



## INTERPRET AND MANAGE CONFLICTS WITHIN THE WORKPLACE

UNIT STANDARD 114226

CREDITS: 8

NQF LEVEL: 5

NOTIONAL HOURS: 80

LEARNER GUIDE

Rock Lilly Connections

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## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This workbook belongs to you. It is designed to serve as a guide for the duration of your training programme and as a resource for after the time. It contains readings, activities, and application aids that will assist you in developing the knowledge and skills stipulated in the outcomes. Follow along in the guide as the facilitator takes you through the material, and feel free to make notes and diagrams that will help you to clarify or retain information. Jot down things that work well or ideas that come from the group. Also, note any points you would like to explore further. Participate actively in the skill practice activities, as they will give you an opportunity to gain insights from other people's experiences and to practice the skills. Do not forget to share your own experiences so that others can learn from you too.

## ICONS

For ease of reference, an icon will indicate different activities. The following icons indicate different activities in the manual.

|   |                            |   |                            |
|---|----------------------------|---|----------------------------|
|   | <b>Outcomes</b>            |   | <b>Individual activity</b> |
|  | <b>Assessment Criteria</b> |  | <b>Note!</b>               |
|  | <b>Practical activity</b>  |  | <b>Reflection</b>          |
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## **PROGRAMME OVERVIEW**

### **PURPOSE**

The person credited with this unit standard is able to identify and manage the resolution of personal conflict between persons or parties. The main focus will be on the workplace although the same principles can be used elsewhere.

The qualifying learner is capable of:

- Describing the main sources of conflict
- Describing appropriate techniques to manage conflict
- Implementing a strategy to resolve conflict
- Developing the attributes of a good conflict manager

### **LEARNING ASSUMPTIONS**

The learner undertaking this unit standard must be competent in:

- Communication at NQF Level 4 or equivalent
- Mathematical Literacy at NQF Level 4

### **HOW YOU WILL LEARN**

The programme methodology includes facilitator presentations, readings, individual activities, group discussions, and skill application exercises.

### **HOW YOU WILL BE ASSESSED**

This programme has been aligned to a registered unit standard. You will be assessed against the outcomes of this unit standard by completing self-tests, group exercises, quizzes, assignments, on the job tasks and theoretical tests that covers all specific outcomes, assessment criteria and the essential embedded knowledge stipulated in the unit standard. You will be required to collect and keep all evidence of assessments until you are done and then submit them in the format of a Portfolio of Evidence which will have to be signed off by your manager. When you are assessed as competent against the unit standard, you will receive a certificate of competence and you will be registered on the NLRD (National Learner Record Database) as having achieved 6 credits.

## **ASSESSMENT INFORMATION**

In order to be declared competent for this learning programme the following is required of you:

- a. Ensure that you attend all training sessions for the full duration.
- b. Ensure that all tasks are completed as they are being done in the training session and if not, then it must be completed as homework.
- c. Ensure that all on the job assessments are completed under the supervision of your manager and are signed off by the same manager.
- d. Ensure that all assessments, be they formative, summative, theory or practical are completed and submitted as part of your POE.
- e. Work smart, not hard!!!

## **FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT**

In each Learner Guide, several activities are spaced within the content to assist you in understanding the material through application. Activities in the learner manual are not for assessments. Formative assessments are in a separate module written formative assessment. Please make sure that you complete ALL activities in the Formative Assessment Guide, Formative activities must be completed at the end of each section.

## **SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT**

You will be required to complete a Portfolio of Evidence for summative assessment purposes. A portfolio is a collection of different types of evidence relating to the work being assessed. It can include a variety of work samples. The Portfolio of Evidence Guide will assist you in identifying the portfolio and evidence requirements for final assessment purposes. You will be required to complete Portfolio activities on your own time, using real life projects in your workplace environment in preparing evidence towards your portfolio.

### **Being Declared Competent Entails:**

Competence is the ability to perform whole work roles, to the standards expected in employment, in a real working environment. There are three levels of competence:

- Foundational competence: an understanding of what you do and why.
- Practical competence: the ability to perform a set of tasks in an authentic context.
- Reflexive competence: the ability to adapt to changed circumstances appropriately and responsibly, and to explain the reason behind the action.

To receive a certificate of competence and be awarded credits, you are required to provide evidence of your competence by compiling a portfolio of evidence, which will be assessed by a relevant SETA accredited assessor.

## **You Have to Submit a Portfolio of Evidence**

A portfolio of evidence is a structured collection of evidence that reflects your efforts, progress and achievement in a specific learning area, and demonstrates your competence.

### **The Assessment of Your Competence**

Assessment of competence is a process of making judgments about an individual's competence through matching evidence collected to the appropriate national standards. The evidence in your portfolio should closely reflect the outcomes and assessment criteria of the unit standards of the learning programme for which you are being assessed. To determine a candidate's knowledge and ability to apply the skills before and during the learning programme, formative assessments are done to determine the learner's progress towards full competence. This normally guides the learner towards a successful summative (final) assessment to which both the assessor and the candidate only agree when they both feel the candidate is ready.

Should it happen that a candidate is deemed not yet competent upon a summative assessment, that candidate will be allowed to be re-assessed. The candidate can, however, only be allowed two reassessments.

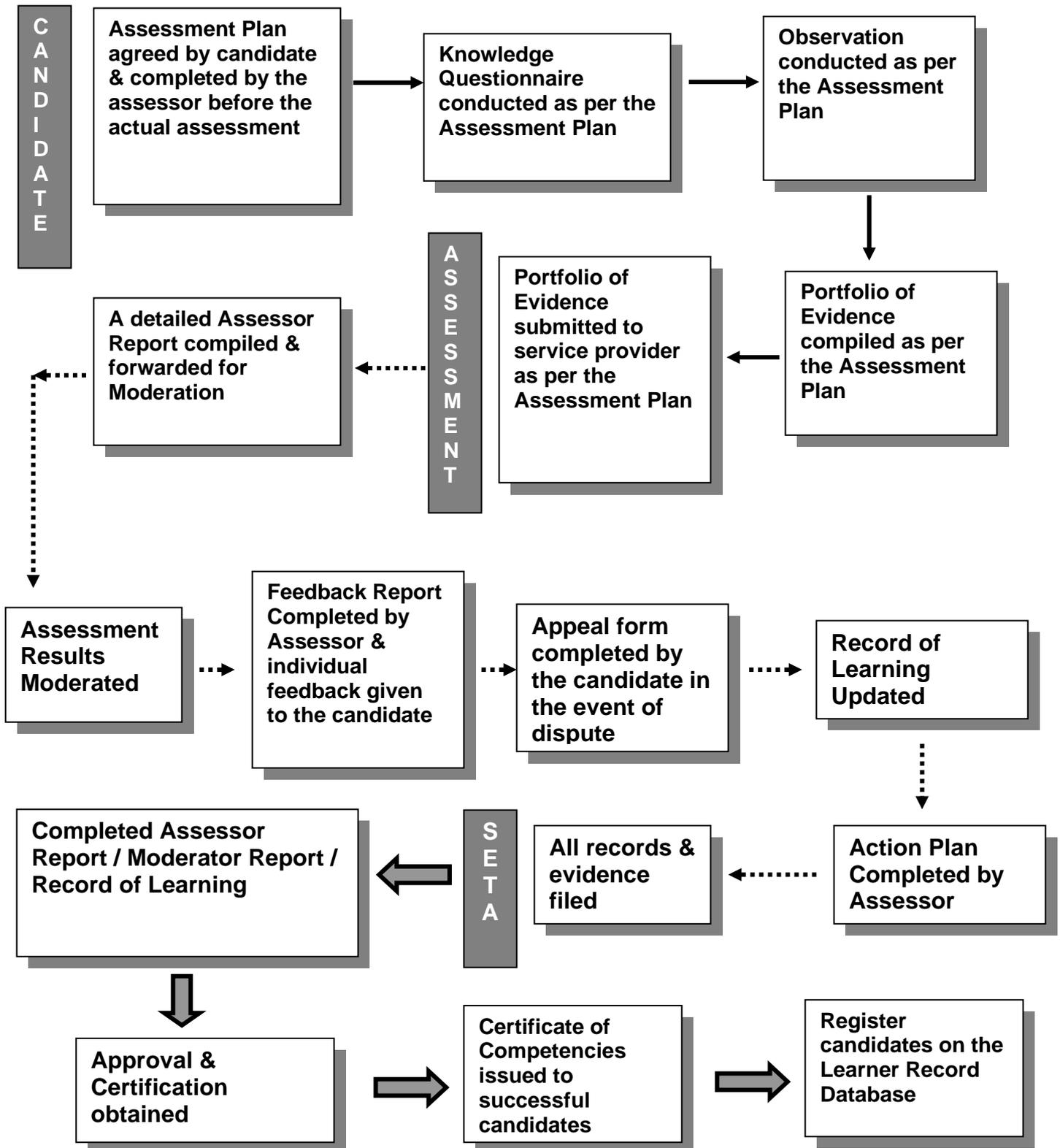
When learners have to undergo re-assessment, the following conditions will apply:

- Specific feedback will be given so that candidates can concentrate on only those areas in which they were assessed as not yet competent.
- Re-assessment will take place in the same situation or context and under the same conditions as the original assessment.
- Only the specific outcomes that were not achieved will be re-assessed.
- Candidates who are repeatedly unsuccessful will be given guidance on other possible and more suitable learning avenues.

In order for your assessor to assess your competence, your portfolio should provide evidence of both your knowledge and skills, and of how you applied your knowledge and skills in a variety of contexts. The POE guide directs you in the activities that need to be completed so that your competence can be assessed and so that you can be awarded the credits attached to the programme.

