

Applying Conflict Coaching to Handle Vietnamese Family's Conflicts

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Abstract: Conflict coaching is one-on-one conflict resolution process involving one conflict party and a coach that assists conflicting parties to improve their understanding of a conflict and cope with their dispute in the most effective way.¹ This process has become more popular in developed countries to deal with workplace conflict and family disputes. There are some challenges in applying this process for those who come from high-context culture country like Vietnam due to the differences among financial condition, perception, communication styles, legal system, customs, religion and gender. This article presents different conflict coaching processes as well as the possibility and the importance of implementing conflict coaching in Vietnam by analyzing the values of conflict coaching process.

Keywords: Conflict Coaching. Vietnam. One-on-One Session. Role-Play. Problem Solving.

Summary: Introduction – The Definition of Conflict Coaching – Application of Conflict Coaching to the Family – Five Conflict Coaching Models from the Alternative Dispute Resolution Community Are – Model 1: Problem Solving for One (PS1) – Model 2: CERT Conflict Styles Coaching – Model 3: CINERGY Conflict – Coaching Model 4: Comprehensive Conflict Coaching (CCC) – Model 5: Real Conflict Coaching™ System – Why Real Conflict Coaching™ System Will Be Desirable in Vietnam – Real Coach – Professional Intervening Party – Conclusion – References

Introduction

Vietnamese family members often deal with their conflict by keeping silent, ignoring quarrelling or domestic violence instead of looking for a real conflict resolution process. According to Vietnamese tradition and culture, people, especially women often do not reveal their conflict issues with others due to the fear regarding violence, reputation, children and work.² Conflict coaching is considered as a dispute support service in the field of alternative dispute resolution (ADR). It assists individuals to improve their understanding of a conflict and encourages the development of an ongoing relationship.³ This article provides an overall definition,

¹ JONES; BRINKERT, 2008.

² SHIU-THORNTON, 2005.

³ JONES; BRINKERT, 2008.

of conflict coaching, as well as indicating different conflict coaching models and skills. The models and skills will be highlighted with the integration of the disputant's perspectives into cultural factors in the Vietnamese family context. The article concludes by suggesting that the conflict coaching process should be considered and could be conducted as an effective conflict resolution process in order to deal with family conflicts in Vietnam.

The Definition of Conflict Coaching

Conflict coaching is a one-on-one conflict resolution process involving one conflict party and a coach.⁴ This process aims to assist clients in developing their understanding of the nature of conflict for themselves, and their communication skills in order to discover the most appropriate options to solve their problem.⁵

Application of Conflict Coaching to the Family

Frequent and intense conflict, such as arguing or domestic violence between parents, could have a negative impact on family relationships, other family members' sense of safety, the development of emotional, social and behavioral problems, as well as education.

In Vietnam, males are assumed to be more powerful and have more important responsibility in the household and as a consequence they often get heated and react in ways that escalate the intensity and may, in particular, act violently.⁶ In addition, families are constructed so that there is often an extended family and so there will be more than three generations living together in the Vietnamese cultural ideal.⁷ Hence, the conflict may be really complicated because it not only occurs between husband and wife but also for example between mother-in-law and wife.⁸ Respecting the older people in the family like parents-in-law, uncles and aunts, doing housework and taking care of children, the gender preference for sons, and building harmony and happiness are considered as the main tasks of females.⁹ It could be difficult, for example, for a disputant to be involved in mediation or family dispute resolution process where both conflict parties attend in the meeting.¹⁰ However, exploring a possible resolution process could be seen as a positive way to help all members in family achieving well-being and maintaining

⁴ JONES; BRINKERT, 2008.

⁵ JONES; BRINKERT, 2008.

⁶ RYDSTOM, 2003.

⁷ SHIU-THORNTON, 2005.

⁸ SHIU-THORNTON, 2005.

⁹ SHIU-THORNTON, 2005.

