THE GREAT COURSES®

Topic
Professional

Subtopic
Communication
Skills

The Art of Conflict Management: Achieving Solutions for Life, Work, and Beyond

Course Guidebook
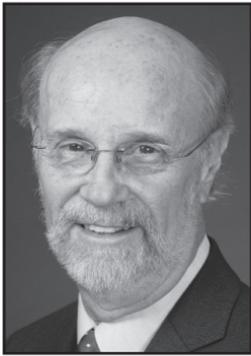
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Professor Michael Dues, a veteran teacher and scholar as well as an experienced organizational consultant, teaches courses in conflict management, argumentation, and organizational communication. He has served as head of the Department of Communication at the University of Arizona; as chair of the Department of Communication Studies at California State University, Sacramento; and as president of the Arizona Communication Association.

Professor Dues received his B.A. in History from Bellarmine College (now Bellarmine University) in Louisville, Kentucky; his M.A. in American History from the University of Louisville; and his Ph.D. in Communication and American Studies from Indiana University. Midway through his 40-year career, he spent a decade serving as a successful full-time consultant, working with both public and private organizations on the human aspects of management. Professor Dues also served seven years as an ombudsman for the University of Arizona. In his work on conflict, he draws not only on academic studies but also on his broad experience as an administrator, consultant, and practitioner.

Professor Dues has been honored by the University of Arizona and Cal State, Sacramento, for consistently excellent teaching. He has also written for academic and trade publications. His books include *Boxing Plato's Shadow: An Introduction to the Study of Human Communication* (McGraw-Hill, 2001) and *The Practice of Organizational Communication* (McGraw-Hill Primus, 1999), both coauthored with his spouse, Mary Brown; and *The Pursuit of Probable Truth: A Primer on Argument* (Pearson Custom, 2009). ■

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SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

The Art of Conflict Management:
Achieving Solutions for Life, Work, and Beyond

Scope:

Conflict occurs in all human relationships. Handled badly, it harms individuals, relationships, organizations, communities, and nations. Handled well, it helps identify and solve problems and build stronger, deeper relationships. Throughout human history, cultures, governments, tribes, organizations, and families have developed mores and rules for handling conflict with the intention of limiting the harm conflict can do and securing the benefits of stable and productive relationships. Why, then, are so many human conflicts handled badly? Can't we do better? Many of the rules and mores developed over time have been helpful, yet hardly anyone would claim that humans in general are good at managing conflicts.

Shortly after World War II, scholars and professional practitioners (mediators, counselors, ombudsmen, consultants, and attorneys) began a concerted effort to better understand conflict and develop better ways to manage it. In recent decades, social scientists have joined this effort. From Morton Deutsch's concept of "win-win," to Roger Fisher and William Ury's "principled negotiation," to John Gottman's study of conflict in intimate relationships, we will explore insights into the nature of conflict provided by these researchers.

In the first part of this course, we'll focus on understanding the nature of conflict, including the roles of perspective, emotions, goals, and power. We will study different conflict styles, some much more effective than others, and describe specific ways to manage conflict and negotiate agreements more successfully—with less damage and more gain.

We'll then focus on the two most common relational contexts in which conflict occurs and where it matters most—our close personal relationships and our work relationships. We'll look at the pivotal role of managers in

dealing with conflict in the workplace and devote time to understanding how and where to get and give help in managing conflicts.

After considering the daunting challenges involved in confronting major moral and cultural conflicts, we will look at ways to better manage conflict's aftermath—after a "resolution" has been achieved—and at how to teach our children about constructive conflict management.

The primary aim of this course is to offer new insights into the nature of conflict and the challenges and opportunities conflicts present, including an appreciation of the serious scholarly efforts to find more effective ways to manage conflict. As you move through the course, you'll learn practical tips, tools, and techniques to better handle conflict in your personal and professional lives. ■

Why Conflict Management Matters
Lecture 1

Conflict is going to happen; it's going to do damage. We surely have reason to handle it as well as we can in order to minimize the damage that we do.

Scholars and professionals have been studying **conflict management** intensely since about the mid-20th century, and they've generated some new thoughts based on research that can help us understand what's going on in a conflict, elements that we may be juggling as we deal with conflict, and what specific things we can do to get better results from conflicts. Note, however, that there is no easy recipe for managing conflict.

We begin with some dramatizations that help us define the term "conflict." **William Wilmot** and Joyce Hocker give us a long version of this definition in their textbook *Interpersonal Conflict*: "an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals." A shorter definition of conflict might be that it is a "discomforting difference." The Wilmot and Hocker definition has most of the five elements that are always present in a conflict: (1) interdependence (meaning that the behavior of one party has an effect on the other), (2) difference, (3) opposition, (4) expression, and (5) emotion.

Why do we need to handle conflict better than we do? First, we want to avoid the harms that can come from conflict, and second, we want to reach the benefits that can come from it. To avoid the harms that stem from conflict, we have to face the "Four Awful Truths": (1) Conflict will occur; it is inherent in human interaction; (2) conflict always involves some risks and costs; (3) the damage that occurs in conflict results not so much from the conflict itself but from the dysfunctional strategies that we use to deal with it; and (4) some of the damage that occurs in conflict is irreversible.

Of course, there is also a positive side to conflict. It brings to the surface problems that we didn't see before, which can be especially useful in

organizations. Going through conflict deepens our understanding of one another and enables us to improve our relationships.

Later in the course, we'll talk about examples of successes in resolving major conflicts, such as the Camp David Accords that led to the 1979 peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. Another way we have achieved success in handling conflict is through research. In fact, conflict management is a major area of research in psychology, sociology, communication, and organizational management. Some of the questions that have been explored include the following: In order for one party to win in a conflict, does the other party have to lose, or do the two parties have to compromise to keep one from losing? What are we really after when we engage in conflict? If we want to reach a good resolution, what should we focus on in negotiating?

Keep in mind that there is also a positive side to conflict. It brings to the surface problems that we didn't see before, which can be especially useful in organizations.

It's important to note that when we try to change the way we think about or behave in a conflict, we're not writing on a blank slate. The fact is that we started learning to manage conflict early, and those lessons do not just go away because we've done some research or listened to a lecture. We learn to deal with conflict from our culture, from our families, and from organizations. Probably your first lesson in managing conflict came from your family, when you were in your "terrible twos" and you decided to try out saying "no" for the first time. You've been learning to manage conflict ever since.

Some of what we have learned from our families, our culture, and our organizations works well, but some of our ideas about conflict and the ways we deal with it are misguided. For example, it's not true that if you're in a love relationship, you shouldn't have conflict, or that the person you're having a conflict with is your enemy; conflict most commonly occurs among couples, family members, friends, or colleagues. Some people think that "winning" a conflict requires having more power than the other party. But the only power

two parties need in a conflict is a sufficient degree of interdependence to make it worth each person's while to work things out. Finally, it's not true that conflicts are just communication problems. Communication is almost always essential in resolving conflicts, but it's rarely a solution in itself. ∎

Name to Know

Wilmot, William: Author of *Artful Mediation* and co-author of *Interpersonal Conflict* and *Innovation: The Five Disciplines for Creating What Customers Want*. Wilmot serves as a teacher, consultant, facilitator, and coach.

Important Term

conflict management: Any and all actions people use in dealing (or not dealing) with a conflict, including resolution.

Suggested Reading

Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*.

Wilmot and Hocker, *Interpersonal Conflict*.

Assignments

1. Identify where, when, and how you learned your most compelling early lesson about dealing with conflict. What was that lesson?

2. Think of two or three examples of conflicts you have experienced.

The Adversary System
Lecture 2

You're not going to escape the adversary system unless you're a very rare individual in the developed world. We can all be expecting to be involved with it sooner or later, in the court as a plaintiff or a defendant or, certainly, as a juror.

We need to understand the **adversary system** for two main reasons. First, we can't escape it. Across the developed world, we engage in processes to resolve disputes, legal proceedings to settle court cases, and so on. If we want to be effective in getting some of our own disputes resolved, we must be able to use the adversary system. Second, there is a downside to the adversary system that we have to pay attention to, that is, the assumption that a conflict is a competitive event, that in order to have a winner, we must also have a loser.

In the cultures of the Greek city-states of the 6th century B.C., it was normal to go to war every spring and summer. Because the cost of such fighting was high in terms of lives, money, and property, the Greeks ultimately learned to substitute verbal combat for physical combat; some disputes were aired before a judge, who then made an award. Over time, this process was systematized. The citizens of Athens, having suffered the rule of several tyrants, decided that they would bring the adversary system into governmental decision-making; this was the beginning of democracy.

The Greeks placed a great deal of emphasis on human reasoning, and a cornerstone of the reasoning process used by the Greeks is known as the **principle of noncontradiction**. According to Aristotle, this is the idea that "a thing cannot be and not be at the same time." This principle bears with it a sense of reducing things to black and white. It's useful, but there's a limit to this kind of thinking.

As the use of the adversary system grew, **Sophists** emerged, who were originally teachers of **rhetoric** and debate. The Sophists believed that it is a good idea to test truth by having both sides argue against each other.

Plato and Socrates objected to this approach on the grounds that it seemed to privilege winning over finding the truth. Aristotle, however, said that it should be easier to argue a case if you're on the side of truth. The evidence should be better, and the reasoning should be clearer.
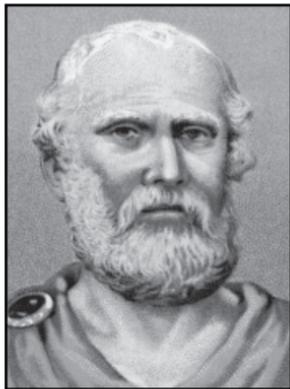
Portrait of Ancient Greek philosopher Socrates.

Over time, the adversary system has been refined and improved. We have professionals who are trained in using the system. We have standards for practice, for arguments, and for evidence. We use the system in courts, organizations, and the political arena. For all these reasons, we need to develop skills in argument.

One of the skills to master for effective argument is to understand **forensic reasoning**. This is the process of comparing the facts of a case against an established general principle, such as a law. Next, you need to learn to recognize the **issue** and, with it, the starting point for the argument. To find the starting point, think of what would happen if nobody brought up the argument. Richard Whately, a theorist of argument in the 19th century, articulated this idea as a "presumption in favor of the status quo."

We presume that the status quo is acceptable unless someone persuades us differently by argument. For this reason, we assume that someone accused of a crime is innocent, and it falls to the government to prove the accused's guilt.

Portrait of Plato.

Another tip for effective **argumentation** is to consider the credibility of your evidence. Always ask: What is the source of the evidence? Do you have reason to accept the testimony of some person or institution as an expert on the issue? Is it possible that this expert is biased or has a conflict of interest?
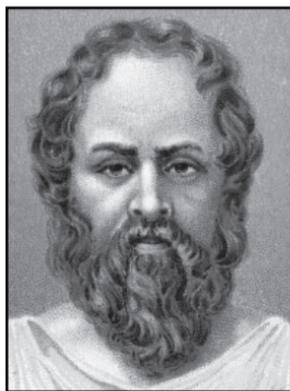
Also, check your own logic; make sure the conclusions you draw flow solidly from the evidence. Of course, you also need to examine your opponent's logic; think about the possible arguments your opponent might bring up and how he or she might respond to your arguments. Finally, in some situations, you may need to get the help of a professional, such as an attorney.

Earlier, we said that the adversary system has a downside: It sometimes privileges winning at the expense of truth. The underlying assumption of the adversary system is that it's competitive, that in order to have a winner, we must have a loser. This assumption is costly, often in terms of relationships; for organizations, it may result in material costs. For this reason, disputants frequently try to settle matters out of court and legislative bodies try to work out a compromise before putting an issue to a vote. ■

Important Terms

adversary system: System of dispute resolution originating in ancient Greece, in which each disputant presents his or her claims and supporting evidence to a neutral third party, who then judges how the dispute should be settled.

argumentation: The study and practice of how people reach conclusions through logical reasoning, that is, making claims based on premises.

forensic reasoning: Observing and documenting the facts in a given case and deciding how the facts relate to an established standard or rule.

issue: A matter of concern that is unsettled or in dispute between two parties.

principle of noncontradiction: Aristotle's law stating that two contradictory statements cannot both be true at the same time; one of the two must be false.

rhetoric: The art of using language to communicate effectively. Aristotle defined rhetoric as the art of finding all the means of persuasion in any given situation.

Sophist: In ancient Greece, a member of a class of roving teachers of philosophy and rhetoric who taught their students to persuade or convince others.

Suggested Reading

Dues, *The Pursuit of Probable Truth: A Primer on Argument*.

Dues and Brown, *Boxing Plato's Shadow: An Introduction to the Study of Human Communication*.

Jacoby, *The Age of American Unreason*.

Assignment

1. Think about your own level of skill in argument. If you don't think you're very good at, take a course in argumentation or do some reading about it. Set an objective for yourself to strengthen your ability to argue rationally and follow through on it.

Morton Deutsch and the Concept of Win-Win

Lecture 3

One of the major goals of this course is to help us identify when conflicts are pure and to seek resolutions that are win-win solutions—true win-win solutions, not just compromises.

Over the course of history, the adversary system became less harmful, although it still rested on the assumption that conflict involves a winner and a loser. In the 17th century, for example, the Thirty Years' War taught Europeans the idea of religious tolerance. The 18th century—known as the Age of Reason—resulted in increased **negotiations** between nations rather than total destruction of one nation by another. But the assumption of competition in conflict wasn't seriously challenged until the mid-20th century with the work of **Kurt Lewin** and his student **Morton Deutsch**.

Lewin, a psychologist, developed a conceptualization of human motivation and behavior in groups called **field theory**, which works as follows: We see ourselves as being in a kind of field, or "lifespace." Other people are also in that field. Our motivation is our movement across the field to reach a destination on the other side. Other people in the field can either help or hinder us in that effort, and the way we interact with these people depends on whether we see them as allies or obstacles.

In the course of studying conflict among group members in the context of field theory, Deutsch defined conflict as: "a condition that exists when Person A makes a move that makes it harder for Person B to reach his goal." However, Deutsch noticed that in task-oriented groups with shared goals, most conflict arose over how to achieve the goals, not from the fact that one individual was blocking another's way in reaching an individual goal. Deutsch realized that conflict might be beneficial to groups in finding better ways to reach their shared goals. Findings from a related field, **game theory**, also showed that people tend to compete rather than cooperate in conflict situations.

Deutsch defined two kinds of conflict: competitive conflict, a situation that requires one party to lose in order for the other to win, and pure conflict, a situation in which both parties can fully win. An argument between the head coach and the offensive coordinator over what play to call in order to win a football game is a classic pure conflict. They both have the same goal; they're either going to win or lose together.

> It's also a mistake to immediately resort to figuring out a compromise. You shouldn't chase "no win-no lose" when you could be chasing "win-win."

The possible outcomes in conflicts are: (1) win-lose (competitive), (2) no win-no lose (that's a compromise or a tie, which is still competitive), (3) lose-lose, and (4) win-win. Deutsch found that most conflicts are pure conflicts, which means that we can pursue a **win-win solution**; both parties can negotiate, and neither has to lose. This idea has been the cornerstone of research in conflict management.

