Copyright © 2015. Information Age Publishing. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

ical resources (i.e., efficacy, hope, optimism, resiliency, and overall psychological capital) in order to combat the stressors that they face at work.

INTRAINDIVIDUAL CONFLICT

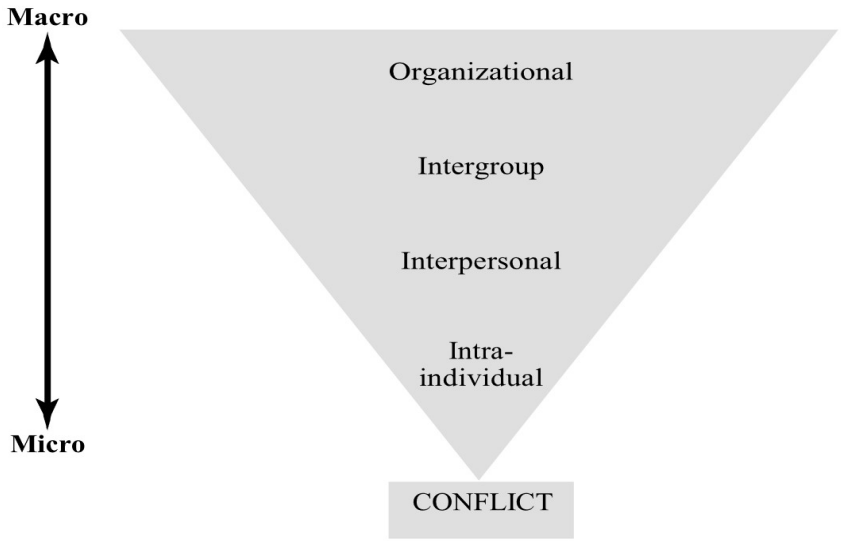
Although stress and conflict are treated differently, they are combined in this one chapter mainly because of the conceptual similarity between individual dispositional stressors and intraindividual conflict. After presenting the intraindividual forms of conflict in terms of frustration, goals, and roles, some more macro interactive conflict models are briefly reviewed as shown in Figure 9.3.

Conflict Due to Frustration

Frustration occurs when a motivated drive is blocked before a person reaches a desired goal. Figure 9.4 illustrates what happens. The barrier may be either overt (outward, or physical) or covert (inward, or mental-sociopsychological). The frustration model can be useful in the analysis of not only behavior in general but also specific aspects of on-the-job behavior. Theft of company property and even violence on the job may be a form of an aggressive outcome to job frustration. For example, a summary article on violence in the workplace noted that even though on-the-job killings have dropped in recent years, this is because of fewer homicides in places like taxis and convenience stores. Workplace homicides by "associates"—current and former coworkers, customers, and clients—are

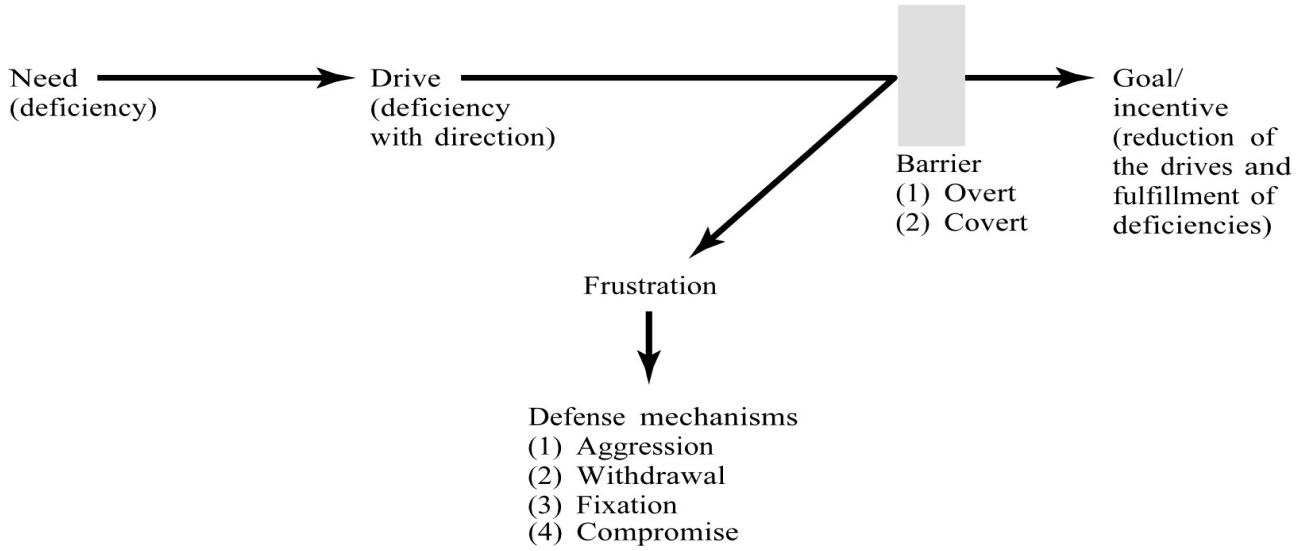
Defense mechanisms actually on the upswing since 1997.[81] In addition, employee crimes, as a form of displaced aggression (e.g., fictitious sales transactions, illegal kickbacks, and theft of office equipment and retail items meant for sales to customers), is also on the rise.[82]

