

Conflict

[http://www.mediationworks.com/
mti/certconf/video.htm](http://www.mediationworks.com/mti/certconf/video.htm)

Definitions of Conflict

- “Social conflict is a relationship between two or more parties who (or whose spokesmen) believe they have incompatible goals.” (Kriesberg, 1973, p. 17)
- “Conflict is incompatible behavior between parties whose interests differ.” (Brown, 1983, p. 4)
- “Dyadic conflict will be considered to be a process which includes the perceptions, emotions, behaviors, and outcomes of two parties (...). Conflict is the process which begins when one party perceives that the other has frustrated, or is about to frustrate, some concern of his.” (Thomas, 1976, p. 891)

Definitions of Conflict II

- “Social conflict is an interaction
 - between actors (individuals, groups, organizations....),
 - where at least one actor perceives a difference in perceptions, cognitions, emotions, or will with the other actor,such that in fulfilling what the actor thinks, feels or wants, he/she is frustrated by the other actor.” (F. Glasl, 2002, translated by C. Schwierien)
- “...A process which begins when one party perceives that another party has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect, something the first party cares about.” (H & B)

Key elements in conflict

- Opposing interests between individuals or groups
- Recognition of such opposition
- The belief by each side that the other will act to interfere with its interests
- Actions that in fact produce such interference

Effects of conflict in business settings

- Direct costs
 - Payment of temporary workers during strike
 - Litigation
 - Penalties for breach of contract
 - ...
- Indirect costs
 - Economic consequences from focusing on conflict instead of focusing on business
 - Bad decisions
 - Reputation damage
 - Damage of corporate culture, motivation,..
 - Turnover, illnesses....

Effects of conflict in a business setting II

- Potential positive effects
 - Better mutual understanding & respect
 - Higher social cohesion
 - Higher team-effectivity
 - Higher quality of group decisions
 - More creativity & innovation
 - ...

Outcomes of Different Amounts of Conflict

Too little conflict	Optimal conflict	Too great conflict
Apathy Stagnation Poor focus Unmotivated Few changes Slow to adapt Not integrated Few new ideas	Cohesive Productive Cooperation Organizational goal focused Innovative & changing Solution searching Creatively adapting to environment	Chaotic Disruptive Distracted Pliticized Uncooperative Hostile to other groups

Important factors in a conflict

- Incompatible interests
- Perceptual factors
 - Selective perception
 - Reduction of cognitive dissonance (Festinger)
 - Overconfidence
 - Self-fulfilling prophecies
 - Loss aversion; sunk costs
 - Faulty attributions
- Social factors
 - “Faulty” communication
 - Reactive devaluation
 - Intercultural differences
- Personality traits/characteristics
 - Type A/B



Personality Types

- Type A personality
 - Competitive
 - High need for achievement
 - Aggressive
 - Works fast
 - Impatient
 - Restless
 - Extremely alert
 - Tense facial muscles
 - Constant feeling of time pressure
 - More likely to suffer stress-related illness
- Type B personality
 - Able to take time out to enjoy leisure
 - Not preoccupied with achievement
 - Easy-going
 - Works at a steady pace
 - Seldom impatient
 - Not easily frustrated
 - Relaxed
 - Moves & speaks slowly
 - Seldom lacks enough time
 - Less likely to suffer s