What are the practical lessons we can learn from Deutsch? First, whenever you encounter a conflict with someone with whom you have shared goals, try to identify the shared goals and see how you can help each other to reach them. Second, try to treat conflicts as problems or challenges that you can work on together with the other party to achieve a solution for both. Unless you really don't care about the other party, it's a mistake to engage in verbal combat, as if you're trying to win the game at the other party's expense. As we'll see in a later lecture, it's also a mistake to immediately resort to figuring out a compromise. You shouldn't chase "no win-no lose" when you could be chasing "win-win."

More than half a century since Deutsch's breakthrough, the idea of win-win still hasn't penetrated society to any great extent. Research has shown that humans are much more complicated than Lewin's field theory or Deutsch's concept of win-win fully recognized. You might try for a win-win solution and find that your views about what's going on in a conflict differ considerably from those of the other party. Further, in any given situation, we don't have just one shared goal; each of us has multiple complex goals, some of which we're not even conscious of and some of which may be in

conflict themselves. Perhaps our greatest limitation in working toward win-win solutions is that each of us comes to the table with deep-seated ideas about conflict and powerfully ingrained strategies. Writing over the lessons we've learned since early childhood is an exceptionally difficult task for human beings. Throughout this course, we'll look at important research findings that will help us push back against those early lessons and reach new understanding about conflict. ■

Names to Know

Deutsch, Morton: Considered the founder of modern conflict management theory and practice.

Lewin, Kurt: One of the pioneers of modern social psychology and applied psychology.

Important Terms

field theory: Theory developed by Kurt Lewin, which holds that human behavior is a function of both an individual's psychological field, or "lifespace," and the social environment at the time the behavior occurs.

game theory: A mathematical method for analyzing how people make decisions in situations involving competition and conflict. Involves choices in which each party may gain or lose, depending on the others' choices.

negotiation: A process of achieving agreement or resolving disputes through discussion.

win-win solution: A conflict solution in which the outcome is favorable for both parties.

Suggested Reading

Deutsch, *The Resolution of Conflict: Constructive and Destructive Processes*.

Assignment

1. Work on getting past the *slogan* "win-win." Try to remember the last two or three times you heard or used the term. Consider whether the person using it understood the meaning of the term and used it accurately. If the term was used at less than full strength, what would have been the difference if both parties really understood the concept and sought to accomplish it together?

Perception, Perspective, and Punctuation

Lecture 4

> **We need to understand one another's perceptions and consider what it would look like from their perspective in order to get somewhere.**

One of the most important insights that has emerged in research since Morton Deutsch's development of the concept of win-win relates to the role of perception and perspective in conflict. Conflict does not arise so much from a difference itself but from the perception we have of that difference.

Perception is a cognitive activity in which we assign meaning to the things people say or do or the things we see. In a conflict, the parties usually have differing perceptions about what's going on. One may perceive a difference where there's no real difference, and the other may perceive a *different* difference than the one the first party saw. People get off track in attempting to deal with conflict because they're working with different perceptions of what's really going on. Consider the example of the proposal team at an engineering firm. The team has eight days to prepare a proposal, but half that time is wasted because the team members have different perceptions about their assignments.

We need to develop two skills to help us understand the other person's perceptions in any conflict: **empathy** and **perspective-taking**. Empathy is a communication skill; it involves an awareness of one's own perspective and the ability to see things from the other person's point of view. Psychologists call this ability perspective-taking; it requires adopting the other person's psychological viewpoint.

A concept that's closely related to perspective-taking is **punctuation**. In communication research, this term refers to the timing that parties assign to events. Our understanding of the beginning and end of a certain episode affects the way we perceive the situation. In the example of the proposal

team, Pete thinks the conflict started with Ellen; she asks him for the list of resources, which he can't deliver until he has her project design. Ellen thinks the conflict started with Pete; from her perspective, he hasn't been getting anything done. In reality, the conflict probably started in the team meeting, when assignments were handed out but the sequence of who would pass completed work to whom wasn't specified.

Wilmot and Hocker, in their text *Interpersonal Conflict*, describe the **lens model of conflict interaction**, a tool for understanding perceptions. In a conflict, parties view each other as if they're each looking through a camera lens, and the meaning of the conflict varies a great deal depending on the angle, the direction, and the distance you have from what's really going on. Using the metaphor of the camera lens helps us to look at ourselves and the situation from the other person's point of view.

One problem that we have to be aware of, even using the lens model, is the **fundamental attribution error**. Almost all of us tend to attribute mistakes or failings on our part to external events, but we also tend to attribute the behavior of others to their own character or emotions. Obviously, this can be a significant problem in dealing with a conflict: I'm unhappy with something you did, and I attribute your behavior to your personality, but you attribute it to outside factors that you couldn't help. My perspective will push you into being defensive, because it will feel like I'm attacking your character.
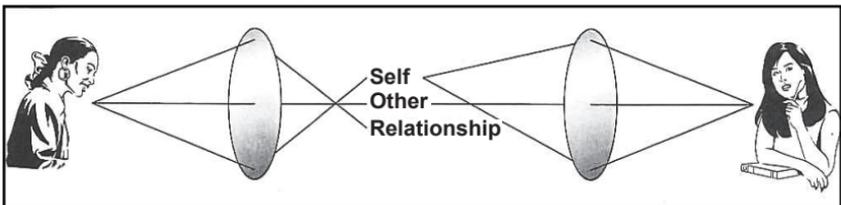

Figure 4.1. The lens model helps us to understand the meaning of conflict, which varies depending on the angle, direction, and distance between you and the object.

We can get beyond the attribution error with person-centered communication, as opposed to position-centered or rule-centered communication. Rule-centered communication, often used in bureaucratic or legal settings, focuses on asserting the facts and their relationship to the rules. Position-centered communication is based on taking a stand and defending it. Neither of these approaches helps the parties arrive at a win-win solution. With person-centered communication, however, the parties are willing to understand the other side, to take into account what the other person is thinking and feeling. This approach requires the ability to question your own perceptions and punctuation of events and to listen to the other party's perspective.

In a conflict, parties view each other as if they're each looking through a camera lens, and the meaning of the conflict varies a great deal depending on the angle, the direction, and the distance you have from what's really going on.

Person-centered communicating does not mean, however, that the objective facts and rules are irrelevant. In fact, in their own way, perceptions are their own set of facts that need to be accounted for, just as rules, deadlines, and standards need to be taken into account. The skills of argumentation we discussed earlier should still be applied. It's also important to note that it takes courage to engage in person-centered communication, to look at a situation and be willing to admit that you may be contributing to the problem. ■

Important Terms

empathy: The skill of being able to understand what another person is experiencing from his or her perspective; the ability to put oneself in another's shoes.

fundamental attribution error: The common tendency to assume that the behavior of others stems primarily from personal character traits rather than the situation at hand.

lens model of conflict interaction: A model illustrating that each party in a conflict has a particular view of himself or herself, the other person, and the relationship; all of these combine to form one's perception of the conflict.

perception: The process of observing and assigning meaning to the things we see.

perspective-taking: Adopting a viewpoint that considers how events might look and feel to the other person.

punctuation: The way each party perceives and defines the chain of events in a conflict.

Suggested Reading

Folger, Poole, and Stutman, *Working through Conflict: Strategies for Relationships, Groups, and Organizations*.

Wilmot and Hocker, *Interpersonal Conflict*.

Assignments

1. Think of a conflict in which you were involved. Apply the lens model to see more clearly how your perspective and, therefore, your perception differed from that of the other party.

2. Identify differences in punctuation of events (what caused a certain event and who initiated it) and notice how changing your punctuation of events in a conflict can fundamentally change your perceptions about that conflict.

Managing Multiple and Conflicting Emotions

Lecture 5

> **There's a difference between feeling an emotion—communicating about emotion—and behavior, and you want to distinguish the two.**

Arising from our perceptions, our emotions are multiple, complex, and changeable, and negative emotions are one of the elements that are always present in a conflict. As we know, the primary emotion here is anger, and humans can be dangerous when we're angry.

In the Western world, we tend to think of ourselves as beings who live by reason, with emotions as a sometimes troublesome element thrown into the mix. Recent studies in the neurology of consciousness and emotion, however, have shown that the reality may be just the opposite. Rather than reasoning beings with troublesome emotions, we're really emotional beings who have evolved an ability to reason that helps us deal with our emotions.

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Happiness (and sadness) are internal facts that exist neurologically.

Think of emotions as internal facts. If you're feeling love or hurt or anger, those emotions are things that exist neurologically. They correlate with physical reactions occurring in the body. Emotions are relevant to any conflict, and they have to be accommodated in the way we deal with conflict.

Emotions occur in reaction to stimuli, which are the perceptions of events that we talked about in the last lecture. The two central elements of emotions are the feeling itself, which can be either positive or negative, and arousal, that is, the strength of the emotion. Note, however, that emotions are mixed

and multiple; we can feel anger, sadness, fear, and guilt all at the same time. Emotions can also mask one another; men, for example, tend to mask fear with anger. If we interact badly during a conflict, we can do damage that may be irreversible or set off an upward spiral of hostility.

To handle emotions in a conflict, start by remembering that an emotion is not a behavior. Being angry is not the same as acting on your anger. Telling someone that you're angry does not require you to scream. Recall, too, that emotion is an internal fact; it's a response to perceptions you are having. You don't need to apologize for or explain away the fact that you feel something. Three interactions between two co-workers demonstrate how emotions can be mishandled: by faking, by hiding, and by acting out. We also

In terms of reporting, you need to take reasonable risks to ensure that your true feelings are known.

see what happens when one of the co-workers honestly and constructively expresses how she feels and offers a suggestion for moving forward.

How can you take emotions into account when trying to resolve a conflict? First, you have to report them to the other party. Second, you need to remember that an emotion is not a judgment about the other party. You have to own it. You don't necessarily know what the other party's motivations and concerns are; you know only that you feel a certain way. In terms of reporting, you need to take reasonable risks to ensure that your true feelings are known. When you're telling someone about your emotions, phrase your remarks specifically as "I" statements. If the arousal level is too high to do that, then step away from the situation for a few minutes to calm down and steer your thoughts away from the conflict.

Here are five requisites for deciding when you can usefully express emotion in a conflict situation: (1) access, that is, the ability to cognitively recognize that you're feeling something and gauge the intensity of that feeling; (2) appropriate verbal communication skills to talk about the emotion; (3) self-esteem, that is, the idea that you have a right to feel certain emotions and pursue your own good; (4) an environment in which it's safe to talk about

emotions; and (5) a willing partner, someone who is willing to listen and work out the conflict. The first three are skills that belong to you; you can develop those. The last two are factors that you can't control; if you don't have a safe environment or a willing partner, you may need to change the overall situation that you're in.

To be a willing partner yourself requires courage and caring. It's difficult to listen when another party is expressing negative emotions without defending yourself or interrupting with your own responses. At the same time, listening to how the other person feels doesn't mean you have to tolerate verbal abuse. Be aware, too, of keeping the conversation level; don't allow your emotions to spiral upward to hostility. Finally, treat the other party's honest expressive emotion as a privileged communication; don't spread that information or use it to hurt your partner. ∎

Suggested Reading

Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* or *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain*.

Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*.

Assignment

1. The next time you find yourself in a conflict, remember to treat emotions as internal facts and report them. Consider what emotions you feel. How can you express them using "I" statements? Try it and see what happens.

Multiple, Complex, and Changing Goals
Lecture 6

Ideally, although perhaps rarely, the perfect thing that we're looking for is for both parties to really understand their own goals and the other party's goals fully. That's what would give us the ideal, the best chance for a real win-win.

J ust like emotions, goals are multiple, complex, and changeable and can be tricky to work with in understanding a conflict. Identifying goals can help us think clearly about the resolution we want to reach and handle the emotions we experience in conflict.

Any particular conflict involves multiple goals, and some of them are more conscious than others. In some cases, goals can be in conflict with one another, or they may overlap. This multiplicity and complexity increases geometrically when we're dealing with two parties, each with his or her own set of goals.

Wilmot and Hocker define a goal as the answer to the question: What do I want? Answers fall into four types. The first is the topic goal, that is, the obvious issue on the surface of the conflict. The second is the relational goal. Conflicts occur between people who are interdependent, and those people have goals relative to that relationship. Relational goals address the question: How do I want to be treated in this relationship? The third type of goal is the identity goal; this refers to how you want to be perceived and how you want to perceive yourself. The last type of goal is the process goal: How do I want to resolve this conflict?

Topic goals are usually what trigger our awareness of a conflict and tend to be readily identifiable. These goals represent the issues that we perceive in terms of the element of frustration in our definition of conflict. Topics goals are also most likely to be perceived as being incompatible with the other party's goals.

The relational goal represents how we want to be perceived and treated in a relationship with another party. It's often pursued indirectly through topic goals. Your spouse may disagree with you on an issue, but you want that person to treat you as an equal and to show that he or she cares about you. The relational goal may be the real driver behind the topic goal of a particular conflict, or it may be in conflict with the topic goal.

The relational goal may be the real driver behind the topic goal of a particular conflict, or it may be in conflict with the topic goal.

The identity goal is often overlooked, but it can be the most important. We're all working out our identities as we go through life on any given day. In every conflict, that identity tends to be challenged. Of course, the identity goal may be pursued through a topic goal or a relational goal, or it may require us to choose between topic and relational goals. Process goals are driven by the other three types and represent multiple options for resolving conflicts.

Identifying and clarifying all these goals is an important first step in any negotiation. Understanding your goals will help you stay on target and ensure that you don't sell yourself short. At the same time, knowing your goals makes it easier to be flexible and adapt to the other party's interests.

When you're in a conflict situation, you first need to determine what you want in terms of the topic goal; try to state a satisfactory outcome of the conflict for yourself. Next, look at the relational goals and repeat the process. Ask: How do I want to be treated in my relationship with the other party? Then consider how that answer relates to the topic goal. Do the two fit or clash? If they clash, which goal is more important? With the identity goal, examine how you want to think of yourself and how you want the other party to perceive you, not only in this situation but in general.

As you're working through this process, keep in mind the perceptions we talked about in Lecture 4. Your goals result in part from your perceptions, so question yourself about that aspect of the conflict. Is your perception based on accurate information? Is your punctuation of the situation correct? Finally,

you need to think about the process goal: How can you go about resolving this conflict? We'll talk more about process goals in future lectures; for now, we look at several dramatizations to identify the goals of the various people in conflict.

Identifying goals is a rigorous intellectual effort that necessitates thought and calmness. The kind of thinking required to explore your goals is not necessarily what you usually engage in during a conflict. Instead of thinking about goals, most of us tend to stew about the conflict or rehearse clever things to say. We really need to return to Deutsch's insight that we're looking for a win-win solution and that we can often find it if we can clearly identify our goals. ■

Suggested Reading

Wilmot and Hocker, *Interpersonal Conflict*.

Assignments

1. For one of those conflicts, try to identify the topic, relational, and identity goals of each party. These lead to process goals.

2. Consider whether the lens model might help you see the perspectives and perceptions of each party more clearly. Then look again to see if you can now identify more possibilities for win-win solutions.

Power—How Much We Need and How to Use It
Lecture 7

This distributive way of thinking about power ties to that old concept of win-lose, because if I have more, that means you have less. If you get more, that means I have less, so it's that win-lose idea of power carried through into win-lose in a conflict.

