I am not afraid of storms for I am learning how to sail my ship.

—Louisa May Alcott

Rowan is a conflict resolution practitioner in a small consulting group. Although she originally entered the field as a mediator, most of her time is now spent as a training development professional delivering topics such as dealing with difficult people in the workplace and conflict styles. After a recent seminar, she was approached by a participant named Kathryn who requested one-on-one assistance with more effectively handling the confrontational style of her immediate supervisor, a senior leader in the organization. Kathryn wanted to better manage her day-to-day communications with this person and also develop herself as a viable candidate for a top-level position. Rowan did not immediately know how to structure a service for Kathryn but was confident that she could be of help.

***

Mara is the dispute resolution manager in a large federal organization. While the program she heads is widely regarded as a success (mainly because it resolves many employment disputes through voluntary mediation) she feels dissatisfied that her office regularly turns away individual disputants when counterparties are uninterested in trying mediation or another dyadic or multiparty process.

***
David and Linda are the respective heads of human resources and organizational learning in a national insurance company. They have teamed up to create a positive conflict culture in the organization. They are especially interested in the prospect of strengthening supervisor-supervisee relationships by developing supervisors' conflict management skills.

It is striking that while the conflict resolution field has numerous processes for two or more clients, offerings for the individual client are relatively underdeveloped. We believe conflict coaching is a promising means of addressing this gap. Conflict coaching is a process of conflict intervention involving one disputant/client and one conflict resolution professional. Given the resonance of one-on-one professional coaching and the fact that it is often not feasible to engage two or more parties simultaneously, there is a need to advance this process. With the body of conflict communication theory and research, there is a bountiful reservoir on which to draw.

Each of the brief opening cases represents an opportunity to introduce the practice of conflict coaching. Rowan could coach Kathryn regarding her current tensions with her supervisor and more broadly as a promising senior-level leader in a particular organizational conflict culture. Mara is in a position to add conflict coaching as an alternative dispute resolution (ADR) process offering within her organization, possibly with internal capacity or with an outside collaborator. David and Linda may find it appealing to train supervisors in a tailored conflict coaching model as a way of strengthening the supervisor-supervisee relationship. Obviously, many other conflict coaching scenarios are also possible.

In this chapter, we offer a general definition of conflict coaching and explore its two main sources of development, namely the executive coaching and conflict resolution communities. We then propose likely drivers of continued development for conflict coaching before presenting some important conflict coaching principles. The current chapter concludes with a number of reasons why the conflict resolution community, in particular, has much to contribute and gain by developing conflict coaching. This sets the stage for the next chapter, which introduces the Comprehensive Conflict Coaching model, elaborated in detail throughout the remainder of the book.

A General Definition of Conflict Coaching

Conflict coaching is a process in which a coach and client communicate one-on-one for the purpose of developing the client's conflict-related
understanding, interaction strategies, and interaction skills. The definition is broad in that it encompasses different forms of communication between the coach and client. Conflict coaching, as it is explored and refined here, is primarily understood as a face-to-face interaction with occasional use of print-based activities and resources; however, it can also reasonably take place via the telephone, Internet, or other oral, written, and/or visual media. The definition is also expansive, as it permits different kinds of conflict-related conversations to take place, including but not limited to ways of making sense of conflict, general plans for actively managing conflict, and specific communication behaviors for the client to possibly enact. While contextual issues (including interpersonal, organizational, and cultural factors) are certainly central to any coaching conversation, they are not included in the definition; this allows for the application of conflict coaching in a wide variety of relational circumstances. Finally, this basic definition allows significantly different coaching models to be proposed. For instance, the model proposed in this book takes a moderate position on the use of the coach's expert knowledge base within the coaching session. Some may argue for stronger use of the coach's perspective, while others may argue that it should be more restrained.

Sources of Development: An Overview of Conflict and Coaching in the Executive Coaching and Conflict Resolution Fields

Over the past two decades, the concepts of conflict and coaching have been addressed in combination by a number of different scholars and practitioners. These writings can be grouped in two general categories, although it should be emphasized that they basically developed simultaneously and sometimes thematically overlap. The first category is made up of work from the executive coaching field that, usually incidentally, mentions conflict as playing a role in the executive coaching process. The second category captures work from an explicit conflict resolution point of view.

BACKGROUND ON EXECUTIVE COACHING

Executive coaching is usually one-on-one professional development within an organizational setting. Tobias (1996) noted that the term first appeared in business settings in the late 1980s and came about not as
a strikingly new concept or practice but as a more appealing label for a practice of consultation offered to managers and senior leaders that had evolved over time. A thorough review of the literature generally supports this view (Kampa-Kokesch, 2001). Berglas (2002) stated that there were 2,000 executive coaches in 1996 and at least 10,000 in 2002, and there are projected to be more than 50,000 by 2007.

Executive coaching can be narrow to expansive in terms of topics and duration. It has been used to teach specific skills, improve job performance, prepare for professional advancement, and assist with broader purposes such as an executive's agenda for major organizational change (Witherspoon & White, 1996).

Diedrich (1996) worked to modify an executive's style, assist executives in adjusting to change, help in developmental efforts, and provide assistance to derailed executives. Kiel, Rimmer, Williams, and Doyle (1996) characterized approximately one-quarter of their clients as needing help preparing for advancement, a second quarter having performance problems, and the remaining half as needing to reinforce their existing areas of strength. Levinson (1996) noted simply that executive coaching largely involves supporting clients as they advance in terms of adaptive work behaviors. Those with a stronger popular emphasis also commonly include life coaching within an executive coaching framework. For instance, Morgan, Harkins, and Goldsmith (2005) make distinctions in terms of coaching leaders and behavioral coaching, career and life coaching, coaching for leadership development, coaching for organizational change, and strategy coaching. Given the topical breadth of executive coaching, it is not surprising that the coaching relationship may be limited to one or two meetings or extend over many years.

