

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# Illuminating interviews: Insights into the hearts and minds of conflict resolution practitioners

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This article shares insights gleaned from interviews with nine experienced, successful conflict resolution practitioners engaged in a variety of interventions from a variety of organizations. The interviews were conducted first with graduate students participating in a class on “Reflective Practice.” Subsequently, the authors conducted a second round of interviews to appeal to a wider audience. Questions and topics addressed by the respondents included childhood disposition for this kind of work, critical milestones along the way, helpful characteristics/attributes, satisfaction they derive from their work, greatest challenges, lessons learned, and examples of “reflecting-in-action” utilization.

The genesis and impetus for this report evolved from five deeply felt concerns of the primary author. First, after 47 years working with graduate students in conflict resolution (CR), it became increasingly apparent that due to changes in the job market most graduates were finding work in the field as practitioners rather than as full-time college professors. Second, graduate degree curriculums in most universities, especially at the Ph.D. level, continue to emphasize theory and research methods over actual practice courses and supervised clinical opportunities and/or fieldwork. Third, current practice courses and training workshops in the CR field may be communicating the misguided impression that techniques, formulas, and conflict specialization (particularly with an over-emphasis on mediation, which attracts so many students to the field) will adequately prepare one to have successful career in the field. Fourth, hiring guidelines which mandate Ph.D.s and traditional academic publications for faculty appointments in our graduate programs, limit the opportunity for student exposure to practitioners that would provide a more realistic picture of both the art and science of professional work in our field. Finally, more foundational emphasis on what Donald Schön (1983) pioneered as “reflecting-in-action” in his highly influential book, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professional Think in Action*, would better prepare aspiring CR practitioners to adroitly confront unanticipated client responses and behaviors.

These combined concerns influenced the primary author's decision to create a graduate course elective titled *The Reflective Practitioner: Consulting, Conflict, and Change in Organizational Settings*. One of the course creator's primary goals was to provide his students with exposure to real world CR practice via personal interviews with seasoned, successful practitioners representing a variety of CR disciplines. In securing such an educational opportunity, the primary author/course creator contacted practitioners who have developed reputations for effective CR practice and extended an invitation for them to share their CR journeys with the students. The ultimate goal of the course was to provide the graduate students with a more realistic understanding of some of the actual challenges and requirements of practitioners in conducting diverse CR interventions, coupled with the abundant rewards practitioners derived from their work.

To ensure a comprehensive view of what successful work in the CR field requires, the primary author originally developed a set of 10 interview questions designed to highlight the roles and functions of the nine interviewees. The questions solicited feedback about what led the interviewees into the CR line of work, what they found to be most meaningful in their practice, what major challenges they have faced, key lessons learned, and what particular CR skills, attributes or characteristics they believed contributed to their success. Another key area of focus was how the practitioners utilized Donald Schön's (1983) "reflection-in-action" principles. After reviewing transcripts of the responses to the questions and observing the profound impact of the interviews on the students, the primary author was motivated to share some of the findings with a wider audience of people in different stages of their CR careers. To accomplish this, he enlisted critical assistance from the two co-authors, who contributed greatly with the logistics, research and writing of the report.

Following evaluation of the initial interview data and receiving advice from other experts in the CR field, the authors elected to conduct a second round of interviews with the original interviewees to probe deeper into their insights and experiences. They believed this would enhance the breadth of the responses and appeal to a wider audience of CR practitioners.

It is the hope of the authors that this report will benefit individuals aspiring to work in the CR field and also serve CR practitioners who ordinarily do not get to share insights, concerns and analyses with other CR professionals due to the solitary nature of the work. For the purpose of brevity, the responses to all of the questions are not included in the following text.

Our report is unique in several ways. We consciously selected and interviewed a variety of CR specialists who practice mediation, but who also conduct other types of CR interventions. Our contribution also differs in that we did not focus on a particular aspect of our field, such as the transforming effect on our specialists, or on one specific expertise. Our questions were wide-ranging to lend insights to students and others about how CR practitioners view their work, what motivates them, and what drives the choices they make. Above all, our hope was that this glimpse into the "hearts and minds" of professionals in our field would advance our understanding of some factors that influence success among CR practitioners.

## 1 | METHODOLOGY

When constructing the list of possible interviewees, the primary author wanted variety among domestic and international workers; among those whose primary jobs were in government, higher education or private consulting businesses; and among the types of conflict work practiced. He also sought respondents who have worked in the field for at least 10 years and are viewed as highly successful in their work. The final list comprised nine interviewees, including three professors who are also active practitioners, three organizational ombudspersons (ombuds) at major state universities or within a

government agency, one U.S. practitioner who performs ombuds related work (but who has a more general CR title within the Office of Inclusion and Diversity at her university), one government contractor who specializes in conflict systems design, and one Canadian practitioner who leads his own international negotiation firm.

The original interviews were conducted via a university conference call system with the class participants seated around a conference table. The students took turns introducing themselves, and subsequently, asking one of the 10 questions. The in-class interviews lasted between 50 and 60 min and were scheduled May 17–19, 2018. After gathering additional feedback, a second round of 30–60 min interviews were conducted by the authors during late 2018. All of the interviewees gave permission to be audio-recorded before both interview sessions.

The authors fully transcribed the interviews. From the 50 plus pages of transcribed notes, the team selected the most salient themes and insights conveyed in response to each question. Illustrative quotes are included to give actual voice to the respondents. Some liberties were taken in creating paraphrases from actual quotes to promote clarity for readers. However, sentences or phrases that seemed particularly interesting, innovative or critical were kept “as is” and presented as direct quotes from the interviewees. Quotes cited in the published manuscript were preauthorized for use by each of the interviewees.

## 2 | SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO SELECTED QUESTIONS

**Question 1:** How do you define yourself, and what are the main activities/functions/roles you are doing today as a conflict management practitioner? (See Appendix A for a quick reference guide to the following interviewees.)

Roy Baroff, J.D., is a mediator, educator, and ombuds. In addition to mediation and teaching/training, he primarily serves as the faculty and staff ombuds at North Carolina State University, located in Raleigh, North Carolina. Baroff has changed how he identifies himself, from a conflict resolution professional to a “conflict engagement professional.” He desires to empower people to personally engage their own conflicts and disputes as they work with him as a conflict coach and facilitator, thereby creatively strategizing their own conflict solutions. For more than 25 years, Baroff has conducted court-based and workplace mediations and has served as an arbitrator and provider of conflict resolution skills to businesses and organizations.

Brian Bloch, M.A., is the organizational ombuds for the U.S. Department of Interior, working primarily with Native Americans. He also serves as a pro bono ombuds for the Hare Krishna community. He offers facilitation, conflict coaching, a variety of trainings, and some mediation as part of his ombuds duties. Bloch is committed to building and modeling conflict management competencies and integrating the use of collaborative problem solving and dispute resolution processes in all areas of the Department's work. One of his favorite duties is conducting group activities that utilize a combination of organizational development-type techniques to help teams work more in harmony.

Toran Hansen, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor in the Department of Conflict Analysis and Dispute Resolution at Salisbury University, located in Salisbury, Maryland. Hansen's initial foray into the field of conflict resolution was with restorative justice and mediating violent disputes in the West Palm Beach, Florida, county court system. His major interests are in restorative/transitional social justice and conflict transformation approaches to dialogue. Hansen has also conducted domestic and international trainings and interventions with many groups, including nonprofit organizations and

among indigenous peoples in South America. He is the author of *The Generalist Approach to Conflict Resolution* (2012), which promotes the idea of being a “conflict guide.”

Evan Hoffman, Ph.D., is currently a Senior Associate at the Canadian International Institute of Applied Negotiation and a mediator with Concorde Inc. During the past 10 years, he has conducted workshops and trainings with hundreds of community leaders, university students, police officers, and government officials around the world. Hoffman loves that “no two days are really the same in the field,” especially in his international work, which takes him to many challenging conflict spots throughout the world. Hoffman has published numerous articles on the themes of conflict prevention and resolution, mediation, and peace building. In addition, he has provided consulting services to the United Nations, the European Union, the Carter Center, the Ottawa Police Service, and the Vietnamese Ministry of Justice. Hoffman also coedited, with David Carment, *International Mediation in a Fragile World* (Routledge, 2017).

