense) discussions from this seminar extended the thinking of all involved and inspired the development and publication of several editions of *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice* (Deutsch and Coleman, 2000; Deutsch *et al.*, 2006, forthcoming). The chapters of the book each begin by presenting the theoretical ideas derived from empirical research in each substantive area (interdependence, justice, power, etc.), then draw out the implications of these ideas for understanding conflict, and then conclude with the translation of these ideas for educating or training people to manage their conflicts more constructively. Every six to seven years, a new edition is then generated to reflect recent advances in science and practice.

On the practice side, The Mediation Support Unit (MSU) of the United Nations Department of Political Affairs, a system-wide asset that assists mediation initiatives of the UN, member states, regional/sub-regional organizations and NGOs, recently reached out to connect with a select group of Academics to form an Academic Advisory Council on mediation aimed at closing the gap between the academic community and operational support. The intent of the Council is to create a means for the operational support provided by MSU to benefit from the research and analysis of academic institutions on mediation and conflict resolution, and for such institutions to benefit from insights and experience-based knowledge from the ground; insights that could, in turn, help inform and focus research. The Academic Advisory Council was launched in the fall of 2012, and is comprised of select academic institutions from around the globe with established quantitative and qualitative tools related to mediation, conflict and peace processes from different regions reflecting different perspectives.

Theory-practice projects such as these are rarely easy but often critical. Returning to our Nepal meeting, after the first of day of grandstanding by the subgroups we were able to come together and, ultimately, learn and advance our

thinking considerably. The academics came to appreciate and value the grounded-insights of the practitioners, and the practitioners gained from the precise distinctions offered by the scientists.

2.   Mechanistic or Holistic?

For well over a hundred years, scholars have debated the relative value of two distinct scientific paradigms: The atomistic-mechanistic approach versus the holistic-systems approach. Generally speaking, the first approach, influenced by the likes of Descarte and the maxims of formal logic, emphasized the importance of the analysis or breaking-apart of phenomena like conflict and peace into their micro-component parts and the search for linear, causal mechanisms and relationships. This orientation pinpoints more stable variables – attitudes, structures, policies, etc. – and attempts to identify their direct, typically short-term effects on phenomena of interest. It is evident in such schools as Newtonian physics, structuralism in psychology, and realism in international affairs (Deutsch, 1969).

In contrast, more holistic approaches of Field Theory in physics, Gestalt psychology and multi-level theories of organizational science and international affairs stress the importance of understanding how fields of forces and elements come together and organize to effect phenomena. This 'systems' approach has roots in Taoism, dialecticism and Aristotelian holism, and emphasizes how contradictory elements operate in tension to shape and drive systems through non-linear networks of causation. These complex systems can evidence non-linear dynamics such as emergence, self-organization, catastrophic change, and the unintended consequences of actions (Coleman, 2011; Vallacher *et al.*, forthcoming), which are largely inconsistent with linear or mechanistic models.

For instance, mechanistic research on conflict resolution would hypothesize that if we can train mediators to *listen* more carefully (X) in conflict it will lead to better outcomes (Y). It would predict X will lead to Y, a valid hypothesis. However, holistic-researchers would argue that whether social conflicts are resolved effectively rarely depends on one thing causing another to happen. The resolution of most conflicts usually depend on many things: the character of the people involved, their prior relationship, the nature of the issues, the situation, the processes employed, cultural norms, and any number of other background issues. In fact, what the future of these conflicts might *really* depend on is how these many things interact and work together; that is, how the whole puzzle does or does not fit together. This would be especially likely with complicated, long-term conflicts involving many people and many issues, in different situations, which keep changing over time.

Which is the more valid approach? Again, both.

There is a basic value in science called *parsimony*, which means that we seek and prefer the simplest possible explanations of phenomena whenever possible. As worthy as this value is, it has led many scholars to seek out 'the simple and sovereign theory' to explain destructive conflict and peace in terms of one over-

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arching factor or variable (Fisher, 1990). While this approach has generated important insights into aspects of causal relations inherent to peace and conflict, the relative importance of these components is too often overstated; and the nature of the relationships *among* the many parts is poorly understood. As George Bernard Shaw once said: "For every complex problem there is a simple solution that is wrong."