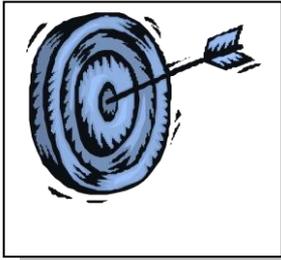
**NOTE YOUR POE GUIDE HAS MORE INFORMATION ON THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

## Assessment Process Flow



# SECTION 1: THE MAIN SOURCES OF CONFLICT

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## Specific Outcome

On completion of this section you will be able to describe the main sources of conflict.



## Assessment Criteria

This specific outcome shall cover:

- ❖ A list of possible sources of conflict, including perceptions and assumptions, is drawn up with examples of where they are most likely to occur. (SO 1, AC 1)
  
- ❖ Positive and negative characteristics of conflict in the workplace are discussed with examples. (SO 1, AC 2)
  
- ❖ Conflict, which may arise in personality types, can be described, using transactional analysis. (SO 1, AC 4)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Conflict in a workplace setting can be a normal part of doing business. In some cases, conflict that is managed properly can be beneficial, as when it fosters an environment of healthy competition. However, conflict may also have a detrimental effect. As a manager or business owner, you need to be aware of potential sources of conflict within your work environment.



- **Conflict** is defined as an incompatibility of goals or values between two or more parties in a relationship, combined with attempts to control each other and antagonistic feelings toward each other (Fisher, 1990). Conflict is a strong disagreement or collision of values, needs, interests, or intentions among individuals, groups, organisations, communities, or nations. Conflict requires the following: opposing interests, recognition of parties, beliefs of parties, and interaction (communication).
- **Conflict resolution:** is intervention aimed at alleviating or eliminating discord through conciliation. In simple, it is the process of ending a disagreement between two or more people in a constructive fashion for all parties involved.
- **Conflict management:** is the practice of identifying and handling conflict in a sensible, fair, and efficient manner. Conflict management requires such skills as effective communicating, problem solving, and negotiating with a focus on interests.

### 1.1 POSSIBLE SOURCES OF CONFLICT (AC 1)

The first step in uncovering workplace conflict is to consider the typical sources of conflict. There are a variety of sources of workplace conflict including interpersonal, organisational, change related, and external factors. Sources of conflict include the following:

#### Change

Implementation of new technology can lead to stressful change. Workers who don't adapt well to change can become overly stressed, which increases the likelihood of conflict in the workplace.

#### Interpersonal Relationships

When different personalities come together in a workplace, there is always the possibility they won't mesh. Office gossip and rumours can also serve as a catalyst for deterioration of co-worker relationships.

## **Supervisor vs. Employee**

Just as co-worker personalities may not mesh, a supervisor and employee can also experience conflict. A supervisor who is seen as overbearing or unfair can rub an employee the wrong way, which makes the working relationship more difficult.

## **External Changes**

When the economy slides into a recession or a new competitor swoops in and steals some of a company's market share, it can create tension within the company. This stress can lead to conflict between employees and even between upper levels of management.

## **Poor Communication**

Companies or supervisors that don't communicate effectively can create conflict. For example, a supervisor who gives unclear instructions to employees can cause confusion as to who is supposed to do what, which can lead to conflict. In addition, parties may have different perceptions as to what are the facts in a situation, and until they share information and clarify their perceptions, resolution is impossible. Self-centeredness, selective perception, emotional bias, prejudices, etc., are all forces that lead us to perceive situations very differently from the other party. Lack of skill in communicating what we really mean in a clear and respectful fashion often results in confusion, hurt and anger: all of which simply feed the conflict process. Whether the conflict has objective sources or is due only to perceptual or communication problems; it is experienced as very real by the parties involved.

## **Subpar Performance**

When a worker in a department is not "pulling his weight," it can lead to conflict within the department, perhaps even escalating into a confrontational situation. A supervisor who fails to acknowledge or address the situation can add fuel to the fire.

## **Harassment**

Harassment in the workplace can take many forms, such as sexual or racial harassment or even the hazing of a new employee. Companies that don't have strong harassment policies in place are in effect encouraging the behavior, which can result in conflict.

## **Limited Resources**

Companies that are looking to cut costs may scale back on resources such as office equipment, access to a company vehicle or the spending limit on expense accounts. Employees may feel they are competing against each other for resources, which can create friction in the workplace.

## **Perceptions and Assumptions**

Differing perceptions and assumptions about work situations and other cases may result in conflict as well.

In simple terms, the most common causes are the following:

- Scarcity of resources (finance, equipment, facilities, etc)
- Different attitudes, values or perceptions
- Disagreements about needs, goals, priorities and interests
- Poor communication
- Poor or inadequate organisational structure
- Lack of teamwork
- Lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities

### **Root Problem 1: Values (often the most difficult to resolve, due to the deep-rooted nature of the situation)**

#### **Possible Causes**

- assumptions about the other person's values
- real differences in values
- not checking assumptions about values
- mistaking behaviour for values
- seeing a difference between the person's behaviour and what they say are their values
- values are not disclosed
- different ways of life, ideology and/or religion

### **Root Problem 2: Resources**

#### **Possible Causes**

- two or more entities competing for what are assumed to be limited resources
- perception of unequal control, ownership or distribution of resources
- geographic, physical or environmental factors hindering co-operation
- time constraints

### **Root Problem 3: Interpersonal**

#### **Possible Causes**

- general lack of familiarity with others
- stereotypes
- failure to check assumptions about one another
- behaviours perceived to be negative
- unresolved disagreements
- unstated interests
- past negative encounters with the other party

## Root Problem 4: Interests

### Possible Causes

- competing needs, desires or wishes
- substantive, procedural or psychological interests perceived to be in competition

## Root Problem 5: Facts

### Possible Causes

- lack of information
- misinformation
- different views on what is relevant
- interpretation of differences
- different assessment procedures



- a) What is conflict?
- b) Identify and discuss possible sources of conflict with examples of where they are most likely to occur.

## 1.2 POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF CONFLICT IN THE WORKPLACE (AC 2)

Conflict in the workplace can have different effects depending on how it is managed.

- ✓ **Conflict is a positive element** of all groups. Without it, people would not be challenged to think beyond their everyday, routine boundaries. When a variety of people with different perspectives, values, experiences, education, lifestyles and interests come together, differences abound. That diversity can enrich the discussion, the ideas and goals if the conflict and tensions that emerge are resolved and the group uses the learning to improve its work.
- ✓ **Conflict can also be negative** and adversely affect the success of the individuals in the workplace. The solution is for the group to deal with its conflict constructively, before it becomes embedded, spreads and erodes the foundation to the point where it cannot carry on any longer.

A good manager can identify positive characteristics of conflict and will encourage that kind of employee interaction. Supervisors must identify negative characteristics of conflict immediately and eliminate them

as soon as possible. Understanding positive and negative characteristics conflicts in the workplace is an important part of being an efficient manager.

Some of the positive characteristics of conflict are:

- Improve the quality of decisions
- Stimulate involvement in the discussion
- Arouse creativity and imagination
- Facilitate employee growth
- Increase movement toward goals
- Create energetic climate
- Build more synergy and cohesion among teams
- Foster new ideas, alternatives, and solutions
- Test positions and beliefs



However, conflict also has negative characteristics which include the following:

- Be destructive and uncontrollable
- Create ineffective working groups
- Cause productivity to suffer
- Reduce the exchange of ideas and information
- Develop animosities
- Break down communication
- Diminish trust and support



## Competition

Competition can be a positive or negative conflict in the workplace, depending on the situation. Two peers trying to outdo the other in the pursuit of a goal that benefits the company is healthy competition.



*For example, two of the top sales people in the company competing to win a bonus for highest monthly revenue will inspire higher productivity and some bad feelings. But the confidence of each sales representative helps to turn those bad feelings into even more motivation. A competition between the least productive sales associate and the most productive sales associate can result in workplace conflicts based on frustration.*

Managers who choose to spur competition to motivate employees must be certain that the conflict can be contained.

### Spurring Creativity

Positive conflicts can be difficult to determine, but when you see your more creative employees arguing about the good ideas they have to help the company, you have positive competition. Proactive people tend to motivate each other to perform at a higher level. Sometimes that motivation can come in the form of arguing or confrontation, but the end result is that both parties are pushed to their maximum productivity levels. As long as management can find a way to keep the conflict healthy, everyone will benefit.



Discuss positive and negative characteristics of conflict in the workplace with examples.

### 1.3 CONFLICT WHICH MAY ARISE IN PERSONALITY TYPES (AC 4)

Working with different personalities isn't easy, but it's always necessary. In today's fast-changing corporate environment, personality types are mixed together at various levels, and it's crucial that you learn how to spot and work with any you come across. Personality typing may be useful in your business, to help you understand people's differences. In doing so, you'll be able to develop more productive work teams and enhance communication. Take the good, the bad, and the ugly: we all have different styles of communicating and making our way around the workplace. As a manager or co-worker, having a better understanding of how personalities work will help you understand how to create a better and more efficient work environment.



*Conflicts in the workplace often arise because of difficulties people have communicating with other personality types. Learning how to work more effectively with others who are different from you will make you a better person overall. Understanding diversity in the workplace is a very important skill to have,*

and will make you more marketable in the future. Whether you learn by experience or do training exercises to understand this process better, it's worth taking the time to learn about and adapt to other people.

## Personality Types in the Office



### Introverts

*More Work, Less Talk*

- Need private time and space to express their ideas.
- Work best on their own, and social interaction can be difficult for them.
- Schedule a one-on-one meeting if you need to discuss anything in depth.



