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LINKING THEORY TO PRACTICE: HOW COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY INFORMS THE COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING PROCESS FOR THIRD PARTIES

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Abstract

Psychological and cognitive schemas when making decisions within the problem-solving process influence participant behavior. Cognitive psychology models are applied to Fisher and Ury's method of principled negotiation. The potential benefits of cognitive psychology as a means of understanding the cognitive schemata of problem solving participants are discussed in this article.

Introduction

Foreign policy decision-making has included such phenomena as information processing, images, expectations, and other internal events of individual decision-makers in how much leaders can shape their states' foreign policy choices (Kegley & Wittkopf, 1995). Cognitive psychology, therefore, centers on perception, thinking, language, problem-solving, and creativity (Bartos & Wehr, 2002; Christie, Wagner, & Winter, 2001). This study applies four models of cognitive psychology to the collaborative problem-solving model of Fisher and Ury (1981) in order to determine their impact on the decision-making process in conflict resolution. In this article, I set out to understand the role of cognitive psychology in the problem-solving process, and how conflict is dealt with.

Conflicts can be waged destructively or constructively with a number of predictable sequences and strategies to handle each successive stage (Kriesberg, 1998). Deep-rooted conflict is embedded within the parties' gender, past history, psychological perceptions, cultural norms, and belief systems (Galtung, 1996; Jeong, 2000). However, conflicts over culture, gender, and identity politics may not inevitably become destructive (Burton, 1990). The problem-solving process, for example, is an important process in the deescalation and settlement of interpersonal conflicts. The parties in interest-based conflicts can reach compromise solutions (Singer, 1994).

When parties are brought together in a safe space, discussions can go on until the parties fully understand the motivations, needs and concerns of all the others before reaching a negotiated settlement (Deutsch & Coleman, 2000). The third party intervener can establish a conflict resolution process to facilitate the parties' analyses of the conflict, and how they communicate with each other, ask questions, and deal with the real issues that fuel the conflict (Duffy, Grosch, & Olczak, 1991).

Thus, problem-solving intermediaries facilitate the dialogue between parties to enhance resolution outcomes where conflict exists in a relationship (Kolb, 1994). The third party facilitates the conflict resolution process by determining who should talk, when, and by having the parties follow the ground rules and a procedure to discuss the conflict issues in a certain order (Bercovitch, 1984; Schwartz, 1994). The third party also works to create a constructive process that may build trust between the parties, the third party and the parties, and in the process itself (Carpenter & Kennedy, 1988; Yang, 1998). The problem-solving process also allows the parties to vent their emotions, ensuring the way toward resolving the wide-ranging scope and complexity of the conflict (Gray, 1989; Ury, Brett & Goldberg, 1993). However, culture, gender, and one's historical experience also influence how the parties and the third party perceive each other and the process.

Constructionists view the "conception of independent individuals as a historical and cultural artifact" (Gergen, 1999, p. 152). Culture is an ideology and worldview that assists the individual to make sense of the world (Avruch, 1998). Cultural values influence what the individual sees, hears, and feels, and influences how that person interacts with others (Boulding, 1990a; Lederach, 1995). The individual is a product of one's culture and s/he is socialized by that society's institutions with its values, norms, and rules. A culture's meanings and values are encoded in stories (Senehi, 1996, 2000) and these impact that individual's conflict and communication styles (Cohen, 1997; Volkan, 1998) as well as their knowledge systems (Friere, 1999; Lederach, 1995; Tuso, 1997). Low and high cultural contexts constrains the cognitive and emotional behavior of its members (Avruch, 1998). Misunderstandings based on cultural and gender assumptions lead to miscommunication and protracted identity based conflict (Ross, 1993; Rothman, 1997). Cultural stereotypes, for example, can cause one party to misinterpret what the other party is communicating verbally and non-verbally (Cohen, 1997). A transformational process creates a context whereby both parties can challenge stereotypes and different stories empirically so that both parties are heard and understood (Busch & Folger, 1994; Lederach, 1995).

