Review Essay

Thinking Globally and Acting Locally

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The literature of negotiation and conflict resolution continues to build on and move away from traditional emphases on transactions and decision making. Topics such as the impact of culture on negotiation once aroused debate but are no longer even controversial. Enough scholars in our large and multidisciplinary field have benefited from the insights of complementary social sciences so that few serious scholars or practitioners doubt that identity and culture are dynamic factors affecting negotiations.
Some have moved beyond the quest for distributional efficiency that characterized so much early research and now advocate nothing less than social transformation and empowerment through conflict resolution methodologies. Several recent contributions to the negotiation literature — Negotiating Globally, *and* Reaching for Higher Ground in Conflict Resolution *— are evidence that literature in the field is pushing new frontiers.*

As late as 1993, William Zartman, Jeffrey Z. Rubin and numerous others debated the relevance of culture to negotiation (Faure & Rubin 1993). On the far end of the spectrum, Zartman carved out the position that culture is about as important to negotiations as what the negotiators ate for breakfast—irrelevant. Others distanced themselves to various degrees from Zartman's stand. Despite their significant contributions in other areas, they

all overlooked more fundamental debates and research regarding culture and negotiation.

This reviewer believes that even the way we look at culture is culturally constructed. For those of us who tend toward a "crusading universalism," there is a tendency to see cultures in hierarchical terms: advanced, civilized, or primitive. For those who are cultural relativists, all things must be judged from within the culture that generates them. We cannot judge others' actions, relativists say, unless we know and accept their culture as valid.

Jeanne M. Brett. *Negotiating Globally: How to Negotiate Deals, Resolve Disputes, and Make Decisions Across Cultural Borders.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001. 250 pages. ISBN: 0787955868

E. Franklin Dukes, **Marina A. Piscolish**, and **John B. Stephens**. *Reaching for Higher Ground in Conflict Resolution: Tools for Powerful Groups and Communities.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000. 258 pages. ISBN: 0787950580

Indeed, we may not be able to communicate well across cultures until we know how people communicate. Negotiation and dispute resolution are highly specialized forms of communication. To the extent that human behaviors and values are universal or particular, negotiation styles too should be either universally understandable by all people or best understood from within their particular cultural context.

Scholars in communications and other social science disciplines have been demonstrating with rigorous research that culture indeed impacts communication patterns. Since negotiation is a critical way of communicating, it follows that culture is a key variable in negotiation and the resolution of conflict. Those who continue to deny this linkage for the most part espouse a universalist approach to the management of conflict that seems to say "if only they would adopt our way of managing conflict, they would be so much better off." At a July 1993 conference on conflict resolution in the Arab world that took place in Cyprus, Rubin affirmed the arrogance of this contention.

> "Centuries before there was any such a thing as a "Western perspective on conflict resolution," conflicts were being resolved peacefully…We in the West are only now beginning to formalize an understanding of conflict based on a set of principles that have been known and practiced by people around the world for many years (Rubin 1997)."

Paul Salem (1997), Marc Ross (1993) , David Augsburger (1992), Kevin Avruch (1998) and so many others have amply demonstrated that our cultures shape the ways in which we value and engage in conflict, and thus how we resolve it. Groundbreaking sociological and anthropological work by Hall (1976) and Hofstede (1997) supply much of the grist for this work. Hall explored, analyzed and named several of the more critical communica-

tion patterns that differ across culture. Hofstede created a framework of five social, cognitive and perceptual tensions that are resolved differently across cultures and deeply impact the way we interact with each other.

For some time now scholars and practitioners of conflict management have begun accepting the premise that, despite the vast range of things humans seem to universally adhere to, there are differences in our actions, beliefs and values that must be ascribed to our cultural identities. The question of cross cultural competency thus arises: When people from different cultures meet to negotiate in person, correspond by email or work within a group, how can they increase their skill in interacting with each other as individuals and as members of their identity groups?

Negotiating Globally

Relatively few works of negotiation literature were written with the assumption that indeed, culture matters (see, e.g., Weiss 1994a, b, Salacuse 1991; Cohen 1997). Scholars from the negotiation analytic approach—for whom cultural analyses represent a non-quantitative and undesirable factor—have recently come on board, if only to categorize culture as a "process barrier" to be overcome (Sebenius 2002). Still, there were some who were always believers.

Jeanne Brett of the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University is one of them. She has created an impressive track record of research on the nexus between culture and negotiation. Some of her best work on culture and how to realize joint gains has been, in fact, published in these pages (Brett, et al, 1998). Her new book, *Negotiating Globally: How to Negotiate Deals, Resolve Disputes, and Make Decisions Across Borders*, builds on extensive experimental research conducted over the last decade, mostly with her business school and executive education students.

