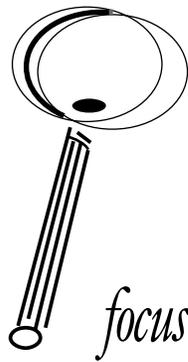


1

Conflict in Organizations



The first to present his case seems right, until another comes forward and questions him.

—Proverbs 18:17

Whenever people meet to conduct business, conflict is the norm. Conflicts of wills, personalities, and ideas. Conflicts of plans and strategies. Conflicts of interest. The world of work is characterized by conflict.

—Malcolm Kushner

Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define *conflict*, including the differences between its two distinct types—*interpersonal* versus *structural*.
- Describe the five main approaches to conflict resolution.
- Cite at least one type of situation appropriate for each approach to conflict resolution.
- Describe what the ten major types of *alternative dispute resolution* have in common.
- Describe the main features of the collaborative approach to conflict resolution known as *principled negotiation*.

INTRODUCTION

Conflict! For many people, conflict is negative, difficult, and unwanted—like an argument with one's spouse or with a friend. However, for others, conflict is fun and energizing. They enjoy the excitement and stimulation that con-

flict can provide. For example, they play competitive sports and games, or they prefer movies and books that involve intense conflicts and their sometimes exhilarating resolutions. In this course, we begin with the assumption that conflict is inherently neither good nor bad.

However, conflicts that are left unresolved—for example, those that are continually sidestepped—tend to have negative consequences for organizations and the people working in them. In this course, we will teach you how to resolve conflict in a manner that maximizes its potential benefits and minimizes its potential harm. In the best-case scenario, properly resolved conflict improves productivity, job satisfaction, personal well-being, and the relationship between or among the conflicting parties. We want this best-case scenario to become the norm in your day-to-day work as a manager.

DEFINITION OF CONFLICT

The term *conflict* has no single, clear definition. However, most people recognize it in the forms of tension, frustration, verbal or physical abuse, disagreement, incompatibility, annoyance, interference, or rivalry. Conflict can develop when two or more individuals or groups have differing interests, and they pursue these interests intensely. Conflict often involves one or both sides consciously interfering with the efforts of the other side to achieve its goals. However, conflict can also arise when individuals or groups are trying to cooperate in attaining a common goal but have differing opinions and beliefs about the best plan of action to pursue. Conflict can range from “friendly” competition to extreme violence. In seeking to capture these many and varied senses of conflict, we will define *conflict* as *the process that begins when one party perceives that another has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect, something that he or she cares about* (Thomas 1992a, 653; 1992b).

Let’s look at a conflict situation common to many organizations. The example involves a sales representative and an administrative assistant arguing over productivity:

- JACK
(sales representative): Phyllis... we need to talk. You’re way too slow in getting my work done—especially my sales agreements. Even worse, what you do for me has far too many mistakes. Something has to change, and change now.
- PHYLLIS
(administrative assistant): I wish I could say I was sorry, but I can’t. I was told when I started this job that I would be given all word-processing and photocopying work at least two days before it’s supposed to be done. And, you know, you’re not the only sales rep here.
- JACK: Yeah, that’s what’s *supposed* to happen. But I can’t always control the flow of work or opportunities to make a sale. The bottom line is the work has to get done.
- PHYLLIS: I know it does, but I work nine to five, and I’m just one person. Can we get another administrative assistant around here? Maybe even just part-time?

JACK: You can talk to Michael [the vice president of the sales division], but I don't think it would fly. He's going say that we can't afford another administrative assistant. And, really, to tell you the truth, we've always just had one, and the work has always gotten done. Are you going to be our "one"?

Jack turns his back and walks briskly out of the office; he's so fed up with Phyllis, and he replays the thoughts he has been having a lot recently: "What kind of idiot is she?" "Why is she so slow?" "Is she really that stupid or is it that she just doesn't care?" Phyllis sits at her desk a few moments to gather her composure; she feels insulted and thinks to herself a thought that she's had a lot lately: "What a jerk." Later that day, she meets a friend from the business across the street for lunch. She tells her side of the story. The two agree that Jack is a fool and doesn't know how to act right.

The conflict between these two individuals illustrates the two basic kinds of conflict common to every organization: structural and interpersonal. *Structural conflict* is rooted in the very nature of organizations. Organizations divide the work they do across a set of positions—in many places the positions are mainly organized vertically in a classic pyramid, while in other places the positions are more horizontally arranged into task-oriented teams (and, indeed, almost all organizations have both of these structures). But whatever the organizational structure, there is a division of labor, and this division creates interdependence. When the work associated with one position is not done correctly or on time, other positions suffer. The division of labor also creates differing interests and priorities; each position has a set of interests and priorities, and these are often at odds with—or even compete with—those of other positions. In the preceding example, it is very likely that had Jean or Candace or Lisa been the administrative assistant, the same conflict would have arisen; the heart of the conflict is not Jack's or Phyllis's personality, but the structural relationship between administrative assistant and salesperson. Structural conflict is heightened by scarce resources.

The structural conflict described in the preceding example, however, contains elements of interpersonal conflict. *Interpersonal conflict* is rooted in differences in personalities, communication styles, and values. And because much of our personality and communication style—as well as many of our values—are shaped by the social groups to which we belong, interpersonal conflict is magnified by social differences. These would include, for example, differences in race, gender, national origin, age, income, marital status, sexual orientation, religion, and physical disability. Had Jack approached Phyllis in a different manner—say in a softer or subtler or more humorous manner—the conflict would have been milder and probably more readily resolved.

A NOTE ON CONFLICT THEORY AND RESEARCH

The best practitioners are always guided by theory. Understanding theory frees one from always learning by trial and error. A theory abstracts the key

elements of common situations, and individuals who know the relevant theory can apply it to specific situations they encounter. For example, regardless of how a particular bone was broken, a competent orthopedist can use his or her theoretical knowledge of the human skeleton to realign and repair the fracture. Similarly, if as a manager you have a grasp of conflict resolution theory, you can use it to guide you through any conflict situation, regardless of what the particular conflict is about. Thus, this first chapter details the dominant theory of conflict and its resolution, called *principled negotiation*. It is critical not to rush through this chapter. Give yourself time to digest the key components of principled negotiation, thoroughly learning what they mean, so that you can apply them as needed in your day-to-day work life.

Please note that the most significant research strides on conflict resolution were made between 1960 and 1990. Research in the 1990s and the first decade of this century has, by and large, only confirmed and slightly enhanced the basic findings of the studies of the 1960–1990 period. Thus, a few of the references in each chapter of *How to Manage Conflict in the Organization*, second edition, may appear to be dated, but the principles of conflict resolution represented in them are still valid. After completing this course, you will want to check out the research from time to time to see what is happening and fine-tune your skills accordingly, but if you learn the basics of conflict resolution as presented here, your learning will last you a lifetime. You will find in this course the latest refinements in the thinking about and approaches to conflict resolution used by experts in the field, but these refinements do not fundamentally change the underlying principles of conflict resolution as they came to be understood in the last two decades of the twentieth century. Technology changes, and it changes the workplace and the potential sources of conflict therein; the social and cultural fabric of the workplace changes, and as it does, so do the potential sources of conflict; organizational structures change—sometimes they flatten (as has been common in recent years), other times they reshape into pyramids—and such changes can create new sources of conflict. However, human nature does not change, and the best methods to handle people really don't change, either—only your abilities to apply them. In this course, you will learn these methods, and we will assist you wherever we can to hone your abilities through a variety of self-assessments, interactive exercises, and practical tools.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION APPROACHES

A *conflict resolution approach* is the method and manner in which a person attempts to eliminate or minimize a dispute between or among parties. Different individuals have different orientations toward resolving conflict. Thus, a conflict resolution approach is a combination of specific behaviors and specific orientations used to deal with a particular conflict situation. Let's turn now to an explanation of the five conflict resolution approaches: avoiding, accommodating, compromising, forcing, and collaborating via principled negotiation.

Avoiding

Avoiding occurs when one or both sides recognize that a conflict exists but react by withdrawing from or postponing the conflict. This approach is a relatively passive one.

