

Weaving Together Theory, Research, Practice, and Teaching: A Four-dimensional Approach to Negotiation and Conflict Management Work

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Abstract

In this article, we suggest a new paradigm for writing on negotiation and conflict management that integrates theory, research, practice, and teaching. While there might be an implicit understanding that such integration is key to advancing the field, we make this explicit. Highlighting the critical aspects of this relationship, we call for a four-dimensional approach to writing in the negotiation and conflict management field. We suggest that adopting such systematic and intentional exploration of all four dimensions should be the default approach to writing on negotiation and conflict management topics. We provide brief summaries of the articles presented in the special issue and discuss the essence, origins, and weighting of the four dimensions in each paper. Finally, we suggest that this four-dimensional approach might have ramifications for the field's work, in areas other than writing.

Introduction

This special issue was inspired by Benjamin Broome's keynote address at the International Association for Conflict Management's annual conference in 2016, after being awarded the Jeffrey Z. Rubin Theory to Practice Award. This award "recognizes a scholar who has made important professional contributions at the nexus of theory, research and practice" (negotiacm.org/iacm-rubin-theory-to-practice-award, n.d.). Using practice to inspire theory and research, or linking theory and research to build new practice techniques, are key to advancing the negotiation field. While celebrated by this award, this three-dimensional nexus is infrequently reflected in our current academic journals, where it is far more common to encounter one-dimensional or two-dimensional treatments of a topic, for example, conceptual/theoretical papers, or papers describing theory to situate a particular research project. We note that books on negotiation reflect this nexus more than do journal articles. And—as Broome (2017) points out in an augmented version of his speech, included in this special issue—there have been numerous initiatives in the field to integrate theory and practice (Azar & Burton, 1986; Breslin & Rubin, 1995 and Deutsch & Coleman, 2000). Still, overall, such comprehensive address of any given topic through exploring it at the nexus of theory, research and practice is less ubiquitous in the literature, providing good reason for

IACM to award those who successfully make this type of contribution. As Broome suggests, there is a need for “cooperation between the theoretical and the applied” (2017, p. 256). Theory can inform practice as much as applied work gives rise to new theories to be tested empirically. It is only through the cooperation of theory, research and practice that we can best develop the field and provide the necessary conflict and negotiation tools that empower those who deal with conflict.

Contemplating the value of compiling a special issue of *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research* to include work at this nexus, we determined that the constitution of the negotiation field justifies recognizing and adding a fourth dimension to this nexus: pedagogy.

Negotiation is often described as an art and a science. The science of negotiation was built over the course of more than fifty years of research and theoretical development; the art of negotiation is evidenced in its practice—where even the most robust and researched strategy may not always produce the intended outcomes. Teaching negotiation requires a mastery of, and intentional focus on, both the science and the art. Indeed, a broad literature exists on teaching negotiation, exploring pedagogy and best practices (Honeyman, Coben, & DiPalo, 2009, 2010; Wheeler, 2000), comparing course content and pedagogical approaches across courses and disciplinary contexts (Fortgang, 2000; Honeyman & Schneider, 2004) and assessment of negotiation students and training efficacy (Ebner, Coben, & Honeyman, 2012; Movius, 2008). However, we note that for the most part, work on negotiation pedagogy is conducted independently of the work done on the other three dimensions, with teaching considerations or applications appearing in research papers only infrequently. Instead, pedagogy is developed generally and in the abstract (e.g., in the form of an article exploring how to best use simulation games for teaching negotiation concepts—*any* negotiation concepts), or more specifically, by teachers preparing material for the end user: student negotiators (e.g., a teacher authoring a simulation game to teach distributive bargaining). This separation further reduces the likelihood that writing on negotiation will integrate all four dimensions of the negotiation field—research, theory, practice, and teaching—in a single piece of work.

And yet, teaching is an activity that mediates and enables Broome’s “cooperation between the theoretical and the applied.” (2017, p. 256). Arguably, most negotiators do not read research articles—but their teachers do, and incorporate the frameworks and findings into negotiators’ formative or ongoing education. Negotiation is a practical field where engaging in the action is, arguably, the reason why all other aspects of the field (theory, research, and teaching) exist. As such, teaching the negotiation skills that build on the field’s theory and its research, to create an evidence-based approach to the practice of negotiation, is critical.

In dedicating this special issue to work that devotes attention to all four dimensions—referred to as 4-D work, or 4-D writing, in this article—we propose a new approach to writing on negotiation. In addition to generating the crop of articles produced by the call for papers, described below, our intention was to model an intentional intersection among the four core dimensions of the negotiation field and to highlight the importance of this intersection. This, we hoped, might encourage subsequent adoption of the model, resulting in the literature becoming richer and recursive—leading to an increasing impetus for negotiation papers to regularly address all four dimensions.

