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# The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice

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## Book review

# The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice

Deutsch M, Coleman PT (eds)  
Jossey-Bass San Francisco 2000

Nadja Alexander

The failure to achieve peace is essentially a failure of the imagination.<sup>1</sup>

To reflect on a book such as the *Handbook of Conflict Resolution* at a time when terror, fear and conflict have gripped the globe on an unprecedented scale provokes more questions than there are answers. Like the student that Coleman quotes in his concluding overview, I too am left shaking my head, convinced that there must be a better way, yet uncertain as to what the next co-operative, 'win-win' step would be. I turn from the headlines of the newspaper: 'Australians at war', to the words of Morton Deutsch and Peter Coleman:

this handbook is concerned with finding co-operative, win-win solutions to conflict, no matter how difficult (Preface xiii).

It is with this stated purpose in the forefront of my mind that I reflect on the contribution that the *Handbook's* collection of essays makes to conflict resolution theory and practice.

The *Handbook* is a collection of essays written by various experts, both theorists and practitioners, in the field of conflict resolution. It is divided into eight parts and 27 chapters. The parts deal with distinct substantive areas from 'Interpersonal and intergroup processes' to 'Creativity and change' to 'Models of practice', just to name a few. Where possible, the editors have travelled the path from theory to practice within each part, beginning with a theory based foundational chapter, followed by a chapter linking the theory specifically to a conflict resolution context and concluding with a chapter drawing out implications for training and practice. Indeed, the gap between theory

and practice and how to build a solid two way bridge between the two is a recurring theme throughout the book.

The multi-disciplinary nature of the collection of essays draws upon social psychology, game theory and theories on culture, conflict, education, political science and decision-making. The multi-disciplinary factor adds a great deal to the appeal of the *Handbook*. It is a valuable work for those who desire to learn more about what lies beyond their own disciplinary borders.

Upon perusing the table of contents, Part 4 on 'Creativity and change' caught my interest and imagination. Howard Gruber's

contribution entitled 'Creativity and conflict resolution: the role of point of view' provides the theoretical basis for Deutsch and Coleman's ensuing discussion paper, which focuses on developing creative approaches to conflict. For me, the standout statement of this section is provided by the words attributed to renowned peace educator Betty Reardon: 'The failure to achieve peace is essentially a failure of the imagination.' 'Yes!' I exclaim to myself, 'that is it.'

So, what are we doing about it — imagination, that is? If we want a different result, then we must do something differently. Where are the debates on creativity, lateral thinking, multiple and emotional intelligences, storytelling, metaphors and the most recent research on the workings of the human brain? The authors cite a well known lateral thinking activity on p 358 and discuss how the activity can be used to encourage and ignite creative processes, following which various techniques for stimulating novel ideas (including a number of those named above) are mentioned. Useful and valuable? Yes. Inspiring and cutting edge? No.

The evening before I sat down to write this review, I had the pleasure of ➤

A V A I L A B L E F R O M P R O S P E C T

## Current Issues in Film Law



The enactment of the *Copyright Amendment (Moral Rights) Act 2000* (Cth) and the *Copyright Amendment (Digital Agenda) Act 2000* (Cth) has prompted a great deal of discussion and comment, as they attempt to fill the gaps and alter the injustices of the past, in addition to keeping in step with emerging technologies.

For this work, editor Mathew Alderson has assembled a superb cast of contributors who examine these changes and the necessity of constant review of the legislation as it affects the film industry in its creative, broadcasting and distribution processes.

*Current Issues in Film Law* will prove an invaluable and authoritative work to those within the industry and to their legal and business advisers. It is the single source of contemporary comment on both the effects of the recent legislative changes upon the film industry today and their application in to the future.

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➤ attending the opening of an art exhibition at the Art Museum at the University of Queensland. The exhibition, entitled 'Political abstraction in the work of David Rankin', explored the relationship between art and politics and challenged traditional approaches to political issues. In particular, the Rankin exhibition throws open to new insights and learnings the way we perceive conflict and its causes, our engagement with conflict and our attempts to create a more peaceful world. Whether you are an art lover or not, this is an example of a cutting edge approach to creatively and imaginatively generate the new 'points of view' that Guber so passionately advocates in Chapter 16 of the *Handbook*. And there are many other innovative approaches. We need to learn about them, think about them, try them out, and integrate them into our lives and the lives of others around us.

This is the message Deutsch and Coleman want to send. Disappointingly, the *Handbook* does not venture far into really innovative and controversial territory, either in Part 4 or elsewhere in the volume. Nevertheless, the collection of

essays the editors have selected provides an invaluable multi-disciplinary compilation that reflect the landmark developments in the fields of conflict resolution. Deutsch, without a doubt, is a pioneer of the conflict resolution and social psychology of justice movements. This work reflects his insights into the journeys that various disciplines have taken in search of more constructive and peaceful approaches to resolving conflict.

Coleman's concluding overview does an excellent job of stitching together the common, transdisciplinary threads throughout the book and providing the reader with a very useful framework for future challenges. I particularly valued his comments on reflective learning and the need for innovation and different ways of thinking. He tells us what we should do, but we, the readers, are left to continue to do what we do — to conduct further research, to experiment with and reflect on our practice — in order to find the answers to the questions the *Handbook* poses. ●

*Nadja Alexander, Associate Professor,  
Faculty of Law, University of Queensland.*

## Future issue

The ADR Bulletin plans to publish a special issue on responses to the Nadrac paper *A Framework for Standards* which was released by the Attorney General in June 2001. Subscribers and readers are invited to contribute to this issue by responding to its recommendations from the perspective of their ADR practices, needs or views. It would be particularly relevant to hear the responses of service providers on the implications of the report for their organisation and practitioners.

In order to provide some structure to the contributions you are invited to use the following questions as a basis for your responses. Needless to say, some poetic licence is allowed and you may wish to respond in some other form.

1. Who are you and what kind of ADR service do you provide?
2. What options from the *Framework for ADR Standards* are you likely to

- adopt (or have adopted) and why?
3. What aspects of the report have you found difficult to adopt and why?
4. How do you see the development of ADR standards in Australia over the next five years?
5. Assume governments will not give a cent to ADR. Envision ADR in Australia in 2010 — name five optimal features of the sector that don't exist now.
6. What are the critical next steps to make your 2010 vision come true?
7. What are the greatest threats to achieving your vision?

Reports should be 400 to 1000 words and should be submitted to the editor of the Bulletin.

The Nadrac report can be found on the website <[www.nadrac.gov.au](http://www.nadrac.gov.au)> and contributions should be submitted to *The ADR Bulletin* by 15 February 2002. The editors reserve the right to decide which portions of the contributions will be used in the special issue. ●

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