Alternatively, systems-theorists have sought to identify the universe of variables relevant to conflict, its occurrence, escalation and de-escalation. This has been an important step because it provides some sense of the context of conflict processes. As useful as this development has been, however, it often hits a dead end. The product of these efforts has often been extremely complex, multilevel models featuring a multitude of boxes and variables connected by a web of lines, loops and arrows. These models do provide a sense of context, but it is hard to know what to take away from them other than the fact that everything is related to everything else.

Today, it has become increasingly clear that understanding conflict and peace dynamics requires a combination of both orientations: the mechanistic and systemic. We need to recognize how a few central factors in conflict operate within a force field of many other variables, all pulling and pushing at the same time: *parsimony informed by complexity*. This is no small matter. As Vaclav Havel once said: "Simple answers which lie on this side of life's complexities are cheap. However, simple truths which exist beyond this complexity, and are illuminated by it, are worthy of a lifetime's commitment."

This is an idea reflected in what Andrzej Nowak has termed *dynamical minimalism* (Nowak, 2004). It suggests that very complex things, such as epidemics, hazardous weather patterns or mob behaviour at sporting events, can sometimes be understood by a few simple rules that demonstrate how the basic components of a problem interact over time. The objective of this approach is to see through the complexity of a phenomenon to find the minimal set of mechanisms that can account for that complexity. Its goal is *simplicity informed by complexity*. Obviously, identifying the few mechanisms or processes responsible for something as complex as a protracted social conflict is no small feat. At one level they are immensely complex, involving multiple elements all linked and interacting with one another and changing over time. But at another more basic level, these conflict dynamics may be quite simple.

This is where we have found the worlds of mechanistic science and holistic science meet. The former helps us to identify key parameters from causal, linear research that may account for significant qualitative changes in conflict and peace dynamics. However, the latter allows us to test the effects of these variables in context and over time, to ascertain those parameters whose effects are greatest and most durable.

Ideally, this mechanistic-holistic hybrid approach might provide a platform for addressing a related crisis in our field – the fact that even though many of the peace projects we launch in the field are successful in that they achieve their specified objectives (termed peace writ little – pwl; Chigas and Woodrow, 2009), they often seem to have little visible or measureable impact on sustainable peace

at the macro-level (termed Peace Writ Large – PWL). This challenge goes to the heart of the utility of our field and may very well determine its future viability.

3.   Conflict or Peace?

Today, we know very little about peace. Why? Because we do not study peace. We study war, violence, aggression and conflict – and peace in the context of those states and processes – but few study peace directly (Fry, 2007).

   Here is a cautionary tale. For well over a decade, the noted psychologist and mathematician John Gottman and his colleagues in his 'Love Lab' in Seattle, Washington studied married couples and theorized about marriage and divorce (Gottman *et al.*, 2002). Eventually, they developed a robust mathematical model for predicting divorce in married couples, which was 97% predictive. The researchers felt very satisfied about this accomplishment until they realized something odd: their model did not predict happiness in marriage (Gottman and Silver, 1999). They had been able to isolate the basic conditions which predicted divorce (or no divorce), but the opposite of these conditions did not predict marital bliss. When they realized the error of their assumptions they developed a programme of extensive study of happily married couples. After 16 years of studying marital happiness and stability, they came to understand more clearly that the predictors of each, divorce versus happiness, were not opposites, but were in fact qualitatively different conditions.

   We believe the same to be true for peace. In a recent set of studies we conducted in Israel and the Palestinian Territories investigating the motives that drive people to support negotiations to end the conflict versus those that motivate them to work actively for improved relations and peace, we found something similar to Gottman. Employing the unique method of *Rule Development Experimentation* to assess motives (see Moskowitz and Goffman, 2007), we found that the reasons Israelis and Palestinians are motivated to end conflict are fundamentally different from and independent of the reasons they are motivated to make and sustain peace (Coleman *et al.*, Working Paper). They are not opposites – the drivers for peace and the drivers for conflict – but are in fact fundamentally different motives. This means that the seventy plus decades of systematic research that has been conducted on the conditions that promote and prevent war, violence, aggression and conflict, although important and useful, are only half the story. It also means we have yet to really understand peace comprehensively.

