CHAPTER 7

Conflict and Cohesion in Groups

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Conflict in Groups

Substantive Conflict
Affective Conflict
Procedural Conflict

Constructive and Destructive Conflict

Conflict Styles
Avoidance
Accommodation
Competition
Compromise
Collaboration
Choosing a Conflict Style

Conflict Management Strategies
The 4Rs Method
The A-E-I-O-U Model
Negotiation
Mediation
Arbitration

Group Cohesion
Enhancing Cohesion
Groupthink

Adapting to Differences
Cultural Responses to Conflict
Gender Responses to Conflict

Balancing Conflict and Cohesion

GroupWork: Win as Much as You Can

GroupAssessment: Ross-DeWine Conflict Management
Message Style Instrument

Conflict is unavoidable in effective groups. Rarely do conscientious group members work together for any length of time without expressing differences and disagreeing. Yet despite the inevitability of conflict, many of us go out of our way to avoid or suppress it. Too often, we believe that effective groups “are characterized by chumminess. Many effective teams look more like battlegrounds, it turns out. . . . Teams with vastly competent members embrace conflict as the price of synergy and set good idea against good idea to arrive at the best idea.”

The word conflict is frequently associated with quarreling, fighting, anger, and hostility. While these elements may be present in a group situation, conflict does not have to involve the expression of negative emotions. When it is treated as an expression of legitimate differences, conflict can improve group problem solving, promote cohesiveness, increase group knowledge, enhance creativity, and promote the group’s goal.

Substantive Conflict

Substantive conflict occurs when members disagree about ideas, issue analysis, and potential solutions or actions. For example, when the members of a student government council try to answer the question “Should student activities fees be raised?” their conflict is substantive because it focuses on working toward the group’s goal of serving students’ cocurricular needs. In Chapter 10, “Argumentation in Groups,” we examine the ways in which effective and ethical argumentation can help groups understand and analyze ideas, influence members, make informed and critical decisions, and achieve their goals.

Affective Conflict

The word affective means “influenced by or resulting from the emotions.” Affective conflict reflects the emotions stirred by interpersonal disagreements, differences in personalities and communication styles, and members’ beliefs and feelings. Affective conflict may occur when a member does not feel valued or feels threatened by the group. Affective conflict also occurs when members believe that their ideas are not being judged fairly or when group members are struggling for power. Affective conflict is more difficult to resolve than substantive conflict because it involves people’s feelings and the way members relate to one another.

Both substantive and affective conflict are often present when group members disagree. For example, Dee believes that student fees should be raised in order to fund more campus activities. Charles disagrees; he suggests that the existing funds should be used more efficiently rather than placing a larger financial burden on
students. At this point in the discussion, the conflict is substantive; it is focused on issues. However, when responding to Dee, Charles rolls his eyes and states, “Only a political fool believes that higher fees are the answer to the problem.” Not only does Dee disagree with Charles on the issues, but she is angered by his comment. Now the conflict has gone beyond its substance; it has become affective as well.

**Procedural Conflict**

**Procedural conflict** is disagreement among group members about the methods or process that the group should follow in its attempt to accomplish a goal. Some group members may want to begin a discussion by suggesting solutions to a problem, whereas others may want to start by gathering and discussing information. Some members may believe that a decision should be made by secret ballot, whereas others may want a show of hands.

Procedural conflicts often arise when groups have difficulty resolving substantive or affective conflict. Rather than facing the issues, they rely on procedures to get them through. “Procedures such as moving to the next agenda item, taking a vote, or changing the topic are ways of withdrawing from conflict.” At the same time—as you will see in Chapter 9, “Structured and Creative Problem Solving in Groups”—constructive procedures can help a group “reduce uncertainty about group decisions” and create a more positive group climate.

**CONSTRUCTIVE AND DESTRUCTIVE CONFLICT**

Conflict itself is neither good nor bad. However, the way in which a group deals with conflict can be either constructive or destructive. **Destructive conflict** results when groups engage in behaviors that create hostility and prevent achievement of the group’s goal. Constant complaining, personal insults, conflict avoidance, and loud arguments or threats all contribute to destructive conflict. The quality of group decision making deteriorates when members are inflexible and are not
open to other points of view. Destructive conflict has the potential to permanently disable a group.

**Constructive conflict** results when group members express disagreement in a way that values everyone’s contributions and promotes the group’s goal. Figure 7.2 characterizes the differences between destructive and constructive conflict.

Groups that are committed to constructive conflict abide by the following principles:

- Disagreement does not result in punishment.
  “I’m not afraid of being fired for disagreeing with other members.”

