

WHAT IS **CONFLICT**?



In the same series:

“What is Interpersonal Communication?”

“What is Negotiation?”

This Brochure was developed by Partners Foundation for Local Development - FPD, in the frame of the project "Capacity Building in Conflict Analysis and Resolution", ROM/00/002, financed by United Nations Development Program - UNDP Romania Country Office and United Nations Department for Economic and Social Problems - UN DESA, New York.

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Democratic societies recognize and accept conflicts, encouraging the free expression of ideas and differences, the personal development, the creativity and competitiveness, valuing them as sources of energy and progress.

The project "**Capacity Building in Conflict Analysis and Resolution**" aims the development of a new culture of conflict management, by:

- Promoting new approaches to the management of differences and conflicts;
- Promoting a new profession, the third neutral party who helps the two parties in conflict negotiate an agreement and reach consensus.



*"Personal differences, competition and rivalry,
have often a positive value for participants and the social system in which they take place."*

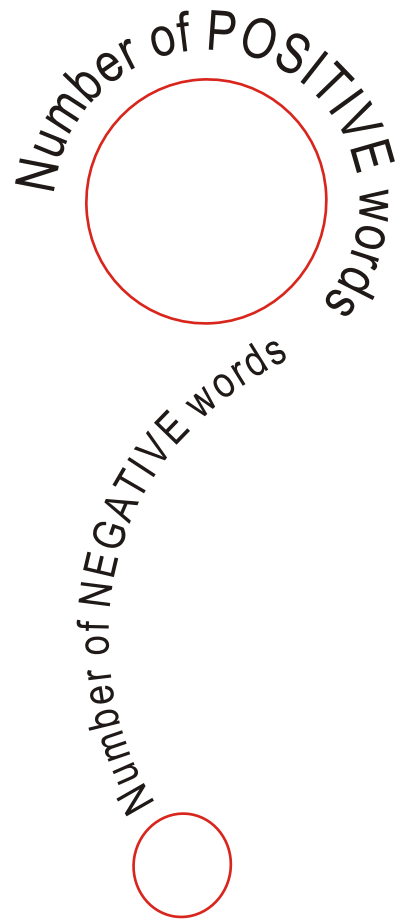
Richard Walton

WHAT IS CONFLICT

When you hear the word Conflict what image comes to your mind? Draw the image in the box below:



What other words come to your mind?
Write them down:



What connotations have these words? Negative, positive? Count how many negative and how many positive words have come to your mind.

The majority of people link the concept of Conflict with bad images and negative connotations. How would you define Conflict using the image you have drawn and the words you have written?

HERE ARE THE DEFINITIONS WE WANT TO PROPOSE YOU:

A confrontation among behaviors, attitudes, emotions, needs, goals or different values or perceived as different.

A way of stimulating interest for solving problems and adjusting relations among different persons.



CHECK YOUR ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT CONFLICT

ANSWER WITH **YES** OR **NO** TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

Is conflict a natural part of life?	YES	NO
Is Conflict good?	YES	NO
Is Conflict bad?	YES	NO
Do we have a preferred Conflict Management Style?	YES	NO
Are Conflict Management Styles determining the Conflicts Outcomes?	YES	NO
Does Conflict have a life of its own?	YES	NO
Is Conflict the same with Violence?	YES	NO
Can we solve Conflicts outside the judicial system?	YES	NO
Is inter-personal communication playing a role in solving Conflicts?	YES	NO
Are there more ways to negotiate?	YES	NO
Can somebody help us overcome a difficult inter-personal Conflict?	YES	NO
Can somebody help us overcome Conflicts when working together?	YES	NO

THIS BOOKLET WILL HELP YOU UNDERSTAND
WHY AND WHEN YOU SHOULD CHOSE **YES** OR **NO**.

IS CONFLICT A NATURAL PART OF LIFE?

