— CHAPTER ONE —

INTRODUCTION TO THE
SECOND EDITION

Since the first edition of this book was published in 2005, research and scholarly advances have made significant contributions to our understanding of how people communicate and engage with each other.

This second edition recognizes the important research done over the last 15 years in the fields of neuroscience, neuropsychology, and behavioral economics with two new models that look at the deeper patterns and biases our million-year-old brains use to connect and make decisions. It also recognizes the value that the tools in the first edition brought to practitioners everywhere, retaining and refining the models that have been recognized as powerful and useful approaches in resolving conflict between people. The new technologies we all use to communicate are very different than they were 15 years ago, but human nature and the experience of conflict are still very much with us.

Imagine for a moment that you are faced with a conflict. Imagine, for example, that your new neighbor is in the habit of having 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 neighbor about the issue, 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 the workplace, in our personal life, or with just about anyone we meet. Given how common conflict situations are and how frequently we deal with conflict, you might think that we'd all be pretty good at handling it and building, or rebuilding, relationships.

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 how we assess the conflict we're facing, followed by 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, the first step we take is to understand the problem. Once we've decided on (or guessed at) the cause, the second step is to take some type of action based directly on what we think that cause is.

In the previous example, the homeowner has assessed the cause of the conflict as the neighbor being insensitive, uncaring, maybe even vengeful. Based on this diagnosis, the homeowner decided the reasonable and appropriate way to address this conflict was to call the police to curtail the neighbor's uncaring, insensitive, and possibly vengeful behavior. The conflict was assessed, and an action that seemed to make sense was 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 diagnosing what is causing a conflict and how effective we are at taking action based on that diagnosis to resolve the conflict.

In many cases, the barrier to effectively managing a conflict is that we diagnose the conflict unconsciously, react emotionally, 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. The list of practitioners, therefore, is long and includes people who work as mediators, negotiators, managers and supervisors, lawyers, union representatives, social workers, human resource and labor 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 discussed: 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? Because relationships are a universal human experience, conflict is 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 be useful to everyone who wishes to improve his or her ability to manage conflict, solve problems, or simply to build strong relationships. 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
Step Two: Taking action to manage the conflict based on the diagnosis

The term "models" is used frequently. This is not a call to introduce more theory or more academic understanding into the conflict resolution process. Although theory and academic knowledge are vital, they are often of little help when faced with a specific 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 on 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 is 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. 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, 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 understanding, recommends or conducts an intervention. Few of us would accept a dentist saying, "Well, I'm not sure which tooth is causing your pain, so I'm going to try pulling a few of them out to see if that 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 begins by 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 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 theory and knowledge about how high levels of certain kinds of cholesterol contribute to heart disease, including complex mechanisms by which cholesterol in the blood contributes to fat slowly building up on the arterial walls, narrowing them and making the heart work too hard, eventually leading to a heart attack. The theories about these mechanisms, however, are not overly helpful in diagnosing any given individual patient. To diagnose effectively, doctors have devised tests that measure cholesterol levels in the patient along with a simple model that states if cholesterol is over a certain limit, specific actions and steps should be put in place to help correct the problem. The doctor, using a simple tool (a blood test) follows a specific model for diagnosing and intervening (if the cholesterol level is above a certain limit, diet changes and cholesterol medicines are prescribed) that requires very little of the deep theory behind the model for the practitioner to be effective in helping the patient.[1]

In general, then, theoretical knowledge is required as a foundation, but in order to apply that knowledge effectively for each individual client or situation, specific practice models and tools are

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1. Indeed, in many professions such as medicine and law, simpler problems that can be diagnosed and treated with effective models are being devolved to professionals with far less theoretical knowledge, such as nurse practitioners and paralegals.

required to assist the professional. These models help the practitioner apply the two key steps mentioned before:

Step One: Effectively diagnosing a conflict
Step Two: Taking action to manage the conflict based on the diagnosis

Without the ability to apply appropriate models and tools effectively, there is little chance the practitioner will help the client.

THEORIES VS. MODELS IN A PRACTICE PROFESSION

We have been using the terms "theory" and "model" in specific and different ways so far, and this leads us to a key question: What is the difference between a theory and a model?

Typically, the terms "theory" and "model" are used almost interchangeably, and indeed there is overlap in their meaning.

There are also some key differences, especially in the context of a practice profession.

A common dictionary definition of "theory" includes:

• "abstract thought"
• "a general principle or body of principles offered to explain a phenomenon"
• "an unproved assumption"

These definitions indicate that theories are broad principles that are often related to abstract thought of a high order. Theories are strongly related to research, to the testing of hypotheses to see if they are true. In the scientific method, if a theory or hypothesis is not supported by hard evidence or cannot be proven true, it is discarded as false or unusable.

