CONF 399
Organizational Conflict and Conflict Resolution
Spring 2016

Wednesdays 10:30am-1pm
Hanover L002

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Office Hours by appointment

This course will focus on conflict that occurs within many types of organizations including businesses, public agencies, nonprofits, and activist collectives. Students will learn about the dynamics and causes of conflicts within organizations as well as how the environment in which these organizations operate can create or limit conflict. Specific tools and interventions will be addressed in order to more effectively manage conflict as well as approaches for developing resilient and successful organizations. The course will utilize case studies, student experience, and simulation.

Learning Objectives
- Understand the nature and dynamics of organizational conflict as well as best practices for avoiding it
- Learn skills appropriate for the resolution of organizational conflict
- Design and develop an in-depth project about an organization
- Develop a critical understanding of the contemporary workplace
- Demonstrate college-level oral and written communication skills.
- Apply skills that will facilitate collaborative learning.

CONF 399 Required Texts

There are three required texts that should be purchased for class:

- Brubaker, David, and Ruth H. Zimmerman. *The Little Book of Healthy Organizations: Tools for Understanding and Transforming Your Organization*. Good Books, 2009.
- Kostera, Monika. *Occupy Management: Inspirations and Ideas for Self-Organization and Self-Management*. Routledge, 2015.
- Vaughan, Diane. *The Challenger Launch Decision: Risky Technology, Culture, and Deviance at NASA*. University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Blackboard

This course will include a significant online component through the course Blackboard site. You will also use it to submit your assignments and to find the weekly reading assignments. Make sure you check Blackboard often.

Assignment Policies

All assignments, unless otherwise noted, should be turned in on Blackboard. Late work will be accepted, but the grade for the assignment will be reduced by 10% each day it is late. After five days, work will only be accepted if approved and then for a maximum of 50% credit. If you have a problem meeting a deadline, contact me before the assignment is due. Arrangements made after the due date are subject to the grade penalty.

Assignments

Organizational Project (three parts)
Each student will design and compete a project related to organizational conflict. We will discuss possible options for this in class, but while it could be a traditional research paper, it does not need to be.

- **Part One: Project Proposal** = 100 points. You will turn in an appropriate proposal for this project on xx.xx, explaining what you want to do, how you are going to do it, and why you think it is a useful project to do.
- **Part Two: Project Contract** = 100 points. In response to my comments on your proposal, you will draft a contract explaining exactly what you plan to deliver for this assignment and how it should be evaluated. A template will be distributed in class. Your contract must be approved before you can turn in the final project.
- **Part Three: Project Final** = 150 points for project, 50 for presentation. Turn in the completed project before class and give a short presentation of your work for the other students. Due 4/27.

Reading summaries = 200 points. Before class on Wednesday, submit a short paragraph summarizing each of the readings for the week as well as a discussion question.

Mid-term analysis = 200 points. We will watch the film *Boycott* in class on 3/16 and you will respond to a prompt for the next class period. Details will be handed out on the day of the film and the essay will be due 3/23.

Final reflection = 100 points. Write a short (1,000-word) Reflection on your experience and what you learned in the class. Due 5/4 by the end of the day.

Discussion/Exercise participation = 100 points.

Grading

Project Proposal: 100 points
Project Contract: 100 points
Project Final: 200 points
Reading summaries: 200 points
Mid-term: 200 points
Final reflection: 100 points
Discussion/exercise participation: 100 points

Total: 1000

Grading scale

930-1000 A
900-929 A-
870-899 B+
830-869 B
800-829 B-
770-799 C+
730-769 C
700-729 C-
600-699 D
0-599 F

Types of Assignments

Reflective writing assignments give you a chance to work with ideas and concepts from class in the context of another experience. In general, it is best to follow a What?, So What?, Now What? Format for these papers:

- **What?** Describe your experience. This may include some summary, but should be focused more on your experience as a viewer/reader/actor/participant. Do not simply summarize a text.
- **So What?** Incorporate the concepts and ideas from class into your experience. Did you see examples of these? Did the experience encourage you to think differently about them? What can these ideas and concepts tell us about the subject of your experience? What connections do you see?
- **Now What?** Contextualize the experience. How does it relate to your other work in the class, your other classes, or your future plans? Where are you going to take this knowledge?

Reflective writing should always be in an *I* voice, since you are writing about yourself. You can introduce the text or film you are discussing, but do not simply summarize it. The reflection is about you and your learning experience.

Informal writing assignments are just for the class. These could include discussion posts or in-class writing. You are writing so that your fellow students will be able to understand, but without formal requirements. This is not an excuse to avoid proofreading or citing your sources.

Professional/policy writing assignments give you a chance to practice writing for a professional audience, such as in a company or governmental organization. Although the requirements for these assignment can vary,

- Develop a good **thesis statement**.
- Develop your thesis through an **argument**.
- Use **evidence** that supports your argument, and explain how it does.
- **Persuade** your reader that your argument is sound and considers alternatives.
- Write in a **formal style**, avoiding contractions and slang. Be precise.

In most cases, an "I" voice will be appropriate, but think about this before starting.

Research writing assignments give you a chance to work outside of class on a question that specifically interests you and to arrive at your own answer to a research question. Research assignments will often include specific requirements and instructions, but in each case:

- Develop a good **research question**.
- Answer this question with an **argument**. You are not simply writing a report about what other people think.
- Use **evidence** that supports your argument, and explain how it does.
- **Cite** quotations, ideas, and data with a formal citation system.
- Write in a **formal style**, avoiding contractions and slang. Be precise.

Papers may utilize and "I" voice, if it is appropriate to the topic.

Academic Integrity

The integrity of the University community is affected by the individual choices made by each of us. Mason has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity. Three fundamental and rather simple principles to follow at all times are that: (1) all work submitted be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification. No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct. Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving the person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes. Paraphrased material must also be cited, using an established citation format (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.). A simple listing of books or articles is not sufficient. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in the academic setting. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me.

Disability and Learning Accommodations

If you have a documented learning disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with Office of Disability Services (SUB I, Rm. 4205; 993-2474; http://ods.gmu.edu) to determine the accommodations you need; and 2) talk with me to discuss your accommodation needs.

I appreciate that not all learning challenges can be covered by disability services and am committed to working with students who do not have formal disability statements as well as those who do. If you have particular needs that can be accommodated, let me know and I will do my best.

Diversity

GMU is an *intentionally* inclusive community that celebrates diversity and strives to have faculty, staff and students who reflect the diversity of our plural society. We do not discriminate on the basis of race, class, linguistic background, religion, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, or disability.

Schedule

1/20 Introductions
1/27 Reading Summary #1: *The Little Book of Healthy Organizations* chapters 1-4
2/3 Reading Summary #2: *The Little Book of Healthy Organizations* chapters 5-8
2/10 Reading Summary #3: *Occupy Management* intro and part I
2/17 Reading Summary #4: *Occupy Management* part II
2/24 Reading Summary #5: *Occupy Management* part III
3/2 Reading Summary #6: *Occupy Management* part IV and coda, project proposal due
3/16 No reading – watch Boycott in class
3/23 Reading Summary #7: *The Challenger Launch Decision* chapters 1 and 2
3/30 Reading Summary #8: *The Challenger Launch Decision* chapters 3 and 4, project contract due
4/6 Reading Summary #9: *The Challenger Launch Decision* chapters 5 and 6
4/13 Reading Summary #10: *The Challenger Launch Decision* chapters 7 and 8
4/20 Reading Summary #11: *The Challenger Launch Decision* chapters 9 and 10, appendix C
4/27 Final project presentations, final project due
5/4 No class, final reflection due