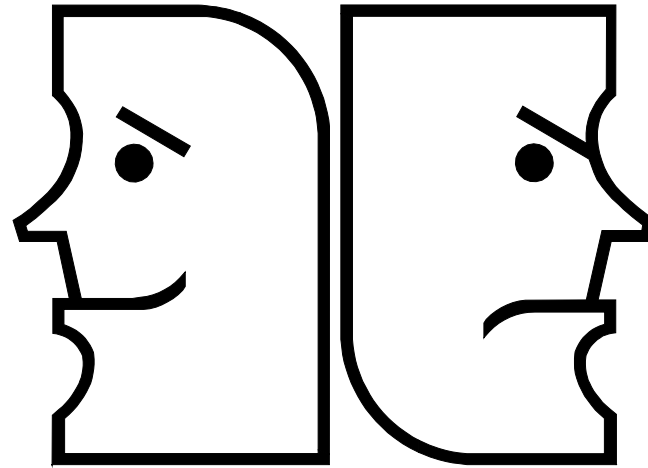# *Managing Conflict Effectively*

Conflict

- Any situation in which people have incompatible goals, interests, principles or feelings

Let's talk about Conflict!

Conflict Exercise

- Share some words that come to mind when you think about conflict at work

- How do you typically deal with conflict?

- What are some typical conflict outcomes?

Benefits of Conflict

- May discover fresh ideas

- May develop an increase understanding

- May gain new ways of diagnosing and looking at conflict

- May enforce positive aspects

- May find an opportunity growth and learning

Costs of Conflict

- May compromise or destroy important relationships

- May reduce the effectiveness on work teams

- May spread to involve others

Key Causes of Conflict

- Assumptions

- Different Perceptions

- Unmet Expectations

- Different Values

- Change Not Clearly Conveyed

- Misperceptions & Stereotypes

- Lack of Communication or Miscommunication
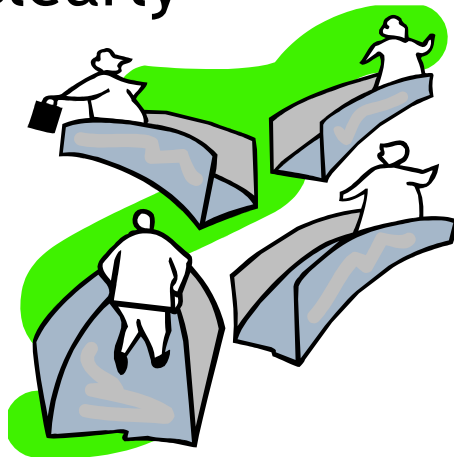
Basis of Conflict

- Relationship
- Data
- Interests
- Structure
- Value

Relationship Conflicts

- Strong emotions

- Misperceptions or Stereotypes

- Poor or Miscommunication

- Repetitive negative behavior

Data Conflicts Occur When

- Lack information necessary to make wise decisions
- Are misinformed
- Disagree over what data are relevant
- Disagree over what data means
- Disagree over how data were gathered

Interest Conflicts Are Caused by

- Competition over perceived or actual needs

- When one party believes that in order to get their needs met, the other must leave

