



Managing Conflict with Collaborators

**Dietrich College Graduate Student
Professional Development Workshop**

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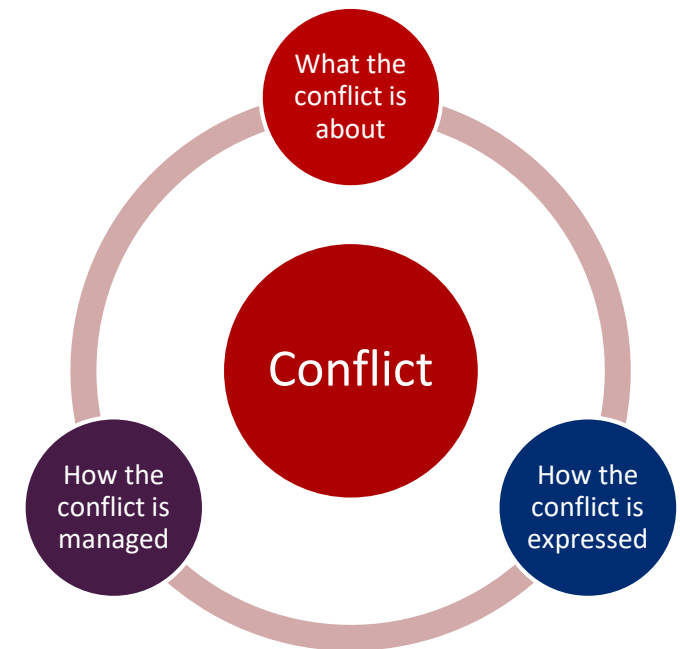
**Richard M. and Margaret S. Cyert Professor
of Organizational Behavior and Theory**



Conflict with Collaborators

"Every conflict we face in life is rich with positive and negative potential. It can be a source of inspiration, enlightenment, learning, transformation, and growth-or rage, fear, shame, entrapment, and resistance. The choice is not up to our opponents, but to us, and our willingness to face and work through them."

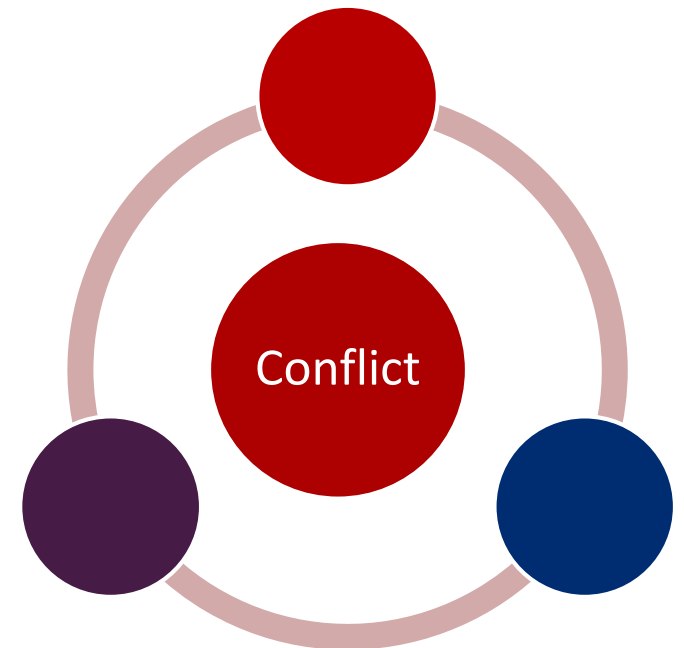
- Kenneth Cloke and Joan Goldsmith in *Resolving Conflicts at Work*



Conflict



- **Conflict:** Arises from opposing interests between people who are interdependent involving
 - goals
 - actions
 - scarce resources





