CHAPTER 10

Managing language and intercultural conflict

> Intercultural conflict frustrations often arise because of our lack of necessary and sufficient knowledge to deal with culture-based conflict communication issues competently. When a second language is involved, the situation may be exacerbated. Our cultural ignorance or ineptness oftentimes clutters our ability to communicate appropriately, effectively, and adaptively across cultural and linguistic lines.
>
> (Ting-Toomey 2012: 279)

> Peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of creative alternatives for responding to conflict. Dorothy Thompson (1893–1961), American freelance journalist.
>
> (J.J. Lewis n.d.)

> In a few decades, the relationship between the environment, resources and conflict may seem almost as obvious as the connection we see today between human rights, democracy and peace.
>
> (Wangari Maathai 1940–2011, 2004 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate. Nobel Women's Initiative n.d.)

learning objectives

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

1. identify and describe the nature and characteristics of conflict
2. define intercultural conflict and describe its characteristics
3. describe the role of language in intercultural conflicts
4. identify five types of conflict
5. explain the potential impact of culture in conflict situations
6. explain why it is important to consider the impact of social, political and historical elements in intercultural conflicts
7. explain the role of face and face saving in conflict situations
8. identify preventative strategies that you can use to avoid threatening the other person's face in a conflict situation
9. offer suggestions and strategies for dealing effectively and appropriately with intercultural conflicts.

INTRODUCTION

Today's globalized world is characterized by increasing contact between people with diverse backgrounds in all spheres of life (e.g. education, family, work, recreation, social, domestic and international politics, worship, etc.). Linguistic and cultural differences among individuals or group members, whether in a multicultural classroom, in linguistically and culturally diverse families, in multinational business teams, in international peace negotiations or other domains, can be a source of misunderstanding and conflict. 'Conflict breeds conflict, unless it is managed successfully' (Gudykunst 2004: 276). It is therefore imperative that we develop the knowledge and skills that can help us to resolve conflicts in a respectful, peaceful manner. It is not just world leaders who require intercultural conflict competence. All of us need to hone the ability to deal appropriately and effectively with misunderstandings and conflict situations on an interpersonal level.

This chapter begins by describing the nature and characteristics of conflict. Next, we explore the domains and types of conflict, and the role(s) of language and culture in conflict situations, especially intercultural interactions. We then turn our attention to intercultural conflict communication styles and the impact of face and facework in conflict situations. Finally, we discuss intercultural conflict competence and constructive ways to resolve language and intercultural misunderstandings and conflict situations.

THE NATURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF CONFLICT

There are many definitions of **conflict**. One of the most widely quoted is by Mortensen (1974: 93), who defines it simply as 'an expressed struggle over incompatible interests in the distribution of limited resources'. More recent definitions tend to be variations of this. Folger *et al.* (2013: 4), for example, refer to conflict as 'the interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatability and the possibility of interference from others as a result of this incompatability'. For Adler *et al.* (2013: 351), conflict denotes 'an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from the other party in achieving their goals'. Conflict is also viewed as 'an inevitable part of the human experience' (Roloff 1987), which 'permeates all social relationships' (Liu *et al.* 2011: 197).

As the above conceptions illustrate, scholars generally agree on the nature and characteristics of conflict and the relationship among those involved. Basically, conflict centres on 'incompatabilities, an expressed struggle, and interdependence among two or more parties' (Putnam 2006: 5). To gain a better understanding of how conflict impacts on everyday life, we now take a closer look at the common elements in these definitions.

Incompatabilities. In a conflict situation, it appears as if an individual or group's gain means another's loss. The parties involved may have incompatible goals or aspirations or they may favour incompatible means to the same ends (e.g. differing decision-making techniques, conflicting communication styles). For example, an individual may employ aggressive tactics to dominate a situation, whereas the other party wishes to negotiate a settlement through lengthy, informal conversations.

An expressed struggle. For conflict to develop, the parties involved must recognize that they disagree about something. You may be annoyed that someone keeps arriving late to meetings

but unless you convey your displeasure either verbally or nonverbally in such a way that this person is aware of your displeasure, there is no conflict.

Scarce resources. Interpersonal conflicts arise when people believe that there are insufficient resources (e.g. materials, food, time, wealth, quality education) for everyone. Many students may wish to join a second language immersion programme but there are a limited number of places; conflict may develop if the selection criteria are not transparent or perceived as fair. In families, sibling rivalry may intensify if children feel that their parents are not distributing their time evenly. Conflict may also erupt if one child is given more allowance or privileges than another.

Scare resources can also lead to conflicts on a larger scale. In some parts of the world, limited resources (e.g. water, arable land) are leading to violent disputes as people struggle to survive. Wangari Maathai, the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, warns that '[i]n a few decades, the relationship between the environment, resources and conflict may seem almost as obvious as the connection we see today between human rights, democracy and peace' (Nobel Women's Initiative n.d.). As the effects of global warming intensify (e.g. flooding, droughts) crops will fail in areas that used to be bountiful; the availability of food will drop and prices will rise, spawning more conflicts as people struggle to feed their families.

Interdependence. Individuals or groups that are involved in a conflict are interdependent in some ways, even if they are not willing to acknowledge this. In interpersonal relationships, for example, parties depend on each other for psychological, emotional, and material resources (Folger *et al.* 2013; Roloff 1981). The well-being of one is affected by the behaviour of the other party and vice versa. Resentment and hostility may cloud their judgment. A negative mindset may prevent people from recognizing that they need to accept their interdependence and work together in order to resolve their conflict.

Inevitability. As conflict is an inevitable fact of life, people routinely find themselves in conflict situations, whether in their personal life, social life, or at work. Siblings may routinely come into conflict with each other and their parents about daily activities. At universities, students who work on projects together may differ about how they should proceed. Romantic partners may find themselves in conflict about whether they should have sex or live together before marriage. When intercultural couples have children, they may find themselves in a conflict situation when they discover they have very different views about child-rearing practices and the role of religion and extended family members in their daily life. In the workplace, conflict about tasks and responsibilities may develop within work teams.

On the world stage, conflicts are bound to develop within regions and between nation-states as groups compete for limited resources (e.g. land, water). This does not mean that violence is also inevitable. Later in this chapter, we discuss peaceful ways to resolve conflict situations.

DOMAINS AND TYPES OF CONFLICT

An inevitable part of life, conflict can occur in any context where humans interact, e.g. one's home environment, social or educational settings, the workplace, within organizations. In all arenas within one's community, conflict may arise between individuals or groups (e.g. families, work or project teams, juries, clubs, political parties, etc.). Conflict can also erupt on the regional,

national or international stage (e.g. intergroup ethnic disputes, regional wars). Contentious, divisive issues can surface at any time in any arena of life.

Conflict can take many forms and cross one or more socially- and historically-constructed boundaries (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, race, language, religion, etc.). As well as perceiving incompatibility with individuals who share similar roots (e.g. the same first language and cultural histories), people may come into conflict with individuals or groups with different cultural, ethnic, linguistic, national, racial, political and religious backgrounds (Chen & Starosta 1998; Folger *et al.* 2013; Orbe & Harris 2008). Gender and age gaps may also trigger or complicate conflict situations. Let's take a look at several types of conflict and examples of each.

Intracultural conflict

A clash of opposing assumptions, beliefs, opinions, needs and goals may occur whenever human beings come together, even if they share much in common (e.g. the same language, ethnicity). **Intracultural conflict** refers to a struggle between individuals with a similar linguistic and cultural background. For example, two Australian EFL teachers in Seoul may become embroiled in a conflict situation when they vehemently disagree about the pedagogy that should be used in their language programme. Malaysian parents who share the same first language and cultural background may find themselves in a highly emotional conflict situation when they have opposing views about what medium of instruction is best for primary children (e.g. a local dialect or English).