Moreover, in low context cultures, women are socialized to see the world through gender colored glasses and they carry gender schemata into conflict contexts (Northrup, 1996), so their information is organized and applied on the basis of gender (Kolb & Coolidge, 1991). For example, males use ritual opposition in interaction with others through argument and challenge--report talk and ethics of rights--whereas women may be oppressed into silence by the patriarchal context (Tannen, 1990). Women take a relational view of others based on trust and openness, empowering the other party and including

their point of view--rapport talk and ethics of care (Tannen, 1990). Feminist scholar-practitioners therefore argue that mediation and negotiation maintain the patriarchal system because they maintain the power relations of domination and subordination, and unequal gender relations (Brock-Utne, 1985; Sylvester, 1987; Taylor & Beinstein Miller, 1994; Stephens, 1994; Tickner, 1992).

Just as gender, age, and culture influence how one thinks, cognitive issues, misperceptions, power roles, and time factors, as well as historical, cultural, and gender contexts, also affect the decision-making process; this leads to distorted decisions and miscommunication because of one's power base and the power others believe one has (Boulding, 1990b; Mayer, 1992). A number of researchers emphasize how cognitive distortions and the individual's setting impact individual perceptions and influence how they make decisions (de Mesquita, 1984; Janis, 1972; Jervis, 1976; Steinbruner, 1974). There is, therefore, a need to distinguish between decision-makers and their decision-making contexts. Equally, misperception and cognitive distortions may dominate more local and interpersonal conflicts, leading to poor decisions that are often sub-optimal.

The decision-maker is a rational actor who bases her/his calculations on a specified type of information, evaluating alternatives on the basis of a specified set of goals and positions. How one interprets one's milieu will impact how one evaluates and selects an appropriate course of action. Consequently, Jervis (1976), de Mesquita (1984), Janis (1972), and Steinbruner's (1974) middle-range theories of cognitive psychology examine the impact of certain processes within the decision-making structure.

This article applies the aforementioned theorists' analytic models--psychological processes, cybernetic process, and expected utility model of decision-making--to the principled problem-solving four-stage process of Fisher and Ury (1981) as shown in Table 1. In terms of individual and small group decision-making, my intent in this paper is to argue that this approach does inform the third party intermediary of the necessity of taking subjective and psychological processes of the parties into consideration if the problem- solving process is to empower both parties. Focusing on the first premise of separating the people from the problem, I discuss Robert Jervis's (1976) cognitive psychology approach. Second, I explore the impact of Bueno Bruce de Mesquita's (1984) expected utility model within the parties' interests and not their positions. In a third section, I discuss Irving Janis's (1972) psychological processes within decision-making groups in the context of the third element of problem-solving, inventing options for mutual gain. Finally, John Steinbruner's (1974) cybernetic decision-making model is discussed within the objective criteria element of the problem-solving process.

Table 1
Cognitive Psychology and the Problem Solving Process

Conceptual Models of Cognitive Decision Making	Roger Fisher and William Ury's Method of Principled Problem Solving
Robert Jervis's Cognitive Psychological Approach Perception of one's environment influences decisionmaking Intentions guide the processing of information Difference between rational and irrational consistency Dramatic historical events impacts a person's images, assumptions, and beliefs Prematurely stop searching for new information	*Separate the People From the Problem* Cognitive factors and a confusing environment can result in a poor decision Suspicion and mistrust shaped by a party's interpretation of historical events impact decisions made Information that conflicts with a party's cognitive schemata may be dismissed or ignored
Bueno Bruce de Mesquita's Expected Utility Model Premeditated decisions to attack other countries is constructed from a country's expected utility maximization Risk taking, probability, and uncertainty are linked to rational foreign policy choices Initiator believes that war will yield positive expected utility	*Focus on Interests Not Positions* Party forms an expected utility calculus to escalate the conflict in pursuit of her/his interests Parties are rational expected-utility maximizers
Irving Janis's Psychological Processes Groupthink leads to poor decisions, deterring rational calculation by interfering with critical thinking Difficulties and alternative courses of action are ignored, leading to poor decisions	*Invent Options For Mutual Gain* Parties and the third party must be realistic, hardheaded, and tough minded based on solid facts Third party ensures a diversity of options so that the best decision is made
John Steinbruner's Cybernetic Process Limitations on the amount of information that people can process at any one given time Decisionmaker monitors a few internal and environmental parameters and parcels out complex problems to subunits	*Use Objective Criteria* External professionals provide information for the parties to make an informed decision Parties can agree on the process criteria Each party's BATNA protects their needs and values.