- When one persons way of doing things is different from another

Structural Conflicts
Result from

- Unequal control, ownership or distribution of resources

- Destructive patterns of behavior

- Geographic, physical, or environmental factors

- Time constraints

- Policy, rules, regulations

Value conflicts are caused by

- Perceived or actual incompatibility of beliefs

- Different criteria for evaluating ideas or behavior

- Different ways of life, ideology, or religion

- Insistent that their values are the only ones that are right

5 Conflict Styles

- Avoiding – Side–stepping or withdrawing

- Accommodating - Putting aside your needs

- Competing – Seeking to win at all cost

- Compromising – Each side concedes

- Collaborating – Working as a team

Thomas - Kilman Instrument
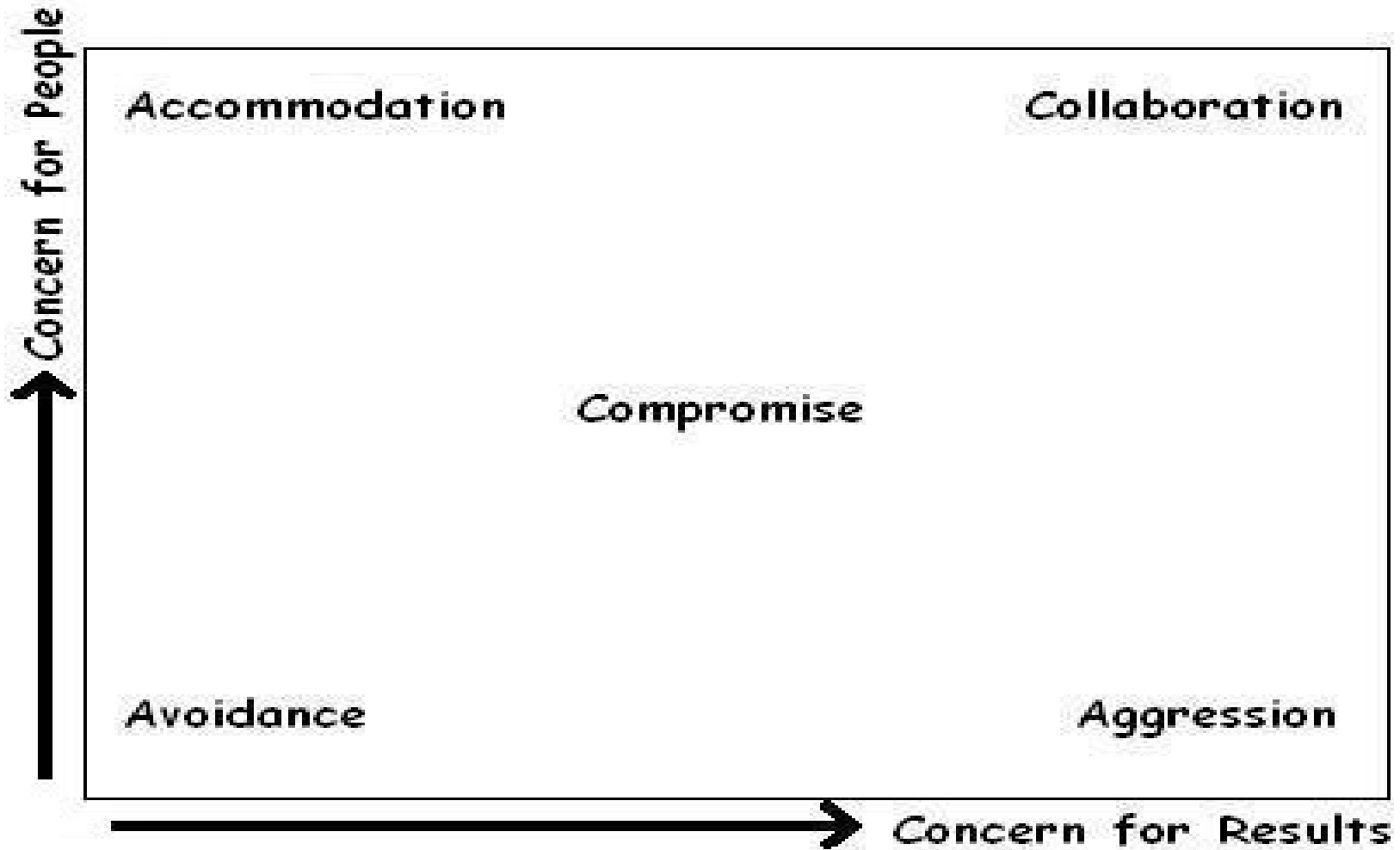
When Avoiding Might Be a Useful Strategy

- overwhelming situation
- step back to gain perspective
- insufficient time to respond
- insufficient information to make a decision/become involved
- inability to influence the outcome

