

## Understanding Conflict

IN THE 1880s ranchers in the western United States fought over water rights; in 1939 Germany attacked Poland; last week a husband and wife argued bitterly over their finances. That all were engaged in a conflict is obvious. In fact, it may seem that nothing is simpler than recognizing a conflict – after all, it involves fighting, does it not? Actually, no, not always. Some conflicts are “latent” and do not involve overt fighting; and some overt fights, such as wrestling matches, are not due to a conflict. Thus it is important to agree on what is and what is not a conflict.

### What Is a Conflict?

It might not surprise you to hear that even theoreticians differ in how they view conflict. For many practical purposes, they may understand it as a special set of interrelated elements: parties, issues, dynamics, and contexts. To gain a deeper understanding, however, they may use certain abstract concepts such as cause and effect; direct, indirect, and intervening causes; and payoff matrices. The discussion in this chapter deals with these concepts.

Students of social conflict have offered many different definitions of conflict. Early on, Park and Burgess defined it simply as struggle for status. Somewhat later, Mack and Snyder defined it as struggle not only for status but also for scarce resources and significant social change

(Himes 1980, 12). Other writers have offered additional definitions.<sup>1</sup> How then should we conceive of conflict?

We may begin by acknowledging that there is a good reason for the great variety of definitions. They tend to reflect authors’ theoretical orientations: psychologists might define conflict in terms of the adversaries’ inner states,<sup>2</sup> sociologists in terms of observable behavior,<sup>3</sup> and so on. The definition used here is similarly anchored in theory – our theory. That theory assumes that conflict can originate either in goal incompatibility or in hostility (or in both), and that it involves a unique type of behavior, conflict behavior. Thus conflict is defined here as a situation in which *actors use conflict behavior against each other to attain incompatible goals and/or to express their hostility.*

But, once again, this definition is more complex than you might think: the *actors* referred to in the definition can be not only individuals but also groups. This means that, at times, we speak about the “behavior” of groups, a practice that some scholars might find objectionable. Yet it preserves uniformity of terminology – after all, we view both individuals and groups as actors – as well as brevity. Moreover, it is common practice to refer to groups “acting.” For example, we say that “In 1941, Japan launched an unprovoked attack against the United States” instead of saying, “In 1941, members of the Japanese government decided, without provocation, to send airplanes manned by Japanese pilots to attack Pearl Harbor.”

The remaining three concepts used in the definition – *goal incompatibility*, *hostility*, and *conflict behavior* – are so important that they are discussed in detail in the following pages. Some additional conflict-related terms, such as violence, fairness, and negotiation, are considered later: the concepts of fairness and justice in Chapter 3; the concept of negotiation in Chapter 9. But two important – and controversial – distinctions can be considered now. We begin with the distinction between conflict and competition.

When several businesspeople bid for a contract, without engaging in conflict action such as spreading false rumors or making threats, they are in competition – but not conflict – with each other. In general, people who are in competition do not engage in conflict interaction and, in fact, may not even be aware that they are competing; they are always seeking the same end; and they usually seek what belongs to a third party rather than what belongs to the opponent

(Kriesberg [1973] 1982, 17). If, on the other hand, they *do* direct conflict behavior at each other, they are in a conflict. It should be added that some writers disagree, viewing competition as a special kind of conflict.

A second distinction that should be made is that between nonviolent and violent conflict. Let us illustrate the difference with the annual fall rut in a herd of elk. In the conflict over females, the males use several types of conflict action: threat postures, strength testing, snorting and bellowing, antler locking, even flight and pursuit. Yet rarely is real violence done in such combat, and then only unintentionally. Humans too use nonviolent conflict actions such as threat, flight, testing, and promise in their conflict – but, unlike male elk, they also do physical and psychological harm to one another. Thus the term “conflict action” will be used here to apply to both violent and nonviolent behavior.

### Incompatible Goals

It is often difficult to determine reliably whether goals are in fact incompatible. Two approaches are quite helpful. The first approach is something that probably occurs to you first: you ask whether it is logically impossible for both parties' goals to be achieved simultaneously.<sup>4</sup> For example, if workers in a factory wish to work as little as possible and be paid as much as possible, while the owners wish them to work as hard as possible for as little pay as possible, it is logically impossible for both goals to be reached simultaneously. Similarly, it is logically impossible for a wife and her husband each to have her or his way if the wife wishes to have children and the husband does not. It is impossible for both the Israelis and the Syrians to have exclusive sovereignty over the Golan Heights.

The second approach is more complex but theoretically more rewarding: you ask whether the two parties have incompatible “payoffs.”<sup>5</sup>

### Using Payoff Matrices

To introduce matrix representation of conflict, consider an example. Suppose a husband does not want any children but his wife wants four. Suppose furthermore that you had a way to assess – perhaps through

Table 2.1. *Incompatible Interests of Wife and Husband*

	Conflict Parties	
	Husband	Wife
<i>Goals</i>		
Four children	–3	10
No children	4	–8

a questionnaire – how much each outcome is worth to each party and found that having four children was worth –3 points to the husband,<sup>6</sup> 10 points to the wife; and that having no children was worth 4 points to the husband, –8 points to the wife. This situation may be represented by the “payoff matrix” displayed in Table 2.1. Note that, in this table, the goals of each spouse are represented by a row that has a positive payoff for him (her): having no children is the husband's goal because it has for him the payoff of +4; having four children is the wife's goal because it has for her the payoff of +10.

When you face new terminology, you often need to stay alert to certain distinctions. In this case, you need to remember the difference between an alternative, its outcome, and its payoff. An *alternative* is one of the actions that the decision maker can choose from (such as having four children); an *outcome* comprises all the consequences of that action (such as feeling fulfilled, having less money and time for leisure activities, having less time with the spouse); and a *payoff* is the total value the decision maker assigns to the outcome (such as the +10 the wife presumably assigns to having four children). Note that a payoff matrix specifies explicitly only what the alternatives are (the rows of the matrix) and what the payoffs are (the numbers within the cells). The outcomes are left unspecified, and readers must use their imagination to fill them in.

Perhaps you are puzzled by the numbers that appear in Table 2.1. Although they are to a large extent arbitrary, they represent a fact of real life: that the importance people attach to various events varies. In this case, the wife values having four children highly, while devaluing the possibility of having no children; the husband's values are the opposite

of hers, though less intense. This being the case, we conclude that the goals and the interests of the husband and wife are incompatible because when an event has a positive payoff for one of them, it always has a negative payoff for the other.

### *Advantages of Matrix Representation*

Payoff tables of the kind given in Table 2.1 have certain advantages. First, they permit us to identify incompatibility: *two* goals are incompatible if one has a positive payoff only for the party and the other only for the opponent. For example, Table 2.1 shows the goal of four children as incompatible with the goal of no children because the first goal has positive payoff only for the wife (+10), the other only for the husband (+4). Incidentally, we may say that *one* goal is "not mutually acceptable" if it has a positive payoff for only one side. Thus, in Table 2.1, having four children is not mutually acceptable because it has positive payoff only for the wife.

Second, using payoff matrices allows you to consider conflicts in which there are more than two alternatives under consideration. For example, suppose that you surveyed workers and managers in a factory and concluded that they have three main goals, and that the attractiveness of these goals can be represented by the payoffs shown in Table 2.2.<sup>7</sup> You will no doubt note that, while there are two incompatible goals (wage of \$20 versus \$10), there is also a third goal, the solvency of the firm, that is shared by both parties (i.e., that has positive payoff for both sides).

