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Resolving Conflict



Managers in large organizations spend 20% of their time dealing with conflict..

Organization Development & Training offers workshops to help you and your work groups.

Conflict is a part of life. We can't escape it, so we need to learn how to manage conflict so that it does not manage us. Properly handled, conflict acknowledges different view points which promotes creativity, leads to deeper, more lasting solutions to problems, and results in learning for all involved.

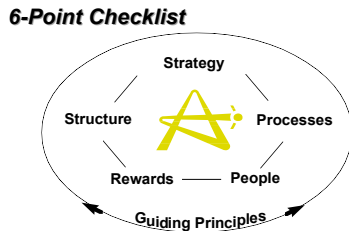
Definition of Conflict

Conflict is any situation in which the NEEDS of two or more people or parts of an organization appear to be incompatible.

Organizational Conflict

Conflict can originate at two levels: organizational and interpersonal. Often, we focus on conflict as a problem between people when in reality, their behaviour is symptomatic of a problem within the organizational system.

The six point check list provides a convenient framework for diagnosing sources of organizational conflict.



Strategy - Conflict may result from: unclear work priorities, conflicting goals and roles, work that does not contribute to goals, overlapping responsibilities, etc.

Processes & Technology - Conflict may result from: overlapping work processes, inadequate equipment and tools, insufficient information, erratic feedback from customers, etc.

People - not having the right people where and when you need them. insufficient training, poor recruiting and hiring practices, lack of support and communication can all result in conflict.

Rewards - the failure to recognize work well done, lack of consequences for poor behaviour, no celebration of successes, inequitable distribution of perks, negative reinforcement, etc can lead to conflict.

Structure - responsibility and resources unevenly distributed, unclear authority, difficult interfaces, duplication of effort, project contributors not integrated, etc.

Guiding Principles - expected values and behaviours for work not made clear or modeled, lack of clear ground-rules...

Interpersonal Conflict

A situation in which the needs of two or more people appear to be incompatible. There are two main types of interpersonal conflict:

Remote subjects - centers on objects, event and persons that are usually, but not always external to the persons involved in the conflict.
Examples: hostility due to politics,

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*religion or beliefs. Arguments over a
decision, news events, policies
Disputes over money, the car, the kids*

Relationships - between the individuals. *Examples: arguments over who is in charge, who has the authority to set rules of behaviour.*

Conflict Styles

In a conflict situation we can describe our behaviour, or how we deal with conflict along two dimensions:

Assertiveness - the degree to which we attempt to satisfy our own needs

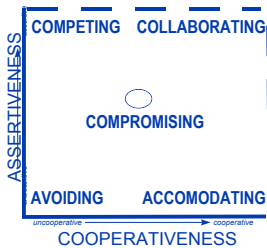
Cooperativeness - the degree to which we attempt to satisfy the other person's needs.

Conflict Styles Model

These two dimensions of behaviour can help us define the five specific methods people use to deal with conflict



Conflict Styles Model



avoiding - our needs are not met, others' needs not met

competing - our needs met, others' needs not met

compromising - our needs and others' needs partially met

accommodating - our needs not met, others' needs met

collaborating - both our needs and others' needs met.

Although all styles have their advantages, collaboration has the greatest potential for bridging interpersonal conflict situations.

6-Step Conflict Resolution Process

Step 1 - Define the Problem

Each person/party defines their perception of the problem individually.

Step 2 - Define Individual Solutions

Each party (individually defines what their solution would look like.

Step 3 - Define Interests, Needs, Fears Addressed by the Solution

Each individual party defines their interests, needs and fears that are met by their solution.

Step 4 - Define Mutual Needs and Interest

The parties work together to define personal needs, business needs and customer requirements they have in common.

Step 5 - Define Solutions that Meet all Agreed Needs and Interests

The parties complete this step together. Based on their common needs, they brainstorm potential solutions, both old and new.

Step 6 - Finalize Solutions and Formulate an Action Plan

The parties collectively come up with an action plan to actualize the agreed-upon solution.

It is recommended that this process be facilitated. Although it can be time-consuming, it leads to creative and mutually satisfying solutions.

Conflict is a natural occurrence in organizations, often determined more by the design of the organization than the people. Conflict presents an opportunity to improve both the organizational system and the relationship between the people in the system.

Questions: To diagnose sources of organizational conflict

Strategy:

Is the role of our work group clear?
Do we know what we're up against (threats, weaknesses)?
Do we know what we have going for us (strengths, opportunities)?
Do we know where we're headed (strategic goals)?
Do we have an overall plan for achieving the goals?

Guiding Principles:

Are we clear about how we approach the business and how we want to work together?

