# *Review Essay*

# Methods, Milestones, and Models: State of the Art in Conflict Analysis Research

*William A. Donohue*

**Daniel Druckman**. *Doing Research: Methods of Inquiry for Conflict Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2005. 408 pages. $106 (hardcover) ISBN 0761927786.

**Peter J. Carnevale and Carsten K. W. De Dreu**, editors. *Methods of Negotiation Research.* Leiden, the Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers/Brill Academic, 2006. 362 pages. $209 (hardcover) ISBN 9004148582.

## The Methods

I agreed to review *Doing Research: Methods of Inquiry for Conflict Analysis* by Daniel Druckman and *Methods of Negotiation Research*, edited by Peter Carnevale and Carsten De Dreu, for *Negotiation Journal* because of the important contributions they make to our field of conflict analysis. Although they address a narrow niche, they offer opportunities to reflect on how the collective efforts of researchers have begun to cohere into a dynamic field.

I will begin with Daniel Druckman's book, because it is largely a single-author text (with some important chapters written by others) designed to serve students in a graduate-level course in conflict methods. Courses devoted to conflict methods are uncommon, but the publication of these books can certainly help faculty make a case for offering such a class. *Doing Research* is the first book to pull together the dizzying array of methods that conflict researchers have used over the past four decades. It begins appropriately with a useful chapter on the importance of research and the different epistemological foundations that underlie conflict

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research. This discussion is essential because conflict research ranges widely across so many quantitative and qualitative disciplines and methods. Students must understand these differences and how they work together in order to answer many important conflict questions. Druckman wisely confronts this issue early on, making it clear in the process that research is not about taking sides in an ideological war that mindlessly favors one method over another. He makes the point that research questions should drive the methodology, not the other way around.

After establishing these epistemological frames, Druckman focuses on key conceptual issues by offering necessary and useful advice on how to begin to conduct conflict research. He offers helpful guidelines on formulating a literature review and using database resources, and on how to think about theory constructively while developing important research questions. Again, this kind of rich discussion is not often found in traditional-methods texts, and I would have found his tips useful when I was a graduate student.

In the second part of the book, Druckman explores individual methods, beginning with experimentation. He focuses on such issues as validity, reliability, and design options across a range of contexts, and provides statistical strategies for answering experimental questions. In particular, he provides examples and advice on how to use the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyze these data.

Part three is devoted to survey research. In a chapter on the conceptual and methodological challenges associated with preparing survey questions and analyzing data, contributing author Scott Keeter describes sampling in great detail and follows up with a discussion of the pros and cons of various data collection modes.

Parts four and five focus on case-based and document analyses, integrating theory and method, and providing excellent examples that serve as useful templates for how to conduct and present results. In the final section of the book, Druckman discusses evaluation research.

*Doing Research* is perhaps most noteworthy for its breadth. It is fascinating to see how broadly conflict researchers ply their trade, using strategies from case analyses to experiments to interviews, and each method offers a distinct window on conflict and conflict resolution. Druckman is careful to point out how these windows differ from each other epistemologically, theoretically, and methodologically. By the time scholars and students work through this book, they should be well schooled in what we do as a field and equipped with the necessary tools to conduct research. I can envision this book being used in a seminar in which students are required to write a research paper in which each student is asked to explore one particular aspect of conflict resolution from a variety of epistemological and methodological perspectives, which would offer a great learning experience.



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*Methods of Negotiation Research*, edited by Peter Carnevale and Carsten De Dreu, is as exciting and diverse in its perspectives as *Doing Research*. This book is reprinted from Volumes 9 (3) and 10 (1) of *International Negotiation*. As such, they comprise a collection of twenty-four essays by thirty-four authors *about* methodology rather than a text on how to actually conduct a research project.

Each chapter is written by an expert who describes his or her preferred approaches to research. For example, the book begins with Jim Wall's journey into field research. I have read many of Wall's insightful articles over the years and have always wondered how he approached his subject matter — this chapter reveals his secrets. (I will reflect in greater detail on Wall's methods and their implications later in this essay.)

The next three chapters are qualitatively focused. David Matz makes a case for using case studies to expose how real negotiations work. Ray Friedman details the steps needed to conduct ethnographic research in negotiations, and Ronald Fisher gives us a glimpse into the fascinating world of problem-solving workshops, which are often cited as useful tools for bridging long-standing cultural differences. These four chapters, along with Linda Putnam's essay on conversation analysis and William Zartman's chapter on case studies, "cover the waterfront" on key qualitative approaches to conflict research.

