

Communication/conflict/ negotiation

Communication



(perception of) conflict → negotiation



Communication

Conflicts : can we live without them?

- Can we do without it? Can we live our lives without getting into conflicts?

Conflict

- No...
- And is this good or bad?

Conflicts are unavoidable and widespread

- The pervasiveness of conflicts and its constancy in time allows us to state
 - The source of conflict is not, in general, a problem of individuals but a systemic issue [however remember perception errors : attribution theory – our tendency to “blame “ individuals]

Conflicts are unavoidable but...we tend to avoid them

- But....
 - Conflict is viewed as a negative thing, it is dysfunctional , should be avoided, leads to malfunctioning etc..
- Why?
 - Because we are educated that way
 - We do not have competencies to deal with them
- Hence,
 - most people fear/avoid conflicts (source of stress, waste of time and energy)
 - And do not want to be involved or link its image to conflicts [seen as detrimental to career]

Conflicts are unavoidable and widespread, hence we must deal with them

- We may run away from them but they will get to us
 - conflicts are embedded in the way organisations are structured and function
- That is why :
 - we must learn how to deal with it and make it play to our side (rather than being just an obstacle we should be able to use them in our advantage)
 - find its source in the context (not on individual A ,B or C
- Managing well conflicts has to become a resource not an obstacle -- > a well managed conflict can bring compensations and improve uneasy/difficult situations, as well as creativity and bring about solutions to problems

Another definition of conflict

- “a dispute among **at least two interdependent parties** that **perceive** the existence of incompatible objectives, scarce resources and the **interference of the other part in the accomplishment of its objectives**”

(Hocker e Wilmot in Essentials, p. 14)

Sources of conflicts: communication

- Communication is increasing its complexity
 - Wrong use of ever more channels
 - Perception errors in its root
- Non communication or wrong style of communication (non assertive, aggressive or manipulation)
- To overcome most conflicts assertive communication is needed
 - The position of each part in the conflict , the objectives each wishes to attain have to be communicated openly and honestly–
- But...
 - communication with true shared meaning is not easy –especially not in situations of perceived conflict – as it implies personal and social skills that most of us are lacking

Organisational conflicts

- They are structural – part of the system
- In O's **ideally** all the parts should work in coordinated manner to reach common goals with the resources they own (financial, human, technical...)

Causes of conflicts in organisations

- Division of work (horizontal and vertical) in the O'
- IN O's all subdivisions should work in coordination to achieve common goals with the available resources
 - Different departments have different deadlines, levels of uncertainty , power
 - individuals within them have different qualifications/age/seniority etc , and different levels of power and status,
 - The more interdependent and the more ambiguous their tasks the greater the unpredictability linked to adaptation to the market →the greater the potential for conflict ;

Causes of conflicts in organisations: hierarchical differentiation

- Higher hierarchical levels have greater power , greater participation in decision making , autonomy, salary, status...
- Lower hierarchical levels wish to acquire a greater slice of autonomy, of decision making, of financial rewards, of status /recognition ...
- Both groups have necessarily different objectives, visions, obey to different sets of rules ..
- Those who have less resources or less access to them want more

Causes of conflicts in organisations: hierarchical differentiation

- Higher hierarchical levels try to control subordinates and these try to evade/resist such control
- Acceptance area : it is the area where it exists legitimacy in the exercise of authority (Barnard)
 - Subordinate perceives conflict when the superior oversteps the acceptance area EX: too short deadline, work on week-ends
 - Superior perceives conflict when the subordinate resists

Causes of conflicts in organisations: hierarchical differentiation

- Usual reaction of superior to the resistance of subordinate :
 - More rules
 - Exercise of power in A more controlling/authoritarian way - giving away less freedom/autonomy
- Objective: greater predictability of subordinate behaviors → uncertainty reduction
- **Effect** : MORE CONFLICT ! AND ALSO LESS CAPACITY OF CHANGE AND ADAPTATION OF THE ORGANISATIONS

Causes of conflicts in organisations: resource scarcity

- No one in an O' has all the resources needed to accomplish his/her tasks
 - or if it does usually wants more , or thinks deserves more (this links to self – image, identity , status)

If possible:

- Increase resources
- Reallocate resources (usually done step by step as an administrative matter to avoid increasing conflicts)

