"An amazingly comprehensive collection of designs, options, examples, and techniques on how to move from conflict avoidance to constructive resolution."
—**Jim Kouzes**, coauthor, *The Leadership Challenge*

CRAIG E. RUNDE
and TIM A. FLANAGAN
authors of *Becoming a Conflict Competent Leader*

DEVELOPING YOUR CONFLICT COMPETENCE

A Hands-On Guide for LEADERS, MANAGERS, FACILITATORS, and TEAMS

MORE CONTENT INCLUDED ON THE INTERNET

THE CENTER FOR CREATIVE LEADERSHIP
Ranked in the Top 5 Worldwide for Executive Education by *BusinessWeek*

Developing Your Conflict Competence

On the Web: Take the Conflict Dynamics Profile® With a 1/2 Hour Review Session at a Substantial Discount

The Conflict Dynamics Profile® assessment instrument helps you better understand how you currently respond to workplace conflict. It enables you to leverage areas of strength and modify behaviors that don't work well. The instrument provides specific measures on fifteen different constructive and destructive behaviors. It also looks at conflict "hot buttons"—situations and behaviors in others that can irritate you and trigger conflict.

In addition to an eight-page report and forty-page development guide, you will also receive a half-hour telephone session with an experienced consultant who will review your results with you.

Link: www.conflictdynamics.org/special

Code word for discount: CCD3

Price: $150.00, a greater than 25% discount

Developing Your Conflict Competence

A HANDS-ON GUIDE FOR LEADERS, MANAGERS, FACILITATORS, AND TEAMS

Craig E. Runde
Tim A. Flanagan

JOSSEY-BASS
A Wiley Imprint
www.josseybass.com

Center for Creative Leadership
NORTH AMERICA EUROPE ASIA
www.ccl.org

Published by Jossey-Bass
A Wiley Imprint
989 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94103-1741—www.josseybass.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Runde, Craig E.
Developing your conflict competence : a hands-on guide for leaders, managers, facilitators, and teams /Craig E. Runde, Tim A. Flanagan.
p. cm.
"A joint publication of the Jossey-Bass business & management series and the Center for Creative Leadership."
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-470-50546-5 (cloth)
1. Conflict management. 2. Interpersonal conflict. I. Flanagan, Tim A. II. Center for Creative Leadership. III. Title.
HD42.R864 2010
658.3'145—dc22

2009044800

Printed in the United States of America
THIRD EDITION
HB Printing 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

A Joint Publication of
The Jossey-Bass
Business & Management Series
and
The Center for Creative Leadership

For all those challenged by conflict (pretty much everyone in the world).
May you find new ways to make the best out of differences!

CONTENTS

PREFACE

WHAT'S A HANDS-ON GUIDE AND WHY SHOULD I BE INTERESTED?

Our first two books, *Becoming a Conflict Competent Leader* and *Building Conflict Competent Teams,* generated a good deal of interest (Runde and Flanagan, 2007, 2008). We were pleased with the reviews and the number of invitations we received to speak and present. We were also intrigued by the volume of inquiries from readers regarding how they could put the principles of conflict competence into action.

We had designed *Building Conflict Competent Teams* to be user friendly. Our intent was that teams could use portions of it as a handbook as they developed norms for interaction and encountered the challenges of conflict. We discovered that team leaders, coaches, consultants, and trainers loved this notion. We also found that they wanted even more. Thus, the concept for this book, *Developing Your Conflict Competence,* is unquestioningly one of practicality and usability for individuals, teams, trainers, facilitators, and coaches.

We didn't enter into this third book in the series lightly. For us, tackling a hands-on guide means covering the concepts we presented in the first two books without pure (boring) replication. At the same time, our intent isn't to break much new ground. Rather, we are committed to providing examples, suggestions, and tools for embracing the opportunities and meeting the challenges of conflict. Our goal

is to provide a resource that makes it easier to address conflict when it occurs. After all, conflict is not only inevitable, it also contains elements of diversity, innovation, and creativity that can result in more satisfying interactions and better solutions.

What this guide is *not* is an exhaustive review of every step you could take for every aspect of conflict possible. We believe it is critical to help you make the most of your time. Therefore, we decided to err on the side of "less is more." Our focus, as always, is on actions, behaviors, and steps.