Carole Houk, LLM, is a conflict management consultant, attorney, and the owner of *Carole Houk, International LLC*, which specializes in designing integrated conflict management systems for businesses and government using conflict management practitioners included in her referral roster. One of her principal clients is the U.S. Department of the Interior. As to why she spends much of her time obtaining work for others, she remarked, “I’m good at getting the work, which is hard for many practitioners who like doing the work but don’t like writing proposals or marketing and getting out there.” Houk has a master’s degree in labor law and has practiced as an attorney and labor lawyer for the U.S. Navy. She developed the *Medical Ombudsman/Mediator Program* in 2001 at the National Naval Medical Center to help resolve patient-provider disputes at the point of care. Her program was subsequently adopted by Kaiser Permanente in 2003 and is currently in place at dozens of its medical centers. Houk is a published author, frequent presenter at national and international conferences, and a popular keynote speaker.

Following a 37-year career as a professor, director of several applied programs, and Training Manager of Executive Education at the Maxwell School of Syracuse University, Neil Katz, Ph.D., has served as a professor and former chair of the Department of Conflict Resolution Studies at Nova Southeastern University for the past 10 years. He also leads his own organizational consulting firm, *Dr. Neil Katz and Associates*. In this capacity, he has worked with numerous prestigious organizations in national and state government, the private business sector, and local community groups, including many school systems. Among his most frequent interventions are trainings in supervisory mediation, interest-based negotiations, and emotional intelligence; facilitations with labor-management councils; mediation in school contract negotiations; and workplace mediations.

At the time of the interviews, Nkaze Chateh Nkengtego, Ph.D., was serving as the Director of Conflict Resolution and Mediation Programs at East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina. She worked with multiple departments and campus groups to help facilitate conversations, identify systemic issues and problematic trends, and aid administrators in forging impactful and timely solutions. Nkengtego offered services such as conflict coaching, mediation, facilitation, and conflict management workshops. Nkengtego is a Certified Mediator with North Carolina’s Office of State Human Resources and a Certified District Criminal Court Mediator, mediating criminal cases in the District Criminal Court of Raleigh, North Carolina. During her tenure at East Carolina University, Nkengtego facilitated numerous workshops and managed more than 130 visitor cases. Since the interviews, Nkengtego has transitioned to a new position working with a nonprofit organization in Syria.

Steven Prevaux, J.D., serves as the University of South Florida’s System Ombuds Officer, having launched the ombuds program in January 2016. He previously served as the university’s General Counsel. His office serves 15,500 faculty, staff, and administrators with workplace conflicts and employment concerns. In addition, he works with small groups and provides assessments, training,

and facilitation. Prevaux serves on the Board of Directors of The Florida Academy of Professional Mediators and is a Certified Organizational Ombuds Practitioner by the International Ombudsman Association. He also holds certification from the Florida Supreme Court as a Circuit Civil and Appellate Court Mediator and is a certified trainer in Workplace Conflict Resolution.

Susan Raines, Ph.D., is an Associate Director and Professor in the School of Conflict Management, Peacebuilding, and Development at Kennesaw State University (Kennesaw, Georgia). She has mediated more than 16,000 disputes in the United States and around the world. Among her many publications, Raines is the author of *Conflict Management for Managers* (2013) and coauthor, along with Jean Poitras, of *Expert Mediators* (2013). Raines describes herself as an “old school” practitioner who works across substantive areas. Her primary work is in organizational conflict management and mediation through the courts, including domestic relations, landlord/tenant, accident/injury, and small claims. She also facilitates and mediates special education cases for the Georgia Department of Education, conducts group facilitation for organizations, and provides executive coaching to enhance management skills.

**Question 2:** What are some examples of the most interesting conflicts you have worked with?

Although a couple of respondents identified a particular conflict experience in response to this question, most respondents described the types of conflict they find fascinating and rewarding to work with.

Prevaux: “As an organizational ombuds, I work with diverse and challenging workplace disputes that have included health care professionals, such as surgeons, nurses, and clinical providers, struggling with change management issues; faculty experiencing policy disconnects; and higher level administrators facing issues between leadership and employees. ... Our main practice is focused on essential 1:1 interactions with employees to actively facilitate resolution of workplace conflicts and concerns. ... While each case bears its own unique identity, some of the more interesting issues surfaced in the course of facilitating the alignment of diverse constituencies to form a health care co-operative.”

Raines: “I facilitated the first watershed water planning effort in Georgia, with more than 35 stakeholder groups over 8 years. This was an important collaborative effort to manage water across jurisdictional lines. Now the group has ‘graduated’ to self-facilitation and is going strong.”

Hansen: “The most interesting conflicts for me tend to be ones where there is a lot on the line. So mediating between people who have committed acts of violence and the people that they harmed is highly rewarding.” Hansen is fascinated with conflict scenarios that can be directed through use of restorative justice techniques. He likes to facilitate interactions between perpetrators and their victims to bring about understanding and hopefully, some level of healthy healing.

Hoffman: “I particularly remembered the work I did in Sudan, which included helping the ambassador collect and analyze data to create regular briefings that assisted in his diplomatic efforts.”

Katz: “Perhaps the most interesting conflict I worked with was some ongoing facilitating/mediation work with a National Partnership Council within one of our largest government agencies. They had endured a long history of very adversarial relations, which resulted in expensive litigation and angry feelings. Over time, we had some success in helping them work some issues in a more collaborative manner.”

Baroff: Perhaps Baroff’s response most succinctly articulated an underlying insight embraced by the collective interviewees. “Tough question. ... Every conflict for the people involved is one of the most interesting conflicts they’re involved with. ... I try to bring a sense of curiosity into every conflict I participate in.”

## 2.1 | Driving themes

Baroff’s insight serves as a reminder to both novice and veteran CR practitioners that conflict resolution is all about the client/visitor, not necessarily the conflict scenario, and, most certainly, not about the practitioner. Conflict resolution is all about “people” in conflict and helping them achieve what is most important to them in mutually satisfying ways.

Finally, the collective responses demonstrated that successful conflict resolution practitioners work in a variety of settings including family, labor-management, environmental CR, criminal justice, and international peace relations. In each of these areas, the experience and talent of the practitioners interviewed seemed to have a meaningful and positive effect.

**Question 3:** What are some examples of your work you were most proud of? Least proud of? What would you have done differently or will do next time?

Houk: “Most proud of my work with the Navy and Kaiser Medical, especially Kaiser where we established healthcare ombuds, which makes an impact on many people’s lives. It is still operating in each of their large medical centers.”

Least proud of and do differently: “work in designing an internal conflict management system for an organization that was so successful and innovative that we wanted to shout out from the rooftops, write about it, and use it for marketing, but they wouldn’t let us. I am now more careful negotiating this issue during the contracting phase.”

Prevaux: “A case that I’m most proud of involved an on-going dispute between a highly successful researcher and an upper-level administrator. This intervention saved both stakeholders from incurring substantial economic and reputational costs that they had previously underestimated. After they became more aware of the potential costs, they were able to thoughtfully break the pattern of personal disregard and counter-attack and address and resolve the material issues. Both sides have since expressed appreciation for the facilitation of a dialogue that resulted in a lasting resolution.”

“Another case involved two tenured faculty members whose collegial relationship had degenerated into indirect and adversarial communications over many months and was worsening. This workplace dysfunction strained collateral peer relationships leading to

cancellation of faculty meetings for the entire semester. The acrimony was starting to spill over into vital areas, potentially risking missing key performance metrics that, if not resolved, could hamper student success. Fortunately, we were able to facilitate a voluntary, confidential and informal meeting that successfully cleared the air between the colleagues and enabled them to restore more productive workplace communication.”

