

Managing Conflict

Conflicts of various types are a natural part of the team process. Although we often view conflict as negative, there are benefits to conflict if it is managed appropriately. People handle conflict in their teams in a variety of ways, depending on the importance of their desire to maintain good social relations and develop high-quality solutions.

Teams can use a variety of approaches for managing conflicts. Developing a healthy solution to a conflict requires open communication, respect for the other side, and a creative search for mutually satisfying alternatives.

Learning Objectives

1. Why is the lack of conflict a sign of a problem in a team?
2. What are the healthy and unhealthy sources of conflict?
3. When is conflict good for a team? When is it bad for a team?
4. How does the impact of conflict vary depending on the type of team?
5. What are the different approaches to conflict resolution?
6. Which approach to conflict resolution is best? Why?
7. What can teams do to prepare for conflicts?
8. How can a mediator help facilitate management of a team conflict?
9. What should a team do to create an integrative solution to a conflict?

7.1 Conflict Is Normal

Conflict is the process by which people or groups perceive that others have taken some action that has a negative effect on their interest. Conflict is a normal part of a team's life. Unfortunately, people have misconceptions about conflict that interfere with how they deal with it. These misconceptions include the following:

- Conflict is bad and should be avoided.
- Team members misunderstanding one another causes conflict.
- All conflicts can be resolved to everyone's satisfaction.

In a dynamic team, conflict is a normal part of the team's activity and is a healthy sign. If a team has no conflict, it might be a sign of a problem. A team without conflict might be suffering from unhealthy agreement, have a domineering leader who suppresses all conflict and debate, or be performing its task in a routine manner and not trying to improve how it works.

Teams often do not handle their conflicts very well. Sometimes, rather than trying to manage their conflicts, they try to ignore or avoid them. This is called "defensive avoidance." To avoid a conflict, everyone becomes quiet when a controversy occurs. Decision-making problems such as the Abilene paradox are in part caused by the desire to avoid controversy. Team members accept what the leader says in order to avoid conflict. The consequences are poor decision making and more problems later in the group's life.

The causes of team conflict change during the team's development (Kivlighan & Jauquet, 1990). During the initial stage, there is little conflict because team members are being polite and trying to understand everyone's positions. This gives way to team conflicts about operating rules and status issues as the team sorts out its roles and rules. Once the team becomes task oriented, conflicts arise about how tasks should be performed. Often, the final stages of a project have little conflict because team members are focused on implementing the decisions they have made earlier.

It is more appropriate to talk about conflict management than about conflict resolution. Conflict is a normal part of a team's operation, and some conflicts cannot be fully resolved. The resolution of a conflict depends on what type of conflict it is. If it is about task issues, the solution is an agreement. Typically, once the agreement is made, it continues to operate. If the conflict is about relationship issues, then an agreement, periodic checks on how well the agreement is working, and opportunities to redefine the agreement are needed. This is true because agreements about relationship issues can change as the relationship changes.

7.2 Sources of Conflict

Conflict may arise from many sources, including confusion about people's positions, personality differences, legitimate differences of opinion, hidden agendas, poor norms, competitive reward systems, and poorly managed meetings. The problem is determining the source to identify whether this is a healthy conflict for the team or a symptom of a hidden problem that needs to be uncovered. If the conflict is about legitimate differences of opinion about the team's task, then it is a healthy conflict. The team needs to acknowledge the source of conflict and work on resolving it. However, sometimes a conflict only appears to be about the team's task and in reality is a symptom of an underlying problem. Finding the root cause of the conflict is important; the team should not waste time dealing with only the symptoms of the conflict. Table 7.1 presents a list of healthy and unhealthy sources of conflict.

Legitimate conflicts are caused by a variety of factors. Differences in values and objectives of team members, differing beliefs about the motives and actions of others, and different expectations about the results of decisions can all lead to conflicts about what the team should do. These differences create conflicts, but from these conflicts come better team decisions.

