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Soc. al Conflict: E, S & S

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Strategic Choice

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Peter Colger has to make a decision. For months he has been looking forward to taking his two weeks of vacation at a quiet mountain lodge where he can hunt, fish, and hike to lofty scenic overlooks. Now his wife Mary has rudely challenged this dream. She has told him that she finds the mountains boring and wants to go to Ocean City, Maryland, a busy seaside resort that Peter dislikes intensely. Peter must decide what strategy to employ in this controversy.

As we saw in Chapter 1, three basic strategies are available to Peter. He can engage in *contentious behavior* and try to prevail—for example, by arguing for the merits of a mountain vacation, indicating that he had already made up his mind, threatening to take a separate vacation if Mary does not agree, or even making a large deposit on a room in a mountain hotel. He can take a *problem-solving approach* and try to find a way to go to both places or to a vacation spot that satisfies both sets of interests. He can *yield* to Mary's demands and agree to go to the seashore. And there is another, less interesting approach: he can *avoid* the conflict

altogether by being inactive (doing nothing) in the hope that the issue will simply go away or by withdrawing from the controversy—for example, by deciding not to take a vacation.

This chapter examines the conditions that determine how Peter (and, more generally, anyone facing a conflict) decides among these basic strategies.

NATURE OF THE STRATEGIES

Contending refers to any effort to resolve a conflict on Party's terms without regard to Other's interests. When Party employs this strategy, it maintains its own aspirations and tries to persuade or force Other to yield. Various tactics are available to Party when it chooses this strategy. They include making threats, imposing penalties with the understanding that they will be withdrawn if Other concedes, and taking preemptive actions designed to resolve the conflict without Other's consent (in our example, perhaps by making a deposit at a mountain hotel). If Party is trying to reach a negotiated settlement of the controversy, contending may also involve presenting persuasive arguments, making demands that far exceed what is actually acceptable, committing itself to an "unalterable" position, or imposing a deadline.

In contrast, *problem solving* entails an effort to identify the issues dividing the parties and to develop and move toward a solution that appeals to both sides. When Party employs this strategy, it maintains its own aspirations and tries to find a way of reconciling them with Other's aspirations.

Various tactics are available to implement the strategy of problem solving. These include risky moves, such as conceding with the expectation of receiving a return concession, mentioning possible compromises as talking points, and revealing Party's underlying interests. They also include cautious moves, such as hinting at possible compromises, sending disavowable intermediaries to discuss the issues, communicating through back channels, and communicating through a mediator.

Yielding, which involves lowering Party's aspirations, need not imply total capitulation. It may also imply a partial concession. For example, Peter Colger might decide to give up his secondary goal of hiking to mountain overlooks in order to make it easier to find a mutually acceptable agreement. He could then engage in problem solving, seeking a quiet resort that permits fishing and hiking where his wife can also accomplish her major goals of spending time at a busy seaside resort.

CHOOSING A STRATEGY

There are trade-offs among the three basic strategies, in the sense that choosing one of them makes choosing the others less likely. Though sometimes found in combination with each other, these strategies are somewhat incompatible, for three reasons. First, the strategies are alternative means of moving toward the same end, agreement with Other. If it is not possible to use one of them, Party is more likely to employ the others. Second, the strategies require different psychological orientations; for example, it does not seem quite right to try to push Other around while yielding to or working with Other. Third, the strategies tend to send out contradictory signals to Other. Yielding often implies weakness, which is incompatible with putting effective pressure on Other. Contending may undermine Other's trust, reducing the likelihood of effective problem solving.

Because of these trade-offs, there are indirect as well as direct antecedents or conditions that favor all three strategies. Indirect antecedents affect the likelihood of adopting a strategy by encouraging or discouraging one of the other strategies.

Most of the rest of this chapter is devoted to two theoretical notions about the conditions that affect choice among the basic strategies. The first, which is summarized in a *dual concern model*, traces strategic choice to the relative strength of concern about Party's and Other's outcomes. The second, which we call the *perceived feasibility perspective*, attributes this choice to the perceived likelihood of success and the cost of enacting the various strategies. These two theoretical notions are complementary in the sense that each deals with issues ignored by the other.[1]

The chapter ends with a discussion of the forces that determine the vigor with which the three strategies are enacted.

THE DUAL CONCERN MODEL

The dual concern model appears in Figure 3.1. It postulates two types of concerns: *concern about Party's own outcomes*, which is shown on the hori-

[1] A good deal of evidence will be cited in support of these theoretical notions, most of it derived from laboratory experiments on simulated negotiation. *Negotiation*, a form of conflict behavior, occurs when two or more parties try to resolve a divergence of interest by means of conversation. Much of the material presented in Chapter 10 (Problem Solving) is in fact descriptive of aspects of negotiation. Laboratory studies of negotiation typically place subjects (often college students) in a simulated negotiation setting and manipulate theoretically relevant variables. Careful measurements of reactions to these variables are taken. Detailed discussion of this kind of research can be found in Pruitt (1981), Pruitt & Carnevale (1993), and Rubin & Brown (1975).
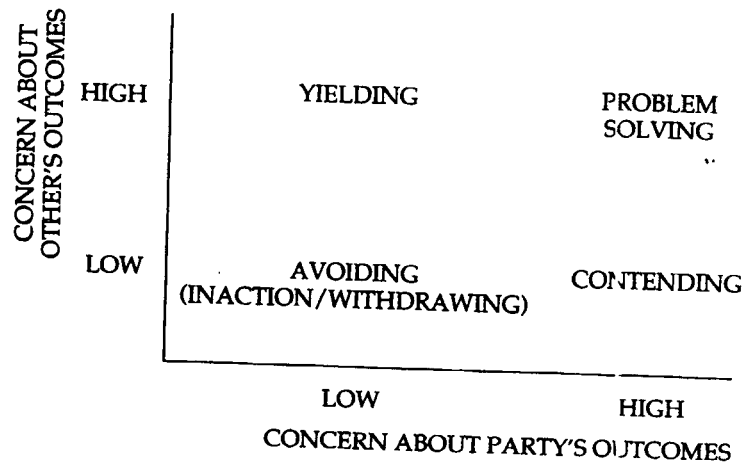
FIGURE 3.1
The dual concern model.