Interpersonal conflict

Interpersonal conflict basically refers to conflict or a struggle between two or more people who may or may not have a similar linguistic and cultural background. Describing interpersonal conflict as 'a problematic situation', Abigail and Cahn (2011: 4) associate it with the following characteristics:

1 the conflicting parties are interdependent
2 they have the perception that they seek incompatible goals or outcomes or they favour incompatible means to the same ends
3 the perceived incompatibility has the potential to adversely affect the relationship leaving emotional residues if not addressed
4 there is a sense of urgency about the need to resolve the difference.

In an interpersonal conflict, a struggle may occur when the communication partners cannot come to an agreement on a way to meet their needs or goals. In this situation, individuals may feel pulled in different directions. For example, you may wish to go to Switzerland to take part in a German language immersion programme but your parents insist that you work during the summer. Your partner wants to go to see a French movie with you but you want to stay home and finish writing an essay that is due. Different aims, expectations and experiences can lead to interpersonal conflict.

Intergroup conflict

Intergroup conflict refers to disputes that arise between two or more groups of people (e.g. different ethnic groups, work groups, study groups, sports teams, debate teams, choirs, etc.). Group conflict situations may develop 'when two work, cultural, or social groups seek to maximize their own goals without locating perceptual congruities' (Chen & Starosta 1998: 143). Disparate objectives, values, communication styles and a wide range of cultural differences may cause friction between groups. For example, business majors may come into conflict with English majors about the use of the same meeting space or other resources (e.g. funds, computers).

Organizational conflict

Organizational conflict refers to disputes that can arise within an organization (e.g. a business, educational institution, a department, political party, social club, etc.) as a result of competing needs, values, beliefs and interests. Within organizations, conflict can assume many forms. There can be a clash among or between formal authority figures (e.g. senior administrators, executives, professors) and individuals or groups with less power and status (e.g. office workers, junior staff, students). Discord about a range of organizational or work-related issues may erupt between individuals, departments, unions and management. Even among those of the same rank (e.g. students, clerks, managers), disputes may occur about aspects such as the division of labour, the choice of language in meetings, the way duties or revenue should be divided, how tasks should be carried out, the hours of work, etc. Subtler forms of conflict (e.g. jealousies, rivalries, a clash of personalities) may also prevail as individuals and groups struggle to enhance their positioning and gain more power and privileges. Competing needs and demands may lead to protests and labour disputes (e.g. the refusal to use a particular language in meetings).

Within organizations, as well as in other contexts, conflicts may be either affective or cognitive in nature. **Affective conflict** refers to a type of conflict that centres on an emotional conflict between parties. Affective conflicts can be very destructive to companies (and interpersonal relationships) if unresolved. A **cognitive conflict** refers to a type of conflict that centres on the completion of a task. Cognitive conflicts often highlight important problems a company or organization needs to fix. (Also, see Chapter 11.)

Intercultural conflict

Intercultural conflict refers to 'the experience of emotional frustration in conjunction with perceived incompatibility of values, norms, face orientations, goals, scarce resources, processes, and/or outcomes between a minimum of two parties from two different cultural communities in an interactive situation' (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel 2001: 17). More recently, Oetzel and Ting-Toomey (2006) explain that this state of discord can arise due to 'the diverse cultural approaches people bring with them in expressing their different cultural or ethnic values, identity issues, interaction norms, face-saving orientations, power resource transactions, divergent goal emphasis, and contrastive conflict styles' (p. 545). **Conflict style** refers to a preferred way of behaving in conflict situations.

Intercultural conflict may materialize as '[o]ur cultural ignorance or ineptness oftentimes clutters our ability to communicate appropriately, effectively, and adaptively across cultural and

linguistic lines' (Ting-Toomey 2012: 279). Limited second language proficiency may exacerbate conflict situations. In a multicultural classroom, disparate views about what constitutes appropriate communication behaviours may lead to conflict between local and international students who have been socialized in a different linguistic and cultural environment. In discussions, an international exchange student may frequently speak up and interrupt other speakers. While this may be quite normal (and expected) in her home environment, her discourse may be perceived as overly direct and aggressive in this context. Tension and discord may prevail when students in the host culture are not accustomed to this style of communication. In another intercultural situation, an Algerian exchange student may find herself embroiled in a tense conflict with her Belgian professor who disapproves of her attending class wearing the hijab (headscarf worn by some Muslim women).

Intercultural conflicts may also arise in meetings or teams that involve students, workers or professionals from diverse backgrounds. For example, disputes may surface due to differing ideas about how a task should be divided and accomplished based on their experiences in their home culture. If group members do not share the same linguistic and cultural norms of politeness, tempers may flare. Lack of familiarity with **cultural scripts** (e.g. routines for requests, refusals, apologies) may result in miscommunication and **misattributions** (inaccurate assumptions), which may spiral into conflict situations.

Interracial conflict

Under the broad category of intercultural conflict, there are many sub-categories including interracial, interethnic and interreligious conflict. **Interracial conflict** refers to a conflict situation whereby race or racial difference is an issue (Orbe & Harris 2008). For example, a dispute between an African American customer and an Asian American shopkeeper may escalate when claims of overcharging and racism are voiced. When black drivers are stopped by white policemen in California, the drivers may claim that they are victims of racial profiling. Convinced that they have been singled out by law enforcement personnel because of their skin colour, a verbal disagreement may quickly escalate into a heated exchange.

Interethnic conflict

Interethnic conflict refers to a conflict situation between individuals or groups affiliated with different ethnic groups, whereby ethnicity is salient. A strong ethnic identity accompanied by ethnic hatred/distrust and inequalities (e.g. unequal financial resources) can lead to conflict situations that may escalate into violence. Conflict between Mexican Americans and European Americans may develop when different views are expressed about proposed changes to U.S. immigration laws. In Cyprus, conflict between Greek and Turkish Cypriots may surface when changes are proposed in educational language policies.

An extreme form of ethnic conflict may result in **ethnic cleansing** (the systematic and violent removal of an ethnic or religious group from a particular territory) and **genocide** (the widespread killing of a national, ethnic, racial or religious group). In the 1990s, for example, in the former Yugoslavia, Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats were forced to flee their homes by Serbs; many were also raped and murdered. In Rwanda, in 1994 the Hutus slaughtered thousands of members of the minority Tutsi population. In 1991, The United Nations Security Council established the **International Criminal Court (ICC)** in the Hague, the

Netherlands to try '**crimes against humanity**', that is, the systemic practice of serious offences against people that are either carried out or condoned by a government (e.g. widespread murder, religious persecution, rapes as a weapon of war, etc.). Many of these crimes involve atrocities that stem from ethnic conflicts, such as in Rwanda and Yugoslavia.

International conflict

International conflict has traditionally referred to disputes between different countries (e.g. the Iran–Iraq war) as well as conflict between people and organizations from different nation-states (e.g. trade disputes between Mexico and the United States, disagreements between the governments of different nations). Nowadays, the term encompasses inter-group conflicts within a nation such as when one group is fighting for independence or for more political, social or economic power (e.g. the conflict in Syria or Mali). Some international conflicts (e.g. the Israeli-Palestinian conflict) are protracted and not easily solved.

