

**Managing Intercollective Conflict:
Prevailing Structures & Global Challenges**

by
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Preface

Anna Borgeryd's exploration of the ways in which the logic and dynamics of different types of institutions (or clusters of institutions) affect the capacities of actors to address, manage, resolve or transform conflicts is relevant for understanding today's world events.

The Global Financial Crisis, for example, has focused new attention on the ways in which economic institutions get trapped by values, beliefs and assumptions which have proven disastrous in the past and will probably be equally disastrous in the future. The challenge facing financial and industrial actors, therefore, is to know why the old logic is flawed and, more importantly, to have some new options to explore.

Anna is keen to focus attention on the ways in which both those in conflict and people working with them can become more conscious of the mistaken and dangerously misleading assumptions that prevent positive visions and collaborative problem solving. The important contribution of this thesis lies in the way in which it challenges the institutional inertia which produces a growing mismatch between real-world problems and the institutions that are supposed to manage them.

The guiding concept "intercollective" is important. Focusing on intercollective dynamics immediately generates an interest in super-ordinate processes and values that might enable more successful solutions to micro and institutional level problems. In these processes, institutions, economic, political and social institutions are frequently the sources of conflict. They cannot, therefore, be the means for their solution unless their own cultural and social dynamics are scrutinized.

This thesis raises all sorts of questions and provides some practical answers to these different dilemmas. I heartily commend it to anyone interested in understanding how bureaucratic institutional inertia generates social and political paralysis.

Kevin P Clements
Director of the National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at the
University of Otago, New Zealand and Secretary General of the
International Peace Research Association

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Prevailing Structures and Global Challenges

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UMEÅ UNIVERSITY
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Abstract

The large institutions designed to deal with the problem of conflict between collectives – sovereign states supported by militaries, military industry, and the United Nations – operate mainly on principles that are hundreds of years old. At the same time, conditions for conflict and its management have changed radically in this century. A theoretical framework describing institutionalized problem management calls attention to the risk that institutional inertia produces a growing mismatch between real-world problems and the institutions supposed to manage them. This leads to the hypothesis that conflict managing efforts fail because they operate on old assumptions that do not sufficiently reflect actual circumstances of conflict.

Because there is great conceptual confusion obscuring the study of we-they confrontation the concept "intercollective" is introduced. The collective is defined as the group that commands people's highest loyalty, whether it is a "nation", "ethnic group", or other entity. The study investigates how prevailing conflict managing structures measure up to today's realities by comparing the logic of the state system to different cases of post cold war intercollective conflict. The key institutions of the state system are described in Part I of the study. Part II clarifies realism and legalism (international law) – the ideas that historically have coevolved with the state system and that explain, justify, and shape it. In Part III, the 1990-91 Gulf War, the 1990-95 break-up of Yugoslavia, and the 1992 Los Angeles riots are investigated and compared to the realist and legalist premises.

The analysis in Parts I and II suggests that realism and legalism form a double ideological support for the state system. The complementarity of these two state-supporting ideas has provided the prevailing system with a particular robustness. Findings in Part III reveal that the three cases of post cold war intercollective conflict present important challenges to the prevailing system's realist and legalist premises. This lack of correspondence between prevailing ideas and real-world conflicts is clearly connected to failures in conflict management. In addition, findings suggest that the state system not only fails to deal with crucial aspects of modern-day conflict, but that it increasingly *produces* problems that it cannot manage.

Key words: Conflict management, state system, political philosophy, political realism, international law, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Clausewitz, social darwinism, Grotius, *jus in bello*, *jus ad bellum*, Gulf War, break-up of Yugoslavia, Los Angeles riots, institutionalized problem management, global issues.

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Preface

Specialization is what doctoral dissertations are supposed to be all about. Yet, in spite of well-meaning advice to scale down my project, I have followed my intuition that there is something very important to be learned about the prevailing conflict managing system by studying it holistically. This work is a wide-ranging journey through seemingly disparate phenomena such as the norms and practices of the state system, 17th century philosophers, the Gulf War, and the 1992 Los Angeles riots. There are innumerable pages already written that provide deep specialized knowledge about each of these topics. This is a dissertation about how they are connected.

To study intercollective conflict and its management is to take on a difficult task. Because different accounts of reality typically play a key role in conflict, any description of a conflict will certainly offend some – or all – of the involved parties. Despite this, I find it intellectually interesting to try to understand the perspectives of all parties to conflict. More importantly however, I think such an approach might provide a fuller understanding of the problem of intercollective conflict, thus improving chances for constructive conflict management.

This work could not have been completed without the support, influence, and help of many people. I would like to thank the Department of Political Science at Umeå University for supporting a thesis unconventional in the discipline and for funding most of the work. Important funding has also been provided by the Kempe Foundation and the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation (Riksbankens jubileumsfond). Credit is due to the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies at Umeå University, where I first became interested in writing a doctoral dissertation. I am grateful for the courses I have taken and the support I have received from both teachers and students at the Department of Peace and Conflict Research in Uppsala and the Department of Peace and Development Research in Gothenburg. I am also deeply indebted to the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (ICAR) at George Mason University where I spent the 1994-95 academic year. The ICAR community's knowledge and skills in the field have inspired me tremendously. Kevin Avruch's comments on a draft of the first chapter have been very helpful. Special thanks are due to Christopher Mitchell for his enduring interest in my work and his valuable advice.

