

Teamwork Training

Conflict in Groups

Conflict can be good for a group if it is managed appropriately. By airing differences, group members can produce quality decisions and satisfying interpersonal relationships. Learn how to manage conflict in a group and then complete the activity.

Identifying Conflict

The first step in managing conflict is to identify the conflict.

1. Do the group members know that a conflict exists?
2. Are the group members arguing over competing goals?
3. Are scarce resources at stake?
4. Are the group members dependent on each other to solve the conflict?

Styles of Conflict Management

Researchers Ruble and Thomas have identified five styles for managing conflict. The styles can be charted on two dimensions:

- assertiveness
- cooperativeness

The five styles are:

Competitive:

high in assertiveness, low in cooperativeness. Competitive people want to win the conflict.

Accommodative:

low in assertiveness and high in cooperativeness. These group members are easy going and willing to follow the group.

Avoiding:

low in assertiveness, low in cooperativeness. Avoiding people are detached and indifferent to conflict.

Collaborative:

high assertiveness, high in cooperativeness. These group members are active and productive problem solvers.

Compromising:

moderate in assertiveness, moderate in cooperativeness. Compromisers are willing to "give and take" to resolve conflict.

Defensive climate

The climate in which conflict is managed is important. Groups should avoid a defensive climate, which is characterized by these qualities:

Evaluation: judging and criticizing other group members.

Control: imposing the will of one group member on the others.

Strategy: using hidden agendas.

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Neutrality: demonstrating indifference and lack of commitment.

Superiority: expressing dominance.

Certainty: being rigid in one's willingness to listen to others.

Supportive Climate

Instead, groups should foster a supportive climate, marked by these traits:

Description: presenting ideas or opinions.

Problem orientation: focusing attention on the task

Spontaneity: communicating openly and honestly

Empathy: understanding another person's thoughts

Equality: asking for opinions.

Provisionalism: expressing a willingness to listen other the ideas of others.

Class Activity

Use your experience of the meetings and team activities to answer the following questions:

Describe a conflict that occurred in your group.

What steps were taken to create a supportive climate in the group?

How was the climate defensive?

How was the conflict resolved?

Which styles of conflict management were used by group members?

Conflict Resolution:

Thinkers/Feelers:

Differences in this personality preference by far are most significant in conflict resolution. Thinkers want feelers to deal with the facts and not personalize everything. Feelers want thinkers to consider the feelings of all those involved. Both types are afraid of losing control. T's are afraid they will lose control if an issue becomes personal and they appear to be personally affected by the conflict. F's are afraid that they will say something during a heated discussion that will cause irreparable harm to an interpersonal relationship. To work together, both types must simply realize that there are no right or wrong ways to approach conflict resolution, only differences.

Tips on resolving conflict:

- Extraverts: Stop and listen.

Extraverts think they can talk their way out of any situation. The key to

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conflict management for extraverts is to occasionally take a time out from talking and listen to what others are saying.

- Introverts: Speak up.

Introverts need to get their side of the story out in the open. As difficult as it is for introverts to speak up at meetings, it is imperative to ensure conflict resolution.

- Sensors: Look beyond the facts.

Sensors need to occasionally look beyond the obvious facts and consider extenuating circumstances.

- Intuitives: Stick to the issues.

Intuitives want to always look at the big picture. A bit of focus goes a long way in resolving simple conflicts.

- Thinkers: Emotion is not always bad.

Thinkers must allow others to express emotion, even if they are unable to do so. Emotions are an integral part of conflict resolution.

- Feelers: Be firm.

Feelers should not apologize for showing emotion. At the same time, they must occasionally say something frank, or even mean. People will respect their honesty.

- Judgers: Don't be a know-it-all.

Judgers must learn to accept the fact that the world is not always black and white. They must learn to entertain points of view other than their own.

- Perceivers: Pick one side of the fence.

Perceivers have both the blessing and the curse of being able to see all sides of an argument. A devil's advocate is sometimes counterproductive in conflict resolution. Ps should learn to defend the position about which they feel most strongly.

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Negotiation

Modern collaborative approaches to negotiating

In modern times, the aim of negotiation should focus on creative collaboration, rather than the traditional confrontational approach, or a winner-takes-all result.