Least proud of: “Working with a productive mid-level manager in an area of strategic importance, yet the manager was widely regarded as abrasive and the subject of increasing complaints of bullying. Our intervention helped individuals to better understand their options and ways they could align their talents with successful workplace outcomes. However, one productive employee with specialized knowledge left the work unit and the organization due to the continued disrespectful behavior of the supervisor. In that instance, I experienced the disappointment voiced by other ombuds who noted that ‘helping good employees get jobs elsewhere’ leaves one with an empty feeling.”

Raines: “Most proud of a family probate case that had been to court twice due to multiple appeals and unresolved conflict because it was essentially relational and the courts were treating it as if it was legal. There were about six parties in the probate matter. The agreement I was part of resulted in their commitment to draft a shared letter to the broader extended family explaining why they were dismissing the litigation and asking everyone for forgiveness and a fresh start. It was my privilege and honor to be present for this watershed moment in their lives.”

“Least proud of: My first mediation case. I wish I could go back in time and give them a refund! After the parties' opening comments, I basically panicked and declared an impasse. I did not have enough tools in my belt to address the challenges facing the parties. If that case came my way today, I am confident a deeper dive into interests, options, reframing, etc. would produce a more positive outcome.”

Katz: “I am perhaps most proud of my work as the facilitator of a negotiation between a solid waste authority (SWA) and a poor, rural town on whether there would be any “community benefits” for the town in having a solid waste plant in its vicinity. The negotiations took place after the SWA had already won total victory in the courts and the plant was built and operating, so no preconstruction community benefits were mandatory or necessary, even though the town negotiators hoped they would gain some.

In hindsight, there were three decisions I made that significantly impacted successful negotiations during the 3 months of weekly meetings. The first was related to leverage—especially over the obviously more powerful group. This leverage ultimately came from a discovery that the chief negotiator for the SWA was nearing retirement and was concerned about his reputation/legacy as a ‘fair and decent guy’ who cared about vulnerable people and communities. The second move that proved very helpful, since I really didn’t know much about the environmental issues and the parties at the table, was arranging for two friends and public relations professionals I had taught in an interest-based negotiation class to work with each of the respective teams as negotiation

coaches. The third helpful move was bringing two students with me who were experts in environmental issues. They assisted with the negotiations by establishing rapport with the parties via their professional understanding of the environmental issues at hand and the unique ‘field’ language the parties were using.

Ultimately, the negotiations were successful and ended up with a \$10-million dollar community benefit package of SWA payments to the town.”

“Least proud of and lessons learned? School contract negotiations in a medium-sized urban school district. The teacher's union was headed by a very strong leader and tough negotiator who had previously ‘delivered the goods to the union’ by very determined and aggressive position-based adversarial bargaining. The school district administrative team, at least on the surface, was more committed and disciplined in trying to use an interest-based, cooperative mutual gains approach.

After several sessions, I noticed the six other members of the teacher's union team were becoming more silent and detached in the face-to-face meetings with their counterparts, and only giving minimal affirmative head nods to the very strong demands and adversarial tones of the union head spokesperson. Little progress was made. It was only after we were well into the negotiations that I realized that the union leader's head and heart seemed to be more wired to that of a ‘street fighter’ than a mutual gains problem solver. Ultimately, my work with them was largely unsuccessful.

From that encounter, I learned an important lesson that served me well with other group negotiations. That is that intra-group dynamics are sometimes as important, or even more important, than inter-group negotiations. In the aforementioned negotiations, I needed to pay more attention to the dynamics within each of the bargaining groups. And, of course, pay more attention to the critical role of leadership, working with all echelons of leadership to ensure they were committed to an interest-based approach.”

## 2.2 | Driving themes

Our interviewees expressed a deep sense of pride and accomplishment in their efforts to play critical roles in navigating very difficult, seemingly intractable conflicts by using the knowledge, skills, and intuition gained from years of experience in conflict resolution work. Nevertheless, their best efforts sometimes failed to bring about the desired results. However, rather than obsessing over their perceived failures, they all elected to take a more positive path, to learn from their mistakes, and to allow their missteps to become new tools in their expanding toolbox of conflict resolution skills.

**Question 4:** What about your work do you find most meaningful and that allows you to sustain your enthusiasm and effort over time?

A critical focus of our interviews was to gain insights about what our seasoned practitioners found most meaningful in their work and what sustained their motivation to continue working in the field. In essence, we wanted to know what provided a kind of “North Star” or powerful “magnet” for them in providing guidance and momentum, especially during difficult times.

### 2.3 | Memorable quotes

Houk: “I am continually motivated to provide resources for healthier workplaces. I think all the work that we're doing now is making the government a much better place to work and it is so necessary to be doing this work right now for the people I know, people in government that didn't leave, are staying and fighting, and showing up every day.”

Hoffman: “What helps me sleep well at night is the knowledge at the end of the day that I made a positive impact in the chaotic world we live in.”

Baroff: “It's really this idea of helping people help themselves. ... I sometimes get a call or an email that says, ‘You really helped me think through this. I was able to work it out.’ That's what it's all about.”

Prevaux: “People are so unfamiliar with the conflict resolution skills and concepts that we teach, and after they learn these things, it is almost miraculous how it opens new doors and avenues of perspective they hadn't thought of before.”

Nkengtego: “I am inspired by the change I see in visitors being open to new options.”

Raines: “The work gives people hope! They leave feeling they have a path forward.”

Hansen: “I find meaning in helping people find their best selves, especially in those ‘transformative moments’ during very humbling and awe-inspiring work with restorative justice.”

Bloch: “Developing trust and relationships with Native Americans, helping them deal with their conflicts and their challenges is really a great honor. ... Showing them respect and then, interestingly, getting respect in return, has been one of the most fulfilling things for me.”

Katz: “The sense that I am helping to move people from a place of pain and unresourcefulness to a place of being able to sleep better at night and greater resourcefulness in seeing some light at the end of the tunnel. Also, in some small sense, I am helping to accomplish the important Jewish mandate of ‘tikkun olam’ (the Hebrew term for practicing social responsibility for ‘repairing the world’).”

### 2.4 | Driving themes

Consistent throughout the interviewees' responses about what keeps them motivated in the CR field is “helping people” and making the world a better place. All of the interviewees agreed that effective practitioners must be “people driven,” not necessarily money, career or self-advancement driven. Impactful CR practitioners hold a collective passion for making the lives of others more manageable, meaningful and healthy.

**Question 5:** Are there occasions when you questioned if you were as helpful as possible? If so, how do you process your thoughts and feelings?

Even though we were interviewing practitioners who are strongly committed to CR work and to their clients, and viewed as highly successful professionally, we were curious to discover if they

periodically revisited and reevaluated their past work. We wanted to learn how they processed their thoughts and feelings, and how they self-identified shortcomings following challenging engagements.

## 2.5 | Memorable quotes

Houk: “In almost everything I’ve done I’ve looked at it and thought, ‘Why did I say that? Why did I do that? Why didn’t I bring in somebody else?’ There are always some things that I could have done differently. You have to be open to what those things are, which is part of good reflective practice.”

Baroff: “You have to remember that the conflicts that come to you as a neutral are NOT yours, as much as you might want to make them yours, or as much as you may feel like they are yours. So, there is a need to learn how to protect yourself. To make sure you are connected to what’s going on so that it means something to you, to be fully engaged in the process, and yet, have to ‘not’ care too much about outcomes.”

Prevaux: “If you think you helped everybody all the time, you might not have helped anybody very much. I need the negative feedback. Some things I might ask if it doesn’t seem to be going well are, ‘How can I help you now? ... What can we do now that would be more helpful to you? ... What does success look like?’”

Raines: “Every time I’ve left a mediation, I’ve had questions in my mind about how I might have done it differently, even when it went well. With everything we do there’s a possibility of a kind of second guessing ourselves, which is part of the reflective practice model in that you’re actually learning from each case you do.”

“I’ve had to remind myself that we might be just one snapshot in a bigger process of change. And, it’s only my job to kind of lay the groundwork or the foundation and hope the seed we plant may come to grow later if it didn’t grow now. Part of it is being humble and not taking too much responsibility for other people’s decisions. But that must be balanced with the important role that we have in helping people change.”

