Handling Conflict

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Conflict is inevitable in groups and organizations, and it presents both a challenge and a true opportunity for every leader. In the well-known book, *Getting to Yes,* Fisher and Ury (1981) contend that handling conflict is a daily occurrence for all of us. People differ, and because they do, they need to negotiate with others about their differences (pp. xi–xii). *Getting to Yes* asserts that mutual agreement is possible in any conflict situation—if people are willing to negotiate in authentic ways.

When we think of conflict in simple terms, we think of a struggle between people, groups, organizations, cultures, or nations. Conflict involves opposing forces, pulling in different directions. Many people believe that conflict is disruptive, causes stress, and should be avoided.

As we stated before in Chapter 5, while conflict can be uncomfortable, it is not unhealthy, nor is it necessarily bad. Conflict will always be present in leadership situations, and surprisingly, it often produces positive change. The important question we address in this chapter is not "How can we *avoid* conflict and *eliminate* change?" but rather "How can we *manage* conflict and produce *positive* change?" When leaders handle conflict effectively, problem solving increases, interpersonal relationships become stronger, and stress surrounding the conflict decreases.

Communication plays a central role in handling conflict. Conflict is an interactive process between two or more parties that requires effective human interaction. By communicating effectively, leaders and followers can successfully resolve conflicts to bring positive results.

This chapter will emphasize ways to handle conflict. First, we will define conflict and describe the role communication plays in conflict. Next, we will discuss different kinds of conflict, followed by an exploration of Fisher and Ury's (1981) ideas about effective negotiation as well as other communication strategies that help resolve conflict. The final part of the chapter examines styles of approaching conflict and the pros and cons of these styles.

► CONFLICT DEFINED

Conflict has been studied from multiple perspectives, including *intra*personal, *inter*personal, and societal. Intrapersonal conflict refers to the discord that occurs *within* an individual. It is often studied by psychologists and personality theorists who are interested in the dynamics of personality and factors that predispose people to inner conflicts. Interpersonal conflict refers to the disputes that arise *between individuals*. This is the type of conflict we focus on when we discuss conflict in organizations. Societal conflict refers to clashes *between societies and nations*. Studies in this field focus on the causes of international conflicts, war, and peace. The continuing crisis between the Israelis and the Palestinians is a good example of social conflict. This chapter focuses on conflict as an interpersonal process that plays a critical role in effective leadership.

The following definition, based on the work of Wilmot and Hocker (2011, p. 11) best describes conflict. **Conflict** *is a felt struggle between two or more interdependent individuals over perceived incompatible differences in beliefs, values, and goals, or over differences in desires for esteem, control, and connectedness*. This definition emphasizes several unique aspects of conflict (Wilmot & Hocker, 2011).

Journal Link 9.1
Read more about intrapersonal conflict.

First, conflict is a *struggle;* it is the result of opposing forces coming together. For example, there is conflict when a leader and a senior-level employee oppose each other on whether or not all employees must work on weekends. Similarly, conflict occurs when a school principal and a parent disagree on the type of sex education program that

should be adopted in a school system. In short, conflict involves a clash between opposing parties.

Second, there needs to be an element of *interdependence* between parties for conflict to take place. If leaders could function entirely independently of each other and their subordinates, there would be no reason for conflict. Everyone could do their own work, and there would be no areas of contention. However, leaders do not work in isolation. Leaders need followers, and followers need leaders. This interdependence sets up an environment in which conflict is more likely.

When two parties are interdependent, they are forced to deal with questions such as "How much influence do I want in this relationship?" and "How much influence am I willing to accept from the other party?" Because of our interdependence, questions such as these cannot be avoided. In fact, Wilmot and Hocker (2011) contend that these questions permeate most conflicts.

Third, conflict always contains an *affective* element, the "felt" part of the definition. Conflict is an emotional process that involves the arousal of feelings in both parties of the conflict (Brown & Keller, 1979). When our beliefs or values on a highly charged issue (e.g., the right to strike) are challenged, we become upset and feel it is important to defend our position. When our feelings clash with others' feelings, we are in conflict.

The primary emotions connected with conflict are not always anger or hostility. Rather, an array of emotions can accompany conflict. Hocker and Wilmot (1995) found that many people report feeling lonely, sad, or disconnected during conflict. For some, interpersonal conflict creates feelings of abandonment—that their human bond to others has been broken. Feelings such as these often produce the discomfort that surrounds conflict.

Fourth, conflict involves *differences* between individuals that are perceived to be incompatible. Conflict can result from differences in individuals' beliefs, values, and goals, or from differences in individuals' desires for control, status, and connectedness. The opportunities for conflict are endless because each of us is unique with particular sets of interests and ideas. These differences are a constant breeding ground for conflict.

Video Link 9.1
Watch suggestions for ending conflict.

In summary, these four elements—struggle, interdependence, feelings, and differences—are critical ingredients of interpersonal conflict. To further understand the intricacies of managing conflict, we'll look at the role of communication in conflict and examine two major kinds of conflict.

▶ COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT

When conflict exists in leadership situations, it is recognized and expressed through communication. Communication is the means that people use to express their disagreements or differences. Communication also provides the avenue by which conflicts can be successfully resolved, or worsened, producing negative results.

To understand conflict, we need to understand communication. When human communication takes place, it occurs on two levels. One level can be characterized as the *content dimension* and the other as the *relationship dimension* (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). The **content dimension** of communication involves the objective, observable aspects such as money, weather, and land; the **relationship dimension** refers to the participants' perceptions of their connection to one another. In human communication, these two dimensions are always bound together.

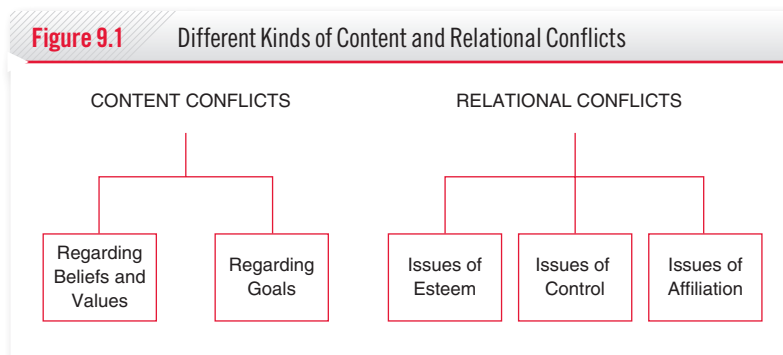**Journal Link 9.2**
Read more about communication and conflict.

To illustrate the two dimensions, consider the following hypothetical statement made by a supervisor to a subordinate: "Please stop texting at work." The *content* dimension of this message refers to rules and what the supervisor wants the subordinate to do. The *relationship* dimension of this message refers to how the supervisor and the subordinate are affiliated—to the supervisor's authority in relation to the subordinate, the supervisor's attitude toward the subordinate, the subordinate's attitude toward the supervisor, and their feelings about one another. It is the relationship dimension that implicitly suggests how the content dimension should be interpreted, since the content alone can be interpreted in different ways. The exact meaning of the message to the supervisor and subordinate is interpreted as a result of their interaction. If a positive relationship exists between the supervisor and the subordinate, then the content "please stop texting at work" will probably be interpreted by the subordinate as a friendly request by a supervisor who is honestly concerned about the subordinate's job

performance. However, if the relationship between the supervisor and the subordinate is superficial or strained, the subordinate may interpret the content of the message as a rigid directive, delivered by a supervisor who enjoys giving orders. This example illustrates how the meanings of messages are not in words alone but in individuals' interpretations of the messages in light of their relationships.

