

CONFRONTING CONFLICTS

*A Toolbox for Understanding
and Managing Conflicts*



international
building global friendship

CONFRONTING CONFLICTS

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PREFACE

This handbook offers tools that may help you to better handle and resolve your personal conflicts. The handbook is not intended to cover all the different theories and aspects of conflict management.

If you know other tools that work better for you, use them (and share them with us as well!) Take what helps you from this handbook, and leave behind what does not.

There are many different theories that consider conflicts in various settings (such as in the workplace, conflicts between countries, armed conflicts). Some conflicts, both personal and on a larger global scale, may cross ‘safety barriers’ and become a violation of human rights. These conflicts often require a different approach and analysis and a level of expertise. This handbook does not focus on conflicts of that nature; the focus is on resolving conflicts among teams of equals, which is often relevant in our CISV lives.

To make this introductory text as easily readable as possible, we decided not to mention references in the text. Instead, we provide suggestions for further reading at the end of the handbook.



This handbook talks a lot about developing awareness and self-reflection. You are invited to really engage in the reading and apply the concepts to yourself, your experiences, and your daily life. There are reflection questions throughout the handbook that will allow you to do this. Reading this from a personal perspective will help you gain a better understanding of yourself, and also of the concepts offered.

Finally, this handbook assumes that there is a conflict at hand. A conflict, in the terms of this handbook, is a disagreement. Hopefully, the tools provided in this book will help you to prevent a conflict from growing or ‘escalating’.

I hope you are able to take something away from this handbook and wish you an enjoyable and educational read!

Sincerely,

Einav Dinur
CISV International



INTRODUCTION

Conflict is a word that we often associate with negativity.

Many people view conflict as something that should be avoided and feel that if a conflict arises it means that something is wrong. This fear of conflict is completely understandable and has a lot to do with how society perceives conflicts. As a result, we often don't develop the tools and skills we need to allow us to handle conflict effectively.

This handbook offers a different attitude towards conflict. You are encouraged to accept conflict as a natural result of different thoughts, ideals, feelings, opinions and

behaviours coming together. A healthy relationship does not necessarily mean one without conflict.

The idea is to move the focus from how to avoid a conflict to how to acknowledge and handle a conflict when it arises.

You may find that a conflict, if handled in a constructive way, can lead to stronger relationships, better understanding of others and a better sense of self. Therefore, the strength of a relationship should not be evaluated based on the number of conflicts that arise, but on how these conflicts are handled and resolved.

Consider the following passage from ‘Mosquito Tactics; A book about Peace Education’ (written and published by CISV Sweden, 2009), which discusses various aspects of creating a sustainable, peaceful environment (page 38):

“Some of us are afraid of conflict, but we don’t have to be. Conflicts are bound to arise as long as people meet and live together; it’s perfectly normal. What we need to do is to improve how we find creative solutions to conflicts. A conflict can often be the beginning of something new and improved, where different values and experiences can be woven together. We find good solutions when we have good opportunities for communication, cooperation and critical thinking. It’s important to study conflicts and understand why they occurred.”

This handbook offers you some tools for understanding conflicts better. It may also help you to gain a better understanding of how you react and interact in a conflict. Hopefully, these deeper understandings will allow you to overcome any fears you have of conflict and to handle them in a way that will allow your relationships to grow and flourish.

The concepts you will encounter in this handbook may not be revolutionary in theory, but they can be revolutionary in practice. You will find that the real challenge is not understanding the concepts, but rather carrying them out consistently.

So, let’s get started!





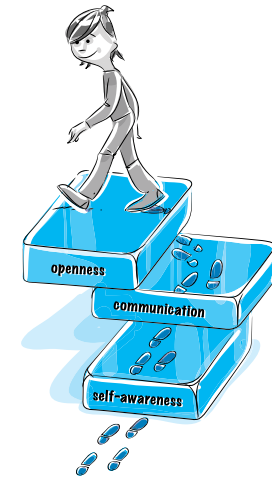
THE BUILDING BLOCKS

Sometimes conflicts work themselves out, but they often require something of us. To ensure productive and constructive conflict resolution, there are certain steps that must happen in the process. These steps can be referred to as the 'building blocks'. Without these, it is difficult to begin talking about conflict management and resolution. This handbook provides suggestions about how you can develop all three building blocks.

