

Conflict Resolution

Introduction

Conflict is a situation between at least two interdependent parties that is characterized by perceived differences and that the parties evaluate as negative. This often results in negative emotional states and behaviors intended to prevail.

Conflict is an inevitable and all-pervasive element in our society and in the world. Although conflicts may end up in destruction and even death, conflicts may also result in increased effectiveness, enhanced relationships, and further goal attainment. Indeed, in human terms conflict is one of the “engines of evolution” that allows us to learn, progress, and grow. Our goal is not to attempt to do away with conflict but rather to skillfully manage conflict to further its constructive potential.

In this document we will explore definitions and views of conflict and conflict resolution. We will specifically present a generic working model for the effective handling of disputes and differences. Also included are specific strategies to enhance your effectiveness in dealing with conflicts. Strategies that will enable you to resolve conflicts yourself and to assist people in attaining their outcomes without damaging relationships.

The focus of this document is on conflict resolution. A communication process for managing a conflict and negotiating a solution. Managing the conflict involves defusing any strong emotion involved in the conflict and enabling the disputing parties to understand their differences and similarities. Negotiation involves enabling the parties in the conflict to achieve an outcome with respect to their differences.

What is Conflict?

A conflict situation exists when there are: at least two parties involved who are interdependent, who are experiencing strong emotions, who seemingly hold incompatible outcomes or beliefs, and at least one of the parties recognize the incompatibility and perceives this to be problematic.

In conflict parties perceive themselves to have incompatible outcomes. The word outcome in this context refers to what an individual wants: their preferred solution or position. Underlying these positions are interests, the reasons why an individual wants to achieve a specific outcome in the first place. Interests are an individual’s perceptions and feelings about what is desirable or useful. Interests are central to an individual’s behavior and are rooted in human needs and beliefs.

Needs and Beliefs. A need is a primary influence of human behavior. When you experience a particular need, you are motivated to respond and take action. This motivated behavior is the result of the tension, either pleasant or unpleasant, experienced when a need presents itself. The desired outcome of the behavior is the reduction of this tension or discomfort. The behavior is intended to satisfy the need.

A belief is a deeply felt priority that is freely chosen and when acted on by an individual or group is thought to enhance life. A belief or conviction is therefore a choice that is viewed as positive by the individual making it.

A need then is motivation and a belief is a choice expressed in behavior. Observing behavior by itself does not reveal whether it was motivated at the unconscious level by a need or a belief.

Interests can be based on needs or beliefs. They represent what caused an individual to choose, either consciously or unconsciously, a particular solution or pursue a particular desired outcome. An individual's position or outcome in a conflict is usually his or her initial best effort to find a solution to satisfy some underlying interests.

Conflicts of needs grow out of differences in outcomes, person goals, and aspirations of interdependent parties in the presence of scarce resources. Two siblings desiring the same toy are experiencing a conflict of needs, as are organizations trying to reach the same market with their products or services.

Conflict of beliefs grow out of differences in convictions or perceptions about reality among interdependent parties. Ideological conflict falls into this category where contention is rooted in perceived difference in convictions or beliefs, accompanied by strong feelings. Your beliefs, for example, may favor one direction of movement over another. Then again, differences may lie not in direction, but in the methods favored to reach the goal, where people have no interest other than defending their own belief system. To defend your own belief system without attacking another person's is a difficult skill. All parties must focus on utilizing their differences in a common quest for a shared outcome and real solutions.

Conflicts of needs often underlie conflicts of beliefs. In such cases, negotiation and problem solving are useful to resolve the situation. However, conflicts concerning belief cannot always be resolved and must be managed even though no negotiated solutions are appropriate.

Conflicts occur within a context of perceived interdependence. An extreme example is a poker game, where the gains of one party are directly related to the losses of the other(s). If the parties in conflict were not interdependent, that is, if the actions of one party did not have some consequence for the other party and vice versa, conflict would not occur. This helps explain the fear of conflict. At best, conflict disrupts the order and established functioning of the group or personal relationship. However, if interdependence has value for everyone in the system and everyone perceives this, then the interdependence is can offer hope for constructive resolution. In this situation, the interdependence is a force supporting the creating of some mutually acceptable solution for the conflict.

Conflict is a matter of perception. If none of the parties involved in an interaction perceives the situation to be one of incompatible outcome, or if none of the parties perceives the situation to be problematic, then conflict does not exist. A situation of incompatible outcomes by itself is only a potential or latent conflict situation. This chapter concerns resolving actual conflicts expressed by the parties and not the analysis or management of latent conflicts or structural antecedents of conflict.

Consequences of Conflict

Conflict per se is neutral, neither good nor bad. It can have positive as well as negative consequences for the parties involved and for the larger social system of which the disputing parties are members.

Positive Results of Conflict

On the positive side, conflict can bring opportunity, drama, development, and growth to individuals, groups, and organizations, resulting in increased cohesion and trust. It can lead, as well, to more effective personal and organizational performance.

