

Conflict Management

What practices can a leader demonstrate to manage conflicts and keep the team on track?

Topics: conflict management, conflict resolution, teamwork, facilitation

Summary: Conflicts among individuals have derailed many teams and organizations. Conflicts also present a test of leadership, in that it often takes skilled leadership to get the crew back on track. This module provides participants a lens to see how they and others approach conflict, as well as strategies for facilitating a resolution to conflict.

Outcomes:

Participants gain knowledge on how different personalities deal with conflict and will develop strategies for dealing with them.

Participants will reflect upon their own approaches to conflict.

Participants gain strategies to address conflict.

Participants gain strategies for limiting conflict escalation by engaging one another in an open and respectful way.

Duration: 2-3 hours

Materials:

Conflict Management Handouts 1-7

Chart paper and pens

Background: Participants will come to this topic with varying backgrounds relating to conflict management, which is why it is structured in a peer-teaching format. Many of the solutions will be generated by the group.

After facilitating the activities contained in this module for the first time, you'll have a better sense of how much time to devote to them.

The module does not specifically address cross-cultural conflict, although many of the activities are still applicable. Because of cultural "hot buttons" that can get pushed during conversations such as this, it is recommended that you recruit a trained diversity facilitator to address the topic of cross-cultural conflict.

Procedure:

Warm-Up:

There are numerous ways to introduce the topic. One suggestion is to tell a story from your own experience that illustrates a conflict and how different personalities approached it.

Lead a group discussion, covering these main questions and points:

- * Where do you find conflict? (Everywhere)
- * Is there any way to prevent conflict? (It's natural and inevitable.)
- * What happens to people when they are faced with a conflict? (They can become uncomfortable and defensive, and other responses)
- * What happens when conflict goes unresolved? (Significant damage to relationships can occur, and other responses)
- * Are there times when conflict is desirable? (Yes. For example, conflict can lead to bonding, learning, sensitivity, and other responses)

The Activity:

The first segment of the module involves participants reflecting upon their own conflict management styles.

1. Provide participants a brief introduction to the five conflict management styles (competitive, avoidant, collaborative, accommodative, and compromising) based on the information given in Conflict Management Handout 1 and 2. Use examples from your own experience to illustrate the approaches to conflict.
2. In pairs, the participants spend five minutes discussing the chart in Conflict Management Handout 2. Ask them to share their own examples of past conflicts and to determine which conflict management they used in particular situations.

The second segment of the module involves brainstorming features of five conflict management styles. NOTE: You may want to prepare a sheet of chart paper to resemble conflict management handout 3 in order to record the group's responses.

1. Let participants know that in their packets, Conflict Management Handout 4 and 5 provide two processes for managing conflicts that arise in an organization. While these processes are not directly addressed during this session, encourage participants to keep these handouts and to use them when a need arises.

2. This activity builds upon the previous one in which participants discussed their own conflict management styles. Lead a discussion of each of the five styles, asking participants to identify a few of the benefits and drawbacks of each. Record the group's responses on chart paper.

The final segments of the module presents two optional activities that focus on group-generated approaches to managing conflict.

1. **Conflict-laden statements.** Engage the group in a discussion of the statements on Conflict Management Handout 6. After each statement, ask volunteers from the group how they could convey a similar message in a less offensive and aggressive manner. To achieve an effect, you might wish to “plant” members of the group to bark out the conflict-laden statements on cue. Each outburst can introduce the specific statement for discussion.
2. **Brainstorming a solution to a real-world conflict.** This handout is a worksheet that leads participants through a process in which they can reflect upon a conflict they see at their organization. The process asks participants to describe the conflict and to apply facilitation skills to brainstorming solutions. Give the group personal reflection time (roughly 10-15 minutes) to write out their responses on the handout. Ask a few volunteers to share their reflections and brainstorm plans.

Wrap Up:

Ask the group what they are taking away from the session and record their answers on chart paper.

Sources:

Handouts 1 and 2 draw from materials by Frances Picherack, UBC Department of Health, Safety and Environment, and Michael Aherne.

Handout 4 draws on materials from “Face to Face,” National Association for Community Mediation.

Conflict Management Handout 1: Knowing your own conflict management style

Unaddressed conflict can paralyze good work. In a working environment can frustrate goals, diminish quality, and increase risks. People develop a conflict management style over time based largely from experience and personality traits. A person's style can modify over time.

