The Negotiator's Desk Reference

Volume 2

Published by DRI Press, an imprint of the
Dispute Resolution Institute at Mitchell Hamline School of Law

Dispute Resolution Institute
Mitchell Hamline School of Law
875 Summit Ave, St Paul, MN 55105
Tel. (651) 695-7676

Printed in the United States of America.
Library of Congress Control Number: 2017936301
ISBN 978-0982794647

Mitchell Hamline School of Law in Saint Paul, Minnesota has been educating lawyers for more than 100 years yet remains committed to innovation to respond to the changing legal market. Featuring more enrollment options than any law school in the country, Mitchell Hamline is committed to accessibility and offers a curriculum rich in advocacy and problem solving. The law school's Dispute Resolution Institute, consistently ranked in the top five dispute resolution programs by U.S. News & World Report, offers more than 30 alternative dispute resolution courses each year in a wide variety of domestic and international programs, including certificate programs in arbitration law and practice, problem solving, and conflict resolution, and is the home of DRI Press. For information on other DRI Press publications, visit http://open.mitchellhamline.edu/dri_press/

85

Influencing Intractable Conflicts

Peter T. Coleman, Nicholas Redding & Joshua Fisher

Editors' Note: The final chapter of our complex-case trilogy describes techniques developed in recent years which promise greater effectiveness in the admittedly frustrating process of actually tackling an intractable conflict. It should be read not only in conjunction with Understanding Intractable Conflicts by the same authors and Getting in Sync by Coleman and Ricigliano, but also in conjunction with McDonald on Kashmir, in which a retired U.S. Ambassador describes what he actually did when drawn into working on the long-standing Kashmir problem.

In the previous chapter, we introduced dynamical systems theory (DST) as a paradigm for understanding intractable conflicts, and proposed a DST theory of practice for working with these conflicts constructively. We then described competencies and skills that allow one to prepare for engaging with these types of conflicts, before outlining approaches for

---

Peter T. Coleman is Professor of Psychology and Education at Columbia University, where he holds a joint appointment at Teachers College and The Earth Institute. Dr. Coleman directs the Morton Deutsch International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution (MD-ICCCR) and the Institute on Psychological Science and Practice (IPSP) at Teachers College, and is Executive Director of Columbia University's Advanced Consortium on Cooperation, Conflict, and Complexity (AC4). He currently conducts research on optimality, adaptivity, and complexity dynamics in conflict contexts.

Nicholas Redding is a research psychologist with the Ulupono Initiative of The Omidyar Group, a social impact investment firm focused on encouraging sustainable energy, food and waste practices in Hawai'i. Prior to joining Ulupono, he was a research program coordinator with the Advanced Consortium on Cooperation, Conflict, and Complexity (AC4) at the Earth Institute, Columbia University. He holds a Ph.D. in Social-Organizational Psychology from Columbia University.

Josh Fisher is the Director of the AC4 consortium at Columbia University. He is also an Adjunct Faculty member in the School of Professional Studies, and an Associate Research Scientist at the Earth Institute, studying conflict management, natural resources, and extractive industry. His current work focuses on natural resource management as a tool for conflict prevention. He works with government, civil society, international organizations, and nonprofit partners to design strategies to constructively manage environmental conflicts. Dr. Fisher received his PhD in Conflict Analysis and Resolution from George Mason University.

comprehending systemic conflict dynamics. For the current chapter, we will continue our guideline series from Part One (see Figure 1), starting with approaches for engaging with intractable conflict systems. Systemic *engagement* is one of the least predictable and thus most challenging phases of nonlinear change processes. However, the study of complex systems of all types has provided important insights into this phase. The guidelines outlined in this stage focus on effectively *entering the system, engaging levers for change*, and *conducting proximal change experiments*.

