Subjective Features of Conflict Resolution: Psychological, Social and Cultural Influences

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Conflict is a pervasive aspect of existence. It occurs at all levels of social life: the interpersonal, intergroup, interorganizational and international. It occurs not only between social units, but also within the different types of social units, within persons as well as within nations. The issues that may be involved in disputes are diverse in substance, significance and style. Types of conflicts can also be distinguished by such other attributes as the nature of the interdependence existing between the conflicting parties, the kinds of strategies and tactics they employ, the nature of the conflict process, the types of methods for intervening in conflict and the types of conflict outcomes.

In light of the enormous variety of types of conflicts, it is not surprising that there have been many different theoretical approaches to understanding conflict. Theoretical approaches often reflect the academic discipline of the theorists. Psychologists have focused on intrapersonal conflict; social psychologists have concentrated on interpersonal and intergroup conflict; sociologists have stressed social, role, status and class conflicts; economists have focused on game theory and decision-making, economic competition, labor negotiations and trade disputes; political scientists and international specialists have centered their work on political and international conflicts. Some writers have focused upon particular types of conflict such as labor—management negotiations, marital conflict and divorcing, community disputes and environmental controversies.

The plethora of scholars writing about conflict from different disciplinary backgrounds and focusing on different types of disputes has given the study of conflict a fragmented appearance. Yet beneath this disorganized surface, there appear to be some common themes which cut across the different disciplines and the different types of conflict. These themes can be summarized, in part, in the following propositions.

1. Most conflicts are mixed-motive conflicts in which the parties involved in the conflict have both cooperative and competitive interests.

2. Conflict can be constructive as well as destructive. Conflict has been given a bad reputation by its association with psychopathology, social disorder and war. However, it is the root of personal and social change; it is the medium through which problems can be aired and solutions arrived at. There are many positive functions of conflict (Coşer, 1967). The social and scientific issue is not how to eliminate or prevent conflict but rather to develop the knowledge which would enable us to answer the question, What are the conditions which give rise to lively controversy rather than deadly quarrel?

3. The cooperative and competitive interests of the parties give rise to two distinctive processes of conflict resolution. Walton and McKersie (1965) have termed the processes ‘integrative bargaining’ and ‘distributive bargaining’ while I have termed them ‘cooperative’ and ‘competitive’ processes (Deutsch, 1973). Associated with the different processes are distinctive strategies and tactics of dealing with conflict, differing communication and influence processes and different attitudes toward the other.

4. The relative strengths of the cooperative and competitive interests within the conflicting parties, and how they vary during the course of a conflict, will be major determinants of the nature of the conflict process and of whether the outcomes of the conflict are likely to be constructive or destructive for the conflicting parties. There are many factors influencing the relative balance of cooperative and competitive interests. Many such factors have been identified by conflict theorists, and I have articulated a hypothesis which provides a general framework for answering the question of what determines whether a conflict will take a cooperative or competitive course (Deutsch, 1973, 1980, 1985). However, it is evident that the implementation of this framework must be different for different types of social units – for example, when the social units involved in the conflict are nations rather than people.

There are, of course, many other factors affecting the course of conflict than the balance between cooperative and competitive interests within the conflicting parties. Among these, I place emphasis upon the normative framework which regulates the relations between the conflicting parties, the relative power of the conflicting parties and the abilities and skills of the conflicting parties to engage in the different types of conflict processes. This third factor of abilities and skills is not sufficiently emphasized in theoretical discussions. I suggest that many destructive conflicts
between nations, groups and individuals result from their lack of skills related to the procedures involved in constructive conflict resolution, and I further suggest that training in these skills should be more widespread (Deutsch, 1988).

The propositions outlined above imply that any comprehensive approach to understanding conflict will necessarily include consideration of both objective and subjective factors, whether the conflict participant is a person, group or nation. That is, one will want to know about such subjective factors as the values, goals, cognitions, expectations and perceptions of the participants as well as about such objective factors as the participants' resources, power, skills, allies and enemies as well as the characteristics of the sociocultural-institutional context within which their relationship is embedded. I term such an approach to conflict as social-psychological. Several key notions in this approach are:

1. Each participant in a social interaction responds to the other in terms of his perceptions and cognition of the other; these may or may not correspond to the other's actualities.

2. Each participant in a social interaction, being cognizant of the other's capacity for awareness, is influenced by his own expectations concerning the other's actions as well as by his perceptions of the other's conduct. These expectations may or may not be accurate; the ability to take the role of the other and to predict the other's behavior is not notable in either interpersonal or international crises.

3. Social interaction not only is initiated by motives but also generates new motives and alters old ones. It is not only determined but also determining. In the process of rationalizing and justifying actions that have been taken and effects that have been produced, new values and motives emerge. Moreover, social interaction exposes one to models and exemplars which may be identified with and imitated. Thus, a child's personality is shaped largely by the interactions he has with his parents and peers and by the people with whom he identifies. Similarly, a nation's institutions may be considerably influenced by its interrelations with other nations and by the existing models of functioning that other nations provide.

4. Social interaction takes place in a social environment – in a family, a group, a community, a nation, a civilization – that has developed techniques, symbols, categories, rules and values that are relevant to human interactions. Hence, to understand the events that occur in social interactions one must comprehend the interplay of these events with the broader sociocultural context in which they occur.

5. Even though each participant in a social interaction, whether an individual or a group, is a complex unit composed of many interacting subsystems, it can act in a unified way toward some aspect of its environment. Decision-making within the individual as well as within the nation can entail struggle among different interests and values for control over action. Internal structure and internal process, while less observable in individuals than in groups, are characteristic of all social units.

Factors Affecting the Likelihood of Conflict

In this section, I shall briefly consider some determinants of the likelihood of conflict.

Contact and Visibility of Differences  Conflict, as well as harmonious, interaction requires a partner. Thus one of the factors contributing to the development of discord between individuals or groups is the opportunity to interact. People or groups that have little or no contact with one another, directly or through the mass media, are unlikely to have either conflicting or harmonious relations. In a survey of research on intergroup relations, Williams (1947) has indicated that the necessary conditions for conflict include 'visibility' and 'competition' in addition to contact.

There is considerable evidence to suggest that the categorization of people into groups on the basis of any distinguishing characteristic commonly has the result that, perceptually, the differences between each category tend to be enhanced (Tajfel, 1970). Thus if people are categorized into groups of ‘black’ and ‘white’ on the basis of skin color, the differences between ‘black’ and ‘white’ will be perceptually accentuated or exaggerated, while the differences among ‘white’ and among ‘black’ will be deemphasized. This phenomenon is often more generalized. If a person has the view that certain features (such as skin color, social class, conduct, intelligence and attitudes) are highly correlated, and if he categorizes people into groups according to one of the characteristics such as skin color, then he is likely to accentuate the differences between the groups on the other attributes that he believes to be associated with skin color.

