HOW CAN WE MANAGE INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT FLEXIBLY?

CHAPTER OUTLINE

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In a tiny Chicago suburb, Ms. Safoorah Khan was hired as a new teacher to teach math in a middle school. She worked there for only nine months when she made an unusual request. Ms. Khan wanted to perform the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia, which every adult Muslim is supposed to make at least once in a lifetime—if they are physically and financially able to. Ms. Khan wanted three weeks off. Millions of devout Muslims from different countries travel to Mecca each year. The Chicago school district, faced with losing its only math lab instructor during the end-of-semester marking period, said no. Ms. Khan, a devout Muslim, resigned and made the trip anyway. U.S. Justice Department lawyers examined the same set of facts and reached a different conclusion—that the school district's decision concerning Ms. Khan's request to visit Mecca amounted to outright discrimination against her. They filed an unusual lawsuit, accusing the district of violating her civil rights by forcing her to choose between her job and her faith. The case is still pending.

J. Markon, *Washington Post,* 2011

Although this case is still pending, questions remain: Whose perspective should we accommodate? Was Ms. Khan forced to choose between her job and her religious freedom? Did the school board of Berkeley-Illinois have grounds to deny Ms. Khan's unpaid leave request? Regardless of the outcome, cases like Ms. Khan offer businesses and organizations an opportunity to practice conscious communication competence in dealing with employees of diverse group membership identity backgrounds. Although each workplace conflict situation may be unique, by asking the right questions and generating multiple win–win alternatives, we can begin to prepare ourselves for an increasingly diverse workforce.

With this in mind, we begin Chapter 9 with unpacking how individuals coming from two different cultural communities bring with them different filtered lenses with which to look at their intercultural conflict encounters.

Intercultural conflict often starts with different expectations concerning appropriate or inappropriate conflict behavior in an interaction scene. Different cultural members often have contrasting images of how conflict should be properly handled. In this chapter, we first explore some cultural background factors that influence the escalation of an intercultural conflict episode. Next, we take a close look at important conflict process factors, such as cross-cultural conflict styles and facework behaviors. Third, we introduce some steps and skills in managing intercultural conflict flexibly. Finally, we identify specific do-able checkpoints to help you in managing different intercultural conflicts mindfully.

Conflict occurs whenever we are fighting over some incompatible goals or unmet emotional needs. We define **intercultural conflict** as the implicit or explicit emotional struggle or frustration between persons of different cultures over perceived incompatible values, norms, face orientations, goals, scarce resources, processes, and/or outcomes in a communication situation (Ting-Toomey, 2005b, 2009; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). Intercultural conflict in and of itself is not necessarily bad. Instead, it is how we approach the conflict and how we manage the conflict that often shapes the process and determines the outcome. If the different cultural members continue to engage in rigid or ineffective conflict styles, the miscommunication can easily spiral into a polarized conflict situation.

INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT: CULTURAL BACKGROUND FACTORS

Let us look at the following communication episode between Gabi (a Latina American student) and Roy (a Filipino American student). Gabi and Roy are in the library discussing their team project due the next day (see L-Chat 9.1).

In the L-Chat 9.1 dialog example, Gabi and Roy tend to make different attributions concerning what's going on with their classmates and also engage in different conflict styles. An intercultural conflict episode often involves complex, multilayered factors. These factors include different cultural conflict lenses, different conflict perceptions, different conflict goals, and different viewpoints on scarce resources. Let's examine two different conflict lenses that result from individualistic and collectivistic cultural patterns.

Culture-Based Conflict Lenses

In Chapter 3, we looked at the value patterns of individualism and collectivism. Cultural value patterns such as individualism and collectivism often color our conflict attitudes, expectations, and behaviors when we are involved in emotionally frustrating episodes (Cohen, 1987, 1991). Different cultural lenses and assumptions serve as the first set of factors that contributes to initial intercultural irritations.

Before you continue your reading, fill out the my.blog 9.1 conflict lens assessment and get a sense of what your conflict lens, or worldview, looks like.

L-CHAT 9.1

GABI (irritated): Where's the rest of our group? What's up with that?! You know, we've already been waiting fifteen minutes. Text them again.

ROY (trying to appease Gabi): I did already. They know we're supposed to meet at the library. They're probably looking for parking. Toyea and Cruz both have to take the freeway, and it's rush hour.

GABI (still irritated): Whatever the case may be, we've got a deadline to meet. You know Toyea and Cruz better . . . you've had two classes with them, right? Are they always like this? I did all my work already and my time is limited today.

ROY (in a soothing tone): Chill. Toyea and Cruz are cool. They're really creative and pull their own weight. If we want an "A," we definitely need the research data that they have for the pitch to be awesome . . . it'll be fine!

GABI (impatient): K. Wait a sec. I'm just gonna play Angry Birds.

(ten minutes later)

GABI (really agitated now): No flippin way! They're not here yet? Did they text?

ROY (in an apologetic tone): Nope . . . but I think they're on their way. They won't flake on us!

GABI (really fed up now): This is so crazy and disrespectful of my time! I have way too many things going on to keep waiting for them to show up. Considering that I did all my work already. . . . It's so irritating! It's this kind of thing that ABSOLUTELY DRIVES ME NUTS working with groups!

ROY (in a conciliatory tone): Look. Why don't you just give me your write-up? I can incorporate your ideas with Toyea and Cruz. I'm sure they'll show up soon. I don't mind waiting for another fifteen minutes. We'll just meet before class tomorrow.

Let's start with the value patterns of individualism and collectivism. For example, for individualists or independent-self personality types, intercultural conflict resolution often follows an outcome-oriented model. Using an **independent-self conflict lens**, a person often views conflict from (1) a content conflict goal lens, which emphasizes tangible conflict issues above and beyond relationship issues; (2) a clear win–lose conflict approach, in which one

person comes out as a winner and the other person comes out as a loser; (3) a "doing" angle, in which something tangible in the conflict is broken and needs fixing; and (4) an outcome-driven mode, in which a clear action plan or resolution is needed. Have you ever noticed that during team presentations in class, a team member may say, "For my part of the project, I did . . . ." This person makes every effort to bring attention to his or her individual accomplishments. From this individualistic conflict lens, the person wants to stand out and be noticed for all of his or her task accomplishments.

Comparatively, for collectivists or interdependent-self personality types, intercultural conflict management often follows a "process-oriented" model. Using an **interdependent-self conflict lens**, a person often views conflict from (1) a relational process lens, which emphasizes relationship and feeling issues; (2) a win–win relational approach, in which feelings and "faces" can both be saved; (3) a "being" angle, in which relational trust must be repaired and loyalty must be amended to preserve relational harmony; and (4) a long-term compromising negotiation mode that has no clear winner or loser in the ongoing conflict. For example, team projects are often difficult for collectivists because they are always the ones who will stay up all night working on the last-minute presentation details—especially when one or two members have failed to carry the workload that was distributed. In their team presentations, collectivists will also often use phrases such as "as a team, we . . . " and "we worked hard" to save the team face and put the best group face forward.

Overall, independent-self types are concerned with conflict outcome closure, whereas interdependent-self types are concerned with interpersonal and ingroup face-saving and face-honoring process issues. These implicit conflict lenses or assumptions taint many intercultural perceptions and orientations concerning antagonistic conflict episodes (see Table 9.1).

Intercultural Workplace Conflict Grid

The second set of background factors takes into consideration the global workplace situation, especially in incorporating the value dimension of small–large

my.blog 9.1 ASSESSING YOUR INDIVIDUALISTIC AND COLLECTIVISTIC CONFLICT LENSES

Instructions: The following items describe how people think about themselves and communicate in various conflict situations. Let your first inclination be your guide and circle the number in the scale that best reflects your overall value. The following scale is used for each item:

> 4 = YES! = *strongly agree*—IT'S ME!
> 3 = yes = *moderately agree*—it's kind of like me
> 2 = no = *moderately disagree*—it's kind of not me
> 1 = NO! = *strongly disagree*—IT'S NOT ME!

	In most conflict situations, I try to . . .	SA	MA	MD	SD
1.	Consider the interests and needs of the other person.	4	3	2	1
2.	Win and feel good about myself.	4	3	2	1
3.	Focus on the conflict process.	4	3	2	1
4.	Focus on the concrete conflict outcome.	4	3	2	1
5.	Listen carefully to what the other person is telling me.	4	3	2	1
6.	Be assertive to get my viewpoint across.	4	3	2	1
7.	Work toward some compromise.	4	3	2	1
8.	Be decisive in terms of how the conflict should work out.	4	3	2	1
9.	Be sensitive to mutual face-saving issues.	4	3	2	1
10.	Be certain to protect my own self-image.	4	3	2	1

Scoring: Add up the scores on all the even-numbered items and you will find your individualistic conflict lens score. *Individualistic conflict* lens score: _____. Add up the scores on all the odd-numbered items and you will find your collectivistic conflict lens score. *Collectivistic conflict lens* score: _____.

