Making Conflict Work Economically

SO FAR, we have explored theories that help us understand why a conflict comes into being and grows. We saw that often this understanding helps us to deal with a conflict in its latent stage. But many problems cannot be solved entirely by addressing their root causes. For example, to fight a large fire, we seldom need to know how it got started; what we need is fire-fighting equipment and fire fighters who know how to use it. Similarly, while knowing how a conflict started is often essential, we also need conflict-moderating skills that are as specialized as those of a fire fighter.

In this chapter, we discuss theories useful for conflict actors: those who are actively involved in the conflict. While some of our discussion could be seen as a restatement of the theories we have already considered, some of it formulates new principles. We focus on approaches that can help one determine how to minimize costs of a conflict.

There are three main approaches to moderating conflict: preventing serious, unnecessary conflict at its points of origin; moving inevitable conflict toward cooperation as it emerges; and moderating coercive conflict as it escalates.

Preventing Serious Conflict

Because incompatibility of goals is a major source of conflict, a society can lessen conflict by addressing the main causes of incompatible

goals: social injustice, role conflict, and value differences (see Chapter 3). But a society can also build into itself a tolerance for "healthy" conflict. Simmel (Coser 1956) argued that both attraction and repulsion between groups are essential for social integration and continuity. A healthy society, organization, or group maintains a balance of cooperative and oppositional relations.

If a society looks upon conflict as both friend and foe, it has a better chance of preventing serious and costly types of conflict. Analytic conflict theory has much to teach us about the dual nature of conflict. Simmel observed that social conflict may be as important for a healthy society as cooperation. All group relations have positive elements of attraction and negative ones of repulsion. Association and dissociation are facts of social life. The forces of social integration, however, usually tend to outweigh those that force us apart. Society wants to stay together and thus ignores or suppresses conflict rather than acknowledging and using it. Simmel would argue that social education should pay as much attention to conflict's positive functions as to its dysfunctions. Human society should be as inventive about ways of engaging in conflict at minimal cost to all – nation-states, groups, individuals – as it is about getting its members to cooperate. The more inventive it is, the less likely that inevitable social tensions will produce high-cost conflict.

Because low-intensity conflicts are rarely encouraged, we discuss four ways to increase their use: balanced sociation, consultation, effective communication, and reconciling potential conflict groups through free interaction.

Balanced Sociation

Balanced sociation is a conscious effort by a society to make both cooperation and conflict prominent in public consciousness, formal education, and public investment. The assumption is that a continuing tension between the two is important for stable and productive social relations. Aho (1994) speaks of "tension wisdom" developing within a society like the United States, with its members growing increasingly tolerant of disagreements and differences and learning how to live with them more creatively and productively.

Balanced sociation could be strengthened through a society's education process. Skills at opposing constructively could be taught

alongside those of cooperating and getting along. Relations with one's opponent would be understood in both their associative and their dissociative dimensions. Both coercive and cooperative conflict resolution would be taught as art forms in the schools. Mediators, arbitrators, national defense specialists, and other conflict professionals would learn how to balance sociation and use conflict in their work.

One guarantor of balanced sociation is what Coser (1956) called the "safety valve" mechanisms – institutions permitting social and interpersonal conflict at minimal cost: nonviolent social movements; institutional third parties such as court systems and mediators; ritualized conflict in sport; and training in noninjurious defense and fighting methods such as the martial arts.

One increasingly common form of social action that illustrates both balanced sociation and safety valve conflict is civil disobedience: an individual or group refuses to obey certain laws but also refuses to use violence against those who enforce them. Since the 1960s, U.S. society has become increasingly tolerant of nonviolent conflict action, recognizing it as a useful safety valve that leads to necessary social change at minimal cost.

The southern sit-ins of the 1960s demonstrated how civil disobedience and other forms of nonviolent action can bring about a society that is more just and less vulnerable to upheaval (Wehr 1968). Black student protest, guided by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, dealt with highly emotional conflict at low cost to society. Likewise, in the 1970s and 1980s, large numbers of North Americans and Europeans used nonviolent action to oppose their governments' preparations for nuclear war. For nearly two decades, the citizens movement against the Rocky Flats nuclear weapons plant in Colorado used disciplined nonviolent protest to influence public opinion, government officials, legislators, and plant workers (Downton and Wehr 1997). As with the civil rights sit-ins, a conflict with great emotional content and potential for high cost was moderated by such nonviolent direct action, and the governments and publics of many nations were moved toward necessary change. A comparison of how mass public protest was handled in Chicago in 1968 and Seattle in 1999 suggests that U.S. society has learned something of the value of safety valve conflict but still has much to learn.

Consultation

Even in societies that acknowledge and teach balanced sociation as an explicit principle of healthy social relations, many groups' interests will be potentially in conflict. They will continue to see many of their goals as incompatible with those of others. Some goals will truly be so while other interests will only appear to be. Helping groups to distinguish actual from illusory goal incompatibility is a promising strategy for conflict prevention.

True goals and interests are often obscured when decisions are made for a group rather than with it. Usually the more powerful ignore or forget the need for consultation with those they control, thus producing unnecessary misunderstanding and resentment. Hierarchical structures, such as one finds in rigid class societies or in bureaucratic organizations, also tend to hinder consultation. This results partly from power differences between levels and partly from communication patterns tending to run horizontally rather than vertically. The segregated South of the 1950s, where the needs and feelings of large segments of the population were disregarded by those in power, is a particularly good illustration.

