

# THE CONFLICT RESOLUTION TOOLBOX



Models & Maps for Analyzing  
Diagnosing  
and Resolving Conflict

GARY T. FURLONG

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Diagnosing  
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 **WILEY**

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## More Praise for *The Conflict Resolu*

"We all know one thing about conflict: It is messy! Furlong's models offer mediators, facilitators, lawyers, psychotherapists and others 'a leg up' in more swiftly figuring out what is going on and what is needed. Furlong does not offer up a single 'truth,' style or theory, so much as a collection of effective tools that professionals, groups and families can use to better understand what they are experiencing and how they can approach achieving better results. Highly recommended."

*James C. Melamed, J.D., CEO, Mediate.com*

"A craftsperson is only as good as the tools they use. In this important new book, Gary Furlong provides the essential conflict resolution toolkit, offering a practical selection of specialized tools that will be useful to all conflict resolution craftspeople—novice and veteran alike."

*Richard J. Weiler, LL.B., Chartered Mediator,  
Fellow, International Academy of Mediators*

"Gary has a remarkable ability to help fellow practitioners and clients alike achieve breakthroughs one wouldn't think possible. Anyone interested in constructively challenging their own thinking will find this toolbox practical and invaluable. His unique insights and strategies are powerful and truly distinguish him as a leading practitioner."

*Leah Borsa, National Alternative Dispute Resolution Advisor, Parks Canada Agency*

"In this well-written book, Gary Furlong provides eight practical and highly original models for analyzing and resolving conflict. Furlong's ingenious transformation of several important theories from psychology, sociology and other fields into models and worksheets, plus his illustration of how these models can be used with some highly emotional interpersonal clashes, give managers fresh ways to think about resolving common workplace conflicts. There is a model to fit various individual conflict resolution preferences and various types of quarrels. Don't miss this important new book—a must have for every manager's reference library!"

*Dr. Carol A. Beatty, Director, Industrial Relations Centre;  
Associate Professor, School of Business, Queen's University*

"This incisive book will help mediators and others working with human conflicts experience the way that different lenses reveal vastly different views. This book will help our teaching, practicing, and thinking, and ultimately assist us in the complex and essential work of seeing things through multiple lenses."

*Michelle LeBaron, Professor of Law and Director, UBC Program on Dispute Resolution*

"This book's strength is in taking some central conflict resolution ideas from others and organizing them into a system of analysis in one handy source. The way analytical tools are presented, their practical usefulness and the depth at which Gary reviews them is new and helpful for practitioners, giving them a jumpstart in learning and growing."

*Gordon Sloan, Partner, ADR Education, Victoria, BC*

## FOREWORD

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Several years ago my life-companion Susan and I decided to take a hiking vacation in France. We planned to walk a portion of the *Sentier de Grande Randonnée* (GR), a network of paths which, during the Middle Ages, were pilgrimage routes between towns and cities in the North of Europe and famous religious shrines in Southern France and Spain. While we were not on a religious pilgrimage per se, we did want to spend some good time together, be in touch with nature, and have a bit of tranquility (which we do not always find in our work as mediators). We also wanted to experience good French meals, village hospitality, and scenic walks through charming French countryside without losing our way, which we knew from past hikes in unknown territory was all too easy to do.

So, in preparation for our vacation, we acquired a number of maps—road maps, topographical maps, maps of towns and villages, maps that showed the way to noteworthy scenery, inns or restaurants. While it sounds like we are map fanatics, this is really not the case. We merely wanted to use them as

tools to plan an exciting route along often poorly marked paths, across fields and streams and ultimately to the peace and quiet of local villages and inns (which we discovered were often few and far between). Once we had planned a general route, and could use the maps to pick out landmarks to locate ourselves as we proceeded, we were able to improvise, take side trips, stop at interesting spots, and find routes around any unexpected barriers that we encountered. Maps are wonderful tools. Oh that we had them for many other aspects of our lives!