Processes & Technology:

Are our major areas of work clear?
Do our work processes support our purpose?
Do we get the information we need?

People:

Do we have the right skills, right place, right numbers?

Rewards:

What motivates are people?
What are we satisfied/dissatisfied with?

Structure:

Do roles, authority levels and reporting relationships fit our strategy and roster of skills?

For more information, contact Organization Development and Training at your site.

OBJECTIVES



- discuss conflict and its causes
- apply AECL's 6-Point Checklist to identification of sources of organizational conflict
- assess your predominant conflict style
- discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the five conflict styles
- identify the key skills involved in conflict resolution
- study a six-step collaborative approach to conflict resolution

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AGENDA



- Introduction
- Definition of Conflict
- Beliefs/Values about Conflict
- Causes of Conflict -
Organizational and Personal
- Conflict Styles
- Conflict Resolution Model

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UNIT 6: RESOLVING CONFLICT

Introduction

Conflict is a part of life. We can't escape it, so we need to learn how to manage conflict so that it does not manage us.

As a leader, you likely spend a significant portion of your time dealing with conflict. It can have a positive influence on your group, or it can be destructive. Properly handled, conflict acknowledges different viewpoints which promotes creativity and leads to deeper, more lasting solutions to problems.

This unit provides an overview of conflict and techniques for dealing with it. Most of us naturally assume that conflict originates with individuals. This unit emphasizes that the sources of conflict are often lodged in the organization, not in the individual. Learning to identify where the conflict is coming from can save a lot of wasted effort and can increase your group's capability to use conflict to improve its effectiveness.

Definition

Conflict is any situation in which the **NEEDS** of two or more people, or parts, of an organization appear to be incompatible.

Background

Many of us dread conflict situations. We may have had unpleasant experiences with conflict in the past and we do not want to repeat the incidents. We may also have been conditioned to avoid conflict because of what we have been told over the years:

- conflict is bad and people who engage in it are bad
- if people disagree, that means they do not like each other
- in a conflict situation someone has to win and someone has to lose
- conflict leads to violence
- talking about issues causing the conflict will only make it worse
- admitting that there is a conflict means admitting that I am wrong, or that I need help
- I cannot disagree with people more senior to me

When you think about it, there are a lot of unwritten rules in our society that lead us to avoid conflict. The reality is that conflict is a very natural part of organizational life. Understanding the sources of conflict can help us deal with it openly and constructively.

**Sources
of Conflict**

Conflict can originate at two levels: organizational, and interpersonal. We will start with organizational sources of conflict.

Organizational Conflict

To understand what causes conflict at the organizational level, it is helpful to recall our discussion of organizations as systems, in “The Changing Workplace”.

Systems

A system is a network of interdependent parts that operates as a whole in order to achieve an intended purpose.

When a system is in balance, each part is contributing its share to the performance of the overall system, and the whole is operating in harmony. In the life of a system, harmony is more an ideal than a regular condition.

There are five characteristics at play in all systems that make achieving balance a continuous effort, and that make conflict a natural part of the system’s ongoing evolution.

1. Sub-systems. All systems are part of a larger system.
Example: a company is part of the larger national economy
2. Dynamics. Systems are not static. They are constantly changing, adapting to the larger systems around them.
Example: A government’s decision to reduce national debt causes a reduction in funding levels to crown organizations, which then respond by adjusting their program structure and reviewing support costs.
3. Interdependence. Each part of a system has a unique purpose. The parts depend on each other in achieving their purpose. Changes to one of the parts eventually impact all of the parts.
Example: All work teams in an organization rely on the Information Technology (IT) group to maintain the company’s computer network. IT relies on accurate, timely information from its users in order to forecast network requirements, and it relies on a flow of resources to develop and maintain the network. A change in IT’s funding level can impact all other parts of the organization.

4. Compensation. Failure in one part of the system necessitates compensating behavior in one or more other parts of the system so that the overall system continues to perform.
Example: When the computer network is down, people compensate with manual work methods.

5. Discomfort. When there is failure in one part of an organization, the compensating behavior distracts the other parts from achieving their purpose, a form of organizational discomfort that eventually gets displayed in poor performance results. The extra personal effort required to compensate for system deficiencies can also cause personal discomfort.
Example: If the computer network fails repeatedly, work groups compensate with less effective/efficient work methods. Deadlines are missed, quality drops, the organization can handle less work and revenue declines. People compensate with longer hours which interferes with their need for efficient work processes and sufficient time off to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

**Acknowledging
Discomfort...Pain**

Discomfort, or pain, is a system's natural way of communicating that something is wrong. Pain indicates **conflict** between the **NEEDS** of different parts of the organization. It is a symptom that can point the way to improvements in the system. Pain is as important to continuous system improvement as positive feedback, yet most of us are conditioned to ignore it. We don't like talking about pain.

