CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to

1. define intercultural conflict;
2. list and explain the three levels of conflict;
3. assess your self-face, other-face, and mutual-face concerns;
4. define facework and identify three primary facework strategies;
5. list and define the 11 subcategories of facework;
6. list and define the five primary styles of conflict communication;
7. list and define the three secondary styles of conflict communication;
8. identify and discuss the conflict styles preferred by individualistic and collectivistic cultures; and
9. identify and discuss the conflict styles preferred by high- versus low-context cultures.
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 conflict. 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 20 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. Ting-Toomey and Oetzel define intercultural conflict as the experience of emotional frustration or mismatched expectations between individuals from different cultures who perceive an incompatibility between their values, norms, goals, scarce resources, or outcomes during an intercultural exchange. Ting-Toomey and Oetzel assert that intercultural conflict occurs when cultural group membership factors influence how individuals approach, avoid, and manage conflict. 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 have incompatible goals and desire different outcomes. You choose to play your music loudly. Akira prefers that you not play your music...
loudly. 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 been between two American students or two Japanese students, the fact that it occurred between an American and a Japanese complicates the issue.

Ting-Toomey and Oetzel maintain that intercultural conflict involves a certain degree of ethnocentric perceptions and judgments. 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 the out-group. Ethnocentric persons foster cooperative relations with in-group members while competing with, and perhaps even battering, out-group members. Hence, by virtue of our cultural upbringing, we think we are correct (i.e., loud music is great vs. loud music is disrespectful).

A Model of Intercultural Conflict

The well-known intercultural communication scholar Young Yum 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).

The micro, or individual, level of intercultural conflict refers to each individual's unique attitudes, dispositions, and beliefs that he or she brings to the conflict. According to Kim's model, cognitive simplicity/rigidity refers to the degree of inflexibility in the way the individuals think about people from different cultures. Rigid, simplistic thinking would include 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 Akira’s complaint, you 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. The 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 cultural groups of the individuals 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, Blacks often argue that American culture practices an asymmetrical power structure. Blacks may feel that the American 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 White and all the workers are Black (or Hispanic, etc.), then the status discrepancy is heightened.6

The macro, or societal, level of intercultural conflict includes factors that probably are out of the control of the interactants. 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, Blacks have long been subjugated by Whites in America. Historically, African Americans were slaves. Even upon emancipation, they were not allowed to vote. As late as the 1960s, restaurants in the South had separate bathrooms, seating areas, and drinking fountains for Blacks and Whites (see Figure 10.2).

Often, the tensions expressed today are rooted in the history of the subjugation of one group over another. Ideological and structural inequality 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. Blacks and Hispanics
have much higher levels of unemployment, for example. 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 the group). Relative to other microcultural groups, Blacks, for example, are economically and politically quite powerful. Political scientists argue, for instance, that presidential elections are swung by the African American voting block. 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.

AN INTERCULTURAL CONVERSATION:
KIM’S MODEL OF INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT

Mike Romney is the supervising director of Acme Marketing Firm. Acme is a direct marketing firm for insurance agencies. Mike, 42 years old, is 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 more than 50 employees. Once a year, Mike has one-on-one meetings with each employee. These annual meetings are a part of each employee's annual evaluation. Today, Mike is meeting with Nicole Norton. Nicole is a relatively new employee and has worked for Acme for just over a year. This will be her first annual evaluation meeting. She was hired as a telemarketer and hopes to move up in the organization soon. She is Black and 33 years old. She was raised in the city of Chicago, in the Robert Taylor public housing district, a notoriously impoverished and violent area. Their meeting takes place in Mike's office.

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. Romney.
Nicole: Oh, OK, Mister Romney. (placing an accent on the "Mister")
Mike: (Noticing her tone of voice) So, where are you from?
Nicole: I grew up on the south side.
Mike: (Thinks to himself, "Probably in the projects. She and I have nothing in common.") Oh, I'm from Kenilworth.
Nicole: Yeah, I've heard of that.
Mike: Yes, well... I've been reading the monthly assessments completed by your manager about your performance. I can see you need improvement in several areas, including customer service and attitude.
Nicole: Hmm, I thought I was doing fine.
Mike: Well, your manager says you are too informal with customers, which leaves a bad impression. (Thinks to himself, "She's probably not had much formal education.")
Nicole: Really? I think they like it. I think it's OK to be a little relaxed once in a while.
Mike: Well, maybe at home you can do that, but not here. (Thinks to himself, "I can't imagine what her home must be like.")
Nicole: (Thinks to herself, "What does this have to do with my home?") Hmm, well, 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.")
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, Mister Romney.
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 is reflected in his comments to himself about Nicole's home and education. Mike also shows some signs of in-group bias in thinking that he and Nicole have nothing in common. Regarding the intermediary level, that Mike prefers for Nicole to call him "Mr. Romney" 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 probably rarely interact with persons in the inner city. Finally, at a societal-macro level, there is a history of subjugation between their groups, and Nicole's group has demonstrable minority group strength.