Hoffman: “The reflective practitioner has to know their strengths as well as their weaknesses and has to be humble enough to say, ‘Maybe I am not the right person to help in this case because of those weaknesses.’”

Katz: “More often than not, I have thoughts about what I ‘should have said or done’ to be more effective, even if by other standards the intervention went well. I guess I am a ‘Monday morning quarterback!’ It takes a toll, yet it does motivate me to keep on learning and progressing in my craft.”

## 2.6 | Driving themes

Although the interviewees are considered very successful in their professional work, they also seemed to possess genuine humility, emotional maturity and a thirst for continuous learning and improvement that motivates them to revisit their efforts, to think about possible missed opportunities,

and to pursue even better future outcomes. Indeed, they saw authentic self-evaluation as one of the central requirements of good reflective practice, together with a realistic reminder that they are only one variable in a complex system, having an important, yet limited role.

**Question 6:** What led you to this kind of work and what do you consider key characteristics or attributes that help determine success in this field?

Another key aspect of our inquiry focused on uncovering what the respondents believed were “milestones” or “signals” that influenced their choice to make conflict resolution work central in their careers. We wanted to understand what they perceived as the most important characteristics, attributes and skills they possessed or had to develop to effectively practice in this field.

## 2.7 | Memorable quotes

Houk: “My uncle was a labor lawyer, and I started out as a lawyer in labor relations. Then I heard and read about interest-based negotiation and thought ‘well, that’s great stuff and that’s what I’d like to do.’ Then I used the approach to handle a whole slew of cases in the Navy. The most influential role models and mentors for my work in labor relations negotiation, system design, and the role and function of ombuds were Christina Merchant and Mary Rowe.”

“The characteristics you need are patience and persistence, because people in conflict might be jumpy and angry and sad, and often irrational and mean and unpleasant. You have to be able to stay in that mode to sit in the unpleasantness with them. ... Many times, you might want to say, ‘snap out of it,’ but you have to be patient to allow them to get to the point when they can move forward.”

Baroff: “Even as a young boy, when an argument broke out during football, I was a bit of a mediator and would say, ‘Hey, guys, let work this out. Let’s figure it out.’”

“What’s helpful for me is that I have a firm belief that the idea there are two sides to every story is wrong. There are really six or seven sides! ... One way to help stay neutral or impartial is thinking, ‘I believe everything everybody tells me when I’m in my role as a neutral, and I don’t believe anything they tell me.’ I sort of suspend my belief and that allows me to not take a side, to not get too focused on one avenue versus another.”

Nkengtego: “When there was a commotion at school, fellow students would say to me, ‘you’re the diplomat, you go talk to the principal or teacher.’ I remember being awarded the ‘peacemaker’ of the year award in ninth grade and later receiving the ‘most trustworthy’ award. When I told my father about wanting to pursue a doctorate in conflict resolution at Nova Southeastern University, my father replied, ‘Well, you were born for this so it must be the right call.’ I was also greatly influenced by my professors in the Department of Conflict Resolution Studies.”

“What is essential [to conflict resolution] is a combination of empathy and staying resourceful. When visitors come to you they are very emotional; they will shed some

tears and you want to be able to convey to them you know what they are going through, but at the same time keep some distance.”

Prevaux: “I would characterize my transition to this field as evolutionary in nature. I was trained as a lawyer initially, but gradually obtained a hunger to help people navigate conflict more constructively.”

“To understand what's really going on in terms of perceptions and dynamics requires going beyond active listening, it is active engagement, an assessment. It's really working with the person to see the conflict through their eyes without getting sucked into taking a position on it. ... Contextual awareness is critical. For ombuds in the organization, it's context, context and context! Having an actual, real-time awareness of what's going on in your corporate culture so you can see where the individual's concerns, challenges and problems fit within the larger mosaic of the organization you're helping to become healthier.”

Raines: “Looking back, I think I partially utilized the conflict resolution skill set as necessary and helpful to navigate the complexities of my neighborhood and family, although several important professors and mentors, such as Lisa Amsler, Rosemary O'Leary, and Gail Bingham, served as catalysts to make this the central focus of my career.”

“We have to have healthy boundaries while being empathic. That's a kind of a tightrope walk, and some people seem better able to do it than others. ... Resilience is helpful because you do have setbacks within a mediation or an intervention, and you need to absorb that and then keep going. ... Humor, you have to have it to survive the hard times and to help other people survive them.”

Hansen: “I believe I developed my thirst for work in peace, justice and conflict resolution in young adulthood by serving as a probation officer, a Peace Corps volunteer, and having a close friend in youth prison. My most influential mentors included Mark Umbreit and Howard Zehr for their work in restorative justice, and John Paul Lederach for his elicitive approach for working with communities.”

“I think the core of it [conflict resolution] is really demonstrating some kind of care and empathy for people and then, even if you screw up and do something completely wrong according to the textbooks, it won't matter quite as much because people will know you're really trying and you're with them. ... You need a sort of internal guide telling you to try to help people and try to be a good person even though this doesn't show up in the scholarship very much.”

Bloch: “My work doing facilitation work with the Hare Krishna Society and my 12-year experience as a monk were critical in my evolution. An important milestone was having a family friend, Arnold Zak, ignite my interest in mediation and introduce me to Mary Rowe, who became my main mentor, coach, confidant and advocate for the next 16 years.”

“This might sound trite, but a sense of humor is critical for me. That’s kind of my nature. When doing training, I’m a firm believer in ‘edutainment’ as opposed to the antithesis of ‘death by PowerPoint.’ When doing facilitation, I keep trying to create a certain ethos, a certain mood in the room. That’s an intangible thing, but it really pushes the tangible results in a good direction. ... Going beyond the techniques and actually being curious, wanting to hear what they have to say, and listening carefully. That’s really where the rapport comes in.”

Hoffman: “I was ushered into this field by my father who was a conflict resolution scholar, practitioner, and co-founder of the Canadian International Institute of Applied Negotiation, so my desire to do peace building work almost felt like a calling.”

Katz: “I believe I am a product of entering young adulthood in the social change initiatives of the 1960s and becoming involved in the civil rights and anti-war movement through action and scholarship in nonviolence. When I started my academic career, I was very fortunate to have Jim Laue and Jerry Cormick as mentors, and later on work with influential colleagues like Jack Lawyer and Catherine Gerard.”

“I think what is most important is curiosity, fascination, tolerance, and compassion. Curiosity and fascination with human behavior (mine and others’!), and tolerance and compassion of the mystery and challenges of human relationships, particularly in organizational settings where you ordinarily don’t have a chance to choose your work associates.”

## 2.8 | Driving themes

In hindsight, several respondents spoke of some “disposition” that influenced their career choice, although the initial trait was further directed by contextual factors, such as becoming a young adult in the 1960s or having a friend in youth prison. Even more significant in moving the respondents to make conflict resolution the focus of their careers were powerful role models and mentors who inspired and guided them.

Among the characteristics, attributes and skills cited, empathy, authenticity, patience, curiosity, and persistence were the driving themes repeatedly articulated by the interviewees. These characteristics helped them work with clients in very challenging, difficult, and heightened emotional states.

Another less obvious driving theme was the need to “stay true to yourself ... to be who you are.” Interwoven throughout the responses were examples of personal characteristics and traits that contributed to the interviewees’ success, such as a playful sense of humor, modesty and fascination with human behavior. This is not to suggest that these characteristics and attributes cannot be enhanced by developmental work; however, it does suggest that aspiring CR practitioners might take a careful inventory of characteristics and traits that are particularly important and strong in their lives, and think about how their strengths can be aligned for success in this type of work.

**Question 7:** What place has Donald Schön’s concept of reflection-in-action played in your practice when you have been faced with *unanticipated* responses from clients?