While international conflicts often involve different national governments, disputes may also erupt between business professionals and/or private businesses or organizations from two different countries. **Private-sector international conflict** is similar to private domestic interpersonal or business conflicts except that it is apt to be more complicated by factors such as linguistic and cultural differences (e.g. variations in communication practices, socio-pragmatic norms), distance and ambiguity about which laws prevail. Jurisdictional disputes and other intercultural complications may arise.

Interreligious conflict

Interreligious or **interfaith conflict (religious conflict)** refers to disputes or conflict situations between individuals or groups affiliated with different faiths, whereby religion is a salient issue. For example, with both Muslim and Christian populations in sub-Saharan Africa growing rapidly, issues of interfaith conflicts are increasing in this part of the world. Interfaith conflict has led to sectarian violence and even murder in Egypt, India, Nigeria and many other nations. Religious disputes may also arise between individuals or groups affiliated with different sects or branches within the same religion. In Ireland, among Christians, there are long-running tensions between Catholics and Protestants and in Iraq there are conflicts between Sunni and Shia Muslims. Intense passions and beliefs make interreligious conflicts difficult to resolve.

Intergenerational conflict

Intergenerational conflict refers to disputes between individuals or groups from different generations, whereby age and divergent life experiences are salient issue. For example, conflict between middle-aged immigrant parents and their children may arise due to differences in language practices, values, beliefs and behaviours. A young female Muslim who was born and raised in Manchester, England may insist on using English at all times and refuse to communicate with her immigrant parents in Urdu, their first language, especially in public. Her parents may forbid her from dating in secondary school and start the process of arranging a marriage for her with a cousin from their home village in Pakistan. In extreme cases, conflict can escalate and lead to an **honour killing**, whereby the young woman is murdered by relatives

who believe that her actions (e.g. premarital sex, refusal to accept an arranged marriage) have brought dishonour on the family. Intergenerational conflict has been the subject of many compelling films, e.g. *Bend it like Beckham*, *The Joy Luck Club*.

Gender conflict

Disputes may also occur between males and females in domestic, social or work environments. **Gender conflict** refers to conflict situations in which gender is a key factor. In a work situation, for example, interpersonal conflict may arise between male and female co-workers due to differences in communication styles and role expectations, as well as a power imbalance. Globally, more women are entering the workforce and joining professions once reserved for males. In many regions, women are gaining more access to positions of power in all sectors of society (e.g. education, government, work, the military, etc.). As they compete for jobs and better salaries and benefits, conflicts can arise when men (and some women) feel threatened by these changes. Accordingly, females may experience discrimination and possible retribution (e.g. intimidation, violence). As they fight for their rights, they may come into direct conflict with males who are resistant to change and unwilling to share power and resources.

Multiplex conflict

A **multiplex conflict situation** refers to disputes between individuals or groups that cross multiple social and historical boundaries (e.g. ethnic, linguistic, international, racial, social, gender, religion, political). For example, imagine an interpersonal conflict situation that involves a white Catholic male from Ireland who speaks English as a first language and a black Muslim female from the Sudan who speaks English as a second language. A language barrier and multiple cultural differences (e.g. religious, social class, cultural) could complicate the communication process and pose challenges for the resolutions of conflicts that arise.

While most conflict situations involve two or more people, individuals can sometimes experience conflict with themselves. **Intrapersonal conflict** or **self-conflict** refers to the internal struggle that can occur within one's own mind. This conflicted state can develop 'when we find ourselves having to choose between two or more mutually exclusive options' (Gamble & Gamble 2013: 218). Within the same individual, conflicting ideas about what is the right course of action may lead to confusion and feelings of inbetweenness. Trying to decide whether to follow their heart and major in Spanish or heed their parent's advice and study business can lead to self-conflict in students. A sojourner who has just returned from a lengthy stay abroad may also experience intrapersonal conflict. For example, the returnee may feel torn between certain values and practices (e.g. communication styles) in the host culture and those in her home environment. Pulled in multiple directions, she may experience marginality and other symptoms of reverse culture shock. Caught between the desire to make a better life for his family in a new country and fond memories of peaceful times in his homeland, a refugee may experience intrapersonal conflict and self-doubts while adjusting to life in a new country.

On a daily basis, the news media draws our attention to conflicts at the international, national or regional level; however, as noted above, disagreements and disputes may also arise between individuals in everyday life. The remainder of the chapter largely focuses on conflict that arises between two (or more) persons or groups with different backgrounds (e.g. cultural, linguistic, religious, ethnic, etc.).

CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF CONFLICT SITUATIONS

Culture plays a role in all conflict situations, whether intracultural or intercultural in nature. It can be a dominant factor or it may influence the conflict in more subtle ways. Both personal characteristics and cultural dimensions may fuel disagreements and conflicts between individuals and groups. In particular, intercultural conflict situations may be exacerbated by a range of cultural elements, including mismatched expectations, higher levels of ambiguity and uncertainty, language and nonverbal barriers, face and identity needs and differing perceptions and understandings of conflict. Let's take a closer look at each of these factors.

Mismatched expectations. The expectancy violation theory posits that individuals have culturally-based expectations about how people should behave in a communicative event (e.g. conversations, arguments) and when individuals or groups do not perform as expected, miscommunication and negative perceptions are apt to develop (Burgoon 1995). Expectations in conflict situations are influenced by the underlying values and norms (e.g. sociopragmatic rules of discourse) that are prevalent in a particular culture. Ideas about what is appropriate verbal and nonverbal behaviour in conflicts are learned during the process of socialization and vary among cultures. Not surprisingly, as noted by Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001: 17), intercultural conflict involves 'emotional frustrations or mismatched expectations that stem, in part, from cultural group membership differences'. In intercultural disputes, negative emotional reactions to unexpected behaviours can lead to an escalation in the conflict.

During enculturation, the socialization process, we develop ideas about what is appropriate or inappropriate behaviour by observing those around us. Cultural norms or rules serve as a guide for what we should or should not do in a conflict situation. A conflict script refers to 'the interaction placement and appropriate sequence of verbal and nonverbal message exchanges' (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel 2001: 11). Basically, this cognitive structure describes appropriate actions and sequences of events in a dispute (Folger *et al.* 2013: 56). For example, a conflict script can signal who should speak first during the process of negotiation. It can also indicate how and when one should apologize and in what language, depending on the nature of the conflict.

Recent studies suggest that people have implicit culturally-based scripts that shape their expectations about how a conflict should unfold and be resolved (Folger *et al.* 2013). Some researchers have also found variations in the conflict scripts of men and women in the same cultural context (Fehr *et al.* 1999). When people from different cultural backgrounds interact, there are bound to be difficulties when they expect different conflict scripts to prevail.

Ambiguity and uncertainty. When people interact with individuals who have a different linguistic and cultural background, there is bound to be more ambiguity and uncertainty than in intracultural interactions. The parties involved may not know whether the conflict is seen in the same way and they may be unsure how to handle the dispute in a manner that is mutually acceptable. Sensitive intercultural communicators may be nervous about the possibility of offending others. There may also be uncertainty in the meaning of verbal expressions when a second language is involved. Individuals with a low tolerance of ambiguity are apt to find intercultural conflict situations more stressful than intracultural events. Their heightened emotions may make it more difficult to resolve the conflict.

The uncertainty reduction theory (URT) (Berger & Calabrese 1975), which was introduced in Chapter 9, suggests that people are uncomfortable with ambiguity and strive to reduce uncertainty in communicative events (e.g. intercultural conflict situations). Cognitive uncertainty refers to uncertainty about the ways in which an individual's culturally-influenced attitudes and

beliefs impact on his or her way of thinking. Linked to the expectancy violation theory, **behavioural uncertainty** has to do with one's uncertainty about how the other person will behave in an intercultural conflict situation. The **uncertainty/anxiety management theory (AUM)** suggests that as we gain more knowledge and understanding of our communication partner, our level of stress or anxiety subsides. As our apprehension diminishes, we can become more effective at resolving conflicts with people who have been socialized in a different linguistic and cultural context (Gudykunst 2004).

