



LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY: **MANAGES CONFLICT**

“Truth springs from argument amongst friends”.

David Hume

Defining Characteristics

- Creates a safe environment for team members to bring out different viewpoints, perceptions and approaches.
- Works to reduce incompatible *behavior* between individuals or parties whose interests differ.
- Solicits different viewpoints if there is not enough diversity of opinion.
- Understands and respects cultural differences.
- Ensures that everyone’s viewpoints is fairly aired and that there is mutual understanding before the action or decision is taken.
- Builds agreement, wherever possible, to reach a solution compatible with the needs of all.

Development Activities

1. Realize that a certain amount of conflict is healthy to be expressed in organizations. People airing different views and perspectives is essential for good decisions and creativity. It is only when this constructive conflict, or “fruitful friction”, creates a highly tense and inflammatory environment that conflicts becomes dysfunctional. Conflict, therefore, can be productive or dysfunctional. Examine your last conflict situation through that lens. Was it a fruitful disagreement that resulted in a better outcome or was the outcome unsuccessful and the relationships suffered?

2. Be aware of your own preferred style of dealing with conflict. Can you adapt your style depending on the situation? Do you compete when it would be more effective to collaborate? Do you avoid conflict when it is more appropriate to deal with it head on? Do you accommodate and give in when it is more advantageous, in the long run, to compromise? Experiment with using a different conflict style if your preferred style does not yield the results you want.
3. Keep a personal journal of how you respond to conflict situations at home and at work. Identify patterns and resolve to experiment with new styles that may yield more positive results.
4. As part of a team building exercise, use a facilitator or consultant to administer a conflict mode instrument, such as the Thomas-Kilmann (TKI). Share the results in a team meeting to increase awareness of team members' preferred style of dealing with conflict. Discuss the impact on team dynamics.
5. In managing a conflict, focus on the future, not on the past or not on pointing to blame.
6. Look for ways to make all parties save "face."
7. For a serious employee dispute, consider bringing in a mediator. This provides a controlled setting where individuals can air their differences and communicate more effectively with one another.
8. Does the individual with whom you are in conflict irritate and frustrate you in countless small ways, but always just within the bounds of socially or professionally acceptable behavior? This is a hallmark of "passive-aggressive" behavior. It can involve hiding the truth, or not dealing with it, so others' feelings or reputations get hurt. This toxic style creates an atmosphere of distrust and secrecy so that group members feel unsure of where they stand. To curb the effects of passive-aggressive behavior:
 - ◆ Become aware --- begin to notice when this is happening.
 - ◆ Don't respond to this behavior. The goal of this behavior is to get the other person to react irrationally.
 - ◆ Calmly confront the real issue. State the facts of the present situation and the consequences of the behavior. Repeat this several times until there is understanding that the recipient of this behavior cannot be manipulated by it.

Recommended Reading

1. Blackard, Kirk, and Gibson, James W., Capitalizing on Conflict: Strategies and Practices for Turning Conflict to Synergy in Organizations: A Manager's Handbook, Davies-Black, Palo-Alto, 2006. According to these mediation experts, dealing with counterproductive conflict in an organized, holistic, and systemic manner can lead to stronger and more resilient organizations.
2. Cloke, Kenneth and Joan Goldsmith. Resolving Personal and Organizational Conflict: Stories of Transformation and Forgiveness. Jossey-Bass, 2000.
3. Crum, Thomas. The Magic of Conflict. Touchstone Press, 1998.
4. Evans, Sybil and Sherry Suib Cohen. Hot Buttons: How to Resolve Conflict and Cool Everyone Down. HarperCollins, 2001.
5. Fisher, R. and G. Ury. Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In. Penguin Books, 1992.
A concise, step-by-step, proven strategy for coming to mutually acceptable agreements in all kinds of conflict situations.
6. Gill, Lucy. How to Work with Just About Anyone. Fireside, 1999.
7. Horn, Sam. Tongue Fu: How to Disarm, Deflect and Diffuse Any Verbal Conflict. St. Martin's Press, 1997.
8. Jandt, Fred, with Paul Gillette. Win-Win Negotiating: Turning Conflict Into Agreement. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1987.
9. Katzenbach, Jon R. and Douglas K. Smith. "The Discipline of Teams." Harvard Business Review, March-April 1993, Vol. 71 & No. 2.
10. Runde, Craig, E., and Flanagan, Tim A. Becoming a Conflict Competent Leader: How You and Your Organization Can Manage Conflict Effectively. Jossey-Bass, 2007.
11. Walton, Richard E. Managing Conflict: Interpersonal Dialogue and Third-Party Roles. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1987.
An easy to read, 160-page digest that presents a framework for diagnosing recurring conflicts and suggests several basic options for controlling or resolving them.
12. Weiss, Jeff, and Hughes, Jonathan, "Want Collaboration? Accept---and Actively Manage--- Conflict," Harvard Business Review, March, 2005.
The authors offer six strategies for effectively managing conflict.
13. Yankelovich, Daniel. The Magic of Dialogue: Transforming Conflict into Cooperation, A Touchstone Book published by Simon & Schuster, 2001

Other Resources

1. Conflict Management Seminars for Leaders and Teams – customized training to increase awareness and develop strategies to deal with conflict more effectively. www.LeadershipTalentSolutions.com 310-306-9898
2. Mediation Training Institute International
Resources for the prevention, management, and resolution of organizational conflicts.
3. Conflict Resolution Information Resource – www.crinfo.org search engine for Conflict Resolution with White Papers, articles and web resources.
4. Thomas -Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI)
<http://www.cpp.com/products/tki/index.asp>