

Chapter 3

Interests and Goals

“Winning or Losing?”

An American father and his 12-year-old son were enjoying a beautiful Saturday in Hyde Park, London, playing catch with a Frisbee. Few in England had seen a Frisbee at that time, and a small group of strollers gathered to watch this strange sport. Finally, one homburg-clad Britisher came over to the father: “Sorry to bother you. Been watching you for a quarter of an hour. Who’s winning?” (Fisher and Ury 1981, 154).

Our interests and goals are sometimes hard to identify. Not only do outsiders usually misperceive our interests, we are often confused about them ourselves. This chapter describes the types of interests we struggle over with others. We treat “interests” and “goals” as different terms for the same things—what we want from others.

All conflicts at some level hinge upon the fact that people perceive that there are *incompatible goals* held by at least two people who are *interfering* with what the other person wants. Whether a sister and her older brother are struggling over limited parental attention, two managers are competing for a coveted promotion in the organization, or a seller and buyer are arguing over the price of a car, the perception of incompatible goals fuels the conflict. In every conflict the interdependence of the parties is built on both common and disparate goals, but the parties often perceive only the disparate goals. Conflict intensifies as people think they want different things; often the dawning awareness of conflict’s existence comes when people say to each other, “What you want is not what I want.” Conflict is more than a disagreement; it is when people believe that another interferes with their interests and goals.

Our goals are different in diverse relationships. In a friendship, for example, your main goal might be affinity—wanting the other to like you (Bell and Daly 1984). On the job, you may primarily want to gain information from colleagues or to persuade them about something. Our goals range from obtaining money, goods, services, love, or status to getting information. In a conversation, your primary goal might be to express your feelings (Argyle and Furnham 1983). Coleman, Fine, Ganong, Downs, and Pauk (2001) found that the majority of conflicts in stepfamilies involved resources (e.g., possessions, space, time, attention, privacy, money), divided loyalty, perceptions that the parents were showing favor to their “own” children, and conflicts with members of the extended family.

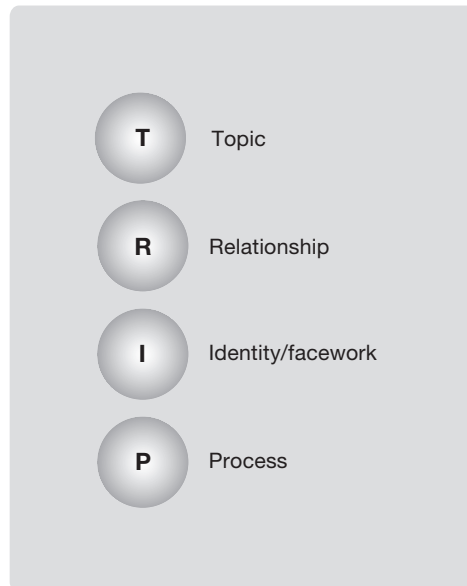
Many times, especially in emotionally charged conflict situations, we may be unaware of what goals we want to achieve. If you are angry at your roommate, you might not know whether (1) you want to punish her for being sloppy; (2) you want to have her

like you, but you still want to influence her cleanliness standards; or (3) you want her to get angry and move out, so you can get a new roommate. Most conflict participants initially lack goal clarity; participants only discover their goals through experiencing conflict with the other participants. As we will see later, the goals will probably shift during the course of the conflict. What you want to achieve in the conflict also affects the tactics you choose during the conflict. For example, if you are “defending yourself,” you are likely to use self-oriented tactics—being competitive and looking out only for yourself. On the other hand, if you want to improve a relationship, you are more likely to use conflict moves that are integrative—taking account of the others’ needs as well as your own (Canary, Cunningham, and Cody 1988). One fact emerges from studying goals in personal and organizational settings—effectively functioning teams have a clear understanding of their objectives. The more clearly individuals or groups understand the nature of the problem and what they want to have occur, the more effective they will be in solving problems (Larson and LaFasto 1989; Hilgerman 1994).

☞ Types of Goals: TRIP

People in conflict pursue four general **types of goals**: (1) *topic* or *content* (2) *relational*, (3) *identity* (or *facework*), and (4) *process*. The acronym TRIP stands for these major types of goals, which overlap and shift during disputes. These types of goals will be examined one at a time (Wilmot and Andes 2004).¹

The Four Types of Goals Pursued During Conflict



¹ In earlier editions of this book, we used “content” following the influence of Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson (1967). We have found, following the work of Wilmot and Andes (2004) that the TRIP acronym is much easier for students to recall; thus, we have changed the label “content” to “topic.” Throughout this book, “content” and “topic” are used interchangeably.

Topic Goals: *What Do We Want?*

The key question when looking at a conflict is “What does each person want?” **Topic**, or content, **goals** emerge as different ideas about what to do, what decisions to make, where to go, how to allocate resources, or other externally objectifiable issues. Topic goals can be listed, argued, supported by evidence, and broken down into pros and cons. For example, Amanda might tell her supervisor, “I have been here six months, and I would like to have a raise.” Other examples of topic goals are

securing a student loan	a clean apartment
more free time	meaningful work
a new pair of skis	fashionable clothing
space to work	a different job
a vacation overseas	reliable transportation
to sell a house for \$80,000	a digital video recorder

In different contexts, the topics change. For example in the workplace here are some typical topics that emerge that cause disputes.

promotion	efficiency	getting to work on time
title	how hard you work	job assignments
accuracy	salary	new computer
office location		

In friendships, people might struggle over

loans from friends	what holiday plans to make
sharing a ride	how welcome friends are in a shared apartment
where to recreate	whether to share possessions
what music to listen to	
movies to see	

Application 3.1

My Topic or Content Goals

Select three different relationship contexts such as school, work, friendship, and romantic relationship.

1. For each relationship, list the “topics” that typically arise in disputes.
2. Compare the list of topics across the three relationships.

Most of us have topics that are distinct in each relationship type as well as some that cross all three categories. You might, for example, have cleanliness as an important topic regardless of the situation, or it might be restricted to only your living environment.

Topic goals can be easily seen and talked about; they are external to us—we can point to them and say, “I want that.” Yet, although they are objective, people often feel very deeply about them.

Topic or content struggles are of two types: (1) people want different things (I want to get the most for my car, and you want to pay the least for it); or (2) people want the same thing (same job, same romantic partner, same room in the house). In either case, what happens is a struggle over the goals. The perception that there is not enough to go around—a perception of a scarce resource—intensifies the conflict. More examples of struggles over content goals follow:

- A divorcing couple tries to construct a visitation schedule that allows each parent access to their young children but that also fits with each parent’s work schedule. The specific visitation schedule is the topic goal (at this point, separate goals) of the couple. Mom may state, “I want the kids on Sundays,” or “I want to see them one night a week when they are at your house.” Dad might say, “I want them on alternate weekends.”
- A romantic couple talks about the pros and cons of either being together for the summer and both working in a restaurant, or one going to Glacier Park to be on trail crew and the other to work as a biologist in the River of No Return Wilderness Area. They want to spend the summer together, but both also want to advance their respective careers.
- Three mid-level managers must come to agreement about which benefits would motivate their employees to stay with the company the longest. Jill favors educational benefits, in addition to a basic benefits package, whereas Chuck favors increased insurance options, while Jim wants to increase flextime options. All three managers want to keep employees longer but disagree on how to do that.
- Mary is going to put her house up for sale because she will be moving to a different region. She asks \$195,000 for the house, knowing that this price will pay for both her relocation and three months of living while she finds a new job. In addition to this amount of money, she wants to sell the house quickly—also a topic goal.

Usually, when you ask people what they want in a conflict, you will hear a topic goal from at least one of the parties—“I just want a different office.” For most people, topic goals are the easiest to identify and tell others about. The topic, although important and the beginning point to understanding all disputes, is just one part of the conflict mosaic. Some writers refer to topic goals as “substantive” or “realistic” goals, but we believe the following kinds of goals are also real and substantive.

Relational Goals: *Who Are We to Each Other?*

The key question when assessing the **relational goals** of a conflict is “Who are we in relationship to each other during our interaction?” Relationship goals define how each party wants to be treated by the other and the amount of interdependence they desire (how they define themselves as a unit). Additionally, the amount of influence each will have with the other is worked out through relational interaction.

Differing relational goals lead people into conflict just as differing topics do. People often experience deep disagreement about the question of who they are to each other. The following statements, expressed during actual conflicts, are relational goal statements:

How You Want to Be Treated by the Other

What I need here is some respect.
 So, what happened to our collegial relationship?
 What I want is for you to support me when we are in public.
 I won't put up with that kind of abuse.
 Well, you don't have to be nasty about it.
 I want to be included on projects that affect me.
 I expect professional conduct from everyone on this team.
 You told Sandra the report would be in by the due date. Then you called in sick and left me holding the job. This hurts my trust that you will do what you say.
 I was hired at the same time Jim was, and now he's receiving extra training. I want access to training as well so I can grow in this job.

The Amount of Interdependence You Want (Are We a Unit?)