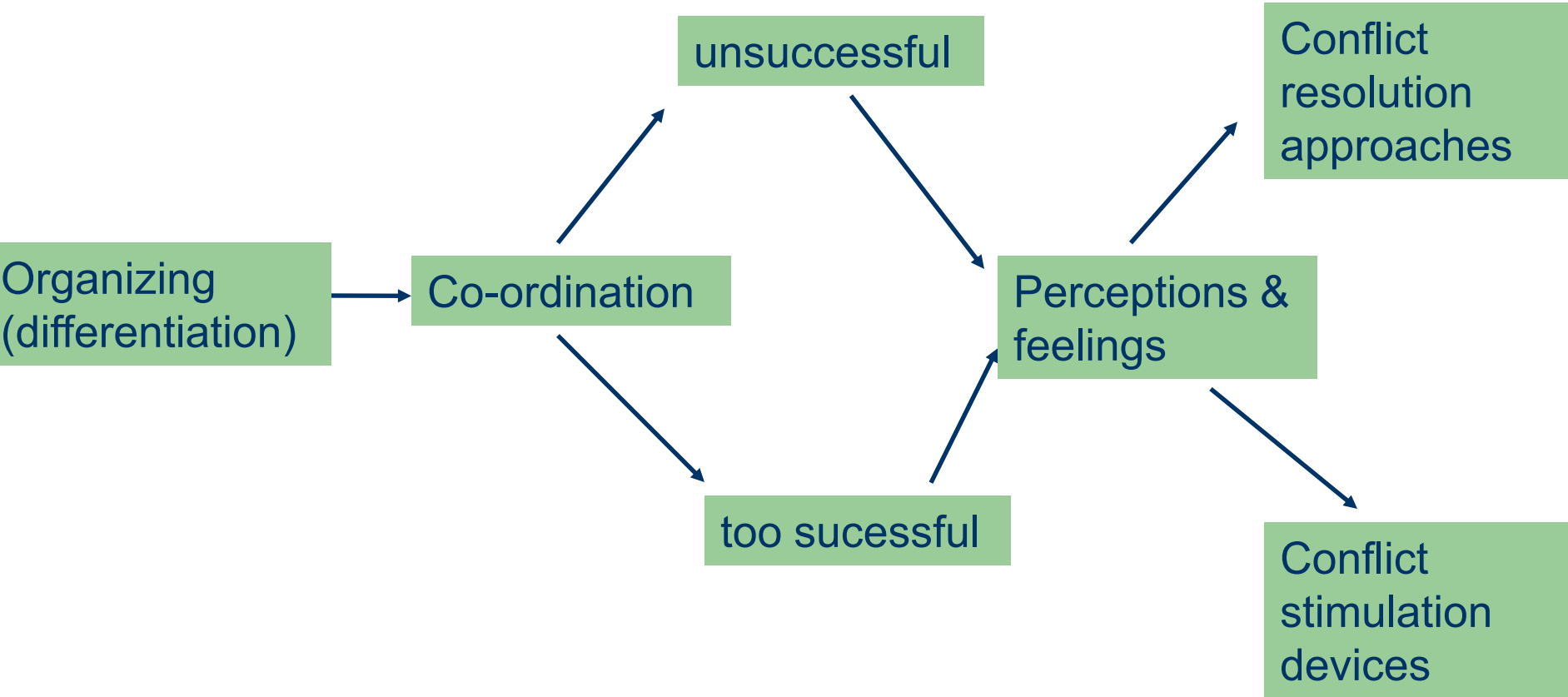
The Role of Emotions and Perception

- The way conflict is defined at the initial stage determines type of outcome
- Conflict also must be felt
 - Anxiety
 - Tenseness
 - Frustration
 - Hostility
- Emotional dimension shapes perception

