Emotions

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The issue of how to manage and resolve conflict is typically approached as if it is solely or primarily a rational problem. Indeed, most negotiation and mediation training focuses on material positions and interests, and looks at the way to get the most for oneself, or a "win-win" outcome for both sides, measuring "winning" and "losses" in material terms. When emotions are mentioned, they are something to be "managed" or "suppressed" or "vented" at the beginning and then ignored. [1] When they are considered, the discussion about emotions is often limited to an emphasis on how anger causes conflict escalation and how to control it. Many disputants believe that by relying solely on logic, they can mask their emotions and defend themselves from vulnerability. [2] Substantive issues often seem easier to discuss than feelings of humiliation, wounded pride, and anxiety, which are viewed as obstacles to rational thinking and a sign of weakness. [3]

It seems clear, however, that emotions and feelings significantly influence how people deal with conflict. Anyone who has ever gotten angry with a spouse or been demeaned and humiliated by a co-worker will recognize this fact readily. It is also important to note that conflicts sometimes arise precisely because parties ignore their own or others' feelings and emotions. Emotions are both a cause and escalator of conflict, and positive feelings among the parties are often a key component of resolution. Once one accepts that emotion is the foundation of all conflict, the issue of how emotion influences the management of conflict becomes central. Many theorists have begun to point out that the lack of detailed attention paid to emotions and their role in relationships limits our understanding of conflict and that more work needs to be done to remedy this. [4]

Emotion and Conflict

Some people assume that political and economic causes are central to a given conflict, while emotional and relational causes are subsidiary. However, it seems clear that intractable conflicts are fueled by both material and non-material concerns. In addition to instrumental goals and rational interests, people have emotional needs, such as the desire for love, status, recognition, and belonging. [5] To see that intractable conflict has significant relational and emotional causes, one only has to take a look at any of the world's protracted conflicts. Most experts agree that the impediments to peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland, for example, were deep-seated emotions. [6] The same can easily be said about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Cyprus conflict, the Rwandan conflict, Kosovo, North Korea, and the conflicts between racial groups or pro-choice and pro-life advocates in the U.S.

Emotions play a role in how parties make sense of their relationships, degree of power, and social status. People constantly evaluate situations and events to feel out if they are personally relevant. [7] These understandings and appraisals are infused with various emotions and feelings. Thus, emotion not only serves a side effect of conflict, but also frames the way in which parties understand and define their dispute.

Second, within the context of relationships, emotions typically serve a "forward-looking communicative function" and express people's agendas, desires, and goals. [8] When parties perceive that they have incompatible goals or that others are interfering with their desires and pursuits, this elicits emotions and leads to conflict. Often the desires in question are a matter of wanting to be taken seriously, treated with respect, and to have one's identity affirmed. Perceived threats to identity and signs of disrespect typically cause emotions to flare and result in interpersonal or intergroup conflict. In other words, the same issues that lead to protracted conflict, (e.g. values, status, and identity), are also the triggers of strong emotions. People who feel "unfairly attacked, misunderstood, wronged, or righteously indignant" are typically overcome with emotion and respond with hostility and aggression. [9] The intensity of an emotion often signifies the importance and salience of an issue and reveals the underlying values of disputants. Thus, the more personally relevant a situation seems, and the more negative feelings parties experience, the greater the potential for destructive conflict.

Some common emotional responses that reveal concerns about identity are pride, shame, and anger. While feelings of pride are linked to parties' feelings of closeness and connectedness, feelings of shame often result from parties' sense that these relationships are threatened. [10] Parties caught in a dispute are prone to unintentionally humiliate each other or disregard one another's perspectives. Resulting feelings of humiliation and disrespect may give rise to unacknowledged shame. Whether parties can manage shame determines whether there will be cooperation or protracted conflict. If they remain unacknowledged and are not dealt with, hurt feelings and shame tend to give rise to anger, aggression, and conflict escalation. [11] At this point, the substantive issues of the dispute may become less important than parties' hurt feelings and rage. Anger, resentment, and hatred may ultimately give rise to a cycle of violence, and thus serve as a driving force behind many of the world's religious wars and ethno-political conflicts.

The Role of Emotion in Mediation and Negotiation

Much of the training literature for negotiation and mediation suggests that emotions should be simply ignored. The prevailing idea seems to be that negotiators should try to set their feelings aside and mediators should try to steer disputants towards "rational" behavior. However, it seems obvious that strong emotions, in particular, the parties'fear and anger, are typically part of the negotiation process. Emotions often cause disputes to escalate and sometimes even cause negotiations to break down. When people feel that their interests are threatened, they often become agitated, angry, and fearful. Ignoring such emotions is likely to harm the negotiation process, not help it. [12] Often trying to suppress or dampen the emotions may simply lead to resentment and the breakdown of agreements. Parties may try to disrupt a process because they do not feel heard, or refuse to follow through with an agreement because their feelings were not recognized. [13]

Roger Fisher and William Ury (1983) suggest that the first step in dealing with strong emotions is to acknowledge them, and to try to understand their source. In many cases, these emotions should be dealt with before addressing the substance of the dispute. A refusal to deal with emotional and relational issues may make it impossible to address substantive issues, they argue. Parties must acknowledge the fact that certain emotions are present and allow the other side to express their feelings. They must also be careful not to dismiss others' feelings or lash out in response to emotional outbursts, as this is likely to provoke an even more intense emotional response from the other side.