We are indebted to our many friends and colleagues who have contributed to this book. They are cited specifically in the text for their stories and suggestions. Without them, this guide could not exist. We also want to thank our editors and marketers at Jossey-Bass, without whom this book would never have been published. Kathe Sweeney, Brian Grimm, Mary Garrett, and Dani Scoville are a wonderful team who make our job much easier and more pleasant. We'd also like to thank Kathy Runde and "Mac" Flanagan for their help in proofing the manuscript.

In short, our hope is that you will find *Developing Your Conflict Competence* both engaging and useful. The stories and examples come from our own experiences and from practitioners in the field. The tips, suggestions, and tools have been developed over time and used in a variety of settings. We welcome your feedback and wish you the very best.

St. Petersburg, Florida
December 2009

Craig E. Runde
Tim A. Flanagan

chapter
ONE

Introduction

When we talk with leaders, team members, and individual contributors, we find universal agreement that conflict is an inevitable part of organizational life. Survey after survey supports the notion that conflict is all around us. In fact, a recent study by the Center for Creative Leadership found that 85 percent of leaders experience conflict on a regular or continual basis (Center for Creative Leadership, 2009). So the question isn't one of whether or not you'll experience conflict or how to reduce or avoid it. Instead, the question is what will you get out of conflict when it does occur. Depending on how you respond, that something can be good or bad, constructive or destructive, invigorating or debilitating.

During nearly all of our presentations, we ask participants what words come to mind when they think of conflict. In just a few moments, we collect dozens of words. Next, we ask the audience how they would characterize most of the words they shared. The response is always the same: most of the words are negative. A few of the words, though, such as *opportunity* or *interesting,* are positive. This tells us a couple of things. First, the vast majority of people experience conflict as negative. Second, there is also a natural, albeit infrequent, response to conflict that is favorable. Next, we ask the audience how they learned to deal with conflict. Many say they followed the lead of models (most of them poor models). Others say that they just tried to avoid or minimize conflict when it happened.

Finally, when we ask how their "conflict education" has worked out, we usually hear a smattering of nervous laughter.

We can virtually guarantee that using traditional approaches to dealing with conflict (avoidance, minimizing, "eye for an eye," and so on) will result in the same poor outcomes that generate the negative words most associate with conflict. It simply doesn't have to be this way. Rather, it is possible to prepare for and respond to conflict in ways that reduce the negative or harmful aspects and promote positive, mutually satisfying outcomes. This field guide provides simple, focused tools and suggestions for doing just that.

DEFINING CONFLICT COMPETENCE

Conflict competence is the ability to develop and use cognitive, emotional, and behavioral skills that enhance productive outcomes of conflict while reducing the likelihood of escalation or harm. The results of conflict competence include improved quality of relationships, creative solutions, and lasting agreements for addressing challenges and opportunities in the future. As with all competencies, people can learn ways to improve, change, and develop.

We believe that those individuals who possess a keen sense of self-awareness are well positioned to develop conflict competence. This requires honesty and objectivity. It requires seeking feedback from others. We recommend using assessment instruments for a thorough analysis.

It is also helpful to understand how conflict begins and unfolds. Cognitive understanding of the "mechanics" of conflict helps to demystify the impact of conflict. In addition, preparation for conflict is critical. In nearly all cases, we find that those who are best prepared for conflict have the best outcomes, the fewest issues, and the most satisfying relationships with their conflict partners.

Most important, we believe that developing skills, learning mental models, and applying basic principles are the keys to developing conflict competence. Our model is simple and involves three key steps: cooling down, slowing down, and engaging constructively. We address the components of the model fully in the pages to follow. In short, though, the model suggests that those who deal well with emotions, are mindful of the ramifications of conflict, and use effective skills during conflict have the best chance of productive outcomes.

Ten Principles of Conflict Competence for Individuals, Teams, and Organizations

Conflict competence applies to individuals, teams, and organizations. It is relevant at work, home, and in community settings. The following principles capture the key elements of conflict competence and can be used to frame effective training efforts.

1. *Conflict is inevitable and can lead to positive or negative results depending on how it is handled.*

When we talk with people, they readily admit that conflict is inevitable. Their life experience has confirmed that when people interact with one another their different perspectives and needs lead to conflicts. They are keenly aware of the negative aspects of conflict but less so about its potential benefits.

