

Conflict Management Communication in the Workplace Series

Leader's Guide by:

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For Trainers:

Introduction

Set in the production office of fictional current affairs program 'Sighted', this 27 minute program provides a dramatic perspective on conflict in workplace communications and explores strategies for dealing with everyday conflict situations. The program deals with the more ordinary communications that go wrong, the personal and workplace costs of these and the possibilities of avoiding such situations and/or dealing constructively with them when they occur.

The program offers insights into the following key elements of conflict and conflict management and summarises them in the following text screens:

- What is conflict?
- Role of conflict in the workplace.
- Conflict spiral.
- Conflict management strategies.
- Constructive conflict management.

Program Timeline

00:00:00	Introduction
00:01:44	Chapter 1 – What is Conflict?
00:05:00	Summary – What is Conflict?
00:05:34	Chapter 2 – Role of Conflict in the Workplace
00:08:03	Summary – Role of Conflict in the Workplace
00:08:39	Chapter 3 – Conflict Spiral
00:11:35	Summary – Conflict Spiral
00:12:18	Chapter 4 – Conflict Management Strategies
00:17:34	Summary – Conflict Management Strategies
00:18:20	Chapter 5 – Constructive Conflict Management
00:24:51	Summary – Constructive Conflict Management
00:25:15	Conclusion
00:26:04	Credits

Background information

Clarifying Confusion about Conflict

Conflict is when two or more values, perspectives or opinions are contradictory in nature and haven't been aligned or agreed about yet, including:

1. Within yourself when you're not living according to your values.
2. When your values and perspectives are threatened.
3. Discomfort from fear of the unknown or from lack of fulfilment.

Conflict is inevitable and often good. For example, good teams always go through a "form, storm, norm and perform" period. Getting the most out of diversity often means contradictory values, perspectives and opinions.

Conflict is often needed because it:

1. Helps to raise and address problems.
2. Helps people learn how to recognise and benefit from their differences.

Conflict is not the same as discomfort. The conflict isn't the problem - it is when conflict is poorly managed that is the problem.

Conflict is a problem when it:

1. Hampers productivity.
2. Lowers morale.
3. Causes more and continued conflicts.
4. Causes inappropriate behaviours.

Ways People Deal With Conflict

There is no one best way to deal with conflict. It depends on the current situation. Commonly, conflict is dealt with in one of the following ways:

Avoidance. Pretend it is not there or ignore it.

Many people choose to ignore or avoid the problem if they deem it not worth the effort to argue. This approach tends to worsen the conflict over time.

Accommodation. Give in to others, sometimes to the extent that you compromise yourself.

This approach should be used sparingly and infrequently. Often this approach will exacerbate the issue, and cause internal conflict.

Competing. Work to get your way, rather than clarifying and addressing the issue. Competitors love accommodators.

To be used to greatest effect when you have a very strong conviction about your position.

Compromising. Mutual give-and-take.

When the goal is to get past the issue and move on, this approach is often constructive.

We have two ways in which you can use the program –

Conflict Management

If you have limited time use the first option – we have called it *Closing in on Conflict* – this session will take one hour. If you have around three hours we suggest that you use the plan for *Workplace Communication 101*.

1. Closing in on Conflict

Phase One: Session Starter.

Phase Two: Discussion based on workplace conflict.

Phase Three: Key Concepts to Take Note of.

Phase Four: Discussion based on the drama as it unfolded in the DVD.

Phase Five: Personal Action Plan.

2. Workplace Communication

Phase One: Session Starter.

Phase Two: Exercise.

Phase Three: Communication Quiz.

Phase Four: Discussion based on workplace conflict.

Phase Five: Key Concepts to Take Note of.

Phase Six: Discussion based on the drama as it unfolded in the DVD.

Phase Seven: Case Study.

Phase Eight: Personal Action Plan.

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1. Closing in on Conflict

Phase One: Session Starter – Stage Names.

A fun and interactive way to start a session is to determine a “workshop name” for each participant. Instruct each participant to think of the name of their first pet and the name of the first street they lived on.

1. Pet name = Workshop first name
2. Street name = Workshop surname

Get the group to tell everyone their workshop name and one thing that they want to take away from the session. These can be written up on a flipchart and reviewed with the group.