Consider our opening vignette: Suppose that Jack (the sales representative) received a sales agreement that, in his mind, had taken Phyllis far too long to prepare. The following telephone conversation between Jack and Phyllis would be labeled an avoiding approach:

PHYLLIS: Hi, Jack.

JACK: Hello, Phyllis. I got the sales agreement that you prepared for me.

PHYLLIS: Was it okay?

JACK: Well, um, actually, um, well... uh... yes, it's okay. Thanks.

PHYLLIS: No problem. It's my job.

Jack has suppressed his frustration and has put off, for who knows how long, a confrontation that, in his heart, he believes he should have with Phyllis. For her part, Phyllis may feel some tension in her conversations with Jack, but is not willing to pursue what may lie behind the tension. Maybe next time Phyllis will do a better job. Or maybe next time Jack will simply accept the less-than-hoped-for quality of Phyllis's work and, for example, correct the errors in the sales agreement himself and creatively make up for lost time in other areas of the sales process. In short, there are a variety of events that could alleviate or eliminate the conflict, thus making the avoiding approach quite effective. However, in general, avoidance is best used as a stopgap measure to give oneself time to decide how best to resolve the underlying problem that is provoking conflict. Conflicts that are avoided can result in molehills becoming mountains.

Accommodating

Accommodating occurs when one side resolves the conflict by giving in to the other side at the expense of at least some of his or her own needs. This approach is also passive and could be called *appeasement*.

Accommodating may be a rational approach if the other side has overwhelming power and the will to use it. In our example, it is very likely (but not certain) that Jack is the more powerful. When this is the case, an accommodating approach to Jack's scolding might be Phyllis's best short-term approach.

There is another good reason why accommodating might be a useful approach. If the relationship between the parties is much more important than the specific conflict issue, each side might be more inclined to accommodate the other. A good, nonorganizational example is a domestic conflict between a husband and a wife. If one or both sides value the relationship more than the issues dividing them, then one or both parties may select the accommodating approach.

In our case, let's assume the relationship between Jack and Phyllis has not always been tense and both recognize that it's better for the organization if they get along. Phyllis might accommodate Jack by coming to work a little

early the next time a sales agreement is due to make sure that she has enough time to finish it and double-check it for errors. She might do this at least once to preserve their relationship. She might also try to eliminate the behavior that's causing the problem by getting an administrative assistant from another department to proofread her work. Although accommodating may appear to be an overly meek approach, we have identified conditions that would make it a sensible one. Quite understandably, however, too much accommodation can lead one to feel resentful, shortchanged, or cheated.

Compromising

Compromising occurs when both sides gain and lose in order to resolve the conflict. Each side is partially satisfied and partially dissatisfied.

The word *compromise* has both positive and negative connotations. In labor-management disputes, a party willing to compromise is considered fair and reasonable, while a party unwilling to compromise is thought to be stubborn and unfair. However, a person who compromises too frequently is sometimes categorized as unprincipled or, perhaps, as a wimp or pushover. Thus, many people do not wish to appear too willing to compromise.

In dealing with organizational conflict, compromise is not inherently good or bad. The situation may not allow for clear-cut winners and losers. Both sides may need to save face and continue their relationship. Jack needs Phyllis, and Phyllis needs Jack. Examine the compromising approach that Jack takes in this phone conversation with Phyllis:

JACK: Hello, Phyllis. I got the sales agreement that you prepared for me.
PHYLLIS: Was it okay?
JACK: Well, actually, it was a bit late, and it had a few too many mistakes in it.
PHYLLIS: Sorry. I'll try to get it right next time.
JACK: Well, let's give this a try: If you could get the next agreement to me a little on the early side, and send it to me as an e-mail attachment, I could do the spell- and grammar-checking myself. I know MS Word pretty well.
PHYLLIS: Hey, I could go for that!

Jack has taken a compromising approach to the developing conflict with Phyllis. Jack will have to proofread the sales agreement himself (a loss) but will get it early (a win). Similarly, Phyllis will have to work faster or come in earlier to get the next sales agreement to Jack early (a loss) but won't have to worry about any minor mistakes it might contain (a win). Compromising is an approach that ensures partial victory and partial defeat for both parties and is quite effective when both sides need to save face. However, as we will see in coming chapters, it is often not the best approach to resolving conflict.

Forcing

Forcing occurs when one or both sides attempt to satisfy their own needs regardless of the impact on the other side. It is an aggressive, no-holds-barred approach. When forcing alone is used to resolve conflict, the specific individuals involved in the conflict generally want to win totally.

Not surprisingly, there are some serious problems associated with the forcing approach. The loser will lose face as well as the particular issues involved in the conflict. If the other party in the conflict has equal power, he or she might respond to force with opposing force. This could result in an enormous struggle and end in a stalemate, with all involved—including the entire organization—becoming the eventual losers. Forcing can also produce hollow victories, in which the winners incur overly severe losses. In organizations, one side may win a particular dispute by forcing but thoroughly damage an ongoing relationship and, thus, destroy the possibility of future ventures with the other side.

In every conflict resolution approach, there are conditions that make it rational to pursue. Forcing can be quite effective when the side adopting it has superior power. Consider the demanding note from the sales representative, Jack, to the administrative assistant, Phyllis:

Phyllis,

You know the trouble your late and sloppy work is creating for us in the sales division. . . . Make sure you get the next sales agreement to me on time, without errors. I can't make it simpler than this. Do it, or I will be forced to talk to Michael [the VP for sales] about your consistently poor performance.

Jack

Why would Phyllis give in to a direct order from Jack? If Jack has more power than Phyllis (which is probably, though not necessarily, the case), then forcing may appear to be an effective, time-efficient approach for him, and accommodating is the safest approach for her. Forcing is a common approach for managers and those in high-level positions to use when dealing with employees. Indeed, our opening vignette of the conversation between Jack and Phyllis was another example of force (“The bottom line is the work has to get done. . . . We’ve always just had one [administrative assistant], and the work has always gotten done. Are you going to be our ‘one?’”) Using force as an approach to conflict resolution can be efficient; however, the person being coerced will often feel resentment and might even look for opportunities to get even.

Collaborating

Collaborating is an attempt made by one or both parties to satisfy fully the needs of both. With collaboration, both sides can be winners. This approach assumes that both sides have legitimate goals and that creative thinking can transform conflict into an opportunity for both of them to achieve their goals.

How is this possible? That is, how can conflict be transformed into collaboration and mutual gain? Let's turn to our developing conflict between Jack and Phyllis. Here is another version of Jack's letter to Phyllis, one that is collaborative in tone:

Hi, Phyllis—

I wasn't fully aware that you were having such a problem with preparing the sales agreements. Eighteen this week! That's amazing. I agree that it's just too much for you to handle in one week. I found out only this morning that you used to have only eight or nine a week. I will look into this to see what we might do, including sitting down with you this Friday. Please think about what you might be able to suggest.

I know that we've hired some new salespeople, and I am starting to realize that you can't promise everybody everything. A new workload situation has crept up on us (we're busier than ever!), and I'm sorry that you've been feeling so much pressure lately.