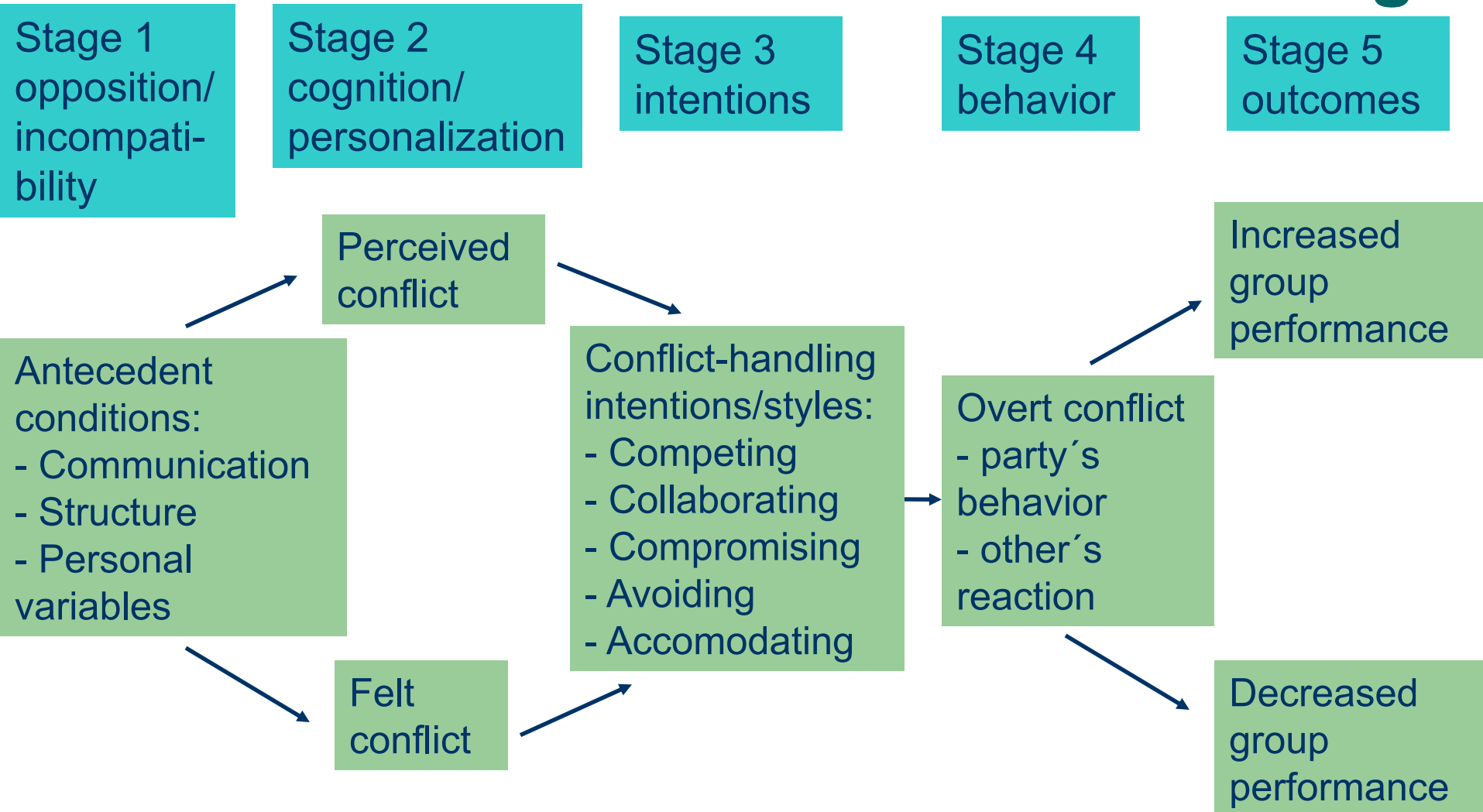
The Coordination - Conflict Model

- Developed of diverse theoretical discussions
- Four-stage model
- Explains
 - How conflict in organizations arises
 - How conflict in organizations can be managed
 - Conflict resolution approaches
 - Conflict stimulation approaches

The Coordination - Conflict Model



The Conflict Process in a Work-setting



Frames of Reference on Conflict in OB

- Unitarist
- Pluralist
- Interactionist

The Unitarist Frame of Reference

- Organizations are harmonious
- Management & employee interests coincide
- Conflict is bad
- Conflict as a failure of coordination/psychological problem
- Assumes that managers are able to permanently change behaviour of employees in conflict