Although the perception of difference between self and other, between the ingroup (one's group) and the outgroup, is a necessary condition for conflict, it is not sufficient. Differences and dissimilarities can be complementary and lead to bonding (for example, husband–wife); it is incompatible differences which give rise to conflict.
Perceived Incompatibility A person's or group's attributes (such as beliefs, attitudes, goals, interests, values, ideology or resources) are incompatible with those of another person or group to the extent that they give rise to actions which prevent, obstruct, interfere, injure, diminish or make less effective or less likely any attribute of the other that is valued positively by the other. Two parties are actively involved in conflict when they are engaging in incompatible actions that are purposes. The incompatible actions may arise because one or both parties perceive that the existence of the other's attributes threatens or weakens the support for his own valued attributes. It is not the objective incompatibility that is crucial but rather the perceived incompatibility. The objective incompatibility may not be recognized because there is a false consciousness with regard to the incompatible interests, and, hence, conflict would be latent rather than actual. Or misperception may lead to the perception of an incompatibility where no true incompatibility exists and lead to a false conflict.

Incompatibilities do not necessarily arise even from differences in attributes that are truly contradictory unless one of the parties insists that the contradictions must be eliminated (that is, the other must give up his contradicting belief, values, interests, goals, and so on), or unless each insists that his own belief, and so on, must be superordinate. While various psychological theories suggest that there is an inherent tendency to eliminate cognitive and social dissonance, it is also evident that individuals, groups and societies appear to differ in their ability to tolerate internal dissonance. Stable, well-integrated individuals, groups or communities are less likely to be rife with contradictions and are more apt to be able to tolerate whatever internal dissonances exist. Stability and integration, thus, reduce the likelihood of conflict and also inhibit the occurrence of destructive processes of conflict resolution.

Perceived Utility of the Conflict True incompatibilities may not give rise to conflict because they are not recognized. Hence, sometimes, to foster social changes it may be necessary to engage in 'consciousness raising' or to correct a false perception of either the issues or parties that are involved in a conflict. However, even when incompatibilities are viewed correctly, conflict is not likely to occur unless a party believes that there is some utility in engaging in the conflict — that is, that there is more to be gained or less to be lost by engaging in the conflict than in not doing. The expected gains may be subtle; one may engage in a conflict one expects to 'lose' in order to demonstrate to oneself or to others that one is not afraid. There are many reasons why individuals, groups and nations avoid engaging in conflicts rather than actively confronting their perceived incompatibilities: their past experiences may have led them to pessimistic views concerning conflict; they may perceive that they have few of the resources and skills necessary to engage in successful or productive conflict; conflict may evoke considerable anxiety; and so on.

Many conflict theorists (for example, Dahrendorf, 1959; Gurr, 1970; Kriesberg, 1982; Tilly, 1978) have been concerned with identifying the conditions which enable individuals, who are dissatisfied with their disadvantaged positions, to organize themselves into an effective group which can mobilize its resources so that they can actively struggle to bring about social change. As Dahrendorf (1959) has pointed out, three sets of analytical conditions can be identified which influence whether a collection of dissatisfied individuals can be organized into an effective conflict group: social conditions (such as the availability of frequent opportunities for such individuals to meet and communicate); technical conditions (such as the availability of skills and facilities which permit effective leadership and coherent organization to develop among the emerging group); and political conditions (such as the absence of a coercive, repressive political apparatus among the ruling elite which would suppress a dissident movement).

To summarize, the likelihood of conflict is enhanced between two parties when: (a) they have the opportunity to interact; (b) their interaction makes salient differences between them which they perceive to be incompatible; and (c) they judge that there is more to gain or less to lose by active efforts to eliminate or reduce the incompatibilities.

Factors Affecting the Course of Conflict

In this section, I shall consider the determinants of whether a conflict takes a constructive or destructive course. My discussion is guided by a hypothesis which I have developed as a result of much research by my students and myself (Deutsch, 1973, 1985). The hypothesis, which I have termed 'Deutsch's crude law of social relations,' is that the characteristic processes and effects elicited by a given type of social relationship (for example, cooperative or competitive) also tend to elicit that type of social relationship. Thus, cooperation induces and is induced by a perceived similarity in beliefs and attitudes; a readiness to be helpful; openness in communication; trusting and friendly attitudes; sensitivity to common interests and de-emphasis of opposed interests; an orientation toward enhancing mutual power rather than power differences; and
so on. Similarly, competition induces and is induced by the use of tactics of coercion, threat or deception; attempts to enhance the power differences between oneself and the other; poor communication; maximization of the awareness of similarities in values and increased sensitivity to opposed interests; suspicious and hostile attitudes; the importance, rigidity and size of the issues in conflict; and so on.

In other words, if one has systematic knowledge of the effects of cooperative and competitive processes, one will have systematic knowledge of the conditions which typically give rise to such processes and, by extension, to the conditions which affect whether a conflict will take a constructive or destructive course. My early theory of cooperation and competition (Deutsch, 1949) is a theory of the effects of cooperative and competitive processes. Hence, from the crude law of social relations stated earlier, it follows that this theory provides insight into the conditions which give rise to cooperative and competitive processes.

Understanding the conditions which give rise to cooperative or competitive social processes, as well as their characteristics, is central to understanding the circumstances which give rise to constructive or destructive processes of conflict resolution. A constructive process of conflict resolution is, in its essence, similar to an effective cooperative process, while a destructive process is similar to a process of competitive interaction. Since much is known about the nature of cooperative and competitive processes, and the conditions which give rise to each, from my work and the work of other scholars (see Deutsch, 1973, 1985, as well as Johnsson and Johnsson, 1983, 1989 for summaries), much of this knowledge can be applied to understanding the factors which determine whether a conflict will take a constructive or destructive course. In the subsections which follow, some of the implications of the preceding ideas will be drawn out more fully.

The Sociocultural Context within which Conflict Occurs

Individuals, groups or nations with different cultural backgrounds must often negotiate about their conflicting interests, beliefs or values, and sometimes they must work closely together in organizations. Their cultural differences may give rise to barriers to interaction, misunderstandings, prejudices and behavior which is unwittingly offensive, and these may reduce the chances that negotiations will be constructive. Similarly, organizational effectiveness will be much impaired if people from different cultural backgrounds cannot work together successfully.

