

Conflict

A potential consequence of interdependent relationships is conflict. Conflict can result from the strongly divergent needs of the two parties or from misperceptions and misunderstandings. Conflict can occur when the two parties are working toward the same goal and generally want the same outcome or when both parties want very different outcomes. Regardless of the cause of the conflict, negotiation can play an important role in resolving it effectively. In this section, we will define conflict, discuss the different levels of conflict that can occur, review the functions and dysfunctions of conflict, and discuss strategies for managing conflict effectively.

Definitions

Conflict may be defined as a "sharp disagreement or opposition, as of interests, ideas, etc." and includes "the perceived divergence of interest, or a belief that the parties' current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously" (both from Pruitt and Rubin, 1986, p. 4). Conflict results from "the interaction of interdependent people who perceived incompatible goals and interference from each other in achieving those goals" (Hocker and Wilmot, 1985).

Levels of Conflict

One way to understand conflict is to distinguish it by level. Four levels of conflict are commonly identified:

1. *Intrapersonal or intrapsychic conflict.* These conflicts occur within an individual. Sources of conflict can include ideas, thoughts, emotions, values, predispositions, or drives that are in conflict with each other. We want an ice cream cone badly, but we know that ice cream is very fattening. We are angry at our boss, but we're afraid to express that anger because the boss might fire us for being insubordinate. The dynamics of intrapsychic conflict are traditionally studied by various subfields of psychology: cognitive psychologists, personality theorists, clinical psychologists, and psychiatrists. Although we will occasionally delve into the internal psychological dynamics of negotiators (e.g., in Chapters 5 and 15), this book generally doesn't address intrapersonal conflict.
2. *Interpersonal conflict.* A second major level of conflict is between individuals. Interpersonal conflict occurs between workers, spouses, siblings, roommates, or neighbors. Most of the negotiation theory in this book is drawn from studies of interpersonal negotiation and directly addresses the management and resolution of interpersonal conflict.
3. *Intragroup conflict.* A third major level of conflict is within a group—among team and work group members and within families, classes, living units, and tribes. At the intragroup level, we analyze conflict as it affects the ability of the group to make decisions, work productively, resolve its differences, and continue to achieve its goals effectively. Within-group negotiations, in various forms, are discussed in Chapters 11, 12, and 13.
4. *Intergroup conflict.* The final level of conflict is intergroup—between organizations, ethnic groups, warring nations, or feuding families or within splintered, fragmented communities. At this level, conflict is quite intricate because of the large number of people involved and the multitudinous ways they can interact with each other.

Negotiations at this level are also the most complex. We will discuss the nature of intergroup negotiations throughout the book, particularly in Chapters 11 and 13.

Functions and Dysfunctions of Conflict

Most people initially believe that conflict is bad or dysfunctional. This belief has two aspects: first, that conflict is an indication that something is wrong, broken or dysfunctional, and second, that conflict creates largely destructive consequences. Deutsch (1973) and others¹⁰ have elaborated on many of the elements that contribute to conflict's destructive image:

1. *Competitive, win-lose goals.* Parties compete against each other because they believe that their interdependence is such that goals are in opposition and both cannot simultaneously achieve their objectives.¹¹ Competitive goals lead to competitive processes to obtain those goals.
2. *Misperception and bias.* As conflict intensifies, perceptions become distorted. People come to view things consistently with their own perspective of the conflict. Hence, they tend to interpret people and events as being either with them or against them. In addition, thinking tends to become stereotypical and biased—parties endorse people and events that support their position and reject outright those who oppose them.
3. *Emotionality.* Conflicts tend to become emotionally charged as the parties become anxious, irritated, annoyed, angry, or frustrated. Emotions overwhelm clear thinking, and the parties may become increasingly irrational as the conflict escalates.
4. *Decreased communication.* Productive communication declines with conflict. Parties communicate less with those who disagree with them and more with those who agree. The communication that does occur is often an attempt to defeat, demean, or debunk the other's view or to strengthen one's own prior arguments.
5. *Blurred issues.* The central issues in the dispute become blurred and less well defined. Generalizations abound. The conflict becomes a vortex that sucks in unrelated issues and innocent bystanders. The parties become less clear about how the dispute started, what it is "really about," or what it will take to solve it.
6. *Rigid commitments.* The parties become locked into positions. As the other side challenges them, parties become more committed to their points of view and less willing to back down from them for fear of losing face and looking foolish. Thinking processes become rigid, and the parties tend to see issues as simple and "either/or" rather than as complex and multidimensional.
7. *Magnified differences, minimized similarities.* As parties lock into commitments and issues become blurred, they tend to see each other—and each other's positions—as polar opposites. Factors that distinguish and separate them from each other become highlighted and emphasized, while similarities that they share become oversimplified and minimized. This distortion leads the parties to believe they are further apart from each other than they really may be, and hence they may work less hard to find common ground.
8. *Escalation of the conflict.* As the conflict progresses, each side becomes more entrenched in its own view, less tolerant and accepting of the other, more defensive and less communicative, and more emotional. The net result is that both parties attempt to win by increasing their commitment to their position, increasing the resources they are willing