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. 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 the image 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. The concept of face becomes particularly significant in situations where uncertainty is high, as in conflict situations where the character of the communicators might be called into question.

Facework

In most conflict situations, interactants are required to defend or save their face when it is threatened or attacked. The various ways one might deal with conflict and face are 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. John Oetzel and his colleagues classify three general types of facework strategies used in intercultural conflict: dominating, avoiding, and integrating facework (see Table 10.1). 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.
Self-Assessment 10.10

Self-Face, Other-Face, and Mutual-Face Concerns

Remember your conflict with Akira Abe at the opening of this chapter? Now, try to imagine yourself in a different situation.

You loaned your car, with a full tank of gas, to Akira. Recall that he is an international exchange student from Japan, whom you do not know well. After he returned your car, you noticed that half of the gas had been used.

Directions: Take a moment and imagine yourself in the above conflict. What would you do? How would you handle this situation? For the following items, please indicate the degree to which you (5) strongly agree, (4) agree, (3) are neutral, (2) disagree, or (1) strongly disagree in terms of the conflict situation presented above.

1. I am concerned with respectful treatment for both of us.
2. My primary concern is saving my own face.
3. Relationship harmony is important to me.
4. I am concerned with maintaining the poise of the other person.
5. Maintaining humility to preserve the relationship is important to me.
6. Helping maintain the other person’s pride is important to me.
7. I am concerned with protecting my self-image.
8. My concern is to act humble in order to make the other person feel good.
9. My concern is to help the other person maintain his or her dignity.
10. I don’t want to embarrass myself in front of the other person.

Scoring:

1. Sum your responses to Items 2, 7, and 10. Scores must range from 3 to 15. This is your self-face score. Higher scores, above 12, indicate a high self-face concern.
2. Sum your responses to Items 4, 6, 8, and 9. Scores must range from 4 to 20. This is your other-face score. Higher scores, above 16, indicate a high other-face concern.
3. Sum your responses to Items 1, 3, and 5. Scores must range from 3 to 15. This is your mutual-face score. Higher scores, above 12, indicate a high mutual-face concern.

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.
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<th>Table 10.1: Facework Behaviors</th>
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**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."
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.\(^1\)

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.\(^2\) The combination of assertiveness, or self-face need, and cooperativeness, or other-face need, defines five primary communication styles of managing conflict and three secondary styles. The five primary styles are dominating, integrating, obliging, avoiding, and compromising.\(^3\) The three secondary styles include emotional expression, third-party help, and neglect (see Figure 10.3).\(^4\)

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 middle ground for resolving the conflict, understanding that each party may have to give up something in order to gain. 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, and 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 would engage an outsider to act as a go-between in the conflict. Neglect is the use of a passive-aggressive approach where one 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”).

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 American college students used fewer avoidance-type conflict styles than did Chinese and Taiwanese students. They also found that Korean and American students were less likely to engage in obliging styles than were Chinese, Japanese, and Taiwanese students. In their study, Lee and Rober found that Americans were actually less confrontational during conflict than were Koreans, a culture considered to be collectivistic.

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 some third party, either other students or the professor. Kevin simply refuses.
Kevin: Well, Kolkeong, I think we should do a presentation. I hate writing papers.
Kolkeong: Well, what have other students done?
Kevin: Who cares?
Kolkeong: Well, maybe they might have some advice.
Kevin: Advice about what?
Kolkeong: About which assignment is preferred.
Kevin: Look, I already know what assignment I prefer.
Kolkeong: 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.
Kolkeong: I think I’ll ask some others what they think.
Kevin: Go ahead and do what you want, but I’m not budging. We’re doing a presentation. 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 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, where conflict was defined 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.22

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 concepts and that these models may not adequately reflect intercultural conflict styles. Take, for example, the avoiding style, where 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.

Recall from Chapter 7 that direct communication includes the use of precise language, where 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 receiver. Ting-Toomey's research has indicated that a direct style is often associated with individualistic 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.

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.

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<th>Directness</th>
<th>Discussion Style</th>
<th>Engagement Style</th>
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<tr>
<td>Indirectness</td>
<td>Accommodation Style</td>
<td>Dynamic Style</td>
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<td>Emotionally Restrained</td>
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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 one 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.

