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Navigating the emotional landscape of mediation: An exploration of the role of emotions in conflict resolution and the strategies for effective management

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of emotions in conflict resolution, explicitly focusing on mediation. Emotions are an inherent aspect of conflict and can significantly impact the negotiation process. Understanding the emotional landscape of mediation is crucial for effective conflict management. This paper discusses the various emotions that arise during mediation, the strategies for effective emotional control, and the role of the mediator in navigating the emotional terrain of the negotiation process.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Mediation is a crucial aspect of dispute resolution, yet the emotional aspects of this process are often overlooked. Emotions are an integral part of human nature and can play a significant role in conflict resolution. However, the question of managing emotions during mediation remains challenging for all parties involved. Should emotions be suppressed or embraced during the process? What role do mediators play in managing emotions? These questions highlight the importance of understanding the emotional landscape of mediation. This paper aims to explore the role of emotions in conflict resolution and provide strategies for effective management. We will begin by examining key theories of emotions and how they relate to mediation processes.

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2 | MEDIATION IN BRIEF

Mediation is a dispute resolution process involving a neutral third party (mediator) who helps with communication and negotiation between two or more parties in conflict. It is a voluntary and confidential process to assist parties in disputes in reaching a mutually acceptable agreement (Bush & Folger, 2005). It differs from other forms of conflict resolution, such as arbitration or litigation, in that the mediator does not make decisions or impose solutions on the parties.

There are several types of mediation, including facilitative, directive (evaluative), and transformative. Facilitative mediation is the most common type and involves the mediator helping the parties communicate and negotiate their solutions. On the other hand, directive (evaluative) mediation involves the mediator providing suggestions and evaluations to the parties to help them reach a settlement. Transformative mediation focuses on empowering the parties to improve their relationship and understanding of each other rather than just resolving the dispute.

The role of the mediator is to facilitate communication, promote understanding, and guide the parties toward a mutually acceptable solution (ABA, 2005). The mediator should remain neutral and impartial and not take sides or make decisions for the parties. The mediator should also maintain confidentiality and ensure the parties have a safe and respectful environment to express their concerns and needs.

There are generally agreed principles for the role of the mediator, such as those outlined in the Model Standards of Conduct for Mediators developed by the American Bar Association (ABA, 2005). These principles include impartiality, confidentiality, informed consent, competence, and self-determination. Impartiality means that the mediator should remain neutral and not favor any party. Confidentiality means that the mediator should not disclose any information shared in the mediation to anyone outside the mediation. Informed consent means that the parties should understand the mediation process and agree to participate voluntarily. Competence means the mediator should have the necessary skills and knowledge to facilitate the mediation. Finally, self-determination indicates that the parties should have control over the outcome of the mediation and should make their own decisions.

3 | UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONS

Emotions are an inescapable part of our lives. They make us human. They play a significant role in our mental and physical well-being, shaping our experiences, interactions, and relationships with others. Humans can express many emotions, such as happiness, sadness, anger, fear, and love. Our emotions allow us to communicate and connect with others deeply, allowing us to share our thoughts and experiences. Our emotions also enable us to feel empathy and compassion for others, allowing us to understand and relate to the experiences of others. This ability to understand and connect with others on an emotional level is an essential part of our humanity.

To elaborate on the above, one can look at T'Pol, a Vulcan fictional character on *Star Trek: Enterprise*. As a Vulcan, T'Pol is initially depicted as struggling to understand and connect with her emotions, often seen as a weakness in her society. However, as the series progresses, T'Pol begins to embrace and express her emotions more fully, which allows her to connect more deeply with her human colleagues and to understand their experiences on a more personal level.

T'Pol's journey is a powerful example of the importance of empathy and compassion in building solid and meaningful relationships. By learning to understand and connect with her

own emotions, T'Pol is better able to understand the experiences of others and relate to them on a more personal level. This allows her to form more profound and meaningful relationships with her colleagues and work together more effectively toward their common goals.

4 | THE ROLE OF EMOTIONS IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Emotions play a crucial role in conflict resolution, as they can both facilitate and hinder the negotiation process. They are integral to the negotiation process and can be powerful tools for reaching mutually acceptable solutions (Shapiro et al., 2006). They can motivate individuals to resolve conflict, help parties identify the underlying issue, and facilitate the expression of essential concerns. Additionally, emotions can build rapport and establish trust between parties, enhancing the likelihood of reaching a satisfactory resolution. On the other hand, emotions can also impede conflict resolution efforts. When individuals experience intense emotions such as anger or fear, they may become less open to negotiation or compromise, which can result in a stalemate (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986). Furthermore, they can make it more difficult for parties to understand each other's perspectives, as individuals may focus more on their feelings than on finding a mutually beneficial solution (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986).

