

RESOLVING CONFLICTS IN THE WORKPLACE

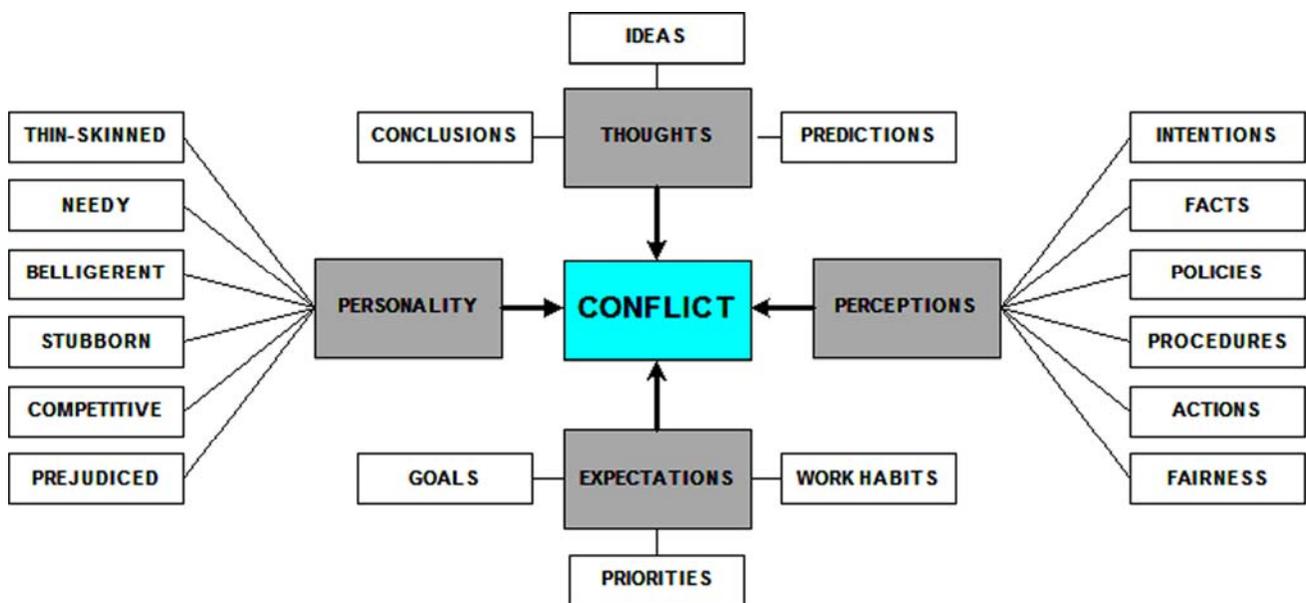
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Conflict is a naturally occurring event in the workplace. In any organization, people are different from one another. They have different needs, different goals, different priorities, different expectations of others, different perceptions about their work, different self-concepts, different views of events, and so on.

On the one hand, these differences contribute to innovative, high quality, customer satisfying performance. On the other hand, they inevitably lead to conflicts—conflicts that need resolution before they impede quality work.

Following is just a sampling of possible differences that lie at the root of conflicts.



The key to conflict resolution is to handle conflicts without you or the conflicting parties being clouded by anger, without being determined to find someone to blame and punish, and without being biased by grudges one may hold.

The goal of conflict resolution is to see the conflict as a problem to be solved and then to engage the parties involved in the conflict in a collaborative effort to find a mutually satisfying solution to the problem.

Work to resolve the conflict early on. Don't wait until things get out of hand.

The following pages contain some useful guidelines for you as a team leader, manager, or supervisor to apply in your role as the mediator of a conflict.

Before You Meet With The Conflicting Parties

- ◆ Gather information beforehand by speaking with conflicting parties separately. Keep your focus on practicing effective listening techniques when you listen to what they have to say, so that you can thoroughly understand their feelings, assumptions, and assertions.
- ◆ Collect any available objective data. Know the facts before you schedule a meeting.
- ◆ Get yourself in the right emotional frame of mind for the meeting. Keep in mind the principles of transactional communication—work hard at staying in your adult ego state. Nothing will hinder your attempts at resolving a conflict more than you being critical or angry.
- ◆ Be aware that each of the parties involved will be seeking to get you “on their side.” Each will listen to your words and watch for nonverbal behaviors that signal you are their ally. Again, work hard at staying in your problem-solving, adult ego state.
- ◆ Choose a neutral place to resolve the conflict. Don’t meet with the conflicting parties in either of their own personal work environments.

Meeting With The Conflicting Parties

- ◆ Attack the problem not the people involved. Keep your focus on solving the problem.
- ◆ Remember, the problem is the problem, not the people. Your aim is to involve the conflicting parties in a collaborative search for a solution to their own problem.
- ◆ Keep your eyes looking forward—the conflict is an opportunity to solve a problem so it won't happen again in the future. Do not focus backward by finger-pointing and blaming.
- ◆ Begin your meeting with the conflicting parties by telling them you are concerned about each of them and about how their conflict can interfere with their performance, the quality of their work, and their contribution to the organizational (or team) mission.
- ◆ Help the conflicting parties actively listen to each other. One technique is for one person to paraphrase what the other person has said before he or she then speaks.
- ◆ Another technique is to ask each person to state the other person's view of the problem early in the conversation. This not only will help them understand the other person's point of view, it will also help them move into an adult ego state.
- ◆ As a result of your active listening, demonstrate to the conflicting parties that you comprehend and understand each of their sides.
- ◆ If you see them misunderstanding each other, point it out to them. But don't couple it with blame as you do so—just show it to them. It may be something simple, such as assigning different meanings to a word, a lack of knowledge about a policy, etc.
- ◆ Keep them focused on the facts.
- ◆ Ask each person to suggest solutions. Emphasize that this is a collaborative effort. If they are unable to do so, or if their solutions are impractical, help them out with ideas of your own.
- ◆ Once a solution has been reached, ask each of them to restate what they have agreed to do in order to eliminate further misunderstanding and to cement the agreement.

Throughout The Conflict Resolution Process

- ◆ Be aware that your personality and the attitude you communicate will have a powerful effect on the outcome.
- ◆ Be honest. Tell people what you're feeling. But do so without finger-pointing or blaming.
- ◆ Know when to give feedback and when to simply observe the conflicting parties as they talk.

As you can see, successful conflict resolution focuses on the conflict as a problem to be solved, *not* on finding fault with people.

Further, the focus is on getting the conflicting parties to talk to each other, listen to each other, and understand each other—*not* attack each other.

Your goal is not to make the conflicting parties like each other or feel good about each another. Your goal is to get them to work more effectively together, and to approach any future conflicts with collaborative, problem-solving mindsets.

The more you coach and facilitate conflicting parties to collaborate on developing a solution when a conflict occurs, the more likely it is that they will eventually learn how to solve their conflicts themselves. That will be a win-win for them, for you, for your team, and for your organization.