CONFLICT AND COACHING IN THE EXECUTIVE COACHING COMMUNITY

As briefly introduced earlier, the terms conflict and coaching seem to have been first joined together in 1994 when Stern (1994) commented on the potential importance of addressing the topic of conflict management within executive coaching work. He noted that executive coaching may be relevant in situations where executives trigger conflict ineffectively or perpetuate destructive conflict.

Kilburg (2000), a prominent executive coaching scholar who has written numerous articles for academically grounded consulting psychologists, wrote a book chapter titled “Working with Client Conflicts.” The chapter, consistent with the overall book and Kilburg's general perspective, addressed clients' internal and external conflicts as understood in
terms of a combined psychodynamic and systems approach. The chapter is a notable contribution to conflict coaching, especially but not exclusively for those working from a therapeutic background. As well as providing general guidelines, Kilburg offered suggestions for coaches working with executives who are effecting change, managing boundaries and limits, dealing with spiritual and moral issues, and valuing diversity.

Kets de Vries (2005), another executive coaching author working from a psychotherapeutic orientation, combined the concepts of conflict and coaching in terms of more broadly addressing group-based leadership coaching. He proposed that there are important benefits to carrying out leadership coaching in a group setting, in part because it allows for effective conflict resolution.

Coaching for conflict is integral to the executive coaching field because conflict permeates the executive’s work world. “Coping with internal and external problems forms the foundation of managerial work, and these problems almost always consist of some form of human conflict” (Kilburg, 2000, p. 217).

CONFLICT AND COACHING IN THE CONFLICT RESOLUTION COMMUNITY

The need for a one-on-one conflict resolution process, in cases where only one party was present for mediation, emerged at Macquarie University in Australia in 1993 (Tidwell, 1997). A response to this need was formalized and put into practice on campus three years later and was known as “problem solving for one.” This process involved a six-step model based on the generation of multiple solutions and the selection of optimal solutions through a cost-benefit analysis.

Conflict coaching seems to have first been named as such in and actively practiced in North America as of January 1996 at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Brinkert, 1999). The campus conflict resolution program was experiencing a low demand for mediation and, consequently, conflict coaching was developed under the co-leadership of professors Joseph P. Folger and Tricia S. Jones. Conflict coaching thereafter became one of the conflict-related services promoted (Jameson, 1998) and engaged in by the Temple campus community. While conflict coaching at Temple was limited to conflict styles coaching until spring 2000 (Brinkert, 2000), it was expanded shortly thereafter to include such subtypes as coaching for confrontation, coaching for diversity, and coaching in possible preparation for mediation. Conflict coaching remains a central conflict resolution service offered on Temple’s campus and, year-to-year, is consistently put into practice more often than mediation.
In the current decade, conflict and coaching have been addressed in the literature in ways that differ from the definition of conflict coaching presented at the outset of this chapter. Keil (2000) applied the coaching metaphor to intervening with work teams. Blitman and Maes (2004) suggested ways that skills and behaviors associated with sports coaches may be helpful within mediation. An article in Personnel Today (NHS Conflict, 2005) noted the need for a massive amount of "conflict coaching training" (or group-based training meant to assist professionals in working through conflict with clients) in Great Britain's National Health Service (NHS). The NHS Counter Fraud and Security Management Service (CFSMS) was instructed to train 750,000 employees in techniques to calm people in potentially violent situations. The training is reportedly behind schedule but is to be carried out by 2008.

Conflict coaching as a one-on-one process has grown in significance over the past 10 years. It is a service marketed by a growing number of for-profit and not-for-profit conflict resolution organizations and individual practitioners. It has visibility on the relatively popular www.mediate.com Web site and appears to be a growing topic of interest at the annual Association for Conflict Resolution conference.

The emergence of conflict coaching as a recognizable and valued intervention process is perhaps most evident given that highly visible organizations are adopting the practice. Cloke and Goldsmith (2000) noted the opportunity to use coaching as one conflict resolution method in organizations. More recently, Weiss and Hughes (2005) recommended, as one of six strategies, that companies use the escalation of conflict as an opportunity for coaching. They went on to describe how IBM executives receive training in conflict management and are provided with online resources to assist them in coaching others. C. Noble (personal communication, April 9, 2007) developed a proprietary conflict coaching model that has been used for the peer conflict coaching program in the Transportation Security Administration, a division of Homeland Security. As Guttman (2005) commented, conflict coaching is relevant for building leadership competency. As such, it is of interest to training development, human resource, and other professionals who regularly facilitate such initiatives.

Likely Drivers of Continued Development for Conflict Coaching

This section identifies some reasons why conflict coaching is likely to expand in the coming years. Most of these drivers of continued development flow out of the early emergence of conflict coaching as outlined
above. Drawing these together arguably demonstrates a promising future for conflict coaching.

**The continued concern with conflict management in a complex service economy.** Ongoing emphasis on interpersonal, team-, and organizational communication in a complex global service economy will likely mean that organizations will make investments in one-on-one assistance as well as other types of professional development for their leaders, managers, and frontline workers. Effective conflict management is an integral part of an economy emphasizing service and communication. The continued growth of the global service sector and ongoing collaboration and competitiveness in the sector seem to suggest growing opportunities to offer conflict coaching. This trend also suggests growth for the conflict management field in general. There will likely be increased demand for conflict coaching theory and research as well as for practice tools as established universities increasingly and visibly develop coaching programs, especially within their business schools (for instance, Georgetown University, INSEAD, the University of Cape Town, and the University of Pennsylvania).

