

CRITICAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION: CONCEPT, DEFINITIONS, DIAGNOSIS, AND STRATEGIES

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THE LINK CONFLICT SPECTRUM

The **Link Conflict Spectrum** is designed to provide a clear overview, as well as diagnostic and planning tool, to decode either relatively simple or complex conflicts and design appropriate adaptive solution strategies to address conflicts at each level of the Spectrum. Implicit in the “Strategies for Resolution” is a commitment to create an opportunity for genuine satisfaction and solution by both/all parties, vs. conflict suppression, deferred, or mandated approaches.

The Conflict Spectrum has close corollaries to the Maslow Hierarchy of Needs. Conflicts can exist in multiple levels at once and typically do. As conflicts move down the Spectrum—that is, come closer to basic fundamental human needs—they become more difficult and intractable (e.g. **Data/Informational level conflicts** are relatively soluble, unless there is an admixture of dynamics from some other level; while conflicts about **Physical Needs** tend to be enduring, intractable, and, internationally, may lead to armed conflict). One important implication of the Conflict Spectrum is that long-standing, complicated conflicts may require multiple approaches to bring to satisfactory resolution.

KEY TERMS IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Stakeholder: Beyond the obvious individuals or groups involved in a given issue, stakeholders are those who have a direct or indirect investment in an issue. All stakeholders are those who are able to -- and may be motivated to -- sabotage or move forward an agreement. Key stakeholders are those who have a legitimate interest in the conflict and its resolution.

Structural Conflict: Disputes arising from social structures (including governmental, cultural, religious, and economic forces) that hold parties in conflict, even if they wish to resolve it. An example from DoD is regulations and directives that dictate how acquisitions are currently performed. An example in an academic institution is policy around tenure. An example in the larger Intelligence Community is role assignments regarding intelligence collection and analysis.

Confidence-Building Measures: Small concessions or gestures that build trust between parties so they can tackle more difficult issues (may and often are missed in the heat of discussion/ dissension).

Shuttle Diplomacy: Meeting with parties individually helping to decode the conflict and start the process of crafting a jointly-satisfactory solution.

Self-Justifying Narrative: A communally- or individually-structured set of complaints, injustices, and/or reasons why a conflict “cannot” be resolved; often takes the form of a repetitive “case” against another party or a proposed solution.

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CONFLICT LEVEL	SOURCES	EXAMPLES	STRATEGIES FOR RESOLUTION
Data/ Information	Fisher & Ury	Costs, history, arguments over facts, data, etc.	Authoritative sources, jointly recognized expert, "Blue-Ribbon" panels
Positions / Interests: Primary focus on power relationships	Fisher & Ury	Civil litigation, business transactions, contracts, customer complaints, inter- and intra-organizational disputes; business disputes; family, neighbor, and community disputes	Alternative dispute resolution (ADR) (mediation, arbitration, etc.); "interest-based negotiation" (including "integrative or interest-based bargaining" or "win-win bargaining"); adjudication; traditional negotiation techniques
Personality and psychologically-determined beliefs: About self & others, worldviews about the nature of conflict (e.g. is win-win even possible?), pre-conceptions & projections that affect perception	T. Kilman, Freud, Jung	Also family, neighbor, and community disputes; some office/ business disputes; EEO disputes; unanticipated employee/ student violent outbreaks	Mediation, counseling, 3 rd -party intervention, training on conflict management, group sessions/ inter-group dialogue
Culturally-determined beliefs: Shared history of perceived communal victimization; religious/ doctrinal conflict	Burton	Religious and ethnic conflicts	Inter-group dialogues (especially with capable conciliation techniques); story-telling and creation of new vision for future; assessment of impact of the dispute on the larger good and allowing for genuine regrouping by all parties
Communal identity: Shared history or language; non-physical needs (security, identity, recognition) that, because non-material, are not scarce material resources but important to the parties	Burton, Gurr	Liberation or nationalist movements; protracted/ intractable social/ diplomatic conflicts	Reconstruction and Stabilization Operations, 2 nd -Track Diplomacy Interactive Problem-Solving Workshops, conciliation, inter-group dialogues,
Physical needs: Survival needs (security, identity, recognition); territory; natural resources (oil, minerals, etc.)	Burton, Gurr	Territorial disputes, resource disputes, genocide, ethnic cleansing	Conciliation; Reconstruction and Stabilization Operations; 2 nd -Track Diplomacy; Interactive Collaborative Problem-Solving Workshops