## *Reviews*

# THIRD-PARTY INTERVENTION STRATEGIES IN SOLVING INTERPERSONAL CONFLICTS: A REVIEW OF RUSSIAN AND FOREIGN STUDIES

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### Abstract

Comparative analysis of psychological research on the role of the third party in conflicts in Russian and foreign traditions is presented in this article. The author's classification of the third party's intervention strategies in a conflict based on two criteria is discussed. The first criterion is a degree of the third party's activity in a conflict. The second criterion is the aspect which third party emphasizes in the process of solving a conflict — the relations between disputants and their emotions, or the result of a conflict. Hence, a classification of the third party's intervention strategies in solving interpersonal conflicts can be presented. For example, when a third party's activity is high and the third party emphasizes the relations between disputants and their emotions in the process of solving a conflict, the third party's intervention strategies are facilitative, evaluative, transformative, as well as mediation strategies. When the third party's activity is high and the third party emphasizes the outcome of a conflict, the third party's intervention strategies are pressing, directive, arbitration, problem-solving, and deal-making. Then, when the third party's activity is low and the third party emphasizes the relations between disputants and their emotions in the process of solving conflicts, the third party's intervention strategies are differentiated, narrative, storytelling, and understanding-based. Finally, when third party's activity is low and the third party emphasizes the result of a conflict, the third party's intervention strategies are analytic, neutral, strategic, pragmatic, as well as orchestration strategies. Different strategies of third-party intervention in a conflict and their efficiency are analyzed.

**Keywords:** third party intervention; interpersonal conflict; efficiency of strategies.

Third-party intervention plays a large role in solving interpersonal conflicts. A third party in a conflict is an individual who is external to a conflict situation between two or more disputants, and who is involved in solving the conflict.

Conflicts can often be resolved more rapidly, more economically, and at an earlier stage with the help of a third

party. Third parties may be limited to advising disputants, or they may also be able to make binding decisions for the parties. They may intervene in conflicts between individuals or between groups.

Researchers and practitioners have paid considerable attention to the role of third-party intervention in conflict resolution, the choice of intervention strategies, and their effects for the last two decades. They noted that the literature on third-party intervention in various arenas focuses mostly on four areas: describing intervention, its effects and value, advice to third parties, and the determinants of third-party intervention (McGuigan & Popp, 2007; Wall & Chan-Serafin, 2010).

Scholars assumed that third-party intervention will influence the ability of a disputant to resolve future conflicts. They emphasized that the process of third-party intervention can develop skills that increase the disputants' efficacy. Disputants gain a better understanding of their own and others' interests during the conflict solving process, which can have positive lasting effects on the relations disputants have with each other and with others (Charkoudian, Ritis, Buck, & Wilson, 2009; Pincock, 2013).

To achieve their goals third parties have to exercise a measure of control, authority, influence, and trust between a third party and disputants (Gerami, 2009; Stimec & Poitras, 2009). The stronger the trust between them, the higher the probability of finding a satisfactory solution (Poitras, 2013).

Also researches mentioned such attributes as effort, credibility, confidence, knowledge, authority, originality of ideas, rapport, intelligence, and a sense of humor (Kolb, 1983; Bercovitch & Houston, 1993).

## Third-party intervention strategies in solving interpersonal conflicts: Russian traditions

There are five forms of third-party intervention in solving interpersonal conflicts traditionally present in Russian studies. They differ in the degree of the third party's control over a decision disputants should make. These forms are arbitrator, mediator, facilitator, observer, and consultant (Dmitriev, Kudryavtsev, & Kudryavtsev, 1993; Emelyanov, 2000; Gromova, 2001; Khasan & Sergomanov, 2004; Antsupov & Shipilov, 2008; Grishina, 2008).

Each form of intervention has its own specificity that exerts an effect on a conflict solving process.

Third parties are the most powerful in cases of arbitration. An *arbitrator* is a judge; they discuss the conflict with disputants, and then dictate an obligatory solution to the parties.

Hence, arbitration may produce more rapid concessions than mediation (Antsupov & Shipilov, 2008). Arbitration is a binding formal method of conflict management.