zontal axis, and *concern about Other's outcomes*, which is shown on the vertical axis. These concerns are portrayed as ranging from indifference (at the zero point of the coordinates) to high concern.[2]

The two concerns in this model are defined as follows: Concern about Party's outcomes means placing importance on its interests in the realm under dispute. When Party has a strong concern about its own outcomes, it is highly resistant to yielding; in other words, its aspirations tend to be rigid and high.[3] Concern about Other's outcomes implies placing importance on Other's interests—feeling responsible for the quality of Other's outcomes. This concern is sometimes *genuine*, involving an intrinsic interest in Other's welfare. It is more often *instrumental* (strategic), being aimed at helping Other in order to advance Party's interests. For example, dependence on Other often encourages Party to build a working relationship by trying to satisfy Other's needs.

The dual concern model makes the following predictions about the antecedents of strategic choice: Problem solving is encouraged when Party has a strong concern about both its own and Other's outcomes. Yielding is encouraged when Party has a strong concern about only

[2] Although not shown in Figure 3.1, it is theoretically possible for Party to have negative concerns about Other's outcomes and even about Party's own outcomes. In other words, we might have extended the coordinates in the figure downward and to the left. A few points about negative concerns will be made in this chapter, but not enough to warrant introducing further complexity into the formal statement of the model. See McClintock (1988) for a discussion of negative concerns about Party's and Other's outcomes.
[3] See Kelley et al. (1967) for a sophisticated discussion of the concept of resistance to yielding.

Other's outcomes. Contending is encouraged when Party has a strong concern only about its own outcomes. Avoiding—and inaction, in particular—is encouraged when Party has a weak concern about both its own and Other's outcomes.[4]

Thomas (1976) notes that the two concerns in the dual concern model are often erroneously reduced to a single dimension, with selfishness (concern about Party's own outcomes) on one end and cooperativeness (concern about Other's outcomes) on the other. This is an incorrect simplification, because it is clear that both concerns can be strong at the same time. Party can be both selfish and cooperative (leading it to engage in problem solving in an effort to reconcile the interests of both Party and Other). By postulating dual concerns, we are forced to distinguish between two ways of cooperating with Other, yielding and problem solving. These were not sufficiently separated in a prior theory of strategic choice (Deutsch, 1973), which proposed only a single motivational dimension ranging from competition to cooperation. Postulating dual concerns also forces us to distinguish between two ways of advancing Party's interests, contending and problem solving.

The Dual Concern Model as a Theory of Conflict Style

The dual concern model was originally developed as a theory of individual differences in conflict style (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Filley, 1975; Rahim, 1983; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979; Thomas, 1976). Conflict style is the way a person most commonly deals with conflict (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993). The dual concern model implies that conflict style is determined by the strength of two independent individual difference variables— concern about Party's own outcomes and concern about Other's outcomes.

This view of the dual concern model has generated two lines of research. The studies in the first tradition typically perform a multidimensional scaling analysis on Party's self-report about the methods it uses in dealing with conflict (van de Vliert, 1990; van de Vliert & Prein, 1989). The findings of these studies are largely consistent with the predictions of the dual concern model: a two-dimensional solution is found, with the largest distances between contending and yielding, and between problem solving and avoiding. The only discrepancy from the dual concern

[4] The dual concern model has its origins in Blake and Mouton's (1964) managerial grid and has been adapted to the analysis of conflict by various authors (Blake & Mouton, 1979; Filley, 1975; Gladwin & Walter, 1980; Rahim, 1983, 1986; Ruble & Thomas, 1976; Thomas, 1976; van de Vliert & Prein, 1989). Other labels are sometimes given to the dimensions in this model. For example, concern about Party's own outcomes is sometimes called *assertiveness*, and concern about Other's outcomes is sometimes called *cooperativeness*.

model is that yielding and avoiding are closer to each other than the model predicts.[5]

The second tradition, largely emerging from organizational settings, focuses on the development of instruments designed to measure Party's preferences for the various conflict styles: problem solving, contending, yielding, avoiding, and compromising (Hall, 1969; Kilmann & Thomas, 1977; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Rahim, 1983). These instruments have been used to examine issues such as the relationship between personality characteristics and conflict style (Kabanoff, 1987) or the impact of status difference on conflict style (Musser, 1982; Putnam & Poole, 1987; Rahim, 1986). For example, Rahim (1986) found that managers use different styles in handling interpersonal conflict with superiors, subordinates, and peers. With superiors they resort to yielding, with subordinates they engage in problem solving, and with peers they use compromising.

Although factors such as status differences may affect conflict style, people often show consistency in their conflict style across various conflict situations. Work by Sternberg and his associates (1984, 1987), although not a direct test of the dual concern model, indicates that Party can indeed be highly consistent in its style across various conflict situations. For example, in one study (Sternberg & Dobson, 1987), college students described recent interpersonal conflict episodes with a same-sex peer, an opposite-sex peer, and a parent. After finishing these descriptions, the participants rated the extent to which each of several styles of conflict resolution was characteristic of their own style. Not only did subjects show strong preference for certain styles of conflict resolution over other styles, but they also exhibited strong consistency in their styles across different interpersonal conflicts.

