De-escalation Fundamentals

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1   Introduction

In a free and democratic society, the police are bound by the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality. Of all the available courses of action, officers must choose the one that they achieve their goal with (necessity), the one that is legally justified (legality), and the one that is least intrusive regarding citizens' constitutionally guaranteed rights

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(proportionality; Staubli, 2017; Terrill & Paoline, 2013). This is the
foundation of the ethical imperative to de-escalate. As a result, the police
are required to justify their use of force in a specific situation and context
with legal authorities that are articulated in abstract terms. These author-
ities can be applied in a way that can result in a discrepancy between
the legal use of force and the (ethically) legitimate use of force (Jackson
et al., 2013; Jones, 2022). This discrepancy is often visible in the recur-
rent media coverage and corresponding public attention to what often
can be referred to as the "lawful but awful use of force" (Jones, 2022).
It poses challenges to the police in their efforts to develop and maintain
public trust and, ultimately, to justify their legitimacy (for the USA, see
Kochel & Skogan, 2021; for Latin America, see Malone & Dammert,
2021; for Europe, see Nägel & Vera, 2021; for South Africa, see Lamb,
2021). The negative impacts of decreased trust by the public and legiti-
macy are well documented for practical police work, including reduced
cooperation (e.g., Ang et al., 2021; Tyler & Fagan, 2008) and officer
well-being (e.g., Donner et al., 2015). In addition, perceptions of absent
legitimacy and (procedurally) just conduct have been shown to increase
non-compliance and risk of violence towards the police (e.g., Gerber
et al., 2018; Tyler et al., 2018).

As an essential course of action to ensure legality, necessity, and
proportionality in law enforcement, de-escalation is paramount (Staller
et al., 2020; Zaiser et al., 2022a). In addition, de-escalation does not only
protect citizens but also the physical safety of everyone who is involved in
an encounter. Because de-escalation attempts to reduce the use of force,
it reduces the risk of physical, psychological, and moral injury. Accord-
ingly, de-escalation has been shown to be a potent predictor of officer
safety (Engel et al., 2022; Oliva et al., 2010; Zaiser & Staller, 2015).
Ultimately, de-escalation is a key component of procedural justice and,
as such, has been proven to facilitate public trust in the police: the more
citizens perceive the police to operate fairly and with respect, the more

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they reciprocate, trust, and comply with them, and the more legitimacy they grant them (Giles, 2002; Kyprianides et al, 2021; Reisig & Lloyd, 2009; Tyler, 2002). This has been demonstrated across national borders and cultural boundaries (Barker et al., 2008). As such, de-escalation is at the core of policing.

For the purposes of this chapter, we primarily refer to de-escalation in behavioural terms rather than using it to describe a situational state of de-escalation, such as a result of behaviours that de-escalated a conflict. Correspondingly, we understand de-escalation to be any conduct practised by the police with the goal of preventing use-of-force as well as preventing and reducing continued or further use-of-force.

Media coverage across the globe, most prominently in the United States, frequently discusses the police as perpetrators against civil rights (Campbell et al., 2018; Maguire & Giles, 2022; Sherman, 2020), and this goes hand in hand with a decrease of trust in law enforcement among the public (Kochel & Skogan, 2021; Lamb, 2021; Malone & Dammert, 2021; Nägel & Vera, 2021). While this may have led to an increased interest of both politics and academia to better understand the nature of conflict during police–citizen encounters, the role of interpersonal and intergroup communication (in general) and of de-escalation (in particular) remains by-and-large under-studied (Engel et al., 2020; Giles et al., 2021).

In this chapter, we will provide an interdisciplinary breakdown of concepts relevant to de-escalation, which are rooted in empirical evidence. We have organized them along an easily accessible, teachable, and applicable sequence. In order to effectively de-escalate, police officers first need to understand the underlying mechanisms that shape the conflicts they encounter during their interactions with the public (Sect. 2). Only then can they get a grasp of how these underlying mechanisms play out across several levels of interaction (including verbal communication, paralingual communication, and non-verbal communication) and how their configuration and continued reconfiguration affords ample opportunity for misunderstandings and misinterpretation between officer and citizen (Sect. 3). As a result, the more officers achieve a congruence of these levels of interaction and synch them with the situation, within which they play out (Sect. 4), the better they