The modern and ideal aim of negotiations is for those involved in the negotiation process to seek and develop new ways of arriving at better collaborative outcomes, by thinking creatively and working in cooperation with the other side.

Negotiating should develop a 'partnership' approach - not an adversarial one. As such, negotiating sides can be encouraged to take a creative and cooperative approach to finding better solutions than might first appear possible or have historically been achieved in practice.

In negotiation there is always a trade. We can think of this as either “buying” or “selling” whether it is an object, ideas, power or money.

Class Activity

We have all seen films where a bank robbery goes wrong - the thieves are surrounded by police and they take a hostage to get away. That's when negotiations start.

Who is buying and who is selling?



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Negotiation techniques and principles

First and most importantly, *positioning* is everything in negotiation. The way that the situation is initially approached, and when, are more influential on outcomes than all of the other negotiating tactics and techniques combined.

Rules 1 and 2 are absolutely critical even before you start a negotiation.

1. Have an alternative - negotiate with freedom of choice

Whether you are “buying” or “selling”, if you can't walk away because you need the deal so badly or because the other side is the only choice, then you are at a serious disadvantage. If the other side believes that you are the only choice then you have the advantage. No other factor is so important: the more you need to secure the deal, the weaker your position, so avoid negotiating when in this state.

This means that when negotiating you have to create the impression that your product or service is unique, and that the other person has nowhere else to go, and that they cannot afford to walk away.

This positioning of uniqueness is the most important tactic, and it comes into play before you even start to negotiate.

If what you offer is not unique remember that you are part of it. You can still create a unique position for yourself by the way that you conduct yourself, build trust, rapport, and empathy with the other person.

Establishing a position (or impression) of uniqueness is the single most effective technique when you are “selling”, whereas denying uniqueness is the most powerful tactic of the “buyer”.

2. Negotiate when the sale is conditionally agreed, not before (if buying the opposite applies)

Negotiate when the sale is conditionally agreed, and no sooner (buyers tend to try to negotiate before giving you any commitment - don't let them)

Or, put another way, don't get drawn into negotiating until you've got agreement in principle to do business.

If you start to negotiate before receiving this commitment you'll concede ground and the customer will attain a better starting point. This would put pressure on you to find more concessions later, and ensure a better finishing point for the customer.

If you are not sure that the customer is conditionally committed to the sale, then ask (a conditional closing question), eg "If we can agree the details will you go ahead?"

If you're buying, then the opposite applies: start to negotiate for concessions before agreeing you want to buy (try this when you next buy something - you'll be amazed at what you can secure without giving any commitment in return).

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3. Aim high

Aim for the best outcome (buyers aim low, and they tend not to go first either) (If you're buying, aim very - even ridiculously - low - but do it politely.) Whatever you're doing, your first stake in the sand sets the limit on your best possible outcome. There's no moving it closer to where you want to go; it'll only move the other way. Your opening position also fixes the other person's minimum expectation, and the closer your start point is to the eventual finishing point the more difficult it is to give the other person concessions along the way and ultimately arrive at a win-win outcome.

Many negotiations are little more than a split-the-difference exercise. They shouldn't be, but that's often the underlying psychology and expectation. So it's logical that to achieve the best possible finishing position you should start as ambitiously as you can (without losing credibility of course).

If you have the option to hear the other person's offer first, then do so. It's a fact that whoever makes the opening offer is at a disadvantage. If you go first, the other person can choose to disregard it and ask for a better offer. And the other person avoids the risk of making an offer themselves that is more beneficial than you would have been prepared to accept. It's amazing how often a buyer is prepared to pay more than an asking price, but avoids having to do so because they keep quiet and let the seller go first.

Vice-versa, the seller can often achieve a higher selling price than he anticipates if he hears what the buyer is prepared to offer first.

4. Let the other side go first

Try to avoid 'going first' on price if you can. (Buyers will often be trying the same tactic.) If you know the other person's starting point before you have to give your own, then this is clearly an advantage to you. For example, if selling, ask the other side if they have an 'outline budget'.

