

CONFLICTS ARE DISAGREEMENTS THAT LEADS TO TENSION BETWEEN PEOPLE

FOUR TYPES OF CONFLICT:

- 1. Instrumental conflicts:**
About: Tangible issues, means, methods, procedures, structures.
Approach: Problem solving
Desired objective: Solution
- 2. Conflicts of interest:**
About: Allocation of time, money, labour, space.
Approach: Negotiations.
Desired objective: Agreement.
- 3. Conflicts of value**
About: Political, religious, moral values
Approach: Dialogue
Desired objective: A deeper understanding
- 4. Personal conflicts:**
About: Identity, self worth, loyalty, breach of confidence, rejection etc.
Approach: Open communication.
Desired objective: Understanding.

NB! The conflict types are most often entangled or overlapping. But it may be useful to identify the central point in a conflict in order to decide how to cope with it. The two first types – instrumental and interest conflicts – may be solved by negotiation. But we cannot negotiate values and feelings; we can only engage in dialogues about them in order to understand ourselves and the other person better.

Instrumental conflicts

The "pure" conflicts: they are still not polluted by negative sentiments, personifications, and reproaches and so on. Two parties are having a disagreement, they simply disagree upon what to do and how. They must find a solution in order to get on with the matter.

We have this type of conflicts very often; they seldom lead to animosity or traumas.

Conflicts of interest

Here, there is a competition for resources that are sparse, or appear to be sparse. The issue is often money, time (e.g. spare time), and space (who's allowed to take up most space, physically and psychically?). At home, it may be the allocation of rooms, housework and leisure time. At work, the dispute is often about working plans, facilities, and wages. At a larger scale, there is the fight for territories and political dominance. Globally there is a fight for basic necessities of life, water supply, and other natural resources.

CONFLICTS OF VALUE

This is about personal or cultural values that we are willing to stand up for. What is right doing, what is wrong doing? It could be moral antagonisms or traditions, religion, political beliefs, human rights

PERSONAL CONFLICTS

This is the dimension of conflicts that may affect everyday life and create enormous confusion: Here, deep and often hidden feelings play the leading role, and the parties become uncertain and vulnerable: How do the others see me? Does anybody at all see me? Can I trust them? Are we excluded? Do they despise us? Are we being respected?

Conflict Understanding: Escalation

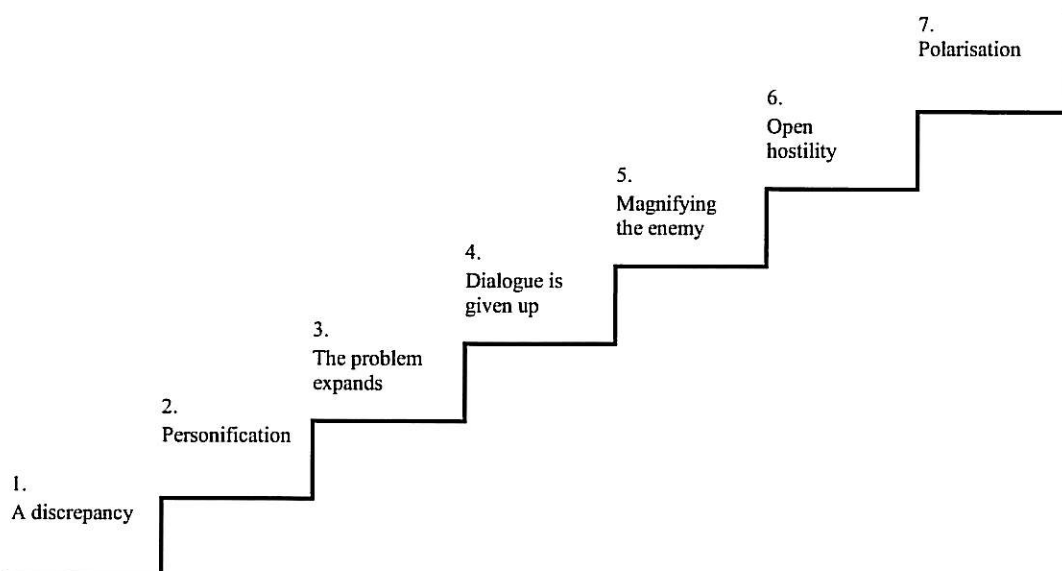
Any conflict is unique, on any level: within the individual, between two persons, between groups, locally, in society, or internationally.

Not two fingerprints are the same, however, there seems to be a paragon for destructive escalation, some kind of script in accordance with which we act, and which appears to be somehow universal.

It's good to know the script. Being aware of it may lead to our reflection on whether we want to play the given parts of the tragedy.

This model below stems from Northern Ireland, and we have talked to people from many cultures that recognise the pattern:

CONFLICT LADDER



CONFLICT ESCALATION

1. **A disagreement**
(Problem solving)
2. **Personification**
(Personal antagonism and defensiveness)
3. **Issue expansion**
4. **Abandoning dialogue**
(Moving towards stereotyping – enemy images)
5. **Magnifying the enemy**
(An eye for an eye)
6. **Open hostility**
7. **Polarisation**

The development is not inevitable but predictable

Disagreement

The "pure" conflict, the parties try to solve a problem that has come up, some difference in opinion about how to think and act. At some point there is a noise on the line, the channel is closed. One of the parties' steps besides the objective solving of the problem, and the situation descends to the next stage.