Because emotion often plays a much more central role in decision making than we realize, it is important to look at parties' subjective view of the situation when trying to determine whether a settlement can and will be reached.

Emotions have the potential to play either a positive or negative role in negotation. During negotiations, the decision as to whether or not to settle rests in part on emotional factors. For an agreement to be reached, it is not necessary that parties overcome all obstacles or address all their substantive concerns. There simply need to be enough incentives to make settlement look like the best option. Because emotion often overcomes logic in the course of the negotiation process, it is important to keep in mind the sorts of feelings that move parties toward resolution. If parties are not emotionally invested in the process, negotiation is unlikely to succeed. Some examples of emotional rewards that might result from reaching an agreement include the establishment of good personal relationships, trust, respect recognition, honor, satisfaction, sense of belonging, and appreciation. [14]

In general, positive emotions increase the likelihood that parties will reach their instrumental goals. Negotiators who are in a positive mood tend to enjoy the interaction more, use less aggressive tactics, and achieve more integrative outcomes. [15] Research has shown that positive emotions foster problem solving, creativity, respect for others' perspectives, and even improved cognitive ability. In addition, feelings of empathy may improve understanding, facilitate communication, and allow us to care for others. [16]

Negative feelings, on the other hand, may have a detrimental impact on negotiations and mediation processes. During negotiations, emotions may intensify as a result of perceived rudeness, rule violations, misrepresentation, challenges to one's own authority, or parties' sense of shame. Feelings that may dissuade parties from agreeing to a negotiated settlement that appears in all other respects to be reasonable include distrust, anger, fear, contempt, embarrassment, shame, pride, and disappointment. In many instances, these same negative emotions inhibit communication during mediation and make it difficult for parties to engage in constructive discussion. As a result of negative feelings, one party may be antagonistic and resist anything the other party proposes. A person may also seek revenge for what she sees as the bad behavior of the other side. Anger, in particular, sometimes disrupts negotiations by reducing the level of trust, clouding parties' judgment, narrowing parties' focus of attention, and changing their central goal from reaching agreement to retaliating against the offender. [17] In sum, negative emotions tend to lead toward inaccurate judgments, lessened concern for the other parties' preferences, and neglect of one's own instrumental goals. [18]

However, there are some instances when the expression of negative emotions can benefit negotiation or mediation. Legitimately expressed anger, for example, can be an extremely effective way to communicate one's commitment, sincerity, and needs. [19] In addition, strategically highlighting one's feelings can sometimes serve as an effective negotiating tactic.

Parties need to find ways to express their emotions effectively during negotiations. In Western cultures, this means being assertive without being provocative or confrontational as well as being willing to make small concessions in order to build trust and defuse anger. Negotiators should also learn to recognize anger before it erupts, try to assess the cause of anger, and apologize when appropriate. Finally, empathizing with another party's emotions and sharing one's own vulnerable feelings can help to build trust and provide reassurance.

Managing Strong Emotions

There are various methods parties can use to deal with emotions so that they have a constructive effect on conflict, rather than a destructive one. Anger management strategies are probably the ones most widely discussed in negotiation and mediation texts. These tactics include relaxation techniques, cognitive restructuring exercises, and communication and listening techniques. These tactics are supposed to give disputants a way to express their angry feelings without being destructive or causing more hurt feelings. One way for disputants to express their feelings in a non-confrontational way is through "I-messages." Theorists note that people "who express anger constructively may provide listeners with a rapid, exact and comprehensive description of their grievances and needs" that is informative and beneficial. [20]

Trauma healing is another way to help parties manage their emotions. Victims of war and violence often feel humiliated, helpless, and hopeless. Other emotional responses that commonly result from trauma include depression, intense fear, and anxiety. One strategy that can help parties to acknowledge and deal with trauma and hidden emotions is storytelling. Some theorists point out that one reason that protracted conflicts get so "stuck" is that disputants do not feel deeply heard by one another or the world at large. Often this is because parties delete their emotions from the narratives they tell about conflict. The "story that each side tells to itself and others about the conflict" does not mention the anger, hurt feelings, humiliation, and shame that parties have experienced. In order to resolve their conflict, parties must begin to acknowledge their hidden feelings in a way that leaves dignity intact. People should have a chance to tell their stories of pain and oppression. The "truth-telling" that occurred in South Africa, for example, allowed both black and white citizens to express some of their emotions and begin to change their shared narrative. [21] Some other ways to begin the process of emotional healing and peacebuilding include testimonies, memorials, and group ceremonies.