Language and nonverbal barriers. Language is a key factor in all conflict situations, whether the parties involved share the same cultural background or not. As well as word choice and verbal communication style (e.g. direct or indirect, emotionally expressive or restrained, formal or informal), our nonverbal behaviours (e.g. tone of voice, body language, gestures, posture, facial expressions, use of space) impact on the outcomes of both intracultural and intercultural interactions.

Whether intentional or not, intercultural conflict may escalate when a person directs inappropriate verbal or nonverbal behaviour towards another. For example, standing very close to someone to emphasize a point may be quite acceptable in one's home environment but may backfire if one's communication partner is used to more personal distance. Feeling under threat, the person may respond in unexpected ways and the conflict may escalate.

In intercultural interactions, it is common for one or more interactants to use a second language and if not fluent, the possibility of miscommunication and misunderstandings is greater. Even if the intercultural communicators speak the same first language, there may be differences in their preferred communication style, which can complicate the conflict situation. If a speaker insists on using a direct style of communication with someone who is much more at ease with subtle ways of communicating, a negative reaction may worsen the conflict situation. Direct communicators may be viewed as abrasive, rude and confrontational, while those who favour an indirect style may be regarded as weak and indecisive. Misattributions and hurt feelings may make it more difficult to resolve conflicts. (Chapter 4 provides examples of various communication styles.)

Although language can sometimes result in intercultural conflict or exacerbate conflict situations, it is also the primary vehicle for solving intercultural conflict, as explained later in the chapter. In addition, context-appropriate nonverbal behaviours can also facilitate conflict resolutions.

Face and identity needs. In all cultures, people are concerned about how they are viewed by others and this also applies to conflict situations. Drawing on Goffman's (1969) notion of face as a social phenomenon that is created through communication, Brown and Levinson (1978: 66) define **face** as 'the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself, [. . .] something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction'. As well as our public image, face encompasses our identity, self-esteem and honour. In intercultural conflict situations, our face is particularly vulnerable as we are often less certain about what will happen (e.g. how our partners will react to what we say and do). The concept of face is especially problematic in ambiguous situations when the identities of the parties are called into question. In intercultural interactions, conflict situations may arise when difficult, awkward and unexpected requests are made. Individuals may be embarrassed and unsure how to respond.

Dimensions of face include positive and negative elements. **Positive face** refers to a person's desire to gain the approval of other people, whereas **negative face** is the desire to

have autonomy and not be controlled by others. **Positive facework** emphasizes the need for acceptance, respect and inclusion, while **negative facework** refers to the degree to which the disputants protect themselves from interference (Ting-Toomey 1990). In conflict situations, individuals strive to protect and manage their self-image.

Facework refers to the 'specific verbal and nonverbal behaviors that we engage in to maintain or restore face loss and to uphold and honor face gain' (Ting-Toomey 2005: 73). How people manage their self-image in conflict situations varies among cultures. 'While face and facework are universal phenomena, how we "frame" or interpret the situated meaning of face and how we enact facework differ from one cultural community to the next' (Ting-Toomey 2005: 73). Naturally, this can lead to misunderstandings and an escalation of disputes. The importance of facework is explored further in the chapter when we examine the conflict face negotiation theory.

Differing perceptions and understandings of conflict. The way conflict is viewed and approached is influenced by our gender and cultural background. Through enculturation, we acquire the attitudes, knowledge structures, behaviours and strategies that are most commonly used to define and respond to disagreements and conflict situations. From an early age, we learn how to deal with conflict by observing our parents and other members of our culture both in the community and through the mass media (e.g. television). We receive messages about what is appropriate for males and females in conflict situations. As our attitudes and perceptions of conflict are shaped within particular environments, it is not surprising that researchers have discovered individual and cultural differences in this domain.

In cultural contexts where **collectivism** is prevalent, the needs and wants of groups are given priority over individuals and conflict tends to be viewed as destructive and harmful for relationships (e.g. China, Japan) (Ting-Toomey & Takai 2006; van Meurs & Spencer-Oatey 2010). To preserve relational harmony and one's public face, **pacifism** is generally favoured, that is, individuals strive to avoid conflict situations. If conflicts arise, people tend to restrain their emotions and try to manage disputes indirectly. Those who use this approach think that relationships are made stronger and conflicts are lessened when emotions are kept in check. This perspective is clearly conveyed in the following Chinese proverb: 'The first person to raise his voice loses the argument'. It is also important to note, however, that some researchers in East Asia have recently identified generational differences in people's perceptions of conflict. Zhang *et al.* (2005), for example, found that young men and women in modern China increasingly prefer collaborative problem solving to resolve disputes, whereas their elders still favour avoiding conflict situations.

In contexts that are more **individualistic** (self-reliance and personal independence are stressed) (e.g. Germany, the United States), people tend to perceive conflict (e.g. the open discussion of conflicting views) as potentially positive. Instead of shying away from conflict situations, individualists maintain that it is best to approach conflict directly (e.g. analyse the situation and take steps to find a solution). Persons who employ this style believe that it is better to show emotion during disagreement than to hide or suppress feelings. For these individuals, this outward display signals one's concern and commitment to resolving the conflict. Through enculturation, people in individualistic cultures have developed the belief that working through conflicts constructively can defuse more serious conflict situations and bring about stronger, healthier and more mutually satisfying relationships (Orbe & Everett 2006; Ting-Toomey 2012; Ting-Toomey & Takai 2006).

Gender also impacts on how conflict is defined and resolved. Although a direct approach to conflict resolution may be prevalent in some contexts, the type of conflict, the relationship

of the disputants and individual preferences may lead to subtle differences in the way conflict situations unfold.

When individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds engage in conflict, they may have differing ideas about how disputes should be handled. As noted by Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001: 1), 'How we define the conflict problem, how we "punctuate" the differing triggering event that leads to the conflict problem, and how we view the goals for satisfactory conflict resolution are all likely to vary across cultures, situations, and individuals'. It is not difficult to imagine how misunderstandings and conflict situations can escalate when people have conflicting ideas about how their differences should be handled.

INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT STYLES

During the process of socialization within one's cultural or ethnic group, we learn particular ways to handle conflict situations. From our elders, we learn when it is appropriate to display emotions and when it is not. We also learn subtle nuances that lead to variations in how we act and respond in a variety of conflict situations in different domains (e.g. family, workplace, etc.). Some researchers (e.g. Filley 1975; Moberg 2001) maintain that we gradually develop a particular orientation toward conflict. **Conflict interaction style** refers to 'patterned responses to conflict in a variety of dissenting conflict situations' (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel 2001: 45).

A number of taxonomies have been developed to conceptualize conflict styles. For example, Blake and Mouton (1964) and Hall (1969) identified five types of conflict behaviour: a competing style (strategies are used to reach one's own goals at the cost of the other party's goals or feelings), an accommodating style (one's own goals are sacrificed for the sake of the other person/the relationship), an avoiding style (behaviours that either ignore or refuse to engage in the conflict), a collaborating style (parties work together cooperatively until a mutually agreeable solution is found) and a compromising style (there is a give and take of resources with no one achieving his or her original goal).

