Conflict Management – Ways to Lead Teams through Healthy and Sometimes Unhealthy Conflict Management

Alex Terwilliger
I know how to use the polling process for this presentation?

Yes

No
Today’s Agenda

- How emotions come into play in conflict
- Why conflict happens in the workplace
- Healthy and unhealthy conflict
- Why conflict is important in our organizations
- What types of conflict can happen
- How we approach managing conflict
- How we execute conflict management
This is a Workshop...So let’s Work!
Think about conflict in your world:

Who
Who are you in conflict with?

What
What are you in conflict about?
What emotions come to mind when thinking about conflict?
Emotions Word Cloud
Negative Emotions

- Annoyed
- Anxious
- Frustrated
- Gloomy
- Sad
- Stressed
- Upset
- Worried

Most frequent negative emotions experienced by employees:
- Frustrated — 56.2% of employees
- Stressed — 45.1% of employees
- Anxious — 30.4% of employees

Negative emotions with highest intensity:
- Angry
- Anxious
- Scared
When in conflict and experiencing negative emotions, employee productivity diminishes.

High performing teams experience anger at 14%, whereas low performing teams experience anger at 30%.
Why does conflict happen in the workplace?
Workplace Conflict Typically Occurs...

1. When people's ideas, decisions or actions relating directly to the job are in opposition.

2. When two people just don't get along.
Conflict – By The Numbers

- 29% of employees reported that they deal with continual conflict.
- 85% of both individual contributors and leaders agreed they experienced some amount of conflict at work.
Healthy & Unhealthy Conflict

Unhealthy conflict:
• When a person or group attempts to assert power over another by
• Exhibited behaviors:
  • Resentment
  • Blaming
  • Claiming superiority
  • Declining morale
  • Circular conversations
• Leads to:
  • Team disruption
  • Resentment, negativity, and increased employee turnover.

Healthy conflict:
• When a person or group has mutual respect and trust, where participants can express thoughts for having a difference in opinion.
• Exhibited behaviors:
  • Creative problem solving
  • Emotional regulation
  • Calm, respective, not personal
• Leads to:
  • Increased productivity
  • Increased engagement,
  • Innovation, creativity, and collaboration.
## Healthy vs Unhealthy Conflict

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Healthy Conflict</th>
<th>Unhealthy Conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rational debate</td>
<td>Bickering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem focussed not people focussed</td>
<td>Verbal abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions kept in check</td>
<td>Not listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calm, non-defensive, respectful</td>
<td>Inability to compromise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for each others views</td>
<td>Blaming and avoiding blame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear and thoughtful communication</td>
<td>Personalising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readiness to forgive and forget</td>
<td>Disrespectful or submissive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rigid and unbending in views</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

after Hirst & Gilchrist(2012)
The Numbers - Common Causes of Conflict
The following list shows what percentage of contributors named these factors as a source of conflict.

- 49%: Clashes between personalities or egos
- 34%: Workplace stress
- 33%: Too much work without enough support
- 29%: Poor leadership
- 26%: Dishonesty or not enough openness
- 23%: Problems with line managers
- 22%: Unclear roles
- 21%: Confusion about accountability
- 18%: Clashing values
- 16%: Poor team composition
- 15%: Forbidden topics, such as inappropriate relationships
- 14%: Problems with performance management
- 13%: Harassment or bullying
- 10%: The perception of discriminatory practices
Think about your team

**Who**
Who on your team is in conflict?

**What**
What are they in conflict about?
Would you classify their conflict as healthy or unhealthy?
Why is healthy conflict important?
Characteristics of High Performing Teams

- Willingness to hold one another accountable
- Commitment and buy-in
- Healthy conflict with critical topics on the table and lively meetings

Trust built on willingness to be vulnerable: admit mistakes, ask for help, and take risks to offer feedback
Characteristics of High Performing Teams

Healthy conflict with critical topics on the table and lively meetings

Trust built on willingness to be vulnerable: admit mistakes, ask for help, and take risks to offer feedback
Characteristics of High Performing Teams

Commitment and buy-in

Healthy conflict with critical topics on the table and lively meetings

Trust built on willingness to be vulnerable: admit mistakes, ask for help, and take risks to offer feedback
Characteristics of High Performing Teams

- Willingness to hold one another accountable
- Commitment and buy-in
- Healthy conflict with critical topics on the table and lively meetings
- Trust built on willingness to be vulnerable: admit mistakes, ask for help, and take risks to offer feedback
Characteristics of High Performing Teams

- Results
- Willingness to hold one another accountable
- Commitment and buy-in
- Healthy conflict with critical topics on the table and lively meetings
- Trust built on willingness to be vulnerable: admit mistakes, ask for help, and take risks to offer feedback
Where would you put your team on this pyramid?

