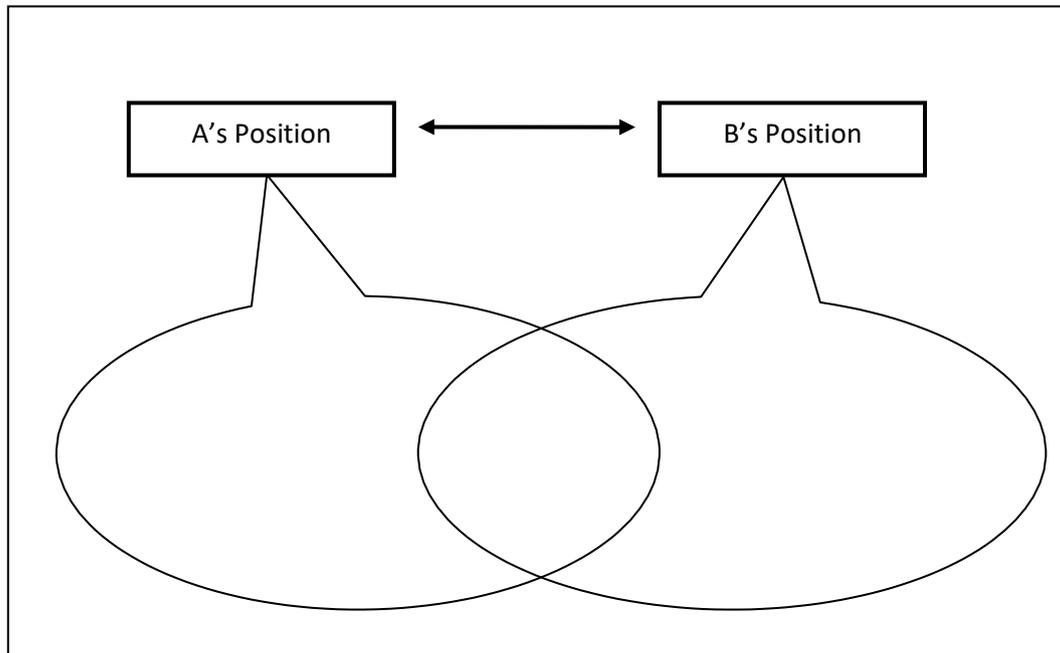


Dynamics of Conflict

Conflicts are part and parcel of human existence. They can take the form of unstated tension, arguments, civilized debate, creative controversy, or violent warfare.



By nature, conflict is dynamic and amorphous. Conflicts relate to underlying differences and struggles between competing human needs. Disputes can be described as a formalised conflict with recognisable parties and positions, the observable aspect of conflict.

A conflict can escalate where parties have competing needs and solutions, neither has the power to impose a unilateral solution (that is a rough equality of power), and they seek a competitive solution to the issue.

Personal Conflict Styles

The “Thomas Killman” model is perhaps the most used and respected approach to examining personal differences in approaches to conflict. It also provides a framework for examining differences in negotiation strategies.

The key to effective conflict resolution lies in using the right approach for the right circumstance, depending on the relative importance of the issue and the relationship. Skilled negotiators move from style to style according to the needs of the situation. While a WIN-WIN is the most desirable outcome, the route to this may involve a mixture of forcing, smoothing, avoiding and compromise as well as collaboration and cooperation.

Each of these styles can be productive or destructive. The particular method of conflict resolution may be inappropriately used, or used without skill. When we talk about “difficult people” we are often talking about a difficult interaction between “our style” and the “style of the other”.

Power and Conflict

John Wade describes the use of power in mediation as follows:

Power can be broadly described as the actual or perceived ability of one person to exert influence upon another person's behaviour or thoughts. As such, power can be constructive or destructive.

The motives, procedures and results associated with the use of power raise important ethical questions.

Sometimes the use of power is obvious, sometimes it is hardly visible. Sometimes certain types of power are accepted; sometimes they are deeply resented and resisted. Sources of power include formal authority, expertise, associations, resources, procedural, nuisance, habitual, moral and personal.

