

# CHAPTER 3 – CONSTRUCTIVE STRATEGIES

## LEARNING GOALS FOR CHAPTER 3

### KNOWLEDGE

In this chapter, you will increase your knowledge of:

- goals of actors in a conflict;
- win-win and compromise solutions to conflict;
- constructive communication tools;
- you-messages and I-messages.

### SKILLS

In this chapter, you will develop your ability to:

- recognise underlying reasons for actors' goals;
- analyse different points of view;
- contrast constructive and destructive strategies;
- use constructive communication tools; active listening and paraphrasing;
- express yourself without accusing the other.

### VALUES

In this chapter, you will reflect on:

- the importance of understanding motivations, needs and fears;
- the priority of understanding each other rather than reaching one's goals;
- the effects of language use and listening strategies.

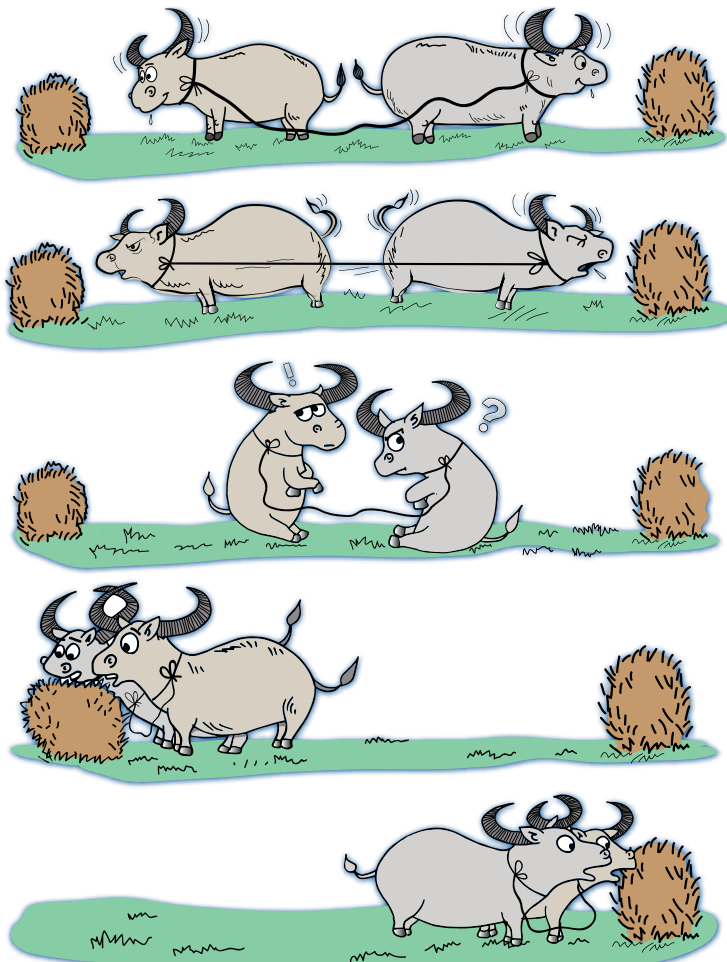
**PREVIEW**

1. Identify a conflict which was resolved, and the situation improved. It can be your own conflict, a conflict within your community, or an intergroup conflict.
2. In groups, explain your example conflicts.
  - a. Who were the actors?
  - b. What were their goals?
  - c. What was the outcome?
  - d. Why do you think the situation was improved, and not made worse?

**3.1 – FINDING CONSTRUCTIVE OUTCOMES**

The constructive way of dealing with conflicts is a process of discovery. Actors create new solutions by understanding the reasons behind each other's goals. These reasons are the actor's motivations, feelings, needs, interests, fears and values. The actors do not try to push what they want to happen, but ask: "Why do I want this to happen?" "Why does the other actor want that to happen?" And, finally, "What can we do to meet both of our needs?"

For example, if you want the window open, and I want it shut, then one of us must win and the other must lose. However, we might discover that you want some air, and I want to stay warm. A constructive solution may be possible - we could open a window or door in another room, for example.



