



Unit - 4

Conflict Management

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Adjust to the supervisor's role with confidence.
- ✓ Develop your skills in listening, asking questions, resolving conflict, and giving feedback to employees.

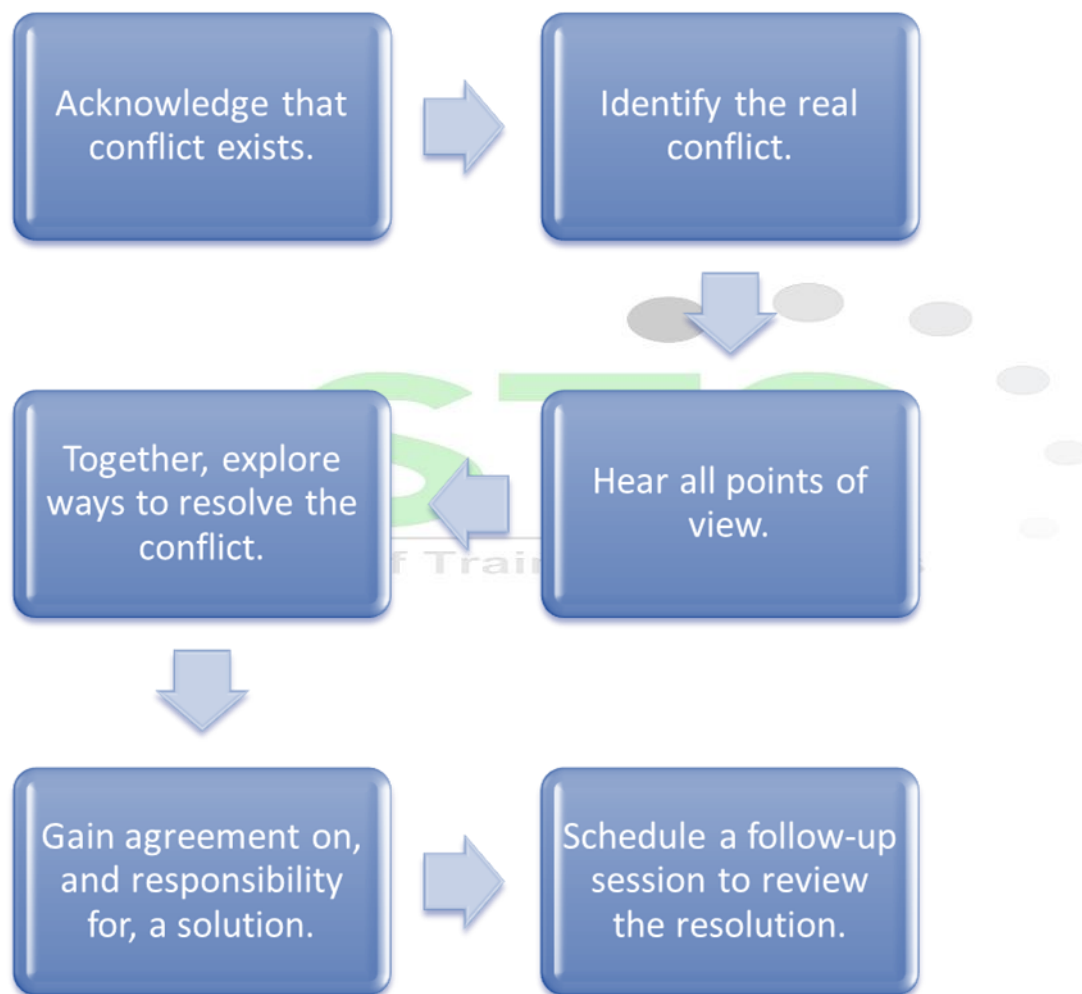
Unit 4

Conflict Management

Managing Conflict

The Conflict Resolution Process

There are six steps to use when your employees are in conflict:



Generally there are four times when supervisors should get involved in a conflict.

- When the employees who are in conflict come and ask you for help.
- When the other employees come to you and ask you to step in.
- When productivity and/or morale are dropping because of the conflict.
- When not dealing with the conflict is starting to make you (as a supervisor) look bad.

Breaking Down the Process

Let's look at those six steps to conflict resolution in greater detail.

Acknowledge that conflict exists.

Meet with the person you have a conflict with and address the fact that there is a problem. No conflict is going to be resolved unless both parties are sincere about making things work out.

Identify the real conflict.

We often discuss the surface issues rather than digging in and identifying the real problem. Sometimes we do this to prevent the conflict from escalating, and other times we do so to avoid hurting someone's feelings. However, unless we get to the root of the problem, it's likely to come back again and again. For example, Jamie may say that he has a problem with the schedule, when in actual fact he feels he is doing more than his fair share of the work.

Hear all points of view.

Communication is the ultimate tool for this situation. You must listen and clarify that you understand the other person. Afterward you can tell your story, taking care to ensure that they understand where you are coming from.



Explore ways to resolve the conflict together.

It's not necessary for there to be a "winner" in conflict resolution. Explore how to resolve the issue. Is Jamie getting more work than the rest of the team? How can things be better distributed if that's the case? How can he better understand the demands on the rest of the team if it is already evenly distributed?

Gain agreement on, and responsibility for, a solution.

The supervisor does not have to be the one to implement the solution, nor should you be telling others what they should do. Work on it together, in partnership, and have everyone involved determine who is responsible for what.

