# Disputant Reactions to Managerial Conflict Resolution Tactics

## A COMPARISON AMONG ARGENTINA, THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, MEXICO, AND THE UNITED STATES

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This study examined disputants' preferences for supervisory conflict resolution tactics. We identified three research needs. Previous work has (a) been mostly from the manager's (and not the subordinate's) perspective, (b) examined only a limited set of possible intervention tactics, and (c) tended to be confined to North American samples. In this role-playing study, we addressed these three needs by examining disputant reactions to five different conflict resolution tactics. In addition, we included participants from Argentina, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and the United States. The results provide evidence pertaining to the efficacy of some tactics and the problems of others. In particular, managers seem to engender the most positive responses when they act either as impartial facilitators or as inquisitorial judges.

**R**esearch has shown that managers can spend as much as 20% of their time resolving conflicts (Thomas & Schmidt, 1976). If conflict levels are too high, an organization can be rife with anger and hostility, making it difficult to coordinate even the simplest shared activities (Baron, 1991; Rahim, 1985; Robbins, 1974; Thomas, 1993; Wall & Callister, 1995). Individuals may be harmed as well. For example, people who live and work in contentious environments report higher levels of stress (Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey, & Toth, 1997) and more psychological distress (Bergmann & Volkema, 1994; Bolger & Schilling, 1991; Lepore, 1992). This is because conflict is an

important part of work life and needs to be managed effectively to promote the welfare of both organizations and the people who work in them.

In large measure, organizations delegate to supervisors the responsibility for conflict management (cf. Sheppard, 1984), although these individuals sometimes have inadequate conflict resolution skills. The fact that managers often are called on to settle conflicts highlights the considerable need for research that can provide them with empirical guidelines. Unfortunately, it is difficult to accommodate managerial needs until we have a better knowledge base. Important steps already have been taken in this direction (Bergmann & Volkema, 1994; Dworkin, 1994; Folger & Cropanzano, 1998; Sheppard, 1984), but certain deficiencies remain. These limitations highlight the need for additional research.

The purpose of this article is to better understand management by exploring how disputants react to managerial conflict resolution tactics. In the sections that follow, we discuss the research results that are currently available and examine three significant limitations in the contemporary literature: Previous work (a) has been mostly from the perspective of the manager, (b) has examined only a limited range of conflict management tactics, and (c) has been conducted primarily on North Americans. These three limitations provide the impetus for this study. We then describe how this study addresses these three concerns.

## MANAGERIAL TACTICS FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

When managers intervene in a conflict, they have to select a resolution tactic. Although a plethora of tactics is available (see Sheppard, 1984, for a review), in practice, five of these receive the widest usage: (a) advising, (b) adversarial, (c) autocratic, (d) providing impetus, and (e) avoidance.

*Advising tactics.* In one field study, Lewicki and Sheppard (1985) presented conflict vignettes to 100 working individuals. This sample consisted of owners and/or managers of travel agencies and commercial credit managers. Lewicki and Sheppard uncovered a tactic they called mediation. Using this tactic, the manager serves as a catalyst to bring the disputants together and to help them work through their problems. Kolb (1986) termed this facilitative tactic "advising" because managers only exert control to the extent that it is necessary to facilitate discussion among disputants.

In two experimental studies, Karambayya and colleagues investigated reactions to participative conflict resolution methods. In the first experiment, Karambayya and Brett (1989) used a sample of 69 mostly male MBA students. Participants experienced a simulated conflict. Individuals reacted

most favorably when the conflict was settled through an advising-like tactic. In a second experiment, Karambayya, Brett, and Lytle (1992) compared the responses of students to those of actual managers. Both groups preferred a tactic that was more oriented toward advising. Consistent results were obtained in a field survey of Turkish workers (Kozan & Ilter, 1994). These individuals desired that their managers use more participative tactics.

Similar findings exist in studies of simulated conflicts in nonwork settings. For example, in an experimental study, Leung, Bond, Carment, Krishnan, and Liebrand (1990; see also Leung, Bond, Carment, Krishnan, & Liebrand, 1991) assessed the reactions of 355 undergraduate students to various conflict scenarios. Their sample included men and women from the Netherlands and Canada. These researchers ascertained that mediation was evaluated favorably. Leung (1987) and Leung and Lind (1986) reported similar results from vignette experiments among male and female undergraduates. Both of these experiments included participants from Hong Kong and the United States. Finally, Leung, Au, Fernández-Dols, and Iwawaki (1992) presented written scenarios to 175 male and female undergraduates from Japan and Spain. (However, it should be noted that this Leung et al. study did not focus on third-party conflict resolution.) In any case, these researchers determined that respondents liked tactics that allowed them to actively participate. Together, these findings suggest that advising could be a cross-culturally powerful technique for managing conflict. The present study examines this possibility.

*Adversarial or arbitration tactics.* When taking an adversarial approach, managers tend to step aside and let each employee present his or her own case, free from harassment (Sheppard, 1983). After this presentation of evidence, managers select the resolution alternative and enforce the decision. The adversarial tactic also has been called arbitration (e.g., Kolb & Glidden, 1986; Shapiro & Rosen, 1994) or adjudication (Karambayya & Brett, 1989). Generally speaking, adversarial legal proceedings are well liked by disputants in the United States (for a review of the earlier evidence, see Thibault & Walker, 1975). Folger, Cropanzano, Timmerman, Howes, and Mitchell (1996) tested this possibility in three experimental studies. In each, undergraduate students responded to written conflict scenarios. Generally speaking, the adversarial procedure was preferred to more autocratic approaches. Studies by Leung et al. (1990) obtained similar results in Canada and the Netherlands. Leung and colleagues also argued that societies that put an emphasis on social harmony will find adversarial tactics, with their built-in confrontations, distasteful. This reasoning was supported in vignette studies by Leung and Lind (1986) and Leung (1987). They discovered that Hong

Kong Chinese participants were less favorably predisposed toward adversarial techniques than were Americans. In fact, the Chinese respondents rated them about as favorably as they did the autocratic approaches. Benjamin (1975) made similar observations regarding Japan. Based on these observations, this study tests the hypothesis that adversarial methods are viewed more favorably by Americans than they are by individuals from other societies.

*Autocratic or inquisitorial tactic.* According to Sheppard (1983), when managers intervene in a conflict, they often exhibit a take-charge directive style. This is referred to as an autocratic or inquisitorial technique. Sheppard conducted a series of interviews with managers and determined that this was the most common approach employed. Likewise, in a survey including professional men and women, Bergmann and Volkema (1994) reported that "using one's authority" was the most common means by which supervisors resolved conflicts (p. 469).