**The strong commitment in many areas of society to productively and ethically manage conflict.** Again, this is a trend that broadly supports the growth of the conflict management field. Organizations and individuals frequently have expectations that conflicts should be handled appropriately. Even an all-star organizational performer may not be tolerated if he or she drives other important or promising members from the organization or is otherwise significantly out of step with the culture and goals of the organization.

**The continued need for a one-on-one ADR process.** While ADR may be ideally suited to purely dyadic or group interventions because of the way that it provides insights and tools for improved interaction, there is still a need to make ADR accessible to individuals. Many clients and ADR professionals acknowledge this reality. Dyadic and multiparty options may not be possible, at least not immediately. It is well accepted among mediators that many mediation referrals do not lead to mediation because one or more parties is reluctant to participate in that process. These parties may find it more appealing to try conflict coaching. Conflict coaching may function as a way of increasing awareness of options for addressing the conflict, including the availability of traditional ADR processes. For some, conflict coaching may be more attractive than other processes for reasons of perceived efficiency and/or effectiveness.

**The need for a process that has a strong and tailored skills emphasis.** While ADR processes such as mediation offer spaces where parties can interact in more productive ways, and while ADR training activities
typically introduce new knowledge and skills in a general manner, conflict coaching offers a unique blend of possibilities for clients. Conflict coaching represents a considerable breakthrough as a conflict management process, as it provides clients with strategies and skills customized to their conflict situations in a relationship rich with interaction. In this respect, conflict coaching complements existing ADR process options and training opportunities. It promises something different, for example, than “mediation for one” or “training for one.” It is a fundamentally different opportunity for addressing conflict more appropriately and effectively. Further, conflict coaching may put the unused and underused existing talents and abilities of ADR professionals into use.

Increasing market recognition and demand. The term conflict coaching and its basic practice have gained common currency, particularly as they have been visibly adopted by large organizations such as IBM (Weiss & Hughes, 2005). The application of conflict coaching within a growing list of organizations has left many with the sense that it is successful. Of course, peer-reviewed research is certainly needed to justify this view. In some cases, individuals have self-initiated a coaching-type relationship with a trusted ADR professional because they perceived the ADR professional as having expertise that would be valuable to access in a one-on-one format. Also, some ADR and executive coaching professionals have observed more generalized demand for these services and have branded their services as executive coaching and/or conflict coaching in order to attract clients. More and more individuals have some awareness of the term conflict coaching both inside and outside the conflict management field.

Increasing interest in the use of conflict coaching as a way to integrate and promote existing ADR processes. The fact that there are a number of established ADR processes does not solve the practical challenge of creating visibility, including providing ways for individuals to determine their appropriateness. Given the habit and preference of most individuals to make one-on-one inquiries regarding conflict-related issues, it seems that most would be amenable to an ADR triage process that is individual in nature. Conflict coaching may be used to introduce mediation, as an entry point in the ombuds process, and to make a more robust organizational dispute resolution system. During intake for a mediation, the mediator typically talks to each party to explain the process and, depending on the type of mediation, coaches them so they can interact in a productive manner. Many mediators do not learn this skill in their training. Ombuds offices may be involved in transitioning parties to mediation but often do much more, as these offices attract parties with many different concerns (Warters, 2000). Conflict coaching may be well
suited to much of the person-to-person problem solving in which ombudspersons engage. And it may help open up the ombudsperson role to be more systemic in nature, as has been called for in that profession's specialty (Wagner, 2000), by incorporating a system of conflict intervention options. This could conceivably result in greater numbers of individuals making use of established ADR processes.

There is evidence that organizational dispute resolution systems that have components in alignment are more effective (Bendersky, 2003). Therefore, it is not unreasonable to suggest that having more components in alignment (i.e., adding conflict coaching to the mix of ADR process offerings) might further enhance effectiveness. The success of existing in-house dispute resolution systems, the best of which resolve up to 90 percent of employee complaints internally (Wexler, 2000), suggests that this is a path worth pursuing.

The likely emergence of conflict coaching as a recognizable executive coaching specialty. Executive coaching continues to have considerable appeal within a wide range of workplace circles. Although some of this appeal may come from the breadth of the process, it is reasonable to assume that there will be increased specialization within executive coaching. Expertise is specialized by nature. Therefore, all other considerations being equal, an individual needing or wanting to work on a conflict-related issue will probably seek out and work with a conflict communication specialist. Conflict communication is central to supervising others, coordinating with peers, influencing upward in the organizational hierarchy, and managing relationships with clients and other external constituencies. Runde and Flanagan (2007) insisted that the ability to handle conflict is a top skill of successful leaders today and is essential to an organization's competitiveness. These authors pointed out that the much talked about need for leaders to be more emotionally competent is intimately linked with their need to be more conflict competent. Runde and Flanagan also emphasize that leaders will themselves admit that there are high costs associated with ineffectively managing conflict.

Continued support and direct involvement from organizational communication professionals who see value as an add-on or alternative to consulting, training, other types of coaching, etc. There are a number of human resource insiders, external consultants, training development professionals, executive coaches, and others who have experienced the need for an allied or alternative intervention in the form of conflict coaching. A human resource specialist or external consultant might not only support a senior leader in defining a strategic message, but he or she might also assist the leader in determining an approach and developing related skills to execute conflict-related aspects of the overall strategy. A training development professional might see
the opportunity to assist a participant in developing conflict awareness, strategy, and skills in a more specialized format due to the participant's unique abilities, responsibilities, challenges, and/or opportunities. Some human resource specialists, organizational communication consultants, and training development professionals may want to hone an additional expertise as a conflict coach. Others will want to focus on existing areas of expertise and refer conflict coaching work to colleagues.

