Effective Communication in Your Workplace

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What is Conflict?

- Any situation where there are differences over goals, thoughts or emotions that can occur within or between individuals or groups and that lead to opposition or antagonistic interaction.

- Conflict is often a struggle between incompatible and opposing needs, wishes, interests, ideas or people.

- Conflict is a fact of life in all types of situations when individuals with different interests compete for the same resource pool.
Conflict

- We’re not comfortable with it; would prefer to avoid it.

- We know that avoiding it doesn’t make conflict go away, conflict if present tends to bother us whether we deal with it or not.

- Dealing with conflict is not a natural skill; it’s learned.
Why Don’t We Like Conflict?

- Conflict has a pejorative connotation so we tend to avoid it.

- Individuals are not trained to deal with conflict – they have memories of bad experiences and this colours their attitude to conflict.

- Being involved in conflict is associated with “losing face”, risking “rejection” and being “unloved”.
The challenge is finding constructive means for managing conflict while still maintaining some differences that serve to energize the group.

Conflict can be an opportunity

So it is not necessarily the conflict that is bad but the way we deal with the conflict may be bad.

But let’s be more clear about the fact that there are two types of conflict.
Negative Conflict – Dysfunctional Conflict

- It hinders our ability to attain goals or objectives.
- It is destructive when it leads to stress and anxiety etc-

Conflict is Dysfunctional when:

- It interferes with other task relevant activities
- When there are unclear/opposing views;
- When our responsibilities are unclear
- When there are personality clashes; people won’t work together
- When it leads to lower self-esteem or self-confidence
Consequences of dysfunctional conflict (unresolved and destructive)

- Poor communication; resentment, violence; withdrawal, avoidance, blaming
- Reduced group cohesiveness;
- Infighting takes precedence over group goals;
- Lowered productivity and group performance
- Depletion of energy and creativity
Positive Conflict - Functional conflict

Consequences of functional conflict

Conflict is viewed as positive when it has following results:

- Creativity and innovation
- Quality of decisions improved; Interest and curiosity
- Problems aired and tensions released;
- Improved relationships and co-operation;
- Group cohesiveness (inter-group conflict is managed)
- Fosters self-evaluation and change;
- Reassessment of group goals and activities;
- Improves performance
- Clarification of key issues and values
Antecedents and Sources of Conflict

1. Differences in goals/objective
2. Miscommunication
3. Differing attitudes, values and perceptions
4. Personality clashes
Antecedents and Sources of Conflict

5 Role ambiguities
6 Resource scarcities
7 Task Interdependence
8 Competing objectives
9 Unresolved prior conflicts
Types of Conflict in Everyday Life

- **Fact Conflict:** giving or receiving information incorrectly
- **Values Conflict:** differences in belief
- **Ego Conflict:** arguing about who knows the most
- **Task Conflict:** deciding on the best way to carry out a task - This kind of conflict can be good.
Content Conflict (different understandings of instructions, events, specifications etc). These are easier to “fix”.

Relationship conflict (differences in values, beliefs especially about responsibility, power, authority, rights, coordination, style of management etc). These are harder to fix.
But we need to be able to deal with conflict

- Conflict is pervasive in our personal and our professional lives.

- We must learn the appropriate skills to deal with conflict.

- If you are distressed by anything external, the pain is not due to the thing itself, but to your own estimate of it; and this you have the power to revoke at any moment. Marcus Aurelius
Dealing with Conflict

- We can successfully face and resolve conflicts by taking a few steps:
  - Recognize conflicts as normal and inevitable
  - Train ourselves not to overreact when conflicts arise
  - And have a strategy to use when conflicts arise
How Do we Deal with Conflict?

- Need to think about importance of both relationship (with others) and goal (outcome aims)
- Is relationship long term or passing?
- Is relationship substantive or narrow?
- Is the relationship more important to me than the matter (goal) under discussion?
- How important is it to maintain a working or friendly relationship with those with whom I am in conflict?
- What possible ramifications will surface after the dust settles?
The submission-assertion-aggression continuum

Submissive person often seen as selfless, does not express needs and feelings.