Increasing consultation among potential conflict groups need not involve major redistribution of power, though it could lead there over time (Curle 1971). It might simply involve creating a more consultative decision process. Just sounding out all those to be directly affected by a decision usually reduces the likelihood of conflict potential. Consultation helps reveal where true goal incompatibility exists and where it does not.

Effective Communication

Preventing conflict through consultation requires effective communication. As communicators send and receive messages, there is enormous opportunity for slippage in the sequence of what is meant, said, heard, or understood (Hocker and Wilmot 1991). We are sometimes amazed at how what we meant to say was so misunderstood. Words and their accompanying nonverbal messages often contradict one another (Tillett 1991).

Misunderstanding. Social conflict nearly always involves misunderstanding. Conflict parties communicate both by what they say or fail to say, and by how they behave toward one another. Even normal interaction involves some faulty communication, but conflict seems to increase it. The higher the level of conflict, the more costly misunderstanding may be. During the Cold War, miscommunication between U.S. and Soviet leaders could have had catastrophic consequences. At every stage and level of conflict, clear communication among parties usually reduces unwise decisions by and costs for the participants.

As a conflict emerges, adversaries become more emotional. Anger, fear, hostility, and suspicion all make communicators more likely to send and receive faulty messages to and from their opponents and their supporters alike. Emotion control is one way to encourage accuracy. The context of the communication is also important. The more background noise and distraction, the less clear the message. The pace and difficulty of message exchange also influence how long and carefully one considers a message before responding to it. For example, a conflict among a university's physics faculty intensified as participants dashed off e-mail responses to one another, unrestrained by slower, more direct, and more demanding nonelectronic ways of communicating. Conversely, when the parties can verify their communication, they tend to increase its accuracy.

Sending and Listening Skills. For written communications, conflict parties should use a message checker – someone who will ask what they wish to convey and whether it will actually be heard that way by the recipient. This checking is often done incidentally, but building it formally into the communication process would give it the prominence it deserves. Much misunderstanding is created simply by careless and imprecise use of words.

The more hostile communication is, the less accurately it may be heard. Hostility produces a defensive reaction by the receiver, who is then less likely to pick up nuances that give a message greater clarity. An important skill is knowing how to use "disarming" rather than "arming" language. The latter selects more forceful words, uses statements rather than questions, and is usually accompanied by hostile intonations, accusatory pauses, and other nonverbal messages that convey hostile feeling.

Methods have been developed to overcome obstacles to effective communication. With "I messages," for example, the sender clarifies the intended meaning of the message.[1] Such messages locate the conflict outside the listener, where it can more easily be reframed for cooperative resolution. They often expand the opponent's ability to listen and hear. They also focus on behavior rather than the person as the source of the conflict. Less likely to be felt as personal attacks, they encourage a similar "I" response from the other.

Often a conflict party is less interested in being clearly understood than in having its say. If its opponent is similarly motivated, a war of words with little clear communication is probable. However, having one's say is a necessary first step toward mutual disclosure and emotional openness. For this reason, disarming listening may be as useful as using disarming language. The technique of "active listening" (Hocker and Wilmot 1991, 239) has several functions. First, it permits the venting of emotion: the speaker feels heard, and tension is released. The listener's body posture and gestures, such as head nodding, confirm for the speaker the sense of being heard. Next, the speaker's feelings are restated by the listener, who paraphrases what the speaker has said, checking with him for accuracy. He or she then asks clarifying questions for further information. The telling-listening function is extremely important in conflict resolution, particularly where a continuing relationship between the parties is necessary, whether they be divorcing parents or ethnic communities in Bosnia and Kosovo.

An Example. Consider the following scenario. Ruth is a senior manager in a government department. Her deputy, John, was one of the applicants for the position she holds, and he was very angry when he was not appointed. John treats Ruth in a formal, unfriendly, but polite manner. He carries out her instructions precisely but never does more than she explicitly tells him. Believing that the tension between them is destructive, both for her and for the workplace, Ruth decides to meet with John in an attempt to clear the air. Although he agrees to the meeting, he insists that there is no problem, that his treatment of her is entirely appropriate, and that he has no wish to have any sort of informal or personal relationship with her (Tillett 1991, 31).

How might Ruth communicate in her upcoming meeting with her deputy to reduce tension between them? First, she would ask herself

where it should take place. The physical setting can help or hinder communication. His coming to her office would emphasize the status difference and the related resentment already blocking communication. Her visiting his office might seem contrived. As neutral and businesslike a setting as possible would be recommended here. Second, Ruth would describe the tension she feels between them and ask John what he thinks might be done to reduce it. Such an approach might induce him to disclose more of his own feelings. The "I" messages and active listening methods she can use would tend to personalize their communication sufficiently but not to a degree that would be uncomfortable for him. Finally, she might ask him to design a program for improving communication generally in the department. In so doing, he would become a resident specialist in it, and thus a deputy with special status.

Reconciling Potential Conflict Groups

Chapter 5 suggests that conflict groups emerge when those with seemingly incompatible goals limit interaction to people within their group, so that each group develops a separate identity and consequent solidarity. By the same token, reconciliation within a society will be enhanced and the formation of conflict groups reduced if conditions are created that encourage free interaction across the boundaries of such potential conflict groups. Such interaction may work to decrease incompatibility: their members may begin to like each other, creating similar interests and goals.

