

Dealing with Conflict Positively

When two or more human beings are together, there is always a chance that conflict will arise. Conflict can either have a positive or negative effect on a situation, depending on how both parties' view the situation or decide to approach it.

Conflict can appear for a number of reasons, including:

- Both sides' expectations of the end result expected from the situation.
- Perceptions of the other party. This may be based on previous situations and experiences. For example, "He will never agree to ... it's not in his nature".
- Differing beliefs, values, needs and objectives.
- Unwillingness by one or more persons to look for a suitable win/win outcome.
- Strong emotions or attitude that may confuse or cloud issues, facts and feelings.
- Confused communication signals, both verbal and non-verbal, leading to misunderstanding.

Conflict can be positive if it makes both sides consider new approaches, generate innovative thinking, therefore leading to better dialogue and possibly better options and, ultimately, a fairer outcome all round.

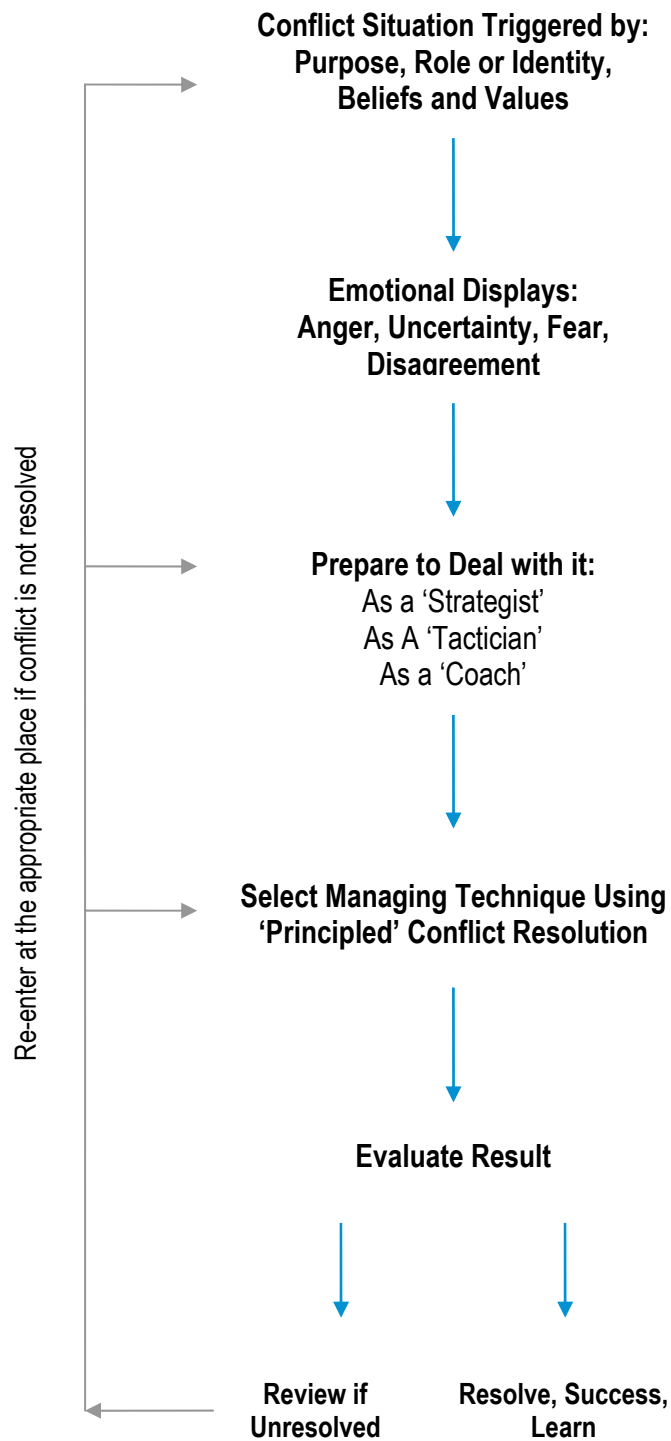
Your Possible Roles in Conflict Resolution

As a strategist: Proactively stepping back and looking at the "big picture"—at patterns of dysfunction or diverted energy that might be occurring and what might be causing them to occur. Then, working to improve conditions that may be fuelling unconstructive conflict.