   It is not that psychology, international affairs and related fields have not been concerned with peace; on the contrary. In fact, scholarship on the psychology of peace has been accumulating for decades and several thousand research studies have been conducted in this area since the end of the Cold War. However, this research has been predominantly *problem-focused*. In other words, the approach employed through these decades of research on peace has focused primarily on addressing and preventing the *problems* associated with conflict and violence and not on the *solutions* associated with peace. Even the idea of *positive peace*, first put forth by Johann Galtung (1985) to distinguish it from *negative*

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peace or attempts to eliminate overt forms of violence, fundamentally concerns problems of injustice and oppression and the needs for 'a more equitable social order that meets the basic needs and rights of all people'. This work has been necessary and critically important. However, a basic assumption inherent to this approach is that if we can gain a sophisticated enough understanding of the problems of conflict, violence, oppression and war that we will better understand, and be better able to foster and sustain, peace. But will we?

Take the case of The *Global Peace Index* (GPI), a recent attempt by the international community to measure the relative position of nations' and regions' peacefulness. It is the product of the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) and developed in consultation with an international panel of peace experts with data collected and collated by the Economist Intelligence Unit. The list was launched first in May 2007, then again every year from 2008 to 2012, and ranks 158 countries around the world according to their peacefulness. This year the *Global Peace Index* for the first time included a *Positive Peace Index* (PPI), which looks at attitudes, institutions and structures that, when strengthened, can improve a country's peacefulness.

The good news is that the PPI is oriented to societal resilience, measuring eight Pillars of Peace including (1) well-functioning government, (2) sound business environment, (3) equitable distribution of resources, (4) acceptance of the rights of others, (5) good relations with neighbours, (6) free flow of information, (7) high levels of education and (8) low levels of corruption. So the intention to measure positive states is there.

The bad news is that on most social dimensions, the PPI still measures only the absence of problems. For example, the PPI's approach to measuring 'good neighbor relations' and 'acceptance of other's rights' uses two indices from the *Indices of Social Development* from the International Institute of Social Studies. The measure for safety and trust (an index of good neighbour relations) reads:

> We measure personal security and trust by using data on general social trust from a wide variety of surveys, indicators of trustworthiness such as reported levels of crime victimisation, survey responses on feelings of safety and security in one's neighbourhood, data on the incidence of homicide, and risk reports on the likelihood of physical attack, extortion, or robbery. (<www.indsocdev.org/interpersonal-safety-and-trust.html>)

Regarding the measure of intergroup cohesion (an index of acceptance of other's rights), it reads:

> We measure intergroup cohesion using data on inter-group disparities, perceptions of being discriminated against, and feelings of distrust against members of other groups. ISD also use data on the number of reported incidents of riots, terrorist acts, assassinations, and kidnappings; agency ratings on the likelihood of civil disorder, terrorism and social instability; and reported levels of engagement in violent riots, strikes, and confrontations. (<www.indsocdev.org/intergroup-cohesion.html>)

And in a recent study, the PPI was found to be strongly correlated with the GPI, thus questioning the PPI's discriminant validity (Druckman, personal communication).

So why are we stuck on measuring problems despite the recognition of the need to assess positive states? First, as humans, fear is simply more primal and basic than hope (Jarymowicz and Bar-Tal, 2006). Brain research has shown that fear reactions to threat are triggered sooner and in a more primitive place in the brain (amygdala) than experiences of hope and optimism, which are considered secondary emotions experienced more downstream (Damasio, 2003, 2004; Snyder, 2000). So we are in fact hard-wired to focus on problems and threats first.

Second, there are definitional problems with peace. For example, a search of the *Thomson Reuters Web of Knowledge* database on articles published in English since 2000 with 'peace' in the their title reveals over 40 terms distinguishing different types or aspects of peace. This is more than a matter of semantics. Peace can differ in a variety of ways, including by level (interpersonal to international to global peace), direction (internal and external peace), durability (from fragile to enduring peace), source or conditions (peace through coercion, democratic participation, economic incentive, etc.), type (negative, positive and promotive peace) and scope (local to global peace). So even though the PPI is attempting to assess an 'optimal environment for human well-being and potential to flourish' (a decent definition of peace), it is still assuming that the absence of negatives (crime, discrimination, rights violations) is sufficient to create such environments.