Types of conflicts

task/procedurale and
relational/personal

Types of conflicts: task/procedure related vs personal /relational

- There is a recurrent division in studies about conflict :
 - Task/professional /cognitive/goals related
 - Relational/interpersonal /emotional /affection related

Task related conflicts

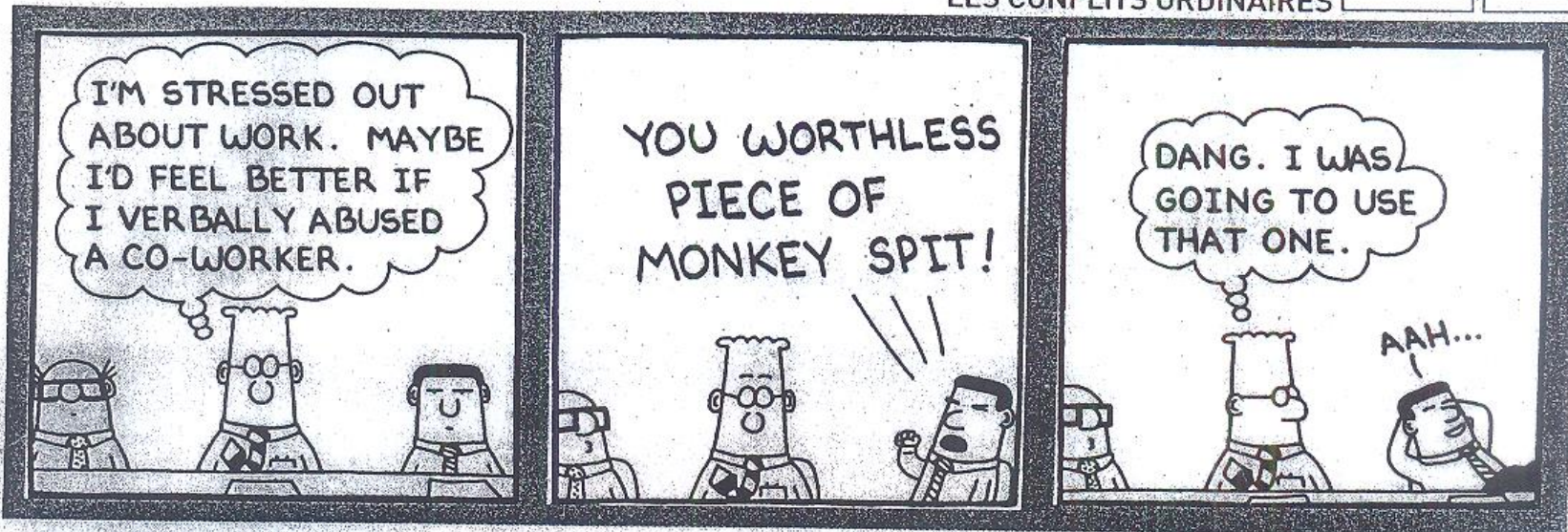
- Related to the **tasks and its objectives** :
 - Controversies on the type of task/projects the group(department /O') should be committed to and the priority given to it
- Related to the **means** how to achieve tasks
 - How to proceed; who is responsible for what ; how work is divided etc
 - Disagreements on what resources are needed for the task , on what team should be doing the task
 - Differences of views/opinions and on decisions made
 - Conflicts linked to resources – offices, equipment , extra payments/prizes

Task related conflict can become personal related conflicts

- The existence of a task conflict does not always imply the existence of a personal conflict – it is possible not to personalize the conflict and keep it within the margin of task related issues
- However
 - conflicts can start with disagreements pertaining to tasks' accomplishment (who, how, when ...) which may lead to criticisms which open the way to hostility, bitterness →
 - there is a very thin line between professional and personal conflicts
- The Personalization of conflict is the mechanism that causes the most dysfunctions (very typical in Portugal!)