Phase Two: Pre Program Discussion.

Have a group discussion, covering the following topics:

1. How common do you think conflict in the workplace is and what causes it?
2. What do you think are the most common causes of conflict in the workplace?
3. What type of conflict have you been involved with at work? How did it work out?
4. Is conflict ever good?
5. What is your preferred way of dealing with conflict?

Phase Three: Key Concepts to Take Note of.

Participant Worksheet - While Viewing the Program

1. What is conflict?
2. List three of the factors affecting conflict in the workplace.
3. What is the conflict spiral?
4. Avoidance is one of the three strategies used in the management of conflict. What are two others?
5. Name the two constructive conflict management strategies.

Suggested Responses:

While Viewing the Program

These are some of the possible participant responses that viewers may suggest while viewing the program:

1. What is conflict?
 - Often begins with small difference or disagreement
 - Conflict of ideas.
 - Conflict of personalities.
 - Can be constructive.
 - Lead to clarifications of ideas.
 - Provides solutions to problems.
 - Conflict of personality is rarely constructive.
 - Lowers productivity and morale.

2. List three of the factors affecting conflict in the workplace.

- Individuals with unique opinions, experiences or ideas.

Subjective factors:

- Individual attitudes.
- Ambitions.
- Abilities.
- Personalities.

Objective factors:

- Business goals.
- Management style.
- Time limits.
- Budgets.

3. Name some factors which may result in a conflict spiral.

- Difference, disagreement, dispute, conflict.
- Initial disagreements not immediately resolved.
- Tactics used by one party mirrored by the other.
- Spiral broken by positive suggestions.
- Broken where third party becomes moderator.

4. Avoidance is one of the three strategies used in the management of conflict. What are the other two?

Submission:

- Surrender, comply.
- Conflict issue not addressed.
- Resentment, low self-esteem.

Force:

- Using power to impose demands.
- Most people dislike force.
- Use other means to resist force.

Avoidance:

- Ignoring conflict.
- Not a successful method.
- Fails to address conflict issue.

5. Name the two constructive conflict management strategies.

Compromise:

- Meeting half way.
- Giving and taking.
- Making sacrifices to achieve desired outcome.

Collaboration:

- Working together.
- Achieve best outcomes for all parties.

Phase Four: After Viewing the Program

Discussion based on the drama as it unfolded in the DVD

1. How do the personal differences of the characters of Kim and Nelson contribute to the conflict? Consider all the factors listed under subjective factors and objective factors.
2. Was either character more to blame than the other for the conflict that developed? If so, which one and why?
3. What are the repercussions of avoiding conflict rather than dealing with it and trying to resolve it?
4. In a group, take a workplace conflict situation which one person is facing or has faced in the past. What strategies were used in the situation? What was the outcome? Now that you have watched the program, what other strategies could have been more effective? What may have been a better outcome?

Phase Five: Personal Action Plan

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2. Workplace Communication

Phase One: Session Starter – Stage Names

A fun and interactive way to start a session is to determine a “workshop name” for each participant. Instruct each participant to think of the name of their first pet and the name of the first street they lived on.

1. Pet name = Workshop first name
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Get the group to tell everyone their workshop name and one thing that they want to take away from the session. These can be written up on a flipchart and reviewed with the group.

Phase Two: Exercise

In this section of the workshop you are going to work with a partner. One of you is A and one of you is B. Lets say that A has always had a tendency towards making everything perfect before moving on to the next project. This has just caused a deadline to be missed. B is very annoyed about this because it reflects poorly on B's performance as well. B's are really angry and decide to tell A's what they think!!! You have five minutes – go...

Ask participants to comment on what happened. Conflict can be difficult to deal with effectively. Let's find out how to deal with it more effectively.

Phase Three: Pre Program Discussion

Have a discussion, covering the following topics:

1. How common do you think conflict is in the workplace and what causes it?
2. What do you think are the most common causes of conflict in the workplace?
3. What type of conflict have you been involved in at work? How did it work out?
4. Is conflict ever good?
5. What is your preferred way of dealing with conflict?

Phase Four: Conflict Quiz

What's Your Conflict Management Style

Listed below are 15 statements. Each statement provides a possible strategy for dealing with conflict. Give each a numerical value:

(ie., 1=Always, 2=Very often, 3=Sometimes, 4= Not very often, 5= Rarely, if ever.)

