



Conflict in the Lab: Concepts and Tools for Managing Interpersonal Conflict

**Columbia University
Ombuds Office**

**Joan C. Waters
University Ombuds Officer**

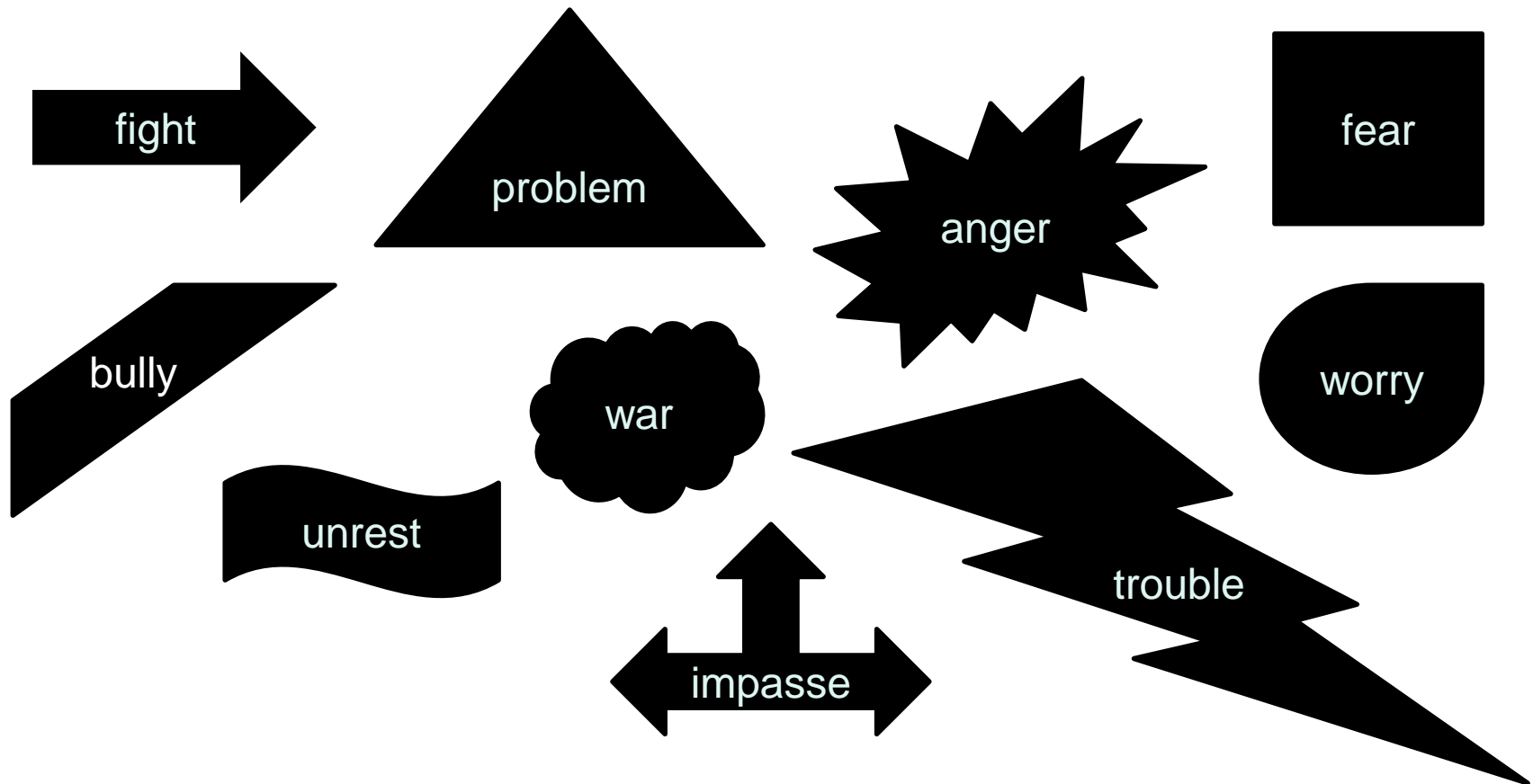
WHAT IS CONFLICT?

