

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

NOVEMBER 29, 2017

STEVEN LEVITT

WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

- Develop skills in managing conflict
- Understand how your personal conflict style may impact interaction outcomes
- Understand basic communication principles that diffuse hostility and lead to more constructive conflict
- Apply skills to practice case studies

OUTLINE

- Sources of conflict
- Personal conflict styles
- Difficult discussions
- Positions vs. interests
- Communication principles
 - De-escalating techniques
- Difficult group members

Unlike fine wine, conflicts that
are left alone rarely improve
with age.

~Eric Harvey



CONFLICT IS A FACT OF LIFE

You cannot make everyone
happy all the time!

WHAT ARE SOME SOURCES OR
CAUSES OF CONFLICT?

Sources/Causes of Conflict

- Diversity: Differences in perceptions, values, desires, goals
- Needs: yours vs. mine
- Data (best source, interpretation)
- Procedures: including ways to resolve conflict
- Power: especially over others

Sources/Causes of Conflict

- Role conflicts
 - Overlaps (parent/friend, student/teacher, supervisor/friend)
 - Changes (from colleague to supervisor)
- Communication: loaded words → emotional responses, criticisms taken personally, not feeling listened to or understood (relational levels of meaning)

Conflict is constructive when it...

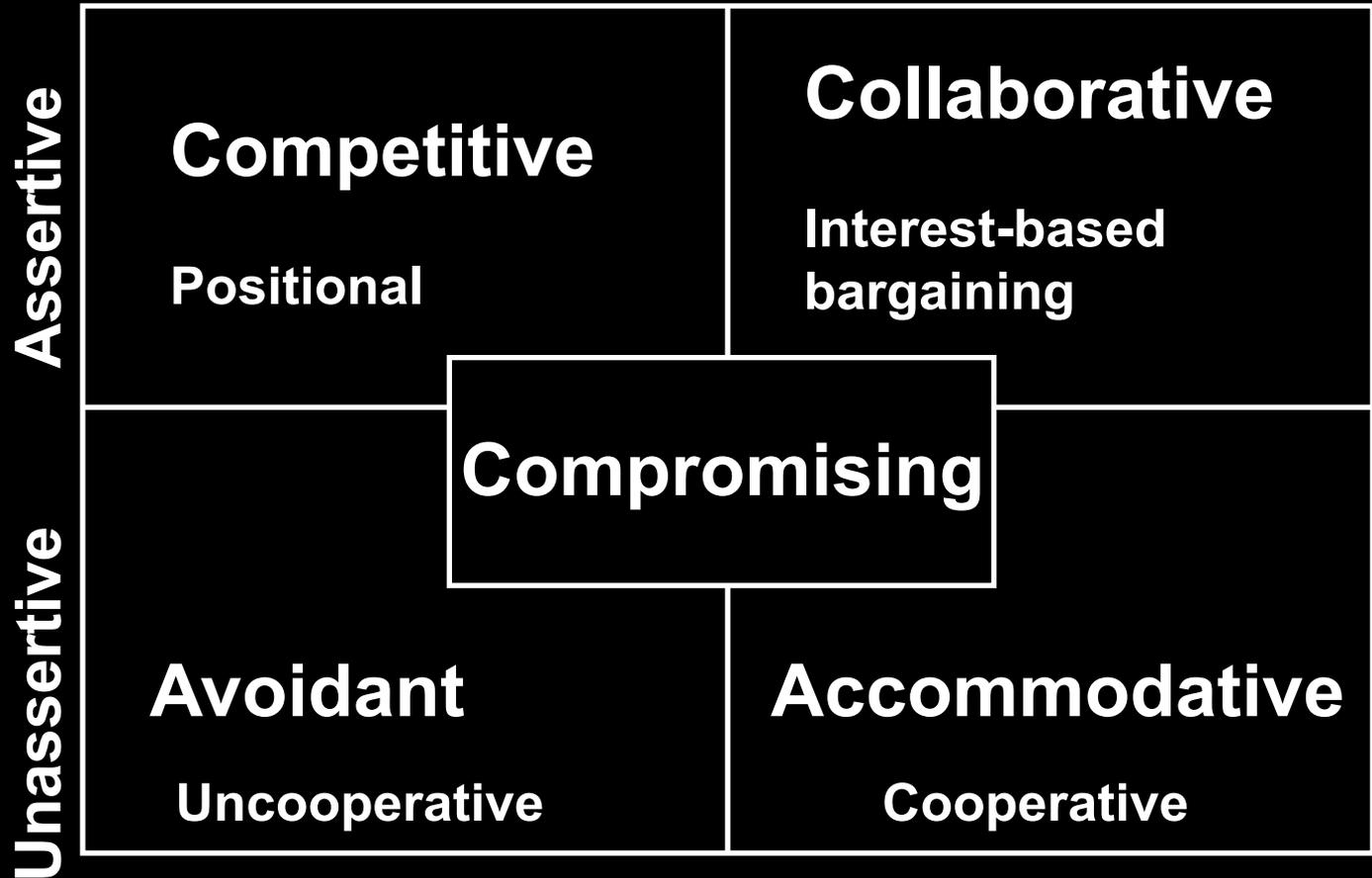
- Leads to unity
- Differences of opinion can emerge
- Leads to better decision making
- Produces change
 - “Change is like manure. It stinks but is excellent fertilizer.”

