The Suchness of Conflict and How to Have a Handle on Resolving Conflict in Team

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I focus on conflict within **small group** (not within of the chaotic world, nevertheless I will apply Buddhist approach ti resolve the root of conflict in the final part of this paper). The exact purpose of small groups can vary, but usually a group's main goal is either to resolve some sort of issue, or to produce some sort of output. In this context, conflict can play one of two roles, It can be a disruptive, negative the cause arguing, taking sides, and even fighting among group members. But conflict can also spark innovation and **"out of the box"** thinking. As a positive force, conflict can "stimulate change, motivate problem solving activity, and compel the group to focus, think through, and articulate a problem clearly and logically" (Laber, 1997). Thus conflict can either result in groups being more productive and more successful, or it can create a hostile environment where trust is gone and productivity is low. But what causes conflict, and how can it be manipulated towards the more positive outcomes?

This is on clear source for conflict; it is very situational. For example, Fisher (1980) identifies **doubt as the main source of conflict.** Whether it is the relevance of the information presented, or the way in which a group handles and collects this information, individuals can and will question its importance or role in the group process. But there is a more human element that is missing from this source. Sometime, lict icause by human emotions such as envy or greed (Simmel, 1955). These emotions may result in conflict that is unrelated to the task at hand. For example, the leadership structure of a group can be a source of conflict because an individual does not think the people in the leadership roles are competent (Patton & Giffin, 1978). In summary, source of conflict may come from many different individual, **group, or organizational factors** (Dace, 1992). Though the source can be ambiguous, recognizing the source can help in dealing with the conflict in a productive manner.

Responses to conflict can vary. Negative responses to conflict including to antagonizing other members, withdrawing from the group, or eve berating other group members (Bales, 1950). This action are usually a result of members who voice concerns and disagreements in a manner that is seen as hostile or offensive. These responses in turn, cause other group members to become overly hostile, embarrassed, and anxious. Members that become emotionally involved can personalize the conflict, making it harder to concentrate on the issue (Patton & Giffin. 1978). Taking issues personally brings discussions beyond the informational level to a level where individuals may feel threatened or inferior (Kowitz & Knutson, 1980). They feel that they must fight for their points so not to lose credibility, thereby closing out other people's opinions and alternate course of action. As a result. Individuals become less willing to participate in a constructive manner, and the group becomes polarized. It becomes bogged down in power struggles, taking sides, and other conflict issues that waste time and resources that should be used to achieve group goals.

As conflict escalates, the effectiveness and productiveness of group members typically lowers. Leaders and members of the group are resigned to manage the disruptive conflict instead of proceeding forward (Laber, 1997). Group members may begin to make decisions that are more centered to avoid conflict than to effectively address the issues at hand. Final decisions go from the criteria of being "the best way that placates those disruptive individuals." Group meeting may begin to look more like group therapy sessions. However, as disruptive as conflict can be, it is not inherently bad. *When approached correctly in a respectful, informational manner, conflict can actually be very beneficial to groups.*

If groups never disagreed, why would they even be necessary? This question points to the fact that issues raised in groups are what makes a group effectively, As Robert Laber states, conflict "makes committee participants aware of an issue's inherent problems and implications" (Laber, 1997). Without

conflict, the groups may suffer from "groupthink" and resulting decisions could suffer from bias and suppress important relevant issues. By raising concerns and differences, group members seek more discussion which will bring more information, more ideas, and more opinions to the group process. The information generation that conflict can bring is a huge benefit for the group process (Kowitz & Knutson, 1980).

Another effect conflict may have that can be either positive or negative is the observation that "group members tend to concentrate greater on those issues (subject of conflict) in order to bring about solutions" (Fisher, 1980). What this observation is stating is that conflict can actually cause more work and more concentration to be done on particular issues. This can be a positive factor because more areas of the issue can be addressed and the resolution can be very complete. However, if the issue is not important, or the amount of time to complete the resolution is outrageously long, then the conflict has caused a waste of a very valuable resource, time, that could have been used on other issues.

