Leadership/Management Development Program

Understanding and Managing Conflict

An Innovative Approach for Resolving Disagreement and Discord

Russell consulting, inc.

STOUT UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
Jeffrey L. Russell

Jeff Russell, co-director of Russell Consulting, Inc. (RCI) with his wife Linda, specializes in helping leaders build productive, supportive, and motivating work environments. RCI helps companies develop their leadership and strengthen team performance to achieve their great performance goals and outcomes. By guiding the exploration of key values held in common by organizational members and developing strategies and actions to express these values-in-action, RCI helps organizations achieve their strategic vision.

Through processes that include “visioning” retreats, Future Search conferences, process redesigns, improving decision making processes, implementing quality improvement strategies, and providing a variety of skill-building seminars, RCI enhances long-term organizational effectiveness and performance.

Consulting Expertise

Jeff consults with public and private organizations in the areas of:

- balanced scorecards/dashboards
- customer and employee focus groups
- developing leadership
- employee job engagement surveys
- employee retention programs
- Future Search conferences
- leading and implementing change
- organizational design
- self-managed teams
- systems thinking applications for business
- team assessment and intervention
- total quality management
- training needs assessment
- visioning and strategic planning

Training Expertise

Jeff conducts an array of leadership and team development seminars on such topics as:

- difficult conversations
- decision making and problem solving
- employee-centered performance reviews
- leadership and strategic thinking/planning
- leading change
- managing conflict and win/win negotiations
- performance management and coaching skills
- team building fundamentals
- team leadership and facilitation skills
- total quality tools and techniques
- train the trainer
- world-class customer service

Professional Background

Jeff serves as an adjunct faculty member at UW-Madison, UW-Milwaukee, and UW-Green Bay. He is also on the teaching faculty of the UW-Madison, UW-Milwaukee and UW-Green Bay Small Business Development Centers.

Jeff has a bachelor’s in Humanism and Cultural Change and a Masters of Science degree in Industrial Relations from UW-Madison.

Before forming RCI, Jeff served as human resource coordinator for the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA). At DOA, Jeff developed and coordinated their employee assistance, leadership and employee development, and equal employment opportunity/affirmative action programs.

Conference Presenter and Author

Jeff is a sought-after speaker at state, national and international conferences. Recent presentations include:

- ASTD International Conferences — 2001 through 2011
- 2005 Minnesota Quality Conference
- Minnesota Project Management Institute, PDD 2007, 2008, and 2009
- Wisconsin SHRM Annual Conference, 2004 through 2007, 2010
- American Society for Public Administration Annual Conference, 2005
- Leading Change, Shanghai, China, 2005

Jeff and his wife Linda have co-authored a number of management books including Leading Change Training, Strategic Planning Training, Change Basics, Strategic Planning 101, and Ultimate Performance Management (ASTD Press, 2009).

Helping You Create and Sustain a GREAT Organization

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Understanding and Managing Conflict

Conflict is a *natural* and inevitable result of people interacting with each other. It can, in fact, play a positive role in surfacing issues that must be addressed and in strengthening relationships within a team. This interactive session on managing conflict is designed to help you better understand the meaning, nature, and root causes of conflict and its major effects on organizations and individuals. You will receive feedback on your personal style of handling conflict, gain a clearer understanding of the steps for analyzing and resolving conflict, and learn effective strategies for achieving WIN/WIN solutions.

**Desired Learning Outcomes**

As a result of participating in this seminar you will be able to:

1. Describe both the positive and negative effects and consequences of conflict.
2. Identify common origins of conflict and the actions that individuals and organizations can take to address these underlying causes.
3. View conflict as a *cycle* or process and, based upon that cycle, identify how to effective manage conflict.
4. Describe the differences between *resolving* and *managing* conflict — and when each is most appropriate to use when conflict arises.
5. Develop a personal action plan for conflict management/resolution based upon your own personal conflict response style.

**Your Personal Learning Objective**

What do hope to learn from this seminar? What do you hope to achieve by the end of the workshop?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

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Personal Reflections about Conflict

Take a few moments to jot down your thoughts about what conflict means to you and how you currently respond and historically have responded to conflict.

1. To me, conflict means . . .

2. When I was growing up, I usually dealt with conflict by . . .

3. When I encounter conflict today, my first response is to . . .

4. I am more inclined to confront people in conflict situations when . . .

5. I am more able to resolve the conflicts that I’m in when . . .
Conflict Defined . . .

Conflict . . .

