

## **CHAPTER 7: RESOLVING CONFLICTS WITH OTHERS**

The major purpose of this chapter is to provide insights and skills into resolving interpersonal conflict in the workplace. Sexual harassment receives special attention because of its prevalence as a type of job conflict.

### **CHAPTER OUTLINE AND LECTURE NOTES**

A **conflict** is a situation in which two or more goals, values, or events are incompatible or mutually exclusive. A conflict is also a strife, quarrel, or battle.

#### **I. SOURCES OF INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT IN ORGANIZATIONS**

Understanding the sources, or causes, of conflict can help resolve the present conflict and help prevent a similar occurrence. All conflict includes the underlying theme of incompatibility between one's goals, values, or events and those of another person.

##### **A. Competition for Limited Resources**

Conflict arises when two or more people squabble over who should get the limited resources, with resources usually being limited.

##### **B. Role Conflict**

Being placed in a predicament can lead to conflict and stress. **Role conflict** is having to choose between two competing demands or expectations. Complying with one aspect of a role makes compliance with the other role difficult or impossible, such as receiving contradictory offers. Role conflict can take various forms such as attempting to complete two objectives that are in apparent conflict. An example is being pushed for both speed and quality.

##### **C. Competing Work and Family Demands**

Balancing the demands of career and family has become a major role conflict facing today's workforce. The challenge is particularly intense for employees who are part of a two-wage-earner family. **Work-family conflict** occurs when an individual's roles of worker and active participant in social and family life compete with one another. Work-family conflict can be a major stressor, and can lead to emotional disorders as revealed by a study of 2,700 employed adults.

##### **D. Building Stone Walls**

According to Robert J. Mayer, the seed of conflict is a small incident called a pinch. The pinched person unconsciously gathers data, and distorts them, to prove he or she is right. The result is an insurmountable obstacle called a stone wall.

#### E. Personality Clashes

Many workplace disagreements arise because people simply dislike each other. A **personality clash** is an antagonistic relationship between two people based on differences in personal attributes, preferences, interests, values, or styles.

#### F. Aggressive Personalities Including Bullies

Some people convert disagreement into an attack on the other person. **Aggressive personalities** are people who verbally, and sometimes physically, attack others frequently. Verbal aggression takes the form of insults, teasing, ridicule, and profanity. Aggressive personalities are also referred to as workplace bullies. Among their typical behaviors are interrupting others, ranting in a loud voice, and making threats.

Aggressiveness can also take the extreme form of shooting and knifing a former boss or colleague by a mentally unstable worker recently dismissed from the company. Homicide is the second leading cause of workplace deaths, with about 1,000 workers murdered each year in the United States alone.

### II. CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES

A well-known classification scheme identifies styles of conflict management based on different combinations of satisfying one's concerns (assertiveness) and satisfying the concerns of others (cooperativeness).

*Competitive.* A competitive person desires to win his or her concerns at the expense of the other party.

*Accommodative.* The accommodative type favors appeasement, or satisfying the other's concerns without taking care of his or her own.

*Sharing.* The sharing style prefers moderate but incomplete satisfaction for both parties, resulting in compromise.

*Collaborative.* The collaborative style reflects a desire to fully satisfy the desire of both parties (**win-win**). The option chosen results in a mutual gain.

*Avoidant.* The avoidant style is a combination of uncooperative and unassertive.

### III. GUIDELINES AND TECHNIQUES FOR RESOLVING CONFLICTS

The techniques described here are based somewhat on the underlying philosophy of win-win.

#### A. Confrontation and Problem Solving

The ideal approach to resolving any conflict is to confront the real issue, and then solve the problem. Confrontation means taking a problem-solving approach to differences and identify the underlying facts, logic, or emotions that account for

them. Confrontation can proceed gently in a way that preserves a good working relationship.

#### B. Constructive Handling of Criticism

Learning to profit from criticism is an effective way of benefiting from conflict. People who benefit from criticism are able to stand outside themselves while being criticized. Suggestions for dealing constructively with criticism include:

1. See yourself at a distance.
2. Ask for clarification and specifics.
3. Decide on a response. (Respond appropriately to the critic.)
4. Disarm the opposition. (If you agree with the criticism, the criticizer no longer has reason to use his or her armament.)