Hidden conflicts that are not really about the team's task may spring from organizational, social, and personal sources. Organizational causes of conflict include competition over scarce resources, ambiguity over responsibilities, status differences among team members, and competitive

Table 7.1 Sources of Conflict

<i>Healthy</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on task issues • Legitimate differences of opinion about the task • Differences in values and perspectives • Different expectations about the impact of decisions
<i>Unhealthy</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition over power, rewards, and resources • Conflict between individual and group goals • Poorly run team meetings • Personal grudges from the past • Faulty communications

reward systems. One common type of organizational conflict is the conflict between the team's goals and the goals of individual team members. This is especially true for a cross-functional project team made up of representatives from different parts of an organization (Franz & Jin, 1995). Hidden agendas (i.e., the hidden personal goals of team members) may lead to conflict in the team that can be difficult to identify and resolve. Gaining agreement about the overall goals of the team and renegotiating team roles can help deal with this type of conflict.

Conflict may be due to social factors within the team. A team with a leader who has poor facilitation skills can have poorly run meetings with a lot of conflict. Poor group norms often show up in poorly managed meetings. When meetings are unproductive, conflict may arise because team members are dissatisfied with the team process. Spending time evaluating and developing appropriate norms helps deal with this type of conflict.

Conflicts may arise from personality differences or poor social relations among team members. These may be due to grudges stemming from past losses, misinterpretations about another person's behavior, or faulty communication, such as inappropriate criticism or distrust. These are often called "personality differences," but typically their source is interpersonal. Although team members are disagreeing about issues, the root cause of the conflicts is an unwillingness to agree. However, it can be difficult to determine whether someone has a legitimate disagreement about an issue or is opposed to agreeing for personal reasons. To deal with these sources of conflict, team building and other approaches to improving social relations are important.

7.3 Impact of Conflict

Conflict may have both positive and negative effects on a team. It can help the team operate better by exploring issues more fully, but it can lead to emotional problems that damage communication. Studies on conflict in work teams show that the impact of conflict depends both on the type of conflict and the characteristics of the team (Jehn, 1995).

Benefits of and Problems With Conflict

Although people often view conflict as a negative event, conflict in teams is both inevitable and a sign of health. Healthy teams are organized to gain the benefits of multiple perspectives. Team members with these multiple perspectives will view issues differently and learn from one another in the

process of resolving their differences. Conflict is an integral part of the team process; it becomes unhealthy for the team when it is avoided or viewed as an opportunity to dominate an opponent.

The benefits of conflict are that it encourages the team to explore new approaches, motivates people to understand issues better, and encourages new ideas (Robbins, 1974). Controversies bring out problems that have been ignored, encourage debate, and foster new ideas. When opposing views are brought into the open and discussed, the team makes better decisions and organizational commitment is enhanced (Cosier & Dalton, 1990). When conflict is dealt with constructively, it stimulates greater team creativity. For this to happen, team members must be willing to participate in the conflict resolution process.

Conflict can have negative effects on a team by creating strong negative emotions and stress, interfering with communication and coordination, and diverting attention from task and goals. Conflicts can destroy team cohesion, damage social relations, and create winners and losers who will be a source of conflict in the future. When the conflict is with an outside group, it can encourage a shift to authoritarian leadership, negative stereotyping of others, and an increase in conformity (Fodor, 1976).

Whether conflicts are productive or unproductive depends on how the team tries to resolve its conflicts (Witman, 1991). Productive conflicts are about issues, ideas, and tasks. The team typically tries to resolve productive conflicts in a cooperative manner. Unproductive conflicts are about emotions and personalities. The team typically tries to resolve these conflicts with one side trying to dominate the other. In productive conflicts, team members focus cooperatively on solving the problems.

Conflict in Work Teams

Whether conflict has a beneficial or detrimental effect on a work team depends on the type of conflict and the team's task (DeWit, Greer, & Jehn, 2012). Relationship conflicts have a negative effect on team member satisfaction and team performance, but the effects of task conflicts vary. Task conflict is sometimes divided into task and process conflict (Behfar, Mannix, Peterson, & Trochim, 2011). Task conflict occurs when people performing nonroutine tasks differ about what is the best approach. This type of conflict usually has a positive effect on team performance. Process conflict occurs when people who are performing routine tasks have differences over how the team is managing the tasks and coordinating the role assignments of the members. Process conflicts often create disagreements among team members about their roles, which can devolve into relationship

issues. Because of this, process conflicts often have negative effects on team member satisfaction and team performance.

Professional project teams are examples of teams performing nonroutine tasks. For this type of decision-making or creative team, conflict is a sign that diverse opinions are being presented. The team benefits from this diversity, and conflict helps improve the quality and creativity of decisions. However, when a conflict becomes intense, it can be detrimental to the team. Conflict may reduce the team's ability to reach consensus, hurt social relations in the team, and reduce acceptance of its decisions (Amason, 1996).