For a course titled *The Reflective Practitioner*, questions about “knowing-in-action” and “reflecting-in-action” were critical for the researchers. Since the introduction of Schön’s work, scholars have paid increasing attention to ways practitioners engage their work, handle unanticipated challenges, and enhance competency. Cheetham and Chivers (1998) sought to advance this competency by researching 80 practitioners from 20 different professions, a blend between the reflective practitioner approach introduced by Schön and competency-based approaches. Their model was heavily influenced by Schön’s challenge to the conventional view of professional practice and his attention to both knowing-in-action and reflecting-in-action, which transforms the practitioner into engaging a form of “artistry” instead of relying solely on applied theory. Schön’s epistemology has become a fundamental dogma in many professional development programs (Cheetham & Chivers, 1998).

Watson and Wilcox (2000) suggested both novice and seasoned reflective practitioners must learn to attend to their everyday experiences through careful study of ways to develop deeper insights into their perceptions, experiences, and roles. Reflection, whether silently, audibly or in the moment, is a pivotal step to enhancing learning and sharpening a practitioner’s personal and professional experiences. Reflection provides an opportunity for practitioners to “catch ourselves in the act of practice” and ask challenging questions (2000, p. 58).

One of our goals in doing the interviews with experienced practitioners was to better understand Schön’s distinction between knowing-in-action and reflecting-in-action and to discover if our interviewees engaged in both (1983). Schön’s first approach, knowing-in-action, represents a professional’s ability to utilize his/her learned knowledge, skills, experience and “repertoire of expectations, images and techniques” (1983, p. 60) to be fully prepared for and ready to encounter *anticipated* conflict situations. As a professional becomes more experienced and skillful, responsive actions become more repetitive and routine, normally yielding intended results toward *anticipated* challenges. “Actions, recognitions, and judgments are carried out spontaneously without having to think about them prior to or during the performance (p. 54).” However, when a professional is suddenly confronted with an *unanticipated* response, be it pleasing, promising, or unwanted, she/he may not be able to totally rely upon academic knowledge and skills or past experience alone.

According to Schön (1983), in circumstances where expert practitioners encounter *unanticipated* responses, they need to engage in reflecting-in-action. In doing so, the practitioner reflects on the understandings that have been implicit in his/her actions. As the practitioner critiques her/his initial framing of the challenge, constructs a new description of it, and “tests the new description by an on-the-spot experiment,” a new “theory in action” emerges, bringing with it a different response (p. 63). In essence, the practitioner becomes “... a researcher in the practice context. He/she is not dependent on the categories of established theory and technique, but constructs a new theory based on the unique case” (p. 68).

Given our suspicion that our interviewees are naturally inclined to use what Schön refers to as knowing-in-action, relying on their experience with previously successful approaches, the researchers were curious to ascertain whether practitioners also engaged in Schön’s reflecting-in-action process in their CR work. We wanted to know if they experienced reflecting-in-action as a powerful resource in their toolbox for conflict resolution, since conflict scenarios often feature unpredictable and constantly shifting interpersonal and group dynamics.

## 2.9 | Memorable quotes

Houk: “You always have to be really nimble; you can’t go in anticipating that you’re going to use the same kind of tools each time because you don’t know what you’re going to meet or discover.”

Raines: “This happens all the time. I try to remind myself not to reach conclusions about someone's intentions or abilities too early in our interactions because as more information becomes available, it becomes clear this person and this situation is more complex than originally thought. Mediators must develop the ability to pivot, improvise, seek out new information, and ask the parties to ‘press the reset button’ to allow us to start over (metaphorically) when something unexpected happens.”

Baroff: “I’m a big fan of having a plan but doing it in pencil. I’m always thinking about what I’m doing as I’m doing it. I believe the part of the brain doing the process stuff is different from the part that is doing the substantive stuff. ... I’m attentive to the kinds of resistance I’m getting. When it happens, I contemplate, ‘Do I need to adjust, back off, listen more, create more space?’ ... As neutrals, we have some learned foundational skills and skills we’ve mastered that we employ, but I do this [reflecting-in-action] all the time.”

Bloch: Quoting WW II Supreme Commander General Dwight D. Eisenhower, “When preparing for battle, I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable.”

Bloch embraces Schön's premise, but he also holds firmly to skill development and planning. “Ideally, a really good practitioner can pull from different skill sets/theories readily available, without even thinking about it.” As a person of faith, Bloch also relies on divine inspiration as a component of reflecting-in-action. For Bloch, praying for divine guidance is another conflict resolution tool, an additional reflecting-in-action-tool.

Prevaux: “Reflecting-in-action is an essential component of the complete alternative dispute resolution practitioner. ... Cases are like fingerprints or DNA; they're all unique and different so they require a different recipe each time, although most of the time they can be grouped into general categories that you have some experience and familiarity with.”

“I look [at it] like cooking, a pinch of this and an adjustment here. It's not purely formulaic. It varies; it is different each time you make the meal. Conflict resolution work is like that—pivoting and adapting is essential.”

Hansen: “It is useful to know the basics from academia, but only to help as a guideline, since conflicts tend to unfold in unique ways every time, and then you just have to do what makes sense in any situation.”

Hoffman: “Need to operate like a jazz musician with all the basic understanding of his/her instrument; yet be able to improvise in the moment and adjust and be flexible and responsive to what is happening.”

## 2.10 | Shared stories

Hoffman: “I think one interesting example of this is from when I was delivering conflict resolution training in Vietnam. I used an Iceberg-type diagram that you've probably

seen before to discuss the idea of positions and interests. On the break, one of the local project officers said the metaphor of an iceberg was not resonating well with the participants since it was outside of their direct experiences. So, we redid the diagram at lunch using the image of a lotus flower sitting on the surface of the pond to reflect the positions and the long, twisted roots under the surface of the water to represent the hidden interests. It required quick thinking, innovation and flexibility to adapt and be responsive to this concern in order to address it on the spot. Coincidentally, the lotus flower is Vietnam's national flower and it represents purity and serenity!"

Raines: "I had a client in a multi-party mediation who kept falling asleep when the other side spoke. My first thought was he might be on drugs and it would be a real impediment to the mediation and to constructive dialogue among the parties. In caucus, I learned he had served three tours of duty in Afghanistan and recently returned with severe post-traumatic stress disorder, which gave him insomnia. He felt so safe in the mediation session, surrounded by people whom he trusted, that he was able to sleep. The knowledge changed my view of the situation and, once he shared his story, it deeply increased the compassion in the room and our ability to reach a solution. The benefits of mediation extended beyond the session, in that some of the participants created a support group that literally agreed to watch over him while he slept until he could get used to his new surroundings. They even organized a backyard camp out. I ran into him a couple of years later and he was like a new man!"

Hansen: "In general I try to incorporate a lot of activities in my training, although the ones I anticipate using and might be effective don't always seem right at the moment. So it helps me to think through a variety of potential activities in advance. Then I can engage in reflection-in-action if I need to shift activities or use one in a different way. I did this with one group after I read some new material on theatrical games. I shifted the focus on one of my standard activities to be a catalyst to go deeper into an exploration of social identities."

Baroff: "I was mediating in a legal case ... one person toppled out of a recliner chair and got hurt ... attorneys, parties, insurance agents, etc. all were there. When we met in caucus, I was hearing two different perspectives in each room. Wasn't getting anywhere. I decided to engage a 'focus group' mediation approach ... brought everyone back together and asked them ... 'If you were a focus group on this case, what else would you want to talk about?' After 4–5 minutes of silence the parties began to share new topics and perspectives. They broke off into subgroups again allowing the individual groups to process the new topics/perspectives brought up in the combined focus group format ... ultimately it helped settle the case."

