

# **Conflict Management: A Manager's Introduction**

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## **Our Agenda:**

- Introductions
- What Makes a Conflict? The Basics
- Styles and Choices
- Communication Skills
- Steps to Resolution

## **Our Goals:**

- To learn more about what conflict is
- To explore conflict styles and choices
- To sharpen our communication skills
- To learn a simple conflict resolution process

## **Our Ground Rules:**

Listen actively.

Ask questions.

Treat each other respectfully.

Take care of our own needs.

# What Makes A Conflict?

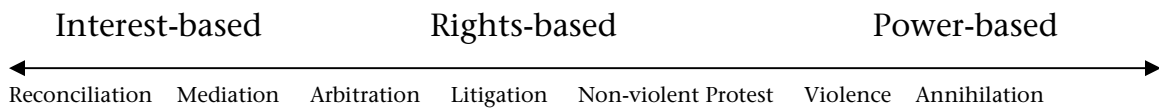
Conflict requires:

- Interdependence
- Interests
- Incompatibility
- Communication

## Three Dimensions of Conflict

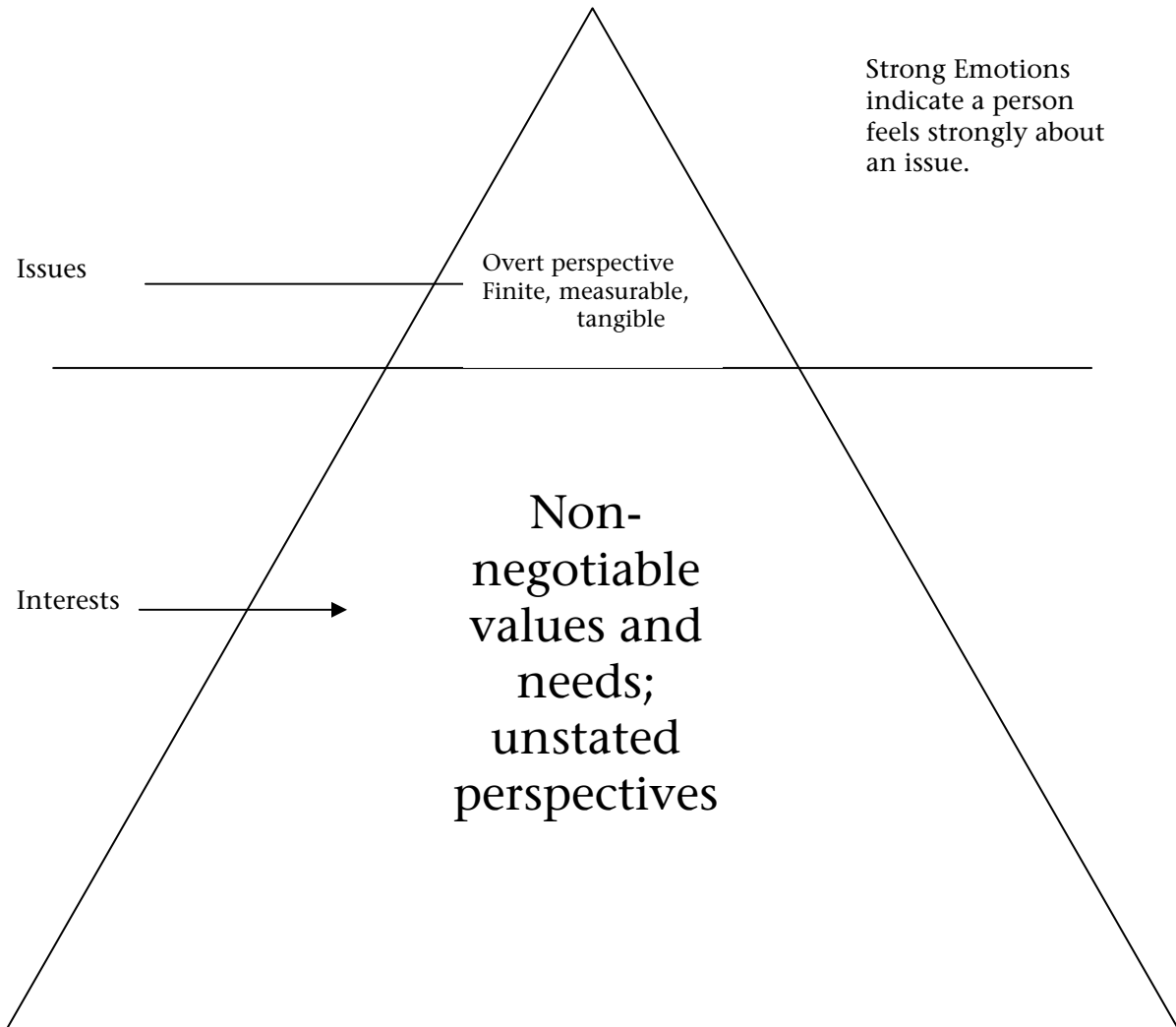
- Content
- Process
- Relationships

## The Conflict Resolution Continuum



# Interests Iceberg

Acknowledging a person's underlying interests can build trust, allow them to hear alternative views, and become open to change. Acknowledging shared interests or values also builds bridges between people who are in conflict.



