Chapter 10

Managing Conflict

INTRODUCTORY EXERCISES

1. If you could eliminate conflict from every group's activities, would you? Why or why not?
2. Identify someone you know who is particularly skilled at operating in conflict situations. Based on your experience with the person, identify some of the person's specific effective behaviors in such situations.
3. List the headlines of stories on the first five pages of a recent newspaper. Identify which of the items describe conflict of some kind and write a brief description of three of the conflicts. What approaches do the parties to the three conflicts seem to be taking? What prospects do you feel each conflict has of being resolved? What is it that makes you see the prospects as you do?

I exhort you also to take part in the great combat, which is the combat of life, and greater than every other earthly conflict.

- Plato

Introduction

In this chapter, we'll explore the nature, leadership implications, and prevalence of an enduring human reality: conflict in groups. We'll also consider a variety of styles whereby people can engage in conflict and review some strategies for managing conflict effectively. You will learn how to deal with conflict in the workplace and how to create and implement a crisis communication plan.

10.1 What Is Conflict?

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define conflict.
2. Identify five subjects of conflict in groups.
3. Acknowledge four major dangers of group conflict.

My athletes are always willing to accept my advice as long as it doesn't conflict with their views.

- Lou Holtz (college and professional football coach)

Most people probably regard conflict as something to avoid, or at least not something we go looking for. Still, we'd all agree that it's a familiar, perennial, and powerful part of human interaction. For these reasons, we need to know what it is, how to identify it, what it may deal with, and what damage it may cause if it isn't handled wisely.

Definitions of Conflict

Hocker & Wilmot (2001)Hocker, J.L., & Wilmot, W.W. (2001). *Interpersonal conflict* (6th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill. defined **conflict**[1] as an expressed struggle between interdependent parties over goals which they perceive as incompatible or resources which they perceive to be insufficient. Let's examine the ingredients in their definition.

1. An expressed struggle between interdependent parties over goals which they perceive as incompatible or resources which they perceive to be insufficient.

First of all, conflict must be expressed. If two members of a group dislike each other or disagree with each other's viewpoints but never show those sentiments, there's no conflict.

Second, conflict takes place between or among parties who are interdependent—that is, who need each other to accomplish something. If they can get what they want without each other, they may differ in how they do so, but they won't come into conflict.

Finally, conflict involves clashes over what people want or over the means for them to achieve it. Party A wants X, whereas party B wants Y. If they either can't both have what they want at all, or they can't each have what they want to the degree that they would prefer to, conflict will arise.

When it came to Lou Holtz and the players on his football teams, it's obvious that Holtz's views of who should take the field and what plays should be run were not always the same as his players'. In a football game it's possible to attempt a pass or to execute a run, for instance, but not both on the same play. In this kind of situation, conflict is inevitable and is probably going to be constant.

Consider the case, likewise, of a small group assigned to complete a project in a biology class. One student in the group, Robin, may be a political science major with a new baby at home to attend to. Robin may be taking the course as an elective and want to devote as little time as possible to the project so as to be able to spend family time. Another member of the group, Terry, may be on the pre-med track and feel strong curiosity about the topic of the presentation. If Terry is determined to create a product which earns a high grade and helps get the professor's recommendation for a summer research internship, then Robin and Terry will experience conflict over how, when, or how hard to work on their project.

Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/dave-goodman/208072430/

As any conflict takes shape, each person brings a combination of perceptions, emotions, and behavior to bear on it. This combination will evolve and change with time, depending on how people interact with each other and with the forces in their environment.

We can't stop perceiving things in our surroundings. How we perceive others—whether positively or negatively—influences both how we feel about them and how we behave toward them, and *vice versa*. The perceptions we experience of ourselves and of others affect our emotional states, which in turn create new perceptions in those around us.

At the beginning of the biology course we just mentioned, Robin may perceive Terry as intelligent and as someone who can pull most of the weight in their class project. Robin may compliment and praise Terry at this point, and Terry may glow with the satisfaction of being appreciated. Their mutual perceptions are then positive, and their emotional state is favorable.

When the first deadline in the project comes along and the portion of the group's work assigned to Robin turns out to be mediocre, however, things will probably change. Terry is apt to start perceiving Robin as a laggard and as a threat to Terry's own ambitions for the class and beyond. Robin, meanwhile, may feel angry and resist Terry's pressure to put more energy into the remainder of their assigned work.

Subjects of Conflict

Beyond the setting of the biology class we've described, group conflicts may deal with many topics, needs, and elements. Marylin KellyKelly, M.S. (2006). *Communication @ work: Ethical, effective, and expressive communication in the workplace.* Boston: Pearson. identified the following five subjects of conflict:

First, there are **conflicts of substance**[2]. These conflicts, which relate to questions about what choices to make in a given situation, rest on differing views of the facts. If Terry thinks the biology assignment requires an annotated bibliography but Robin believes a simple list of readings will suffice, they're in a conflict of substance. Another term for this kind of conflict is "intrinsic conflict."

Conflicts of value[3] are those in which various parties either hold totally different values or rank the same values in a significantly different order. The famous sociologist Milton RokeachRokeach, M. (1979). *Understanding human values: Individual and societal.* New York: The Free Press., for instance, found that freedom and equality constitute values in the four major political systems of the past 100 years—communism, fascism, socialism, and capitalism. What differentiated the systems, however, was the degree to which proponents of each system ranked those two key values. According to Rokeach's analysis, socialism holds both values highly; fascism holds them in low regard; communism values equality over freedom, and capitalism values freedom over equality. As we all know, conflict among proponents of these four political systems preoccupied people and governments for the better part of the twentieth century.

Conflicts of process[4] arise when people differ over how to reach goals or pursue values which they share. How closely should they stick to rules and timelines, for instance, and when should they let their hair down and simply brainstorm new ideas? What about when multiple topics and challenges are intertwined; how and when should the group deal with each one? Another term for these disputes is "task conflicts."

Conflicts of misperceived differences[5] come up when people interpret each other's actions or emotions erroneously. You can probably think of several times in

2. Conflicts which rest on differing views of the facts and which relate to questions about what choices to make in a given situation. Also known as intrinsic conflicts.

3. Conflicts in which various parties either hold totally different values or rank the same values in a significantly different order.

4. Conflicts over how to reach goals or pursue values which members of a group share. Also known as "task conflicts."

5. Conflicts which arise when people interpret each other's actions or emotions erroneously.

your life when you first thought you disagreed with other people but later found out that you'd just misunderstood something they said and that you actually shared a perspective with them. Or perhaps you attributed a different motive to them than what really underlay their actions. One misconception about conflict, however, is that it always arises from misunderstandings. This isn't the case, however. Robert DoolittleDoolittle, R.J. (1976). *Orientations to communication and conflict.* Chicago: Science Research Associates. noted that "some of the most serious conflicts occur among individuals and groups who understand each other very well but who strongly disagree."

The first four kinds of conflict may interact with each other over time, either reinforcing or weakening each other's impact. They may also ebb and flow according to the topics and conditions a group confronts. Even if they're dealt with well, however, further emotional and personal kinds of conflict can occur in a group. **Relationship conflicts**[6], also known as personality clashes, often involve people's egos and sense of self-worth. Relationship conflicts tend to be particularly difficult to cope with, since they frequently aren't admitted for what they are. Many times, they arise in a struggle for superiority or status.

Dangers of Conflict

As we'll see later in this chapter, conflict is a normal component of group interaction and can actually be beneficial if it is identified accurately and controlled properly. It can also be dangerous, however, in several major ways. Galanes & AdamsGalanes, G., & Adams, K. (2013). *Effective group discussion: Theory and practice.* New York: McGraw-Hill. identified three such ways.

The first danger is that individual group members may feel bad. Even when everyone's intentions are good and they intend to be constructively critical, people who receive negative comments about their ideas or behavior may take those comments personally. If the people feel demeaned or mistreated, their level of trust in other members will probably dwindle.

The second danger is an outgrowth of the first. It is that the cohesiveness of the group can be diminished if its members have to nurse hurt feelings that have arisen through conflict. At the very least, someone who has to wonder whether he or she has the respect of someone else in the group may spend time mulling that question which could otherwise be used to contribute to the group's work.

6. Conflicts which involve people's egos and sense of self-worth.

The third danger is that conflict can actually split a group apart. Although inertia can sustain a group for long periods of time if no threats or disruptions occur, intense conflict can cause members to decide to invest their energy somewhere

else. Relationship conflicts, in particular, may lead to all kinds of unhelpful behavior: rumor-mongering; power plays; backing out on promises; playing favorites; ignoring problems or appeals for help; insulting others; innuendo; backstabbing; or dismissing suggestions without considering them seriously. You're probably aware of at least a few groups and organizations whose origins were encouraging but which eventually disintegrated because of internal conflict.

A fourth danger is that conflict can deteriorate into physical violence. Some people in the heat of a conflict may forget this saying, which has been attributed to Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.: "The right to swing my fist ends where the other man's nose begins."