Self-Awareness

Most of us do not try to create or provoke conflicts intentionally. It is more likely that we are unaware of how our behaviour contributes to a conflict, especially an interpersonal conflict (involving one or more other people).

Therefore, the first and most fundamental step of conflict management is self-awareness. In order to have a real understanding of conflicts, you must look inwards and really reflect and understand how you behave, think, react, and communicate in a conflict situation. For that reason, conflict management cannot exist without the development of self-awareness.



Communication

Normally, a conflict involves two or more people. Self-awareness alone is not enough for healthy conflict management. In order for the other side to understand how you are feeling, communication is necessary. Discussing disagreements and sharing your feelings can lead to opportunities to strengthen and improve relationships. Of course there are different ways of communicating, so there is also the question of *how* you communicate, which we will look at later.

Openness

Communicating how you feel in a conflict is not enough when you are looking to resolve a conflict. There must also be an openness to listen and understand the other side and their feelings and perceptions. Listening and being open are an integral part of conflict management and resolution.

In the following pages you will find a more theoretical understanding of conflict, in the hope of developing these three building blocks.



THE INGREDIENTS OF A CONFLICT

Conflicts are often associated with negative emotions. Although this might be true, there are several other elements in a conflict besides emotions. Being able to break down a conflict into the 'ingredients' that are always involved is helpful in understanding the conflict, and even more helpful in its resolution.





Facts

Facts are the actions (or lack of actions) that took place. As such, sides to a conflict should generally be able to agree on the facts.

Does this seem hard? It is, as in most cases people confuse the facts with their own personal interpretation or opinion of them. This can lead to many sets or versions of facts that actually apply to only one situation.

It can be very hard to filter out the facts from our interpretations and feelings. Very often we mistake our feelings or interpretations for the actual facts. Especially in cases where people around us, or even society, agree with our interpretation of them.

For example, say Tom told Anna that he wanted to be in the same planning group as she. Later, Anna joined another group. What Tom might understand from this is, “Anna doesn’t like working with me”. It could be that this is true. However, if Tom is trying to map out the facts, the fact is that Anna joined another planning group. That is the only fact. “Anna doesn’t like working with me” is an interpretation of the fact (caused perhaps by things Tom’s friends may have told him or his previous experiences). It could be that Tom’s interpretation is accurate, and Anna really does not like working with him. But, there could be many different things that led Anna to join a different group.



Feelings

Our feelings reflect our personal interpretation of the facts. This is why identical facts can often generate different feelings in different people.

For example, something that might really upset or frustrate you might not frustrate your friend or colleague, even though the facts are exactly the same.

Feelings are the flavour that we add to the tofu. That is why the same tofu can taste like chicken to you, but taste like soy sauce to someone else.

Feelings are how we experience a conflict. As such, they are also an indicator that a conflict exists or how far it has grown or escalated. In that sense, it is important to be in tune with and listen to your own feelings. Not to understand your feelings as the truth but to consider them as an indication that a conflict exists.

If you feel annoyed with someone, or angry, or hurt – this is an indicator that there could be a conflict at hand. Do not ignore your feelings or try to push them away, but be careful not to mistake them for the facts or view them as the absolute truth. This part can be difficult in many conflicts.

Because feelings are personal interpretations, there is no right or wrong. Therefore, arguing over whether or not a person should or should not feel a certain way is not helpful or effective in resolving conflicts.

