

Managing Interpersonal Conflict

Advances Through Meta-Analysis

Edited by

**Nancy A. Burrell, Mike Allen,
Barbara Mae Gayle, and
Raymond W. Preiss**



Routledge Communication Series

MANAGING INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT

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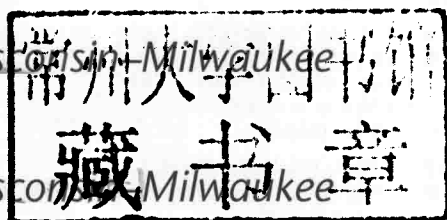
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MANAGING INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT

Managing Interpersonal Conflict is a systematic review of conflict research in legal, institutional and relational contexts. Each chapter represents a summary of the existing quantitative social science research using meta-analysis, with contexts ranging from jury selection to peer mediation to homophobia reduction. The contributors provide connections between cutting-edge scholarship about abstract theoretical arguments, the needs of instructional and training pedagogy and practical applications of information. The meta-analysis approach produces a unique informational resource, offering answers to key research questions addressing conflict.

This volume serves as an invaluable resource for studying conflict, mediation, negotiation and facilitation in coursework; implementing and planning training programs; designing interventions; creating workshops; and conducting studies of conflict.

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- Allen et al: *Interpersonal Communication Research: Advances Through Meta-Analysis*

PREFACE

This edited collection began several years ago while working with graduate students who needed help with their theses and ideas for their comprehensive exams. What could be more interesting than how we engage in conflict? Why do spouses make demands and their partners withdraw from the conversation? Is it important to account for our relational transgressions? Does the size of a jury impact its decision making? This edited collection centers on these questions and many more. Most of my research, teaching and community service has centered on managing interpersonal conflict. I have worked with school systems, small businesses, community mediation centers, non profits, families, neighbors, friends, colleagues and just about everyone was interested in managing their interpersonal conflicts. Moreover, I have spent the past 25 years working in the field of dispute management. I use management rather than resolution because more often than not our disputes are never totally resolved, but we can move on because we have addressed our major concerns and let go of the minor issues. In short, we can manage our conflicts but not always resolve them.

The interesting thing about conflict is that we never feel overly prepared, masterfully competent or even positive about the forthcoming interaction with our supervisors, colleagues, neighbors, family members or significant others. My point here is that conflict is everywhere, and while our preference more often than not is to avoid it, we ultimately learn to manage our disputes.

The book is divided into four sections. The first section overviews our writing and thinking about interpersonal conflict, examining both theory and practice. Because every chapter is a meta-analysis, this first section describes the process of how to conduct a meta-analytic review. What I have come to appreciate about this process is its importance. In short, the various authors have synthesized a great deal of research so that the reader has a summary of the results across many studies.

The first section creates a kind of roadmap through the field of conflict research and theory.

The second section of the book examines how interpersonal conflict is managed in legal contexts. We are fortunate to have a legal system that can help us to address sexual harassment, divorce and environmental disputes. We also have formal and informal mediation processes that keep us from long protracted disputes that tap our financial and emotional resources. The meta-analyses in this section examine juries as they make decisions based on their size, how sexual harassment might be addressed in organizations, the effectiveness of victim-offender mediation, the satisfaction with the mediation process of divorcing parents and the implementation of environmental mediation to settle multiple-party disputes.

The third section of this book focuses on how we address conflict in both public and private organizations at the community, workplace and international levels. Mediation in school settings was extremely popular in the 1970s and 1980s. Educators, parents and students embraced the mediation process as it taught students how to problem solve, communicate with one another and appreciate collaborative school environments. Two of the chapters in this section examine the process of negotiation, the effectiveness of threats versus promises and being a hard versus soft bargainer. Another chapter is situated in the workplace and examines how gender impacts our respective conflict styles. Our chapter on international mediation describes and conducts an initial test of the SAT model. In short, this section addresses conflict management in both public and private contexts (e.g., schools, workplace, international).

Finally, the fourth section looks at managing conflict in personal relationships. Topics addressed in this section include account giving, condom use, techniques for reducing homophobia and demand/withdraw interaction patterns. Conflict is a process that occurs not only at an organizational level but impacts relationships between individuals. The understanding of the process of managing conflict in personal relationships may prove difficult but very valuable for improving the quality of life for individuals.

This edited collection would never have occurred without the help of our numerous contributors. My coeditors, Mike Allen, Barbara Gayle and Ray Preiss worked patiently and tirelessly on this project. Finally, a huge thank you goes to Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group and our senior editorial assistant, Julia Samaritano. I am forever grateful to everyone who moved this project forward. Clearly, managing our interpersonal conflict is a lifelong journey that rewards, punishes, challenges and renews our collective spirits. Thank you one and all!

—Nancy A. Burrell

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