Katz: "A situation that comes to mind when I consciously used the reflection-in-action and shifted my strategy was when I was working as a facilitator with a national labor-management partnership council with one of our large federal social service agencies. The respective labor and management teams were not making progress on any agreements, and there was much bickering and contentious behavior between and among the teams. I knew I needed to do something, but was not sure of what to do. My 'game plan' to establish mutually developing expectations, interests and behavioral norms was

not succeeding, and the behaviors of the participants, especially the union head, were impediments in making progress. Fortunately, I remembered utilization of the 'symbolic frame' from the book *Reframing Organizations* as a possible strategy of 'high risk but high reward' when other strategies are not working. I then relayed a story that former President Jimmy Carter told about a key moment in the 1976 Camp David Accord negotiations that he thought was pivotal in reaching an agreement between President Anwar Sadat of Egypt and Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel. After several weeks and many attempts to make progress, it looked like all was lost, and the parties were packing their bags to go home. Carter visited the Israeli delegation to say farewell to Begin and his associates. It so happened that Begin had requested pictures of Carter for his grandchildren. Following the suggestion of one of his young staff members, Carter obtained and signed the pictures, personalizing them for each of Begin's numerous grandchildren. As Begin accepted the pictures from Carter, the Prime minister gazed at each one and slowly spoke the name of each grandchild. As he did this, his eyes filled with tears. Moments later Begin ordered his entourage to unpack their bags and redouble their efforts to get an agreement.

According to Carter, the overall interest of negotiating an agreement that might create a better life for children and grandchildren then became the overriding motivation in the minds and hearts of both men. Admittedly, a better future for their progeny was always an interest that motivated the negotiators to come to Camp David; however, this fundamental interest might have gotten lost or placed backstage as powerful heads of state engaged in tough, positional bargaining to win victories and satisfy egos. The picture incident placed the interest of a more peaceful future for children and grandchildren solidly at center stage and refocused the parties on their ultimate goals. Days later, an agreement was reached that has established peace between the Israelis and Egyptians for more than 40 years.

'What does this have to do with the way in which I conducted my interventions?' one might ask. At the height of tension between my federal government labor-management teams, I told them the story about Camp David. After the story, I pulled a picture of one of my daughters out of my wallet and passed it around, asking them to look at it. I then told them how this daughter had been in the throes of a serious illness and was now making progress, at least partially because of the emotional support and financial help from the agency they represented. I told them how this assistance had afforded our family an opportunity to hire very good medical care for our daughter, which seemed to make a significant difference in her recovery. And, I told them how thankful my family and I were to the agency that made that high quality care possible and how we would have suffered more if they had not been there in our time of critical need. The humane and compassionate assistance from folks in their agency had made an impact on the Katz family.

The story had the intended effect. As in Camp David, the intervention seemed to refocus the parties on their ultimate mutual interest of serving the public at a time of critical need, on who would benefit by their possible co-operation, and on who, in contrast, would lose by their current in-fighting. Just as in Camp David, the parties did not

discuss the story, but immediately vowed to do redouble their efforts to ‘work together and get it done.’ The parties labored well into the night to come up with more ‘yesable’ proposals that culminated in a more fruitful dialogue and important agreements within the next few days.”

## 2.11 | Driving themes

Whether or not they understood at the time that what they were doing was reflecting-in-action, the interviewees almost unanimously embraced the importance of reflecting-in-action in their complex conflict resolution work. At the same time, the interviewees warned against embracing reflection-in-action without or instead of proper experience and planning. When proper planning and action results in *unanticipated* responses, reflecting-in-action can be utilized to fine tune execution of the pre-strategized plan while also providing critical pivot points for abandoning what is not working and instantaneously transitioning to other potentially successful strategies.

**Question 8:** What are some major lessons learned during your careers, including tips on ‘what not to do,’ and have those lessons learned changed your view of the utility of the CR field?

As interviewers, we were interested in what our respondents would highlight as some of the key lessons learned throughout their careers—including the “what not to do” lessons—and if their views have changed related to the utility of CR knowledge and skills and the CR profession.

## 2.12 | Memorable quotes

Hansen: “I think that some important work that I have done has been lost because I haven't followed up. It is important to remember to make sure that you contact people after a training or facilitation or mediation to see if the agreements are holding and the relationships remain in place.”

“A key lesson I learned is ‘I'm not right most of the time,’ which is a good place to start in conflict resolution since the solutions that the parties come up with work out much better than what I thought was a good solution to their problems.”

“Techniques, models, formulas, and basic information from academia are helpful as templates, but much more sophisticated judgement and choices are needed since conflicts tend to unfold in mysterious ways every time.”

“When you're working with a lot of different people, you're not going to necessarily like them all or get along with all of them ... but you still have to do your best by them and be open and non-judgmental not only as a way to respond to people, but to develop a relationship with them.”

Houk: “We have to realize that a lot of our work occurs when people come to us in real pain. Like a patient waiting too long to come to the doctor—they don't come in with just a sore throat but wait until their condition is more egregious—yet want the doctor

to be immediately responsive to their need. Yes, you want to be responsive to them, but you have to be able to be creative. ‘It’s like Ginger Rogers dancing with Fred Astaire backwards in high heels!’”

“A wonderful woman named Mary Rowe introduced me to the ombuds world and I found there are a variety of ways of utilizing conflict management other than mediation ... all kinds of approaches for people to address their issues and concerns.”

“With my government clients, we’ve transitioned the wording from alternative dispute resolution to conflict management with prevention and management as important as well as resolution.”

Baroff: “I’ve learned that, while historically there may be some people in the world that are bad people and difficult people, it really is the behaviors and the things they do that are difficult. This distinction allows me to separate people from the problem and then be able to work with anybody. ... I’m not one kind of mediator or another kind. I have training in different approaches and I kind of combine them in an interactive hybrid approach.”

“In your role as a neutral ... don’t try to get the matter resolved. If the goal is only to get the matter resolved, you’ll find yourself pushing people to places they don’t want to go and they will push back. ... They will begin to see you as not neutral but partial. Use quality processes and don’t force resolutions. ... Allow the process to lead you all to whatever ending is finally obtained.”

Bloch: “Keeping personal interests out of the equation when facilitating. ... Problems arise when we you don’t recuse yourself when you should. ... You should recuse yourself if you see that this issue pushes your buttons too much. Or, you should at least confide to your clients/visitors the potential conflict because of your personal interests, while assuring them of your ability to remain neutral. ... Give them the choice to use your services or seek someone else.”

“As I am more experienced and confident now, I still adhere to training principles and the ombuds standards of practice, but they are more in the background for me now. What’s in the foreground is ‘what’s going to work,’ so, for instance, I might be more proactive with systemic issues and say to an organizational leader ‘Have you considered’ instead of ‘Well, you might want to consider.’ We’re really in this role to help people, so I think a more engaged role is a healthy thing for the profession.”

“Resist the temptation to make a program dependent upon US. Have from day one a succession plan; train others to do the kind of work we are doing; get interns involved.”

Prevaux: “CR practitioners should be candid in their failures, a single mistake can lead to valuable process improvements. For instance, in working on a matter involving an allegedly abusive supervisor, I invited an individual to consider the perspective of the supervisor in terms of decision-making. While the individual did find that suggestion

helpful from a cognitive perspective, they also found it counterproductive emotionally because it evoked a recollection of past trauma they had suffered in a prior abusive relationship outside of the workplace. We seek honest positive and negative feedback from all who use our services. The negative feedback received was instrumental in improving our practices by accounting for such potential sensitivities in future matters.”

“Fairness matters. People may not remember every corporate mandate clearly, but they are attentive to the effects of their organization on their feelings. To accelerate strategic success, an organization must invest in fairness measures such as establishing an organizational ombuds office, providing informal resolution points of access, and responding to employee input in a prompt and transparent manner.”

Raines: “Don't stop learning. Even great mediators can grow. Keep up with new research and practical ideas that come from your peers. Observe other mediators as a way to grow your skill set and build your ‘mental rolodex.’ The best mediators get better every day.”

Hoffman: “I've moved from an idealist, thinking that mediation would save the world, but now I'm more an idealist with a strong sense of realism. ... I've come to realize that mediation is one tool of many, and there are certain times when it can be used and when it shouldn't be used.”