Third, it matters who is doing the measuring. Many scholarly disciplines operate on a set of basic, often unquestioned assumptions about cause and effect, the nature of human motivation, and what constitutes ideal, positive states. In economics and political science, a prevention-focus (avoiding harmful problems) is primary. Until recently, this was also true in other areas of the social sciences such as anthropology and psychology when movements to study positive processes and states came more into vogue (Fry, 2006; Gottman *et al.*, 2002; Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

So where do we go from here? Again, in both directions simultaneously. Although most people feel certain that peaceful relations are the opposite of contentious ones, research tells us that they are often *simultaneously present* in our lives. Even though we can usually only attend to one or the other, the underlying potential for both exists in many relationships. In fact, they tend to operate in ways that are mostly independent of one another. In other words, conflict and peace are not opposites. They are two prospective and independent ways of being and relating – the two alternative realities. This suggests that people can be at war and at peace at the same time. Even during periods of intense fighting between divorcing couples, work colleagues, ethnic gangs, or Palestinians and Israelis, there exist hidden potentials in the relationships – latent patterns – that are in fact alternative tendencies for relating to one another (Coleman, 2011; Vallacher *et al.*, 2010, 2013). We see evidence of this when people or groups move

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very quickly from caring for each other to despising one another, or when the opposite occurs.

The point is that our actions in a conflict can have very different effects on three distinct aspects of the peace and conflict landscape: on the current situation (the levels of hostility and harmony in relations right now), on the longer-term potential for positive relations (positive potentialities), and on the longer-term potential for negative relations. All three can have a life of their own. This idea suggests that we need to develop separate but complementary strategies for (1) addressing the current state of a conflict, (2) increasing the probabilities for constructive relations between the parties in the future and (3) decreasing the probabilities for destructive future encounters. Most attempts at addressing destructive conflict target numbers one and three, but often neglect to increase the probability for future positive relations. They are aimed at stopping present suffering and avoiding future pain. But without sufficient attention to the bolstering of attractors for positive relations between parties, progress in addressing the conflict and eliminating future conflict will only be temporary.

4.   Men or Women?

In the spring of 2012, I attended a high-level meeting of representatives of the member states of the United Nations organized to launch a new report on UN mediation. In the afternoon, they offered a special eight-person panel session on the importance of the role of women in UN mediation. This was partially in response to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UN, 2000), passed in 2000, which required that women be involved in all peace negotiations and post-conflict rebuilding strategies at all levels in all conflicts going forward. However, at that afternoon's panel-session, none of the panellists were women.

Unfortunately, this is quite typical in our field. The role of women in peace is championed verbally by our leaders, policy makers, academics, NGOs, and most recently the Nobel Peace Prize Commission, while women, in fact, remain marginalized in our scholarship, leadership and decision-making structures related to peace, particularly in the more elite settings of state and international affairs. On the one hand this makes sense given that men are the primary actors and perpetrators of violence and war, and therefore should perhaps bear the responsibility for its mitigation. However, given that women and girls bare the greatest brunt of wars (Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002; UN, 2000, 2008, 2011; The World Bank, 2011), perhaps it is time they (1) become recognized for the considerable work they do to keep, make and build peace, and (2) be allowed parity in access to formal peace processes.

The extraordinary role that Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Leymah Gbowee and the Women's International Peace Network (WIPN) played in the peace process in Liberia in the early 2000s is a striking example of both the presence and absence of women in peace (see Disney and Gbowee, 2012; Gbowee and Mithers, 2011). Ms. Gbowee helped lead an ordinary group of Christian and Muslim women – mothers, aunts and grandmothers – to organize amid the gruelling, protracted

armed conflict in Liberia, with no formal authority and few 'hard' resources – help mobilize and shepherd the peace process between the Liberian government of strongman Charles Taylor and the armed rebels. When the peace treaty was eventually signed, the women then re-organized to help ensure implementation of the agreement in villages across the country. Eventually, the WIPN became known throughout Liberia as a major force for peace. For example, at one point during the war, UN peacekeepers were stuck in a protracted gun battle with rebel forces in the jungle and could see no way out. They contacted the WIPN, whose members arrived at the scene in their standard white T-shirts and headdresses. The women then entered the jungle with hands raised, dancing and singing. After spending two days there, feeding and speaking with the rebels, the women brought the rebels out of the jungle, ending the stalemate.