- Members work with one another to achieve a mutually satisfying resolution of conflict.
  “We can work this out. After all, we’re all after the same thing in the long run.”

- Lower-status group members are free to disagree with higher-status members.
  “I know she’s the CEO, but I think there are some disadvantages to the approach that she suggests.”

- The group has an agreed-upon approach for conflict resolution and decision making.
  “Our group is using the Nominal Group Technique, so I know my ideas will be heard and included.”

- Members can disagree and still respect one another.
  “The group may not like my idea, but the members would never personally attack me for expressing my opinion.”

Constructive group conflict has many positive outcomes. Issues and people are better understood through an open exchange of ideas, opinions, and feelings.
The quality of decision making improves as opposing viewpoints and concerns are discussed. Expressing differences constructively can make a group discussion more interesting and promote participation.

CONFLICT STYLES

Research indicates that all of us have characteristic conflict-handling styles that we tend to apply regardless of the differences in situations. Whereas some people will move heaven and earth to avoid conflict of any kind, others enjoy the competitive atmosphere and the exultation of "winning." In Working Through Conflict,
Joseph Folger and his colleagues recommend that group members work on mastering various styles of doing conflict.

There are five traditional conflict styles: avoidance, accommodation, competition, compromise, and collaboration. These five styles reflect a dialectic tension between focusing on and asserting your personal goals and working cooperatively to achieve the group’s goal. For example, if you are motivated to achieve your own goals, you may use a more competitive conflict style. If you are dedicated to achieving the group’s goals, you may use a more accommodating or collaborative conflict style. Kenneth Thomas, whose research with Ralph Kilmann produced the five conflict-handling styles illustrated in Figure 7.3, acknowledges the dialectic nature of these dimensions. “They are not opposites,” he writes. Collaborating, for example, is both assertive and cooperative.

**Avoidance**

When members are unable or unwilling to accomplish their own goals or contribute to achieving the group’s goal, they may adopt the avoidance conflict style. In some cases, members who care about the group and its goals may adopt the avoidance style because they are uncomfortable with or unskilled at asserting themselves. Group members who use this style may change the subject, avoid bringing up a controversial issue, and even deny that a conflict exists. Avoiding conflict in groups is usually counterproductive because it fails to address a problem and can increase group tensions. Furthermore, ignoring or avoiding conflict does not make it go away.

**FIGURE 7.3 Conflict Styles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Concern for Own Goals</th>
<th>COMPETITION “I win; you lose.”</th>
<th>COLLABORATION “We win!”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Concern for Group Goals</td>
<td>COMPROMISE “Give a little; get a little.”</td>
<td>AVOIDANCE “Leave me alone.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ACCOMMODATION “I give in.”</td>
<td>Low Concern for Group Goals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
However, in some circumstances, avoidance of conflict can be an appropriate approach—specifically when

• The issue is not that important to you.
• You need to take time to collect your thoughts or control your emotions.
• Other group members are addressing the same concerns effectively.
• The consequences of confrontation are too risky.

**Accommodation**

Group members using the **accommodating conflict style** give in to other members at the expense of their own goals. Accommodators are often motivated by a genuine desire to get along with other group members. They believe that giving in to others serves the needs of the group, even when the group could benefit from further discussion. A group member who always approaches conflict by accommodating others may ultimately be perceived as being less powerful and have less influence in group decision making.

Accommodating during conflict can be an appropriate approach when

• The issue is very important to others but is not very important to you.
• It is more important to preserve group harmony than to resolve the current issue.
• You realize that you are wrong or you have changed your mind.
• You are unlikely to succeed in persuading the group to adopt your position.

**Competition**

The **competitive conflict style** occurs when group members are more concerned with their own goals than with meeting the needs of the group. Competitive members want to win; they argue that their ideas are superior to the alternatives suggested by others. When used inappropriately, the competitive style may be characterized by hostility, ridicule, and personal attacks against group members. Approaching conflict competitively tends to divide group members into winners and losers. Ultimately, this may damage the relationships among group members.

In certain group situations, however, the competitive approach may be the most appropriate style. Approach conflict competitively when

• You have strong beliefs about an important issue.
• The group must act immediately on an urgent issue or in an emergency situation.
• The consequences of the group’s decision may be very serious or harmful.
• You believe that the group may be acting unethically or illegally.
Compromise

The compromising conflict style is a “middle ground” approach that involves conceding some goals in order to achieve others. When group members compromise, each member is willing to suffer some losses in exchange for gaining something else. Group members who approach conflict through compromise argue that it is a fair method of resolving problems, since everyone loses equally. “However, when each person gives up something in order to meet the others halfway, the result is only partial satisfaction for all concerned. Commitment to solutions will be questionable.”