There are five general conflict management styles:

- **Competitive**
- **Avoidant**
- **Collaborative**
- **Accommodative**
- **Compromising**

Personality characteristics, such as our general tendencies toward *assertiveness* and *co-operation*, greatly influence our conflict management style.

Assertiveness is the degree to which you attempt to satisfy your own concerns.

Co-operation is the degree to which you wish to satisfy others' concerns.

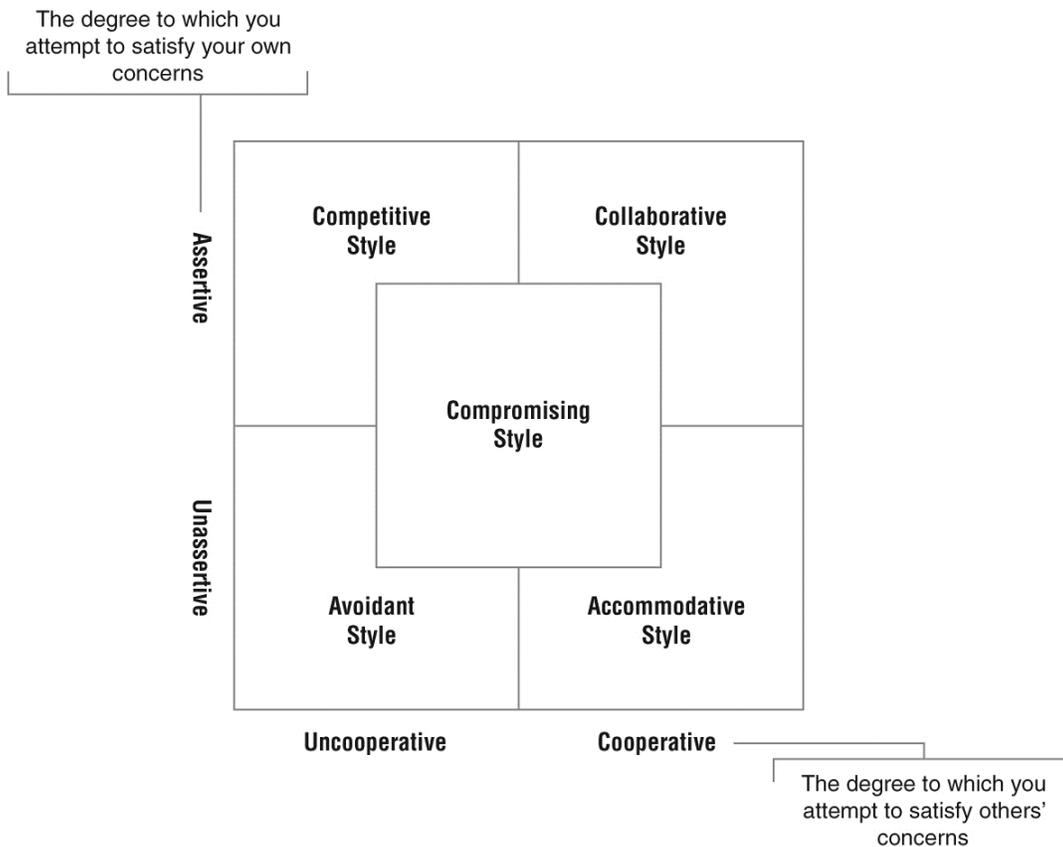
No one style is better than the other for all occasions. Some particular styles, however, are less suited to conflict management or resolution (for example, an avoidant style or a competitive style), and a collaborative style is generally considered the best way to increase the likelihood that the interests of all participants will be considered.

An organizational culture also reflects a conflict management style. In the avoidant style, the organization takes no action to resolve conflicts. The "Higher Authority" style is where an organization encourages referral up the line of command, internal appeals, and formal investigations to deal with conflict. With the power play style, conflict is dealt with through "back room" maneuverings. A collaborative style invites and allows individuals to try and work things out, or negotiate, or get assistance from a third party who can help to resolve matters considering the interests of all parties.

This handout draws from materials by Frances Picherack, UBC Department of Health, Safety and Environment, and Michael Aherne.

Conflict Management Handout 2: Conflict Styles

How do you handle conflict? Think back to a few of your experiences with conflict. For each experience, where on the below graphic would you place the style you employed while engaged in the conflict? Did your approach change under different circumstances?



This handout draws from materials by Frances Picherack, UBC Department of Health, Safety and Environment, and Michael Aherne.

Conflict Management Handout 3: Conflict Styles: Benefits and Drawbacks of Each

As a leader managing conflict, you need to know reasons why people might be drawn to different conflict styles and how to explain the benefits and drawbacks of each.