Continued development of conflict coaching curricula in graduate and undergraduate programs. When academic programs begin to develop courses and formal curricula in an area, it is a sure sign that the topic has gained a legitimacy. Likewise, the existence of courses and curricula continue to promote and support enhancement of the theory and research in that area. We are fortunate that we have courses on conflict coaching that are already being taught at respected programs in conflict management and dispute resolution (for example, at Columbia University, Kennesaw State University, Salisbury University, and Temple University).

Conflict Coaching Principles

Given the early development of conflict coaching, likely drivers of continued growth for conflict coaching, and broad lessons learned from the introduction of other ADR processes and other consulting and training interventions, we propose the following principles for the practice of conflict coaching. These principles are reflected in the Comprehensive Conflict Coaching model that is introduced in the next chapter and explained in detail throughout the remainder of the book.

A flexible model is vital. While some aspects of the conflict coaching process may always or at least often follow a linear pattern, movement throughout stages or onto and off of thematic touchstones is often flexible. The Comprehensive Conflict Coaching model is presented in stages that have an internal logic. We believe that the logic is compelling enough for the coach and client to follow these stages in many coaching situations. However, we do not believe that coaching is limited to a lock-step application of these stages. The stages could occur in a nonlinear or even simultaneous manner.

Both direct and indirect clients should be considered in the coaching experience. There are organizational or systems participants and stakeholders who may need to be considered in the process of coaching, even though they are not in the room. The organization, in the form of one or more organizational representatives, can play the role of indirect client. Involvement of indirect clients underscores the importance of the organizational context for the
disputant. Whether indirect clients are involved in conversations about the coaching process is a case-by-case decision. But all conflict coaching should focus on whether critical indirect clients exist, who they are, and how they might be effectively involved or simply acknowledged.

A relational and systems orientation to conflict coaching is essential. Conflicts must be understood as social constructions of interdependent relationships with normative structures that influence interpretation and action. The Comprehensive Conflict Coaching model is strongly relational in that it assumes a client’s conflict only makes sense in terms of his or her relationship to others—his or her web of relationships that define the critical social context. The context of the dispute includes culture in various forms. As such, the conflict coaching conversation never steps out of contextual or cultural concerns. Consequently, within any given coaching session, it is a reasonable expectation that the coach should directly acknowledge this issue, especially if the client does not.

Coaching is a contingent activity. Knowledge is never complete, and coaching should emphasize that there is always another point of view, another way of knowing that might alter the understanding of the conflict. Both the coach and client should be encouraged to take a contingent approach to understanding and approaching conflict. This has deep implications for conflict coaching. In part it means: (a) The coach should express humility even while speaking as an expert; (b) the client should be encouraged to develop his or her understanding and appreciation for the complex and ongoing dance of conflict, particularly given his or her unique circumstances; and (c) coaches and clients should be cautioned about the inherent inability to definitively understand past or present conflict as well as definitively plan future action at strategic or tactical levels.

Conflict coaches should be knowledgeable about conflict theory and research as well as competent in conflict analysis. Conflict coaching requires a knowledge base that not all aspiring coaches have acquired. For the model proposed in this book, the conflict coach needs to be knowledgeable and experienced in conflict research and theory, be knowledgeable and experienced in facilitating adult learning, have considered his or her own cultural background (including perceptions and possible biases), and have some understanding of the context in which the client is experiencing the conflict. Extrapolating from lessons learned from the study of mediator competence (Lieberman, Foux-Levy, & Segal, 2005), conflict coaches should be involved in ongoing training that is both practical and clearly related to theory. Further, coach assessment should combine self-assessment and assessment by others. Finally, coaches’ abilities to recognize and respond to clients’ emotions may be especially important to develop (Jones, 2005).
Coaching aims to foster client empowerment with the coach combining expert and facilitative approaches. Conflict research and theory can routinely be made accessible and can often be of notable value to individual disputants. Therefore, it is appropriate for coaches to combine expert and facilitative approaches and to share this information. While this model fully embraces the conflict coach as sometimes acting in an expert role, coaches should only assume this stance if they are suitably qualified. Because expertise is limited by its very definition, coaches should expect, not infrequently, to express the limits of their knowledge and/or to recommend outside experts or authoritative resources. Although this model involves the conflict coach occasionally adopting an expert role, this role should not predominate. Any individual conflict coaching session or ongoing conflict coaching relationship should have a general conversational quality. We caution against excessive directiveness by the conflict coach especially, given some practitioner research (Bacon & Spear, 2003) in the executive coaching field, including contrasting findings regarding the coach’s role as perceived by the coach and client. However, arguing that any coach directiveness is inappropriate is unwise, given the value of an executive coach’s expertise as demonstrated by Wasylyshyn (2003).

Coaching is about helping someone reflect on conflict and possible courses of change; it is not about forcing that reflection or change. Because the client has control and responsibility, his or her point of view is central to the coaching process. The client retains full control about which perspectives to consider as well as which strategies and skills to use outside of the coaching session. While the coach should encourage the client to be aware of multiple perspectives and practical opportunities within the conflict, and the coach can give advice about a particular viewpoint or course of action, the client determines what can be done. We encourage coaches to embrace an active role in providing clients with information and alternatives that will foster client empowerment.

The coach has a responsibility to sufficiently understand the particular client’s point of view of the conflict, including the conflict context, prior to offering additional perspectives or specific practical opportunities. The sharing of perspectives and practical opportunities by the coach should always be followed by a clear invitation for the client to respond. This response, even a negative response, should be treated with respect by the coach and integrated into the overall conversation.

Conflict coaching is not appropriate for all cases. There are a variety of reasons why conflict coaching may not be a good alternative. Organizations may advocate coaching as a means of manipulating or silencing. A client may not have the cognitive, emotional, or behavioral competence to participate productively in coaching. There may be a larger social issue that
requires an alternative action before or in addition to coaching, but where coaching alone is not appropriate. In some cases, conflict coaching may begin, but the coach or client may realize that the process is flawed and should be discontinued. In Chapter Two we discuss terminating a conflict coaching process and relationship in more detail. Here, it is important to note that such termination can and, when appropriate, should happen.

