



UNIT-1

What is Conflict

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Recognize how our own attitudes and actions impact others.

Unit 1

What is Conflict?

Conflict as Communication

Defining Conflict

Conflict is a very normal part of healthy relationships. It's not possible for everyone to agree about everything all the time, and to do so can squash creativity and innovation. What is important, then, is to learn how to manage disagreements so that they do not harm relationships. By learning skills to manage conflict, you can approach disagreements with confidence that keeps your personal and professional relationships strong.

Another way to look at dealing with difficult people is to realize that we need to have conversations about accountability. If you consider that holding people accountable (i.e., they are taking responsibility for their actions and results) is a part of your role as a supervisor or at home as a spouse or parent, then these conversations are a part of life. Holding people accountable may or may not become a confrontation, but it is necessary nonetheless. If we avoid these sometimes difficult conversations because we do not like them, consider for a moment whether or not you are valuing that person as a contributor at work or home. If you value them, you are more likely to have these conversations because of your respect for the other individual. We also have to have these conversations with people we do not like for the same reasons.

When you are dealing with difficult people whom you also do not like (we all have people who can rub us the wrong way!), we have an important tip for you before you enter that important conversation. Find something that you like about that person, and you will be able to frame the conversation positively. It doesn't matter what the positive attribute is: they offer good insight in meetings, they are always on time, they meet deadlines, they bring great lunches... just find SOMETHING that you can connect to positively. We guarantee that your conversation will be less likely to get off track and become difficult.

Do We Have To Fight?

People want to be understood and supported. Some of them also want to be nurtured as they progress through life and along their career path. Conflict arises from the differences between people; it flares up when people disagree over something related to their values, motivation, and perception of things or their ideas. From the outside, these differences can look insignificant, but from the inside (or the perspective of the people involved in the conflict) the issues that are at the core of the problem can trigger strong emotions and are very significant.

If you consider the conflicting need for safety versus the desire to challenge and take risks (a frequent conflict between young children and their parents), the conflict becomes readily apparent. The child wants to explore and so the need to move as quickly as possible on stairs becomes their focus. The parent is responsible for the child's safety, so they limit the child's access to the staircase. This limited access becomes the conflict, as the child wants to explore, and the parent wants to avoid bruises and broken bones.

Whether at home or in the workplace, we have to consider that both parties' needs play an important role in the success of the relationship. Each side deserves respect and consideration. A lack of understanding can contribute to arguments, low productivity, and continued disputes. This in turn can lead to the total breakdown of important relationships.

When you acknowledge the legitimacy of conflict and are willing to examine issues in a cooperative environment, you can open the door to creative problem solving, more cohesive teams, and improved relationships. Developing a method to cope and work through conflict empowers people to take control of the outcomes and to contribute strongly to effective teams.

What is A Conflict?

- A conflict is more than just a disagreement. A conflict comes with a threat, and whether the threat is real or not, it must be dealt with in order for the threatened party to be able to move beyond the situation.
- Conflicts become more serious when they are ignored. Since conflicts involve a perceived threat to our own well-being, they stay with us and often become greater in magnitude until we resolve them.
- Perception colors our reactions and triggers emotions. This makes it difficult for us to remain objective, even when we look at the facts. Our perception is influenced by our life experiences, values, and beliefs.
- Conflicts trigger our emotional hot buttons. We aren't always at our best when working through conflict because our emotions can interfere with our ability to remain objective and manage things rationally. Learning how to manage conflict during emotionally stable periods helps us to manage conflict more effectively.
- Conflict brings growth. Although we aren't often able to acknowledge it in the heat of things, when we resolve conflict in our relationships, we are also building trust. In relationships with high levels of trust, we feel more secure, knowing that our relationship will survive, and ultimately get even stronger.

How About Avoidance?

You may think that avoidance is a great way to handle conflict, and we would agree that it is one way to deal with difficult situations. At the same time, consider what happens if you create a policy or procedure at work that no one follows, and you don't want to get into a conflict, so you avoid dealing with it.

On the other hand, you may be in a situation where you feel threatened or somehow unsafe, or you decide that the relationship is not one that you want to foster, and then walk away. You can reschedule the conversation when everyone’s temper has been restored, or you can choose to get some help (e.g., through mediation, your manager, or an HR specialist) with the situation.

Self-Assessment

This assessment will help you to determine your preferences for involvement in dealing with difficult people, and taking on those challenging conversations. Answer each question with yes or no. Scoring directions follow the assessment.

Questionnaire

	Yes	No
1. Instead of getting into an argument, I put off certain discussions.		
2. When someone doesn’t deliver on a promise, I judge them more quickly than I should.		
3. Sometimes I bring up difficult subjects in a way that makes people defensive.		
4. Let’s be honest: there are people I deal with who simply cannot be motivated.		
5. When someone is struggling, I tend to offer advice, even though they may just want to have someone listen to their ideas.		
6. When discussing problems, I sometimes get sidetracked and miss the actual problem.		
7. There are some people I simply cannot work with.		
8. Sometimes it’s not them being difficult, it’s me.		
9. I prefer to just jump in and have the conversation, rather than spending a lot of time planning for it.		
10. I know that I have to have these conversations, but I do not have to like them.		

Scoring

Add up the number of times you answered “yes.” **Write that number here:** _____.

Now, have a look at the explanations below.

- **7-10:** This course is perfect for you. Don’t let your attention wander!

- **4-6:** You're in the right place for help, and you're going to learn some things.
- **1-3:** You're managing well and likely successful in dealing with difficult people.
- **0:** You ought to be teaching this course! Hopefully you'll find a few helpful gems to enrich your relationship building.

Benefits of Confrontation

To Talk or Not to Talk

In deciding whether you want to proceed with a difficult conversation, there are some things to consider. If this relationship is important to you, then it makes sense that the conversation takes place. But not every conversation is necessary. Is it worth tracking someone down and having a confrontation when they cut you off in traffic? The person who interrupts you in a meeting but has never done so before, and probably never would again?

Determining Your Involvement

In order to decide whether you need to deal with a difficult person or not, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is this person important to me?
- Is this relationship important to me?
- Has this happened before?
- Does this bother me or other people?
- Can I invest my time?

If you answer “no” to any of the five questions, we recommend that you remove yourself from the situation, either temporarily or permanently.

Reciprocal Relationships

Interpersonal relationships have a reciprocal nature. When we invite colleagues to meetings or remember their birthdays, they tend to do the same for us. When we invite a colleague to a function, they tend to invite us in return.

The way that our relationships unfold reflects this reciprocal nature. If we engage in small talk, others do the same. If we are not fond of small talk and do not enter into it willingly, people will stop trying to engage us that way.

Considering this same principle, if we continually try to engage people in negative ways, we can predict the results. Think of yourself in terms of some of your work relationships. Do people come to you on their own? Do you make them feel welcome to speak with you?

For this course, we would like you to think of a scenario where you have encountered conflict with a difficult person. It can even be imaginary, as long as it is something you may encounter.

Test Your Knowledge

Think of the difficult person who you identified above.

How do they approach you?

How do you approach them?

In terms of a reciprocal relationship, what kind of expectations do they have in interactions with you?

What could you do to improve that relationship?

How do you think we can achieve better results or performance from our employees, clients or colleagues?

Further Reading:

- ✓ *Conflict Resolution, By Daniel Dana, (2001)*
- ✓ *Conflict: Problems and Solutions By Arthur V. Levy, (2003)*