

Collaborative process for conflict solving

A step by step approach

1. Create an effective atmosphere

- i. Neutralize emotions
- ii. Define ground rules
- iii. Set time and place

2. Create mutual understanding

- i. Identify the needs for me
- ii. Identify the needs for them
- iii. Identify the needs for us
- iv. Focus on individual and shared needs

3. Look for the root cause (s)

- i. Examine the root causes

4. Generate options

- i. Generate, do not evaluate
- ii. Evaluate options

5. Build a solution

- i. Chose a solution
- ii. Build a plan

Introduction

The approach we will use to solve a conflict is based on a **collaborative style**.

The collaborative style

- is both assertive and cooperative
- Collaborating involves an attempt to work with others to find some solution that fully satisfies their concerns. It means digging into an issue to pinpoint the underlying needs and wants of the two individuals.
- Collaborating between two persons might take the form of exploring a disagreement to learn from each other's insights or trying to find a creative solution to an interpersonal problem

With the collaborating approach, the parties work together to develop a win-win solution. This approach promotes assertiveness (rather than aggressiveness or passiveness) and is close to MSF promoted culture. It is particularly adapted to address hard situations.

It can also be used in all situations but this style of addressing conflict is the most efficient if:

- The conflict is about something that is important. An important decision needs to be made.
- The situation is not urgent. If the decision needs to be urgent and the conflict is very complicate (multiple roots and causes) it may take too much time.
- The conflict involves a large number of people, or across different teams
- Previous conflict resolution attempts have failed

This style is not appropriate when the matter is trivial to all involved or urgency.

1- Creating an effective atmosphere

When people are involved in a conflict, there is typically a lot of negative energy.

Anger, frustration, and disappointment are just a few of the emotions often felt.

By establishing a positive atmosphere, we can begin to turn that negative energy around, and create a powerful problem-solving force. This creates a strong beginning for the conflict resolution process.

a- Neutralizing emotions

Before beginning the conflict resolution process, both parties must agree that they want to resolve the conflict. Without this crucial buy-in step, achieving a win-win solution is close to impossible. > ask people to formally agree on that

Once agreed, it is important to neutralize as many negative emotions as possible. This means giving the participants in the conflict time to vent and work through the feelings associated with the conflict. > make sure time is given.

Key steps for the people in conflict include:

- Acceptance that you/they have negative feelings and that these feelings are normal.
- Acknowledgement of the feelings and their root causes. Example: "I feel very angry about the way George spoke to me in that meeting."
- Identification how the feelings might be resolve. Example: "If George apologized to me, I would feel a lot better."
- This can generate ideas about what the root cause of the conflict is, and how to resolve it.

b- Define ground rules

- Ground rules provide a framework for people to resolve their conflict.
- Ground rules should be set at the beginning of any conflict resolution process.
- They can be very brief or very detailed - whatever the situation requires.
- Ground rules should be
 - Developed and agreed upon by both parties.
 - Positive when it is possible. (For example, "We will listen to each other's statements fully," rather than, "We will not interrupt.")
 - Fair to both parties
 - Enforceable
 - Adjustable
 - Written and posted somewhere where both parties can refer to it (for more formal dispute resolution processes).
- If the parties are using a mediator to help them resolve the conflict, it is important that the ground rules be developed by the parties and not the mediator. The mediator's role is that of a guide and mentor, not a judge or supreme ruler.
- Participants can use the ground rules throughout the conflict resolution process to monitor and modify their behaviours. Ground rules give participants an objective, logical way of addressing personal attacks and emotional issues.
 - An example: "Joe, I feel like you have cut off my last several statements. We agreed at the beginning of this that we would listen to each other's statements fully before answering."
- If the conflict is being mediated, this also gives the mediator a fair way to give participants feedback and help them work with the conflict. Since the

same rules are being applied to everyone, it can help the mediator maintain fairness and avoid bias

- Some examples of ground rules include:
 - We will listen to each other's statements fully before responding.
 - We will work together to achieve a mutually acceptable solution.
 - We will respect each other as individuals, and therefore not engage in personal insults and attacks.

c- Set time and place

The right time and place is often a key part of resolving conflict. Trying to solve a major team issue five minutes before the end of the shift just isn't going to work - people are going to be focused on going home, not on the problem.