to spend to win, and increasing their tenacity in holding their ground under pressure. Both sides believe that by adding more pressure (resources, commitment, enthusiasm, energy, etc.), they can force the other to capitulate and admit defeat. As most destructive conflicts reveal, however, nothing could be further from the truth! Escalation of the conflict level and commitment to winning can increase so high that the parties will destroy their ability to resolve the conflict or ever be able to deal with each other again.

These are the processes that are commonly associated with escalating, polarized "intractable" conflict (see also Chapter 17). However, conflict also has many *productive* aspects (Coser, 1956; Deutsch, 1973). Figure 1.1 outlines some productive aspects of conflict. From this perspective, conflict is not simply destructive or productive; it is both. The objective is not to eliminate conflict but to learn how to manage it to control the destructive elements while enjoying the productive aspects. Negotiation is a strategy for productively managing conflict.

Factors That Make Conflict Easy or Difficult to Manage

Figure 1.2 presents a conflict diagnostic model. This model offers some useful dimension for analyzing any dispute and determining how easy or difficult it will be to resolve

FIGURE 1.1 | Functions and Benefits of Conflict

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- Discussing conflict makes organizational members more aware and able to cope with problems. Knowing that others are frustrated and want change creates incentives to try to solve the underlying problem.
 - Conflict promises organizational change and adaptation. Procedures, assignments, budget allocations, and other organizational practices are challenged. Conflict draws attention to those issues that may interfere with and frustrate employees.
 - Conflict strengthens relationships and heightens morale. Employees realize that their relationships are strong enough to withstand the test of conflict; they need not avoid frustrations and problems. They can release their tensions through discussion and problem solving.
 - Conflict promotes awareness of self and others. Through conflict, people learn what makes them angry, frustrated, and frightened and also what is important to them. Knowing what we are willing to fight for tells us a lot about ourselves. Knowing what makes our colleagues unhappy helps us to understand them.
 - Conflict enhances personal development. Managers find out how their style affects their subordinates through conflict. Workers learn what technical and interpersonal skills they need to upgrade themselves.
 - Conflict encourages psychological development—it helps people become more accurate and realistic in their self-appraisals. Through conflict, people take others' perspectives and become less egocentric. Conflict helps people believe they are powerful and capable of controlling their own lives. They do not simply need to endure hostility and frustration but can act to improve their lives.
 - Conflict can be stimulating and fun. People feel aroused, involved, and alive in conflict, and it can be a welcome break from an easygoing pace. It invites employees to take another look and to appreciate the intricacies of their relationships.
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FIGURE 1.2 | Conflict Diagnostic Model

Dimension	Viewpoint Continuum	
	Difficult to Resolve	Easy to Resolve
Issue in question	Matter of "principle"—values, ethics, or precedent a key part of the issue	Divisible issue—issue can be easily divided into small parts, pieces, units
Size of stakes—magnitude of what can be won or lost	Large—big consequences	Small—little, insignificant consequences
Interdependence of the parties—degree to which one's outcomes determine the other's outcomes	Zero sum—what one wins, the other loses	Positive sum—both believe that <i>both</i> can do better than simply distributing current outcomes
Continuity of interaction—will they be working together in the future?	Single transaction—no past or future	Long-term relationship—expected interaction in the future
Structure of the parties—how cohesive, organized they are as a group	Disorganized—uncohesive, weak leadership	Organized—cohesive, strong leadership
Involvement of third parties—can others get involved to help resolve the dispute?	No neutral third party available	Trusted, powerful, prestigious third party available
Perceived progress of the conflict—balanced (equal gains and equal harm) or unbalanced (unequal gain, unequal harm)	Unbalanced—one party feels more harm and will want revenge and retribution whereas stronger party wants to maintain control	Balanced—both parties suffer equal harm and equal gain; both may be more willing to call it a "draw"

