

CONFLICTS IN ORGANISATIONS



MANAGEMENT NOTES

PROFESSOR DR. ALI M. AL-KHOURI

ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING SERIES

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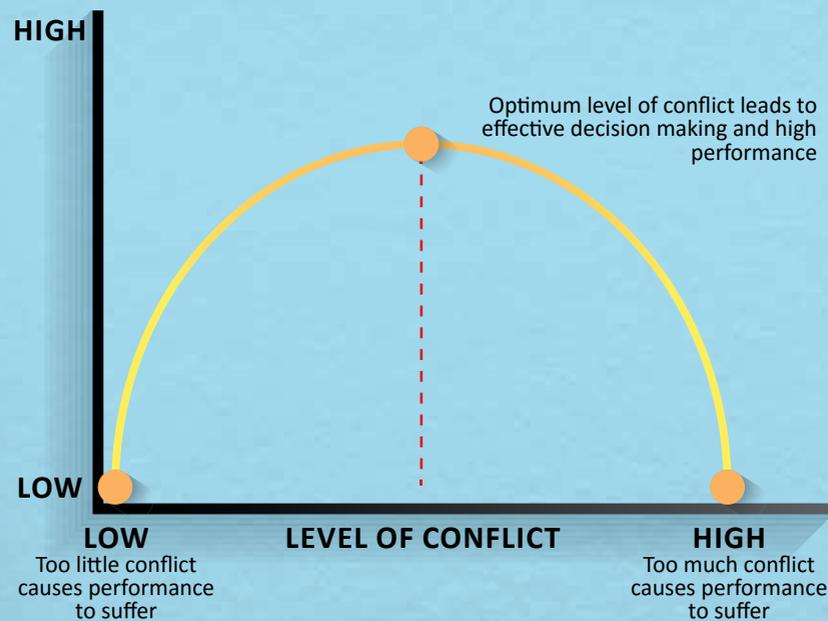
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Level of Organizational Performance



“An organisation, no matter how well designed, is only as good as the people who live and work in it.”

Dee Ward Hock

Founder and Former CEO of the
Visa Credit Card Association

Introduction



It is an indisputable fact that organisations and businesses today need to seek ways of becoming more resilient and competitive to strengthen performance in increasingly aggressive and ever-changing working environments. Ultimately, this is all down to and dependent on the people working in organisations.

This is to say that, the more organisations can encourage their employees to engage in positive interactions and coordination with each other, the higher the productivity and overall performance levels. However, organisations often get derailed by internal conflicts, whereby the vision and mission get lost and the organization get jeopardized.



Conflict as a Result of Human Interactions

In more simple terms, organisational conflict alludes to the result of human interactions. As a natural human trait, individuals have different personalities, beliefs, values, perceptions, and come with diverse skills and experiences, all of which can lead to internal disagreements. Hence, conflicting objectives, opinions and personal interests normally result in contradictions. Table 1 below provides a few generic examples of conflict scenarios in organisations.

Table 1: Conflicts in teams

CONFLICT EXAMPLE	DESCRIPTION
Role ambiguity	Lack of clarity or understanding of who does what, or real overlap in roles
Disagreements over goals	Absence of clarity or agreement on vision or goals
Scarcity of critical resources	Key resources, such as equipment and staff, are scarce
Differences in perceived status	Members treat each other differently based on status
Task interdependence	Interdependent members must rely on other members, and things do not always go as planned
Personal preferences	Team members may dislike other members for their personal characteristics, such as religion, political views, appearance or behavioral idiosyncrasies

Besides, divergence in certain situations can result, for instance, in lowering morale leading to a drop in standards and productivity, missed deadlines leading to a rise in absenteeism and increased workforce turnover. All these factors will reduce an organisation's efficiency and impinge upon its reputation and negatively impact its stated aims and objectives.



Figure 1: Impact of conflict on organisations

“

Change means movement.
Movement means friction.
Only in the frictionless
vacuum of a nonexistent
abstract world can movement
or change occur without that
abrasive friction of conflict.

”

SAUL ALINSKY
American Political Theorist

International Research on Conflicts



A research study that covered organisations in nine countries in Europe and America, found that the majority of people interviewed - 85% of employees - from all work levels, had experienced conflict to some degree.¹The survey discovered that **employees were involved in almost three hours of dispute weekly.** These hours translated into a wastage of 385 million working days and consequently in an estimated staggering bill of \$359 billion in paid hours.²

Interestingly, the same study found that nearly 10% of employees blamed conflicts for project failure. Practically speaking, the percentage of the conflict impact is much much higher in the business world!

¹CPP (2008); although the survey is now dated, our experience indicates that the findings of the study are still valid today.

²This was calculated on the basis of average hourly earnings of \$17.95 in the United States. However, according to the latest report from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics published in 2018, the average American earns \$27.16 per hour.

The Unbearable Cost of Some Conflicts

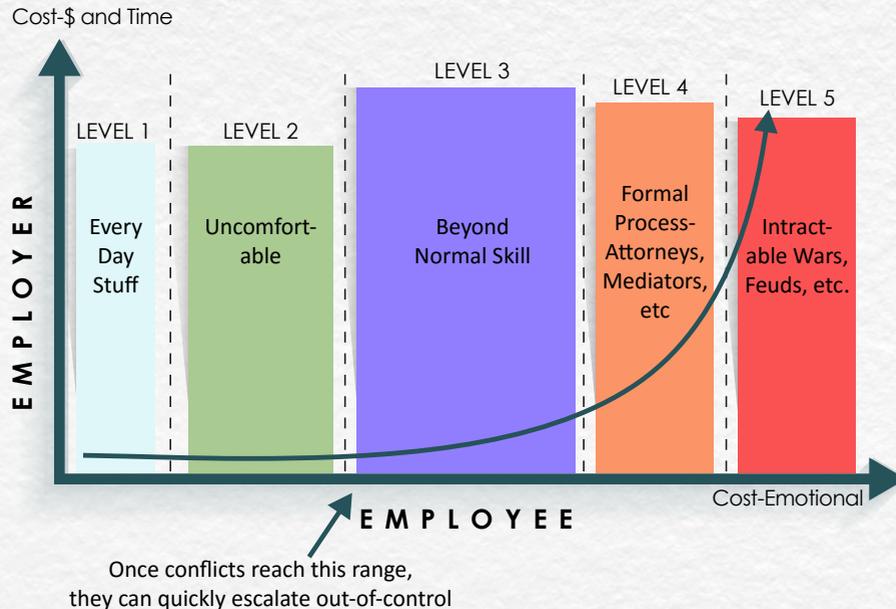


Figure 2: **Progressive Conflict Levels**

Source: Weinstein (2013)

Setting aside the question of avoidance or the alleviation of disputes, once they are created, mismanagement of conflict may escalate cases, from gossip, backbiting and criticism to a breakdown in trust and loss of productivity, inefficiency and a lowering of workforce morale. This will redirect the attentions of those involved from tackling work related matters to people tackling people scenarios!

Such fallouts can often be precluded by taking early action to address the issues. **Organisations need to create the capability to be able to evaluate the stage at which conflict escalates to a state that is counter-productive for those involved and they must be able to manage and resolve such conflicts** successfully. This should help individuals and teams to work through differences while developing stronger relationships, and appreciating other perspectives and being more open minded and flexible.

Organisation Culture and Atmosphere



Those organisations that have the capability to create an atmosphere for constructive agreements and disagreements among their members and control possible negative routes of conflicts have a distinct advantage in meeting corporate goals and succeeding in today's business world. This will not only support them to have a better focus on strategic directions but to deal more effectivity with the imposition of performance impediments.

In fact, the same study mentioned earlier (CPP, 2008) found evidence that **besides the negative verge of conflicts, they can also lead to positive outcomes** within workplace environments. The study reported that as a result of conflict:

- 41% of respondents had better understanding of others,
- 33% of respondents had improved working relationships,
- 29% of respondents found a better solution to a problem,
- 21% of respondents saw higher performance in the team, and
- 18% of respondents felt increased motivation.

Conflict as a Path to **Cooperation and Development**

In general, conflicts must be seen as paths to: brainstorm new ideas, solve existing and emerging problems, provide opportunities for individuals and teams to expand their learnings and skills, and inspire creativity through breakthrough thinking. Resisting conflicts altogether, means that no room for all aforementioned pros, as organisations in this category run with the mindset of a “groupthink”; a kind of thinking style that has proven not only to lead to lower productivity and lack of creativity in organisations, but to poorer outcomes and potential failure.

“No matter how thin you slice
it, there will always be two
sides.”

Baruch Spinoza
(1632 – 1677)
Dutch philosopher

What is Conflict?



Organisational conflict can be defined as dissension or situation marked by a lack of agreement or harmony between individuals or groups in organisations, which can range from issues such as the appointment of responsibility, the allotment of resources and even can extend to the aims and governance of the organisation.

Conflict Definition

Often arguments or misinterpretation over real or imagined variance of needs, provision and convictions, or the antagonistic relationship between co-workers or management, result in organisational conflict.

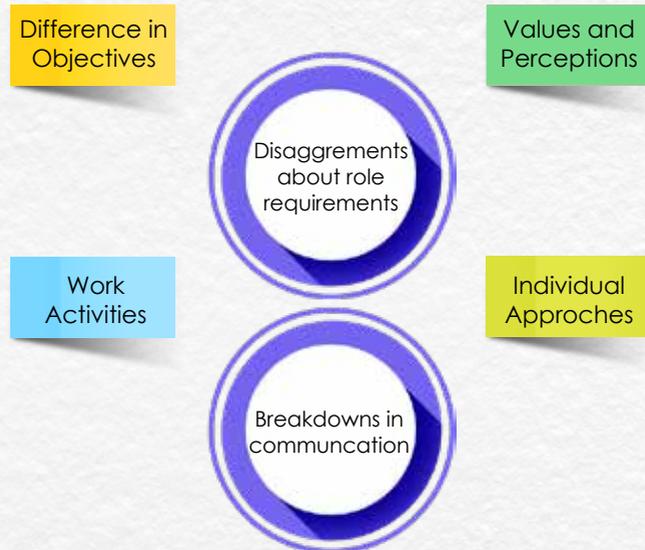


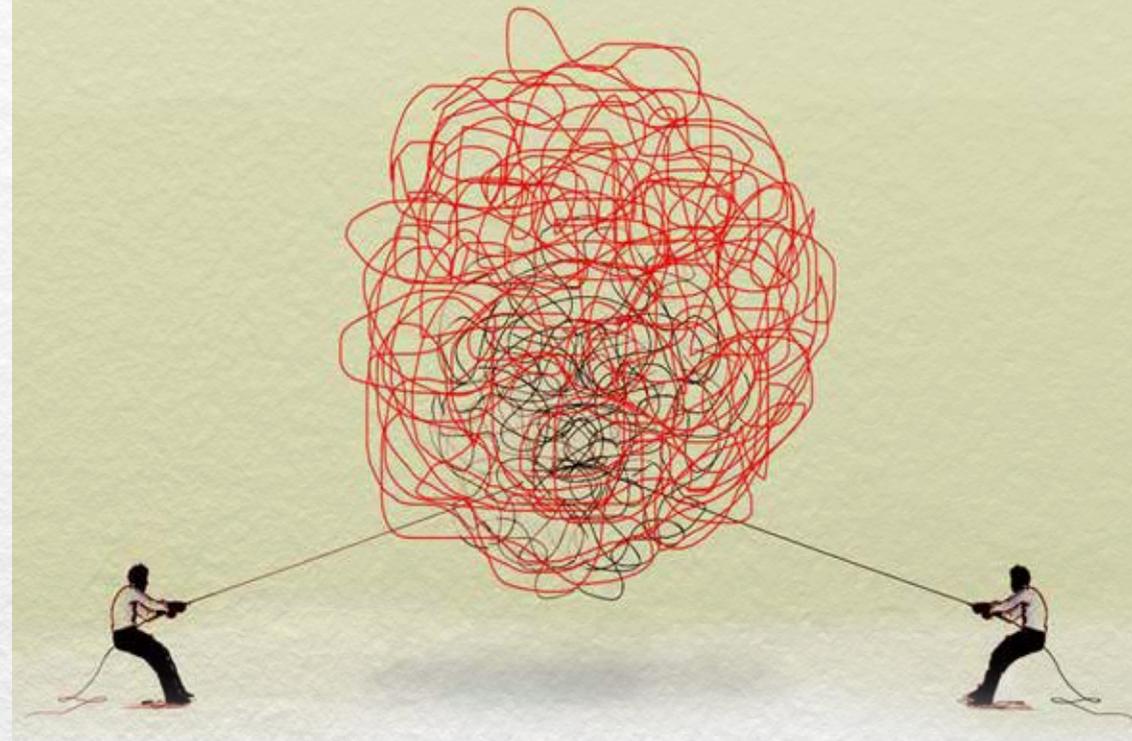
Figure 3: **Conflict sources**

At the workplace, the prospect of dispute or conflict occurs when two or more workers are employed or assigned with similar responsibilities and they have a difference in opinions over the job or the manner in which it is to be carried out.

Table 2: **Relationships, tasks and process related conflict**

TYPE OF CONFLICT	EXAMPLES
Relationships	Disagreement with another team members' political views, religion, orientation, or gender, racial, ethics, or personality characteristics; disagreement with another team members based on experiences outside of the team.
Task	Disagreement over appropriate therapy, team tasks, and goals.
Process	Disagreement over team processes, such as decision making; disagreement over how tasks or goals should be accomplished.

Conflict ensues in the event that one party considers that they have been adversely impacted by the actions or decisions of another party over a contentious issue. The result is contradiction or disagreement, which can embroil into a savage difference of opinion, an acerbic clash of character or degenerate into a virulent feud.



Conflict in the Literature



Conflict in the literature is identified as the discord perceived between one objective's worth and its necessity, and that of another. It is observed that this discord can be found in an individual with their own self-generated indecision, or in the case of an individual set against another individual, group or organisation (Reichers, 1986).



Figure 4: Levels and Types of Conflict

These controversies or disagreements can often be traced back as stemming from personal grievances or when concepts or viewpoints deviate. Timely and positive action is necessitated in certain scenarios by management not only to resolve the current situation but also to put an end to meaningless tensions.

The Handling of Conflict by Management



Figure 5: Key management attention areas

Management must ensure that some conflicts do not continue to reoccur as an associated or quite separate instances, particularly when underlying annoyance and resentments have not been resolved, as they usually manifest themselves in other, or more significant problems.

In general terms, the tendency in current management practices lean towards more of a hope that disagreements will disappear with time, or when one or all of those involved leave the organisation, but there remains the incipient threat. The longer it remains unresolved, the less likely it will be to have a straightforward solution.

“
Some managers have no
problem at all with conflicts;
they may actually enjoy it.
”

Tip: How do you respond to conflict?

**Do you embrace it, or do you
prefer to run and hide from it?**



For most of us, the second option is the more likely – we don't enjoy finding ourselves in worrying or uncomfortable situations, and conflict definitely makes us worried and uncomfortable!

When we're faced with conflict, our fight-or-flight response kicks in – our palms start to sweat, we blush, and adrenaline rushes through our system. We start to feel less in control of ourselves and will often say things we don't mean. Even if we do mean them, we'll often wish we'd said them more kindly and diplomatically.

As a general rule, we need to keep in mind that workplaces are dynamic; change is a constant and, as a result, conflict is almost inevitable. Hence, exposure to conflict is inevitable, and the more we experience it, the more capable we become of adapting to it, managing it and resolving it. Let's look at it this way, conflicts are essential elements in the process of enabling us to revisit our goals and roles, and improve our productivity and performance levels.

WORKPLACE CONFLICT

There are lots of people who don't know about workplace conflict, like how it's impacting an organisation's bottom line. These negative impacts are what we call the cost of conflict.

89%
of employees
have seen
conflict escalate

\$12K
in turnover
costs per toxic
employee

1 Day
the average amount
of time per month
employees spend
dealing with conflict

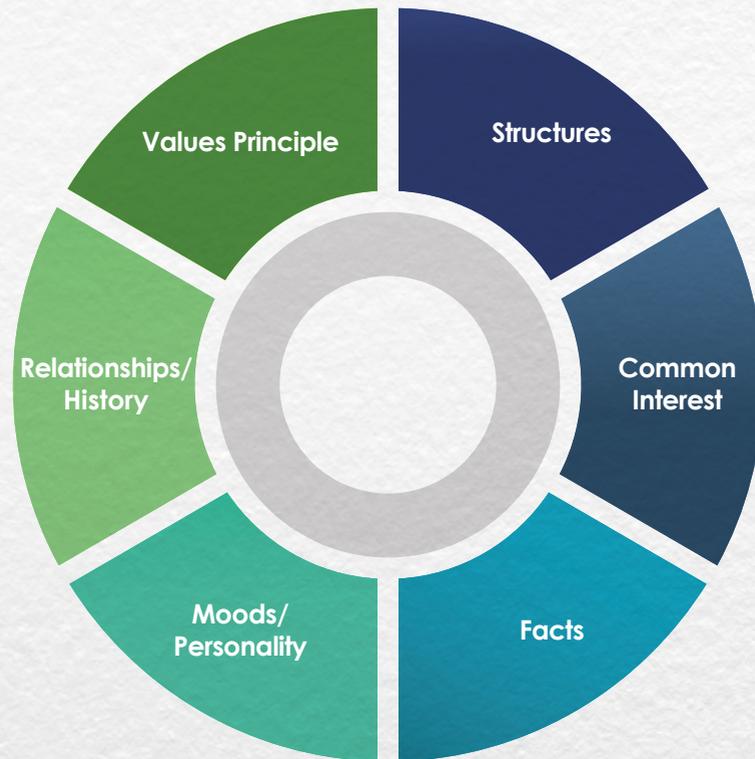
1/3
approximate
time a manager
wastes dealing
with conflict

Source: **Housman and Minor (2015)**

“
Where all think alike,
no one thinks very much.
”

Walter Lippmann
(1889 – 1974)
American Writer

Functional and Dysfunctional Conflict



Generally, there are two types of conflict in organisations. There is **positive conflict**, where a difference of opinion about a subject, leads to active disagreement. This prompts the evaluation of different ideas and alternatives, leading to the clarification and reassessment of options. And there is **negative conflict**, where personal issues become involved in the situation, which generally results in unproductive conclusions.

“
Conflict is drama,
and how people deal with
conflict shows you the kind of
people they are.
”

Stephen Moyer

English Film and Television Actor and Director

Conflict in and Between Groups: Functional and Dysfunctional Conflicts

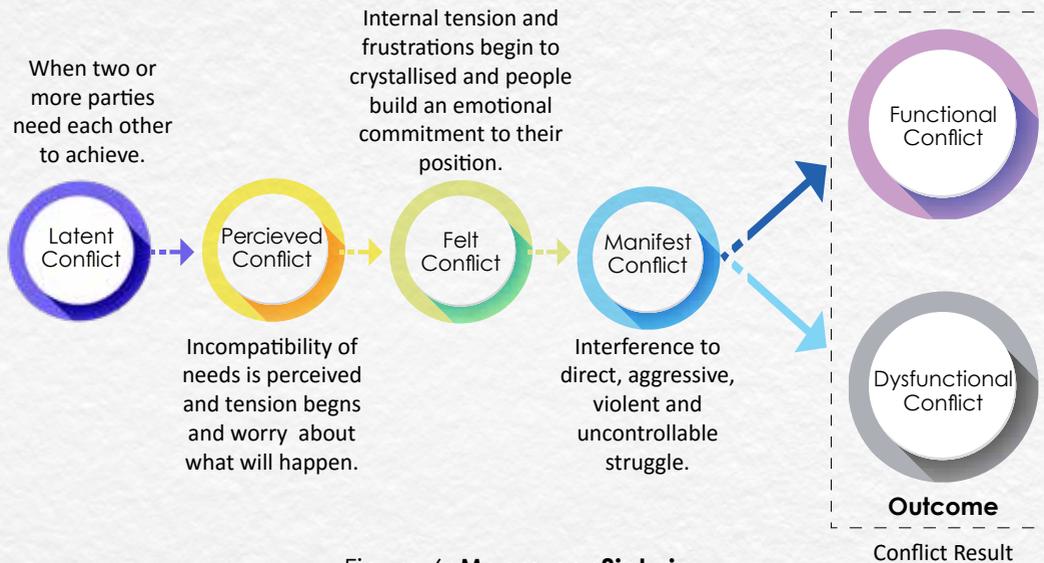


Figure 6: **Macro conflict view**
Source: Purohit (2014)

The Bright Side of Conflicts

The positioning of two or more different ideas aimed to enhance the work environment or the performance of an organisation is described as positive or functional conflicts. This is the situation where personnel are constructively critical of the ideas and suggestions of their peers in improving performance and work conditions, rather than by negative arguments that are directed personally at co-workers.

Such conflicts, if managed perceptively, can lead to the early anticipation and resolution of issues, allowing those involved to feel they have made a positive contribution towards the improvement of the organisation. Constructive criticism is a core element in organisations that can help employees understand what they are doing well and what they need help with e.g., for professional development, clarified expectations, stronger working relationships and overall organizational growth (Zenger and Folkman, 2014).

Knowledge Point: Harvard Study on Conflict

In a study conducted in 2014 to Harvard Business Review, by a three to one margin of respondents indicated that constructive criticism did more to improve their performance than positive feedback. 57% of respondents preferred receiving constructive criticism over positive feedback; only 43% preferred praise/recognition.

Although the employees desired to receive constructive criticism in the workplace, the study revealed that managers and leaders strongly disliked giving this type of feedback. 72% said they thought their performance would improve if their managers would provide corrective feedback.

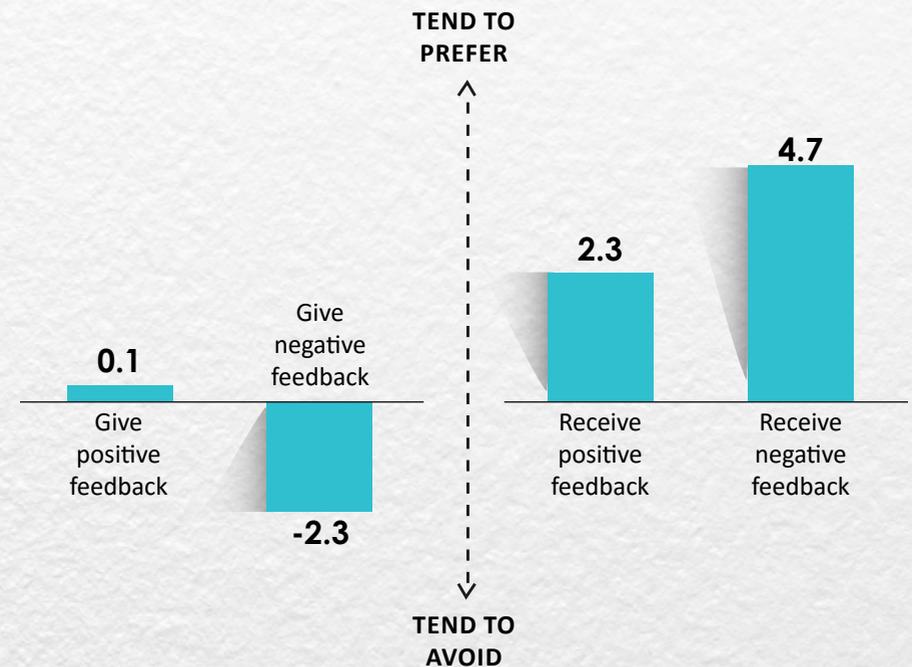


Figure 7: **Harvard conflict survey**
Source: Zenger and Folkman (2014)

Holding the Stick from the Middle

Despite the negative observations, it should be appreciated that conflict in moderation is an indispensable element to engender a vigorous corporate outlook. Too little and it suppresses performance, too much and the same effect results.

