Negotiation in International Relations, Cooperation and Peacebuilding - Teaching Materials

Welcome to Module 01 of the course Cultural Styles of Negotiation and Protocol in Asia. This is a highly interactive course that will equip you with the skills and knowledge necessary to negotiate successfully. You will learn about different negotiation techniques and how these can help you adapt to difficult contexts. For that, you will dive into a three-weeks-long negotiation case. You will also explore the impact of culture, with a focus on Asian contexts.



Theis a print version of the web-based materials. Check sociologiauva.notion.site to access the updated, interactive materials.

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C-01 - Introduction to Conflict

Welcome to the teaching materials on negotiation and mediation in international relations. Through this course, you will learn essential methods, techniques, and principles for navigating complex negotiations in international contexts. While the primary focus is on social and diplomatic scenarios—from bilateral agreements to multilateral treaty negotiations—the skills you develop are highly transferable to business, legal, environmental, and humanitarian fields.

You'll explore both theoretical frameworks and practical strategies, examining real-world case studies that illustrate how cultural awareness, power dynamics, and communication styles shape negotiation outcomes. By the end of this course, you'll be equipped with tools to analyze conflict situations, design negotiation strategies, and facilitate productive dialogue across diverse international settings.

Introduction

Conflict: the very word often evokes negative associations—hostility, competition, destruction. Students frequently connect conflict with feelings of anxiety, anger, stress, and hopelessness. Yet, paradoxically, conflict is the lifeblood of negotiation. Without conflict, there would be nothing to negotiate.

This chapter explores the definition of conflict, examines various conflict styles, and demonstrates how a nuanced understanding of conflict is crucial for effective negotiation.

Objectives

- 1. Define conflict accurately, distinguishing it from related concepts such as disagreement, competition, and violence.
- 2. Explain the multifaceted nature of conflict, including its potential positive and negative aspects, and challenge common misconceptions about conflict as being inherently negative or destructive.

1. Common myths around conflict

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Few concepts are as present in our daily lives as conflict, from everyday disagreements with friends and family to large-scale conflict between nations. As the psychologist Anatol Rapoport observes, "conflict is a theme that has occupied the thinking of men more than any other, save only God and love" (Rapoport, 1974, p. 12). Yet, despite its ubiquity, our understanding of conflict is often clouded by misconceptions that can significantly hinder our ability to navigate it effectively, particularly in the context of negotiation.

It's easy to fall into the trap of simplified thinking about conflict. We hear certain phrases and prescribed solutions so often—"you just need to talk it out!"—that we accept them as truths without really examining them. Let's take a closer look at some of the most pervasive and problematic of these "common wisdoms" about conflict, and why you, as an aspiring negotiator, need to be mindful of them (Doucet, 1997; R. Fisher et al., 2011; Hocker & Wilmot, 2018).

Myth 1: Conlict is abnormal

The idea that conflict is an aberration, a disruption of the natural order, is a common one. However, conflict is not an anomaly; it's a normal and inevitable part of human interaction. It arises from genuine differences in interests, values, or access to resources, and does not necessarily imply confrontation. Trying to eliminate conflict entirely is not only unrealistic but also counterproductive, as it prevents us from addressing underlying issues.

Myth 2: Conflict can be resolved with good communication

We strive to get people to "talk to each other" when they face a conflict, assuming that will solve the issue. While poor communication can certainly exacerbate conflict, it's not always the root cause. Conflict can and does occur even when communication is clear and effective—many conflicts deal with profound issues that cannot be addressed as easily as just talking. In these cases, people can understand each other perfectly well and still have fundamentally incompatible goals. Focusing solely on communication as the solution can mask deeper, structural issues and disregard the worries of the conflict parties.

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Not all conflict is just communication

The trade conflict between the United States, on one side, and Canada, Mexico or China, on the other, goes well beyond clear communication.

Myth 3: Conflict and disagreement are the same thing

We often conflate disagreement with conflict, but they are distinct phenomena. Disagreements involve a difference of opinion or perspective that can be handled constructively. Conflict, on the other hand, involves a deeper struggle. You can disagree with someone without being in conflict with them, and you can be in conflict even when you agree on certain points—or if you agree on all points!

New concept: <u>Dispute</u>

To better understand this difference, you need to familiarise yourself with the term **dispute**, which we will explore later.

Myth 4: Conflict participants are mentally unstable

When looking at conflict from the outside, or even when we are faced with conflict ourselves, we tend to see conflict parties as mentally unstable: "oh, she's deranged" or "he's so toxic". The idea that conflict is always a sign of mental instability or dysfunction is a damaging misconception. While there may be a relation between mental health and conflict, conflict itself is not inherently pathological. Framing conflict as a mental illness can stigmatize individuals and discourage them from seeking constructive solutions.

Myth 5: Conflict should be avoided at all costs

This myth emerges from how poorly we understand conflict. Conflict is not always negative; in fact, it can be productive sometimes. While uncontrolled escalation is certainly undesirable, avoiding conflict altogether is not a healthy or productive strategy. That is not to say you should seek conflict, but you should be mindful of the costs of supressing it. Suppressed conflict can fester and erupt later in more destructive ways. Sometimes, engaging with conflict,

even though it's uncomfortable, is necessary to address underlying issues and build stronger relationships.

Myth 6: To avoid conflict, be polite

Politeness plays an important role in social interactions, but it's not a foolproof shield against conflict. People can be polite on the surface while harboring resentment or disagreement underneath. Over-reliance on politeness can actually prevent real issues from being addressed honestly and openly.



New concept: Conflict Styles

To better understand the "trap of politeness", you need to be aware of different conflict styles and cultural norms, and use different approaches as the situation demands. We will explore this in C-03 -The Conflict Transformation Perspective.

Myth 7: No anger, no conflict

Conflict doesn't always manifest as shouting or angry outbursts. It can be much more subtle, expressed through passive-aggressive behavior, withdrawal, or even just a general sense of tension—in fact, deep conflict may be hiding underneath a smile. Failing to recognize these more subtle signs of conflict can lead to missed opportunities for intervention and resolution.



New concept: Conflict Analysis

To better understand the layers of conflict, we will discuss different tools to analyse conflict, in a framework known as Conflict Analysis.

Myth 8: Conflict can be "fixed"

There's no magic bullet for resolving conflict. Each conflict is unique and requires a tailored approach. Thinking that you can simply apply a prepackaged solution or formula is naive and often ineffective. Not one solution will fit all conflicts; instead, solutions will be derived from the context and the parties involved. Consequently, no one can really teach you how to negotiate —we can only teach you techniques and principles that will need to adapt to the reality you are dealing with. Beyond a philosophical discussion, these

myths deeply affect a negotiator's capacity to deal with conflict. Avoiding these misconceptions requires that we understand **what** conflict is, **where** it comes from, and **how** we approach it.

2. So what *is* conflict, then? Towards a definition

The literal definition of conflict, emerging from the Latin "confligiere", refers to a physical collision between two objects. As noted by Bercovitch and colleagues, "[t]his physical sense of two or more bodies moving against each other has been retained by those who offer an empirical definition of conflict" (Bercovitch et al., 2008, p. 4), and in popular culture. As a consequence, "conflict usually has negative connotations", and is used as the "the opposite of co-operation, harmony, accord, or even peace. Within everyday usage it is most closely associated with and often used to mean the same as violence." (Doucet, 1997, p. 177). In everyday language, conflict is frequently used interchangeably with violence. To approach conflict in negotiation, we need a more nuanced understanding. In this course, we will use Hocker & Wilmot's definition:

"Conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals." (Hocker & Wilmot, 2018, p. 3)

There are two key components in this definition:

- Conflict is perceived. It isn't just about objective reality, but also about perception. Sometimes, we *feel* conflict even before it manifests in overt actions.
- Conflict is expressed. It is not merely internal: it surfaces in our thoughts, feelings, and, crucially, our actions. It's not just what we think, but how those thoughts influence our behavior.

At this point, we must consider some important distinctions: latent vs manifest conflict; intrapersonal vs interpersonal conflict; and conflict vs dispute.