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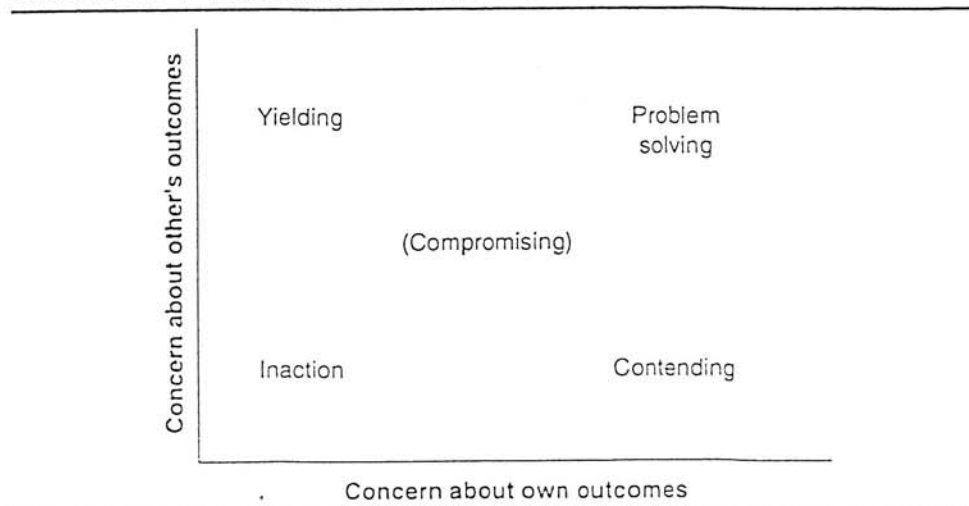
Conflicts with more of the characteristics in the "difficult to resolve" column will be harder to settle, while those that have more characteristics in the "easy to resolve" column will be settled quicker.

Effective Conflict Management

Many frameworks for managing conflict have been suggested, and inventories have been constructed to measure negotiator tendencies to use these approaches.¹² Each approach begins with a similar two-dimensional framework and then applies different labels and descriptions to five key points. We will describe these points using the framework proposed by Dean Pruitt, Jeffrey Rubin, and S.H. Kim (1994).

The two-dimensional framework presented in Figure 1.3 is called the *dual concerns model*. The model postulates that people in conflict have two independent types of concern: concern about their own outcomes (shown on the horizontal dimension of the figure) and concern about the other's outcomes (shown on the vertical dimension of the figure). These concerns can be represented at any point from none (representing very low concern) to high (representing very high concern). The vertical dimension is often referred to as the cooperativeness dimension, and the horizontal dimension as the assertiveness dimension. The stronger their concern for their own outcomes, the more likely people will be to pursue strategies located on the right side of the figure, whereas the weaker their concern for their own outcomes, the more likely they will be to pursue strategies located on the left side of the figure. Similarly, the stronger their concern for permitting, encouraging, or even helping the other party achieve his or her outcomes, the more likely people will be to pursue strategies located at the top of the figure. The weaker their concern for

FIGURE 1.3 | The Dual Concerns Model



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ther party's outcomes, the more likely they will be to pursue strategies located at the top of the figure.

Although we can theoretically identify an almost infinite number of points within the two-dimensional space based on the level of concern for pursuing one's own and the other's outcomes, five major strategies for conflict management have been commonly identified in the dual concerns model:

Contending (also called competing or dominating) is the strategy in the lower right-hand corner. Actors pursuing the contending strategy pursue their own outcomes strongly and show little concern for whether the other party obtains his or her desired outcomes. Pruitt and Rubin (1986) state, "[P]arties who employ this strategy maintain their own positions and try to persuade the other party to yield" (p. 25). Threats, punishment, intimidation, and unilateral action are consistent with a contending approach.

Yielding (also called accommodating or obliging) is the strategy in the upper left-hand corner. Actors pursuing the yielding strategy show little interest or concern in whether they attain their own outcomes, but they are quite interested in whether the other party attains his or her outcomes. Yielding involves lowering one's own aspirations to "let the other win" and gain what he or she wants. Yielding may seem like a strange strategy at first, but it has its definite advantages in some situations.

Inaction (also called avoiding) is the strategy in the lower left-hand corner. Actors pursuing the inaction strategy show little interest in whether they attain their own outcomes, as well as little concern about whether the other party obtains his or her outcomes. Inaction is often synonymous with withdrawal or passivity; the party prefers to retreat, be silent, or do nothing.



