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Facing Conflict Head-On

Organizational conflict can cripple productivity, hamper decision-making and delay new initiatives.

Conflict is costly at every level. It affects you, your team and the organization as a whole.

Yet, many managers often turn a blind eye to it, hoping it will resolve itself over time. In reality, we know that conflict doesn't resolve itself. In fact, unresolved conflict festers and spreads like a virus...

Why do managers avoid handling workplace conflicts?

- Fear of making things worse
- Uncertain skills or limited experience in managing conflict
- Unable to keep discussions from getting 'personal'
- Uncomfortable with conflict and emotion in the workplace

Managing conflict through better communication

- Conflict is inevitable. It's impossible to completely eliminate it. Some conflict is actually healthy. To resolve conflict creatively, encourage all sides to communicate openly and to respect differing viewpoints.
- Detect the early 'sparks' of harmful conflict and address them before they fan into real flames. The key to conflict management is to deal with these warning signs effectively.
- Skilled communicators rarely find themselves in raging conflicts. Be clear about what you say and skilled in how you say it. This greatly improves your ability to delegate, negotiate, problem-solve, coach and manage conflict. Take every opportunity to improve your own communication skills.
- Help is available! DISC tools are extremely useful in providing objective and professional ways to open doors between entrenched positions. They are critical in removing the false assumptions and unrealistic expectations that can cripple efforts to manage conflict between individuals or groups.

Organizational conflict has many faces

Interpersonal (Me vs.You):

Disagreement or misunderstanding between two or more people can lead to judging, labelling, blaming, resistance, or sabotage of each other's efforts.

Intrapersonal (Me vs. Me):

Internal conflict can pull an individual in two or more different directions. People who don't acknowledge this internal conflict often send mixed messages, making it difficult to reach the root of the problem.

Personal-functional (Me vs.The Job)

A poor job fit doesn't incorporate the strengths of an employee's behavioural style and/or attitudes and values. The stress of trying to adapt to a misfit job saps energy and increases interpersonal conflicts.

Organizational (Us vs.Them)

Inter-departmental, intra-team (cliques), inter-layer (between hierarchies) and, of course, union-nonunion conflict can also escalate and threaten an organization's success.

Whatever the conflict, you need to intervene!

Do 'Cliques' create conflict in your team?

Team members cluster in subgroups for any number of reasons (common interests, shared projects or shared behavioural styles). When subgroups become cliques, they can exclude others or create opposing coalitions that destroy consensus and create conflict.

Do you inadvertently encourage 'cliques'?

Try to balance your relationships and divide your time equally among team members.

Plan to:

- Use people from different cliques to work on projects together.
- Encourage interaction outside of the workplace.
- Be mindful of how you lunch and interact with all people in your team.

(See *The Management Team Handbook*, Marie G. McIntyre.)

Use DISC and PIAV (Personal Interests and Values) tools to:

- Detect Me vs. Me and Me vs. The Job conflict
- Resolve Me vs.You and Us vs.Them conflict
- Acknowledge and respect differences
- Build trust and understanding
- Objectively focus discussion on explanations for misunderstanding and miscommunication
- Provide strategies for more effective interaction
- Predict a person's most comfortable response to conflict

DISC Core Style

Dominance

Influence

Steadiness

Compliance

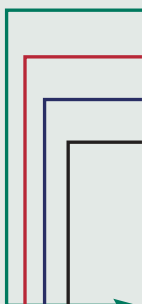
Most comfortable conflict response

Competing

Collaborating
(talking it out)

Accommodating

Avoiding



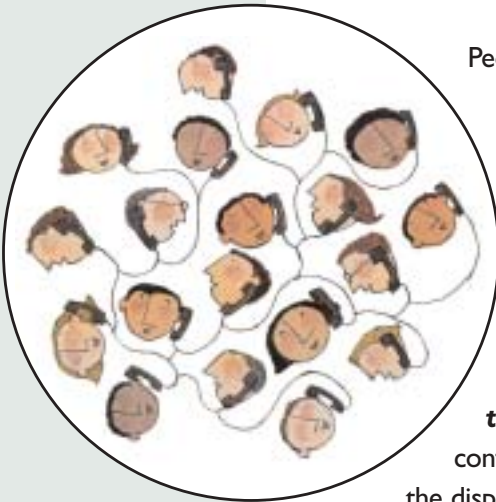
Train your team to manage conflict

When your people have the necessary skills to manage conflict, you don't need to intervene as often.

Provide your people with training to:

- Use “appreciative inquiry” – ask questions with genuine curiosity instead of blaming and prying to find underlying motives, values and interests.
- Listen without interrupting.
- Summarize what the other person says, (even the emotional tone), then ask the other person to verify or correct it.
- Use “I” statements rather than “you” statements – e.g., “I’m frustrated because we’re going to be over budget if we wait any longer to...” vs. “You’re slowing this down.”
- Help the other person see your viewpoint; share your own assumptions and beliefs.

The problem is *between* people, not ‘in’ people.



People involved in recurring conflict often view the “other person” as the problem.

Ask them to reflect on this:

“If the other person were truly the problem, wouldn't everyone else have trouble working with him or her too?” Usually co-workers can communicate and get along with both participants in a conflict.

People in conflict need to start seeing the problem as something **between them** rather than within them. Once they move from conflict as personal to conflict as an idea, they are more willing to look at what each contributes to the dispute.

The management skill lies in helping disputants open their minds to possibility.

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Helpful Resources:

→ Sy Landau, Barbara Landau and Daryl Landau. *From Conflict to Creativity: How Resolving Workplace Disagreement Can Inspire Innovation and Productivity*. 2001. John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

The Landaus are a family of mediators with backgrounds in law, psychology and dispute resolution. Using many examples and anecdotes from their work in the field, their book outlines an effective approach to transforming conflict into an opportunity for joint problem-solving.

Would you like to recommend a book or resource?

Please just send a review and why you like it and we'll post your recommendation!