

## CHAPTER 11

### Managing Conflict

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### Hocker and Wilmot definition...

- “Conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from the other party in achieving their goals.”



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### Breaking down the definition...

- Expressed struggle
  - All people involved must know that some disagreement exists.
- Perceived incompatible goals
  - When people perceive their goals to be mutually exclusive, the conflict is real, albeit unnecessary.
- Perceived scarce rewards
  - Not enough of something to go around.
- Interdependent
  - “We’re all in this together.”
- Inevitability
  - Research: In both happy and unhappy relationships have conflicts, but manage them in different ways.”

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## Functional and Dysfunctional Conflicts

### Functional

- Integration
- Cooperation
- Confirmation
- Agreement
- De-escalation
- Focusing
- Foresight

### Dysfunctional

- Polarization
- Opposition
- Disconfirmation
- Coercion
- Escalation
- Drifting
- Shortsightedness

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## Positive Versus Negative Results

### Positive

- Reward of successfully facing a challenge.
- Leaves partners feeling better about themselves and each other.
- Learn more about each other's needs and how they can be satisfied.
- Relationship strengthens.
- Safe outlet for feelings of frustration and aggression.

### Negative

- No one gets what they originally wanted
- Today's victor likely suffers tomorrow at the hands of the original loser
- Dysfunctional conflicts threaten the future of a relationship
- Dissolving a relationship in the face of conflict is hardly a satisfying pattern

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## Avoidance (Lose-Lose)

- Avoidance: When people nonassertively ignore or stay away from conflict.
- Pessimistic attitude about conflict.
- Avoiders put up with the status quo.
- Leads to unsatisfying relationships.
- Avoidance can help when:
  - risk of speaking up is too great
  - when the conflict isn't worth the effort
  - when the issue is temporary



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## Accommodation (Lose-Win)

- Accommodation: When we allow others to have their own way rather than asserting our point of view.
- Accommodation could enhance the relationship.
- Important to examine the role that culture plays.
  - Low-context cultures view avoidance/accommodation less positively.



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## Competition (Win-Lose)

- Competition: Win-lose approach to conflict that involves high concern for self and low concern for others.
- Ingrained in North American culture.
- Bid for control can breed aggression.



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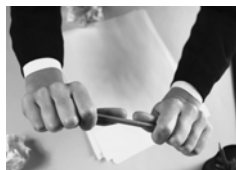
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## Passive Aggression

- Passive aggression: When a communicator expresses dissatisfaction in a disguised manner.
- “Crazymaking”: Tactics designed to punish another person without direct confrontation.
  - Guilt
  - Nonverbal; loud sigh, pained expression
  - Humor, sarcasm



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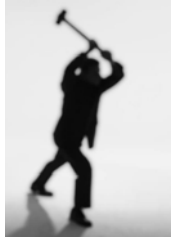
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## Direct Aggression

- Direct aggression:
  - Character attacks
  - Competence attacks
  - Physical appearance attacks
  - Maledictions (wishing bad fortune)
  - Teasing
  - Ridicule
  - Threats
  - Searing
  - Nonverbal emblems (fist-shaking, waving arms, etc.)
- Severe impact on the target
  - Verbal aggression could have physical impact
  - Can cause a destructive spiral



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## Compromise (Negotiated Lose-Lose)

- Compromise: Gives both people at least some of what they want, although both sacrifice part of their goals.
  - Approach does not deserve its "positive" image
  - Costs involved can be great if one person compromises values.
  - When compromises are satisfying and successful, they are categorized as "collaboration."



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## Collaboration (Win-Win)

- Collaboration: Win-win solutions to conflict that satisfy all parties involved.
- High degree of concern for self and others; goal of solving problems in "our way."
- Cooperative problem solving is rare!
- Win-win is not always possible or appropriate; time-consuming, some decisions need to be made quickly.



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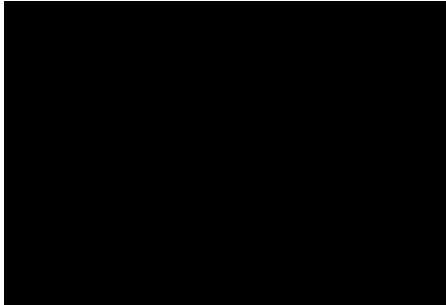
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## Collaboration (Win-Win)



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## Which Style to Use?

- There is no single “best” way to respond to conflicts.
- Consider
  - The situation
  - The other person
  - Your goals
- Conflict is relational: Character is determined by the way the people involved interact.
- People develop a relational conflict style: A pattern of managing disagreements that repeats itself over time.

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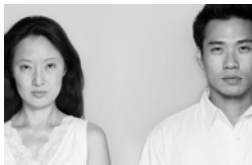
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## Complimentary, Symmetrical, and Parallel Styles



- Complimentary conflict style: Partners use different, but mutually reinforcing behaviors.
- Symmetrical conflict style: People use the same tactics.
- Parallel conflict style: Shifts between complementary and symmetrical patterns from one issue to another.
- Complementary “fight-flight” style is common in many unhappy marriages.

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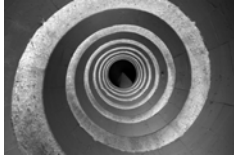
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## Complimentary, Symmetrical, and Parallel Styles



- Threats and insults lead to an escalatory spiral.
- When partners withdraw, a complementary de-escalatory spiral results.
  - Relationship is a shell of its former self.
- Symmetrical styles can be beneficial when people communicate assertively, listen to other's concerns, and working together to resolve them.

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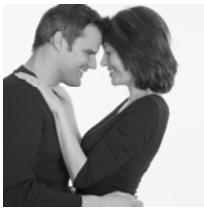
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## Intimate and Aggressive Styles



- Interaction between emotional closeness and aggression.
  - Nonintimate-aggressive
  - Nonintimate-nonaggressive
  - Intimate-aggressive
  - Intimate-nonaggressive
- Pattern helps identify types of couples:
  - Separates
  - Intimates
  - Traditionals

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## Conflict Rituals

- Conflict rituals
  - Unacknowledged, but very real repeating patterns of interlocking behavior.
    - Child interrupts parents
    - Parents tell child to wait
    - Child whines and cries
    - Parents listen rather than ignore the fussing.
  - Rituals are a problem when they are the only way relational partners handle conflicts.



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## Gender

- Research
  - Males use more competing behaviors with same-sex peers more avoiding behaviors with opposite sex peers
  - Women more concerned with maintaining the relationship during a conflict.
- People perceive greater differences than really exist.



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## Culture

- Assertive approach not the norm in the rest of the world.
- Individualistic cultures, competing conflict style.
- Collective cultures, accommodating, compromising, problem-solving styles.
  - "The first person to raise his voice loses the argument."
  - More focus on face-saving.
- Italians view heated debate as a "discussione."
- Approach to conflict: part of biological makeup, personality.
- Self-concept: powerful than culture.
- "Culture of relationship" shapes our behavior.

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## Seven-Step Approach from Weider-Hatfield/Raider

1. Define your needs
2. Share your needs with the other person
  - Choose suitable time/place
  - Use "I" language
3. Listen to the other person's needs
4. Generate possible solutions
5. Evaluate the possible solutions and choose the best one
6. Implement the solution
7. Follow up on the solution

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