

Conflict Management in Agile Settings

Conflict can be good

Moshe Gotesman
PhD, PMP, A-CSM, SAFe, LeSS, Kanban, ITIL
mosgot Consulting



Welcome!

What are we doing here?



What are we doing here?

- Handle conflicts in an agile setting
 - Know how to identify conflict
 - Assess a conflict severity level
 - Know how to find value in a conflict
 - Learn conflict resolution techniques
 - Let's try it!

Rules for today

Ask

Agree/disagree



Comment

Let's have fun!

Who am I?

- B.Sc. Aeronautical Engineering
- PhD Computer Science
- IT world since 1997
- IT Technical Project Manager since 2004
- From startups to Walmart and in between (Sun Microsystems, Visa, Nokia, Google)
- Currently Scrum Practice Lead at Fisher Investments
- Project Management Instructor at UC Berkeley and Santa Cruz extensions
- PhD, PMP, A-CSM, SAFe, LeSS, Kanban, ITIL



Who are you?

- Name
 - Role/company
 - What's the one thing you most want to get out of your investment in this course?



Managing Conflict

Do not ignore. It will not go away

Baltasar Gracian



Conflict is part of being together

- Where people work together, conflict is a common thing
- It usually does not go away on its own
- Can easily deteriorate into major problems
- Hard feelings remain long after “the end”

Conflict is part of being together

“minor quips at one another, rolling eyeballs, heavy sighs, emotional voices, stony silences, tension in the air”

Lyssa Adkins

Managing Conflict

- If not handled properly, conflict is certainly bad
- Leadership goal is to make the conflict disappear ASAP
- In agile settings we have two goals:
 - Make the conflict disappear ASAP, but
 - use conflict as an opportunity

Conflict in an Agile Setting

*If we manage conflict
constructively, we harness its
energy for creativity and
development*

Kenneth Kaye



Conflict is bad (?)

- Leadership goal is to make the conflict disappear ASAP
- In agile settings we use conflict as an opportunity
 - Make it disappear but also gain something

Agile teamwork is highly collaborative

- Agile team members are highly dependent on each other
 - They work as a team. Not in silos.
 - Not only because of the nature of the work/product but by the agile spirit
- Agile deliberately promotes “One for all and all for one”

Agile teamwork is highly collaborative

- Question: If a Scrum team member is done with their committed work, what should they do for the rest of the sprint?

Agile teamwork is highly collaborative

- Question: If a Scrum team member is done with their committed work, what should they do for the rest of the sprint?
 - Most common approach: bring a new story into the sprint and start working on it
 - Better approach: go help your teammates finish their commitment!

Agile teams are driven to excellence

- Agile Principle #9:
Continuous attention to technical excellence and good design enhances agility.
- Agile teams are expected to drive for remarkable results.
 - Again, a “built-in” agile concept

Agile teams work together

- Agile Principle #6:
“The most efficient and effective method of conveying information to and within a development team is face-to-face conversation.”

Time is critical

- In Agile, turn-around time is very short
- By the time a conflict resolves itself, the sprint (or more) is over

Handling Conflict in an Agile Setting

When life gives you lemons, make lemonade



Handling conflict in agile teams

- Do not avoid conflict
- Turn conflict into a benefit

“Face conflict squarely, skillfully determine the severity of it, mindfully decide whether to intervene and how, generously teach teams to navigate it, and courageously refuse to settle for a team that shrinks from greatness by avoiding it.”

Coaching Agile Teams by Lyssa Adkin

Handling conflict in agile teams

- There is no magic formula for handling conflicts, but there are methods available.
- We will cover here the Five Levels of Conflict model
 - Based on: Navigating Conflict: A Guide to Fostering High-Performance Agile Teams (2009) by Lyssa Adkins

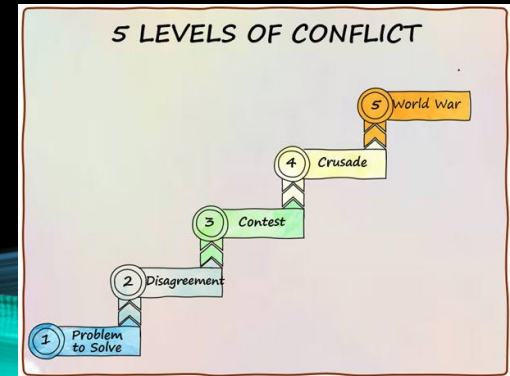
The Five Levels of Conflict model

Identify, de-escalate



Five Levels of Conflict

Identify



The Five Levels of Conflict



Managing Conflict

De-escalate



Step 1: Do Nothing

- Give the team an opportunity to work it out themselves
 - Agile Principle #9: ...Give them the environment and support they need, and trust them to get the job done.
- Tell them you trust them to work it out

