

Conflict Management

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What is Workplace Conflict?

- A condition between workers who are:
 - Interdependent in some way
 - Acting in ways that create a business problem

The Costs of Unresolved Conflict

- Lost work time and productivity
- Lost employees / high turnover
- Damage to organization reputation
- Sabotage, theft, damage
- Lowered job motivation
- Health costs due to stress
- Legal costs due to litigation

Is Conflict always a bad thing?

- Can be opportunity for growth or learning
- Inspires creativity
- Can bring up alternative ways of thinking and behaving we had not considered before
- Can challenge us to value differences
- Sometimes people need to seek job fulfillment elsewhere
- Can improve communication

“Two heads are better than one only if they contain different opinions”

The Ingredients of Conflict

- Differences in perceptions
- Differences in values
- Differences in power
- Differences in opinions
- Personality clash
- Rule breaking
- Need for attention

Conflict Prevention – Mediation without an event

- Effective decision-making and problem-solving tools
- Stress Management techniques
- Effective management
 - Be sensitive to the relationships among your employees
 - Encourage employees to come talk to you
 - Be proactive and role model effective approaches to conflict
- How do people want to be treated?

Benefits of Conflict Resolution

- If workplace conflict is managed and resolved, team members' commitment to the organization increases

Approaches to Resolving Conflict

- CONQUEST – power play, win/lose, adversarial, autocratic, demand/threaten
- AVOIDANCE – conflict will go away if I ignore it, time will heal all wounds
- BARGAINING – a game where demands are traded and success relates to how much each party concedes, haggling
- BAND-AID – a quick fix, only dealing with surface issues
- ACQUIESCE – go along to keep the peace, may lead to passive aggression

The Win/Win Approach

- Cooperative approach
- Go back to underlying needs
- Recognize individual differences
- Openness to adapting position
- Empowers participants
- Gains commitment and increases motivation
- Helps people learn to work together

Interpersonal Conflict

- Common source of workplace conflict
- Relating well to people is a critical factor success in most jobs
- Flexibility to other's style (not manipulation or conformity)
- Example

Emotions During Conflict

- Anger
- Fear
- Hopelessness
- Frustration
- Disappointment
- Paranoia / suspicion
- Jealousy
- Shame

Human Needs Affecting Conflict

- Power
- Approval
- Inclusion
- Justice
- Identity

Dealing with Interpersonal Conflicts

- Be aware of “fight or flight” response
- Openly address conflict
- Be sensitive to potential damage
- Use a problem-solving approach – look for SHARED GOALS
- Listen
- Be Flexible

Watch Your Language, Young Lady!

Conflict as War	Conflict as Opportunity
“We shot down that idea.”	“What would you like to see happen instead?”
“Your position is indefensible.”	“This issue presents us with a real challenge.”
“He dropped a bomb on me.”	“Your feedback helped me see some ways I could improve.”

Eight Strategies for Resolving Conflicts at Work (Cloke & Goldsmith)

#1 Change the culture and the context of conflict

- ❖ What is workplace's culture in terms of conflict?
- ❖ What would we like for the culture to be?
- ❖ How do we accomplish this?

Strategy #2

Listen actively, empathetically, and responsively

- ❖ Encourages others to follow suit
- ❖ Helps you get to the heart of the conflict

The Art of Active Listening

- Many interpersonal conflicts would not arise if we treated our co-workers with the same basic courtesies we extend to customers
 - No interrupting
 - Reflect back understanding of views
 - Ask clarifying questions
 - Really listen, don't prepare your rebuttal until you have HEARD the other person
 - Use of "I" statements

Clearing the A-I-R

Appreciate

Explicitly tell others you want to hear their point of view

“I appreciate the opportunity to discuss this problem with you”

Inquire

The other person has the floor – be an active listener

“Let me make sure I understand your position:...”