For example, if someone is hurt by something you did, even if you didn't mean to hurt them, you should try to avoid saying "Oh, you shouldn't be hurt by that." Phrasing it this way suggests that what this person is feeling is wrong. Therefore, it would be more effective to say, "I'm sorry you feel hurt; I never intended for you to feel this way." By phrasing it this way you are acknowledging that the other person feels hurt and also explaining to them that this was not intentional. When you acknowledge how people feel, they will be more likely to listen and believe you when you explain that you didn't mean for them to feel this way.



Needs

Needs are basic necessities that motivate us as individuals. For example: the need to be respected and valued; the need to be understood; the need to be loved; the need to be recognised.

Different people have different needs, or different sensitivities to certain needs, which is why two people can have a different reaction to the same set of facts.

Our needs are actually the causes of the way we feel. When a need is not met, it generates feelings. A good way to think of needs is like a backpack filled with things that come from our culture, our religion, our personal experiences, traumas and so on. We take this backpack with us everywhere we go.



Reflect: now that we've mapped out the different ingredients of a conflict, try applying this to a conflict you have, or have recently had. Can you identify the facts? Can you describe which feelings you had during this conflict? Can you point out which needs were not met and generated these feelings?

3

FACING CONFLICT

In this chapter we will explore the different reactions we have when conflicts arise. In order to simplify things, we will look at three of the reactions or approaches that could be considered the most common. Of course, one person can have different kinds of reactions and these can very much depend on things such as the type of conflict, the mood the person is in, and their opinion of the other person. See if you can identify yourself in any of the following examples.



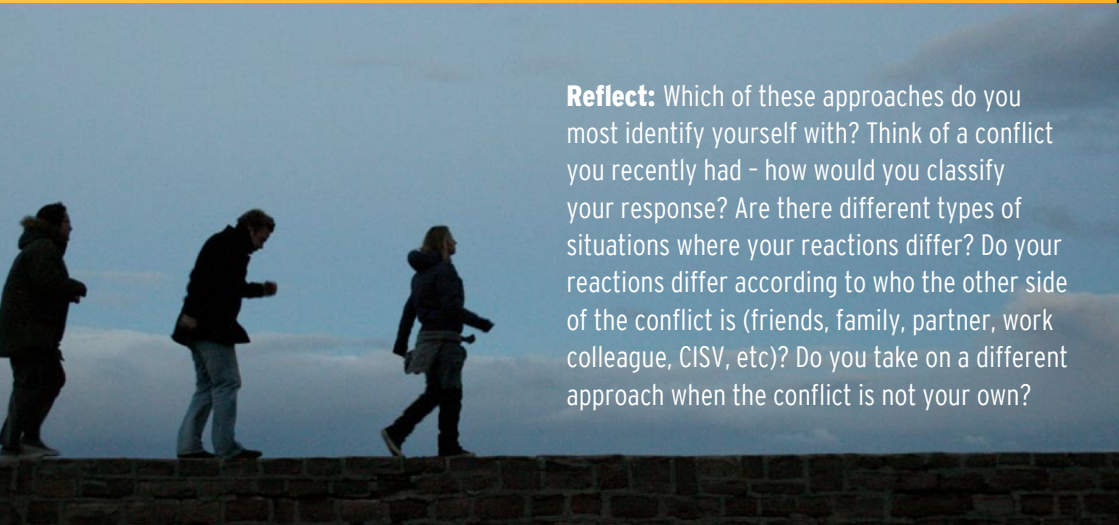
FACING CONFLICT

HIT

The hitter has an aggressive approach to conflict. The hitter will usually get angry, defensive and will openly blame the other person or people for the existence of the conflict (“You did this and that and therefore we are in conflict”).

Hitting will often increase friction between the sides and lead to defensiveness from other people involved in the conflict. The hitter is usually competitive and wants to be right, or to win the disagreement. Their reaction can be more about proving that they are right than finding a solution to the conflict.

When a person ‘hits’, this is usually obvious to others. It can be in the language they use or in the tone of their voice, for instance. On the positive side, the hitter does not pretend that there is not a conflict; they acknowledge the conflict and react.