Ingroup ethnocentrism reduces the likelihood that a productive problem-solving process will characterize the interaction among the members of different groups. Ingroup ethnocentrism may not be as universal as Sumner (1906) posited but it is ubiquitous (see Brewer, 1986; LeVine and Campbell, 1972) and it clearly provides obstacles to constructive interaction among people from different cultural groups. Sumner characterized ethnocentrism as the view of things in which one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it. Folkways correspond to it to cover both the inner and the outer relation. Each group nourishes its own pride and vanity, boasts itself superior, exalts its own divinities, and looks with contempt on outsiders. Each group thinks its own folkways the only right ones, and if it observes that other groups have other folkways, these excite its scorn. Opprobrious epithets are derived from these differences. (1906: 12-13)

As Tajfel (1982a, 1982b) has pointed out, the self-identity of individuals is very much linked to the characteristics of the groups with which they identify; these characteristics then help to define their social identity. The expectations, beliefs, language, practices, rituals, norms and values which members of an ingroup have in common define their shared culture. The culture, in turn, establishes the symbolic meaning of actions, defining a type of action as appropriate or inappropriate, respectful or disrespectful, friendly or hostile, praiseworthy or blameworthy, and so on. Cultural differences are established early and the cultural assumptions acquired in childhood often have heavily laden emotional connotations of good and bad. Hence, an ethnocentric orientation to cultural differences is apt to result in strong emotional reactions. Although the term ethnocentrism is usually employed in relation to ethnic and nationality groups, it is well to recognize that an analogous process can occur in the relation between various social categories - for example, those based on gender, age, race, religion, class, occupation, physical disability. Each social category has its own subculture and the differences between the subcultures (in expectations, practices, language, norms, values, and so on) may lead to misunderstandings, stereotypes and prejudices which affect the ability of people in different categories to manage the conflicts between them successfully.

Ethnocentrism is conducive to the occurrence of conflict but not conducive to its constructive resolution. What are some of the factors affecting the occurrence and intensity of ethnocentrism and what methods are effective in dealing with ethnocentrically based conflict? LeVine and Campbell (1972) have addressed the first question, as have many other scholars concerned with the development of intergroup prejudice (such as Brewer, 1986; Brewer and
Kramer, 1985; Stephan, 1985). Sherif (1966) has addressed the second question, as have other scholars (such as Stephan, 1985; Wilder, 1986; Worchel and Austin, 1986) concerned with the reduction of destructive intergroup conflict.

There appear to be several reasonably well-established propositions relating to the occurrence and intensity of ethnocentrism that are supported by theoretical analysis (LeVine and Campbell, 1972) as well as by the existing research (Brewer, 1986).

1 Ethnocentric ingroup bias occurs most consistently with regard to such moral traits as ‘trustworthiness,’ ‘honesty,’ ‘peace-loving,’ ‘virtuous’ and ‘obedient.’ As Brewer (1986) suggests, these are all traits that can be defined in terms of normative prescriptions that apply to ingroup, as opposed to intergroup, behavior – that is, one is supposed to exhibit moral behavior toward the members of one’s group but not necessarily to the members of other groups. When two interacting groups have each limited their ‘moral community’ (Deutsch, 1985) to their own group, they are apt to have reciprocal stereotypes (Campbell, 1967) such as ‘we are loyal; they are cliquish’; ‘we are honest and peaceful among ourselves; they are hostile and treacherous towards outsiders.’

2 The more intense the competition between groups, the greater the tendencies toward ethnocentrism in their relations; the more intense the cooperation between groups, the less the ethnocentrism (Blake et al., 1964; Brewer, 1986; Deutsch, 1973; Sherif, 1966; Turner, 1975; Worchel, 1986).

3 Reciprocal relations tend to occur between interacting groups – that is, ingroups will return the perceived attitudes of outgroups towards themselves so that reciprocal attitudes (positive or negative) will tend to agree.

4 Perceived differences between the ingroup and outgroup will generally be congruent with the maintenance of positive self-evaluation (Turner, 1975). Where the ingroup’s position is objectively less favorable than the outgroup’s (for example, it has lost a competition), one could expect the perceived differences to be minimized rather than exaggerated or explained in a way which would reduce its implications for self-esteem. Otherwise, one would expect real differences to appear in exaggerated forms in the stereotyped images of the outgroup.

5 The pyramidal-segmentary, as compared to the cross-cutting, type of societal organization is more conducive to ingroup ethnocentrism and destructive intergroup strife within a society (LeVine and Campbell, 1972). In the pyramidal-segmentary type, each smaller unit that an individual belongs to is included as a segment of each larger group that he is a member of. In the cross-cutting type, the groups to which a member belongs cut across, rather than nest in, one another. His residence group is not necessarily included in his kinship groups, and his work group may be composed of people from different ethnic groups.

A number of different approaches to changing intergroup prejudices, stereotyping, and discriminatory behavior have been studied (Allport, 1954; Sherif, 1966; Stephan, 1985; Worchel and Austin, 1986): intergroup contact, information and education, sensitivity training or problem-solving workshops, negotiations between group leaders and the use of cooperative procedures. The research (see Stephan, 1985, for a summary) is much too extensive to permit more than several brief statements. First, it is evident that the most profound and enduring positive changes in intergroup relations occur when successful cooperation in the achievement of a joint or superordinate goal is promoted (Cook, 1984, 1985; Johnson and Johnson, 1983; Sheriff, 1966). A social context of cooperation enhances the effectiveness of each of the other approaches, and without a cooperative context, the other approaches may have little lasting effects. A second factor enhancing the effectiveness of each of the different approaches is a favorable normative context in which accepted authority, or influential third parties, strongly favor positive relations between the groups.

Intergroup contact, per se, can be either positive or negative in its effects upon intergroup relations depending upon the context within which it occurs and the nature of the contact. Contacts are more likely to have positive effects if they: are of equal status; are extended over time; occur in diverse situations; permit individuation of group members; have high acquaintance potential; have positive contexts and outcomes. In addition, contacts have more positive effects when the ingroup and outgroup members are similar in basic beliefs and values, are of equal competence and are similar in numbers.

Studies of the effects of information, lectures, films, propaganda, and so on, generally reveal positive effects (Stephan, 1985; Williams, 1947) but most such studies do not have long-term follow-up and have not included behavioral data. Intergroup workshops, multiracial sensitivity training groups, and the like, also appear to have short-run positive effects (Stephan, 1985) and such group techniques have shown some promise in dealing with intercommunal and internation conflict (Burton, 1969; Doob, 1970; Kelman and Cohen, 1986).

There have been few studies of the effects of negotiations between leaders. However, the rapid development of international negotiations between business leaders and government leaders has
led a number of scholars to focus on how cultural factors affect national negotiating styles (such as Binnendijk, 1987; Weiss and Stripp, 1985). The aim of this scholarship is to provide negotiators with an understanding of the implicit cultural assumptions which are likely to determine how negotiators from different nations (Nader and Todd, 1978: 29) 'perceive the world, including the way in which they see and evaluate the machinery for processing disputes and decide on their course of action.' Lacking such knowledge, negotiators from different cultural backgrounds are likely to misunderstand one another and apt to engage in behavior that is unwittingly offensive to the other: circumstances not conducive to constructive conflict resolution.

