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EMOTIONAL REGULATION AS A PREREQUISITE FOR CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE IN CONFLICT SITUATIONS

У статті теоретично обґрунтовано роль емоційної регуляції як психологічної передумови конструктивного діалогу в умовах міжособистісного конфлікту. Вихідним є положення про те, що конфліктна взаємодія супроводжується підвищенням емоційного напруження, актуалізацією негативних емоцій, зміною когнітивного оцінювання ситуації та зростанням імовірності імпульсивних, захисних або деструктивних поведінкових реакцій. За таких умов здатність особистості усвідомлювати, диференціювати, приймати й регулювати власні емоційні стани набуває значення внутрішнього психологічного ресурсу, який забезпечує можливість збереження діалогічної взаємодії.

На основі аналізу наукових підходів уточнено зміст поняття емоційної регуляції в контексті конфліктної взаємодії. Показано, що емоційна регуляція не передбачає усунення, заперечення або пригнічення негативних емоцій, а забезпечує гнучке управління їх інтенсивністю, тривалістю та способами вираження відповідно до ситуації та комунікативної мети. Особливого значення набувають усвідомлення емоційного стану, когнітивна переоцінка конфліктної ситуації, контроль імпульсивних реакцій, децентрація, толерантність до емоційного напруження, емпатійне розуміння позиції іншого та вибір конструктивної комунікативної поведінки.

Запропоновано структурно-процесуальну модель емоційної регуляції конструктивного діалогу в умовах конфлікту, яка охоплює емоційно-діагностичний, когнітивно-переоцінювальний, регулятивно-стабілізаційний, комунікативно-діалогічний та рефлексивно-інтегративний компоненти. Визначено психологічні механізми, що забезпечують перехід від автоматичної емоційної реакції до усвідомленої діалогічної відповіді.

Обґрунтовано, що результативність емоційної регуляції доцільно визначати не відсутністю негативних емоцій у конфлікті, а здатністю особистості зберігати усвідомленість, самоконтроль, гнучкість когнітивного оцінювання, емпатійність, орієнтацію на предмет конфлікту та готовність до пошуку взаємоприйняттого рішення.

Ключові слова: емоційна регуляція; конфлікт; конструктивний діалог; міжособистісна взаємодія; когнітивна переоцінка; саморегуляція; емоційна усвідомленість; емпатія; комунікація; рефлексія.

The article provides a theoretical substantiation of the role of emotion regulation as a psychological prerequisite for constructive dialogue in interpersonal conflict. It is based on the premise that conflict interaction is accompanied by increased emotional tension, the activation of negative emotions, changes in the cognitive appraisal of the situation, and an increased likelihood of impulsive, defensive, or destructive behavioral responses. Under such conditions, an individual's ability to recognize, differentiate, accept, and regulate their own emotional states becomes an important internal psychological resource that enables the maintenance of dialogical interaction.

Based on an analysis of scientific approaches, the concept of emotion regulation in the context of conflict interaction is clarified. It is demonstrated that emotion regulation does not imply the elimination, denial, or suppression of negative emotions; rather, it involves the flexible management of their intensity, duration, and modes of expression in accordance with situational demands and communicative goals. Particular importance is attributed to awareness of one's emotional state, cognitive reappraisal of the conflict situation, control of impulsive responses, decentering, tolerance of emotional tension, empathic understanding of the other person's perspective, and the selection of constructive communicative behavior.

A structural-process model of emotion regulation in constructive dialogue under conflict conditions is proposed. The model comprises emotional-diagnostic, cognitive-reappraisal, regulatory-stabilizing, communicative-dialogical, and reflective-integrative components. The psychological mechanisms

facilitating the transition from an automatic emotional reaction to a conscious dialogical response are identified.

It is substantiated that the effectiveness of emotion regulation should be assessed not by the absence of negative emotions during conflict, but by an individual's ability to maintain awareness and self-control, demonstrate flexibility in cognitive appraisal and empathy, remain focused on the subject matter of the conflict, and be willing to seek a mutually acceptable solution.

Key words: emotion regulation; conflict; constructive dialogue; interpersonal interaction; cognitive reappraisal; self-regulation; emotional awareness; empathy; communication; reflection.

Introduction and Relevance of the Problem. Conflict is an inevitable form of social interaction arising wherever people differ in needs, expectations, values, goals, interpretations, roles, or preferred ways of acting. The psychological significance of conflict, however, is determined not only by the objective incompatibility of positions but also by the way this incompatibility is emotionally experienced. The same disagreement may become a productive discussion, a temporary rupture, or a prolonged destructive confrontation depending on how participants interpret the situation, regulate affective arousal, and transform emotional impulses into communicative action. For this reason, the study of constructive dialogue in conflict requires attention not only to communication techniques but also to the internal regulatory processes that make these techniques psychologically available at the moment of tension.

In everyday and professional discourse, constructive communication is often reduced to a set of verbal recommendations: speak calmly, use «I-statements», listen actively, avoid accusations, formulate requests, and seek compromise. These recommendations are valuable, yet they may be insufficient when emotional activation exceeds a person's regulatory capacity. A participant may know the rules of effective communication and nevertheless interrupt, attack, withdraw, become sarcastic, freeze, or repeat the same accusation when anger, fear, humiliation, shame, helplessness, or perceived injustice becomes dominant. The central problem is therefore not a lack of knowledge about communication alone, but the temporary narrowing of attention, cognition, behavioral flexibility, and capacity for perspective-taking under emotional load.