Latent vs Manifest conflict (Doucet, 1997)

Conflict can be hidden (latent) or visible (manifest). Latent conflict exists beneath the surface, in perceptions and unspoken tensions. It can also be

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structural, such as in cases of deep social inequality. It often takes a trigger—a specific event or action—to bring it into the open, turning it into manifest conflict. Triggers can be personal (an insult), cultural (a violation of norms), contextual (a change in economic conditions), or simply a matter of accumulated stress reaching a breaking point.

New concept: <u>Trigger</u>

A **trigger** is an event that makes latent conflict surface, turning it into manifest conflict. Triggers can be personal (insults, attacks, behaviours), cultural (norms that are broken, values that are threatened...), contextual (an increase in negative climate conditions, a worsening economy), or simply due to saturation.

Interpersonal vs intrapersonal conflict (Bercovitch et al., 2008)

In addition to being latent or manifest, conflict can be interpersonal (between two or more people) or intrapersonal (with oneself). Intrapersonal conflict involves internal struggles, often as individuals grapple with conflicting values or desires. These two types of conflict are often intertwined. For example, interpersonal conflict with a colleague might trigger intrapersonal conflict as you question your own approach or values, experiencing cognitive dissonance.



New concept: <u>Cognitive Dissonance</u>

Cognitive dissonance is a term coined by the social psychologist Leon Festinger in the 1950s. It refers to a feeling of discomfort when we are faced with contradictory ideas (Festinger, 2011). For instance, if someone you like commits an act that you consider immoral, you may experience cognitive dissonance.

Conflict vs dispute (Spangler & Burgess, 2016)

Lastly, it is important to distinguish between conflicts and disputes. Conflict often refers to deep-rooted, long-term issues that may seem intractable (we will explain this concept later). It's characterized by negative feelings and perceptions that make even the thought of the other party unpleasant.

Disputes, on the other hand, are typically shorter-term, more specific, and more easily addressed through negotiation. Most conflicts are actually composed of multiple, smaller disputes, which pose an opportunity for intervention.

An example of conflict with disputes

In the case of Maria and Eva, seen in class, the two had a longstanding conflict made up of smaller disputes: who cleans the kitchen, who takes out the trash, when should bills be paid... In international relations, conflicts can also include hundreds or smaller disputes: how to deal with border violations, how to access funds, what are the terms of a loan...>

Can you think of conflicts that contain many different disputes in International Relations?

3. Wrapping-up

This chapter explored common myths about conflict and provided a comprehensive definition of what conflict truly is. We learned that conflict is not merely about communication breakdowns or mental instability, but rather an expressed struggle between interdependent parties with perceived incompatible goals. We distinguished between important concepts like latent versus manifest conflict, interpersonal versus intrapersonal conflict, and conflicts versus disputes. Understanding these distinctions and moving beyond common misconceptions is crucial for effective conflict management and negotiation. In the next chapter, we will explore the nature of conflict and some of its possible sources.

C-02 - Understanding conflict in International Relations and your role in it

Introduction

Now that we've defined conflict, it's crucial to understand its origins. How does conflict arise, and what factors contribute to its development? Let's revisit Myth 2: "Conflict can be resolved with good communication." While we've established that communication alone isn't a magic bullet, poor communication is undoubtedly a major source of conflict. Beyond communication, we'll also explore the roles of interdependence and perception, and your own role in conflict.

1. Communication: Positions vs Interests vs Needs

Misunderstandings and misinterpretations are fertile ground for conflict. Unfortunately, **humans are notoriously bad at communicating clearly**. Often, we communicate our positions—what we want—rather than our underlying interests—why we want it. Even deeper lie our needs—the fundamental human requirements that drive our interests. Consider this example of a dispute between work colleagues:

- Position: "I want the corner office."
- Interest: "I want a quiet workspace to concentrate."
- Need: "I need to feel productive and valued."

Now, consider this other example:

- Position: "We must close our borders to migrants."
- Interest: What do you think may be the underlying interests?
- Need: What do you think may be the underlying need here?

As you can see, the same position can stem from very different interests and needs. Until we understand these underlying motivations, it's difficult to find common ground or explore alternative solutions. When we focus only on positions, conflict is likely (R. Fisher et al., 2011). However, exploring the underlying interests and needs can open up possibilities for mutually acceptable solutions. Effective communication involves digging beneath the surface to understand the why behind the what, a key skill for negotiation.

Exploring interests and needs is a challenging task that every negotiator faces.

Not only is it difficult, technically, to "hear" the underlying need, it is also morally difficult. When you're faced with values that are in direct opposition to yours, suspending judgmenet may help you listen more openly (McAllister, 1997). We will discuss this when addressing impartiality in negotiation and mediation.

2. Real incompatibilities: different values and perspectives

While many conflicts stem from misunderstandings, power struggles, or competing interests, some are rooted in fundamental differences in values and worldviews or past grievances. Unlike material interests—such as land, resources, or money—values are deeply embedded in personal and collective identities, making them more difficult to compromise.

Value-based conflicts are particularly difficult to resolve because they challenge a party's core self-identity. A government pushing for strict secularism and a religious community demanding the right to practice freely may not have an immediate "middle ground" that satisfies both sides. Similarly, when personal, group or national identity is at stake, groups may reject concessions that feel like betrayals of their heritage. These conflicts are emotionally charged, deeply personal, and often more resistant to traditional negotiation techniques.

However, managing value-based conflicts does not mean forcing compromise on fundamental beliefs. Instead, effective resolution focuses on coexistence, finding ways for both sides to live with their differences without ongoing conflict. This may involve recognizing and respecting opposing values,

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reframing the debate around practical solutions, or establishing mechanisms for long-term dialogue and trust-building.

3. Interdepence: without interdepence, there is no negotiation

Interdependence is a double-edged sword. It's the very foundation of negotiation, yet it also creates the potential for conflict. As Bercovitch and colleagues (2008, p. 144) and Hocker & Wilmot (2018, p. 5) point out without interdepence, there's no need to negotiate. If you don't rely on another party for something you value, why bother engaging in a potentially difficult conversation? You can simply walk away. However, when we do rely on others—for resources, support, information, or even emotional connection—our goals become intertwined. This interconnectedness, particularly when it's asymmetrical (with parties holding different types or levels of power—economic, military, cultural, etc.), can lead to friction. Differences in priorities, values, or preferred methods create opportunities for conflict to emerge. Paradoxically, it's precisely this interdependence that necessitates negotiation.

In negotiation, you will deal with at least two different types of interdependence:

- Positive interdependence: your chances of achieving your goal are
 positively correlated with the other party's chances of achieving theirs. In
 essence, you're both working towards a shared outcome. This can foster
 collaboration and cooperation.
- Negative interdependence: your chances of achieving your goal are
 negatively correlated with the other party's chances. This is a win-lose
 scenario, where one party's gain is often perceived as the other's loss. This
 type of interdependence can lead to competition and even hostility.

When parties are locked in unproductive negative interdependence, they can find themselves in a gridlocked conflict. Gridlocks are notoriously difficult to resolve because all parties feel trapped in a negative dynamic. Hocker and Wilmot (2018, p. 6) describe the characteristics of gridlock, which include:

- Feelings of rejection by the other party
- Communication that is unproductive and repetitive
- Entrenchment and unwillingness to compromise

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- Increasing frustration and hurt after each interaction
- Absence of humor, amusement, or affection in communication
- Escalating hostility and insults
- Growing polarization and reduced willingness to compromise
- Emotional and/or physical disengagement

Gridlocks highlight the importance of understanding the type of interdependence at play. Recognizing when a situation has devolved into a gridlock is the first step towards finding strategies to break the negative cycle. This might involve reframing the interdependence, focusing on shared goals, or seeking the assistance of a third party mediator.

New concept: <u>Hurting Stalemate</u>

In armed conflict, gridlocks are also known as "hurting stalemates" (Zartman, 2000). We will use Zartman's terminology in following chapters.

4. Perception: feelings can sometimes be facts

Lastly, perception plays a powerful role in shaping conflict. Our feelings about a situation, even if based on subjective interpretations, can become our "facts", blocking all progress. If I perceive that you're undermining me, that perception, regardless of its objective accuracy, will drive my behavior and fuel the conflict. This is not to say that all perceptions are equally valid or that we shouldn't strive for objectivity. However, acknowledging the power of perception is essential for understanding conflict dynamics.

