

Conflict

Is it a bad thing?

# Conflict

## Not always a bad thing:

- The tension between the desire to be part of a group and desire to be an autonomous individual provides the energy and motivation in a group
- Therefore conflict is inevitable, not to be feared and shows that the group is alive!
- Fresh ideas often result from differing opinions
- A degree of competitiveness can lead to greater motivation and harder work from individuals

# Conflict

Managed badly it can:

- Stop teamwork
- Hinder individuals from achieving their personal goals
- Personal enjoyment and satisfaction ceases
- If function of the committee is impaired, conflict resolution is necessary

# Conflict

Managed well, conflict can lead to:

- better decisions
- more creative ideas
- higher quality output from the team
- opponents can become allies (again)
- stronger relationships between members and team
- enjoyment and satisfaction in the work

# Aims of Conflict Resolution

- Co-existence: stress common ground, not differences
- Compromise: try to negotiate for a 'win-win' situation
- Genuine resolution: conflict/tension genuinely explored
  - tries fresh approaches
  - explores others interests and concerns rather than differences
  - takes dispute to other members of team
- Professionalism:
  - makes meeting more formal.
  - uses agenda: keeps meeting moving & discussion to-the-point
  - development of robust groundrules/constitution/mission statement
- If necessary, seeks independent advice/arbitrator

What are typical Conflicts?

*Some one not doing their job*

- Define goals
- Set rules – refer to Societies groundrules/constitution/mission statement
- Set sanctions/consequences
- Seek agreement from everyone

# Individuals V Team work

- Agreeing on decision making process
- Keep everyone in the loop
- Minute all decisions
- Circulate to everyone



# Skills for coping when things go wrong

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Mediating between opposing factions

# Game Theory

The most widely-used methods of resolving conflict are based on 'game theory'

“Everyone is trying to achieve some kind of ‘payoff’ or benefit, but the payoff may be different for different people and organisations”

# Typical Payoffs

- gaining a sense of achievement from completing a worthwhile and/or high quality job
- obtaining financial reward
- making a profit for the company
- getting the job done as quickly as possible in order to go somewhere better
- having a feeling of self-esteem or self-worth
- being recognised for one's efforts

*Getting your payoff is called a "win". Not getting your payoff is called a "lose"*

What are the payoffs in a Society?



# Achieve a 'win win'

This process is designed for team members, where it is assumed that there is a degree of goodwill and some trust between them.



*It will be much easier to find a solution if everyone understands what everyone else needs from the situation (this is referred to as a game of "complete information" - not all games are as open as this, but in a team environment a complete sharing of information is a highly desirable goal). This stage (done properly) ensures that any conflict is based on real differences and not misperceptions.*

# 1. Understand the conflict

*At this point rather than arguing over what course of action is right or wrong, think in terms of each parties 'interests, concerns and needs' in the conflict. Each party considers:*

## **Interests**

- What are my interests in this conflict?
- What do I really care about in this conflict?
- What do I want?
- What do I need?
- What are my concerns, hopes, fears?
- **Possible Outcomes**
- What kinds of alternatives or agreements *might* we reach? (Keep this to yourself for now)

## **2. Listening and acknowledging the others interests/win positions without arguing**

1. Each person/party take turns to tell the other about their interests in the conflict
2. As one person/party speaks, the other party listens without interrupting
3. When the first person/party has finished speaking, the second person/party can ask for clarification on any issues
4. Then the second person/party takes their turn to follow steps 1-3 above

Note:

This stage can be difficult, because many people see their point of view only and, in a conflict situation, emotion can make one blind to alternatives. In extreme cases, you may need to get each party to articulate/summarise the others' argument until the other party agrees with the summary.

This is a very important stage and should not be rushed.



### **3. Brainstorm ideas**

- generate creative ideas that meet the interests, values, needs, wants, concerns, fears of both/all parties
- classic brainstorm rules mean you initially generate ideas without evaluating agreement/disagreement at this point in the process
- allow any and all ideas even the seemingly bizarre

## 4. Evaluate the ideas to see if any meet the 'win' criteria of both parties.

- This process takes a positive approach of making proposals that meet both win positions. If you don't take a positive approach (i.e. suggesting solutions rather than criticising others views) the argument can end up going round in circles. If, after evaluation, no ideas meet the win criteria of both parties, then:
- Declare how you might be prepared to compromise on your win position. Ask other parties to declare how they might also be prepared to compromise.
- Reevaluate the ideas/alternatives to see if any of them meet the new, compromise positions.

If, after this stage, there are still no ideas that meet the compromised win-win position, then you may have to refer to a third party to make a resolution. In extreme cases, where games reach this stage the result is usually a 'lose' for one or other party, and often a 'lose-lose' scenario.

5. Finally, once agreement is reached then *don't skip the final step* - articulating and writing down the conclusion. If you don't ensure everyone remembers what the final decision was and why, you may get more conflict in the future (memories tend to be subjective)