Reflect: Which of these approaches do you most identify yourself with? Think of a conflict you recently had - how would you classify your response? Are there different types of situations where your reactions differ? Do your reactions differ according to who the other side of the conflict is (friends, family, partner, work colleague, CISV, etc)? Do you take on a different approach when the conflict is not your own?

RUN

The runner is a person who tends to avoid or deny conflict. The runner is usually afraid or reluctant to confront the other side and therefore the runner’s reaction to conflict is usually internal and is not so obvious to others.

People who ‘run’ wish to get rid of the conflict by not engaging in it, but avoiding confrontation does not mean that the conflict goes away. While the runner is trying to avoid (possibly aggressive) confrontation, this reaction can actually escalate a conflict as more tension builds under the surface between the parties involved.

STAND

The stander, first and foremost, acknowledges that there is a conflict at hand. They are willing to stop and understand what led to the conflict, and separate the facts from the feeling and needs of the people involved.

‘Standing’ does not mean being passive. A stander can communicate their opinion and feelings, but they tend to do so in a constructive rather than an aggressive way. ‘Standing’ is not always an instinctive reaction to a conflict. It can be a reaction the stander has reached after they’ve had a chance to calm down. Or, they may have realised that pretending the conflict isn’t there does not lead to real resolution.

A visual way of thinking of these approaches is pretending that each side of a conflict is sitting in a car, with the two cars facing each other. You can drive your car forward. You will then make contact with the other car, but it could be destructive.

You can put the car in reverse. Then you'll avoid a collision but you did not really resolve anything.

You can also park the car. Then perhaps you can step out, walk over to the other car, see what is going on in there, and maybe look at your own car from the outside.

So, which approach is the right one?

People often think that hitting and running is wrong and standing is right. This is partially true. Of course, we should all strive to 'park our car' and 'stand' as much as we can. However, our reactions to conflicts are part of us, and trying to fight against them or judge ourselves for how we react does not help us to resolve conflicts.

This is where self-awareness plays such an important role. By developing awareness of yourself and your reaction to different types of conflicts, you can get to know yourself in a way that will eventually help you to 'stand'.

For example, you may know that often for the first day after a disagreement, you are so angry that you will most likely 'hit'. Knowing this, you can give yourself that time to calm down, understanding that your first reaction is dominated by angry feelings. During that day, you should not judge yourself for being angry or for not being able to 'stand' right away. Judging yourself is never constructive. However, being aware of this pattern will enable you to consider the conflict more objectively, after you calm down. You can then 'stand' and think of what the actual facts were, what needs you had that were not met, what feelings that led to, and finally to communicate this and try to resolve the conflict.



In other words, 'hitting' and 'running' are not wrong. It could be that you will always have to 'hit' or 'run' first before you can move on to 'standing'. Understanding these natural reactions is something that can help you to understand yourself, and may in the end make it easier for you to 'stand'. Perhaps with practice, you can manage to 'stand' faster, or even right away.

Just as you have certain reactions (such as needing a day to calm down), others have their own reaction patterns. Therefore, there might be a situation where you are ready to 'stand', but the others are not. Understanding this can help you to see whether the other sides to a conflict want to 'hit' or 'run'. Recognising this can help you to find a time to 'stand' that would be most productive for everyone involved.

A good way to identify if you are ready to stand is to ask yourself the following question (and try to answer honestly): *'What is my objective? Is it being right and proving that I am right, or is it resolving the conflict at hand?'*

It is okay to feel like you are in the right. If you feel that you are more focused on being right, take more time until you are truly ready to resolve the conflict. Forcing yourself or others into resolving a conflict, when not everyone is ready, is not effective. Ask yourself this question again and again. When you feel your objective is to truly resolve the conflict, then you are ready to 'stand'.

4

WHEN THE CONFLICT ESCALATES

Conflict, in the context of this handbook, is simply a disagreement. It can be a very basic disagreement that has a very simple solution and the conflict will be easily resolved. The existence of a conflict does not depend on how terrible the outcome of the conflict is or how difficult it is to resolve. The severity of a conflict can usually be connected to how far the conflict has grown or escalated. In order to help us understand this, let's look at ways in which a conflict can escalate. We will consider two types of escalation: the external and the internal.



