

Unit K4: Social conflicts and conflict behavior

1. Summary

Social conflicts are defined very differently, but there are some common features and general characteristics of social conflicts: The conflict parties represent different interests, there are incompatible intentions to act and incompatible behaviors. Complex processes take place among the conflict parties at the emotional level. On the action level, there are very different behaviors that are significant for conflict intervention.

2. Social conflicts

What is meant by social conflict? Over time, very different definitions of social conflict have been proposed, depending on professional viewpoints and perspectives.

"A conflict exists when there is disagreement among people" (Berlew 1977, quoted from Glasl 1999:12). To this it must be said that disagreement does not always have to lead to a conflict - and even less already constitutes a conflict. Dahrendorf's (1961) concept of conflict is similarly broad: "The concept of conflict is first of all meant to designate any relationship of elements that can be denoted by objective ('latent') or subjective ('manifest') opposition." In contrast, it is well known from the discussion of systems theory that a system may very well contain different elements that exhibit a certain degree of oppositeness without this necessarily already constituting a conflict.

According to Brown (1983:4), conflicts consist of opposing interests and behavior: "Conflict is incompatible behavior between parties whose interests differ".

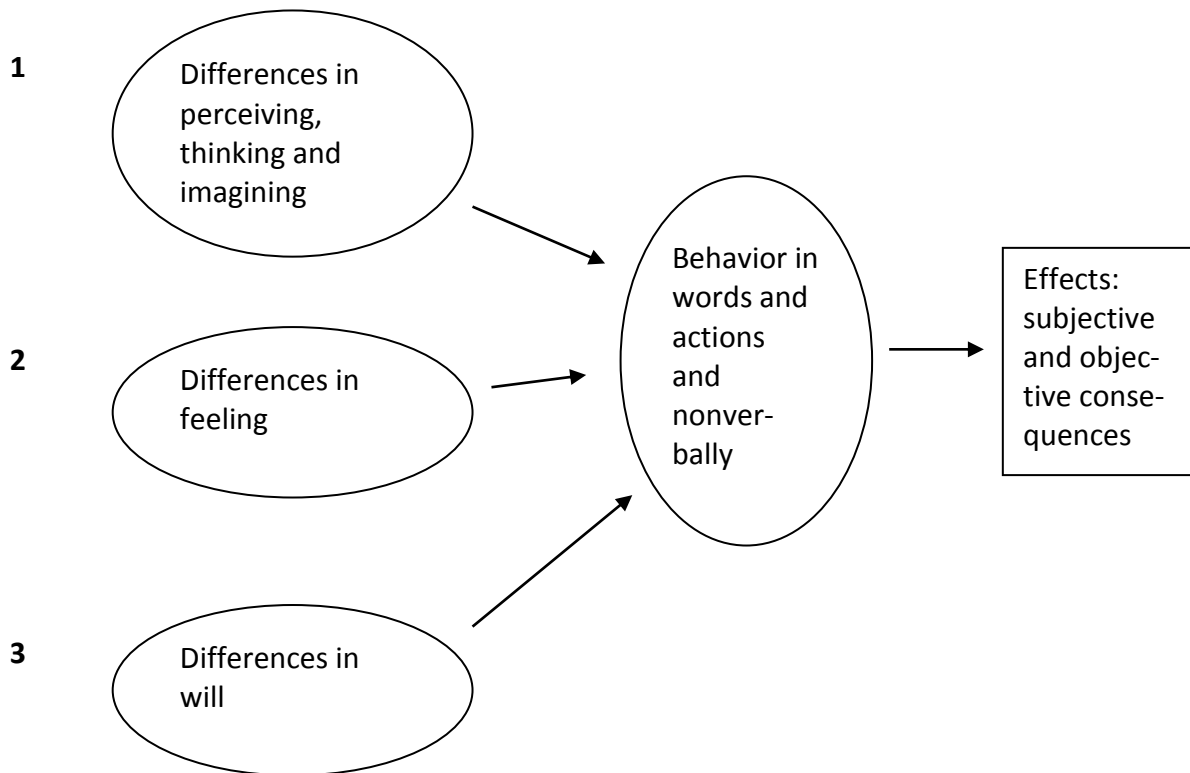
Other authors point out that a conflict always contains a minimal or partial incompatibility between the intentions or tendencies to act of the different parties: "In general, conflicts are characterized by dispositions to act which are incompatible with each other or even mutually exclusive (incompatibility of action tendencies). These discrepant standpoints are explained by the efficacy of subjective interests (motives), fundamental convictions and

value attitudes, and the particular expectations and attitudes associated with them" (Neubauer et al. 1999:6, emphasis by the authors). Or in the words of Karl Berkel (1990:10), one "speaks ... of a conflict when two elements are simultaneously opposed or incompatible."