Conflict coaching should follow a principle of efficiency. A common question about conflict coaching and executive coaching is, “How long will this take?” Of course, there is no definitive answer to that question other than, “It depends.” Still, we believe that conflict coaching should attempt to follow a basic principle of efficiency—getting the most benefit with the least amount of time and effort. Some executive coaches describe their coaching relationships as taking months or even years. While there may be some mutually defined conflict coaching relationships of this length, we encourage coaches to think in terms of shorter-term coaching cycles in which the client can move quickly through analysis and action planning to intervention and assessment.

Conflict coaching should follow a high ethical standard. Any discussion of ethics is fraught with disagreement about what is ethical and how one should behave to enact that standard. In the conflict field, ethical codes of conduct are generated and continually debated. This is certainly the case with the practice of mediation despite considerable attention being focused on mediation ethics over the span of many years (McCorkle, 2005). But we believe that no conflict process can be introduced without a consideration of ethics. Even if the frequency with which conflict coaching is used does not grow, a serious examination of conflict coaching ethics is needed within the ADR field.

Whether or not this field-level conversation takes place anytime soon, coaches and organized coaching programs need to be clear with themselves and with potential clients about fundamental ethical matters such as impartiality, conflict of interest, dual roles, and confidentiality. Impartiality would seem to be primarily concerned with ensuring that the coach has no prejudice toward the client. In terms of conflict of interest, the coach has a responsibility to disclose any and all actual or potential dealings or relationships that would result in bias against the client. Likewise dual roles prior to and during the conflict, and those foreseen after conflict coaching, should be directly acknowledged to the client. In order to reasonably safeguard the client and make the process as effective as possible, we strongly advise that, where dual roles exist for coaches, these are put aside within individual coaching sessions. However, we recognize that the complexity of this issue means that it must be more thoroughly considered for each context. The boundaries of confidentiality also need to be made clear to
clients prior to engaging in a coaching session. This can be a challenging but vital issue to clarify in some cases, such as those involving an organizational sponsor who insists on some degree of reporting regarding a particular client’s coaching involvement or progress. Other matters such as responsibility for the coaching process and outcomes, coach compensation, other coach and client commitments, and the procedure for terminating the coach-client relationship should all be dealt with at the outset of the coaching relationship. Where major ethical compromises exist, the coach should independently withdraw from acting in a coaching capacity.

Conflict coaching requires quality control, assessment, and monitoring. As with any professional human intervention and any business practice, conflict coaching should be introduced only where it can reasonably be considered in alignment with the goals and capacities of those involved and where it can otherwise be executed successfully. Just as important, it should be adopted only in circumstances where there is a commitment from the outset to ensuring quality thresholds, systematic scanning for unanticipated negative and positive outcomes, and a general striving to develop a stronger process through continuous learning on a multitude of levels. Just as the use of other ADR processes tends to be more readily accepted if it is institutionalized before conflicts arise, so too may quality control, assessment, and monitoring be best introduced prior to the start of conflict coaching activities.

Conflict coaching should be seen as part of a larger system of conflict management. Conflict coaching is most powerful if it is offered within a context-specific organizational dispute system, or at least where it is offered within the context of more generally available ADR options. In no respect is conflict coaching meant to supplant more established conflict management options or deemphasize the value of a systemic approach. On the contrary, conflict coaching should be introduced in a manner that strengthens the attractiveness, use, and outcomes of organizational dispute systems and ADR.

Conflict coaching can function as an inflow, parallel, or outflow mechanism for mediation, ombuds processes, and other ADR and organizational dispute system processes. An effective conflict coaching model integrates with a wide range of process options, in the very least, by minimally introducing those options to clients. In this manner, conflict coaching can work well as an initial process for clients and the conflict professionals they engage. Conflict coaching can provide a good setting for the client, and possibly also the coach, to determine the appropriateness and appeal of other conflict processes. Conflict coaching can also be used parallel to or after other processes. In organizational dispute system terms, conflict coaching should be seen as a key loop back process. Conflict coaching is a process to which people can always return as a way.
of refocusing a conflict at the interest-based level. Of course, the coach must be considerate of potential conflicts in cases where he or she functions in different professional roles with a given client.

Conflict coaching can serve an individual or a group of clients, and the client(s) can likewise be involved in conflict with an individual or group. Although conflict coaching may have gained early appeal and may have primary ongoing appeal as a way to offer conflict management services to individuals who are alone in seeking professional assistance, other client configurations are certainly possible. For instance, two clients in conflict with one another may both opt for conflict coaching prior to, after, or in place of mediation. Conflict coaching may need to be adapted somewhat but is certainly also possible with a client group representing a common party in a conflict. The coaching client(s) may be using the conflict coaching process to explore strategies and skills with another party consisting of one or more individuals or a defined group.

Conflict coaching must be sensitive to various cultural contexts. The direct and indirect parties to conflict coaching are never outside of culture. Cultures relevant to a given coaching interaction may exist at both broad and narrow levels and are likely to be multiple even for a single individual. While most professionals inside and outside of the conflict management field may generally appreciate the importance of relatively universal cultural concerns such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, more local cultural concerns can be just as significant. These can include organizational culture, organization department-level culture, regional differences, industry sector culture, and professional culture. The overall design of a conflict coaching program needs to take prevailing cultural currents into account. Cultural currents also need to be taken into account within specific conflict coaching relationships.