Table 2.2. *Incompatible and Compatible Goals of Workers and Managers*

	Conflict Parties	
	Workers	Managers
<i>Goals</i>		
Wage: \$20 per hour	7	-3
Wage: \$10 per hour	-4	8
Solvency of the firm	2	5

Table 2.3. *An Example of a Zero-Sum Conflict*

	Conflict Parties	
	Husband	Wife
<i>Goals</i>		
Four children	-10	10
No children	8	-8

A third advantage might not seem to be very important, but it is to a theoretician: payoff matrices allow him or her to distinguish between goals and interests. The *goals* of a party are quite specific: they are the alternatives that have a positive payoff for the party.<sup>8</sup> Thus Table 2.2 specifies that the workers have two goals, the wage of \$20 and the solvency of the firm; the managers also have two goals, the wage of \$10 and the solvency of the firm. The *interests* of a party are more diffuse: they are all the outcomes from all possible alternatives that have positive payoffs for the party. Because certain desired outcomes – such as security, recognition, respect, and justice – seem to be universal, they are sometimes viewed as the party's "true" interests. As we discuss shortly, interests are incompatible if, in general, they are negatively correlated: when the party's payoff for an outcome is high, the payoff of the opponent tends to be low.

Fourth, payoff representation allows you to determine the *extent* to which the goals and interests are incompatible. In the example of Table 2.1, the payoffs of the husband and wife, although divergent, are not totally incompatible. They could be, for example, exactly opposite for the two parties, as shown in Table 2.3. Incidentally, you now know that the often-used term "zero-sum game" corresponds to an extreme conflict and that it can be represented by a matrix in which each row sums up to zero.

Fifth, matrix representation of payoffs in a conflict allows us to determine whether *an agreement is possible*. For example, because in the case represented by Table 2.2 "solvency of the firm" has a positive payoff for both adversaries, the workers and the managers could begin their negotiation by agreeing to pursue this goal. It is also possible

to determine whether a compromise is possible on something about which the parties do not agree. One possible solution is to "split the difference," giving the workers a wage that is halfway between what they demand (\$20) and what the management is willing to pay (\$10), that is, a wage of \$15.

To determine whether this compromise is acceptable to the two parties, we must compute the payoffs (rather than wages) associated with it. It turns out that this can be accomplished by performing the following computations (see Bartos 1967):

Workers' payoff:  $.50 * (7) + .50 * (-4) = 1.5$

Management's payoff:  $.50 * (-3) + .50 * (8) = 2.5$

Because the resulting "compromise" payoffs (1.5 for the workers and 2.5 for the managers) are positive for both sides, this 50–50 split is acceptable to both.

Finally, matrix representation allows you to determine what agreement is "best" for both sides. In our example, a strong argument can be made that the wage corresponding to the 50–50 split (\$15) is close to being best: it can be shown that it is even better to agree on a wage that is only slightly higher, \$15.46. If you are willing to go through a fairly technical discussion, you can learn why this wage is best by reading about the so-called Nash solution (Nash 1950; Luce and Raiffa 1967; Bartos 1967).

### *Identifying Goals and Interests*

The practical consequence of this discussion is that you can benefit from both the concept of logical contradiction and the concept of payoff matrix. To illustrate, suppose that one country invades another. How do you determine whether the goals and interests of the two countries involved in the conflict action are incompatible?

First, you ask whether each country claims sovereignty over the same territory, as do both Israelis and Palestinians over East Jerusalem. If both do, then, since sovereignty means exclusive control, it is *logically* impossible for either of them to claim sovereignty over the territory and accept its occupation by the opponent. Second, you try to obtain a rough estimate of the payoffs. True, it is seldom possible to assign exact payoffs in real-world conflicts. Still, if each party is "vitaly interested"

in the territory, you may assume that each assigns high positive payoffs to its own occupation of it and very low negative payoffs to its occupation by the opponent. You may also try to guess the payoffs for additional alternatives, such as assigning each country only a part of the territory, or having the territory administered by a neutral body. This helps you to determine whether an agreement can be reached.

Thus you can gain considerable insight into any conflict if you keep in mind the matrix approach. You then can determine what the main alternatives are; speculate on the likely consequences of each alternative; and guess whether a party assigns high, low, or negative payoffs to these consequences.

### **Hostility**

The definition of conflict offered here implies that conflict behavior can occur not only because the parties have incompatible goals but also because they feel hostility toward each other. Whether you rely on your intuitive understanding of hostility or on a more formal definition such as an "antagonism, opposition, or resistance in thought or principle" (Webster's 1976, 553), you undoubtedly realize that hostility plays quite a different role in conflict than do incompatible goals. The distinction between rational and nonrational behavior helps us to understand this difference.

### *Rational Behavior*

During the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, the United States and the Soviet Union came close to war. Soviet Premier Krushchev decided to challenge U.S. missile supremacy by secretly installing medium-range missiles in Cuba. Informed about this, President Kennedy faced a crucial decision: if the United States responded too strongly, a nuclear war might result; if he responded too weakly, the influence of the Soviet Union would increase. During lengthy cabinet meetings, several options were considered, ranging from invading Cuba and destroying the missile sites to registering a strong protest and demanding the removal of the missiles. After listening to arguments from his aides for and against each option, Kennedy decided on an action that was neither too provocative nor too submissive: he ordered the U.S. Navy to start a blockade of Cuba, inspecting Soviet ships to determine

whether they carried missile-related cargo. At the same time, he started a personal dialogue with Krushchev, informing him of the impending blockade. For a while, the Soviets did not respond, and two of their ships proceeded toward Cuba, protected by a submarine. As the ships were approaching the 500-mile barrier imposed by the United States, confrontation appeared inevitable. But, to the Americans' huge relief, the Russian ships stopped before crossing the barrier, and intense negotiations ensued. A compromise was worked out: the Soviets agreed to withdraw their missiles; the United States agreed not to invade Cuba and to withdraw American missiles from Turkey (Kennedy 1969).

In most important respects, Kennedy's decision-making process was "rational," because he reached his decision through lengthy deliberation during which he (1) considered a number of possible actions, (2) considered the likely consequences of each action, (3) evaluated each set of consequences, and (4) chose the action with the most desirable consequences.

Given the fact that payoff matrices play an important role in the theory of rational decision making,<sup>9</sup> it is not surprising that there is a close parallel between these steps and the steps involved in constructing a payoff matrix. To construct a payoff matrix and use it rationally, you must:

1. Determine the possible alternatives.
2. Determine the outcomes associated with each alternative.
3. Assign a payoff to each outcome.
4. Choose the alternative with the highest payoff.

Some theoreticians – notably Weber ([1922] 1947) – argue that we should distinguish between two types of rationality. One of these is the "instrumental" rationality. It occurs when your action is directed at a *specific goal* that can be obtained, such as the best way to avoid rush hour traffic, buying the best car with the money you have, or deciding whether you should study in order to pass tomorrow's examination or can afford to go to a party. The other type is "value" rationality. It occurs when your objective is to conform to a *vaguely defined set of values*, such as when a Catholic is trying to decide which of several possible alternatives – making a contribution to her church, going to confession, and so on – might be the most appropriate behavior.

Although the abstract principles guiding rational actions are clear, their practical implementation is fraught with difficulties, because different individuals, faced with the same situation, may differ in what action they see as rational: they might consider a different set of alternatives, have different beliefs about what outcomes are likely, or evaluate the outcomes differently. For example, had Kennedy not considered a blockade as a feasible alternative, he might have opted for invading Cuba; had Krushchev foreseen correctly how Kennedy would react, he might have chosen not to install the missiles; had Krushchev not considered the inferior power of the Soviet Union unacceptable, he might have chosen not to act the way he did.

Despite these complications, one can draw a clear (abstract) distinction between rational and nonrational action. An action is (objectively) rational if it is reached by an actor who not only followed the steps outlined here but did it with an almost supernatural skill: he or she considered a set of all relevant alternatives, assessed their outcomes correctly, evaluated them in accordance with his or her values (or the values of the group he or she represents), and then chose the action that was the best. An action is (objectively) nonrational if it is not best (not highest-valued) in this sense.

### *Hostility as Nonrational Behavior*

When we are angry, we often act contrary to our better judgment – that is, we act nonrationally. Most acts driven by emotions such as anger tend to be spontaneous and quick, and often at odds with what a more careful deliberation might suggest. For example, a husband and a wife, after spending hours deciding where to go for their vacation, may finally reach a compromise accepted by both. And then, when it is time to make reservations, one of the pair may say, "I really do not want to do this; I hate that place." It does not help for the other person to say, "But you agreed!" because the reluctant partner may simply answer, "I know, but I do not feel like doing it."