I am also indebted to Johan Galtung. He has provided me with documents that I otherwise would not have been able to study. In addition, his expert advice was what later brought me to ICAR. I happened to share a taxi with him from the airport to the 1993 EUPRA conference in Budapest and asked him for advice about where to go for a year abroad. His answer led me to Dennis Sandole who kindly arranged for me to apply for a visiting scholarship to ICAR. Dietrich Fischer, Cristophe Barbey,

Håkan Wiberg, Abdul Kadhim, and Carl-Ulrik Schierup made available to me material important for this work. Alexis Heraclides, Kevin Clements, Richard Rubenstein, Rajmohan Gandhi, Jan Eliasson, and Jan Øberg have provided good advice and encouragement. I am particularly indebted to Per Cramér at Gothenburg University, whose knowledgeable comments on Chapter 4 have been very valuable.

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Finally, I would like to thank my family for everything that has proven essential in writing this dissertation. My father Kjell, mother Margareta, and sister Karin have in their own ways provided excellent examples of empathic conflict management, of self-motivation and intellectual persistence, and of an entrepreneurial and problem-solving spirit that makes many things possible. My aunt Elisabet and her husband Arjun Ompal gave me an early interest in global issues and peace work. A special thanks to Roger for his constant support during the years.

Chapter 1

Managing Intercollective Conflict A Theoretical Framework

Investigating the Management of Intercollective Conflict

Conflict can be a source of joy or pain, a benefit or burden, a blessing or a curse, a gift or a torment, depending on how it is handled. Too often, the unique opportunities inherent in conflict situations are missed and the worst allowed to happen unnecessarily.¹

Conflict between collectives is one of the most pressing problems facing humanity. War – the extreme expression of intercollective conflict – has always been a deadly endeavor but in this century it has reached unprecedented levels of destructiveness. War now has the potential to destroy all higher life-forms on the planet. Yet, conflict itself is not inherently bad. Conflict can be seen as a productive outlet which protects society from unreasonable injustice, and even as a constructive driving force for positive change. And regardless of what we think about conflict, it is an inescapable aspect of all social relationships. Conflict between collectives is thus pandemic and must be seen as a natural part of human existence. The fact that conflicts are potentially very threatening has to do with the ways in which they are handled. It is therefore of utmost importance for the survival and prosperity of humankind that intercollective conflict be managed in the best way possible.

When faced with large-scale problems, humans tend to create and empower institutions for their management. Investigating prevailing strategies for managing any collective problem will therefore involve examining institutions: How do they work? What are the assumptions and perceptions of problems that underlie the way in which institutions operate? These affect decisions about which managing strategies should be used. And any problem management strategy rests on a claim that its underlying problem description is accurate enough to work in the real world.

The large institutions designed to deal with the problem of conflict between collectives – sovereign states supported by militaries, military industry, and the United Nations – rest on premises that are hundreds of years old. At the same time, conditions for conflict and its management have changed radically during this century. Approaching the end of the millennium, change is accelerating. Because of this we

have to contemplate the possibility that real-world challenges severely undermine the rationale for, and the operation of, prevailing conflict managing institutions. The purpose of this study is to investigate how prevailing conflict managing structures measure up to today's realities by comparing the logic of the state system to different cases of post cold war intercollective conflict. I now turn to a brief investigation of present conditions for intercollective conflict and its management.

Conditions for Intercollective Conflict and Its Management Have Changed

[I]t is a new order, not so much because the cold war ended..., but because the fundamental underpinnings of world politics, the parameters that sustain it, have undergone transformation.

*James N. Rosenau*²

A dangerous element in change is our historical inability to perceive when it takes place and to understand its significance. /.../ Destruction... can be one result of our failure to understand the strong forces at work in the present world of high technology and rapid change.

*Harry Clay Blaney III*³

We live in a century in which the pace of change is historically unique and practically incomprehensible. The values of crucial indicators have taken off, and many curves depicting change have turned almost straight up – a graphic picture of the dizzying speed at which the world is presently transforming. Circumstances for conflict and conflict management have thus altered dramatically. First, the number of people in the world is increasing rapidly. Whereas it took some 10,000 generations for humankind to reach a population of two billion, we are now facing the prospect of adding another *seven* billion in a single lifetime. And we are well under way. At the present rate, the global population grows by close to 100 million every year.⁴

A second, and related, factor of change is the increasing number of actors operating in the global arena. Since the end of the second world war the number of sovereign states has almost tripled.⁵ In recent times intergovernmental organizations have stepped into the arena as players and the number of citizen organizations has virtually skyrocketed. In 1909 there were less than two hundred non-governmental organizations, by the 1980s there were 18,000.⁶ Transnational corporations have also grown tremendously in number and influence.⁷ In addition, this century has seen the emergence of an international recognition of the intrinsic worth of all individuals. The universal declaration of human rights marks, in principle if not in practice, the emergence of the person onto the global scene.⁸