The Dual Concern Model as a Theory of the Impact of Conditions on Strategic Choice

The dual concern model also serves as a theory about the impact of various conditions on strategic choice. Some of these conditions affect Party's concern about its own outcomes; others affect Party's concern about Other's outcomes.

[5] Note that these studies, unlike the dual concern model shown in Figure 3.1, often include a "compromising" style, which involves working toward an agreement by making concessions. In earlier versions of this model (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Rahim, 1983; Thomas, 1976), this style is centrally located and thus equidistant from the other four styles. However, the results of recent studies indicate that the compromising style may be better placed between problem solving and yielding, but far from avoiding and contending (van de Vliert & Prein, 1989). It seems that a compromising style results from high concern about Other's outcomes combined with moderate concern about Party's outcomes (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993).

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Determinants of Party's Concern about Its Own Outcomes

The strength of Party's concern about its own outcomes differs from situation to situation and from person to person. For example, Party A may be relatively indifferent about the location and quality of his or her vacation, whereas this may be a matter of great concern for Party B. A, on the other hand, may have a much deeper concern about the quality of work on the job.

Concern about Party's outcomes can be traced to a number of determinants. One is the importance of the interests affected by these outcomes. As noted in Chapter 2, important interests produce high, rigid aspirations, which is the same thing as having a strong concern for Party's outcomes. For example, suppose that Party A does not have strong preferences about vacation plans, while B has an extremely taxing job and has a great need for rest and relaxation during vacation. If these vacation preferences are challenged by another person (C), Party A is likely to yield or avoid, whereas Party B will make an effort to salvage its preferences via contentious or problem-solving activities.

Another determinant of Party's concern about its own outcomes in any one realm is the importance of outcomes in other realms. Party does not have an infinite amount of time or energy, so it cannot pursue all of its interests with equal intensity. A strong concern about one issue often leads to a weak concern about others. For example, Party A may be relatively indifferent to the issue of quality of vacation because of being wrapped up in job-related issues, a political campaign, or some other absorbing activity.

Party's concern about its own outcomes is also affected by the way these outcomes are framed. When Party focuses on its potential losses in a conflict, it employs a negative frame. But when Party focuses on its potential gains, it employs a positive frame.[6] Interestingly, research on framing effects in negotiation (Neale & Bazerman, 1985; Thompson, 1990a) shows that negotiators with a positive frame make more concessions than those with a negative frame. Seeing outcomes as various degrees of loss highlights the potential costs of concessions, making it hard for Party to give up its position. This suggests that negative framing produces more concern about Party's outcomes than positive framing.

Fear of conflict is another determinant that leads concern about Party's outcomes to be low. This is because resistance to yielding, which is produced by a high concern about own outcomes, tends to engender conflict. Fear of conflict is a personality predisposition for some

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[6] For example, consider a wage dispute between labor and management. Suppose the workers demand $16 per hour, while management insists on $12 per hour. One option would be "splitting the difference," that is, agreement on $14. If the workers see this as a $2 loss (since $14 is $2 less than their original demand), they are employing a negative frame. In contrast, if they see the option of $14 as a $2 gain (since $14 is $2 more than management's initial offer), they are employing a positive frame.

people. It is also produced by certain situations, such as when Party is attracted to (or dependent upon) Other but is uncertain about Other's opinion of Party (Hancock & Sorrentino, 1980). Situations such as this, which are said to involve "false cohesiveness" (Longley & Pruitt, 1980), are especially common at the beginning of a relationship when people are getting to know each other. Research on newly formed romantic couples suggests that such sentiments can block all forms of assertiveness, including both contentious and problem-solving behavior (Fry et al., 1983).

The conditions mentioned so far affect individuals acting on their own behalf. But the parties to conflict are often groups. Hence, we must inquire into the antecedents of the concern that group members feel about the outcomes achieved by their group.

Especially strong concerns about the fate of the group tend to develop in cohesive groups whose members share a similar life situation and discuss their common fate with one another. This is particularly likely when the members of such groups regard themselves as part of a broader social movement, making common cause with similar groups in other locations (Kriesberg, 1982).

When the parties are groups or organizations, actual conflict behavior is usually carried out by representatives (e.g., a labor-management dispute). Research on negotiation (Benton & Druckman, 1973; Neale, 1984; Smith, 1987; Tjosvold, 1977) suggests that representatives are usually more reluctant to yield than are individuals bargaining on their own behalf. This is because they are trying to please their constituents and typically view their constituents as nonconciliatory. The effect disappears in those infrequent cases where the constituent is revealed to have a conciliatory bias (Benton & Druckman, 1974; Tjosvold, 1977).

Other studies suggest that representatives are especially reluctant to yield under conditions that make them anxious to please their constituents, such as when they have low status in their groups (Kogan et al., 1972), are distrusted by their constituents (Wall, 1975), wish to continue associating with their constituents (Klimoski, 1972), think that their constituents depend on them (Enzle et al., 1992), or have female as opposed to male constituents (Pruitt et al., 1986). All of these conditions can be viewed as enhancing Party's concern about the outcomes of its group.

Accountability to constituents has much the same effect. A representative is accountable to the extent that it must report negotiation outcomes to powerful constituents. Accountable representatives are especially reluctant to concede in negotiation (Bartunek et al., 1975), suggesting that they are particularly concerned about own-group outcomes. As a result, they are more likely to adopt a contentious or problem-solving approach than to yield (Ben-Yoav & Pruitt, 1984b; Neale, 1984).

Quite often, constituents instruct their representatives to achieve high

outcomes and are dissatisfied when they come home with less. This also serves to bolster the concern felt by representatives for their side's outcomes.