### Extroverts

*More Sociable, Less Focused*

- Love being in the spotlight, and are at their best in people-oriented jobs.
- Acknowledge their ideas and input -ideally in public- in order to motivate them.
- Thrive on interacting with others, and excel at thinking on their feet.



### Perceivers

*Adaptable and Unconventional*

- Can be very productive when they are actively engaged.
- Tend to take an unconventional approach to their job.
- Recognize their creativity, and appreciate their out-of-the-box thinking.



### Judgers

*Well Organized, Less Flexible*

- Enlist them in product development, planning, and scheduling.
- Tend to be very good at thinking things through and detail-oriented work.
- Work best when every detail is planned, and can be upset by last-minute changes.

Personality conflicts exist, that's a fact. It's important however, to realise that there can be serious consequences when personalities clash.

- ✓ **Stress:** having to deal with personality clashes causes a great deal of tension and anxiety. Being in a constant state of alert, preparing for the next unpleasant interaction, can cause both physical and mental strain. In certain situations, this stress can have real physical impact on health. Sometimes the level of stress is unbearable, causing workers to leave their jobs.
- ✓ **Lower productivity:** when members of the team are in conflict with each other, that conflict has a negative effect on the entire project. Conflict drains energy and lowers productivity. The effectiveness of teams relies in large part on their ability to work in a cooperative manner. When that cooperation is

disrupted, the progress of the whole team suffers. Whether the clash is overtly obvious, or subtle, personality conflicts affect the morale of team, and sometimes entire office.



### 1.3.1 TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS

The unit of social intercourse is called a transaction. If two or more people encounter each other sooner or later one of them will speak, or give some other indication of acknowledging the presence of the others. This is called transactional stimulus. Another person will then say or do something which is in some way related to the stimulus, and that is called the transactional response.

In an attempt to explain Transactional Analysis to a more mainstream audience, Dr. Thomas Harris developed the following summary. Although this is a very good tool for beginners to learn, keep in mind that this is a wildly simplified approach, and can have the effect of “dumbing down” Transactional Analysis. The summary is as follows:

*Parent – taught concept*

*Child – felt concept*

*Adult – learned concept*

When two people communicate, one person initiates a transaction with the transactional stimulus. The person at whom the stimulus is directed will respond with the transactional response. Simple Transactional Analysis involves identifying which ego state directed the stimulus and which ego state in

the other person executed the response. According to Dr. Berne, the simplest transactions are between Adults ego states.



*For example, a surgeon will survey the patient, and based upon the data before him/her, his/her Adult decides that the scalpel is the next instrument required. The surgeon's Adult holds out his/her hand, providing the transactional stimulus to the nurse. The nurse's Adult looks at the hand, and based upon previous experiences, concludes that the scalpel is needed. The nurse then places the scalpel in the surgeon's hand. If the nurse fails to provide the scalpel this may result in conflict.*



- a) Briefly describe the transactional analysis.
- b) Describe conflict, which may arise in personality types, using transactional analysis.

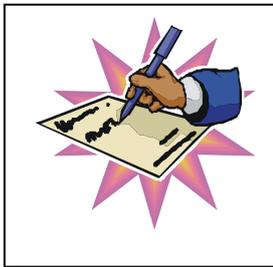
# SECTION 2: APPROPRIATE TECHNIQUES IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

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## Specific Outcome

On completion of this section you will be able to explain appropriate techniques in conflict management.



## Assessment Criteria

This specific outcome shall cover:

- ❖ The various business conflict modes are discussed with examples. (SO 2, AC 1)
- ❖ Organisational conflict modes are explained with examples. (SO 1, AC 3)
- ❖ Useful steps to be taken to manage conflict are explained with examples. (SO 2, AC 2)
- ❖ The route, which conflicts normally follow toward resolution, can be described with examples. (SO 2, AC 3)

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Have you ever had a disagreement with a co-worker? You probably have at one time or another. Workplace conflicts are very common; there are very few offices where all the employees get along. Because of this, conflict management is a necessary component of the workplace, and those in a leadership position must be skilled in conflict management techniques. When conflicts go unaddressed, they can have a negative impact on productivity and teamwork. Using conflict management strategies in the workplace will help maintain a healthy work environment.

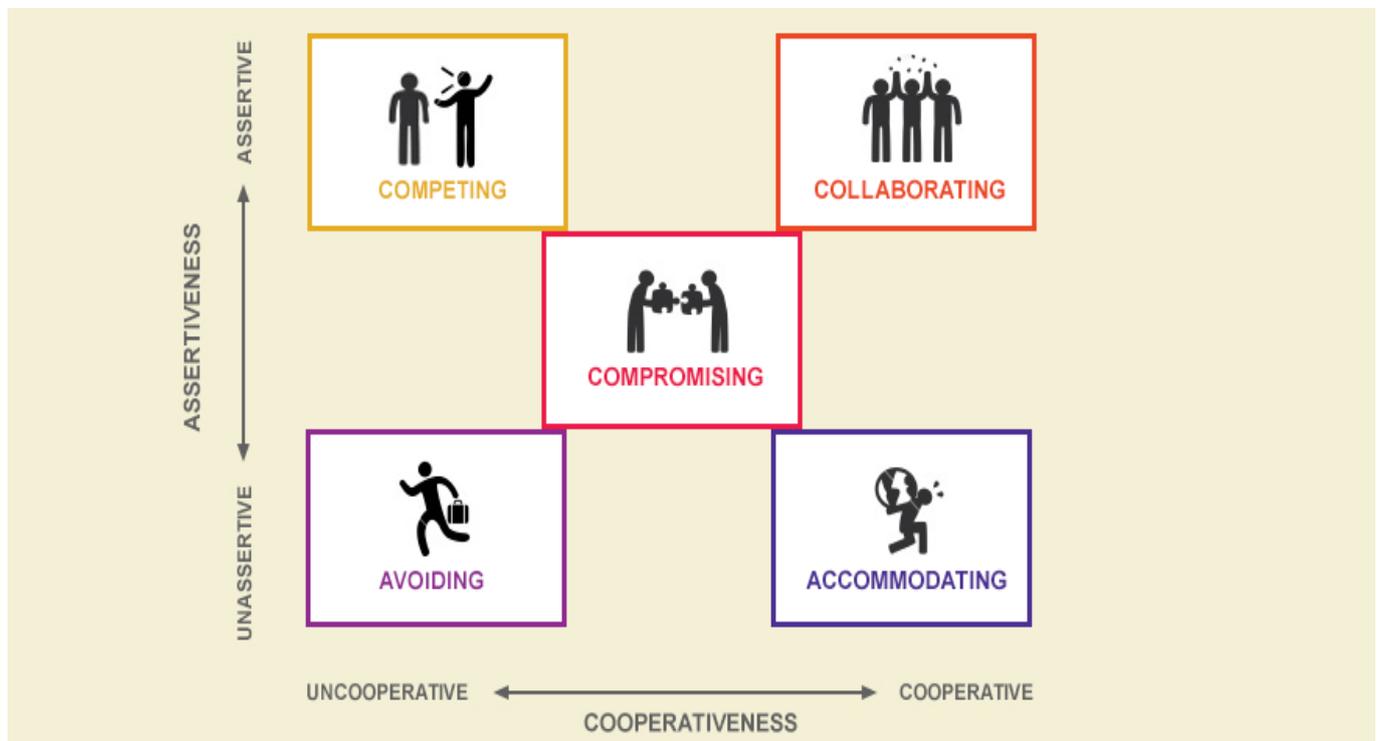
### 2.1 VARIOUS BUSINESS CONFLICT MODES (AC 1)

How do you deal with conflict? Psychologists Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann proposed five different conflict handling modes in 1974. Their work described a person's behaviour along two dimensions:

- assertiveness-a focus on your own concerns; and
- cooperation- the extent to which you attempt to satisfy the other party's concerns.

The resulting Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode interpretative instrument has remained a popular tool since that time.

Here are the five conflict management styles according to Thomas, K.W., and R.H. Kilmann:



## A. Competing

Competing is also known as forcing. An individual firmly pursues his or her own concerns despite the resistance of the other person. This may involve pushing one viewpoint at the expense of another or maintaining firm resistance to another person's actions.



*Examples of when competing may be appropriate*

- *In certain situations when all other, less forceful methods, don't work or are ineffective*
- *When you need to stand up for your own rights, resist aggression and pressure*
- *When a quick resolution is required and using force is justified (e.g. in a life-threatening situation, to stop an aggression)*
- *As a last resort to resolve a long-lasting conflict*

### **Possible advantages of competing:**

- May provide a quick resolution to a conflict
- Increases self-esteem and draws respect when firm resistance or actions were a response to an aggression or hostility

### **Some limitations of competing**

- May negatively affect your relationship with the opponent in the long run

- May cause the opponent to react in the same way, even if the opponent did not intend to be forceful originally
- Cannot take advantage of the strong sides of the other side's position
- Taking this approach may require a lot of energy and be exhausting to some individuals

## **B. Collaborating (Win-Win)**

Collaborating is also known as problem confronting or problem solving. Collaboration involves an attempt to work with the other person to find a win-win solution to the problem in hand - the one that most satisfies the concerns of both parties. The win-win approach sees conflict resolution as an opportunity to come to a mutually beneficial result. It includes identifying the underlying concerns of the opponents and finding an alternative which meets each party's concerns.



