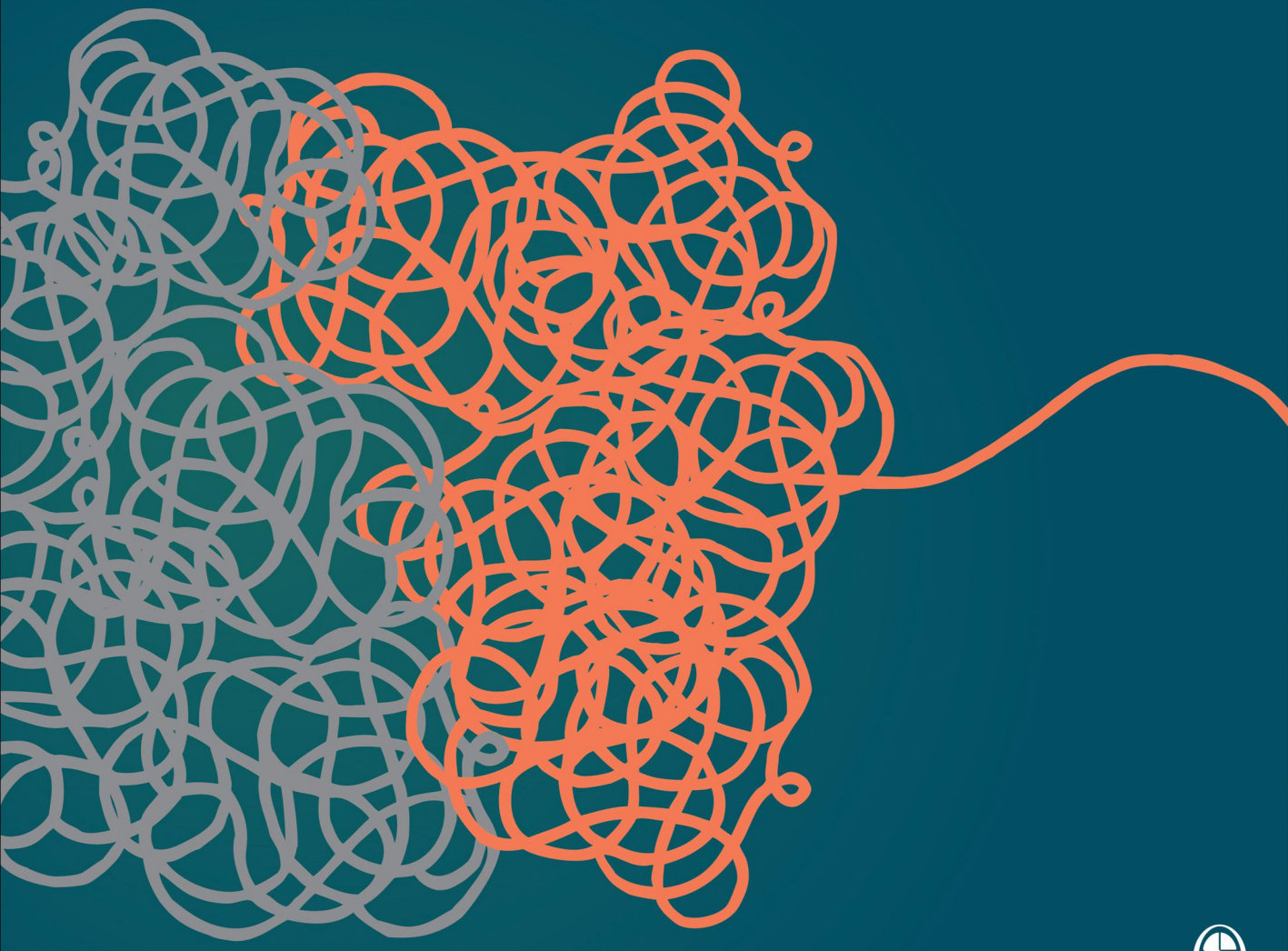
conflict & communication

FRED E. JANDT



Conflict and Communication

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Fred E. Jandt

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fred E. Jandt was one of the first communication scholars to study conflict. In 1973, his edited volume *Conflict Resolution Through Communication* (Harper & Row) introduced the discipline to conflict studies from outside the field. He was one of the invited participants at the conference sponsored by the Research Board of the Speech Communication Association, which debated the directions for future conflict studies and produced the book *Perspectives on Communication in Social Conflict* (Prentice Hall).

In later years, he conducted the seminar *Managing Conflict Productively* for corporate and government agency professionals throughout the United States. That seminar led to the 1985 publication of his popular book *Win-Win Negotiating: Turning Conflict Into Agreement* (Wiley), which has been translated into eight languages and continues to be used today.

In the 1990s, he partnered with the noted multicultural counseling scholar Paul B. Pedersen to plan and host a conference of mediators from the Asia-Pacific region held in Penang, Malaysia. From that conference, he and Paul edited the volume *Constructive Conflict Management: Asia-Pacific Cases* (SAGE, 1996).

Fred uses his life experiences in his work as a professional mediator. He continues to train volunteers learning to become mediators in the California justice system.

He began his professional career at The College at Brockport, State University of New York, after receiving his PhD from Bowling Green State University.

PREFACE

Why should we study conflict as part of a communication curriculum? As you read this book, you'll see that communication and conflict is a dynamic and engaging field of study with direct relevance to our daily lives.

Drawing on my many years as both an academic researcher of conflict and a professional conflict negotiator and mediator, I've approached the study of conflict with two overarching main ideas: Conflict is inevitable, and conflict is experienced and managed through communication.

First, conflict is a fact of life, and something that we don't need to strive to avoid at all costs. We have all experienced conflict to some degree and frequency, and at least some of those conflicts were probably stressful. Simply put, if we live and work with other people, conflict is inevitable. At one time, it was popularly believed that all conflicts were destructive and should be avoided. We now understand that, in fact, conflicts can be very productive in many instances. A simple personal conflict with a romantic partner such as an argument about whether or not to go out to dinner every weekend night can help resolve opposing views about personal finances. Or, a professional conflict between colleagues around missed deadlines could help to establish a shared set of priorities at work. Conflict occurs in all components of our lives, and therefore we'll cover a broad range of interpersonal and organizational conflicts throughout this text.

Second, communication plays a central role in conflict. As reflected in the contemporary academic study of conflict, we engage in conflict though communication, and we use communication skills to manage conflict. You'll note that I've used the word *manage* rather than *resolve*. The emphasis of this book is not on putting a final end to a conflict, as *resolve* would suggest, because that outcome isn't always possible or desirable. Instead, this book focuses on using communication skills to manage or influence ongoing conflict in order to minimize negative outcomes and promote positive outcomes.

GOAL AND PEDAGOGY

The general goal of this textbook is to help you develop the skills to analyze conflicts and to manage conflicts productively.

In Chapter 1, you will explore the definition of conflict and its academic study. In Chapter 2, you'll examine the concept of power, an important element of interpersonal relationships and conflicts, as well as several different styles of dealing with conflict. In Chapter 3, you will learn how to analyze a conflict in order to accurately describe a conflict, assist the parties if possible, and apply the lessons drawn from one conflict's outcomes to future conflicts. In Chapter 4, you'll learn about the effect of culture on conflict and develop improved skills for dealing with intercultural conflicts. In Chapter 5, you'll learn how to improve your negotiating skills. Anger, aggression, and bullying can lead to destructive conflicts—and

in Chapter 6, you'll learn skills for dealing with these challenges. Chapters 7 and 8 introduce mediation skills—both face-to-face and online—followed by Chapter 9 with a focus on apologies, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Finally, Chapter 10 applies what you have learned in previous chapters to explore conflict in families and organizations.

Learning Objectives are presented at the start of every chapter to help you focus your attention on the most significant concepts and skills introduced in each chapter. Boldface **key terms** and a **glossary** help highlight and deepen your understanding of important terminology as you advance through the text.

In each chapter, you will find multiple boxed **Case Studies** drawn from a wide range of interpersonal and organizational contexts that will give you an opportunity to analyze conflicts at various stages and to apply conflict management skills to those scenarios. These Case Studies are paired with critical thinking questions to guide discussion around specific conflict management skills and applications. At the end of each chapter, you will also find **Discussion Questions** to encourage you to review and deepen your understanding of the important concepts and skills introduced in the chapter. For additional instructor resources, visit the companion site at **study.sagepub.com/jandtconflict**.

I hope that you will find new ideas and new skills in this book that will help you see conflict and communication in new ways, and that you will continue to use your new understanding of conflict management to enrich your personal life and career.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to acknowledge two scholars early in my career for introducing me to conflict studies—interpersonal communication and peace scholar John "Sam" Keltner and my dissertation adviser at Bowling Green State University Delmar M. Hilyard.

My colleagues have stimulated my thinking about communication and conflict. I want to particularly acknowledge Professors Joseph DeVito and Thomas J. Knutson.

My association with many professional mediators continues to stimulate my thinking. I particularly want to acknowledge Dana Crawford King, former program manager of the Dispute Resolution Center in Riverside, California, and former board member of the National Association for Community Mediation; Judy Brannen, independent mediator and REDRESS® mediator; Susan Nauss Exon, associate dean for faculty development and professor of law at the University of La Verne College of Law; and John Winslade, professor of counseling and guidance, California State University, San Bernardino.

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And, finally, the professional staff at SAGE continues to nourish authors' ideas and guide them to continue to build such a distinguished body of work in communication. Specifically, Matthew Byrnie, senior acquisitions editor of communication and media studies, has such a talent for guiding authors to improve. SAGE editorial assistant Janae Masnovi, copy editor Melinda Masson, and project editor Tracy Buyan helped guide this manuscript to end product. Their collective expertise sets today's standard of excellence.

1

CONFLICT IN OUR LIVES

Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, you will be able to:

1. Describe popular attitudes and myths about conflict
2. Define conflict
3. Identify conflict management skills
4. Apply listening skills to conflict management

In this first chapter, you are challenged to examine your beliefs and early learning about conflict. Some of those beliefs and attitudes may negatively affect your interactions with others today. You'll then learn a new definition for conflict reflecting the reality that it not only is inevitable but also can be productive. With that beginning perspective, you'll be able to learn new skills for conflict management using this text. In this chapter, you'll learn the role listening plays in conflict management.

POPULAR ATTITUDES ABOUT CONFLICT

Take a minute before reading this chapter to make a list of the words that come to your mind when you think about conflict. Then mark which ones are positive and which are negative.

For many years, I conducted management training programs in conflict and negotiation for corporate, nonprofit, and government executives across the country. If your list is like theirs, you probably have many more negative associations with conflict than you have positive ones. If your list is like theirs, you included words like *argue*, *hostility*, *disagreement*, *draining*, *fight*, *stressful*, *upsetting*, and *anxiety*. What is the significance of associating conflict with unpleasant feelings? Those feelings may influence the way we act in conflict situations. If we feel conflict is unpleasant, we may tend to avoid dealing with it.

