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# Conflict Management: A Practical Guide

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## Book review

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***Conflict Management:  
A Practical Guide 2nd Edition***,  
Peter Condliffe, Lexis Nexis  
Butterworths, 2002, 296pp.

Peter Condliffe's book is a welcome addition to the growing library of literature on conflict management. His long bibliography (pp 281-96), gives a glimpse of how much activity is occurring in analysis, story-telling and research on conflict management.

The book has seven chapters, namely:

1. Understanding conflict
2. Responding to conflict and the rise of ADR
3. Communication, assertiveness and verbal jujitsu
4. Collaborative conflict management
5. Negotiation
6. Mediation
7. Conflict management in groups and organisations: dispute system design.

At the end of each chapter are helpful exercises and questions to reinforce the ideas contained in each chapter.

The reviewer particularly enjoyed the chapter on mediation which works systematically through structures of mediation, and functions and skills of a mediator. It contains the best case illustrations in the book and the writer is obviously able to draw ideas from personal experience, as well as from the classical mediation literature.

In the mediation chapter, there is also a very useful summary and critique of the model of mediation labelled 'transformative' (pp166-7). The writer is walking side-by-side with Kenneth Kressel by asking hard questions about euphoric new 'products' on the mediation market. Likewise, there is a helpful summary of the criticisms of mediation generally (pp166-7).

As for the other chapters of the

book, its strengths are also its weaknesses. The strength is the introduction to the reader of many writers' ideas and summaries. These windows necessarily trigger interest in a few or many of these writers. Every reader will find that at least one of these summaries will stimulate more reading.

Conversely, this rapid-fire overview does not attempt to synthesise or critique most of these schools of thought and practice (unlike in the mediation chapter). Some of these summarised theories have been subjected to extensive critiques and qualification (eg Myers-Briggs, male and female 'voices'). Some readers may feel awash with acronyms and new language, eg ABC, STAR, crocodiles, land-mines and magpies, 7 ways to say no, lonerangers, troubleshooters, group workers, SWAT (SWOT?), R-Quadrant, CATWOE, unitary, pluralist, radical, organisational interfaces.

This reviewer particularly liked, and will use, a history of ADR in Australia (p 34); an excellent set of questions and forms to complete when preparing to respond to a conflict (pp 46-56); and some outstanding exercises for use with larger groups or organisations in conflict (pp 245-55).

Australia has been blessed with a host of long-term researchers and writers in the field of conflict management (eg Burton, Astor, Chinkin, Boule, Soudin, Charlton, Dewdney, Wolski, Tomasic, NADRAC, Ingleby, Fisher, David, Bryson, Tillett, Gribben, to name a few). There are also gems to be extracted and used from Condliffe, *Conflict Management: A Practical Guide*. ●

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