The Pluralist Frame of Reference

- Organizations are a collection of groups
- Each has its own legitimate interests
- Conflict is inevitable
- Early warning system
- Management has to keep balance between potentially conflicting goals and interest groups
- Can be resolved through compromise to the benefit of all

The Interactionist Frame of Reference

- Conflict necessary for performance in an organization
- Should be encouraged & stimulated!
- Distinction between functional & dysfunctional conflict
 - **Functional:** Supports organization goals and improves performance
 - **Dysfunctional:** Does not support goals, hinders performance
- Performance improvements:
 - Exposes weaknesses in organizational decision making & design
 - Stimulates & energizes to deal with underlying problems
 - Sharpens understanding of real goals & interests between groups
 - Avoids premature resolutions

Conflict diagnosis

Basic analysis of a conflict

- What are the conflict issues
- How could you describe the conflict process
 - General aspects
 - Escalation?
- Who are the parties in the conflict
- What are the positions & relationships of the parties
- What are the basic attitudes towards conflict of the parties

Conflict escalation

- Many different models
- Most widely used: 9-step model of F. Glasl
 - Descriptive!
 - Diagnostic tool
- Different approaches to explanations

The escalation model

- Stage 1: Hardening
- Stage 2: Debates & Polemics
- Stage 3: Actions, not words
- Stage 4: Images & coalitions
- Stage 5: Loss of Face
- Stage 6: Strategies of threats
- Stage 7: Limited destructive blows
- Stage 8: Fragmentation of the enemy
- Stage 9: Together into the abyss

Stages 1 - 3

- Stage 1: Hardening
 - Hardening of points of view, clashes
 - Consciousness of tensions, unpleasant
 - Conviction: tensions can be solved through dialogue
 - No clear parties

Cooperation > competition

- Stage 2: Debates & polemics
 - Polarization in thinking, feeling, aims
 - Black-and-white view
 - Quasi-rational tactics, verbal violence
 - Parties try to get others on their side
 - Devaluations

Cooperation \geq < competition

- Stage 3: Actions, not words
 - Actions
 - Non-verbal behavior dominant and different from verbal
 - Danger of misunderstandings/misinterpretations
 - Pessimism
 - Group-cohesion, clear parties develop
 - Threats
 - Empathy lost

Cooperation < competition

Stages 4-6

- Stage 4: Images & coalitions
 - Stereotypes, rumors, image-campaigns
 - Try to get each other in negative roles, fight
 - Try to get outsiders on own side
 - Self-fulfilling prophecies
 - ...
- Stage 5: Loss of Face
 - Attacks on “face” – rehabilitation important
 - Accuse of having lost honor, of betrayal..
 - “Unmasking” of the opponent
 - Isolation
 - Ideologies, values, principles important
 - “Angel – devil” picture
- Stage 6: Strategies of threats
 - Blackmail
 - Threat and counter-threat
 - Activities for self-binding (like in game of chicken!)
 - Stress
 - Acceleration

Stages 7-9

- Stage 7: Limited destructive blows
 - Dehumanization of the other
 - “Limited strokes of destruction”
 - Relatively small own damage perceived as gain
- Stage 8: Fragmentation of the enemy
 - Paralyzing and disintegrating of system of opponent
 - Try to destroy vital functions of the other
 - ...
- Stage 9: Together into the abyss
 - No way back
 - Total confrontation
 - Destruction for the cost of self-destruction

How to avoid escalation?

