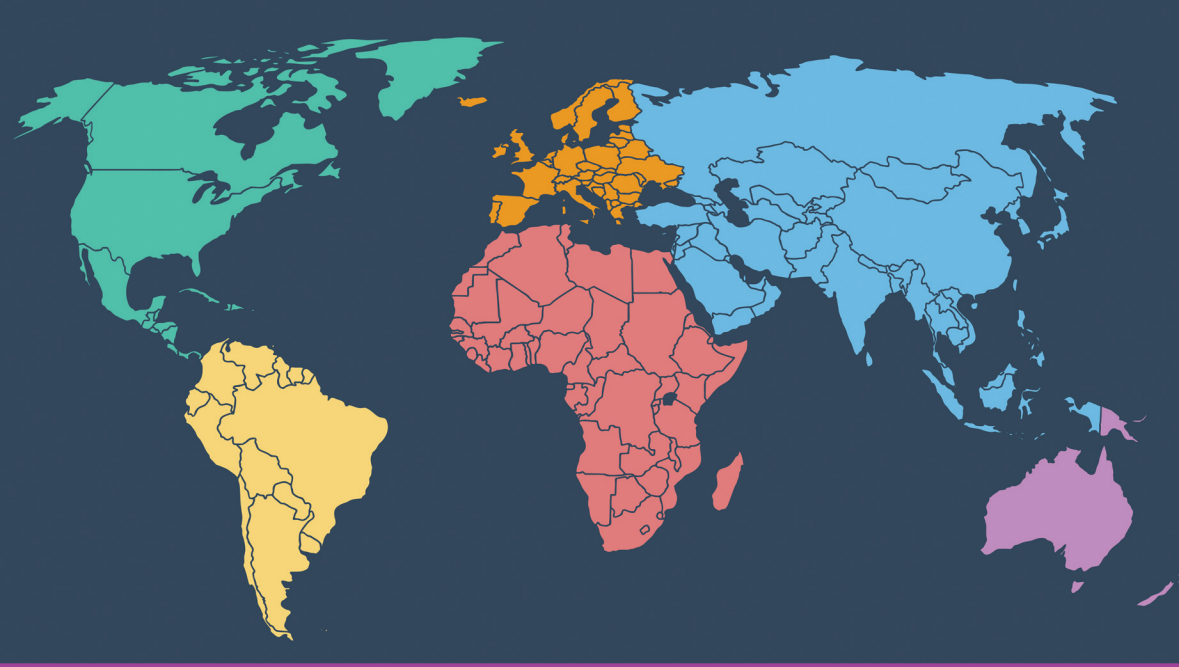

CULTURAL IMPACT ON CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Edited by Nancy T. Watson, Lei Xie, & Matthew J. Etchells

A VOLUME IN INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION

Cultural Impact on Conflict Management in Higher Education

A Volume in International Higher Education

Series Editors

Fredrick M. Nafukho and Beverly J. Irby
Texas A&M University

International Higher Education

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FOREWORD

Ryan Crocker
Texas A&M University

Last year, I had the privilege of writing a foreword for a ground-breaking book by Nancy, Karan Watson, and Christine Stanley, *Conflict Management and Dialogue in Higher Education*. That book set the stage for this one which takes conflict global.

It is therefore most appropriate that Nancy Watson and Christine Stanley have authored the opening chapter of *Cultural Impact on Conflict Management in Higher Education*. After reviewing key concepts from their previous book such as the inevitability (and indeed desirability) of conflict, that conflict is to be managed, not avoided and that the greater the diversity in an organization or society, the greater the degree of conflict, they turn to a set of principles that define conflict management in a global context. Many of them are important in my former world of diplomacy in the Middle East such as reflective engagement, active listening, and communication.

