
Preface

It is vital to understand that we cannot discuss international negotiation, mediation, and conflict resolution as if life conditions and situational contexts did not influence the thoughts, feelings, and actions of human beings. People actively construct their own experience. The more an individual action is conceived and guided by cognitive, emotional, and motivational processes, the smaller the probability that it can be accurately predicted, particularly on the scale of collective action. As a result, world leaders often seem surprised by the way events unfold, often with considerable rapidity. Early awareness for preventive problem-solving possibilities is, therefore, a strategic goal of negotiators: a willingness to look ahead for potential problems and to identify and heed the warning signals. Moving forward, it is important to keep hope and resilience alive among the conflicting parties. Training seems to be the best way to increase awareness of these issues. However, while it is possible to use rational training approaches to facilitate recognition of these problems, these approaches may actually be of limited value in producing change. Key to the process of reasoning is the development of core cognitive, emotional, and motivational processes, particularly those aimed at creating justice, fairness, and outcomes supporting the common good. This is especially the case in a global world where many individuals can be affected by the decisions of a few. Nowadays, our biggest challenge in international negotiation is to encourage negotiators to emphasize cooperative and justice-seeking motives as opposed to “trying to get the best deal for the home team.”

The main goal of this interdisciplinary volume is to expand the recognition that international negotiation represents a process that often rests on interpersonal relationships. Techniques may be applied among parties to reformulate situations to prevent future conflicts through persuasion skills and efforts to shift perspectives. In fact, negotiation should not be seen solely as a tool for identifying non-bellacose solutions and reaching agreements to international issues. Negotiation happens in everyone’s daily life and can be regarded as a basic mode of human interaction. We negotiate at the market, with our friends when we organize a trip and during romantic meetings. At the end of the day, we have to deal with the sometimes conflicting goals, needs, and desires of a counterpart. Life itself is about compromises, and, therefore, it is about reaching agreements. In this regard, the social functional role played by cognition and emotions that are at the heart of negotiation tells us just how they are essential features in human communication more generally. Just as negotiation is a social dynamic process, so too are the thoughts and feelings of negotiators.

The social cognitive approach described in this book is one that has only quite recently started to gain traction among scholars. The most recent findings in cognate fields such as neuroplasticity, affective neuroscience, cognitive sciences, and cultural studies call attention to the limitations of explaining social behavior in terms of power, economics, and resources. Emerging concepts in these fields make evident the relevance of a more constructivist philosophical, anthropological, and psychological approach to knowledge. That said, we are aware of the institutional constraints within which we negotiate. Nevertheless, we find in the figure of the negotiator a sort of bridge to powerful decision-making elites, enabling changes in perceptions and belief, which may in turn influence the processes of decision making. In the final analysis, the goal is to be able to affect leaders' decision-making process and policy shaping. Moreover, international negotiation usually includes parties with different languages, with different meaning attributions, operating with frameworks based on different cultural and ethical models. Hence "reality" may be categorized according to divergent frames and semantic fields. In this light, there is always a gap between a message sent and a message received: the more such a gap is filled, the more likely the communication will be a successful one. To this extent, it is important for negotiators to be aware that every negotiation—as in every communication process—is a subjective dynamical and interactive process, in which both parties are in some way actively responsible for mutual understanding. In this volume, we have made an attempt to explore the relevance of research to complex cases. It is our hope that the work presented in the chapters to follow contribute to a widening of horizons and an awareness that multiple perspectives can be brought to bear on the practice of peace negotiations.

There is a saying in Brussels in the EU institutional framework: "everybody calls for coordination, but nobody wants to be coordinated." Our biggest challenge is coordination. But I am proud to have been the coordinator of this team of the very distinguished contributors. The coordination process has been smooth and, above all, a great learning opportunity. I am indebted to all the contributors for their cooperation, professionalism, and enthusiasm in being part of this interdisciplinary venture. But it is also hoped that readers will benefit in a more practical way by tailoring the authors' concepts to their own training venues, so that they appreciably could increase the mastery, effectiveness, and sustainability of peace negotiation strategies.

It may be evident that I am passionate about this volume. It is a first step in the direction of developing effective approaches to conflict resolution through negotiation. A second step will be to integrate the approaches toward a larger vision of negotiation and related attempts to understanding human sociopsychological mechanisms to bring about conflict transformation and, most important, to sustain changes. It is very satisfying to see this volume in print and have an opportunity to expose people from many parts of the world to these ideas, constructs, and operational approaches.

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Mauro Galluccio

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