

MENTORING MATTERS: EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND RESOLVING CONFLICT

Audrey J. Murrell, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Business Administration,
Psychology, Public and International Affairs and
Director, David Berg Center for Ethics & Leadership

Mentoring Defined



- The process of forming, cultivating and maintaining mutually beneficial developmental relationships between one or more mentors and one or more protégés.
- Developmental networks as a group of people who take interest in and action to support and/or advance an individual's career, personal and/or professional development.

Mentoring Functions

- ❑ **Career Functions:** Those aspects of mentoring relationships that enhance “learning the ropes” and supporting the individual’s career advancement and professional development.
 - ❑ Sponsorship
 - ❑ Exposure & Visibility
 - ❑ Coaching
 - ❑ Protection
 - ❑ Challenging Assignments

Mentoring Functions

- ❑ **Psychosocial Functions:** Those aspects of mentoring relationships that enhance a sense of competence, clarity of identity, perceptions of organization support and overall effectiveness in one's professional role.
 - ❑ Role Modeling
 - ❑ Acceptance & Confirmation
 - ❑ Counseling
 - ❑ Friendship

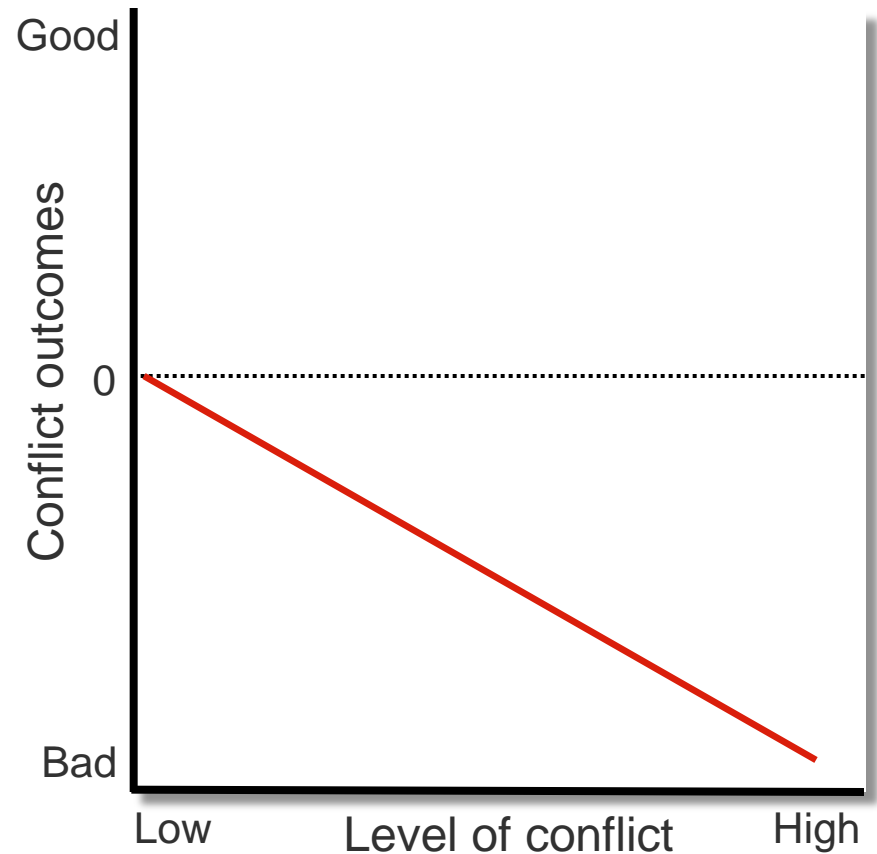
Mentoring in *Not* a Panacea

- Eby & McManus typology of negative mentoring experiences include:
 - Exploitation
 - Egocentricity
 - Sabotage
 - Harassment
 - Interpersonal difficulty
- Research on other negative factors include:
 - Mentoring vs “cloning”
 - Unethical behavior (e.g., taking credit for work)
 - Boundary violations