External Escalation

External escalation takes place out in the open and can be visible and noticeable to someone looking from the outside, or from the other side of the conflict.

Step 1: Disagreement

This can be any kind of situation where you and someone else do not agree. It can be not agreeing with what a person is doing or what they are not doing, how they are acting, what they are saying, or how you both interpret things. It can be big or small, important or seemingly silly.

Step 2: Personification (“You are a rude person”)

Have you ever experienced someone getting annoyed with you about something you have done, yet when they say something about it, they make it about YOU and not about the thing you did? For example, if someone said something to you that you thought was rude and you responded “You are very rude!”, you made it sound as though the person was rude. If you responded “When you said this, I felt offended because...” then you are sharing the idea that the statement, rather than the person, was rude.

Personification means to take the focus away from the specific action or lack of action that bothered you – and make it about the person instead. When people feel there is an attack on their character and personality they are more likely to become defensive. This usually means they are less likely to be open to listening to the other side, which is why personification usually leads to escalation.

Step 3: Generalisation (“You always do that”)

This step can often happen when you have a conflict with someone that has known you for a long time, like a partner, family member, or long-time friend. Do you recognise this step? The famous, “You always do this...” or, its partner, “You never do that.” Although sometimes it really does feel that your partner never washes the dishes or that your friend is always late for your meeting plans, you must be careful not to generalise. During a conflict, it’s easy to get away from the disagreement at hand and expand it to include former conflicts. This can escalate the conflict because you are no longer focused on the facts right now, and you are bringing things in from the past. Keep in mind that people don’t always do certain things. They might *often* do certain things, but generalising about it is likely to make them defensive.

Step 4: Dialogue stops and gossip begins (“There is no point in talking it over”)

Frustration caused by a disagreement can lead to a point where the dialogue between the sides to the conflict stops, or never even begins.

Often, we like to find comfort and support from third parties not directly involved in a conflict. It’s very natural to want to have support from people around us. However, we must be aware of how turning to someone outside of the conflict can escalate it.

There are two big dangers in the gossiping stage. The first is that it will begin to create an ‘us versus them’ situation. The sides to the conflict are now finding supporters to ‘their side’ and escalating the conflict into something bigger that involves more people. There is a second danger that often happens when we turn to third parties. When we share a conflict with a friend, they will often agree with our side or our arguments. This can lead to a bigger confusion between facts and feelings, and leave us stuck in the position that we must be right – because ‘it’s not just me, other people agree with my opinion’.

Step 5: Enemy Images

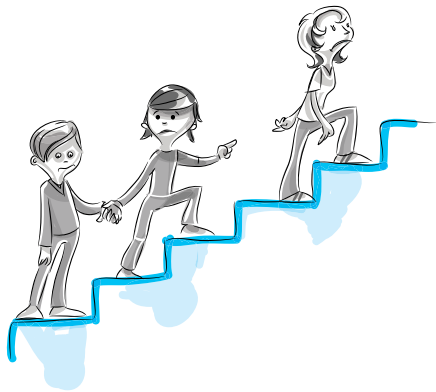
This step means that as a result of the way the conflict has gone you now view the other side as an enemy. Viewing someone this way will make you less likely to resolve the conflict, which is why this is an escalation step.

Step 6: Open hostility

This stage means that everyone knows that the different sides of the conflict are opposing and view themselves as enemies. This step can mean the 'opponents' are openly fighting, or making disrespectful remarks and comments about each other.

Step 7: Polarisation

At this stage, the sides have alienated themselves from one another, and their relationship is severely damaged.



Internal Escalation

Internal escalation is sometimes mistaken for a more peaceful way of handling a conflict because there is no open hostility. However, internal escalation can lead to negative outcomes, just like external escalation. Therefore it's also important to understand the steps of this type of escalation, which can be harder to recognise.



