What is conflict and how does it affect group communication?

Definition
- An expressed struggle between...
- at least two interdependent parties
- who perceive
  - incompatible goals
  - scarce resources, and
  - interference from the other party in achieving those goals

Hocker & Wilmot (1995)

Remember Group Tension
- **Primary** tension - Uneasiness and discomfort in:
  - Getting acquainted, and
  - Managing group uncertainty about:
    - The group task
    - Group relationships
- **Secondary** tension – Occurs as group members:
  - Struggle for influence
  - Develop roles and norms
  - Explore differences in approaching the group task

When is conflict likely to occur?
Conflict Myths

• Can always be avoided
• Is always due to misunderstandings
• Is always a sign of a poor interpersonal relationship
• Can always be resolved
• Is always bad

Benefits of Conflict

• Focuses attention on problems requiring solving
• Clarifies potential changes
• Identifies important issues to involved parties
  • You learn about you and your values (and your partner and his/her values)
• Keeps relationships interesting
• Strengthens relationships when conflict management attempts are successful

Types of Conflict

• **Intrapersonal vs. Interpersonal** Conflict – conflict within yourself vs. conflict between people.
• **Intragroup vs. Intergroup** Conflict – conflict within a group vs. conflict between groups.
• **Pseudo** Conflict – lack of understanding (AKA “false” conflict)
• **Simple** Conflict – real differences in ideas, definitions, perceptions, and goals
• **Ego** Conflict – the focus is on the person, not the behavior or the issue
Minimizing Pseudo Conflict

- Ask what others mean
- Establish supportive climate
- Actively listen

Substance of Conflict

- **Perceived** scarce resources
  - Information, time, etc.
- Diverse backgrounds
  - Values, abilities/experience/knowledge
  - Power imbalances
- Varying orientations to task accomplishment
  - Definitions of subject, process, commitment
  - Conflicts of interest
- Competitive group climate and/or defensive communication patterns
  - Self-centered disruptive roles

Styles/Tactics

- Conflict styles: Patterned responses
- Tactics: individual moves
- We tend to rely upon one or two conflict styles
  
  "If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail.”
  
  – Abraham Maslow
Five basic conflict styles

- **Competition (win/lose)**
- **Accommodation (lose/win)**
- **Avoidance (lose/lose)**
- **Compromise (win/lose, lose/win, lose/lose)**
- **Collaboration (win/win)**

**Styles & Tactics Matrix**

- **Concern for OWN Needs & Goals Being Met**
  - Low
  - High
- **Concern for OTHER’S Needs & Goals Being Met**
  - Low
  - High

**Difference between Compromise & Collaboration**

- **Compromise**
  - Focuses on *positions*
  - Each side gives up something important (not always 50/50)
  - Come in with a specific solution in mind
  - Often involves “turn taking” in solutions

- **Collaboration**
  - Focuses on *interests*
  - Both work together to help address each other’s interests
  - Create a mutual solution
  - Often simultaneous activity in solutions
Principled Negotiation

- **People**: Separate the People from the Problem
- **Interests**: Focus on Shared Interests, not Positions
- **Options**: Generate a variety of possibilities before deciding what to do
- **Criteria**: Base decisions on Objective Standards

R. Fisher & Ury, 1981

Additional Elements

- Strive to be **Unconditionally Constructive**
  - Make choices/take actions that benefit both you and the other parties … regardless of whether the other parties reciprocate
- Know your **BATNA**
  - Best
  - Alternative
  - To a
  - Negotiated
  - Agreement

How to Work a “Win-Win”

- Identify your problem & unmet needs
- Make a date to discuss it
- Describe your problem & needs
- Consider the other person’s point of view
- Negotiate a solution
- Follow up on a solution