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Chapter 18: Conflict resolution

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CHAPTER 18: CONFLICT RESOLUTION

A brief introduction to the field

Dealing with conflict involves every communication skill from listening to reasoning and is an essential skill in one's personal and business life.

Simple explanations of conflict resolution compare win/win negotiations with win/lose or lose/lose negotiations. However, more subtle analysis of conflict resolution explores multiple and competing goals and examines expressed and underlying interests and needs of the parties. In a negotiating situation experienced negotiators explore the level of preparation of other negotiators in terms of how much information they have gathered about their own and others' situation, their aims and goals, their previous history of negotiating and their interpersonal relationship skills. A competent negotiator must also know how to handle the process of the negotiation – how much to concede, at which point in the negotiations concessions promote a solution and at which point they lead to further expectations of concessions. An even more competent negotiator is skilled in reframing the issues and the resources involved in such a way that needs and goals are met on both sides. Negotiations can still continue with individuals who wish to bargain competitively and who do not take a problem-solving cooperative approach, but ultimately such negotiations conducted in a spirit of mutual mistrust are unlikely to lead to lasting solutions once bluff, deception and hostility are discovered. So negotiations depend on both sides wanting to solve the problem. Strategies such as resource to legal means or strikes are the outcome when negotiations fail. Almost always such replacements for negotiating in good faith are more costly and more damaging, so it is important for negotiation skills to be widely used in the community.

Quotable quotes writing exercise

Conflict is “an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards, and interference from the other party in achieving their goals” (Hocker & Wilmot, 1991, p. 12).

In the form of a paragraph give an account from your own experience which illustrates this definition.

“Argumentativeness includes the ability to recognise controversial issues in communication situations, to present and defend positions on the issues and to attack the positions which other people take” (Infante, 1988,)

In the form of a paragraph (p. 69) describe an individual you consider to be skilled at “argumentativeness”.

Discussion exercise

The city of Beretta's tramcars are an institution. Souvenir shops sell them in metal in all authentic detail as well as in those clear plastic domes which create a snow storm when you turn them upside down (although it never snows in Beretta).

In March this year the tramcars came to a stop. The new Minister for Transport, Norm Intransigent, saw that tramcars were losing money. Pondering the problem, he decided to investigate, feeling that all the reports in the world would probably change nothing except the number of trees in the forests. So, leaving Robert his chauffeur and his Fairlane safely ensconced at Parliament House, he took a tramcar all the way out to his leafy suburban home, leaving at 2 pm to avoid the hordes of city commuters, as he had no desire to stand for an hour and a half with his nose squashed against someone else's armpits.

He immediately saw the problem. Labour costs. Not only was there a driver, but there was a conductor who most of the time lounged against the rails and very occasionally helped a young mother up with her pram, or an old fellow with a walking stick who found the steps too high.

After trying out his ideas on his wife (who agreed with him) over a leisurely cup of tea he called Robert, his driver, to come and get him because he reasoned that by then his tramcar would be

swarming with school kids armed with heavy bags of books which they would be likely to swing into his shins.

Back in the office he set about putting his ideas into action by issuing the following orders.

1. Immediately install ticket machines at the front of the tramcar and have drivers monitor the passengers.
2. Give all conductors notice and redundancy packages of two weeks pay.

The effect of this was that the Transport workers went on strike, stopping the tramcars. Norm Intransigent was quoted by *The Rage* newspaper as saying, "They can strike until they are blue in the face. We were elected to bring efficiency to the city of Beretta and bring it we will. I run my ministry like a business. It's user pays from now on. The Transport Department will provide a low cost, no frills service for people."

The public was incensed. Old ladies went on for hours on talkback radio about how they wouldn't be able to get their shopping carts up the tramcar steps. Striking conductors rang in to say that people wouldn't be able to pay their fare at peak hour because they'd be stuck down the back of the tramcar in the peak hour crowds. Drivers said they'd be held responsible for the murder and mayhem that was bound to happen, especially when they had school kids on board with no one to supervise them.

The Premier decided to transfer Norm Intransigent to the Department of the Environment. He hoped the new Minister, Con Listener, would solve the problem and get the trams running again.