#### C. Image Exchanging

The essential point of **image exchanging** is that you and your antagonist make it clear that you understand the other person's point of view. Empathy of this kind may lead to a useful and productive compromise.

#### D. Cognitive Restructuring

The conflicting elements in a situation can be lessened by viewing them more positively. According to the technique of **cognitive restructuring**, you mentally convert negative aspects into positive ones by looking for the positive elements in a situation. If you search for the beneficial elements in the situation there will be less area for dispute.

#### E. Negotiating and Bargaining

Conflicts can be considered situations calling for **negotiating**, or conferring with another person to resolve a problem. Five leading negotiating tactics are presented here.

1. *Focus on Interests, Not Positions.* Rather than clinging to specific negotiating points, keep your overall interests in mind and try to satisfy them.
2. *Compromise.* The most widely used negotiating tactic is **compromise**, the settlement of differences by mutual concessions. One party agrees to do something if the other party agrees to do something else.
3. *Begin with a Plausible Demand or Offer, Yet Allow Room for Negotiation.* A plausible demand shows that you are bargaining in good faith. If a third party has to resolve a conflict, a plausible demand will receive more sympathy. A plausible demand does not preclude beginning with a demand that allows room for compromise and concession.
4. *Make Small Concessions Gradually.* Making steady concessions leads to

more mutually satisfying agreements in most situations.

5. *Know Your Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement (BATNA)*. The goal of negotiating is not just to agree, but to reach an agreement more valuable than non-agreement. When you are aware of your best alternative to a negotiated agreement, it sets a floor to the agreement you are willing to accept.

#### IV. COMBATTING SEXUAL HARASSMENT: A SPECIAL TYPE OF CONFLICT

**Sexual harassment** is generally defined as unwanted sexually-oriented behavior in the workplace that results in discomfort and/or interference with the job. It can include an action as violent as rape or as subtle as a sexually-oriented comment about a person's body or appearance.

##### A. Types and Frequency of Harassment

The courts recognize two types of sexual harassment: (a) *quid pro quo* harassment is receiving an unfavorable employment action because sexual favors are refused, (b) *hostile environment* harassment created by sexually-oriented conduct. The standard is often what a reasonable person would consider harassment but gender influences was is considered to be reasonable. Sexual harassment is also regarded as an expression of power by one individual over another because the harasser has more formal power than the harassed.

Sexual harassment is widespread in the U. S. and other countries. According to one compilation of figures, at least one-half of all women have been harassed at some point in their career. At least 10 percent of women workers have quit their jobs because of being harassed. Yet a recent survey found that only 1.3 percent of women workers filed a sexual harassment complaint.

##### B. Recent Supreme Court Rulings on Sexual Harassment

What constitutes harassment continues to evolve. Three 1998 Supreme Court decisions are relevant.

1. In *Oncale vs. Sundowner Offshore Services Inc.*, the Court ruled that sexual harassment is actionable even when the people involved are the same sex.
2. In *Burlington Industries Inc. vs. Ellreth* it was ruled that an employer can be liable for sexual harassment whether or not a supervisor's threats to job status are carried out.
3. In *Farager vs. the City of Boca Raton, Florida*, it was ruled that an employer is liable for a pervasive, hostile atmosphere of harassment.

##### C. The Adverse Effects of Sexual Harassment

Aside from being unethical, immoral, and illegal, sexual harassment is widely thought to have adverse consequences. A study with business and university workers showed that even a low levels of frequency, harassment exerts a significant impact on women's psychological well-being, job attitudes, and work behavior. Another study showed that the negative effects remained two years after the incident. Also, one study showed that personality factors did not influence whether the harassed person would suffer negative consequences.

#### D. Guidelines for Preventing and Dealing with Harassment

A starting point in dealing with sexual harassment is to develop an awareness of the types of behaviors that are considered sexual harassment. Often the difference is subtle. Behaviors that might be interpreted as environmental harassment include the following:

1. Inappropriate remarks and sexual implications.
2. Terms of endearment.
3. Suggestive compliments.
4. Physical touching.
5. Work-related kissing

Several actions by management are the most critical in preventing and dealing with harassment. A building block is to create and widely disseminate a policy about harassment. Zero tolerance should be emphasized, and the company should have an *open-door policy* about sexual harassment. Frequent discussion about the problem is helpful.

