

**INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT@WORK**  
**Topics in Labor Studies**

Course Number 38:624:516: 90/38:578:610:90

Department of Labor Studies and Employment Relations  
School of Management and Labor Relations  
Rutgers - the State University of New Jersey

Class Times: on-line

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### **COURSE OVERVIEW**

This course offers an in-depth examination of interpersonal conflict in the workplace. Despite the ubiquity of conflict at work and a voluminous literature of theory and practical advice the actual concept remains rather fuzzy. Perhaps this is because there are so many different possibilities for interpersonal conflict to emerge at work. In this course we will review the major theories and read some of the better empirical studies. However, the bulk of the course will be devoted to developing and practicing our interpersonal conflict management skills. Therefore, you will find this course relatively light on reading and heavy on personal assessment, practice and reflection – either in journals or in team discussions. Essentially – theories of conflict while useful are entirely dependent on our ability to manage our own behavior in conflict situations.

This Spring 2024 semester takes place in a historic context in which the topic of conflict in general is particularly salient. We are still dealing with the residual effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic consequences. The United States remains politically polarized and the looming 2024 elections promise plenty of conflict. The situation in Israel/Palestine has stimulated major conflicts. These developments in the larger context have entered our workplace, our family life and our relationships with friends and neighbors. These circumstances provide a compelling reason to focus on our own conflict management competencies. As we will discuss throughout the semester – we cannot change other people’s behavior, but we can manage our own. Over the course of this semester, we will examine most of the major theories of interpersonal conflict and discuss their strengths and weaknesses. Students will assess their own competencies and

styles based on each of the theories. Each student will undertake a “conflict management imitative” which will require practicing some new skills. The basic goal of the course is for students to develop and/or improve their own abilities to deal with conflict at work effectively.

### **Action Learning Methodology**

The instructional method used in this course is called “action learning.” Action learning is an approach to solving real world problems by developing an action plan, implementing it and then reflecting on the results both individually and in a team environment. The action learning process requires (1) a real problem that is important and complex; (2) a diverse problem-solving team; (3) a requirement that “talk” be converted to action; (4) a commitment to learning. This approach means that students are expected to play an active role in their own and others’ learning.

### **GRADING POLICY**

Our topic is a multifaceted concept with many dimensions. This class is designed to assess student performance on many of these dimensions rather than simply on mastery of the theoretical content contained in the readings. Class discussions and journal exercises focused on knowledge of the theories are important but putting concepts into practice in real time is the real test. Students’ performance in class will be evaluated using a point system. The elements of the course are distributed across a variety of performance measures so that exams are not the determining factor of grades. Completing all of the assignments on time is very important in this system as missing one assignment can have a significant negative effect on the final grade. The points for each element of the course as listed below:

Course Component	Points per Assignment	@% of Final Course Grade
Team discussions	20	20
Journal Entries	20	20
Conflict Management Initiative	20	20
Overall contribution to class	10	10
Exam 1	20	20
Exam 2*	10	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*Exam 2 will be optional. If you are happy with your grade by week 13 you may elect to skip it.

You must complete all assignments to receive credit for this course. In terms of the Rutgers University letter grade and grade point average system, your final grade will be calculated as follows:

%	RU Letter Grade
90-100	A
85-89	B+
80-84	B
75-79	C+
70-74	C
60-69	D
Below 60	F

## **COURSE COMPONENTS**

### Team discussions (20% of final grade)

Students will be assigned to a Team of 4-6 people. Contributions to team discussions is a key performance indicator of leadership abilities as well as academic skills. In order to participate effectively you will need to read all assignments and be prepared to contribute according to the instructions provided including meeting all deadlines.

### Journal Entries (20% of final grade)

You will be asked to make a series of journal entries during the course. Journal assignments will ask you to reflect on what you learned from the course material and experiences as well as how you might use the knowledge or insight you gained.

### Action Learning Conflict Management Initiative (20% of final grade)

During the second half of the semester, you will be expected to practice your conflict management competencies in an actual setting. Ideally this will be a work-related conflict. However, if necessary, a non-work interpersonal conflict will be permitted such as a volunteer organization or (last resort) a personal relationship such as family or friends. Your team will act as your Action Learning Set to help you think through your approach.

### Examination I (20% of final grade)

An exam will be administered near the middle of the course covering the material from the first half of the course. This exam is designed to help you retain, integrate, and deepen your understanding of the ideas we will have explored up to that point in the semester. Make-up examinations are only allowed in the case of documented family, work, and medical emergencies.