Assertive person stands up for his/her own rights and expresses personal needs, concerns, and ideas in direct and appropriate ways …..she/he does not violate the needs of others or trespass on their personal space

Aggressive person expresses her feelings needs and ideas at the expense of others.
Payoffs and Penalties

- Being submissive means you can avoid conflictual situations

- Payoffs
  - Never to blame
  - Need lots of protection
  - Selfless
  - Win over aggression

- Costs
  - Live an unlived life
  - Lack control in their emotions
  - Relationships less satisfying than could be.
  - Ill health
Payoffs and Penalties (Continued)

- Being aggressive means that you get your needs met

Payoffs
- Secure material needs and objects they desire
- Are less vulnerable and protect self
- Survives far better than others and paid more – in short run

But
Costs

- Aggressive people fear counter aggression
- Loss of control
- Aggression fosters its own destruction because others will respond by
  - Resisting
  - Lying
  - Covering up
  - Sabotage
  - Forming alliances etc - in other words
- Aggression alienates others
- Destroys relationships because people feel used
- Aggression can be detrimental to health
Advantage and Price of Assertion

- **Pay-offs**
  - Assertive people like themselves
  - Have fulfilling relationships
  - At least attempt to live their own life

- **But**

- **Costs**
  - Being true to your own values can be risky
  - Risking dissension and bringing about conflict to improve situations
  - Assertion takes willpower- sometimes easier to be submissive or aggressive
Resolution Styles

(Dwyer (2007))

Figure 6.3: The probable impact of negotiation styles and conflict resolution strategies on relationships and goal achievement
Collaborating is appropriate....

- To find a solution when both sets of concerns are too important to compromise
- When your objective is to learn
- To merge insights from people with different perspective’s
- To gain commitment by incorporating concerns into a consensus
- To work through feelings that have interfered with a relationship
Competing is appropriate....

- Quick, decisive action is vital
- On important issues where unpopular actions need implementing
- On issues vital to company welfare when you know you’re right
- Against people who take advantage of non-competitive behaviour
Avoidance is appropriate....

- Issue is trivial, more important issues are pressing
- You perceive no chance of satisfying your concerns
- Potential disruption outweighs the benefits of solution
- Need to let people cool down and regain perspective
- Others can resolve the conflict more effectively
- When issues seen tangential or symptomatic of other issues
- Gathering information supercedes immediate decision

- But not appropriate if following applies
Reasons why you might engage in avoidant behaviour

- Fear of being ‘taken for a ride’
- Guilt for being assertive
- Intimidation
- Fear of ‘losing face’
- Wanting to be liked or needing to be ‘nice’
- Fear of conflict
- Lack of self-confidence
Accommodating is appropriate

- When you are wrong - allow a better position to be heard, to learn and show reasonableness
- When issues are more important to others than yourself
- When harmony and stability are important
- To build social credits for later
- To minimise loss when you are outmatched and losing
- To allow subordinates to develop by learning from their mistakes
When your goals are important, but not worth the effort of more assertive strategies
When opponents with equal power are committed to mutually exclusive goals
To achieve temporary settlements to complex issues
To arrive at expedient solutions under time pressure
As a backup when collaboration or competition is unsuccessful
Key Points to Remember When Dealing with Conflict

- The importance of assertive behaviour
- The importance of participating rather than withdrawing from a conflict situation
- The importance of reflective listening
- The importance of reducing impulsive behaviour and increasing observing and reflecting behaviour
- The importance of checking out strategies and outcomes decided by the parties
Conflict Prevention

Two communication techniques helpful for preventing conflicts are:

- Using “I” language and not putting other on the defensive

- Paying attention to nonverbal cues – your own and the other person’s
Levels of conflict

Discomfort

Incident

Misunderstanding

Tension

Crisis
Advice for Managing Conflict

1. Control your temper and emotional response
2. Understand the issues
3. Pick your battles
4. Search for a common goals or ground.
Define the conflict

Examine possible solutions

Test the solution

Evaluate the solution

Accept or reject the solution
Problem solving (win-win)

The six-step approach:
- Select best time
- Define needs
- Brainstorm solutions
- Evaluate solutions
- Choose solutions
- Implement solutions
References