Objectively acknowledging that there is discomfort, or pain, is the first step in addressing organizational conflict.

Reflect for a minute. Are there any parts of your organization that appear to be experiencing discomfort, or pain? Describe the situation.

6-Point Checklist

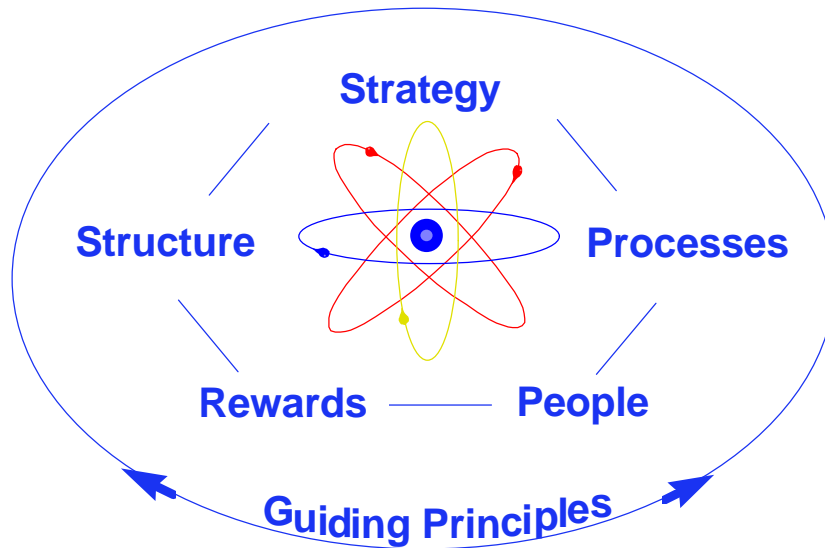
Systems deliver perfectly what they have evolved to produce. This statement reflects an important lesson about conflict in the workplace. Without attention to our design of workplaces and organizations, we can unintentionally set the stage for conflict. If the root causes of conflict lie in poor workplace or organization design, we can struggle for years trying to address the problem at the interpersonal level without success. The 6-Point Checklist has been developed to help you assess your part of the organization. It provides a convenient framework for diagnosing sources of organizational conflict.

The next section reviews each of the six checkpoints for potential sources of conflict. Once we have reviewed the checklist we will revisit the situation you described above, to identify potential causes and appropriate actions.

Systems View of Conflict

The “6-Point Checklist” provides a convenient framework for diagnosing sources of organizational conflict.

The 6-Point Checklist



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UNIT 6: RESOLVING CONFLICT

Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the role of our work group clear? • Do we know what we're up against...threats, weaknesses? • Do we know what we have going for us...strengths, opportunities? • Do we know where we're headed...strategic goals? • Do we have an overall plan for achieving the goals?
Guiding Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do we have clear guiding principles for our work group...are we clear about how we approach the business and how we want to work together?
Processes & Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are our major areas of work clear? • Do we have a clear picture of how we get the work done? • Can present work processes and technology deliver the strategic goals?
People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do we have the right skills, right places, right numbers? • Are recruiting, career development, training and performance feedback programs sufficient?
Rewards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Motivators</u>. Are people doing work that they see as meaningful? Do they have enough autonomy, access to information, opportunity to learn? Are the work processes designed to give people timely performance feedback? • <u>Satisfiers/Dissatisfiers</u>. Are people satisfied with pay and benefits programs?
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do roles, authority levels, and reporting relationships fit our strategy, processes, and roster of skills? • Is resource allocation appropriate? • Are we operating in the right locations (geography and physical layout)?

When a company restructures itself, as AECL did recently, all six areas of the checklist are affected. It is normal for companies to experience a balancing period during which the various parts of the organizational system adjust to one another. For the balancing to work, the organizational incompatibilities, or **organizational level**

conflicts need to be surfaced and dealt with. This is, potentially, the healthy side of conflict. However, if the conflicts are not surfaced and addressed as an organizational systems issue, it can lead to **interpersonal level conflict**. As mentioned above, if the root causes of the conflict lie at the organizational level, we can waste a lot of effort addressing them solely as if they were interpersonal issues. As a leader interested in developing a smooth functioning team, it is important to become skilled at diagnosing the source(s) of conflict that will naturally surface in your work group.

Before going back to the list of conflict situations you developed on page 6-4, let's have a more detailed look at the 6-Point Checklist. Asking the right questions can help diagnose the causes of conflict and identify potential solutions. As we will see, the six points are closely connected. Many questions apply equally to more than one area.

