

Christie, D. J., Wagner, R. V., & Winter, D. A. (Eds.). (2001). *Peace, Conflict, and Violence: Peace Psychology for the 21st Century*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

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CHAPTER 16

THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF PEACEMAKING

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Conflict is a natural aspect of any relationship. Conflict may be positive or negative, that is, functional or dysfunctional. Whereas negative conflict threatens to erode the growth and development of a relationship, positive conflict can actually strengthen relationships, especially when the parties in conflict share fundamental values.

One of the major difficulties peacemakers confront in conflicts between groups from different cultures is the uncertainty about cultural values. Peaceful resolution of intercultural conflict often involves the parties acknowledging their shared values and mutually appreciating their cultural differences. However, in intercultural conflict resolution even when different cultural groups share the same values, their behavioral expression of these values may differ. Not only can different behaviors have the same meaning, the same behavior can have different meanings. Therefore, it is important to interpret each behavior in its cultural context. In order to intervene constructively in intercultural conflict, it is essential that a peacemaker understand both the basic values of the cultures and the behavioral expressions of these values. The peacemaker is then in a good position to help the parties empathize with one another and to gauge how best to approach

them in the context of their own conflict resolution processes.

A consistent weakness of many international peacemaking efforts derives from the cultural insularity of the practitioners, especially the insensitivity of Western peacemakers to the cultural context of non-Western groups in conflict. Lund, Morris, and LeBaron-Duryea (1994) suggest that culture-centered models which incorporate a culturally sensitive approach to conflict may be more appropriate than any universal (“one-size-fits-all”) model of intervention. It is the purpose of this chapter to explore, clarify, and propose methods of meeting the critical need to incorporate cultural understanding into the peacemaking process. In the first section, I present a culture-centered perspective on conflict. Then, I compare Western and non-Western models of peacemaking, contrasting the collectivist model invoked in the Asia-Pacific region with the individualistic model of the West. In the third section, I describe in detail certain features of the Chinese and Hawaiian conflict resolution systems to exemplify some non-Western peacemaking procedures which could prove useful in the West. In the fourth section, I present the Cultural Grid, a model that helps identify the complexity of culture and guides the training of people to manage conflict in multicultural settings. Finally, I turn to prospects for the future, noting the growing importance of cultural understanding and certain cultural fictions that must be set aside if we are to promote peace effectively in the twenty-first century.

A CULTURE-CENTERED PERSPECTIVE ON CONFLICT

The ways that conflicts between groups are managed reflect each group’s culturally acquired patterns of attitudes and beliefs. These patterns may involve punishing wrongdoers, repairing strained or broken relationships, depending on courts or legal systems or relying on informal social pressure through teasing, gossip, exclusion, and supernatural forces. These typical ways of

perceiving and responding to conflict are so natural to ingroup members of a culture that they assume their perspectives can be applied in other cultures (Fry & Bjorkqvist, 1997).

The impact of culture on conflict has important implications. First, misunderstandings may occur as groups in conflict interpret the behavior of outsiders according to the cultural rules of insiders. Second, conflict may not be resolved when groups in conflict seek quick and easy answers by forcing their own cultural perspective on one another. Third, a better understanding of the impact of culture on conflict may allow us to adapt others' peacemaking strategies to enlarge our own repertoire.

Peacemaking requires that both parties to a conflict be able to accurately understand the conflict from the other side's point of view. In a failing conflictual process, two groups are frustrated in their efforts to achieve agreement by an inability (or unwillingness) to accurately interpret or understand each other's perspective. In contrast, when conflicting groups adopt a culture-centered perspective, they actively seek meaning in the other's actions and proactively try to make their own actions understandable to the other (Dubinskas, 1992). By jointly constructing cultural meaning, the cultural differences are not erased. Instead, the cultural integrity of all parties is preserved and a new basis for intercultural cooperation and coordination is constructed as a metaphoric bridge to an island of common ground for both sides of the dispute.