**ACTIVITY**

**BUFFALO MANIA**

1. What is the conflict?
2. How do the two buffaloes solve the conflict?
3. Imagine a dialogue between the two buffaloes in the picture. What might they say to each other?  
In pairs, create a conversation which shows the conflict and the solution that the buffaloes reach.  
**Example:** Buffalo A: Hey, some hay for me!...  
Buffalo B: Some hay for me too...
4. Present your conversation to the class


In 2.2, we looked at the win-or-lose mentality (one side wins and the other side loses). However, this is not the only possible outcome. The constructive method can lead to better results and benefit more actors. The other possible outcomes are:

- **COMPROMISE:** each side gives up something that they want, but also gets something they want. They do this so that they can reach an agreement.
- **WIN-WIN:** all actors get what they want, and do not have to give up anything.

Match the outcomes to the conversations.


- win-lose outcome
- compromise
- win-win outcome

## EXERCISE




**A:** I should have this coconut. It is mine.  
**B:** No, I should have it. It's mine.

**Conversation 1**




**A:** Well, the coconut can be cut into pieces.  
**B:** Yes. Why don't we just cut it in half and share it?




**A:** I wanted the whole coconut but at least now I have half of the meat.  
**B:** I don't like the meat but now I have half of the juice.

**Conversation 2**




**A:** I'm older, so I should have it.  
**B:** No, I should have it because I'm younger.




**A:** Go away! It is mine!  
**B:** You are so mean! I'm going to tell mum!

**Conversation 3**



**A:** Why do you want the coconut?  
**B:** Well, I'm thirsty, I want to drink the juice. And you?  
**A:** I want to eat the coconut meat.



**A:** You can have the juice if I can have the meat.  
**B:** Sure, that's great.

## ACTIVITY

### CREATING OUTCOMES



1. Read the text and, in groups, think of five different outcomes to the conflict.
  - a. **a lose-lose outcome** – both Zaw Aung and Win Thu get nothing;
  - b. **two kinds of win-lose outcome:**
    - i. Zaw Aung gets what he wants, but Win Thu does not;
    - ii. Win Thu gets what he wants, but Zaw Aung does not;
  - c. **a compromise** – both Win Thu and Zaw Aung give up something that they want, but both also get something that they want;
  - d. **a win-win outcome** – both Win Thu and Zaw Aung get what they want and don't have to give up anything.
2. Discuss the questions.
  - a. Which outcome would be easiest to achieve? Why?
  - b. Which outcome would be most difficult to achieve? Why?
  - c. Were you able to find a win-win outcome? How did you do that?

Two brothers, Zaw Aung and Win Thu, got a big piece of land when their grandfather died. It has been owned and farmed by their family for generations. It is a big field, not far from the town, and could be used for many different things.

Zaw Aung wants to build an apartment building on the land. He says that his family and Win Thu's family could each have a big apartment on the top floor. They could rent the other apartments to people and get lots of money from this. However, this project would be expensive, and the land would not be as useful or beautiful with a new building on it.

Win Thu wants to plough the field, and use the land to grow different crops and fruit trees. They might not make a lot of money, but they would be using the land in the same way as their ancestors, he says.



## FOCUS ON MYANMAR: THE MINIMUM WAGE

K3,600 per day is now the minimum wage in Myanmar. It was decided by the *National Committee on the Minimum Wage*. The committee includes ministers, employers and unions. At the start of the negotiations, employers wanted a minimum wage as low as K2,500. Workers wanted K4,000.

Daw Htay Htay Aye is the company director of *Thiri Sandar Garment and General Trading Company*. She said that she could not afford to pay the rate. "If I have to pay my workers 3,600 kyats, then I have to increase my prices or fire some staff", she said.



Ma Win Theingi is a worker at the *Yes One* factory. She said that she will take the deal, but she does not fully accept it. Ma Yin Aye also works at a garment factory. She said the amount was not enough. "We are planning to complain right now," she said.

Ko Kyaw Lwin Oo is a union leader at the *E-land Myanmar* garment factory. He said that most workers agreed with K3,600, although they asked for a higher amount. "We agreed to these wages. It is fair for us because those wages are for an eight-hour day, and it is not much below our demand for K4,000," he said.

Ma Sander is a member of the *Federation of Trade Unions – Myanmar*. She said that employers and workers will have to negotiate higher wages for more productivity. "If the owners pay more, I can promise that we will work hard" she added.





Source: <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/yangon/15224-proposed-k3600-minimum-wage-draws-mixed-response-from-workers-employers.html>

1. What kind of outcome was reached in this conflict?
2. Put the actors into three categories: *satisfied*, *not satisfied* and *unknown*.
3. Is the conflict finished or will it continue?
4. Is this outcome based on competition or on cooperation?

