

Facilitator's Guide

Understanding and Dealing with Conflict

Even a straight pin is no good if it loses its head. —Anonymous

Rationale:

Conflict is as common as rain and arises wherever people come in contact and have competing needs. Conflict is not always bad and may be needed to keep organizations growing and to provide personal growth opportunities. Successful conflict resolution relies on understanding how to utilize the correct conflict response for each circumstance and the removal of barriers to effectiveness.

Goal:

To develop understanding of effective conflict responses for different situations and removal of barriers to resolution.

Program Objectives:

- To recognize the characteristics of five conflict management approaches
- To demonstrate the application of appropriate responses to potential organizational conflict situations
- To analyze the effect of positive and negative emotional communication behaviors toward effective conflict resolution

Pre-Program Preparation/Materials:

- Read Understanding and Dealing with Conflict fact sheet.
- Review and prepare copies of the quiz *How to Deal With Conflict* for participants.
- Prepare five communication response posters for display on avoidance, accommodation, competition, compromising, collaboration.
- Prepare positive and negative Communication Behavior Statement cards for Learning Activity 3.

Introduction:

Plain and simple, when people come in contact with each other, conflict will arise. Conflict is not always bad and is sometimes needed to keep an organization growing. How we deal with the conflict that arises will affect the potential outcome.

Introductory Activity:

Take a moment and think of a situation that you have experienced in a group setting that involved conflict. Without talking about specific people, share your insights to the following two questions with the person beside you. How did people in the situation deal with the conflict? How did the way the people handled the situation affect the outcome?

Objective 1: Recognize the characteristics of five conflict management approaches

Facilitator Opening Statements:

We each have our own way of dealing with conflict. The techniques we use are based on many variables, such as our temperament, personality, environment and our life stage. There are five major styles of conflict management to choose as a response, depending on the situation and circumstances. There are no right or wrong approaches, but some ways are more effective than others in providing the most opportunity for successful resolution and growth.

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Learning Activity 1:

Provide Understanding and Dealing with Conflict quizzes for each participant; have participants individually complete quiz, scoring their response tendencies in each of the five categories –avoidance, accommodation, competition, compromise and collaboration. Display a poster of each category as you share characteristics of each response, asking participants to raise their hands if this was their category with the highest scores.

Objective 2: Demonstrate the application of appropriate responses to a potential organizational conflict situation

Facilitator Comments:

Review potential positive and negative aspects of each conflict response. For example:

- **Avoidance**—Good for trivial matters; good when more study is needed; doesn't deal with real issues and suppresses communication
- **Accommodation**—Good for preserving relationships when issue is more important to other person; continued use suppresses joint communication and may build resentment
- **Competition**—Good when winning or survival is important; creates a "loser" situation with little shared solution
- **Compromise**—Attempts to find common ground, shared power; someone "gives up" ground to reach shared solution; may not realize the best solution overall
- **Collaboration**—Satisfies desires of both parties, especially with concerns too important to compromise; difficult to bring together competing views

Learning Activity 2:

Divide participants into the five conflict response groups, based on their highest quiz category scores. Ask each group to discuss the following scenario:

You are all members of the Allensville Extension Homemaker Club. Your club has been selected as your county's outstanding community service organization, receiving a \$500 donation. You must decide the one best use for the money as a club.

Once everyone has had a chance to read the scenario, ask each group to go through the following steps:

Step 1: Ask each group member to think silently about their own preferred use for the money.

Step 2: Then hold a large group discussion on what should be done. Use the characteristics of your group's conflict response style to handle any disagreements in the discussion.

Step 3: Ask each group to consider the following questions - Was your group satisfied with the results? Why or why not? Was everyone satisfied individually? Why or why not?

Step 4: Now assign groups a different conflict response style, asking them to use the characteristics of this style in their discussions. Then question: Was this response more or less effective for your situation and members? Why or why not?

Objective 3: Analyze the effect of positive and negative emotional communication behaviors on effective conflict resolution

Facilitator Statements:

Conflict gives rise to emotional response that can positively or negatively affect communication and conflict resolution. There are some basic do's and don'ts for communication behaviors in a conflict situation:

- For starters, "Calm down!" The old adage "Even a straight pin is no good if it loses its head" applies in conflict resolution.
- Find a place and a time to talk.
- Ask questions, and listen more than you talk.
- Focus on the problem, not the person.
- If compromise or collaboration is needed, maintain a positive attitude and an open mind.
- Nonverbal communication is often more significant than what we say. Open- or close-mindedness can be communicated very effectively without saying a word.
- Verbal communication can be quite disruptive if it includes harsh language, insults, blame or threats.
- Interruptions or a refusal to listen are other obvious communication barriers.
- Sarcasm is seldom helpful in resolving conflict. It may be more subtle but is no less damaging than harsh words.
- Finally, don't make excuses, change the subject, try to read the other person's mind or put words in that person's mouth.