For a production or service team, the impact of task-related conflict depends on the type of task the team is performing (Cohen & Bailey, 1997). Task conflict disrupts performance on a routine task but can improve performance on a nonroutine task. When the team is performing a routine task, process conflict is a sign that its jobs are poorly defined or that team members are unwilling to cooperate and work together. Conflict among team members in this situation usually is not productive. However, when the team is performing a nonroutine task, such as evaluating how to improve quality, conflict is a natural part of the problem-solving process.

Relationship conflict is detrimental regardless of the type of task a team is performing (Jehn, 1995). Although relationship conflict creates dissatisfaction for the team, it often does not overly disrupt the team's performance. In many cases, team members try to avoid working with members with whom they do not get along on a personal level. Consequently, relationship conflict hurts performance only when the task requires interdependent actions.

This distinction between the effects of task and relationship conflict does not always hold (DeDreu & Weingart, 2003). Conflict disrupts performance and reduces satisfaction because it creates stress and negative feelings and distracts members from performing the task. Low levels of conflict in decision-making tasks may improve the quality and creativity of decision making, but this effect vanishes when the conflict intensifies. A little conflict may stimulate thinking, but more intense conflict distracts people because of their emotions.

The reality is that task and relationship conflict are often correlated (Choi & Cho, 2011). Disagreement on a task issue can lead to personal attacks. It is difficult to say, "I don't like your ideas" and not have it heard as, "I think you are stupid." Relationship conflicts often lead to increased task conflicts because of the negative emotions that are created. One factor that affects the relationship between task conflict and performance is trust. When team members have a high degree of trust in each other, task-related conflict is less likely to lead to relationship conflict. Teams with high levels of trust can tolerate task-related conflict and use the conflict productively.

Teams can benefit from task conflict when they have a high degree of trust and psychological safety (DeDreu & Weingart, 2003). To use conflict constructively, teams need to cultivate an environment that is open and tolerant of diverse viewpoints, where team members feel free to express their opinions and have the ability to resist pressure to conform to the group (Ilgen, Hollenbeck, Johnson, & Jundt, 2005). They need to develop cooperative work relationships so that disagreements are not misinterpreted as personal attacks. A “constructive controversy” uses communication styles that focus on issues and ideas and not on personal criticism (Tjosvold, 1995).

7.4 Conflict Resolution Approaches

The conflict resolution approaches available to teams vary, depending on the team members’ desire to be assertive and cooperative. Because team members have long-term relationships with one another, they should try to use a collaborative approach to conflicts whenever possible.

Two Dimensions of Conflict

There are several ways people and teams can try to resolve conflicts. The approaches they take depend on their personalities, their social relations, and the particular situation. The types of conflict resolution approaches can be analyzed using the following two dimensions: distribution (concern about one’s own outcomes) and integration (concern about the outcomes of others) (Rahim, 1983; Thomas, 1976; Walton & McKersie, 1965). In other words, people in a conflict can be assertive and try to get the most for themselves, or they can be cooperative and concerned with how everyone fares. These two dimensions are independent and lead to the creation of five different approaches to conflict resolution (Figure 7.1):

1. *Avoidance*. This approach tries to ignore the issues or denies that there is a problem. By not confronting the conflict, team members hope it will go away by itself.
2. *Accommodation*. Some team members may decide to give up their position in order to be agreeable. They are being cooperative, but it costs the team the value of their opinions and ideas.
3. *Confrontation*. Acting aggressively and trying to win is one way to deal with a conflict. However, winning can become more important than making a good decision.
4. *Compromise*. One way in which to balance the goals of each participant and the relations among the teams is for everyone to “give in” a little.

5. *Collaboration*. When both sides of a conflict have important concerns, the team needs to search for solutions that satisfy everyone. This requires both cooperativeness and respect for others' positions.

Comparing Different Approaches to Conflict Resolution

Although all these approaches can be used to resolve conflict, each approach has problems. Avoidance, accommodation, and confrontation all may work to resolve the conflict, but these approaches create winners and losers. Teams using these styles often have trouble implementing decisions and find themselves addressing the same issues later. Compromise works somewhat better because everyone wins a little and loses a little. A compromise promotes equity or fairness but usually does not result in optimal decisions.