A third element that directly affects the conditions for conflict and conflict management has to do with economic trends. We have seen a five-fold expansion of the world economy since the end of the second world war. In addition, we now have a

truly global economy, and the globalization of production, finance, and commerce is eroding the borders of states. Few governments can control the value of their currency when one trillion dollars worth of currencies are exchanged every day. Nor can any people, however remote, live unaffected by the global economy. In addition, pollution, information, culture, and migration sweep the globe, largely disregarding man-made borders and further deepening the interdependence of all people on earth.⁹

All of the above factors can be understood in terms of increasing density. Economic and other hardships encourage increasing numbers of actors to organize and therefore tend to provoke political fragmentation. As more people and more organizations engage in more activities, the risk that any party will find its goals to be incompatible with the goals of others increases.¹⁰ Buzan puts it this way:

Density is about more people doing more things. It means that people's activities are more likely to impinge on other people's existence, both intentionally... and unintentionally..., and positively... as well as negatively...¹¹

A fourth factor of change that significantly affects conditions for conflict and its management is growing global inequality. Although global economic output has quintupled since mid-century, the expansion of the world economy has not been used to alleviate the plight of the poor. On the contrary, the situation for the majority of the world's inhabitants has actually deteriorated.¹² The gap between the rich and poor has increased, and is now larger than ever. In 1960 the ratio of the share of global income earned by the richest 20% of the earth's inhabitants compared to the poorest 20% was 30 to 1. By 1989 the size of the gap was twice as great – 59 to 1.¹³ Today we have a world where a staggering 1,000 million people – almost 20% of the world's population – do not have enough food to enable them to sustain normal work. These are the *absolute poor* whose lives are so blighted by "malnutrition, illiteracy, and disease as to be beneath any reasonable definition of human dignity," and their ranks are swelling.¹⁴

This growing imbalance interacts with increasing density to produce a situation in which human activities, for the first time ever, threaten the earth's carrying capacity.¹⁵ It seems disturbingly accurate to say that rich and poor alike, albeit for different reasons, are engaged in dangerous de-facto deficit spending.¹⁶ Today, human activities lead to resource degradation on an unprecedented scale. This creates new scarcities that may well breed conflict. If people will go to war for land that can support them, what does it mean that human activities have, in a mere fifty years, led to the degradation of 1,200 million hectares of land – an area roughly equal to the size of China and India combined?¹⁷ What does it mean in terms of intercollective conflict that, in the coming century, heat-trapping gases in the atmosphere might cause global warming, rising sea levels, and the displacement of millions of people?¹⁸

Changes in Technologies of Communication and Violence

[T]he art and practices of war, spurred on by the revolution in technology, have changed fundamentally at increasing speed /.../ the technological race at sea, on land and in the air has escalated without interruption.¹⁹

All four factors mentioned above are extremely important for understanding the context and nature of conflict today. Technological change in general, and changes in the technologies of communication and violence in particular, add another factor of revolutionary change to the picture. Moreover, such change is cumulative, irreversible and can – in contrast to piecemeal, organic change – develop in leaps and bounds. Finally, it tends to spread quickly.²⁰

The twentieth century has seen uniquely rapid changes in knowledge and ways of doing things. Advances in the field of communication and information processing are but one example. The spread of new technologies has created global information and communication networks capable of instantly broadcasting a massacre taking place on one continent into the living-rooms of people on another. It has also provided vehicles for the spread of western popular culture and, for the first time in history, has enabled the world's poor to see for themselves how rich people live.²¹

During this century the capacities of war technologies have increased to such an extent that we have experienced not one, but several military revolutions.²² This short period of time has seen the advent of bomber and fighter aircraft, rapid mobile armored fighting vehicles, attack helicopters, and fighter submarines. Total war became a reality. Chemical and biological weapons have been developed into powerful tools of mass destruction.²³ This is also the century when the atom was split, enabling collectives in conflict to unleash destructive energies to the point of total annihilation. Nuclear and hydrogen bombs have been attached to a variety of elaborate delivery systems. It was during the cold war that the globe came to be criss-crossed by a network of intercontinental ballistic missiles, intermediate range and short range "tactical" weapons – all armed with nuclear warheads.²⁴

While incomprehensibly devastating weapons of mass destruction were produced and stockpiled, the development of conventional weapons continued unabated – increasingly making them unconventionally powerful. Fuel air explosives, powerful armor-breaking anti-tank ammunition, and high-tech delivery systems such as cruise missiles with multiple target-seeking bombs are but a few examples.²⁵ Modern technological development has created sophisticated and efficient mines. From a helicopter, thousands of mines can easily, rapidly, and affordably be spread over vast areas. Stretching the possibility for warfare over time, night vision systems even make combat possible around the clock.²⁶

The constantly increasing sophistication of weapons has produced a situation in which the weakest link in the military machinery is the physical and psychological

limitations of the human being. In an effort to strengthen this weak human link, research has been conducted on numbing drugs aimed at making people more able soldiers by taking away the fears and moral scruples that make them human, while leaving intact their intellectual capacities.²⁷

