Conflict Revolution: Mediating Evil, War, Injustice, and Terrorism

Kenneth Cloke
If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work, and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry
1. Every conflict takes place not only between individuals, but in a context, culture, and environment; surrounded by social, economic, and political forces; inside a group or organization; contained by a system and structure; among a diverse community of people; at a particular moment in time and history; on a stage; against a backdrop; in a setting or milieu.
2. None of these elements is conflict-neutral. Each contributes – sometimes in veiled and unspoken, yet profound ways to the nature, intensity, duration, impact, and meaning of our conflicts. And each, depending on circumstances, can play a determining role in the success of the conversations, interventions, and methods used to prevent, resolve, transform, and transcend them.
3. Social inequality, economic inequity, and political autocracy are systemic sources of chronic conflict, yet they are nearly always experienced interpersonally, leaving the systems and structures that regularly re-create them in the shadows, unnoticed and unresolved.
4. All conflicts are fractally organized, and possess characteristics that are self-similar on all scales. This self-similarity allows us to adapt resolution techniques that have been successful on one level to disputes on an entirely different level.
5. Other than when social, economic, and political issues are explicitly raised, it is rare that the contextual, environmental, or systemic elements that fuel them are openly identified, acknowledged, analyzed, or resolved. Instead, they linger in the background, generating distortions and misunderstandings that make matters worse.
6. All conflicts take place *between* people; that is, at the borders and boundaries that separate individuals, cultures, organizations, and nations. Every conflict can therefore be regarded as reflecting and *reinforcing* the borders and boundaries between people, drawing lines of demarcation that separate them into opposing sides, positions, cultures, experiences, and individuals, and alienating them from one another.
7. Every border and boundary is also a connection, a unifying potential, a place where two sides can come together. As a result, resolution can be regarded as consensually crossing borders. Non-consensual border crossings are experienced as boundary violations and strenuously resisted. Consensual border crossings are experienced as acts of friendship, indicators of caring and affection, and precursors to collaboration, problem solving, and reconciliation.
Conflicts can therefore be prevented, resolved, transformed, and transcended by identifying the boundaries that separate us and consensually crossing them, communicating across the internal and external borders we have erected to keep ourselves safe, overcoming the sources of opposition we have created within ourselves, and redesigning the systems and institutions we inhabit and turning conflict resolution values and principles into priorities.
What is Changing Exponentially?

- The size and density of human populations
- CO2 emissions and global warming
- The destructive power and availability of military technology
- Species extinctions
- Resistance to antibiotics
- Vulnerability to pandemics, natural catastrophes, and severe weather conditions
- Loss of bio-diversity
- Unregulated economic transactions
- The global impact of environmental decisions
- The intentional death and maiming of civilians in warfare
- The amount, cost, and availability of information
- The growth of scientific knowledge and technological capacity
- The speed, memory, and declining cost of computers
What Else is Changing Exponentially?

- Northern hemisphere average surface temperature
- Gross Domestic Product
- Loss of tropical rainforest and woodland
- Water use
- Paper consumption
- Number of motor vehicles
- Fisheries exploited
- Foreign investment
- Corporate mergers and acquisitions
- Volume of money exchanging hands daily
- The amount of garbage and waste
- Energy needs of cities
- The cost of medical care
What Is Changing Incrementally?

- Implementation of solutions to poverty and hunger
- Reductions in bigotry and prejudice
- Assertions of territoriality and willingness to use warfare
- Vulnerability of civilian populations to terror
- Effectiveness of international regulatory institutions
- Control over policies and practices of currency speculators, hedge funds, and multinational corporations
- Increased life expectancy and declining child mortality
- Vulnerability to infectious diseases
- Elimination of illiteracy
- Mistreatment of women and children
- Rapidity of government responses to ecological problems
- International cooperation to halt environmental destruction
- Understanding, training, implementation, and institutionalization of conflict resolution
- Awareness of the extent and seriousness of global problems
Sources of Chronic Conflict