Emotions in conflict perform an adaptive signaling function. Anger may indicate a perceived violation of boundaries or injustice; fear may signal threat or anticipated loss; sadness may reflect loss of connection; shame may arise when the self is experienced as devalued; guilt may motivate repair; disappointment may signal unmet expectations. The problem emerges when the emotion is equated with an instruction for action. «I am angry» can rapidly become «I must attack»; «I am afraid» may become «I must avoid»; «I feel ashamed» may become «I must defend myself by devaluing the other». Emotional regulation creates a psychological interval between affective activation and behavioral response. Within that interval, the individual can identify what is happening, assess the meaning of the emotion, choose a regulatory strategy, and decide how to communicate without denying the emotional reality of the situation.

Contemporary research increasingly treats emotion regulation as both an intrapersonal and interpersonal phenomenon. Regulation may occur within the individual, but it also unfolds between people: one person's tone, facial expression, validation, withdrawal, criticism, or calm presence changes the emotional state of the other and, in turn, alters the trajectory of the interaction. Recent work on dyadic and interpersonal emotion regulation emphasizes that regulatory processes have consequences not only for the targeted emotion but also for relationship dynamics. This perspective is particularly important for conflict, where each participant simultaneously regulates the self and influences the emotional field of the interaction.

The relevance of the problem is intensified by the fact that constructive dialogue is required in diverse contexts: intimate and family relationships, educational environments, professional teams, organizational negotiations, helping professions, mediation, community interaction, and social conflicts. In each of these domains, escalation may have different consequences, but the underlying psychological task remains similar: to preserve sufficient self-regulation and relational contact so that disagreement can be processed through meaning, language, and coordinated action rather than through impulsive attack, avoidance, coercion, or emotional shutdown.

Theoretical Foundations of Emotional Regulation. Emotion regulation is commonly understood as the processes through which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how these emotions are experienced and expressed. The process model associated with J. J. Gross shifted research away from viewing regulation as a single act of emotional control and toward analyzing regulation across the unfolding emotional episode. From this perspective, strategies may operate before an emotional response is fully activated or after physiological, experiential, and behavioral response tendencies have

emerged. This temporal logic is especially useful for conflict because regulation can begin before a difficult conversation, during the interpretation of the partner's words, at the moment of rising arousal, or after an impulsive response has already occurred.

The distinction between antecedent-focused and response-focused regulation clarifies why some strategies are more effective in particular phases of conflict. Situation selection and situation modification concern the conditions in which interaction occurs: choosing an appropriate time, reducing external distractions, limiting exposure to known triggers, or changing the format of a conversation. Attentional deployment concerns what the person focuses on: a provocative phrase, the broader context, the partner's intention, bodily signals, or the shared goal. Cognitive change concerns interpretation: whether disagreement is perceived as disrespect, abandonment, incompetence, threat, or a solvable difference. Response modulation concerns what happens after the emotion is activated, including breathing, pausing, changing voice intensity, inhibiting an insult, or temporarily interrupting the conversation.

Cognitive reappraisal is particularly relevant to constructive dialogue because it changes the meaning assigned to an event rather than simply masking the outward expression of emotion. In conflict, a statement such as «You never listen to me» may initially be interpreted as a global attack. Reappraisal does not require accepting the accusation as true; instead, it may involve recognizing that the statement could be an emotionally intensified expression of unmet need. This shift can reduce defensive responding and increase the possibility of clarification. The regulatory value of reappraisal therefore lies in creating alternative interpretations that preserve complexity and prevent the immediate fusion of subjective meaning with objective fact.

At the same time, no regulatory strategy should be treated as universally adaptive. Context, timing, intensity of emotion, relationship history, power asymmetry, and the nature of the conflict all matter. A strategy that is useful for moderate irritation may be insufficient during extreme arousal. Temporary disengagement may protect dialogue from escalation when both participants intend to return to the issue, but the same behavior may become avoidant if it functions as chronic withdrawal. Direct expression of dissatisfaction may be constructive when change is possible and necessary, yet harmful when it becomes contemptuous, humiliating, or coercive. Regulation therefore requires flexibility rather than rigid adherence to one "correct" strategy.

The multidimensional approach of K. L. Gratz and L. Roemer is also important because it conceptualizes emotion regulation as more than reducing emotional intensity. Their framework includes awareness and understanding of emotions, acceptance of emotional responses, access to effective strategies, and the ability to pursue goal-directed behavior and inhibit impulsive action while distressed. Applied to conflict, this means that successful regulation is not equivalent to becoming emotionally neutral. A person may remain angry or hurt and still act in accordance with the goal of dialogue, maintain boundaries, listen, formulate a request, and refrain from destructive behavior.

This multidimensional perspective allows us to distinguish regulation from emotional suppression. Suppression may reduce visible expression without changing the internal meaning or intensity of the experience and may sometimes interfere with interpersonal understanding. Constructive regulation, by contrast, includes the capacity to acknowledge the emotion internally, determine whether and how it should be expressed, and choose a form of expression proportionate to the situation. The key question is not «How do I stop feeling this?» but «How do I remain capable of purposeful action while this emotion is present?».