Interpretation: Scores on each conflict lens dimension can range from 5 to 20; the higher the score, the more individualistic and/or collectivistic you are. If all the scores are similar on both conflict lens dimensions, you are a bifocal conflict lens person.

Reflection probes: Compare your scores with a classmate's. Take a moment to think of the following questions: What factors shape your conflict lens? Do you come from a conflict-approach or a conflict-avoidance family? Do you know that individualists tend to approach conflict and collectivists tend to avoid conflict? What do you think are the pros and cons of either approaching a conflict directly or dealing with a conflict indirectly? How can you deal with conflicts constructively when you and your conflict partner have very different conflict lenses?

power distance on top of the value dimension of individualism–collectivism. In combining both individualism–collectivism and small–large power distance value patterns, we can discuss four predominant corporate value conflict approaches that result from forming a grid based on the individualism–collectivism continuum and small–large power distance continuum: impartial, status-achievement, benevolent, and communal (Ting-Toomey, 2009, 2010c). The *impartial approach* reflects a combination of an individualistic and small power distance value orientation; the *status-achievement approach* consists of a combination of an individualistic and large power distance value orientation; the *benevolent approach* reflects a combination of a collectivistic and large power distance value orientation; and the *communal approach* consists of a

TABLE 9.1 INDIVIDUALISTIC AND COLLECTIVISTIC CONFLICT LENSES

Individualistic conflict lens	Collectivistic conflict lens
Outcome-focused	Process-focused
Content goal-oriented	Relational goal-oriented
Doing-centered	Being-centered
Use personal equity norms	Use communal norms
Self-face concern	Other-face concern
Low-context conflict styles	High-context conflict styles
Competitive/dominating behaviors	Avoiding/obliging behaviors
Conflict effectiveness	Conflict appropriateness

FIGURE 9.1 Workplace Values' Cultural Conflict Grid: Four Conflict Approaches

combination of collectivistic and small power distance value orientation (see Figure 9.1).

Before we continue, let us look at the background information that paves the way for the U.S./Japan Conflict Case Example, below. The background context is as follows (adapted from Clarke & Lipp, 1998, pp. 232–233): A Japanese multimedia subsidiary in the United States had just completed a very successful year. All of the company goals were met or surpassed. As a result, the annual sales conference was held at the Disneyland Resort Hotel in California. Many of the salespeople brought their spouses to the conference, to celebrate and enjoy a well-earned vacation. The audience at the corporate dinner celebration consisted of mostly American salespeople and their spouses and some Japanese technical support personnel. The Japanese president gave a brief welcome speech in halting English, but the audience appreciated his remarks. Given this background, the following event sequences take place:

A U.S./Japan Conflict Case Example

Next, the American director of sales, William Bates, got up and introduced the Japanese vice president, Satoshi Ota-san. They had planned ahead of time to give two short motivational speeches to kick off the conference. Ota-san was about fifty years old, and he had used the previous two weeks to memorize his carefully prepare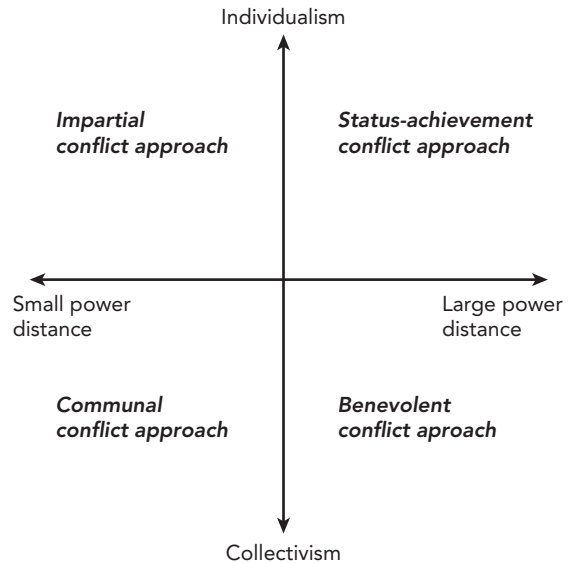d speech in English. When Ota-san stood up, his posture was rigid, his face was serious, and his tone sounded harsh. Here is what he said:

> Thank you for your hard work this fiscal year. We have broken many records, *but*…we need to be careful and not to settle down so easily. We need to keep up our fighting spirit! Our competition is working to defeat us at this very minute while we are celebrating. You have done a good job…but you must do more and aim higher. There is no time for frivolous activities. You must prepare yourselves to work twice as hard this coming year. The company has invested a lot of money in new manufacturing facilities. These facilities are producing our new product lines. It is your duty and loyalty to this company to sell these products as efficiently as possible. You must not fail! You must not let your guard down! You must not be content! I hope you will do a better job in the new fiscal year. Thank you.

The American audience sat in stunned silence during most of Satoshi Ota-san's speech. The American director of sales, William Bates, stood up quickly, physically backed away from the Japanese vice president of sales, and with an awkward smile said:

> Disregard everything he just said. We are here to celebrate your fantastic achievements this year!

We have outperformed all our competitors this past year and your success is far beyond expectations. So give yourselves a big round of applause, and let the festivities begin!

The audience applauded. Bates gave the signal to the hotel staff to serve the dinner. For the rest of the conference, the tension between Satoshi Ota-san and William Bates was palpable, and most of the other Americans were irritable.

What went wrong here? Why did Mr. Bates physically back away from Mr. Ota? What did you, the reader, think of Mr. Ota's reaction to Mr. Bates' (i.e., "Disregard everything he just said.") comment? Can you identify all the culture-based collision bumps in the above critical incident? Can the conflict clashes between the two key characters be reconciled? What corporate conflict approach did Mr. Ota practice? What conflict reactions did Mr. Bates exhibit?

Before we reveal the answers, let us explore more in depth the conceptual frames of the four corporate conflict approaches. Overall, managers and employees around the world have different expectations of how a workplace conflict episode should be interpreted and resolved—depending on whether the workplace culture emphasizes impartial, status-achievement, benevolent, or communal conflict interaction rituals. More specifically, for example, in the *impartial approach* (a combination of individualism and small power distance) to workplace conflict, the predominant values of this approach are personal freedom and equal treatment (Smith, Dugan, Peterson, & Leung, 1998). From the impartial conflict approach lens, if an interpersonal conflict arises between a manager and an employee, the manager has the responsibility to deal with the conflict in an objective, upfront, and decisive manner. The employee is sometimes invited to provide feedback and reactions to the fact-finding process. He or she can also ask for clear justifications and evidence from the manager. In an equal-rank employee–employee conflict, the manager would generally play the "impartial" third-party role and would encourage the two employees to talk things over and find their own workable solution. Managers in large corporations in Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Norway appear to practice the impartial conflict communication approach (Hofstede, 2001, 2009).

Alternatively, from a *status-achievement approach* (a combination of individualism and large power distance) to conflict, the predominant values of this approach are personal freedom and earned inequality. For example, in France, employees often feel that they have the freedom to voice directly their complaints about their managers in the workplace (Storti, 2001). At the same time, they do not expect their managers to change much because they are their bosses and thus, by virtue of their titles, hold certain rights and power resources. The managers, meanwhile, also expect conflict accommodations from their subordinates; subordinates may be free to complain, but the manager is the authority and makes the final decisions. When the conflict involves two same-rank coworkers, the use of upfront conflict tactics to aggressive tactics is a hallmark of the status-achievement approach. Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001) also observed that U.S. management style often follows a combined impartial approach and status-achievement approach: the larger U.S. culture emphasizes that with individual hard work, personal ambition, and fierce competitiveness, status and rank can be earned and status cues can be displayed with pride and credibility.

Based on the empirical work of the GLOBE project (Carl, Gupta, & Javidan, 2004), many managers in other parts of the globe tend to see themselves as interdependent and at a different status level than others. That is, these managers think of themselves as individuals with interlocking connections with others and as members of a hierarchical network. They practice the *benevolent approach* (a combination of collectivism and large power distance value patterns) in approaching a conflict problem. The term "benevolent" implies that many managers play the authoritative parental role in approaching or motivating their employees. Two values that pervade this approach are obligation to others and asymmetrical interaction treatment. Countries and large corporate cultures that predominantly reflect the benevolent approach include most Latin and South American nations (e.g., Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil, and Chile), most Asian nations (e.g., India, Japan, China, and South Korea), most Arab nations (e.g., Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan) and most African nations (e.g., Nigeria and Uganda; Hofstede, 2001).

For many large East Asian corporations, for example, Confucian-driven hierarchical principles promote a type of parent–child relationship between the manager and the subordinate. Under the benevolent conflict approach, although a manager can confront her or his employees to motivate them to work harder, it is very rare that subordinates will directly challenge the manager's authority during a conflict interaction. However, subordinates might opt for using passive-aggressive or sabotage conflict strategies to deal with workplace tensions or frustrations. In dealing with low-importance conflicts, managers would consider using the "smooth over" relational tactics or subtle pressure tactics to gain employees' compliance. However, in dealing with high-importance conflicts, benevolent managers could act in a very directive or autocratic and controlling manner. They might also practice preferential treatment by treating senior employees more favorably than junior employees or family network friends more generously than peripheral workplace members.