When using this tactic, the manager directs the discussion, selects the resolution alternative, and enforces the outcome. Both Sheppard (1983) and Shapiro and Rosen (1994) likened this intervention to that of a parent. Although the inquisitorial tactic is widely used in the United States, a field study by Lewicki and Sheppard (1985) found that many American managers hold reservations about the autocratic tactic. This seemed to occur because autocratic proceedings offer disputants little control over the process. Likewise, experimental studies by Karambayya and Brett (1989) and Karambayya et al. (1992) ascertained that both undergraduate and working disputants responded unfavorably when their managers resolved conflicts with directive tactics. Moreover, in legal settings, American disputants respond very negatively to an inquisitorial tactic (Folger et al., 1996; Thibault & Walker, 1975). These aversive reactions may generalize to other nations. For instance, the Turkish workers surveyed by Kozan and Ilter (1994) preferred that their managers resolve conflicts with less directive tactics. Additional research in nonwork settings further suggests that Chinese disputants also tend to prefer participative conflict resolution tactics to inquisitorial proceedings (Leung & Lind, 1986). It could be that autocratic tactics are uniformly questionable. However, the possibility of cross-national generalizability has not yet been examined in work settings. The present study investigates this possibility.

*Providing impetus.* When providing impetus, managers provide motivational incentives to individuals so that they might work through their conflicts (Sheppard, 1983). Often, these incentives are negative, such as a real or

implied threat. Shapiro and Rosen (1994) referred to this tactic as "offering incentives" and compared it to a "kick in the pants." Shapiro and Rosen investigated the frequency with which the tactic was used. They surveyed 74 managers and ascertained that offering incentives was employed about 16% of the time. Their frequency of use is lower than other tactics but is frequent enough to merit attention. Although Sheppard's (1983) interviews and Shapiro and Rosen's (1994) field survey suggest that this tactic is sometimes used by managers, we could find no data bearing on disputant reactions to it. However, it should be noted that this intervention seems to combine the worst of both worlds. First, the manager partially defects from his or her duty to resolve conflicts. Second, this technique is highly directive. In view of these considerations, we expect that disputants of many nations will evaluate this tactic negatively. The present study addresses this claim.

*Avoidance*. The aforementioned field study by Shapiro and Rosen (1994) also presented evidence indicating that a commonly used intervention tactic is simply to ignore the problem. This occurred 18.9% of the time. In their review, Kolb and Glidden (1986) termed this tactic "avoidance." Americans are not the only people who avoid conflict. Leung (1988) presented a conflict vignette to a diverse sample of Americans and Hong Kong Chinese. Both groups included undergraduates and nonstudents. The Chinese were likely to avoid a conflict with a fellow in-group member (i.e., a close friend) and pursue it with an out-group member (i.e., someone who was not a close friend). Americans were about equally likely to pursue the conflict in both groups.

When a manager is acting as a third party, the meaning of avoidance is subtle. The term does not necessarily refer to situations in which the supervisor has been invited by the disputants to intervene and has turned down their request. This circumstance would likely be seen as unfair if, for no other reason, the manager was declining to provide needed assistance. Rather, a manager avoids a conflict when, after seeing the problem, he or she does not initiate an active intervention of some kind. For example, during his tenure at Ford Motor Company, Henry Ford I did little to resolve conflicts among his upper managers. He believed that conflicts inspired hard work and weeded out people of weak character (Halberstam, 1986).

As with providing impetus, the avoidance tactic could be seen as a dereliction of duty on the part of the manager. In some sense, avoidance also denies process control because it precludes the very existence of third-party proceedings. As such, we expect it to engender negative responses. Unfortunately, we could locate no evidence pertaining to managerial avoidance. However, some important evidence from nonwork settings has been

collected in the studies by Leung and colleagues. Leung et al. (1992) determined that both Spanish and Japanese participants evaluated avoidance, termed "ignoring," less favorably than more active techniques such as mediation and arbitration. Leung et al. (1990, 1991) obtained similar results among Canadian and Dutch participants (although the Dutch were more likely to ignore a conflict than the Canadians). Leung et al.'s (1990, 1991) research needs to be extended to the case of third-party conflict resolution in work settings. In addition, the present study examines whether avoidance is viewed negatively in the United States and in other nations.

## LIMITATIONS IN PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Whereas progress has been made in understanding managerial tactics for third-party conflict resolution, substantial research needs remain. Our review of the literature identified three crucial limitations. These three concerns provide the impetus for this study.

*Limitation 1: Most research was from the perspective of the third party or manager.* To understand how disputants respond to conflict intervention tactics, one must first know the tactics to which they are being exposed. Logically, research to date has emphasized describing the available methods. However, this approach also carries certain limitations. Just because an approach is widely used does not necessarily mean that it is the most effective. This is especially true in the case of conflict resolution. For instance, based on the results of a survey, Sheppard, Blumenfeld-Jones, Minton, and Hyder (1994) reported that managers tended to be more autocratic than disputants may prefer. Similar findings were obtained in Karambayya et al.'s (1992) experimental study. These findings raise the possibility that supervisors are using nonoptimal conflict resolution tactics. However, this cannot be definitively demonstrated until it is shown that disputants react differently to alternative tactics. Overcoming this limitation, the present study collects reactions from the disputants' perspective.

*Limitation 2: No study has simultaneously examined all five tactics.* The five tactics outlined above have emerged from descriptive research. Unfortunately, none of the previous research has examined all five concurrently. Additionally, much of the research that does exist was not conducted in the context of work settings. Thus, the precise ranking of these different tactics is not known. This study seeks to address this limitation by having participants rate all five tactics as they pertain to a simulated workplace conflict.

*Limitation 3: Most research was conducted in the North American cultural context.* Conflict resolution represents an important managerial duty in the context of North American organizations. In the future, the time spent managing conflicts may increase due to the increasing globalization of the world economy (Aguinis & Kraiger, 1996; Smith & Bond, 1993). These developments will require increased interaction among individuals from various national backgrounds (Moghaddam, Taylor, & Wright, 1993; Triandis, 1994). Accordingly, it would be helpful to know which conflict resolution tactics are seen as the most fair and appropriate by people from a variety of different national backgrounds. The literature on cross-cultural psychology offers some suggestions in this regard.

According to Hofstede (1980) and Triandis (1996), the United States tends to be high on individualism and low on collectivism. In general, individualistic nations tend to give priority to personal goals and preferences. Decisions are more likely to be evaluated based on how they influence individuals and less on how they influence the group. When resolving legal conflicts, individualistic societies protect the individual disputant by granting him or her influence in the procedure (Bond, Wan, Leung, & Giacalone, 1985; Leung, 1987, 1988; Leung & Lind, 1986). This individualistic national syndrome may explain many of the results we have already reviewed. For example, research on simulated legal and interpersonal conflicts has found that North Americans (i.e., Canada and the United States) and people from other individualistic nations (e.g., the Netherlands) prefer control-enhancing techniques, such as advising (Karambayya & Brett, 1989; Karambayya et al., 1992; Leung et al., 1990, 1991) and, to a lesser extent, adversarial proceedings (Folger et al., 1996; Leung et al., 1990). Conversely, North Americans react less favorably to tactics that offer little process control, such as the autocratic tactic (Folger et al., 1996; Karambayya & Brett, 1989; Karambayya et al., 1992; Thibault & Walker, 1975). Finally, procedures in which the manager forgoes his or her job duties should be seen as the most negative of all. Thus, providing impetus and avoidance (Leung et al., 1990) should be especially disliked.

