



RESOLVING CONFLICT



FOR TODAY'S
LEADERS

WHAT IS CONFLICT?



Conflict is an inevitable result of social interaction in our everyday lives. It occurs because we engage in situations and circumstances with people who have different goals, values and backgrounds.

In every workplace conflict is present to varying degrees. We define conflict as a “strong disagreement between people, groups, etc., that often results in anger and arguments.” When management teams know how to resolve conflict effectively, they save time by turning potentially destructive situations into positive opportunities for growth and development.

Conflict can be split into two categories, disruptive conflict and constructive conflict. Disruptive conflict may result in unhealthy competition, defensive communication, personal attacks and a closed work environment, all of which hinder productivity. On the other hand, constructive conflict results in cooperation, collective focus, open work environments and supportive communication.

Like stress, conflict is inevitable, and it can either be positive or negative. It is not possible for two or more people to work together and always agree. Conflict can, at times, be necessary and beneficial, and help foster team growth. Constructive conflict can help make you more focused on the work at hand. Disruptive conflict can make you resistant and defensive.

One way to reduce discomfort with conflict or disagreement is to identify and use common steps to manage conflict in a positive way. Effectively dealing with conflict is one of the most difficult aspects of being in a leadership position. When faced with conflict, we often react without realizing that we have constructive, healthy choices available to us. We unconsciously start pushing back.

Well-managed conflict can spark creativity and challenge employees to think about what they are doing and how they might improve methods and procedures. To successfully manage conflict, one needs to understand the five different conflict management styles.

FIVE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES

COLLABORATION

Collaboration is sometimes called cooperative problem solving. When collaborating, one has a high concern for self and a high concern for others. A collaborative conflict management style enables people to work together so everyone wins. It involves redefining the problem at hand, in order to find a solution that will meet each individual's interests.

COMPETITION

Competition involves a high concern for self and a low concern for others. Choosing a competitive conflict management style means a person is putting his or her own interests before anyone else's. This produces a "Win-Lose" situation and is a disruptive style of conflict management. Individuals can sometimes be so committed to getting what they want, they end up ruining friendships and work relationships in the process.

COMPROMISE

A compromise involves a medium concern for self and a medium concern for others. Individuals choose this style of conflict management when it is important to satisfy some of their interests, but not all of them. They are likely to "split the difference," or agree, "Something is better than nothing." With a compromise, everyone wins something but everyone loses something as well.

AVOIDANCE

Individuals who choose avoidance do not get involved in conflict. They have a low concern for self and a low concern for others. This is the most frequently used style for dealing with conflict, which says, "You decide and leave me out of it." It's often used as a conflict management style until the problem can't be ignored any longer.

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation is when one has a low concern for self and a high concern for others. People who choose accommodation as a conflict management style put their interests last and let others have what they want. These individuals believe that a good relationship is the most important aspect, and that a good relationship requires accommodation.

Each conflict management style has its own strengths and weaknesses. Which type of conflict management style do you use?



SUCCESSFUL CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflict can be instigated by any number of triggers. Regardless of how the friction starts, it's hazardous to leave conflict unaddressed. Ignoring conflict can result in permanently destroyed relationships and unhealthy employee interaction. We should all strive to create a workplace that involves effective conflict resolution, not one that harbors negative attitudes and hinders communication. In order to effectively resolve conflict, leaders must reinforce positive communication and employees must be given the tools and skills to communicate effectively.

Creating a workplace of proactive conflict resolution means:

1. Management promotes and encourages conflict to be addressed constructively and immediately.
2. Employees are given the skills to communicate effectively.
3. Employees experiencing conflict have a clear way to address the situation in a safe environment—before it escalates.

It's important to remember that conflict is normal and can be a healthy part of our daily lives.

- Misunderstandings arise from miscommunication.
- Conflicts typically occur when one person's desires or needs interfere with co-workers desires or needs.
- Effective conflict resolution skills can make the difference between positive and negative outcomes.