WESTERN AND NON-WESTERN MODELS OF PEACEMAKING

Individualistic vs. Collectivistic Cultures

Non-Western cultures have typically been associated with "collectivistic" perspectives, while Western cultures have typically been associated with "individualistic" value systems (Kim, Tri-

andis, Kagitcibasi, Choi, & Yoon, 1994). One difference between the two value systems is that individualism describes societies where the connections between people are loose, and each person is expected to look after him or herself. Collectivism describes cultures where people are part of strong cohesive ingroups which protect them in exchange for unquestioned lifetime loyalty (Hofstede, 1991). Differences on the individualism-collectivism dimension can lead to problems. For instance, the concept of individual freedom is a reflection of an individualistic value and it would be improper to impose such a value on a collectivistic society.

A second difference is that in non-Western collectivistic cultures, one of the ways to manage disagreement between people is through the use of quoted proverbs or stories that give guidance on how to manage power differentials, handle disputes, locate mediators or go-betweens, and how to achieve mutually satisfactory settlements (Augsburger, 1992). For example, Watson-Gegeo and White (1990) describe how Pacific Islanders prefer the term “disentangling” over the more individualistic notions of conflict resolution or dispute management. Disentangling is more a process than an outcome and the image of a tangled net or line blocking purposeful activity has a practical emphasis as well as implying the ideal state where the lines of people’s lives are “straight.” Katz (1993) likewise talks about “the straight path” as a healing tradition of Fiji with spiritual dimensions of health for the individual and for society.

A third difference is the notion of self. In Western societies, the self is grounded intrapsychically in self-love, self-definition, and self-direction. In the solidarity of a collectivistic setting, the self is not free. It is bound by mutual role obligations and duties, structured and nurtured in an ongoing process of give-and-take in facework negotiations. In the West, there must be high consistency between public face and private self-image. In the East, the self is not an individual

but a relational construct” (Augsburger, 1992, p. 86).

High and Low Context Cultures

Another way of distinguishing cultures is the degree to which context matters.

Low context cultures generally refer to groups characterized by individualism, overt communication and heterogeneity. The United States, Canada and Central and Northern Europe are described as areas where low context cultural practices are most in evidence. High context cultures feature collective identity-focus, covert communication and homogeneity. This approach prevails in Asian countries including Japan, China and Korea as well as Latin American countries. (Hall, 1976, p. 39)

Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) have made similar distinctions: Low-context cultures are likely to emphasize the individual rather than the group, be concerned about autonomy rather than inclusion, be direct rather than indirect, take a controlling style of confrontation rather than an obliging style, and be competitive rather than collaborative. To illustrate, Hall (1976) contrasts the American (low-context) with the Japanese (high-context) perspective regarding justice. In a Japanese trial, the accused, the court, the public, and the injured parties come together in a collaborative effort to settle the dispute. In the United States, the function of a trial is to focus on the crime, confront the perpetrator, and affix blame in a way that the criminal and society see the consequences.

Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey associate high-and low-context with collectivism and individualism, respectively. While low-context persons view indirect conflict management as weak, cow-

ardly, or evasive, members of high-context cultures view direct conflict management as impolite and clumsy. While low-context persons separate the conflict issue from the person, high-context cultures see the issue and person as interrelated. While low-context persons seek to manage conflict toward an objective and fair solution, high-context cultures focus on the affective, relational, personal, and subjective aspects which preclude open conflict. While low-context cultures have a linear and logical worldview which is problem-oriented and sensitive to individuals, high-context cultures see the conflict, event, and all actors in a unified, holistic context. While low-context cultures value independence focused on autonomy, freedom, and personal rights, high-context cultures value inclusion, approval, and association.

Table 16.1 Differences between Low-and High-context Cultures

Low Context	High Context
Individual participants must first accept and acknowledge that there is a conflict before resolution/mediation can begin.	Traditional groups must first accept and acknowledge that there is a conflict before resolution/mediation can begin.
Conflict and resolution/mediation process must often be kept private.	Conflict is not private and must be made public before the resolution/mediation process can begin.
Conflict management trains an individual to negotiate/mediate or resolve conflict reactively.	Social conflict management emphasizes monitoring or mediating stress in a proactive manner.
Resolution and mediation are individually defined by the individuals involved in the conflict.	Conflict and its resolution/mediation are defined by the group or culture.
Settlements are usually devoid of ritual and spirituality.	Settlements are most often accompanied by ritual and spirituality.