Like all technology, these tools of warfare tend to disperse rapidly. The speed of this process has increased, shortening the time during which the inventors have a monopoly. In fact, we have now reached a stage where, given money and some time, all who want and understand how to use a particular weapon are able to do so. Although efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons have probably been successful in slowing down the dispersion, they have not been able to stop it. As far as the availability of other kinds of weapons is concerned, little keeps it from being a buyers' market.²⁸

Such tremendous increases in destructive capabilities and their dispersion have naturally changed the nature of warfare. One important dimension is simply who gets killed. In the beginning of the century, casualties of war were mostly born by soldiers. The ratio of civilian to military deaths was 1 to 9. Approaching the end of the century, this has changed. According to estimates, civilians now suffer 75% of deaths in war. Modern warfare's assault on societies is also reflected in the psychological health of embattled peoples.²⁹

To summarize, we are witnessing growing interdependence as well as increasing political fragmentation in large parts of the world. At an accelerating pace, technological development and social change are altering the conditions for intercollective conflict and its management. New problems, knowledge, and ways of doing things have created new sources of conflict as well as new possibilities for, and limitations to, conflictual behavior. Dramatic changes in three areas are particularly significant. First, the sheer growth in population and growing *per capita* consumption lead to increasing pressures. In addition, the distribution of the growth in population and consumption worsens global inequality. Taken together, this contributes to environmental degradation which threatens to produce a global scarcity of basic life-sustaining resources. Second, the technologies of storytelling have a unique impact because communication networks now span the globe. Third, we face a reality of radically new destructive capabilities as well as a new and expanding degree of its dispersion.

Defining Key Concepts: Collective, Conflict, and Management

In order to investigate prevailing capacities for and challenges to the management of intercollective conflict it is necessary to clarify the meaning of *collectives* in *conflict* and the concept of *management*. Defining these concepts involves a discussion of the key role played by norms in making coexistence and cooperation possible and the pervasiveness of values embedded in concepts like "problem" and "management".

On Human Collectives

A Conceptual Quagmire

In all there is to read about the politics, diplomacy, wars, and revolutions of the last several centuries, these terms contradict and trip over one another, adding their additional blur to the miasmalike quality of the history itself. In one text or context or another, the word "nation" has been used interchangeably with "tribe", "people", "ethnic group", "race", "religion", "nationality", "country", and "state", among others.

*Harold R. Isaacs*³⁰

A great conceptual confusion haunts the study of aggregates of human beings.³¹ We use the word "international" arrantly to refer to what goes on between states. Likewise, the term "national security" which is used to create an aura of overriding importance and irrefutability, really means the security of the state.³² The notion of "nation-state" – meaning a sovereign state whose citizens all share certain traits that make them one nation – is supposed to bridge this inconsistency. But this concept is a mythical ideal that corresponds badly to the real world. Nielsson points out that there is not one single nation-state in the explicit sense of one which is "ethnically pure." In some states one people represents an overwhelming majority, but most sovereign entities are significantly multinational.³³

Before wandering too far into this conceptual morass, it is useful to study the etymology of some of the words used to talk about groups of humans. "Nation" has its origin in the Latin *nasci*, to be born, and it originally meant breed, stock, or race. In later usage, however, the word has come to refer to a people with political unity and independence. Hence the connection to "state". The word "state" also has its roots in Latin – *status* meaning manner of standing, condition. "State" is currently used to refer to all of the following: a body of people occupying a defined territory and organized under a sovereign government, the territory itself, and the governing and administrative apparatus.³⁴

"Country" is a word referring to human aggregates that has strong connections to territory. It usually refers to bordered districts of land to which some people belong and other people do not. It is frequently used interchangeably with "state". In discussing one concept, other words come into the spotlight. One example is the concept of "people". Latin's *populum* referred to the inhabitants of an area. "People" is still used broadly to denote the body of persons composing a community, tribe, or nation. The word can mean human beings in general, and sometimes refers to persons in hierarchical relations – i.e. those who belong to a superior. Used in this way "people" refers to the masses.

The word "community" is derived from Latin's *communis*: fellowship, community of relations. It can be used to mean a body of people that is organized politically and shares a common character, agreement, or identity. Although the word has been used

to refer to groups at all social levels, from the municipality to the state or commonwealth, it has become increasingly associated with the micro-level of the neighborhood. "Society" is a related word that signifies an association of individuals. (Compare the Latin *socius*, companion.) It is often taken to mean harmonious and ordered relationships set up by people for their mutual benefit. It can also be used to refer to people living under the same government. Sometimes "society" has more exclusive, upper-class connotations.