Major Reasons for the Conflict Resolution Field to Develop Conflict Coaching

We are committed to the “big tent” approach to the development of conflict coaching. While we are communication scholars, the approach to conflict coaching detailed in this book draws from multiple disciplines. More broadly, we believe that the continued growth of the conflict coaching process relies on the (loosely) coordinated involvement of currently active professionals representing diverse academic, applied, and personal backgrounds. One such community where we have encountered such productive diversity is in the conflict resolution field. It is our hope that those in this field—together with those from allied fields—become active in the growth of the conflict coaching process. Two main reasons for doing so follow.
emotion, and power for making sense of how clients can best understand and accomplish their primary objectives.

Finally, adopting a systems orientation as part of a communication perspective means three practical things for the conflict coach. Two of these have already been mentioned—the importance of patterns and the importance of context. The systems perspective reinforces attention to patterns of communication rather than random acts (Fisher, 1976). While a single behavior may be very important, the client’s strengths and weaknesses as a conflict manager are usually found in recurring patterns of behavior that need to be surfaced and broken. A systems perspective continually reminds the coach of the importance of context in determining meaning of communication (Jones, Remland, & Sanford, 2007). The layers of context—relational, social, organizational, cultural, institutional, etc.—all color the meaning and appropriateness of any communication. Thus, a coach must help the client to recognize and analyze the impact and interplay of relevant contexts. The third practical aspect of a systems orientation is that it reminds us that all parts of the system are interrelated and that change in one part of a system will ultimately affect other parts of the system. This is an extremely valuable insight when considering and planning change interventions. The strategy that Jim adopts for dealing with Richard will not simply affect Jim and Richard. As members of a system, their actions will directly and indirectly affect others in the system—other communication faculty, other CLA faculty, communication students, etc.

**STAGES OF THE CCC MODEL**

Jim has just called you to inquire about the nature of conflict coaching and to gather information about your process and orientation. To gain his confidence and demonstrate that you have a solid analytic approach and effective strategy for intervention, you need to articulate your model of practice.

In conflict coaching there is preparatory interaction and then the coaching process, just as in mediation there is an intake process followed by the mediation. In this chapter we discuss considerations for the preparation, but we concentrate on the stages of the coaching process. For readers interested in a more thorough treatment of preparation for coaching, we have included a variety of check sheets and explanatory aids on the accompanying CD-ROM.

*Preparation for Coaching: Ensuring That Conflict Coaching Is Appropriate.* In our earlier review of the executive coaching models, preparation is what executive coaching scholars discuss as “contracting” (Valerio & Lee, 2005) or the “alliance check” (Natale & Diamante, 2005). Preparation involves determining whether the client understands and desires
coaching, whether the client is able to profitably engage in coaching, and whether the coach is an appropriate choice for the client. We see this preparation as involving three conversations (although they may take place in one interaction or be separate). We also acknowledge that content in the preparation discussions may need to be restated and revisited later in the coaching process. In this manner, "preparation" covers the broader function of managing the coach-client relationship on an ongoing basis.

Initial Conversation. The initial conversation or contact is about managing expectations. This initial interaction allows the coach to provide a basic overview of coaching, a brief discussion of process and principles, and a sense of time and resource commitment. For example, in your initial conversation with Jim, you would want to provide a basic definition of coaching, explain how coaching can be advantageous and what needs to be included to make it effective, present your model of coaching and what will be expected of Jim and of you, and give a sense of how long it will take and what it will cost. Basically, Jim should leave this initial conversation having received answers to the following questions (even if Jim didn’t ask these questions):

- What is conflict coaching?
- How can conflict coaching help me?
- What will I get out of conflict coaching?
- What do I need to do to participate effectively in coaching?
- What are some limitations of coaching?
- When is coaching appropriate and when is it inappropriate or maybe even counterproductive?
- What is the coaching process?
  - What will happen?
  - How long will it take?
  - How much time will it take?
- How much control do I have over the process?
- How will we know if coaching is helping?
- What happens when coaching is over?
- Who will know about the coaching?
  - Who can know?
  - Who must know?
  - How much is confidential?
- Who pays for the coaching? And how much?

Assessing the Client’s “Coachability.” There is always a possibility that a client is not mentally competent or otherwise able to participate in coaching. A coach needs an interaction with the client or with others that enables the coach to decide whether the client can effectively participate. Through initial conversation, questionnaires, or data collection, the coach
may determine that this client is not ready for or able to participate in coaching. For example, in executive coaching, Frisch (2005) assesses client characteristics to determine whether someone is a good candidate for coaching. He argues that a client with very significant personal or familial problems (for example, substance abuse or psychological impairment) should be automatically rejected as a candidate for coaching. Beyond that, additional factors such as the client's tolerance for risk, the client's willingness to try new approaches, the client's emotional resilience, and the client's motivation to change should all be considered by the coach before committing to a coaching relationship. Usually, if a client like Jim is referring himself to coaching, the coach can determine whether Jim is a good candidate for coaching by interviewing him on his history, concerns, and motivations for the process. If Jim was referred to coaching by the dean or the provost of the university, the coach may ask about basic employment information and the sponsor's perceptions of Jim's suitability for coaching. If there is serious concern about Jim's competence, the coach could ask Jim to complete psychological assessment instruments or talk first with a counselor before beginning the coaching process. Finally, it is important to point out that from the coach's standpoint, Jim retains the choice about whether or not to proceed and, once he has started, to continue with coaching, even if he is mandated to participate by his workplace.

Assessing the Coach's Ability. There are also questions about the coach's fit with the situation. In most cases, these are not questions of competence as much as questions of potential bias or conflict of interest. If a coach were good friends with Richard or sought to gain prominence for his department or university if Jim's department were disbanded, there are obvious conflicts of interest, and that coach should not enter into this coaching relationship. We know all too well that conflict practitioners are only human and have biases that can interfere with their work. Perhaps a coach has a very strong humanistic orientation and is biased against social science. The bias may be strong enough to dissuade the coach from working with Jim.