Carnevale and De Dreu's book covers quantitative approaches thoroughly as well. Dan Druckman contributes a useful discussion on time-series analysis that further develops the discussion from his book. Jonathan Wilkenfeld contributes a comprehensive overview of simulation and experimentation. Dean Pruitt discusses field experiments, and Carnevale and De Dreu contribute another chapter on lab experiments. In addition, Aukje Nauta and Esther Kluwer describe how to use questionnaires, and Robin Pinkley, Michele Gelfand, and Lili Duan walk us through multidimensional scaling techniques.

This book also explores key *substantive* issues from a methodological frame. For example, Jacob Bercovitch reviews research in mediation from an archival perspective. Xu Huang, Evert Van de Vliert, and Catherine Tinsley explore issues of culture and conflict, and Bruce Barry and Ingrid Smithey Fulmer examine the issue of affect in negotiation, which is certainly a topic of growing interest. Rachel Croson looks at relevant issues in economics, and Rebecca Hollander-Blumoff examines research in law and negotiation. This section concludes with a discussion of the role of personality processes in conflict by Lauri Jensen-Campbell and William Graziano.

I was also pleased to see that *Methods of Negotiation Research* pays a great deal of attention to negotiation processes. Laurie Weingart, Mara Olekalns, and Philip Smith provide an excellent overview of quantitative coding to understand how humans interact in conflict situations, as well as a chapter on Markov chain models of communication processes. Process



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issues are seldom discussed in methods books, but these two chapters give readers an excellent sense of how this research is conducted. Two additional chapters deal with fairly new topics. In one, Alice Stuhlmacher and Treena Gillespie share their insights about meta-analysis as a research method, and, in the other, Yeow Siah Cha discusses techniques and issues associated with gathering data online.

Both books work together quite well. Druckman provides more specific methodological and statistical detail while also taking a step back to discuss epistemological issues. Carnevale and De Dreu's book will help students dig deeper into the major areas of research as they apply to their individual interests. Both books provide a great deal of challenging material, a lot to cover in a one-semester course. I suspect, however, that both books are intended also as resources for scholars as well.

What do these books tell us about the state of research in the conflict resolution field? What additional methods, or ways of discussing these methods, would extend our knowledge of conflict processes? Indeed some topics gaining ground in other fields do seem to be missing from these discussions. For example, a considerable body of work in both management and communication studies focuses on organizational conflict issues. Linda Putnam, Charles Conrad, and others in communication have talked about how employees and managers ought to address conflicts in the workplace. Methodologically, most of this research uses questionnaires of one form or another to address key issues, so the survey perspectives apply. But a discussion of the use of network analysis to explore issues of information flow and conflict could make a useful contribution to any future volume on conflict research methods.

Researchers have also made significant progress studying conflict and interpersonal relations. Those who study marital disputes have used interaction analysis as well as questionnaire data in an effort to understand how couples manage disputes and use various strategies to deal with one another. Finally, I suspect that sooner or later our field will become more involved in cultural/critical research perspectives. For example, the narrative mediation approach developed by John Winslade and Gerald Monk (2000) also seems to be gaining a following. A narrative approach draws on a post-structuralist analysis of power that emerges through the discourse. Mediators can use these narratives, Winslade and Monk argue, to manage power relations between parties and to produce more satisfactory conflict resolution outcomes.

## The Milestones

As we go forward in our field we must continuously account for the methods and strategies we use to understand conflict issues. Certainly, conflict touches every corner of society. Such phenomena as globalization, the movement to a knowledge-based economy, and the ascendance of



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culture as a consideration in nearly every endeavor make our field increasingly relevant. As a result, we must be even more accountable for our observations, even more aware of the need to provide accurate, reliable, tested information, and even more concerned with the relevance of our questions. What do these two books tell us about how well we are meeting these challenges? Are we progressing through the milestones that are essential for us to build and grow in relevance and value?

In my view, the publication of *Doing Research* and *Methods of Negotiation Research* constitutes an important milestone for the field of conflict analysis in several ways. First, they are groundbreaking for the interdisciplinary bounty of methodological riches that they display, with contributions from psychology, business, political science, communication studies, alternative dispute resolution, social work, and labor relations.

These books are impressive in range and scope. From the qualitative to the quantitative and the microscopic to the macroscopic, they describe research methodologies that, properly executed, are capable of producing profound insights into the incredibly complex phenomenon of human conflict. In the process, they provide solid evidence that the study of conflict and conflict resolution has indeed emerged as its own field. We have horizontally integrated our various interdisciplinary biases and we have done so with the necessary respect for our diverse approaches and methods.