Trust build on willingness to be vulnerable...

Healthy conflict with critical topics....

Commitment and buy-in

Willingness to hold one another accountable

Results
Five Dysfunctions of a Team

- Inattention to Results
- Avoidance of Accountability
- Lack of Commitment
- Fear of Conflict
- Absence of Trust

- Status and Ego
- Low Standards
- Ambiguity
- Artificial Harmony
- Invulnerability
Types of Conflict...

- Information
- Values
- Interest
- Relationship
- Structural
Information

- Different or insufficient information
  - You may be privy to information that they do not have access to or vice versa.
- Disagreement over what data is valid or relevant
  - One study or another
  - One set of facts over another
  - Subjectivity in fact vs opinion
Values

- When belief systems are perceived to be incompatible.
  - I believe this and you believe that
- When we impose values onto others
Interest

• Competition over perceived or actual needs.
  • Think resources – money, time, human capital
  • If you get X, then I will not get Y.
• Parties believe that they must WIN and the opposition must LOSE.
• Misconceptions about a person’s intent.
• Strong negative emotions toward a person.
• Poor communication between the parties.
• A belief that the other person’s actions are motivated by malice or an intent to do harm.
• Varying work ethics.
• Red tape/layers of procedures
• Green tape/the procedures we place on ourselves
• Limited opportunities within the organization.
• Structure of the teams
• Lack of clarity on role / expectations.
Which type of conflict are you seeing most often in your organization?

- Information
- Values
- Interest
- Relationship
- Structural
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pair, Share – 5 mins

• Find a partner – 2.5 mins per person
• Discuss:
  1. What type of conflict is most present in your organization?
  2. Why do you think this is the case?
  3. Is it healthy or unhealthy?
  4. How are you addressing the conflict?
Ways to approach managing conflict?
Thomas Kilmann Conflict Management Model

- Competition
- Collaboration
- Avoidance
- Accommodation

Axes:
- Assertiveness
- Cooperativeness
Avoiding

• Watching the situation play itself out organically and try to avoid getting directly involved.
• Imagine if everyone avoided conflict at your organization.

Use this when it is safer to postpone dealing with the situation or you don't have as great a concern about the outcome!
Accommodating

• An element of self-sacrifice
• Satisfying the other person
• While it may seem generous, it can take advantage of the perceived “weaker” employees and cause resentment.

Use this when you really don’t care a lot about the outcome but do want to preserve or build the relationship
Competition

• Willing to pursue one’s own concerns at another person’s expense – Winning

• Proving that their way is right

Use this style when you are less concerned about the relationship but the outcome is important.
Collaborating

• Attempt to work together to identify a solution that fully satisfies everyone’s concerns
• Both sides can get what they want and negative feelings are minimized

Use this style when the long-term relationship and outcome are important.
Compromise

- Expedient, mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies both parties
- Both sides can get what they want and negative feelings are minimized
- Be aware that no one is really satisfied!

Use when the outcome is not crucial, and you are losing time
Which category would you say is your natural tendency?

Avoidance
Accommodating
Competition
Collaboration
Compromise
None of them
I don't have a natural tendency
How do we address the conflict?
Identified what type of conflict it is:

Identified what approach you are going to use:

Address the conflict with the parties:
Addressing Conflict in the Workplace

1. Talk - face to face to the other party / parties
2. Focus on behaviors or events – not personalities
3. Listen intently and carefully
4. Identify the points of agreement or disagreement
5. Prioritize the areas of conflict most important to resolve
6. Develop a plan to work on each conflict – starting with most important
   - Set up additional meetings
7. Follow through on your plan
8. Build on successes
Addressing Conflict in the Workplace

1. Talk - face to face to the other party / parties
2. Focus on behaviors or events – not personalities
3. Listen intently and carefully
4. Identify the points of agreement or disagreement
5. Prioritize the areas of conflict most important to resolve
6. Develop a plan to work on each conflict – starting with most important
   - Set up additional meetings
7. Follow through on your plan
8. Build on successes

Connect
Communicate
Exchange
Execute
Intentions – Actions = Squat
Final Thoughts?

Be comfortable with the uncomfortable.

Believe a future state is possible.

Be intentional
Identified what type of conflict it is:

Identified what approach you are going to use:

Address the conflict with the parties:


Addressing Conflict in the Workplace

1. Talk - face to face to the other party / parties
2. Focus on behaviors or events – not personalities
3. Listen intently and carefully
4. Identify the points of agreement or disagreement
5. Prioritize the areas of conflict most important to resolve
6. Develop a plan to work on each conflict – starting with most important
   • Set up additional meetings
7. Follow through on your plan
8. Build on successes

Thank you for your time!

Alex Terwilliger
Alex.Terwilliger@ku.edu
Kupmc.ku.edu
Cell – 928.600.1384