Negotiations are face-to-face and confidential. Negotiations are indirect (through intermediaries)

Preference for court settlements. and public.
Relying on courts to resolve/mediate conflict is
regarded as a failure.

Using data from a 1994 conference on “Conflict resolution in the Asia Pacific Region,” Pedersen and Jandt (1996) developed some hypotheses about how high-and low-context cultures experience conflict differently. These hypotheses are presented in Table 16.1.

Western cultures have typically been associated with more individualistic perspectives with less emphasis on the importance of context. Non-Western cultures have typically been more collectivistic with more emphasis on the importance of context. Of course, neither of these two perspectives is right or wrong or exclusively Western or non-Western. Nevertheless, in any conflict involving parties from different cultures, peacemakers need to be sensitive to the different rules that apply to peacemaking in each culture. An examination of conflict in a high-context culture located in the Asian-Pacific region of the world, can help illustrate many of the principles of peacemaking across cultures.

CONFLICT IN AN ASIAN-PACIFIC CONTEXT: A CASE STUDY

The Asian-Pacific perspective is unique in several ways, as described by a Chinese mediator. “We who engage in mediation work should use our mouths, legs and eyes more often. This means we should constantly explain the importance of living in harmony and dispense legal education. We should also pay frequent visits to people’s houses and when we hear or see any symptoms of disputes we should attempt to settle them before they become too serious” (Barnes, 1991, p. 26).

The Concept of “Face”

Conflict management in the Asian context has been described as face maintenance, face saving, face restoration, or face loss (Duryea, 1992). The concept of “face” is Chinese in origin as a literal translation of the Chinese term *lian*, representing the confidence of society in the integrity of moral character. Without moral character, individuals cannot function in their community (Hu, 1945). One loses face when an individual or group or someone representing the group fails to meet the requirements of their socially defined role or position. Face can become more important than life itself as the evaluation of the self by the community is essential to identity. What one thinks of self is less important than what one thinks *others* think. Ting-Toomey (1994) defines the concept of face in conflict management as important in all communications.

The traditional Chinese approach to conflict resolution is based on saving face for *all* parties by the choices each makes regarding personal goals and interpersonal harmony. This approach follows the Confucian tradition in which the choice between personal goals and interpersonal harmony depends on the particular *nature* of the relationship between conflicted parties (Hwang, 1998). When a subordinate is in conflict with a superior he or she must protect the superior’s face to maintain interpersonal harmony. Opinions are expressed indirectly, and any personal goal must be achieved privately while pretending to obey the superior.

When the conflict involves horizontal relationships among “ingroup” members, they may communicate directly, and to protect harmony they may give face to each other through compromise. If, however, one insists on his or her personal goal in spite of the feelings of the other, the fight may continue for a long time. If both parties insist on their conflicting personal goals, they may treat the other as an “outgroup” member and confront that person directly, disregarding

harmony and protecting their own face. A third party might be required to mediate this conflict and it may result in destroying the relationship.

Hwang (1998) describes the Confucian relationships of father/son, husband/wife, senior/junior brother, and superior/subordinate in a vertical structure emphasizing the value of harmony. “When one is conflicting with someone else within his or her social network, the first thing one has to learn is *forbearance*...In its broadest sense, forbearance means to control and to suppress one’s emotion, desire and psychological impulse” (p. 28). Therefore a subordinate must obey and endure the superior’s demands, relying on indirect communication from some third party in their social network to communicate with the superior. Because Confucian rules of *politeness* require both sides to “care about the other’s face” at least superficially, conflict among ingroup members may not be evident to outsiders. In a family, for example, members take care of each other’s face in front of outsiders to maintain superficial harmony by obeying publicly and defying privately (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998)