Stages of the CCC Model—The Coaching Process. Let us assume that the preparation conversations with Jim went well, and Jim has decided to start conflict coaching. The conflict coaching process consists of four stages, with some stages involving a variety of options (see Figure 2.1). Prior to conflict coaching, the coach has preparatory conversations with the client. During conflict coaching, the four stages are Discovering the Story; Exploring Three Perspectives—Identity, Emotion, and Power; Crafting the Best Story; and Enacting the Best Story. In addition, there is a parallel process of Learning Assessment.
Figure 2.1 The Comprehensive Conflict Coaching Model

NOTE: While stage-to-stage movement can be nonlinear and even simultaneous, this figure represents the overall flow of a typical coach and client conflict coaching relationship. It is also a good way to initially learn the model.
that extends throughout the conflict coaching experience. Each of these stages is discussed in more detail.

**Stage One: Discovering the Story.** The first stage helps clients construct a coherent narrative of their experience of the conflict and engage in perspective taking about the possible narratives of other parties in the conflict. In this stage, the coach concentrates on discovering as much of the story as possible in order to have an adequate understanding of the conflict, the parties, and the context. Clients usually express content goals during this stage for both themselves and others, although, notably, these content goals may be changed, refined, or understood more fully later in the coaching process. This stage is discussed in much greater detail in Chapter 3. The discovery process is intended to increase coherence. Most coaching will involve at least the following three levels of clarification:

*Initial Story.* This is the client's story that comes with little urging from the coach. The conversation begins with the coach asking very general questions about the conflict and listening as the client tells the story for the first time to the coach. The initial story provides information about how the client sees important issues, persons, and opportunities in the conflict. The initial story often presents characterizations of other parties and assumptions about information and actions. When the coach asks Jim, “What's going on?” in his conflict, Jim may tell an initial story that sounds very similar to the one presented at the beginning of this chapter. The initial story paints a particular picture that represents Jim's current view of the conflict but that may change considerably with more discussion and refinement.

*Refine Story.* After the client presents the initial story, the coach helps the client refine that story. The story is expanded through some basic questions that ask the client to add information or detail. Part of the refinement process is encouraging the client to provide more information pertinent to how other parties in the conflict may be communicating and experiencing the conflict and talking more about how the conflict is affecting others in the system. Whereas the initial story is the outline, the refined story is the essay. A key aspect of refinement is that the coach is not challenging the narrative of the client, but is encouraging the client to provide the most comprehensive and coherent version of that narrative. Working with Jim, the refinement may go more deeply into the dynamics of the department and the dynamics of the field that have resulted in the bifurcation of humanistic and scientific communication scholars. The refinement could also go to explaining how the dean's vision for the college is reinforced or sanctioned by other organizational academic changes at the university. The story refining comes to closure when there does not seem to be more important information for the client to add.
Testing the Story. At this point the coach becomes more assertive by "testing" the refined narrative. The coach can ask questions to challenge the client's understanding of facts or information. Or, the coach can test assumptions that the client is making about the situation or the people involved. In this way, testing can lead to challenges of hostile attributions the client is making about the other party and can increase the client's ability to consider alternative explanations for a person's actions. A common consequence of testing is increasing the client's ability to take the perspective of the other party. Through the testing process, the coach can help identify information that the client does not have and needs to have to make strategic decisions. The process of testing allows the coach to raise questions about what doesn't make sense, or about what a person hearing this story may question. In Jim's case, the testing of the story may lead to a variety of important insights. For example, the coach may test whether the reorganization is really imminent or whether the process of the reorganization will take two or three years to complete. This insight could help Jim strategize about longer-term actions, because the demise of the department is not likely to happen as soon as he had thought. Similarly, the coach may help Jim test his assumptions about how resistant Walter might be to accommodating Richard in order to keep the department together. Perhaps Jim has been assuming Walter's noncooperation without considering the alternative, or perhaps Jim has assumed that his best role in this conflict is as mediator/chair. Perhaps the coach can help Jim think about how this conflict would unfold for him if he stepped out of the chair's position. The testing could raise questions about whether the provost supports the dean's reorganization and the dean's evaluation of the Department of Communication Studies. Jim may be encouraged to identify information that would convince his department they are seen much more favorably in the university than the dean would want them to think. All of these tests do not lead to a "true" story, but they help create a more complex and coherent story that serves as a better foundation for analysis and action.

Stage Two: Exploring Three Perspectives—Identity, Emotion, and Power. Once the client's story has been told, refined, and tested, the client has a description of the current situation. How does the coach help the client move from the understanding of the present to the orchestration of the desired future? The coach has to help the client understand the forces or drivers in the conflict in order to understand what to change and how to change it. We believe that there are three essential analytic elements in any conflict: issues of identity, issues of emotion, and issues of power. In Chapter 4 we begin by explaining the role of identity in conflict and how the identity perspective can inform the client's preferred actions and outcomes in the conflict. In Chapter 5 we discuss
emotion and emotional communication in conflict, again focusing on how the coach helps the client see his or her emotions as a diagnostic and analytic tool. And in Chapter 6 we consider power dynamics in conflict. The power perspective helps clients see how they are able to influence the development of the preferred conflict outcome.

It is very important to emphasize that we see identity, emotion, and power as the perspectives through which we define all of our relationships with others. It is the merging of these three perspectives that clarifies the nature of a relationship, the experience of conflict in the relationship, and the means of recognizing necessary change and redefinition in the relationship. Thus, these three perspectives are all essential in order to have a relational orientation to conflict (Jones, 1994; Wilmot & Hocker, 2007).