Rahim (1983) categorized and measured the following conflict styles based on the individual's concern for self or other: dominating style (high self/low other concern), obliging style (low self/high other concern), avoiding style (low self/other concern), integrating style (high self/other concern) and compromising style (moderate self/other concern). Rubin *et al.* (1994) view conflict styles in terms of withdrawing, yielding, problem solving or inaction. More recently, Wilmot and Hocker (2010) identified the following five conflict styles: avoidance (lose-lose), accommodation (lose-win), competition (win-lose), passive aggression (indirect aggression or opposition), direct aggression (confrontation), compromise (negotiated lose-lose) and collaboration (win-win).

In Western contexts, these typologies (or variations of them) are widely used by interpersonal and organizational communication specialists to help them make sense of differences in **conflict management** (the process by which individuals or groups try to find a satisfying outcome in conflict situations). To measure the conflict styles that feature in these taxonomies, a number of survey instruments have been developed (e.g. Hall's (1969) conflict management survey, Rahim's (1983) organizational communication conflict instrument).

Most conceptualizations of conflict styles have been shaped within Western, individualistic cultural contexts and questions have been raised about their applicability in other settings, especially in collectivist cultural contexts such as those in Asia (Kozan 1997; Hammer 2004, 2005; Kim & Leung 2000; Ting-Toomey *et al.* 2000). Since the underlying conceptual frameworks of most of these taxonomies are not grounded in culturally-based patterns of difference,

Hammer (2004, 2005) argues that they are not useful to identify and compare intercultural conflict styles.

With the limitations of previous taxonomies in view, Hammer (2004, 2005) devised the **intercultural conflict style model** that is presented in Figure 10.1. This model is based on two core dimensions that he maintains are influenced by cultural values and beliefs: (1) the degree of directness when dealing with conflicts (**direct conflict styles** vs. **indirect conflict styles)** and (2) divergent ways of coping with the affective dimension of conflict interaction (**emotional expressive styles** vs. **emotionally restrained styles**). These responses are linked to individualism–collectivism and high-/low-context communication patterns, which were discussed in Chapter 4.

As Figure 10.1 illustrates, Hammer's (2004, 2005) model identifies four basic, conflict resolution styles that can be found in different cultural groups: discussion (direct and emotionally restrained), engagement (direct and emotionally expressive), accommodation (indirect and emotionally restrained) and dynamic (indirect and emotionally expressive). Let's take a brief look at each.

The **discussion style** emphasizes a verbally direct approach to conflict situations that is tempered by an emotionally restrained response. People who adopt this style generally follow the maxim, 'say what you mean and mean what you say'. They pay careful attention to their word choice so that their views are clearly conveyed. Intense expressions of emotion are avoided; instead, people prefer to calmly discuss disagreements in a conversational, informal style, drawing on facts whenever possible rather than personal feelings. The discussion style is widely used by European-Americans, Australians and other people from individualistic nations.

The **engagement style** is characterized by a more verbally direct and confrontational or direct approach to dealing with conflict. The display of intense verbal and nonverbal expressions of emotion is considered an acceptable way to demonstrate one's sincerity, concern and willingness to work hard to resolve conflict. Some studies have linked this style to African Americans, Southern Europeans and some Russians (Martin & Nakayama 2011).

The **accommodation style** emphasizes a more indirect and emotionally restrained approach to dealing with conflict. To prevent a dispute from escalating, people who use this style employ ambiguous language, silence and avoidance. **Emotional restraint** (controlling the expression of one's emotions) is regarded as essential to maintain interpersonal harmony among the parties. Intermediaries (e.g. mutual friends, colleagues) or mediators may also be

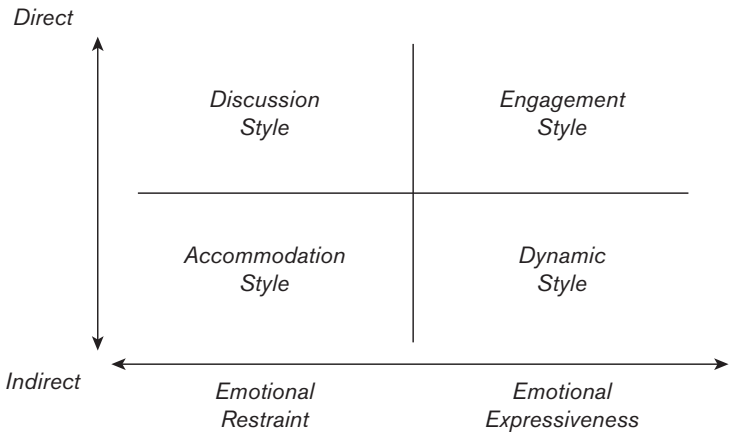

Figure 10.1 A model of intercultural conflict style

used to manage conflict. **Mediation** refers to the settlement or negotiation of a conflict or dispute by an independent person. **Negotiation** is a process by which the parties or group resolve a dispute by holding discussions and coming to an agreement that is mutually acceptable. **Mediators** or **intermediaries** are third parties that may facilitate negotiations and dialogue between the disputants. The accommodating style is often used by Latinos, American Indians and Asians.

The **dynamic style** involves the use of indirect strategies and emotionally intense expression to deal with substantive disagreements. **Emotional expression** refers to observable verbal and nonverbal actions that convey emotions. People who adopt the dynamic style may use linguistic devices such as hyperbole and metaphors. They may also repeat their message, use ambiguous language, tell stories or use third party intermediaries to try to resolve conflicts. Thus, this style is characterized by emotionally confrontational discourse and expression. Hammer (2005) asserts that the credibility of each party is linked to the degree of emotional expressiveness. The dynamic style may be used by Arabs in conflict situations.

For Hammer, 'the ability to recognize and respond appropriately to cultural differences in conflict style is critically important in effectively managing and resolving disagreements and conflict' (Intercultural Conflict Style, ICS n.d.). To facilitate this, he devised the Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory, a tool that is now widely used to measure preference for the cross-cultural conflict styles that feature in his model. As well as learning about their own conflict style, respondents are provided with information about the strengths and weaknesses of the other cross-cultural approaches to dealing with conflict. Hammer (2004, 2005) maintains that heightened awareness of culturally-based styles can help resolve intercultural conflict.

While some cross-cultural studies indicate that people in different cultures tend to display consistent styles across a variety of conflict situations, it is important to recognize that individual-level factors also influence actions and behaviours. Cai and Fink (2002), Gudykunst and Kim (2003), Oetzel (1998) and many other interculturalists caution us to be wary about making generalizations about cultures and conflict styles. Cultures are complex and dynamic. As conditions change, individuals and speech communities adapt their language use, nonverbal behaviours, communication strategies and conflict styles. People may vary their responses to disagreements and conflicts depending on the setting and situation (e.g. the language being used, the status and power of the disputant, the degree of familiarity with the parties involved, the level of formality, etc.). We must keep in mind that taxonomies can lead to errors and stereotyping if not verified by experience (LeBaron 2003). Folger *et al.* (2013: 133) conclude that 'while culture is likely to affect the choice of conflict style, there is no simplistic, cut-and-dried formula, It is just one of many factors that should be taken into account'.

FACEWORK AND INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Concerned about an overreliance on Western notions of conflict and conflict interaction styles, Ting-Toomey (2005, 2012) developed the **conflict face negotiation theory**, which addresses the ways face-losing and face-saving behaviours influence intercultural conflict situations. In particular, her theory helps explain why individuals from high-context cultures (e.g. collectivist, Asian settings) tend to manage conflict differently from people who have been socialized in low-context cultures (e.g. individualistic, Western contexts). As you will see, in this framework, identity is positioned as a major factor in intercultural conflict episodes.

