



Finding Common Ground

Strategies for Improved Communication

Participant's Workbook

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Strategies for Improved Communication

Introduction

It is inevitable that there will be differences in the workplace (ranging from different interpretations of procedures, to differing assessments of performance between supervisor and employee and between supervisors and between staff). This course provides a common language and basic tools for raising and resolving differences and concerns. It supports the concepts of mutual respect, good communication and cooperative problem solving.

Objectives

By the end of this course you will be able to:

1. Recognize the major causes of conflict and that conflict can present positive opportunities
2. Respond to conflict by respecting the person
3. Resolve conflict by addressing the problem
4. Use Reflection to learn from conflict

The 4 Rs of Conflict Management

Recognize

- That conflict is a natural resource
- There are potential opportunities in conflict
- We have a responsibility to manage conflict

Respond with respect

- **V**alidate
- **A**sk rather than tell
- **L**isten

Resolve

- **U**ncover interests
- **E**xplore Options
- **D**ecide together on an agreement

Reflect

- Learn from conflict

Definition of Conflict

The differences that arise between people that cause them concern.

Some important points about conflict:

- Conflicts between ourselves and co-workers are inevitable and normal, given that each of us is different from everyone else
- conflict may arise without all of the parties necessarily being aware that there is a conflict
- Sometimes we even have internal conflicts – we are “of two minds” about something
- Conflicts may occur between two or more people and may develop from one or more issues or problems
- Conflicts are not necessarily positive or negative – they just are – and they present opportunities to solve problems collaboratively

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Common Workplace Conflicts Worksheet

What is the Problem or issue?

--

Who are the people involved?

Party A =

Party B =

What do they want?

Party A wants . . .

Party B wants . . .

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Causes of Conflict

Facts

People can see the same facts differently or they can disagree over the facts of a situation. Conflicts over facts are often the easiest to manage.

To explore differences over facts ask:

- Do stakeholders have access to the same information? For example, are upper level managers missing critical operating details or the most current data? Are less informed employees missing part of the big picture?
- Is the same information being interpreted differently? Cultural background, social conditioning, personal history, and vested interests influence perceptions. One person may interpret an event as a challenging opportunity, while another may see it as obscure or ambiguous. For example: People may receive new information at different times. Some people might not receive new information. Two people might interpret things differently.

Sharing information or getting reliable information can usually resolve conflicts over facts.

Methods

People often disagree on the techniques and procedures for completing a task or project.

To explore differences over methods, ask these questions:

- Does good alignment exist between a task to be accomplished and the person asked to perform it? That is, are the skills and interests of individuals well matched to the jobs they are asked to perform?
- Does it really matter which method we use? Is one way more effective than another, or are we in conflict merely over using "our" method?
- Is the required task well framed? Specifically, have clear and reasonable boundaries been set?
- Is enough support being provided? Do people have adequate resources, facilities, training, and recognition? For example:
 - Two employees might differ over the best way to conduct a procedure.
 - Supervisors may have different ways of rewarding or disciplining employees.
 - Managers may have different opinions about how to keep their staff up to date on current information.

Conflict over methods can usually be resolved by the airing of differences and collaboration—working together to come to an agreement on methods.

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Goals

People can have incompatible or divergent goals. One party is trying to achieve one set of outcomes, and another party wants something entirely different to happen.

To explore conflict over goals, ask:

- What are our goals? What outcome does each of us want to achieve? Often, articulating differences in goals goes a long way in understanding and reducing conflict.
- Where is our common ground? What goals do we share? How can we best meet our mutual goals? For example:
 - One employee sees her job as an opportunity for advancement and promotion. Another may see her job as what she does for a living, is quite content to keep doing it, and actually doesn't look to advance. Another might see her job as part of a civic duty. Yet another might see her current job as a chore that must be completed until she finds a new job.

Disagreement over goals usually occurs at one level of concern. However, a higher level can almost always be found where stakeholders share a common vision or goal.

Like conflicts over methods, disagreement over goals can usually be resolved by problem solving and finding common ground.

Values

People can disagree over values or basic principles or beliefs. This is the most difficult kind of conflict to resolve.

To explore conflict over values, ask the following:

- Could cultural differences be operating here? If yes, how can we acknowledge and respect one another's differences?
- How do our values differ? An awareness and articulation of differences in values can help each party understand the other.
- Given our differences, how can we best work together?
- Can we agree to disagree? One person might see working part time as an opportunity to spend more time with his family while another might view it as a loss of income.

Oftentimes, we must acknowledge our differences, respect the other's position, and move on, knowing that long-held beliefs and values will not change.