When possible, teams should use a collaborative approach to conflict resolution. In collaboration, team members search for the alternative solution that allows everyone to win. Although finding a collaborative solution may be time consuming and difficult, it has many benefits. Collaboration encourages creativity, leads to greater commitment to decisions, and improves relationships among team members (Pruitt, 1986).

Members of work teams have long-term concerns about their relationships that go beyond specific situations or conflicts. Teams with shared goals and long-term commitments are likely to show more concern for

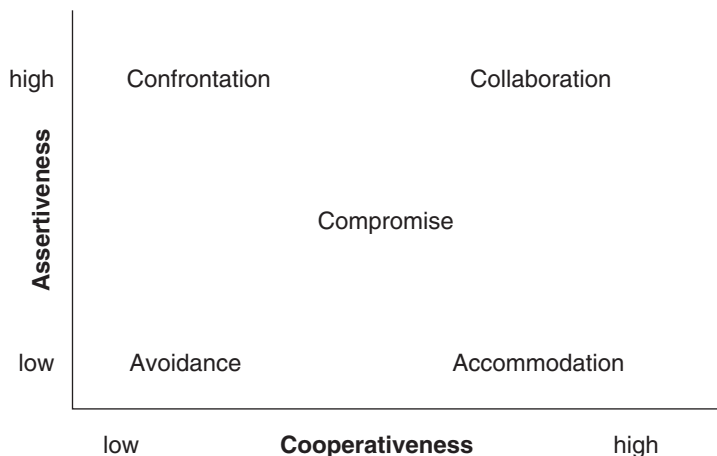


Figure 7.1 Conflict Resolution Approaches

SOURCE: Thomas, K. (1976). In *The Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology* (Marvin D. Dunnette, Ed.). Published by Rand McNally College Publishing Company, Chicago. Copyright © 1976 Marvin Dunnette.

other team members when conflicts arise. Conflicts arise from different perspectives and interests, but the shared goals encourage concern for the perspectives of others. This is why work teams tend to use collaboration and accommodation when resolving internal conflicts (Farmer & Roth, 1998).

Although collaboration may be the best approach in theory, it cannot always be achieved in practice. Occasions arise when different approaches to conflict resolution are best. For example, in a conflict with an emotionally upset boss, a good short-term strategy is to be accommodating. In an emergency situation, people are more likely to accept a confrontational style because they value a quick resolution. Collaboration is the best approach when team members have relatively equal status and there is time to work through a solution. Other approaches may be better when there are large differences in power and a quick resolution is needed.

7.5 Managing Team Conflicts

Teams can prepare for conflicts by creating an environment that allows for dealing with conflicts without creating emotional and relationship problems. Mediators or facilitators can help teams to manage their conflicts by controlling communications and building trust. Managing conflicts requires using negotiating tactics to find solutions acceptable to all sides of the issue.

Preparing for Conflicts

Teams often try to ignore or avoid conflicts rather than addressing them. This strategy allows the conflict to grow, and sometimes task conflicts become relationship conflicts because they have not been resolved. The negative emotions from these unresolved conflicts disrupt trust, hurt communications, and make the conflicts harder to resolve.

Teams should take a more proactive approach to conflict management by preparing for conflicts. Preparing for conflicts means developing approaches to identify conflicts in early stages and creating an environment that supports constructive controversy so that disagreements can be expressed.

Because people try to avoid conflict, problems within a team often go unspoken and unaddressed. Teams need to create a communication climate where members feel safe to raise issues and voice disagreement (Kayser, 1990). Leaders need to facilitate team meetings in a manner that encourages participation from all members. In addition, teams should regularly conduct group process evaluations to help identify problems and periodically

set aside time for task and social reflexivity sessions to identify unresolved issues and team process problems (West, 2004).

The most important aspect of preparing for conflicts is to create a psychologically safe communication environment that allows for constructive controversy to occur (Edmondson & Roloff, 2009). The goal is to make it safe for team members to address task conflicts without creating unwanted emotional problems within the team. This requires a sense of trust among team members that dealing with a conflict will not damage their relationship within the team. Psychological safety encourages teams to address conflicts in a collaborative fashion rather than to avoid them (Bradley, Postlethwaite, Klotz, Hamdani, & Brown, 2011). It allows dealing with task conflicts to have a positive impact on team performance without creating relationship conflicts that hurt performance.