And yet, right now, you're holding in your hand a book about conflict. Why would you want to learn more about unpleasant things? Like a few executives in those management training programs, you may have some positive words on your list. In those programs, one or two people in the room would tentatively raise their hands to suggest some positive words—words such as *creativity*, *energizing*, *progress*, *opportunity*, and *growth*. Now challenged, others would begin to suggest ways that conflict is positive. Usually, someone would recognize that it is through conflict that change occurs. Unless objections are voiced, things don't change. Conflict can lead to social change such as the end of segregation or the fight for women's rights. The points to be made are that conflict can be productive and that, if we can accept this possibility, we may be more willing to deal with conflict when it occurs.

Now go back to your list and identify the context you had in mind when you wrote each word. For example, if you wrote the word *argue*, were you thinking of conflicts in your family or your workplace? You might use the general contexts of interpersonal, organizational, community, and intercultural/international. It is these four contexts to which conflict communication theories and principles have been applied (Oetzel, Ting-Toomey, & Anderson, 2013). You might see that the words on your list could apply to all four contexts. This illustrates that conflict can be studied exclusively in one context (i.e., interpersonal conflicts) or using a multicontext approach, which can lead to conclusions such as that "it is through conflict that change occurs." You will find that this is a textbook about conflict in all of these contexts. At times, you'll focus on one particular context, such as conflict in families or community conflict resolution centers. But as our lives take place in all of these contexts, you'll also develop a transcontext understanding of conflict. That executive in the training program who saw that conflict can lead to change in organizations (organizational context) could also see that conflict can lead to social change (community context) and could then conclude that "it is through conflict that change occurs" (transcontext).

Myths About Conflict

That many people at first have negative associations with conflict demonstrates a myth about conflict—that is, that conflict is always bad. In fact, as you saw above, conflict can be positive.

There are other myths that affect the way we deal with conflicts:

Myth: Harmony is normal; conflict is abnormal.

Reality: Conflicts are inevitable, and conflicts in relationships are as normal as is harmony. Conflict is a universal feature of human groups. Wherever there are scarce resources, divided functions in society,

different levels of power, or competition for a limited supply of goods, status, valued roles, or power, conflict can occur (Augsburger, 1992). Both conflict and harmony, not one or the other, are normal in a single relationship.

Myth: Conflicts are communication breakdowns. If people communicated better, there would be no conflicts.

Reality: I hear this myth more than any other. I ask people to consider this: Sometimes, with more communication, it becomes increasingly clear that the conflict is very real and very important. More communication simply helps the parties to see that they are very much in disagreement.

Myth: Conflicts destroy relationships.

Reality: Unresolved conflict can destroy a relationship. Conflicts that are confronted by both parties to work toward a resolution can, in fact, strengthen the relationship.

Myth: Productive work teams don't have conflicts.

Reality: If experience has shown us anything, it is that work teams that strive to avoid conflict can experience disasters. It is in work teams where conflict is openly expressed and addressed that productivity is highest.

Myth: The best way to resolve conflicts is simply to compromise.

Reality: Compromise is one way to resolve conflicts, but there is a more productive way. It does, however, require more effort from the disputing parties. In Chapter 5, for example, you'll read about collaboration as a way to resolve conflicts in ways that both parties win.

Myth: Conflicts are conflicts worldwide, as are the ways to resolve them.

Reality: Conflicts occur in all cultures, but how they are expressed and how they are resolved vary greatly. How do we know when a conflict is over? Some cultures tend to view conflict in terms of a final resolution while, for others, the concept of conflict resolution may not be meaningful as conflict is understood as part of an ongoing process that continues as long as the relationship exists.

Myth: In families, as long as the children don't see their parents fight, they are not affected by conflict.

Reality: Families are a system made up of parts. If one part of the system is having difficulties, the difficulties affect every other part.

These are only some myths about conflict. What is the significance of there being so many myths about conflict and that so many of these are negative? Just as having negative associations with conflict influences how we behave in conflict situations, these negative popular myths demonstrate that conflict and conflict resolution are not well understood.

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▸ Marital conflict is inevitable. It's how the conflict is expressed and resolved that has consequences for children. Children who experience their parents repeatedly using verbal and physical aggression can become distraught, react with anger, develop sleep and health problems, and have problems forming healthy relationships with peers.

Childhood Learning About Conflict

Ask yourself where you learned how to handle conflicts. Children learn from their experiences with their parents and from their peers. There is evidence that children develop a conflict style similar to that of their parents and use that style not only in family conflicts but also in conflicts outside the family (Koerner, 2013). One influential study (Vuchinich, 1990) identified five strategies for ending a disagreement—compromise, third-party intervention, withdrawal, standoff, and submission. Later studies collapsed these into three categories—negotiation (compromise and third-party resolution), disengagement (withdrawal and standoff), and coercion (submission) (Jensen-Campbell, Graziano, & Hair, 1996). Negotiation means talking things out to achieve a middle ground between the parties. Disengagement is dropping the conflict without achieving a resolution. In coercion, one party submits to the demands of the other party.

Studies of parent–child strategies for ending a disagreement show that coercion predominates and negotiation is atypical (Laursen, 1993). There is evidence to suggest that parents prefer negotiation but practice coercion more often (Smetana, Yau, & Hanson, 1991). As a generalization, then, our first experiences with conflict are that the more powerful party determines the outcome. (You'll read more about conflict in families in Chapter 10.)

You probably never had formal instruction in dealing with conflicts. Video games can teach skills and provide recreation, but what do they teach about conflict? In many video games, opposing parties are depicted as aggressive adversaries. They emphasize violence over creative conflict resolution and autonomous action over cooperation. What do children learn from television and popular culture? Children see revenge and getting even as legitimate motivations and see that conflicts have winners and losers.

But it's probably not from formal instruction, not from video games, and not from television that we learn how to end a disagreement. Most child development theorists assert that it is peer relationships that shape our behavior and that the specific conflict-ending strategy used is a product of maturity.

Laursen, Finkelstein, and Betts (2001) did a comprehensive review of 31 research reports on child (ages 2–10), adolescent (11–18), and young adult (19–25) strategies for ending disagreements with peers. For the most part, the researchers worked with middle-class North Americans of European ancestry. Peers were defined as siblings, friends, romantic partners, and acquaintances, including dormitory roommates and classmates.

Children end disagreements with coercion more often than with negotiation or disengagement, and with negotiation more often than with disengagement. Adolescents end disagreements with negotiation more often than with either coercion or disengagement, with no difference in the use of coercion or disengagement. Young adults end disagreements with negotiation more often than with coercion or disengagement and with disengagement more often than with coercion. As age increases from childhood

to young adulthood, the use of negotiation increases. Coercion does not fall below disengagement until young adulthood (Laursen et al., 2001).

When the peer relationship is considered separately, negotiation is prevalent in all peer relationships, except those with siblings. Friends, romantic partners, and acquaintances resolve conflicts more often with negotiation than with coercion or disengagement and more often with coercion than with disengagement. While young adults end disagreements with siblings more often with negotiation than with coercion or disengagement and more often with coercion than with disengagement, adolescents end disagreements with siblings more often with disengagement than with negotiation (Laursen et al., 2001).

Of course, these are generalizations, but I challenge you to thoughtfully review your childhood learnings about conflict. What were your early influences, and how have they affected the way you view conflict?

So let's review. Most of us have more negative associations with conflict than positive ones. Most of us believe to be true many things about conflict that are in fact not true. And most of us did not have the opportunity to learn creative ways of dealing with conflict as children. Certainly, all of us can benefit from learning more about conflict and developing new skills for dealing with conflict.

In this book, you will learn the role of power in conflicts, how to analyze conflicts, the role of culture in conflicts, negotiation and mediation skills, skills to deal with anger and aggression, apology and forgiveness skills, and the special case of conflicts in families and organizations. Dealing with conflict is a skill, and that skill can be improved.

THE ACADEMIC STUDY OF CONFLICT

I can imagine your reaction to the heading for this section: "How does learning about the history of the academic study of conflict help me improve my skills in dealing with conflicts?" The academic study of conflict does not have centuries of history. In fact, only relatively recently has there been consensus on what the concepts mean and what theories inform us with meaningful ways of understanding the relationships among the concepts.

One early scholar whose work influenced later communication scholars was Georg Simmel. Simmel was born in Berlin in 1858 and completed his doctorate in philosophy in 1881 at the University of Berlin. He elected to stay on as a Privatdozent (an unpaid lecturer dependent on student fees—he had inherited wealth). His courses ranged from the history of philosophy, logic, and ethics to social psychology and sociology. His lectures were very popular among students as well as the cultural elite of Berlin not only for their content but also because of his performance skills as a lecturer. Simmel was a prolific author, but rather than focusing on one area, he published more than 200 articles and 15 major books in the fields of philosophy, ethics, religion, sociology, literary and art criticism, and cultural criticism (Coser, 1977).

Simmel advanced the idea that society is made up of an intricate web of multiple relations between individuals who are in constant interaction with one another. "Society is merely the name for a number of individuals, connected by interaction" (Coser, 1977, p. 178). He used the term *sociation* to refer

to the pattern or form of the social interaction between individuals. He made it clear that sociation always involves harmony and conflict, attraction and repulsion. Both harmony and conflict are positive, structuring and defining the relationship. According to Simmel, an entirely harmonious or conflict-free group could not exist empirically as it would be unable to change or develop (Simmel, 1903, 1922).

Simmel observed that when members of any one group come into contact with members of another group and react to them with opposition, they will at the same time pull more tightly together as a group. For example, when one country is under attack from another, people in the defending nation set aside differences to cooperate against the attacker. This observation of a relationship between conflict and attraction later influenced communication scholars (Gauthier, 2009).

Simmel established, then, that in relationships between individuals and groups, conflict is as natural as the forces that bring people together. This, of course, negates many of the conflict myths identified earlier.

A second early scholar is Lewis Coser. Born Ludwig Cohen in Berlin in 1913, he left for Paris as a young man to study comparative literature and sociology at the Sorbonne. In 1940, France put all native Germans, regardless of their religion or politics, in internment camps. Coser was later able to immigrate to the United States, where he wrote for several political publications and taught at several universities including Chicago, Berkeley, Brandeis, and the State University of New York at Stony Brook. He was the author or editor of some 18 books, but it was his dissertation, *The Functions of Social Conflict* (1956), which extended Simmel's ideas into 16 propositions, that became a classic. Many communication scholars have been influenced by Coser's definition of conflict and his propositions. We'll present those most relevant to communication later in this chapter.

In general, the historical tradition of communication studies is the study of consensus—that is, the strategies that serve to bring individuals and groups together as one mind. In other disciplines, with the exception of Simmel and Coser, scholars who were studying conflict for the most part ignored or gave little attention to communication variables (Putnam, 2013).

Communication scholars turned to the study of conflict in reaction to the 1960s and 1970s protests on the nation's streets and college campuses. The civil rights movement, the anti–Vietnam War movement, the women's movement, the gay rights movement, and the environmental movement all were voicing conflict. A few communication researchers were beginning to study these social conflicts.