Hammer has developed an instrument that measures these four styles. He maintains that the ICS Inventory is useful in applied settings, such as in organizations and even within families. Hammer asserts that after the conflicting parties recognize their own style and that of their counterpart, conflict is better managed. For example, Hammer cites a case in which one of the conflicting parties used an engagement style while the other’s style was 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, 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—and particularly of the cultural roots in these styles—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.25

A CULTURE-BASED SITUATIONAL MODEL OF CONFLICT

Taking into consideration many of the features of conflict discussed above, Ting-Toomey and Oetzel have developed what they call a culture-based situational model of conflict.26 In their model, Ting-Toomey and Oetzel highlight four main factors that come into play during an intercultural conflict episode: individual factors, conflict process factors, situational features, and conflict outcomes. During intercultural conflict, these four factors come together in a complex formula that defines the specific conflict episode.
The individual factors are similar to the microlevel factors of the Kim model of conflict. Here, the individual factors include such variables as the person’s degree of individualism or collectivism. Ting-Toomey and Oetzel point out that individualists tend to express conflict through assertiveness, express their emotions, and value personal accountability. Collectivists restrain their emotions and protect the in-group. The individual factors also include large and small power distance. Persons from large and small power distance cultures manage conflict differently. For example, children in small power distance cultures may challenge their parents, as in the United States, whereas children in China, a large power distance culture where filial piety is highly valued, would not challenge their parents. An individual’s personality traits would include those characteristics that may or may not be directly linked to culture. For example, in any culture, people experience anxiety. This could lead to one’s approach-avoidance tendencies during conflict. Face concerns also contribute to conflict, as we have seen in the paragraphs above. A person’s self-, other-, or mutual-face concern affects how he or she approaches and manages conflict.  

Unique situational features also affect the conflict episode. Relationship parameters include the specific relational dynamics of the parties involved. Ting-Toomey and Oetzel point to three specific relational parameters that affect conflict: whether the parties see
themselves as competitive or cooperative, whether they trust or distrust each other, and the
degree to which they see themselves as intimate and close (i.e., affiliative) or experience
issues related to control and dominance. In-group–out-group distinctions refer to the degree
to which the parties involved are members of the same in-groups or whether there are clear
group differences between them, including race, ethnicity, and or sex differences.

The conflict process factors 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? Likewise, what type of facework do the individuals engage in? (Refer back
to Table 10.1 for the list of facework behaviors.) Finally, how do the individuals manage their
emotions? Are they expressive or restrained?

Last, the model includes conflict competence criteria and outcomes, which include effective-
ness, appropriateness, satisfaction, and productivity. Conflict competence refers to the application
of intercultural conflict knowledge. In other words, 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. Satisfaction refers to the degree to
which the individuals are able to create the desired images of themselves, and to what extent
those images are accepted by the opposing party. Finally, productivity refers to the perception
by both parties that a successful resolution was reached. Ting-Toomey and Oetzel refer to pro-
ductive 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 below.28

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Win-Lose Conflict Orientation</th>
<th>Win-Win Conflict Orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ignoring cultural differences</td>
<td>Respecting cultural differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insensitivity to conflict context</td>
<td>Sensitivity to conflict context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arguing and defending self-interest</td>
<td>Uncovering deeper conflict needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict mode</td>
<td>Compromising mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in mindless behaviors</td>
<td>Practicing mindful conflict skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigidity of conflict posture</td>
<td>Willingness to change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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.29 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. The specific characteristics of the outcome-oriented approach are summarized below:

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 below:

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, where each person is mindful of cultural differences, mindful of the different goals, and willing to experiment with different conflict management styles.  

CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN HIGH- VERSUS LOW-CONTEXT CULTURES

Human communication is dependent on the context in which it occurs. In addition to the verbal and nonverbal codes exchanged between interactants, the salient features of a communicative context include the cultural, physical, sociorelational, and perceptual environments. 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 will actively monitor the nonverbal elements of the context. 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 Figure 10.4). 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. They argue that in low-context cultures, such as that of the United States, individuals are more likely to separate the conflict issue from the persons involved. In high-context cultures, such as that of 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

Figure 10.4 What type of facework might be at play here?
400 persons from both high- and low-context cultures. Chua and Gudykunst found that persons from low-context cultures preferred solution-oriented conflict resolution styles, whereas persons from high-context cultures preferred nonconfrontational styles.\(^\text{35}\)

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

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 avoid instigating conflict, while U.S. Americans (i.e., a low-context culture) are more direct in their dealings with conflict.

**STUDENT VOICES ACROSS CULTURES**

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 a certain number of behaviors or attitudes that one can expect to see from a Mexican when that person is in a stressful or uncomfortable situation.

(Continued)
(Continued)

As Mexicans are Latinos, our character 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 that a Mexican must confront when it is necessary to admit his or her problems before a possible solution can be considered.

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

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter began by asking you to imagine yourself in a conflict. All types of human relationships, from 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. In addition to the Kim model of intercultural conflict, we have seen how the concept of face and facework contributes to intercultural conflict. Finally, the chapter ends with a model of conflict styles and a discussion of how persons from different cultures manage conflict.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Recall a conflict that you have experienced. How did your cultural background affect how you handled it?

2. What types of intercultural conflicts occur on your college or university campus? What groups or cultures have frequent conflicts?

3. Regarding Question #2 above, how do these groups manage and address the conflict?

4. Do you prefer to handle conflict directly or to avoid it altogether?

5. What irritates you the most about how others handle conflict? Why?