However, social conflict is also a special form of interaction "in which different views, attitudes, beliefs, and value orientations are acted out through communication among conflicting social systems" (Dieckmann 1989:15). According to Rüttinger (1980:20), social conflicts are "situations of tension in which two or more interdependent parties vigorously attempt to realize apparent or actual incompatible plans of action, while being aware of their antagonism."

In contrast, according to Dahrendorf (1992:8), "modern social conflict is ... an antagonism of entitlements and supply, politics and economics, civil rights and economic growth." Today, he argues, social conflict is a confrontation between demanding and saturated segments of the population, and the lines of social conflict have become increasingly unclear and complicated.

Glasl (1998:22) is to be fully agreed with when he clearly distinguishes social conflict from differences or disagreements. According to Glasl, there are three levels at which differences can occur: The perceptual level, the emotional level and the volitional level (cf. Glasl 1998:22ff as well as 1999:36ff).



According to Glasl (1998:24), conflict arises from differences "when at least one 'actor' (a party, i.e., a person, group, etc.) experiences dealing with a difference in such a way that it is impaired by the actions of another 'actor' in living or realizing its own ideas, feelings, or intentions."

If every interaction is potentially conflictual, then an essential task of state and society is to be integrative and to balance divergent interests, or at least to provide mechanisms for dealing with conflict. However, from a sociological point of view, Feldmann (2005:89) suggests that one could confidently say that many social conflicts of the 19th and 20th centuries have their causes not in too weak social integration, but in too strong integration. For according to Feldmann (2005:89), "strong integration and a firmly established system of values and norms ... are associated with ethnocentrism," which usually leads to greater isolation against others, strangers. Because groups attribute certain positive characteristics to themselves and set themselves apart from other groups, integration and exclusion - and thus also "normal xenophobia" - represent "inevitable processes within societies," according to Feldmann (2005:89).

Glasl (1999:14/15), drawing on Rüttinger and other authors, proposed the following comprehensive definition of social conflict:

"Social conflict is an interaction

- between actors (individuals, groups, organizations, etc.),
- where at least one actor
- incompatibilities
in thinking/imagining/perceiving
and/or feeling
and/or will
- with the other actor(s) in such a way that in the realization an impairment
- that in the realization an impairment
- by another actor (the other actors)".

Social conflicts are always interpersonal conflicts. Neubauer et al. (1999:5-7) name three characteristics of conflicts:

- The presence of at least two parties to the conflict,
- the incompatibility of action tendencies, and
- the incompatibility of behavior.

2.1 The Conflict Behavior Scheme according to Bjorn Christiansen

Christiansen (1959, cf. Jandt 1988:19ff) developed a scheme with six behavioral variants in conflict situations. In a whole series of studies it could be shown empirically that persons in conflicts react according to a certain pattern, which has to do with the kind of work they do. Conflict behavior also depends on the circumstances under which the work is performed in the respective organizations.

The six variants of conflict behavior can be represented as follows:

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<p>Field I We blame another person for the situation.</p>	<p>Field II We assume that someone else will bring about the desired change. We take the following view, "We have a problem, and you should come up with something about it!"</p>
<p>Field III We hold ourselves responsible. We see the problem as our fault.</p>	<p>Field IV We take action ourselves: "We have a problem, and we need to do something about it!"</p>
<p>Field V We hold another person responsible by giving him absolution. We feel guilty about our hostile feelings toward the other person and thereby forgive him his sin of harassing us.</p>	<p>Field VI We hope that the solution to the problem will present itself: "We have a problem, and someone, somewhere, sometime, will do something about it."</p>

The fields on the right (II, IV and VI) have to do with changing the situation. On the left side, blame is assigned first.