The personal characteristics of disputants may determine how much power that individual has and can profoundly affect the process and outcome of negotiations. Characteristics include motivations, skills, knowledge, gender, ethnicity, and literacy. A person may have power but choose not to use it or may be unable to use it.

Sources of Power – Mayer Model

There are many sources of power, but for the most part they can be divided into the following 10 'Power' categories:

1. Formal authority

The power that derives from a formal position within a structure that confers certain decision-making prerogatives. This is the power of a judge, an elected official, a CEO, a parent, or a school principal.

2. Expert/information

The power that is derived from having expertise in a particular area of information about a particular matter.

3. Associational

The power that is derived from association with other people with power

4. Resource

The control over valued resources (money, materials, labour, or other goods or services). The negative version of this power is the ability to deny needed resources or to force others to expend them.

5.Procedural

The control over the procedures by which decisions are made, separate from the control over those decisions themselves (for instance, the power of a judge in a jury trial).

6.Sanction

The ability (or perceived ability) to inflict harm or to interfere with a party's ability to realize his or her interests.

7.Nuisance

The ability to cause discomfort to a party, falling short of the ability to apply direct sanctions.

8.Habitual

The power of the status quo that rests on the premise that it is normally easier to maintain a particular arrangement or course of action than to change it.

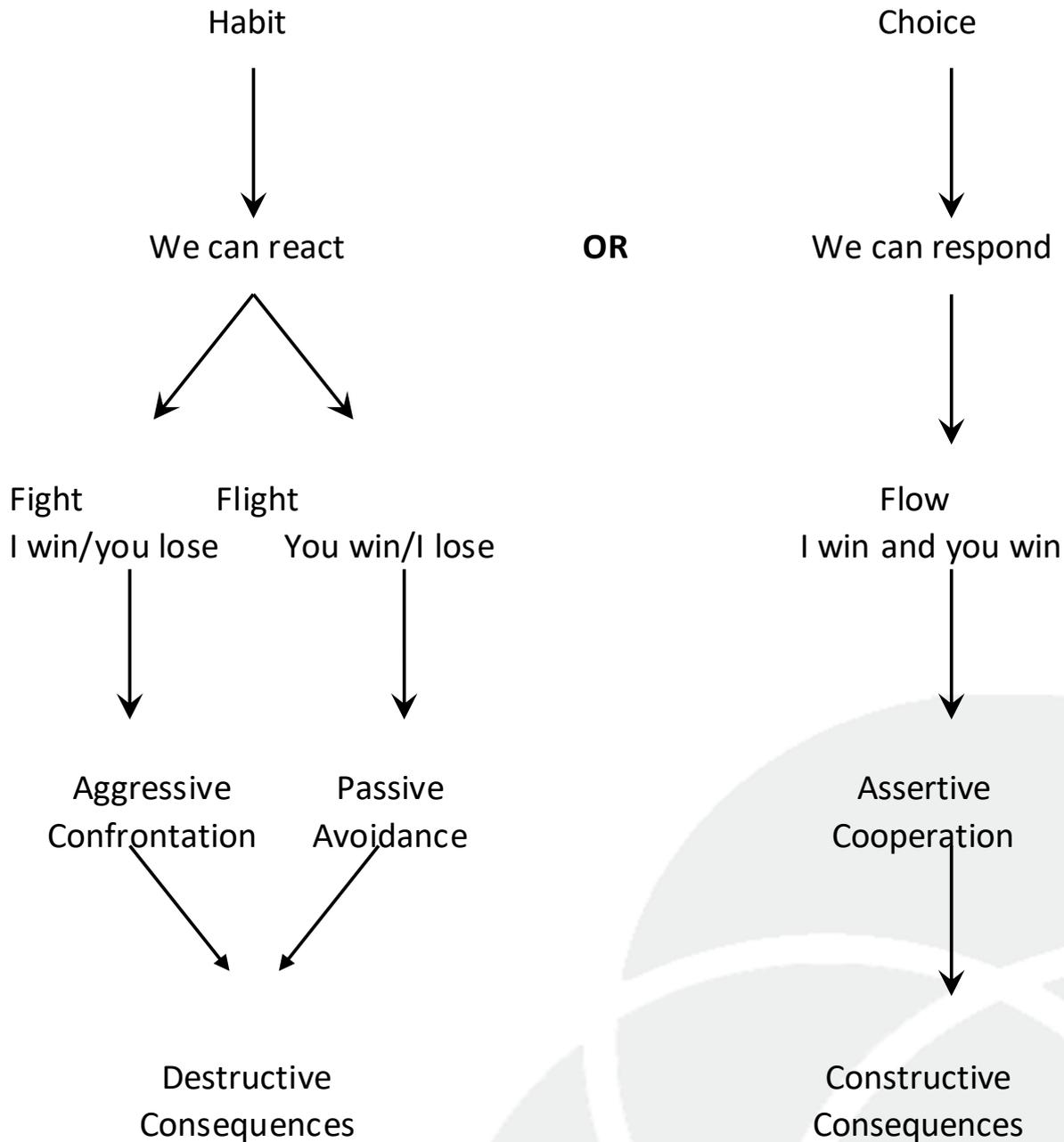
Can you come up with a clear example for each of Mayer's sources of power?