MANAGING ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT

Conflict is a potentially productive part of social interaction at home and at work. High performance organizations of the 21st century emphasize the importance of:

- Minimizing the dollar cost of conflict in the organization.
- Recognizing and managing conflicts, including communication problems and personality clashes.
- Engaging in constructive conflict including competition.
- Providing tools to help employees manage their conflicts.

The challenge for organizations is to distinguish normal and healthy differences from destructive conflict, and to learn how to deal effectively with problem situations before they get out of hand. The two types of conflict, disruptive and constructive, have the potential to have a significant effect on any organization. Disruptive conflict frustrates employees, causing them to focus on the conflict rather than the company's goals. It creates resentment and inappropriate behavior when the conflict is left unresolved, and it interferes with open communication needed for consensus decision making. On the other hand, constructive conflict lets employees know they can speak their minds. It helps clear the air and allows for all sides of the issue to be heard.



In order to resolve organizational conflict, one must identify the underlying causes. Several causes of workplace conflict are assumptions, change, conflicting goals, differing priorities, weak consensus and poor communication. Once the causes are identified, management has a clear idea of how to proceed. Managers, supervisors and staff members must take ownership of conflict management. There are many reasons for managing organizational conflict, most importantly that the impact conflict has on an organization's bottom line can be devastating. Wasted time, reduced decision quality, loss of valuable employees, sabotage and health costs are all manifestations of unresolved, disruptive conflict.



Creating an environment in which conflict is reduced requires the involvement of leadership and employees in organizational change and decisions. Employees who are invested in the organization and given an opportunity to speak are less likely to create conflict. It also improves communication within the workplace and reduces role ambiguity. Supervisors, managers and all employees can help create an environment where conflict is less likely to occur. This in turn improves productivity and has an impact on company success.

The training in our Resolving Conflict program introduces participants to essential knowledge of the elements of conflict and conflict management styles. This training is designed to motivate participants to set goals and define actions for developing and enhancing their current conflict management abilities.

Participants will acquire the knowledge and skills to meet specific learning objectives including:

- Understanding the elements of conflict
- Recognizing conflict management styles
- The ability to engage in constructive conflict including competition
- Enhancing conflict management skills
- Identifying difficult people
- Defining causes of organizational conflict
- Taking ownership of conflict management
- Enhancing organizational conflict management skills

As we have learned, conflict is unavoidable. It's present in every workplace, and it's the responsibility of management to assess conflict situations and handle each one in a timely manner. Individuals who successfully resolve conflict create a productive and roactive work environment, which allows for open communication and reduces overall business costs.



“INSTEAD OF SUPPRESSING CONFLICTS, SPECIFIC CHANNELS COULD BE CREATED TO MAKE THIS CONFLICT EXPLICIT, AND SPECIFIC METHODS COULD BE SET UP BY WHICH THE CONFLICT IS RESOLVED.”

- ALBERT LOW

ABOUT HIGH PERFORMANCE LEADERSHIP

The High Performance Leadership program enables companies to develop and implement transformational leadership and succession-planning initiatives through seminars, retreats, assessments, and one-on-one executive coaching. The HPL program offers the highest level of training for existing and emerging leaders through the use of proven best practices in leadership.

Through the program, organizations are able to enlist expert guidance and training from a select group of faculty members who are preeminent leaders in their fields. Content in the HPL program's principles and practices are based upon observation and research from the foremost authorities in the field of leadership and motivate people to move from high potential to high performance.

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- One-day seminars that lay the foundation for high performance leadership
- Two-to-three day retreats that allow for further leadership development
- A one-year, comprehensive development program that introduces foundational skills
- Custom, in-house training

PEACE IS NOT THE ABSENCE OF CONFLICT BUT THE PRESENCE OF CREATIVE
ALTERNATIVES FOR RESPONDING TO CONFLICT -- ALTERNATIVES TO PASSIVE OR
AGGRESSIVE RESPONSES, ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE.

— DOROTHY THOMPSON



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