

Farm-Success

training farmers for sustainable succession processes

Conflict management: Conflicts as opportunity – how to prevent, solve and use them in a positive way

Technische
Universität
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Supported by
the Erasmus+ programme
of the European Union

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.
Project N°: 2015-1-DE02-KA202-002390

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1. The main structures of conflicts

1.1 INTRODUCTION

- Conflicts are something quite normal!
- Where people live together, there will always be differences, different ideas and perceptions.
- From these differences conflicts arise. It is important to know how they arise, how you can manage them and how you can solve or even prevent them.

What are conflicts?

A conflict is a state of tension, a situation between two or more conflicting parties around incompatible goals, values, interests or actions.

A conflict occurs when two or more parties represent mutually incompatible (or seemingly incompatible) acts of action and each party tries to prevent the other from realizing the opposing alternative.

Conflicts are normal life situations because of the diversity of human attitudes. Conflicts are not exceptional. However, they are usually seen as negative because conflicts are often disturbances that cause internal and external pressure and thus disturb the daily course of action.

1. The main structures of conflicts

1.2 SHAPES AND APPEARANCES OF CONFLICTS

Different appearances of conflicts:

- Smouldering below the surface

vs.

- Shows itself in concrete words and actions

- Tension between the different inclinations, needs, wishes or interests of one person

vs.

- Between two or more individuals or groups

Different shapes of conflicts:

- Conflicting objectives: Disagreements about the objective to be achieved or the way to be implemented
- Assessment conflict: Objectives or approaches are evaluated differently. Contradictory views on the necessity of the task
- Distribution conflict: Opposing positions on resources, time, money, access to information and people involved
- Relationship conflict: Disorders on a human level
- Conflict of values: No consensus about basic attitudes and values – basic convictions and beliefs diverge

2. Signs of conflicts-how to recognize conflicts

2.1 SYMPTOMS 1

In order to prevent and solve problems a first step is to recognize them and identify them as a conflict. Here, you will find some symptoms that occur in connection with conflicts:

Resistance:

- Frequent contradiction
- Defiant reactions, hindrance or delaying tactics
- Exaggeration of differences
- Stressing of difficulties
- “Indirect” resistance in the form of not preventing the other one from getting problems or disturbing the other one
- Frequent complaints

Escape:

- Avoid contacts, conversations
- High absenteeism
- Wanting to be redeployed
- Termination (of the job, friendship, relationship, ...)

Stubbornness:

- Clinging to one’s own point of view
- Stubborn adherence to previous approaches
- Pedantic compliance with regulations

2. Signs of conflicts-how to recognize conflicts

2.2 SYMPTOMS 2

Conformity:

- “Echoing someone’s words”, “pretending that everything is fine”
- Keep good suggestions, also suppress negative messages
- Do not introduce/implement improvements

Formality:

- Distinctive courtesy
- Emphasis on written communication
- Forming formal regulations for all

Lack of interest:

- Do only what is necessary
- Postpone decisions, come too late
- Signs of depression

Hostility:

- Injurious, degrading remarks
- Not recognizing good performance
- Create an irritated climate through rumours, intrigues, denunciation, bullying
- More failures
- High committee rate
- High complaint rate
- Strong cost increases

3. Typical fields of conflicts in succession processes

3.1 FIELDS OF CONFLICTS 1

Successions tend to be accompanied by challenges in different ways. Depending on your situation, various areas can become challenging. Here, you will find some topics which should be kept in mind to prevent conflicts therein:

Financial aspects: All aspects of the topic “finances” tend to contain conflict potential. Make sure to make clear agreements in every respect and be very sensitive with the topic. Especially try to deal with the following areas:

- Old-age insurance of the predecessor;
- Additional income of both parties (predecessor and successor);
- Payments to predecessor after succession;
- Care of the predecessor;
- Compensation of the heirs/siblings;
- Adaptation of the last will and testament to succession;
- Taxation of the succession;
- Agreement about the property;
- Company agreement;
- Lease agreement;
- Fitness of the business for the future.



3. Typical fields of conflicts in succession processes

3.2 FIELDS OF CONFLICTS 2

Personal aspects: If more than one person lives and works on the farm, personal differences can be challenging. On the other hand, it can be very helpful to have support of family members and other persons for the daily business. Have a look at the following personal aspects:

- Intergenerational and intragenerational conflicts;
- Living situation: enough free spaces to retreat to;
- Clearly defined responsibilities;
- Possibilities to integrate other persons (like the wife of the successor) into the business.