Respond

Now you have the floor

“Now that I have a sense of your point of view, let me explain where I’m coming from”

From Workplace Wars

Words that Promote Conflict

- “You must...”
- “You lied to me”
- “This is so typical of you...”
- “You always / you never”
- “The problem is...”
- “If you don’t do this, then...”
- “You’ll never change”
- “You’re being hysterical”

Strategy #3

Acknowledge and integrate emotions to solve problems

- ❖ More controversial approach
- ❖ Unexpressed emotions can create conflict
- ❖ Communicate constructively while containing the destructive potential of emotions

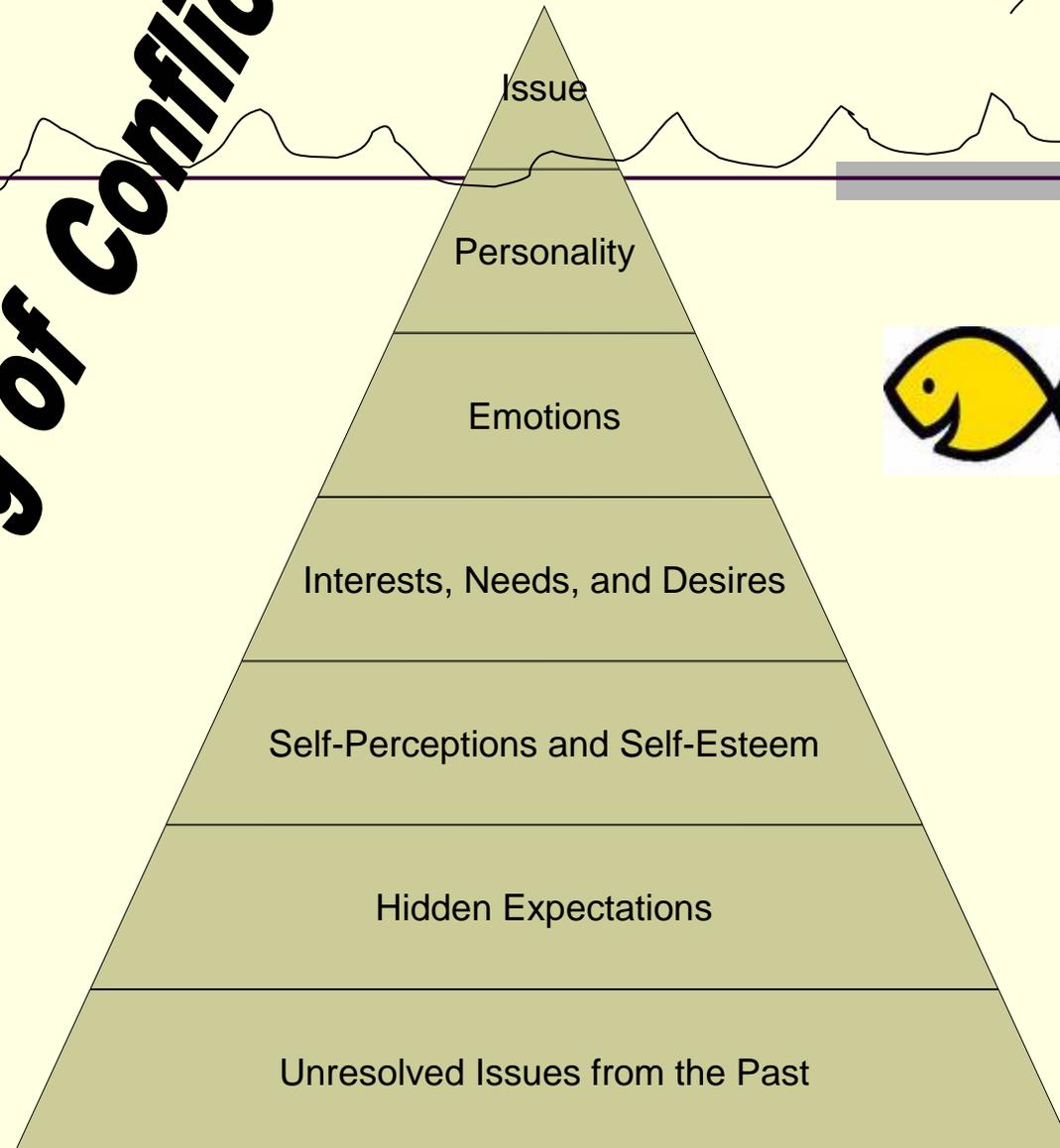
Strategy #4

Search beneath the surface for hidden meaning

- ❖ Conflicts are rarely about the most superficial issue
- ❖ Practice empathy and honesty



The Iceberg of Conflict



Questions to Take You Below the Surface

- Can you tell me what bothered you about what I did?
- What is the most important thing to you in solving this problem?
- Would you be willing to start again right now and do it differently?
- What would it take for you to let go of this conflict and feel that the issue has been completely resolved?

Strategy #5

Separate what matters from what gets in the way

- ❖ Let go of blaming
- ❖ Let go of who is “right”
- ❖ Focus on the future

Strategy #6

Stop rewarding and learn from difficult behaviors

- ❖ Instead of identifying the problem as a “difficult person” or a “difficult personality,” identify the problem as a DIFFICULT BEHAVIOR
- ❖ What is rewarding the difficult behavior?

Strategy #7

Solve problems creatively, plan strategically, and negotiate collaboratively

- ❖ Adopt a positive attitude toward problem-solving
- ❖ Approach problem-solving as a collaborative process

Strategy #8

Explore resistance, mediate, and design systems for prevention and resolution

- ❖ What to do when your best efforts are met with resistance
- ❖ Alternative Dispute Resolution

Introduction to Mediation

- Usually a process involving a neutral third party who helps disputing parties find solutions to contested issues