FIGURE 9.3. Level of Conflict in Organizational Behavior



Copyright © 2015. Information Age Publishing. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

FIGURE 9.4. A Model of Frustration



There is increasing concern and research on aggression and violence in the workplace. Although self-reported incidences of workplace aggression are a reaction to frustration, there is research evidence that individual differences (e.g., trait anger, attribution style, negative affectivity, attitudes toward revenge, self-control, and previous exposure to aggressive cultures) account for this aggression,[83] but so do situational factors such as interactional justice and/or abusive supervision.[84] Another study also found personality variables such as stress reaction and control correlated with workplace aggression, and the incidence of aggression depended on the perception of being victimized by others.[85] The form of aggression may depend on the perception of organizational justice (i.e., the judged fairness),[86] and there is a study that violent crime rates in the community of the workplace predicted the amount of reported aggression at that workplace.[87] Implementing a violence-prevention policy and providing training to supervisors and employees in workplace-violence awareness seems to decrease the incidence rate for employee-on-employee violence.[88]

In addition to aggression and violence, the withdrawal reaction to frustration may be a major explanation for the "motivational problem" of employees. They may be apathetic or have "retired on the job" because they are frustrated, not because they have no motivation. Many employees' motives have been blocked by dead-end jobs, high degrees of job specialization, or supervisors who put up barriers. Similar to aggression there is research evidence that both perceived organizational support[89] and personality variables[90] affect what manner and what type of withdrawal behaviors employees exhibit. The fixation reaction to frustration may be used to explain irrational bureaucratic behavior. (The rules become the ends in themselves, and the frustrated employee pathetically adapts to the barriers.) Compromise can help explain midcareer changes (frustrated employees go around the barriers) or "living outside the job" (frustrated employees cannot achieve motivated goals on the job, so they seek fulfillment outside the job). These reactions to frustration often cost organizations a great deal because of the dysfunctions associated with aggression, withdrawal, and fixation. In the case of compromise, the employee's motivation is forced outside the

Copyright © 2015. Information Age Publishing. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

organization. Although the discussion so far indicates the dysfunctional nature of frustration, such negativity should not be automatically assumed.

In some cases frustration may actually result in a positive impact on individual performance and organizational goals. An example is the worker or manager who has high needs for competence and achievement and/or who has high self-efficacy (see Chapter 7's discussion) in being able to do a job well. A person of this type who is frustrated on the job may react in a traditional defensive manner, but the frustration may result in improved performance. The person may try harder to overcome the barrier or may overcompensate, or the new direction or goal sought may be more compatible with the organization's goals. In addition, one research study found stress and strain levels were lower for participants with high self-efficacy than for those with lower self-efficacy.[91]

Once again, it should be remembered that defense mechanisms per se are not bad for the individual. They play an important role in the psychological adjustment process and are unhealthy only when they dominate the individual's personality. Also, those who have successfully overcome frustration in the past by learning that it is possible to surmount barriers or find substitute goals are more tolerant of frustration than those who have never experienced it, or than those who have experienced excesses in frustration. There is also evidence that "venting" (an emotional reaction of expressing one's negative feelings to others) has an adverse affect on performance and amplified the negativity.[92] However, in general, a major goal of management should be to eliminate the barriers (imagined, real, or potential) that are or will be frustrating to employees. This goal may be accomplished through job redesign efforts (see Chapter 6) that are more compatible with employee motivation or leadership skills that get the frustrating barriers out of people's way.