When you think about conflict, what words come to mind?



WHAT IS CONFLICT?

NEGATIVE CONCEPTS



WHAT IS CONFLICT?

POSITIVE CONCEPTS

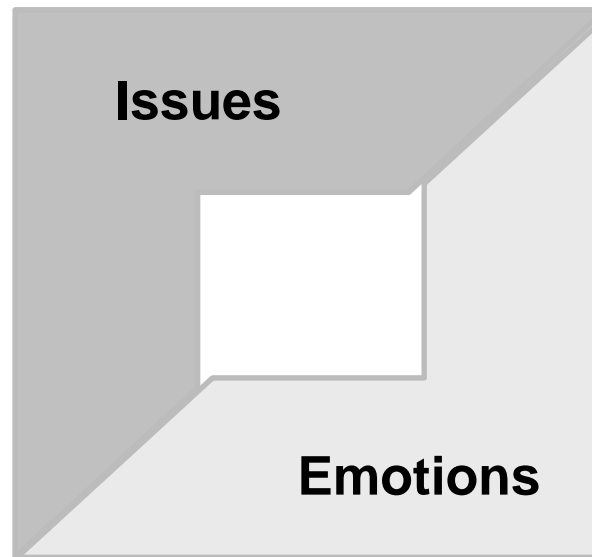
opportunity

growth

change

WHAT IS CONFLICT?

Most conflicts have two dimensions:



Conflict is a struggle between two (or more) parties who perceive their goals as incompatible.

UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT

Conflict is sparked by any number of contrasts –
and sustained and flamed by many more

Diversity	Of thought, identity or experience
Needs	Confusion of needs and wants
Perceptions	Different perceptions or misperceptions
Power	Imbalance of power or exertion of power
Values and Principles	Can be strongly held, easily abandoned, unclear or unexpressed
Feelings and Emotions	Express or suppressed
Internal Conflicts	Inexplicable behavior caused by conflict of internal values

ADDRESSING CONFLICT

Think about a conflict that you have experienced...



At work

At home

On the subway

In a store

ADDRESSING CONFLICT

Often...

- ***Stakes are high***
- ***Opinions vary***
- ***Emotions run high***

LEVELS OF CONFLICT MODEL

Level	Major Objective or Motive	Key Assumption	Role of Third Party	Emotional Climate	Negotiation Style
1. Problems	Solve the problem	We can work it out	Advisor/facilitator	Hope	Open, direct, clear and non-distorted communication; common interests recognized
2. Disagreements	Self-protection	Compromise is necessary	Enabler/mediator	Uncertainty	Cautious sharing; vague, general language; calculation beginning
3. Competition	Winning	Not enough resources to go around	Arbiter/judge	Frustration and resentment	Strategic manipulation; distorted communication; personal attacks begin; no one wants to be first to change
4. Fight/Flight	Hurting the other	Neither party can/will change. Neither individual sees a need to change their views	Partisan/ally	Antagonism and alienation	Verbal/nonverbal incongruity; blame perceptual distortions evident; refusal to take responsibility
5. War	Eliminating the other	Costs of withdrawal greater than staying	Rescuer/intruder	Hopelessness and revenge	Emotional volatility; no clear understanding of issues, self-righteous; compulsive; inability to disengage

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ADDRESSING CONFLICT

**The interactions that come next,
the attempts to resolve the conflict –
are crucial**

WORDS TO LIVE BY

“**Speak** when you are **angry**
and you will make the **best**
speech you will ever **regret**.”

~Ambrose Bierce

WHAT IS YOUR CONFLICT RESOLUTION STYLE?

Avoidance?

I try to stay away from situations that might be confrontational

Competition?

I use whatever tactics are necessary to win

Accommodation?

I tend to smooth things over for the sake of the relationship

Cooperation?

