

Learning from conflict...

A Digest of Practical Research

Winter 2006-2007

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Learning opportunities



ACR's Seventh Annual Conference
October 24- 27, 2007
Phoenix, AZ

Fourth Viennese Conference on Mediation
"Culture Meets Culture"
"The 'new' discontent with culture",
Date: 03rd to 06th May 03- 06th, 2006
Place: Europahaus, Vienna
For more details: visit:
<http://www.bildungsmanagement.at/su/blinks/kongresse.html>

"Maybe there's a small section where readers can write in and request subsequent research"

This Digest

is a prototype for what many people hope will be an ongoing opportunity to share research, evaluation and related learning products that will help people address public issues in productive ways.

The idea

The digest was conceived in a chance post-conference airport meeting involving Gail Bingham, Tanya Denckla Cobb, Julie McFarland, and Bernie Mayer. Wouldn't it be helpful, these researchers/practitioners thought, to develop a periodic digest that synthesizes conflict resolution, collaboration and related research in a way that enables those whose work addresses conflict to improve their practice?

Tanya's organization, the Institute for Environmental Negotiation, University of Virginia, had received one of a final set of grants from the Hewlett Foundation intended to disseminate knowledge generated during two decades of research and practice supported by the Foundation's conflict program. This idea appeared to be an ideal vehicle for doing just that.

Who is this for?

The digest is intended primarily to assist professionals and volunteers whose work encounters public and policy conflict, such as public

administrators, planners, and conflict resolution practitioners, including many attorneys. Such practitioners are found in agencies of government at all levels, consulting firms, private practice, mediation centers, and in those academic settings and think tanks that engage in practice. Such practitioners are eager to learn but find standard research publications inaccessible, both literally (not knowing where research is published) and figuratively (specialized language, lengthy reports make comprehension difficult). Several such digests successfully provide this service to a variety of fields (e.g., various disciplines within medicine, law, farming) and in 2006 *Negotiation Journal* began to summarize research focused on negotiation. But nothing of the sort proposed currently exists.

The focus

The focus of the Digest will be on knowledge that improves practice – that is, the ability to address conflicts. The syntheses provided will focus on how the research reviewed could be used to enhance practice, by offering (for example) practical insights into conflict resolution, practice strategies and techniques. While the unifying theme is practice, the subject matter may vary widely, including environment, education, transportation, housing, and health among others. Similarly, the research



The goal of this project is to develop a periodic digest that synthesizes conflict resolution, collaboration and related research in a way that enables those whose work addresses public issues to improve their practice.

reviewed will be inter-disciplinary, with research found in conflict resolution, public administration, planning, law, sociology, organizational development, public policy, and other journals. The focus will be on empirical research. However, there may be illustrative case studies that would be relevant as well.

Content

The digest will focus on current research – what do the latest research journals report? What does this mean for practice and practitioners? It will also include reviews of research found in new books and reports; while most research is published in journals, some may be synthesized or reported in books and stand-alone reports. It will be important to have the brief (300-1,000 words) syntheses written in clear, accessible language.

The content of the Digest will adapt to user needs as the audience grows and becomes more clearly defined. Issues of the Digest may focus on particular topics or themes, (e.g., trust, public involvement, role of facilitators). Eventually, if interest continues, the digest could be expanded to include reviews of classic articles, books and research; for theme-based issues in particular, past research would be useful. Other ideas include offering teaching tips and training tips related to particular research, e.g., how can lessons drawn from the research be taught?

The Digest will be published in electronic form, with plans to have continuing access to past issues provided by the Conflict Research Consortium at the University of Colorado.

The distribution list is envisioned as a standard listserv with distribution capabilities only (registrants would not be able to post to the listserv), and registration open to any interested party. It may be suitable at some later date to expand this to allow for a second listserv that allows for a response and discussion format, for those who would like to do so.

The audience is intended to be professionals and citizens whose work encounters public and policy conflict, such as public administrators, planners, and conflict resolution practitioners.

The workshop

On June 28, 2006, a workshop on this digest was held in conjunction with the Policy Consensus Initiative meeting on collaborative governance. This workshop was held in Boston prior to the Environment/Public Policy Section Conference. This session included approximately 35 individuals representing a wide array of interests, including independent facilitators, non-profit facilitators, state legislators, one mayor, state and federal agency staff, and university personnel.