I thought we were best friends.
 I can't help if I don't know if you want to stay on the project with me.
 We both have our separate lives to live now, so let's get on with it.
 What I do is none of your business.
 I just don't know who we are to each other anymore.

Relational goals will emerge in any ongoing dispute and must be recognized and managed. For example, Donohue, Drake, and Roberto (1994) note that "the more mediators ignore disputants' relational concerns, the more difficulty they will experience in reaching agreement" (261). Yet, relational goals seldom become open, spoken messages (Wilmot 1995). Relationship definitions might instead be communicated by who talks first, who talks the most, nonverbal cues such as eye contact, and many other factors. For example, if an employee asks for a raise and is told no, the supervisor might be warning, on the relational level, "Don't push too far. I have the right to tell you what we can afford and what we cannot afford." If the employee says, "Why not? This is the best year we've ever had!" the relational message might be, from the employee's perspective, "I have a right to challenge what you say." Much of the communication regarding relational goals remains tacit and unspoken. Productive conflict interaction sometimes requires that a third party or a participant make overt the tacit relationship definitions. The following are some examples of relational goals:

- A second wife decides not to go to a big family gathering of her husband's relatives. She resents the expectation that since his family gathers at Labor Day every year, she is expected to attend. She prefers to visit with her family at that

time of year. If the husband and wife have a conflict over this issue, the content goals may be fairly clear: the husband wants the wife to go to the gathering, whereas the wife wants to visit her family and not attend the big gathering. The wife's relational goals might be varied: to establish equity in the time she spends with her family, to establish her independence from the new family group, or to protect herself from comparison to the first wife. The husband's relational goals might be to please his family, to introduce his second wife to the family in a relaxed setting, or to spend more time with his wife. Each argues about how much influence they will allow the other to have, about what kind of a unit they are, and about many other relational issues. If the couple argues about content goals only, they will get stuck on issues about plane fares and what they can afford, or the weather in Georgia around Labor Day, or the accommodations provided. In ongoing relationships such as this one, the goals surrounding who the participants are to each other need to be given priority. Most people argue content when they ought to be talking about relational goals.

- In a staff meeting, Joan insists that “before we decide on the reorganization, I need to know how committed you all are to staying with the organization.” She needs some clarity on how people define their relationship to the larger group before plunging ahead with an extensive reorganization plan.
- Two teenage girls currently are “on the outs” with each other. Jennifer talks about how JoAnn is “high and mighty,” then JoAnn complains to another friend that Jennifer has “an abnormal need to be in on everything.” The conflict erupted the day after JoAnn canceled her plan to go shopping with Jennifer and went with another friend instead. The content, whether to go shopping together, was not the issue; the relational strain was.

Relational goals *are at the heart of all conflict interactions* yet are difficult to specify from the outside (and sometimes from the inside as well). That is because each person translates the same event into his or her own relational meaning. A conflict is interpreted differently by each participant. Just as we have no success in translating Ukrainian unless we speak the language, conflict parties must learn the relational language of their conflict partners. For example, a father and daughter fight many evenings when she comes home from school and he arrives home from work. Mother gets pulled into playing peacemaker, trying to urge them to get along better. The following example demonstrates how an event can trigger such a conflict.

Daughter scatters books, shoes, and lunch box in the living room while she gets a snack. Father comes home an hour later, sees the mess, and explodes. Daughter says, “I forgot,” and Father says, “You always forget.”

Content messages: “I forgot.” “You always forget.”

Daughter's translation: It's not important. I wish he'd pay attention to something that is more important to me.

Father's translation: She doesn't listen. She is getting too independent to care what I think.

The difficulty with relational issues is that we never ultimately know the other person's translations. Just as the daughter and father have different translations for these events, usually the conflict parties cannot accurately guess what the other's translations will be, or if they can, they try to dismiss them. The friend who says "you shouldn't be bothered by not being invited to the picnic" is not accurately tuning into your translations. One technique in conflict management, therefore, is to have conflict parties *share their relational translations* of the content issues.

Other examples of incorrect or incomplete translations of each other's messages are illustrated by the following:

- A couple argues over who should fill the car with gas each week—each feels she or he is doing more work than the other and wants credit for what is already being done. But the man argues that he shouldn't have to do all the work on the car, and the woman argues that he doesn't notice how much work she does for him, such as taking clothes to the cleaners. Not only are they arguing about content, but they are mistranslating the crucial relational goals (which remain unstated).
- Co-workers bicker each day about whose turn it is to lock up the business, which requires staying longer at the end of the day. None of the procedures developed seem to work—people have doctor's appointments, or have to pick up a child, or have a racquetball court reserved, so they have to leave early. This conflict is becoming a big issue. So far, the only way people resolve the issue is by coming up with creative excuses for leaving work. Resentments grow daily, factions are created, and pretty soon, the boss will have to step in and make a new rule, which will displease everyone. No new procedure (content solution) will work until leftover resentments are explained and attended to (relational issues). Then new, shared goals can be developed that have a chance of finally working.

Relational goals are often reactive. What I want from you is the result of what I think you think about me. Once a conflict is triggered, each party reacts to what he or she thinks the other is doing or wanting. When Sandy says, "I won't take that kind of treatment from Jason," she is reacting to her guess about how Jason will act in the future, too. Once the conflict spiral begins, each person responds to an image of the other that may not be accurate. When Jason replies, "You are just trying to control me," he states his relational reaction to Sandy. In this manner, relational goals escalate into polarized states.

Application 3.2

My Relational Goals

Take two important relationships to you, for example, a parent, romantic partner, life-long friend, or other personal relationship. Think of a time you were upset at how he or she treated you. Then, list the "relational issues" that arose. For example, look at the samples of relational issues and amount of interdependence examples we gave above and see if you can identify your key relational issues.

Let's summarize some principles about relational interests and goals.

- Every statement carries a relational message.
- We each translate or interpret relational messages differently.
- Relational interests carry more urgency than topic interests.
- Our relational interests are triggered in reaction to the other's behavior.

Good relationships make the topic issues much easier to resolve, bring synergy to a conversation and enhance our positive identity.

Identity, or Face-Saving, Goals: *Who Am I* in This Interaction?

The key question in assessing **identity**, or **face-saving**, **goals** is "Who am I in this particular interaction?" or "How may my self-identity be protected or repaired in this particular conflict?" As conflicts increase in intensity, the parties shift to face saving as a key goal (Rubin 1996). Face saving, or identity protection, occurs throughout the conflict but will be highlighted more at certain times than at others.

In addition to content and relational goals, interaction goals include specific desires to maintain one's sense of self-identity. Identity needs have been extensively discussed as face work or saving face (Folger, Poole, and Stutman 2004; Wilson 1992; Goffman 1967; Brown and Levinson 1978). Often people will say, with frustration, "What are we fighting about?" or "I don't know what is going on!" Many times, a puzzling or maddening interaction can make sense if one analyzes whether one or more of the parties is primarily trying to present a positive face by claiming one's need to be approved of, to be included, and to be respected (Lim and Bowers 1991). When face saving becomes an issue, people are less flexible and engage in destructive moves (Folger, Poole, and Stutman 2004). According to Brown (1977), "In some instances, protecting against loss of face becomes so central an issue that it swamps the importance of the tangible issues at stake and generates intense conflicts that can impede progress toward agreement and increase substantially the costs of conflict resolution" (175).

Many times we express our identity or face-saving goals openly. The athlete who says, "I don't use drugs because I'm not that kind of person" or a friend who says to you, "I'm really good with verbal retorts" is telling you about their preferred identity. Or the teenager who says, "I don't have premarital sex because it violates my beliefs" is giving a clear identity statement. Simply listing the answers to "who am I" will be a good start for identifying your identity. These identity statements often arise when people are talking about themselves.

competent	likeable	responsible	trustworthy
best friend	logical	enthusiastic	well-organized
reliable family member	friendly	expert	leader

Another way to find your identity concerns is the exercise in Application 3.3.

Application 3.3**My Criticism Log**

Keep track of all the negative thoughts you have about people in your world over a few days and jot them down in your notebook or diary. You don't need to track the type of relationship, who the other is, or anything else—just list the negative thoughts you have or comments you make. Some examples are “he is so stupid,” “I can't believe how incompetent she is,” “he is so mean to everyone,” and “she is just power hungry.”

1. List all these criticisms of others, then in groups of three or four, just read them aloud to others (don't worry about how you sound; just say them even though they are sometimes difficult to share).
2. Members of your group help you identify your two or three main “themes” for your criticisms of others. Most of us have two or three main identity dimensions that arise in criticisms of others. Put these “themes” in nonjudgmental or positive terms.
For example, medical doctors often say things about their colleagues such as “he isn't the sharpest knife in the drawer,” “she didn't do very well in medical school,” “I just don't know how he became a doctor given his inability to process all the details,” and “he isn't very bright.” The theme of “intelligence” is clear.
3. Discuss with the group your main identity “themes” and how they predict with whom you will have conflict or struggles.