The main reason why rational and emotional actions are often at odds is that whereas rational action takes into account all of the possible consequences, emotional action does not. When I am angry, I need to strike out at somebody, and damn the consequences. Thus feelings – especially feelings of hostility – are often an obstacle to

settling a conflict and implementing the settlement. A skillful mediator is well aware of this fact and works hard to remove this obstacle. Validating hostility and allowing it to express itself in harmless ways are among the tools that help this process.

In a conflict, the most important emotion is hostility toward the enemy. Thus Kennedy, instead of engaging in careful deliberation, might have responded impulsively and ordered immediate invasion of Cuba. In some cases, a conflict may start rationally, only to deteriorate into nonrationality. Thus while a demonstration may have been planned as a disciplined way of letting one's point of view be known, it may turn into a riot that is fueled by hatred, expressed in rock throwing, burning of cars, looting, and even killing. Similarly, reasonable efforts by police to maintain order may be transformed into a "police riot" if they are carried away by hostile emotions toward the demonstrators. Such was the case in the Chicago demonstrations in the summer of 1968.

The relationship between hostility and conflict behavior is complex. On the one hand, hostility adds fuel to and intensifies conflict behavior. On the other hand, conflict also intensifies hostility: as conflict continues and the parties inflict injuries on each other, the participants are no longer motivated solely by a desire to reach their original goals; increasingly, they become determined to destroy the enemy. The nature of conflict is thus transformed.

### Conflict Action

Conflict has been defined here as "a situation in which actors use conflict behavior against each other to attain incompatible goals and/or to express their hostility." But what is – and what is not – "conflict behavior"? To most of us, this term evokes images of fighting, violence, coercion, and force. But our definition of conflict suggests that conflict behavior is *any* behavior that helps the party to achieve its goal that is incompatible with that of the opponent or that expresses its hostility toward him or her.

Social scientists are sometimes accused of using obscure language to express relatively simple ideas. In some cases, we must plead guilty. But some technical terms are essential if you wish to understand conflict. One pair of useful terms is conflict action and conflict behavior. We speak about participants' conflict "action" when we are assuming that

they are guided by rational considerations; when we assume that they may be rational *or* nonrational, we use the term conflict "behavior." For example, we might say that demonstrators are engaged in conflict *action* when they march through a city in a planned fashion, using signs and nonviolent language to demand the ouster of a crooked politician. When such intent and planning may be absent, we might use a more general term conflict *behavior*. This distinction is not hard and fast, but, because we hope to show how to approach conflict in a thoughtful manner, we use, most of the time, the term conflict action.

Another important distinction is between "coercive" and "noncoercive" action (behavior). This distinction is so important that we give it special attention later. You should know, however, that some writers use the terms "competitive" and "cooperative" instead.<sup>10</sup> We prefer our terminology because it captures an essential point: a conflict is quite different when the adversaries use force than when they don't.

### Coercive Action

Coercion forces the opponents to do what they do not wish to do. It accomplishes this by threatening to inflict injury on them, or by actually inflicting it (Kriesberg [1973] 1982, 116). The distinction between threatening and actually inflicting injury is necessary because the two have theoretically different interpretations: while the threat of injury is best conceived within the framework of a payoff matrix, the actual injury is not.

*Actual Coercion.* We use "actual" coercion if we try to weaken our opponents by injuring them. It is useful to distinguish between physical violence and symbolic injury. Severe *physical* injury can be violent: hurting or killing the opponents, or destroying their property (Himes 1980, 103). For example, soldiers of one nation try to kill those of another, or boys fighting in a schoolyard try to knock each other down. Or physical injury can be nonviolent, such as depriving the opponents of resources they need. For example, a nation may punish its opponent by preventing ships from going in or out of its harbors, or a wife may lock her husband out of their house. *Symbolic* injury, on the other hand, weakens the opponent by inducing fear, shame, or guilt through actions such as jeering or using derogatory names. For example, strikers may

Table 2.4. *A Revised Version of a Husband-Wife Conflict*

	Conflict Parties	
	Husband	Wife
<i>Goals</i>		
Four children	-3	10
No children	4-10 = -6	-8

try to dissuade nonunion workers from entering a factory by calling them "scabs."

*Threat of Coercion.* The primary consequence of an actual injury is to decrease the opponents' ability to continue the conflict. Thus it should not be viewed as involving a change in their payoffs. A threat of violence, on the other hand, is best understood within the framework of payoff matrices: if the opponents' payoffs for their original goal are sufficiently reduced by the threat, they will abandon it and may adopt the threatening party's goal.

Let us illustrate using the conflict between husband and wife, represented in Table 2.2. Suppose that the wife threatens to leave her husband if he does not agree to have four children, and that this threat is believed by the husband.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the wife's leaving would be so devastating to him that the threat decreases his payoff for having no children by 10 points (see Table 2.4). Because now his payoff for "four children" is higher (-3) than the payoff for "no children" (-6), a rational husband who does not have any other choice will agree to having four children. But he has been coerced into choosing an option that has negative payoff for him, that is, he will do something he does not want to do<sup>12</sup> - which, incidentally, suggests why threats are often a bad strategy: when a person is forced to choose an option with a negative payoff, he or she is bound to feel hostile and will be less likely to cooperate in the future.

Although the distinction between threatening and actually inflicting an injury is conceptually clear, in practice the two are often intertwined and hard to separate. For example, consider two men who have been fighting until one of them gives up. How should we interpret the

defeated man's actions? Should we assume that he no longer views fighting as profitable, or should we assume that he is no longer capable of fighting? Another complication is that threats do more than make resistance less desirable. As we discuss in Chapter 8, threats may increase the opponents' hostility and thus make them less likely to yield.

### *Noncoercive Conflict Action*

Not all conflict actions involve coercion. Some, such as joint searching for new options, involve "pure" cooperation. Others, such as persuasion and rewarding, lie somewhere between full-scale coercion and pure cooperation: they resemble coercion in that their objective is to make the opponent accept the player's goal; they resemble pure cooperation in that they use inducements rather than force.

*Persuasion.* Like a threat of coercion, persuasion works by changing the payoffs that the goals offer to the opponents. But while threat of coercion decreases the payoff for one's opponents' original goal, persuasion increases their payoff for the party's own goal. It does so at no cost to itself, simply by bringing to the opponents' attention certain favorable outcomes they had originally not considered. For example, suppose that parents want their son to go to college, but he does not wish to go. They can try to persuade him by pointing out that, if he goes to college, he will be able to make new friends, enjoy sports, and take interesting courses. If he does not go to college, he will have to find employment immediately. And surely that would not be as pleasant as college life.

Note that successful persuasion seldom involves abstract logical arguments or righteous positioning. Instead, it involves showing one's opponents that it is to *their* advantage to adopt "our" goals. Thus a pro-choice advocate, trying to persuade a pro-life advocate to change her action should not argue that his point of view is morally right; instead, he should point out that the pro-life advocate could herself have an unwanted or high-risk pregnancy, that an abortion performed under medical supervision would save her from having to raise an unwanted child, or might even save her life.

*Promising a Reward.* Another type of conflict action involves promising rewards. Those who promise a reward also play to the opponent's self-interest, but instead of emphasizing existing options the opponent has overlooked, they create – usually at their own expense – new outcomes that are rewarding for the opponent.<sup>13</sup> In the parlance of the theory of games, they create “side payments” that is, a commitment to reward their opponents if they accept the first party's goals. Thus the parents may try to induce their son to go to college by promising to buy him a new car to take him there.