Is Conflict Good or Bad?: Pre 1970s View

Historically, experts viewed conflict as dysfunctional

- ❑ Undermined relations
- ❑ Wasted human energy
- ❑ More job dissatisfaction, turnover, stress
- ❑ Less productivity, information sharing

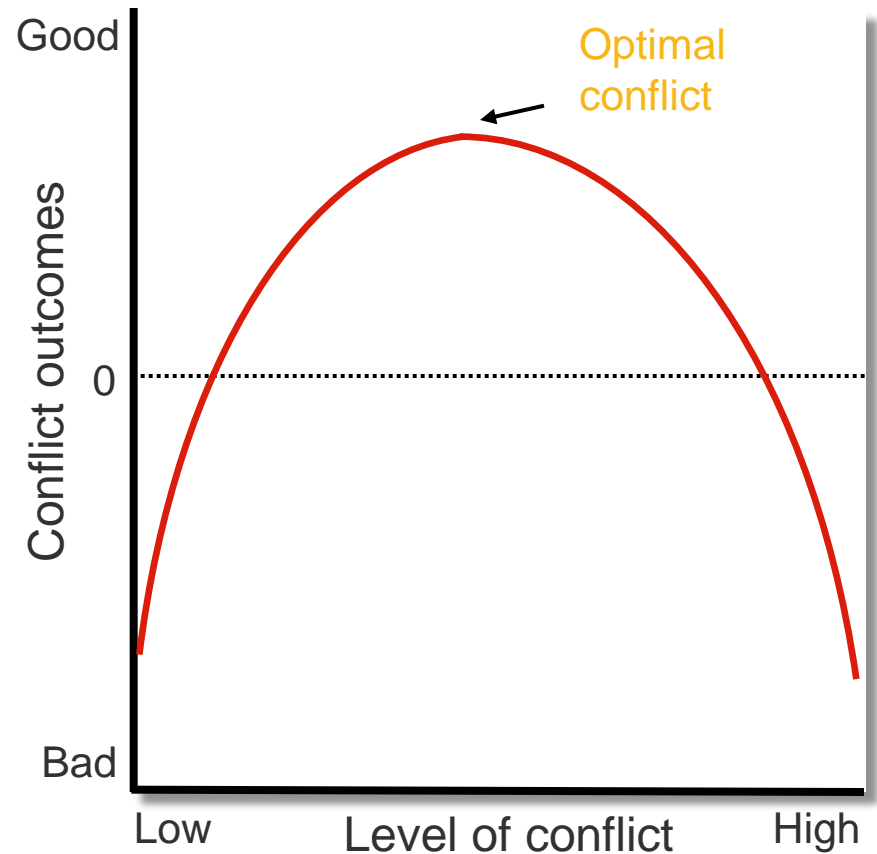