But Task related conflict can become personal related conflicts

LES CONFLITS ORDINAIRES



« Mon travail me stresse complètement. Peut-être me sentirais-je mieux si j'agressais verbalement un collègue. »

« T'es qu'un vulgaire crachat de singe ! »

« Zut ! J'allais justement l'utiliser comme victime. »

Task related conflict can become personal related conflicts

- Conflict is often personalized because:
 - There are extra work tensions that are released in the workplace
 - Work related conflicts may generate , or reveal, relational conflicts
 - There are demands by the O's that are inconsistent with the personal development of individuals and their good performance

And remember : Due to **systematic errors of attribution** (perception) we tend to explain other's action and faults base on **internal factors** personality /incompetence (they are doing it on purpose to attack me/hurt me, etc)

Relational/interpersonal conflicts – very difficult to handle

- Personal conflicts usually involve questions of identity , protection of public image , protection of “territory” (autonomy) status
- Emotional and physical reactions to these type of conflicts tend to be intense (overtly or covertly)
 - **Feelings** : jealousy, rage, discomfort, tensions, irritation , frustration, fury , remorse , despise, etc
 - **Behaviours**: screaming, crying, physical violence, distancing, interrupting communication, banging doors or others, etc

Relational/interpersonal conflicts

- These are usually disguised as task related because we tend not to assume openly relational difficulties (which may have deeper explanations linked to identity, self image)
 - We avoid to expose publicly those deeper personal issues, especially in the professional context → we try to give away a good image

Personal conflicts are dysfunctional

- Task related conflict may lead to personal related conflict and impede the resolution of the task related conflict (even if it is of simple resolution)
- Rather than framing the issue rationally it becomes framed emotionally
 - Personalization and emotions affect judgement

Consequences of conflicts

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE

Some negative consequences of conflicts – usually linked to personal

- Excessive and negative emotions (lack of control)
- Reduction (or abandonment) of communication (with those in disagreement)
- Distorted perceptions → give rise to negative stereotyping
- The main reason for conflict loses importance and secondary issues gain importance (often the real reason for conflict is lost)
- Greater emphasis on competition → issues framed into winning vs losing rather than cooperation)
- Holding rigidly to a position
- Distance among people may lead to conflict escalate – similarities lose value , and differences gain value
- Rupture among people and potential destruction of the group

(Essentials p.15)

Continuum of conflict intensity



Some negative consequences of personal conflicts

There is a negative association between relational conflicts and productivity and satisfaction in groups

- Individuals spend more time and energy in interpersonal issues rather than in technical/substantive issues and decision making
- Oversimplification of issues at stake when emotions take charge (the good guys vs the bad guys)

task related conflict can be positive

- Conflict is an opportunity to bring to open discussion old problems and solve them
- They can stimulate the discussion of varied ideas
- It improves the quality of decision
- It allows to defy the status quo and change / innovate
- They can improve productivity
- Reinforces intra-groups relations and improves personal development

In sum

- Conflict in moderate levels can be functional, especially in groups with creative tasks
- Too little conflict may lead to apathy, incapacity of change, innovation , no self criticism
- Too much conflict is too high – crises , escalation of conflict -task accomplishment becomes at stake
- Solution : balance /moderation