The importance of identity, or saving face, can be seen when large corporations or individuals are sued in court. In some circumstances, they can enter an “Alford Plea,” which means “we don't admit guilt, but based on the evidence presented we think we would be convicted.” Thus, we read news reports of organizations saying, “we didn't do it, and we paid the plaintiff \$15,000,000.” On one hand this seems absurd, but on the other it helps sensitize us to the importance of saving face. The issue is no longer “did I break the law,” but “how can I protect how I see myself and others see me?”

In each conflict interaction, individuals either save face or lose or damage face. Self-esteem has been discussed as a scarce resource. This is another way of saying that people's sense of self is often tenuous, not fixed. Few people are so full of self-esteem that they do not care about looking good in conflicts, or being seen as intelligent, honorable, correct, or justified. Likewise, when your opponent begins to perceive that you are damaging his or her sense of self, the stakes get higher. Face work occurs for each party throughout the conflict (see figure 3.1). In face-saving conversations, people often give accounts of what has happened, or what the interaction meant, as a way to “repair” one's identity after a personal attack (Buttny 2000).

Since people often act out of self-interest, what normally happens as a dispute progresses is that people protect their own face, or identity, while damaging the other's face, or identity. Productive conflict management demands that we attend to neglected quadrants. One study analyzed communication in three cases of hostage negotiations. The cases involved three different people: (1) an armed, suicidal man barricaded inside a TV station; (2) a man suffering extreme emotional instability who was barricaded in a house; and (3) an armed man holding his children hostage. What

Figure 3.1 Dimensions of Saving and Damaging Face

	Self	Other
Save face	Save self's face	Save other's face
Damage face	Damage self's face	Damage other's face

emerged in the taped FBI transcripts was the necessity to let the men save face while working to get the hostages released. The outside negotiators had to restore the armed men's face, by saying such things as "I think you are an extremely strong person for how you have handled this so far," "You've got a whole lot of people who care about you," and "The people you are trying to help, they need you" (Rogan and Hammer 1994). Sometimes face is saved ahead of time, and other times it is restored after there has been some loss, like in the hostage situation.

Figure 3.1 also shows how someone can damage one's own face. Though it seems unlikely, people often say negative things about themselves. When you say, "I'm just a terrible parent," or "I'm a lousy student," or "What does someone my age think he/she is doing going back to school?" those statements are damaging to one's own face, or identity. In the hostage situation, the armed men were, in effect, saying, "I'm just crazy," and the job of the outside negotiators was to get the men to start to see their own behavior as not quite so damaging to their view of themselves. Once face is restored, one is more free to give up extreme defensive tactics, such as holding hostages.

People try to avoid loss of face by defending their self-images against humiliation, embarrassment, exclusion, demeaning communication, or general treatment as unimportant or low-power individuals. Attempts to solve a problem or stop a conflict by causing another person to lose a sense of dignity and worth never work in the long run. Remember the four horsemen discussed in chapter 1, and how many destructive conflict cycles result from this kind of destructive communication. Overuse of power may temporarily solve a problem. When losers are created, however, the losing group or individual waits for a time and place to "make it right," either by getting back at the winners, by subverting the ongoing process, or by leaving the relationship, work setting, or group. Demeaning communication creates ongoing pain and dissatisfaction, and the conflict remains unresolved at a deep level.

Face saving and giving others face are extremely important in all cultures but often take precedence over topic issues in Asian cultures. It is now well known in the business community that entirely different kinds of negotiations are required in Asian cultures. Attempting to give others face and avoiding at all costs the loss of face of the other are part of the requirements of polite interaction among many Pacific Rim cultures. One would never pin an opponent down or attempt to prove him or her wrong.

The box labeled “Going Public,” from a newspaper column about mediation in different types of disputes, briefly treats the necessity of saving face, even in Western cultures.

Going Public: Like Dirty Laundry, Gripes Are Best Aired in Private

“ASK A MEDIATOR”

by William Wilmot, PhD, and Roy Andes, MA, JD

Reader: I’m an employee of a business that’s falling apart. We have a high profile in the community and could easily pressure the management by going public with our complaints. Should we?

Mediators: We are a society addicted to two values at odds with one another: privacy and public disclosure. Nowhere more than in conflicts do those values collide. Although the public likes to know what’s going on, and the press likes the pizzazz of conflict, people whose relational dirty laundry gets hung out in public suddenly become more positional, more intransigent and more likely to use lawsuits and other formal or hostile procedures.

Why? The answer is privacy and face saving. We all want people to feel good about us, to like us, and to give us strokes. We feel that if we are completely open about our dilemmas and conflicts people are less likely to give us the things we want. How many of us tone down, postpone or even entirely avoid family arguments in public? How many of us in conflicts with friends or co-workers prefer to talk “privately” rather than in the presence of strangers? ALL of us, of course, do so. It’s only natural. It’s just as true for public officials and corporate executives as for the rest of us. People want privacy when they have to confront strong feelings and disagreements.

Destroying that privacy is as much an escalation of a conflict as throwing a bomb into the room. In response to such a “bomb,” most people respond aggressively. They are certainly less likely to be cooperative, and less willing to try to work collaboratively to help you get what you want and need.

If you want to solve problems rather than preach about them, do it in private. If you want sincerity and openness, privacy is the best way to go. This is why mediators provide absolute confidentiality of mediation discussions. It’s also why good negotiations take place out of the glare of press attention. Collaboration and problem-solving take mutual commitment, safety, patience, and thoughtfulness. None of those virtues emerge in a 30-second sound bite.

You can tell that attempts to save face are being employed when you or others engage in the following kinds of communication (adapted from Folger, Poole, and Stutman 1993):

1. *Claim unjust intimidation.* Topic goals take second place to this specific kind of relational goal—to stand up to another’s attempt to take over. People accuse

others of taking advantage, declare their resistance to unjust treatment, and often seek support from outside parties when they are being treated unjustly.

2. *Refuse to step back from a position.* A person who no longer feels comfortable with an earlier position may choose to stay with it, even in light of new information, because looking foolish or inconsistent results in losing face. Thus, topic and larger relational goals are set aside to avoid looking weak, ill informed, or incompetent. In a community in a Western mountain state, water rights became a major conflict for a group of summer home owners in the mountains. A city tried to claim water rights to a small creek that flowed through the home owners' property. One man resisted the efforts of a majority to build a legal defense fund because he had said at a meeting, "I'm not going to pay some lawyer to fritter away my money on something we can't stop anyway!" As several summers wore on, this embattled individual refused to step back from his position of "no money to lawyers" and "we can't make any difference anyway." He wrote letters to others in the home owners' group, bitterly protesting the intimidation of the majority group in assessing a fee for each home owner to build the legal fund. Clearly, as new information came in strongly supporting the efforts to fight the city's water claim, as when the district court judge supported the summer-home group, the man who was fighting to avoid losing face found himself in a dilemma—to fight further might be to lose face even more. Eventually, he pretended he had supported the legal efforts all along but just thought the fees were too high. This was a face-regaining effort, and the home owners' group wisely dropped the issue so the man could be part of the community again. For him, the content and relational goals had become temporarily unimportant.
3. *Suppress conflict issues.* People also try to save face by refusing to admit that a conflict exists, since to acknowledge the conflict might mean that events are out of control, which might make people feel uncomfortable and incompetent. In the water rights conflict discussed previously, several longtime friends of the dissident home owner said things like, "Well, Kent is just cantankerous. He'll get over it," or "Well, these things bring up strong feelings." The association had few effective means of conflict resolution. Many felt that to acknowledge conflict at all would mean that their group was in danger of losing a sense of camaraderie and community spirit. One board member tried to schedule a meeting that the dissident individual could not attend because of his travel schedule—an attempt to suppress or avoid the issue of face, or identity, needs.

In productive, ongoing relationships, several kinds of communication will help people restore their lost face or prevent further loss of face. You can increase flexibility and problem solving if you

1. *Help others increase their sense of self-esteem.* Treat others with goodwill, giving them the benefit of the doubt even when they have been belligerent or unproductive. You might say things like "Everyone gets upset sometimes. We can get past this," or "You must not have had all the information I had. You couldn't have known about the Grandview project yet, as I did." Even saying something

like “I know you were doing what you thought was best” gives the other person the benefit of the doubt and is usually true. People do tend to do what they think is best at the time.

2. *Avoid giving directives.* Parents can tell their teenage children, “I want you to honor the house rules we’ve discussed. I want to be able to trust you and not worry about monitoring you—you’re almost grown and can make decisions for yourself.” This approach is much better than “If you don’t follow the rules we’ve set up you can find somewhere else to live!” As will be discussed later, it’s better to avoid direct threats and to use persuasion and face-saving communication instead. No one wants to be pushed around. Even if you have “right on your side,” it may not always be wise to be “right,” as this creates winners and losers.
3. *Listen carefully to others and take their concerns into account.* Even when you don’t have to listen because you have the power to make a decision independently, listening and taking care of others’ concerns as best you can helps them feel included, approved of, and respected.
4. *Ask questions so the other person can examine his or her goals.* By asking questions instead of attacking, you give the other person a chance to change in the interaction instead of entrenching or digging in (note the warlike metaphor).

In conclusion, helping others protect their self-identity as a good, worthy and competent human being goes far toward helping resolve conflict by allowing people to focus on other goals than self-protection.