Jandt (1988:22) observed the following typical behaviors in different occupational groups:

<p>Field I doctors and technicians workers, students, unemployed</p>	<p>Field II Upper management</p>
<p>Field III Doctors and technicians Workers, students, unemployed</p>	<p>Feld IV Mittlere Führungskräfte und Verwaltungsbeamte Unternehmer, vor allem kleinerer Betriebe</p>
<p>Field V</p>	<p>Feld VI</p>

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Senior managers (apart from typical behavior according to variant II) often do not exhibit any particular conflict behavior, but react differently, depending on the situation. Middle managers want to present themselves as problem and conflict solvers (variant IV!) - in order to make a career. According to Jandt, the typical behavior of doctors and technicians corresponds predominantly to variants I and III. Jandt explains this by the fact that in both professions a diagnosis (i.e. an "assignment of blame" in the broadest sense) is usually the first step in problem solving. Jandt attributes the behaviors of workers, students and the unemployed (variants I and III) to the fact that these occupational groups often have the feeling that they themselves have no influence on the solution of the problem.

Behavior variant VI is less dependent on a specific occupation, but rather on the environment.

None of the six possible conflict behaviors is better or worse for conflict resolution according to Jandt (1988:23). All behavioral variants have their advantages and disadvantages. Behavior IV is not infrequently at the expense of health.

To me, this typologization seems very problematic - and probably empirically refutable. But the conflict behavior variants can be helpful in analyzing and intervening in a conflict.

Of interest for a conflict analysis in the work area is the following conflict subdivision:

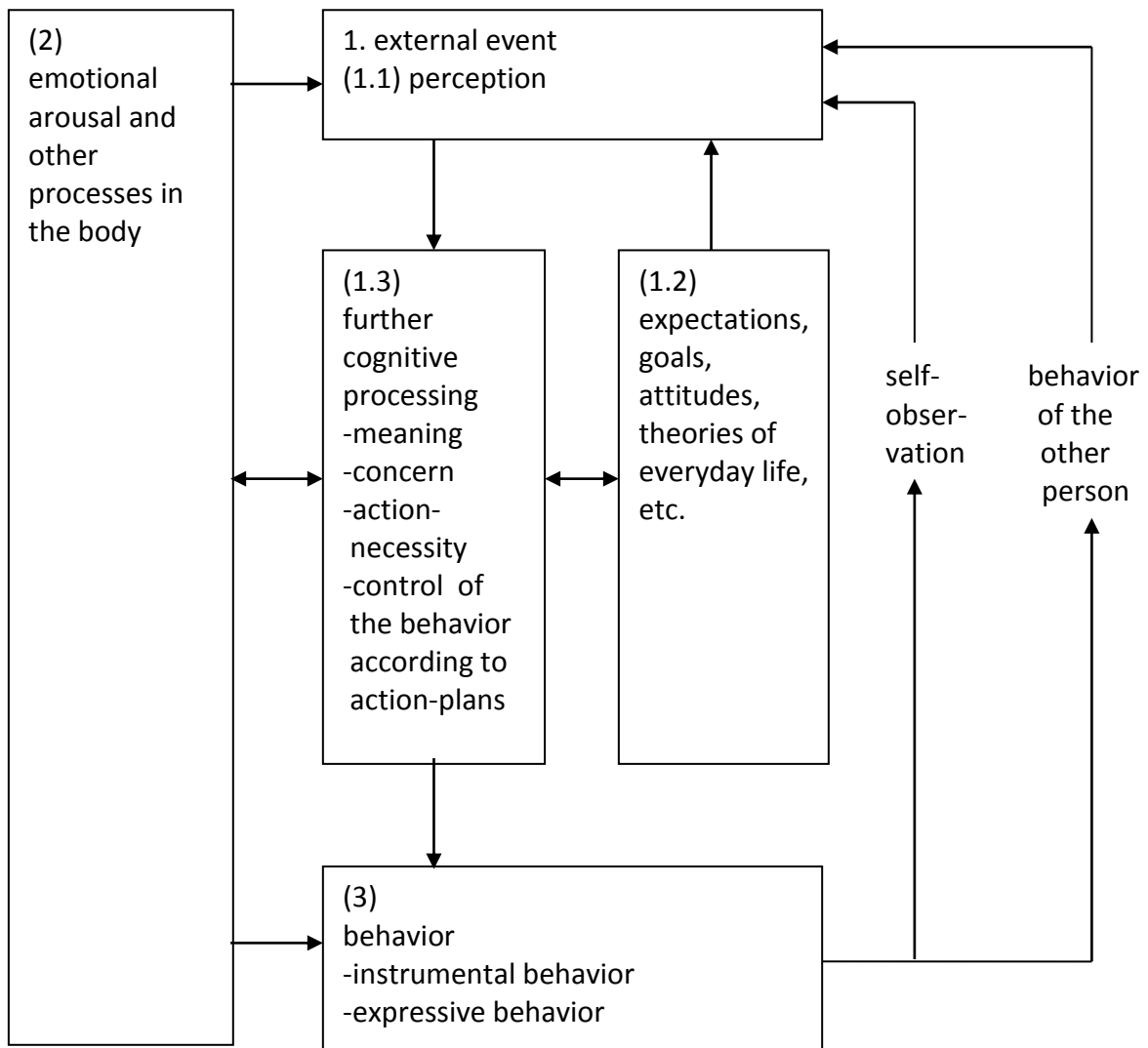
Distribution conflict	Competition for scarce goods	Two want the same thing, but it is only available once
Evaluation conflict	Different goals, values, norms	One finds other things right and important
Conflict of judgment	Different assessment of the effect of measures	People consider other things to be promising
Relationship conflict (identity conflict)	Impending defeat, embarrassment	One fears losing face

