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Customizable Soft-Skills Courseware

Conflict Management



Instructor Guide

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Published by HRDQ
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Phone: 0040 734 350 525
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ISBN 978-1-58854-261-8
EN-02-MY-13

Instructional design and learning philosophy

We are committed to providing the best core-skills content possible for Instructor-Led Training (ILT). The following principles are applied in the development of programs:

Sound Instructional Design

All course content is developed using a variety of research techniques. These include:

- Brainstorming sessions with target audience
- Library research
- Online research
- Customer research (focus groups, surveys, etc.)
- Subject Matter Experts (SME)
- Interviews with trainers

Expert instructional designers create imaginative and innovative solutions for your training needs through the development of powerful instructional elements. These include:

- Learning objectives — effective tools for managing, monitoring, and evaluating training
- Meaningfulness — connects the topic to the students' past, present, and future
- Appropriate organization of essential ideas — helps students focus on what they need to know in order to learn
- Modeling techniques — demonstrate to students how to act and solve problems
- Active application — the cornerstone to learning — helps students immediately apply what they have learned to a real-life situation
- Consistency — creates consistent instructions and design to help students learn and retain new information
- Accelerated learning techniques — create interactive, hands-on involvement to accommodate different learning styles

Application of Adult Learning Styles

Adults learn best by incorporating their personal experiences with training and by applying what they learn to real-life situations. Our experienced instructional designers incorporate a variety of accelerated learning techniques, role-plays, simulations, discussions, and lectures within each course. This ensures that the learning will appeal to all learning styles and will be retained.

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Course objectives

Successful completion of this course will increase your knowledge and ability to:

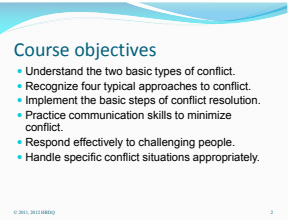
- ◇ Understand the two basic types of conflict and reasons they occur.
- ◇ Recognize four typical approaches to conflict.
- ◇ Implement the basic steps of conflict resolution.
- ◇ Practice communication skills to minimize and even prevent conflict.
- ◇ Employ strategies for responding to challenging people such as dealing with an extremely angry person or someone who won't acknowledge the conflict.
- ◇ Handle specific situations including dealing with your boss, client, or another department.

Key principles

- ◇ Conflict is inevitable.
- ◇ Conflict is not always bad.
- ◇ The only behavior I can control is mine.
- ◇ If you don't deal with conflict early, it will escalate.

Icebreaker activity: Complete the following sentence in 10 words or less. "In my opinion, conflict most usually occurs when _____." Allow a minute for participants to think of their answer, and then have them share with a partner or in small groups. Set a strict time limit to avoid lengthy venting. Debrief by sharing answers with the entire group.

Review the course objectives and key principles with the group.



Course objectives

- Understand the two basic types of conflict.
- Recognize four typical approaches to conflict.
- Implement the basic steps of conflict resolution.
- Practice communication skills to minimize conflict.
- Respond effectively to challenging people.
- Handle specific conflict situations appropriately.



Key principles

- Conflict is inevitable.
- Conflict is not always bad.
- The only behavior I can control is mine.
- If you don't deal with conflict early, it will escalate.

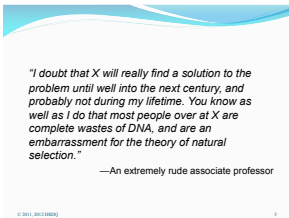
Chapter One



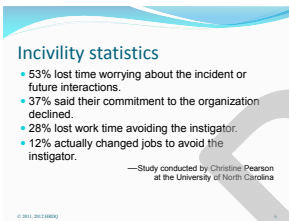
UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT



Death of civility: Deborah Tannen wrote a book on the subject called *The Argument Culture*. Have participants think of TV shows that are based on arguing and polarizing each position—“McLaughlin Group” or “People’s Court”- type shows.



Read the example of extreme rudeness on the PPT. It was sent by an associate professor at a major university to 13 people, including the vice chancellor, and is verbatim except for removing the department names.



Have participants share their “war stories.” Check out www.workplacebullyinglaw.org and refers participants to it for ideas and support.

