



CONFLICT DIAGNOSIS

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INTRODUCTION

a. Social and practical relevance of the specific topic addressed

Conflict diagnosis is an important topic for everyone. Whenever people meet (may it be at the workplace, at university, within families, with friends, etc.) there is the possibility of disputes to arise. It is a great asset to be able to analyse these conflicts in order to subsequently deescalate and solve them.

Especially people working in leading or counselling positions (e.g. employees of human resources departments, social workers, lawyers) find themselves often confronted with different conflict situations. In order to react adequately and/or give good advice it is necessary to understand the dynamics behind the problem. Otherwise the dispute may not be solved at all, personal or business relationships may be damaged and/or the parties to the conflict may find themselves unhappy with the outcome. Diagnosing conflicts is therefore a great support in making smart decisions when solving disputes.

b. Need assessment

A European-wide survey among 340 students with different study backgrounds (conducted in the course of this ERASMUS+ project) shows the importance of the topic. More than half of the students (54%) answered that they do not think that their university pays sufficient attention to the development of soft skills of the students. The soft skill “conflict management” was chosen by 13% of the students as a skill they would like to develop. This seems comprehensible, since unsolved conflicts in organizations lead, inter alia, to a loss of productivity and higher sickness rates, which ultimately results in high conflict costs and therefore people with the skill to diagnose and manage conflicts are very popular and in demand on the labour market.

c. Main goals and learning outcomes

The main goal when learning about conflict diagnosis is to enable yourself to analyse conflict situations from various angles. After learning about conflict diagnosis you can identify the current circumstances of the conflict, which type of conflict you are dealing with, what level of escalation it has reached and which procedure of dispute resolution would possibly be most appropriate to achieve a satisfying outcome for the parties involved.

CAUSES AND INDEXES OF BAD CONFLICT DIAGNOSIS

If conflicts are not diagnosed right (or not at all) before taking action various problems might occur.

- The conflict might not be solved at all, because the real cause of the dispute was not found.
- The false dispute resolution method or strategy might be chosen if the level of conflict escalation is not diagnosed. This means there might be either too less or too much of intervention by a third party, which

could again lead in the first case to the dispute not being solved at all. In the second case an intervention, e.g. by the court, might damage the relationship between the conflicting party, although they would have been able to solve their problem in an amicable way.

- One or more of the conflicting parties may be very unsatisfied with the outcome of the chosen method/strategy, since their needs and interests in solving the dispute were not identified right or not at all.

ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE CONFLICT DIAGNOSIS

Effective conflict diagnosis includes:

- Identifying the circumstances of the case (what causes the conflict, who is part of the conflict, how are their roles defined, what are the relations between them, what are their interests and needs in solving the dispute etc.);
- Identifying the type of conflict (inter- or intrapersonal, structural, distributional etc.);
- Identifying the current stage of the conflict (level of escalation, are parties willing to cooperate etc.).

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EXERCISE 1

THE WAR OF ROSES

In the following you will read the names of the different levels of conflict escalation according to Glasl as well as different situations of a marital conflict.

- First, bring the different levels of conflict escalation into the right order.
- Afterwards, identify at which level of escalation the conflict is in each of the given situations.
- In the end, you can compare your results with the solutions on page XY and think about 1-2 aspects you have learned from this exercise.

Tip: To prepare for this exercise see video lecture on this topic.

Note: This exercise is based on the movie “War of Roses“ by Warren Adler from 1989 and is an (exaggerated) example of how a conflict might escalate.

Different Levels of Conflict:

Debate – Level __

Action not Words – Level __

Threat Strategies – Level __

Tension – Level __

Limited Destruction – Level __

Loss of Face – Level __

Coalitions – Level __

Together into the Abyss – Level __

Disintegration – Level __

Marital Dispute

Level __

The Roses buy a house, which Barbara chooses and Oliver pays for. Over the next few years, Barbara decorates the house meticulously. Once there is nothing left to decorate in the house, she decides to set up a catering company. Oliver agrees but places an assistant at her disposal despite Barbara’s repudiation. In the meantime, Oliver moved up the career ladder and is a top lawyer. He promises to look through Barbara’s company contracts but instead, he swats a fly with them. In turn, she seeks revenge by being noisy when he makes important phone calls. In bed, she fights off his advances with martial arts techniques.

