

Introduction to the Special Issue on Culture, Communication, and Conflict Management

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This special issue includes four articles addressing communication challenges inherent in international and cross-cultural conflict management. The authors treat culture, defined broadly as a social group with shared values and norms that are reinforced and perpetuated through the group's institutions, as geopolitical boundaries or national identification. Communication is operationalized through negotiation behaviors, dialogic competencies, conflict communication strategies, and communication bullying. Methods include both qualitative and quantitative, with two papers testing conceptual models of conflict management within the global social, cultural, and economic landscape. Together, this set of papers offers novel contributions and directions for future research on micro (e.g., partner's cultural values (Liu, 2018); reflexivity (Broome et al., 2019)), meso (e.g., family obligations (Tommy & Oetzel, 2018)), and macro (e.g., global positioning (Van de Vliert & Conway, 2018); legal constraints (Tommy & Oetzel, 2018)) influences on cross-cultural conflict management, conflict cultures, and effective intercultural communication.

In the first paper of this special issue, Liu puts a new spin on an old school intercultural negotiation paradigm by testing actor and partner effects of cultural values on strategy. Content-coded communication from intra- and intercultural negotiation simulations demonstrates the influence of power distance values and role-based power on partner's priority information exchange and relationship-building strategies. For example, when Chinese employees had high power distance (culturally congruent values), their counterparts engaged in culturally congruent negotiation behaviors: Chinese managers used less integrative behavior, and U.S. managers used more integrative behavior. But when U.S. employees had high power distance (culturally incongruent values), their U.S. manager counterparts displayed culturally incongruent behaviors—less priority information exchange. This paper extends existing work linking culture directly to negotiation norms and behaviors (Adair, Taylor, & Tinsley, 2009) and is consistent with current dynamic constructivist approaches (Shan, Keller, & Imai, 2016) illustrating the role of context (e.g., negotiator role or same- vs. cross-cultural setting), in predicting culturally normative negotiation behaviors.

In the second paper in this special issue, Tommy and Oetzel use qualitative methods to examine intercultural workplace conflict management and test the culture-based social ecological conflict model (CBSECM). In-depth interviews with Chinese managers and their Papua New Guinea employees highlight the individual-level role of power (e.g., face and power distance) as in the Liu paper. The qualitative data also support meso- and macro-level predictors of conflict communication, for example situational appraisals of family obligations and legal constraints. Together, these multilevel effects explain high-

power managers' competitive communication strategies and low-power employees' passive resistance strategies. The authors discuss how these conflict communication patterns result in low trust and work satisfaction.

While the first two studies operationalize communication through traditional negotiation and conflict management strategies, the third study by Broome and colleagues addresses general characteristics of interpersonal communication that nurture an inclusive environment for intercultural dialogue. The authors use qualitative data from two-part structured interviews with an interpretive structural modeling method to build a flow diagram of dialogic competencies. Results reveal five multifactor constructs: Listening, Openness, Validation, Empathy, and Reflexivity, and demonstrate their relative influence within a process model of effective intercultural communication.

In the final paper of this special issue, Van de Vliert and Conway tackle big data from the CLASH (CLimate, Aggression, and Self-control in Humans) initiative (Van Lange, Rinderu, & Bushman, 2017) at the national level to demonstrate distal roots of culture on conflict. The authors extend honor-culture (Aslani, Ramirez-Marin, Semnani-Azad, Brett, & Tinsley, 2013; Leung & Cohen, 2011) and conflict-culture (Andersen, Lustig, & Andersen, 1990) literatures by examining geographical position, ecological stressors, and conflict indices in both the Northern and Southern hemispheres. Findings indicate greater latitudinal (north–south) than longitudinal (east–west) variation in national conflict across the globe. In other words, the well-known Northern hemispheric Southern (vs. Northern) culture of aggression and conflict is duplicated in Northern (vs. Southern) cultures in the Southern Hemisphere, and these north–south patterns are more pronounced than commonly used East versus West comparisons. The authors discuss the effects, including ingroup favoritism, outgroup discrimination, and communication bullying, in relation to understanding social conflict in a global context.

Together, the articles in this special issue raise several considerations for contemporary culture, communication, and conflict research. Two important avenues with forward momentum include: novel conceptualizations of culture (e.g., Van de Vliert and Conway's Northerners vs. Southerners; specific understudied national populations such as Tommy and Oetzel's Papua New Guinea) and intercultural conflict communication dynamics such as Liu's actor–partner effect modeling or Broome and colleagues' intercultural communication effectiveness model. Researchers are taking into account contextual variables that impact conflict processes and activate culture: at the micro-level interlocutors' validation and reflexivity (Broome et al., this volume) or partner's culture (Liu, this volume); at the meso-level family and legal systems that constrain conflict management repertoires (Tommy & Oetzel, this volume); and at the macro-level ecological stressors as shown by Van de Vliert and Conway. We hope the contributions in this state-of-the-art research collection ignite your curiosity, broaden your understanding, and stimulate your future research on culture and communication in the field of negotiation and conflict management.

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