Competing priorities: A classic example is sales versus quality control. Sales usually want the newest product or service immediately, while quality control wants to make certain all the kinks are worked out.

Reasons for conflict

Death of civility

The number one thing that drives people crazy at work is people who steal other people’s food from the office fridge. It may be petty, but it points to the disintegration of politeness and common sense in the workplace.

- ◇ Atmosphere of animosity
 - Tendency to polarize every problem as two opposing viewpoints offering no middle ground
 - Fueled by culture, media, and politicians
- ◇ Loss of manners
 - Sense of isolation and de-personalization fueled by e-mail and voice mail
 - The House of Representatives felt obligated to hold a civility retreat for its members in Hershey, Pennsylvania (“the sweetest place on earth”); fewer than 200 of the 435 House members attended
- ◇ The faster we go, the more disconnected we become

Lack of resources: time, money, and people

Competition and frustration arise when employees attempt to complete their tasks without enough resources. Internal competition often fuels conflict within an organization.

Competing priorities

This occurs when two tasks must be completed at the same time, but doing one prevents the other from getting done.

Getting buy-in

Buy-in is getting agreement on the nature of the conflict; it is not agreement on what to do about it (yet).

Eliminate misunderstandings

- ◇ Make sure the “conflict” is not merely a miscommunication.
- ◇ Ask, “How would you describe the situation, and what do you want to do about it?”

Clarify perceptions

- ◇ Provide an accurate description of the situation including your feelings about it. Don’t exaggerate.
 - Ask yourself, “How has my behavior contributed to current perceptions about the situation?”
- ◇ Ask, “Are we starting from the same or different assumptions?” “What is this conflict **not** about?”
- ◇ Welcome the other person’s perceptions.
 - Restate what you are told to make sure you’ve understood correctly. Example: “John, if I understand correctly, you believe I haven’t shared information about departmental changes and you feel left out. Is that right?”

Define the problem

- ◇ Explain the negative impact the current situation is having, or describe a preferred future state.
 - Focus on concrete examples.
 - Be specific about what you want.
- ◇ Avoid getting sidetracked into other issues.
- ◇ Ask, “What do we agree on, and what do we disagree about?”

Provide some examples of misunderstandings versus true conflicts.

Clarify perceptions: Here’s the place to separate issues and emotions, values/personal opinions from content, etc. Sometimes our values are so ingrained that it’s hard to recognize and articulate them.



Activity: The lawn problem. This activity illustrates the importance of defining the problem and recognizing the difference between identifying the symptoms and the source of a problem. Complete instructions for conducting the activity are in the Trainer Supplement.

Define the problem: Separate the conflict into sub-issues if necessary, and then clarify and prioritize.

Make sure you’re addressing the real problem and not merely a symptom of the problem. Often the incident that ignites the conflict is merely “the last straw.” Beware of red herrings—stated conflict to avoid dealing with unstated issues.

Asking questions

Initiate

- ◇ “What are your thoughts about ...?”
- ◇ “You seem ... am I understanding correctly?”
- ◇ “I’m not sure what to do about ...”

Gather

- ◇ “Tell me more about ...”
- ◇ “What are your thoughts about ...?”
- ◇ “I’d like to hear your opinion about ...”

Clarify

- ◇ “Help me understand ...”
- ◇ “What did you mean by ...?”
- ◇ “Could you give me an example of ...?”

Reframe

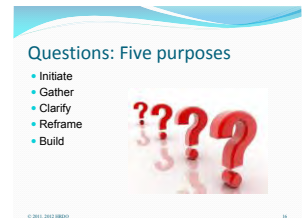
- ◇ “It sounds like you are saying ...”
- ◇ “What would you do if you were me?”

Build

- ◇ “What if we ...?”
- ◇ “What can I do to help?”
- ◇ “How can we ...?”

There are five basic reasons to ask questions:

1. To initiate a conversation or certain subject area
2. To gather information
3. To clarify specific information
4. To reframe or summarize the conversation
5. To build the relationship



Review the information about communicating feelings. Emphasize that awareness is the first step to controlling and communicating feelings. Without awareness, you have no chance of being proactive in managing your emotions.