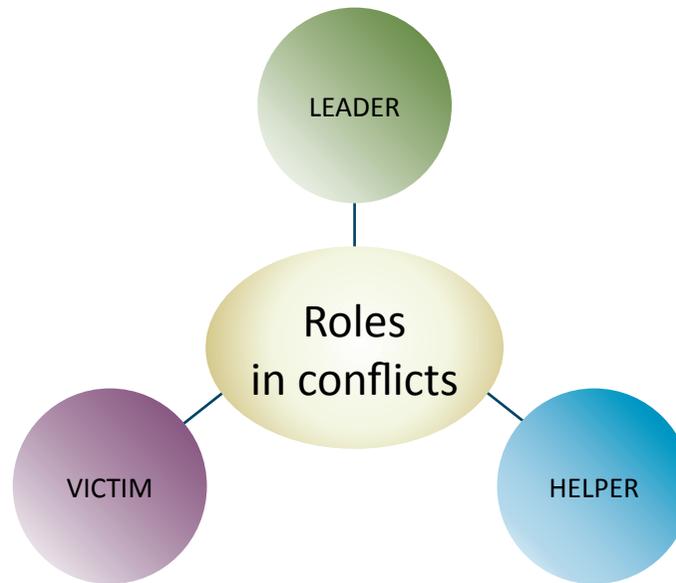
Business direction: In most cases, the predecessor built up the company and is very convinced of what he is doing. This can be a good precondition but it can also be challenging.

- Openness of the predecessor to adapt new ideas;
- Implementation of new ideas by the successor;
- Plans for the future;
- Possibility to change the orientation of the farm;
- New branches/business fields;

4. Roles in conflicts

4.1 ROLES – INTRODUCTION

Now that you are aware of important fields of conflicts in succession processes let us turn to the different roles. These are also important aspects of conflicts and they can play an important role in a conflict. If you know the different roles and which role you are playing, you know better how to act and what to keep an eye on. In daily routine and especially in conflict situations, everyone tends to take on one of the following roles – in confrontations these roles can change:



4. Roles in conflicts

4.2 ROLE 1

VICTIM:

- Behavioural patterns / personality:

dependency, lack of independence, mummy's boy, weakling, hypochondriac, deadbeat, loser; child who is left alone; sacrifice, martyr, submissive, exaggerated adjustment to rules and formalities

- Feelings:

being exploited, dependency, hopelessness, sadness, depression, darkness, heaviness, pain, fainting, being alone, loneliness, fear, guilty feelings, shame.

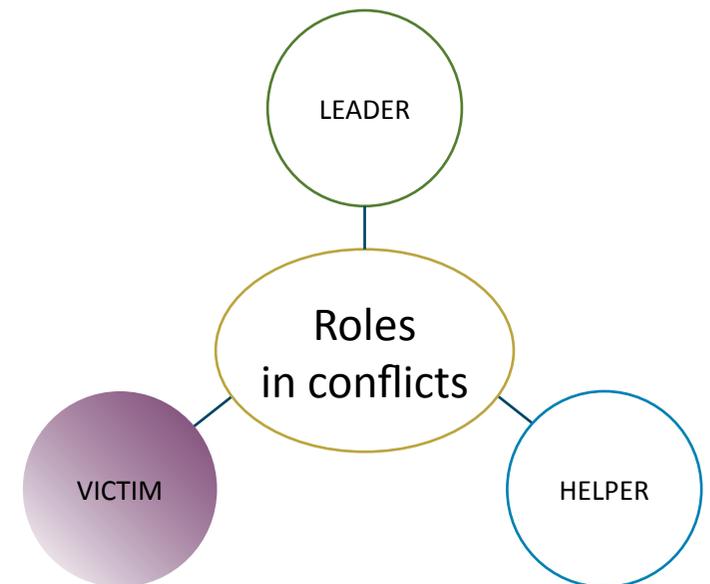
- Main drive:

consent to one's own limitation and finiteness.

- Handling:

Questions: How and why did I contribute to becoming a victim? What profit do I get? Be active, take responsibility for yourself and others, develop behavioural alternatives and try them out. Make your own decisions. Use help. Acceptance of structures and rules. Dignity and experience with others and accepting oneself. Humour. Development of willpower. Take fate into your own hands and make something of it.

Motto: "Develop strengths from weaknesses".