Ho’oponopono

One Pacific Islands model for peacemaking and managing conflict is through *ho’oponopono*, which means “setting to right” in the Hawaiian language. The traditional Hawaiian cultural context emphasizes cooperation and harmony. The extended family, or *ohana*, is the foundation of traditional Hawaiian society, ... [and] successful maturation of a person in the Hawaiian culture thus requires that an individual cultivate an accurate ability to perceive and attend to other people’s needs, often without being asked” (Shook, 1985, p. 6). Unregulated conflict disrupts balance and harmony, requires self-scrutiny, admission of wrongdoing, asking forgiveness, and restitution to restore harmony. Illness becomes a punishment that occurs when one ignores the so-

cial pressure against taking negative actions or having negative feelings toward others.

The traditional *ho'oponopono* approach to problem solving and conflict management begins with prayer, asking God for assistance and placing the process in a cosmic or spiritual context. This is followed by identification, which means sharing strength to solve the family's problems by reaching out to the persons causing disruption to establish a favorable climate. The problem is then described in a way that ties the person who was wronged and the wrongdoer together in an entanglement. Then the many different dimensions of the entanglement problem are explored and clarified, one by one. As each aspect is identified through discussion, the layers or tangles of the problem are reorganized until family relationships are again in harmony. Individuals who have been wronged are encouraged to share their feelings and perceptions and to engage in honest, open self-scrutiny. If the group discussion is disrupted by emotional outbursts, the leader may declare a period of silence for family members to regain harmony in their discussion. Following this is the sincere confession of wrongdoing, where the wrongdoer seeks forgiveness and agrees to restitution. Untangling the negative then joins both the wronged and the wrongdoer in a mutual release and restores their cosmic and spiritual harmony. A closing spiritual ceremony reaffirms the family's strength and bond.

Attempts to adapt *ho'oponopono* to Westernized contexts have applied those aspects of (1) recognizing the importance of conflict management in a spiritual context, (2) channeling the discussion with sanctions of silence should disruption occur, and (3) bringing the wrongdoer back into the community as a full member with complete restitution and forgiveness. Understanding a radically different dispute resolution system should help peacemakers become more sensitive to whatever cultural differences they encounter in their work.

THE CULTURAL GRID

Hines and Pedersen (1980) introduced and developed The Cultural Grid to help identify and describe the complexity of a cultural context in a way that would suggest research hypotheses and guide the training of people to manage conflict in multicultural settings. Table 16.2 presents the Within-Person Cultural Grid. The grid provides a conceptual framework that demonstrates how cultural and personal variables interact in a combined context, linking each behavior (what you did) to expectations, each expectation to values (why you did it), and each value to the social system (where you learned to do it). Each cultural context is complicated and dynamic so that each value is taught by many teachers, with different values becoming salient in different situations. Multicultural self-awareness means being able to identify what you did (behavior), why you did it (expectation and value), and where you learned to do it (culture-teachers).

The Within-Person Cultural Grid is intended to show the complex network of culturally learned patterns behind each behavior in a chain of logic from teachers to values and expectations to the behavior. The dangers of interpreting behaviors “out of context” are apparent once the contextual linkage of behaviors to expectations, values, and social systems has been demonstrated. Cultural conflict can arise when the context of behavior is not interpreted appropriately. For example, our cultural teachers may have taught us the value of being fair and might have communicated that we should “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Someone from another culture might share the same value (i.e., being fair), but there may be differences in which behaviors are viewed as indications of fairness. If you focus only on the behavior out of context, a misunderstanding may occur.