will be able to effectively de-escalate. This, in turn, requires them to cultivate a self-concept that commits them to the ethical imperative of de-escalation and subscribe to the beliefs and values that allow them to practise de-escalation in ways that exhaust its full potential (Sect. 5). Only if officers understand these relationships, can they effectively employ the evidence-based de-escalation strategies that are discussed in Chapters 9 (Kiesler Circumplex Model), 11 (Crisis Negotiations), 27 (Evidence-Based De-escalation Approaches Evaluated in Canada), and 29 (Evidence-Based De-escalation Approaches Evaluated in Germany). At the end of the chapter, we conclude avenues of practically relevant research to address the shortfalls of the de-escalation and communication phenomena discussed above and identify key takeaways for police officers, trainers and instructors, and decision-makers.

2   Conflict and Conflict Dynamics

Intra-Psychological, Inter-Personal, and Inter-Group Conflict

Effective de-escalation requires police officers to have a basic grasp of conflict and the ways it typically unfolds. Conflict between individuals and groups often starts within each conflict party's mind. Shantz (1986) distinguished between *intra-psychological* and *inter-personal* conflict. *Intra-psychological* conflicts can be the product of an internal weighing of often incompatible or even contradictory interests, goals, and/or associated courses of action. These kinds of conflicts cause emotional tension and, therefore, influence the goals, motivations, and behaviour of an individual. They often arise in response to how an individual conducts themselves in their social environment. Correspondingly, *intra-psychological* conflict often causes and/or arises in response to an *inter-personal* conflict, where one party faces another party with incompatible or opposing interests, goals, motivations, and behaviours (Garvey & Shantz, 1992; Sprey, 1979). Once officers realize that conflict starts within the mind of each involved party and that it plays out within as well as between individual minds, they understand the importance

of exploring the other's "inner conflict". This allows them to identify the goals and motivations that drive their behaviours in the first place, as well as the underlying ambivalences. These can be ultimately addressed for a more effective conflict resolution by, for instance, pointing out common ground and areas of agreement (Cecchini, 2021; Toribio-Flórez et al., 2020).

As police officers interact with citizens, they can only infer the goals and motivation of the other person based on the behavioural cues they perceive during the encounter (Crick & Dodge, 1996; Dodge, 1986). Accordingly, no one will ever have knowledge of the reality that the other person is experiencing, how they are making sense of it, and how it causes them to behave. In this context, effective conflict management and resolution requires conflict parties to change perspective. The more they can understand the way the other person perceives and makes sense of the conflict or encounter (and of the world in general), the better they can understand their relative goals and motivations. In other words, understanding the other person's inner ambivalences, that is, *intra-psychological* conflict in relation to the *inter-personal* conflict they are experiencing, allows officers to compare their goals and motivations with those of the citizen. Only then can they explore the potential overlap and identify more targeted and sustainable approaches to managing and resolving the conflict.

When the police interact with the public, police officers and citizens do not only encounter as individuals but also as members of distinct social groups. Accordingly, the situational context often determines which social identity and to what degree it will shape the encounter (Giles & Walther, 2022; Giles et al., 2021; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This adds an additional layer to the individual and concurring group identities of both officer and citizen, which ultimately shape the encounter and potential conflict (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social identity and group affiliation do not only determine the goals and motivation of the individuals in the encounter. They also shape the way each side perceives and interacts with one another (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; see also, Giles & Walther, 2022). This is crucial to achieving a better understanding of how potential conflict between both sides can escalate, as expectations of how each side will behave might make escalation a self-fulfilling prophecy. For

instance, when a police officer stops a car to enforce a traffic safety measure, the citizen's reactions will be guided by their social identity. As a member of a visible minority, who gets disproportionately often stopped by the police, they might infer the officer's motivation in light of their social identity as a police officer, who disproportionately often stops members of a visible minority. After all, they have been stopped by the police, again (Giles et al., 2021; Lowrey-Kinberg, 2021).

At this point, we would like to summarize that there are three levels, across which potential conflict during a police–citizen encounter plays out. *Intra-psychological* conflict is rooted within each individual, based on their individual and social identity, past experiences, and on the situational context of the encounter. *Inter-personal* conflict between individuals is often either the cause or an effect (or both) of *intra-psychological* conflict which it carries out at the interactional level. *Inter-group* conflict is not limited to actual encounters between groups of individuals, for instance, during sporting events or violent and non-violent protests. It essentially shapes both the *intra-psychological* and *inter-personal* conflict within and between police officer and citizen, based on their social identity and the group they affiliate with. Without changing perspective, both conflict parties will not be able to access the wealth of information about either side's goals and motivations, which they need to effectively manage and resolve potential conflict.