2. *While people generally see conflict as negative and prefer to avoid it, better results can emerge from engaging it constructively.*

Research in organizational conflict has identified various types of conflict that lead to different outcomes. Two important types include *task* conflict, which focuses on resolving the issues that stem from differences, and *relationship* conflict, which emerges when people are more interested in placing blame than they are solving problems. Task conflict can lead to creative solutions and improved decisions, whereas relationship conflict nearly always leads to interpersonal tension and poorer performance. People have more experience with relationship conflict and as a consequence see conflict as a negative to be avoided. This often leads them to respond ineffectively and guarantees that they experience the dysfunctions that come with that type of conflict. When they are able to engage conflict effectively, though, they are more likely to attain the benefits that can come from task conflict.

3. *In order to overcome reluctance to address conflict, people need to believe it is important to do so—thus recognizing the tremendous value of managing conflict effectively.*

Motivation is as important as knowledge in developing conflict competence. Changing established beliefs and patterns of behavior is difficult, and unless people see value in doing so, it won't happen. Helping them understand the benefits that emerge from managing conflict effectively is critical in providing the rationale and impetus to undertake this work.

4. *Individual conflict competence involves developing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral skills that enable one to cool down, slow down, and engage conflict constructively.*

When faced with conflict, people respond in a variety of ways. They think about what is happening. They experience emotional reactions that are influenced by the ways they view and interpret the conflict. They also take action to address the concerns that the conflict raises. In order for people to be able to deal effectively with conflict, they need to be able to improve their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral skills so they can cool down, slow down, and engage the matter constructively.

5. *Cognitive skills include developing self-awareness about one's current attitudes and responses to conflict and an understanding of conflict's basic dynamics.*

As with most leadership skills, self-awareness plays an important role in dealing with conflict more effectively. This includes an understanding of how people currently view conflict, because their attitudes can affect their responses to it. Self-awareness also involves understanding what triggers a person in the first place as well as how he responds when conflict emerges. This awareness allows him to leverage effective responses and at the same time work on improving areas where he is using ineffective behaviors. This development work plays out better when people recognize some of the fundamental dynamics of the conflict process.

6. *Emotional skills include understanding one's emotional responses to conflict, regulating those responses to attain and maintain emotional balance, understanding and responding to the emotions of one's conflict partners, and when necessary slowing down to allow extra time to cool down.*

In order to use constructive behavioral responses to conflict, a person first needs to be able to manage his emotional responses. This allows him to become curious, and curiosity is a key factor in engaging one's conflict partner constructively. Conflict is all about emotion. Being able to manage one's emotions provides a foundation from which to choose and use constructive behavioral responses.

7. *Behavioral skills include engaging constructively by understanding others' perspectives, emotions, and needs; sharing one's own thoughts, feelings, and interests; collaborating to develop creative solutions to issues; and reaching out to get communications restarted when they have stalled.*

Considerable research and publishing have been done in the field of conflict, and there is considerable agreement about the kinds of behaviors that work well to resolve conflicts. These include *listening to understand* how other people see an issue, *sharing* one's own perspectives, *working together* to develop effective solutions to problems, and *keeping communications going.* When these behaviors are used, conflict can move in more productive directions. Of course, it can be a challenge to use these behaviors. If it were simple, people would already handle conflicts better.

8. *Engaging constructively also involves reducing or eliminating the use of destructive behaviors characterized by fight-or-flight responses to conflict.*

One of the reasons that responding constructively can be a challenge is that people are more likely to default to destructive fight-or-flight behaviors, either because these are the kinds of responses they have learned to use or because they are upset and turn to reactive behaviors in order to protect themselves. Reducing the use of these kinds of responses depends in large part on developing and practicing new, more constructive approaches and on regulating emotional reactions to conflict.

9. *In team settings, conflict competence includes creating the right climate to support the use of the "cool down, slow down, and engage constructively" model among teammates so they can have open and honest discussions of issues. Creating the right climate includes developing trust and safety, promoting collaboration, and enhancing team emotional intelligence.*

In order to manage conflict effectively, team members need to be able to discuss issues openly and honestly. When they can robustly debate issues without turning a task-focused conflict into one involving relationship conflict, they can develop better, more creative solutions. This is not easy to do and requires developing norms that produce the right climate for managing conflict constructively. This includes changing attitudes about conflict so that it is not just something to avoid. It also means creating a safe environment in which team members trust that what they say won't be used against them. Working together with team spirit produces collaborative effort that can enable people to give others the benefit of the doubt when conflict emerges. Managing emotions is important in team settings as well as in individual contexts, because emotions are contagious and if not addressed can spread tension throughout the team. Team members also need to use constructive behaviors when addressing conflicts in order to keep a solution-oriented focus to their discussions.