In 1997, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and HealthNational Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. (1997). Violence in the workplace. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/violfs.html. reported that more than one million workplace assaults occurred in the United States annually. More recent statistics from the Occupational Safety and Health AdministrationOccupational Safety and Health Administration. (2012). Workplace violence. Retrieved from http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/workplaceviolence/. suggest that twice that many workers may be subject to violence each year; that 506 workplace homicides were committed in 2010; and that homicide is the leading cause of death for women in American workplaces.

KEY TAKEAWAY

- Conflict, which is a struggle over goals or resources, may take many forms and lead to several kinds of harm if it is not skillfully dealt with.

EXERCISES

1. Find news on line of a conflict which erupted into violence. What factors in the situation do you feel contributed to that outcome?
2. Tell a fellow student about a values conflict you've experienced in a group. Describe how you concluded that the conflict dealt with values. Did the group make the same determination at the time?
3. Identify a personality clash you believe you have observed in a group. Write 4-6 pieces of advice you think might have helped each party to that conflict.
4. If a conflict has been brought about by a combination of incompatible goals and insufficient resources, what do you believe will happen if one of the two causes is eliminated? Give an example which substantiates your viewpoint.

10.2 Leadership and Conflict

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe four roles that a leader might play with respect to conflict.
2. Assess the effectiveness of leadership behavior exhibited in an illustrative academic situation.

"The hope of the world is that wisdom can arrest conflict between brothers. I believe that war is the deadly harvest of arrogant and unreasoning minds."

- Dwight Eisenhower

To lead a group successfully through conflict requires patience, good will, and determination. Robert BoltonBolton, R. (1979). *People skills: How to assert yourself, listen to others and resolve conflicts*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall noted that leaders with low levels of defensiveness tend to help people in their organizations avert unnecessary strife because they are able to focus on understanding and dealing with challenges rather than on saving face or overcoming resistance from others in their groups. Bolton also wrote that employing power judiciously, displaying charisma, and employing effective communication skills can positively affect the way conflict is handled. In this section we will examine four general roles a leader may adopt with respect to preparing for inevitable instances of conflict. We will also provide an example of how one leader adopted the fourth role in a conflict situation.

The Leader as Motivator

Just as it takes more than one person to create conflict, it generally requires more than a single individual to resolve it. A leader should, therefore, try somehow to cause other members of a group to identify benefits to themselves of engaging in productive rather than destructive conflict. Randy Komisar, a prominent Silicon Valley executive who has worked with companies such as WebTV and TiVo and co-

founded Claris Corporation, had this to say about the importance of this kind motivational role as his companies grew:

"I found that the art wasn't in getting the numbers to foot, or figuring out a clever way to move something down the assembly line. It was in getting somebody else to do that and to do it better than I could ever do, in encouraging people to exceed their own expectations; in inspiring people to be great; and in getting them to do it all together, in harmony. That was the high art."Komisar, R., & Lineback, K. (2000). *The monk and the riddle: The education of a Silicon Valley entrepreneur.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Press. We'll talk later about specific strategies that leaders and other group members can employ to manage conflict by means of motivation and other strategies.

The Leader as Delegator

No leader, even the leader of a handful of other people in a small team, can handle all the challenges or do all the work of a group. In fact, you've probably encountered leaders throughout your life who either exhausted themselves or alienated other group members—or both!—because they tried to do just that. Beyond accepting the sheer impossibility of shouldering all of a group's work, a leader can attempt to prevent or manage conflict by judiciously by acting as a **delegator**[7], turning over responsibility for various tasks to others.
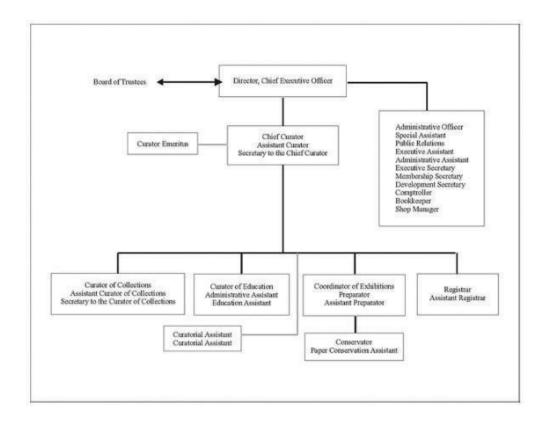
Warren Bennis, a pioneer in the field of leadership, wrote that such delegation is a vital component of the leader's role. When it is practiced skillfully, according to Bennis, delegation may confine conflicts to the levels at which they occur and free the leader to conduct higher-level undertakingsBennis, W. (1997). *Why leaders can't lead.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass..

The Leader as "Structuralist"

Michael Thomas, a professor for many years at the University of Texas, served as a respected consultant to numerous businesses and educational institutions. As he went from group to group, he tackled their problems primarily by reviewing their organizational charts and tinkering with their structure. As an admired organizational theorist and **structuralist**[8], he believed that nearly any problem, tension, or conflict in a group could be solved structurallyProfessor emeritus Thomas, Jr., dies at 76. (2008, Nov 14). *US Fed News Service, Including US State News.* Retrieved from ProQuest Database.. How people behave, he said, is largely determined by where they sit in an organization and whom they report to and supervise. If Mike saw that people in two separate sections of a group were at odds, for instance, he would propose that the sections be consolidated so that both

7. A leader who seeks to prevent or manage conflict by transferring responsibility for some of his/her tasks to others in a group or organization.

8. A leader who attempts to manage conflict in a group by its composition or structure.

became responsible to the same supervisor. Mike certainly used further techniques in his consultant's role, but his emphasis on structural changes stands as one kind of advice for leaders who hope to lessen the damaging effects of conflict in their groups.

Realistic Conflict Theory, or Realistic Group Conflict Theory (RGCT), likewise stresses the importance for leaders of configuring subgroups within a larger group so that they are required to meet common goals. A classic study by social psychologist Muzafer SherifSherif, M., Harvey, O.J., White, B.J., Hood, W., & Sherif, C.W. (1961). *Intergroup conflict and cooperation: The robbers cave experiment.* Norman, OK: The University Book Exchange. with 22 twelve-year-old boys in a summer camp in Oklahoma exemplifies the nature of RGCT and illustrates the concept of "leader as structuralist."

The boys were split into two groups at the start of the study, after which leaders quickly emerged in each group. The two groups were then required to compete in camp games and were rewarded on the basis of their performance. Soon conflict arose as negative attitudes and behavior developed within each group toward the other.

In the third part of the study, the structure of the camp was changed in such a way that the two antagonistic groups were called upon to share responsibility for accomplishing a variety of tasks. The outcome of this structural change was that attitudes within each group toward the other became favorable and conflict lessened dramatically.Sherif, Muzafer (1966). *In common predicament: Social psychology of intergroup conflict and cooperation.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Paradoxically, a leader may also deal with conflict by separating people rather than bringing them together. If a team is experiencing internal conflict that seems to be related to intense personality differences between two individuals, for instance, the leader may decide to change the composition of the team so as to reduce their interaction. (Think about the third-grade teacher who finds two children pummeling each other during recess and sends them to opposite ends of the schoolyard).

The Leader as Promoter of "Constructive Deviation"

Civil disobedience. . . is not our problem. Our problem is civil obedience...The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory.

   - Howard Zinn

I was at a conference in Jackson Hole, talking with Peter McLaren and Donaldo Macedo and David Gabbard. This guy in a herring-bone suit, all prim and proper, came over and said, "Well, Dr. Macedo, very, very interesting talk. I enjoyed it very much. Dr. Gabbard, very interesting talk. I enjoyed it very much."

He was going around being polite. And then he turned and looked at Peter McLaren, and he said, "Mr. Mclaren..."—*not* "doctor"—"your discourse stretches my comfort zone just a little too much."

And before any of us could say anything, Donaldo turned to him and said, "There are millions of people born, live their entire lives, and die on this planet without ever knowing the luxury of a comfort zone."

The guy was speechless. It was a very polite way for him to say, "You know, I'm tired of hearing white men tell me that they're feeling a little oppressed by discourse."

The guy walked away, and Peter McLaren turned to me and said, "F**k! Why didn't I say that?" But that's Macedo. Macedo is on his toes, all the time. He's never caught tongue-tied. He knows exactly how to turn it around.

  - Roberto Bahruth

A **deviate**[9] is someone who differs in some important way from the rest of a group. ResearchValentine, K.B., & Fisher, B.A. (1974). An interaction analysis of verbal innovative deviance in small groups. *Speech Monographs*, *41*, 413–420. indicates that interaction with deviates may account for up to a quarter of many groups' time and that such interaction may serve a positive function if it successfully causes people who hold a majority opinion to examine their views critically. In essence, dealing with deviates can keep group members on their toes and counteract the tendency to engage in groupthink. Encouraging deviates is one measure a leader can take to promote constructive conflict which brings a group to a higher level of understanding and harmony.