The Unpleasant Side of Conflicts

Negative conflict, on the other hand, can be wholly disruptive to an organisation. It may often originate simply from a belief by a team member that they have been singled out for criticism. The effect can be spread contagiously throughout the organisation, impinging upon productivity and standards and, in extreme situations, this can lead ultimately to aggression in the workplace.

Often conflict escalation has regressive condition that can be traced back to an early lack of appreciation of the severity of the situation, and consequently, a failure to take positive action to ameliorate it.

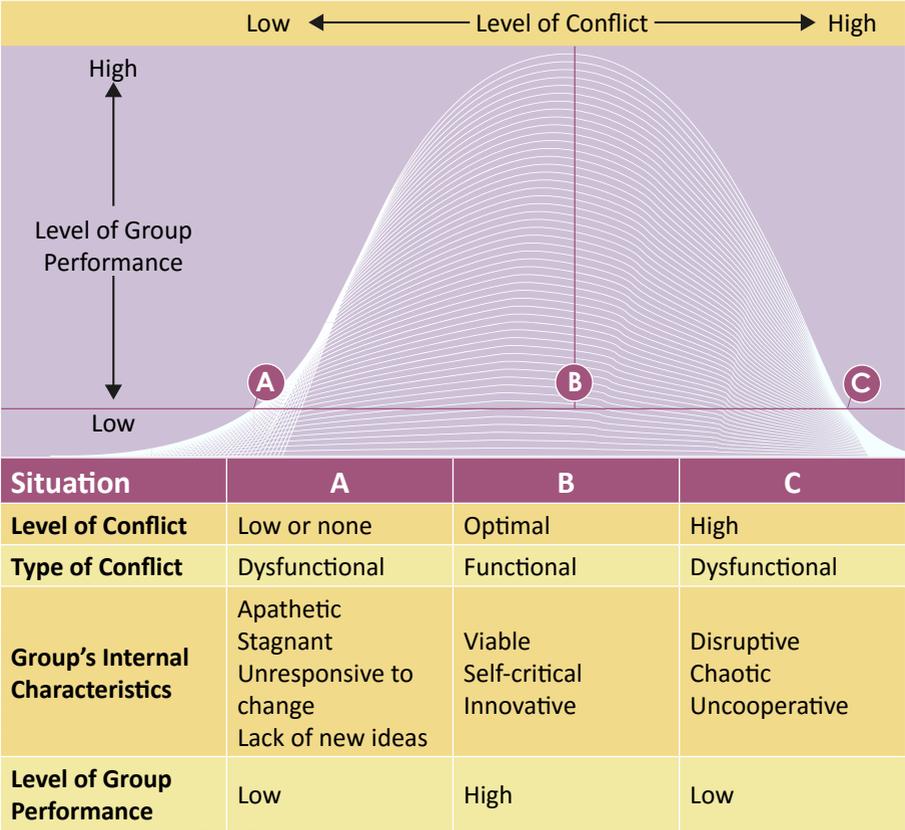


Figure 8: Level of conflict and organisational performance

The ideal situation is to maintain conflict within manageable bounds, in its mid-range. This may seem to fly in the face of logical convention, but a mid-range of task-centred conflict can produce healthy dialogue and generate progressive ideas for the organisation.

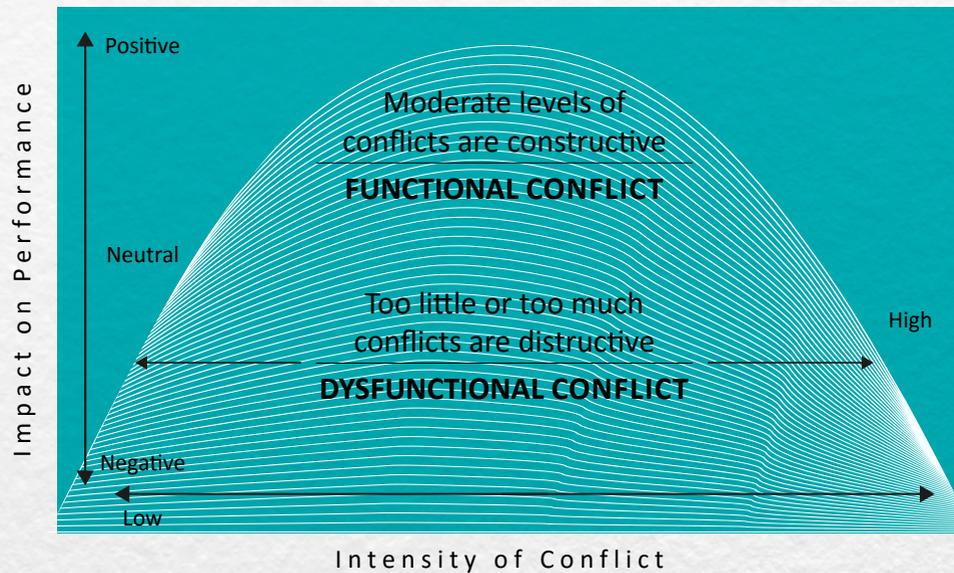
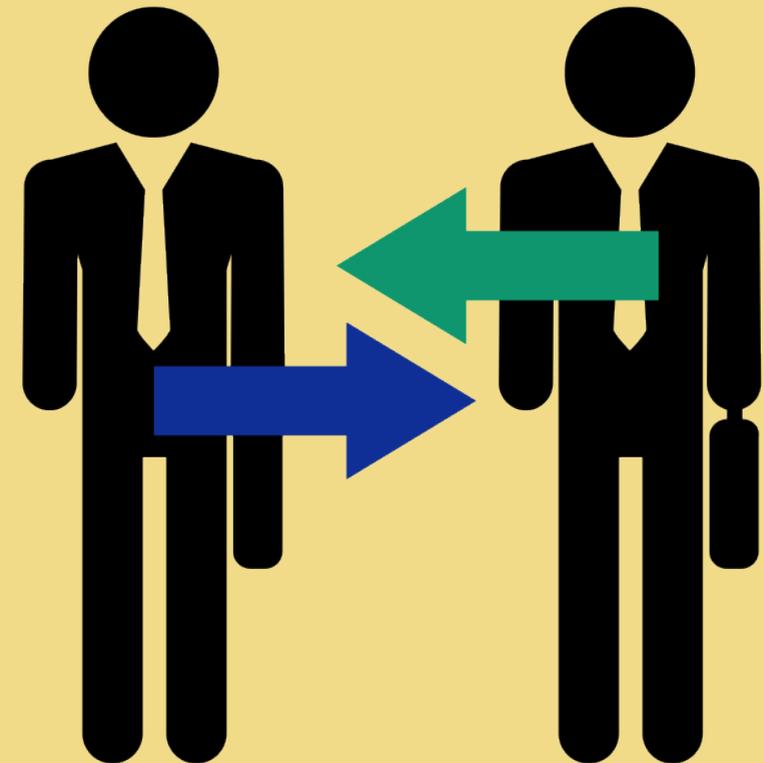


Figure 9: **The inverted U relationship between performance and conflict**

Healthy differences in opinions (referred to as functional conflict) among individuals or groups is an acceptable condition, to generate innovative ideas and propositions, and incentivises the group to strive for better performance and improved results. In contrast, dysfunctional conflict has a damaging effect on performance and is likely to engender further complications and greater negativity.



Knowledge Point:

Why Conflicts Are Necessary?³



► **Conflict can be a pathway to solutions.**

We all like routines, we like to feel that we understand the rules, and we like to think that we've been doing things right all along. New ways of working can take us out of our comfort zone. Yet sometimes, when things are clearly not working as well as they could, we need to go back to the drawing board and shake things up a little. Conflict can often help us to understand what works and what doesn't, and it allows us to redesign, reinvent and refine the systems we have in place.

► **We can learn the behaviour patterns of other people.**

Another positive effect of conflict is that it provides us with ways to develop our understanding of other people. By understanding what upsets a person or causes them to become defensive, we can enter into discussions with confidence, knowing that we can push that person hard in productive ways without offending them or causing them to withdraw.

► **We can become better listeners**

Developing good listening skills is crucial for any successful manager. Absorbing, understanding and accepting someone else's point of view can be difficult, especially when we just don't agree with that person. By listening

actively rather than passively, and by thinking objectively about what the other person is saying, we can learn a lot, and we may even come to change our own thinking about things that are important to us.

► **Conflict encourages flexibility**

In conflict situations, we are forced to adjust to others, and they are forced to adjust to us. Two of the most valuable qualities a person can have when faced with conflict are humility and openness. No-one likes arrogance or stubbornness, and it's important that we are willing to respect others and admit when we are wrong. If we simply wish to get our own way in every conflict situation, we will quickly come to be seen as egotistical and controlling. It's important that we understand the principles of give and take, and make sure we achieve a balance between the two.

► **It's an opportunity to express our needs.**

People are often bad at saying what they want. Sometimes, it is necessary for things to reach a conflict situation in order to admit to what they would really like. Handled in a positive way, conflict can get people's wishes and desires out into the open. It's important to be balanced when presenting your needs; standing your ground without being aggressive or combative is essential in making sure that people understand that you are fair-minded and not a pushover. The more we ask for what we want or need in positive ways, the more relaxed and confident we become about doing it in the future.

► **It opens our minds to new ideas.**

As we discuss ideas with others, our understanding of a situation becomes fine-tuned. Conflict is extremely useful as a tool for shaping and refining ideas, because it allows for problems and flaws to be pointed out which, in turn, leads to the elimination of those issues. Acknowledging and understanding other people's views is the key to this fine-tuning process – other people will very often point out things we haven't thought of, helping us to shape our own ideas more clearly. Used in this way, conflict can actually encourage trust, respect and co-operation, rather than damaging them.

³Based on recommendations of Campbell (2016).

“

The better able team members are to engage, speak, listen, hear, interpret, and respond constructively, the more likely their teams are to leverage conflict rather than be levelled by it.

”

Runde and Flanagan
(2010)

Why Management Needs to Promote Positive Conflicts?



Conflicts within an organisation can lead to positive or negative results. When positive, it is a healthy condition. Facing the challenge of surmounting issues can create cohesion within groups, moulding them into functional bodies better able to address and resolve setbacks. Therefore, management should promote a working environment where members feel secure enough to express dissenting opinions and as an approach to accomplishing goals and strengthening relationships.

Promoting Positive Conflicts



Figure 10: Dealing with conflicts
Source: <https://www.csinfo.it/>

Experienced management view diversity and differences of opinion as a unique characteristics of great teams and that conflicts are ways to get the best results; and never as a “right or wrong” game. They view conflict as a constructive instrument to produce new ideas, solve problems, expand individual and group skills, and foster creativity and higher levels of productivity.

Why Embrace Conflicts?

Following are some justifications promoting the adoption of conflict in organisations to drive positive results and higher functioning teams:

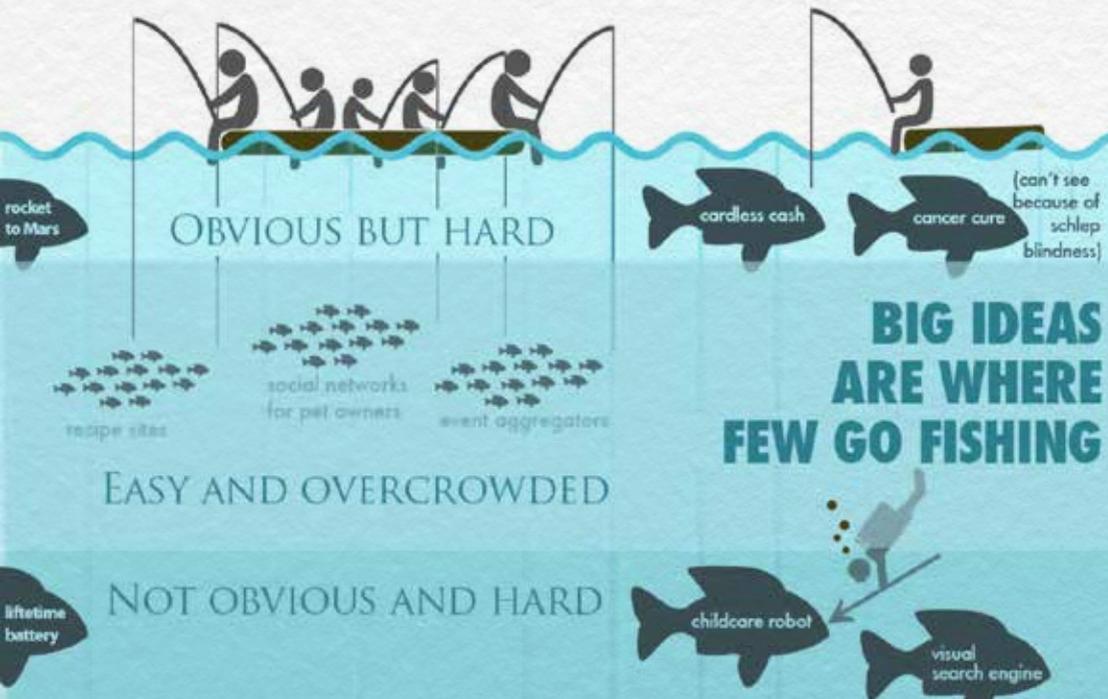
(1) Conflicts are the means of highlighting the existence of problems, identifying those involved and putting forward possible solutions. The atmosphere of critical conflict encourages the workforce to identify and evaluate different options and motivates them to take positive action to formulate their ideas and implement them.

(2) The presence of a functional conflict environment within an organisation has many benefits beyond those of encouraging change. Failures and faults within the system are better identified, and the climate of correction leads more positively to rectification, and the avoidance of possible delay, thereby minimizing latent frustration and grievances.

(3) The presence of conflict encourages enthusiasm and innovation. It generates an atmosphere for questioning existing practices and reviewing problems from a wide viewpoint, extending the opportunities for arriving at the most apposite solution. The generation of controlled aggression directed at the workplace is a new and healthy experience for most people, whereby they learn the emotions and issues that arouse them to question and contest existing practices.

WHERE ARE THE BIG IDEAS?

SCHLEP BLINDNESS PHENOMENON
by ANNA VITAL



Source: <https://blog.adioma.com/where-are-the-big-ideas-schlep-blindness-infographic>

Knowledge Point: Conflict and Schlep Blindness

The “schlep blindness” is a term used by Graham (2012) to describe that there are great startup ideas lying around unexploited right under our noses. ‘Schlep’ is a Yiddish word, from a German origin meaning ‘to drag’, and it has passed into general use in the American society to **mean tedious and unpleasant task**.

The most precarious aspect of schleps is that most of detests of ideas is unconscious. Our unconscious won't let us see ideas that involve tedious or unpleasant schleps. That is what Graham's (2012) calls schlep blindness.

Although there is no one single formula to overcome schlep blindness, raising consciousness is a critical tool for raising awareness and open our eyes to new ideas and perceptions.

In organisational terms, this would mean to “think” and find the degree of unity across systems; and a link to the organization's identity and self-referencing attributes (Pees et al., 2009).

As Mary Esther Harding - British-American Jungian analyst - puts it: “conflict is the beginning of consciousness.” Indeed, conflict challenges the status quo – the established way of doing things – which may trigger deepening awareness, the creative thinking skills of teams and in finding solutions challenges and meeting goals (Hülshager et al., 2009; Shalley & Gilson, 2004). In nutshell, conflicts should facilitate the exploration of ideas and positioning of different viewpoints.

As such, organisations need to interpret conflict as a natural resource that can be used for positive change and development at both personal and organizational levels, which should in turn empower the creation of new paradigms of thought, innovation and leadership (Ziebell, 2018).

Conflict as a Business Tool

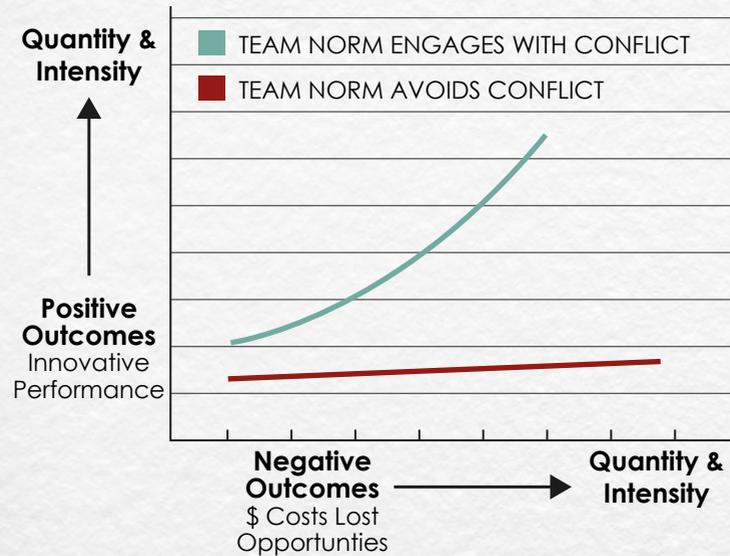


Figure 11: **Constructive conflict as a business tool**
Source: resologics.com

Various international research studies found that successful organisations view conflict as an indispensable instrument that supports enhance teams' performance, specifically when they actively and thoughtfully engage in business matters.⁴

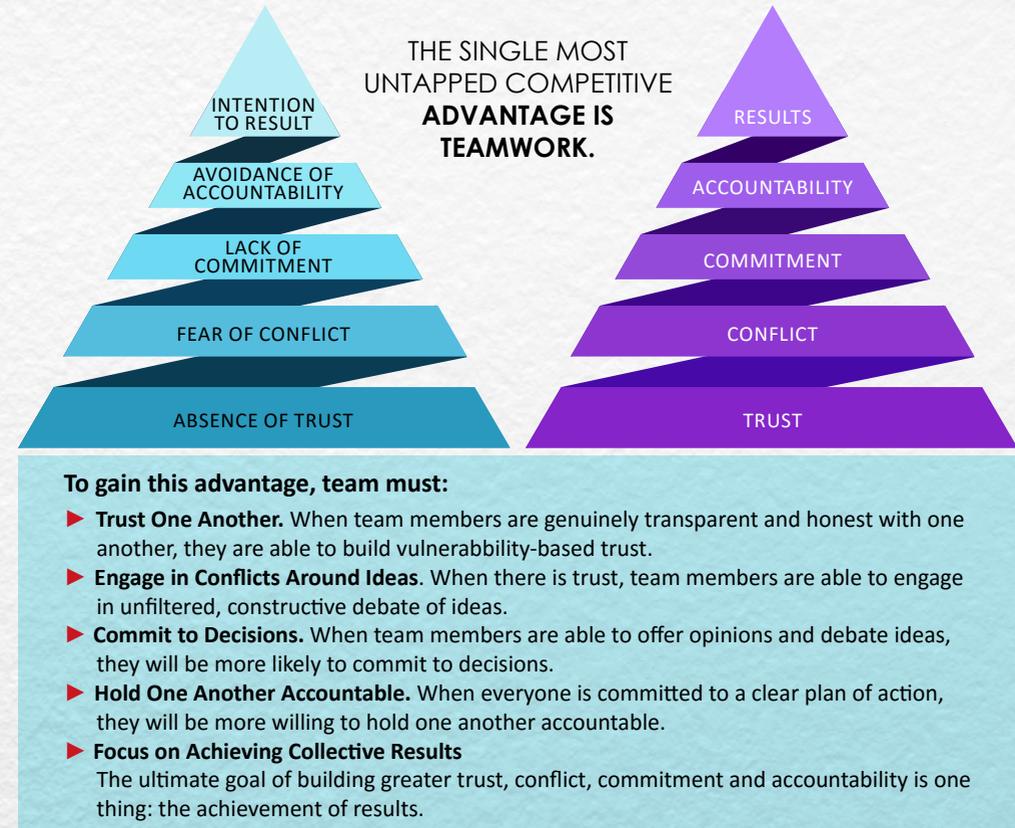
In fact, many organisations indicated that restraining conflict, creates kind of a "groupthink," - a term we mentioned earlier - which discourages innovation as everybody is promoted to see things only in one color!

⁴Groysberg et al., 2018; Hemlin et al., 2008; Jehn, 1995; Lee, 2015; Mumford, 2002; Redmond, 1993; Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004; Shalley and Gilson, 2004.

All in all, organisations need to develop better understanding of the dysfunctions that keep teams from performing at their best.

The Five Dysfunctions of Team

Lencioni (2002; 2016) identified five behaviours that if addressed and maximised will result in more efficient and effective teams. These behaviours are trust, conflict, commitment, accountability, and results. See also Figure 12. Each behaviour builds upon the previous and supports the others.



To gain this advantage, team must:

- ▶ **Trust One Another.** When team members are genuinely transparent and honest with one another, they are able to build vulnerability-based trust.
- ▶ **Engage in Conflicts Around Ideas.** When there is trust, team members are able to engage in unfiltered, constructive debate of ideas.
- ▶ **Commit to Decisions.** When team members are able to offer opinions and debate ideas, they will be more likely to commit to decisions.
- ▶ **Hold One Another Accountable.** When everyone is committed to a clear plan of action, they will be more willing to hold one another accountable.
- ▶ **Focus on Achieving Collective Results**
The ultimate goal of building greater trust, conflict, commitment and accountability is one thing: the achievement of results.

Figure 12: **5 team dysfunctions and behaviors of a cohesive team**
Source: Lencioni (2002; 2016)

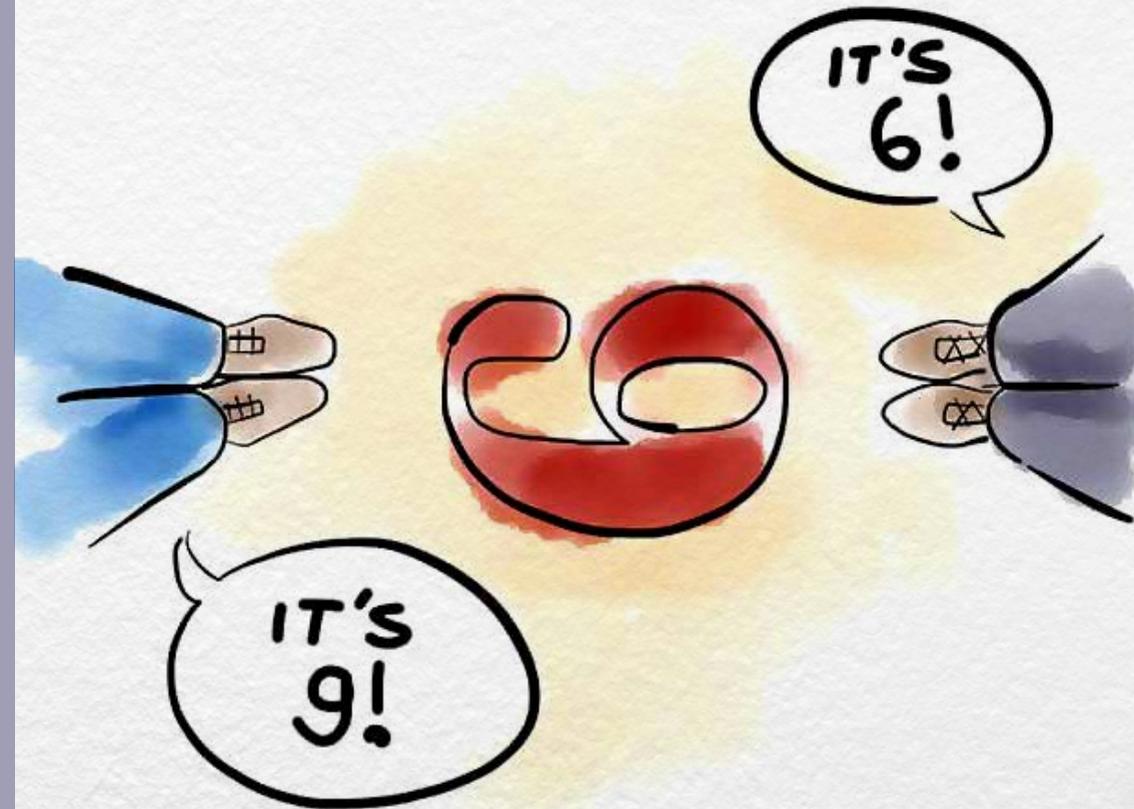
By following such models, organisations can better strategize their plans to drive team effectiveness and productivity. Remember, "darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that."⁵

⁵Martin Luther King, Jr.