*Pure Cooperation.* What may be called “pure” cooperation differs from the actions discussed so far in that its objective is to find a solution that is gratifying to both parties. Usually, it involves searching for a goal that is different from those the parties had originally pursued. In some cases, each party searches for such a solution on its own; in other cases, the search itself is a joint one, involving a continuing dialogue. Some cooperative actions are preparatory to finding such a solution. For example, a party may try to understand its opponents' point of view; it may attempt to validate that point of view; or it may seek third-party assistance in resolving the conflict. We consider such cooperative actions here and in the coming chapters and devote Chapter 9 exclusively to them.

### *Degree of Coerciveness*

For many purposes it is important to consider the specific types of action described thus far. But for other purposes – such as making causal statements of the form “An increase in X leads to an increase to Y” – it is necessary to have a term that refers to the “degree” of a conflict, terms like intensity, destructiveness, or strength. There does not seem to be a word that captures this perfectly, but the term “coerciveness” seems quite appropriate. For example, when two boys start to hit each other after merely exchanging sarcastic remarks, it may be said that their behavior becomes more coercive.

Figure 2.1 shows that our use of the term “degree of coerciveness” runs into a slight conceptual problem: we identify the lower end of the continuum both as corresponding to (a low level of) coerciveness

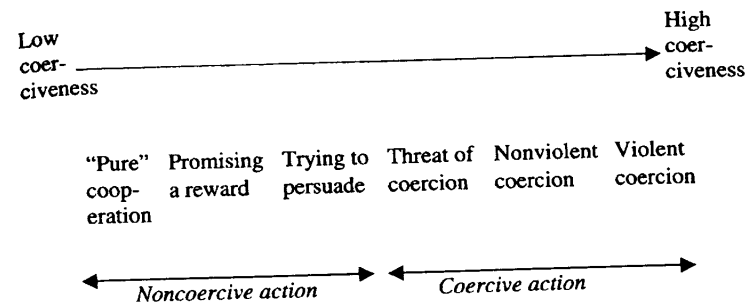


Figure 2.1. Coerciveness of Conflict Action

and to “noncoercive action.” How can something be both coercive and noncoercive? We ask the reader to bear with us, recognizing that this problem is often encountered when one tries to convert a continuum into a concept with only two categories.<sup>14</sup>

In general, it is possible to arrange the different types of conflict action on a continuum from low to high degree of coerciveness, as shown in Figure 2.1. “Pure cooperation” is an action that is minimally coercive: while inducing the opponent to abandon his original goal, it takes his interests as much into account as those of the actor herself. “Promising reward” is somewhat more coercive: although it rewards the opponent, it does so only in order to promote the actor's own interests. “Trying to persuade” is even more coercive: it pursues the actor's own interests without rewarding the opponent's in any way; it merely notes which of his interests coincide with those of the actor. The remaining three benchmarks – threats, nonviolent coerciveness, and violent coerciveness – clearly manifest increasing coerciveness: “threat of coercion” because it decreases the opponent's payoffs; “nonviolent coerciveness” because it is punishing to the opponent; and “violent coerciveness” because it is highly punishing, possibly even fatal, to the opponent.

### Conclusions

Although the very concept of conflict is the subject of considerable controversy, the theories to be discussed in subsequent chapters suggest a fairly simple definition: conflict is a situation in which actors



use conflict action against each other to attain incompatible goals and/or to express their hostility. To make this definition meaningful, one must understand its three main terms: incompatible goals, hostility, and conflict behavior. The term "incompatible goals" invites several questions. What is meant by incompatibility? What is a goal, and how does it differ from an "interest"? Is it possible to have different degrees of incompatibility? How can one identify a goal that is acceptable to both sides? A goal that is best for both? So-called payoff matrices help one to answer these questions.

Much could be said about hostility, but to understand the unique role it plays in conflicts, consider its nonrational aspects. Unlike rational action (which is based on careful deliberation and uses a specific procedure of judgment and valuing), expressions of hostility are nonrational in that they are quick, impulsive, and often at odds with what action a rational analysis might suggest. Thus conflict behavior that is heavily influenced by hostility is often damaging to the actor's own long-range interests.

"Conflict behavior" is an umbrella term that covers many diverse types of behavior. It refers to (more or less) rational action as well as to (nonrational) expressions of hostilities; to behavior that is highly coercive (such as physically harming the opponent) as well as to behavior that is fully cooperative (such as searching for a mutually acceptable solution). Still, it is desirable to have a concept that treats these qualitative differences as matters of degree – and the concept of coerciveness is such a concept (see Figure 2.1).

## Development of Incompatible Goals

MUCH OF this book is about understanding social conflicts. Why did World War II occur? Why do I and my husband fight so often over trivial matters? Why does the Palestinian conflict continue to fluctuate between escalation and deescalation? There are three different ways to answer such questions: to look at the origins of conflict, to consider conflict actions, and to focus on conflict dynamics. This chapter considers the first problem, origins due to goal incompatibility.

Clearly, there are any number of specific reasons why two conflict actors can have incompatible goals. But it is possible to subsume them under three main headings: contested resources, incompatible roles, and incompatible values. This point is so important that it is worth representing it graphically (see Figure 3.1).

### Contested Resources

As the term suggests, resources are contested when a party wants some of the resources the other party has or when both adversaries want the same unallocated resource. Let us consider the main types of such resources, and then ask why a party may want more than it has already.

#### *Frequently Contested Resources*

Humans can fight about a bewildering variety of things: about money, about land, about children, about infidelity, about politics. And yet

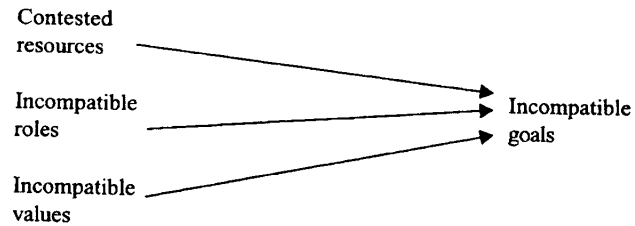


Figure 3.1. Possible Causes of Goal Incompatibility

it is possible to reduce this perplexing variety by classifying resources into three main categories: wealth, power, and prestige (Weber [1922] 1947).

*Wealth.* Because the first of the three main resources, wealth, usually involves “tangibles,” it is easiest to understand. Today, when speaking of wealth, we tend to think of *money* – the source of much happiness and unhappiness, and of many conflicts. If you wish to see a conflict over money, attend a meeting at which the lawyer reads the last will of a recently deceased parent. The children, who in the past managed to get along in a reasonably civil manner will, more likely than not, be at each other’s throats because each believes that he or she deserves more money than they actually got.

In ancient times the most important type of wealth was *land*, the source of prestige and power. Even though not as important as it once was, land is still a source of many serious conflicts. For example, both the Israelis and the Palestinians claim that East Jerusalem has historically been theirs and only they should have sovereignty there now. The Golan Heights, now occupied by the Israelis, was until 1967 a part of Syria and is claimed by it.

*Power.* There are those who seem to be bent on gaining and exercising power at all cost. They tell others what to do but respond angrily whenever others make suggestions to them; they monopolize conversations; they demand that they be treated with respect at all times. Nations can be – and usually are – equally power-hungry. They arm themselves to the teeth; they threaten their neighbors with armed intervention; they suppress internal dissention with force.

It is not difficult to identify actors who are powerful. But it is difficult to put your finger on what it is that they have. What exactly is power? While literature abounds with different definitions, we propose one that fits with our discussion of coerciveness: an actor is powerful if he or she can coerce others to do what he or she wants them to do *by altering their payoffs*: by either promising to reward the action he or she desires or by threatening to punish them if they fail to do so. Quite often, power is unequally distributed, with those who have only a little wanting more, those who have a lot wanting to keep it. Yet the very concept of “power inequality” is somewhat ambiguous, for it can have two quite different meanings.