Of course, listening to a deviate may be disconcerting, since it may push us outside our comfort zone in the way that Peter McLaren did in the story told by Roberto Bahruth. In fact, deviates naturally have great difficulty influencing a group because of other people's resistance. For this reason, part of a leader's responsibility may sometimes consist in simply making sure that a deviate is not outright silenced by members of the majority. In other cases, it is the leader who at least at times assumes the role of deviate herself or himself.

Because deviates by their very nature call the members of the majority in a group to stop and seriously question their attitudes and behavior, which is usually disconcerting and uncomfortable, the most successful deviates are generally those who attempt to lead others in a cautious fashion and who demonstrate loyalty to their group and its goals.Thameling, C.L., & Andrews, P.H. (1992). Majority responses to opinion deviates: A communicative analysis. *Small Group Research*, *23*, 475–502. Timing can also determine whether a deviate's influence will be accepted. Waiting until a group has developed a sense of cohesiveness is most likely to be more effective, for instance, than jumping in with an unexpected or unconventional proposal during the group's formative stages.

A Leadership Example

In early 1980 the brutal Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia had just been defeated at the end of many years of fighting, and several hundred thousand Cambodian refugees flooded hastily-constructed camps in eastern Thailand.Chandler, D.P. (1992). *A history of Cambodia*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. Many Americans became

9. Someone who differs in some important way from the rest of a group.

concerned about the suffering in the refugee camps, and a group of 25 graduate students in Vermont studying international administration nearly played a direct role in the situation because their program's director was willing to speak out as a deviate.

The students were seated in a circle one morning, engaged in a discussion about human service agencies. One of them noticed that the director of the program, Walter Johnson, had been silent for some time and asked, "Walter, what do you think?"

Walter took a deep breath and replied, "I think what we're talking about is all well and good, but what I'd really like to do is call a colleague of mine at the U.N. and see if we could help the Cambodian refugees in those horrible camps in Thailand."

A stunned silence fell over the group. Someone asked, "Are you serious?"

Walter replied, "Yes, I am."

Silence returned. Finally, one of the students said, "Walter, if you believe what you're saying, go ahead and talk to your friend."

Walter left the room and returned in half an hour to say that his U.N. colleague was willing to investigate humanitarian service options in Thailand for the students. The challenge, then, was to explore whether the students themselves would consider performing such service.

For the next two days, the whole group engaged in difficult, soul-searching discussions about what it would mean for them to go to Thailand. They quickly realized that if they made that choice they would have to abandon their curriculum at the school and might imperil their financial aid. Some of them would probably have to leave a spouse or children behind. And they might be putting themselves in danger of disease or violence. On the other hand, they could potentially be able to act according to their shared ideal of contributing to world peace in a personal, direct, and powerful manner.

Ultimately, the group realized that it was facing an "all or none" question: either every one of them would have to agree to travel to Thailand, or none of them should. Walter's role as a constructive deviate in the Vermont group stimulated it to consider an option—the "go to Thailand option"—which in turn spurred earnest and productive conflict which most likely would not otherwise have taken place.

KEY TAKEAWAY

- To harness conflict in a positive manner and contribute to the healthy functioning of a group, a leader should play the roles of motivator, delegator, structuralist, and promoter of constructive deviation.

EXERCISES

1. Think of someone you met in a group whom you would consider to be a "deviate." On what basis did you make that determination? To what degree did others in the group share your assessment of the person?
2. Do you share the view that any conflict What examples from your own experience support your answer? Consider a group that you're currently part of, imagine a change in its structure which you feel could reduce its conflict, and share the information with two fellow students.
3. All other things being equal, would you prefer to address a conflict by bringing the parties together or separating them? Explain your reasons and provide an example which you believe supports them.

10.3 Conflict Is Normal

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

That which is willed happens but rarely; in the majority of instances the numerous desired ends cross and conflict with one another, or these ends themselves are from the outset incapable of realization, or the means of attaining them are insufficient. Thus the conflicts of innumerable individual wills and individual actions in the domain of history produce a state of affairs entirely analogous to that prevailing in the realm of unconscious nature.

  - Friedrich Engels

I don't like that person. I'm going to have to get to know him better

  - Abraham Lincoln

A cartoon from the 1970s shows two women standing behind a couch where their husbands are sitting and watching a football game. One woman says to the other, "I thought they settled all that last year!" Do you suppose it would be nice if people could settle their differences once and for all, if conflict would just go away, and if everyone would just agree with each other and get along all the time?

Of course, those rosy developments aren't going to take place. Conflict seems to stubbornly retain its position as part of the human landscape; you can hardly find a group of people who aren't experiencing it right now or have never experienced it.

There's reason to believe, too, that a moderate amount of conflict can actually be a healthy and necessary part of group life if it is handled productively and ethically.Amason, A. C. (1996). Distinguishing the effects of functional and dysfunctional conflict on strategic decision making: Resolving a paradox for top management teams. *Academy of Management Journal*, *39*, 123–148. We may actually be better off, in other words, if we experience conflict than if we don't, provided that we turn it to advantage.
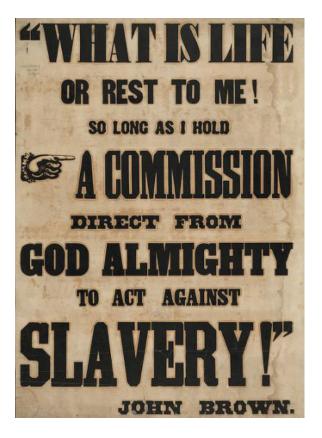
The 19th-century German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel believed that contradiction and negation, which constitute both causes and ingredients of conflict, lead every domain of reality toward higher rational unity. He wrote that each level of interaction among human beings, including those which take place in larger social structures, preserves the contradictions of previous levels as phases and subpartsPelczynski, A.Z. (1984). 'The significance of Hegel's separation of the state and civil society. In A.Z. Pelczynski (Ed.), *The State and Civil Society* (pp. 1–13). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press..

Much more recently, research by Jehn and MannixJehn, K. A., & Mannix, E. A. (2001). The dynamic nature of conflict: A longitudinal study of intergroup conflict and group performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, *44*, 238–251. indicated that "effective teams over time are characterized by low but increasing levels of task conflict, low levels of relationship conflict with a rise toward the end of a project, and moderate levels of task conflict in the middle of the task timeline."

Conflict and the Hope of Social Change

Many years ago one of the authors attended a multi-day workshop in New York City on how to promote international peace and reconciliation. After hearing a presentation at the workshop about nuclear proliferation and biological weapons, a participant asked, "Human history is full of violence, bloodshed, and cruelty. What hope do we have of ever saving ourselves?"

The presenter replied, "Yes, we've had violence and bloodshed and cruelty throughout history. And as long as there are differences between people and their opinions, the danger will exist that we'll destroy ourselves, especially now that we have weapons that can wipe out our whole species. But the question isn't, 'Can we eliminate conflict?' The question is really, 'Can we accept conflict as part of the human condition and handle it so that we move forward instead of annihilating ourselves?'"

The presenter then offered what she said were signs of hope that groups of people can, indeed, work through even profound differences without descending into chaos or perpetual hatred. Slavery was once considered a normal part of society, she said, but no more. Child labor, too, used to be considered acceptable. And miscegenation laws existed in the United States until 1967. The presenter's point here was that, with hard work, groups can overcome past evils and deficiencies if they're willing to work through the conflict that invariably crops up when individuals are asked to change their behavior.

Two Models of Conflict

The presenter in New York went on to say that we can conceive conflict in terms of two models. The first is the **cancer model**[10], which portrays conflict as an insidious and incessantly expanding element which if left to itself will inevitably overwhelm and destroy a group. If we accept this model, conflict must either be prevented, if possible, or extirpated if it does manage to take root.

10. A view which conceives of any conflict as being inevitably expanding, pernicious, and destructive.

In the **friction model**[11], by contrast, conflict is seen as a natural by-product of human relations. Any machine generates waste heat simply through the interaction of its component parts, and this heat seldom threatens to halt the actions of the machine as long as people conduct preventive and ongoing maintenance—adding oil, greasing joints, and so forth. Likewise, according to this model, groups inevitably produce conflict through the interaction of their members and need not fear that it will destroy them as long as they handle it wisely. Saul Alinsky, a prominent 20th-century community organizer, wrote these words in support of the friction model of conflict: "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."Alinsky, S. (1971). *Rules for radicals: A pragmatic primer for realistic radicals.* New York: Random House.

Benefits of Healthy Conflict

Without conflict, life in general can easily become stagnant and tedious. When conflict is absent in a group, it often means that people are silencing themselves and holding back their opinions. If group discussions are significant, rather than merely routine, then varying opinions about the best course of action should be expected to arise. If people suppress their opinions, on the other hand, groupthink may spread and the final result may not be the best solution.

One favorable feature of healthy conflict is that people engaged in it point out difficulties or weaknesses in proposed alternatives and work together to solve them. As noted in another section, a key to keeping conflict healthy is to make sure that discussion remains focused on the task rather than upon people's personalities.

If it is properly guided and not allowed to deteriorate into damaging forms, conflict can benefit a group in several ways. Besides broadening the range of ideas which group members take into consideration, it can help people clarify their own views and those of others so that they have a better chance of sharing a common understanding of issues. It can also help group members unearth erroneous assumptions about one another. Finally, it can actually make a group more cohesive as members realize they are surmounting difficulties together. In short, conflict is indeed normal.

11. A view of conflict which conceives of it as a natural and manageable by-product of any group's activities.

KEY TAKEAWAY

- Conflict may be viewed as a pernicious and destructive element of group interaction, but considering it as a normal by-product of human relationships is a more accurate perspective.

EXERCISES

1. An adage says, "If you want an omelet, you have to break some eggs." To what degree do you subscribe to this folk saying? What reservations, if any, do you have about how it has been or might be used with respect to social change?

2. Some conflict throughout history has spread perniciously, as the cancer model might suggest. Have you personally experienced such enlargement of conflict in a group? If so, what factors do you believe contributed to the situation? At what point did normal friction among the group's members turn into a more harmful form of conflict?

3. Describe a situation in which you gained increased important understanding as a result of conflict in a group you were part of.

10.4 Conflict Styles

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

The hard and strong will fall. The soft and weak will overcome.

 - Lao-tzu

If you're a member of a group, you most likely want to minimize futile conflict—conflict that is unlikely to be resolved no matter what you do to address it. You also probably prefer to avoid conflicts which might weaken your group, or those whose nature or outcome is irrelevant to your goals. Once you and the other members of a group recognize that you are involved in a significant conflict whose resolution may make it more likely that you can achieve your goals, you may engage in the conflict via several styles. In this section we'll consider "menus" of styles proposed by three groups of communication authorities.

General Manager Shocker's corporate posture is compromised by his editorial impulse.

Three Style "Menus"

All three style "menus" include a range of approaches, as represented in <u>Table 10.1 "Individual Styles of Conflict in Groups"</u>. The styles described by Linda Putnam and Charmaine WilsonPutnam, L.L., & Wilson, C.E. (1982). Communicative strategies in organizational conflicts: Reliability and validity of a measurement scale, in M. Burgoon (Ed.), *Communication yearbook 6* (pp. 629–652). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage. range from nonconfrontational to controlling and cooperative. According to Putnam and Wilson, if you adopt a **nonconfrontational style**[12], you refrain from expressing your thoughts and opinions during a conflict. This may be because you're shy or feel intimidated by the group environment or the behavior of some of its members. It may also be because you don't know how to express viewpoints constructively under the time constraints of a conflict situation or lack information about the topic of the conflict. If you adopt a **controlling style**[13], by contrast, you'll try to monopolize discussion during a conflict and make a serious effort to force others in the group to either agree with you or at least accept your proposals for how the group should act. The **cooperative style**[14] of conflict, finally, involves active participation in the group's conflicts in a spirit of give and take, with the group's **superordinate goals**[15] in mind.

12. According to Putnam and Wilson, the practice of refraining from expressing thoughts and opinions during a conflict.

13. According to Putnam and Wilson, the practice of attempting to force others in a group to agree with one's position in a conflict.

14. According to Putnam and Wilson, the practice of participating in a conflict in a spirit of give and take.

15. Goals which transcend those of individuals in a conflict and which all parties can subscribe to.

Rahim, Antonioni, and PsenickaRahim, M.A., Antonioni, D., & Psenicka, C. (2001). A structural equations model of leader power, subordinates' styles of handling conflict, and job performance. *International Journal of Conflict Management, 12*(3), 191–211. enlarged upon Putnam and Wilson's three-style "menu" by adding two further options. They framed their conceptualization in terms of potential combinations of two dimensions, concern for self and concern for others. Here are the options resulting from the combinations:

High concern for self and others (**integrating style**[16]): Openness; willingness to exchange information and resolve conflict in a manner acceptable to all parties.

Low concern for self and high concern for others (**obliging style**[17]): A tendency to minimize points of difference among parties to a conflict and to try to satisfy other people's needs.

High concern for self and low concern for others (**dominating style**[18]): A win-lose orientation and a drive to compel others to accept one's position.

Low concern for self and low concern for others (**avoiding style**[19]): Sidestepping areas of conflict, passing the buck to others, or withdrawing entirely from the conflict situation.

Intermediate concern for self and for others (**compromising style**[20]): Mutual sacrifice for the sake of achieving an outcome that all members of the group can accept.

Table 10.1 Individual Styles of Conflict in Groups

Putnam & Wilson	Rahim, Antonioni, & Psenicka	Adler & Rodman
Nonconfrontational	Integrating	Nonassertive
	Obliging	Directly Aggressive
Controlling	Dominating	Passive Aggressive
	Avoiding	Indirectly Communicating
Cooperative	Compromising	Assertive

Adler and RodmanAdler, R.B., & Rodman, G. (2009). *Understanding human communication* (10th ed.). New York: Oxford University Press. emphasized communication elements in their listing of five conflict styles. First of all, they

16. According to Rahim, Antonioni, and Psenicka, a practice of being open and willing to exchange information and resolve conflict in a way that is acceptable to all.

17. According to Rahim, Antonioni, and Psenicka, a practice of minimizing points of difference in a conflict so as to try to satisfy others' needs.

18. According to Rahim, Antonioni, and Psenicka, a win-lose approach to conflict in which one tries to compel others to accept one's position.

19. According to Rahim, Antonioni, and Psenicka, a practice of sidestepping areas of conflict, passing the buck, or withdrawing from conflict entirely.

20. According to Rahim, Antonioni, and Psenicka, an approach to conflict characterized by mutual sacrifice in the pursuit of outcomes that all members of a group can accept.

designated **nonassertion**[21] as a style of conflict in which the group member is unable or unwilling to express him- or herself. According to these theorists, this conflict style is widely used in intimate relationships such as marriages, in which the partners may disagree with each other frequently yet decide not to provoke or prolong conflicts by voicing their differences. People in groups can display a nonassertive style by either ignoring areas of conflict, trying to change the subject when a conflict appears to be arising, physically removing themselves from a place where a conflict is taking place, or simply giving in to someone else's desires during a conflict.

Direct aggression[22] is the second conflict style identified by Adler and Rodman. A group member who attacks someone else willfully—by saying "That's ridiculous" or "That's a crazy idea" or something else that attempts to demean the person—is engaging in direct aggression. Direct aggression need not be verbal; gestures, facial expressions, and posture can all be used to convey aggressive meaning.

Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/o5com/4926088644/

21. According to Adler and Rodman, a style of conflict marked by inability or unwillingness to express oneself.

22. According to Adler and Rodman, a conflict style involving willful verbal or nonverbal attacks on other people.

23. According to Adler and Rodman, a conflict behavior marked by subtle expressions of hostility or resistance which the party to the conflict may disavow.

24. George Bach's term for passive aggression.

Passive aggression[23], referred to as "**crazymaking**[24]" by George BachBach, G.R., & Goldberg, H. (1974). *Creative aggression.* Garden City, NY: Doubleday., is a subtle conflict style in which a person expresses hostility or resistance to others through stubbornness, resentment, procrastination, jokes with ambiguous meanings, petty annoyances, or persistent failure to fully meet expectations or responsibilities.

Someone who displays this style of conflict may disavow any negative intent if confronted or questioned about his or her behavior.

Indirect communication[25] is a style which avoids the unmistakable force of the aggressive style and which instead implies concern for the person or persons it is directed toward.Kellermann, K., & Shea, B.C. Threats, suggestions, hints, and promises: Gaining compliance efficiently and politely. *Communication quarterly, 44*, 145–165. Rather than bluntly saying, "I'd like you to get out of my office now" when a discussion is bogging down, for instance, you might yawn discreetly or comment on how much work you have to do on a big project. Indirect communication may comprise hints, suggestions, or other polite means of seeking someone else's compliance with one's desires. Sometimes it can be used to send "**trial balloons**[26]" to group members—proposals which are tentative and provisional and don't have a great deal of **ego investment**[27] behind them.

Assertion[28] is the final style of communication identified by Adler and Rodman, and it is also the one that we recommend in most cases. Group members who operate according to this style express their feelings and thoughts clearly but neither coerce nor judge others while doing so. If you choose to use what Adler and TowneAdler, R.B., & Towne, N. (2002). *Looking out/looking in* (10th ed.). Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers. called a "**clear message format**[29]," you can practice assertion by following five steps in a conflict situation.

25. According to Adler and Rodman, a conflict style which uses hints, suggestions, or other polite means of seeking compliance from others with one's desires.

26. Tentative proposals designed to test how parties to a conflict may respond to later requests or other expressions of desire.

27. Personal, emotional commitment to an idea or course of action in a conflict.

28. A process of sending descriptive and normative messages in a conflict without coercing or judging other parties in the conflict.

29. According to Adler and Towne, a five-step process of transmitting assertive messages in a conflict.

"The remark you've just made has hurt me and I'm feeling anger toward you."

The first step is to offer an objective description of behavior being exhibited by those with whom you are in conflict. Don't interpret or assess the behavior; just describe it. For example, you might say, "Lee, you just rolled your eyes at me."

The second step is to present your interpretation of the behavior, but without stating the interpretation as fact. For instance, "Lee, I get the impression that you may have dismissed my proposal, because you rolled your eyes at me."

The third step is to express your feelings about the behavior you've described and interpreted. For example, "When you roll your eyes like that, I get the impression that you've dismissed my proposal, and I feel resentful."

The next step is to identify the consequences of the behavior, your interpretation, and your feelings. For instance, "Lee, I see that you rolled your eyes at me when I made my proposal. I get the impression that you've dismissed it, and I'm resentful. I don't feel like discussing the matter any further now."

The final step is to state your intentions, based on the four preceding ingredients of the situation. For example, "Lee, you rolled your eyes at me when I made my proposal. I get the impression that you've dismissed it, and I'm resentful. I don't feel

like discussing the matter any further now, and if I see you act this way again I'll probably just leave the room until I calm down."

We admit that following a list of communication behaviors like one this can feel unfamiliar and perhaps overly complex. Fortunately, being responsibly assertive can sometimes be a very simple matter which immediately yields positive results. In fact, following just one or two steps from the five outlined here may be sufficient to prevent, defuse, or resolve a conflict.

A friend of ours named Gus told us about a time when he was part of an enthusiastic crowd watching a football game at Washington State University. A few rows below him in the stadium sat an elderly woman, and directly in front of her was a man many inches taller and substantially heavier than she was.

The first time the WSU team made a good play, the man leapt to his feet and screamed wildly, blocking the woman's view of the field. As the widespread cheering subsided, but with the man still standing in front of her, the woman calmly but forcefully said, "Sorry sir, but I can't see."

"Excellent question, Timmy! ... The answer is yes. If a fight breaks out among parents, play is halted until the police arrive."

The man grunted roughly in response and kept standing until the rest of the crowd quieted. The next couple of times that WSU managed an impressive play—and this was one of those rare contests in which they did so on several occasions—the man jumped up again, preventing the woman from seeing the action over and over again.

Every time this happened, the woman spoke up, saying "Sir, I really can't see" or "You're blocking my view." According to Gus, the effect of the woman's assertive statements was like a series of weights being placed on the man's shoulders. Eventually, he succumbed to the cumulative weight of her statements—the power of her assertions—and moved to an empty nearby seat.

Of course, not everyone who behaves in ways that we find objectionable will respond as positively as the oafish gentleman did to the elderly woman. Some people in the heat of a disagreement may resist even the mildest and least judgmental statements of assertion. How to deal with people who resist even responsibly assertive communication, along with other strategies to manage conflict in general, will be the subjects of our next section.

KEY TAKEAWAY

- Theorists have identified a range of conflict styles available to members of groups, including a five-step assertion approach which may offer the greatest general applicability and prospects for effectiveness because it avoids coercing or judging others.

EXERCISES

1. Consider the adage "Discretion is the better part of valor." To what degree do you feel it corresponds to what Putnam and Wilson called a "nonconfrontational" style of conflict?

2. Think about a time when you experienced a conflict in a group that was eventually resolved. What style(s), from among those described in this section, did the parties to the conflict exhibit? Do you feel the people chose the best style for the circumstances? Why or why not?

3. What specific statements or questions would you use to attempt to communicate with someone who habitually employs passive aggression in conflicts? Provide examples of your past experiences with such behavior, if you have them.

4. Take another look at the cartoon in which the woman says "The remark you've just made has hurt me and I'm feeling anger toward you." Does it seem funny to you? If so, what elements of the cartoon and its text amuse you? How would you change the drawing or the words to portray a healthful interaction between people based on responsible assertion?

10.5 Conflict in the Work Environment

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

The word "conflict" produces a sense of anxiety for many people, but it is part of the human experience. Just because conflict is universal does not mean that we cannot improve how we handle disagreements, misunderstandings, and struggles to understand or make ourselves understood. Hocker and WilmotHocker, J., & Wilmot, W. (1991). *Interpersonal conflict.* Dubuque, IA: Willam C. Brown. offer us several principles on conflict that have been adapted here for our discussion:

- Conflict is universal.
- Conflict is associated with incompatible goals.
- Conflict is associated with scarce resources.
- Conflict is associated with interference.
- Conflict is not a sign of a poor relationship.
- Conflict cannot be avoided.
- Conflict cannot always be resolved.
- Conflict is not always bad.

Conflict is the physical or psychological struggle associated with the perception of opposing or incompatible goals, desires, demands, wants, or needsMcLean, S. (2005). *The basics of interpersonal communication.* Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.. When incompatible goals, scarce resources, or interference are present, conflict is a typical result, but it doesn't mean the relationship is poor or failing. All relationships progress through times of conflict and collaboration. How we navigate and negotiate these challenges influences, reinforces, or destroys the relationship. Conflict is universal, but how and when it occurs is open to influence and interpretation. Rather than viewing conflict from a negative frame of reference, view it as an opportunity for clarification, growth, and even reinforcement of the relationship.

Conflict Management Strategies

As professional communicators, we can acknowledge and anticipate that conflict will be present in every context or environment where communication occurs, particularly in groups. To that end, we can predict, anticipate, and formulate strategies to address conflict successfully. How you choose to approach conflict influences its resolution. Joseph DeVitoDeVito, J. (2003). *Messages: builing interpersoanl skills.* Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. offers us several conflict management strategies that we have adapted and expanded for our use.

Avoidance

You may choose to change the subject, leave the room, or not even enter the room in the first place, but the conflict will remain and resurface when you least expect it. Your reluctance to address the conflict directly is a normal response, and one which many cultures prize. In cultures where independence is highly valued, direct confrontation is more common. In cultures where the community is emphasized over the individual, indirect strategies may be more common. Avoidance allows for more time to resolve the problem, but can also increase costs associated with problem in the first place. Your organization or business will have policies and protocols to follow regarding conflict and redress, but it is always wise to consider the position of your conversational partner or opponent and to give them, as well as yourself, time to explore alternatives.

Defensiveness Versus Supportiveness

GibbGibb, J. (1961). Defensive and supportive communication. *Journal of Communication, 11*, 141–148. discussed defensive and supportive communication interactions as part of his analysis of conflict management. **Defensive communication**[30] is characterized by control, evaluation, and judgments, while **supportive communication**[31] focuses on the points and not personalities. When we feel judged or criticized, our ability to listen can be diminished, and we may only hear the negative message. By choosing to focus on the message instead of the messenger, we keep the discussion supportive and professional.

Face-Detracting and Face-Saving

Communication is not competition. Communication is the sharing of understanding and meaning, but does everyone always share equally? People struggle for control, limit access to resources and information as part of territorial displays, and otherwise use the process of communication to engage in competition. People also use communication for collaboration. Both competition and collaboration can be

30. Characterized by control, evaluation, and judgments.

31. Focuses on the points and not personalities.

observed in group communication interactions, but there are two concepts central to both: face-detracting and face-saving strategies.

Face-detracting strategies[32] involve messages or statements that take away from the respect, integrity, or credibility of a person. **Face-saving strategies**[33] protect credibility and separate message from messenger. For example, you might say that "sales were down this quarter," without specifically noting who was responsible. Sales were simply down. If, however, you ask, "How does the sales manager explain the decline in sales?" you have specifically connected an individual with the negative news. While we may want to specifically connect tasks and job responsibilities to individuals and departments, in terms of language each strategy has distinct results.

Face-detracting strategies often produce a defensive communication climate, inhibit listening, and allow for little room for collaboration. To save face is to raise the issue while preserving a supportive climate, allowing room in the conversation for constructive discussions and problem-solving. By using a face-saving strategy to shift the emphasis from the individual to the issue, we avoid power struggles and personalities, providing each other space to save faceDonohue, W., & Klot, R. (1992). *Managing interpersonal conflict.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage..

In collectivist cultures, where the community well-being is promoted or valued above that of the individual, face-saving strategies are common communicative strategies. Groups are valued, and the role of the individual is de-emphasized. In Japan, for example, to confront someone directly is perceived as humiliation, a great insult. In the United States, greater emphasis is placed on individual performance, and responsibility may be more directly assessed. If our goal is to solve a problem, and preserve the relationship, then consideration of a face-saving strategy should be one option a skilled business communicator considers when addressing negative news or information.

Empathy

32. Messages or statements that take away from the respect, integrity, or credibility of a person.

33. Messages or statements that protect credibility and separate message from messenger.

34. Listening to both the literal and implied meanings within a message.

Communication involves not only the words we write or speak, but how and when we write or say them. The way we communicate also carries meaning, and empathy for the individual involves attending to this aspect of interaction. **Empathetic listening**[34] involves listening to both the literal and implied meanings within a message. For example, the implied meaning might involve understand what has led this person to feel this way. By paying attention to feelings and emotions associated with content and information, we can build relationships and address conflict more constructively. In management, negotiating conflict is a common task and empathy is one strategy to consider when attempting to resolve issues. We can also observe

that inherent in the group development process is the presence of conflict. It is not a sign of bad things to come, nor a reason to think something is wrong. Conflict is a normal part of communication in general, and group communication in particular. In fact, conflict can be the antidote to groupthink, and help the group members refrain from going along with the flow, even when reason or the available information indicated otherwise.