Philosophy of Conflict

The law of conflict management says: Let's not do it your way or my way; let's do it the best way.

Greg Anderson
Author and Founder of
the American Wellness Project



The primary distinction between traditional approaches and contemporary approaches on conflict is that the traditional approach considers conflicts as demotivating, affecting productivity and as interrupting incidents, while the contemporary approach considers conflicts as a critical need that encourages adaptiveness, flexibility, responsiveness, and being more dynamic.

Conflict Schools

The concept of conflict has evolved over time from the classical philosophy of conflict to interactionist philosophy. In principle, management views conflict from three viewpoints:

1. Classical Approach⁶

In this approach, management regards conflict in a negative manner, considering it damaging to the normal function of the organisation. Conflict is seen to be associated with dissatisfaction and aggravation in the workplace, hindering the normal order of functionality and causing disruption.

Where there is disparity between the aims of the organisation and those of the individuals, it is inevitable that organisational interests will prevail to the detriment of individual interests. In consequence, this will lead to the creation of a greater divide between management and the workforce.

In this situation, the organisational structure is created by management in such a way that there is a clear order of policies and rules. Based on authority, the distribution of responsibility should be clearly delineated to ensure all levels of the workforce understand their own limits of responsibilities within the hierarchy. This structure will allow for the rapid response and settlement of any incipient crisis.

⁶Based on the classical management theory that was introduced in the late 19th century and is still used today by management as an approach that focuses on laying down clear structures and functions to control operations. This theory evolved during the industrial revolution to recognize the role of management played in Organisations particularly on efficiency of the work process and overall productivity. This classical school does not give importance to the human aspects of the workforce.

2. Human Relations Approach⁷

Sometimes referred to as the behaviouralist approach to conflict, the essential difference between it and the classical approach, is that it works on the premise that from a human relations approach, conflict is inevitable. The conflict will be precipitated by the dissimilitude of ideas and outlook of the individuals involved.

The aim should be to resolve the issues amicably on the acceptance that the conflict is inevitable. Every endeavour should be made to accommodate the demands of management and of the individual.

3. Interactionist Approach⁸

The interactionist approach, goes beyond the human relations approach, again accepting that the conflict is unavoidable, but considering it from a broader aspect. It does not attempt to suppress the conflict but chooses to promote contributions and intervention.

The intention is to generate new ideas and approaches that may be integrated with comparative ease, particularly when issues are concerned with large scale business change.

This approach allows for positive interaction between conflict group members, sustaining an ongoing minimum level of conflict enough to encouraging the generation of new ideas and promoting discussion aimed at improving organisational performance.

⁷Based on the human relations theory of management that began development in the early 1920's, also during the industrial revolution. The theory focuses more on the people in the workplace than the rules, procedures and processes. This is based on the belief that people by nature desire to receive special attention and encouragement to be more productive. So the theory advocates that instead of giving workers quotas and requiring certain procedures, workers are exposed to motivational and emotional tactics to get them to increase productivity.

⁸Based on the theoretical perspective in sociology that derives social processes (such as conflict, cooperation, identity formation) from human interaction. The theory evolved in the latter half of the twentieth century and has become one of the dominant sociological perspectives in the world today. The argument of the theory is that workers' interactions are of vital importance in business environments, as these interactions set the climate and have a major impact on business success, including employee morale and productivity.

Table 3: **Traditional vs current views of conflict**

TRADITIONAL VIEW OF ORGANISATIONAL CONFLICT	CURRENT VIEW OF ORGANISATIONAL CONFLICT
Conflict is avoidable.	Conflict is inevitable.
Conflict is caused by management error in designing organisations or by trouble makers.	Conflict arises from many causes, including organisational structure, unavoidable differences in goals, differences in perceptions and values of specialized personnel and so on.
Conflict disrupts the organisation and prevents optimal performance.	Conflict contributes and detracts from organisational performance in varying degrees.
The task of the management is to eliminate conflict.	The task of the management is to manage the level of conflict and its resolution for optimal organisational performance.
Optimal organisational performance requires the removal of conflict.	Optimal organisational performance requires a moderate level of conflict.

“
 In business, when two people
 always agree, one of them is
 irrelevant.”

William Mills Wrigley Jr.
 (1861 –1932)
 American Industrialist

Economic, Value and Power Conflict

The conflict theory suggested by Karl Marx - the father of social conflict theory - argues that human behaviour (conflicts) in social contexts are typically owed to either competition on finite resources, domination or power. Conflict theorists view society as an arena where individuals and groups will work to maximize their own benefits.

Understanding

The Roots of Conflicts

An interpretation of conflict by an American psychologist (Daniel Katz, 1965), tabulated three prime sources in organisations as: (1) economic, (2) value and (3) power.

Economic conflict results from the restricted availability of resources. This leads to groups contesting to obtain what is available, thereby generating aggressive behaviour.

Value conflict stems from the perception of what is considered essential in terms of preferences and ideas by people. This is best exemplified by a wartime situation, where different individuals or groups have ideas and principles they uphold in an antagonistic fashion.

Power conflict evolves when parties decide to exert their influence to capitalise on their position in a social environment. It can develop between individuals or groups, and in a corporate setting, amongst departments and divisions. Power can also be a factor in other forms of conflict as a means of imposing the intentions of one entity upon another.

Commonly, conflicts are not specifically of one origin but will be a mixture of a number of sources. There is likely, as an example, to be a combination of economic competition and a struggle for power in a dispute involving management and unions, as differing political values and ideologies will be involved.

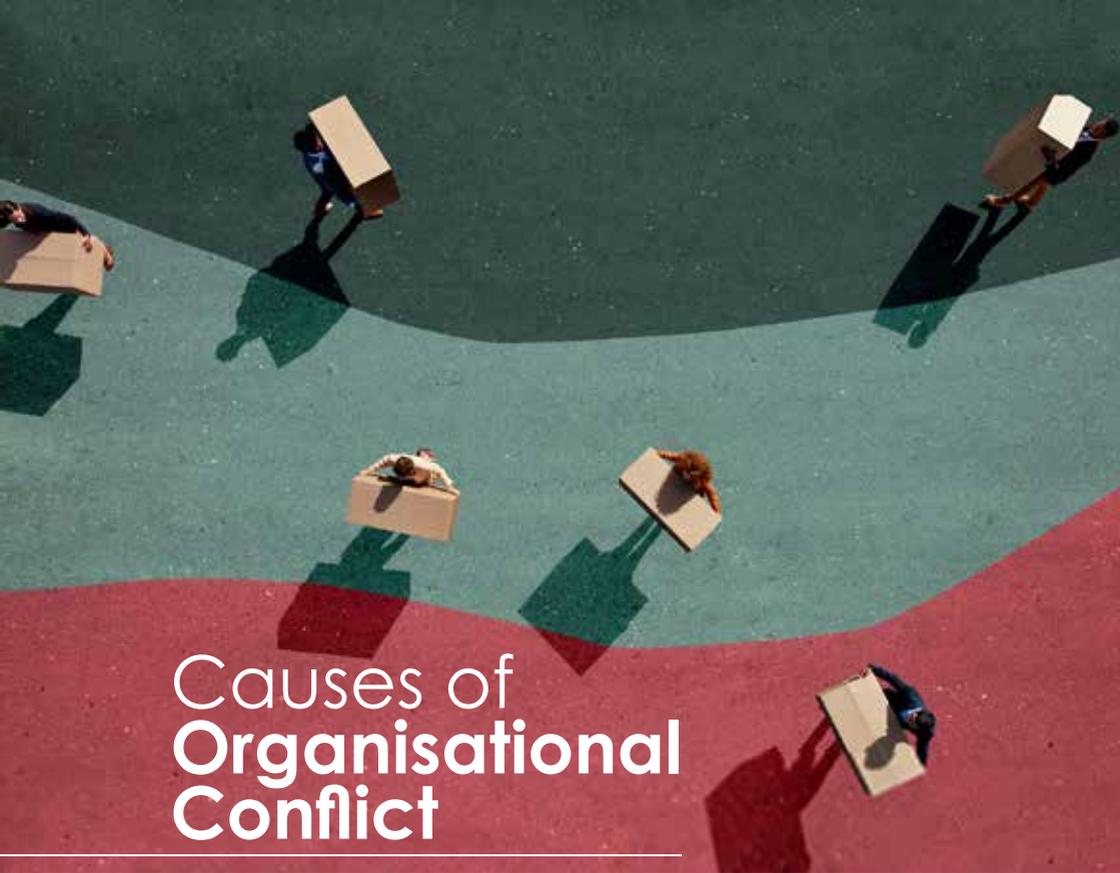


In individual or group discussion, there will always be differences of opinion on particular issues. These variances typically lead to conflict. Human nature dictates that there will always be divides in philosophy and thinking.

On acceptance of this posit, the requirement is to handle the situation constructively and as quickly as possible before it escalates beyond possible resolution.

“
It isn't that they can't see the solution. It is that they can't see the problem.”

Gilbert Keith Chesterton
(1874 – 1936)
English Writer and Philosopher



Causes of Organisational Conflict

As a general rule, people come from different backgrounds and have own perceptions of life and work. When these attributes and preferences come to interact with each other, there are higher chances that they do not function in harmony.

Conflict Stimulus in Organisations

When a conflict arises in a workplace, the environment can become toxic, which can have a negative impact on morale. More often than not, and as indicated earlier, conflicts are the result of misunderstandings, miscommunication and cultural differences than of genuine malice.

Although numerous to count, the following are some of the most common factors that lead to conflict situations in organisations:

- **Managerial Expectations:** Normally, performance targets, invariably predetermined by management, will be set for employees. In the event that they are not met or are misconstrued by subordinates and not attained in the specified time, quality and budget, there will always be conflict arising fueled by managerial expectations.
- **Goal Struggle.** A comparatively straightforward issue, where one person or one group's desired goal, conflicts with those of others involved and there is a contest to establish which goal is to prevail.
- **Misunderstanding:** The wrong interpretation of an instruction or of information can cause widespread conflict. Those involved in the chain of communication may have understood different ideas of the requirement and until such time as the information is gathered and presented correctly to those involved, resolution of the dissension will not be possible.
- **Lack of Accountability:** If there is no clear chain of command or delegation of responsibility for a project, in the event of failure or problems arising, those involved will evade admitting responsibility, which will lead to conflict.
- **Work Stress:** Human beings are resilient creatures, but we all have our breaking point. Stress at work can lead to tension in personal lives, which can make individuals more susceptible to irrational or antisocial behaviour. When team members have an unhealthy work-life balance, they will be less happier, less productive, more argumentative and, ultimately, less valuable to their organisations.

Knowledge Point:
Studies on Stress



Stress in the workplace is more common than we might think. In a study carried out by the American Institute of Stress, 40% of employees regarded their job as being “very” or “extremely” stressful. Such level of stress among employees was envisaged to lead to unpleasant incidents.

Of all the employees interviewed, a quarter said they had felt the urge to scream or shout because of the stress they were under, while almost a third had actually raised their voice at co-workers. 14% admitted that they had felt the urge to hit a colleague in the past year and, worryingly, one in ten said they worked in a place where stress had led to actual physical violence.

Organisations need to be aware of stress-related issues, spotting them as soon as they arise. Stressed employees rarely do the best work. A happy workforce is a productive workforce, and catching stress-related issues before they get out of hand is a great way to maintain a positive working environment.

In general, there are many factors that can result in differences of understanding between parties, and can be subject to prejudiced by selective perception, emotional bias and self-centredness. This clearly shows that failure in presenting the situation in a lucid and deferential manner will most likely lead to confusion, distress, antagonism, and organisational chaos.



Figure 13: Common causes of workplace conflicts



The root cause of almost all conflicts come often from poor communication.

The Personal Side in Conflicts

There are also other personal factors that may lead to conflicts in organisations. Following are few examples:

- **Cognitive Dissonance.** A situation where the opinion of one person or group varies with that of the others. Cognitive conflict is broadly defined as the mental discomfort happening when someone is confronted with new information that contradicts their prior knowledge, beliefs, values, motives, and needs.
- **Affective Disagreements.** In the event that there is a virulent disagreement between one person or one group, and another, an affective conflict ensues. It can often result from personal feelings or emotions which lead to antagonistic differences spilling over into the workplace.
- **Behavioural Differences.** This is a more personal based situation, where one person's conduct may be inadmissible and offensive to others. For example, the adoption of a contentious dress code or inappropriate language can lead to behavioural conflict.

Each of these types of conflict is usually triggered by different factors, and each can lead to very different responses by the individual or group. This will be further elaborated on in the next chapter.

“
Difficulties are meant to rouse, not discourage. The human spirit is to grow strong by conflict.”

William Ellery Channing
(1780 –1842)
American Author

Classification of Conflict

Disagreements provide the opportunity to learn and develop corporate flexibility and to encompass change through the positive settlement of conflict.



Slicing Up Conflicts

Every individual experiences interpersonal⁹ and intra-personal¹⁰ change at some degree on daily basis, both within the organisation and in their personal lives. These can best be categorised into five types of conflict: intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, intragroup, and inter-organisational.¹¹

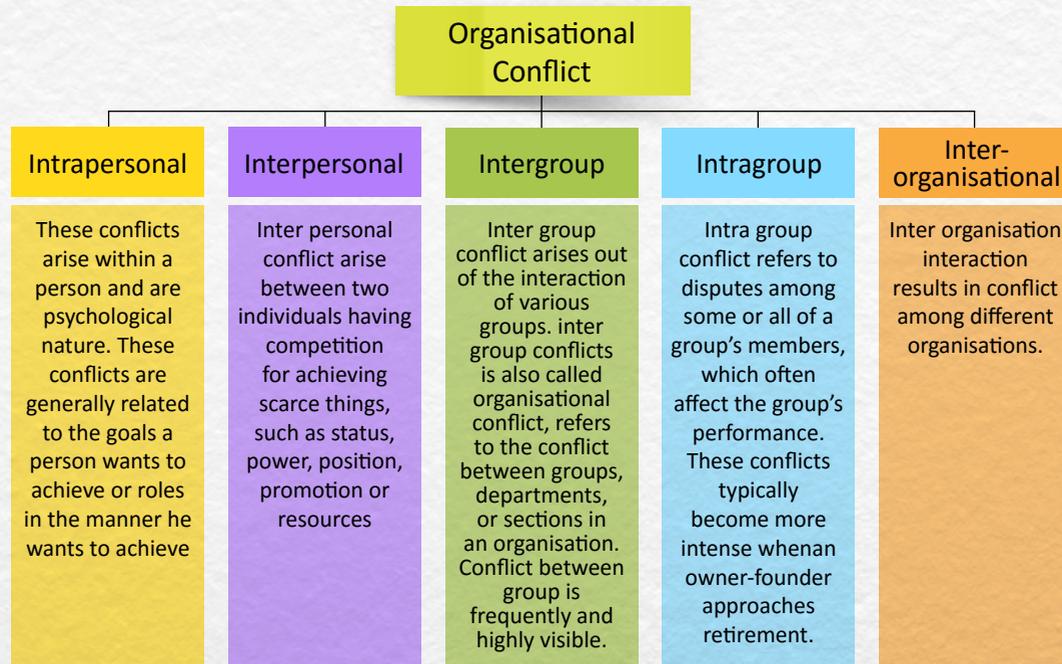
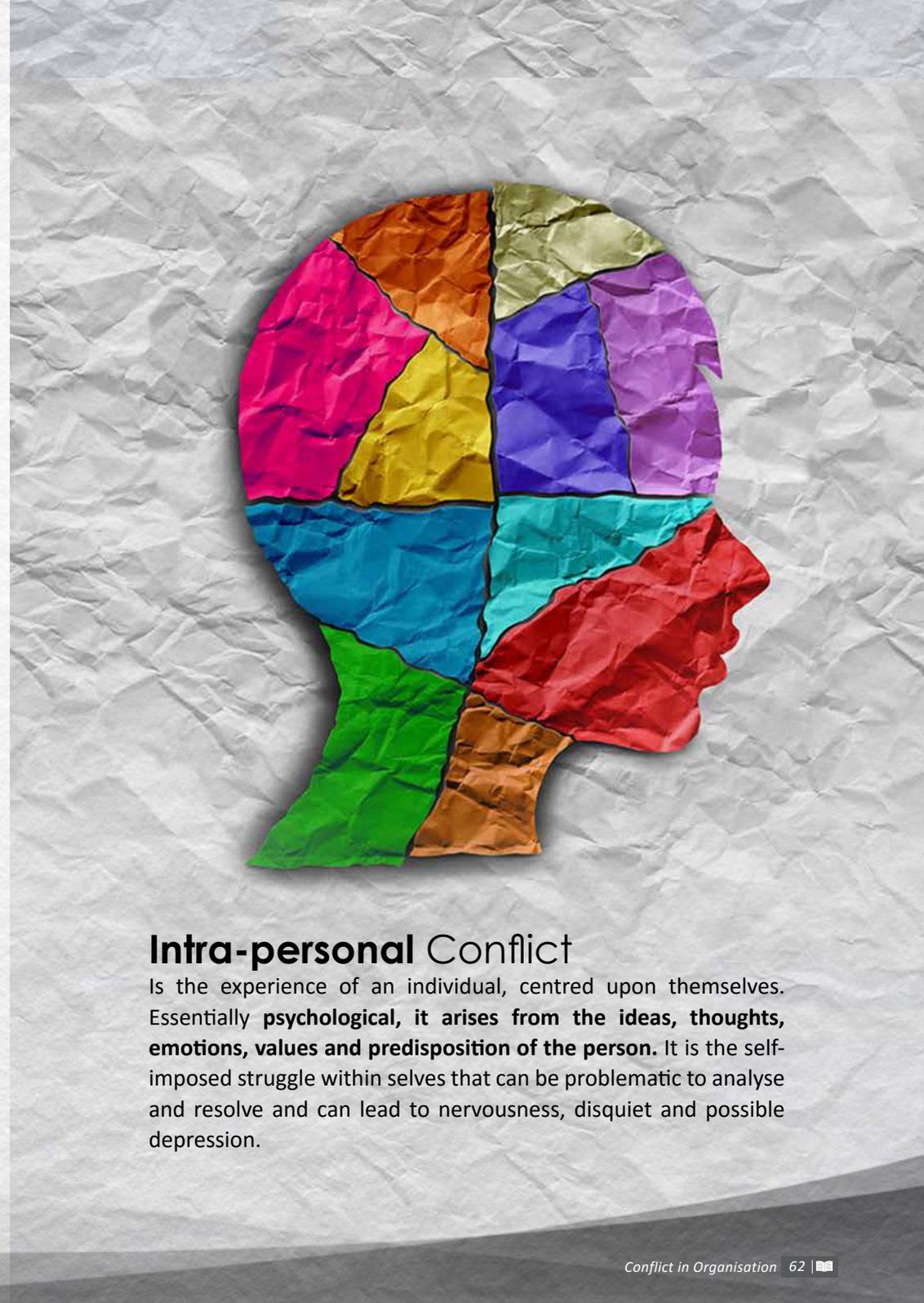


Figure 14: Types of organisational conflict



Intra-personal Conflict

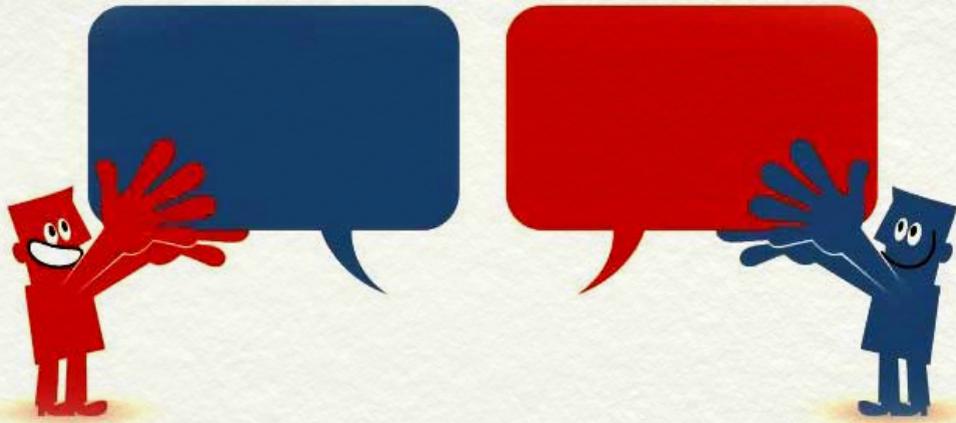
Is the experience of an individual, centred upon themselves. Essentially **psychological**, it arises from the ideas, thoughts, emotions, values and predisposition of the person. It is the self-imposed struggle within selves that can be problematic to analyse and resolve and can lead to nervousness, disquiet and possible depression.

⁹'Interpersonal' refers to something involving, or occurring among several people.

¹⁰'Intrapersonal' refers to something occurring within the mind of the individual or self.

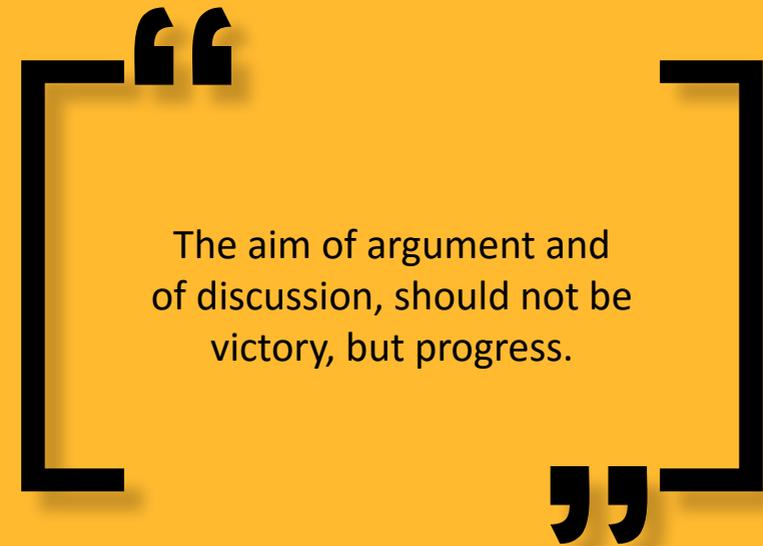
¹¹There is also a sixth conflict level referred in the literature as 'intra-organisational', where conflict occurs within an organisation and affects its functions. Conflict at this level occurs at vertical (between managers and subordinates) or horizontal (between departments and work groups) dimensions of the organisation. The types of conflict in this level are very much similar in the discussed categories.

Inter-personal Conflict



Involves two individuals, where differences of opinion occur. The conflict could arise, for example, in an organisation, where two managers are vying for sparse manpower or limited resources. It could be particularly relevant where marketing managers are duelling against one other over sale-related promotional methods.