Positive consequences for individuals involved in conflict can include:

1. *Reconciliation of the interests of the disputing parties*: Most conflicts can end with at least some satisfaction of the legitimate interests of the parties involved, usually through some integrative agreement of mutual benefit. Rarely do conflicts have to end in clear-cut win/lose outcomes.
2. *A sharpened sense of identity and solidarity*: As individuals engage in conflict, their sense of who they are as persons, with unique needs tends to be sharpened. As they differentiate themselves from one another, they uncover ways in which they are similar and different. The similarities enhance rapport and a sense of solidarity, the difference help to sharpen a sense of identity.
3. *Interaction*: Conflict tends to promote interaction at an interpersonal level and create a new system of which all parties are instantly a part. As one party change, all the other parties must then change to restore the equilibrium.
4. *Internal change*: As disputing parties experience conflict and engage in dialogue with others of differing needs and beliefs, they are confronted with the prospect of making adjustments in their positions. The pressure to explore new ideas and feelings can challenge an individual to move from rigidity to flexibility, with consequent internal change.
5. *Clarifying the real problem*: Conflicts often emerge around different solutions to a particular problem shared by the disputing parties. As dialogue is conducted and the parties begin to explore the interests underlying the contrary positions, the real problem can be identified and addressed.

Conflicts often involve groups and occur between group members. Conflict can have positive consequences for all group members that are parties to the dispute. Some of them include:

1. *Increased trust*: As individuals enter into any experience with one another in group setting, trust is low, resulting in defending behaviors on the part of group members. In conflict situations this tendency is exacerbated, since the disputing parties perceive the possibility of their failing and being hurt. As individuals share their thoughts and feelings with one another in the group, trust builds, freeing energy previously spent in defending.

2. *Incensed productivity and results:* As conflict is exposed and the parties involved express their thoughts and feelings, the group can be healed of some of the negative feelings that tend to prevail in conflict situations. As the group is freed of diverting emotions and discovers new solutions, its productivity can increase.
3. *Group unity:* Conflict fosters a sense of group unity and identity as disputing parties reconcile individual differences. Without conflict, groups become stagnant and uncreative.

Negative Results of Conflict:

Often the positive benefits of conflict are overshadowed by harmful consequences that result when disputing parties attempt to achieve their goals at the expense of others. Such forcing exchanges often bring about an escalation of the conflict that is difficult to reverse. When forcing methods are used, any of the following negative consequences can follow:

1. Minor differences can escalate into major conflicts involving actions imposed by a power person or group on another, resulting in greater loss to the system as a whole.
2. The number of issues in the conflict can increase, resulting in greater complexity and greater difficulty in managing the situation.
3. Specifics can give way to global concerns, which often cause the person to be equated with and confused with the issue at stake or the entire relationship between the disputing parties to be called into question.
4. The intention can shift from getting a specific interest satisfied to beating the other parties at all costs.
5. The number of parties can increase, making it even more difficult to de-escalate the conflict.

Conflict Outcomes

Conflict always manifests itself in some specific outcomes. Three possible outcomes can emerge:

1. Dominance or imposition, resulting in resentment and sometimes destructive consequences.
2. Withdrawal or avoidance, resulting in resentment and lowered self-image.
3. Compromise of resolution, resulting in at least some of the beneficial consequences being achieved.

These outcomes are dependent on the approach or strategy used to deal with the conflict. The choice among alternative strategies can spell the difference between resentment and mutual respect. These outcomes result from five basic approaches, or strategies, available to address the conflict situation:

Collaboration: A win/win strategy based on problem solving where the interests of all parties can be met. This approach results in maintaining strong interpersonal or inter-group relationships while ensuring that all parties achieve their interests.

Compromise: A mini-win/mini-lost strategy based on a solution that partially satisfies the interests of the parties involved. This approach results in the parties' attempting to win as much as possible while preserving the interpersonal or inter-group relationships as much as possible.

Accommodation: A yield-lose/win strategy wherein one party yields to the other party (or parties) to protect and preserve the relationships involved.

Controlling: A win/lost strategy based on imposing a particular preferred solution on the other party (or parties). This approach results in sacrificing the interpersonal or inter-group relationship to achieve a desired outcome, regardless of the consequences to the other party (or parties).

Avoiding: A lose/lose strategy based on withdrawing and choosing to leave the conflict. This approach results in abandoning both the desired outcome and the relationships involved.

The win/win approach to conflict management is one in which the problem is viewed as external to the persons involved. The opposing parties collaborate to seek a high-quality solution that meets their mutual needs while preserving their relationship. The win/win strategy involves the use of problem solving methods and is generally the ideal approach for managing both conflicts of needs and conflict of beliefs, since it resolves the conflict and results in mutual respect between the conflicting parties.

The other strategies for conflict management, which as a group are called forcing strategies or approaches, are those in which each party tackles the problem separately. When the problem comes between the parties and distances them, one or both parties end up settling for a solution that does not meet their interests. The forcing approaches generally represent less-than-optimal methods for managing conflicts, since they result in resentment and continue to distance the disputing parties from one another.

