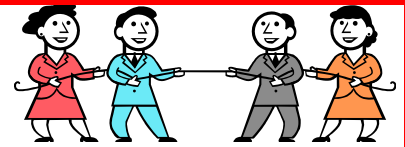


CONFLICT STYLES & CONFLICT RESOLUTION



Conflict can be a source of great distress for most of us. The very word can conjure up negative thoughts, feelings and memories. Much of our understanding of conflict derives from our experiences of conflict in the past, especially as a child. In fact this often informs our approach to conflict as adults.

Is conflict really as bad as we fear?

It's easy to confuse the nature of conflict (a disagreement) from the behaviours that sometimes arise from disagreements. It's a bit like anger - the emotion of anger is not necessarily bad in itself - but it is associated with bad behaviour, so gets a bad reputation through association.

Conflict is the same, so its how we handle/respond to conflict that counts.

There are 5 types of responses to conflict - all of which have advantages and disadvantages depending on the context. They can become our default approach however and that's when we may not handle conflict well or achieve the resolution we want. It is definitely true that "one size doesn't fit all" when it comes to responding to conflict situations.

CONFLICT STYLES The 5 styles are:

The Avoider

"if I ignore it the problem will go away", "there's no problem here!"

Advantages: avoids negative interactions with others/ others get their own way so usually they like the avoider/ prevents possible conflict over small things BUT

Disadvantages: Avoiders can be walked over and never address issues that may be important to them/ Some problems will not go away

The Peacemaker

"let's keep everyone happy", "I'm sure we can all fix this together"

Advantages: peacemaker wants everyone to be happy and emphasises harmony/ smooths over small issues BUT

Disadvantages: this approach can "gloss over" bigger issues in an attempt to hastily make peace/ It can create the illusion of problem solving

The Confronter

"let's talk about what's really going on here", "I can't believe you..."

Advantages: confronter likes to get all problems out in the open no matter how painful/ this can get to the bottom of an issue and clear the air BUT

Disadvantages: can be controlling and intimidating, causing hidden resentment in others and sometimes blocking of resolution

The Compromiser

"how can we make everyone happy", can we find some common ground"

Advantages: tries to meet all parties needs in some way by giving each person some of what they wanted BUT

Disadvantages: can mean no-one ends up happy and the problem is still unresolved/ puts all the responsibility for solving the problem on the compromiser and not the group.

The Collaborator

"let's hear from each person", "what do we see as possible solutions?"

Advantages: lets each person express their concerns and possible solutions/ all feel heard and all contribute to solving the problem BUT

Disadvantages: can challenge existing power structures because the group becomes powerful in its own right with no clear leader needed.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

When dealing with a conflict situation - it is important to RESPOND - rather than to REACT.

Responding = you think things through and you respond to the conflict in a constructive and assertive manner

Reacting = approach the conflict in an automatic, defensive manner implying that it is something threatening and frightening

Steps to conflict resolution through responding not reacting:

- ① managing your emotions: BREATHE AND RELAX
- ① saying nothing at first: LISTEN AND BE OPEN
- ① focusing on the facts: CONCENTRATE
- ① ignoring inflammatory remarks: DON'T BE DEFENSIVE
- ① when they have stated their case: PARAPHRASE TO CLARIFY
- ① stating your opinion: BE CALM AND ASSERTIVE
- ① describing your wants, needs and feelings: YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO BE HEARD
- ① being prepared to work together to find a SOLUTION
- ① remember that both parties are responsible for resolving this issue