KINDS OF CONFLICT ◄

The content and relationship dimensions provide a lens for looking at conflict. As illustrated in Figure 9.1, there are two major kinds of conflict: conflict over content issues and conflict over relationship issues. Both kinds of conflict are prevalent in groups and organizational settings.

Figure 9.1   Different Kinds of Content and Relational Conflicts

CONTENT CONFLICTS

- Regarding Beliefs and Values
- Regarding Goals

RELATIONAL CONFLICTS

- Issues of Esteem
- Issues of Control
- Issues of Affiliation

CONFLICT ON THE CONTENT LEVEL

Content conflicts involve struggles between leaders and others who differ on issues such as policies and procedures. Debating with someone about the advantages or disadvantages of a particular rule is a familiar occurrence in most organizations. Sometimes these debates can be very heated (e.g., an argument between two employees about surfing the Internet while working). These disagreements are considered conflicts on the content level when they center on differences in (1) beliefs and values or (2) goals and ways to reach those goals.

Conflict Regarding Beliefs and Values

Each of us has a unique system of beliefs and values that constitutes a basic philosophy of life. We have had different family situations as

well as educational and work experiences. When we communicate with others, we become aware that others' viewpoints are often very different from our own. If we perceive what another person is communicating as incompatible with our own viewpoint, a conflict in beliefs or values is likely to occur.

Conflicts arising from differences in beliefs can be illustrated in several ways. For example, members of PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) are in conflict with researchers in the pharmaceutical industry who believe strongly in using animals to test new drugs. Another example of a conflict of beliefs can occur when teachers or nurses believe they have the right to strike because of unfair working conditions, while others feel that these kinds of employees should not be allowed to withhold services for any reason. In each of these examples, conflict occurs because one individual feels that his or her *beliefs* are incompatible with the position taken by another individual on the issue.

Conflicts can also occur between people because they have different *values.* When one person's values come into conflict with another's, it can create a difficult and challenging situation. To illustrate, consider the following example of an issue between Emily, a first-generation college student, and her mother. At the beginning of her senior year, Emily asked her mother if she could have a car to get around campus and to get back and forth to work. In order to pay for the car, Emily says she will take fewer credits, work more often at her part-time job, and postpone her graduation date to the following year. Emily is confident that she will graduate and thinks it is "no big deal" to extend her studies for a fifth year. However, Emily's mother does not feel the same. She doesn't want Emily to have a car until after she graduates. She thinks the car will be a major distraction and get in the way of Emily's studies. Emily is the first person in her family to get a college degree, and it is extremely important to her mother that Emily graduates on time. Deep down, her mother is afraid that the longer Emily goes to school, the more student loan debt Emily will have to pay back when she finishes.

The value conflict between Emily and her mother involves Emily's desire to have a car. In this case, both individuals are highly interdependent of one another: To carry out her decision to get a car, Emily needs her mother's agreement; to have her daughter graduate in four years, Emily's mother needs cooperation from Emily. Both individuals perceive the other's values as incompatible with their own,

and this makes conflict inevitable. Clearly, the conflict between Emily and her mother requires interpersonal communication about their different values and how these differences affect their relationship.

Conflict Regarding Goals

A second common type of content-related conflict occurs in situations where individuals have different *goals* (see Figure 9.1). Researchers have identified two types of conflict that occur regarding group goals: (1) procedural conflict and (2) substantive conflict (Knutson, Lashbrook, & Heemer, 1976).

Procedural conflict refers to differences between individuals with regard to the approach they wish to take in attempting to reach a goal. In essence, it is conflict over the best means to an agreed-upon goal; it is not about what goal to achieve. Procedural conflicts can be observed in many situations such as determining how to best conduct job interviews, choose a method for identifying new sales territories, or spend advertising dollars. In each instance, conflict can occur when individuals do not agree on how to achieve a goal.

Substantive conflict occurs when individuals differ with regard to the substance of the goal itself, or what the goal should be. For example, two board members of a nonprofit human service agency may have very different views regarding the strategies and scope of a fund-raising campaign. Similarly, two owners of a small business may strongly disagree about whether or not to offer their part-time employees health care benefits. On the international level, in Afghanistan, the Taliban and those not members of the Taliban have different perspectives on whether or not girls should be educated. These illustrations by no means exhaust all the possible examples of substantive conflict; however, they point out that conflict can occur as a result of two or more parties disagreeing on what the goal or goals of a group or an organization should be.

CONFLICT ON THE RELATIONAL LEVEL

Have you ever heard someone say, "I don't seem to get along with her [or him]; we have a personality clash"? The phrase *personality clash* is another way of describing a conflict on the relational level. Sometimes we do not get along with another person, not because of *what* we are talking about (conflict over content issues) but because of *how* we

are talking about it. **Relational conflict** refers to the differences we feel between ourselves and others concerning how we relate to each other. For example, at a staff meeting, a manager interrupts employees and talks to them in a critical tone. The employees begin texting on their phones, ignoring the manager. A conflict erupts because both the manager and the employees feel unheard and disrespected. It is typically caused neither by one person nor the other, but arises in their relationship. Relational conflict is usually related to incompatible differences between individuals over issues of (1) esteem, (2) control, and (3) affiliation (see Figure 9.1).

Relational Conflict and Issues of Esteem

The need for esteem and recognition has been identified by Maslow (1970) as one of the major needs in the hierarchy of human needs. Each of us has needs for esteem—we want to feel significant, useful, and worthwhile. We desire to have an effect on our surroundings and to be perceived by others as worthy of their respect. We attempt to satisfy our esteem needs through what we do and how we act, particularly in how we behave in our relationships with our coworkers.

Handbook Link 9.1
Read about workgroup conflict.

When our needs for esteem are not being fulfilled in our relationships, we experience relational conflict because others do not see us in the way we wish to be seen. For example, an administrative assistant can have repeated conflicts with an administrator if the assistant perceives that the administrator fails to recognize his or her unique contributions to the overall goals of the organization. Similarly, older employees may be upset if newer coworkers do not give them respect for the wisdom that comes with their years of experience. So, too, younger employees may want recognition for their innovative approaches to problems but fail to get it from coworkers with more longevity who do not think things should change.

At the same time that we want our own esteem needs satisfied, others want their esteem needs satisfied as well. If the supply of respect we can give each other seems limited (or scarce), then our needs for esteem will clash. We will see the other person's needs for esteem as competing with our own or taking that limited resource away from us. To illustrate, consider a staff meeting in which two employees are actively contributing insightful ideas and suggestions. If one of the employees is given recognition for her input but the other is not, conflict may result. As this conflict escalates, the effectiveness of their working

relationship and the quality of their communication may diminish. When the amount of available esteem (validation from others) seems scarce, a clash develops.

All of us are human and want to be recognized for the contributions we make to our work and our community. When we believe we're not being recognized or receiving our "fair share," we feel slighted and conflicted on the relational level with others.