Chinese Concept of Conflict



Risk and Opportunity

Scenario number _____

Potential Risks:

--

Possible Opportunities:

--

Risk and Opportunity

Potential Risks:

--

Possible Opportunities:

--

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Responding with Respect

Validate – acknowledge that the other person deserves to be heard.

Ask, don't tell – ask open-ended questions to demonstrate you are hearing what they have to say.

Open-ended Questions

What . . . ?
How . . . ?
Why . . . ?
What do you think about ...?
What's your opinion?
What would happen if ...?
What is this like?
Why do you think this happened?
How do you think this works?
How did you ... ?
How else could you do that?
What could you tell me about...?
Tell me about it.

Listen Actively – paraphrase to make sure you understand.

Paraphrasing

"I wonder if . . ."
"Could it be that . . ."
"It sounds like . . ."
"It seems like . . ."
"I gather that . . ."
"Is it correct to say . . ."
"As I hear it . . ."
"You appear to be . . ."
"I guess that . . ."

Active listening skills

- Listen with respect – give the other person time to talk
- Don't challenge or interrupt
- Check for understanding
- Don't problem-solve

Raising an issue

Prepare

- Don't be rushed
- Select the right place

Put it on the table

- State the problem and why it's a problem
- Be respectful – talk about the problem not the person
- Speak for yourself, not for others