Emotional Energy in Conflicts

In any relationship, there is an underlying level of emotional energy (that is, an underlying perception of resentment or mutual respect). In a relationship characterized by underlying resentment, destructive emotional energy, or negative feelings (the level of which can vary) the parties are predisposed to engage in conflict. The conflicts that do occur tend to be intense. Resentment can be thought of as unexpressed conflict, which causes feelings of mistrust and distances the parties involved from one another. Such negative feelings often result from:

- Use of inappropriate conflict management strategies.
- Anticipation of future clashes.
- Outward behavior that causes tension.
- Unexpressed apathy of indifference
- Unsettled grievances that have accumulated over time
- Power building by one or both parties.

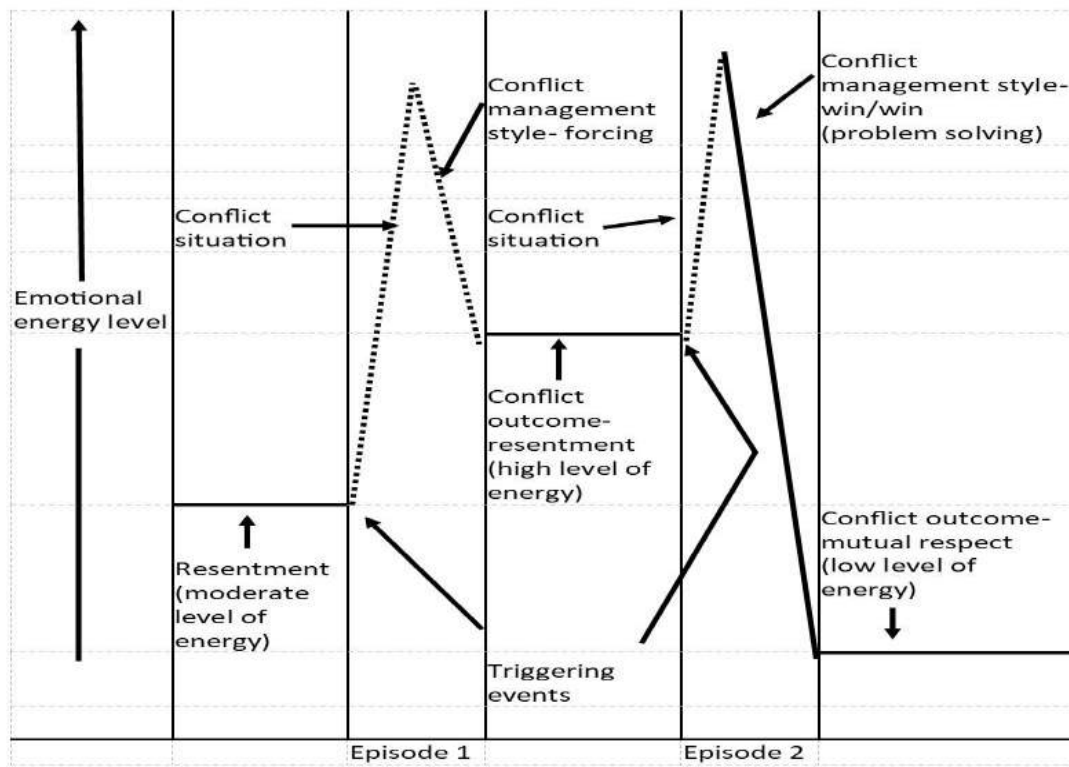
- Stereotyping by one of both parties.

In a relationship characterized by underlying mutual respect negative feelings are usually expressed openly, the conflict is engaged from a positive frame of reference and brought to a mutually satisfying conclusion. Such a situation is characterized by:

- Use of collaborative conflict-management strategy when conflicts are recognized.
- Open expression of thought and feelings
- Anticipation of the other party's needs.
- Acknowledgement and appreciation of the other party's positive behavior.
- Respect for diversity and individual differences.

Figure 1 illustrates part of a conflict cycle, consisting of two episodes of conflict. As shown in the graph, the level of emotional energy in the relationship and the degree of residual conflict are at first moderately high, indicating a moderate level of resentment. The emergence of open conflict in each episode begins with a "triggering event," a precipitating occurrence that shifts the balance of power or changes a situation. The conflict situations themselves are overt expressions of conflict, involving specific instances of infringement, high energy, and expressed strong feelings. The significant difference between the two episodes lies in how they are managed.

