Understanding and Managing Conflict

An Innovative Approach for Resolving Disagreement and Discord

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Learning Objectives . . .

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 effectively 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.

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Conflict . . .

- Situation where the concerns of at least two parties appear to be incompatible.
- Begins when one parties perceives that another party has frustrated or is likely to frustrate a need, interest, or concern.
- Arises from perceived differences in interests, desired, values, etc.
- Arises from abundance of need and a perceived scarcity of a resource.

A New Perspective . . .

Conflict is destructive —— Conflict is constructive
Conflict is avoidable —— Conflict is inevitable
Conflict is driven by issues —— Conflict is driven by passion/emotion
Conflict is unmanageable and ungovernable —— Conflict is manageable

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Reflections on Conflict . . .

On Your Own . . .

- Take a few minutes to reflect on how you respond to conflict. Jot down a few thoughts in response to the questions . . .
- As a small group . . .
  - As a small group, reflect upon and discuss your answers to these questions . . .

When is conflict functional or constructive?

When is it dysfunctional or destructive?

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Conflict is **FUNCTIONAL When:**

- New ideas and approaches emerge.
- A solution evolves or is discovered.
- Relationships are strengthened.
- Pent-up resentments/emotions are released.
- “Hidden” agendas and issues are uncovered.
- Better communication and understanding result.

Conflicts are dysfunctional when:

- Energy is diverted from important work.
- Barriers to understanding, cooperation, and action are created.
- Perceived differences in values/beliefs are deepened.
- Unproductive behaviors are produced.
- Healthy discussions of ideas/issues are restricted.
- Fear of expressing differing ideas and viewpoints.
- Issues and people are polarized.

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Before seeking revenge, first dig two graves.

— Chinese proverb

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Conflict as a Cycle . . .

The Origins of Conflict . . .

- **Interpersonal Origins** . . .
  - Faulty assumptions and inferences.
  - Lasting grudges/history together.
  - Poor communication and misunderstanding.
  - Lack of respect/appreciation for differences in personality, beliefs, etc.

- **Organizational Origins** . . .
  - Methods for allocating resources.
  - Organizational design/structure.
  - Reward systems.
  - Poorly defined roles, responsibilities, and expectations.
  - Lack of accountability/consequences.

Controlling or Resolving Conflict

- **The best way to control conflict is . . .**
- **The best way to resolve conflict . . .**
Controlling Conflict . . .

- Prevent the triggering event.
- Prevent or control the overt expression of conflict behaviors (to prevent people doing or saying things that will make matters worse)
- Manage the aftermath.
- ?

The Foundations for Finding Win/Win

7. Actively listen to the other party.
8. Remain calm.
9. Recognize the nature of disagreements — and be mindful of the consequences of not achieving an agreement.
10. Accept responsibility for his/her contribution to the problem . . . and its solution.

Resolving Conflict . . .

- Use controlling skills
- Create an open environment
- Explore underlying issues
- Encourage active listening
- Calm the situation
- Mediate
- ?

Developing Your Plan- Part 1

Think of a specific conflict situation you are currently experiencing.
- Complete subparts (a) through (f) of your Personal Plan

The Foundations for Resolving Conflict

1. Create and open and trusting environment.
2. Have roughly equivalent power/authority.
3. Identify personal objectives — Each party needs to know what it wants and needs from a resolution of the conflict.
4. Acknowledge interdependence with the “other” side of the negotiation.
5. Explore underlying interests.
6. Demonstrate empathy for the other side.

When We Disagree . . .

1. Focus on the problem, not the person.
2. Describe the problem.
3. Know your own underlying interests.
4. Explore the Other Person’s underlying interests.
5. Brainstorm solutions.
6. Select the best solution.
7. Develop a mutual commitment for action.
8. Follow-up and follow-through on commitments.
Conflict Styles . . .

- Tough Battler (Win/Lose)
- Problem Solver (Win/Win)
- Compromiser
- Avoider
- Friendly Helper
- Unassertive
- Assertive

Degree of Assertiveness

Degree of Cooperativeness

- Uncooperative
- Cooperative

When is each style appropriate? Inappropriate?
- Lose/Lose
- Win/Lose
- Lose/Win
- Win/Win

Win/Lose

Lose/Lose

Lose/Win

Win/Win

Reflecting On Your Style . . .

Turn to a neighbor . . .
- What surprised you about your conflict style?
- What didn’t surprise you?
- What is one “take-away” from this discussion that might enable you to approach conflict differently in the future?

Developing Your Plan

- Complete Part 2, subparts A through D
- Be prepared to discuss with your partner . . .

Developing a Personal Strategy

1. Decide whether you really want to work through the conflict.
2. Decide what you want out of the situation.
3. Acknowledge your feelings.
4. Find something in common with the other party.
5. Identify the real, underlying, issues.
6. Depersonalize the conflict.
7. Be direct.
8. Let go.

Pathways to an Agreement

1. Explore underlying interests.
2. Brainstorm options.
3. Establish standards for evaluating options to meet mutual needs.
4. Identify your BATNA.
5. Develop possible solutions.
6. Rehearse.

When the Other Party won’t Agree

- Step One: Don’t React, Go to the Balcony.
- Step Two: Don’t Argue, Step to the Other Person’s Side
- Step Three: Don’t Reject, Reframe
- Step Four: Don’t Push, Build Them a Golden Bridge
- Step Five: Don’t Escalate, Educate

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Developing Your Plan

Complete Part 3 of your Personal Plan . . .

Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves.

— Carl Jung
Swiss psychiatrist
b. 1875, d. 1961

Sometimes I lie awake at night, and I ask, “Where have I gone wrong?” Then a voice says to me . . .

. . . “This is going to take more than one night!”
— Charles M. Schulz
Charlie Brown in “Peanuts”
American cartoonist
b. 1922, d. 2000

Thanks!

• Best of luck in understanding and managing your conflicts!