The compromise approach should be used when the group has been unable to find a more constructive solution. Groups should consider compromising when

- Other methods of resolving the conflict will not be effective.
- The members have reached an impasse and are no longer progressing toward a reasonable solution.
- The group does not have enough time to explore more creative solutions.

Collaboration

The collaborative conflict style searches for new solutions that will achieve both the individual goals of group members and the goals of the group. Instead of arguing over who is right or wrong, the collaborative group seeks creative solutions that satisfy everyone’s interests and needs. Collaboration promotes synergy and resolves the dialectic tension between assertiveness and cooperation. It also “involves trying to find an ‘integrative’ (or win-win) solution” that allows the group to make progress toward achieving its common goal.

There are, however, two important drawbacks to the collaborative approach. First, collaboration requires a lot of the group’s time and energy. Some issues may not be important enough to justify such creative effort and extra time. Second, in order for collaboration to be successful, all group members must participate fully. Avoiders and accommodators can prevent a group from engaging in true collaboration.

Groups should approach conflict resolution collaboratively when

- They want to find a solution that will satisfy all group members.
- New and creative ideas are needed.
- A commitment to the final decision is needed from each group member.
- The group has enough time to commit to creative problem solving.

Choosing a Conflict Style

While individuals may be predisposed to a particular conflict style, effective group members choose the style that is most appropriate for a particular group in a particular situation. As situations change, so may the members’ approach to
conflict. One of us works as a legal communication consultant who routinely sees members of mock juries use various conflict styles while deliberating a case. The following is an example:

During the first hour of deliberation, the jury engaged in a heated debate over a controversial, yet central, issue in the case. Tony was conspicuously silent throughout this discussion. He was asked his opinion several times. Each time, he indicated that he agreed with the arguments that Pam had presented. On a later issue, Tony was a central participant. He argued vehemently that one of the defendants should not be held liable. He even said, “I’m just not going to concede this point. It’s not right for the man to go to jail over this.” Eventually, one of the jurors suggested that Tony reexamine a document presented as evidence of the defendant’s guilt. Tony was quiet for a few minutes and carefully reviewed the document for himself. He then looked up at the group and said, “Well, this changes everything for me. I guess he really was a part of the conspiracy.”

Tony used several approaches to deal with conflict in the group. First, he avoided it altogether. He simply had nothing to add to the discussion. Tony then became competitive when he thought that a person might be unjustly imprisoned. However, he became accommodating when a review of the evidence convinced him that he had been wrong.

When selecting a conflict style, you should consider the following questions:

• How important is the issue to you?
• How important is the issue to other members?
• How important is it to maintain positive relationships within the group?
• How much time does the group have to address the issue?
• How fully do group members trust one another?

Answers to these questions can suggest whether a particular conflict style is appropriate or inappropriate in a particular situation. For instance, if group members do not trust one another, the compromising style would be less appropriate. If the issue is very important, and the group has plenty of time to discuss it, collaboration should be explored. There is no single conflict style that will be effective in all group situations. The skilled member balances a variety of considerations and chooses an appropriate style.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Appropriate conflict styles can help resolve disagreements, particularly when group members understand the dialectic tension between assertiveness and cooperation. Sometimes, however, a group must set aside the substantive, affective, or procedural issue under discussion and address the nature or causes of the conflict directly. In short, groups need a strategy for analyzing the conflict.
In order to choose the most appropriate conflict management strategy, you must understand your group’s conflict. We suggest using the 4Rs method to analyze the conflict in a particular situation. The four steps of the method are accompanied by these relevant questions:

- **Reasons.** What are the reasons for or causes of the conflict? Are the causes associated with expressed differences about issues, methods, and/or members? Do other concerned members agree with your assessment of the reasons for the conflict?

- **Reactions.** How are group members reacting to one another? Are the reactions constructive or destructive in nature? Can members’ reactions be modified into more constructive behavior?
• Results. What are the consequences of the group’s current approach to the conflict? Is the conflict serious enough to jeopardize the group’s goal and members’ morale?

• Resolution. What are the available methods for resolving the conflict? Which method best matches the nature of the group and its conflict?

Analyzing and understanding the nature of the disagreement will result in a better resolution. The 4Rs method provides a way of thinking about conflict and selecting an appropriate approach to conflict management.