Those who know my background will not be surprised to hear that after that important first chapter, I turned immediately to Chapter 5, "Middle East: Conflict Management in Higher Education." I must admit I approached the chapter with some trepidation. Would this be another instance in which scholars assume that because the Arab states all speak Arabic, they are all the same. This makes as much sense as saying that because they all speak English, the United States, Canada, Britain, and Australia are all basically the same. Fortunately, the authors avoid this trap,

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focusing on two very different states, Egypt and Lebanon. Egypt since the military coup has become increasingly authoritarian, while Lebanon is decentralized to the point of near anarchy: the Lebanese Parliament was unable to choose a new President, and the office was vacant for 2 years.

Implicit here and elsewhere in the book is the salience of the rule of law—or its absence. Whether we acknowledge it or not, rule of law in this country, while imperfect, is the essential context within which we undertake our efforts at conflict management and resolution. In societies where rule of law is weak or nonexistent, the challenges become much bigger. Yet great universities have emerged and flourished under very difficult conditions. As the authors note, these include the American University of Beirut, on whose International Advisory Committee I sit, and the American University of Cairo.

Other chapters deal with other countries—China, the United Kingdom, Kenya…. The first chapter is the common guide for assessing conflict in higher education in dramatically different societies and political systems, and can be used literally around the world. I hope the authors will continue to work in this important field. For example, a comparison of conflict in universities in Israel and in the Palestinian territories could be very enlightening and directly relevant to my former occupation of diplomacy.

As I studied the intervention approaches laid out by Dr. Watson and Dr. Stanley, I was struck by the many similarities to my former profession. For diplomats, of course, negotiation is paramount and it takes many forms. Mediation is also important. I will cite several examples of each; others can determine their relevance to conflict management in global higher education.

June 1982. The Israelis have invaded Lebanon to destroy the military capabilities of The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). As the Political Counselor at the American Embassy in Beirut, I participate in a particular form of mediation known as proximity talks. These occur when one party refuses to talk directly to another. We and Israel refused to talk directly to the PLO which at the time we considered a terrorist organization. Americans and Palestinians assembled in the house of the Lebanese Prime Minister, me in the dining room and Khalil al- Wazir, the overall commander of Fatah military operations (he was later assassinated by Israeli commandos) in the study. The Prime Minister walked back and forth between us. On my end, I had a line open to the State Department which in turn was in contact with the Embassy in Tel Aviv and the Israelis. We did get the ceasefire, but it didn't hold.

Fast forward 25 years. I am the American Ambassador in Iraq, engaged in mediation of a different sort. Scarred by Saddam Hussein's tyranny, Iraqi political leaders were unable to make even simple compromises. For them, compromise meant concession, concession equaled defeat and

defeat led to death. I found, however, that what they couldn't give to each other, they might give to me. I would meet with one party and get a position and then tell the other party that I could get this, but he would have to give me that. With the Americans in the middle as mediator and implicit guarantor, we got quite a bit done. To do it, a deep understanding of culture and context is essential, as Drs. Watson and Stanley note in the case of higher education.

Negotiations likewise require an understanding of culture and context. Afghanistan, early March 2002. We had just launched Operation Anaconda against a concentration of Taliban and al-Qaida in the eastern mountains. There were more of them with better arms than we thought, and it became clear that we were not going to prevail without armor. The Northern Alliance had a number of old Soviet tanks, but the Alliance was predominantly Tajik and the fight was in a Pushtun area. Understanding the difference is crucial. The Pushtun warlord with whom we were working adamantly refused to allow Tajiks into his area. I went to see his brother in Kabul, a member of the Afghan cabinet. We spent more than hour in a freezing cold room lit only by kerosene lanterns, and I could not budge him an inch. One of my advisors suggested a break, and told me I had to be more direct, indicating what the consequences were if the refusal held. We returned to the table, and I told the Minister that the armor was going through with or without his brother's permission. If the latter, he would not be seeing his brother again. There was a long pause, and the Minister said we could work it out, and so we did. I had not understood the context well enough to know that the stakes literally had to be life or death.