A *mediator* does not have the power to force the parties to make a binding decision; they can only assist in finding an acceptable solution. The disputants make the final decision independently. A mediator is interested in a favorable solving of a conflict that would satisfy both disputants (Grishina, 2008).

One of the most non-authoritarian intervention roles is a *facilitator* aimed mainly at facilitating the process without

getting involved in a discussion and conflict solving (Gromova, 2008).

An *observer* can prevent disputants from mutual aggression or violation of existing agreements and solutions (Emelyanov, 2000).

A *consultant* is a qualified and impartial expert acting as a third party. He or she must be a scholar-practitioner or an expert. Consulting is an innovative form of intervention in a conflict. A consultant should define a conflict subject, figure out if the disputants have already solved similar conflicts, and help them find an acceptable solution in a conflict (Antsupov & Shipilov, 2008).

## Third-party intervention strategies in solving interpersonal conflicts: Foreign approach

Thus, the review of Russian studies shows that authors traditionally consider only from four to five third-party intervention strategies in solving conflicts while foreign scholars have categorized third-party intervention into different types of strategies that may be used in the relationship with the conflict parties (Bercovitch & Houston, 1993). Approximately twenty have been reported, such as analytic (Birke, 2000), evaluative (Riskin, 1996; Lande, 2000; Della Noce, 2009; Wall & Chan-Serafin, 2014), pressing (Carnevale & Pruitt, 1992; Lee, Gelfand, & Kashima, 2014; Wall & Chan-Serafin, 2014), neutral (Kydd, 2003; Wall & Chan-Serafin, 2014), facilitative (Riskin, 1996; Gabel, 2003; Kressel, 2007), differentiated (Regina, 2000), narrative (Bannink, 2007; Hardy, 2008), evaluative-directive (Abramson, 2004), mediation-arbitration (Ross & Conlon,

2000), problem-solving (Harper, 2006; Bannink, 2007), strategic (Kressel & Gadlin, 2009), pragmatic (Alberstein, 2007), storytelling (Pinto, 2000), transformative (Bush & Folger, 1994; Bannink, 2007; Kressel, 2007), understanding-based (Friedman & Himmelstein, 2006), dealmaking and orchestration strategies (Kolb, 1985).

I assume that these third party intervention strategies can be considered based on two criteria. The first criterion is the degree of the third party's activity. The second criterion is the aspects emphasized by the third party in the process of solving a conflict - the relations between disputants and their emotions, or the result of a conflict. I suggest that some third parties focus on the substance of a conflict, while others focus on improving the conflict process and the relations between disputants. Hence, a classification of the third party's intervention strategies in solving interpersonal conflicts can be presented (Figure 1).

Comparing the strategies to each other it can be noticed, for instance, that a *neutral* third party may be not too much involved in the process of negotiation, playing the passive role of the "*Orchestrator*" in D. Kolb's taxonomy or using *analytic* strategy in R. Birke's classification.

Different third-party intervention strategies should be specified. J. Wall and S. Chan-Serafin (2014) categorized a third party behavior into **pressing, evaluative,** and **neutral** strategies.

Using *evaluative strategy* is typically adopted by a third party to analyze the cases in a balanced manner, point out the strengths and weaknesses to each side, give opinions, and discuss

**The classification of the third party's intervention strategies in solving interpersonal conflicts**
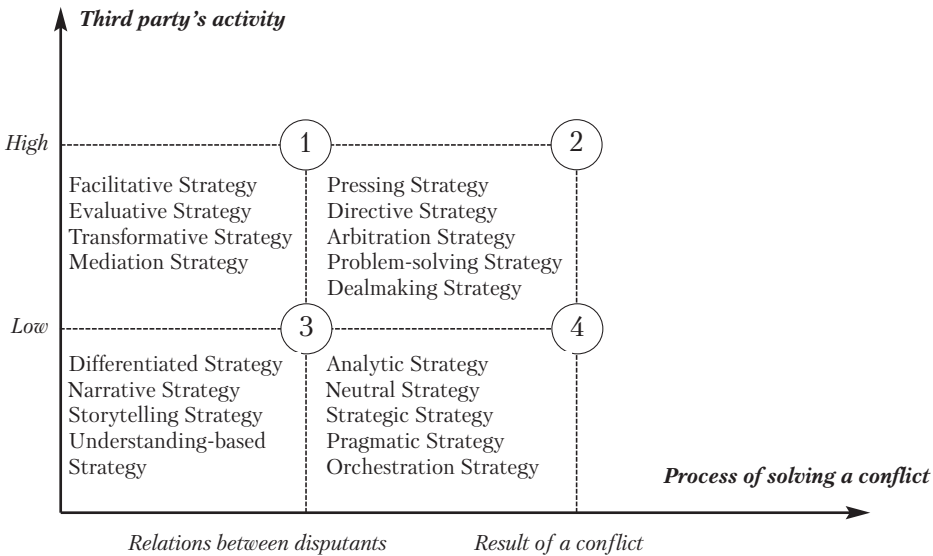