Conflict as an Emotionally Saturated Interaction. A conflict episode can be conceptualized as a dynamic sequence: triggering event – appraisal – emotional activation – physiological mobilization – action tendency – communicative response – reaction of the other participant – secondary appraisal – further escalation or de-escalation. Each link influences the next, and the process is recursive. A harsh tone may be interpreted as disrespect, which intensifies anger, increases physiological arousal, produces a sharper response, and confirms the other person's expectation of hostility. Thus, escalation is often maintained not by one isolated cause but by a feedback loop in which emotion and communication mutually reinforce one another.

Physiological arousal deserves particular attention. Classic research by R. W. Levenson and J. M. Gottman demonstrated the importance of physiological and affective patterns during couple conflict. When arousal rises, cognitive resources may become increasingly organized around threat detection and self-protection. The person may listen selectively, remember prior grievances, overestimate hostile intention, and lose access to nuanced language. The partner's neutral or ambiguous behavior may then be interpreted through a threat-focused lens. From the standpoint of constructive dialogue, the ability to notice rising activation before behavioral control is lost is therefore a central regulatory skill.

The emotional meaning of conflict is also shaped by relational history. Current disagreements often activate earlier experiences of being ignored, controlled, abandoned, criticized, humiliated, or treated unfairly. This does not mean that present conflict is merely a repetition of the past, but it explains why apparently small events can produce disproportionate emotional responses. A late message, forgotten promise, critical remark, or change of plans may acquire symbolic meaning: «I am not important», «I cannot rely on you», «My needs do not matter», or «I am being controlled again». Emotional regulation requires the ability to differentiate the present stimulus from the broader network of meanings it activates.

Another important process is emotional contagion and reciprocal regulation. In dyadic interaction, one person's activation changes the other person's emotional state. Raised voice may evoke fear or anger; withdrawal may intensify pursuit; sarcasm may evoke shame and counterattack; calm validation may reduce defensiveness. This reciprocal nature of regulation means that constructive dialogue cannot be understood as two independent individuals applying techniques in parallel. It is a co-regulated process in which each participant contributes to either widening or narrowing the regulatory capacity of the interaction.

Research on conflict communication further suggests that the effectiveness of directness, opposition, cooperation, and validation depends on context. Constructiveness cannot be defined as constant softness or agreement. At times, direct confrontation of a serious and changeable problem may be necessary. In other situations, support and validation may be more useful than immediate problem solving. The psychologically mature form of dialogue therefore combines emotional regulation with contextual sensitivity: the capacity to remain engaged with both the problem and the relationship.

Aim and Methodological Framework. The aim of the article is to provide a theoretical substantiation of emotional regulation as a psychological prerequisite for constructive dialogue in conflict situations and to develop a structural-process model of its realization. To achieve this aim, the following objectives were defined: to clarify the psychological content of emotional regulation in conflict; to analyze the relationship between emotional activation, cognitive appraisal, and communicative behavior; to distinguish adaptive regulation from suppression, avoidance, and impulsive discharge; to identify the psychological mechanisms that support the transition from emotional reaction to constructive response; to substantiate the components and stages of a structural-process model of emotional regulation in constructive dialogue; and to define criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of regulation in conflict interaction.

The methodological framework integrates the process approach to emotion regulation, the cognitive-behavioral approach, the interpersonal and dyadic perspective, the reflective approach, and the communicative approach to conflict. The process approach makes it possible to locate regulatory intervention at different stages of the emotional episode. The cognitive-behavioral perspective clarifies the relationships among interpretation, emotion, physiological activation, action tendencies, and behavior. The interpersonal perspective emphasizes reciprocal influence and co-regulation. The reflective approach highlights awareness of internal states and habitual patterns. The communicative perspective links regulation to observable dialogue behaviors such as listening, validation, assertive expression, clarification, negotiation, and repair.

The study uses theoretical analysis and synthesis of psychological literature on emotion regulation, interpersonal communication, conflict behavior, dyadic processes, and constructive problem solving; conceptual and terminological comparison; systematization; theoretical generalization; and structural-process modeling. The proposed model is theoretical and requires subsequent empirical verification [2].

Emotional Awareness as the Starting Point of Constructive Regulation. Emotional awareness is the first condition for regulation because an unrecognized emotional state is more likely to be enacted automatically. In conflict, people often identify only the most visible emotion, usually anger, while more vulnerable experiences remain outside awareness. Irritation may coexist with fear of rejection, disappointment, helplessness, grief, shame, or longing for recognition. When the emotional field is reduced to «I am angry» communication tends to organize around accusation. When the person can differentiate «I am angry because I felt ignored, and beneath the anger I am afraid that my needs do not matter», the possibilities for dialogue expand.

Awareness includes recognition of bodily signals. Increased heart rate, muscular tension, heat, shallow breathing, pressure in the chest, changes in voice, or an urge to interrupt may function as early markers of escalation. These signals are not merely physiological noise; they provide information about the narrowing of the regulatory window. Learning to notice them before the point of behavioral disorganization allows the person to intervene earlier. A brief pause taken at the first signs of escalation is qualitatively different from leaving after an exchange of insults.

