# CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Content

Conflict Management

Tensions between individuals or teams are human, and they are likely always to be where people interact.

Even a misunderstood joke, a careless statement understood as criticism or misunderstandable body language can end fatally. It is all the more important to learn more about good communication and conscious behavior for conflict prevention.

In conflict situations, you can now conceive yourself as a victim or perpetrator and accept it as a never-changing course of life. Or you consider it constructive as a good training opportunity to develop yourself both as a leader, as well as to expand your conflict-solving skills.

Persistent conflicts should also be considered as a consequence of leadership behavior. Since, depending on the degree of escalation, the consequences can be very destructive you are required as a superior in case of conflict. Unfortunately, because we do not have a magic wand to resolve conflicts with magic, we should follow a clear strategy.
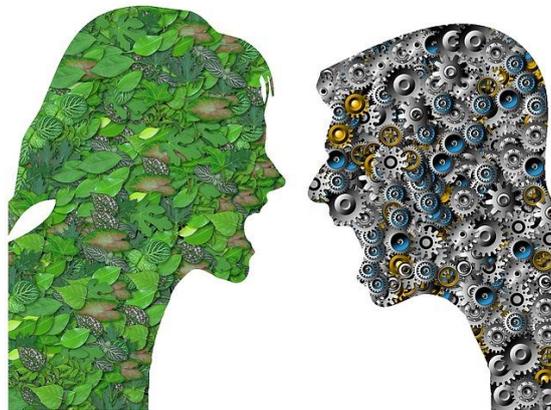
If the conflict has already been recognized, we want to intervene as quickly as possible so that it does not even really emerge, or bring about a solution as fast as possible. The solution optimally works from both sides, but can also be aspired to from one side alone.
Of course, the most elegant way to handle conflicts is not to let it happen. If one recognizes the first signs, ideally the impending conflict can be clarified immediately.

Unfortunately, even though prevention is actually the best and most effective way, it is also somewhat ungrateful, as it is barely noticed nor

acknowledged. It is not a matter for people who like to focus on their exploits. For those who like to get results quickly and often rise to high positions. As with a fire, the rescue firefighter is the hero rather than the one who keeps checking the fire protection conditions, draws attention to risk factors and thus tacitly prevents the fire, right?

Today we want to see how we can quietly and efficiently identify and avoid conflicts in advance.

What Is A Conflict?

When can we really talk about a conflict? Of course, the transition is fluent, but there are some clear clues or criteria for a conflict (according to Rosenstiel, Molt & Rüttinger, 2005):

➢ There is a tension situation
➢ There are two or more parties involved
➢ The requirements of the other participants are perceived as incompatible
➢ There is an awareness of opposition/rivalry.

So a mere disagreement is not a conflict unless there are other criteria such as incompatibility and mutual awareness. Moreover, it is also not a conflict if one party does not realize that the other party is harming it. Sometimes it even goes so far that no harmful acts have yet taken place, but one party believes that this is so and reacts accordingly.

Conflicts are not inherently negative. On the contrary, they are partly necessary to ensure progress and development. The art is to allow these functional conflicts and to prevent only the others.

Let's take a closer look at the different forms of conflict.

relationship based	fact based
manifest	latent
dysfunctional	functional

In most functional conflict situations, the actual situation is to be improved for all concerned. They are therefore indispensable for processes of innovation. We often find these in change management, thus change processes. And since people generally do not face changes in such a positive way, any transformation naturally causes friction.

When the conflict has been resolved, then the improved new factual level usually serves to benefit the parties involved.

The opposite is a dysfunctional conflict. Take a strike as an example. They often end up at the detriment of both (the flight crew does not reach their goals, airlines lose a lot of money and generate dissatisfied customers; in the worst case scenario staff might even have to be laid off). Other airlines will be more frequented during this time, and perhaps even permanently, former regular customers will leave. The third party wins in this case.

At the same time, a strike can serve as a good example of a manifest conflict. Here the smoldering or latent conflict has broken out.

This latent conflict is often difficult to discern because, as with a volcano, the surface stays calm for a very long time. But here, too, there are single signs, such as increased turnover in the department or increased expressions of dissatisfaction. In the direct relationship, this would be declining communication, disputes over trivialities, etc.

