



Cornell University  
ILR School

## Conflict Resolution Skills in the Workplace

# THE WORKER INSTITUTE

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**March 22, 2018**

# Taking a Creative View of Conflict

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**Conflict is like pain.**

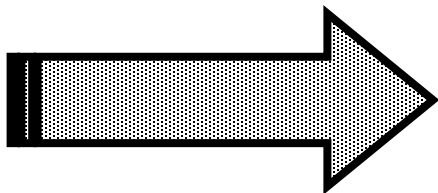
■ You don't have to like it.  
But it serves a purpose.  
It tells you something needs fixing.  
So fix it.

**Conflict can be a source of:**

■ Learning  
Better Decision-Making  
Improved Working Relationships

**Conflict is an opportunity for improvement. Use it.**

**Here's what makes this so difficult. . .**



**PEOPLE ISSUES  
BLOCK PROGRESS ON  
TECHNICAL SOLUTIONS**

# What Makes Conflict Resolution So Difficult?

*Think about an adversarial conflict you've been involved with. . . .*

*Keeping that in mind, put a ☒ next to the observations you've experienced.*

- It is possible to create competitive groups by merely placing them in a situation that appears competitive.
- Perceiving a situation as competitive distorts the judgment of group members so that they are likely to overestimate the quality of their solution to a problem and underestimate that of their "opponent".
- Once a group creates a solution to a problem, it becomes committed to it and is unable to understand an alternative solution.
- Opportunities to gain further information about an opponent's solutions are used to attack and belittle the opponent, rather than to study the proposal. The negotiation conference will often be used as a forum for justifying one's own position.
- Stereotypes of the other side develop, leading to what has been called the "enemy image." The image, once established, is maintained and reinforced through restricting communications, selective filtering, and interpretation of the evidence to fit the image.
- The stress of competitive interaction, often increased by deadlines and threats, distorts the way the parties see the situation, and leads the parties to behave and think rigidly

# How to Get There . . .

## Use Questions + Listen!

Good questions are the most direct route to understanding and understanding is the best route to a satisfactory settlement. Questions can also be used to govern the pace and direction of negotiations.

### Ask questions

- questions offer no target to strike at
- questions offer no position to attack
- questions lead to **INFORMATION**
- clarify information
- questions facilitate **PROBLEM SOLVING**

### Practice Active listening

- use attentive body language
- paraphrase to check comprehension
- avoid jumping to conclusions
- avoid getting defensive
- listen to learn
- avoid challenging what's being said while it's being said

## Simply ask - WHY?

- Why do you want that?
- How did you come to that conclusion?
- What is it about that idea that's most attractive to you?
- What do you need that for?
- So, you need a solution that will . . .
- What would it take to resolve this?
- Tell me more about . . .
- What led you to that position?
- Let me be sure I understand. Would you explain . . .
- Why is that important to you?
- What is it about that position that's most important to you?
- What are you trying to achieve with . . .
- Can you give me an example of why this is a concern?
- Talk to me some more about . . .

Then **listen**. To check for understanding, **paraphrase** back to the speaker what you've just heard. Now, you're getting information you need to work with.

## Interest-Based Decision Model

- ◆ Clearly identify the issue(s)
- ◆ Share relevant data/information
- ◆ Identify & explain each party's interests on the issue
  - Identify your own interests
  - Exchange and explain your interests
- ◆ Identify common/similar interests
- ◆ Identify conflicting interests
- ◆ Create options or actions
- ◆ Evaluate options with objective standards/criteria
- ◆ Develop action plan