Interaction Rituals. Goffman's (1967) concept of "interaction ritual" provides us with an understanding of how free interaction can prevent conflict across racial and class divisions. Interaction rituals occur when members of a group – a civil rights organization, for example – are in close proximity to each other (meetings and demonstrations) and have a common focus of attention (racial justice), and when their interaction is imbued with deep feelings (shared humanity). Such interactions tend to transform the members' common reality into something sacred, signifying membership in a common group, and providing a reference point of moral solidarity for the whole group. Such rituals may either promote or block a group's ties to other groups.

As an example, consider an exchange of musicians or dancers between two hostile nations. When the visiting artists perform, the close proximity of members of the audience, their attention to the performers, and the feelings stirred by the performance create a bond between the audience, the artists, and the nations they represent. As another example, consider the civil rights movement. As whites joined the civil rights movement of the early 1960s, black-white interaction rituals were being created that celebrated interracial unity; subsequently, as the black power and black pride movement developed, new rituals of solidarity and membership among blacks alone eclipsed those that encouraged interracial bonds.

Bonding rituals might be useful in Bosnian communities that still have multiethnic populations. One might encourage small group discussions between Muslims and Roman Catholics dealing with topics of local health and safety and the merits of candidates in upcoming elections. Such interactions might become "ritualized," celebrating the sacredness of the larger urban community, bonds of citizenship as Bosnians, and the like. They could offset the rituals occurring within each religious community and thus discourage divisive ethnic communalism.

Social Reality Construction. As conflict emerges, opponents are very likely to misperceive the other's goals, motives, and attributes. As the role of enemy is thrust upon one's opponent, he or she is seen as behaving pretty much as one would expect an opponent to do. A self-fulfilling prophecy begins to operate and the perceived enemy becomes a real one. Opposing sides create the conflict in part by how they make sense of what is happening between them. Conflict reality depends heavily on how the conflict parties explain to themselves and others what is going on. The parties may see their respective goals as highly incompatible where in fact they are not. Acting from such misperceptions may in fact make them so.

How humans explain what is happening as they interact is important for understanding social conflict. Berger and Luckmann (1966) see any interaction as created socially by the conflict parties out of their everyday activity. In conflicts this process of social creation happens as we first externalize what we believe is happening. Thus, when we make a new friend (or enemy), we create a relationship. We recreate

it each time we interact with that friend (or enemy). For example, two physicists often have need for the same lab space, equipment, and graduate student at the same time. On one such occasion, they may have a nasty encounter with personal insults. From that time forward, the joint problem of scarce resources may be redefined by them as a conflict.

The new product (friendship or conflict) is then objectified as it fits into the descriptive terminology and other parts of the objective order society already has in place to describe such interactions. We internalize that new objective reality, feeling that it fits our experience, and we act accordingly. It thus becomes reality for us even though our perception is at odds with the facts. Each conflict becomes a clash of contending realties, with opponents convinced it is factually based.

Getting conflict parties to question their perception of reality permits them to distinguish those aspects of reality that are in opposition from those that are not. Once the parties realize that they are not in total conflict with one another, they can begin to cooperate and turn the conflicting interests into a problem to be solved. If a conflict is a reality constructed by opponents, it can just as well be reconstructed by them into less costly, more cooperative forms.

Enemy images are the most harmful and resistant form of constructed conflict reality. One believes and expects the worst of an enemy. Getting opponents to reconstruct their "enemy" perception of each other has been the focus of several enemy reality reconstruction projects carried on by academic researchers.

Among the first experiments with getting opponents to question their perception of a conflict reality were Burton's (1969) *controlled communication workshops*. He brought representatives of nations and societies who were hostile to each other to a program of intense examination of their perceptions of objective reality and of one another. He used a range of exercises, including optical illusion graphics, to get participants to question their beliefs about what was real.

Herbert Kelman has brought together young academicians and diplomats from opposing sides in a conflict – with Palestinians and Israelis (Kelman 1982), for example. In his approach he attempts to sensitize participants to the problem realities faced by their opponents.

Mitchell and Banks (1996, 145) reviewed scholar-practitioner approaches that have, as their central theme, reconstructing reality and

that strive to transform the participants into enhanced realists who know with greater clarity the nature of the conflict situation they confront. They concluded that reality reconstruction workshops have a special problem: reentering from the workshop setting into the conflict situation participants temporarily left behind. There will be an inevitable disconnection between the reality reconstructed in the workshop and the unreconstructed reality to which the parties return. Even their workshop participation may be seen as fraternizing with the enemy and may place them at personal risk, as was apparently the case with some in the Doob (Doob and Foltz 1974) intervention in the conflict in Northern Ireland. Those who are external to the conflict must enter it with great caution, because there always are constituencies to whom participants must answer, and whose realities may remain unreconstructed.

Some progress in reconstructing enemy realities has been reported in programs where leaders are brought together without being extracted from their constituent communities. The Public Conversations program in Boston, for example, has had some success in reducing at least local hostility around the abortion issue (Chasin et al. 1996). There, enemies have become partners working on reducing abortion through preventing unwanted pregnancies, an approach acceptable to both. All enemies have some common reality, certain goals all of them wish to achieve. Identifying that common ground through reality reconstruction is an important step.

Moving toward Cooperation

Conflict can take either a cooperative or coercive path (Deutsch and Coleman 2000). Which direction it takes depends on how it is "framed" by the conflict parties. If they characterize it as a problem solvable through their joint effort, cooperative approaches – such as negotiation – will be adopted early on. If, however, the conflict is seen as a win-lose struggle, coercive processes – such as power contests – will likely be the initial strategy of choice.

