

Conflict Management Workshop

I. What is Conflict?

Conflict is an **expressed struggle** between at least two **interdependent** parties who **perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources & interference** from others in achieving their goals.” (Wilmot & Hocker)

Characteristics of Productive Conflict

1. Flexibility
2. **Openness (not making too many assumptions) and open communication**
3. Respect (for yourself and for others)
4. Perception of a mutually beneficial option (think of something to benefit both)
5. Attacking the problem, not the person (and ignoring their attacks)

Characteristics of Negative Conflict

1. Avoidance (eliminates opportunity for clarification)
2. Inflexibility
3. Escalation through mutually reinforcing negative statements
4. **Poorly expressed, but strong emotions ('venting' on someone)**
5. Feeling insecure, uncertain or unsure in the situation

Conflict can be expressed, or go unexpressed, in many different ways. **The critical factor is to consciously think about how you want to handle it rather than unconsciously creating an unhealthy situation.**

Options for dealing with conflict include:

- Avoidance
- Intrapersonal Resolution
- Expressed Conflict

Conflict is often a balancing act between relationships and objectives - it is important to be aware of this when evaluating how to respond; look at what value each holds for you.

II. What Causes Conflict (What's your Conflict MAP?)

There are three major factors in conflict interaction/assessment:

Motivation

- **What is possibly driving the person or their behavior?** What are they trying to achieve?
- What fears, uncertainties or doubts could they be experiencing? How could this affect their behavior towards you?
- What can you do about it (is there a way to alleviate their fear/concern at little cost to you)

Assumption/Attribution/Interpretation

- What characteristics, values, goals, expectations, etc, are you attributing to them?
- What are your own assumptions?

Perceptions

- What are you perceiving about the situation (not assuming, but actually perceiving)?
- What do you think their perceptions are about: you, the situation, etc.?
- Are there potential misconceptions on their part you might be able to clarify?

Misperceptions of the other person's behavior or motivations are the primary reason for many conflicts.

- **Often, we take a position and/or get defensive too early and don't explore all the options**

III. How We Can Deal With Conflict Most Effectively

Five Conflict Interaction Styles (Thomas & Kilmann)

1. Avoiding – “I will think about it tomorrow”
2. Accommodating – “It would be my pleasure”
3. Competing – “My way or the highway”
4. Compromising – “Let’s make a deal”
5. Collaborating – “Two heads are better than one”

No one style is better than the others or is appropriate for every situation. The key is to be flexible enough to be able to utilize the style that is most appropriate and effective in any given situation.

Come up with your PLAN:

1. Check your **Perceptions** – are they objective and valid or are they reactive or biased
2. **Let** go of previous issues or judgments – don’t let these overly impact your current situation
3. **Analyze** – ask yourself what course of action will meet your needs best in the long run
4. **Negotiate** – discuss a course of action with the other party; be flexible, direct and open

Cooperation Skills (Claassen & Reimer)

Supportiveness Skills:

1. Paraphrasing
2. Openness
3. Agreement Stating (use ‘and’, not ‘but’)

Assertiveness Skills:

1. “I” Messages
2. Preference Stating
3. Purpose Stating

Try to use the approach/response that will be most beneficial (to you and to others) in the long run rather than responding based on pride, anger, frustration or uncertainty

Specific Techniques

When trying to use new approaches we need both: 1. New Skills and 2. The Motivation to use them. Think about the benefits of managing conflict better (better relationship with your family, less stress, being able to effectively express your viewpoint, etc.) in order to provide you with the internal motivation you need to try new things.

Perception (Internal):

- “Go to the Balcony” (Ury) – don’t react
- Identify your own hot buttons and be aware of when they’re being triggered
- Focus on the facts, not perceptions, assumptions or expectations

Action (Internal and External):

- Active Listening = 1. Decide to be open 2. Give 100% of your attention 3. Suspend judgment
- Look for low cost, high value options – don’t forget the intangibles
- Utilize descriptive, specific, non-judgmental language rather than vague or accusatory language
- Be aware of your meta-communication (tone, body language, facial expression, eye contact)

Interaction (External):

- Separate the problem from the person
- Check in with the other – state your perception/understanding and ask for feedback (paraphrase)
- Identify a common goal that you can work on together (must have value for each party)
- Develop your BATNA – Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement (Fisher and Ury)

When everything else is stripped away, the ultimate and final thing that we each have control over is our attitude – how we react to the situations presented to us. (paraphrased from Viktor Frankl)