1. Strategy

Strategy is the organization's formula for success, based on its interpretation of the business environment. Strategy confirms the organization's purpose, and establishes the overall direction, and key goals for the business. A sound strategy highlights the overall work that needs to be done by the group, and provides the basis for plans which break the large picture into smaller more manageable pieces of work. Together, the strategy and accompanying plans act as a guide in day to day activities, clarifying which activities are deemed most important - the **priorities** for the organization or team, and showing the relationship between the various activities.

Roles are linked to the strategy and accompanying plans. Without a clear strategy and plan, people cannot understand their role and how they connect with the roles of others. We will also address roles when we discuss Structure.

Symptoms of conflict related to strategy and plans:

- confusion about work priorities
- differing or conflicting goals
- confusion around the purpose of the work
- confusion about who the customer is

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- people saying:
“When are we possibly going to be able to do all of this?” ,
“We can’t manage this”!
- chronic stress, burnout
- constant need for direction
- recurring miscommunication
- individuals feeling overwhelmed OR underutilized
- lack of team effort, or opposing efforts
- conflict over who does what, responsibility, accountability
- work being done that does not contribute to the goals
- low level of trust in management and the company

Questions that can help clarify the sources of conflict

Purpose

- Is our purpose clear? Are we all committed to the same purpose?

Strategy

- Do we have a clear business strategy...based on an analysis of our business environment...strengths/opportunities, weaknesses/threats?
- Does everybody understand and buy-in to the strategy?
- Do we have high clear goals for the group?
- Are goals realistic and achievable given our resources?

Plans

- Do we have work plans to identify how we are going to achieve the goals?
- Are priorities clear, and consistent? Are people often jerked from one assignment to another?
- Are aware of risks? Does our plan address managing risks?

Things the leader can do

1. Work with your manager and your team to answer/address the above questions.
2. Talk with your customer(s) to find out if their needs are being met.
3. When difficulties arise, work with employees to ensure strategy is still appropriate. Something may have changed in the business environment. Use the Planning For Results process to build work plans, it has been developed to help teams clarify where they are going.
4. Develop some form of scoreboard or other feedback mechanism to communicate progress against milestones and goals.
5. Review workloads, and roles regularly.

2. Processes and Technology

Work processes are the way we get work done, the work methods and procedures through which we develop outputs. Technology is the equipment and tools that we use. Technology is usually an integral part of the work process, that's why we have grouped them together.

Often a team's processes reflect the style of the team leader. Or, they may have evolved over the years from habits, assumptions, and preferences. However, they may not necessarily be the best way to get the work done.

Feedback is the life-blood of work processes. Feedback loops, incorporated directly into work processes, tell people whether or not specifications are being met, as the work progresses - the backbone of continuous improvement. Lack of accurate, timely feedback can spawn conflict. Without objective feedback mechanisms, people doing the work must rely exclusively on subjective opinions of how effective they are.

Symptoms of conflict related to processes and technology:

- customer complaints
- not meeting deadlines/specifications
- frequent arguments about how to get the work done
- frequent arguments about results achieved
- complaints about inadequate equipment and tools
- complaints about lack of recognition
- same mistakes being repeated
- feedback is obtained but seldom used to make improvements
- increased anxiety around performance appraisal time...people unsure of the basis for assessing their performance
- more complaints about things done poorly than celebrations about things done well

Questions that can help clarify the sources of conflict:

Customers

- Do we have an objective way of gauging customer satisfaction?
- Are our customers completely satisfied?

Processes

- Do our work processes support our purpose?

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- Are our work processes clear to us? Are they mapped-out? Should they be?
- Do we know how our work processes intersect/overlap? Do the intersections/overlaps cause conflicts?
- Where in our work does the performance of one person or team depend upon that of another? Is there a smooth, organized flow between jobs that lie in sequence?
- Do we regularly miss deadlines...go over budget...fail to meet specifications?
- Is time/money/equipment/material being wasted?

Technology

- Are we using the right technology to support the processes and achieve our goals?
- Do we have the skill to use the technology to optimum advantage?

Information and Learning

- Do we get the information we need to do our jobs and make decisions? Do we collect feedback and use it to improve how things get done?
- Do we have an organized process for debriefing problems and successes?
- Do we learn from mistakes or punish mistakes?
- How do we obtain and use information about our performance?
- How do we go about improving our work processes?