Learning Activity 3:

Pass out the following positive and negative communication behaviors to participants (use multiple cards for large groups).

- Use body language to show disapproval of all ideas other than yours.
- Insult another person's idea.
- Interrupt each person, stating why your idea is best.
- Make a sarcastic remark about the discussion process.
- Ask positive questions to learn more about another's idea.

Return to your "club" discussions regarding the use of money. Ask members to demonstrate their positive or negative behavior in their club discussions. Discuss which behaviors led to effective conflict resolution and which behaviors became a barrier toward a group solution.

Summary

While it isn't possible to manage to live a life free of conflict, we can manage our response to conflict. Every situation will be different; the responses will also be different. Using the appropriate response can help make conflict a productive – rather than destructive – fact of life.

Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding. —Albert Einstein

References

Hustedde, Ronald J, Steve Smutko, and Jarad J. Kapsa. Turning Lemons into Lemonade: Public Conflict Resolution. Southern Rural Development Center series #221. <http://srdc.msstate.edu/trainings/lemons/221.html>.

Thomas, Kenneth W., and Ralph H. Kilmann. Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument. Mountain View, CA: CPP, Inc, 1974-2009. www.kilman.com/conflict.html.

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Communication Behavior Cards

Use body language to show disapproval of all ideas other than yours.

Insult another person's idea.

Interrupt each person, stating why your idea is best.

Make a sarcastic remark about the discussion process.

Ask positive questions to learn more about another's idea.

How I Deal with Conflict Quiz

We have our own way of dealing with conflict. Our basic underlying temperament, our personality, our environment and where we are in our professional career or personal lives are variables that affect how we deal with conflict. However, by and large, there are five major conflict styles. Most address conflict from a collaborating, competing, avoiding, harmonizing or compromising style. None of these strategies is superior in and of itself. How effective each style is depends on the context in which it is used. Each statement below provides a strategy for dealing with a conflict. Rate each statement on a scale of 1 to 4 indicating how likely you are to use this strategy. Be sure to answer the questions indicating how you would behave rather than how you think you should behave.

1 = Rarely

2 = Sometimes

3 = Often

4 = Always

1. I explore issues with others to find solutions that meet everyone's needs. _____
2. When there is a disagreement, I gather as much information as I can and keep lines of communication open. _____
3. I try to see conflicts from both sides. What do I need? What does the other person need? What are the issues involved? _____
- Total of Section 1** _____
4. I would argue my case and insist on the merits of my point of view. _____
5. I find conflicts challenging and exhilarating; I enjoy the battle of wits. _____
6. I can figure out what needs to be done, and I am usually right. _____
- Total of Section 2** _____
7. When I find myself in an argument, I usually say very little and try to leave as soon as possible. _____
8. Being at odds with other people makes me feel uncomfortable. _____
9. I avoid hard feeling by keeping my disagreements with others to myself. _____
- Total of Section 3** _____
10. I try to meet the expectations of others. _____
11. I try to accommodate the wishes of my friends and family _____
12. I may not get what I want, but it's a small price to pay for keeping peace. _____
- Total of Section 4** _____
13. I try to negotiate and adopt a give-and-take approach to situations. _____
14. I prefer to compromise when solving problems and move on. _____
15. To break deadlocks, I meet people halfway. _____
- Total of Section 5** _____

How to score the quiz:

As stated, the 15 statements correspond to the five conflict-handling styles. To find your most preferred style, total the points in each section. The section with the highest score indicates your most commonly used strategy. The one with the lowest score indicates your least preferred strategy. However, if you are a leader who must deal with conflict on a regular basis, you may find your style to be a blend.

Style	Corresponding Section	Total
Collaborating	Section 1	_____
Competing	Section 2	_____
Avoiding	Section 3	_____
Accommodating	Section 4	_____
Compromising	Section 5	_____

Brief description of the five conflict styles:

Collaborating Style: Problems are solved in ways in which an optimum result is provided for all involved. Both sides get what they want and negative feelings are minimized.

Pros: Creates mutual trust; maintains positive relationships; builds commitments

Cons: Time consuming; energy consuming

Competing Style: Authoritarian approach

Pros: Goal oriented; quick

Cons: May breed hostility

Avoiding Style: The non-confrontational approach

Pros: Does not escalate conflict; postpones difficulty

Cons: Unaddressed problems; unresolved problems

Accommodating Style: Giving in to maintain relationships

Pros: Minimizes injury when we are outmatched; relationships are maintained

Cons: Breeds resentment; exploits the weak.

Compromising Style: The middle-ground approach

Pros: Useful in complex issues without simple solutions; all parties are equal in power

Cons: No is one ever really satisfied; less-than-optimal solutions are implemented

Adapted from Northern Carolina State University "Preparing Future Leaders" <http://www.ncsu.edu/grad/preparing-future-leaders/docs/conflict-management-styles-quiz.pdf>