**The A-E-I-O-U Model**

In order to resolve conflict, a group must fully understand its members’ concerns. If members do not understand the problem, they cannot find effective solutions. Jerry Wisinski’s A-E-I-O-U Model is a way to clearly communicate concerns and suggest alternative actions. The steps in the A-E-I-O-U Model are as follows:

*A*—Assume that the other members mean well.

*E*—Express your feelings.

*I*—Identify what you would like to have happen.

*O*—Outcomes you expect are made clear.

*U*—Understanding on a mutual basis is achieved.

---

**FIGURE 7.4 Approaches to Conflict Management**

- **4Rs Method (Analyze the Conflict)**
- **CHOOSE APPROPRIATE APPROACH TO CONFLICT**
  - We should express concerns and suggest a solution.
  - We should bargain to settle differences.
  - We need a third party to facilitate the discussion.
  - We need a third party to decide for us.

- **A-E-I-O-U Model**
- **Negotiation**
- **Mediation**
- **Arbitration**
Chapter 7  Conflict and Cohesion in Groups

The first step, A, requires a belief that other group members are willing to cooperate. Such a belief could be expressed as follows: “I know that all of us want this project to be successful.” If you or other members sense that some people are not willing to cooperate or that a hidden agenda is lurking below the surface, the group should spend as much time as needed on this step to ensure that members are committed to resolving the conflict.

The second step, E, identifies your feelings associated with a specific behavior or action: “But, I’m really worried, because it seems as though we’re not putting in the work that’s needed.” Expressing your feelings and describing behavior helps the group interpret your reaction to the situation. Also, as you listen to others express their feelings, paraphrase what they’ve said to ensure that you and others understand their concerns.

The third step, I, requires that you not only express your concerns but also identify what you want to have happen: “I would like to be assured that all of you are as concerned about the success of this project as I am, and that you have been thinking about how we can make sure the work gets done on time.” The group can now focus its discussion on solving the problem. As you listen to others share their recommendations, you may realize that group members are close to or far from agreement.

The fourth step, O, directs you to inform members of the potential outcomes of their behavior: “I sincerely believe that if we don’t work late for the next couple of days, we will not be prepared to make an effective group presentation next week.”

The final step, U, recognizes that your group may need more time to reach a mutual understanding: “Could we try staying late for the next few days to get ahead of the game? What do you think?” A group will frequently reject an initial suggestion but then go on to develop a more satisfactory solution. This final step requires that all group members understand the problem and agree to a solution. When all the steps in the A-E-I-O-U Model are combined, they become the essential ingredients in creating a constructive approach to conflict management.

**Negotiation**

Negotiation is a process of bargaining in order to settle differences or reach solutions. Normally, negotiation takes the form of compromise, with group members conceding some issues in order to achieve agreement on other points. Group members will be more willing to bargain if they believe that they will be no worse off and might even be better off by the end of the negotiation process.

Conflict can be resolved through a process of “principled negotiation.” 17 The four principles are as follows:

- Separate the people from the problem.
- Focus on group interests, not positions.
• Generate a variety of possible solutions for mutual gain.
• Insist on objective criteria for choosing a solution.

When group members focus on defending their positions, the result is winners and losers. When the members focus on group interests, the entire group wins. However, group negotiation can become deadlocked when members are unable to appreciate the needs of others or are unwilling to make concessions. The following strategies can help break a deadlock:18

• Limit the scope of the problem by dividing it into manageable parts.
• Minimize defensive behavior by having members explain or paraphrase the other side’s position.
• Summarize areas of agreement to promote further cooperation.
• Take a break to relieve group tensions.
• Ask for more information to avoid inaccurate assumptions.

Clearly, group members must balance a variety of needs during negotiation.19 They must be willing to cooperate with others while attempting to meet as many of their own needs as possible. They must openly communicate what they are willing to concede, yet not sacrifice more than is necessary. Finally, members must balance the need to gain their own short-term goals against the benefits of mutually desirable long-term conflict resolution.

Mediation

In recent years, mediation has become a more commonly used tool for resolving disputes. Mediation is “facilitated negotiation [that] employs the services of impartial third parties only for the purpose of guiding, coaching, and encouraging the disputants through negotiation to successful resolution and agreement.”20 Mediation is an appropriate approach to conflict resolution when group members are unable to resolve the conflict by themselves and when everyone concerned is willing to participate in the process and abide by the final settlement. If group members cannot agree to these terms, then mediation is not an option.