Self-Image, Face, and Ego

A successful change of perspective also appreciates each other's desire to maintain a positive self-image, colloquially often referred to as "saving face" (Goffman, 1955). If we experience or are confronted with information and/or actions that threaten our positive self-image or question our self-concept, we experience a *loss of face* (Oetzel et al., 2001; Ting-Toomey, 2005). As a result, we often experience negative emotions and find ourselves in a state of arousal, which can ultimately escalate conflict (Rogan & Hammer, 1994). As humans, we seek to maintain a positive self-image independently of any external influences, including

judgement by other persons. However, at the same time, how we experience and think other people see us does play an integral role in how we feel about ourselves. Accordingly, maintaining a positive self-image and *saving face* is more complex than it appears and often is at the root of conflict at all the three levels of conflict discussed above: *intra-psychological*, *inter-personal*, and *inter-group* (Donohue, 1992; Folger et al., 2021). This is not limited to conflict across cultural boundaries but also plays out within the same socio-cultural environments (Oetzel et al., 2001; Ting-Toomey, 2005). One major implication beyond the understanding of self-image and face as a source of conflict is the potential it offers as a management strategy. For instance, actively *saving the face* of a citizen (i.e., doing facework) might help an officer avoid, de-escalate, or resolve a conflict arising from the context of the encounter (Rogan & Hammer, 1994). At this point, we would like to point out that face can be associated both with one's individual as well as one's social identity and/or group affiliation (Spencer-Oatey, 2007).

Furthermore, research has found that threats to favourable views of the self can lead to aggression (Baumeister & Boden, 1998; Baumeister et al., 1998; Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). In this context, scenes in which officers have been provoked by citizens' questioning their authority come to mind. In addition, conflict management can become significantly more challenging, when one or more parties are intractably locked into commitment to enforcing a short-term over a long-term gain (Baumeister et al., 1998; Muraven et al., 1998). This has been shown to be especially the case when they are in a state of depleted will power or self-control, in the literature referred to as *ego depletion*: conflict parties might lack the energy to put in the cognitive effort that an effective change of perspective and corresponding *facework* require (Hülsheger & Schewe, 2011). Researchers have already investigated the effects of ego depletion on police officers and found a tendency towards misconduct (Donner & Jennings, 2015) and excessive use of force (Staller et al., 2019). As a result, conflict between the police and the public has been found to be escalated by factors associated with the general and situational self of the officers involved.

Escalation

Persons in conflict typically start by asserting themselves and their interests politely, without aggression, for instance by making suggestions or asking for consideration (Friedman & Currall, 2003). If they don't achieve their goal(s) that way, they increase their level of assertiveness and might become authoritative or aggressive in their demeanour and communication. This includes demands that can be accompanied by threats of avoidable consequences and/or threats of violence. Ultimately, the threats materialize and violence (or force, in the police context) is used to get what they want.

Humans' innate tendency towards reciprocity (Becker & Strauss, 1956) nudges them to do the same in return and complement the actions of the other person, rather than stoically maintaining their position. This metaphorical conflict spiral (Rubin, 1994) is characterized by the reciprocation of each other's (micro-) aggressions and conflict behaviours, each turn of which increases the intensity of the conflict. The dynamic of this exchange of one-upmanship shapes the expectations of both conflict parties and corresponding, confirmation-biased perceptions. Ultimately, it turns the conflict spiral and the escalation it facilitates further and further into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Eventually, both sides are at risk of ending up in a place where their adversarial frames evolve into a justification of moral superiority. This, in turn, can result in the dehumanization of the other person or group (Opotow, 2005; Rubin et al. 1994). Aggravating factors on this trajectory include the use of superior enforcement strategies, (perceived) unfairness, and/or anonymity, as well as perceived moral superiority or inferiority (Friedman & Currall, 2003). These factors can be easily found in the citizen perspective during adversarial encounters with the police, where they are often perceived to rely on superior and unfair enforcement strategies as well as to treat (especially certain groups of) citizens without due respect, protected by the anonymity of their uniforms.

De-escalation

In this context, de-escalation is the successful slowing down, stopping, and/or reversing of the conflict spiral, as well as avoiding/preventing it in the first place. Factors associated with successful de-escalation are typically associated with the parties involved in the escalating conflict as well as with the situational context of it (Zaiser et al., 2022a).