¹⁰ SPENCER; HARDY, 2014.

good relationships.¹¹ Conflict coaching could be a suitable process to the marriage conflicts and family disagreements. For example, Noble (2008) points out that Kawas and Margarite could think about conflict coaching in order to deal with their interpersonal dispute after 13 years of marriage. The reason is that conflict coaching addresses the client's objectives such as improving conflict competence and response, preventing other conflict due to escalation and could be useful as a pre-mediation process.¹² Additionally, an individual family member may have an opportunity to become a coachee and be trained in additional coaching skills which are proactive and practical and can be initiated by this individual in different situations and contexts. In addition this opportunity, implementing available conflict coaching model can also assist the coachee in improving understanding of conflict, self-awareness, power imbalance and identifying a suitable outcome to deal with their conflict.¹³ To illustrate, a Vietnamese man could recognize that their violent action is wrong and understand its effects on his children's development or a women can come to understand her human rights, the reasons for a mother-in-law's attitude and action, as well as identify the way to avoid future disagreements.

Five Conflict Coaching Models from the Alternative Dispute Resolution Community Are

Model 1: Problem Solving for One (PS1)

Problem solving for one is a conflict resolution process which focuses on assisting the clients who are experiencing conflict where the opponents are unwilling or unable to participate mediation.¹⁴ Tidwell (1997) asserts that this model aims to achieve the outcomes of problem analysis, option costing and communication skills development.

Problem solving for one model¹⁵	
1. Preamble and introduction	Detailing and clarifying expectations
2. Storytelling	The presenting party will be asked to describe the conflict

¹¹ SPENCER; HARDY, 2014.

¹² NOBLE, 2008.

¹³ JONES; BRINKERT, 2008.

¹⁴ TIDWELL, 1997.

¹⁵ TIDWELL, 1997.

Problem solving for one model¹⁵	
3. Conflict analysis	Analysing conflict to get better understanding of conflict dynamics, conflict mapping and develop perspectives. Developing different ideal options which could be used in dealing with conflict.
4. Alternative generation and costing	Stating problems, generating a list of alternatives to each problem and testing costs and benefits of options. Improving better methods and skills to manage negative effects.
5. Communication strategy development	Developing interaction skills by asking questions, practicing assertiveness, listening and role playing.
6. Restatement of the conflict handling plan	The action plan for future with the purpose of reducing the negative elements of a conflict to create a possible outcome.

Model 2: CERT Conflict Styles Coaching

CERT conflict styles coaching was written and developed at Temple University by the Conflict Education Resource Team (CERT) and is provided for client who cannot or choose not to become involved in a mediation or where the opponents do not want to participate in mediation and is similar to Problem solving for one.¹⁶

CERT Conflict Styles Coaching Model¹⁷	
1. Introduction	Introducing party and CERT, UCS; confidentiality; approach for explanation of choices and interactions; goals and expectation of the session
2. Conflict styles	Conflict styles instrument; survey in perspective; explain and review five styles with personal illustrations; style tendencies and collaborative perspective
3. Developing choices in a particular conflict	Brief introduction of conflict; telling story; gaining understanding various approaches to situation; evaluate styles and decide option for action plan; determine next steps to take; reflections; summary of the conflict exploration process

¹⁶ BRINKERT as cited in SPENCER; HARDY, 2014.

¹⁷ BRINKERT, as cited in SPENCER; HARDY, 2014.

CERT Conflict Styles Coaching Model¹⁷	
4. Close	Final reflections and questions; recognize the challenges and opportunities of conflict; briefly summarize the client's major point of view; evaluation and exchange good-byes

Model 3: CINERGY Conflict Coaching

Noble (2012) created and developed CINERGY Conflict Coaching Model with the combination of seven steps.