Lastly, sometimes a failed negotiation can produce excellent results—you don't always have to get to yes. Back in Baghdad, the Prime Minister was pushing for direct U.S.- Iran talks to persuade Tehran to cease supporting antigovernment militias. I knew we would not succeed, and we didn't. The Prime Minister attended all the meetings, and saw that there would not be a political solution. Accordingly, he launched a major military action against the largest of the militias, effectively crippling it. As Clausewitz famously said, war is the continuation of politics by other means.

Whether any of this is relevant to conflict in higher education, I leave to others. I can say that this excellent book is relevant to the world I have come out of. The emphasis on an understanding of foreign cultures is at the core of diplomacy, as is a solid knowledge of history. We tend to be ahistorical as Americans, but for most of the world, it is as William Faulkner said of the American South: The past isn't dead—it isn't even past. Empathy (not sympathy) is essential. Knowing your adversaries is at least as important as knowing your friends. We should all be asking the question Butch Cassidy put to the Sundance Kid as they are chased through Bolivia: Who are those guys?

That, of course, did not end well.

Ryan Crocker

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CHAPTER 1

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

International Perspectives and Practices

Nancy T. Watson and Christine A. Stanley
Texas A&M University

Patience has nothing to do with suppression. In fact, it has everything to do with a gentle, honest relationship with yourself. If you wait and don't fuel the rage with your thoughts, you can be very honest about the fact that you long for revenge; nevertheless, you keep interrupting the torturous story line and stay with the underlying vulnerability. That frustration, that uneasiness and vulnerability, is nothing solid. And yet it is painful to experience. Still, just wait and be patient with your anguish and with the discomfort of it. This means relaxing with that restless, hot energy—knowing that it's the only way to find peace for ourselves or the world.

—Pema Chodron

INTRODUCTION

Conflict

Conflict is a part of our lives. Conflict occurs in all aspects of our lives: personal, work, between two individuals, between small groups, and between multiple and large groups. Conflict is defined as a struggle between people

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with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values and goals (Watson & Watson, 2011). Many people think eradicating conflict is the goal to strive for both in one's life and at work. However, strong conflict managers know that *conflict simple is*; conflict typically is neither positive nor negative but rather how we address conflict can have constructive or destructive outcomes.

Higher Education

Higher education is a place where diverse thoughts, perspectives, and people come together. Because of the potential richness of diversity on a college campus, the opportunity for conflicts occurs. The more diverse an organization becomes, the more conflict will exist, because conflict in and of itself is neutral, individuals and organizations want to think about how to strategically use and engage in conflicts to move their units forward (Stanley & Algert, 2007).

International Perspective and Practices

Managing conflict does not work when there is a "one-way only approach/model" for addressing conflict. When we say, "if this conflict happens, this is how we will address it every time," we are not being strategic for the majority of conflicts that arise; because there are many elements that impact a conflict and these factors must be considered when deciding how a conflict is addressed. As shown in Figure 1.1 people and organizations often act as though conflicts are unidimensional and that considering the "strength" of the conflict is the only variable to consider. In actuality, conflicts are multidimensional. There are many variables that accompany conflict; all with varying impact and strength, and the variables are all interacting in different ways at any given time. Some dimensions, although not an exhaustive list by any means, that may exist are related to: (a) one's personal beliefs or beliefs about an issue; (b) an individual's personal history in terms of how the conflict was perceived as something to be discussed or not; (c) work culture of the conflict where if "one has a conflict," the person or unit is messing up or there is a problem person; (d) the unconscious strategies of "face saving" (trying to maintain one's image) present; (e) social hierarchies or relationships; and (f) the diversity dimensions and issues that may be present.

TRUTHS ABOUT MENTALLY MODELING CONFLICTS

We "act" like conflicts are unidimensional (the only variable is the strength of the conflict) with multiple issues.

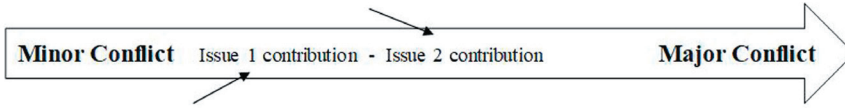


Figure 1.1. Traditional view about conflicts.