Is Conflict Good or Bad?: 1970s-1990s View

1970s to 1990s – belief in an optimal level of conflict

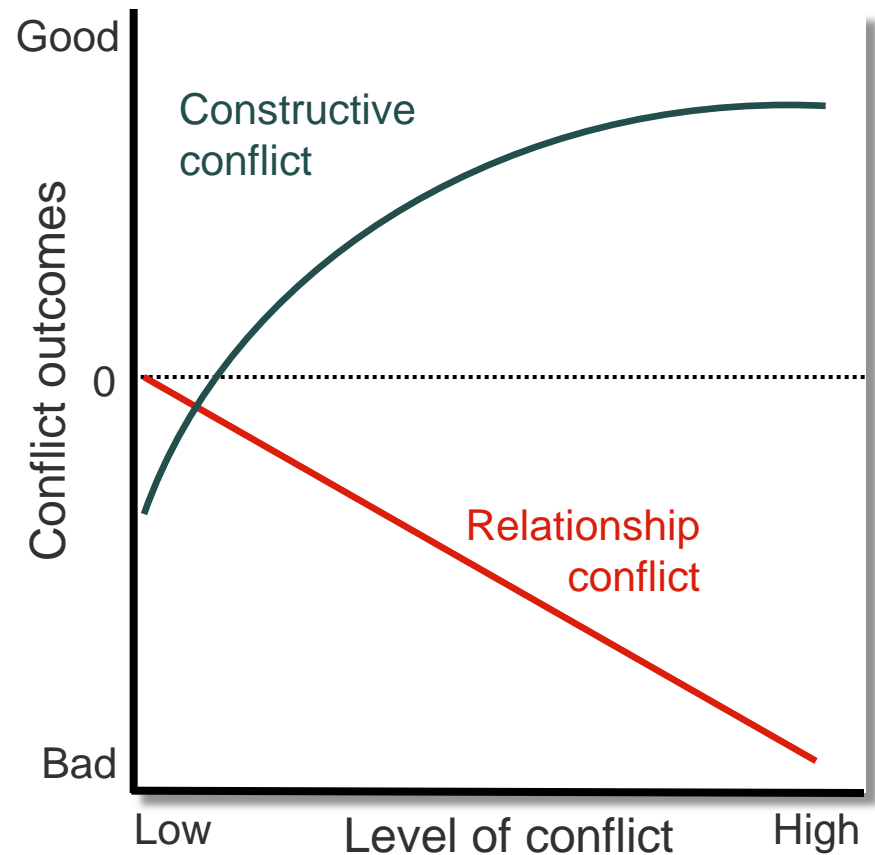
Some level of conflict is good because:

- Energizes debate
- Reexamine assumptions
- Improves responsiveness to external environment
- Increases team cohesion