CINERGY Model of Conflict Coaching¹⁸	
1. Clarify goal	Stating what the presenting client wants to achieve in the coaching session
2. Inquire about the situation	Hearing what communication results in the conflict; letting the client vent; and identifying the opponents
3. Name the elements	Developing the client's self-awareness and considering to other perspectives; exploring new awareness and insights; gaining different point of views
4. Explore choices	Discovering various appropriate action plans to achieve goal; considering the advantages and disadvantages of the different choices
5. Reconstruct the situation	Confirming client's outcome and selecting the order of choices to develop action plan; creating, reconstructing and preparing options such as testing situations; providing feedback and observations
6. Ground the challenges	Considering any difficulties and challenges
7. Yes, the Commitment	Hearing client's feedback and learning through the session; discussing and confirming the client's next step, efforts and positive notes

Model 4: Comprehensive Conflict Coaching (CCC)

The CCC model was published in the book Conflict Coaching – Conflict management strategies and skills for the individual by two co-authors Tricia Jones and Ross Brinkert. This conflict coaching model assists client in developing the “5 C’s”

¹⁸ NOBLE, 2012.

which include clarity, comprehension, choice, confidence, and competence.¹⁹ This has four main stages.

The Comprehensive Conflict Coaching Model²⁰	
Preparation	
1. Discovering story	Initial story: Asking general questions about conflict and listening to the client's story in terms of characterization of other parties and assumptions about information and actions. Refine story: Expanding the story by questioning for more specific information. Testing the story: Asking questions to challenge the client's understanding of the facts or making assumption about the situation.
2. Exploring the story	Identifying identity; emotion; power
3. Crafting the best story	Encouraging the client to identify how conflict looks like if it was managed effectively
4. Enacting the best story	Considering the best approach to achieve the best outcome to deal with conflict, negotiation and other ADR processes, as well as finding the major strategies for conflict management

Model 5: Real Conflict Coaching™ System

This conflict coaching model is developed by Samantha Hardy and Nidja Alexander for Conflict Coaching International.²¹ There are eight major steps in the conflict coaching intake as following:

Real Conflict Coaching™ System Model²²	
1. Goal setting	Specific, measurable, attractive, relevant and realistic, time frame, yours, scale
2. What happened?	Storytelling, explore story, challenge story
3. Why does it matter?	Need, identity, emotions, power
4. Other perspectives	Other parties, other people and independent

¹⁹ SPENCER; HARDY, 2014.

²⁰ JONES; BRINKERT, 2008.

²¹ SPENCER; HARDY, 2014.

²² HARDY; ALEXANDER, 2012.

Real Conflict Coaching™ System Model²²	
5. Preferred future	Tell story, explore story, reality test
6. Action plan	Specific, ordered, reality tested, time frame, reviewable
7. Reflection	New learning, feedback
8. Closure	Summery, what's next

Although different models have different steps used to approach the conflict story and explore for ways of resolution, the main aim of all these model is to follow a standardized process with inclusion of goal setting, discussing the past to discover the conflict story, and then moving on to the action plan for the future.²³ It is difficult to evaluate which model is the best one because its suitability and effectiveness depend also on the conflict styles and dynamics of the client as well as other aspects such as culture and education. For example, the effectiveness of the CCC model could be in terms of outlining an action plan in the near future, while the CINERGY model is used widely to handle conflict in workplaces or within organization.²⁴ This article, however, will concentrate on analyzing the Real Conflict Coaching™ System model which is established and developed by Samantha Hardy and Nidja Alexander and how it could be used to deal with Vietnamese family disputes. The Real Conflict Coaching System is a ADR service which would be conducted by a real conflict coach to assist the individual who is, or may be involved in or experience conflict in the future.²⁵ There are four Real values in this model which include reflection, engagement, artistry and learning.²⁶ Additionally, the development of this model has seen it not only in workplace and university contexts but also in the family dispute resolution area in Australia.²⁷

Why Real Conflict Coaching™ System Will Be Desirable in Vietnam

Real Coach – Professional Intervening Party

The real conflict coaching would be conducted by a real coach who has completed a training requirement²⁸ so that therefore, they might be rich in experience,

²³ SPENCER; HARDY, 2014.