Perception is strongly affected by emotions, and compounds what Fisher, Ury and Patton refer to as the people problem: "[w]e are creatures of strong emotions who often have radically different perceptions and have difficulty communicating clearly. Emotions typically become entangled with the objective merits of the problem." (R. Fisher et al., 2011, Chapter 1). In conflict, parties often hold strong emotions and opinions about their interests and how other parties either help or hinder them. When there's a perception of incompatible needs (either because both parties want the same thing, or because they want

opposing things), parties may develop a feeling of **personal interference**. They may blame the other party personally, preventing them from addressing the conflict constructively.

Consider these examples:

Incompatible needs because parties want the same thing: two departments within a company are competing for the same limited budget. Each department perceives that receiving the larger share is essential for its survival and success. Even if there are objective criteria for budget allocation, perceptions of unfairness or favoritism can fuel conflict.

Incompatible needs because parties want different things: two neighboring countries have conflicting claims over a disputed territory. One country perceives the land as historically theirs and vital for national identity. The other country perceives the land as strategically important and rich in natural resources. These differing perceptions of the land's value create seemingly irreconcilable needs. In both examples, it's not just the objective situation, but how it's perceived by each party, that drives the conflict. It's not about deciding who's "right" and who's "wrong," but about understanding how each party constructs their reality and how those realities clash.

5. Sources of conflict in International Relations

In addition to the above, conflicts in International Relations may emerge from a variety of other sources. This is not meant to be a comprehensive list, but to illustrate the many areas where being equipped with a good understand of conflict, its nature and its process can give you an edge as a negotiator.

5.1. Gender inequality and structural violence against women

Since 2000, the UN Security Council has recognized the unique challenges women and girls face during conflicts through various resolutions (see United States Institute of Peace, 2025). Sadly, we still see gender inequality causing tensions in many societies today. When women face unfair treatment and

barriers to participating in political, economic, and social life, it not only hurts them directly but can create wider problems that affect everyone in society, making it harder to build truly inclusive communities (Close et al., 2020; Hudson et al., 2012; Tielemans, 2015).

Gender inequality is a driver of conflict, it impacts how people *experience* conflict, it "[results] in the use of more severe, gender-specific forms of violence", and it determines the quality and durability of peace agreements (Cohen, 2023, p. 5; Langridge et al., 2018).

Emerging from feminist studies, **gender** goes beyond the traditional division between men and women, while recognising women's crucial role in peace. Peacebuilding organisations like Conciliation Resources have proposed "gender transformative approaches", where men, women and other gender identities are included meaningfully and work together to transform conflict (see Cohen, 2023).



We will discuss the crucial role of women in peace processes once we dive into negotiation.

5.2. Territorial conflict

Historically, disputes over territory have been one of the primary causes of conflict in international relations. Territorial conflicts, such as competing claims over land and resources, are often tied to national identity, historical grievances, and strategic interests. Since land possession is perceived as a vital component of national sovereignty, territorial conflict can lead to prolonged hostilities, and easily become intractable (Valeriano & Vasquez, 2008).



Can you think of recent or current conflicts where territorial disputes have been a driver of conflict?

5.3. Economics and resources

Economic disparities and competition for resources frequently sark conflict. Access to essential resources such as water, oil, and minerals can become contentious, especially when distribution is perceived as unjust or exploitative. Trade disputes (think of current events), economic sanctions, and financial instability further contribute to tensions, making economic policy an essential factor in conflict management (Sjöstedt, 2008).

5.4. Ethnicity and ethno-religious conflict

Ethnic and religious divisions have long been a source of conflict, often exacerbated by historical grievances, political exclusion, and discrimination. Ethnic conflicts frequently emerge when groups perceive threats to their cultural identity, political representation or fundamental values (Deneckere, 2019; Rothchild, 2008).

5.5. Environmental conflict

Environmental issues have become an increasingly prominent source of conflict, particularly as climate change exacerbates resource scarcity. While the link between environmental degradation and conflict has been well-understood for decades (Gleditsch, 1997), we have witnessed an increase in environmental conflict with disputes over water, arable land or energy resources (Lazard, 2022).

5.6. Digital conflict

Lastly, the rise of digital technologies and social media has introduced new forms of conflict: cyber warfare, misinformation campaigns, digital espionage, radicalized discourses... (Jenny et al., 2018; United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2019). The need for governance mechanisms has been discussed at the United Nations and the European Union, highlighting the importance of a new source of conflict that often acts as an amplifier of social grievances.

6. Who am I in conflict? Conflict Styles

We've already established that negotiation is inevitably linked to conflict, and that conflict emerges from multiple sources. So, as an aspiring negotiator, who are you in conflict? How do you deal with conflict? How does conflict affect you, and how do you react? In International Relations, finding a response to these questions requires that you look at your personality, at your cultural background, and at your Conflict Style. Your capacity to understand and adapt the different conflict styles, observing cultural norms, will be crucial.

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Part of the social psychology of conflict, Conflict Styles are a way to understand how individuals react to conflict. In negotiation manuals, authors typically apply the model developed by Fisher et al. (2011). This model, based on a scale developed by Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann, categorizes individuals along two dimensions: assertiveness and cooperativeness. Assertive individuals show high concern for themselves, seeking to achieve their own goals and well-being; cooperative individuals show high concern for others, seeking to help them achieve their goals and well-being. These two dimensions yield five distinct conflict styles:

- Competing: high assertiveness, low cooperativeness (seeks a win-lose approach).
- Collaborating: high assertiveness, high cooperativeness (seeks a win-win approach).
- Compromising: moderate assertiveness, moderate cooperativeness (seeks mutual concessions).
- Avoiding: low assertiveness, low cooperativeness (ignores or postpones) conflict).
- Accommodating: low assertiveness, high cooperativeness (yields to others).



Resource: you can assess your own conflict style using this tool, provided by the United States Institute of

Peace: https://www.usip.org/public-education-new/conflict-stylesassessment

7. Wrapping-up

We've covered the main sources of conflict: poor communication (where we often focus on positions rather than underlying interests and needs), real differences in values and perspectives that can't simply be "talked away," the role of interdependence (both positive and negative) which makes negotiation necessary in the first place, and how our perceptions and emotions can turn into "facts" that shape conflicts. We have also explored sources of conflict in international relations, and got to know our own role in conflict.

Understanding these sources helps us see why conflicts aren't just simple misunderstandings, but complex situations that need careful handling and multiple approaches to resolve.

In the next chapter, we adopt Conflict Transformation as a perspective to look at the process of conflict and begin analyzing it.

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C-02 - Understanding conflict in International Relations and your role in it

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5. Sources of conflict in International Relations

In addition to the above, conflicts in International Relations may emerge from a variety of other sources. This is not meant to be a comprehensive list, but to illustrate the many areas where being equipped with a good understand of conflict, its nature and its process can give you an edge as a negotiator.

5.1. Gender inequality and structural violence against women

Since 2000, the UN Security Council has recognized the unique challenges women and girls face during conflicts through various resolutions (see United States Institute of Peace, 2025). Sadly, we still see gender inequality causing tensions in many societies today. When women face unfair treatment and

barriers to participating in political, economic, and social life, it not only hurts them directly but can create wider problems that affect everyone in society, making it harder to build truly inclusive communities (Close et al., 2020; Hudson et al., 2012; Tielemans, 2015).

Gender inequality is a driver of conflict, it impacts how people *experience* conflict, it "[results] in the use of more severe, gender-specific forms of violence", and it determines the quality and durability of peace agreements (Cohen, 2023, p. 5; Langridge et al., 2018).

Emerging from feminist studies, **gender** goes beyond the traditional division between men and women, while recognising women's crucial role in peace. Peacebuilding organisations like Conciliation Resources have proposed "gender transformative approaches", where men, women and other gender identities are included meaningfully and work together to transform conflict (see Cohen, 2023).



We will discuss the crucial role of women in peace processes once we dive into negotiation.

5.2. Territorial conflict

Historically, disputes over territory have been one of the primary causes of conflict in international relations. Territorial conflicts, such as competing claims over land and resources, are often tied to national identity, historical grievances, and strategic interests. Since land possession is perceived as a vital component of national sovereignty, territorial conflict can lead to prolonged hostilities, and easily become intractable (Valeriano & Vasquez, 2008).



