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INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT

Honest disagreement is often a good sign of progress.

—Mahatma Gandhi

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define intercultural conflict
2. Define facework and identify three primary facework strategies
3. List and define the five primary and three secondary styles of conflict communication
4. Identify and discuss the conflict styles preferred by individualistic and collectivistic cultures
5. Identify and discuss the conflict styles preferred by high- versus low-context cultures
6. Explain and apply the components of the contingency model of cross-cultural conflict

Imagine yourself in the following situation:

> Akira Abe is an international exchange student from Japan who lives down the hall from you in your dorm. You have interacted with Akira only occasionally and do not know him very well. This morning, Akira approached you to complain that you frequently play your music so loudly that he is unable to study or sleep. Akira then asked if you would please stop playing your music so loudly.

What would you do in this situation? How would you resolve this conflict? Would you comply with Akira's request? Would you argue with Akira?

Conflict, such as the one depicted above, is an inevitable part of living in a society with others. All types of human relationships—from strangers to acquaintances to intimates—experience conflict. Communication plays a paradoxical role in most conflicts because communication is required both to instigate conflict and to resolve it. Unfortunately, conflict is the source of much relational stress and dissolution; fortunately, the successful resolution of conflict is one of the strongest and most consistent predictors of relational satisfaction. Hence, an understanding of conflict and how to resolve it is an essential part of becoming a competent communicator, especially in your relationships with persons from other cultures.

DEFINITION OF INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT

In the past 30 years, a growing body of theory and research has emerged in the intercultural communication literature regarding the nature of intercultural conflict. Much of this research is based on the work of Stella Ting-Toomey and John Oetzel.[1] They define **intercultural conflict** as

> the implicit or explicit emotional struggle between persons of different cultural communities over perceived or actual incompatibility of cultural ideologies and values, situational norms, goals, face-orientations, scarce resources, styles/processes,

intercultural conflict The implicit or explicit emotional struggle between persons of different cultures over perceived or actual incompatibility of cultural ideologies and values, situational norms, goals, face orientations, scarce resources, styles/processes, and/or outcomes in a face-to-face context

and/or outcomes in a face-to-face (or mediated) context within a sociohistorical embedded system.[2]

Recall from Chapter 1 that a fundamental assumption of intercultural communication is that it is a group phenomenon experienced by individuals. Likewise, during intercultural conflict, one's group membership (i.e., culture) becomes a factor in how conflict is perceived, managed, and resolved. Some of these cultural factors may be unconscious, such as one's degree of individualism or collectivism. Other factors are probably very conscious. Recall your conflict with Akira. The two of you are from different cultural communities, have incompatible goals, and desire different outcomes. You choose to play your music loudly. Akira prefers that you not play your music loudly. From a sociohistorical perspective, you may wonder if all Japanese are quiet and dislike loud music. Perhaps Akira questions if all Americans are rude and insensitive to the wishes of others. Although the conflict between you and Akira could just as easily have occurred between two U.S. students or two Japanese students, the fact that it happened between a U.S. student and a Japanese student complicates the issue.

Ting-Toomey and Oetzel maintain that intercultural conflict involves a certain degree of ethnocentric perception and judgment. Recall from Chapter 1 and Chapter 5 that ethnocentric persons hold attitudes and behaviors about their in-group that are biased in favor of the in-group, often at the expense of out-groups. Ethnocentric persons foster cooperative relations with in-group members while competing with, and perhaps even battling, out-group members.[3] Hence, by virtue of our cultural upbringing, we think we are correct (i.e., loud music is great vs. loud music is disrespectful). To explain intercultural conflict further, three models will be presented next: Young Kim's Model of Intercultural Conflict, Ting-Toomey and Oetzel's Culture-Based Social Ecological Conflict Model, and Benjamin Broome's Model of Building a Culture of Peace Through Dialogue.

Kim's Model of Intercultural Conflict

Well-known intercultural communication scholar Young Yun Kim has developed a model of intercultural conflict. Kim argues that intercultural conflict occurs at three interdependent and interrelated levels, including a micro or individual level; an intermediary level; and a macro or societal level (see Figure 10.1).[4]

The micro, or *individual*, level of intercultural conflict refers to the unique attitudes, dispositions, and beliefs that each individual brings to the conflict. According to Kim's model, cognitive simplicity/rigidity refers to the degree of inflexibility in the way individuals think about people from different cultures. Rigid, simplistic thinking includes gross categorization and stereotyping (e.g., all Americans are rude; all Japanese are quiet). In-group bias refers to the degree to which the individual is ethnocentric.

Recall from Chapter 1 that ethnocentrism is defined as viewing one's own group as being at the center of everything and using the standards of one's own group to measure or gauge the worth of all other groups. Insecurity/frustration refers to the degree to which the individual has a high level of uncertainty about, and fear of, out-group members (e.g., they will steal our jobs). Divergent behavior refers to the behavioral patterns of the individual that clearly *differentiate* and distance him or her from out-group members. For example, obviously different speech patterns or accents may ostensibly separate groups from one another. During conflict, people will often exaggerate their mannerisms and speech to accentuate their differences compared with out-groups. Because you are upset about

FIGURE 10.1   ■   Kim's Model of Intercultural Conflict
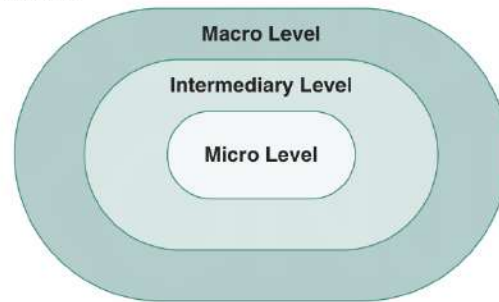
Macro Level

- History of subjugation
- Ideological or structural inequalities
- Minority group strength

Intermediary Level

- Segregation/contact
- Intergroup salience
- Status discrepancy

Micro Level

- Cognitive simplicity/rigidity
- In-group bias
- Insecurity/frustration
- Divergent behaviors

Macro Level

Intermediary Level

Micro Level

SOURCE: Based on Kim, Y. Y. (1989). Interethnic Conflict: An Interdisciplinary Overview. In J. B. Gittler (Ed.), *Annual Review of Conflict Knowledge and Conflict Resolution* (Vol. 1). New York: Garland; Kim, Y. Y. (1990). *Explaining Interethnic Conflict: An Interdisciplinary Overview.* Paper presented at the annual convention of the Speech Communication Association. Chicago, IL.

Akira's complaint, you may intentionally turn up the volume on your music. Imagine two employees working together, each from a different culture, who have gross stereotypes of each other, are both ethnocentric, fear each other, and have highly divergent behavioral patterns. Kim's model predicts that such a situation is likely to engender conflict.[5]

The *intermediary* level of intercultural conflict refers to the actual location and context of the conflict. Some environments (e.g., neighborhoods, school, work) may be more likely than others to facilitate conflict. Segregation and contact refer to the extent to which the individuals' cultural groups interact on a daily basis. Perhaps the most basic condition for intercultural conflict is contact between diverse cultures or ethnicities on a day-to-day basis. Segregated workplaces or schools do not allow for much interaction, and components at the individual level (e.g., cognitive rigidity, in-group bias) tend to escalate to intolerable levels that facilitate intercultural conflict. Intergroup salience refers to the observable physical and social differences between the conflicting individuals. Such cultural markers include distinct physical and behavioral differences, such as race, language, and speech patterns.

As Kim notes, to the extent that the groups are culturally distinct, the communicative skills of the less powerful cultural group will clash with those of the majority group members. The majority group's symbol system is dominant. Status discrepancy refers to the degree to which conflicting parties differ in status along cultural lines. For example, African Americans often argue that U.S. culture practices an asymmetrical power structure. They may feel that the U.S. corporate culture reflects the same asymmetry. On the job, managers and supervisors have more power than workers. If all the managers in a business are of one race or ethnicity and all the workers are of another, then the status discrepancy is heightened.[6]

By Russell Lee. This image is available from the United States Library of Congress's Prints and Photographs division under the digital ID fsa.8a26761. http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa1997026728/PP/. Public Domain. https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=85632

Photo 10.1 Segregated drinking fountain in use in the American South.

The macro, or *societal,* level of intercultural conflict includes factors that are probably out of the interactants' control. These conditions include any history of subjugation, ideological/structural inequality, and minority group strength. The history of subjugation of one group by another is a key environmental factor in many intercultural conflicts. For example, African Americans have long been subjugated by Whites in the United States. Historically, African Americans were slaves. Even after emancipation, they were not allowed to vote. As late as the 1960s, restaurants in the South enforced separate bathrooms, seating areas, and drinking fountains for African Americans and Whites (see Photo 10.1).

Often, the tensions expressed today are rooted in the history of one group's subjugation of another group. Ideological and structural inequity refers to societal differences regarding power, prestige, and economic reward. Historically, in the United States, Whites have held most of the power positions and gained most of the economic reward. Hence, there is a vast ideological and structural difference between Whites and other groups. Minority (i.e., microcultural) group strength refers to the amount of power (e.g., legal, political, economic) a particular group possesses. Microcultural groups vary in their ability to rally their members against structural inequalities. Minority group strength varies as a function of the status of the group's language within the society, the sheer number of members in the group, and forms of societal support (e.g., governmental services designed specifically for that group). Relative to other microcultural groups, African Americans, for example, are economically and politically quite powerful. Political scientists argue, for instance, that presidential elections are swung by the African American voting bloc. According to Kim, the greater the ethnic group's strength, the more likely that an individual in that group will take action in intercultural conflict situations.[7] Taken together, these three levels of conflict merge during any intercultural conflict. To the extent that these individual, intermediary, and societal factors are present, intercultural conflict will likely ignite.

A Culture-Based Social Ecological Conflict Model

In a model of conflict that complements the Kim model discussed above, Ting-Toomey and Oetzel have developed what they call a culture-based social ecological conflict model.[8] You will see some similarities between this model and the Kim model. In their model, Ting-Toomey and Oetzel highlight four main factors that come into play during an intercultural conflict episode: primary orientation factors, situational appraisals, conflict processes, and conflict competence. During intercultural conflict, these four factors come together interdependently in a complex formula that defines the specific conflict episode (see Figure 10.2).

The primary orientation factors are what each individual brings to the conflict. This would be similar to Kim's micro level, but with some added variables. Ting-Toomey and Oetzel suggest that each individual brings macro, exo, meso, and micro layers to the

AN INTERCULTURAL CONVERSATION
KIM'S MODEL OF INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT

Mike Fabion is the vice president of Acme Marketing Firm, a company his father founded. Acme is a direct marketing firm for insurance agencies. Mike is 58 years old and White. He was born and raised in Kenilworth, Illinois, a wealthy Chicago suburb. Mike has six directors under him in Acme's organizational hierarchy. These six directors each manage and supervise about seven employees. Thus, Mike supervises about 50 employees. Once a year, Mike has one-on-one meetings with each employee. These meetings are a part of each employee's annual evaluation. Today, Mike is meeting with Nicole Newton. Nicole is a new employee and has worked for Acme for just over a year. She was hired soon after graduating from college with a bachelor's degree in communication. This will be her first evaluation meeting. She was hired as a telemarketer and hopes to move up in the organization soon. She is African American and 23 years old. She was raised in the city of Chicago, in a public-housing district. Their meeting takes place in Mike's office. She and Mike have never met.

Mike:	Good morning, Nicole. Come in and have a seat.
Nicole:	Hi, Mike.
Mike:	Actually, until I get to know my employees, I prefer to be called Mr. Fabion.
Nicole:	Oh, OK, Mr. Fabion (placing emphasis on "Mr.").
Mike:	(Noticing her tone of voice.) So where are you from?
Nicole:	I grew up on the South Side.
Mike:	(Thinks to himself, "She and I have nothing in common.") I'm from Kenilworth.
Nicole:	Yeah, I've heard of that.
Mike:	So do you have any education beyond high school?
Nicole:	Yes. As my résumé indicates, I have a bachelor's degree. That should be in my file.
Mike:	Oh, yes, here it is. It says here you have a degree in communication? What's that all about? Classes in speech, I guess, or radio and television?
Nicole:	Well, no. I took classes in organizational communication, political communication, intercultural communication . . . courses like that. We discuss and explore how humans interact within a variety of contexts. It's a great major!
Mike:	Well, there was no such major when I went to school. I don't understand. Why not major in business? Anyway . . . I've been reading your manager's monthly assessments of your performance. I can see you need improvement in several areas, including customer service and attitude.

(Continued)

AN INTERCULTURAL CONVERSATION (Continued)
KIM'S MODEL OF INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT

Nicole: Really? I thought I was doing fine.

Mike: Well, your manager says you are informal with customers. I think that leaves a bad impression. (Thinks to himself, "I guess that's not taught in communication classes.")

Nicole: Really? I think they like it. I think it's all right to be a little relaxed once in a while.

Mike: Well, maybe elsewhere, but not here.

Nicole: Have any of my customers complained?

Mike: Not directly, no.

Nicole: So then, what's the problem? (Thinks to herself, "What's his problem? He thinks he's pretty special. *He* needs a class in communication.")

Mike: Look, Nicole, I'm not going to argue with you. I'm telling you to improve your attitude and stop being so informal with the customers.
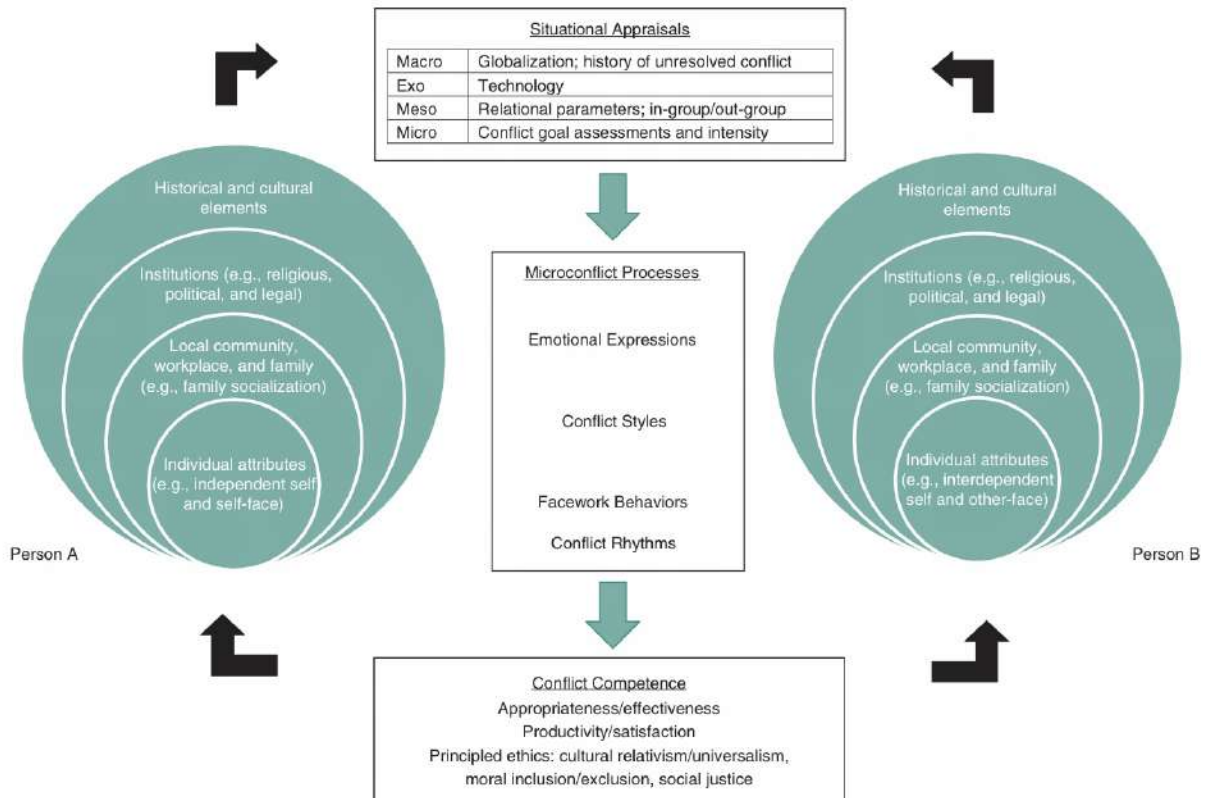
Nicole: Whatever you say, Mr. Fabion.

Several of the factors outlined in the Kim model can be applied to this brief conflict exchange between Mike and Nicole. In terms of the micro (individual) level, Mike's cognitive rigidity and simplicity are reflected in his inflexible stance about Nicole's informality, which doesn't seem to be an issue with her customers since none of them has complained, and his lack of knowledge about communication degrees. Regarding the intermediary level, that Mike prefers for Nicole to call him "Mr. Fabion" highlights the status discrepancy between them. That Mike meets with his employees only once a year shows that he has little contact with (i.e., is segregated from) them. Moreover, persons in Kenilworth may rarely interact with persons in the inner city. Finally, at a macro (societal) level, there is a history of subjugation between their groups, and Nicole's group has demonstrable minority group strength.

conflict—with *macro* meaning "larger than," *exo* meaning "external or outside," *meso* meaning "middle or intermediate," and *micro* meaning "localized or small."

Similar to Kim's model, the macro-level primary orientation factors are the larger sociocultural factors, histories, worldviews, beliefs, and values held by each individual. Macro-level variables may be outside the individual's control but nevertheless affect his or her approach to conflict. Some macro-level variables might include the effects of globalization (i.e., the compression of cultural boundaries) on an individual. Exo factors include the formal institutions present in any culture, including religious institutions, governments, and health care systems, among others that are external to the individual but affect his or her approach. Meso-level factors refer to the more immediate dimensions

Situational Appraisals

Macro	Globalization; history of unresolved conflict
Exo	Technology
Meso	Relational parameters; in-group/out-group
Micro	Conflict goal assessments and intensity

Microconflict Processes

Emotional Expressions

Conflict Styles

Facework Behaviors

Conflict Rhythms

Historical and cultural elements

Institutions (e.g., religious, political, and legal)

Local community, workplace, and family (e.g., family socialization)

Individual attributes (e.g., independent self and self-face)

Person A

Historical and cultural elements

Institutions (e.g., religious, political, and legal)

Local community, workplace, and family (e.g., family socialization)

Individual attributes (e.g., interdependent self and other-face)

Person B

Conflict Competence
Appropriateness/effectiveness
Productivity/satisfaction
Principled ethics: cultural relativism/universalism,
moral inclusion/exclusion, social justice

of a particular culture—for example, the local church group, one's workplace setting, or even one's extended family. Finally, the micro-level factors include the individual's unique intrapersonal attributes, such as his or her level of individualism or collectivism, actual physical location, and personal experiences, among others.[9] For example, Ting-Toomey and Oetzel point out that individualists tend to address conflict through assertiveness, express their emotions, and value personal accountability. Collectivists restrain their emotions and protect the in-group.

While primary orientation factors are the principal influences on conflict, they affect how each individual perceives (appraises) the situation in which the conflict takes place. Macro, exo, meso, and micro levels appear here as well. Macro situational features might include the effects of globalization on this particular situation, such as immigration. Oftentimes, immigrant groups are faced with conflict from the native cultural groups. But, of course, not all conflicts are about immigration. Exo-level variables might include whether the interactants are in-group or out-group members. We tend to use different communication strategies when interacting with the in-group compared with the out-group. Meso-level variables focus on relational dimensions in this particular conflict and

might include one's status in the family or organization. Finally, micro-level situational features might include the individual's goal in a given situation (e.g., to ask for a pay raise).[10]

The micro conflict processes include those factors that emerge from the conflict interaction itself. For example, during conflict, the two individuals' conflict interaction styles come into play interdependently. So how does Individual A's competitive style combine with Individual B's avoidance style? Finally, how do the individuals manage their emotions? Are they expressive or restrained?

Last, the model includes conflict competence criteria and outcomes, which include effectiveness/appropriateness, productivity/satisfaction, and principled ethics. Conflict competence refers to the application of intercultural conflict knowledge. In other words, how are we to use what we know about conflict to act competently and produce an effective, appropriate resolution? Appropriateness refers to the degree to which the individuals' behaviors are suitable for the cultural context in which they occur. Effectiveness refers to the degree to which the individuals achieve mutually shared meaning, which leads to intercultural understanding. Productivity/satisfaction refers to the degree to which the individuals are able to create the desired images of themselves, to what extent those images are accepted by the opposing party, and the perception by both parties that a successful resolution has been reached. Ting-Toomey and Oetzel refer to productive resolution as a "win–win" conflict orientation and to unproductive resolution as a "win–lose" conflict orientation. A comparison of the two orientations is presented in Table 10.1.[11]

We can apply the Culture-Based Social Ecological Model to the earlier interaction between Mike Fabion and Nicole Newton, as we did the Kim model. Regarding their primary orientation factors, Mike and Nicole have very different macro-level orientations. Race plays a key role here, as Nicole's cultural roots are in subjugation and slavery. Their exo-level factors are also key. Mike and Nicole are probably not members of the same social institutions. Mike is unfamiliar with Nicole's education in communication. They differ in age, and their political affiliations are likely to be different as well. The meso-level factors are particularly relevant here because, within the workplace, Mike carries much higher status than Nicole. Interestingly, their micro-level factors may not differ considerably, as

TABLE 10.1 ■ Win–Lose and Win–Win Conflict Orientations	
Win–Lose Conflict Orientation	Win–Win Conflict Orientation
Ignoring cultural differences	Respecting cultural differences
Insensitivity to conflict context	Sensitivity to conflict context
Arguing and defending self-interest	Uncovering deeper conflict needs
Conflict mode	Compromising mode
Engaging in mindless behaviors	Practicing mindful conflict skills
Rigidity of conflict posture	Willingness to change

SOURCE: Oetzel, J. G., Ting-Toomey, S., Masumoto, T., Yokochi, Y., & Takai, J. (2000). A Typology of Facework Behaviors in Conflicts With Best Friends and Relative Strangers. *Communication Quarterly, 48*, 397–419.

both were raised in the United States and probably carry an individualistic orientation. They likely appraise the conflict situation differently. At the macro level, the issue of race is unresolved, especially in Chicago. At the meso level, Mike's hierarchical status in this organization places him at a distinct advantage. In this scenario, Nicole's goal is to receive a positive evaluation, while Mike's goal is to point out what he sees as a problem (i.e., Nicole's informality). Ironically, Nicole is correct in thinking that Mike needs a course (or two) in communication.

INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE, CONFLICT RESOLUTION, AND A CULTURE OF PEACE

So how might Mike and Nicole resolve their conflict? Like the other scholars cited in this chapter, Benjamin Broome maintains that conflict is an unavoidable consequence of living in a culturally diverse world. But Broome also believes that among myriad cultural groups, peace is possible. He argues that successful intercultural conflict resolution requires that conflicting interactants engage in *dialogue* and promote a *culture of peace*.[12] Broome asserts the following:

> To build and maintain peace, we must learn productive ways to handle disagreements, and we must develop norms, mechanisms, and institutions that will guide us toward resolving divisive issues without violence. A central means through which such actions can unfold is *dialogue*.[13]

Broome traces the etymology (i.e., the origins) of the word *dialogue* to ancient Greece, where *dia* means "through or across" and *logos* means "words or reason." Broome contends that via dialogue, conflicting parties can reason with each other using communication as the vehicle toward understanding and eventual conflict resolution. Via dialogue, Broome asserts, conflicting parties become aware of how they each interpret and prescribe meaning to the immediate context. Broome is careful to point out that dialogue does not rule out disagreement. Instead, via dialogue, conflicting parties begin to understand each other's unique perspective on the issue confronting them, which can then lead to peace. Broome's model is presented in Figure 10.3.[14]

According to this model, as conflicting individuals engage in dialogue, a number of processes can result and lead to the possibility of a culture of peace. First, dialogue makes possible sustained contact. Just as in the Kim model and Ting-Toomey and Oetzels's model, Broome maintains that conflict is often ongoing because conflicting parties are segregated or have little contact with each other. To engage in dialogue, conflicting parties must come together and interact. Without interaction, it is impossible to understand the other's position. And while Broome admits that sustained contact does not guarantee a resolution, without contact, resolution is unfeasible. Such contact, Broome asserts, can help the conflicting parties reduce uncertainty and become aware of each other's perspectives, which helps reduce hostility. By segregating themselves, the conflicting parties make any kind of empathy between groups impossible. But via dialogue, at least understanding the other's point of view becomes possible, which can then lead to a reduction of hostility. As

STUDENT VOICES ACROSS CULTURES
MANAGING INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT

Corie Stingl

Corie Stingl

My name is Corie Stingl, and I had the privilege to attend St. Norbert College from 2012 to 2016. I graduated with a bachelor of arts in communication and received a Spanish language certificate. One of my favorite classes in my time in school was Intercultural Communications. While in this class, I learned so much about myself and how I interact with others in this world.

While at St. Norbert College, I served as a mentor for international students as a Bridges International mentor. We met weekly with international students and tried to serve as a resource for them to practice speaking English and learn about American culture. Through this experience, I met Haruka Asari, a student from Japan. Over the year that she was at our campus, our friendship grew immensely. We both longed to learn about each other's cultures, but wanted to make sure we did it in a way that was respectful and sensitive of the other person.

As a result of this, I learned a few tips about avoiding conflict during intercultural interactions. The first is to practice honesty and ask permission. I would say things like, "Hey, Haruka, I would love to learn about Japanese culture. Is it OK if I ask you a few questions?" or "Can you tell me something I don't know about your culture?" Practicing asking permission allowed for both of us to become more comfortable with learning from and with each other.

The second thing I learned is to listen genuinely and try your best to remember significant pieces of information that are shared with you. When you are able to recall information that was shared with you in a situation like this, it makes the other person feel respected and valued. I believe that creating this kind of environment is what made my friendship with Haruka so strong.

From Haruka, I was able to learn so much about Japanese culture, such as what not to do with chopsticks, some commonly used Japanese phrases, and some historical facts about the country. Hopefully, I can put the things she taught me to use, as I hope to visit her in Tokyo in a few years. I am so grateful for my friendship with Haruka and for the things she taught and continues to teach me!

FIGURE 10.3   ■   Broome's Model of Building a Culture of Peace Through Dialogue
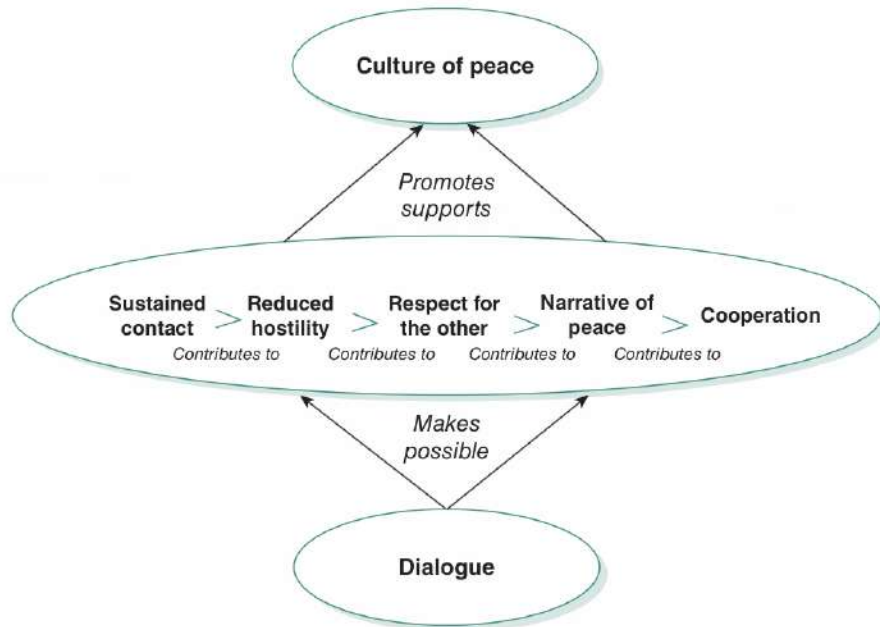
conflicting parties engage in interaction and begin to reduce hostility, they can begin to develop respect for each other. Broome maintains that as members of each group begin to listen to each other and to understand each other's viewpoints, they will develop a degree of regard and respect for each other. Once again, Broome acknowledges that this does not necessitate agreement but at least can initiate the process of peaceful discussion rather than hostile confrontation. As peaceful discussion continues, interactants are more likely to engage in cooperative rather than competitive and hostile action. This, then, can lead to a culture of peace.[15]

Broome is careful to point out that building a culture of peace is a lengthy and difficult process. He understands that unequal social and economic conditions, beyond either party's control, may prevent conflicting parties from engaging in willful dialogue. He asserts that each party must be a willing participant. Moreover, current societal, national, or international events outside the control of either party may impede progress as well.[16]

So what Mike Fabion and Nicole Newton might try is to engage in more frequent interaction and get to know each other (i.e., reduce uncertainty—remember Chapters 1 and 9?). They may find that they have more in common than they thought (remember the model of relational empathy and third-culture building in Chapter 9?). For example, they both work for the same company, and each wants the company to succeed. As they begin to

face A person's sense of favorable self-worth or self-image experienced during communicative situations. Face is an emotional extension of the self-concept. It is considered a universal concept

self-face The concern for one's own image during communication, especially conflict

other-face Concern for another's image during communication, especially conflict

mutual-face Concern for both parties' images or the image of the relationship during communication, especially conflict

facework Communicative strategies employed to manage one's own face or to support or challenge another's facer self-face

dominating facework Communicative behaviors characterized by an individual's need to control the situation and defend his or her self-face

avoiding facework Communicative behaviors that focus on an attempt to save the face of the other person during communication or conflict

integrating facework Communicative behaviors that allow for the shared concern for self- and other-face and strive for closure during communication or conflict

reduce uncertainty and discover their commonalities—at least in their shared desire for the good of the organization—they may begin to respect each other, engage in more peaceful interaction, and eventually cooperate.

THE CONCEPT OF FACE, FACEWORK, AND COMMUNICATION CONFLICT STYLES

Face

In an effort to explain intercultural conflict, a number of researchers apply a theory called *face-negotiation theory*.[17] According to this view, the concept of *face* explains how people of different cultures manage conflict. Face refers to a person's sense of favorable self-worth or self-image experienced during communicative situations. Face is an emotional extension of the self-concept. It is considered a universal concept; that is, people in all cultures have a sense of face, but the specific meanings of face may vary across cultures. Ting-Toomey and her associates differentiate among three types of face: self-face, other-face, and mutual-face. Self-face is the concern for one's own image, other-face is the concern for another's image, and mutual-face is the concern for both parties' images or that of the relationship. Ting-Toomey maintains that one's face can be threatened, enhanced, undermined, and bargained over both emotionally and cognitively. According to face-negotiation theory, people in all cultures try to maintain and negotiate face in virtually all communication situations. Generally, however, persons of individualistic cultures have a greater concern for self-face and a lesser concern for other-face than do members of collectivistic cultures.[18] The concept of face becomes particularly significant in situations when uncertainty is high, as in conflict situations when the character of the communicators might be called into question.

Facework

In most conflict situations, interactants are required to defend or save their faces when they are threatened or attacked. The various ways one might deal with conflict and face are collectively called *facework*. Specifically, facework refers to the communicative strategies employed to manage one's own face or to support or challenge another's face. Facework can be employed to initiate, manage, or terminate conflict.[19] Oetzel and his colleagues classify three general types of facework strategies used in intercultural conflict: dominating, avoiding, and integrating facework (see Table 10.2). Dominating facework behaviors are characterized by an individual's need to control the conflict situation and defend his or her self-face. Avoiding facework behaviors focus on an attempt to save the face of the other person. Integrating facework allows for the shared concern for self- and other-face and strives for closure in the conflict.[20]

Cross-cultural research has shown that individualists, such as U.S. Americans, tend to prefer facework behaviors that defend the self-face or confront the other (i.e., aggression). Collectivists, such as Taiwanese and Chinese, tend to prefer other-face strategies such as avoiding the conflict, seeking a third party, or giving in to the other. Collectivists also prefer mutual-face facework such as attempting to solve the problem through a third party, having a private discussion, or apologizing.[21]

TABLE 10.2 ■ Facework Behaviors

Dominating Facework Behaviors

1. Aggression: verbally assault the other person
   "I would say nasty things about the other person."
   "I would ridicule the other person."

2. Defend self: reply to a threat
   "I would be firm in my demands and not give in."
   "I would insist my position be accepted."

Avoiding Facework Behaviors

1. Avoidance/pretend: dismissal of the conflict that does not threaten the other's face
   "I would act as though I wasn't upset at all."
   "I would try to ignore it and behave as if nothing happened."

2. Give in: succumb and/or yield to the other
   "I would give in to the other person's wishes."
   "I would let the other person win."

3. Involve a third party: reliance on an outside party to help manage the conflict
   "I would ask another friend to help us negotiate a solution."
   "I would talk with the other person through an outside party."

Integrating Facework Behaviors

1. Apologize: offer an apology for the conflict
   "I would offer an apology even though I didn't do anything wrong."
   "I would say I'm sorry and act as though it didn't happen."

2. Compromise: utilize direct discussion to resolve the conflict
   "I would try to find some middle ground to solve the problem."
   "I would try to combine both our viewpoints."

3. Consider the other: show concern for the other
   "I would listen to the other person and show respect."
   "I would tell the other person I'm aware of their position."

4. Private discussion: engage in relational talk about the conflict in a private setting
   "I would keep our discussions private."
   "I would wait until we were by ourselves to talk about it."

5. Remain calm: stay quiet and unruffled
   "I would try to remain calm."
   "I would try to listen well."

6. Express emotions: communicate feelings about the conflict
   "I would express my feelings in a straightforward manner."
   "I would be direct in expressing my feelings."

SOURCE: Adapted from Oetzel, J. G., Ting-Toomey, S., Masumoto, T., Yokochi, Y., & Takai, J. (2000). A Typology of Facework Behaviors in Conflicts With Best Friends and Relative Strangers. *Communication Quarterly, 48,* 397–419.

Conflict Communication Styles

In addition to the facework strategies one might use to manage face during conflict, researchers have studied conflict interaction styles. Whereas facework is employed to manage and uphold face during conflict, conflict interaction styles refer to the ways individuals manage the actual conflict. How people manage communication during conflict differs considerably across cultures.[22]

One's conflict interaction style is based on two communication dimensions. The first is the degree to which a person asserts a *self-face need*—that is, seeks to satisfy his or her own interests during conflict. The second is the degree to which a person is cooperative (i.e., observes an *other-face need*) and seeks to incorporate the interests of the other.[23] The combination of assertiveness, or self-face need, and cooperativeness, or other-face need, defines five primary communication styles and three secondary styles of managing conflict. The five primary styles are dominating, integrating, obliging, avoiding, and compromising.[24] The three secondary styles are emotional expression, third-party help, and neglect (see Figure 10.4).[25]

The degree to which a person asserts a high self-face need while simultaneously discounting the other-face need defines the *dominating* communication style. A person exercising a dominating approach might use his or her authority, expertise, or rank to try to win the conflict. The person who assumes a high self-face need while also attending to the needs of the other-face takes on an *integrating* style. This person might try to collaborate with the opponent or try to find an agreeable solution that fully satisfies both parties. The person who tries to balance both self-face and other-face needs takes on a *compromising* style. This person would probably use a "give-and-take" approach and might propose some

FIGURE 10.4 ■ Self-Face Concern, Other-Face Concern, and Communication Styles of Managing Conflict
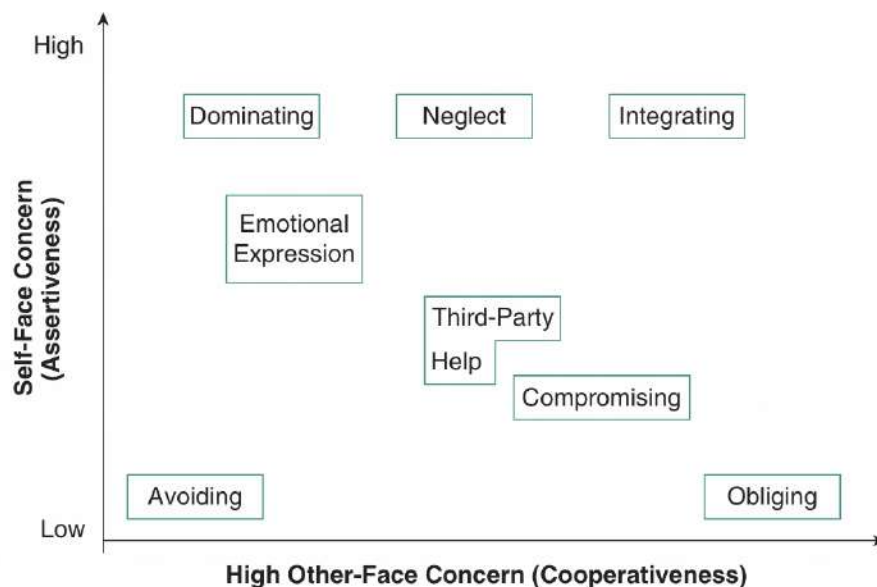
middle ground for resolving the conflict, understanding that each party may have to give up something to gain something. The person using an *avoiding* style ignores both self-face need and other-face need. This person might keep the conflict to himself or herself and not discuss it. The person who puts the other-face need ahead of self-face need assumes an *obliging* style. This person will try to accommodate the opponent or try to satisfy the needs of the other before satisfying his or her own needs.

Ting-Toomey and Oetzel maintain that the five primary conflict styles overlook some of the subtle, fine distinctions of conflict behavior used across cultures, so they have added three secondary styles. *Emotional expression* refers to how one might use his or her emotions to guide conflict. This is demonstrated by the type of person who listens to his or her base feelings and proceeds accordingly. *Third-party help* is the extent to which a person is willing to engage an outsider to act as a go-between in the conflict. *Neglect* is the use of a passive-aggressive approach, whereby a person might ignore the conflict but attempt to elicit a response from the other via aggressive acts. For example, this person might insult the other or say things that might damage the other's reputation (e.g., "I would say nasty things about the person to others").[26]

Research in this area has shown that, in general, individualists tend to use more dominating styles during conflict than do collectivists. Collectivists tend to use more integrative, obliging, and avoiding styles during conflict. Such generalizations do not hold for all cultures considered collectivistic, however. For example, in a study comparing five cultures, Ting-Toomey and her colleagues found that Korean, Japanese, and U.S. college students used fewer avoidance-type conflict styles than did Chinese and Taiwanese students. They also found that Korean and U.S. students were less likely to engage in obliging styles than were Chinese, Japanese, and Taiwanese students.[27] In their study, Hyun Lee and Randall Rogan found that U.S. citizens were actually less confrontational during conflict than were Koreans, a culture considered to be collectivistic.[28]

AN INTERCULTURAL CONVERSATION
DOMINATING AND THIRD-PARTY CONFLICT STYLES

Kevin, who grew up in Madison, Wisconsin, is a student at the University of Wisconsin. Kevin is enrolled in an introductory communication course. The professor has assigned Kevin and Kokkeong, an international exchange student from Malaysia, to work on a project together. The professor has given them the option of either submitting a paper or giving a presentation. Kevin and Kokkeong disagree on which option to pursue. Kevin prefers the presentation option, while Kokkeong prefers the paper option.

In the following conversation, Kevin asserts himself forcefully. He stresses his experience and expertise on the matter of presentations versus papers. His approach is typical of a dominating conflict style. Kokkeong, on the other hand, tries to convince Kevin that they should seek the advice of a third party, either other students or the professor. Kevin simply refuses.

Kevin:	Well, Kokkeong, I think we should do a presentation. I hate writing papers.
Kokkeong:	Well, what have other students done?
Kevin:	I don't know, probably presentations. Nobody likes writing papers.
Kokkeong:	Well, maybe they might have some advice.
Kevin:	Advice about what?
Kokkeong:	About which assignment is preferred.
Kevin:	But I already know what assignment I prefer.
Kokkeong:	I wonder if we should ask the professor for his advice.
Kevin:	Why? He's already given us the option. Look, I've been a student here for 2 years. I know how these things work. Let's just do the presentation.
Kokkeong:	I think I'll ask some others what they think.
Kevin:	Go ahead, but doing a presentation is the best choice. I know what I'm talking about.

THE INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT STYLE INVENTORY

Mitchell Hammer has developed a model of intercultural conflict based on his Intercultural Conflict Style (ICS) Inventory. Hammer is the founder of several organizations that focus on intercultural communication. He has applied his conflict model in work with the NASA Johnson Space Center, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the National Institutes of Health. Hammer's ICS Inventory is a theoretical model and assessment tool used by professional mediators and trainers to diagnose and manage intercultural conflicts. Hammer contends that the dynamics of conflict revolve around two fundamental features of all conflict: disagreement and emotional reaction. Like others, Hammer maintains that a central characteristic of conflict is disagreement. This is consistent with Ting-Toomey and Oetzel's definition, presented earlier in this chapter, which describes conflict as mismatched expectations between individuals from different cultures who perceive an incompatibility between their values, norms, goals, scarce resources, or outcomes. Disagreement would be considered the cognitive component of conflict. A second fundamental feature of conflict is the affective or emotional response to the disagreement. According to Hammer, conflicting parties experience an antagonistic emotional reaction toward each other based on their disagreement and the perception of threat associated with it. So Hammer's conflict model is based on a cognitive and affective component—that is, disagreement and the negative emotional reaction to it.[29]

The focus of Hammer's model is on intercultural conflict style. Like others, Hammer contends that people respond in patterned ways to conflict and that their communication styles are predictable. Conflict style, then, is the behavioral component of conflict that follows from the cognitive (i.e., disagreement) and affective (i.e., negative emotional

reaction) dimensions of conflict. Echoing the work of Ting-Toomey and others, Hammer maintains that one's conflict style is learned culturally. But Hammer argues that the five conflict styles based on an individual's concern for self- or other-face have been developed within individualistic, Western cultural conceptions and that these models may not adequately reflect intercultural conflict styles. Take, for example, the avoiding style, in which the person ignores both self-face need and other-face need. Consistent with Ting-Toomey's research, Hammer notes that in collectivistic cultures, an avoiding style is used to maintain relational harmony and actually reflects a high concern for self and others. Following his contention that conflicts evolve from disagreement and its resulting negative emotional reactions, Hammer proposes that people, regardless of culture, deal with disagreement either directly or indirectly and that they either openly express or restrain their emotional reactions to conflict. Thus, one's intercultural conflict style is defined by one's direct or indirect communication about disagreements and his or her emotionally expressive or emotionally restrained behaviors.[30]

Recall from Chapter 7 that direct communication includes the use of precise language, in which one's intentions are explicitly stated and the sender is responsible for making his or her case known. Indirect communication includes the use of ambiguous language, or hinting, and the burden of understanding rests with both the sender and the receiver. Ting-Toomey's research has indicated that a direct style is often associated with individualistic and low-context cultures, while an indirect style is associated with collectivistic and high-context cultures. Emotionally expressive individuals overtly and visibly (i.e., nonverbally) communicate their feelings through intense facial expressions, frequent gesturing, body posture, and overall active involvement. Emotionally restrained individuals minimize gesturing, mask their emotions both verbally and nonverbally, hold back their sentiments, and control their feelings. Extant research suggests that individualistic and low-context cultures are often emotionally expressive, while collectivistic, high-context cultures are often emotionally restrained.[31]

According to Hammer's model, during conflict, the extent to which an individual is either direct or indirect and emotionally expressive or emotionally restrained defines his or her intercultural conflict style, of which there are four types. Hammer maintains that these styles are independent of culture. The four styles are (a) discussion, (b) engagement, (c) accommodation, and (d) dynamic style (see Figure 10.5).[32]

As the graphic shows, an individual who approaches conflict directly but is emotionally restrained takes on a *discussion* conflict style. This person emphasizes precise language and straightforward communication about the disagreement while withholding his or her emotions. This person is typically comfortable addressing conflict and is calm and collected emotionally. The person who is direct in his or her communication and is also emotionally expressive takes on an *engagement* style. This person is confrontational about the disagreement and forthright with his or her emotions. This is the type of style that "pulls no punches." When a person communicates about conflict indirectly and without emotion, he or she takes on an *accommodation* style. This is the type of person who only hints at the nature of the disagreement and may prefer an intermediary to address the conflict. This person sees emotional outbursts as potentially dangerous. Finally, the person who communicates indirectly about the disagreement but is emotionally expressive takes on a *dynamic* style. Verbally, this person may use exaggeration and repetition of his or her messages while also employing a nonverbal, emotionally confrontational form of expression.

FIGURE 10.5 ■ Intercultural Conflict Styles

Hammer has developed an instrument that measures these four styles. He maintains that the ICS Inventory is useful in applied settings, such as organizations and even families. Hammer asserts that after the conflicting parties recognize their own style and that of their counterpart, they can better manage conflict. For example, Hammer cites a case in which one of the conflicting parties used an engagement style and the other used accommodation. Hammer points out that a large part of the conflict between the two was the misperceptions each party held about the other. The accommodation-style individual felt that the engagement-style person was rude and aggressive, while the engagement-style party felt that the accommodating-style individual was deceptive and lacking in commitment.

Hammer also notes that, particularly in the United States, many people believe that their conflict style is discussion and that this is the most appropriate style. But after completing his scales, many of these people see that they actually approach conflict with an accommodation, engagement, or dynamic style. Hammer concludes by saying that when persons try to implement a discussion style, thinking it is the most appropriate and having little awareness of the other three styles—particularly their cultural roots—they tend to see the engagement style as callous, the accommodation style as lacking sincerity, and the dynamic style as unstable and disorganized. Knowledge of these various styles is the first step toward successful conflict management and resolution.[33]

INDIVIDUALISTIC AND COLLECTIVISTIC APPROACHES TO CONFLICT

A central theme articulated throughout this book is that whenever individuals from different cultures come together and interact, they bring with them a whole host of different value orientations, cultural expectations, verbal and nonverbal routines, perceptual

experiences (e.g., ethnocentrism), and divergent group memberships (e.g., ethnicity) that often lead to communication problems and conflict. A source of intercultural conflict is often a felt need to protect one's group—that is, one's culture. This need may be felt passionately.

In her work, Ting-Toomey maintains that persons from individualistic cultures approach conflict differently than do persons from collectivistic cultures.[34] According to Ting-Toomey, individualists tend to follow an outcome-oriented approach to intercultural conflict. Collectivists, on the other hand, tend to follow a process-oriented approach. The outcome-oriented approach preferred by individualists emphasizes the importance of asserting their self-identity in the conflict and the accomplishment of perceived tangible outcomes or goals. The process-oriented approach preferred by collectivists focuses on mutual-face or group-face interests. These interests are sought prior to, or in lieu of, any tangible outcomes or goals.[35] The specific characteristics of the outcome-oriented approach are summarized as follows:[36]

1. To the individualist, conflict is closely related to the goals or outcomes. Conflict is "end" oriented, in that the individualist seeks to achieve something.
2. Individualists become frustrated during conflict when their counterparts are unwilling to address the conflict openly and honestly.
3. Individualists see conflict as satisfying when their counterparts are willing to confront the conflict openly and assert their feelings honestly.
4. Conflict is seen as unproductive when no tangible outcomes are negotiated and no plan of action is executed.
5. Conflict is seen as productive when tangible resolutions are reached.
6. Successful management of conflict is defined as when individual goals and the differences between the parties are addressed openly and honestly.

The specific characteristics of the process-oriented approach are summarized as follows:[37]

1. The significance of the conflict is assessed against any face threat incurred in the conflict; it is also evaluated in terms of in-group versus out-group.
2. Conflict is seen as threatening when the parties move forward on substantive issues before proper facework management.
3. Conflict is seen as satisfying when the parties engage in mutual face-saving and face-giving behavior and attend to verbal and nonverbal communication.
4. Conflict is seen as unproductive when face issues and relational/group feelings are not addressed properly.
5. Conflict is defined as productive when both parties can declare win–win results on facework in addition to substantive agreement.
6. Successful management of conflict means that the faces of both conflict parties are saved or upgraded and each person has dealt with the conflict strategically in conjunction with substantive gains or losses.

Ting-Toomey maintains that the outcome-oriented model preferred by individualists encourages an effective finish to the conflict over the appropriate treatment of the parties

involved. The collectivist-preferred process-oriented model emphasizes the appropriate treatment of the parties involved over an effective solution. Moreover, asserts Ting-Toomey, the accomplishment of one criterion may help accomplish the other. For example, as individualists successfully address the core issues in the conflict, appropriate and genial interaction between the parties can follow naturally—that is, face saving. On the other hand, from the collectivist's perspective, acting appropriately in the conflict by engaging in necessary facework eventually brings about effective outcomes. For collectivists, strategic facework is more important than winning or losing a conflict. In fact, collectivists often see losing a given conflict for the moment as gaining key advantages in the long term. In the end, the key to competent intercultural conflict management is *mindfulness,* in which each person is mindful of cultural differences, mindful of the different goals, and willing to experiment with different conflict management styles.[38]

CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN HIGH-VERSUS LOW-CONTEXT CULTURES

As we have seen throughout this book, communication is very much dependent on the context in which it occurs. The contextual model guiding the organization of this book includes the cultural, microcultural, environmental, perceptual, and sociorelational contexts and how these contexts affect the choice of verbal and nonverbal messages. And recall from Chapter 2 that the degree to which interactants focus on these contexts while communicating varies considerably from culture to culture. In some cultures, persons choose to focus more on the verbal codes than on the nonverbal elements, while in other cultures, people actively monitor the nonverbal elements of the context. Edward Hall describes the former as low context and the latter as high context.

According to Hall, a high-context culture is one in which most of the information during communication is found in the physical context internalized in the person, while very little is found in the explicit code (see Photo 10.2). A low-context culture is one in which the mass of information is in the explicit code (i.e., the verbal code).

Elizabeth Chua and William Gudykunst have compared conflict resolution styles between high- and low-context cultures.[39] They argue that in low-context cultures, such as the United States, individuals are more likely to separate the conflict issue from the persons involved. In high-context cultures, such as China, the conflict issue and the persons involved are typically connected. For example, directly disagreeing with someone may be seen as losing face and is perceived as insulting. Moreover, Chua and Gudykunst assert that persons in low-context cultures tend to be more direct and explicit in their dealings with conflict, whereas persons in high-context cultures prefer implicit communication. In their study of nearly 400 persons from both high- and low-context cultures, Chua

Photo 10.2 What kind of conflict style might be at play here?

STUDENT VOICES ACROSS CULTURES
PROBLEM-SOLVING IN MEXICO

Rodrigo Villalobos

I am from Leon, Guanajuato, Mexico, but now reside in the United States. I am a graphic design major.

I do not believe that people from Mexico deal with trouble or stressful situations in the same way as others do. To generalize on a particular set of characteristics that define how a person of Mexican nationality resolves his or her own problems would be almost impossible. The social and economic surroundings of every individual in Mexico are usually completely different, which makes their problem-solving processes much different as well.

However, there are certain behaviors or attitudes that one can expect to see from a Mexican when that person is in a stressful or uncomfortable situation.

As Mexicans are Latinos, our characters and personalities are rather warm and heartfelt.

We express our feelings, to a certain extent, more than people from other races or ethnicities do. For example, when a situation makes a Mexican person happy, he or she will express it more boldly than someone from Sweden would. In the same manner, when a Mexican person feels uncomfortable, upset, or mad about a specific problem or situation, this person's reaction will be quite volatile (e.g., yelling, screaming, lack of verbal communication, trying to avoid the problem, etc.).

We all know that the shortest way to solve problems is through communication and an open-minded understanding of the situation. Perhaps the slower pace of life in Mexico affects how Mexicans approach their problems (e.g., postponing dealing with problems). Also, pride and lack of will to reconcile might be obstacles a Mexican must confront before considering a possible solution.

Since friendships have a lot of value to persons from Latin America (not to say they don't to people from other places), friends will ask for advice and talk to each other for insight into a problem.

and Gudykunst found that persons from low-context cultures preferred solution-oriented conflict resolution styles, whereas persons from high-context cultures preferred nonconfrontational styles.[40]

Chua and Gudykunst conclude that their results are consistent with other research that has found a similar pattern between high- and low-context cultures. Specifically, research has revealed that Mexicans (i.e., a high-context culture) prefer to deny that conflict exists or to avoid instigating conflict, while U.S. Americans (i.e., a low-context culture) are more direct in their dealings with conflict.[41]

avoiding The person using an avoiding style to manage conflict ignores both self-face need and other-face need. This person might keep the conflict to himself or herself and not discuss it. Often, persons with little power or influence choose to avoid addressing conflict. Avoiding may an effective strategy if one needs to do more research on the topic of conflict

forcing A forcing strategy to resolve conflict is used when one coerces another into compliance. Forcing eliminates choice and is often used by persons who possess power over others

education/persuasion This strategy to resolve conflict is defined by one's use of information, logic, or emotional appeals to influence another

infiltration With this strategy to manage conflict, one introduces his or her value orientation, hoping that the opposing party will see the value and adopt it

negotiation/compromise Using this strategy to manage conflict, both parties give up something. Often, with compromise neither party is completely satisfied with the outcome

Buller argue that neither of these responses is satisfactory. Instead, Kohls and Buller point out that there are several communication strategies one can use when addressing cross-cultural conflicts.[42] These include **avoiding**, **forcing**, **education/persuasion**, **infiltration**, **negotiation/compromise**, **accommodation**, and **collaboration/problem-solving**. Note that these seven strategies parallel those outlined earlier with Face Negotiation Theory and are based on the research of Thomas and Kilmann.[43]

Avoiding: As the label suggests, persons using an avoiding style choose not to address the conflict. Often, persons with little power or influence choose to avoid addressing conflict. Avoiding may an effective strategy if one needs to do more research on the topic of conflict. Another reason to use avoiding is if passions are high. Temporarily avoiding conflict may allow the emotions to settle.

Forcing: A forcing strategy is when one coerces another into compliance. Forcing eliminates choice and is often used by persons who possess power over others. Recall that in many cultures rigid and strict social hierarchies prescribe who has power.

Education/Persuasion: This strategy is defined by one's use of information, logic, or emotional appeals to influence another. This strategy is often seen in small power distance cultures where people are seen as essentially equal.

Infiltration: With this strategy, one introduces his or her value orientation, hoping that the opposing party will see the value and adopt it.

Negotiation/Compromise: Using this strategy, both parties give up something in order to resolve the conflict. Often, with compromise neither party is completely satisfied with the outcome.

Accommodation: With this strategy, one of the conflicting parties simply adopts or cooperates with the position of the opposition. This is the "When in Rome, do as the Romans do" strategy.

Collaboration/Problem Solving: With this approach, the conflicting parties work together to find a mutually agreeable solution in which each party accomplishes his or her goal without compromise. This is the *win–win* strategy.

Regarding the seven communicative strategies outlined above, Kohls and Buller argue that the specific strategy one uses in cross-cultural conflict is *contingent* on at least three factors, including (a) the central values at stake in the conflict (i.e., centrality) and the degree to which such values are held by the majority (i.e., consensus), (b) the individual's ability to resolve the conflict, and (c) the degree of urgency in resolving the conflict.[44]

Kohls and Buller maintain that not all conflicts are equal in terms of the centrality of the cultural values at stake and the consensus with which they are held. For example, in the brief examples cited above, not making direct eye contact with a superior certainly does not hold the same importance as aborting a fetus because she is female. Cultural values vary along a continuum of cultural centrality (see Figure 10.6). Some values are at the core of a culture (i.e., central) while others are peripheral.[45]

In managing cross-cultural conflict, one must assess the centrality of the conflicting values in gauging what kind of communicative strategy to adopt. Peripheral values may have to be sacrificed in order to maintain cross-cultural relationships, while central values may need to be defended at the cost of the relationship. Related to the centrality of values

is the degree to which the majority holds the particular value as central to their culture (i.e., consensus). Kohls and Buller maintain that if a value is at stake but is not widely held by the majority, it may be considered less important and more easily sacrificed. They point to providing maternity leave for the parents of newborns, which responds to central familial values in many Western cultures such as the United States. But such practices are not widely held across cultures. So while this may be a central value in the United States, it does not reach consensus across cultures. The combination of value centrality and value consensus is what Kohls and Buller call *intensity*.[46]

FIGURE 10.6 ■ Continuum of Cultural Centrality

SOURCE: Adapted from Buller, P. F., Kohls, J. J., & Anderson, K. S. (1991). The Challenge of Global Ethics. *Journal of Business Ethics, 10*(10): 767–775. Kohls, J., & Buller, P. (1994). Resolving Cross-Cultural Ethical Conflict: Exploring Alternative Strategies. *Journal of Business Ethics, 13*(1): 31–38.

Another factor that will influence how one responds to cross-cultural conflict is the degree to which an individual has influence over the conflict. In some cases, an individual may not have any control or ability to affect the outcome of the conflict, while in other cases an individual may have considerable control. For example, recall from Chapter 9 the issue of arranged marriages. In many cultures, young women have no control over whom they will marry and that such decisions are made for them by their parents who have complete control.

Finally, the third factor is urgency. This refers to the timeline that is needed to resolve the conflict. In some cases, there will be pressure, perhaps even a deadline, for which the conflict needs to be resolved quickly. In other cases, the conflicting parties may have sufficient time to resolve it. For example, in many cultures parents may take a considerable amount of time finding the appropriate partner for their son or daughter in an arranged marriage. They may even place matrimonial ads in newspapers and take weeks or months finding a potential spouse for their child. However, when the parents do find an appropriate match, there is often a strict deadline placed on the son or daughter to accept the partner, sometimes only a matter of hours.
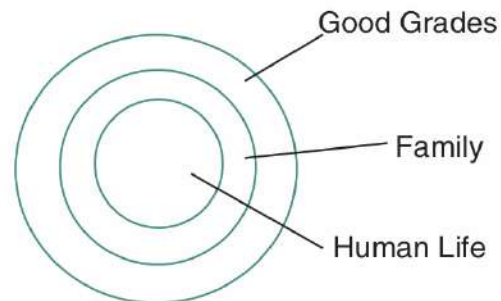
To repeat, Kohls and Buller argue that there are several communicative strategies one may use during conflict (e.g., avoiding, infiltration, etc). But they maintain that the particular strategy to be used is contingent on the urgency of the conflict, the intensity of the conflict, and how much influence one holds in the conflict. [47]

Kohls and Buller's contingency model can be applied to a number of cross-cultural conflicts.

accommodation
With this conflict-resolution strategy, one of the conflicting parties simply adopts or cooperates with the position of the opposition. This is the "When in Rome, do as the Romans do" strategy

collaboration/ problem-solving
With this conflict-resolution approach, the conflicting parties work together to find a mutually agreeable solution in which each party accomplishes his or her goal without compromise. This is the win–win strategy

SCENARIO #1: LATE FOR MEETINGS

Gene Lanoye is a U.S. manager for Acme Corporation based in Acme's Mexico office in Cuernavaca, which is the capital and largest city of the state of Morelos. Gene manages a team of nine Mexican workers and holds routine Monday morning meetings at 8:00 a.m. to brief the team about the week ahead. Gene is frustrated because many of his employees are often late to the meeting, and some do not show at all. Gene doesn't know how handle the situation.

TABLE 10.3 ■ Cross-Cultural Conflict Scenarios				
	Urgency	Intensity Centrality + Consensus	Influence	= Strategy
Scenario 1.	Low	High	High	Infiltration, Collaborate, or Educate
Scenario 2.	High	High	High	Force
Scenario 3.	High	High	Low	Avoid
Scenario 4.	Low	Low	Low	Negotiate
Scenario 5.	High	Low	Low	Accommodate

SOURCE: Adapted from Buller, P. F., Kohls, J. J., & Anderson, K. S. (1991). The Challenge of Global Ethics. *Journal of Business Ethics, 10*(10): 767–775. Kohls, J., & Buller, P. (1994). Resolving Cross-Cultural Ethical Conflict: Exploring Alternative Strategies. *Journal of Business Ethics, 13*(1): 31–38.

Recall from Chapter 4 that the United States is a monochronic-oriented culture in which schedules and punctuality are important and guide the communicative context. Mexico is a polychronic culture in which time is relaxed, schedules are flexible, and the natural context guides one's communicative acts. Mexico is the United State's third-largest trading partner, and many U.S. companies send their managers to Mexico to manage their businesses and Mexican employees. These managers take with them their monochronic orientation, which can lead to a variety of cross-cultural conflicts within a polychronic culture such as Mexico. In many U.S. companies, meetings are routinely scheduled (e.g., weekly or monthly) and are held regularly, often covering relatively mundane topics. Many U.S. managers have complained that their Mexican employees are often late for such meetings or sometimes do not attend at all. In this case, we have a conflict that is relatively low in urgency, of high intensity (i.e., the monochronic orientation is a central value across the United States), and the U.S. manager carries considerable influence over his employees, given that Mexico is a large power distance culture. Here, the contingency model would prescribe that Gene Lanoye exercise an infiltration, collaboration, or education strategy. Gene might try to emphasize to the employees why it is important to be on time for such meetings, while simultaneously collaborating with them by suggesting that if they are prompt for the meetings they will be rewarded somehow. Ironically, oftentimes persons from monochronic cultures who spend time in polychronic cultures adjust rather quickly to the polychronic orientation and find it difficult and stressful when returning home to their native monochronic orientation. To be sure, there may be instances in which an emergency occurs and Gene needs to schedule an urgent meeting. Here, because the urgency is high and Gene carries influence, he may be forced to require that his employees attend a meeting at the precisely scheduled time and mete out punishment if his employees are late.

SCENARIO #2: WRITE A PAPER OR GIVE A PRESENTATION?

Jim and Akira are students at a university in the United States. Jim is from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Akira is an international exchange student from Japan. Although they share the same major and have had a few classes together, Jim and Akira have only interacted occasionally and do not know each other very well. A professor has assigned Jim and Akira to work together on a class assignment that is due in 2 weeks. The professor has given them the option of either submitting a paper or giving a presentation to the class. Jim and Akira disagree on which option to pursue. Jim wants to give a presentation. Akira insists on writing a paper.

Coming from a collectivistic, high-context culture, it is understandable why Akira would prefer to write a paper. He would prefer to not stand out among his fellow students. Remember that in Japan, "the tallest nail gets hammered down." Coming from an individualistic, low-context culture, Jim might prefer to give a presentation—that way he doesn't have to write a paper. In this situation, because the assignment is not due for 2 more weeks, the urgency is relatively low. The intensity is relatively low as well. There is probably not a strong consensus on whether to write a paper or deliver a presentation. Nor is this assignment attached to some strong cultural value in either Japan or the United States. Finally, since both Jim and Akira are students, neither possesses any hierarchical status over the other. Here, the contingency model would prescribe that the two students negotiate. It is likely that there will be more assignments in the future since they share the same major. So perhaps Jim could agree that they write a paper for this assignment, but when or if the next assignment is given, they would deliver a presentation. Akira would probably agree.

SCENARIO #3: TOO MUCH TOUCHING

Morgan is a student from the United States who is studying abroad for a semester in Ecuador. Morgan has taken on a part-time job as a waitress in a restaurant in Quito, the capital city of Ecuador. The restaurant is very popular and busy. As in most restaurants during the prime-time dinner hour, the kitchen area is hectic with chefs, kitchen staff, and the wait staff, working diligently in close quarters. Although she likes her job there, Morgan is very uncomfortable with the amount of touching that occurs in the kitchen. Other employees constantly bump into her, touch her, rub up against her, and stand very close to her. Morgan is upset and believes this is borderline sexual harassment and wants to approach the manager about it.

Recall from Chapter 8 that cultures vary considerably regarding haptics, or touch behavior. Cultures vary along a high-, moderate-, and low-contact continuum. High-contact cultures tend to encourage touching and engage in touching more frequently than do either moderate- or low-contact cultures, in which touching occurs less frequently and is generally discouraged. Many South and Central American countries, including Ecuador, are considered high-contact cultures. The United States is regarded as a moderate- to low-contact culture. Coming from the United States, Morgan probably misinterprets the intent of the frequent contact in the kitchen. During peak dining hours, there is some degree of urgency to get the

food orders prepared and delivered to the customers. The intensity is rather low, however. Serving guests in a restaurant is important but probably is not as central a value among Ecuadorians as is family, for example. Finally, Morgan possesses little influence compared to the head chefs, the managers, and the owners of the restaurant. Applying the contingency model, the urgency is relatively high, the intensity is low, and her influence is low. Hence, Morgan should accommodate her fellow employees and perhaps engage in the high-contact behaviors herself. This might be a case of "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." Recall Lindsey Novitzke's *Student Voices Across Cultures* profile in Chapter 8, in which she recounts how uncomfortable she was initially with the high-contact behaviors in Zambia. Lindsey accommodated the behaviors, and ironically, after returning to the United States, Lindsey actually craved touch and felt that people in the United States were unusually distant.

SCENARIO #4: BRIBERY?

Jeff Zahn is a U.S. businessman who has been approached by some of his Chinese business acquaintances about opening a business in China that may prove very useful to many Chinese and profitable to Zahn. There are some deadlines to meet, so Jeff needs to make a decision. After expressing an interest in the business, Jeff learns from his Chinese business acquaintances that many companies in China pay bribes or give gifts to local government officials and tax collectors in order to operate. In Beijing, almost half all companies report the need to bribe or give gifts in order to stay in business.[48] So Jeff is faced with a dilemma. The conflict is relatively urgent, as deadlines need to be met. The intensity for Jeff is high because of the ethical issue of paying bribes. Such acts are clearly illegal in the United States, but because Jeff is from the United States, he has little control over the issue. Given the contingency model prescription of high urgency and intensity—but low influence—it might be best for Jeff to avoid this opportunity.

As we can see from the previous discussion of Kohls and Buller's contingency model, there are a number of ways to manage cross-cultural conflict, depending on the urgency of the issue, the intensity of the conflict, and the degree of influence one has over the outcome.

Chapter Summary

This chapter began by asking you to imagine yourself in a conflict. All types of human relationships we have—from ones with strangers to acquaintances to intimates—experience conflict. We cannot avoid or eliminate conflict, but we can manage and reduce it. Communication plays a paradoxical role in most conflicts because communication is required both to instigate conflict and to resolve it. Unfortunately, conflict is the source of much relational stress and dissolution.

In this chapter, we have seen that a variety of factors play a role in triggering and escalating conflict. Three models were presented, including Kim's Model of Intercultural Conflict, Ting-Toomey and Oetzel's Culture-Based Social Ecological Model, and Broome's Model of Building a Culture of Peace Through Dialogue. We have seen how the concepts of face and facework contribute to intercultural conflict. Finally, the chapter ended with a contingency model of conflict styles and a discussion of how persons from different cultures manage conflict.

SOLUTION-ORIENTED CONFLICT STYLES PREFERRED BY LOW-CONTEXT CULTURES

1. Direct communication about the conflict

2. Collaborating behaviors that aim to find a solution for both parties

3. Giving in or compromising

4. Accommodating the other

5. Confronting the issue

NONCONFRONTATIONAL STYLES PREFERRED BY HIGH-CONTEXT CULTURES

1. Indirect communication

2. Avoiding or withdrawing from the issue

3. Using silence

4. Glossing over differences

5. Concealing ill feelings

RESOLVING CROSS-CULTURAL CONFLICT: A CONTINGENCY MODEL

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, conflict is an inevitable part of living in a society with others. Although we cannot eliminate conflict, we can learn to manage and resolve it competently. To be sure, Kim's Model of Intercultural Conflict, Ting-Toomey and Oetzel's Culture-Based Social Ecological Conflict Model, and Benjamin Broome's Model of Building a Culture of Peace Through Dialogue are excellent examples that describe and explain intercultural conflict. Now, we will focus on how to resolve conflict with persons from cultures different than our own.

Recall from earlier in this chapter that cross-cultural conflict often results from the incompatibility of cultural ideologies and values. How many wives should a man have? Is it acceptable to abort a child because she is female? Is a dinner of dog meat acceptable? Is direct eye contact with someone of higher status OK? When individuals experience and respond to cross-cultural conflict, they are faced with a dilemma. To what extent do they adapt to the other person's cultural ideologies and values, and to what extent do they adhere to their own culture's ideologies and values? To the extent that people adapt to the other person's cultural values, they may be following the familiar adage "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." Or instead, do they hold fast to their native cultural values? Perhaps doing as the Romans do violates a core value that one holds firmly. John Kohls and Paul