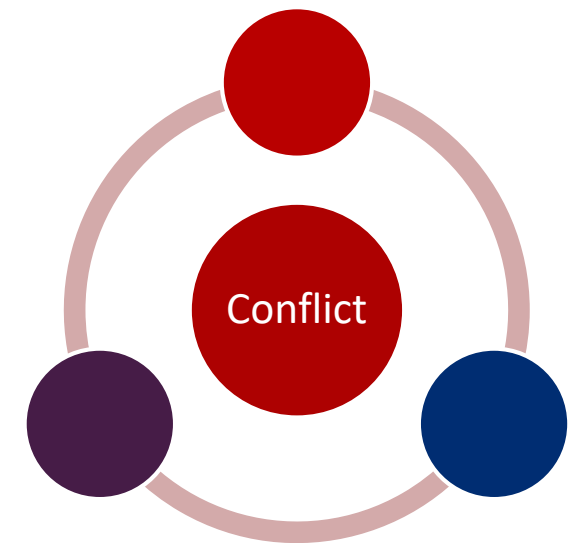
Is conflict good or bad?

• **Positive Effects**

- creativity
- avoid false consensus
- surfaces problems
- more comprehensive search and deliberation

• **Negative Effects**

- detracts from getting work done
- interferes with group satisfaction
- stressful





Is conflict good or bad?

It depends on...



What the conflict is about



Work Related Conflict

- **Disagreements about performance-related activities**
- **Types**
 - **Task** – what needs to be done
 - **Process** – logistics, managing deadlines, who should do what

Relationship Conflict

- **Interpersonal incompatibilities and attacks**
- **Types**
 - **Value** conflicts
 - **Status** conflicts
 - **Personal attacks**
 - **Personality clashes**



What the conflict is about

<p>Task Opinions & Ideas</p>	<p>“We disagreed on points of view regarding the cases and what decisions should be made.” “My group debates a lot in morning meetings about the right way to test” “We challenge each other’s opinions about client needs in order to double-check ourselves”</p>
<p>Process Time and Resources</p>	<p>“We often had vastly different ideas about timing and amount of work needed.” “We totally disagreed about how to divide up the work.” “Some people didn’t want to spend time or money in the initial stages of the project.”</p>
<p>Relationship Emotional & Status</p>	<p>“My team has ego clashes and a huge problem with arrogance.” “No open fighting, just bottled-up resentment, occasional sarcasm.” “One person always has to be right. This person is sometimes oppressive.”</p>

Assessing Types of Conflict



Task Conflict

- How much conflict about the work you do is there in your group?
- How often do people in your group disagree about opinions regarding the work being done?
- How frequently are there conflicts about ideas in your group?

Process Conflict

- To what extent do you disagree about the way to do things in your group?
- How much disagreement is there about procedures in your work group?
- How frequently are there disagreements about who should do what in your work group?

Relationship Conflict

- How much are personality conflicts evident in your group?
- How much tension is there among members in your group?
- How much emotional conflict is there among members in your group?