Once a group has decided to use mediation, there are two basic requirements: an impartial mediator and a well-planned mediation session. The group must choose an impartial mediator who is not involved in the conflict. If a conflict involves all members of the group, a mediator from outside the group should be chosen. The group leader or another group member should be considered as a mediator only if he or she is not involved in the conflict. The mediator does not take sides in the dispute. Instead, he or she guides the group through the process and facilitates negotiation.
Effective mediators follow a well-established set of basic steps:21

- **Introduction.** Explain the mediation process and create a supportive climate by offering words of encouragement and asking for questions prior to beginning.

- **Storytelling.** Allow each member to tell his or her story without interruption. Use stories to identify issues and establish commonalities. Summarize each group member’s perspective.

- **Agenda building.** List the issues to be negotiated and frame the goals of the session.

- **Negotiation and problem solving.** Guide the group members toward possible solutions.

- **Testing agreement.** After agreeing on a resolution to the conflict, discuss ways to implement the solution. Write a clear, unambiguous, and understood agreement. Group members should sign the agreement.

- **Closure.** Praise the group and provide copies of the agreement to all members. If possible, lead a discussion on ways in which the group can resolve future conflicts.22

An effective mediator establishes a rapport with disputing group members through empathic listening.23 Listen to each member’s concerns, acknowledge the legitimacy of those concerns, and assure members that you will try to help everyone discover a solution that will meet their needs.24

**Arbitration**

Groups often seek mediation when all other methods of resolving a conflict have failed. If, however, mediation does not work, a group may seek arbitration. **Arbitration**, like mediation, involves a third party. However, after considering all sides, the agreed-upon arbitrator decides how to resolve the conflict. The arbitrator may choose one person’s solution or may develop a solution the group has not yet considered. Whatever the final decision, group members are obligated to accept and implement the solution, no matter what they think about the decision.

When turning to an arbitrator to make a decision, group members “have acknowledged that their own decision-making powers are insufficient to resolve the dispute. Their function, therefore, is to present their side of the case as fully and as capably as possible so that fairness and justice can prevail.”25 Despite the hope for a just outcome, professional arbitrators understand that their decisions may not satisfy or please everyone in a group. Yet, for groups that cannot resolve conflicts or solve problems on their own or with the help of a mediator, arbitration may be the only way to make a needed decision.
GROUP COHESION

Resolving conflict in groups does not guarantee success, nor does it ensure that group members will work together in pursuit of a common goal. Working in groups also requires cohesion. Cohesion is the mutual attraction that holds the members of a group together. Groups that are cohesive feel committed and unified; members develop a sense of teamwork and pride in the group. The following are characteristics of a cohesive group:

• High levels of interaction
• A friendly and supportive communication climate
• A desire to conform to group expectations
• The use of creative and productive approaches to achieving goals
• Satisfied members

Enhancing Cohesion

Cohesive groups are happier and get more work done. Clearly, your group wants to strive for cohesion. We suggest four general strategies for developing group

ETHICAL GROUPS

Ethical Conflict Resolution

Ethical conflict resolution respects differences, uses power positively, encourages collaboration, seeks constructive change, and promotes positive relationships. Mediation experts Stephen Littlejohn and Kathy Domenici suggest the following strategies for resolving conflict constructively:\1

• Speak to be understood rather than to win.
• Focus on your own perspective rather than criticizing others’ behavior.
• Speak in ways that are respectful rather than attacking or threatening another.
• Recognize that there are many perspectives rather than polarizing a dispute into only two points of view.

• Express uncertainties rather than blindly adhering to a position.
• Recognize the complexities of an issue rather than oversimplifying it.
• Explore ideas in new ways.

Engaging in ethical and constructive conflict resolution does not guarantee that you will get what you want, nor does it preclude that possibility. Rather, practicing ethical conflict resolution promotes respectful communication that encourages us to seek solutions that satisfy everyone involved.

cohesion: establish a group identity and traditions, emphasize teamwork, recognize and reward participation, and respect group members.  

Establish a Group Identity and Traditions. Begin by referring to the group using terms such as we and our instead of I and my. The language that members use to refer to the group can influence the way they perceive their connection to it. Some groups create more obvious signs of identity, such as a group name, logo, or motto. As members continue to work and interact with one another, the group begins to develop its own history. Many groups develop rituals and ceremonies to reinforce their traditions.

Emphasize Teamwork. The members of cohesive groups believe that their contributions are essential to the success of the group. Group members feel responsibility for and take pride in both the work that they do and the work of other members. They frequently make statements that stress the importance of everyone’s role. Rather than the individual members taking personal credit for success, a cohesive group will emphasize the group’s accomplishments.

