

Resolving Conflict Productively

Presented to:
PMI – Albany

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Agenda

1. Exploration of Conflict:
 - a. Definition
 - b. Causes
 - c. Outcomes
2. The Dynamics of Conflict:
 - a. Three Stages
 - b. Five Styles
3. Techniques to Resolve Conflict
4. Dealing with the Emotions Generated by Conflict
5. When Conflict Keeps Repeating
6. Facilitating the Resolution of Conflict
7. Essential Skills for Handling Difficult People

CONFLICT

Sometimes, despite our best efforts to understand and work things out with others, conflict may arise. This is not in itself a bad situation. As a matter of fact, given today's pace and demands, conflict is a likely occurrence. The key is to resolve these differences as quickly and as smoothly as possible.



Let's first remind ourselves what conflict is, and how it is caused:

Conflict is:

- "A striking together with force"
- "A controversy, disagreement, opposition"
- When the actions of one person or group interfere with the needs and interests of another person or group, leading to an escalation of differences
 - when time and/or resources are limited
 - when goals differ

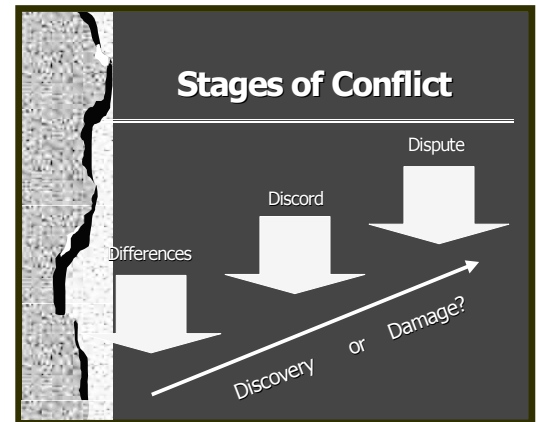
Conflict is caused by:

- Organizational Factors
 - Heavier workloads
 - Tighter deadlines
 - Continuous Quality and Productivity Improvements expected
 - Do more with less
 - Competition for Advancement
- Teams and High-Involvement Work Environments
 - More people are being asked to work together in groups
 - Formal and informal boundaries
 - Differing individual perspectives, beliefs, and styles
- Workforce Diversity
 - Need for collaboration among several work teams
 - Employee population comprised of people from many communities Values, cultures, expectations are varied and challenge our ability to communicate and understand

STAGES OF CONFLICT:

Differing points of view can promote creativity and innovation. It can produce unique solutions to problems by building on opposing opinions and ideas. It can bring about positive outcomes for an organization. However, allowed to escalate to a state of conflict, it can be both unproductive and disruptive.

The following three stages provide the **warning signs** that indicate that conflict is growing and requires intervention to get back on a positive track.



Stage 1: *Differences*

- ⇒ The work group is doing more "telling" than asking or listening
- ⇒ Ideas and/or suggestions are discounted
- ⇒ There is less tolerance of other's differences
- ⇒ People evidence an unwillingness to let go of their own ideas
- ⇒ Impasses are reached and solutions get bogged down

Stage 2: *Discord*

- ⇒ People become defensive about their ideas
- ⇒ People quickly take sides in the issue
- ⇒ Two-way communication is lacking
- ⇒ People are less willing to communicate in a solution-oriented manner
- ⇒ Competition takes place at the expense of cooperation

Stage 3: *Dispute*

- ⇒ People are more concerned about winning than arriving at the best decision
- ⇒ People try to "win" others over to their point of view – even those outside of the conflict
- ⇒ Team / Work group goals yield to personal interests
- ⇒ Level of emotion and tension is high
- ⇒ Productivity, morale, work relationships are noticeably declining

