

## Summary

Interpersonal conflict is an inevitable part of human interaction. On a nearly daily basis, people are bound to face others who pursue contradictory goals or hold opposing viewpoints, which can eventually lead to conflict. Sometimes, people can successfully resolve these disagreements independently but some disputes may require intervention by an impartial third party. Through carefully selected strategies, a mediator can help disputants navigate the negotiation stage, communicate their objectives and arrive at a mutually beneficial solution. To date, conflict management literature has primarily investigated traditional mediation strategies—which are typically aimed at resolving resource conflicts (i.e., conflicts about tangible issues such as money). Recently, however, negotiation researchers have increasingly explored a particularly challenging type of conflict: value conflicts (i.e., conflicts about intangible issues such as beliefs or principles). These studies revealed that disputants in value conflicts exhibit more competitive attitudes (Hinds & Mortensen, 2005), show higher levels of distancing (Skitka et al., 2005), intolerance and egocentrism (Wright et al., 2008), see less common ground (Kouzakova et al., 2012), are less encouraged to seek win-win opportunities (Harinck et al., 2000), are more likely to expect zero-sum outcomes (Rapoport, 1964) and consider classic conflict solutions such as compromises particularly unacceptable (Harinck et al., 2000; Harinck & De Dreu, 2004) in comparison to disputants in resource conflicts.

Although much of this research has increased our understanding of how reluctant disputants are to negotiate—once their sacredly held values are at stake—few studies considered the effects of the mediator's strategies when intervening in value conflicts. Indeed, inviting such obstinate

parties to place their values as cards on the table and employing traditional techniques aimed at 50-50 compromises may prove unsuccessful. The present dissertation aimed to investigate effective ways of intervening in value conflicts through two strategic steps. First, I sought to identify the strategies currently employed by professional mediators when intervening in value conflicts. Second, I examined the effects of a possibly counterproductive cost-risk strategy (i.e., threatening litigation) and a controversial strategy (i.e., exhibiting anger)—both of which are currently being used in the field to intervene in value conflicts.

In **Chapter 2**, I report on the results of an exploratory research consisting of in-depth interviews with professional mediators in the field. This study provided initial insight into the characteristics of mediation techniques aimed at resolving value conflicts. Several propositions were formulated, one of which suggests traditional mediation techniques such as perspective taking, identifying and the transformative- and narrative mediation styles may make diverging values too salient, thereby promoting stalemates. Moreover, classic intensification techniques such as paradox intervention, encouraging escalation and confrontation may also be detrimental as they tend to intensify inherently intense value conflict situations. This study also produced an extensive inventory of a variety of mediation strategies currently employed when intervening in value conflicts. The effects that the majority of these strategies pose on value conflicts have not been previously examined. For this reason, I selected two specific strategies for further empirical investigation: threatening litigation (Chapter 3) and exhibiting anger (Chapter 4).

In **Chapter 3**, I outline the efficacy of threatening litigation once employed in value conflicts. This technique was selected for empirical examination after considering that

people respond with moral outrage to the thought of trading off their values for monetary purposes (Tetlock et al., 2000). Since mediators who threaten litigation may warn parties of the increased costs they will face by resolving the dispute in court, as opposed to at the mediation table, this technique may prove unsuccessful when the issues concern personal values. As such, it was hypothesized that framing the threat of litigation as a loss of losing control of the outcome may be more successful than framing it as incurring increased costs. The results showed that threatening litigation framed as loss of control of the outcome was more likely to increase parties' motivation to continue the mediation session than no threat.

Furthermore, framing the threat as incurring increased costs was likely to decrease avoidance behavior. When disputants exhibit avoidance behavior, they refrain from communicating their objectives in an effort to avoid confrontation. By not communicating their objectives however, disputants inhibit mediators from successfully diagnosing the conflict and encouraging possible effective activities such as logrolling. As such, in conflicts about tangible issues such as resources, less avoidance behavior may be productive as it allows the parties to highlight their objectives, and the mediator in turn can employ fitting strategies. In value conflicts on the other hand, where the issues concern personal beliefs, it is advised to not over-address the diverging values (Chapter 2). Considering avoidance behavior causes parties to make their differences loom more severe, which in turn can lead to confrontation, this behavior may prove unfavorable. As the results showed threatening litigation framed as incurring increased costs may decrease avoidance behavior, this technique may prove unsuccessful when employed in value conflicts.

In **Chapter 4**, the efficacy of mediator-expressed anger was examined. Exhibiting anger was selected as it is not

found among mediation strategies used by mediators. Although anger is a well-established negotiation tactic used by negotiators themselves (Van Kleef et al., 2008), mediators on the other hand, are trained to be calm and neutral third parties. Considering negotiation literature shows that anger expressed by a negotiator will either lead to retaliation or concession, based on the power of the negotiator (Lelieveld et al., 2012), I investigated whether the mediator's power would also impact the efficacy of anger, if expressed by the mediator. The results showed that although both high- and low-power angry mediators were rated unfavorably by disputants, high-power mediators elicited more productive conflict handling behaviors than low-power mediators, regardless of their anger. This corresponds with findings in negotiation research which has found that high-power negotiators who display anger experience more concessions from their counterparts than low-power negotiators who exhibit anger (Lelieveld et al., 2012).

With reference to both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, the studies presented in this dissertation expand our understanding of the development, escalation and resolution of value-based disputes. Despite being faced with conflicts that have repeatedly been termed difficult, if not impossible to resolve, mediators are currently approaching value conflicts with the intention to reach sustainable resolutions (Chapter 2). In doing so, however, mediators should be aware of techniques that—while beneficial when intervening in disputes concerning issues such as scarce resources—may prove unsuccessful when employed in disputes about people's sacredly held values. Specifically, threatening litigation may be best framed as a loss of control of the outcome versus incurring increased costs, as the former may motivate intransigent parties to continue the mediation session while the latter may decrease

avoidance behavior (Chapter 3). Moreover, mediators who may employ displays of anger as a strategy to overcome an impasse or promote productive conflict handling behaviors should only consider this if they hold a position of power and prioritize the resolution of the dispute above the disputants' evaluation of the mediator and the mediation process (Chapter 4).

Finally, by reporting on the current state of the practice of mediating value conflicts as well as by empirically investigating findings observed in the field, this dissertation can help in expanding the mediator's strategies to better intervene in these intractable disputes.