4.1 | The role of positive emotions in conflict resolution

Positive emotions can play a significant role in conflict resolution by creating a sense of mutual understanding and building trust between conflicting parties. Positive emotions such as empathy, compassion, and respect can aid in finding a resolution that satisfies both parties, leading to a more productive negotiation. When individuals experience positive emotions, they are more likely to view the other party positively and work toward a mutually beneficial solution. Research has shown positive emotions can enhance problem-solving abilities, increase creativity, and promote positive social interactions (Forgas, 2001). Positive emotions can also help to create a positive emotional climate during negotiations, which can aid in reaching a resolution that satisfies both parties.

Positive emotions can increase cooperation and reduce negative attitudes and behaviors, which can be helpful in conflict resolution. Positive emotions can help to create a sense of collaboration, leading to better communication and problem-solving (Fisher & Shapiro, 2005). Another study by Barbara Fredrickson (2004) highlights the benefits of positive emotions such as joy, interest, and love. These emotions broaden people's thinking and attention, which can aid in generating creative solutions to conflicts. Positive emotions can also undo negative emotions, making it easier for people to forgive and let go of past conflicts.

The role of positive emotions in conflict resolution is also highlighted in the book "Getting to Yes" by Fisher et al. (2011). They emphasize the importance of building positive relationships and using effective communication techniques to create a collaborative negotiation process (Fisher et al., 2011). By focusing on interests rather than positions and exploring creative options for mutual gain, positive emotions can help create win-win solutions (Fisher et al., 2011).

Positive emotions can be powerful tools in conflict resolution. By creating a sense of understanding, building trust, and fostering collaboration, positive emotions can lead to better communication and problem-solving, resulting in more effective and satisfactory outcomes for all

parties involved. However, it is essential to note that positive emotions alone may not be enough to resolve a conflict. Combining positive emotions with effective communication, active listening, and problem-solving skills is essential. Positive emotions can provide the foundation for a successful negotiation, but they must be coupled with practical strategies to ensure a resolution.

4.2 | The role of negative emotions in conflict resolution

Conflict is inevitable in human interactions, often leading to negative emotions such as anger, frustration, and resentment. While these emotions may seem counterproductive to conflict resolution, they can positively facilitate communication and promote understanding. One of the ways negative emotions can be helpful is by providing an opportunity for individuals to express their grievances and be heard. In conflict resolution, it is essential for all parties to feel like their perspectives are being acknowledged and validated. Negative emotions can catalyze this process, often prompting individuals to speak out and share their thoughts and feelings (Jones & Bodtke, 2001; Picard & Siltanen, 2013). Another way negative emotions can facilitate conflict resolution is by motivating individuals to seek solutions. When people feel angry or frustrated about a situation, they are more likely to take action to resolve it. This can involve seeking new information, collaborating with others, or being more open to compromise (Keltner et al., 2003).

However, it is also important to note that negative emotions can also impede conflict resolution if they are not managed effectively. When individuals become too focused on their negative emotions, they may lose sight of the bigger picture and be less willing to listen to others or consider alternative viewpoints (Deutsch, 2006). Additionally, negative emotions can escalate conflict and make it more difficult to find common ground.

To effectively use negative emotions in conflict resolution, individuals must learn to manage and productively channel them. This may involve active listening, empathy, and assertiveness, which can help individuals express their emotions constructively (Smolinski & Xiong, 2020).

Negative emotions can also play a positive role in conflict resolution by allowing individuals to express themselves and seek solutions. However, they can also hinder conflict resolution if not managed effectively. By learning to manage negative emotions and use them productively, individuals can facilitate more effective communication and collaboration in conflict resolution.

5 | THE IMPACT OF CULTURE ON EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION IN MEDIATION

Culture can significantly impact how individuals express and manage emotions in mediation. Different cultural backgrounds can shape individuals' beliefs, values, and behaviors, including their emotional expression, which can affect their interaction with others in mediation settings. Culture can impact emotional expression in mediation through the norms and values surrounding emotions in different cultures. For example, some cultures may encourage the expression of emotions as a means of resolving conflict. In contrast, others may view emotional expression as inappropriate or disruptive in conflict resolution. Thus, individuals from different cultural backgrounds may have different expectations and preferences regarding emotional expression in mediation.

Research suggests that people from collectivistic cultures, such as those in East Asia, may be more likely to suppress their emotions in public settings to maintain harmony and save face. In

contrast, people from individualistic cultures, such as those in the United States, may be more likely to express their emotions freely in public (Matsumoto et al., 2008). This difference in emotional expression can affect how individuals approach conflict resolution and participate in mediation sessions. For example, individuals from collectivistic cultures may be more likely to avoid direct confrontation and prefer a more indirect approach to conflict resolution, while individuals from individualistic cultures may be more likely to engage in direct communication and assertiveness during mediation (Nishiyama, 1971; Ting-Toomey, 1997). In addition, cultural differences in emotional expression can affect how individuals perceive the emotions of others in mediation, which can lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding.

