

**Izabela Walczak**

University of Humanities and Economics in Lodz

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7357-963X>e-mail: [iwalczak@ahelodz.pl](mailto:iwalczak@ahelodz.pl)

## Around conflict – image, language and metaphors

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**Abstract:** Activities that promote both learner's autonomy and collaboration, foster in-depth understanding, provide inspiration and develop creative thinking seem to be an essential part of today's educational landscape. This paper analyses a workshop task designed on the basis of a theoretical model of the causes of conflicts, used in the academic *Constructive Conflict Resolution* course. The exercise involves creating outputs that combine visual and linguistic elements, illustrating the subject matter literally and figuratively, which then is used as the trigger for the in-class discussion aiming at in-depth understanding of the various aspects of the topic. Moore's wheel of conflict was applied as the knowledge component of the in-class activity which may be situated within a broader theoretical discourse on the role of image, language, and metaphors in conflict resolution education. The pedagogical potential of transcending traditional frameworks to foster autonomy, collaboration, and critical thinking were explored by examining how visual and linguistic elements can reframe learners' engagement and thus effectiveness of the learning process.

**Keywords:** conflict, metaphor, image, creativity

### About the Author

Izabela Walczak – graduate of English Language and Literature Studies (University of Lodz). Lecturer at the University of Humanities and Economics in Lodz, freelance trainer, linguist and management practitioner. She has written articles on language, education and management and speaks at Polish and international conferences.

## Introduction

The subject of this analysis is a sample of 15 collages created by 3 groups of students of Graphics and Journalism faculties during in-class activity in *Constructive Conflict*

*Resolution* workshops. The objective of the task was to integrate diverse perspectives and to encourage exploration, so that learners acquire in-depth understanding of the topic and become empowered to navigate conflicts with confidence and insight.

The students' works were analysed through the following lenses:

1. Image.
2. Language.
3. Metaphor.

The task and students' output analysed in this paper were designed on the basis on Christopher Moore's circle of conflict, a theoretical framework designed to identify the causes of conflict, which are categorized under five primary sources: relationship, data, interest, value, and structure.

Conflict resolution frameworks propose models to analyse the multifaceted nature of disputes. Christopher Moore's *Circle of Conflict* may serve, among others, as a diagnostic tool, categorizing conflicts according to their possible sources. Moore's model indicates that conflicts arise from distinct, often overlapping sources, each requiring tailored resolution strategies.<sup>1</sup>

Tab. 1. Circle of conflict summary

Conflict type	Definition	Literature
Relationship conflicts	Rooted in interpersonal tensions, miscommunication, or emotional animosities.	G. Furlong, <i>The Conflict Resolution Toolbox</i> , Wiley and Sons, Ontario 2005.
Data conflicts	Stem from misinformation, incomplete data, or divergent interpretations.	Ch. Moore, <i>The Mediation Process practical strategies for resolving conflict</i> , Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco 1996.
Interest conflicts	Driven by competing needs (substantive, procedural, psychological).	R. Fisher, W. Ury, B. Patton, <i>Getting to Yes: Negotiating an agreement without giving in</i> , Century Business, Sydney 1991.
Value conflicts	Arise from incompatible beliefs, ethics, or cultural norms.	Dow D., <i>Tool – Circle of Conflict</i> , 3.10.2019, <a href="https://synergycommons.net/resources/tool-circle-of-conflict/">https://synergycommons.net/resources/tool-circle-of-conflict/</a> [accessed: 1.08.2025].
Structural conflicts	Caused by systemic inequities in power, resources, or institutional design.	Dow D., <i>Tool – Circle of Conflict</i> , 3.10.2019, <a href="https://synergycommons.net/resources/tool-circle-of-conflict/">https://synergycommons.net/resources/tool-circle-of-conflict/</a> [accessed: 1.08.2025].

Source: own elaboration on the basis of listed literature.