Recognize and Reward Contributions. Frequently, group members become so involved in their own work that they neglect to praise others for their contributions. In addition, members are often quick to criticize others’ mistakes and poor work. While constructive criticism is important, members must feel that their efforts are appreciated. Cohesive groups establish a climate in which praise is encouraged. Many groups reward individual efforts and initiative. Celebration dinners, letters of appreciation, certificates, and gifts are all ways in which some groups reward themselves.

Respect Group Members. When strong interpersonal relationships are developed in groups, members become more sensitive to one another’s needs. Groups that require members to do their part of the work without regard for individual concerns will develop little cohesion. Treating members with respect, showing concern for their personal needs, and appreciating diversity will promote a feeling of acceptance.

Groupthink

Groupthink is a term that describes the deterioration of group effectiveness that can result from in-group pressure. Group pressure that produces too much conformity can have disastrous effects. The homogeneous–heterogeneous dialectic discussed in Chapter 1 is particularly important when dealing with groupthink. The more members have in common, the more cohesive they may become. Homogeneous groups run the risk of being “more insulated from outside opinions, and therefore more convinced that the group’s judgment on important issues must be right.”
Symptoms of Groupthink. Irving Janis, a professor at Yale University, developed the theory of groupthink after recognizing patterns in what he termed policymaking fiascoes. He suggested that groupthink was a significant factor in several major policy decisions, including the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, the escalation of both the Korean and Vietnam wars, the attack on Pearl Harbor, and the Watergate burglary and cover-up. Groupthink may also have contributed to the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger. After analyzing many of these policy decisions, Janis identified eight symptoms of groupthink. Figure 7.5 illustrates the symptoms and expressions of groupthink.

Dealing with Groupthink. The best way to deal with groupthink is to prevent it from happening in the first place. The following list provides practical

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groupthink Symptoms</th>
<th>Expressions of Groupthink</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Invulnerability</strong>: Is overly confident; willing to take big risks.</td>
<td>“We’re right. We’ve done this many times, and nothing’s gone wrong.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rationalization</strong>: Makes excuses; discounts warnings.</td>
<td>“What does Lewis know? He’s been here only three weeks.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Morality</strong>: Ignores ethical and moral consequences.</td>
<td>“Sometimes the end justifies the means.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stereotyping Outsiders</strong>: Considers opposition too weak and stupid to make real trouble.</td>
<td>“Let’s not worry about the subcommittee—they can’t even get their own act together.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Censorship</strong>: Doubts his or her own reservations; unwilling to disagree or dissent.</td>
<td>“I guess there’s no harm in going along with the group—I’m the only one who disagrees.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pressure on Dissent</strong>: Pressures members to agree.</td>
<td>“Why are you trying to hold this up? You’ll ruin the project.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Illusion of Unanimity</strong>: Believes everyone agrees.</td>
<td>“Hearing no objections, the motion passes.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mindguarding</strong>: Shields members from adverse information or opposition.</td>
<td>“Rhea wanted to come to this meeting, but I told her that wasn’t necessary.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ways to minimize the potential of groupthink. Choose the methods that are most appropriate for your group.

- Ask each member to serve in the role of critical evaluator.
- If possible, have more than one group member work on the same problem independently.
- Discuss the group’s progress with someone outside the group. Report the feedback to the entire group.
- Periodically invite an expert to join your meeting and encourage constructive criticism.
- Discuss the potential negative consequences of any decision or action.
- Follow a formal decision-making procedure that encourages expression of disagreement and evaluation of ideas.
- Ask questions, offer reasons for positions, and demand justifications from others.
- Before finalizing the decision, give members a second chance to express doubts.

In the short term, groupthink decisions are easier. The group finishes early and doesn’t have to deal with conflict. However, such decisions are often poor and sometimes result in harm. Spending the time and energy to work through differences will result in better decisions without sacrificing group cohesiveness.

ADAPTING TO DIFFERENCES

Conflict becomes more complex when group members are diverse. Differences in cultural and gender perspectives may result in misunderstandings, prejudices, and unintentionally offensive behavior. A group’s failure to manage conflict among diverse members effectively can have serious consequences. Companies that fail to understand, respect, and adapt to differences are likely to have more strikes and lawsuits, low morale among workers, less productivity, and a higher turnover of employees.