10. *In organizational contexts, conflict competence involves creating a culture that supports the "cool down, slow down, and engage constructively" model. This includes aligning mission, policies, training programs, performance standards, and reward structures to reinforce the conflict competence model. It also includes creating integrated conflict management systems to support these cultural changes.*

In order to be conflict competent, an organization needs its leaders, managers, supervisors, and employees to be individually conflict competent. At the same time, it needs to align its conflict management processes with its mission, values, policies, performance standards, and reward structures in order to reinforce the kind of conflict behaviors it wants its personnel to use with each other and with its vendors and customers. This involves creating systems to reinforce its conflict model and to provide multiple avenues for employees to address conflicts, preferably at the lowest possible level at the earliest possible time.

Individual Conflict Competence Model

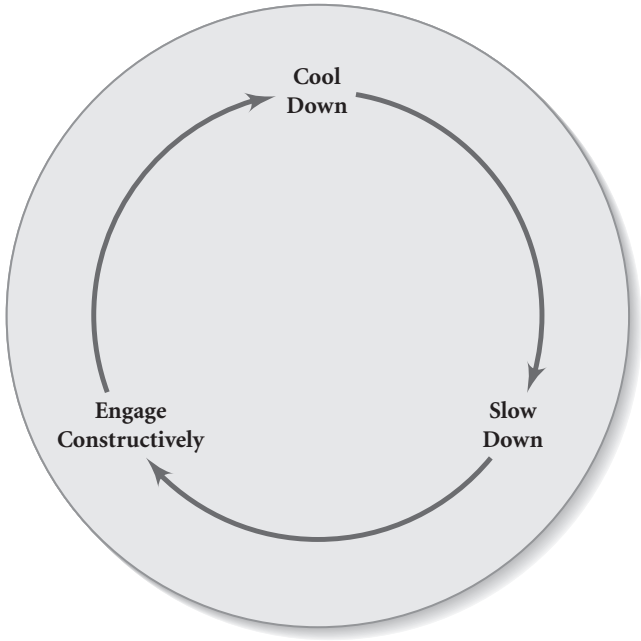
Our model of individual conflict competence looks at cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of how people respond to conflict. Key elements of the model are shown in Figure 1.1.

Cool down relates to strategies to help regulate emotions so that a person can maintain or regain emotional balance before proceeding further. If you are upset, your cognitive faculties are impaired and it is easy to slip into use of destructive behaviors. So a key first step is to make sure that your emotions are managed effectively. Since emotions can come and go rather quickly, it may be necessary to cool down several times during a conflict.

Slow down involves developing a strategy for what to do when cooling down is not working. Strong emotions can be challenging, and despite our best intents, there will be times when our efforts to calm down will not be entirely effective. In these cases, it is important to have ways to slow things down. Taking a time-out to enable your emotions to calm down is much better than going too far and saying something you will later regret. These foot-in-your-mouth comments usually escalate the conflict and prove very hard to undo.

Once you have used cool down and slow down to allow you time to gain a more balanced state, you can then move on to engage the other person using constructive behaviors.

Figure 1.1
Individual Conflict Competence Model



Engage Constructively The key behaviors associated with the *engage constructively* part of the Individual Conflict Competence Model are reaching out, perspective taking and listening for understanding, sharing thoughts and feelings, and collaborating to create solutions. Figure 1.2 provides a graphic view of these behaviors.

Reaching out is a behavior that involves working with the other person either at the very start of conflict to get communications moving or later on to get things back on track.

Perspective taking and listening for understanding involve listening for how the other person sees the situation, using empathy to understand how the other person is feeling, and asking about what he or she wants. Through this process you can develop new insights about the conflict and help lower tensions.

Sharing your thoughts and feelings involves telling the other person how you see the situation, how you feel about it, and what you want for yourself and the other person.