Can you think of recent or current conflicts where territorial disputes have been a driver of conflict?

5.3. Economics and resources

Economic disparities and competition for resources frequently sark conflict. Access to essential resources such as water, oil, and minerals can become contentious, especially when distribution is perceived as unjust or exploitative. Trade disputes (think of current events), economic sanctions, and financial instability further contribute to tensions, making economic policy an essential factor in conflict management (Sjöstedt, 2008).

5.4. Ethnicity and ethno-religious conflict

Ethnic and religious divisions have long been a source of conflict, often exacerbated by historical grievances, political exclusion, and discrimination. Ethnic conflicts frequently emerge when groups perceive threats to their cultural identity, political representation or fundamental values (Deneckere, 2019; Rothchild, 2008).

5.5. Environmental conflict

Environmental issues have become an increasingly prominent source of conflict, particularly as climate change exacerbates resource scarcity. While the link between environmental degradation and conflict has been well-understood for decades (Gleditsch, 1997), we have witnessed an increase in environmental conflict with disputes over water, arable land or energy resources (Lazard, 2022).

5.6. Digital conflict

Lastly, the rise of digital technologies and social media has introduced new forms of conflict: cyber warfare, misinformation campaigns, digital espionage, radicalized discourses... (Jenny et al., 2018; United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2019). The need for governance mechanisms has been discussed at the United Nations and the European Union, highlighting the importance of a new source of conflict that often acts as an amplifier of social grievances.

6. Who am I in conflict? Conflict Styles

We've already established that negotiation is inevitably linked to conflict, and that conflict emerges from multiple sources. So, as an aspiring negotiator, who are you in conflict? How do you deal with conflict? How does conflict affect you, and how do you react? In International Relations, finding a response to these questions requires that you look at your personality, at your cultural background, and at your Conflict Style. Your capacity to understand and adapt the different conflict styles, observing cultural norms, will be crucial.

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Part of the social psychology of conflict, Conflict Styles are a way to understand how individuals react to conflict. In negotiation manuals, authors typically apply the model developed by Fisher et al. (2011). This model, based on a scale developed by Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann, categorizes individuals along two dimensions: assertiveness and cooperativeness. Assertive individuals show high concern for themselves, seeking to achieve their own goals and well-being; cooperative individuals show high concern for others, seeking to help them achieve their goals and well-being. These two dimensions yield five distinct conflict styles:

- Competing: high assertiveness, low cooperativeness (seeks a win-lose approach).
- Collaborating: high assertiveness, high cooperativeness (seeks a win-win approach).
- Compromising: moderate assertiveness, moderate cooperativeness (seeks mutual concessions).
- Avoiding: low assertiveness, low cooperativeness (ignores or postpones) conflict).
- Accommodating: low assertiveness, high cooperativeness (yields to others).



Resource: you can assess your own conflict style using this tool, provided by the United States Institute of

Peace: https://www.usip.org/public-education-new/conflict-stylesassessment

7. Wrapping-up

We've covered the main sources of conflict: poor communication (where we often focus on positions rather than underlying interests and needs), real differences in values and perspectives that can't simply be "talked away," the role of interdependence (both positive and negative) which makes negotiation necessary in the first place, and how our perceptions and emotions can turn into "facts" that shape conflicts. We have also explored sources of conflict in international relations, and got to know our own role in conflict.

Understanding these sources helps us see why conflicts aren't just simple misunderstandings, but complex situations that need careful handling and multiple approaches to resolve.

In the next chapter, we adopt Conflict Transformation as a perspective to look at the process of conflict and begin analyzing it.

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C-04 - Conflict Analysis

Introduction

Conflict Analysis is a flexible framework that orients the work of peace practitioners, mediators, and negotiators. It is also a dynamic and iterative process—conflict is not static, and analysis must evolve as the conflict evolves. Rather than striving for an objective 'truth,' Conflict Analysis aims to make subjective perceptions transparent (Mason & Rychard, 2005). This is why participatory approaches are frequently used in conflict analysis, ensuring that the perspectives of relevant stakeholders are included.

Objectives

This is a practical chapter. By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- Identify the key actors involved in a conflict, considering power dynamics and marginalized voices.
- Analyze the issues driving the conflict, differentiating between surface disputes and deep-rooted causes.
- Understand and evaluate the behavioral patterns and styles of conflict parties.
- Apply different conflict analysis tools to structure and interpret conflict dynamics.
- Recognize stages of conflict and escalation trends to assess intervention timing.
- Investigate root causes and motivations that sustain conflict over time.



To achieve thse objectives, you will need to consult the materials referenced here and apply them to our negotiation case. Consult the papers published on the Virtual Campus.

1. Who? Conflict Actors

Every conflict involves a range of actors with different roles, interests, and levels of influence. Understanding who is involved, who is affected, and who has the power to influence outcomes is central to conflict analysis (Bravant, 2010; Mason & Rychard, 2005)

Key Questions

- Who are the primary actors directly engaged in the conflict?
- Who are secondary actors that influence the conflict indirectly?
- Who are external actors (international organizations, NGOs, regional powers) with an interest in the conflict?
- Are there hidden actors (e.g., informal leaders, influencers) whose role is not immediately visible?



Make sure to include gender perspectives

Ensuring gender-sensitive conflict analysis is crucial to understand the power dynamics and structural inequalities that fuel conflict (Close et al., 2020).

What should it include?

- A **multi-level approach**: actors range from individuals and organizations to states and international bodies.
- A **gender-sensitive perspective**: gender plays a key role in shaping conflict participation, experiences, and resolutions. Women networks are fundamental to the success of mediation processes. (Close et al., 2020; Tielemans, 2015).
- The role of local communities: not all stakeholders have a formal role in negotiations, but their voices matter (Petra et al., 2014).
- **Diversity and inclusion**: be sure to create a horizontal process that allows for meaningful participation of minorities (see Douglas & Petrovic, 2024)

What tools can I use?

 Conflict Mapping: A visual representation of key actors and their relationships (Bravant, 2010; Charbonnier & Oliva, 2016; Mason & Rychard,

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2005)

- Stakeholder Analysis Matrix: Categorizing actors by their interests, power, and stance on the conflict (Douglas & Petrovic, 2024).
- Stakeholder "Onion": it helps you identify positions, interests and needs.

2. What? Conflict Issues

Conflicts are often misunderstood because people focus on surface-level disputes rather than the underlying structural issues. Identifying the "real" conflict drivers is necessary for sustainable resolution (Charbonnier & Oliva, 2016). You will need to evaluate consequences, but also deeper roots.

Key Questions:

- What are the immediate disputes (e.g., land, resources, governance)?
- What deeper grievances or systemic inequalities fuel the conflict?
- How do historical narratives shape perceptions of the conflict?
- Are there external factors (economic crises, geopolitical shifts) influencing the conflict?

What tools can I use?

- Concept Mapping: visually linking different issues and their connections, creating clusters of topics and ideas (Bravant, 2010).
- Onion Model (Positions, Interests, Needs): Distinguishing between what
 parties say they want (positions), why they want it (interests), and what
 fundamental needs must be addressed (Mason & Rychard, 2005)

3. How? Conflict Styles and Behaviors

Different actors engage in conflict differently. Some prefer direct confrontation, while others may use avoidance, accommodation, or strategic competition. Identifying conflict styles helps in anticipating responses and strategizing interventions (Burgess, 2020).

To identify **Conflict Styles**, you can apply the model we saw in Chapter 2, always linking them to specific behaviors you have observed.

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4. When and where? Conflict Stages

Conflicts do not remain static. They evolve through different phases, from emergence to resolution or stagnation. Recognizing the timing of intervention is crucial, as not all "moments" in conflict call for the same strategy (Zartman, 2000).

Key Concepts

- Zartman's Conflict Bell Curve: identifies stages from emergence to escalation, stalemate, de-escalation, and resolution (Zartman, 2000).
- **Hurting Stalemate:** a point in the Conflict Bell Curve where all parties recognize that continued conflict is too costly and are open to negotiation (Brahm, 2003; Zartman, 2000).
- Glasl's Escalation Model: a nine-stage framework showing how conflicts intensify and how they can be de-escalated (Glasl, 1982).