Cultural Responses to Conflict

The cultural values of individual members will greatly influence the degree to which they are comfortable with conflict and the way in which conflict is resolved. Members from cultures that value conformity are less likely to express disagreement than those from cultures that place a higher value on individualism. While people from Japanese, German, Mexican, and Brazilian cultures value
group conformity, those from Swedish and French cultures are generally more comfortable expressing differences.\textsuperscript{34} In addition, Chinese group members may feel uncomfortable with adversarial approaches to conflict.\textsuperscript{35} It is also important to remember that cultural differences may be regional rather than international. For example, Franco-Canadians are often more cooperative during the negotiation of conflict, while Anglo-Canadians are slower to agree to a resolution.\textsuperscript{36}

In Chapter 3, “Group Member Diversity,” we note that the individualism–collectivism cultural dimension strongly influences the ways in which group members communicate. Not surprisingly, this dialectic also explains why members define and respond to conflict differently. For example, collectivist members may merge substantive and affective concerns, making conflict much more personal. “To shout and scream publicly, thus displaying the conflict to others, threatens everyone’s face to such an extreme degree that such behavior is usually avoided at all costs.” In individualistic cultures, however, group members may express their anger about an issue and then joke and socialize with others once the disagreement is over. “It is almost as if once the conflict is resolved, it is completely forgotten.”\textsuperscript{37} Thus, when an individualistic member prefaces a critical or disparaging remark by saying, “Now don’t take this personally . . .,” you can bet that a collectivist member will do just the opposite.

**Gender Responses to Conflict**

Groups must also be sensitive to how gender differences influence conflict. In general, women are more likely to avoid conflict or to leave a group when there is continuous conflict.\textsuperscript{38} In addition, women are more likely to address conflict privately rather than in front of the entire group.\textsuperscript{39} Men and women can learn from each other’s perspectives as they work through a group’s conflict.

**TOOLBOX 7.2**

**Let Members Save Face**

Collectivist cultures place a high value on “face.” From a cultural perspective, face is the positive image that you wish to create or preserve. Thus, cultures that place a great deal of value on “saving face” discourage personal attacks and outcomes in which one person “loses.” Keep in mind the following collectivist perspectives about conflict:\textsuperscript{1}

- Conflict is understood within the context of relationships and the need to preserve “face.”
- Conflict resolution requires that “face” issues be mutually managed before a discussion of other issues.
- Conflict resolution is considered successful when both parties are able to save “face” and when both can claim that they have “won.”

Studies show that men and women from similar cultures do not differ significantly in terms of the conflict strategies and styles that they use. However, men and women do differ in terms of their expected focus and behavior in conflicts. Men tend to focus on substantive issues, while women tend to focus on the relationships among members. As a result, women tend to behave more cooperatively than men under ideal conditions. At the same time, research notes that women may compete more forcefully in reaction to what they perceive as betrayal or underhanded behavior by others.\(^{40}\)

**BALANCING CONFLICT AND COHESION**

The management of conflict is “a delicate balancing act, like that of a tightrope walker, or a rock climber who must find just the right handholds or fall to sure death.”\(^{41}\) Effective groups must balance the conflict–cohesion dialectic. Having group members with different perspectives promotes critical thinking and creative problem solving. At the same time, “too many differences, or one difference that is so strong it dominates grouping resources, can overwhelm the group” and its ability to focus on the group goal.\(^{52}\) Groups must balance the need to express differences with the need to achieve group consensus. Individual thought must be encouraged, yet collective group goals need to be achieved.

A group that lacks cohesion is less creative, productive, and satisfied. Extremely cohesive groups, however, risk engaging in groupthink. Yet fear of groupthink
should not discourage efforts to promote cohesion. Groups that are characterized by too much or poorly managed conflict do not develop cohesion. However, groups that place too much emphasis on cohesion while avoiding conflict will often make bad decisions. Groups that engage in constructive conflict are able to successfully balance conflict and cohesion.

GROUPWORK

Win as Much as You Can

Goal: To demonstrate the merit of competitive and cooperative models of conflict styles within the context of small group communication

Participants: One or more groups of eight divided into four dyads (two-person subgroups)

Procedure
1. There are ten rounds in this exercise. During each round, you and your partner will have to choose an X or a Y. The payoff for each round is determined by the choices of all the dyads in your eight-person group.

2. There are three key rules:
   - Do not confer with other members of your group unless you are told to do so.
   - Each dyad must agree upon a single choice for each round.
   - Make sure that other members of your group do not know your dyad’s choice until you are told to reveal it.

3. Confer with your partner on every round. Before rounds 5, 8, and 10, you can confer with the other pairs in your group.

