

COMMENT



Conflictology: A Multidisciplinary Vision

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Abstract

Conflictology is defined as the way of understanding conflicts assuming all related areas, such as conflict resolution, transformation and management, while at the same time it is based on the principles of non-violence as a paradigm opposed to the conviction that violence is the way to resolve conflicts. It is, therefore, a form of cross-disciplinary, comprehensive and synthetic knowledge. Conflictology is the culmination of knowledge that helps us understand conflicts, crises, violence of all kinds, and, simultaneously, the compendium of transformation, intervention and aid techniques, resources and procedures.



Keywords

conflictology, peace culture, mediation, conflict resolution, conflict transformation, conflict management, non-violence

One of humanity's greatest concerns and where it has made a lot of effort has been to try and live in peace, as individuals and with each other, leading to the accumulation of wide-ranging thoughts and procedures. The fragmentation of science due to specialisation, a lack of communication between different human cultures, and competitiveness, has created multiple denominations with the same aim: to live in peace. Conflictology brings them together.

We learn about conflictology when we change how we think and, therefore, how we live. Without this change, the violent paradigm in which we firmly believe and, consequently, practise, there is no true learning. Conflictology is the compendium of knowledge and skills in the environment of conflict, crises and violence that leads us to seek non-violent ways of interacting and the full meaning of peace as a way of thinking and acting.

If we believe that deceit is legitimate and useful, that repression is legal and pragmatic, violence and exploitation understandable, and limitation of freedom reasonable, then we have not yet rid ourselves of barbarism and we still have a long way to go to become civilised. Without an integral transformation of the ways we relate to one another as individuals and in social relations, we will continue to act as we always have and real solutions will as always be de-

layed. Conflictology, therefore, is a system which proposes change, a reform of the main social institutions such as politics, justice and security, as something truly necessary to put an end to the degradation of relations due to violence, permanent conflict, social injustice, insecurity and the lack of an efficient system for peaceful coexistence.

It is not a question of values, principles or ideology, or a set of theories. It is a different way of thinking that can be reached through many different routes, using the rationality of empirical science, philosophy, simple life experience, feelings, emotions such as love, poetical or mystical inspiration, and through meditation, contemplation, ascetics, logic, and more, from any cultural or ideological vision. Conflictology is a plural, cross-disciplinary and open discipline. It is not limited by closed laws or training programmes, nor is it the domain of a specific organisation. The fact is that, as well as psychologists, sociologists, teachers, lawyers and philosophers, it is also of interest to doctors, biologists, diplomats, the police, members of the armed forces, engineers and many more, since conflicts can be found anywhere, at every level and in every sphere.

Open to all fields of knowledge, as well as social sciences such as psychology, sociology, history, politics and anthropology, it also includes biology, neurology, phi-



losophy, and even mathematics.¹ Conflictology embraces rationalist thought and oriental philosophy and benefits from contributions by psychology and the neurology of emotions. The importance of knowing how to resolve conflicts should not be restricted to one occupation, but should be part of the culture of everyday life. Specialists should only have to intervene in processes involving conflict where the seriousness or complexity of the situation exceeds the ability of people to find a solution for themselves.

It has even been proven that, in the field of violent conflicts and criminal activity, the use of conflictology is more effective than traditional police and judicial systems, which by definition are used to defend established power rather than justice, devoted more to repression, which violates basic rights on many occasions, and which, surprisingly, are not at all effective. In an area of the city of Guayaquil in Ecuador, which has some of the highest levels of violence and crime in the country, where police could enter but not leave because of the power of armed criminal organisations, with few resources, violence and crime rates fell by 60%² in six months using conflictology procedures.

Conflictologists learn mediation, negotiation and conciliation techniques, about the bases of neurobiology in violence, and the philosophical foundations of conflicts and peace. There are contributions from the schools of psychology, also from anthropology and history relating to conflicts, war and violence. Other study materials include the use of teaching methods and social communication techniques, “proxemics”, the sociology of conflict, the influences of neurobiology on human and social behaviour, teaching and communication and even non-violent combat techniques, such as aikido.