What tools can I use?

- Timeline Analysis: create a timeline of the conflict and identify key turning points.
- Escalation Models: using Glasl's or Zartman's frameworks.

5. Why? Root causes and motivations

Without addressing the root causes of conflict, any agreement is likely to be temporary. Root causes often involve deeper structural inequalities, identity issues, and historical grievances.

Key Questions

- What social, economic, or political structures sustain the conflict?
- Are there unresolved historical grievances fueling the conflict?
- What role do identity and collective narratives play?
- Are there opportunities for transformative change?

What tools can I use?

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- Problem Tree Analysis: mapping out immediate issues, deeper causes, and long-term effects.
- PESTLE analysis: identifies Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental issues that may impact the negotiation.

6. Wrapping up

Conflict Analysis is an essential skill for any international relations practitioner. It provides a systematic approach to understanding conflict drivers, actors, and dynamics, offering insights for effective intervention, negotiation, and peacebuilding. The list above is not comprehensive, but it will give you an overview of what you should be looking at, and how, and will serve to prepare for our negotiation case.

As we move into negotiation techniques, consider how conflict analysis influences negotiation strategies. Recognizing actors, issues, behaviors, and root causes will help you craft informed, context-sensitive negotiation approaches.

Beyond Conflict Analysis

In recent years, Conflict Analysis has evolved into **Conflict Assessment** and **Systems Analysis**, emphasizing a more holistic, interdependent, and multi-layered understanding of conflict (Bravant, 2010). Various handbooks and guidelines for conflict analysis have been developed by organizations engaged in peacebuilding and mediation, such as swisspeace, Berghof Foundation, the European Institute of Peace, and the European External Action Service.

Practitioners need to combine different approaches to suit their specific context.

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C-05 - Negotiation

Introduction: about Principled Negotiation

Equipped with an understanding of conflict and the skills to analyze it, it's finally time to discuss **negotiation**. Remember when I told you in <u>C-01 - Introduction to Conflict</u> that no one can really teach you how to negotiate? **That's not entirely true.** Beyond learning from experience, you can also master a series of techniques, principles, strategies, and tools that will give you a competitive advantage.

In this course, you will learn the **Principled Negotiation Method**, sometimes referred to as the Harvard Method (R. Fisher et al., 2011). This approach is widely applied in international negotiations, used by businesses, governments, and Third Sector organizations. The beauty of this method lies in its ability to break negotiation into distinct components, equipping you with practical strategies to handle difficult negotiations. This method is not just theoretical, it is highly applicable, and you will use it in simulations and, hopefully, in your professional life.

What is negotiation?

We understand negotiation, based on the literature, as a structured dialogue between parties who seek to reach an agreement (Bercovitch et al., 2008; Fisher et al., 2011)—but this definition barely scratches the surface of its complexity. Negotiation is a dynamic process that interweaves conflict, cooperation, power, strategy, and psychology. As we transition from understanding conflict to managing it effectively, it's important that you see negotiation not just as a technique, but as an essential skill in international relations.

To negotiate successfully, one must **move beyond the illusion that negotiation is simply about making demands, trading concessions, or persuading the other party to yield**. Instead, negotiation is about crafting agreements that satisfy deeper interests while navigating constraints, power imbalances, and cultural differences.

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The four components of Principled Negotiation

Principled Negotiation is structured around **four core elements**:

- Step 1: separate people from the problem
- Step 2: focus on interests, not positions
- Step 3: invent options for mutual gain
- Step 4: insist on using objective criteria

Each of these principles allows you to approach disputes rationally, maintain relationships, and develop sustainable agreements.

Step 1. Separate people from the problem

One of the most common pitfalls in negotiation arises from the **failure to distinguish between substantive issues and interpersonal dynamics.** When conflict becomes personal, parties often react emotionally rather than rationally, which leads to escalation rather than resolution. Fisher and colleagues refer to this as the "**people problem**", where negotiators conflate their personal identity or self-worth with their bargaining position (Fisher et al., 2011).



An example of the people problem:

In diplomatic conflicts, national leaders frequently frame concessions as signs of weakness rather than as pragmatic steps toward resolution. This dynamic is exacerbated when historical grievances, national pride, or political survival are at stake. To mitigate these tensions, negotiators must engage in active listening, demonstrate empathy, and cultivate trust. In doing so, they reduce emotional resistance and create an environment more conducive to constructive dialogue (Deutsch, 1973). We will explore these techniques in the next chapter.

Step 2. Focus on interests, not positions

A position is the explicit demand that a party brings to the table, whereas an interest represents the deeper motivation behind that demand (Hocker &

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Wilmot, 2018). While it may seem simple enough to distinguish between the two, failure to differentiate interests and positions often leads to **deadlock**.



An example of unrecognised needs
In international trade disputes, two countries might each insist on
specific tariff levels, refusing to budge out of fear that any concession
would signal defeat. However, upon closer examination, one country's
true concern may be domestic job security, while the other's priority
is market access.

Interests are one of the most complex areas of conflict resolution and negotiation, because they're typically invisible. It's your job as a negotiator to unearth them.

When faced with a position, consider two key questions:

- Why do they want this?
- Why not something else?

Hocker & Wilmot (2018, pp. 78–90) identify four different types of interests that you can look out for: topic, relationship, identity and process (TRIP).

Topic: what do we want?

The most common type of goal, these are interests that can be listed, argued, supported by evidence, and broken down into pros and cons.

- Example: two employees argue over project deadlines—one wants speed, the other quality.
- Example: remember María and Eva? Could you identify their topic interests?

Relationship: who are we to each other?

Relationship interests define the role you wish to play in an interaction, how you expect to be treated, the level of independence you seek, and the influence each party has on one another.

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Example of relationship interests

Eva and Maria both had relationship interests, demanding different types of engagement and affection.

Identity: who am I in this interaction?

In negotiation, we try to maintain a sense of self. When conflict looms, our identity is troubled, either because we feel attacked (as thus must defend ourselves) or because we avoid becoming the source of the problem. Oftentimes we try to "save face" (Hocker & Wilmot, 2018, p.84), hiding our moves and avoiding shame.



New concept: <u>Saving Face</u>

Saving face refers to the effort to maintain dignity, honor, and reputation in social or professional interactions, especially in conflict or negotiation. In many cultures, particularly in Asia and the Middle East, losing face equates to personal humiliation and can escalate disputes.

Process: what communication processes will be used?

Process is perhaps one of the most neglected interests in negotiation and conflict. Sometimes we dive right into action without looking at what are the acceptable terms of discussion. What is a fair process we can agree on? Who speaks when? What is the role of time and space in this negotiation?



The importance of process interests

In formal negotiation, process can take a long time to settle, even before parties begin to discuss anything of substance. In UN peace negotiations, procedural agreements may take weeks before substantive topics are even addressed. In ASEAN diplomacy, procedural interests are carefully managed due to the organization's commitment to non-interference and consensus-building.

Be careful with interests

Naturally, TRIP interests overlap, and not all TRIP interests emerge in all negotiations. In addition, it's important that you don't make assumptions about interests: even if a conflict party seems cohesive, often their members won't agree on how they see things. In fact, internal conflict around interests is common.

Step 3. Invent options for mutual gain

A common expression in negotiation and mediation is that good negotiators "enlarge the pie". But what does that mean? Simply, that successful negotiators are creative, brainstorm multiple solutions, and try to see all sides of a problem (Rapoport, 1974).



An example of enlarging the pie

A classic example of this approach can be found in environmental negotiations, where two nations may disagree over industrial emissions. If one country demands strict environmental regulations while the other resists for economic reasons, the negotiation may seem doomed. However, by introducing mechanisms such as emissions trading or green technology investment, both economic and environmental concerns can be addressed simultaneously (Gleditsch, 1997).

Inventing options requireschanging the mindset: **instead of seeing negotiation** as a battle to be won, it should be seen as a problem-solving exercise.

Techniques such as brainstorming, scenario planning, and structured dialogue facilitate the development of innovative solutions that serve the interests of all parties—always mindful of potential cultural gaps and misunderstandings (Schoen, 2021).