Last, the *communal approach* (a combination of both collectivism and small power distance value orientation) is the least common of the four conflict workplace approaches. The values that encompass this approach are authentic interdependent connection to others and genuine equality via respectful communication exchanges at all levels. Research to date has shown that Costa Rica is the only country found to fit this approach (Hofstede, 2001). Nonprofit mediation centers or successful start-up small businesses also appear to practice some of the communal decision-making behaviors and participatory democracy so that everyone has a say, and they also often take turns to rotate democratic leadership. In the communal approach, the importance of mindful listening skill, interpersonal validation skill, and collaborative dialog skill are emphasized (Barge, 2006; Domenici & Littlejohn, 2006).

After reading the explanation of the four corporate conflict approaches, we hope you have increased your knowledge on these complex values issues. If you answered earlier that in the critical incident Mr. Ota used a benevolent approach to motivate his audience, your answer is correct. Mr. Ota's approach included high authority and also treating the employees as a parent might try to motivate children. In addition, if you answered that Mr. Bates' conflict reactions reflected both impartial (e.g., based on objective facts: the American sales force had a banner year) and status-achievement (e.g., they all worked ambitiously to attain this well-deserved event recognition) conflict approaches, you also earn an "A" grade. Clearly in this conflict case example, the Americans and the Japanese carried different cultural assumptions about the meaning of a sales conference celebration event and the meaning of a motivational speech.

From the "status-achievement" corporate worldview, for example, Mr. Bates and the American audience were expecting an "individual status-recognition celebration" event. Many of them brought their spouses to mark the festivity and to enjoy a fun-filled vacation. They expected complimentary accolades and positive motivational messages. Instead, all they heard were what seems to them direct criticism and insults. From the benevolent corporate worldview, Mr. Ota (and perhaps some of the Japanese technical staff) viewed this context as another occasion to "motivate" the sales workforce to work harder and to plan productive sales strategies collectively. Also, Mr. Ota had tried so hard for the prior two weeks to memorize his motivational speech in English, and he thought for sure that the celebration occasion in Disneyland itself sent a strong positive signal to the employees that the company already valued their hard work and dedicated effort. However, Mr. Ota was also looking forward to the special occasion to further motivate his sales employees to reach their highest professional potential and personal best. Mr. Bates' awkward smile and his cavalier phrase "Disregard everything he just said" created enormous face loss for Mr. Ota and also for the corporation's Japanese president who was in attendance.

A knowledgeable, third-party intercultural consultant—or an intercultural consulting team—who understands the deep cultures and the corporate cultures of both Japanese and the U.S. societies can help bridge the widening chasm between these two cultural conflict parties. Understanding the underlying, unspoken value clashes and the misconstrued assumptions between the American and Japanese attendees would serve as a good first step to reconcile the cultural and corporate expectancy differences.

Intercultural Conflict Perceptions

The third set of background factors involves conflict perceptions and orientation. Conflict involves both perception and interaction. **Conflict** is an aggravating disagreement process between two interdependent parties over incompatible goals and the interference each perceives from the other in her or his effort to achieve those goals (Wilmot & Hocker, 2011).

The primary perception features of intercultural conflict are the following: (1) conflict involves intercultural perceptions—perceptions are filtered through our lenses of ethnocentrism and stereotypes; (2) ethnocentric perceptions add biases and prejudice to our conflict attribution process; and (3) our attribution process is further complicated by dealing with different culture-based verbal and nonverbal conflict styles. Recall that ethnocentrism is defined as the tendency to view our cultural practices as the *right* way and to rate all other cultural practices with reference to our standards. Similarly, when members of a culture believe that their own approach is the only *correct* or *natural* way to handle conflict, they tend to see the conflict behaviors of other cultures as *deviant* from that standard. A rigidly held ethnocentric attitude promotes a climate of distrust in any intercultural conflict. In real-life conflict scenarios, individuals often practice ethnocentric behaviors and polarized attributions without a high degree of awareness.

For example, Ben-Porath and Shaker (2010) asked black and white research participants to read the same news story about Hurricane Katrina that hit the New Orleans region (the deadliest Atlantic storm arrived on August 29, 2005, resulting in the deaths of 1,836 individuals and the evacuation of 300,000 residents) and the aftermath humanitarian disaster. Overall, blacks hold the government much more responsible for the human tragedy that followed Hurricane Katrina than whites. The expert researchers conclude that "blacks overwhelmingly believed that the consequences of Katrina were a product of government incompetence or indifference in the face of suffering of an overwhelmingly black population. That the inclusion of images [a black image or a white image of an individual holding a large bag as he walks on a New Orleans highway, and also photos of a survivor joined by a small group of same-race victims on the

highway] did not lessen blacks' perception of government responsibility speaks to the durability of these attitudes" (Ben-Porath & Shaker, 2010, pp. 462–463). In comparison, white readers who saw the images of survivors of the storm held the federal government less accountable than black readers who viewed those same images or no images at all.

Moving beyond the attribution biases in the aftermath of the catastrophic Hurricane Katrina disaster, let's check out another example. Read the following conversation in L-Chat 9.2 between Ms. Rebecca Levine (a Jewish American supervisor) and Mr. Manuel Morena (a recent South American immigrant) in a U.S.–South American joint venture firm, which illustrates the different conflict styles and attribution processes.

In L.Chat 9.2, Ms. Levine uses an assertive, emotionally expressive verbal style in dealing with the conflict. Mr. Morena, on the other hand, uses a hesitant, indirect verbal style in answering her questions. Ms. Levine uses a *straight talk* low-context approach in dealing with the work problem, whereas Mr. Morena uses a *face talk* high-context approach in dealing with the issue. If both had a chance to understand concepts such as LCC and HCC styles, they might arrive at a better understanding of each other's behavior.

Ms. Levine is using her low-context style to evaluate Mr. Morena's behavior (e.g., "Manuel Morena is trying to one-up me") and Mr. Morena is using his high-context script as a baseline to evaluate Ms. Levine's "rude and overbearing" behavior. Better outcomes could result if both were consciously competent: Ms. Levine might engage in a private conversation with Mr. Morena rather than engage in such direct face-threat behavior in public. Mr. Morena, on the other hand, might learn to be more direct and forthcoming in answering Ms. Levine's questions and use fewer pauses and hedges in his conflict interaction style.

Intercultural Conflict Goal Issues

The fourth set of cultural background factors involves conflict goal issues. The perceived or actual differences in an intercultural conflict often rotate around the following three goal issues: content, relational, and identity (Wilmot & Hocker, 2011; Ting-Toomey, 2010c).

L-CHAT 9.2

MS. LEVINE (in the main office): Manuel, where's your pro-ject report? You said you'd get it done soon. I need your part of the report so that I can finish my final report by the end of this week. When do you think you can get it done? [Attribution: *Manuel Morena is such a slacker. I should never have trusted him with this time-sensitive document. I thought I was giving him a break by putting him in charge of this report.*]

MR. MORENA (hesitantly): Well . . . Ms. Levine . . . I didn't realize the deadline was so soon . . . I'll try my best to get it done as soon as possible. It's just that there are lots of details I need to cross-check and sources I need to verify, and I'm waiting for Mr. Nam to get back with me . . . [Attribution: *Ms. Levine is sure a tough lady. Anyway, she is the supervisor. Why didn't she tell me the exact deadline early on? Just last week, she told me to take my time on the report. She knows that verifying sources takes a lot of time! I'm really confused. In Venezuela, the supervisor always tells the workers what to do.*]

MS. LEVINE (frustrated): Manuel, how soon is soon? I real-ly need to hear about your plan of action. You can't be so vague in answering my questions all the time. I believe I've given you plenty of time to work on this report already. [Attribution: *Manuel Morena is trying to be sneaky. He doesn't answer my questions directly at all. I wonder if all Venezuelans are that sneaky? Or maybe he isn't comfortable working for a Jewish American? Or a female? Anyway, I have to press him to be more efficient and responsible. He's in America. He has to learn the American way.*]

MR. MORENA (after a long pause): Well . . . I'm really not sure, Ms. Levine. I really don't want to do a bad job on the report or disappoint you. I'll try my best to finish it as soon as possible. Maybe I can finish the report next week. [Attribution: *Ms. Levine is a real pushy boss. She doesn't seem to like me and she's causing me to lose face in front of all my peers. Her voice sounds so harsh and loud. I've heard that American people are hard to work with, and she is really something —rude and overbearing. I'd better start looking for a new job tomorrow.*]

By **content goals**, we mean the practical issues that are external to the individuals involved. For example, an interfaith couple might argue about whether they should raise their children to be Muslim or Mormon, or an intercultural couple might disagree about whether they should raise their children as bilinguals or monolinguals. Intercultural business partners might argue about whether they should hold their business meetings in Montreal, Hamburg, or Atlanta. Content conflict goals also affect the perceptions of relational and identity goals.