But one of the most extraordinary facts about these 'ordinary' women is that, prior to 2008, few members of the international community – beyond Liberia – had ever heard of Ms. Gbowee and the WIPN. Although their feats were legion within Liberia, the story of the Liberian peace process told in the rest of the world somehow – remarkably – omitted the role of the WIPN. This invisible tale was eventually captured and shared on film by a group of documentary filmmakers (who happened to be women) entitled *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* (<www.praythe devilbacktohell.com/>), which aired as part of a series on *PBS's Frontline* in 2011 called *Women in War*. Today, the film has been shown to women living in zones of protracted conflict around the world as a stimulus for discussions of the potential role (or existing but unrecognized parts) women can play in realizing peace.

As Disney and Gbowee (2012) wrote,

> So what the women accomplished in Liberia may be remarkable, but it is also understandable. It has also been done in many other times and places, most often without having been noted in official accounts of the events. A historical example of such action by African women is the infamous 'Aba women's riot' in October of 1929; when the women of Aba in Eastern Nigeria demonstrated against high taxes and low prices of Nigerian export. This is one of the most poignant examples in West Africa of women using their numerical strength, ability to mobilize and traditional role to advocate for inclusion on an issue affecting their lives [...]Women have a special relationship to peace because peace is necessary for them to do what they need to do in a culture. And whether that relationship is on the second X chromosome or in the way we raise our girls and boys to adulthood, it hardly matters. Women fight for peace because peace is what they must have to do their jobs. (p. 201)

Once again, the choice is a false one. Men and women are allies for peace, and the sooner we recognize this – and actually act on it – the better.

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5.   Rationality or Emotion?

Decades of research on social conflict have championed the importance of cognitive processes like stereotyping, attitudes, schemas, analysis, planning on conflict management, yet paid little attention to the role of emotions (Barry and Oliver, 1996; Coleman *et al.*, 2009). This has resulted in many practical techniques offering recommendations like 'If you become emotional during conflict, wait until it passes before you act' or 'Rise above your emotions and try to get a *rational* perspective on the situation'. This advice may be useful when emotions are a passing anomaly or inconvenience as they are in many low-level a conflicts. But not when emotions are basic, not when they are enmeshed within the conflict, not when they *are* the rationale. To really comprehend such conflicts we need research models that place emotions at the center. We need models that not only see emotions as the energy behind the conflicts, but also recognize that they create the context through which we experience conflict.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that emotions are not simply important considerations in conflict. They fundamentally *are the issue* in most conflicts as they often set the stage for destructive or constructive interactions. In fact, research on emotions and decision making with patients suffering from severe brain injuries found that when people lose the capacity to experience emotions, they also lose their ability to make important decisions (Bechara, 2004). Emotions are not only relevant to our decisions in conflict, they are *central* to them.

Fortunately, recent laboratory research on emotions and conflict dynamics tells a consistent tale; it is the ratio that matters (Gottman *et al.*, 2002; Losada and Heaphy, 2004). It is not necessarily how negative or how positive people feel about each other that really matters in conflict; it is the *ratio* of their positivity to negativity *over time*. Studies show that healthy couples and functional, innovative workgroups will have disagreements and experience some degree of negativity in their relationships. That is normal, and in fact people usually need to experience this in order to learn and develop in their relationships. However, these negative encounters must occur within the context of a sufficient amount of positive emotions for the relationships to be functional. And because negative encounters have such an inordinately strong impact on people and relationships, there have to be significantly more positive experiences to offset the negative ones.

Scholars have found that disputants in ongoing relationships need somewhere between three and a half to five positive experiences for every negative one, to keep the negative encounters from becoming harmful (Gottman *et al.*, 2002; Losada and Heaphy, 2004). They need to have enough emotional positivity in reserve. Without this, the negative encounters will accumulate (rapidly), helping to create wide and deep patterns for destructive relations. At the same time, any positive encounters will dissipate and have little effect on future positive relations. This can result in relationships with overwhelming negative attraction. In other words, intractable conflicts (Coleman, 2011).