Teams can engage in other preemptive conflict management strategies to help avoid conflicts (Marks, Mathieu, & Zaccaro, 2001). Preemptive conflict management strategies include the development of cooperation and trust-building among members, team contracts that identify how to handle difficult situations, and the development of norms for managing communications within a team. These actions help the team effectively address conflicts and reduce the destructive impact of conflicts when they occur.

Facilitating Conflicts

Successful conflict management requires developing trust among participants (Ross & Ward, 1995). If members on one side trust members on the other side and believe everyone wants a fair solution, they are better able to negotiate a solution. Many conflict reduction approaches are designed to build trust among the parties in a conflict. For example, in a study of bargaining through e-mail, allowing participants to engage in a “get acquainted” telephone call before the bargaining session increased chances of reaching an agreement by 50% (Nadler, Thompson, & Morris, 1999).

Outside mediators or facilitators can sometimes be helpful for managing team conflicts when the issues have become too emotional. Mediators operate by gaining trust among participants, managing hostilities, developing solutions to conflicts, and gaining commitment to the solutions from participants (Carnevale, 1986). They use a variety of tactics to do this. Some tactics focus on the emotional or relationship aspects of situations, whereas others are oriented more toward problem-solving aspects.

In highly emotionally charged situations, direct communication can lead to threats and aggressive language. Mediators help control the communications between people on both sides of the conflict to ensure courtesy and respectful communication. They create controlled opportunities for each side

to express their views and listen to and acknowledge the other side's perspective. This helps reduce the impact of miscommunication and confusion about the other side's position. Mediators search for small areas of agreement in order to build trust and demonstrate that there is common ground.

Negotiating Conflicts

Negotiation or bargaining is the process by which two sides engaged in a conflict exchange offers and counteroffers in an effort to find a mutually acceptable agreement. One of the most important dimensions in understanding how negotiation works in conflict resolution is whether participants have a win-win or a win-lose perspective (Walton & McKersie, 1965). A win-lose perspective is based on the belief that what is good for one side is incompatible with what is good for the other (Thompson & Hastie, 1990). With a win-win perspective, participants believe a solution that satisfies both sides is possible.

The goal of managing team conflicts is to develop integrative, win-win agreements that are beneficial to both sides. Integrative agreements are more rewarding than compromises and improve ongoing relationships among parties (Pruitt, 1986). The keys to developing integrative agreements are focusing attention on interests rather than positions and developing trust and rapport between the conflicted parties.

When a team becomes involved in a conflict, members often form coalitions on the basis of their position on the conflict. Rather than focusing on issues of interest, they focus on whether others are for or against their position. Thompson and Hrebec (1996) found that 50% of people in a conflict failed to realize when they had interests completely compatible with each other, and 20% failed to reach agreement even when their interests were compatible. One reason for this failure is that they did not exchange information about their interests and overlooked areas of common interest (Thompson & Hastie, 1990).

Imagine being on a committee whose goal is to reduce violence in local high schools. As the committee begins to search for solutions, a conflict arises over whether the schools should use electronic surveillance technology. Committee members divide over this issue, and all future ideas are evaluated on the basis of support for or opposition to this position. Over time, the debate becomes increasingly hostile, and new ideas are rejected according to whoever expressed them rather than being evaluated for their quality.

The solution to this conflict is to find an integrative agreement that addresses the committee's goal (i.e., to improve safety in the schools) but does not depend on either position. The participants need to step back from

their emotional involvement in supporting their positions and understand what is really important to them. There are alternative approaches to reducing violence without decreasing privacy in the schools. Some examples include training students in conflict management, using students to monitor compliance with safety rules, and providing teachers with training to help them deal with aggressive incidents.