*Examples of when collaborating may be appropriate:*

- *When consensus and commitment of other parties is important*
- *In a collaborative environment*
- *When it is required to address the interests of multiple stakeholders*
- *When a high level of trust is present*
- *When a long-term relationship is important*
- *When you need to work through hard feelings, animosity, etc*
- *When you don't want to have full responsibility*

### **Possible advantages of collaborating:**

- Leads to solving the actual problem
- Leads to a win-win outcome
- Reinforces mutual trust and respect
- Builds a foundation for effective collaboration in the future
- Shared responsibility of the outcome
- You earn the reputation of a good negotiator
- For parties involved, the outcome of the conflict resolution is less stressful (however, the process of finding and establishing a win-win solution may be very involved – see the drawbacks below)

### **Some limitations of collaborating:**

- Requires a commitment from all parties to look for a mutually acceptable solution
- May require more effort and more time than some other methods. A win-win solution may not be evident

- For the same reason, collaborating may not be practical when timing is crucial and a quick solution or fast response is required
- Once one or more parties lose their trust in an opponent, the relationship falls back to other methods of conflict resolution. Therefore, all involved parties must continue collaborative efforts to maintain a collaborative relationship

### C. Compromising

Compromising looks for an expedient and mutually acceptable solution which partially satisfies both parties.



*Examples of when compromise may be appropriate:*

- *When the goals are moderately important and not worth the use of more assertive or more involving approaches, such as competing or collaborating*
- *To reach temporary settlement on complex issues*
- *To reach expedient solutions on important issues*
- *As a first step when the involved parties do not know each other well or haven't yet developed a high level of mutual trust*
- *When collaboration or competing do not work*

#### **Possible advantages of compromise:**

- Faster issue resolution. Compromising may be more practical when time is a factor
- Can provide a temporary solution while still looking for a win-win solution
- Lowers the levels of tension and stress resulting from the conflict

#### **Some Disadvantages of using compromise:**

- May result in a situation when both parties are not satisfied with the outcome (a lose-lose situation)
- Does not contribute to building trust in the long run
- May require close monitoring and control to ensure the agreements are met

### D. Avoiding Withdrawing

Avoiding is also known as withdrawing. This is when a person does not pursue her/his own concerns or those of the opponent. He/she does not address the conflict, sidesteps, postpones or simply withdraws.



*Examples of when withdrawing may be appropriate:*

- *When the issue is trivial and not worth the effort*
- *When more important issues are pressing, and you don't have time to deal with it*
- *In situations where postponing the response is beneficial to you, for example-*
  - *When it is not the right time or place to confront the issue*
  - *When you need time to think and collect information before you act (e.g. if you are unprepared or taken by surprise)*
- *When you see no chance of getting your concerns met or you would have to put forth unreasonable efforts*
- *When you would have to deal with hostility*
- *When you are unable to handle the conflict (e.g. if you are too emotionally involved or others can handle it better)*

**Possible advantages of withdrawing:**

- When the opponent is competing/attempts aggression, you may choose to withdraw and postpone your response until you are in a more favourable circumstance for you to push back
- Withdrawing is a low stress approach when the conflict is short
- Gives the ability/time to focus on more important or more urgent issues instead
- Gives you time to better prepare and collect information before you act

**Some limitations of withdrawing:**

- May lead to weakening or losing your position; not acting may be interpreted as an agreement. Using withdrawing strategies without negatively affecting your own position requires certain skill and experience
- When multiple parties are involved, withdrawing may negatively affect your relationship with a party that expects your action

## **E. Accommodating**

Accommodating is also known as smoothing. Smoothing is accommodating the concerns of other people first of all, rather than one's own concerns.



Examples of when accommodating may be appropriate:

- When it is important to provide a temporary relief from the conflict or buy time until you are in a better position to respond/push back
- When the issue is not as important to you as it is to the other person
- When you accept that you are wrong
- When you have no choice or when continued competition would be detrimental

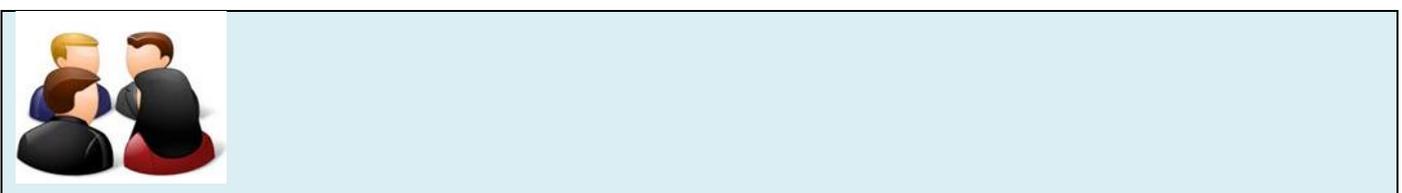
**Possible advantages of accommodating:**

- In some cases smoothing will help to protect more important interests while giving up on some less important ones
- Gives an opportunity to reassess the situation from a different angle

**Some limitations of accommodating:**

- There is a risk to be abused, i.e. the opponent may constantly try to take advantage of your tendency toward smoothing/accommodating. Therefore it is important to keep the right balance and this requires some skill.
- May negatively affect your confidence in your ability to respond to an aggressive opponent
- It makes it more difficult to transition to a win-win solution in the future
- Some of your supporters may not like your smoothing response and be turned off

| Conflict-Handling Type | What it Means              |
|------------------------|----------------------------|
| COMPETING              | <i>I win, you lose.</i>    |
| COLLABORATING          | <i>We both win.</i>        |
| COMPROMISING           | <i>Neither of us wins.</i> |
| AVOIDING               | <i>Nobody wins.</i>        |
| ACCOMMODATING          | <i>I lose, you win.</i>    |



## 2.2 USEFUL STEPS TO BE TAKEN TO MANAGE CONFLICT (AC 2)

Managing conflict is never easy, whether you are trying to resolve a conflict of your own or trying to help two people settle a dispute. The most important thing to know is that the longer you let the situation continue, the worse it will be when it's time to resolve it. So take a deep breath, maintain your cool, and get ready to find a solution that can make everyone (reasonably) happy.

### 2.2.1 MANAGING THE CONFLICTS OF OTHERS

- a) **Make a plan for meeting.** If two people are genuinely in conflict and you want to help them or they need your help then you should plan a time to meet that would make everybody happy. Of course, you may just walk into a conflict and have to solve it on the spur of the moment, but hopefully you have some time to plan in advance. If so, pick a time and place that works for both people, and make sure that they are both invested in solving the conflict. If there's real trouble, then the sooner you can get together, the better.
- b) **Let each person state his or her side of the story.** If you are in charge of managing a conflict, whether it's because you are a manager or because you are helping two people figure out their issues, you have to be an active listener. Let each person express his or her position and listen with compassion and care until each person has stated his or her feelings and desires. Don't let the people interrupt each other and make it clear that each person will take turns fully explaining him or herself.
- Make sure that both people are really listening to each other instead of just waiting until their turn to have their say. If necessary, have one person repeat some of the main points the other person made, so it's clear that they both have an understanding of how each person is feeling.
- c) **Make it clear that you are there to help resolve, not solve.** The people who are in conflict must figure out how to move past their problems on their own, not look to you for magical solutions that will make all of their problems go away. You should make this clear from the start so both parties know that they have to work hard and listen actively before they can move forward. You are there to mediate so the conflict doesn't get out of control and so that both parties can look at the situation with more objectivity and control, but that doesn't mean you will provide them with an answer.
- d) **Maintain your objectivity.** Even if you think that Nel is obviously in the right and Mpho is 100% wrong, it is not your position to say so. If you jump in on Nel's side, then Mpho will feel like you are both ganging up against her and the conflict will be even further from a resolution. Instead, keep your

own personal opinions and ideas out of it and treat each person's perspective with compassion and respect. Even if one person is more "right" than the other, they both still have to reach a solution that can reasonably please both of them.

- If you are mediating a conflict, then you should pay equal attention to both people. Let each person spend about the same amount of time speaking and make points that support both people instead of just focusing on one person or the other.
  - Maintain a neutral expression, and try not to look put off or skeptical if one person is stating something you don't agree with at all.
- e) Be a calming force.** One of your primary tasks is to help both people keep their cool. Manage their stress levels, their anger, and their emotions to the best of your ability. If someone is getting too heated, raising his or her voice, and getting visibly angry or upset, take a five-minute break or ask that person to take a few deep breaths and wait until he or she can speak calmly. You can only find a solution if both people stay calm and can see clearly.
- If the conversation is not going down a constructive path, and both people have resorted to name calling and cursing and just criticising each other back and forth without getting anywhere, then you should intervene and get the conversation back on track. You can say something like, "Let's focus on what's important here," or "We're just not getting anywhere with this kind of talk."
- f) Figure out the source of the tension.** Once both people have stated their cases, you can help them figure out what is really at stake. They may think that they are really angry at each other because of financial tension, but they may really be upset because of a lack of communication. Be as specific. Have each person discuss all of the things that are troubling him or her and see if you can really find the root of the problem. Be patient. It may take a bit of digging- and some pain- to get there.
- If you can put it in simple terms, something like, "Tom feels that Mpho is micromanaging his project" then you can begin to tackle the problem better than if you just knew that the two people were angry with each other.
- g) Work together to find a solution.** Once you have all agreed on the source of the tension and the problem that is at hand, you can begin to find a solution. Remember that both people do have to agree about the nature of the real problem to be able to find an effective solution. It may not be readily apparent, and you may need some perseverance and creativity to get there, but eventually, you should be able to find a way to make both people (reasonably) happy. Here are some potential solutions you may find and ways to state them gracefully:
- "It seems that Tom has been managing Ellen a little too closely. To avoid this in the future, Tom and Ellen can discuss the objectives of a project in great detail and can decide on times when

they can both check in about the status of the project; this will make Tom feel at ease about where the project is going, while giving Ellen a little bit of breathing room."