We note that in our own work and writing on negotiation, we have not generally taken a 4-D approach ourselves; when we have done so, it is quite likely that this was done unintentionally. As we issued the negotiation field the challenge of intentionally incorporating all four dimensions into every individual act of writing, we extended it to ourselves as well—both as authors and as guest editors of this special issue. This began with the challenge of balancing the special issue’s vision with a nondirective approach. While intentionality in applying a 4-D approach was a basic requirement for inclusion, the method for doing so—in terms of style, balance among the four dimensions, order of address, etc.—was left open. As we described this in our call for papers:

“We welcome empirical papers using novel (qualitative and quantitative) methodologies that offer innovative applications for teaching and practice, conceptual papers that inspire new research with an

applied focus and implications for teaching, pedagogical papers that suggest teaching approaches that rely on negotiation research to improve practice, or papers originating in a focus on practice, which challenge accepted theory and develop new pedagogical or research methods. Every paper should incorporate negotiation theory, research, pedagogy and practice in fresh ways. The purpose of this special issue is to foster greater linkages among these four elements to broaden and enrich the field of negotiation” ([https://doi.org/onlineibrary.wiley.com/store/10.1111/\(issn\)1750-4716/asset/homepages/ncmr_call_for_papers_nexus.pdf?v=1&s=36632c8523afc0d97f85ac3f18ed3c94714614bc&isagudo=false](https://doi.org/onlineibrary.wiley.com/store/10.1111/(issn)1750-4716/asset/homepages/ncmr_call_for_papers_nexus.pdf?v=1&s=36632c8523afc0d97f85ac3f18ed3c94714614bc&isagudo=false), 2017).

This open approach stemmed from our realization that while we could conceptualize the value of creating the 4-D intersection, and while we could suggest several different pathways for authors wishing to take up the gauntlet of doing so in a journal article, we did not have any reason to believe that some of these pathways would turn out to be better than others, or, indeed, that the pathways we envisioned were in any way a definitive and exhaustive list of routes. In inviting the field to consider a novel approach to its work, we anticipated receiving submissions demonstrating novel structures of thinking and writing—and were, indeed, rewarded by a multiplicity of approaches.

Creating 4-D Articles

While it might be conceptually pleasing to envision authors beginning any project wearing a pair of glasses that simultaneously presents them with a 4-D view of any topic or segment of any paper, we recognize that in practice, writing is unlikely to follow that route. Furthermore, we remind that while completed work might be sequential or follow a prescribed structure, the workflow—the thinking process, reading, conceptual review, research conduct, writing of actual text, and everything else that goes into writing a paper—is a far less linear and structured process. It involves working concurrently on some aspects, forming associative connections, division of labor between co-authors, and filling in some blanks only at the end. Writing an article might take a great deal of effort—but it is not an act of running a marathon, in the sense of departing point A, passing through measuring points B, C, and D, refreshing at predesignated points throughout the route, and ending with breaking a ribbon or crossing a line at point E. Perhaps, the creation of a film is a better metaphor: Movies are shot out of sequence, with dialog and plot ever-shifting as filming and production proceeds; some scenes might be edited to their final level of perfection even as others are still on the drawing board. In movies, as in articles, the final outcome perceived by the consumer tells a story that does not reflect—indeed, hides—the nonlinear, oft-chaotic, process that went into creating the piece of work.

Applying this insight to the process of generating 4-D papers, it seems reasonable that articles might emphasize one of the dimensions more than others; indeed, one or more dimensions may have motivated the authors to engage with the topic in the first place, and therefore, they naturally receive more attention owing to author affinity. Articles have triggers or origins that determine their structure and weighting. Did a challenge in practice trigger a search for conceptual grounding? Did noticing a gap in the literature lead to observing practitioners in action? In addition to the impetus for engagement, an article’s very essence might lie more squarely across one of these dimensions than others. As a result, it is hard to imagine a piece of writing equally weighted across all four dimensions, in such a manner that the reader could not determine differential focus—although the capacity to produce such writing might develop over time and practice with a 4-D approach.

The articles in this issue serve to exemplify this issue, of a multidimensional approach with a leaning toward a particular dimension. All have a central focus but all also develop, expose, and extract important aspects of all four dimensions. In doing so, the articles in this issue act as exemplars for implementing the 4-D approach and demonstrate the value of doing so.

This is easily shown, through introducing the articles in the special issue.