The phrase **relational conflict goals** refers to how individuals define the particular relationship (e.g., intimate vs. nonintimate, informal vs. formal, coop-erative vs. competitive) or would like to define it in the interactive situation. Relational conflict goals also involve mismatched relationship expectation issues. For example, individualists generally crave more pri-vacy and collectivists generally desire more connected-ness in an intimate relationship. The struggle to define *independence* and *interdependence* can cause chronic relationship problems in many intercultural couples.

In a business setting, if one business partner (from Sydney) opts to scribble a note and fax it to another international partner (from Jakarta), the latter might view this gesture as a signal of disrespect for proper professional distance. The Jakartan partner perceives the informal gesture of a scribbled note as a violation of formal business exchange. However, the Sydney business partner may not realize that he or she has committed a *faux pas* by sending this casual message; the informal note was actually intended to indicate "pleasant friendliness" and "closer distance" for the sake of establishing a relaxed working atmosphere.

Research shows that across many cultures, females tend to be more comfortable addressing relational con-flict goal issues than males (Ting-Toomey, 1991; Wood, 1997). Males, in comparison, tend to prefer addressing content conflict goal issues and with more ease than pursuing relational conflict topics. In addition, from the collectivistic cultural standpoint, relational conflict goals usually take precedence over content goals. The rationale from the collectivistic point of view is that if the relationship is in jeopardy, it is useless to spend time talking about practical or content issues. Identity goals, however, are paramount to both individualists and collectivists, as well as to males and females, across a wide range of conflict situations.

The phrase **identity-based goals** means face-sav-ing and face-honoring issues in a conflict episode.

They are basically about self-respect (face-saving) and other-consideration (face-honoring) issues in a conflict situation (Ting-Toomey & Cole, 1990). Recall from Chapter 4 that identity-based goals can involve respectful or disrespectful attitudes concerning three identity issues in conflict: cultural, social, and personal. For example, although an interfaith couple is arguing about which religious faith they should instill in their children (cultural or social identity), they are also asserting the *worthiness* of their own particular religious beliefs (personal identity). To the extent that the couple can engage in a constructive dialog about this important issue, the conflict can act as a catalyst for their relationship growth. However, many intercultural or interfaith couples may not possess the necessary conflict skills to deal with important identity issues constructively (Karis, 2009; Kennedy & Sakaguchi, 2009; Rustogi, 2009; Ting-Toomey, 2009; Toyosaki, 2011).

At a minimum, in any conflict scene, conflict parties should realize that they are interdependent in the relationship or within the workplace system. If they were not interdependent, they could just walk away from the conflict scene without the necessity of fighting over incompatible goals. For example, in L-Chat 9.2, Ms. Levine is dependent on Mr. Morena to finish his report before she can put her final report together. Ms. Levine's final report to senior management can mean a promotion or more name recognition for her in the firm. However, Mr. Morena is dependent on Ms. Levine to give him a good performance review for his potential year-end bonus. Thus, both have personal and mutual interests in resolving the conflict. Unfortunately, oftentimes culture-based conflict styles and behaviors lead to intercultural collisions in the negotiation process. With their views of the situation distorted by ethnocentric lenses and mindless stereotypes, both parties in the conflict may be stuck in their polarized positions and perceptual views. They must learn new conflict management skills to disengage from their set behaviors and to free themselves from their negative conflict loops.

Perceived Scarce Resources

The fifth set of background factors is perceived scarce resources. *Conflict resources* are tangible or intangible rewards that people want in a dispute. The rewards or commodities may be scarce or perceived as scarce by individuals in the conflict. Perceived scarce resources may spark the initial flame behind the conflict.

Tangible resources include how much money to spend on a smart phone, an iPad, or choice of prime location for a vacation. Some tangible commodities are indeed scarce or limited (e.g., only one promotion available for three workers). Other tangible resources are only *perceived* to be scarce (e.g., not enough parking spaces for everyone—when abundant spaces are reserved for administration) rather than actual scarcity. **Intangible resources**, however, may include deeply felt desires or emotional needs, such as emotional security, inclusion, connection, respect, control, and meaning issues. Recurring conflict between two or more individuals often involves unmet (or frustrated) intangible needs rather than conflicting tangible wants. Scarce intangible resources can be real or perceived as real (e.g., two men fighting for the perceived lack of attention from their boss) by individuals in the conflict episode. Both tangible and intangible resources can be managed constructively or destructively, depending on whether the disputants are willing to spend the time and energy in probing the underlying concerns and needs of the other conflict party.

Rothman (1997), and intercultural conflict expert, recommended the following three techniques in negotiating scarce resources in a conflict situation: differentiation, expansion, and compensation. **Differentiation** means taking an active stance to acknowledge the different cultural perspectives and lenses in a conflict situation. At the same time, the conflict parties display good faith in addressing the conflict by dividing up the large puzzle into different pieces or slices. They also strive to maintain constructive momentum to keep on moving forward to reach a shared goal or vision. For example, twin sisters are fighting over a CD. One actually wants the disc, and the other actually wants the cover. By articulating their basic needs in a collaborative dialog format, the sisters can share the CD productively without the need to compromise or make unnecessary concessions.

Expansion means an active search for alternative paths or creative solutions to enlarge the amount, type, or use of available resources (e.g., using

existing resources in imaginative ways or cultivating new resources) for mutual gains. For example, the twins may want to make their own music and draw their own CD cover. They can also learn to work together to mix resources (e.g., artwork and music) for mutual gains. When both parties are guided by shared goals or dreams as they search for creative alternatives, they can reduce rigid stereotypes and see each other's humanity more clearly.

Last, **compensation** means conflict parties can offer exchanges or concessions for conflict issues they value differently. For example, one twin sister desperately wants the disc to play at her sorority party that night, but the other twin had planned to take it with her on an overnight driving trip. One twin can offer money to the other (e.g., monetary compensation that is worth more than the price of the original CD) to compensate for the time and effort it takes to go and buy another CD—thus reflecting the compensation technique via seeking out other pragmatic alternatives. As Rothman (1997) notes, "pieces of peace, that one side may offer the other in exchange for something else, can be powerful in fostering confidence and advancing the constructive cycle of cooperation" (p. 64). Culture-sensitive collaborative dialog helps the disputants come to recognize their positive interdependence in a mindful manner.

Through flexible conflict communication skills, the conflict parties may invent creative alternatives or paths to generate additional resources for mutual gain. In this section, we have discussed four cultural background factors—culture-based conflict lenses, intercultural conflict perceptions, conflict goals, and perceived scarce resources—that influence an actual intercultural conflict negotiation process. We now turn to a discussion of important conflict process factors.

INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT PROCESS FACTORS

The following section draws from the conceptual explanations of Ting-Toomey's (1988, 2007a, 2007b) face-negotiation theory and presents some interesting research findings concerning conflict styles and facework behaviors in diverse cultural and ethnic groups. **Face** is really about socially approved self-image and

other-image consideration issues. **Facework** is about the verbal and nonverbal strategies that we use to maintain, defend, or upgrade our own social self-image and attack or defend (or "save") the social images of others. For example, when others confront us with face-threatening conflict messages, we are likely either to engage in defensive facework strategies or to flee the scene altogether to recoup our face loss. The following section discusses three approaches to the study of conflict style and defines each conflict style. It then describes some cross-cultural and cross-ethnic conflict styles and facework behaviors.

Defining Conflict Styles

Check out my.blog 9.2, which contains a short questionnaire designed to assess broad conflict styles. Take a couple of minutes to complete it now. The higher the score in the left-hand column, the more direct or low context you are in your conflict style. The higher the score in the right-hand column, the more indirect or high context you are in your conflict style. Overall, **conflict communication style** refers to patterned verbal and nonverbal responses to conflict in a variety of frustrating conflict situations (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). There are three approaches to studying conflict styles: the dispositional approach, the situational approach, and the systems approach.

A **dispositional approach** emphasizes that individuals do have predominant conflict style tendencies in handling a wide variety of conflict situations in different cultures. Conflict style is learned within the primary socialization process of one's cultural or ethnic group. It also depends highly on one's dispositional or personality traits. For example, an extrovert will tend to use a more dominating or expressive style, but an introvert will tend to use a more avoiding or obliging style. By extension, a cultural trait approach means particular cultures (e.g., collectivistic cultures) on a systems-based level would also exhibit certain predominant conflict style tendencies (e.g., using more obliging or avoidance conflict patterns). A **situational approach**, on the other hand, stresses the importance of the conflict topic and the conflict situation in shaping what conflict styles will be used in what types of relationships and in what contexts, or both of these. Situational factors such as the conflict topic, situation,

relationship type, time pressure, and conflict goals can have a strong influence on whether we will engage in the conflict or avoid the conflict altogether. A **systems approach** integrates both dispositional and situational approaches. It recognizes that most individuals have predominant conflict style profiles because of strong cultural and family socialization conflict scripts. However, individuals also modify their styles on the basis of the particular conflict situation and on their partners' responses and reactions to their conflict behaviors. Among other factors that influence conflict style are intergroup conflict histories, ethnocentric filters, prejudiced mindsets, mood, and conflict competence skills (Hammer, 2009; LeBaron, 2003). We take a systems approach in understanding most cross-cultural conflict style issues in this chapter.