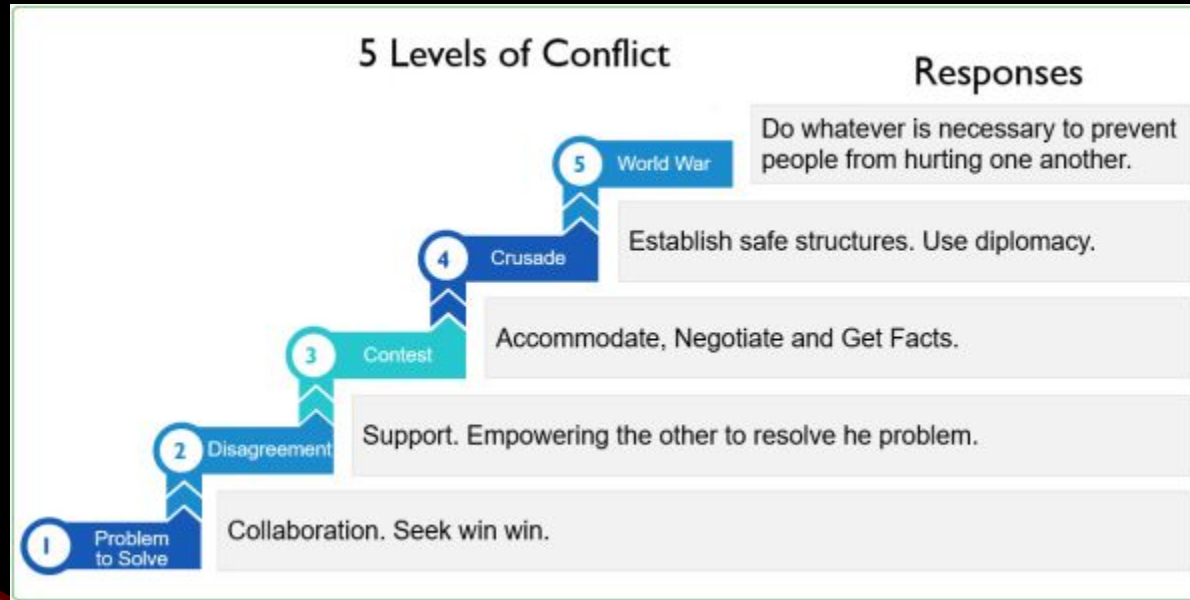
Step 1: Do Nothing

- Watch and listen
 - Is the team handling things on their own?
 - Imperfect team self-solution is better than your perfect solution
 - “Everything you do for the group is one less thing they know they can do for themselves” (Corrigan 2006)
 - Are they making progress?

Step 2: Analyze

- Nobody has the full (or correct) picture
 - What is the level of conflict?
 - What are the issues?
 - How would I respond as side A?
 - How would I respond as side B?
 - What resolution options are open?
 - What should I do (if anything)?

Step 2: Analyze



Step 3: Respond

- Navigating Conflict: A Guide to Fostering High-Performance Agile Teams (2009) by Lyssa Adkins
- Don't forget to make lemonade!

Conflict level	Successful response options
Level 1: Problem to Solve	Collaboration. Seeking a win-win situation. Consensus. Learning where every team member's head is with regard to the issue and, in time, arriving at a decision everyone can back.
Level 2: Disagreement	Support. Empowering the other to resolve the problem. Safety. Anything that restores a sense of safety, such as collaboration games or re-grounding in the team's shared values.
Level 3: Contest	Accommodate. Yielding to the other's view when the relationship is more important than the issue. This is a successful short-term strategy only and becomes a liability if used often over the long term. Negotiate. When the "thing" the conflict is about is divisible, such as the use of a shared resource, negotiation can work. Negotiation will not work when the issue revolves around people's values. Values are not divisible, and one person giving in to another in violation of their own values feels like a sellout. Get factual. Gather data about the situation to establish the facts.
Level 4: Crusade	Establish safe structures again. Use "shuttle" diplomacy, carrying thoughts from one group to the other until they are able to de-escalate and use the tools available at lower levels of conflict.
Level 5: World War	Do whatever is necessary to prevent people from hurting one another.



