

# CONFLICTS AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

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# *Understanding and Dealing with Conflicts*

## **The Nature of Conflict**

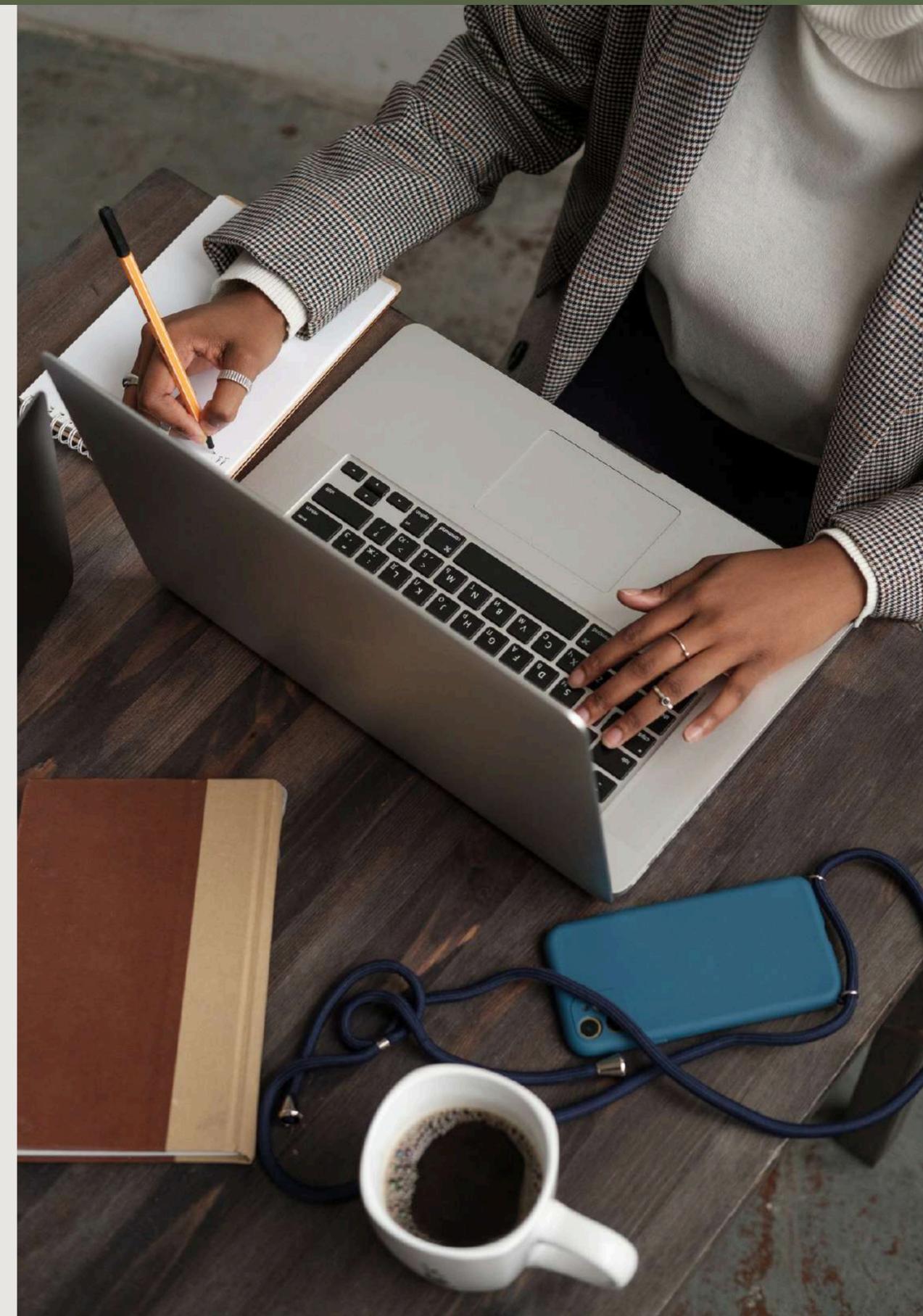
Conflict arises when individuals or groups with differing needs or goals perceive obstruction from others in achieving them. Realistic group conflict theory links it to struggles over limited resources, while social identity theory connects it to group perceptions and discrimination. Ting-Toomey distinguishes between *independent* (individualist) and *interdependent* (collectivist) selves, shaping how conflict is viewed and expressed—openly in individualist cultures, relationally in collectivist ones.