Process Goals: What Communication Process Will Be Used?

The key question when assessing **process goals** is “What communication process would work best for this conflict?” Many times people disagree about how to formally or informally conduct a conflict. A group might argue over the merits of consensus versus voting. Intimates often disagree about whether strong emotions hurt the process of conflict or not, or whether the partners should stay up and talk when one is sleepy or wait until morning. Work groups go back and forth about whether to send out opinion questionnaires, talk informally in a series of meetings, delegate certain decisions, or put off deciding certain issues. All these relate to the process of conflict interaction and will impact content, identity, and relational goals.

Some examples of process goals are

giving each one equal talk time	talking informally before deciding	not allowing the children to speak
consensus	having high-power	voting
decisions made by subgroup	person decide	
	secret ballot	

Different processes of communication may change the relationships involved. For instance, minorities may be given more power with a free flow of communication, whereas higher-power people might maintain their power with a more tightly organized form of

interaction, such as one that relies heavily on written communication. One of the current trends in the workplace is that people want more processes that enhance equality and open participation. People struggle in organizations and small groups over the pros and cons of consensus, informal discussion, information gathering, delegated decisions, written summaries, voting, and parliamentary procedure. Women, more so than men, are more comfortable soliciting everyone's opinion (Brown and Gilligan 1992). Process goals also vary in different cultures, with some being quite authority oriented and others relying on equal participation. In Native American tribal politics, a long process of consensus building is often required before a decision is considered valid by the tribe. The tribal members delegate less to their elected officials than do Western European cultures.

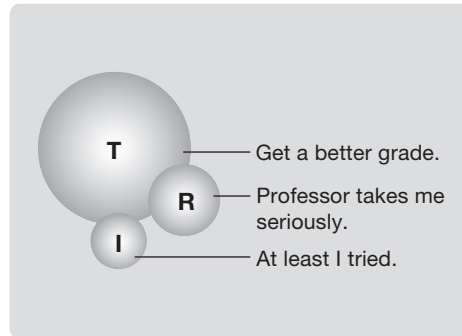
In addition to changing the levels of influence, different processes encourage or discourage creative solutions. Quick, well-defined processes help you move forward but may decrease creative, innovative solutions. Longer, sometimes confusing processes that build in time for reflection and evaluation improve the chances for creativity. Thus, different processes affect the outcome of a conflict interaction as well. For instance, one couple began to struggle over when to buy a house. The wife wanted to buy a house in the next few months, whereas the husband wanted to save more money before they looked seriously. The husband suggested that they first discuss with each other their financial goals and then talk about the house. This discussion resulted in the wife's decision that she, too, wanted to wait at least a year so that they could better their financial situation. By changing from content issues, such as the interest rate, the availability of houses in the desired neighborhood, or the likely tax consequences, to a different process, such as talking about other goals, the couple changed the relational conflict ("I've got to get her/him to listen to me") to a mutually acceptable process.

Large public meetings are arenas for process conflict. In one conservation organization, the planning group struggled over whether to have a symposium of speakers presenting their ideas on biodiversity or whether to break the participants up into small groups to discuss different ideas and then bring questions back to the resource people. The executive group, anxious to present their organization's views on the importance of biological diversity, decided on a process they could control, the symposium of carefully chosen speakers. This led to a clear but noninvolving presentation.

Conflicts over process involve face-saving or face-giving goals as well. People who know they are in the minority often argue over correct parliamentary procedure, which provides more options for hearing from the minority than does, for instance, informal large-group discussion followed by voting. Often, process conflicts change as individuals are heard. People drop their obstruction to a certain process if they are assured of being heard and counted (face/identity issues) and when they see that their content and relational goals are being protected. As in struggles over differing content, relational, and identity goals, process conflicts blend into the other conflicting goals. Shifting from one level to another often helps parties avoid becoming stuck in an unproductive conflict.

The Overlapping Nature of TRIP Goals

Now that each type of goal has been explained and illustrated, we can deepen our analysis of goals in conflict. A number of features about conflict goals need to be highlighted.

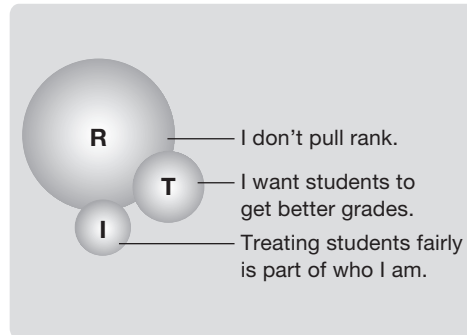
Figure 3.2 Content Goals Paramount

Feature 1: Not all types of goals emerge in all disputes. Raging disputes go on in which no process, or procedural, issues emerge. In the workplace, for example, there may be a heated disagreement between two supervisors, yet neither wants to change any of the processes used, how frequently they meet, or who is included. Similarly, many examples of conflicts can be cited in which there are no content issues. Two friends may be locked in a struggle over how responsive they are to one another, a relational issue that doesn't involve content. It is often puzzling to parents how their children can fight for hours over "nothing"—no identifiable content issues. But rest assured, if there is a struggle and no content issues are apparent, the struggle is about something. The dispute rests on identity, process, and/or relational grounds.

Feature 2: Interests and goals overlap with one another and differ in primacy. When you begin a dispute over your grade (the topic goal), you also want to be treated well by the professor (the relational goal) and want to think that you tried hard (the identity, or face-saving, goal). Figure 3.2 demonstrates how this might look from your side.

As you can see, you begin a discussion with the professor with the topic issue paramount in your mind; the relational and identity issues are there but not as important to you. Note therefore that even though they differ in prominence, different goal types emerge. The professor, on the other hand, may be most concerned that she be seen as a fair and kind person, so a diagram of her goals at the beginning of the conversation might look like figure 3.3. She may be most concerned about relational issues, such as others seeing her as a fair person who treats students equally, and identity issues ("I'm doing this job the way it should be done; I like how I respond to student concerns"). Her primary goals, then, are relational and identity goals. The topic goal of the student's grade is much less significant, unless the student feels he or she is being treated unfairly.

A second example illustrates how a process or procedural goal might be utmost in one party's mind. You are a member of a departmental student group and would like to run for president. You were out of town last weekend, and this Tuesday in class someone said, "Hey, what do you think about Stan being president of the student club? We had an election last night." For you, the procedural issue of not being notified of a meeting when others knew you wanted to run for president is the paramount issue, as shown

Figure 3.3 Relational and Identity Goals Paramount

in figure 3.4. Note that in this case, the procedural issue looms largest, followed by identity and relational issues of equal weight.

The examples illustrate that for each party, the paramount interests probably differ from those of another person in the same situation. Notice that all of these examples included relational and identity goals because it is rare to have a conflict that does not involve identity and relational issues.

Feature 3: Identity and relational issues are the “drivers” of disputes; they underlie topic and process issues. As you listen to people describe conflicts, you begin to notice a pattern—at the core of the disputes are their concepts of who they are and how they want to be treated in relationships. In most business disputes, for example, regardless of the topic issue, someone is concerned about trust, treatment, or communication—relational issues. Further, the face saving discussed earlier is a key element in all disputes. Because we are human beings, our inherent subjectivity drives disputes. Think back to when you were not chosen to play as a kid or were excluded from some high school activity, and you may remember just how important relational and identity issues are. As discussed under Feature 1, relational and identity concerns will almost always overlap—*who you are* with others is related to *how* the relationship is conducted. Figure 3.5 illustrates which goals are almost always present and, in fact, drive almost all disputes.

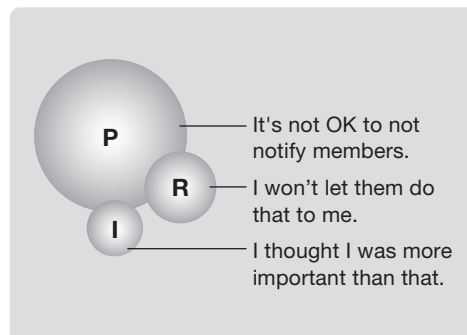
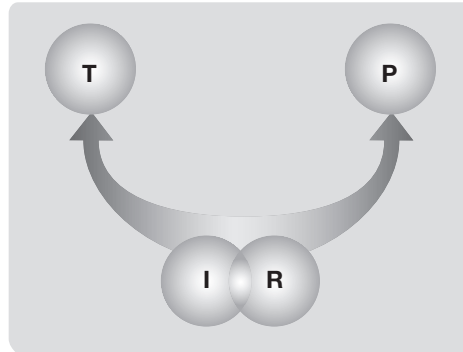
Figure 3.4 Process Goals Paramount