I recall — not so long ago — having conversations with colleagues from psychology and business who asked, "What's this communication thing you're doing with all that coding?" I actually had to explain that negotiators *communicate* with each other, and that their verbal exchanges produce relationships, and that these communications and relationships both have a tremendous impact on negotiation outcomes. But I no longer need to explain such thinking because so much research on interaction and negotiation now appears in many different kinds of book and journals — in management, in psychology, in political science, and in so many other disciplines. It has become more important to understand conflict itself than to bolster or be defensive about our disciplinary training, and these two books underscore that fact.

A second milestone represented by these books is the legitimization of several newer research methodologies. Recently, I ran across an excellent study by Gerben Van Kleef et al. (2006) in the *Journal of European Social Psychology.* To explicate the role of anger in negotiation in the face of power differences, the authors presented five data sets using three distinct methodologies: an experiment, a field simulation, and three scenario studies. They sought to determine whether low-power negotiators are likely to concede in the face of an angry opponent, and the methodological diversity of their study proved useful in identifying the role of anger in such situations. Many of us have advocated such approaches in theory, and now they are being actively embraced in practice.



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In his book, Druckman explores this methodological diversity from a unique perspective. Rather than having individual authors comment on their favorite methods, with the help of coauthors, Druckman integrates the approaches, pulling together an array of methods that cut across the various disciplines. But he takes the additional step of providing extensive "how-to" information in a consistent format at a reasonably basic level, so that our students will have specific criteria for what high-quality work looks like in our field. This step makes it much easier to use these methods to see conflict phenomena from multiple perspectives, making our work competitive in the best journals.

These books mark another milestone in the way in which they accommodate an array of qualitative perspectives. Qualitative and quantitative research approaches rarely cohabitate peacefully. In some fields, shame is heaped upon "out-groups" who "go over to the dark side" methodologically. I have had such conversations with colleagues in my own field of communication. Sometimes, even talking with someone from "that school" can raise eyebrows. Certainly such conversations should not cause consternation among mature scholars. I think that the fact that such attitudes seem utterly ridiculous to those of us who work in conflict resolution is a sign of the field's vigor and maturity. Of course, each of us prefers some methods over others. But our values, as reflected in Druckman's careful treatment of the different conflict methodologies, reflect a strong commitment to pursue quality in *all* kinds of research methodologies rather than to define quality through methodological preference itself.

The fourth milestone for the field that these books signal involves generational, as well as disciplinary, diversity. We have passed the point at which the field is dominated only by scholars from one generation or another. As someone who has been active in the International Association for Conflict Management, handing out dissertation awards and attending conferences over the years, I find it striking how many young and talented researchers the field now attracts. It also encourages "young" thinking from its more seasoned talent. By young thinking, I mean an ability to expand one's perspectives, a flexibility ably demonstrated in both *Doing Research* and *Methods of Negotiation Research*.

How did the study of conflict achieve these milestones? Some essays from Carnevale and De Dreu's book offer some insights. In his essay on fieldwork, Wall discusses the importance of "getting lost." To Wall, getting lost means becoming immersed in unfamiliar territory and taking risks by exploring "strange" areas that nonetheless offer the potential of fascinating discovery and opportunities to learn and grow.

Wall "sort of" knows what he's looking for, but not really. He sees branching out as a chance to learn something unexpected, and he remains open to that possibility. For example, he has a general idea that there is something called a mediator in this unusual culture, but what does that



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really mean, and can we be open to new ways of thinking about the mediation role, particularly in the broader context?

Wall further argues that sometimes we can be *too* efficient. We are taught in our research to be maximally efficient in how we use subjects, develop concepts, present items on questionnaires, or use categories to code transcripts. Parsimony is scientific nirvana. The most efficient explanation consistent with the evidence is always best. But that ethic can restrict possibilities. "Getting lost," on the other hand, can mean to backtrack and to risk not making any progress for the sake of fully exploring those possibilities.

Wall argues for the virtues of "a fine mess." Getting lost is a messy process, particularly when one travels with someone who does not enjoy getting lost. But for Wall, the payoff has been significant, resulting in several articles that have substantially enhanced our thinking about mediation.