Step 4. Insist on objective criteria

Negotiations frequently become mired in subjective perceptions of fairness. To counteract this, Fisher and colleagues advocate the use of **objective criteria**, such as market value, legal precedent, expert opinions, or widely accepted standards. The goal is to move away from arbitrary demands and toward agreements that can be justified on rational grounds.

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In International Relations, however, finding those objective criteria can be challenging. Human Rights, historical treaties or international law may be an option; when parties struggle to find the common ground upon which to negotiate, third-party mediation may be required.

Power dynamics and the importance of BATNA

Power is an inescapable element of negotiation. Some parties wield significant leverage due to their economic, military, or strategic advantage, while others find themselves in weaker positions. To navigate this imbalance, Principled Negotiation deploys the concept of **BATNA**—the Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement. A negotiator's BATNA represents their **fallback option** if negotiations fail. The stronger one's BATNA, the greater their negotiating power.

While **BATNA** represents the strongest alternative to a failed negotiation, WATNA (Worst Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement) highlights the worst possible outcome, helping negotiators assess risks.

Beyond Principled Negotiation in International Relations

Despite its broad application and pedagogical power, **Principled Negotiation is not without its critics**. Its structured methodology and emphasis on rational problem-solving have made it a dominant framework, but critics argue that it overlooks crucial factors such as power asymmetry, emotional complexity, and cultural diversity.

In today's world of heightened tensions and conflict, the method is sometimes seen as too optimistic, oversimplified, or even naïve (Reyes, 2014). One of the main critiques of Principled Negotiation is that it assumes parties can reconcile their interests and find equal footing, which we know is not always the case (McKeown, 2013). International negotiations often deal with fundamental values and profound social, personal and spiritual differences, which are hard to tie to one objective criteria. The Principled Negotiation approach is also seen as Western-centric, favouring individualist and low-context cultural frameworks (Doyle, 2022; Schoen, 2021).

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An attempt to bridge cultural differences: the Middle East peace lexicon

In the realm of international negotiations, language is more than just a means of communication—it shapes how parties perceive and frame conflicts. Words like *peace*, *justice*, *normalization* or *compromise* may have vastly different historical and cultural implications in each language. What may seem like a neutral diplomatic term in English could carry deeply political or ideological weight in another context. For instance, in the 1970s, different interpretations of the term "normalization" led to a deadlock in the negotiations between Israel and Syria. The **Middle East Peace Lexicon** (2001) was an initiative to develop an "interpretive dictionary of key negotiating words in Arabic, Farsi, Hebrew, and Turkish", to serve as reference for English-speaking negotiators.

The challenge of semantic interpretation is not unique to the Middle East. Being keenly aware of the local language and its nuances will help you navigate perceptions and prevent misunderstandings. You can read more in this fascinating article (R. Cohen, 2001): https://www.diplomacy.edu/resource/language-and-negotiation-a-middle-east-lexicon

In addition, critics contend that **the model underestimates the role of power dynamics**. In many real-world negotiations, especially in diplomacy and international trade, power is not distributed evenly, affected by cultural, economic or gender inequalities (Bowles & Babcock, 2013). The framework assumes that all parties have the ability to negotiate in good faith and on equal footing, but this is rarely the case (McKeown, 2013).

Importantly, for you as an aspiring international negotiator, some contend that **Principled Negotiation does not account for cultural diversity and the challenge of intercultural negotiation** (Schoen, 2021), where applying culture-based negotiation models may be a better option (LeBaron, 2003).

Nevertheless, understanding Principled Negotiation is an important foundation, as it provides you with a structured way to engage with negotiation dynamics. As a negotiator, you should develop your own approach, drawing on multiple methods and integrating the successes and shortcomings of the models you study.

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Conclusion: Beyond Principled Negotiation in International Relations

Principled Negotiation can help you prepare for negotiation and begin incorporating the techniques to help you reach better deals. It is a widely used and respected model, and it offers a structured approach to negotiation. It focuses on separating people from problems, identifying interests over positions, generating options for mutual gain, and using objective criteria.

However, its limitations in addressing power imbalances, cultural differences, and complex emotional dynamics have led to the development of alternative approaches, winich you can explore in addition to adopting culture-specific principles and practices (which you will learn in Module 02). Here are some models, specific to international conflict resolution:

- Hurting Stalemate Theory (Zartman, 2000): this model suggests that
 negotiations only become viable when all parties perceive that continuing
 the conflict is more costly than reaching an agreement. This perspective is
 particularly useful in intractable conflicts where negotiations fail repeatedly
 until conditions become unbearable for all sides.
- Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation (Lederach, 1997): rather than
 focusing solely on problem-solving, Lederach's approach to negotiation
 prioritizes long-term relationship-building, reconciliation, and systemic
 change. It is particularly relevant in post-conflict societies where
 sustainable peace depends on social and political transformation rather
 than just a settlement.
- Multiparty Mediation and Multi-Track Diplomacy (Diamond & McDonald, 1996): this broader framework expands negotiation beyond official state actors, incorporating informal and civil society actors into the process. It recognizes that in many international conflicts, back-channel negotiations, non-state mediators, and grassroots engagement play a crucial role in conflict resolution.

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Three examples of non-Western, community approaches to negotiation and peacebuilding

Beyond Principled Negotiation, there are many non-Western models that you can apply to approach negotiations and dialogue.

Ubuntu is a Southern African philosophy that emphasizes communal relationships, mutual respect, and interconnectedness. As conflict resolution approach, it focuses on restoring harmony and relationships within the community, with practices such as storytelling, active participation, joint problem-solving, and mutual respect. The process is often facilitated by community elders or respected figures who guide the parties towards reconciliation and forgiveness (Murithi, 2006).

In Rwanda, the **Abunzi** are local mediators mandated by the state to resolve disputes through a conciliatory approach. They emphasize restorative justice and community participation. The process is public and involves hearing from both parties and witnesses. The goal is to reach a mutually acceptable solution, and if that fails, the Abunzi render a decision based on the law, culture, or their conscience (Mutisi, 2011).

Sulha is a traditional Arab-Islamic conflict resolution practice aimed at restoring peace and social harmony. Like Abunzi, Sulha involves a mediator (often a respected elder or religious leader) who facilitates dialogue between conflicting parties. The mediator helps the parties to negotiate terms of reconciliation, which often include compensation and public acknowledgment of wrongdoing (Mladenov, 2024).

In the next chapter, we will explore specific techniques and tools to prepare for a negotiation and to deploy in actual negotiation.

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C-06 - Skills, tools and techniques of negotiation

Introduction

Negotiation is not just about knowing strategies or understanding conflict dynamics—it is about mastering the skills that make you an effective negotiator. These skills include active listening, strategic questioning, emotional intelligence, and adaptability, among others. In this chapter, we will explore the core competencies that define a successful negotiator and how these skills impact negotiation outcomes in both diplomatic and business settings.

A skilled negotiator balances power dynamics, communicates effectively, and adapts their approach depending on the cultural and political context. Understanding these skills will help you enhance your ability to navigate negotiations successfully, whether in formal peace talks, corporate deals, or everyday interpersonal disputes.

Core skills of a negotiator

1. Active listening

Active listening (R. Fisher et al., 2011; Gottman, 1999; LeBaron, 2003) is a fundamental skill for negotiators. It involves more than just hearing words—it requires engagement, interpretation, and strategic response.

To deploy active listening, consider several tools:

- Demonstrating engagement and attention. Sitting and looking down won't communicate attention. Instead, adapt to your interlocutors' style, nod, and use your body language to visually demonstrate you care about what they're telling you.
 - You can also explictly invite the other party to develop their argument: "I
 understand this is critical to you. Go ahead—I'm fully listening."
- **Looping**: repeat or paraphrase what the other person has said, especially when you need to confirm you understand them correctly.

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- For instance, if you perceive a misunderstanding, or if you'd like your counterpart to clarify:
- **Reframing**: framing refers to the emotional and contextual perspective that you give to a message. If you frame a message aggressively, your interlocutor may go into a defensive position. But what do you do if your counterpart presents their messages in aggressive frame? Well, you reframe: that is, you try to find the core of their message and present it back to them without the emotional connotations. To reframe, try to look for the four sides possible sides of their message:
 - Facts: what are they saying explicitly?
 - Self-revelation: what are they saying about themselves and their perspective?
 - **Relationship**: what does it suggest about how you and they relate to each other?
 - Requests: are they asking for something in particular?

