



Effective Communication for Conflict Resolution

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Agenda

- History
- Sources of conflict
- Costs and benefits of conflict
- Conflict resolution
- Mediation and mediator skills
- Effective communication
- Barriers to effective communication

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History of Conflict Resolution

- In thinking about and practicing conflict resolution, it's useful to have some historical framework:
 - In 1946, social psychologist Kurt Lewin, then Director of MIT's Research Center for Group Dynamics, started Training Groups that advocated open-minded appreciation and inclusion of differences.
 - Also in 1946, the US Office of Naval Research and the National Education Association funded the National Training Laboratory for Applied Behavioral Science (NTL).

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History of Conflict Resolution

- In 1960s, Lewin (now at Yale University) collaborated with NTL to apply conflict resolution to workplaces.
- In the 1970s, mediation—an alternative to litigation—was introduced as a non-coercive, interest-based, facilitated process to resolve conflict.
- The history of mediation as a self-help skill in workplaces begin in 1980 with an article by Daniel Dana on managerial mediation.

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Conflict: Defined

- To learn how to resolve conflict, we first need to know what conflict is so that we do not use an excellent tool to fix the wrong problem, for example, the carpenter who tries to drive a nail with a screwdriver.
- A conflict involves a condition between or among workers, whose jobs are interdependent, who feel angry, who perceive the other as being at fault, and who act in ways that cause a problem at work.

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Conflict: Defined

- Conflict often occurs when there is an emotional disagreement between two or more people about policies, process, activities or outcome.
- It is easy to confuse conflict with the decision, disagreement, stress, or other common experiences that may cause, or be caused by, conflict—these are not conflict, and they are not best handled by conflict resolution tools.

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Sources of Conflict

- Poor communication
- Competition/rivalry
- Authority not defined
- Different viewpoints
- Limited resources
- Value/generational/cultural differences
- Aggressive, insecure individuals

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Costs of Conflict

- Destroys professional relationships
- Creates barriers to individual and organizational effectiveness
- Derails teamwork
- Creates enemies and hidden agendas
- Adds stress to the workplace
- Wastes time, money and resources
- Affects the ability to stay competitive

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Benefits of Conflict

- Helps increase strength and cohesion
- Provides a safety valve function
- Helps clarify issues and goals
- Improves relationships
- Fosters improved communication
- Triggers innovation and creativity
- Becomes a major cause of organizational change

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Conflict Resolution

- Conflict resolution is a process of working through opposing views in order to reach a common goal or mutual purpose.
- At the heart of conflict resolution is effective communication.
- With effective communication, participants are able to:
 - Express their initial positions
 - Explore the underlying concerns
 - Determine mutually acceptable solutions

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Conflict Resolution Styles

- Competing
 - Relies on aggressive communication; low regard for relationships; low level of trust
- Accommodating
 - One's needs are yielded to the other; preserving the relationship is most important
- Avoiding
 - Ignoring the conflict so that it appears to disappear

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Conflict Resolution Styles

- Compromising
 - Engaging in a series of tradeoffs; may be satisfactory result, but not satisfying
- Collaborating
 - Pooling of individual needs and goals towards a common goal; mutual win-win

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Principles of Effective Communication

- To be an effective communicator, we must listen.
 - 55% of communication is nonverbal.
 - 38% is in the tone of the voice.
 - 7% of effective communication is the words.

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Principles of Effective Communication

- Communication is a two-way street.
- Communication is perception.
- Communication is not only what the speaker intends.
- Communication depends on what the listener perceives.
- The listener must always check perception with intention.

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Active Listening Skills

- In a 1996 report, the National Communication Association revealed that adults typically listen at only a 25% efficiency level.
- Listening skills are developed when we are young.
 - As children, we are usually good listeners.
- As we age and develop from childhood to adulthood, we learn anti-listening skills.
- As an adult, we have to work at listening and make it in an active response.