The Method of Principled Negotiation

Individuals, organizations, and communities are turning to alternative methods of conflict resolution like mediation and negotiation to deal constructively with professional, interpersonal, intergroup and international conflicts (Rothman, 1997). Conflicts need to be transformed into problems to be resolved (Ury, 1993). *Getting to Yes* provides a problem-solving strategy for people to cooperate with each other by negotiating principled and mutually satisfactory agreements (Fisher & Ury, 1981). The Fisher and Ury (1981) problem-solving approach highlights a negotiating strategy based on a philosophy of working with the other party to negotiate interests in a principled way by separating the people from the problem, focusing on interests and not positions, inventing options for mutual gain, and using objective criteria.

Separate the People from the Problem

By putting oneself in the other's shoes, one can address perceptions, fears, insecurities, frustrations, and emotions that affect the mediation or negotiation process in ways that can support building an effective working relationship (Ury, 2000, 1993, Gandhi, 1992). Parties that listen and talk effectively can analyze a conflict from a multidimensional "social cubism" framework and eliminate misunderstandings and misperceptions (Byrne & Keashly, 2000; Byrne & Carter, 1996). The parties will then filter the intended communication through their cultural, historical, and gender schemata (Cohen, 1997; Kolb & Coolidge, 1991).

Robert Jervis's (1976) emphasis on cognitive factors in decision-making can be applied to the first stage of the problem-solving process. His cognitive psychological approach to decision-making promotes an important thesis that foreign policy decision-makers' perceptions of their environment and of other actors often diverge from each other's with important consequences for their and other's subsequent actions. The core of Jervis's (1976) analysis is to describe how intentions of each specific party guide the processing of information by decision-makers, with special attention paid to the persistence of such intentions in the face of apparently contradictory information.

Furthermore, Jervis (1976) distinguishes between rational and irrational consistency when discussing the persistence of intentions. Irrational consistency is manifested mainly at three stages in the decision-making process. First, incoming information that is inconsistent with decision-makers' previous thoughts about decision problems may be misunderstood and twisted in meaning until it becomes consistent, rejected or ignored. Second, the failure to see trade-off relationships among the myriad of options available is another means by which irrational consistency creeps into decision-making. Finally, post-decisional rationalization is the third mechanism by which people typically reappraise the alternatives following a decision, thinking more favorably than before of the chosen solution while feeling less positively about the rejected alternatives.

Age may be a factor in how the third party intermediary and the conflict parties were taught to think. Dramatic historical events may have a powerful impact upon younger decision-makers whose historical images are not yet fully established (Jervis 1976). Decision-makers learn from history, drawing upon grossly oversimplified and emotion-laden analogies that often carry policy recommendations inappropriate to the current situation. Their personal experiences and superficial readings of the most vivid features of the situation hold undue influences.

Decision-makers perceive more order and certainty than exists in their uncertain and disorderly milieus. The invention of order and certainty is revealed in their construction of stable internally consistent belief systems and in decision-makers' tendencies to prevent the search for new information (Jervis 1976). As expectations condition the interpretation of incoming information, new evidence is often made to fit prior expectations. There is an inability to transfer deductive thinking to new variations of the problem (Mayer, 1992). Decision-makers become indifferent too quickly to additional information, and more resistant too quickly to contradictory evidence.

Decision-makers are asked to make decisions with far-reaching and unpredictable consequences on the basis of extraordinarily complicated, incomplete, and uncertain evidence. They operate in an informational milieu that Jervis (1976) calls a fog. As the problem- solving process involves a complex processing of tasks, situational forces exert powerful influences upon a party's ability to perform such tasks.