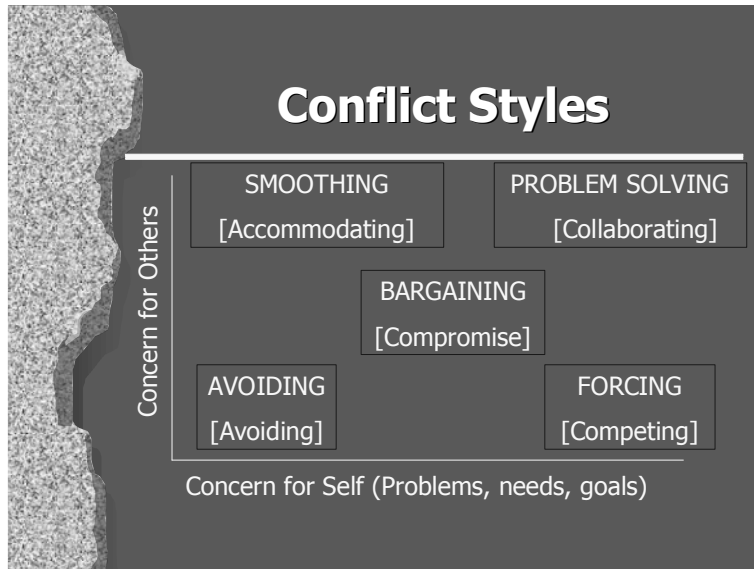
Out of any of these three stages, one of two conditions can result:

- **Discovery** - Conflict is recognized and appropriate interventions are undertaken. The people involved in the conflict regain perspective and realize that teamwork and trust can be re-established.
- **Damage** - Conflict is allowed to escalate even though everyone is aware that it is happening. Conditions deteriorate and there is damage to workgroup relations, customer service and overall productivity and morale.

Which one of these conditions occurs is determined by how responsive the group is to the warning signals and how effectively interpersonal and conflict resolution skills are utilized.

The Five Conflict Styles:

There are five different approaches to dealing with conflict, each having its own set of advantages and disadvantages. While the preferred method for handling conflict is the collaborating or problem-solving mode, there are unique situations that will call for one of the others periodically.



Actually, while each situation calls for its own approach, it is best to follow this sequence for handling conflict:

1. Problem Solving
2. Bargaining
3. Forcing or Accommodating {depending on importance}
4. Avoiding

The following is an overview of the five conflict styles indicating:

- The characteristics of each
 - Benefits for its use
 - Drawbacks for its use
- ⇒ Remember, except for infrequent situations, the problem-solving (collaborating) style is the most productive for resolving conflict.

When To Use A Particular Conflict Resolution Style:

Competing:

- When quick, decisive action is vital, e.g. emergencies
- On important issues where unpopular courses of action need implementing, e.g. cost cutting, enforcing unpopular rules, discipline
- To protect yourself against people who take advantage of noncompetitive behavior

Collaborating:

- To find a mutual solution when both sets of concerns are too important to be compromised
- When your objective is to learn from the experience - e.g. to understand another's point of view
- To merge insights from people with different perspectives on a problem
- To gain commitment by incorporating other's concerns into a consensus
- To work through hard feelings which have been interfering with a relationship

Compromising:

- When goals are moderately important, but not worth the effort or potential disruption of more assertive modes
- When two opponents with equal power are equally committed to mutually exclusive goals
- To achieve temporary settlements on complex issues
- To arrive at expedient solutions under time pressure
- As a backup, when collaborating or competition fail

Avoiding:

- When an issue is of small importance, or when more pressing issues are pending
- When you see no chance to satisfy your concerns
- When the potential damage of confronting a conflict outweighs the benefits
- To let people cool down, to reduce tensions, regain perspective and composure
- When gathering more information makes more sense than an immediate decision
- When others can resolve the conflict more effectively
- When the issue is symptomatic of another more basic issue

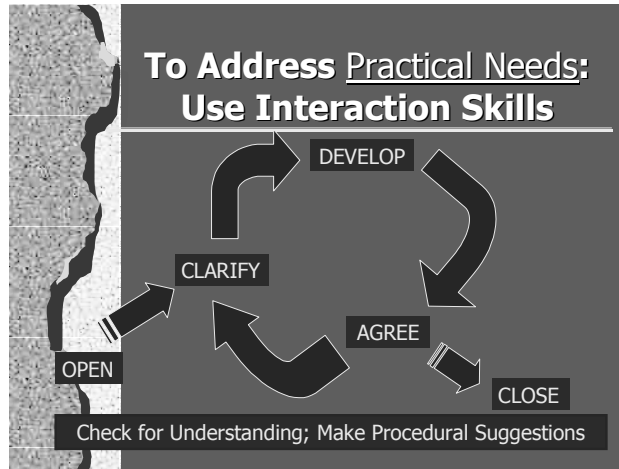
Accommodating:

- When you realize you are wrong, to allow a better position to be heard, to learn from others, or to show that you are reasonable
- When the issue is much more important to the other person than to yourself, to satisfy the needs of others, and as goodwill to maintain the relationship
- To build up social credits for later issues more important to you
- When continued competition would only damage your cause, or are outmatched
- When preserving harmony is more important
- To allow others to learn by experimenting with trial and error opportunities

When resolving conflicts, two needs must be met:

- ⇒ **Personal** needs: to be included, to be understood
- ⇒ **Practical** needs: to achieve the desired results

Remember the importance of Attending Skills:
Posture, Visual, Non-verbal Cues and Behavior



Conflict Resolution Process

1. **OPEN** by identifying the conflict and its impact.
 - Uncover facts, check assumptions
 - Confirm desired outcomes
 - Gain commitment to resolving conflict
2. **CLARIFY** causes of the conflict.
 - Identify underlying causes
 - Consider all viewpoints
3. **DEVELOP** ideas for resolving the conflict.
 - Seek and discuss ideas
 - Explore needed resources and support
4. **AGREE** on a plan for resolving the conflict.
 - Specify actions to take
 - Confirm needed resources and support
 - Confirm how and when to track progress
5. **CLOSE** by summarizing and confirming confidence.
 - Highlight important features of plan
 - Check level of confidence (all involved parties)

Some Conflict Resolution Tips:



- Start out discussion with "I" message
- Be clear on what is the problem and what is the perception
- Understand the other person's position first, then share your views
- Avoid judgment and rebuttal during dialogue
- Find shared goals, then brainstorm solution
- Agree on "trial" solution, establish criteria to gauge success
- Always follow up - don't assume that everything is going according to plan

When Dealing with Emotions:

- Acknowledge that they exist
- Recognize that difference in beliefs, perceptions and goals are natural
- Remember that negative feelings don't usually go away on their own
- If emotional intensity is high, reschedule discussion for a more suitable time
- Listening doesn't mean agreeing
- Anger usually evolves from other emotions: hurt, jealousy, fear, frustration

When conflict needs to be addressed:

- Quality of work and productivity is declining
- One person is consistently avoiding another
- Co-workers are inappropriately withholding information
- Tension exists between co-workers
- Some people demonstrate an unwillingness to work together
- People are complaining that conflict is interfering with their work

When conflict repeats:

- Identify what factors are causing people to avoid resolving the conflict. (Fears, consequences, political reasons, etc.)
- Learn to recognize warning signs in advance.
- Interrupt destructive habits before they escalate the conflict further.
- Use existing methods to "make peace" and reinforce their use as early as possible.



Essential Skills for Handling Challenging People

To avoid unhealthy forms of conflict, it is important to focus on the similarities between people rather than the differences. Success in communication rests on finding common ground in order to redirect a conversation to a more positive outcome. With people whom are difficult to get along with, the emphasis needs to be on reducing differences to deal more constructively with one another.

This is accomplished with two processes:

- **Blending:** is any behavior by which you reduce the differences between you and another in order to establish common ground and better understanding. This usually results in increased rapport.
- **Redirecting:** is any behavior that builds on the rapport established in order to move the interaction in a more positive direction.

It is important to keep in mind that no one cooperates with others that they feel are against them. We need to feel someone is “with us” in order to share common feelings and collaborate.

In addition, blending always precedes redirecting, whether you are doing the listening or the speaking in the interaction with a difficult person. Rapport needs to be nurtured or re-focusing the interaction will meet with resistance.

Ways to Blend with Another:

- Mirroring with Body and Facial Expressions including posture, animation
- Matching Voice Volume and Speed

Listening to Understand:

The more we are willing to put our need to be heard on hold and listen to another, the more likely they will be willing to listen to us.