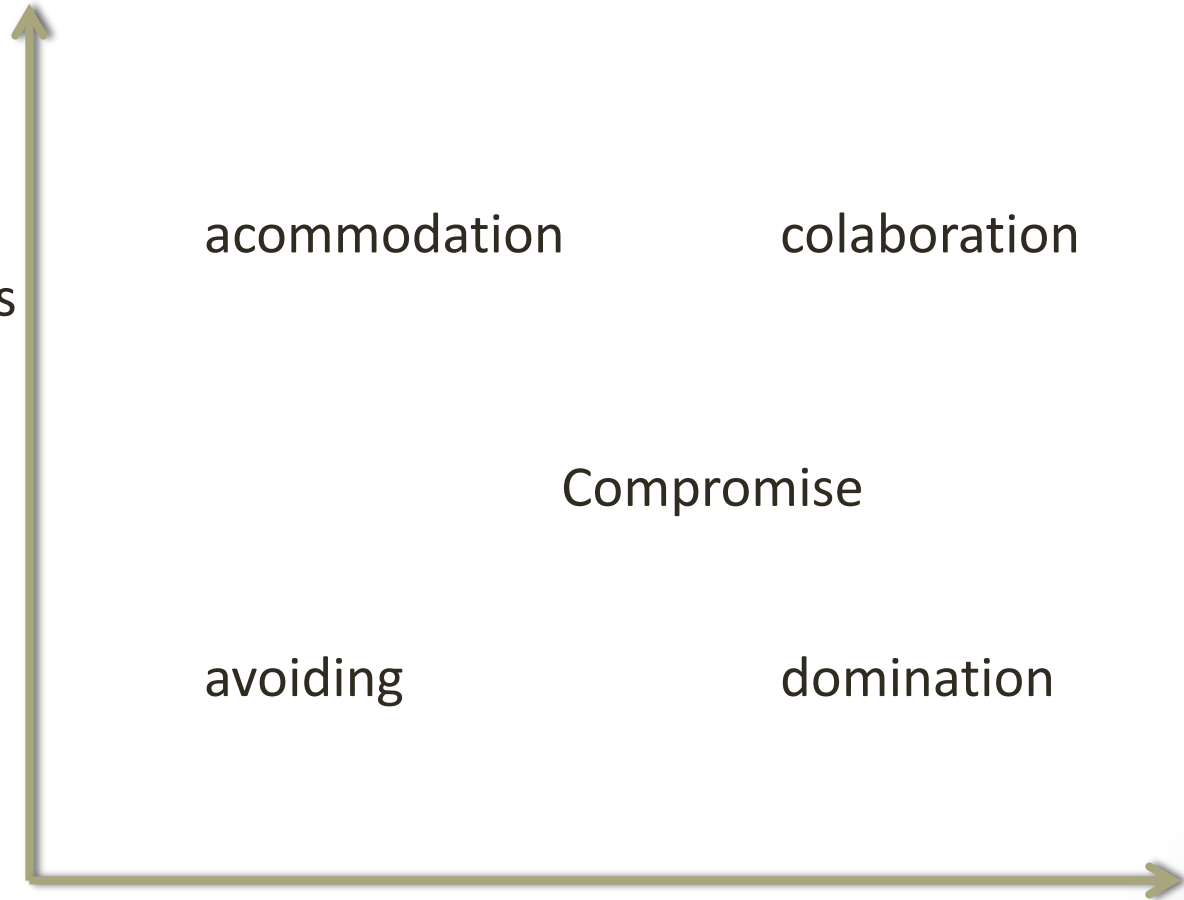
Conflict management styles

- The position of each part in the conflict, the objectives each wishes to attain , has to be communicated assertively (openly and honestly)
- – this is improbable in many situations → But it is a required condition to overcome conflicts (and start a process of negotiation)

Styles in the resolution of conflicts : the model of dual interests (Pruitt e Rubin, 86)

cooperativeness

Degree to which I attempt to satisfy others



assertiveness - Degree to which I attempt to satisfy my concerns

TABLE 13-1 When to Use the Five Conflict-Handling Orientations

Conflict-Handling Orientation	Appropriate Situations
Competition	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. When quick, decisive action is vital2. On important issues where unpopular actions need implementing3. On issues vital to the organization's welfare and when you know you're right4. Against people who take advantage of noncompetitive behavior
Collaboration	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To find an integrative solution when both sets of concerns are too important to be compromised2. When your objective is to learn3. To merge insights from people with different perspectives4. To gain commitment by incorporating concerns into a consensus5. To work through feelings that have interfered with a relationship
Avoidance	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. When an issue is trivial, or more important issues are pressing2. When you perceive no chance of satisfying your concerns3. When potential disruption outweighs the benefits of resolution4. To let people cool down and regain perspective5. When gathering information supersedes immediate decision6. When others can resolve the conflict more effectively7. When issues seem tangential or symptomatic of other issues
Accommodation	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. When you find you are wrong—to allow a better position to be heard, to learn, and to show your reasonableness2. When issues are more important to others than yourself—to satisfy others and maintain cooperation3. To build social credits for later issues4. To minimize loss when you are outmatched and losing5. When harmony and stability are especially important6. To allow subordinates to develop by learning from mistakes
Compromise	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. When goals are important, but not worth the effort or potential disruption of more assertive modes2. When opponents with equal power are committed to mutually exclusive goals3. To achieve temporary settlements to complex issues4. To arrive at expedient solutions under time pressure5. As a backup when collaboration or competition is unsuccessful

Source: K. W. Thomas, "Toward Multidimensional Values in Teaching: The Example of Conflict Behaviors," *Academy of Management Review*, July 1977, p. 487. With permission.