CONFLICT STYLE	BENEFITS	DRAWBACKS
Avoidance		
Competitive		
Compromise		
Accommodative		
Collaborative		

Conflict Management Handout 4: Managing Conflict on Your Own – An Eight-Step Conflict Resolution Process

Think, Listen, Cooperate (TLC) – from “Face to Face,” National Association for
Community Mediation

THINK

Step 1: Deal with Your Anger

You can't negotiate a good agreement if you and/or the other person are too angry to think straight or if you don't acknowledge your feelings.

Step 2: Do Your Homework

Think about the following questions before you approach the other person:

How does this conflict affect each of us?

What interests or values are at stake here for each of us?

What prejudices or assumptions do we have about each other?

What approach or style would be best here (avoid, compete, collaborate, etc.)?

What would be the best time and place to initiate this conversation?

LISTEN

Step 3: Set a Positive Tone

Invite the other person to negotiate. (“Could we talk?”)

State positive intentions. (“I'd like to make our working relationship better.”)

Acknowledge and validate the other person. (“I can see this is difficult for you, too.”)

“Thank you for working with me on this.”)

Step 4: Use Ground Rules

One person talks at a time.

Work to improve the situation.

Stay calm.

Step 5: Discuss and Refine the Problem

One at a time, each person shares issues and feelings.

Use effective listening and speaking techniques.

Identify interests and needs.

If necessary, discuss assumptions, suspicions and values.

Summarize new understandings.

COOPERATE

Step 6: Brainstorm Possible Solutions

Each person contributes ideas to satisfy interests and needs.

Don't criticize or evaluate ideas yet.

Be creative.

Use “I can...” or “We could...” rather than “You should...” or “You'd better...”

Step 7: Evaluate and Choose Solutions

Solutions should be:

Mutually agreeable

Realistic

Specific

Balanced

Solutions should address the main interests of both parties.

Step 8: Follow Up

Check back with each other at an agreed upon time and date.

If the agreement isn't working, use the same process to revise it.

Conflict Management Handout 5: Managing Conflict For Others – A Four-Step Conflict Resolution Process Mediated by a Neutral Third Party

As a leader you may be called on to help others resolve conflicts. Here is a simple four-step process to aid you in facilitating a conflict resolution meeting.

Step 1: States concerns or issues

Each party should state concerns or issues one at a time and uninterrupted while the other party listens. The listening party should write down what he or she hears. As a mediator, you should give time guidelines and make sure that only one person speaks at a time and that each party has the opportunity to express concerns without interruption.

Step 2: Acknowledge stated concerns or issues

After the concerns have been expressed, each party has the opportunity to paraphrase the concerns that they heard the other party state. Parties do not respond personally, defend their actions or discuss concerns; they simply read back what they heard and recorded. This acknowledgement does not necessarily imply agreement; it simply acknowledges that the concern or complaint exists. Parties may not agree with alleged concerns, but what's important is that one party believed it happened and caused harm. That is what you should deal with.

Step 3: Take responsibility for actions

Each party has an opportunity to take responsibility for actions that may have been inappropriate, inaccurate or harmful.

Step 4: Make a plan for resolution

This plan is intended to change the actions that caused the concerns. Some ideas to keep in mind as you make a plan:

- Address each of the party's concerns individually
- Brainstorm possible solutions to each concern without evaluating
- Choose a solution that best meets the needs of both parties
- Plan to support and review the plan at regular intervals
- Write up the plan and have all parties sign the agreement

Conflict Management Handout 6: Reframing Conflict-Laden Statements

In the following statements, reframe the statement by finding either the positive or the interests.

Quit telling me how to do everything! You must really think I'm stupid.

She is a terrible person. She blabbed all the secrets I told her when we were friends.

Our program here has worked perfectly for a long time. I don't know why you all feel you can just come and change things.

Don't come near me. I'm too angry to talk right now.

You never listen to me.

He doesn't care at all about the integrity or history of this community. He just wants to look good in front of his boss.

Conflict Management Handout 7: Brainstorming a solution to a real-world conflict

Think of a conflict you are having or someone you work with is having.

1. Describe the conflict.

2. Describe the benefits that would result from resolving the conflict.

3. List a few ideas/steps that could help resolve the conflict.

4. Would a meeting assist in moving the conflict toward resolution?

If so, what are the desired outcomes of the meeting?

What are some considerations and approaches the facilitator could apply in working with the group?