Emotional differentiation is equally important. Global descriptions such as «I feel bad» provide little regulatory information. More differentiated labeling-irritated, offended, anxious, ashamed, disappointed, powerless, jealous, lonely-helps connect emotion with meaning and need. Labeling does not automatically solve the conflict, but it reduces ambiguity and supports more precise communication. Instead of «You make me crazy», a participant may say, «When the decision was made without me, I felt excluded and angry because participation in such decisions is important to me».

Awareness also includes recognition of action tendencies. Anger may generate an urge to attack, fear an urge to escape, shame an urge to hide, and hurt an urge to withdraw or retaliate. Constructive regulation does not demand that the action tendency disappear. It requires recognizing the tendency as a psychological impulse rather than an obligation. This distinction is one of the central transitions from reaction to response.

Cognitive Appraisal and Reappraisal in Conflict. Emotions arise not only from events but from the meanings attributed to events. Cognitive appraisal therefore occupies a central position in the regulation of conflict. Participants continuously answer implicit questions: What is happening? Is this dangerous? Is it fair? What does it say about me? What does it say about the other person? Can I influence the situation? Is the partner acting intentionally? These appraisals may occur rapidly and outside deliberate awareness, yet they shape emotional intensity and behavioral choice.

Conflict appraisals are vulnerable to cognitive distortions. Mind reading may transform uncertainty into certainty about hostile intention. Overgeneralization turns a specific event into «always» and «never». Personalization interprets another person's behavior as primarily directed against the self. Dichotomous thinking divides participants into right and wrong, victim and offender, competent and incompetent. Catastrophizing treats disagreement as evidence of relational collapse. Emotional reasoning equates the intensity of feeling with the truth of interpretation: «Because I feel betrayed, betrayal must have occurred exactly as I imagine it» [3].

Cognitive reappraisal involves generating a broader and more flexible interpretation without invalidating the original emotion. It may include separating facts from assumptions, considering situational explanations, examining alternative intentions, distinguishing impact from intent, and identifying the specific need or value involved. For example, «She interrupted because she does not respect me» can be reformulated as «I experienced the interruption as disrespectful; I need to clarify whether she was dismissing me or reacting impulsively». Such reappraisal does not erase the boundary issue; it prevents premature certainty from dictating behavior.

Decentering supports reappraisal by allowing thoughts to be experienced as mental events rather than unquestionable facts. In conflict, this may take the form: «I notice the thought that I am being deliberately humiliated», rather than «I am being deliberately humiliated». The linguistic difference reflects a psychological shift. It creates room for inquiry, evidence, and alternative perspectives. This is especially important when the emotional system is producing rapid threat-based interpretations.

Perspective-taking is a related but distinct process. It does not require agreement with the partner's position. Rather, it involves reconstructing how the situation may look from the other person's point of view. This capacity reduces egocentric certainty and supports dialogue because the partner's behavior becomes psychologically intelligible even when it remains unacceptable. Understanding is not the same as approval; it is a condition for accurate communication.

Regulation of Arousal and Tolerance of Emotional Discomfort. Constructive dialogue requires a level of physiological activation compatible with listening, language, inhibition, and flexible reasoning. When arousal becomes excessive, continuing the conversation at any cost may be counterproductive. Regulation-stabilization therefore includes strategies that reduce the intensity of activation without abandoning the issue. Slow breathing, grounding, posture change, sensory orientation, deliberate reduction of speech rate, temporary silence, or a mutually agreed pause can restore access to reflective functioning [12].

A pause is constructive when it is structured. It should communicate both the need for temporary regulation and the intention to return: «I want to continue this conversation, but I am too activated to speak carefully. I need twenty minutes, and then I will come back». Without the second element, withdrawal may be experienced as abandonment or punishment. Thus, even a self-regulation strategy has an interpersonal form and must be communicated in a way that protects the relational frame.

Tolerance of emotional discomfort is a core regulatory capacity. Many destructive conflict behaviors function as attempts to end intolerable internal states quickly. An insult may discharge anger; coercion may reduce uncertainty; withdrawal may reduce anxiety; premature agreement may reduce fear of rejection. These behaviors can provide immediate relief while worsening the long-term problem. The

capacity to remain with discomfort without impulsive action makes it possible to choose behavior according to goals and values rather than immediate relief.

Acceptance plays an important role here. Acceptance does not mean approving the conflict, agreeing with the partner, or resigning oneself to harmful behavior. It means acknowledging the present emotional state without adding a secondary struggle such as «I must not feel angry», «I should not be afraid» or «If I am hurt, I am weak». Secondary judgment often intensifies arousal. Acceptance reduces the energy spent fighting the existence of the emotion and redirects attention toward how to respond to it.

Regulation should also be distinguished from forced calmness. A person can speak quietly while using contempt, manipulation, or passive aggression. Conversely, a person may speak with visible emotion and still remain constructive. The criterion is not emotional flatness but preservation of agency, boundaries, respect, and goal-directed communication.

Communicative Transformation of Emotion. The communicative-behavioral component translates regulated emotional experience into language and interaction. This is the point at which internal regulation becomes visible in dialogue. A constructive message typically differentiates observation, emotional response, meaning, need, and request. Instead of global character judgments, the speaker refers to a specific situation. Instead of attributing motives as facts, the speaker describes impact and asks for clarification. Instead of demanding mind reading, the speaker formulates a concrete request [6].