Form into five groups; each group taking one of the following tasks:

1. Draw up a list of factors that contributed to this situation.
2. Prepare a negotiation strategy for the Department of Transport's negotiations with the Union.
3. Prepare a negotiation strategy for the Union.
4. Suggest ways in which similar attempts to change public institutions might be handled in the future.
5. As Norm Intransigent's new public relations officers, respond with a memo to his request "What can I do to get people to co-operate with my ideas in the future? Tell me how to manage public opinion."

Finally, each group make an oral report to the whole group using the format:

1. First Presenter: explains the main idea and mentions three sub-ideas;
2. Second Presenter: outlines the 1st sub-idea;
 - shows visual aid-graph to support idea and gives supporting evidence;
3. Third Presenter: Begins with anecdote; and presents 2nd sub-idea
4. Second Presenter: Presents 3rd sub-idea and statistics presented graphically;
5. First Presenter: sums up key idea.

Team task

"Neighbours and the Dutch Elm Tree":

Scenario:

Fifteen years ago David and Helen Jenkins built their home in the leafy Brisbane suburb of Indooroopilly. Choosing their block because it included a magnificent fifty year old Dutch Elm tree which was home to many birds, they sited their house to take advantage of it. This tree growing at the border of their property is one of the few large Dutch Elm trees left in the world because the Dutch Elm disease which has destroyed the character of many American and European towns and cities once shaded by these trees has not yet reached Brisbane. A specialist tree-doctor has declared the tree fit for another 100 years.

Michael and Lindy Blore moved up from Melbourne three months ago and bought the Neo-Tudor house with 5 bedrooms, 3 bathrooms, plus lounge, study, family and rumpus rooms which Brimstone

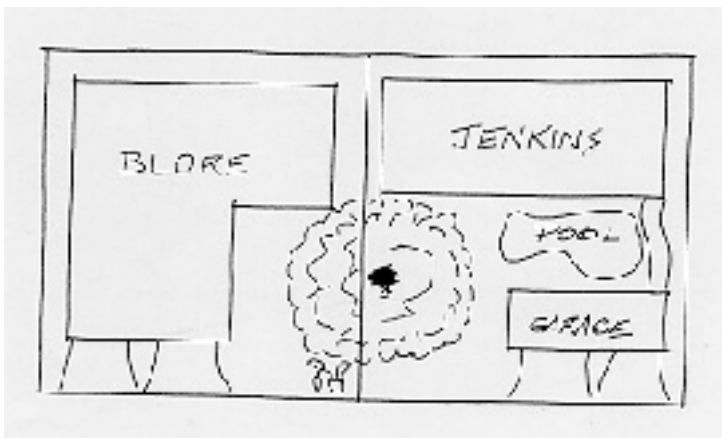
Constructions built on the last remaining block in the subdivision shaded by David and Helen Jenkins' fifty year old Dutch Elm.

Because the Blore house covers almost the entire area of their block, the only area large enough to site a swimming pool is the patio outside their family room and parents' retreat underneath the overhanging branches of the huge Dutch Elm tree. However, the pool construction man has advised them that the Jenkins' fifty year old tree has grown so large that not only does it overshadow the Blore's block but that its roots probably cover the area where the Blore's wish to place their pool. He feels that excavation in the area will possibly kill the tree, but that if the tree does not die and the pool is put in the area where the Blore's want it to go, the tree will possibly reclaim the area, sending its roots into the area of the pool and at the very least disrupting paving and perhaps undermining the foundations of their house.

Lindy Blore has left all her friends behind in Melbourne and was apprehensive about moving. Helen Jenkins has been very helpful in easing Lindy into Brisbane networks. She introduced her to a group of friends who play tennis on Wednesday and has advised her about which doctor and dentist to use, given her the telephone number of the milkman and newsagent and arranged to have her put on the same roster at the school tuckshop. Helen also advised Lindy not to let her children arrange cane toad races on the front lawn because of the danger from the poison sacs in the toads' glands.