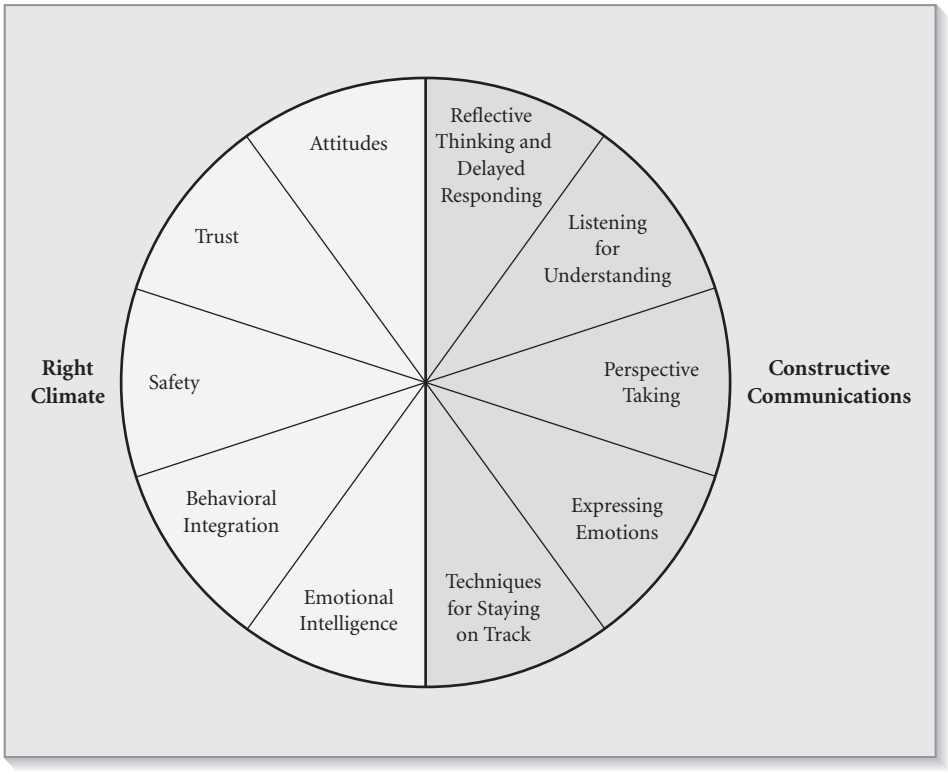
Figure 1.2
Engage Constructively Model

Collaborating to create solutions involves trying to find answers to the issues raised by the conflict that will work for both parties. It includes reflecting on the merits of alternative solutions, brainstorming with the other person to develop new approaches, and remaining flexible so you can make the best out of whatever solution is devised.

Team Conflict Competence Model

Team conflict competence includes creating the right climate to enable open, honest discussion as well as using constructive communications techniques to discuss issues. Team members know that conflict is an integral part of team life. Yet, most teams don't take the time to figure out how they want to deal with it when it emerges. The team model in Figure 1.3 shows some of the important elements that teams must address to manage conflict effectively.

Figure 1.3
Team Conflict Competence Model



The *right climate* includes five elements that teams can use to help support open discussion. The first involves changing attitudes toward conflict so it isn't looked upon only as negative. The second and third deal with creating and preserving a sense of *trust* and *safety* among members of the team. The fourth component involves creating a collaborative spirit in the team. The final element concerns improving the team's emotional intelligence.

Once the right climate is set, then team members can use *constructive communications* techniques to keep discussions focused on solutions and away from finger pointing. These constructive techniques include reflective thinking and delayed responding, listening for understanding and perspective taking, and expressing emotions as well as thoughts.

Figure 1.4
Organizational Conflict Competence

Source: Adapted from a model developed by Jennifer Lynch, QC (Lynch, 2005).

A special set of techniques help teams *stay on track* when communications become challenged and begin to turn destructive.

Organizational Conflict Competence Model

Expanding conflict competence from teams to entire organizations presents more complex challenges, but there are some fundamental similarities. Perhaps the most important one is developing and supporting a culture in which people can raise issues and discuss them in constructive ways. Our view of organizational conflict competence is influenced by our colleague, Jennifer Lynch, QC, and others who have evolved the concept of integrated conflict management systems (ICMS). These systems help organizations align their values and mission as well as policies and procedures with the kinds of conflict management approaches they want used by their employees. Figure 1.4 is an adaptation of Jennifer's model for an ICMS (Lynch, 2005).

In this model, *organizational support* refers to the skill development that enables individuals to develop individual conflict competence together with the leadership, coordination, communication, and evaluation required to create an ICMS.

An *updated alternative dispute resolution* system involves elements such as mediation, fact finding, arbitration, and other processes that can be used to deal with conflict that has reached a point where the individuals themselves are unlikely to resolve it without the involvement of third parties.

Together, the organizational support and the updated alternative dispute resolution components create and sustain the ICMS that in turn helps transform an organization's culture into one that supports conflict competence.

chapter
TWO

Cognitive Aspects of Conflict

The first element of individual conflict competence deals with the cognitive aspects of conflict, including improving current attitudes about conflict, appreciating the value of managing conflict effectively, and understanding how you currently respond to conflict. This chapter explores ways of improving cognitive skills in these areas.