Let's do it!

It's really simple!

Practice

- You are a team Scrum Master
- The two lead engineers on your team disagree
 - The dispute very quickly becomes ugly
- Many people are the audience

Step 2: Analyze

What is the level of conflict?

1. Problem to solve
2. Disagreement
3. Contest
4. Crusade
5. World war

Step 2: Analyze

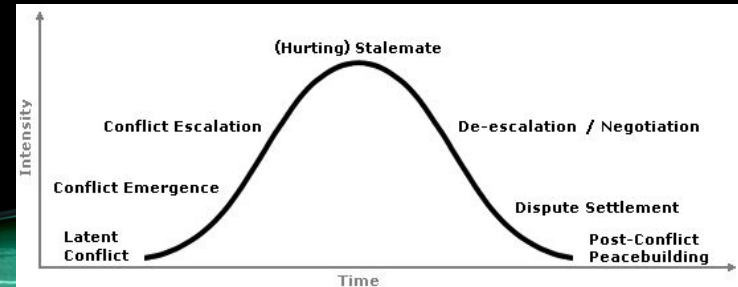
- What are the issues?
- How would I respond as side A?
- How would I respond as side B?
- What resolution options are open?

Step 3: What should I do (if anything)?

- Should I get involved?
- What should I do?
- What should I do first?

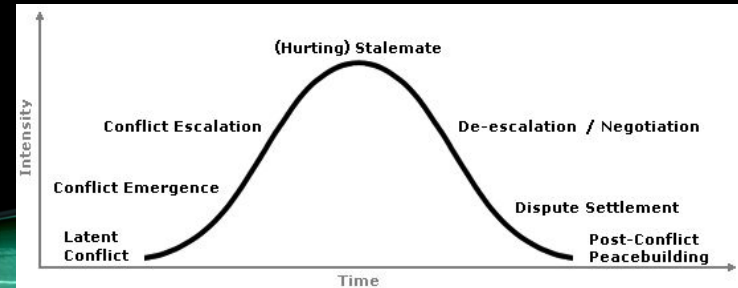
Step 3: Resolution

- Cease fire (prevent further escalation)
- Next?



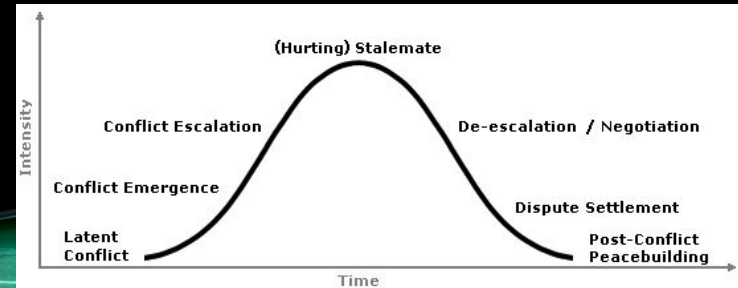
Step 3: Resolution

- Cease fire (prevent further escalation)
- Heal the team
- Next?



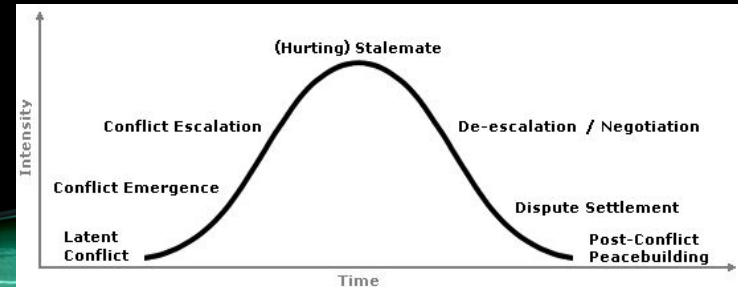
Step 3: Resolution

- Cease fire (prevent further escalation)
- Heal the team
- Settle the conflict
- Next?



Step 3: Resolution

- Cease fire (prevent further escalation)
- Heal the team
- Settle the conflict
- Make peace
- Next?



Step 3: Resolution

- Cease fire (prevent further escalation)
- Heal the team
- Settle the conflict
- Make peace
- Make lemonade (find benefits)