See you Friday!
Jack

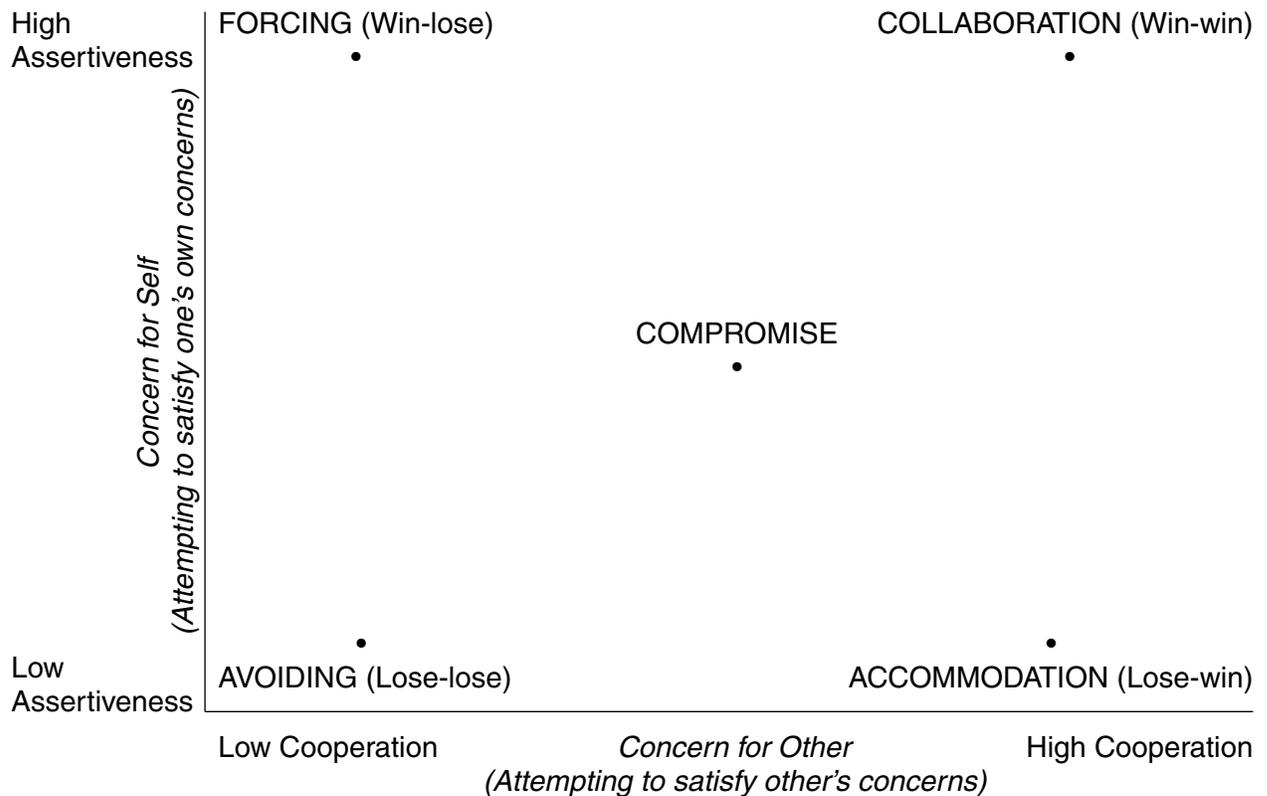
Not all problems between Jack and Phyllis will seem to disappear so rapidly. But many conflicts can be handled by collaboration. Here, Jack has tried to determine the real problem. He hasn't gotten angry or accused Phyllis of indifference or incompetence. Instead, he has begun to dig below the surface; in doing so, he has discovered that there is no deep-seated conflict between Phyllis and himself. Rather, both of them need to adjust to the new and larger workload facing everyone in the office.

In uncovering the real problem, Jack has been able to redefine the situation. Instead of wanting to interfere with his goal, he will find out that Phyllis actually wants to help Jack—to get him his sales agreements on time and as error-free as possible. For his part, Jack has probably identified the underlying problem—a new level of work that has crept up on everybody. This realization will enable Jack and Phyllis to begin solving the workload problem together.

Collaborating, or *creative problem solving* as it is sometimes called, does demand that at least one and preferably both sides look beyond the immediate problem. It takes imagination and cooperation and can consume considerable amounts of time and energy. Nevertheless, a collaborating approach to conflict resolution can produce two winners, and, therefore, it can contribute to the quality of working relationships. Professional management journals have published many studies demonstrating that individuals and firms emphasizing collaboration have much higher success rates than individuals and firms emphasizing other forms of conflict resolution (Thomas 1992a). Indeed, because of its many benefits, one popular form of this conflict resolution approach will be stressed throughout this course under the classification *principled negotiation* (see the last section of this chapter).

VARYING SITUATIONS, VARYING APPROACHES TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Exhibit 1–1 diagrams the relationship of conflict-resolving approaches to one another. The schematic highlights the differences among the approaches

E**Exhibit 1–1****Conflict-Resolving Approach**

Adapted, by permission, from Kenneth W. Thomas, "Conflict," in Steven Kerr, *Organizational Behavior*, Grid Publications, 1979, p. 154.

with regard to two dimensions: the degree of assertiveness that a participant is willing to use to resolve a conflict and the degree to which the participant attempts to cooperate with the other party and address that party's concerns.

In a landmark study, management professor Kenneth W. Thomas found that successful executives varied their conflict-resolving approaches according to the situation. The ability to implement the right approach for the conflict at hand is a skill you should acquire. Tool 1–1 of your Conflict Resolution Tool Box summarizes Thomas's findings; it shows what individuals who have gone to the very top—chief executive officers (CEOs)—do when confronted with conflicts in their organizations. As discussed in this chapter, there are five major approaches to conflict resolution. Even though collaboration via principled negotiation is emphasized during most of this course (especially in the first five chapters), all of the approaches are used, and you should be able to conceptualize and apply all of them. Which approach you should take will vary with the situation at hand. Typical situations that would be appropriate for each approach to conflict resolution are listed in Tool 1–1. Use it, and all of the tools in this course, to help make the best choices for yourself and your organization when you are dealing with conflict resolution issues.



Conflict Resolution Tool Box

Tool 1–1 Knowing When to Apply a Particular Conflict Resolution Approach

Instructions: The following is a list of the typical situations that are appropriate for each of the five major conflict resolution approaches. When you must resolve a conflict in your organization, use this tool to see which situation most closely resembles the conflict at hand for you, then apply the appropriate technique.

FORCING

- When quick, decisive action is vital (that is, emergencies)
- On important issues where unpopular actions need to be taken (for example, cost cutting, enforcing unpopular rules, discipline)
- On issues vital to company welfare when you know you're right
- Against people who take advantage of noncompetitive behavior

COLLABORATING

- To find an integrative solution when both sets of concerns are too important to be compromised
- When your objective is to learn
- To merge insights from people with different perspectives
- To gain commitment by incorporating concerns into a consensus
- To work through feelings that have interfered with a relationship

COMPROMISING

- When goals are important but not worth the effort or potential disruption of more assertive modes
- When opponents with equal power are committed to mutually exclusive goals
- To achieve temporary settlements to complex issues
- To arrive at expedient solutions under time pressure
- As a backup when collaboration or competition is unsuccessful

AVOIDING

- When an issue is trivial or more important issues are pressing
- When you see no chance of satisfying your concerns
- When potential disruption outweighs the benefits of resolution
- To let people cool down and regain perspective
- When gathering information supersedes immediate decision
- When others can resolve the conflict more effectively
- When issues seem tangential or symptomatic of other issues

ACCOMMODATING

- When you find you're wrong—to allow a better position to be heard, to learn, and to show your reasonableness
- When issues are more important to others than to yourself—to satisfy others and maintain cooperation
- To build social credits for later issues
- To minimize loss when you are outmatched and losing
- When harmony and stability are especially important
- To allow subordinates to develop by learning from mistakes

Adapted, by permission, from Kenneth W. Thomas, "Toward Multi-Dimensional Values in Teaching: The Example of Conflict Behaviors," *Academy of Management Review*, 1977, p. 487.

As a result of the conflict and the conflict resolution approaches employed, organizational performance may improve, remain the same, or deteriorate. Here, we'll introduce a basic value judgment. If organizational performance improves or remains stable, the overt conflict and the conflict resolution approaches have been beneficial at best, harmless at worst. If organizational performance has declined, the overt conflict and the conflict resolution approaches have been detrimental.

To some, this value judgment may seem obvious and noncontroversial. It is neither. When we focus on the concept of organizational performance, we are minimizing the importance of individual satisfaction, departmental satisfaction, and the satisfaction of external groups, such as consumers or suppliers. In other words, if organizational performance is improved, we can state that the given approach to conflict resolution (for example, accommodating or collaborating) has been beneficial. To illustrate, recall the final part of the confrontation between Jack and Phyllis in the opening vignette:

JACK: ... The bottom line is the work has to get done.

PHYLLIS: I know it does, but I work nine to five, and I'm just one person. Can we get another administrative assistant around here? Maybe even just part-time?

JACK: You can talk to Michael [the vice president of the sales division], but I don't think it would fly. He's going say that we can't afford another administrative assistant. And, really, to tell you the truth, we've always just had one, and the work has always gotten done. Are you going to be our "one"?