CONFLICT ATTITUDES

In our programs and presentations, we often ask questions of participants to get them thinking about their current attitudes toward conflict. People clearly have thoughts and feelings about conflict, but these often go unexamined. Yet, these attitudes affect the ways that people act when conflict arises even if individuals have not thought about them. We find it helpful to get people thinking about their relationship with conflict, and one way is by having them explore their attitudes.

Exploring Current Conflict Attitudes

It would be helpful to consider your own attitudes about conflict. Do you think it is something bad, to be avoided? Are there positive aspects of conflict? What has affected your understanding and approach to conflict? When we run programs, we ask people a number of questions about conflict to help them reflect on their attitudes. We share them next as if you were conducting a program with others. If you are doing this exercise by yourself, answer the questions based on your own thoughts and feelings toward conflict. In either case, we believe you will discover some interesting answers!

1. We suggest you begin by having people first think about conflict and then share words that come to mind to describe it. You will probably hear lots of words like *stress, frustration, anger,* and *fear.* Less frequently you may hear words like *opportunity* and *resolution.* Once you have solicited a number of terms, ask your participants how they would characterize most of the words they've just heard. If your group is like the hundreds that we have asked, they will describe the words as *negative.*

2. At this point, shift your inquiry to how people deal with conflict. You could ask a question such as, "How do you or most of your colleagues respond to conflict at work?" While a few people may say they react to it aggressively or move to resolve it, most of the answers will be something like, "We avoid it."

3. You may ask at this point, "How well does the combination of viewing conflict as negative and avoiding it work out?" People usually chuckle at this point, as they begin to see how ineffective this approach is.

4. We also suggest asking people, "Why do you think conflict seems to be so difficult to manage?" You will likely hear a variety of responses. "It is emotionally distressing." "I'm afraid I might hurt the other person" (or its converse—"I'm afraid they might hurt me"). Eventually, someone will probably suggest, "I've never learned how to deal with conflict." You'll see a lot of others nod in agreement with this statement. It is easy to follow up with, "How many of you learned how to deal with conflict in school?" Rarely will you see more than 1 percent of hands raised. Some people may joke that they learned how to deal with conflict on the playground. School conflict management programs have improved in recent years, so eventually we will see more people who did learn effective ways of dealing with conflict in school. We also ask our participants, "How many of you learned to deal with conflict at work?" A few more hands will go up but rarely more than 10 percent.

5. We suggest one more preliminary question: "How many of you believe that conflict is something that inevitably arises in the workplace?" Nearly everyone usually agrees with this, largely because of their personal experiences. This point can be further emphasized by referring to the Center for Creative Leadership study we mentioned earlier that found that 85 percent of leaders encounter conflict on a regular or continual basis (Center for Creative Leadership, 2009).

6. At this point it may be helpful to recap: Conflict is inevitable. We generally use negative words to describe it (but there are a few positive words as well).

We generally use avoidance techniques when it arises. It can be emotionally distressing, and we've never learned how to address it effectively. With all of that, participants readily agree that there is little doubt why conflict is such a vexing problem.

Connecting Attitudes to Conflict Results

People find it interesting to look at their conflict attitudes and see that theirs are similar to those of most people. They also begin to see that their attitudes probably make it harder to deal with conflict effectively. We like to strengthen this connection by relating attitudes with research on organizational conflict. In both *Becoming a Conflict Competent Leader* and *Building Conflict Competent Teams,* we explored research on organizational conflict. Since the mid-1990s, researchers have looked at two very different types of conflict. One type, called *relationship* or *affective* conflict, describes situations in which people have apparently incompatible differences and focus more on who is at fault or to blame than on how to solve the problem caused by the differences. We then talk about the researchers' conclusions about the outcomes of this type of conflict: increased stress, people avoiding or pulling back from one another, decreased creativity, lowered morale, and poorer decision making (DeDreu and Weingart, 2003). When we describe this type of conflict to participants, they usually are very familiar with it. When we ask about their own experience with relationship conflict, they quickly realize that the negative words they used earlier to describe conflict essentially describe *this* form of conflict. So most of their experience is with relationship conflict, and most of what they get out of conflict is something bad. No wonder they would prefer to avoid it!