Figure 1: Conflict Cycle



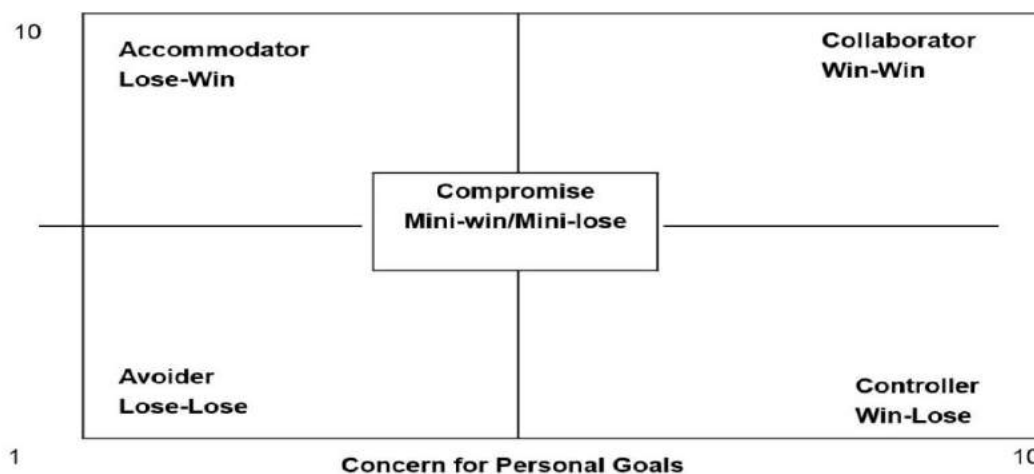
The first conflict episode is handled using a forcing approach, which suppresses the open conflict but results in a considerably higher level of emotional energy than existed at first, a higher level of underlying resentment in the relationship occurs. The relationship is therefore even riper for a subsequent episode of conflict, which promptly breaks out following another triggering event.

The second conflict episode, in contrast is handled using a win/win problem solving approach, which results in lowering the level of emotional energy in the relationship. This increases the level of mutual respect and builds the gravity of the relationship. Use of this win/win approach then not only results in suppression of the overt manifestations of the conflict but alters the nature of the relationship itself, such that future conflicts are much less likely to occur, and those conflicts that do occur are much less likely to be intense.

A Two Dimensional Model of Conflict

The alternative strategies of attending to disputes and differences suggest a two-dimensional model for conflict based on how an individual or group balances concerns around the task and relationship in the conflict situation. There are individuals who shrink away at the first signs of conflict, while others typically confront the conflict and seek a solution in which the goals of all parties are met. There are individuals so concerned about the possibility of damaging their relationship with the other party (or parties) that they concede their interest practically at the first sign of a conflict. Others attempt the “half-a-loaf” tactic, trying to achieve as much of their interests as possible while doing as little damage to the relationship as possible. Still others are so concerned with achieving their interests that they damage or destroy the relationship with the other party (or parties).

An individual’s fundamental approach to conflict is determined by the amount of concern he or she demonstrates for the relationships and for the personal interests of the parties involved in a particular situation. The five strategies, or approaches to conflict, identified in the section on “Conflict Outcomes” are shown in the two-dimensional model of conflict (Figure 2). The conflict strategies, or approaches, represented by the differing degrees of emphasis that may be placed in the relationship between the conflicting parties and on their personal interests can briefly be described as follow: **Figure 2. Two Dimensional Model of Conflict**



Collaborating: the collaborative approach to conflict is to manage it by maintaining interpersonal relationships and enduring that all parties to the conflict achieve their interests. This attitude toward conflict is one in which the individual acts not only on behalf of his or her self-interest, but on behalf of the other party's interests as well. Upon recognizing that a conflict exists, the individual utilizes appropriate problem solving methods to resolve it. This is a win/win posture, in which the stance of both the parties toward conflict management is win/win.

Compromise: The compromise approach to conflict is to assume that a win/win solution is not possible and adopt a negotiating stance that involves a little bit of winning and a little bit of losing, with respect to both the interests and the relationships of the involved parties. Persuasion and manipulation dominate the style. The objective is to find some expedient, mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies the interests of the parties involved. The parties' stance toward conflict management here is mini-win/mini-lose.

Accommodating: The accommodating approach to conflict involves maintaining the interpersonal relationships at all costs, with little or no concern for the interests of the parties involved. Giving in, appeasing, and avoiding the conflict are viewed as ways of protecting the relationships. This is a yield-lose/win approach, in which one's party's stance toward conflict management is to yield-lose, allowing the other parties to win.

Controlling: The controlling approach to conflict involves taking the necessary steps to ensure that interests are met, whatever the cost to the relationships involved. Conflict is viewed as a win or lost proposition, with winning somehow equated with status and competence. This is a power-oriented mode in which one party uses whatever power seem appropriate to achieve his or her own position, to defend a position that is believed correct, or simply to attempt to win.

Avoiding: The avoidance approach to conflict is to view it as something to be shunned at all costs. A central theme of this style is hopelessness, which results in a high degree of frustration for all parties involved. The parties' interests are usually not met, nor is the interpersonal relationship maintained in this approach. This approach might take the form of diplomatically sidetracking an issue, postponing an issue, or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation. This is a leave-lose/win approach in which one party's stance toward conflict management is to leave-lose, allowing the other parties to win.

Three basic points to remember about people's approaches to conflict (sometimes referred to as their styles of conflict) are that:

- People develop their approaches for reasons that make sense to them.
- No one approach is better than another in every situation.
- People change their approaches in order to adapt to the demands of new situations.

