

Managing Conflict Part Three



Dr. Ali Qassem

www.aliqasseminternational.com

Conflict, as mentioned in the previous articles, is inevitable and an inherent part of any organization. However, research indicates that unresolved or poorly resolved conflict can make the conflict worse and result in negative consequences; high turnover, job withdrawal behaviour, low morale and the like.

Therefore, it is important to find a suitable resolution for interpersonal conflict situations among the organization's employees. Successful conflict resolution, however, often depends on the employee's immediate superior.

The manner in which a manager or a supervisor handles and deals with a conflict situation influences and determines whether the conflict has a positive or a negative impact on the individuals or the groups involved and the organization.

Robert Townsend, who was an American business executive, author and who had the credit for transforming Avis into car renting giant, said, "A good manager does not try to eliminate conflict; he tries to keep it from wasting the energies of his people. If you are the boss and your people fight you openly when they think that you are wrong – that is healthy"

The manager or the supervisor must act as a counselor who helps the conflict parties reach an acceptable solution. He or she must have the ability to recognize the type of conflict; whether intrapersonal, interpersonal, inter-group, organizational, or political.

This allows him or her to direct the conflict accordingly to a positive outcome, rather than destruction.

Psychologists suggest that there are few conflict resolution strategies and techniques. These strategies are problem-solving, expanding resources, compromising, smoothing, withdrawing, authoritative command, altering and confrontation using the "Interest-Based Relational Approach".

Problem-solving strategy is a face to face meeting in order to identify the causes of the conflict and to find immediate solution to resolve it. When the lack of a resource, such as opportunities for advancement, causes conflict, providing additional sources and opportunities for the conflict parties may be the appropriate solution.

Compromising is effective in dealing with interpersonal conflict when it benefits both parties and when each party is willing to give up something of value. It is often used when the parties believe that the issue is not very important. However, compromising leaves the real cause of the conflict unsolved and provides the basis for future conflict.

Smoothing is to emphasize the common interests and to minimize the differences between the conflict parties. It is to pretend that the conflict does not exist. This strategy does not lead to a long-term solution and generally creates more conflicts.

Forcing a solution by an authoritative command from the management is another strategy to resolve an interpersonal conflict. However, this strategy, like the two previous ones, only provides the basis for future conflict.

Another strategy is altering, which is changing something. This includes transfer employees, redesign jobs, and coordinate positions. Resolving conflict by confrontation and using the "Interest-Based Relational Approach" work well because it respects individuals' differences, feelings and opinions while helping them understand the real cause of the conflict.

However, there are basic rules and guidelines that must be followed for this strategy to work; be calm, be patient, have respect and listen before you talk; you have to understand the whole issue before supporting or defending either party.

In addition, when you are resolving a conflict, encourage parties to communicate their feelings, needs, and concerns freely, do not try to place blame, identify areas of mutual agreement, emphasize mutual benefits to both parties, and make sure that good relationships are the first priority,.

People have preferred conflict resolution style and deal with conflict in many ways based on their prior experience and other factors. However, it is important in resolving a conflict to make sure that the involved parties understand that the conflict may be a mutual problem that is better to be solved.

Karl Theodor Jaspers, the German psychiatrist and philosopher said, "Conflicts may be the sources of defeat, lost life and a limitation of our potentiality but they may also lead to greater depth of living and the birth of more far-reaching unities, which flourish in the tensions that engender them".