A conflict that is often found in everyday leadership is the factual conflict. In the competition for a position or an attractive workplace, two or more employees fight for the bet. Since in many cases these conflicts lead to meaningful changes and improvements, they are often also functional conflicts.

In relationship conflicts, it behaves differently. Many emotions are often involved here. To stay with the same example, this could be an already assigned job. The inferior of the two competitors, perhaps both, if there was a laughing third, has not defeated the defeat and is resentful. Sabotage, blackmailing and even bullying can be the consequences. Objectivity or functional solution cannot be mentioned here.

The longer a conflict can manifest itself and ends in open confrontation, the more difficult it becomes to deal with and thus a solution.

What Happens Physically?

In every situation we are only flesh-and-blood people, with our hormones, biological reactions, and our genes.
Conflict situations are physiologically a stressful situation. What does that mean?
When we are under stress, feeling pressured, we tend to focus on three strategies (2 by Walter Cannon, 1 by Jeffrey Allan Grays).

➢ fight / attack
➢ escape
➢ Subjugate/feign death

The hypothalamus is the center of the stress response. With the control of the autonomic nervous system and the activation of the pituitary gland, it fulfills a dual function. In its first function, the organs are controlled (heartbeat, blood vessels, airways, and muscles, including facial muscles / facial expressions), and the adrenaline flow is stimulated, which stimulates the spleen, bone marrow, and liver. More sugar is provided as an energy source. In addition, the thyroid gland is activated and ACTH, a stress hormone secreted, which releases about 30 other hormones in preparation for an emergency.

When considered neurobiologically, conflict activates the pain center of the human brain.

A lot of energy is spent, which is missing elsewhere. And that is certainly not a goal to strive for, right?

What Are The Consequences Of A Conflict (Job, Private)?

But now to the ~~emergence~~emergency. Conflicts can develop in many ways. It can, e.g~~.~~, to ~~the~~ nature and the external circumstances, to opposing personalities, evaluations, prejudices or misunderstandings. Rosenstiel published framework conditions for the conflict in 2007. The more that applies, the more likely a conflict will be.

Here I briefly discuss the following origins for conflicts:

- ➢ Nebulous expectations
- ➢ Excessive diplomacy

- `cannot smell '
- Inferiority and heteronomy
- Unclear roles
- Symptoms of hidden conflicts
- Implied / Indirect Punishment
- 'warning shot' niceness
- Negotiation
- Misunderstanding of diplomacy
- strong group formation
- unnecessary coercion for coordination

Expectations

Wouldn't it be easier if we knew for sure what expectations other people have of us?

Often, we implicitly expect each other to behave according to our ideas. However, these remain unspoken, often unconscious even for us, leading to statements such as:

- "Usually ...."
- "That's obvious."

Karlheinz Wolfgang has put it in a nutshell: "Expectations are one-sided contracts of which the other knows nothing."

Above all, this can lead to awkward situations between the supervisor and the employee.
After all, it is not really helpful if you do not know what is expected of you, but you fall into disfavor when you are displeased.

But why are expectations not expressed clearly?

This is often associated with fears; ironically, the fear of conflict.

Do you have a colleague or a colleague, who needs a lot of confirmation from the outside, is rather vulnerable and remarkably nice in all circumstances? How does he handle difficult situations?
Sometimes the otherwise nice colleagues express themselves in a very derogatory way about absent ones, leave something to be desired in terms of reliability, or embarrass others through unfinished tasks.

It is helpful to keep in mind that it is a paradox to both want to do everything right while developing a healthy, open culture of conflict. A special eye for latent or even destructive activities is certainly appropriate. Of course this does not mean that you should put all nice people under general suspicion.

Excessive Diplomacy

Politics in larger companies are becoming more important. You've got to be careful not to step on anyone's feet. You do not know who knows whom. As a result of this diplomacy, there is no real argument between colleagues, employees or supervisors. Again, it may happen that is spoken only in the absence of people. But is this really the culture that drives you and your team?