Source: University of Bern lecture

The conflict can take place on one or more of these four levels.

2.2 Simplified behavioral model in conflict situations

In every interaction - and thus also in every conflict situation - cognitive (= knowledge and awareness), affective (= feeling, emotional) and physiological (= biological-body) processes play a role. The following relationship exists between event perception, internal processing and expressed behavior (according to Neubauer/Gampe/Knapp/Wichterich 1999:13):



Source: Neubauer/Gampe/Knapp/Wichterich 1999:13.

In conflict situations that are repeated or that are part of a longer-lasting dispute, this behavior pattern functions as a circular circle that repeats itself over and over again.

Individual processes can have a conflict-intensifying or conflict-reducing effect. For example, increasing emotionalization (2) usually intensifies the conflict.

Emotions often work according to the "accumulation model" (cf. Neubauer et al. 1999:23): This idea assumes that certain emotions accumulate in a similar way to water in a reservoir. When a certain amount is reached - the famous drop that causes the barrel to overflow - the feeling then violently bursts forth and provides itself with an outlet. However, the reality is a bit more complicated. For example, it is known that the course of arousal depends not only on the type of subsequent possible behavior of the affected person (e.g. aggression against the perpetrator of the frustration or against a substitute object), but also on the social status of the perpetrator of the frustration.

For cooperative conflict resolution, minimum conditions must be present, which Neubauer et al. (1999:26/27) formulate as follows:

- "a) At least one party to the conflict must be interested in a real solution and be willing to work with others to this end so that the process of cooperative decision-making can be set in motion. However, the willingness of all parties to cooperate is then necessary for the development of solutions.
- b) At least one party to the conflict must be able to control its own emotional arousal and expressive behavior to such an extent that it can act as a positive behavioral model even in difficult discussion situations.
- c) Even if there is an imbalance of power, any use of force must be avoided. Cooperative conflict resolution corresponds to the demand for a 'defeat-free' method ... in which the aim is to find and realize the best solution, but not to distinguish between victors and vanquished. In this respect, the need for defense, defense and counterattack is also largely eliminated.
- d) In order to achieve the most open communication possible, a minimum level of mutual trust is essential.... Each participant should be assured that his candor will not be used against him at a later time. In an atmosphere of mistrust, each party to the conflict will try to present itself in the most tactically skilful way possible, so as not to provide the opponent with a target for attack. Normally, it will be possible to build up

a relationship of trust only slowly, whereby coping with problems together creates favorable conditions for intensifying trust" (emphasis by the authors).