Every conflict, even those with loved ones, involves a power struggle. Power can be defined as the ability to cause or influence an outcome. Notice that it is not the ability to control a situation. Control is always limited and is often an illusion.

Understanding power returns us to the notion of interdependence. In an interdependent relationship, each party has some power over the other in the sense that each of us controls consequences for the other. We can behave in ways that will have effects on the other person.

We can identify three basic kinds of power: (1) personal power, such as talents, skills, or knowledge that we may have; (2) relational power, that is, the power that derives from the nature of the relationship between the parties; and (3) situational power, the conditions in the conflict situation that give power to one party or one issue more than another. Most conflicts involve a mix of these three types of power.

A common mistake in thinking about power is the idea of distributive power, that is, that a set amount of power is available and that more power to one party means less to the other. Other misconceptions are that lack of power is a matter of moral weakness or that lack of power is the same as innocence. The fact is that simple possession and exercise of power is neither right nor wrong; it just is. It's also true that we give away power in many situations—to be liked, to be promoted, and for other reasons.

In the 1950s, John French and Bertram Raven identified five bases of power, or **power currencies**. Reward power is what we get from our ability to give rewards, and coercive power, from the ability to punish. Legitimate power

is either explicitly given or assumed to be legitimate based on recognized cultural roles. A supervisor in an organization has legitimate power, as does a parent. Referent power derives from the people we're associated with, and expert power is based on expertise or knowledge. Scholars from other disciplines have put forth variations on this list of power types, but the important point to remember is that both parties have power in any conflict and that power derives from the interdependence between the two parties in general and the particular situation they are in.

In strategic planning, organizations consult their stakeholders because the two entities are, in some sense, interdependent, and thus, stakeholders have power to affect the organization's ability to carry out its plans.

The concept of stakeholders used by large organizations in strategic planning can help clarify interdependence in a conflict. A stakeholder is a person or group that has a stake in what the organization does and has an effect on the organization. In strategic planning, organizations consult their stakeholders because the two entities are, in some sense, interdependent, and thus, stakeholders have power to affect the organization's ability to carry out its plans.

In a conflict, you do not need more power than the other party in order to get your needs met and the conflict resolved. What you need is sufficient interdependence between the two parties, like the organizational stakeholders, such that there is a reason to devote time and energy to working the issue out to a satisfactory solution. The concept of leverage helps to evaluate this aspect of a conflict. Your leverage is the other party's stake in your satisfaction with the solution. Of course, the other party has some leverage with you, as well; to move through a conflict, you need to understand the stakes for both parties.

Research has shown that the most important thing to understand about power in a conflict is this: The more equal the conflicting parties are in power, the better the chances are of working out a win-win resolution. Conversely, the

greater the disparity in power between the two parties, the less likely they are to achieve a lasting, satisfactory solution.

How can we equalize power? If you've got more power in a conflict, you should exercise restraint and explicitly recognize the interdependence that's in play. Successful managers understand that they must treat employees as having power and importance of their own. It's also helpful to be aware of the limitations of your power; remember that control is often an illusion and that in any relationship, both parties have power.

If you have less power in a conflict, it's important to stay engaged and keep speaking up. Research shows that if you do that, your power will grow and the other person will begin to listen to you more. You can also gain power by seeking allies or by building your knowledge and increasing your personal skills.

Finally, in either situation, you have to recognize the power you have and be willing to act on it. That willingness often motivates the other person to negotiate toward a win-win resolution. ■

Important Term

power currencies: Various sources of power that may be used to influence outcomes of social interactions, originally introduced by French and Raven in 1959.

Suggested Reading

Folger, Poole, and Stutman, *Working through Conflict: Strategies for Relationships, Groups, and Organizations*, chap. 5.

Assignments

1. Try using the concept of leverage. Think of a conflict you recently experienced and ask yourself: What was the other party's stake in my satisfaction with the outcome? Notice whether you actually had choices to make about consequences for the other party.

2. Consider whether you could have increased your leverage, and if so, how you could have done that. Get in the habit of assessing and being comfortable with your power in a conflict.

Conflict Styles
Lecture 8

What I really want—my objective—is to have skill in all five of those modes of conflict management so that I can choose the one that best applies to the situation and the relationship.

In managing conflict, most people appear to operate with a repertoire of one or two default strategies, regardless of the specific situation or whether the strategies result in win-win outcomes. Scholars in the field call these strategies **conflict styles**.

In the mid-1960s, two management theorists, Robert Blake and Jane Mouton, developed a theory of management styles based on a grid. In the 1970s, **Kenneth Thomas** and **Ralph Kilmann** applied the earlier theory of management styles to managing conflict. These researchers identified five conflict strategies and arranged them in a model according to the degree to which each reflected "concern for self" and "concern for the other person" and the degree to which each represented cooperativeness or non-cooperativeness.

The first of Thomas's and Kilmann's conflict styles is avoidance, that is, acting as if the conflict isn't present. This style results in a lose-lose resolution. The second style is competition, one party attempting to get what he or she wants at the other's expense. This is a win-lose strategy. The third style is compromise, a no win-no lose strategy in which both parties give something up. Accommodation is the fourth style; here, one party gives in but doesn't get anything in return, resulting in a lose-win resolution. Finally, the fifth style is collaboration, that is, working together with the other party to achieve a win-win outcome. This is the best strategy, but it's certainly not the most common conflict style in use, and it may not work all the time; it may be impossible to get the other party to cooperate. We should also note that most people don't use a single style; most of us tend to follow a pattern of conflict styles, using one as a primary strategy but falling back on a different style if the first one doesn't work.

This model can help us observe the styles and patterns we use, and once we're aware of these patterns, we can expand our repertoire so that we can respond with strategies that are better suited to specific situations and relationships. The objective here is to develop skill with each style.

More recently, **John Gottman**, a psychologist, has developed a typology of what he calls "bids" and "responses." A bid is one party communicating with another, seeking a response of some sort. If that communication is about a conflict, the bid would be an effort to negotiate a compromise or to collaborate. The three types of responses that the first party might receive are characterized as turning toward, turning away, and turning against. Turning toward acknowledges and validates the bid; it moves toward closeness in the relationship. Turning away is an indifferent response and creates distance between the parties. Turning against acknowledges the bid but rejects its validity. This is a hostile response, and it creates hostility in the receiving party.

Gottman's work is primarily in close personal relationships, but his model can be applied to other types of associations, as well. Our responses to others should make it clear that we want to hear what they are saying and that we're
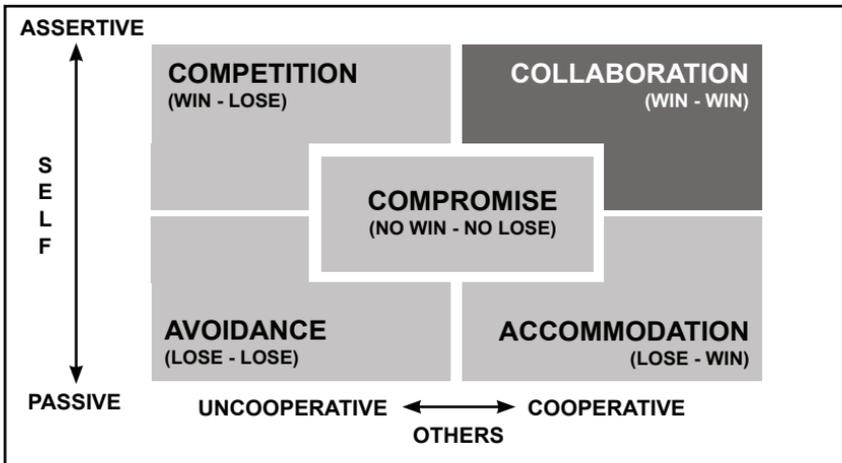
Figure 8.1. Thomas-Kilmann conflict style model.

happy to work together to resolve conflicts. Turning toward is not always easy, but Gottman tells us that it is the best response most of the time.

How can we relate Gottman's work to the five conflict styles of Thomas and Kilmann? Collaboration is clearly turning toward, and compromise is, as well, but compromise sets limits and boundaries. Accommodation might appear to be turning toward, but it's not good for the relationship and it doesn't help to resolve conflicts; in many cases, it's another version of avoidance. Competition is most obviously turning against, but it can also be turning away. Turning away can be a power game, as in not letting the other person in on what's going on. In the same way, avoidance is turning away, but it can also involve competition in that it's a way to show less respect. In conflict management, the most consistently effective strategy is the correlate of collaboration: turning toward. ∎

Names to Know

Gottman, John: Well known for his groundbreaking research on marital stability, Gottman is a professor of psychology emeritus at the University of Washington and currently heads the nonprofit Relationship Research Institute.

Kilmann, Ralph: A consultant and author of 15 fifteen books and more than 100 articles on organizational design and conflict management.

Thomas, Kenneth: Has taught as a professor of management at UCLA, Temple University, and the University of Pittsburgh.

Important Term

conflict styles: Default strategies for managing conflicts that people tend to employ across different situations.

Suggested Reading

Gottman and DeClaire, *The Relationship Cure: A Five-Step Guide to Strengthening Your Marriage, Family, and Friendships*.

Wilmot and Hocker, *Interpersonal Conflict*, pp. 130–177.

Assignments

1. Identify your own default conflict style. How does it limit your ability to resolve conflicts?

2. Discuss with someone with whom you have a close personal relationship how you respond to each other in a conflict; do you turn toward, turn away, or turn against?

Dysfunctional Conflict Strategies
Lecture 9

Everybody knows revenge feels good. One of the things I love about Aristotle is [that] when he listed what he called his seven causes of human happiness, he put revenge on his list.

I n the last lecture, we talked about conflict styles and the fact that we need a full repertoire of strategies we can use depending on the specific situation. In this lecture, we'll look at **dysfunctional conflict strategies**, that is, those that have harmful side effects or excessive costs that may outweigh the desired benefits.

The first of these strategies is avoidance, which we saw in the last lecture. Avoidance can take a number of forms, such as hoping the problem will blow over or changing the subject. Of course, such tactics can result in harmful effects; most of us know that problems not addressed often fester and get worse. Further, avoidance can result in losing one's credibility for dealing with problems. In some cases, however, avoidance may be a useful strategy. For example, if you feel that the other party has more power and will impose an unwanted resolution, it may be wise to avoid the problem if possible.

In withdrawal, one party who has a conflict with another tries to reduce or eliminate interaction to avoid addressing the conflict or to punish the other party. Tactics used for withdrawal include avoiding eye contact and speaking in a flat unemotional tone. The person on the receiving end of withdrawal feels hurt and confused and may become resentful or may reciprocate. The relationship may be damaged, and the original problem remains unsolved. Again, there may be some situations in which withdrawal is useful, specifically, if you need to withdraw temporarily from a conflict to calm down.

The strategy of imposition involves the direct exercise of power; one party unilaterally imposes a resolution. Imposition can be overt or covert; that is, a manager may use his or her authority to end a discussion or an employee may go behind the manager's back and do things a different way. Imposition

may cause the other party to counter with a greater exercise of power, escalating the conflict. In an organization, this strategy may cause resentment and decrease morale. Imposition may be the best strategy, however, when immediate action is required or when the goals are important and the other party won't cooperate.

Triangulation is defined as complaining to a third party instead of addressing the conflict directly with the other party involved. This strategy can be used to gain an ally and secure a resolution without the other party's participation or just to vent, which we sometimes think of as a beneficial activity. Research has shown, however, that venting can actually make you madder instead of calming you down. The harmful effects of triangulation tend not to appear immediately but to build up over time. In organizations, cliques develop, morale declines, and teamwork breaks down. Tactics of triangulation include complaining under the guise of asking for advice or presenting oneself as the victim and the other party as the villain. Triangulation might be useful to gain an ally in situations where the other party has more power and won't cooperate to solve the problem.

Research has shown, however, that venting can actually make you madder instead of calming you down.

Manipulation may be more subtle than triangulation, but it's equally dangerous. It's using indirect means to achieve a goal without letting the other party know and without regard to the other's interests and goals. Tactics here include planting information with third parties or masking true motives. This strategy usually damages the other party's interests, as well as the manipulator's credibility. Manipulation is a self-centered, deceptive behavior that should never be used.

Absolute framing sets up the conflict issue in black-and-white terms, stating what absolutely must or must not happen or what the other party must or must not do. The tactic here is basically drawing a line in the sand and daring the other party to cross. This strategy precludes mutual agreement and tends

to lead to escalation, but it may be useful in conflicts that require a clear moral and relational stand.

Another dysfunctional strategy is payback or revenge, defined as doing harm to or withholding good from another person in order to balance a sense of wrong one feels. Of course, tactics here can be quite creative, ranging from withdrawal all the way up to murder. A difference in the perception of the harm done tends to cause escalation in conflicts where this strategy is used.

The last dysfunctional strategy on our list may be a surprising one: compromise, that is, negotiating a solution in which each party gives up something. Compromise is often a good strategy, but we should use it only if we have really tried to achieve a win-win resolution and couldn't do so. In most cases, the parties can reach a solution that's better for both of them without having to settle for less. ■

Important Terms

dysfunctional conflict strategy: A conflict strategy that yields unwanted side effects that may exceed its benefits.

triangulation: Drawing a third party into a conflict instead of directly addressing the other conflict party.

Assignments

1. Think through the strategies you used in a recent conflict—and there was probably more than one. Identify the strategies and ask why you used each one and whether it got you the result you hoped it would. What other results—unwanted results, especially to your relationship with the other party—did using certain strategies produce?

2. See if you can document for yourself the harmful effects of a dysfunctional conflict strategy.

Principled Negotiation
Lecture 10

We shouldn't be laying out one option and just choosing yes or no. That's a mistake. That's an error in decision making.

Roger Fisher and **William Ury**, two researchers associated with the Harvard Negotiation Project, have developed four principles for win-win negotiations. The first of these is to separate people from the problem. In other words, focus on events or behaviors rather than the parties involved. The second principle is to focus on interests, not positions. The term "**interest**" here refers to the reason behind the stand someone might take. What are you trying to gain, or what are you feeling frustrated about? The term "**position**" refers to someone's stand on an issue. Fisher and Ury tell us not to take a position and defend it or bargain for it but to focus on the interest behind the position. Keep in mind that both parties in a conflict have interests, and if both can articulate those interests, then they have a shot at reaching a win-win solution.

The third of Fisher and Ury's principles is to generate options for mutual gain. In most conflicts, we tend to put forth one or two options, then try to make a choice from those limited alternatives. Instead, we should brainstorm for multiple options, keeping in mind the goal of mutual gain. When we have a list of options, we move to the fourth principle, which is to base the choice on some kind of objective criteria. Try to identify measurable ways to assess the value of the suggestions.

Consider the example of a married couple, Carlos and Barbara, and their conflict over environmental issues. According to the first principle of negotiation, we should separate Barbara and Carlos from the problem. If we do this, we can easily identify each party's interests: Barbara's interests are to use less water and recycle as much as possible, and Carlos's are to enjoy his long showers and not to have to devote too much thought to recycling. The list of options the two could generate might include installing a low-flow shower head, posting a list of recyclables for Carlos, and so on. The objective criteria for choosing among the options might be, for example, how much water they

can save using the various options they've come up with. Ultimately, they might choose a combination of the options that fits their lifestyle.