Reframing the Conflict

The so-called framing process can limit the cost of conflict. Mediators normally begin it by getting opposing parties to redefine a conflict

each has already framed as a "zero-sum" (what one gains the other loses) struggle. Reframing participants' perception of the conflict can lead them to consider a number of cooperative conflict resolution techniques. In order to understand these techniques, let us consider the basic process through which cooperation can be achieved, the process of negotiation.

Negotiation. Negotiation occurs when conflict parties agree to meet face-to-face to resolve their conflict. Although various approaches to negotiation have been discussed, so-called integrative bargaining (Fisher and Ury 1981) has been widely accepted as one of the most promising.

Integrative bargaining starts from the assumption that the interests of the conflict parties are seldom totally opposed to one another, that quite often there are common interests not being considered. It approaches negotiation as joint problem solving, a process that permits all negotiators to discover common interests, to identify ways to "increase the size of the pie" available, and even to "bake" more pies. Its goal is to identify the true interests of negotiators, and to build an agreement that meets those interests. It differs from the more conventional and costly "positional bargaining," where positions, demands, and subsequent mutual concessions are inherent in the process.

Integrative bargaining occurs in several stages. It begins with settling the "people problem" by establishing good personal relations and communication among the negotiators. It then moves to getting the negotiators to clarify their interests and leave their stated positions behind.[2] The third stage tries to meet their common and divergent interests collaboratively through joint brainstorming and creation of new options. Although most interests usually are addressed at this third stage, unresolved issues can be considered in the final stage, by applying what Fisher and Ury call "fair standards" – such as precedent or expert judgment – to proposed agreements.

There was a point early in the Bosnian conflict where approaches such as integrative bargaining might have prevented the heavy costs of civil war. The window of opportunity was not large, probably somewhere in mid-1991, before the Yugoslav People's Army decided that its future lay with a Serbian Yugoslavia and thus began to arm Serbian groups in Bosnia. The Croatian government did likewise with Bosnian

Croats. There was a period of a very few months, however, when the more moderate leaders of the Serb, Croat, and Muslim communities in Bosnia might have negotiated an approach to immunize that multiethnic state against such interethnic violence as subsequently occurred.

Several concepts and theories help us to understand why integrative bargaining tends to work well. Prominent among them are the concepts of trust and fairness.

Promoting Trust. Integrative bargaining provides negotiators with a process that, through personal sharing, can build trust by eliminating various emotional and communication obstacles. Trust can be further strengthened when a negotiator's verbal and nonverbal communications coincide. In every social encounter, each of us presents a positive "face," or image of self, composed of attributes of which we feel society approves. In other words, we all try to look our best. In the negotiation setting, for example, our best face would likely be conciliatory, powerful, firm, confident, fair, efficient, deserving, and so on. Our success as a negotiator will depend largely on how well we maintain our "negotiating face," how credible it is to our opponent across the table. We maintain it through what Goffman calls "face work" – the actions "taken by a person to make whatever he [or she] is doing consistent with face" (1967, 12). In negotiation, above all, we want our opponents to take us seriously. The more they can be reassured that our face truly represents a reliable negotiating self behind it, the more likely they are to respond likewise and with confidence, and move toward agreement.

People can learn how to act as credible negotiators – in fact, how to *be* credible negotiators.[3] They can be trained in the "face skill" components of negotiation: facial expressions and other body language, voice intonation, conciliatory physical gestures, timing, face saving, and so on. The trust of one's negotiating partner is achieved in large part by a credible performance.

Fairness in Negotiation. Two criteria can be applied to settlements: we can attempt to make them "just," or we can strive to make them "best possible." A settlement may be said to be just if it conforms to some universally accepted and invariant principle. Zartman et al. (1996) distinguish among three main principles of fairness: priority, equality, and proportionality.

The *priority* principle usually identifies a winner, and does so by applying an external principle or precedent. For example, the adversaries in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were using, for many years, the priority principle when the Israelis demanded complete security (an external principle) and the Palestinians demanded the return of all conquered territories (the precedent of previous occupation). The *equality* principle postulates that the adversaries should receive equal shares. This principle was applied to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict when, in 1967, the United Nations Security Council recommended an exchange of territory for security (Zartman et al. 1996, 91).

The *proportionality* principle – also known as the "equity" principle – prescribes that the adversaries be rewarded in proportion to their merit or need. Homans's (1974) concept of distributive justice, discussed in Chapter 3, assumes that rewards should be proportional to an actor's merit: the greater her contributions and investments, the greater her share should be. To illustrate, consider divorce settlements. It is customary to award the primary custody of the children to the mother because, more often than not, she has provided the children with more of the day-to-day care than the husband has (greater contributions), and because, being a woman and a mother, she is more deserving (greater investment).

The settlement may be said to be the *best possible* if it is acceptable to both adversaries and gives them equal measures of (dis)satisfaction. (This suggests that a search for the best possible settlement relies heavily on the equality principle.) But, before this principle can be applied, the adversaries themselves have to be made equal in some fashion.

Several equalizing *procedures* can be applied in real-life conflicts. One of them is that each adversary should reveal his "bottom-line demand" (the option that has zero payoff for him). The equality principle is then applied by "splitting the difference" between these two demands.[4] One could argue that the Dayton Agreement, discussed in Chapter 8, was such a settlement. We might say that the Greater Serbs' bottom-line demand was an annexation of all the territory they had occupied; and that the Bosnian government's bottom-line demand was for control of all of its territory. We might also say that the disappointments of the two sides were commensurate: while 49 percent of Bosnia became a Serbian republic, Sarajevo was not a part of it, and the Greater Serbs could not annex that territory; the Bosnian government,

while keeping nominal control over the entire territory and real control over 51 percent of Bosnia, could not reach the goal of keeping all of Bosnia under its exclusive control.