Active listening is an effective tool in and beyond negotiation. However, it's important that you consider the cultural context you are operating in. For instance, in Northern Sweden, it is common for people to nod and hum as another person speaks, to show engagement. In Japan, however, silence is often used as an active listening tool, indicating deep thought and respect.

You must also tune into the emotional context of the conversation. Sometimes, being faced with constant looping and reframing can be frustrating.



To reframe a negative statement, keep the core of the message while "framing" it in clearer, more neutral terms: For example, if you're faced with a situation like this one:

"Your demands are unreasonable; you're ignoring the economic reality!" 💬

Try this response:

"You're concerned our proposal doesn't fully reflect economic constraints—is that right?"

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When your counterpart is frustrated, acknowledge their emotions before addressing the issue, and avoid amplifying them. For example:

"I can see this issue is very important to you. Let's find a way forward together."

—

Rather than:

"Calm down, you're overreacting." 🗶

2. Asking effective questions

Skilled negotiators use questions strategically to uncover interests, clarify information, and guide discussions towards resolution (R. Cohen, 2001; McKeown, 2013; Schoen, 2021). Remember when we discussed the different types of interests? Learning to ask good questions will help you find out what those interest are. To ask good questions:

- **Use open ended questions**. This type of question encourages discussion and exploration (e.g. "what would a fair agreement look like to you?"), and allows you to dig into the interests behind your counterpart's positions.
- Use probing to uncover deeper motivations: "why is this issue important to you?" or "could you tell me more about why this is not acceptable to you?".
- Use neutral framing and explain why you're asking.

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Open questions can help your counterpart open up and avoid defensives. Instead of:

"Do you agree with this proposal?" (Yes/No answer) 🗶

Try:

"What aspects of this proposal work for you, and which ones concern you?" (Encourages discussion)

You can use different types of questions to achieve this effect:

- Exploratory: "What would an ideal outcome look like for you?"
- Clarifying: "Can you explain why that option is important to you?"
- Expanding: "How do you think we could address both our concerns?"

3. Emotional intelligence and cultural intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is critical in negotiation. It enables negotiators to manage their own emotions while also understanding and influencing the emotions of others (Hocker & Wilmot, 2018). Meanwhile, **cultural intelligence (CQ)** will help you understand and adapt to the cultural context of a conversation (see LeBaron, 2003). Both are important tools for international negotiators and mediators.

To enhance your emotional intelligence, observe these four components (Hocker & Wilmot, 2018):

- **Self-awareness**: recognize your emotional triggers and biases. For example, do you tend to become defensive when challenged, or do you withdraw from the conversation?
- **Self-regulation**: manage your reactions to prevent escalation. If you feel frustrated, take a deep breath and reframe the situation before responding. Sometimes, you might need someone else to step in for you.
- Empathy: seek to understand the perspectives and emotions of others. If a counterpart seems hesitant, ask open-ended questions to uncover their concerns.

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- **Social skills**: build, manage relationships, and de-escalate tensions. Use humor or personal anecdotes where appropriate to foster connection—always considering cultural norms.
 - Imagine you are a diplomat negotiating a ceasefire between two warring factions. One side is deeply emotional, blaming the other for years of violence. Tension is escalating as both parties become entrenched.

A poor response, one that does not employ emotional intelligence, may look like this:

"We need to focus on facts, not emotions." (Dismissive, creates resistance) X

An emotionally intelligent response, however, may look like this:

"I can see how much pain this conflict has caused your community. A ceasefire could help prevent further loss. What guarantees would you need to trust this process?"

Emotionally intelligent negotiators acknowledge emotions without dismissing them, and redirect the conversation toward constructive solutions.

Meanwhile, your **cultural intelligence (CQ)** is composed of for different elements (Ang et al., 2007; Livermore, 2011):

- Metacognition: recognize the components of your own cultural background (values, traditions, body language...) that could affect how you are perceived by others, and which may make it difficult for you to adapt to other contexts.
- Cognition: get to know the culture of your interlocutors. Familiarize yourself
 with their values, worldviews, body language, and norms to anticipate
 potential misunderstandings. For example, direct eye contact is seen as
 respectful in some cultures, while in others it may be perceived as
 aggressive.
- Motivation: recognize the importance of understanding and adapting to your interlocutors culture. What benefits might it have for your negotiation?

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Demonstrating cultural sensitivity can build trust and credibility.

• **Behaviour**: in light of the above elements, modify your behaviour to match the cultural expectations of your interlocutors, or at least to demonstrate that you are ready to adapt within your possibilities. Doing so will send an important message and will help you build rapport.

Process, process, process... and flexibility

Negotiation is a structured process, and mastering negotiation skills involves understanding how to apply them effectively at each stage (Bercovitch et al., 2008; Zartman, 2000).

Step 1. Planning and preparation

Before negotiation begins, successful negotiators:

- Define their objectives and priorities.
- Shape their teams and all internal responsibilities
- Research the other party's interests, strengths, and weaknesses.
- Identify potential areas of compromise and BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement).

Step 2. Pre-negotiation: setting the agenda and rules

Pre-negotiation plays a crucial role in setting expectations and preventing conflicts during discussions. At this stage, negotiators try to:

- Establish ground rules (e.g., confidentiality, speaking order, decisionmaking processes).
- Agree on the agenda to ensure structured discussions.
- Build rapport before tackling difficult issues.

Step 3. Negotiation: communication and problemsolving

During the negotiation itself, the skills of active listening, questioning, and emotional intelligence come into play. Some of the most common pitfalls at this stage include:

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- Emotional escalation → Stay calm, acknowledge emotions, and refocus on facts.
- Fixed positions → Explore underlying interests instead of demands.
- Power imbalance → Strengthen your BATNA and seek third-party mediation if necessary.

Step 4. Closing and implementation of agreements

Negotiation doesn't end when the conversation is over, or even when you reach an agreement—it requires follow-up. When the negotiation is over, you should summarize the key points and ensure all parties understand them. You should also set clear responsibilities and terms to implement the agreements reached, as well as mechanisms to ensure all parties follow them through.

Remember that, while preparation and process are important, a rigid approach to negotiation can lead to deadlock. While preparation is crucial, negotiators must also be willing to adjust their strategy as the conversation unfolds. Flexibility allows you to respond to unexpected developments, adapt to new information, and keep the dialogue open even when obstacles arise.

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C-07 - Power in negotiation

Introduction

Throughout the previous chapters, we have examined the nature of conflict, analyzed its sources, and explored how negotiation can serve as a structured dialogue to address competing interests. Power lies at the heart of these processes: without power, it is difficult to shape outcomes or gain traction for an agreement. However, power is often misunderstood in negotiation. We sometimes assume that power boils down to dominance or authority—who "wins" and who "loses." Yet, in reality, power can take many forms. As Coleman (2014) points out, at its core, power is the ability to get what you want, but how we go about getting it matters immensely.

This chapter will explore the role of power in negotiation, its personal and contextual components, and how we can harness it responsibly in line with the principles of conflict transformation and principled negotiation introduced in earlier chapters.

1. Power, a multifaceted concept

Power has a notorious reputation. It evokes ideas of dominance, punishment, or even corruption. However, as we have seen with conflict itself, it is much more nuanced than a simple zero-sum struggle. Power can be used to dictate or to cooperate, to impose or to support. It can be destructive or constructive, depending on how we approach it.

Coleman (2014) suggests that power is more helpfully understood as a combination of personal and contextual elements. **On a personal level**, we bring our traits, skills, and motivations to negotiation. **On a contextual level**, cultural norms, institutions, historical imbalances, and resource inequalities can magnify or diminish our capacity to influence outcomes.

Earlier, we noted that **interdependence** is a vital condition for negotiation: if parties truly do not need each other, there is little incentive to negotiate. Power enters here as a defining force—if one party perceives they have enough resources to survive on their own, they may be reluctant to come to the table, or they may do so under the assumption that they can dictate terms. Whether

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this assumption holds often depends on **the dynamics of power** in that specific context.