Weiss and Stripp (1985) have developed a conceptual framework for discussing negotiations that includes twelve culturally sensitive variables and they have characterized seven national negotiating styles in terms of these variables: American; Chinese; French; Japanese; Mexican; Nigerian; and Saudi. Employing their variables, Weiss and Stripp characterize the American style of negotiation as: competitive; soliciting negotiators on the basis of knowledge and experience; oriented to substantive issues; informal; explicit in communication style; employing empirically based reasoning in persuasive argumentation; individualistic; trust rests on verification and enforceability of agreements; risk-taking; negotiating under a sense of time pressure; making decisions authoritatively; and preferring contractual agreements. In contrast, the Japanese style of negotiation is characterized as: collaborative; soliciting negotiating teams on the basis of seniority and age; concentrating on relationship-based issues; formal and concerned with politeness and protocol; using indirect and complex forms of communication; appealing to intuition, experience, and reason; oriented to collective aspirations; trust rests on past record and intuition; aversive to uncertainty and risk; having a long time horizon; having decisions made through consensus-building; and preferring brief agreements which are based more upon mutual understanding and trust rather than lengthy agreements with detailed specifications.

The above is a very truncated version of the lengthy characterizations made by Weiss and Stripp. How well their characterizations describe 'typical' American and Japanese negotiating styles is difficult to assess. In any case, their characterizations would suggest that major misunderstandings and difficulties might occur between negotiators from these different nations if they were not trained to be sensitive to their cultural differences in negotiation styles.

The Nature of the Issues Involved in the Conflict
As the discussion of incompatibilities suggests, there are many different issues that can be the focus of conflict and a number of different typologies have been developed to categorize the content of issues— for example, whether the conflict is over resources, preferences and nuisances, beliefs, values, or the nature of the relationship (Deutsch, 1973). Here, I shall focus on some formal characteristics of issues rather than their content, since the likelihood that a conflict will take a constructive or destructive course is more determined by such characteristics of issues than their content. Below, I shall consider such attributes of an issue as its size, rigidity and centrality.

Size One of the characteristics of destructive conflicts is that they tend to grow in size or to escalate. The converse also seems true: small conflicts are easier to resolve constructively than large ones (Deutsch, 1973; Fisher, 1964). One enlarges a conflict by dealing with it as a conflict between large rather than small units (a racial conflict rather than a conflict between two individuals of different races), as a conflict over a large, substantive issue rather than over a small one (being treated fairly or being treated unfairly on a particular occasion), as a conflict over a principle rather than over the application of a principle, as a conflict whose solution establishes large rather than small substantive or procedural precedents. Many other determinants of conflict size could be listed. For example, an issue that bears upon self-esteem or a change in power or status is likely to be more important than an issue that does not affect these things. Illegitimate threats or attempts to coerce are likely to increase the size of the conflict and thus increase the likelihood of a destructive process.

Conflict size may be defined as being equal to the expected difference in the value of the outcomes that a party will receive if it wins compared with the value it will receive if the other wins a conflict. A party 'wins' a conflict if it obtains outcomes that are satisfying to it; the more satisfying they are to it, the more it wins. This definition implies that conflict size will be small for a party that believes that both parties can win and large if it thinks that one party will lose (have less than satisfactory outcomes) if the other wins. This definition also implies that the size of a given conflict may be larger for one party than for the other. One party may expect that its outcomes will be quite satisfactory even if the other wins, while the second may believe that its outcomes will be adversely affected if the other wins.
I have defined conflict size subjectively, in terms of expected outcomes. In simple and easily grasped situations, there is likely to be a close correspondence between the objective and subjective definitions, so that the expected difference in outcomes will neatly parallel the actual differences that occur when one or the other party wins. In more complex situations, such a correspondence is less likely.

It is somewhat surprising that, in the literature dealing with the management of conflict, there has been relatively little focus on what Fisher (1964) calls issue control. Controlling the importance of what is perceived to be at stake in a conflict may prevent the conflict from taking a destructive course. Many conflicts may be defined in a way that either magnifies or minimizes the size of the disputed issues. In general, 'here-now-this' conflicts, which are localized in terms of particular, delimited actions and their consequences, are much easier to resolve constructively than conflicts that are defined in terms of principles, precedents or rights, where the issues transcend time and space and are generalized beyond the specific action to personalities, groups, races or other large social units or categories. Thus, when a quarrel starts to center on personalities or group membership rather than on specific actions, it usually takes a nonproductive turn. Similarly, when a discussion focuses on rights or principles rather than on what is specifically taking place at a given time and locale, it is not likely to be fruitful. Thus, in the Cuban missile crisis, neither the United States nor the Soviet Union would have been ready to negotiate about a fundamental principle such as 'freedom' or 'communism.' Notwithstanding, they were able to negotiate about the much smaller, more focused, and specific issue of the location of seventy-two weapon systems.

**Issue Rigidity** The perceived lack of satisfactory alternatives or substitutes for the methods of achieving the outcomes or for the actual outcomes initially at stake in the conflict makes for issue rigidity. Sometimes, motivational and intellectual limitations may lead the parties to perceive issues more rigidly than reality dictates so that they freeze themselves into 'positions' (Fisher and Ury, 1981). However, it is also evident that a harsh reality may very much limit the possibility of finding acceptable substitutes and narrowly restrict the possibilities open to the conflicting parties. If there is insufficient food, shelter, clothing, medicine or anything else required for physical and psychological survival, conflict over such necessities will often take on a desperate quality.

Issue rigidity is determined not only by the psychological and environmental resources available to the conflicting parties but also by the nature of the issue. Certain issues are less conducive to conflict resolution than others. 'Greater power over the other,' 'victory over the other,' 'having more status than the other' are rigid definitions of conflict, since it is impossible on any given issue for each party in conflict to have outcomes that are superior to the other's.

**Centrality of the Issues** Any issue that infringes upon something considered to be vital to security, physical well-being, socioeonomic position, self-esteem or defense against anxiety is central. The more central an issue is considered to be, the more likely it is to be viewed as an important or large issue and the more apt it is to be defined as a rigid one. Thus conflicts over issues that are considered to be central by both sides are often the most irreconcilable ones. The centrality of an issue is determined not only by the substantive significance of the issue, or by what values are perceived to be at stake, but also by one's perceived vulnerability. The more vulnerable a party considers itself to be in a given area, the more likely it is that it will view an issue bearing upon that area as central.

**The Orientation of the Parties to the Conflict**
I have distinguished three basic types of motivational orientations to a conflict (Deutsch, 1973): cooperative – the party has a positive interest in the welfare of the other as well as its own; individualistic – the party has an interest in doing as well as it can for itself and is unconcerned about the welfare of the other; and competitive – the party has an interest in doing better than the other as well as doing as well as it can for itself. Since each of two parties can have any one of the three basic orientations, nine (3×3) combinations of orientations are theoretically possible. However, research (Deutsch, 1973; Kelly and Stahelski, 1970) as well as theory (Deutsch, 1982) suggest that only reciprocal combinations are stable and that nonreciprocal combinations tend to move in the direction of mutual competition if either party has a competitive orientation. Research results also suggest than an individualistically oriented dyad will move toward either mutual cooperation or mutual competition depending upon which is favored by external circumstances and situational facilities.