Level __

A fight in front of the children and the housekeeper escalates and Oliver spreads intimate details about his wife on the street. The lighting of the Christmas tree flickers and the couple accuse each other of their respective inability to look after technical issues. At night, an electrical short circuit sets the Christmas tree on fire, the house and the family can be saved at the very last minute.

Level __

Oliver tells Barbara about the accident with the cat. As a result, Barbara locks him in the sauna. Just before he threatens to suffocate, she lets him out but utters further threats.

Level __

In front of Barbara's guests, the couple stages a battle. As Oliver refuses to exit his vintage car, Barbara drives over his car and all its occupants. Oliver enters the house armed with an iron bar. The situation escalates and turns into a fight to the death. During the fight, Barbara falls over the handrail on the second floor and lands on the chandelier. Oliver jumps on top of her and the chandelier plummets. The housekeeper and the sent for lawyer find both of them dead.

Level __

Three years after the birth of their youngest child, the Roses' marriage is plunged into a crisis. Oliver starts a promising career as lawyer and spends less time with his family. The married couple fights over trivialities such as the placing of the Christmas star. A serious incident occurs during a dinner with Oliver's superiors where he stifles his wife's halting story and continues to tell the story instead of her. At night he apologises for his behaviour saying: "I hope they didn't notice what a jerk I am."

Level __

Oliver collapses in the middle of a work meeting and is taken to hospital in suspicion of a heart attack. Barbara does not visit him in hospital. When his work colleague takes him home, Barbara demands a divorce. She ignores the love letter Oliver wrote in his hospital bed and says: "I couldn't read your handwriting." Oliver moves out.

Level __

Oliver saws off the heels of Barbara's much-loved high heels. Barbara visits Oliver's lawyer and wants to take advantage of his weakness for attractive women. He declines her offers and says: "If you want this to end, all of us have to sit down and compromise." Oliver shows up drunk at a reception Barbara organised for her clients and causes a scandal by his obscene entrance. Consequently, Barbara drives her Jeep against her husband's vintage car.

Level __

Barbara and Oliver divide the house into differently coloured zones, which may not be entered by the opposite party. Oliver's lawyer issues the following warning: "There are other houses, too, and other women. Nobody will win this case; it is only about HOW MUCH you will lose." Oliver disagrees: "I have more square metres." After a fight he hits Barbara's cat by accident.

Level __

Barbara and Oliver meet at Barbara's lawyer's office, Oliver's former partner, who quotes from Oliver's love letter: "Everything I have I owe to you", a statement he wants to use to prove that Barbara is entitled to the house. Oliver feels betrayed and announces an unconditional fight over the house. The lawyer calms Barbara down: "My dear, once all this is over, this will be one of your happiest days." Oliver discusses counter-strategies with his own lawyer and moves back into the embattled house.

SITUATION

Different Levels of Conflict



Martial Dispute

The situations were given in the following order: Level 2, 5, 7, 9, 1, 3, 8, 6, 4

EXERCISE 2

DIFFERENT WAYS TO DEAL WITH CONFLICTS

Read through the examples and try to figure out what conflict resolution behaviour is shown (according to Schwarz: Delegation, Escape, Consensus, Destruction, Compromise, subordination).

In all examples, A and B live together in a shared apartment.

Example 1

A: "You never put your dishes away! I can't cook anymore because the whole sink is full! Whenever I come home from my night shift, I have to clean up the kitchen first! "

B: "That's not true, I always put my dishes away!" - and goes into his room.

Example 2

A: "I am the main tenant and I want you to move out. It just can't go on like this! "

B: bursts into tears and packs his bags.

Example 3

A: "It just can't go on like this! You never put your dishes away! If that doesn't change immediately, you'll move out tomorrow! You know that I am the main tenant here!! "

B: "You're so mean, but then I'll just do it ..."

Example 4

A + B: argue again about the dishes that have not been cleared away, the dispute escalates, landlady C is called in.

C: "The kitchen always needs to be tidied up! I don't want to see leftovers lying around or bugs crawling around here! If you don't pull yourself together, you'll both have to move out!

Example 5

A: "How about if we agree that the sink is always free ..."

B: "... and I can leave the dishes on the sideboard. Fits! "

A: "Ok, all right!"

Example 6

B: "What if I cook for us every day and you clean up afterwards?"

A: "Yes, you cook so well, that's a good idea! Let's try it! "

SOLUTIONS:

1. Escape, 2. Destruction, 3. Subordination, 4. Delegation, 5. Compromise, 6. Consensus