Goal Conflict

Another common source of conflict for an individual is a goal that has both positive and negative features, or two or more competing goals. Whereas in frustration motives are blocked before the goal is reached, in goal conflict two or more motives block one another. For ease of analysis, three separate types of goal conflict are generally identified:

1. *Approach-approach* conflict, where the individual is motivated to approach two or more positive but mutually exclusive goals.
2. *Approach-avoidance* conflict, where the individual is motivated to approach a goal and at the same time is motivated to avoid it. The single goal contains both positive and negative characteristics for the individual.
3. *Avoidance-avoidance* conflict, where the individual is motivated to avoid two or more negative but mutually exclusive goals.

To varying degrees, each of these forms of goal conflict exists in the modern organization, but approach-avoidance is most relevant to the analysis of conflict.

Approach-avoidance conflict results from organizational goals having both positive and negative aspects for organizational participants. Basic research in psychology suggests that the positive aspects of a given organizational goal are stronger and more salient at a distance (in time and/or space) than the negative aspects. On the other hand, as a person gets nearer to the goal, the negative aspects become more pronounced, and at some point the individual may hesitate or fail to progress any further at the point where approach equals avoidance. For example, managers engaged in long-range planning typically are very confident of a goal (a strategic plan) they have developed for the future. Yet, as the

Copyright © 2015. Information Age Publishing. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

time gets near to commit resources and implement the plan, the negative consequences seem to appear much greater than they did in the developing stage. Managers in such a situation may reach the point where approach equals avoidance. The result is a great deal of internal conflict and stress, which may cause indecision, physical reactions, or even depression.

Such approach-avoidance conflict and its aftermath are very common among decision makers and people in responsible positions in today's organizations described in the introductory comments. As noted in a cover story of *Fortune*, "To the survivors, the revolution feels something like this: scary, guilty, painful, liberating, disorienting, exhilarating, empowering, frustrating, fulfilling, confusing, challenging."[93] In other words, as these terms indicate, many managers in recent years have been experiencing very mixed feelings, or approach-avoidance reactions.

Role Conflict and Ambiguity

Closely related to the concept of norms (the "oughts" of behavior), role is defined as a position that has expectations evolving from established norms. People living in contemporary society assume a succession of roles throughout life. A typical sequence of social roles would be that of child, son or daughter, teenager, college student, boyfriend or girlfriend, spouse, parent, and grandparent. Each of these roles has recognized expectations that are acted out like a role in a play.

Besides progressing through a succession of roles such as those just mentioned, the adult in modern society fills numerous other roles at the same time. It is not uncommon for the adult middle-class male to be simultaneously playing the roles of husband, father, provider, son (to elderly parents), worker or manager, student (in a night program), coach of a Little League baseball team, church member, member of a social club, bridge partner, poker club member, officer of a community group, and weekend golfer. Women, of course, also have numerous, often conflicting, roles.[94] Although all the roles that men and women bring into the organization are relevant to their behavior, in the study of organizational behavior the organizational role is the most important. Roles such as software developer, clerk, team leader, salesperson, engineer, systems analyst, department head, vice president, and chairperson of the board often carry conflicting demands and expectations. There is research evidence that such conflict can have a negative impact on well-being[95] and performance and may be affected by cultural differences.[96] For example, in a study of CEOs in international joint ventures, it was found that role conflict was lower when the foreign partner was dominant in the venture, but higher when the local parent was dominant. Role conflict was inversely related to cultural distance.[97]

There are three major types of role conflict. One type is the conflict between *the person and the role*. There may be conflict between the person's personality and the expectations of the role. For example, a production worker and member of the union is appointed to head up a new production team. This new team leader may not really believe in keeping close control over the workers, and it goes against this individual's personality to be hard-nosed, but that is what the head of production expects. A second type is *intrarole* conflict created by contradictory expectations about how a given role should be played. Should the new team leader be autocratic or democratic in dealing with the team members? Finally, *interrole* conflict results from the differing requirements of two or more roles that must be played at the same time. Work roles and nonwork roles are often in such conflict. For example, a successful executive working for a computer company said that she often worked from 7:30 A.M. to 11:30 P.M. Her long hours led to the breakup of a relationship.