In the worst case, something is blurted out of the rumor mill maybe it's someone who wants to 'revenge' on it for a previous case, but also generally shying away from conflict. There are several scenarios, all of which do not really show constructive conflict management.
But it can happen as well, that you just cannot stand each other right from the beginning, what has an increasingly negative influence on the cooperation. The likelihood that everything just restricts itself without taking appropriate measures is rather very low.

Inferiority
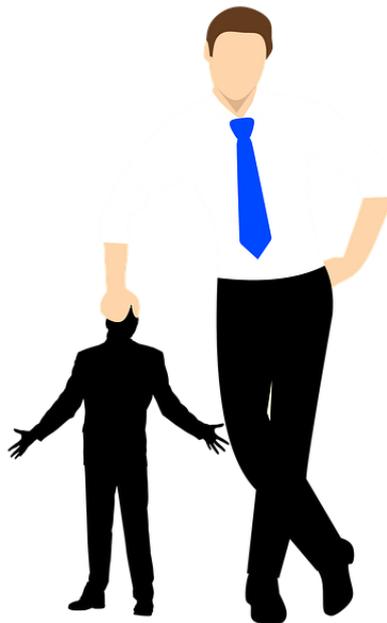
The feeling of inadequacy can mainly be triggered consciously or unconsciously by anyone. If one feels superior or is perceived by the second party, e.g, due to hierarchical structures, this can lead to conflicts.

Another conflict triggered by hierarchies can arise from the dispute over competences and responsibilities. Often this form of conflict is based on insufficient framework conditions and responsibilities.

This type of conflict should be avoided by the greatest possible clarity and constructive communication.

Also, in this context, the cause should be led by the feeling of pressure from others, so foreign determination. It leads to reactance, which can manifest itself in open, as well as hidden discussions and evolving conflicts.

Negotiation

There is a negotiation in every relationship; about taking over orders, processes, salary, priorities etc.

This provides fertile ground for conflicts. But if you're aware of that and you're looking for a solution, it's usually at a very low level of escalation. In this scenario, there are always unspoken or inappropriate expectations. Also legitimate or unjustified claims are made, which may lead to further conflicts. And, of course, emotions and beliefs always play their part, which should be considered in the process.

The feeling of belonging to a group can strengthen a group and is also important. Problems can arise when two strong groups work against each other, discriminate or exclude each other through their strongly shaped identities. Mostly, no information is shared with each other to give `the others' no advantage. Reorganization, merger or simply lousy leadership can create such situations in the professional environment.

What can happen to groups also applies to individuals. Different values and cultures or even big discrepancies in the personality can easily lead to disagreements or simply misunderstandings and manifest in conflicts.

How Can You Prevent A Conflict?

What solutions and preventive measures can one generate from this rather long list of causes?

Here we come back to the differentiation of functional (constructive) and dysfunctional (destructive) conflicts. The costs for the latter can be very high, such as missing professional motivation, high turnover, low quality up to mobbing.

But what does this mean for our implementation in everyday life?

Be aware of the level and nature of the conflict. And as a consequence always try to grasp conflicts on the latent level, especially dysfunctional ones and those on the relationship level.

Share your knowledge with your team. The more team members can pay attention to what kind of conflict the higher the chances of intervening early.

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Also, attentive and trained team members will also be more likely to do so themselves using, e.g, communication, constructive feedback, and negotiation not to let conflict arise. Above all, the relationship level comes into play here.

Relationship conflicts like to disguise themselves as a factual conflict. Therefore, always check their justification. If this does not exist or is questionable, this may just as well be a relationship conflict. If you've missed it once, you'll probably notice it soon. Because the two parties will certainly find a new reason, which will then occupy you again.

The longer a conflict can manifest itself and ends in open confrontation, the more difficult it becomes to deal with and thus a solution.

It is basically helpful to find out the roots of the conflict.

These 4 questions can help you:

> What is the conflict (factual and emotional)?
> What are the respective interests of both parties?
> What are the consequences of the conflict?
> How do the affected persons feel?

As a guideline we can take here the information of Friedrich Glasl, who found out that conflicts arise in interpersonal relationships when there is an incompatibility in thinking, wanting, feeling and acting.