Activity: Expressing emotions. Working in small groups, have participants complete the chart. Many answers will work as long as they are candidly, yet calmly stating how the emotion felt. A helpful tool is to remind participants that if they can substitute “I think” or “I feel as though” or “I feel that,” then they haven’t really expressed an emotion. For example, “I feel you hurt my integrity” can be substituted with “I think you hurt my integrity” or “I feel as though you hurt my integrity.” A true feeling statement is “I am hurt because what you said damaged my integrity.”

Communicating feelings

The first step toward emotional control is to figure out what triggers intense emotions. Awareness of these triggers can help you maintain a detached engagement: the ability to separate issues and personalities in a conflict.

Ask yourself ...	Ask others ...
When do I get frustrated or complain, or become obsessed or mentally exhausted?	When have you seen me upset?
When have I avoided dealing with a person or situation?	What situations seem to upset me the most?
When have I talked about people behind their backs?	What behaviors tell you that I am mad, sad, glad, or afraid?
What is guaranteed to put me in a bad mood?	When am I difficult to get along with?

Use language to express feelings

- ◇ Express, don’t dramatize
- ◇ Four basic feelings: mad, sad, glad, afraid

Emotion	Less effective	More effective
Mad	Screaming, swearing, throwing things	
Sad	Crying	
Glad	Not expressing any emotion	
Afraid	Denial, looking scared	

When the other person (or you) is ready to talk, consciously use positive language.

Emphasize that this is one of the simplest but most effective ways to minimize conflict or keep it from escalating.

Activity: Rephrase negative statements. Possible answers:

1. I can process your request as soon as you complete all the information.
2. Ms. Jones can help you with that.
3. It will be ready next Wednesday.
4. I don't know, but I'll find out.
5. The finance department can handle that issue.

Ask participants to identify other typical negative statements and suggest positive alternatives.

Examples:

You should have/you must ...

If you will ... we can ...

You failed to ..., and one option for you is ...

We insist you ..., and I suggest you ...

Rephrasing negative messages

- I can process your request as soon as you complete all the information.
- Ms. Jones can help you with that.
- It will be ready next Wednesday.
- I don't know, but I'll find out.
- The finance department can handle that issue.

Positive language

Cooperative language focuses on problem solving, emphasizes the present and future, lets the other person save face, uses words with reduced emotional impact, and demonstrates sincerity, trust, and respect.

“I” messages

- ◇ Wrong way: “You drive me nuts when you ignore my suggestions.”
- ◇ Right way: “I feel ignored when you don’t respond to my suggestions.”

Rephrasing negative messages

One trick to sounding more cooperative is to always say what you *can* do, not what you *can't* do.

Instructions: Rewrite the following statements, stating them in a more positive way.

Negative	Positive
1. I can't process your request because you forgot to fill out all the information.	1.
2. That's not my job.	2.
3. It won't be ready until next week.	3.
4. I don't know.	4.
5. You need to call another department.	5.

Activity: Thinking on your feet.
Purpose: To practice handling challenging personalities in real time.

Materials needed: Slips of paper with the situations listed on this page written on the slips of paper (but not the label). Note: A copy of this page is in the Trainer Supplement to duplicate and cut apart for each presentation.

To conduct the activity: Put the slips of paper in a bowl and ask for volunteers to draw them out. To begin, demonstrate what you want participants to do. Draw a slip of paper and read it to the group. (Ask for a volunteer to play the challenging personality — they won't have to do much.) Demonstrate the first thing you would do and the first thing you would say to get the interaction headed in a positive direction.

Conduct this activity like a lightning round — very quick and fast-paced. If a volunteer is struggling, allow participants to shout out tips or ideas to help.

Challenging personality practice

Denial

Your co-worker told a client in a meeting that you couldn't meet his deadline. The co-worker has avoided your attempts to discuss the incident, saying he or she is too busy to meet.

Uncooperative

You need the help of a team member to complete a report, but the team member refuses to help.

Angry hothead

You confront a co-worker who is complaining about the team to other departments. The co-worker immediately begins attacking you.

Intimidated

In a meeting with a client, the client says something negative about your boss. You think your boss should know about it.