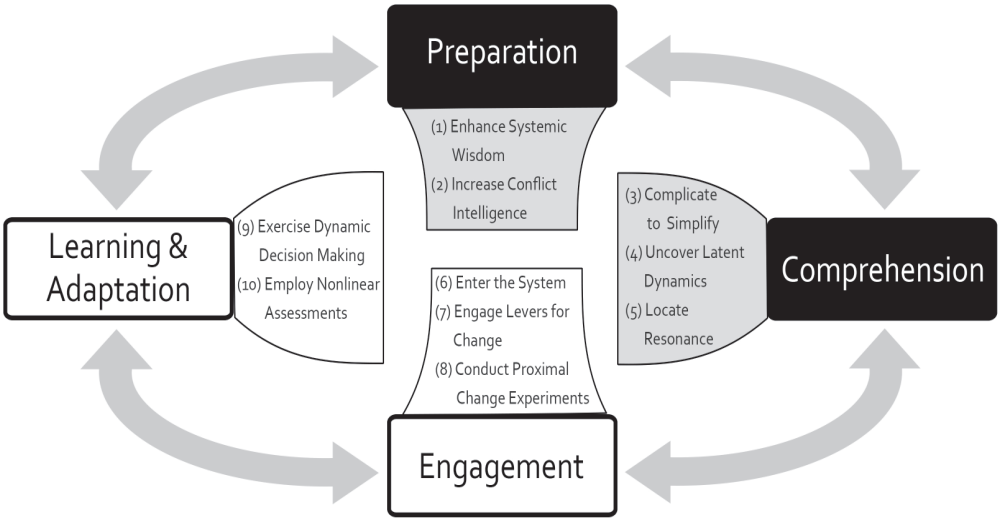

Figure 1: A Dynamical Systems Theory of Practice

Guideline #6: Entering Systems Mindfully

Begin Mindful of Initial Conditions

Research from three different conflict labs in the U.S. has come to the same conclusion: what happens at the onset of a conflict is critical. Studies conducted in Marcel Losada's Capture Lab, which studied conflict in executive work teams, John Gottman's Love Lab, which studies marital conflict and divorce, and Coleman and Kugler's Moral Conflict Lab, which studies difficult moral disputes, have shown that *what goes on in the first few minutes of a conflictual encounter has the most impact on everything that follows*.

This is consistent with other research on nonlinear systems, which consistently shows that they tend to be particularly sensitive to the initial conditions of the system. Computer simulations of conflict dynamics suggest that even very slight differences in initial conditions can eventually, after a delay, make a big difference in the experiences of the parties (Liebovitch et al. 2008). The effects of these small differences may not be visible at first, but they can trigger other changes that trigger still others, cascading over time to culminate in major changes in the structure and

dynamics of the system. For example, at the onset of a negotiation, slight differences in the moods of participants or in the framing of the process by facilitators may be almost imperceptible at first, but can lead to qualitative shifts in the dynamics as the negotiation progresses. These initial differences can be the result of various factors: the attitudes or personalities of the people coming in; their openness to dialogue, or the level of complexity of their thinking; how the conversations are set up and facilitated; how the room and participants are arranged spatially; or history of the disputants' interactions together. But what is clear is that the initial encounters tend to matter more than what follows.

This has several implications for initiating change as a negotiator or mediator. First, setting a strong, professional tone at the outset of a session by getting consensus on clear ground-rules and establishing your credibility as a professional can build a strong base for respectful discourse. If you get a sense that the disputants are incensed and are likely to come out of the gate kicking and screaming, then it may be best to caucus right away to see if it's possible to de-escalate hostilities and start the joint discussion later on from a more reasonable place. In addition, the earlier you intervene into a potentially destructive, escalating conflict, the better. It is much harder to reverse a process of destructive conflict when the session has gone sour then it is to mitigate one before it goes bad.

Finally, when determining how to introduce alternative dispute resolution (ADR) initiatives into new settings (schools, human resource departments, labor-management grievance procedures, etc.) it is best to seek to integrate them into the initial designs of the undertaking or existing internal procedures, and not attempt to add them on later. Starting early and being cognizant of existing, and potentially latent, dynamics helps to shape the emerging culture of the initiative in a way that is conducive to constructive conflict. (See Honeyman et al. 2007; also NDR: McDonald, *Peer Mediation* and NDR: Groton et al., *Thinking Ahead*.) Bringing these procedures in later on will typically elicit much greater resistance.

Begin with what is Working

Peace and conflict resolution practitioners tend to focus on identifying and solving problems. While important, this approach tends to obstruct our view of what is already working in a conflict system, and of existing opportunities for solutions. Virtually every conflict system contains people and groups who are willing to reach out across the divide and work to foster dialogue and peace. These are what Laura Chasin calls *networks of effective action* (Pearce and Littlejohn 1997), and Gabriella Blum (2007) labels *islands of agreement*. For example, Blum has found that during many protracted conflicts, the disputing parties often maintain areas in their relationship where they continue to communicate and

cooperate, despite the severity of the conflict. In international affairs this can occur with some forms of trade, civilian exchanges or medical care. In communities and organizations these islands may emerge around personal or professional crises (e.g., a sick child), outside interests (e.g. mutual work on common causes), or by way of chains of communications through trusted third parties. Recognizing and bolstering such networks or islands is job one.

For example, during the civil war in Mozambique, a critical actor in catalyzing the peace process was Catholic Archbishop Jamie Pedro Gonçalves who, being one of the first native and black bishops in the region, was respected by both major parties in the dispute and was tied to a broad network of contacts within the communities (Bartoli, Bui-Wrzosinska and Nowak 2010). Because he was perceived as neutral among the parties in the dispute, and was communicating directly with a diverse range of stakeholders, he was well-placed to influence the system toward positive change. Thus, initial systemic engagement should begin by identifying and engaging with these networks, carefully, and working with them to help alleviate the constraints on their activities in a safe and feasible manner. Ideally, a systemically competent practitioner will have processes in place through systemic *comprehension* (see Part One) to assist them in visualizing these networks and leveraging critical information to constructively engage them.

A more thorough scan of the system can help to locate its more functional components. These may include local norms and practices that prohibit aggression and violence beyond certain levels, indigenous grievance systems or other regulatory mechanisms considered impartial and fair, or widely respected members of families or communities that might be able to play a more actively constructive role in addressing disputes. Feedback-loop mapping can be particularly useful for identifying and understanding the more constructive aspects of social systems. Merely asking stakeholders, "Why doesn't the conflict get worse?" "Why did disputants settle in the past?" or "What provides a sense of hope today?" can orient the analysis towards the more constructive components or dynamics of the system. Or asking, "Where are the islands of agreement or the networks of effective action today?" Or "What types of taboos exist for destruction and violence here (places of worship, children, hospitals)?" This information—which is typically ignored in traditional conflict analysis—can help reveal the existing feedback processes in the system that inhibit destructive conflict engagement.