In *Negotiating Globally*, Brett sets out to crown her years of executive training and academic research with a volume that takes her research and turns it into general advice for business negotiators. For the savvy business traveler looking for an intelligent book to read in-flight, this is a fine choice. As a text in an MBA-level course on cross cultural negotiation, this could be part of the assigned reading. Serious cross cultural negotiators from other fields and scholars of culture and negotiation will be less satisfied.

There is a real need for research and prescriptive advice that synthesizes the findings of those who mainly focus on negotiation analysis and those who mainly focus on cross-cultural communication. Work that attempts to fill this niche tends to fall into two broad categories which I call "laundry lists" and "case studies." The laundry lists typically include advice on what to do or not to do when negotiating with one nationality or another. These tend to be written from a US-centric perspective and focus on concluding business deals with little or no reference to other social science research. Laundry lists are sometimes the maximum extent of cross-cultural knowledge that business and government officials obtain. At its

very best, this stream of literature yields innovative work like the two articles by Stephen Weiss (1994a, b).

On the other hand, the case studies can be deep ethnographic studies in methodology, but they can also reinforce stereotypes instead of helping prepare people for cross-cultural encounters. The publishing arm of the United States Institute of Peace has a thoughtful series of book-length case studies that analyze the political negotiation behavior of entire countries while seeking to avoid the stereotyping error.

Brett's book holds out the promise of transcending both categories. While she seeks to offer a 'how-to' manual that provides easy-to-follow advice for anyone who negotiates across cultures, Brett's research ultimately yields good insight for cross cultural business transactions, but given her familiarity with both streams of research, deeper insights and better advice might be expected. This book offers no systematic framework that a negotiator could use in a cross-cultural negotiation.

While the cases used and examples offered were interesting and held the attention of this reviewer, they also came exclusively from the business world. The book title alone will attract people from the civil society sector, public policy and international development fields. But they will not find examples that speak to their experience. Also, the experiments and simulations used for data did not build in the "shadow of the future" (the expected salutary effect of a long term relationship on a current negotiation), because, Brett states, "Our research does not follow relationships over time" (p. 75). While all of this is reasonable in a book that primarily targets MBA students, the title claims a more general applicability not supported by the simulations, the participants, the methodology or the prescriptive advice offered.

Chapter One stands out as a welcome affirmation and explanation of the culture-negotiation nexus. It sets forth, in clear, understandable language, how culture impacts communication and thus negotiation. Brett does this principally by integrating some of the basic findings of Hall (1976) and Hofstede (1997). In affirming the difficulty of linking negotiation theory to cultural knowledge, she argues that cross-cultural negotiators will need to have flexible strategies in order to reach their goals and that compromising on strategy need not imply compromising on goals. But in her incorporation of Hofstede's critically important work, Brett omits his findings on the culturally-informed propensity for avoiding uncertainty (i.e. Hofstede's Uncertainty Avoidance Index), which presents rich research opportunities for culture and negotiation linkages.

The two core chapters of the book are Chapter Two: Negotiating Deals, and Chapter Three: Resolving Disputes. Brett deals with these two topics separately since, as she points out, conflict behaviors that are culturally appropriate when closing a transaction may change when there is dispute over the resulting relationship. The specific bits of advice, on the other hand are too specific possibly because they come from the population of executive education students that studied at Northwestern.

This reviewer enjoyed the narratives of negotiation and the outcomes discussions, but hoped for more diversity and less typologies in the cultural subjects. Israelis are cast as "pragmatic individualists," while Germans are "cooperative pragmatists," and Japanese are "indirect strategists" (p.74). While this may seem illuminating to some, such human model-building is not the point the book set out to make, which is: what to do when you—whatever your cultural identity— encounter an Israeli, German or Japanese across the table from you?

Brett's recognition that different cultures predispose people to negotiate differently is in itself a positive step for our field. What remains then is how to best equip people for such encounters. How do you gather and offer information? How do you determine and explore interests? How do you build the relationship? How do you close the deal or manage a dispute? Will a quick read of *Getting to Yes* be sufficient? Should we adopt our counterparts' styles and assumptions? Should they adopt ours?

There is no one right answer, and Brett wisely avoids claiming there is one as she discussed these problems. Implicit in the text is an inclination toward *adaptability* as the key to unlock cross cultural negotiations. At different times, Brett seems to recommend working from one's stereotypical negotiation behavior and at other times moving beyond it. Much more could be said about cultural adaptability and how it helps in negotiations.

Chapter Four, which addresses the increasingly critical role of multicultural teams, correctly points out why decision making is difficult and what conflict dynamics can result from them. The prescriptive part, as elsewhere, is weaker than the analysis. Under a section entitled "Constructive Ways to Confront Dysfunctional Conflict," Brett affirms that prevention is better than intervention but leaves the reader hungry for more "constructive ways" other than a brief mention of apologies and having a facilitator call for a break when tension runs high.