Another major equalizing procedure relies on *equal concessions*. This procedure can be justified on the grounds that, no matter how different the adversaries may be in other respects, their differences can disappear once they make certain prominent demands – such as their opening demands or their bottom-line demands. One can say, in effect, "Now the two are the same: both have made their prominent demands." And, having thus "equalized" them, one can apply the equality principle by insisting that they make equal concessions.

To return to our case of the sit-ins for civil rights, fairness for African Americans was rare in the South of the 1960s. None felt that more keenly than black college students. Resentment of the injustice of state-enforced racial discrimination was acknowledged as the primary motivation for their protest (Wehr 1968, 68). Blacks' negotiation over the method and pace of desegregation began only when the federal government began to implement equality before the law – a principle reflecting the norm of reciprocity.

Institutionalizing Cooperative Conflict

It is evident that conflict can be limited and controlled by institutional forms (e.g., collective bargaining, the judicial system), social roles (e.g., mediators, conciliators, referees, judges, police), social norms (fairness, justice, equality, nonviolence, integrity of communication), rules for conducting negotiations (such as when to initiate and terminate negotiations, how to set an agenda, or how to present demands), and specific procedures (e.g., hinting versus explicit communication, or public versus private sessions) (Deutsch 1973, 377).

The creation of the U.S. Mediation and Conciliation Service in the 1930s is a good illustration of such institutionalization. Over the decades since then, this service has intervened to transform industrial warfare characterized by threat-heavy conflict strategies into a trading process of collective bargaining. Threat is still used in industrial relations – unions threaten to strike, companies threaten to move their plants elsewhere – but it has been replaced by exchange as the dominant guiding principle.

In the 1960s civil rights conflict, the Community Relations Office was set up in the U.S. Department of Justice to move the conflict parties' emphasis on threat strategies toward exchange and integrative action. It was often quite successful and continues to this day to facilitate racial peace. Civil rights groups in the 1960s already had a threat-minimizing strategy in place with their commitment to nonviolence, although it tended to weaken over the decade as civil rights organizations had to compete with black power groups for the allegiance of black youth.

Conflict-moderating institutions have had a similar influence at the international level. In the 1980s and 1990s, a Central American presidents' organization brought about such a shift away from threats in several civil wars through its Esquipulas peace process. Such change in the strategic power mixes of conflict groups was particularly noticeable in the Nicaraguan conflict (Wehr and Nepstad 1994).

Controlling Escalation

If an emerging conflict is framed by the opposing parties as a coercive rather than cooperative process, it is bound to escalate. That was certainly the case with the sit-in movement. Once racial desegregation was defined as the clear goal of southern blacks – and once it became clear that for most southern whites racial segregation was a way of life for which they would fight – cooperative resolution became only a dim possibility. And once military force had been used in the ethnically disputed sections of Croatia and Bosnia, the conflict escalated uncontrollably. As escalation occurs, however, it may become so costly that ways of moderating it will come into play. The idea, of course, is to bring those moderating methods to bear earlier rather than later, thereby reducing harmful consequences.

Although some conflicts can be controlled by addressing their underlying causes, such as unjust power distribution, and although some can be cooperatively resolved at relatively low cost, many inevitably escalate to higher levels of intensity and cost. Uncontrolled escalation is really something like cancer in the human body. Three approaches can control such escalation: getting adversaries to change their power strategies; introducing third-party intervention such as mediation; and using escalation methods that are self-limiting.

The reader should note that many of the specific approaches discussed here are a variation on the tit-for-tat strategy we considered in Chapter 7. Remember that this strategy recommends not only that each party should reciprocate the cooperative moves of the opponent (such as concessions) and his or her coercive moves (such as threats), but also that it should, at times, unilaterally make cooperative moves (such as breaking the deadlock).

Power Strategies

Often, adversaries are reluctant to deescalate a conflict. They cling doggedly and irrationally to power strategies that are increasingly costly and even self-defeating. But not all power strategies involve the use of force, and there are ways of getting conflict parties to shift toward less costly power applications.

Boulding (1989) discusses three types of power: threat power, trading power, and giving power.[5] Threat power amounts to saying, "If you do something bad to me, I will do something as bad or worse to you." Even some forms of nonviolent direct action – such as strikes and boycotts – are threat-based. By contrast, exchange power suggests, "If you do something nice for me, I will reciprocate." Force is replaced with trade; the power contest gives way to negotiation. Further still from the use of force by a conflict party is unilateral giving power. It is reflected in the attitude, "I will do something nice for you simply because you are a fellow human being," or a decent person, or someone in need, or whatever. At the threat end of the power spectrum lies the "do to you" behavior. At the integrative or giving end is the no-strings-attached "do for you" action.

Force is a form of conflict behavior that should be used cautiously if at all. As a coercive action, it moves a conflict away from cooperative resolution. It also tends to be more costly to both the users and their opponents. The more costs that the adversaries sink into a conflict, the more difficult it is for them to write off the cost and shift to cooperative resolution. Even if force is not actually used by conflict parties, the possibility that they might use it will influence the conflict. Still, potential force is usually more useful for cooperative resolution than applied force. Because less harm is done, less needs to be undone later. We can think of threat as a moderate type of force.