Step 1: Disagreement

Just as in an external escalation, internal escalation also starts with any kind of disagreement.

Step 2: Inner monologue (no dialogue)

When we don't share or communicate how we are feeling, an inner monologue develops. This monologue is highly likely to be based on our interpretations and feelings, and it is possible that it has very little to do with reality.

Remember our example earlier about Tom and Anna? Tom told Anna that he would like to be in a planning group with her, and later Anna joined a different group. Tom might start developing an inner monologue that Anna joined a different group because she doesn't like working with him. Or worse, Tom could feel that she doesn't like him in general. It could be that Anna loves working with Tom, but just completely forgot his request. Anna has no idea that this monologue is happening in Tom's head.

Step 3: Withdrawal (invisible escalation, other party does not know)

When we reach certain conclusions in our inner monologue, this can lead to us withdrawing from a certain situation or a certain individual.

Take the example of Tom and Anna again; if Tom now thinks that Anna doesn't like him, he will probably keep a distance from her and be less friendly. If Tom knows Anna will be in a certain place, or in a certain group, Tom might choose not to join. Tom's entire behaviour towards Anna now stems from his belief that Anna dislikes him. Throughout this process Anna might not even be aware that a conflict exists!

Step 4: Enemy images

Just as with external escalation, enemy images can also develop when the escalation is internal. It can happen with the person having the inner monologue. It can also begin developing in the other side to the conflict.

Continuing with the example of Tom and Anna; Anna can also start developing enemy images of Tom. As far as Anna is now concerned, Tom is not nice to her and is avoiding her. So, perhaps Anna, not knowing of Tom's inner monologue, will also start having negative feelings towards Tom, thus escalating the conflict even further.

Step 5: Polarisation

The relationship is over. It is important to underline that not confronting a conflict does not make it go away. We can see how by not dealing with a simple disagreement, we can actually escalate it to a much more serious outcome, like polarisation.

For instance, it could be that Tom and Anna were great friends at first, but because they did not communicate their inner monologues and their feelings, they ended up not liking each other. Their relationship is now broken and all over a miscommunication.

• • •

Being aware of these different types of escalation, and the different steps, can help us in understanding how serious a conflict has become and what actions are necessary in order to begin resolving it.

Exercise

In the next disagreement you encounter (whether you are a participant in the disagreement or an observer), try to see if you can identify the different escalation steps. Try to recognise which step the conflict is currently on. This will help you to develop awareness of how a conflict can escalate.

Reflect: Can you identify yourself in any of the escalation steps? Are there any particular steps that you feel you usually get trapped in?

5

COMMUNICATION: COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

Understanding the different ingredients and approaches to conflict are tools that can help us build awareness towards a conflict and how we perceive and interact within it. The second building block of conflict resolution is communication. Communication is one of the most powerful tools we have when dealing with conflict management and resolution. This may seem obvious, but think of how many times you felt or thought something, but did not communicate it. This chapter focuses on *how* you communicate.

It is important to discuss not only *if* you communicate but also *how* you communicate. What kind of communication will help you to express yourself and take you closer to resolving the conflict?



What Is My Objective?

Remember to keep asking yourself “What is my objective? Being right and proving that I am right, or resolving this conflict at hand?” Moving from the self-awareness stage to the communication stage will not be effective unless you are truly ready to resolve the conflict.

The main concept of effective communication is taking ownership of your feelings and needs, and realising that your perception of the conflict is exactly that – your perception, which is not necessarily the same thing as the facts. Also, keep in mind the steps of conflict escalation, and try to avoid them when communicating about a conflict.

Ways To Keep Your Communication Effective

A way to communicate effectively in a conflict is to use ‘I’ statements and avoid pointing fingers at others. ‘I’ statements help us to take responsibility for our feelings and needs, as opposed to blaming the other side for the outcome of the situation. The most common formula for phrasing an ‘I’ statement is “I feel/felt _____ (feelings) when _____ (facts) because I need to _____ (needs)”.