In 1973, Jandt edited the first book to apply conflict research to communication studies and introduce the communication discipline to the broad area of conflict studies. This was soon followed by a conference attended by communication researchers interested in the future of conflict studies in the communication discipline (Miller & Simons, 1974). The conference encouraged communication researchers to apply their perspective to the study of conflict.

The ensuing four decades of communication scholars' study of conflict have been documented (Olekalns, Putnam, Weingart, & Metcalf, 2008; Roloff, 1987). As Linda Putnam (2013) has observed, these four decades of communication research continue to affirm that "communication plays a vital role in shaping conflict issues and outcomes" (p. 29).

Conflict Defined

Let's return to Coser and his early definition of conflict. Writing in the tradition of Simmel, Coser (1956) developed a commonly used definition of **conflict**: "a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals" (p. 8). Hocker and Wilmot (2014) refined that definition to reflect a communication perspective: "an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals" (p. 13). In a comprehensive review of the literature, Putnam (2013) concluded that most communication scholars believe some form of interaction is fundamental to conflict in interdependent relationships over incompatible interests, goals, and values. Let's look at the parts of these definitions:

An expressed struggle. Sometimes conflict seems to be obvious, as when two people are in a heated verbal argument. But it isn't all that obvious. The two people could be the best of friends who enjoy an energetic discussion of issues. Sometimes there doesn't appear to be any conflict, as when two coworkers sharing an office are quite polite with one another. But that politeness could represent bitter resentment. Conflict exists when the parties agree in some way that the behaviors associated with their relationship are "conflict" behaviors (Jandt, 1973).

Interdependence. Parties in conflict must have some mutual interest, and some dependence upon one another. We do not engage in conflict with strangers; in fact, the more intimate the relationship, the more intense the conflict can be (Coser, 1956). Neighbors have an ongoing relationship as long as they live next to one another; management and labor have a relationship as long as they are members of the same business organization; divorced couples can have a lifelong relationship if they have children.

Perceived incompatible goals. Sometimes parties in conflict want the same thing and perceive that objective as limited or indivisible; for example, siblings want undivided attention from a parent. Sometimes parties want different things and perceive one's goal as incompatible with the other's goal; for example, two siblings want to watch television—just different shows.

Perceived scarce resources. Resources can be the obvious—money, land, jobs, prime parking places, and offices with windows. But resources that can be perceived as scarce can also be intangible, such as attention, caring, and love.

Interference. The perception of interference or actual interference is necessary for conflict. Another's actions are perceived as making it impossible to achieve desired goals and scarce resources.

Coser uses the term *realistic conflict* for conflicts that meet the definition above. He excludes from realistic conflict hostility and aggression directed at an unknown party (Coser's fourth proposition). For the interaction to be conflict, it must occur in a relationship. Hence, a person who leaves a heated argument to walk over to an unknown third party and utter a hostile expletive is not in conflict with that unknown third party.

From this defining restriction, we can also imagine that runners in a race who do not interact with one another during the race or salespeople in a sales contest who do not interact with one another during the competition are not in conflict. Competition is not realistic conflict.

CASE STUDY 1.1

Twitter Fights: Amanda Bynes Versus Rihanna

Twitter is the place where you can say what's on your mind the second you think about it. It's also the place where celebrities make outrageous statements and start feuds 140 characters at a time.

Amanda Bynes took to Twitter to attack pop star Rihanna and Chrissy Teigen of *Sports Illustrated* fame, calling both of them ugly. Bynes suggested Chris Brown's 2009 abuse of Rihanna was a result of her being "not pretty enough."

Amanda Bynes @AmandaBynes
@rihanna you look so ugly tryin to be write
View conversation

Amanda Bynes @AmandaBynes
@rihanna Chris brown beat you because you're not pretty enough
Hide conversation Reply Retweet Favorite More

Rihanna@rihanna
Ya see what happens when they cancel Intervention?
Details

Amanda Bynes @AmandaBynes
@rihanna unlike ur fugly faced self I don't do drugs! U need the intervention dog! I met ur ugly face in person! U aren't pretty u know it!

Rihanna@rihanna
Look who came to see me!! My lover Stella McCartney!!! #dwt instagram.com/p/Y9tQFOhM-N/
Exapand

Amanda Bynes @AmandaBynes
@rihanna no one wants to be your lover so you call everyone and their mother that I almost named my new dog Rihanna

Source: http://mashable.com/2013/09/10/twitter-fights/

DISCUSSION:

1. Does this Twitter fight meet Coser's definition of conflict?
2. How have social media changed the way we communicate in conflict?

The Inevitability of Conflict

Now let's review some of Coser's propositions, since they clearly show that conflict is inevitable in relationships. Remember from Simmel and Coser that relationships are characterized by attraction and conflict. Coser's second proposition states that conflict is necessary to maintain a relationship. His eighth proposition states that "the absence of conflict cannot be taken as an index of the strength and stability of a relationship" (Coser, 1956, p. 85). Think of two people who never argue and compare them to two people who experience conflicts and work through them. This proposition suggests that the first couple may not raise any conflicts because their commitment to their relationship is minimal. The second couple is invested in the relationship and works to maintain it. In fact, in the sixth proposition, Coser (1956) asserts that conflicts in close relationships "are likely to be intense" (p. 72). If the relationship is important, the conflict may become intense.

Several of Coser's propositions deal with the inevitability of conflict in groups. The first proposition states that "conflict serves to establish and maintain the identity and boundary lines of societies and groups" (Coser, 1956, p. 38). Coser's (1956) ninth and tenth propositions have generated a great deal of discussion on the societal level: "Conflict with another group leads to the mobilization of the energies of group members and hence to increased cohesion of the group" (p. 95), and "Groups engaged in continued struggle with the outside tend to be intolerant within" (p. 103). Think of a team, company, or country that, when challenged by an outside group, becomes motivated to perform and becomes less tolerant of disagreement within. Think of leaders of teams, companies, or countries who have engaged in a "search for enemies" to gain the benefits of conflict. Director/writer Michael Moore in the 1995 movie *Canadian Bacon* portrayed a United States with an economy in a rut and a president with low approval ratings starting a war with Canada.

Conflict Resolution or Conflict Management?

Understanding that conflict is inevitable and potentially beneficial, you can now consider the implications of the commonly used term *conflict resolution* and the term *conflict management.*

BusinessDictionary.com defines *conflict resolution* as "an intervention aimed at alleviating or eliminating discord through conciliation." A website of a community health group defines it as "a way for two or more parties to find a peaceful solution to a disagreement among them" (Courage to Change, 2015). Wikipedia—rightly or wrongly the source that many would use—defines it as "the methods and processes involved in facilitating the peaceful ending of conflict and retribution." You'll note that these and other definitions of **conflict resolution** or dispute resolution emphasize putting an end to the conflict. You now know that may well be an impossibility.

The concept of conflict resolution as a final end to conflict may not be meaningful in some cultures. In the United States, reaching an agreement is the end of the discussion as the parties share an understanding. Pye (1982) suggests that the Chinese understanding of conflict and negotiation is that they are an ongoing process. The Chinese word *wenti* is translated into English as "problem" but actually has a meaning closer to "question." A problem can be solved, but a question can only

be answered in the context of the current conditions that pose it. *Agreement* in Chinese means finding a place of common understanding from which questions in their current context can be answered for that moment. It is the beginning, not the end, of the discussion. For example, conflict over implementation and clarification of the agreements will continue as long as the relationship continues.

Communication and organizational scholars prefer to use the term **conflict management**. The term is used to suggest that there can be possible outcomes to conflict. Rahim (2002), for example, states that the aim of conflict management is to minimize any negative outcomes of conflict and promote the positive outcomes of conflict. Properly managed conflict can improve group outcomes and enhance an organization's performance. Communication scholars more likely use conflict management to include the benefits of conflict.

Constructive and Destructive Conflict

In the social sciences, Morton Deutsch has been called one of the founding fathers of the field of conflict resolution. After servicing in the U.S. Air Force during World War II, Deutsch studied for his doctoral degree in psychology. His dissertation compared the productivity of cooperative groups and competitive groups. As a beginning professor, he taught introductory psychology classes in which he experimented with cooperative and competitive grading processes.

In 1973, he published the book *The Resolution of Conflict* in which he differentiated between constructive conflict and destructive conflict. **Destructive conflict** was defined as conflict in which the disputants lost sight of their original goals and, instead, focused on hurting or annihilating each other. For example, in a business setting, employees who have grievances with management or who feel they are not being heard by management may waste time and work at a minimal level, doing only what they are required to do, resulting in a drop in productivity and service quality. They may be careless with supplies and equipment; they may engage in graffiti and even do direct damage to the company.

Constructive conflict, on the other hand, was defined as those conflicts that stimulate motivation and productivity, foster cohesiveness within groups, and invoke change. You should have guessed by this point that outstanding social leaders and organizational leaders intentionally manage conflict, such as by requiring open examination of decisions to ensure constructive outcomes.

That observation was clearly demonstrated by Irving Janis (1972, 1982) in his classic studies of **groupthink**. Janis's research interest had been decision making under stress. He popularized the term *groupthink* to refer to groups in which the desire for harmony and conformity results in minimizing conflict, suppressing dissenting viewpoints, and isolation from outside influences. Janis demonstrated how groupthink resulted in dysfunctional decision making in his study of several disasters in U.S. foreign policy, including the failure to anticipate the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the Bay of Pigs invasion fiasco in the Kennedy administration, and the continued Vietnam War in the Johnson administration.

The Bay of Pigs invasion was the primary case studied by Janis in formulating the theory of groupthink. The plan for an invasion of Cuba was initiated in the Eisenhower administration. When President Kennedy took office, the plan was uncritically accepted even though such valued advisers as Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. and Senator J. William Fulbright attempted to voice their objections to it. The Kennedy team believed in the infallibility of the plan and did not question the Central Intelligence Agency's assumptions about the ineffectiveness of Fidel Castro's air force and army and his inability to control any internal uprisings. Eventually, Schlesinger engaged in self-censorship and did not raise objections. He, along with others who had doubts about the plans, failed to speak up because they felt to do so might result in their ouster from the administration's inner circle. The resulting decision, of course, was disastrous.

Cecil W. Stoughton

▸ Before taking office, President-Elect John F. Kennedy asked Harvard professor Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. to be a special assistant in the White House. Schlesinger is second from left with President and Mrs. Kennedy in 1961.

> "But five minutes after it [the Bay of Pigs invasion] began to fall in, we all looked at each other and asked, 'How could we have been so stupid?' When we saw the wide range of the failures we asked ourselves why it had not been apparent to somebody from the start. I guess you get walled off from reality when you want something to succeed too much."
>
> —John F. Kennedy quoted in Sidey, H. (2001, April 16). The lesson John Kennedy learned from the Bay of Pigs. *Time*. http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,106537,00.html

Janis contrasted the decision making for the Bay of Pigs invasion with the decision making during the Cuban Missile Crisis that took place in the same administration one year later. In this case, essentially the same participants learned from past mistakes and put in place procedures to ensure that conflicts were expressed and considered in decision making. President Kennedy invited outside experts to share their viewpoints. He divided the group into occasional subgroups to break the group cohesion. He deliberately absented himself from some of the meetings so as to encourage more open dissent.