Two key strategies for the sexual harassment victim are to use either a formal complaint procedure or to resolve the problem on his or her own. Text Exhibit 7-3 provides the details.

### **ANSWERS TO DISCUSSION AND REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. How might conflict among workers to obtain high performance evaluations be seen as competition for limited resources?

Under a system whereby managers are forced to give a fixed proportion of high evaluations to employees, the resource of a high performance evaluation is limited. Workers must therefore compete with one another to achieve these high performance evaluations.

2. What good does it do you to know a work associate's conflict style?

Knowing a work associate's conflict style can help you resolve conflict with the

individual. If you know, for example, that the person generally uses the competitive style, you will have to work extra hard to reach a mutually satisfactory resolution to the conflict.

3. What are the disadvantages of having an accommodative style of handling conflict?

A person who is accommodative will usually wind up as the loser in conflict situations, sometimes giving away so much that it is to the person's detriment. For example, a small business owner might give a demanding employee such a large salary increase that profits suffer.

4. Remember the hypothetical conflict between "Bill Budweiser" and the Anheuser Busch Company? What solution do you propose to satisfy the underlying interests of both parties?

A key interest of Bill Budweiser is to earn money as a brewery, and a key interest of Anheuser Busch to protect their brand name. How about this for a solution? If Bill Budweiser agrees peacefully to choose another name for his brewery, Anheuser Busch will agree to hire his brewery to make a defined amount of beer each year for one of Busch's minor labels. The Anheuser Busch contract will help the fledgling brewery meet expenses. Neither party's best interests will be served by fighting a legal battle over the brand name.

5. Experts have observed that it is difficult for most people to confront others. Why is confrontation so difficult for so many people?

Confrontation is difficult for several reasons. One problem is that we know how uncomfortable we feel when we are confronted. Another is that many people are concerned that confrontation will trigger angry feelings in the other person. Also, confrontation may trigger fear of retaliation, such as long-term hard feelings.

6. Have you ever attempted to disarm the opposition? How effective was the tactic?

Usually one or two class members can provide excellent examples of how disarming the opposition worked. An entertaining example is agreeing with a police officer after being pulled over for a traffic violation. Quite often the officer will not give a ticket. Instead the officer will say, "Just be careful next time."

7. How might a student use cognitive restructuring to get over the anger of having received a low grade in a course?

The student who uses cognitive restructuring to the extreme might say, "I'm

thankful for this wake-up call. Now I know that I have urgent developmental needs in this subject. I will study on my own to improve my deficiencies."

8. Visualize yourself buying a new vehicle of your choice. Which negotiating technique (or techniques) would you be the most likely to use?

Buying a new or used vehicle is a wonderful laboratory for practicing most negotiating techniques. An especially powerful technique is to begin with a plausible demand or offer. The seller then takes you seriously and will work extra hard to accommodate you because you are a valid prospect. Although your offer is plausible, allow room for compromise. Internet information about vehicle prices has made it easier for customers to make a plausible offer. In general, offering about 15 percent below the sticker price will place a person in the plausible-offer zone, and pique the interest of the seller.

9. Studies have shown that women working in male-dominated positions, such as a female construction supervisor or bulldozer operator, are more likely to experience sexual harassment than women in other fields. What explanation can you offer for this finding?

One possibility for the elevated frequency is that men resent women invading their territory, so they express their resentment through the intimidation of sexual harassment. Another possibility is that men working in male-dominated occupations tend to be more macho, and part of being macho is to demean women.

10. Is inviting a coworker to dinner a second time a form of sexual harassment if the coworker refused the first invitation?

Unless the second invitation is offered in an intimidating manner, it should not be considered as environmental sexual harassment. Extending the invitation six times or more despite refusals could be interpreted as harassment. Asking people for dates repeatedly is one of the gray areas for classifying behavior as harassing.

## ANSWERS TO CASE QUESTIONS

### *Caught In a Squeeze*

This case illustrates some of the real issues that surface in work-family conflict.

1. What type of role conflict Heather facing?

Heather faces interrole conflict in which two of her important roles (professional versus family person) are competing for her time. Interrole

conflict in this form is referred to as work-family conflict.