**h) Make a plan.** Once you have found a resolution for the problem, you can set out specific guidelines for making it happen. Remember that both people have to be invested in finding this solution. You can set a timeline for achieving these goals and have both people put it in writing so they feel that it will actually happen. Here are some ways it can happen:

- "Tom and Ellen should meet for an hour before every new project, taking at least two detailed pages of notes so that Ellen has enough direction to go off on her own. They should meet every three days for half an hour to discuss the progress of the project."

**i) If both parties agree to disagree, help them part amicably.** Maybe neither person, nor one of the people, is unwilling to budge, and after much discussion, you haven't moved past square one. If that's the case, then you should still make it so that one person understands where the other is coming from and that they can leave the situation without extra hostility or tension. Maybe Tom can't help but breathe down Ellen's neck; if that's the case, then they have to find a way to coexist or make a smart plan for parting ways.

- Consider the fact that maybe both people just aren't ready to resolve the conflict and need more time to cool off. If you feel like the argument is getting nowhere because both people are too heated and emotional, not because they refuse to budge from their positions, then consider asking both people reschedule your meeting for a time when both parties can think more clearly.

**j) End the conversation on a positive note.** Whether both parties have reached a healthy conclusion or have agreed to disagree, you should end the situation on an optimistic note so neither person feels defeated.

If both parties are feeling friendly, go out for a coffee or a beer; if both parties are still very angry, try to diffuse the situation with a bit of humour and see if they will at least shake hands and stay cordial. If emotions are too heated, then it's time for everyone to back off for a bit, but if the vibe is positive, make the people feel good about having the conversation.

- Remind both parties that, however unpleasant it may be to discuss a conflict, that they have been mature and done the right thing by deciding to resolve the situation instead of staying angry or avoiding the tension.

## 2.2.2 MANAGING YOUR OWN CONFLICTS

**a) Face the conflict head-on.** If you are dealing with a conflict of your own, then the worst thing you can do is run and hide, waiting for the conflict to get bigger and bigger until it's almost impossible to

resolve it. Sure, conflict is no fun, whether you are butting heads with a co-worker or your long-term boyfriend, but remind yourself that if you brush your problems under the rug, then they are guaranteed to get worse. So take a deep breath and accept that you have to deal with it.

- b) Don't tell everyone about it.** It's okay to seek advice from a close friend or another co-worker if you genuinely don't know what to do. But if you feel the urge to complain to every person in sight about the conflict just so you can gossip or get some anger off your chest, then you are only getting yourself worked up and possibly putting your relationship in jeopardy if the other person finds out about what you have been saying. If you do need advice, then talk to just one or two people whom you really trust so you can have some meaningful direction.



*Think about it; how would you feel if you heard your co-worker was telling everyone in the office about your problems without talking to you about it? That kind of behaviour is guaranteed to make you feel worse.*

- c) Use "I" statements.** "I" statements are crucial for solving a conflict as objectively as possible. "I" statements make your feelings and motives clear and can help the other person see your side of the story without feeling accused or persecuted; "You" statements make the other party feel like he or she is on the chopping block and will make him or her feel much more defensive. Here are some ways to make useful "I" statements:

"I feel like I've been picking up the majority of the work on the project," is more effective than "You have been making me do all of the work on this project."

- d) Be specific.** This doesn't mean you have to list the 90 things that the person has done to hurt you or to cause the conflict. In fact, this kind of behaviour will only make the person feel worse, like he is being picked apart. Instead, stick to two or three concrete scenarios that can illustrate what you mean to make the person see the situation from your perspective. For example, "I spent ten hours on the Roberts report while you only worked on the cover page."

- e) See it from the other person's perspective.** If you really want to solve the situation, then you have to understand where the other person is coming from. Be emotionally aware and listen to what the person is feeling and saying; often times, the person may try to act like it's really not a big deal, but the look on his face will show you that the person is deeply angry or hurt. Get a sense of the things that are really troubling the person, what you have done to contribute to these feelings, and the ways that you have both contributed to the situation. If you are only focused on getting your way at all costs, then you will never be able to find a compromise that pleases you both.

- f) **Avoid name calling or cursing.** If you feel the urge to say something nasty or to curse just to hurt the other person, take a deep breath and wait until you feel calmer. Ask for a five minute- or an hour-long -break if you really feel unstable and unable to think rationally. This is far better than saying something you regret, and is guaranteed to make the other feel more angry and less likely to be reasonable.
- g) **Focus on the future instead of dwelling on the past.** Sure, discussing some aspects of the past can help you pick up on certain patterns of behaviour and can make you see how both of you have wronged each other or acted inappropriately, but if you dwell on the past, both people will only feel worse. Instead, you should focus on what's ahead of you, and how you can work together to avoid the problems that have occurred in the past. To do that, you will have to change what you are both doing, because it's not working.
- h) **Figure out the real source of the tension.** Work together to figure out what is really troubling you both. You may think you may be arguing with your co-worker because you feel that he has given you too much of the workload, but the real reason may be that you feel that he or she has received too much praise for his work, while you have been overlooked. You can only find a resolution once you agree on this point.
- i) **Resolve, don't win.** You may be so focused on your "told you so!" or "ha!" moment that you are not seeing the big picture here. Sure, it will feel good to make the other person see how wrong he has been and to see your side of the story completely-for about five seconds. After that, what do you do? Let the other person walk away fuming or with his tail between his legs? Of course not. It's better to both admit your mistakes and work together to find a constructive solution that favours both of your perspectives. If you are determined to win, then the other person will be even more determined to get his or her way.
- j) **Ask a third party for help if it's necessary.** If you feel that you are getting nowhere and are only making things worse, then there's no shame in asking for help, whether you seek counselling, ask a close mutual friend for help, or even discuss the conflict with a manager. A third party can often have a better perspective on a situation where two people feel so emotionally invested that they can't think straight.
- k) **Agree to disagree if you have to.** If you have given it your all, then it's okay to agree to disagree. Unfortunately, sometimes two people are so set in their ways that there is no wiggle room, or both people have such a strong case that there is no middle ground that can please them both. Though this is not an ideal scenario, the best thing you can do is agree to have differing perspectives on the subject and find a way to move on, whether it's not to bring up this particular case again or to spend some time apart.

- Agreeing to disagree isn't the greatest outcome, but it's better than continuing to argue about the same point without getting anywhere.
- Instead, try to focus on the things that you and the person do share and have in common to keep your relationship positive.

**l) Forgive.** If you have both wronged each other, then you have to find a place that allows you to truly forgive the person, even if it's impossible to completely forget what happened. This is the mature way to go, and it will be the easiest path toward your mutual happiness in the future. If you truly cannot forgive the other person, then you have to find a way to manage your relationship if you stay together or are still forced to be in the same room. It takes strong character and compassion to forgive someone. If you are able to forgive someone who really hurt you, then be proud of yourself for being able to forgive and to move on from your conflict.



a) Identify and explain useful steps that can be taken to manage conflict with examples.

b) Explore conflict life cycle with examples.

## 2.2.3 SPECIFIC PERSONALITIES AND STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH THEM

### a. Complainers

- Gripe incessantly but never try to do anything about their complaints.
- May feel powerless to do anything or may refuse to bear the responsibility for a solution.

### Strategies

- Listen attentively even though it may be very difficult.
- Acknowledge what the complainer says by paraphrasing the complaints.
- Don't agree with the complaints.

- Be prepared to interrupt and take control of the situation. Complainers love to ramble.
- Use limiting responses that pin the complainer to specifics.
- Avoid the accusation-defense-reaccusation sequence where you defend an accusation and then are reaccused.
- State the facts without comment and without apology.
- Switch to problem solving.
- Be prepared to begin this strategy from the beginning several times.

#### **b. Indecisives**

- Can ruin a program because they put off decisions until it is too late to do anything about it.
- Delay making a decision until the decision is made for them.
- Won't let go of anything until it is perfect, which it never is.

#### **Strategies**

- Bring the issues out in the open and make it easy for them to be direct. Pursue all signs of indecision.
- Help them solve the problem(s).
- Place all the alternatives in rank of importance.
- Emphasize the importance of quality and service.
- If possible, keep control of what you are working on.
- Watch for signs that the pressure to make a decision may be overloading them.

#### **c. Super-agreeables**

- Appear very reasonable, sincere and supportive, at least in your presence.
- Often don't produce what they say they will produce.
- Sometimes act contrary to what they have led you to expect.

#### **Strategies**

- Make honesty non-threatening. They are afraid you don't want to hear the truth.
- Be personable if you can and only if you mean it.
- Don't allow them to make unrealistic commitments they can't fulfil.
- Be prepared to compromise so you are both in a win-win situation.

- Listen to their humour. They often hide the truth there.

#### **d. Negativitists**

- Object to everything.
- Believe whatever you propose won't work or is impossible.
- All too often completely deflate any optimism you might have for a project.

#### **Strategies**

- Avoid getting drawn into their attitude.
- State your own realistic optimism.
- Don't agree with them.
- Don't hurry to propose solutions.
- Use their negativism constructively. It never hurts to have a devil's advocate.
- Be prepared to take on the project with support from others if you can't change their attitudes.

#### **e. Know-it-all Experts**

- Believe, and want you to believe, that they know all there is to know about anything worth knowing.
- Are usually condescending, imposing or pompous.
- Will try to make you feel inferior.