Assertiveness is essential because constructive dialogue is not synonymous with compliance. Emotion regulation should increase the capacity to express disagreement clearly, set boundaries, refuse unacceptable behavior, and negotiate needs without humiliation or coercion. An emotionally regulated person may say «No», «This is not acceptable to me», or «I am willing to continue only if we stop insulting each other». The regulatory achievement lies in communicating the boundary without converting it into a global attack on the other person's worth.

Active listening is another behavioral expression of regulation. Genuine listening in conflict is difficult because the listener is simultaneously managing their own emotional response. The impulse to prepare a counterargument competes with the task of understanding. Reflective listening, paraphrasing, and clarification slow the interaction and reduce the risk that assumptions will replace information. Phrases such as «Do I understand correctly that...?» or «What was most important for you in that situation?» create cognitive space and signal relational engagement.

Validation has a specific regulatory function. To validate is to recognize that the other person's emotional response is understandable from their perspective, even if one disagrees with their interpretation or behavior. Validation reduces the need to intensify emotion in order to be heard. It may therefore interrupt escalation. However, validation should not be confused with agreement or surrender. «I understand why you were angry when you thought I had excluded you» can coexist with «I see the situation differently».

Repair is a particularly important feature of constructive dialogue. Regulation is never perfect; participants may interrupt, raise their voices, become defensive, or say something unnecessarily harsh. The decisive factor is whether the interaction contains mechanisms for repair: acknowledging escalation, correcting wording, apologizing for the form of expression, restating the underlying need, or returning after a pause. A relationship or dialogue does not become constructive because conflict is absent, but because disruption can be recognized and repaired.

Interpersonal and Dyadic Emotion Regulation. Emotion regulation in conflict is not solely an individual competence. Interpersonal regulation occurs when one person intentionally or unintentionally influences another person's emotional state. Tone of voice, facial expression, proximity, timing, responsiveness, humor, reassurance, silence, and validation can all alter arousal. Recent integrative work on supportive communication and interpersonal emotion regulation emphasizes the need to understand communication as part of the regulatory process rather than as a separate outcome.

Dyadic regulation is especially evident in recurring conflict patterns. One participant may pursue contact more intensely as anxiety rises, while the other withdraws to reduce overload. The withdrawal increases the first person's anxiety, leading to stronger pursuit; stronger pursuit increases the second person's overload, producing further withdrawal. Neither behavior can be understood adequately in isolation. The regulatory task is to change the cycle itself: the pursuer learns to express need without escalating pressure, while the withdrawing participant learns to request space without disappearing from the relational field.

Co-regulation also explains why a calm response can sometimes reduce escalation and at other times intensify it. If calmness is experienced as presence and receptivity, it may stabilize the interaction. If it is experienced as cold superiority or emotional disengagement, it may increase frustration. Regulatory

behavior therefore acquires meaning within the relationship. Technique without attunement may fail because the partner responds not only to what is done but to what it signifies [1].

The interpersonal perspective also highlights asymmetry. Not all conflicts occur between equally powerful participants, and not all situations are safe for open emotional expression. Constructive dialogue presupposes a minimum of psychological and interpersonal safety. In contexts involving intimidation, coercive control, violence, or serious abuse of power, the primary goal may be safety, boundaries, and access to support rather than mutual dialogue. Emotion regulation should never be used to place responsibility for another person's aggression on the individual experiencing it.

Structural-Process Model of Emotional Regulation for Constructive Dialogue. On the basis of the theoretical analysis, emotional regulation in conflict can be defined as a purposeful and context-sensitive process of awareness, interpretation, modulation, expression, and reflective integration of emotional experience that preserves the individual's capacity for goal-directed action and supports communication oriented toward clarification, boundary protection, mutual understanding, and problem solving.

The proposed structural-process model comprises five interrelated components: (1) emotional-awareness, (2) cognitive-appraisal, (3) regulation-stabilization, (4) communicative-behavioral, and (5) reflective-integrative. The components are presented sequentially for analytical clarity, but in real interaction they operate recursively. A person may move back from communication to stabilization, revise an appraisal after hearing the partner, or become aware of a previously unrecognized emotion during reflection.

The emotional-awareness component involves recognition and differentiation of emotions, bodily markers, action tendencies, triggers, and underlying needs. Its goal is to transform diffuse activation into psychologically meaningful information. The cognitive-appraisal component involves examining interpretations, assumptions, perceived threats, attribution of intentions, and rigid beliefs. Its goal is to increase cognitive flexibility and reduce automatic hostile or catastrophic interpretations.

The regulation-stabilization component includes acceptance of emotional experience, reduction of excessive physiological arousal, attentional control, tolerance of discomfort, impulse inhibition, and flexible selection of strategies. Its goal is not to eliminate emotion but to restore a level of activation compatible with deliberate action. The communicative-behavioral component includes assertive expression, active listening, validation, clarification, boundary-setting, formulation of requests, negotiation, and repair. Its goal is to convert regulated emotion into dialogue behavior.