Let's look at an example in business. Imagine a small to mid-size organization with an annual budget of $30 million and about 120 employees. The vice president of operations wants to buy a new billing and accounting system, which she believes will reduce errors and save money in the long run. The accounting department likes the current system and believes that it will take too much time to get up to speed on a new system. We first separate the people from the problem: It's not that the VP is overbearing or insensitive or that the people in accounting are resistant to change because it requires effort. Either of those

Keep in mind that both parties in a conflict have interests, and if both can articulate those interests, then they have a shot at reaching a win-win solution.

statements may be true, but it doesn't help to solve the problem if we focus on the people. The issue is: Should the company get a new accounting system and, if so, would it offer gains in efficiency?

The two parties seem to have taken stands on this issue, but recall that Morton Deutsch found that task-oriented groups have shared goals in many more cases than they have different goals. Here, the accounting employees have a legitimate interest in minimizing unnecessary work and avoiding new sources of error, and the VP shares those interests. The parties now need to generate a list of options for accomplishing those goals. The new accounting software proposed by the VP is just one option. Others might include researching other software packages that might require less adjustment or looking at the processes in accounting to see what can be streamlined. Objective criteria for choosing one option or a combination might include person hours, processing time, or startup and training costs for a new system.

Fisher and Ury also developed the concept of **BATNA**, best alternative to a negotiated arrangement. In any negotiation, to identify your bottom line and your power bases relative to the issue, consider what your best alternative would be if you don't negotiate a good arrangement with the other party. If

you know what that alternative is, then you know how hard you can push or whether you need to back off in negotiations. These researchers also draw on martial arts with the idea of negotiation jujitsu: In negotiations, don't meet force with force; instead, draw the other party in and use his or her force. Try to discover the other party's interests, then present your own interests and make suggestions for mutual gain. ■

Names to Know

Fisher, Roger: Professor of law emeritus at Harvard Law School and former director of the Harvard Negotiation Project.

Ury, William: A former professor at Harvard Business School and a founder of the Harvard Negotiation Project.

Important Terms

BATNA: In principled negotiation, this term stands for "best alternative to a negotiated agreement." Each negotiator decides ahead of time what solution he or she will opt for if a negotiated agreement is unsatisfactory or fails.

interests: Reasons underlying a participant's stance or position in a negotiation.

position: A statement of what a negotiator wants or needs.

Suggested Reading

Fisher and Ury, with Bruce Patton, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating an Agreement without Giving In*.

Harvard Business School Press, *Harvard Business Review on Negotiation and Conflict Resolution*.

Assignments

1. Think through what strategies you used in a recent conflict—and there was probably more than one strategy. Ask yourself: What was the strategy? Why did I use it? Did it get me the result I hoped it would? And what other results—unwanted results—especially to the relationship—did it produce?

2. See if you can document for yourself the harmful effects of a dysfunctional strategy.

Preparing and Arranging to Negotiate
Lecture 11

The evidence is actually stronger to support our own behavior changing the way we feel than it is to support the way we feel … driv[ing] our own behavior.

In this lecture and the next, we'll walk through a seven-step process that we can use in applying Fisher and Ury's four principles of negotiation. This lecture covers the steps for preparing to negotiate. The two basic conditions that must be present in order to use this process are as follows: (1) You must be able to define the issue in terms of voluntary behavior from the present moment forward, and (2) the other party must be willing and able to negotiate. You also must be calm enough to do the intellectual work of negotiating.

Step 1 in the negotiation process is to define the conflict issue, that is, state the difference that's bothering you and identify why it's bothering you. Again, the issue must be stated in terms of the other party's voluntary behavior, not in terms of emotions, attitudes, or character, from the present moment forward. Neither emotions nor character are negotiable, although both may be reflected in behavior, which is negotiable. Make sure once you identify the behavior that changing it will fix the problem.

It may be helpful to write the issue down in one of two formats. For personal relationships, John Gottman suggests using the **XYZ formula**: "When you [behave

Without both parties willing and able to negotiate, negotiation is simply not possible.

in a certain way], I feel [negative emotion]." In a professional setting, use this adaptation: "You are [behaving in this way], and that's a problem for me because…."

What if the issue really is a matter of feelings, character, or personality? Remember that these things must be reflected in behavior and try again to identify the objectionable actions. What if the issue relates to past behavior? In that case, ask yourself what you're after. Do you want an apology, a promise not to repeat the behavior, or some kind of compensation? You must bring the discussion into the present. If the issue can't be defined as voluntary behavior, then you can't negotiate. Your options are to accept the current situation, escalate the conflict, impose consequences, get an ally, or exit the relationship.

Step 2 of the negotiation process is to identify and evaluate your goals. Here, you can bring in the earlier types of goals we discussed (topic, relational, identity, and process), as well as Fisher and Ury's focus on interests. Good questions to ask yourself include: Why do I want to resolve this conflict? What is a good resolution for me? How important is it to me that I reach this resolution? How do I want to be viewed by the other party? How does this situation affect the way I view myself? Note that the topic, relational, and identity goals interact with one another.

Step 3 requires you to decide whether or not you want to resolve the issue by negotiating. Consider the degree of interdependence you have with the other party, your leverage, the context of the potential negotiation, the nature of your relationship, the risks of introducing the issue, and BATNA. Once you've looked at all these factors, don't delay the decision. Remember that delaying is one of the most common forms of avoidance. And once you've made the decision, take full responsibility for it. If the negotiation goes well, give yourself credit; if you decide not to negotiate, remind yourself that you chose not to take steps to correct the problem.

You might think that certain conflicts aren't important enough to bother about, but you can use minor conflicts to practice some of the strategies and techniques you've learned in this course. This also establishes a track record for negotiating with others. Be careful, too, not to undervalue your

own importance in the situation; you have needs and goals, just like the other party does.

Step 4 in the process is to arrange a meeting with the other party in order to negotiate. Keep in mind that you've done the preparation for negotiation, but the other party hasn't yet. To just launch into a discussion about the issue can take the other person by surprise and cause resentment. In carrying out step 4, approach the other party directly and privately, preferably in person or over the phone. Label the conflict as a problem and state the issue exactly as you defined it in step 1. Tell the other party that you'd like to find a solution to the problem that will satisfy both of you, then ask when would be a good time to meet, providing a specific timeframe. If the other party counters by raising other issues, agree to talk about these after the initial problem has been solved. Step 4 is a commitment, but remember that you can't make progress if you avoid the problem; you have to step up and start negotiations. ∎

You might think that certain conflicts aren't important enough to bother about, but you can use minor conflicts to practice some of the strategies and techniques you've learned in this course.

Important Term

XYZ formula: John Gottman's useful formula for using "I" statements and avoiding criticism of the other person when communicating during a conflict. Usually stated as: "In situation X, when you do Y, I feel Z."

Suggested Reading

Dues and Brown, *The Practice of Organizational Communication*, chap. 11.

Assignment

1. Think of three conflicts you experienced in the last year. Consider how the issues were defined by the conflicting parties and how they could best be phrased in terms of someone's voluntary behavior—with a focus on the present and the future.

Negotiating Conflict Resolutions
Lecture 12

It's very typical to require more than one meeting and more than one discussion to get an ongoing behavior change and make it stick. You've got to fine-tune things.

In this lecture, we continue with the seven-step process for negotiating conflicts. Step 5 is to conduct the meeting that you arranged in step 4. Come to the meeting prepared to explain your point of view and to offer suggestions for solving the problem, but don't be overly committed to your own solutions. Also come with the mindset that you will listen to the other party's views, feelings, and suggestions. If you asked for the meeting, you should take the lead; begin by thanking the other person for his or her time and willingness to listen. Restate the issue and the purpose of the meeting—to find a solution that works for both parties. Then, ask the other person how he or she wants to proceed. What if the other person attempts to hijack the agenda by raising other issues? As you did in step 4, agree to discuss those issues, but do not put them in front of yours.

As the meeting proceeds, don't allow discussions of feelings or explanations to become repetitive. Stay focused on interests and goals and move forward by pushing in that direction. Of course, it's also important to get suggestions on the table; steer the conversation toward something you can agree on, again, based on objective criteria.

In step 6, you make a **contract**, an agreement between the two parties about what each will do to solve the conflict. The contract must be clear, and it must address voluntary behavior from the present forward because it will hold each party responsible for following through on the agreed-upon terms. It must also be an unequivocal agreement. In your negotiations, verbalize the agreement, then check to make sure that the other party has the same understanding. Ask the other party whether he or she agrees to the contract and confirm your own agreement. In some cases, you may want to specify a time when you will check back to make sure that the agreement is working. A word-of-mouth agreement is generally acceptable in early negotiations. If

the other party consistently fails to follow through on agreements, you may need to put them in writing. In reaching an agreement, the other party may offer a statement that does not relate to clear, voluntary behavior; in other words, he or she says, "I'll try." In this case, push through to identify concrete behaviors that stand behind "trying." What if you just can't find a win-win resolution? If that happens, acknowledge it and consider a compromise.

What if you can't find any acceptable solution, not even a compromise? Deutsch showed that most of the time, you can find a win-win resolution, but not always. If that's the case, you may decide to escalate the conflict or end the relationship.

Step 7 in this process can be more difficult than the first six steps combined. This step involves following through on the contract. Obviously, you must do what you agreed to do and stick with it. You also need to pay attention to whether or not the other party complies with the agreement. If the other party is in compliance, you should express your appreciation for his or her behavior. Without positive feedback, the other party will almost invariably revert to the old behavior. If the other party is not following the agreement, you should arrange another meeting and see if you can adjust the original solution to make it work. If the other party fails to follow through repeatedly, you may decide to escalate the conflict, give up, or exit the relationship. If you're making progress with each meeting, stay with the program, but if you're spinning your wheels, you may have to make a more difficult decision.

Push through to identify concrete behaviors that stand behind "trying."

In some cases, unforeseeable difficulties may arise after you've reached an agreement. If that happens, go back to step 4; explain the problem and ask for another meeting. Finally, hurt feelings or broken trust may linger after a conflict has been negotiated. We'll look at the process of forgiving, healing, and rebuilding in a later lecture.

This seven-step process of negotiation is not a recipe to follow that always results in an agreement. Because every conflict and every person is unique, there is no guarantee that going through this process will result in a good resolution every time. You can't control the other party in a conflict, but you can influence outcomes, and you have a chance at reaching better outcomes through this process. ■

Important Term

contract: A concrete, stated agreement between conflicting parties on what each party will do to solve a conflict and for which each party can be held responsible.

Suggested Reading

Kellett and Dalton, *Managing Conflict in a Negotiated World: A Narrative Approach to Achieving Dialogue and Change*.

Assignment

1. Start with a smaller conflict—one that is not extremely emotional or crucial in your life—and try to apply all seven steps of the negotiating process. Then look for other chances to use the process. Build it into your repertoire for managing conflict.

Listening in Conflict
Lecture 13

Some of the estimates say we run as high as 75 to 80 percent of our communicating activity involved in listening, but we're still not doing very well.

We spend much more time listening than we do speaking, but most of us are not very good listeners, and conflict situations often make listening more difficult. Even when they're trying to communicate, parties in a conflict may feel that they are not being heard.

Listening is a complex task, and it's not passive; it requires attention, focus, and openness to what is being said. Researchers in communication have identified different kinds of messages or different dimensions of messages that come at us when we're in a discussion. The British scholar I. A. Richards, for example, labeled four kinds of messages we receive in communication: sense, feeling, tone, and intention.

The sense of the message is what's on the surface, the words that are spoken. Feeling, such as hostility or indifference, underlies the sense message. The tone relates to the relationship between the speaker and the listener; they may be equals or one may talk down to the other. If the listener rejects the message about the relationship, he or she will probably not process the sense or feeling of the message. The intention of the message relates to why the speaker is conveying the surface message. These four types of messages come at the listener all at once, and they may complement or contradict one another.

In communication, there is always some difference between the message the speaker sends and the message the listener receives. Two researchers, Claude Shannon and Norbert Weaver, developed a model that helps to illustrate the difficulty experienced in matching up those messages. According to the Shannon and Weaver model, a communication transaction has five steps. The source (the speaker) first gets an idea to communicate, then encodes it into words. The communication then travels through some

medium, such as sound waves, to reach the receiver. The receiver (the listener) decodes the communication and holds the idea. We can see that differences arise between the sender and the receiver in communicating even a simple message. In a conflict, psychological "noise" may distort the message to an even greater extent.

What can you do to listen better during a conflict? First, you should appreciate the difficulty of the task and credit yourself and the other party for trying. As a listener, you should assume equal responsibility with the speaker for the transmission. You're working with the other party to try to communicate a message and ensure that the message received matches the intended meaning. You also need to focus fully on the task of listening and attempting to understand; try to disregard psychological noise. It may be helpful to agree with the speaker on a time limit for the communication. As you listen, ask questions to try to draw out meaning and confirm your understanding. Instead of listening for what the words mean, work to understand the meaning that the speaker is trying to convey. A good way to check whether your interpretation matches the speaker's intention is to paraphrase his or her message.
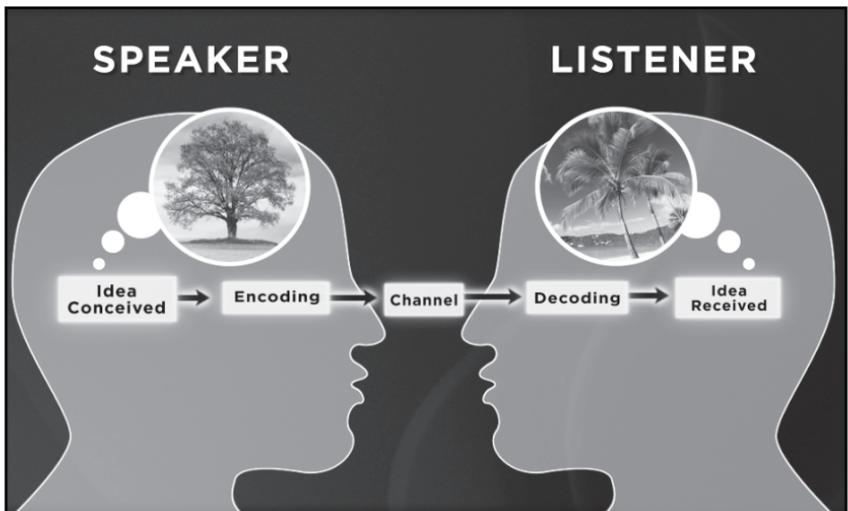

Figure 13.1. The Shannon and Weaver model of communication illustrates how the message that was sent was different from the one received.

As a listener, it's also important that you respond to and reciprocate the message you receive, even if it's painful. Let the speaker know what you intend to do with the information. Communication encompasses a general **rule of reciprocity**. You need to give back information that is equal to what the speaker has given to you.