#### **Strategies**

- Do your homework on the subject.
- Listen to and acknowledge what they say.
- Question firmly, but don't confront. They hate being wrong.
- Avoid being a counter-expert.
- Let them be the expert they think they are.

#### **f. Silent-unresponsives**

- Answer every question and every plea for help with a yes, a no, or a grunt and sometimes with an I-don't-know.

#### **Strategies**

- Ask open-ended questions.
- Use the friendly, silent stare.
- Pause for long periods, inviting them to fill the void.
- Comment on what is happening in the discussion.
- Recycle the conversation if necessary.
- Break the tension by helping them to say what they are thinking.
- Set time limits on the length of the discussion.

#### **g. Hostile-aggressives**

- Try to bully and overwhelm you by bombarding you.
- Make cutting remarks or throw temper tantrums when they don't get their own way.
- Are convinced theirs is the only way.

#### **Strategies**

- Stand up for yourself, without being threatening.
- Give them time to run down.
- Get their attention, but don't startle them.
- Have them sit down; this will make them less aggressive.
- Speak for your own point of view; don't attack them.
- Avoid a head-on fight.
- Be friendly.

### **2.3 DIFFERENT STAGES OF CONFLICT (AC 3)**

Conflicts are processes, a cluster of events taking time to evolve and reshape. They are always complicated because they are intertwining into the complex context of our lives. Like any process, conflicts can be mapped and tracked through a series of stages or phases that we can call its life cycle. There are distinct stages which conflicts have in common, through which they pass, sometimes over and over again. Conflict life cycle models can help us to identify and map out these stages and tell us where the conflict has been, where it presently is, and where it is heading. This allows the conflict practitioner and the conflicted parties to view and understand the conflict and address the conflict from a holistic perspective, thus creating stronger resolutions and solutions.

The typical conflict life cycle map contains seven distinct stages of a conflict's life cycle:

- Latent conflict
- Emergence
- Escalation
- deadlock/stalemate
- de-escalation
- resolution, and
- collaborative action.

**a) Latent conflict:** Latent conflict exists whenever individuals, groups, or organisations have differences with one another, but those differences may not be enough to cause one side act and escalate the situation. These may be things that annoy one party or another, but are categorized as annoyances, or things not worth getting upset.

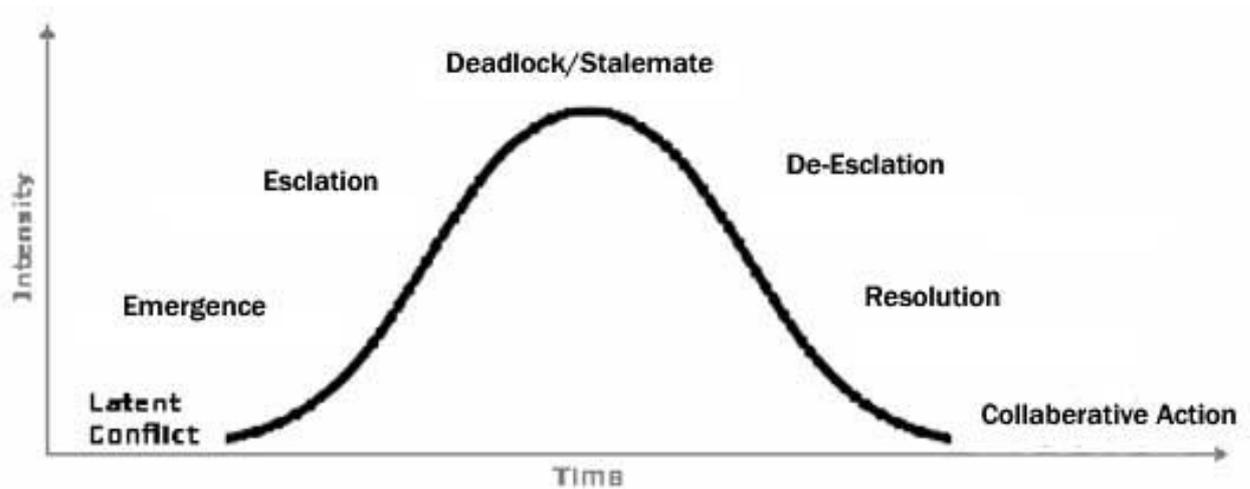
**b) Emergence:** This is the stage where we begin to notice conflict. Once the accumulation of differences or annoyances build up or an altercation erupts; the latent conflict that may have been dormant manifests in a public manner.

**c) Escalation:** Escalation is the increase in the intensity of the conflict and in the severity of tactics used. When conflict escalates it tends to spill over involving more people and other related issues. Parties begin using their power and resources to make stronger threats and harsher sanctions.

**d) Deadlock/Stalemate-** Once conflict escalates it reaches the stage of stalemate. In this stage parties perceive that they cannot win or get everything they want, yet do not want to give in or back down. Parties begin to run out of resources and tactics to use to their advantage.

**e) De-Escalation:** Eventually conflicts begin to wind down and transform. Parties begin to change their stances and positions. This may be because of outside forces, change in perspectives or simple time. Parties may begin to see that their goals are unrealistic and begin to change them for realistic solutions.

## CONFLICT STAGES MODEL



f) **Resolution:** In this stage parties begin to look for a way to resolve their problems. Grievances are often reduced, and both sides begin look for alternative ways to resolve their conflicts. In this stage resolutions are found.

g) **Collaborative Action:** In this stage the parties work together to implement the resolution. This is where the parties begin to work together to implement the resolution. In this stage, parties begin to strengthen their understanding, communication and relationship with each other.



Other writers say there are five stages of conflict:

- ✓ *Latent Stage: Participants not yet aware of conflict*
- ✓ *Perceived Stage: Participants aware a conflict exists*
- ✓ *Felt Stage: Stress and anxiety*
- ✓ *Manifest: Conflict is open and can be observed*
- ✓ *Aftermath: Outcome of conflict, resolution or dissolution*

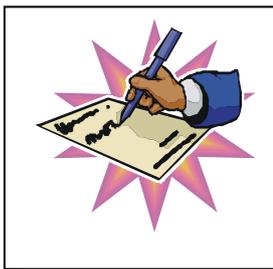
# SECTION 3: THE APPROPRIATE ACTION PLAN AND STRATEGIES TO MANAGE CONFLICT

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## Specific Outcome

On completion of this section you will be able to describe the appropriate action plan and strategies to manage conflict.



## Assessment Criteria

This specific outcome shall cover:

- ❖ Methods available to resolve conflict in terms of the Labour Relations Act are listed with examples. (SO 3, AC 1)
- ❖ The most appropriate strategy to resolve a particular conflict is chosen with a justification for the choice of strategy. (SO 3, AC 2)
- ❖ The need to adopt action plans and adapt them to a particular conflict is demonstrated with examples. (SO 3, AC 3)
- ❖ The role of policies and procedures in place in the organisation are explained in terms of their role in preventing and/or resolving conflicts.. (SO 3, AC 4)

### 3. INTRODUCTION

When employees are in conflict, the resulting tension can sabotage the performance of everyone in the office. Resolving conflict smooth things over and channels the negative feelings into productive solutions; the process allows your staff to develop problem-solving skills that make a team function effectively. To manage conflict in your company, develop an action plan that helps your staff resolve problems. This will be covered in this section.

#### 3.1 METHODS AVAILABLE TO RESOLVE CONFLICT IN TERMS OF THE LABOUR RELATIONS ACT (AC 1)

The Labour Relations Act (No 66 of 1995) governs how employers and employees should deal with each other and what rights trade unions and employer organisations have in the workplace. It is not about terms and conditions of employment. The Labour Relations Act (LRA) deals with rights of individuals regarding fairness, bargaining and dispute resolution.

Below are methods to resolve a labour conflict under the Labour Relations Act

##### **Collective bargaining**

Especially in workplace situations, it is necessary to have agreed mechanisms in place for groups of people who may be antagonistic (e.g. management and workers) to collectively discuss and resolve issues. This process is often called "collective bargaining", because representatives of each group come together with a mandate to work out a solution collectively. Experience has shown that this is far better than avoidance or withdrawal, and puts democratic processes in place to achieve "integrative problem solving", where people or groups who must find ways of co-operating in the same organisation, do so within their own agreed rules and procedures.

##### **Conciliation**

The dictionary defines conciliation as "the act of procuring good will or inducing a friendly feeling". South African labour relations legislation provides for the process of conciliation in the workplace, whereby groups who are in conflict and who have failed to reach agreement, can come together once again to attempt to settle their differences. This is usually attempted before the more serious step of a strike by workers or a lock-out by management is taken; and it has been found useful to involve a facilitator in the conciliation process. Similarly, any other organisation (e.g. sports club, youth group or community organisation) could try conciliation as a first step.

##### **The difference between negotiation, mediation, and arbitration**

Three methods of resolving situations that have reached the stage of open conflict are often used by many different organisations.

It is important to understand these methods, so that people can decide which methods will work best for them in their specific conflict situation:

- ✓ **Negotiation:** this is the process where mandated representatives of groups in a conflict situation meet together in order to resolve their differences and to reach agreement. It is a deliberate process, conducted by representatives of groups, designed to reconcile differences and to reach agreements by consensus. The outcome is often dependent on the power relationship between the groups. Negotiations often involve compromise - one group may win one of their demands and give in on another. In workplaces Unions and management representative usually use negotiations to solve conflicts. Political and community groups also often use this method.
  