The working definition of conflict must be general enough to identify both its good and bad aspect. The following is the working definition of conflict the will be used in my paper:

Conflict: and instance in group interaction where the differences in beliefs or attitudes or actions come to light. These instances can be brought in both constructive and negative ways. Problems with technology and other materials could also be classified as instances of conflict.

In particular, my paper focuses on instances of conflict that emerge due to differences regarding **work goals and technology** used to achieve work goals, which commonly found in our workplace.

The Nature of conflict

The focus of my paper is examining conflict within a small group. as opposed to within and individual or between groups. Though individual conflict can give rise to intra-group conflict, I will focus on individual personalities of group members. As stated before. The focus is hoe the individual acts as a member of the group

Many researches on conflict indicates that in a problem solving group. several different types of conflict may emerge. One type is **procedural conflict.** There may be debate on how exactly to implement the strategy, and/or the steps required. The disagreement that emerges from the discussion of strategy to solve the problem is procedural conflict (Kowitz & Knutson, 1980). An example is a discussion on how to catty out individual tasks. For examples, if one member is attempting to measure something and there is a constant debate on whether the task is being done correctly, that is an example of procedural conflict. An important distinction of this type of conflict is its focus on the **strategy around the task,** not on the information discovered while completing the task. That type of conflict will be designated as informational.

Information conflict "occurs substances of group discussion" (Kowitz & Knutson, 1980). As opposed to procedural conflict, informational conflict is when the group members disagree about the content of information that emerges during their work. For example, if the two managers both get different measurements for the same outcomes of working performance, they are having a disagreement about a fact (the actual measurements of the performance). Informational conflict, though, is not limited to hard facts. Disagreements about interpretations and opinions based on the data collected are also classified as informational.

Sometimes, conflict can be classified as just plain irrelevant. When personalities are attacked or discussions become derogatory, relationship conflict has appeared. This type of conflict is classified and usually the result of some personality clash, or because of other external factors. An example would be a participant lashing out at a partner because they are taking too long to accomplish a task. The big difference between relationship conflict and the previous two is that its contribution to the team is always negative. No new ideas or new approaches will come out of relationship conflict, **only fighting and argument.**

The fourth type of conflict is specifically outlined for this paper. This conflict is known as **technology conflict.** Technology is use quite extensively in our environment. The use of Microsoft's NetMeeting, Microsoft Word, telephones, and cameras are all examples of technology used. The two ways conflict can occur with technology can either be from not knowing how to properly use the technology, or the technology stops working. This type of conflict can be recognized by extensively questioning how to use a piece of technology, or by the need for outside help to resolve problems, Because of the dependence on technology, the amount of technology conflict could be a significant factor on the group's success

Conflict Configuration

Now that conflict has been defined, a closer examination of the conflict interaction process is necessary. In their article "Phases of Conflict in Small Group Development," Ellis and Fisher (1975) describe three phased of conflict interaction.

The first phase is described as **the interpersonal conflict phase**. This phase "results from individual differences among the personalities of the group still view themselves as individual members as opposed to a member of a team. Because of this individual outlook and the fact it is still early in the group process, this phase may include procedural conflict as the strategy for completing the group's goal, e.g., a natural science experiment, begins to form. If individuals become apprehensive, or do not start to integrate into the group process, relationship conflict could also emerge. If group members get bogged down in managing relationship conflict, then group members won't get that sense of unity that is needed to succeed. As Patton and Giffin (1978) states, "only when members feel comfortable can conflict safely emerge".

The confrontation conflict phase is identified by an increased level of interaction and the testing of ideas (Ellis & Fisher, 1975). The members start feeling more like a group and they start "buying in" to the idea that the process can work (Fisher, 1980). This phase signals the beginning of really getting into the task the group is assigned to do. Procedural conflict may still be seen, but the conflict that should start to develop is informational. **Idea generation is a byproduct** of this phase, which means the conflict is taking a positive effect and the group dynamics are getting better.