Kate and Simon, the Blore children, are well settled into their new school, have joined the swimming club, and belong to the gymnastics club and Little Athletics and are already swapping computer games and sleeping over at the houses of other children in the neighbourhood. However, all is not well in the Blore household. Lindy Blore is appalled by the noise made by the Brisbane birds, particularly those resting in the Dutch Elm and by the bats which nightly swoop in to shelter in the tree. Bat droppings soil the patio which she complains to Michael "smell like a Carlton pub". She has told Michael that she will not be happy until the tree has gone.

Despite her wish to see the last of the Dutch Elm, Lindy Blore is a keen gardener and, nostalgic for Melbourne's Lemon Scented Gums, she has planted two of them at the corner of their property alongside the brick fence constructed by the Jenkins just before the Blore's block was built upon. In three months the Lemon Scented Gums have grown two metres and the Jenkins have discovered that their eventual height in Brisbane is 50 metres.



Unable to agree to the Blore's suggestion that they chop down the Dutch Elm Tree, the parties have come to the Neighbourhood Dispute Centre seeking mediation of their dispute.

Michael Blore is open about the above situation but he is so financially committed that after he puts in the pool he will not have funds to move. He does not want his financial situation revealed to anyone and he would prefer his wife to remain hazy about it too.

*The Mediator***Why Mediation?**

Have each party outline their response:

“I have decided to approach a mediator for help in solving this dispute because

Michael Blore: _____

Lindy Blore: _____

Helen Jenkins: _____

David Jenkins: _____

Knowing about opening statements

Opening statements are often an expression of a party’s maximal position and often do not take others’ needs and interests into consideration. They are put forth to educate other parties about how strongly a party feels about an issue or to express how far a party wants an opponent to yield. For these reasons, opening statements and the positions expressed therein are rarely accepted as representations of legitimate interests by other disputants, who both understand and expect parties to adhere to the practice of making a large initial demand. Once a proposal is rejected, one or more parties usually take the initiative to propose another solution or counterposition (Moore, 1986, p. 200).

Occasionally, however, the party who initiated a proposal or position does not recognise the categorical rejection of his or her alternative, and doggedly adheres to the original position. The party ignores the need for alternative proposals, assuming that if the right persuasive technique is used or the correct influence is exerted, the other party will concede. This results in a deadlock (Moore, p. 210).

Opening statements: disputants state the problem.

Michael Blore: _____

Lindy Blore: _____

Helen Jenkins: _____

David Jenkins: _____

From these, you as a mediator help the clients

Define the parameters of the dispute,

Clarify the issues and interests,

Develop an agenda and

Through questioning **identify common and conflicting interests** (Moore, p. 199).

Discussion exercise: Negotiating With Your Neighbours

Brian and Nicole have been living in their present house for 10 years. They like living there because their neighbours are stable family people who do not bother them. Recently, however, one family with four teenage boys has bought a set of drums. They practice at odd times – 7.30 am., 3.00 pm. Sundays and during their school holidays. Brian and Nicole have had endless discussions about the drumming and wish they could do something about it. They wonder if their neighbours realise how loud it sounds for them.

1. In groups of three make a list of options and their possible consequences, and come to a decision about what Brian and Nicole and their children, who are also annoyed by the drumming, should do or not do.
2. If you did decide to negotiate what would you do to prepare for the negotiation? What would be your opening statement?
3. Finally, discuss your suggested options in a group and list them on a whiteboard with their possible consequences.

Options	Possible Consequences
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Decision about action or inaction and reason.

Preparation

Opening Statement

Likely response by the other party to your opening statement.

Your response to the likely response

Individual tasks

What are you—a Koala, a Dolphin, a Wombat, a Shark, a Budgie or a House Cat?

Decide which description fits you best and put on a label. Find someone else in the class who has your label and give one another examples of Budgie, Dolphin or Cat behaviour.

Approach someone wearing a different label and share examples of behaviour which fit your respective labels.

Koala

Everyone's friend –usually gives in–hates conflict and avoids it as much as possible because he/she wants to get along with people. Nothing else matters–hates arguments. Nice–easy to get on with. Agreeable.

Dolphin

Smooth, smart, looks good, very good at public relations, but a bit of a show-off. Moves around in a crowd and follows anyone who has a new idea, but doesn't stay around to solve problems; leaves them to someone else to follow through and do the work. Can be defensive when challenged which makes them hard to work with.