Relational Conflict and Issues of Control

Struggles over issues of control are very common in interpersonal conflict. Each one of us desires to have an impact on others and the situations that surround us. Having control, in effect, increases our feelings of potency about our actions and minimizes our feelings of helplessness. Control allows us to feel competent about ourselves. However, when we see others as hindering us, or limiting our control, interpersonal conflict often ensues.

Interpersonal conflict occurs when a person's needs for control are incompatible with another's needs for control. In a given situation, each of us seeks different levels of control. Some people like to have a great deal, while others are satisfied (and sometimes even more content) with only a little. In addition, our needs for control may vary from one time to another. For example, there are times when a person's need to control others or events is very high; at other times, this same person may prefer that others take charge. Relational conflict over control issues develops when there is a clash between the needs for control that one person has at a given time (high or low) and the needs for control that others have at that same time (high or low). If, for example, a friend's need to make decisions about weekend plans is compatible with yours, no conflict will take place; however, if both of you want to control the weekend planning and your individual interests are different, then you will soon find yourselves in conflict. As struggles for control ensue, the communication among the participants may become negative and challenging as each person tries to gain control over the other or undermine the other's control.

A graphic example of a conflict over relational control is provided in the struggle between Lauren Smith, a college sophomore, and her parents, regarding what she will do on spring break. Lauren wants to go to Cancún, Mexico, with some friends to relax from the pressures of

school. Her parents do not want her to go. Lauren thinks she deserves to go because she is doing well in her classes. Her parents think spring break in Cancún is just a "big party" and nothing good will come of it. As another option, her parents offer to pay Lauren's expenses to go on an alternative spring break to clean up an oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Lauren is adamant that she "is going" to Cancún. Her parents, who pay her tuition, threaten that if she goes to Cancún, they will no longer pay for college.

Clearly, in the above example, both parties want to have control over the outcome. Lauren wants to be in charge of her own life and make the decisions about what she does or does not do. At the same time, her parents want to direct her into doing what they think is best for her. Lauren and her parents are interdependent and need each other, but they are conflicted because they each feel that the other is interfering with their needs for control of what Lauren does on spring break.

Conflicts over control are common in leadership situations. Like the parents in the above example, the role of leader brings with it a certain inherent level of control and responsibility. When leaders clash with one another over control or when control issues exist between leaders and subordinates, interpersonal conflicts occur. Later in this chapter, we present some conflict management strategies that are particularly helpful in coping with relational conflicts that arise from issues of control.

Relational Conflict and Issues of Affiliation

In addition to wanting relational control, each of us has a need to feel included in our relationships, to be liked, and to receive affection (Schutz, 1966). If our needs for closeness are not satisfied in our relationships, we feel frustrated and experience feelings of conflict. Of course, some people like to be very involved and very close in their relationships, while others prefer less involvement and more distance. In any case, when others behave in ways that are incompatible with our own desires for warmth and affection, feelings of conflict emerge.

Relational conflict over affiliation issues is illustrated in the following example of a football coach, Terry Jones, and one of his players, Danny Larson. Danny, a starting quarterback, developed a strong relationship with Coach Jones during his junior year in high school. Throughout the year, Danny and Coach Jones had many highly productive conversations

inside and outside of school about how to improve the football program. In the summer, the coach employed Danny in his painting business, and they worked side-by-side on a first-name basis. Both Danny and Terry liked working together and grew to know each other quite well. However, when football practice started in the fall, difficulties emerged between the two. During the first weeks of practice, Danny acted like Coach Jones was his best buddy. He called him Terry rather than Coach Jones, and he resisted the player-coach role. As Coach Jones attempted to withdraw from his summer relationship with Danny and take on his legitimate responsibilities as coach, Danny experienced a sense of loss of closeness and warmth. In this situation Danny felt rejection or a loss of affiliation, and this created a relational conflict.

Relational conflicts—whether they are over esteem, control, or affiliation—are seldom overt. Due to the subtle nature of these conflicts, they are often not easy to recognize or address. Even when they are recognized, relational conflicts are often ignored because it is difficult for many individuals to openly communicate that they want more recognition, control, or affiliation.

According to communication theorists, relational issues are inextricably bound to content issues (Watzlawick et al., 1967). This means that relational conflicts will often surface during the discussion of content issues. For example, what may at first appear to be a conflict between two leaders regarding the *content* of a new employee fitness program may really be a struggle over which one of the leaders will ultimately receive credit for developing the program. As we mentioned, relational conflicts are complex and not easily resolved. However, when relational conflicts are expressed and confronted, it can significantly enhance the overall resolution process.

Communication remains central to managing different kinds of conflict in organizations. Leaders who are able to keep channels of communication open with others will have a greater chance of understanding others' beliefs, values, and needs for esteem, control, and affiliation. With increased understanding, many of these common kinds of conflict will seem less difficult to resolve and more open to negotiation.

We now turn to Fisher and Ury's (1981) approach to communicating about conflict. It is one of the most recognized approaches of conflict negotiation in the world.

▶ FISHER AND URY APPROACH TO CONFLICT

Derived from studies conducted by the Harvard Negotiation Project, Fisher and Ury (1981) provide a straightforward, step-by-step method for negotiating conflicts. This method, called **principled negotiation**, emphasizes deciding issues on their merits rather than through competitive haggling or through excessive accommodation. Principled negotiation shows you how to obtain your fair share decently and without having others take advantage of you (Fisher & Ury, 1981).

Video Link 9.2

Watch William Ury speak.

As illustrated in Figure 9.2, the Fisher and Ury negotiation method comprises four principles. Each principle directly focuses on one of the four basic elements of negotiation: people, interests, options, and criteria. Effective leaders frequently understand and utilize these four principles in conflict situations.

Figure 9.2	Fisher and Ury's Method of Principled Negotiation

Separate the **People** from the Problem	Focus on **Interests,** Not Positions	Invent **Options** for Mutual Gains	Insist on Using Objective **Criteria**

PRINCIPLE 1: SEPARATE THE PEOPLE FROM THE PROBLEM

In the previous section of this chapter, we discussed how conflict has a content dimension and a relationship dimension. Similarly, Fisher and Ury (1981) contend that conflicts comprise a *problem factor* and a *people factor*. To be effective in dealing with conflicts, both of these factors need to be addressed. In particular, Fisher and Ury argue that the people factor needs to be separated out from the problem factor.

Separating people from the problem during conflict is not easy because they are entangled. For example, if a leader and her subordinate are in a heated conversation over the subordinate's negative performance review, it is very difficult for the leader and the subordinate to discuss the review without addressing their relationship and personal roles.

Our personalities, beliefs, and values are intricately interwoven with our conflicts. However, principled negotiation says that people and the problem need to be disentangled.

By separating people from the problem, we enable ourselves to recognize others' uniqueness. Everyone has his or her own distinct thoughts and feelings in different situations. Because we all perceive the world differently, we have diverse emotional responses to conflict. By focusing directly on the *people aspect* of the problem, we become more aware of the personalities and idiosyncratic needs of those with whom we are in conflict.

Perhaps most important, separating people from the problem encourages us to be attentive to our relationships during conflict. Conflicts can strain relationships, so it is important to be cognizant of how one's behavior during conflict affects the other party. Rather than "beat up" on each other, it is useful to work together, alongside each other, and mutually confront the problem. When we separate people from the problem, we are more inclined to work with others to solve problems. Fisher and Ury (1981) suggest that people in conflict need to "see themselves as working side by side, attacking the problem, not each other" (p. 11). Separating the people from the problem allows us to nurture and strengthen our relationships rather than destroy them.

Consider the earlier example of the supervisor and employee conflict over the negative performance review. In order to separate the people from the problem, both the supervisor and the employee need to discuss the negative review by focusing on performance criteria and behavior issues rather than personal attributes. The review indicated that the employee didn't meet performance objectives—the boss could say, "You didn't get your work done," but in separating the people from the problem, the boss would instead explain how the employee was unable to meet the requirements ("The number of contacts you made was below the required number"). The employee, on the other hand, may feel the objectives were unrealistic. Rather than telling her boss it was his fault ("You set unobtainable objectives"), the employee should make her point by providing facts about how these standards are not realistic ("The economic downturn wasn't considered when these objectives were developed"). By focusing on the problem in this way, the employer and the employee are maintaining their relationship but also confronting directly the performance review issues.

PRINCIPLE 2: FOCUS ON INTERESTS, NOT POSITIONS

The second principle, which is perhaps the most well known, emphasizes that parties in a conflict must focus on interests and not just positions. *Positions* represent our stand or perspective in a particular conflict. *Interests* represent what is behind our positions. Stated another way, positions are the opposing points of view in a conflict while interests refer to the relevant needs and values of the people involved. Fisher and Ury (1981) suggest that "your position is something you have decided upon. Your interests are what caused you to so decide" (p. 42).

Focusing on interests expands conflict negotiation by encouraging individuals to explore the unique underpinnings of the conflict. To identify interests behind a position, it is useful to look at the basic concerns that motivate people. Some of our concerns include needs for security, belonging, recognition, control, and economic well-being (Fisher & Ury, 1981). Being attentive to these basic needs and helping people satisfy them is central to conflict negotiation.

Concentrating on interests also helps opposing parties to address the "real" conflict. Addressing both interests *and* positions helps to make conflict negotiation more authentic. In his model of authentic leadership, Robert Terry (1993) advocates that leaders have a moral responsibility to ask the question "*What is really, really going on* in a conflict situation, and what are we going to do about it?" Unless leaders know what truly is going on, their actions will be inappropriate and can have serious consequences. Focusing on interests is a good way to find out what is at the heart of a conflict.

Consider the following conflict between a college professor, Dr. Smith, and his student, Erin Crow, regarding class attendance. Dr. Smith has a mandatory attendance policy, but allows for two absences during the semester. A student's grade is lowered 10% for each additional absence. Erin is a very bright student who has gotten As on all of her papers and tests. However, she has five absences and does not want to be penalized. Based on the attendance policy, Dr. Smith would lower Erin's grade 30%, from an A to a C. Erin's position in this conflict is that she shouldn't be penalized because she has done excellent work despite her absences. Dr. Smith's position is that the attendance policy is legitimate and Erin's grade should be lowered.

In this example, it is worthwhile to explore some of the interests that form the basis for each position. For example, Erin is very reticent and does not like to participate in class. She is carrying 18 credit hours and works two part-time jobs. On the other hand, Dr. Smith is a popular professor who has twice received university-wide outstanding teaching awards. He has 20 years of experience and has a strong publication record in the area of classroom learning methodology. In addition, Dr. Smith has a need to be liked by students, and does not like to be challenged.

Given their interests, it is easy to see that the conflict between Erin and Dr. Smith over class attendance is more complex than meets the eye. If this conflict were to be settled by negotiating positions alone, the resolution would be relatively straightforward, and Erin would most likely be penalized, leaving both parties unsatisfied. However, if the interests of both Erin and Dr. Smith were fully explored, the probability of a mutually agreeable outcome would be far more likely. Dr. Smith is likely to recognize that Erin has numerous obligations that impact her attendance but are important for her economic well-being and security. On the other hand, Erin may come to realize that Dr. Smith is an exemplary teacher who fosters cohesiveness among students by expecting them to show up and participate in class. His needs for control and recognition are challenged by Erin's attendance and lack of class participation.

The challenge for Erin and Dr. Smith is to focus on their interests, communicate them to each other, and remain open to unique approaches to resolving their conflict.

PRINCIPLE 3: INVENT OPTIONS FOR MUTUAL GAINS

The third strategy in effective conflict negotiation presented by Fisher and Ury (1981) is to invent options for mutual gains. This is difficult to do because humans naturally see conflict as an "either-or" proposition. We either win or lose; we get what we want, or the other side gets what it wants. We feel the results will be favorable either to us or to the other side, and we do not see any other possible options.

However, this tendency to see conflict as a fixed choice proposition needs to be overcome by inventing new options to resolve the conflict to the satisfaction of both parties. The method of principled negotiation

emphasizes that we need to brainstorm and search hard for creative solutions to conflict. We need to expand our options and not limit ourselves to thinking there is a single best solution.

Focusing on the interests of the parties in conflict can result in this kind of creative thinking. By exploring where our interests overlap and dovetail, we can identify solutions that will benefit both parties. This process of fulfilling interests does not need to be antagonistic. We can help each other in conflict by being sensitive to each other's interests and making it easier, rather than more difficult, for both parties to satisfy their interests. Using the earlier example of Dr. Smith and Erin, Erin could acknowledge Dr. Smith's need for a consistent attendance policy and explain that she understands that it is important to have a policy to penalize less-than-committed students. She should make the case that the quality of her papers indicates she has learned much from Dr. Smith and is as committed to the class as she can be, given her other obligations. Dr. Smith explains that he is not comfortable ignoring her absences and that it is unfair to other students who have also been penalized for missing class. They could agree that Erin's grade will be lowered to a B, rather than a C. While neither party is "victorious," both felt that the best compromise was reached given each person's unique interests.

PRINCIPLE 4: INSIST ON USING OBJECTIVE CRITERIA

Finally, Fisher and Ury (1981) say that effective negotiation requires that objective criteria be used to settle different interests. The goal in negotiation is to reach a solution that is based on principle and not on pressure. Conflict parties need to search for objective criteria that will help them view their conflict with an unbiased lens. Objective criteria can take many forms including

- *precedent,* which looks at how this issue has been resolved previously;
- *professional standards,* which determine if there are rules or standards for behavior based on a profession or trade involved in the conflict;
- *what a court would decide,* which looks at the legal precedent or legal ramifications of the conflict;
- *moral standards,* which consider resolving the conflict based on ethical considerations or "doing what's right";

- *tradition,* which looks at already established practices or customs in considering the conflict; and
- *scientific judgment,* which considers facts and evidence.

For example, if an employee and his boss disagree on the amount of a salary increase the employee is to receive, both the employee and the boss might consider the raises of employees with similar positions and work records. When criteria are used effectively and fairly, the outcomes and final package are usually seen as wise and fair (Fisher & Ury, 1981).

In summary, the method of principled negotiation presents four practical strategies that leaders can employ in handling conflicts: separate the people from the problem; focus on interests, not positions; invent options for mutual gains; and insist on using objective criteria. None of these strategies is a panacea for all problems or conflicts, but used together they can provide a general, well-substantiated approach to settling conflicts in ways that are likely to be advantageous to everyone involved in a conflict situation.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION ◄

Throughout this chapter, we have emphasized the complexity of conflict and the difficulties that arise in addressing it. There is no universal remedy or simple path. In fact, except for a few newsstand-type books that claim to provide quick cures to conflict, only a few sources give practical techniques for resolution. In this section, we describe several practical communication approaches that play a major role in the conflict resolution process: differentiation, fractionation, and face saving. Using these communication strategies can lessen the angst of the conflict, help conflicting parties to reach resolution sooner, and strengthen relationships.

DIFFERENTIATION

Differentiation describes a process that occurs in the early phase of conflict; it helps participants define the nature of the conflict and clarify their positions with regard to each other. It is very important to conflict resolution because it establishes the nature and parameters of the conflict. Differentiation requires that individuals explain and elaborate their own position, frequently focusing on their differences rather than their similarities. It is essential to working through a conflict (Putnam,

Video Link 9.3
Watch more on differentiation.

2010). Differentiation represents a difficult time in the conflict process because it is more likely to involve an escalation of conflict rather than a cooling off. During this time, fears may arise that the conflict will not be successfully resolved. Differentiation is also difficult because it initially personalizes the conflict and brings out feelings and sentiments in people that they themselves are the cause of the conflict (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 1993).

The value of differentiation is that it defines the conflict. It helps both parties realize how they differ on the issue being considered. Being aware of these differences is useful for conflict resolution because it focuses the conflict, gives credence to both parties' interests in the issue that is in conflict, and, in essence, depersonalizes the conflict. Consistent with Fisher and Ury's (1981) method of negotiation, differentiation is a way to separate the people from the problem.

An example of differentiation involves a group project. Members of the group have complained to the instructor that one member, Jennifer, seldom comes to meetings; when she does come, she does not contribute to the group discussions. The instructor met with Jennifer, who defended herself by stating that the group constantly set meeting times that conflict with her work schedule. She believes they do so on purpose to exclude her. The teacher arranged for the students to sit down together, and then had them explain their differing points of view to one another. The group members said that they believed that Jennifer cared less about academic achievement than they did because she did not seem willing to adjust her work schedule to meet with them. Jennifer, on the other hand, said she believed the others did not respect that she had to work to support herself while going to school, and that she was not in total control of her work schedule.

In the above example, differentiation occurred among group members as they attempted to assess the issues. It was a difficult process because it demanded that each participant talk about his or her feelings about why the group was having conflict. Both sides ultimately understood the other's differing viewpoints. The group and Jennifer set aside a definite time each week when they would meet, and Jennifer made sure her supervisor did not schedule her to work at that time.

FRACTIONATION

Fractionation refers to the technique of breaking down large conflicts into smaller, more manageable pieces (Fisher, 1971; Wilmot & Hocker,

2011). Like differentiation, fractionation usually occurs in the early stages of the conflict resolution process. It is an intentional process in which the participants agree to "downsize" a large conflict into smaller conflicts and then confront just one part of the larger conflict. Fractionating conflict is helpful for several reasons. First, fractionation reduces the conflict by paring it down to a smaller, less complex conflict. It is helpful for individuals to know that the conflict they are confronting is not a huge amorphous mass of difficulties, but rather consists of specific and defined difficulties. Second, it gives focus to the conflict. By narrowing down large conflicts, individuals give clarity and definition to their difficulties instead of trying to solve a whole host of problems at once. Third, downsizing a conflict helps to reduce the emotional intensity of the dispute. Smaller conflicts carry less emotional weight (Wilmot & Hocker, 2011). Last, fractionation facilitates a better working relationship between participants in the conflict. In agreeing to address a reduced version of a conflict, the participants confirm their willingness to work with one another to solve problems.

An example of fractionation at work involves David Stedman, an experienced director of a private school that is on the verge of closing due to low enrollment. School board members are upset with David's leadership and the direction of the school, and David is disappointed with the board. The school had been running on a deficit budget for the previous three years and had used up most of the endowment money it had set aside. The school's board members see the problem one way: The school needs more students. David knows it is not that simple. There are many issues behind the low enrollment: the practices for recruitment of students, retention of students, fundraising, marketing, and out-of-date technology at the school, as well as bad feelings between the parents and the school. In addition to these concerns, David also has responsibility for day-to-day operations of the school and decisions regarding the education of students. David asked the board members to attend a weekend retreat where, together, they detailed the myriad problems facing the school and narrowed the long list down to three difficulties that they would address together. They agreed to work on an aggressive recruitment plan, fund-raising efforts, and internal marketing toward parents so they would keep their children at the school.

In the end, the retreat was beneficial to both David and the board. The big conflict of "what to do about the school" was narrowed down to three specific areas they could address. In addition, the school board developed

an appreciation for the complexity and difficulties of running the school, and David softened his negative feelings about the school board and its members' input. As a result of fractionating their conflict, David Stedman and the school board developed a better working relationship and confirmed their willingness to work on problems in the future.

FACE SAVING

A third skill that can assist a leader in conflict resolution is face saving. **Face saving** refers to communicative attempts to establish or maintain one's self-image in response to threat (Folger et al., 1993; Goffman, 1967; Lulofs, 1994). Face-saving messages help individuals establish how they want to be seen by others. The goal of face-saving messages is to protect one's self-image.

In conflict, which is often threatening and unsettling, participants may become concerned about how others view them in regard to the positions they have taken. This concern for self can be counterproductive to conflict resolution because it shifts the focus of the conflict away from substantive issues and onto personal issues. Instead of confronting the central concerns of the conflict, face-saving concerns force participants to deal with the self-images of the participants as they are related to the conflict.

Interpersonal conflicts can be made less threatening if individuals communicate in a way that preserves the self-image of the other. Conflict issues should be discussed in a manner that minimizes threat to the participants. By using face-saving messages, such as "I think you are making a good point, but I see things differently," the person acknowledges the other's point of view without making that person feel stupid or unintelligent. The threat of conflict is lessened if participants try to support each other's self-image rather than to damage it just to win an argument. It is important to be aware of how people want to be seen by others, how conflict can threaten those desires, and how our communication can minimize those threats (Lulofs, 1994).

In trying to resolve conflicts, face saving should be a concern to participants for two reasons. First, if possible, participants should try to avoid letting the discussions during conflict shift to face-threatening issues. Similar to Fisher and Ury's (1981) principle of separating the people from the problem, this can be done by staying focused on content issues and maintaining interactions that do not challenge the other person's self-image. Second, during the later stages of conflict, face-saving messages can actually be used to assist participants in giving each other validation and support for how

they have come across during conflict. Face-saving messages can confirm for others that they have handled themselves appropriately during conflict and that their relationship is still healthy.

The following example illustrates how face saving can affect conflict resolution. At a large university hospital, significant disruptions occurred when 1,000 nurses went on strike after contract negotiations failed. The issues in the conflict were salary, forced overtime, and mandatory coverage of units that were short-staffed. There was much name-calling and personal attacks between nurses and administrators. Early negotiations were inhibited by efforts on both sides to establish an image with the public that what *they* were doing was appropriate, given the circumstances. As a result, these images and issues of right and wrong, rather than the substantive issues of salary and overtime, became the focus of the conflict. If the parties had avoided tearing each other down, perhaps the conflict could have been settled sooner.

Despite these difficulties, face-saving messages did have a positive effect on this conflict. During the middle of the negotiations, the hospital ran a full-page advertisement in the local newspaper describing its proposal and why it thought this proposal was misunderstood. At the end of the ad, the hospital stated, "We respect your right to strike. A strike is a peaceful and powerful means by which you communicate your concern or dissatisfaction." This statement showed that the administration was trying to save face for itself, but also it was attempting to save face for nurses by expressing that their being on strike was not amoral, and that the hospital was willing to accept the nurses' behavior and continue to have a working relationship with them. Similarly, the media messages that both parties released at the end of the strike included affirmation of the other party's self-image. The nurses, who received a substantial salary increase, did not try to claim victory or point out what the hospital lost in the negotiations. In turn, the hospital, which retained control of the use of staff for overtime, did not emphasize what it had won or communicate that it thought the nurses were unprofessional because they had gone out on strike. The point is that these gentle face-saving messages helped both sides to feel good about themselves, reestablish their image as effective health care providers, and salvage their working relationships.

All in all, there are no shortcuts to resolving conflicts. It is a complex process that requires sustained communication. By being aware of differentiation, fractionation, and face saving, leaders can enhance their abilities and skills in the conflict resolution process.

▶ KILMANN & THOMAS STYLES OF APPROACHING CONFLICT

Video Link 9.4

Watch more about styles of approaching conflict.

There's no doubt that people have different ways of handling conflict and that these different styles affect the outcomes of conflict. A **conflict style** is defined as a patterned response or behavior that people use when approaching conflict. One of the most widely recognized models of conflict styles was developed by Kilmann and Thomas (1975, 1977), based on the work of Blake and Mouton (1964), and is the basis for our Conflict Style Questionnaire on pages 203–205.

The Thomas-Kilmann model identifies five conflict styles: (1) avoidance, (2) competition, (3) accommodation, (4) compromise, and (5) collaboration. This model (see Figure 9.3) describes conflict styles along two dimensions: assertiveness and cooperativeness. *Assertiveness* refers to attempts to satisfy one's own concerns, while *cooperativeness* represents attempts to satisfy the concerns of others. Each conflict style is characterized by how much assertiveness and how much cooperativeness an individual shows when confronting conflict.

Figure 9.3   Styles of Approaching Conflict
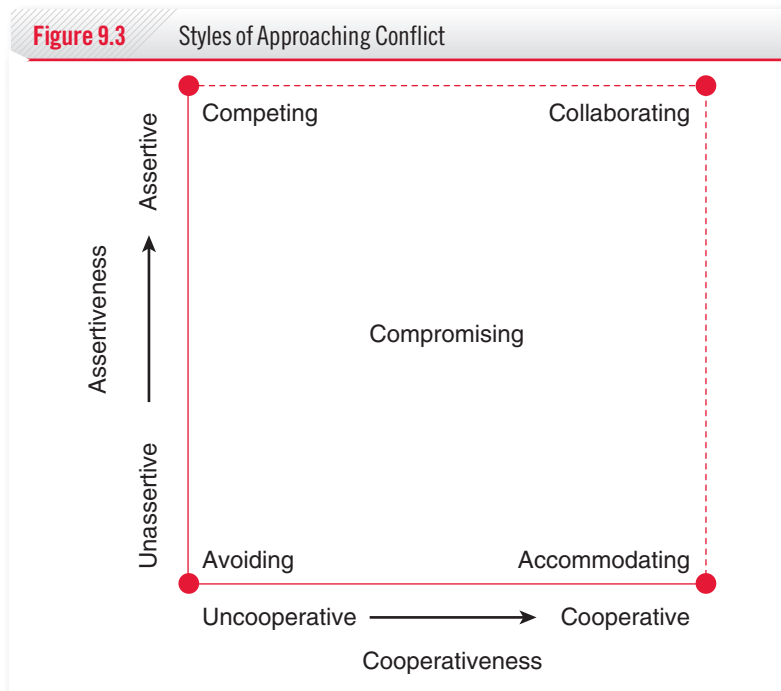
Sources: Reproduced with permission of authors and publisher from Kilmann, R. H., & Thomas, K. W. Interpersonal conflict-handling behavior as reflections of Jungian personality dimensions. *Psychological Reports,* 1975, 37, 971-980. © Psychological Reports, 1975.

In conflict situations, a person's individual style is usually a combination of these five different styles. Nevertheless, because of past experiences or situational factors, some people may rely more heavily on one conflict style than on others. Understanding these styles can help you select the conflict style that is most appropriate to the demands of the situation.

AVOIDANCE

Avoidance is both an unassertive and an uncooperative conflict style. Those who favor the avoidance style tend to be passive and ignore conflict situations rather than confront them directly. They employ strategies such as denying there is a conflict, using jokes as a way to deflect conflict, or trying to change the topic. Avoiders are not assertive about pursuing their own interests, nor are they cooperative in assisting others to pursue theirs.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Avoidance as a style for managing conflict is usually counterproductive, often leading to stress and further conflict. Those who continually avoid conflict bottle up feelings of irritation, frustration, anger, or rage inside themselves, creating more anxiety. Avoidance is essentially a static approach to conflict; it does nothing to solve problems or to make changes that could prevent conflicts.

However, there are some situations in which avoidance may be useful—for example, when an issue is of trivial importance or when the potential damage from conflict would be too great. Avoidance can also provide a cooling-off period to allow participants to determine how to best resolve the conflict at a later time. For example, if Jon is so angry at his girlfriend that he throws his BlackBerry at the wall, he might want to go for a ride in his car and cool down before he tries to talk to his girlfriend about the problem.

COMPETITION

Competition is a conflict style of individuals who are highly assertive about pursuing their own goals but uncooperative in assisting others to reach theirs. These individuals attempt to resolve a struggle by controlling or persuading others in order to achieve their own ends. A competitive style is essentially a win-lose conflict strategy. For example, when Wendy seeks to convince Chris that he is a bad person because

he is habitually late for meetings, regardless of his reasons for doing so, it is a win and lose conflict style.

Advantages and Disadvantages

In some situations, competition can produce positive outcomes. It is useful when quick, decisive action is needed. Competition can also generate creativity and enhance performance because it challenges participants to make their best efforts.

Generally, though, competitive approaches to conflict are not the most advantageous because they are more often counterproductive than productive. Resolution options are limited to one party "beating" another, resulting in a winner and a loser. Attempts to solve conflict with dominance and control will often result in creating unstable situations and hostile and destructive communication. Finally, competition is disconfirming; in competition, individuals fail to recognize the concerns and needs of others.

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation is an unassertive but cooperative conflict style. In accommodation, an individual essentially communicates to another, "You are right, I agree; let's forget about it." An approach that is "other directed," accommodation requires individuals to attend very closely to the needs of others and ignore their own needs. Using this style, individuals confront problems by deferring to others.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Accommodation allows individuals to move away from the uncomfortable feelings that conflict inevitably produces. By yielding to others, individuals can lessen the frustration that conflict creates. This style is productive when the issue is more important to one party than the other or if harmony in the relationship is the most important goal.

The problem with accommodation is that it is, in effect, a lose-win strategy. Although accommodation may resolve conflict faster than some of the other approaches, the drawback is that the accommodator sacrifices his or her own values and possibly a higher-quality decision in order to maintain smooth relationships. It is a submissive style that allows others to take charge. Accommodators also lose because they may fail to express their own opinions and feelings and their contributions are not fully considered.

For example, Jenny's boyfriend is a sports fanatic and always wants to stay home and watch televised sports while Jenny would like to do something like go to a movie or to a club. But to make him happy, Jenny stays home and watches football.

COMPROMISE

As Figure 9.3 indicates, **compromise** occurs halfway between competition and accommodation and involves both a degree of assertiveness and a degree of cooperativeness. Many see compromise as a "give and take" proposition. Compromisers attend to the concerns of others as well as to their own needs. On the diagonal axis of Figure 9.3, compromise occurs midway between the styles of avoidance and collaboration. This means that compromisers do not completely ignore confrontations, but neither do they struggle with problems to the fullest degree. This conflict style is often chosen because it is expedient in finding middle ground while partially satisfying the concerns of both parties.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Compromise is a positive conflict style because it requires attending to one's goals as well as others'. Compromise tends to work best when other conflict styles have failed or aren't suitable to resolving the conflict. Many times, compromise can force an equal power balance between parties.

Among the shortcomings of the compromise style is that it does not go far enough in resolving conflict and can become "an easy way out." In order to reach resolution, conflicting parties often don't fully express their own demands, personal thoughts, and feelings. Innovative solutions are sacrificed in favor of a quick resolution, and the need for harmony supersedes the need to find optimal solutions to conflict. The result is that neither side is completely satisfied. For example, Pat wants to go on a camping vacation, and Mike wants to have a "staycation," hanging around the house. In the end, they agree to spend their vacation taking day trips to the beach and the zoo.

COLLABORATION

Collaboration, the most preferred style of conflict, requires both assertiveness and cooperation. It is when both parties agree to a positive settlement to the conflict and attend fully to the other's concerns while not sacrificing or suppressing their own. The conflict is

Handbook Link 9.1
Read more about collaboration.

not resolved until each side is reasonably satisfied and can support the solution. Collaboration is the ideal conflict style because it recognizes the inevitability of human conflict. It confronts conflict, and then uses conflict to produce constructive outcomes.

Advantages and Disadvantages

The results of collaboration are positive because both sides win, communication is satisfying, relationships are strengthened, and negotiated solutions are frequently more cost-effective in the long run.

Unfortunately, collaboration is the most difficult style to achieve. It demands energy and hard work among participants as well as shared control. Resolving differences through collaboration requires individuals to take time to explore their differences, identify areas of agreement, and select solutions that are mutually satisfying. This often calls for extended conversation in which the participants explore entirely new alternatives to existing problems. For example, residents of a residential neighborhood seek to have an adult entertainment facility in their midst close or leave. The owner refuses. The residents work with city officials to find an alternative location to relocate the facility, and the city gives the facility's owner tax breaks to move.

The five styles of approaching conflict—avoidance, competition, accommodation, compromise, and collaboration—can be observed in various conflict situations. Although there are advantages and disadvantages to each style, the conflict-handling style that meets the needs of the participants while also fitting the demands of the situation will be most effective in resolving conflict.

CASE STUDY

The following case study describes a conflict that occurred between a college student and his father. The questions provided at the end of the case will help you analyze the conflict using ideas from the different conceptual perspectives discussed in the chapter.

Conflict With My Father

John Lawrence

Ever since my 14-year-old sister was very young, her left eye has had visible blood vessels, which are quite large, red, and noticeable. It's a terrible thing for her. She continuously looks like she has pinkeye,

hasn't slept, or has used some kind of illegal drug. Curious people ask, "What's wrong with your eye?" compelling her to have to explain the extra blood vessels with which she was born.

Over the past eight years, the blood vessels have grown 50% larger, becoming close to 2 or 3 times the size of normal, healthy blood vessels. My sister and parents went to some specialists who want to conduct an imaging procedure to better identify how the vessels are being blocked in her brain. Then, if they think it necessary—and there is a high likelihood they will find it necessary—they will operate to redirect blood flow into her brain and around the overgrown blood vessels. The surgery will be on the brain's surface and quite dangerous, with a number of possible negative outcomes including brain damage and death.

A few days after we got the bad news, my father came to me and was upset. He said our family needed to be more supportive of my sister through this crisis. He didn't think my mom and I were showing my sister enough love, and we needed to make more of an effort to do so to help her get through the hard times ahead.

My initial reaction was "How dare you!" His words felt like a personal attack of my character. Did he think because I hadn't given her a giant hug in front of him and said, "I love you, I love you" that I didn't "truly" love her? Did I need to "report" to him every last bit of caring I expressed to my sister for him to acknowledge?

I didn't outwardly get upset with my dad because I knew his emotions were running high. I tried to explain to him that I did call my sister after her return from the specialists to hear the news directly from her and I had talked to her several times since. His reaction to these statements, however, implied that my actions aren't "satisfactory love showing," and he repeatedly stated that I needed to do more. This cut me quite deeply.

I didn't continue to defend myself because engaging my dad in an argument would have worsened the whole situation and solved nothing. I don't believe you can measure a person's internal compassion toward another based on stereotypical expressions such as hugs and kisses. Not all people show compassion and care in the same ways. For my dad to use his rating scale of showing compassion to judge me wasn't right. If I had to do it all over again I would try to explain this logic to him. At the time, though, I was so offended by his accusations that I was too mad to try and explain. Instead, I elected to let him say what he wanted, express my opinion in a simple way, and then just take whatever came to me without fighting back.

Source: Adapted from John Lawrence.

Questions

1. How would you describe the conflict between John and his father?

2. In what way are John's and his father's interpersonal concerns the same or different? Is their conflict a relational conflict? If so, what type of relational conflict?

3. From Fisher and Ury's (1981) perspective, what are John's and his father's *positions* and *interests* regarding the conflict?

4. Do you think John handled the conflict in the right way? If you were John, how would you have handled the conflict?

Summary

For leaders and subordinates alike, interpersonal conflict is inevitable. Conflict is defined as a felt struggle between two or more individuals over perceived incompatible differences in beliefs, values, and goals, or over differences in desires for esteem, control, and connectedness. If it is managed in appropriate ways, conflict need not be destructive but can be constructive and used to positive ends.

Communication plays a central role in conflict and in its resolution. Conflict occurs between leaders and others on two levels: content and relational. Conflict on the content level involves differences in beliefs, values, or goal orientation. Conflict on the relational level refers to differences between individuals with regard to their desires for esteem, control, and affiliation in their relationships. Relational conflicts are seldom overt, which makes them difficult for people to recognize and resolve.

One approach to resolving conflicts is the method of principled negotiation by Fisher and Ury (1981). This model focuses on four basic elements of negotiation—people, interests, options, and criteria— and describes four principles related to handling conflicts: Principle 1—Separate the People from the Problem; Principle 2—Focus on Interests, Not Positions; Principle 3—Invent Options for Mutual Gains; and Principle 4—Insist on Using Objective Criteria. Collectively, these principles are extraordinarily useful in negotiating positive conflict outcomes.

Three practical communication approaches to conflict resolution are differentiation, fractionation, and face saving. Differentiation is a process that helps participants to define the nature of the conflict and to clarify their positions with one another. Fractionation refers to the technique of paring down large conflicts into smaller, more manageable conflicts. Face saving consists of messages that individuals express to each other in order to maintain each other's self-image during conflict. Together or singly, these approaches can assist leaders in making the conflict resolution process more productive.