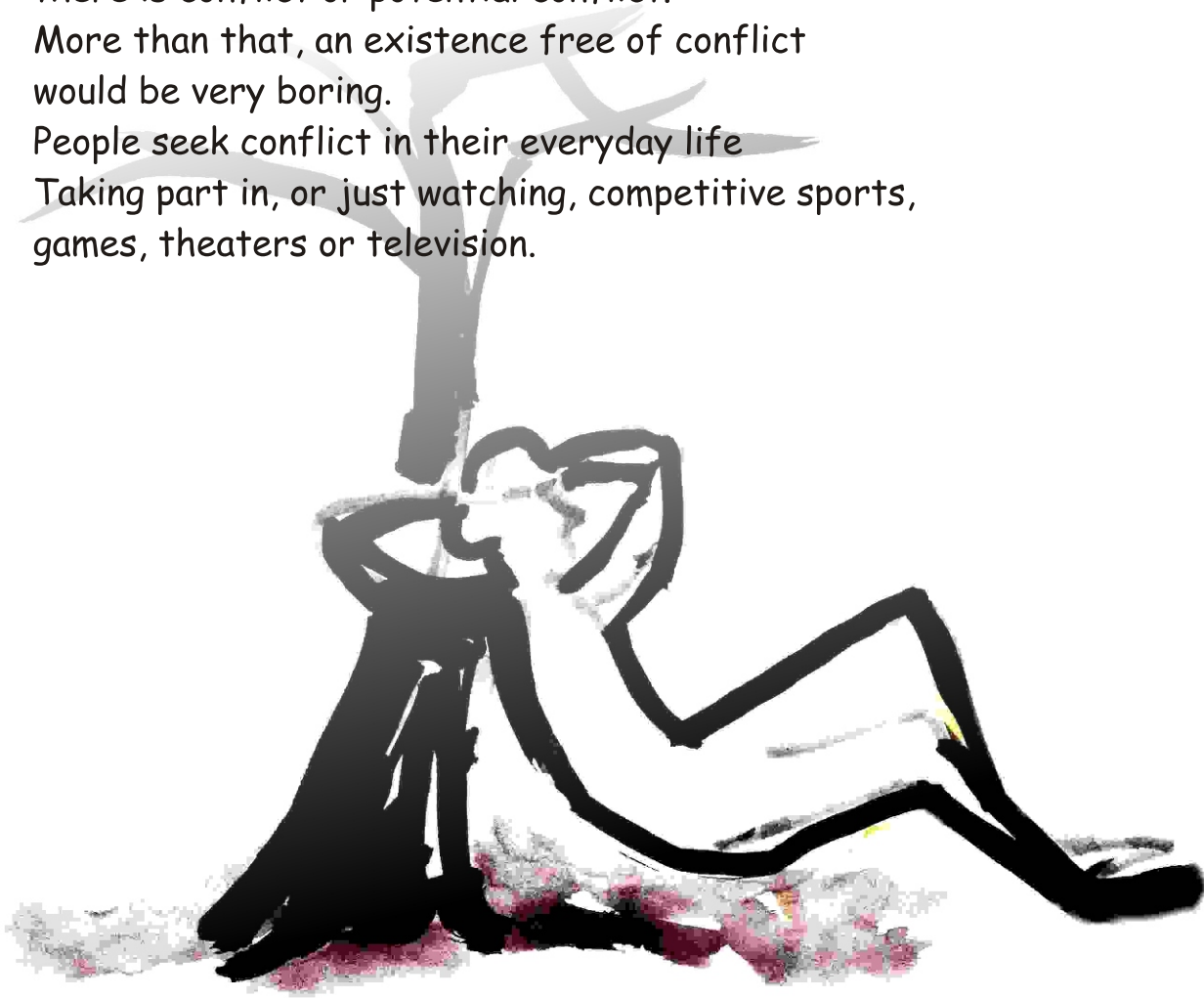
YES. CONFLICT IS A NATURAL PART OF LIFE.

Whenever two or more people are gathered
there is conflict or potential conflict.

More than that, an existence free of conflict
would be very boring.

People seek conflict in their everyday life

Taking part in, or just watching, competitive sports,
games, theaters or television.