4-D Papers in Brief

The special issue opens with Broome (2017). In an augmented version of his speech upon accepting the Jeffrey Z. Rubin Theory to Practice Award, Broome describes the sometimes uncomfortable relationship between practitioners and academics, but acknowledges the need for a positive symbiosis for both aspects to thrive. While Broome focuses on the symbiosis between theory and practice, he includes afterthoughts that detail the integral role that the classroom plays in building theory, research, and practice. As he suggests, it is through tension and tradeoffs that a successful creative process emerges. Broome proposes that a “concerted effort by academics and practitioners” to join in a “collaborative inquiry. . .to coproduce knowledge” is the way forward for the field of negotiation and conflict resolution (2017, p. 258). This special issue, suggesting a 4-D approach, is a first effort to foster that type of collaborative inquiry.

Fosse, Ogliastris, and Rendon (2017) provide a fascinating window into the psychocultural profile of the French negotiator. More than one window, actually, given that their research explores this not only through perceptions of French negotiators, but through perceptions of French negotiators held by Latin American negotiators as well. This exploration not only expands our understanding of an individual country or group’s negotiation culture, but contributes to two other areas as well. First, by providing insight and illustration to recognized categories of cultural approaches to negotiation: dignity-based, honor-based and face-based. Second, by detailing the perceptual common ground that can exist between negotiators from dignity- and honor-based negotiation cultures. Perception is a key to understanding in negotiation, and as Broome points out, it is through the “feedback loop of experience, learning and practice, we can utilize a wider repertoire of understanding to transform difficult situations into positive action” (2017, p. 257). The teaching dimension of this article includes two different elements: First, in that part of the data was collected through student assignments; the course design incorporated a student research assignment which then provided some of the data for the study. The authors describe the benefits of this for data collection as well as for student experience and learning. Second, in recommendations for how to use the study’s findings in specific classroom exercises.

Fisher and Fisher-Yoshida (2017) detail a new approach to improving negotiation skills. Rather than beginning with a curriculum generically acknowledged to be beneficial to negotiators, they describe a process of deep exploration of a particular form of practice within a specific context, aimed at eliciting the core areas of knowledge, skills, and competencies its practitioners require. Next, they detail a comprehensive training approach for providing those practitioners with the complex and diverse abilities they need. The training approach incorporates both pedagogical theory and a method for identifying core areas of subject-matter theory and incorporating them into the classroom. The authors were able to capture one of the key elements of symbiosis that Broome describes: “Theory-practice symbiosis can help mitigate the tendency of practitioners to become infatuated with intervention trends” (2017, p. 258). Fisher and Fisher-Yoshida go beyond educational trends to develop new approaches to educating negotiators that are deeply embedded in the context of their applied work.

Borbély and Caputo (2017) suggest that while focusing on what is going on at the table is important, it is only one out of a number of important frames of observation, from the perspective of organizations who send representatives out to negotiate on their behalf. Whereas this frame has thus far captured most of the attention of the negotiation field, zooming out from the table uncovers other critical areas these organizations need to pay attention to and develop: Linkages between different negotiations the organization is conducting concurrently or sequentially, the overall organization of an organization’s negotiation activities and functions, and the organization’s overall negotiation capability. The authors focus on the practice side and the “negotiation infrastructure” in organizations and ask some important questions such as “Is the organization aware of its negotiation potential, and is this potential being enabled?” (2017, 248) and “Should negotiation be viewed as a corporate capability?” (2017, 248). They discuss negotiation training and the need for more rigorous exploration of “what’s next” after training. They present a theoretical model that draws upon empirical literature and practice-oriented concepts, implementing what

Broome describes as using “theory development to create stronger connection to the concerns and problems faced by practitioners” (2017, p. 258). Through applying a 4-D approach, this article exemplifies the importance of the symbiotic relationship among teaching, research, theory, and practice.

4-D and Paper Essence/Origin

Looking at the articles from an *origins* perspective, recreating what triggered the writing and what the authors set out to do at the start, it would appear that Fisher and Fisher-Yoshida set out to improve a particular area of practice in *Educating Negotiators*, Borbely and Caputo aimed to improve theory with an applied focus in *Approaching Negotiation at the Organizational Level*, and Fosse and his colleagues, in *When Dignity and Honor Cultures Negotiate*, set out to expand theory through examining practice. We offer this analysis from the perspective of the reader—which, as we’ve noted, might be different from that the authors. Categorizing these same papers by their perceived *essence* results in a slightly altered picture. We might suggest that Fosse, Ogliastris, & Rendon, 2017 is essentially a research paper, Borbely and Caputo’s work is essentially a conceptual theory paper, and Fisher and Fisher-Yoshida’s article is essentially a teaching paper.