Relationship conflicts arise from interpersonal issues such as miscommunication, mistrust, emotional tensions, or negative past history. Quite unsurprisingly, this inter-

<sup>1</sup> Ch. Moore, *The Mediation Process practical strategies for resolving conflict*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco 1996.

personal dynamic is also reflected in organizational conflicts.<sup>2</sup> Data conflicts occur due to misinformation, lack of data, or differing interpretations of numbers or messages, confirmed by studies emphasizing the importance of accurate data in resolving disputes.<sup>3</sup> Data conflicts are also related to the use and understanding of linguistic subtleties.

Classic and common conflicts of interest stem from competing needs or goals such as resource allocation. Importantly, resources may also be immaterial. These types of conflicts are typically possible to solve through negotiation. Value conflicts, on the other hand, are deeply rooted in differing beliefs, ethics, or cultural norms held by individuals or groups. These conflicts tend to be difficult to handle, unless differences are acknowledged without judgment, there are shared values possible to define, or solutions that honour all perspectives can be drafted.

Structural conflicts are caused by systemic setups such as imbalanced power distribution, inequitable resource allocation, or structures that by definition disadvantage certain groups. Depending on the context, this category of conflicts may be solved through policy or organizational changes ensuring fairness and equity.

Moore's circle of conflict helps mediators to diagnose disputes by identifying their root causes, which enables interventions tailored to the specific type of conflict. It complements frameworks like Bernard Mayer's *Wheel of Conflict*, which incorporates human needs such as identity and security into conflict analysis.<sup>4</sup> Together, these models provide a holistic understanding of complex disputes.

Studies have demonstrated the utility of Moore's framework in various contexts, e.g. workplace disputes involving leadership changes often combine structural and relationship conflicts,<sup>5</sup> however empirical studies validating its predictive accuracy are limited as it is primarily a conceptual framework.

More recent adaptations have expanded the model to include language barriers and adaptive challenges within value conflicts, reflecting evolving understandings of cultural and communicative complexities.

## **Conflict collage activity**

As Moore's model provides a clear categorization of conflict causes and is applicable in interpersonal, organizational, and historical contexts, the *Constructive conflict resolution* cross-curricular course in-class task is designed with it as a basis. The course

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<sup>2</sup> C. De Dreu, L.R. Weingart, *Task versus Relationship Conflict: A Meta-Analysis*, "Journal of Applied Psychology" 2003, vol. 88, no. 4, pp. 741–749.

<sup>3</sup> M. Bazerman, D.A. Moore, *Judgment in Managerial Decision Making*, John Wiley & Sons, New Jersey 2012.

<sup>4</sup> B.S. Mayer, *The Dynamics of Conflict Resolution*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco 2000.

<sup>5</sup> K. Jehn, E.A. Mannix, *The dynamic nature of conflict: A longitudinal study intragroup conflict and group performance*, "Academy of Management Journal" 2001, vol. 44(2), pp. 238–251.

is a two-day workshop class. The theoretical model of the circle of conflict is introduced on the first day, through elicitation and discussion, after a warm-up exercise. Afterwards, students are divided into groups and asked to reproduce the format of the 'empty' circle of conflict and fill in the respective areas with magazine and newspaper clips: pictures, photographs, key words, phrases and/or headlines. Hard copies of magazines and newspapers are a mix of everyday, lifestyle, political (representing right and left-wing of the political scene), gutter press and advertising leaflets, offer a variety of source material, both visual and linguistic. It is also possible for students to use internet news portals in search for applicable headlines and copy them on the collage in writing, as well as to add their own drawings.