IS CONFLICT GOOD? IS CONFLICT BAD? CONFLICT IS NEITHER GOOD NOR BAD.

The way we solve conflicts or the outcomes of conflicts can be good or bad. We should not eliminate conflicts, but we should know how to have lively controversies instead of deadly quarrels, how to create constructive conflicts and avoid destructive ones.

Constructive conflicts have many positive outcomes:

- People's interest and curiosity are stimulated;
- People grow, establish their group and personal identities, by testing and assessing oneself processes;
- Problems are aired, people adapt to new situations or invent new solutions to old problems.



Destructive Conflicts are violent and have negative outcomes: parties go beyond seeking to achieve their goals peacefully, they try to dominate and destroy each other. Destructive conflicts have a tendency to expand and escalate.



Our personal Conflict Management Style determines, in many situations, if the Conflict will develop into a constructive or destructive situation.

DO WE HAVE A PREFERRED CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLE?

YES, WE HAVE A PREFERRED CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLE influenced by our personality, family, traditions, and education.

Our Conflict Management Style is a combination of two variables:

- The measure we fight for our interests;
- The measure we take into consideration the other's interests.

Five combinations of these two variables determine five Conflict Management Styles.

COMPETITIVE STYLE

If you have this style you focus on your interests and you totally neglect the other's interests. You are ready to win at all costs. Relationships are not important for you, just achieving your goal. Means are not important for you, just achieving your goal. You may attack the other person with criticism, put-downs, name-calling or violence.



ACCOMMODATING STYLE

This style is the opposite of the Competitive style: you focus on achieving the other's goal and totally neglect your own goal. Relations with the other party are more important than winning. You seek an agreement at almost any cost, offering concession in order to preserve (or create) a good relationship with the other side.

AVOIDING STYLE

If you have this style you have a low focus on goals as well as on relations. You avoid or pretend the conflict does not exist, even if you will not achieve your goals or will damage your relations with the other party.



COMPROMISE STYLE

If you have this style you win something from what you wanted and give up something else, by dividing and sharing. Of course, you have limits of how much you are willing to give away.

COLLABORATIVE STYLE

If you use this style you give high importance at the same time to goals and relations. Collaborative style involves full and open communication: you are attentive to the other, you are waiting to respond, and you make helpful suggestions. Is the most difficult and time-consuming approach, but has the best results if both parties use this style.



WHAT STYLE DO YOU USE MOST IN CONFLICTS?

Even if you have a personal style, you should adapt to situations, each of the styles is appropriate to be used in specific situations.

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| COMPETITIVE
S T Y L E | ● In emergency situations when quick, decisive actions are needed; |
| | ● When you have the main responsibility/expertise to solve the problems or unpopular changes need to be implemented. |
| ACCOMMODATING
S T Y L E | ● When the relations to be preserved are more important than achieving your goal; |
| | ● When the issue is more important to the other person than to you; |
| | ● When neglecting your own goals is based on your values system (you are saints); |
| | ● When you use it as a strategy of losing a battle but hoping to win the war; |
| | ● When you want others to learn by their actions and encourage them to express themselves. |
| A VOIDING
S T Y L E | ● When you ask yourself "What will happen if I do not do anything?" and if the answer is "Nothing" than probably it is worth avoiding the conflict; |
| | ● When you consider that you will loose more by confrontation than by avoidance, or the issue at stake is minor; |
| | ● When you decide to postpone the conflict because you want to gain time (in order to collect more information, or to be better prepared for the conflict situation, or to let hot emotions to cool down). |
| COMPROMISE
S T Y L E | ● When both parties have equal power; |
| | ● When you want to achieve temporary settlements in complex matters, as an intermediary steps toward a more sustainable agreement developed through cooperation; |
| COLLABORATIVE
S T Y L E | ● When is a crisis upon resources such as time, energy or other material resources that are limited and the problem to be solved is important and urgent. |
| | ● When it is important to preserve important objectives without compromising and at the same time maintaining relations; |
| | ● When it is important to get to the roots of unresolved problems that may have lingering for a long time; |
| | ● When there is a complex issue, involving many interests and many parties. |

ARE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES DETERMINING THE CONFLICTS OUTCOMES?
YES, THE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES USED BY THE PARTIES IN CONFLICT
DETERMINE THE CONFLICT OUTCOMES.