From his observations and study, Janis identified eight symptoms of groupthink:

1. Illusions of invulnerability, which lead to excessive optimism and encourage risk taking
2. Unquestioned belief in the morality of the group, which can lead to group members ignoring the consequences of their actions

3. Rationalizing any warnings that might challenge the group's assumptions
4. Stereotyping those outside the group who are opposed to the group as weak, biased, or stupid
5. Self-censorship of any ideas that might challenge the group's consensus
6. Illusions of unanimity among group members as silence is viewed as agreement
7. Group members who question the group being pressured to conform
8. The presence of mindguards, members who take on the role of shielding other group members from dissenting information

Janis (1972, pp. 209–215) also recommended actions the group leader should take to avoid groupthink:

1. Leaders should assign each member the role of "critical evaluator." This allows each member to freely air objections and doubts.
2. Leaders should not express an opinion when assigning a task to a group.
3. Leaders should absent themselves from many of the group meetings to avoid excessively influencing the outcome.
4. The organization should set up several independent groups, all working on the same problem.
5. All effective alternatives should be examined.
6. Each member should discuss the group's ideas with trusted people outside of the group.
7. The group should invite outside experts into meetings. Group members should be allowed to discuss with and question the outside experts.
8. At least one group member should be assigned the role of devil's advocate. This should be a different person for each meeting.

Notice that Janis's recommendations are that leaders should set up mechanisms to ensure the benefits of constructive conflict.

As dramatic and popular as Janis's work has been, it did not put a stop to groupthink. Just a few disastrous examples of the outcomes of groupthink are as follows:

- The explosion of the space shuttle *Challenger* in 1986. NASA managers ignored warnings about launching in low temperatures and ignored the flaw in the

shuttle's O-rings. The engineers who initially opposed the launch later held back their concerns. The result was the disaster in which all seven crew members lost their lives.

- The bankruptcy of energy company Enron in 2001. The management team at Enron clearly demonstrated an illusion of invulnerability in hiding billions of dollars in debt from failed deals and projects. The few employees who questioned the company's management practices either resigned or were fired. Accountants and lawyers who had inside knowledge of the company's activities knew that if they didn't go along, their firms could easily be replaced with firms that would.

- The cover-up of sexual abuse of children at the highest levels of Pennsylvania State University's leadership, revealed in 2011. A *Time* magazine report (Cohen & DeBenedet, 2012) used Janis's model to conclude that members of an insider group at Penn State "managed to twist logic to the point where they thought that it was more 'humane' to cover up the repeated allegations of . . . abuse than to report them to the police."

The list of examples could continue for pages. How can so many talented, educated people act in such fear of conflict that constructive dissent is suppressed? How can so many people lack conflict management skills?

LEARNING NEW CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SKILLS

The purpose of this text is to assist you in developing new skills in managing conflicts. In the next chapter, you will learn how to analyze a conflict to identify its elements. This is necessary to accurately describe a conflict, assist the parties if possible, and apply any conclusions to future conflicts. In Chapter 3, you will develop a more complete understanding of the concept of power, since power is an element in all interpersonal relationships. You will also learn about different styles of dealing with conflict.

Conflict and conflict management are very much products of cultures. In Chapter 4, you will learn more about the effect of culture on conflict and develop improved skills in dealing with intercultural conflicts. Much of conflict management involves negotiation skills, and in Chapter 5, you will learn how to improve your negotiating skills. Anger, aggression, and bullying are challenges in relationships and can lead to destructive conflicts. Chapter 6 presents skills for dealing with these challenges.

The next two chapters deal specifically with mediation skills—both face-to-face and online. Those are followed by a chapter on apologies, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The final chapter applies what you have learned to conflict in families and organizations.

But before going any further, we need to begin with the skill that is basic to all of conflict management.

LISTENING AND EMPATHY

In all the classes and training programs I've taken where listening has been a topic, I've heard the instructor say how important listening is but been disappointed in what was said about how to improve listening skills. So much was little more than platitudes. As Hewes and Graham (1989) point out, the receiver/processor role has been given short shrift in the communication discipline. It was only in 1995 that a group of listening specialists developed a definition of listening that could be commonly agreed upon. **Listening** was defined as "the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages" ("An ILA Definition of Listening," 1995, p. 4). Developed from Judi Brownell's (2010) six components of listening-centered communication and Joseph DeVito's (2016) five stages of the listening process, the following stages better define listening:

- **Stage 1: Hearing and attending to a message.** The first stage of the listening process is physiological, involving the human sensory receptors for auditory and visual stimuli and the neurological processes in the brain. You should not assume you are hearing and attending at an optimal level. Consider just auditory reception alone: Recent research shows that based on standard hearing examinations, one in eight people in the United States (13%, or 30 million) aged 12 years or older has hearing loss in both ears (Lin, Niparko, & Ferrucci, 2011). The statistics for visual reception are similar. Twenty-one million people in the United States report functional vision problems or eye conditions that may compromise vision (Pleis & Lethbridge-Çejku, 2007).

- **Stage 2: Deciphering meaning from the message.** After the message has been sensed through auditory and visual channels, it must be attended to through the short-term memory system and then interpreted for meaning. Researchers agree that the human attention span is quite limited. Wolvin (2010) explains that listening involves shifting stimuli from and into long-term memory storage while creating meaning. What we attend to is limited by our perceptional filter, which screens the stimulus so that our predispositions alter the message. Our culture, past experiences, roles, interests, attitudes, and beliefs shape our expectations of the message. For example, one's technical training may influence one to attend to stimuli critical in that technical area (e.g., a medical professional may attend to medical information). Interpreting a message for meaning involves assigning meanings to the words and nonverbal messages. Our vocabulary limits the accuracy and extent of listening comprehension. Think of the different meanings the spoken phrase "Get out of here" can have depending on who is speaking, where it is spoken, and how it is spoken.

- **Stage 3: Remembering what was heard.** Thomas and Levine (1994) explain that listening and verbal recall are related but separate constructs. Listening is dependent upon our ability to act on what is received either immediately or at some later point in time. Memory, then, affects our ability to formulate appropriate responses (Brownell, 2010).

- **Stage 4: Thinking critically about the message.** At some point, listeners will make judgments about the accuracy and validity of the information received. Listeners assess what has been heard by "weighing evidence and reasoning, recognizing emotional appeals, and drawing other conclusions that will affect their subsequent listening response" (Brownell, 2010, p. 146).

- **Stage 5: Answering and giving feedback to the speaker.** Once the listener receives and interprets the message, the listener then responds to the message. This response or feedback is an essential part of the communication (Wolvin, 2010). Cooper and Husband (1993) characterize this feedback as demonstrating "an *accurate* understanding of the message as well as demonstrat[ing] *support* for the relationship between the communication participants" (p. 13). Daly (1975) explained, "No matter how effective, skilled, or competent an individual is in listening, unless he or she is perceived as listening by the other interactants, little may be accomplished" (pp. 1–2).

> "The most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and be understood. The best way to understand people is to listen to them."
>
> —Ralph Nichols, pioneer in the field of listening

Communication and listening scholars also draw from what has been labeled as active listening and dialogic listening.

The concept of **active listening** comes from the theories of Carl Rogers's person-centered therapy. Born in Oak Park, Illinois, Rogers studied agriculture, history, and then religion. He left seminary studies to complete his MA and PhD at Teachers College, Columbia University. In his second book published in 1942, Rogers first developed his counseling theory that clients in establishing a relationship with an accepting and understanding therapist can change their attitudes toward themselves and others and can become more emotionally mature, more open to their experiences, less defensive, more democratic, and less authoritarian (Rogers & Farson, 1957). Rogers and Abraham Maslow are considered pioneers of the humanistic psychology movement, which holds that people are inherently good and driven toward self-actualization. In his later years, Rogers worked applying his theories to social conflict. In Belfast, Northern Ireland, he worked to bring influential Protestants and Catholics together.

Rogers developed his theory as a foundation for counseling and labeled it "non-directive therapy." That Rogers believed his principles to apply in a variety of other contexts is reflected in his evolving label for his approach from "non-directive" to "client-centered" to "person-centered." And his theory has been applied to interpersonal relations, education, and other helping professions.

Rogers described behaviors to avoid in active listening. In active listening, we avoid reasoning with, pleading with, and encouraging the speaker, or doing anything to change the speaker's perceptions. We avoid responding to requests for decisions, judgments, and evaluations. We avoid providing advice and information. And we avoid encouragement, which can be seen as an attempt to motivate the speaker in a certain direction. As Rogers explains, typical listening behaviors are of little use in active listening. To a person who is deeply discouraged, "I'm sure everything will work out OK" is not a helpful response because it can be seen as an attempt to change the speaker's perceptions (Rogers & Farson, 1957).

Active listening includes attention to verbal and nonverbal messages. The listener must convey to the speaker that the listener is seeing things from the speaker's point of view. Rogers emphasizes that verbal messages have two components: the content of the message and the feeling or attitude underlying the content. Consider a speaker who said, "I've finished that lathe setup." The content is obvious. If the same speaker had said, "Well, I'm finally finished with that damned lathe setup," it might be that in addition to the same content a feeling or attitude was being communicated. But if the same speaker had said, "I'd like to melt this lathe down and make paper clips out of it," the feeling component would be more important than the content (Rogers & Farson, 1957). It is the nonverbal messages from such things as vocal hesitations, facial expressions, body posture, and hand and eye movements that frequently convey feelings and attitudes.

Active listening does include feedback. Active listening nonverbal feedback can use head nods, appropriate eye contact, and leaning forward. Active listening verbal feedback is the point or position of the speaker. This restatement cannot be parroting the words of the speaker as that is only evidence of having heard the words. The restatement must be a restatement in the listener's own words and must demonstrate an understanding of both the content and the feelings and attitudes. As Rogers explains, the feedback should convey the message that "I'm interested in you as a person, and I think that what you feel is important. I respect your thoughts, and even if I don't agree with them, I know that they are valid for you. I feel sure that you have a contribution to make. I'm not trying to change you or evaluate you. I just want to understand you. I think you're worth listening to, and I want you to know that I'm the kind of a person you can talk to" (Rogers & Farson, 1957, p. 284).

When Jonathon Chace was a mediator in the U.S. Community Relations Service, he was assigned to mediate a highly charged community conflict that had erupted in protest activity. The conflict was over the construction of a highway that would physically divide a public housing project in the community. The highway authorities prevailed, and the community members got little opportunity to address their concerns. After the final session, the leader of the community group made a point of thanking Chace for being "different from the others." Chace asked, "How was I different?" The reply: "You listened. You were the only one who cared about what we were saying" (Salem, 1982, p. 99).

The concept of **dialogic listening** is advanced as an alternative to active listening. Johannesen (1971) distinguishes between monologue and dialogue: Monologue speaking or listening "seeks to command, coerce, manipulate, conquer, dazzle, deceive, or exploit" (p. 377). Dialogue speaking or listening is characterized "by such qualities as mutuality, open-heartedness, directness, honesty, spontaneity, frankness, lack of pretense, nonmanipulative intent, communion, intensity, and love in the sense of responsibility of one human for another" (p. 375).