The search for an integrative solution can be difficult. It is often useful for a team to either use an outside facilitator for a difficult conflict or receive training in facilitating conflicts. The following (adapted from Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1991) is the structure for negotiation of a conflict:

1. Separate the people from the problem.
 - Negotiations must deal with both the issues and the relationship, but these two factors should be separated.
 - Diagnose the cause of the conflict. What goals are in conflict? Identify what each side in a conflict wants; make sure each side clearly understands the issues.
 - Encourage both sides to recognize and understand their emotions. Ask them to view the conflict from the perspective of the other side and practice active listening.
2. Focus on the shared interests of all parties.
 - Focus on the issues, not on positions.
 - Identify how each side can get what it wants. Determine the issues that are incompatible between the two sides. Recognize that both sides have legitimate multiple interests.
 - Have each side identify and rank its goals in the conflict. This often shows that the important goals of each side are different, thereby helping each side see how to trade off unimportant goals to get what it really wants.
3. Develop many options that can be used to solve the problem.
 - Creatively try to generate alternatives that provide mutual gains for both sides. Separate generation of ideas from selection of alternatives.
 - Look for areas of shared interest. Invent multiple solutions as well as solutions to parts of the problem.
 - Practice viewing the problem from alternative perspectives.
4. Evaluate the options using objective criteria.
 - Develop objective criteria to use as a basis for decisions. Define what fair standards and fair procedures to use to resolve the conflict. Agree on these principles before agreeing on a solution.
 - Talk through the issues in order to eliminate unimportant issues. Discuss important differences, searching for the common points on each side.
 - Focus on solutions to which both sides can agree. Do not give in to pressure.

5. Try again.

- Creative solutions are difficult to develop. Practice brings about success.
- Teams do not always resolve their conflicts, but they do try to manage conflicts while working through their various tasks.
- Establish monitoring criteria to ensure that agreements are kept.
- Discuss ways in which the team can deal with similar issues in the future. How can the team improve its ability to manage conflicts? (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1991)



LEADING VIRTUAL TEAMS: REDUCING CONFLICT AND DEVELOPING COLLABORATION

Problem: Because trust, social relations, and miscommunication are problems for virtual teams, it is harder to create a psychologically safe environment that encourages collaboration rather than conflict.

Solution: Many approaches discussed in Chapter 5 (Cooperation) can be used to help create an environment to support collaboration. In addition, a meeting leader might employ a structured process that identifies competing assumptions and objectives of different subgroups represented in a meeting or project. These processes can be used in face-to-face meetings, but they provide additional value in virtual meetings.

Many structured analysis processes exist to help facilitate a collaborative discussion of a conflict, and some of these are available as virtual collaboration tools. These processes commonly identify the key subgroups, what the objectives of each group are, and what underlying assumptions or values guide the decisions of each group. Exercises that explicitly identify and communicate this information can help members of each subgroup better understand the rationale for the behaviors and messages made by members of other groups during the meeting. This information provides context for hearing and understanding messages and therefore can contribute to trust along the lines of “I may not agree with you, but I understand where you are coming from when you say this.”

Summary

Conflict is a normal part of a team’s existence. It is a sign of healthy team interactions. However, teams often do not handle conflict well. Sometimes they make bad decisions in order to avoid conflict rather than learning how to manage it effectively.

Conflict may be analyzed in terms of its sources and types. Conflicts that are healthy for a team come from disagreements on how to address task issues; conflicts that are unhealthy originate from organizational, social, or personal sources. The type of conflict determines the way it should be managed. When conflicts are about misunderstandings and task issues, they can be managed using negotiation to develop acceptable agreements. When conflicts arise from social or personal sources, they often require team building to develop social skills and improve social relations.

Conflict brings both benefits and problems to a team. Conflict helps the team perform its task by fostering debate over issues and stimulating creativity. Conflict hurts the team when it creates strong negative emotions, damages group cohesion, and disrupts the team's ability to operate.

Approaches to resolving conflicts vary, depending on how assertive participants are about getting their way and how cooperative they want to be. Although team members use different conflict resolution approaches depending on the situation, collaboration typically is the most effective approach. Collaboration attempts to identify an alternative solution that satisfies both parties. Although they may be more difficult and time-consuming to achieve, collaborative solutions encourage acceptance and support for the solutions.

Team Leader's Challenge 7

The high school in your town has been having problems. Recently, the number of gangs at school has increased. Acts of vandalism and juvenile delinquency are also increasing. Although there have not been any major outbreaks of violence, stories in the media of violence in other communities have raised concerns among parents. The school board has created a committee of teachers, administrators, students, and concerned parents to develop proposals for dealing with problems at the local high school. You are the leader of this committee.

The meetings started with polite sharing of ideas, but tensions soon became apparent. The four groups had very different ideas about the degree of seriousness of the problem and appropriate solutions. Polite criticism of ideas shifted into cynical asides and finally into heated attacks. As people became more emotional, the negative comments became more personal. You are aware that some of the participants have fought over other school issues in the past.