• Is a situation in which the concerns of at least two people or groups appear to be ________________.

• Begins when one party ________________ that another party has frustrated — or is likely to frustrate — the party’s needs, interests, or concerns.

• Arises from perceived ________________ in interests, desires, values, beliefs, expectations, etc.

• Arises from an abundance of need and a perceived ________________ of a desired resource (such as time, space, positions, computers, parking spaces, access, etc.).

Gaining a New Perspective on Conflict . . .

From . . . To . . .

➢ Conflict is destructive . . . ➢ Conflict is ________________

➢ Conflict is avoidable . . . ➢ Conflict is ________________

➢ Conflict is driven by issues . . . ➢ Conflict is driven by ________________

➢ Conflict is unmanageable and ungovernable . . . ➢ Conflict is ________________
The Role of Conflict in Organizations

Conflict can be USEFUL or PRODUCTIVE when . . .

Conflict is DYSFUNCTIONAL or UNPRODUCTIVE when . . .
The Origins of Conflict

**Interpersonal Origins** [What do people do that can lead to conflict?]

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**Organizational Origins** [What do organizations do that can lead to conflict?]

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Exploring the Cycle of Conflict

- **Underlying Issue** — The issue that is the origin of and may continue to drive the disagreement or conflict. The underlying issue can be a permanent and lasting (fundamental) or a short-term (ephemeral) issue.

- **Triggering Event** — The incident or event that allows the disagreement to surface. The triggering event is the catalyst that leads to the overt expression of the disagreement/conflict.

- **Overt Expression** — The overt expression of the disagreement is what we normally can see/observe in the actions of and interactions between others. The overt expression may be through words or actions.

- **Consequences or Aftermath** — The consequences or aftermath are the short- or long-term effects of the disagreement. The aftermath may include lingering feelings of anger or resentment, relief, fear, or greater awareness — and can include retaliation or reparations, rubbing salt in the wounds or healing.
Managing Conflict ➔ Control or Resolve?

Understanding and viewing conflict as a cycle grants you the opportunity to identify specific “leverage points” (places where you can significantly influence the process or outcome) for either controlling or resolving conflict.

The Best Way to Control Conflict Is to . . .

Based upon the “conflict as a cycle” model, identify possible leverage points to control (vs. resolve) the conflict:

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

The Best Way to Resolve Conflict Is to . . .

Based upon the “conflict as a cycle” model, identify possible leverage points to actually resolve (vs. just control) the conflict:

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
Approaches for Controlling or Resolving Conflict

Controlling Conflict Involves . . .

- **Preventing Triggering Event** — Try to prevent the triggering event from occurring.
- **Preventing the Overt Expression of Conflict Behaviors** — Provide negative consequences for expressing conflict behaviors. Parties to the conflict should perceive that expressing conflict (a) poses a significant problem or embarrassment for them, (b) increases the likelihood that everyone will lose, or (c) has the potential of opening up an even larger can of worms.
- **Managing the Aftermath** — Strive to “dampen” or smooth over the conflict by encouraging members to tone down their reactions, to offer apologies, to put the issue behind them.

Resolving Conflict Involves . . .

- **Using Conflict Controlling Skills** — Use the conflict skills listed under controlling (above), in combination with the resolution skills, to reduce the volatility of the conflict while you’re guiding the parties in conflict towards a resolution.
- **Creating an Open Environment** — Strive to create an environment where people can constructively express their ideas and concerns without needing to defend these feelings.
- **Exploring the Underlying Issues** — Guide the parties in discussing their underlying interests or concerns in relation to the conflict. Discover what is important to each person involved in the conflict and why it is important to him or her.
- **Encouraging Active Listening** — Set the expectation that each party will actively listen to one another before expressing his or her own ideas. Model active listening skills (e.g., asking questions and paraphrasing).
- **Calming the Situation** — Strive to decrease defensiveness by those involved. Look for cause — resist blaming any individual for the conflict. Use a relaxed, understanding, and confident tone as you seek to understand the situation.
- **Mediating** — Encourage the parties to resolve the conflict on their own, but be available to mediate the dispute if the problem continues.
The Foundations for Resolving Conflict

For a successful win/win resolution of a conflict, each party to the conflict must:

1. **Create an Open and _________________ Environment** — Each party strives to create an environment where each can constructively express his or her ideas and concerns without needing to defend them.