2.3 The conflict strategy model according to Bühl

Walter Bühl already presented a model for the regulation of conflicts in the 1970s (Bühl 1973, quoted from Dieckmann 1989:49/59):

- "1. All conflicts must be regarded as social conflicts. Interpretation: conflicts arise from the way people live together, not from innate instincts.
2. Conflicts are not solved by polarization, but by depolarization. Interpretation: The antagonism is not to be intensified by reinforcement mechanisms with regard to the polarization of the opposites. Rather, ways must be sought to reduce polarization, e.g., through mediation in some form.
3. The opposing party to the conflict must never be elevated to the status of 'enemy'. Interpretation: The opposing person or group must basically be seen as capable of talking. It is never an enemy to be eliminated.
4. Conflicts are not solved by their full manifestation, but only by their timely limitation. Interpretation: One is in error if one thinks that the opposing positions must first come to full manifestation and culmination in order for the conflict to be regulated. Rather, escalation must be avoided and the conflict must be kept within bounds in good time.
5. Conflict solutions only make sense in the direction of extending the time horizon. That is, conflict solutions with a short time horizon are always dangerous, unjust, one-sided or destructive. Interpretation: There is no point in trying to 'rush' the regulation of the conflict. Rather, one must take one's time and let time work for one.
6. Final conflict solutions are less desirable than meliorative conflict solutions. Interpretation: One must first clarify the overall situation and then gradually improve the conflict situation by taking small steps.
7. Conflicts are to be solved by social change, not by freezing the change. Interpretation: All parties involved must fundamentally affirm change. Those who

bring change to a standstill, if it has already begun, prevent the conflict from being resolved or regulated.

8. Direct conflict solutions are costly and value-destroying, indirect solutions are cost-saving and value-creating. Interpretation: Those who tackle conflict resolution directly here and now must expect higher 'costs' in the broadest sense than with indirect conflict regulation, which strives for problem resolution from different sides and at different times on different levels.
9. Conflict resolution must not be monocausal, it should be multidimensional and functional. It is a matter of restoring the functional context so that a prosperous coexistence is possible. Interpretation: It leads the effort for a conflict regulation into a dead end, if one thinks to find the cause in one place or in a certain person or group, to 'put the blame' on one person. Rather, the solution must be guided by several guidelines. It must take into account the complexity of the conditions of origin and proceed in such a way that the context of life is not broken. 10.
10. The solution to the conflict must not be reductive, it must be socially productive. Interpretation: the solution to the problem must advance development. It must not set development back to earlier stages and reduce the possibilities of the opponents. Rather, everyone must have the feeling: Through the conflict, I have advanced a bit for myself and in my relationship with others. The conflict was ultimately beneficial."

2.4 Capacity for conflict

According to Herzlieb (2012:15), the ability to deal with conflict represents a core competence in behavior in conflict situations. It consists of the ability, firstly, to avoid unnecessary conflicts, secondly, to recognize conflicts at an early stage, thirdly, to resolve conflicts constructively and fourthly, to remain capable of acting in conflict situations that cannot be resolved (Herzlieb 2012.15). Due to the teamwork situation, the importance of the ability to deal with conflicts has massively increased in the modern working world.

2.4.1 Recognizing conflicts

Herzlieb (2012:63) points out that the body does not lie: therefore, physical reactions are well suited to perceive or recognize conflicts.

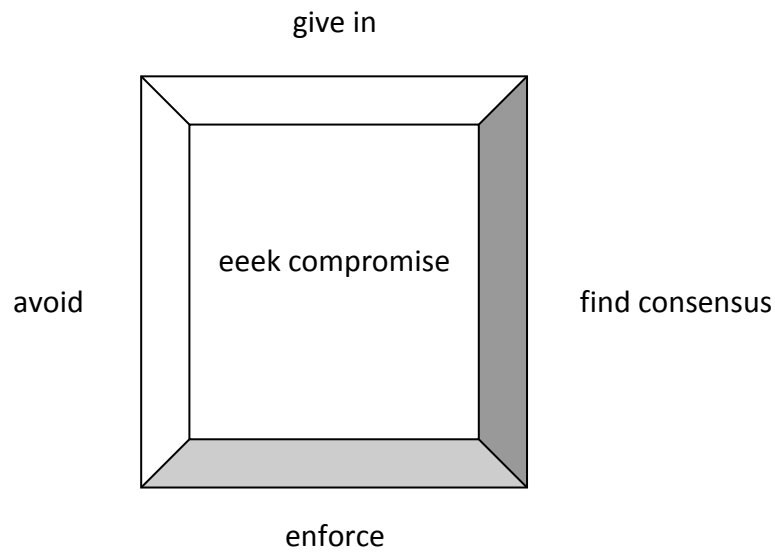
According to Herzlieb (2012:64), existing conflicts but also the lack of conflicts can be recognized by the following behaviors:

Anyone who approaches you openly has no problem with you:	Anyone who physically blocks and stonewalls signals a high potential for conflict:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Your counterpart maintains eye contact with you, - turns towards you, - has a relaxed, open attitude, - appears relaxed and friendly, - nods when you speak, - gestures with open palms, - lets you finish. <p>Such signals indicate a positive basic mood without serious potential for conflict.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Your counterpart makes little or no eye contact, - turns away from you, - crosses his arms, - crosses their legs, - has tense muscle tone, - gestures with open hands, - shows serious or rigid facial expressions, - shakes his head while speaking. <p>These are signals that can - but do not necessarily have to - signal conflict potential.</p>

2.4.2 Dealing with conflicts

Conflicts are not simply bad or to be prevented at all costs. Conflicts are an inevitable part of human coexistence. However, when conflicts strain the atmosphere, make work difficult, or jeopardize a relationship, they should be actively dealt with.

Herzlieb (2012:94) has formulated four basic behaviors in conflicts, namely giving in, avoiding, asserting, and finding consensus:



Source: Herzlieb 2012:94; own presentation.

Herzlieb (2012:94) sees the search for compromises as the royal road, so to speak, between these four behaviors.

2.5 Ability to act in conflicts

According to Berkel (2011:72), individuals who are capable of conflict have six key characteristics or capabilities: Flexibility and identity, self-worth, resilience and agency, balance between autonomy and heteronomy, cautious trust in others, and tolerant value orientation:

Characteristic	The personality capable of conflict is able and willing,
flexibility and identity	to adapt and adjust to different people and situations and still not lose sight of one's own goals
self-worth and service	to form and shape oneself into a personality and yet serve an idea and be of use to others
resilience and ability to act	to endure unclear and contradictory situations and yet act decisively and consistently
autonomy and heteronomy	to form and hold a personal opinion and yet have one's assumptions challenged and be willing to compromise
trust and caution	to trust oneself and others and yet learn to expect and live with disappointments
value orientation and tolerance	to commit to values and yet respect the values of others.

Source: Berkel 2011:72.

3. Control Questions

1. What do you understand by social conflict?
2. According to Glasl, what elements belong to a (social) conflict?
3. Why are disagreements not yet conflicts? What else must be added?
4. Name the six conflict behaviors according to Christiansen!
5. Which internal and external processes take place during conflict behavior?
6. Explain the "accumulation model" for feelings!
7. What are the four minimum conditions for a cooperative conflict resolution according to Neubauer et al.
8. According to Bühl, what are the 10 points to be considered in conflict management?
9. Which four partial competences belong to the conflict ability according to Herzlieb?

4. Links

Definition Konflikt

<http://wirtschaftslexikon.gabler.de/Definition/konflikt.html?referenceKeywordName=sozialer+Konflikt>

Soziale Konflikte

<http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/d/D25757.php>

Verschiedene Konfliktarten

http://www.ewi-psy.fu-berlin.de/einrichtungen/arbeitsbereiche/arbpsych/media/lehre/ws0708/12672/konflikte_sc_hrap_13122007.pdf

Bund für Soziale Verteidigung BSV

Der Bund für Soziale Verteidigung wirkt als Mitglieder- und Dachverband intensiv dafür, neue Handlungsoptionen im Konfliktmanagement bekanntzumachen und entsprechende Initiativen der gewaltfreien Konfliktaustragung und des zivilen Friedensdienstes zu fördern.

<http://www.soziale-verteidigung.de>

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