Determinants of Concern about Other's Outcomes

As mentioned earlier, concern about Other's outcomes takes two basic forms: genuine concern, based on an intrinsic interest in Other's welfare, and instrumental concern, aimed at advancing Party's own interests. There is an important difference between the two. Because instrumental concern is aimed at impressing Other, it is stronger when Other is more concerned about its own outcomes. By contrast, genuine concern aims at serving Other, regardless of Other's degree of self-interest.

Genuine concern about Other's outcomes is fostered by various kinds of *interpersonal bonds*, including friendship or love (Clark & Mills, 1979; Clark & Reis, 1988), perceived similarity (Hornstein, 1976), and kinship or common group identity (Brewer & Kramer, 1986; Fisher, 1990). Genuine concern is also fostered by a positive mood, which may result from succeeding in an important task, getting a small gift, eating good food, imagining a vacation, hearing humorous remarks, and so on. A positive mood enhances cooperation in negotiation (Baron, 1990; Carnevale & Isen, 1986; O'Quin & Aronoff, 1981; Pruitt et al., 1983) and fosters helping behavior (Cunningham et al., 1990; Isen & Levin, 1972; Salovey et al., 1991).[7]

Instrumental concern about Other's outcomes is common whenever Party sees itself as dependent on Other—when Other is seen as able to provide rewards and penalties. An example is the expectation of further negotiation in the future, which has been shown to encourage concession making (Gruder, 1971) and problem solving (Ben-Yoav & Pruitt, 1984a, b). Dependence leads to the conclusion that it is desirable to build a relationship with Other now. Hence, Party tries to impress Other with its concern about Other's welfare.[8]

Dependence is by no means a one-way street. Mutual dependence is quite common and can encourage either mutual yielding or mutual problem solving. The impact on mutual problem solving is illustrated by a case study of mediation between two managers in the same company (Walton, 1969). It was not until both men discovered that they could be hurt by each other that they began trying to solve their problems.

For Party to be aware of its dependence on Other, it is often necessary for Party to project itself into the future. This point is important for un-

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[7] Paradoxically, some kinds of negative moods have also been shown to enhance helping behavior (Carlson & Miller, 1987; Cialdini & Kenrick, 1976). One explanation for this is that helping someone gets rid of Party's bad mood (Carlson & Miller, 1987). It appears that helping behavior following a negative mood may sometimes be motivated by concern about the way Party is feeling rather than by genuine concern for Other.

[8] Rusbult and her associates (Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992; Rusbult et al., 1991) call the desire to build a relationship *commitment* and have shown that it is central to accommodation in marital conflict.

derstanding conflict because people embroiled in escalating conflicts often lose awareness of the future. They concentrate so hard on winning in the present that they lose track of the importance of maintaining good relations. In such situations, future perspective can be regained in a number of ways. One is to take time out from the controversy—to become disengaged for a while.

Although bonds and dependencies usually foster concern about Other's outcomes, under certain conditions they can produce exactly the opposite reaction—antagonism toward Other and adoption of contentious tactics. Indeed, conflict between people in close relationships tends to breed more intense emotions—such as anger, hatred, and contempt—than that among strangers (Bersheid, 1983; Peterson, 1983). This reaction occurs when people to whom we are bonded—friends, relatives, people we admire—fail to fulfill their minimum obligations or severely frustrate us. Our bonds to these people can actually encourage more anger and aggression than we would otherwise feel, because we believe they owe us preferential treatment. A similar reaction occurs when people on whom we are dependent are unresponsive to our needs (Gruder, 1971; Tjosvold, 1977). The ordinary reaction to dependence is concern about Other's outcomes. But if Other is perceived as taking advantage of this concern, it often seems necessary to reverse gears and retaliate in order to motivate Other to be more responsive.[9]

Experimental Support for the Dual Concern Model

Four experimental studies of negotiation behavior (Ben-Yoav & Pruitt, 1984a, b; Carnevale & Keenan, 1990; Pruitt et al , 1983) provide evidence in support of the dual concern model. In all four studies, the two concerns specified in the model were independently varied. High concern about Party's own outcomes was created either by asking negotiators to achieve an explicit profit level (Ben-Yoav & Pruitt, 1984a; Pruitt et al., 1983), by giving them a negative rather than a positive frame (Carnevale & Keenan, 1990), or by making them accountable to constituents (Ben-Yoav & Pruitt, 1984b). High concern about Other's outcomes was induced either by giving negotiators a small gift so as to induce a positive mood (Pruitt et al., 1983), by making them expect cooperative future interaction (Ben-Yoav & Pruitt, 1984a, b), or by instructing them to care about Other's outcomes (Carnevale & Keenan, 1990).

The predictions of the model were largely confirmed: high concern about Party's outcomes coupled with high concern about Other's out-

[9] These reactions are outside the scope of the dual concern model, which deals only with positive concern about Other's outcomes. A fuller discussion of bonds and their effect on conflict can be found in Chapter 8.

comes produced higher joint outcomes, suggesting that some form of problem-solving strategy was used. High concern about own outcomes coupled with low concern about Other's outcomes led to the use of contentious tactics such as threats and persuasive arguments. Low concern about own outcomes coupled with high concern about Other's outcomes produced the lowest joint benefit in most of the studies, suggesting yielding (aspiration collapse) as predicted by the dual concern model.