Defeated

You just find out you've been taken off a pet project of yours. You go to your boss's office to talk about it.

Dealing with team conflict

Develop a system

- ◇ Analyze the conflict.
 - The stated conflict may be a symptom of a bigger, underlying problem.
- ◇ Clarify values differences.
 - Teams often have trouble separating the people from the problem.
- ◇ Look for shared goals.
- ◇ Gain commitment.
 - Encourage team members to commit to change individually. One person can make a difference.
 - Make sure employees are equipped in terms of skills and support to carry out the agreement.

Support the system

Myth: All conflict can be resolved with better communication. Not all conflict can be resolved.

- ◇ Teams tend to act the opposite of what is actually going on.
- ◇ Reward the behavior you want to encourage.
 - Publicly praise employees willing to go out on a limb and disagree or present a different approach or solution.
- ◇ Look for successful counterintuitive decisions and share them.

Dig beyond symptoms to the disease.

Diversity, while a positive force in many aspects, can highlight value differences that lead to personality conflicts.

Teams tend to avoid dealing with conflict because it feels bad (they think) and they're not prepared (lacking skills).

A majority vote doesn't equal commitment.

Support the system:

Ask participants for examples of meetings they've been in where everyone agreed on a decision, then promptly bad-mouthed it afterward.

Ask them to think of other meetings in which two groups were willing to disagree in public. Was there a better, more long-lasting result? Generally, when people feel free to voice their opinions, there's less resentment at the outcome, even if it's not the ideal solution.

Team conflict

- Analyze the conflict.
- Clarify values differences.
- Look for shared goals.
- Gain commitment.

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Activity: Case studies. Divide participants into five groups. Assign one of the case studies to each group. Allow about 10 minutes for participants to read and answer the questions. Debrief by having each group share its case study and answers. Be certain to tie the answers to the strategies discussed previously in this chapter.

Case studies

Instructions: Read your assigned case study and answer the questions that follow it.

Elizabeth and Tracy

Elizabeth is in a quandary. As a long-time member of the division orders team, she already has her own work deadlines stacked up to a point that causes her a lot of stress. The good news is that she is confident enough in her skills that she knows she can get the job done in time, if she has no interruptions. She looks away from her computer to rest her eyes, and there stands Tracy, her boss.

“Hi, Elizabeth, did you have a good lunch?”

“Mmm hmm.”

“What did you have?”

“Chicken sandwich.”

“Was it good?”

“It was quick. That’s why I ordered it. What’s up?”

“Well, I just talked to Jason and he said that he is snowed under. I was wondering if you had some time to help him out.”

“I’m pretty snowed myself. Can’t Jason just put in a little extra time?”

Tracy shifts her feet uneasily. “Well, his son has a soccer game right after work, and he can’t. Besides, he doesn’t have your skills. You can do his work in half the time, and without mistakes.”

“I have plans to meet friends for dinner as soon as I get finished with my work.”

“Well, that’s not nearly as important as a child’s soccer game. You only get one chance at seeing your kids grow up. When you get married and have kids, you’ll understand that. I know when my son Bobby was playing Little League I never missed a game. I remember the time he played in the all-metro tournament. I told my husband, you’re just going to have to pick the kids up at school so I can be at the games on time. It was a good thing too, because ...”

Elizabeth interrupts, “So what you’re saying is, married people’s lives are more important than single people’s?”

Course review

1. List three reasons conflict occurs.

2. List the two types of conflict.

3. Describe the difference between the rational and emotional minds.

4. Define detached engagement.

5. Which of the following is NOT a typical approach to handling conflict?

- a. Avoid
- b. Command
- c. Accommodate
- d. Collaborate
- e. Compete

6. List the four conflict resolutions steps, in order.

7. Consensus means 100 percent agreement.

- a. True
- b. False

1. Death of civility, lack of resources, competing priorities, workload issues, responsibility without control

2. Issue-based and personality-based

3. The rational mind is analytical, logical, objective, and slower to decide. The emotional mind is subjective, based on perceptions (not factual data) and quick to decide or jump to conclusions.

4. A mindset that enables one to separate negative emotions from issues in a conflict

5. b. Command

6. Approach, buy-in, consensus, do it

7. b. False

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