Many nations are more collectivistic than the United States. These collectivistic nations are more likely to give priority to the needs of the group. As such, there is a greater emphasis on harmony and group maintenance. In legal settings, individuals from collectivistic nations tend to prefer mediation or advising, as these processes allow both parties to "speak their piece" (Benjamin, 1975; Kozan & Ilter, 1994; Leung, 1987; Leung & Lind, 1986; Leung et al., 1992). On the other hand, adversarial tactics institutionalize a clash between two group members. According to Leung (1987) and Leung and Lind (1986),

Chinese respondents (who are from a collectivistic society) like adversarial proceedings less than do Americans. Chinese participants also report preferring advising to adversarial approaches. When adversarial and autocratic techniques are compared, Chinese respondents show no clear predilections. There are other tactics that people from collectivistic nations like even less than adversarial ones. Leung et al. (1992) ascertained that individuals from two collectivistic nations, Japan and Spain, rated an adversarial process, here termed "arbitration," more favorably than avoidance (or ignoring).

However, there may be one important caveat. Relative to their individualistic counterparts, people from collectivistic societies tend to form more closely knit in-groups. These in-groups, such as family and friends, are extremely important. According to Triandis (1989) and Oyserman and Markus (1993), these groups provide much of the foundation of the collectivistic self-identity. For this reason, people from collectivistic societies resolve conflicts in ways that preserve the well-being of their in-groups. On the other hand, Triandis (1989) also noted that collectivists have less commitment to their out-groups. For example, although one might be extremely careful to preserve the relationship with a friend (an in-group member), a collectivist might be much less likely to be concerned about maintaining an out-group. Thus, when compared to conflicts with out-group members, we expect that when the disputants are individuals from the same in-group, their preferences should change slightly, with the autocratic tactic becoming less favored and the advising tactic being more favored.

## THE PRESENT STUDY

In this study, we addressed the three limitations noted in the literature on managerial conflict resolution tactics. In doing so, we examined disputant reactions to five third-party conflict resolution tactics that could be used by managers within different nations. We hypothesized that people from relatively collectivistic nations would prefer different managerial interventions than those preferred by people from more individualistic nations. To test this possibility, we examined subsamples of individuals from four nations: Argentina, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and the United States. According to research by Hofstede (1980, chap. 5), Latin America is relatively collectivistic, whereas the United States is relatively individualistic. Accordingly, we predicted that disputants' evaluations of the tactics would show a three-way interaction among type of tactic (adversarial, autocratic, advising, providing impetus, and avoidance), nationality (Argentina, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and the United States), and relationship between

disputants (in-group and out-group). The form of this three-way interaction can be more precisely formalized into the following four hypotheses.

*Hypothesis 1:* Respondents from collectivistic nations will rank their preferences for conflict resolution tactics in the following manner: Advising is the most preferred, followed by adversarial and autocratic, followed by providing impetus and avoidance. No difference is expected between adversarial and autocratic methods, and no prediction is made regarding differences between providing impetus and avoidance.

*Hypothesis 2:* Respondents from individualistic nations will rank their preferences for conflict resolution tactics in the following manner: Advising is the most preferred, followed by adversarial, followed by autocratic, followed by both providing impetus and avoidance. No prediction is made regarding differences between providing impetus and avoidance techniques.

*Hypothesis 3:* When compared to people from individualistic nations, those from collectivistic nations will rate adversarial proceedings less positively. Conversely, when compared to people from collectivistic nations, those from individualistic nations will rate inquisitorial tactics more negatively.

*Hypotheses 4:* Only individuals from collectivistic nations will be affected by the in-group/out-group manipulation. Among these participants, when the disputants are from the same in-group they will rank advising higher and inquisitorial lower than when the disputants are from an out-group.

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS

Participants were from four countries: Argentina ($n = 126$), the Dominican Republic ($n = 38$), Mexico ($n = 58$), and the United States ($n = 108$) (see Table 1). The total sample size was 330, although for some analyses, this varies slightly due to missing data. All participants were undergraduate university students attending classes, which enhances the likelihood that the four subsamples are similar on dimensions other than nationality. Care was taken to ensure that all participants were citizens of the nation in which the data were collected. Experimental surveys were randomly distributed during regular class time.

Because some of the cells were seemingly small, we conducted a statistical power analysis. In addition, a power analysis is particularly necessary given that we had an unequal-$n$ design (Stone-Romero, Alliger, & Aguinis, 1994). Given a nominal Type I error of .05, an expected medium effect size (i.e., $f^2 = .25$; Cohen, 1988, p. 286) and an unequal-$n$ design including four groups, the average sample size needed to achieve a power level of .80 is 45

TABLE 1
**Participant Demographics**

|                      | Argentina | Dominican Republic | Mexico | United States |
|----------------------|-----------|--------------------|--------|---------------|
| Mean age in years    | 25.27     | 22.16              | 26.98  | 22.10         |
| Percentage employed  | 66.7      | 65.8               | 83.9   | 71.9          |
| Percentage female    | 79.4      | 47.4               | 34.5   | 71.3          |
| Sample size          | 126       | 38                 | 58     | 108           |

(Cohen, 1988, p. 384, Table 8.4.4). Thus, the average sample size in our study ($n = 330/4 = 82.5$) was virtually twice as large as the sample size needed to achieve the recommended .80 level of statistical power. Moreover, our average sample size is larger than that required to reach a power level of .95 (i.e., $n = 70$). Accordingly, we feel confident that our sample was sufficiently large to detect any practically significant population effects (i.e., of at least medium magnitude).

**RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study manipulated three independent variables in a 5 by 4 by 2 factorial design (Conflict Resolution Tactic × Nationality × Disputant Relationship). Both nationality and in-group/out-group were between-subjects factors. Conflict resolution tactic was a within-subjects factor. These manipulations were accomplished using a role-playing methodology. Individuals were given one of two packets of materials. Both sets of packets described a workplace dispute between the participant/disputant and a coworker. In one scenario, the coworker and the respondent had an unspecified (i.e., not in-group) relationship. The first manipulation read as follows:

> Imagine that you are a member of a work team. Currently, you and one of the other team members have developed a serious disagreement about how a project should be handled. You have begun to argue, and your differences are making work unpleasant and threatening the quality of the project. Your manager is considering how to handle the problem. Below are five tactics, labeled Procedure A to Procedure E, that your manager could use in order to settle your disagreement with the other person. Please read each and answer the questions that follow.