The topics of identity, emotion, and power can take volumes to fully explain. Our goal in these chapters is to help the conflict coach understand how each of these elements functions as a strategic perspective that a client should engage before making decisions about “what to do” in the conflict. Think of these three perspectives as three lenses through which the coach will ask the client to view the conflict. Each lens highlights certain critical insights. Together, the lenses help the client see clearly what future situation is best for him or her. As you will see in the chapters, identity, emotion, and power are intricately linked. Understanding one helps you understand the others. Impacting one will impact others. Thus, effective strategic action is most likely when the client understands the congruence of the perspectives and how specific action will affect each component.

The Identity Perspective. Desired and damaged identity lies at the heart of the experience of conflict. Most people are in conflict because they believe someone or something is preventing them from “being who they are” or “who they want to be.” Likewise, people in conflict are often ignorant of how their actions are negatively impacting the identity of the other. The conflict coach helps the client clarify current identity and desired identity. The coach helps the client see how the client can protect his or her identity and affect the other’s identity. And the coach can help the client appreciate the consequences of these influences on identity. In working with Jim, the coach can help Jim clarify how the current conflict is damaging his identity as a leader, a scholar, and an influential member of the field. The coach can help Jim reflect on whether he has conflict between his own identities—perhaps maintaining the chair role is making it difficult for him to be the scholar he’d like to be. If Jim’s identity has been damaged or is not what he would like, the coach can help Jim think about what his preferred identity is and how best he can create and protect that identity. The coach should also encourage Jim to think about the identities of other parties in the conflict and the things that might damage their identities and escalate the conflict.
The Emotion Perspective. Emotions are central to conflict. Our emotions help us understand when we are in conflict, they serve as a metric of how important the conflict is to us, and they provide a way of understanding what needs to change in order for us to feel better about the situation. As we discuss in Chapter 5, many clients and coaches are not well versed in the nature of emotion and the role of emotion in conflict. Many are uncomfortable with emotion and are unwilling to use it as an analytic tool. But coaches should help clients be more emotionally aware and appreciate the strategic value of emotions in conflict. Emotions are strongly linked to identity and power. Emotions are motivation and, as such, help us understand why people act in certain ways. One of the roles of the emotion perspective in conflict coaching is to help clients understand why they are motivated to do something but also to understand why another party may be motivated to behave in a certain way. What is Jim's emotional experience of this conflict? Is he angry, sad, depressed, afraid, or amused? How are these emotions affecting what he sees as possible options for action? How are these emotions preventing him from being comfortable with the status quo? What needs to happen for him to have a more positive emotional experience of this department and the reorganization?

The Power Perspective. What is the client's ability to influence the current situation in a way that is favorable to him? That's the bottom line of power. Assuming that Jim knows what he wants (e.g., he knows his identity needs, and he understands his emotional needs), can he make changes to the current situation that will increase his ability to create the desired identity and the more positive emotion? What factors are in his way? What resources are needed to increase his influence? What are the consequences of changing the power in his relationship with Richard, with the dean, etc.? The conflict coach can help Jim appreciate all of these aspects of power and can help Jim understand how the larger system restricts power or provides power that can affect Jim's conflict.

Stage Three: Crafting the Best Story (discussed in Chapter 7). At this stage in the conflict coaching, the client has constructed a coherent story of the conflict and has looked at that conflict through the three perspectives of identity, emotion, and power. The coach has facilitated the client's analysis of the conflict and now encourages the client to envision what the situation would be like if the conflict were managed most effectively. Granted, the coach and client understand that attaining an ideal outcome may be unlikely. But, the coach knows that attaining the ideal outcome is impossible if the client can't even articulate what that is. Using insights from the three perspectives, the coach assists the client in crafting a story of success, a journey with clear milestones that would meet the identity, emotion, and power interests of the client.
Stage Four: Enacting the Best Story. Knowing what you want is the first step to getting it. But, you must also know what needs to happen to move you toward that end. In this stage, the coach helps the client consider the best approach for dealing with the conflict to ensure the optimum outcome. Part of this will be to identify basic strategies for conflict management. Should Jim avoid the situation with Richard altogether, or collaboratively negotiate with Richard, or seek mediation? Part will be assessing whether Jim has the skills to enact the preferred strategy or tactic. If Jim needs to have effective communication skills to interact with the dean more effectively, can the coach provide skills training for Jim? And part of the challenge is helping Jim to understand how to leverage the larger system of conflict management opportunities available in the university and the community. Because Stage Four includes a variety of strategic and tactical opportunities, we have devoted four chapters to it. Chapter 8 presents advice on improving the three critical communication skills in conflict—confronting, confirming, and comprehending. Chapter 9 explains how coaches can instruct clients in conflict styles and the appropriate style for the conflict. Chapter 10 concentrates on negotiation skill, looking at the client’s ability to negotiate effectively in a collaborative, competitive, or mixed-motive situation. Chapter 11 focuses on developing clients’ awareness of other dispute resolution systems and processes to enhance their success.

The Parallel Process of Learning Assessment. Assessment and evaluation are essential components of conflict coaching and tend to occur throughout the process. We describe assessment of the client’s learning and successful implementation of the conflict strategy as a parallel process to the first four stages. Once clients have a vision and an action plan for managing the conflict, they should develop benchmarks of success to determine progress along the way. In this stage, covered in Chapter 12, we discuss learning assessment in an adult learning context. The coach can help Jim define what he will see if his conflict management strategy is successful. In a more general sense, the coach can help Jim to reflect on and assess what he has learned through the conflict coaching process.

Some Areas of Adaptability for the CCC Model

In Chapter 1, we proposed principles that apply to the variety of forms of conflict coaching that have emerged. The Comprehensive Conflict Coaching model is consonant with these principles. However, given that the CCC model is a particular kind of conflict coaching, it is useful to detail some considerations specific to this model.