The reflective-integrative component includes analysis of the conflict episode, identification of successful and unsuccessful regulatory choices, awareness of recurring triggers and relational patterns, integration of feedback, and planning of alternative responses. Its goal is to transform each conflict into a source of learning rather than merely an event to be survived. Over time, this component supports the development of a more flexible personal style of emotional regulation.

Table 1.

Structural-Process Model of Emotional Regulation as a Prerequisite for Constructive Dialogue

Component	Main task	Mechanisms / methods	Constructive-dialogue manifestation	Expected result
1. Emotional-awareness	Recognize the emotional state before it becomes automatic behavior	Emotion labeling; body scanning; trigger identification; differentiation of primary and secondary emotions; recognition of action tendencies	The participant can name what is happening internally and distinguish emotion from accusation	Awareness of the emotional process and reduced automaticity
2. Cognitive-appraisal	Examine the meaning assigned to the conflict	Fact–interpretation distinction; alternative	Less mind reading and global attribution;	More flexible and realistic interpretation of the situation

		explanations; cognitive reappraisal; decentering; perspective- taking	greater curiosity and clarification	
3. Regulation- stabilization	Maintain arousal within a range compatible with deliberate action	Breathing; grounding; attentional shifting; acceptance; pause; impulse inhibition; distress tolerance	Reduced escalation; capacity to remain engaged or to take a structured break	Restored behavioral choice and self-control
4. Communicative- behavioral	Translate emotion and needs into constructive interaction	Assertiveness; I- statements; active listening; validation; boundary-setting; concrete requests; negotiation; repair	Specific language instead of global accusations; preservation of contact and boundaries	Problem-focused, respectful dialogue
5. Reflective- integrative	Learn from the conflict and consolidate adaptive regulation	Post-conflict reflection; feedback; analysis of triggers; identification of patterns; planning alternative responses	Ability to discuss not only the issue but also how the dialogue unfolded	Flexible regulatory repertoire and improved future conflict management

Psychological Mechanisms of the Transition from Reaction to Response. The central psychological transition in constructive conflict regulation is the movement from automatic reaction to deliberate response. This transition is not a single mechanism but a coordinated sequence. First, attentional monitoring detects internal activation. Second, emotional labeling organizes the experience. Third, decentering separates the person from the immediate interpretation. Fourth, reappraisal expands the field of possible meanings. Fifth, physiological stabilization reduces the urgency of action tendencies. Sixth, goal activation restores awareness of what the person wants from the conversation. Seventh, communicative selection transforms the internal state into language compatible with both self-respect and relational respect [9].

Attentional deployment determines which aspects of the conflict dominate consciousness. Under threat, attention is drawn toward evidence of hostility and away from evidence of cooperation. Deliberately widening attention can therefore be regulatory: noticing the partner's complete message rather than one provocative phrase; remembering the shared goal; observing one's own body; or attending to information that contradicts the assumption of total hostility. This does not require ignoring genuine threat. It requires preventing attentional capture from becoming the sole organizer of the interaction.

Inhibitory control is another mechanism. Constructive dialogue often depends on not performing the first available action: not sending the message immediately, not interrupting, not using the most hurtful fact available, not raising the voice further, not leaving without explanation. Inhibition alone is insufficient because suppressed impulses may return, but it creates time for alternative behavior to be selected. Thus, inhibition functions as a bridge rather than an endpoint.

Goal activation is particularly important because emotional escalation changes the operative goal. A conversation may begin with the goal of solving a problem and shift toward proving innocence, winning, punishing, forcing recognition, or escaping discomfort. A simple regulatory question – «What do I want to achieve in the next five minutes?» - can expose this shift. Restoring the goal of understanding, boundary-setting, decision-making, or problem solving reorganizes behavior around longer-term consequences.

Mentalization and perspective-taking support the recognition that the partner has an internal world that cannot be inferred with certainty from observable behavior. During conflict, mentalization may collapse into certainty: «I know why you did this». Restoring curiosity – «What was happening for you?» - reduces attributional rigidity. This mechanism is especially valuable when the same behavior can have multiple meanings.

Repair integrates regulation and relationship. Once escalation has occurred, the regulatory task changes from prevention to restoration. Repair may involve acknowledging one's contribution, naming the emotional overload, clarifying intent, correcting an unfair statement, apologizing, or proposing a new format. The capacity to repair prevents the perfectionistic belief that constructive dialogue must proceed without mistakes. A more realistic standard is that participants can detect rupture and return to dialogue.

Adaptive and Potentially Maladaptive Strategies. The adaptive value of an emotion regulation strategy depends on context, timing, function, and flexibility. Cognitive reappraisal may reduce unnecessary escalation, but repeated reinterpretation can become self-invalidation if it is used to rationalize persistent mistreatment. Acceptance can support tolerance of emotion, but it should not become passive acceptance of boundary violations. A pause can protect the conversation, but repeated pauses without return become avoidance. Emotional expression can increase authenticity, but unmodulated expression may become aggression. The same outward behavior can therefore have different psychological functions.

Suppression is particularly complex. In some situations, temporarily inhibiting expression may be useful - for example, preventing an insult while searching for a more accurate formulation. Chronic suppression, however, may reduce emotional transparency and prevent the partner from understanding the significance of the issue. The relevant distinction is between strategic modulation of expression and habitual disconnection from emotional experience.