Conflicts are actually multidimensional in that many variables with differing strengths are all interacting in different ways at once.

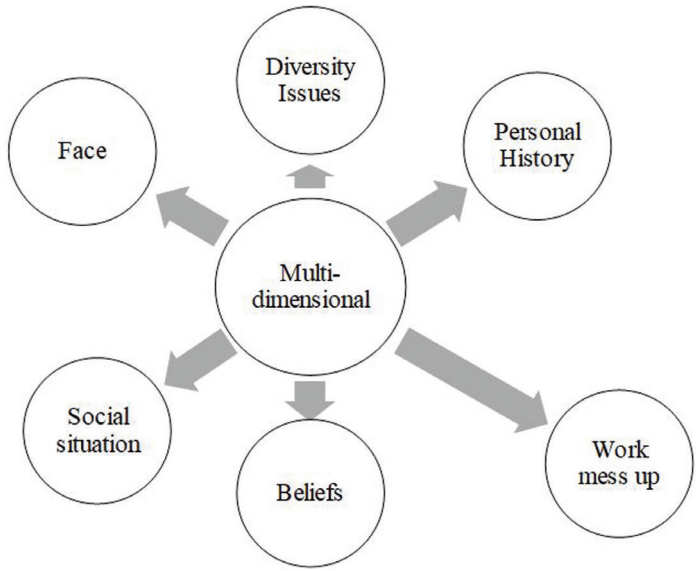


Figure 1.2. Multidimensionality of conflict.

One dimension that must be considered with the existence of a conflict is what cultural variables are present. Culture must be discussed when thinking about conflict, conflict management, and conflict resolution. Culture is defined in many ways. Generally speaking, and relying on work from scholars such as Edgar Schein (1993), "culture is a pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group learned as it solved problems … that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (Schein, 1993). Culture impacts how a person thinks and how a group works together (Office for Diversity, 2016). All organizations have a

conflict culture. Further, a majority of organizations have a conflict culture that is unwritten, unspoken and often one of avoidance.

We know faculty, staff, students, and administrators from different cultures often communicate and engage in conflict from a variety of perspectives. For example, Hoff argued, "Cultural misunderstandings can surface when there is a 'clash of expectations' " (as cited in Damen, 1987, p. 313). Often it is assumed American students, faculty and staff are operating from one cultural narrative while our international students, faculty, and staff are operating from other cultural narratives (Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, & Roy, 2009). This is an example of a "master narrative," which typically refers to preexisting sociocultural forms of interpretation (Lyotard, 1984). Often the grand narrative is assumed to be the "true narrative" and anyone who operates differently from a counter narrative, to the culture is viewed as problematic. These differences in culture and narratives often create or escalate a conflict.

It is important to realize that culture, diversity, and life experiences shape who we are as people and that each of us operates with different narratives. Recognizing differences and working to engage cross-culturally, are key to effective communication and conflict engagement.

In this book, the authors present conflict culture of world regions and attempt to illuminate the similarities and uniqueness of conflict cultures.

Background

Effective conflict management in higher education begins with self-awareness, engaging effectively with others, while and finally understanding how national and cultural influences impact conflict. Figure 1.3 illustrates this further.

The multilayer conflict reflection to engagement model illustrates the components to consider when thinking about conflict, namely, conflict and self, conflict with others, conflicts in organizations, and conflict and world cultures.

Conflict and Self–AtEM Level I

Effective conflict management begins with self. Five specific areas for self-understanding are used on the model (Figure 1.2). *Self-awareness* is simply defined as having a *conscious knowledge* of self, particularly one's thoughts, feelings, motivators and values (Bonnstetter, Suiter, & Widrick, 1993). Self-awareness is part of emotional intelligence and sets it apart from EI because of the significant importance of self-awareness and reflections