Leverage Instability

Intractable conflicts tend to be ultra-coherent, closed systems that steadfastly resist many good faith attempts at change. When absolute certainty about "us versus them" takes over in such systems and provides *the* foundation for understanding, then it's likely time to *seek instability*.

This entails either capitalizing on recent disruptive conditions or creating new conditions that in fact *destabilize* the system. (Note that our use of "destabilize" is a rigorous one, not the casual usage that implies that stability is always good.)

For instance, in research on the approximately 850 enduring international conflicts that occurred throughout the world between 1816 and 1992, over three-quarters of them were found to have ended within ten years of a major political shock (i.e. world wars, civil wars, significant changes in territory and power relations, regime change, independence movements, or transitions to democracy; Diehl and Goertz 2001; Klein, Goertz and Diehl 2006). From the perspective of DST, these shocks created fissures in the stability of the previous attractors, eventually leading to the establishment of the necessary conditions for the major restructuring and realignment of conflict landscapes (i.e., in the vernacular, for peace to break out.) This suggests that events such as those erupting in the Middle East today (e.g., the ISIL threat, instability in Iraq and Syria) may actually promote optimal conditions for dramatic realignment of socio-political systems—such as in Israel-Palestine—contrary to common assumptions. Similarly, a family system plunged into crisis by divorcing parents, a child's diagnosis of a terminal illness, a criminal conviction of a family member, or the need to quickly uproot and move out of state for work could all place a family system into a tenuous, high-anxiety state.

However political shocks can go either way—encouraging radical change or further intransigence. For example, precisely ten years after 9/11 and the American incursions into Afghanistan and Iraq (major political shocks), Tunisia and others states in the MENA region erupted into revolutions which, in the case of Tunisia, today offer the potential of a stable shift from an authoritarian regime to more pluralist democratic rule. However other states, such as Egypt, despite the temporary shift in political dynamics, seemed to return to the previous pattern of hardline military rule after one year. Thus, the results of destabilization can take months or years to become evident, as the initial shock most likely affects factors that affect other factors and so on until overt changes occur. It is also important to note that such ruptures to the coherence and stability of sociopolitical systems do not *ensure* radical or constructive change, or peace. They must therefore be considered a necessary, but insufficient, condition when working with intractability.

Guideline #7: Engage Levers for Change

Donella Meadows (2008) outlined a set of low to high impact levers for navigating change in complex systems. Below are five derived from DST.

Open up the System

Research shows that relatively high levels of emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and structural complexity characterize more constructive conflict relations. Thus, communities that maintain more complex crosscutting structures and social networks have been found to be more tolerant, less destructive, and less violent when conflicts do spark (Varshney 2003). Research also supports the idea that more constructive relations are often associated with an increased capacity for physical or psychological *movement* (Bartoli, Bui-Wrzosinska and Nowak 2010). From this perspective, sustainable solutions to difficult, long-term conflicts require establishing conditions that induce and allow for sufficient openness: complexity, movement, and adaptation.

Michelle LeBaron, Carrie McLeod, and Andrew Floyer Acland (2013) tell a story of how in 1993 a group of international diplomats gathered near Dublin to attempt to generate new ideas for addressing the Israel-Palestine conflict. A primary challenge for the facilitators was to figure out how to move this group out of well-worn ruts when speaking about the conflict: positional statements, repetitive framings, and limiting assumptions that tended to dictate how they defined and responded to the conflict in the Middle East. For the first two days, the process followed a standard problem-solving format, and little of value transpired.

On the third day, the diplomats took a bus trip to Belfast. Jostled in the old school bus used for transport, the previously restrained participants began to experience each other differently. As they uncovered commonalities and shared passions, they began to relate more playfully. Several discussions with Northern Irish peacemakers and visits to bi-communal projects deepened the camaraderie within the group. As the bus headed back to Dublin following a group meal, participants sang together in the darkness. One of the facilitators later wrote, "Only after this excursion did conversations enliven, originality emerge, and imaginative possibilities for shifting intractable conflict in Israel-Palestine begin to reveal themselves" (LeBaron 2014: 594).

The facilitators of the meeting were thrilled by the change in dynamics among the participants but struggled to understand what had happened. Then something stuck them. Human beings are physical entities, so ignoring or denying this when we try to talk things out and negotiate is a mistake. Physical changes—movement, jostling, speaking with outsiders, traveling to new places—is one way to shake up and perhaps alter our programmed chronic responses to conflicts and thus allow and encourage us to see, think, feel, and respond differently. (See also Honeyman and Parish 2013, suggesting that what may work best is to arrange for a change in the participants' *social context*—in other words, whom they are engaging with and about what—at the same time as the spatial movement.)

Work Upstream, Away from the Conflict

Recognizing that stakeholders in protracted conflicts often view peacemakers as also being players in the theater of conflict, some interveners attempt to work constructively upstream in these settings—away from the conflict—by circumventing the conflict.