> **Instead of listening for what the words mean, work to understand the meaning that the speaker is trying to convey.**

In many conflicts, especially heated ones, the speaker may need to help the listener process the intended message. If you're the speaker in this situation, again, acknowledge and appreciate the other party's willingness to listen. Do not challenge or make demands on the listener; confine your message to "I" statements. Then, work with the listener to ensure that your intended meaning gets across. Always remember that saying something is not the same as communicating it. Pay attention to the listener to make sure your message gets through accurately. If the listener doesn't paraphrase your message, invite him or her to do so. If what you have to say may cause pain or fear, try to put the listener at ease first, then be honest. In some situations, such as conflicts in a personal relationship, it may be helpful for the two parties to agree on a signal for times when one or the other needs a brief break from the conversation.

Most people respond to conflicts with one of three fundamental strategies: fight, flight, or communicate. Lower animals can choose the first two, but humans have the option of communication, which often requires taking risks, enduring pain, and persevering to reach a resolution. Listening is a skill that can be learned, but practicing it can bring immediate gains in your relationships. ■

Important Term

rule or norm of reciprocity: The universal social expectation that people will respond to each other in kind—responding to a positive action with another positive action and responding to a negative action with another negative action.

DeVito, *The Interpersonal Communication Book*, Parts 1 and 2, especially chap. 5.

1. Think about the most recent argument you engaged in with a friend, loved one, or work colleague. Did you feel that you were really being heard or understood? If not, to what extent might the suggestions in this lecture have helped? You might want to write out your responses to this assignment.

Dynamic Patterns in Close Relationships
Lecture 14

Recognizing the stages is going to help by reducing blaming to start with, but it's also going to help us if we want to go ahead and resolve conflicts and stay in the relationship.

Conflict is inherent in human interaction, and in close personal relationships, it can do the worst damage or the most good. In this lecture and the next one, we'll look at the dynamics of close relationships to see how these affect the way we handle conflict.

A close personal relationship is characterized by significant interdependence and deep emotional involvement. Such relationships are common contexts for conflict because they involve a good deal of interaction; the consequences of conflict in personal relationships also tend to matter more than in other associations.

Relationships are more challenging to maintain now than they were in the past. Humans live longer now than they used to, so relationships last longer. We also have more outside interests that compete for our time and attention and more social supports for pursuing those interests as individuals.

John Gottman identified a list of the top five issues that couples fight about: communication, sex, jealousy, in-laws and stepfamily members, and chores, including financial management. All these issues can be extrapolated

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Bonding gives humans a feeling of affection and a sense of belonging.

to other types of relationships. For example, jealousy might appear in sibling relationships or friendships.

It's important to remember that relationships are dynamic, not static. We can think about relationships as an ongoing pattern of interacting with others. In many cases, the patterns are predictable based on the nature of the relationships. Recognizing these patterns and understanding how they work can reduce the threat and the intensity of conflicts.

Leslie Baxter, a researcher in interpersonal relationships, developed a model that illuminates such patterns of interaction. Evidence shows that humans are motivated both to form bonds with one another and to carve out individual space for themselves. We achieve an individual identity and freedom by separating, but we receive affection and a sense of belonging by bonding. According to Baxter, these oppositional motivations create a situation of **relational dialectics**, that is, opposing tensions that result from the conflicting emotional needs of partners. People manage this tension by moving closer and farther away at different times; of course, we're rarely in perfect sync with our partners in this movement, which can result in conflict.

To sustain a close relationship, we need to put it on the line repeatedly with experimentation, then move toward intensification, integration, and bonding again.

Another researcher, Martin Knapp, put forth the idea of relational stages, which expands, in some ways, on Baxter's model. According to Knapp, most relationships are temporary and are characterized by stages of moving in and bonding, then moving away. Knapp's stages of coming together are as follows: (1) initiation, (2) experimentation, (3) intensification, (4) integration, and (5) bonding. Bonding results in a honeymoon kind of feeling, but even in loving, long-term relationships, once this stage is reached, it isn't permanent. Both partners need some space to keep the relationship going. People also go through stages in moving apart, although relationships don't have to reach the final stage. These stages are: (1) differentiation, (2) circumscribing (that is, communicating less), (3) stagnation, (4) avoidance, and (5) termination.

If both parties aren't experiencing these stages at the same time, conflict will arise, but in long-term relationships, those conflicts can serve as triggers to bring partners back together.

In terms of Knapp's stages, when partners identify and negotiate a conflict, they are cycling back to the experimentation stage, which can lead to a deeper, more satisfying relationship. To sustain a close relationship, we need to put it on the line repeatedly with experimentation, then move toward intensification, integration, and bonding again. This is risky and difficult work, but the process results in increased closeness and trust.

John Gottman identified what he called the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse for relationships, that is, actions that signal the end: (1) complaining and criticizing, (2) showing contempt, (3) becoming defensive, and (4) stonewalling. Gottman has found that most relationships don't survive when these patterns appear.

The ways in which people handle conflict in a given relationship tend to stabilize as conflict styles, such as avoidance or compromise. A more beneficial conflict style for close personal relationships is collaboration. Here, the parties recognize the potential for conflict caused by Baxter's relational dialectics and work together to deal with these tensions. Just being aware that ebb and flow are natural in a relationship removes some of the threat and makes it easier to handle conflict. Knapp's relationship stages can help us see when we're moving toward stagnation and can trigger us to pay more attention to our partners. Recall, too, Gottman's idea of bids and responses from Lecture 8; in a personal relationship, the pattern of response to a bid should be turning toward instead of turning away or turning against.

Maintaining close personal relationships has been shown to have positive effects on physical health, and understanding the dynamics of these relationships can help us reduce conflict and grow even closer with our partners. ∎

relational dialectics: Opposing tensions that result from conflicting emotional needs of relational partners; such tensions are constantly in flux and affect couples' communication patterns.

Suggested Reading

Baxter and Montgomery, *Relating: Dialogues and Dialectics*.

Fisher and Brown, *Getting Together: Building Relationships as We Negotiate*.

Gottman and DeClaire, *The Relationship Cure: A Five-Step Guide to Strengthening Your Marriage, Family, and Friendships*.

Assignment

1. Talk with your partner about how the two of you handle conflicts. Ask your partner whether he or she would like to handle your conflicts differently and, if so, how. Then ask what you might do to make the relationship a safer, more inviting place to bring up conflicts, talk about them constructively, and work out win-win resolutions. Create a plan, identifying specific actions you will take and avoid.

Disruptions in Close Relationships
Lecture 15

If you haven't said anything positive to your partner and now you've got something negative to say, that's not going to feel fair, or it's going to feel more threatening.

As we saw in the last lecture, conflict in close personal relationships differs from that in temporary or casual relationships. The stakes are much higher in close relationships; a conflict that is not handled well can disrupt your life and undermine your sense of identity. The risks of both speaking up and listening are greater because strong emotions are involved. At the same time, there is greater opportunity to get the conflict resolved. The caring, identity, and investment you have in the relationship increase your motivation and put you in a better position to work through the conflict.

Roger Fisher and Scott Brown, authors of *Getting Together*, offer suggestions for building strong, supportive relationships that make good contexts for **conflict resolution**. First, try to balance emotion with reason, and second, develop an interest in your partner's viewpoints. Always consult before deciding on anything that might affect your partner and listen to his or her feedback. Fisher and Brown also tell us that we need to be wholly trustworthy but not wholly trusting; to be perfectly trustworthy is too heavy a load to add to another human being. Never try to coerce or push your partner; negotiate as equals. Finally, practice acceptance of your partner; then, when you have differences, deal with them seriously.

As we discussed in Lecture 5, strong emotions that are relevant to a conflict should be expressed but not acted out. A safe environment and a willing partner are necessary for emotional expression. As we saw in Lecture 7, it's also important to work for equality in a relationship because the more equal the power is between the two parties, the better the odds are of reaching a win-win resolution. In Lecture 13, we touched on the rule of reciprocity, that is, giving the same level of intimacy as you receive in a relationship. In communication, this translates to trading information equally because, as we saw, information is power. If each partner has equivalent information

about the other, the relationship becomes a stronger, safer place for handling conflict.

Another suggestion for building strong relationships is to give at least 80 percent positive feedback to the other party. We learned from the psychologist B. F. Skinner that humans have a need for positive reinforcement to function at an optimal level. If we apply that idea to our handling of conflict, we can see that it's much easier to listen to something negative if you have a general sense that you are appreciated in a relationship. As we said in the last lecture, collaboration is the optimal conflict style in personal relationships. The seven steps of negotiation we described in Lecture 10 can be applied to this collaboration.

Stability is achieved through the development of roles and patterns of interacting, but when significant events occur—either positive or negative—they can disrupt these ongoing patterns.

Counselors often urge their clients to call a **family meeting** or a couples meeting, which serves as a regular opportunity to bring up and respectfully discuss conflicts. Such meetings should be scheduled at least twice a month and can serve a broader purpose of communicating; they don't have to be limited to only dealing with disagreements. The general rule is that each person gets time to talk while the others practice active listening. Questions may be asked, but not to challenge. If time allows, negotiations can take place during the meeting.

We turn now to the topic of **critical communication contexts**; here, a disruptive event creates a situation in which effective communication becomes simultaneously more important and more difficult. Think of close relationships as living systems, which have tendencies toward both stability and adaptation. Stability is achieved through the development of roles and patterns of interacting but, when significant events occur—either positive or negative—they can disrupt these ongoing patterns. Destabilizing events change the self-concepts of the members in a relationship, alter individuals' ability to perform, change the demands of established roles, and threaten the

identities of the individuals involved, setting up a perfect storm for relational communication. The parties in the relationship may feel fear, anger, and uncertainty; the need for communication increases—to renegotiate roles—but the stress caused by this emotional overload makes it difficult to communicate directly, especially about conflicts.

To deal with critical communication contexts, keep in mind that you can't prevent them; life brings both pleasant and unpleasant surprises. Even though it may be difficult, talk more, not less, and make sure you get the taboo topics on the table. You may also want to get professional help. Finally, bear in mind that you can achieve a "new normal"; you can't return to your earlier relationship, but you can work through the immediate problem and come out on the other side. Gottman urges us to celebrate the struggle of surviving disruptive events together. ∎

Important Terms

conflict resolution: A process leading to a recognized outcome of a conflict—a negotiated agreement or a unilaterally imposed solution.

critical communication context: A situation in which a distressing, destabilizing event creates a "critical context" among relational partners; in this context, effective communication becomes simultaneously much more important and much more difficult.

family meeting: A scheduled time set aside with a structured agenda and ground rules to promote meaningful communication, encouragement, cooperation, joint decision-making, and problem-solving among all family members.

Suggested Reading

Baxter and Montgomery, *Relating: Dialogues and Dialectics*.

Fisher and Brown, *Getting Together: Building Relationships as We Negotiate*.

Gottman and DeClaire, *The Relationship Cure: A Five-Step Guide to Strengthening Your Marriage, Family, and Friendships*.

Assignments

1. Agree to hold a couple or family meeting for one hour or less at a set time each week for four weeks. In the meeting, try to speak up honestly about what feels good to you and what bothers you. Do your best to listen to one another without arguing.

2. Ask for what you need or would like from the others at the meeting. Treat the issues raised as problems and try to work together to solve them. Then, determine whether such meetings are worthwhile in your relationship.

How Management Theories Affect Conflict
Lecture 16

Some years ago, the American Management Association commissioned a study on how conflict affects managers. One of the conclusions from that study is the estimate that managers spend about 25 percent of their work time giving attention to conflict in one way or another.

Poorly managed conflict makes work life unpleasant, and it affects how organizations function. Conflict in organizations most often occurs in task-oriented groups, which should enable group members to achieve win-win solutions, but that's not generally what happens. The workplace rivals personal relationships as a setting where conflicts are most likely to occur and most likely to matter.

The costs and consequences of organizational conflict stem from how such conflict is handled. Costs to the individual involved in conflict include wasted time and effort, increased stress, reduced performance and motivation, delayed career development, and even loss of employment. Organizations experience both direct and opportunity costs from conflict. Under these headings fall costs associated with impaired communication and function, damaged relationships and rapport, reduced morale and productivity, increased absenteeism and turnover, and even litigation. The accumulated costs of everyday organizational conflicts seem to cause the most damage. Reducing these costs requires avoiding unnecessary conflict and improving the conflict management behavior of employees.

Organizations are social realities; their existence depends on a shared idea of what the organization is and how it is structured. One of the components of an organization as a shared idea is an underlying management theory, a set of assumptions that establishes rules, controls, and relationships. Over the course of the 20th century, four primary management theories developed that govern how we set up and run organizations: classical management, human relations management, human resources management, and systems management. Each of these has advantages and disadvantages for

managing conflict, and each changes the way people go about managing conflict in an organization.

Most organizations still rely heavily on classical management. This theory emerged around the turn of the 20th century with the Industrial Revolution. At the time, the German sociologist Max Weber outlined a structure for factories and other large organizations that he believed would be efficient, productive, and long-lasting. He based his hierarchical, bureaucratic structure on two existing organizations: the Prussian army and the Catholic Church. From these organizations, Weber drew the idea of an ordered chain of command, with communication and decisions flowing from the top down. Although the bureaucratic structure is successful, it embodies power and status differences and communication hierarchies that often impede direct negotiation in conflicts.

The underlying assumption in systems theory is that all organizations are like living organisms, constantly moving, changing, and interacting, and a change in any one element affects the organization as a whole.

The human relations theory of management took hold with organizations around 1930. According to this theory, developed by a social psychologist named Elton Mayo, productivity can be improved by treating employees as individuals and interacting with them on a friendly basis. For Mayo, the correct metaphor for an organization was not a well-oiled machine but a family. Mayo's theory moved organizations in the direction of better conflict management, but most of the inhibiting effects of classical management were still very much in place in his conception of organizations.

The period from the late 1940s until well into the 1980s saw the development of human resources management theory. Here, a key assumption is that the primary resource of any organization is its people; thus, motivation is likely to be vital to increased productivity. Motivation can be achieved by matching the individuals' goals in the organization with the goals of the organization as a whole. The metaphor for this type of organization is a team, with employees participating in decision-making. In organizations with this

orientation, communication flows up, down, and across the organization, but again, the classical structure remains in place.

Since the 1980s, systems theory has been applied to organizational management. The underlying assumption in systems theory is that all organizations are like living organisms, constantly moving, changing, and interacting, and a change in any one element affects the organization as a whole. The challenge is to maintain stability while adapting to change and solving problems as they arise. This theory recognizes that some parts of the system operate informally and unofficially; that is, much of the development and maintenance of the real organization occurs through the interactions of its members. With a systems management approach, decisions may be revisited and renegotiated, creating a climate that facilitates effective conflict management.

Managers and supervisors must understand that it is in their best interest to improve conflict management within the organization in order to minimize costs. This goal can be accomplished through understanding the organization from a systems point of view and drawing from the people-oriented approaches of human relations and human resources management theory. ■

Suggested Reading

Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*.

The Manager's Role in Dealing with Conflict
Lecture 17

Positive feedback doesn't cost anything. It's easy to give, and it really helps with motivation, and it sets up the conditions where you have a safer environment, a more positive environment, to address conflict.

In any organization, pursuit of better conflict management begins at the top; in this lecture, we look at seven key principles that can guide top supervisors and managers. The first of these is to prevent unnecessary conflict, which can be caused by creating competitive situations, failing to clearly define roles and responsibilities, and failing to establish areas and lines of authority. Unnecessary conflict can also arise when managers make decisions without consulting the stakeholders, that is, the employees who will be affected.