2. What should Heather do to resolve her conflicts with respect to family and work responsibilities?

On the family side, Heather needs to develop a better support system, such as a retired person to act as a backup for taking care of her son when neither Heather nor her husband are tied up with work responsibilities. On the work side, perhaps Heather can arrive at an informal contract with her manager about the limits to her availability with respect to non-standard work hours.

3. What should the company do to help deal with the type of conflict Heather is facing? Or, should the company not consider Heather's dilemma to be their problem?

The company needs to think through what constitutes reasonable demands on the time of working parents. Though careful planning, managers might be able to reduce emergency meetings. The modern company does think consider the work/personal life conflicts of employees to be partly their responsibility.

## COMMENTS ABOUT QUIZZES AND EXERCISES

### *Styles of Conflict Management*

This exercise sets the stage for learning about conflict resolution. The results from this questionnaire can be related to the information about conflict management styles presented later in the chapter.

### *Win-Win Conflict Resolution*

Finding win-win solutions to conflicts (or options for mutual gain) is a cornerstone skill for conflict management. Here is one possibility for each option:

1. *Luncheon problem.* You and your coworkers arrive at a fixed luncheon schedule, such as each Thursday, to which you will commit. You will then be able to satisfy your work schedule and their demands. You can work an extra hour on Thursday to make up for lost time.
2. *"Debbie" problem.* The workmates might prefer the diminutive "Debbie" because it is more informal, yet Deborah prefers to be called "Deborah." The coworkers might

agree to call her "Deborah" yet still use a nickname of their choosing from time to time that Deborah finds acceptable. They might use the diminutive "D" occasionally. In this way Deborah is not called Debbie, yet informality is preserved.

3. *Transfer problem.* You reach a win-win solution by training a replacement for yourself. You win by obtaining a transfer, and your manager wins by retaining your valuable skills.

### *Disarming the Opposition*

The essential skill here is to agree with the criticizer and then work on a solution to the problem. The role-plays can be illuminating because people have to combat their natural tendency to simply enter into a debate.

### *Cognitive Restructuring*

Imagination and tolerance are required to do an effective job of cognitive restructuring.

*Nancy.* "Nancy is so thorough that it takes her two extra weeks to provide her input. Maybe I can work with Nancy to help her become less of a perfectionist."

*Boss.* "My boss is such a devoted, dedicated person. He wants to make sure that I do every little detail correctly. Maybe I can find a way to prove to him that I am very thorough."

### *The Negotiator Quiz*

Students might want to discuss the significance of individual items such as Number 15, "It's fun to haggle over price when buying a car." My experience is that this quiz adds value to the study of negotiation.

### *Combatting Sexual Harassment*

Encouraging volunteers of different ages and work experience to enter into these role plays can be illuminating. (Having a woman in her 40s play Bertha, and a man in his 20s play Bert will work especially well.) These roles plays are likely to be effective because the content is inherently interesting, and they integrate many of the techniques of conflict resolution. My experience is that modern students are not particularly titillated by sexual content of exercises, and can therefore conduct these role-plays professionally.

### *Conflict Resolution Role Play*

A sophisticated approach to this role-play would search for a win-win solution to this situation of work-family conflict. An option for mutual gain might be to allow Heather to do some of the analytical portion of her work at home such as on Sunday night after Christopher is in bed! The team leader and company also win, because Heather accomplishes her work goals.

## EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

### *Multiple Choice*

- (b) 1. Conflict occurs whenever
  - a. you secretly dislike another person.
  - b. two sets of demands are incompatible.
  - c. you deal with coworkers.
  - d. your job is demanding.
  
- (c) 2. Sam and Muriel argue over who gets to use the new desktop computer. Their conflict is best classified as
  - a. differences in goals.
  - b. personal differences.
  - c. competition over limited resources.
  - d. conflict-prone job duties.
  
- (a) 3. Research indicates that work-family conflict is
  - a. a major stressor that can lead to emotional disorders.
  - b. a minor stress for well-adjusted people.
  - c. the leading cause of job stress.
  - d. easily fixed by granting workers more vacation time.
  