The other group of participants received a vignette in which the two conflicting workers belonged to the same in-group. They were described as close friends. Specifically, the description read as follows:

> Imagine that you are a member of work a team. One of your coworkers has become a close personal friend as well. You and your friend have developed a serious disagreement about how a project should be handled. You have begun to argue, and your differences are making work unpleasant and are threatening the quality of the project. Your manager is considering how to handle the problem. Below are five tactics, labeled Procedure A to Procedure E, that your manager could use in order to settle your disagreement with your friend. Please read each and answer the questions that follow.

After reading their respective vignette, the participant/disputant's task was to evaluate five methods of resolving the conflict: adversarial, autocratic, advising, providing impetus, and avoidance. The tactics were not titled. Rather, they were listed simply as A, B, C, D, and E. This was to help mitigate any bias due to the name of the tactic. The descriptions of the five tactics are presented in Table 2. As shown in this table, the five summaries were presented in only a single order. We made this decision due to practical considerations. Altering the order of presentation would have produced a large number of different versions of the instrument. Because the data were collected in class by a course instructor in four different nations, we wanted to keep the method of administration as straightforward as possible.

## DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Each participant completed a series of 8-point Likert-type items. Anchors ranged from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. These questions measured three of the dimensions identified by Leung (1987): (a) fairness, (b) likelihood of reducing future animosity, and (c) overall evaluation. Each of these three criterion measures was assessed with two items that were averaged together to form a dimension score.

Participants first were queried regarding the fairness of the tactic. These two items read, "If the manager uses Procedure [identifying letter], I believe that justice would be served," and "Procedure [identifying letter] is a fair way to resolve this particular conflict." As participants rated the fairness of each tactic, there was a total of 5 two-item Fairness scales. The coefficient alpha reliabilities ranged from .91 to .94. Next, participants completed two questions in which they estimated the likelihood that the tactic would reduce future conflict: "Procedure [identifying letter] would be helpful in reducing future animosity between my coworker and I," and "Procedure [identifying letter] would do little to reduce future animosity between my coworker and I" (reverse scored). The five coefficient alpha reliabilities ranged from .65 to .71. These are slightly lower than the reliabilities for the Fairness and overall Evaluation scales. However, they are acceptable for research purposes

TABLE 2
**Descriptions of the Five Managerial Conflict Resolution Tactics[a]**

Adversarial/arbitration (Tactic A)

When using procedure A, the manager listens to both of you present your own case. However, when doing so, the manager maintains active control over the presentation of evidence and arguments. For example, the manager may interrupt, ask specific questions, disagree, or ask for clarification. Based on this evidence, the manager decides how to settle the argument.

Autocratic/inquisitorial (Tactic B)

When using procedure B, the manager sits quietly and listens as each of you present your own case. The manager is careful to let you and the other person control the presentation of evidence and arguments. Thus, the manager does not interrupt and seldom asks questions. Based on this evidence, the manager decides how to settle the argument.

Advising/mediation (Tactic C)

When using procedure C, the manager meets together with both you and the person with whom you are arguing. The manager does not control the discussion and, instead, lets each of you present your own case. The manager is involved to facilitate the interaction between you and the other person. Therefore, you and your coworker decide how to resolve the problem. The manager's role is to bring the two of you together to help you work out your own problems.

Providing impetus/providing incentives (Tactic D)

When using procedure D, the manager does not discuss the problem in a detailed way. The manager is not involved in the process of conflict resolution. Instead, the manager meets with the two of you and provides a strong incentive for you to solve your own problems. For example, the manager may simply order you to work things out.

Avoidance/ignoring (Tactic E)

When using procedure E, the manager decides not to get involved. The manager does nothing and entirely avoids the problem. Instead, the manager lets you and the other person work things out for yourselves.

a. Listed in the order they were presented to the research participants.

(Nunnally, 1978). Finally, participants were asked to use two items to provide an overall evaluation of the tactic. These two questions were, "Procedure [identifying letter] is an excellent way to resolve the conflict between my coworker and I," and "Overall, Procedure [identifying letter] is a terrible way to resolve the conflict between my coworker and I" (reverse scored). The coefficient alpha reliabilities ranged from .77 to .86.

**TRANSLATION PROCEDURE**

At least two individuals from each of the four countries were involved in writing and preparing the stimulus materials. Once it was determined that the five tactics were similarly meaningful among all four nations, the materials

were written in English and then translated into the appropriate Spanish dialect. Although Spanish is the most widely used language in Latin America, dialects vary somewhat. Thus, the same Spanish word might be more or less comprehensible depending on the particular region. To alleviate this concern, four native speakers from two different nations prepared the Spanish versions. Two Argentines worked on the version for Argentina, and two Mexicans worked on the version for that nation. Both of these Spanish instruments were prepared through a process of back translation. In the end, the two Spanish surveys were quite similar. The Mexican version also was used in the Dominican Republic, although it first was approved for clarity by two Dominican natives.

## RESULTS

### DATA TRANSFORMATIONS

According to Leung and Bond (1989), the use of self-reports can create problems for cross-cultural research. In particular, various groups may use the scales differently. For example, Chen, Lee, and Stevenson (1995) found that Japanese and Chinese respondents tended to use the midpoints of Self-Report scales; Americans tended toward the extreme ends. These different response styles were associated with individualism or collectivism, with collectivists in the middle of the scale, and individualists toward the extremes. Because the present study compared people from both individualist and collectivist nations, this issue needs to be addressed. Fortunately, this potential problem can be solved by standardizing the ratings within each national group. This analytic strategy is described in detail by Leung and Bond (1989), so only a brief summary will be offered here.

Within a given national subsample, each individual provided a rating for each conflict resolution tactic. These ratings were analyzed in two ways. First, they were averaged across all of the participants in a given nation. Second, they were averaged across all five conflict resolution tactics. This provided one overall national mean and one national standard deviation. In other words, these descriptive statistics were computed for the entire national subsample and for all of the tactics considered together. Using this information, we then converted each individual's separate rating into a $z$-score. All analyses were performed using these $z$-scores. Implicitly, this standardization procedure assumes that there are no national differences on overall procedural preferences. For example, although Americans and Argentines might differ on their ratings of particular tactics, they are assumed not to differ on

their overall national means. This assumption is seen as reasonable in conflict research, and so standardized scores commonly are used (cf. Leung et al., 1990, 1991). To ease interpretation further, we converted the standard scores to *T* values. The conversion formula is

$$T = (z\text{-score} \times 10) + 50.$$

This conversion does not alter the statistical properties of the raw score; it simply multiplies each value by one constant (10) and adds another (50). The only purpose of the *T*-score conversion is to eliminate negative numbers and decimals. This makes the obtained values easier to interpret, as the resulting distribution has a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10. For example, a score of 75 would be 1.5 standard deviations above the mean. For completeness, we display both *T* and *z*-scores in Table 3.