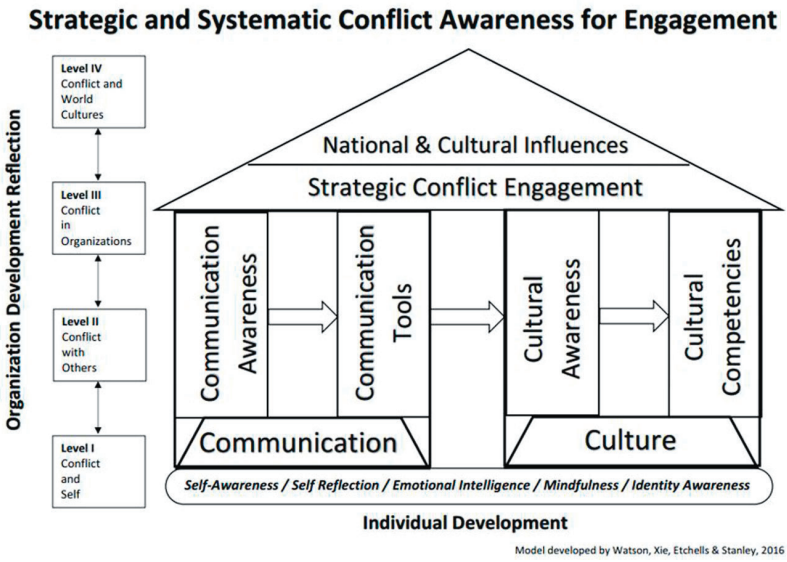


Figure 1.3. Multilayer conflict reflection to engagement model.

as an initial step in effective conflict management. *Self-reflection* is related to self-awareness in that it has to do with *intentional thought* about one's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and actions. Salovey and Mayer (1990) created the term *emotional intelligence* (EI) and defined it as the ability to recognize, understand and manage one's own emotions as well as the influence of the emotions of others (Mayer & Geher, 1996). Goleman (1995) talked about five components of EI namely *self-awareness*, which involves self-regulation, internal motivation, empathy, and social skills. *Self-regulation* is the ability to suspend judgment (one of the critical components necessary for dialogue and effective conflict management) through the process of directing one's moods and impulses. *Internal motivation* is leaning toward an internal locus of control, an inner drive, understanding what is important to one's life, and having a joy and interest in pursuing life goals.

The fourth component, healthy *empathy*, is the ability to exercise perspective taking. Perspective taking, which is not synonymous with agreement, is a variable that must be present for people in conflict to work through their differences with one another. Empathy involves having the capacity to have a general understanding of the emotions of others. When one can practice constructive empathy and perspective taking, there is the likelihood for anticipating someone's response with some accuracy. Finally, Goleman (1995) said *social skills* are necessary for EI, and these skills have

to be present to engage in conflict strategically and productively. Social skills include being an effective leader, a strong change agent, and able to clearly articulate one's plan and getting others to understand and follow.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness, according to Coleman (as cited in Gregoire, 2014), is the foundation of emotional intelligence. Further, mindfulness is a foundational skill/tool for a conflict manager and a dialogue facilitator. Mindfulness is related to shifting how we pay attention and this is especially true in higher education. Mindfulness, like dialogue, involves suspending judgment so one can listen for new information and meaning. This is counter to what we know about communication, both internal and with others, which involves listening to others to identify the errors in their work or their thinking. Mindfulness is related to self-awareness and can be used in how we listen to ourselves and others.

Identity Awareness

Identity awareness or cultural identity is being aware of one's own unique identity; and involves knowing ourselves, our multiple identities, and understanding that we have a mental model unique to self that is going to be different than others (Chao & Moon, 2005). Cultural identity is how "I identify myself" among my other identities and understanding that cultural differences exist between me and others. My identity is not the "ideal identity" for others and hopefully is something I have reflected on, am aware of, and have adapted and changed over time. Senge (1992) addressed how mental models affect what we see. Two people can observe the same event and walk away with a different understanding of the event because they tended to or processed different details (p. 3). Mental models are neither right nor wrong; however, they become problematic when we are not aware that we operate with our own unique mental model and assume everyone else thinks, feels, and behaves the way we do.