Copyright © 2015. Information Age Publishing. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

When she got word that her mother was seriously ill, she remembered: "I had about five minutes to be upset before the phone started ringing again. You get so far into it, you don't even realize your life has gotten away from you completely."[98]

The production team leader and the fast-climbing executive obviously represent the extreme cases of organizational role conflict. Yet to varying degrees, depending on the individual and the situation, people in every other position in the modern organization also experience one or all three types of role conflict. Staff engineers are not sure of their real authority. The clerk in the front office does not know whether to respond to a union-organizing drive. The examples are endless. The question is not whether role conflict and ambiguity exist—they do, and they seem inevitable.[99] Rather, the key becomes a matter of determining how role conflict can be resolved or managed.[100]

INTERACTIVE CONFLICT

Besides the intraindividual aspects of conflict that are closely related to stress, the interactive aspects of conflict are also an important dynamic of organizational behavior. This section is specifically concerned with analyzing the interactive conflict that can result at the interpersonal and intergroup levels in today's organizations.

Interpersonal Conflict

Those who have interpersonal conflict most often attribute the cause to a personality problem or defect in the other party. For example, as discussed in Chapter 6, research from attribution theory on the so-called fundamental attribution error suggests that people attribute others' behavior to personal factors such as intelligence, ability, motivation, attitudes, or personality. Whetten and Cameron, however, go beyond this surface explanation and propose that there are four major sources of interpersonal conflict.[101]These can be summarized as follows:

1. *Personal differences.*Everyone has a unique background because of his or her upbringing, cultural and family traditions, and socialization processes. Because no one has the same family background, education, and values, the differences can be a major source of conflict. Disagreements stemming from the differences "often become highly emotional and take on moral overtones. A disagreement about who is factually correct easily turns into a bitter argument over who is morally right."[102]
2. *Information deficiency.* This source of conflict results from communication breakdown in the organization. It may be that the two people in conflict are using different information or that one or both have misinformation. Unlike personal differences, this source of conflict is not emotionally charged and once corrected, there is little resentment.
3. *Role incompatibility.* This type of interpersonal conflict draws from both intraindividual role conflict (discussed in the previous section) and intergroup conflict (discussed in the next section). Specifically, in today's horizontal organizations, managers have functions and tasks that are highly interdependent. However, the individual roles of these managers may be incompatible. For example, the production manager and the sales manager have interdependent functions: one supports the other. However, a major role of the production manager is to cut costs, and one way to do this is to keep inventories low. The sales manager, on the other hand, has a dominant role of increas-

Copyright © 2015. Information Age Publishing. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

ing revenues through increased sales. The sales manager may make delivery promises to customers at are incompatible with the low inventory levels maintained by production. The resulting conflict from role incompatibility may have to be resolved by higher-level management or systems development through advanced information technology.

4. *Environmental stress*. These types of conflict can be amplified by a stressful environment. In environments characterized by scarce or shrinking resources, downsizing, competitive pressures, or high degrees of uncertainty, conflict of all kinds will be more probable. "For example, when a major pet-food manufacturing facility announced that one-third of its managers would have to support a new third shift, the feared disruption of personal and family routines prompted many managers to think about sending out their résumés. In addition, the uncertainty of who was going to be required to work at night was so great that even routine management work was disrupted by posturing and infighting."[103]

In addition to identifying some of the major sources of interpersonal conflict as in the preceding, it is useful to analyze the dynamics of individuals interacting with one another. One way to analyze their confronting others is through the response categories of (1) forcing (assertive, uncooperative); (2) accommodating (unassertive, cooperative); (3) avoiding (uncooperative, unassertive); (4) compromising (between assertiveness and cooperativeness); and (5) collaborating (cooperative, assertive).[104] Like role conflict, there is research indicating the complexity of interindividual and intragroup conflict,[105] and it is not always bad. For example, one study found the following profile of high-performing teams: (1) low but increasing levels of process conflict; (2) low levels of relationship conflict, with a rise near project deadlines; and (3) moderate levels of task conflict at the midpoint of group interaction.[106]