In addition, there are various communication processes that attempt to meet the emotions head on and channel them in constructive ways. In transformative mediation, two of the central goals are empowerment and parties' mutual recognition of relational issues. Insofar as emotions are seen as an integral part of conflict, mediators encourage their expression during proceedings. One of the mediator's primary tasks is to help parties to become more aware of their own emotional expressions and behaviors and to recognize the feelings of others. Rather than trying to suppress or control the emotions, mediators should "learn to identify cues to unacknowledged emotions in the discourse of the disputing parties." [22] Helping parties to communicate and acknowledge their emotions is key to the restoration of healthy relationships.

Various tools are available to deal with strong emotions that surface during intervention processes. First, mediators should try to validate and/or soothe parties' emotions and attempt to set a constructive tone for mediation. Some methods of emotional management and communication include empathic listening (also called "active listening"), perspective taking, apology, symbolic gestures, and trust building. In addition, the mediator may allow the parties to vent their emotions in a caucus or joint session; or suppress and contain emotions by interrupting a conversation, taking a cooling-off break, or engaging in shuttle diplomacy. [23] When conversations become overly heated or destructive, mediators can identify the emotional expression as problematic and offer explicit guidelines to govern communication.

Mediators can also assist parties in emotionally reappraising and reframing the current situation. Parties in conflict appraise their circumstances in certain ways and react emotionally as a result. Through dialogue, analytical problem solving, and discussion, disputants can modify their appraisals and co-construct their emotional reactions. [24] This involves the ability to visualize the world as it appears to others and imagine how they must be feeling. As parties reshape the emotional meaning attached to their relationship and interaction and alter their view of the situation at hand, parties can determine which feelings they experience and in effect negotiate their emotions.

One technique that may serve as a complement to emotional reframing is appreciative inquiry. [25] This approach relies upon collaborative inquiry and affirmative questioning to collect positive stories and attend to what is best within their community or group. In this way, disputants cooperatively search for the passions and feelings that hold the potential for constructive change. Parties then use their understanding of "the best of what is" to construct a vision of what their community might be if they could identify their strengths and build upon their current achievements. Thus, this approach taps into whatever positive feelings are available and builds upon them.

[1] Suzanne Retzinger and Thomas Scheff, "Emotion, Alienation, and Narratives: Resolving Intractable Conflict." *Mediation Quarterly* 18(12)(2000-2001); available at: http://www.soc.ucsb.edu/faculty/scheff/16.html

[2] Erik A. Fisher and Steven W. Sharp, *The Art of Managing Everyday Conflict: Understanding Emotions and Power Struggles,* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 60.

[3] Daniel L. Shapiro, "Negotiating Emotions," in *Conflict Resolution Quarterly,* (20:1, 2002), 68.

[4] Retzinger and Scheff, http://www.soc.ucsb.edu/faculty/scheff/16.html

[5] Shiri Milo-Locker,"The Decision to Settle - Balance, Setoffs and Tradeoffs Between Rational, Emotional and Psychological Forces," Mediate.com, available at: http://www.mediate.com/articles/lockerS1.cfm?nl=51

[6] Retzinger and Scheff, http://www.soc.ucsb.edu/faculty/scheff/16.html

[7] Shapiro, 72.

[8] ibid.

[9] T.S. Jones and A. Bodtker, "Mediating With Heart in Mind: Addressing Emotion in Mediation Practice," in *Negotiation Journal,* (17:3, 2001), 228.

[10] T. J. Scheff, *Bloody Revenge: Emotions, Nationalism, and War,(*Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 3.

[11] ibid., 22.

[12] Daniel Bjerknes and Kristine Paranica,"Training Emotional Intelligence For Conflict Resolution Practitioners," Mediate.com, available at: http://mediate.com/articles/bjerknes.cfm

[13] ibid.

[14] Milo-Locker, http://www.mediate.com/articles/lockerS1.cfm?nl=51

[15] Shapiro, 69.

[16] Robert S. Adler, Benson Rosen, and Elliot M. Silverstein, "Emotions in Negotiation: How to Manage Fear and Anger," in *Negotiation Journal*, (14:2, 1998). Summary available at: http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/full_text_search/AllCRCDocs/adler.htm

[17] ibid.

[18] Shapiro, 70.

[19] Adler, Rosen, and Silverstein, http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/full_text_search/AllCRCDocs/adler.htm

[20] Retzinger and Scheff, http://www.soc.ucsb.edu/faculty/scheff/16.html

[21] ibid.

[22] ibid.

[23] Schreier, 103-4.

[24] Shapiro,78.

[25] International Institute for Sustainable Development, "Appreciative Inquiry and Community Development," available at: http://www.iisd.org/ai/