1.1. Personal power: orientation and styles

Our individual orientation to power influences how we handle conflicts and negotiations. Two decades ago, McClelland (1995) proposed that people pursue power through different motivational patterns, including:

- Seeking **support** from others who are already powerful (e.g., forging alliances, rallying friends or mentors).
- Asserting autonomy by creating alternatives and reducing dependence on others.
- Exercising **assertion**, or "power over," through dominance and direct control.
- Emphasizing **togetherness**, or "power with," by collaborating toward mutual goals.

These orientations often play out in negotiation. For example, someone who strongly values autonomy may focus on their Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement (BATNA) rather than building a cooperative rapport. Another who prefers "power with" might devote significant time to brainstorming options that benefit both sides, as advocated in principled negotiation (R. Fisher et al., 2011). Meanwhile, a highly authoritarian boss might try to drive an outcome through threats—an approach often rooted in "power over" tactics that can alienate or provoke resistance.

This personal dimension is rarely neutral. Our personality, experiences, and cultural background can color our perception of how power "should" be used, sometimes without our conscious awareness.

In <u>C-03 - The Conflict Transformation Perspective</u>, we explored the conflict styles (competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, accommodating), which overlap with these power orientations. Those who tend to compete in conflicts may be more inclined toward assertion. Those who prefer collaborating may gravitate toward "togetherness" and synergy. By becoming aware of these tendencies, we can better manage power dynamics in ourselves and respond more deftly to others' approaches.

1.2. Contextual power: culture, History and structure

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Beyond our personal inclinations, power is also shaped by the environment in which we negotiate. Societies differ significantly in their approaches to hierarchy, equality, and conflict (Adorno, 1982; Hofstede, 1980). You may be familiar with cultural dimensions: in a high-power-distance culture, people may accept that a leader or authority figure has broad leeway to decide outcomes, while in a low-power-distance culture, parties may expect to share control more evenly. Negotiators who ignore these deep cultural and historical structures risk misreading the signals of who truly holds the leverage or how disputes should be approached.

Noam Chomsky (2002 original 1957) used the term "deep structure" to highlight underlying institutions and inequalities that tilt the balance of power. Some groups might have historically enjoyed superior access to resources or political influence, positioning them as "powerful" before negotiations even begin. Others may have been marginalized and thus have fewer direct means of asserting their demands. Meanwhile, Merton and Kitt (see Schulze & Krätschmer-Hahn, 2014) described how sudden shifts in power or status can spark anxiety, resentment, or even overt conflict. This theory, known as "relative deprivation", explains that, if one party unexpectedly loses an important resource or sees their influence eroded, they may feel threatened and respond aggressively. This is especially relevant in international negotiations, where changing economic or geopolitical realities can upend previously stable relationships.

For negotiators, being attuned to such contextual factors is crucial. C-04 - Conflict Analysis introduced tools of Conflict Analysis—such as mapping actors and exploring root causes—that help us see beyond surface issues. By identifying structural power imbalances, we can assess whether certain parties need external support or "soft power" interventions to have a fair chance at a meaningful dialogue.

2. Hard power, soft power, smart power

Power also operates on different planes: military might, economic rewards or sanctions, cultural influence, and moral appeal. Joseph Nye (2004) famously categorized these as **hard power** (coercion through "carrots and sticks") and **soft power** (persuasion through attraction, cultural resonance, and shared

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values). He later introduced the notion of **smart power** (Nye, 2009), which integrates both depending on the situation.

Hard power relies on overt means such as economic sanctions or military threats. In a negotiation, this might appear as a boss declaring, "We'll have to fire 20% of you," or a government threatening heavy tariffs. While it can yield quick results, overuse of hard power breeds resentment and can poison the broader relationship—something we observed in destructive conflict patterns back in C-03 - The Conflict Transformation Perspective.

Soft power, by contrast, operates more subtly. It involves shaping preferences by appealing to shared identities, moral obligations, or simply making an attractive offer. Soft power can be particularly effective in negotiations because it frames cooperation as natural or even beneficial to identity. However, it is not automatically more ethical; it can still be manipulative if used to deceive or coopt.

Smart power, as Nye describes it, requires discerning when to project strength and when to rely on consensus-building. In <u>C-05 - Negotiation</u>, we discussed how principled negotiators rely on objective criteria to reduce friction. Yet without some element of hard power (e.g., a strong <u>BATNA</u>), weaker parties may find it difficult to bring the other side to the table. A skilled negotiator balances these dimensions, moving fluidly between them in pursuit of a stable, mutually acceptable solution.

3. Power is perceived and dynamic

Power in negotiation is never static; it fluctuates as parties perceive each other's strengths, vulnerabilities, and intentions. **Sometimes, what matters is less your objective power—actual resources or alliances—and more how the other side thinks you will use them**. This is a key insight in principled negotiation: if you believe your <u>BATNA</u> (**Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement**) is strong, you negotiate with confidence. Conversely, if the other side sees your BATNA as weak, they may adopt a more aggressive stance.

Recognizing that power is subjective and fluid should remind you that **negotiation is as much about building trust and credibility as it is about rational argument**. Fear of "losing face," (see <u>C-05 - Negotiation</u>), comes into play here. A party that feels humiliated may refuse a perfectly reasonable deal, simply to reassert its dignity or power. Skilled negotiators often address this by

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creating off-ramps—ways for the other side to shift positions without looking weak—or by **reframing** concessions as mutual gains, rather than defeats.

4. Managing power in Principled Negotiations

While principled negotiation calls for separating people from the problem and focusing on objective criteria, **there is no escaping power**. Indeed, as we have seen throughout these pages, power can manifest in intangible ways—through relationships, identity, culture, or historical privilege. Attempting to rely solely on "rational problem-solving," as critics of the Harvard Method caution (Doyle, 2022), may overlook deeper asymmetries. Thus, an effective negotiator will:

- 1. **Assess power dynamics**: before entering the negotiation, map not only each side's resources (money, legal rights, alliances), but also the perceptions they carry. Who seems most threatened? Who has a better fallback plan? How might identity, culture, or existing roles shape each party's sense of entitlement?
- Leverage BATNA wisely: strengthening your BATNA may help you avoid being cornered, but brandishing it too aggressively can foster hostility. Ideally, you develop a robust Plan B while also demonstrating a willingness to collaborate.
- 3. **Invest in trust-building**: power imbalances become less dangerous when the parties commit to respectful dialogue and transparency.
- 4. **Seek balance where possible**: a purely one-sided agreement rarely lasts. Sustainable solutions often require that both sides feel validated, which may mean adjusting processes or even bringing in a neutral mediator.
- 5. **Stay attuned to shifts**: because power is dynamic, be prepared for sudden changes in the negotiation climate. An internal political crisis or a new alliance can rapidly transform what each side perceives as feasible.

As a negotiator, you never really stand outside the power equation. You contribute your own sense of security or insecurity, your personal or organizational backing, and even your presence in the conversation—an essential insight from the Conflict Transformation framework that we saw in previous chapters. If you position yourself as a neutral facilitator, for instance, you may carry moral credibility but lack coercive leverage. If you are a

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stakeholder with resources to withhold, you may command attention but struggle to seem impartial. Balancing these dimensions is part of the negotiator's craft.

Conclusion

Power, like conflict, is an inherent part of negotiation: neither good nor bad in itself, but always capable of creating constructive or destructive outcomes. Whether we pursue power over others or choose to build power with them can shape the tone of a negotiation. By understanding personal power orientations, recognizing contextual imbalances, and practicing strategies that balance firmness with mutual respect, negotiators can steer discussions toward outcomes that endure.

By now, you have seen how the principles of conflict analysis, conflict transformation, and principled negotiation dovetail with a nuanced understanding of power. With the concepts of power in mind, you are better equipped to assess leverage, respond to asymmetry, and ensure that your negotiations remain grounded in fairness, trust, and a genuine regard for the needs of all parties. Ultimately, navigating power effectively is what allows negotiation to become a transformative force, rather than a mere exercise of "who gets to win."

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These are supplementary materials. Make sure to complement them with the readings and exercises indicated by your professor.

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