We then talk about the second type of conflict, called *task* or *cognitive* conflict, with which people have less experience. Task conflict emerges when people appear to have irreconcilable differences but they stay focused on ways of solving the problems caused by those differences in mutually beneficial ways. When people are able to stay focused on solutions, which we understand is not easy, they often come up with more creative solutions and effective decisions and implementations (Roberto, 2005). Participants are typically less familiar with this type of conflict, but they recognize that the positive words they shared earlier, like *resolution* and *opportunity,* describe task conflict and its more favorable outcomes.

So, conflict is inevitable and you are likely to either experience it as relationship conflict, with its bad outcomes, or task conflict, with its more favorable outcomes. Our point to participants is that the way you think about conflict can have an effect on whether you get more good or more bad results from it. Our next step is to look at how to improve attitudes.

Changing Conflict Attitudes

Since most people have negative attitudes about conflict that can flavor and affect the ways they respond to it, we enable people to begin looking at conflict in new ways—ones that help them see it as something to embrace rather than just avoid. Again, we have framed this as a group exercise, and it can be helpful to do this with others. If you are alone, though, you can still profitably reflect on these questions and your answers to them.

1. We typically divide participants into groups of three or four. We then ask them to start by thinking about any conflict they have experienced that had some kind of a positive outcome. This itself can take some doing. We tell them to first write down a description of the conflict and the positive outcomes that came from it.

2. Once they have completed the first step, we ask participants to think about what caused the conflict to have a good result. We ask them to think about the types of behaviors and approaches people used that seemed to help the conflict move in a more positive direction.

3. After everyone has had a chance to describe a conflict that turned out well and list some contributing factors for the success, we ask the participants to share their stories and comments with others in their small groups. We ask them to look for common factors that seemed to lead conflict in a positive direction and for some common types of successful outcomes. After sharing in the small groups, a representative from each group reports their key findings. As this is being done, we encourage participants in other groups to ask questions and provide comments about what they are hearing. When participants are from the same organization, these questions and comments are often more specifically related to the substance of the conflicts, but even in groups of people from different organizations this interaction usually leads to additional insights.

APPRECIATING THE VALUE OF DEALING WITH CONFLICT

As we noted, people generally prefer to avoid dealing with conflict. Leaders are just as or even more conflict averse than everyone else. As a consequence, we feel it is important to have people reflect on why they should overcome their reluctance to engage conflict.

What is the cost of conflict for you? How much time do you spend either dealing with conflict or thinking about it? Does it affect your relationship with others? If you are the leader of an organization or team, how is conflict costing your organization? Are your employees empowered to debate issues so that you get more creative results, or is your organization one in which people keep quiet, avoid rigorous discussion, and settle for mediocre compromises?

If you are training others, you can put program participants in groups and have them come up with reasons why dealing with conflict effectively is of value to them personally, as well as to their organization. You may want to prime the pump by providing the groups with an example. One good one is to ask them whether managers in their organization waste much of their time dealing with conflict. You'll probably get an affirmative reaction to this example, as numerous surveys have confirmed that a typical manager can spend 20 percent or more of his or her time on conflict (Thomas and Schmidt, 1976; Watson and Hoffman, 1996; Center for Creative Leadership, 2003). After 10–15 minutes, you can ask groups to share their results with the larger group. As each point is raised, we recommend spending time discussing the costs associated with it and how handling conflict better could result in either savings or improved results for an organization. During this time we also encourage participants to share personal experiences, which increases the interest and relevance of the exercise.

Another more formal way to help people evaluate the cost side of conflict is the use of the Dana Measure of Financial Cost of Organizational Conflict (*Dana Cost of Conflict Survey,* 2009). This online calculator helps people explore the cost of conflict to their organization. We find that the calculator is the best tool for focusing people on the multiple costs of conflict, such as wasted management time, retention problems, absenteeism, health costs, grievances, complaints, sabotage, and violence. Dan Dana notes that these costs are often unexamined or at least not thought of as conflict issues. When we have participants in our programs fill out his online calculator, we recommend that they be very conservative in their estimates of

various costs. Yet, when they get back the results of their estimates, they are usually astounded by how much conflict can cost. The costs of managers' time can be particularly profound. At even 20 percent of managers' time, conflict can be a tremendous financial burden to an organization.