2. **Have Roughly Equivalent _________________** — Each party enters the conflict resolution attempt with the perception that they each have the capacity to equally influence the eventual outcome.

3. **Be able to Identify _________________** — Each party must know what he or she needs/wants from the situation. Negotiating a win/win resolution hinges upon both parties clearly knowing and being able to identify what they want.

4. **Acknowledge _________________ with the Other Party** — Acknowledging that, over the long term, each party needs the other to enable them to achieve their individual goals heightens the value of coming to a resolution.

5. **Explore _________________ Interests** — The disagreeing parties inquire into each other’s underlying interests or concerns — the forces and factors that underlie what they each need/want to achieve in the situation. The goal is for each person to discover what is most important to him/her and the other person and why it is important to each.

6. **Demonstrate _________________ for the Other Side** — A resolution of the conflict is often only possible when each side demonstrates understanding, respect, and empathy for the other’s perspective.

7. **Actively _________________** — Both parties to the conflict actively listen to one another before expressing his or her own ideas.

8. **Remain _________________** — When disagreement surfaces, the parties remain calm and work hard to decrease defensiveness. They look for the causes of the underlying tension/discord and resist blaming. They use a relaxed, understanding, and confident tone as they seek to understand the situation.

9. **Recognize the Nature of _________________** — Disagreement is a natural part of every relationship. Each party recognizes that some level of disagreement is inevitable — but also recognizes the consequences of not achieving agreement and commits to working through the conflict.

10. **Accept _________________ for His/Her Contribution to the Problem and the Solution** — A genuine resolution of the conflict is reached when each party to the agreement takes responsibility for his/her contribution to the discord and to his/her contribution to the solution.
When You’re in a Disagreement . . .

Consider the following as a step-by-step guide for reaching a win-win resolution when you’re involved in a conflict situation . . .

1. **Focus on the __________________, Not the Person** — View the disagreement as a third party and have both of you focus your attention on resolving the problem caused by this “uninvited” guest.

2. **____________________ the Problem** — What precisely is the problem and how does it affect you, your team, your department, your customers and stakeholders? Separate facts from assumptions (what is known from what is assumed). What are the short- and long-term effects of this conflict? How important is it that it be resolved?

3. **Know Your Own __________________ interests.** What are the deeper interests that underlie your “position?” What is important to you and why?

4. **Explore the Other Person’s __________________ Interests—and Share Your Own** — Discover the deeper issue behind the disagreement. Look for cause not blame.
   - Discover what the other party’s underlying interests are. LISTEN. What is the underlying need that the other party has that must be addressed by the eventual solution that you both agree to?
   - Share what your underlying interests are. COMMUNICATE. What is the underlying need that you have that must be addressed by the solution you both agree to?

5. **________________________ Solutions** — Mutually brainstorm possible solutions to the disagreement that directly address the underlying interests/needs of each party. Be aware that such solutions may involve trade-offs, compromises, longer-term solutions, etc. and that neither party may get their individual interests/needs fully met.

6. **Select the ______________ Solution** — Review all possible solutions and settle upon the solution that is the best at satisfying the needs of both parties.

7. **Develop a ______________ ______________ for Action** — Identify the actions each party will take toward implementing the desired win-win solution.

8. **________________________ and ____________________________ on Commitments Made.**

[adapted from *Getting to Yes*, by Fisher and Ury and *Getting Past No* by Ury]

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*Understanding and Managing Conflict*

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Conflict Response Style

[Adapted from the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument]

1. **Avoider** (uncooperative and unassertive): You neglect your concerns as well as those of the other person by not raising or addressing the conflict issue.

2. **Friendly Helper** (cooperative and unassertive): You seek to satisfy the other person's concerns at your own expense.

3. **Tough Battler** (uncooperative and assertive): The opposite of accommodating—you do whatever you can to win your own position.

4. **Problem Solver** (cooperative and assertive): The opposite of avoiding. You work with the other person to find a solution that **fully** satisfies your own concerns and those of the other.

5. **Compromiser** (intermediate cooperativeness and assertiveness): You seek a middle-ground position that **partially** satisfies both parties.
A Personal Strategy in Response to Conflict

When conflict surfaces, there are several steps that every person should take in order to respond constructively and effectively:

1. Decide whether or not you really want to work through the conflict – and if the other person is willing to work with you.