In any conflict, a mix of the three types of power can be used. Shifting a conflict from a coercive mode to a cooperative resolution path requires that each party expand its trading and giving strategies and diminish its use of force or threat of force. Organizations and professional intervenor roles can be created to assist adversaries to make that shift, as was the case with the various civil wars in Central America in the 1980s. In that instance, mediators were particularly important in helping adversaries to change their power mixes toward deescalation.

The movement for civil rights in the United States illustrates how changing one's power strategy can increase the cost of conflict. Until the mid-1960s, civil rights leaders used a power mix of nonviolent force tempered with an integrative view of their opponents as fellow humans who were simply doing wrong. They also used some trading behavior in negotiations with businesses and governments in different cities throughout the South. That was a difficult power mix to sustain. It had to be forceful enough to open up segregated facilities yet sufficiently moderate to deter the full fury of racial backlash from southern whites. Nonviolent force was necessary to escalate the conflict, but nonviolent ideological restraint was required to prevent an explosive escalation.

Martin Luther King and other leaders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) were able to maintain the more moderate mix into the mid-1960s, despite Black Panther and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) shifts toward increasingly militant strategies and the eruption of northern urban riots. But ultimately, SCLC rhetoric and tactics became more militant in an effort to retain control of the movement as it moved northward. When King was assassinated in 1968, the movement's radical wing ignored trading and giving power and went toe-to-toe with its opponents in urban police departments. That shift in power strategies was very costly for them and society generally.

The Nicaraguan civil war in the 1980s illustrates the opposite tendency, the way opposing sides reduce conflict costs by shifting away from threat-heavy power mixes to more cooperative ones (Wehr and Nepstad 1994). The Sandinista government was in conflict both with U.S.-supported Contra forces in the north and south and with indigenous groups on the Atlantic Coast. From middecade on, these

opponents were increasingly persuaded by diplomats and by changing regional and global contexts to alter their strategy mixes toward cooperative resolution. Cease-fires were arranged and exchange behavior increased, with threats being increasingly replaced by cooperation. Integrative behavior expanded as negotiated agreements were implemented. Regional autonomy and subsequent reconciliation were worked out with the Atlantic Coast peoples. National elections were agreed to and resulted in a peaceful transfer of power in 1990 and a subsequent uneasy mutual tolerance among former adversaries.

A moderating shift in participants' power mixes occurred largely in response to the political context of the conflict. Some aspects of that context within Nicaragua itself were especially influential, notably the moderating influence of religious organizations and women in the Sandinista revolution. Changes in the global political context were also important: the Cold War was winding down, thus reducing the U.S.-Soviet military confrontation in Central America. Perhaps most important was the changing Central American context, where regional leaders had created the Esquipulas process and structure for resolving civil wars throughout the region. Opposing sides in Nicaragua used Esquipulas to expand their trading and integrating interaction with one another.

Third-Party Interventions

We discuss intervention here rather than earlier in the chapter because intervenors such as mediators are usually not invited into a conflict until it is spiraling upward. When impartial third parties intervene in a conflict, new relational structures and possibilities for moderating the conflict are created. Introduction of a mediator, for example, changes the conflict's physical and social character, generating new intergroup relations and transactions. The presence of an observer tends to put contenders on better, if not their best, behavior. Intermediaries facilitate accurate communication, clarifying the contenders' issues, interests, and needs. They may even divert blame toward themselves as a technique for transforming stalemate into resolution. Most important, third parties bring additional minds and problem-solving skills to the conflict. The contenders are no longer on their own.

Mediation. A common type of intervention is mediation, best defined as negotiation facilitated by third, presumably impartial, parties. It is a rather formal process with certain stages that most mediators generally follow (Moore 1986). The third party assists the disputants to reframe their conflict, develop an agreement, and implement it. Usually, a mediator gets the conflict parties to reframe the dispute as a problem to be solved collaboratively, prepares an agreement signed by all three, and often guarantees its implementation. As a conflict emerges, the relationships of contending parties with one another take on a special character. Attention comes to focus ever more on the behavior of the adversary to the exclusion of any noncontenders involved. One justifies one's behavior increasingly by what the other has done rather than by any universal standard of correct behavior. A process Coleman (1957) has called reciprocal causation takes over so that each contender comes to form something like an independent social unit engrossed in tit-for-tat attack and defense behavior.[6] Without some external intervention, such dynamics can lead to extreme force being used at higher and higher cost.

Introduction of an impartial third party may moderate conflict because, as Porter and Taplin (1987) have noted, it transforms a two-party relationship into a three-party group, which creates a new relational system with new dynamics of communication, emotional responses, and conflict behavior. The third party becomes an observer, evaluator, and facilitator of the disputants' behavior, which they are likely to moderate accordingly. The new triadic system of relationships helps resolve the conflict in several ways: it stimulates disputant cooperation, permits face-saving, and provides for tension release.

Most important, the mediator gets the participants to reframe their reality. As we have already seen, many conflicts are largely a clash of different realities, mistakenly viewed by the opposing parties as objective facts. If a conflict is based on reality constructed by the opponents, it can just as well be reconstructed and reshaped by them into a less costly, more productive form.

Because the behavior of the mediator is of paramount importance, the effectiveness of various techniques and the relationship between a mediator and the disputants are topics much discussed by professional mediators. For example, are the most effective mediators those

totally unconnected personally to the conflict parties and thus more impartial, as is generally believed? Or is connectedness with the conflict parties a useful mediator attribute, particularly in non-Western cultures (Wehr and Lederach 1991)? Some research suggests that mediators who are more sociable and empathic with the disputants in their personal style produce more agreements than those who remain distant from them (Bartos 1989).