Selecting Styles: the approach to conflict you should select is contingent on the circumstances of the particular situation. The specific applications that call for each of these approaches are grouped by strategy as follows, starting with the most preferred approach and ending with the least preferred:

Collaborating

1. When concerns are too important for compromise.
2. When no party has a good solution and merging insights offer possibilities.
3. When complete resolutions are needed, eliminate leftover negative feelings.

Compromising

1. When the goal of outcome of the conflict is not worth the time and energy required for collaboration
2. When a quick and temporary expedient settlement is acceptable.
3. When collaborating does not work out and the conflict cannot otherwise be resolved.

Accommodating

1. When one party has a decidedly better solution (position).
2. When the issues involved are considerably more important to one party.
3. When continued competition could damage the relationship, lead to escalated conflict in the future, and lead to a loss of the relationship.

Controlling

1. When quick, decisive action is vital.
2. When an issue is important and an unpopular course of action needs implementation.
3. When an issue is vital to the long term success of an organization.
4. When the needs of the other party are unimportant.

Avoiding

1. When an issue is trivial in relation to other more pressing concerns.
2. When there is no possibility of either settling or resolving the issue.
3. When one of the parties has low power in relation to the other.
4. When the potential damage of confrontation outweighs the benefits of resolution.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution is a process of managing a conflict and negotiating a solution. It is best understood as a working model with two key elements, conflict management and negotiation.

Conflict Management is a communication process for changing the negative emotional states in a conflict to emotional states that allow working out a solution to the conflict. Negotiation is a communication process for enabling disputing parties to achieve an outcome with respect to their differences.

The win/win or collaborative strategy in conflict requires a special approach to negotiation, interest-based negotiation. Interest-based negotiation is a communication process for developing an integrative agreement that meets the interests of the differing parties.

Resolving conflicts to achieve positive outcomes involves two distinct elements, conflict management and negotiation. The first element, conflict management, deals with the attitudes and strong negative emotions usually associated with a conflict situation. It involves defusing the accompanying emotional energy and achieving a mutual understanding of differences. This

element is often referred to as conflict settlement. Conflict settlement occurs when destructive behavior has been reduced and hostile attitudes lessened. However, the causes of the conflict still remain to be resolved. Once the conflict has been reduced, the next step is to use negotiation or problem solving to arrive at an outcome that satisfies both parties. At this point, the conflict is resolved, that is, the structure of the situation that gave rise to the struggle in the first place is changed and modified so that the interests of all parties are met. Conflict management is then directed toward settlement and negotiation is directed toward achieving the more difficult outcome, resolution.

The material in the following sections of this chapter describe a sequence of actions that are useful in managing and resolving conflicts. We have organized these suggested actions in terms of a model. The model proposes the order in which the skills should be used. It provides a framework for deciding what actions to take at what time and an outcome for each action to be taken during the conflict. It describes what you should do, why, and when.

Principles of Conflict Resolution

Successful conflict resolution is based on the following principles:

- The essence of conflict is the high emotional energy around perceived differences.
- The essence of conflict management is the defusing of high emotional energy and mutual understanding of differences.
- Resolution of the conflict often involves negotiation (problem solving) to bring about an outcome that is mutually satisfying.
- The keys to effective conflict resolution are the ability to:
 - Reflectively listen to ensure understanding.
 - Maintain rapport at all times.
 - Differentiate positions from interests.
 - Work toward resolution based on motivating interests.

Overall Frame: A presupposition of interest-based conflict management is based in an overall frame for conflict that is positive includes:

- Respect and integrity
- Rapport
- Resourcefulness
- A constructive attitude

Respect and Integrity: Respect means that I view every person with unconditional positive regard, regardless of the behavior evidenced by the person. I may deplore the behavior and find it totally unacceptable. I refuse, however, to allow that behavior to contaminate my regard of the others in the conflict as human persons.

I also act with integrity in conflict situations, that is, I am honest and open in all my dealings with the person to the extent that the situation allows. My fundamental perspective is to seek solutions

that are mutually beneficial. I therefore avoid getting my needs met at the expense of the other person.

Rapport: Essential too the effective management of conflict is rapport, the ability to create a relationship of responsiveness and attentiveness with the other. In conflict situations I need to be able to gain rapport and maintain it throughout the conflict resolution process.

Resourcefulness: To be resourceful is to be able to maintain a state of attentiveness and focus in which you have access to those experiences of excellence in your personal history that are relevant to the situation at hand. A state of resourcefulness is typified by a mental alertness, intense focus, and a relaxed demeanor that allows you to function effectively even in stressful situations.

A Constructive Attitude: In conflict situations an attitude of being totally and unconditionally constructive is not only useful but essential. This means that regardless of what others do, you are to act as if they are positively intentioned at some level.

It is possible that others might act in ways to get their needs met at your expense. Even in situations in which others will not engage or use unethical techniques, you are to adopt a constructive attitude throughout the conflict resolution process. This means simply behaving “as if” the others in the dispute will also be constructive. This attitude is infectious and assists the process of gaining a win/win solution to the conflict.