## ANALYSES OF VARIANCE

*Preliminary considerations*. Demographic summary data are presented in Table 1. The groups showed statistically significant differences regarding gender composition and employment status. However, effect size estimates indexed by $\eta^2$ indicated that these differences were of extremely small magnitude. The gender effects ranged between .00 and .01. The $\eta^2$ scores for employment status were about the same—between .00 and .03. Nevertheless, because of the presence of statistically significant differences, we conducted all the substantive analyses treating gender and employment status as independent variables. Because these analyses were not theory-based and post hoc, it was necessary to adjust the alpha level using a Bonferroni correction for each of the 12 tests. Thus, we used an alpha level of .004 (i.e., a nominal alpha of .05/12 tests; for details, see Hayes, 1988, pp. 410-413). In no case did either gender or employment status show a significant main effect or interaction.

Our findings would seem to be in keeping with previous research. We were aware of a single study that reported an unanticipated gender effect. Leung and Lind (1986) investigated preferences for adversarial and nonadversarial conflict resolution strategies among American and Chinese studies. In this study, gender unexpectedly interacted with nationality and experimenter status to influence preferences. For the Chinese participants, men and women responded similarly. On the other hand, for the American participants, the impact of gender was moderated by the effect of experimenter status. In particular, when the experimenter was of high status, American men preferred the adversarial tactic, whereas American women did not

TABLE 3

**Mean *T*-Score Ratings for Each Conflict Resolution Tactic by Country**

| Conflict Resolution Tactic | Argentina | Dominican Republic | Mexico | United States |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Advising/mediation | | | | |
| Overall evaluation | 67.12 (1.712) | 63.60 (1.360) | 74.04 (2.404) | 75.00 (2.500) |
| Fairness | 63.21 (1.321) | 63.71 (1.371) | 68.97 (1.897) | 73.32 (2.334) |
| Reducing conflict | 65.59 (1.559) | 66.55 (1.655) | 68.60 (1.860) | 75.09 (2.509) |
| Adversarial/arbitration | | | | |
| Overall evaluation | 47.75 (−.226) | 52.55 (.255) | 49.59 (−.041) | 49.01 (−.099) |
| Fairness | 50.92 (.092) | 55.64 (.564) | 54.45 (.445) | 54.34 (.434) |
| Reducing conflict | 55.55 (−.555) | 47.91 (−.209) | 47.59 (−.241) | 40.73 (−.927) |
| Autocratic/inquisitorial | | | | |
| Overall evaluation | 47.51 (−.249) | 74.84 (2.484) | 67.24 (1.724) | 60.47 (1.047) |
| Fairness | 51.48 (.148) | 73.43 (2.343) | 64.55 (1.455) | 63.92 (1.392) |
| Reducing conflict | 45.79 (−.421) | 61.25 (1.125) | 57.39 (.739) | 54.20 (.420) |
| Providing impetus/ providing incentives | | | | |
| Overall Evaluation | 46.78 (−.322) | 31.66 (−1.834) | 33.58 (−1.642) | 34.03 (−1.597) |
| Fairness | 44.67 (−.533) | 33.66 (−1.634) | 34.79 (−1.521) | 31.04 (−1.896) |
| Reducing conflict | 48.31 (−.169) | 38.77 (−1.143) | 40.51 (−.949) | 40.43 (−.957) |
| Avoidance/ignoring | | | | |
| Overall evaluation | 40.59 (−.941) | 27.45 (−2.255) | 25.25 (−2.475) | 31.42 (−1.858) |
| Fairness | 39.93 (−1.007) | 23.49 (−2.651) | 27.48 (−2.252) | 25.49 (−2.266) |
| Reducing conflict | 45.59 (−.404) | 35.48 (−1.452) | 36.15 (−1.385) | 39.25 (−1.075) |

NOTE: Standard *z*-scores are shown in parentheses.

distinguish between adversarial and nonadversarial. Conversely, when the experimenter was of low status, American women preferred the adversarial tactic, whereas American men showed no clear preference. However, these results would not apply to the present experiment, as we did not manipulate experimenter status.

The nations also differed significantly with respect to age. This posed a different analytical problem because age, unlike gender and employment status, was measured as a continuous variable. Polychotomizing age and treating it as an independent variable in an Analysis of Variance would have resulted in a loss of statistical power (cf. Aguinis, 1995). This could have led us to underestimate the confounding effects of the age variable. A more

conservative analysis was to calculate the Pearson correlation between age and each of the 15 dependent measures (three types of ratings of five tactics). Consistent with the findings for gender and employment status, the $R^2$ effect sizes ranged between .00 and .01. As one might expect, when a Bonferroni correction was applied, none of these associations were statistically significant.

A total of 39 tests were conducted using the demographic variables. Of these, only one managed to explain even 3% of the variance. Of these tests, 37 explained 1% or less. Likewise, none of the associations were statistically significant when the large number of post hoc tests was taken into account. Finally, there were no a priori theoretical reasons for expecting differences to exist. Consequently, we conducted all subsequent analyses collapsing the data across gender, employment status, and age.

*Initial hypothesis tests*. Based on previous research and theory, we expected a three-way interaction among the independent variables: Resolution Tactic × Nationality × Disputant Relationship. We first examined respondents' overall evaluation of each tactic. Tactic showed a significant main effect, $F(4, 1,272) = 166.61, p < .001, \eta^2 = .34$. There was also a significant two-way interaction between tactic and nationality, $F(12, 1,272) = 12.31, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10$. Disputant relationship showed neither a main effect, $F(1, 318) = .64$, n.s., $\eta^2 = .00$; nor a two-way interaction with tactic, $F(4, 1,272) = .73$, n.s., $\eta^2 = .00$; nor a two-way interaction with nationality, $F(3, 318) = 1.15$, n.s., $\eta^2 = .01$. We observed no evidence for the anticipated three-way interaction, $F(12, 1,272) = 4.29$, n.s., $\eta^2 = .01$.

The findings for the fairness ratings were similar to those for the overall evaluation. There was a significant main effect for tactic, $F(4, 1,272) = 247.20, p < .001, \eta^2 = .43$. Resolution tactic also interacted with nationality, $F(12, 1,272) = 15.42, p < .001, \eta^2 = .12$. However, once again, relationship did not interact with nationality, $F(3, 318) = .34$, n.s., $\eta^2 = .00$; or tactic, $F(4, 1,272) = .42$, n.s., $\eta^2 = .00$; nor did the expected three-way interaction materialize, $F(12, 1,272) = .80$, n.s., $\eta^2 = .01$. Also lacking was a significant main effect for relationship, $F(1, 318) = 3.08$, n.s., $\eta^2 = .01$.