This scientific approach is found in many professions (including the social sciences and conflict resolution) and is typically labeled the "research" side of the field. In the sciences, "pure," or "theoretical," or "deep" are terms used for research that initially gives little or no thought to practical uses or applications, focusing instead on uncovering foundational ideas. Great sums of money are spent and many

people engaged in this type of research in many fields, including the field of conflict resolution.

Separate from the research component of most fields, there is also a "practice" or applied branch of the field centered around "practitioners" who take the existing knowledge of the field and determine how to directly apply that information to help individual patients or clients.

The term "theory," therefore, seems to point us in the direction of abstract investigation with less, or little, applicability to the practitioner. The practitioner, on the other hand, is focused on learning the skills and tools that help in applying their knowledge and information directly with specific clients. For practitioners, very little deep theory is directly useful and applicable in a clinical setting other than in the most general way, unless the theory has been translated into a useful, functional model.

This is precisely why many professions describe a significant split in their fields between research and practice, between theoretical work and the clinical application of that knowledge in the field. In many fields, this gap between theory and practice exists because practitioners rarely see how the majority of research conducted helps them as practitioners. Research is often (although certainly not always) either too general or too esoteric to be easily understood, let alone directly applicable in the field. For this reason, a great deal of important information rarely (or only very slowly) makes its way to the practitioners in the field.

Models, however, can be something quite different from theory. Dictionary definitions of "model" include some of the following:

• "a description or analogy used to help visualize something that cannot be directly observed"
• "a miniature representation"

Models, then, as we are using the term, have a few unique characteristics. Good models are structures or representations that approximate reality, but in a simpler and clearer way. Maps, for example, are an excellent form of model, in that they represent reality (i.e. the

streets of a city), but in a smaller and simpler way (the map fits in our pocket, where the city streets themselves clearly do not), so they can help guide us to where we want to go. In the same way, conflict analysis models are "maps" of complex conflict theory or processes that are simplified and focused to help us understand the cause of the conflict in specific situations, along with the actions we might take that will help us reach a resolution.

Christopher Moore, one of the global leaders in conflict resolution, reinforces this idea that practitioners need models, or "conflict maps":

> To work effectively on conflicts, the intervener needs a conceptual road map or "conflict map" that details why a conflict is occurring, identifies barriers to settlement, and indicates procedures to manage or resolve the dispute.[2]

For our purposes, then, models are far more useful than theories for a number of reasons.

First, a model, unlike a theory, is not burdened with whether or not it is "true," but rather is burdened by the more functional test of whether it is helpful and useful in simplifying or clarifying what it represents. It doesn't matter whether a model is "true" or "right" in general; it matters whether a particular model is helpful with a specific problem. If it is, we use it, and if it isn't, we don't discard it forever as "false," we simply don't use it in this particular situation. For example, if I am in Toronto and all I have is a map of New York City, I wouldn't deem the map false and throw it away. It is simply not useful to me in Toronto, and I would put it away until I'm back in New York City where it will once again be useful. For this reason, the experienced practitioner, like the experienced traveler, carries numerous maps that may be needed on the journey.

Second, a model helps us sift through a great deal of complex information by narrowing our focus to what will actually help us. Models, in this sense, help us take detailed theoretical knowledge and simplify it to something we can make sense of more quickly. As described by communication specialists Robert and Dorothy Bolton:

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2. Christopher Moore, *The Mediation Process: Practical Strategies for Resolving Conflict* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 58.

An elegant model is a useful simplification of reality. It enables you to ignore a mass of irrelevant or less relevant details so you can focus on what is most important. A model shows what to look for, helps identify meaningful patterns, and aids in interpreting what you see. In other words, a model helps cut through the distracting aspects of a situation so you can better grasp the essence of what you want to understand.[3] [emphasis in original]

Models, in this sense, are tools for helping us effectively get to the core or the root cause of the problem.

Finally, models help practitioners accomplish practical goals. For example, when going to visit a friend in an unfamiliar city, we often rely on a computer app on a small screen that zooms in on our starting point and our end point, ignoring virtually all other information about the city or location so that we can easily get from point A to point B. Despite this narrow focus, it is extremely practical for the task at hand.

Without the ability to translate conflict theory into models and tools that help diagnose the specific conflict at hand, and without the ability to choose actions and interventions useful for that particular conflict, practitioners will simply not be good at resolving conflict.

