

# CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

## Introduction

Organizational conflict occurs when two or more parties, who have different objectives, values or attitudes compete for the same resources. Conflicts can arise due to disagreements between individuals or departments due to their dissimilar focus.

Contrary to popular belief, not all organizational conflicts are detrimental to the effective functioning of the business or project at hand.

Popular management theorists have recognized the fact that groups tend to *storm* before performing, and in one sense, this can be advantageous, as it brings problems out into the open, addresses the need to resolve such issues satisfactorily, motivates staff to seek acceptable solutions and each department or person embroiled in the conflict learns to respect and even benefit from the inherent differences of each other.

However, some conflicts spin out of control. This lower employee morale results in unacceptable behavioral patterns, reduces productivity and causes an escalation in differences that makes bridges harder to build.

Identifying actions that aggravate conflict, others that resolve differences and the different method of coping with conflict are all part of conflict management which are discussed in detail below.

## Managerial Actions that Aggravate Conflicts

Ill-defined expectations, non-consultative changes and feelings of helplessness in the decision making process tend to aggravate conflict. Poor communication, an authoritative style of leadership and impromptu planning are at the very heart of these problems.

Ambiguous objectives, inadequate allocation of resources, be it time, money or personnel, and badly defined process structures heighten such issues even further. Egotistic behavior, battle between *Alpha dogs* for supremacy and poor management techniques also play a pivotal role in aggravating conflicts.

A lack of understanding, an excuse-ridden culture and avoidance of accountability too increase the detrimental effects of conflicts.

## Managerial Actions that Minimize Conflicts

Formulating well-defined job descriptions in a consultative manner, ensuring that any overlaps are minimized and carrying out periodical reviews to ascertain that such documentation is accurate, give the employees a sense of control over their own destiny.

This participative approach goes a long way in minimizing conflicts and helps foster better work ethics.

Formulating cross-departmental teams to solve specific problems, conducting outbound training, which fosters team spirit, holding regular meeting where feedback on performance is given and where the challenges faced are addressed and the solutions are discussed are some of the other relationship building techniques used by progressive organizations.

## Different Methods of Handling Conflicts

The four most popular methods of handling conflict can be summarized as *fight, flight, fake or fold*.

To elaborate further, fighting is where one party tends to dominate another by way of repetitive arguments, labeling and name-calling.

Flight is where people run away from problems instead of confronting them and turns to avoidance as a means of handling conflict. Faking, as its name implies, means agreeing to the solution presented, although in reality, the opposite holds true.

Folding is where an individual is made to agree to a solution by means of browbeating. However, none of the aforementioned method would yield satisfactory results in the long term.

Even today, compromise and collaboration go a long way in resolving conflicts in an optimal manner, as both are win-win situations for the most part, after which, interested parties can work together to reach a common goal.

Effective dialogue paves the way for conflict resolution. If the disagreements cannot be resolved by the two parties themselves, then a third party arbitrator or counselor might need to be consulted for best results.

## **Skills Required for Conflict Resolution**

Communication skills, negotiation skills and the ability to see the whole picture are necessary skills in conflict management. Listening skills and the ability to find solutions that do not compromise any party's interest are also worth developing when handling conflict management.

## **Steps in Conflict Management**

- Identify the problem.
- Identify the limiting resource or constraint that is generally at the root cause of the conflict.
- Engage in participatory dialogue and find a range of solutions that will be acceptable to all the parties concerned.
- See which solutions clash with the organizational objectives and are not in keeping with the company's culture.
- Eliminate those that do not promote mutual understanding or acceptance.
- Choose the best solution that satisfy most people most of the time and implement this.

## **Conclusion**

Conflicts are inevitable in one's personal life in organizations or even between nations.

It does have some noteworthy advantages if handled correctly as it brings problems out into the open and compels interested parties to find solutions that are acceptable to all. However, conflicts that escalate out of control are detrimental to everybody in the equation, so conflict management becomes a necessity.

Some basic skills, some knowledge, and having the best interest of the organization at heart, together with respect for its people, will go a long way in handling conflict admirably.