In her essay on discourse analysis in Carnevale and De Dreu's book, Putnam discusses "mucking around" with the data, which is another way of getting constructively lost. Her guidelines for mucking are informative: "Let the text and context talk to you; work back and forth between the text and the concepts; look for inconsistencies, ironies, or unexpected occurrences; dispute your own interpretation and explanation" (188). Indeed, there is much to learn from textual analyses about conflict.

Is it possible that many of us ventured into the area of conflict analysis with a willingness to get lost and muck around? Or, perhaps we were drawn to the field because the passion with which our colleagues pursue these questions is contagious. Whatever our motives, we ventured forth and have become this horizontally integrated tribe willing to enter strange territory, to become occasionally confused, and to continuously revisit our assumptions and observations. These books remind us how exciting this process can be.

## The Models

What are the conceptual implications of the research methods explored in these books? Before we can begin to answer this question, we must first understand epistemologically how we make knowledge claims about our subject matter, because the methods are intended to bolster the quality of those knowledge claims.

Scholars focusing on the ways in which we make knowledge claims typically point to four kinds of relationships. The first is *nomic necessity*, which posits causal forces between phenomena, or a time-ordered cause–effect relationship. We typically use experiments to control phenomena in such a way that we can isolate the causal mechanisms and then employ the appropriate statistics to estimate the strength of that nomic necessity.

The second epistemological relationship is *logical necessity*, which posits that phenomena are bound by a set of variables that combine in



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some kind of process to accomplish a goal. Systems theory is generally used to show how system variables combine in order to accomplish a goal. And, while different kinds of systems theories exist, they all seem to take this general form. The key methodological need is to identify the different elements in the particular system and then reveal how they work to accomplish a specific outcome. A typical example of a system approach is a causal model that identifies how variables combine to accomplish a specific outcome that is specified in the model.

Like nomic necessity, logical necessity is viewed as more deterministic, or beyond the conscious control of individuals. These forces are external to the individual and not under the person's discriminating control. In my view, system elements are not causally linked because it is impossible to achieve the kind of control necessary to make causal claims. One would need to remove the variance from all the combined elements to determine causality, which is impossible.

The third kind of phenomenological relationship is known as *practical force*, which describes how individuals make choices to accomplish their goals. These choices are under individual control: a person decides to move in this direction or that direction depending on what seems most pragmatically viable. Of course, the scholar invested in a causal, deterministic view of the world will claim that there is no such thing as free choice and that all choices are determined by forces beyond individual control, even though that scholar cannot directly observe that deterministic force (maybe we will someday). This choice-making process should not be viewed as a system process because the system goal is not governed by individual choice. Practical force does not seek to understand how elements combine to accomplish an overarching goal beyond individual intent, but rather how choices work toward selected ends. Scholars typically use interpretive research strategies to uncover various choice combinations. This scholarly form is distinct from a causal or system analysis because the researcher seeks to become intersubjectively involved in the research context, to "get lost" in it. In general, intersubjectivity is viewed by causal and system scholars as bias that compromises objectivity and, ultimately, knowledge claims. But it is revered in interpretive research.

The fourth kind of force is *moral necessity*, which focuses on how individuals use moral frameworks to guide their choices. Critical and cultural studies use highly interpretive approaches to determine the extent to which the choices of some impose moral imperatives on others. For example, making the choice to call a group of women "girls" can be viewed by the intersubjective scholar/participant as having the effect of devaluing the insights these women offer.

Given these four kinds of necessity, what can we learn about how our field is progressing methodologically and conceptually from these books? First, let us look at the various chapters in the Carnevale and De Dreu book.



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As noted previously, several chapters present interpretive pragmatic approaches to the study of conflict. The chapters by Wall, Friedman, Fisher, and Putnam are excellent examples of how to dive into the research process, become immersed in the phenomena, and present an informed view of certain negotiation events. None of these scholars identify a specific system of behaviors that functions independently of individual choice. Rather, they talk about how negotiators make choices to move the deliberations along in some interesting way. Note also that none of these posit the psychological constructs that may have driven individual choices; the emphasis instead is on the unique set of choices made in specific contexts.

On the other side of that epistemological coin are the researchers who work more from nomic necessity and causal relationships. This perspective is well represented in the conflict research and in these texts. As noted earlier, Druckman instructs readers quite successfully on how to conduct experiments and simulations in chapter three of his book. Carnevale and De Dreu's book provides another take on conducting laboratory experiments on social conflict both in their chapter on experiments and simulations, and in their summary chapter, which counted the prevalence of methods across studies from 1997 to 2001. They found that, by far, the greatest number of studies involved laboratory experiments. Surveys and questionnaires were used less frequently, and math modeling came in third. Chapters in the book dig deeper into these topics by focusing on multidimensional scaling and the use of experimental methods to study economics.