The borderline between disagreement and personification: this borderline is crucial. If it has once been exceeded, the sour atmosphere and the confusion can rapidly escalate. Usually one party starts reproaching, threatening, offending or likewise, and the other party follows.

Hence, right here at this borderline the training for conflict de-escalation makes sense. How can I react to aggression in a manner of détente without yielding from my goals? The further we descend the conflict steps, the harder it gets.

Personification

At this point, it's no longer the issue that is the problem, but the other party. It is his or her fault, and negative emotions begin to muddle up the picture. We reproach, attack, and defend ourselves. We feel confused, attacked and uncomfortable. We throw suspicion on each other's intentions and we begin to stamp the other party's character.

The Problem expands

We come to think of many other flaws and defects in the other party, other problems he/she creates. Old unsolved conflicts and old injustice emerge.

Evade or attack

These are two classic reactions, the adrenaline prompts us to either run or hit. There can be good reasons for both reactions and they are not unjustifiable but they do resemble each other in that they cut off any actual dialogue and contact with the adversary and the problem that lies behind his or her behaviour. They are not a part of a solution, but an escalation of the problem.

Many people admit that they are afraid of conflicts and of confrontation, that they are evasive.

Others have the wrong idea that conflict resolution is about being nice and turning the other cheek. Many conflicts arise from being aggressive and not listening properly, but it is likely that just as many arise when we do not say what we really mean to say, when we do not get the message through, when we do not say where we draw the line.

Conflict resolution is not about giving in, but about self-respect, standing up for one's values just as one respects the other party's right to being different.

Abandoning dialogue

The negative emotions blur our ability to think - we communicate inaccurately. We twist each other's words; we can't really hear what is said. This is the dialogue of the deaf. It becomes too disagreeable, obviously words are not sufficient, haven't we said so a hundred and one times, it's no use and so on. We begin to avoid talking to each other; instead we talk about each other, to others. We communicate through acts – different kinds of physical or psychological violence.

We search for allies and we form groups. Talking **about** each other instead of **with** each other is a clear indication of aggravation, but will it always make conflicts escalate? Not necessarily - it depends on the purpose, the manner, and the result. Talking to an outsider about the conflict may clarify and open up, or it may close, stamp and stupefy.

Enemy images

The more we close off towards the other party, the more locked up and explosive the relationship becomes. The other party turns into a subject of projection, we see in the latter everything despicable that we do not want to recognise in ourselves. At this point, the original disagreement has almost disappeared; the goal is to prove right, to triumph

It is he or I, an eye for an eye, heroes and villains, fair and fowl. I am/we are right, our goal at present is to prove right all the way, only one reaction from the other part will suffice: concession, apology, total surrender. We have become fundamentalists.

The conflict is like a magnet, like a black gap in the universe: it attracts all energy, we must be perpetually occupied with it, can hardly speak of anything else. Simultaneously, we loathe it and are attracted to it. The road is open to:

Open hostility

We are no longer able to see the others as beings of the same human kind as ourselves, human beings who basically want peace and reason, who suffer by the conflict. Therefore, we are able to proceed to open, hostile actions, physically and psychically. In major conflicts, extremists are now taking care of the contact, and with devastating results. They are now more or less autistic, their

regard of the enemy has very little to do with reality. The end justifies the means. Moderates have been segregated on both sides, as they still regard the enemy as human beings, they want negotiation, they try to see the matter from both sides, they fail, and they are traitors. Hostile actions may now accelerate, from bullying to civil war.

Polarisation

At this point, the parties are no longer able to stay in the same place. This is the time of divorces, sackings, notices of resignation, flight, and establishing ghettos. One takes flight, or is driven away.

The best thing that can happen now is that the parties have no further contact, the worst that they carry on with the war from a distance.

THREE WAYS OF RESPONDING TO CONFLICTS:

Evade:

Flee, wear a mask, ignore, postpone, wait, and bend.

Attack:

Be aggressive, threaten, verbal violence, psychological violence, physical violence.

Meet the conflict openly:

Acknowledge the disagreement, examine, dare to question, be clear.

The three responses are optional. All are commonly applied, but if 1) and 2) form a pattern with the individual, or in the group as a whole, change may be needed.

Communication and analysis:

Facts

What took place, without interpretations and judgements?

Feelings

That which is going on inside

Needs

That which is behind or below the feelings

Possibilities

The action wanted

MEDIATION PHASES

1. **prior to the mediation**
Where, when, who, how?

2. **The opening of the mediator**
Game rules
What will happen?
Acceptance from the parties

3. **The description of the parties**
What is the issue?
What are the problems?
I would like to know some more about....
See opinions, emotions, interests and needs
Themes, what is up for negotiation, what is dialogue?

4. **Common formulation of a problem and creation of agenda/themes**
Find a common ground and discover the issue the parties are disagreeing about and gain acceptance of this

5. **Brainstorming**
Which possible solutions exist?

6. **The parties negotiate for solutions**
The suggestions for solutions are linked to interests and needs

7. **The formulation of an agreement**
Form, content, approval, timeframe

8. **Round off and good bye**