- Mediation is an emerging field of professional practice
- Steps in mediation

Mediation Process

- Dialogue is directly between the disputants, about the specific issue to be resolved
- Cardinal rules:
 - Stay in the process (no walk-aways)
 - No one-sided solutions (no power plays)

Mediation Steps

- Hold preliminary meetings with disputants
 - Hear each person's side of the story
 - Define the problem
 - Explain the rules
 - Assess each party's willingness to resolve the conflict
- Hold three way meeting
 - Encourage conciliation
- Be quiet
 - Don't give advice or opinions
 - Don't propose solutions
- "Let's Make a Deal"
- Follow Up

Good Mediation Agreement

- Balanced
- Behaviorally specific
- Written

Self-Mediation Steps

- Find a time to talk
 - The Issue Statement (why we need to talk)
 - The Request (asking the other to meet)
- If there is resistance,
 - Acknowledge the objection
 - Show the benefits of talking
 - Ask again
- Plan the context
 - Time and place for meeting
 - State the issue as a work-related problem we need to solve together

Self-Mediation Meeting

- Talk it Out
 - Express appreciation
 - Express optimism
 - Review guidelines (let's persist until we agree, let's not push a one-sided solution)
 - State the Issue
 - The invitation: "Help me understand your perspective"
 - Don't run the show

Team Conflict Mediation

- Prevent problems in mediation meeting
 - Personalization – don't allow people to use person insults and derogatory language
 - Withdrawal – don't allow any one person to remain passive
 - Scapegoating – don't allow subgroups to “gang up” on others
- Brainstorming Options
 - Silent, individual generation of ideas
 - Round robin
 - Voting and ranking options

Helpful References

- Conflict Resolution (2001) by Daniel Dana
- People Styles at Work (1996) by Robert Bolton & Dorothy Grover Bolton
- Resolving Conflicts at Work (2005) by Kenneth Cloke & Joan Goldsmith
- Workplace Wars and How to End Them (1994) by Kenneth Kaye

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