Gunnysacking

Bach and WydenBach, G., & Wyden, P. (1968). *The intimacy enemy.* New York, NY: Avon. discuss **gunnysacking**[35] (or backpacking) as the imaginary bag we all carry, into which we place unresolved conflicts or grievances over time. If your organization has gone through a merger, and your business has transformed, there may have been conflicts that occurred during the transition. Holding onto the way things used to be can be like a stone in your gunnysack, and influence how you interpret your current context.

People may be aware of similar issues but might not know your history, and cannot see your backpack or its contents. For example, if your previous manager handled issues in one way, and your new manage handles them in a different way, this may cause you some degree of stress and frustration. Your new manager cannot see how the relationship existed in the past, but will still observe the tension. Bottling up your frustrations only hurts you and can cause your current relationships to suffer. By addressing, or unpacking, the stones you carry, you can better assess the current situation with the current patterns and variables.

We learn from experience, but can distinguish between old wounds and current challenges, and try to focus our energies where they will make the most positive impact.

Managing Your Emotions

Have you ever seen red, or perceived a situation through rage, anger, or frustration? Then you know that you cannot see or think clearly when you are experiencing strong emotions. There will be times in the work environment when emotions run high, and your awareness of them can help you clear your mind and choose to wait until the moment has passes to tackle the challenge.

"Never speak or make decision in anger" is one common saying that holds true, but not all emotions involve fear, anger, or frustration. A job loss can be a sort of professional death for many, and the sense of loss can be profound. The loss of a colleague to a layoff while retaining your position can bring pain as well as relief,

35. The imaginary bag we all carry, into which we place unresolved conflicts or grievances over time.

and a sense of survivor's guilt. Emotions can be contagious in the workplace, and fear of the unknown can influence people to act in irrational ways. The wise business communicator can recognize when emotions are on edge in themselves or others, and choose to wait to communicate, problem-solve, or negotiate until after the moment has passed.

Evaluations and Criticism in the Workplace

GuffeyGuffey, M. (2008). *Essentials of business communication* (7th ed.). Mason, OH: Thomson-Wadsworth. pp.320 wisely notes that Xenophon, a Greek philosopher, once said "The sweetest of all sounds is praise." We have seen previously that appreciation, respect, inclusion, and belonging are all basic human needs across all contexts, and are particularly relevant in the workplace. Efficiency and morale are positively related, and recognition of good work is important. There may come a time, however, when evaluations involve criticism. Knowing how to approach this criticism can give you peace of mind to listen clearly, separating subjective, personal attacks from objective, constructive requests for improvement. Guffey offers us seven strategies for giving and receiving evaluations and criticism in the workplace that we have adapted here.

Listen Without Interrupting

If you are on the receiving end of an evaluation, start by listening without interruption. Interruptions can be internal and external, and warrant further discussion. If your supervisor starts to discuss a point and you immediately start debating the point in your mind, you are paying attention to yourself and what you think they said or are going to say, and not that which is actually communicated. This gives rise to misunderstandings and will cause you to lose valuable information you need to understand and address the issue at hand.

External interruptions may involve your attempt to get a word in edgewise, and may change the course of the conversation. Let them speak while you listen, and if you need to take notes to focus your thoughts, take clear notes of what is said, also noting points to revisit later. External interruptions can also take the form of a telephone ringing, a "text message has arrived" chime, or a co-worker dropping by in the middle of the conversation.

As an effective business communicator, you know all too well to consider the context and climate of the communication interaction when approaching the delicate subject of evaluations or criticism. Choose a time and place free from interruption. Choose one outside of the common space where there may be many observers. Turn off your cell phone. Choose face to face communication instead of

an impersonal email. By providing a space free of interruption, you are displaying respect for the individual and the information.

Determine the Speaker's Intent

We have discussed previews as a normal part of conversation, and in this context they play an important role. People want to know what is coming and generally dislike surprises, particularly when the context of an evaluation is present. If you are on the receiving end, you may need to ask a clarifying question if it doesn't count as an interruption. You may also need to take notes, and write down questions that come to mind to address when it is your turn to speak. As a manager, be clear and positive in your opening and lead with praise. You can find one point, even if it is only that the employee consistently shows up to work on time, to highlight before transitioning to a performance issue.

Indicate You Are Listening

In mainstream U.S. culture, eye contact is a signal that you are listening and paying attention to the person speaking. Take notes, nod your head, or lean forward to display interest and listening. Regardless of whether you are the employee receiving the criticism or the supervisor delivering it, displaying of listening behavior engenders a positive climate that helps mitigate the challenge of negative news or constructive criticism.

Paraphrase

Restate the main points to paraphrase what has been discussed. This verbal display allows for clarification and acknowledges receipt of the message.

If you are the employee, summarize the main points and consider steps you will take to correct the situation. If none come to mind, or you are nervous and are having a hard time thinking clearly, state out loud the main point and ask if you can provide solution steps and strategies at a later date. You can request a follow-up meeting if appropriate, or indicate you will respond in writing via email to provide the additional information.

If you are the employer, restate the main points to ensure that the message was received, as not everyone hears everything that is said or discussed the first time it is presented. Stress can impair listening, and paraphrasing the main points can help address this common response.

If You Agree...

If an apology is well deserved, offer it. Communicate clearly what will change or indicate when you will respond with specific strategies to address the concern. As a manager you will want to formulate a plan that addresses the issue and outlines responsibilities as well as time frames for corrective action. As an employee you will want specific steps you can both agree on that will serve to solve the problem. Clear communication and acceptance of responsibility demonstrates maturity and respect.

If You Disagree...

If you disagree, focus on the points or issue and not personalities. Do not bring up past issues and keep the conversation focused on the task at hand. You may want to suggest, now that you better understand their position, a follow-up meeting to give you time to reflect on the issues. You may want to consider involving a third party, investigating to learn more about the issue, or taking time to cool off.

Do not respond in anger or frustration; instead, always display professionalism. If the criticism is unwarranted, consider that the information they have may be flawed or biased, and consider ways to learn more about the case to share with them, searching for a mutually beneficial solution.

If other strategies to resolve the conflict fail, consider contacting your Human Resources department to learn more about due process procedures at your workplace. Display respect and never say anything that would reflect poorly on yourself or your organization. Words spoken in anger can have a lasting impact, and are impossible to retrieve or take back.

Learn from the Experience

Every communication interaction provides an opportunity for learning if you choose to see it. Sometimes the lessons are situational, and may not apply in future contexts. Other times the lessons learned may well serve you across your professional career. Taking notes for yourself to clarify your thoughts, much like a journal, serve to document and help you see the situation more clearly.

Recognize that some aspects of communication are intentional, and may communicate meaning, even if it is hard to understand. Also know that some aspects of communication are unintentional, and may not imply meaning or design. People make mistakes. They say things they should not have said. Emotions are revealed that are not always rational, and not always associated with the current

context. A challenging morning at home can spill over into the work day and someone's bad mood may have nothing to do with you. Team members aren't always the same day to day, and the struggles outside of the work environment can impact the group.

Try to distinguish between what you can control and what you cannot, and always choose professionalism.

KEY TAKEAWAY

- Conflict is unavoidable and can be opportunity for clarification, growth, and even reinforcement of the relationship.

EXERCISE

1. Write a description of a situation you recall where you came into conflict with someone else. It may be something that happened years ago, or a current issue that just arose. Using the principles and strategies in this section, describe how the conflict was resolved, or could have been resolved. Discuss your ideas with your classmates.
2. Of the strategies for managing conflict described in this section, which do you think are the most effective? Why? Discuss your opinions with a classmate.
3. Can you think of a time when a conflict led to a new opportunity, better understanding, or other positive result? If not, think of a past conflict and imagine a positive outcome. Write a 2–3 paragraph description of what happened, or what you imagine could happen. Share your results with a classmate.

10.6 Effective Conflict Management Strategies

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. List four preventive steps that a group and its members may take to lessen the likelihood of experiencing damaging conflict.
2. Identify measures related to space and time that a group may employ to mediate against potentially destructive conflict
3. Describe steps which members of a group may take to manage conflict when it arises.
4. Explain the "SLACK" method of managing conflict.

I've led a school whose faculty and students examine and discuss and debate every aspect of our law and legal system. And what I've learned most is that no one has a monopoly on truth or wisdom. I've learned that we make progress by listening to each other, across every apparent political or ideological divide.

  - Elena Kagan

In calm water every ship has a good captain.

  - Swedish Proverb

To be peaceable is, by definition, to be peaceable in time of conflict.

  - Progressive magazine

If group members communicate effectively and show sensitivity to each other's needs and styles, they can often prevent unproductive and destructive conflict from developing. Nevertheless, they should also be prepared to respond in situations when conflict does crop up.

Before considering some strategies for dealing with conflicts, it's worth pointing out that the title of this section refers to "management" of conflict rather than to "resolution." The reason for this choice of terminology is that not all conflict needs to be—or can be—resolved. Still, most conflict needs to be managed to keep it from side-tracking, slowing down, weakening, or eventually destroying a group.

First Things First

We've all heard that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Managing conflict is easiest if we've acquired some tools to prevent it from getting out of hand. One way to gain such tools is to undergo some actual formal training in conflict management. A Google search of educational sites related to "conflict management courses" yields several thousand results from around the United States and elsewhere, including numerous certificate and degree programs at the undergraduate and graduate level. Commercial entities offer hundreds more opportunities for professional development in this realm.

A second, more specific preventive measure is for members of a group to periodically review and reaffirm their commitment to the norms, policies, and procedures they've set for themselves. In more formal groups, it's a good idea to assign one member to look over the bylaws or constitution every year to see if anything needs to be changed, clarified, or removed in light of altered circumstances. The danger in not paying attention to such details is represented in the story, told by Robert TownsendTownsend, Robert (1970). *Up the organization.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf., of a British civil service job created in 1803 which called for a man to stand on the Cliffs of Dover with a spyglass. The man's role was to ring a bell if he saw Napoleon coming. The job was not abolished until 1945.

A third measure which groups can take to lessen the possibility that damaging conflict will take place within them is to discuss and distinguish between detrimental and beneficial conflict—between that which promotes improvement and that which obstructs progress. The initial "forming" stage of a group, when people are apt to act tentative and be on their best behavior, is probably the best time to set aside some group time to let members share their views, experiences, and expectations with regard to "bad" and "good" conflict. It may be a good idea to ask members of the group to cite specific examples of conflict which they would accept or endorse, and also examples of conflict which they would hope to avoid.

A fourth preventive measure is for the group to explicitly remind its members that "**deviates**[36]" are to be appreciated and respected for the diverse perspectives they can share and the unconventional opinions they may hold. This kind of statement

36. Someone who differs in some important way from the rest of a group.

may give creative members the impression that they have intellectual "free space" for generating and sharing ideas later in the evolution of the group.

Logistical Measures

Proponents of feng shui believe that configurations of furniture affect people's moods and behavior. Employees at the National Observatory in Washington, DC, maintain an atomic clock which keeps precise universal time. You don't need to belong to either of these groups to believe that how a group uses space and time can affect the level and nature of conflict it will experience.

With respect to **proxemics**[37], for instance, research has demonstrated that conflict between people who disagree with each other is more likely to flare up if they sit directly across from each other than if they are seated side by side.Gordon, J., Mondy, R. W., Sharplin, A., & Premeaux, S. R. (1990). *Management and organizational behavior.* New York: Simon & Schuster, p. 540. Why not, then, purposefully plan where people are going to sit and the angles from which they'll see each other?

Decisions about when and for how long groups will gather can also affect their level of conflict. Research into human beings' **circadian rhythm**[38]—the 24-hour cycle of energy highs and lows-shows that 3 a.m. and 3 p.m. are the two lowest-energy times.http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2004/10/17/night-shift.html Depending on whether group members clash more or less when their energy level is low, it therefore may or may not be wise to meet at three o'clock in the afternoon.

Whenever people in a group get together, it's natural that the mood and outlook they bring with them will be influenced in part by what's happened to them earlier that day. For any individual, a touchy discussion, a disappointment, or an embarrassing episode might precede the group's interactions. Unfortunate events like these—as well as other powerful experiences, whether positive or not—may consciously or unconsciously color the demeanor of group members at the start of their interaction.

Another time-related conflict management strategy, thus, is to begin a discussion with a "time out" for people to rest and loosen up. We know of college instructors who initiate each of their class sessions with two minutes of silence for this same purpose.

37. The study of how people's use of space affects interaction and meaning.

38. A biological process which displays a recurrent pattern each 24 hours.

Once Conflict Occurs...

Numerous authorities have offered suggestions on how to manage conflict once it reaches a level where it should not or cannot be allowed to dissipate on its own. Hartley & Dawson, first of all,Hartley, P., & Dawson, M. (2010). *Success in groupwork.* New York: St. Martin's Press. suggested taking the following steps:

1. Make sure the lines of communication are open. If they aren't, open them.
2. Define the issues. Don't allow a nebulous sense of overpowering disagreement to develop. Be specific about what the conflict pertains to.
3. Focus on the task, rather than on personalities. Discourage or deflect comments that question a group member's motives or personal qualities.
4. Proceed according to your established ground rules, policies, procedures, and norms. After all, you established these components of your group's identity precisely to deal with difficult circumstances.

In addition to following rules and procedures peculiar to its own history, a group that's experiencing conflict should strive to maintain civilityMeyer, J.R. Effect of verbal aggressiveness on the perceived importance of secondary goals in messages. *Communication Studies, 55*, 168–184. and follow basic etiquette. As Georges Clemenceau wrote, "Etiquette is nothing but hot air, but that is what our automobiles ride on, and look how it smoothes out the bumps."

Malcolm Gladwell's popular book, *The Tipping Point*, describes how New York City's subway system was revitalized by David Gunn and William Bratton in the 1980s and 90sGladwell, M. (2000). *The tipping point: How little things can make a big difference.* New York: Little, Brown and Company.. Together, Gunn and Bratton launched a campaign to eliminate vandalism, including graffiti on the sides of train cars, and to prosecute "fare-beaters." At the start of the campaign, doubters complained that more serious crime in the subways and streets needed to be attacked first. Gunn and Bratton insisted, however, that setting a broad example of civility would ultimately create an atmosphere in which potential criminals would be less likely to engage in serious criminal acts. After many years of relentlessly enforcing basic laws mandating public decency, not only did graffiti nearly disappear entirely from the subway system, but overall crime in the New York metropolitan area declined substantially.

Hopefully you will never witness vandalism, much less felonious behavior, in a small group. Malicious verbal interchanges, nevertheless, can poison the

atmosphere among people and should be prevented if at all possible. As an old Japanese saying puts it, "The one who raises his voice first loses the argument." It doesn't hurt to calmly and quietly ask that discussion of particularly contentious topics be postponed if comments seem to be in danger of overwhelming the group with negativity.

In addition to reminding people that they should exercise basic politeness, it may be wise at times for someone in the group to ask for a recess in a discussion. Calvin Coolidge said, "I have never been hurt by anything I didn't say," and it may be a good idea in irate moments to silence people briefly to prevent what Adler and RodmanAdler, R.B., & Rodman, G. (2009). *Understanding human communication* (10th ed.). New York: Oxford University Press. referred to as an "**escalatory spiral**[39]" of hurtful conversation.

If the tone of a group discussion permits thoughtful reflection, it can be helpful to separate task and relationship goals and deal with conflict over each kind separately.Fisher, R., & Brown, S. (1988). *Getting Together: Building a relationship that gets to yes.* Boston: Houghton-Mifflin. Using indirect communication, rather than

39. A process which reinforces itself and thereby continually increases in intensity.

confronting another group member head-on, may also defuse extreme emotions and preserve other people's face.

Here are further techniques for managing conflict in group interactions:

1. "Test the waters" for new ideas without making it seem that you're so attached to them that you'll fight to impose them on others.
2. If an ego clash erupts, see if you can identify something that the disagreeing individuals *can* agree on. Perhaps this will be a superordinate goal. It could also be a common opposing force, since the idea that "my enemy's enemy is my friend" can serve to bind people together.
3. Employ active listening. Strive to fully understand other people's viewpoints before stating your own.
4. If people's comments meander to topics that aren't germane, steer the discussion back to the key issues under discussion.
5. Frame the situation as a problem to be solved, rather than as a struggle which must be won.
6. Treat everyone as partners on a common quest. Invite continued frank interchanges and assure group members that they may speak out without fear of reprisal.
7. Consider carefully how important it is for you to prevail in a particular conflict or even just to express your views. Ask yourself whether the potential negative consequences of your action will be worth it.
8. Unless a disagreement is over an essential point, consider whether it might be best to "agree to disagree" and move on.

Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/buddawiggi/5987710858/

"Going with the Flow"

As we've seen, there is no shortage of specific strategies and techniques for people to choose from when conflict occurs in a group. In fact, it may be overwhelming to try to decide which strategies and techniques to use, at which times and with which people, under which circumstances. Randy Fujishin, a therapist and writer from California, proposed an attitude which might help people deal both with conflict itself and with the feelings of stress it often engenders. He suggested that we regard conflict as neither a call to battle nor a warning to dissolve or disband a group. Instead, Fujishin proposed that people regard conflict as "an invitation to listen, learn, explore, and growFujishin, R. (1998). *Gifts from the heart: 10 communication skills for developing more loving relationships.* San Francisco: Acada Books.." His advice when conflict takes place is this: "Instead of tensing, relax. Instead of stiffening, bend. Instead of arguing, listen. Instead of pushing or running away, get closer. Flow with the disagreement, situation, or individual for a period to discover where it may lead."