The idea here is that attempts to address these conflicts directly, in the context of a peace process, typically elicit resistance, as they are seen as affecting the balance of power in the conflict (usually by supporting lower-power groups most adversely affected by the conditions). Interveners recognizing this will work to address conditions of hardship without making any connection whatsoever to the conflict or peace processes. Retired US Ambassador John McDonald's private effort in establishing a bus line across the Kashmir border is an example. [NDR: McDonald & McDonald, *Kashmi*r]. To some degree, this is what many community and international development projects try to achieve. The difference is that this tactic targets the conditions seen as most directly feeding the conflict, and requires that every attempt be made to *divorce* these initiatives from being associated with any peace process (Praszkier, Nowak and Coleman 2010). This un-conflict resolution strategy can help address some of the negativity and misery associated with conflicts, without becoming incorporated (attracted) into the polarized "good versus evil" dynamics of the conflict.

For example, several years back a conflict-resolution and peace-building group arrived at a Palestinian school in Israel to work to promote peaceful coexistence among Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Israel-Palestine through an intensive educational program in peace and conflict resolution. It soon became clear that this intervention evoked negative feelings and attitudes among the local Palestinians. Some complained that the interveners simply did not have sufficient understanding of their circumstances; others expressed the opinion that by making the Palestinians the focus of the program, the interveners were implying that they, the Palestinians, were the source of the problem. Resentments built, and the result was that the school authorities were forced to terminate the program.

Later, an alternative group of activists, who worked closely with local residents and were familiar with the specific needs of the community, decided to focus their work on an area that crossed cultural lines and was a shared interest of both groups: information technology (IT). The group proceeded to establish an IT school for Arab and Jewish students. As they had surmised, the study of computer science proved to be a "bonding agent" among the students, without regard to religious and ethnic differences.

Seek Soft Power

Sometimes, however, more direct intervention into a conflict is necessary. Soft-power third parties are at times able to weaken resistance to change by carefully introducing a sense of alternative courses-of-action, hope for change, or even a sense of doubt in the ultra-certain status quo of "us versus them" conflicts. Through the unique influence of people and groups with little formal or "hard" power (military might, economic incentives, legal or human rights justifications, and so on) but with relevant "soft" power (trustworthiness, moral authority, wisdom, kindness, etc.), change does occur. Soft-power parties can also model and encourage other more constructive means of conflict engagement, such as shuttle diplomacy and indirect communication through negotiation chains.

This is the extraordinary role that the Women's International Peace Network (WIPN) played in the early 2000s, when they helped end Liberia's decades-long civil wars (Disney and Gbowee 2012). This ordinary group of women—mothers, aunts and grandmothers—organized amid the grueling armed conflict in Liberia, with no formal authority and few "hard" resources—helped to mobilize and shepherd the peace process between the government of strongman Charles Taylor and the rebels. For example, at one point in 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, who arrived at the scene in their 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.

Enhance Positive Latent Attractors for the Future

Seen from the perspective of attractor landscapes, finding common ground between parties, emphasizing shared goals and concerns, facilitating trust-building activities, and incentivizing cooperative trade initiatives—although they may appear to be largely ineffective in situations locked in an ongoing protracted struggle—may in fact be acting slowly and indirectly to establish a sufficiently wide and deep attractor basin for moral, humane forms of intergroup relations. One day, these initiatives may provide the foundation for a stable, peaceful future. The key is to work both to enhance factors that increase the likelihood of a shift to peace in the system, while simultaneously working to minimize the factors that perpetuate destructive conflicts. It is not possible to eliminate all factors that contribute to destructive conflict, but it may be possible to elevate just enough positive components so as to shift the ratio to favor factors promoting peace relative to those perpetuating more destructive dynamics.

In *Psychological Components of Sustainable Peace* (Coleman and Deutsch 2012), a group of distinguished scholar-practitioners of peace

and conflict offered a review of empirical research on factors associated with peaceful individuals, groups, and societies. These factors can be viewed as components of a multilevel system of peace, and so used as a checklist of factors associated with increasing probabilities for lasting peace:

Individual Level
■ Recognition of the interdependence of all people, similar and different, local and global. ■ A strong self-transcendent value orientation committed to the welfare of others and society. ■ An optimal balance of openness to change and conservatism, responsive to changing times and circumstances. ■ Skills and behaviors promoting cooperation and trust. ■ nowledge, attitudes, and skills for constructive conflict resolution. ■ Higher levels of cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social identity complexity. ■ Capacities for tolerance and realistic empathy (understanding how a situation looks to someone else). ■ A strong sense of global identity, along with a concrete understanding of the steps that need to be taken locally to act as a global citizen.
Organizational Level
■ Structures of cooperative task, goal, and reward interdependence in schools, workplaces, and politics. ■ Gender parity with a proportional number of women in the highest positions of leadership in business, politics, and the military. ■ Political and business ethics that are in harmony with nature and environmental stewardship. ■ Institutions that reflect and uphold self-transcendent values. ■ Programs and workshops in constructive conflict resolution and creative problem solving for children, adults, parents, and leaders of schools, businesses, and politics.

