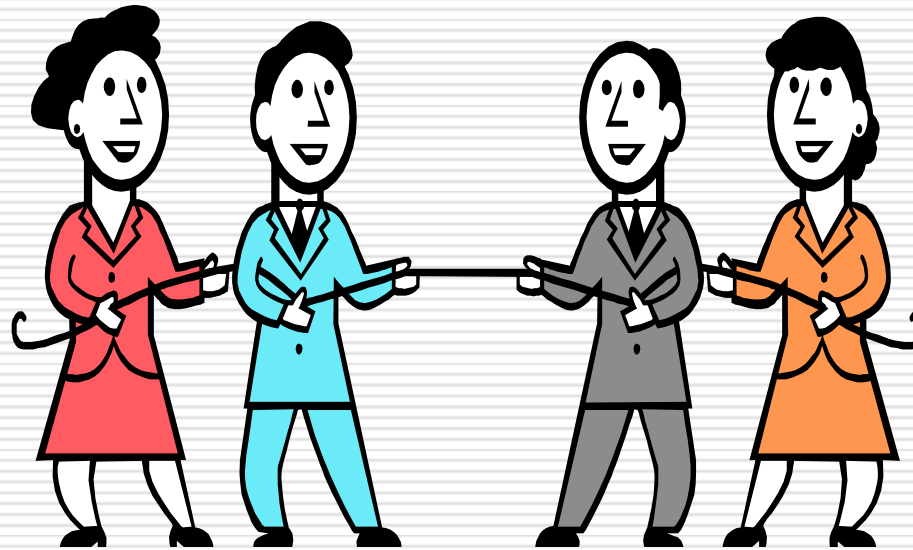# Managing Conflict in Today's Schools

Developed from the Contents of Reginald Leon Green's

Practicing the Art of Leadership: A Problem-based Approach to Implementing the ISLLC Standards

Chapter 6

Conflict Defined

- "The interaction of interdependent people who perceive opposition of goals, aims, and views, and who see the other party as potentially interfering with the realization of these goals."
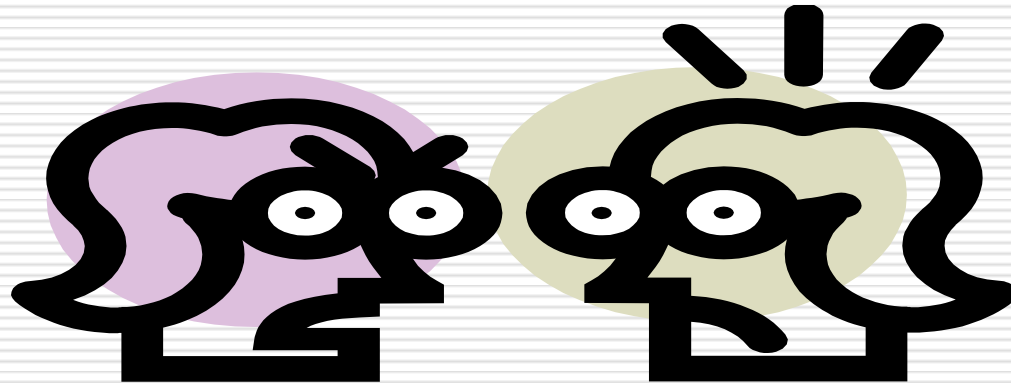
Putnam & Poole (1987, p. 352)

Conflict in Schools

□ Conflict occurring in schools is latent and exists because of divergent views and incompatibility of those views.

Owens (1995)

Conflict Occurring in Schools

- ❑ Within an individual
- ❑ Between individuals
- ❑ Among faculty members
- ❑ Between groups within the larger faculty
- ❑ Between the school leadership and central administration

The Nature of Conflict

☐ Conflict can be functional or dysfunctional.

Functional Conflict

☐ When conflict is functional, the school benefits; there is a win-win attitude, and harmony exists.

Owens (1995)

Dysfunctional Conflict

☐ When conflict is dysfunctional, there is a win-lose attitude and hostility is produced.

Owens (1995)