If the group reaches the third phase, then the group has really achieved a good synergy. The third phase is called **the substantive phase** and it is characterized by the positive discussion of ideas and the fact that all conflict is related to the issues at hand (Ellis & Fisher, 1975). No relationship conflict is found in this phase, and informational conflict should be the only type of conflict to be constant through this phase. However, progressing to this phase is not a natural progression. Only with proper leadership and proper management of the conflict can a group successfully navigate through these stages.

Conflict Management and Resolution

The second point of my paper focuses on the reaction of group members to conflict. The terms "conflict management" and "conflict resolution" are used inter changeably in most conflict researches. However, some articles make a distinction between the two. They take the approach that "conflict resolution" is based on the notion that conflict is essentially negative and its point is to end the conflict, not solve the main issue (Kottler, 1994). "Conflict management" is, however, based on the fact conflict can be positive and this directs conflict to constructive dialogue (Nemeth & Owens. 1996; Rybak & Brown, 1997; Tjsovold, 1991).

Managing the participants' behavior in relation to conflict is imperative in the group process because it has the power to make conflict a positive force in the group environment. Probably the most important factor in determining whether conflict can be managed in a beneficial way is how members approach the situation.

Some groups develop very effective work practices, working as a cohesive unit, constructively striving towards group goals. Other group descend into the realm of bickering and standoffs, causing no goals to be accomplished and the group to fail in its tasks. So, it is entirely possible that the deciding factor in whether a group succeeds or fails is in its ability to manage conflict in a constructive manner.

Research has identified a number of conflict resolution and conflict management tactics. Synthesizing the research provides a more comprehensive understanding of actions typical of conflict resolution and management tactics (see table below).

	Strategy	Objective	Example Actions and Tactics
Conflict Resolution ↓ **Conflict Management** ↓ **Healthy**	Passive Indirect	Resolve conflict Without Confronting it directly	Changing the subject Joking about the situation Agreeing just to agree
	Distributive	Resolve conflict by seeking concession from group members	Concealing information Threating others Coercing others Suggesting to vote Persuading with concessions
	Integrative	Resolve conflict Through discussions and logical reasoning (no concessions Sought)	Exchanging information Considering alternative viewpoints Suggesting to vote Presenting logical reasoning Clarifying issues, Suggestions, etc…

Source: Adapted from Silars, 1980, Dace, 1992, Poole et al., 1991 Zornozar, 2002

Types of Conflict Management / Resolution

In the conflict literature, three types of conflict management/resolution strategies have appeared most frequently. The three strategies are **passive indirect, distributive, and integrated** (Dace, 1992; Zornoza, 2002; Poole et al., 1991). Two of the three strategies tend to follow more of the conflict management track, but the third will depend on the situation.

Passive indirect is also known as "avoidance behavior" (Poole et al., 1991). This strategy is inherently a conflict resolution strategy. The goal of this strategy is to smooth over the conflict by avoiding the subject. Typical behaviors include avoiding the issue, changing the subject, joking, and submissive actions (Sillars, 1980). The point of passive indirect is to get the conflict resolved, even at the expense of the goal of the group. Therefore, passive indirect is a very ineffective way of managing conflict because **it sacrifices the productivity ot the group in return for harmony.**

The second strategy is labeled as **distributive.** Patton and Giffin (1978) describe a distributive strategy as a strategy where one person gains at another's expense. Actions that can result from this type of strategy are typically **Negotiation tactics.** Requesting, demanding threatening, and persuading are just some examples of this type of strategy in action (Sillars, 1980). This strategy, however, cannot be immediately labeled ad either conflict management or conflict resolution. Tactics such as insulting and demanding imply that coercion is being done through negative tactics. However, if one uses logic and well thought argument relevant to the issues to persuade someone to buy-in to his idea, then that would be viewed as being productive. The way this strategy is used will determine whether or not conflict management or conflict resolution is being used.