Understanding occurs on two levels:

Emotionally the person feels you understand what they are feeling

Intellectually the person feels you understand what they are saying

When someone is avoiding the issue, you need to do the following:

- Express the importance to you [and them, if possible] in resolving the issue.
- Recognize that it may not be a good time for them and you will be happy to approach the matter later.
- Let them know that your working relationship is too important to let it go. This way they know that you will be following up.
- Remind them that delaying the discussion can make it more difficult to resolve and that sooner is better than later.
- Stay on it. Wait a day or two, and then approach the person. {Unless they have already done so with you.
- Don't push early on as it may make them more resistant to the conversation. But if they are obviously hiding from the discussion, you must dial up the urgency.
- As a last resort, offer to take the issue to a third party for assistance. This should be a tactic when the issue is of a magnitude that it is clearly affecting work flow or interactions among people.
- Never fight your intuition. If you know that there is something going on, do not be talked out of it. Specifically describe the impact on you and ask for their assistance in working through the issue – whether they acknowledge the issue or not.

When you need to facilitate conflict between two or more other people:

From time to time, it may not be possible for two people to resolve their differences without some assistance from a neutral third party. If you find yourself in the role of being a “mediator” there are some basic steps that can help ensure the success of this effort:

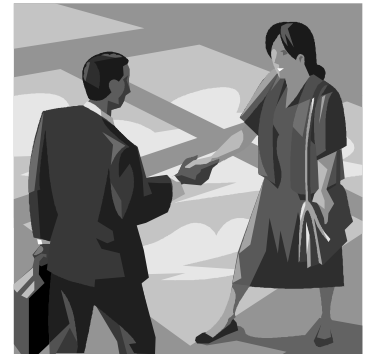
1. If possible, find a location that will be discreet so that confidentiality can be maintained.
2. Set the ground rules at the beginning – how people will contribute, in what order, your role as mediator, what will happen if emotions flare, etc.
3. Make sure that each person has an opportunity to fully describe their perspective on the issue without interruption. [With the exception of clarifying questions]
4. Make sure that each person's feelings are validated and/or confirmed so each speaker knows that they have been heard.
5. When each person's position has been stated, the participants are guided to brainstorm solutions that can resolve the difference.
6. All members of the group work with the various solutions to arrive at the best decision.
7. To bring closure to the discussion, the parties confirm what was agreed upon and how they will follow up with each other. They will also develop a “plan B” as to how to handle future problems when they arise.

Facilitator Tips:

- Remain neutral throughout, Guide the discussions but avoid taking sides.
- If people appear to be confused, ask them to restate their positions for clarity.
- If emotions begin to escalate, slow the process down and ask people to reframe their statements in a less volatile manner. If after several attempts, it appears that people are having a difficult time staying calm, take a short recess. When they return, summarize what has been discussed to that point. Value all points of view and resume the discussion.
- If people begin talking over each other, intervene and slow down the process also. Remind them how important it is that we capture the information so a solid plan can be resolved.
- Do not attempt to over control the dialogue. Give people some latitude to monitor their behavior. If it appears unlikely they are able to do this then step in. Remember that we are attempting to develop people's skills in resolving their own issues.

Taking Responsibility for Resolving Issues:

- A. Recognize your role in shaping the situations that you encounter. Before responding to the particular circumstance that you find yourself in, ask yourself:
- ✓ Who is responsible for what has happened here so far?
 - ✓ Who is responsible for what is about to happen?
 - ✓ Of the various choices, which will best meet my needs in this situation?
- B. To facilitate a successful interaction, keep in mind:
- ✓ Staying focused on your goals and avoid becoming defensive.
 - ✓ Be understanding of others.
 - ✓ Be aware of your body language.
 - ✓ Choose your responses carefully.
 - ✓ Be an active listener.
 - ✓ Use an appropriate level of assertiveness, given the specific situation.
 - ✓ Know what techniques are right for you.



Creating Trust and Collaboration

Trust and collaboration enable people to work together openly and productively. It is hard to imagine getting much accomplished without it, yet it is quite challenging to build credibility. It is vital to the service relationship to have some degree of trust to work effectively. Here are some important guidelines that promote trust and collaboration:

1. Be consistent in your behavior. Nothing erodes trust quicker than a person whose approach changes dramatically from day to day.
2. Seek out common ground: interests, past experiences, goals, concerns.
3. Be aware of tone and body language – keep it respectful and open.
4. Use assumption-free questions plentifully. Show a genuine respect for the other person's knowledge and opinion.
5. Communicate regularly – as much as is reasonable.
6. Genuinely recognize other's contributions to the success of the partnership.
7. Be willing to acknowledge mistakes, avoid taking yourself too seriously
8. Keep your promises