The dual concern model postulates that strategic choice is determined by the strength of two concerns: concern about Party's own outcomes and concern about Other's outcomes. When both concerns are strong, people prefer problem solving; when the former concern is strong, they prefer contending; when the latter concern is strong, they prefer yielding; and when both concerns are weak, avoiding is likely. Party's concern about its own outcomes, which produces high rigid aspirations, tends to be strong when the interests at stake are important, when outcomes in other realms are unimportant, when a negative frame is employed, when there is low fear of conflict, when there is high accountability to constituents, and when constituents insist that their representative achieve a high level of benefit. Concern about Other's outcomes can be either genuine or instrumental. Genuine concern is fostered by interpersonal bonds of all types and by good mood. Instrumental concern is fostered by a desire to develop a working relationship with a person on whom one is dependent.

THE PERCEIVED FEASIBILITY PERSPECTIVE

Choice among the three basic strategies is also a matter of perceived feasibility—the extent to which the strategy seems capable of achieving the goals that give rise to it and the cost that is anticipated from enacting each strategy. Considerations of feasibility supplement those specified by the dual concern model. The dual concern model indicates the strategies preferred under various combinations of concern about Party's and Other's outcomes. But for a strategy actually to be adopted, it must also be seen as minimally feasible. If not, another strategy will be chosen, even if it is less consistent with the current combination of concerns.

For example, consider the situation when Party is concerned about both its own and Other's outcomes. Problem solving is its preferred strategy. But if this strategy seems infeasible or too risky, Party is likely to shift to yielding or contending, its next best alternatives. Which of these is chosen is determined both by the relative strength of the two concerns and by other considerations of feasibility and cost. If Party is more concerned about Other's outcomes than its own, it will adopt a yielding approach, provided that this seems reasonably feasible. If Party is more concerned about its own outcomes than Other's, it will shift to contentious behavior, also provided that this seems reasonably feasible.

As another example, take the Party who is concerned mainly about its own outcomes. Contending is Party's preferred strategy because it holds the promise of getting something for nothing. But problem solving is a close second if the contentious approach appears infeasible or costly. Indeed, problem solving often seems the most feasible way of allowing Party to pursue its interests.

The next three sections deal with the perceived feasibility of problem solving, contending, and yielding.

Perceived Feasibility of Problem Solving

Perceived Common Ground

Problem solving seems more feasible the greater the *perceived common ground (PCG)*. PCG is Party's assessment of the likelihood of finding an alternative that satisfies the aspirations of Party and Other. The more likely it seems that such an alternative can be found, the more feasible problem solving appears to be. PCG is greater (1) the lower Party's own aspirations, (2) the lower Other's aspirations as perceived by Party, and (3) the greater the perceived richness of the set of integrative alternatives—that is, Party's belief that integrative solutions (alternatives favorable to both parties) exist or can be devised.[10]

This definition implies that PCG is the mirror image of perceived conflict. As PCG goes up, conflict, in the sense of perceived divergence of interest, goes down.[11]

The graphs in Figure 3.2 further explain PCG. The abscissa in these graphs maps Party's own benefits; the ordinate, Party's perception of Other's benefits. The large dots in these graphs refer to known alternatives, the medium-sized dots to alternatives that seem potentially discoverable, and the smallest dots to long shots. As before, the location of a point in the space shows the perceived value of that alternative to the two parties. The vertical lines in these graphs refer to Party's own aspirations and the horizontal lines to the aspirations Party perceives Other to hold.

PCG is greater the more points there are to the northeast (above and to the right) of the intersection of the aspiration lines and the darker these

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[10] Party's belief in the existence of integrative solutions will be affected by many considerations, but one in particular has received considerable attention in recent years. This is the "fixed-pie" assumption, whereby Party (independent of objective reality) proceeds from the view that the conflict is zero-sum.

[11] The reader may be surprised to learn that lower aspirations make problem solving seem more feasible. Superficially, this seems inconsistent with the point made earlier that lack of concern about own interests (which produces low aspirations) reduces the likelihood of problem solving. However, these two points are not contradictory. We are talking about two countervailing forces that are simultaneously activated when concern about own interests is low. The one makes problem solving seem more feasible, and the other (by permitting the strategy of yielding) makes problem solving seem less necessary.
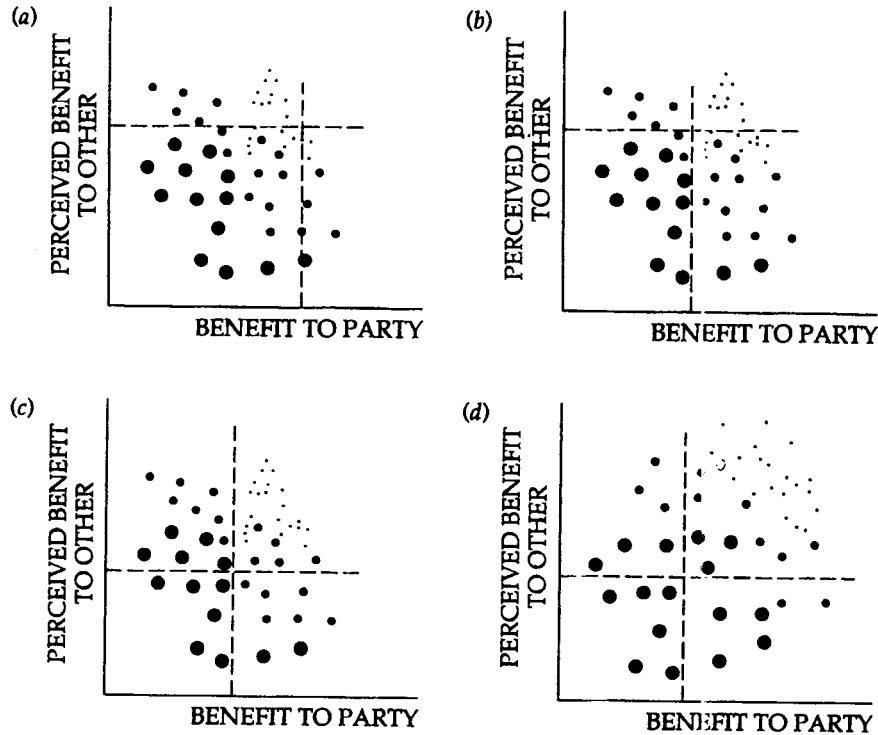
FIGURE 3.2
Four levels of perceived common ground (PCG), ranging from none in *a* to high in *d*.