"Race" is a word with sweeping connotations. Applied to plant and animal species, it refers to common descent or origin and implies inherited characteristics. Referring to humans, the word has been used imprecisely to mean great divisions of mankind based on conspicuous surface traits such as skin color, facial features, hair texture, and so forth. These distinctions among humans have been used politically to claim that some "races" are inherently superior to others.³⁵

Looking at the concept of "ethnic", we find that it has its roots in the Greek word for "nation". However, the word has largely come to mean "pagan" peoples, or more precisely nations that are not Christian or Jewish. "Ethnic" has been linked to "race" and implies "exotic" and "foreign". At times the label "ethnic group" simply functions as a euphemism for lower class.³⁶ It typically denotes a group that shares the affinities of a nation – for example language, religion, perception of a common history and origin – but that lacks a state of its own.³⁷

This closes the circle of our excursion into the etymology of words referring to clusters of humans. There is no objective difference between "nation" and "ethnic group" other than the capacity to establish a state. Upon examination the distinction is arbitrary and infused with the relative power or powerlessness of groups, as well as the political preferences of those who classify people as a "nation" or an "ethnic group". Referring to this, Isaacs notes:

Distinctions are variously made among and between these terms, having to do with ideas about size, territory, "stage of development" or measure of "backwardness", the level of "consciousness" or, in the end, just how the particular writer feels about it. The facts, past and present, seem to suggest that the formula whereby a "tribe" or a "people" does or does not become or remain a "nation" depends mainly on the conditions of power or the lack of it, and the given political circumstances of the time.³⁸

The We-They Phenomenon in Focus

All of the above serves as a caution against the careless use of terms to describe groups of people. It also serves as a reminder that conceptual confusion is more than a mere semantic problem. It mirrors great factual confusion in the complex realms of politics, norms, propaganda, and military power, within which the phenomenon of human collectives is firmly embedded. The question is what to do about it. An explicit focus on the essence of what we are interested in might provide a stepping-

stone stable enough to avoid the worst omissions, misinterpretations, and subjectivities of the linguistic quagmire. This study addresses *the problem of we-they confrontation and how it is managed*. In the following I will therefore focus on the we-they dichotomy, a subject that has most notably been dealt with by anthropologists.³⁹

Differences between groups of people have existed throughout all of recorded history.⁴⁰ Although humans are usually affiliated with a number of different clusters of people, there is virtually always one tie that is most important and above all others.⁴¹ This *basic group identity* has the crucial function of giving individuals a sense of belonging and self-esteem. It is a complex phenomenon that has important political, social, cultural, and psychological implications. The most fundamental We is the group that is perceived to provide security and basic identity, and it can be recognized by the fact that it commands the supreme loyalty of its members.⁴²

How can we recognize, in any particular case, the entity to which people give their supreme loyalty? The most straight-forward way is to simply consider what people say about belonging, trust, duty, and loyalty.⁴³ In addition, we can look at the permeability of the group; if people can move with ease into and out of the group and there are strong ties to people outside, it is less likely to be a We that commands people's supreme loyalty.⁴⁴ Other important signs that suggest that we are dealing with a basic identity We is if people express a distinctive culture (in symbols, dress, language, music etc.), take part in separate institutions, and displays a moral self-sufficiency.⁴⁵ If there are ethical barriers that strengthen the cohesion of the group and distances it from others we are very likely to have encountered a group that commands supreme loyalty.⁴⁶ Finally, political activism based on group identity is an indication of a basic We. Elites using, or trying to use, the group as a platform for political action is an explicit demand for the members' loyalties; and sometimes a leader will even demand, and receive, supreme loyalty.⁴⁷

Speaking more concretely, what is this fundamental We in practice? The influential idea of modernization holds that the nation (as in "nation-state") is – or is in the process of becoming – the cluster which commands the supreme loyalty of people. In this perspective, "nation-building" emerges as a key concept.⁴⁸ Others argue that ethnic affiliation is decisive, "overriding other social cleavages... to become the master principle and the major identity for purposes of sociopolitical action."⁴⁹ For the purposes of this study, what entity is the fundamental We is an empirical matter and can vary from case to case. There are a number of possibilities, including: an interstate alliance, state, ethnic group or nation, region, religion, class, clan, city, business corporation, and a cosmopolitan elite.⁵⁰

The fact that identities are subject to change complicates matters further. Isaacs shows how changing relations of power and the pressures of external conditions can provoke, pacify, and mold basic group identity. A previously dormant or even non-existent We can be revived or created in times of crisis, perceived threat, and social or

economic decline. Thus, basic group identity is fluid, malleable, and susceptible to political manipulation.⁵¹ It is not likely, however, that a new identity group can take any form considered to be instrumental for problem management. Stavenhagen notes that the mobilization of human collectives is usually motivated by some primordial collective bond in addition to instrumental thinking aimed, more or less intentionally, at pursuing political action.⁵²

In this study I will use the word "collective" to mean the basic We that commands the supreme loyalty of its members. Hence, conflicts between such entities will be called "intercollective". It is, admittedly, a rather lackluster term. Nonetheless it helps keep the focus on that which is truly of interest here. Its origin lies in the Latin *colligere*, meaning 'to gather together' – a reference clearly in harmony with the fluidity and political malleability of the phenomenon. In modern usage the term simply means a collection of individuals taken as a whole. Thus, "collective" has another important advantage – preconceived notions of what it is largely do not adhere to it and it will therefore have greater potential as an analytic tool.⁵³

On Conflict

Conflict Is Incompatibility

In general usage, "conflict" is a concept that means many different things. Some reserve it for cases of overt hostile behavior, others talk about structural conflicts, yet others refer to conflict within one person.⁵⁴ However, confusion about the meaning of conflict is not as prevalent as is that about words denoting human collectives. Because of the work of scholars in the field of conflict research, the term is actually well developed and fairly clearly outlined. I will draw on this work to briefly review aspects of conflict essential to the purposes of this study.