Once again, it is not that cognitive processes associated with conflict analysis, negotiation planning, integrative problem-solving, and so forth are not crucial to peace and conflict. They are. But they have also been the main story we focus in in

most research and practice. And this story fails to recognize what cognitive science has now been telling us for over 20 years (Bechara, 2004; Lakoff and Johnson, 1999): emotions establish the context for our cognitive processing of information.

6.   Disciplinary or Multidisciplinary?

Alcoholics Anonymous has a saying that they share with their addicted members that "We are only as sick as our secrets". When it comes to our professional disciplinary training in peace and conflict, I like to say "We are only as sick (or limited) as our assumptions." That is, when it comes to conflict and peace, each of us has developed our own preferred metaphors, approaches and models. We may not be aware of them, but we have them, nevertheless. I once interviewed an eminent international peacemaker who said to me, "I don't have any use for models or theories in my work". He then went on to describe his model to me, in detail, which involved dealing with every situation anew on its own terms. It was a *non-model* model (a situational-contingency model), but an implicit model nevertheless.

Our implicit models usually come from some combination of our formative personal or professional experiences with conflict (including how we saw our parents, teachers, coaches, politicians, etc. model how to deal with conflict), or else from our formal education – from how we were trained to see problems and solve them. Experience has shown that engineers, physicians, military officers, social workers, teachers, therapists, political scientists, diplomats, economists, union organizers, and so on all see and approach conflicts in distinctly different ways. They all bring to conflict their own *metaphors* and *frames* – ways of seeing and thinking (Goffman, 1974; Morgan, 1997). These frames often highlight certain aspects of conflict situations and ignore others, as they shape our sense of reality and of what is and is not relevant to a solution. Some emphasize power and politics, some relationships, some economics and scarce resources, some trauma, and others stress community rituals, chemical imbalances or childhood experiences. In fact, cognitive scientists tell us that our frames are often stronger determinants of our perceptions and actions in social situations than the facts on the ground are! As the linguist George Lakoff has put it, "frames trump facts".

Of course, there is no *one* right way to view and solve conflicts. But some ways are certainly better (or at least less consequential) than others, and any one frame or approach, whether political, spiritual, psychological, economic, or otherwise, is unlikely to be sufficient to comprehend and address peace or complex, long-term and volatile conflicts. These require both a mindfulness of our own frames and an ability to work collaboratively with others who see things differently.

This, again (and finally), requires a both-and-approach. It requires that we train students within their disciplines to be the best and most informed psychologists, anthropologists, economists, political scientists, biologists, physicists, lawyers, epidemiologists, etc. they can be, so that they can bring to bear the best their field has to offer to the understanding of peace and conflict. *And* it requires

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that we train them to be able to work across disciplines. To be able to problemat-
ize, conceptualize, communicate, design, conduct research, and intervene collabo-
ratively with experts from other disciplines – and to learn from one another – in
order to bring our best, synthesized understanding to the many social problems
and challenges of our time.

7.   Managing our Dilemmas

The six dilemmas presented here are merely representative of the many tensions
that exist at the core of our field. However, it is not simply the presence of these
polarities that challenge our work, but rather our human attempts to manage
them that generate unintended consequences.

Theoretically, there are five possible responses to such dilemmas (Peng and
Nesbitt, 1999). The first is *denial*, a common response which entails ignoring the
contradiction or pretending it does not exist. This can have short-term benefits
(as in the temporary management of anxiety) and long-term negative consequen-
ces (such as intensification of the problem). The second is *discounting*, where peo-
ple distrust or discount information from one side of the dilemma because of the
difficulty of reconciling the contradiction. The third and most common, *differen-
tiation*, involves a comparison of both sides of the dilemma resulting in a polar-
ized decision that, ultimately, one side is right and the other is wrong. Psycholo-
gists have suggested that people – and particularly Westerners – often prefer this
process as a manner of reducing the cognitive dissonance caused by holding two
such contradictory cognitions (Festinger, 1957; Peng and Nesbitt, 1999).