Chronic conflicts are those that nations, societies, organizations or individuals

• have not fully resolved
• need to resolve in order to grow and evolve
• are capable of resolving
• can only resolve by abandoning old approaches and adopting new ones
• are resistant to resolving because they are frightened, dissatisfied, insecure, uncertain, angry, or unwilling to change
How to Stereotype

1. Pick a characteristic
2. Blow it completely out of proportion
3. Collapse the whole person into the characteristic
4. Ignore individual differences and variations
5. Ignore subtleties and complexities
6. Ignore our common humanity
7. Make it match your own worst fears
8. Make it cruel
Elements of Demonization

- Assumption of Injurious Intentions - they intended to cause the harm we experienced
- Distrust - every idea or statement made by them is wrong or proposed for dishonest reasons
- Externalization of Guilt - everything bad or wrong is their fault
- Attribution of Evil - they want to destroy us and what we value most, and must therefore be destroyed themselves
- Zero-Sum Interests - everything that benefits them harms us, and vice versa
- Paranoia and Preoccupation with Disloyalty - any criticism of us or praise of them is disloyal and treasonous
- Prejudgment - everyone in the enemy group is an enemy
- Collapse of Neutrality and Independence into Opposition - anyone who is not with us is against us
- Suppression of Empathy - we have nothing in common and considering them human is dangerous
- Isolation and Impasse - we cannot dialogue, negotiate, cooperate, or resolve conflicts with them
- Self-Fulfilling Prophecy - their evil makes it permissible for us to act in a hostile way toward them, and vice versa

[Based partly on work by Kurt R. and Kati Spillman]
Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement

1. **Rationalizing** the possible beneficial consequences of otherwise wrong behaviors that are imagined to outweigh their negative consequences. (“If I make enough money by doing this I can help people later.”)

2. **Obscuring** or lessening personal responsibility for participating in the wrongful activity. (“I just did what I was told.” “I just played a small part.” “Other people do the same thing, so why can’t I?”)

3. **Denying** the seriousness of harmful effects on others. (“He won’t mind.” “He’s going to be fine.” “It was only a small thing.” “He can claim it on his insurance.”)

4. **Blaming**, dehumanizing, or derogating the victim. (“He was stupid.” “She was a bitch.” “It served him right.” “She shouldn’t have …“)

5. **Demonizing** the perpetrator. (“He is vicious.” “He’s not human.” “He should be shot.”)

6. **Magnifying** or exaggerating the harm that occurred. (“What he did [if a minor infraction] is intolerable.”)

7. **Distancing** or separating from both sides. (“A plague on both their houses.” “It has nothing to do with me.”)

(Based on work by Albert Bandura)
Common Moral Rationalizations

• **Moral Justification**: “He did it first.”

• **Euphemistic Labeling**: “All I did was …”

• **Disadvantageous Comparison**: “He’s much worse than I am.”

• **Displacement of Responsibility**: “She made me do it.”

• **Diffusion of Responsibility**: “Everyone is doing it.”

• **Disregard/Distortion of Consequences**: “What I did wasn’t that bad.”

• **Dehumanization**: “He deserved it.”

• **Blaming the Victim**: “She was asking for it.”

(Based on work by Albert Bandura)
The Smallest Piece of Evil

- Sometimes evil originates simply in the attribution of blame to someone other than ourselves for a harm that has befallen us, or the assumption that our pain was caused by our opponent’s pernicious intentions.
- Blaming others for our suffering allows us to externalize our fears, vent our outrage, and punish our enemies or coerce them into doing what we want against their wishes.
- It allows us to take what rightfully belongs to them, place our interests over, against, and above theirs, and ignore their allegations of wrongdoing against us.
- The “smallest piece of evil” is the inability to find the other within the self.
- A potential for evil is thus created every time we draw a line that separates self from other inside ourselves. This line expands when fear and hatred are directed against minorities and we remain silent or do nothing to prevent it; when dissenters are described as traitorous and we allow them to be silenced, isolated, discriminated against, and punished; when negative values are exalted and collaboration, dialogue, and conflict resolution are abandoned and we do not object.
7 Skills to Recover from Conflict

