

# Conflict Behavior

# Introduction

- Theoretical considerations
- Conflict escalation
- Rational thinking and intractable conflicts

# Theoretical Considerations

- Conflict schemas
- Conflict management styles
- Integrative and distributive outcomes
- Conflict goals

# Conflict Schemas

- Schemas: Storage systems that preserve emotional learning
- Conflict schemas: powerful set of negative thoughts and feelings
- Arise from failure to fulfill basic life needs (safety, connection, autonomy, competence)

# Conflict Schemas

- Abandonment
- Deprivation
- Subjugation
- Mistrust
- Unlovability
- Exclusion
- Vulnerability
- Failure
- Pefectionism
- Entitlement

# Tell-tale Signs

- Repetitive and predictable
- Triggered without conscious thought
- Fast, strong, inappropriate overreaction
- Tied to some symbolic meaning

# Conflict Management Styles

- Competing
- Accommodating
- Avoiding
- Compromising
- Problem-solving (Collaborating)

# Competing

- Satisfying own interests to the exclusion of other's interests
- Lacks flexibility
- Two strategies:
  - Forcing
  - Contending

# Accommodating

- Accede to other's demands
- Highly flexible
- Empower others and suspend personal control
- Variations:
  - Yielding
  - Conceding

# Avoiding

- No concern for own or other's interests
- Disempowers by denying possibility of dealing with conflict
- Can escalate a conflict
- Variations:
  - Protecting
  - Withdrawing
  - Smoothing

# Compromising

- Both parties give up some needs to fulfill others
- Moderate flexibility
- Both parties empowered—shared control
- Variations:
  - Firm compromisers
  - Flexible compromisers

# Problem Solving

- High concern for own and other's interest
- Explore all possible solutions
- Will not sacrifice own goals
- Highly flexible
- Mutual empowerment

# Challenges with Problem Solving

- Requires time and energy
- High degree of information
- Open, safe, secure communication
- Conflict schemas block collaboration
- Must be willing to ignore power issues

# Integrative and Distributive Outcomes

- Integrative behavior flows on a continuum from avoiding to problem-solving
- Distributive behavior flows on a continuum from competing to accommodating
- Compromising is common to both, but has a different meaning depending on the continuum

# Choices in Conflict

- Fixed resource or jointly owned problem?
- How should I treat myself and other?
- Observations:
  - These evaluations represent “good” and “bad” choices of the amygdala (approach or defend)
  - Choices generally made outside of conscious processing

# Conflict Goals

- Content
- Relationship
- Identity
- Process

# Content Goals

- What do I want?
- Easy to see and talk about
- Usually external
- Focus on rights and remedies

# Relationship Goals

- Who are we in this relationship?
- Hierarchy issues
- Fairness, justice, equal treatment
- Often real cause of conflict
- Difficult to work with relational goals

# Process Goals

- One party wants to avoid, the other wants to confront
- Coercion versus collaboration
- What communication process is best?
- Quick processes defeat innovation
- Longer processes allow reflection, but are confusing and frustrating

# Goals Govern Conflict

- Not all goals emerge in all disputes
- Goals overlap
- Relational and Identity goals drive disputes
- Content goals rarely satisfy parties in conflict
- Conflict parties specialize in one goal

# Goal Specialization

- Parties often have separate goals
- Differing goals = danger + opportunity
- Specialization reflects relative power

# Goals Emerge in Different Forms

- Content goals may emerge as relational, identity or process goals
- Often, parties cannot express relational goals, but act out the content goals

# Goals Shift During Conflict

- Prospective goals
- Transactive goals
- Retrospective goals

# Clarifying Conflict Goals Is Important

- *Clear goals can be shared*
- *Clear goals can be altered*
- *Clear goals are achievable*

# Reframing Goals

- A central technique of peacemaking is to help the parties clarify and reframe all of their goals.

# Conflict Escalation

- Social processes
- Psychological processes

# Conflict Escalation

- Escalation results from personality regression
- Five stages of escalation
- Each stage is reciprocal to human emotional development

# Escalation - Stage I

- Typified by normal, everyday life
- Conflict resolved through mutual care and empathy
- Look for objective solutions in a cooperative manner
- Conflict escalates with stubborn behavior

# Escalation - Stage II

- Fluctuation between cooperation and competition
- Acknowledge common interests, but own interest is paramount
- Information filter is limited to that favoring one's interests
- Persuasion, no showing of weakness
- Conflict escalates when persuasion fails

# Escalation - Stage III

- Fear that common ground has been lost
- No hope for reasonable outcome
- Interaction becomes hostile
- Parties retain lawyers
- Paradox--each side believes that by pressuring the other, the other will change
- Stereotyping is applied as negative identification to the other
- Power becomes important as empathy disappears
- Conflict escalates with a challenge to face or self-esteem

# Escalation - Stage IV

- Cognitive function regresses to 6 years old
- Party cannot consider Other's thoughts, feelings, or perspectives
- Both sides in roles from which they see no escape
- Hostility greatly intensifies
- Conflict escalates with attacks on identity

# Escalation - Stage V

- Progressive regression in the form of a comprehensive ideology
- Totalizing of antagonistic perspectives
- Sacred values, convictions and superior moral obligations are now at stake
- Conflict has reached a hallucinatory-narcissistic stage
- Individual perceptions and evaluations disappear
- Party strives for total control through force and coercion
- Other responds with counter-coercion and counter-force

# De-Escalation

- Parties must be walked back through the 5 stages
- People will start at different stages
- People will move at different rates
- Matters will be complicated if attorneys are escalated in their own conflict

# Rational Thinking

- Deductive reasoning requires a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion
- Deductive arguments are evaluated as valid or invalid
- Establishing minor premises requires inductive reasoning
- Inductive arguments can only be evaluated as strong, moderate, or weak
- Thus, disagreement on minor premises frequently leads to conflicting, but perfectly valid, deductive arguments
- With both sides claiming valid deductive arguments, conflicts become intractable.

# Example: Pro Life vs. Pro Choice

- Pro Life Rational Argument:

- Humans should not be killed
- An embryo has human status
- Therefore, embryos should not be killed

- Pro Choice Rational Argument:

- Humans should not be killed
- An embryo does not have human status
- Therefore, choosing to abort an embryo is not killing

# Valid, But Contradictory Arguments Lead to....

- Major premise is the same
- Minor premise is different
- Conclusions are opposite
- But, both arguments are valid.....
- So, which one is the truth?

# ...Intractable Conflicts

- Deductive arguments do not claim to be truthful, only valid or invalid as to form
- People easily confuse validity with truth
- Therefore, a valid argument can be characterized as truthful
- Opposing views can therefore be rejected as false (despite also being valid)
- This is the essence of intractability

# Summary

- Conflict schemas
- Conflict management styles
- Integrative-distributive behaviors
- Conflict goals
- Conflict escalation
- Intractable conflicts



The End