Conflict outcomes could be:

1. WIN-LOSE

Only one party achieves his/her goal, through verbal or physical fight and dominance.

2. LOSE-LOSE

Both parties avoid conflict, postpone its resolution or give up their goals.

3. WIN/LOSE-WIN/LOSE

Both parties give up something and gain something.

4. WIN-WIN

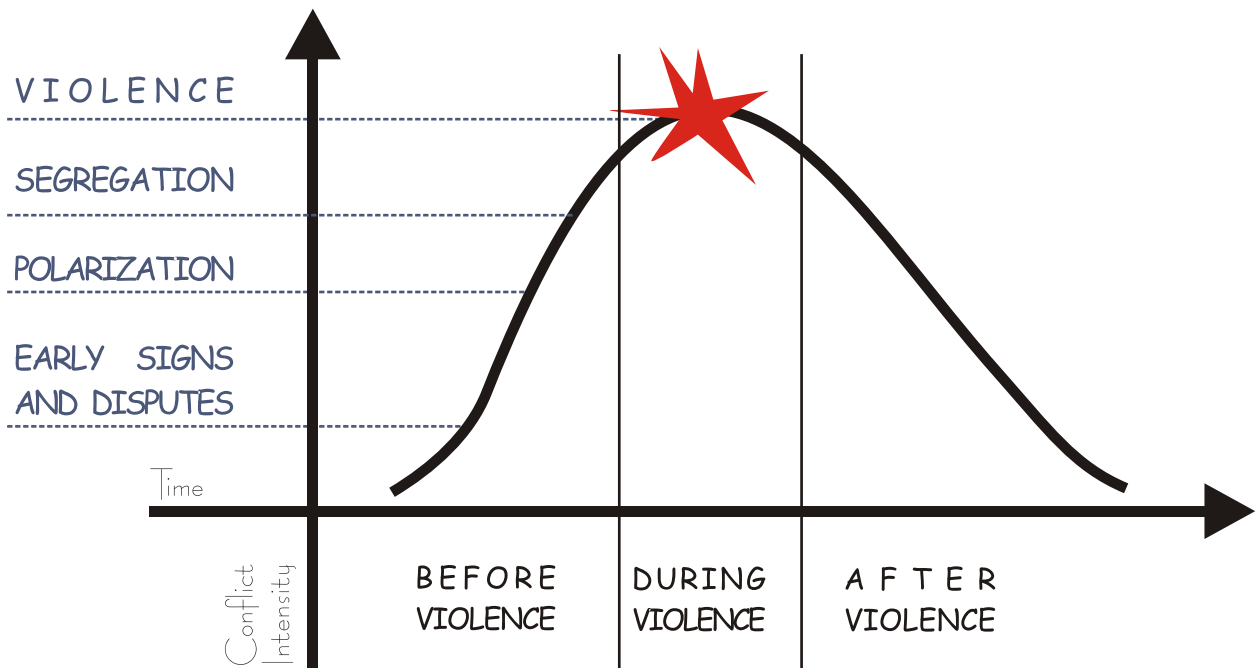
Both parties gain more than they lose, by redefining their goals and exploring new possibilities.

What styles did parties in Conflict use to achieve this type of Outcome?

1. Competitive vs. Accommodating, Competitive vs. Avoiding
2. Avoiding vs. Avoiding, Competitive vs. Competitive
3. Compromise vs. Compromise
4. Collaborative vs. Collaborative

DOES CONFLICTS HAVE A LIFE OF THEIR OWN?

YES, CONFLICTS HAVE THEIR OWN LIFE CYCLE: they are born, they may arrive at full and intense expression and they die, having inside them the seed for a new beginning.