Dialogic listening, then, includes authenticity, inclusion, confirmation, presentness, spirit of mutual equality, and supportive climate (Johannesen, 2002, pp. 58–60). Authenticity refers here to listening without deception. Pretending to be interested in the speaker's ideas and feelings and providing feedback that is insincere shows a lack of authenticity. The authentic listener provides honest feedback and does not use the speaker for any selfish or concealed reasons (Floyd, 2010).

In active listening, the listener focuses on the speaker's views and feelings alone. The listener's views and feelings are not a part of the interaction. From the perspective of dialogic listening, this could be considered a lack of authenticity. Dialogic listening is more of a joint process, a shared conversation in the present, in which listeners attend to their own views—and the other person's views—at the same time to come to a shared understanding (Stewart & Thomas, 1995).

Inclusion refers to making an effort to place the listener in the speaker's position. The listener attempts to understand "where the speaker is coming from." Confirmation means accepting the speaker as a person of worth simply because he or she is a human. Thinking of the speaker in terms of his or her role, for example, is not confirming the person's worth as a human; compare "the supervisor said" to "Mrs. Raetzsch said." Presentness refers to actively attending to the speaking not only by physical presence but by focusing one's mental attention on the speaker. A spirit of mutual equality means recognizing and respecting that everyone has the right to communicate freely and openly without prejudgment. Finally, a supportive climate results from the cumulative effect of the listener's efforts at authenticity, inclusion, confirmation, presentness, and spirit of mutual equality (Floyd, 2010).

Dialogic listening is also contrasted with the concepts of sympathy and empathy. One early use of the concept of **sympathy** comes from the economist and moral philosopher Adam Smith, who believed that all humans experience a "fellow-feeling" when we observe someone experiencing an emotional state; that is, we experience an affective state that more or less matches the state we observe in others. Independent of that usage, the early use of the word **empathy**, in German aesthetics, meant the tendency of observers to project themselves into that which they observe. Contrasting the early use of these two concepts, we see that sympathy had a largely passive flavor. Empathy suggested a more active attempt "to get inside the other" to feel what the other felt (Davis, 1994). Contemporary usage of the term *sympathy* is more commonly "acknowledging another person's emotional hardships and providing comfort and assurance" while contemporary usage of the term *empathy* is "an affective response more appropriate to someone else's situation than to one's own" (Hoffman, 1987, p. 48).

Empathic listening is often called active listening as the techniques are the same. Empathic listening has as its objective to feel what the other feels. Active listening in person-centered counseling has the objective of changing clients' attitudes toward themselves and others. Critics of empathic listening and active listening argue that it is impossible to be another person, to fully understand what another is feeling.

CASE STUDY 1.2

Levels of Listening and Responding

Listening skills are critical to relationships, both personal and professional. The following case study demonstrates Ashley's listening to gain an understanding of why her roommate Brittany is upset. The level 1 response demonstrates ignoring feelings. The level 5 response demonstrates an accurate understanding of feelings. The level 7 response demonstrates the highest degree of responding to feelings.

When Ashley enters their room, she sees Brittany in tears on her bed.

Ashley: "What's wrong?"

Brittany: "I'm really in trouble. I went to the bookstore to pick up a flash drive and some snacks. I had too much to carry in my hands, so I put the flash drive in my coat pocket. On the way to the checkout, I saw Megan, and we stopped to talk. We kept talking while we walked to the checkout. I put the snacks on the counter and paid for them. I just forgot about the flash drive in my coat pocket. Just as I was leaving the store, a security guard stopped me and Megan and asked me to accompany him to an office. He asked me what was in my coat pocket. I immediately recognized my mistake and offered to pay for it. The security guard said, 'Yes, shoplifting is a mistake. We have you on camera pocketing the item. You can't make it go away by offering to pay for it now.' The security guard took down my information and told me I'd be hearing from campus police this evening. What am I going to do?"

Level 1 Response:

Ashley: "I've heard that the campus bookstore has been having problems with shoplifting."

Analysis: Ashley's response communicates only a minimal understanding of what Brittany said and clearly does not communicate any empathy. She is not communicating any awareness of Brittany's feelings. Ashley may be unwilling to offer any advice.

Level 2 Response:

Ashley: "Did you say you were still inside the store when the security guard spoke to you?"

Analysis: Ashley demonstrates a negligible degree of understanding of what was said while ignoring Brittany's feelings.

Level 3 Response:

Ashley: "That's not fair. That could have happened to anybody. Did you tell him you just forgot about the flash drive?"

Analysis: In contrast to the lower levels where feelings are totally ignored, this response shows a minor degree of understanding by saying, "That's not fair." Most of the emotion in Brittany's statement, though, is ignored.

Level 4 Response:

Ashley: "That was wrong for the security guard to embarrass you in front of Megan. I'd be embarrassed too. Did you mention to him that you had to put the flash drive in your pocket because you couldn't carry all your stuff?"

Analysis: At this level, Ashley responds accurately to Brittany's most obvious feelings, but her response does not convey the importance of the feelings. There appears to be a desire and effort to understand, but the level of understanding is low.

Level 5 Response:

Ashley: "So you put the flash drive in your pocket and just forgot to pay for it at the checkout. Then security stopped you in front of Megan and everyone else, and you don't know what campus police are going to do about it, right?"

Analysis: At this level, Ashley's response is essentially interchangeable with the meaning and emotion Brittany expressed.

Level 6 Response:

Ashley: "After what was just a simple honest mistake, you were embarrassed in front of Megan and everyone. I'd be scared too about what campus police would do if this had happened to me."

Analysis: Ashley recognizes Brittany's feelings, including those not readily apparent.

Level 7 Response:

Ashley: "You must have been threatened when that security guard stopped you in front of Megan. To make it worse, you're just waiting to hear from campus police, and you have no idea what they might do. You must feel awful."

Analysis: At the highest level, Ashley accurately responds to Brittany's feelings and adds to the meaning, reflecting she truly understands what Brittany is feeling. She demonstrates an awareness of the intensity of the emotions.

Based on Barkai, J., & Fine, V. O. (1983). Empathy training for lawyers and law students. *Southwest University Law Review, 13,* 505–529.

DISCUSSION:

Use this case study as a model to write out possible different-level responses. The responses should reflect different degrees of the content of the message and the feelings underlying the message.

CASE STUDY 1.2

Listening Skills for Conflict Management

Listening means different things in different contexts. Listening to a lecture is different from listening to someone making a controversial political argument. And both are different from listening to an intimate friend sharing a feeling. And still more different is the listening a person involved in a conflict expects from us. Not all listening is effective communication. In fact, a certain kind of listening in some situations might even escalate conflict. Intentional listening motivated by the desire to argue and debate is likely to cause further conflict and distance (Mayer, 2000).

In this section of this text, I will share with you what I have learned about listening and about empathy from decades of experience in mediation and conflict management. Listening for conflict management includes the following:

- Controlling the environment as much as possible to minimize noise and other distractions.
- Being totally present in the moment. A listener who is not feeling well or is worried about external factors such as a family member in the hospital cannot be totally present in the moment.
- Allowing the speaker to speak without interruption.
- Asking for help understanding the meaning of any of the speaker's words or technical phrases with which the listener is not familiar.
- Taking notes with the speaker's permission if the conflict story is complex. Explain that the notes are to help you understand and will be destroyed.
- Asking questions to clarify what was said, to gain additional information, and to encourage the speaker to continue speaking. These questions should be nonthreatening and must not be interrogation-style questions. Interrogation interviewing uses strategic questions designed to elicit a confession or information that the interviewer believes the speaker has. Threatening and interrogation questions can cause the speaker to be defensive and withhold information and feelings. Examples of questions appropriate when listening to a speaker in conflict are "What happened next?" and "Tell me more."
- Identifying and remembering the issues in the conflict. In conflict, the word *issue* refers to the problem, the matter in question, the point of contention, and what parties believe the conflict is about. Frequently, the speaker in conflict situations focuses on facts and opinions in an attempt to determine "right and wrong" or "what really happened." In conflict management, the listener focuses on identifying exactly what the issues in dispute are and what the speaker's position on each issue is.
- Making frequent summaries of the facts and issues. These summaries are also critical in conflict management. First, they are evidence of the speaker's having been heard. For many people in conflict situations, this may be the first time they feel they have been heard. Second, they give the speaker the opportunity to correct and refine what he or she said. Third, what the listener chooses to highlight in the summary tends to be what is carried forward in future discussions. In effect, the listener is evaluating the facts and choosing not to include in summaries those facts not relevant to a description of the issues. For example, a speaker may include

other events that happened the day of the conflict episode. The listener may decide not to summarize those "other events" if they are irrelevant to the issues in conflict. Most important, the listener is organizing the summaries to highlight the issues in conflict. This helps the speaker to focus on issues rather than on details.

- Identifying and remembering the feelings underlying the speaker's messages.
- Acknowledging the speaker's feelings to demonstrate an understanding of his or her emotions. Think of the listener who says in a commanding voice, "Get yourself together and just tell me what happened without all the drama." Contrast that to the listener who says in a quiet manner, "I can see that this situation is very upsetting to you."
- Finally, not expressing opinions or evaluations. The listener does not provide information. These can be experienced as attempts to influence how the speaker is perceiving the conflict.

Facilitating Others' Listening

I'm sure you've heard someone at some time say something like "The problem with him is that he doesn't listen." Can you make someone a better listener? We can establish a structure that does encourage one to be a better listener. One example of such a structure is **study circles**. A study circle is a small group of people who meet for an extended period to discuss and explore an issue or topic. Study circles are quite different from what are known as focus groups, which are used in market research. Focus groups are assembled to discuss a product or service. Here the listening of the marketing firm conducting the group is critical. In study circles, the focus is on improving the listening of the group participants.

Study circles became popular in Sweden in the early 20th century as part of popular political movements such as temperance and workers' movements. Study circles remain a broadly supported activity in Sweden, allowing citizens to more fully participate in their community and national dialogues (Larsson & Nordvall, 2010). The concept has been adopted in the United States with the support of organizations such as the National Issues Forums and the Study Circles Resource Center. In the United States, study circles have been formed around issues such as race relations, same-sex marriage, and immigration. It is exactly such issues about which some speakers, unwilling to listen to other views, express strong opinions. The study circle format encourages people to express their opinions and listen to other views.

iStockphoto.com/Alina Solovyova-Vincent

▸ Study circles meet to discuss public issues in a democratic and collaborative way. A neutral facilitator encourages listening for understanding.

Each study circle has a leader or facilitator who remains neutral throughout the process. The facilitator does not share personal opinions. The facilitator explains that the purpose of the study circle is to deliberate on the issue in a democratic and collaborative way. The facilitator establishes basic group rules:

- All views should get a fair hearing. All group members are encouraged to express their opinions.
- Disagreements and conflicts over ideas can be useful, but disagreements should not be personalized. Personal attacks are not tolerated.
- If someone says something that offends another group member, any member of the group should feel free to explain how the comment affected him or her.
- It is important to hear from everyone in the group. People who tend to talk a lot should make special efforts to give others the opportunity to express their views.
- Each group may add to these basic rules on its own.

The facilitator monitors the group by noting who has spoken, who hasn't spoken, and what points haven't had a fair hearing. The facilitator actually says very little. The facilitator's comments are typically suggestions for group process. For example, rather than providing summaries for the group, the facilitator may ask a group member to summarize. And the facilitator may ensure that reticent members have the opportunity to speak.

The facilitator also assists the group's critical thinking by ensuring that a wide range of ideas are considered. The facilitator may ask the group to consider a point of view that is not represented in its membership. The facilitator may ask the group to consider advantages and disadvantages of different points of view and may ask the group to think about the values that underlie beliefs. The facilitator is prepared to ask open-ended questions to stimulate discussion (Study Circles Resource Center, 1993).

Having facilitated study circles for same-sex marriage and immigration issues, I have seen how the structure that study circles provide makes it possible for individuals who begin the group with firm, extreme positions to become able to listen to and consider other positions and respect others who hold different positions as individuals.

Study circles highlight the difference between listening to argue and listening to understand:

In dialogue, one listens to the other side(s) in order to understand, find meaning, and find agreement.

In debate, one listens to the other side in order to find flaws and to counter its arguments.

Source: Study Circles Resource Center. (1993). *A guide to training study circle leaders*. Pomsfret, CT: Topsfield Foundation.

Developing listening skills most appropriate for conflict management is the necessary first step. The second step is to develop the skills to analyze and understand a conflict. In the next chapter, you'll consider how the concept of power may well be the fundamental element to understanding conflict. In Chapter 3, you'll learn a systematic way of analyzing and understanding conflicts that includes power, among other factors.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Write a brief but thoughtful analysis of what you learned about conflict from your parents, from video games, and from television and popular culture. Are any of your beliefs or learning actually myths about conflict? If so, what is the reality?

2. Think of more examples of groupthink in which a group or organization intentionally acted to suppress conflict and suffered the consequences of flawed decision making. What different choices could the participants have made in order to arrive at a better outcome?

3. Compare listening for conflict management as presented in this chapter to active listening and to dialogic listening. What are the similarities and differences?

4. In what ways does the guide for study circles as described in this chapter suggest ways to improve others' listening in conflict situations?

KEY TERMS

Active listening (p. 15)

Conflict (p. 7)

Conflict management (p. 10)

Conflict resolution (p. 9)

Constructive conflict (p. 10)

Destructive conflict (p. 10)

Dialogic listening (p. 16)

Empathy (p. 17)

Groupthink (p. 10)

Listening (p. 14)

Study circles (p. 21)

Sympathy (p. 17)

2

POWER AND CONFLICT STYLES

> "Wherever I found a living thing, there found I Will to Power; and even in the will of the servant found I the will to be master."
>
> —Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Chapter 34

Donald Trump made the phrase "You're fired" popular on his television show *The Apprentice*. In the real corporate world, it's not quite so easy. Terminating an employee because of gender, race, religion, marital status, or age is illegal. Employers must have a valid reason for firing an employee. Firing an employee for personal reasons may create a nonproductive, destructive conflict environment.

For example, the board of directors of a West Coast tech company appointed a new president. At her previous position, there had been stories that she instigated conflicts in the workplace, but the board

Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, you will be able to:

1. Define power and its relationship to conflict
2. Identify Western styles of conflict
3. Describe conflict styles in cultures that value harmony
4. Discuss the goals of conflict coaching

appointed her with a mandate to change the direction of the company. Within a year of her arrival, 20 of 25 top managers were fired, reassigned, or forced into retirement. Each one suffered some financial or professional loss because of this president's actions. Clearly, each of these former employees had a conflict with the president. Some accepted their fate. Some attempted to fight back with formal complaints and lawsuits. Some attempted to appeal directly to the board, which turned a deaf ear. A year later, all had given up any attempt to retain their position. Why? Because the president had the full support of the board—she had overwhelming power.

What is **power**? It is commonly understood to be the ability to influence or control the behavior of others. Defined as such, the exercise of power is endemic to humans as social beings.

What gives a person power? Resources, such as money; force, such as military power; skills, abilities, and expertise that are desired by others, such as medical arts; specialized knowledge; position in a hierarchy; charisma; and persuasion skills broadly defined to include everything from moral power to public relations. Clearly, some individuals have had power because at one time or another they possessed one or more of these.

How is power related to the study of conflict? Conflict can result from the exercise of power. Conflict can be expressed in resistance to attempts to control one's behavior as well as in unjust or evil attempts to control others. Power has a moral dimension as the exercise of power can be legitimate or unjust or evil. The exercise of power is critical to understand interpersonal as well as international relations.

In this chapter, you'll first develop an understanding of power. Then you'll read about styles of dealing with conflict. Finally, you'll read about conflict coaching to assist individuals to improve their competency in conflict management and particularly to help those who must deal with power imbalances in conflict.

The popular and academic literature on power is extensive. Rather than begin with a literature review, let's begin with an individual known for the practical application of power.

DEFINITIONS OF POWER APPLIED TO CONFLICT

Saul David Alinsky was born in Chicago to Russian immigrant parents. He studied archaeology at the University of Chicago. After two years of graduate school, he worked for the state of Illinois as a criminologist while at the same time working as an organizer for the labor group CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations). By 1939, he became more active in community organizing, beginning in the poor areas on the South Side of Chicago. As his reputation grew, he was invited to work with slum communities across the nation. His books *Reveille for Radicals* (1946) and *Rules for Radicals* (1971) became handbooks on the use of power for community organizers. It is said that he influenced President Barack Obama in his time as a Chicago-based community organizer as well as in his 2008 presidential campaign. It is also said that former Republican House majority leader Dick Armey gave copies of Alinsky's books to Tea Party leaders.

In 1972, Alinsky gave an interview for *Playboy* magazine in which he spoke directly about power. Asked how he started as an organizer in Chicago, he explained that the first thing he did was to move into the community as an observer, to listen to the people's grievances, and to learn what organizations already existed.

> Power is not only what you have but what the enemy thinks you have.
>
> —Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, p. 127

AP Photo

▸ Saul Alinsky was invited to Rochester, New York, to organize for jobs for community members. Kodak, as the city's largest employer, became his target. Alinsky secured proxies from shareholding members of the Unitarian Universalist Association in order to gain access to Kodak's shareholders' meeting held in Flemington, New Jersey. Alinsky is shown speaking to the crowd of protesters whom he had bused in from Rochester. By forcing Kodak to acknowledge them, he gained power for the group he represented.

Alinsky clearly described the source of his power: "Power comes in two forms—money and people. You haven't got any money, but you do have people." He established community-wide coalitions of workers, labor leaders, housewives, and small businesses and soon had his power base ready "to do battle" with boycotts, picketing, sit-ins, strikes, and some creative actions. Some of his more effective tactics were completely nonviolent, and very often the threat of them was enough to gain success. Alinsky described one such threat directed at the Rochester (New York) Philharmonic, the city's cultural jewel. "I suggested we pick a night when the music would be relatively quiet and buy 100 seats. The 100 blacks scheduled to attend the concert would then be treated to a preshow banquet in the community consisting of nothing but huge portions of baked beans. Can you imagine the inevitable consequences within the symphony hall? . . . Rochester would be immortalized as the site of the world's first fart-in."

Alinsky also understood that power is something others give you. One way to get it was to bait the power structure into publicly attacking you. As Coser noted in his propositions (see Chapter 1), when a high-power organization attacks another, it has given its target power equal to its own simply by recognizing it. As Alinsky explained in the *Playboy* interview, "I deliberately maneuvered to provoke criticism. I made outrageous statements to the press, I attacked every civic and business leader I could think of, and I goaded the establishment to strike back. *The Chicago Tribune*, one of the most right-wing rags in the country at the time, branded me a subversive menace."

And, finally, Alinsky knew that being able to deliver what people wanted gave him power. He told the story of a Chicago mayor who was extremely antilabor but also had a strong admiration for then president Franklin Roosevelt. Because of his antilabor stance, the president accorded him second-class status at best. As Alinsky said, "I figured I might just be able to use this personal Achilles' heel to our

advantage." Alinsky would arrange for labor leaders to applaud him publicly as a true friend of workers. "Within forty-eight hours I'll have turned you into a champion of liberalism . . . and that'll make you completely acceptable to F.D.R. on all occasions, social and political." Alinsky got the support he needed.

What principles can we derive from Alinsky's use of power?

1. Like conflict, power exists in relationships.
2. To some extent, power is perceived power.
3. Like conflict, some power is resource-based. People have power when the resources they possess are valued.
4. The exercise of power may be necessary to effect change.

Traditional Theory of Power

Much of conflict theory was developed by scholars whose primary interest was organizations and society. One early theorist, Max Weber, was born in 1864 in the German province of Saxony. He studied law at the University of Heidelberg and the University of Berlin, earning his law doctorate in 1889. He was a prodigious scholar, writing on Western economic and legal history, public administration, religion, and culture. He has been called "the leading scholar of questions of power and authority in the twentieth century" (Wolfe, 2011).

Weber accepted an invitation to participate in a conference of international scholars held in St. Louis in 1904. He found much he admired in the booming capitalist United States. What he observed strengthened his ideas about authority, organization, and power, which he developed in his book *Economy and Society*. He described authority in the past as traditional—that is, inherited and accepted by the holder's subjects—and as charismatic—that is, an individual leader was seen by followers to possess a special gift for leadership. Modern authority he saw as bureaucratic and rational, grounded in laws and enforced by an administrative structure capable of applying those laws. He saw bureaucratic organizations as the most advanced form of organizations humans had achieved and best suited for capitalism (Naím, 2013).

Weber described these bureaucracies as vertical, pyramid-shaped hierarchical arrangements of positions defined by specialized duties and technical expertise. Decision making in bureaucracies was based solely on facts and the policies and procedures of the organization. Personal relationships were not to be involved. Weber was to argue that such rational, professional, hierarchical, and centralized structures were best for all types of organizations from labor unions to universities.

From this context, power became defined as the ability to direct or prevent the current or future actions of other groups and individuals. Power is the means by which we get others to behave in ways they would not otherwise (Naím, 2013).

Still within the context of Weber's tradition, John R. P. French and Bertram Raven's (1959) classic work on power clearly established a definition of power based on the relationship between parties. Power depends on the understandings between parties. A party being influenced must recognize a quality in the party attempting the influence that would motivate it to change in the way the influencing party intends. In this sense, power depends on others' recognition of a motivating quality.

French and Raven identified five categories of such motivating qualities while noting there may be other, minor categories:

1. Legitimate or positional power. French and Raven describe legitimate power as power because of the relative position the person holds in an organization. Legitimate power is delegated to the holder of the position only while in that position. It is accompanied by the artifacts of power such as offices and uniforms.

2. Referent power. Referent power is the ability of an individual to attract others and build loyalty and is often based on charisma and interpersonal skills. Sports figures are said to have referent power and, as such, are sought out to endorse products in advertising.