- (d) 4. "Stone walls" in conflict arise largely because a person
  - a. refuses to resolve conflict.
  - b. erects communication barriers.
  - c. is blocked when attempting to resolve conflict.
  - d. builds a wall composed of minor hurts.
  
- (a) 5. A personality clash refers to the fact that sometimes people
  - a. basically dislike each other.
  - b. go out of their way to do mean things to each other.
  - c. have different goals.
  - d. are too much alike.
  
- (d) 6. A manager who says to a group member, "Are you going to be stupid for the rest of your life" is most likely engaging in
  - a. competition over limited resources.
  - b. win-win conflict resolution.
  - c. building stone walls.
  - d. bullying.

- (b) 7. Homicide on the job
  - a. is typically triggered by sexual harassment.
  - b. has become a leading cause of workplace deaths.
  - c. is an example of role conflict.
  - d. can usually be prevented by image exchanging.
  
- (b) 8. Linda Yang, a labor relations specialist, wants each side to leave the negotiating table well satisfied. Yang is best advised to use which style of conflict management?
  - a. competitive
  - b. collaborative
  - c. accommodative
  - d. sharing
  
- (c) 9. The method of identifying the true source of conflict and resolving it systematically is called
  - a. frame the outcome in positive terms.
  - b. disarm the opposition.
  - c. confrontation and problem solving.
  - d. begin with a plausible offer, but allow room for negotiation.
  
- (a) 10. The technique, *disarm the opposition*, assumes that
  - a. you have done something wrong.
  - b. you are completely innocent.
  - c. the other side has less power than you.
  - d. the other side has very little power.
  
- (a) 11. A major purpose of image exchanging is for two people or groups in conflict to learn how
  - a. the other side views the conflict.
  - b. foolish conflict between two people really is.
  - c. to apply human relations on the job.
  - d. differences can be settled.
  
- (d) 12. A police officer says to you, "Pull over, you've been driving ten miles per hour beyond the speed limit." Following the principle of disarm the opposition, you should respond in this manner:
  - a. "Officer, there has been some mistake."
  - b. "How would you like to deal with me when you are out of uniform?"
  - c. "You must have been speeding in order to catch me."
  - d. "You're right, I was speeding."

- (a) 13. A major component of cognitive restructuring is to
- search for the positive elements in a situation.
  - play a mind game.
  - change the cognitions of the opposing side.
  - agree that you have been in the wrong.
- (c) 14. Alex has been severely criticized by his boss. He deals with the problem by saying to himself, "The criticism I received is good because it will prevent me from repeating that mistake." Alex is engaging in
- image exchanging.
  - disarming the opposition.
  - cognitive restructuring.
  - a self-defeating mind game.
- (d) 15. The negotiating strategy, *focus on interests, not positions*, calls for the negotiator to
- quickly uncover the interests of the other side.
  - stick to his or her demands until the last.
  - find mutual interests with the other side.
  - strive to satisfy his or her overall interests.
- (b) 16. A key advantage of making a plausible demand in a negotiating session is that it
- prevents the other side from making a counteroffer.
  - shows you are bargaining in good faith.
  - prevents the other side from making an extreme demand.
  - gets you about one-half of what you really want.
- (a) 17. You are interested in purchasing a speedboat, on sale for \$35,000. You make an offer of \$29,500, thereby using the negotiating tactic,
- begin with a plausible demand or offer, yet allow room for negotiation.
  - compromise.
  - make small concessions gradually.
  - know your best alternative to a negotiated agreement.
- (c) 18. The bargaining technique, *make small concessions gradually*
- is much less effective than granting concessions at the outset of bargaining.
  - is much less effective than granting concessions at the end of bargaining.
  - leads to more satisfactory agreements in most cases.
  - leads to less satisfactory agreements in most cases.