My goal is to find a solution where both sides win

ADDRESSING CONFLICT

You Can:

- Avoid the conflict
- Have a conversation and handle it badly
- Have a conversation and handle it well

BE STRATEGIC

Be strategic regarding...

- What you say,
- How you say it,
- When you say it,
- Who you say it to,
- Who is present when you say it.

RULES TO LIVE BY

- Be Objective
- Be Specific
- Be Accurate
- Be Careful to select the right mode of communication
- Be Mindful of your principles/institution mission
- Be Smart about recordkeeping
- Be Curious

REMOVING EMOTION TO RESOLVE CONFLICT

Recognizing the Bait and Avoiding the Hook

“Are you an idiot? You know better than to leave chemicals in the break room fridge. Now, I have OSHA coming to the lab and it’s all your fault.”

Your goal is to remain cool, gain or maintain emotional control.

Be assertive, not aggressive. Do not demean or insult.

Stand up for yourself without putting anybody else down.

**You can’t control what other people do; you can control what you do.
Don’t let difficult people control you.**

A key to effective communication is controlling emotion.

REMOVING EMOTION TO RESOLVE CONFLICT

Strategies for Avoiding Emotional Minefields

Sorting

Ignoring emotionally charged words

Fogging

Stating a vague acknowledgement

Time Out

Stating a specific time in the future to continue the conversation

Broken Record

Calmly repeating your point

Requesting

Using an “I” statement to express your wants/needs/preference

Flushing

Responding to what is said, not what is meant

REMOVING EMOTION TO RESOLVE CONFLICT

“Are you an idiot? You know better than to leave chemicals in the break room fridge. Now, I have OSHA coming to the lab and it’s all your fault.”

I understand your frustration. It was an emergency and I can explain why it happened either now or later. How can I help you get ready for the OSHA visit?

REMOVING EMOTION TO RESOLVE CONFLICT

GOALS:

Maintain emotional self control during conflict

Remain assertive and not aggressive under pressure

Take responsibility for your actions and responses

INEFFECTIVE

She made me angry

He upset me

They humiliated me

He insulted me

She manipulated me

EFFECTIVE

I became angry

I was upset

I felt humiliated

I took it as an insult

I fell for her manipulation

CONSISTENT COMMUNICATION

Be consistent in your statements:

ACTION:

OUTCOME:

*Since you forgot to include the data tables,
our grant was returned as incomplete.*

SOLUTION:

*Please update the application and
notify the PI.*

REDUCING CONFLICT IN THE LAB



Think about areas of
conflict in your lab.

REDUCING CONFLICT IN THE LAB

Have you explicitly discussed any of these issues?

- **Lab Goals and Mission**
- **Communication within the Lab**
 - with the PI
 - among peers
 - with staff
- **Works Habits and Lab Hours**
 - Hours of the PI
 - Hours for the lab members
 - Time away from the lab
 - Vacations
 - Emergency
 - Travel
- **Behavior in the Lab**
 - Authorship/Ownership
 - Evaluations
 - Use of lab materials

CLARIFYING QUESTIONS FOR DIFFERENCES OF OPINION

Ask:

- What makes you think that?
- What led you to this conclusion?
- Have you considered ...
- May I make another suggestion?

Say:

- I appreciate having the opportunity to further explore this issue with you.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER:

CONVERSATION STARTERS

To clarify a point or to get your perspective heard

- Following yesterday's conversation, I want to make sure you understand my point of view.

Buying time

- Thanks for your feedback. Can I take some time to think this over and schedule a meeting to continue this conversation?

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER:

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Cooperation in a Team

- I asked for this meeting today so we can find a solution to our issues that can meet both our needs.
- Our roles require us to work together. Some important areas for me to be able to work with you are:

[getting updated on ____].

[sharing information such as ____].

[responding positively to requests for help].