Figure 3.5 Relational and Identity Goals Propelling a Dispute

Note that the relational and identity issues are the subjective forces that propel the topic and process issues into focus. Even though the identity and relational issues are the most difficult to talk about, they are the most potent issues in conflicts. One interesting feature of how people operate, given that relational and identity issues are the foundations of all conflicts, is that sometimes identity and relational interests may be met indirectly. For example, it may not be common in your family to say, “I feel excluded,” but rather, family members may watch others at the family picnic, see who is left alone, and seek them out for a talk. In an organization, it may not be within the cultural norms to say, “I don’t feel very valued here,” but the president may give you access to the boardroom for meetings if he or she guesses that you are feeling pushed aside. Similarly, watch little kids at play. One of the kids may be left out, and another may turn to that child and say, “Want to play dolls with me?” Such a move is both a relational and identity tactic. When Bill, one of the coauthors of this book, was 12 and not getting any time with his dad, he was hyperactive and on the verge of delinquency. An observant neighbor, Francis Cowger from Upton, Wyoming, noticed him, and offered him a summer job driving his tractor. Many relational and identity needs were filled for Bill on a John Deere tractor. If Francis had approached Bill’s dad and said, “I think your kid needs some attention, but I know you are working 14 hours a day, so how about I give him a job on my ranch this summer?” Bill’s dad would have been insulted. But the indirect offer to help, by giving Bill a job, avoided a conflict with the father and allowed Francis to give neighborly assistance. By being alert to the “relational translations” someone else might make, you can serve both relational and face-saving needs indirectly through content. Indirect, topic-only solutions do not work in intense conflict situations, however. The more severe and strained the conflict, the less satisfying the content approaches will be. This leads to the fourth feature of conflict goals:

Feature 4: In a serious dispute, topic-only solutions are rarely satisfying to conflict parties. If you know someone who has ever won a lawsuit, ask him or her, “How do you feel about the other party and the process you went through?” You probably will hear anger, frustration, and exasperation, with the person usually launching into a tirade about both the other party and the other party’s attorney. That is because (unless it is a very unusual case) only topic issues have been addressed, and the needs to save face, to be listened

to, and to be told that you aren't crazy have not been attended to. During the dispute there is often so much threat to each person's identity that content solutions alone are not satisfying. In this type of situation, if an outsider says, "You got \$150,000; what more do you want?" the plaintiff will usually answer, "An apology."

Feature 5: Conflict parties often specialize in one kind of goal. Conflict parties in ongoing struggles often highlight one type of goal and limit themselves to it, as in the following dialogues:

In the Family

Grandfather: My daughter is just not a good mother to her kids—she needs to learn how to be a better mother. The kids need to be cleaner, and they are always late to school. Those kids need a better mom. (topic specialization)

His daughter: [the mother of two small boys] I am just not willing to have the kids spend time at their grandparents' house until Dad learns how to treat people better. He only criticizes me and the kids and never says anything positive. (relational and identity specialization)

In the Organization

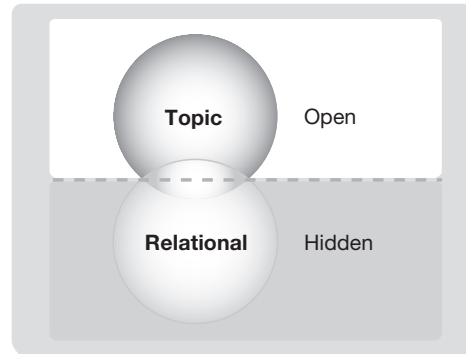
Faculty member: This is a ridiculous place to work. I put in a lot of hours and no one notices. I'd just once like to get some credit for what I do here. (relational specialization)

Chair of department: Dr. Samuels just doesn't do a very good job in the classroom. I can't support him for promotion until he begins to get higher marks from the students. I'll have to have some hard-hitting sessions with him outlining how a professional person does a job like his. (topic specialization, then a shift to relational specialization)

In these conflicts, the participants separate and specialize—one party on topic goals and the other on relational goals. This split tends to keep the conflict going—as the topic specialist continues to expect better “performance” from the other, the relational specialist becomes more and more critical of the treatment he or she receives.

Specialization in either topic or relational goals often reflects the parties' relative power. All too often, high-power parties are the ones who focus exclusively on topic. Failure to acknowledge relational goals may be due to a lack of skill or can show hostility, lack of caring, or even a desire to compete. Focusing only on topic devalues the other person and his or her concerns. The most powerful group member usually wins by structuring the conflict and ignoring troubling relational issues from lower-power people. Topic discussion is simpler and requires less investment in the other person. Similarly, lower-power members may wish to bring in goals other than topic goals as a power-balancing mechanism. If a lower-power person can get the higher-power person to agree that relational process, and identity goals, are important, the lower-power person is “empowered” and becomes a legitimate party in the conflict.

Feature 6: Goals may emerge in a different form. Sensitivity to the different types of goals allows you to recognize when one type of goal is being acted out in terms of another. Any one of the four can come to the surface in a different form. Topic goals emerge as relational, identity, or procedural goals. Relational goals can emerge as topic,

Figure 3.6 Relational Goals Emerging in Topic Form

identity, or procedural goals, and so on—there are 12 possible substitutions. One of the most common is illustrated in figure 3.6: a relational goal carried by topic.

Many times conflict parties are simply unable to identify their relational goals. Instead, they act them out at the topic level. For example, you may feel devalued by your boss, so you wage an ongoing, persuasive campaign to change the performance evaluation system used by the organization. Or you think your brother does not respect you, so you argue that he doesn't have the training to handle your aging mom's finances. In "Stay for Dinner," notice the shift in goals.

"Stay for Dinner"

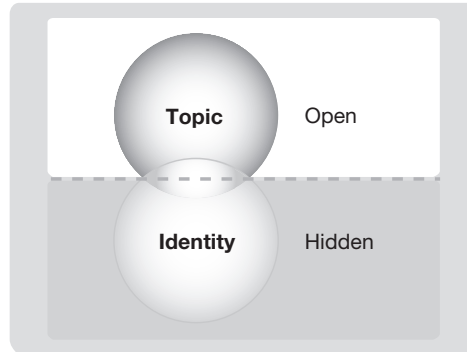
Connie, Sharon, and Janene, seniors at a university, share an old house near campus. They have known each other for years; they grew up in the same town. Their roommate relationship has, thus far, been fairly smooth, although recently an issue has emerged. Janene eats two meals a day on campus at the food service. Connie and Sharon like to cook, so they prepare their meals at home. They have invited Janene to share their evening meal several times, and Janene has occasionally accepted. It's Thursday night, Janene is rushing to get to the food service before it closes, and the following dialogue takes place:

Connie: Hey, Janene, you might as well stay and eat with us. It's late—you'll never make it.

Janene: No big deal. If I miss it, I'll get a hamburger or something. [She rushes out the door.]

Connie: [to Sharon] That's the last time I'm going to ask her to eat with us. She thinks she is too good to be bothered with staying around here with us.

A few weeks later, Connie and Sharon find someone who is willing to room with them, share cooking, and pay a higher rate. So they approach Janene and say, "We are struggling with finances, and we have someone who will eat here, share expenses, and save us all money on food. Would you rather pay a higher rate or move out?"

Figure 3.7 Identity Goals Emerging in Topic Form

As you can see, this dispute began with two people feeling excluded and quickly degenerated into a topic-only conflict. Because relational issues were ignored, a long-time friendship was lost.

Identity conflicts, as well, often erupt on the topic level, as shown in figure 3.7.

“I’m right/Are not/Am too” is an example of an identity-driven dispute that gets played out on the topic level. Each person starts by wanting to feel right (identity, or face saving). Watch what quickly happens.

“I’m Right/Are Not/Am Too!”

Duane and Kathy are going to a movie. Duane is driving, and they both notice a red car passing them.

Duane: That’s a Subaru, like the kind I was telling you about.

Kathy: No, I think it was a Toyota. But it’s pretty.

Duane: No, it was a Subaru!

They argue back and forth about the rightness of their claims. Neither is a car expert, but both are adamant, using sarcasm and biting humor.

Kathy: Well, you may be right, but I still think it was a Toyota.

Duane: Look, I know I’m right!

Kathy: You never think I know anything!

Duane: You don’t know anything about cars. Blow it off. It’s not important.

Kathy sits silently for 10 minutes.

The couple will continue to argue about identifying cars, but both have stated relationship concerns. Kathy feels she is not given credit as a knowledgeable person. Duane states that he needs to be right on things he knows more about. The couple appear to

be negotiating about who has preeminence in certain areas of expertise. They haven't worked out how to "call off the conflict" or how to ask for more respect from each other. They are likely to find other topics to fight over until the relationship is addressed directly. The following box presents two openings that might start them off more productively.

Duane: I get bothered when you challenge me about something I know a lot about. I start thinking you don't think I'm very smart.

or

Kathy: Duane, I'm not that interested in Toyotas, or Subarus either. But I've been thinking that you get the last word on most topics we discuss. It makes me want to never give in—even if I know I'm wrong.

Goals Change in Interaction

TRIP goals are like a lava lamp, glowing, changing, altering, and always moving.
—Leanne Eleff, 2001

Goals don't stay static but undergo transformation before, during, and after disputes. They will emerge as one type and, during the course of the dispute, flower into another type. Even after the struggle is over, goals will shift and change.

Take the case of Eleanor, a senior in a class. She felt the grade on her last essay was too low.