The work involves searching for and selecting appropriate materials, planning it visually and presenting to other groups, which requires discussion, collaboration and assigning roles in teams. It is a structured open-ended task, with a theoretical model as a point of reference no 'correct' or best solutions. There is an infinite number of solutions and possible output ideas. The activity is followed by presentations of posters and the discussion encouraging students to reflect on their work and the ideas of other groups. The lecturer may use several questions to facilitate the discussion, the examples of which are listed below:

Tab. 2. Discussion questions

Category of questions	Examples
Understanding and going beyond	<i>Which examples in specific conflict categories are most relevant and illustrative?</i> <i>In your opinion, which elements in the collages best reflect the nature of conflict?</i>
Self-reflection	<i>What have you discovered and learnt about conflicts during the exercise?</i> <i>What experience, memories or thoughts has the activity triggered?</i> <i>What are your reflections about yourself?</i> <i>What other thoughts come to your mind?</i> <i>What information/conclusion/reflection will you take away from the exercise?</i>
Inspiration from others and new discoveries	<i>What have you learnt about other perspectives?</i> <i>Is there anything that you changed your opinion about? If so, what?</i> <i>How can each type of conflict be prevented?</i> <i>Having reviewed the collages, how can conflicts be best defined?</i> <i>Which types of conflicts seem easier and which more difficult to deal with? Why?</i>
Limitations of the model	<i>What would you add to what has already been discussed?</i> <i>In your view, what is missing from the model?</i> <i>What are its possible weaknesses?</i> <i>What would you change in the model?</i>

Source: own elaboration.

## Images and language

In the analysed sample, students use a variety of clippings, including photographs, graphics short articles or their pieces, headlines, phrases or key words as well as their own inputs, both verbal and visual, the examples of which are listed in the table below.

Tab. 3. Examples of images and language in conflict categories

Conflict type	Examples of illustrations	Examples of key words, phrases and/or headlines
Relationship conflicts	Pictures of couples and families A cartoon clip showing a creature escaping a snowball	<i>First Love for the Second Time</i> <i>Steps Full of Emotions</i> <i>I Have Followed My Own Path</i>
Data conflicts	Picture of a head with a padlock inside, picture of butterflies flying out from a telephone screen	<i>A Skeleton in a Cupboard, The Whole Truth about Wołyn,</i> <i>Facts Are Missing – or Everyone Has Their Own</i> <i>That's Not What I said, and You Heard it Wrong,</i>
Interest conflicts	Mild and spicy ketchup	<i>Nations Have Their Rations, Changing the Profession After Years</i> <i>All That Glitters is Not Gold</i>
Value conflicts	Religious paintings	<i>Boys Don't Cry</i> <i>What's Most Important Is Found Inside</i> <i>We Believe in Different Things</i>
Structural conflicts	Hospital	<i>Aristocrats – We Love to Hate Them</i> <i>The System is Dividing Us</i> <i>One Country, Two Nations</i>

Source: own elaboration on the basis of source material.

It was noted that students, apart from neutral or formal register, used the language relevant for their age group (22–24 years of age), using informal expressions such as *cutie*, *sham* or *you came in hot*. Similarly, the pictures showing historical figures or article clippings with serious content such as armed conflicts, political or social issues, were accompanied by pictures reflecting their interests such as e.g. sports, cars or music.

In several cases images were combined with verbal elements, offering illustrative insights, for example:

- A couple discussing a choice of wine with a headline ‘*What do you think darling?*’ illustrating relationship conflicts.
- A picture of a younger and older woman put together to illustrate conflicts between generations.
- Headline *Part-time fathers – new urban trend* combined with a picture of a mother and a child sitting on one end of the couch and the father working on his laptop on the other
- Cartoon clipping showing a university graduate with a diploma complaining about the offered salary, illustrating structural conflicts.