What if we told you that the administrative assistant was fired within two months? Even though she had improved her performance, it still fell short of Jack's "bottom line"—and Jack held more sway with Michael than Phyllis did. Phyllis's replacement, Alexis, struggled, but consistently got all the day's word processing and photocopying done. Jack and the other sales representatives were satisfied with Alexis's work, and confrontations between the administrative assistant and the sales representative ceased.

The manager in charge resolved this conflict through a forcing approach; he fired the administrative assistant. From the administrative assistant's point of view, the outcome was terrible. From the organizational performance perspective, however, the results were beneficial.

Naturally, we must be careful in measuring organizational performance. We also need to be aware of long-term impacts as well as immediate results. If, as a consequence of keeping Jack and letting Phyllis go, the new administrative assistant (Alexis) quits soon after being trained, and if this happens several more times (new administrative assistants quitting because they can't stand Jack's abrasiveness and overinflated ego), we might have a long-term decrease in organizational performance.

This is clearly a measurement problem. But the value judgment remains the same. We need a basic outcome variable, and organizational performance, not individual or specific department satisfaction, is what we consider most important. We will adopt this fundamental value judgment in this course.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN A CHANGING WORKFORCE

In recent years, several crosscurrents have made effective conflict resolution more important than it has ever been in the world of work. First, an ever-growing number of organizations are becoming increasingly diversified along a number of dimensions: culture, race, ethnicity, age, gender, and disability. Steadily disappearing are the days when the typical organization had men as managers and supervisors, women as clerical workers, people of color as production-line workers or cleaning staff, older workers being forced into retirement, and disabled individuals nowhere to be found. This social diversification has been accompanied by a cultural change in which individuals of all backgrounds are quicker to speak up in the face of perceived or real mistreatment or exploitation and, moreover, have the means to address these issues via litigation, arbitration, assistance from government agencies and labor relations boards, and increased union representation in the white-collar workforce.

Changes in the Workforce

Younger managers (those under forty), may be only vaguely aware of what older managers have witnessed in their lifetimes: White men no longer control the office and the shop floor to the overwhelming degree that they once did. Before the first decade of the twenty-first century is over, nearly a fifth of the workforce will have African, Latino, or Asian ancestry; this trend, an increasing presence of people of color throughout American society, including all areas of the workplace, will continue for decades to come. Just as important, nearly half of the workforce—including nearly half of all executives, administrators, and managers—are now women.

The best way to get a feel for the magnitude of these changes is to visit the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Web page from time to time (www.bls.gov), as well as that of the General Social Survey (<http://webapp.icpsr.umich.edu/GSS>). The BLS is a division of the U.S. Department of Labor. The GSS is a national probability sample of the U.S. adult population that is conducted every two years by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago. Respondents are asked a host of questions on their work histories, family backgrounds, personal histories, behaviors, and attitudes toward a variety of issues. Because NORC uses rigorous scientific sampling strategies and has a high response rate for the GSS, its data are of the highest quality. Both BLS and GSS data go back to the early 1970s. If you take a few minutes to familiarize yourself with their Web pages, you'll find that both are easy to navigate and offer current and historical data on the racial, ethnic, and gender makeup of the United States and its workforce. Exhibit 1–2 displays some diversity data—downloaded from the BLS and GSS Web sites at the end of 2004—for you to consider.

The first table in Exhibit 1–2 shows the slow but steadily growing presence of women and people of color in the labor force, while the second

**Exhibit 1–2****Growing Diversity in the Labor Force**

Percentage of the Civilian Labor Force						
Year	All	Women	White	Black	Latino	Asian
1992	100	45.4	85.0	11.1	8.9	4.0
2002	100	46.6	83.2	11.8	12.4	5.0
2012	100	47.5	80.3	12.2	14.7	5.5

Adapted from the Bureau of Labor Statistics Web page: <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/ecopro.t06.htm>.

Percentage of Workers in Selected Groups Employed for Six Major Occupational Categories, by Year				
Year/Occupation	White		Black	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
1972–1973				
Professional/Managerial	28.2	20.2	7.3	13.6
Technical/Sales	9.6	6.0	2.6	1.5
Service/Clerical	12.1	56.2	25.8	62.9
Blue-Collar	43.8	17.1	60.3	19.7
Farm	6.4	0.5	4.0	2.3
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
1986–1987				
Professional/Managerial	35.4	30.8	16.7	17.5
Technical/Sales	10.1	8.7	6.1	3.0
Service/Clerical	11.0	44.5	22.8	68.2
Blue-Collar	37.6	15.3	52.8	11.2
Farm	5.9	0.7	1.6	0.1
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Exhibit 1–2 continues on next page.

Exhibit 1–2 continued from previous page.

Percentage of Workers in Selected Groups Employed for Six Major Occupational Categories, by Year				
Year/Occupation	White		Black	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
1999–2000				
Professional/Managerial	32.9	34.8	17.6	23.9
Technical/Sales	13.7	16.5	10.2	13.5
Service/Clerical	13.0	36.9	20.5	47.1
Blue-Collar	37.0	10.9	47.7	14.5
Farm	3.4	0.9	4.0	1.0
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Adapted from the General Social Survey Web page: <http://webapp.icpsr.umich.edu/GSS/>.

reveals significant changes in the types of occupations in which individuals in these groups are employed—with substantial growth in the higher-prestige (professional, managerial, technical) occupations. The rise in occupational prestige for women and minority groups is particularly important when it comes to conflict resolution, as higher-prestige workers are significantly more likely than lower-prestige workers to expect and assert what they consider to be their workplace rights.

Conflict Resolution and the Law

Today's managers, whatever their own individual gender or racial and ethnic background, must be sensitive to issues of race, national origin, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, and disability—hopefully, out of decency and a sense of fair play. But whatever the motivation, it is no longer a choice to have this sensitivity, but a legal mandate—as many managers have learned the hard way in the past decade. Indeed, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) averages more than 100,000 complaints a year, complaints filed by individuals charging that their companies discriminate, harass, or retaliate on the basis of sex, age, disability, religion, national origin (ethnicity), or race. In many cases, charges are also filed with the equivalent state-level equal employment commission, and some 50,000 are received by the American Civil Liberties Union. A careful review of these complaints reveals that many of them are rooted in unresolved workplace conflicts

involving working conditions, rules, rights, and discipline—a large proportion of which should have, and could have, been nipped in the bud with proactive conflict resolution efforts on the part of management.

The same kinds of unresolved disputes that end up as charges filed with state and federal EEOCs can also end up in costly litigation. Disgruntled employees have an army of lawyers dedicated to employment law to choose from (many of these lawyers are members of the 3,000+-strong National Employment Lawyers Association; see their Web site at: www.nela.org). Recent reviews of data relating to unresolved work-related conflict reveal that two out of three employees say they are more willing to sue their employers than they were five years earlier, and that U.S. companies spend \$20 billion a year on litigation directly and lose tens of billions of dollars indirectly on lost productivity, higher insurance rates, absenteeism, turnover, sabotage, and violence. These additional losses totaled \$88 billion for small businesses alone in 2003, according to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce (Allen 2004; Hoover 2004).

These statistics show that not only is the workplace diversifying, but individual workers from diverse backgrounds are also increasingly likely to sue or file charges against a company based on what they believe is unfair treatment on the job. Put another way, companies whose managers are not good at resolving conflict are going to find themselves wasting increasing resources on handling conflict through expensive means—lawyers, lawsuits, and formal mediation and arbitration—instead of through the relatively inexpensive conflict resolution efforts of their managers and supervisors. No management techniques or skills are going to be more important to you than those you will learn in this course!