²⁴ NOBEL, 2012.

²⁵ SPENCER; HARDY, 2014.

²⁶ SPENCER; HARDY, 2014.

²⁷ SPENCER; HARDY, 2014.

²⁸ SPENCER; HARDY, 2014.

knowledge and skills in helping clients deal with their conflict. In an effective conflict coaching session, the conflict coach would need to apply a diverse range of coaching skills such as listening, questioning, and evaluation and consider ethical issues throughout the meeting in order to assist the client to obtain the five C's.²⁹ With regard to the first C of clarity, the client could gain better understanding of the conflict situation.³⁰ In Vietnam, family conflict frequently occurs between wife and husband or parent-in-law in terms of children care, financial issues, housework, obligations and respect.³¹ However, in Vietnam, it is easy to see that disputants try to keep secret and hide their problems instead of looking for a resolution to handle the conflict or even do not want to tell the truth about their family conflict.³² They might think it could cause a negative impact on their reputation, safety and security or children.³³ In some cases, Vietnamese citizens do not have awareness and understanding of their actions. Hence, if the client was asked to explain the factors which cause the conflict escalating without judgment, they could begin to think about all related facts and events.³⁴ In terms of comprehension, the coach helps the coachee to achieve a better understanding their own, and others' needs and goals by answering challenging questions about how and why the reality of the situation is influencing them.³⁵ Additionally, the Vietnamese who are in conflict may fail to unpack the conflict story because of their fear of violence or negative impact on their children and family relationships,³⁶ omitting some important points and being biased in their thoughts towards the opponents' behaviors and actions. Thus, exploring other perspectives could assist them in exploring and realizing that their opponents could think and observe the situation in different way.³⁷ Building confidence may be an essential aspect that the Vietnamese disputant would need to achieve in order to overcome in themselves the effects of harsh social prejudice.³⁸ To illustrate, people could be enabled to think about things such as the others who precede themselves, family as the most important value, children need to be obey directly the older family member's decisions such as choosing a major education³⁹ and women having all the responsibility to do housework and maintain the happiness in family. When experiencing conflict, people may choose to remain silent as it is responsibility and obligation first, instead of calling for help to avoid some

²⁹ SPENCER; HARDY, 2014.

³⁰ SPENCER; HARDY, 2014.

³¹ SHIU-THORNTON, 2005.

³² SHIU-THORNTON, 2005.

³³ SHIU-THORNTON, 2005.

³⁴ SPENCER; HARDY, 2014.

³⁵ SPENCER; HARDY, 2014.

³⁶ SHIU-THORNTON, 2005.

³⁷ SPENCER; HARDY, 2014.

³⁸ CLOKE; GOLDSMITH, 2000.

³⁹ DAVIS, 2000.

negative impacts to their family. So, in a one-on-one session, a conflict coach could build the confidence of the client because they could come to the meeting without being observed by other family members' eyes, as well as, by helping the client to manage their conflict. Therefore, achieving competence means that the real coach assists the client in improving their conflict management skills to handle their present and future conflict.⁴⁰ This is really important because the family conflict in Vietnam happen easily as a result of the tradition and culture of living in an extended family situation where it is crowded and complicated, for instance.