Sometimes you will be pleasantly surprised at what the other side expects to pay (or sell at), which obviously enables you to adjust your aim. Letting the other side go first is a simple and effective tactic that is often overlooked.

Letting the other side go first also enables you to use another tactic, whereby you refuse to even accept the invitation to start negotiating, which you should do if the price or cost point is completely unacceptable or a 'silly offer'. This then forces the other side to 'go again' or at least re-think their expectations or stance, which can amount to a huge movement in your favour, before you have even started.

5. List all of the other side's requirements before negotiating

Get the other person's full "shopping list" before you start to negotiate (buyers usually do the opposite - they like to pick concessions up one by one - indefinitely)

Establish in your own mind what the other person needs, including personal and emotional aspects. Everything that is part of or related to a deal has a value. Everything has a cost to you or your organization, even if it's not on the price list. Negotiation isn't just about price and discount. It's about everything that forms the deal. It's about

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specification, colour, size, lead-time, consumables, contract length, penalty payments, get-out clauses, delivery dates, stock-holding, re-order lead-times, after-sales support product, product training, technical back-up, breakdown service, call-out costs, parts costs, parts availability, payment type, payment date, payment terms. All these and more are called variables, and each one affects the cost. Some affect the cost more than others, and buyers and sellers nearly always place a different value on each. It's critical therefore to know exactly what your buyer wants before you start to negotiate. Get the full list of issues written down and commit him to it. This is vital if you are to keep a track on the values of the deal and the eventual outcome. You also avoid your position being eroded bit by bit by the late introduction of concessions required.

6. Trade concessions - don't give them away

Never give away a concession without getting something in return (buyers tend to resist giving any concessions at all)

This is a matter of discipline and control. It's simple. Never give anything away without getting something in return. If you do you are not negotiating you are simply conceding.

A commitment from the other person can be a suitable concession to get in return for something of relatively low value. The simplest and most elegant concession to secure is agreement to proceed with the deal now - use it to close.

7. Keep the whole picture in your mind

Keep the whole package in mind all of the time (buyers tend to divide and erode your position, bit by bit)

The buyer's tactic will be to separate out single issues, or introduce new ones later. If you allow this to happen your position will be eroded.

Think about the knock-on effects to the whole situation every time a concession is requested. The overall value and profitability of a deal or contract depends on its component parts. When you change one element, you change the whole, so keep the whole situation in mind - keep assessing effects on the total arrangement, understand the effects, and explain how each change or demand affects the whole thing.

8. Prepare and keep looking for variables (tradable concessions for both sides)

Keep searching for variables, concessions, 'bargaining chips', incentives. (Buyers will look for your concessions but will tend not to offer their own)

A variable or tradable is any factor that can be altered and which has a real or perceived value. You are not a mind-reader and the other person may not be totally open, or even fully aware of all the possible variables that are of interest, so keep looking for them.

Prepare and estimate values of real and perceived variables before the negotiation, and keep looking for new ones during the negotiation.

If the other side is cooperative involve them in looking for variables too - for both sides.

The more variables you find the less you will have to give on price, and the more added-value you can build into the deal. The buyer will not offer his own concessions normally,

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so you can look for his possible concessions as well as your own (ie variables within the buyer's situation as well as your own).

9. Keep accurate notes

Keep accurate notes, and show that you are doing it (the buyer stands to benefit from any lack of record, and some buyers conveniently forget things that are not in their favour, even concessions you've won from them)

Controlling the negotiation is vital. the other person may forget, misunderstand, or attempt to distort interpretation of what was discussed and agreed. Keeping notes shows that you are in control, professional, can't be out-flanked, and enables you to summarise and assess continually.

10. Summarise and clarify the negotiation as you go

Summarise and confirm understanding continually (see above - it's your loss, not the buyer's, if you allow misunderstandings to develop)

This avoids misunderstandings developing, accidentally or otherwise. Misunderstandings can be catastrophic, not so much because of the way they affect the financial structure of the unfolding deal, but because they undermine the rapport and the trust, which is critical to being able to do business in the first place.

Getting positive agreement throughout the process also is psychologically important; it strengthens trust and commitment, and helps to ease the other person into an agreeable frame of mind.