



1 Conflict

Conflict is inevitable, but combat is optional.

Max Lucade

A conflict is a clash between antithetical ideas or interests – within a person or involving two or more persons, groups or states pursuing mutually incompatible goals. Like all social phenomena, conflicts are usually complex and may emerge on different levels. Some are primarily intra-personal, while others are inter-personal, and there are conflicts across all layers of society. Conflicts may have a predominantly civil and internal dimension or may take on transnational or even global forms. Each and every conflict has its own history, features and dynamics. Since conflict is a social phenomenon, it is an inevitable part of human interaction. The role of conflict as a driver of social change can be considered to be constructive if the conflicting parties ac-

Morton Deutsch assumed that conflict is potentially of individual and social value; his basic question was how to prevent conflicts from being destructive. Johan Galtung characterised conflict as two or more individuals or groups pursuing mutually competing goals with opposing interests and needs, and emphasised the linkage between structural, behavioural and attitudinal aspects of conflict.

Friedrich Glasl defined social conflict as an interaction involving at least two parties (individuals, groups, states) with at least one party experiencing differences (distinctions, contradictions, incompatibilities, etc.) in perception, thinking, imagination, interpretation, feeling (sympathy – aversion, trust – mistrust) and desires (needs, objectives, purposes, goals) to the other party in such a way as to make them feel that the potential for the realisation of their ideas is affected.

knowledge the legitimacy of different interests and needs of all actors involved. Constructive approaches to conflict aim to create a social and political environment which allows the root causes of the conflict to be addressed and which enhances sustained and non-violent alternatives to the use of force. Destructive approaches are characterised by conflicting parties' efforts to resolve a conflict unilaterally and at the cost of others.

Conflicts may either be manifest through behaviour and action, or latent, remaining inactive for some time, while incompatibilities are not articulated or are part of structures (political system, institutions, etc.). In symmetric conflicts between similar actors, the conditions, resources and contexts of the conflicting parties are roughly equal. They can compromise on how to deal with a conflict according to agreed social, political or legal norms and thus transform their rules of collaborative engagement. Strength may influence the nature of a compromise, but in the end it is reliability and reciprocity which count. Asymmetric conflicts,

however, cannot be easily transformed without paying respect to the often unbalanced relationships that lie at their roots. For example, at the intra-state level, asymmetric conflicts are caused by unequal social status, unequal wealth and access to resources, and unequal power – leading to problems such as discrimination, unemployment, poverty, oppression, and crime.

Unilateral superiority may pose a serious obstacle to constructive interaction between conflicting parties. But it would be premature to conclude that this is a general rule, because history tells us that both bold and benign actors may tame irresponsible drivers of conflict. However, constructive collaboration needs a willingness on the part of all conflicting parties to engage constructively, irrespective of their weakness or strength. And a transformation of conflict cannot be expected if the root causes of conflict are not addressed.

Components of Conflict Analysis

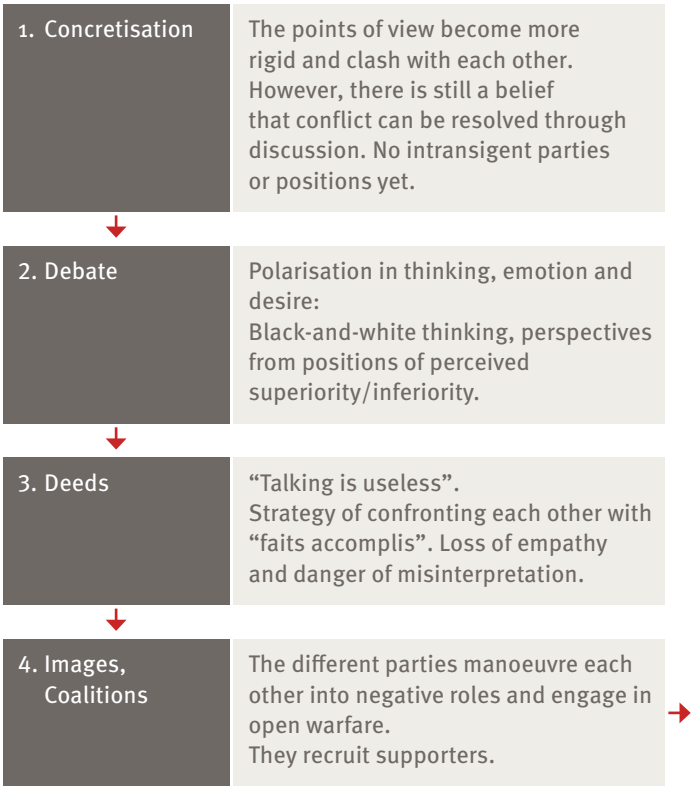
Levels	Individual	Society
Causes	<p>Conflicts of interest material resources, power, influence</p>	<p>Conflicts of needs non-material, basic needs: physical and non-physical elements such as security, love, self-esteem, participation, identity or freedom</p>
	latent	
Strength of opponents	symmetric	

Conflict analysis

The United States Institute of Peace defines conflict analysis as the systematic study of the profile, causes, actors and dynamics of conflict. It is the first step in conflict transformation and peacebuilding. It undertakes a careful inquiry into the potential course of a conflict so that a roadmap for transformation can be created. A diligent analysis needs to identify the root causes, which sometimes remain veiled in open-ended forms of conflict management (→ conflict transformation and → systemic conflict transformation). Conflict dynamics and relationship patterns are equally important components of conflict analysis.

		International	
	Value conflicts non-material, collective norms	Identity conflicts self-perception	
		Ideology conflicts belief and philosophy	
		Conflicts of estimation valuation of competence	
		manifest	
		asymmetric	

The Nine Levels of Conflict Escalation by Friedrich Glasl



Conflict escalation

A crucial dynamic of conflict is the risk of escalation. The deeper the tensions, the fiercer the combat, the more difficult it is to keep a conflict under control (→ violence & non-violence). As Friedrich Glasl has pointed out, escalation occurs in stages and effective intervention must be adapted to the relevant stage. His



model of nine stages of escalation is useful as a diagnostic tool for sensitising people to conflict dynamics. Sensitisation may enhance awareness of potential and necessary actions to resist the risk of escalation.

Conflicts are multifaceted and multi-layered. There are conflicts over interest, needs, values and identity. Often, the root causes of conflict are disguised by ostensible tensions, such as ethno-political strife. Ethnicity or culture does not necessarily cause a conflict, but both constitute highly influential areas of socialisation and identification amongst social peers. Deeply-rooted conflicts become part of collective memory and thus are usually more resistant to transformation.

The role of → gender in the construction and transformation of conflict also needs a more nuanced understanding. Often, women are seen only as the main victims of war and conflict. But this perspective is too simplistic: while women often play an important role in peacemaking and social transformation, they may also act as aggressors, soldiers, combatants or politicians responsible for making decisions about military interventions and war. Their potential as both constructive and destructive drivers of social change is under-researched and often neglected.

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