Conflict escalates from early signs to violence much easier than de-escalates after violence occurred. Very rarely conflicts go from early stages into violent stages suddenly. They are gradually going through stages that can be recognized as steps towards violence.

The early signs are non-verbal, attitudes and behaviors that express parties' disagreements and frustrations. If parties are aware and recognize them, the issues can be discussed, clarified and solved.

If not addressed, the tension rises and parties may express verbally their feelings and positions during disputes. If parties are open to hear each other and communicate effectively, the issues can be discussed, clarified and solved.

If Conflict is not solved the tension may continue to rise.

Communication between parties becomes more difficult.

Conflict expands involving more issues and more persons or organizations that take the side of one party or the other. Parties become polarized, focused on achieving their own goals and deaf and blind toward the other's goals. They may try again to solve their dispute and sit down at the negotiation table.

If they fail to solve the conflict the situation could worsen. Parties arrive at the level of segregation, when communication is broken, and they cannot anymore talk to each other. In this stage, a third part intervener, mediator, facilitator, arbitrator or judge can help solve the conflict with peaceful means. As we move from mediation towards the judicial system the chance to improve relationships is decreasing. But at least violence is not used to achieve goals.

If peaceful means fail, the situation can get more and more tense and the conflict is heading towards violent outbreak. Extremists who are better prepared and organized to fight aggressively for their goals usually grab the leadership. Additional grievances are raised. Parties begin to view each other as less than human, thus not deserving human treatment. Dehumanization makes possible for parties to engage in violence, to hurt each other and to violate the generally accepted norms of behavior regarding one's fellow man.

IS CONFLICT THE SAME WITH VIOLENCE?

NO, CONFLICT SHOULD NOT BE CONFUSED WITH VIOLENCE, AS MANY DO IT.

Violence is only a conflict manifestation, when its intensity is the highest, emotions are strongest and rationality lowest.

Is violence in the human nature? Those who are optimists say no, it is not in the human nature, but it is present as a potential that can be activated:

- (a) If human basic needs are left unattended by cynical actors or bad structures.
- (b) If the culture glorifies violence and justifies revenge (violence as a compensation to violence).

Violence has not only **visible effects** as death and physical damages, but also **invisible effects** such as traumas, myths of glory and heroes, addiction to revenge and victory that may be more important because they influence the behavior of future generations. If nothing is done about the conflict basic causes "after violence" becomes easily "before violence".