Professional mediators differ in their philosophies. Some see their responsibility as simply to facilitate an agreement that the conflict parties agree is fair and workable. Although most mediators adhere to an impartiality principle, feeling that any favoring of one side over another destroys their usefulness, some believe that the mediation process should empower any party that is at an unfair disadvantage. Still others practice what is called "transformative mediation," where the intervening third party intends not only to reach agreement but to modify the conflict relationship and setting (Busch and Folger 1994).

Intermediation. In the intervention approach known as "intermediation," an intermediary plays a quite different role than the formal mediator whose role we have just described. The intermediaries work to facilitate communication between conflicting parties. Their involvement normally extends over long periods and is particularly useful in very sensitive and potentially explosive conflicts. They function, for example, as conveyers of information between heads of state or hostile ethnic communities who cannot be seen by their constituents to have contact with the "enemy." Once fully trusted by the opposing sides, they sometimes suggest gestures or unilateral concessions that might lead to a lessening of tension and to negotiation. They must generally be superb communicators and confidants (Kolb 1995). Total impartiality is important. That is why Quaker conciliators, with their reputation for being able to see truth on all sides, have often succeeded as intermediaries where others have failed (Yarrow 1978).

On occasion, several methods will be used in the same conflict. One of the authors of the present work was asked to help resolve a difficult conflict within a university physics department. There were actually two types of conflict going on: conflict between project groups

over space and equipment, and conflict due to extreme tension between the leaders of those groups. The mediator used a multitrack approach. First, he interviewed each of the ten participants to "map" a shared reality of the conflict and locate some ideas for resolving it. He also reduced the leaders' hostility through face-to-face mediation with them. Finally, he used a "single text agreement technique," circulating three successive draft agreements until one acceptable to all was achieved. All participants claimed ownership of the settlement at a signing ceremony that ended with a champagne toast. Five years later, the agreed-upon arrangement continued to work reasonably well.

Multimodal Intermediation. Many types of third parties can be introduced into a conflict, working together either simultaneously or at different points when their form of assistance is most needed. There are many different functions intermediaries can perform. Intervention may begin with the "explorer," who assures the contenders that the other side's goal is not total victory, and end with the "reconciler," who facilitates the healing process (Mitchell 1993). Along the path of resolution, unifiers, facilitators, legitimators, and many other specialists may be introduced. Such a multimodal approach is especially useful with large-scale conflicts. An intervention team must use its skills and relationships with the contenders at the right time, in the right context. Even intraorganizational and two-person conflict could benefit from the team approach, though the types of intervenors would be fewer. Who is there who could help us out of this conflict? This should be the first question conflict opponents should ask. The more varied their concept of third parties, the more intermediary potential they will see as they look around them.

The multiplicity of intermediary roles and functions has been illustrated in numerous contemporary international conflicts (Miall et al. 1999). Efforts to end civil war in Bosnia suggest many of them: involvement of European Community representatives as intermediaries and mediators (though these plans mostly failed); United Nations humanitarian peace keeping, involving modest military, medical, and supply forces to protect major urban centers; NATO military interposition to implement the Dayton Agreement and support political reconstruction; and citizen reconciliation teams from nongovernmental organizations.

In the Nicaraguan civil war, intermediation was done in a number of ways (Wehr and Lederach 1991). Within the Esquipulas process, the presidents of the Central American nations created conciliation commissions for each of the civil wars in progress. Oscar Arias, president of Costa Rica, played the lead intermediary role, because his nation has been historically neutral and unarmed since 1948. His persuasive intervention got the Sandinista government and its opponents to agree to demilitarize the conflict and hold meaningful elections.

A second conflict, between the Sandinistas and Atlantic Coast indigenous groups, complicated Nicaraguan peacemaking. Intermediary types essential in that process included insider-partial mediators such as Cardinal Obando y Bravo and outsider-neutral mediators such as Jimmy Carter. International observer teams monitored the elections and the subsequent transfer of power. Reconciliation teams have now been working nearly a decade to reintegrate demobilized soldiers from both sides into their towns and villages.

Interposition. Another approach to controlling escalation is the placing of a neutral third party physically between the conflicting parties. At the international level, multinational peace keeping has for forty years been a common way of preventing conflict and violence. Military forces and observers are interposed between opposing sides. As Yugoslavia was coming apart in the early 1990s, a new variant of peace keeping was tried, preventive deployment (Carnegie 1997, 64). Macedonia, intending to become an independent state, was threatened with attack from Serbia. A United Nations military and political contingent, sent to Macedonia as a deterrent, has also played an intermediary role between the Macedonian and Serbian governments.

A preventive presence of third parties need not be military or governmental. Increasingly, private citizens groups have intervened to prevent violence (Wehr 1996). In the Nicaraguan civil war of the 1980s, international teams from Witness for Peace were stationed along Nicaragua's borders and in strategic villages at high risk of Contra attack (Griffin-Nolan 1991). The assumption underlying such a practice is that the presence of unarmed foreigners deters attacks on civilians in war zones. The same principle underlies international accompaniment (Mahony and Eguren 1997), where foreign observers stay with human rights leaders whose protest work puts them at risk in civil

conflicts. The deployment of two thousand civilian human rights monitors in the Kosovo province of Yugoslavia through the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe is an interesting recent example. United Nations peace-keeping forces have often been deployed in civil conflicts, with varying success (Carnegie 1997).