Consulting HR or Requesting Formalized Alternatives

The new organizational environment that has been evolving over recent years, and which will continue to do so in similar directions for the foreseeable future, has two important implications for managers. First, it has never been more important to resolve conflict quickly, quietly, and effectively—to avoid costly and time-consuming EEOC-type charges, employee lawsuits, formal arbitrations, and other forms of dispute resolution involving outside agents. And second, both new and seasoned managers need to develop a sense of when it is necessary to discuss a conflict with the human resources (HR) officer in their organizations. Such discussion is especially important if a manager plans to get involved in a budding conflict via e-mail or voice or text messages—all of which can be saved and used in a lawsuit or arbitration or governmental intervention. The rules of due process, as well as many federal and state laws, regulate many aspects of interpersonal relations in the modern workplace; you may have been introduced to these during training, but unless you use this knowledge frequently, it is easy to forget. You need to consult with your HR officer when you believe that such regulations might be relevant to the conflict at hand (there will be more on these regulations as well as on electronic communication issues, later in the course).

In some cases, the officer will point out the relevant due-process and legal issues involved, which will help set the boundaries of what you can and cannot do. In others, the officer will ask you to hold off on your conflict resolution efforts until the company attorney has been consulted. In some instances, the officer will recommend one of the many forms of alternative dispute resolution (ADR). So that you are not totally unprepared for what these might be, we briefly review the most common of them in the next section. Pay close attention to this section, as the descriptions of ADR foreshadow most of the basic conflict resolution techniques that you will learn in this course. In addition, if it has not already happened, in your role as manager you will very likely be recruited to serve as an impartial third party as part of one or more ADR approaches that your organization either uses now or will use in the future.

TYPES OF ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Alternative dispute resolution (ADR) is a term given to approximately two dozen procedures for conflict resolution that are used when a manager's efforts have failed, but the conflict is not yet out of hand and might still be considered in its early stages—for example, before a disgruntled employee has sought out a labor attorney and begun litigation, or before such an employee has filed a charge with the EEOC or one of its state-level equivalents. (Although even if one of these occurs, a high-level form of ADR will likely be the first course of action, taken by both the company and the government employment commission or the employee's attorney or union representative.) Seasoned managers will generally know when ADR is appropriate, and new managers will usually get a recommendation to pursue ADR from a seasoned manager or from their HR office. Many larger companies and almost all federal government agencies now have their own teams of ADR specialists, while smaller organizations will bring in such specialists from the outside.

Like most of the techniques presented in this course, ADR approaches seek to involve the disputing parties in the resolution of their conflict, thereby increasing the probability that each of them will be more satisfied with the outcome than a situation in which a manager or a trial judge *imposes* a decision. Indeed, most of the techniques for conflict resolution that you will learn in the coming chapters reflect the basic philosophy of ADR and have been incorporated, in part, into its various forms. Following are the ten most common ADR approaches. If your place of employment is unionized or if you work for a government agency, it is likely that you have already had experience with at least one of them.

Conciliation

Much as a third friend might try to intervene in an argument between two friends in a way that would calm emotions without showing favoritism, a

conciliator is brought in to calm emotions that are getting out of control and to induce the disputing parties to communicate in a friendlier and more respectful manner. Conciliators usually begin by shuttling back and forth between the parties—sometimes in person, sometimes by phone, and sometimes via e-mail—to get each side’s point of view and a sense of the level of emotional upset. Conciliators will also meet with other individuals—for example, the managers or coworkers who are either directly or indirectly involved—to get a sense of the facts of the situation and the general mood of the organization (Is morale high or low? Is turnover high or low? Absenteeism? Wages/benefits? Cultural sensitivity? Gender sensitivity?). A conciliator will then meet with the parties in a neutral place. The basic goal is to enable a positive dialogue and increase the level of trust. A conciliator will sometimes offer a reality check to one of the parties who seems to be out of touch with the facts or the organizational culture, but will do so very gently. Occasionally, conciliation can lead to an acceptable solution for the conflict at hand, though more often it is used as a lead-in to other ADR methods.

Dispute Panel

A dispute panel is a step above a conciliator, in that two or more impartial individuals are used. Like a conciliator, the panel will gather information on the conflict at hand, as well as its organizational context. It will meet the disputants individually and help each side try to understand the other’s point of view. A dispute panel generally makes recommendations, but these are at best suggestions, as it has no formal authority. These suggestions are generally phrased in terms—like all good ADR language—that are hard on the logic and supporting data that each side uses, but soft on the people involved.

Early Neutral Evaluation

Early neutral evaluation is a common technique used by U.S. district courts and has been adopted by many other federal bodies and private companies. Each party in a dispute makes its best presentation to a neutral third party. The neutral party then writes out the strengths and weaknesses of each side’s arguments and evidence and offers a nonbinding evaluation. The implication is: “If this went to court, here’s how a judge or jury would likely decide the case.” Sometimes this is enough for one of the disputing parties to have a change of heart and realize the relative weakness of his or her position.

Peer Review

Related to dispute panels and early neutral evaluation is the ADR approach known as peer review. Like dispute panels and early neutral evaluation, peer review boards listen carefully to each opposing party—gathering as much as they can on the facts, the emotions, the perceptions, and the

social-cultural-organizational context of the dispute. They make decisions that may or may not be binding, depending on the agreement that is made before the peer review begins. Peers are exactly that—coworkers and managers. These individuals are most likely to be able to understand the issues present in the organizational culture and to empathize with employees who have run into difficulties. Peer review board members are typically long-time employees who have earned the respect of management and coworkers; they are also typically given problem-solving and conflict resolution training. In larger organizations, peer review boards are often standing groups; in smaller organizations, they are usually formed on an ad hoc basis. In either case, care is taken to make the board as impartial as possible. One common way to achieve this is to have a blind peer selection process, whereby the peers are randomly chosen from a pool of qualified coworkers and managers.

Facilitation

Facilitation and *mediation* are sometimes used as synonyms, but they are generally recognized as two distinct forms of ADR. A facilitator is generally less concerned with the substance of the conflict and the facts surrounding it—which are critical to a mediator—and more concerned with the style of communication and the protocol of a meeting intended to resolve a conflict. The facilitator is not there to judge, nor even to make recommendations, but rather to ensure that each party follows the everyday rules of deference and demeanor (for example, don't interrupt; attack the idea, not the person; keep emotions in check; ensure that each person understands the other's point of view by having the person rephrase the other's argument in his or her own language; allow for breaks for individuals to collect their thoughts or perhaps walk off some anger). Facilitation is generally not used when the emotions involved are very high, the two sides are extremely polarized, or the level of trust is very low.

Mediation

Mediation is the next step up from facilitation and is used when a conflict has become highly polarized. Mediators, like conciliators, usually meet with each party individually to clarify perceptions, emotions, and viewpoints. Then, like facilitators, mediators bring the parties together and assist in the flow of conversation between them. However, mediators go beyond the roles of conciliation and facilitation in that they will often point out issues the parties have not considered, including a variety of possible resolutions. Mediators view themselves as catalysts to conflict resolution, not as judges. Indeed, they do not have authority to dictate a resolution; their goal is to get the parties to agree voluntarily on how best to solve their conflict. Mediation is one of the most popular forms of ADR and, if you have not already encountered it, you very likely will at some point during your career. It is also one of the most successful forms of ADR and is used in the majority of EEOC cases. Indeed, evaluation studies of the success of the federal EEOC—in which measures of speed, efficiency, satisfaction, and cost all point to the effective-

ness of mediation—have prompted many major corporations to adopt this form of ADR.

Arbitration

Nearly as popular as mediation is arbitration, which has a long history of use in the resolution of labor management and commercial disputes. Fans of professional sports are well aware of this technique, as it is commonly used to resolve salary disputes between a team owner and particular players. Arbitrators are jointly agreed upon so that neither party thinks that the individual (or sometimes panel of individuals) is biased. Arbitrators make final decisions, though the power of these is agreed upon beforehand. Non-binding decisions mean just that, though in actuality they carry considerable weight and the “losing” party often withdraws or softens its complaints or demands. In other cases, especially where the workplace is unionized or government-related, decisions may be binding. When binding arbitrations are involved, the arbitrator generally comes from one of the high-profile (and expensive!) arbitration groups such as “Triple A,” (the American Arbitration Association) or from the U.S. government’s Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service. Arbitration at this level is much cheaper than litigation, but far more expensive—arbitrators can charge upwards of \$300 an hour—and far more disruptive than the efforts of a manager adept at the kinds of conflict resolution skills taught in this course.