A WIDE RANGE OF CONFLICT ANALYSIS MODELS

There is no magic formula that resolves all disputes. Because conflict situations can be so diverse, and because models are not exclusive representations of "truth," we are not looking for a single model that will make sense of every conflict in the world. Rather, we need to be comfortable with a wide range of models that will help us in diagnosing different problems, in vastly different circumstances, with different people. This handbook contains nine different models that approach conflict situations from different points of view. All nine approaches can be useful for diagnosing and intervening in a wide range of situations.

Diagnosis is about framing the conflict in a way that has coherence and makes sense. The effective practitioner needs a wide range of

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3. Robert Bolton and Dorothy Grover Bolton, *People Styles at Work* (New York: AMACOM, 1996), 9.

diagnostic models and frameworks that help organize and make sense of a wide range of situations.

As described by Bernard Mayer, another leader in the field of mediation, these models are essential for the practitioner:

> A framework for understanding conflict is an organizing lens that brings a conflict into better focus. There are many different lenses we can use to look at conflict, and each of us will find some more amenable to our own way of thinking than others. . .We need frameworks that expand our thinking, that challenge our assumptions, and that are practical and readily usable.[4]

Mayer's lens analogy is useful. For example, conflict can be viewed through a communication lens, an interests lens, a personality lens, a structural lens, a cultural lens, a dynamics of conflict lens, and many more. This means that an effective practitioner should have a constellation of diagnostic models to help frame and understand different situations; as experience grows, the practitioner will become more skilled at choosing the one(s) that will help create effective interventions.

Regardless of the type of model or map, good models do have some characteristics in common. Effective conflict analysis models should be simple and useful. Each model needs to meet the practitioner's test: "Does applying this model help me diagnose the problem as well as help me choose what I do next, in real time as I work with the conflict?"

To meet this test, there are two requirements for models that can be described this way:

1. **Diagnosis: Simplicity vs. Complexity**—Effective diagnostic models and tools attempt to strike a fine balance between simplicity and complexity; a model that is overly complex will be too difficult to put into practice, and a model that is shallow or obvious is a waste of time. The complexity of the diagnosis can be extreme, such as Rummel's unified theory of conflict in his book *The Conflict Helix*,[5]

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4. Bernard Mayer, *The Dynamics of Conflict Resolution* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 4.
5. R. J. Rummel, *The Conflict Helix: Principles and Practices of Interpersonal, Social and International Conflict and Cooperation* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1991).

which proposes a single, detailed model for understanding all conflict, all the way from the interpersonal to the geopolitical. Although it may sound interesting to have a model that attempts to explain all conflict in the world, bear in mind that this model takes a full-length book to even explain, let alone to apply. Good models are able to address complexity but simplify this complexity enough to be useful.

2. **Strategic Guidance**—Effective models are clear and focused in giving strategic direction to the practitioner. The clearer the strategic direction the model gives, the more practical and applicable it becomes (and the more likely it will actually be used in conflict situations).

BECOMING A REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Another goal of the models in this book is to assist the practitioner in growing and developing, in becoming a "reflective practitioner." Reflective practice is a term that has been used by a variety of writers looking into the very nature of effective professional practice. Michael Lang and Alison Taylor's book *The Making of a Mediator* is devoted to understanding the development of the mediator from novice to artist and describes reflective practice in this way:

> Reflection is the process by which professionals think about the experiences, events and situations of practice and then attempt to make sense of them in light of the professionals' understanding of relevant theory. Reflection occurs both during the performance of professional practice (reflection in action) and after the experience (reflection on action). It nurtures exploration and discoveries that lead to an increased repertoire of skills, it enhances the person's ability to modify forms of intervention, and it may alter his way of thinking about the problems presented.[6]

Reflection, clearly, is at the very heart of the process of learning and developing, essentially it's the process of "learning how to learn."

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6. Michael Lang and Alison Taylor, *The Making of a Mediator* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 19.

This process of "learning how to learn" was identified by learning theorists Chris Argyris and Donald Schön as crucial to the growth of skill and ability:

> The foundation for future professional competence seems to be the capacity to learn how to learn (Schein, 1972). This requires developing one's own continuing theory of practice under real-time conditions. It means that the professional must learn to develop "micro theories" of action that, when organized into a pattern, represent an effective theory of practice.[7]

If "learning how to learn" is the path to growth, then the essential element of this growth is the ability to reflect on what is successful, what is working and what is not. And key to this would be having a framework, an ongoing set of structures or models on which to reflect and on which to base any changes or adaptations for enhanced performance. In short, these types of models and tools of analysis are necessary in order to become reflective practitioners.