Fujishin also developed what he called the "**SLACK**[40]" method of managing conflict. Although he intended it to be brought to bear primarily on disputes in one-on-one relationships, its components may apply also in group situations. "SLACK" is an acronym standing for "sit, listen, ask, compromise, and kiss." Major emphasis in this method is placed on being receptive to what other parties in a conflict have to say, as well as to their emotional states. Fujishin really does suggest kissing or hugging as the final step in this method, but of course many groups will choose instead to celebrate the achievement of post-conflict reconciliation and progress through words.

Perhaps the central message we can derive from Fujishin's writings on this topic is that, although we should respond to conflict earnestly, we should take a long view and avoid losing our composure in the process of managing it. Even at moments of extreme tension, we can remind ourselves of an ancient saying attributed first to Persian mystics and later cited by such notable figures as Abraham Lincoln: "This too shall pass."Taylor, A. (1968). "This Too Will Pass (Jason 910Q)". In F. Harkort, K.C. Peeters, & R. Wildhaber. *Volksüberlieferung: Festschrift für Kurt Ranke* (pp. 345–350). Göttingen, German: Schwartz.

KEY TAKEAWAY

- Conflict can be managed by implementing a combination of preventive, logistical, and procedural actions, as well as by maintaining composure and perspective.

40. A method developed by Randy Fujishin to manage conflict ("SLACK" stands for "sit, listen, ask, compromise, and kiss").

EXERCISES

1. What proportion of conflicts within small groups do you feel can actually be resolved rather than merely managed? Provide a rationale and example(s) for your answer.
2. Think about a conflict that you recently observed or took part in. What elements of its timing, location, or physical surroundings do you think contributed to its nature or severity? Which of those elements, if any, do you think someone might have been able to change to lessen the intensity of the conflict?
3. Labor negotiations sometimes include a mandated "cooling-off period." Describe a conflict situation you've witnessed which you believe might have turned out better had such a cooling-off period been incorporated into it. Describe areas of conflict in your life, at school or elsewhere, in which you feel it would be helpful to make use of such a technique?

10.7 Crisis Communication Plan

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Understand how to prepare a crisis communication plan.

A rumor that the CEO is ill pulls down the stock price. A plant explosion kills several workers and requires evacuating residents on several surrounding city blocks. Risk management seeks to address these many risks, including prevention as well as liability, but emergency and crisis situations happen nevertheless. In addition, people make errors in judgment that can damage the public perception of a company. The mainstream media has no lack of stories that involve infidelity, addiction, or abuse that, from a company's standpoint, require a clear a response. In this chapter we address the basics of a crisis communication plan.

Mallet, Vaught, and BrinchMallet, L., Vaught, C., & Brinch, M. (1999). *The emergency communication triangle.* Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Saftey and Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Research Laboratory. indicate the importance of focusing on key types of information during an emergency including:

- What is happening?
- Is anyone in danger?
- How big is the problem?
- Who reported the problem?
- Where is the problem?
- Has a response started?
- What resources are on-scene?
- Who is responding so far?
- Is everyone's location known?

You will be receiving information from the moment you know a crisis has occurred, but without a framework or communication plan to guide you, valuable information

may be ignored or lost. These questions help you quickly focus on the basics of "who, what, and where" in the crisis situation.

Crisis communication requires efficiency and accuracy.

Source: Jupiter Images 4218613.jpg

Developing Your Own Crisis Communication Plan

A **crisis communication plan**[41] is the prepared scenario document that organizes information into responsibilities and lines of communication prior to an event. With a plan in place, if an emergency arises, each person knows his or her role and responsibilities from a common reference document. Overall effectiveness can be enhanced with a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities for an effective and swift response.

The plan should include four elements:

1. Crisis communication team members with contact information,
2. Designated spokesperson,
3. Meeting place/location, and
4. Media plan with procedures.

41. The prepared scenario document that organizes information into responsibilities and lines of communication prior to an event.

A crisis communication team includes people who can:

1. Decide what actions to take,
2. Carry out those actions, and

3. Offer expertise or education in the relevant areas.

By designating a spokesperson prior to an actual emergency, your team addresses the inevitable need for information in a proactive manner. People will want to know what happened and where to get further details about the crisis. Lack of information breeds rumors and that can make a bad situation worse. The designated spokesperson should be knowledgeable about the organization and its values, comfortable in front a microphone, a camera and media lights, and able to stay calm under pressure.

Part of your communication crisis plan should focus on where you will meet to coordinate communicate and activities. For your own house in case of a fire, you might meet in the front yard. For an organization, a designated contingency building or office some distance away from your usual place of business might serve as a central place for communication in an emergency that requires evacuating your building. Depending on the size of your organization and the type of physical facilities where you do business, the company may develop an emergency plan with exit routes, hazardous materials procedures, and policies for handling bomb threats, for example. Safety, of course, is the first priority, but in terms of communication, a key goal is also to eliminate confusion about where people are and where information is coming from.

Whether or not evacuation is necessary, when a crisis occurs your designated spokesperson will gather information and carry out your media plan. He or she will need to make quick judgments about which information to share, how to phrase it, and whether certain individuals need to be notified of facts before they become public. The media and public will want to know information and reliable information is preferable to speculation. Official responses help clarify the situation for the public, but an unofficial interview can make the tragedy personal, and attract unwanted attention. Remind employees to direct all inquiries to the official spokesperson and to never speak "off the record."

Enable your spokesperson to have access to the place you indicated as your crisis contingency location to coordinate communication and activities, and allow that professional to prepare and respond to inquiries. When crisis communication is handled in a professional manner, it seeks not to withhold information or mislead, but to minimize the "spin damage" from the incident by providing necessary facts, even if they are unpleasant or even tragic.

KEY TAKEAWAY

- Because crises are bound to happen despite the best planning, every organization should have a crisis communication plan, which includes designating a crisis communication team and spokesperson.

EXERCISES

1. Locate the crisis communication plan where you go to school or work, or find one online. Briefly describe the overall plan and please note at least one part, element, or point of emphasis we have not discussed. Post and compare with classmates.
2. When people don't know what to do in a crisis situation, what happens? How can you address probable challenges before the crisis occurs? Discuss your ideas with classmates.
3. As a case study, research one crisis that involves your area of training or career field. What communication issues were present and how did they affect the response to the crisis? Compare your results with classmates.
4. Locate a crisis communication online and review it. Share and compare with classmates.
5. Do you always have to be on guard with members of the media? Why or why not? Explain your answer to the class as if they were members of the media.

10.8 Summary

In this chapter we have dealt with managing conflict. We have defined conflict and identified dangers which can arise from it. We have leadership approaches to conflict and reviewed the nature of conflict in the work environment. We have also explored effective conflict management strategies and explained how to develop and when to use a crisis communication plan. Conflict is a perennial and nature part of group communication which can be managed effectively if we understand the important concepts and skills shared in this chapter.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

Interpretive Questions

1. In what 2–3 ways has your view of conflict changed as a result of reading this chapter?
2. To what degree do you feel that techniques which are effective for managing conflict in small groups can produce positive results within large organizations or between nations? On what evidence or experience do you base your view concerning this question?

Application Questions

1. Think of one of your ongoing relationships in which conflict plays a larger or more harmful part than you would prefer. Which conflict management strategies from this chapter are you willing to put into use in that relationship? Please report back to one or more of your classmates in two weeks concerning the outcome of your plan.
2. Think of a leader you know who you believe manages conflict particularly effectively. Arrange an interview with the person in which you ask him/her for examples of how s/he used one or more of the strategies mentioned in this chapter. Ask also if the person has further advice for you to use in a conflict situation. Present your instructor with a short written description of the results of your interview.

Additional Resources

A Literary Zone article describes the literary devices of internal monologue and stream of consciousness.

http://literaryzone.com/?p=79

For another twist on the meaning of "stream of consciousness," visit this blog from the retail merchant Gaiam.

http://blog.gaiam.com/

Read an informative article on self-concept and self-esteem.

http://psychology.suite101.com/article.cfm/
impact_of_selfconcept_and_selfesteem_on_life

PsyBlog offers an informative article on self-disclosure. Don't miss the reader comment fields at the end!

http://www.spring.org.uk/2007/02/getting-closer-art-of-self-disclosure.php

The job search site Monster offers a menu of articles about employment interviews.

http://career-advice.monster.com/job-interview/careers.aspx

About.com offers an informative article about different types of job interviews.

http://jobsearch.about.com/od/interviewsnetworking/a/interviewtypes.htm

The Boston Globe's Boston.com site offers tips on handling conflict in the workplace from management consultant Sue Lankton-Rivas.

http://www.boston.com/jobs/galleries/workplaceconflict/

An article by M. Afzalur Rahim which describes in detail the challenges posed by organizational conflict and offers approaches for managing it.

http://193.140.134.6/~gokturk/sbox/Rahimtowarddevtheory.pdf