Another way in which culture can impact emotional expression in mediation is through the degree of emotional intensity that is considered acceptable or appropriate. Some cultures may encourage the expression of intense emotions as a means of resolving conflict. In contrast, others may view intense emotional expression as a sign of weakness or lack of control. Cultures vary in the degree to which they value emotional intensity, with some cultures valuing intense emotional expression and others respecting emotional restraint. This can impact how individuals from different cultural backgrounds express and manage their emotions in mediation.

Cultural background can also impact how individuals perceive and interpret emotions in mediation. For example, individuals from some cultures may view the expression of anger as a sign of strength or power, while others may view it as a sign of aggression or disrespect. Similarly, individuals from some cultures may view the expression of sadness or vulnerability as a sign of weakness, while others may view it as a sign of authenticity and honesty. These cultural differences in perception and interpretation of emotions can impact how individuals from different cultural backgrounds respond to emotional expression in mediation.

To address the impact of culture on emotional expression in mediation, mediators should be aware of the cultural differences in emotional expression and adjust their approach accordingly. This may involve creating a safe space for individuals from collectivistic cultures to express their emotions and ensuring that individuals from individualistic cultures do not dominate the conversation. Mediators should also strive to understand the underlying cultural values and beliefs that shape emotional expression and encourage open and honest communication in mediation sessions (Schein, 2010).

6 | EMOTIONS, MEDIATION, AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND ABUSE (IPV/A)

Mediation, emotions, and intimate partner violence and abuse (IPV/A) are all interconnected, and managing emotions is crucial in resolving conflicts that lead to IPV/A. IPV/A is a significant social and public health issue affecting millions worldwide. According to the World Health Organization (2021), about one in three women worldwide has experienced either physical and/or sexual IPV/A by an intimate partner or non-partner at some point in their lives (WHO, 2021).

In cases of IPV/A, mediation can be challenging due to the power dynamics involved, the complexity of emotions, and the potential for continued abuse. Emotions such as anger, fear, and frustration can escalate conflicts, making it challenging to reach an agreement. Scholars have developed frameworks for detecting IPV/A in couples during mediation, such as the one created by the American Bar Association. The SAFeR Mediation Discussion Guide, which stands for Screen, Assess, Focus on effects, and Respond, thoroughly examines the potential impact of IPV on the parties' engagement in mediation. It assesses whether adjustments to the process and appropriate interventions can effectively address their issues. Additionally, the guide explores alternatives to mediation, such as a court process or other dispute resolution methods (ABA, 2019).

The issue of IPV/A cannot be adequately dealt with in one chapter. The important thing is that while mediation can be a practical approach to resolving disputes in IPV/A cases, it is only suitable in some situations. The mediator must have specialized training in handling emotions and understanding the dynamics of IPV/A. They must also be equipped to communicate with parties who report high violence in their relationships. Ultimately, the mediator's primary concern should be the safety and well-being of the parties involved.

7 | MANAGING MEDIATORS' EMOTIONS

Mediation is a process that involves navigating the emotional landscape of conflict resolution. Mediators must be skilled in managing their emotions while working effectively with disputants' emotions. To do this, mediators must have high levels of emotional intelligence and be able to recognize and identify the emotions that may arise during mediation. Mediators must be aware of their own emotions and be able to manage them effectively. Mediators should have high levels of emotional intelligence, which includes self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Goleman, 1998; Kelly & Kaminskienė, 2016). Self-awareness is the ability to recognize and understand one's emotions, while self-regulation is the ability to manage those emotions effectively (Kelly & Kaminskienė, 2016). Motivation refers to the drive to achieve goals, while empathy involves understanding and being able to feel the emotions of others. Social skills involve the ability to communicate effectively and build relationships. Mediators must also have a solid understanding of the emotions that may arise during mediation. They must be able to recognize and identify these emotions, both in themselves and the disputants. Once emotions have been identified, mediators can work to manage them effectively. This may involve taking breaks, offering support, or reframing the issues.

8 | STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING DISPUTANT'S EMOTIONS IN MEDIATION

Mediation is a process that requires parties to manage their emotions to achieve a successful resolution. Mediators and the parties can use different techniques to manage emotions during mediation.

8.1 | Active listening

Active listening plays a crucial role in mediation by allowing the mediator to understand the parties' perspectives and facilitate a productive and respectful dialogue. Active listening involves listening with empathy, reflecting on what is heard, and clarifying and checking one's understanding (Fisher et al., 2011). The mediator can better understand the party's underlying interests, emotions, and concerns through active listening. This helps the mediator to identify areas of common ground and potential solutions that meet the needs of both parties. Active listening also helps to establish trust and rapport between the mediator and the parties, which is essential for effective mediation.