The participants were very enthusiastic about the potential value of this project. Many of them proposed more ambitious goals than had initially been considered, including tailoring different digests to different audience needs. IEN will be seeking partners and support to develop the digest consistent with these expressed goals and interests.

Following are selected suggestions made by participants:

Digest Goals should also include...

- Create reflective practice tool AND tool for communicating with sponsors and policymakers about conflict resolution work.
- Foster continued and increasing interaction between researchers and practitioners.
- Focus on findings from empirical research, but don't give up reporting on theory.

Opportunities that a Digest Could Provide:

- Get ahead of the publication lag between when research is conducted and when its results become widely known.
- Increase visibility of the conflict resolution field
- Spur interest and interdisciplinary work from other fields.

- Capture lessons learned over years of experience from so many practitioners.
- People who consume research may eventually gain a more prominent role in producing it and thereby “steer the boat.” This change in perspective is long overdue.
- Offer practical results for agencies working with a results-based budget.

Accessibility to the Digest

- Important not to lose practitioner audience by focusing solely on researchers.
- Should be a mechanism to translate research into terms useful for policymakers.
- To remain accessible, entries should be BRIEF and tied to tools.
- KEYWORD analysis will be critical for accessibility of those interested, especially through electronic searches/catalogs.

“Stories and case studies inspire decision makers.”

Potential Target Audiences:

- Funders and sponsors of processes.
- Researchers in other fields.
- State-level audience within governor's offices of policy, planning, etc.
- Get more local with audience and distribution – use NACO and leagues of local governments, state institutes of government.
- Include journalists to raise awareness of fields.
- Caveat: Can't do everything!

Scope and Content:

- Has to be interdisciplinary.
- International relevance across cultures.
- Partition or vary content to attract/remains useful to varying audiences. Consider separate lists for various research topics or methods, case studies.

Key elements of success included the following:

Process Design:

- effective facilitation,
- focused scope and realistic objectives;
- comprehensive and sustained public involvement;
- sufficient funding;
- broad and inclusive participation;
- adequate scientific and technical information (and, related, the importance of monitoring and evaluation);
- collaboration skills training;
- well-defined decision rules and process rules.

Participant traits:

- active support and participation by Forest Service staff;
- value of cooperative, enthusiastic, and committed participants;
- trust and social capital;
- continuity in participants over time,
- strong leadership.

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Linking Theory to Practice: A Theory of Change Model of the Natural Resources Leadership Institute, by Mary Lou Addor, Tanya Denckla Cobb, E. Franklin Dukes, Mike Ellerbrock, L. Steven Smutko. Conflict Resolution Quarterly, 23 (2), pp. 203-223. Winter 2005.

Most trainers develop their curricula in response to specific needs and to achieve specific outcomes. Much less common, however, is the phenomenon of trainers who deliberately shape their training to build on, test or implement specific theories. Now trainers - specifically those engaged in providing adult leadership development training - can enrich their curricula by drawing on lessons suggested by the article.

A leadership training for natural resource managers, such as those designed and conducted by the authors, can be based on numerous theories concerning leadership development, conflict resolution and problem solving, adult learning and learning transfer, and how sustainability in natural resources and

Sample digests of relevant research

Public Involvement In USDA Forest Service Policymaking: A Literature Review, by William Leach. Journal of Forestry, 104(1), pp. 43-49. 2006.

Topic(s)/Keywords: public participation, United States Forest Service, literature review, best practices.

William Leach provides a brief history of public participation in the Forest Service from 1960 to present and reviews 25 of the most significant empirical studies on the topic, with a focus on keys to success. Twenty-one broadly defined keys to success are identified, and then organized in terms of process design traits, participant traits, and contextual traits.

Summarized findings suggest several attributes the agency can look for when selecting individuals to facilitate collaborative planning processes involving multiple stakeholders.

One particularly interesting study that Leach reviewed noted that “of the 227 public meetings that constituted the 1977 RARE II process [it] was unable to detect any evidence that public comments actually factored into the agency's final decisions.” (Mohai, P. Public participation in natural resource decision-making. *Natural Resources Journal* 27(1): 123-155, 1987). ❄

This next example is drawn from a synthesis provided by Tanya Denckla Cobb; it is intended primarily for stylistic purposes, as it does not address empirical research.