Things the leader can do:

1. Work with your team to answer/address the above questions.
2. Talk with your customers to find out if their needs are being met. Use customer satisfaction surveys to gauge quality.
3. Have your team identify problems within work process. Use process mapping tools.
4. Set up regular problem-solving, information-sharing and debriefing sessions.
5. Make performance feedback part of day-to-day operations. Design feedback loops directly into work processes so that people get feedback from the work itself.
6. Develop a scoreboard or other feedback mechanism to provide ongoing feedback about quality of work processes.

3. People

People refers to everyone who is on the team as well as the leader or manager. Having the right people where and when you need them in order to make the processes work is a vital part of meeting strategic goals. From a systems viewpoint, this area involves HR Planning, career progression, training, employee relations and performance feedback systems. It also refers to the way team members support one another.

Symptoms of conflict related to people issues:

- deadlines are missed
- complaints about quality, costs
- skills aren't available where and when needed to meet workload
- people feel stagnant, not stimulated
- people feel unrecognized, not valued
- complaints around lack of attention by leader
- lack of team effort and cohesion
- complaints about lack of feedback
- negative employee relations climate, lack of collaboration

Questions that can help clarify the sources of conflict:

- Do we have the right skills, the right numbers, the right work locations to do accomplish our goals?
- What skills, knowledge do we lack, and what are we doing about obtaining these?
- Are there sufficient training opportunities?
- Do we have a mentoring program that deepens bench strength?
- Does recruiting and career streaming stimulate flow through of fresh skills and ideas?
- Do some of us feel "in over our heads?"
- How do we support one another's efforts and morale?
- Do we respect one another?
- Do we communicate well?

Things the leader can do:

1. Work with your team to answer/address the above questions.
2. Talk to people on a regular basis. Ask them what 's going well, what could work better.
3. Involve your team in developing a forecast of work demand/skill supply.
4. Develop recruiting, career progression, and training plans.
5. Develop communication skills through workshops, example and practice.

6. Hold regular team meetings. Discuss recruiting, career progression, and training plans.

4. Rewards

The purpose of rewards is to align goals of employees with goals of the organization. Technically, rewards are part of the people area. However, rewards are such a powerful influencer of behavior that we have identified them separately on the checklist, for emphasis. Non-monetary rewards are the most influential, and usually the easiest to develop. The highest impact non-monetary rewards are: meaningful work, opportunity to learn, personal autonomy over work, access to information, and timely performance feedback. Monetary rewards are pay, benefits, and performance incentives

Symptoms of conflict related to rewards:

- poor morale and low energy
- high levels of absenteeism
- apathy, feeling that the work has no meaning
- individuals focus on personal projects and find excuses to not support team goals
- people missing deadlines and deliverables
- people not putting in any extra effort to create success
- complaints about boredom, lack of challenge
- complaints about lack of authority, autonomy or power to do things the way they ought to be done
- little to no loyalty
- complaints of favoritism
- high or low performers being ostracized
- “not enough information” an excuse for error
- complaints that there is no feedback about performance
- complaints about pay and job classification

Questions that can help clarify the sources of conflict:

- Do we feel recognized for the work we do?
- How do we recognize and reward accomplishments?
- What are the consequences of poor behavior?
- Do we celebrate success?
- How often do we get together to discuss our work and its progress?
- If someone is having difficulty, are we supportive and concerned, or condemning and absent?
- Do our rewards support our purpose, strategy and goals?

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- How did our rewards come about? Did we have any input to them?
- Are rewards distributed equally and fairly?
- Do our monetary and non-monetary rewards encourage performance?
- Do people feel loyalty to the company and accountability for their results?

Things the leader can do:

1. Work with your team to answer/address the above questions.
2. Review the reward and recognition strategy with your team. Link it to your business strategy and plan.
3. Make yourself available to all members of your team.
4. Focus on non-monetary rewards. They are the most powerful influencers and you have more control over them.
5. Get your team to identify reinforcers of poor performance.
6. Hold regular meetings to celebrate successes and to discuss what can be learned from mistakes.
7. Regularly ask people if they have the information and authority they need. Help them get it.
8. Don't play favorites. Reward performance objectively.

5. Structure

Structure refers to the distribution of responsibility, authority, and resources which establish the power to get things done. Structure should support achievement of the group's goals, integrate the people within the group in a constructive way, and facilitate their interface with other groups, including customers, suppliers, and other work groups.