Wombat

At the first sign of conflict goes to ground, backs down, gets into a hole. Avoids talking about anything that will lead to conflict and backs off from people who want to talk through things.

Shark

Has to win. Goes for the jugular. Forces the issue. Pushes people around. Argues long and loud. There are winners and losers and Sharks want to win at all costs. They attack, intimidate, use power tactics and abuse to get their way.

Budgie

Everyone likes them. Problem solvers. Talk all the time trying to solve the problem. Very loyal to their partners but work well in groups flying around everywhere looking for solutions. Work at problems until solved. Talk rather than fight. Friendly. Good listeners.

House Cat

Basically out for themselves, but can cajole and persuade when necessary. Can be nice when satisfied–curl up in people's laps when they get what they want. Their approach is subtle – they rub themselves up against people and purr to create a good impression and get what they want. They don't help others though or solve anyone else's problems but their own. They are individualists and don't work well in groups – if another cat has what they want, they either slink up and take it or they attack the other and fight.

Writing tasks

Write a paragraph using the model on p. 69 “I like being a (One of either a Koala, Dolphin, Wombat, Shark, Budgie or House Cat.) _____ because _____, but I’m interested in learning more about how to be a _____ because _____.”

Write a paragraph from the model on p. 69 arguing whether or not it is positive and constructive to be known as an effective arguer.

Speech opportunities

Impromptu speech – “How we solve conflict in our house”.

Sources of information

- Bailey, T., Killey, J. and White, P. (1992). *It’s a deal! Win-win negotiating* (video recording). London: BBC Training Videos.
- Hooker, J.L., and Wilmot, W.W. (1991). *Interpersonal conflict* (3rd ed.). Dubuque, Iowa: Brown.
- Latimer, T. (Producer), & Inman, J. (Director). (1982). *The art of negotiating* (video recording), Brentford, Middlesex: Rank Aldis.
- Moore, C.W. (1986). *The mediation process: Practical strategies for resolving conflict*. Jossey-Barr, San Francisco.

Assertion Versus Aggression

Quotable quote for discussion

“In a culture where individualism is as highly valued as it is in the United States, people are expected to take the initiative in advancing their personal interests and well-being and to be direct and assertive with others . . . interpersonal competition and a modest level of abrasiveness are tolerated and even expected” (Wenzhong & Grove, 1985, p. 23).

A brief introduction to the field

Young people are told that they need to assert themselves to prevent others taking advantage of them while at the same time avoiding being too aggressive. Aggression is less often praised, although to some it seems to be a desired characteristic as in “an aggressive and dynamic business developer” or “an aggressive batsman (or woman)”. We can distinguish “verbal aggression” from the “aggression” that describes being fearless and ready to take risks. Assertion then can come to mean looking out for your own interests, while not denying the interests, rights and dignity of others. Verbally aggressive people deny these rights by attacking the person they are dealing with rather than the problem. The verbally aggressive fall into the category of “difficult people”. They use the emotions of anger or pretended anger to create fear and diminish self-esteem. In others attack is their usual strategy and everywhere they see opponents. In the short term they can seem to prosper, but over the long haul they are avoided and bypassed when solutions are sought which will leave all ready to work together in the future. Verbally aggressive people seek to have the last word, seek out weaknesses of others and exploit them with personal jokes or attacks. Assertive people on the other hand see that just as they have rights, so too, do others and that their interaction with others should not diminish rights on either side but instead concentrate energies on solving problems.

Sources of information

- Quarry, P., and Ash, E., (1993). *Being assertive* (video recording) Middle Park, VIC: Ash Quarry Productions.
- Smith, M.J. (1984). *When I say no I feel guilty* (video recording). Hollywood, CA: Cally Curtis 10.

Interviews

Quotable quotes

“Go to an interview prepared to talk about what you’ve done in the past in specific terms and relate those examples with confidence” (Marilyn Smith).

A brief introduction to the field

Interviews combine the communication skills of listening and non-verbal awareness, understanding another’s background and culture and the ability to draw people out and explore their ideas and feelings. A good interviewer has enough background information with which to avoid asking embarrassingly ignorant questions. An expert in non-verbal communication, the good interviewer is alert to what is not being said, what is avoided and what makes the interviewee afraid or proud. While good interviewers plan and structure the interview so that their purposes are achieved, they can however, abandon their set structure if a broad question raises issues which seem more important to the purpose of the interview. The interview is thus responsive to the interaction it creates.