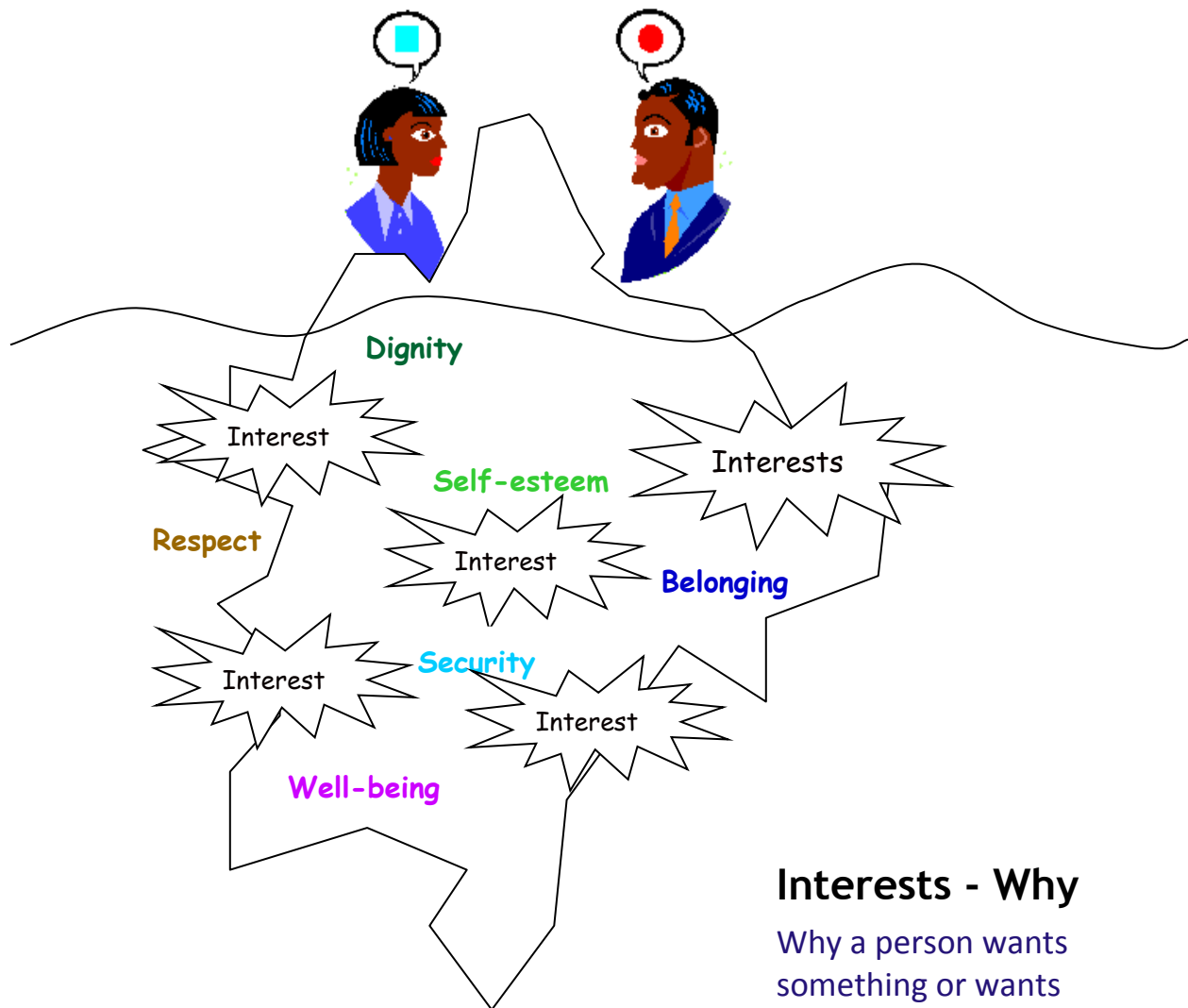
Invite cooperation

- "I'd like to solve this in a way that we can both be happy with."
- "How can we fix this?"

Uncovering Interests

Positions - What

- A stand or demand
- View on resolution of problem



Interests - Why

Why a person wants something or wants something done in a particular way
Their fears, hopes, wants, needs

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Positions/Interests Scenarios

In each scenario consider what might be possible if the underlying interests of each party were identified and addressed.

Scenario 1

Miguel (A) and Alice (B) are coworkers who have worked together for the past 2 years. Recently Alice heard from another co-worker that Miguel had made a comment disapproving of Alice's method of checking materials into the section and that she should be reprimanded or punished. Miguel takes the security of materials submitted for copyright seriously and is convinced that Alice is compromising it. Alice has refused to speak to Miguel, and the atmosphere has become chilly and uncomfortable any time the two of them are working in the same area. Miguel suspects that a coworker told Alice what he had said, but he does not want to bring up the topic because he is worried there will be a scene.

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Scenario 2

Clarissa (A) is a Supervisor and Amir (B) works for her in the Copyright Office. Today Clarissa told her staff that they were going to have to ensure coverage of the office during lunch by staggering their lunchtimes. It is important to Clarissa to be seen as an impartial supervisor and she thinks everyone should just cooperate because they are lucky to even have a job. Amir is very upset because he meets his wife for lunch at a specific time that she cannot change. He is typically very quiet and has not told anyone he works with that he left his last job because his supervisor never consulted him or asked his point of view before changing his hours

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Scenario 3

Chantel (A) has been working at the Copyright Office for a short time, and today she received a briefing that included a new requirement that all customers leaving the card catalog room must open their bags for inspection when departing. Chantel takes her job very seriously and is committed to security. Lee (B) is a regular from a Copyright Research Firm and is a familiar face to the staff. He is in a particular hurry today and when Chantel asks him to open his bag for inspection, Lee becomes very irritable and shouts that he is going to be late for an appointment. He further tells Chantel that she does not know the rules, that he comes to do research here often and that he finds this unnecessary and humiliating. Chantel is flustered, but insists that Lee allow her to look in his bag.

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Scenario 4

Jon (A) is a Copyright Office manager. He prides himself on developing good morale and is committed to developing and retaining good employees. In a few months the office he is responsible for is acquiring a new system to process information. The staff like and respect Jon but have become very frustrated with the lack of information on the new system and have begun to demand more information during the weekly briefings. Paula (B), representing some of the staff, has come to Jon to let him know that many of her co-workers are very concerned that they will be able to learn the new system and still perform their jobs acceptably.

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Uncovering Interests Worksheet

Scenario number _____

Problem or Issue	
Party A	Party B
What Party A wants:	What Party B wants:
A's Interests – Why they want; their underlying hopes, wants, fears, needs	B' s Interests – Why they want; their underlying hopes, wants, fears, needs

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Uncovering Interests Worksheet

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A's Interests – Why they want; their underlying hopes, wants, fears, needs	B' s Interests – Why they want; their underlying hopes, wants, fears, needs

Exploring Options

Ideas for Brainstorming

- Collect as many ideas as possible from all participants
- All ideas are welcome
- Be creative
- Do not criticize or judge; don't groan, frown, or laugh
- All ideas are equally valid at this point.
- Build on other peoples' ideas.

Deciding on a “SMART” Agreement

Specific, *must address the interests of each party*

Mutually acceptable, *should be determined collaboratively so both parties are satisfied*

Appropriate, *should not contain conditions outside the control of the parties involved*

Realistic, *it is practical and reasonable*

Time-based, *has an estimated time line and contingencies*

A VALUED Approach

Validate

Ask, and

Listen to

Uncover interests

Explore options, and

Decide



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The VALUED model is an easy way to remember the elements of finding common ground.

Finding Common Ground Worksheet

Issue/Problem	Who is involved?	What are their position(s)?	What are their interest(s)?	Options/Possible Solutions

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