## ACTIVITY

### OUTCOMES OF CONFLICT

1. Think of an intergroup or interstate conflict. Identify four possible outcomes – win-win, win-lose, lose-win, lose-lose.
2. Make a presentation to the class.

Conflict Name:		Actors:	
1. 	<b>Win-win:</b> Both actors get what they want.	2. 	<b>Win-lose:</b> Actor A gets what they want, Actor B does not.
3. 	<b>Lose-win:</b> Actor B gets what they want, Actor A does not.	4. 	<b>Lose-lose:</b> Neither actor gets what they want.

## DISCUSSION

1. Is it possible to know in advance whether a conflict has a win-win solution or not?
2. Which type of outcome is the most common? Why?
3. What are the benefits of a compromise? What are the possible problems?

## REFLECTION

1. Have you had a conflict with a lose-lose ending? How did it feel?
2. Have you had a conflict with a win-lose ending? How did it feel?
3. Have you had a conflict with a win-win ending? How did it feel?



▲ Why does constructive conflict take more time than destructive conflict?

## 3.2 – THE CONSTRUCTIVE PROCESS

Not every conflict has a win-win solution. Sometimes, actors must agree to a compromise. This is why, in the constructive way of dealing with conflicts, the process of understanding is more important than the solution.

When we try to understand the other actors, we show them that their motivations, feelings, needs and values are important to us. We show each other that we do not play a win-or-lose game. We show the other actors that *they* are important to us.

This **mutual** understanding creates basic trust. With trust, conflicts can be solved. People do not fear that others will ignore their needs. They become willing to compromise. After that, finding a solution becomes easier.

The conflict then changes from confrontation to cooperation.

What is the main idea of the text? Choose the best answer.

1. In the constructive way of dealing with conflicts, the process of understanding is more important than the solution.
2. In a conflict, we sometimes have to give up things that we want.
3. Communication about motivations, feelings, needs and values is part of constructive conflict resolution.
4. Not every conflict has a win-win solution, and actors may have to compromise.

### PREVIEW

1. What needs to happen for you to change your position in a conflict?
2. What does another actor have to do before you change your position?

### EXERCISE



## FOCUS ON MYANMAR: THE ALAM VILLAGE TRACT SCHOOL

There were many complaints and conflicts in Alam Village Tract about the local school. Parents felt that the local school did not have the same facilities as other schools. This made them angry. They **blamed** the school and local government.

To address the problem, the township administrator organised a meeting between parents, teachers, principals and local government staff.

However, instead of focusing on the problems, the group began by talking about positive things. Both the school and local community agreed on several positive things about the school. They were happy that primary education was free. Parents were also happy because children could improve their knowledge of Myanmar language.



At the end of the meeting, they agreed that there were still challenges, like the lack of fences and proper toilets.

To show their interest and **commitment** to school improvements, parents agreed to help build the fences and toilets. The cooperative environment of the meeting encouraged the Village Tract Administrator to ask for extra funds.

This kind of cooperation is a good example of how improved relationships and positive action can result from open discussion. In this case, the community's offer to build fences and toilets shows trust in the Township Administration. That motivated the Village Tract Administrator to request more funds and assistance for the local schools.

Source: Local Governance Mapping: The State Of Local Governance: Trends In Kachin (UNDP Myanmar 2015)

1. What issue caused conflict in Alam Village Tract?
2. Who were the actors?
3. What did the parents think about the local government at the beginning of the conflict?
4. How did the parents and the township administration improve their relationship?
5. What was the result of the positive approach taken at the meeting?
6. What kind of outcome is this?