First, power inequality may involve *domination*: party A has power over and dominates party B. Such situations often lead to a fight for liberation from oppression. Historical examples abound, ranging from slave revolts against Roman masters to the fight of Chechen rebels for independence from Russia. Second, power inequality exists when A does not dominate B, but has greater power *potential* than B does. This type of power inequality also can lead to conflict. This is because power is often a “zero-sum” commodity: if one party gains it, somebody else must lose it. Thus when the less powerful party seeks to increase its power potential, the more powerful party will resist these efforts.<sup>1</sup>

To illustrate the difference between these two types of power inequality, consider Germany following World War I. Through the Versailles treaty, Germany was reduced to a minor power and was required to pay heavy reparations to the victorious allies. This gave the allies power to dominate Germany’s economy. When Hitler became the chancellor of Germany, he reduced this power by blatantly ignoring the Versailles treaty. In addition, by rearming Germany, he made that nation stronger, thus increasing its power potential. Just how much the balance of power had shifted toward Germany was shown when Hitler invaded Austria and Czechoslovakia with impunity. This would not have happened before Germany’s rearmament.

*Prestige.* Street gang members constantly strive to gain a reputation for being tough and fearless, often by such acts as drive-by shootings. Often, there is conflict within a gang as young members try to show that they are tougher than their current leader. Gang leadership can

change rapidly and often. Similarly, movie or rock stars are adored by their fans for only short periods of time, being soon displaced by new idols.

In these examples the struggle is about *prestige* (also referred to as "reputation," "respect," or "esteem"), the third most important contested resource. It is a scarce resource because, by definition, it presupposes ranking from the most respected to the least, and because most of us desire high prestige but only a few can have it at any given time.

Prestige is often closely linked with power: a person who has power is often held in high respect; a person who is highly respected often can acquire power. Yet prestige is conceptually different from power. Whereas power is based on the ability to alter another's payoffs, prestige is based on the ability to live up to the group's ideals. We respect, admire, and listen to an outstanding athlete, a saint, a successful general, a Nobel laureate.

Because prestige is earned by exemplifying a group's ideals, and because in modern societies different groups have different ideals, a person who enjoys high prestige in one group or one setting may have low prestige in another. This is due to the fact that membership in different groups is assigned different values. Thus, in the days of racial segregation, famous black entertainers such as trumpeter Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong might receive a standing ovation from their audiences and still not be allowed to dine or stay in the very clubs where they performed. At the same time, it is possible to gain respect from those who have denied it in the past, and to do so through conflict action. For example, denying African Americans seating in the front of the bus in the segregated South was a sign of disrespect. The civil rights struggle not only forced southern states to discontinue this practice, but also earned higher respect for blacks. This was finally accomplished when – and only when – it was made clear by civil rights activists and federal courts that such disrespect was contrary to the basic values of American society.

### *Reasons for the Contest*

Obviously, there are many reasons why one actor may want somebody else's resources. A playground bully may try to take away another child's toys because of his sociopathic personality; Japan may have embarked

on its expansionist policies during World War II because it lacked natural resources such as oil. But perhaps the most common reason for a contest – and one that has been theorized about most – is injustice: one party has resources that rightfully belong to another party.

*Injustice.* Justice and injustice are among the most elusive and disputed concepts in social theory. And yet, without having a clear idea of what is and is not unjust, it would be nearly impossible to understand many conflicts. The concept of *distributive justice* yields one clear definition. Although this concept is quite old, its importance was recently re-emphasized by Walton and McKersie (1965). But for us, the clearest and most complete exposition is again by George Homans (1974).

Roughly speaking, Homans argues that most of us live by the same basic principles: we believe that we are treated unjustly if we receive less *reward* than is appropriate (proportional) to our *contribution* to the group and to our *investments* in the group.<sup>2</sup> For example, factory workers will compare the wages they are paid and the enjoyment they derive from their work (their rewards) with the hours they have to work, their level of responsibility, and the tension it generates (their contributions), and with their seniority, amount of education, and membership in prestigious groups (their investment).

If the distribution of wealth, prestige, and power is – and is believed to be – unjust, those treated unjustly will desire to get more than they are currently receiving.<sup>3</sup> This creates incompatible goals: the privileged wish to maintain the status quo, the underprivileged to change it to their advantage. But there are at least two reasons why the theory of distributive justice alone might not account adequately for what is viewed as fair and just.

One reason is that its principles can be at odds with a society's culture. In some cases, culture is so strong that it totally overrides the principles of distributive justice. For example, Egyptian pharaohs were believed to be gods who must be obeyed, right or wrong. In other cases, culture is weaker, and beliefs in distributive justice coexist with widely held cultural beliefs. For example, American culture emphasizes equality, usually equality of opportunity but sometimes even equality of results. Some hold that wealth, prestige, and power should be equally distributed: they view the very rich with suspicion, call bosses by their first names, and resent being told what to do, even by their

bosses. And yet these Americans also abide by the principles of distributive justice: they believe that parents should have more power than their children, that a competent employee should be paid better than one who does not do her job properly, that a law-abiding person should be respected more than a criminal.

The second problem is that Homans's theory is often difficult to use in practice. The privileged are bound to argue that their contributions and investments are higher, just as surely as the underprivileged will argue that they are not. Thus less controversial criteria are needed, such as *relative deprivation* – a concept that plays a crucial role in the conflict theory developed by Gurr (1970).

If you are gainfully employed, you may decide that you are treated unfairly by comparing yourself to others who have jobs similar to yours. If you find that they are being rewarded more than you are, you feel "relatively deprived." Thus fire fighters will compare their salaries with those of police officers, police in one city will compare themselves with those in another, and so on.

True, for the reasons mentioned earlier, some clearly deprived groups do not make such comparisons. For example, in traditional Hindu society, the members of the outcaste groups did not compare themselves unfavorably to the members of the higher castes such as the Brahmins, even though they were much poorer and had to work very hard at menial jobs. This was because the Hindu religion taught that people's position in life was a reflection of their performance in their previous life: a person who had lived a good life would, in the next life, move into a higher caste; a person who failed to live meritoriously would move to a lower caste or out of the system completely. Thus the power, wealth, and prestige of the Brahmins were seen as rewards for their exemplary previous lives. By contrast, the outcastes were believed to deserve their lowly position because they had not behaved well in their previous lives. Consequently, the caste system was seen as just – although that belief weakened in the second half of the twentieth century.

Feelings of injustice can also occur when we compare what we get now to what we were getting in the past. Thus social conflicts tend to occur when economic depression creates wide-scale unemployment. Or we may compare what we are receiving to what we have been promised. In some cases, the promises are implicit. For example, in a

broad historical perspective, popular uprisings seem to be more likely when the conditions of the oppressed are beginning to get better than when they remain at the same low level. This is because the improvements cause the oppressed to believe that they were "promised" more than any regime can deliver.<sup>4</sup>

One can put up with a lot if the demands made by others are sanctioned by the society itself: children tend to obey their parents, soldiers their officers, students their teachers. But if the legitimacy of the "rulers" is in doubt, rebellion rather than obedience may be forthcoming. Max Weber ([1922] 1947) discussed three conditions under which domination is likely to be viewed as *legitimate* and therefore just.

The first condition exists primarily in small tribal societies. In these groups, a leader is viewed as legitimate if he has charisma,<sup>5</sup> that is, if he can perform acts of exceptional bravery or miracles such as walking on water, healing the sick, or raising the dead. Although charisma is of crucial importance in tribal societies, it is also of some importance in modern societies. When a leader addressing a large audience is able to keep it spellbound, he or she has charisma. Orators such as Adolf Hitler or Martin Luther King and great actors such as Laurence Olivier had charisma. Mediocre speakers and actors do not.

Charismatically legitimated power is very unstable, because the leader who fails to perform extraordinary feats continuously will come to be seen as illegitimate. For this reason, charismatic power is often routinized into a second type, one that Weber calls "traditional." This type of power is found mostly in preindustrial societies that are fairly large and lead a settled life. As the name suggests, in these societies a ruler is viewed legitimate if he or she has acquired power and wields it in a manner prescribed by the customs of the community. For example, William the Conqueror, being an illegitimate son of an English king, was not selected as that king's successor, and had to take the throne by invading England.