Consequently, it is important to pay close attention to preventive measures.

Before we come to further tips for prevention, I would like to mention a basic rule, which you should always apply (in your leadership role):.

> ➢ positive attitude

Let's assume that you are not directly involved either as a supervisor, work colleague, friend or family member, but in the role of mediator or arbitrator.

It is best if you generally approach with a positive attitude to all parties involved in the conflict, even if you may already suspect that the following part is not quite easy.

Your positive attitude is often transferred to the opponents, which makes the aggressive mood flatten faster.

The same applies, of course, if you yourself are a party in conflict! It is beneficial to find peace and a solution-oriented approach to the other party.

<p style="color:orange; text-align:center">Concentrate on the desired end result, so the solution</p>

You work much more constructively if you proceed in a solution-oriented and goal-oriented way. The search for a scapegoat will not get you anywhere.

Remember that every person has reasons for his behavior. See if you can identify the causes for your employees. Then you can also start there directly, to reach a solution as well as long-term results and a better understanding of your employees.

Address it early

It will not help you if you look away and talk a nice situation.

It happens again and again that executives do not really know how to deal with difficult employees or situations. As a consequence, they do not do anything first. However, that involves a few dangers.

Inaction is not particularly conducive to your respect or reputation as a leader. In general, the risk that the motivation in the team suffers and the interaction among colleagues might be explosive.

It is still the best approach to discuss conflicts early on, before the fronts harden, even if you are personally unaffected by the behavior. So you can proactively avert massive conflicts in the team.

With the following questions you can address the root of the conflict:

> What are the emotional and technical aspects?
> What interests are involved?
> What are the consequences?
> How do the respective parties feel about the situation?

Excluded from the public

Solve conflicts always bilaterally and not in front of an audience. See that the two conflicting parties have a quiet room. Further listeners or eavesdroppers mind increase their defensive behaviour. Because due to a loss of face in front of other people a win-win solution for the parties is almost impossible.

Listen

I know that the air in conflict situations is often very charged and highly strained. And it is exactly this tense situation that makes it physiologically very difficult for the involved parties to concentrate on the 'oponent'. In this situation, hormones tend to dampen our senses, so that we restrict ourselves to the two basic solutions: flight or attack.

Every party has its own opinion, or 'personal truth' usually firmly in mind and tries to make it clear to their opponent of conflict. After all, it clearly seems the only logical approach.

But it is precisely in this situation that it the most constructive to listen closely. Be prepared to empathize with both, with you as a mediator, or as one of the parties involved in your opposite. Listen impartially and try to hear the underlying message. Stay open in a neutral way to hear different options to wishes and solutions.

Communicate clearly

This is probably the rule with which you will most often come in many situations in everyday life. Get used to communicating clearly how a situation affects you. Use words like 'I have the impression ...', 'I mean to have heard ...'.

If you are involved in the conflict, express yourself how you would imagine the ideal situation in the future, for example your desired situation. If you are in the role of the mediator, please do ask both parties to do so.

A possible phrasing could look like this:

> ➤ `I would wish that we greet each other politely / respectfully in the morning ...... or ... I would appreciate we keep the tone calm under all circumstances .... or ... ..excepting it'.

Never rely on someone reading your thoughts, but express yourself clearly and in a calm tone.

Direct confrontations, accusations with the direct address 'you' or personal attacks tend to lead to resistance and can deepen the conflict.

Reappraise
It is not always possible to bring about a harmonious solution quickly. Sometimes a longer process is necessary, in which some things have to be worked out first. It is not good to sweep essential aspects of the dispute under the carpet just to get a quick fix. Often, this solution will not last. Always try to aim for a win-win situation.

Refer to neutral position
As a supervisor, it is rather counterproductive to provide a solution, as it

is very unlikely to bring about a real win-win situation. Try to resolve the conflict without proposing a solution. Support the two parties in the conflict to develop their own.

<p style="color:orange; text-align:center">Reflection and task: Conflict Management</p>

Which techniques do I already use?

How can I integrate useful techniques into everyday life?

How does it make sense to share my knowledge of the techniques with my staff?