4. Roles in conflicts

4.3 ROLE 2

LEADER:

- Behavioural patterns / split personality:

judge, observer, rebel, perfectionist, superman, avenger, moralizer, witch, wiseacre; slogan: "I will intimidate you"

- Feelings:

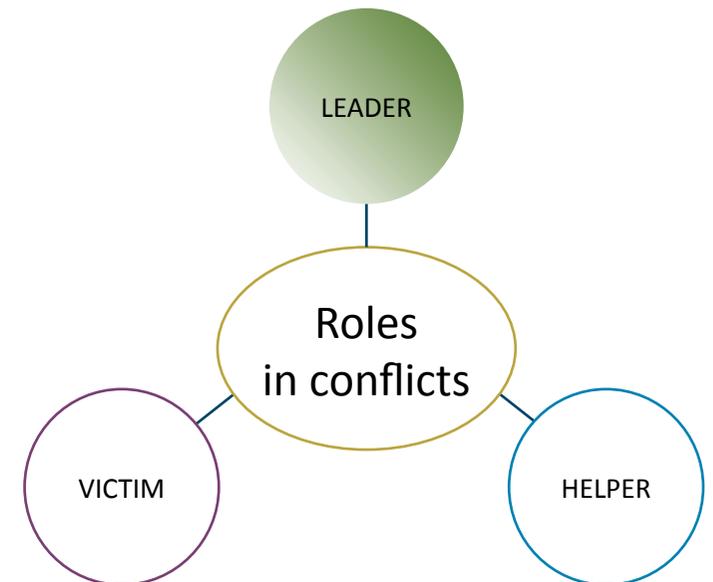
power, triumph, revenge, anger, maybe unconscious fear (according to the slogan: "Attack is the best form of defence!"), arrogance, vanity, assault, aggressiveness

- Main drive:

distance, order and distinction, truth and justice, idealism

- Handling:

Involvement of a neutral mediator, power legitimation, forgiveness, humanizing the ideals. Allowing yourself what you forbid others and yourself. Set a frame. Commitment to one's own and others' rights. Humour. Return aggression to its origin. Shift of the aggressive energy to symbolic expression. Compassion. Admission of weaknesses



4. Roles in conflicts

4.4 ROLE 3

HELPER:

- Behavioural patterns / personality:

The scout, the Good Daughter, the Wife as a nurse, the overprotective mother, caring, shepherd, altruist, self-exploitation, workaholic.

- Feelings:

lives by the acknowledgement of his / her commitment

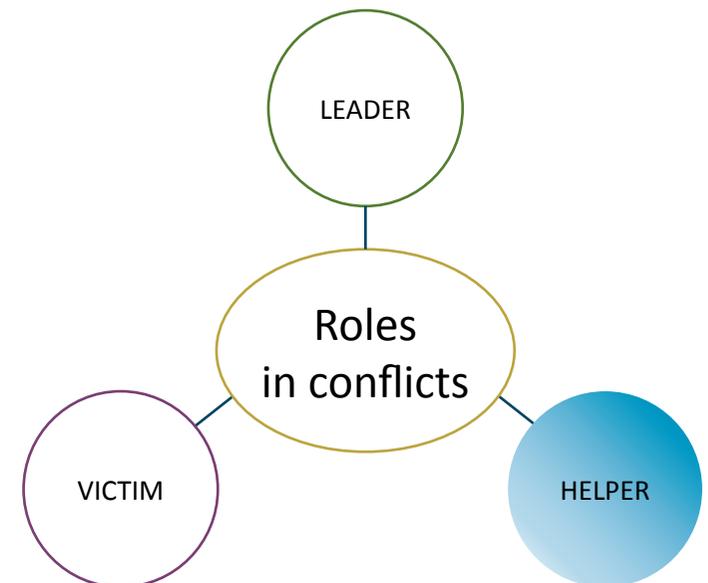
- Basic energy:

love, contact and proximity.

- Handling:

Patience. Learn to not know everything and let things go. Be responsible for yourself. Let yourself be helped and learn to accept presents, also have an eye on your needs – not only on the needs of others. Wait until you are asked for help. Look for compensation in giving and taking. Humour. Delegate tasks to others.

Usually, none of these roles fits perfectly – but since you know now which role fits best to your behaviour and self-perception, you can learn to take on responsibility and learn how to deal with that role. For example, if you are mainly a “victim” learn how to stand up for your rights and become a upright personality.



5. Strategies to solve conflicts

5.1 CONFLICT TYPES

In order to solve conflicts it is important to know the basics of different appearances of conflicts, how to act and what to avoid. Keep the roles from the previous chapter in mind, and apply this knowledge to the following information:

There are two types of conflicts:

COVERT CONFLICTS

- impede the exchange of information and cost time
- lead to unproductive reactions of the participants (rotten compromises, exaggerated competition, intrigues)
- increase anger, which can lead to irritability, persistent stress and illness.

OPEN AND FAIR CONFLICTS

- improve the information of those involved
- lead to improvements and innovations in the respective case and in the relationships,
- make the parties feel more relaxed and more motivated.

5. Strategies to solve conflicts

5.2 SEPARATION OF FAMILY AND BUSINESS

Considering the fact that we are talking about family farms, another important point is the separation of family and business. There are family-like businesses and business-like families.

Both – families and businesses – usually have different needs and interests. For example, the business wants to develop the products and increase the income, persons are replaceable. While the family tries to increase the wellbeing of the members and tasks can be replaced – but not persons.

- Since these two parts are mixed in a family business, we need a common basis to talk about the different topics within succession. This basis is an **objective and realistic view** without too much emotionality.
- It is recommended to communicate and discuss about succession **at the very beginning** in the way it was just mentioned. This can “feel as if you were talking to strangers” but it is helpful to go through succession in a smooth but productive way.
- A second step is to **write down all results** and to fix them – this will also feel like a strange thing to do with family members but if you get into trouble and difficult situations, you have written down everything and there is no need to discuss in this emotional situation. Of course, it makes sense to update these agreements from time to time if new circumstances occur.



5. Strategies to solve conflicts

5.3 DESTRUCTIVE REACTIONS

As in every situation, there are good and bad reactions – also in conflicts. Here, you will learn about some destructive reactions which you should avoid:

DESTRUCTIVE REACTIONS ON CONFLICTS:

- **Attack:** force someone to do something, “Me or You”, threats and use of power. These procedures can trigger a desire for revenge.
- **Submission:** to surrender, to abandon one’s own goals, not to bring up disagreements, to smooth them, to harmonize them. This can lead to frustration.
- **Belittlement:** rotten compromises, everyone relinquishes their original demands. Agreement is made only on the lowest common denominator in order to have peace and quiet. The feelings of the participants are not taken seriously. No one is really satisfied.
- **Escape:** avoidance, withdrawal, doing nothing, not stirring latent conflicts. This behaviour can cause helplessness and distraction.



5. Strategies to solve conflicts

5.4 POSITIVE APPROACH TO CONFLICTS

In order to reach a WIN-WIN situation knowing the following principles will help:

1. accept and watch the conversation partner
2. compassionate understanding, active listening
3. express feelings clearly and honestly
4. show open-mindedness to changes in facts and feelings
5. go into the conversation without maximum postulations

Behaviour that will help ease the conversation:

- try to look at the problem(s) of the partner from his point of view;
- see the partner as an equal person;
- analyse the problem together;
- try to find solutions for the problems together without assuming your ideas are the best;
- offer help;
- tell the partner about his effect on you;
- put the focus on the things that connect you with each other;
- show a cooperative attitude.

5. Strategies to solve conflicts

5.5 SOLVE CONFLICTS

To solve a problem, 6 steps have been approved to be helpful:

1. describe the conflict from different perspectives;
2. search for possible solutions;
3. assess the different solutions;
4. decide for one or several solutions;
5. start implementing the solutions step by step;
6. keep on reviewing the solution process and adjust it to the new situation;



5. Strategies to solve conflicts

5.6 CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

The following table will show you the main ideas concerning deescalating behaviour in order to sum up the above-mentioned facts:

Fix uncontroversial facts	Let the other person finish	Polite way of behaving
Admit mistakes	Talk with each other instead about each other	External advice
Accept good reasons	Apologize	Mediation
Active listening	Objective – NOT emotional	Balance of giving and taking