While two people traversing an unknown rural landscape is not the same as navigating one's way through a conflict, it is remarkable how similar the two are. In both situations, the people involved have to locate themselves at any given point in time (geographically or relationally), identify significant "signposts" that indicate direction (progress, backtracking, wrong turns or detours), and develop successful strategies to handle a wide variety of unforeseen circumstances such as the washed out physical or emotional "bridge" needed to cross a barrier, overcome vicious dogs and strong feelings, and find needed resting places. Successful navigation when hiking is greatly facilitated by having a map, however, maps that help people navigate difficulties in relationships and other life conflicts are often few and far between.

Gary Furlong's new work, *The Conflict Resolution Toolbox*, is a valuable compilation and explication of "maps" that can be used by professional conflict management practitioners and others involved in disputes, to better handle and resolve differences. Drawing on the work of a number of conflict theorists and practitioners, he presents a range of models and maps, which anyone involved in conflict, will find useful in. He has developed a range of possible productive approaches and strategies to regulate destructiveness, manage disagreements, resolve differences, and positively transform conflicted relationships. Gary is careful to note that no one map can provide

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a sure and successful route through every conflict, but his collection is sure to provide multiple sources of insight and assistance in the development of a number of plausible trails to resolution.

In the work, Gary provides a detailed overview of a number of models and maps, demonstrates how they can be applied to specific cases and points the way for conflict analysts and strategists to become reflective practitioners—people who can understand and creatively respond to and resolve disputes when they are in them, and reflective learners who can gain insights from analysis of past experiences.

*The Conflict Resolution Toolbox* should be one of the essential works on the bookshelf, (and better yet in the briefcase) of any person who wants to gain a greater understanding of the causes, dynamics and development of conflicts, and who is seeking more effective strategies to address and resolve them.

Dr. Christopher Moore  
Partner, CDR Associates,  
and Author of *The Meditation  
Process: Practical Strategies  
for Resolving Conflict*

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I would also like to thank all of the people whose work I have used to construct many of these models. Your generosity and openness in allowing me to work with and develop your material has made this book possible, and is a tribute to the core values and principles of the conflict resolution field.

Most importantly, I'd like to thank my wife, Ronalda Jones, for her unquestioning support—as the gifted writer of the family, she understood the time that was needed to do this well.



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## — CHAPTER ONE —

### INTRODUCTION

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Imagine for a moment that you are faced with a conflict. Imagine, for example, that your new neighbour loves to have guests over many nights of the week until the early hours of the morning, keeping you up with the noise. When you talk to your neighbour, he laughs and tells you, "Loosen up, have some fun. Come and join us if you want! You need to enjoy life more!" You go home after the conversation and get increasingly angry. You think about how insensitive he is, how little he cares for other people. You begin to think that he may actually be retaliating for the fact that your dog barks every now and then, which he complained about once. Given how you see the problem, you vow to call the police the next time he has a party during the week. This conflict is headed for a significant escalation.

We are all faced with conflict situations in many aspects of our lives, whether in our personal life, in the workplace, or with just about anyone we meet. Given how common conflict situations are and how frequently we deal with conflict, you would think that we'd all be pretty good at handling conflict.

The reality is a bit different, in that most people report little confidence in addressing or handling conflict. Why?

Managing conflict effectively is a simple two-step process that starts with:

1. how we assess the conflict we're facing, followed by
2. what action (or inaction) we decide to take to address it.

Whenever we are faced with a dispute, the first thing we do is try to make sense of it—try to determine what the conflict is about. In other words, Step One is trying to diagnose the conflict. Once we've decided on (or guessed at) the cause, Step Two is taking some type of action based directly on what we think has caused it.

In the example above, the homeowner has assessed the conflict in Step One as being caused by the neighbour's being insensitive, uncaring, maybe even vengeful. Based on this diagnosis, in Step Two the homeowner decides the reasonable and appropriate way to address this conflict is by calling the police to curtail the neighbour's uncaring, insensitive and vengeful behaviour. The conflict was assessed, and an action that seems to make sense is taken based on that assessment. But how accurate was this assessment?

In every conflict, we employ these two steps, either consciously or unconsciously. In fact, how good we are at managing conflict will be based, fundamentally, on how skilled we are at these two steps:

1. creatively and insightfully diagnosing what is causing a conflict, and
2. effectively and skillfully taking action to resolve the conflict.

In many cases, the barrier to effectively managing a conflict is that we diagnose the conflict unconsciously, react emotionally,

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make choices and apply tools based on a poor diagnosis, and end up escalating the situation.