Cultural Level
■ Language for peace: a large lexicon for all aspects of cooperative and peaceful relations, and sufficient use of such terms to foster automaticity. ■ An appreciation of environmental stewardship and equitable sharing of the earth's resources among its members and with all human beings. ■ Strong norms valuing and nurturing children. ■ Early socialization of children oriented toward mutual care and nurturance. ■ Cross-cutting structures fostering common interests, activities, and bonds across different ethnic and religious groups. ■ Shared, accurate, and transparent collective memories of past events, conflicts and relationships between groups.
Societal Level
■ A societal idea of peace. ■ Societies that define themselves as internally and externally peaceful. ■ A transcultural elite with shared norms of tolerance, cooperation, and creative problem solving, who model for all the efficacy and value of constructive, non-violent action. ■ National governance structures tending towards egalitarianism and democracy. ■ Use of the Internet and other social technologies to mobilize broad social movements for humanitarian works and global peace. ■ Strong initiatives for communications, trade, and cultural and civilian exchanges between nations.

Table 1: Checklist of factors associated with increasing probabilities for lasting peace.

Together, these factors can operate in concert to constitute a *system of sustainable peace*—in other words, societal attractors for peaceful relations—distinguishing such societies from those locked in systems of destructive conflict. As mentioned above, other dynamical research has shown (see Gottman et al. 2002; Kugler, Coleman and Fuchs 2011; Losada 1999) that when the ratio of positive dynamics to negative dynamics in social systems is high (somewhere between 3:1 and 5:1), the odds of healthier, thriving relations and societies tend to increase markedly. When the positivity/negativity ratio is closer to 1:1 or lower, the relatively stronger effects of negativity will drive the system into either a sustained state of hostilities or lead to its disintegration. In other words, focusing resolution efforts on activities that do not directly confront the factors contributing to the conflict, but instead work to build or strengthen existing elements in the system that serve to strengthen the probabilities of sustainable peace, can be an effective strategy. What is critical is to work with these positive elements in the system in ways that stimulate movement toward a new attractor for sustainable peace.

Reverse Engineer Negative, Destructive Attractors

Even when systems de-escalate and appear to move into a state of peace, it is critical to recognize that the potential for destructive interactions (destructive attractors) is still functioning in a latent manner. Now, it is important to begin to deconstruct and dismantle the negative attractors. This entails decoupling some of the reinforcing feedback loops that perpetuate the conflict, or adding inhibiting feedback to lower the level of super-coherence in the system. We call this reverse engineering.

The following components for preventing and mitigating destructive conflict (Coleman 2012) can be used by communities as a checklist of aspects to address or enhance for decreasing probabilities for destructive conflict:

Individual Level
■ Awareness of the causes, consequences, and escalatory tendencies of destructive conflict and violence. ■ High levels of tolerance for, and openness to difference. ■ Moderate levels of tolerance for uncertainty. ■ Moderately high levels of self-monitoring, restraint, and regulation of internal impulses for destructive or violent acts. ■ A capacity for forgiveness.
Organizational Level
■ Early access to peace education and multicultural tolerance programs in preschool, elementary, and middle school. ■ Establishing national political and social institutions that ensure the implementation and follow-through of negotiated settlements. ■ Functional and accessible venues for constructive, non-violent action to seek recourse and address perceived injustices and other harms.
Cultural Level
■ Satisfaction of basic human needs including physiological needs, safety, and dignity. ■ Norms of gender equity and equality in the home, schools, and the workplace. ■ Values, attitudes, and skills supporting non-violence. ■ Opportunities for peaceful sublimation of aggression through competitive sports, occupations, creative arts, etc. ■ Strong norms for procedural and distributive justice in schools, workplaces, marketplaces, and elsewhere in the community. ■ Social taboos against corporal punishment and other forms of violence in the home, schools, workplaces, and public spaces.

Societal Level
■ Well-coordinated early warning systems operating through local governments and NGOs networked locally, regionally, and globally for efficient communication. ■ Use of crisis-mapping: an open-source platform for collecting and plotting local cell-phone accounts of the commission of violent atrocities, to inform the international community of emerging crises in a timely manner. ■ Use of the Internet and other social technologies to mobilize broad non-violent movements for social justice and corporate responsibility. ■ Coordination between local governments, civil society, and international organizations to prevent violent conflict. ■ Well-functioning global organizations and institutions such as the United Nations, the International Criminal Courts, Interpol, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Table 2: Checklist of factors for decreasing probabilities for destructive conflict.

Once the reinforcing feedback system of conflict escalation/stalemate is mapped, it can help to target specific links for the introduction of inhibiting feedback mechanisms.

Tables 1 and 2 are provided, not as exhaustive lists of peaceful and destructive systemic factors, but instead as a means for negotiators, and others working to influence positive change, to begin to explore the system from this perspective and start to identify and map existing processes that can be strengthened, to increase the probabilities for sustainable peace while simultaneously minimizing the impact of the more destructive elements. As described in the previous chapter, those working in the system can engage stakeholders in mapping activities and other methods of inquiry to begin to flesh out the factors and feedback loops perpetuating the conflict. These checklists can be used to complement that process by looking specifically for levers to shift the constructive and destructive drivers in the system.

Guideline #8: Conduct Prototype and Proximal Change Experiments

One strategy for cultivating and sustaining positive systemic change is through the identification or establishment of strong but isolated prototypes of the desired change—prototypes that can survive long enough to test and then facilitate the transfer of changes throughout the broader system (Morgan 1997). These experiments can be used as systemic probes to explore and learn about a system's reactions to the proposed change.