- Power balance
 - Often: fight for power
 - Powerful subjects: more often cognitive biased!
- Accountability more to process...
 - ...less to results!
- Cooperative climate
 - Focus on cooperation as opposed to competition
 - Consideration of long-run consequences
 - Language use

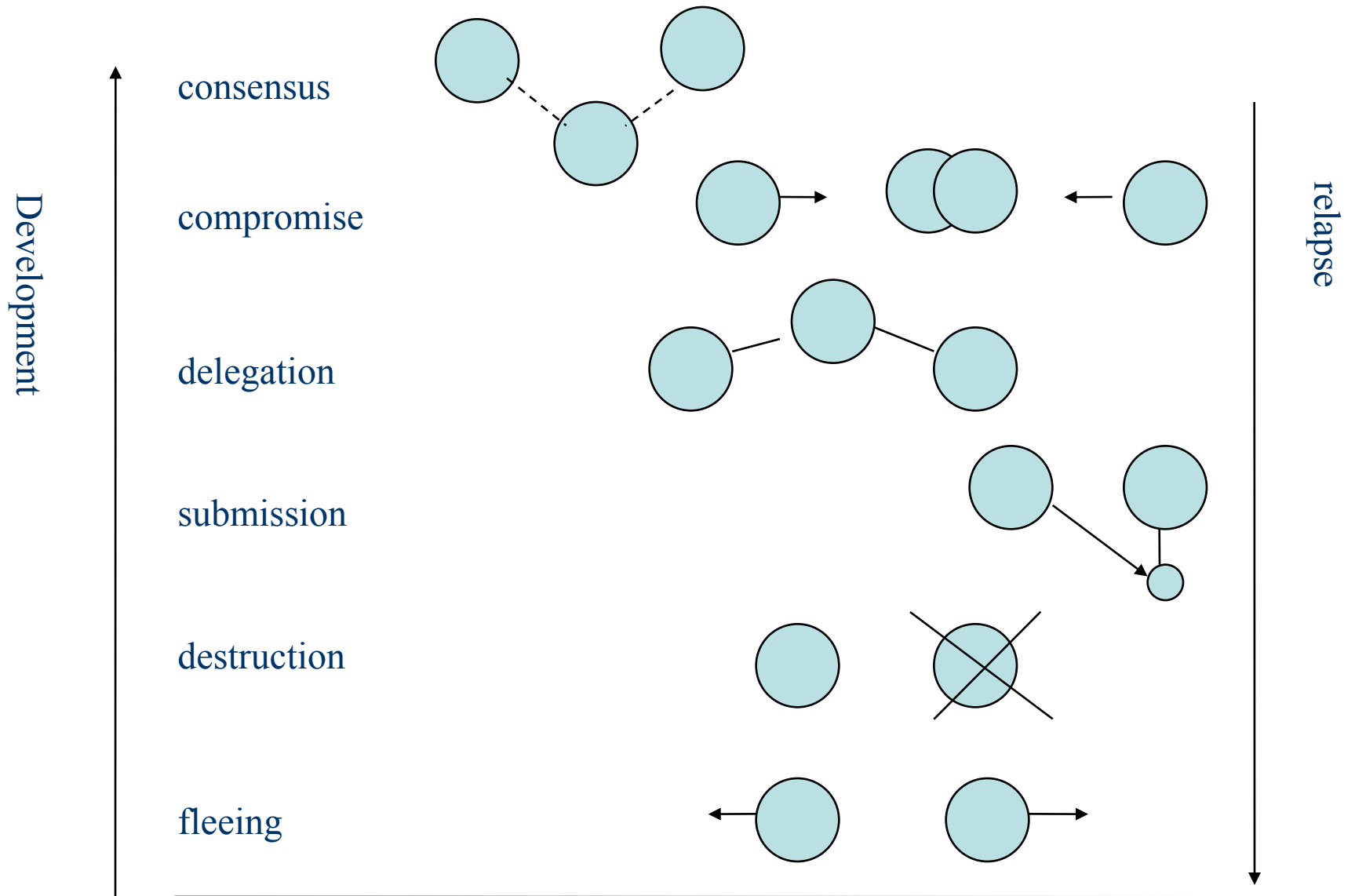
Conflict between groups

- Escalate faster, often less constructive
 - People in groups often show behavior they wouldn't show as individuals
 - De-individuation
 - Mass behavior
 - In inter-group conflicts, group-identity is challenged
 - Individual identity
 - Group identity
 - Offensive behavior towards other group = good behavior towards own group
- => social support for adverse behavior
- People trust groups less than individuals – “attack is best defense”