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Active Listening Skills

- The elements of listening behavior include verbal and nonverbal responses.
 - Verbal responses include asking questions, providing feedback, and vocal tone.
 - Nonverbal responses include eye contact, head nodding, and body language.
 - Researchers tell us that as much as 70% of how we interpret oral messages depends on accompanying nonverbal cues.

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Four Steps to Active Listening

1. *Attention:* Pay attention to the speaker so that you can successfully hear the message.
2. *Interpretation:* Take a moment to carefully interpret the speaker's message.
3. *Evaluation:* Decide what to do with the information you have received.
4. *Respond:* Make a verbal or nonverbal response to help the speaker know that you have heard their message.

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Tips to Improve Active Listening Skills

- Listen and do not talk.
 - The speaker needs the opportunity to get their ideas or opinions across. A good listener does not disrupt this process.
- Listen to the entire message and do not jump to conclusions.
 - Many people will stop listening to the speaker as soon as they think they understand the message.
- Concentrate on the words of the message.
 - Do not focus on any speech problems or unordinary mannerisms that may distract you from listening.

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Tips to Improve Active Listening Skills

- Learn from the speaker.
 - To gain new information, keep an open mind.
- Use appropriate verbal responses to help with interpretation and evaluation by asking questions and providing feedback:
 - "Do you mean....?" "Did I understand you to say....?" "I see what you're saying!" or "That's interesting".
- Use appropriate nonverbal responses to help with interpretation and evaluation:
 - Make eye contact or nod head.

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Effective Communication to Resolve Conflict

- Active listening supports conflict resolution by:
 - Focusing conversation
 - Providing a clear exchange of information
 - Supporting mutual respect
 - Providing more options for conflict resolution

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Effective Communication Techniques to Reduce Conflict

- The Defusing Technique
 - Goal is to address the other's anger by simply agreeing with the person.
 - When you find some truth in the other's point of view, it is difficult for the other person to maintain anger.
 - "I know I said I would take care of it. You are absolutely right. I need to be more responsible sometimes."
 - Validating the other's stance in order to move on to a healthy resolution of the conflict.

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Effective Communication Techniques to Reduce Conflict

- Empathy
 - Put yourself into the shoes of the other person and see the world through their eyes.
 - There are two forms of empathy: *Thought Empathy, Feeling Empathy*
- Thought Empathy
 - Gives the message that you understand what the other is trying to say
- Feeling Empathy
 - Acknowledgment of how the person probably feels.

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Effective Communication Techniques to Reduce Conflict

- Exploration
 - Ask gentle, probing questions about what the other person is thinking and feeling.
 - Encourage the other to talk fully about what is on his or her mind.
 - For example, “Are there any other thoughts that you need to share with me?”

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Effective Communication Techniques to Reduce Conflict

- Using “I” Statements
 - Take responsibility for your own thoughts rather than attributing motives to the other person.
 - This decreases the chance that the other person will become defensive.
 - For example, “I feel pretty upset that this thing has come between us.” This statement is much more effective than saying, “You have made me feel very upset.”

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Effective Communication Techniques to Reduce Conflict

- Stroking
 - Find positive things to say about the other person, even if the other is angry with you.
 - Show a respectful attitude. For example, “I genuinely respect you for having the courage to bring this problem to me. I admire your strength and your caring attitude.”

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Keys to Resolution

- Consider changing how you react to the person
- Stay flexible
- Check out the facts first
- Act with respect for yourself and others
- Own your feelings – “I” statements
- Focus on solving the problem, not placing blame
- There’s no time like the present
- Change how you react to the person

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Things to Consider

- Conflict between people is a fact of life—it's not necessarily a bad thing.
- Conflicts occur at all levels of interaction.
- Even the “best” workplaces will require employees deal with conflict resulting from a number of issues, including gossip, stress, miscommunication, and differing agendas.

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Things to Consider

- Conflict is a critical event in the course of a relationship.
- When it is resolved well, conflict leads to deeper understanding, mutual respect and closeness.
- The health of a relationship depends not so much on the number of conflicts between participants, but on how the conflicts are resolved.

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References

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Keep in Mind...

You must be the change
You wish to see.

-Ghandi

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