- (d) 19. Knowing one's best alternative to a negotiated agreement (BATNA) is designed to help a person
- prevent the opposing side from gaining any advantage.
  - block a win-win solution.
  - choose creative alternative solutions.
  - prevent accepting unfavorable terms.
- (b) 20. In *quid pro quo* sexual harassment, the harassed person
- is intimidated with sexually-toned language.
  - loses out because of refusal to grant a sexual favor.
  - is ignored because of refusal to grant a sexual favor.
  - is promoted because of granting a person a sexual favor.
- (d) 21. In the *hostile environment* form of sexual harassment, the harassed person
- does not get a fair hearing for his or her complaint.
  - suffers a job loss for having filed a complaint.
  - suffers a job loss for having refused to grant sexual favors.
  - may not necessarily suffer a job loss.
- (d) 22. A study of gender differences about perceptions of what constitutes sexual harassment found that
- men and women disagreed substantially as to the meaning of sexual coercion.
  - men were much more prudish than women.
  - men perceived a broader range of behaviors to be harassing.
  - women perceived a broader range of behaviors to be harassing.
- (a) 23. According to a current viewpoint of sexual harassment, the sexual harasser
- is usually a power abuser and legal offender.
  - usually commits sexual harassment to acquire power.
  - usually harasses a more powerful person.
  - confuses sexual attraction with quest for power.
- (b) 24. According to the U. S. Supreme Court, misconduct between two people of the same sex
- does not qualify as sexual harassment.
  - can be considered sexual harassment.
  - can only be considered sexual harassment if the person charged also engages in misconduct with someone of the opposite sex.
  - can only be considered sexual harassment if one of the parties is homosexual.

- (d) 25. A study of how personality factors influenced the negative effects of sexual harassment indicated that
- conscientious workers had few negative effects.
  - introverted workers suffered the most.
  - neurotic workers actually benefited from sexual harassment.
  - personality factors did not influence the negative effects.

*True/False*

- (T) 1. One meaning of conflict is that one side attempts to block the other from achieving its goals.
- (F) 2. Role conflict comes about when two workers want to play different roles in the department.
- (T) 3. The multiple roles played by many workers contribute to experiencing work-family conflict.
- (F) 4. The psychological symptoms of work-family conflict tend to be confined to minor problems such as an occasional bad dream or skin twitching.
- (F) 5. The *building of stone walls* type of conflict occurs when somebody hurls a major insult at another person.
- (F) 6. A personality clash between two individuals usually comes about because one person has a fancier job title than the other.
- (T) 7. Workplace bullies have been know to create a number of psychological and physical ailments for their victims.
- (F) 8. So far, workplace violence is under enough control so it is still an insignificant cause of homicides on the job.
- (F) 9. To use the competitive style of conflict management, a person must give primary concern to the needs of the other party.
- (T) 10. When the collaborative style of conflict management is used, both sides gain something of value and the relationship between the two parties is likely to improve.
- (F) 11. In the *sharing* style of conflict management, the agreements reached are typically options for mutual gain.

- (T) 12. Confrontation and problem solving is considered the ideal approach to conflict resolution because it leads to a resolution of the underlying issues.
- (F) 13. A key principle of benefiting from criticism is to take the criticism personally, so you will take it seriously.
- (T) 14. A recommended approach to dealing with criticism is to act as if you are a detached observer looking for useful information.
- (F) 15. Apologizing to your criticizer for what you did wrong is a poor tactic because it makes you appear to be a wimp.
- (T) 16. To use the image exchange method of conflict resolution, both sides must make it clear that they understand the other side's concerns.
- (F) 17. To effectively use cognitive restructuring, one must exaggerate the negative impact of the criticism.
- (T) 18. Your manager annoys you because she frequently corrects the most minor flaws in your work. To use cognitive restructuring, you would tell yourself something like, "I guess my boss is just trying to be a caring manager. Maybe I can profit from her small suggestions."
- (F) 19. To focus on interests, not positions, the negotiator thinks of certain demands that he or she must absolutely have met.
- (T) 20. Knowing your best alternative to a negotiated agreement (BATNA) helps you from accepting an offer that is smaller than you need to.
- (T) 21. *Quid pro quo* harassment takes place when a person's job is in jeopardy for not submitting to a boss's sexual advances.
- (T) 22. Men and women tend to agree that various forms of sexual coercion can be classified as *quo pro quo* harassment.
- (F) 23. A study demonstrated that personality characteristics are a major factor influencing whether a person who has experienced sexual harassment will have decreased life satisfaction and well being.
- (F) 24. Widely disseminating policies about sexual harassment has generally been an ineffective approach to controlling harassment because such policies themselves can be interpreted as sexual harassment.

(T) 25. The easiest way to deal with sexual harassment is to speak up before it becomes serious.