Symptoms of conflict related to structure:

- complaints from external customers, suppliers, or other groups about access to your group
- delays in completing work
- miscommunication or misunderstandings at interfaces between your group and other groups
- duplication of effort
- disagreement over authority and decision-making power
- complaints about inadequate resources
- people not accepting accountability for results
- complaints about collaboration from other groups
- more than one group doing the same work
- breakdown in communication and cooperation at interfaces

Questions that can clarify the sources of conflict:

- Is authority clear?
- Do our roles and reporting relationships fit our strategy, goals, work processes and skills?
- Who are the key groups we connect to in our work? How do we connect with them? How often? Do we need a better way of integrating our efforts?
- Do we have trouble getting what we need from others?
- Do others complain about our ability to deliver?
- Are we feeling pressure or tension from other groups?
- Are we operating out of the right locations?

Things the leader can do

1. Work with your team to answer/address the above questions.
2. Set meetings with your team and other groups with whom you interact frequently. Invite members of other groups to your group meetings.

6. Guiding Principles

Guiding principles are the fundamental beliefs about how to run the business. These beliefs guide key business decisions, establish the parameters for personal and organizational performance, and influence how people interact. Clear principles are especially useful in times of stress and downsizing when individuals require guidance to make difficult choices and try to adapt to the changes around them.

Symptoms of conflict related to guiding principles:

- fear, tension, uncertainty about what behaviors get rewarded/punished
- bickering, infighting
- low commitment to the company
- mistrust and disbelief in leaders

Questions that can help clarify the source of conflict:

- What are the key principles or values that guide how we operate?
- Are the ground-rules for working together clear?
- What gets rewarded around here?

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Things the leader can do:

1. Work with your manager and team to answer/address the above questions.
 2. Define the guiding principles for your work group.
 3. Use the guiding principles to guide you in making tough decisions, i.e. how to resolve conflicting priorities.
 4. Articulate the behaviors that are expected in line with the principles.
 5. Review guiding principles regularly to see if they are in line with your business goals and plans.
 6. Get your team to identify ways to flag/resolve situations where the principles are not being adhered to.
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Regular attention to the 6-Point Checklist will help leaders and teams identify and deal with **organizational level conflict**. Causes of conflicts will likely be lodged in several areas and may require action on several fronts. We will cover **interpersonal level conflict** in the next section.

Refer back to page 6-4 where you identified conflicts in your group. *Based on the 6-Point Checklist, what are some possible causes and solutions?*

Possible Causes

Potential Solutions

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Interpersonal Sources of Conflict

Interpersonal conflict refers to a situation in which the needs of two or more people appear to be incompatible.

Types

The two main types of interpersonal conflict are:

1. Remote Subjects. Conflict which centers on objects, events and persons that are usually, but not always, external to the persons involved in the conflict. *Examples: Hostility due to politics, religion, or beliefs. Arguments over a decision, news events, policies. Disputes over money, the car, the kids.*
2. Relationship. The cause of the conflict is not so much some object or event as the relationships between the individuals. *Examples: arguments over who is in charge, who has the authority to set rules of behavior.*

Compounding Factors

The following factors can compound interpersonal conflict, or if the differences are significant enough, initiate conflict.

Different Personal Styles. People with different personal styles may have difficulty working together.

Example: Someone who likes to make quick decisions and is usually comfortable doing so with limited information, working with someone who likes to have a lot of detailed information before they make a decision.

Stress. In today's world people can have difficulty balancing work and personal life. We experience stress in all aspects of our lives and we each deal with it in different ways. Stress levels are cumulative. As we accumulate stress, we become less objective, and more prone to conflict.

Different Personal Needs. Our needs are a collection of our hopes, expectations, fears, concerns, beliefs, and preferences. Our behaviour is strongly influenced by these needs. Strongly divergent personal needs can lead to conflict and can impact how people respond to each other when they are engaged in conflict.

Example. William Schutz, a behavioral psychologist described three dimensions of interpersonal behavior in which individuals vary significantly. These dimensions have been widely used over the past forty years to help people understand their needs in relationships.

- (1) Need for inclusion, i.e. be included in decisions and group activities.
- (2) Need for control over others and over situations, and the willingness to accept control imposed by others.
- (3) Need for affection, i.e. have others shows us that they care about us..

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People have different levels of awareness of their needs, and different comfort levels being open about those needs. The more aware or open people can be about their needs, the easier it is to resolve conflict between them.

Honest Miscommunication. In these cases, people do not explain the facts clearly or in sufficient detail, or people do not listen objectively. The inevitable misunderstandings then lead to, or compound conflict.

Different priorities, personal goals, or perceptions are additional factors that can complicate conflict that already exists, or lead to conflict.

Conflict as a Positive Force

Conflict has the potential to surface different viewpoints and increase a group's creativity. It can also lead to deeper, more lasting solutions to problems because potential antagonists explore their differences and come up with solutions that meet a broad range of needs.