The Bad Grade

Eleanor to her friend: That instructor has it in for me. He continues to ignore me in class and on the last assignment, he really cheated me. I'm simply not going to put up with that any longer.

Eleanor thinking to herself as she waits to see the instructor: Ok, when I go in there, I'm going to get him to apologize to me for causing me such grief. I want him to see just how much he has ruined my senior year.

Eleanor in the office: Mr. Jones, I would like it if you would re-grade the first essay question. I don't think you understood what I was trying to write.

Mr. Jones: Sure, glad to. I'll give it back to you on Tuesday after class.

Note how her goals changed. She began with bad treatment and being ignored (relational goals) and a content goal (being cheated) to a relational goal (I want him to

apologize to me) to a pure content goal (reevaluate one question). Such change and flow are typical in conflict situations.

One way to look at this flow of goals is to specify how goals change across time from (1) prospective (before interaction with the person), to (2) transactive goals (during the interaction itself), to (3) retrospective (after the conflict is over). It is important to be able to track the changes in both your and the other person's goals—they continue to evolve over time.

Prospective Goals

The word *goals* most commonly connotes intentions people hold before they engage in conflict. For instance, Sally might say to Dorothy, “What do you hope to accomplish at the board meeting? The last one was awful—so much confusion and disorganization.” Dorothy might reply, “I want to sort out who’s in charge of the budget decisions and how we’re supposed to come up with \$5,000 more next year than we took in this year. I don’t want to take responsibility for more fund-raising.” Dorothy has stated her **prospective goals**—those she can identify before the board meeting begins. Simply stated, she hopes that the board will decide who makes budget decisions and delegate fund-raising to some responsible party. Most of the other board members will come to the meeting with their own prospective goals. An effectively managed meeting will take account of all the prospective goals members bring, whether they are readily stated or not.

Taking the time to clarify what you want from a particular interaction lays the groundwork for more effective conflict. The expectation of collaboration establishes a positive tone for the discussion.

When you clarify your prospective goals, you

- Gain clarity about what you want from a meeting.
- Prepare yourself for a discussion.
- Get a sense of “I can do this.”

Of course, as we have the actual conversation with the person, we usually change in their presence like Eleanor did. During the discussion, your goals continue to shift and change during the transaction itself.

Transactive Goals

In many conflicts “goals are quite complex and ephemeral” (Sillars and Weisberg 1987), and they only become clear as the conflict unfolds. For example, during a struggle with your housemate over financial misunderstandings, you discover that what you really want is to move—which you did not know you felt until the argument began. You have just stumbled onto a **transactive goal**—one discovered during the conflict itself.

Transactive goal development takes place during conflict episodes rather than before or after. You may have been absolutely certain that you wanted an assistant to carry out the new project your boss assigned to you, but during a staff meeting you may change your demand for an assistant. You now say that you can do the work without an assistant for at least six months. What happened? Did you back down? Did the boss win? Did

you have “no guts”? More likely, you became aware of the interdependent nature of your work team and decided to change your demand, given the needs of the entire group. You may have been given recognition for the difficulty of your job. Maybe your boss said in front of the group, “I’d like to give you an assistant, but I don’t have the money in the budget and don’t know where I can get it” (a face-saving message). Your conflict goals changed because of the communication event.

A school board member was trying to decide how to handle her strong opposition to the closed, or “executive,” sessions of the board that her colleagues on the board supported. She discussed the incipient conflict with friends ahead of time, rehearsing what she was going to do (prospective goal). When the next board meeting arrived, she did not give her prearranged speech. She compromised and agreed with her colleagues that some closed meetings, in limited circumstances, were acceptable. This change is an example of transactive goal development.

The concept of transactive goals developed from the conviction that communication, itself, is transactional. To describe communication accurately, we must look at what happens when people are together instead of looking at each person’s separate experiences (Wilmot 1987; Laing, Phillipson, and Lee 1966). Relationships are interpenetrative, with each person influencing and being influenced by the other (Wilmot 1995). To say that the board member in the example was persuaded by the other board members is simplistic. Neither did she persuade them to adopt her point of view. They all influenced each other, creating new, transactive goals through the process of a board meeting.

You may have noticed that your goals change in conflicts as you get a chance to express your feelings, be heard, and talk through your opinions and wishes (while the other party does the same). If you are a person who says, “I don’t know what I want until we get a chance to discuss it,” you understand transactive goals. The following box exemplifies the way new goals develop as a conflict progresses. Note that the two friends see themselves as interdependent and that they value their relationship as well as solving the immediate topic issue (finding the lost object).

Verbal Communication

Goal Analysis

First phone call:

Amy: You know that silver star pendant I loaned you? I guess you didn’t return it with the rest of the jewelry, because I can’t find it.

Janice: I don’t have it. I remember that I didn’t borrow it because I knew it was valuable to you. You must have misplaced it somewhere. But I’ll look.

Amy’s #1 prospective goal is to *get the pendant back from Janice*.

Janice’s #1 prospective goal is to *convince Amy that she is not responsible for the disappearance of the necklace*, a goal that is incompatible with Amy’s prospective goal.

(continued)

Verbal Communication

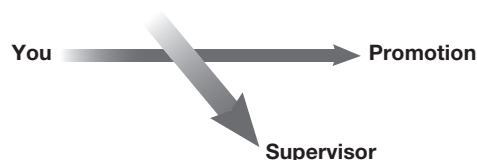
Goal Analysis

Second phone call:

Amy: I still can't find it—I'm getting panicky. I'll hold while you go look. Please check everywhere it might be.	Amy maintains prospective goal #1 by escalating her previous goal statement. Amy and Janice still have incompatible goals.
Janice: You're upset about the necklace, and I don't know what I can do since I honestly don't think I have it. But what really concerns me is that you are upset with me. You mean a lot to me, and this hurts.	Transactive goal #2: <i>Affirm the relationship in spite of the loss of the necklace.</i>
Amy: I know. I really don't want to put it all on you. I'm glad you understand, though. You know, John gave me that necklace.	Amy reaffirms transactive goal #2, making it mutual. She agrees to discuss, affirming the relationship as a new, additional goal.
Janice: Well, what can we do to get this solved? I feel awful.	Janice restates transactive goal #2 and offers transactive goal #3: <i>Find the necklace together without damaging the relationship.</i>
Amy: I'll hang up and we'll both go look everywhere and then report back.	Amy advances transactive goal #4: <i>Share the responsibility with a new plan of action.</i>
Janice: OK. And then we'll come up with something if we don't find it right away. Cross your fingers.	Janice accepts transactive goal #4 and advances transactive goal #5: <i>We will keep working until we solve this problem.</i>

We shift to negative goals when we can't "get what we want." It is only when we get frustrated that we belittle, injure, or try to damage the other. This shift from the original topic or content goal to a negative relationship or identity goal characterizes the destructive conflict. In diagram form, the goal change occurs as follows:

1. You want a promotion:
You —————> Promotion
2. When you ask her for a promotion, your supervisor says, "No way. You aren't going to get a promotion as long as I'm the boss here. Your work has been substandard, not worthy of promotion." Your boss interferes with your original goal, and you begin to focus most of your attention on her interference and your attempts to gain power.



3. You then begin to lose sight of your original goal and spend energy trying to get even with the boss. You talk to people at home and at work about her, tell others how biased she is, spread rumors at work, and do other things to undercut her authority.



This example describes a typical pattern of goal shifting in a conflict. What began as a topic goal, getting a promotion, turns into a relational contest between the two of you—you shift from a positive content goal to a negative relational goal.

Such shifts occur often and can be either spontaneous or strategic (Infante and Wigley 1986). Two business partners, for example, who begin by wanting to help each other earn sizable amounts of money, experience a misunderstanding over a contract and then spend the next two years trying to one-up each other during board meetings and to get others in the organization to side with them. The partnership begins to flounder as each member thinks the other is more trouble than he is worth.

One other type of goal shifting occurs in conflicts. Often, a person who is frustrated over the content of a conflict (the vote doesn't go your way; you can tell the outcome of the discussion will be unfavorable) will shift from content to process. Concerns about fair process, equal treatment, and other process issues often surface when one has not been successful at attaining a desired content goal. The teenager who launches an appeal to use the family car and is turned down may resort to arguing that "you listened to Steve, but you didn't let me tell you why I needed the car. You treated me unfairly." She is switching from the unsuccessful content attempt to a discussion of process. Similar process concerns arise in many conflicts after the participants realize their content goals have been thwarted. A change in any type of conflict goal spills over to the other types of conflict goals. Often, as in previous examples, identity issues become intertwined with relational goals. When you feel powerless in relationship to another person, your sense of effectiveness or worthiness is challenged. Thus, identity goals rise in importance.

Conflict parties also *sacrifice content for relationship goals* or relationship goals for content. When the spouse never argues, avoids expressing any disagreement, and always says, "whatever you want, dear," he or she is sacrificing content goals in order to maintain the relationship. Acquiescing to others and never telling them what you really feel are types of content goal sacrifice. Alternatively, if you are intently set on your content goal (making money, negotiating the best possible contract, or always winning), you may be sacrificing the relationship in order to win the content. If you never consider the wishes of the other and always try to win, you are probably destroying valuable relationships in order to accomplish your goals.