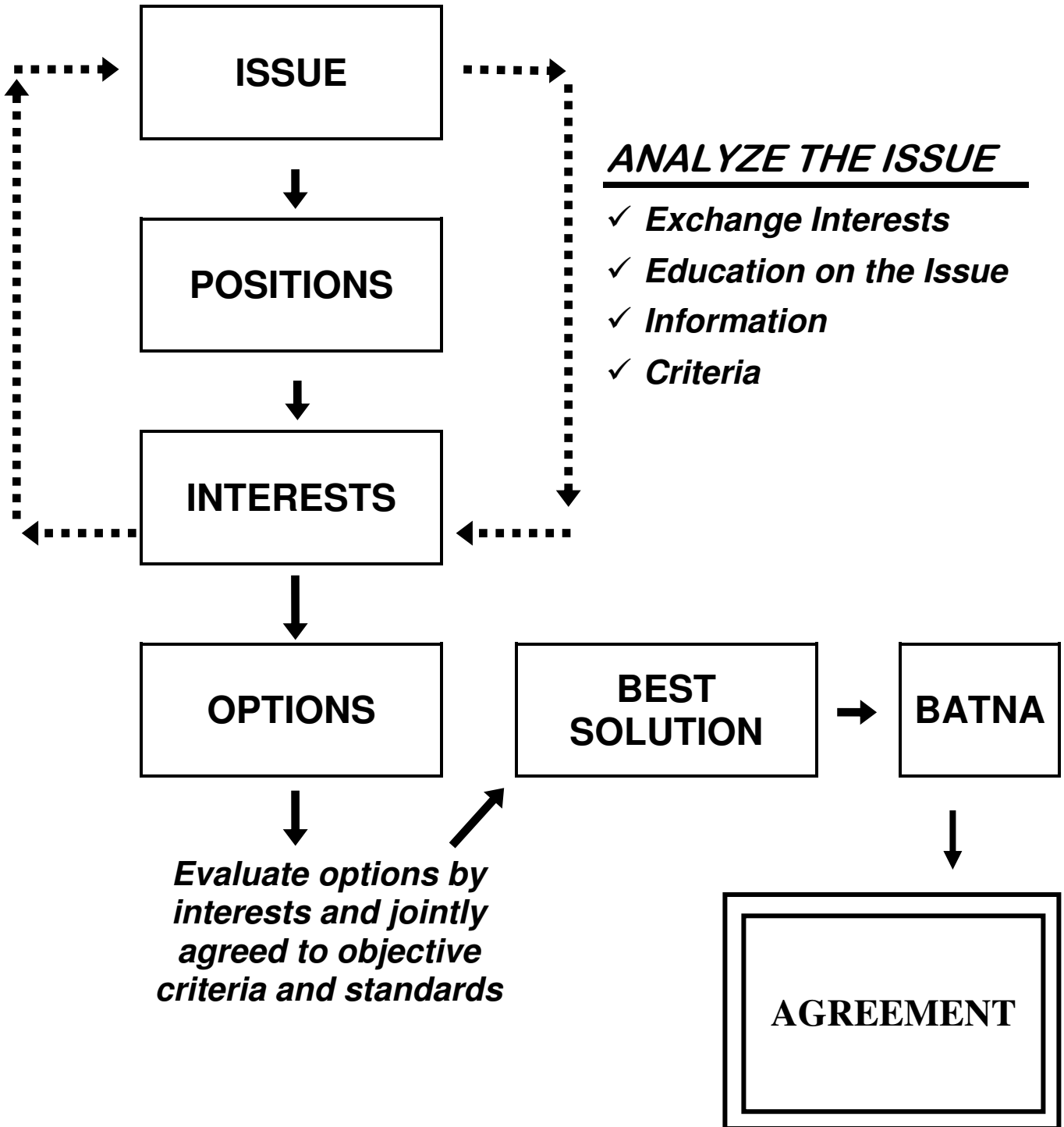
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Interests are needs, desires, concerns, fears.  
Interests reflect what one really cares about.  
Interests reflect the concerns that drive positions.  
Interests are the key!

**To discover interests, yours and theirs, ask questions.**

# Interest Based Conflict Resolution in Sequence

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# Get Your Point Across Without Driving Them Away

Be hard on the problem, soft on the people.

Human (personal) factors may be more important in reaching agreement than the terms proposed (substance). The way statements are phrased and delivered can threaten or wound others. This happens both on purpose and by accident.

- í Ask questions
  
- í Say “Yes, and my concern is . . .” instead of “No, but”
  
- í Use only “I” statements  
Avoid “you” statements & absolutes -- never, always, etc.
  
- í Warn, don’t threaten – I wonder what will happen when . . .
  
- í Use constructive feedback --  
When, this happens . . .  
Then, this happens to me . . .  
And I get . . .  
I would prefer. . .



# The Basic Philosophy Underlying IBB

- People are free to choose to help or hinder, to cooperate to mutual benefit or to manipulate to personal advantage.
- Organizational survival and growth are facilitated by joint problem-solving.
- Seeking the ideas of others can lead to better solutions and greater enthusiasm for the job at hand.
- Interest based conflict resolution is an attempt to get people to synthesize aims rather than enter into win-lose competitiveness.
- Participants in a dispute need to recognize and clarify one another's interests and attempt to see that each gets something of what they want and need.
- Specific ways of behaving create particular effects. The surest way of changing any human situation is to change the way you, yourself behave.
- Interest based conflict resolution employs no trick or posturing.

## **Interest-Based Problem Solving**

### **Mapping Out the Way to Agreement**

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- Interests
- Options
- Standards
- Alternatives
- Proposals

### **Interests**

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- Our needs, desires, concerns, fears; the things that one really cares about
- Interests usually underlie positions

### **Positions**

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- Positions are statements or demands
- Tend to lock people into positions taken
- The more you clarify and defend, the more committed you become
- Ego becomes identified with position

### **Traditional Approach to Problem-Solving**

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- More attention paid to positions, less time to meet underlying concerns
- Too much time is taken as both sides start with extreme positions.