The second principle for managers is to be courageous in the face of conflict; step up and deal with conflicts openly and constructively. Third, focus on the general pattern of conflict management in the organization. Practice the art of "management by walking around" to get an idea of how everyday conflicts are handled. Fourth, promote informal resolution of conflict by creating policies that state a preference for resolution by

Managers and supervisors can prevent unnecessary conflict by creating an environment of open communication.

discussion, although with authority still specified for making final decisions. Remember that employees need policy, training, and modeling to manage conflict effectively.

A fifth principle is that along with the emphasis on informal resolution, formal processes need to be in place for conflict management. Organizations need documented procedures for addressing grievances and discipline issues; however, managers should note that these are adversarial processes and should avoid overreliance on them. Sixth, try to assess and, if appropriate, improve on the **organizational culture**. Keep in mind Edgar Shein's method for identifying an organization's culture: It's characterized by whatever follows the phrase "The way it's really done around here is…." Related to culture is **organizational climate**, which is defined as how it feels for employees to work for a given organization. The communication climate is how the organization works to invite or prohibit constructive communication. I sometimes use the term "**conflict climate**" to refer to the collective influence of organizational culture, organizational climate, and communication climate on how individuals manage conflict. Conflict climate factors include relationships among workers, power relationships, communication patterns, flow of information, use of positive feedback and recognition, and conflict management practices. The seventh principle for managers is that they must model the behaviors they desire in conflict management.

> **Remember that employees need policy, training, and modeling to manage conflict effectively.**

One of the most prevalent complaints about supervisors is that they don't deal with conflicts when they arise. In most cases, supervisors should attempt to resolve differences constructively through discussion and mutual agreement. If an employee complains about a supervisor, he or she should listen and negotiate if doing so doesn't require surrendering authority. If an employee wishes to appeal a supervisory decision, the supervisor should support the employee and cooperate with the organization's established procedures for such appeals. Supervisors should also allow time and create conditions for employees to negotiate resolutions themselves rather than

interceding for them. This approach gives the supervisor a chance to serve as facilitator and teacher.

To promote effective conflict management, it's important for supervisors to give regular informal feedback to employees, and again, about 80 percent of that feedback should be positive. Getting positive feedback enables employees to handle the negative feedback that comes with conflicts much better. In situations where you must give negative feedback, do so immediately and in private. Do not wait for formal evaluations; nothing said in a formal evaluation should be a surprise to the employee.

The same general principles that apply to managers and supervisors also apply to employees: Deal directly with conflicts and attempt to resolve them by direct mutual discussion. If you're in doubt about whether this approach is acceptable, ask a supervisor or experienced co-worker.

One problem that frequently comes up in organizational conflict management is **workplace bullying**, which refers to repeated mistreatment of a target. Such behavior can corrupt the whole workplace culture and climate. If you're the target of bullying, you need to confront it or report the behavior and ask for help. If you're a supervisor who becomes aware of bullying, you need to resolve the situation immediately or risk damage to your organization.

Better organizational conflict management means better morale, reduced absenteeism and turnover, stronger employee motivation, and higher productivity. Effective conflict management is obviously good for the bottom line, and it's also good for organizations as human environments. ∎

Important Terms

conflict climate: The combination of organizational culture, organizational climate, and organizational policies and procedures that affects the way members manage conflict.

organizational climate: Members' collective perception of how it feels to work and live in a particular organization.

organizational culture: Deep, pervasive, usually unspoken code that governs the way things are done in an organization and its overall atmosphere and determines what ideas and behavior are considered right or wrong, important or unimportant, and acceptable or unacceptable.

workplace bullying: Repeated mistreatment of a targeted individual characterized by disruptive acts that threaten the individual's emotional and/or physical health and career.

Suggested Reading

Cloke, Goldsmith, and Bennis, *Resolving Conflicts at Work: Eight Strategies for Everyone on the Job*.

Assignment

1. How well are everyday conflicts handled in the organization where you work or volunteer? Is the dominant pattern one of discussion and mutual agreement? If so, your assignment is done. If not, ask yourself these hard questions: What is my role in this pattern? Am I helping or hurting? What can I do to improve the handling of everyday conflicts?

Getting Professional Help with Conflict
Lecture 18

Most individuals are unable to fully pursue resolution of a dispute through the courts because they just can't afford it. Organizations and insurers even calculate that it's less expensive to write checks—sometimes six- and seven-figure checks—than to take a case to court.

It should be abundantly clear by now that managing conflict is among the most difficult, dangerous, and challenging things humans have to do. One fortunate consequence of all the research and development that has taken place on this subject is that a good deal of competent professional help is available for handling conflict.

A primary reason you might want to get help in a conflict is that the formal adversary system—the legal system—is expensive in terms of money and time. Taking matters to court also often results in collateral damage, such as when children are involved in hostile divorce cases. Further, courts provide only win-lose resolutions.

Studies show that the mere presence of an objective third party can help in achieving conflict resolution; the disputing parties become more cooperative, more reasonable, and less extreme. A general rule is to start by seeking help with a conflict at the lowest and least formal level possible, where the risks are lowest and it's easiest to achieve a win-win. In this lecture, however, we'll start at the highest level and work our way downward.

The highest level of assistance below the courts is arbitration or mediation, solutions that are often promoted by attorneys, state and local governments, and counselors. According to the American Arbitration Association, arbitration is "a legal technique for resolution of disputes outside the courts, wherein the parties to a dispute refer it to one or more persons who are arbitrators, by whose decision they agree in advance to be bound." Many **arbitrators** are attorneys and, in most areas, they must be licensed to practice arbitration. They must be impartial in any dispute, and they must conduct investigations and hearings according to specified rules, including rules of

evidence. Attorneys or advocates can participate on both sides, but arbitrators themselves can question the disputants and the advocates; witnesses can also be presented and questioned. Arbitration proceedings may have legal status and the decisions may carry legal weight. Arbitration is generally much less expensive than court proceedings and brings quicker results, but it does not offer win-win resolutions.

Studies show that the mere presence of an objective third party can help in achieving conflict resolution; the disputing parties become more cooperative, more reasonable, and less extreme.

According to the National Association of Community Mediation, the definition of mediation is as follows: "a process of dispute resolution in which one or more impartial third parties intervenes in a conflict or dispute with the consent of the participants and assists them in negotiating a consensual and informed agreement." The task of **mediators** is broader than that of arbitrators; these professionals intervene and help with the consent of both participants. Mediation is often suggested for marital disputes or family conflicts, and it may be provided for in labor contracts. Like arbitrators, mediators undergo specialized training and must pass a certification test. Notice that mediation is not an adversarial process; it allows disputants to reach a win-win resolution. In general, these five characteristics define the mediation process: (1) voluntary, (2) collaborative, (3) confidential, (4) informed, and (5) neutral and balanced.

The next step down the ladder is the **ombudsman**, who assists with problem-solving on behalf of a community or an organization. Many organizational ombudsmen are members of the International Ombudsman Association and adhere to certain standards of practice. Ombudsmen must have independence in structure, function, and appearance; in other words, they shouldn't be part of the classical management chain of command. Like mediators, they are neutral and impartial, and they hold all communications in confidence. They do not participate in formal adjudication, such as arbitration or court proceedings. Many organizations find that retaining an ombudsman is a cost-effective way to resolve conflicts. In some organizations, an informal

ombudsman, referred to as a "priest," may emerge. This is an individual who has been with the organization for a long time and has built a reputation as being wise, trustworthy, and willing to listen to and help others.

Finally, we arrive at counselors, who may specialize in marriage and family issues, employee assistance, community problems, or education. Counselors have varying education requirements and training, depending on their specialty and location. In seeking the help of a counselor, it's important for all the parties involved to agree in advance to counseling. In family or marriage counseling, both parents or spouses should participate in identifying and selecting the counselor.

It's a good idea to know what kinds of professionals are available to help before you need them in the midst of a stressful situation. As we said, first seek the lowest level of help, then work your way up the ladder if the conflict requires it. ∎

Important Terms

arbitrator: A person with designated authority to hear and evaluate cases and render a binding or nonbinding decision on an issue between parties engaged in a dispute.

mediator: A person who is trained to act as a neutral third party and who helps disputants, with their consent, negotiate a mutual agreement among themselves, seeking win-win solutions whenever possible.

ombudsman: A person appointed to act as an informal, neutral, independent, and confidential intermediary to help solve problems or manage conflicts.

Suggested Reading

Cloke, *Mediating Dangerously: The Frontiers of Conflict Resolution*.

Assignment

1. Find out what counseling, ombudsman, mediation, and arbitration services are available to you and under what circumstances. Inquire by phone or via the Web sites listed below about specific services offered. Find out what help is offered in your workplace. Ask friends, family, and colleagues for recommendations and keep the contact information you gain on hand.

Resources

Association for Conflict Resolution
12100 Sunset Hills Rd., Suite 130
Reston, VA 20190
http://www.acrnet.org/

National Academy of Arbitrators
NAA Operations Center, Suite 412
1 North Main St.
Cortland, NY 13045
http://www.naarb.org/

American Arbitration Association, Washington, DC, Regional Office
1776 Eye St. NW, Suite 850
Washington, DC 20006
http://www.adr.org/

International Ombudsman Association
390 Amwell Rd., Suite 403
Hillsborough, NJ 08844
http://www.ombudsassociation.org/

United States Ombudsman Association
5619 86th St. NW, Suite 600
Johnston, IA 50131-2955
http://www.usombudsman.org/

The Ombudsman Association
5521 Greenville Ave., Suite 104-265
Dallas, TX 75206
http://web.mit.edu/negotiation/toa/TOAintro.html

National Association for Community Mediation
P.O. Box 44578
Madison, WI 53744
http://www.nafcm.org/pg89.cfm

American Counseling Association
5999 Stevenson Ave.
Alexandria, VA 22304
http://www.counseling.org/

Helping Others Manage Conflict
Lecture 19

> *That victim/rescuer setup is a terrible temptation into a triangulation role. It may feel noble riding to the rescue and helping someone who feels weak, but being the victim is damaging to the victim.*

There may be times when you're asked to serve as a neutral third party for others who are in conflict. One of the most important ways you can help is through coaching, that is, prompting the disputants to identify their goals, recognize each other's perspectives, and decide whether and how to proceed with a resolution effort. You might also serve as an informal mediator or facilitator. In this role, you sit down with the disputants and guide them through a constructive conversation.

Intervening as a third party in a conflict should not be undertaken lightly. You should first ask whether you have clear authorization from both parties to intervene. You should also ascertain whether or not the conflicting parties are truly interested in finding a mutually satisfactory solution. If one or both parties are unwilling to commit to working toward a real resolution, you may want to refrain from engaging.

Before you step in to help, ask yourself whether you have the necessary communication skills. Are you good at listening? Do you have the ability to empathize with people? Can you analyze issues and ask helpful questions? You also have to be honest and trustworthy and have the right motives for wanting to help; avoid self-centered reasons for getting involved in a conflict.

Determine your specific role and get agreement from all parties involved about what assistance you will give. Make it clear that you're not interested in taking sides; you must be neutral and impartial, just like the professional mediators and ombudsmen.

If only one person comes to you for help, you can serve as a coach, but remember that you're hearing only one side of the conflict. Validate the disputant's feelings and express your understanding, but don't jump in and

take sides. Try to be a calming and empowering influence. Encourage the person who has come to you to think about a mutually satisfactory resolution. You may want to walk through the beginning of the seven-step negotiation process, as we discussed in Lecture 11.

If you're asked to serve as a mediator or facilitator, spell out your role and the roles of the disputants, along with the process that all parties will follow. The disputants must own the content of their negotiations and agreements; your job is to promote open communication and to guide them in a fair process of resolution.

If you arrange a meeting between the parties, begin by thanking them for their willingness to trust you and encourage them to seek a resolution that will serve everyone involved. To create a safe environment, you may need to set some ground rules, such as prohibiting personal attacks. Guide the discussion using the steps for negotiation we covered in Lecture 12. Ask questions as the discussion progresses and check perceptions, but make sure the parties address their remarks to each other, not you. Observe carefully to ensure that verbal and nonverbal messages match. Keep the parties focused on the current conflict; if other issues arise, you may want to keep a list of these to negotiate at a later time. Once the parties have described their perceptions of the conflict, ask for suggestions to resolve it. If the conflict appears complex and resistant to solution, suggest **fractionation**, that is, breaking the problem into parts and working on one issue at a time. Throughout this process, honor and validate expressions of the parties' emotions, but don't allow them to get out of hand. Keep your own tone level and discourage emotional escalation.

When an agreement is reached, make sure that its content is clear and focused on behavior. At this point, you may also need to clarify what your role will be in following up with the parties on the agreement.

As you work through this process, you may be able to help disputing parties recognize and rethink their patterns of conflict management. One expert says that if a conflict has come up over the same issue three times, it's not about the issue but about the pattern of communication and resolution. In an assessment role, you're not just guiding the participants through negotiation but making suggestions for handling conflict differently. Engage the

participants as stakeholders and treat the process as an exercise in problem-solving. Observe, describe, and analyze patterns of interaction in conflict management to diagnose problems and suggest solutions. Keep in mind that if this assessment does not lead to action and improvement, increased conflict may result. It's important, therefore, to get agreement on concrete, positive steps from all parties involved. ■

Important Term

fractionation: A useful conflict management technique that consists of breaking or "chunking " large conflicts into smaller parts and dealing with the parts separately.

Suggested Reading

Cloke, *Mediating Dangerously: The Frontiers of Conflict Resolution*.

McCorkle and Reese, *Mediation Theory and Practice*.

Assignment

1. Look back at the last time you tried to help someone else with a conflict, and ask yourself these important questions:

    ● How well did your intervention work out?

    ● Was the appeal to you for help a case of triangulation?

    ● Did you try to focus your help on coaching or mediating?

    ● If you tried to mediate or facilitate, did you stay focused on the process the conflicting parties were engaged in, or did you get involved in the content?

    ● If the intervention didn't work out perfectly, what might you do differently if you had the chance to do it again?

Moral and Cultural Conflicts
Lecture 20

If you can get people to see and understand each other and begin to talk in ways that they can understand, that demonizing and that kind of negativity can be broken down and you can … begin to break through and get mutual trust and understanding.

When conflicts are framed as matters of morals, they pose particularly difficult challenges to anyone trying to resolve them, and they can even seem to justify violence. They appear to preclude win-win resolutions and render approaches to negotiation and compromise morally suspect. Are such conflicts hopeless, or can workable solutions be found?

Moral conflicts are those in which the issues are framed as matters of what is morally right and morally wrong. Note from the outset that this absolute framing is a dysfunctional conflict strategy. Moral values are inherently subjective, yet they are usually held as nonnegotiable absolutes. In a dispute about a moral question, it's difficult to reach a win-win resolution.

Barnett Pearce and Stephen Littlejohn, two well-known communication scholars, point out that our values tend to be embedded in clusters and are essential to our sense of order and function in the world, essential to holding communities and cultures together. For example, the Israelis and Palestinians each believe deeply that Jerusalem is their God-given homeland, and this belief plays a significant role in the religion and culture of each nation. A challenge to any one value in such a cluster threatens to unravel the whole.