Conflict is **destructive** when...

- “You and me” moves to involving others
- Self-concern moves to getting even
- A specific issue gives way to general complaints
 - One issue becomes many (“kitchen sinking”)

5 Styles of handling conflict

Degree to which you attempt to satisfy your concerns



Degree to which you attempt to satisfy other's concerns

➤ **Competitive Style**

- Assertive and interested in getting your way
- Less interested in cooperating with others
- Forceful approach

➤ **Good style to use if:**

- the issue is really important to you and you want to get your way
- you have the authority and need to make a quick or emergency decision

➤ **Avoidant Style**

- Don't assert yourself
- Don't cooperate
- Just step aside

➤ **Good style to use if:**

- you're dealing with a difficult person and tensions are high (beware of ambush)
- you're unsure of what to do
- you have time and temporarily want to wait before deciding
- you are physically in danger

➤ **Accommodative Style**

- Work cooperatively with the other person
- Don't assert your own concerns

➤ **Good style to use if:**

- the outcome is very important to the other person
- you feel you can't win
- you want to maintain peace and harmony
- you can gain a "bargaining chip"
- you recognize that you are wrong and the other person is right

➤ Collaborative Style

- You get actively involved by asserting what you want
 - Still try to cooperate with others
 - Takes a little longer because you want to truly consider both sides
- **Good style to use if:**
- parties have different needs; hard to pin down
 - you have the time to look at underlying issues
 - you want to maintain a good relationship with others