Schedule a follow-up session.

People will make commitments and agree on actions just to get out of a sticky situation. Make sure you follow up and ensure that things have been suitably resolved. This will help to acknowledge and preserve the value of the relationship, which is what resolving conflict is really about.

Managing Challenging Situations

Steps for a Difficult Conversation

It can help to have a framework for conversations that occur during conflict and challenging situations. We like this seven-step process as it can be modified to suit any situation.

Step 1: Make sure the receiver is ready.

Some people resent it when we pounce on them unannounced. Others are much more receptive when you simply ask permission. If you are unsure if someone is ready to talk, try these helpful icebreakers:

- Is this a good time to talk?
- Can we talk about something I've been thinking about?
- Would now be a good time to talk, or should I come back later?
- Can I have 15 minutes of your time? (Make sure you stick to just 15 minutes!)

Step 2: State your purpose.

Remember to use positive intent and to be aware of your body language. If you are professional and avoid anger, you can be pretty sure that the other person will too.

Step 3: Ask for their story.

Listen. Ask questions so that you understand. (You may want to refer back to the toolkit that we covered this morning.)

Step 4: Tell your side.

Focus on behaviors, numbers, and facts rather than criticizing the person. "Lesley, your work is always late," is too general, but "Lesley, your reports have been late six times this month," is specific. Be aware of your frame of reference as well as theirs to keep your message clear; reframe as needed.

Step 5: Get to the third side.

Synthesize both stories into the third story. This is an objective view of what's going on, so it'll be different than the first two stories. Here you can check for understanding by sharing what's coming out in both points of view.

Step 6: Evaluate the three F's.

To get to the heart of the problem, evaluate the 3 F's: **facts**, **frequency**, and **frustrated relationship**.

Facts

What are the facts of the issue? Create a list so that you do not get sidetracked while you plan your conversation. Don't drag in other stories or unrelated issues that have happened previously. If you are talking to someone about tardiness, then stick to that and leave things like poor report writing, gossiping, or not taking care of equipment out of the conversation.

Frequency

Make sure you have a very clear history of the frequency of the issue. In this case, how often is the individual late? How late are they?

Describe the pattern like this: "This is the second time that I've called this to your attention. You agreed it would not happen again. Now I am concerned that I cannot trust you to keep a promise."

Revealing that you notice a pattern brings the history to the forefront. The history is important because repeated frequency erodes your trust.

Frustrated Relationship

If your real concern is about the relationship, but you only focus on the pattern, then you are not likely to get the change that you are aiming for. You have to discuss what is important to you in terms of the relationship. Explain that when they repeatedly ignore your expectations to be on time, they aren't just demonstrating a lack of commitment to the job. They are eroding your trust in them, your trust in their ability to do their job, and the possibility of being trusted with assignments in the future.

Statements like the following can be helpful:

- I feel like I cannot trust you to get the work done.
- I feel like I am constantly nagging you and I don't like to do that.
- I feel like I can't trust you to keep the commitments you make.

Step 7: Create an action plan, if appropriate.

Make sure that the employee creates or at least contributes to the plan so that they agree to it. They need to be responsible for the outcomes, not blaming co-workers, life at home, or the company if things do not go as planned.

Step 8: Follow up.

If you commit to follow up with the employee every few days at first, and then less frequently, make sure that you do so. They may need support from you initially to keep on track.

Note

We don't want you to get so caught up in steps that you can't move through the conversation. This is the pretty natural flow of a problem-solving conversation, but it should help you when you plan when you take a few minutes to plan what you are going to say. Also remember that you have to listen in a conversation, and that once you know what's really behind a certain behavior or issue, plans can change. Be flexible and forward-thinking, and make your job easier!

Case Studies

Describe how you would handle each of these situations.



A staff member will not admit that their behavior was wrong.

An employee agrees with what you say, but you feel they are not really committed to change.

The individual refuses to accept responsibility for their results at work. They blame you for not providing enough support and other people for not doing their jobs properly.

Developing Relationships

Understanding Your Relationships

Step One



To begin, put yourself in the middle of the space below. Now, think of all the people that you deal with regularly in the course of a single day. Put these people around yourself. This is your people network.



Step Two

Now, assess the degree of difficulty you have working with each of these people. If you do not have much difficulty with someone, draw a straight line between yourself and them. If you have a lot of difficulty, draw a zigzagging line.

Step Three

Look at the people you get along well with (the straight line people). **Write down some of the things these people do that makes your interaction run smoothly.**

Next, move on to the people causing you difficulty. **What are they doing or not doing that makes your relationship so difficult? What do you want them to do instead?**

Sometimes we do things that add to the strain of a difficult relationship, although we don't really think that we are. Examine your involvement in these relationships and consider your role there. **Is there anything that you should be doing?**

Establishing Credibility

Whether you have recently started your position as a supervisor or you hope to in the near future, there are behaviors you can start now to help give you a leadership edge.

In his book *Tribes: We Need You to Lead Us*, author Seth Godin says that if you don't have anyone following you, you are not a leader. What kind of leader will you be, or are you?

In their book *The Leadership Challenge*, James Kouzes and Barry Posner write about five practices of exemplary leadership, one principle of which is that leadership opportunities are everywhere to be in a leadership position in order to be a leader. You can take the lead, create opportunities, and achieve your goals no matter what your job title is.

Further Reading: