

# Part 1

# Presentation and Discussion

# Resources

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This opening section of the handbook contains recommended background reading intended mostly to provide a conceptual framework for managing conflict in the workplace. You can use the articles for self-education, as the basis for lectures, as handouts in a training session, or as helpful reading to pass along to individuals with particular problems.

In several of the selections you will discern a recurring theme: Managing conflict does not mean eliminating it so that smiling collaboration may reign eternal and supreme. In particular, managing conflict does not mean silencing arguments about the wisdom of initiatives born in the executive suite or even the efficacy of decisions reached by majority rule in a work team. Managing conflict is not about defining all resistance as naysaying and then attempting to crush it.

Which is to say, it's no accident that the first article in the lineup is titled "The Art of Creative Fighting."

Most of the selections come from Pfeiffer *Annuals* published in the 1970s and 1980s. They were chosen as thoughtful, intelligent, and even classic statements of timeless themes, ideas, and strategies. Much has been said and written since about these ideas, but little has been added. When it comes to discussing the interplay of conflict and collaboration, or the basic choices available to us in classifying and deciding how to handle different types of conflict, the "old"

articles, paradoxically, have a freshness missing from more recent rehashes of these themes.

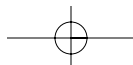
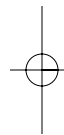
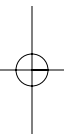
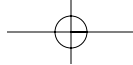
All but three of the selections fall into that “conceptual framework” category. Of the three mavericks, two are included with the thought that they might prove useful in specific situations. “Dealing with Disruptive People in Meetings” is an article you might want to copy and keep in a drawer to hand discreetly to a manager or team leader who has tried all of the recommended approaches but now is at wit’s end and ready to trade Confucius for Machiavelli. “Confrontational Communication” is offered as a handout or the basis of a lecture about how to deal gracefully with angry people, including angry customers.

The final selection, “Breaking Down Boundaries: Breaking Through Resistance,” from the 2000 Pfeiffer *Annual*, puts conflict management into the context of the 21st Century, explaining how several organizations have managed successful change initiatives that probably sound very much like things your organization is trying to do today.

The ten articles in this section include:

- **The Art of Creative Fighting:** Beware the tendency to view conflict as sin and its absence as a state of grace. But take care to understand what a fight is really about.
- **Conflict Resolution Strategies:** How to resolve disputes so that they stay resolved.
- **Win/Lose Situations:** Yes, “win/win” has become a cliché. But thinking like this explains why the phrase caught on in the first place—and why it’s still important.
- **A Taxonomy of Intergroup Conflict-Resolution Strategies:** An overview of strategies and tactics that seek to avoid, defuse, contain, or confront conflicts.
- **Developing Collaboration in Organizations:** A comprehensive discussion of how to encourage collaboration while giving conflict its due.
- **Constructive Conflict in Discussions:** The importance of allowing dissenting ideas to be heard.
- **Dealing with Disruptive People in Meetings:** Then again, not all conflict is constructive. Here’s some hard-nosed advice for the meeting leader who has just plain had enough.
- **Confrontational Communication:** A practical, four-step process for dealing with an angry person, be it a coworker or a customer.

- **A Positive Approach to Resistance:** Why and how managers must honor the “resisters” to the organization’s latest brilliant scheme.
- **Breaking Down Boundaries: Breaking Through Resistance:** Common change initiatives of today, and how some clever organizations have guided them without running aground.



# 1

## The Art of Creative Fighting

*H.B. Karp*

Whether the particular setting is the family, the small group, the agency, or the business unit, training individuals to deal effectively with conflict requires a great deal of skill and awareness on the part of the facilitator. When training is unsuccessful in other areas of human resource development, such as communication, problem solving, or motivation, the worst that usually happens is that the situation does not improve with time; in other words, communication remains ineffective, problems are not solved, or productivity fails to increase. In dealing with conflict, however, the situation is quite different. A training error or an inappropriate intervention can make the situation immediately more risky and volatile than it was previously. It also becomes less likely that a positive outcome will emerge.

Several elements contribute to making conflict training such a touchy area:

- The topic itself has a strong tendency to initiate deep feelings on the part of most participants and some facilitators. Most people either do not like conflict or are afraid of it even before they deal with it.
- Training in conflict management is not just a matter of cognitive understanding of relevant theory and technique. Facilitators must be comfortable with conflict and their own unique approaches to dealing with it *before* they can assist others in this regard.
- Despite disclaimers to the contrary, there appears to be a highly preferred, “one-best way” to deal with conflict from the viewpoint of human resource development: collaboration. Facilitators work effectively with people in developing collaborative approaches to conflict issues, but they often ignore or avoid other approaches in the process. This tendency has the effect of

limiting alternatives and can lead to an impasse. In fact, such a unidirectional approach may increase rather than lessen the fear of conflict. Although collaboration may be the most preferable method for dealing with conflict, on some occasions a collaborative solution simply is not available.

A pragmatic view of training in the area of conflict indicates that the first essential step is to help people to see the simplest and most basic aspects of conflict, thereby stripping it of its mystic and awesome nature. Conflict certainly demands respect, but it need not generate fear and wonder. The second essential step is to legitimize the process of conflict. The most valuable skill needed in handling a conflict is not the ability to get along well; it is the ability to fight well. The time to get along well is after the fight is over. Indeed, when people are able to fight fully and creatively, it is probable that they will get along better after the resolution than they did before the conflict arose.

## THE NATURE OF CONFLICT

Conflict occurs when two or more people attempt to occupy the same space at the same time. This space can be physical, psychological, intimate, political, or any arena in which there is room for only one view, outcome, or individual. Whether cast in the home or the work setting, conflict is absolutely unavoidable as a normal condition of active life. In addition, it is neither good nor bad in itself; it simply is. Whether the outcome of a conflict situation is positive or negative is almost totally determined by the way in which it is managed. When managed effectively, conflict actually becomes a vital asset in that it is a prime source of energy and creativity in a system.

The four major categories of areas in which conflict arises are described as follows, in descending order of the objectivity involved.

1. *Fact.* Conflict over fact is the most frequent variety, the most objective in nature, the least volatile, and by far the easiest to resolve. This type of conflict centers on *what a thing is or is not*. Resolution is usually achieved by comparing the object of the conflict to a standard or by referring to a mutually acceptable authority. For example, if one person believes that a specific object is a hammer and another believes it to be an axe, resolution is simple to achieve: Obtain a picture of each and hold them next to the object in question.

2. *Method.* Conflict over method is a little more subjective and volatile than conflict over fact. Those involved disagree about a procedure and are in conflict over *what is to be done*. Although personal opinion enters into the process, the conflict can be managed objectively for the most part. For example, a conflict about how to conduct a sales campaign can be resolved most easily by achieving mutual agreement on market conditions, advertising capabilities, budget constraints, and so forth.
3. *Objectives.* Conflict over objectives is more subjective and has a greater potential for volatility than the two types previously discussed. It concerns *what is to be accomplished* and is harder fought due to the fact that it incorporates higher degrees of personal commitment and risk, in terms of both personal and organizational variables. For example, “what is best for the company,” such as the next project, is often intertwined with “what is best for me,” such as the next promotion. Critical to managing this type of conflict is the recognition that the subjective elements involved are as legitimate as the objective elements.
4. *Values.* Conflict over values is almost totally subjective in nature and is, therefore, the most volatile type. It pertains to *what is right or wrong*. Mismanaged conflicts over values can result in divorces and even wars. The basic strategy in dealing with such a conflict is to avoid it if at all possible. If it is unavoidable, the best tactic is to objectify the issue as much as possible, dealing with behaviors or events that arise from the value rather than dealing with the value itself. For example, a heated argument over the morality of capital punishment has a high probability of ending in nothing but rage, self-righteousness, and moral indignation. However, a discussion of capital punishment in terms of its deterrent effects and legal ramifications has a somewhat better chance of resulting in agreement and resolution.

## STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING CONFLICT

The three basic strategies that are used to manage conflict are described in the following paragraphs. These strategies concern the way in which the conflict is resolved rather than the way in which it is conducted.

1. *Competition* is known as the “win/lose” approach to conflict; people compete to see who wins, and the winner takes all. The most obvious example of the competitive approach to conflict is an athletic event.

2. *Compromise* is a “lose/lose” approach. All parties agree to sacrifice equal portions of what they want. Subsequently, another mutual cut may be established and another until everyone settles for very little of what he or she originally wanted. An illustration of the result of conflict that is dealt with through compromise is the comparison between the wording of a bill in the House of Representatives prior to its first committee hearing and the final wording when that bill is enacted into law.
3. *Collaboration* is called the “win/win” approach. When this strategy is employed, people agree ahead of time to work with their conflict until they come up with a unique solution that provides each of them with all or almost all of what he or she wants.

There is little question that the collaborative approach to conflict, although it is the most costly in terms of time and energy, has the highest probability of producing the most creative and highest yielding results. However, as mentioned previously, there are times when a collaborative approach is not available and the issues are too important and vital to the individuals involved even to consider compromise. Some conditions that tend to preclude collaboration are harsh time deadlines, poor interpersonal relationships between or among the conflicting parties, severely limited resources, or differing values. Under these circumstances, competition is the only means available for managing the conflict.

Frequently a conflict is first approached competitively due to lack of interest in or unawareness of a collaborative alternative; then, after those involved have competed for a while, they discover a collaborative solution. If the fighting is creative and effective, there is a higher probability that this will occur, given the potential availability of a collaborative solution at the outset.

## **CREATIVE FIGHTING**

It is often the case that people in conflict are unwilling to engage one another powerfully simply because they do not possess the basic skills required for effective fighting. Paradoxically, once an individual has acquired these skills and is comfortable with them, it is much less likely that he or she will have to use them. The newly acquired knowledge and abilities produce a clear confidence that is observable to others, thereby making the individual less subject to unilateral attacks. On the other hand, if a fight becomes unavoidable, he or she can handle it.

Anger is as appropriate and productive a reaction to events as is any other human response. It is as unavoidably reflexive a response to being frustrated as laughter is to being amused. The issue involved is not whether it is appropriate to feel anger when frustrated, but rather how to deal with anger appropriately when it occurs. People must be made aware that there are techniques of fighting that can be learned and used skillfully. Also, they must be given the opportunity to practice these techniques in a neutral, low-risk setting, such as a training workshop. When all parties involved in a fight have acknowledged the legitimacy of conflict, established the norms for fighting, and are confident in their own abilities and strength, they are likely to approach one another with respect. Under such circumstances, there is little threat to ongoing relationships; in fact, there is a great potential for solidifying and enhancing these relationships.

The following paragraphs describe ten guidelines for the process of preparing people to fight creatively.

### ***Establish the Legitimacy of Fighting***

Fighting must be seen as a natural and sometimes appropriate thing to do. Occasionally it is even fun, as long as all parties agree to do it. Above all, fighting must not be viewed as an activity to be avoided at all costs. Whenever two or more people are working or living together, conflicts of interest arise. Sometimes these conflicts can be resolved through peaceful negotiation or willing compliance; sometimes they cannot. When the latter condition exists, fighting is the ultimate and appropriate response, unless one or more of the parties disempower themselves and give in because of fear of confrontation.

As stated previously, when fighting is approached creatively, it has several positive aspects that should be recognized: It is energizing; it honors all of its participants; it frequently produces the best solution under the circumstances; it strengthens, rather than weakens, relationships; and the arena in which it occurs becomes a safer, more “human” place in which to live and work. When fighting is not engaged in creatively, personal relationships deteriorate and become characterized by spite, sniping, silent vows of vengeance, sulking, self-pity, and complaints about being misunderstood.

### ***Deal with One Issue at a Time***

In an ongoing relationship, unfinished business frequently coexists with the current source of contention. The temptation when fighting is to bring up unresolved arguments from the past and catch an opponent off guard. When

this ploy is successful, the person who initiated it achieves the upper hand and places the opponent on the defensive; the parties involved start a different fight that bears no relevance to the present conflict, and both (or all) of them become vulnerable to attack in this fashion.

Therefore, it is important for those in conflict to maintain a focus on the point of contention. When one person confronts another with an unrelated issue, the individual who is attacked should not respond except to say “That’s not what we’re dealing with at the moment.” Subsequently, the parties may agree to discuss the secondary issue at some time in the future.

Occasionally, during the course of a fight, it becomes obvious that a secondary issue from the past is actually blocking the resolution of the issue at hand. For example, one person might say to another, “The last time you asked me for support and I helped you, you refused to acknowledge my contribution in the final report.” When such a situation arises, the current issue should be set aside until closure of the unfinished issue is achieved, at which point the original fight can be continued with greater energy and a higher probability of a successful outcome. The important point is that only one issue should be addressed at a time.

### ***Choose the Arena Carefully***

Just because one person is angry with another and wants to fight does not automatically mean that the second party is ready or willing to oblige. Too often, one of the parties is dragged into “the combat zone” when totally unprepared or uninterested, and this situation frequently creates further unnecessary defensiveness, resentment, and personal animosity. To prevent such a development, all parties involved must understand and agree that if one person does not want to fight at a particular moment, no fight takes place at that time. There are three basic responses to consider when a fight is impending.

1. *Engage.* If the timing is right and the point is legitimate, the sooner it is brought into the open and dealt with creatively, the better. The usual outcome of avoiding a fight is that the longer it stays internalized, the higher the probability that it will fester and become more interpersonally volatile.
2. *Accede.* If an issue is important to one party but not to another, the person who feels it to be unimportant may accede to the point. Before engaging in a fight, everyone involved should determine whether the issue

is worth his or her time and effort. It makes little sense to pursue a goal that is of no personal consequence. One benefit of this response is that it transforms an opponent into an ally. Another positive aspect is that the individual who consciously chooses to accede to another's wishes experiences no loss of power.

3. *Postpone.* If a person is prematurely engaged in a conflict, he or she may choose to acknowledge the issue and then put it aside. This approach involves listening to what the other person says, acknowledging an understanding of the point being made and its importance, and setting a time for assembling everyone involved and dealing with the issue. This response has a tendency not only to defuse the issue for the individual who brought it up, but also to prevent its escalation. In addition, postponing a fight allows time to consider the issue fully and to develop appropriate tactics.

The individual who initiates a confrontation and is met with postponement as a response must remember that an opponent should never be forced to fight before he or she is ready. Agreeing to the postponement can be advantageous in that a fully prepared opponent is less likely to overreact or to wage unwarranted counterattacks than is an opponent who is caught off guard.

### ***Avoid Reacting to Unintentional Remarks***

Frequently, in the heat of battle, things are said that are regretted an instant later. This is particularly true if the issue at hand is of deep, personal significance to one or both of the parties; if ego involvement is high; or if the relationship is an important one. A related consideration is the fact that often people do not know precisely what they feel or think until they hear themselves verbalizing these feelings or thoughts.

An important aspect of creative fighting is to establish the norm that when unexpected or unintentional comments are made, none of the parties involved will respond by escalating the fight into a more volatile stage that no one wants. Instead, the preferred tactic should be to stop the conversation when a questionable comment is made and determine whether the comment accurately conveys what the speaker meant. If the speaker disavows the comment, everyone—including the speaker—should ignore it; if he or she confirms it, a deeper point of contention may have arisen. In the latter case, those involved in the fight must then decide which issue to focus on.

### ***Avoid Resolutions That Come Too Soon or Too Easily***

Newly married couples are often told, “Never let the sun set on an argument.” However, this advice may be too simplistic. When a fight is resolved too quickly or a simple but incomplete resolution is agreed to, there are several negative side effects that are usually more painful and damaging in the long run than the original fight itself.

For example, if a fight ends prematurely, its unfinished elements do not go away; they are temporarily repressed and will almost certainly manifest themselves later. Also, the easiest solution is not always the best one in that it tends to treat symptoms and thereby obscure the real problem. Still another negative effect is that if the solution is complete for one party but not for another, the person who feels unsatisfied is not emotionally free to enter into future fights with total enthusiasm. This last effect, although very subtle, can seriously damage the relationship(s) involved.

Each fight has its own, unique level of intensity. Some fights involve simple disagreements and are resolvable “by sundown,” whereas those that involve intense feelings, deep-seated values, or complex issues require much more time to be dealt with effectively. With each fight, it is essential that the parties recognize and remain aware of the time element.

There are ways to approach the handling of time. The first is to recognize clearly and specifically the complexity and importance of the issue and then to agree to devote as much time as required to achieve a resolution. The second approach, known as “bracketing,” is also quite useful, particularly when complex, interdependent relationships are involved and the issue at hand is complicated. Many times, reality dictates that even though a fight is taking place, everyday life must go on. When this is the case, it is appropriate to fight for the length of time available; “bracket” the fight by setting it aside completely, but on a temporary basis; devote energies to other concerns as necessary; and resume the fight when possible. In many instances, this approach allows adversaries to work together well and energetically in areas that are not affected by the fight; the harmonious functioning is possible because the point of contention, although “on hold,” is still actively being honored by the adversaries.

### ***Avoid Name Calling***

The function of creative fighting is to manage conflict in such a way that the following outcomes are ensured.

- An effective resolution is found;
- Everyone involved maintains a clear sense of personal dignity throughout; and
- The relationship(s) is (are) in no way damaged.

Nothing blocks these outcomes more effectively than resorting to name calling.

Creative fighting is unlike many other approaches to conflict in which the participants devote their efforts to injuring their opponents as much as possible; instead, when fighting creatively, each participant strives to achieve a specific objective. In most cases these individual objectives are mutually exclusive so that a clear choice must be made as to which will constitute the final outcome. When accomplishing a specific objective is a person's reason for fighting, it is very much in that individual's best interest not to dehumanize the opponent(s).

Name calling usually occurs when logical arguments fail or when one or more of the parties have become frustrated beyond tolerance. In order to avoid name calling, the safest and most productive stance to maintain throughout the fight is to speak strictly for oneself. When everyone invariably speaks only in terms of what he or she wants, feels, or thinks, there is little risk that anyone will be personally offended; consequently, there is little risk that the fight will escalate to a more volatile and unmanageable level.

### ***Avoid Cornering an Opponent***

Occasionally, being "right" and devastating one's opponent may be more personally satisfying than achieving the best resolution possible. However, this approach produces only momentary satisfaction and can be very costly. The practice of cornering and devastating an opponent may preclude a solid resolution. Also, the party who is the object of such an attack may eventually retaliate in kind.

One important aspect of conflict is that, regardless of the point of contention, the longer the fight goes on or the greater the intensity, the higher the ego involvement and the greater the need to save face. Everyone involved should keep this in mind and make it as easy as possible to accommodate one another's wishes. Above all, opponents must be allowed to save face. For example, if it is obvious to everyone that an opponent cannot win a particular argument, it is best to let that opponent retire gracefully. The adversary who allows such a retreat not only achieves what he or she wants, but also accords the opponent the respect that is deserved. Thus, this stance

usually results in some degree of appreciation on the part of the vanquished opponent, particularly when all parties realize that pain and humiliation could have been inflicted had the party with the upper hand chosen to do so.

### ***Agree to Disagree***

Creative fighting demands the generation of alternatives and a conscious choice of one of these alternatives. Although a mutually acceptable resolution is always the desired outcome, sometimes the reality is that such a resolution is not available. In a fight in which the point of contention is basically impersonal, such as an argument over a fact or a method, a mutually acceptable resolution is almost always available. However, in a fight that is waged over a deeper, more personal issue, such as an objective or a value, mutuality is much more difficult and sometimes impossible to achieve. In the latter case, each viewpoint is so innately a part of the individual who holds it that any attempt to minimize its validity will be taken as an attack on the individual personally. Thus, it is almost impossible for someone involved in such a fight to concede a point without feeling personally diminished in the process.

As mentioned previously, the best and most obvious choice in dealing with arguments of a personal nature is to avoid them completely, if at all possible. Sometimes, however, a discussion about one point reveals a more intense point that is really what is at issue. As soon as it becomes evident that the parties involved are diametrically opposed on a deeply personal issue, there is little or no chance that anything can be said to alter the situation. In fact, the longer the confrontation continues, the higher the probability that each party will become more firmly entrenched in his or her position. Thus, the parties should simply agree to disagree and drop the subject for the moment. Once everyone agrees that it is perfectly acceptable to see things differently and that no attempts at conversion will be made, the subject is much safer to discuss in the future should it arise again. In the meantime, all parties can live or work together productively, because the point of difference can be side-stepped.

It is highly improbable that people involved in a long-term work or personal relationship will share all core values. Not to recognize this fact invites unnecessary squabbling. Although there seems to be constant pressure in interdependent relationships to locate common ground, it may be just as important to isolate irreconcilable differences and acknowledge them as being equally natural and “human.”

In some rare instances in which a relationship between two people is extremely interdependent and long term, the parties may hold such polar-

ized values that when one pursues his or her value, the pursuance automatically creates pain or severe problems for the other. Some examples of this type of polarization are the need for autonomy versus the need for participation, the need for isolation versus the need for intimacy, and concern with production versus concern for people. When the situation is so extreme that any concession on the part of either person will result in a loss of self-respect, the following procedure should be considered.

1. *Accept the polarity.* The two parties involved must establish the norm that both have a right to their viewpoints, but that neither is required to like the opposite viewpoint.
2. *Establish the importance of the relationship.* The parties should determine all of the positive, productive aspects of the relationship. It is preferable that they complete this task together rather than separately. They must review the basic values that they hold in common as well as their past successes in the relationship. During this process, enjoyable times and instances of mutual support should be recalled, and the potential for similar occurrences in the future should be accepted. In addition, the interdependent nature of the relationship should be acknowledged and defined.

It is important to note, however, that this step might reveal the possibility that the two parties do not have a solid relationship and that permanent disengagement may be the most realistic, mutually beneficial resolution.

3. *Stay with the fight to the end.* If the parties determine that the relationship is important and worth saving, they must agree to endure the fight. However, neither should acquiesce only to please the other person or to reduce the other's pain; both should be appreciative of attempts to please, but they should not accept concessions that are made strictly for this purpose. If they have evaluated their relationship correctly, they will find ways to continue to work together productively, even though they are both experiencing some degree of pain. Both parties must remember that although they seriously disagree on a specific issue, they do not disagree on all others.

Working or living with someone under these conditions represents an incredibly heavy burden for both parties. Sooner or later, only because of exhaustion, it is probable that they will mutually agree to "let go" of the troublesome issue. More to the point, as the exhaustion increases, so does the importance of other issues, and the originally polarized viewpoints tend to become modified. When this happens, it may be possible to achieve a resolution.

### ***Focus on What Is Wanted Rather Than Why It Is Wanted***

Almost all fights, creative or otherwise, arise from the fact that the participants want different things. Also, in many cases compliance from the opponent(s) is necessary for the attainment of each person's objective. Thus, it is essential to establish clearly what each party wants and how these objectives differ. On the other hand, spending time and energy exploring why each party wants what he or she wants is, at best, a total waste of time and, at worst, an invitation to a psychological melee.

The point to remember is that people have a right to want what they want and to want all of it. This point has tremendous impact on creative fighting. When participants answer opponents' inquiries as to why they want specific objectives, they become "defendants" and the opponents become "judges" who can rule on the worthiness of the reasons supplied. These reasons, once verbalized, are usually anything but convincing. The reality is that very few people know exactly why they want what they want. In fact, most are not very concerned with their own motivation in this regard; for them, it is simply enough that they want.

In addition, the answer to the first "why?" usually leads to another "why?" and still another, and each time the defendant is forced to stray farther from the original objective in order to provide an answer. Eventually, the issue that generated the fight becomes obscured. The roles may even be reversed; the defendant may become the judge and counter with questions of his or her own. Thus, all parties are compelled to defend themselves, and as a result the fight may escalate.

Therefore, the best strategy is to avoid asking and answering queries about motivation. Instead, each person should concentrate on accomplishing his or her specific goal.

### ***Maintain a Sense of Humor***

Fighting is most often viewed as a grim and serious business. In many cases, of course, it is quite serious and certainly deserves to be respected. However, even when the subject of the fight is important and tempers are aroused, it is important that the participants not lose their perspectives. The best way to retain one's perspective during a fight is to exercise a sense of humor. For example, a married couple may be arguing vehemently about finances when suddenly the husband exclaims, "Not only *that*, but you never really liked my mother!" At such moments, it is perfectly legitimate to recognize the humor of the situation and respond accordingly. In fact, the parties involved may

be unable to control their laughter and subsequently may find that the fight has disintegrated. Although the tendency when engaged in a fight is to become more “righteous” as the confrontation progresses, the participants would do well to remember that it is the fight that should be taken seriously—not themselves.

## SUMMARY

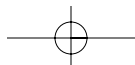
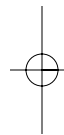
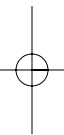
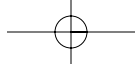
Training people to deal with conflict in an effective manner requires much of a facilitator. Participants must be taught that conflict is a natural part of life and that dealing with it creatively can actually enhance rather than destroy relationships.

Part of the facilitator’s responsibility is to help the participants to see that there are four different sources of conflict—fact, method, objectives, and values—and that each source represents a different level of volatility. In addition, the three basic strategies for handling conflict—competition, compromise, and collaboration—should be presented and explained, and the facilitator should take care not to convey an exclusive prejudice in favor of collaboration.

When all participants are aware of the basic aspects of conflict, they should be allowed to practice fighting creatively in a relatively nonthreatening environment, such as a workshop. As they practice, the facilitator should help them to adhere to the ten guidelines that are detailed in this paper.

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# 2

## Conflict-Resolution Strategies

*Joan A. Stepsis*

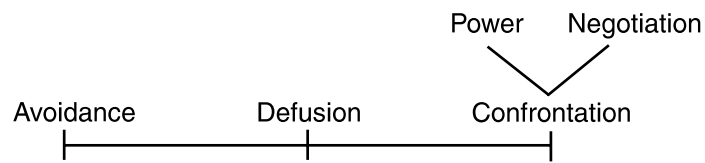
Conflict is a daily reality for everyone. Whether at home or at work, an individual's needs and values constantly and invariably come into opposition with those of other people. Some conflicts are relatively minor, easy to handle, or capable of being overlooked. Others of greater magnitude, however, require a strategy for successful resolution if they are not to create constant tension or lasting enmity in home or business.

The ability to resolve conflict successfully is probably one of the most important social skills that an individual can possess. Yet there are few formal opportunities in our society to learn it. Like any other human skill, conflict resolution can be taught; like other skills, it consists of a number of important subskills, each separate and yet interdependent. These skills need to be assimilated at both the cognitive and the behavioral levels (i.e., Do I understand how conflict can be resolved? Can I resolve specific conflicts?).

### RESPONSES TO CONFLICT SITUATIONS

Children develop their own personal strategies for dealing with conflict. Even if these preferred approaches do not resolve conflicts successfully, they continue to be used because of a lack of awareness of alternatives.

Conflict-resolution strategies may be classified into three categories—avoidance, diffusion, and confrontation. The accompanying figure illustrates that avoidance is at one extreme and confrontation is at the other.



A Continuum of Responses to Conflict Situations

### **Avoidance**

Some people attempt to avoid conflict situations altogether or to avoid certain types of conflict. These people tend to repress emotional reactions, look the other way, or leave the situation entirely (for example, quit a job, leave school, get divorced). Either they cannot face up to such situations effectively, or they do not have the skills to negotiate them effectively.

Although avoidance strategies do have survival value in those instances where escape is possible, they usually do not provide the individual with a high level of satisfaction. They tend to leave doubts and fears about meeting the same type of situation in the future, and about such valued traits as courage or persistence.

### **Defusion**

This tactic is essentially a delaying action. Defusion strategies try to cool off the situation, at least temporarily, or to keep the issues so unclear that attempts at confrontation are improbable. Resolving minor points while avoiding or delaying discussion of the major problem, postponing a confrontation until a more auspicious time, and avoiding clarification of the salient issues underlying the conflict are examples of defusion. Again, as with avoidance strategies, such tactics work when delay is possible, but they typically result in feelings of dissatisfaction, anxiety about the future, and concerns about oneself.

### **Confrontation**

The third major strategy involves an actual confrontation of conflicting issues or persons. Confrontation can further be subdivided into *power* strategies and *negotiation* strategies. Power strategies include the use of physical force (a punch in the nose, war); bribery (money, favors); and punishment (withholding love, money). Such tactics are often very effective from the point of view of the “successful” party in the conflict: that person wins, the other person loses. Unfortunately, however, for the loser the real conflict may have

only just begun. Hostility, anxiety, and actual physical damage are usual byproducts of these win/lose power tactics.

With negotiation strategies, unlike power confrontations, both sides can win. The aim of negotiation is to resolve the conflict with a compromise or a solution that is mutually satisfying to all parties involved in the conflict. Negotiation, then, seems to provide the most positive and the least negative byproducts of all conflict-resolution strategies.

## NEGOTIATION SKILLS

Successful negotiation, however, requires a set of skills that must be learned and practiced. These skills include (1) the ability to determine the nature of the conflict, (2) effectiveness in initiating confrontations, (3) the ability to hear the other's point of view, and (4) the utilization of problem-solving processes to bring about a consensus decision.

### *Diagnosis*

*Diagnosing the nature of a conflict* is the starting point in any attempt at resolution through negotiation. The most important issue which must be decided is whether the conflict is an ideological (value) conflict or a "real" (tangible) conflict—or a combination of both. Value conflicts are exceedingly difficult to negotiate. If, for example, I believe that women should be treated as equals in every phase of public and private life, and you believe they should be protected or prohibited in certain areas, it would be very difficult for us to come to a position that would satisfy us both.

A difference of values, however, is really significant only when our opposing views affect us in some real or tangible way. If your stand on women's place in society results in my being denied a job that I want and am qualified to perform, then we have a negotiable conflict. Neither of us needs to change his values for us to come to a mutually acceptable resolution of the "real" problem. For example, I may get the job, but in return agree to accept a lower salary or a different title or not to insist on using the all-male executive dining room. If each of us stands on his principles—maintaining our value conflict—we probably will make little headway. But if, instead, we concentrate on the tangible effects in the conflict, we may be able to devise a realistic solution.

The Israeli-Arab conflict provides a good example of this point. In order to settle the tangible element in the conflict—who gets how much land—ideological differences do not need to be resolved. It is land usage that is the area of the conflict amenable to a negotiated settlement.

It is important to determine whether a conflict is a real or a value conflict. If it is a conflict in values resulting in nontangible effects on either party, then it is best tolerated. If, however, a tangible effect exists, that element of the conflict should be resolved.

### ***Initiation***

A second skill necessary to conflict resolution is effectiveness in initiating a confrontation. It is important not to begin by attacking or demeaning the opposite party. A defensive reaction in one or both parties usually blocks a quick resolution of differences. The most effective way to confront the other party is for the individual to state the tangible effects the conflict has on him or her. For example: “I have a problem. Due to your stand on hiring women as executives, I am unable to apply for the supervisory position that I feel I am qualified to handle.” This approach is more effective than saying, “You male chauvinist pig—you’re discriminating against me!” In other words, confrontation is not synonymous with verbal attack.

### ***Listening***

After the confrontation has been initiated, the confronter must be capable of hearing the other’s point of view. If the initial statement made by the other person is not what the confronter was hoping to hear, defensive rebuttals, a “hard-line” approach, or explanations often follow. Argument-provoking replies should be avoided. The confronter should not attempt to defend himself or herself, explain his or her position, or make demands or threats. Instead, the confronter must be able to engage in the skill termed reflective or active listening. He or she should listen and reflect and paraphrase or clarify the other person’s stand. When the confronter has interpreted the opposition’s position to the satisfaction of the other person, he or she should again present his or her own point of view, being careful to avoid value statements and to concentrate on tangible outcomes. Usually, when the confronter listens to the other person, that person lowers his or her defenses and is, in turn, more ready to hear another point of view. Of course, if both people are skilled in active listening, the chances of successful negotiation are much enhanced.

## **Problem Solving**

The final skill necessary to successful negotiation is the use of the problem-solving process to negotiate a consensus decision. The steps in this process are simply stated and easy to apply:

1. *Clarifying the problem.* What is the tangible issue? Where does each party stand on the issue?
2. *Generating and evaluating a number of possible solutions.* Often these two aspects should be done separately. First, all possible solutions should be raised in a brainstorming session. Then each proposed solution should be evaluated.
3. *Deciding together (not voting) on the best solution.* The one solution most acceptable to all parties should be chosen.
4. *Planning the implementation of the solution.* How will the solution be carried out? When?
5. *Finally, planning for an evaluation of the solution after a specified period of time.* This last step is essential. The first solution chosen is not always the best or most workable. If the first solution has flaws, the problem-solving process should be begun again at Step 1.

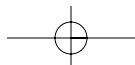
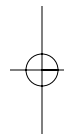
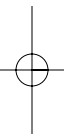
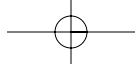
Since negotiation is the most effective of all conflict-resolution strategies, the skills necessary to achieve meaningful negotiation are extremely important in facing inevitable conflicts.

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## 3

## Win/Lose Situations

*Gerry E. Wiley*

Win/lose situations pervade our culture. In the law courts we use the adversary system. Political parties strive to win elections and to win points in legislatures. Debates are common at schools, universities and in the media. The put-down is generally regarded as wit. Competing with and defeating an opponent is the most widely publicized aspect of a good deal of our sports and recreation.

The language of business, politics, and even education is dotted with win/lose terms. One “wins” a promotion, “beats” the competition, buys a lubricant to obtain “the racer’s edge” for his auto. Students strive to “top the class” or “outsmart” the teacher. Although we do recognize cooperative effort and collaboration, it seems that we tend to emphasize “healthy” competition.

In an environment that stresses winning, it is no wonder that competitive behavior persists where it is not appropriate. Imagine a typical committee meeting to decide on a suitable program for a club. Members interrupt one another to introduce their own ideas. Proposals are made that other members do not even acknowledge. Partnerships and power blocs are formed to support one program against proponents of another. When members of such a committee are enabled to analyze the operation of the group, they commonly agree that they were not listening to one another because they were thinking of ways to state a case or to counter the proposal of someone else. They were interrupting to get a point out before the speaker clinched the sale of his idea. In these ways they were acting as competing individuals rather than as a collaborating group. They had started out to reach the best decision regarding a program, but had slipped into a win/lose contest. Very often the original purpose is completely overshadowed by the struggle to win. This failing of committees is common.

### ***Some Potential Win/Lose Situations***

Group meetings are not the only sphere in which a win/lose situation can arise. Visualize a consultant discussing a client's problem. For any of a number of reasons, the client may perceive the consultant's helpful suggestions not as they were intended but as criticism of the client. As a result the client might also feel in competition with the consultant. The contest would revolve around whose methods were more effective or who could do the job better. Instead of listening to the recommendations, the client would be trying to shoot them down, while the consultant would be concentrating on defending his or her expertise. When a consultant and client are locked in a win/lose match, the chances are very small that the consultant's advice will be used.

Win/lose contests can also develop in an organization. Individuals may strive for a dominant position. Battles can rage discreetly (and not so discreetly) between departments. For example, a planning department might develop a new assembly procedure. When it is introduced to the assembly department, the workers might resent it and lock horns with planners. It is easy to interpret the situation in win/lose terms. The planners are showing that they know more and can design a procedure better than the men on the job. If the new procedure works well, the planners "win." On the other hand, if the innovation does not improve production, the planners "lose," and, in a sense, the assemblers "win" because their normal operation proved superior. Seen in this light, it should be expected that the assemblers will not be committed to giving the innovation a fair trial. In extreme cases, they may even sabotage it "to show those theoretical snobs in Planning." In fact all efforts to plan for others are plagued by win/lose traps. In some companies and institutions internal win/lose rivalries absorb more effort than the main production or service.

## **POTENTIAL RESULTS OF WIN/LOSE**

Although there are obviously some instances where a win/lose approach can be a positive factor, it is generally destructive. Win/lose is too often poisonous to interpersonal relations and organizational effectiveness. Suppose a husband loses an argument with his wife, and the couple goes dancing instead of to a horse race. He can retaliate by being sullen or obnoxious. He has turned a win/lose situation into an ordeal where both partners are miserable. Often win/lose "victories" become losses for both parties, producing a "lose/lose" result.

Some of the negative results of win/lose have been shown in the examples already given. The following list identifies fourteen problems that may arise from win/lose confrontations.

1. Divert time and energy from the main issues.
2. Delay decisions.
3. Create deadlocks.
4. Drive unaggressive committee members to the sidelines.
5. Interfere with listening.
6. Obstruct exploration of more alternatives.
7. Decrease or destroy sensitivity.
8. Cause members to drop out or resign from committees.
9. Arouse anger that disrupts a meeting.
10. Interfere with empathy.
11. Leave losers resentful.
12. Incline underdogs to sabotage.
13. Provoke personal abuse.
14. Cause defensiveness.

## **FROM WIN/LOSE TO WIN/WIN**

Since win/lose events will undoubtedly be experienced often in the course of life, it is important to know how to cope with them. If the predominant tendency of win/lose contests is to produce lose/lose outcomes, it becomes a matter of redirecting these toward “win/win” results. In a “win/win” result everyone comes out on top.

It is extremely difficult for one person alone to reorient a win/lose. You are likely to be treated as a third party in the argument, or you may have both adversaries turn on you. Although it would be ideal to have all parties committed to avoiding a win/lose result, the efforts of a significant segment of a group can usually be effective. Even in a one-to-one conflict, one of the parties can often turn off the contest. It takes two to fight. The more people who recognize the dangers in a win/lose struggle and want to adjust the situation, the more likely is a successful outcome.

### ***Some Means of Reorienting to Win/Win***

1. Have clear goals, understood and agreed upon. Use the goals to test whether issues are relevant or not.
2. Be on the lookout for win/lose. It can develop subtly. If you feel under attack, or feel yourself lining up support, you are likely in a win/lose contest.
3. Listen empathetically to others. Stop yourself from working on counter arguments while another person is speaking. Take the risk of being persuaded. Try the other person's reasoning on for size.
4. Avoid absolute statements that leave no room for modification. "I think this is the way . . ." is better than "This is THE ONLY way . . ."
5. If you are planning for others, provide some means for their involvement. The doers should feel that they can have influence on decisions that affect them.
6. Try to make decisions by consensus rather than by victory of the majority.
7. Test to see that trade-offs and compromises are truly accepted by all.
8. Draw a continuum line and have members place themselves on it regarding the issue. It often occurs that the different "sides" are not far apart.
9. Be alert to selling or winning strategies in others and avoid using them yourself. "Any intelligent person can see the advantages . . ." would be a danger signal.

This list is not exhaustive, but may provide a beginning toward more productive relationships. The key idea in adjusting a win/lose situation is to strive for what is best for all rather than trying to *get your way*.

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## 4

# A Taxonomy of Intergroup Conflict-Resolution Strategies

*Daniel C. Feldman*

“Intergroup conflict” refers to overt expressions of hostility between groups or their intentional interference with each other’s activities. The research on intergroup conflict generally has been in five distinct areas: (1) identifying the causes of intergroup conflict (for example, Lawrence & Lorsch, 1969; Merton, 1940); (2) illustrating the dynamics of intergroup conflict (for example, Blake & Mouton, 1961a; Sherif & Sherif, 1953); (3) analyzing strategies used by groups to gain power (for example, Deutsch, 1949; Pfeffer, 1977); (4) identifying the consequences of intergroup conflict (for example, Dutton & Walton, 1965; Hammond & Goldman, 1961); and (5) examining intergroup conflict-resolution strategies (for example, Pruitt, 1971; Sherif, 1958).

The literature in this last area, intergroup conflict-resolution strategies, consists mainly of field and laboratory experimental studies. Typically, a study examines one conflict-resolution strategy in a pre- and postdesign, analyzing the effectiveness of the strategy in reducing intergroup conflict (affect, perceptions, and/or behavior). Rarely are different strategies compared, either empirically or conceptually. This article presents a taxonomy of intergroup conflict-resolution strategies that frequently are used in organizations and discusses the circumstances in which each strategy is most effective.

The primary dimension along which intergroup conflict-resolution strategies vary is how openly they address the conflict. The chief characteristic of *conflict-avoidance* strategies is that they attempt to keep the conflict from coming into the open. The goal of *conflict-defusion* strategies is to keep the conflict in abeyance and to “cool” the emotions of the parties involved. *Conflict-containment* strategies allow some conflict to surface, but tightly control which issues are discussed and the manner in which they are discussed. *Conflict-confrontation* strategies are designed to uncover all of the issues of the conflict and to try to find a mutually satisfactory solution.

## CONFLICT-AVOIDANCE STRATEGIES

### ***Ignoring the Conflict***

This strategy is represented by the absence of action. Managers, for example, often avoid dealing with the dysfunctional aspects of conflict. Unfortunately, when they avoid searching for the causes of the conflict, the situation usually continues or becomes worse over time. However, although ignoring the conflict generally is ineffective for resolving important policy issues, there are some circumstances in which it is at least a reasonable way of dealing with problems. One such circumstance is when the conflict issue is trivial. For example, there may be differences of opinion about the wisdom of allowing employees time to attend a one-time training program. This is such a short-run, temporary issue that it does not warrant much attention.

Another circumstance in which ignoring the conflict is a reasonable strategy is when the issue seems to be symptomatic of other, more basic conflicts. For example, two groups may experience conflict over the amount and quality of office space. Such conflicts often reflect more important issues about relative power and status. Resolving the office-space problem would not address the key issues, and attention could be directed more fruitfully to the more basic concerns (Thomas, 1977).

### ***Imposing a Solution***

This strategy consists of forcing the conflicting parties to accept a solution devised by a higher-level manager. Imposing a solution does not allow much conflict to surface, nor does it leave room for the participants to air their grievances, so it also generally is an ineffective conflict-resolution strategy. Any peace that it does achieve is likely to be short-lived. Because the underlying issues are not addressed, the conflict reappears in other guises and in other situations.

Forcing a solution can, however, be appropriate when quick, decisive action is needed. For instance, when there is conflict over investment decisions, and delays can be very costly, forcing a solution may be the best strategy available to top management. Likewise, it may be necessary when unpopular decisions must be made and there is very little chance that the parties involved could ever reach agreement (Thomas, 1977). An example of this is when a university must cut back on the funding of academic pro-

grams. It is unreasonable to expect that any department would agree to cut its staff and students for the greater good; yet some hard, unpleasant decisions ultimately must be made.

## **CONFLICT-DEFUSION STRATEGIES**

### ***Smoothing***

One way that a manager can deal with conflict is to try to “smooth it over” by playing down its extent or importance. The manager might try to persuade the groups that they are not so far apart in their viewpoints as they think they are, point out the similarities in their positions, try to appease group members whose feelings have been hurt, or downplay the importance of the issue. By smoothing the conflict, managers hope to decrease its intensity and avoid escalation or open hostility. Like forcing a solution, smoothing generally is ineffective because it does not address the key points of conflict.

However, smoothing sometimes can serve as a stop-gap measure to let people cool down and regain perspective. In the heat of battle, people may make statements that are likely to escalate the conflict; and smoothing often can bring the disagreement back to a manageable level. Smoothing also may be appropriate when the conflict concerns nonwork-related issues. For instance, as Alderfer (1977) points out, intergroup conflict frequently occurs between older and younger employees because of their different political beliefs and moral values. Smoothing can help to defuse the tension so that the conflict does not spill over into central work issues.

### ***Appealing to Superordinate Goals***

Managers can defuse conflict by focusing attention on the higher goals that the groups share or the long-range aims that they have in common. This approach tends to make the current problem seem insignificant beside the more important mutual goals (Sherif, 1958).

Finding superordinate goals that are important to both groups is not easy. Achieving these goals requires cooperation between the groups, so the rewards for achieving the goals must be significant. The most successful and most frequently used superordinate goal is organizational survival: If the subunits do not cooperate sufficiently, the continued existence of the larger organization itself will be severely jeopardized.

## CONFLICT-CONTAINMENT STRATEGIES

### *Using Representatives*

One of the strategies that managers use to contain conflict is the use of representatives. In order to decide an issue, they meet with representatives of the opposing groups rather than dealing with the groups in their entirety. The rationale is that the representatives know the problems and can argue the groups' points of view accurately and forcefully (Blake & Mouton, 1961b).

Although this seems to be a logical way of proceeding, the research on the use of representatives as a means of solving intergroup conflict is fairly negative. Representatives are not entirely free to engage in compromise; rather, they must act out of loyalty and are motivated to win (or at least to avoid defeat) even though a solution to the intergroup problem may be sacrificed in the process. A representative who "gives in" is likely to face suspicion or rejection from group members; consequently, if a representative cannot win, he or she will try to deadlock a solution or at least forestall defeat. In one study (Blake & Mouton, 1961b), only two of sixty-two representatives capitulated to the opposition; all other situations with representatives ended in deadlock.

Although individual representatives have difficulty in negotiating an agreement because of their fear of rejection by their groups, two situational factors can increase the effectiveness of this strategy. First, the use of *groups* of representatives from each side can help to overcome individual anxiety about group rejection. The members of each team can provide mutual support when they need to make concessions in order to achieve agreement. Second, groups of negotiators may receive broader support and trust from their respective sides, as each representative may represent a different constituency or bring a different expertise to the negotiations. Most labor negotiations involve several representatives of both management and labor.

Resolving conflict through representatives is more effective before positions become fixed or are made public. After positions become fixed, representatives become even more intransigent; and "giving in" is more likely to be attributed to the personal failure of the representatives than to situational factors.

### *Structuring the Interaction Between the Groups*

Some managers assume that one way to decrease conflict is to increase the *amount* of contact between the groups (if the groups interacted more, they would like each other better and fight less). In reality, increased interaction

can merely add fuel to the fire; the two groups spend their time looking for additional reasons to reinforce their negative stereotypes of each other.

However, *structuring* the interaction between the groups can be effective in resolving conflict. Providing constraints on how many issues are discussed and the manner in which they are discussed can facilitate conflict resolution. There are many ways to structure the interaction between groups to deal with conflict; some of the most effective strategies include the following:

- Decreasing the amount of direct interaction between the groups in the early stages of conflict resolution;
- Decreasing the amount of time between problem-solving meetings;
- Decreasing the formality of the presentation of issues;
- Limiting the recitation of historic events and precedents and focusing instead on current issues and goals; and
- Using third-party mediators.

All of these strategies allow some conflict to surface and be addressed, but prevent it from getting out of hand and hardening the groups' positions. Decreasing the amount of direct interaction between the groups early in the conflict helps to prevent the conflict from escalating. Decreasing the amount of time between problem-solving meetings helps to prevent backsliding from tentative agreements. Decreasing the formality of the presentation of issues helps to induce a problem-solving, rather than a win-lose, orientation to the conflict. Limiting how far back historically and how widely precedents can be cited helps to keep the focus on finding a solution to the current conflict. Finally, a mediator can act as a go-between who transmits offers and messages, helps the groups to clarify their positions, presents each group's position more clearly to the other, and suggests some possible solutions that are not obvious to the opposing parties (Wexley & Yukl, 1977).

Structuring the interaction is especially useful in two situations: (1) when previous attempts to discuss conflict issues openly led to conflict escalation rather than to problem solution and (2) when a respected third party is available to provide (and enforce) some structure in the interactions between the groups.