Managing Conflict

- Definition of conflict resolution: A process which has as its objective the ending of the conflict between disagreeing parties. (H & B)

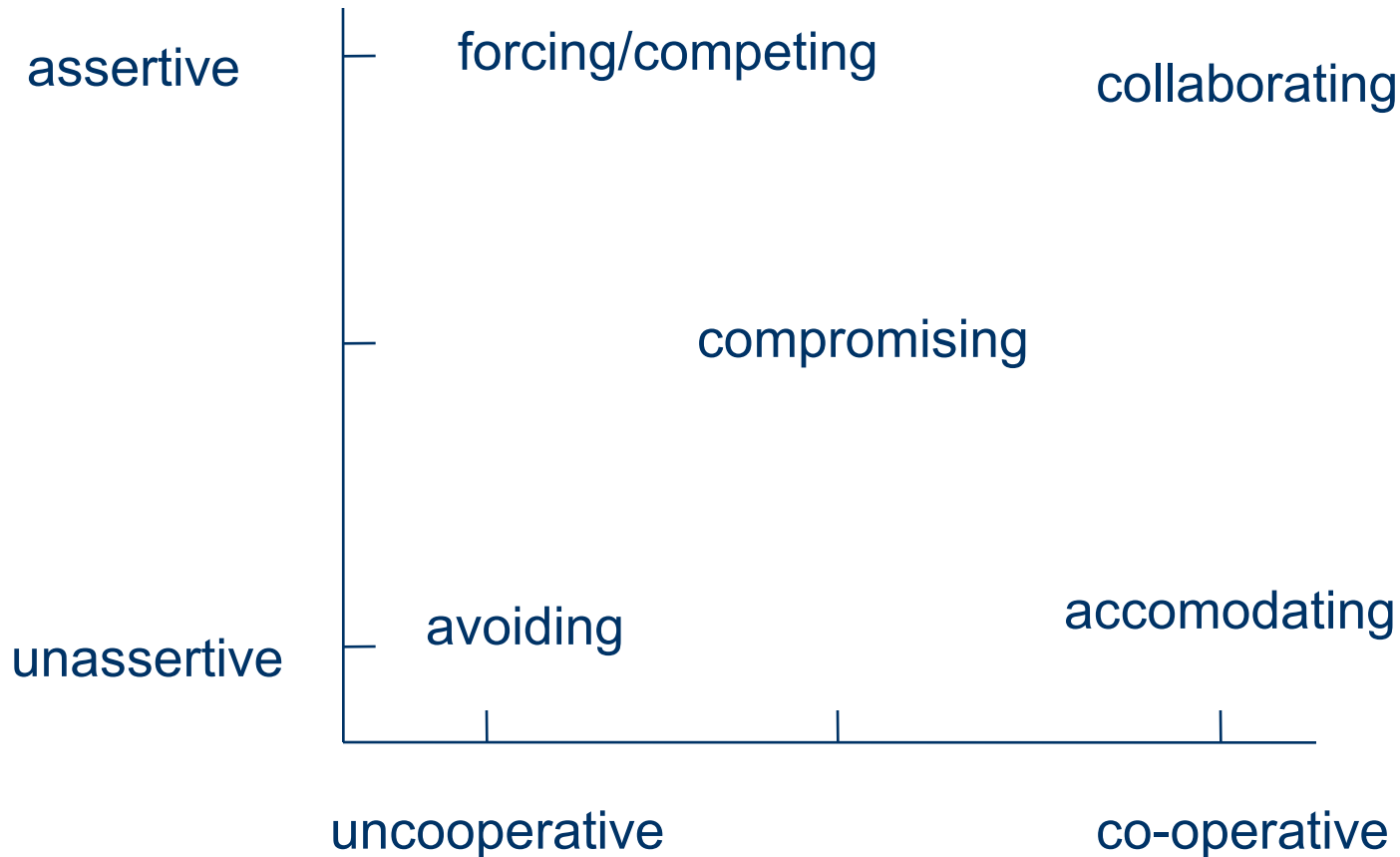
Evolution of conflict handling



Intuitive Conflict Handling/Negotiation

- Intuitive conflict handling styles
 - Competing
 - Collaborating
 - Avoiding
 - Compromising
 - accomodating
- Focus on positions
 - Suggest all-or-nothing alternatives
 - Maximization of own utility
- Perception of conflict as zero-sum game
- Strategic behavior
- Early choice and evaluation of solution alternatives
- Mix of relationship- and task level

Conflict Resolution Styles (Thomas, 1977)



Negotiation / Bargaining

- Negotiation: “A process in which two or more parties exchange goods or offers, counteroffers, and concessions either directly or through representatives.” (B & B)
- Distributive bargaining
 - Dividing a “fixed pie”
 - Win-lose situation
- Integrative bargaining
 - Seeks to increase total amount of resources
 - Win-win situation

Factors Determining the Outcome of Bargaining

- Tactics of bargainers
- Orientations towards the process
- Perceptions – errors in perceptions
- Decision-making biases
- Personality traits
- Cultural differences

Traditional Ways of Conflict Resolution (in Organizations)

- Delegation
 - Informal
 - Often in strategy- and relationship conflicts
- Arbitration
 - Often well-known person as arbiter
- Grievance procedures
 - Formalized
 - Relationship conflicts and task-conflicts
- Lawsuits
 - Task conflicts
 - Distributional conflicts
 - Conflicts about basic issues

Alternatives

- Interest-oriented negotiation
 - Harvard concept
 - Focus from positions to interest
 - Distinguish between task- and relationship level
 - Collect many possible options for agreements before evaluating them
 - Evaluate options using objective criteria
 - BATNA-testing
 - Limits