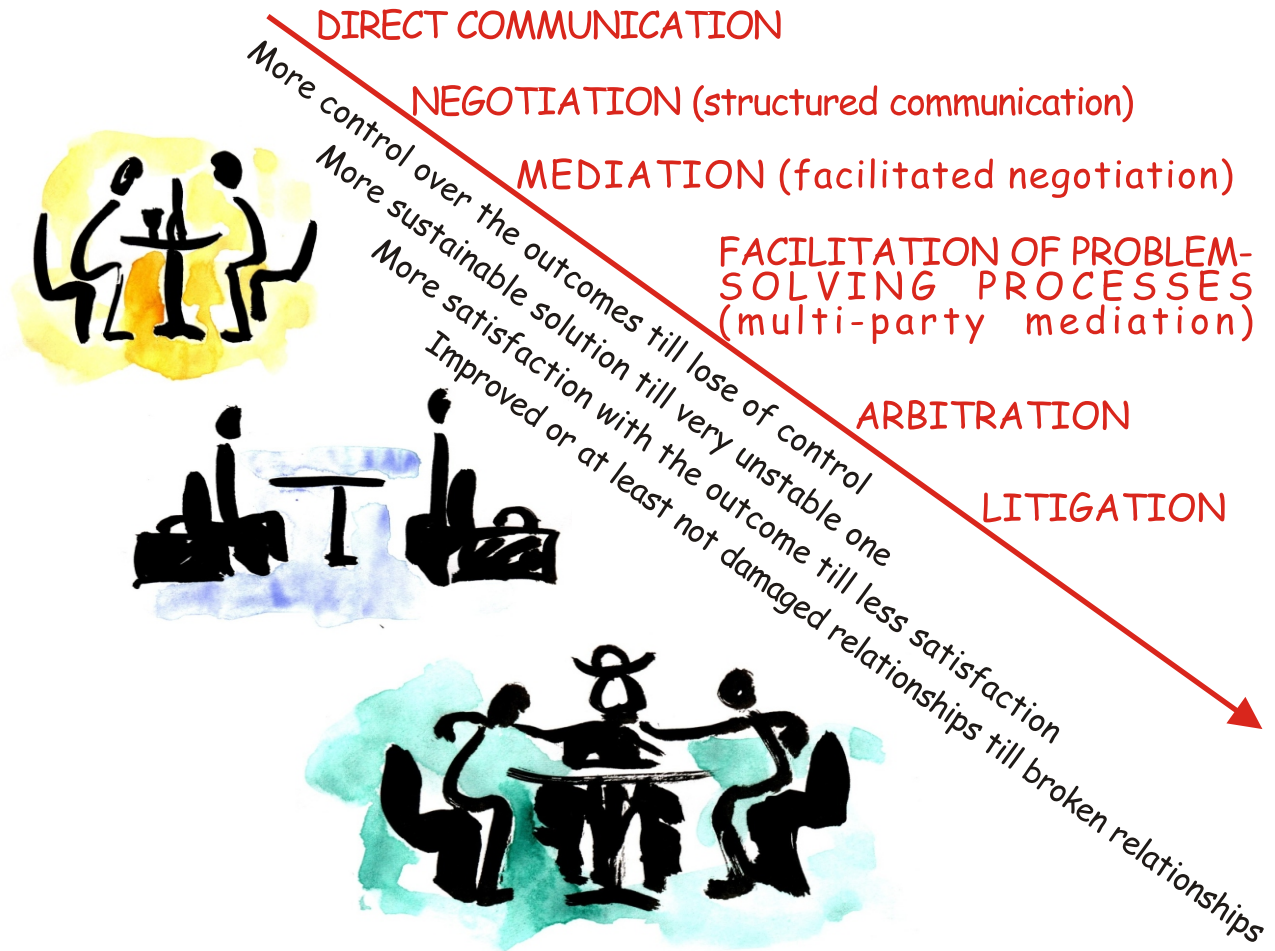
Violence can be stopped "naturally" if people run out of means of destruction, if they run out of targets to be destroyed, if they run out of willingness to destroy, if belligerents become tired and disgusted or they run out of the hope of winning.

Violence can be stopped also, more rapidly, by force: a military intervention, called peace - keeping, when an outside party put apart those in conflict and assist them in the transition from violence to peace.

CAN WE SOLVE CONFLICTS OUTSIDE THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM?

YES, WE CAN USE ALTERNATIVE (TO ARBITRATION/LITIGATION) RESOLUTION STRATEGIES TO SOLVE CONFLICTS, if parties are still willing to communicate, directly or helped by a third, neutral person.

The Alternative Resolution Strategies can be presented on a continuum from the very early stages of a conflict till the violence outburst:



IS INTER-PERSONAL COMMUNICATION PLAYING A ROLE IN SOLVING CONFLICTS?

YES, IMPROVED INTER-PERSONAL COMMUNICATION IS THE KEY TO SETTLING CONFLICTS PEACEFULLY.

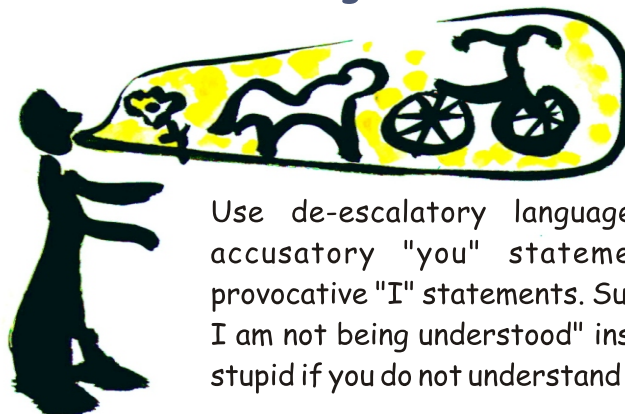
A simplified model of inter-personal communication involves two people - the Speaker and the Listener, two processes - sending and receiving, and one message.