Mediated Arbitration

Commonly referred to as “med-arb,” this form of ADR is usually reserved for complex cases that would cost a small fortune if the decision were made to litigate. Sometimes the mediator-arbitrator roles are taken on by a single individual (or panel), and other times the roles are divided between individuals (or panels). This form of ADR begins with mediation, which continues until an impasse is reached. Quite often, many aspects of the case have already been resolved, and the sticking point is decided upon by the mediator-now-turned-arbitrator (or the second individual brought in as arbitrator). Mediated arbitration allows for the quick handling of the easy points to resolve, thereby allowing the disputing parties to concentrate on their real grievances.

Ombudsperson Evaluation

Sometimes your human resources officer will offer to bring in an ombudsperson to help you settle a dispute. An ombudsperson will play any one of a number of roles in trying to resolve the conflict—including fact finder, conciliator, facilitator, counselor, and mediator. Ombudspersons have no power other than that of persuasion, but they have proven themselves so successful that many government agencies—including the Department of Agriculture, the National Institutes of Health, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, and the Smithsonian Institution—now have highly developed evaluation programs.

E Exhibit 1–3 Alternative Dispute Approaches

Degree of Polarization	High	Minitrial Nonbinding Arbitration	Binding Arbitration Mediated Arbitration
	Low	Dispute Panel Early Neutral Evaluation Ombudsperson Evaluation	Peer Review Facilitation Conciliation
		No	Yes
Is the Decision Binding?			

Minitrials

Minitrials, like mediated arbitrations, are reserved for complex cases in the hopes of avoiding long and costly litigation. Here, the third party is either a former judge or a trial lawyer with years of experience. The individual usually runs the minitrial like a relaxed version of the real thing. The goal is to decide which side has the greater merits and what would be some acceptable settlement options, though no final settlement is dictated. The goal is to give the disputants a sense of the critical issues involved so that they can focus on these to arrive at what has now been deemed an acceptable settlement (one of the options decided upon at the minitrial).

To help you visualize the situation in which a particular ADR approach is most appropriate, Exhibit 1–3 plots each approach as it falls along two key dimensions: the degree to which each disputing party has become hardened, emotionally invested, and polarized (the vertical axis), and whether the decisions of the neutral third party (the facilitator or mediator) are binding (the horizontal axis). This exhibit graphically illustrates a central part of the ADR philosophy: that decisions aimed at resolving conflict should ultimately come from the disputing parties themselves and not be imposed by some outside authority. This is also a central component of the *principled negotiation* approach to conflict resolution that is emphasized throughout this course.

In sum, the modern manager is generally expected to handle conflict with the kinds of tools that are taught in this course. However, you will sometimes be advised (or even directed) to use one of the aforementioned ADR approaches, and sometimes you will want to request one or more of these alternatives yourself.



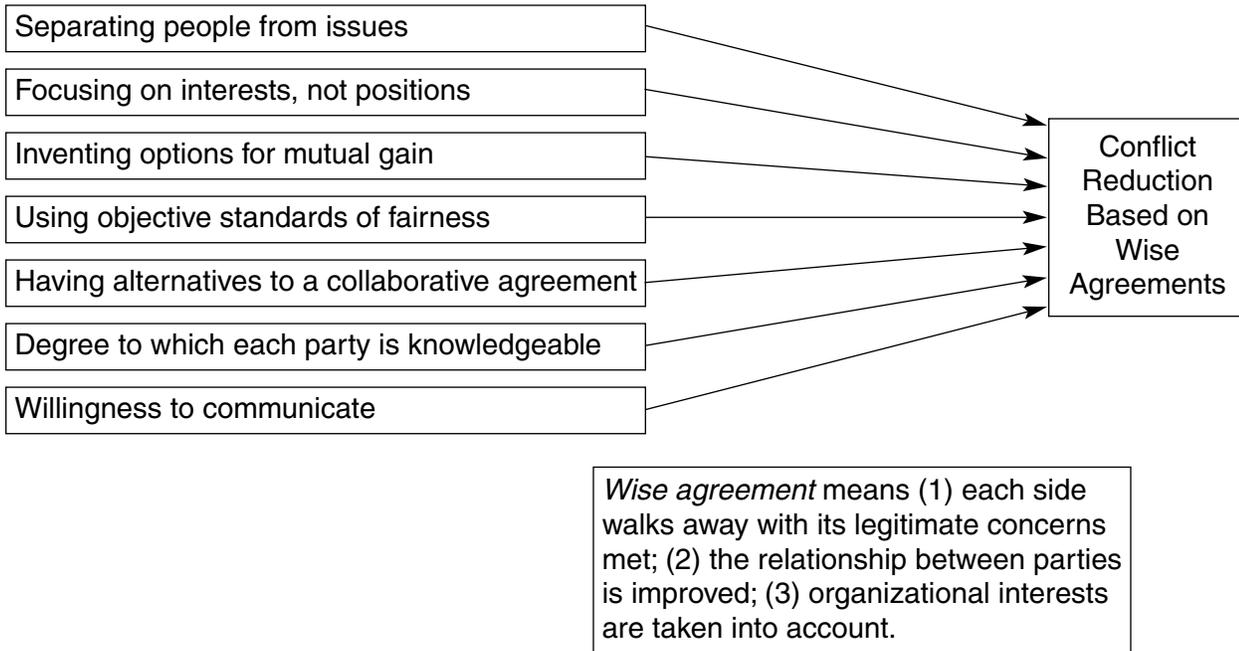
Think About It

Think of a conflict that you are currently experiencing in your organization or that you experienced in the past. Which ADR approach do you think might best be applied to the conflict? Does your organization use this form of ADR?

PRINCIPLED NEGOTIATION

As is apparent in the preceding description of approaches to conflict resolution, ADR, and the problems associated with disgruntled employees, whenever possible, collaboration is the best approach. It has the greatest chance of satisfying each party and, therefore, the greatest chance of maintaining agreements over the long haul; this, in turn, yields the greatest probability of obtaining high levels of organizational performance. This approach has received intensive study at Harvard University Law School in its Program on Negotiation, which involves scholars and research projects from Harvard, MIT, Simmons College, and Tufts University. The program has produced a form of conflict resolution that is rooted in collaboration and has become known as *principled negotiation*. The method requires that conflicts be resolved on the merits of the issues involved rather than through haggling, trickery, or posturing. It prescribes that individuals in conflict search for mutual gains; when this does not seem possible, then their decisions should be based on fair standards independent of the will of either side. Principled negotiation has been described as being hard on the merits of the points of views involved but soft on the people. Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patton have popularized this approach to conflict resolution in several books, the best known being *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* (Fisher et al. 1991).

Fisher, Ury, and Patton do not define conflict precisely. They assume the participants involved in a conflict realize that there is a problem between the parties that needs to be resolved. They assume that each of us has different interests and that conflict will arise when parties involved in a social or business relationship pursue these interests. Fisher, Ury, and Patton focus on those behaviors that will magnify or reduce the conflict. They argue that conflict resolution works out best for organizations and the individuals working within them when (1) each side walks away with its legitimate interests met; (2) the relationship between parties has been improved, or at least not

E**Exhibit 1–4****The Principled Negotiation Approach to Conflict**

damaged; and (3) organizational or community interests are taken into account (Fisher et al. 1991, 4). When all three of these conditions are met, we have what Fisher, Ury, and Patton label a *wise agreement*.

Exhibit 1–4 diagrams the key factors that serve to promote or reduce a particular conflict, according to the proponents of principled negotiation. It will be worth your time to memorize these factors as they appear throughout this book. The next section presents brief descriptions of each factor. As the course progresses, we will deal with them in more detail.

Separating People from Issues

Fisher, Ury, and Patton remind us that the “other side” in a conflict is a person or persons (Fisher et al. 1991). As human beings we have emotions, values, different backgrounds, and different viewpoints. Everyone wants to feel good about himself or herself. If you try to resolve a conflict by attacking the person and not the problem, you may win the battle but lose the war. If while winning you make the other party lose face, you risk losing their full cooperation; you risk losing them as an ally in future disputes that you may have with others; you risk their revenge. In our continuing conflict vignette for this chapter, Jack would likely gain more success by first sympathizing with Phyllis’s complaints about her workload. She would have become less defensive. She would be less likely to think of him as a jerk and be more likely to appreciate Jack’s problem.