Mitchell points out that conflict research is relevant to many levels of human interaction. He convincingly argues that all conflicts involving two or more people are social phenomena with important similarities. As there are common fundamental patterns and processes, findings from inter-personal, inter-communal, and interstate conflicts all contribute to generic insights of conflict research.⁵⁵

The essence of conflict is incompatibility. In a utopia where everything that anybody could ever want exists in abundance, it is impossible to imagine conflict. But we live in a reality of social coexistence within physical limits, and this creates friction and forces us to engage in constant accommodation. We have a conflict when "two or more social entities or 'parties'... perceive that they possess mutually incompatible goals."⁵⁶

This definition suggests several things. First, there can be two or more parties in conflict, a rough general rule being that the greater the number the more potentially complex the conflict. Second, we are reminded by the words "social entities" and

”parties” that we can include the entire micro-macro spectrum discussed above. Third, an important word in the definition is ”perceive”. There does not have to be an objective, actual incompatibility in order for there to be conflict.⁵⁷ Correspondingly, there cannot be conflict unless people perceive an incompatibility. Finally, people’s goals play the key motivating role in conflict. They represent what people want and thus why they are in conflict.⁵⁸

The Roles of Attitudes and Behavior in Conflict Escalation

The essence of conflict is incompatibility but we cannot know the phenomenon fully if we do not look closer at conflictual *attitudes* and *behavior* – aspects that must be included if we are to understand the escalation of conflict.⁵⁹ When in conflict, people tend to have distinctive emotions, attitudes, and perceptions of their situation, as well as an inclination to behave in contentious ways. Psychological states are an integral part of conflict, and they become particularly complex and important in intercollective conflict. As conflict escalates, distinct psychological and behavioral phases can be discerned. When incompatibility is first perceived, the contending groups may have open-minded attitudes that enable them to deal with it in a fairly cooperative manner. If the incompatibility remains unresolved, however, attitudes tend to become harsher, and pressure to conform within one’s group increases. If this happens, it is typical that ”the mature, complex view of reality is sacrificed for a reduced, simplified version which is more easily sustained emotionally.”⁶⁰

As the psychological gap between the collectives widens, and people are increasingly unable to consider how their opponents perceive the situation, groups tend to behave in ways that fulfill the negative and fearful expectations they have now developed about each other. Threatening behavior marks a full-fledged escalation. Antagonism becomes total when sacred values are perceived to be at stake and the conflict assumes overriding importance. At this stage, the internal cohesiveness of the collective is typically strong and people often entertain fantasies of omnipotence as if intoxicated by the magnetism of the collective. Violence is often used once this stage has been reached as parties strive to assume control over the situation and thereby subdue one another. Typically, the enemy is dehumanized. As a result, ethical standards and personal responsibility for destructive actions toward Them fades.⁶¹

Conflictual attitudes and behavior frequently aggravate and perpetuate conflict. At higher levels of escalation these interrelated aspects can drive a conflict largely independently of the initial incompatibility, indeed even if it has disappeared. As people engage in conflictual behavior, the original conflict issues may well become overshadowed by an image of the enemy as the incarnation of all that is evil. In addition, at escalated levels of conflict, powerful intracollective forces act to further aggravate the problems and entrench the conflict.⁶²

Looking more specifically at behavior in conflict, it can be defined to include all kinds of actions – from violence and coercion exclusively, to any conceivable response to perceived incompatibility including avoidance and yielding. A stance between these two extremes defines conflict behavior as actions undertaken by one party in a situation of conflict which are aimed at Them and are intended to make them *abandon or modify their goals* or to *incapacitate* them to act according to their goals.⁶³ In addition to violence, coercion, and threat this definition includes the activities of, for example, persuasion, manipulation, negotiation, and non-violent *Satyagraha*,⁶⁴ but it does not include passive yielding or avoidance.

On Management

The management of conflict is clearly related to behavior in conflict. However, it is not the same thing. Management, as used in this work, simply means behavior that is coordinated and directed towards a preferred objective. We have seen that the problem of intercollective conflict originates in a sense of incompatibility, in a perception that others threaten the fulfillment of important goals. Those goals can range from the very survival of individuals of the collective to the protection of a small elite's superfluous vested interests. The goals can involve securing the existence of the collective or the perpetuation or expansion of its lifestyle. The threatened goals can be entangled with cherished values as well as with material interests.