- When possible, choose a quiet place to discuss the conflict.
- Make sure that there is lots of time allowed.
- Minimize distractions if possible: turn cell phones off, forward office phones to voice mail, and turn off computers.

If you are mediating a conflict resolution meeting

- Be conscious of the needs of both parties when scheduling the meeting
- Make sure that the time chosen works well for both of them.
- Choose a location that is neutral (one that they are both comfortable with or that neither has visited before).
- Remove distractions

2- Create mutual understanding

a- Identify the needs for me

- To begin you have to identify what you personally want out of the conflict.
- Try to state this positively
- Create two versions of your personal needs statement: your ideal resolution and your realistic resolution. Alternatively, you could frame your statement into several steps if the conflict is complicated
- A useful exercise is to break down your statement into wants and needs. This is particularly valuable if your statement is vague.

Take an example: "I want changes to the schedule"

Want	Need
More input into the scheduling process	To work less than 30 hours per week
A more regular schedule	More notice for schedule changes

This will give you some bargaining room during the conflict resolution process and will help ensure that you get what you need out of the solution. In the example above, you may be willing to give up a more regular schedule if more notice for schedule changes is provided.

b- What do the other want?

- Identify what the person that you are in conflict with wants.
- Try to frame this positively.
- Explore all the angles to maximize your possibilities for mutual gain.

These framing questions will help you start the process.

- What does my opponent need?
- What does my opponent want?
- What is most important to them?
- What is least important to them?

c- What do we want?

- Now that you have identified the wants and needs of both sides, look for areas of overlap. These will be the starting points for establishing mutual ground

Example:

John and Paul are in conflict over the current roaster. As the most senior members of the watchmen team, they both alternate their regular duties with that of team leader. Although taking on the responsibility gives them the opportunity to develop their supervision skills, the supervisor also has to work an extra hour per shift and has additional safety responsibilities.

Joe and Paul both work Monday to Friday, and as watchmen team member, their shifts are from 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. As team leader, they are expected to work from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

	John	Paul
WANTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To have at least two team leader shifts per week 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To have at least two team leader shifts per week. • To leave by 4:30 p.m. on Fridays.
NEEDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To leave by 4:30 p.m. on Mondays and Wednesdays to pick up his children • to ensure that the team leader position is covered by someone from Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not to have more than three team leader shifts per week • To ensure that the team leader position is covered by someone from Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

- From this simple chart, we can see that John and Paul have the same goal: to ensure that the team leader position is covered by someone during regular

working hours. Thus, this is a logistical conflict rather than an emotional one. We can also see from the chart that there seems to be some good starting ground for a solution.

- However, when working through the wants and needs of both parties, be careful not to jump to conclusions. Rather, be on the lookout for the root cause. Often, the problem is not what it seems.

d- Focusing on Individual and Shared Needs

- Objective of the step:

So far, we have talked about laying the foundation for common ground, one of the key building blocks for win-win solutions. This step will look at some techniques on building common ground and using it to create partnerships.

It may not seem like we have progressed very far in resolving the conflict. Indeed, most of these primary steps are focused on information gathering and problem solving

- For minor conflicts, having these steps in your toolbox will simply help you keep all possibilities in mind during the conflict
- For major conflicts, these steps will help you ensure you achieve the best solution possible for the situation.

2 key actions/factors:

- ***Finding/expressing a common ground:***
 - Refer to previous step = be able to find common ground even before the conflict begins
 - Other possible areas of common ground could include
 - Continuing to work with each other, or continuing to work for MSF, beneficiaries, ...
 - Try hard enough and you'll find something in common!

You should continue to try to find common ground throughout the entire conflict resolution process. It will help you understand your adversary's position and better position you to help create a win-win solution

- ***Building positive energy and goodwill***
 - There are often many negative emotions associated with conflict. No wonder - conflict makes many people upset and anxious, and often results in negative feelings like anger and disappointment.
 - If you are able to turn that negative energy into positive energy to help build goodwill with the person that you are in conflict with, resolving the conflict will be much easier. Ironically, the more negative the situation, the more important this step is
 - Let's say that the person that you are in conflict with is very angry with you. Although they have agreed that they want to resolve the conflict, they are cool towards you and putting in minimum effort towards resolving the problem.