A 'dual concern' model of motivational orientation has been articulated by many theorists (such as Blake et al., 1964; Cosier and Ruble, 1981; Pruitt and Rubin, 1986; Thomas, 1976). The dual concerns are 'concern for self' and 'concern for the other'; the two concerns are considered to be independent; each can range from
'low' to 'high.' Cooperativeness is associated with high concern for self and other; accommodativeness with low concern for self and high for other; competitiveness with high concern for self and low for other; and conflict avoidance with low concern for both. Presumably there would be little conflict when there is little concern for self (as in 'avoidance' or 'accommodativeness') and, hence, the two major orientations to conflict in the dual concern model would be cooperativeness and competitiveness.

The effects of these two major motivational orientations on conflict processes have been studied extensively (see Deutsch, 1973, for a summary). As indicated earlier in this section, cooperative orientations generally lead to cooperative or constructive processes of conflict resolution. In contrast, a competitive orientation usually leads to a competitive conflict process which has the following characteristics.

1 Communication between the parties is unreliable and impoverished. Available communication channels and opportunities are either not utilized or used to try to mislead or intimidate. Little confidence is placed in information obtained directly from the other party; espionage and other circuitous means of obtaining information are relied upon. The poor communication enhances the possibility of error and misinformation of the sort likely to reinforce preexisting orientations and expectations. Thus, the ability of one party to notice and respond to shifts away from a win-lose orientation by the other party becomes impaired.

2 The conflict stimulates the view that the solution can only be imposed by one side or the other through superior force, deception or cleverness. The enhancement of one’s own and the minimization of the other’s power become objectives. The attempt by each party to create or maintain a power difference favorable to its own side tends to expand the scope of the conflict from a focus on the immediate issue to a conflict over the power to impose one’s preference upon the other.

3 The competitive conflict leads to a suspicious, hostile attitude that increases sensitivity to differences and threats while minimizing awareness of similarities. This, in turn, makes the usually accepted norms of conduct and morality less applicable. It permits behavior that would be considered outrageous if directed toward someone like oneself. Since neither side is likely to grant moral superiority to the other, the conflict is likely to escalate as one side or the other engages in behavior morally outrageous to the other.

The Characteristics of the Conflicting Parties

Social scientists have written extensively about the factors within parties that determine their predispositions to be prejudiced or fair-minded and to engage in destructive or prosocial forms of social behavior. This literature is too extensive to summarize here. However, a brief perspective on it will be presented which represents a growing consensus among psychologists studying the relationship between personality and social behavior (Snyder and Ickes, 1985).

The once dominant dispositional approach which seeks to understand social behavior in terms of relatively stable traits, dispositions and other propensities that reside within individuals is now considered to have a limited usefulness. Such an approach typically focuses on one or more enduring predispositions of the following types: motivational tendencies (for example, aggression, power, pride, fear); character traits (for example, authoritarianism, machiavellianism, locus of control, dogmatism); cognitive tendencies (for example, cognitive simplicity versus complexity, the 'open' versus 'closed' system); values and ideologies (for example, egalitarianism–nongalitarianism, cooperative–competitive, traditional–modern); self-conceptions and bases of self-esteem; and learned habits and skills of coping. Thus, some scholars have sought to explain destructive conflict in terms of an inborn or acquired need for aggression; others have emphasized the power motive or pride; still others have stressed ‘black-and-white’ thinking; while others have employed ideologies and self-conceptions as the basis of their explanations. Although there is evidence for some consistency in social behavior across different types of situations (see Epstein, 1979), the evidence more strongly indicates that people, groups, and nations behave rather differently under different circumstances (see Mischel and Peake, 1982).

The now dominant approach to explaining social behavior is one that seeks to understand its regularities in terms of the interacting, reciprocally influencing contributions of both situational and dispositional determinants. There are several well-supported theses in this approach (see Snyder and Ickes, 1985), which I summarize as follows.

1 Individuals vary from one another considerably in terms of whether they manifest consistencies of personality in their social behavior across situations. For example, those who monitor and regulate their behavioral choices on the basis of situational information show relatively little consistency (see Snyder, 1979), as do those who report a relatively low degree of private self-consciousness (Scheier et al., 1978).

2 Some situations have 'strong' characteristics and, in these, little individual variation in behavior occurs despite differences in
individual traits (Ickes, 1982; Mischel, 1977), while other situations with weak characteristics permit the play of individual differences.

3 Some situations evoke dispositions because they are seen to be relevant to it, make it salient as a guide to behavior, and permit modes of behaving that are differentially responsive to individual differences in it (Bem and Lenney, 1976); other situations lacking these characteristics will not encourage the manifestation of a disposition.

4 Some situations evoke self-focusing tendencies which make predispositions salient to the self and, as a consequence, a more influential determinant of behavior than in situations where such a self-focus is not evoked (Brockner, 1979; Duval and Wicklund, 1972, 1973; Scheier et al., 1981).

5 There appears to be a tendency for a congruence between personal dispositions and situational strategies (Deutsch, 1982) such that persons with given dispositions tend to seek out types of social situations that fit their dispositions and persons tend to mold their dispositions to fit the situation which they find difficult to leave or to alter (Snyder and Ickes, 1985). For a characterization of the nature of the cognitive, motivational and moral orientations or dispositions that are congruent with the basic types of social relations (defined by their location on the following four dimensions: cooperative vs competitive; egalitarian vs nonegalitarian; social-emotional vs task-oriented; formal vs informal), see Deutsch (1982, 1985).

This more complex model of the reciprocally influencing, interacting contributions of situational and dispositional determinants of social behavior suggests a continuing reciprocal influence between the internal states and characteristics of the conflicting parties and their external conflict. That is, the causal arrow goes in both directions between internal characteristics and external conflict rather than simply from internal characteristics to the nature of the conflict process. This is also why parties in an extended conflict process, whether cooperative or competitive, often tend to become mirror images in some respects (Bronfenbrenner, 1961).

The internal needs of the conflicting parties may require a conflictual relationship and, in turn, a conflictual relationship may generate needs within the parties that further perpetuate the conflict. Thus, there are many kinds of internal needs for which a hostile external relationship can be an outlet:

(a) It may provide an acceptable excuse for internal problems; the problems can be held out as caused by the adversary or by the need to defend against the adversary.

(b) It may provide a distraction so internal problems appear less salient.

(c) It can provide an opportunity to express pent-up hostility arising from internal conflict through combat with the external adversary.

(d) It may enable one to project disapproved aspects of oneself (which are not consciously recognized) onto the adversary and to attack them through attack on the adversary.

