

CONFLICT SOLVING MODULE

Definition

Conflict is the situation in which two people are opposed in a clear manner:

- 1) Antagonism between one person and another;**
- 2) An individual expresses an attitude resistance against the other.**

It is an element of crisis in relationship between two individuals and, to solve it, an effort of mutual active adaptation is required.

Conflict is a situation that needs to be transformed, and not a war to fight: we often tend to abolish instead of dealing with the situation; you can change the perspective noting the existence of a critical situation or a problem and try to deal with it.

Conflict is a normal, and even healthy, part of relationships. After all, two people can't be expected to agree on everything at all the times. Since relationship conflicts are inevitable, learning to deal with them in a healthy and effective way is crucial.

Causes of conflict

A conflict situation between two people can be generated by various causes, and in particular by the presence of:

- 1. quarrelsome people:** people who, for their character, are predisposed to conflict, or situations tend to generate type of relational conflict, beyond the content of communication transmitted;
- 2. scarcity of resources:** conflict can be generated by a scarcity of resources (e.g. civil wars of the African populations), or by situations where a person needs of any type of resource which is not given.
- 3. power struggle:** in the relationship between two people you can distinguish between two levels: a vertical one, when two people are in a hierarchical relationship; an horizontal level, when two persons are linked by an equal relationship non-hierarchical. The difference becomes potentially conflicted when, creating a struggle power, one intends to prevaricate the other one.

Typology of conflict

Conflicts can act at three levels:

Intrapersonal: whenever we have to make choices between needs, desires or different duties;

Interpersonal: whenever two people are in disagree because they have different needs and different goals;

Inter group: in cases of disputes between groups and nations

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The fact that conflict exists, however, is not necessarily a bad thing: as long as it is resolved effectively, it can lead to personal and professional growth.

By resolving conflict successfully, you can solve many of the problems that it has brought to the surface, as well as getting benefits that you might not at first expect:

- **Increased understanding:** the discussion needed to resolve conflict expands people's awareness of the situation, giving them an insight into how they can achieve their own goals without undermining those of other people.
- **Increased group cohesion:** when conflict is resolved effectively, team members can develop stronger mutual respect and a renewed faith in their ability to work together.
- **Improved self-knowledge:** conflict pushes individuals to examine their goals in close detail, helping them understand the things that are most important to them, sharpening their focus, and enhancing their effectiveness.

However, if conflict is not handled effectively, the results can be damaging. Conflicting goals can quickly turn into personal dislike. Teamwork breaks down. Talent is wasted as people disengage from their work.

Conflict resolution

Conflict resolution is the process by which two or more parties engaged in a disagreement, dispute or debate, reach an agreement resolving it.

Conflict resolution theories are structured around the type of dispute and the approaches to the conflict taken by the parties.

One of the most popular conflict resolution theories is the Interest Based Relational (IBR) Approach. IBR puts forth a set of conflict resolution rules that should be used with any dispute:

- **make sure that good relationships are the first priority:** as far as possible, make sure that you treat the other calmly and that you try to build mutual respect;
- **keep people and problems separate:** by separating the problem from the person, real issues can be debated without damaging working relationships.
- **behave civilly and be understanding of the other party's positions:** by listening carefully you'll most-likely understand why the person is adopting his or her position.
- **Listen first; talk second:** to solve a problem effectively you have to understand where the other person is coming from before defending your own position.
- **Set out the "Facts":** agree and establish the objective, observable elements that will have an impact on the decision.
- **Explore options together:** be open to the idea that a third position may exist, and that you can get to this idea jointly.