When demands and ambitions held by different collectives are seen to overlap, a situation of goal-incompatibility is perceived. This is a problem for all who believe that their goal fulfillment is at stake and people in collectives often react with greater cooperation within the group – urged on by leaders who call on them to muster additional resources and further coordinate their behavior. In other words, elaborate strategies for collective problem management can develop.

Conflict management often aims at making opponents unwilling or unable to pursue their ambitions, but it can just as well involve modifications and changes in the ambitions of the managing collective itself. What it will aim at depends on the nature of the preferred objective – whether it is, for example, that "we must always have our way" (and we are always in the right), or "we want a stable outcome that does not harm our important long-term interests" (and we might sometimes be wrong). Another important distinction is that, while conflict behavior is confined to parties in conflict, outsiders can engage in conflict management.

War as Conflict Management

War is a social invention, another of man's mechanisms designed to cope with his environment... [As] a cultural artifice war is among man's most recent innovations.⁶⁵

War is the extreme expression of intercollective conflict. We have a war when we have organized, premeditated, socially sanctioned use of force by human collectives in pursuit of specific goals.⁶⁶ These collectives typically perceive themselves as self-contained, and very strong internal norms are at work at this level of escalation.⁶⁷ In an effort to manage a conflict with others, We use violence in order to force Them to obey our will.⁶⁸ By its very nature, war is a conflict managing effort involving violent behavior, and it is therefore also a dangerous threat to others – one which they, in turn, will try to manage.

The earliest evidence of institutionalized warfare is from the Neolithic period, some ten thousand years ago. This suggests that when hunter-gatherers developed the more stationary life of farming – creating in the process new opportunities for investment in labor, the accumulation of wealth, and population growth – war entered the human repertoire of responses to intercollective conflict.⁶⁹ Since then, humans have devoted increasing amounts of resources to ever more powerful institutions, for the preparation and waging of war.

A Theoretical Framework of Institutionalized Problem Management

Conflict between collectives is but one of many large-scale problems that humans attempt to manage. Knowledge about the nature of *institutionalized problem management in general* provides fundamental insights which are useful in guiding this study. In what follows I present a theoretical framework of group problem management. It is derived from a review of theories from a number of different fields that ask questions such as: How does joint problem management develop? What are its important component parts? What are the most important restraints and driving-forces shaping problem management and its real-world outcomes?

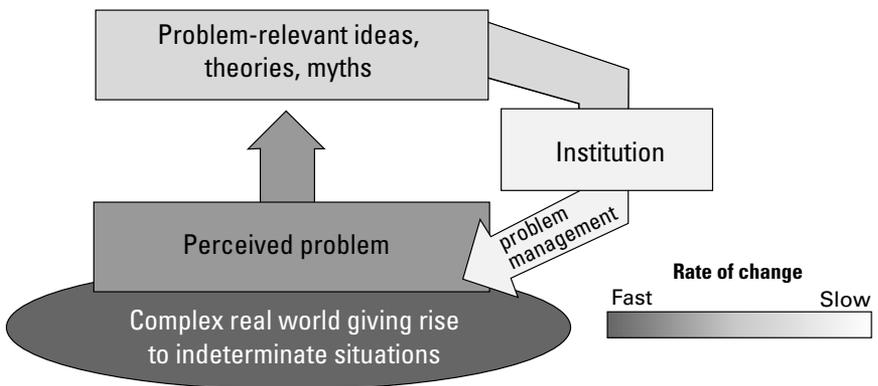


Fig. 1.1 Institutionalized problem management and different rates of change

Although an examination of research on the nature of and conditions for group problem management reveals a variety of approaches, there are basic components that appear repeatedly: *the complexity of reality, the perception of problems, the development of problem-relevant ideas, the creation and maintenance of institutions, and change*. By linking these concepts I construct a theoretical model of institutionalized problem management (see Fig. 1.1). This framework is, in principle, useful for the evaluation of any problem management. It can be understood as a simplified three-phase narrative of what happens when many people sense that something is not right but, as individuals, they lack the ability to deal with it.

The Complexity of Reality and the Perception of Problems

A central issue for much of the theorizing about conditions for problem management is the question what is the nature of reality out of which problems emerge. There is broad agreement in the literature that reality is complex and indeterminate, and thus uncontrollable in its entirety.

Chaos theory and cybernetics provide important insights into the nature of change in dynamic, complex systems. Change in complex systems is a remarkably similar phenomenon in very different contexts. It has been found that very small changes at the beginning of a process can lead to monumental differences later on. And systems can enter chaotic phases of change during which the outcome is impossible to predict.⁷⁰ The study of chaos points to the need for holism and caution in dealing with the world. It has shown that things with no visible resemblance to each other are, in fact, related, and that the dynamism of reality creates a significant measure of uncertainty.⁷¹

Cybernetic methodology depicts the world's dynamism in terms of reactive *feedback cycles*. These cycles do not have any particular beginning or end, and can be seen as regulatory processes. Some feedback cycles achieve stability and balance, whereas others produce change.⁷² According to the cybernetic perspective it is not possible to clearly discern cause and effect in complex systems because they are dynamic and interdependent rather than unidirectional phenomena.⁷³