This is essentially what Laura Chasin and her organization, the Public Conversations Project (PCP), were able to do with the pro-life and pro-choice dialogue group in Boston. The initiative was launched in secret, and PCP was able to protect the anonymity of the group for several years, until the members themselves felt confident enough about

their process and outcomes to go public. What was critical here was the facilitator's capacity to *protect the boundaries of the experiment* (and in this case the lives and livelihoods of the participants) as long as was necessary.

Alternatively, John Gottman (2014) describes the use *of proximal change experiments* with married couples. In these studies, the goals are much smaller than that of couples therapy. The proximal goals are to change specific aspects of a couple's relationship, such as how they enter or begin a conflict discussion or how they respond to their spouses' initial attempts at communication. The researchers then examine the effects of such adjustments on subsequent discussions between the couple, and may use these data to reinforce the value of the change. The idea is that by changing one smaller component of the system, observers and parties involved can experiment with potential levers for improving the system, learning more about how the system behaves over time. For a couple in distress, Gottman's group found that a brief intervention focusing just on improving friendship initially significantly reduced negativity in the future. Rather than committing to a lengthy and involved series of therapy sessions with an indeterminate outcome, couples were able to see small positive changes after one session (Gottman 2014). Although the goals of such interventions are smaller, they are informed by knowledge of complex systems (such as the power of initial conditions), and so target potentially significant "small" adjustments.

Summarizing the above, the following questions can be used to guide the systemic engagement approach:

- Are the initial conditions conducive to constructive change? Has a sufficient degree of professionalism and respect been established in the process? Should caucusing, shuttle diplomacy or other forms of one-on-one engagement be the next step?
- Where are the islands of agreement or the networks of effective action functioning in the system today? How might you support or bolster the work of these networks? What are some possible unintended consequences of engaging with these networks?
- Why doesn't the conflict get worse? What provides a sense of hope today?
- Are there local taboos against destructive action and violence (places of worship, children, hospitals) that might be leveraged?
- Where are the opportunities for "opening the door to instability?" (Either capitalizing on recent disruptive conditions or creating new conditions that *destabilize* the system)?
- Are there opportunities for physical changes—movement, jostling, speaking with outsiders, traveling to new places—to

shake up chronic responses to conflicts and allow participants to see, think, feel, and respond differently?

- Are there opportunities for working upstream—initiating *an un-conflict resolution strategy*—to help address some of the negativity and misery without becoming pulled into the polarized "good versus evil" dynamics of the conflict?
- Where are the soft-power third parties working? Will they benefit from your support?
- What are the venues and opportunities for reinforcing a system of sustainable peace?
- Where are the levers for inhibiting or reverse engineering a system of destructive conflict?
- When and where should the change experiments begin?

Finally, in order to leverage the power of proximal change experiments (described above), a system needs to be in place to learn from those experiments in order to assess:

- What changed in the system and in what direction.
- Which changes were expected, and what (if any) unanticipated factors or dynamics emerged as a result of the experiment.
- When things moved in unanticipated or undesired ways, what went wrong as a result of assumptions about the system, an inadequate understanding of the system, or new emergent properties of the system.

In order to learn about the system in this way, the last lap is systemic learning and adaptation through dynamic decision-making and assessment of nonlinear impact.

Guideline #9: Exercise Dynamic Decision Making and Action

In his influential book *The Logic of Failure: Why Things Go Wrong and What We Can Do to Make Them Right*, Dietrich Dörner (1996) presents his research on decision making and initiating change in complex environments involving "simulated communities." Dörner's research tells us a lot about decision-making, change, and leadership in complex systems and raises important considerations for fostering *sustainable* solutions. His findings suggest that well-intentioned decision makers working in complex systems typically commit a standard set of errors:

- They act without prior analysis of the situation, or clarification and prioritization of goals.
- They fail to anticipate the side effects or long-term repercussions of their actions.
- They assume that the absence of immediately obvious negative effects means their measures have worked correctly.
- They let over-involvement in subprojects blind them to emerging needs and changes on the ground.

Why? Because this way of thinking and acting is usually more efficient and less cognitively demanding in the short term, and it helps to bolster one's self-esteem by maintaining a feeling of control. Importantly, this happens across stakeholders and levels of power.

The good news is that Dörner's research also sheds light on more effective methods of decision-making and problem solving within complex systems. The research participants able to improve the well-being of the simulated communities did the following:

- **Made more decisions:** They assessed a situation and set a course, but then continually *adapted*, staying open to feedback to reconsider their decisions and alter their course as needed. They were found to make more, not fewer, decisions as their plans unfolded. They found more possibilities for enhancing the system's well-being as the situation evolved.
- **Demonstrated complexity of action:** They seemed to understand that the problems they were addressing were closely linked with other problems, so their actions would have multiple effects. Therefore, they made many more decisions and took a wider variety of actions while attempting to achieve one goal (e.g. "I'll increase revenues in Greenvale by creating new jobs, investing in product development, and advertising"). This was in contrast to those who failed, who would typically make one decision per goal (e.g. "I'll raise taxes in Greenvale to raise revenues").
- **Focused on the real problems first:** They took the time to gather enough information to determine the central problems to address, and did not jump into action prematurely or simply focus on the problems they c*ould* solve because that felt good.
- **Tested hypotheses more:** They tested their solutions in pilot projects, and assessed the effects before committing to them.
- **Asked *why* more***:* They actively investigated the *why* behind events: the causal links that made up the *networks of causation* in their community.
- **Stayed focused on the prize...:** Effective decision makers identified the central issues early on and stayed focused on addressing them. Ineffective decision makers got easily distracted and diverted; they shifted from problem to problem as each arose.
- **...But not on one solution:** However, effective decision makers did not develop a single-minded preoccupation with one solution. If the feedback data informed them that a solution was too costly or ineffective, they altered their approach.