What can you do as Speakers, the message senders, to improve your communication skills?

Know what you mean and express it clearly.

Resist the temptation to make personal attacks and accuse your opponents.



Use de-escalatory language, by replacing accusatory "you" statements with less provocative "I" statements. Such as "I feel as if I am not being understood" instead of "You are stupid if you do not understand me".

Try to express your true feelings and thoughts through an **assertive behavior**. What is assertive behavior? The assertive behavior is placed on a continuum between submissive (non-assertive behavior) and aggressive behavior. People who behave submissively demonstrate a lack of respect for their own needs and rights. Aggressive persons express their feelings, needs and ideas at the expense of others. Assertive persons, while meeting own needs do not violate the needs of others. Most animals defend their space and their lives by fight (aggressiveness) or flight (submissiveness). Only humans have the third option of verbal confrontation through assertive messages.

What can you do as Listeners, the message receivers, to improve your communication skills?

- Be a good listener. Listening is more than merely hearing with your ears. As one little girl, looking up to her father, who was reading the newspaper, said: "Daddy, you have to listen to me with your eyes as well as your ears!" When listening look at the message meanings behind the words you hear, use your eyes to observe and understand the messages of the body gestures, the tone of the voice, the face expressions.
- Apply active listening techniques:

Basic acknowledgements including verbal and non-verbal signs and sounds that let the speaker know you are listening with interest and respect.

Attentive Silence - keep silent even if it is difficult, but when you succeed to do it, usually you are able to find out more information from the speaker.

Questions - use open-ended questions that are preferable to close-ended questions, because they are providing opportunities for the speaker to open up.

Paraphrasing is a tool that you may use to summarize, to clarify or to confirm if you, as listener, have understood correctly what was said. Paraphrasing is focused on the speaker's content. "Excuse me, but let me see if I understand what you are saying..."

Mirroring involves reflecting back to the speaker in succinct statements the emotions he/she is communicating.

Reflecting meanings - once you know how to reflect feelings and content separately it is relatively easy to put the two together into a statement that reflects the entire meaning.

Summative reflection is a brief restatement of the main themes and feelings the speaker expressed over a longer period of discussions.



ARE THERE MORE WAYS TO NEGOTIATE?

YES, THEORIES HAVE IDENTIFIED TWO BASIC APPROACHES to manage conflicts: through competition and through collaboration. These are the same two approaches available to us in negotiation as well.

Competitive negotiation is a process of win-lose bargaining with compromise or impasse as the likely outcomes.

Collaborative negotiation is a win-win process where people constructively deal with their differences focusing on satisfying the needs of both sides.

What is important is that you understand the consequences of your strategic decision when answering the question: "Should I approach the negotiation in a competitive or collaborative way?" Research has shown that **COLLABORATION IS LEADING TO MORE COLLABORATION AND COMPETITION TOWARDS MORE COMPETITION.**

Using a collaborative strategy can look very simple, but in fact is very complex and difficult to master. Collaborative negotiation - or principled negotiation - has as outcome a good agreement.

How can be described a good agreement?



Wise: satisfies the parties interests, in a fair and long lasting way.

Efficient: takes less time and effort to reach it.

Improves, or at least not damages, parties relationships.

In order to reach a good agreement, the negotiation process should follow **4 PRINCIPLES**:



Separate the people from the issues: separate people's problems from substantive ones.

Focus on interests rather than positions: find the real problems under apparent solutions.



Generate a variety of options before settling an agreement: look at alternative solutions to the same problem.



Insist that the agreement is based on objective criteria: find objective criteria to take any decisions, from identifying the real and priority problems, till selecting the best solution.