This demonstrates how papers can adopt a 4-D approach with uneven weighting in terms of focus and motivation. Incorporating the other dimensions, beyond the origin dimension or the essence dimension, both improve the way the authors conceptualize and portray the more heavily weighted dimension and extend beyond that to provide a comprehensive treatment of the topic. Expanding Broome’s (2017) biological metaphor around symbiosis a bit further and applying it to the articles in this special issue, the authors began with the host (either research or theory or practice) and then layered the other critical elements of the 4-D framework to create a more robust environment for survival and sustainability as symbiotic organisms.

Enhancing 4-D

It may be, that as strategic approaches to 4-D are developed, we may discover ways for smoothing over distinctions between a host dimension and other dimensions, at the writing stage and, perhaps, earlier on in any project’s genesis. This might be done through further understanding of the most beneficial ways of mapping and relating between dimensions. To this end, we offer some initial suggestions for characterizing such mapping and relating, resulting from a critical review of the articles in this issue. It seems to us, that pieces demonstrate a more robust 4-D approach, the more they are:

Multilateral rather than bilateral: Applying a 4-D lens, one can examine any particular dimension with regard to any other individual dimension (e.g., discussing research in light of theory, and then practice in light of research, and teaching in light of practice). Alternatively, all dimensions could relate to *all* others.

Multidirectional rather than bidirectional or unidirectional: Beyond the channels opened between dimensions, we can explore the flow of information and effect through these channels. In a unidirectional flow, one dimension informs another (e.g., a research finding has implications for practice). In a bidirectional flow, the channel between two dimensions flows both ways (e.g., teaching informs practice, and teaching is challenged by practice). In a multidirectional flow, the range of effects in one channel informs all other channels (e.g., teaching informs practice, and practitioners push back against certain elements of teaching as unrealistic. This calls into question the theory that the teaching is grounded in, leading to a research project to clarify the issue).

Primarily multidimensional, rather than a host and add-ons: While we have acknowledged that there may be differential weighting between dimensions in any given article, this might be an effect of traditional writing patterns rather than an insurmountable constraint. While intentionally adding an

“implications for practice” or “implications for teaching” (or, indeed, both) section on at the end of a research paper is a good step forward, applying a full 4-D approach would involve exploring the core topic more robustly through each of the four dimensions, examining the interplay between them in a multilateral and multichannel sense, as described above.

4-D as a Cultural Shift

Viewed narrowly, adopting a 4-D approach might be seen as a new set of captions structuring and guiding the writing of any publication. However, in a deeper sense, the 4-D approach presents a cultural shift, given that a new paradigm for work on negotiation may have far-reaching ramifications.

Viewed as an approach to writing, a 4-D approach may involve not only new structures in articles, but new structures in authorship as well. It may lead to increased co-authorship, given that individuals might not be full experts across all four dimensions. It may result in increased participation in negotiation writing by some who have not previously engaged in this endeavor, primarily, practitioners and teachers.

Beyond writing, we wonder what other ripples we might see, should a 4-D approach extend beyond writing to infiltrate other work in the negotiation field. What effects would there be on teaching or on practice, if these were approached with 4-D in mind? How might a conference panel—indeed, an entire conference!—run differently, if 4-D was a core value?

Conclusion

We suggest that the 4-D approach has hitherto been seen as facultative or discretionary, and offer the perspective that in order for negotiation and conflict management field to fully thrive, the 4-D approach should be its default mode of work. In Broome’s (2017) biological metaphor of how actors and activities in the fields of negotiation and conflict management interact, rather than seeing one area as a parasite, taking away the life and essence of the host, the 4-D approach should be seen as empowering and nourishing the field. While we acknowledge we might be belaboring the biological metaphor, we think it most aptly expresses the paradigm shift we are suggesting.

Certainly, this approach is not without challenges and further questions. Not in the least, some of these relate to its scope of applicability. Should this 4-D approach only pertain to writing in the negotiation and conflict management domain? Or should this expand to teaching, training, and practice? In other words, any time we do a training, approach a negotiation, or any other work in the field, should the 4-D framework be evident?

We believe that a 4-D approach could be applied—and would be beneficial—in activities ranging beyond writing. However, as one of the field’s major activities, writing is a good place to start, beginning with this special issue. And, as one of the field’s most publicly visible activities, writing provides an opportunity to set forward examples of how the 4-D walk might be walked, and stimulate discussion of the approach’s challenges and its ultimate value for the field.

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