positive or negative aspects of each side's case.

*Neutral strategies* enable a third party to be impartial, not to evaluate or attempt to move either side off positions, to keep both sides talking, have no interest in the outcome, and not to tell the parties what to do. Using a neutral strategy a third party does not take part in a conflict process but mainly performs the role of an observer.

*Pressing strategies* constitute the most active form of intervention. A third party attempts to move disputants off current positions pressing one or both sides. A third party tends to be direct and persistent (Wall & Chan-Serafin 2014). The pressing strategy describes a third party's behavior as criticizing the conflicting parties and making them do what he or she wants them to do.

J. Wall, T. Dunne, and S. Chan-Serafin (2011) mentioned that the two

assertive strategies – evaluative and pressing – produce significantly more agreements than a neutral strategy.

K. Kressel (2007) classified a third party's behavior in terms of **facilitative, evaluative, strategic,** and **transformative** strategies.

In the *facilitative* strategy a third party focuses primarily on helping the parties identify and express their interests and needs, find a constructive and structured format for dialogue and problem solving.

In the *evaluative* strategy a third party attempts to provide the parties with a realistic assessment of their negotiating positions.

In the *strategic* style a third party adopts to address the underlying dysfunction that is fueling the conflict.

In the *transformative* strategy a third party's attention and activity aim at ascertaining whether there is an

underlying or latent cause that has fueled the parties' conflict and, if so, they attempt to interest the parties in addressing it (Kressel, 2007, p. 252).

D. Kolb (1994) observed a great number of third parties using various strategies and divided these strategies into two groups named **"Dealmakers"** and **"Orchestrators"**.

*The "Dealmakers"* often offer their opinions and make independent suggestions or recommendations. They attempt to control the process and content of negotiations, and to provide additional motivation for the parties to "make the deal".

By contrast, *the "Orchestrators"* tend to take a more passive role in a conflict preferring that the parties handle the conflict situation themselves with only limited help from the third party (Baker & Ross, 1992).

Generally, the preference of a third party's intervention strategy is determined by the personal features of the conflicting parties, by reasons that have provoked conflict interactions, and the conflicting parties' behavior. It is important to mention that a third party is always interested in the favorable outcome of conflicts meeting both disputants' wishes.

### The effectiveness of the third party's intervention strategies in solving interpersonal conflicts

The problem of the effectiveness of the third party's intervention strategies in solving interpersonal conflicts is an important area for scholars.

A number of studies (Carnevale & Pruitt, 1992; Carment & Rowlands, 1998; Nugent & Broedling, 2002; De Dreu & Carnevale, 2003; Loschelder & Trotschel, 2010) have mentioned the importance of the third-party's intervention effect in solving interpersonal conflicts.

The third-party's intervention should provide valuable results for the disputants and third parties. The major outcome for the disputants is agreement (Kressel & Pruitt, 1989; Wall, Stark, & Standifer, 2001; Hedeen, 2004; Kay, 2009).

Efficacy of a third party's intervention depends on a great number of conditions. One of the ways to evaluate the effectiveness of a third party is to look at the intervention process itself. The disputants come to a conflict solving process with a stunningly diverse array of issues, meanings, experiences, and expectations (McGuigan & Popp, 2007). The efficacy of a third party may be affected by their choice of intervention strategy.