Intergroup Behavior and Conflict

In addition to interpersonal (which includes intragroup) conflict, social psychologists have been concerned about intergroup conflict for a number of years. Intergroup behavior is even specifically identified as follows: "Intergroup behavior occurs whenever individuals belonging to one group interact, collectively or individually, with another group or its members in terms of their reference group identification."[107]

Several antecedent conditions have been identified for explaining intergroup conflict. These can be summarized as follows:[108]

1. *Competition for resources*. Most organizations today have very limited resources. Groups within the organization vie for budget funds, space, supplies, personnel, and support services.
2. *Task interdependence*. If two groups in the organization depend on one another in a mutual way or even a one-way direction (as in a sequential technological process), there tends to be more conflict than if groups are independent of one another. The more diverse the objectives, priorities, and personnel of the interdependent groups (for example, research and operations), the more conflict there tends to be.
3. *Jurisdictional ambiguity*. This may involve "turf" problems or overlapping responsibilities. For example, conflict might occur when one group attempts to assume more control or take credit for desirable activities, or give up its part and any responsibility for undesirable activities.

Copyright © 2015. Information Age Publishing. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

4. *Status struggles*. This conflict occurs when one group attempts to improve its status and another group views this as a threat to its place in the status hierarchy. One group may also feel it is being inequitably treated in comparison with another group of equal status in terms of rewards, job assignments, working conditions, privileges, or status symbols. Human resources departments justifiably often feel they are treated inequitably in relation to marketing, finance, and operations departments.

Groups in conflict behave differently from smoothly cooperating groups. Here is a real-world example:

> A division of Litton Industries needed to integrate West and East Coast operations in order to provide customers a full spectrum of services. The West Coast group had been running call centers for 30-some years, were hard working, but resistant to change. The East Coast operation was cobbled together through recent acquisitions and specialized in enterprise-wide process consulting. This East Coast group was freewheeling, risk-taking and could care less about Litton culture and tradition. The resulting conflict left virtually no communication or unified sense of direction between the two groups. Covert sabotage was routinely waged by both sides to dilute one another's effectiveness.[109]

There is recent research evidence that such groups in conflict change both internally and in their intergroup perceptions. For example, one study of 70 top management teams found internally that the degree of trust moderated the relationship between task conflict (the perception of disagreements about decisions made by the group) and relationship conflict (an emotional perception of interpersonal incompatibility).[110] Another study found that low intragroup cohesiveness and negative relationships across groups were significantly related to higher perceptions of intergroup conflict.[111] Overall, most experts today emphasize the importance of making a cost-benefit analysis of the conflict situation at any level and then setting up dispute resolution systems[112] and, most recently, setting up systems through advanced information technology that eliminate conflict inherent in traditional (i.e., hierarchical and functional specializations) organization designs.

THE EFFECTS OF STRESS AND INTRAINDIVIDUAL CONFLICT

As has been pointed out, stress and conflict are not automatically bad for individual employees or their organizational performance. In fact, it is generally recognized that low levels of stress and conflict can even enhance job performance. For example, one study found that mild stress, such as getting a new supervisor or being involuntarily transferred, may have the positive result of an increased search for information in the job.[113] This may lead employees to new and better ways of doing their jobs. Also, mild stress may get employees' "juices" flowing and lead to increased activity, change, and overall better performance. People in certain jobs, such as in sales or creative fields (for example, newspaper journalists and television announcers who work under time pressures), would seem to benefit from a mild level of stress. People in other jobs, such as police officers or physicians, may not benefit from constant mild stress.

Research is also emerging that indicates that the level of difficulty, the nature of the task being performed, personal dispositions (such as Type A, personal control and learned helplessness, and psychological hardiness, and psychological capital, discussed in previous sections), other psychological dispositions (such as negative affectivity[114]), and neuroti-