Conflict affects important team outcomes



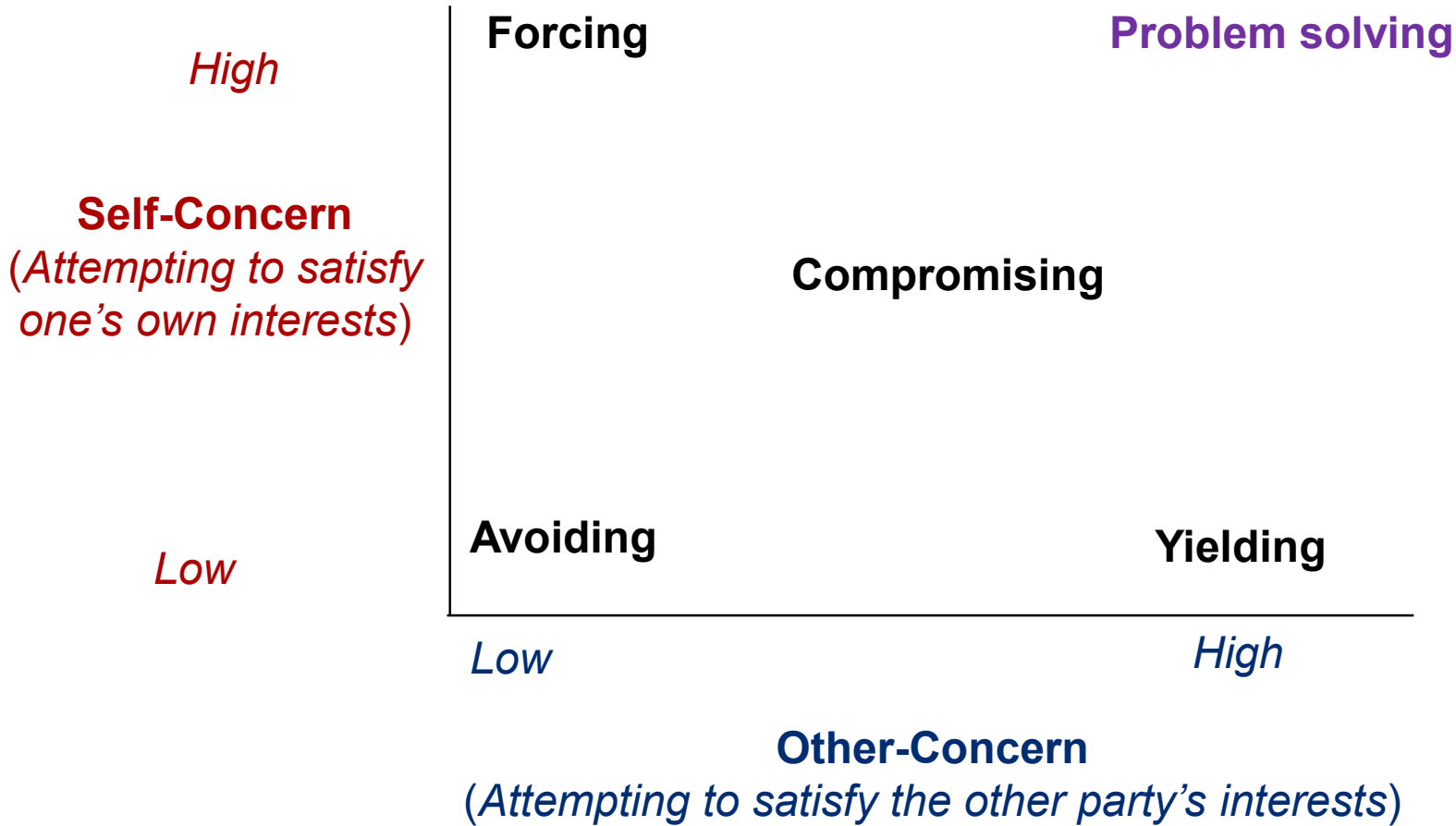
Process and Relationship conflict are more harmful than **Task conflict**

- All types of conflict interfere with **trust** in the team
- **Process and relationship conflict** are also associated with
 - Lower **team cohesion**
 - Lower **satisfaction**
 - Lower **commitment**
 - Lower **team performance**
- **Task conflict's** effect on **group performance** varies from positive to negative across studies.
 - What influences when it's effective and when it's not?

(De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; De Wit, Greer, & Jehn, 2012)



Managing Conflict





Examples of Conflict Management Strategies

Problem solving

- Work out a solution that serves everyone's interests
- Try to come up with a creative solution that incorporate multiple perspectives.

Compromising

- Find a middle-of-the-road solution.
- Emphasize that we have to find a compromise solution.

Avoiding

- Avoid discussing differences of opinion as much as possible.
- Avoid a confrontation with one another.

Yielding/Accommodating

- Give in others' demands.
- Let others have their way.

Forcing

- Push our individual points of view.
- Try to force one another to accept our own points of view.