## DISCUSSION

**"The path is the goal."**

– M. K. Gandhi

1. What does Gandhi mean by this statement?
2. How is it connected to constructive strategies of conflict resolution?



### 3.3 – CONSTRUCTIVE TOOLS FOR DEALING WITH CONFLICTS

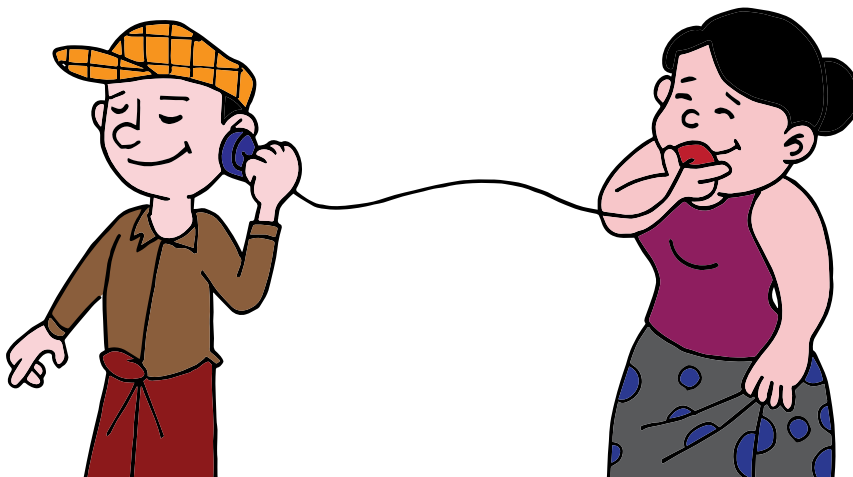
The constructive process is based on understanding. At some point in almost every conflict – between individuals, groups, or countries – actors will try to solve their conflict by talking. They will use destructive strategies (like fighting) only if communication fails. Then they might try again to communicate.

This is why good communication skills are important; they help us deal with conflict in a healthy way.

Both listening and speaking skills are important to successful communication. Both speaking and listening can either support understanding or block understanding.

#### LISTENING

Listening is the main **tool** that we use to communicate understanding. Listening – not talking – shows that we respect the other person, their feelings and needs, or their point of view in a conflict.



**“Listening is not waiting to talk.”**

– N.N

1. What does this statement mean?
  2. What is the difference between “listening” and “waiting to talk”?
- 
1. In pairs or groups, describe a time when you felt that someone was really listening to you. How did you know that? What did they do to show that they were really listening to you?
  2. In pairs or groups, describe a time when you thought that someone was listening to you very badly. How did you know that? What showed that they were not really listening to you?
  3. Make two lists. What do you like a listener to do? What do you not like a listener to do?
  4. Put your lists on the wall. Walk around and look at other groups’ lists.

#### PREVIEW

**“The only way to truly get rid of an enemy is to make him your friend”**

– Abraham Lincoln

Do you agree with this quotation? Why or why not?

#### DISCUSSION

#### ACTIVITY

#### LISTENING

Good listening is also called “active listening.” Active listeners show that they are trying to understand the speaker. They can do this by using tools like *body language* and *paraphrasing*.

### BODY LANGUAGE AND ENCOURAGERS

We do things with our eyes, face or body to show that we are listening. We call this *body language*. Some examples of body language are: keeping eye contact, smiling and nodding your head. They show that you are interested in what the other person is telling you.

We can also use sounds or words to show that we are listening, for example “hmm”, or “yes.” This shows people: “*I am interested in what you have to say. Please continue.*” These sounds encourage the other person to talk, so they are sometimes called *encouragers*.



## ACTIVITY

### PAYING ATTENTION

1. In groups of three, one person is the listener, one person is the speaker and one person is the observer.
  - **Listener:** Focus on the speaker and listen to what they are saying. Use body language to show that you are listening. Use encouragers if you can.
  - **Speaker:** Talk to the listener about something that is important to you – your job, your family, a decision you made, etc.
  - **Observer:** Watch both the speaker and listener. Pay attention to the listener.
2. Talk and listen for three minutes.
3. Afterwards, the observer gives feedback on what they observed. How did the listener show that they were paying attention?
4. Change roles until each group member has played each role.
5. Discuss the questions in the boxes.

#### As the Listener:

1. What was comfortable or easy for you?
2. What was difficult for you?
3. Did you enjoy listening?

#### As the Speaker:

1. Did you feel like the listener listened to you?
2. How did you feel about being listened to?
3. How did the listener show that they were listening to you? Could they have done anything differently?