Table 16.2 Within-Person Cultural Grid

	Personal Variables		
	Where you learned to do it (teachers)	Why you did it (values and expect.)	What you did (behavior)
Cultural Teachers			
1. Family relationships			
relatives			
fellow countrypersons			
ancestors shared beliefs			
2. Power relationships			
social friends			
sponsors and mentors			
subordinates			
supervisors and			
superiors			
3. Memberships			
co-workers			
organizations			
gender and age			
groups			
workplace colleagues			

4. Non-family relationships			
friendships			
classmates			
neighbors			
people like me			

In order to examine interpersonal processes, we now consider another cultural grid. The Between-Persons Cultural Grid is illustrated in Table 16.3. This grid describes the relationship between two people or groups by separating what was done (behaviors) from why it was done (expectations). The Between-Persons Cultural Grid includes four quadrants. Each quadrant explains parts of a conflict between two individuals or groups, recognizing that the salience of each quadrant may change over time and across situations (Pedersen, 1993). In the first quadrant (same behavior, same expectation), two individuals have similar behaviors and similar positive expectations. The relationship is congruent and harmonious and there are positive shared expectations behind the behavior. Both persons are smiling (behavior) and both persons expect friendship (expectation). There is little conflict in this quadrant.

Table 16.3 Between-Persons Cultural Grid

Why It Was Done(expectation)	What Was Done? (behavior)	
	Same action	Different action
Perceived same and positive reason		
Perceived different and negative reason		

In the second quadrant, two individuals or groups have different behaviors but share the same positive expectations. There is a high level of agreement in that both persons expect trust and friendliness. However, if behavior is interpreted out of context, it is likely to be incorrectly seen as different and possibly hostile. This quadrant is characteristic of cultural conflict in which each person or group is applying a self-reference criterion to interpret the other person's or group's behavior. Both expect respect but one shows respect by being very formal and the other by being very informal. In another example, two people may both expect harmony but one shows harmony by smiling a lot and the other by being very serious. If the behaviors are not perceived as reflecting shared, positive, common-ground expectations, the conflict may escalate as each party perceives the other as hostile. The conditions described in the second quadrant are very unstable and, unless the shared positive expectations are quickly found and made explicit, the salience is likely to change toward the third quadrant.

In the third quadrant, the two persons have the same behaviors but now they have different or negative expectations. The similarity of behaviors gives the appearance of harmony and agreement, but the hidden expectations are different or negative and are not likely to bode well for the relationship. While you may have cross-cultural conflict when the behaviors are the same and expectations are different, the salient feature here is no longer the shared cultural value, meaning, or expectation, but rather the similar behaviors outside their cultural context. When I interpret your behavior from my own cultural perspective, I impose my culture on you and interpret your behavior out of context. Although both persons are now in disagreement this may not be obvious or apparent to others. One person may continue to expect trust and friendliness while the other person is now distrustful and unfriendly, even though they are both behaving similarly, both

smiling and glad-handing. If these two people can be guided to remember an earlier time when they shared positive expectations, they might be able to return to the second quadrant and reverse the escalating conflict between them. If the difference in expectations is ignored or undiscovered, the conflict may move to the fourth quadrant.

In the fourth quadrant, two people have different and/or negative expectations and they stop pretending to be congruent. The two persons are at war with one another and may not want to increase the harmony in their relationship any longer. Their disagreement is now obvious and apparent, and they may just want to hurt one another. This condition would describe intimate violence, hate crimes, ethno-political violence, terrorism, and other extreme forms of conflict.

It is very difficult to retrieve conflict from the fourth quadrant because one or both parties have stopped trying to find shared positive expectations. Unfortunately, many conflicts between people and groups remain undiscovered until reaching the fourth quadrant. An appropriate prevention strategy would be to identify the conflict in behaviors early in the process when those differences in behaviors are in a context of shared positive expectations, allowing both parties to build on the common ground they share without forcing either party to lose integrity.

Therefore, two people may both share the positive expectation of *trust* but one may be loud and the other quiet; they may share *respect* but one may be open and the other closed; they may both believe in *fairness* but one may be direct and the other indirect; they may value *efficiency* but one may be formal and the other informal; they may seek *effectiveness* but one may be close and the other distant; or they may want *safety* but one may be task-oriented and the other relationship-oriented. Only when each behavior is assessed and understood in its *own* context does that behavior become meaningful. Only when positive shared expectations can be identified

will two individuals or groups be able to find common ground without sacrificing cultural integrity.