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my.blog 9.2 GENERAL CONFLICT STYLE ASSESSMENT

Instructions: Consider several conflict situations in which you find your goals or wishes differing from those of another person. How do you usually respond to those conflict situations?

Following are some pairs of statements describing possible behavioral responses. For each pair, circle the "A" or "B" statement that is **most characteristic of your own conflict behavior in most conflict situations.**

1.   A. I attempt to stand firm in my conflict requests.

       B. I do my best to soothe the other person's feelings and tend to the relationship.

2.   A. I tend to take time to understand the background context of the conflict story.

       B. I tend to separate conflict task issues from conflict relationship issues.

3.   A. I try to verbally defend my position to the best of my ability.

       B. There are often times that I shy away from facing the conflict person or problem.

4.   A. I try to downplay the importance of the conflict disagreement.

       B. I tend to be direct in expressing my conflict feelings.

5.   A. I try to show him or her the logic and reasons of my position.

       B. I emphasize that our relationship is much more important to me than the conflict itself.

6.   A. I'm usually firm in pursuing my conflict goals.

       B. I'm usually sensitive to the fact that other people might hear our conflict arguments in public.

7.   A. I can usually figure out whether the other person is angry by tuning in to her or his feelings.

       B. I like to get potential conflicts out on the table as soon as I am aware of the problem.

8.   A. I usually try to persuade the other person that my way is the best way.

       B. I try not to discuss the problem in front of others.

9.   A. I usually apologize just to soothe feelings and soften the conflict situation.

       B. I believe in dealing with conflict in an up-front, honest manner.

10.   A. I usually articulate and assert my conflict goals clearly.

       B. If it makes the other person happy, I sometimes flow along with his or her wishes.

11.   A. I try to do what is necessary to avoid useless tensions.

       B. I am usually firm in pursuing my conflict intentions.

12.   A. I try to postpone facing the issue until I have had time to think it over.

       B. In most conflict situations, I press to get my conflict points made.

Continued

my.blog 9.2 CONTINUED

Scoring: Circle the letters below that you previously circled on each previous item of the questionnaire.

Scoring interpretation:

1.	A	B
2.	B	A
3.	A	B
4.	B	A
5.	A	B
6.	A	B
7.	B	A
8.	A	B
9.	B	A
10.	A	B
11.	B	A
12.	B	A

Total number of items circled in each column:

Left column: _____   **Right column:** _____

                    [LCC]   [HCC]

Scoring: Add up the circled items on the left-hand column and you will find your low-context conflict style score. Low-*context conflict style* score:_____. Add up the circled items on the right-hand column and you will find your high-context conflict style score. *High-context conflict style* score:_____.

Interpretation: Scores on each general conflict communication dimension can range from 0 to 12; the higher the score, the more low context and/or high context you are in your general conflict behaviors. If the scores on both columns are similar, you tend to use both direct/low-context, and indirect/high-context conflict approaches.

Reflection probes: Take a moment to think of the following questions: Is your family a "low-context" conflict engagement family or a "high-context" conflict avoidance family? Do you have a consistent approach in dealing with conflicts or do you switch conflict styles often? Are you happy with your own conflict approach? Do your cultural or ethnic groups value a low-context or a high-context approach in dealing with various conflict situations? Why? Share some of your conflict perspectives and stories with a classmate.

Without realizing it, over the years you probably have developed some patterned conflict styles to deal with various conflict issues. You may be the individual who exits from any conflict scene or gives in easily to keep the peace. Or you may be the diametrically opposite type—the one who gets stimulated by a conflict-challenging environment. Many researchers conceptualize conflict styles along two dimensions. For example, Rahim (1992) based his classification of conflict styles on the two conceptual dimensions of concern for self and concern for others.

The first dimension illustrates the degree (high or low) to which a person seeks to satisfy her or his own conflict interest or face need. The second dimension represents the degree (high or low) to which a person desires to incorporate the other's conflict interest. The two dimensions are combined, resulting in five styles of handling interpersonal conflict: dominating, avoiding, obliging, compromising, and integrating.

Before you continue reading, take the fun test in my.blog 9.3 and obtain your specific conflict style scores.

The five-style conflict model represents one way of conceptualizing these different conflict style tendencies (see Figure 9.2).

The **dominating** (or **competitive/controlling**) **style** emphasizes conflict tactics that push for one's own position above and beyond the other person's interest. The dominating style includes aggressive, defensive, controlling, and intimidating tactics. The **avoiding style** involves dodging the topic, the other party, or the situation altogether. This style includes behavior ranging from glossing over the

my.blog 9.3 ASSESSING YOUR SPECIFIC FIVE CONFLICT STYLES

Instructions: Recall how you generally communicate in various conflict situations with acquaintances. Let your first inclination be your guide and circle the number in the scale that best reflects your conflict style tendency. The following scale is used for each item:

4 = YES! = *strongly agree*—IT'S ME!
3 = yes = *moderately agree*—it's kind of like me
2 = no = *moderately disagree*—it's kind of not me
1 = NO! = *strongly disagree*—IT'S NOT ME!

		SA	MA	MD	SD
1.	I often "grin and bear it" when the other person does something I don't like.	4	3	2	1
2.	I "give and take" so that a compromise can be reached.	4	3	2	1
3.	I use my influence to get my ideas accepted in resolving the problem.	4	3	2	1
4.	I am open to the other person's suggestions in resolving the problem.	4	3	2	1
5.	I generally give in to the wishes of the other person in a conflict.	4	3	2	1
6.	I usually avoid open discussion of the conflict with the person.	4	3	2	1
7.	I try to find a middle course to break an impasse.	4	3	2	1
8.	I argue the case with the other person to show the merits of my position.	4	3	2	1
9.	I integrate my viewpoints with the other person to achieve a joint resolution.	4	3	2	1
10.	I generally try to satisfy the expectations of the other person.	4	3	2	1
11.	I try not to bump up against the other person whenever possible.	4	3	2	1
12.	I try to play down our differences to reach a compromise.	4	3	2	1
13.	I'm generally firm in pursuing my side of the issue.	4	3	2	1
14.	I encourage the other person to try to see things from a creative angle.	4	3	2	1
15.	I often go along with the suggestions of the other person.	4	3	2	1
16.	I usually bear my resentment in silence.	4	3	2	1
17.	I usually propose a middle ground for breaking deadlocks.	4	3	2	1

18. I am emotionally expressive in the conflict situation.　　4　3　2　1

19. I dialog with the other person with close attention to her or his needs.　　4　3　2　1

20. I do my best to accommodate the wishes of the other person in a conflict.　　4　3　2　1

Scoring: Add up the scores on items 1, 6, 11, and 16 and you will find your avoidance conflict style score. *Avoidance style* score: _____. Add up the scores on items 2, 7, 12, and 17 and you will find your compromising conflict style score. *Compromising style* score: _____. Add up the scores on items 3, 8, 13, and 18 and you will find your dominating/competing conflict style score. *Dominating style* score: _____. Add up the scores on items 4, 9, 14, and 19 and you will find your integrating/collaborating conflict style score. *Integrating style* score: _____. Add up the scores on items 5, 10, 15, and 20 and you will find your obliging conflict style score. *Obliging style* score: _____.

Interpretation: Scores on each conflict style dimension can range from 4 to 16; the higher the score, the more you engage in that particular conflict style. If some of the scores are similar on some of the conflict style dimensions, you tend to use a mixed pattern of different conflict styles.