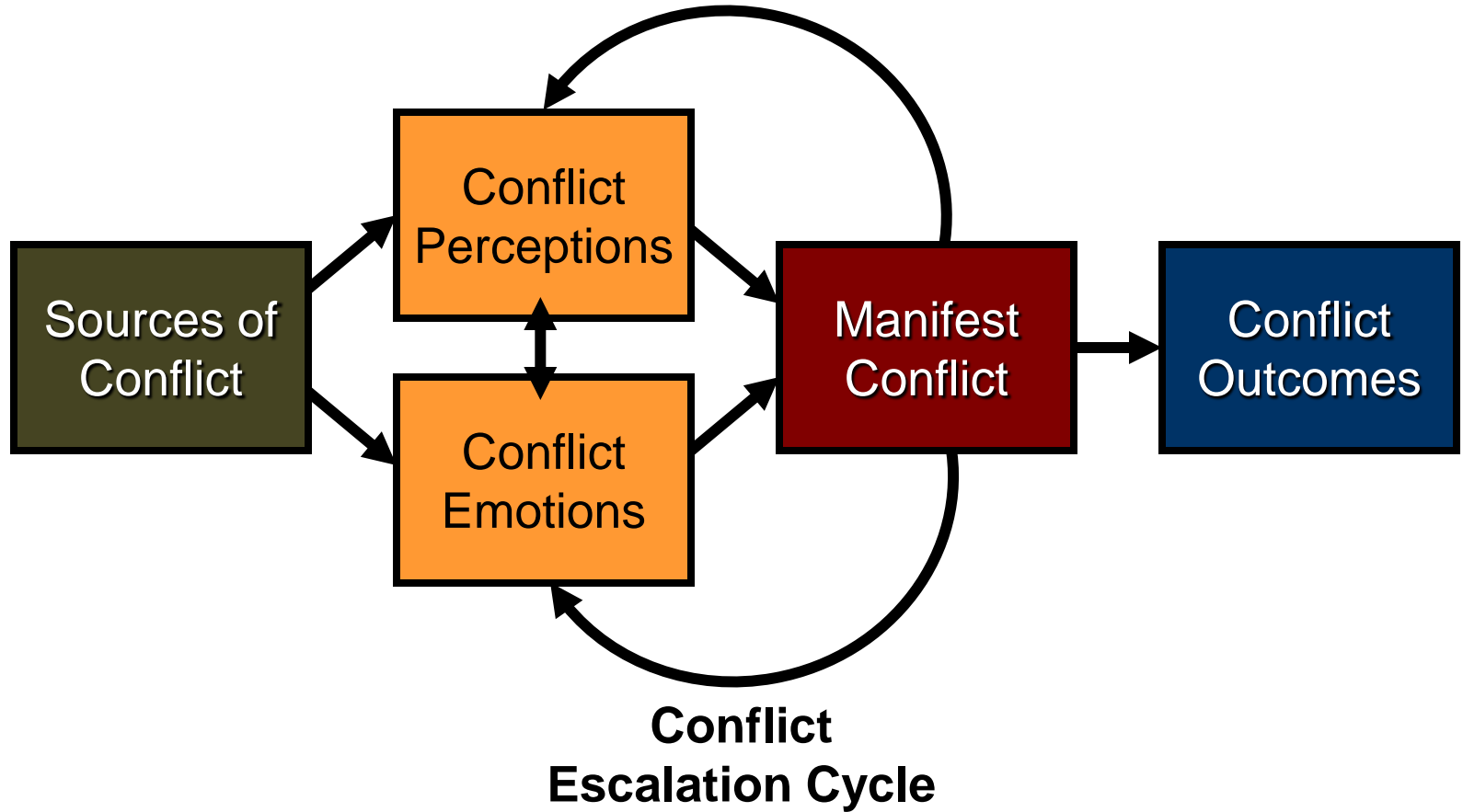


Is Conflict Good or Bad?: Emerging View

- Two types of conflict
 - ▣ **Constructive conflict** -- Conflict is aimed at issue, not parties
 - ▣ **Relationship conflict** -- Conflict is aimed at undermining the other party
- Goal: encourage constructive conflict, minimize relationship conflict
- Problem: difficult to separate constructive from relationship conflict
 - ▣ Drive to defend activated when ideas are critiqued



The Conflict Process



Structural Sources of Conflict

Incompatible Goals

- One party's goals perceived to interfere with other's goals
- Different assumptions/definitions of mentoring