For instance, a number of studies established that *the pressing, directive,* and *arbitration strategies* of a third party more often lead to agreements than *the neutral, analytic,* and *orchestration strategies* (Kochan & Jick, 1978; Carnevale & Pegnetter, 1985; Hiltrop, 1985; Kressel & Pruitt, 1989; Wall & Rude, 1991; Bercovitch & Houston, 1993; De Dreu & Carnevale, 2003; Wall et al., 2011).

The pressing, directive, and arbitration strategies are most efficient in a conflict situation when disputants do not have enough time to solve the conflict and are forced to find an immediate solution, and also when disputants know weaknesses and strengths of each other and have no opportunity to find an acceptable solution. These types of strategy are also efficient when disputants are too emotional and aggressive.

It is possible to use less authoritarian strategies after disputants have calmed down (Grishina, 2008).

By contrast, other researchers found the use of *facilitative, narrative,* and *mediation strategies* to be more effective (Burton, 1969; Wissler, 2002; Siqueira, 2003; Mareschal, 2005).

For instance, J. Burton (1969) emphasized the importance of facilitative strategies in overcoming perceptual barriers and contributing to solving a conflict. Likewise, J. Wall and S. Chan-Serafin (2014) mentioned that individuals prefer to have control over their actions and have a negative emotional reaction when someone attempts to constrain their personal freedom, and puts pressure on them.

Hence, it is doubtful whether there will ever be a third party's intervention strategy that is effective in all kinds of situations. D. Kolb reported the determinative influence of circumstances on a third party's stylistic behavior (Kolb, 1983).

Thus, the issue of the effectiveness of a third party's intervention in a conflict remains rather disputable.

## Conclusion

In summary, it can be noted that the variety of third-party intervention strategies need to be categorized. I suggest two criteria for classification — the degree of the third party's activity and aspects that third party emphasizes in the process of solving a conflict. One of the *limitations* of my review can be in the fact that there are other criteria that can be used for the categorization such as effectiveness of the third-party's intervention, the degree of disputants' activity, and others.

I suppose that these findings could be extended in *further research* by focusing on additional contexts of the third-party's intervention context — domestic, organizational, or international. It will also allow a possibility of generalizing these findings.

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# Стратегии вмешательства третьей стороны в разрешение межличностных конфликтов: обзор российских и зарубежных исследований

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## Резюме

В статье представлен сравнительно-психологический анализ отечественных и зарубежных исследований роли третьей стороны в разрешении конфликтов. Обсуждается авторская классификация стратегий вмешательства третьей стороны в конфликт, основанная на двух критериях. Первый критерий — это степень активности третьей стороны в конфликте. Второй критерий — аспект, подчеркиваемый третьей стороной в процессе решения конфликта, — отношения между участниками конфликта и их эмоции или результат конфликта. Таким образом, может быть представлена классификация стратегий вмешательства третьей стороны в процесс разрешения межличностного конфликта. Например, когда активность третьей стороны высока и третья сторона акцентирует свое внимание на отношениях между конфликтующими сторонами и их эмоциями в процессе решения конфликта, стратегиями вмешательства третьей стороны являются фасилитативная, оценочная, трансформирующая стратегии и стратегия посредничества. Когда активность третьей стороны высока, но третья сторона ориентируется на результат конфликта, стратегиями вмешательства третьей стороны могут быть — директивная стратегия, стратегии прессинга, арбитража, решения проблем и стратегия активного вмешательства в конфликт («dealmaking» в классификации Д. Колба). Далее, когда активность третьей стороны низка и третья сторона подчеркивает отношения между конфликтующими сторонами и их эмоции в процессе разрешения конфликта, стратегиями вмешательства третьей стороны являются дифференцирующая, нарративная, описывающая стратегии и стратегия, основанная на понимании ситуации. Наконец, когда активность третьей стороны низкая и третья сторона подчеркивает результат конфликта, стратегиями вмешательства третьей стороны могут быть аналитическая, нейтральная, стратегическая, прагматичная стратегии и стратегия пассивного наблюдения («orchestration» в классификации Д. Колба). В статье также проанализирована эффективность различных стратегий вмешательства третьей стороны в конфликт.

**Ключевые слова:** вмешательство третьей стороны, межличностный конфликт, эффективность стратегий.

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