### 2.13 | Driving themes

Several key lessons emerged from the interviewees' responses to this question. First, striving to “force” a resolution can have less than optimal results. If a practitioner's focus is more on his/her own success in resolving the conflict at hand, her/his client's real needs may be neglected. Second, a practitioner's failure to recuse him/herself from a mediation, negotiation or facilitation conflict that is “too close to home” emotionally or ideologically can potentially bring harmful biases into the CR initiative. The ethics of when or when not to engage a conflict scenario is always a critical consideration. Third, non-disclosure of professional failure is an impediment to the growth and future success of the conflict resolution field in general. Trying to save face by not disclosing failure risks the same failure repeatedly perpetuated by other practitioners. Fourth, expert practitioners are competent in a variety of interventions in addition to mediation, and a robust toolbox is a critical asset in this field. Fifth, classroom and workshop training is a good starting point, but actual experience in the field is essential to be able to respond to situations that are complex and unpredictable. Seasoned practitioners rely on their vast experience, intuition, knowledge and skills to become an element of positive change in individuals and organizations. Finally, the need for practitioners to engage in CR continuing education and skill building cannot be overstated. Since the conflict resolution field is constantly evolving, practitioners will provide the best service to their clients by keeping up with the most current resources.

**Question 9:** What are some of the major challenges you have faced in your work?

Respondent answers to this question were particularly illuminating. Many of the responses addressed the broad challenge of the newness of the CR field.

## 2.14 | Memorable quotes

Nkengtego: “Convincing people of the value of informal conflict resolution and why we need this service, even though we already have human resources and legal and internal audit, etc.”

Prevaux: “Educating people on how to be successful in task-based conflicts that drive strategic outcomes rather than to stay stuck in relational conflicts, which are toxic. ... Explaining that ADR should not really be defined as *alternative* dispute resolution but should really refer to *appropriate* dispute resolution.”

Raines: “Constantly having to let people know we exist, what we do, and who we are. ... The challenge of rewiring society with experience so they don't go to court first or they don't fire someone first, or go to another adversarial process, but first resort to a collaborative process.”

Hoffman: “Obtaining adequate funding is always a challenge. When you compare available funding for peace building and conflict resolution to funding for military expenditures, it is mind-boggling. I have to turn down many requests to assist with projects all over the world because there's just not enough money. ... We need more advocacy to make the case why politicians and donors and funding agencies should be directing more money to our work ... and a need for evidence-based research that demonstrate tangible results.”

Bloch: “[CR] can be a lonely profession and might lead to ‘compassion fatigue,’ so need colleagues to reach out [to each other]. ... A challenge to always be dealing with people who aren't necessarily and generally at their best in one way or another. Dealing with negative energy much of the time.”

Katz: “A major challenge for me has always been taking on too much responsibility for what happens in my interventions, especially when it involves multiple actors. Ultimately, I have to remind myself that I am one actor in a complex human drama and my actions will have influence, yet not be the most critical element in choices the parties make.”

## 2.15 | Driving themes

The most fascinating aspect of the responses to this question was that dealing with conflict was not cited as the greatest challenge by most CR practitioners. The majority of the interviewees indicated that consistently having to explain the benefits of conflict resolution processes was the biggest challenge. Several respondents believed that the field of conflict resolution will still be in its pioneer phase for another 20 years. Established practitioners will continue to carry the burden of introducing the CR field and more importantly, demonstrating its value for business, educational, religious and political institutions. Notwithstanding the challenges, our respondents also recognized that the work they all do might be even more necessary today. As Houk posited, “The current environment is both a tough time and a great time—tough because there is not the support we need to do this work, especially at the federal level, and great because there has never been a bigger need for people in our field to do this working locally, nationally and internationally.”

**Question 10:** What initiatives are you currently engaged in or would like to see happen to advance our work and give the field more credibility?

In responding to this question, several practitioners offered creative ideas and actions they have already implemented or planned to implement soon in their current CR work. When considering the future of conflict resolution, several respondents identified new areas and skill sets that need to be explored and developed to enhance the effectiveness and credibility of conflict resolution.

## 2.16 | Current initiatives

Baroff: “I have been asking people ‘What would you have done if you had not contacted the ombuds office?’ and ‘What did you do after visiting the ombuds office?’ to demonstrate value and return on investment. The accumulated returned data indicates that the university may have avoided grievances, lawsuits, voluntary personnel losses, etc., saving untold thousands of dollars while simultaneously ensuring the retention of productive employees.”

Prevaux: “Organizational culture is powerful (‘Culture eats strategy for breakfast!’), but we can influence culture by leveraging training to develop conflict management skills and develop far reaching pockets of trust within the organization. I can be a ‘force multiplier’ by supporting individuals and teams.” Prevaux also encouraged greater exposure of CR departments, “Just because the ombuds is confidential does not mean it should be invisible. CR practitioners need to be far more proactive in marketing their services.”

Raines: “Started mediation clinic on campus with faculty and student mediators for the 36,000 students and all university employees to help change the campus culture and improve our culture of disputing. ... Lots of new outreach initiatives to all the stakeholders on campus to say, ‘this is what mediation is and this is how it can help.’”

Hoffman: “Exploring some new initiatives on funding like the possibility of crowdfunding, partnering with reputable corporations and businesses to sponsor projects, forming coalitions with non-profits in other countries (e.g., youth project in Lebanon), and face-to-face promotions and marketing in the regions in which we are doing projects.”

Bloch: “Always nurturing ‘strategic relationships’ with folks, like the heads of offices of human resources, equal employment opportunity, civil rights, law enforcement, the president of the union—having regular meetings with different components of the organization that can help each other. I have developed a referral system that helps employees get their needs met.”

## 2.17 | Current initiatives driving themes

Remaining proactive and aggressive were two driving themes behind interviewees' responses to effective initiatives they are currently utilizing. CR practitioners need to be proactive in formulating reports that quantify the value of their departments and services. CR practitioners must network

within their respective organizations to build solid rapport with leaders and constituents. They must also be proactive in providing CR training workshops to educate and excite organizational leaders about conflict resolution. In short, CR must sell itself!

## 2.18 | Future initiatives

Several interviewees introduced new areas through which conflict resolution can be further developed and promulgated. Some of the identified areas merely call for additional exploration and education.

Nkengtego: “One thing that appears to be a challenge, and perhaps it needs a little bit more attention and exploration, is the role of faith, religion and prayer in our work. These are significant realities that affect, overtly or covertly, how we do our interventions. These have the potential of either being a boon or bane in any given case.”

Hoffman: “I have written on the need to develop a new generation of peace leaders (see Appendix for more information). ‘Current anti-radicalization strategies, which rely on surveillance, reporting, and rather passive attempts to attract would-be terrorists, are not enough. Instead of relying primarily on increased surveillance and passive outreach to young people, what if we responded to their need for exciting, meaningful lives in a different manner. Why not replace the allure of being a terrorist with the allure of being a peace leader’” (Hoffman, 2016, p. 2).

## 2.19 | Restorative justice/restorative practice

Hansen and Bloch shared their usage of restorative justice principles and techniques in their mediation and facilitation in a variety of domestic cases with violent offenders, in Mennonite and Native American communities, and in international peacebuilding activities in South America. Both men called for more practitioners to be educated in restorative justice, for more restorative justice techniques to be implemented into conflict resolution models (see Appendix B for more information on the use of restorative justice on conflict resolution).

## 2.20 | Polarity management

Bloch also endorsed polarity management as a potential resource for conflict resolution. “Polarity management is the practice of understanding that finding balance between opposing values is often the best way forward” (Schulte, 2016). Schulte continued, “We tend to think that one end of the spectrum must ultimately win out over the other. We choose either to lead or to empower, to support or challenge. But often the most effective way forward is in honoring and embracing both at the same time.” According to Bloch, utilizing polarity management principles in our conflict resolution work is both natural and powerful.

## 2.21 | Online mediation

Hoffman and Raines commented that the practice of mediation is increasingly moving online, and there is currently very little training or guidance in this area. In response to this shortcoming, The Canadian International Institute of Applied Negotiation recently published *CIAN'S Best Practices for Online Dispute Resolution*, which was developed by Hoffman and is one of the first documents

of its kind. It provides tips about what to do or not do to make the online session a success (see Appendix B for more information).