This suggests that reality is so complex that there is little chance that we can ever fully comprehend it, let alone completely control it. Despite this, people seek to comprehend and manage reality in order to realize a variety of goals and values. According to Dewey, the western idea of a strict separation of knowledge and science from morality and values is flawed. This dualism has led to the division of realms, one in which flawless logic and accuracy are assumed to reign and one for the lowlier practical activities.⁷⁴ Dewey argues that in the real world of practical efforts humans can never escape the perils of uncertainty and change. Such is the nature of our physical reality with its constant and complex interactions.⁷⁵

Institutional economists – a group of scholars continuing the tradition of pragmatic instrumentalism – take up where Dewey left off by taking the *indeterminate situation* as their point of departure. Such a situation is a precognitive state of affairs in which individuals have a sense that something is wrong.⁷⁶ It gives rise to doubt and it thus initiates a process of inquiry. As the situation is investigated, a cognitive construction – the problem – is created.

Not only is reality complex, it is also changing. There are many dynamic forces that continuously press for change. Driven by development, innovation, and dispersion, technology is one of the most potent reality-changers. Since we are always forced to relate to reality in making decisions, we are constantly trying to assess the future consequences of alternative options. William L. Renfro puts it this way:

A sense of the future not only pervades all good politics but underlies every decision people make... The question, then, is not whether people should, to the extent possible, seek to forecast the future..., but whether they should articulate, discuss, analyze, and improve their forecasting and anticipation capabilities.⁷⁷

To summarize, even though the complexity of reality makes it largely unmanageable, humans act as if there are predictable patterns of cause and effect that we can understand, manipulate, or adapt to.⁷⁸ If people sense that something is wrong they start to think about it. They will soon discern a pattern taking shape – they perceive a problem. The first element in the model is thus the *real-world problem* itself, and we note that it may well be perceived differently by different people. The problem is the very *raison d'être* for collective problem management – it is what gives it its purpose.

The Development of Problem-Relevant Ideas

Another critical issue is how problems are defined and made "manageable". Once something has been defined as a problem, people start developing ideas about its nature. Systems of thought take shape that answer such questions as: *What is this problem? Why does this happen? Where? Who can do anything about it? How?* The goal is to realistically outline the nature and scope of an issue – i.e. to develop the knowledge necessary to adequately deal with the problem.⁷⁹ Given that people's perceptions that something is wrong varies, as do their views about what is wrong and why, this second phase will also involve a competition of ideas.

This competition about how to best deal with real-world problems is a key issue for many people who write about problem management. Their conclusions are similar; conflicting ideas about real world problems, rooted in different underlying assumptions, contend for power to decide society's organization and to prescribe practical measures of response. When an idea prevails it is put to work – its remedies are used to deal with the problem as defined. Ideas that are implemented in this way constantly have real-world effects.

In the field of operational research, soft systems methodology (SSM) has emerged as a tool to analyze and deal with changing and ill-defined problem situations. It can also be used to evaluate ongoing problem management. In order to fully accomplish this, analysis must go beyond facts and logic to include the "myths and meanings by which human beings make sense of the world" and to uncover the differences in people's underlying assumptions about the world.⁸⁰ SSM directs attention to *Weltanschauungen* that all too often go unnoticed and are taken as givens. It focuses attention on the need to compare the problem-structuring world views that underpin management to their real-world outcomes.⁸¹

Dewey similarly thinks of ideas as instruments. Like instruments, ideas are constructed by people for a purpose and they should be judged on the basis of the consequences they produce. He puts it this way:

The test of ideas, of thinking generally, is found in the consequences of the acts to which the ideas lead, that is in the new arrangement of things which are brought into existence.⁸²

From this it follows that Dewey considers ideas to be "hypotheses, not finalities." While prior experience is important, there must always be room for revision of ideas, although a revision might lead to the conclusion that no change is currently necessary. Systems of thought that are capable of resolving real world problems are true in the most important sense of understanding reality to such an extent that they are successful. False ideas are those that fail to deal satisfactorily with problems.⁸³

Addressing the question of what should be considered good information about the future, Renfro also emphasizes the usefulness of a forecast. He argues that good forecasts are those that are "used to create a better future than is otherwise anticipated."⁸⁴ He points out:

[M]ost issues become credibly foreseeable only when they have become so stable as to be impervious to outside forces ./.../ to the rule, "Don't decide in the dark, get all the facts first," the future says "You can only have all the facts when it's too late to decide anything."⁸⁵

The American political scientist Harold Lasswell also emphasizes that we are always faced with decisions. In order to make good ones it is necessary to study the future and consider how actions chosen today will effect it. For this purpose, he specifies five tasks:

1) The clarification of goals and values; (2) The description of trends; (3) The explanation of conditions; (4) The projection of possible and probable futures if current policies are continued; (5) The invention, evaluation and selection of policy alternatives (in order to achieve preferred goals).⁸⁶

Lasswell thus underscores the importance of studying existing policies and analyzing their possible future consequences. He was a founder and advocate of the twin fields of futures studies and policy analysis.⁸⁷ They are of necessity holistic and multi-