While factors associated with the target of de-escalation effort remain outside a police officer's direct sphere of influence, approaches addressing the situation and environment of an escalated encounter have been proven to effectively de-escalate conflict situations and the persons causing them (e.g., creating time and distance, and/or containing dangerous conflict parties; Goodman et al., 2020; Police Executive Research Forum [PERF], 2016).

However, the focus of this chapter is on active, communication-based, de-escalation approaches to enable police officers to fully exhaust the potential of de-escalation. As mentioned in the introduction, research on de-escalation, especially in the context of policing, is scarce (Engel et al., 2020, 2022). In addition, little has been studied on the effectiveness of any single de-escalation method (for law enforcement, see Engel et al., 2020; for mental health settings, see Roberton et al., 2012). Correspondingly, conceptual and substantial clarity on what constitutes effective de-escalation appears to vary not only among practitioners and training across police agencies (Sloan & Paoline, 2021) but also in research (Staller et al., 2019).

An occupational setting, within which de-escalation has been studied more thoroughly, is mental health (Price et al., 2015). Price and Baker (2012) reviewed the literature on de-escalation in mental health settings and identified seven themes, along which empirical evidence has been established. The first three associate effective de-escalation with the skills and abilities of those that work in such occupations, including characteristics of effective de-escalators, their abilities to maintain personal control, and, more generally, verbal and non-verbal skills. The other four themes relate to the process of intervening itself and include: how and when to intervene, ensuring safe conditions during the de-escalation, and specific de-escalation strategies. Still, in their conclusion, Price and

Baker (2012) state that de-escalation is a "complex intervention, which has been overlooked by rigorous research, and it is often assumed that staff are able to perform these techniques in clinical practice" (p. 310).

It appears that, just as in mental health, a lack of research and deeper understanding keeps police officers from living up to an expectation of effective de-escalation and management of conflict between the police and the public.

Path Dependency vs. Non-Linearity

The conflict spiral discussed above suggests both escalation and de-escalation to be rather path-dependent and to play out in a linear fashion. If an encounter between a citizen and a police officer escalates or de-escalates depends on the interplay of a myriad of factors across officers, citizens, the situational context of their encounter, and, if present, third parties. This interplay often comes to pass in ways that both conflict parties, officer and citizen, reciprocate and complement in response to each other (Schulz von Thun, 2019; Watzlawick et al., 2011), manifesting the path dependency of the conflict spiral.

However, conflicts often play out linearly only on their surface. They never allow for a reliable prediction along the lines of an if–then–when sequence, as conflict escalation and de-escalation are often conceptualized and taught in use-of-force training (for a detailed discussion, see Di Nota et al., 2021). Officers cannot blindly expect a citizen to comply and follow their instructions, just as the deployment of a conducted energy weapon will not guarantee the incapacitation of a citizen. It is, just as de-escalation is, subject to a plethora of determinants, including the type of clothing the citizen is wearing, the distance of the deploying officer, the location of both parties, and many other factors.

The complex and dynamic nature of conflict ultimately results in sometimes more and sometimes less predictable ways in which an encounter can unfold (especially the degree and the timing of potential escalation; Zaiser et al., 2022b). In addition, the continuing reconfiguration of all the variables involved allows officers to always stop the dynamic and press the reset button, in order to leave the initially laid out path and reverse the conflict spiral. However, officers need to de-escalate the situation confidently and competently.

3   Levels of Interaction

Many of the encounters between the police and the public are characterized by the police's mission to maintain public safety and enforce the law, which makes conflict a constant possibility. For the purposes of this chapter, we approach these conflicts as social situations, in which everyone involved cannot interact without communicating (Luhmann, 1981; Watzlawick et al., 2011). Accordingly, the course of any such encounter is determined by communication. This communication is not limited to verbal communication but includes several levels of interaction, or communication channels, between officer and citizen. These channels come into play in different and constantly changing configurations (Schulz von Thun, 2019; Watzlawick et al., 2011). Consequently, not all messages, sometimes not any at all, are received by a person communicated with. Rarely are they perceived exactly in the way the communicator intends (Schulz von Thun, 2019; Watzlawick et al., 2011).

