

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Competency Development Guide

Conflict Management Defined:

The practice of recognizing and dealing with disputes in a rational, balanced and effective way. Conflict management implemented within a business environment usually involves effective communication, problem resolving abilities and good negotiating skills to restore the focus to the company's overall goals.

Source: BusinessDictionary.com

Conflict in the workplace is unavoidable. The ability to recognize conflict, understand the nature of conflict and bring a quick and fair resolution to conflict is a critical skill for leaders.

What creates conflict in the workplace? Ego, pride, jealousy, opposing positions, performance discrepancies, compensation, power... you might come to the conclusion that just about anything and everything creates conflict. The reality is that most conflict is usually a result of poor communication or a lack of emotional control.

Using Communication to Resolve Conflicts

1. Be open and honest

When conflict results from misunderstandings, frustrated expectations, and uncertainty, you should facilitate a dialog between the people involved. Everyone should remain calm, polite, and nonjudgmental. At the same time, team members shouldn't shy away from the real issues. It's not enough to simply pay lip service to being open and honest. As team leader, you must facilitate dialog between team members in order to resolve conflict. Focus the discussion on the present, not the past. And be sure to talk about issues and problem behaviors, not team members' personalities.

2. Clarify expectations

As team leader, you must do whatever you can to ensure your team members understand how, when, and why something needs to be done, as well as who should do it.

Clarifying expectations should happen at two key points – first, when the team is established, and second, at the beginning of any new initiative or work phase. During these two periods, uncertainty is at its highest and team members need their roles clarified. Give them opportunities to ask as many questions as necessary about what their responsibilities are, when certain events will happen, and how to work with other members of the team. Team members need to find out what other teammates expect of them and to test the validity of their own expectations of others.

However, clarifying expectations isn't a one-time deal. Because it's impossible to anticipate every single event and uncover all expectations, the clarification process should happen regularly as work proceeds. If expectations are violated, the team needs to discuss them – conflict due to violated expectations affects everyone.



"It takes me a long time to lose my temper, but once lost, I could not find it with a dog."

Mark Twain

"Peace is not the absence of conflict, but the ability to cope with it."

Dorothy Thomas

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SUPPORTING BEHAVIOR STATEMENTS

3. Clarify perceptions

People in the middle of a conflict have a hard time understanding their own role in the conflict. To resolve the conflict, you must clarify their perceptions about themselves and the other people involved. The concept of “image exchanging” involves having people involved in a conflict explain their perceptions of themselves and each other. By using this concept, you should be able to help close the gap between team members’ self-images and how those team members perceive each other.

Almost all interpersonal conflict on a team is the result of a lack of communication. You can prevent conflict by trying to achieve better communication, which will help team members to understand each other and be able to work together. You can use three principles to help resolve conflict through communication: be open and honest, clarify expectations, and clarify perceptions.

6 Techniques to Facilitate Conflict Resolution

1. **Avoiding** involves retreating from an actual or potential conflict situation. This may happen when someone gets so angry or frustrated that they just walk away from an argument, or when someone chooses to pretend that no conflict exists. Sometimes people agree with a request just to avoid an argument. This approach is almost always counterproductive, because if you don’t work through a problem, it’s unlikely to go away.

2. **Forcing** involves pushing one point of view at the expense of others. This occurs when someone makes a decision that results in one person winning and one person losing – a win-lose situation.

3. **Accommodating** is another technique to dealing with conflict. A team leader who takes this approach to conflict resolution emphasizes areas of agreement rather than areas of difference. It usually means downplaying a conflict, often to prevent arguments or ill feeling.

4. **Compromising** involves negotiating a solution that’ll bring about some degree of satisfaction to all parties involved. Both parties meet each other halfway and, in the process, give something up. That’s why this approach is sometimes seen as providing only lose-lose solutions, although it can provide a way to move forward.

5. **Collaborating** involves combining ideas and viewpoints from several people with different perspectives. This leads to general agreement and commitment to a solution among all team members.

6. **Confronting** involves identifying a problem’s root cause and its best solution by examining alternatives. It requires a give-and-take attitude and open dialog in which team members assess and consider options. Confronting often provides a long-lasting solution to conflict because everyone is involved in working toward a solution to the cause of the conflict.

To identify competency skill gaps consider outlining key supporting behaviors that are important in your organization.

You can assign a basic Likert scale to each behavior statement (examples outlined below) and have the employee and the employee’s manager rate proficiency.

ACHIEVING RESULTS

Addresses performance problems promptly.

Sets clear, well-defined desired outcomes for work activity and tracks progress.

Seeks and gives performance feedback to others.

Sets challenging goals and demonstrates a strong sense of urgency and persistence about accomplishing them.

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Conflict Management: Unavoidable Truths
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SUPPORTING BEHAVIOR STATEMENTS

DECISION MAKING

Bases decisions on an analysis of short-range consequences or simple options, including people's reactions and potential problems.

Gathers sufficient information to identify gaps and variances before making a decision.

Focuses on objectives and results when considering the various alternatives to a decision.

MANAGERIAL COURAGE

Confronts adversity and is energized by challenges.

Deals effectively with difficult people or situations.

Encourage direct and tough debate but isn't afraid to end it and move on.

Holds unpopular position as appropriate.