## Interests are non-negotiable values such as:

- |                    |                   |                         |
|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Safety             | Fair treatment    | Trust                   |
| Basic survival     | Health/well being | Peace of mind           |
| Self-respect       | "Sanity"          | Peace and quiet         |
| Consistency        | Dependability     | Privacy                 |
| Good communication | Honesty           | Respect for differences |
| Credibility        | Connectedness     | Being seen as competent |

*adapted from material from the Thurston County Dispute Resolution Center.*

**Identifying Interests in Issues:**

As a supervisor, how would you respond to an employee who made the following comments to you?

*Issue:* "Mavis has taken three long lunches in the last two weeks. She's never here on time, and you never see it. I'm going to start documenting every time she goes on break or lunch or leaves the office."

Possible Interests:

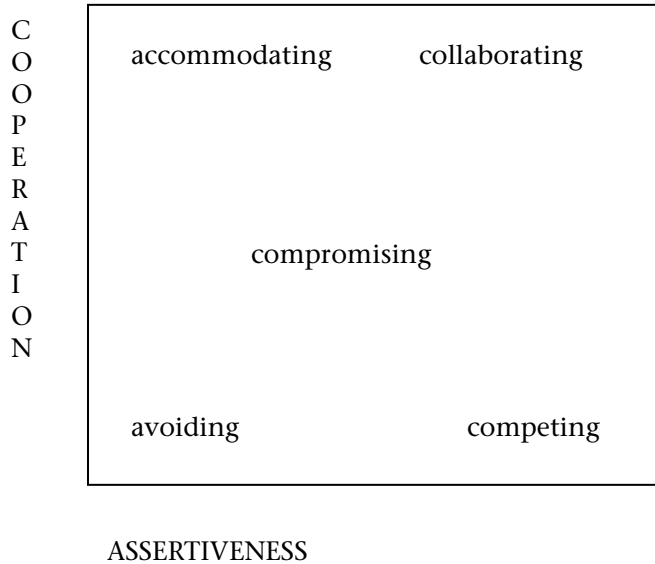
*Issue:* "I want to tape all our meetings from now on, George, so that I'll have evidence of what you said to me."

Possible Interests:

*Issue:* "I'm telling you about Hortense's bad behavior in confidence. I don't want you to do anything about it, or she'll know that I came and talked to you."

Possible Interests:

## Five Conflict Styles



### Another Way of Thinking About the Five Styles

**Accommodating:** the relationship is more important than the interest.

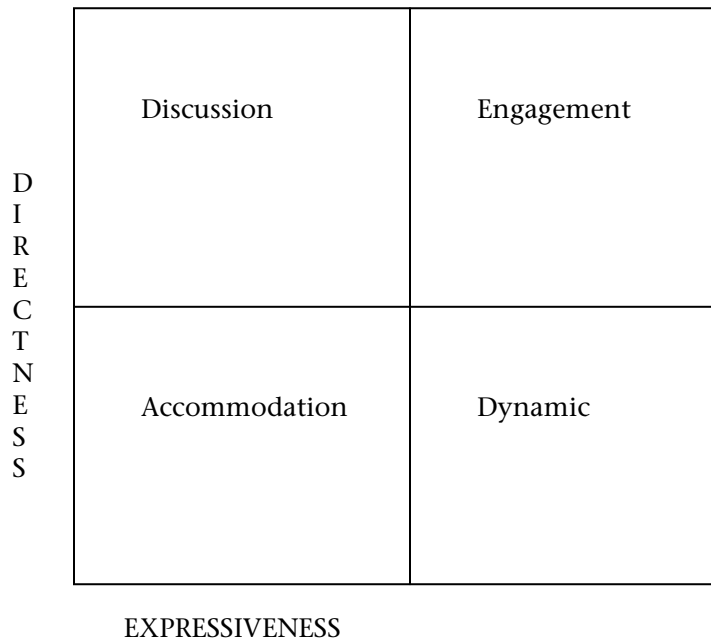
**Collaborating:** the relationship and the interest can both be preserved.

**Compromising:** the relationship and the interest can be balanced.

**Avoiding:** neither the relationship nor the interest can be preserved.

**Competing:** the interest is more important than the relationship.

## Four Cultural Styles



### Extending Our Options

Which of the five styles is your most common or comfortable approach? In what kind of situation would you be able to use the other four approaches?