Broadly, communication can be divided into verbal and non-verbal (Wood, 2015). Further exploration into the nature of communication has led researchers to the question of the relative share that verbal and non-verbal communication occupy in the conveyance of a message (Argyle et al., 1970; Mehrabian & Albert, 1967; Mehrabian & Wiener, 1967; Scherer, 2003). Mehrabian (1971) broke interpersonal communication down into three categories and found, similar to Argyle et al. (1970), that non-verbal and paralinguistic communication convey disproportionately more meaning than verbal communication. We would point out that Mehrabian's research (Mehrabian & Albert, 1967; Mehrabian & Wiener, 1967) is empirically rooted only in the communication of emotional content and is subject to significant limitations in its ecological validity, as it is the result of a series of laboratory experiments. However, the research discussed here offers a major insight: it establishes the relevance of paralinguistic language and non-verbal language, as it marks an important communication channel and, accordingly, a crucial level of interaction between the police and the public. Especially because police–citizen encounters often follows and/

or results in emotional response, we find the basic tenet of the dispro-
portionate share in message conveyance between verbal and non-verbal
communication helpful in educating police officers about the basics of
de-escalation.

The remainder of this section will introduce a selection of levels of
interaction, which research has found to be relevant communication
channels for officers during citizen encounters: presence, body language
(including facial expressions), verbal communication, and paralinguistic
communication.

Presence

As mentioned above, there cannot be an encounter where there is
no communication. Accordingly, communication between officer and
citizen starts the moment they encounter each other (Zaiser et al.,
2022a). Ramifications of the mere presence of the police have been docu-
mented in several studies on the ways that officers' appearance shapes
their perception by the public. For instance, several studies have inves-
tigated citizen impressions of the police based on uniform colour (e.g.,
Bell, 1982; Johnson, 2013) and the level of militarization (e.g., vest worn
on top, tactical holsters; Blaskovits et al., 2022; Simpson, 2020), as well
as based on whether officers are on patrol in cruisers, on bikes, or on foot
(Simpson, 2017). Research done by Simpson also includes the effects of
a variety of non-military accessories (such as hats, sunglasses, or gloves;
Simpson, 2020).

In the context of de-escalation, one of the most consequential effects
of officer presence can be seen in the repeatedly documented cases of
officer-created or *officer-induced jeopardy* (Keyes, 2020; Smith, 2022):
despite an absent risk to the public or any third parties, officers imme-
diately confront citizens, often armed with edged objects and/or going
through psychological crisis. As a result, they escalate the situation to
the point where they often have to use lethal force to defend themselves,
sometimes without a single word being said before the escalation.

Citizens going through psychological crisis can be, for instance,
approached without sirens and with a limited number of officers visible

to them, if the risk to the public can be mitigated through containment with a perimeter. Maintaining distance and creating time by slowing things down allows officers to plan their actions and account for contingencies, before they engage the citizen (Goodman et al., 2020; Keyes, 2020). A citizen armed with an edged weapon intending to "suicide by cop" in a public space can be passively contained by the first arriving units, who make sure no third parties enter the perimeter. The arrival of further officers then allows for a more active containment of the person, without any officer exiting their vehicle. This allows officers to keep creating time and distance, even as they might move the perimeter along with the slowly moving pedestrian. One officer can then engage in crisis intervention and attempt to verbally de-escalate the person from the safety of their cruiser. In contrast, a confrontation outside the cruiser would significantly increase the risk of creating a possible lethal use of force in response to an attack by the armed citizen.

These considerations demonstrate how the conflict can evolve even before the active engagement of the public by the police, and how the ways in which the police are present can determine escalation or de-escalation.

Body Language

Just as with their presence, so the body language of police officers can determine whether a conflict during a citizen encounter will escalate or de-escalate. Research on body language includes a variety of categories, of which proxemics, kinetics, and haptics are among the more extensively studied ones. Proxemics is communication by means of spatial distance between the self and the other (Hall, 1963), as well as the positioning of people and/or objects in the space (McKay et al., 2009). This could be, for instance, the use of a police cruiser to block another vehicle and keep it from leaving the scene (which can escalate a conflict due to its confrontational nature, or de-escalate it as a successful containment). The line between mere presence and proxemics is fine and often blurred. Correspondingly, proxemics plays a crucial role in confrontations that create *officer-induced jeopardy*. Officers need to be cognizant of space not

only in terms of their own distance to a potentially dangerous citizen but also of that of members of the public and other relevant environmental features. These could be objects that do or can play a role in the containment of the threat and the resolution of the conflict.