Conflictology, which is a synonym for conflict resolution and conflict transformation as established multidisciplinary occupations, has its roots in pacifism and non-violence as a moral approach, political system and expression of life. Unlike a pacifist movement that focuses on denouncing war and the apology for peace, conflictology is not restricted to denouncing the barbarity of war and violence, but there is a decision to intervene directly, first-hand, in war and in conflicts, with scientific knowledge of conflicts, violence and crises, using methods that do not contradict its objectives, i.e., non-violent and peaceful. And the aim is clearly to end violence, achieve reconciliation and be able to live in peace. Conflictology is, there-

fore, basically a pragmatic, applicable and, above all, vital occupation.

In conflictology, the idea of peace goes beyond that of classic war and notions of conflict based exclusively on physical violence. It includes violence in the broadest sense of the word, that does not always use knives or firearms but resorts to other methods that can also injure, kill, dominate and harm: deceit, hatred, political and economic structures or a legal system that limits freedom, eradicates dignity and fosters harm to others are refined and highly efficient forms of extreme violence. These forms of violence are commonly used in social and political relations, in judicial processes and in a large part of family and interpersonal conflicts.

It also includes all forms of terrorism as a way of waging war, both groups of citizens in revolt against the state they are a part of and the terrorism of states and criminal organisations against the democracy and civil liberties that challenge their supremacy and their monopoly of power. In classic security policies, terrorism is tackled as an abnormal phenomenon that needs trial and imprisonment if not physical destruction, without heeding the origins, causes or motivation of the armed groups that carry out terrorist actions. Terrorism cannot be comprehended without understanding – which does not mean agreeing with – the belligerent party, the states, the victims, the organisations that carry out terrorism and the population that supports it morally and politically, that justifies it. We could say the same of criminality, of Mafia-type organisations. Simple repression normally does not solve the problem but defers it, and the cost of repression is very high.

If violence is anything that can cause harm to oneself, to another or to the social or natural environment, non-violence is exactly the opposite: it consists of causing good, even to those we may consider to be our competitors or adversaries, those who think differently from us, who live differently. This, which may seem very philosophical or moralist, ends up being what predetermines behaviour in business, in the Justice Administration, in governability, education, and so on. And it is exactly the beliefs contrary to these that predetermine the actions of government, of financiers, of politicians, of judges and others that have led us into the current crisis. We should not underestimate the moral, ethical or philosophical foundations of human behaviour: these philosophical foundations are the cognitive bases from which social and political behaviour and attitudes are derived.

1 Anatol Rapoport, mathematician and his game theory. In the field of theoretical physics, the so-called chaos theory, in biology, scientific ecology and the Gaia theory.

2 *Pandillas y Maras: Aproximación a su comprensión y propuestas de estrategia de solución del conflicto que éstas generan desde la perspectiva de la conflictología*, Latin American Countries' Ministries of Justice Conference, Editorial Tirant lo Blanc, Valencia 2008. The methodologies proposed are being applied gradually by the General Directorate of Citizen Security of the Department of the Interior of the Catalan government, by the Catalan Police specialising in organised gangs, and also by the Spanish Security Forces.



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Religions and philosophies seek loyalty to principles and, especially, to hierarchy rather than freedom and spiritual peace of people. The fear of uncertainty brings totalitarian systems of thought to submission in the search for convictions that distance themselves from the unknown and the anxiety due to the insecurity of living without knowing everything. Dual thought is a structure of conflictive thought, discovering the possibility of thinking other-

wise means accepting uncertainty and discovering mental peace.

Conflictology brings together the diversity of approaches and procedures to understand that living peacefully requires effort, but at the same time teaches us that the different strands of knowledge conflictology is based on enable the desire to live in peace to be achieved. ■

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