➤ **Compromising Style**

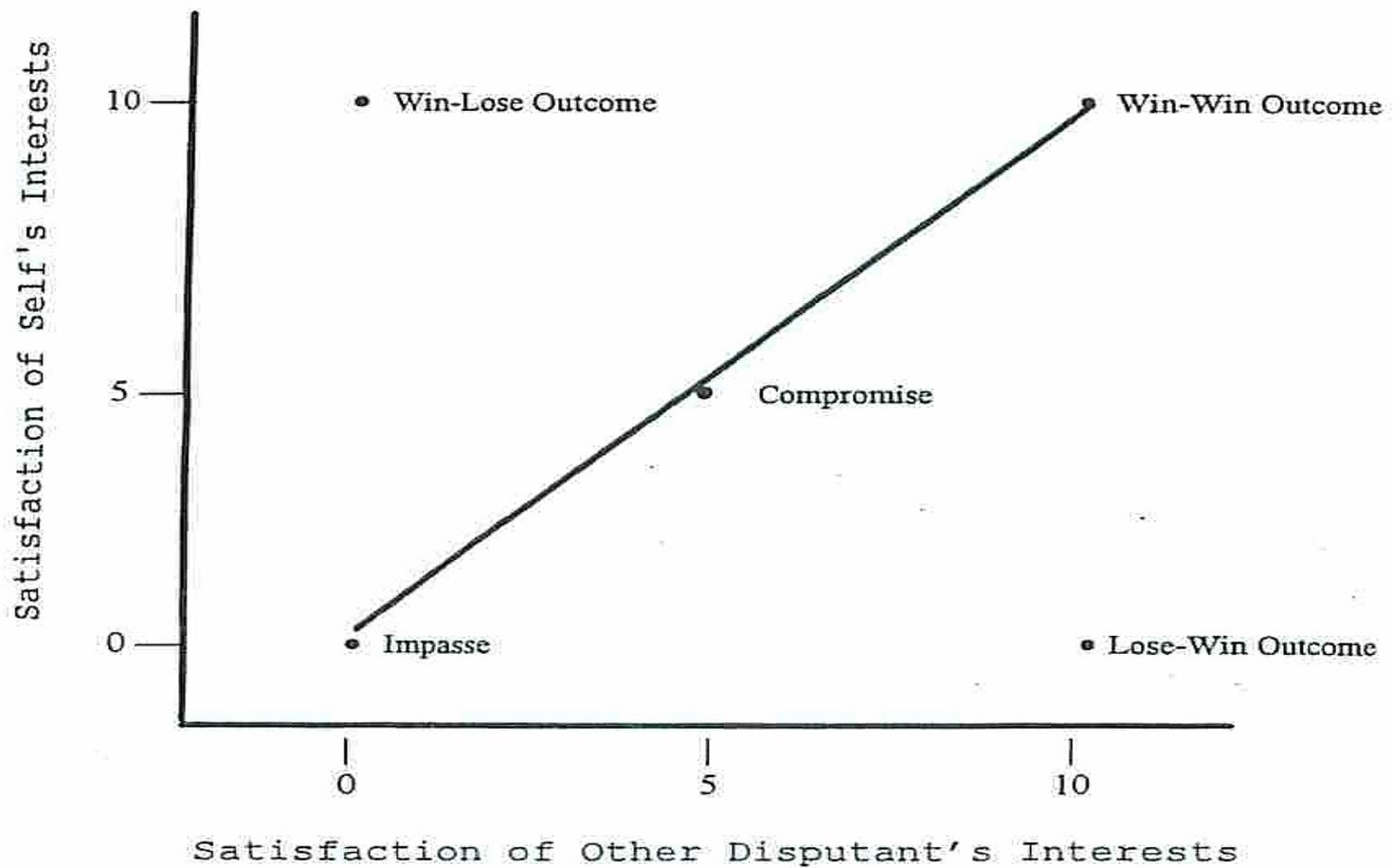
- Give a little to get a little
- Others do the same
- Search for underlying needs and
- attempt to work it out

➤ **Good style to use if:**

- you and the other person want the same thing and only one can have it (both want the same office)
- you have the same power as the other person(s)
- you want to achieve resolution quickly
- collaboration is not working

CONFLICT RESOLUTION OUTCOMES

Source: C.W. Moore, *The Mediation Process*, 1996



Difficult Discussions

“Having not said anything the first time,
it was somehow even more difficult to
broach the subject the second time around.”

— Douglas Adams

So Long, And Thanks For All The Fish



Difficult Discussions

- 90% of people and a large number of managers tend to avoid confronting co-workers about inappropriate behaviors.
- Important vs. urgent – if not urgent, easy to put off, then...?

Difficult Discussions

- “The avoidance trap.” What are the risks and rewards?
- Saying/doing nothing validates behavior and encourages more.
 - E.G. Performance evaluations
- Beware of “ambushes.”

Afraid of confronting?

- Realize what is happening now isn't meeting your interests. It's worth trying something new.
- Plan the discussion, especially your opening – see handout.
- Keep your goal in mind.

Assertiveness Script

- **When...** (describe situation)
- **the effect is...** (on you/family/team/company)
- **I feel...** (emotion)
- **I prefer...** (thing, action, discussion, etc.)

Exercise

Difficult Discussion Scenarios

POSITIONS VS. INTERESTS

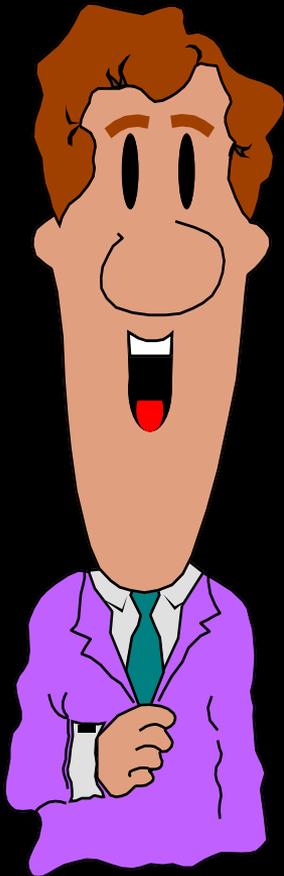
- **A position is a stated demand or attitude**
 - **What you state you want**
 - Demand, refusal, complaint, etc.
- **Direct, content level of meaning; attached to ego**

POSITIONS VS. INTERESTS

- **Interests** are the desires and concerns which are underlying and often silent behind the stated position
- **Why** you want it
 - Listen for the “wish”
 - “A complaint is usually a wish for something different”

Exercise

**Identify Positions vs.
Interests**



“The single biggest problem with communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”

— *George Bernard Shaw*



NUMBER ONE PRINCIPLE

- Communication is a complex process which is subject to individual perceptions, and thus
- Ripe for misunderstandings

A message is “bent” on the way from sender to receiver through a process called ‘refraction.’