points are. In Figure 3.2, PCG is greater in *b* than in *a* because Party's own aspirations are lower. It is greater in *c* than in *b* because Other's perceived aspirations are also lower. It is greater in *d* than in *c* because there appears to be a richer set of available alternatives—that is, there is greater perceived feasibility of developing integrative solutions (as shown by the fact that the darker points are farther from the origin in the northeast direction).

A number of conditions contribute to Party's choice of problem solving by enhancing PCG, the perceived likelihood that integrative solutions can be developed. These include the following:

1. *Faith in own problem-solving ability.* Party may be a good communicator and/or may understand how to devise mutually beneficial alternatives. Hence, Party's experience may lead it to see considerable integrative potential in almost any situation. Or Party may be less capable, likely to view conflict as more intractable and to

adopt strategies of yielding or contending rather than problem solving.

2. *Momentum.* Momentum refers to prior success at reaching agreement in the current controversy. The more frequent and recent such successes have been, the greater will be Party's faith that these successes can be reproduced in the future and that problem solving is worthwhile. Momentum can sometimes be encouraged by scheduling easier issues earlier in a negotiation agenda, so that a solid foundation of success has been built by the time more difficult issues are encountered.

3. *Availability of a mediator.* Mediators often serve as communication links between the parties, coordinating movement toward compromise or helping to develop integrative solutions. Their availability should make problem solving more likely to be successful.[12]

4. *Other's perceived readiness for problem solving.* Problem solving seems more feasible to the extent that Other seems ready to participate in this process. There are two reasons for this. One is that the perceived likelihood of developing integrative solutions is enhanced because joint problem solving is usually more efficient than unilateral problem solving. The other is that problem solving seems less risky when Other is not taking a contentious approach because under those conditions there is less danger in allowing oneself to look weak.

Trust

The perception that Other is ready for problem solving, and hence that there is a likelihood of developing solutions, is sometimes a function of trust—that is, of Party's perception that Other is concerned about Party's interests. Trust encourages problem solving when Party is otherwise reluctant to adopt this strategy, presumably by making problem solving seem more feasible (Kimmel et al., 1980).

Although trust allows Party to adopt a problem-solving strategy, it is no guarantee that this strategy will be adopted. Indeed, trust can sometimes have quite the opposite effect, encouraging high, rigid aspirations defended by contentious behavior.

[12] An example of the latter mechanism can be seen in the British reaction to the Argentine occupation of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands in 1982. Yielding was ruled out on the grounds of cost to the British image. Avoiding seemed inadvisable because every day of the occupation enhanced the legitimacy of the Argentine action. In short, the choice was between contending and problem solving. At first it appeared that there might be integrative potential; American Secretary of State Alexander Haig was trying to mediate the crisis. Hence the British adopted a problem-solving strategy, working with Haig while defending their basic interests by moving their fleet slowly toward South America. However, the perceived likelihood of developing integrative solutions disappeared with the failure of Haig's mission, making problem solving seem quite infeasible. As a result, the British adopted an exclusively contentious approach, an all-out invasion of the islands.

Whether trust encourages problem solving or contending depends at least in part on Party's perception of Other's resistance to yielding—that is, the apparent firmness of Other's aspirations. A trusted Other whose aspirations do not seem firm will be expected to give in to Party's demands. Hence, contentious behavior seems especially feasible and will be often adopted. But if Other's aspirations seem firm, trust implies instead that Other will cooperate only if Party cooperates. This encourages Party to adopt a problem-solving strategy.

Evidence that problem solving is encouraged by a combination of trust and perceived firmness comes from several negotiation studies. All examined Party's response to helpful actions (which presumably generated trust) by Other. When Other had been helpful, Party was more willing to cooperate if Other also (1) had high threat capacity (Michener et al., 1975; Tjosvold & Okun, 1976), (2) had a tough constituent (Wall, 1977), (3) had been unyielding or competitive in the past (Deutsch, 1973; Harford & ° Solomon, 1967; Hilty & Carnevale, 1992), or (4) had been unwilling to make unilateral concessions in the past (Komorita & Esser, 1975; McGillicuddy et al., 1984). These findings suggest that trust encourages problem solving when Party believes that Other has firm aspirations.

Trust develops in a number of ways. It is encouraged by a perception that Other has a positive attitude toward Party, is similar to Party, or is dependent on Party. As an example of the latter point, Solomon (1960) has shown that trust is greater when Party sees itself as having a capacity to punish Other for failing to cooperate. Trust is also likely to develop when Other is a member of Party's own group (Kramer & Brewer, 1984; Yamagishi & Sato, 1986) or when Party expects that third parties will punish Other for being uncooperative (Yamagishi, 1986). Furthermore, trust tends to develop when Party has been helpful toward Other (Loomis, 1959), since Party assumes that Other will reciprocate Party's helpful behavior.

Party tends to trust Other when Other has been helpful or cooperative, especially if its help is directed toward Party (Cooper & Fazio, 1979) and has occurred recently (Kelley & Stahelski, 1970). Trust is an especially common response when Other's helpful behavior is seen as voluntary and not as a product of environmental forces. Hence, Party tends to trust Other when Other's helpful behavior is not required by its role (Jones & Davis, 1965) or seems to be costly to Other (Komorita, 1973).