3. Expert power. Expert power is derived from a person's skills or expertise. When those skills or expertise are needed or desired, such people are sought for leadership in the area of their expertise—and sometimes in areas removed from their expertise.

4. Reward power. Reward power refers to individuals being able to give others rewards such as material rewards, benefits, time off, and promotions.

5. Coercive power. Coercive power is the ability to deny privileges or withhold rewards as well as apply negative consequences such as assigning unpleasant tasks.

Other categories might be more common in certain cultures. For example, in some societies, age or connections to powerful figures are associated with power.

Generally, the traditional theory of power can be described as one of "power over," as in the ability to dominate another person or group. In this view, "I have power over them" means "I have the ability to make them do what I want them to do." **Power-over** usually can call upon some type of threat or force to make people comply.

Alternative Theory of Power

Mary Parker Follett is regarded as one of the leading management theorists. Her ideas on power, negotiation, alternative dispute resolution, and employee participation have been highly influential. Follett was born in 1868 into an affluent Quaker family in Quincy, Massachusetts, and spent much of her early life there. In 1892, she entered the Society for the Collegiate Instruction of Women (later Radcliffe College).

She graduated summa cum laude in 1898 and, it is said, was denied a doctorate at Harvard because she was a woman. She worked as a social worker in Boston where she advocated for the need for community centers before becoming the vice president of the National Community Center Association in 1917. She was one of the first women to address the London School of Economics, where she spoke on management issues. She was also a consultant to President Theodore Roosevelt on managing not-for-profit, nongovernmental, and voluntary organizations.

While Follett published many works, her writings were known only in limited circles. The popular management ideas at the time were those of Weber and the Scientific Management movement, which

CASE STUDY 2.1

W. L. Gore & Associates Inc.

W. L. Gore & Associates Inc. was founded in 1958 by Wilbert (Bill) Lee Gore and his wife Genevieve (Vieve) Walton Gore. By 2013, the company employed 10,197 employees and had annual revenue of $3.2 billion.

The company is one example of the "power with" concept. Gore had spent 16 years with the DuPont Company where he gained experience with task-force teams, which were formed outside the company's formal hierarchy to deal with specific problem situations over short time periods. At W. L. Gore & Associates, he established a flat, lattice-like organizational structure with no formal chain of command or predetermined channels of communication. Every worker shares the title of associate, and all are encouraged to communicate directly with each other. Teams organize around new products, businesses, or other opportunities. There are no bosses but rather leaders. Leaders may be appointed, but more often team associates choose to follow a leader rather than have a boss assigned to them (Hamel & Breen, 2007).

Some quotations from the company's web page:

"All of this takes place in an environment that combines freedom with cooperation and autonomy with synergy."

"Everyone can earn the credibility to define and drive projects."

Source: http://www.gore.com/en_xx/aboutus/culture/index.html

DISCUSSION:

1. Most likely, your previous work experience has been in power-over organizations. Identify one work experience you have had and redesign it as if in a power-with organization.
2. What conflicts are likely to develop in power-with organizations? (Hint: Review the discussion of groupthink in Chapter 1 as one example.)

was based on the idea that there was one right way for tasks to be performed and that the best form of leadership was top-down hierarchy. But her ideas influenced more well-known figures in the human relations movement. Follett set the stage for a generation of progressive changes in management that helped humanize the U.S. workplace (Tonn, 2003).

In this context, Follett developed the idea of reciprocal relationships in organizations and the critical importance of informal processes within organizations. She advocated the principle of noncoercive power sharing based on her concept of "power with" (coactive power) rather than the coercive "power over" concept. By **power-with**, she meant the ability to work with others cooperatively by power sharing (Follett, 1924/1951).

Power Imbalances

When conflicts arise in power-over contexts, parties are conscious of how much power one has compared to the other. As you'll read in later chapters, negotiation and mediation are more effective if the parties hold relatively equal amounts of power.

However, when there is a power imbalance between the parties, there are effects on the parties and on the dispute. Power imbalances can affect how the parties view themselves. Research by neuroscientists Jeremy Hogeveen and his colleagues (2014) demonstrated that believing we have power changes the way the brain operates.

Hogeveen's research focused on the mirror system region of the brain. The mirror system contains neurons that become active both when we do an action, such as squeeze a rubber ball, and when we watch someone else do that same action. Whether we do it or observe someone else do it, our mirror system activates. Furthermore, because our actions are linked to deeper thoughts—like beliefs and intentions—we may also begin to empathize with what motivates another person's actions. The research by Hogeveen et al. (2014) examined whether giving a person a feeling of power or powerlessness would change how the mirror system responds to someone else performing a simple action.

Participants wrote a diary entry either about a time they depended on others for help or about a time they were in charge. The researchers then measured the way the participants' mirror systems responded to someone else performing a simple action. Those feeling powerless had more empathy than those feeling powerful. This study and others are demonstrating that believing one has power diminishes all varieties of empathy.

Power imbalances also affect the dispute itself. Consider these likely outcomes:

1. The high-power person or group can refuse to enter into negotiation, mediation, or another dispute resolution process simply because it has no need to. This person or group can get what it wants without engaging the low-power person or group.

2. The low-power person or group may refuse to enter into negotiation, mediation, or another dispute resolution process out of fear it will be forced to make unwanted concessions.

3. The high-power person or group can simply impose its will on the other side, which is forced to accept it. The high-power person or group has the resources, force, or position in the hierarchy to enforce compliance.

4. The low-power person or group may strive to build power before being willing to enter into negotiation or mediation.

The first three outcomes to power imbalances might not seem to result in any overt conflict. In fact, an outside observer might label the current state of affairs as one of peace. The commonly used definition of peace is a state of harmony characterized by the absence of hostility, violence, and war. The observation

CASE STUDY 2.2

Refusal to Negotiate: The Governments of Quebec and the Mohawk

A conflict developed between Canada's Quebec government and the Mohawk tribe over the issue of extending a golf course onto land that the Mohawks felt was sacred. In protest, the tribe erected temporary barricades to protect its land.

A power imbalance between the parties clearly affected the outcome. The Mohawk people considered themselves a separate nation based on 18th-century treaties between the tribe and the government. At the time of the conflict, Canadian authorities did not recognize the Mohawk claim of sovereignty, contending instead that the Mohawk people were Canadian.

The Mohawk people wanted to discuss sovereignty, land, and the preservation of natural resources. The Mohawks brought in the well-known mediator John Paul Lederach to help develop the issues and mediate the conflict. They proposed removing the barricades with the condition that none of the protesters would be arrested. Framing the protesters as criminals, the government officials walked out without making any counterproposals. An order to remove the barricades by force followed.

Source: Friesen, R. (1991). Reflections on Oka: The Mohawk confrontation. *Conflict Resolution Notes, 8*(4), 36–38.

DISCUSSION:

1. What were the government's sources of power?
2. What were the possible outcomes of the imbalance of power?
3. Are there ways the Mohawks could have equalized the power?

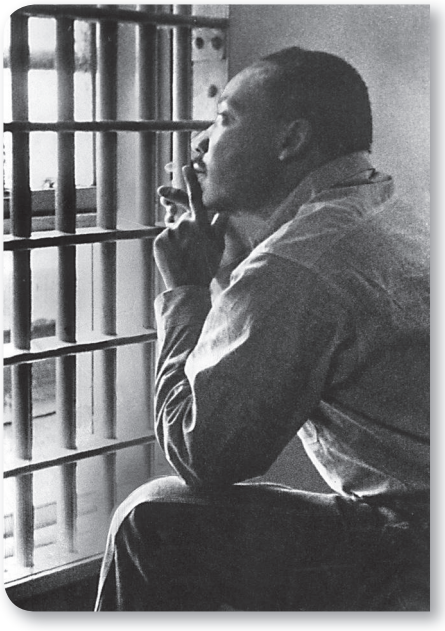
that the first three outcomes are peaceful should take us back to Chapter 1 to reexamine exactly what is meant by conflict. Is the presence of overt hostile behaviors a necessary defining characteristic of conflict? Is a community, organization, family, or relationship that lives under repression and the threat of hostility at peace?

In peace studies, peace is seen not only as the end of overt conflict, but also as the establishment of new balanced relationships between the parties. Peace is thus equated with justice. As Wright (1942) argued, "The positive aspect of peace—justice—cannot be separated from the negative aspects—elimination of violence" (p. 1305). And as former U.S. secretary of state John F. Dulles (1957) said, "Peace and justice are inseparable."

The fourth outcome of an imbalance of power (above) is that the low-power person or group may strive to build power before being willing to enter into negotiation or mediation. At the beginning of this chapter, you read about Saul Alinsky, a master of building power in community groups. Another way to work for a balance of power is nonviolent resistance. There are many examples of nonviolent resistance in history, including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Dr. King was born January 15, 1929, and educated in Georgia's segregated public schools. He received his BA degree from Morehouse College, studied theology at Crozer Theological Seminary, and received an advanced degree from Boston College. In 1954, Dr. King became pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. The next year, he led a 382-day boycott of Montgomery's segregated public bus system. During the boycott, Dr. King was subjected to personal abuse, arrest, and bombing of his home. Later, in 1963, he led another massive civil rights protest in Birmingham that resulted in his arrest for marching without a permit. In jail, he came across an open letter written to him by eight white church leaders in Birmingham that criticized his tactics as "unwise and untimely." He responded with his "Letter From Birmingham Jail" in which he clearly explained nonviolent resistance as a response to power imbalance.

Dr. King emphasized the relationship dimension that we have seen is critical to understanding power and conflict. "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere," Dr. King wrote. "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."



Everett Collection Historical / Alamy

▸ Photo of Martin Luther King Jr. following his 1963 arrest in Birmingham. In 1964, Dr. King received the Nobel Peace Prize for his nonviolent approach to combating racial inequality.

Then, Dr. King clearly explained the strategy of nonviolence:

> Nonviolent direct action seeks to create a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. . . . The creation of tension [is] a part of the work of the nonviolent resister.
>
> I have earnestly worked and preached against violent tension, but there is a type of constructive nonviolent tension that is necessary for growth. The purpose of the direct action is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation.
>
> We have not made a single gain in civil rights without determined legal and nonviolent pressure. History is the long and tragic story of the fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily. (King, 1963)

Protesters were beaten, teargased, attacked by police dogs, and sprayed with high-pressure water hoses. In the tradition of India's Gandhi, Dr. King's message was to respond to violence with nonviolence. In 1964, he received the Nobel Peace Prize; at age 35, he was the youngest person to have received it at that time.

> I am not interested in power for power's sake, but I'm interested in power that is moral, that is right and that is good.
>
> —Martin Luther King Jr.

Let's return to the example from the beginning of this chapter. Obviously, the new president had legitimate or positional power because of her position in the company. She had the support of the board and the legal right to terminate employees without cause. But she also chose to exercise what French and Raven (1959) labeled as coercive power when she began to withhold rewards, deny privileges, and otherwise treat negatively people whom she did not want. With this extreme power imbalance, she simply imposed her will on the employees. Those who raised objections were simply ignored since she felt no need to engage them in any informal conflict management process. Those who sought legal remedies soon faced the reality that the president had the financial resources of the company behind her, which made any legal action prohibitively expensive.