Don't answer as you think you should, answer as you actually behave.

- ___ a. I argue my case with peers, colleagues and co-workers to demonstrate the merits of the position I take.
- ___ b. I try to reach compromises through negotiation.
- ___ c. I attempt to meet the expectation of others.
- ___ d. I seek to investigate issues with others in order to find solutions that are mutually acceptable.
- ___ e. I am firm in resolve when it comes to defending my side of the issue.
- ___ f. I try to avoid being singled out, keeping conflict with others to myself.
- ___ g. I uphold my solutions to problems.
- ___ h. I compromise in order to reach solutions.
- ___ i. I trade important information with others so that problems can be solved together.
- ___ j. I avoid discussing my differences with others.
- ___ k. I try to accommodate the wishes of my peers and colleagues.
- ___ l. I seek to bring everyone's concerns out into the open in order to resolve disputes in the best possible way.
- ___ m. I accept the recommendations of colleagues, peers, and co-workers.
- ___ n. I avoid hard feelings by keeping my disagreements with others to myself.
- ___ o. I believe that given time, a solution will become apparent.

Scoring:

The 15 statements you just read are listed below under five categories. Each category contains the letters of three statements. Record the number you placed next to each statement.

Calculate the total under each category.

Style				Total
Competing/Forcing Shark	a	e	g	
Collaborating Owl	d	i	l	
Avoiding Turtle	f	j	o	
Accommodating Teddy Bear	c	k	n	
Compromising Fox	b	h	m	

Results: My dominant style is _____ (Your LOWEST score)
and my back-up style is _____ (Your second lowest score)

Conflict Management Styles

The Competing Shark

- Sharks use a forcing or competing conflict management style.
- Sharks are highly goal-oriented.
- Relationships take on a lower priority.
- Sharks do not hesitate to use aggressive behaviour to resolve conflicts.
- Sharks can be autocratic, authoritative, and uncooperative; threatening and intimidating.
- Sharks have a need to win; therefore others must lose, creating win-lose situations.
- Advantage: If the shark's decision is correct, a better decision without compromise can result.
- Disadvantage: Hostility and resentment may build among co-workers.

Appropriate times to use a Shark style:

- When conflict involves personal differences that are difficult to change.
- When fostering intimate or supportive relationships is not critical.
- When others are likely to take advantage of non-competitive behaviour.
- When conflict resolution is urgent; when decision is vital in crisis.
- When unpopular decisions need to be implemented.

The Avoiding Turtle

- Turtles adopt an avoiding or withdrawing conflict management style.
- Turtles would rather hide and ignore conflict than resolve it. Sometimes this can be seen as uncooperative or unassertive.
- Turtles tend to give up personal goals and display passive behaviour creating lose-lose situations.
- Advantage: May help to maintain relationships that would be hurt by conflict resolution.
- Disadvantage: Conflicts remain unresolved, overuse of the style leads to others walking over them.

Appropriate times to use a Turtle Style:

- When the stakes are not high or issue is trivial
- When confrontation will hurt a working relationship
- When there is little chance of satisfying your wants
- When disruption outweighs benefit of conflict resolution
- When gathering information is more important than an immediate decision
- When others can more effectively resolve the conflict
- When time constraints demand a delay

The Accommodating Teddy Bear

- Teddy bears use a smoothing or accommodating conflict management style with emphasis on human relationships.
- Teddy bears ignore their own goals and resolve conflict by giving into others. This can be seen as unassertive or cooperative, creating a win-lose (bear is loser) situation.
- Advantage: Accommodating maintains relationships.
- Disadvantage: Giving in may not be productive, bear may be taken advantage of.

Appropriate times to use a Teddy Bear Style

- When maintaining the relationship outweighs other considerations
- When suggestions/changes are not important to the accommodator
- When minimising losses in situations where outmatched or losing
- When time is limited or when harmony and stability are valued

The Compromising Fox

- Foxes use a compromising conflict management style. Concern is for goals and relationships.
- Foxes are willing to sacrifice some of their goals while persuading others to give up part of theirs.
- Compromise is assertive and cooperative. Result is either win-lose or lose-lose.
- Advantage: Relationships are maintained and conflicts are removed.
- Disadvantage: Compromise may create less than ideal outcome and game playing can result.