In modern societies legitimate power tends to be of the third, or bureaucratic type.<sup>6</sup> A person holding a high position in a bureaucracy is presumed to have legitimate power if he or she was chosen in accordance with specific written rules and follows the prescriptions of the office. Thus Richard Nixon was forced to resign when he was widely seen as having violated the duties of the U.S. presidency.

*Absolute Deprivation.* While a sense of injustice may be the most important reason why one party wants more than it has, there are other reasons. One of these is "absolute" deprivation. It occurs when a party is deprived of whatever it needs to lead a decent life. For example, during the early 1800s, the relationship between the Apache tribes and the Spanish and Anglo settlers in northern Mexico and southeastern Arizona was relatively peaceful as long as the Spanish colonial government of Mexico provided the Apaches with regular rations of food.<sup>7</sup> But when the Mexican Revolution of 1810 drained government resources, those rations dwindled and became insufficient. In 1824 the Apaches bolted from their settlements and began raiding white settlements. A lengthy war between the settlers and the Indians ensued (Swaney 1991).

*Belligerent Culture or Personality.* The word "belligerence" is derived from Latin for "waging war" (Webster's 1976, 102). Although today the term has several commonly accepted meanings, we shall use it here to mean a *disposition toward coercive action*.<sup>8</sup> Thus a wife may be always finding fault with what the husband does, one of a set of siblings may fight constantly, Germany may start many wars. When adversaries have incompatible goals, even when none of the obvious causes – such as injustice – is operating, the cause may be a belligerent personality or culture.

Often, we can gain considerable insight into a conflict if we know the actors' *culture*. For example, if we know that Apache men were expected to be warlike and the Hopi to be peaceful, we can understand why Apaches routinely raided other tribes. But if we wish to gain deeper theoretical understanding, we need to ask why these cultural differences exist in the first place. One of the most plausible explanations refers to the actors' "mode of production."

According to this theory, the Hopi, earning their living by agriculture, had to live settled lives and, thus provided with enough resources to live, developed little desire to attack others. Being dependent on having farming technology, they gradually developed a culture that valued hard work and was peaceful. The Apaches, on the other hand, relied primarily on hunting. Because they needed to move frequently to follow game, and even then often went hungry; because they often encountered opposition from other tribes; and because they had to

use weapons when hunting or fighting, they developed a culture that valued bravery and was warlike.

The second main reason for inherent belligerence is the actors' *personality*. For example, a playground bully will always attack other children, taking away their toys; some football players will fight hard to score even when they have been injured. Once again, knowing the actor's personality helps us to understand why he or she is engaged in a conflict. But why do personalities differ?

One reason has just been discussed – the actor's culture. Parents bring up their children to uphold the values of their society; thus their personality is, to some extent, a reflection of that culture. Because the Hopi praised their children for cooperative behavior, the Hopi tended to be peaceful toward others; because the Apache rewarded their children for bravery and aggressiveness, Apache adults tended to be belligerent even toward each other.

But noncultural factors shape personality as well. Some aspects of personality – such as intelligence – seem to be genetically determined. But an actor may also become habitually belligerent if his or her aggressive behavior has been well rewarded in the past. For example, a boy who has been a successful athlete in high school may become a highly aggressive business executive.

Whatever its causes, belligerence contributes to goal incompatibility. Thus the playground bully may have the goal of taking away another child's toy, while that child will have the goal of keeping it; the Apaches who attacked a ranch often had the goal of taking away the rancher's cattle, while the rancher's goal was to keep his cattle for himself.

### Incompatible Roles

Two parties can have incompatible goals because they play different roles in an institution or an organization. The so-called functional school of theorizing explains role differentiation by noting that societies work better if they divide their labor.<sup>9</sup> Industrial societies have several social institutions, each attending to specific functions. They have families to provide a haven for family members and to raise children; religions to define and enforce main moral values; political institutions to set common goals and to distribute resources; economic institutions to produce goods and services (Parsons and Smelser 1956). Moreover,

modern societies create organizations that further differentiate labor: management coordinates the work; engineers design the products; workers produce them; and salespeople sell them. Thus most employees play a role that has been assigned to them.<sup>10</sup>

### *Vertical Differentiation*

Sociologists have paid most attention to what might be called vertical role differentiation. It assigns different roles to different positions within the power hierarchy. This differentiation occurs within both social institutions and groups: parents have power over their children, ministers over their parishioners, managers over workers, government officials over citizens. Sociologists have long studied vertical role differentiation and the resulting conflict, especially in industrial organizations, but they have not always agreed on why the conflict exists. Karl Marx, who initiated inquiry into this problem, explained it in one way; Ralf Dahrendorf, another German sociologist, quite differently.

*Marx's Theory.* Marx developed a complex theory of social systems, one that was augmented and changed over the years. Yet there is a continuing theme in his writing that ties social conflict to private ownership: social conflicts exist because there are those who own the means of production and those who work for the owners (Marx and Engels [1846] 1947). The goals and interests of these two groups are incompatible, and they are therefore inevitably in conflict with each other.

What constitutes the "means of production" depends on the mode of production. In feudal societies the main mode of production was agriculture; hence the main means of production was land. Land pitted those who owned it, the aristocracy, against those who worked on it, the peasants, serfs, and slaves.<sup>11</sup> In capitalist societies, the main means of production is capital, most notably factories and information. The basic cleavage is between those who own the capital (the capitalists, also known as the bourgeoisie) and those who work for them (the proletariat).

Marx's analysis of conflict in capitalist societies led him to conclude that the capitalist's relentless pursuit of profit creates many problems for the workers. He argued that, in the long run, there is only one way a capitalist can make a profit – by exploiting workers. He must

pay them less than the goods they produce are worth. In fact, Marx believed that capitalists will always try to reduce the wage to a mere subsistence level, to a point where it is barely sufficient for the survival of the worker and his family. Not surprisingly, the proletariat's goal is the opposite: to raise wages to a fair level.

Marx saw additional reasons for the incompatibility between bourgeoisie and proletariat in goals and interests. In their ruthless pursuit of profit, capitalists dehumanize their workers. They do not hesitate to tear them away from their families and their churches, to turn them into machines doing boring and repetitive work without knowing its purpose. Thus, the ultimate goal of the proletariat is (should be) the destruction of the capitalist system, just as the goal of the capitalist is the preservation of the system.

*Dahrendorf's Theory.* Subsequent writers found Marx's analysis wanting. Among the most influential is Ralf Dahrendorf (1959). Having criticized Marx's theory of conflict on the grounds that it has yielded predictions that proved false, he proceeded to make his most important point.<sup>12</sup> He argued that Marx failed to make correct predictions because he took into account only a special case of a more general phenomenon. Marx believed that private ownership of the means of production is the cause of social conflicts – that if it were eliminated, harmony would prevail. In point of fact, said Dahrendorf, the true cause is more general: it is an aspect of the vertical differentiation itself – the division between those who protect the interest of the whole, and the interests of the remaining group members.

The "whole versus part" aspect of vertical differentiation exists and creates incompatible goals in many diverse associations. In some cases, the incompatibility is between the stated goals of the organization and the goals of its members *as individuals*. For example, although priests and ministers should (and usually do) lead church members on the road to righteousness, some members find sinful ways more enjoyable. Although professors should (and often do) impart knowledge to students, some students wish to enjoy their stay at the university and study as little as possible. Although the commissioners of a county are responsible for collective needs such as well-kept roads and fire protection, some citizens are concerned only with lowering their taxes.

In other cases, the incompatibility is between the stated goals of the whole organization and the goals of those who are assigned more *specific tasks* within it. Thus the managers of a firm should see to it that the firm makes a good profit, while the engineers should design the best possible product, no matter how expensive it may be.

