

Virtually every major conflict in today's world, as well as a lot of minor ones, is strongly influenced, if not caused, by cross-cultural tension. This premise, intuitively obvious to anyone working internationally or across national cultures, lies at the heart of University of British Columbia professor LeBaron's and South African researcher Pillay's book, written in collaboration with three other global researchers.

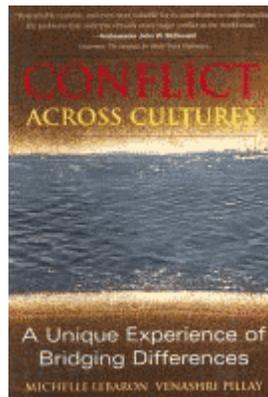
"Culture is embedded in every conflict because conflicts arise in human relationships," the authors postulate. Therein also lies the key: LeBaron and Pillay explain the potential of building relationships as a strategy for conflict resolution. Pointing at the three dimensions of conflict, material (the "what"), symbolic (the meaning of issues to the people involved) and relational, they emphasize the need for effective conflict resolution addressing all three of these levels.

What comes next is an overview of cultural models and what one of the co-authors describes as his "journey towards cultural fluency." The three chapters that follow, "When the waters of culture and conflict meet," "Capacities and skills for international conflict resolution," and "A map through rough terrain: A guide for international conflict resolution"

together present the meatiest part of the book, outlining how cultural values and beliefs shape conflicts, describing what it takes to mediate such conflict, and suggesting a mapping process for cross-cultural conflict mediation.

The mediator's perspective, found throughout most of the book, makes *Conflict across Cultures* more useful for those in such roles than for individuals who are directly involved in conflict. In addition, the fact that each of the book's chapters has been written by a different author or pair of authors is a bit of a mixed bag. It brings a refreshing diversity of thoughts and approaches to the subject and stimulates creative thinking in a trap-laden field. On the flip side, each of these authors uses different terminologies and presents their own models, which makes it hard for the non-expert reader to connect the different models and see how they all come together.

Reading *Conflict across Cultures* left me with mixed feelings. On one hand, the authors present a profound analysis that does justice to the intricate complexity of their subject. On the other hand, those looking for hands-on advice and practical strategies, as I had been, may be left wanting more than this book has on offer. Bottom line, it is a worthy read, but readers looking to develop their own toolset for conflict resolution will still need to dig deeper.



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Culture and Conflict: Connections. Cultures are embedded in every conflict because conflicts arise in human relationships. Cultures affect the ways we name, frame, blame, and attempt to tame conflicts. Whether a conflict exists at all is a cultural question. Ways of naming, framing, and taming conflict vary across cultural boundaries. As the example of the elderly Chinese interviewee illustrates, not everyone agrees on what constitutes a conflict. We then turn to an examination of key conflict process factors, such as conflict styles across cultures and considerations of face. We then offer some insights to managing intercultural conflict flexibly. This makes communication across cultures much more likely today than it was in the past, and considerations of appropriate and effective intercultural communication all the more salient. Ultimately, this boils down to being flexible intercultural communicators. In the article "How to Argue Across Cultures," Jeanne Brett, Kristin Behfar and Jeffrey Sanchez-Burks not only break down some examples of cross-cultural conflict like the one above, they also explain that we all have invisible boundary lines that are steeped in the cultures that produced us. These lines are formed as we grow up, go through school, and observe how those around us behave—and they are hard to cross when we find ourselves in uncomfortable situations.