Perceived Cost

Despite the existence of PCG, parties may not necessarily adopt a problem-solving strategy. This is because the adoption of problem solving is subject to at least three risks: image loss, position loss, and information loss (Pruitt, 1981). Image loss is a perception by Other that Party is weak and thus willing to make extensive concessions. This perception, an unintended potential result of using problem solving, encourages Other

to use a contending strategy in an effort to pressure Party to make those concessions. Position loss is a perception by Other that Party has conceded from a previous position. Problem-solving efforts by Party sometimes involve tentative suggestions of other possible options, which may unintentionally produce such a perception. The third risk, information loss, occurs when Party reveals its underlying interests or lower limit. Other can use this information to gain an advantage.

Perceived Feasibility of Contending

Contending seems more feasible the lower Other's apparent resistance to yielding. There is not much point in putting pressure on an opponent who has extremely strong feelings, has powerful and resolute constituents, or has already yielded as much as possible. Moreover, there is not much point in applying pressure on an opponent who, in negotiation, has more attractive alternatives away from the table.[13] Other tactics, such as yielding and problem solving, are more likely to be adopted. But if Other's aspirations (however high they may be) seem relatively easy to dislodge, contentious behavior gets a boost.

The points just made imply that contentious behavior is often self-liquidating, a victim of both failure and success. If it fails, this indicates that Other's resistance is greater than originally thought, so Party will abandon the tactic. If it succeeds and Other yields, Other's resistance to further yielding is likely to grow because Other will come closer and closer to its limit. Again, Party must eventually abandon the tactic.

The feasibility of contending is also a function of Party's apparent capacity to employ contentious tactics and of Other's apparent capacity to counter them. Does Party have good arguments? Does Other have counterarguments? Is Party adept at arguing its case? How effective is Other as a debater? Can Party punish Other? How good are Other's defenses against such tactics? Does Party have ways to commit itself credibly? Is Other capable of undoing these commitments?

Capacities such as these are sometimes lumped together under the familiar concepts of *power* and *counterpower*. These concepts have some merit in that they allow us to make a few broad generalizations. For example, we can generalize that more powerful people have higher aspirations and make greater use of heavy contentious tactics, regardless of the source of their power. But there is a tendency to overuse these concepts in social science theory, making facile generalizations with little real meaning (see, for example, Blalock, 1989; Morgenthau, 1967). The problem is

[13] This is the concept of BATNA (best alternative to negotiated agreement), as described by Fisher et al., (1991). If Other has a strong BATNA, contending may drive Other to take that best alternative.

that there are many kinds of power, each with a different set of properties (French & Raven, 1959; Raven & Rubin, 1983).

Perceived Cost

Contentious behavior, particularly in its more severe forms, runs the risk of alienating Other and starting a conflict spiral. There is also some danger of third party censure. Such considerations may deter contentious behavior, particularly when Party is dependent on Other or on watchful third parties.

Costs are also associated with constituent *surveillance*, which has a complicated relationship to the use of contentious tactics. Surveillance must be distinguished from accountability to constituents. Representatives are accountable to the extent that they can be rewarded or punished on the basis of the outcomes they generate for their constituents. They are under surveillance when their actual conflict behavior (for example, how they negotiate) is being observed. Representatives who are being observed by their constituents usually worry about getting out of line with these constituents' expectations. If they believe the constituents favor toughness, they will tend to adopt contentious behavior; if they see the constituents as conciliatory, they will avoid contending. These points are supported by a study of the joint effect of surveillance and sex of constituent (Pruitt et al., 1986) on strategic choice. Surveillance by male constituents was found to enhance negotiator contentiousness, whereas surveillance by female constituents was found to diminish contentiousness. This makes sense if we assume that the subjects subscribed to the usual stereotype that men favor a tough approach and women a conciliatory approach to interpersonal relations.[14]

Perceived Feasibility of Yielding

The success of problem solving and of contending are sometimes in doubt because they depend on Other's responses, which are not under Party's control. In contrast, it is much easier for Party to yield, because this strategy relies primarily on Party's own behavior—subject to Other's acknowledgment. This does not mean that yielding is always a feasible or effective strategy.

Several conditions encourage yielding. One is time pressure. In the

[14] Research on how men and women actually negotiate paints a more complex picture than this stereotype. Findings are inconclusive. Some studies indicate that women are more socially attuned than men and therefore more likely to vary their negotiating behavior in response to social cues, such as Other's attractiveness or Other's response to Party's cooperative initiatives (Rubin & Brown, 1975; Swap & Rubin, 1983). Women are also more likely than men to handle isolated negotiations in light of long-term relationships (Greenhalgh & Gilkey, 1984). Men are more likely than women to use a forceful style (Kimmel et al., 1980; Lim & Carnevale, 1990). Men also tend to obtain better outcomes than women through negotiation (Gerhart & Rynes, 1991; Rifkin, 1984). Still other studies show no gender differences (Nadler & Nadler, 1984). See Kolb and Coolidge (1991) for a more detailed discussion of gender and negotiation.

face of time pressure, all three strategies are possible, but research (Hamner, 1974; Pruitt & Drews, 1969; Smith et al., 1982) suggests that the favorite strategy is yielding. This is presumably because yielding is the fastest way to move toward agreement. Contending and problem solving are adopted in the face of time pressure only when there is heavy resistance to yielding.