(e) It may permit important parts of one's self — including attitudes, skills and defenses developed during conflictual relations in one's formative stages — to be expressed and valued because the relations with the present adversary resemble earlier conflictual relations; and so on.

Parties to a conflict also frequently get committed to perpetuating the conflict by the investments they have made in conducting the conflict. Thus, for example, in explaining his opposition to an American proposal shortly before Pearl Harbor, Prime Minister Tojo said that the demand that Japan withdraw its troops from China was unacceptable:

We sent a large force of one million men [to China] and it has cost us well over 100,000 dead and wounded, [the grief of] their bereaved families, hardships for four years, and a national expenditure of several tens of billions of yen. We must by all means get satisfactory results from this. (Quoted in Jervis, 1976: 398)

Similarly, there is considerable evidence to suggest that those who have acquired power, profit, prestige, jobs, knowledge or skills during the course of conflict may feel threatened by the diminution or ending of conflict.

Misjudgements and Misperceptions
Impoverished communication, hostile attitudes, and oversensitivity to differences — typical effects of competition — lead to distorted views that may intensify and perpetuate conflict; other distortions commonly occur in the course of interaction. Elsewhere (Deutsch, 1962, 1965), I have described some of the common sources of misperception in interactional situations. More recently, cognitive psychologists have extensively investigated the biases and heuristics which may adversely affect perception and judgment (for summaries, see Jervis, 1976; Kahneman et al., 1982; Markus and Zajonc, 1985; Nisbett and Ross, 1980).

Errors in perception and thought interfere with communication, make empathy difficult and impair problem-solving. Psychologists can provide a check list of the common forms of misperception and
misjudgement occurring during intense conflict. Such a list would include: perceiving something out of its context; autistic hostility; self-fulfilling prophecies; egocentric, groupcentric, ethnocentric and nationalistic self-serving biases; black–white thinking, including demonizing the other; shortening of one’s time perspective; narrowing of one’s range of perceived options; the fundamental attribution error; pluralistic ignorance; false consensus; confirming one’s expectations or preconceptions. In addition, there are common biases related to making inferences from the selective processing of information such as overemphasizing the importance of information that is easily available, the basis of first impressions, vivid and negative.

It is impossible to discuss here more than a few of the processes involved in misperception and misjudgement. I select four: perceiving things out of context; self-serving biases; self-fulfilling prophecies; and the fundamental attribution error.

Perceiving Things Out of Context The perception of any act is determined by both the perception of the act itself and the context within which it occurs. The context of a social act often is not obvious, whereupon we tend to assume a familiar context—one that seems likely in terms of our own past experience. Since both the present situation and the past experience of actor and perceiver may be rather different, it is not surprising that the two will interpret the same act quite differently. Misunderstandings of this sort are very likely, of course, when an actor and perceiver come from different cultural backgrounds and are not fully informed about these differences. A period of rapid social change also makes misunderstandings widespread as the gap between past and present widens.

Self-Serving Biases Most people and groups are more strongly motivated to hold a positive view of themselves than to hold such a view of others; a bias toward perceiving one’s own behavior as being the more benevolent and legitimate is not surprising. This is a simple restatement of a well-demonstrated psychological truth, namely, that the evaluation of an act is affected by the evaluation of its source—and the source is part of the context of behavior. Research has shown, for example, that American students are likely to rate more favorably an action of the United States directed toward the Soviet Union than the same action directed by the Soviet Union toward the United States.

If each side in a conflict tends to perceive its own motives and behavior as the more benevolent and legitimate, it is evident that the conflict will intensify. If A perceives its actions as a benevolent, legitimate way of interfering with actions that B has no right to engage in, A will be surprised by the intensity of B’s hostile response and will have to escalate its counteraction to negate B’s response. But how else is B likely to act if it perceives its own actions as well motivated? And how unlikely is it not to respond to A’s escalation with counterescalation if it is capable of doing so?

To the extent that there is a biased perception of benevolence and legitimacy, one could also expect that there will be a parallel bias in what is considered to be an equitable agreement for resolving conflict: should not differential legitimacy be differentially rewarded? The biased perception of what is a fair compromise makes agreement more difficult and thus extends conflict.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecies Merton, in his classic ‘The self-fulfilling prophecy’ (in Merton, 1957), has pointed out that distortions are often perpetuated because they may evoke new behavior that makes the originally false conception come true. The specious validity of the self-fulfilling prophecy perpetuates a reign of error. The prophet will cite the actual course of events as proof that he was right from the very beginning.

The dynamics of the self-fulfilling prophecy help to explain individual pathology—for example, the anxious student who, afraid he might fail, worries so much that he cannot study, with the consequence that he does fail. It also contributes to our understanding of social pathology—for example, how prejudice and discrimination against blacks keep them in a position that seems to justify the prejudice and discrimination.

So, too, in international relations. If two conflicting nations believe that war is likely and either side attempts to increase its military security vis-à-vis the other, the other side’s response will justify the initial move. The dynamics of an arms race has the inherent quality of folie à deux, wherein the self-fulfilling prophecies mutually reinforce one another. As a result, both sides are right to think that the other is provocative, dangerous, and malevolent. Each side, however, is blind to how its own policies and behavior contribute to the development of the other’s hostility. If each could recognize its own part in maintaining the vicious spiral, it could lead to a reduction of mutual recrimination and an increase in mutual problem-solving.

The Fundamental Attribution Error This error is identified as a tendency in causal attribution for observers to assign greater responsibility for the outcomes of actions to actors rather than to situations (Jones and Nisbett, 1972). In contrast, actors tend to
assign greater responsibility to situations rather than to themselves; this is particularly the case for negative events. Thus, people have the tendency to attribute the aggressive action of the other to the other's personality while attributing one's own aggressive actions to external circumstance (such as the other's hostile actions). It is evident that this type of bias in attribution is apt to escalate conflict.

There are, of course, other types of processes leading to misperceptions and misjudgements. In addition to distortions arising from pressures for self-consistency and dissonance reduction (see Jervis, 1976), intensification of conflict may induce stress and tension beyond a moderate optimal level, and this overactivation, in turn, may lead to an impairment of perceptual and cognitive processes in several ways. It may reduce the range of perceived alternatives; it may reduce the time perspective in such a way as to cause a focus on the immediate rather than the overall consequences of the perceived alternatives; it may polarize thought so that percepts will tend to take on a simplistic black-or-white, for-or-against, good-or-evil cast; it may lead to stereotyped responses; it may increase the susceptibility to fear- or hope-inciting rumors; it may increase defensiveness; it may increase the pressures for social conformity. In effect, excessive tension reduces the intellectual resources available for discovering new ways of coping with a problem or new ideas for resolving a conflict. Intensification of conflict is the likely result, as simplistic thinking and polarization of thought push the participants to view their alternatives as being limited to victory or defeat.