An organisation is successful when

- it overcomes its embedded conflicts, by putting in place adequate mechanisms to deal with them and create the necessary conditions for sharing resources , knowlledge , mutual help, cooperation
 - Well performing O's successfully overcome conflict and concentrate effort on the task at hands – O's goals
- Leadership has a crucial role there
 - it can rule to divide or rule to unite ; must be capable of listening and deciding with fairness

Conflict as a process :

FROM A LATENT CONFLICT TO OVERT
CONFLICT

Conflict as a process

- Conflict can be described as a sequence of episodes
 - From its perception by both parts to open crisis/hostile behaviors
- But not all conflicts get to this point
 - Conflict may not even be perceived
 - If perceived it may be solved before open hostility

Conflict as a process

- The process of conflict is dynamic (and as it is an interpersonal phenomena one never knows how will it end-umpredictability):
 - The perceptions of each other changes in the process
 - The position of each part may get adjusted / or reinforce maladjustment
 - The intensity and the energy vary
 - Allies are searched – may increase intensity

Phases in the dynamic of conflict

- Some authors speak of 5 phases (ex: Thomas 92; Pondy 67)
- Here we will simplify these in 3 stages
 - 1) latent conflict – potential for Development of tensions
 - 2) open conflict – behaviors are taken to deal with the conflict
 - 3) outcomes - Closures by reconciliation or conflict suppression ; or rupture; conflict suppression; overcoming conflict and reconciliation; conflict escalate

Stage 1 – latent conflict

- As we have seen there is always a latent conflict within organizations - which bring about tensions that may vary in its intensity
 - Resource scarcity, vertical and horizontal differentiation

And these may be relational or professional related – but usually they are interlinked

Stage 1 – latent conflict

- Latent conflict may or may not be perceived
 - When there is Perception of conflict but conflict does not exist
 - → must improve communication
- When there is latent conflict but there is no perception of it, it may mean that
- conflict is being suppressed – individuals are ignoring it , and only a threatening conflict is recognized → may have perverse effects __>
- Attention focus mechanisms - there are always too many conflicts to deal with – energy and time must be focused
 - More probable to focus only on routine , easy to solve conflicts with short term solutions – others are ignored /not dealt with→ or must be dealt with separately, by a special unit
- Conflicts can accumulate silently – due to non assertive communication, suppression of conflict, limited attention focus

Stage 2 : conflict related behaviours

- This is the stage in which conflict becomes visible → there is some sort of crisis happening
- A crisis can be triggered due in result of unimportant issues , which may hide deeper and more important ones (role, values, personal conflicts)
- When new condition arise a crisis can explode
 - Example of new conditions: financial shortages; new person coming in and changing the organisation, stress due to excessive work , firm's bad results
- A crisis gives visibility to the conflict
 - Behaviors implied include aggression (verbal or physical) , sabotage , apathy, discontinuing communication, employees strictly abiding by the rule ...

Stage 2 : conflict related behaviours- crisis

- A crisis may release tensions and express publicly what has been hidden – it may be better than disguised hostility, which ruins the organisation
- But it can also trigger an escalation of conflict which with excessive behaviours and feelings and unpredictable consequences
 - Ex: depressive states of individuals; physical aggression ; court processes
- Conflict **must be managed** in order to overcome crisis – a solution must be searched in which the goals of each part must be replaced by common /shared goals

Describe a conflict (DONE)

- Describe a “professional” (work, school, association, church, sports, scouts, etc) related conflict:
- Who was involved and what was the relation among them?
- What was in the root of the conflict?
- What was at stake?
- How did you solve this conflict (if it was solved , if not why not)?
- Max one page– send by e-mail up to 19th April

Analysing a conflict – group work

- As a group analyse the conflict case handed in by me(follow the guiding questions below)
- Hand in printed the 5th may – 2 pages max
- The 5th may each groups should present its analysis (5/10 min max) starting with an introduction of the case analysed
- The groups nominates the colleague (1) doing the presentation

Analysing a conflict of a colleague

- What is in the root of conflict?
- 1) communication
- 2) o' al structure
 - Hierarchy ?
 - horizontal division of tasks?
 - Resource scarcity?
- Type of conflict :
 - Personal vs task – did the profesional conflict have a personal/relational component ?
- Conflict management
 - How did your colleague solve the conflict according to the conflict management styles?
 - What are the advantages and disadvantages in this way of solving the conflict ?
- Was the Conflict functional/dysfunctional ? Were/are there any positive or negative consequences of this conflict?
- Did/does the conflict have a positive/negative effect on the person in questions (the narrator or group or organization)?
 - How can this conflict situation be overcome ? or if the situation was solved , do you think it has been solved in the best way ? why?

Conflict management technique

- Conflict resolution techniques robbins judge , p 489
- Conflict handling techniques gordon 463

Conflict as a process