Organizations such as corporations, universities, and school systems have created ombuds staff who interpose themselves in internal disputes. Ironically, the very hierarchical structures that have embraced such cooperative mechanisms may shy away from using them effectively. The university conflict described in Chapter 6 is a case in point: although both the faculty and the administration incurred extremely high costs, neither would use ombuds staff as intermediaries.

Unilateral Deescalation

Interrupting and reversing the escalatory spiral is at the heart of conflict moderation. One approach is known as GRIT (graduated reciprocation in tension reduction; Osgood 1962). One side interrupts the upward spiral by taking a modest unilateral step to halt it, either by declining to reciprocate the opponent's last move or by actually moving back down the spiral. The initiator waits for expected reciprocation by the other side.

Patfoort (1995) presents escalation not as a spiral but as a ratcheting process in which parties alternate in trying to maintain dominance in their relationship. Each climb-up requires a more forceful and aggressive action than before. Father-son conflict often assumes such a major-minor pattern. A zigzag effect rather than a spiral is produced. This dynamic is interrupted unilaterally when the dominated party refuses to remain in the low-power position but declines to rise above one of simple equivalence with the adversary.

Self-Limiting Escalation. Some kinds of escalation have a built-in limitation (Wehr 1979). The Gandhian method of satyagraha, active noncooperation of one party to escape domination by another, is a good illustration. By its ideological restraint and its controlled approach to escalation, satyagraha holds in check the "runaway responses" that Coleman (1957) identifies as prime motivators of uncontrolled escalation: generalization of issues, shift from disagreement to antagonism, information distortion, tit-for-tat symmetry (without unilateral concessions),[7] and extremist leadership. Although an ideological commitment to nonviolence was certainly the most important element controlling escalation in Gandhi's satyagaha campaigns, his other strategic and tactical policies also inhibited runaway escalation. Take, for example, his stepwise method of escalating confrontation in a campaign: he would end each campaign episode by withdrawing with his lieutenants to an ashram for a period of reflection and meditation, further communication with his opponents, and manual labor. This hiatus permitted a wiser – more rational – decision about the next upward step to be taken.[8] At any of these intervals of reflection and withdrawal between escalating steps, the challenger might suspend confrontation, return to less intense levels of conflict, and reopen negotiation with the opponent. A similar possibility for suspending a power contest to reopen negotiation is built into the contemporary approach known as dispute system design (Ury et al. 1993). Looping back to negotiation as integral to one's way of doing conflict is a powerful conflict-moderating device.

Gandhi's way of dealing with conflict had another moderating aspect. He viewed his opponents as partners in a search for truth. Bondurant (1988) has conceptualized satyagraha as the "Gandhian Dialectic"; nonviolent action (antithesis) engages established structures of power (thesis) in a truth-seeking struggle leading to a more just and truthful relationship between the parties in conflict (synthesis). That was very much the way Martin Luther King approached the civil rights struggle in the United States. So while such conflict approaches may appear coercive to the casual observer, they have important cooperative "partnership in problem solving" elements as well.

Conclusions

Conflict-moderating approaches tend to have a synergistic effect when applied together. Bosnian peacemaking illustrates how the moderating approaches we have discussed in this chapter can be complementarily applied. It took a long process of intermediation, mediation, and negotiation before the 1995 Dayton Agreement was reached. To

reach it, reluctant leaders had to be brought to the table, and threat strategies – including military force and economic sanctions – had to be used by third parties such as NATO and the European Community. The linchpin of the agreement's implementation was interposition of multinational military forces to separate the opposing sides: an initial intervention force superseded by a stabilization force, which remains in place at this writing. This enforced separation of the three sides permitted the building of institutions for resolving residual conflict and encouraging reconciliation, particularly within multiethnic villages where those could be reestablished (Murray 1997).

In these pages, we have presented a number of theories of conflict processes, illustrative real-world applications, and methods for dealing with conflict creatively and at reasonable cost. In a sense, we all are conflict actors most of the time, working at the craft of getting along with others, meeting our needs and defending our interests, minimizing harm to others and society. Human experience has provided us with a substantial number of tools to handle conflict well. We must learn to use these tools skillfully, judging wisely when to use which approaches under what circumstances and in which settings. Escalation is sometimes necessary, but when? Negotiation is often mutually beneficial for all parties, but not always so. Even force is sometimes called for to protect life and other things of value, but is it physical or intimidating force that is required? We must constantly be asking ourselves, Which tools work well together and which do not? When and for how long should they be used? Perhaps most important, our choice of conflict action methods should be informed by our accumulated theoretical understanding of how conflict works.

The secret to preventing the escalation of costly conflict is really not a secret at all. As we noted in Chapter 1, for at least two centuries now humans have been consciously learning how to do so and have practiced it and reflected upon it. Were our efforts not hampered by the breakneck speed with which weapons are developed, and the pressures of rapid population growth, we would probably have resolved the problem already. We must continue to train ever larger numbers of individuals and groups in how to manage conflict more economically.

Although human knowledge about conflict increased substantially in the twentieth century, so has the world's population and the

technology of violence. In this new century and millennium, conflict actors must increasingly practice the "principles of good conflict": clarifying goals and interests to move coercive conflict toward cooperative resolution; selecting conflict strategies and tactics rationally and applying them economically to further those interests; and using conflict knowledge to inform our practice of conflict as we reduce its cost.