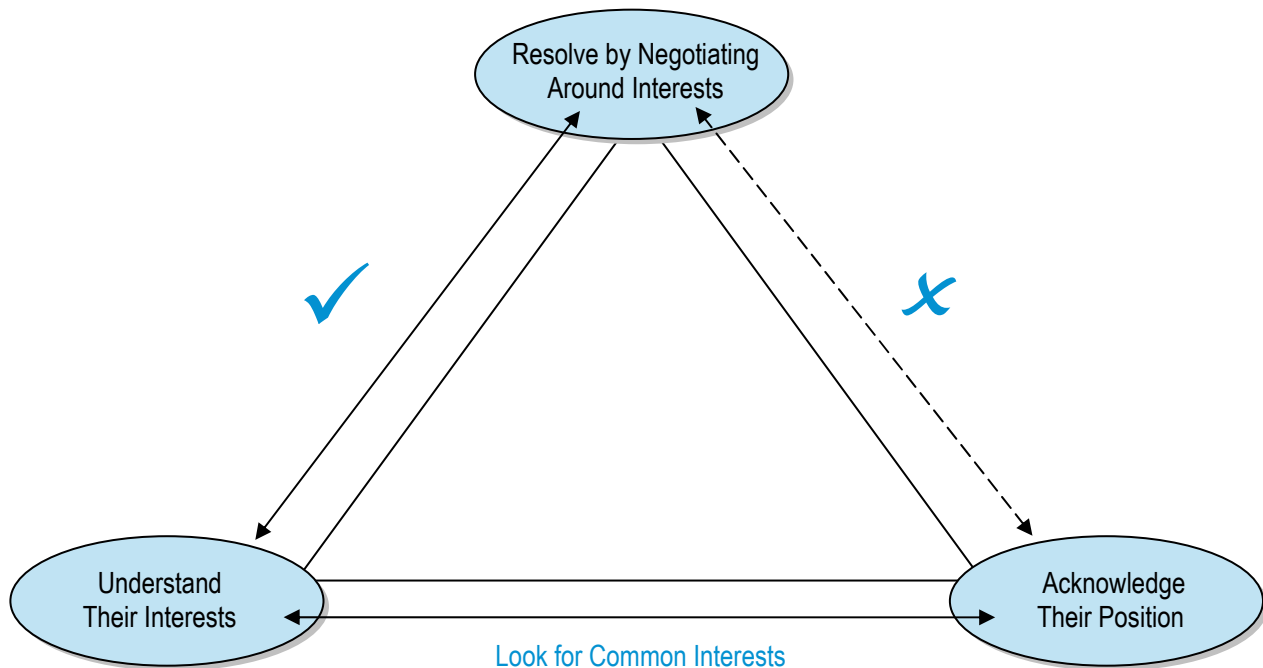
As a tactician: Using the skills to resolve conflict situations you find yourself facing. Also, acting as a conflict mediator between other conflicting groups or individuals.

As a coach: Developing skills in others who are seeking to resolve conflicts of their own. Offering advice and counsel and serving as a thinking partner.

Conflict Reduction/Resolution Strategy



Positional Conflict vs. Interest Conflict



Avoid...

- Discussing/negotiating around their position
- Getting bogged down around their position

Focus on...

- Understanding their motivators (these will be behind their position)
- 'Chunk up' to open out their interests and needs
- A person is most committed to their position just after they've made their request so respond by questioning and listening to understand the interests and needs behind their position
- Look for common interests to build trust and rapport

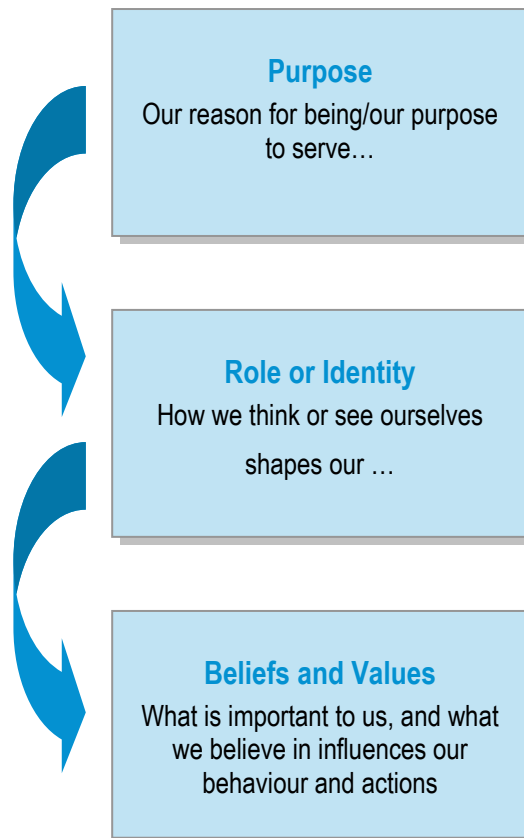
"Maintain your outcome, not your position"

Shelle Rose Charvet – 'Words That Change Minds'

Conflict Triggers

By listening and understanding the other party's views, it will enable us to establish the cause of the problem as they see it.