According to Pearce and Littlejohn, opposing sides in moral conflicts tend to describe the issues using "incommensurate language"; that is, they talk about the issues in terms that just don't compute with the other side. This tendency leads to us to view our opponents on moral issues as villains or enemies. At the same time, these scholars tell us that people often oversimplify moral issues and speak about them in absolutes, which can sometimes justify a move to violence.

Abortion is a moral issue that remains controversial in the United States today. Each side of the debate over the legality of abortion frames the issue in absolute terms. Anti-abortion proponents view abortion as the killing of an unborn child. Pro-choice supporters see a government prohibition on abortion as a violation of a woman's right to control her own body. Each side views the other as advocating the violation of a moral principle; thus, compromise or negotiation doesn't seem to be an option. Further, the values of each side are embedded in wider moral clusters: One is focused on having legitimate authority to enforce clear moral standards, and one is directed toward ensuring individual rights and freedoms. Surrender on the issue of abortion would threaten these larger clusters of values.

The language used by one side on the abortion issue does not compute with the other side because each is speaking from a different moral system; they're unable to engage in a discussion that could lead to any agreement or conclusion. Beyond that, each side tends to oversimplify the issue greatly: the right to life versus the right to choose. To some extent, the opposing sides are also both guilty of the fundamental attribution error that we discussed in Lecture 4. Taking a stand on one side of the conflict or the other is attributed to basic character traits; in this case, our opponents seem fundamentally evil. It's hard to comprehend that people on the other side of the issue are basing their actions on a coherent moral code in which they sincerely believe and, therefore, are behaving ethically. The issue of whether or not same-sex couples should legally be allowed to marry presents a similar picture of a moral conflict that is seemingly intractable.

We should also note that moral conflicts tend to develop long histories, in which positions harden. Multiple and complex issues are reduced to simple moral imperatives, and the opponents' actions come to be viewed as grave moral offenses that may justify violent responses. Such conflicts can last for generations.

Today, a number of major moral conflicts, including those between Israel and Palestine and between Shiite and Sunni Muslims, seem to deny efforts at resolution. Is there any hope for peace? Scholars, diplomats, and internationally recognized mediators, including William Ury, are gaining some success in finding peaceful resolutions to international conflicts.

Among the specific tactics that may be helpful in dealing with moral conflicts is **reframing**, that is, finding a constructive new way to view a conflict through a different lens or frame. Other useful tactics include fractionating, developing empathy, and attempting to build mutual trust. Finally, note that moral conflicts don't always take place on a national or international scale; they also happen in our own lives. In our personal lives, we tend to frame moral issues in black-and-white terms and view our opponents as immoral or unethical, rendering negotiation difficult. If you fall into this pattern, try to reframe the conflict so that will be understood and accepted by all parties. ∎

Important Terms

moral conflict: A conflict between parties who are locked into opposition.

reframing: Finding a new, constructive way to look at a conflict issue through a different lens or "frame."

Suggested Reading

Cloke, *Conflict Resolution: Mediating War, Evil, Injustice, and Terrorism.*

Pearce and Littlejohn, *Moral Conflict: When Social Worlds Collide.*

Assignment

1. Consider the following questions:

- When, if ever, might violence be justified in addressing a moral conflict?

- When, if ever, is tolerance of others' views on serious moral issues morally wrong?

- Might it help us to deal with moral conflicts if we got past the taboo against discussing moral issues with our friends and colleagues?

Managing Moral Conflicts—Success Stories
Lecture 21

If empathy and trust building and fractionating and reframing can help to achieve agreements in these moral conflicts, you know what? They can help us in our personal lives, as well.

Just because moral conflict is challenging doesn't mean that we have to accept defeat. In this lecture, we'll look at three success stories in dealing with moral conflict from recent history and see the three strategies of building empathy, fractionating, and reframing at work.

The first of these success stories occurred in 1978, with the negotiation of the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel. The conflict between the two nations had an extensive, ugly history. For many years, the Arab nations, including Egypt, had challenged Israel's right to exist as a nation on land taken from the Palestinians. Israel strongly asserted its claim to the region based on its ancient historical occupation and its right to freedom from persecution in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Three costly wars had been fought over the issue of Israel's nationhood, in 1948, 1967, and 1973.

In 1978, Israel occupied the Sinai Peninsula, which was historically a part of Egypt. The major players involved in trying to negotiate the conflict were President Anwar Sadat of Egypt, Premier Menachem Begin of Israel, and President Jimmy Carter of the United States. Sadat suggested fractionating the conflict—focusing only on the Sinai Peninsula—instead of trying to
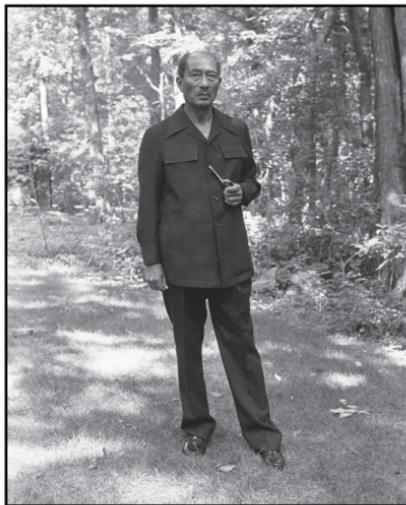
President Sadat fractioned the conlict between Israel and Egypt to get a peaceful solution.

negotiate the large-scale solution that Carter originally sought. Begin was amenable to the fractionation and asserted that Israel would be willing to return the Sinai if the nation could be guaranteed a secure peace. Carter realized that the situation presented an opportunity for progress, so he shifted his focus to this incremental approach. Carter invited Sadat and Begin to the United States; in the resulting negotiations, the parties made a conscious effort to draw on the principles of negotiation set forth by Fisher and Ury. Carter played an important role in the negotiations by building empathy, serving as a mediator in some instances, and reframing the issue as one that would affect the children and grandchildren of Egypt and Israel. Sadat and Begin shared the Nobel Peace Prize for signing the Egypt/Israel Peace Treaty of 1979, a treaty that has never been violated.

> **Carter played an important role in the [Camp David] negotiations by building empathy, serving as a mediator in some instances, and reframing the issue as one that would affect the children and grandchildren of Egypt and Israel.**

Another excellent example of fractionation can be found in the negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union that resulted in the first Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I). Both nations had framed the global conflict of the Cold War as a moral conflict, and the two had fought proxy wars in Korea and Vietnam, the Middle East, and Africa throughout the 20th century. Unable to curb the arms race in which they were engaged, the two nations remained deeply suspicious of each other; neither could see a way to reduce the level of threat even though they acknowledged the value to be achieved in doing so.

Ultimately, Ronald Reagan proposed a negotiation to Mikhail Gorbachev for the two countries to reduce or limit the number of nuclear weapons each held. These negotiations took much longer than the Camp David Accords, but in 1991 they resulted in START I, which went into effect in 1994. Since that time, the original treaty has been renegotiated to reduce nuclear armaments even further.

Our third example is the negotiation that took place between the governors of Utah and Oregon over issues of environmental management. Note that debates about environmental issues are typically framed in moral terms: Environmentalists talk about saving the planet, while those on the other side talk about destroying jobs. In the late 1990s, at an annual meeting of the Western Governors' Association, John Kitzhaber, the liberal governor of Oregon, and Mike Leavitt, the conservative governor of Utah, were asked to draft a common statement that the association could make concerning environmental management.

In the course of struggling over their differences, the two governors reframed the discussion to come up with a list of points of agreement. This led them to focus on the principles that should be applied in making environmental policy decisions rather than on the policies themselves. At a later meeting, about 400 stakeholders were brought in from all sides of this issue to attend breakout groups with the aim of refining a shared environmental doctrine. The ultimate result was a set of guidelines called the Enlibra Principles, which steer government toward balanced environmental management.

It's interesting to note in all three of these examples that the strong stands taken by both sides of an issue may be necessary to break through to a genuine negotiation. The figures who made progress in each of the examples were not middle-of-the-road folks but people who stood firmly on their moral principles. It's also heartening that in all three cases, these leaders were willing to come together to resolve serious moral conflicts without compromising their principles. ■

Suggested Reading

Begin, "Nobel Lecture," http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1978/begin-lecture.html.

Leavitt, speech to the Western Governors' Association at the Plenary Session of Shared Environmental Doctrine, http://www.westgov.org/wga/initiatives/enlibra/leavitt_speech.pdf.

Sadat, "Nobel Lecture," http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1978/al-sadat-lecture.html.

Assignments

1. Identify one or two moral conflicts on which you have a strong opinion. Consider whether you could agree to some reframing of the issue without compromising your values. Or, in order to seek a resolution, could some part of the conflict be carved out and negotiated on its own?

2. Thinking about other contemporary moral conflicts, can you see possibilities for more examples of success stories?

Managing Conflict's Aftermath
Lecture 22

When [transgressions] happen, we don't get to go back to the way it was, but we do get to move forward toward some new kind of normal state that can be good.

Managing conflict doesn't end when you reach an agreement, yet the aftermath of conflict is the most overlooked aspect of conflict management. This aftermath is often marked by emotional residues, damaged trust, and relational distance. How do we bring those in conflict back to a healthy relationship?

Even a well-intentioned effort at conflict resolution can sometimes yield the discovery that the differences between parties can't be bridged; one person may have to lose, which results in hurt feelings. That kind of damage can cause resentments to linger and new conflicts to emerge. What we need to work toward in conflict management are acceptance, apology, amends, forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing.

In the small number of conflicts that result in win-lose resolutions, the "loser" has to choose among accepting the outcome, escalating the conflict, or exiting. If you're in this position and you accept the outcome, take full responsibility for that choice. Remember that the other party hasn't decided to keep offending you; you've decided to live with certain conditions. This decision doesn't have to be permanent, however; you may choose to negotiate again later, escalate, or leave.

Escalating the conflict involves additional costs and risks—it may mean turning to official channels—but even if the conflict is escalated, it's still possible to move on after a resolution has been reached. If the conflict can't be resolved and you don't feel you can accept the conditions, you may have to terminate the relationship. You will feel the loss associated with termination even if you're leaving a bad relationship, but don't think of termination itself as a failure; in many cases, termination is the result of finally being honest about a failure of the relationship.

As we said, even conflicts that end with good resolutions often leave behind painful emotional residues. In the heat of a conflict, you may say something that hurts the other person. Trust may be broken if you discover that the other party wasn't completely honest with you. These "relational transgressions" are defined as actions or inactions that are perceived to be sufficiently serious violations of the relationship that they require explanation. Such transgressions often result from pursuing topic goals in a conflict at the expense of relational and identity goals. Managing conflict aftermath means moving toward healing in these instances; the goal is to work toward making the relationship positive again for both parties.

Reaching this goal begins with apologies, which have five parts: (1) a specific definition of the offending behavior, (2) an acknowledgment that the behavior caused harm, (3) a statement of responsibility for the behavior and the harm, (4) a statement of regret, and (5) a commitment to avoid repeating the behavior. If you are apologizing, focus on your own actions and avoid explaining them as a response to the other party's behavior.

Forgiveness is not approval of the other party's behavior but a letting go of emotional residues, and it may take time to occur.

The next step in the healing process is making amends, that is, fixing what has been broken, which may be part of the relationship itself. Beyond that is forgiveness. It may seem backwards, but it's true that if you're the one who has been offended, you forgive to benefit yourself. Forgiveness is not approval of the other party's behavior but a letting go of emotional residues, and it may take time to occur.

Next, you move toward reconciliation. This is an interactive process between the parties in a conflict that requires cooperative effort. It does not involve denying that the transgressions occurred but acknowledging them and trying to move forward. Reconciliation requires noticing new behavior and giving positive feedback; it may also require an iterative process of renegotiation.

The last step, healing, applies to both individuals and relationships. It involves getting to a point where you can reframe the conflict in a new context of your

relationship. When you reach that point, you should honor yourselves for the struggle you've undergone to work through the conflict successfully.

The aftermath of a conflict can present several pitfalls: a lingering sense of opposition and resentment, insecurity about the relationship, and the emergence of taboo subjects. In all these cases, open communication and affirmation by both parties of each other can help get the relationship back on track.

Although the work is difficult, don't put off healing valuable relationships, or you may run out of time to do so. There's a saying that pain is necessary, but misery is optional. When we don't deal with the aftermath of conflict, we're continuing to be miserable when we don't have to. Making apologies can be hard work, but it's often very much worth doing. ∎

Suggested Reading

Fisher and Brown, *Getting Together: Building Relationships as We Negotiate*.

Gottman and DeClaire, *The Relationship Cure: A Five-Step Guide to Strengthening Your Marriage, Family, and Friendships*.

Lerner, *The Dance of Anger*.

Assignment

1. The next time you have an altercation with someone with whom you have an ongoing relationship, make a good apology, being sure to include all five components that we discussed in the lecture. Identify your part in whatever went wrong, regardless of what the other party did that may have been much worse.

Teaching Our Children about Conflict
Lecture 23

Kids can learn early the principle of win-win because it's real, and they can experience win-win resolutions and carry that into their adult life.

Today's children learn a mixed set of lessons about managing conflict, some of which are helpful and some genuinely harmful. That learning begins and continues at home and takes place in neighborhoods, at school, and through the media. At home, children learn about handling conflict primarily from watching their parents and older siblings, and they may draw painful and frightening lessons from our poor handling of conflict. For example, to a child, any comment about one parent by the other, either negative or positive, is taken as a judgment about that parent and about the child. In other words, a criticism of the other parent can go right to the child's heart. Research has shown that children in high-conflict families have greater problems with psychological adjustment, conduct, and self-concept. The way parents communicate during a conflict—not whether they have a conflict—has a significant effect on the child's well-being.

The way parents communicate during a conflict—not whether they have a conflict—has a significant effect on the child's well-being.

As parents, we must model good conflict management for our children. Don't fall into the trap of avoidance, but do try to minimize children's exposure to ongoing strife. Even if you're going through a divorce, model civility and constructive communication. In addition to modeling, we can also use direct instruction. Consciously explain to children how to manage conflict and the consequences of good and bad conflict management. Provide positive feedback when children practice good conflict management strategies, and don't reinforce bad strategies, such as throwing temper tantrums.

Make sure the family structure includes power for everybody. Children don't have equal power with parents, but they shouldn't be powerless, because

Conflict learning begins at home as toddlers (if not before) and continues throughout their lives in their neighborhood, at school, and in the media.

that traps them into thinking that they're not responsible for anything. If the conflict is between you and your child, listen to the child and negotiate when appropriate. The family meetings that we talked about in Lecture 15 can be used to give children a voice.

The lessons we teach children about managing conflict are quite similar to those for adults that we've discussed throughout this course. Teach children to express their feelings using "I" statements, to listen to the other person and avoid snap judgments, to consider the other person's point of view and feelings, to take responsibility for their own behavior and apologize, to invite the other person to work toward a resolution together, to manage their emotions, and not to hold grudges.

Children also learn a great deal about managing conflict outside the home, and lessons learned while playing with other children may sometimes contradict or overshadow what is taught at home. My own experience with

a neighborhood bully illustrates the fact that parents don't have complete control over what their children learn.