### ***Bargaining***

Bargaining is the process of exchanging concessions until a compromise solution is reached.

Bargaining can lead to the resolution of a conflict, but usually without much openness on the part of the groups involved and without much real problem solving. Typically, in bargaining each side begins by demanding more than it really expects to get. Both sides realize that concessions will be necessary in order to reach a solution, but neither side wants to make the first concession because it may be perceived as a sign of weakness. Thus, each party signals a willingness to be flexible in exchanging concessions without actually making an explicit offer; a tacit proposal can be denied later if it fails to elicit a positive response from the other party (Pruitt, 1971). Bargaining continues until a mutually satisfactory agreement is reached between the two groups, although such a solution can be reached without much open discussion of the conflict issues and without much effort to solve the underlying problems. Therefore, bargaining often results in a compromise agreement that fails to deal with the problem in a rational manner and is not in the long-term interests of both groups.

For bargaining to be feasible at all as a conflict-resolution strategy, both parties must be of relatively equal power. Otherwise, one group simply will impose its will on the other, and the weaker group will have no means of obtaining concessions from the stronger one. Bargaining also is more likely to work if there are several acceptable alternatives that both groups are willing to consider. Otherwise, bargaining is likely to end in a deadlock.

## **CONFLICT-CONFRONTATION STRATEGIES**

### ***Problem Solving***

Problem solving is an attempt to find a solution that reconciles or integrates the needs of both parties, who work together to define the problem and to identify mutually satisfactory solutions. In problem solving there is open expression of feelings as well as exchange of task-related information. Alderfer (1977) and Wexley and Yukl (1977) summarize the most critical ingredients in successful problem solving:

1. Definition of the problem should be a joint effort based on shared fact finding rather than on the biased perceptions of the individual groups.
2. Problems should be stated in terms of specifics rather than as abstract principles.
3. Points of initial agreement in the goals and beliefs of both groups should be identified along with the differences.

4. Discussions between the groups should consist of specific, nonevaluative comments. Questions should be asked to elicit information, not to belittle the opposition.
5. The groups should work together in developing alternative solutions. If this is not feasible, each group should present a range of acceptable solutions rather than promoting the solution that is best for it while concealing other possibilities.
6. Solutions should be evaluated objectively in terms of quality and acceptability to the two groups. When a solution maximizes joint benefits but favors one party, some way should be found to provide special benefits to the other party to make the solution equitable.
7. All agreements about separate issues should be considered tentative until every issue is dealt with, because issues that are interrelated cannot be settled independently in an optimal manner (Blake & Mouton, 1962, 1964; Walton & McKersie, 1965).

There are two preconditions for successful, integrative problem solving. The first precondition is a minimal level of trust between the two groups. Without trust, each group will fear manipulation and will be unlikely to reveal its true preferences. Second, integrative problem solving takes a lot of time and can succeed only in the absence of pressure for a quick settlement. However, when the organization can benefit from merging the differing perspectives and insights of the two groups in making key decisions, integrative problem solving is especially needed.

### ***Organizational Redesign***

Redesigning or restructuring the organization can be an effective, intergroup conflict-resolution strategy. This is especially true when the sources of conflict result from the coordination of work among different departments or divisions. Unlike the other strategies discussed so far, however, organizational redesign can be used either to decrease the conflict or to increase it.

One way of redesigning organizations is to reduce task interdependence between groups and to assign each group clear work responsibilities (that is, create self-contained work groups) to reduce conflict. This is most appropriate when the work can be divided easily into distinct projects. Each group is provided with clear project responsibilities and the resources needed to reach its goals. A potential cost of this strategy is duplication and waste of resources, particularly when one group cannot fully utilize equipment or

personnel. Innovation and growth also may be restricted to existing project areas (Duncan, 1979), with no group having the incentive or responsibility to create new ideas.

The other way to deal with conflict through organizational redesign is to develop overlapping or joint work responsibilities (for example, integrator roles). This makes the most use of the different perspectives and abilities of the different departments, but it also tends to create conflict. On the other hand, there may be tasks (for example, developing new products) that do not fall clearly into any one department's responsibilities but require the contributions, expertise, and coordination of several. Assigning new-product development to one department could decrease potential conflict, but at a high cost to the quality of the product. In this case the organization might try to sustain task-based conflict but develop better mechanisms for managing the conflict. For example, providing "integrating teams" can facilitate communication and coordination between the members of interdependent departments (Galbraith, 1974).

## SUMMARY

The main dimension along which intergroup conflict-resolution strategies are arrayed is how openly they address the conflict: Conflict-avoidance and conflict-defusion strategies allow little or no conflict into the open; conflict-containment and conflict-confrontation strategies deal with the conflict more openly and thoroughly (see Table 1).

Which strategy is most effective depends on how critical the conflict is to task accomplishment and how quickly the conflict must be resolved. If the conflict arises from a trivial issue and/or must be resolved quickly, a conflict-avoidance or conflict-defusion strategy is most likely to be effective. If the conflict centers around an important work issue and does not need to be solved quickly, a conflict-containment or conflict-confrontation strategy is most likely to be effective.

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**Table 1. Conflict-Resolution Strategies**

<b>Conflict-Resolution Strategy</b>	<b>Goal of Strategy</b>	<b>Appropriate Situations</b>
Ignoring the conflict	Avoidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When the issue is trivial</li> <li>• When the issue is symptomatic of more basic, pressing problems</li> </ul>
Imposing a solution	Avoidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When quick, decisive action is needed</li> <li>• When unpopular decisions must be made, and consensus between the groups appears very unlikely</li> </ul>
Smoothing	Defusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a stop-gap measure to let people cool down and regain their perspective</li> <li>• When the conflict is over nonwork issues</li> </ul>
Superordinate goals	Defusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When there is a mutually important goal that neither group can achieve without the cooperation of the other</li> <li>• When the survival or success of the total organization is in jeopardy</li> </ul>
Representatives	Containment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before the groups' positions become fixed and made public</li> <li>• When each side is represented by groups of representatives rather than by one spokesman</li> </ul>
Structuring the interaction	Containment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When the previous attempts to openly discuss conflict issues led to conflict escalation rather than to problem solution</li> <li>• When a respected third party is available to provide structure and serve as a mediator</li> </ul>
Bargaining	Containment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When the two groups have relatively equal power</li> <li>• When there are several acceptable, alternative solutions that both parties are willing to consider</li> </ul>
Problem solving	Confrontation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When there is a minimum level of trust between the two groups and no pressure for a quick solution</li> <li>• When the organization can benefit from merging the different perspectives and insights of both groups in making key decisions</li> </ul>
Organizational redesign	Confrontation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When the sources of conflict result from the coordination of work</li> <li>• Self-contained work groups are most appropriate when the work easily can be divided into clear project responsibilities; lateral relationships are more appropriate when activities require much interdepartmental coordination but do not clearly lie within any one department's responsibilities</li> </ul>

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