Conflict Resolution Presuppositions: Our conflict resolution processes are based on the following presuppositions (these presuppositions may or may not be actually correct but are useful to accept in conflict resolutions):

- People have the resources to make the changes they wish to make.
- People are doing the best they can at any particular moment in time.
- A mutually acceptable solution is available and is desirable (that is, shared interests).
- Cooperation is preferred to competition.
- The views openly expressed by others are perceived by them to be legitimate representations of their true positions.
- The existence of differing opinions is helpful.
- The disputing parties are capable of competing but choose to cooperate as a consequence of the change agent’s intervention.

Conflict Resolution Model

The conflict resolution working model (Figure 3) is a process comprised of four stages: awareness, self-preparation, conflict reduction, and negotiation.

Figure 3. Conflict Resolution Model**Stage 1- Awareness**

This is the first stage of the conflict resolution model. It involves coming to awareness of the negative emotional states in a conflict. It emerges around the awareness of perceived differences, usually because of:

- An assertion where one party attempts to influence another party or parties to achieve his or her needs.
- One party takes a stand on an issue that is opposed by another party or parties.
- One party attempts to exercise power or control over the actions or behavior of the other party or parties.
- Feedback, where one party gives feedback to another and the feedback is resisted.
- Imposed sanctions, where one party intentionally harms the other to get their needs met.

Stage 2- Self Preparation

This second stage of the conflict resolution model involves accessing a resourceful state, deciding your outcome and planning the steps to achieve it. This stage can take place quickly or involve a considerable amount of time depending on the context.

Assessing and Maintaining a Resourceful State: The most critical step in this stage involves accessing and maintaining a resourceful state. You will first need to “own” and take charge of your own emotions or internal states. A belief tends to exist that emotional states just occur or are somehow controlled by other’s actions or behaviors. I believe that emotional states are chosen by people at some level and are controllable. Owning and controlling your emotional state and then ensuring that you can maintain a resourceful state throughout a conflict situation is essential to successfully resolving conflict.

Eliciting a resourceful state, or any other state, can be achieved in any one of the following ways:

- Memory recall: recalling a time of excellence in your life.

- Shift physiology to match physiology of resourcefulness: recognizing that physiology representation and internal states are connect. Change your physiology to change your state.
- Live access: presenting a stimulus to yourself that evokes a state in the present moment.

Sometime you will need to disassociate or move to an external perceptual position in order to objectify your feelings, gain control over your emotions and act with resourcefulness. In other instances it may be useful to talk about your feelings and thoughts with another to vent and work through them.

In any case, it is useful to separate the people from the problem or issue. A reality in dealing with conflicts is that you are dealing with human beings who have emotions, deeply held beliefs, and difference personal histories. Building a relationship of trust, understanding, and respect is essential to having conflicts managed well and outcomes negotiated successfully.

In reality, two kinds of interests exist in a dispute: the content or substance and the relationship. Failing to deal with the relationship with sensitivity can be disastrous. The key is to separate the substance from the relationship and place the relationship first.

Dealing with the relationship first means obtaining and maintaining rapport throughout the conflict resolution process. The key is to separate the people from the problem and deal with the people as human beings and with the problem or issue on its merits.

Decide On Your Outcome: In some instances you might have the time to decide your outcome and plan the process before the conflict is managed. In other situations you might find yourself in the moment and will need to manage the conflict and prepare as best you can during the process. Should you have the time, determining your outcome and planning the process is advantageous.

An outcome is what you want to achieve in a particular situation. A particular outcome is a negotiation context often referred to as a position.

Distinguishing between a position and interests is essential for effective conflict reduction. Roger Fisher and William Ury make the distinction clearly in their work *Getting to Yes*, as follows:

- Position: What you decide you want in a dispute or difference- a particular solution.
- Interest: What caused you to decide. Your specific needs in the dispute of difference that prompted you to take a particular position or arrive at a particular solution.

Your position is essentially a specific solution that will achieve your outcome. Underlying your position are your interests. It is your interests, your fundamental needs in a situation, that usually

cause you to arrive at a particular solution. For example, two people at the library are reading in the same room. One wants the window open and the other wants it closed.

Conflict of needs are usually around positions. When people “lock into” positions, the best that can be hoped for is a compromise. The possibility of achieving a collaborative solution in a dispute or difference emerges because of the commonality of the underlying interests of the parties. This commonality promotes integrating the interests to achieve a resolution to the conflict that is satisfying and pleasing to all parties involved.

Knowing what your outcome is and the interests that underlie in a conflict situation will help you enormously in managing conflict and negotiations of mutually acceptable resolutions. An outcome exists for each issue in the conflict. Often more than one issue is present. Your outcome and the interests that underlie will need to be identified for each issue. Make certain that your outcomes are self-dependent. This means that you will define your needs in terms that do not involve the other party. Thus, if the negotiation is unsuccessful, you can attempt to meet those same outcomes in another way.