Generally consistent results also occurred for participants' ratings of the likelihood of reducing future conflict. Conflict resolution tactic manifested a main effect, $F(4, 1,268) = 102.32, p < .001, \eta^2 = .24$, and a two-way interaction with nationality, $F(12, 1,268) = 7.05, p < .001, \eta^2 = .06$. There was no main effect for relationship, $F(1, 317) = .03$, n.s., $\eta^2 = .00$; nor did we observe the predicted three-way interaction, $F(12, 1,268) = 1.63$, n.s., $\eta^2 = .01$.
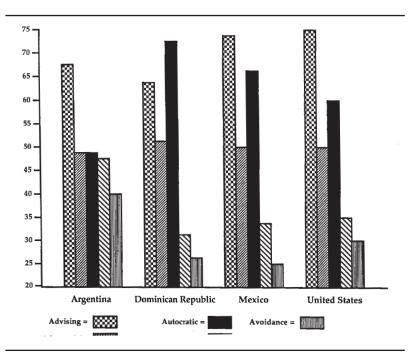
**Figure 1:   Mean Overall Evaluation Ratings for Each Tactic Expressed in *T*-Scores**

Relationship did not interact with nationality, $F(3, 317) = 1.80$, n.s., $\eta^2 = .01$, but showed an unexpected two-way interaction with tactic, $F(4, 1,268) = 2.63$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$.

The single significant finding for relationships offers scant encouragement with respect to our hypotheses regarding in-group/out-group. This interaction was not predicted a priori. Moreover, of several tests, it is the only one that was statistically significant, and (as can be seen from an $\eta^2 = .01$) it was quite weak. For completeness, we also performed a Bonferroni correction to adjust for the large number of tests. As one might expect, this relationship became nonsignificant when a more stringent alpha level was used. On the other hand, all of the other significant interactions also passed this more rigorous test. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that our manipulation of disputant relationship did not have the intended effect. Fortunately, we still can test Hypotheses 1 through 3. To do so, we collapse the data across relationship.

The interactions between tactic and nationality are displayed in Figures 1 through 3. We will discuss these findings from two perspectives. First, we
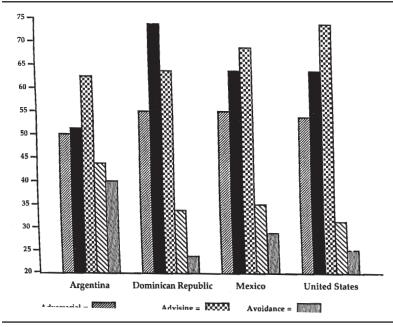
**Figure 2:   Mean Fairness Ratings for Each Tactic Expressed in *T*-Scores**

will examine conflict resolution tactics within each nation. This perspective is reflected in Hypotheses 1 and 2. Second, we will search for cross-national differences by looking within each tactic. This perspective is captured in Hypothesis 3.

## COMPARISONS WITHIN EACH NATION

Hypotheses 1 and 2 made specific predictions regarding the rank ordering of the five conflict resolution tactics. To test these expectations, we separately examined the ratings of overall evaluation, fairness, and likelihood of reducing future conflict for each nation. Using a series of *t* tests, the tactic that was expected to have the highest rating was tested against each of the techniques that were expected to receive lower ratings. These findings are discussed below.

*Argentina*. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, Argentines evaluated advising more favorably than any of the other four tactics. Also as expected, Argentines reported no difference between the adversarial and autocratic tactics. Contrary to expectations, the autocratic and adversarial approaches were not
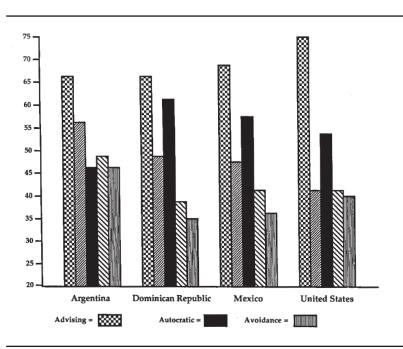
**Figure 3:    Mean Ratings of the Likelihood of Future Conflict Expressed in *T*-Scores**

evaluated more highly than providing impetus, although both were viewed more favorably than avoidance. Although not predicted a priori, Argentines gave a higher evaluation to the providing impetus method than they did to avoiding the conflict. Fairness ratings showed a virtually identical pattern. Advising was seen as fairer than any of the other four approaches. The adversarial and autocratic techniques were seen as about equally fair, whereas both were rated higher than the providing impetus or avoidance. Providing impetus was perceived as somewhat more fair than avoidance. The final dependent measure we considered was the likelihood that a given conflict resolution tactic would reduce future conflict. Advising was seen as more likely to reduce future conflict than any of the others. There were no other significant differences.

*Dominican Republic*. In their overall evaluations, Dominicans perceived no difference between advising and autocratic. This was contrary to our expectations. Interestingly, Dominicans gave both the advising and autocratic tactics more favorable evaluations than they did the adversarial,

providing impetus and avoidance methods. The autocratic and adversarial approaches were preferred to providing impetus and avoidance, but the Dominicans saw no difference between providing impetus and avoidance. The Dominican fairness ratings were somewhat different than their overall evaluations. The autocratic method was seen as fairer than any of the others. Advising was seen as no more fair than adversarial proceedings, and both the advising and adversarial method were perceived as fairer than providing impetus and avoidance. Finally, the Dominicans saw providing impetus as fairer than avoidance. They saw the advising and autocratic tactics as equally likely to reduce future conflict. However, both of these approaches were more likely to alleviate animosity than the other three techniques. There were no further significant differences.

*Mexico*. Mexicans were also positively predisposed toward advising. Advising was rated significantly higher than any of the other approaches. As with the Dominicans, but unlike the Argentines, the Mexicans gave more favorable ratings to the autocratic, as opposed to adversarial tactic. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, the Mexican subsample evaluated both autocratic and adversarial methods more favorably than they did any of the others. Mexicans also preferred providing impetus to avoidance. In terms of fairness, advising and autocratic tactics received similar ratings. The Mexicans also viewed these two techniques as fairer than the other three. Adversarial was perceived to be fairer than providing impetus and avoidance, whereas Mexicans saw no difference between the latter two. Advising was viewed as more likely to reduce future conflict than were any of the others. Respondents from Mexico rated the autocratic tactic as more likely to reduce future conflict than the adversarial, providing impetus, and avoidance tactics. Adversarial was viewed more favorably than providing impetus and avoidance. There were no further differences.

*United States*. Individuals from the United States evaluated advising more favorably than all of the other tactics. Americans evaluated the autocratic tactic more favorably than they did the adversarial, providing impetus, and avoidance approaches. Adversarial proceedings were viewed more favorably than providing impetus and avoidance. Among the U.S. subsample, there were no reliable differences between these latter two. Advising was viewed as more fair than all of the others. The autocratic approach was rated as fairer than all other tactics, except advising. The adversarial tactic was preferred to providing impetus and avoidance. In terms of fairness, Americans did not distinguish between providing impetus and avoidance. Americans rated

advising as more likely to reduce future conflict than the other four methods. Autocratic tactics were rated more favorably than adversarial, providing impetus, and avoidance. The U.S. sample showed no further differences.