What biases do different experimental methods reveal? Generally, scholars using experimental and survey methods gravitate toward exploring psychological issues as drivers of negotiation behavior. Whether focusing on affect, power, frames, personality, styles, or trust, laboratory and field experiments seek to manipulate these constructs and examine the impact on outcomes. Much of the theoretical thinking is consistent with this tradition because psychological phenomena are treated as relatively stable constructs explored in comparatively static situations.

But those scholars who study systems have begun to make a significant impact on conflict research. Several chapters in both books focus on coding naturalistic or simulated interaction data to describe systems that achieve various goals of one form or another. For example, the Carnevale and De Dreu book includes a chapter on Markov Chain models, while Druckman's book looks at time-series analyses. Bercovitch's chapter on archival research in the Carnevale and De Dreu book provides basic information on how to think about conflict systems and the ways in which they are organized.

In my view, the chapters devoted to systems recognize the value of understanding process. The psychological orientation of disputants is important, but so too is their interaction and the larger systems within which they bargain. This focus on logical force makes it clear that systems explanations can be useful in understanding conflict. These explanations



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could be even more effective if they adhered to the requirements of cybernetic or structural-functional system metatheories (Monge 1977). As scholars become more sophisticated in thinking about systems and the logics behind them, more process theories will emerge. For now, we must settle for system descriptions rather than system theories.

As I noted earlier, what is missing from these books are cultural/critical methods of inquiry. The element of moral necessity is generally underrepresented in conflict research. The prominent cultural critical scholars who can ask tough questions about, for example, whether a mediation system is empowering for disadvantaged disputants are not represented. Conflict scholars often fail to critique the institutional structures and judge their appropriateness for disputants.

Some notable attempts to build this kind of scholarship can be found in the work of such scholars as Deborah Kolb and in her efforts to expose the role of gender in negotiations. Her examinations of the underlying power structures that women face at the bargaining table exemplify the need to focus on the overriding context within which disputes occur. This scholarship seeks to reveal the constraints imposed by the context and determine its moral imperative.

Another tool that can begin to deconstruct barriers to effective collaboration may be found in the workshop as a research tool. This action-oriented perspective, as Ron Fisher points out, seeks to balance power and develop relationships among disputants locked in difficult disputes. Disputants and ordinary citizens are brought together to both build relations and to learn one another's perspectives with the broader goal of exploring how the context of dispute resolution can be more justly formed and implemented to serve disputants' best interests.

## Conclusions

Going forward, I see at least three realities that scholars in this field must confront. First, many journals seem to expect more multistudy articles that use fairly disparate methods with the goal of triangulating or replicating results to demonstrate greater confidence in the findings. In negotiation, there seems to be an increasing emphasis on behaviors with less exclusive reliance on perceptual data. The implication of this is that we must train future generations to be more epistemologically flexible and to approach more broadly the phenomena we are interested in understanding. Our models must be less static and more externally relevant. That is, where we were once happy only with solid internal validity, it seems apparent that demonstrating strong external validity is now necessary, as well.

Second is the issue of the quality of questions that we are asking. Are we really asking the big questions that will move this field forward? While esoteric studies probing theoretically minor issues may prove effective for getting tenure or impressing deans, our research ought to probe much



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more interesting questions. We are a conflict field, and the world needs insights into these important processes. The standard answer to this question is that many tightly focused articles might someday collect into a grand scheme and produce something important. I hope we begin to make asking the big questions a priority, and use those "big ideas" to jump-start the process.

Third is the issue of technology. Are there methods of inquiry that show promise in other fields that might be relevant for us? Some of my colleagues studying video game impacts are using magnetic resonance imaging to capture brain activity as people play video games. I cannot imagine placing people inside an MRI machine and asking them to pick a fight and then analyzing their brain waves. But it does raise the question of whether or not we are taking advantage of technological breakthroughs to ask the tougher questions. So many conflicts occur online, and research in computer-mediated negotiation is beginning to emerge that shows some promising results.

Five years from now I hope we look back on *Doing Research* and *Methods of Negotiation Research* with some sense of pride. These methods books give us a coherence and legitimacy that is at the very least exciting and at the most imposing. They throw down the gauntlet for us to get better at what we do because they clearly define the standards for competent scholarship. Let us rise to the occasion and complete the vision of an interdisciplinary field on the forefront of social change.

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