"My concession speech will be brief. You win."

4. *Problem solving* (also called collaborating or integrating) is the strategy in the upper right-hand corner. Actors pursuing the problem-solving strategy show high concern for attaining their own outcomes and high concern for whether the other party attains his or her outcomes. In problem solving, the two parties actively pursue approaches to maximize their joint outcome from the conflict.
5. *Compromising* is the strategy located in the middle of Figure 1.3. As a conflict management strategy, it represents a moderate effort to pursue one's own outcomes and a moderate effort to help the other party achieve his or her outcomes. Pruitt and Rubin (1986) do not identify compromising as a viable strategy; they see it "as arising from one of two sources—either lazy problem solving involving a half-hearted attempt to satisfy the two parties' interests, or simple yielding by both parties" (p. 29). However, because other scholars who use versions of this model (see footnote 12) believe that compromising represents a valid strategic approach to conflict, we have inserted it in Pruitt, Rubin, and Kim's framework in Figure 1.3.

Much of the early writing about conflict management strategies—particularly the work in the 1960s and 1970s—had a strong normative value bias against conflict and toward cooperation (Lewicki, Weiss, and Lewin, 1992). Although the models suggested the viability of all five strategic approaches to managing conflict, problem solving was identified as the distinctly preferred approach. These writings stressed the virtues of problem solving, advocated using it, and described how it could be pursued in almost any conflict. However, more recent writing, although still strongly committed to problem solving, has been careful to stress that each conflict management strategy has its advantages and disadvantages and can be more or less appropriate to use given the type of interdependence and conflict context (see Figure 1.4).

FIGURE 1.4 | Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict and Situations Where They Are Appropriate or Inappropriate

Conflict Style	Situations Where Appropriate	Situations Where Inappropriate
Integrating	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Issues are complex. 2. Synthesis of ideas is needed to come up with better solutions. 3. Commitment is needed from other parties for successful implementation. 4. Time is available for problem solving. 5. One party alone cannot solve the problem. 6. Resources possessed by different parties are needed to solve their common problems. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Task or problem is simple. 2. Immediate decision is required. 3. Other parties are unconcerned about outcome. 4. Other parties do not have problem-solving skills.
Obliging	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. You believe you may be wrong. 2. Issue is more important to the other party. 3. You are willing to give up something in exchange for something from the other party in the future. 4. You are dealing from a position of weakness. 5. Preserving relationship is important. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Issue is important to you. 2. You believe you are right. 3. The other party is wrong or unethical.
Dominating	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Issue is trivial. 2. Speedy decision is needed. 3. Unpopular course of action is implemented. 4. Necessary to overcome assertive subordinates. 5. Unfavorable decision by the other party may be costly to you. 6. Subordinates lack expertise to make technical decisions. 7. Issue is important to you. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Issue is complex. 2. Issue is not important to you. 3. Both parties are equally powerful. 4. Decision does not have to be made quickly. 5. Subordinates possess high degree of competence.
Avoiding	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Issue is trivial. 2. Potential dysfunctional effect of confronting the other party outweighs benefits of resolution. 3. Cooling off period is needed. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Issue is important to you. 2. It is your responsibility to make decision. 3. Parties are unwilling to defer; issue must be resolved. 4. Prompt attention is needed.
Compromising	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Goals of parties are mutually exclusive. 2. Parties are equally powerful. 3. Consensus cannot be reached. 4. Integrating or dominating style is not successful. 5. Temporary solution to a complex problem is needed. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. One party is more powerful. 2. Problem is complex enough to need a problem-solving approach.

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LEBANON CONFLICT RESOLUTION NETWORK

RECOMMENDED BOOKS ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION

1. *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In.* Roger Fisher and William Ury. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981
2. *Getting Past No.* William Ury.
3. *Getting Together: Building a Relationship That Gets to Yes.* Roger Fisher and Scott Brown. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988.
4. *The Science of Conflict.* James A. Schellenberg. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.
5. *Interpersonal Conflict.* Joyce L. Hocker and William W. Wilmot. Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown, 1985.
6. *Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ.* Daniel Goleman. New York: Bantam Books, 1995.
7. *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation* : John Paul Lederach .Good Books, Intercourse, PA 17534. 2003.
8. *Interpersonal Conflict* . Hocker ,Joyce and William Wilmot . Dubuque:Brown and Benchmark , 2000).
9. *The Third Side: Why we fight and how we can stop.* New York : Penguin,2000.

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