Keeping in mind that the president believed she had a mandate from the board to change the direction of the company, were her actions legal? Ethical? Coercive power is considered a negative-sum game; that

is, either both parties end up losing, or the winner's gain is less than the opponent's loss. Coercive power is typically costly to implement and maintain. If the victims of coercive power feel there has been an injustice, they may try to build up their power and then readdress the conflict; that is, they may attempt to "get even." We'll return to this case again later in this chapter as we consider conflict styles and conflict coaching.

WESTERN CONFLICT STYLES

Conflict styles refer to how we respond to power and conflict. Do you have a typical way of responding to power and conflict, or do you find that you respond in different ways depending on the situation? Do you believe that you tend to avoid conflicts or avoid some and attempt to find a way to compromise in other conflicts?

Perhaps the earliest description of conflict styles still referenced today is that of Morton Deutsch (1949). Deutsch applied Lewin's (1935) force field theory of "driving" and "restraining" forces to describe the type of action (cooperation or competition) that people were likely to employ in a dispute. In cooperative situations, the parties' goals are positively correlated. One party can only attain its goals to the extent that the other party does as well. In competitive situations, the goals of the parties are negatively correlated. One party can attain its goal only to the extent that the other party does not (Teucher, Brett, & Gunia, 2013). This is now known as the unidimensional view of competition versus cooperation.

Deutsch's work was followed by what are now called dual-concern models, which include the two dimensions of concern for self, or assertiveness, and concern for others (Rahim, 1983). Over the years, various conflict style inventories have been introduced to measure and illustrate how people deal with conflicts. The most popular of these is the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument.[1] The instrument itself is composed of 30 statement pairs. To complete the assessment, you simply select from each pair the statement that most accurately describes what you would do in a conflict.

The conflict style inventory in Figure 2.1 developed by Rahim and Mager gives you scores for the five styles for two contexts. You may have the same style in the two contexts, or they may be different.

You don't need to complete the instrument to benefit from this chapter. You'll first read about each of the five styles and then relate that style to the preceding discussion of power. The five conflict styles are distributed on two axes—assertiveness and cooperativeness. Concern with one's own concerns is assertiveness; concern with the other person's concerns is cooperativeness. For the purposes of this text, we have relabeled the cooperativeness dimension as concern for the relationship. These two dimensions are similar to concern for production and concern for people in the managerial grid developed by Robert Blake and Jane Mouton (1964).

Placed on a grid, the five conflict styles in the Thomas-Kilmann instrument are shown in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.1 Identifying Your Conflict Style

Purpose

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

Directions

1. Think of two different situations (A and B) where you have a conflict, a disagreement, an argument, or a disappointment with someone, such as a roommate or a work associate. Write the name of the person for each situation below.
2. According to the scale below, fill in your scores for Situation A and Situation B. For each question, you will have two scores. For example, on Question 1 the scoring might look like this: 1. 2 | 4
3. Write the name of each person for the two situations here:

Person A _____ **Person B** _____

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

	Situation A	Situation B	
1.	_____	_____	I avoid being "put on the spot"; I keep conflicts to myself.
2.	_____	_____	I use my influence to get my ideas accepted.
3.	_____	_____	I usually try to "split the difference" in order to resolve an issue.
4.	_____	_____	I generally try to satisfy the other's needs.
5.	_____	_____	I try to investigate an issue to find a solution acceptable to both of us.
6.	_____	_____	I usually avoid open discussion of my differences with the other.
7.	_____	_____	I use my authority to make a decision in my favor.
8.	_____	_____	I try to find a middle course to resolve an impasse.
9.	_____	_____	I usually accommodate the other's wishes.
10.	_____	_____	I try to integrate my ideas with the other's to come up with a decision jointly.
11.	_____	_____	I try to stay away from disagreement with the other.
12.	_____	_____	I use my expertise to make a decision that favors me.
13.	_____	_____	I propose a middle ground for breaking deadlocks.
14.	_____	_____	I give in to the other's wishes.
15.	_____	_____	I try to work with the other to find solutions that satisfy both our expectations.
16.	_____	_____	I try to keep my disagreement to myself in order to avoid hard feelings.
17.	_____	_____	I generally pursue my side of an issue.
18.	_____	_____	I negotiate with the other to reach a compromise.
19.	_____	_____	I often go with the other's suggestions.

20.	_____	_____	I exchange accurate information with the other so we can solve a problem together.
21.	_____	_____	I try to avoid unpleasant exchanges with the other.
22.	_____	_____	I sometimes use my power to win.
23.	_____	_____	I use "give and take" so that a compromise can be made.
24.	_____	_____	I try to satisfy the other's expectations.
25.	_____	_____	I try to bring all our concerns out in the open so that the issues can be resolved.

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

Scoring: Add up your scores on the following questions:

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

Scoring Interpretation

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

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

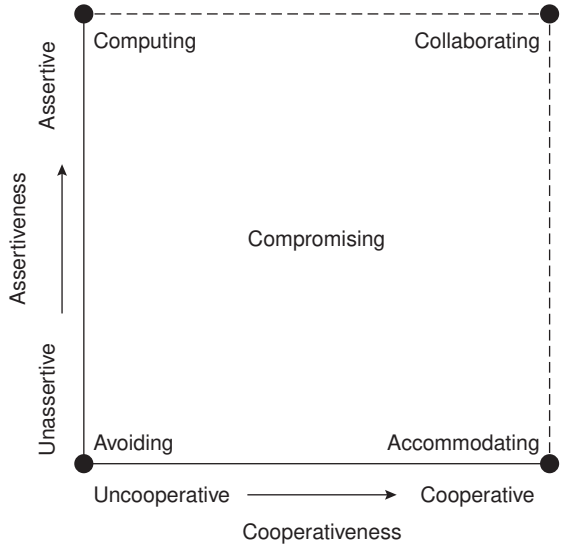
Scores from 15 to 20 are representative of a strong style.

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

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

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

Figure 2.2 Conflict Grid



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

Avoiding

Avoiding conflict means denying the conflict exists or otherwise withdrawing from dealing with the conflict. There can be various motivations for avoiding conflict. On the grid, using the relabeling of the cooperativeness dimension as concern for the relationship, the avoiding style has low concern for the relationship. And on the grid, avoiding is unassertive. Without the engagement of the avoiding party, the conflict situation is not likely to change; the situation largely continues as is.

Some simply are not willing or able to deal with the conflict at the time. Think of the phrases "Bury your head in the sand" and "Pull the blankets over your head," and you have an understanding of this motivation for the avoiding style. These avoiders are turtles who pull their heads under their shell.

Others are intentionally choosing this style when the issue is of low importance and particularly when both the issue and the relationship are of low importance. In this case, it makes sense to disengage or "walk away."

Avoiding can also be an intended choice for low-power individuals in conflict with high-power individuals. Avoiding can lower the risk exposure for the low-power individual and "buy time" for the conflict to evolve and change.

And, finally, remember from the discussion of the tech company president that high-power individuals may actively avoid conflict because they feel they don't have to address the issues.

Whatever the motivation, avoiding can have a critical effect on the relationships between people. Remember, conflicts occur in relationships. If the conflict is not addressed, the relationship is weakened. In her couples research, Mary Anne Fitzpatrick (1988) established couple types based in part on how the spouses responded to conflict. Traditional couples are interdependent and fit traditional gender roles. Traditionals do have conflicts but keep the relationship in mind when discussing issues. Independent couples value both connection and personal autonomy. In conflict, independents actively argue for their personal positions. Separates are not interdependent. Separates avoid conflict. How can this be explained? Coser (see Chapter 1) explained that more conflict occurs in close relationships. Because we care about a close relationship, we are more willing to fight for it. Conflict occurs less often in casual relationships. Because we put such low value on the relationship, it is easy to avoid conflict by simply weakening the relationship even more.

Accommodating

Have you ever played a board game, such as checkers or Sorry, with a particularly talented niece or nephew? At a certain age, your opponent must win. You, as the adult wanting to avoid a scene, try your best to lose. That's **accommodating**. It means setting aside your own needs in order to please the other person. Accommodators are the teddy bears who bring comfort.

On the grid, accommodating is unassertive. Using the relabeling of the cooperativeness dimension as concern for the relationship, the accommodating style has high concern for the relationship. At its extreme, the accommodating style means doing whatever the other party wants in order to maintain the relationship and, in a sense, surrendering power to the other party.

For a book on customer service, Jandt (1995) conducted interviews with executives of customer service organizations and a national mail survey of customer service workers. The director of a large urban community services center mentioned in passing in his interview that he could easily pick out the best people to hire for customer service positions from one bit of information about the applicants. He said, "I find that in one way the best people working for me are adult children of alcoholics. Children growing up in dysfunctional and alcoholic families often want nothing more than to please. They're so into giving and giving and taking care of." The national mail survey of customer service employees revealed the same information. Customer service employees who indicated they grew up in dysfunctional or alcoholic families were more likely to be in customer service jobs and more likely to get satisfaction from those jobs. Think of this as an extreme example of accommodating—always giving in, always doing what the other party wants in order to maintain peace in the relationship.

Were we to assign a likely outcome to the accommodating style of conflict, it would "lose-win"; that is, we lose to make it possible for the other party to win. That helps us understand how accommodating

CASE STUDY 2.3

Throughout this text, you'll find reprints of letters to advice columnists. You might find this an unusual resource, but consider this: Each one will relate a real-life conflict situation for analysis. You will be able to apply what you are reading in each chapter to the case and critique the comments the advice columnist provides.

Ask Amy: Tired

Dear Amy: I've been married for several years. I am very Type A, but I try to keep my aggression under wraps. My husband is also Type A[1] and has no problem speaking his mind.

I prefer to avoid conflict, and it seems he is always looking for a good fight. He has his opinions and viewpoints, as we all do. However, if someone doesn't see his point of view, he flies off the handle. I try to remind him that the world would be an extremely boring place if everyone thought exactly the same way.

Anyway, to avoid arguments or getting yelled at and then getting the silent treatment, I sometimes just nod my head in agreement to whatever he says. Then he gets mad because he says I just agree with him to avoid a fight, which is true.

I am not confrontational, and I would prefer to not argue with him. This is obviously a no-win situation.

What should I do?

—Tired

Dear Tired: In a healthy and functioning relationship, there should not be winners and losers. The way you describe this, the dynamic between you is a trap for both of you. He wants to be engaged, believed, and persuasive. You see spirited arguments as "fighting"—and you might be right.

You can change this dynamic, but you'll need mutual commitment and (preferably) professional help to do so. A therapist can mediate and also teach you two different ways to behave. Aggression and avoidance are not a healthy combination.

—Amy

DISCUSSION:

1. Describe the relationship between Tired and her husband.
2. Amy says Tired needs to learn new skills. What conflict skills do you believe Tired needs to learn?

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1. Type A personality traits include impatience and aggressiveness and can include competitiveness and a strong achievement orientation.