Reflection probes: Compare your conflict style scores with a classmate's. Take a moment to think of the following questions: Where did you learn your conflict style tendencies? What do you think are the pros and cons of each specific conflict style? When you are having a conflict with someone from a different culture, how would you address the different conflict style issues? What skills do you need to practice more to be a culturally sensitive conflict negotiator?
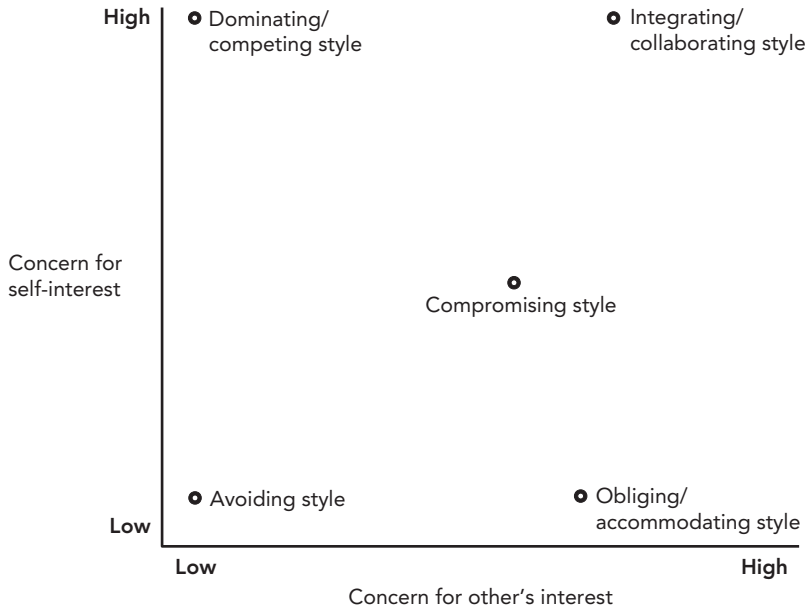

FIGURE 9.2 A Five-Style Conflict Model: A Western Approach

topic and denying that conflict exists to leaving the conflict scene. The **obliging** (or **accommodating**) **style** is characterized by a high concern for the other person's conflict interest above and beyond one's own conflict position. Individuals tend to use the obliging style when they value their relationship more than their personal conflict goal. They tend to either smooth over the conflict or give in to the wishes of their conflict partners. The **compromising style**, however, involves a give-and-take concession approach to reach a mid-point agreement concerning the conflict issue. In using the compromising style, individuals tend to use fairness appeals, trade-off suggestions, or other quick, short-term solutions. It is an intermediate style resulting in some gains and some losses for each party. Finally, the **integrating** (or **collaborative**) **style** reflects a commitment to find a mutual-interest solution and involves a high concern for self-interest and also a high concern for the other person's interest in the conflict situation. In using an integrative style, individuals tend to use nonevaluative descriptive messages, qualifying statements, and mutual-interest clarifying questions to seek common-ground solutions. This is the most time-consuming style of the five conflict styles. Johnson (1986) equated the five different styles to the following animals: shark = *dominating style*, turtle = *avoiding*, teddy bear = *obliging*, fox = *compromising*, and owl = *integrating*.

It should be noted here that in the U.S. conflict research literature, obliging and avoiding conflict styles are often described as being negatively disengaged (i.e., *indifferent* or *fleeing* from the conflict scene). However, collectivists do not necessarily perceive obliging and avoiding conflict styles as negative. For example, collectivists often use these two conflict styles to maintain mutual-face interests and ingroup harmony (Ting-Toomey, 1988). From the collectivistic cultural lens, obliging and avoiding styles can be viewed as two very constructive, face-sensitive conflict styles.

Cross-Cultural Conflict Styles

Face-negotiation theory helps to explain how individualism–collectivism value patterns influence the use of diverse conflict styles in different cultural situations (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998; Ting-Toomey & Takai, 2006). The premise of the theory is that members who subscribe to individualistic values tend to be more self-face-oriented and members who subscribe to group-oriented values tend to be more other- or mutual-face-oriented in conflict negotiation. The face orientation, shaped by the various cultural, personality, and situational factors, frames our different motivations to use different conflict styles. Individuals who are more self-face-oriented tend to use a direct, low-context conflict style to assert their rights in a conflict situation. Individuals who are more other-face- or mutual-face-oriented tend to use an indirect, high-context conflict style to maintain other or mutual face and to preserve relational harmony (Oetzel, Garcia, & Ting-Toomey, 2008). The more independent or individualistic you are, the more likely you are to use a linear logic, low-context approach in managing your conflict. The more interdependent or collectivistic you are, the more likely you are to use a spiral logic, high-context approach in dealing with your conflict (Okabe, 1983).

Research (e.g., in China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Mexico, and the United States) clearly indicates that individualists tend to use more self-defensive, dominating, and competitive conflict styles in managing disputes than do collectivists. In comparison, collectivists tend to use more integrative and compromising styles in dealing with conflict than do individualists. It is important to point out that in the research literature focusing on individualists, the compromising style often connotes task-based compromises—you have to give something tangible to get something back and reach a midpoint compromising solution. However, for collectivists, the term "compromise" often means relational give-and-take concessions from a long-term reciprocity perspective. In other words, by "giving in" during a particular conflict episode, both have the mutual understanding that each individual has taken turns giving in. Finally, research also indicates that collectivists tend to use more obliging and avoiding conflict styles in a wider variety of conflict situations than do individualists (Cai & Fink, 2002; Oetzel, Garcia, & Ting-Toomey, 2008; Oetzel et al., 2001; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991; Ting-Toomey, Yee-Jung, Shapiro, Garcia, Wright, & Oetzel, 2000).

It is interesting to note that whether the conflict is with a member of the ingroup or a member of an outgroup also clearly affects how collectivists manage conflict. Chinese, for example, are more likely to pursue a conflict with an outgroup member and less likely to pursue a conflict with an ingroup member than U.S. Americans (Leung, 1988). Likewise, Japanese tend to use a competitive/dominating conflict style with outgroup members and an obliging style with ingroup members more than do U.S. Americans. For U.S. Americans, whether they are having a conflict with an outgroup member or an ingroup member does not seem to influence their predominant conflict styles (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001; Ting-Toomey & Takai, 2006).

On the personal attributes level, independent-self individuals tend to use more competitive/dominating conflict styles than do interdependent-self individuals, and interdependent-self individuals tend to use more avoiding, obliging, integrating, and compromising styles than do independent-self individuals (Oetzel, 1998, 1999). Thus, to gain an in-depth understanding of an individual's conflict styles, we must understand his or her cultural conditioning process, personality attributes, and ingroup–outgroup conflict situations (Oetzel, Arcos, Mabizela, Weinman, & Zhang, 2006; Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003; Ting-Toomey, 2007a, 2007b; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001).

Cross-Ethnic Conflict Styles and Facework

In terms of different ethnic conflict styles and facework behaviors, most conflict research has focused on European American conflict styles in both interpersonal and organizational conflict domains. Overall, European Americans tend to prefer solution-based conflict strategies and tend to compartmentalize socioemotional conflict issues separately from task-based conflict issues more than do African Americans (Ting-Toomey, 1985, 1986). European Americans also tend to use more dominating/controlling conflict strategies in dealing with romantic relationships than do Asian Americans (Kim, Lim, Dindia, & Burrell, 2010).

Distinctive conflict styles and facework strategies exist within different ethnic groups in the United States (Orbe & Everett, 2006). The following section first addresses African American conflict styles and then Asian American, Latino/a American, and Native American conflict style orientations.

African American Conflict Styles

African American conflict styles are influenced simultaneously by both individualistic and collectivistic values. At the same time that traditional African values are collectivistic (e.g., community, interdependence, being at one with nature, and church/religious participation) and large power distance-based (e.g., respecting grandparents and pastors), they are also in constant struggle against the power dominance of whites in white-privileged U.S. society (Asante & Asante, 1990).

The white-privileged social position refers to a primarily favored state of whites holding power over other minority groups in all key decision-making avenues (McIntosh, 1995). There is also a tendency for European Americans or whites to view racism episodes as individual acts rather than as part of a problematic, power-imbalance institutional package. Thus, assertive conflict styles and emotionally expressive facework behaviors may be one method by which African Americans uphold self- and ingroup-membership dignity.

Research also reveals that African Americans tend to be more emotionally engaged in their conflict approach, whereas European Americans tend to be more emotionally restrained in their conflict discussions (Ting-Toomey, 1986). The *black mode* of conflict is high-keyed (e.g., energetic, nonverbally animated, and emotionally expressive), whereas the *white mode* of conflict is relatively low-keyed (e.g., dispassionate, nonverbally disciplined, and emotionally restrained; Collier, 1991, 2001; Kochman, 1981, 1990). Let's check out L-Chat 9.3. Zoe, a European American, is the movie director, and Blake, an African American, is the screenwriter. Melody, a European American, is the producer.

Overall, in a conflict situation, African Americans tend to prefer an emotionally engaged, assertive mode of conflict discussion, but some European Americans tend to prefer an analytical, neutral-tone mode in controlling their conflict emotions. It is also interesting that, according to cross-ethnic conflict research (Ting-Toomey et al., 2000), African Americans who identify

L-CHAT 9.3

ZOE: So, Blake, what's your opinion about our film? What's the best action plan?

BLAKE (enthusiastically): I think we need to go back and reshoot the conclusion. The ending is useless and we've had more complaints, and we need closure.

ZOE: (analytically): Melody, what do you think?

MELODY (analytically): Zoe, I think the ending is doable. It just needs to be tweaked with a better soundtrack.

BLAKE (with an animated voice): ARE YOU KIDDING ME?? We did this last time and the movie bombed! Using music to cover up the flaws doesn't support this movie and just DOESN'T WORK!!