1. Communication skills to reduce bias and prejudice and engage in constructive dialogue
2. Negotiation skills to solve problems and settle differences
3. Emotional skills to work through rage and guilt and assuage grief and loss
4. Mediation skills to resolve disputes collaboratively
5. Community building and public dialogue skills to develop interest-based, collaborative leadership and become productive, functional communities again
6. Heart and spirit enhancing skills to rebuild empathy and compassion and encourage forgiveness and reconciliation
7. Conflict resolution systems design skills to prevent and resolve future disputes before they become intractable
12 Conflict Resolution Methodologies

1. Interest-Based Negotiation
2. The Multi-door Courthouses
3. Prejudice Reduction and Bias Awareness
4. Cross-Cultural Mediation
5. Public Policy and Environmental Mediation
6. Victim-Offender Mediation and Restorative Justice
7. Public Dialogue and Community Building
8. Nonviolent Communication and Appreciative Inquiry
9. Transformative, Transcendent, and Heart-Based Mediation
10. Truth and Reconciliation Commissions
11. Conflict Resolution Systems Design
12. Integrated Capacity Building
MBB: A Twelve-Step Program

1. Identify potential partners and allies and convene a cross-cultural team of experienced trainers to conduct research and deepen understanding of what may be required
2. Meet with the leaders of hostile factions to secure agreement on a common plan, build trust, and encourage on-going support
3. Interview leaders of opposing groups, sub-groups, and factions, listen empathetically to their issues, and clarify cultural mores, values, interests, goals, and concerns
4. Elicit from each group or culture the methods currently used to resolve disputes, and identify ways of validating, supplementing, and expanding their core strategies
5. Select or elect a team of volunteers from each group who want to be trained as mediators, facilitators, and trainers
6. Form cross-cultural teams of volunteer mediators and facilitators to work in communities, schools, workplaces, and government offices
7. Train volunteer facilitators in techniques for processing grief and loss, reducing prejudice, facilitating public dialogue, organizing Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, and similar efforts to build collaborative relationships and improve trust
8. Train teams to facilitate public dialogues, arbitrate disputes, encourage forgiveness and reconciliation, and conduct conflict audits
9. Form cross-cultural teams to train trainers in these techniques throughout civil society
10. Develop case studies revealing successes and failures, and build on-going popular, financial, and institutional support for resolution programs
11. Conduct periodic feedback, evaluations, audits, and course corrections to improve the capacity of volunteers and identify where future support may be required
12. Redesign conflict resolution systems in civil society, economic organizations, political parties, and government agencies to increase opportunities for early intervention, dialogue, mediation, and negotiation between adversaries
MBB’s Goals

1. To develop and assist people around the world, including the US, in improving their capacity to resolve conflicts within and between their communities;

2. To increase our awareness, understanding, and willingness, as mediators and conflict resolvers, to act as global citizens and work collaboratively to prevent and reduce chronic conflicts;

3. To encourage the development of alternative approaches to expressing, negotiating, resolving, and transcending social, economic, political, ethnic, religious, and cultural differences;

4. To partner with other organizations in mobilizing volunteer mediators and conflict resolution professionals, and assist them in contributing, in whatever ways we can, to improve conflict resolution skills and understanding, promote forgiveness and reconciliation, and integrate peace with justice.
30 Things You Can Do (1)