Types of Conflict

- ☐ **Interpersonal**

- ☐ **Intergroup**

- ☐ **Interorganizational**

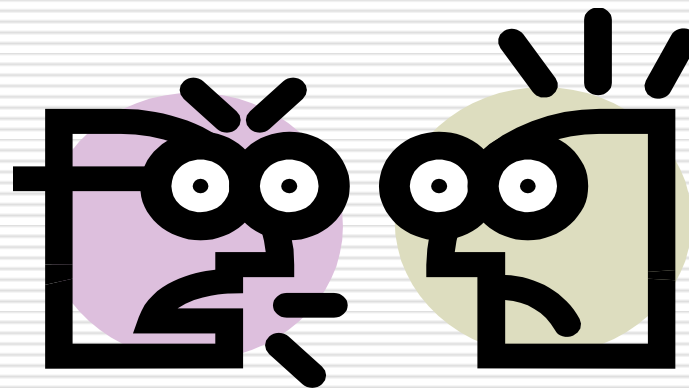- ☐ **Role**

Types of Conflict

1. Interpersonal--conflict that exists between individuals within a group
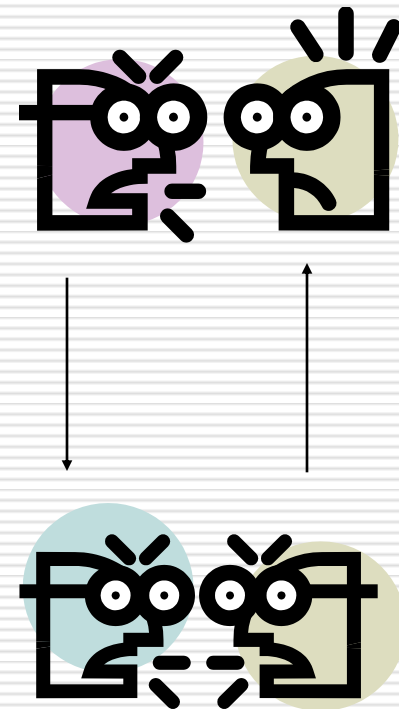
Barge (1994, p. 163)

Types of Conflict

- [ ] 2. Intergroup-- conflict that exists between two groups within an organization
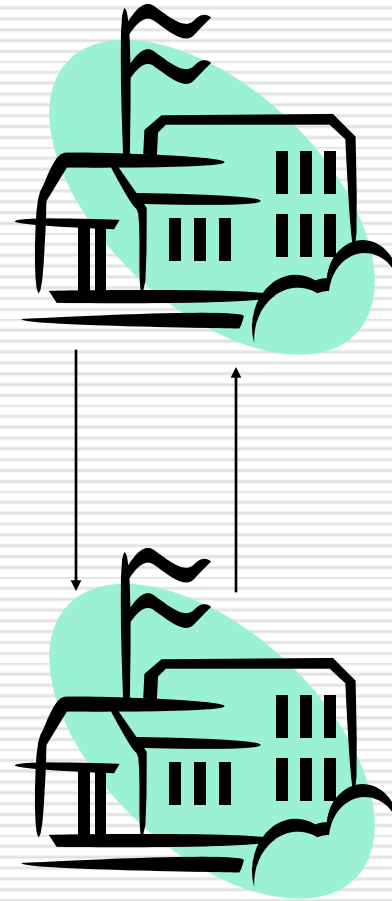
Barge (1994, p. 163)

Types of Conflict

- 3. Interorganizational-- conflict that exists between two organizations

Barge (1994, p. 163)

Types of Conflict

- 4. Role--Incompatibilities between the expectations individuals hold for other individuals as they perform various functions in schools

Three Main Causes of Conflict

☐ Competition for scarce resources

☐ Desire for autonomy

☐ Divergence in goals

Conflict Management

A Challenge for School Leaders

Conflict Management Defined

- Conflict management is the process of resolving and minimizing the disagreements resulting from perceived or real differences

Greenhalgh (1986)

Strategies for Managing Conflict

- ☐ **Avoidance**
- ☐ **Smoothing**
- ☐ **Bargaining**
- ☐ **Power struggle**
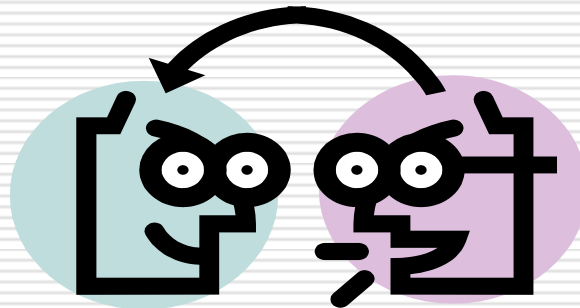- ☐ **Problem solving**

Strategies for Managing Conflict

☐ Avoidance--used when the leader wants to maintain a rational climate and avoid hostility (does not resolve the conflict)

Strategies for Managing Conflict

☐ Smoothing--The leader wants to maintain positive interpersonal relationships and attempts to minimize differences of opinion.

Strategies for Managing Conflict

- ☐ Bargaining--The leader shows moderate levels of concern for both task and relationship (disputing parties make concessions; neither party wins nor loses completely).

Strategies for Managing Conflict

- ☐ Power struggle--The leader shows little concern for interpersonal relationships. The major focus is on task accomplishment. Power and force are used to break down the opposition, regardless of the consequences.

Strategies for Managing Conflict

☐ Problem solving--The leader displays a collaborative approach to managing conflict. The primary concern is accomplishing the task in a manner that is rational and allows a positive climate to be maintained.

Conflict

- Conflict is an inevitable and all-pervasive element in schools. When it occurs, effective leaders seek to manage it, giving consideration to:

Conflict

- ☐ The nature of the conflict
- ☐ Its intensity
- ☐ The people involved, and
- ☐ The seriousness of issues

Trust Factor

If you don't believe in the messenger, you won't believe the messenger. (Peter Drucker)

When relational trust is strong, reform initiatives are more likely to be deeply engaged by school participants.   (Bryk and Schneider)

☐ Minimizing conflict and opposition to change.

References

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Owens, R. G. (1995). *Organizational behavior in education* (5th ed.) Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Putnam, L. L. & Poole, M. S. (1987). Conflict and negotiation. In F. M. Jablin, L. L. Putnam, K. Roberts, & L. W. Porter (eds.), *Handbook of organizational communication* (pp. 503-548). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.