It is important to note again that there is no single diagnostic model that is "right" or "correct" or even "true." As Folger, Poole, and Stutman state, theories[8] from the practitioner's point of view (i.e. diagnostic models) are best judged by their utility, not whether they are right or wrong. They are meant to be useful, to "explain relationships so that we might describe them more fully, predict their recurring features, and control their dependent outcomes."[9]

Because they are tools and structures to help us make sense of the infinitely complex situations of conflict, the more diagnostic models and tools a mediator has, the more likely he or she will understand any given conflict and intervene effectively.

Theories should be evaluated on the basis of utility: certain concepts and theories will speak to you and others will not. The real test,

7. Chris Argyris and Donald Schön, *Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974), 157.
8. Many previous writers use the term "theory" in the same way we have defined the term "model," in that it refers not to deep sociological theory but rather practical frameworks that help the practitioner make sense of, or diagnose, a conflict.
9. Joseph Folger, Marshall Poole, and Randall Stutman, *Working Through Conflict* (New York: Harper Collins College Publishers, 1993), 44.

however, is for practitioners to employ these ideas in the marketplace of everyday life. The best theories and concepts are the ones that allow you to understand and manage conflict in your relationships, in your family, in your organization, in your life. No other measure of a theory can compete with this crucial test.[10]

It is through this process of testing, trying, and getting feedback on the success and value of our diagnostic models and tools that reflective practice is achieved.

Finally, this process of reflection is also a two-way street, in that by learning and applying a model for diagnosing a situation of conflict, and by using this model to reflect on the effectiveness of the actions taken to address the conflict, the learning generated will no doubt change and improve the quality, focus, and depth of the diagnostic model. It will lead, as Argyris and Schön have said, to "developing one's own continuing theory of practice," one's own models. This creates an endless process of growth, learning, and improvement in the field, practitioner by practitioner. This is the hallmark of truly effective practice.

SUMMARY

In summary, then, this book is focused on a specific type of conflict analysis model that practitioners can use to both diagnose a conflict situation as well as to gain some guidance about what interventions might help and why. The key points to remember when working with these models are as follows:

- Each model is intended to be a simple, useful map or framework to help the practitioner work with conflict situations encountered in practice.
- The range of conflict situations is virtually infinite, and one model will simply not be helpful in all situations. The practitioner should have a number of models to help with different situations.
- Conflict can be seen and addressed from a variety of viewpoints. For this reason, the practitioner should have a variety of models to work with.

10. Ibid., p. 67.

- Models are not looked at as "true" or "false"; they are only useful or not in a specific situation. Models that are helpful should be used. Models that are not should be put away until a situation arises where they are useful.
- Models need to meet the practitioner's test: "Does applying this model help me diagnose the problem, as well as help me choose what I do next?" Models need to be complex enough to bring value and simple enough to be easily applied and used.
- Effective use of these models is the beginning of reflective practice, the path to continual improvement in managing and resolving conflict.

One of the most frequent comments heard from experienced practitioners exposed to these models is that they intuitively understand a number of them but have taken years to develop this intuition through trial and error. An important goal of learning and working with these models is to consciously speed up the practitioner's learning curve by helping everyone become a reflective practitioner. These models offer a jump-start in learning and growing as a conflict resolution practitioner.

The strategies and applications of the models described here are simply a start, a beginning, a scratching at the surface of the many ways practitioners can put these models to use. As practitioners work frequently with any of these (or other) models, they will find different ways to apply them to their advantage; indeed, they may even adapt or modify a model to make it more useful and effective. This is only to be encouraged. This book is intended to introduce a basic set of models and touch on the main strategies for applying them, providing the practitioner with a useful reference manual for the ongoing use of these tools.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is not intended to be read as a novel, from start to finish in that order. Each conflict model is given its own self-contained chapter, offering a clear understanding of that model's focus, what kind of situations it can be useful in, and what interventions are likely to help. Each model's chapter can be read independently and stands on its

own. That said, the reader might also find it helpful to see how the various models relate to each other, and frequent footnotes point from one model to another where useful.

Additionally, to help the reader get a clear sense of how the different models relate to each other, there is a single case study of a complex conflict situation that all nine models are applied to. Chapter 2 starts off with a brief summary of all nine models, followed by this detailed case study. Each model is then presented in detail in its own chapter. Within each chapter, each model is applied to the same case study, so the reader can gain an appreciation of how the model is used, and how different models will give the practitioner different viewpoints, different diagnoses, and different options for intervention. Remember that there is more than one way of assessing and intervening in any particular conflict, and indeed that is one of the strengths of using different models or maps.

Each model is then followed by an additional case study unique to its chapter, to give the reader a further chance to see each model in action. Where applicable, worksheets or other helpful guides are included to round out each model.

We are all lifelong students of conflict resolution and relationship building (like it or not), and it is hoped that one or a number of these models will become invaluable in your practice and in your life.