There are three basic ways to reduce the misjudgements and misperceptions that typically occur during the course of conflict. They are not mutually exclusive. One method entails making explicit the assumptions and evidence which underlie one's perceptions and judgements. Then, one would examine how likely these were to have been influenced by any of the common sources of misperception and misjudgement and how reliable and valid they would be considered by an objective outsider – for example, as in a court of law.

A second method entails bringing in outsiders to see whether their judgements and perceptions of the situation are in agreement or disagreement with one's own. They may have different vantage points, different sources of information and more objectivity which would enable them to recognize errors of judgement and misperceptions developing from enmeshment in the conflict. The outsiders should have the independence to ensure that they are free to form their own views and the stature to be able to communicate them so that they will be heard.

When the nature of the conflict is such that the employment of objective outsiders is not feasible, the use of internal 'devil's advocates' has been recommended (George, 1972; Janis, 1972) as a way of challenging the assumptions and evidence underlying one's perceptions and judgements. Here, too, it is important that the devil's advocates be sufficiently independent and prestigious to present hard challenges to conventional views in a way that cannot be ignored.

Processes Involved in the Perpetuation and Escalation of Conflict

Some conflicts appear to take on a life of their own. They continue even though the issues which initially gave rise to them have long been forgotten or become irrelevant. Other conflicts are like malignant tumors; they grow out of control and enmesh the conflict participants in a web of hostile interactions and defensive manoeuvres which continuously worsen their situations, making them feel less secure, more vulnerable, and more burdened. I have identified a number of the key elements which contribute to the development and perpetuation of a malignant process (Deutsch, 1983). They include (a) an anarchic social situation, (b) a win-lose or competitive orientation, (c) inner conflicts (within each of the parties) that express themselves through external conflict, (d) cognitive rigidity, (e) misjudgements and misperceptions, (f) unwitting commitments, (g) self-fulfilling prophecies, (h) vicious escalating spirals and (i) a gamesmanship orientation which turns the conflict away from issues of what in real life is being won or lost to an abstract conflict over images of power.

In previous sections I have touched on many of these elements. Here, I wish to elaborate briefly on anarchic social situations and unwitting commitments.

The Anarchic Social Situation

There is a kind of situation which does not allow the possibility of 'rational' behavior so long as the conditions for social order or mutual trust do not exist. A characteristic symptom of such 'nonrational situations' is that an attempt on the part of an individual or nation to increase its own welfare or security without regard to the security or welfare of others is self-defeating.

Consider, for example, the United States' decision to develop and test the hydrogen bomb in the effort to maintain military superiority over the USSR rather than to work for an agreement to ban testing of the H-bomb and, thus, prevent a spiraling arms race involving this monstrous weapon (Bundy, 1982). This US decision led the
Soviet Union to attempt to catch up. Soon both superpowers were
stockpiling H-bombs in a nuclear arms race. United States leaders
believed that if the Soviets had been the first to develop the H-
bomb, they would have tested it and sought to reap the advantages
from doing so. They were probably right. Both sides are aware of
the temptations for each to increase security ‘by getting ahead.’ The
fear of ‘falling behind’ as well as the temptation to ‘get ahead’ lead
to a pattern of interactions that increases insecurity for both sides.

Such situations, which are captured by the Prisoners’ Dilemma
Game, have been extensively studied by myself (Deutsch, 1958,
1973) and other social scientists (see Alker and Hurwitz, 1981,
for a comprehensive discussion). When confronted with such social
dilemmas, the only way an individual or nation can avoid being
trapped in mutually reinforcing, self-defeating cycles is to attempt
to change the situation so a basis of social order or mutual trust can
be developed.

Unwitting Commitments In a malignant social process, the parties
not only become overcommitted to rigid positions, but also become
committed, unwittingly, to the beliefs, defenses, and investments
involved in carrying out their conflictual activities. The conflict,
then, is maintained and perpetuated by the commitments and
investments given rise to by the malignant conflict process itself.
Within limits, the more costly the actions you take based on your
beliefs, the greater the need to reduce any prior-to-action doubts
that you may have had about your beliefs (Festinger, 1957). Jervis
(1976: 405) has an excellent, detailed discussion with many illustra-
tions from international conflict of how the need to reduce cognitive
dissonance will ‘introduce an unintended and unfortunate con-
tinuity in policy.’

One of the characteristics of a pathological defense mechanism is
that it is perpetuated by its failures rather than by its successes in
protecting security. An individual might, for example, attempt to
defend him-/herself from feeling like a failure by not really trying,
attributing failure to lack of effort rather than lack of ability. The
result is that the person does not succeed and does not quell
anxieties and doubts about the ability to succeed. As a conse-
quence, when again faced with a situation of being anxious about
failing, the individual will resort to the same defense of ‘not trying’;
it provides temporary relief of anxiety even as it perpetuates the
need for the defense, since the individual has cut him-/herself off
from the possibility of success.

So too, the defenses that emerge during the course of conflict can
perpetuate themselves and the conflict. Thus, suppose a nation,
because it is suspicious of another nation and its intentions, defends
itself by limiting the amount of dissidence that can be expressed
internally. The repression of dissidence does not permit grievances
to be expressed and makes it less likely that the necessary changes
to reduce discontent will occur. As a consequence, discontent and
dissidence may grow, and there will be a need for the continued use
of the defense of repression.

Although many individuals, groups, and nations appear to get
embroiled in malignant conflict processes, little is known about how
to undo such processes. They are, undoubtedly, easier to prevent
than to cure.

The Skills Involved in Constructive Solutions to Conflict
Third parties (mediators, conciliators, process consultants, ther-
pists, counselors, and so on) who are called upon to provide
assistance in a conflict in which the conflicting parties need help to
resolve their conflict constructively require four kinds of skills. The
first set of skills are those related to the third party’s establishing
an effective working relationship with each of the conflicting parties
so that they will trust the third party, communicate freely with her
and be responsive to her suggestions regarding an orderly process
for negotiations (see Folberg and Taylor, 1984; Kressel, 1985;
Kressel and Pruitt, 1985; Rubin, 1980). The second are those
related to establishing a cooperative problem-solving attitude
among the conflicting parties toward their conflict. Much of the
preceding discussion in this chapter indirectly focuses on this area;
this is elaborated more fully in Deutsch (1973). Third are the skills
involved in developing a creative group process and group decision-
making. Such a process clarifies the nature of the problems that the
conflicting parties are confronting, helps to expand the range of
alternatives that are perceived to be available, facilitates realistic
assessment of their feasibility as well as desirability and facilitates
the implementation of agreed-upon solutions (see Blake and
Mouton, 1984; Fisher and Ury, 1981; Janis and Mann, 1977;
Zander, 1982). And, fourth, it is often helpful for the third party
to have considerable substantive knowledge about the issues around
which the conflict centers. Substantive knowledge could enable the
mediator to see possible solutions that might not occur to the
conflicting parties and it could permit her to help them assess
proposed solutions more realistically.