Jervis (1976) draws the third party's attention to the fact that cognitive factors and a confusing environment can result in poor decisions for the parties within a problem-solving context. Suspicion and mistrust combined with the parties' images of the world shaped by their interpretations of historical events will have a major impact on the decisions made in the problem-solving process. Information that conflicts with the parties' cognitive schemas may be dismissed and ignored. Consequently, it is imperative that the third party makes sure that parties are really hearing what other parties are saying by spending a considerable amount of time on the initial storytelling and reframing mode of the problem-solving process. The intermediary must challenge cultural and gender stereotypes, because misperceptions in the stories create a problem-solving context that dehumanizes both parties.

Focus on Interests, Not Positions

Focusing on positions instead of jointly exploring real interests stifles creativity and mutual gain when the parties will not discuss other options (Moore, 1996). When the parties stick to their positions, they send a message to each other that they do not want to work together collaboratively (Bolton, 1986; Katz & Lawyer, 1992).

Bueno Bruce de Mesquita's (1984) expected utility model or theory of choice can be applied to the second element of the problem-solving process. The rational behavior model of premeditated decisions to attack other countries is constructed from a handful of

assumptions. First, approval of a single key leader who can veto decisions initiating wars, interventions and threats is necessary. Second, the leader is a rational expected utility maximizer, "choices between war and peace are made as if to maximize the strong leader's welfare and by extension, the welfare of those at whose pleasure the leader remains in a position of leadership" (de Mesquita, 1984, p.57). Third, uncertainty about other states' actions in the event of war must enter into the calculations. Finally, a state's war making capabilities decline as the site of battle becomes geographically remote from the nation state. These assumptions produce straightforward propositions about who is likely to launch a war against whom.

The expectation is that wars--and interventions and threats--will be initiated only when the initiator believes war will yield positive expected utility. In other words, wars are calculated events that occur in an atmosphere of prior planning and preparation. Wars are patterned activities that involve risks, but these risks are carefully considered. Before war is initiated, certain necessary conditions have to be satisfied, and it is these necessary conditions that make the onset of war a predictable phenomenon. However, under some rather unusual circumstances that depend on calculations about probable actions by allies or nonaligned third parties, states may attack more powerful adversaries and may even have strong incentives for war against their close allies.

Not only are states with positive expected utility more likely to initiate conflict, they are more likely than initiators with negative expected utilities to achieve their objectives. Success is almost certain if third parties with credible threats do not intervene. Argentina's invasion of the Falklands/Malvinas islands in 1982 was based on three calculations: (1) that a foreign military venture would quell growing domestic unrest within Argentina; (2) that the vast distance of the Falklands/Malvinas islands from Britain would render British projection of military power into the area relatively ineffective; and (3) under certain conflicting treaty obligations and desire for Latin American support of its Salvadorian policy, the U.S. would not get involved in the conflict and would remain neutral. The end result of these calculations was the Argentinan military junta's decision to favor war over inaction. Hence, de Mesquita (1984) argues that the rational estimate of probable gains from aggression may underlie all other instances of interstate conflict.

Thus, de Mesquita's "War Trap" theory indicates that parties in the problem-solving process (see Table 1) will form an expected utility calculus to decide whether to escalate the conflict in pursuit of their interests or to work with the other parties and the third party to problem solve and negotiate a productive agreement. The "War Trap" model of expected utility also informs the intervener that the parties are rational expected utility mazimizers. Thus, it is imperative that the third party creates a context whereby s/he aligns with both parties, revealing a preference for creating a process that is fair to both parties.

Invent Options for Mutual Gain: Possible Solutions

Taking a narrow one-sided focus can lock the parties into arbitrary positions, and dampen expectations so that they are unprepared to constructively engage each other in real problem-solving (Umbreit, 1995). It is critical to brainstorm possible trade-offs and to be aware that a Graduated and Reciprocated Initiative in Tension Reduction (GRIT) by one of the party's could save face for the other party (Weeks, 1992).

Irving Janis's (1972) psychological processes within decision-making groups can also usefully apply to the third element of the problem-solving process. Janis (1972) defines groupthink as the kind of decision likely to emerge from a cohesive body of policymakers under strong leadership who miscalculate the practical consequences of such a decision. In other words, groupthink is bad because the decisions it fosters are usually fiascoes; policymakers tend to indulge in irrational thinking; their illusions are symptoms of group madness and result in poor decisions (Nutt, 1989).