8 SIMULTANEOUS CONVERSATIONS

 The image cannot be displayed. Your computer may not have enough memory to open the image, or the image may have been corrupted. Restart your computer, and then open the file again. If the red X still appears, you may have to delete the image and then insert it again.



- **What I say**
- **What I mean by what I say**
- **What you hear**
- **What you think I mean by what you hear**

- **What you say**
- **What you mean by what you say**
- **What I hear**
- **What I think you mean by what I hear**

LISTENING IS KEY

- People listen better if they feel you have understood them.
- If you want others to appreciate your interests, demonstrate you understand theirs (interest-based bargaining).
- Ask open-ended probing questions.

- Listening is an active, mental process of interpreting meaning *at the relational level*
- ◆ Most common mistake: egocentric listening
- Focus on the speaker's thoughts, not your own

CONTENT VS. RELATIONAL LEVELS OF MEANING

- *Each message has both a content and a relational level of meaning*
- *May be the same, but more often different meanings*

CONTENT LEVEL OF MEANING

- Literal, dictionary meaning
 - “Gee, it’s cold in here.” → statement about temperature
 - “You should...” → well-intentioned advice

CONTENT LEVEL OF MEANING (cont'd)

- Surface level POSITION (what someone says they want; demand, refusal, judgement, etc.)
 - “I won’t support that new course as required for our majors.”

RELATIONAL LEVEL OF MEANING

- **Implied by speaker**

- “Do something to make me warm.”

- **Potentially interpreted meaning by receiver**

- (re: advice) “So you don’t think I’m smart enough to think of that myself.”

RELATIONAL LEVEL OF MEANING

- Underlying, unspoken INTEREST (why someone wants something)
 - “This course is not relevant to contemporary professional needs.” **OR**
“This course does not advance my political agenda for the department.”
- Relational meaning typically reflects status of relationship (power, climate, etc.)

Exercise

Content & Relational Levels of Meaning

De-escalating Techniques

- Acknowledge their feelings (we cannot control feelings, only how we act as a result)
- Paraphrase their message to ensure accurate understanding
- Neutralize hostile language
- Avoid advising (relate to content vs. relational levels of meaning)

De-escalating Techniques

- Avoid asking “why” questions that sound like interrogation – ask “what” questions instead
- Focus on present and future, not past
- Frame statements as perceptions/ beliefs, not fact
- Use “and” rather than “but”

USE “I” LANGUAGE, NOT “YOU”

- “You” statements → place blame
 - “You didn’t get your work done last night, so I had to do your work and mine too!”
- “I” statements → accept responsibility for feelings
 - “I was really upset and stressed when I found I had to do all my work and your work too.”

“I” LANGUAGE

- A statement about them they believe untrue or unfair will create anger, but a statement about how you feel is hard to challenge.

“I” Language

- “You’re not listening” – or
- “You don’t understand” →
- “Perhaps I have not done a good job of explaining myself. Let me try again.”

Exercise

Reflective Listening:

Paraphrase, acknowledge feelings, neutralize hostile language

**How do we deal with
difficult group members?
What makes people
difficult?**

Different Types of Difficult Group Members:

- Those who DOMINATE
- Those who BLOCK PROGRESS
- Those who are IRRESPONSIBLE
- Those who are UNETHICALLY AGGRESSIVE

Spirals: each person's behavior reinforces and intensifies the other's behavior

- Competitive styles
- Avoiding or accommodating styles
- Competitive and accommodating styles

SPIRALS CONT'D



Negative spirals can quickly get out of control leading to a communication breakdown or worse.

SPIRALS CAN BE POSITIVE!

TALK



GOOD LISTENING



MODEL CONSTRUCTIVE
BEHAVIORS



COLLABORATIVE
CLIMATE