Which of the four styles is most comfortable for you? Which style is most challenging?

How might you use this information in working with employees?

## A Few Unhelpful Communication Skills

- Blaming
- Avoiding
- Rationalizing
- Placating
- Joking
- Rushing to "Fix It"

### Compassionate Communication:

- Compassionate communication is a four step process of beginning difficult conversations.
- There are two elements to non-violent communication: expressing self and hearing others.

#### The Four Steps in Compassionate Communication:

1. Observation
2. Feelings
3. Needs
4. Request

1. Observe without evaluation. Your observation should describe an external event without too much emotional content:

- I noticed that you slammed the door when you left my office.
- You sent me an email about our meeting.
- I didn't see the report I asked for.

2. Feeling is not thinking

- Watch for "I feel that . . .", which is substituting *thinking* for *feeling*.
- "I felt that you were trying to humiliate me." v. "I felt humiliated."

3. Express your need clearly and concretely. What is your *interest*?

- I need clarity about my responsibilities.
- I need to feel safe in my workplace.
- I need to be treated respectfully.
- 

4. Use clear, positive, concrete action language to express request.

- I wonder if we can make an appointment to talk more about this.
- I'd like to understand your decision better.
- Can we agree that you won't use that word again here at work?

Choose two or three new partners and try using the non-violent communication steps with the following examples in your small group.

**When [*event, described neutrally*] happened, I felt [*angry, excluded, etc.*] because I need [*name a need*]. Could we [*talk about what happened; think about a solution, etc.*]?**

**When you said my ideas were stupid in our staff meeting, I felt embarrassed and hurt, because it's important to me to be treated respectfully. Could we talk about changing the way we interact in staff meetings?**

- You see an open notebook on a colleague's desk with your name and a list of all the phone calls you've made, trips to the bathroom, times you went on and came back from break.
- A colleague shows you an email that someone in the office has circulated, accusing you of complaining to your supervisor about a conflict. The message encourages your co-workers to give you the "silent treatment." Your colleague won't tell you who sent the message.
- A coworker storms over to your desk, shouting, "This is it! I've had it with you, you incompetent #@^!! I'm going to stomp a mudhole in you and walk it dry! You better watch your @#%^ \*^%#@!"
- When you go to the supply cabinet to get a pad of paper and some sticky notes, the coworker who orders supplies says, "You use way too many supplies. Nobody else uses so many sticky notes. Put some of those back."
- In a staff meeting, you notice a co-worker exchanging meaningful glances with a friend while you talk. Then he writes a note on his pad and shows it to her. She looks at you, then back at him, and rolls her eyes. They smile at each other. Then he sighs heavily and slumps in his chair.

# A Simple Process for Facilitating Conflict Management

## Assessment

Listen to each party.

Ask yourself—and them:

- Are they ready to resolve this conflict?
- Is it safe and wise to bring them together?
- Is an informal process appropriate for this conflict?

If the answer to all those is Yes, then schedule some uninterrupted time in a quiet, private place.

## Setting the ground rules

In order to keep the interaction safe and productive, set some ground rules.

Sample ground rules to choose from:

- We will be civil and respectful.
- We will say what we need.
- We will listen to each other.
- We will be open to creative solutions.
- We will keep this conversation confidential.
- We will keep the agreements we make here.
- Others?

## Telling the stories

Each person has an uninterrupted chance to describe his or her experience.

The facilitator takes notes, pays attention, and reflects back.

## Identifying issues

The participants and the facilitator make a list of issues which need to be addressed.

The list should identify issues as neutrally as possible.

- Communication, not Gossiping
- Scheduling, not Unreliability
- Meetings, not Fewer Pointless Meetings

## Brainstorming solutions

The participants—not the facilitator!—go down the list of issues and make requests, negotiating back and forth.

The facilitator keeps track of what agreements they are making, and checks back until everyone agrees.

Agreements should be very specific and clear. They should include timelines and implementation guidelines.

### **Making an agreement**

Participants review the list of agreements and make any changes necessary.

When they are agreed, talk about next steps: what will you do if these agreements don't work out? Who will do what first? Does the facilitator need to meet with them again?

Thank them for taking part in the process. Congratulate them on their progress. Remind them that you'll be there to work with them further if they need it.

## **A Few Words about Trust**

Trust: the belief in and willingness to act on the basis of the words, actions, and decisions of another person.

What breaks trust?

What builds trust?

- Reliability and consistency over time
- Shared values, goals, and identities

Rebuilding Broken Trust

- Exchange information about perceived violation.
- Affirm commitment to re-establishing trust.
- Make small, measurable agreements and keep them.
- Identify common goals and values.
- Allow time.