Focusing on Interests, Not Positions

Fisher, Ury, and Patton observe that individuals who focus only on particular positions in a conflict situation tend to paint themselves into a corner (Fisher et al. 1991, 5). The more you clarify and defend your position, the more committed you become to it; your ego becomes identified with your position, and you now have a new interest—saving face. All of this reduces the odds of resolving a conflict in a manner that will maximize its gains and minimize its costs. Rather than taking a position at the onset, you should let your interests be known, and leave both you and your adversary the opportunity to choose from one of many starting positions. For example, in the Jack-Phyllis dispute, Jack began with the position that the work had to be done as it was in the past, with just one administrative assistant. But what if he had approached Phyllis with his overall problem of “the work not getting done” without such a starting position? Had he expressed his general concern without announcing his starting position (the work’s gotta get done as it was in the past, and that means just one administrative assistant!), he would have made both himself and Phyllis less defensive and more likely to be open to a discussion on how to solve Jack’s problem of the work not getting done and Phyllis’s complaint of being overworked. At the onset, it is possible that neither Jack nor Phyllis knows where to find the best resolution of their conflict: perhaps in something as simple as getting an answering machine to help Phyllis handle telephone calls while she types and photocopies or perhaps in restructuring the workday—or perhaps even in restructuring the organization. Such possibilities were shut off when Jack announced that the work had to get done and it had to be done in the way it had been done in the past.



Think About It

Think of a time when you focused on your position in a conflict. Briefly describe your position, then write down how focusing on your interests—which would have allowed for several starting positions instead of the single one that you chose—might have altered the outcome.

Inventing Options for Mutual Gain

Had Jack and Phyllis not gotten personal in their dispute and had Jack not focused on his single position of the work having to be done as it was in the past, the door might have opened to considering a variety of options for both of them getting what they wanted. Quite likely some of these options would never have been considered by the disputants individually but would emerge only in discussion and brainstorming.

Using Objective Standards of Fairness

We are not always going to get our way in life. None of us can win every battle. When we do lose, however, it is easier to accept if we see “rightness” in the outcome. You will also win more battles amicably if you can show the other party that the outcome you desire meets some fair standard. What we use as a fair standard will vary with every situation. Although the standard emphasized in this course is organizational performance, Fisher, Ury, and Patton offer many others (Fisher et al. 1991, 85):

- Market value
- Precedent
- Scientific judgment
- Professional standards
- Efficiency
- Costs
- What a court would decide
- Moral standards
- Equal treatment
- Tradition
- Reciprocity
- Expert opinion

Jack would be unlikely to impress Phyllis with the argument that she should stay after five o'clock to finish her work. Phyllis's salary is based on a forty-hour week, a standard many American workers have come to accept as fair. He would do better, say, if he opened a discussion of how Phyllis could get more work done with less effort (and, among other things, make her feel like the company is not taking advantage of her).

Having Alternatives to a Collaborative Agreement

We can't always settle a dispute in a way that meets the interests of all parties. In such cases, we can keep conflict and its ill effects in check if we make sure we have a BATNA (*best alternative to a negotiated agreement*). Perhaps Phyllis is the big boss's niece, and Jack comes to realize that the situation isn't going to improve no matter how much he separates the person from the issue, focuses on interests instead of positions, and so on. To make everyone less miserable and to promote his interest of getting his sales work done on time, Jack may have to forget about Phyllis and go his own way. For example, he may realize that he is still making money if he farms out part of the work—say, by taking some of his sales agreements to a commercial secretarial service.

Degree to Which Each Party Is Knowledgeable

Knowledge is power. The more of it you bring to a conflict, the more likely you are to find a solution that is satisfying to everyone. Before saying that the com-

pany could not afford another administrative assistant (even part-time), it would be best if Jack knew what Phyllis was being paid and knew whether he was correct in his assessment of company finances. Phyllis would be in a better negotiating position and increase the likelihood of resolving the conflict to everyone's satisfaction if she knew for sure that Jack was telling the truth about the past situation (or if Jack is an honest man, whether he is correct in his assessment)—that is, that the work got done on time with just one administrative assistant. Perhaps if Phyllis talked with the previous administrative assistant, she might find out that this administrative assistant also struggled. Or she might find out this administrative assistant's secrets for getting the work done.

Willingness to Communicate

A willingness to communicate means taking the time to empathize—to put yourself in the shoes of the other party. Of course, this is easier said than done. But there are some tricks of the trade:

- Interrupt if you don't understand and you want a point repeated, but don't interrupt to jump to a conclusion. If you have a tendency to interrupt, try sucking in a breath of air for three seconds, then holding it for three seconds, and then exhaling it, quietly, for six seconds. This technique will help you gain more control over your interrupting tendencies, as well as give you more control over what you say and how you say it (Glass 1992, 98).
- Avoid loaded questions that make value judgments or assume too much. "Phyllis, why do you think I'm getting these sales agreements back late?" is much preferred to "Phyllis, why do you hate your job?"
- Keep the person talking by smiling and interjecting "mm-hmm" periodically (of course, smiling is not appropriate in every situation), but don't be fearful of occasional moments of silence to allow everyone involved to collect their thoughts.
- Don't focus just on words; home in on the emotions with which the words are spoken and that lie behind the words. Whatever you say, expect the other side to hear something different; then take the time to close the gap between what you said and what they heard.
- Be credible. Credibility is enhanced when you have a reputation for honesty, when you know your facts, and when you rely on reason more than emotion. It is enhanced when you can articulate your thoughts, which sometimes requires that you think out your arguments ahead of time—writing them down, refining them, sharing them with a confidant who can act as a sounding board and give you some constructive feedback.
- Control your body and your clothing. This means many things—for example, resist foot tapping, fiddling with objects, and fidgeting (Glass 1992, 98) and keep yourself well groomed and odorless. It means monitoring yourself if you know that you have a tendency to laugh at humor that is inappropriate for a culturally diverse workplace or to yawn in the middle of the day (turn your head and cover your mouth if you do have to yawn or sneeze or cough or belch). It means modulating your voice and avoiding mumbling, slurring, cackling, and bellowing; it means wearing pressed clothes that fit and are in line with the organization's dress norms.

- **Control the interaction space.** If you think that your conversation is going to take a while, put your phone on hold, let your administrative assistant know you don't want to be disturbed, and close the door. If you are in a public space, like an open office area or the lunchroom, and see a conversation getting emotional, then put it on hold and find a private space if possible (and if this isn't possible, then revisit the conversation at a later time when it can be held in private).

The points we've made here are so important that we have reformulated and embellished them as Tool 1–2. (Even though some of these points are applicable to electronic communication, they emphasize face-to-face situations. Chapter 4 will deal with the importance of using e-mail, instant messaging, and teleconferencing in ways that increase the probability of resolving a conflict successfully.) These points reflect basic skills that you can develop to become a better and more willing communicator. Hone these skills until they become a natural part of your interaction style, as good communication is a critical component of the principled negotiation approach to conflict resolution. So when you are facing a conflict in your organization and have the responsibility for trying to resolve it, pull out Tool 1–2 and review these points before meeting with the parties involved (especially when you are a primary party in a particular dispute). When these become a natural part of your style, you will be able to maintain the poise—the coolness under fire—so often required in social interactions aimed at conflict resolution. You should also see Tools 4–6 and 4–7 for suggestions on being a more successful communicator by improving your listening skills and using electronic communication to resolve conflicts.



Conflict Resolution Tool Box

Tool 1–2 Becoming a Better Communicator

Instructions: If you are facing a conflict in your organization and are responsible for trying to resolve it, review the following suggestions before meeting with the parties involved (and especially when you are a primary party in a particular dispute). Mastery of these techniques will help you maintain your poise in social interactions aimed at conflict resolution.