CULTURALLY BASED CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

There are many reasons for conflict across cultures. Different needs and wants, different beliefs, competing goals, different loyalties, values, ideologies, and geopolitical factors provide opportunities for conflict. Limited resources and wealth, the availability of technological solutions, disparities in power across social groups and classes all provide reasons for disagreement.

The United States offers one example of the increasing importance of a culture-centered perspective on conflict and the need to develop more adequate culture-sensitive tools for managing conflict. Demographic changes in the United States, with some minority groups growing more rapidly than others, will change the nature of community disputes so that issues of race, national origin, and ethnicity are more likely to be important considerations in the twenty-first century. The culture-based approach emphasizes that although cultures may embrace the same core values, the expression of these values in observable behaviors may differ dramatically, thereby increasing the likelihood of misunderstanding. Those seeking to mediate or manage community disputes will need to know more about the cultural background of the people involved. Culturally defined tools and strategies will become necessary not only to understand the disputes, but also to assist and resolve them (Kruger, 1992).

Sunoo (1990) provides seven guidelines for mediators of intercultural disputes.

1. Anticipate different expectations.

2. Do not assume that what you say is being understood.
3. Listen carefully.
4. Seek ways of getting both parties to validate the concerns of the other.
5. Be patient, be humble, and be willing to learn.
6. Apply win-win negotiating principles to the negotiation rather than traditional adversarial bargaining techniques.
7. Dare to do things differently.

These recommendations parallel ten guidelines by Cohen (1991), who suggests that the negotiator study the opponent's culture and history, try to establish a warm personal relationship, refrain from assuming that others understand what you mean, be alert to indirect communication, be sensitive to face/status issues, adapt your strategy to your opponent's cultural needs, be appropriately flexible and patient, and recognize that outward appearances are important.

Lund, Morris, and LeBaron-Duryea (1994) note that culture is complicated and dynamic with considerable diversity within each cultural group. Culture provides a metaphor for respecting the complicated and dynamic diversity within and between cultural groups while also defining the common ground that connects the groups. Finding common ground without giving up integrity and without resorting to simplistic stereotypes or overgeneralizations is the primary challenge.

Dominant-culture methods of conflict resolution are based on culture-bound assumptions and incorporate values and attitudes not shared by members of minority groups. These culture-bound assumptions are implicit or explicit in many of the models of mediation and negotiation originating in the West. It is important to separate fact from fiction in these models and to make peace-

makers aware of culturally bound assumptions.

Fictions

One fiction is that conflicts are merely communication problems and if effective communication can be facilitated, then the conflict will be solved. In fact, the cultural context mediates all communications between groups and must be attended to in all conflict management.

A second fiction is that there is a middle ground which both parties must reach through compromise to get some of what they want. In fact, the conflict may not fit a winlose model and compromising may be less effective than reframing the conflict so that both parties gain without losing integrity.

A third fiction is that the optimal way to address conflict is to get both of the parties in the same room and facilitate an open, forthright discussion of the issues. In fact, direct contact in many cultural contexts may be destructive, especially in contexts where conflicts are managed indirectly.

A fourth fiction is that parties in conflict should emphasize their individual interests over collective values of family, community, or society. In fact, the collective interests may be more important than individual interests in some cultures.

A fifth fiction is that any third-party mediator must be a neutral person with no connections to any of the conflicting parties. In fact, neutrality may be impossible or even undesirable when it requires going outside the group to find a third party.

A sixth fiction is that good procedures for conflict resolution should be standardized according to fair, reasonable, and rational formats and policies. In fact, the expectation of fairness, rea-

sonableness, and rationality may be expressed quite differently by each culture.

Peacemaking between ethnocultural groups has become an urgent need in recent times and promises to be a major priority of the twenty-first century. By better understanding the positive contribution that a culture-centered approach to peacemaking provides, we might be better prepared to promote the sustainable satisfaction of human needs for security and a high quality of life on a global scale for the twenty-first century.