Possible Negative Effects of Avoiding Conflict

- you don't speak up for what you believe, think or feel

- people don't know your views, or believe you don't care

- you may become an unproductive team member

- people stop asking for your input

When Accommodating Is A Useful Strategy

- The task or goal is relatively unimportant

- nurturing relationships is a priority

- you want to encourage others to act similarly

Possible Negative Effects of Accommodating
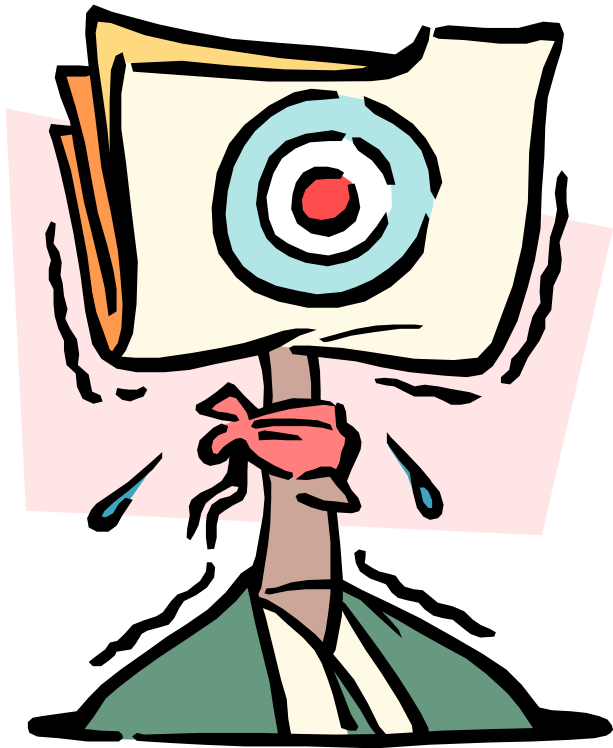
- legitimate needs and concerns suppressed to foster harmony

- others do not look to you for your opinion

- you are relied upon to smooth the troubled waters

- you may become frustrated by not expressing your ideas

When Competing is a Useful Strategy

- taking action is imperative

- time is short

- you have important ideas to contribute

- you believe it's time for action

Possible Negative Effects of Competing

- fail to take others' ideas into account

- act prematurely

- others may resent your being directive and not want to deal with you

- adversely affect important relationships

When Compromising is a Useful Strategy

- something is better than nothing--breaking a stalemate

- finding common ground is important to all involved

- time is limited and goals or tasks are important

Possible Negative Effects of Compromising

- reach agreement prematurely

- results not optimal—give something to get something

- don't allow full consideration of all possible options and proposals

When Collaborating is a Useful Strategy

- problem to be solved is difficult or unique

- problem requires the involvement of all concerned

- inclusiveness is important

Possible Negative Effects of Collaborating

- ignore when others want a compromise or other decision making process

- need additional time and commitment from others to participate

- people using a competing approach may take advantage of openness and trust

- What do you feel when you hear the word *conflict*?
- What do you feel when you are *experiencing* conflict?
- What *physical reactions* happen?
- Conflict doesn't just impact our thoughts. There is a *tremendous impact* on our brains and bodies as well.

- Often people feel:
  - Sweaty palms
  - Nausea
  - Dry mouth
  - Shaking
  - Tense muscles
  - Increase heart rate
  - Warm, reddening face

The Physical Impact of Conflict

- Our brains release adrenaline within seconds and cortisol within minutes.
- Conflict produces higher levels of Cortisol in our brains, which
- Shuts down our thinking centers
- Activates conflict avoidance and reactive behaviors
- Cortisol can cause us to perceive more negativity and judgement than actually exists

The Physical Impact of Conflict

- When stress lingers, so does cortisol
- Excess cortisol is *linked* to:
    - Insomnia
    - Disrupted metabolism
    - A weakened immune system
    - And, and, and…
- Cortisol *sears* memories into our brain
- The effects of Cortisol lasts more than *26 hours*

The Physical Impact of Conflict

- Positive interactions produce higher levels of *Oxytocin* in our brains, which
  – Often called the *love* hormone
  – *Elevates* positive emotions and actions
    ○ Reduces anxiety while *increasing relaxation*
    ○ Contributes to effective communication and increased *trust*
- Sadly, Oxytocin metabolizes significantly quicker
  – Lasting *minutes not hours*

Path of Conflict

Precipitating Event and/or Hot Buttons

Initiate Conflict

Constructive Responses
Behaviors which keep conflict to a minimum

Destructive Responses
Behaviors which escalate or prolong conflict

Task-Focused Conflict (Cognitive)

- Focus on task and problem solving
- Positive effect
- Tension decreases
- Group functioning improves

Person-Focused Conflict (Affective)

- Focused on personal
- Negative emotions (anger, frustration)
- Tension increases
- Group functioning decreases

CONFLICT DE-ESCALATES

CONFLICT ESCALATES

Responding to Conflict

- Acknowledge the problem
- Don't take it personally
- Choose your words carefully
- Put your ego aside
- Keep your emotions in check
- Listen

Principles of Conflict Resolution

- Use conflict as a natural resource
  - Inevitable; cannot be avoided, nor should it be
- Assure a fair process
- Don't react
  - Focus on behavioral responses and how they might be changed
- Deal with feelings
- Attack the problem, not the person
- Practice direct communication
- Focus on the future