The remaining two responses, dialectical and dialogical thinking, are both
attempts at managing these dilemmas by acknowledging the value of both per-
spectives and retaining basic elements of both. *Dialectics* is a philosophy where
phenomena are thought to be defined by and seen as generating their opposite
(such as life and death, day and night, war and peace), and are thought to exist in
a constantly changing state of tension and balance (see Morgan, 1997). A dialecti-
cal course of change is essentially conflictual in that it proposes that all stages or
states of being and relating are 'overcome' as life proceeds through a "spiral-like
ascension defined by the triad thesis/antithesis/synthesis" (Toscano, 1998: 70).
Thus, conflicts are seen as driven by oppositional forces that can be overcome,
transformed and integrated with each other on an ongoing basis. As such, con-
flicts are seen as resolvable through a synthesis of the opposing sides of the
dilemma. This is a basic assumption of most models of conflict resolution, includ-
ing integrative negotiation (*e.g.*, win–win solutions), mediation and problem-solv-
ing workshops (Toscano, 1998).

The philosophy of *dialogics* takes a similar view of the importance of contra-
diction in change, but differs in its perspective on the relations and dynamics
between opposites. Based on the work of the Russian analyst Bakhtin (Holquist,
1990; Todorov, 1981), the dialogical relation is defined as one "where 'thesis' and
'antithesis' can never be subsumed into a higher 'synthesis', but are instead des-
tined to constitute *the permanent poles of a noneliminable tension*" (Toscano, 1998:

70). Many basic dilemmas are thought to be propelled by these tensions, but this view does not require one side of the equation to be overcome by another in order for change to occur. Constructive change results from the capacity to accept the permanence of the tension, and to find ways to proceed which respect this permanence.

A protracted dialogue process on abortion that occurred in Boston is illustrative of the presence and management of such a non-eliminable tension. In response to a deadly shooting rampage at two abortion clinics in the Boston area in 1994, three 'pro-life' and three 'pro-choice' leader/activists began meeting to have a dialogue about abortion. For six years these six women met together in secret, concerned about the repercussions that meeting with the other side might have on their own safety and on their standing and ability to lead within their own communities. In January 2001 they went public, co-authoring an article in *The Boston Globe* about their experiences of meeting together. They wrote,

> We […] made a commitment that some of us still find agonizingly difficult: to shift our focus away from arguing our cause. From the beginning, I have felt an enormous tension […] between honoring the agreement to not argue for our position and my deep hope – which I still feel – that these women for whom I have such great respect will change their minds about abortion

The essence of their experience has been paradoxical. They wrote, "Since that first fear-filled meeting, we have experienced a paradox. While learning to treat each other with dignity and respect, we have all become firmer in our views about abortion" (Fowler *et al.*, 2001).

After six years of respectful, articulate, humanizing dialogue, each individual participant became more committed to and more polarized over the central dilemma of women's rights and the rights of the unborn fetus. From a dialogic perspective, this specific issue cannot be resolved, but may result in remedies that respect the oppositional constancy of these differences. This philosophical and practical perspective is viewed by some as a rudimentary requirement for peaceful coexistence between conflicting groups (Toscano, 1998; also Deutsch, 2000; Rawls, 1996), and provides a road map for addressing many of our more challenging core dilemmas.

8.   Conclusion

Those of us working on peace and conflict around the globe cannot prevent destructive conflicts from occurring and cannot make peace happen. Believing we can reflects linear, cause-and-effect thinking about fostering change in a complex, non-linear world. However, we can do a great deal to reduce the *probabilities* that conflicts will escalate and persist, and increase the probabilities that more people will work to resolve them constructively. In other words, while occasional conflicts cannot be stopped, the tendency for conflicts to evolve over time into stable

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destructive patterns that impair our social and physical environments can be mitigated and prevented.

Ironically, the usefulness and impact of our work will ultimately depend on our own abilities as a field to effectively manage, resolve, tolerate or capitalize on the many tensions, divisions and conflicts we experience internally, across science and practice, paradigms, orientations, gender, rationalities, and disciplines. In other words, it depends on whether we take the time to walk our talk and apply our trade to our own multicultural, multidisciplinary, multidimensional collective. I remain optimistic of our chances.

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