When people respond to interpersonal conflict in a positive way, their behaviour looks like this:

- people are animated, interested, involved
- people listen to others, no interruptions, no personal attacks
- people get better at expressing their own needs, and surfacing other members' needs
- people focus on meeting each other's needs, not just their own
- people take the time to determine root causes of conflict by asking questions and listening to viewpoints that are different from their own
- people work to reach consensus solutions
- Others:

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When people respond to conflict in a negative or destructive way, they may behave like this:

- shouting and other signs of anger
- people may avoid/withdraw and be silent
- people do not listen to each other - they are too busy putting forth their point of view
- people do not try and understand other points of view/perspectives
- threatening comments e.g. " I'll go to my boss"
- verbal attacks on others personally e.g. " that's a stupid thing to say!"
- Others:

As a group learns that interpersonal conflict can be a positive force, the members become better at acknowledging their differences and using them to the group's advantage. Ties between group members become stronger and the group becomes more capable of generating creative approaches to issues and problems.

Now think of your group. How do people deal with interpersonal conflict? Are they close to the above positive behavior? Or do people display the opposite behaviors? Describe their prevalent behaviors.

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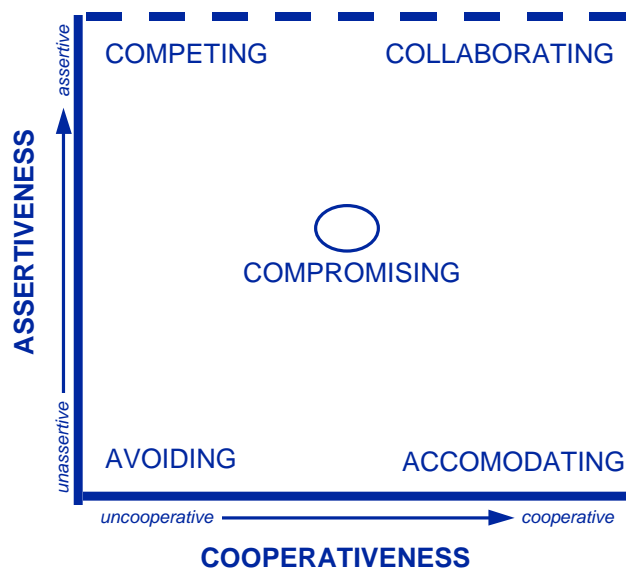
As a team leader, you will want to ensure that your team's ability to deal with conflict is as strong as it can be. The next two sections deal with conflict styles and a six-step process for resolving conflict that is focused on mutual gains.

Model of Conflict Styles

This model is adapted from "Conflict and Conflict Management" by Kenneth Thomas in The Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, edited by Marvin Dunnette (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1976).



Conflict Styles Model



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In a conflict situation we can describe our behavior, or how we deal with conflict along two dimensions:

1. Assertiveness - the degree to which we attempt to satisfy our own needs.
2. Cooperativeness - the degree to which we attempt to satisfy the other person's needs.

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These two dimensions of behavior can help us define the five specific methods people use to deal with conflict:

- avoiding - our needs are not met, others' needs not met
- competing - our needs met, others' needs not met
- compromising - our needs and others' needs partially met
- accommodating - our needs not met, others' needs met
- collaborating - both our needs and others' needs met.

Page 10 of the Thomas-Killmann Conflict Mode Instrument you have completed describes the five styles.

Although all styles have their advantages, collaboration has the greatest potential for bridging interpersonal conflict situations.

Although people have a predominant style, we all have the potential to extend our range of styles. As we practice new styles, they become more comfortable.

The next section presents a six-step process for applying collaboration in resolving interpersonal conflict.

Collaborative Conflict Resolution

The collaborative conflict resolution process leads to resolving conflict by creating a win-win situation. This approach is based on the work of Roger Fisher and the Harvard Negotiation Project and the Center for Conflict Resolution Training, Justice Institute of British Columbia.

The following process applies the principles of collaboration in six steps. It can be used to resolve a conflict involving any number of people. It is based upon interest-based resolution, rather than confrontational, position-based, competitive approaches we often see used, with the inevitable win-lose outcome. The process requires the creation of a safe environment through the setting of a number of ground-rules that all parties agree to follow, and the application of basic communication skills. Simple worksheets (found after page 25) have been provided to help participants complete the steps.

In any conflict situation, resolution will only be achieved if the parties are able to come together in a safe environment. This environment can be created by an agreement on the principles by which people will operate:

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- everyone is allowed to be right in their experience of the problem (an individual's perception = their reality)
- all parties are considered equal in their perception and in their right to participate in resolution
- everyone is allowed to speak without interruption
- all parties agree to openly state their assumptions and to clarify whether these assumptions are true in reality with the others
- the parties believe there is a resolution somewhere in the "middle".