## Metaphors

In both group work and the discussion, students are encouraged to think not only directly about examples relevant for each category of conflict but also reflect on the phenomenon in a broader context and search for loose associations and its metaphorical illustrations induced by both visual and verbal cues. The result might be the metaphors generated in the in-class discussion:

- *A conflict is like a toilet paper if it starts rolling, it seems to never end.*
- *Some conflicts are like a global warming, at first one may not notice that something is going terribly wrong.*
- *If you think the best solution in a fight is to use force, you might be surprised.*
- *In a conflict of interests, some people's needs may be like a bottomless well, in which case it will be hard to meet half way in a negotiation.*
- *In an argument, you might have no idea what the other side is thinking or what their values are, it is better than to ask, rather than assume things.*

Thinking metaphorically encourages learners to generate different perspectives and search for otherwise opaque aspects of phenomena, which increases the educational value of the activity:

[it] is essential to cognition, shapes the way we perceive our environment and our interactions, builds bridges to community, and ultimately shapes culture. Thus, understanding metaphor in as much depth as it affords and then utilizing it as a pedagogical tool becomes an invaluable resource for instructors. [...] A new frame means a new perception. Metaphors can have that kind of power in helping students to see the world in ways they never have before.<sup>6</sup>

Metaphors and visual representations of concepts serve as catalytic tools for translating abstract notions such as conflict sources into tangible learning experiences, enabling learners to map familiar schemas onto complex conflict dynamic.<sup>7</sup> For example:

- Structural conflicts might be visualized as 'architectural flaws' in a building, necessitating systemic redesign.
- Value conflicts could be framed as 'tectonic plates' grinding against deeply held beliefs.
- Such metaphors activate neural pathways associated with creative problem-solving, enhancing retention and critical analysis.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> S. Anika, *The Pedagogical Power of Metaphor*, "Locutorium" 2020, vol. 15, <https://locutorium.byu.edu/issues/volume-15-2020/the-pedagogical-power-of-metaphor/> [accessed: 1.08.2025].

<sup>7</sup> G. Lakoff, M. Johnson., *Metaphors we live by*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1980.

<sup>8</sup> E. Botha, *Why Metaphor Matters in Education*, "South African Journal of Education" 2009, vol. 29(4), pp. 431–444; J. Littlemore, *Functions of Metaphor in Educational Contexts*, University of Birmingham, Birmingham 2020.

The task of creating outputs combining visual and linguistic elements exemplifies the visual-linguistic synergy of educational activity design.

As a potential development workshop participants might be requested e.g.

- to diagram conflict sources as interconnected nodes, using colour coding to denote their intensity and gravity.
- to think of narrative metaphors (e.g., ‘negotiation as a dance’) to articulate conflict solution strategies.

This approach aligns with embodied cognition theory, which posits that multisensory engagement deepens conceptual thinking. By juxtaposing Moore’s model with learner-generated metaphors, educators can help students challenge static frameworks; for instance, a metaphor of ‘*conflict as a rhizome*’ critiques the linearity of Moore’s categories, emphasizing interconnectedness.

## Educational value

The exercise *Conflict collage*, by application of image, language and metaphors as tools supporting discoveries, collaboration, creative and critical thinking and discussion, offers a number of educational benefits.

First of all, it supports learners’ autonomy as students through reconfiguring the Circle of Conflict into personalized models were able to select the examples that they found personally meaningful and relevant to their experience. This kind of approach triggers engagement by allowing students to filter out irrelevant content. At the same, it has to be noted that the selectivity may become a limitation when teaching specific content, excluding essential but less directly relatable concepts. For example, while learners might focus on interpersonal conflicts that resonate with their age group or social context, they may overlook other social or organizational issues.

Discussing posters created by students clearly helped disclose apparent reasons why conflicts occur, as well as unearthing root causes and authentic rationale or emotions of conflicting parties. Conflicts often seem to arise from surface-level issues that appear to be the immediate cause but are, in reality, manifestations of deeper underlying factors. The distinction between them is critical for effective conflict resolution. Reasons, such as miscommunication or personality clashes, often mask more profound triggers such as ineffective structures or differences in values and beliefs. For instance, communication issues may seem to be the primary issue in workplace disputes, but closer analysis often reveals unclear job descriptions or responsibilities for assigned tasks. The activity helped students understand similar examples and the underlying principles.