Kinetics refers to communication by means of body movement, for instance through gestures (e.g., an officer putting their hand on their holstered duty pistol to project authority), mimicry and facial expression (e.g., eye contact and gaze to project situational control), as well as movement of other body parts (e.g., a bladed stance to signal preparedness).

Haptics concerns communication by touch or any type of body contact (Hans & Hans, 2015), which typically determines the use of force, when officers go "hands on", arrest citizens, or administer first aid. However, haptics also includes handshakes, pats on shoulders, or supportive touches.

Verbal Communication

Verbal communication refers to the transmission of information using spoken or written language (Gibbs et al., 1998; McKay et al., 2009). What distinguishes verbal from non-verbal communication, other than the channel or method of transmission, is that it is typically used consciously and deliberately to transmit explicit message content. Verbally communicated information is ideally received exactly in the way the speaker or writer intends it (Schulz von Thun, 2019). Therefore, we expect verbal communication to be explicit, tangible, and referenceable later in time (Dascal & Berenstein, 1987; Gibbs et al., 1998). Yet, this declarative nature of verbal communication should not hide its fallibility, as will be discussed below.

Paralinguistic Communication

Paralinguistic or paraverbal communication covers those aspects of non-verbal communication that add meaning to and qualify verbal communication through the vocal expression of several different categories.

These include (but are not limited to) (Trager, 1961): voice set, tone, pitch, resonance, tempo, rhythm, volume, and articulation. The modulation and configuration of these aspects allows us to convey meaningful information separate from the use of any other channel or method of communication (Scherer, 2003; Schulz von Thun, 2019).

Correspondingly, paralinguistics play a crucial role in the transmission of latent and implicit information, such as underlying emotions or sarcasm (Argyle et al., 1970; Mehrabian & Albert, 1967; Mehrabian & Wiener, 1967; Scherer, 2003). While paralinguistics are often used to mark sarcastic messages for the receiver to identify them as such, the communication of emotion and empathy, a key to successful de-escalation (Vecchi et al., 2019; Zaiser & Staller, 2015), is substantially transmitted paralinguistically (Kraus, 2017).

4   Authenticity and Congruence

So far, we have established that communication manifests itself across multiple levels of interaction. Typically, we communicate on several, if not all, of these levels at the same time (Mehrabian, 1971; Schulz von Thun, 2019; Watzlawick et al., 2011). Especially for police officers, it is important to understand that communication across all of these levels is always characterized by some degree of ambivalence. This constitutes the risk of misunderstanding and misinterpretation. In addition, developmental, cognitive, and social psychological as well as physiological properties and corresponding health disorders can impede effective communication on any channel just as much as socio-cultural, socio-economic, and geographical background has been found to (Hans & Hans, 2015; Schulz von Thun, 2019; Tannen, 2012).

The ambivalence associated with each of these communication channels, regardless as to whether they are rooted in a social, cultural, physiological, or psychological context, makes communication just as complex and dynamic as the conflict itself that it is used to manage. Officers can draw from the interpersonal communication literature to improve both their assessment and interpretation of other people as well as a more deliberate practice in their de-escalation. We have identified

two approaches that lend themselves to making sense of and organizing communication on all levels of interaction: *congruent communication* (Mehrabian, 1971; Watzlawick et al., 2011) and *consistent communication* (Schulz von Thun, 2019). *Congruent communication* requires, for the successful transmission of information, especially when discussing emotional content, all levels of interaction to be aligned: presence, proxemics, kinesics, haptics, and verbal and paralinguistic communication. This minimizes the risk of misinterpretation and misunderstandings while maximizing the probability that the message will be received the way it is intended by the sender. As a result, aligning the levels of interaction makes communication authentic. Examples in law enforcement include the use of active listening skills: it is easy for an officer to ask open-ended questions, use minimal encouragers like "mhm", and reflect the last three words spoken by the citizen without actually processing what they might have been told. A lack of eye contact, a closed-off posture, and a significant distance between officer and citizen manifests a misalignment of non-verbal and verbal communication and will signal a lack of attention to the citizen. They can then, in turn, feel they are not being listened to, which bears the potential of further escalation. Another example is the presence of an officer of militarized appearance (e.g., outer vest with magazine pouches, tactical holster, hatch gloves) and authoritative demeanour (e.g., always in a position of tactical advantage, above eye level), who responds to a citizen going through psychological crisis and stating they had only come to have a conversation. In other words, *congruent communication* aligns one's inner experience with their outer demeanour.