In other words, the best results, or the results that lead to more constructive engagement and more sustainable solutions over time, are those that result from a process of adaptation to changes in the system. This requires that stakeholders build structures and processes for decision-

making that are both analytical and deliberative (National Research Council 1996; Balint et al. 2011). Under this approach, the *analytical* component enables stakeholders to collect information on systemic responses to action and decisions, in order to assess what is changing in the system and how. This requires collaboratively structuring means of monitoring the proximal change experiments as they are implemented, and cycling that information back to the stakeholders and decision makers. The deliberative component then provides a forum for stakeholders to engage each other constructively in order to understand how each party perceives and is affected by those changes, in order to design new proximal change experiments to adapt to the new system dynamics. Again, this deliberative process will likely be rife with the same conditions described in the preceding section on Systemic Engagement (i.e. high levels of complexity, uncertainty, and disparity in types of power or degree of impact from systemic changes). Thus increasing Systemic Preparation and Systemic Comprehension are required to enable stakeholders to engage in this process of engagement and learning, in order to adapt to new dynamics and maintain a new level of constructive dialogue and collaboration.

Guideline #10: Employ Nonlinear Assessments

The concepts of *cause* and *effect* are overly simplistic in complex systems and protracted conflict. While an action may have a direct (i.e. linear change) impact on certain associated factors, it will also have dispersed or indirect impacts on more distant factors and dynamics across the system. Further, the energy from those impacts can accumulate in the system and contribute to additional changes across time (i.e. non-linear change). In assessing change in a system, it is therefore more fruitful to operate in terms of *impetus, influence*, and *impact*.

Creating the adaptive and deliberative structures described above can enable assessment of linear change in a system, and result in enhanced adaptation in systemic *engagement*. However, nonlinear changes in systems typically belie assessment and outcome evaluation. Because they are inherently unpredictable, it is nearly impossible to anticipate specific outcomes—to plan for and then to monitor predicted outcomes of interventions. What is needed then are methods to augment linear change assessment in systems, in order to provide the full range of information back to stakeholders to continue refining their systemic comprehension and thus informing new approaches to systemic engagement, and to learning and adaptation.

Fortunately, an ever-expanding suite of tools is being developed to complement traditional approaches to monitoring and evaluation. These new approaches range from community-based monitoring to retrospective and forensic analytical techniques, and others that leverage the power of the data revolution and social media to gather real-time data. In

this quickly evolving landscape, new analytical communities are forming to respond to the need for research and development in this area. An example of this is the Learning Lab at USAID (http://usaidlearninglab.org/) which develops, tests, and hosts a community around alternative methods for program planning and learning. Several of the approaches they employ, like the family of methods known as Outcome Mapping, suggest that what can be anticipated in nonlinear systems are eventual (high-level) qualitative changes in the patterns that are of interest in the given situation; in, for example, patterns of conflict or peace, negativity or positivity, destructiveness or constructiveness. Thus, these approaches recommend identifying the patterns of interest, and then selecting outcomes for measurement *en passant*, as the effects of the intervention unfold in the system, and only then identifying variables and dynamics that might inform the state of the changing nature of the pattern of interest. Further, several of these approaches recognize that change in a system is simultaneously produced by endogenous impetus (an impetus initiated by action inside the system and stakeholders), as well as by exogenous shocks (external forces that influence the factors or dynamics inside the system). In order to assess how change occurs in the system, it is thus important to account for influence and impact of both endogenous and exogenous stimuli.

As with all approaches to conflict management, identifying the correct suite of tools with which to collect information on changes in the system will ultimately depend on the specific context, the needs and capacities among decision makers, the resources available, and buy-in from the stakeholders. However, the DST approach relies on anticipating information needs to enable enhanced systemic preparation, improved systemic comprehension, and adaptive systemic engagement. It then relies on building structures and processes that are both analytical and deliberative, as well as able to assess the linear and non-linear changes that occur across the system.

The following set of questions is provided to guide this process of ongoing systemic learning and adaptation:

- What are the most general objectives of this initiative? Increase well-being? Reduce a sense of injustice-without-recourse? What qualitative changes would you hope to see in the system if the intervention were successful?
- What are the (possibly many) feasible actions a decision-maker could initiate that might have a positive impact on these objectives? What might be the unintended consequences of these actions?
- What has changed or is changing in the system as a result of previous change experiments and/or external events? Based on those changes, is your current comprehension of the system still accurate? Is your current strategy for engaging the system still appropriate and relevant? Do you need new indicators and strat-

egies for monitoring progress and learning about change in the system?