(Adapted from De Dreu, Evers, Beersma, Kluwer, & Nauta, 2001)

Factors to consider when choosing a conflict management strategy



- **Issues:** the extent to which the conflict involves important priorities, principles or values are involved in the conflict
- **Relationship:** the importance of maintaining a close, mutually supportive relationship with the other party
- **Relative power:** the power balance between you and the other party
- **Available time (and resources):** how much time you have to resolve the issue
- **Organizational culture:** the acceptable conflict management strategy based on the values of the organization



Choosing a Conflict Management Strategy

Problem Solving:

- For important issues when time is not a problem
- Where organizational support exists
- When a win-win solution is possible

Avoiding:

- For small issues
- When you have limited time/resources

Forcing:

- In emergencies
- When only one right way exists
- To prevent others from taking advantage of non-assertive approaches

Yielding/Accommodating:

- When you are interested in keeping harmony
- To build credits - using small favor to get larger one

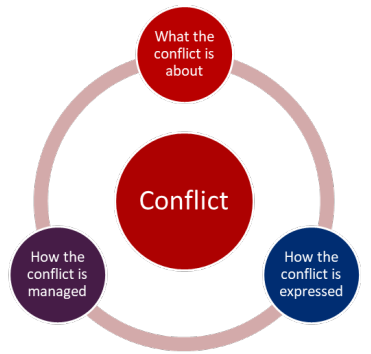
Compromising:

- At a later stage in the conflict
- When a partial win is better than none for both parties



How the conflict is expressed

Thomas and Mary are engaged in a conflict over who how to design a study...





How the conflict is expressed

Thomas and Mary are engaged in a conflict over how to design a study...

Version 1

Thomas tries to **explain why he believes** the design is appropriate (and rules out multiple alternative explanations).

Mary **listens but remains concerned**.

She **suggests** that Thomas **may not have considered** some potential unintended consequences of the design and that they may want to **discuss** the issue further.

Thomas disagrees.

Version 2

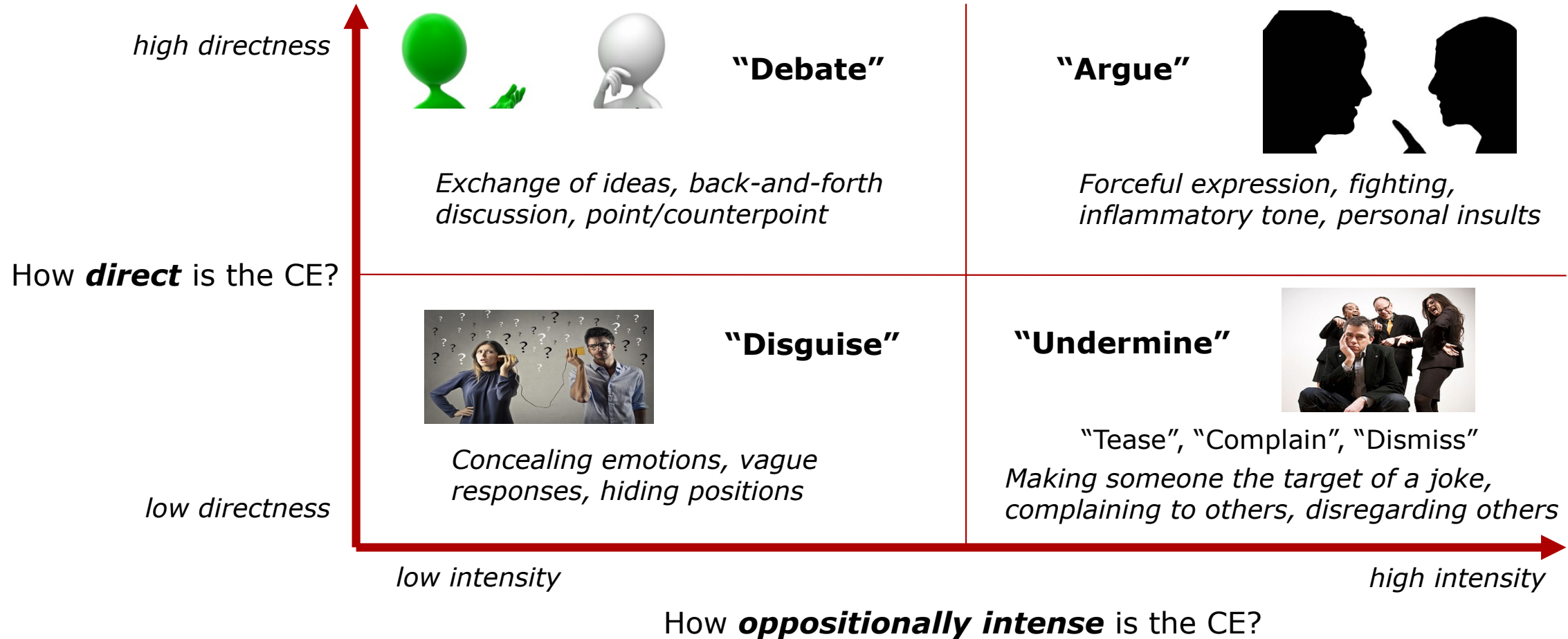
Thomas **defends** his reasoning and **unequivocally states** that the design is the right approach (and why others are wrong).

