
Andrade, Plowman, and Duchon (2008) draw upon complex adaptive systems theories to challenge the traditional thinking of conflict and management at an organizational level. First, the term “conflict” needs to be reframed as “pattern fluctuation” (p. 27). Then, instead of managing conflict, leaders need to harness the opportunities of pattern fluctuation to grow, be creative, destroy old thinking, and innovate. This shift in thinking creates a positive and productive view of naturally occurring and unavoidable change rather than a negative view of threatening conflict that needs to be stopped or managed. In order for organizations to grow and become more tolerant with change, the people within need to be given the autonomy to improvise, experiment, innovate, and utilize constructive feedback rather than be inundated with top-down stifling mandates.

Andrade, Plowman, and Duchon (2008) encourage leaders to not focus on *styles* of handling conflict but rather encourage improvisation, mindfulness, and reconfiguration (p. 33). Leaders who encourage mindfulness empower all people to pay attention to the system, each other, and value their own strengths and
solutions. During the process of reconfiguration, decision making is decentralized to smaller “patches” of the organization so these patches can innovate in their contexts and influence other nearby “patches”.

While Andrade, Plowman, and Duchon (2008) assert that organizational change is normal, fatigue, chaos, and interpersonal relationship conflict still need to be addressed. This article is useful for leaders to remember that not all conflict is bad, conflict is unavoidable, if top-down mandates should be scrutinized for their effectiveness and relevance, and innovation and growth happens when conflict (pattern fluctuation is present).


Coleman, Kugler, Mitchinson, & Foster (2013) constructed a situational model of conflict that reflects conflict across power differences (p. 1964). The model is comprised of five zones that were created by juxtaposing persons with asymmetrical power (high and low authority), the amount of goal interdependence (cooperative versus competitive) between them, and the relational interdependence (how important the relationships are and how goals are linked) (p. 1965). Coleman,
et al. (2013) hypothesized that persons in conflict within each zone will be characterized by similar and somewhat predictable reactions including their psychological and emotional orientations to the conflict (benevolence, support, dominance, appeasement) (p.1966); perceptions of ownership of the problem (p. 1967), and the level of comfort during the process and acceptance of the outcome. Coleman, et al. (2013) listed the combinations of characteristics they predicted each zone would exhibit.

Two studies were conducted to test the situational model. The first study was a survey consisting of scenarios given to 210 individual volunteers in 18 large U.S. cities. The survey items to test the model were developed by content experts and focus groups containing people with vast organizational experience. Participants read the scenarios and ranked their likely responses, reactions, comfortability, and values on a Likert scale of one to seven, seven being the most likely. The second study was a two-day simulation of scenarios with 87 graduate students in a large U.S. University enrolled in a course studying conflict. Participants were given power rankings (top, middle, and bottom), independently read their characteristics and scenarios, then were required to interact with multiple other participants. The participants were required to fill out questionnaires after certain rounds of the simulations.
The ANOVA results of both sets of data indicated that Coleman, et al. (2013) were accurate in their predictions of characteristics particular to each of the situational zones. For example, persons in high power and highly interdependent situations are more likely to respond in benevolent, cooperative, and caring ways whereas persons in high power, interdependence, but had competitive goals valued winning, authority, and were less empathetic. The situational model needs to be tested utilizing case studies.

Coleman, et al.’s (2013) situational model helps leaders to consider the asymmetry of power, goal interdependence, and relational interdependence of participants when considering approaches to navigate conflict situations. Coleman et al point out that emotion and personal traits are also contributing factors to consider in conflict situations.


Fiol, Pratt, and O’Connor (2009) propose a model to examine and manage the role a group’s identity plays in intractable conflict. Intractable conflict is one that is long standing, pervasive, expands beyond the original dispute, simplifies stereotypes, maintains zero-sum conceptualizations, and thrives upon mutual misidentification (p. 39). An administration versus physician dispute of a major
hospital and a dispute between the board and pilots of United Airlines were used to describe the facets of intractable conflict.

The model consists of a series of steps to identify, decouple, and rebuild group identities in order to achieve inter-group harmony. The steps are recommended to be performed sequentially, but overlap at the same time. First, the conflict needs to be assessed for ripeness (readiness) to problem solve. Groups need to decouple (disentangle) themselves from one another by securing their own identities; understanding that one’s identity is not dependent on what the other is not (p. 43). After building a strong sense of self and legitimacy, a superordinate identity that encompasses both parties may be explored to help see each other in a more positive light (p. 40). Finally superordinate goals may be explored (p. 39).

Jumping to one step too quickly can backfire causing groups to further distance themselves to secure their identities, filter information to justify their own purposes, and further promote unhelpful stereotypes. Throughout the article, Fiol, Pratt, and O’Connor caution leaders about these missteps. Though this model has yet to be tested as it is the first of its kind, it is backed by significant research in identify and conflict theories. The authors give extensive ideas on future research and caution that each intractable conflict is complex and unique. This new approach gives leaders of any organization insight into hidden factors behind long-
standing, complex conflict including those in the cultural and labor-management relations.