CAN WE ASK FOR HELP TO SOLVE OUR CONFLICT?

YES, YOU CAN, BY ASKING A THIRD, NEUTRAL PARTY TO MEDIATE YOUR CONFLICT.

WHAT IS MEDIATION?

It is a structured negotiation process, facilitated by the mediator.

The mediator assists those involved in conflict to break the cycle of blame and stop fighting with each other, helps them communicate better, helps them identify their needs and work together to develop a solution that meets those needs. Unlike a judge or an arbitrator, the mediator does not make decisions for the parties involved and does not assign blame or fault.

THE MEDIATOR'S JOB IS TO:

- Get the parties to agree to mediation.
- Create an appropriate climate by the set up of the room and of behavior ground rules.
- Find out what happened, listening carefully to each party.
- Encourage parties to carefully listen to each other, talk one at a time, and help them understand the perspective of the other.
- Help parties identify their needs and find solutions that work for all sides.

THE MEDIATION PROCESS IS:

CONFIDENTIAL - the mediator can not be called to testify in the court and all the information remains between parties involved.

VOLUNTARY - mediation only happens if parties understand the process and the mediator role and agree to participate.

EFFICIENT - the mediation process is less time and money consuming, compared to litigation or to continued fighting.

EMPOWERING PARTIES - disputants can discuss whatever issues they consider to be relevant, without having the fear that the content will be judged; they have control over the decision-making process and do not face the risk of a decision that is made without their consent.

INFORMAL - parties can discuss and express their ideas and feelings in an informal and confidential setting.

CONSTRUCTIVE - parties increase their chances to fix or improve their relationship, in contrast with litigation that ends in blame and hostile feelings, damaging relationships.

SUSTAINABLE - agreements are in most cases implemented by the parties who developed and own them.



CAN SOMEBODY HELP US OVERCOME CONFLICTS WHEN WORKING TOGETHER?

YES, WE CAN SOLVE OUR PROBLEMS PEACEFULLY THROUGH FACILITATED PROBLEM SOLVING PROCESSES, **that avoid the use of power and coercion**, and those involved can identify the sources of conflicts and develop solutions to the satisfaction of all parties.

WHAT IS A FACILITATOR?

The facilitator is a neutral person, without the authority to take decisions, accepted by all group members, who help the group be effective in identifying and solving problems, taking decisions and achieving a task.

WHAT IS A FACILITATOR DOING?

The facilitator role is very similar to the role of mediator. The facilitator channels the collective effort, helping group members overcome the obstacles during their working together, by:

IMPROVED COMMUNICATION: the facilitator creates an environment that fosters communication among parties, an atmosphere in which everyone feel free to express their points of view, their needs and their concerns, without offending the others.

EFFECTIVE DECISION-MAKING: the facilitator helps parties take group decisions by assuring that everyone's ideas and concerns have been heard and that all can live with the decisions made.

LOGICAL PROBLEM SOLVING: the facilitator proposes and agrees with parties on the sequence of the steps to be taken towards achieving their goal, and monitors the progress, maintaining the focus on the agreed agenda.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF USING A FACILITATOR FOR THE PROBLEM SOLVING PROCESS?

The facilitator helps:

Develop trust and improve relations among group members:

- Encourages diversity and tolerance;
- Assures all group members participation;
- Motivates group members.

Enhance group work effectiveness in solving complex problems by:

- Building common understanding about the problem;
- Improving group decision quality;
- Developing a creative solution, accepted by all group members;
- Clarifying each member responsibilities.



Skill-building training can improve communications abilities. Reading this handout may improve your understanding and knowledge of the main concepts. But only reading will not improve your communication skills. You have to "learn by doing" in a skill building Training Program.

It is our experience that a high level of communication effectiveness can be reached only through intensive and well-designed training programs. We encourage you to be critical when selecting the communication training you want to attend. The training program should really address your needs through a demand-driven and client-centered design and delivery.

If you want to know more about our Training Programs that are designed to improve your communication skills described in this handbook please feel free to contact us at:

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