The out-of-pocket costs of conflict are easier to calculate, and make for easier return on investment arguments. When we are working with organizational leaders, we like to explore other value propositions associated with conflict, such as enhanced creativity and improved decision making. Again, we put participants in small groups and ask them to talk about the kind of interactions they have around conflict. In particular, we prompt them to explore the degree to which their top management teams engage in robust discussions about different approaches to issues. We recommend having a facilitator placed with each group. The facilitator's purpose is to prompt participants to make connections between their ability to engage conflicting approaches and the quality of the ideas they are able to produce and the decisions they make. This discourse generally leads to recognition that robust discussion brings more creative options, because as people bounce ideas off one another they come up with new concepts that had not been considered before. This interaction also allows for more complete vetting of alternatives and leads to better decisions. Implementation is better as well, because members of a team have felt part of the process even if their proposal was not chosen. Dan Dana has found that clients appreciate this part of the value proposition.

"The out-of-pocket costs of workplace conflict certainly catch people's attention. Yet, it is the effects of conflict on decision quality that seem to make the greatest impression. When I discuss this with clients, they initially say that they never really thought about the connection. Upon reflection, they readily agree that this happens on a regular basis and leads to some poorly considered, costly decisions" (Craig's discussion with Dan Dana on July 8, 2009). If, however, conflict is addressed effectively, better decisions can be obtained.

UNDERSTANDING HOW YOU CURRENTLY RESPOND TO CONFLICT

Self-awareness is a key component of most leadership development programs. The gap between a person's intention and his or her impact on others can be of particular importance in conflict contexts.

Take a minute and ask yourself a few questions:

- How often do I face conflict in the workplace?
- When conflict occurs, do I prefer to avoid dealing with it or give in to others?
- Do I come off too aggressively at times?
- Do I take time to listen to other people's thoughts on an issue?
- When conflicts emerge, am I aware of my feelings and those of others?
- Do I rush to solve problems before I'm sure of what the issues are?
- Do I collaborate with others to come up with solutions, or do I make most of the decisions on my own?

When people reflect on these and similar questions, they begin to get a better sense of how they approach conflicts. We don't often take the time to consider such things. As a consequence we are often unaware of how we truly think and feel about conflicts and are sometimes surprised by our reactions to conflict.

Using Instruments

While various forms of self-reflection can be helpful, we find that people seem to pay more attention when we use assessment instruments as part of their development work. The instruments contribute an additional sense of objectivity and credibility to the process. The powerful impression they can have on people also underscores the importance of making sure you use assessments that have been properly tested and validated and that they are administered by competent professionals. In this section we talk about one instrument that focuses on conflict behaviors and a group of others that deal with conflict styles.

The Conflict Dynamics Profile We often use the Conflict Dynamics Profile® (CDP) in our programs. Yes, it was developed at Eckerd College, where we work, but there is more to it than just that. The course of conflict is heavily influenced by the behaviors people use when dealing with it. The CDP looks at behaviors

that tend to move conflict in both positive and negative directions. It measures behaviors in others that can trigger people's negative emotions that lead to tension and exacerbate conflict. It also reveals the responses or reactions we use once conflict is initiated.

The CDP was developed by Drs. Sal Capobianco, Mark Davis, and Linda Kraus in the late 1990s and was influenced by research on organizational conflict that focused on two different types of conflict: cognitive or task conflict and relationship or affective conflict (Amason, 1996). The former type of conflict is characterized by discussion, creative thinking, and good decision making, and the latter by blaming, emotional tension, and dysfunction.

The CDP authors suggested that the kind of conflict that is experienced is largely determined by the kinds of behaviors that people use when they are faced with conflict. They identified a set of constructive behaviors that when used would lead to the more productive task conflict and another set of destructive behaviors that usually generated relationship conflict. The CDP measures the frequencies with which people use the various constructive and destructive behaviors.

In addition to behaviors, the CDP also measures conflict triggers. These behaviors in others that cause irritation in an individual and can lead to destructive reactions are called *hot buttons.* The hot buttons as well as the behavioral scales are normed against a large adult population so that recipients can see how their patterns compare against other people. Hot buttons are described in greater depth in the chapter on emotions.

Administering the CDP To administer the CDP, one must be certified in the instrument, which comes in both multirater and self-assessment versions. While it is available in both online and paper-and-pencil formats, most people use the online version.

When we use the 360-degree version of the instrument with a group, we ask participants and their respondents to complete the instruments using the instructions that come with it. If we use the self-assessment version of the instrument, only the individuals respond to questions.

During the program, we review the model underlying the instrument using a PowerPoint slideshow that comes with the certification materials. We make sure that people understand the specific scales that are presented on the CDP report so that people are clear about the data they will be reviewing. These are described