- ✓ **Mediation:** when negotiations fail or get stuck, parties often call in an independent mediator. This person or group will try to facilitate settlement of the conflict. The mediator plays an active part in the process, advises both or all groups, acts as intermediary and suggests possible solutions. In contrast to arbitration (see below) mediators act only in an advisory capacity - they have no decision-making powers and cannot impose a settlement on the conflicting parties. Skilled mediators are able to gain trust and confidence from the conflicting groups or individuals.
  
- ✓ **Arbitration:** means the appointment of an independent person to act as an adjudicator (or judge) in a dispute, to decide on the terms of a settlement. Both parties in a conflict have to agree about who the arbitrator should be, and that the decision of the arbitrator will be binding on them all. Arbitration differs from mediation and negotiation in that it does not promote the continuation of collective bargaining: the arbitrator listens to and investigates the demands and counter-demands and takes over the role of decision-maker. People or organisations can agree on having either a single arbitrator or a panel of arbitrators whom they respect and whose decision they will accept as final, in order to resolve the conflict.



List methods available to resolve conflict in terms of the Labour Relations Act with examples.

### 3.2 THE MOST APPROPRIATE STRATEGY TO RESOLVE A PARTICULAR CONFLICT (AC 2)



#### Practical activity

*In groups, read the following scenario and recommend an appropriate strategy that should be used to resolve this conflict.*

Andile Khumalo is a production manager at Truband (Pty) limited a manufacturing company located in Pretoria. Most of the time, employees in his department are always fighting. The situation is getting out of hand. Last week one of the employees was almost injured as he was fighting over equipment with another employee. The main cause of conflict in this department is shortage of equipment and good tools. So employees fight every day for tools and equipment. Andile is always telling staff to work well together but as soon as he leaves the factory, employees start fighting again.

- I. What is the cause of conflict in this scenario?
- II. Recommend the most appropriate strategy that Andile should use in order to resolve this conflict. Justify.
- III. Why do you think Andile need to adopt action plans to resolve this conflict and other types of conflicts in his department? Use examples to support your answer.

Below are some strategies that can be used to resolve different types of conflicts:

- ✓ **Lack of clarity:** Employees wind up in turf wars when boundaries aren't clearly defined. A well-written job description, along with clearly defined reporting relationships can help prevent this situation.
- ✓ **Limited resources:** In today's environment where people are asked to do more with less, there is often conflict over time, money, supplies and even space. When you observe conflict in the workplace, determine if employees have adequate resources to do their work. Whenever possible, include employees in the resource allocation process. This will provide them with a better understanding of how allocation decisions are made in your organisation.

- ✓ **Conflicts of interest:** Individuals fighting for personal goals and losing sight of organisational goals can create quite a ripple in the organisation. Continually remind employees how their personal goals and efforts fit with the organisation's strategic business goals.
- ✓ **Power struggles:** The need to control is at the root of many workplace conflicts. Who should have that information? Who should be involved on that project? Who has the corner office? Recognise that power struggles exist. Teach employees how to manage relationships in the organisation so they can effectively navigate through political mine fields.

### 3.3 ACTION PLANS FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION (AC 3)

For most people, conflict is associated with a negative, destructive situation. And, yes, it certainly has the potential to wreak havoc within a work team. But it needn't be a bad thing. Constructive conflict management can produce creative solutions to problems, higher-quality relationships, and constructive change. The key is to resolve conflict in such a way that it improves the situation for all the relevant parties involved. Important steps in this process include:

- a) **Identify the problem.** Find out what the source of the conflict is and in what stage the conflict is in. The aim is to try to get involved as soon as possible.
- b) **Give both sides a voice.** Arrange for a meeting and make sure that there is a mutual airing of differences, complaints, and negative feelings. Both parties must feel that this is a neutral space. Don't meet with the parties separately – this could give the more persuasive party an unfair advantage.
- c) **Work through the differences.** This will require time and commitment. Here, the aim is to bring about greater understanding of the parties' different attitudes, perceptions, and positions. Encourage both sides to put forward their points of view and encourage them to try and understand each other's point of view.
- d) **Identify solutions.** Find a resolution for each issue. The best way to do this is to ensure that both parties play an active role in identifying a solution to the different issues. Listen carefully as the employees blow off steam, and then wait for them to propose their own solutions.
- e) **Reach a compromise.** When resolving conflict, the aim should be a win-win outcome, where both parties obtain their goals through creative integration of their concerns. Get both parties to acknowledge the issues, and agree to move forward. It might be a good idea to get them to sign an agreement.

- f) **Develop/ Set up a plan** to achieve that solution and put that plan into action. Consider who will do what, by when, and how to implement the resolution of the conflict. This is a vital step. Without it, conflict could easily flare up again.
- g) **Implement the plan and monitor the plan in action.** Don't just walk away thinking the plan will work. Check to make sure it does.
- h) **Keep communication channels open.** Ensure that relevant parties meet regularly to discuss any awkward situations or problems that could give rise to future conflict situations.
- i) **Do follow-up.** Remember to do follow-up in due course, for example three months after the initial meeting. Check whether the issues are resolved, and whether further mediation is required. Evaluate the conflict resolution process in general and the resolution of this conflict specifically. Did the process yield an effective, positive result? Were employees involved satisfied with the resolution? Will your efforts help to eliminate or at least minimise this type of conflict in the future?

#### **Summary: Conflict Resolution Action Plan**

- a) Set a time and a place for the discussion.
- b) Have a conversation using your effective communication and conflict resolution skills and collaborate to define the problem specifically.
- c) Create an honest list how you may have contributed to the conflict, taking personal responsibility for all of your choices and actions.
- d) Consider your past attempts to solve problems similar to this one. What worked about those solutions? What was unsuccessful?
- e) With past solutions in mind, brainstorm ways to solve this current problem.
- f) Discuss and evaluate each possible solution and agree on one to start working towards.
- g) Set up a plan to achieve that solution and put that plan into action.
- h) Set up and follow up time to check-in and evaluate the progress of the implementation to agreed upon solution.
- i) Reward yourself for the progress.

### **3.4 THE ROLE ORGANISATIONAL OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES IN PREVENTING/RESOLVING CONFLICTS (AC 4)**

Every organisation will experience periods of internal discord, tension and conflict. But they must have ways of resolving these if they are to carry out their functions and achieve their goals. Organisations should have documented policies and procedures for dealing with conflicts. Those organisations that have developed stable and enforceable policies and procedures for dealing with internal conflict and complaints are more resilient in times of great change and external crises, and more likely to achieve their goals.

Conflict resolution policies and procedures usually have clear definitions about:

- who should be involved in different complaints
- the roles, rights and responsibilities of those involved
- the procedures and options available to them
- the way communications and discussions will be carried out
- the kind of cultural input and factors that should be taken into account
- other kinds of external expertise available, including allowing individuals to resolve their grievance through any external legal means at any stage of the process
- the need for timeliness so that disputes are not left to simmer
- requirements for full documentation of the process and outcomes.

In addition, employees will be trained on the procedures to follow during conflict. Counter-productive conflict can result in;

- employee dissatisfaction
- reduced productivity
- poor service to clients
- absenteeism and increased employee turnover
- increased work-related stress, or
- litigation based on claims of harassment or a hostile work environment.

In addition to the productivity and cost benefits of timely conflict resolution, employee morale is higher when employees believe there is a fair and consistent process, which goes beyond their immediate supervisor, for dealing with conflict. Conflict resolution policies and procedures often implement a progression of interventions, escalating the involvement of management and formal procedures based on the seriousness of the conflict and the inability of the parties to resolve differences on their own. Unionised environments often use the formalised grievance procedure for conflict resolution, as dictated by the collective agreement. Harassment can be a source of conflict, and organisations have a legal responsibility to provide a harassment-free work place. Organisational conflict prevention policies and procedures will enable employees to work well together and respect other employees in fear of the consequences of causing problem in the workplace.



Do you have policies and procedures that govern the prevention or resolution of conflict in your workplaces? Explain their roles in preventing and/or resolving conflicts.

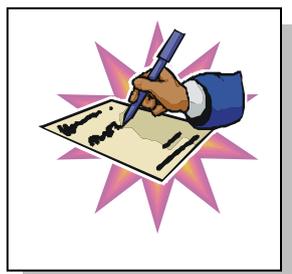
## SECTION 4: THE ATTRIBUTES OF AN EFFECTIVE CONFLICT MANAGER

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### Specific Outcome

On completion of this section you will be able to explain the attributes of an effective conflict manager



### Assessment Criteria

This specific outcome shall cover:

- ❖ Personal attributes of a good conflict manager can be listed with examples of how each characteristic contributes to conflict resolution. (SO 4, AC 1)
- ❖ A skills audit is done by the learner to identify the skills he/she needs to develop to be an effective conflict manager. (SO 4, AC 2)
- ❖ The negative attributes which should be avoided or controlled by an effective conflict manager are listed with an explanation of the negative effect each has on the resolution of conflict. (SO 4, AC 3)

## 4. INTRODUCTION

A manager is a person who is appointed for handling and managing things at a workplace. Conflict management incorporates policies to minimise the negative aspects and to improve the positivity of a conflict. So mainly, a conflict manager is involved in this particular task. There are different types of people in an organisation and everyone holds its separate and distinct point of view, which initiates conflicts between the team. In turn this creates disputes and the working environment gets disturbed. One of the major responsibilities of a conflict manager is to enhance learning processes and group overall productivity and effectiveness in an organisation.