As the grounds for conflict arise from personal opinions rather than undebatable facts, which by their very nature tend to generate undeniable agreement, personal opinions are governed by criticism and disagreement that develop from personality confrontations, disputing differences of views, opinions and targets, which can be agitated by individuals' variances in attitudes, dynamism and character.



The aim of argument and of discussion, should not be victory, but progress.

Joseph Joubert
(1754 – 1824)
French Writer



Intragroup Conflict

Stems from within a team. **Differences of opinion and misapprehension among team members** creates intragroup conflict. Generally, it begins with interpersonal disagreement where disparate personalities clash over ideas and ways of doing things. This can manifest itself, for example, when the team present a collective plan that is disagreed with by one or more member of the group.

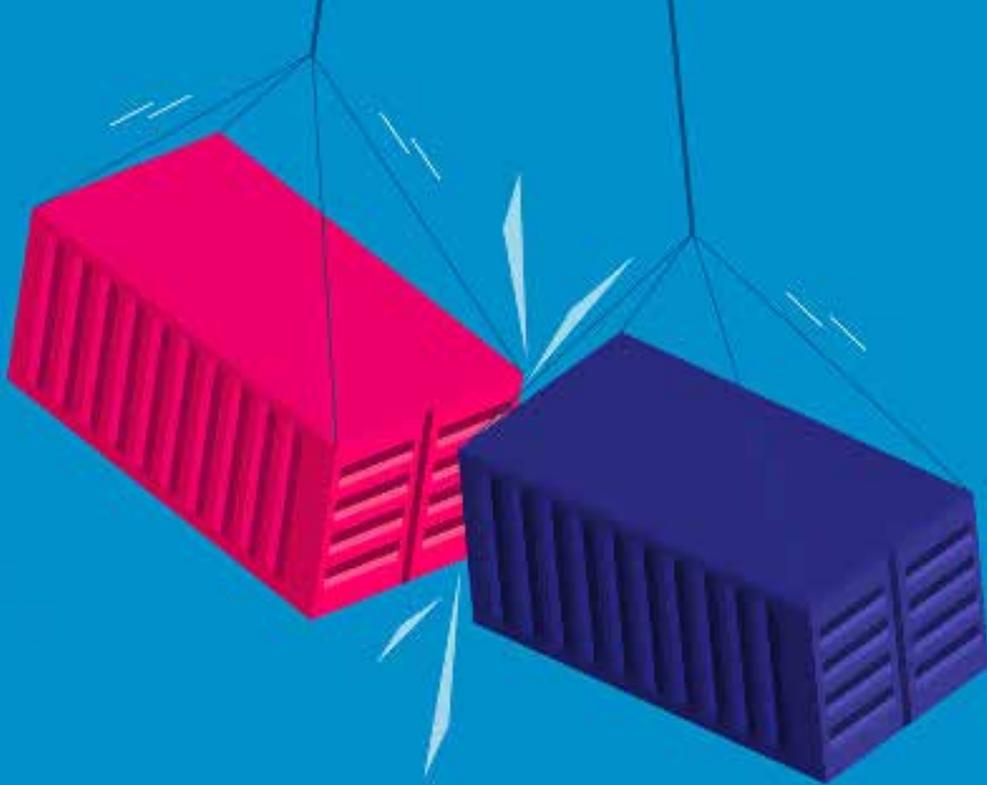
Conflict within a group can have a positive effect on the ultimate decision making, whereby the final outcome can allow them to achieve their purpose, but excessive disharmony can be counter-productive and needs to be resolved before it develops out of control.

Intergroup Conflict



Is a further development of disagreement where different teams or groups in an organisation conflict. This is particularly prevalent in a large organisation that has a number of interrelated departments, but which have independent responsibilities. To maintain the development and flow of business it is likely that conflict will **occur, not on a personal level, but because of the team spirit in promoting their particular cause or requirement**, which may be related to the structure of the organisation.

This may stem from lack of cooperation over realistic production and delivery forecasts; different goals for different groups within the organisation. It may also include competition over access to resources, or one group closing ranks and setting their own parameters that do not conform to those of other groups within the organisation.

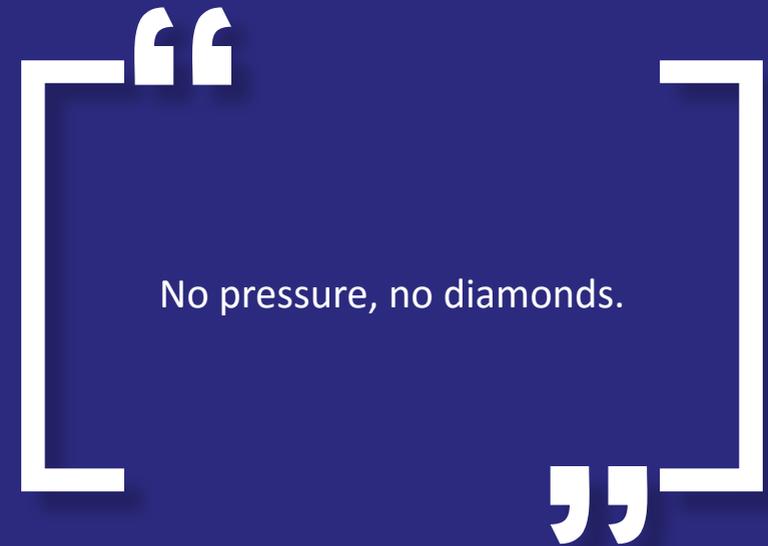


Inter-organisational Conflict

As the name implies, **occurs when two interdependent organisations are reliant on one another and some dispute generates conflict**. This could arise where a production entity conflicts with their dependent vendors over policy matters, delivery quotas or quality, or delivery turn-around time.

There is a likelihood of such disputes arising between government regulatory agencies and the organisations their policies affect following the introduction of particular legislative changes.

This kind of conflict usually hits the productivity of the organisation, rather than the deterioration of its performance. There is a wide consensus that some level of inter-organisational conflict is cardinal for organisations to compete in the market.



Mary Case

Conflict in the Workplace

The first step in uncovering workplace conflict is to consider the typical sources of conflict. There are a variety of sources of workplace conflict including interpersonal, organisational, external factors.

Values Conflict

Incompatibility in core belief such as religion, ethics or politics, different criteria for evaluating ideas or behaviour, different ways of life, ideology, difference in priorities.

Power Conflict

Competition in the level of influence each party wishes to attain or maintain in the relationship or decision making process

Economic Conflict

Competition in attaining monetary or human resources.

Data Conflict

Lack of information, misinformation, different views on what is relevant, different interpretations of data, different assessment procedures

Interpersonal Conflict

Incompatibility in needs, goals, or approaches to communication or work styles.

Interests Conflict

Perceived or actual competition over substantive (content) interests, procedural interests, psychological interests

Organisational Conflict

Inequalities in the organisational structure and how employees report to each other, destructive patterns of behaviour or interaction; unequal control, ownership or distribution of resources; unequal power or authority, geographical, physical or environmental

Environmental Conflict

External pressures such as recession that impact the daily work structure.

Relationship Conflict

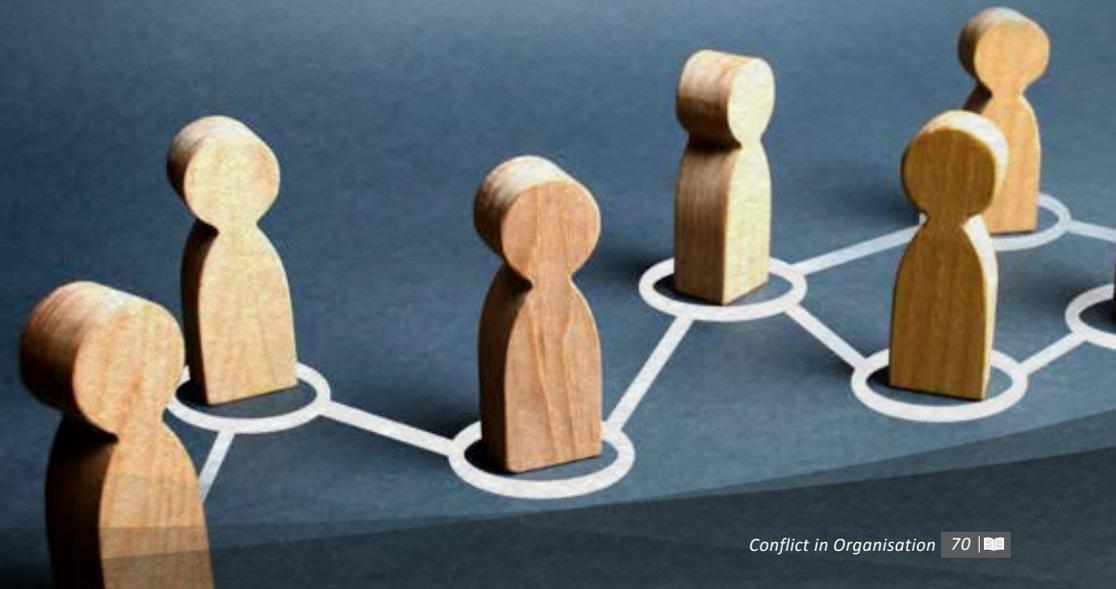
Strong emotions, misperceptions or stereotypes, poor communication or miscommunication

Knowing the source of workplace conflict is a good first step toward resolving it. Taking time to understand why a conflict is occurring will allow you to collect the right tools to resolve it properly.

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Stages of Conflict Development

There are different approaches to illustrate the stages of conflict. In principle, the common approach depicts conflicts to develop through a set of stages of activity, and progressive intensity, and tension.



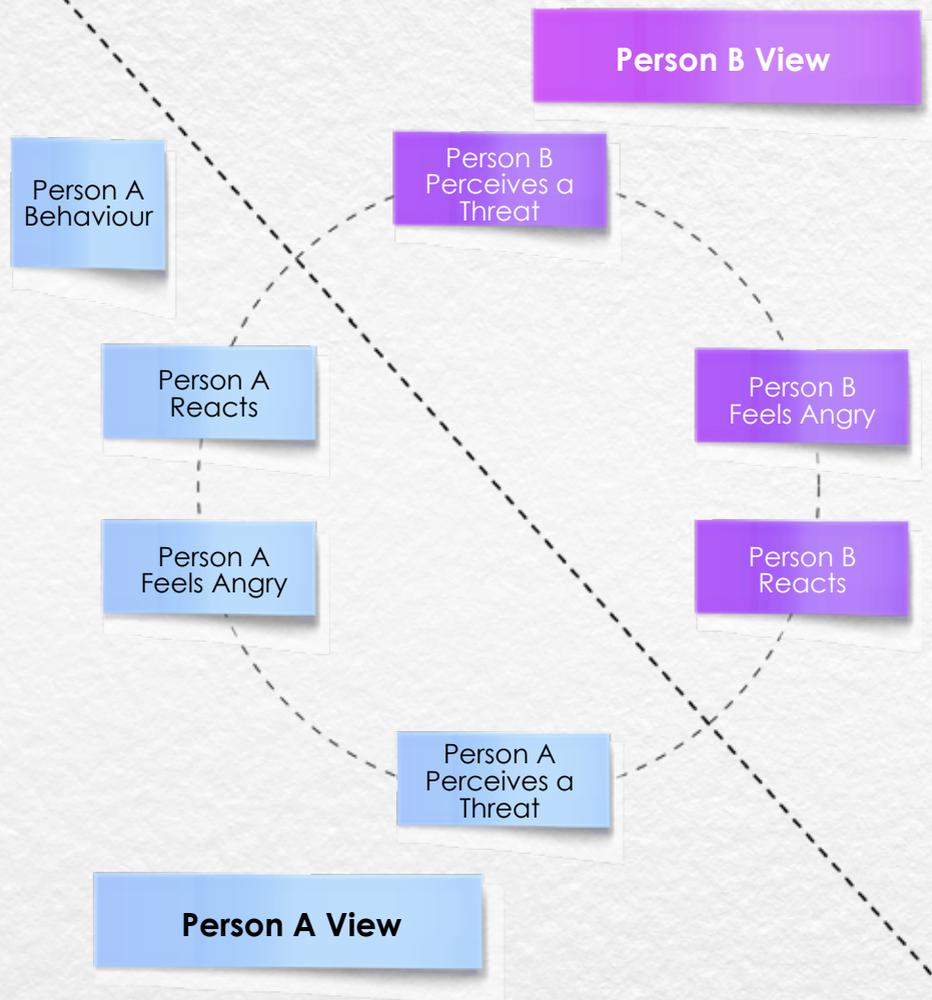


Figure 15: Conflict escalation scenarios

Conflict Progress

A process view of conflict considers conflict not just as a discrete interaction (as illustrated in Figure 16); but rather, as a series of stages with distinct characteristics.¹² The conflict, according to the view, is perceived to be dynamic, ongoing and continuous and changes over time.

¹²Pondy (1967)

The Five Progressive Stages of Conflict

Figure 17 Depicts how conflict progresses in five distinct stages:

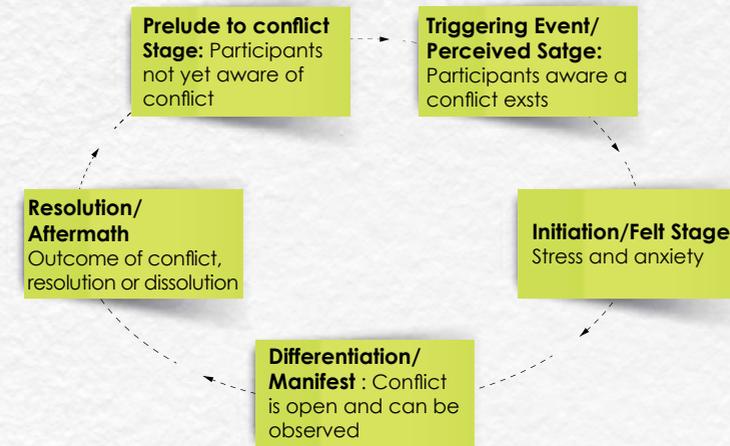


Figure 16 Stages of Conflict

Source: Pondy (1967)

1. Prelude to the Conflict/Latent Stage. A summation of all aspects that can cause a conflict between individuals. Differences of opinion and interests, a lack of communication and information, a divide in educational, cultural, religious and sociological background, are all contributory factors leading to conflict.

2. Triggering the Event/Perceived Stage. There will always be the development of an event to instigate conflict. It can emanate from a two-sided dispute between individuals, which may be based on professionalism or may simply arise from personal animosity.

3. Initiation/Felt Stage. This is a time when the conflict is already underway and can usually be signified by an escalation in disagreements, volatile arguments and general abuse, indicating the commencement of hostilities.

4. Differentiation/Manifestation Stage. A further development in the process where vociferous differences are heard between individuals and the root cause of the problem is aired.

5. Resolution/Aftermath Stage. The futility of conflict requires a reconciliation, a compromise by parties that goes some way to diffusing the conflict. At this stage, options to solve the conflict are mooted.

* In section: "Conflict Escalation Model", a more detailed view of conflict progress is provided.

“
In a conflict, being willing to change allows you to move from a point of view to a viewing point; a higher more expansive place, from which you can see both sides.
”

Thomas Crum
American Author

Conflict Resolution



Management need to step in certain situations before conflicts escalate to a state where productivity suffers. Resolution needs to be made whereby different individuals and groups conform to meet agreed common objectives rather than setting their own agenda.

Conflict Resolution as a Process

Misdirected efforts and inability to handle conflicts can lead to the disruption of an organisation and cause long-lasting and irreparable damage. When handled proficiently, it gives the opportunity for improvement and a means to strengthen the ties between management and the workforce.

A conflict reaction body within an organisation can be of benefit, but solving issues is the responsibility of all individuals and departments and cannot be delegated solely to an individual or a single group. The inherent need is for all responsible persons in an organisation to **understand the cause and development of conflicts** and the **effective measures needed** to resolve them successfully.

Sharland (2014) offers suggestions for addressing conflict and communication methods to employ to avoid conflict, resolve conflict, and understand others' points of view. See Table 4 and Table 5 below for negative and positive responses to conflict scenarios.

Table 4: **Negative responses to conflict**

Unresolved Conflicts	Competitive Response	Advance Response
Resistance to a directive or change (manager's perspective)	Use force of will or authority to make it happen, and escalate punitive action if resistance continues. Dismiss perspective of those resisting and view them as having malicious intent and a motivation that is deliberately destructive. A frequent consequence is workforce strike action.	Work only with those who do carry through the directive in the hope that others will follow along in time. Vent frustration to others about noncompliance of those resisting but do not address the issue directly with the resisters.
Difficulty between staff members (manager's perspective)	Make an informal judgement based on past experience of those involved and tell the person felt to be the cause to "fall in line or else." Ask the staff member you most sympathize with to bring any difficulties to you to deal with.	Keep the staff member at issue separate from each other via scheduling project team allocation, and putting others you feel are good workers with them in the hope that their attitude rubs off on those in dispute.

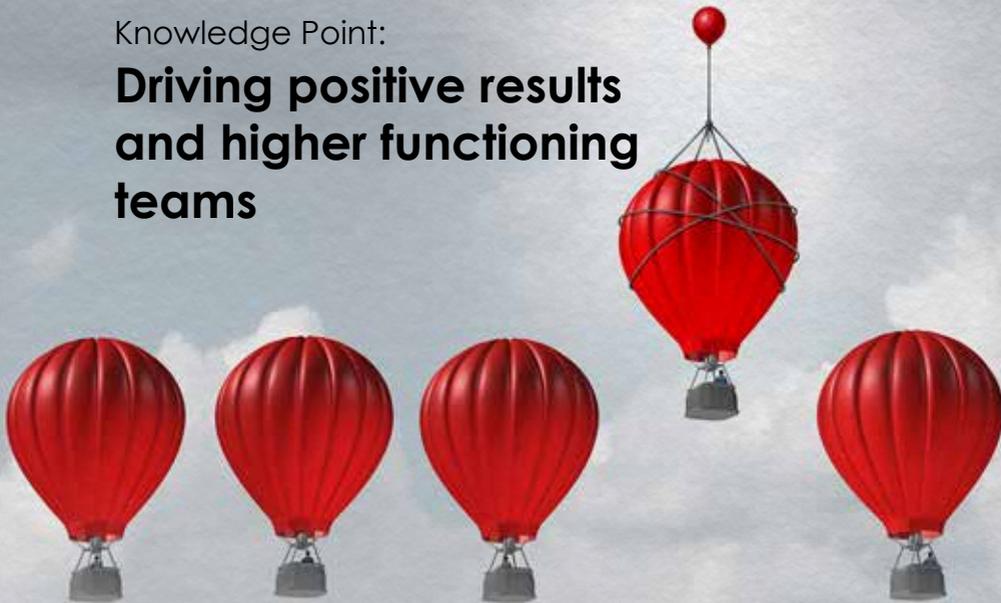
Resistance to content of training (trainer's perspective)	Engage in direct arguments with attendees., possibly including personal comments. Justification to self is that attendees are not "up to" the training, possibly because they are academically or technically lacking.	Not wanting to engage with challengers, possibly using a style that is entirely didactic to prevent- either from the start or during the session if the challenges feel like "too much".
Resistance to style of training or personality of trainer (trainer's perspective)	Make comments such as "AtXYZ" organisation they loved this approach or "I have been a trainer for 25 years" in response to challenges about styles or personality.	Make comments such as "They were an aggressive group; not open to learning" or "One or two had ego problem so I will ask for some pre-selection of attendees in the future to others outside of the training session.

Table 5: **Positive responses to conflict**

Situation	Ways to Create Learning, Connection, and Insight
Resistance to a directive or change (manager's perspective)	Explore reasons for resistance with open questions to gain connection with views. This does not mean the directive does not go ahead, but concerns are acknowledged and accommodated rather than dismissed and continually resisted
Difficulty between staff members (manager's perspective)	Explore with them separately and possibly together the reason for difficulty (supports their insight and connection and may lead to learning), but don't direct actions regarding the working relationship. Place onus on staff to resolve personal dispute with each other effectively, amicably and professionally, possibly using meditation for support
Resistance to content of training (trainer's perspective)	Explore objections and obstructions. Staff know what they do day-to-day, so content may not be accommodating their needs. Exploration does not mean omitting the training, but it encourages engagement with content rather than passive spoon feeding.
Resistance to style of training or personality of trainer (trainer's perspective)	Reflect on your own feelings as trainers about the response. Listen to views of attendees about style (taken from session evaluations, for example). Make changes to style and beware of blaming resistance on trainees to avoid making changes.

Knowledge Point:

Driving positive results and higher functioning teams



1. **Accentuate the positives!** As a manager, you can benefit a great deal from identifying areas of common ground. By focusing on what is praiseworthy about what an individual or team is doing, rather than things you disapprove of or disagree with, you can build trust and respect quickly. This is especially important for managers who are new to the role.

2. **Give a little respect.** The most successful ideas, projects and companies are, more often than not, a result of people arguing, debating and disagreeing. By challenging things, we can predict where the weaknesses lie and resolve them quickly. But disagreeing and arguing have to be done in a respectful way. Remember, you're challenging ideas, not attacking the thinker. As soon as you resort to personal attacks, you've undermined your own position. Challenge, test and modify, but do it in a way that makes the other person feel like they've played an important role in the process – they usually have.

3. **Encourage your team to see conflict as a step on the road toward forward progress.** People are reluctant to complain, especially to their manager. The risk of being demoted or fired may be too great. Or they may feel that putting forward an alternative point of view won't achieve anything. Some managers just aren't interested. As a manager, you are more likely to see positive results from your staff if you are willing to listen to them without making them feel intimidated or despondent.

4. **Make sure everyone is on the same page:** When people feel like they are working toward the same goals, they are likely to work more productively. Make sure you have a clear mission statement that outlines the reasons for the team existing in the first place. If everyone understands the purpose of the mission, and their role in it, they are more likely to work well as a team.

5. **Disagreement isn't necessarily a bad thing.** Teams can be especially effective when they brainstorm, but in order for brainstorming to work, there needs to be a positive, supportive atmosphere. Team members must feel confident about speaking up, even when others might disagree with them. Healthy debate can lead to valuable innovation.

6. **Compromise is sometimes the best option.** For many of us, the thought of compromising is hard to stomach. Yet there are times when, without a little give and take on both sides, things simply grind to a halt. Being stubborn can be a real progress-killer. An effective leader will recognise those times when it's worth meeting someone half way in order to take a project forward.

Knowledge Point:

What to do when faced with destructive conflict?

It is hard, sometimes, to know what to do when a difficult situation arises. If we're faced with a conflict situation that is potentially destructive, the best thing we can do is to step back and try to understand what's happening. If we're confronted by someone who's angry or upset, we need to listen to them and try to understand why they feel the way they do. Once we understand the problem, resolving it probably becomes much easier.

Put yourself in the other person's shoes for a moment. What could you say or do that would make them feel happier? If there isn't anything obvious you could do, you may need to call on a mediator, who can help you to find a solution that works for everyone. However, you choose to handle things, though, the key is to remain calm. Slow things down, breathe deeply, show the other person you're willing to work with them to find a solution. This can help to prevent things from escalating, and the more calm and rational you are, the more likely the other party is to want to engage with you in a productive, positive way.



“Differences can be the sources of creativity, or they can serve to divide.”

Craig Runde
American Trainer,
Coach and Author

Methods of Conflict Resolution: The Simple Way



From an overall perspective, there are three possible scenarios for any given conflict: win-win, win-lose, and lose-lose. The “win” term is associated with outcomes in line with or above expectations, and the “loss” term refers to outcomes being below expectations. However, when conflict resolution efforts fail, and in no agreement scenarios, the parties are forced to seek alternative solutions.

The Simple Strategy for Conflict Resolution

The manner in which conflicts are handled will decide whether the outcome is prolific or damaging. There are a number of methods of dealing with a situation that are applicable, no matter what the state of the conflict. Original management approaches are likely to promote new solutions that meet the requirements of all parties. This may require a better distribution of authority and responsibility, and a better distribution or greater availability of resources.

A situation where parties have some independent decision-making authority and a level of autonomy is likely to generate a more positive outcome as they will be able to propose possible solutions, and none of the parties will be totally dependent on the other.

Primarily, there are three terms that can outline the possible outcomes of a dispute or conflict, and how each side perceives the outcome, these are: win-win, win-lose, and lose-lose.¹³

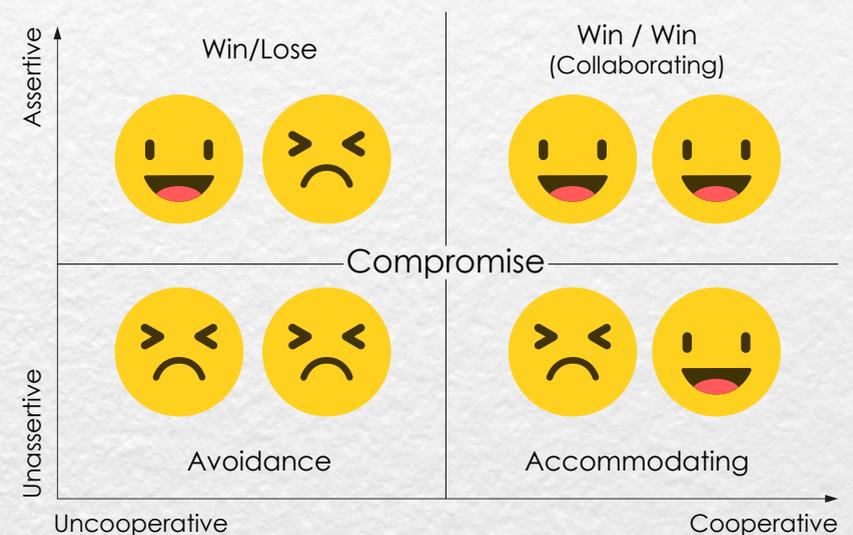


Figure 17: Types of negotiation approaches

¹³Blake et al., 1964



The Win-Win Approach

A positive approach to satisfy the aims of both parties constitutes a win-win situation. Cooperative problem resolution is undertaken **where it is accepted that there is a problem to be solved jointly, not as a face-to-face battle**. This is achieved by the two parties combining to settle the problem rather than competing with one another.

Agreement may be reached utilising all those qualities engendered by the relationship, without the need to resort to aggression or forceful persuasion. By focusing on the wishes and requirements the two parties need in unison, instead of developing strategies to fuel the dispute, will allow them to develop manageable and mutually acceptable goals. This situation can only succeed if the parties work together and establish long-term relationships, rather than short-term temporary solutions.

The communication and methods used should be transparent and equally accessible by both groups. As such, management should aim to escalate the atmosphere of trust and cooperation and use their human relations and deft problem-solving skills to reach a win-win solution.



The Win-Lose Approach

Win-lose is a frequent occurrence, where damaging inherent attitudes of domination, aggression, competitiveness and resistance pervade situations. The mythical 'fixed-pie' assumption¹⁴ brought to negotiations is that the pie of resources is fixed: what one party loses the other party gains.

On this basis, **the overriding aim is to force the other party into submission**. This can be achieved through a number of open and closed methods. The deciding vote of the leader, a majority vote, or a resolution by arbitration are all acceptable. More dubious methods are through threats, clandestine acts or innuendo when employing whatever means works is considered to be justifiable.

'We-they' becomes a factor in the process and the problem develops the characteristics of an intergroup conflict. The classic consequence is for there to be a clear victor and an ignominious loser, who retreats to contemplate the experience and formulate a new assault. Inevitably, the outcome is that everyone loses eventually.

¹⁴"Fixed Pie" notion refers to the assumption that there is only so much to go around, and the proportion to be distributed is limited and variable. The assumption of a fixed pie triggers competitive behaviour that bypasses opportunities for collaboration and leaves parties entrenched in an impasse. Bazerman and Moore (2013) noted that the fixed pie assumption is a fundamental bias that distorts negotiators' behaviour: "When negotiating over an issue, they assume that their interests necessarily and directly conflict with the other party's interests."

The Lose-Lose Approach

Placating the parties involved or resorting to the simplest solution is a lose-lose strategy. There is **no attempt to exploit the possible benefits of productive conflict resolution**. The assumption is that the conflict is unavoidable and the only reasonable solution is to dissipate the differences and ameliorate parties in as benign a manner as possible.

Such a method can have its applications, particularly in allowing each party satisfaction, even though they may not have achieved all of their aims. Both sides are unaware that a more acceptable outcome may have been reached if the parties had pursued the problem more directly and with greater cooperation. In certain instances, where the resources are simply not available to meet the demands, this approach may suffice by avoiding a win-lose situation.



Knowledge Point:

Unhealthy and Healthy Response to Conflict

Conflict normally brings emotions and feelings into the play and can lead to disappointment, and discomfort. The way we handle conflicts will determine the build or break of the relationship.

Table 6: **Healthy and unhealthy ways of managing and resolving conflict**

Unhealthy responses to conflict	Healthy responses to conflict
An inability to recognize and respond to the things that matter to the other person	The capacity to empathize with the other person's viewpoint
Explosive, angry, hurtful, and resentful reactions	Calm, non-defensive, and respectful reactions
The withdrawal of love, resulting in rejection, isolation, shaming, and fear of abandonment	A readiness to forgive and forget, and to move past the conflict without holding resentments or anger
An inability to compromise or see the other person's side	The ability to seek compromise and avoid punishing
Feeling fearful or avoiding conflict; expecting a bad outcome	A belief that facing conflict head on is the best thing for both sides

Source: **Bewoor and Madhuri** (2012)

Knowledge Point:

Office Gossip and Rumours

Small talk and gossip are staples of office life. While most forms of small talk are harmless and actually good for the working environment, gossip, or talking about people behind their back, can often cause bad feelings and distractions. According to an international report published by Udemey (2018), concluded that gossip and small talk are the cause of over half of all meetings being disrupted.



It's all too easy for office gossip to go that little bit too far. What started as a bit of fun can quickly develop into a conflict situation if people don't know how much is too much. Most people are happy to be teased a little, as long as it's done in good spirits, but everyone has their own red lines, and no-one likes being mocked behind their back. It's important to recognise that everyone is different, and that it's not worth the risk of upsetting someone by gossiping about them (or making fun of them).

Because everyone's different, it may make sense for management to ban office gossip altogether, by making it clear that gossip will not be tolerated in the workplace. Figure 19 depicts a number of practices followed by organisations to help reduce workplace distractions.

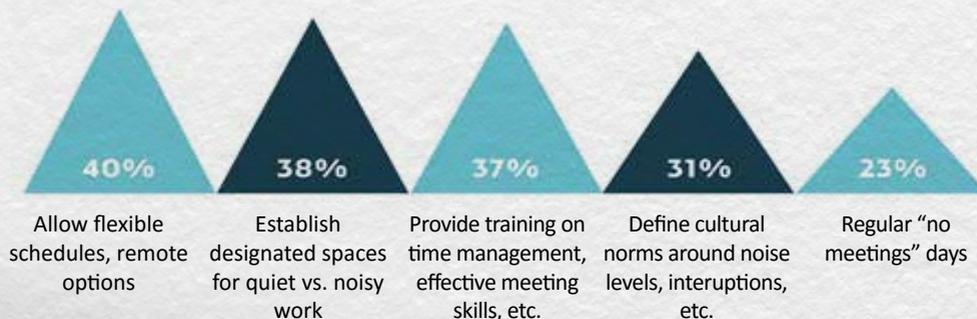


Figure 18: **Practices to reduce workplace distraction**

Source: **Udemey** (2018)



For good ideas and true innovation, you need human interaction, conflict, argument and debate.

Margaret Heffernan
English Writer

Conflict Escalation Model



The nine stage model of conflict escalation developed by Friedrich Glasl highlights standpoints and perceptions of antagonistic parties that lead to conflict escalation. The model that was developed based on the review of contemporary escalation and intervention models, shows how parties in conflict, lose the ability to cooperate in a constructive manner as their successive and mutual experiences break down, and offer new perspectives on how to handle them.

Glasl's Escalation Model¹⁵

One of the renowned illustrious tools of conflict escalation stages was presented in 1982 by Friedrich Glasl; an Austrian organisational researcher. The tool is considered valuable as a diagnostic instrument for management and those playing facilitators roles, as it sensitizes people on the mechanisms of conflict escalation.

Rather than seeking the causes in individuality, the model attempts to explain the internal logic of conflict relationship stemming from approachable ways of handling contradicting views. It argues that conscious efforts need to be exercised in order to resist the escalation mechanisms, and avoid having conflicts spin out of order.

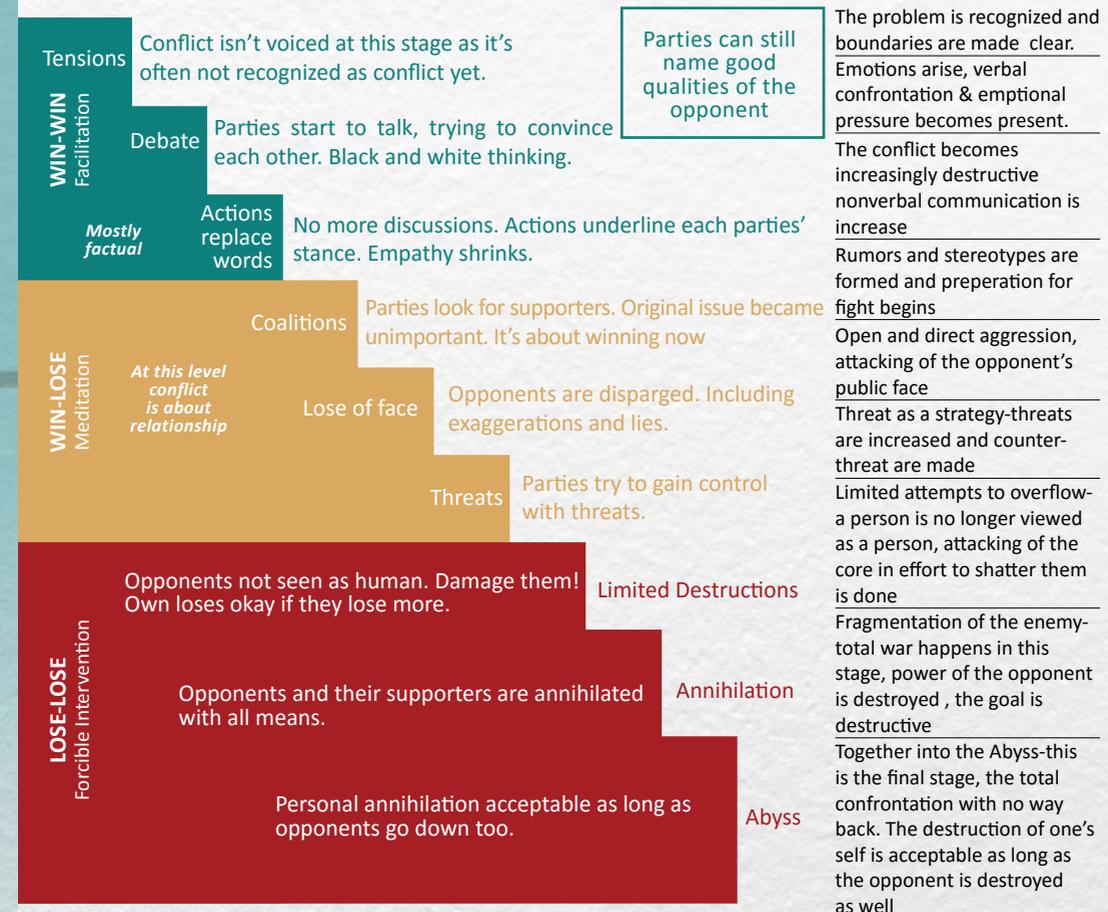


Figure 19: Glasl 9 Stage model of conflict escalation

¹⁵This chapter is written based on the interpretation of the "Glasl's Nine-Stage Model of Conflict Escalation" by Jordan (2000).

“
The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't being said.
”

Shannon L. Alder

Stage 1: Tensions



Conflicts start with tensions due to clash of opinions. At this stage positions become fixed and the conflict narrative begins, as the standpoints established by the conflicting parties tend to be mutually incompatible. It is the content of the conflict that is the centre of attention, and the parties typically trust that it is possible to solve the problem.

The lack of progress in addressing the differences leads the conflicting parties to rule that interacting with the other party to try to intervene on the matter is an enormous wastage of time. However, the parties continue to commit themselves towards resolving the issue even as they view the other party as stubborn and unreasonable. Yet, the doubts that kick in when the commitment does not bear fruit lead either party to question if the other party is committed enough towards finding a solution to the matter, which leads to increased suspicion that the other party has ulterior motives.

Mutuality forms the basis of communication at this stage, as each party recognizes the fundamental status of the other party, and starts to dialogue as responsible human beings and trying to be fair in the interactions. When the fairness and open discussions reach to a dead end, the threshold of stage 2 is reached since both parties start losing faith in using those strategies to solve the conflict.



Stage 2:

Debates and Polemics

The conflict at this stage graduates to verbal confrontations with either party viewing the other as being docile to sensible arguments. The parties use forceful ways for pushing through their standpoints and make them count.

The arguments between the parties move gradually from rational arguments to power issues and emotions, with the parties no longer assuming that the words mean what they seem to indicate. The parties look at the other side's hidden message and consequences, which increases mistrust between them, as they expect the opposing party to try gaining an advantage at the other's expense.

Confrontations are accepted at this stage since the conflicting parties aim at not appearing as if they are weak or yielding to the pressures of the other party. However, outbursts may occur at this stage because of the frustrating experiences of either party that leads to the build-up of tension. The threshold of stage 3 reaches when one party does not see the necessity of continuing discussions with the other party, and begin acting without the other side's knowledge.



Stage 3:

Action, not Words

Both parties at this stage assume that further talks will not yield the desired results. Each party forms a stereotypical image about the other party. The reduced nature of verbal communication at this point minimizes the chances for either party to clarify their image as viewed by the other party. The stereotypical images lead either party to believe that the opposing party is developing strategies and hidden motives aimed at them.

Each party starts to view their actions as a reaction to the behaviours of the opposing party, which is necessary for their survival. Covert attacks on the counterpart's social reputation, general attitude, position, and relationship to others act as the threshold to stage 4. Escalation from this stage means that management need to pay serious attention to the conflict and direct efforts to resolve it in a healthy manner.

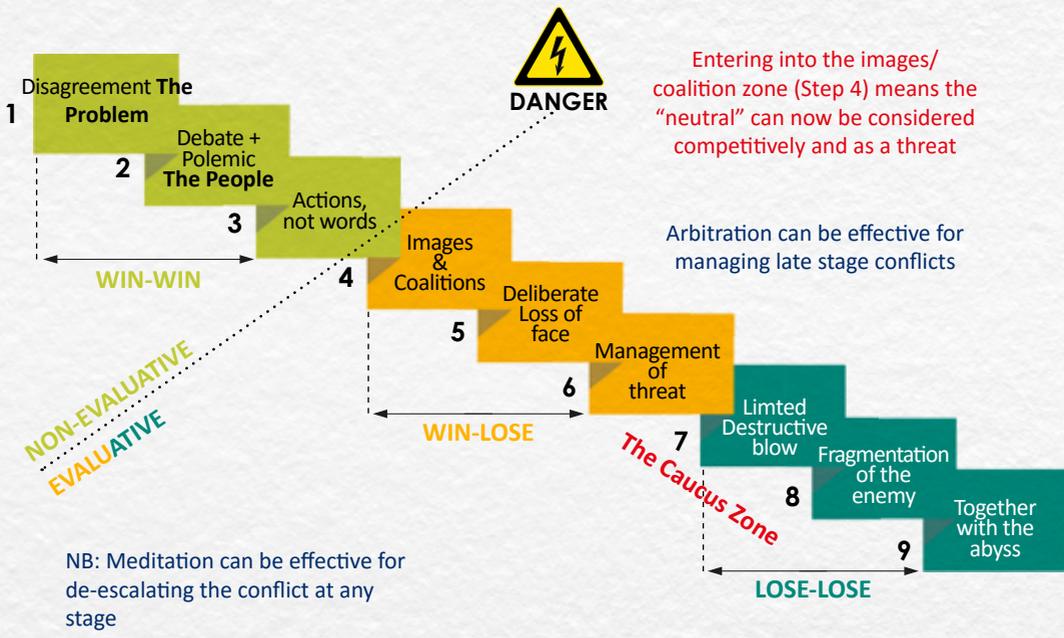


Figure 20: Evaluative processes and their impact



Stage 4: Images and Coalitions

At this stage, the negative images cloud the vision of one party, preventing them from seeing the real complexity of the issue and the other party's individuality, with neither side accepting the view made of them by the other party.

The conflicting parties seek to find any possible gap to inflict discomfort on the other party whenever possible. The parties deal with each other with insinuations and poor body language, but they still leave the room that would allow them to deny any wrongful intentions whenever challenged about their actions. However, the inability of the other party to respond to the attacks in an open discussion opens the path for retaliatory measures by the opposing party.

At this stage, bystanders join the conflict as either party seeks to enlist them to support their viewpoints. The parties focus on gaining an advantage in the ensuing power struggle while affecting the progress of their counterparts through attacks on their attitude, relationships, view, and behaviour.



Stage 5: **Loss of Face**

Each party conducts a reinterpretation of the whole conflict at this stage, as they feel the other party followed an immoral and consequential strategy from the beginning to gain an advantage over them and that their opponents' constructive moves are just deceptive covers to their real intentions. The view assumed by either party in this stage is that of angels and devils, and not about superiority and inferiority.

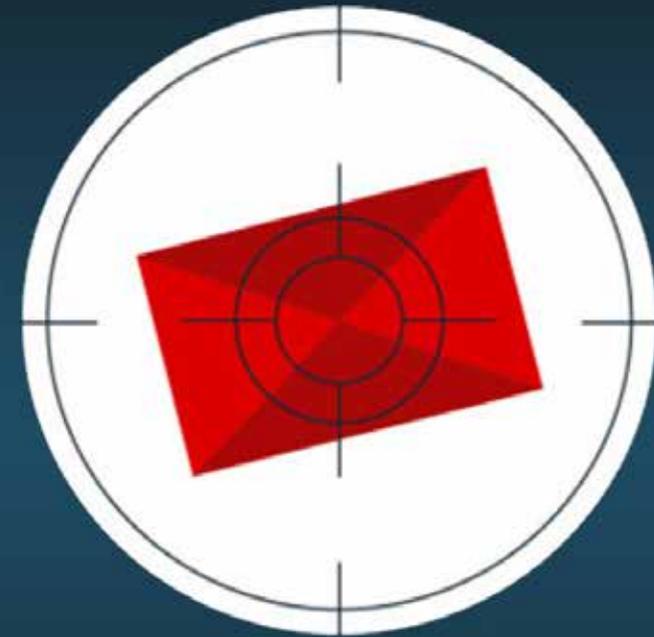
The conflict in this stage does not conform to real values anymore but rather the prevalence. Cynical suspicion and expectations grow in this stage because of the dramatic transformation of the other side's image by one party, which leads either party to categorize any constructive efforts by the other party as malice.

Further, the opposing party tends to view any gesture towards establishing minimal trust as extreme and humiliating. Deadlock arises in this stage when either party considers the gestures to address the issue by conceding the role played in the disagreement as weakness and an avenue for the opponent to gain the upper hand in the conflict.

Stage six's threshold appears to be more dynamic than that of stage five. The conflict enters the sixth stage when the parties start issuing an ultimatum and strategical threats.

Stage 6:

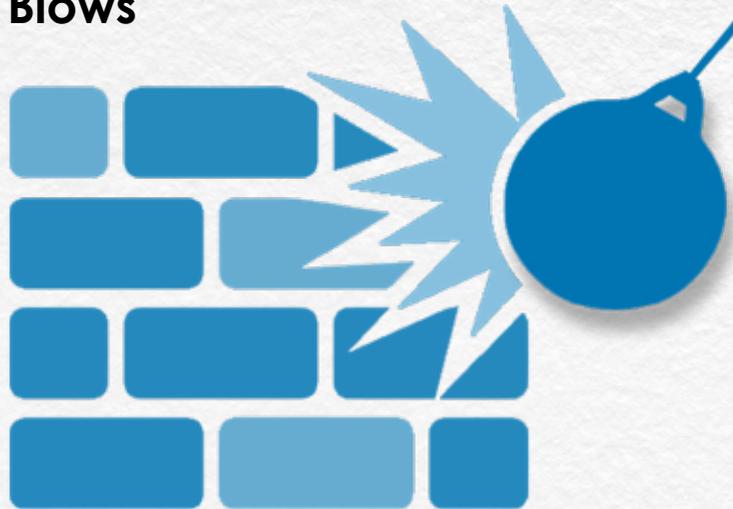
Strategies of the Threats



Threats become the solution for either party when they come to understand that there is no other way of dealing with the issue. The threats as a result undermine the sense of security for the conflicting parties, as either party expects the other to be highly capable of executing the stated threats.

The dynamics of strategical threats made by the threatening party leads to the loss of control. The parties' act of binding self to the strategies of threat heavily restricts their freedom to choose alternative courses of action. The sturdy stand taken by either side regarding their views, and the threats issued leads to the risk of those parties disintegrating into smaller units that act autonomously. Such occurrences might lead to an unstoppable level of destruction.

Stage 7: Limited Destructive Blows



At this stage, the other side is the pure enemy. Each side's view regarding the end of the conflict does not involve any amicable solution for the other side, with the main target being eliminating or exterminating the other side.

The human aspect is long gone at this stage, and battle lines are drawn by either party, as the consequences calculated by the parties become skewed. For instance, gains are counted in terms of the losses incurred by the opposing side.

The main objective of each party at this stage revolves around neutralizing the firepower of the counterpart, which further leads to the securing of one's survival, as they seek superiority to block their adversary in a long-term perspective. Any real communication no longer exists between the parties at this stage.

An obvious sign of this stage, is threats followed by immediate interruption of communication. In this stage, the conflicting sides consider ethical norms when there is a pressing concern to consider them in the conflict. However, when they find them bothersome, they cast them away, unlike in the earlier stages where exploration of the gaps in those norms was common. Attacks directly aimed at the enemy's core and attacks intended to shutter the enemy or destroy his or her vital systems acts as the threshold for stage 8.

Stage 8: Fragmentation of the Enemy



In this stage, the intensity of the conflict increases. The vital systems and the basis of the power of the other party are usually the aspects targeted for attack in this stage.

The conflicting parties fall into factions fighting one another because of the need by either party to act in retaliation of the other side's attacks as a way of satisfying internal pressures. The target of the attacks on the adversary is the vitality signs, with the objective being to destroy the enemy's basis of existence.

The concern for one's survival becomes the only restraining factor for the conflicting parties. When the parties give up the self-preservation drive, the conflict reaches the threshold of stage 9, as there are no checks for further destructiveness.

DANGER ZONE

Stage 9:

Together into the Abyss

In this stage, which is the last of conflict escalation, the desire to annihilate the enemy grows so strong that the parties neglect self-preservation instincts to the point that even one's survival does not count. Extermination of the other party is the main goal in this stage as nothing else matters.

Consequences such as ruins, bankruptcy, nor physical harm do not have any place to be counted in this stage. It is a total war between the two conflicting parties as all bridges are burned, and there is no turning back.

Concerns for neutral parties do not exist anymore. The main concern for the conflicting parties is to ensure that the enemy falls in their race towards the abyss.

“

Most misunderstandings in the world could be avoided if people would simply take the time to ask: What else could this mean?

”

Shannon Alder

De-escalating Conflicts through **Setting and Enforcing Limits**



No set of conditions can guarantee conflicts to progress constructively. However, organisations need to ensure that they employ different mechanisms to defuse potentially negative behaviours and conflicts.



Setting and Enforcing Limits¹⁶

According to Glasl's conflict model, it is conceivable that conflicts can escalate beyond constraints. Escalation represent greater depths of conflict that may have devastating effects. As such, there is a need for strategies to control and ameliorate this regression.

¹⁶This chapter is written based on the interpretation of the article written by Maiese (2004).

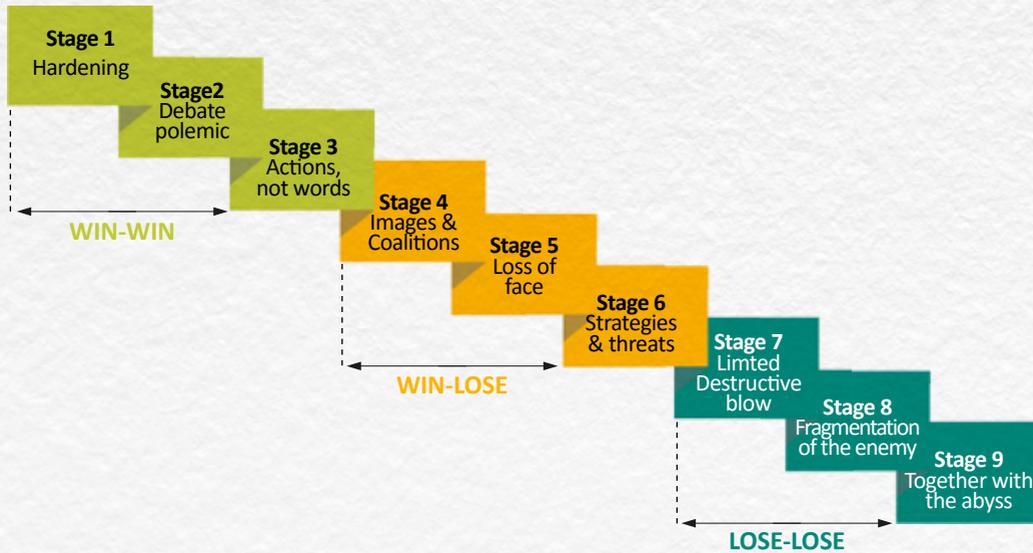


Figure 21: Glasl's Conflict Escalation Model¹⁷

De-escalation can be carried out in small confining stages before resorting to any major action. This requires considerable patience on the part of those involved – i.e., management and facilitators - as the process is likely to be slow and needs concentrated effort to succeed.

Management or the conflict resolution facilitator, may start off by developing a perspective of the situation that affects the understanding of the relevant information to conflict. This perspective should promote a better understanding of the problem causing the conflict and enable its resolution.

This should follow getting both parties together and encourage them to acknowledge that they must negotiate and understand the need to modify their approach and adapt to new forms of thinking and behaviour. There are a range of restrictive conditions that needs to be heeded and put in to deter abrasive activities and guide towards a rational solution. These are said to act as **'rules of communications and ceilings on acceptable behaviour'**.

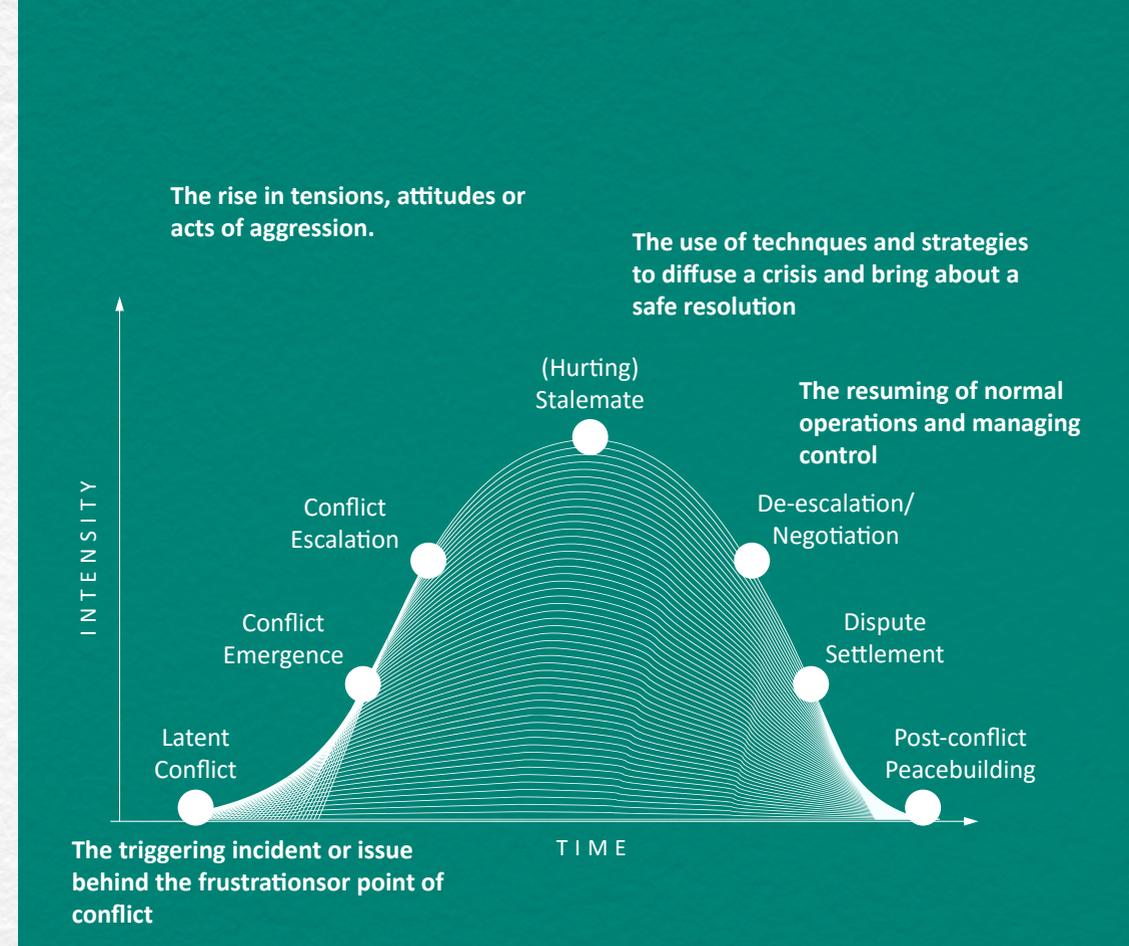


Figure 22: Conflict Escalation And De-Escalation Curve

¹⁷The three levels of Glasl's model have clearly defined outcomes. For instance, at the first level, it is possible for both parties to win (win-win); the second level results in one party losing, the other winning (win-lose); and both parties are losers in the third level (lose-lose).

“
Don't ever take a fence
down until you know why it
was put up.”

Robert Fros

Encouraging the De-escalation of Conflicts

In light of the organisational attention may show willingness to participate in the procedure with the intention of reaching a common solution of benefit to both sides.

Building relationships, empathy, and entrapment are factors that have a role in de-escalation. In some cases, entrapment can result in escalation but can be managed to assist in restricting its effects. When parties have agreed on a policy of appeasement then entrapment can require them to remain on track.

Besides, emotions play a part in the de-escalation process. Emotional involvement and cross-sharing will soften attitudes and engender support towards additional de-escalation activities. The lessening of a hard-line approach, often related to thoughts of justification and morality, may result in de-escalation progressing at a more progressive pace.

Once de-escalation processes are in place then the tone of interaction is reversed and there is a mutual recognition that the two sides are inter-reliant and that their aims must be combined and integrated to achieve a positive result.

A training programme employing workshops, individual and group discussions can be beneficial in resolving misconceptions, stereotypes and imagined hostility and allow a period of contemplation of the situation. The gradual programme of improvement in relations can lead each party to understand and accept the other party's rights and standpoints.

Reciprocation, where each side in the conflict matches the other in conciliatory acts, will dissuade the opposing party from taking any more provocative action. Creating a space for shared goals and objectives will diffuse contentious issues and enhance cooperation and encourage both parties to seek win-win results. The continued establishment of good communication and uncontentious objectives will increase the de-escalation of the conflict.

A pre-agreement established between parties when a conflict is first addressed avoids the situation developing out of control leading to entrapment. Parties can agree to cut their losses in such circumstances. If the possible consequences of conflict are made known to the parties either from within their own resources or by calling upon an outside agency to mediate and use diplomacy to diminish the limits of the struggle, their awareness is likely to lead to a settlement.

There is always the possibility that 'rumouring' may fuel the dispute. To pre-empt such an eventuality, both sides should put parties in place to quash misrepresentations and be proactive in forestalling any such eventuality and preventing its propagation. The use of escalation-limiting announcements should help quell any possible provocation.

Convening social accord between parties will help to lower aggression. This can be through the form of friendship, kinship, respect and understanding, and identification of like wishes and practices. All efforts at cordiality will help counteract any contentious issues that may otherwise result in aggressive action.

Equating oneself to the members of the other party both by sympathising with their situation and stating an understanding of their outlook, plus identifying both parties as being elements of the same main group (or organisation), can create a sense of comradely attachment.

Shared membership of groups allows the identification of commonalities between members. In the widest sense, this can be the acceptance of the human qualities of other people and accepting them into one's own realm. Such a kindred association is likely to reduce the possibility of escalating aggression by creating a greater affinity between opposing individuals and groups.

Demounting Conflicts

In the event that the conflict has reached a critical level of severity, the sides must resort to accepted de-escalation procedures with a view to appeasement.

The eradication of intimidation and the reduction in the number of individuals or groups involved are all ploys for de-escalation. **The diminishing of one issue or its intensity can lead to a lessening of the conflict.** The measures can be directed towards diluting aggression or, more productively, towards increased collaboration.

To transpose escalation to de-escalation is a gradual process, not a single event. Evolved over time that implicitly increases the need for a solution, the stage by stage progress involves appeasement through face-to-face discussion, agreeing and reconciling on marginal issues, as a pathway to solving the core problems. This, in turn, develops a more amenable ambience, develops conciliation, lessens suspicion and builds towards a favourable result.

Parties involved in conflict are limited in the extent to which they can inflict hurt. The scenario has to be played within the confines of those involved. Once the groups believe they have inflicted as much damage as possible they are likely to consider the situation a stalemate with no possibility of intensifying the conflict further. At this stage, both sides recognise that deadlock has been reached without the likelihood of success by either side and that the damage has been vehement activity, with disproportionate costs and resulted in enervation of resources.

This is the stage at which both parties become aware that there must be change and they adapt to a new perception of their conflict. **On understanding that their demands are not achievable within reasonable bounds, it is probable that they will then endeavour to adopt a more mollifying attitude.** In the event that there is no giving way or disengagement possible, both parties need to agree on a mutually agreeable solution.

It is at this stage of developments that one of the parties is likely to make a goodwill offering. This concession will reduce hostility and the feelings of aggression and can lead to both parties granting added benefits to one another in recognition of cooperation. This further progresses the act of de-escalation.

Deadlocked Conflicts



Conflicts that are deadlocked may be progressed by adopting more complex strategies. For such approaches to succeed, there is a need for a more detailed analysis to be made to ascertain the reasons for the standstill and the stage it has reached. There is no panacea for solving all conflicts in all situations. However, there is a wide range of options available. **Deliberation should be made to decide which choice will achieve what result under differing conditions.** The optimal selection will be influenced primarily by the stage of escalation reached in the process.

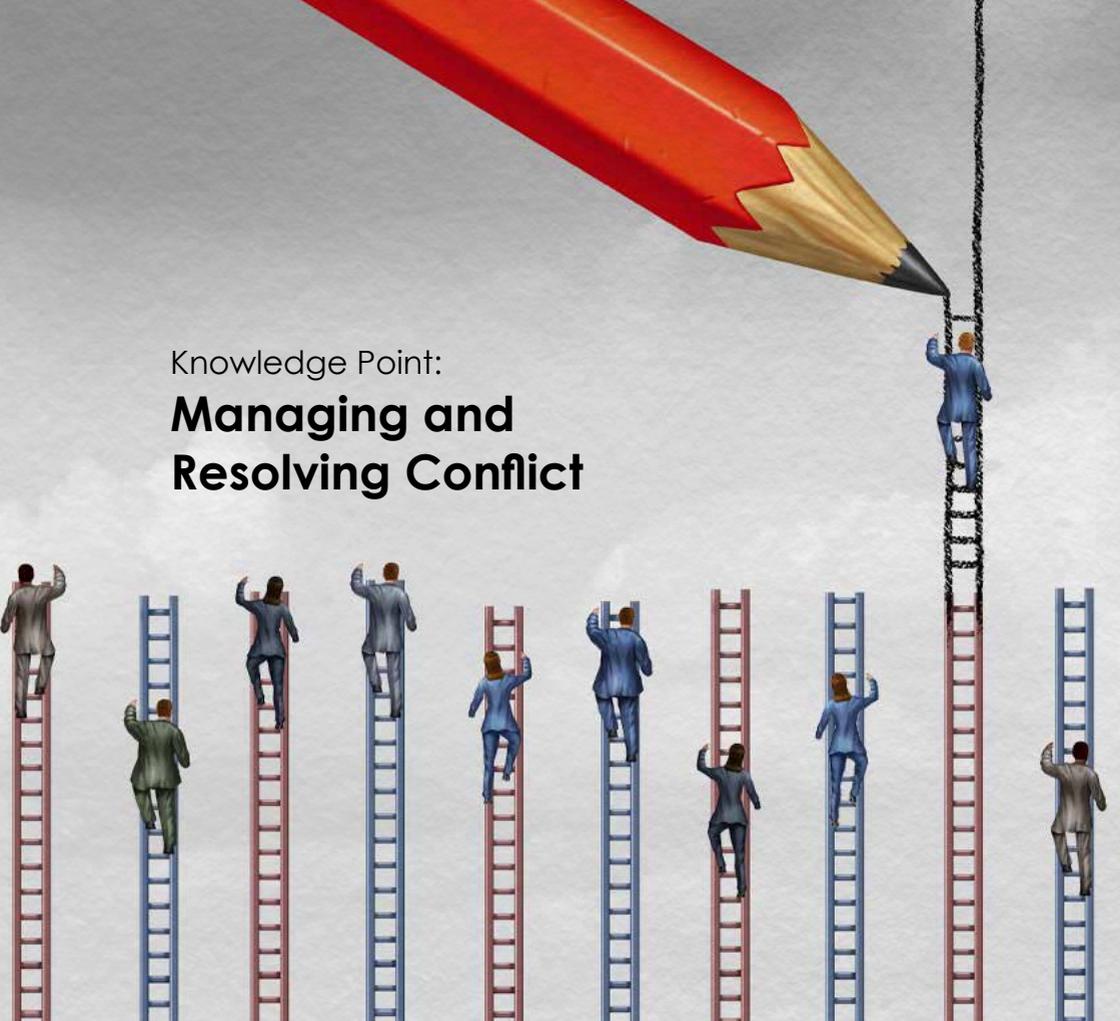
Sub-diving the dispute into smaller elements can assist parties to differentiate between the often conflicting or overlapping issues. This can lead to resolution of the marginal issues prior to addressing the main objectives. This gradual working towards an agreement by first resolving less critical matters allows the opposing sides to practice working together in readiness for the main and more problematic issues.

During this period of working together, there is an opportunity for contact and communication, where discussion enables parties to explain their standpoint and thus avoid any further development of the dispute through a lack of understanding. **Joint problem-solving discussions enable each party to amplify their requirements and priorities to the other party whilst solving lesser trivial issues.**

During this development of joint negotiations, individuals are able to develop personal touch bases with their opponents. This is a critical element in the development of genial conditions to enable the parties to have meaningful discussions and to work together.

It has been observed that hostility is generated during escalation where conditions of suspicion and discontent are rife, exacerbating tension and promoting stereotypes in the dispute. To promote de-escalation, **the development of common goals and joint projects can establish equal status between parties and improve attitudes.** Newly appointed tasks can suppress differences within the group and between parties and build comradeship. The differences are likely to be set aside as both sides concentrate on the objective they share.

The following chapter will highlight one of the most well-known management approaches for conflict management.



Knowledge Point:
Managing and Resolving Conflict

Take a look at the following guidelines. These will help you to handle conflict situations in positive and productive ways.

Don't just hear the words – listen the message. Listening well is a remarkably powerful skill to have at your disposal. When you're faced with a conflict situation, your ability to listen to, interpret and respect the views of another person will help you to respond in positive, productive ways. People appreciate empathy – by putting yourself in their shoes and seeing the situation through their eyes, you will be in a better position to forge bonds with them.

Resolving conflict is not about winning the argument. All too often, we stick to our guns in an argument because the thought of losing face or being proved wrong is too much to bear. A good manager, though, will understand that sometimes acknowledging that someone else is right can earn them a great deal of respect from their team.

The past is less important than the present. It's all too easy to bear a grudge. It's natural for us to harbour resentment toward people who have wronged us in the past. But the past is just that: the past. What's really important is the present. Stop and think – does bad feeling carried over from the past actually improve the situation in the present? If not, maybe it's time to let bygones be bygones.

Sometimes, it's just not worth fighting. Conflict takes a lot of time energy, which can often be better spent on other things. The ability to recognise when the cost of winning an argument might be bigger than the reward on offer is a valuable skill to learn. Remember to weigh up the pros and cons of continuing to argue, and be willing to walk away.

Forgiveness can be hard, but it can be extremely powerful too. As a manager, you need to be prepared to forgive people. If you can't do this, resentment will persist, and you'll be unlikely to achieve a good working relationship with your staff.

An argument isn't an argument if only one side is arguing. One of the easiest, quickest and most effective ways to end an argument is to stop arguing. This doesn't mean conceding defeat; it simply means recognising when a conflict is costing more effort and time than it is worth. Walking away and redirecting that time and effort toward something more positive is a victory in itself.

“
In great teams, conflict become productive. The free flow of conflicting ideas is critical for creative thinking, for discovering new solutions no one individual would have come to on his own.
”

Peter Senge

Management Role in Conflict Resolution



The resolution of any conflict will primarily be determined by the approach and conduct of the managers involved, the manner in which they deal with the issue. This should also be based on an understanding of the underlying reasons for the conflict, which will have a major effect on the outcome. Knowledge of how a conflict arose and its current state will influence management in their choice of actions. Investigating the complexities of the discontent and establishing the type, or types of conflict to which the problem conforms will allow for a more effective resolution.

Management Skills

Organisational theory has led to the conduct of a volume of study on the significance of management skills. It emphasises the role of management and skills in organisations i.e., in formulating and directing strategies and acting as the critical link between the upper echelons of an organisation and the workforce. Therefore, they play a vital role in guiding their organisations to realise their targets by directing and motivating the workforce.

As such, management intervention is a crucial element of conflict de-escalation in organisations to ensure that limits are not exceeded in one party's attempt to arrive at an early advantageous solution.



Figure 23: **Timing of negative conflict recognition and management intervention**

Intermediaries are in a position to advise leaders how best to modulate the conflict and guide them towards establishing mutually acceptable methods. They are in an advantageous position as their disinterested status means the other party is more likely to consider and act upon their advice rather than accept the terms of their adversary direct. Where outside actors are active and positive in the conflict there is a strong likelihood that their intervention to prove effective in reaching a solution.

Thomas-Kilmann Instrument

Studies have determined that there are five stated handling styles in resolving conflict, a model that was proposed by Thomas-Kilmann. These are: (1) competing, (2) avoiding, (3) accommodating, (4) compromising and (5) collaborating. They come in accordance with management practice that correspond to the strategies of resolution.



Figure 24: **Thomas-Kilmann Instrument, five prevailing conflict modes**



Avoidance or **Withdrawal**

This is a situation where management chooses to avoid conflict by refusing to accept its existence. The intention may be to delay making any decision or a wish to be conciliatory towards the parties involved. This attitude may be discerned in comments such as 'I don't think there's any problem. I feel fine about how things are.'

Individuals may seek to avoid conflict as they inherently seek connectivity with others. This is not a major issue when a dispute is of minor importance, but avoiding a more serious problem can have serious repercussions, arising just because the concerned party does not wish to generate discontent or does not feel able to cope with the other party's response.

“
Instead of suppressing conflicts, specific channels could be created to make this conflict explicit, and specific methods could be set up by which the conflict is resolved.
”

Albert Low

Accommodation or Smoothing



In this circumstance, the quiescent side tacitly pulls out from the argument allowing the other to win. Individuals who adopt this attitude may be unable to present their own case or may decide that by remaining silent they preserve what they consider to be a valued relationship with the other party. They also perceive disagreements to harm their own feelings as well as those of the other party.

A passive approach may serve some instances, but it may also lead to other team members supposing they have been 'accommodated', generating a negative feeling of being inadequate which, in turn, may affect productivity. The effect is to create a temporary solution and is likely to lead to other problems in the future where individuals feel they have been enervated and are left in a disadvantaged state.

Compromise



The compromise method of reaching a solution requires the two parties each to cede certain of their demands to the extent that the other party will agree to the reduced conditions. This scenario is most likely to be followed where both parties are of equal status and strength within an organisation and agree to work together.

Almost inevitably, this dilution of conditions will leave both parties aggrieved as their full demands have not been met. The process can be time and resource consuming if applied to all conflicts.

Competition or Authoritative Command

This method brings two groups into direct conflict and generates strong competition. This conflict resolution strategy is usually resorted to when the opposing parties are highly motivated and power-driven. The driving force of management in this process will be to succeed in their demands without any regard for the other party. Without consideration of the other party's well-being or wishes, they will use their authority in an endeavour to propel their own interests through the negotiations.

The manner in which these conflicts are resolved can be by the use of aggressive action, employing any means available,

such as the use of forceful argument, assuming a position of dominant authority or employing any known advantage to undermine the other party. This is a powerful and conceivably abrasive method that requires cautious consideration before being deployed.

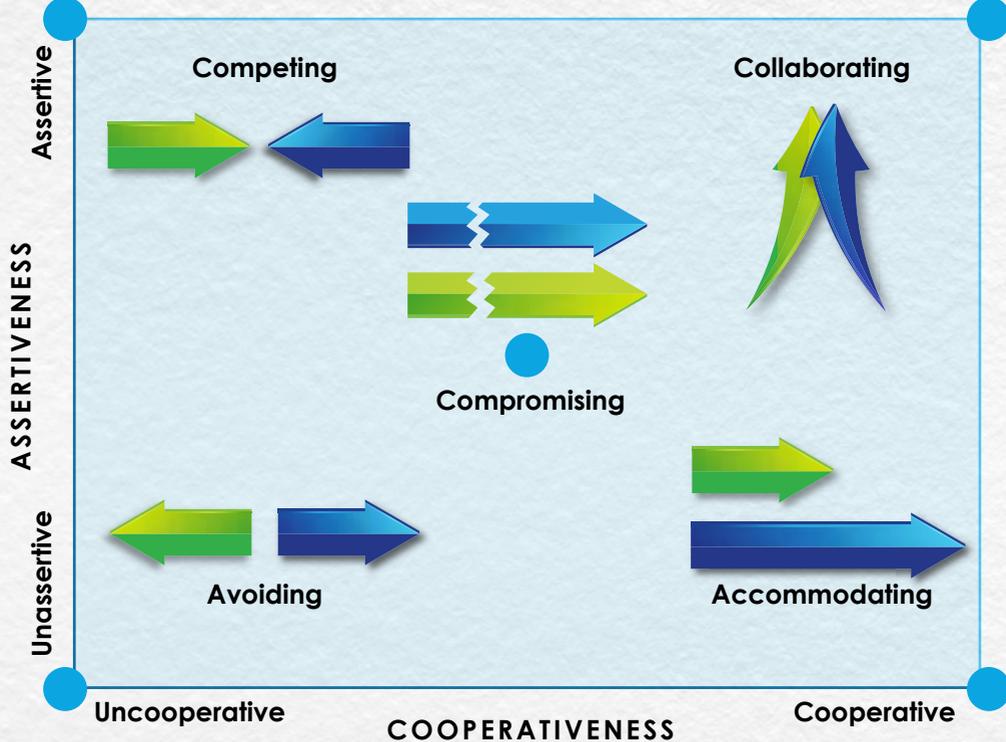
Indeed, competition can be considered healthy in creating a progressive atmosphere. However, if used too often or in an unsuitable manner it can result in bad relations being established between groups, especially if one or other is determined to advance their cause without regard for the well-being of others. This method is used on occasion when there are strong objections on moral or unethical grounds for the propositions or for any alternatives

Collaboration or Problem Solving

Collaboration reverses the concept of avoiding confrontation. The views and aims of the parties involved are combined in an effort to build a solution based on the strengths of the involved parties. Interpersonal communication is required to bring the ideas of the parties into parallel. Drawing together the separate aims will allow cohesion of the issues involved and the teamwork thus created, as opposed to generating argument, will provide a foundation for the development of added possible solutions. The final outcome is a win-win situation for all parties. Nevertheless, this can be a protracted process that is demanding on both time and resources. Consequently, it is only applicable to a limited number of situations.

This strategy is the best method for producing an effective outcome. Each side presents its case, identifying their position with facts and reasoning while paying attention to the presentation from the other side. This leads to the questioning of the rationale rather than a direct criticism of either party. From this, problem-solving will develop where each group makes a positive contribution towards solving the problems of the others. Ultimately, all parties benefit and all matters of concern are addressed and resolved in a cooperative manner.

Table 7: Summary of Thomas-Kilmann's conflict handling orientation



Conflict- Handling Orientation	Best Scenario to Use Conflict- Handling Orientation
Competition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When quick, decisive action is vital. On important issues where unpopular actions need implementing. On issues vital to the organization's welfare and when you know you're right Against people who take advantage of non-competitive behavior.
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To find an integrative solution when both sets of concerns are too important to be compromised. When your objective is to learn. To merge insights from people with different perspectives To gain commitment by incorporating concerns into a consensus. To work through feelings that have interfered with a relationship

Avoidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When an issue is trivial, or more important issues are pressing. When you perceive no chance of satisfying your concerns. When potential disruption outweighs the benefits of resolution. To let people cool down and regain perspective. When gathering information supersedes immediate decision. When others can resolve the conflict more effectively. When issues seem tangible or symptomatic of their issues.
Accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When you find you are wrong to allow a better position to be heard to learn and to show your reasonableness. When issues are more important to others than yourself to satisfy others and maintain cooperation. To build social credit for later issues. To minimize loss when you are outmatched and losing. To allow subordinates to develop by learning from mistakes.
Compromise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When goals are important, but not worth the effort or potential disruption of more assertive modes. When opponents with equal power are committed to mutually exclusive goals. To achieve a temporary settlement to complex issues. To arrive at expedient solutions under time pressure. As a back-up when collaboration or competition is unsuccessful.

Source: iEduNote.com (<https://iedunote.com>)

Knowledge Point:

Tips for Management

Think in new and positive ways about conflict.

In the past, it was normal for people to see conflict as a bad thing. The response was often to create more rules, which hasn't always been effective. Modern organisations have found that conflicting views can actually be valuable, and have started taking them on board more frequently. Through allowing for the positive exchanges of ideas, and effective management of that exchange, conflict can be transformed from a problem into an asset.



Ground rules are vital. It's much easier for people to perform in the way their organisations want them to when they understand what is acceptable and what is not. Establishing ground rules is a good way to let everyone know what they can and can't do. A good example of a ground rule is one that states that, when someone is talking, they should not be interrupted. These rules should be readily available in the workplace – they might be on posters around an office, or in a handbook issued to all staff, for example.

Take positive action. One of the worst things a manager can do in a conflict situation is nothing. Doing nothing, or avoiding the situation, or pretending it isn't happening, is only going to upset people more. When people get angry or upset, they want to see something done about the things that have caused them to feel that way. Inaction, or not doing anything, can cause staff to feel that management is not really interested in the things that make them unhappy, and this can make the situation worse. A good manager will always be responsive to complaints, and will take visible steps to make things better.

Train yourself to spot situations that aren't being handled well. Situations aren't always immediate. Sometimes they can develop over a long period. When the resources of an organisation are stretched and management styles change regularly, it can be hard to spot emerging trends that lead to conflict. If you start to see evidence of low productivity, high rates of conflict and low morale emerging, it's time to take a look at the bigger picture and ask yourself whether a new approach might be beneficial.

Make positive conflict behaviour the norm. The senior executives in an organisation are the role models for the rest of the staff. Their behaviour sets the tone for the whole work environment, and can be hugely influential on the ways in which more junior staff carry out their day-to-day tasks. Most organisations have their own set of values that shape the way things are done. But it's important for an organisation to respect its team members as individuals too, and allow them to feel comfortable with the ways in which things are done.

Laughter is the best medicine. Most people take their work very seriously, which can lead to the workplace becoming dry and humourless. This, in turn, can create a tense and stressful atmosphere in which conflicts are more likely to occur. But there's nothing to say that work can't be fun. Try to introduce entertaining, playful activities in meeting or day-to-day activities - these can help to lower tension and improve morale.

“
Conflict is the beginning of
consciousness.”

Mary Esther Harding

British-American Jungian Analyst and Psychoanalyst

Learning and **Conflict Management**

Learning is a key for survival for both individuals and businesses. Thus, organisations need to develop systems not only to deal with conflicts, but to also to learn from conflicts.

Learning as an Approach to Conflict Management

Organisational learning has often been quoted as the product of conflict, as it is argued to energise teams to learn. As such, a learning organisation observes conflicts as opportunities to learn from, and as such considers them as 'eye openers' to explore different perspective, adopt more creative and innovative business solutions and embark on positive changes.

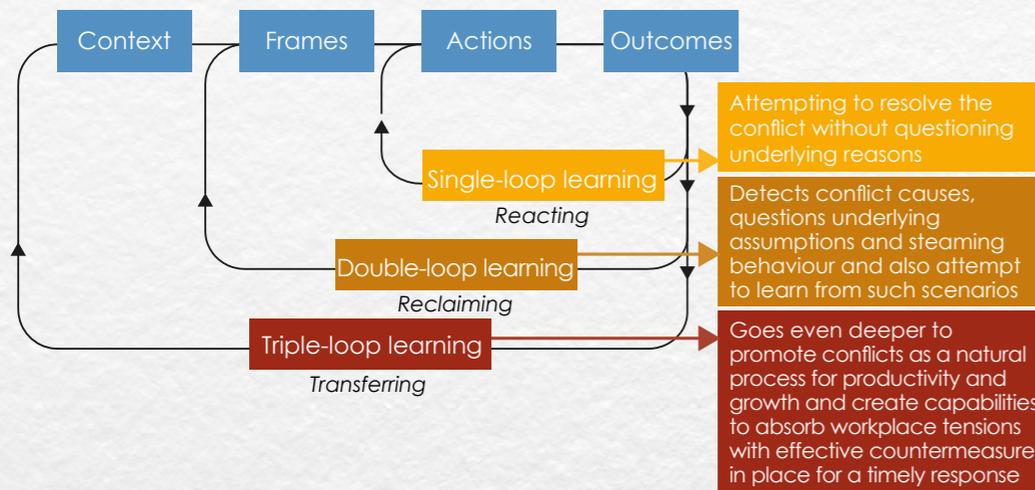


Figure 25: Conflicts in learning Organisations

Organisational conflict management should be structured in such a way as a learning experience to improve organisation performance. This should come in conjunction with developing strategies to ameliorate the conflict. This is particularly relevant for organisations where the learning process allows a corporation to continue to function effectively. The experience should encourage management to question their modus operandi and continuously subject their operations to stringent critical analysis.

The disparity among parties leading to conflict and conflict resolution should be seen as a vital learning process in an organisation's ongoing operations. The formative closure of conflicts can be viewed as the result of positive learning gained from dealing with disagreements.

The acquisition of knowledge, its distribution and interpretation of information, together with organisational memorisation - that is preserving information for future access and use - can be identified as the most important objectives for management in organisations. This collection of data and experience allows members to cooperate in the diagnosis and resolution of problems.

On occasion, the very act of management accepting the existence of a problem and taking steps to correct it, can deactivate tension and bring the parties together in a more understanding and co-supportive relationship. This can lead to the forming of a more flexible organisation that is better able to react to the exponential changes in contemporary business.

Conflict in Four Stages of Organisational Learning¹⁸

According to a study carried out in the mid-1990s, successful learning teams typically progress through four phases prior to achieving collective and organisational learning (Tompkins, 1995; 1997). These four stages are (1) collaborative climate, (2) collective understanding, (3) collective competence and (4) continual improvement (Tompkins and Rogers, 2004).

Success was achieved by groups that proceeded through the sequence. In the event that one level was not attained, then it was seen that the group reverted to the preceding level before needing to recycle the process (Figure 27).

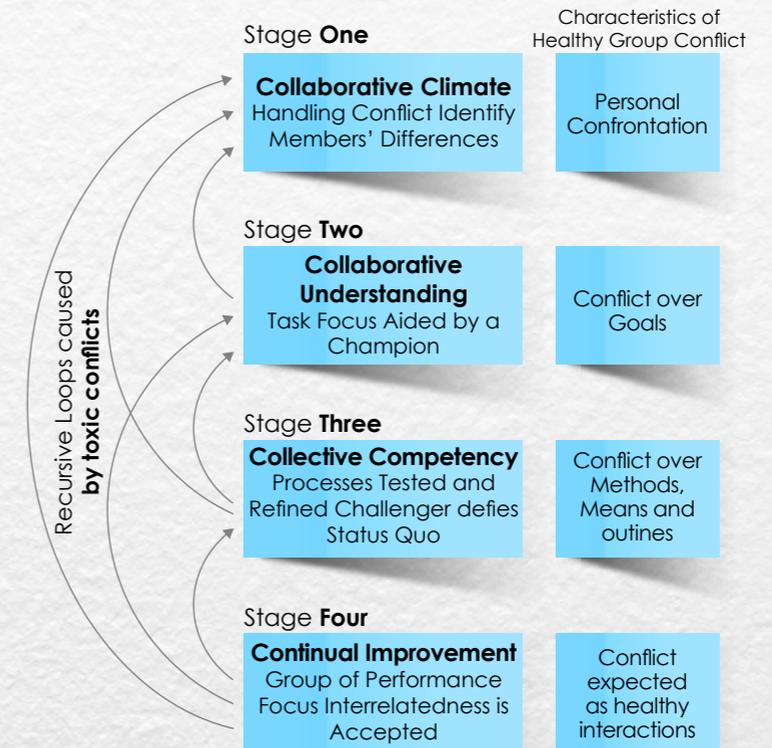
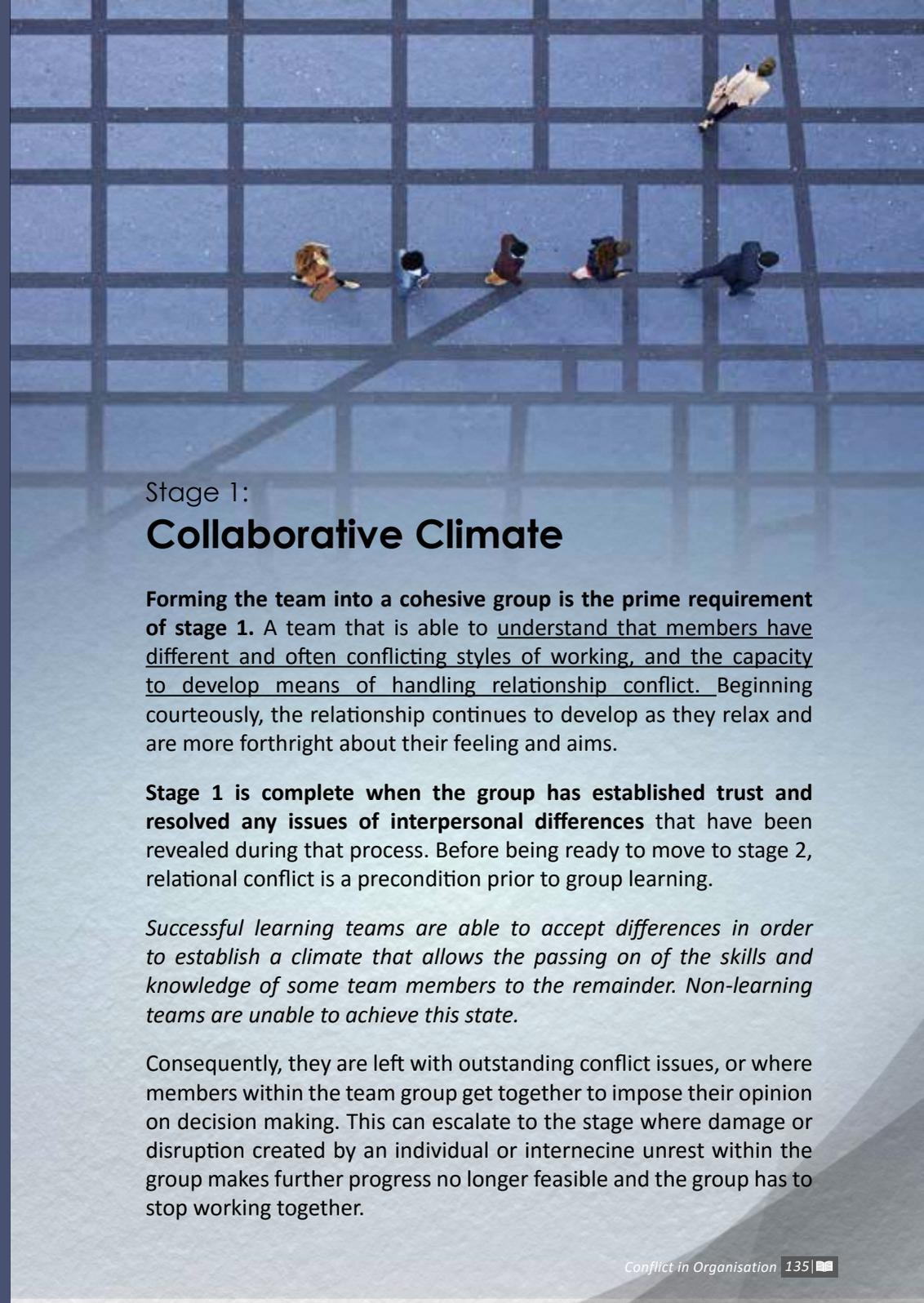


Figure 26: Stages of conflict in learning groups
Source: Tompkins and Rogers, 2004

¹⁸The content in this section is written based on the interpretation of the article written by Tompkins and Rogers (2004).

“
If you can't go around it,
over it, or through it, you had
better negotiate with it.”

Ashleigh Brilliant
English Author



Stage 1:

Collaborative Climate

Forming the team into a cohesive group is the prime requirement of stage 1. A team that is able to understand that members have different and often conflicting styles of working, and the capacity to develop means of handling relationship conflict. Beginning courteously, the relationship continues to develop as they relax and are more forthright about their feeling and aims.

Stage 1 is complete when the group has established trust and resolved any issues of interpersonal differences that have been revealed during that process. Before being ready to move to stage 2, relational conflict is a precondition prior to group learning.

Successful learning teams are able to accept differences in order to establish a climate that allows the passing on of the skills and knowledge of some team members to the remainder. Non-learning teams are unable to achieve this state.

Consequently, they are left with outstanding conflict issues, or where members within the team group get together to impose their opinion on decision making. This can escalate to the stage where damage or disruption created by an individual or internecine unrest within the group makes further progress no longer feasible and the group has to stop working together.

Stage 2:

Collective Understanding

The aim of this stage is to establish clarity of vision. This is when the team states its aims and purpose in a manner that is understood by all. This may create conflict in the first instance, but as the team works towards integration, the aims will become clear. The ultimate achievement is to for all sides to come together with a common purpose when the group has a clear understanding of its aims. Prior to this, there has been the discussion of the required outcome, alternatives, insights, and proposed directions, setting aside interpersonal issues.

Champions

The recognition and appointment of champions who are accepted by all team members has a positive effect on attaining collective understanding. These champions help disseminate information throughout their group. Their role is to act as a go-between to help team members meld together to achieve common goals by diverting any conflict away from the stated aim. This can be achieved by generating dynamic discussion over the task. As they have a wide perspective of the whole scenario, they are able to direct the team towards their mutual goal.

Relationship conflict at this stage should be minimal, however, productive discussion and weighing of options will continue to generate task conflict. The subjugation of the views of other people, as opposed to those of the champion, should not be regarded as a loss of identity, but as an advancement of the group's effectiveness.

Stage 3:

Achieving Collective Competency (Learning from Mistakes)

At this stage, the team has a collective set of skills and is able to function. Process and methods are crucial to reach the group's ideal solution. A procedure of systematically scrutinising, benchmarking, documenting and experimenting will be the process undertaken by the true learning team.

It is inevitable that there will be issues during the experimentation phase, but collective responsibility will ensue and the team will learn from them. This will be in direct contrast to the non-learning teams, where experimentation is less likely, as the team will not wish to make errors. When errors do occur, the tendency will be for members to avoid taking personal responsibility and blame other individuals in the team.

Challengers

Constructive criticism will be a critical element of stage 3, elements incorporated in the role of the challenger or resistor - at least one nonconforming member - who brings procedural conflicts to the forefront. They are individuals who will attempt to impede important change efforts, by raising taxing questions about key issues that have been agreed and accepted by most team members and challenge tacit acceptance. Questioning why change is necessary when it has been advocated or asking why change is not being accepted when it has been rejected, forces team members to review their decision making.

Challengers force team members to look at their decisions from a new perspective. They pose searching questions, dispute fact assumptions and undermine conventional team thinking. The challenger focuses primarily on methods and means of the work task. The challenger is concerned with the means, procedures and processes of the task. Their short-term focus differs from that of the champions in stage 2, who concentrate more on the long-term aspects of a task.

The role of the challengers are to be dysfunctional, and only when the team has established a sense of unity and is unified over the goals, which is normally achieved during the second stage of organisational learning, only then can the challengers prove to be effective.

Stage 3 is marked complete when the team members are mutually cooperative in their work and in their relationship, one to another, which is evident in their group abilities.

This is the stage when the team has achieved a strong bond of connectedness and have developed into a learning team. The preservation of this unity depends on their ability to continue through stage 4.

Stage 4:

Moving to **Continual Improvement**

At stage 4, **the team is now mutually comfortable with the capabilities, the strengths and weaknesses of other team members.** This is the time of organisational learning. Routines are in place and the team has the skills and competency to achieve its work satisfactorily. The skills have been shared throughout the team so that no one person is responsible for a particular task. This is a mature stage of development when the team is not reliant upon a single person and the loss of one member can be compensated for.

This is a dynamic process and it may be that new champions and new challengers appear to meet the likelihood of an ever-changing scenario. This may require the team to proceed through the learning stages again, but if the team remains focused, they will find the processes resolve themselves. This team spirit will allow them to go forward and accept and resolve any new issues they encounter.

Process and task conflicts will continue to be part of the continuous learning cycle. There will be ongoing critical debate and dialogue, with inevitable minor disagreements on associated tasks. Methods and procedures typify the routine, which is a major part of the programme, and will usurp relationship conflict and are indicative of the achievements in this phase of the process.





Knowledge Point:
Positive Conflict

In order to progress through the four stages of learning, team members and leaders need to use conflict in positive, productive ways. Here are four steps to achieving this:

- **Communicate:** Be ready and willing to talk about things that make you and your team uncomfortable. The sooner things are out in the open, the sooner they can be resolved. Be aware of the conversations that you need to have with people, and have them. By making them productive and positive, you will be able to motivate people to strive toward goals.
- **Have faith in people:** Team members are always more productive when they feel that they are valued by the organisation. By making people feel valued and encouraging positive, co-operative behaviour, your team will perform better and clash less.
- **Identify common goals:** If people feel like they are working toward the same goals, they will work better together.
- **Encourage transparency in the workplace:** If people know what to expect from each other and the organisation, they will develop stronger bonds and a greater sense of trust.

“
Change means movement.
Movement means friction. Only
in the frictionless vacuum of
a non-existent abstract world
can movement or change occur
without that abrasive friction of
conflict.”

Saul Alinsky

(1909-1972)

American Political Theorist

At A Glance: Studies show that there is a clear relationship between an organization's approach to new ideas and its response to conflict, with those that reported more highly adaptive behaviour overall also reporting more adaptive responses to conflict.

HOW DIFFERENT TYPES OF ORGANISATIONS MANAGE CONFLICT AROUND NEW IDEAS



Organisations that support or champion innovation

Organisation that manage the status quo or focus on incremental change

HOW DIFFERENT TYPES OF ORGANISATIONS MANAGE CONFLICT AROUND NEW IDEAS

ORGANISATIONAL TYPE	RESPONSE TO HEATED CONFLICT			
	Conflict escalates to unproductive levels as idea conflict turns into personal conflict	Conflict is avoided by abdicating to leaders	Conflict is cooled by increasing levels of agreement	Conflict is embraced as a necessary part of change
Champions innovation as core practice	3	3	8	12
Generates and supports innovation	0	4	16	11
Implements incremental departures from business-as-usual	17	24	14	4
Focuses on managing the status quo	5	3	1	0

HOW LEADERS OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF ORGANISATIONS REVOLVE CONFLICT AROUND NEW IDEAS

ORGANISATIONAL TYPE	ACTION TAKEN BY LEADERS TO RESOLVE CONFLICT			
	Leaders take no direct action	Leaders occasionally take action	Leaders frequently take action	Leaders always take action
Champions innovation as core practice	0	7	14	5
Generates and supports innovation	0	6	21	4
Implements incremental departures from business-as-usual	12	36	8	3
Focuses on managing the status quo	4	5	0	0

Source: **EmcArts Inc**
www.artsfwd.org/survey-results-conflict-management-and-the-adaptive-organization/

Concluding Remarks



“
Conflict is the beginning
of consciousness.”

Mary Esther Harding

Concluding Remarks

In today's world, constant change is inevitable and organisational environments need to move with the times, although this, by its very nature, will always likely to cause conflict. Therefore, conflict management is an essential skill for all organisations, and for its management at every level. Without such skills, it would be unlikely for individuals and teams to appreciate that conflicts can often be resolved as with the same speed that it arises.

People by nature have different worldviews, that would result in dissimilar beliefs, values and perceptions, and hence are expected to have differences in opinion. Conflict resolution skills can help solve issues in a collaborative manner and thereby avoid the situation where there is ongoing discontent, that can continue to suppurate and result in a revived conflict.