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER:

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Scheduling Feedback/One-on-One Time

- I know you're very busy, however, if I can check in with you more regularly, I think we can be more [*productive*] [*effective*] [*responsive*] [*successful*].
- Sometimes, I need your input and I don't know how best to reach you.
- Can we agree on a process to connect each week to review upcoming issues?

Expressing Concerns About Inclusion

- Not being included in the [*meeting*] [*decision*] [*process*] gives me the impression that you don't [*trust*] [*value*] my [*input*] [*contribution*]. I'd like to discuss this so we can avoid this situation in the future.
- This is difficult for me to raise and while [] may not be intentional, this is very upsetting to me.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: CONVERSATION STARTERS

Issues Relating to Too Many High Priorities

“I know we are under a lot of pressure right now to get results. However...”

“...I am not sure what are my top priorities.”

“...there seems to be a conflict in priorities.”

“Can you tell me...”

“...what is the ranking of importance?”

“...what do you see as the most important?”

“May I send you an email confirming this understanding?”

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER:

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Relating to Evaluation

- If you have negative feedback about my performance, please give it to me privately.
- I would like to improve my performance but comments like that give me no direction.
- I would like to know specific ways I can improve.
- I really value my role/position/work and want to be successful. That's why I need to discuss _____.
- I appreciate your time. I have a few issues I want to raise because I feel they are interfering with my ability to do a good job.
- I have three issues I am eager to resolve with you.
- I hear what you're saying and respect your point of view. However, I see it a little differently. May I share my perspective?

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER:

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Dealing With A Disruptive Co-Worker

- **I'm not sure if you're aware of this but...**

[your voice is loud] **and I am distracted by your conversations.**

[your lunches smell very strong] **and it's hard to concentrate.**

[the sound of your music is] **loud and distracting.**

- **Sometimes, I think you may not be aware that you're abrupt with people. Let me share some specifics...**
- **This is very difficult for me, but I need to speak to you ...**

[I saw an email you wrote that disturbed me].

[I received a message from you that is inaccurate].

[It has come to my attention that ...].

SUGGESTED READINGS

- Resolving Conflicts at Work: Ten Strategies for Everyone on the Job (Kenneth Cloke and Joan Goldsmith)
- Dealing with People You Can't Stand: How to Bring Out the Best in People at Their Worst (Dr. Rick Brinkman and Dr. Rick Kirschner)
- Impossible to Please: How to Deal with Perfectionist Coworkers, Controlling Spouses, and Other Incredibly Critical People (Neil J. Lavender, PhD and Alan A. Cavaiola, PhD)
- It's All Your Fault At Work: Managing Narcissists and Other High-Conflict People (Bill Eddy and L. Georgi DiStefano)
- Giving Voice to Values: How to Speak Your Mind When You Know What's Right (Mary C. Gentile)
- Working with You is Killing Me: Freeing Yourself from Emotional Traps at Work (Katherine Crowley and Kathi Elster)
- The Conflict Paradox: Seven Dilemmas at the Core of Disputes (Bernard Mayer)

COMMUNICATING TO REDUCE CONFLICT

Ombuds Office “Welcome to My Lab” Letter Sample

[Sample Welcome to My Lab Letter](#)

Some Labs/PI’s create “Welcome to My Lab” Letters

These sample NIH letters – created by the PI’s and vetted by the NIH – address many of the topics we have discussed. They are examples of how to articulate expectations clearly from the outset.

[Sample Lab Letter #1](#)

[Sample Lab Letter #2](#)

[Sample Lab Letter #3](#)

Sample ‘Lab Rules’ Written by Lab Post Docs and Graduate Students

This is an example of a “tongue-in-cheek” set of rules created by graduate students and post-docs and sanctioned and embraced by the PI – addressing many of the same topics.

[Sample Kalueff Lab Rules 2010](#)

RESOURCES

Conflict Resolution Resources

OMBUDS Office

660 Schermerhorn Extension

ombuds.columbia.edu

ombuds@columbia.edu

212-854-1234