As noted earlier in this chapter, face is present in every culture on our planet although the ways individuals or groups interpret the meaning of face and enact facework varies. Within

the context of the conflict face negotiation theory, **face** refers to a 'claimed sense of desired social self-image in a relational or international setting' (Ting-Toomey 2012: 285).

> Face is tied to the emotional significance and estimated calculations that we attach to our own social self-worth and the social self-worth of others. It is therefore a precious identity resource in communication because it can be threatened, enhanced, and undermined, and bargained over.
>
> (Ting-Toomey 2005: 73)

Ting-Toomey's theory identifies several types of face. **Self-face** refers to the 'protective concern for one's own image when one's own face is threatened in the conflict situation' (Ting-Toomey & Takai 2006: 701). **Other-face** is 'the concern or consideration for the other conflict party's image in the conflict situation' (ibid, p. 701). **Mutual-face** refers to 'the concern for both parties' images and/or the "image" of the relationship (ibid, p. 701). **Mutual facework** is the process of constructing a shared sense of identity (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi 1998). Communicating respect and a positive regard for self and others is referred to as **face management**, while facework refers to 'the specific verbal and nonverbal behaviors that we engage in to maintain or restore face loss and to uphold and honor face gain' (Ting-Toomey & Takai 2006: 701). Cultural, relational and situational factors impact on the facework strategies that are used in conflict situations.

The conflict face negotiation theory is based on the following assumptions: (a) people in all cultures try to maintain and negotiate face in communicative events; (b) the concept of face is especially problematic in emotionally threatening or identity-vulnerable situations when the situated identities of the communicators are challenged; (c) the cultural value scales of individualism–collectivism (Ting-Toomey 2010a; Triandis 2002) and small-large power distance (Hofstede 2001; House *et al.* 2004) shape facework concerns and styles; (d) the value patterns inherent in individualism and collectivism shape members' preferences for self-oriented facework or other-oriented facework; (e) small and large power distance value patterns shape members' preferences for **horizontal-based facework** (informal–symmetrical strategies/equal treatment) versus **vertical-based facework** (formal–asymmetrical strategies/deferential treatment); (f) the value dimensions coupled with individual, relational and situational factors, influence the use of specific facework behaviours in particular cultural scenes; and (g) **intercultural facework competence** is 'the optimal integration of knowledge, mindfulness, and communication skills in managing vulnerable identity-based conflict situations appropriately, effectively, and adaptively' (Ting-Toomey & Takai 2006: 702).

Intercultural conflict involves behaviours that can be both **face-threatening** (actions that cause someone to be humiliated) and **face-saving** or **face-giving** (actions that protect or support an individual's self-image or reputation). **Face maintenance** refers to 'the desire to project an image of strength and capability, or conversely, to avoid projecting an image of incapability, weakness, or foolishness' (Ting-Toomey 1990: 80). In an antagonistic conflict situation, individuals or groups may experience **face loss** when they are not treated in a way that respects their preferred self-identities (e.g. position, status, self-image). A face-threatening act involves a stressful episode in which one's identity is challenged or ignored. The conflict face negotiation theory posits that repeated face loss and face threat frequently result in an escalation in the conflict situation or a breakdown in negotiations.

In an intercultural conflict situation, individuals may have very different ideas about what language and communication styles are appropriate. **Face threats** (challenges to an individual's self-image) may intentionally or unintentionally occur due to **sociopragmatic expectancy**

violations (e.g. nonverbal acts or language usage that is perceived to be inappropriate in relation to one's self-ascribed status or role identity) (Spencer-Oatey 2008b; Thomas 1995). People from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds may not share the same understandings about what discourse and nonverbal behaviours are appropriate in a particular setting or situation, and misunderstandings can easily become conflict situations (Arundale 2006; Culpeper *et al.* 2003; Ting-Toomey 2009, 2012). In a discourse community, individuals become familiar with specific face-related conflict behaviours and may be unsure how to respond when second language speakers do not speak or behave in the ways they expect (Arundale 2006; Spencer-Oatey 2005, 2008b). In intercultural interactions, individuals or groups may be surprised and even shocked when they are exposed to unfamiliar facework and **conflict management styles** (preferred ways of dealing with conflict situations) (e.g. animated displays of emotion, swearing).

Spencer-Oatey (2000, 2008b) observes that people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds may adopt different strategies to manage face and maintain **rapport** (mutual empathy and understanding) in interpersonal interactions and conflict situations: a **rapport-enhancement orientation** (a desire to strengthen or enhance harmonious relations between interlocutors), a **rapport maintenance orientation** (a desire to maintain or protect harmonious relations), a **rapport-neglect orientation** (a lack of concern for the quality of interpersonal relations perhaps because of a focus on the self) and a **rapport-challenge orientation** (a desire to challenge or impair harmonious relations between the interlocutors).

When a second language is involved in the conflict situation, various linguistic elements and paralanguage (e.g. the tone of voice, word choice) can result in a mismatch between **facework styles** (pattern of behaviours designed to manage face). Disparate conflict goals, assumptions and **facework strategies** (steps taken to manage face) can further complicate the situation. Whether intended or not, both linguistic and non-linguistic elements can hamper rapport between the interlocutors, derail the conflict management process and lead to an escalation in the intercultural conflict.

INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT COMPETENCE

To prevent miscommunication and misattributions from continuously spiralling into major intercultural conflicts, it is essential to have an understanding of the components of intercultural conflict competence. While Chapter 12 explores the construct of intercultural (communicative) competence more broadly, this section focuses on attributes and characteristics of individuals who skilfully manage intercultural conflict situations.

First, it is important to define what is meant by intercultural conflict competence. As noted in Chapter 1, Ting-Toomey (2012: 279–80) refers to it as 'the mindful management of emotional frustrations and conflict interaction struggles due primarily to cultural, linguistic, or ethnic group membership differences'. This term encompasses the use of effective and appropriate facework strategies in intercultural conflict situations (e.g. conflict facework competence as defined in the conflict face negotiation theory). **Conflict facework competence** entails

> the development of a deep knowledge structure of the cultural-framed social setting, the key conflict parties' socio-cultural and personal identities, the conflict speech event, and the activation of culturally/linguistically appropriate and effective facework negotiation skills in respect to all the situational and multi-layered features.
>
> (Ting-Toomey 2012: 286)

Interculturalists (e.g. LeBaron 2003, LeBaron & Pillay 2006, Ting-Toomey 2004, 2009, 2012) have identified a number of core elements in intercultural conflict competence: culture-sensitive knowledge, mindfulness (mindful awareness, mindful fluency), constructive conflict communication skills (e.g. second language proficiency, sociopragmatic awareness, intercultural and interpersonal conflict management skills) and communication adaptability. Let's look at each in turn.

Culture-sensitive knowledge. Ting-Toomey (2004, 2009, 2012) maintains that culturally-based knowledge is the most vital ingredient in intercultural conflict competence. Without it, individuals may adhere to an ethnocentric stance and judge all unfamiliar conflict behaviours as weird or unsophisticated in comparison with their own (or their ingroup's) ways of dealing with disputes. With more knowledge of diverse ways of handling conflicts (e.g. awareness of the conflict scripts and styles that are prevalent in other cultural settings), individuals can suspend negative valuations and reflect on what may lie behind unfamiliar or unexpected behaviours in misunderstandings and conflict episodes.