*Who Is Right?* To whom should you listen, to Marx, who often saw social conflict as rooted in private ownership, or to Dahrendorf, who attributed it to vertical role differentiation? As recent history has shown, this question is far from trivial. If you side with Marx, you may try to minimize social conflicts by eliminating private ownership – an approach adopted by Soviet leaders. If you listen to Dahrendorf, you may try to minimize concentration of power – an approach typical of Western democracies.<sup>13</sup>

We side with Dahrendorf, simply because his theory is more general and thus explains more than Marx's does. For example, why did the miners in the former Soviet Union rebel against their managers, even though the means of production were not privately owned? Why did the workers throw in their lot with the dissidents in communist countries such as Poland and Czechoslovakia? Dahrendorf's theory suggests that they rebelled because their interests and goals were different from those of the people who were responsible for the whole: the managers wanted to fulfill the current five-year plan, the workers wanted a decent living without backbreaking work.<sup>14</sup>

To get to the main thrust of our argument, we must make a technical point: although those who are responsible for the whole group nearly always have more power than those who are not, this book separates these two aspects of inequality. Earlier, we noted that those who have power tend to have different goals than those who do not; now we are saying that those who are responsible for the whole would have different goals than those who are responsible for the parts, *even if there were no power difference between them.*

This comparison puts Marx's theory in a new light. Marx was undoubtedly right when he spoke of the shameless exploitation of workers by nineteenth-century capitalists. However, one could point out – as would Dahrendorf – that this was not only because capitalists had unlimited power and used it to their own advantage, but also because they had to seek prosperity for the whole of their enterprises.

Thus the incompatibility of goals was due not only to exploitation by those with power, but also to the fact that capitalist enterprises had to make a profit in order to survive, while the workers had to have decent wages to live.

### *Horizontal Differentiation*

An organization or institution usually has role differentiation that is due to the very fact that many members have only partial and specific responsibilities. For example, an organization might have one type of role for engineers, another for salespeople, still another for accountants. Such role differentiation may be called horizontal to indicate that although the roles are different, the people playing them relate to each other as colleagues, not as superiors and subordinates.

On paper, the specialized roles are designed in such a way that they work in harmony to achieve a common purpose: the engineers prepare blueprints for the products, the salespeople endeavor to sell it, the accountants manage the finances. In reality, the goals assigned to different specialists may be incompatible. Suppose that an engineer is assigned the task of upgrading a jet fighter. She proceeds to do the best job she can, using the newest available technology. Often, this requires adding new equipment that, in turn, needs to be monitored by the pilot. Then the prototype of the redesigned fighter is given to a test pilot. He finds that the cockpit is so full of dials and levers as to be unmanageable. And the stage is set for a conflict: the engineers strive to include the newest technology; the test pilots want a plane that can be handled with ease.

### **Incompatible Values**

Groups that are separated from each other tend to develop different cultures that may advocate incompatible values – that is, the standards of rightness and goodness that hold a culture and society together. Let us consider how value incompatibility can happen.

### *Separation*

Any individual, separated from others, will in time develop a unique set of values. He or she will abandon these values in favor of group

values only if he or she interacts frequently with the group members. The same is true for groups.

*Separation of Individuals.* Within-group interaction tends to be most intense in small tribal societies. Although a large society can preserve some of the features of a small group – Japanese society being a prominent example – in most instances large industrial societies tend to promote the culture of individualism, thereby inhibiting free within-group interaction. Individualism encourages the members to formulate and develop their own values rather than to accept those of their group. Just how extreme individualism can be is suggested by Bellah et al. (1986, 221): they found that, in the contemporary United States, some individuals had created a religion of their very own, with their own unique beliefs and rituals.

One of the reasons why individuals separated from others develop unique values is a difference in personalities: some are aggressive, others passive; some are talkative, others taciturn; some like to solve problems in solitude, others like to socialize. These personality differences can create value differences and lead to incompatible goals. Thus two roommates might be in conflict because one likes the room clean and well organized whereas the other likes to be free to put things wherever she wants. At times, these differences can erupt into conflict over seemingly trivial matters such as not keeping the cap on the toothpaste.

*Separation of Groups.* When a nomadic tribe moves into a new territory and becomes prosperous, its population grows in size. But a tribal society can function adequately only when it is small, say between fifteen and fifty members. When it grows larger, some of its members leave and create a new social unit at a new location. Given the physical separation, interaction between the original tribe and the new unit becomes minimal, while within each unit it is intense.<sup>15</sup> Ultimately, the two groups develop different cultures. For example, Swiss villages located in isolated valleys have developed unique dialects that are unintelligible to villagers in other valleys. Although such linguistic differences need not create incompatible values, sometimes they do. At the very least, each village considers itself superior to its neighbors.

Group separation has similar consequences in modern societies. Because members of separate groups seldom interact across their group's boundaries, their cultures become different – in some cases, incompatible. Consider, for example, the proliferation of cults in contemporary American society, ranging from religious cults that worship ancient gods to secular cults such as militias that oppose the government. Each group is small and has clearly defined beliefs, values, and norms that make it distinct from other cults and from mainstream culture.

*Personal and Group Identity.* An important reason why different actors have incompatible goals is that they – be they individuals or groups – value themselves much more highly than others value them. They feel that they are not fully appreciated by others, that they are not receiving their due: students are shattered if they receive a bad grade, employees feel almost invariably that they deserve higher pay, children feel that their siblings are loved more than they are. And, as has been observed by anthropologists, all societies are “ethnocentric,” believing themselves better than others.

Not surprisingly, I need to justify why I am better than others think I am. So I construct an *identity* that proves it. I may believe that, although I did not have the same education as my colleagues, I have a better intuitive understanding of how to solve problems; that, although my parents were poor farmers, I am just as good as anybody else because I have an ancestor who came to America on the *Mayflower*; that, although my business is not doing very well, I have always treated my customers fairly. Similarly, groups develop identities that justify their imagined superiority: the French may believe that they are more cultured than the Americans; the southern whites that they are more industrious and honest than the blacks; the Apaches that they are braver than the Hopis.

A discussion of group identity would be incomplete without considering its current version, one that exists primarily in large contemporary societies. It occurred as a result of several developments happening more or less simultaneously, such as industrialization and urbanization, population growth and mobility, and technological advances – especially in communication and transportation. These



changes made it possible to mobilize the population of large societies such as France and the United States, and unify it through a commonly held set of values – values that became known as *nationalism*: a desire to achieve, maintain, and perpetuate the identity, integrity, prosperity, and power of the entire nation (Christenson et al. 1975, 24–30).

Perhaps all groups in danger of losing their identity will fight. Chicanos wish to preserve their language and cultural heritage and resist attempts at assimilating them into Anglo culture. Even the friendliest Indian tribes have turned to warfare once the whites started to take away their land or despoil their sacred grounds. Ethnic groups within the Soviet Union declared their independence as soon as the power of the central government diminished. But nationalism, because it occurs in large societies equipped with modern and deadly weapons, changed the nature of conflict dramatically, making it so destructive as to threaten the very existence of humankind.

#### *Values of Communities and Systems*

It is impossible to predict in detail what culture will be created by separated groups. Some tribes worship the sun, others the ocean; some societies prescribe that one should eat with forks and knives, others that one ought to use chopsticks. But in certain very general respects one can predict the type of values a society will develop: small tribal societies tend to develop “communal” values, whereas large industrial societies tend to adopt “system” values.

Classical sociologists, trying to explain the functioning of societies, found that they could not do so without distinguishing between two broad types of social arrangements. At first, they thought that this distinction was linked to historical development. They believed that early, preindustrial societies had social arrangements and values quite different from those of the emerging industrial societies. Although this point was made most forcefully by German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies ([1887] 1963), other sociologists made similar observations. Because each of them arrived at this conclusion from a different starting point, they all conceptualized this variation somewhat differently and gave it different names.<sup>16</sup> But contemporary German sociologist Jürgen Habermas (1987) argues that all societies have both types of these arrangements, that they differ merely in how important each

arrangement is. He calls these two types of arrangements “lifeworld” and “system.” This book uses his term “system” but not – because it seems confusing to many – his term “lifeworld.” Instead, we shall speak about “communities” and “communal” values.