- “Leader’s Digest”: tap into responsibility to use existing knowledge to guide practice.
- Power of stories: Stories and case studies inspire decision makers.
- Consider role of “remedial” or classic content – opportunity to circulate research from the past, even the 1950s, that isn’t being implemented.

Content/Format:

- Subject matter could vary widely – transportation, family, education, etc. Also human services, also at the local/municipal level.
- Maybe there’s a small section where readers can write in and request subsequent research, thus not only bringing research to practitioners, but ALSO connecting practitioners back with researchers.
- Sound bytes are helpful.
- Offer various levels of detail or links to in-depth results for those interested.
- Present research and findings in different ways to make it readable/usable for various audiences.

Production of Digest:

- Print a small brochure and get researchers used to what you’re doing. Get them accustomed to sharing their abstract. Consider going to meetings and get a few minutes on the agenda to present this idea.
- Newsletters are always looking for copy – planners’ journals, etc.
- Get the researchers on board first, then practitioners.

Distribution/Delivery:

- Consider affiliating with other newsletters and journals.

Suggested potential affiliate publications:

- On-line International Journal of Public Participation
- Conflict Resolution Quarterly
- Negotiation Journal
- Governing Magazine
- PCI e-news
- Group Facilitation: A Research and Applications Journal

environmental issues may be taught. The authors identify these “inputs” and enumerate practical implications of these inputs for the leadership training curriculum. Drawing on surveys of trainees, now numbering several hundred in Virginia and North Carolina, preliminary findings indicate that training methodologies employed by the authors are effective in achieving the desired intermediate outcomes or goals: building personal and professional awareness, changing behavior of participating leaders to be more collaborative in their approach to environmental problems, and, in terms of more systemic change, expanding their leadership and influence and strengthening institutions in their ability to manage conflict. Authors agree, however, that longitudinal studies are needed to determine if this model of leadership development is leading to more systemic change in attaining the ultimate desired outcomes of sustainability – meaning healthy and resilient environmental, economic, and social systems.

Trainers working with adult learners - particularly those interested in leadership development - can use this article to enrich their understanding of how and why adult training should be experiential, include a diversity of perspectives, and include ways for participants to transfer or apply learning to their lives. Trainers can obtain important tips in this article for how to design effective training, build-in different kinds of evaluation, and ensure a valuable learning experience. ❄

For more information, contact

Denckla Cobb and Dukes at the Institute for Environmental Negotiation (434-924-1970) or Addor and Smutko at North Carolina State University (919) 515-9602).

Norms of Deliberation: An Inductive Study, by Jane Mansbridge, Janette Hartz-Karp, Matthew Amengual, John Gastil. Journal of Public Deliberation. 2(1). 2006. Article 7.

The authors of this study intended to “advance the project of modern deliberative theory” by looking more carefully at what deliberative democratic practice is doing. They collected tapes of ten small-group deliberations on public issues, with such deliberations ranging from exercises in deliberation public policy advice. They then recruited ten senior facilitators to review them and describe interactions as “good,” “very good,” “problematic,” or “very problematic.”

The authors identify two main general standards used by the facilitator/evaluators for evaluating deliberation: (1) maintaining a positive “group atmosphere” and (2) making progress on the group’s task.

The study goes into considerable detail about what facilitators who coded these sessions value. Some of the key findings follow:

- The coders positively valued emotions that elicited new ideas and perspectives for consideration

and negatively valued emotions that in various ways seemed to close down communication.

- A majority of the coders explicitly favored the goal of “consensus.”
- Few valued the search for a “common good”.
- All of the coders explicitly ascribed value to the free flow of ideas.
- Coders repeatedly stressed the importance of making the group safe enough for free, open and direct interchange.
- Most coders explicitly promoted the limited exercise of facilitator power with a primary goal of “non-domination.”
- The coders strongly valued equality both as a matter of fundamental fairness and as a means, through inclusiveness, to the free flow of ideas. The values of extensive and inclusive participation in discussion, self-facilitation and group control, and the fair

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<http://services.bepress.com/jpd/vol2/iss1/art7>
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representation of views were far more important than equal power, equal opportunity to exercise power, or even the equal opportunity for access to influence.