#### As the Observer:

1. What did you see the listener do?
2. What other things did you observe?

## DISCUSSION

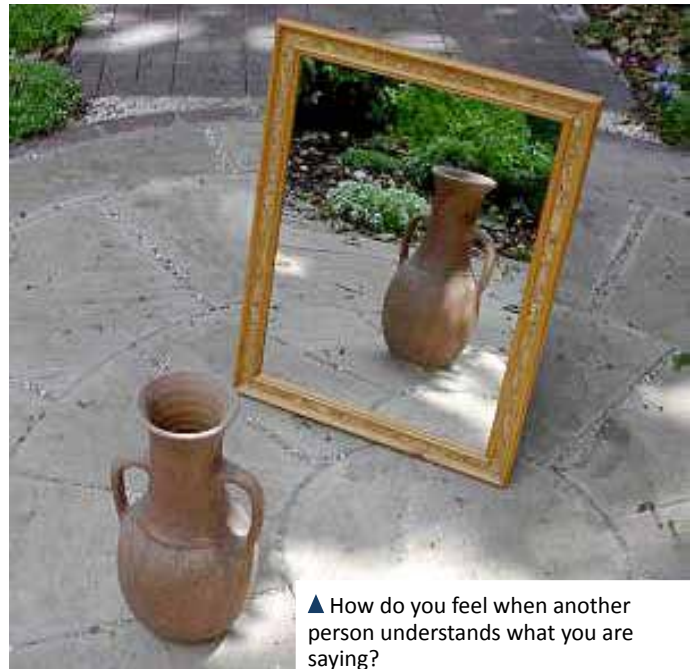
Think about your own language or even another language that you have studied. Do you have encouragers in this language? What are they? How do you use them?

## PARAPHRASING

In communication, we cannot know if another person understands things the same way as us. A speaker may say one thing, but the listener may hear another thing. This happens because communication is not only about words. It is also about the meaning behind the words. We *understand* a person when we know what they mean, not only what they say. We *misunderstand* someone when we get the meaning wrong.

Misunderstandings are common in situations of conflict. For example, a wife asks her husband to not go to the tea shop every evening. The husband agrees. After that, he goes to the riverside every evening. Here, the husband misunderstands his wife. The wife explains only part of what she wants him to do.

*Paraphrasing* is another tool of active listening. When we paraphrase, we tell the speaker *in our own words* what we heard. This supports understanding. It allows the listener to check whether they understood the speaker correctly. If not, it gives the speaker the opportunity to make their meaning clearer.



▲ How do you feel when another person understands what you are saying?

Sai Long and his parents are living in different places. When Sai Long visits home, his mother tells him: "It's nice that you're here again." Sai Long does not respond and feels angry.

1. What message did Sai Long probably hear?
  - a. "I am pleased to see you."
  - b. "Please visit me more often."
  - c. "You should visit me more often!"
  - d. "I am feeling lonely."
  - e. "You are a bad son because you come so rarely."
2. Why does Sai Long hear this message?
3. How can he be sure about what his mother is really saying?

## EXERCISE

Paraphrasing does not mean that we agree with the other person. We still keep our own opinions. It just helps us to understand the other before we express ourselves. It also slows down an argument and can prevent escalation of the conflict.

A paraphrase does not judge the other. It describes, in our own words, what we heard. Even if we make a mistake, no harm is caused because the other person can make their meaning clearer.

Paraphrasing is most powerful when we connect to the speaker's feelings and needs.



A: I'm having a hard time communicating with Bill and I don't know what's going on.  
 B: Hmm... *It sounds like you're frustrated that you and Bill aren't getting along.*"



A: Yes... and I don't know what to do about it.  
 B: *Sounds like you are feeling helpless and would like some advice, is that right?*



A: No, I just would like to know if you too have a problem with him.  
 B: *So, you would like me to tell you how I get along with Bill?*



A: Yes, that's it!

## ACTIVITY

## PARAPHRASING

- In pairs, one person is the speaker and one person is the listener. Talk and listen for three minutes.
  - Speaker:** Talk to the listener about a political or social issue you feel strongly about – the work of a leader, an environmental problem, roles and responsibilities in your community, etc. Pause regularly to give your partner the opportunity to paraphrase. If you want to challenge the listener, choose a more controversial topic.
  - Listener:** Listen to the speaker. When they pause, paraphrase – repeat in your own words what you heard them saying.
- Swap roles and repeat the activity.
- Discuss the questions in the boxes.

**As the Speaker:**

- Was the listener's paraphrasing accurate? What did you do if it wasn't?
- Did it help you to hear your own words paraphrased? Why or why not?
- How does it feel to be listened to without being interrupted? Does that happen often in your life? Why or why not?"

**As the Listener:**

- What was easy about paraphrasing? What was difficult?
- How did you feel when you had to re-state, or repeat, what someone else said?

