**Chapter Two**

**Communication Options in Conflict**

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter identifies the choices we can make in conflict situations. Just as there are many different types of conflicts and kinds of conflict issues, so there are different ways that we can respond to conflicts. Many people do not realize that they have options and can freely choose among them, with differing results. Our first response in a conflict situation is not necessarily the best one. We need to slow down, think about the situation, and then respond to the other, using the skills discussed in this chapter. The only way to develop conflict skills is to use them in conflict situations.

**Learning Objectives**

At the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

● Define and give examples of intangible conflict issues.

● Distinguish among behavioral, personality, and relationship issues.

● List the steps in the dysfunctional cycles, namely avoidance/accommodation. competition, and passive-aggressive conflict communication.

● List the steps in the functional cycles, namely compromise and collaboration conflict communication.

● Describe the differences between compromise and collaboration.

● Explain the three factors you should consider when choosing among the five conflict communication options.

● Describe the three primary considerations that should influence your choice of a conflict communication option.

● Explain the advantages of collaboration.

**Key Terms**

**accommodating** occurs when at least one person smoothes over a conflict, gives in to the other, obliges the other, and doesn’t make waves.

**avoidance** occurs in a conflict situation when one or both parties do not address the issue at all.

**behavioral issues** concern observable specific and individual behaviors such as the way we handle money, time, space, and so on.

**collaboration** occurs when both parties work together to develop a mutually satisfying outcome or agreement.

**communication apprehension** refers to the level of anxiety a person feels in response to interpersonal, group, or public communication situations.

**communication considerations** refer to three aspects of the conflict situation--the occasion, the other person, and your needs--that should guide the way we choose to react to the situation.

**competitive conflict escalation cycle** means that the conflict bogs down in the differentiation stage when competitive interests lead to divergence rather than integration, and often gets out of hand.

**compromising** occurs when no one totally wins or loses, each getting something (perhaps) of what she or he wanted.

**conflict communication options** consist of functional and dysfunctional conflict cycles.

**conflict issues** are the focal point of the conflict, the “trigger” that people point to when they are asked what the conflict was about.

**confrontation avoidance/accommodation cycle** is characteristic of those people whose first impulse is to avoid initiating conflict or to quickly withdraw when conflicts arise; in this pattern, avoidance generally creates negative outcomes, which in turn lead to future avoidance.

**gunny-sacking** is storing up hurts and anger until one can’t take it anymore and one erupts, often becomes verbally abusive, and perhaps turns violent.

**intangible conflict issues** do not involve hard, physical, or observable assets. they center on love, attention, cooperative and beneficial behaviors, respect, power, self-esteem, and caring, as opposed to hard, physical or observable assets.

**passive-aggressive communication** is the ability to impose one’s will on others through the use of verbal and/or nonverbal acts that appear to avoid an open conflict or accommodate to the desires of others, but in actuality are carried out with the intention (or perceived intention) of inflicting physical and/or psychological pain, injury, or suffering.

**personality issue** focuses on a whole constellation of behaviors such as being dominating, introverted, selfish, lazy, or overachieving.

**personal stress** occurs within a person and refers to wear and tear on one emotionally and physically.

**relationship issues** involve rules, norms, and boundaries that partners have tacitly or overtly agreed on.

**relationship stress** occurs outside the individual and refers to wear and tear on a relationship.

**schismogenesis** occurs when the behaviors of one person intensify the behaviors of another person. This is experienced as an escalation of the conflict.

**scripts** are routinized events that we perform with little deviation each time we do them.

**Undesired Repetitive Pattern (URP)** is an automatic, “knee-jerk” response to one another:

Something one says triggers an automatic response in the other, and the episode quickly escalates out of control.

**Chapter Outline**

**[Objective #1: Define and give examples of intangible conflict issues.]**

I. Intangible Issues

A. Conflicts over intangible issues do not involve hard, physical, or observable assets

1. They center on love, attention, cooperative and beneficial behaviors, respect, power, self-esteem, and caring

2. Conflicts over issues that are intangible, and, thus, not truly scarce resources (even though conflicting parties may think otherwise)

**[Objective #2: Distinguish among behavioral, personality, and relationship issues. ]**

B. Types of Intangible Issues

1. Personality issue conflicts focus on a whole constellation of behaviors such as being dominating, introverted, selfish, or achievement oriented

2. Conflicts over relationship issues involve rules, norms, and boundaries that partners have tacitly or overtly agreed on

3. Behavioral issues concern specific and individual behaviors such as the way we handle money, time, space, and so on.

II. Conflict Communication Options

**[Objective #3: List the steps in the dysfunctional cycles, namely**

**avoidance/accommodation, competitive, and passive-aggressive conflict**

**communication.] See the text for specific steps for each cycle.**

A. Dysfunctional Conflict Cycles

1. Avoiding/Accommodating Conflict Communication

2. Competitive Conflict Communication

3. Passive-Aggressive Communication

**[Objective #4: List the steps in the functional cycles, namely compromise and**

**collaboration conflict communication. ] See the text for specific steps for each cycle.**

**[Objective #5: Describe the differences between compromise and collaboration.]**

**See the text for specific differences.**

B. Functional Conflict Cycles

1. Compromising Conflict Communication

2. Collaborating Conflict Communication

C. Collaboration: The Preferred Strategy

1. Low Personal and Relationship Stress

2. High Personal and Relationship Growth and Satisfaction

D. Enacting Collaboration

1. Clarification of Perspectives

2. Rigid Goal but Flexible Means

3. Developing Mutual Understanding

4. Implementation of a Mutual Understanding

**[Objective #6: Explain the advantages of collaboration. ]**

E. Advantages of Collaboration

1. It is less competitive.

2. It features mutual learning and fact finding.

3. It allows for exploration of differences in underlying values.

4. It resembles principled negotiation, focusing on interests rather than positions.

5. It allocates the responsibility for implementation across many parties.

6. Its conclusions are generated by participants through an interactive, iterative, and reflexive process.

7. It is often an ongoing process.

8. It has the potential to build individual and community capacity in such arenas as conflict management, leadership, decision making, and communication

**[Objective #7: Explain the three factors you should consider when choosing among the**

**five conflict communication options. ]**

F. Communication Considerations: Choosing the Appropriate Communication Option

1. The Occasion (Including Time and Location)

2. The Other Person

3. Your Needs