Process Preparation: After deciding your outcomes, further anticipation of the conflict episode is useful. Anticipate and prepare for the positions and interests of the opposing party. Prepare constructive ways of communicating your outcomes and responding to the positions of the other.

Stage 3- Conflict Reduction

The third stage of the model, conflict reduction, involves reducing the level of emotional energy (diffusing negative emotions) and clarifying to understand the differences. This allows disputing parties to settle the conflict, that is, agree to eliminate destructive behavior as well as negative attitudes and feelings toward each other. This settlement may not be an agreement that resolves all the differences but one that enables the disputing parties to go forward with an understanding of their differences and mutual respect for one another.

The process involves the parties using reflective listening to change the negative emotional states in the conflict to states that are more amenable to resolving disputes and differences. The process also allows the parties to clarify misunderstandings and facilitate movement from a focus on the past to a focus on the future. Explicit in the process is acknowledging the positive intentions of the other parties.

The object of conflict reduction is to achieve a constructive emotional state where all parties have a clear and mutual understanding of each other’s views. If the difference involves beliefs that are intangible, success is achieved when there is a mutual understanding. If the differences are tangible (needs), success is achieved when the parties agree to negotiate and arrive at a mutually satisfying solution.

A useful set of steps for conflict reduction are outlined in Figure 4. The skill of listening is used to diffuse the negative emotions when they arise. The two parties get their positions heard and similarities and differences are clarified.

Figure 4 Conflict Reduction

Listen to others point of view- reflective listening.

Summarize what the other is saying.

Invite them to listen to you.

Express your point of view.

Check their understanding.

Point out differences- agree and disagree.

Continue cycle on points you disagree.

Stage 4- Negotiation

Negotiation is a communication process where each party attempts to influence each other to get what they want or need from each other. Interest based negotiation is a particular form of negotiation where the outcome is to achieve an integrative agreement. An integrative agreement is one in which all the parties get their interests at least partially satisfied.

The most critical step in negotiation is identifying and clarifying interests. This step involves distinguishing between position and interests as described previously.

The components of this stage are:

- Identify the positions of all parties: This involves surfacing the initial positions of all the parties to the conflict. As a skilled person you will need to listen reflectively to each party's position and summarize it to his or her satisfaction. This helps the disputing parties to clarify their often initially confused positions.
- Elicit the underlying interests of all parties: This involves uncovering the interests of each party that underlie their initial positions, that is, the reasons why the positions are held. You can elicit the interests of the parties to the conflict in a number of ways:
 - 1 "Chunking up" the position to interests. This can be done by asking generalizing questions, such as "What reasons cause you to hold that position?" "For what reason does that solution appeal to you?" "For what reason does that position make sense to you?" "What is important about that position?" "What will that Solution give you?"
 - 2 Listening with a "third ear" to the possible meanings that underlie the positions. This involves being attentive to points emphasized and de-emphasized, the unique words a person uses, and around which specific issues emotional energy rises.
 - 3 Intuiting the interests that are likely to underlie positions based on experience.
 - 4 Inferring interests from what the parties have said or how they have behaved in situations external to the conflict situation.

Asking other who know the disputants about their beliefs, positions, and values observed in other contexts.

Interests occur on a hierarchy range of logical levels: behind every position is an interest and behind every interest is a more general interest. A position is an interest of solution at a very low and specific logical level. Position and interest in this respect are the same but at widely different levels of generality. The movement to a more general interest or to a more specific position is referred to as “chunking.”

Conflict resolution usually requires finding a mutually acceptable solution that meets the interests of both parties. If all parties can see their interests satisfied, movement toward resolution is substantially increased. For example, Jim and his dad had a dispute over a motorcycle. The conflict was resolved with the purchase of an automobile for \$600, which enabled Jim to satisfy his underlying interest in having the independence to climb in the mountains when he wished to do so. By eliciting interests of higher levels of generality, a mutually satisfactory solution was attained.

If an initial position can be chunked up or made more general, the opportunity to uncover mutual interests is increased. Another example of differentiating position from interests was the case of Dave’s car.

Dave decided to sell his ten year old car for \$9,000, a price he chose by examining the asking price for similar cars in the newspaper. A buyer answered Dave’s advertisement and offered him \$7,000 for the car. The positions of the two parties were:

Dave’s position:	\$9,000
Potential buyer’s position:	\$7,000

A compromise might be to split the difference at \$8,000, but this would likely result in some feelings of resentment on both sides. Dave decided that a collaborative outcome was easier and entered into a conflict-management strategy to achieve an outcome satisfactory to both parties. Dave then reflected on the situation, identified his interests, and elicited the potential buyer’s interests. The interests of the two parties are defined in Table 4:

Dave’s Interests	Potential Buyer’s Interests
A price that is just and fair.	A price that is just and fair.
Get the money upon delivery of the car in order to purchase another one.	Get the car right away to take a trip.
Have the potential buyer satisfied so that the potential buyer would not bother Dave in the future.	Obtain the car’s repair records to verify its maintenance history.