Remember the foundation of effective conflict awareness and engagement begins first with ourselves! The intrapersonal conflict management skills briefly defined above are the foundation of the awareness to engagement model (AtEM model) (Figure 1.2). This foundation holds the four pillars for Level 2 in the AtEM model, which can be categorized as communication pillars and cultural pillars.

Conflict With Others—AtEM Level II

After building a conflict awareness and foundation related to self, intrapersonal conflict and reflection, one must then think about interpersonal conflict or conflict with others.

Level II *conflict with others* involves people being aware and equipped with strong communication skills and cultural understanding. Communication skills involve both communication awareness and communication tools.

Communication Awareness

Communication awareness involves an understanding that communication involves both speaking and listening and an awareness of how one's communication is impacting others. Communication awareness is related to self-awareness. Many people are far better speakers than listeners. Listening is at the heart of effective conflict management and essential for learning and understanding others. With communication awareness people should think about their implicit biases.

Implicit bias is often unconscious, and is the judgment and bias one makes in a given situation. Implicit bias can lead to stereotyping and biased attitudes towards people based upon different dimensions and/or characteristics they may have. When we consider our unconscious biases and move them to a conscious level of understanding, we become a reflective communicator.

Reflective engagement involves a thoughtfulness of self and of others before one speaks. Reflective engagement involves self-awareness of one's thoughts, feelings, and biases and gives one the opportunity to thoughtfully engage in dialogue with another versus imposing oneself onto others. Through reflective engagement one increases the likelihood that we will learn about another, who they authentically are and what they think, instead of imposing our mental models onto them. We are reflective when we engage with others, and we strengthen the likelihood that we have an idea of the issues that exist between self and others or that we will be able to identify where the conflict issues lie.

Identify issues help with communication awareness and they create an opportunity for people or groups to have a common understanding of what their issues are; for the sake of this book what the conflict issues are that exist between them. Being able to identify the issues leads to being able to acknowledge what is similar (where we have common ground) and where we think quite differently. Being able to *acknowledge* differences creates a common understanding for what the conflict issues are and the opportu-

nity to decrease bias and further creates the opportunity to effective conflict management. Finally, communication awareness involves having strong *communication skills*. Communication awareness increases within self and others, when one has a set of skills to ask both self and others questions and clarifications for increased understanding, learning, dialogue and meaningful and strategic conflict engagement.

Still within Level II communication the second pillar is *communication tools*. Communication tools are intervention strategies and different methods of communication one can engage in to increase the likelihood of a meaning conflict discussion with others. One tool for effective communication is being able to identify where the *common goal* with others are. Exploring common goals leads to a willingness to learn from others, including their *perspective*. With a plan to identify where the common goals are the likelihood for moving into effective communication is possible, versus if one searches only for "where the other person is wrong." In American English, working to identify common goals assist all parties to stay focused on a constructive outcome versus simply relying on the idea that "my idea is right so clearly the other person and any of their ideas are wrong." Further, finding common goals assists us with communication by hearing the other person's perspective. Note that understanding another person's perspective does not necessary mean one agrees with it; it merely means one is willing and able to understand "where another is coming from" and this is important for effective communication and conflict management.

Active listening is an essential communication tool. Active listening involves being fully present with the speaker; concentrating, focusing on what the speaker is sharing, and striving to understand the other. Active listening techniques involve encouraging a person to share more, asking questions to understand the other's perspective and restating or summarizing what another has said to check for understanding (Watson, Watson, & Stanley, 2016).

Dialogue, as a communication strategy, is another communication tool. Dialogue is working to suspend judgment as one listens for new information. Dialogue is underutilized, particularly in higher education, as we typically work to find flaws in a person's perspective in order to correct them and tell the other they are wrong. By suspending judgment as another speaks, one increases the likelihood to hear someone else's narrative that is "true" to them.

Intervention strategies. When conflicts arise, one wants to be strategic in choosing the ideal conflict intervention strategy which increases the likelihood one will accomplish their communication goal. Below are brief explanations pertaining to conflict intervention strategies (Stanley, Watson & Algert, 2005).