Participants in a conflict need skills and orientations similar to
those of a skilled mediator if they are to develop constructive
solutions to their conflicts. They need the skills involved in estab-
ishing a cooperative, problem-solving relationship with the other,
in developing a creative group process which expands the options available for resolving their conflict, and they need the ability to look at their conflict from an outside perspective so that they do not get ensnared in the many unproductive or destructive traps which abound in conflicts.

In recent years, many workshops and programs for training people in the skills of constructive conflict resolution have emerged. Training has taken place with negotiators, managers in industry and government, married couples having problems and school children. Many self-help books have been published (see Weiss, 1983, for a review of a number of well-known ones). Centers and institutes of training and research in conflict resolution have been established at a considerable number of universities. All of this is in response to a strong worldwide need for more knowledge about how to prevent destructive conflict and how to encourage constructive controversy. As a theoretician-researcher who has tried to develop some of this knowledge, as an educator who has tried to develop a framework for teaching conflict-resolution skills (Deutsch, 1988), and as a teacher who has tried to teach such skills, I am concerned that there is relatively little research being done on the effectiveness of what we are teaching.

Some Suggestions for Research

Although conflict has been a fascinating topic for philosophers and historians as well as religious and governmental leaders throughout recorded history, the systematic study of conflict and conflict processes is of recent vintage. This area was not identified as a field of scholarship, as such, until after World War II, even though scholarly work on conflict in many disciplines occurred earlier. The brief existence of this field of study means that no research questions have yet been fully answered and many have not yet been asked. This is true for all the topics discussed in this chapter as well as for the many that were not mentioned. There is still much need for unguided basic research by imaginative investigators to help map the field and to identify its key characteristics.

Possibly even more fundamental than mapping the field would be research to establish to what extent the study of conflict is a coherent field. Like many other scholars working in this area, I have assumed that there are conflict processes and variables that affect the courses and outcomes of conflict which cut across the various behavioral and social sciences. We have assumed that, although there are many different types of conflicts, it is possible to develop theories which can be applied to a wide range of disputes. But are such assumptions valid? Is it theoretically and empirically useful, for example, to discuss cooperative and competitive processes when considering intergroup and internation as well as interpersonal relations? Do nations as well as people make misperceptions and misjudgments in the course of their conflicts? Even beginning to think clearly about whether such questions are answerable and, if so, how they could be answered, raises fundamental issues about the conceptual linkages as well as the empirical differences among the various behavioral and social science disciplines concerned with conflict. In terms of theoretically oriented research, I consider this topic to be the one with the highest priority.

In terms of research which is important to do for both theoretical and practical reasons, I would select three topics of high priority: study of the process involved in malignant conflicts and how such conflicts can be prevented or aborted; investigation of the conditions under which different forms and methods of third-party intervention are effective in helping conflicting parties to deal constructively with difficult disputes; and research on the effectiveness of different methods of teaching the knowledge, attitudes and skills which promote constructive conflict resolution. Each of these topics is discussed briefly below.

In an earlier section of this chapter and elsewhere (Deutsch, 1983), I have characterized the nature of malignant conflicts and have tried to identify some of the processes involved in such conflicts. Other scholars (such as Brockner and Rubin, 1985; Kriesberg, 1984; Patchen, 1987; Pruitt and Rubin, 1986; Smoke, 1977) have discussed insightfully the processes involved in the escalation of conflict. Yet it is evident that we are a long way from having the comprehensive understanding of the processes necessary to make constructive suggestions about how to prevent, abort or deescalate such conflicts. Such conflicts cause much damage and suffering to the participants whether the conflict is at the interpersonal level as manifested in family violence, at the intergroup level as expressed in communal violence (for example, between the Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland), or at the international level as in wars (for example, between Iraq and Iran, between the Arab states and Israel). Research and theorizing should be directed at helping to identify and characterize different stages in escalating conflicts, to specifying the symptoms and signs of the onset of transitions from one stage to another. Such research might lead to greater understanding of when and how to prevent or abort an escalation. We also need to go beyond Osgood's (1962) proposal for deescalating conflicts: GRRT (the graduated reciprocation in tension-reduction). Although the proposal clearly has merit
It also needs further elaboration and qualification through systematic research. Mediation, conciliation, arbitration, problem-solving, workshops, counseling, and other forms of intervention into conflict are widespread. There is increasing reliance upon these alternative dispute resolution procedures because the courts are overcrowded and inaccessible, legal procedures for handling disputes are costly and often raise the level of contentiousness between the parties, and there is a sense that better resolutions of conflicts can be obtained through the use of alternative dispute resolution procedures. However, as Kressel (1985) has indicated, there have been few good research studies comparing the outcome of mediation with other forms of third-party intervention such as court decisions or arbitration. There are even fewer which study the comparative effects of different approaches to mediation. Although the little research that has been done in this area (see Pruitt and Kressel, 1985, for a summary) suggests that the outcomes from mediation are more satisfactory than those obtained from courts, the research also indicates that those who seek mediation rather than a court decision have 'easier' conflicts to deal with — for example, they are less predisposed to a competitive struggle than those who want to battle it out in court. Yet it is evident that it would be of considerable social utility if research could help identify the conditions and methods of third-party intervention that are likely to be helpful in difficult conflict situations.

In recent years, there has been a rapid expansion of workshops and courses devoted to helping people at all ages, in varied occupations, at high and low status levels, to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes which would make them more effective in dealing with their conflicts at work, at school, or in the home. A number of different curricula have been developed for teaching conflict resolution to children from kindergarten through high school. So far as I know, there has been little systematic research on these efforts. Yet clearly there is need for research to answer a host of relevant questions, such as: Are there people who are relatively 'better' or 'worse' than others in dealing with conflicts across varied situations of conflict or does an individual's effectiveness in managing conflict vary greatly from situation to situation? How is conflict effectiveness to be defined and measured? If there are systematic variations in effectiveness among individuals across situations, what are those variations due to — differences in knowledge, attitudes, or behavioral skills related to conflict? How can these differences be measured validly and reliably? At what age levels is it appropriate to begin what sort of training? Is it ever too late to train people? What techniques of training are most effective, about what, with whom? These and many other questions require answering if we are to have the systematic knowledge that would enable effective training in conflict resolution.

Let me conclude this chapter by stating that I believe there has been significant progress in the study of conflict since this area emerged as a field of scholarship. However, the progress does not yet begin to match the social need for understanding conflict. Given the increasing destructiveness of the instruments available for use in destructive conflict, the social need for better ways of managing conflict is urgent. In relation to this need, too few social scientists are working, and receiving support for work, on the scientific issues which are likely to provide the knowledge that may lead to more constructive conflict resolution of the many conflicts which await us all.

References


New directions in conflict theory