As Dave and the potential buyer surveyed their interests, both agreed to all the interests. The only hitch was determining what is just and fair. The two decided to check the N.A.D.A. Used Car Guide to determine a just and fair price by splitting the difference between the retail and

wholesale value for the make and year of the car. Both parties were happy with a price of \$8,400. No feeling of resentment remained.

Summarize and gain agreement on similarities and differences in interests. This step involves summarizing the areas of agreement and disagreement. Focusing on the areas of agreement establishes an “agreement frame,” which emphasizes likeness and similarity and increase the probability of rapport between the disputing parties. If a change agent is involved, then he or she needs to summarize the remaining differences in interests and check each party for understanding.

At this point the conflict may be resolved by pointing out shared interests. Sometimes enough similarity may exist to allow the disputing parties to come to some kind of agreement around the commonality of their interests and thereby settle the conflict.

Now the parties need to move to problem solving around the differences that remain. Problem solving allows the parties to create ideas for joint action that will satisfy the identified interests.

Problem Solving: Conflict resolution most generally requires problem solving. Problem solving in the context of conflict is a joint effort to find a mutually acceptable solution. It is the search for solutions that meet the interests of the parties better than the previously proposed positions. Ideally, the parties involved exchange information freely, work together to identify the issues that divide them, brainstorm in search of alternatives, and collectively evaluate alternatives to reach a mutually acceptable solution with which all parties can agree. When conflicts are intractable, however, such discussions are impractical because of the realities faced by the disputing parties. In such cases a third party can be used to facilitate the problem solving process.

Guidelines for using problem solving in conflict situations include:

1. Define the problem in terms of the interests of the parties:
 - Incorporate the interests identified into the problem statement.
 - State the problem in a way that does not communicate blame or judgment.
 - Test out the problem statement and gain acceptance.
 - Take the necessary time.
2. Identify (and clarify) as many options as possible for the solution:
 - Ask the parties to suggest possible solutions.
 - Treat the disputing parties’ ideas with respect.
 - Discourage evaluation until a number of possible options have been proposed.
 - Separate inventing from deciding.
3. Evaluate options for solution:
 - Discard options that any party perceives as “impossible.”
 - Combine similar options.
 - Prioritize the options.
 - Be open to new options to make sure they satisfy all parties’ needs.

4. Decide on an acceptable solution:
 - Do not push or impose solutions.
 - When a decision appears close, state this so that all parties understand it.
5. Develop an implementation plan (action plan):
 - Decide specifically who does what and by when.
6. Develop a process for evaluating effectiveness:
 - Decide specifically who does what to evaluate implementation of the plan and by when.
 - Incorporate this process into the implementation plan.
7. Explore feelings and reactions to the process:
 - Invite the disputing parties to share perspectives on the process.
 - Share your own perspectives on the process.
 - Allow this focus on the process to move the conflict event to a close.

The following are some important points to remember in facilitating the problem solving process either as an involved party or a third party to the conflict:

- Always invite the disputing parties to use the problem solving method. The parties need to choose the processes they will use.
- Describe the process in one sentence to the parties so they know what will happen.
- Ask permission to take notes and use newsprint so all can see the development of the process.
- Maintain rapport at all times.
- Reflective listen to help the disputing parties get their interests stated and met.
- Write down every solution suggested in brainstorming.
- Be open to unusual solutions.
- Do not settle for a solution that doesn't meet at least some of the interests of all parties.
- Respond to your own emotional reactions during the process.
- Be sensitive to the others involved.
- Be congruent and express respect and empathy.

Some suggestions for breaking deadlocks in the problem solving process include:

- Go back to brainstorming to generate additional options.
- Go back to initial identification of interests and attempt to restate the problem.
- "What's blocking us?"
- See whether the parties would be willing to sleep on the problem or reflect on it and resume the process later.
- Ask whether further study or more data would be helpful.
- Call in an outside consultant with content expertise.
- Inform the parties of the consequences of failure to meet time constraints if there are sufficient reasons why a solution must be reached immediately.

- See whether the parties would be willing to try one of the proposed solutions for a period of time.
- Take a “first step.” Leave some areas unresolved for later discussion.

Problem solving is thus an important step in the negotiation and conflict resolution model presented in this section. Overall the stages are to prepare for the conflict, to manage the negative emotional energy in the conflict, and to negotiate acceptable agreements. Negotiation involves the identification of interests and problem solving to identify acceptable joint agreements.

Conclusion

Conflict is characterized by perceived differences and negative emotional states. The issues in conflict can be thought of as tangible and intangible, as needs or beliefs. Conflict often results in destructive ends but it does not have to. Collaboration and compromise are usually available as alternatives in a conflict situation. Pursuing these ends in conflict is called conflict resolution.

To manage conflict successfully, we propose that the negative emotions that accompany conflict be managed by the strategic use of reflective listening. The differences in needs that underlie the conflict can best be dealt with by interest-based negotiation. Solutions are found when conflicting parties surface the interest behind their positions. The problem solving process is used to allow the free creation of ideas that will best meet the needs to the two parties.