The final strategy I will elaborate for this paper is the **integrative strategy**. This strategy is characterized by the participants having and open mind about all ideas and the discussion of the ideas is constructive and not personal (Sillars, 1980). Also, no concessions (ผู้เขียนอยากจะแปลว่าชั้ว) are sought when participating in this strategy. Analytical remarks are a key sign that this strategy is being utilized (Poole et al., 1991). Because of its emphasis on both issues of the main problem and the creation of and environment for the free flowing of ideas, **the integrative strategy is labeled as a conflict management strategy.**

Of special note, because of the inclusion of technology as a source of conflict, none of these strategies may apply to the breakdown of technology. In other words, some types of conflict may not necessarily have a management/resolution strategy that fits one of the mentioned three.

The Sole Way to Sustainable Conflict Resolution: Thongchai's Great Recommendation

I strongly believe that conflicts are challenges. Conflicts are life's challenges to us. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama said during a private audience to the Tibetan community at Shimla, India, "As long as there is human Society, there will always be conflicts. As I always say that if we do not want conflicts at all we have to make the entire humanity stupid or dull, and then there will be no problems at all." Therefore conflicts are an inevitable part of any change and potential development. Conflicts can lead to hostility and stagnation or they can lead to social progress and better understanding. It depends entirely on how people cope with conflicts. Conflicts are not necessarily negative. As Else Hammerich, a former European Parliament member put it: "Conflicts are not negative, but life's challenges to us; they are part of the challenges of life. They can lead to social progress, more wisdom, frankness and understanding among people."

Conflicts should not necessarily be prevented. If conflicts are managed using the tools of non-violent conflict resolution, they may lead to progress in relations and a more comfortable and transparent environment. The axiom of non-violent resolution is to deal with conflict in ways that lead to personal and social transformation, to transform conflicts into creative energy.

Obstacles to **mental liberation** like **misunderstanding, hatred, delusion, and lust** are inherent in the ignorant mind. The equivalent Buddhist term for "ignorance" is egoistic mind. And the term conflict is equivalent to suffering in the sense that suffering causes emotional disruption. But while conflict is part of suffering, suffering itself is not conflict. For example, the suffering of birth, old age, illness and death are not conflicts.

Accepting conflicts inherent in life in a negative way, such as by criticism yields harmful results both to oneself and others, It reflects inferior thinking. **"As we think, so we are."** As I think, so I am We must accept life aw it is and relate with other from the "heart" than from the "head".

His Holiness the Dalai Lama once said; "According to the Buddhist philosophy, the main source of conflict is hatred and attachment, and the root cause of these conflicting emotions is ignorance."

For the Danish Centre, it has now come up with three main ways by which to face a conflict, known as "three ways of meeting a conflict." The first one says opening the issue in question with a suitable discussion using non-violent communication or compassionate communication and taking into consideration the needs and intentions of the concerned individual is the most suitable way to resolve a conflict. Flight and Flight, the other two possibilities, are not suitable approaches or practices for resolving a conflict in a peaceful and non-violent way.

Modern thinking on conflict resolution is a constant process **of learning and experimentation.** The progresses achieved fit in with the changes occurring in the world, enabling resolutions of issues with exact antidotes. The four principles of Action, Reflection, Learning and Strategies in conflict resolution propounded by the Danish Centre provide useful diversion for converting non-beneficial action into beneficial action. However, the centre felt that it was in dire need to incorporate humane qualities of compassion, love and generosity, the quest for which led them to explore the Buddhist philosophy. For my conclusion, I strongly concern of the Buddhist approach, which eliminate suffering lies in the "four noble truths." These approaches emphasize the realization of the nature of suffering, its impermanent nature,

emptiness, selflessness, causes and conditions leading to suffering chances of cessation of suffering and the path to liberation. Buddhism says that the origin of all suffering is embedded in the cyclic nature of our existence through the influences of emotions and one's karma. Desire, hatred and other negative emotions are the true causes of suffering of living beings. Cessation of suffering refers to addressing the causes of suffering, like desire and hatred and other non-virtuous actions. True path to eliminating suffering lies in holding a correct view of life and understanding and practicing the existence of the path leading to enlightenment.

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