1. Join MBB or similar organizations, and help publicize their work. To contact MBB, visit the website at www.mediatorsbeyondborders.org, or email mediatorsbeyondborders@gmail.com
2. Send a donation to MBB or similar organizations, and assist them in locating potential funders and making media contacts in your area
3. If you have expertise in a particular region, country, language, or conflict, and would like to help, or become a member of a project team and work in that country for a period of several years, contact MBB and specify your interest
4. If you have training materials in communication, dialogue, problem solving, negotiation, mediation, prejudice reduction, conflict resolution, and similar topics that might be useful to people in conflict areas, especially if they are in other languages, send them to the MBB Library
5. If you have useful information regarding a country or region where conflicts are occurring, contact MBB and share or coordinate your information with others
6. Select a country or region where conflicts are occurring, form a small group of like-minded people, or create a local chapter of MBB to study, think about, and discuss what is happening there
7. Go online to see what has already been written about the conflict and synthesize it into a briefing paper others can supplement online or read before traveling there
8. Prepare a summary of the history of a conflict, or description of the dominant political forces and constituencies, economic factors, or environmental concerns that impact it; or list the main sources of impasse and similar information that might be useful in briefing groups or project teams working there
9. Adopt one or more “pen pals” in an area you select, and wherever possible add correspondents from the opposing side
10. Once you make contact, ask questions to expand your knowledge and understanding of what is taking place there, then pass it on
11. Find out what is needed or desired by way of assistance and let MBB or similar organizations know
12. Identify important cultural “dos and don’ts” and publicize them
13. Prepare a list of useful quotations from indigenous authors, including poetry, stories, folklore, novels, religious tracts, and political ideas and send them to the MBB Library
14. Develop a list of stereotypes used by each group against their opponents and send it to MBB
15. Start a local area blog, or send information and ideas to MBB’s blogsite at www.mwoborders.blogspot.com
16. Collect important news articles from media in and around the area, translate them, and forward them to others
17. Create a list with useful descriptions and contact information identifying mediators, facilitators, trainers, and allied professionals in the country or region who might be willing to assist
18. List other potentially useful contacts, such as leaders in government and hostile organizations for use by groups or project teams in the area
19. Identify institutions and organizations already contributing to peace, including descriptions and contact information
20. Organize a public dialogue in your community to discuss global conflicts, pass resolutions supporting conflict resolution, and publicize facts and stories that raise people’s awareness
30 Things You Can Do (3)

21. Send “pen pals” information about MBB and other organizations, and assist them in forming chapters or supporting conflict resolution activities in their area

22. Send useful books, training materials, and articles to conflict resolvers in other areas

23. Assist in preparing or revising training materials targeted to areas you select

24. Contact media to increase awareness of conflict resolution, write letters to the editor, or op-ed pieces advocating meditative approaches to conflict

25. Contact political representatives to encourage support for conflict resolution

26. Write to the United Nations, especially country representatives, and encourage use of conflict resolution

27. Contact schools, religious gatherings, etc. and ask to speak about conflict resolution and conflicted areas

28. Invite friends from ethnically diverse communities to dinner, ask them to bring cultural food, artifacts, and materials to share, discuss conflicts in the area, and agree on ways you can help

29. Travel to an area to gather information first-hand, but do not intervene in conflicts without adequate training, preparation, support, and assistance

30. Make copies of this list and pass it on. If these ideas don’t succeed, invent others. Don’t give up. A journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step
Mediation Advice for Change Agents

- Walk your talk
- Don’t drink the water
- Fix systems, not people
- Changing yourself automatically changes others
- There is no such thing as neutral observation
- Look with peripheral vision
- Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee
- Search for preventive opportunities
- Take a little longer to make it right
- Think of conflicts as opportunities
- Change me vs. them into us vs. it
- Don’t stand between an addict and their dope
- Be optimistic and realistic
- Let go. Give up your expectations
- Not everything works for everybody
- Change always takes longer than planned
- Learn from each other
- Don’t control the process - leave room for others
- There are no magic wands
- Don’t be afraid of success
“We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the vitriolic words or actions of the bad people, but for the appalling silence of the good people. We must come to see that human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and persistent work of men … and without this hard work time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation. We must use time creatively, and forever realize that the time is always ripe to do right.”

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.