## TESTS OF CROSS-CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

We now turn to the second perspective: comparing each tactic across the four nations. As we have indicated, our predictions here were limited. We did expect that American respondents would be more favorable toward adversarial proceedings and less favorable toward autocratic proceedings or compared to respondents from other nations. These two predictions were tested with planned contrasts. Because prior work is somewhat limited, we investigated other mean differences in an exploratory fashion. These analyses were conducted using the Tukey method of multiple comparisons. These post hoc findings are discussed briefly.

*Advising*. No cross-national differences were predicted for this technique. Thus, we only discuss post hoc comparisons. In the overall evaluation, the Dominicans and Argentines rated "advising" similarly. The Mexicans rated it significantly more positively than did the Argentines, whereas the U.S. subsample rated it more positively than did either the Argentines or the Dominicans. Once again, the United States and Mexico did not differ. For fairness reports, Mexico, Argentina, and the Dominican Republic did not differ. However, the U.S. participants saw advising as more fair than did the Argentines or Dominicans. Once again, The United States and Mexico did not differ appreciably. Findings for the likelihood of reducing future conflict were less dramatic. The United States differed from Argentina, but otherwise, all nations were similar. Although all four nations reacted favorably to advising, some nations reacted more favorably than did others.

*Adversarial tactic*. Predictions pertaining to the adversarial approach were not supported. None of the nations differed on any of the three dependent variables.

*Autocratic tactic*. The U.S. subsample was expected to be less favorably predisposed to the autocratic tactic than were the other three nations. This prediction was not supported. When compared to Argentines, the overall U.S. evaluation was actually less negative, more fair, and more likely to reduce future conflict. The United States and Mexico did not differ on any of the variables. U.S. respondents evaluated the autocratic method more negatively than did the Dominicans. Americans also saw the autocratic tactic as

less fair, but the United States and the Dominican Republic samples did not differ with regard to future conflict.

These planned contrasts were followed by Tukey tests. According to these results, the Argentines evaluated autocratic tactics significantly more negatively than did the other three groups. The Dominican evaluation was significantly more positive than was either the United States or Argentine evaluations. There were no further differences. Identical findings occurred for the fairness ratings, except that in this case, the Dominicans perceived this tactic as more fair than did any of the other three nations. Finally, the other three nations differed from Argentina but not from each other.

*Providing impetus*. As with advising, all of the tests regarding providing impetus were post hoc. In terms of their overall evaluation and fairness ratings, the Dominicans, Mexicans, and Americans did not differ. The Argentines saw providing impetus as more positive and fairer than did the others. For likelihood of reducing future conflict, there were fewer differences. Argentines were more sanguine than were Dominicans. Otherwise, the four groups were similar.

*Avoidance*. Results for avoidance were quite similar to those for providing impetus. According to Tukey tests, the Argentines gave avoidance higher evaluations and higher fairness ratings than did the other three nations. The United States, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic samples did not differ with respect to their overall evaluation or fairness ratings. For likelihood of reducing future conflict, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and the U.S. groups were again similar. When compared to participants from the Dominican Republic and Mexico, Argentines saw avoidance as more likely to reduce future conflict.

## DISCUSSION

This study investigated disputant reactions to five different conflict resolution tactics. These data could make a substantive contribution in three different domains: workplace conflict, cross-cultural management, and managerial practice. However, like all studies, the inferences that can be drawn from this experiment are limited by the nature of the design. In the pages that follow, we first discuss the contributions of this study. We then conclude with a detailed examination of potential concerns and make recommendations for future research.

## CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

*Contributions to understanding workplace conflict*. Conflict management involves a dialogue between disputants and a third party. Previous work has emphasized one part of this dialogue—the portion that runs from the manager to the subordinates. This study addressed this limitation by having undergraduate participants role-play the position of a person subjected to each conflict resolution tactic. Our findings suggest that employees like some of the tactics used by their managers (e.g., advising, autocratic) but dislike others (e.g., providing impetus, avoidance).

Another limitation of previous work was that no study had examined all five conflict resolution tactics together. Based on a review of this literature, this study was able to investigate a broader range of tactics. This affords a more precise ranking of the five tactics than was available previously. Across all four nations, advising was seen as a useful technique for resolving conflict. This tactic always was ranked first or second. Autocratic tactics also were evaluated reasonably favorably. Finally, providing impetus and avoidance were seen as the least effective tactics. The adversarial tactic generally received intermediate ratings.

*Contributions to cross-cultural management*. Assuming that a set of results from one nation being generalized to another can be risky, and numerous researchers have called for more research on individuals from different nations (e.g., Smith & Bond, 1993; Triandis, 1994). National cultures may act as moderators, demonstrating important boundary conditions under which certain processes operate (for a discussion, see Moghaddam et al., 1993). Therefore, research including multiple nations increases our understanding of phenomena by demonstrating when they do or do not occur. This is an issue of external validity, analogous to the trade-off between laboratory and field studies that we discuss below. Additionally, it is well known that corporations operate in an emerging global economy. Managerial practices that work well in one society may be injurious in another. Consequently, it behooves researchers and practitioners to develop an extensive body of knowledge that spans national boundaries (cf. Adler, 1991). Our investigation addressed these needs by examining preferences in four different nations. Some differences were uncovered. For example, Argentines were more negative toward autocratic tactics than were others. Conversely, individuals from the Dominican Republic tended to be somewhat more favorable toward an autocratic approach. Nevertheless, these differences should not mask certain similarities. These data suggest some measures of cross-

national commonalty. With some exceptions, respondents reacted most positively to those tactics at the extreme ends of managerial control. That is, in every nation but Argentina, the two top-ranked tactics were advising (in which the subordinates settle the matter with their supervisor's guidance) and autocratic (in which the supervisor controls the process and renders a decision).

Nevertheless, there are two lessons learned from this study that are useful for managerial practice. First, before choosing to implement various conflict resolution tactics, managers should consider disputant reactions. If a manager uses the "wrong" tactic, negative outcomes may include disputants' perceptions of unfairness and future additional conflict. For instance, when managers act as arbitrators, reactions are more negative than when they act as impartial facilitators or inquisitorial judges. Second, managers in international assignments should consider cross-cultural differences regarding disputants' preferences. The use of tactics that are perceived as being fair and conducive to positive future interactions in the United States may not lead to the same outcomes in other countries. For instance, advising is seen as the most fair tactic in the United States, but this is not the case in the Dominican Republic, where autocratic tactics are perceived as more fair.

