



Conflict management

Non-violent conflict is a natural disagreement resulting from individuals or groups that differ in attitudes, beliefs, values or needs. It can also originate from past rivalries and personality differences. Other causes of conflict include trying to negotiate before the timing is right or before needed information is available. Conflicts are bound to occur as long as people from different backgrounds and cultures, with different orientations and way of doing things try to work together on a project. Though conflicts are inevitable, it can be minimized, diverted and /or resolved to the benefit of the team. Conflict in a team can lower the team spirit, moral and productivity. Some conflicts can also be creative and some are rather destructive and contra productive. Some conflicts can be costly and some can become profitable depending on how the conflict is managed and the eventual outcome of the conflict. Conflicts can arise from the individual differences or ambitions, from rivalry between sub-groups in the team and simply from different opinions on a certain topic or on the way of doing things.

Conflict can be destructive when it:

- Takes attention away from other important activities
- Polarizes people and groups, reducing cooperation
- Increases or sharpens difference

Conflict is constructive when it:

- Results in clarification of important problems and issues
- Results in solutions to problems
- Strengthens communication skills
- Builds cooperation among people through learning more about each other and how to work together



Managing Conflict

In managing a conflict it is very essential to go through the 5 step process of analyzing the conflict, determining the management strategy, negotiating and resolving the conflict:

Strategies for dealing with conflict:

1. **Non-verbal alert:** Non-verbal behaviors can be an early warning sign of conflict. Ask people to verbalize their feelings wherever possible.
2. **Team development:** As a team matures through different stages of team development, some kind of performance is achieved but it is likely to be impeded by the other processes of growth and by individual agendas.
3. **Resort to authority:** this means bringing in someone using legitimate power base to take a decision. This may be necessary if team members are playing destructive roles.
4. **Planning:** planning techniques, such as task scheduling, timelines and project diaries and meetings may provide an authoritative and neutral way of sequencing tasks to be performed by different individuals or sub-groups, thus reducing potential for conflict.
5. **Use communication skills more effectively:** sometimes it is best to utilize what you know about good communication skills. Try to control destructive role plays and acknowledge individuals by praising their input. Open and honest communication is the most important thing to resolve a conflict!

Creative / Constructive conflict transformation

a. Collaborating : win/ win

Team work and co-operation help everyone achieve their goals while also maintaining good relationships. Working through differences will lead to creative solutions that will satisfy both parties' concerns. This may be used when there is a high level of trust, you do not want full responsibility, you want others to be part of the solution, people involved are willing to change thinking as more information is found and new options are suggested and when working through animosity and hard feelings. Collaborating can take a lot of time and energy and may be opportunistic.

b. Compromising: win some / lose some

Winning something and losing a little is reasonable. Here both ends are placed against the middle in an attempt to serve the common good while ensuring each person can maintain something of their original position. This can be used when people of equal status are equally committed to goals, time can be saved by reaching intermediate settlements on individual parts of complex issues and goals are moderately important. Compromising can



derail important values and long term objectives in the process may not work if initial demands are too great.

c. Accommodating: lose/win

Working towards a common purpose is more important than any of the peripheral issues. Appease others by downplaying conflict, thus protecting the relationship. This can be used when the issue is not as important to one party as it is to the other, you know you cannot win, it's not the right time, harmony is extremely important, the parties have in common a good deal more important than their differences.

d. Competing: win/ lose

Associates can win a conflict with competition. When goals are extremely important, one must sometimes use power to win. Competition comes in when you know you are right, you need a quick decision, a strong personality is trying to steamroller you and when you need to stand up for your rights. Competition can be dangerous since it can escalate conflict and losers may retaliate.

Links:

- How to Deal With Conflict
<http://managementhelp.org/intrpsnl/basics.htm>
- Conflict Management Skills
<http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7labor/13.htm>