Mary **interrupts him before he is finished**.

She **asserts** that Thomas **does not have the expertise** to make design decisions about the study, and demands they reopen the issue.

Thomas disagrees.

Different ways conflict is expressed



(Weingart et al., 2015; Behfar et al., 2016)



Assessing Conflict Expression

Argue	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. We often quarrel when we have conflict.2. We often argue when we have conflict.3. We often fight when we have conflict.
Debate	<ol style="list-style-type: none">4. We often engage in debates when we have conflict.5. We often go back and forth presenting our counter-arguments when we have conflict.6. We frequently deliberate when we have conflict.
Dismiss	<ol style="list-style-type: none">7. We are often unwilling to consider one another's perspectives when we have conflict.8. We frequently ignore one another's perspectives when we have conflict.9. We tend to discount one another's perspectives when we have conflict.
Undermine	Tease <ol style="list-style-type: none">10. We often tease one another when we have conflict.11. We often make fun of one another when we have conflict.12. We often make one another the target of a joke when we have conflict.
	Complain <ol style="list-style-type: none">13. We often talk behind each other's backs when we have conflict.14. We typically vent to other people when we have a conflict.15. We usually complain to our coworkers when we have a conflict.
Disguise	<ol style="list-style-type: none">16. We tend to be indirect when expressing concerns when we have conflict.17. We tend to be vague when expressing our differences during conflict.18. We usually avoid saying what we really mean when we have conflict.

Behfar, Kim, Weingart, Bendersky, Bear, Todorova, & Jehn (2016)

The Importance of How Conflicts are Expressed

- Conflict is **harmful** when it is expressed less directly or more intensely (i.e., argue, undermine, disguise)
- Conflict can be **beneficial** to group work when it is *expressed more directly and less intensely* (i.e., **debate**)
 - Examples: playing devil's advocate, challenging a proposal, pointing out ways to improve a plan
- By optimizing the conflict expression in teams, you can **harness the untapped potential** of positive conflict
 - Greater trust among team members, more information sharing, greater team learning, better team performance



The Conflict Eco-system





Having Difficult Conversations

- But what if the conflict is
 - more personal or sensitive?
 - is likely to be emotional?
 - with someone of higher status (like my advisor!)?
 - involves giving negative feedback?
- How do I navigate potentially difficult conversations?

**Come back next week for Part 2:
Having Difficult Conversations**



Part 2: Role Play Scenario

- For those who have signed up for next week's workshop on difficult conversations...

Role Play: A doctoral student and their advisor have been jointly working on a manuscript, and problems have arisen regarding expectations for the deliverable...

Attendees will receive role instructions for either the student "Sam" or the professor ("Dr. Franklin") and will have an opportunity to practice engaging in a difficult conversation with another participant.



Questions?

Thank you!



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