Appropriate times to use a Fox Style

- When important/complex issues leave no clear or simple solutions.
- When all conflicting people are equal in power and have strong interests in different solutions.
- When there are no time restraints.

The Collaborating Owl

- Owls use a collaborating or problem confronting conflict management style valuing their goals and relationships.
- Owls view conflicts as problems to be solved and often find solutions that are agreeable to all sides (win-win).
- Advantage: Both sides get what they want and negative feelings eliminated.
- Disadvantage: Takes a great deal of time and effort.

Appropriate times to use an Owl Style

- When maintaining relationships is important.
- When time is not a concern.
- When peer conflict is involved.
- When trying to gain commitment through consensus building.
- When learning and trying to merge differing perspectives.

Source: *Mastering Human Relations*, 3rd Ed. by A. Falikowski 2002 Pearson Education
<http://www.pearsoned.ca>

Phase Five: Key Concepts to Take Note of.

Participant Worksheet

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- Often lowers productivity and morale.

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Subjective Factors	Objective Factors
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Ambitions	Management style
Abilities	Time limits
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Resentment, low self-esteem	Use other means to resist force

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Phase Six: Case Study

Divide participants into groups of three, four, or five to work on a case study and decide on what advice they would give to the other parties involved. At the end of thirty minutes they will make a presentation to the other groups. Remind participants to keep in mind the concepts covered today.

Case Study

CruiseControl is a cruise line operating in the Asia Pacific region. They are a part of a much larger shipping company which carries containers around the Pacific Ocean.

The cruise business has become extremely competitive. Some countries run their own fleets at very low costs.

According to the customer surveys which are carried out at the end of every cruise, passengers generally seem to think that the advantages of travelling with CruiseControl is that all crew members speak fluent English, the food is excellent, the standard of cleanliness high. In addition, the ships are newer, which means the facilities in all the cabins are fabulous, with TVs, phones, and ensuite bathrooms.

There is a range of cruises that cover most of the well known beauty spots of New Zealand, Australia and Pacific region as well as cruises aimed at the specialist traveller, (for example, visiting historic places, whale watching or swimming with the dolphins).

It is also possible for corporate clients to hire a ship as a thank you to staff or clients and they can also get a customised itinerary.

CruiseControl has a sales force of 12 people whose job is twofold. First they have to service the travel agents from whom 60% of bookings come. The agents themselves need to see a rep so that they can ask questions, receive training, get help with complaints, be updated, and generally be reminded of the excellence of the product. Two of the reps are in Auckland, one in Wellington, one in Christchurch, four in Sydney, one in Melbourne, one in Perth, and two in Brisbane.

The reps have quarterly sales targets set by the National Sales Manager. This quarter is the final chance for reps to add to their annual target and hence compete for the annual company award. The prize is a cruise for two on any one of the company's ships to any chosen destination as advertised. Three of the reps are neck and neck with their results over the last three quarters, which means this quarter will be the deciding one. One of the reps, Nikki is determined to win, having already boasted of it to her partner and promised him the chance of accompanying her on the prize trip. Henri and Vicki are also keen, of course, but feel that they must do their best and let the best one win in the end.

At the sales conference the prize is announced. Sure enough Nikki has won it. When the sales figures are read out the manager makes a special mention of the POP Account which apparently decided the winner. Henri and Nikki look at each other knowing that they each have branches of that company in their own patches. This can only mean that Nikki went ahead and signed up all of their business without involving them. It is usual practice to let everyone share in the really big deals. In the break whilst everyone is congratulating Nikki, Henri and Vicki get together for a coffee and share their horror at what has happened. If Nikki had not done this it would have been a dead heat!

Discuss how you would feel if you were Nikki, Henri or Vicki. What should happen now? What advice would you give the three reps and their manager - present your ideas to the group.

Phase Seven: Personal Action Plan

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Other Relevant Programs Available From Training Point.net

Communication in the Workplace Series

Conflict at Work

Communicating in a Diverse World - Dialogue - Now You're Talking!

Dealing with Conflict

Mediating Disputes

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