 - Necessity of open information exchange
 - Negotiation dilemma/prisoners' dilemma
 - “objective” evaluation criteria
 - Biased perceptions

Mediation & Arbitration

- Mediation

- Neutral third party
- Assists in achievement of a negotiated solution
- Influences conflict resolution process
- Guides the parties to discover own solution to their problem
- Positions & needs!

Arbitration

Third party

Has authority to impose binding agreement

Voluntary or compulsory

Problem: Less commitment in imposed settlement!

When is conflict positiv?

- Important distinction:
 - Socio-emotional conflicts
 - Task-conflicts
- Effect of socio-emotional conflicts
 - Negative effect on performance
 - Reduce job satisfaction & commitment
 - Best solutions: “let’s agree to disagree”
 - At least in the short run, for short-term teams

When is conflict positiv cont.

- Effect of task-related conflict
 - New insights & information?
 - Better decision-making (in groups)?
 - ⇒ Depending on context!!
- Conflicts about interests vs. differences in opinion about content
 - Conflicts about interests rarely positive effect
 - But:
 - can be solved searching for win-win solutions
 - This can help to deal with future conflicts
 - Stimulation of different opinions can enhance
 - quality of decisions
 - Innovativeness
 - But: participation has to be high for the positive effects!

Preconditions for productive task conflict

- No socio-emotional conflict
- Complexity of task rather high
- U-shaped relationship between arousal and performance (Yerkes-Dobson law)
- Handling of conflict should be problem-solving

Conflict Stimulation

- Engendering conflict between parties
- Stimulating existing conflict
- To engender new thinking, encourage different opinions, problem solving
- Techniques
 - Communications
 - Restructuring
 - Bringing in outsiders
 - Devil's advocate method
 - Dialectic method
 - Specific leadership style