With more cultural knowledge, one can learn to reframe one's interpretation of a conflict situation and take into account the other person's cultural frame of reference. At the same time, it is essential to bear in mind that not all individuals from a particular linguistic, cultural or ethnic background behave in the same way. Not all individuals who share a similar linguistic, cultural or ethnic background adopt the same conflict style. As well as recognizing individual factors, it is vital to develop knowledge about the potential impact of a variety of elements that can influence how the conflict situation unfolds (e.g. quality and type of relationship between the disputants, setting) in a particular social, political and historical context.

Mindfulness. To effectively manage intercultural conflicts, one must recognize the potential impact of one's personal and cultural communication expectations, conflict communication style, cognitions and emotional display on the conflict situation. At the same time, it is essential to become attuned to the other conflict party's communication assumptions, cognitions, language use and emotions (LeBaron 2003; LeBaron & Pillay 2006; Ting-Toomey 1999, 2012). Mindful awareness requires us to 'reflect on our own cultural ways of knowing and being, noticing how they are continually shaped by memories, experiences, and interpretations' (LeBaron 2003: 12). This process can draw our attention to the ways we frame conflict situations and make choices that ultimately either heighten tension or resolve intercultural conflicts. Recognition of face and identity needs (our own and those of the other person) is essential to resolve tense situations in a sensitive manner. Mindful fluency requires us to 'tune into our own cultural, linguistic, and personal habitual assumptions in scanning a problematic interaction scene' (Ting-Toomey 2012: 288). In other words, it is necessary to develop awareness of both self and other in conflict episodes.

We must also be open to learning other conflict management practices (ways to resolve disputes) from our communication partners. In order to accommodate intercultural differences, we must learn to see the unfamiliar behaviour from multiple cultural perspectives (Langer 1989, 1997). In other words, it is useful to view intercultural conflict episodes from an ethnorelative orientation rather than a narrow, ethnocentric lens. For example, if a second language speaker is using indirect responses or silence in a conflict situation, instead of rushing to a negative valuation, a mindful communicator may consider her emotional and cognitive reaction and reflect on why the individual may be responding in this way. The sensitive intercultural communicator may then consider modifying her approach to enact facework-sensitive behaviours.

Constructive conflict communication skills. Language is a core element in intercultural conflict situations and if disagreements and disputes are to be resolved in a manner that is mutually satisfactory, interactants need well developed interpersonal communication skills and, in many cases, proficiency in a second language. Constructive communication skills refer to 'our operational abilities to manage a conflict situation appropriately and effectively via skillful language, verbal, and nonverbal behaviors, whether in a first or second language' (Ting-Toomey 2012: 288). In particular, skills such as deep listening, de-centring, face-sensitive respectful dialogue skills, mindful reframing, comprehension checks and collaborative conflict negotiation skills are essential for intercultural mediators, especially when a second language is involved (Barge 2006; Coleman & Raider 2006; Ting-Toomey 2004, 2012).

Communication adaptability. Finally, in intercultural conflict episodes we must be flexible and willing to modify our interaction behaviours and goals to meet the specific needs of the situation. Our cognitive, affective and behavioural adjustments should help facilitate the resolution of intercultural conflict situations (Rogan & Hammer 2006; Ting-Toomey 2009, 2012). For example, dynamic conflict code-switching (e.g. adapting our conflict style to meet the other conflict party's communication approach, using their first language) can signal our respect and desire to preserve the relationship and resolve the conflict in an amicable way. (This notion is similar to the act of convergence that is associated with the CAT, the communication accommodation theory that was introduced in Chapter 4.)

Individuals who develop the skills and attributes of intercultural conflict competence are in a much stronger and healthier position to deal with difficulties that arise when communicating with people who have been socialized in a different linguistic and cultural environment.

MANAGING LANGUAGE AND INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT SITUATIONS

> The ability to thrive in a multicultural world is now central to our survival; it is a basic life-skill on our shrinking planet. In every land, people from around the world pass through, communicating, coupling, trading, and sometimes fighting. They make things together, share strategies and resources, draw on commonalities to build bridges, and come into conflict over differences . . . The need to summon creativity and exercise the choice to cooperate has never been more urgent.
>
> (LeBaron & Pillay 2006: 12)

While conflict is part of every culture and is unavoidable in human life, there are steps we can take to enhance our intercultural conflict competence and prevent intercultural disagreements from escalating into destructive conflicts.

- In a conflict situation, be aware of your own goals and those of others. Look for common grounds or overlapping between your aims and those of the other person.
- Bear in mind that the way conflict is expressed, perceived, and dealt with varies among cultures. In intercultural interactions, your communication partner may not view the situation as you do and may try to manage the conflict in ways that are unfamiliar or uncomfortable for you. Make an effort to understand the situation from the other person's perspective and refrain from dismissing a different conflict style as simplistic and unworkable.
- Stay centred and push yourself to go beyond traditional stereotypes and dualistic ('us' vs.

'them') thinking, whereby 'us' is superior. While approaches to conflict vary across cultures, remember that not everyone who is affiliated with a particular cultural or ethnic group follows the styles identified in the taxonomies that have been discussed in this chapter. For example, don't automatically assume that your Japanese groupmate will be non-expressive and accommodating, or that your German friends will adopt an expressive, confrontational style in conflict situations. Observe and learn from experience.

- Listen attentively before responding. Conflicts can escalate when we do not listen to each other. Even if you feel that you are becoming emotional, try to be patient and attend to what others are saying. In second language situations be sensitive to the possibility that you are misunderstanding what is being said. It is also conceivable that you are not conveying your ideas or feelings in a way that is being understood as you would like. Lack of fluency in the language being used may serve as a barrier in conflict situations. Patience, careful listening and explicit comprehension checks (e.g. asking questions to be sure one's message is clear) are essential in intercultural interactions, especially when a second language is involved. In a conflict situation, plan your message with care, especially when either you or your communication partner is using a second language.
- When misunderstandings and conflict arise, try to understand both sides of an issue and be open to differing perspectives. Together, you and the other communicators may synthesize your ideas and come up with a creative third perspective or resolution that is mutually acceptable.
- If you are accustomed to verbally and nonverbally conveying your emotions, recognize that this may have negative consequences when the other person is used to a more indirect style of communication. Be careful of your word choice and monitor your nonverbal behaviours. Avoid actions that may appear threatening such as standing very close to the other person. While it is normal to become angry in some conflict situations, it is essential to move past the hostility and refrain from seeking retribution. Carefully observe the nonverbal behaviours of other people involved in your disagreement. Monitor and adapt your nonverbal behaviours in conflict situations.
- Be sensitive to face and identity needs (your own and those of the other party). In particular, make use of positive facework strategies and demonstrate respect for the other person's identities and position within a particular sociocultural context.
- Avoid personal attacks, offensive or abusive language, profanity, name calling and emotional overstatements in conflict situations. Disagreements may escalate if degrading or disrespectful comments are made about an individual's culture, language (e.g. accent, dialect), ethnicity, religion or background. Also, remember that ignoring the discriminatory or racist behaviour of others gives permission for these offences to continue.
- Even in difficult situations, try to retain your sense of humour and be willing to let go of your hostility and feelings of revenge. Lessen your defensiveness in conflict situations. Be willing to admit mistakes, learn from them, and apply what you have learned in future intercultural interactions.
- Be sensitive to the power dimension in all conflict situations. **Interpersonal power** refers to 'the ability to influence another in the direction we desire—to get another person to do what we want' (Beebe *et al.* 2010: 218). In conflict situations, some individuals may have more power or control. For example, if you are using your first language with a non-native speaker who is not fully proficient in the language, remember that you are apt to be in a stronger position to convey your ideas in a persuasive manner.
- Check your perceptions of an intercultural conflict with trusted friends or colleagues who are familiar with the linguistic and cultural background of the other party in the dispute.