By using the following alignment model we can determine at what 'level' the conflict exists.



'High Gain' Questions That Can Be Asked To Determine at What Level Conflict Is Operating

When questioning, we must consider the questions from both perspectives and then ensure we get and understand their responses. Examples:

- "What is at stake here for you?" (Value)
- "What do you believe should be happening?" (Belief)
- "Why is this important to you?" (Belief)
- "What is the purpose of what you are doing/want to achieve?" (Purpose)
- "How do you see yourself in all of this?" (Identify)
- "Describe to me your role in this?" (Role)

Look for similarities and differences. The differences will usually tell us why the conflict exists. Conflict usually gets down to small detail very quickly. We need to "chunk up" to a higher level – Purpose, Role, Beliefs and Values.

Value Based Questions

- "Why is this important to you?"
- "What does this mean for you?"
- "What value do you gain from this?"
- "What are your priorities here?"

Belief Based Questions

- "What do you believe should be happening?"
- "What are you basing these beliefs on?"
- "What is your evidence?"

Role Based Questions

- "Describe how you would like to carry out this task to achieve your values"
- "How does this situation align with your role/position?"
- "What do you see are your responsibilities in this situation?"

Purpose Based Questions

- "What is the purpose of carrying out this task for you?"
- "Do you feel that this task is designed to achieve its purpose?"
- "How do you think that the purpose supports the overall aims of the team/department/business?"

We should remember that the true cause of conflict could come from many sources, for example, organisational culture. If this is the case then senior management must be involved and take responsibility to solve the conflict.

'Principled' Conflict Resolution

Positional conflict resolution rarely works as people tend to defend their position, egos 'kick in' and clarity becomes foggy. Reframe the situation by using 'Principled' Conflict Resolution. The following four principles define a straightforward approach to effective principle-based conflict resolution.

Principle 1: Separate the People from the Problem

In order to avoid positional conflict, we must separate the people from the problem. We all have personalities, egos, feelings and emotions. If we get 'bogged down' with these it is easy to lose sight of the big picture of what is trying to be achieved.

Consider...

- Acknowledge their position.
- Empathise and recognise that differences exist.
- Identify common ground/interests.

Principle 2: Understand 'WHY', not just 'WHAT'

Principle 2 focuses on getting behind a person's stated position and understanding what is motivating them (their interests) regarding the issue causing conflict. These interests may not always be clearly communicated by the other party. There will be a need to get them to open up by tactfully questioning and demonstrating that you are listening effectively.

Consider...

- Using questions that explore their motivators and values (see previous page)
- Prefacing these delicate questions with 'softeners', for example:
 - "I'd be interested to know..."
 - "So that I can understand your position, can you tell me..."

Principle 3: Create Options for Mutual Gain

Principle 3 is about searching for options. If you only have one option then you don't have choice. Two options can be seen as a dilemma, an 'either/or' scenario. More than two options opens up possibilities to work in a collaborative way to find an outcome that satisfies both sides' interests.

Consider...

- Moving into the Spontaneous Child Ego State
- Avoid statements like *"What I want..."*
- Use statements like *"What are all of the ways we could resolve this..."*
- Keep an open mind and suspend judgement
- Seek combinations and connections between ideas. *How about if we looked at A in conjunction with C?"*

Principle 4: Agree on Using Objective Criteria

Principle 4 is about negating the thought that *"He who has the positional power wins"* By agreeing on a set of fair objective criteria and standards then this sets the scene for a 'fair and equitable' outcome.

Consider...

- Realistic timelines, appropriate resources available, practical and workable solutions.

Conflict Symptoms

Positive Attitude



Negative Attitude

Appreciates differences

Magnifies differences

Solution centred

Problem-centred

Assertive

Aggressive or passive

Patient

Impatient

Pragmatic

Fixed/Stubborn

Wants to improve

Doesn't want to bother

Seeks agreement

Harbours resentment

Clears the air

Allows it to fester

Open minded

Closed-minded

Listens well

Interrupts/contradicts

Constructive

Destructive

Questions

Lectures

Keeps perspective

Exaggerates

Molehill is molehill

Molehill is mountain

Capable of self-criticism

Blames others

Thinks team

Thinks self

Responsible

Irresponsible

This article was written by John, Associate Trainer to MyTrainingExpert. If you would like to know more about John please contact our team of Learning Professionals.

www.MyTrainingExpert.com

0844 630 9110 info@MyTrainingExpert.com