2. Decide what you want out of the situation.

3. Acknowledge your feelings – and the feelings of the other party.

4. Approach this situation with compassion and an open mind. Feel a genuine interest in and empathy for the other person’s perspective. Identify and set aside your assumptions and judgments. Be open to hearing the other party’s perspective.

5. Find something in common with the other party. Find areas of common ground and agreement before you tackle areas of disagreement.

6. Identify the real, underlying, issues. For a lasting solution to the problem, spend your energy on getting at the root of the issue and focus on the things that really matter and that will contribute to an enduring solution.

7. Depersonalize the conflict. Focus on the issue, not the person. Don’t take it personally. It’s not about you!

8. Be direct. Deal with the conflict directly rather than hoping that the person gets the hint, the problem goes away, they’ll figure it out, etc. (it won’t and they won’t!).

9. Let go. Recognize the limits of what you can do to resolve the problem. Accept the fact that you can’t control the actions of the other party. Keep choosing the positive and affirming path — and hope that the other person does too.

Significantly adapted from Anger and Conflict in the Workplace, by Lynne McClure
Exploring Pathways to an Agreement
(When the Other Person Doesn’t Want to Agree)

1. **Explore Underlying _____________** — Define your interests. What needs or interests do you want/need to have satisfied? Based on what you know about the other person, imagine what their interests are. What assumptions can you make about the likely needs or interests that he or she has that they want to satisfy?

2. **Brainstorm _________________** — By yourself, explore options for mutual gain. . creative solutions that satisfy the underlying interests for both you and the other person. Develop a range of options (not just one) and suspend your own critical judgment to enable a fair review of the options and how well each satisfies both sets of interests.

3. **Establish ________________ for Evaluating Options** — Develop fair standards that both you and he or she could use to objectively evaluate the "goodness" of each option in meeting mutual needs.

4. **Identify Your _________________** — The goal of conflict resolution is not always to achieve agreement. An agreement is only a means to an end and that end is to satisfy your interests with a minimal disruption to the interests of others. The purpose of conflict resolution is to explore whether you can satisfy your interests better through an agreement than you could by pursuing your BATNA or **Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement**.

   The BATNA is your “walk-away” alternative; the one that you find acceptable if your negotiations with the other person fall through. If you have a good BATNA, you have leverage in your negotiations (the situation is not hopeless). If the BATNA is good enough, you may decide that you don’t need to negotiate.

5. **Develop Possible _________________** — A solution is an option you are prepared to agree to. It should be a solid solution that satisfies your interests, tries to satisfy the interests of the other person (as you understand them), is based on fair standards, and is better than the BATNA for either side. You should strive to have three possible solutions: ideal, comfortable with, and live with.

6. _________________ — Test out your ideas with a coworker in advance of your interaction with the other person.

Developing a Win/Win Strategy
(When the Other Person Doesn’t Want to Agree)

1. **Step One – Don’t React, Go to the Balcony**: Keep your emotions and reactions out of it. Buy time to think and get a fresh perspective on the problem/conflict by going to the balcony for a different view.

2. **Step Two – Don’t Argue, Step to the Other Person’s Side**: Now deal with the emotions/reactions of the other person. Instead of getting drawn into the problem/conflict, try to understand the other person’s perspective. Stepping to their side is a way of disarming them (they don’t expect you to listen). By stepping to their side, you listen to them, acknowledge and validate their perspective, agree with them (wherever you can), and show them respect.

3. **Step Three – Don’t Reject, Reframe**: When the other person continues to assert his or her “position” strongly, consider this an opportunity to understand the individual’s perspective better. Reframe the issue by asking, “Could you tell me more about why you want this? And why it’s important to you?”

4. **Step Four – Don’t Push, Build Them a Golden Bridge**: With a better understanding of the other person’s interests, and despite his or her reluctance to see or understand your interests, seek to build a golden bridge between both of your interests. By building a golden bridge to a mutually satisfactory solution, you help the other person save face and make the outcome look like a victory to them.

5. **Step Five – Don’t Escalate, Educate**: The other person may still not want to cooperate and seeks to escalate the conflict. Monitor your own reactions and use your power to educate not escalate. Show the person that they cannot win without cooperating with you. Get the other side to see the logical consequences of not coming to an agreement with you.

Conflict Resources


