

BADEN EUNSON

Conflict Management

- ✦ conflict and its uses
- ✦ getting off the conflict spiral
- ✦ negotiation tactics and styles
- ✦ creating win-win situations

WILEY BUSINESS TOOLS SERIES

Conflict Management

BADEN EUNSON

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Contents

Preface vii

Introduction xi

1 Conflict—the basics 1

2 Conflict development 11

3 Approaches to managing conflict 23

4 Negotiation—the basics 43

5 Positions, concessions and interests 55

6 Getting ready to negotiate 67

7 Negotiation styles 85

8 Negotiation tools and planning 91

Conclusion 107

Notes 109

Glossary 115

Index 119

Preface

Why bother with communication? Sure, communication is a ‘soft skill’ that everyone talks about, but is communication that important when you need to be upgrading your skills and knowledge as you are developing your career?

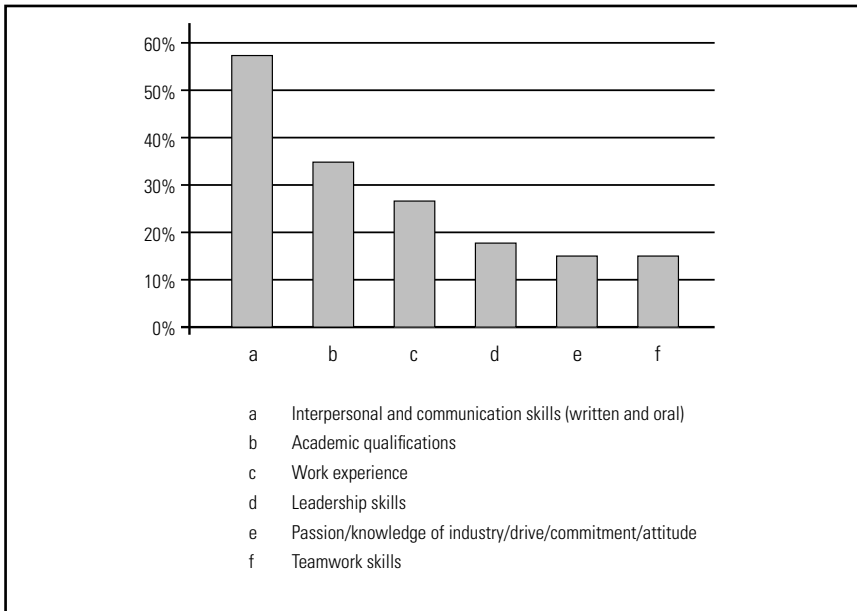
Well, actually, it is. All varieties of communication are among the best business tools you can have in your career toolkit. A 2006 survey by Graduate Careers Australia, *Graduate Outlook 2006*, found that when employers were looking for graduates to hire, the technical competence of the graduates in their chosen field ran a poor second to the communication skills the employers were primarily looking for, as shown in figure 1 (overleaf).

Even if you don’t have a degree, or are already in your first or second career, time and again, those with good or great communication skills seem to have an advantage over those who don’t.

Can such skills be learnt? Of course they can. The book you hold in your hands is part of the Business Tools series, a series that will help you use

aspects of communication as tools—to assist your career advancement and possibly your own personal development.

Figure 1: 2006 survey by Graduate Careers Australia—factors favoured most by graduate employers



Soft skills, such as communication—in contrast to hard skills, such as number crunching and physical labour—are also known as generic, employability or transferable skills. That means that:

- while the technical knowledge you currently have may well be obsolete in five years' time, the soft skills will still be relevant in twenty or thirty years' time
- the transferable nature of soft skills will help you progress within your organisation out of your current area of specialisation. They can even help you move on to other organisations when the time is right for such moves.

Conflict Management is all about soft skills for hard situations. I begin by looking at some models of conflict, such as the conflict spiral, and consider ways to get off the spiral or stop it from even beginning. Along

the way, I will tackle the difficult questions, such as ‘Can conflict be a solution as well as a problem?’ and ‘Might you need to increase conflict in some circumstances rather than reduce or eliminate it?’

Using the general concept of conflict management as a context, I then zoom in on a subset of conflict—negotiation. Here you will find a strange and fascinating world of strategies and tactics, concessions, fallback positions, plan Bs, positions and interests, territory, power and so much more.

I hope you find this book easy to read, and a useful tool and resource in your career as a communicator.

Baden Eunson
Melbourne
March 2007

Introduction

As the title suggests, *Conflict Management* explores the best ways to manage conflict situations in the workplace and shows that while conflict can be a very destructive force, it can also prove to be a creative and positive one if managed correctly.

In chapters 1, 2 and 3 the multiple causes of conflict, numerous ways of approaching conflicts and different styles of reacting to or managing conflict are explored. It's useful sometimes to understand conflict as a spiral, or ladder of escalation, with distinct phases. I will pay particular attention to conflict in organisations, where incidents involving conflict can be understood in terms of a number of underlying dynamics and recurring patterns.

There are a number of conflict management solutions, such as interpersonal skills, gender and cultural dynamics, group dynamics, contact and communication, superordinate goals, tit for tat, de-escalation thresholds, apology, forgiveness, praise, sacrifice, creation of new resources, decoupling and buffering, formal authority, planning, appropriate scale, stalemates, compromise and mediation.

These are explored in chapters 4 and 5. I also consider the perhaps unusual idea that sometimes conflict needs to be created to resolve certain situations.

I then turn my attention to a particular type of conflict resolution—negotiation. In chapter 6, I introduce BATNAs (best alternatives to a negotiated agreement), WATNAs (worst alternatives to a negotiated agreement) and Plan Bs. And I explain why the saying ‘win–win outcome’ is not just a cliché. The importance of researching TOS (the other side in the negotiation), as well as clearly identifying your goals, bottom lines and the concessions you are willing to make are also discussed.

In chapters 7 and 8, I explore the differences between positions and interests, the role of territory and time, and of publics or stakeholders in negotiation. I also look at the nature of power in negotiations and how packaging techniques can offer greater flexibility when discussing outcomes, before moving on to negotiation styles in chapter 9.

Finally, in chapter 10, I consider the tools negotiators can use during the negotiation process, which include non-verbal communication, listening, questioning and persuading skills, signalling, strategies and tactics, cultural and gender sensitivity, and different channels of communication. I then consider planning for negotiation, finally arriving at the conclusion that life is a series of negotiations and few of them actually ever finish—and sometimes we are very grateful for that.