Schulz von Thun's (2019) *consistent communication* also uses the concept of congruence, but expands it beyond the alignment of the different communication channels: for communication to be effective and free of ambivalence, it needs to be (i) congruent across channels, (ii) in line with one's values and beliefs, (iii) match the nature of the relationship with the other person, (iv) address and match the inner workings of the other person, and (iv) account for the situational context of the encounter.

At the bottom line, effective de-escalation depends on the complex interplay between multiple levels of interaction, geared towards an

equally complex and dynamic situational context/conflict with one or more other interlocutors. As a result, the limited training of simple, single-level, linear communication and de-escalation skills that officers are currently exposed to is not sufficient for them to acquire the knowledge, skills, and abilities to effectively exhaust the full potential that de-escalation can unfold.

5 Self-Concept and Attitude

Congruent and *consistent communication* synchronizes all levels of interaction and aligns what is communicated with values and beliefs, ideally of both interlocutors, in a way that accounts for the situation and characteristics of everyone involved. This constitutes the importance of police officers' self-concept and their corresponding attitude. *Consistent communication* especially requires officers to soul-search and reflect on what it means to them to have that role and how they can live up to its mission. What follows is a list of motivational principles that the literature has associated with effective de-escalation. We offer them to guide officers in aligning their individual values with those of the community they serve and, ultimately, in fostering and maintaining a self-concept that is committed to de-escalation.

Guardian Mindset

Research has shown that officers who adopt a *guardian mindset* value communication over authoritative enforcement tactics and are less likely to be associated with misconduct as well as with excessive use of force. Consequently, they contribute significantly to public trust in the police (McLean et al., 2020; Rahr & Rice, 2015; Zaiser & Staller, 2015). Officers with a guardian mindset put emphasis on building and maintaining relationships with the communities they serve and view offenders as part of these communities. On the other hand, officers with a *warrior mindset* rely on more authoritative enforcement and frame interactions with the public in terms of us (the police) versus them (the public). This

can narrow officers' perceptual filters down to only picking up nega-
tive environmental cues in their interactions with the public, such as
potential threats or dangers (Rahr & Rice, 2015; for a more detailed
discussion on threat perception and underlying danger narratives in
the police, see Chapter 2 in Volume I of this book). This, in turn,
removes potential avenues of de-escalation from their attentional focus
and can have an escalatory effect on any conflict encountered. Officers
with a guardian mindset take initiative and keep using the de-escalation
methods discussed below, often despite an escalation of potential conflict
(as long as they can maintain officer and public safety), until they are able
to nudge an escalated citizen to reciprocate the de-escalation they keep
demonstrating and, thus, stop and reverse the conflict spiral.

Empathy and Unconditional Commitment to Changing Perspective

The fundamentals of conflict discussed above make it clear that effec-
tive conflict management, resolution, and corresponding de-escalation
requires a change of perspective for police officers to better under-
stand the goals and motivation of the other conflict party. Officers
need to understand the interests and motivations of the citizens they
encounter, as well as the underlying emotions. Relating to another
person's emotional experience for a better understanding of what drives
their behaviour requires officers to effectively *empathize* with them
(Vecchi et al., 2019; Zaiser et al., 2022b). Once they achieve a successful,
empathy-based change of perspective, officers will be able to recognize
how emotion and action, as well as motivation and behaviour, are often
not aligned. As a result, they can explore such discrepancies to identify
and utilize openings for effective de-escalation. Just as it might be easier
for parents to relate to another parent's feeling of wanting to hit their
child rather than to another parent actually hitting their child, so an
officer might be better able to de-escalate a use-of-force arrest, if they
learn that the arrested party has attempted to escape to see their spouse
one last time before going to jail.