Intermediaries may be able to suggest more effective and appropriate ways to diffuse the situation. In particular, their feedback may help you to understand what lies behind unfamiliar actions. They may also suggest ways to adapt your verbal and nonverbal communication style to resolve the conflict in mutually acceptable ways.

- Recognize that people have different conflict styles, which often have cultural origins as well as personal characteristics. Failure to recognize and respect individual and cultural differences can lead to negative evaluations of persons and an escalation of the dispute.
- Generate possible solutions to the conflict instead of focusing on the difficulties. Be proactive. Work with your communication partner to try to negotiate a solution that is mutually acceptable.
- Identify your preferred conflict management style, especially if it differs from that of the other disputants. (You could use one of the taxonomies discussed in this chapter.) What language and communication style do you use in conflict situations? What nonverbal behaviours do you use to complement or substitute your verbal message? Even though we may modify our conflict strategies depending on the situation and the type of conflict, we are apt to rely on a similar style in most situations. When we interact with others, we may find that some conflict situations are more challenging than others since our preferred conflict style may not be compatible with the other person. As well as becoming more self-aware, be attentive to the behaviours and reactions of your communication partners. How do people respond to your verbal and nonverbal actions in a conflict situation?
- Be creative and expand your repertoire of conflict management strategies. If a particular way of dealing with conflict is not working, be willing to experiment with a different style. For example, if you are used to using very direct discourse to get your point across, and this is negatively impacting on your interactions with a Taiwanese friend, try to use more indirect expressions and a less expressive approach. Adaptability and flexibility are central in the enhancement of intercultural relations including conflict situations.
- Recognize the importance of context in conflict situations. Conflict styles within a multicultural family context are apt to have different dimensions and consequences in workplace environments or public settings.
- Finally, recognize that disputes do not need to end a relationship. Instead of isolating yourself from or fighting with the other party, try to start a dialogue to resolve your differences. If necessary, wait until tempers have cooled. Dialogue should be sincere, respectful and not rushed. Be attentive and open to different ways of seeing the conflict. Dialogue can help you to reach a deeper understanding of diversity conflict experiences.

SUMMARY

> It is essential that we enhance our understanding of conflict and its terrain so that we can navigate the physical, psychological, and spiritual chasms that threaten to swallow us, creative potential and all. Enhancing our understanding of conflict necessarily means building awareness of ourselves—the common sense we share in cultural groups—and coming to know something of those who are different from us by culture and worldview.
>
> (LeBaron & Pillay 2006: 12)

Conflict between individuals and groups is a natural feature of the human condition. When we interact and form bonds with other individuals, groups or entities (e.g. organizations, nations), disagreements inevitably arise from time to time. Doreen Thompson, a freelance

journalist, observes that 'Peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of creative alternatives for responding to conflict'. How we perceive and manage conflict defines the quality of our interpersonal, intercultural and international relationships. Our ability (or inability) to resolve conflicts can lead to either their enhancement or demise. Whether the conflict is at the individual level, or on the national or world stage, all of us must heed LeBaron and Pillay's advice and develop the knowledge, skills and mindset that facilitate the resolution of disputes. As our world is becoming more interdependent, intercultural conflict competence is essential for all members of the human race.

This chapter began by defining conflict and describing characteristics of conflict situations. After identifying particular domains of conflict, we reviewed numerous types as well as subcategories of intercultural conflict (e.g. interethnic, interreligious, intergenerational). We also looked at variations in the way conflict is viewed and managed. After reviewing dimensions of intercultural conflict styles and various conflict taxonomies, we turned our attention to the role of face and facework in conflict resolution. The remainder of the chapter focused on intercultural conflict competence and constructive, practical ways to manage language and intercultural conflict situations.

discussion questions

1 As the world becomes more interconnected and each nation more multicultural, why do we continue to witness intercultural conflicts across the world? Is conflict innate to human nature? Are conflicts a natural consequence of the process of globalization?
2 What are the main sources of intercultural conflicts at the individual level? At the regional or national level? At the international level?
3 Why is it important to understand the context in which intercultural conflict occurs?
4 Identify four types of intercultural conflict and provide examples of each.
5 How might power differentials come into play in intercultural conflicts that involve a second language? Provide examples to illustrate your points.
6 Describe the following intercultural conflict styles: discussion, engagement, accommodation and dynamic. Provide examples of each.
7 In small groups discuss your personal conflict style. What style do you use most often? Did your family, friends, educational, religious and political institutions influence this style? How does it affect your relationships with others? Discuss whether a different approach might lead to different outcomes.
8 Explain how face-concerns can influence the ways we manage conflict in intercultural situations. Provide examples.
9 Recall a conflict that you have experienced. Did your linguistic and cultural background affect how you handled the situation? If yes, how?
10 What types of intercultural conflicts occur on your campus or in your community? What groups have frequent disputes? How do groups manage and address these conflicts?
11 In this chapter a number of suggestions have been offered to help manage language and intercultural conflict situations. Which ideas do you think are the most useful? In small groups discuss other constructive ways to resolve intercultural conflicts, especially those that involve a second language.

further reading

Abigail, R.A. and Cahn, D.D. (2011) *Managing Conflict through Communication,* 4th edn, Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

This text introduces the study of conflict and covers such topics as anger management and facework in relation to interpersonal conflict, group conflict, organizational conflict and social conflict.

Cupach, W.R., Canary, D.J. and Spitzberg, B.H. (2009) *Competence in Interpersonal Conflict,* 2nd edn, Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.

This text presents a conceptual framework to explain why communication competence is central to conflict management. The authors offer constructive guidelines that provide a basis for dealing with conflicts in five settings: intercultural, organizational, familial, mediation and violence in intimate relationships.

Domenici, K. and Littlejohn, S.W. (2006) *Facework: Bridging Theory and Practice*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

In this book, identities facework is presented as central to intercultural communication, including the management of conflict situations.

Folger, J.P., Poole, M.S. and Stutman, R.K. (2013) *Working through Conflict: Strategies for Relationships, Groups and Organizations,* 7th edn, Boston: Pearson.

This accessible text provides an introduction to conflict and conflict management that is grounded in theory, research and practice. It includes a chapter on face-saving.

LeBaron, M. (2003) *Bridging Cultural Conflicts: A New Approach for a Changing World*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Mindful awareness, cultural fluency and conflict fluency are introduced as tools for grappling with intercultural conflict in a wide range of interpersonal, community, organizational and political contexts. LeBaron draws on Western and Eastern approaches to conflict resolution.

LeBaron, M. and Pillay, V. (2006) *Conflict Across Cultures: A Unique Experience of Bridging Differences*, Boston: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

Drawing on examples from a variety of cultures, this text illustrates techniques to resolve conflicts that stem from cultural difference. The authors describe and identify the processes, tools and skills that facilitate successful conflict resolution.

Oetzel, J.G. and Ting-Toomey, S. (eds) (2006) *The SAGE Handbook of Conflict Communication: Integrating Theory, Research, and Practice*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This comprehensive handbook synthesizes key theories, research and practice in conflict communication in a variety of contexts (e.g. conflicts in relationships and families, conflict at work, conflict in communities, conflict in international and intercultural situations).

Ting-Toomey, S. and Oetzel, J.G. (2001) *Managing Intercultural Conflict Effectively*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Integrating intercultural research and theory, the authors present a practical framework for understanding intercultural conflict in various settings (e.g. within the family, within business organizations, within small groups). Suggestions are offered to deal with conflict more effectively.