ZOE (takes a deep breath): Are you finished, Blake? Good— then here's the plan. Given the time constraint, think about tweaking the ending with music. Melody, contact Kristi in the production department and see how much it'll cost to bring in some hard rock music. Also, set up a prescreening test for . . .

BLAKE (interrupts Zoe): Zoe, it's NOT GONNA WORK! Remember last time . . .

ZOE (losing her cool): OK, BLAKE! I heard you the first time already. Now . . .

BLAKE (raising his voice and trying hard to be heard): I'm serious, Zoe. We're gonna end up losing money . . .

Zoe (in a take-charge voice): ALL RIGHT, enough is enough, BLAKE! I don't know what YOU think I can do. You seem to ALWAYS be challenging my decisions . . .

strongly with the larger U.S. culture tend to use a more give-and-take compromising style in conflict than African Americans who identify weakly with the larger U.S. culture. As a complex and diverse group, many African Americans have an integrative system of individualistic and collectivistic values. Their affectively laden conflict pattern is strongly influenced by ethnic/cultural values, social class, and reactions to racial oppression factors (Cross, 1991; Cross, Smith, & Payne, 2002).

Asian American Conflict Styles

In terms of Asian American conflict orientation, research shows that the philosophy of Confucianism strongly influences proper facework and conflict enactment. Confucius was a Chinese philosopher of practical ethics who lived from 551 to 479 B.C.E. His practical code of conduct emphasizes hierarchical societal structure and appropriate family role performance. Confucianism remains the fundamental philosophy that underlies many Asian cultures (e.g., China, Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea, and Japan). Some core Confucian values are dynamic long-term orientation, perseverance, ordering relationships by status, having a sense of shame, and emphasizing collective face saving (Chen, 2001; Chen, 1997; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). A collective or interdependent sense of shame includes the constant awareness of other people's expectations of one's own performance and the concern for face-losing behaviors.

Asian Americans who adhere to traditional Asian values tend to use avoiding or obliging conflict styles to deal with a conflict at hand. They sometimes also use "silence" as a powerful, high-context conflict style. Moreover, they may resort to third-party help—especially from trusted family members or networks—to mediate the conflict situation. Asian Americans who identify strongly with the larger U.S. culture tend to use an integrative conflict style to find content solutions to the conflict more than do Asian Americans who tend to identify weakly with the larger U.S. culture (Ting-Toomey et al., 2000).

Given the diversity of the Asian American population, we should also pay close attention to the country of origin, immigration experiences, acculturation, generation, language, family socialization, and levels of ethnic and cultural identity importance that create tremendous distinctions among and within these multiple groups.

Latino/a American Conflict Styles

In the context of traditional Latino/a Americans' conflict practices, *tactfulness* and *consideration of others' feelings* are considered important facework norms. Tactfulness is conveyed through the use of other-oriented facework rituals, such as the use of accommodation (i.e., "smoothing over") and avoidance conflict behaviors (Garcia, 1996; Hecht, Ribeau, & Sedano, 1990).

For example, in Mexican American culture, the word *respeto* connotes the honor, respect, and *face*

that we accord to listeners in accordance with their roles and hierarchical statuses. In Mexican American culture, facework is closely related to family loyalty, honor, name, respect, and extended family approval. Thus, well-mannered and diplomatic facework behaviors are preferred in managing conflicts in the Mexican American ethnic community. Avoidance conflict style is sometime preferred over a head-on confrontative style in dealing with minor or midrange conflict issues. Collectivism and large power distance values are the underlying value patterns that frame the Latino/a American conflict expectations and attitudes. In dealing with annoying conflict situations, however, it has also been found that Latino/a Americans who identify strongly with their traditional ethnic values tend to use more emotionally expressive conflict styles than Latino/a Americans who do not strongly identify with their traditional ethnic values (Ting-Toomey et al., 2000).

With the tremendous diversity that exists under the "Latino/a American" label, we would do well to increase the complexity of our understanding of the values and distinctive conflict patterns of each group (e.g., Puerto Rican group, Cuban group, or Mexican group).

Native American Conflict Styles

In comparison, Native Americans prefer the use of verbal restraint and self-discipline in emotional expressions during conflict. Some of the value patterns of Native Americans that have been identified by researchers are the following: (1) sharing—honor and respect are gained by sharing and giving; (2) cooperation—the family and tribe take precedence over the individual; (3) noninterference—one is taught to observe and not to react impulsively, especially in meddling in other people's affairs; (4) time orientation—Native Americans tend to be more present-oriented than future-oriented and believe that life is to be lived fully in the present; (5) extended family orientations—there is a strong respect for elders and their wisdom and generational knowledge; and (6) harmony with nature—the tendency is to flow with nature and not want to control or master one's outer environment (Sue & Sue, 1999). Given these value patterns, we can infer that in terms of emotional expression, Native Americans

tend to be more other- and mutual-face-sensitive in dealing with disputes in their everyday lives. Out of consideration for the other person's face, they use more emotionally understated expressions in trying to resolve their conflict peacefully. They are also likely to go to a third-party elder to solicit wisdom in resolving the conflict issue and, thus, help each other to maintain face. They also tend to use more deliberate silence in conveying their displeasure. Communal and large power distance values frame many Native Americans' nuanced emotional expression styles.

However, given the fact that there are over five hundred Native American tribes, any generalizations should serve only as preliminary cultural knowledge (rather than rigid stereotyping) that helps us to be more consciously competent in generating alternative viewpoints in interpreting an entangled conflict situation. We should realize that, for example, Native Americans who live on or near reservations are more likely to subscribe to traditional values, whereas other Native Americans may adhere to predominant, mainstream values or a set of bicultural values (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001).

FLEXIBLE INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT SKILLS

Flexible intercultural conflict management depends on many factors. One key factor is the ability to apply adaptive conflict communication skills. This section identifies five skills that are critical to flexible intercultural conflict management: facework management, mindful listening, cultural empathy, mindful reframing, and adaptive code-switching (see Blog Pic 9.1).

Facework Management

Facework skills address the core issues of protecting our own communication identity during a conflict episode and, at the same time, allowing us to deal with the communication identity of the other conflict party. All human beings value the feeling of *being respected and being accepted*—especially during vulnerable conflict interactions. How individuals protect and maintain self-face needs and, at the same time, how they learn to honor the face needs of the other conflict

Blog Pic 9.1   Conflict among coworkers may result in frustration.

party very likely differs from one culture to the next and from one particular conflict scene to the next.

On a general level, both individualists and collectivists must learn to *save face* strategically and *give face* appropriately to each other during a conflict episode. **Self-oriented face-saving behaviors** are attempts to regain or defend one's image after threats to face or face loss. **Other-oriented face-giving behaviors** are attempts to support others' face claims and work with them to prevent further face loss or help them to restore face constructively. *Giving face* means not humiliating others, especially one's conflict opponents, in public.

For *individualists having conflicts with collectivists, giving face* means acknowledging collectivists' ingroup conflict concerns and obligations. Further, it means learning to mindfully listen and hold a mutual-orientation perspective in the conflict process, learning to apologize when you are part of the conflict problem, and giving credit to the teamwork or family members that frame the collectivists' action or accomplishment. For *collectivists having conflicts with individualists, giving face* means honoring others by expressing your ideas (or opinions) actively with other conflict parties in a candid manner, engaging in explicit verbal acknowledgment and feedback during a conflict negotiation process, recognizing the person's abilities and complimenting his or her unique contributions, and understanding the differences between acting assertively, passively, passive aggressively, and aggressively (see Blog Pics 9.1 and 9.2).

Mindful Listening

Mindful listening is a face-validation and power-sharing skill. In a conflict episode, the disputants must try hard to listen with focused attentiveness to the cultural and personal assumptions that are being expressed in the conflict interaction (see Table 9.2). They must learn to listen responsively or *ting* (the Chinese word for listening means "attending mindfully with our ears, eyes, and a focused heart") to the sounds, tone, gestures, movements, nonverbal nuances, pauses, and silence in a given conflict situation. In mindful listening, facework negotiators tend to practice dialogic listening, one-pointed attentiveness, mindful silence, and responsive words and posture.

By listening mindfully, conflict disputants can learn to create new categories in interpreting the

Blog Pic 9.2   Business negotiations conducted in a social setting.

