

CONFLICT & DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Escalation & Structural Changes During Conflict

Instructions

When doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, it is *information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible position on an issue, rather than another.

Reading

Pruitt, D. G., & Kim, S. H. (2004). Escalation and Its Development. In *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement* (3rd ed., pp. 87–100). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Pruitt, D. G., & Kim, S. H. (2004). The Structural Change Model. In *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement* (3rd ed., pp. 101–120). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Questions

1. What is meant by conflict escalation? What are the five (or even six) transformations that generally occur as a conflict escalates?
2. What is a “structural change” during a conflict? Why do these changes encourage a conflict to escalate?
3. What are the six forms of psychological structural change discussed by Pruitt and Kim?
4. The **crude law of escalation** claims that structural changes encouraging heavier contentious tactics are also encouraged by those tactics.

For instance, blame encourages violence (Party blames Other and therefore acts violently towards Other) and blame is also encouraged by violence (Other blames Party for being violent).

How do all the six forms of psychological structural change follow this crude law?

5. The **proliferation law of structural change** claims that structural changes encouraging heavier contentious tactics usually generate further structural changes that also encourage heavier tactics.

For instance, blame often generates anger and hostile perceptions.

How do all the six forms of psychological structural change tend to follow this proliferation law?

When responding to questions 3, 4, and 5, fill out the table posted on the website. I’ve already done the first row for you. Please print out and bring this table to class, so we can discuss it together as a group.

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting.