

SECOND
EDITION

Conflict Management and Intercultural Communication

The Art of Intercultural Harmony

Edited by XIAODONG DAI
and GUO-MING CHEN



CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Conflict management and harmony building are two key issues of intercultural communication research and merit particular attention in the globally interconnected world. In the expanded second edition, the book explores the effective ways to manage intercultural conflict and develop intercultural harmony, and takes an interdisciplinary approach to address the two issues.

The book begins with the theoretical perspectives on conflict management and harmony building. It examines intercultural communication ethics, diversity and inclusion, conflict resolution, conflict face negotiation, and intercultural competence. It presents both Western and non-Western perspectives. The book then addresses in its second section conflict management and harmony building in specific contexts. These include communication in intergenerational relationships, multinational corporations, and virtual spaces, and covers a range of national cultures including the USA, Japan, Germany, and China.

Drawing on the current research findings, this book covers the major theoretical perspectives and provides for a wide range of discussions on intercultural conflict management. It is a crucial reference for teachers, students, researchers, and practitioners alike.

Xiaodong Dai is Associate Professor of Foreign Languages College of Shanghai Normal University, P. R. China. He currently serves as the Vice President of the China Association for Intercultural Communication (CAFIC).

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‘There is hardly a more timely and important subject to study than conflict, its cultural conceptions and enactment. Given the complexity of the world’s stages today, there is hardly a more challenging arena in which to study conflict than through an intercultural and international lens. Here in Dai’s and Chen’s new edition, we have a wide range of studies that address these concerns. The international network of scholars spans a range of fields and nations and thus adds diversity in region to this type of study as well as a wide range in scholarly approaches. Readers will enjoy a breadth in views, finding conflict to be conceived, addressed, and managed in particular and multiple ways. Reading these works with an eye toward further inquiry and practice will no doubt serve as an aid to further knowledge and social betterment.’

Donal Carbaugh, *Professor Emeritus, University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA*

‘This edited volume on intercultural conflict could not appear at a better time! Incorporating multidisciplinary approaches, perspectives, and contexts, the renowned contributors suggest ways to explain and diffuse enduring conflicts, predict or prevent others from erupting, and how to address or handle tensions so that constructive interconnectivity can be realized. The book brilliantly includes both established and updated thinking, Eastern and Western approaches, theoretical and applied perspectives on complex conflict landscapes, and highlights future research directions on intercultural negotiation, mediation, and harmony. As the world grapples with complex tensions within or between persons, communities, groups, or nations, this work provides scholarly hope that conflict can be meaningfully understood in more cultural contexts and managed or resolved through initiatives based on intercultural insights.’

Steve J. Kulich, *Professor, Past-President of the International Academy of Intercultural Research (IAIR) (2019–2021), Founder of the SISU Intercultural Institute (2006–) and the Journal of Intercultural Communication & Interactions Research (JICIR) (2021–, Peter Lang)*

‘*Conflict Management and Intercultural Communication* treats intercultural conflict from an impressive array of theoretical and philosophical perspectives. The book also creatively explores harmony-building in vital and fascinating contexts, including virtual environments. This book is a must-have resource for anyone interested in conflict resolution across cultural landscapes.’

Alberto González, *Professor, College of Arts and Sciences, Bowling Green State University, USA*

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The Art of Intercultural Harmony

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Edited by Xiaodong Dai and Guo-Ming Chen

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PREFACE

As one of the oldest concepts regarding human behavior, conflict management has been studied by scholars in different academic disciplines for many decades. The concept has remained significant in the contexts of both human interaction and scholarly research as human society has progressed into the 21st century. The new century, characterized by globalization accelerated by the rapid development of new technology, strongly demands a global connectivity in which intensive competition and cooperation between people from differing cultures manifests the urgent need to situate the study of conflict management in a global context.

In response to this call for the study of conflict management in a global context, the fourth biannual International Conference of Intercultural Communication, sponsored by Shanghai Normal University on December 28–29, 2014, focused on the theme of “Conflict Management and Intercultural Harmony.” After the conference, 17 papers from a pool of more than 150 presentations were selected to be included in the first edition of the book. In editing this updated volume, we expand the range of discussion by inviting nine more leading intercultural scholars to join the project. The two-section structure of the first edition is kept but more issues are addressed. The authors are from different cultures and academic disciplines, and the papers deal with different aspects of conflict management from various research perspectives and in diverse cultural contexts. The diversity and richness of these papers corresponds to the need for the study of conflict management in a global society.

The publication of this scholarly manuscript would not have succeeded without support from various sources. First, we would like to express our gratitude for the authors’ willingness to contribute their papers to this meaningful collection. We also greatly appreciate the College of Foreign Languages of Shanghai Normal University and the Harrington School of Communication and Media at the

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INTRODUCTION

Xiaodong Dai and Guo-Ming Chen

With the strengthening of global interconnectivity and interdependence, conflicts frequently arise due to tensions stemming from different cultural perceptions, disparate social preferences, or diverse value orientations. This problem has become particularly salient in recent years when people in different nations and cultures need to coordinate to combat Covid-19 but at the same time endeavor to maintain their preferred ways of life. While effective management of a conflict opens up opportunities for people to learn more about others and make a joint effort to explore better patterns of communication, mismanagement often leads to escalated hostility and damaged relationships (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). How to manage conflicts constructively and achieve harmonious interaction is one of the main issues faced by intercultural communication scholars.

In this expanded second edition, 27 leading international scholars from diverse disciplines joined the project to explore effective ways of managing intercultural conflict and developing intercultural harmony. The volume consists of two sections. The first section includes 12 chapters which deal with the theoretical perspectives on conflict management and harmony building. It examines intercultural communication ethics, conflict resolution, conflict face negotiation, and intercultural competence. Both Western and non-Western perspectives are presented. The second section includes nine chapters which address conflict management and harmony building in cultural contexts, international business, and virtual space.

Perspectives on Intercultural Conflict Management

An intercultural conflict occurs when people have incompatible expectations, values, norms, interests, or goals in interactions (Wilmot & Hocker, 2007). A conflict may appear at the interpersonal or intergroup level and involve political, economic, or cultural factors. The complexity of the problem demands intercultural

communication scholars address it from different perspectives. Only through the synthesis of different perspectives can a more complete picture of intercultural conflict be presented.

In recent decades scholars have indeed approached intercultural conflict from diverse perspectives and developed useful theories and models. For example, Ting-Toomey (1988, 2005, 2017) examined conflict from the face negotiation perspective and has claimed that people in all cultures try to negotiate face in order to maintain a positive self-image in intercultural interaction. While high power distance and collectivistic cultural members tend to show more concern with other-face and mutual-face, low power distance and individualistic cultural members tend to show more concern with self-face. In managing a conflict, collectivists usually adopt avoidance, third party mediation, and integration strategies, whereas individualists tend to employ direct confrontation and domination strategies. Drawing on the social identity theory, Worchel (2005) developed a model of peaceful coexistence. He argued that it is not the group identity in itself but the perceived threat to group identity that is the root of intercultural conflicts. The recognition of others' right to exist, curiosity and interests in their cultures, and a willingness to engage in a cooperative interaction with them are the key to peaceful coexistence. Moreover, Moran, Abramson, and Moran (2014) have argued that effective intercultural conflict management is based on five steps: (1) describing the conflict in a way that is understood in both cultures; (2) examining the problem from both cultural lenses; (3) identifying the causes from both cultural perspectives; (4) solving the conflict through synergistic strategies; and (5) determining whether the solution works interculturally.

When analyzing an interpersonal or intergroup conflict, most scholars emphasized the influence of cultural values on conflict behavior and the cross-cultural comparison of conflict styles. Some scholars have examined how cultural diversity is managed in organizations, but they have tended to focus on a single level of intercultural conflict (e.g., Oetzel, Dhar, & Kirschbaum, 2007). Meanwhile, others have tackled the issue from the perspective of a specific culture. For example, Chen (2001, 2009, 2014) has developed a theory of harmony to deal with conflict from the Chinese cultural perspective. For future research, we suggest that intercultural scholars further explore the concept of intercultural conflict with an approach that considers the interactive process of conflict management and the ethics of conflict negotiation, and adopts a multilevel perspective.

Comparing different conflict styles allows people to understand the preferred way of handling an intercultural conflict, but it is only the first step toward solving the problem. In order to effectively manage an intercultural conflict, it is necessary to address the interactive process regarding how differences are reconciled or integrated, how intercultural agreements are reached, and how commonalities and consensuses are constructed. As intercultural conflict management involves individual, group, and cultural factors, focusing on one factor alone will not satisfactorily resolve the problem. Although taking the multilevel perspective is challenging for scholars, it can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issue and help them reach an effective way of dealing with intercultural conflict (Oetzel et al., 2007).

In many cases, intercultural conflicts are difficult to resolve and take more time and energy to negotiate a solution. Even if the solution has been reached, other conflicts may emerge if one party feels that it is being treated unfairly (Worchel, 2005). Conflict negotiation ethics is therefore an integral part of the intercultural conflict management process. The ethics of intercultural conflict negotiation provides people from different cultures with mutually shared moral norms and principles that can be used to guide their mutual interaction. Moral principles such as human dignity, equality, justice, nonviolence, sincerity, tolerance, and responsibility are conducive to conflict resolution and achieve lasting outcomes (Chen, 2015; Christians, 2014; Ojelabi, 2010).

Conflict Management in Cultural Contexts

Cultural value defines what is right, equal, fair, and safe, and what is wrong, unequal, unjust, unfair, and dangerous (Marsella, 2005). It shapes the way we perceive the world and the way we respond to social reality (Chen, Ryan, & Chen, 2000). Culture is a key determinant in conflict management. Examining how a conflict is managed in diverse cultural contexts allows us to learn about a counterpart's communication behavior, so that intercultural harmony can be constructed in interaction.

Over the years, scholars have widely investigated conflict behavior in various cultural contexts. For example, Kozan and Ergin (1998) examined the differences in preference for third party help in conflict management between Americans and Turks. They found that the Turkish people are more collectivistic and prefer third party mediation in conflict management; they also found that this tendency is particularly strong in females. Siira, Rogan, and Hall (2004) compared conflict management between Americans and Finns. The authors found that Americans and Finns have a similar preference for the use of non-confrontation strategies, but Finns use more solution-oriented strategies and Americans use more controlling behaviors. Chen (2010) discussed conflict management strategy in Chinese state-owned enterprises. He pointed out that the Chinese emphasize harmony in social communication by applying accommodation, collaboration, and avoidance strategies in conflict resolution, and the elderly tend to use these strategies more frequently than the young.

A number of empirical studies in this area also focused on conflict styles and strategies by employing Hofstede's culture value orientations as their analytical framework. However, most of these studies conducted intercultural comparisons using the dimensions of individualism and collectivism and power distance rather than examining how conflicts are negotiated and resolved. For future research, we suggest that more attention be paid to: intracultural diversity; situational factors; comparative studies between non-Western cultures; and negotiation processes.

First, Hofstede's theory presents a useful framework for identifying cultural differences and the root of intercultural conflicts, but it does not consider intracultural variations. Within a nation in which co-cultural groups exist, it is necessary to take the issues of diversity into account in order to manage conflict successfully. For

example, when communicating with a subordinate, Mexican Americans place less emphasis on other-face and more likely use the aggressive strategy than European Americans. However, when communicating with a superior, Mexican Americans place more emphasis on other-face and are more likely to use obliging and integrating strategies (Tata, 2000). In China, people generally are restrained when it comes to solving interpersonal conflicts, but Northerners are more emotional and aggressive than Southerners (Yu, 2013).

Second, situational factors such as ingroup/outgroup membership and conflict salience also influence intercultural conflict management (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2003). For instance, Japanese are direct in expressing personal opinions when interacting with ingroups, but they are highly indirect when interacting with outgroups. Moreover, the Chinese tend to be polite when face is being maintained in a conflict situation but may become fiercely confrontational when it is lost (Chen, 2010).

Third, world cultures are interrelated, especially in this globalized society. Merely comparing Western and non-Western cultures reflects the bias of Eurocentrism (Miike, 2010). To explore the differences between non-Western cultures and between Western cultures respectively is to allow people to reach a better understanding of conflict management. For example, while Japanese and Brazilians are both collectivists, Brazilians use emotional expressions to maintain relationships and Japanese negatively view overt emotional expressions as standing in the way of relational harmony (Graham, 1985). Kozan (1989) also found that, when managing a conflict with subordinates, Turkish managers use the collaborating style more than the forcing style and that Jordanian managers use the collaborating style more than the compromising style.

Finally, conflict management is a dynamic process. The examination of intra/intercultural conflict negotiation can help one see how diverse strategies are enacted and what factors shape the process of conflict management. A variety of factors, such as relationships, power, identity, economic interest, and social justice, affect conflict negotiation and therefore need to be included in the study of intercultural conflict management. For instance, the Chinese tend to invite a high status person or a person known to both parties to be the mediator for the conflict (Han & Cai, 2015). In Chinese society, a powerful mediator can facilitate constructive interaction and help the parties in question reach an agreement. In addition, scholars need to investigate how various factors interact with one another. Analyzing the complex interplay of multiple factors is the key to grasping the true nature of a conflict and developing effective ways to resolve it. Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001) have identified four factors that determine the result of intercultural conflict negotiation: primary orientation, situational and relationship boundary, conflict process, and conflict competence. These interrelated factors work together to bring about productive and satisfactory outcomes, which attests to the fact that intercultural conflict management is a dynamic process.

Overview of the Book

This volume has two sections. The first section deals with the multiple perspectives on conflict management and harmony building, and the second section explores

conflict management in diverse cultural and communication contexts. The first section begins with two chapters that address the ethics of conflict management and harmony building. The following ten chapters explore conflict management and harmony building from culture-general and culture-specific approaches.

In the first chapter, Benjamin J. Broome explores a viable way to bring harmony to our conflictual world. According to Broome, conflict is part of the harmonizing process, and dialogue provides an important means to manage it. By bringing individuals with different perspectives together in a safe place, different views are articulated and opportunities for mutual learning are created. Thus, the inherent tension between self and other can be productively managed. When the issues are fully examined and when all voices are heard, it becomes possible to synthesize differences and work toward the state of intercultural harmony.

In the second chapter, Yuxin Jia and Xue Lai Jia present a dialogic approach to intercultural conflict by exploring how communication ethics works in the process of conflict management. The authors argue that building up a sound dialogic ethics is central to reaching conflict resolution and intercultural harmony. While modern ethics emphasizes the self, postmodern ethics emphasizes the other. The modern perspective may lead to the dichotomy of self and other. The postmodern perspective may suffer from the problem of “all for the other,” which may result in a dependent relationship between self and other. The dialogic approach is a better alternative than both the modern and postmodern approaches. It incorporates the concern for self and the concern for the other. This dialogic approach is best exemplified by Confucian *ren*, which offers a viable way to manage conflicts in a multicultural world.

In the third chapter, Patrice M. Buzzanell discusses conflict management from the organizational communication perspective. She focuses on the conflict between managerialist perspectives and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in an organizational context and conceptualizes such technical-social conflict as a wicked and complex problem that defies a rational approach. Buzzanell argues that it requires design thinking and a constitutive approach to effectively manage the conflicts that arise between traditional organizing and diversity and inclusion for equity and accountability.

In the fourth chapter, Xiaodong Dai addresses intercultural conflict management from the perspective of interculturality. According to Dai, in order to effectively manage an intercultural conflict people need to examine the interactive process of interculturality development, which is the process through which a possible means of harnessing the intercultural tension can be obtained. Interculturality not only cultivates a positive attitude toward cultural diversity, but also fosters an intercultural perspective that facilitates joint actions in intercultural conflict management.

In the fifth chapter, Beth Bonniwell Haslett proposes a new approach to conflict management. Because most scholars focus on the use of different conflict styles, how the development of common ground serves to manage intercultural conflict deserves further investigation. Haslett posits that honoring face is an important element in the process of intercultural conflict management. Those commonly shared values such as respect, trust, empathy, pluralism, openness, and equality are

essential components of the universal face, which can be employed to broaden the way that conflict management is examined in future research.

In the sixth chapter, Stella Ting-Toomey reviews the evolutionary process of her conflict face-negotiation theory (FNT). FNT is based on the studies of face from Hsien Chin Hu (1944), Erving Goffman (1955), and Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson (1987). The theory stipulates cultural, individual, and situational factors that shape conflict style in interaction. The first version of FNT emphasizes the functional link of Hall's high-context and low-context cultural schema to conflict styles. The second version focuses on how individualism and collectivism affect conflict styles. The third version further deals with individual-level factors regarding the face concern and conflict styles, and also addresses the issue of conflict competence. According to Ting-Toomey, scholars need to further examine complex situational and identity issues in the study of intercultural conflict management in order to expand the scope of FNT.

In the seventh chapter, Kathryn Sorrells presents an intercultural praxis approach to conflict management. Her intercultural praxis model consists of six key elements: inquiry, framing, positioning, dialogue, reflection, and action. Sorrells thinks that nonviolence principles can meaningfully inform conflict management. It is possible to work out effective ways to deal with intercultural conflicts in the neoliberal global context and facilitate reconciliation, harmony and "beloved community" by integrating nonviolence principles with the intercultural praxis model.

In the eighth chapter, Min-Sun Kim and Yoshiko Kameo examine how multicultural identity contributes to developing conflict communication competence. They argue that multicultural identity embodies individuals' psychological growth, which facilitates frame switching. Multicultural individuals can easily transcend cultural boundaries and adapt to diverse cultural perspectives in order to apply appropriate conflict management styles in organizations and interpersonal settings.

In the ninth chapter, Akira Miyahara de-Westernizes conflict management models from the Japanese perspective. Western models/theories tend to regard assertiveness as positive or effective behavior and avoiding it as negative or ineffective behavior in communication. However, in Japanese culture, avoiding, as a typical manifestation of "air reading" (*ku'uki wo yomu*), is not only accepted but encouraged in many situations. Miyahara cautions that although "air reading" is an effective way to avoid conflict, it has its dark side and cannot be blindly employed in social communication.

In the tenth chapter, Guo-Ming Chen approaches conflict management from the Chinese perspective. Chen argues that communication is contextually dependent, and that each culture has its own unique way of managing conflict. In light of Chinese philosophy, conflict should be treated as a holistic system which is formed by the dynamic and dialectic interaction between the two parties of *yin* and *yang*. Although each party possesses its own identity, the identity cannot be fully developed individually. When a conflict arises, the two parties should be treated as an interrelated whole, so that the conflict can be constructively managed and that unity in diversity can be attained.

In the eleventh chapter, Yiheng Deng and Pamela Tremain Koch propose a Chinese model of constructive conflict management. They combine Western

theories with Chinese values and concepts to develop strategies of conflict management that can work in a cross-cultural context. The model indicates that collectivism, harmony, face, *guanxi* (relationships), and power are the central values of Chinese culture. Strategies such as constructive confrontation, open and direct discussion, seeking hard facts, resorting to off-line talk, and turning to a third party of higher authority for intervention are effective ways for the Chinese to manage conflicts.

In the twelfth chapter, Helen Spencer-Oatey takes an interdisciplinary perspective on intercultural competence and harmonious intercultural relations. She points out that while most of the intercultural competence theories fail to identify relationship management as a core component, interpersonal pragmatics can inform our understanding on intercultural competence and help improve the problem. From the perspective of interpersonal pragmatics, the evaluation of individuals' relational management competence consists of four key elements: contextually-based judgment of normalcy of behavior, judgment of behavior and agent, judgment of appropriateness of behavior and agent, and impact on interpersonal rapport. The pragmatic perspective on the evaluation process provides us with an alternative approach to intercultural competence.

The second section (Chapters 13–20) deals with conflict management in diverse cultural and communication contexts. Conflict management in China, the U.S.A., and Japan are investigated first, followed by international trade and business contexts and virtual space.

In the thirteenth chapter, Xuan Zheng and Yihong Gao investigate Chinese parent-child conflict management strategies. Based on discursive evidence, they find that among the five preferable strategies for Chinese students dealing with this type of conflict—integration, compromising, obliging, dominating, and avoiding—dominating and avoiding rank the highest. Zheng and Gao also find that the strategy of articulating is favored more by university students. The students use it to construct an independent self and equal relationship with their parents.

In the fourteenth chapter, Yan Bing Zhang and Weston T. Wiebe investigate the intergenerational conflict between older adults and younger adults in the U.S. Their research finds that there seems to be no intergenerational conflict between older and younger adults. Factors contributing to this situation include lack of interaction and interpersonal boundaries, as well as mutual respect, relational closeness, understanding of the other's perspective, attentive communication and listening, and topics of mutual interest.

In the fifteenth chapter, Yuko Takeshita discusses intercultural communication management professionals in Japan. Despite the development of globalization in Japanese society, people have few opportunities to practice intercultural communication and often encounter linguistic and cultural problems when interacting with foreigners. Intercultural communication management professionals play an important role in helping their fellow citizens manage intercultural conflict and create new business opportunities.

In the sixteenth chapter, Michael B. Hinner analyzes intercultural conflict management, in particular the pseudo-conflicts, in the context of international business.

Although English is used as a lingua franca in international business communication, misunderstandings and intercultural conflicts often occur because of differing cultural backgrounds. Hinner identifies five key factors—identity, culture, perception, self-disclosure, and trust—that shape the communication process in intercultural conflict management. The five factors help people better perceive and manage misperception and misunderstanding, which often lead to intercultural conflict in the context of international business transactions.

In the seventeenth chapter, Juana Du and Ling Chen conduct a case study on intercultural conflict management in transnational mergers and acquisitions. They find that cultural differences affect international business communication. The poor management of misunderstandings may lead to intercultural conflict. Misunderstanding and subsequent intercultural conflict can lead to failed business acquisitions. Du and Chen suggest that corporations need to engage each other in open dialogue to develop culturally appropriate strategies that will allow acquisition to proceed without issue.

In the eighteenth chapter, Marcella Hoedl and Peter Franklin shed light on the bright side of Sino-German cultural differences. According to their study, some of the cultural differences, such as Chinese relationship management and German task management, German risk and uncertainty avoidance and Chinese experimentation with diversification, German love of detail and Chinese big picture, and German pursuit of perfection and Chinese pragmatic solution-orientation, have the potential for cultural synergy.

In the nineteenth chapter, Alois Moosmueller examines intercultural conflict management in multinational corporations (MNCs). Cultural diversity is generally regarded as a valuable asset for MNCs. Three examples provided by Moosmueller demonstrate that although MNCs endeavor to cultivate a global mindset, ethnocentric attitudes and work habits still dominate daily communication in MNCs. Moosmueller indicates that cultural difference remains a challenge for MNCs. To develop the potential for innovation and improve the efficiency of company management, MNCs need to incorporate diversity into their general operating strategies.

Finally in the twentieth chapter, Ping Yang addresses the characteristics, approaches, and strategies of conflict management in virtual space from a dialectical perspective. Her study shows that online conflict management is characterized by complexity, nonverbal communication, quicker escalation, more violence, and salience of power and control; online approaches to intercultural conflict include productive vs destructive and competitive vs cooperative; frequently used online conflict strategies include domination, collaborating, compromising, and avoiding, which depend on context, topic, relationships, and desired outcomes.

Conclusion

Conflict is a complex problem that affects the whole process of intercultural communication. Scholars have studied the nature of conflict from diverse perspectives; addressed the management of conflict at both interpersonal and intergroup levels; and conducted cross-cultural comparisons on conflict styles and strategies. These studies

have contributed to the understanding of the concept, but many questions still remain unanswered. Specifically, more research should focus on the interactive process of conflict negotiation and the management of conflict among non-Western cultures. The trend of globalization has increased interconnectivity and interdependence among nations and cultures. Only through an appropriate and effective management of intercultural conflict can people establish harmonious relationships in our global society.

The complexity of conflict management and resolution demands further research. This expanded new edition, as the first edition, attempts to explore theoretical issues as well as conflict management in diverse cultural and communication contexts. We hope that the chapters in this volume can further enrich the scholarly literature and provide some practical suggestions in the area of intercultural conflict management.

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Section One

Perspectives on Intercultural Conflict Management and Harmony Building



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1

MOVING FROM CONFLICT TO HARMONY

The Role of Dialogue in Bridging Differences

Benjamin J. Broome

It is easy to become pessimistic about the possibility of living in harmony in our increasingly diverse world. We hear daily reports in the media about suicide bombings, drone strikes, terrorist attacks, violent protests and demonstrations, gang warfare, organized crime, human trafficking, and many other forms of violence. Indeed, there is abundant evidence of violent conflicts occurring around the world. In their analysis of armed conflicts from 1946–2013, Themnér and Wallensteen (2014) report that since the end of World War II, there have been 254 armed conflicts active in 155 locations around the world. In 2013 alone, there were 33 armed conflicts occurring in 25 locations worldwide. Disturbingly, there were 15 new conflicts in the three years preceding their analysis. Many of these conflicts are civil wars, lower-level insurgencies, and other forms of conflict that can tear a country apart for decades, and sometimes permanently.¹ Although there are also many positive and uplifting stories of people working together cooperatively, and despite the study by Pinker (2011) that shows violence is lower today than during previous periods of history, the prevalence of war and other forms of violent conflict could certainly create a perception that the world is hopelessly embroiled in violent conflicts.

High-tension conflicts are costly. Some of the effects are material: human lives are lost, physical property is destroyed, essential infrastructure is damaged, public health systems no longer function properly, the education system is severely disrupted, and outside investment dries up. All of these can have devastating effects on the economy and future development of a country in conflict (Glaeser, 2009).² Other costs are less visible and less quantifiable but can have consequences that last for generations: loss of family members, relatives, and close friends; population displacement; constant disruption and fear for one's life and the post-trauma mental conditions that often result; injuries and disability; malnutrition leading to lower life expectancy; loss of normal childhood and adolescence for many children and young people; disrupted,

delayed, and often never-completed education; brain drain from the emigration of educated work force; reduced investment and tourism from abroad and the devastating effects of a breakdown in trust, manifesting itself both in individual confidence in society and divisions between groups that once lived together. And the effects go far beyond the country in which the war is taking place, affecting neighboring states and areas far away from the conflict itself, as we are seeing now with the refugee crisis in Europe.³

Given the overwhelming negative consequences of conflict and violence, clearly there is a need to promote greater harmony in the face of the increasing number of confrontations. Unfortunately, the quest for harmony can seem despairingly out of reach in a world filled with tensions emanating from racial, religious, and resource-based conflicts. For some, discussions of peace and harmony might seem wishful thinking or even delusional. Even for those dedicated to building peace, many questions arise when discussing harmony and conflict: What has brought about the breakdown in harmony that seems to characterize today's world? Can anything be done to counteract the disruptive forces acting against harmony? Is harmony even possible in the face of so much violence and destruction? Is there reason to believe that harmony will be achieved someday? These are all reasonable questions, but they are often guided by a view that harmony is a quiet and stable state of existence where people are in agreement about issues and everyone acts in concert within an established order. Such a view of harmony is an idealistic aim that is unachievable and even dysfunctional in a healthy society.

In this chapter, a conception of *harmony* is adopted that emphasizes difference rather than sameness, and that focuses on process rather than outcome. Drawing on both ancient Greek and Chinese approaches to harmony, the argument will be made that instead of viewing conflicts as a threat to harmony, they should be seen as an essential part of the harmonization process. Indeed, conflicts over seemingly incompatible goals can sometimes serve as the impetus for individual and social changes that need to be made in order to address the underlying causes for the conflicts. And although differences, by their very nature, will cause disagreement and discord, we are not destined to live in a violent world. An alternative to violence is *dialogue*, which has the potential to promote harmony and lead to greater peace in conflict-torn societies. This chapter will suggest ways in which dialogue can help bring about more peaceful ways of dealing with differences, contributing to a process of harmony that embraces, rather than avoids, diversity and change.

Harmony: Going beyond Agreement and Conformity

Harmony has been seen as important throughout history and across cultures; the concept of harmony is reflected in music, art, politics, religion, and other aspects of society (Xie, 2012). At first glance, harmony would seem to be a rather straightforward concept that is easy to define. In the English language, the word “harmony” is usually associated with agreement, getting along without problems, tolerating differences, avoiding conflicts, and experiencing consensus across issues of concern to society.

Even with positive connotations, the pursuit of harmony is often regarded in the West as naïve or even harmful in the face of strong differences. Perhaps because of the individualistic focus in the West, harmony is considered a somewhat weak concept. Although it is a positive value, it is not one to be placed above standing up for one's rights or defending one's position when there are conflicts. Many influential academic and activist figures, including political liberals and staunch defenders of humanities education, focus more on justice and human dignity than on finding ways to pursue harmony (see, for example, Martha Nussbaum, 2001). Harmony is often juxtaposed with the need to fight for one's rights. For Westerners, the choice is clear: you must stand up for your beliefs and be willing to fight for what you believe is rightfully yours, rather than "give in" so that the harmony will not be disturbed.

In the East, harmony is treated quite differently, particularly in places such as Thailand, Japan, Korea, and China. In these societies, harmony is viewed as one of the primary values, and it is seen as underlying much of human interaction (Chen, 2011). The group-based and hierarchically-oriented nature of many Asian societies leads people to seek harmony by avoiding outward displays of anger (Hu, Grove, & Zhuang, 2010), refraining from engaging in argument especially when it involves disagreement (Hazen & Shi, 2009), showing self-restraint, saving face, avoiding direct criticism of others, exhibiting modesty, and practicing generosity (Wei & Li, 2013). Sustained by politeness and respect, societies with a Confucian tradition will usually display a courteous attitude toward others, in an effort to build a harmonious communication climate (Chen, 2014). In general, the emphasis on harmony means that people are more disposed to engage in negotiation when differences arise, more willing to compromise, and less inclined to engage in confrontation when faced with conflicts.

In contrast to contemporary treatments of harmony in both the West and the East that tend to emphasize agreement and similarity, ancient conceptions of harmony gave importance to tension and dissimilarity. The English term *harmony* is from the ancient Greek word *a'romnia*, which means the joining or coming together of different entities. The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus (6th century BCE), defined harmony as opposites in concert, believing that harmony exists when disparate forces are held in tension (Graham, 2015).⁴ Using the example of the bow and lyre, Heraclitus demonstrated that tension and opposition are essential to harmony, and that unity is made possible because of opposing tensions. He used the example of night and day, which are opposites but are intimately connected and interdependent. If you lose day, you lose night as well. Heraclitus gave us the well-known insight that a person can never walk in the same river twice, as both the person and the river are constantly changing. For Heraclitus, harmonization happens through this constant change, not through seeking agreement and sameness. Everything is subject to internal tension, and harmony comes from opposing elements and movements pulling in opposite directions but finding equilibrium. Harmony is not a matter of properly orienting ourselves to preexisting structures or conditions; rather, the structure of the world is itself the result of the harmonizing process, in which different forces are integrated into dynamic unity (Li, 2008).

The emphasis on diversity and unity was also reflected in the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius, who like Heraclitus lived during the 6th century BCE. For Confucius, harmony is a generative and creative process in which diverse elements are brought together to form a complex and inclusive world. To produce good music, musicians must be able to mix together very different sounds so that they complement and complete one another. Likewise, to produce a delicious dish, good cooks must be able to mingle ingredients with contrasting flavors and different tastes. With both music and food, different elements complete each other and enhance one another, coming together in a coherent and harmonious way. However, harmony is much more than simply mixing sounds and mingling flavors; rather, it requires that the various elements enrich one another by forming a relationship in which they mutually compensate for one another's shortcomings, mutually reinforce one another's strengths, and mutually advance each other's paths toward fulfillment. Even the five virtues of Confucianism—human excellence, moral rightness, ritualized propriety, wisdom, and sageliness—need to be practiced in harmony in order to achieve happiness and the prosperity of the world (Li, 2008).

As with Heraclitus, Confucius stresses the dynamic nature of tension and diversity within harmony. In the Confucian view, conflict between parties, when it is handled properly, serves as a step toward harmony. Although the Confucian way advocates self-restraint, subduing emotions in public, and indirect expressions of approval, it is at the same time built around the coexistence of difference. When facing a controversial issue, the Confucian approach calls for taking into account the whole picture, and resolving the differences through facework, social connections, and reciprocity (Wei & Li, 2013). For Confucians, harmony is dependent on a continuous process of managing opposing forces through give and take. Li (2014) uses the example of rocks and water in a river, where both have to yield in some way. Through this “negotiation” process, order is established, although this order is constantly changing.

While they have different starting points and base their thinking within different cosmologies, both Heraclitus and Confucius understood harmony as an ongoing process in a constantly changing world. For both, the goal of harmony is not to conform to a fixed underlying structure of the world; rather, structure itself is a result of the harmonizing process. And in both approaches, harmony is much more than sameness; in fact, harmony has to be achieved through difference. As Li (2014) argues, since harmony is a composite, it can only be realized by the successful integration of different elements. This need for integration makes harmony inclusive in nature, since during the harmonization process each component finds an appropriate place, and none of the components exclude or suppress one another. Even when elements are in conflict, one or more of them can change positions, or at least be stabilized within the system so that they are not disrupting it in ways that are damaging to the overall structure or to the long-term viability of the system.

Although harmony emphasizes balance and equilibrium, conflict is also part of the harmonization process. Unlike simple differences, where harmony can be achieved when contrasting elements complement one another within a larger pattern, conflict produces a level of tension that can put harmony at risk. This usually

necessitates a negotiation process in which parties need to jointly explore ways to modify their positions to accommodate the other, or find creative ways to satisfy the needs of both parties. By taking an inclusive approach and using the tension between positions to engage in creative exploration, it is possible to find harmonious solutions to conflicts.

While there is no panacea, one of the important means of encouraging and nurturing harmony across difference is *dialogue*, a concept and a practice that, like harmony, is frequently misunderstood, and, despite having positive associations, is not widely seen as a powerful force in the face of conflict. But if we can move beyond a view of harmony as sameness, accord, conformity, and uniformity, and instead understand harmony as encompassing diversity and creative tension, then we will be positioned to understand how dialogue can help transform conflict into harmony. The next section will explore the nature of dialogue and will propose several ways in which it can be a key component in harmonizing the tension that is inevitable in today's conflict-filled world.

Dialogue: A Path from Conflict to Harmony⁵

The question of how to harmonize protracted conflict situations is one that has long concerned diplomats, community leaders, researchers, and anyone seeking to bridge the divide between disputing parties. Certainly there are no easy answers, and any possibility for progress will need to involve multiple levels of society and numerous approaches for moving forward. But *dialogue* can be a key piece of the strategy for both preventing societies from falling apart under pressures from seemingly insurmountable differences, and for engaging in a healing process once societies have succumbed to the ravages of violence. By bringing individuals with a variety of perspectives together in a safe space, different voices can be heard and creative ideas can be generated, providing opportunities to learn from others and expand one's perspective on the conflict and the possibilities for the future.

Contemporary understandings of dialogue are influenced significantly by the philosopher, theologian, playwright, and educator Martin Buber (1958). His seminal work *I and Thou* led to a shift in our thinking about communication, relationships, and the possibility for genuine human interaction. He distinguishes between the "I-It" encounter, in which people are treated as if they were objects to be manipulated or changed in some way, and the "I-Thou" relationship, in which people are viewed as having unique histories that shape their beliefs, attitudes, and values. An I-Thou encounter is characterized by curiosity, discovery, and learning, while an I-It encounter is centered on persuasion, positioning, and argument. In Buber's view, dialogue is a way of being with others, a way of acknowledging the complexity of other people's experiences and seeking understanding of their perspectives. Buber's views reflect the type of harmony that is described in the previous section, and communication that is characterized by I-Thou dialogue can play a critical role in the harmonization process that needs to occur in response to conflict.⁶

One of the concepts introduced by Buber, the notion of the “between,” has gained traction among several scholars who study dialogue. Buber (1958) uses the “between” as a metaphor for the dialogic space that exists between persons in a relationship. This common center of discourse brings people together in conversation, allowing meaning to be co-constituted during dialogue. In this way, people create new understandings through their interaction by engaging in a process that Stewart (1983) labels “interpretive listening,” Bohm (1996) refers to as “collective intelligence,” and Broome (2009) terms “relational empathy.” By giving attention to the “between,” dialogue points to the *interdependence* of self and other, the *intersubjectivity* of meaning, and the *emergent* nature of understandings (J. Stewart, 1978, 1983). This type of exchange is perhaps the best way to harness the tension of conflict and use it as a springboard for transforming relationships and generating creative ideas, both of which are key to the process of harmonization in conflict situations.

On a practical level, dialogue often takes the form of structured group interaction. Individuals from opposing sides of a conflict are brought together in a safe space, usually under the guidance of a third-party, in which participants can engage in facilitated discussions. Although it usually requires great care to set up and special expertise to facilitate, structured dialogue groups can provide a setting for examining the basis for a conflict, repairing damaged relationships, and exploring steps that might be taken to address critical issues that are embedded in the conflict. Structured dialogue groups can take a variety of forms, from small informal meetings to institutionalized discussion groups that meet on an ongoing basis over a long period of time.⁷ But the essence of any form of dialogue is to enable an exchange of views, perspectives, and ideas that is centered on fostering mutual respect and understanding, and creating mutually embraced pathways for joint action.

There are a number of approaches to intergroup dialogue in conflict situations. Some are highly structured and predominantly analytical (Burton, 1969; Sandole, 2001), dealing primarily with the substance of the conflict. Through intensive discussions over a period of several days, a third-party helps participants analyze the sources of the conflict and develop possible solutions. Other approaches are less structured and more informal efforts to ease tensions and improve relations in international conflicts. These sessions are primarily oriented toward helping participants learn about each other, developing better communication across the divide, and establishing working relationships (Doob, 1981; Volkan, 1998; Wedge, 1967). In the psychodynamic approach, an attempt is made to humanize the “enemy,” build confidence, and overcome hatred, all of which helps uncover emotional issues that might otherwise affect the conflict negatively. Between the rational and psychodynamic approaches are those that focus on both relationship and substance (Azar, 1990; Fisher, 1997; Kelman, 1982). Typically, these approaches give equal emphasis to both the educational and the political aspects of the conflict; they attempt to produce changes in the attitudes and perceptions of the participants while simultaneously transferring these changes to a broader societal discussion or to the political arena.

Of course, in situations with a long history of division, making progress requires a systematic, prolonged set of dialogues committed to the transformation of

conflictual relationships. Decades, or even centuries, of enmity cannot be overcome overnight, and there are many forces in the society and larger context of the conflict that can quickly undo any progress from dialogue sessions. Lederach (1997) suggests that dialogue must give emphasis to both peace *and* justice, as well as to both truth *and* mercy, in order to be effective. The goal of dialogue is the long-term transformation of a “war system” into a “peace system” that is characterized by political and economic participation, peaceful relationships, and social harmony (Lederach, 1999, 2003). The aim is to create an *infrastructure for peace* that simultaneously addresses—and involves—all the different levels of a society that have been affected by conflict: from the grass-roots level (the vast majority), to national leaders (ethnic/religious leaders, leaders of NGOs, academics/intellectuals, among others), and to the top level of political and military leadership (Lederach, 1997).

Although most intergroup dialogue approaches are not grounded specifically in the literature of harmony, their purposes are highly compatible with the conceptualization of harmony described in the previous section. With their emphasis on listening, non-polarized discourse, and the creation of new understandings, most approaches to intergroup dialogue contribute in significant ways towards the goal of bringing balance and equilibrium to difficult conflict situations. While recognizing that harmony within a particular society or within the overall global system depends on many system-level factors, dialogue can play a critical role in shaping these factors. Through dialogue, impetus for necessary changes at the societal level can be cultivated, new ideas can emerge for reaching effective agreements at the political level, increased levels of understanding can be achieved, and new relationships can be formed that will promote the cooperation that is required for changes to be implemented successfully both before and after a political settlement. All of these possible outcomes contribute immensely to the process of establishing, restoring, and maintaining harmony in conflict situations. The remainder of this section will connect dialogue to the key characteristics of harmony that were discussed earlier.

Identifying Differences

Conflict occurs at least in part because of differences in perspectives, goals, and the means to achieve desired outcomes. Often in conflict situations, groups on each side will operate according to stereotypes and misconceptions that can keep them apart and lead them to take unnecessary actions against the other party. It is important to identify and acknowledge these differences so they can be appropriately addressed by the conflicting parties. Unfortunately, conflict can further reinforce and promote bias and prejudice by preventing the type of contact that can break down misconceptions and help each party better understand the other. Over time this tends to become institutionalized, which further solidifies the boundaries between the parties in the conflict (Hewstone & Greenland, 2000).

Structured dialogue provides an important avenue for helping groups understand each other's views of the conflict, learn about each other's aspirations for the

future, and identify the issues on which they hold contrasting opinions. Of course, simply bringing people together will not by itself lead to the constructive identification of differences. The contact hypothesis that Gordon Allport (1954) originally described in his book, *The Nature of Prejudice*, which was extended by Amir (1969), Cook (1978), Hewstone and Greenland (2000), and Pettigrew (2008), among others, demonstrates that intergroup contact is effective primarily in conditions of equal status, sustained interactions, cooperative interdependence, and social norms of equality. These conditions can be cultivated through dialogue, allowing groups to effectively identify the differences that divide them. Only when this happens can groups start the process of finding ways to build harmony based on these differences.

Harnessing and Transforming Tension

The differences that exist within any society are always a potential source of destructive tension. In a harmonious world, tension is the basis for a strong society, as it is for the bow and lyre that Heraclitus described in his writings. And it is the basis for a prosperous society, where a mix of perspectives, practices, and dreams allows a society to flourish with creative and innovative ideas. But the tension that arises from violent conflict has a destructive effect, driving people apart and suppressing imagination and originality. Anxiety and fear dominate, and people put up defensive walls to protect themselves. These walls constrain interaction, stem the free flow of ideas, and thwart the possibility for collaborative inquiry. Instead of diversity leading to a bold and exciting future, differences set society on a regressive path of short-sighted policy decisions and repressive measures.

Dialogue provides a way to harness potentially damaging tension and redirect it toward healthy growth. Exploring the tensions that are fueling the conflict can relieve some of the pressure, so that it no longer plays such a dominating role in the discourse. The act of sitting together and learning from one another, engaging in conversation that explores the basis for differences that exist between competing groups, can help tilt the flow of negative energy toward positive ends. As Salomon (2009) suggests, it is critical to cultivate more positive attitudes toward the other side and more positive attitudes toward peace. Bar-Tal (2009) agrees when he advocates developing “an emotional orientation of hope that reflects the desire for the positive goal of maintaining peaceful and cooperative relations with the other party” (p. 369). Dialogue can aid in creating a “positive vision based on humanistic and inclusive ideals without an inherent destructive potential. ... [with a] focus on the possibility of, and satisfactions inherent in connection to, community and peace” (Staub, 1996, p. 147).

Restoring Balance and Equilibrium

Many of the conflicts described in the introductory section are part of systems that have been characterized by disharmony for an extended period of time. They have