1. Empathize—you must be able to put yourself in the other party's shoes.

- If you cannot imagine what it's like to be in the shoes of the other party, then find someone who does (for example, a colleague who has worked in a position similar to that of the other party's) and get insight from this person.
- Spend some time in the office area of the other party: See what the work atmosphere is like. For example, are interruptions common? Does the other party have helpers? What technology is involved?
- Ask the other party to talk about what they do and how they feel about it.
- Talk to friends, colleagues, or peers about the other party—for example, their personality, the nature of their job.
- A universal trait of all human beings is that they do not like to lose face. When they do, more often than not their immediate reaction is to strike back. Thus, even when you know that you are right and the other party is wrong, always try to allow the other party to save face.

Conflict Resolution Tool Box continues on next page.

Conflict Resolution Tool Box continued from previous page.

2. **Be slow to interrupt—you must know when it is appropriate and how to avoid it when it's not.**
 - Interrupt if you don't understand and need a point repeated.
 - Do *not* interrupt to jump to a conclusion.
 - If you have a habit of interrupting when it is not appropriate, learn to control it by taking a slightly larger than normal breath and holding it for three seconds, then exhaling slowly and quietly for six seconds. This technique has the added benefit that you gain control over what you say and how you say it.
 3. **Avoid loaded questions—especially those that make value judgments, assume too much, or are based on stereotypes.**
 - Ask the person to give their reasons for their actions (“Phyllis, what do you think is behind your tendency to argue with the sales reps?” instead of “Phyllis, your tendency to argue with the sales reps tells me that you don't know how to get along with men.”)
 - Try not to stereotype; stereotyping lies behind many loaded questions—for example, women tend to have higher-pitched voices, speak more softly, or prefer unanimity over disagreement. You can acknowledge such differences between men and women without accepting negative comparison like “women are the weaker sex.”
 4. **Be credible.**
 - Be as honest as you can, given the circumstances (in some cases you may not be able, nor may it be wise, to divulge *everything* related to the issue at hand).
 - Know your facts, and be able to back them up if necessary.
 - Whenever possible, make your case analytically, using cause-and-effect reasoning.
 - If you find yourself becoming overly emotional, take a break (excuse yourself to go to the bathroom or get a drink of water—during which time you can get control of your emotions).
 5. **Control your body and your body language.**
 - Be well groomed—look the part of someone who cares about how others see him or her.
 - In close quarters, make sure you don't have bad breath.
 - Make sure that you don't smell, but avoid heavy aftershaves or perfumes.
 - Do whatever it takes not to sweat!
 - Resist foot tapping, fiddling with objects, fidgeting.
 - Make eye contact and resist staring out the window or into space.
 - Be quick to smile, which encourages the other party to open up, as does occasionally murmuring “mm-hmm” while he or she speaks.
 - Keep your voice under control, doing your best not to yell, cry, cackle, or get the giggles.
 6. **Control the interaction space.**
 - Don't argue in public spaces, and when you head for more private space, do so with little fanfare (for example, don't storm into your office with the other party and then slam the door).
 - Put your telephone answering machine on quiet mode; turn off your cell phone.
 - Let those around you, who might otherwise feel free to walk in on you, know that you don't want to be disturbed for a while.
 7. **Control your clothes.**
 - Dress appropriately—if you want people to look at you seriously as a professional, then be serious about looking like a professional.
 - Take a quick peek in the mirror before meeting with the other party (make sure your tie is straight, your blouse is buttoned, the spaghetti sauce you had at lunch didn't seep through your napkin, and so on).
-



This chapter introduced concepts, terms, and value judgments regarding conflict and conflict resolution within organizations, as well as the principled negotiation model. Our basic premise is that conflict in organizations is not inherently positive or negative. Rather, we examine each conflict situation and its aftermath before determining the value of the conflict to the organization. For the purposes of this course, we have a general criterion for evaluating conflict and its

aftermath: How does it impact organizational performance?

We defined *conflict* as the process that begins when one party perceives that another has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect, something that he or she cares about. We emphasized that successful managers must learn to distinguish how much of a particular conflict in their organizations is due to structural causes and how much is due to interpersonal differences. Structural conflict is rooted in the very nature of organizations and is heightened by scarce resources. Interpersonal conflict is rooted in personality differences. And because much of our personality is shaped by the social groups to which we belong, interpersonal conflict is magnified by social differences—for example, differences in race, gender, national origin, age, income, marital status, sexual orientation, religion, and physical disability.

This chapter presented five approaches to conflict resolution. *Avoiding* occurs when one or both sides recognize that a conflict exists but react by withdrawing from or postponing the conflict. *Accommodating* occurs when one side resolves the conflict by giving in to the other side at the expense of at least some of his or her own needs. *Compromising* occurs when both sides gain and lose in order to resolve the conflict. *Forcing* occurs when one or both sides attempt to satisfy their own needs regardless of the impact on the other side. *Collaborating* is an attempt made by one or both parties to satisfy fully the needs of both. It is important to not only understand all five approaches to resolving conflict but also identify the situations in which each method should be applied. Tool 1–1 provides a list of the typical situations that are appropriate for each major conflict resolution approach.

An ever-growing number of organizations are becoming increasingly diversified in terms of several factors: culture, race, ethnicity, age, gender, and disability. This social diversification has been accompanied by a cultural change in which individuals of all backgrounds are quicker to speak up in the face of perceived or real mistreatment or exploitation. Modern managers must respond by improving their conflict resolution skills. When these skills are not enough, they should turn to their human resources officer, who can recommend one of the many forms of alternative dispute resolution (ADR). ADR approaches seek to involve the disputing parties in the resolution of their conflict, thereby increasing the probability that each of them will be more satisfied with the outcome. Ten common forms of ADR are *conciliation*, *dispute panels*, *early neutral evaluation*, *peer review*, *facilitation*, *mediation*, *arbitration*, *mediated arbitration*, *ombudsperson evaluation*, and *minitrials*.

Fisher, Ury, and Patton's *principled negotiation* model emphasizes that conflict resolution is best handled through collaboration and negotiation. Major determinants of successful conflict resolution include separating people from issues, focusing on interests rather than positions, inventing options for mutual gain, using objective standards, having alternatives to resolving the conflict, knowledge, and the willingness to communicate.



Review Questions

1. Structural conflict has its roots in the scarce resources, division of labor, and _____ in modern organizations. 1. (d)
 - (a) different racial backgrounds of the people found
 - (b) latent functions
 - (c) personality differences
 - (d) interdependence among positions

2. _____ would generally be appropriate when quick, decisive action is vital (emergencies); _____ would generally be more appropriate when you want to gain commitment by incorporating concerns into a consensus; _____ is good when you want to build social credits for later issues; _____ is okay when an issue is trivial; and _____ can help to achieve a temporary settlement to a complex issue. 2. (a)
 - (a) Forcing/collaborating/accommodating/avoiding/compromising
 - (b) Mediating/compromising/arbitrating/appeasing/conceding
 - (c) Arbitrating/accommodating/forcing/collaborating/accommodating
 - (d) Collaborating/accommodating/arbitrating/mediating/avoiding

3. There are five conflict resolution approaches: accommodating, forcing, _____, _____, and _____. 3. (a)
 - (a) avoiding/compromising/collaborating
 - (b) appeasing/mediation/concession
 - (c) avoiding/collaborating/mediation
 - (d) arbitration/avoiding/appeasing

-
4. Major approaches to alternative dispute resolution have in common that they: 4. (d)
- (a) rely on government agents trained in conflict management to propose at least two acceptable options for resolving the dispute at hand.
 - (b) use former judges to make decisions regarding the complaints of disgruntled employees, thereby preventing costly lawsuits.
 - (c) use coworkers to resolve disputes within their departments or teams.
 - (d) seek to involve the disputing parties in the resolution of their conflicts.
5. In the principled negotiation approach to conflict resolution, we strive to separate people from issues, focus on interests not positions, invent options for mutual gain, use objective standards of fairness, develop a BATNA, _____, and _____. 5. (c)
- (a) have the conflict aired before a mediator/avoid electronic communication
 - (b) seek arbitration as a first, not a last, resort/have both parties resolve a conflict via compromise
 - (c) maximize our knowledge of the issue at hand/maintain a strong willingness to communicate
 - (d) accommodate the needs of both the stronger and weaker of the parties involved/seek mediation as a first, not a last, resort