Unconditional Respect

Our call for officers to show *unconditional respect* and dignity towards any citizen they encounter is based on the concept of *unconditional high regard*, a well-established approach to crisis intervention and psychotherapy as well as counselling psychology (Rogers & Farson, 1957). Effective de-escalation, especially of psychological crisis, requires the full acknowledgement of the other person's personhood and dignity. Their past and present actions or inactions should not interfere with that respect. Especially when officers witness disturbing actions by a citizen or when conflict with a citizen has already escalated significantly, managing it from a place of respect for the opponent helps prevent the above mentioned perceived moral superiority that often leads to the dehumanization of them. Because officers are regularly exposed to generally contemptible actions and behaviours (Violanti & Gehrke, 2004), we feel that holding the corresponding actors in unconditional high regard would be asking far too much. While both concepts are based on the same basic principle, unconditional respect appears to be compatible with the professional self-concept we hope all officers hold themselves accountable to. Unconditional respect supports not only de-escalation but also fosters co-operation (Allison et al., 2021), for instance when officers attempt to acquire witnesses, persuade victims to provide a statement, or increase the interview yield from suspects (Alison et al., 2013).

6   Conclusion

In this chapter, we have referred to the police's ethical imperative to exhaust the full potential of de-escalation, using the least amount of necessary and legally justified force at any given time. We have argued that in order for officers to live up to that expectation, police officers first need to understand the underlying mechanisms that shape the conflicts they encounter during their interactions with the public. Only when they understand how conflict manifests within each conflict party's mind in interaction with other people and influenced by concurrent

concepts of individual and social identity, will they be able to explore the potential overlap of goals and motivations that they can utilize for effective de-escalation and effective conflict management. In addition, only when police officers are aware of how escalation and de-escalation play out across several levels of interaction (including verbal communication, paralingual communication, and non-verbal communication), can they appreciate that the configuration and continued reconfiguration of these communication channels afford ample opportunity for misunderstandings and misinterpretation between officer and citizen. As a result, the more congruently and the more consistently officers communicate and the better they synch these channels with the situation and the citizen(s) they encounter, the better they will be able to de-escalate. This, in turn, requires them to cultivate a self-concept that commits them to the ethical imperative of de-escalation and to subscribe to the beliefs and values that allow them to practise de-escalation in ways that exhaust its full potential. In other words, with the right mindset, congruence and consistency will naturally determine officers' genuine approach to de-escalation and the corresponding conflict management.

Only if officers understand these relationships can they effectively employ the evidence-based de-escalation strategies that are discussed in Chapters 9 (Kiesler Circumplex Model), 11 (Crisis Negotiations), 27 (Evidence-Based De-escalation Approaches Evaluated in Canada), and 29 (Evidence-Based De-escalation Approaches Evaluated in Germany).

We have argued that, in addition to the skills training they already receive, police officers require education on what makes de-escalation work so as to be effective de-escalators. The corresponding implementation efforts have to be based on evidence, which we suggest can be advanced with avenues of further research, including (but not limited to):

- While there is research that documents a disproportionate allocation of training between use of force and de-escalation (for the United States, see PERF, 2015; for Germany, see Staller et al., 2019), we have not found any systematic evaluation of what communication,

de-escalation, and crisis intervention training looks like in any juris-
diction. Establishing baseline knowledge on what is taught and how it
is trained will allow for a more effective allocation of resources.

- As initial evidence on the effectiveness of communication, de-
escalation, and crisis intervention training is beginning to emerge
(Engel et al., 2022; Todak & James, 2018), rigorous research on factors
that facilitate the successful transfer of knowledge, skills, and abilities
from training into the field is still outstanding.
- Because the impact of attitude and mindset on officer conduct remains
under-studied (Clifton et al., 2021), and in light of what we know
about it from the psychology of inter-personal communication (Schulz
von Thun, 2019; Zhang & Giles, 2018), we hope for further research
examining the role that mindset plays for effective de-escalation.

Key Takeaways
Police Officers
    We encourage police officers to:

- Use training and education to reflect on their self-concept as a police
officer in order to align their personal values and beliefs with the
expectations of their organization and communities;
- Be open to and seek de-escalation education and training;
- Commit to a deliberate practice of de-escalation in the field.

Conflict Management Trainers
    We encourage practical skills instructors and conflict management
trainers to:

- Acknowledge that de-escalation requires not only training but also
education and to seek opportunities to design corresponding modules
and sessions based on current research and in ways that address
conceptual and didactical shortfalls;
- Advocate for de-escalation education and training;
- Commit to implementing evidence-based best practices.

Police Decision-Makers
    We encourage police decision-makers to:

- Commit education and training under their area of command or responsibility to evidence-based best practices;
- Increase the amount of time and resources allocated to not just de-escalation training but also de-escalation education so as to reduce the disparity between the amount of time and resources allocated to de-escalation and use-of-force topics.

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