In conclusion, conflict goals change over time. As one goal is frustrated, others assume more importance. You may not know which goals, topic, relational, identity, or process, are the most important, for they are in flux. Goals change during the transactions we have with others.

Retrospective Goals

Retrospective goals emerge after the conflict is over. People spend a large part of their time and energy justifying decisions they have made in the past. They need to explain to themselves and others why they made the choices they did. This process often happens with intimates who, for example, have an intense conflict over discipline of the children. After the first triggering comment, they may say, "Let's decide what's best for the children, not just what fits our own upbringing" (prospective goal). During subsequent conflicts over specific instances of discipline, they discuss everything from how the individual children react, to whether Mom and Dad should support each other's choices, even if they don't agree. If they decide that discipline is to be handled differently from the way it was in past episodes, Mom might say retrospectively, "I mainly wanted to see whether you would begin to share the discipline with me." Dad might say, "All along I was really trying to get you to see that you need to loosen up with the kids." Assuming that the couple comes up with a wise agreement they can follow in future episodes, the retrospective sense making helps them to define who they are and to make meaningful statements about the place of the conflict in their lives. Monday morning quarterbacking is important in ongoing relationships as well as in sports.

Since we do not know the implications of a conflict until we look back on it, retrospective goals give us clarity. Weick (1979) explains this sense-making process as the reverse from the usual way of looking at goals. He explains organizational behavior as "goal interpreted." People act in an orderly fashion, coordinating their behavior with each other, but with little notion of how this is accomplished until after the fact. Then they engage in retrospective meetings, conversations, paper writing, and speeches to explain why they did what they did. Talking about what happened after an important conflict is as important as talking about what will happen before a conflict episode. In these retrospective accounts, your prospective goals for the next episode are formulated. Thus, we learn from experience.

Retrospective sense making also serves the function of face saving. Visitors to the United States often comment on our lack of face-saving social rituals as compared to the situation in Japan, China, and other countries. Even if you have been involved in a competitive conflict and have won, rubbing it in or gloating over the loser will only serve to alienate and enrage the person, perhaps driving him or her to devious actions in retaliation. If you give respect to the person, even if you did not agree with the position, the person's "face" will be saved, and you will lay the groundwork for collaboration in the future. Following are some face-saving comments:

Employer to job applicant: We looked very highly on you and your application. Our offer to Ms. Shepherd was based on her experience in our particular kind of operation. Even though you and I have been at odds for some time over organization of the new program, I want you to know that your new ideas are always sound and well organized. I just have different priorities.

Mother to teenage daughter: I know you didn't want to cause us worry. You couldn't have known how upset we'd be that you were four hours late. But since you did not follow our agreement, we are grounding you for a week, as we said we would if the rule was not followed.

☞ Goal Clarity

As noted above, how conflict parties formulate, alter, and explain their goals in a conflict determines to a large degree the success of the conflict experience. This section gives suggestions for better articulating and working with goals to improve your conflicts.

Clarify Your Goals

Goals that are unclear or hard to specify usually produce more conflict. One study demonstrated that in organizations, unclear and ambiguous goals produced more conflict between employees (Schnake and Cochran 1985). A careful specification of everyone's goals lets you decide which ones to abandon, which ones to trade, and which ones to maintain (Hermone 1974). Further, as Papa and Pood (1988a) demonstrated, **goal clarity** before the conflictual interaction results in increased satisfaction with the discussion with the other party.

Sometimes, however, a discussion of goals in interpersonal conflict elicits the same avoidance reaction mentioned in earlier chapters: "I don't want to be manipulative. If I figure out what I want ahead of time, I'm being pushy and presumptuous—I'll let the chips fall where they may." However, all effective communication is goal directed (Phillips and Metzger 1976). This means that communication is purposive, not that it is manipulative, and that people communicate for reasons and to reach goals. Since no one can avoid being goal directed, especially in conflict communication, productive conflict management depends on parties' taking open responsibility for their goals. In other words, know what your goals are, state them clearly to yourself, and communicate them in a flexible manner to your conflict partners. Advantages of clarifying your goals follow:

1. *Solutions go unrecognized if you do not know what you want.* If parents are not clear about whether they want their 18-year-old to live at home or to board in the dorm at a local college, they will not know how to manage the conflict with the son who wants to live in the dorm but does not have a job. If saving money is the primary goal, the parents might allow the son to live in the dorm and get a job. If the parents have decided that they do not want him to live in the dorm under any circumstances, the son's offer to get a job may trigger a covert conflict that is unclear and unproductive for all parties.
2. *Only clear goals can be shared.* Since people cannot read your mind, you must clearly communicate your goals. An example of this kind of goal sharing occurred in an academic department. The chairperson complained that the faculty was not paying enough attention to university politics. He made several statements over a period of a week or so, urging more attendance at meetings, more discussion of long-term budget and curriculum plans, and voluntary participation in activities around campus. Since all this happened at the beginning of a semester, when the rest of the faculty were feeling busy, hassled by bureaucratic demands, and underappreciated, the response from the faculty was negative. A genuine conflict began to brew. Finally, the chairperson said, "Since keeping us involved in the university is my job, I feel really down when nobody supports what I'm doing.

I need some feedback on what you think so I'm not just floundering around." Because he changed his goal statement from "Why don't you people work more?" to "I need support for what I'm doing," the conflict was reduced and productively managed.

3. *Clear goals can be altered more easily than vague goals.* One agency was embroiled in conflict over whether to fund and provide staff support for a new program to aid recently unemployed families. The three staff members who had been charged with setting up the new program did not know whether the agency director wanted to support that particular new program or whether he wanted to demonstrate to the funding sources that the agency was committed to being responsive to families in general. When the director clarified that the specific program should serve an underserved population, the staff members altered their previous goals so that the new program would assist with community problems of child abuse that were receiving little funding at that time. The change in staff goals was possible because the larger goals were clarified for the staff members, along with their important role in reaching the goals.
4. *Clear goals are reached more often than unclear goals.* Having a map helps travelers reach a destination. Similarly, Raush et al. (1974) found that 66 percent of the conflicts in which the issue was clearly stated were successfully resolved, whereas only 18 percent of the conflicts in which the issue remained vague and nonspecific were resolved. For example, a couple is considering where to move after college. If they choose the first option, "We will stay in the same city no matter what," they will have made a significantly different choice than if they choose the second option, "We will both get the best jobs we can." Those with shared individual and relational destinations are more likely to arrive at some desired point together. Clarifying goals has one risky outcome: it may make seriously incompatible goals apparent. However, they will become apparent sooner or later. Additionally, when goals are "stated explicitly and directly there is control of escalation" (99). When one's goals are unclear, they often promote overreaction from the other person, who misjudges the nature of the conflict. We are remarkably poor at second-guessing the goals of our conflict partners.

Often people create difficulty by assuming that their goals cannot be attained—that the other party will stand in their way. How many times have you planned and schemed for days, only to find that others were perfectly willing to give you what you wanted? A friend was miserable because her children would not give her any free time on the weekends. She began to believe they did not respect her needs. Finally one night she said in tears, "If I don't have some time alone, I'll go crazy." The teenagers were glad to make plans to give her time with no responsibilities. She simply never had asked. Even if the goal is a difficult one, allotting time to accomplish a clear goal allows for its attainment (Neale and Bazerman 1985).

In conclusion, clarifying goals is a key step in conflict management. People assess the conflicts in which they participate by making decisions about which goals are worth pursuing. In common language, they get a "grip" on the situation before deciding how to proceed.

Estimate the Other's Goals

Once a destructive conflict begins spiraling, *all our behavior is reactive*. We make choices based on what we think the other is thinking and intending. While not as elaborate as chess moves, all conflicts share a structure similar to chess—knowing the other has “moves,” you try to counter his or her moves. Our **estimate of the other's goals**—about “what the other wants”—propels our own choices.

When you talk to two parties to a dispute individually, you will be struck by their misjudgments of the other's goals. Here are some samples from real disputes:

Party #2 Estimate of #1's goals

He wants to control me

She is trying to fire me

He wants favored treatment

He doesn't value our input

She is getting ready to break up with me

Party #1 Goals

I need some predictability

I want to restructure the unit

I want to be recognized

This crisis demands action

I need just a little more space

One of the patterns in disputes is that as you get more convinced you *know* what the other wants, you are less accurate. Figure 3.8 demonstrates this relationship.

Becoming convinced we know absolutely what the other wants sets the stage for misinterpretation. As Sillars (2002) notes in his research on married couples in conflict, “I have been struck by how confident people seem to be when making very tenuous inferences about others” (8). One dramatic example comes from Catholics who were abused. They had this to say about their goals:

Most survivors do not want to receive money from the church as compensation for what was done to us. Most of us merely want to ensure that our perpetrators are removed from being able to abuse others in their position as trusted priests. We'd like some apology for what we've endured. Sometimes we want an apology or acknowledgement given to our parents (Survivors 2004).