Finally, researchers have found that people approach conflict using five styles: (1) avoidance, (2) competition, (3) accommodation, (4) compromise, and (5) collaboration. Each of these styles characterizes individuals in terms of the degree of assertiveness and

cooperativeness they show when confronting conflict. The most constructive approach to conflict is collaboration, which requires that individuals recognize, confront, and resolve conflict by attending fully to others' concerns without sacrificing their own. Managing conflicts effectively leads to stronger relationships among participants and more creative solutions to problems.

Go to **http://www.sagepub.com/northouseintro2e/** *for additional exercises and study resources. Select Chapter 9, Handling Conflict, for chapter-specific activities.*

Glossary Terms

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relational conflicts   180

relationship dimension   176

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9.1   **Conflict Style Questionnaire**

Visit **www.sagepub.com/northouseintro2e** for downloadable versions of these questionnaires

Purpose

1. To identify your conflict style

2. To examine how your conflict style varies in different contexts or relationships

Directions

1. Think of two different situations (A and B) where you have a conflict, a disagreement, an argument, or a disappointment with someone, such as a roommate or a work associate. Write the name of the person for each situation below.

2. According to the scale below, fill in your scores for Situation A and Situation B. For each question, you will have two scores. For example, on Question 1 the scoring might look like this: 1. 2 | 4

3. Write the name of each person for the two situations here:

Person A _____   Person B _____

| **1 = never** | **2 = seldom** | **3 = sometimes** | **4 = often** | **5 = always** |

**Person	Person** **A	B**	
1. ____|____ I avoid being "put on the spot"; I keep conflicts to myself.	
2. ____|____ I use my influence to get my ideas accepted.	
3. ____|____ I usually try to "split the difference" in order to resolve an issue.	
4. ____|____ I generally try to satisfy the other's needs.	
5. ____|____ I try to investigate an issue to find a solution acceptable to both of us.	
6. ____|____ I usually avoid open discussion of my differences with the other.	
7. ____|____ I use my authority to make a decision in my favor.	
8. ____|____ I try to find a middle course to resolve an impasse.	
9. ____|____ I usually accommodate the other's wishes.	
10. ____|____ I try to integrate my ideas with the other's to come up with a decision jointly.	
11. ____|____ I try to stay away from disagreement with the other.	
12. ____|____ I use my expertise to make a decision that favors me.	
13. ____|____ I propose a middle ground for breaking deadlocks.	

Person | Person A | B	
14. ____|____	I give in to the other's wishes.
15. ____|____	I try to work with the other to find solutions that satisfy both our expectations.
16. ____|____	I try to keep my disagreement to myself in order to avoid hard feelings.
17. ____|____	I generally pursue my side of an issue.
18. ____|____	I negotiate with the other to reach a compromise.
19. ____|____	I often go with the other's suggestions.
20. ____|____	I exchange accurate information with the other so we can solve a problem together.
21. ____|____	I try to avoid unpleasant exchanges with the other.
22. ____|____	I sometimes use my power to win.
23. ____|____	I use "give and take" so that a compromise can be made.
24. ____|____	I try to satisfy the other's expectations.
25. ____|____	I try to bring all our concerns out in the open so that the issues can be resolved.

Source: Adapted from "Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict: First-Order Factor Model and Its Invariance Across Groups," by M. A. Rahim and N. R. Magner, 1995, *Journal of Applied Psychology, 80*(1), 122–132. In W. Wilmot and J. Hocker (2011), *Interpersonal Conflict* (pp. 146–148). Published by the American Psychological Association.

Scoring: Add up your scores on the following questions:

A|B	A|B	A|B	A|B	A|B
1. ___|___	2. ___|___	3. ___|___	4. ___|___	5. ___|___
6. ___|___	7. ___|___	8. ___|___	9. ___|___	10. ___|___
11. ___|___	12. ___|___	13. ___|___	14. ___|___	15. ___|___
16. ___|___	17. ___|___	18. ___|___	19. ___|___	20. ___|___
21. ___|___	22. ___|___	23. ___|___	24. ___|___	25. ___|___
___|___ A|B **Avoidance** **Totals**	___|___ A|B **Competition** **Totals**	___|___ A|B **Compromise** **Totals**	___|___ A|B **Accommodation** **Totals**	___|___ A|B **Collaboration** **Totals**

Scoring Interpretation

This questionnaire is designed to *identify* your conflict style and *examine* how it varies in different contexts or relationships. By comparing your total scores for the different styles you can discover which conflict style you rely most heavily upon and which style you use least. Furthermore, by comparing your scores for Person A and Person B, you can determine how your style varies or stays the same in different relationships. Your scores on this questionnaire are indicative of how you responded to a particular conflict at a specific time and therefore might change if you selected a different conflict or a different conflict period. The Conflict Style Questionnaire is not a personality test that labels or categorizes you; rather, it attempts to give you a sense of your more dominant and less dominant conflict styles.

Scores from 21 to 25 are representative of a very strong style.

Scores from 15 to 20 are representative of a strong style.

Scores from 11 to 15 are representative of an average style.

Scores from 6 to 10 are representative of a weak style.

Scores from 0 to 5 are representative of a very weak style.

9.2   Observational Exercise

Visit **www.sagepub.com/northouseintro2e** for downloadable versions of these questionnaires

Handling Conflict

Purpose

1. To become aware of the dimensions of interpersonal conflict
2. To explore how to use Fisher and Ury's (1981) method of principled negotiation to address actual conflict

Directions

1. For this exercise, you are being asked to observe an actual conflict. Attend a public meeting at which a conflict is being addressed. For example, you could attend a meeting of the campus planning board, which has on its agenda changes in student parking fees.
2. Take notes on the meeting, highlighting the positions and *interests* of all the people who participated in the meeting.

Questions

1. How did the participants at the meeting frame their arguments? What *positions* did individuals take at the meeting?

2. Identify and describe the interests of each of the participants at the meeting.

3. Discuss whether the participants were able to be objective in their approaches to the problem. Describe how the people involved were able to separate themselves from the problem.

4. In what ways did the participants seek to find mutually beneficial solutions to their conflict?

9.3   Reflection and Action Worksheet

Visit **www.sagepub.com/northouseintro2e** for downloadable versions of these questionnaires

Handling Conflict

Reflection

1. How do you react to conflict? Based on the Conflict Style Questionnaire, how would you describe your conflict style? How has your past history influenced your conflict style?

2. Read the story about John Lawrence on page 198. What kind of conflict does it describe? What is John's conflict style? What is his father's conflict style? Do you agree with how John handled the conflict? How would you have reacted if you were John Lawrence?

3. This chapter describes three kinds of relational conflict (i.e., esteem, control, affiliation). Of the three kinds, which is most common in the conflicts you have with others? Discuss.

Action

1. Briefly describe an actual conflict you had with a family member, roommate, or coworker in the recent past. Identify the positions and interests of both you and the other person in the conflict. (Note: Individuals' positions may be easier to identify than their interests. Be creative in detailing your interests and the other person's.)

2. Describe how you could *fractionate* the conflict.

3. Using Fisher and Ury's (1981) methods, describe how you could separate the person from the problem and how you could work together to address the conflict.

4. During your discussions, how could you help the other party in the conflict save face? How could the other party help you save face?