Brett's final chapter (Chapter Seven) is a missed opportunity to provide a general synthesis or suggest avenues for further research. A mere six pages, it is billed as a discussion on whether "Western negotiation strategies" will end up dominating the world someday. True to her central thesis—which I agree with—Brett claims that negotiation styles will not be "globalized," but remain diverse. But what are "Western negotiation strategies" exactly? Brett never really says. Rubin (1997), in any case, pointed out that what we have appropriated as "Western" is often borrowed from other traditions.

Formulating advice on how people from different cultures might negotiate better and create joint gains is a high risk activity, and Brett is to be applauded for taking it on. As a business school text, *Negotiating Globally* makes the most sense, given its simple, straightforward style, its refreshing integration of Hofstede and Hall's complex work and the transactional emphasis throughout. For serious scholars and negotiators, the final word has yet to be written.

Reaching Higher Ground

Reaching Higher Ground in Conflict Resolution: Tools for Powerful Groups and Communities was refreshing for someone (like this reviewer) who is a practitioner of conflict management and who is also an academic researcher. The book pretends neither to be a theory-building work nor a final answer to any conundrum. Yet therein lies one of its chief virtues: editorial humility coupled with extremely practical value. In offering us a volume based on their ongoing facilitation and consulting work, Dukes, Piscolish and Stephens provide deep insight for facilitators, mediators, and just about anyone who is member of a group that fights fruitlessly, gets little accomplished, and yet has a serious mandate to accomplish.

The three authors seem to move seamlessly among themselves and the reader is hard-pressed to hear anything but a single voice advocating intelligently for facilitators to move their groups to "higher" ground, rather than simply finding "common" ground.

Whereas so much negotiation prescriptive advice and theory focus on a single decision moment—whether shared among two or many parties— this book is grounded in the reality that most of us work in groups charged with critical tasks that are often unsuccessful in doing anything other than aggravating their members. The authors focus on the lack or misuse of ground rules ("shared expectations" in the book's terminology) in self-run or facilitated groups.

The authors explicitly point out that facilitative processes and the tools used for running groups are "too often used as weapons of coercion rather than as tools of construction" (p. 37). Anyone who has emerged from the conflict management discipline can recognize that the authors are pointing, with laudable honesty, to the problem of consonance within our own discipline. There are practitioners and scholars in this field who preach about principled negotiation but whose practice is slyly authoritarian, value-destroying and short-sighted.

Another refreshing aspect of *Reaching for Higher Ground* is that the examples used are miniature case studies which come from the authors' vast professional mediating and facilitating experience. In this regard, they draw from business, academic, government and non-profit examples. Practitioners who regularly cross such sectoral lines will enjoy the authors' familiarity with diverse contexts. To their lasting credit, they also do not shy away from drawing lessons from their less successful professional moments.

The bulk of the volume consists not of diagnosis of poor group processes, but of infinitely more useful practical advice written for a reader who may not be a group leader or group facilitator. In other words, it is written for all of us who have (and no doubt will) sit in on tedious, unproductive meetings run in autocratic fashion, permeated by distrust, and whose outcome is determined elsewhere. From the perspective of this reviewer, the lynchpin is Chapter Five, in which the authors explain six steps for creating shared expectations that have the capability of launching and guiding a

group on its path toward the higher ground of productivity, safe exploration of difference, healthy dissent, and attainment of vibrant consensus. Other chapters speak explicitly to the experience of working in dysfunctional groups. Two of the last chapters focus entirely on a particular context (Chapter Eight is a hospital setting while Chapter Nine discusses community conflicts and how they were addressed from Australia to Hawaii).

True to its pragmatic and helpful approach, *Reaching Higher Ground* ends with four brief appendices that are actual examples of ground rules the authors have used or seen in their facilitative work. This is a highly valuable, readable book that should be thoroughly highlighted, underlined and elephant-eared. It also serves as solid text for anyone teaching advanced mediation and facilitation skills. The book is highly useful for mediators and facilitators. However, it will be most appreciated by members of groups that do not have a facilitator, and anyone who works in groups or teams, or attends meetings of any kind.

Future Research Directions

The growing academic exploration of negotiation, decision making and culture will only gain in relevance as cultures continue to come into contact with each other in contexts as diverse as UN peacekeeping operations, communal conflicts, international relief and development work and global business encounters. *Negotiating Globally* serves as a building block in what should be a much broader interdisciplinary effort. In this regard, I believe negotiation theorist must accept the work of Hofstede et al. as 'first principles'.

There is a promising research and practice agenda waiting to be fulfilled by building on what *Reaching for Higher Ground* has started. The theoretical dimension of this agenda can explore systematically how different process choices contribute to success or damage a group's performance or group survival. Longer term case studies might focus strongly on process as they control for other factors. Additional prescriptive work might be done on how to cope when the leadership is the problem: arbitrary, non-democratic governance (I have in mind corporations, non-profits and universities in the US and not just 'foreign' dictators).

Both books reviewed here exemplify a tradition of solid Jossey-Bass contributions to a growing and increasingly diverse discipline.

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