Differentiation

- Different values/beliefs
- Explains cross-cultural and generational conflict

Task Interdependence

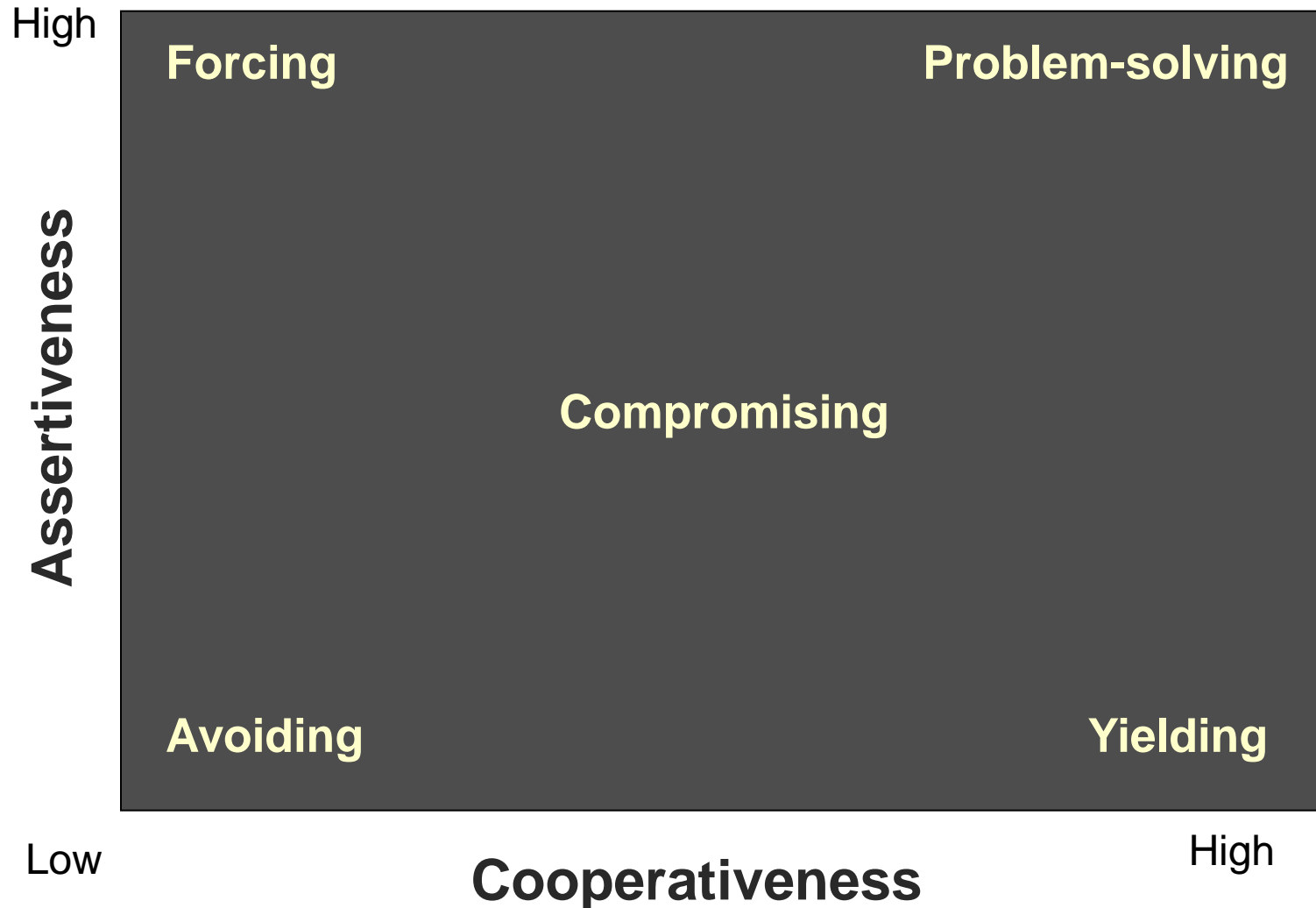
- Conflict increases with interdependence
- Parties more likely to interfere with each other

more 

Structural Sources of Conflict

Scarce Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Motivates competition for the resource• Lack of access to “closed networks”
Ambiguous Rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creates uncertainty, threatens goals• Without rules, people rely on politics
Communication Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Diversity dialogs (function, gender, race, generation, culture, level, tenure)• Pressures for impression management

Five Conflict Handling Styles



Conflict Handling Contingencies

Problem solving

- ▣ Best when:
 - Interests are not perfectly opposing
 - Parties have trust/openness
 - Issues are complex
- ▣ Problem: other party take advantage of information

Forcing

- ▣ Best when:
 - you have a deep conviction about your position
 - quick resolution required
 - other party would take advantage of cooperation
- ▣ Problems: relationship conflict, long-term relations

Conflict Handling Contingencies

Avoiding

- Best when:
 - relationship conflict is high
 - conflict resolution cost is higher than benefits
- Problems: doesn't resolve conflict, frustration

Yielding

- Best when:
 - other party has much more power
 - issue is much less important to you than other party
 - value/logic of your position is imperfect
- Problem: Increases other party's expectations

Conflict Handling Contingencies

Compromising

- ▣ Best when...
 - Parties have equal power
 - Quick solution is required
 - Parties lack trust/openness
- ▣ Problem: Sub-optimal solution where mutual gains are possible

Key Question – how does your conflict style enhance versus obstruct effective mentoring relationships?