## **WE ALL “PRACTICE” CONFLICT RESOLUTION DAILY**

This is a handbook for conflict resolution practitioners aimed at helping them understand and analyze conflict more effectively in their work. Practitioners, typically, are people who regularly manage conflict as part of their work or their life. The list of practitioners, therefore, is long and includes roles such as mediators, negotiators, lawyers, managers and supervisors, social workers, human resource and labour relations specialists, insurance adjusters, and many more. For these people, this handbook introduces a number of conflict analysis models that are useful and applicable to the two steps above: diagnosing conflict, and offering direction and ideas on resolving that specific conflict.

If this book is useful to conflict resolution practitioners for the simple reason that they regularly manage conflict, what about the rest of us? In other words, who else manages conflict regularly and might benefit from using and applying some of these models? Conflict is a universal human experience, something that every single one of us works with and addresses in our lives far beyond the workplace. In that sense, we are all “practitioners” when it comes to working with conflict effectively, and the tools and models in this book will apply to everyone who wishes to improve his or her ability to manage conflict effectively. For the sake of simplicity, then, this handbook will use “mediators” and “practitioners” interchangeably to mean “people who deal with and manage conflict.”

This book is focused on models and tools that help with the two key steps in managing and responding to conflict:

**Step One:** Effectively diagnosing a conflict, and

**Step Two:** Taking action to manage the conflict based on the diagnosis.

I use the term “models” frequently. This is not a call to introduce more theory or more academic understanding into the conflict resolution process. While theory and academic knowledge are excellent, they are often of little help in a given situation. If theoretical knowledge serves as the general foundation for the field, then “models” are the specific tools or heuristics that guide the application of that theoretical knowledge in practice. This handbook is not focused toward more theory, but rather on tools that can be applied directly to the practice of managing each and every conflict.

To understand this relationship between theory and practice, it will be helpful to understand the nature and characteristics of what can be called “practice professions.”

## **DIAGNOSIS: FINDING THE ROOT CAUSES OF CONFLICT**

A practice profession, quite simply, is a profession aimed at helping individual people solve specific functional problems. It is distinguished here from professions that focus more generally on research and the discovery of theoretical knowledge. There are numerous professions that have a significant practice component to them, professions as diverse as medicine and law, as well as technical professions such as civil engineering and auto repair. And the nature of every practice profession is that the first critical skill the practice professional must have is the ability to diagnose, to determine the root cause of a specific problem.

For example, when a patient sees a doctor, the first thing that the doctor must arrive at is a diagnosis of the problem; indeed, everything flows from the diagnosis, and little is done until a diagnosis is reached. During the diagnostic process, if



there is any doubt about either the diagnosis or the recommended course of action (i.e., treatment) that flows from the diagnosis, a “second opinion” is often sought before any treatment is considered. Similarly in law or engineering, or even car repair, little action can be taken until the professional understands (or believes she understands) what the problem is, and based on that recommends or conducts an intervention. Few of us would accept a dentist saying, “Well, I’m not sure which tooth is hurting, so I’m going to try pulling a few of them out to see if it helps.” Few of us would return to an auto repair shop that randomly replaced part after part hoping that this would eventually solve the problem.

If diagnosis is the first key ability for a practice professional, it’s important to understand how the diagnostic process works and where it fits for the practitioner. In general, most diagnosis has its roots in the theoretical background knowledge of the field. For example, once a mechanic understands from automotive theory that the transmission of a car is responsible for sending power to the wheels, if a car won’t move while the engine is running the mechanic starts looking at the transmission as the source of the problem. Once a doctor understands the digestive tract and what functions it performs, when a patient presents with abdominal pain immediately after eating the doctor will start investigating the digestive system first. Some theoretical knowledge is therefore necessary for good diagnostic skills.

In more complex fields, however, theory alone is inadequate for good diagnosis. In addition to a grounding in general theory, practitioners need effective models and tools to achieve an accurate and useful diagnosis. For example, heart disease is one of the most common diseases in the world. There is extensive “deep” theory and knowledge about how high levels of certain kinds of cholesterol contribute to heart disease, including complex mechanisms for how cholesterol in the