### **Positional Bargaining**

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- Arguing over positions endangers ongoing relationships
  - Positional bargaining puts relationships and substance in conflict
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## **Basic Elements of Negotiation**

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### **Power, Rights and Interests**

- Power is rarely clear and there are many types of Power
- Rights are sometimes contradictory and rights assertion can be costly and frequently needs third party intervention
- Focus on the Interests, find out what they need and focus on interests to resolve the issue in a way that works for you

### **The Goal: Joint Problem-Solving**

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- People Sitting Side by Side
- Facing the Problem
- Reaching a Mutually Satisfactory Agreement

### **5 Barriers to Cooperation**

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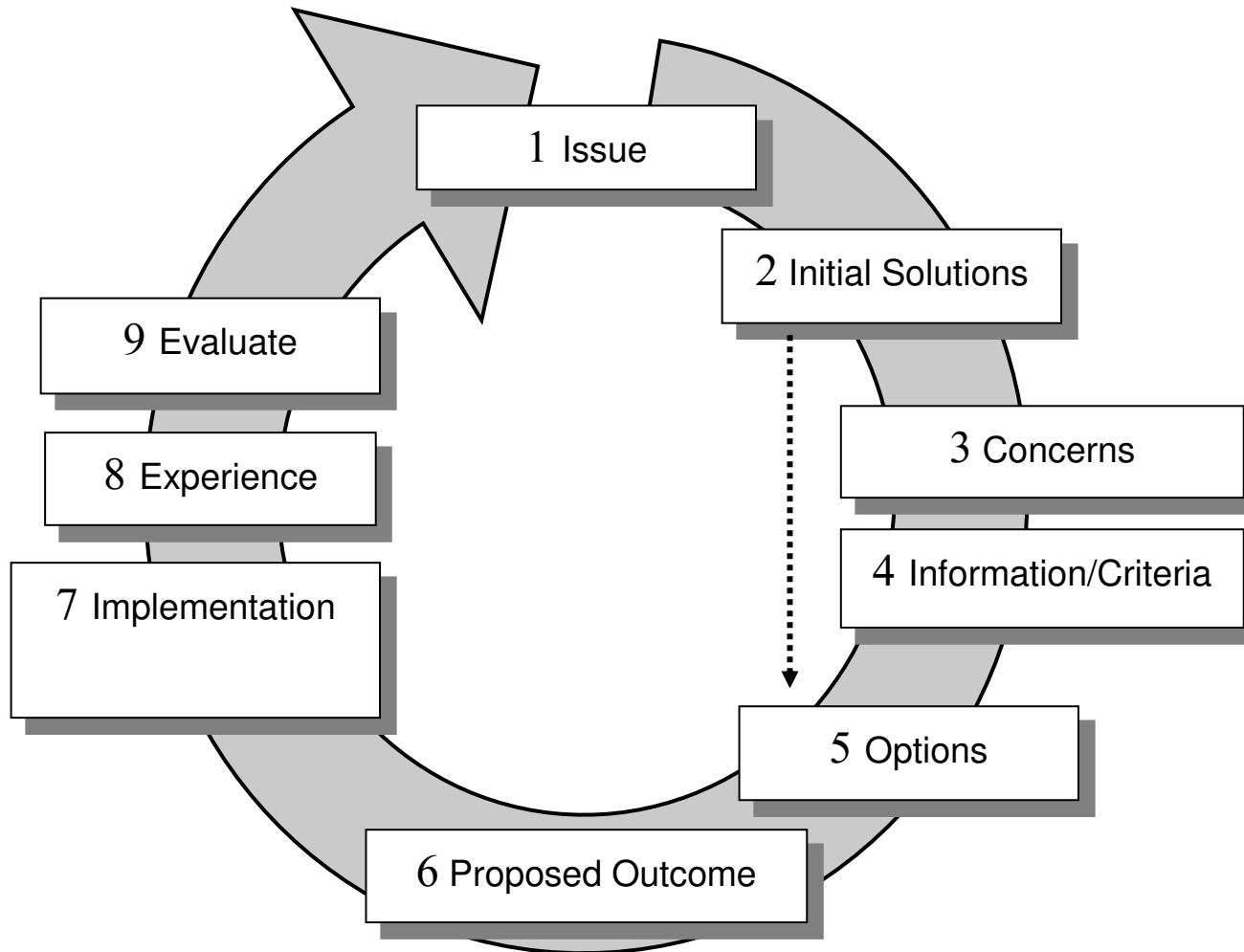
- Your Reaction
- Their Emotion
- Their Position
- Their Dissatisfaction
- Their Power

### **Strategy: Breakthrough Negotiation**

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- Go to the Balcony
- Step to Their Side
- Reframe
- Build Them a Golden Bridge
- Use Power to Educate

# Working Together: Information, Communication, Problem-Solving



## Keys to Success

- v Have a general discussion of the issue. *What does it mean from your constituency's perspective?* Listen for learning. Share data and information. Also ask: What will happen if we can't resolve this issue?
- v Label initial solutions/positions as options. And move on.
- v Shift the focus from solutions to concerns. *Why does your initial solution appeal to you? What concerns does it address?* Recognize and understand both yours and theirs. Ask why. Listen for understanding. Identify shared and different concerns.
- v Education and Information – *What do both sides need to understand about the issue to address it competently? What information is missing? Jointly establish objective criteria for the solution.*
- v Create multiple options. Brainstorm to get new ideas.
- v Convert the option which best meets objective criteria and addresses the concerns of both parties into a proposed outcome. Accept it if it is better than what you could achieve acting alone.
- v Plan implementation; evaluate the results and improve.