Small groups have a hidden agenda based upon the objective of preserving friendly intergroup relations, which result in producing blindness to reality, deterring rational calculation, and interfering with critical thinking. Consequently, groupthink takes on two forms: (1) positive beliefs about the decision group itself, and (2) the protection of these beliefs against internal and external dissidence.

This leads us to the question of what produces constructive, destructive, or poor decisions. Janis (1972) identifies six factors that contribute to faulty decision-making: (1) failure to observe the full range of alternatives; (2) failure to notice obvious risks and drawbacks; (3) inattention to courses of action initially judged to carry prohibitive costs; (4) neglecting to seek expert advice; (5) downgrading advice or information through challenging the parties' positions; and (6) limited attention to difficulties expected in implementation. He associates these features of inadequate decision-making with groupthink, although Janis (1972) admits they could also result from a lack of awareness, fatigue, prejudice, or other causes.

Janis's (1972) remedies for avoiding groupthink are that groups should be realistic, hardheaded, and tough-minded, utilizing solid facts in making decisions (see Table 1). Policymakers should face controversial issues by encouraging a diversity of opinions so that the best decision is made. In this sort of situation, problem-solving is genuinely nonauthoritarian, genuinely open-minded, and genuinely reasonable. The problem-solving third party, therefore, can encourage the parties to look at the issues from multiple perspectives so that the parties make the best decision. Also, Janis (1972) did not pay attention to the problem of objectifying criteria for classifying policy decisions as good or bad. Objectifying criteria is the next stage of Fisher and Ury's (1981) problem-solving model and is most necessary for a balanced outcome to be derived from the problem-solving process. Consequently, the third party must assist parties to realistically examine all of the facts and issues in the conflict, being aware not to become a part of

any groupthink process whereby social pressure to conform to a rational model of decision-making results in a least optimum outcome.

Use Objective Criteria

Using external standards based on scientific judgment and professional standards can assist the parties to use a broad range of fair criteria to decide among options to reach a mutually rewarding solution based on principle (Hocker & Wilmot, 1995). The parties can agree on the criteria to be used in the process. Knowing one's Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement (BATNA) makes sure that each party will not compromise their basic needs, values, and security and accept a poor agreement (Fisher & Ury, 1981; Lewicki, Saunders, & Minton, 1999).

John Steinbruner's (1974) cybernetic process can be applied to the fourth stage of the problem-solving process. He explores decision-making as a cybernetic process, contrasting the rational-analytical and cybernetic-cognitive models of human decision-making and demonstrating how these conflicting models provide different insights into the shortcomings of large government bureaucracies and the decisions they make. Steinbruner's (1974) discussion of theories of choice is organized around the attributes of the class of decisions that he terms complex. A decision problem is complex when actions under consideration must generate outcomes whose evaluation requires the consideration of two or more objectives, which must trade-off negatively. Decision-makers must also experience uncertainty about the consequences that will result from the actions being contemplated, and the power to make the decision must be made by two or more individuals.

The analytic model corresponds with the technical definition of rational decision-making under risk, assuming that decision-makers are expected utility maximizers who revise their opinions in the light of new information. Steinbruner (1974) rejects the analytic paradigm because it requires that statespersons, in order to make decisions, have perfect or nearly perfect information about their circumstances.

The rational paradigm ignores the limitations on the amount of information people can process at any one given time that satisfies the components of rational choice. Steinbruner (1974) accepts the notion that analysis can impose decisions on people. He favors an alternative paradigm and develops a cybernetic model of individual choice behavior. Cybernetic decision- makers monitor a few internal and environmental issues and parcel out complex problems to other experts who consider only a few variables when choosing among options. Uncertainty is resolved through simple trial and error learning.

A more complete account must explain how decision-makers define and change their goals over time. It must also tell why they perceive and classify states of their milieu as they do. He uses these cores of empirically established principles, which deal with the storage and retrieval of information and with the tendency to maintain simple and

consistent cognitive structures, to provide a partial explanation of how decision-makers formulate goals and perceive their environment. Statespersons initially make categorical judgments about what is desirable and attainable, and subsequent information to the contrary is not likely to alter those judgments; therefore, when faced with conflicts among the partial solutions offered to them, decision-makers would not construct the careful trade-offs necessary for an optimal solution.