American sociologist Talcott Parsons (Parsons and Shils 1951) developed a theory that helps us understand these differences. He noted that before specific social arrangements can be created, five basic decisions must be made. Should the relationships between members be affective or affectively neutral, self-oriented or collectively oriented, universalistic or particularistic, specific or diffuse, ascriptive or achievement-oriented?

These distinctions may be illustrated by contrasting the values of a mother with those of a surgeon. Whereas a mother is expected to relate to her children in an “affective” and loving way, a surgeon should never get emotionally involved with his or her patients and thus never treats members of his or her own family. Whereas a mother should have a “collectivist” orientation, caring for her children as much as or more than she cares about herself, a surgeon is expected to be strongly motivated by money and reputation. Whereas a mother should have a “particularistic” orientation toward her children, believing them to be the most beautiful and the smartest, a surgeon should provide the same quality of service universally, to all patients. Whereas a mother’s role is defined in a “diffuse” manner – she is expected to be a nurse, a chauffeur, a teacher, or whatever is called for – a surgeon typically is a specialist, perhaps performing only heart surgeries. Finally, whereas a mother’s role is defined in an “ascriptive” fashion – because only a woman can perform it and (until very recently) most women were expected to perform it – anybody who completes the requisite medical training achieves the status of a surgeon.

Once a society has specified its preferred types of relationships, it has created a social structure and, in effect, inaugurated a set of cultural values. Although any combination of values is possible, they often tend to coalesce into two mutually exclusive sets. One set is typical of communities, the other of industrial systems (see Table 3.1).

Different structures promote different types of values. Communal values are created spontaneously when members of a society engage in *free, face-to-face communication* that can occur only in small groups. Early in history, communal values were found in small tribes; today

Table 3.1. *Values of Communities and Industrial Systems*

Communal Values	Values of Industrial Systems
Be affective	Be affectively neutral
Be collectivistic	Be self-oriented
Be particularistic	Be universalistic
Be ascriptive	Be achievement-oriented
Be diffuse	Be specific

they exist in small groups such as families, clubs, or religious cults. Although communal values originate in small groups, they can also be found in certain larger groupings that were derived from the original small groups: Christian Scientists, Alcoholics Anonymous, the National Organization for Women. And although their cultures may differ in many respects, they are similar in that they tend to adopt the values of the community.

The values of the "system" emerge when a society attempts to solve its problems in an *instrumentally rational way*,<sup>17</sup> especially when members of a society attempt to solve problems posed by their "environment." As Parsons has noted, when the members consider how best to "adapt" to the environment – how to organize themselves in order to extract raw materials and transform them into usable goods – they tend to create economic organizations and institutions. And in industrial societies, these organizations and institutions tend to be bureaucratic, that is, hierarchical, formal, and highly differentiated. Hence the industrial system has the values listed in the right column of Table 3.1.

Before leaving this topic, we must clarify one point. Whereas all communities promote the values listed in the first column of Table 3.1, only *industrial systems* promote the values listed in the right column. Other types of systems may promote some of the communal values. For example, the Catholic Church, which reflects many of the values of feudal systems, does not assign specialized roles to those at the lower levels of its hierarchy: a priest is expected to minister to all spiritual needs of his parishioners. Moreover, the church teaches the collectivistic values of self-sacrifice and emphasizes affective values such as

"love thy neighbor." The systems of future societies may also be expected to advocate many of the communal values.<sup>18</sup>

Habermas (1987) has pointed out that the difference between communal and system values can be a source of social conflict. In fact, he argued that in the advanced industrial societies the system "colonizes" and "deforms" communal life. For example, money and power interfere with the free interaction that is at the heart of communities (Ritzer 1992, 446).

### *Role Differentiation*

Role differentiation tends to create incompatible goals directly, by asking those who play different roles to act in incompatible ways. But it can also create incompatibility indirectly, by promoting different values. Teachers and educators not only have the goal of teaching their students, they also tend to value knowledge as such. Military officers not only have the goal of creating units that will fight well but also cherish the values of honor and obedience. And so on.

Some roles emphasize communal values; others, system values. For example, a minister is likely to emphasize the need for universal love, one of the primary communal values. A businessman, on the other hand, is just as likely to feel that in the business context efficiency – a value of the industrial system – is more important than active concern for others.

### **Conclusions**

We began by explaining goal incompatibility in terms of three main causes: contested resources, incompatible roles, and incompatible values. We can now elaborate on that explanation. Although the more detailed explanation, shown in Figure 3.2, is too complex to be quickly understood, you can profit from it if you are willing to spend some time studying it: you will come to understand how the causes depicted in the simpler graph of Figure 3.1 are themselves produced.

Figure 3.2 shows that there are three main reasons why you might *contest the distribution of resources*: because you believe that you are treated unjustly, because you do not have enough to live decently ("absolute" deprivation), or because you have a belligerent culture

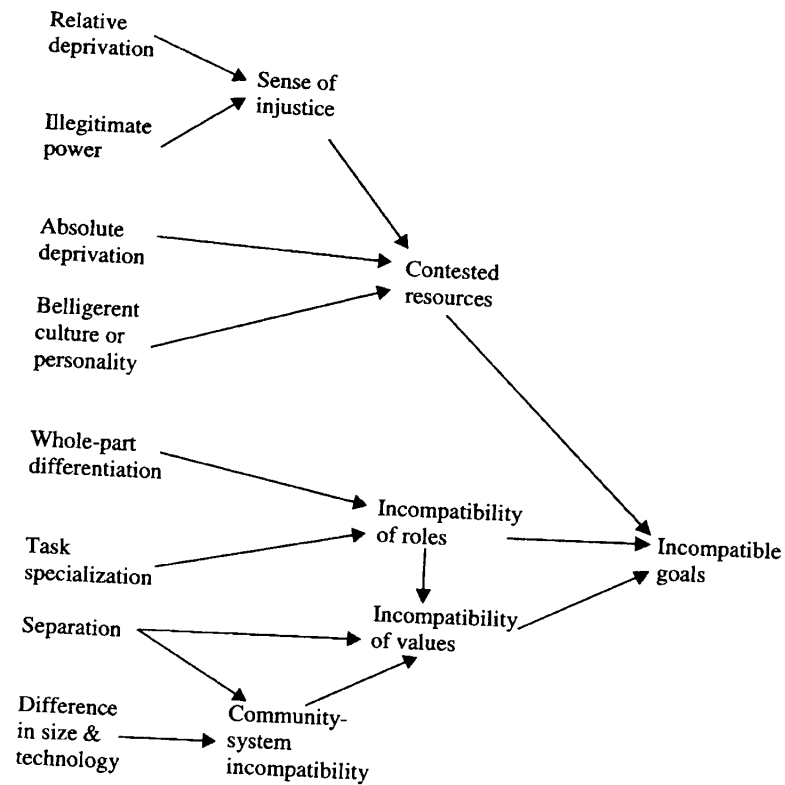


Figure 3.2. Causes of Incompatible Goals

or personality. It further shows how you can document injustice: by showing that you are deprived in comparison to others, or by proving that those who have power hold it illegitimately.

The graph also reminds us that *role incompatibility* exists for one of two main reasons: either because “vertical” differentiation assigns those in power the responsibility for the whole organization while assigning to the remaining members only specialized tasks; or because “horizontal” differentiation assigns specialized tasks to different members.

Finally, Figure 3.2 shows that there are three general reasons why two parties may have *different values*: because they play different roles,

because they have been separated from each other, and because their groups differ in size and technology. Differences in size and technology matter because, when members of one party live in a small rural community while most of their opponents live in large industrial cities, the first party will have the “communal” values described in the first column of Table 3.1, the opponent the “system” values shown in the second column.

Figure 3.2 shows causes that may but need not operate in any specific conflict. The discussion of the next chapter makes this point vividly by showing that the U.S. civil rights conflict has only one main cause, while an organizational conflict to be discussed in Chapter 6 was shaped by several causes.