Skills needed in conflict resolution

Several skills are useful in effective conflict resolution:

- Ability to view problems and issues from multiple perspectives
- Ability to remain relaxed and focused
- Ability to perceive and understand the feelings and emotions of others
- Ability to actively listen - a listening technique that requires you to provide feedback to the person to which you are listening by restating or paraphrasing what someone is communicating to confirm your understanding
- Ability to control and manage your emotions
- Ability to use and interpret nonverbal communication
- Ability to think critically and objectively
- Ability to compromise -- the willingness to concede something in exchange for an opposing party's concession

Conflict resolution process

Having in mind the following rules you are almost sure that you can keep contentious discussion positive and constructive.

1. Be focus and understand the situation

Make sure that people understand that the conflict may be a mutual problem, which may be best resolved through discussion.

If you are involved in the conflict, emphasize the fact that you are presenting your perception of the problem.

2. Use active listening skills to ensure you hear and understand other's positions :

- make sure you understand what the other person is telling you—from his or her point of view.

- Repeat the other person's words, and ask if you have understood correctly.

- Don't interject your own point of view until the other person has said everything he or she wants to say.

- Make sure that when you talk, you're using an assertive approach, expressing in a clear and effective way your feelings and opinions, rather than a submissive or aggressive style.

3. Gather Information

- Ask for the other person's viewpoint.

- Try to understand his or her motivations and goals, and confirm that you respect his or her opinion.

- See the conflict from the other person's point of view

- Be sure to focus on work issues. Distinguish between thoughts and feelings and do not attribute to the other part the responsibility for what you feel.

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- Use "I" statements. Learn to say "I think ...", "I would like ...", "I'm afraid ...". A personal statement expresses something of themselves without blaming and criticizing the other and without making him responsible for our emotions, our feelings and our reactions. This work of awareness is to move from "You make me angry because you ..." to "I'm angry because I ...".

4. Agree the problem

Often different underlying needs, interests and goals can cause people to perceive problems very differently. You'll need to agree the problems that you are trying to solve before you'll find a mutually acceptable solution.

Sometimes different people will see different but interlocking problems – if you can't reach a common perception of the problem, then at the very least, you need to understand what the other person sees as the problem.

5. Negotiate a Solution

By this stage, the conflict may be resolved: both sides may better understand the position of the other, and a mutually satisfactory solution may be clear to all.

This is where a technique like win-win negotiation can be useful to find a solution that, at least to some extent, satisfies everyone.

Ground rules: some tips to effectively manage the conflict

Take your time

Wait for the right time, take time and avoid knee-jerk reactions.

Remain calm.

Try not to overreact to difficult situations. By remaining calm it will be more likely that others will consider your viewpoint.

If you start to feel angry or upset take a "time out"

If you feel you may lose control do something to help yourself feel steadier.

Express feelings in words, not actions.

Telling someone directly and honestly how you feel, can be a very powerful form of communication.

Avoid the "Matryoshka effect"

Just like the Russian dolls, every conflict it always contains other smaller and at the same time is part of a larger conflict.

Be specific about what is bothering you.

Vague complaints are hard to work on.

Deal only with the content of the conflict.

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Avoid pushing the issue to a general framework, in a previous situation, in a context of personal sympathy or antipathy. Storing up lots of grievances and hurt feelings over time is counterproductive.

Deal with only one issue at a time

Don't introduce other topics until each is fully discussed.

Avoid the "kitchen sink" effect where people throw in all their complaints while not allowing anything to be resolved.

No "hitting below the belt".

Attacking areas of personal sensitivity creates an atmosphere of distrust, anger, and vulnerability.

Avoid accusations.

Accusations will cause others to defend themselves. Instead, talk about how someone's actions made you feel.

Don't generalize.

Avoid words like "never" or "always." Such generalizations are usually inaccurate and will heighten tensions.

Avoid value judgments

The value judgments label the other and focus the attention on the evaluation of wrongs, instead of focusing on needs and responsibilities.

Accept and give constructive criticism

Focus on the work rather than the person. A constructive analysis builds someone up. It identifies at least one problem and gets a person to think about what caused the issue. It also invites her to find possible solutions to whatever is going wrong.

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