TABLE 9.2   MINDLESS VERSUS MINDFUL LISTENING CHARACTERISTICS

Mindless listening	Mindful listening
Ethnocentric lens	Ethnorelative lens
Reactive approach	Proactive/choice approach
Selective hearing	Attentive listening
Defensive posture	Supportive posture
"Struggle against"	"Struggle with"
Judgmental attitude	Mindful reframing
Emotional outbursts	Vulnerability shared
Coercive power	Shared power
Positional differences	Common interests
Fixed objectives	Creative options
Win–lose/lose–lose outcome	Win–win synergy

unfolding conflict sequences. *Creating new categories* means learning to apply culture-sensitive concepts to make sense of conflict variation behaviors. We can also practice mindful listening by engaging in paraphrasing and perception-checking skills. **Paraphrasing skills** involve two characteristics: (1) summarizing the content meaning of the other's message in your own words and (2) nonverbally echoing your interpretation of the emotional meaning of the other's message. The summary, or restatement, should reflect your tentative understanding of the conflict party's content meaning, such as "It sounds to me that…" and "In other words, you're saying that…." You can also try to paraphrase the emotional meaning of the disputant's message by echoing your understanding of the emotional tone that underlies her or his message. In dealing with high-context members, your paraphrasing statements should consist of deferential, qualifying

phrases, such as "I may be wrong, but what I'm hearing is that…" or "Please correct me if I misinterpret what you've said. It sounded to me that…." In interacting with low-context members, your paraphrasing statements can be more direct and to the point than with high-context members.

Moving beyond paraphrasing, **perception-checking** (see Chapter 8 on intergroup bias) is designed to help ensure that we are interpreting the speaker's nonverbal and verbal behaviors accurately during an escalating conflict episode. Culturally sensitive perception-checking statements involve both direct and indirect perceptual observation statements and perceptual verification questions. They usually end with questions. For example, a perceptual statement can be "You look really confused. I mentioned the deadline to check out was noon. It is now 2 p.m. Did you understand the time? Or is there something else that may not be clear? [pause]." Perception checking is part of mindful observation and mindful listening skills, to be used cautiously in accordance with the particular topic, relationship, timing, and situational context.

Mindful listening involves a fundamental shift of our conflict perspective. It means taking into account not only how things look from your own conflict perspective but also how they look and feel from the other conflict partner's perspective. Over time, mindful listening can lead to the development of cultural empathy.

Cultural Empathy

Cultural empathy has two layers: cultural empathetic understanding and cultural empathetic responsiveness (Ridley & Udipi, 2002; Broome & Jakobsson Hatay. 2006). **Cultural empathy** is the learned ability of the participants to understand accurately the self-experiences of others from diverse cultures and, concurrently, the ability to convey their understanding responsively and effectively to reach the "cultural ears" of the culturally different others in the conflict situation.

Some suggested cultural empathy techniques (Pedersen, Crethar, & Carlson, 2008; Ridley & Udipi, 2002; Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2010c) include the following: (1) check yourself for possible cultural biases and

hidden prejudices in the conflict episode, (2) suspend your rigidly held intergroup stereotypes, (3) do not pretend to understand—ask for clarification, (4) use reflective time and appropriate silence to gauge your own understanding of the other's conflict perspective, and (5) capture the core conflict emotion, metaphor, meaning, and facework theme of the other conflict party and echo the theme back to the conflict party in your own words—with carefully phrased responsive words and gestures.

Mindful Reframing

Mindful reframing is a highly creative, mutual-face-honoring skill. It means creating alternative contexts to frame your understanding of the conflict behavior. Just as in changing a frame to appreciate an old painting, creating a new context to understand the conflict behavior may redefine your interpretation of the behavior or conflict event. **Reframing** is the mindful process of using language to change the way each person defines or thinks about experiences and views the conflict situation (Keaten & Soukup, 2009).

This skill uses language strategically for the purpose of changing the emotional setting of the conflict from a defensive climate to a collaborative one. Through the use of neutrally toned (to positively-toned) language, reframing can help to soften defensiveness, reduce tension, and increase understanding. The following are some specific suggestions for mindful reframing: (1) restate conflict positions into common-interest terms, (2) change complaint statements into requests, (3) move from blaming statements to mutual-focused, problem-solving statements, (4) help those in conflict recognize the benefits of a win–win synergistic approach, and (5) help conflict parties understand the "big picture."

Reframing is a critical conflict management skill because how you *frame* the conflict event may change how you respond to it (Putnam, 2010). In sum, competent intercultural conflict management requires us to communicate flexibly in different intercultural situations, which necessitates adaptation. Constructive conflict management requires us to be knowledgeable and respectful of different worldviews and multiple

approaches to dealing with a conflict situation (Canary & Lakey, 2006; Cupach, Canary, & Spitzberg, 2010). It requires us to be sensitive to the differences and similarities between individualistic and collectivistic cultures. It also demands that we be aware of our own ethnocentric biases and culture-based attributions when making quick or hasty evaluations of other people's conflict management approaches (Coleman & Raider, 2006).

Adaptive Code-Switching

Intercultural code-switching is conceptualized as "the act of purposefully modifying one's behavior in an interaction in a foreign setting in order to accommodate different cultural norms for appropriate behavior" (Molinksy, 2007, p. 624). To qualify as an intercultural code-switching situation, a situation must have norms that are either unfamiliar to the switcher or in conflict with values central to the switcher's identity. Central to Molinksy's (2007) conceptualization are two psychological challenges that must be met: code-switchers must execute the new behavior in such a manner that insiders of the culture judge the task performance and behavioral performance dimensions as appropriate to the context, and second, the code-switchers are eventually able to form a coherent sense of "identity dimension" via seeing the meaningful relevance of the behavior in context.

In sum, intercultural code-switching refers to intentionally learning and moving between culturally ingrained systems of behavior relevant to the situation at hand. Thus, individuals who have mastered the deep value structures of a culture (such as individualism and collectivism and other core culture-specific values) and the situational norms of an intercultural conflict episode can code-switch adaptively via an astute culture-sensitive situational analysis.

To extend this line of thinking, there are two possible modes of code-switching. *Behavioral or functional code-switching* refers to surface-level verbal and/or nonverbal code-switching, especially for multicultural workplace survival and adaption. In contrast, *dynamic or integrative code-switching* is an internal and external synchronized dance of fluid figure-eight movements in which the dialectical tensions of individualism–collectivism (or any other seemingly contrastive value dimensions) within oneself are resolved or harmonized. Externally, the communication styles of this hybrid individual are also assessed as adaptive, appropriate, and effective. Lengthy foreign living experiences, bicultural and multicultural individuals growing up in a diverse household, third culture children's adaptation experiences, and a willingness to encounter differences have been found to enhance creative tendencies within individuals (Leung, Maddux, Galinsky, & Chiu, 2008; Maddux & Galinsky, 2009).

INTERCULTURAL REALITY CHECK: DO-ABLES

To summarize, there are many complex factors that shape an intercultural conflict episode. In addition to the different culture-based conflict lenses, individuals use very different conflict styles and facework behaviors to approach a conflict situation. The latest research on cross-national and cross-ethnic conflict styles illustrated the struggles in an intercultural conflict negotiation process. Five specific communication skills—*facework management, mindful listening, cultural empathy, mindful reframing,* and *adaptive code-switching*—were recommended as starters to practice competent intercultural conflict management.

Some specific recommendations can also be made based on differences in individualistic and collectivistic styles of conflict management. These suggestions, however, are not listed in any order of importance. To deal with conflict constructively in a collectivistic culture, *individualists must do the following:*

- Be mindful of the mutual face-saving premises in a collectivistic culture, especially the use of specific facework skills in managing the delicate balance of humiliation and pride, respect and disrespect, and shame and honor issues.
- Practice patience and mindful observation: Take five seconds before verbally articulating your feelings. Be mindful of past events that bear relevance to the present conflict situation and also limit the number of verbal *why* questions—because collectivists typically focus on the nonverbal *how* process.

- Practice mindful listening skills: Attend to the sound, movement, and emotional experience of the other person. This indicates that one person is attending to the other person's identity and relational expectation issues; remember that the word *listen* can become *silent* by rearranging the letters.

Some specific recommendations also can be made for collectivists in handling conflict with individualists. When encountering a conflict situation in an individualistic culture, *collectivists must do the following:*

- Engage in an assertive style of conflict behavior that emphasizes the right of both parties to speak up in the conflict situation and respects the right to defend one's position; learn to open a conflict dialog with a clear thesis statement and then systematically develop key points.
- Assume individual accountability for the conflict decision-making process: use "I" statements when expressing opinions, sharing feelings, and voicing thought processes; assume a sender-responsible approach to constructively manage the conflict;

learn to ask more *why* questions and probe for clear explanations and details.
- Engage in active listening skills: engage in active verbal paraphrasing and perception-checking skills to ensure that the other person thoroughly understands each point; learn to occasionally disclose emotions, attitudes, and experiences within the conflict process itself; do not rely solely on nonverbal signals or count on other people to gauge personal reactions.

To manage intercultural conflict flexibly we must be prepared to take alternative cultural perspectives into consideration. If another party is an interdependent-self collectivist, we may want to pay attention to his or her "process-oriented" assumptions during our conflict negotiation. If others are independent-self individualists, we may want to be sensitive to their "outcome-oriented" assumptions during the conflict negotiation. Flexible intercultural conflict management means using culture-sensitive communication skills to manage the process and outcome of conflict adaptively and productively.