Team task

1. In a group of four (three interviewers and an interviewee), role play job selection interviews in your field—law, communication, public service, computing.
 - a) Briefly describe the job the interviewee has applied for. Brainstorm for ideas about what the you as the interviewers might want to know.
 - b) Formulate these ideas into questions.
 - c) Prioritise the questions, ensuring that some are open, some hypothetical, some direct and some indirect.
 - d) Two members of the group role play the interviewers, another the interviewee, the third an observer who writes a description of observations about the verbal and non-verbal aspects of the interview.

Observations

- (e) Write a paragraph using the model on p. 69 on “Effective Interviewer Behaviour” or on “Effective Interviewee Behaviour”.
2. In groups of three develop an interview schedule for a job advertised in your field. The job advertisement may describe the kinds of competencies required. If it doesn’t, contact a professional in your field and ask them to describe the kinds of work that are done in the job. Make a list of these specific skills.

As well as specific skills for particular jobs, Windschuttle (1995) suggests that interviewers are looking for people:

- who have good oral and written communication
- who are able to analyse, judge and make decisions
- who can cope with stress and
- who will be temperamentally suited to the job

Combine these general skills with your list of specific skills and develop a list of questions for a structured interview with you as the interviewer. Remember that you will be attempting to find out if the person you are interviewing will be suitable for the job, so make the questions elicit specific examples of behaviour from the candidate. For example, if the job requires someone who is able to

cope with stress, your question might be. “We need someone who can cope with stress in this job. Can you tell us about a stressful situation in your last job and how you coped with it?” When your group has developed a set of questions combine with another group. The combined group should have two sets of questions.

From this group of six people elect two each of interviewers, interviewees and observers who take notes of the interaction and act as mentors in the reflection phase of this task.

Interviewees should not answer questions that they have helped devise, although it is better if the interviewer helped compose the questions.

Interviewers and interviewees should be briefed by the observers, after which students should rotate roles.

Putting your case in an interview

In groups of two work through the following scenario:

Your Karate club has reached the National finals. The trouble is you have no funds left, as your club has used all its allocation from the University Clubs’ fund and with the exams coming up there is no time to fund-raise. You need \$1000, so you seek a meeting with the Student Council chairperson to put your case.

For you as President of the Karate Club and for the Student Council Chairperson

What is the purpose of the interview?

President of the Karate Club _____

Student Council Chairperson _____

What sequence of conversation would ensure that this purpose was met?

President of the Karate Club _____

Student Council Chairperson _____

What type of information should the President of the Karate Club present?

What type of information should the Student Council Chairperson present?

Role play the interview.

Journal

Reflect on your experience of being interviewed. What questions did you feel prepared for? Which questions did you find difficulty answering? Was this because the questions were unexpected or poorly composed or was there some interviewee skill that you feel you ought to work on?

Individual tasks: Interviews

Give an example of each of the following types of question, stating your purpose in using it and the probable effect of such a question. Number one (Hypothetical question) has been done for you.

1. Hypothetical question
2. Open question
3. Primary question
4. Secondary question
5. Opinion question
6. Factual question
7. Closed question
8. Leading question.
9. Direct question
10. Indirect question

Example of a hypothetical question:

If you were given a free rein in this department what would you do?

Purpose or when you would use it:

When you want to know if the person has thought about the job they are applying for and is creative but also discrete and diplomatic

Probable effect:

This question is too broad and would probably result in an answer unlikely to offend. A better use of a hypothetical question would be in a more defined situation "What would you do if a customer complained about the quality of the service she had just received?"

Speech opportunities

Prepare and deliver a four minute presentation using visual aids on "Making the most of yourself at an interview".

Sources of information

How employers choose the person for the job. In Windschuttle pp.156–157.

Bolles, R. N. (1993) *What color is your parachute?* Berkely CA.: Ten Speed Press.

Quarry, P. (1993). *Interviewing* (video recording). South Yarra, Vic: Seven Dimensions.