Handling Your Own Anger/Upset - The Thing You Have Some Control Over

When people are involved in conflicts, they often experience strong emotions and feelings. Feelings in conflict situations are normal. However, feelings can make people behave in particular ways. These behaviours often make a difference in a conflict situation. Behaviour usually falls into one of two categories:

-  Aggressive (shouting at someone)
-  Passive (ignoring the situation)



What is your default habit?

Think of a relevant example that demonstrates this.

What changes would you like to make in the future?

Barriers to Effective Communication

A barrier to communication is something that prevents understanding between people. Meaning barriers exist between all people, making communication much more difficult than most people seem to realise.

Communication barriers are high-risk responses, that is, responses whose impact on communication is frequently (though not inevitably) negative. These roadblocks are more likely to be destructive when one or more persons who are interacting under stress. The unfortunate effects of communication blocks are many and varied. They frequently diminish the other's self-esteem. They tend to trigger defensiveness, resistance and resentment. They can lead to dependency, withdrawal, feelings of defeat or of inadequacy. They decrease the likelihood that the other will find their own solution to their problem.

Each roadblock is a "feeling blocker"; it reduces the likelihood that the other will constructively express their true feelings. Because communication roadblocks carry a high risk of fostering these negative results, their repeated use can cause permanent damage to a relationship.

Thomas Gordon devised a list that he calls the 'dirty dozens' of communication spoilers which are listed below.

Behaviour	Description
Criticising	Criticism is often inappropriate and excessive, leading to defensive and/or aggressive responses. It is often justified as a way of getting another to improve or perform better. There are often better alternatives.
Name calling and labelling	Labels tend to put barriers between us and others by creating a 'box' into which we place others. The result is often to distance others from us.
Diagnosing	A more sophisticated form of labelling practices often by professionals of various kinds. It can damage communication for the same reasons as labelling.
Praising Evaluatively	Unrestrained praise is often insincere and hollow. It can also be manipulative, if the person using it has an ulterior motive. The result is often resentment.
Ordering	If ordering is used with coercion, it will create resistance and anger. Responses can range from sabotage to submission
Threatening	Threatening has the same effects as ordering but often more pronounced
Moralising	Creates many problems including resentment, increased anxiety and it often creates pretence in the communication

Excessive or inappropriate questioning

Questions are unavoidable and valuable tools of communication but when used to excess create boredom and unnecessary distance between people. There are often better, more direct ways of communicating

Advising

Advice is sometimes valuable but when used inappropriately it may damage the other's confidence or fail to enhance his or her own problem-solving abilities. It often prevents a full exploration of the issues

Diverting

Diverting is used often to avoid the unpleasant, unpalatable or the uncomfortable. It creates much tension.

Logical argument

Logic is necessary but using logical argument when emotions are running high may be inappropriate because it creates distance.

Reassuring

Sometimes is a way of avoiding the issues whilst having the appearance of providing comfort. It can in some cases be very frustrating for the person being reassured.