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## Model of Conflict Styles

**Thomas and Kilmann (1974)** identified **five styles** of conflict management based on concern for self vs. concern for others:

1. **Competing** – assertive and uncooperative; focused on personal goals.
  2. **Avoiding** – unassertive and uncooperative; sidesteps confrontation.
  3. **Accommodating** – cooperative and unassertive; prioritizes others' needs.
  4. **Compromising** – moderate concern for both self and others; seeks middle ground.
  5. **Collaborating** – assertive and cooperative; seeks mutual benefit.
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# Culture, Emotions, and Conflict



- Emotions play a crucial role in how conflict is expressed and resolved.
- Individualist cultures often see emotional expression as honesty and clarity; people may openly show anger or disagreement.
- Collectivist cultures tend to control emotional displays to maintain harmony and prevent loss of face.
- Emotional restraint is valued as a sign of maturity, self-control, and social intelligence.
- Misreading emotional cues across cultures can easily escalate misunderstandings and deepen conflict.

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# Management of Conflict

How people perceive, interpret, and manage conflict differs widely across cultures.

- In many Western cultures, negotiation is viewed as the main form of conflict management:
- Win–lose → competitive approach (typical in individualist environments).
- Win–win → cooperative approach (typical in team-oriented management).
- Stephen Covey adds two more orientations:
- Lose–win → yielding to maintain peace.
- Lose–lose → both sides compromise or withdraw.
- Each style reflects deeper cultural and moral beliefs about fairness, respect, and the value of relationships.
- Understanding these orientations helps managers adapt strategies that fit the cultural context.



# Mindfulness and Conflict Management

Mindfulness means being aware of one's own cultural assumptions and sensitive to others' perspectives.

- Core components include:
  - Mindful reframing – reinterpreting messages considering the other person's cultural norms.
  - Collaborative dialogue – engaging with empathy, patience, and suspension of judgment.
  - This approach promotes understanding, reduces emotional escalation, and fosters trust in diverse teams.
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# Managing Conflict in the Asia–Pacific Region

Conflict behavior in Asian contexts often reflects high respect for social harmony and authority:

- Malaysia – emphasis on face-saving and reciprocity; dignity and respect guide communication.
- Thailand – calmness and smiling prevent loss of face; open confrontation is avoided.
- Korea – conflict is often mediated by senior authority; indirect and hierarchical negotiation preferred.

These patterns highlight how cultural norms, hierarchy, and collectivist values shape conflict-handling practices.



# Mediation and Conflict Transformation

Mediation is also culture-specific:

- Collectivist cultures prefer mediation through respected elders or social networks who maintain relationships.
- Western cultures tend to use professional mediators following structured, legal processes.

Conflict transformation goes beyond short-term resolution.

- It aims to change underlying attitudes, values, and systems that fuel conflict.
- Focuses on long-term healing and building sustainable cooperation.
- Encourages participants to see conflict as an opportunity for learning and relationship growth.

# Case Study

In 1994, US President Bill Clinton took a strong and aggressive stance during trade negotiations with Japan's Prime Minister Hosokawa.

The US aimed to open Japan's market and used a "results-oriented" or "get-tough-with-Japan" policy to secure domestic political support.

Despite using strong and forceful language, Clinton's approach achieved only minor concessions.

- European/American negotiators: Showing anger led to larger concessions from the other side.
- Asian and Asian American negotiators: Showing anger led to smaller concessions, as it violated their cultural norm of emotional restraint and harmony.

When anger was expressed in a way that fit cultural expectations (e.g., moderate, respectful tone), Asian negotiators responded more positively.

But when anger was expressed inappropriately to the culture, both Western and Asian negotiators reduced concessions.

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**The study highlights that expressing anger is not universally effective in negotiations.**

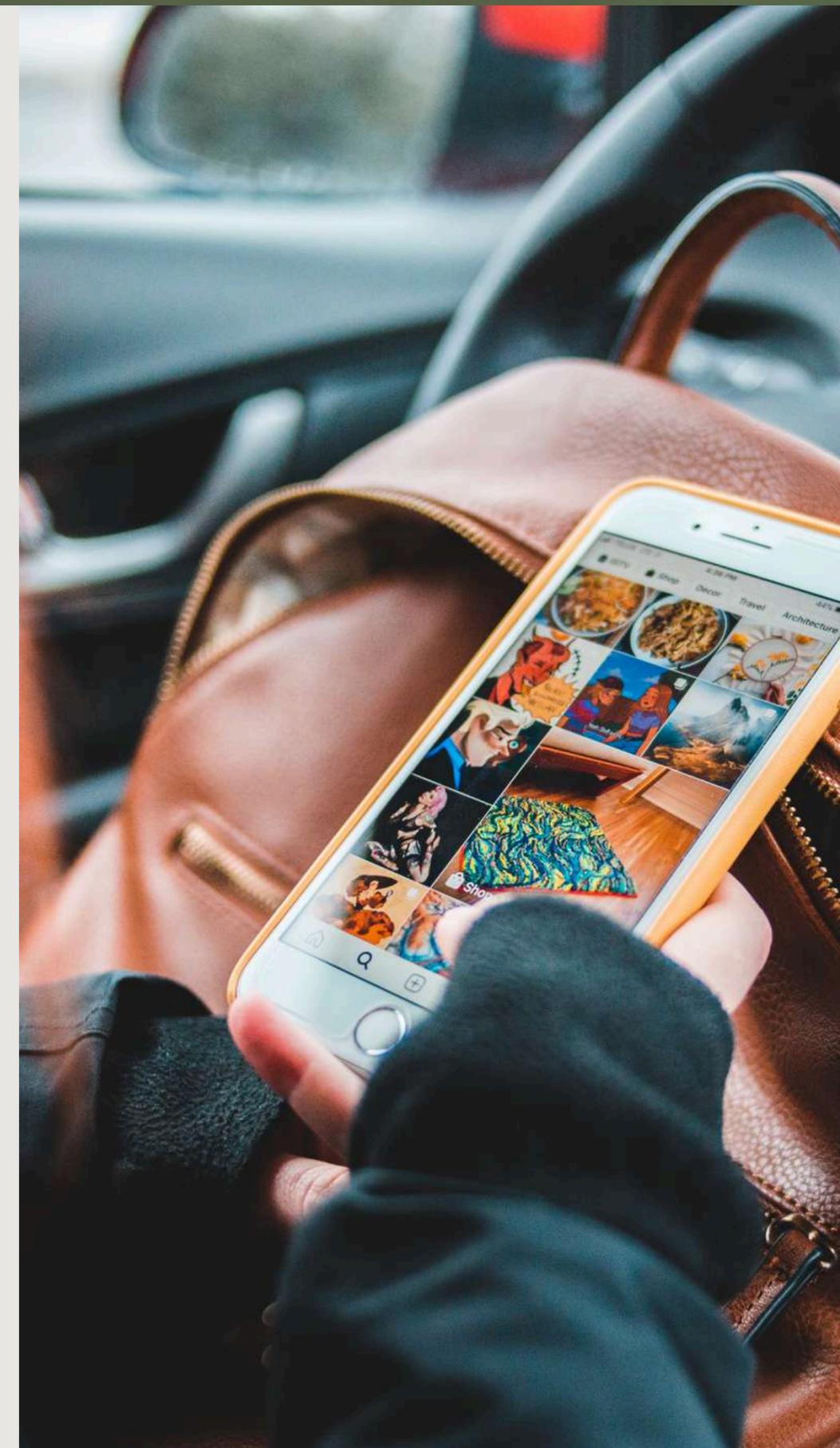
**Cultural context matters:**

- **In Western (individualist) cultures, assertiveness and emotional expression may be seen as signs of confidence and power.**
- **In Asian (collectivist) cultures, such displays can be perceived as disrespectful, disharmonious, or a loss of face.**

**Key lesson:**

**Effective negotiators must adapt emotional expressions to match the cultural norms of their counterparts.**

**Showing anger might work in one culture but backfire in another, damaging trust and reducing cooperation.**



THANK YOU

*For Listening*

TEAM 2

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