constructive, deescalating, esteeming, objective- and goal-orientated

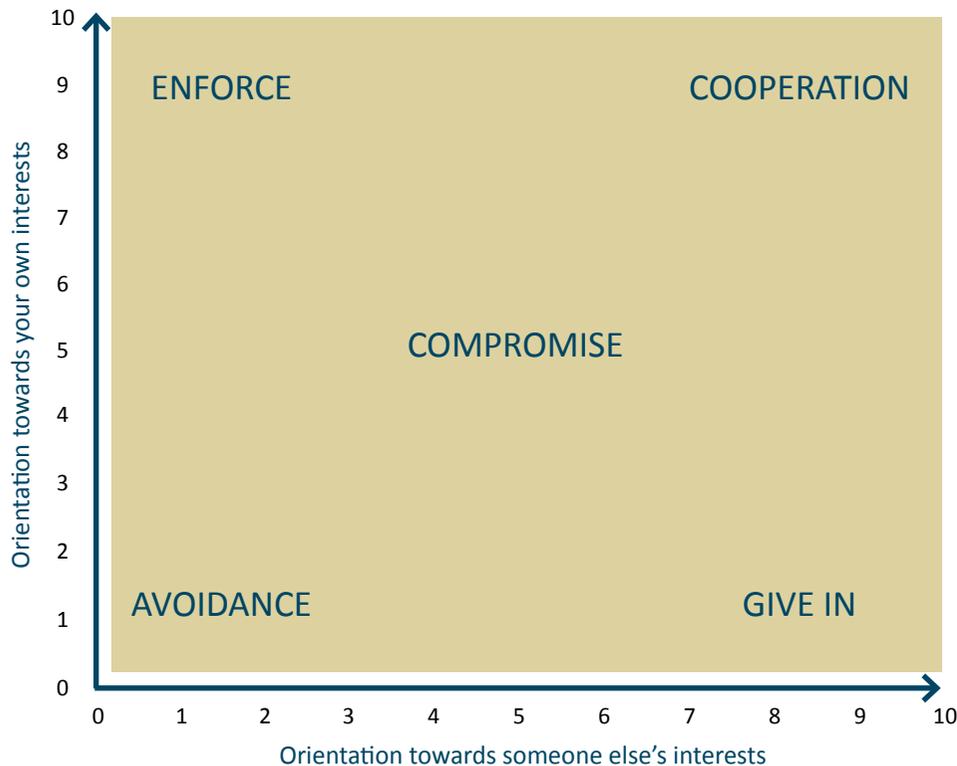
Give time	Highlight similarities	Attack the problem-not the person
Inform about the motivation of your own questions	Small steps	
Confirm understanding	Flexibility	Balance of giving and taking
Create a safe setting	Respect	Agree about rules and structures
I think ... you have to ...	Distance	At eye level

5. Strategies to solve conflicts

5.7 CONFLICT STAGES

To get a visible idea of the basic problems which lead to conflicts and then, in a next step, to different types of solutions, have a look at the following diagram:

THOMAS MODEL OF CONFLICT STAGES: (Kenneth W. Thomas 1976)



1/1: Avoidance – Both sides lose.

Possible goals: avoidance, postponement, displacement, ignoring, exiting.

9/1: Enforce - I get everything, the other side gets nothing. Enforcement at the expense of the other side, compete, win.

1/9: Give in - The other side gets everything, I get nothing. Avoidance, adjustment, subordination, allow everything, let the opponent win.

5/5: Compromise - Both sides win some and lose some. Moderate competition and self-assertion, commonalities in the foreground.

9/9: Cooperation - both sides win.

Each side wins (in the ideal case, both sides can realize 100% of their interests), the will to cooperate, find new solutions.

6. Preventive actions

6.1 PREVENT CONFLICTS

The first step of preventing conflicts is to assume that every conflict can be solved if the solution includes a benefit for both parties.

To prevent conflicts the following behaviours are helpful:

- avoid unnecessary lecturing, corrections and judgments
- learn to stand by your own mistakes, weaknesses and mistakes
- do not accept provocations and “declarations of war”
- do not confront the partner with new problems spontaneously
- always consider the perspective of the partner from the outset if problems are emerging
- do not open up old wounds and injuries, but allow them to rest
- revise old and entrenched judgments against each other
- agree on a new beginning on both sides even before a new problem shows up
- work on it to deal with stress and pressure situations better

6. Preventive actions

6.2 DECLINE CONFLICTS

If the above-mentioned behaviours did not help to prevent conflicts, it may be necessary to decline the conflict.

In order to decline conflicts some general behaviours are helpful:

- Direct communication: Explain your problems in a transparent and authentic manner
- Empathy: “I want to understand you and your problem and why you behave like this.”
- Say no: Say no without hurting and demotivating the other person. Keep the person and the conflict separate.
- Tolerance: Be tolerant of other opinions and do not let differences throw you out of balance. Between black and white there are many shades of grey – not to mention all the colours.
- Stamina: Tolerate tensions which cannot be solved immediately.

Bibliography

Main structure of this course was taken from the following source:

- <http://www.seminarhaus-schmiede.de/pdf/konfliktmanagement.pdf>
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