Now, of course, this doesn't mean that the legal system will respond to these goals. In American culture we often substitute money for other goals, since legally it is easier to do that and also pay for your lawyer.

Figure 3.8 Confidence and Accuracy about the Other's Goals



In most personal conflicts where you know the other for a long time, your inferences about the other are “well informed but also quite biased” (Sillars 2002, 2). We all assume we “know” someone well, but the research is quite clear that we don’t! For one thing, when individuals are asked to report their thoughts during a video recall, only 5 to 7 percent of the time are they thinking about their partner’s perspective (Sillars 2002). Further, while one person focuses on the topic (content), the other focuses on the relationship—they tend to see only their part of the TRIP issues and not the other person’s.

Given that there is misunderstanding about the other, this by itself feeds negative conflict spirals and the descent into destructive conflict. In addition, however, *both parties feel misunderstood by the other*. They somehow know the other is misunderstanding their goals, and, in fact, feeling misunderstood then moves the conflict to a more destructive level. As you feel misunderstood, you will choose destructive conflict moves to get back at the other.

No wonder we get into such difficulties in conflict. We misunderstand the other, react to what we think he or she is intending, feel very confident in our assessments, and then justify our damaging moves.

No magic process untangles these intertwining misperceptions. Communication itself is fraught with difficulties, but one revolutionary thing to do is ask the other what he or she needs. Many years ago, Bill, one of the coauthors, had an ongoing struggle with a colleague. Finally, after many days of tug-of-war in meetings, Bill stomped into Wes’s office and said (not in a good tone of voice), “Wes, what do you want?” Wes calmly replied, “For you and me to go to lunch.” Bill, taken aback, said, “What are you saying? We are arguing about a tenure case.” Wes said, “Well, that is what I want.” So, against his better judgment, Bill went to lunch with Wes and survived it. Not only that, but their relationship began to slowly transform. What was driving the dispute from Wes’s side was feeling that Bill didn’t value him. They had lunch every three weeks from then on, and as a result, their conflicts subsided. Sometimes all you have to do is (1) ask and (2) listen!

Collaborative Goals

The best goals are clear, as explained previously, and help conflict interactants collaborate on resolving the conflict while protecting their ability to work, live, or interact with each other in important ways. The following statements characterize **collaborative goals** and may be used as a checklist for “good goals”:

1. *Short-, medium-, and long-range issues are addressed.* Many times people engage too forcefully with others at the beginning of a conflict because they are afraid their ideas will not be heard. Collaborative goals build in ways for people to be involved in the process as it unfolds. To form collaborative goals, plan for evaluations along the way. Give as much attention to a few weeks or months from now as to “right now.” Looking at longer-range goals helps de-escalate the importance of initial, prospective goals. One city council, meeting in a retreat, specified which goals, over a time line, were important to them. They set up a plan to specify who would do what by when and with what evaluation process. A year later, only those goals that had been broken down into a specific time line were achieved. Goals that are set up on a time line are less overwhelming than global goals such as “Let’s

change the way we get along as a family” or “I want more say about the financial structure of our family.”

2. *Goals are behaviorally specific.* Doable goals (Phillips and Metzger 1976) can be checked. “I’ll try to do better” might become a doable goal with specification; at present, it is a positive statement but not a collaborative goal. Terms used in intimate relations are often more vague than statements in business relationships. A corporate vice president could not get away with telling the president, “I will try the best I can to remember to turn the monthly reports in on time,” but intimates make such vague promises frequently. Specificity helps the parties know when a goal has been accomplished. The following examples illustrate how to make vague statements more specific:
 - Instead of saying, “Please respect my things more,” say, “I want you to ask me before you borrow any of my clothes. I’m usually glad to oblige, but I want you to ask me, all right?”
 - Instead of saying, “Let’s get this show on the road” (and then showing nonverbal impatience during a meeting), say, “I need to leave this meeting at 5:00 sharp.”
 - Instead of saying, “This time, young lady, you’re going to listen to what I say!” a parent might say, “Last time we talked about your messy room I wasn’t pleased with where we got. This time, I want you to listen to me, and I will listen to you, and then I want us to decide on what is reasonable. OK?”
3. *Statements orient toward the present and future.* The language of change uses what can be done now instead of what should have been done in the past. Hopeful statements instead of blaming statements set the expectation that agreements can indeed come about. A department head might say, “I want our program group to increase services to clients without increasing hours worked by our counselors,” instead of, “We have got to be more efficient than we were last year.”
4. *Goals recognize interdependence.* In all conflicts, tension arises between serving self-interest and serving the interests of the other party. In Western cultures we have overemphasized self relative to community interest, whereas Eastern cultures tend to focus on the interests of the group, or community (Dien 1982). Research consistently indicates, however, that when conflict parties operate with both concern for self and concern for others, the agreements that emerge serve the parties best (Tutzauer and Roloff 1988; Holloway and Brager 1985). This does not mean that you give in to the other; you can remain firm in achieving solutions that work for you while simultaneously seeking to please the other (Tutzauer and Roloff 1988). When one has low concern for the other coupled with a high demand for one’s own goals, however, coercion and manipulation result (Kimmel et al. 1980). High concern for self and the other coupled with high demand that one’s own goals remain important gives the parties an opportunity to develop creative, integrative solutions to the conflict.
5. *Collaborative goals recognize an ongoing process.* An overriding goal of constructive conflict is to remain committed to the process of constructive conflict. The particular content can be transcended by adhering to a collaborative process.

Fisher and Ury (1981) remind conflict managers that goal setting begins with the participation of all conflict parties. “Give them a stake in the outcome by making sure they participate in the process” (27). For collaborators, “the process is the product” (29).

The outcome of constructive conflict should be wise agreements. Wise agreements are fair and durable and take the interests of all parties into account (Fisher and Ury 1981, 4). The struggle for wise agreements is exemplified by a couple with children that goes to court for a divorce. The agreement should be representative of both sides; should be fair to all parties, including the children; should keep the couple out of court in the future; and should set up care for the children if they are too young to care for themselves. The process should be efficient, involve all parties’ interests, and improve or at least not damage the relationship between the parties.

When conflict parties work together to clarify goals and specify what the conflict is and is not about, destructive conflicts subside. Collaboration is a high-energy alternative to avoidance, violence, coercion, frustration, despair, and other forms of destructiveness. Collaboration is not always possible, but when it is, destructive conflict is transformed into constructive problem solving.

The participants can come to see themselves as working side by side on a problem, attacking the problem instead of each other. The overarching process goal is “We, working together, can solve this problem that is confronting us.” Part of the self-interest of conflict parties is preserving a workable relationship, focusing on the problem instead of each other. Relational preservation becomes a superordinate goal, as in the classic Sherif and Sherif (1956) study where groups of boys were placed in situations that aroused conflicts of interest between the two groups. The researchers then introduced a common enemy, thus stimulating the two groups to work together, which reduced their intergroup hostility. In interpersonal conflicts, long-term relational, process, and identity goals can reduce conflict over short-term goals.

Summary

As a conflict unfolds, topic, relational, identity, and process goals emerge (TRIP). Topic goals are the “objective,” verifiable issues that people talk about. Relationship goals are those pertaining to the parties’ influence on each other. Who gets to decide, how they treat one another, and other aspects of their communication are relationship goals. Identity, or face-saving, goals have to do with the needs of people to present themselves positively in interactions and to be treated with approval and respect. Process goals refer to parties’ interests in how the interaction is conducted.

Although most conflict parties center their discussions on content and process goals, the relationship and identity components often fuel the feeling in a given conflict.

Goals change in the course of a conflict. Prospective goals are those identified before interacting with the other parties. Transactive goals emerge during the communication exchanges. Transactive goals often shift; a destructive conflict is characterized by a shift from original goals to a desire to harm the other party. Retrospective goals are identified after the conflict episodes have

occurred. Unregulated, unplanned, fast-paced conflicts keep many people from understanding their goals until they later have time to reflect on the transactions.

Productive conflict management is enhanced by clarifying your goals, better estimating the

other's goals, and working to build collaborative goals. Working against or without consulting the other party often sets destructive forces in motion that preclude integrative management of the conflict.

Key Terms

Use the text's Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/wilmot7 to further your understanding of the following terminology.



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topic goals 64

relational goals 65

identity, or face-saving,
goals 69

process goals 74

prospective goals 83

transactive goals 83

retrospective goals 87

goal clarity 88

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goals 90

collaborative goals 91

Review Questions



Go to the self-quizzes on the Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/wilmot7 to test your knowledge of the chapter concepts.

1. Define the four types of goals (TRIP).
2. How do goals shift over time?
3. How do goals overlap and influence one another?
4. When do conflict parties shift their goals?
5. What does it mean to sacrifice one kind of goal for another?
6. What happens to goals in interactions with others?
7. What happens when we experience change in prospective goals?
8. Give an example of a transactive goal.
9. What are common identity themes?
10. How do retrospective goals change?
11. What does it mean to "specialize" in a type of goal?
12. What are the advantages of goal clarity?
13. Do conflict parties accurately estimate the other's goals?
14. What determines if goals are collaborative?