Resolving Conflict

- Identify the issues

- Identify the underlying interests

- Identify options for mutual gain

- Develop agreements based on objective standards

- Goal of successful conflict management is not elimination, but reducing its harmful effects and maximizing positives

Metaphors and Meaning of Conflict

- Conflict as War/Common Phrases
- Believe others are out to get us
  - *"Your position is indefensible"*
  - *"We shot down that idea"*
  - *"We've got a battle on our hands"*
  - *"He dropped a bomb on me"*
  - *"Let's line up the troops and man the barricades"*
  - *"I won"*

Metaphors and Meaning of Conflict

- Conflict as Opportunity/Common Phrases

- Find out why it happened the way it did and move to higher level of resolving them (future focused/what I've learned)

  "This issue presents a real challenge for us"

  "What would you like to see happen instead"?

  "We now have a chance to make things better"

  "You have a good point. What could we do together to address this?"

  "Your feedback has helped me see some ways I could improve, for example, by communicating more respectfully. Is that right?"

  "What are all the possibilities for solving this problem?"

Metaphors and Meaning of Conflict

- Conflict as Journey

  - Focuses on the present vs. past or future

  - On the relationship between you and the other party vs. what you both are doing, saying, feeling

  - On the *process* of discussing, negotiating and resolving conflict vs. the difficulty of finding a resolution

  - When we think of it as a journey, we become less concerned with the goal or destination and more focused on the process. We relax and enjoy the ride

Metaphors and Meaning of Conflict

- Conflict as Journey/Common Phrases
  - *"Your ideas point in the right direction"*
  - *"Here is what I really enjoy about working with you"*
  - *"We're off to a good start"*
  - *"Where do you want to go with that"*
  - *"Is this process/conversation working for you?"*
  - *"We're on the road to a solution"*
  - *"I think we've arrived at an agreement"*

Changing the Context of Conflict

"When you alter how you see your opponent, you automatically alter your definition of yourself, which in turn automatically alters your understanding of the causes, content and context of your conflict. By seeing your conflicts as opportunities or journeys, you will automatically increase your capacity to listen and resolve conflicts, strengthen your relationships and improve the way you approach conflicts in the future."

Ken Cloke/Joan Goldsmith

Learning to Collaborate in Conflict

- Recognize it can be a positive experience

- Opportunity to learn and grow

  – Can I think of this in positive light?

- Use empathy to place yourself in others shoes

- Understanding vs. condoning behavior

  – Why did they act as they did?

  – How do they see my actions?

  – What can I learn from this exchange? (motivation/interests of other party)

  – How can I respond more skillfully?

Learning to Collaborate in Conflict

Shift the focus from holding onto power and supporting position to sharing responsibility and satisfying both sides' interests

- If I let go, what might I learn as a result?

- What changes am I willing to make?

- What would happen if they did the same?

- What are my interests vs. theirs?

- What interests do we share?

- How can they both be satisfied?

Learning to Collaborate in Conflict

- Focus efforts beyond settlement to fully resolving underlying interests

  - What does accommodation or settlement for the sake of settlement leave out of the equation?

  - What are the deeper underlying interests?

  - What would it take to resolve them?

  - How can I present these interests so that we can settle this matter?

Learning to Collaborate in Conflict

- Be completely honest with yourself and other party
- Give empathetic and timely feedback
  - What feedback can you give to other party that is honest/truthful and moves you toward resolution?
  - How long did it take to get there?
  - Why did it take so long?
  - How can you shorten the time if something new occurs?
  - What feedback would the other party give me?
  - Have I requested that feedback?
  - Why not? What's stopping me?
  - What would be the benefit of that information?
  - What honest feedback can I give myself?

Learning to Collaborate in Conflict

- Speak and act with impeccable integrity and clarity-without judgment, from your heart and spirit and not just from your head

  - Has your communication been clear and given with integrity? If not, why not?

  - What can you say to the other party that comes from the heart and is clear and nonjudgmental?

  - Can you ask questions that allow the issue of who they are to remain open?

Learning to Collaborate in Conflict

- Search for small scale collaborative alternatives that increase cooperation, create common ground and focus on share interests

  - Brainstorm individually or with the other party

  - What are things you can do together to increase your cooperation and partnership?

  - What could you both do to find or create what you both need and want?

The Goal of Effective Communication

To move from

Conflict

Through

Communication,

Cooperation

To

Collaboration