Moreover, the organization now offers online training simulations to help build capacity in this area. The training offers feedback from expert coaches and leads to a certificate in online dispute resolution skills (see Appendix for more information).

## 2.22 | Emotional intelligence

Prevaux called for more extensive training in and use of emotional intelligence. “In my experience, the conflict skill set that appears most helpful to effective conflict resolution appears quite similar to emotional intelligence, with its four main areas of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management.” Prevaux noted that these competencies “might be undervalued in some corporate cultures because they are not readily discernible by those focused on outcomes to the exclusion of process. Yet, when these skills are lacking in specific leaders, the consequent ‘hard costs’ to the employer and organization might be significant in terms of turnover, reduced individual and team performance, diminished productivity, and reputational damage that can last well beyond the initial impact.”

## 2.23 | Training methods

Hoffman promoted the critical need for updating training methods to match the realities of current conflicts. “Conflict prevention, political advocacy, project design, monitoring and evaluation, and policy analysis” are all areas that must be added to the “basic training” of CR practitioners. Hoffman also stressed “that training should emphasize teamwork, self-discipline, curiosity, how to work under pressure, the need for flexibility/innovation, and cross-cultural sensitivity.”

## 3 | FINAL THOUGHTS

Interviewee responses not only provided the *Reflective Practitioner* students with many profound insights to ponder and incorporate into their future conflict resolution work, but also offered illuminating perceptions for those of us already practicing to review, reevaluate and incorporate into our respective CR practices.

Key take-a-ways from this research project included:

1. Conflict resolution professionals work in a variety of arenas, including workplace, family, environmental, public policy, labor-management, criminal justice, indigenous people, and interventions abroad on ethnic/tribal issues and diplomatic efforts. To do so, they have incorporated a variety of learned CR skills and experiences into their individual “toolboxes,” which has spearheaded their successes through bringing out the right “tool” at the right time.
2. Many individuals in the conflict resolution field believe the work is somewhat of a “calling.” Some respondents realized, mostly in hindsight, that the disposition toward CR work was evident from childhood. All of the interviewees asserted they were inspired and directed by influential mentors, role models, and/or educational events during their life journey. They affirmed their original inspiration, motivation, desire to “do well,” and “make the world a better place” sustained their efforts, even in difficult times.

3. These dispositions and motivations were reinforced by personal attributes, such as hopefulness, humility, compassion, empathy, and curiosity. Although already inclined toward “doing good,” to ‘help people help themselves’ these personal attributes needed to be fortified and enhanced through skills such as reflective listening, group facilitation and problem solving, coupled with a mindset to remain facilitative and non-judgmental. Thus, the “fit” of personal characteristics and the developmental requirements for CR work are important factors in successful practice.
4. Classroom learning of theories, formulas, models, and role-plays are helpful in building foundational concepts, frameworks and skills; however, human behavior in the conflict arena is infinitely complex and unpredictable. Therefore, the ability to adequately assess what is needed in ongoing conflicts and respond from one’s ever expanding “mental rolodex” of intervener options is critical for positive outcomes.
5. Effective “processes” must be embraced by practitioners as equally important, or perhaps more important, than substantive “resolved case agreements” in our work. This acknowledges the understanding that we have more control over the process than the outcome. We are only one variable in the complex dynamics that govern human interactions.
6. Effective CR practitioners must develop a strong foundation of skills and lessons learned through knowledge, experience and quality preparation. However, they must also understand that knowing-in-action will not be sufficient in itself to manage *unanticipated* client reactions/behaviors. The effective practitioner should hone reflecting-in-action skills, which will allow her/him to spontaneously pivot from the planned strategy to a new hypothesis that allows a different “game plan” to best address *unanticipated* challenges and, in essence, demonstrate the competency of a “researcher in the practice context” (Schön, 1983, p. 68).
7. Our field is still in its “pioneering stage.” Educating those outside the field about who we are, what we do, and how we can contribute value is still a necessary consideration for advancing CR implementation and building a cross-community professional appreciation for what conflict resolution practitioners can “bring to the table.” Some ways to accomplish this are to do good work in our own “sphere of influence,” be open to new areas of practice such as emotional intelligence and online mediation, and find more effective ways to evaluate and document the costs and benefits of our work.

In addition to these more defined “take-a-ways,” an overarching insight among our author team in hearing and thinking about the interviewee responses is that our selected practitioners engaged both their minds and hearts in their work to combine elements of science and art. Effective CR practitioners, if you will, combine technique/skills/theory/formulas for predictable results with flair, improvisation and intuition that is less definable and more akin to art than science (Almengor, 2018). Beyond what Schön refers to as the “technical rationality” of trained professionals who apply rigorous scientific theory and techniques and follow clearly defined step-by-step game plans to tackle problems, artistic professionals interpret experience and spin their craft in mysterious ways so their “clients/visitors” may explore and pursue unimagined possibilities. Expert consultants rely on a rich mixture and accumulation of lifetime experiences and human encounters that afford them the knowledge, skills, desire, courage and dexterity to bring to life the “magic” of successful conflict interventions by transforming how their participants view their disputes, and how they interpret their own experience and action of others. In doing so they appear to utilize some of the best practices of both art and science to help accomplish the lofty motivation and goal that seems to sustain and guide their work, “Our work gives people hope. They leave feeling they have a path forward” (Raines).

It is the hope of the authors that these interview notes, originating from a variety of seasoned conflict resolution practitioners, provide students and practitioners alike a more realistic view of the richness and complexity of work in our field, coupled with what drives and motivates the efforts of highly successful CR professionals. In addition, we hope this report may prompt some thoughts on current limitations in graduate level CR training which tend to minimize student exposure to experienced CR practitioners who could potentially provide extended guidance, coaching, and mentoring: all common to obtaining mastery in many other professions. Above all, we hope the words of our interviewees will provide insights and inspiration for all CR practitioners, motivating us to continue progressing in our effectiveness and impact as we continue to engage our hearts and mind in this critical and necessary work.

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## APPENDIX A

### Interviewee quick reference guide

Area of practice	Respondents
University Professors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Toran Hansen, Ph.D. Associate Professor Department of Conflict Analysis and Dispute Resolution Salisbury University Salisbury, Maryland</li><li>Neil Katz, Ph.D.</li></ul>

(Continues)

Area of practice	Respondents
	Professor and former Chair Department of Conflict Resolution Studies Nova Southeastern University Ft. Lauderdale, FL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Susan Raines, Ph.D.                Associate Director and Professor                School of Conflict Management, Peacebuilding and Development                Kennesaw State University                Kennesaw, Georgia</li> </ul>
Organizational Ombuds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roy Baroff, J.D.                Faculty and Staff Ombud                North Carolina State University                Raleigh, North Carolina</li> <li>• Nkaze Chateh Nkengtego, Ph.D.                Director of Conflict Resolution and Mediation Programs                East Carolina University                Greenville, North Carolina</li> <li>• Steven Prevoux, J.D.                Ombuds Officer                University of South Florida                Tampa, FL</li> </ul>
U.S. Practitioner of Related Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carole Houk, LLM                Consultant, Attorney, Owner                Carole Houk International LLC                Chapel Hill, NC</li> </ul>
Government Contractor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brian Bock, M.A.                Ombuds                U.S. Department of the Interior                Washington, D.C.</li> </ul>
Canadian Private, International Practitioner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evan Hoffman, Ph.D.                Senior Associate                Canadian International Institute of Applied Negotiation                Metchosin, B.C.</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX B

### Additional resources

Colloquy on Restorative Justice Part 1. (2018). *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 36(2), 93–175.

Hoffman, E. *Training world peace leaders*. <http://ciian.org/assets/Educating%20a%20New%20Generation%20of%20Peace%20Leaders%20as%20a%20Way%20to%20Prevent%20Homegrown%20Terrorism.pdf>

Hoffman, E. *Online mediation: Best practices*. <http://ciian.org/ODRBestPractices.pdf>.

Hoffman, E. *The Canadian Institute of Applied Negotiation — Online Dispute Resolution Training Simulations*. <http://ciian.org/disputeResolutionSimulations.html>