### 4.1 PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES OF A GOOD CONFLICT MANAGER (AC 1)

There are several other attributes/skills that a conflict manager should possess:

- a) **Emotional intelligence:** The concept of emotional intelligence has been around since the 1990s and refers to the ability to understand one's own emotions and the emotions of others. As those who are caught up in disputes are often emotional, it's important that the conflict manager is able to remain calm, size up each employee's emotional response and talk to them in an empathetic way. If the conflict manager doesn't demonstrate emotional intelligence, they will get drawn into the rage, anger or fear displayed by the parties involved. This will only serve to worsen, rather than improve, the situation.
- b) **The ability to see common causes and links:** A vital part of the process is identifying the aspects that can bring the parties together as well as those that are causing conflict. Good mediation should find potential for common ground and help the parties to understand the points of views of others. Those issues that will help bring employees together can only be discovered if the conflict manager listens carefully, understands the underlying problems and compares the goals of each person.
- c) **Communications skills:** Conflict resolution is all about communication so the conflict manager has to demonstrate the full range of abilities associated with it. This means that they have to be able to extract the crucial details from employees who are perhaps not expressing themselves very well and repeat them back in a manner that everyone involved will understand. Alongside listening, communicating in a focused way is essential to get results. If the conflict manager can't get to the heart of the matter quickly, the employees involved will lose faith in the process and withdraw their co-operation.
- d) **Experience:** This works in two ways. First of all, an effective conflict manager should have general work experience that has given them insight into working relationships, leadership, workplace

psychology and management theory.

Theoretical knowledge is important but, unless a conflict manager can relate it to real life situations, it won't resolve workplace conflict. Secondly, like anything else, practice makes perfect. The more conflict scenarios that a conflict manager has managed, the better the expertise they will bring to the problem. The best conflict managers have experience of a wide range of conflict across a good number of industries.

- e) **Finding sensible solutions:** A good conflict manager helps employees in conflict situations find solutions that are mutually agreeable and pragmatic. In other words, the conflict manager has to believe that the solutions are realistic and that they'll actually work. The conflict manager should also clearly identify who will be responsible for what in pursuing these solutions. This may involve tasks or initiatives for managers or leaders out with the conflict situation as much as those assigned to the employees who are participating in the mediation process.
- f) **Negotiation:** The conflict manager should be able to negotiate freely with the conflicting parties in order to reach a resolution.
- g) **People analysis:** The conflict manager should be an expert with people analysis, he should analyse their real motives to be able to suggest a resolution that they are willing to accept.
- h) **Neutral:** The conflict manager should never take a side, he should be neutral, or else he won't be trusted by either side. It is very important to maintain neutrality at all times, not only during conflicts.
- i) **Respected and Respectful:** The conflict manager must be a respected person (someone who talks politely and calmly) and he must respect other people.
- j) **Serious:** A conflict manager should reflect an image of professionalism (which will again, make people trust him) at all times, otherwise, he won't be taken seriously and nobody will even listen to his suggestions.

Here are top qualities of a conflict manager

- a) One of the healthiest qualities which must be present in conflict manager is ethics; he/she must be a follower of ethics.
- b) The manager should be a wise leader and he/she should act ethically in resolving every conflict as well as problems.
- c) The conflict manager is required to be calm and rational; he/she should focus on issues not on people and personal grudges.
- d) He/she must be respectful to all parties and even to himself/herself. Manager needs to be

reasonable and he/she must always try to make people understand their mistakes and work by using word “I” instead of “you”.

- e) Another quality of the manager is to cut costs to the company. He/she must control costs and closely monitor expenditures while managing a conflict.
- f) Conflict manager must be understanding and adaptable.
- g) He/she must be humble so that urgent tasks can be managed properly in limited time and with limited resources.
- h) He or she must have self-motivation, optimism and calmness. Well self-motivation is a must thing because a self-motivated person can effectively motivate his/her team which can improve productivity.
- i) Integrity should be there in a manager so that people can trust him/her.
- j) Conflict manager needs to be dependable, reliable, responsive, confident and flexible.
- k) He/she must have proper knowledge of the industry, organisation, business hierarchy, legal implications, basic money management, and he/she must be aware of the delegation of tasks.
- l) He must have the communication qualities that comprise public speaking, active listening, specific instructions delivery, written formal communication and presentation organisation.
- m) Some of the relationship qualities like team player, mediator, customer service, collaboration, and courage to value others should be the attributes of a good conflict manager.



**List personal attributes of a good conflict manager with examples of how each characteristic contributes to conflict resolution.**

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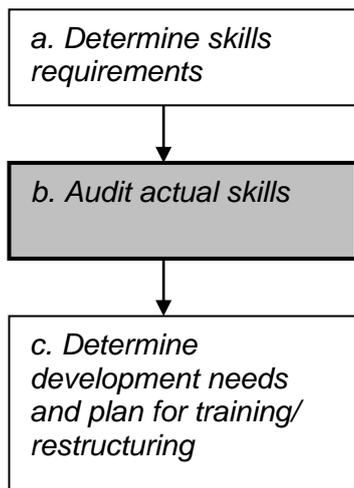
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the skills audit process is a skills gap analysis. This information will enable you to improve by undergoing appropriate training and development to cater for the identified skill gaps.

The process to be followed essentially consists of the following:



There are three key stages to a skills audit.

- ✓ The first is to determine what skills each employee requires.
- ✓ The second stage is to determine which of the required skills each employee has.
- ✓ The third is to analyse the results and determine skills development needs.

The outcome of the skills audit process is usually a training needs analysis. This will enable you to identify and implement suitable learning interventions to address your skills needs.



You can use the template below to conduct your skills audit

| Competencies/skills needed  | My Skills | My development needs |
|---|-----------|----------------------|
| <b>1. Management Skills: People</b><br>(Including - leadership skills, staff supervision, teamwork, team building, time management, crisis management, managing conflict/disagreements, stress management.)   |           |                      |
| <b>Management Skills: Work</b><br>(Including - planning and managing organisational learning, project management, planning and managing change, problem-solving, developing policies, implementing policies, monitoring and evaluation of projects and employees, identifying the differences that you want the |           |                      |

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| work of your organisation to make.)   |  |  |
| <b>Communication skills</b><br>(including – conflict resolution/prevention, developing publicity, dealing with the media, assertiveness, negotiation and influencing, networking, letter-writing, report-writing)   |  |  |
| <b>Organisational knowledge and practice</b><br>(Including - knowledge of organisational mission/aims/objectives, developing policies, knowledge of organisational policies and how they work, knowledge of local and national support agencies related to your work)   |  |  |
| <b>Human Resources</b><br>(Including-recruitment and selection, interview skills, disciplinary and grievance procedures, anti-discrimination legislation, law relevant to the organisation, first-aid, sickness and absence policy, health and safety at work, employment contracts, working with volunteers) |  |  |
| <b>Any other skills you feel you need for your personal development or to carry out your role more effectively?</b>   |  |  |



### **4.3 THE NEGATIVE ATTRIBUTES WHICH SHOULD BE AVOIDED OR CONTROLLED BY AN EFFECTIVE CONFLICT MANAGER (AC 3)**

Below are examples of negative attributes which should be avoided or controlled by an effective conflict manager:

#### **Dealing with issues**

- avoiding confrontation
- leaving conflicts between team members to sort themselves out
- not addressing bullying
- allowing a situation to develop before intervening
- stepping in to intervene in conflicts without understanding the issues
- allowing a disruptive team member to return to the team

Not dealing with issues head-on will allow them to turn ugly. Employees will be demotivated and team members will be less effective. This may result in increased levels of absenteeism and employees can become less productive.

#### **Use of official processes**

- making a complaint official before seeking to resolve locally
- making a complaint official against the complainant's wishes
- not following correct procedure in dealing with a conflict
- using "red tape" associated with procedure to discourage employees from making official complaints

Conflicts will go unresolved in the workplace thereby increasing absenteeism, turnover rate, etc. In addition, employees' morale will be affected and they will become less productive. Employees will also not respect or follow set procedures when dealing with conflict. Some will just compromise until they cannot take it anymore.

#### **Participative approach**

- taking sides
- not giving equal time to each side of the conflict

- speaking to employees in a parent/child manner
- not listening to employee complaints

Employees will be discouraged to report conflicts and they won't feel as part of the organisation. Some will even leave the organisation in search of better opportunities.

### **Acting as a role model**

- losing temper within discussions
- deliberately creating conflict in the team
- engaging in conflict with other managers
- engaging in conflict with employees

### **Integrity**

- making public where complaints have come from
- bullying employees
- threatening employees unfairly with disciplinary action

Other negative attributes which should be avoided or controlled by an effective conflict manager include;

- **Non-action:** doing nothing in hopes conflict will disappear. The negative effect of this is employees will be harassed and fail to report because the manager “does not do anything about it”. Conflicts will therefore continue in the workplace.
- **Secrecy:** trying to keep a conflict out of view of most people - usually creates suspicion
- **Administrative or biting delaying:** action on a conflict by buying time, usually by telling the individual involves that the problems being worked on or that the boss is still thinking about the issue. This will demotivate employees as they will not feel important in the organisation. Employees may become less productive or even leave the organisation.
- **Due process non-action:** procedure set up to address conflicts that are so costly, time-consuming, or personally risky that no one will use it. Conflicts will go unresolved in the workplace thereby increasing absenteeism, turnover rate, etc. In addition, employees' morale will be affected and they will become less productive.
- **Character assassination:** attempt to label or discredit an opponent. Employees won't report conflict situations in fear of character assassination. Conflicts will go unresolved in the workplace and the effects of such will be evident in the organisation.



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Terry, P.M. "Conflict Management." *Journal of Leadership Studies* 3, no. 2 (1996): 3–21.

Thomas, K.W., and R.H. Kilmann. *Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument*. Sterling Forest, NY: Xicom, Inc., 1974.