- What further proximal experiments, prototypes or pilot projects might be useful in testing the system?
- Do the funders understand the need for setting high-level objectives and conducting post-hoc evaluations?
- What is a realistic timeline for seeing the nonlinear impacts of the initiative? Ten years? Twenty?
- What are the generalizable learnings you take from this experience that might inform future change initiatives?

Conclusion

The state of the practice of working effectively with protracted conflicts and associated problems in the context of complex, nonlinear systems is nascent at best. However, if we as a field wish to have a constructive impact somewhere between doing no harm and sustaining peace, then this must be our next horizon.

The theory of practice outlined in this chapter and the preceding one is a work in progress. It pulls together insights from research and practice on addressing conflicts and related challenges in complex systems, and provides a parsimonious heuristic for thinking about social change in these contexts. It synthesizes insights and findings from our own labs and practices, as well as from those of our colleagues working in this area. As such, it offers a platform for research and practice that is itself simple and complex, stable and dynamic, old and new, and constantly evolving.

Our main objective for sharing this theory of practice at this stage in its development is to challenge, stimulate, and invite readers with whom the approach resonates to engage with us.

References

Balint, P., R. Stewart, A. Desai and L. Walters. 2011. *Wicked Environmental Problems: Managing Uncertainty and Conflict*. Washington D.C.: Island Press.

Bartoli, A., L. Bui-Wrzosinska and A. Nowak. 2010. Peace is in Movement: A Dynamical Systems Perspective on the Emergence of Peace in Mozambique. *Peace and Conflict* 16(2): 211-230.

Blum, G. 2007. *Islands of Agreement: Managing Enduring Armed Rivalries*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Coleman, P. T. 2012. Constructive Conflict Resolution and Sustainable Peace. *In Psychological Components of Sustainable Peace*, edited by P. T. Coleman and M. Deutsch. New York, NY: Springer.

Coleman, P. T. and M. Deutsch. (eds). 2012. *Psychological Components of Sustainable Peace*. New York, NY: Springer.

Diehl, P.F. and G. Goertz. 2001. *War and Peace in International Rivalry*. 1st edn., Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Disney, A. and D. Gbowee. 2012. Gender and Sustainable Peace. In *Psychological Components of Sustainable Peace*, edited by P. T. Coleman and M. Deutsch. New York, NY: Springer.

Dörner, D. 1996. *The Logic of Failure: Why Things Go Wrong and What We Can Do to Make Them Right*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Press.

Gottman, J. M. 2014. *Principia Amoris: The New Science of Love*. New York: NY: Routledge.

Gottman, J. M., C. D. Murray, C. C. Swanson, R. Tyson and K. R. Swanson. 2002. *The Mathematics of Marriage*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Honeyman, C., J. Macfarlane, B. Mayer, A. Schneider and J. Seul. 2007. The Next Frontier is Anticipation: Thinking Ahead about Conflict to Help Clients Find Constructive Ways to Engage Issues in Advance. *Alternatives to the High Cost of Litigation* 25(6): 99-103.

Honeyman, C. and R. Parish. 2013. Choreography of Negotiation: Movement in Three Acts. in *Choreography of Resolution: Conflict, Movement, and Neuroscience*, edited by M. LeBaron, C. MacLeod, and A. F. Acland. Chicago, IL: American Bar Association.

Klein, J. P., G. Goertz and P. F. Diehl. 2006. The New Rivalry Dataset: Procedures and Patterns. *Journal of Peace Research* 43(3): 331-348.

Kugler, K. G., P. T. Coleman and A. M. Fuchs. 2011. Moral Conflict and Complexity: The Dynamics of Constructive Versus Destructive Discussions Over Polarizing Issues. *IACM 24TH Annual Conference Paper*. Available at SSRN: http://ssrn.com/abstract=1872654.

LeBaron, M. 2014. The Alchemy of Change: Cultural Fluency in Conflict Resolution. In *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*, 3rd Ed., edited by P. T. Coleman, M. Deutsch and E. Marcus. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

LeBaron, M., C. MacLeod and A. F. Acland. (eds). 2013. *Choreography of Resolution: Conflict, Movement, and Neuroscience*. Chicago, IL: American Bar Association.

Liebovitch, L. S., V. Naudot, R. Vallacher, A. Nowak, L. Bui-Wrzosinska and P. T. Coleman. 2008. Dynamics of Two-Actor Cooperation–Competition Conflict Models. *Physica A: Statistical Mechanics and Its Applications* 387(25): 6360-6378.

Losada, M. 1999. The Complex Dynamics of High Performance Teams. *Mathematical and Computer Modeling* 30(9): 179-192.

Meadows, D. 2008. *Thinking in Systems: A Primer*, edited by Diana Wright. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing.

Morgan, G. 1997. *Images of Organization*. London, UK: Sage Publications.

National Research Council. 1996. *Understanding Risk: Informing Decisions in a Democratic Society*. Washington D.C.: National Academy Press.

Pearce, B. W. and S. W. Littlejohn. *1997. Moral Conflict: When Social Worlds Collide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Praszkier, R., A. Nowak and P. T. Coleman. 2010. Social Entrepreneurs and Constructive Change: The Wisdom of Circumventing Conflict. *Peace and Conflict: The Journal of Peace Psychology* 16(2): 153-174.

Varshney, A. 2003. *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.