No advice in conflict coaching session: If Vietnamese disputants have the chance to experience a coaching session as a coachee and be challenged by several questions to get a higher understanding of their conflict as well as develop their conflict management skills they would recognize that advice is not important. The key point is that the family conflicts occur every day because of tradition, culture and even people's character. For example, if the husband gets angry or stressed, the wife could be responsible or punished for his emotion.⁴¹ If the client receives advice or suggestions regarding how to deal with their conflict such as "be a good wife"⁴² they may become passive and this could lead to them being stressed and nervous when facing other future conflict. As a result, conflict coaching should be applied because it may achieve a long-term aim which provides conflict management skills, communication skills and the strategies to help clients come up with different options to resolve their conflict rather than receiving only advice.⁴³

Role play: Being a coachee, a Vietnamese disputant such as a female could be challenged by different testing questions which help them to think about different perspectives and options to help them consider the best strategy to deal with their conflict. Also, they would benefit because there are a coaching relationship between a coach and a coachee which is built based on truth, openness and trust with each other.⁴⁴ Therefore, although they see some barriers due to the tradition and culture, they could be empowered to open to unpack their story in coaching session. In some case, the client could experience emotional escalation when telling their story. However, this could help them realize their own situation, needs and goals. Additionally, the client also may identify the power imbalance which could be one of main cause of conflict in Vietnamese family, men and women, younger and older, for instance.⁴⁵ As a result, the client could explore their own options and develop their awareness regarding protecting their human right and values. Moreover,

⁴⁰ SPENCER; HARDY, 2014.

⁴¹ SHIU-THORNTON, 2005.

⁴² SHIU-THORNTON, 2005.

⁴³ NOBLE, 2008.

⁴⁴ STARR, 2011.

⁴⁵ SHIU-THORNTON, 2005.

by answering challenging questions and telling the conflict story instead of keeping silent, the client could be helped to think positively, and see more closely any anger, empathy and forgiveness. Telling their story could help the coachee more accurately make judgements themselves about the conflict when seating in front of a real coach.⁴⁶ Therefore, the Vietnamese disputant could discover their emotional pain, other perspectives and create who he or she is, as well as recognize and analyze conflict dynamics, powers and needs in order to select the most appropriate outcome. Moreover, the coachee could be developing their communication and interaction skills that will help them address conflict, stress and pressure of the opponents.⁴⁷ In Vietnamese culture, this would be an important learning outcome for women in order to communicate with their husband or other members in family.

Maintain relationship: It is the fact that Vietnamese people think the better way to deal with their family conflict is not to argue and keep silent because they have responsibility to build domestic harmony.⁴⁸ Additionally, people often fear retaliation and embarrassment if the family conflict is revealed because they could receive a lot of negative comments from other family members and society.⁴⁹ Therefore, using a conflict coaching session to deal with Vietnamese family conflict could be a safe way to maintain their family relationship due assurance of confidentiality and ethical issues which need to be followed by the coach.⁵⁰

Time constraint and cost: Conflict coaching could be happening for only one party so the presenting party could actively schedule meeting time with a real coach. A conflict coaching normally takes around 45 to 75 minutes depending on how complicated each session is, and as a consequence it could save the client's time in comparison with other processes like mediation, family dispute resolution or litigation. Additionally, the cost of a coaching session could be much cheaper than family dispute resolution and litigation. This would assist Vietnamese who may not look for a resolution process because of their financial situation, especially people who are living in rural areas.

Conclusion

There could be some challenges due to cross-cultural aspects, different characters, power, values, customs and tradition when applying a Western conflict coaching model in an Asian culture like Vietnam. However, there are many diverse advantages when conducting the Real Conflict Coaching™ System to handle family

⁴⁶ CLOKE; GOLDSMITH, 2000.

⁴⁷ NOBLE, 2008.

⁴⁸ SHIU-THORNTON, 2005.

⁴⁹ SHIU-THORNTON, 2005.

⁵⁰ SPENCER; HARDY, 2014.

disputes in Vietnamese context in long-term situations. This is because the huge values of conflict coaching will bring to coachee. They will improve their coaching skills to better understand themselves, control emotional issues as well as maintain a good relationship with other members in their family. Moreover, there is potential for developing and applying conflict coaching model because Vietnamese people are looking for this approach that is more effective and cost less than other conflict resolution processes in Vietnam. As a result, there should be more in-depth research on the application of conflict coaching in Vietnam.

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