



Communication, Conflict, and the Management of Difference

Stephen W. Littlejohn and Kathy Domenici

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Humans make distinctions constantly; those distinctions can be barriers, obstacles, or opportunities. Conflict exists when the differences we notice challenge us--when they require work to make them livable. The work of conflict involves making decisions about how to act in a specific situation and how to respond to the actions of others. It means engaging in the potentially hard work of interpreting, thinking in new ways, and creating effective resources for change. The actions, responses, and interpretive schemes that emerge between or among the parties in a conflict determine whether the management of difference moves toward harm or toward value. This book issues an invitation to engage in a thoughtful dialogue about human difference, conflict, and communication. The authors draw numerous examples from their work in mediation; they discuss a variety of definitions, practical tools, models, and theories to help analyze conflict and to manage differences. They encourage readers to learn how communication competence can move discussions away from harmful interactions and empower parties to expand their options. The appendix provides a wealth of information in a succinct format. It discusses basic communication skills; introduces a number of alternative dispute resolution methods, including negotiation, mediation, facilitation, collaboration, and public engagement; and concludes with practical information about dialogue as an important approach to differences.

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