Women and men define their goals or the states of their environment in different ways (Tannen, 1990). Thus, in the problem-solving approach, the third party can direct the process so that the parties can make trade-offs among options (see Table 1). The third party can also parcel out complex problems to experts so that fair criteria are used to analyze various options and a principled agreement is reached between the parties.

Conclusions

These four cognitive psychology scholars who engage in studying decision-making processes note that individuals and small groups make foreign policy decisions. Janis, Jervis, de Mesquita, and Steinbruner contend that individuals' belief systems, life histories, cognitive schemas, and experiences influence their behaviors. Cognitive distortions and perceptions impact the policy process. Applying their models to Fisher and Ury's (1981) four elements of principled problem-solving, I noted the need to focus on the parties' subjective and cognitive factors in creating a context, milieu, and framework that emphasizes perceptions, cognitive factors, psychological stress, and rational calculations when making decisions leading to a final agreement. It is the argument of this paper that conflict resolution and peacemaking training must engage in the following: (1) incorporate skills that train intermediaries about how cognitive distortions can undermine the problem-solving process; (2) assist third parties in creating a context whereby the stereotypes and perceptions embedded within the storytelling of the parties are challenged through the skill of reframing and reflexive dialogue; (3) emphasize that culture constrains cognitive and emotional behavior. The meaning in culture is transmitted through symbols (language, metaphors, schemas, customs, practices and beliefs) that emphasize doing or being, and guide individual and group behavior. Culture has a cognitive and emotional content, and is part of human consciousness. Third parties, therefore, need to be aware of the *emic* and *etic* cultural approaches that influence parties negotiation styles, and their need to develop an elicitive approach (Avruch, 1998; Lederach, 1995); and, (4) bring the invisibility of gender (Sylvester, 1987) into the problem-solving process. Gender organizes social life, social structure, and social beliefs (Taylor & Miller, 1994). It is important to build cooperative understandings of gender into the problem-solving process to transform values, attitudes, and behavior (Taylor & Miller, 1994).

There are also other approaches to mediation and negotiation. Transformational mediation, for example, empowers and creates a framework for the parties to recognize each other, repair trust, and rebuild a relationship with each other (Busch & Folger, 1994; Folger & Busch, 1996; Yang, 1998). It is a constructive process that also facilitates using independent experts to share information on complex technical issues (Grillo, 1996; Pope, 1996). The transformative intervener facilitates the parties to effectively analyze the conflict and make effective decisions that clarify their issues (Schwerin, 1995). The third party takes on a responsive role to facilitate a discussion of the past, and the here-and-now to develop a solid framework based on empowerment and recognition that goes beyond the session (Busch & Folger, 1994; Folger & Busch, 1996). Transformational mediation can also help the public to learn about the root causes of conflict and society's unequal power structure as well as to develop mediation and civic education skills (Schwerin, 1995). Thus, the process is psychologically, socially, and politically empowering for the participants because it builds self-esteem and self-efficacy, teaches problem-solving and listening skills, and forges a critical consciousness (Schwerin, 1995).

In addition, "Reflexive Dialogue" allows the parties to articulate to each other the impact of the conflict on their self-definition and experience (Rothman, 1996). By putting the two stories together, the transformational process permits the parties to share both stories to develop a shared narrative and meaning (Senehi, 1996, 2000). The sharing of stories encourages consciousness raising because each party develops a deeper understanding of self through a weaving of the collective narrative (Rothman, 1996; Senehi, 1996, 2000)--for example, anger makes a person aware of her or his wants and needs (Burgess & Burgess, 1996).

Thus, cognitive psychology has much to offer the problem-solving processes within conflict resolution. In particular it indicates that how parties perceive directly influences what they perceive. Conflict parties view the world through different cognitive schemas and conceptual frameworks that will determine the questions that the third party intermediary will ask, what facts are relevant, and which decisions the parties will reach. More research, linking cognitive psychology to the problem-solving practice, needs to also focus on the third party intervener's cognitive factors and distortions, which surely will influence how that third party directs or facilitates the process.

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