Payoff Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Xs:</th>
<th>Lose</th>
<th>$1.00 each</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$1.00 each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Xs:</td>
<td>Win</td>
<td>$1.00 each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Y:</td>
<td>Lose</td>
<td>$3.00 each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Xs:</td>
<td>Win</td>
<td>$2.00 each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ys:</td>
<td>Lose</td>
<td>$2.00 each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>X:</td>
<td>Win</td>
<td>$3.00 each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ys:</td>
<td>Lose</td>
<td>$1.00 each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ys:</td>
<td>Win</td>
<td>$1.00 each</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The textbook’s Instructor’s Resource Manual explains how to conduct this GroupWork exercise.
GROUPASSESSMENT

Ross-DeWine Conflict Management Message Style Instrument

Directions. Below you will find messages that have been delivered by persons in conflict situations. Consider each message separately, and decide how closely this message resembles the ones that you have used in conflict settings. The language may not be exactly the same as yours, but consider the messages in terms of their fundamental similarity to your messages in conflict situations. There are no right or wrong answers, nor are these messages designed to trick you. Answer in terms of the responses you actually make, not what you think you should say. Give each message a 1 to 5 rating on the answer sheet provided according to the following scale. Mark one answer only.

Tally Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Round</th>
<th>Time Allowed</th>
<th>Confer with</th>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>$ Won</th>
<th>$ Lost</th>
<th>Balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 min.</td>
<td>partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 min.</td>
<td>partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 min.</td>
<td>partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1 min.</td>
<td>partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5*</td>
<td>3 min.</td>
<td>group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+1 min.</td>
<td>partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1 min.</td>
<td>partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1 min.</td>
<td>partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8**</td>
<td>3 min.</td>
<td>group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+1 min.</td>
<td>partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>1 min.</td>
<td>partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10***</td>
<td>3 min.</td>
<td>group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+1 min.</td>
<td>partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Payoff is multiplied by 3.
**Payoff is multiplied by 5.
***Payoff is multiplied by 10.

In conflict situations, I . . .

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>never say things say things say things like this like this like this</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- __1. “Can’t you see how foolish you’re being with that thinking?”__
- __2. “How can I make you feel happy again?”__
- __3. “I’m really bothered by some things that are happening here; can we talk about these?”__
- __4. “I really don’t have any more to say on this . . . (silence).”__
- __5. “What possible solutions can we come up with?”__
- __6. “I’m really sorry that your feelings are hurt—maybe you’re right.”__
- __7. “Let’s talk this thing out and see how we can deal with this hassle.”__
- __8. “Shut up! You are wrong! I don’t want to hear any more of what you have to say.”__
- __9. “It is your fault if I fail at this, and don’t you ever expect any help from me when you’re on the spot.”__
- __10. “You can’t do (say) that to me—it’s either my way or forget it.”__
- __11. “Let’s try finding an answer that will give us both some of what we want.”__
- __12. “This is something we have to work out; we’re always arguing about it.”__
- __13. “Whatever makes you feel happiest is OK by me.”__
- __14. “Let’s just leave well enough alone.”__
- __15. “That’s OK . . . it wasn’t important anyway. . . . You feeling OK now?”__
- __16. “If you’re not going to cooperate, I’ll just go to someone who will.”__
- __17. “I think we need to try to understand the problem.”__
- __18. “You might as well accept my decision; you can’t do anything about it anyway.”__

**Scoring Instructions:** Next to each item, list the rating (from 1 to 5) that you gave that item. When you have entered all ratings, add the total ratings for each column and divide by 6. Enter the resulting score in the space provided.
All of us may use any one of these styles in different settings and under different circumstances. People do tend to have a predominant style, however, which is evidenced by the kinds of messages generally sent during conflict situations.

The SELF items deal with one’s personal interests in the conflict situation. These messages suggest that one’s primary concern is in resolving the conflict so that one’s personal view of the conflict is accepted by the other. This is a “win” approach to conflict resolution.

The ISSUE items deal with an emphasis on both parties dealing with the problem. These message statements suggest an overriding concern with the content of the conflict rather than the personal relationship.

The OTHER items deal with neither the conflict issues nor personal interests, but emphasize maintaining the relationship, even at the cost of resolving the conflict. These statements suggest that one would rather ignore the problem to maintain a good relationship with the other person.

The averages are an indication of scores one might expect to receive. Scores that are higher or lower than these means indicate a higher or lower use of this message style than would normally be expected.


### NOTES


5. Putnam, p. 185.


8. Folger, Poole, and Stutman, p. 213.


13. Thomas, p. 94.

14. Dianna Wynn is a trial consultant for Courtroom Intelligence, a consulting firm specializing in courtroom communication.

15. Folger, Poole, and Stutman, pp. 229–231.


40. Folger, Poole, and Stutman, p. 235.

41. Wilmot and Hocker, p. 22.