Exam 2, (10% of the final grade)

This exam will take place during the final class week and will cover material from the second half of the course. This exam is optional. If you are happy with your grade at Week 13 you can opt out. Exam 2 will *not* be cumulative.

#### Overall contribution to the Class.

10% of the final grade will be awarded based on your overall performance and contribution: meeting deadlines, effort put forth in journals and team discussions, contributions to your team's discussions and case analysis.

### **COURSE TEXTBOOKS**

I have chosen two books as required reading for this course. After reviewing a lot of books in interpersonal conflict I didn't find anything suitable. Many are little more than pop psychology and others are aimed at people studying to be therapists. Consequently, I have selected one classic and one from a distinguished organizational development and change scholar/practitioner. These will be supplemented with assigned readings.

Roger Fisher and William Ury. **Getting to Yes**. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Penguin Books. 2011  
Edgar Schein and Peter Schein. **Humble Inquiry**. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Barrett-Koehler. 2021

The Canvas course management system will be used for the administration of this course.

I will rely on Canvas to make general class announcements and to send emails to students as necessary. Therefore, **it is absolutely imperative that you monitor your Canvas mail or arrange to have it forwarded to your personal email account**. I will not be responsible for announcements and email messages that you miss as a result of your not regularly monitoring course email. Also, you need to communicate with me via Canvas and not by my various Rutgers emails as I do not check them as frequently.

### **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Violations of academic integrity are not tolerated in this course or in any course that you take at Rutgers (or any institution of higher learning). Academic dishonesty, committed intentionally or unintentionally, has serious consequences. Please visit Rutgers University's Academic Integrity website at: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/> to learn

how you can steer clear of academic integrity violations. The Resources for Students link on the left menu of the homepage is an especially-useful tool for current students.

## **RUTGERS DISABILITY POLICY**

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>.

## **CLASS SCHEDULE (a more detailed description of assignments is found on the course site)**

Week	Topic	Assignments
1	Introduction and Course Overview	❖ Introductions
2	Documenting your own interpersonal conflict experiences	❖ Ladder of Inference ❖ Inquiry/Advocacy ❖ Week 2 Journal ❖ Week 2 AL questions
3	Theories of Interpersonal Conflict	❖ Barki – theories of conflict ❖ Week 3 AL Team Discussion
4	Getting to Yes (GtY); Inquiry vs Advocacy	❖ Scheins Preface, Introduction ❖ GtY: Preface to 3 <sup>rd</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> editions; Introduction ❖ Week 4 Journal; ❖ Weeks 3-4 AL questions
5	Conflict and Communication	❖ Scheins, Chapter 1 ❖ GtY, Chapter 1 ❖ Week 5 AL Team Discussion
6	Practicing Interests and Options; Your	❖ GtY, Chapters 2 ❖ Scheins, Chapt 2

	conflict resolution project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Your conflict management initiative</li> <li>❖ Week 6 Journal</li> <li>❖ Weeks 5-6 questions</li> </ul>
7	Feedback on your conflict management initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ GtY Chapter 3&amp;4</li> <li>❖ Scheins, Chapter 3</li> <li>❖ Team discussion: Team members' proposals</li> </ul>
8	Mid-semester review Exam I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ GtY Chapter 5</li> <li>❖ Scheins Chapter 4</li>   <li>❖ Exam I</li> </ul>
9	What if they have more power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Getting to Yes Chapters 6, 7</li> <li>❖ Humble Inquiry, Chapter 5</li> <li>❖ AL Team Discussion Case study</li> </ul>
10	High Conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Getting to Yes Chapter 8</li> <li>❖ Humble Inquiry Chapter 6, 7</li> <li>❖ Getting on the Balcony</li> <li>❖ "I got Obama'd"</li> <li>❖ Week 10 Journal</li> <li>❖ Conflict management initiative update</li> <li>❖ Weeks 9-10 questions</li> </ul>
11	Updates on your conflict management initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Getting to Yes IV</li> <li>❖ Humble Inquiry, Chapter 8</li> <li>❖ AL Team Discussion: feedback on conflict initiative update</li> </ul>
12		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Individual presentations of your initiative to class</li>   <li>❖ Week 12 journal</li> <li>❖ Weeks 10-12 questions</li> </ul>

13	Feedback on conflict initiatives	❖ TBA
14	Course Wrap up	❖ Exam II ❖ Final Journal and class feedback discussion