When a conflict exists between disputants, a person in the position to intervene must decide which intervention approach is needed. This consideration must take into account not only the current conflict, but also the long-term relation and interactions of the disputants with each other and with the intervening party. The major factors of concern are: (a) establishing how much influence the disputants have in determining the process and resolution to the current conflict, and (b) how much influence the intervening party has on the process and resolution. Other considerations when choosing an approach are how much effort, time, and resources the approach will take.

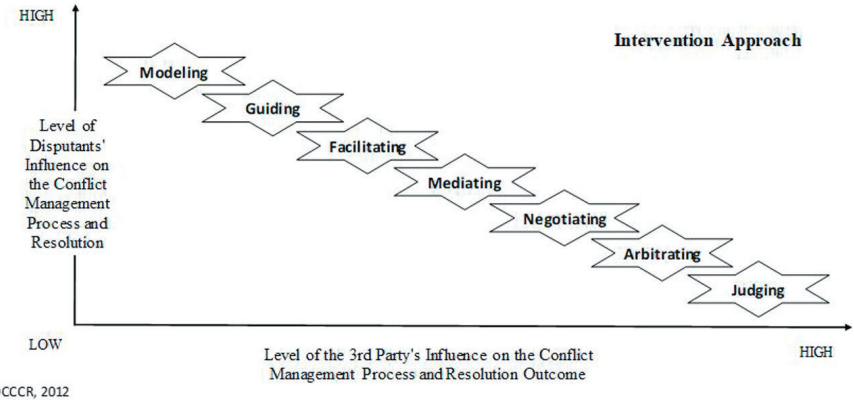
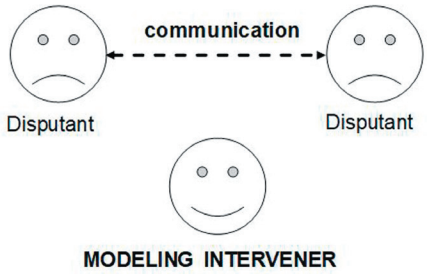


Figure 1.4. Conflict management intervention approaches.

In the different approaches to intervention there are many different factors to consider; two important factors are: (a) who is primarily communicating with whom, and (b) who decides if the resolution is satisfactory. To contrast the norms in the different intervention approaches, consider the following diagrams. Note the level of involvement of the third party (i.e. modeling intervener) regarding influence on the outcome and level of communication in the conflict process. Also, from each diagram, determine the extent of communication between the disputants in each intervention approach (Watson & Watson, 2015).

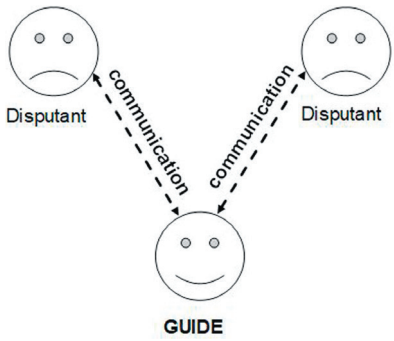
MODELING: Intervening serves as a pattern for behavior. To thoughtfully and intentionally model workplace behavior requires skills in:



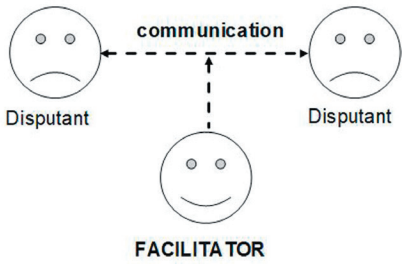
- Self-awareness of behavior
- Managing one's emotions to demonstrate consistency

GUIDING: Intervener meets with disputants to supervise or direct. Effective guidance requires skills in:

- Active listening
- Perspective talking (seeing other's position)
- Timing so guidance is perceived as supportive



FACILITATING: Intervener enters into ongoing relationship to help disputants. Bringing disputants together to assist and support them in managing their conflict requires skills in:



- Active listening
- Impartiality to support all disputants