How can you (the leader of the committee) reduce the negative emotions in this situation?

How do you build trust among the groups?

What can be done to negotiate agreement among the four groups?

Improvement of a team's ability to manage conflict can be achieved in several ways. Creating a psychologically safe environment helps teams collaboratively deal with conflicts, rather than trying to avoid them. Mediators can be used to help manage communications during a conflict and develop trust among the participants. Integrative solutions to conflicts can be developed through the use of structured negotiation practices that focus on the interests of all parties involved.

SURVEY: CONFLICT RESOLUTION STYLES

Purpose: Understand your preferred style for dealing with conflicts. There are five basic approaches for dealing with conflicts: avoidance, accommodation, confrontation, compromise, and collaboration. The style that you prefer depends on how assertive you are about getting what you want and how much you value your relationship with the other participants.

Directions: Use the following scale to indicate the amount of your agreement with each of the following statements about how you deal with conflict.

- | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-------|---|---|---|---|----------------|
| | Strongly Disagree | | | | Strongly Agree |
| _____ | 1. I try to avoid stating my opinion in order not to create disagreements. | | | | |
| _____ | 2. When there is a disagreement, I try to satisfy the needs of the other people involved. | | | | |
| _____ | 3. I use my influence to get my position accepted by others. | | | | |
| _____ | 4. I try to find the middle course to resolve differences. | | | | |
| _____ | 5. I try to discuss an issue with others to find a solution acceptable to all of us. | | | | |
| _____ | 6. I keep my opinions to myself if they disagree with others' opinions. | | | | |
| _____ | 7. I usually go along with the desires of others in a conflict situation. | | | | |
| _____ | 8. I am usually firm about advocating my side of an issue. | | | | |

- _____ 9. When I negotiate, I usually win some and lose some.
- _____ 10. I like to work with others to find solutions to a problem that satisfy everyone.
- _____ 11. I try to avoid disagreements with others.
- _____ 12. I often go along with the recommendations of others in a conflict.
- _____ 13. I stick to my position during a conflict.
- _____ 14. I negotiate openly with others so that a compromise can be reached.
- _____ 15. To resolve a conflict, I try to blend the ideas of all of the people involved.

Scoring:

Add questions 1, 6, and 11 to obtain your Avoidance score.

Add questions 2, 7, and 12 to obtain your Accommodation score.

Add questions 3, 8, and 13 to obtain your Confrontation score.

Add questions 4, 9, and 14 to obtain your Compromise score.

Add questions 5, 10, and 15 to obtain your Collaboration score.

Discussion: Did you have a preferred conflict resolution style? What would encourage you to be more collaborative? How do you deal with people who use a different style of conflict resolution?

SOURCE: Adapted from Rahim, M. (1983).

ACTIVITY: OBSERVING CONFLICT RESOLUTION STYLES

Objective: Team members use one of the following five styles to handle conflicts and disagreements:

- Avoidance: trying to ignore the issue or deny that there is a problem
- Accommodation: giving up one's position in order to be agreeable
- Confrontation: acting aggressively and trying to get one's way

- **Compromise:** seeking a balance so everyone gets part of what they want
- **Collaboration:** searching for a solution that satisfies everyone

Activity: Observe a team or group discussion and note what happens when there is conflict or disagreement. As an alternative, divide a group and assign them positions on a debate topic. As another alternative, see the Team Leader’s Challenge, which presents a conflict with multiple roles (teachers, administrators, students, and parents) that could be assigned and used to create a conflict. Using Activity Worksheet 7.1, note the types of communications that occur during the conflict.

Analysis: How well did the group members handle the conflict? Which conflict resolution styles did the team members use? How effective were the conflict styles in persuading others? Did the team handle its conflicts in a constructive manner?

Discussion: How can the team better handle conflicts? What can be done to encourage more use of collaboration as a conflict resolution style? Would an outside facilitator be helpful? What would they do?

ACTIVITY WORKSHEET 7.1
Observing Conflict Resolution Styles

	<i>Group Members</i>					
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>
Gives ideas and suggestions						
Clarifies or organizes the discussion						
Criticizes or attacks others’ ideas						
Agrees with or supports others’ ideas						