Active listening can also help to diffuse tension and emotions that may arise during the mediation process. By demonstrating that they are listening and understanding the parties' perspectives, the mediator can help the parties feel heard and validated, reducing the likelihood of conflict and promoting a more collaborative environment.

Active listening in mediation involves four key components: attending, understanding, responding, and remembering. Attending consists of giving the parties undivided attention and focusing on verbal and nonverbal communication. Understanding involves interpreting the parties' messages accurately and empathizing with their perspectives. Responding consists in providing feedback and clarifying information. Remembering involves recalling essential information and using it to facilitate a productive dialogue (Kelly & Kaminskienė, 2016; Rogers & Farson, 1957).

The parties can also use this technique to understand each other's perspectives and to show that they are willing to listen to the other person.

8.2 | Validation

Validation is a crucial aspect of mediation, as it helps the parties feel heard and understood, facilitating a more productive and collaborative process. Validation involves acknowledging another person's emotions, feelings, or experiences as legitimate and worthy of attention and respect. By validating the parties' perspectives, the mediator can help to reduce defensiveness and create a more open and collaborative environment for negotiation. This process can also help to develop a sense of safety for the parties, which can facilitate the disclosure of sensitive or emotional information that may be important for the mediation process (Fruchter, 2019). It is important to note that validation does not necessarily mean agreeing, and mediators should exercise extreme caution, so they may not end up looking biased or favoring one party over the other.

Validation can take many forms, including verbal and non-verbal communication. This includes active listening, reflecting, and paraphrasing. By actively listening and reflecting on the parties' perspectives, the mediator can demonstrate that they understand and respect their positions (Fruchter, 2019). This can help to reduce the parties' frustration and promote a more productive and respectful dialogue. Additionally, paraphrasing the parties' concerns and needs can help to clarify their positions and identify areas of common ground. A mediator may verbally acknowledge the parties' feelings and perspectives explicitly. Importantly, these statements may only work in some mediation processes. And a mediator should refrain from making such statements sparingly. Before making these statements, the mediator must assess the mediation process and the party's attitudes toward mediation. An example of a mediator making such validating statements is when one party cooperates, and the other does not. The mediator can make validation statements to the party who is not cooperating to get them to be open to the process and show that their emotions are being acknowledged.

Validation is a critical component of transformative mediation, which seeks to empower the parties and transform their relationships (Bush & Folger, 2005). In transformative mediation, validation is used to help the parties to acknowledge and understand each other's perspectives and to promote empathy and understanding.

The parties can also use validation to show empathy for each other's emotions and to acknowledge the validity of each other's feelings.

8.3 | Reframing

Reframing is an essential technique used in mediation to help parties understand a situation from a different perspective. Reframing is looking at a statement or situation from an alternative angle or perspective (Moore, 1994).

The role of reframing in mediation is to shift the parties' focus from positions to interests, helping them to explore potential solutions that meet their underlying needs. By reframing the situation, the mediator can help the parties to see new possibilities and explore alternative options for resolving their conflict. Reframing can take different forms depending on the case and the party's needs. For example, the mediator may reframe a statement made by one of the parties to help the other party see it in a new light. The mediator may also reframe the issue to help the parties see it as a shared problem they can work together to solve.

Reframing can also help to reduce defensiveness and promote a more collaborative environment by shifting the parties' focus from blaming each other to finding a mutual solution. By reframing the situation positively, the mediator can help the parties see each other as potential partners in resolving their conflict rather than adversaries.

8.4 | Empathy

An important technique used by both mediators and the parties in mediation. It involves putting oneself in the other person's shoes and trying to understand their perspective. Empathy can help to build trust and understanding between the parties. Mediators can use empathy to understand the emotions and perspectives of the parties, while the parties can use empathy to understand each other's positions.

Managing emotions is an essential part of the mediation process. Mediators and the parties can use different techniques to manage emotions, such as active listening, validation, reframing, and empathy. These techniques can help to create a positive environment that encourages the parties to work together to achieve a successful resolution.

9 | CONCLUSION

Emotions play a significant role in the mediation process, and it is essential to understand and acknowledge them. Emotions can impact the outcome of mediation, either positively or negatively. Therefore, mediators must develop emotional intelligence and effective strategies for managing emotions. Active listening, reframing, and empathetic communication are effective strategies for managing emotions in mediation. Mediators should create a safe and supportive environment for parties to express their emotions and be trained to identify and manage emotions effectively. By effectively managing emotions, mediators can facilitate a more productive and positive mediation process, leading to a more successful resolution of conflicts.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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