The exercise offers an element of surprise and inspiration as browsing through magazines or news portals helps students think about the known in a new way and

think creatively about old elements to produce the new, exposing learners to new perspectives and associations. By juxtaposing seemingly unrelated elements, students engage in combinatory creativity, which can lead to novel insights about conflict dynamics.<sup>9</sup> For example, browsing through media reports on political disputes alongside interpersonal conflicts can help learners identify parallels between power struggles at different scales. Although the task has as its objective the understanding of the main causes of conflict, in the collages there were indications of what helps prevent and solve them as well. This not only enhanced understanding but also encouraged innovative thinking about potential solutions, the topic covered in detail in latter parts of the course.

Finally, the activity develops critical thinking skills as, while working on their posters, students were bound to discover and discuss weaknesses of the model, e.g. an overlap between categories; as conflicts often involve multiple drivers (e.g., structural inequities exacerbating relational tensions).

## Conclusions

Moore's framework remains a cornerstone in conflict resolution literature, offering a systematic lens to categorize causes of disputes and allows for in-depth understanding of the nature of conflict. It was found to be a malleable material for an activity involving discovery of a theoretical framework, development of deep understanding of its meaning and opening the door for new interpretations as well as creative and critical thinking. By empowering learners to critique and reimagine the model, it is possible to cultivate the agility needed to navigate today's polycentric disputes. The analysis of workshop outputs demonstrated how such creativity bridges theory and practice, advancing conflict resolution beyond mechanistic frameworks.

Deep understanding offered by this type of activity becomes the trigger for authentic learning that happens in class rather than relying on memorizing a 'list' of conflict categories. Self-reflection questions help to increase self-awareness of students offering personal development space transcending the syllabus contents.

It must also be noted that education is a two-way street or rather a roundabout, as numerous new insights about the conflict were also discovered by the author of the article during the class and the analysis of the source material. As one of the conclusions the analysis offers promising material for future design of in-class activities that combine multiple elements for effective learning in various domains, such as 3D sculptures or interactive digital maps.

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<sup>9</sup> J.M.V. Sikubwabo, *The perceptions and challenges of a holistic aspect of mediation for effective conflict resolution*, World Mediation, 13.03.2024, <https://worldmediation.org/the-perception-s-and-challenges-of-a-holistic-aspect-of-mediation-for-effective-conflict-resolution/> [accessed: 1.08.2025].



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**Wokół konfliktu – obraz, język, metafora**

**Streszczenie:** Działania dydaktyczne, które jednocześnie promują autonomię oraz współpracę, sprzyjają pogłębionemu rozumieniu, dostarczają inspiracji i rozwijają twórcze myślenie, wydają się stanowić istotny element współczesnego krajobrazu edukacyjnego. Niniejszy artykuł analizuje zadanie warsztatowe zaprojektowane z wykorzystaniem teoretycznego modelu konfliktów, stosowanego w ogólnoakademickim kursie Konstrukttywne rozwiązywanie konfliktów. Ćwiczenie polega na łączeniu elementów wizualnych i językowych, ilustrujących zagadnienie zarówno w sposób dosłowny, jak i metaforyczny. Prace służą jako punkt wyjścia do dyskusji warsztatowej ukierunkowanej na pogłębione zrozumienie różnych aspektów omawianego tematu. Jako komponent merytoryczny aktywności wykorzystano koło konfliktu Moore’a. Zbadano, w jaki sposób elementy wizualne i językowe przekładają się na zaangażowanie studentów w kontekście roli obrazu, języka i metafor w edukacji rozwiązywania konfliktów, współpracy i krytycznego myślenia.

**Słowa kluczowe:** konflikt, metafora, obraz, kreatywność

**Nota autorska**

Izabela Walczak – absolwentka filologii angielskiej Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego. Wykładowca Akademii Humanistyczno-Ekonomicznej w Łodzi, trenerka freelancerka, lingwistka i praktyk zarządzania. Autorka artykułów z zakresu językoznawstwa, edukacji i zarządzania; uczestniczka i prelegentka krajowych i międzynarodowych konferencji naukowych.