THE 6-STEP CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROCESS

Step 1 - Define the Problem

- each person/party defines their perception of the problem individually (can use worksheet #1)
- reasonable time limit for the exercise (15-20 minutes)
- this is done without interruption

Step 2 - Define Individual Solutions

- each party defines what their solution would look like (can use worksheet #2)
- again, done individually and without interruption
- reasonable time limit (5 min. maximum)

Step 3 - Define Interests/Needs/Fears Addressed by the Solution

- Each party defines their interests, needs, and fears that are met by their solution. These can be personal, business, or customer-related. (use worksheet #3)
- Once again, without interruption
- Reasonable time limit for the exercise (e.g. ~10 min. max.)
- Once complete, points are next transferred to a flip chart so that they will be visible to all parties for the next step

Step 4 - Define Mutual Needs and Interest

- The parties complete this step together (use worksheet #4)
- Parties refer to the other's flipcharts to identify common needs, interests and fears
- Should address personal needs, business needs, and customer requirements
- Common needs, etc. are recorded on a new flipchart or whiteboard for all to see. These become the parameters for the solution.

Step 5 - Define Solutions that Would Meet all Agreed-Upon Needs and Interests

- The parties complete this step together
- Brainstorm potential solutions: old and new
- Test each option against the parameters from Step 4
- If a realistic solution is not found, revisit and redefine the parameters, and repeat Step 5

Step 6 - Finalize Solutions and Formulate an Action Plan

- Parties collectively come up with an action plan to actualize the agreed upon solution (Use worksheet #5)

Summary

Conflict is a natural occurrence in organizations, more often influenced by the design of the organization than by the people inside the organization.

Conflict presents an opportunity to improve both the organizational system and the relationship between the people in the system.

The leader plays a key role in determining if the group will see conflict as an improvement opportunity. You can help your team by adopting a systems view and modeling collaborative behaviors like openly gathering and sharing information, and by listening with empathy to what people have to say. This helps build a climate of trust, an essential ingredient for dealing constructively with conflict.

Resolving conflict requires both trust and commitment. Typically, as trust increases, commitment also increases. If trust is eroded, commitment can disappear.

A systems view of organizations helps people assess the causes of organizational conflict and come up with appropriate actions to strengthen the organization. AECL's 6-Point Checklist can help in this regard.

A genuine commitment to achieving mutual gains helps people come up with win-win resolutions of interpersonal conflict. The Conflict Styles Model can help people understand their prevalent style and provide a reference point for building their collaboration skills. The 6-Step Conflict Resolution Process can help individuals collaboratively resolve conflicts.

When handled as an improvement opportunity, conflict can surface multiple viewpoints which promotes creative improvements to the organizational system and surfaces solutions to interpersonal problems that all parties have a stake in implementing. This approach develops strength through consistent organizational improvements and through the bond that forms between people jointly committed to continuously improving how they work together.

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Based on what we have covered in this unit, my personal style, and my knowledge of my work environment, my goal and plan for making better use of organizational and interpersonal conflict to improve how our work group operates is as follows.

GOAL: _____

PLAN: _____

References

1. Peter F. Drucker, Managing in a Time of Great Change, Truman Talley Books, 1995.
2. Jay Galbraith. Designing Organizations, Addison Wesley, 1995.
3. Gray, Barbara. Collaborating, Finding Common Ground for Multiparty Problems. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1989.
4. Blake, Robert R. and Mouton, Jane Srygley. Solving Costly Organizational Conflict. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1984.
5. L. David Brown. Managing Conflict at Organizational Interfaces. Addison-Wesley, 1983.
6. McKay, Matthew; Davis, Martha; and Fanning, Patrick. Messages: The Communication Skills Book. Oakland, California: New Harbinger Publications, 1983.
7. Fisher, Roger. Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Worksheet for Step #1: Defining the Problem from an Individual Perspective

This is what I think the problem is...

Why I see it as a problem...

Assumptions I hold about the other party...

How I feel about the situation...

How it affects me...

Worksheet for Step #3: B. Defining Business and Customer Interests and Needs Met by the Solution

Business Needs

Business Interests

Customer Needs

Customer Interests

Worksheet for Step #4: Defining Mutual Interests, Needs and Fears Met by the Solution

Mutual:

Needs:

Interests:

Fears:

Worksheet for Step #5: Defining Solutions That Meet All Agreed-Upon Needs

SOLUTION DESCRIPTION	MUTUAL NEEDS TO BE MET	MUTUAL INTERESTS TO BE MET	MUTUAL FEARS TO BE ADDRESSED

