

Understanding Conflict

Understanding Conflict – Study Notes

1. What Is Conflict?

- **Definition:** A perceived incompatibility of goals, values, or interests between two or more parties.
 - **Key Elements**
 - **Interdependence:** Parties affect each other's outcomes.
 - **Perception:** Conflict exists when at least one party believes there is an incompatibility.
 - **Potential for Change:** Conflict can be resolved, managed, or escalated.
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2. Types of Conflict

Category	Scope	Typical Setting	Example
Intrapersonal	Within one person	Decision-making, value clash	Choosing between career advancement and family time
Interpersonal	Between two individuals	Workplace, family, friendships	Disagreement over project responsibilities
Intragroup	Within a team or group	Teams, committees	Competing ideas for a marketing campaign
Intergroup	Between groups or organizations	Departments, unions, nations	Labor union vs. management negotiations
Organizational	Across the whole organization	Corporate culture, policy changes	Restructuring that affects all employees
International	Between nations or supranational entities	Diplomacy, trade, security	Trade dispute between two countries

3. Sources (Causes) of Conflict

Source	Description	Typical Triggers
Goal Conflict	Different or incompatible objectives	Competing sales targets

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Source	Description	Typical Triggers
Resource Scarcity	Limited assets (budget, time, staff)	Budget cuts for multiple departments
Role Ambiguity	Unclear responsibilities	Overlapping duties in a project team
Values & Beliefs	Divergent personal or cultural values	Ethical stance on environmental policies
Communication Breakdown	Misunderstandings, lack of information	Incomplete hand-off of project details
Personality Clashes	Differences in style, temperament	Introvert vs. highly extroverted colleague
Structural Factors	Organizational hierarchy, policies	Rigid reporting lines that limit collaboration

4. Conflict Handling Styles (Thomas–Kilmann Model)

Style	Level of Assertiveness	Level of Cooperativeness	When to Use
Competing	High	Low	Quick decisions, emergencies, protecting vital interests
Collaborating	High	High	Complex problems, long-term relationships, creative solutions
Compromising	Medium	Medium	Time-pressured situations, when both sides must give up something
Avoiding	Low	Low	Trivial issues, when emotions are too high, or when the issue is not one's responsibility
Accommodating	Low	High	To preserve harmony, when the issue is more important to the other party

Tip: Effective managers often shift among styles depending on the context.

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5. Conflict Resolution Process

1. Identify the Issue

- Clarify what the disagreement is about.
- Separate facts from perceptions.

2. Gather Information

- Listen to all parties.
- Collect relevant data, documents, or evidence.

3. Define Interests & Needs

- Distinguish *positions* ("I want X") from *interests* ("I need security").

4. Generate Options

- Brainstorm multiple solutions without judgment.
- Encourage creativity and joint ownership.

5. Evaluate & Select Solutions

- Use criteria such as fairness, feasibility, and impact