Rumination is another common response to conflict. Repetitive analysis can create the subjective impression of problem solving while actually maintaining anger and threat activation. Productive reflection differs from rumination because it leads to new information, differentiated meaning, or a plan for action. Rumination circles around blame and certainty; reflection increases complexity and choice.

Avoidance may reduce immediate distress but often leaves the underlying issue unresolved. Nevertheless, not every postponement is avoidance. A deliberate decision to delay a conversation until participants have sufficient time and regulatory capacity can be adaptive. The criterion is whether postponement serves later engagement or functions as a way to make engagement indefinitely unnecessary.

Cathartic discharge deserves caution. The belief that anger must be “released” through aggressive expression can reinforce aggressive scripts rather than improve regulation. Constructive expression aims to communicate the meaning of anger and protect boundaries without rehearsing hostility. Emotional authenticity does not require maximal intensity of expression.

Criteria for Evaluating the Effectiveness of Emotional Regulation in Conflict. The effectiveness of emotional regulation in conflict should not be evaluated solely by reduction of negative emotion. A dialogue may remain emotionally intense and still be constructive. More appropriate criteria concern the preservation or restoration of psychological functions necessary for interaction.

First, the person maintains awareness of the emotional state and can distinguish emotion from action. Second, the person retains the ability to inhibit impulsive behavior and choose a response. Third, interpretations become more differentiated and less globally accusatory. Fourth, the person can formulate needs, boundaries, and requests in specific language. Fifth, the person remains capable of listening and checking understanding. Sixth, disagreement can be tolerated without immediate devaluation of the other or collapse of the relationship frame [10].

Seventh, the participant can recognize when arousal has exceeded a workable level and can initiate a structured pause. Eighth, after escalation, the person is capable of repair and return. Ninth, the interaction shifts from proving who is “bad” or “right” toward defining the problem, clarifying positions, and identifying possible decisions. Tenth, the conflict produces learning: participants can identify triggers, patterns, successful strategies, and areas requiring further work.

At the dyadic level, effectiveness may be reflected in reduced reciprocity of negative affect, greater responsiveness, more accurate mutual understanding, increased capacity to alternate speaking and listening roles, and restoration of cooperative problem solving. Importantly, these criteria should be interpreted within the context of the relationship and should not be used to demand “calm communication” from a person facing intimidation or abuse.

Practical Application in Psychological Counseling and Mediation. The proposed model can be translated into a sequence of psychological interventions. At the assessment stage, the psychologist or mediator identifies typical conflict triggers, dominant emotions, physiological signs of escalation,

automatic interpretations, action tendencies, habitual regulatory strategies, and recurrent interaction cycles. Attention should be paid not only to what participants argue about but to how the conflict develops over time.

The emotional-awareness stage may use emotion diaries, trigger maps, body-signal monitoring, differentiation of primary and secondary emotions, and reconstruction of recent conflict episodes. The task is to increase precision. A client who reports «I just explode» can gradually learn to identify the preceding sequence: tension in the body, thought of being ignored, fear of losing influence, anger, urge to interrupt, raised voice. Once the sequence becomes visible, intervention points appear.

The cognitive-appraisal stage may include identification of automatic thoughts, fact–interpretation separation, examination of evidence, alternative explanations, perspective-taking, and analysis of rigid rules such as «If a person loves me, they should know what I need without being told» or «If I admit any part of responsibility, I will lose». The aim is not to replace negative thoughts with artificially positive ones but to develop interpretations that are more accurate, contextual, and useful for action.

The regulation-stabilization stage includes practicing short strategies before they are needed in real conflict. Breathing, grounding, attentional orientation, self-instruction, and structured pauses are more effective when rehearsed in advance. Clients can develop an individualized «escalation map» with early, middle, and late signs of overload and corresponding actions for each level.

The communicative-behavioral stage uses role play, rehearsal of assertive messages, validation practice, listening exercises, boundary statements, and repair attempts. A useful transformation is from accusation to structured expression: specific event – emotional impact – meaning or need – request. For example: «When plans changed and I learned about it at the last moment, I felt angry and unimportant. I need us to discuss changes that affect both of us. Next time, please tell me before the decision is final».

In mediation, the model can help the practitioner track not only substantive positions but the regulatory capacity of the participants. When arousal is too high, additional argument may deepen polarization. The mediator can slow the pace, summarize, separate issues, validate emotional significance without endorsing claims, and restore a workable level of interaction. Thus, emotional regulation becomes part of the procedural architecture of mediation.

In couple and family counseling, the model can be used to identify reciprocal cycles rather than locating the problem exclusively within one partner. The question shifts from «Who starts the conflict?» to «How does each response become a trigger for the next response?» This reframing reduces blame and makes the cycle itself a shared target for change.

In professional teams and educational settings, the model can support training in difficult conversations, feedback, negotiation, and boundary-setting. The emphasis should be on scenario-based practice rather than lecture alone, because regulatory skills must be available under activation, not only understood intellectually.

Discussion. The proposed model conceptualizes emotional regulation as a functional prerequisite for constructive dialogue rather than as an additional communication skill. This distinction has theoretical and practical significance. Communication techniques are implemented through cognitive and behavioral systems whose availability changes under emotional load. Therefore, interventions that teach dialogue without addressing emotional regulation may produce knowledge that is difficult to access precisely when conflict becomes intense.