There are two sources of time pressure: cost per unit time of engaging in the controversy and closeness to a deadline. In negotiation, time pressure may be due to any cost of continued negotiation, including time lost from other pursuits, the expense of maintaining negotiators in the field, or rapid deterioration of the object under dispute (such as fruits and vegetables). Deadlines are points in the future at which significant costs are likely to be experienced if the controversy has not been resolved. At a strike deadline, the union pulls workers out of the factory; at a hiring deadline, the job offer is withdrawn. The closer Party is to a deadline and the larger the penalty for passing that deadline without agreement, the greater the time pressure and hence the more likely Party is to yield.

Perceived Cost

Because it can be seen as a sign of weakness, yielding may result in image loss. This may be costly as it encourages Other to use a contentious strategy. Other may jack up the pressure to lower Party's aspirations. Furthermore, the image of being weak also invites future exploitation from third parties. In interactions with someone who is known as a "pushover," contentious strategies may be the first and immediate course of action. Other parties are emboldened by Party's reputation and may make quick, contentious moves. Fear of image loss discourages yielding.[15]

We have argued that perceived feasibility—assessment of effectiveness and cost—affects strategic choice. This consideration supplements the forces specified in the dual concern model. For example, problem solving is adopted when Party is concerned about both its own and Other's outcomes, provided that there is some perceived possibility of success at a reasonable cost. The perceived feasibility of problem solving is a function of perceived common ground (PCG), the perception that an alternative can be found that satisfies the aspirations of both Party and Other. PCG, in turn, depends on Party's own and Other's perceived aspirations and the perceived likelihood of developing integrative solutions. Perceived feasibility of contending is a positive function of perceived power and an inverse function of Other's apparent resistance to yielding.

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[15] Note that yielding can also be costly to Other, however, in the sense that its use can result in low mutual benefits (Ben-Yoav & Pruitt, 1984a; Pruitt et al., 1983). This is because contentious behavior, encouraged by Party's yielding, prevents the exploration of integrative solutions that are actually more beneficial (for both parties) than those resulting from contentious strategies (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993).

Perceived feasibility of yielding is affected by time pressure and the cost that is anticipated from enacting it.

THE VIGOR OF STRATEGIC BEHAVIOR

Implementation of the three basic strategies can be more or less vigorous. In the case of contentious behavior, vigor refers to the heaviness of the actions taken. Shouts are more vigorous than persuasive communications, blows more vigorous than shouts, shots more vigorous than blows. In the case of problem solving, vigor refers to the creativity of the problem-solving effort. At the low end of vigor is a simple, dull effort to coordinate the making of concessions toward an obvious compromise. At the high end is an active effort to understand Other's interests and a thoughtful search for a way to reconcile these interests with Party's own. In the case of yielding, vigor refers simply to how far Party drops its aspirations.

There are various determinants of how vigorous a strategy will be. One set of determinants is embodied in the dual concern model (Figure 3.1). The stronger the concerns specified by this model, the more vigorous will be the predicted strategy. Thus, if Party's concern about its outcomes is weak, greater concern about Other's outcomes will produce deeper yielding. If concern about Other's outcomes is weak, greater concern about Party's outcomes will encourage more extreme contentious behavior. If neither concern is weak, problem solving will be more vigorous and creative when the dual concerns are stronger.

It is common for Party who has adopted a coping strategy to begin less vigorously and move toward greater vigor if earlier efforts do not achieve agreement. Such gradualism ensures that no greater costs will be incurred than are necessary to achieve Party's goals. This point is most obvious in the realm of contentious behavior. Like the United States in the Vietnam War, Party usually begins cautiously and escalates only if its efforts become unsuccessful.[16]

Two of the coping strategies—contending and problem solving—appear to have a paradoxical feature: If adopted, the vigor with which they are enacted is a function of some of the same conditions that *discourage* their being adopted in the first place.

As mentioned earlier, the expectation of resistance from Other discourages contentious behavior. But suppose that other conditions (such as being a highly accountable representative with no dependence on Other) predispose Party to contend. What is the effect of expected resistance then? Our hypothesis is that it promotes the use of heavier contentious

[16] Sometimes a different sequence is found: one side makes a large, early commitment in the hope of successfully contending through a preemptive strike (e.g., Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait).

tactics. If Other looks like a pushover, it should be easy to get a concession by simple stonewalling or persuasive argumentation. But if Other's position seems engraved in stone, heavier tactics will be needed, in the form of threats or other coercive actions.

Problem solving also exhibits this paradoxical feature: low PCG discourages problem solving, but it also encourages a creative form of problem solving when this strategy is adopted for other reasons. Suppose, for example, that there is a mutually perceived stalemate—Party and Other are unwilling to yield and contentious tactics seem useless. If avoiding is infeasible, problem solving is the only possible approach. To the extent that PCG is low (whether because of high aspirations, a perception that Other has high aspirations, or minimal perceived likelihood of developing integrative solutions), it will seem necessary to employ a more creative effort in order to reach agreement.

The latter point can be illustrated by reference to Figure 3.2. PCG is lower in Figure 3.2a than in any of the other three cases. Hence, problem solving seems infeasible and is unlikely to be elected. But suppose that problem solving *must* be employed despite its infeasibility. Then a greater creative effort will be needed to resolve the conflict in Figure 3.2a, because the viable options seem more remote.

CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 3 has presented a preliminary theory about the conditions that affect the choice Party makes among the three coping strategies available to it in conflict: contending, problem solving, and yielding. This theory consists mainly of a dual concern model, supplemented by some ideas about the effect of feasibility considerations. The theory also implies some paradoxical hypotheses about determinants of the vigor with which certain of the strategies are employed; for example, the same conditions that make contending and problem solving seem less feasible probably cause these strategies to be employed with greater vigor if they happen to be adopted. We turn in the next chapter to a detailed consideration of one of the three strategies, contending.