*Contributions to managerial practice.* Because conflict resolution is important to organizational effectiveness and is a major component of supervisory duties, supervisors are in need of a well-validated set of tactical options. This need is likely to be compounded in future years. It is difficult enough to manage conflicts within the United States, where one might presume at least some shared normative language. The problems of coordination and conflict become more forbidding as one moves across national boundaries and into an international marketplace. Research has shown that when individuals are from different cultural backgrounds, conflict sometimes becomes more likely and coordination more troublesome (James, Chen, & Cropanzano, 1996; Sowell, 1983, 1994). In fact, these difficulties can even cause individuals to retreat to the familiar, preferring to transact business within their own ethnicity (Kotkin, 1993). If an organization or an individual desires to do business within an increasingly globalized economy (and most large firms do, see Heilbroner & Thurow, 1994), then one must be prepared to resolve conflicts among individuals from diverse backgrounds. In the present study, we based our predictions on Hofstede's (1980) distinction between individualism and collectivism. In part, this was because this construct is associated with a large research literature that at least in some cases, directly pertains to conflict management. However, it should be strongly emphasized

that societies vary on more than a single dimension. In light of some unpredicted effects, it seems possible that something other than collectivism is influencing the present results.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY
## AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

It is important to emphasize the exploratory nature of the present experiment. This study has some important limitations that create a need for future research on this topic. We discuss four concerns here: (a) the role-playing methodology, (b) the use of a student sample, (c) the need to consider more contextual factors, and (d) the failed in-group/out-group manipulation.

*Use of role-playing design.* In our study, participants were required to read about a situation and to respond by indicating how they would like to see the matter resolved. Our vignettes functioned in the manner of an especially detailed questionnaire. The advantage of this design is that it allowed us to examine the responses of a diverse set of individuals to a wide range of possible tactics. This had not been done in previous research, perhaps due to the inherent practical difficulties. Our design also allowed for causal inferences and theory building. Earlier work had been limited in this regard. Unfortunately, all benefits come at a cost. We cannot absolutely be sure that respondents know how they actually would behave. Perhaps, the pressure of a real-world conflict would cause different reactions.

It is important to examine how this methodology might have biased our results. Following a detailed meta-analysis of vignette studies within the organizational sciences, Murphy, Herr, Lockhart, and Maguire (1986) concluded that the major difference between ratings of "paper" people (that is, vignette studies) and actual observations was that the paper-people studies yielded larger effect sizes. In other words, the relationships among the variables were similar across the two methodologies, although associations were stronger when vignettes were used. Murphy et al. suggest that there is probably less "noise" and/or a stronger "signal" within a scenario. Given that the goal of our research was to better understand the relationships among the theoretical constructs, the vignette approach provides an advantage because it affords a clearer examination of the relevant concepts. Of course, it also means that we cannot attempt to generalize our effect sizes to field settings, but this was not our intention.

As many scholars have noted, theory building seems best done by a program of research that alternates between the lab and field (e.g., Berkowitz & Donnerstein, 1982; Ross & Grant, 1994; Sackett & Larson, 1991). One

approach is to allow applied concerns to dictate which topics are important, whereas alternative designs are used to test theoretical relationships (cf. Fromkin & Streufert, 1976). This is the model taken here. Descriptive field research by Kozan and Ilter (1994), Sheppard et al. (1994), and others articulated a set of tactics that are widely used by managers. In our study, we examined disputant reactions to the entire list. The next step would be to return to the field and attempt to replicate our results. This model of research breaks down the lab versus field duality by arguing that neither method is inherently better. Rather, each paradigm complements the other and strengthens the inferences that can be drawn confidently. We have tried to place our present work within this multiparadigm tradition.

*Use of undergraduate students*. A related limitation concerns the use of undergraduate research students. In an informative review, Gordon, Slade, and Schmitt (1986; see also Gordon, Slade, & Schmitt, 1987) argued that undergraduates could behave in ways that are systematically different than working people. Gordon et al. suggested that these differences could call all undergraduate samples into question. This may be less of a concern for our study than for others. The bulk of our participants were employed. Thus, they were probably not as naive as some undergraduates are presumed to be.

Even more relevant are the issues raised by Greenberg (1987). As mentioned previously, our goal was to help build a theory that might (pending additional replication) generalize to work settings. As Greenberg noted, the goal is to generalize the theory, not to generalize the particular results. From a well-validated theory, future researchers can derive "testable interventions" (p. 158). No study, not even a field study, can simulate all of the conditions relevant to a complex social phenomenon. However, many studies—preferably employing a variety of designs—can give us confidence in our underlying conceptual model. Using an evaluation study, the resulting model then can be tested within a particular setting. Greenberg raised another issue as well. Even if findings fail to generalize, our study would have made a contribution by exploring the boundary conditions under which a phenomenon can be observed. Knowing when something does not work (i.e., discriminant validity) is as important to our understanding as knowing when it does (i.e., convergent validity). For this reason, even a subsequent failure to replicate can provide important information.

*Consideration of context*. Several researchers have raised the possibility that the appropriate conflict management tactic could vary depending on the situation (e.g., Sheppard, 1984; Thomas, 1993). For example, in Bergmann

and Volkema's (1994) survey of professional workers, it was found that people varied their behavior based on the number of conflict episodes and on the position power of their opponent (e.g., a peer vs. a supervisor). More directly related to the present study, Shapiro and Rosen (1994) discovered that managers varied their tactics based on three situational factors: type of issue, seriousness of the problem, and self-efficacy for effective resolution. Despite these promising findings, there is surprisingly little work investigating the different tactics that managers actually use in various settings. Even more problematic for our interests, little research or theory has examined how employees respond when interventions vary. In short, we do not yet know exactly when and how managers adjust their tactics, nor to do we know how situations might moderate employee responses. This was precisely the reason why the present study manipulated the in-group/out-group status of the disputants. Unfortunately, our manipulation was not successful. Clearly, future research—whether it is conducted in the lab or in the field—needs to be more attentive to the organizational context within which conflict occurs.

*Failed in-group/out-group manipulation.* Perhaps the most disappointing finding of this study was that the in-group/out-group manipulation had no effect. The scenarios manipulated this variable by making the other disputant a close friend or a person who was not well known to the participant. This would seem to have face validity, as close friends tend to be part of one's personal in-group (e.g., Triandis, 1989). Nonetheless, no significant effects were obtained. In hindsight, this could have been due to the phrasing of our experimental manipulation. In both vignettes, the disputants were said to be members of the same team. This might have led the research participants to view their conflict opponent as a member of the same in-group—regardless of whether they were close friends. In view of the literature attesting to the importance of the in-group/out-group distinction for collectivistic societies (e.g., Triandis, 1994), and in view of the fact that one conflict management study did find a significant effect (Leung, 1988), we believe that it is too early to accept even tentatively the null hypothesis. It seems more likely that our brief (one sentence) manipulation was inadequate to capture the full commitment and emotional bond that one holds toward another in-group member. As such, we would recommend future research on this topic.

## CONCLUSIONS

Given the limitations of this study, it must been seen as exploratory. However, it does offer a promising beginning. From a review of the descriptive research, we were able to identify five widely used conflict management

tactics. We then examined disputant ratings of these conflicts on three dimensions: overall evaluation, fairness, and likelihood of reducing future conflict. Finally, unlike previous work, we collected data from four different nations. Our findings provide initial evidence pertaining to effective (advising and autocratic methods) and ineffective (providing impetus and avoidance) conflict resolution tactics. Although a good deal more research is needed, work of this kind has the potential to provide managers with an effective tool for creating pleasant and effective work environments.

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