**As Both:**

- What was the effect of paraphrasing on this conversation?
- Have you ever used this tool before? Explain.

## SPEAKING

The way that we speak to each other can either support or block understanding. If we judge or classify other people, we will probably create **resistance** and escalation. If we want **compassion** and understanding, we have to speak from the heart about our feelings and needs.

**"Words can be windows or walls."** – Marshall Rosenberg

What does this statement mean? Paraphrase it. Compare your statements as a class.

## DISCUSSION

## ACTIVITY

### A MESSY ROOM

Moet Moet is talking to her roommate, Hnin Wai, about a problem with their living situation. In the boxes are two different ways that Moet Moet could address this problem.

1. Which of Moet Moet's statements do you like better? Why?
2. Imagine Hnin Wai's response to the Statement A. What would she say? Write a response.
3. Imagine Hnin Wai's response to the Statement B. What would she say? Write a response.
4. Compare the responses. Are they different? Why?

**A.** "I hate sharing a room with you, Hnin Wai. You are a messy person. Every time I try to clean, you make everything dirty again. I can't find my things because your stuff is everywhere! Where do you get so much stuff? There's no space for me in this place. I just can't live with you. In the future, I hope you plan on living alone because nobody in the world is going to be able to live with you in this mess."

**B.** "I'm having trouble living in this room, Hnin Wai. It makes me really upset when I come in here and there is stuff all over the place. I can't think clearly when there's mess all around me. Also, my things get lost and I can't find them when I need them. I just want my room to be clean and peaceful. I need to have more organisation in here."



### YOU-MESSAGES AND I-MESSAGES

*You-messages* are statements. They tell another person what is wrong with them. They put the blame on that person. They make that person responsible for the speaker's feelings. But, because no one likes to be blamed or criticised, *you-messages* can block understanding. Sometimes they make the other person want to argue or fight.

#### You-messages:

"You don't respect me." "You never listen."  
"You always say that."

The opposite of a you-message is an *I-message*. In an *I-message*, we speak about ourselves. Instead of blaming or accusing the other person, we talk about our feelings and needs, and what would fulfil our needs.

**I-messages:**

“I don’t like it when this happens.”  
 “I feel angry because I need respect.”  
 “I am sorry, because I missed our appointment.”

1. Look at the statements from Moet Moet. Identify three you-messages.
  2. Look at the statements from Moet Moet. Identify three I-messages.
- 
1. Classify these statements into you-messages and I-messages.
    - a. It makes me angry when people make jokes about my name.
    - b. You are late again.
    - c. You do not care about other people.
    - d. You drive too fast.
    - e. I really don’t like it when you take my things without asking for my permission.
    - f. I think you are lazy.
    - g. Can’t you ever remember to clean your feet?
    - h. I feel disappointed because you don’t keep your promises.
    - i. When no one asks for my opinion, I feel hurt because I want to be part of the group.
    - j. You never spend time with me anymore.
    - k. I need to feel respected, so I feel angry when people call me names.
    - l. You’re going to destroy our family if you don’t stop spending money.
  2. Change three of the you-messages above into I-messages.  
**Example:** “*You are late again!*” > “*I worry when you are late.*”,  
 “*You do not care about other people*” > “*I need help.*”
- 
1. Is it difficult for you to make I-messages? Why?
  2. How do you feel, when you hear a you-message about yourself?
  3. Describe a situation in your life where you used you-messages. What was the outcome?

## EXERCISE

## ACTIVITY

### YOU-MESSAGE OR I-MESSAGE?

## DISCUSSION



## FOCUS ON MYANMAR: CONFLICT BETWEEN THE OLDER AND YOUNGER GENERATIONS

In a town, there are many conflicts between older and younger people. The conflicts are because of bad communication and misunderstandings. This often happens when people try to work for their community or make group decisions.

Aye is a youth leader. She explained her view of the situation: "I am an activist. I want people to work together for the community. But the older generation doesn't accept it. They don't want us to be involved, but they can't give us any reason for this."

Young people want to do things in new and different ways. They are frustrated that their communities don't allow them to become leaders.

Many youth feel that the older generation does not support them. Be Be, another young person said, "Our youth groups always organise meetings, events and trainings for youth. We want to build capacity and make a better community. But the older generation doesn't understand. They think it is a waste of time and energy. We want them to support us, but they are not interested."