The research of Calvin Morrill, a sociologist at the University of California, has shown that as they move through adolescence, young people apply roughly the same set of conflict management strategies that their parents use. Further, conflict management itself seems to be a development process; as teenagers become more rational and more attuned to moral questions, they also become less impulsive. For parents, this means they should avoid being either over- or underprotective. Children must go out into the world, take some risks, and solve some problems on their own. Even at the college level, children should be able to rely on their parents for support, but we need to avoid the temptation to become "helicopter parents," hovering over our children, ready to swoop in and rescue them at a moment's notice.

Many schools now offer direct instruction in conflict management, along with peer mediation programs. In these programs, student volunteers learn conflict management strategies and help their fellow students in resolving conflicts.

Of course, children also learn a great deal about conflict from the media. Happily, violence on television does not cause the vast majority of children to become more violent, but it does result in increased aggression for some. Violence in video games seems to have an even greater affect on these same children. Researchers have also studied the influence of narratives in entertainment on children. As we know, most television shows and movies are centered on a main character who encounters an obstacle, and the narrative focuses on how that character chooses to deal with the obstacle. Seldom do we see the character pursuing a win-win resolution; instead, the plot usually involves some kind of clash or deception. As parents, we should be aware that these are the lessons children are taking in. One way to find "teachable moments" is to watch what your children are watching and talk about how conflicts are handled. ∎

Suggested Reading

Fitzell, *Free the Children! Conflict Education for Strong, Peaceful Minds*.

Gottman, DeClaire, and Goleman, *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child: The Heart of Parenting*.

Neuman and Bashe, *Helping Your Kids Cope with Divorce the Sandcastles Way*.

Segrin and Flora, *Family Communication*.

The following is a list of resources that feature good conflict management skills and outcomes, including children's books and books for teens.

Classics: The plots of some classics of enduring interest resolve conflicts in constructive ways. Two examples are:

- Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*, which illustrates the potential damage of anger and revenge and the better results of forgiveness and working together.

- Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mocking Bird*, in which Atticus Finch employs the adversary system with skill, passion, and integrity to achieve a just outcome.

For young children: TeachersFirst.com lists good books for children by age range. Examples include:

- *Curious George* by Hans Augusto Ray (for ages 4 to 8).

- *A Light in the Attic* by Shel Silverstein (for ages 9 to 12).

For teens: The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) lists current books for teens in which constructive resolution strategies are effectively employed (www.ala.org/yalsa). The 2010 winner of YALSA's Michael L. Prinz Award, *Going Bovine* by Libba Bray, is an excellent example.

Assignments

1. Ask yourself what you learned about conflict from your family. Consider how your early experience affects the way you manage conflict today.

2. How can you demonstrate constructive conflict management to your children? How can you help them manage conflict constructively?

Conflict Management—A Success in Progress
Lecture 24

> **Despite all that we can learn from the research and all the practices we have for better conflict management, I want to say this: Conflict remains a delicate art, and it's a major challenge.**

In this lecture, we'll consider what knowledge and skills in conflict management we have today that were not available to us in 1950 when Morton Deutsch first gave us the idea of the win-win resolution. We'll then conclude the course by exploring some topics in conflict management that offer promise for future study.

Recall the three typical conflicts we looked at in Lecture 1: two roommates in conflict over noise in their apartment, the married couple who reached an impasse over whether the husband should take a job offer in another city, and the battles in a company over where to set the boundaries of sales districts. Back in 1950, the two roommates would probably have viewed their conflict through a lens of the other's character, and each might have concluded that she needed to endure the problem or work out a compromise. Today, the roommates would be more likely to view the problem as a matter of behavior to be negotiated.

The conflict between the married couple, Kate and Ken, is a little more complex. In 1950, Ken probably would have made his career choice, and the two would have moved. On one level, that's simpler, but it doesn't give Kate an equal part in the decision. Today, there's a much better chance that Ken and Kate would negotiate with more equality and try to take into account each other's perspectives. If needed, they might get professional help from a couples counselor. Even though the situation would be more complicated today, the couple would have a better shot at a win-win resolution.

In the third conflict, it's likely that back in 1950, Don, the salesman, would have made an appointment with his boss, Dale, to discuss a change in sales territories. It's also likely that Don would have had to cheerfully accept whatever decision Dale made or find another job. In our time, that issue

would probably be addressed in a meeting with all the salespeople, and the group would work together to create territories everyone could agree on.

These examples show that we now have concepts and strategies we can use to negotiate better resolutions. Throughout my professional life, I've seen many instances where even incremental changes in the way conflicts are handled have made for happier employees and greater productivity. On one assignment at a state agency, I learned of the sincere apology made by the deputy director to a group of mailroom employees after she learned that she had badly misjudged their work ethic. On another occasion, I was asked to participate in working out a resolution between the state of California and the Environmental Protection Agency over verifying reductions in auto emissions. I worked with focus groups of stakeholders to brainstorm solutions that were later approved by both the state and the federal government.

As we become more willing to speak up for our individual interests, we bring more conflicts to the surface and make the process of handling conflict more complex.

Despite the extensive research conducted in conflict management since the 1950s, we still have much to learn. For example, dissemination of the knowledge we've gained is still limited. Further, as we become more willing to speak up for our individual interests, we bring more conflicts to the surface and make the process of handling conflict more complex. Thus, we need to better balance our needs for belonging and affection with our pursuit of individual interests and freedom. In our personal relationships, we need to learn to accept and become comfortable with the things that we can't change about others. We also need to learn more about how our children deal with conflict and how we can do a better job of teaching them. Finally, in looking at moral conflicts, we need to learn toleration and appreciation for the differences of others.

Let's close with 10 fundamental lessons you should take from this course: (1) Conflict is inherent in human interaction, but we can learn to manage it better; (2) we can achieve a win-win solution most of the time; (3) we need to report and take into account one another's perspectives; (4) we need to be aware of our multiple goals; (5) we have a better shot of achieving

a win-win solution if the power between the parties is close to equal; (6) we need to work with a broad repertoire of conflict strategies; (7) we have useful processes and steps to follow in conflict negotiation; (8) our personal and professional relationships have important dynamics of their own; (9) we have to manage the aftermath of conflict; and (10) professional help is available if we need it.

Conflict points us to problems we need to solve and challenges us to fully encounter ourselves and others with whom we have relationships. We can't avoid conflict, and life would be less interesting without it. ∎

Assignment

1. How can you continue to improve your conflict management skills in your personal, professional, and community relationships?

Glossary

adversary system: System of dispute resolution originating in ancient Greece, in which each disputant presents his or her claims and supporting evidence to a neutral third party, who then judges how the dispute should be settled.

arbitrator: A person with designated authority to hear and evaluate cases and render a binding or nonbinding decision on an issue between parties engaged in a dispute.

argumentation: The study and practice of how people reach conclusions through logical reasoning, that is, making claims based on premises. Argumentation includes debate and negotiation, which are concerned with reaching mutually acceptable conclusions.

BATNA: In principled negotiation, this term stands for "best alternative to a negotiated agreement." Each negotiator decides ahead of time what solution he or she will opt for if a negotiated agreement is unsatisfactory or fails.

conflict: An actual or perceived difference of some significance between two parties, each of whom perceives that the other party is interfering with his or her needs or desires. The instructor's short definition is "a discomforting difference."

conflict climate: The combination of organizational culture, organizational climate, and organizational policies and procedures that affects the way members manage conflict.

conflict goal: A desired outcome in a given conflict. Major types include topic, relational, identity, and process goals.

conflict management: Any and all actions people use in dealing (or not dealing) with a conflict, including resolution.

conflict resolution: A process leading to a recognized outcome of a conflict—a negotiated agreement or a unilaterally imposed solution.

conflict styles: Default strategies for managing conflicts that people tend to employ across different situations.

contract: A concrete, stated agreement between conflicting parties on what each party will do to solve a conflict and for which each party can be held responsible.

critical communication context: A situation in which a distressing, destabilizing event creates a "critical context" among relational partners; in this context, effective communication becomes simultaneously much more important and much more difficult.

dysfunctional conflict strategy: A conflict strategy that yields unwanted side effects that may exceed its benefits.

empathy: The skill of being able to understand what another person is experiencing from his or her perspective; the ability to put oneself in another's shoes.

family meeting: A scheduled time set aside with a structured agenda and ground rules to promote meaningful communication, encouragement, cooperation, joint decision-making, and problem-solving among all family members.

field theory: Theory developed by Kurt Lewin, which holds that human behavior is a function of both an individual's psychological field, or "lifespace," and the social environment at the time the behavior occurs.

forensic reasoning: Observing and documenting the facts in a given case and deciding how the facts relate to an established standard or rule.

fractionation: A useful conflict management technique that consists of breaking or "chunking " large conflicts into smaller parts and dealing with the parts separately.

fundamental attribution error: The common tendency to assume that the behavior of others stems primarily from personal character traits rather than the situation at hand. The "actor-observer bias" includes the opposite tendency, that is, to explain our own behavior as primarily the result of the current situation rather than our character.

game theory: A mathematical method for analyzing how people make decisions in situations involving competition and conflict. Involves choices in which each party may gain or lose, depending on the others' choices.

interests: Reasons underlying a participant's stance or position in a negotiation.

issue: A matter of concern that is unsettled or in dispute between two parties.

lens model of conflict interaction: A model illustrating that each party in a conflict has a particular view of himself or herself, the other person, and the relationship; all of these combine to form one's perception of the conflict. These views filter reality and are always distorted to some degree.

mediator: A person who is trained to act as a neutral third party and who helps disputants, with their consent, negotiate a mutual agreement among themselves, seeking win-win solutions whenever possible.

moral conflict: A conflict between parties who are locked into opposition because they are deeply committed to different moral orders and beliefs and do not share a common standard by which to settle their differences.

negotiation: A process of achieving agreement or resolving disputes through discussion.

ombudsman: A person appointed to act as an informal, neutral, independent, and confidential intermediary to help solve problems or manage conflicts.

organizational climate: Members' collective perception of how it feels to work and live in a particular organization.

organizational culture: Deep, pervasive, usually unspoken code that governs the way things are done in an organization and its overall atmosphere and determines what ideas and behavior are considered right or wrong, important or unimportant, and acceptable or unacceptable.

perception: The process of observing and assigning meaning to the things we see.

perspective-taking: Adopting a viewpoint that considers how events might look and feel to the other person.

position: A statement of what a negotiator wants or needs.

power currencies: Various sources of power that may be used to influence outcomes of social interactions, originally introduced by French and Raven in 1959.

principle of noncontradiction: Aristotle's law stating that two contradictory statements cannot both be true at the same time; one of the two must be false.

punctuation: The way each party perceives and defines the chain of events in a conflict. Each party tends to punctuate events in such a way that he or she appears to be reacting to the behavior of the other party. Disagreement about how to punctuate the sequence of events is at the heart of many conflicts. For example, I nag because you withdraw; I withdraw because you nag.

reframing: Finding a new, constructive way to look at a conflict issue through a different lens or "frame," with the goal of changing perceptions and positions from fixed and negative to more flexible and positive.

relational dialectics: Opposing tensions that result from conflicting emotional needs of relational partners; such tensions are constantly in flux and affect couples' communication patterns.

rhetoric: The art of using language to communicate effectively. Aristotle defined rhetoric as the art of finding all the means of persuasion in any given situation.

rule or norm of reciprocity: The universal social expectation that people will respond to each other in kind—responding to a positive action with another positive action and responding to a negative action with another negative action. This norm can be a powerful factor in conflict escalation and de-escalation.

Sophist: In ancient Greece, a member of a class of roving teachers of philosophy and rhetoric who taught their students to persuade or convince others.

triangulation: Drawing a third party into a conflict instead of directly addressing the other conflict party.

win-win solution: A conflict solution in which the outcome is favorable for both parties.

workplace bullying: Repeated mistreatment of a targeted individual characterized by disruptive acts that threaten the individual's emotional and/or physical health and career.

XYZ formula: John Gottman's useful formula for using "I" statements and avoiding criticism of the other person when communicating during a conflict. Usually stated as: "In situation X, when you do Y, I feel Z."

Biographical Notes

Cloke, Kenneth: An internationally recognized mediator, facilitator, arbitrator, attorney, teacher, speaker, and author. He is director of the Center of Dispute Resolution, which is a multidisciplinary, multicultural association of professionals. Cloke specializes in helping parties resolve complex conflicts in community and workplace settings.

Deutsch, Morton: Considered the founder of modern conflict management theory and practice. Deutsch received his M.A. from the University of Pennsylvania (1940) and his Ph.D. (1948) in social psychology from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Studying under Kurt Lewin, he focused in his Ph.D. dissertation on the question of whether conflicts were necessarily competitive situations and found that they were not. To the contrary, he discovered that most conflicts could be resolved in a way that enabled both parties to "win." Deutsch is a professor emeritus at Columbia University, where he founded the International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution. He has authored many articles and several books on conflict management, including the *Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice* (2000), and has received numerous awards for his research.

Fisher, Roger: Professor of law emeritus at Harvard Law School and former director of the Harvard Negotiation Project. Fisher served in World War II and, after the war, helped to administer the Marshall Plan in Paris and Washington, DC. He practiced law in Washington and served as a consultant to the Department of Defense. In addition to *Getting to Yes*, Fisher has authored seven other books on conflict management. He originated the award-winning television series *The Advocates* and consults with individuals, organizations, and governments on conflict management.

Gottman, John: Well known for his groundbreaking research on marital stability, Gottman is a professor of psychology emeritus at the University of Washington and currently heads the nonprofit Relationship Research Institute. He has translated much of his research into readable, practical

guides for married couples. Two of his most interesting books are *The Seven Principles of Making a Marriage Work* and *The Relationship Cure*.

Kilmann, Ralph: A consultant and author of 15 fifteen books and more than 100 articles on organizational design and conflict management. Kilmann taught for some 30 years in the Graduate School of Business at the University of Pittsburgh. He is perhaps best known for his work, along with Kenneth Thomas, on the Kilmann-Thomas instrument for assessing five conflict styles.

Lewin, Kurt (1890–1947): One of the pioneers of modern social psychology and applied psychology. After growing up and being educated in Germany, Lewin emigrated to the United States in 1933 and became a citizen in 1940. In his work at Duke University and the Center for Group Dynamics at MIT, he developed foundations for the study of group dynamics and human motivation and influenced Fritz Perls and Abraham Maslow, as well as Morton Deutsch.

Thomas, Kenneth W.: Has taught as a professor of management at UCLA, Temple University, and the University of Pittsburgh. He focuses on building tools to improve motivation and work performance. Along with Ralph Kilmann, Thomas developed the concept of five conflict styles and the instrument for assessing an individual's conflict styles.

Ury, William: A former professor at Harvard Business School and a founder of the Harvard Negotiation Project. Working with the Carter Center of Emory University, Ury continues to serve as a mediator and advisor to governments and organizations around the world. He served as consultant to the White House on establishing nuclear risk reduction centers in Washington and Moscow. Ury is the author of five books other than *Getting to Yes*, the most recent of which is *Getting Past No: Negotiating with Difficult People*.

Wilmot, William: Author of *Artful Mediation* and co-author of *Interpersonal Conflict* and *Innovation: The Five Disciplines for Creating What Customers Want*. Wilmot serves as a teacher, consultant, facilitator, and coach. In his worldwide consulting practice, he works with organizations of all sizes on innovation, team development, conflict management, and mediation.

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