For example, if I am working in a team and someone disregards my ideas I can say, “I feel offended when the group doesn’t use my ideas because I need to feel included.” This kind of phrasing is easier for the other side to accept rather than hearing a comment such as “You guys don’t care about my ideas and don’t include me”.

Using ‘I’ Statements might seem a bit artificial at first, but formulating this sentence can actually help you understand and be aware of your own feelings and needs in this conflict. Another way of developing an ‘I’ statement is taking every ‘You’ sentence and changing it to an ‘I’ sentence. So, instead of “You really hurt me when...” use “I felt really hurt when...”



- Using a statement such as “You really hurt me...” suggests that it is a fact and will most likely make the other side defensive. We now know that being hurt is a feeling and therefore we should claim it as such. Own your feelings by using an ‘I’ statement.
- Try to avoid vague, general comments (“You are insensitive”; “You always make fun of me”). As you recall, using general statements and making a personal attack on someone’s character are steps in the escalation of a conflict and are very ineffective ways of communication. Try using specific examples (and remember to use ‘I’ statements), and separate the person from the action. This will help the other person to understand your perspective without feeling that they are being attacked personally.
- Keep the conversation ‘above the belt’. Hurtful comments that play on people’s insecurities, offensive remarks and bad language are not very effective in getting the other side to listen to you. Keep your communication honest, yet respectful. If you are using disrespectful language it is also an indicator that you are still in the ‘hitting’ phase. Be aware of this and take your time until you are truly ready to ‘stand’.
- The fastest way to get others to listen to you is to listen to them. If you expect others to listen to you, treat them with the same respect; don’t interrupt, don’t roll your eyes, don’t look bored or uninterested. Make them feel like they are being heard and understood (see next chapter about Openness).

6

OPENNESS: OPEN UP

Communicating how you feel is not enough to resolve conflicts. You must be open to listen to and understand the other side and their feelings and perceptions. The best and easiest way to begin understanding the other side is by listening to them.



Different Perspectives

In order to resolve conflicts effectively, one side must acknowledge the other side's feelings and needs. Acknowledging does not mean you are agreeing with the other side's perspective, or giving up your own. It simply means you are willing to understand and accept that the other side perceives things differently from you.

Listening is not just being quiet until the other person has finished speaking. It is also not just hearing what the other person has to say. Real, or active, listening involves a true effort to understand the perspective of the person speaking. This sounds easier than it is; especially when we are angry, emotional, and feel the need to stick to our side of the story. Because of this, having some kind of structure for listening is often helpful.

Exercise:

Have a seat designated in the room (perhaps a certain chair or sofa). The person sitting in that seat is the one who has the right to speak and share their perspective. After the person in the chair is finished speaking, the other side(s) must make that person feel understood, by summing up or repeating what they have said.

The other side(s) cannot discuss anything else or make comments about what has been said. They can only repeat what has been said to show that they have listened or ask questions to clarify and help them understand. When the person in the chair is satisfied that they have been understood, they may leave the chair. Then the chair becomes free for someone else to speak.

(The same exercise can be done using an object; whoever is holding the object is the speaker).



7

BRING IT ON

This section offers some practical guidelines that you, as an individual, a couple or a team, can use when you face conflict. This structured outline can help you put all the theory into practice.



Guidelines To Managing Conflict

1

Stand. Acknowledge that there is a conflict and be aware of your approach to the conflict (Are you ‘hitting’ or ‘running’? Is the other side ‘hitting’ or ‘running’? Are you ready to face the conflict and ‘stand’?). Remember to be honest and aware. Are you interested in resolving the conflict or in winning it?

Be attentive to whether or not the other sides to the conflict are ready to ‘stand’. Forcing someone to resolve a conflict may not lead to a solution, and could also make the conflict worse.

2

Break down the conflict. Try to separate the conflict into its ingredients the way you see them (facts/feeling/needs). What were the facts? How do you feel (try being specific with the way you feel)? What needs do you have that haven’t been met? Also, try to identify how far the conflict has gone, using the escalation steps.