People from the older generation say that they provide opportunities for youth. However, they say that youths are not interested in taking them. Daw Si Si is an elder community leader who is angry with mistakes made by youth in arranging a meeting.

Daw Si Si explained: "I have been a community leader for many years. Now I want to retire. I want to give my responsibilities to the younger generation, but they are not interested. I asked some of them to arrange a meeting, but they made mistakes, so some people arrived late. Young people these days are busy doing other things. I ask them to do something very simple and they can't even do that. I worry about the future. How can I pass on responsibility if they can't even arrange a meeting?"

Another youth from the community said, "In our community we can't work together if people over 40 or 50 years old are involved. They find it hard to cooperate and talk to each other. Youths have an easier time cooperating. Even if one older person is with a youth group, all cooperation will be lost because they often object to our ideas."

Source: Unpublished Report, Independent Researcher

1. What do the young people say about the older generation?
2. What do the older generation say about the young people?
3. Do they use you-messages or I-messages?
4. How do the young people feel and what do they need?
5. How do the older generation feel and what do they need?
6. What could the young people do to improve their relationship with the older generation?
7. What could the older generation do to improve their relationship with the young people?

## DISCUSSION

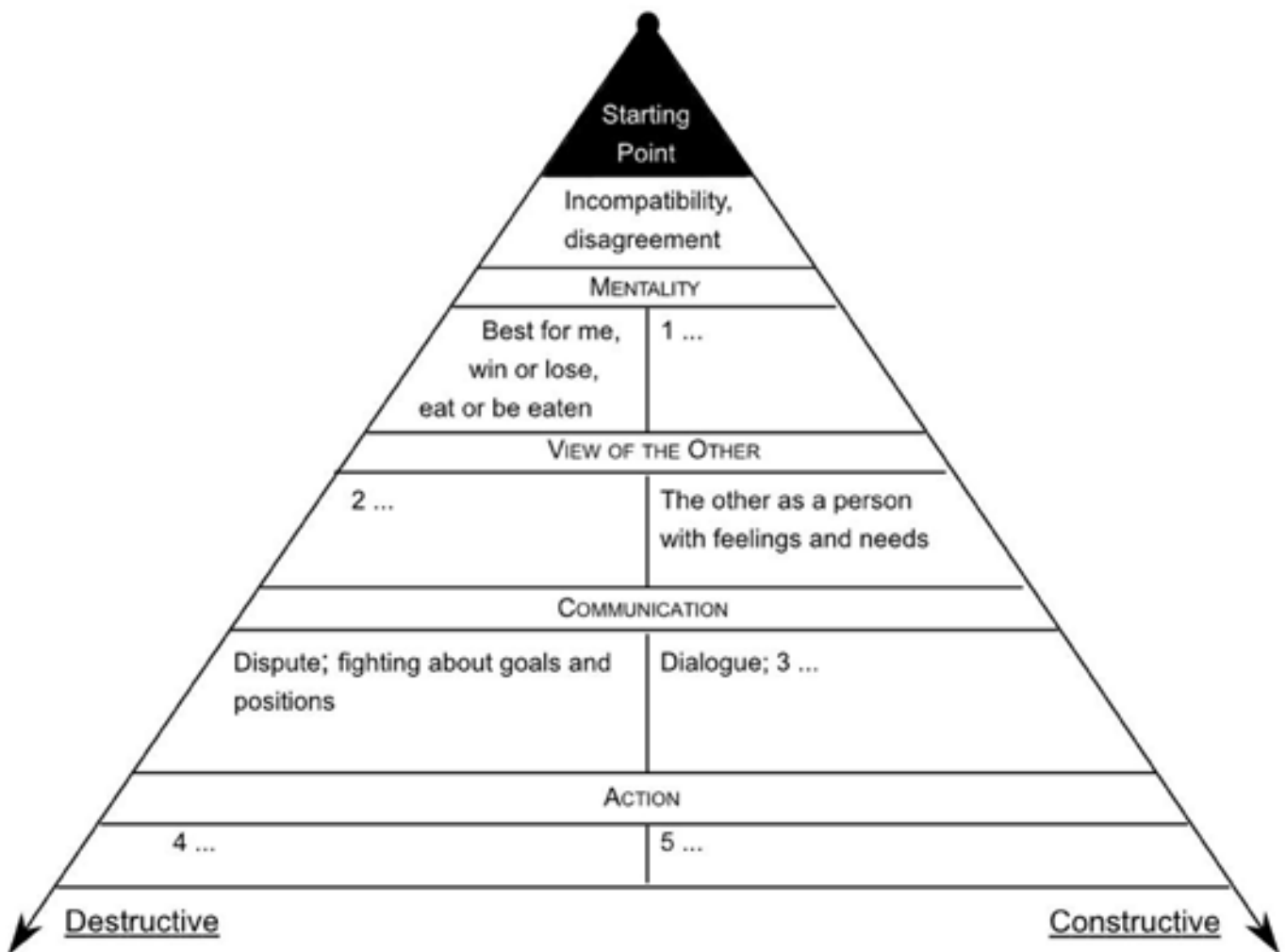
1. How do people in your class talk to each other? Do they listen well to each other? Do they use you-messages or I-messages?
2. What are the reasons for this behaviour?
3. Do women and men in your class behave differently in discussions?
4. Are you content with the communication in your class, or do you want to change something?