The key is learning how to manage conflict effectively so that it can serve as a catalyst, rather than a hindrance, to organisation improvement.

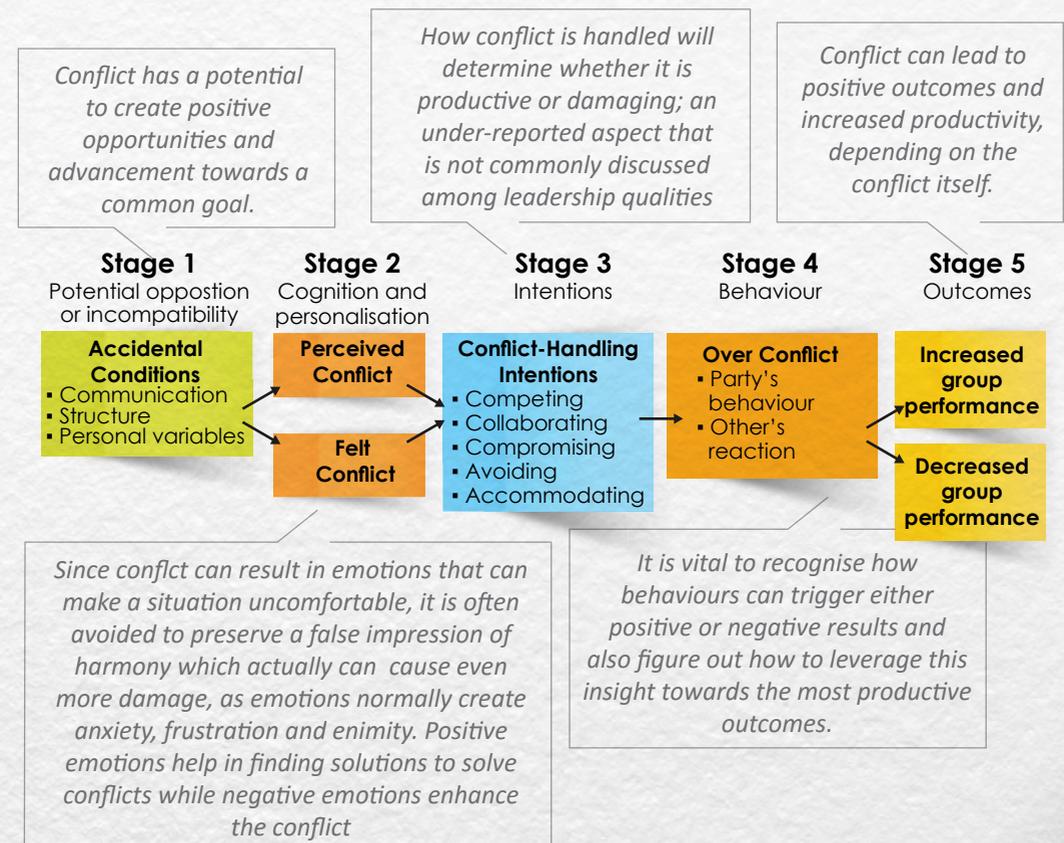


Figure 27: **Conflicts from potentiality to outcomes**
Source: **Robbins and Judge** (2013)

In certain scenarios, the longer a conflict is left, the greater the effort required to solve it. Unsatisfactory conflict management has many repercussions. The management-employee trust will be adversely affected, which in turn is likely to diminish motivation with an attendant lowering of morale. The impact of this is likely to be a rise in stress levels, possible health and safety at work accidents, a decrease in performance and productivity, a rise in absenteeism and a greater turnover of staff, and most adversely, organisation and business failure!

Management who avoid conflict and lack conflict management skills can also lack the ability to achieve their business objectives. They are likely to have poor interpersonal skills in dealing with people.

The benefit of dealing with conflict is manifested in building relationships of trust and in generating ideas, as well as identifying personal and professional expectations.

As emphasised in conflict resolution approaches in this book, a key aspect of countering conflict is the bringing together of opposing interests to eliminate any build-up of tension, which emphasises the need for assertive and cooperative environments. This is of particular importance to management and a critical element in the development of their reform programmes, where managers must be at the forefront of change. Communication and the passage of cogent information are paramount in building comprehensive understanding throughout the diversity of professional and individual interests.

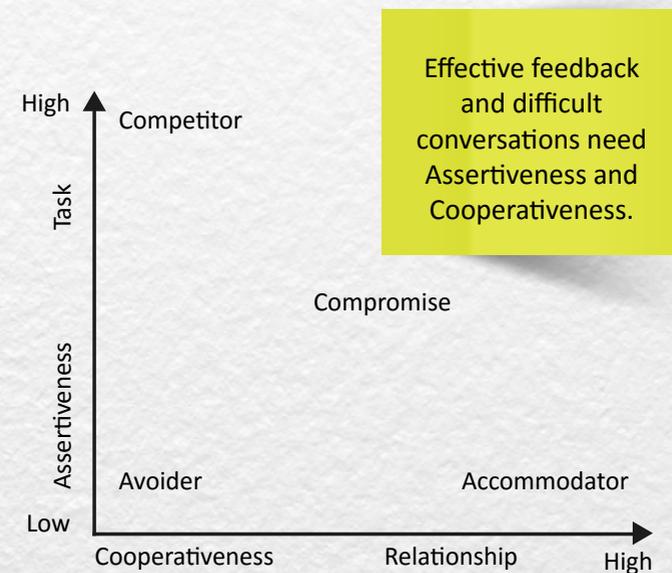


Figure 28: **The conflict grid**

The fundamental aim is to ensure that all employees have the same knowledge of the organisational procedures and targets and to give every team the opportunity to function to the best of their ability. This is most effectively achieved by an organisational cultural model of common agreement as the norm and the consideration that some conflicts generally have negative effects on performance and on interrelations if not managed properly.



Figure 29: The iceberg of culture

To reiterate, communication plays a key role. Communication is a multi-level skill, where dialogue and the free exchange of ideas across all levels of the workforce must be ongoing and congenially possible throughout the organisation, generating a cohesion of well-motivated teams with a strong sense of commitment.

Last but not least, international practice shows that organisations need to build a culture to accept conflict as a means of corporate learning. They must seek a deep understanding of the most effective ways of using the conflict for the good of the organisation.

By associating conflict with creativity and viewing it as a normal development in the way in which people and groups conduct themselves in normal circumstances, organisations can learn from the process and dispel the idea that it is a deviant behaviour to be avoided.

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Appendix:

WORKPLACE CONFLICT SURVEY

Appendix:

Workplace Conflict Survey

An international research study on workplace conflict questioned 5000 full-time employees in nine countries in Europe and the Americas, namely: Belgium, Brazil, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The study was to ascertain how different countries react to conflict. To extract details on assessing the reaction, the long- and short-term effect on both individual and organisation performance. From these findings, a correlation was made between both positive and negative reactions and results.

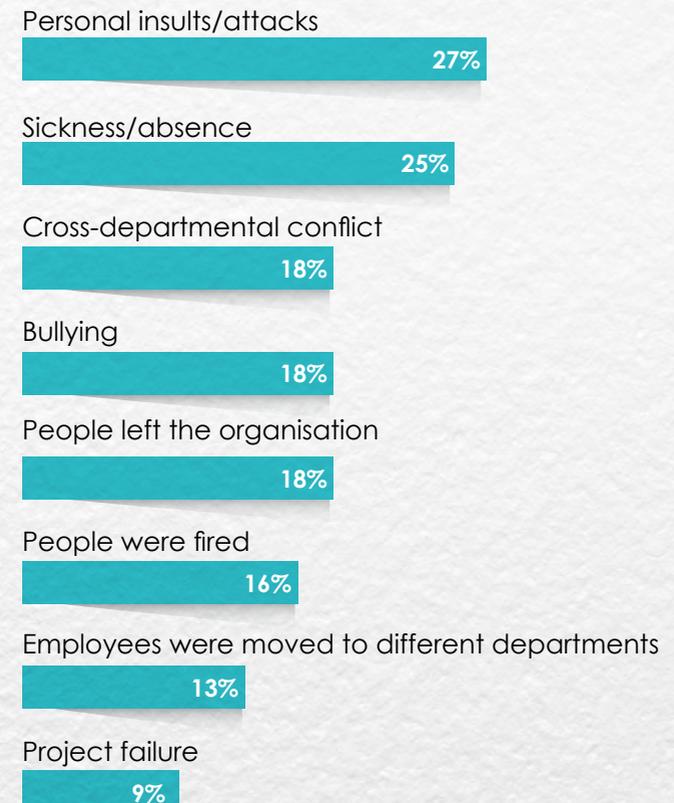
The findings revealed that perceptions of conflict can be too stereotyped and poorly managed conflict can lead to massive annual losses to business. There was evidently a need for more flexible and subtle handling of conflict.

However, the constructive findings were that conflict when channelled correctly can promote progress that harmony is not able to achieve. The survey postulated that there was a need for a greater understanding and consideration of conflict by the workforce and an overall need to analyse the suppositions that exist.

Average number of hours per week spent on dealing with workplace conflict, by country



What negative outcomes of workplace conflict have you witnessed?



How does conflict make you feel?

Demotivated—it's such a distraction
21%

Angry and frustrated
18%

Nervous—sick to stomach
9%

Sleepiness and stressed
9%

Nothing—I'm used to it
19%

Confident—the issue have been aired
12%

Excited—a chance to prove myself
5%

Energized—it's the spice of life
5%

How does conflict make you feel? United States versus survey average

Demotivated—it's such a distraction
24%
21%

Angry and frustrated
26%
18%

Nervous—sick to stomach
7%
9%

Sleepiness and stressed
8%
9%

Nothing—I'm used to it
22%
19%

Confident—the issue have been aired
9%
14%

Excited—a chance to prove myself
2%
5%

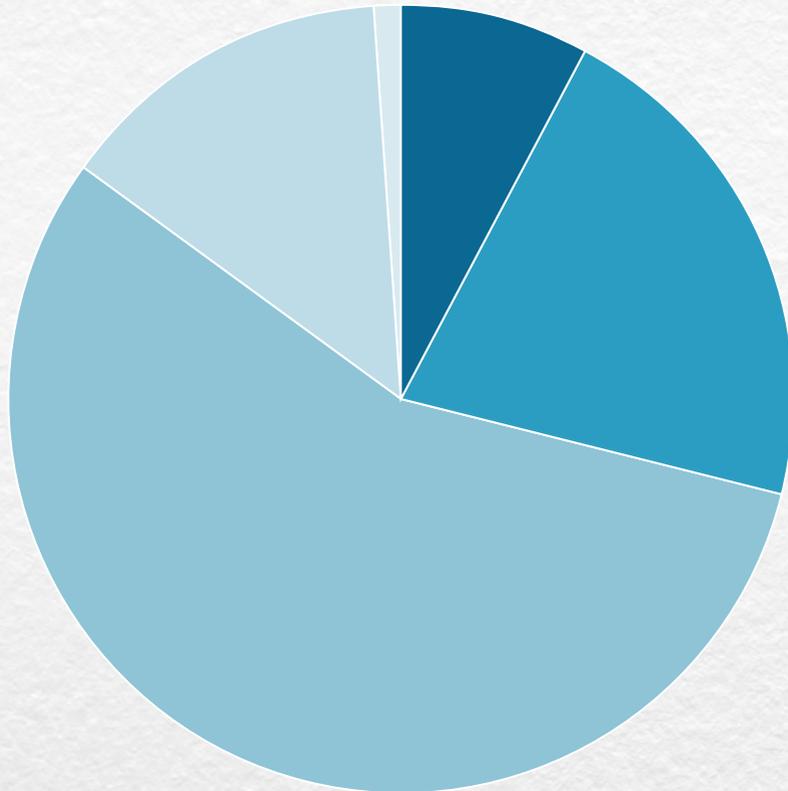
Energized—it's the spice of life
1%
5%

United Kingdom
Total

Negative feelings:
Total 57%
UK 65%

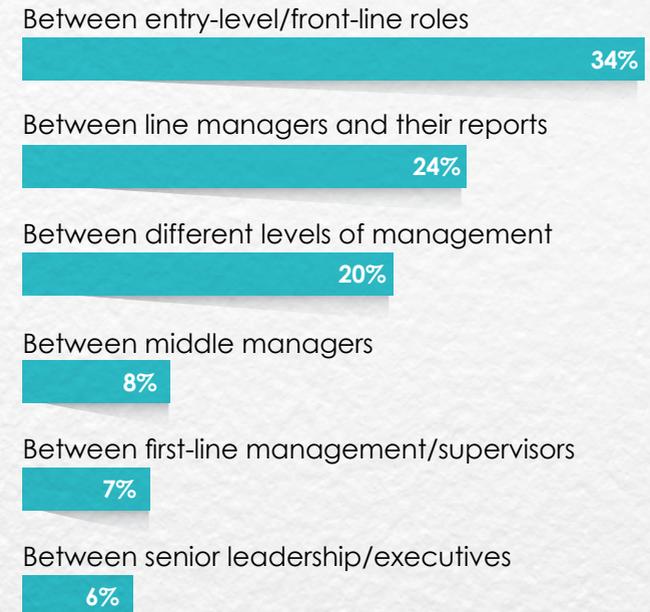
Positive feelings:
Total 24%
UK 12%

Do you ever have to deal with conflict in the workplace?



Yes, Always	8%
Yes, frequently	21%
Yes, occasionally	56%
No, never	14%
Don't know	1%

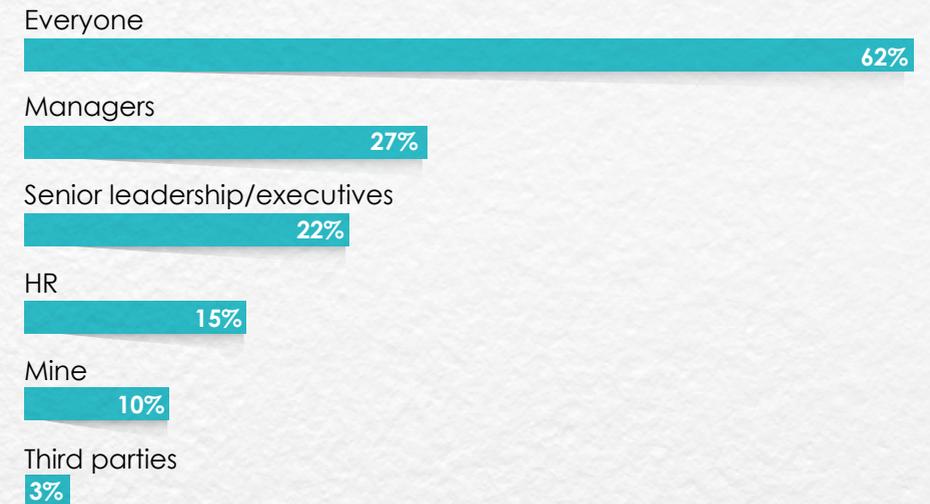
At what level of your organisation do you observe the most conflict?



What are the main causes of conflict?



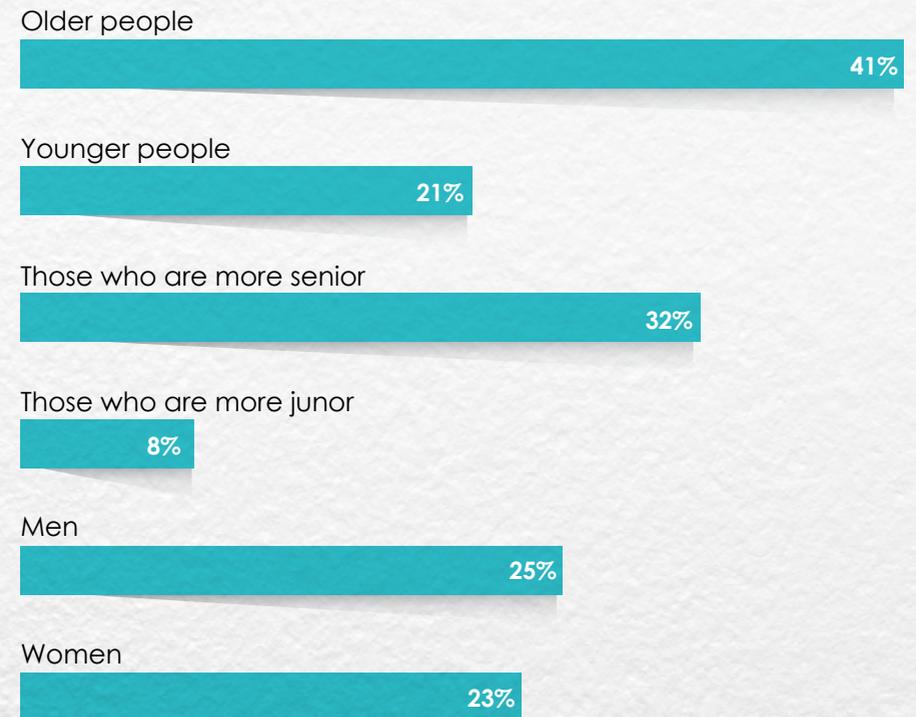
Whose ultimate responsibility is it to ensure conflict in the workplace is managed more effectively?



What could managers do to address conflict at work more effectively?



Who do you perceive to handle conflict most effectively?



Training in conflict management received, by country

Country	Part of leadership development	Formal external course	None
United States	22%	18%	43%
Belgium	6%	12%	72%
Brazil	16%	18%	43%
Denmark	9%	14%	61%
France	5%	11%	73%
Germany	13%	10%	50%
Ireland	13%	10%	63%
The Netherlands	7%	10%	63%
United Kingdom	14%	12%	55%

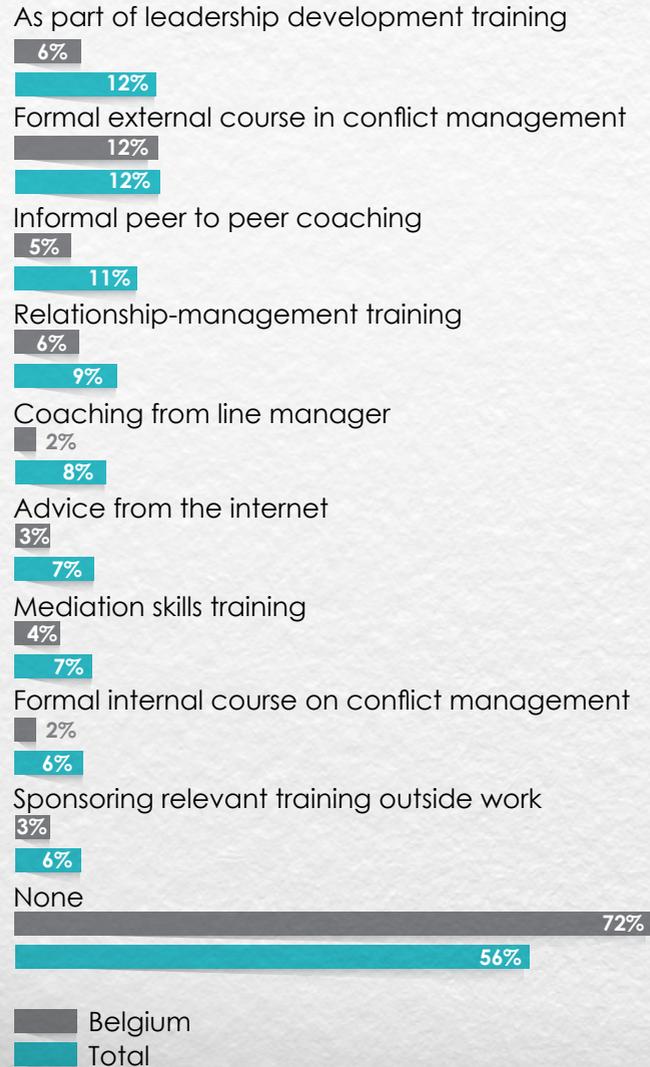
Training received on managing workplace conflict

United States versus survey average



Training receive on managing workplace conflict

Belgium versus survey average



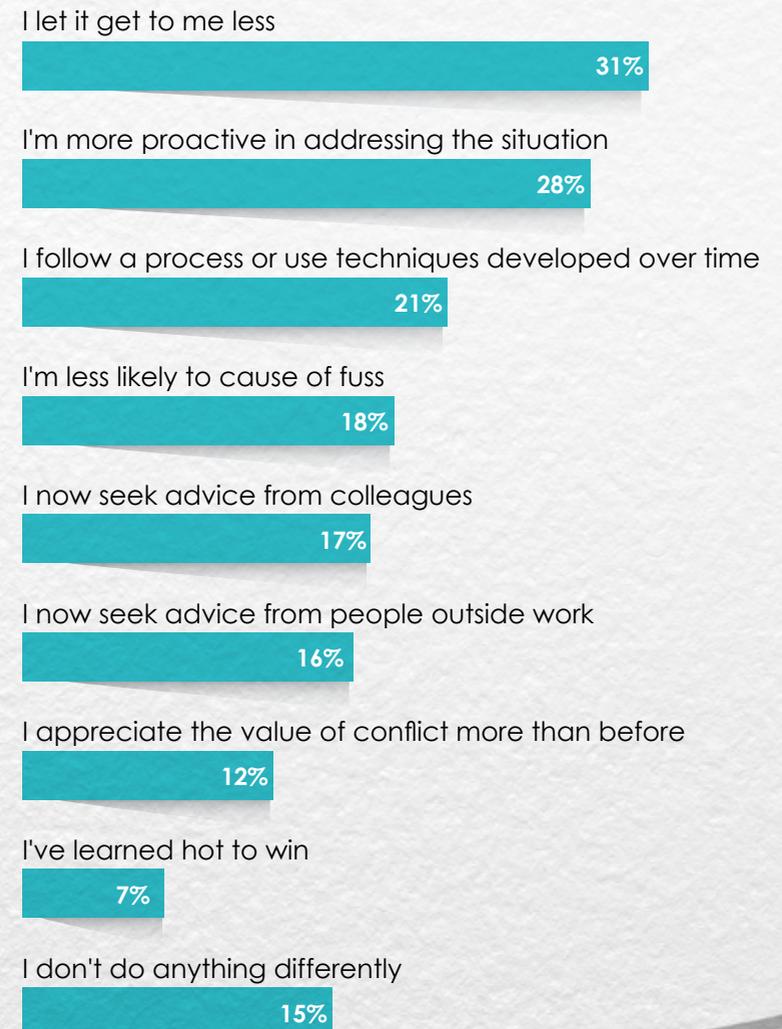
How did training help you to become more effective?



What positive outcomes have you experienced from workplace conflict?



How do you handle workplace conflict differently now than you did earlier in your career?



In organisations, conflict is a must; simply because the whole system is dependent on relationships. In fact, conflict is more of a survival instrument in today's dynamic and rapidly changing environments. Organisations that will succeed in managing conflicts to their advantage are most likely to win their games!

About the Author

Professor Dr. Ali M. Al-Khouri is one of the renowned international practitioners in the field of organizational development and transformation. With over 28 years of experience, he played a key role in leading numerous successful initiatives in Arab and West African countries.

His organizational work was rated as world-class and role model for excellence as it received tens of local and international awards including the "UN Award for Public Sector Excellence". He was also recognized among the most influential people in the world in various practice categories.

Having published more than 140 books and journal articles, he is an active researcher in the field of organisational and sustainable development, knowledge-based society, and in digital transformation.

He is a Professor and Fellow of the British Institute for Technology in London, UK. He attained his higher education from top UK universities, where he received his B.Sc. (Hons.) from Manchester University, M.Sc. from Lancaster University, and an Engineering Doctorate (EngD) from Warwick University.

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