The model also challenges the idea that successful regulation means minimizing emotion. Negative emotions can contain important information about boundaries, injustice, loss, unmet needs, or threat. Excessive focus on calmness may create a socially desirable but psychologically superficial form of communication. The aim is not to make conflict emotionally neutral but to preserve reflective and communicative capacity while emotion is present.

A second important implication concerns flexibility. Research on emotion regulation increasingly emphasizes that strategy effectiveness is context-dependent. The proposed model therefore avoids assigning fixed adaptive or maladaptive status to every strategy. A pause, direct confrontation, distraction, suppression of immediate expression, or acceptance can each be useful or harmful depending on function and context. Mature regulation involves selecting, monitoring, and revising strategies rather than applying them mechanically.

A third implication is the integration of intrapersonal and interpersonal regulation. Conflict cannot be reduced to self-control within two isolated individuals. Emotional states are mutually influenced, and each participant's behavior changes the regulatory demands placed on the other. This makes dyadic patterns an essential unit of analysis. The same individual may regulate effectively with one partner and poorly in a relationship organized around chronic threat, invalidation, or pursuit-withdrawal cycles.

A fourth implication concerns the relationship between regulation and power. Calls for emotional self-regulation can become ethically problematic when applied without attention to coercion, violence, or structural asymmetry. Constructive dialogue is not always the appropriate immediate goal. In unsafe situations, regulation may support protective action, boundary-setting, disengagement, and help-seeking rather than mutual problem solving. This limitation should be explicit in both research and practice.

A fifth implication concerns learning from conflict. The reflective-integrative component positions conflict as a potential source of psychological development. After the immediate issue is resolved, participants can examine what activated them, which interpretations intensified the episode, what helped them recover, and what should be done differently next time. Repeated reflection may gradually transform regulation from effortful technique into a more stable relational competence.

The model is consistent with contemporary developments that connect supportive communication, interpersonal emotion regulation, and dyadic regulation. Recent reviews emphasize that regulatory processes can improve or worsen affect and can influence relationship dynamics beyond the immediate emotional target. This supports the proposition that constructive dialogue should be studied as a regulatory-interpersonal system rather than solely as a set of verbal behaviors.

Conclusions. Emotional regulation is a fundamental psychological prerequisite for constructive dialogue in conflict situations. Conflict activates emotional, cognitive, physiological, and behavioral processes that can narrow attention, intensify threat appraisal, increase impulsivity, and reduce perspective-taking. The ability to regulate these processes creates the conditions under which disagreement can remain within the domain of dialogue rather than shift into destructive escalation, avoidance, coercion, or relational rupture.

The theoretical analysis supports a multidimensional understanding of regulation. Effective regulation includes awareness and differentiation of emotion, cognitive appraisal and reappraisal, acceptance of emotional experience, stabilization of arousal, tolerance of discomfort, inhibition of impulsive responses, flexible strategy selection, perspective-taking, assertive communication, validation, boundary-setting, and repair. Regulation should not be equated with suppression or emotional neutrality.

The proposed structural-process model comprises five interrelated components: emotional-awareness, cognitive-appraisal, regulation-stabilization, communicative-behavioral, and reflective-integrative. These components describe the movement from recognizing emotional activation to transforming it into deliberate communication and integrating the experience after the conflict. The model is recursive rather than strictly linear and can be applied to individual, dyadic, counseling, mediation, educational, and organizational contexts.

The key mechanisms of the transition from reaction to constructive response include attentional monitoring, emotion labeling, decentering, cognitive reappraisal, physiological stabilization, distress tolerance, impulse inhibition, goal activation, perspective-taking, verbalization of needs, and repair. The effectiveness of regulation should be assessed not simply by whether negative emotion decreases but by whether the person preserves agency, contact, boundaries, listening capacity, specificity of language, and the ability to return to problem solving.

The theoretical nature of the model constitutes both its value and its limitation. It provides an integrative framework but requires empirical verification. Further research should examine the relative contribution of each component, the temporal sequence of regulatory processes during real conflict, individual and cultural differences, and the role of relationship context and power asymmetry.

Prospects for Further Research. Promising directions include development of a psychodiagnostic protocol for assessing emotional regulation specifically in conflict situations; validation of a Conflict Dialogue Emotion Regulation Scale; observational studies combining self-report, behavioral coding, and physiological indicators; and experimental comparison of reappraisal, structured pause, validation, and perspective-taking interventions. Longitudinal studies could clarify whether improvement in regulation predicts more stable changes in conflict communication over time.

Further research should also examine dyadic regulation. Rather than measuring only each participant's individual traits, studies may assess how one person's regulatory behavior changes the other person's affect and subsequent behavior. Actor-partner models, sequential behavioral analysis, and ecological momentary assessment could be particularly useful. Another important direction is to study professional contexts such as mediation, psychological counseling, social work, education, and management, where emotional regulation is both a personal resource and a professional competence.

Cross-cultural research is necessary because norms of emotional expression, directness, hierarchy, disagreement, and relational obligation differ across cultural contexts. The same regulatory behavior may have different interpersonal meanings. Finally, research should distinguish ordinary interpersonal conflict

from interactions involving coercion or violence, where the criteria and goals of regulation require a safety-centered framework.

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