### 3.4 – DESTRUCTIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE STRATEGIES IN CONTRAST

The diagram shows the two different ways of dealing with conflict. In both cases, conflict starts with incompatible goals or a disagreement between the actors. Then the actors choose either the destructive or the constructive way of dealing with the conflict.

In the beginning, both strategies seem similar. The differences are in our attitude towards conflict and our view of the other person. But in the end they lead to quite different actions, violence on the one side and non-violence on the other side.



PREVIEW

1. What is similar about destructive and constructive strategies of dealing with conflicts?
2. What is different about them?

Complete the diagram using the words and phrases below.

- a. violence
- b. revealing **underlying** reasons, creating new solutions
- c. non-violence
- d. the other as a tool, or an obstacle to my goals
- e. best for all, cooperation, mutual understanding

EXERCISE

## ACTIVITY

### USING THE STRATEGIES

Read the scenario and follow the instructions.

1. Identify a destructive strategy to deal with this conflict (violence, avoidance, dispute, you-messages) then answer the questions.
  - a. How might the conflict continue?
  - b. How might the conflict end? Give an example and identify the outcome.
2. Identify a constructive strategy to deal with this conflict (I-messages, active listening, dialogue) then answer the questions.
  - a. How might the conflict continue?
  - b. How might the conflict end? Give an example and identify the outcome.

Fatima and Nilar are neighbours. Between their houses is a small area of land. Neither household owns this land. The women decide to use this land to grow vegetables. They plan to share them between their families. While they are digging in the soil, Fatima's spade hits something big and hard. Nilar comes to help, and begins to move the soil with her hands. She pulls up a large red stone: a ruby. Both women scream with surprise. "I can't believe I found a ruby!" said Fatima. "No, I found this ruby," said Nilar. They both feel that the ruby belongs to them. They argue about what to do next.



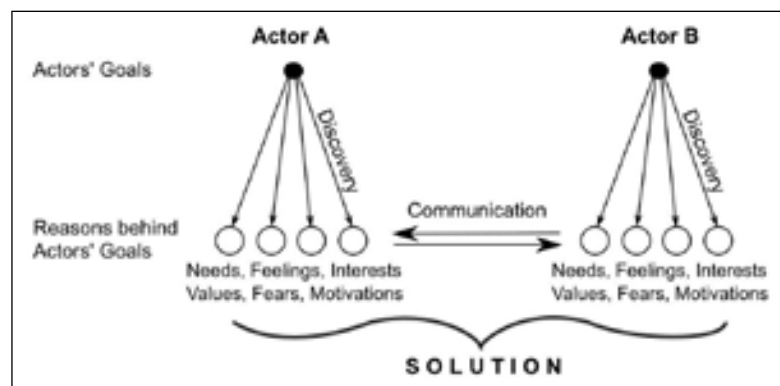
## DISCUSSION

1. What happens if one actor uses destructive strategies and the other uses constructive strategies?
2. What needs to happen for an actor to change from a destructive to a constructive strategy?

## CONCLUSION

### ANSWER THE QUESTIONS

1. Based on the diagram, describe the constructive way of dealing with conflicts.



2. What is the difference between a compromise and a win-win solution?
3. Why is the process of understanding so important for conflict resolution?
4. What is paraphrasing and why do we do it?
5. What is a you-message and why might it make a conflict worse?
6. What is an I-message, and why might it improve a conflict?