3

Communicate. Let the other person or people involved in the conflict know how you feel. Use effective communication. Use ‘I’ statements.

4

Listen openly and actively. Be open to the other side’s feelings and needs and actively try to gain mutual understanding. Try not to judge how others feel. Remember, there is no right or wrong when it comes to feelings and needs.

At a certain point the sides need to finish discussing the past and move their focus towards resolving the disagreement effectively.

Before you move to finding solutions, both sides need to feel like they have been understood and that their feelings and needs have been communicated and heard.

Rushing this part and moving prematurely to trying to find a solution can leave all sides feeling frustrated and this can get in the way of true resolution.

5

Brainstorm for solutions. After all sides have shared their needs, think together how you can make sure these needs are met in the future. Is there something you can do, or not do, in order for the sides to feel that their needs are met?

6

Seek a win-win solution. Look for a solution that will meet everyone’s needs and not just one of the sides. If all sides feel happy, or at least content with the solution, they are more likely to keep to their commitment, as they will also gain from it.

Throughout the process, keep checking that your goal is still to resolve the conflict. This should not be about winning or about ending the conversation fast. It is about communicating and finding a solution that makes everyone feel comfortable.

7

End on a positive note. Dealing honestly with conflict is not easy and you should reward yourself with a joint positive experience once you’ve reached a solution. Do something fun together, or share something positive about each other. Ending on a positive note will help you remember how conflicts can be constructive and bring people closer.

Facilitating Conflict

Creating a resolution-oriented atmosphere in your team might also mean facilitating a conflict that you are not directly related to; for example, as a staff in a camp or as a member of a committee. Here are some guidelines to remember when you are facilitating a conflict.

A

Lead by example. Show others that you are not afraid of conflicts and that conflict resolution should be a positive process.

B

Stand. ‘Standing’ in a conflict that isn’t your own does not mean that you are taking a side. You are just helping the involved parties to ‘stand’ on their own. However, remember to be attentive to whether all sides are ready to ‘stand’.

C

Encourage sides to break down the conflict. When you are talking to the parties involved (whether together or separately) try guiding them to separate the facts from the feelings and needs. If they are familiar with the concepts of this book, you can openly talk about separating the conflict into its ingredients. If they are not familiar with these terms, you can guide them through questions (When he did this, how did you feel? Why did you feel this way? You feel this person doesn’t like you, why is that?)



D

Acknowledge feelings. Remember that there are no right and wrong feelings and be careful not to dismiss people’s feelings. Avoid saying things like “Oh, you really shouldn’t feel this way...” Feelings are not rational and therefore arguing with feelings is neither effective nor constructive.

E

Encourage sharing and open communication. When people feel that their feelings are valid they are more likely to open up and share their needs. Allow people to vent or explain their feelings, while guiding them towards ‘standing’. This will help in finding a real solution.

F

Let the solution come from the parties. Facilitate the conversation so that the solution doesn’t come from you but rather from the direct sides to the conflict. For example, instead of saying “Well, maybe you should talk with this person and tell them how you feel” try saying “What do you think you can do so this doesn’t happen again?” or “Do you think talking with this person will help?”



FURTHER READING

For anyone interested in reading up in more detail, here are some excellent resources, freely available on the internet.

The Danish Centre for Conflict Resolution

has a good website with materials in several languages at (www.konfliktloesning.dk). In particular, see the booklet *Conflict Resolution: Working with conflicts*, available at: (www.konfliktloesning.dk/files/ConflictResolution.pdf)

Transcend International

is another rich resource for conflict resolution initiatives, networks and publications, available at (www.transcend.org).

The Conflict Resolution Information Source

is a linking website through which you can find many relevant organisations and publications (www.crinfo.org).

'I Statements'

are viewed as integral to effective conflict resolution and are cited extensively, including on the website of the Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management (www.disputeresolution.ohio.gov/schools/contentpages/Istate21.htm)



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