- You may think, “Why should I bother?” This is a very important question indeed. How much energy and time are you will to spend on this conflict? Is it worth resolving?
- Consider, however, the power that your approach has. You have two basic options: to match your adversary’s demeanour, or to be a positive influence. Both will likely take as much energy, but which will yield greater results?
- Here are some ways to build positive energy.
 - Have a good attitude. The preparation steps we discussed earlier should help you identify the positive things that will come out of this conflict. Try to focus on these things instead of the negative aspects of the conflict.
 - Frame things positively.
 - Try to keep emotions out of your statements. State feelings and opinions in as objective a manner as possible. Label your thoughts as thoughts by starting sentences with, “I think...”
 - Take a break when you need it.
 - If you say, “I see where you’re coming from,” make sure you mean it. If you can’t see where they are coming from, ask them to tell you more. Often, sharing information can break down even the toughest person’s defenses.
- Invite the other person to step into your shoes. Tell them a story, outline consequences, and explain how you feel in an objective manner. Share as much information as you can.

3 - Getting to the Root Cause

Building a positive foundation and gathering information are key steps to resolving conflict, but it is going to be difficult to solve the problem if we don’t know what the problem is! In this step, we will learn how to delve below the current conflict to the root of the problem.

This phase is important for long-term resolution

Here are different techniques related to the level of difficulty:

➤ The 5 W (WHY)

- Verbal investigation. This involves continuously asking “Why?” to get to the root of the problem.
- Paying attention to the wording of the root cause is important
- Watch out for vague verbs.
- Try to keep emotions out of the problem statements.
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➤ Identify opportunities for Forgiveness

- Forgiveness is a key concept in conflict resolution. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting that the conflict happened, or erasing the emotions that it created. It

does mean accepting that the conflict happened. Accepting and working through how it made you feel, accepting the consequences that it had, and letting those actions and consequences exist in the past.

□ Successful conflict resolution should give the participants some feeling of closure over the issue. Participants should feel that the conflict has been resolved to their satisfaction, and that it will not likely reoccur. These accomplishments should help participants put the conflict behind them and move forward, to more things that are positive.

□ These goals should be kept in mind during the resolution process. Ask yourself, “Will resolving this help provide me with closure? Will this action help me accept what has happened and move on?”

➤ **Identifying the Benefits of Resolution**

- There is no doubt about it - conflict resolution can be hard work. Effective conflict resolution digs deep into the issues, often exploring unfamiliar territory, to resolve the core conflict and prevent the problem from reoccurring.
- However, this process can be time-consuming and emotionally difficult. You and the person that you are in conflict with may arrive at a point (or several points) in the conflict resolution process where you wonder, “Is this really worth it?”
- When you arrive at these stalemates, look at why you are resolving the conflict. It can also be helpful to explore what will happen if the conflict is not resolved.
- Questions
 - What relationships will deteriorate or break up?
 - If this is a workplace conflict, what is the financial cost to the organization?
 - What will be the emotional cost to the participants?
 - Who else will be affected? Will it affect the beneficiaries?
- These questions should help participants put things into perspective and evaluate whether or not the conflict is truly worth resolving. In most situations, resolving the true conflict is well worth the effort in the long term. Visualizing the benefits can provide the motivation to work through the rest of the process.
- For complex conflicts, there are some additional ways to stay motivated.
 - It’s OK to break the resolution sessions into parts, with a different goal for each session.
 - It’s also OK to take breaks as needed - a walk around the block or a glass of water can do wonders to refresh the mind and body.

4 - Generating options

Once you have a good handle on the conflict, it’s time for all parties in conflict to start generating some options for resolution. In this stage, it’s all about quantity, not quality; you want as many options to choose from as possible.

a- First Generate, Don't Evaluate

- To begin, generate ideas for resolving the symptoms of the conflict.
- Then, move on to the root cause and expand your list of ideas.
- Key points:
 - Don't be afraid to throw out wacky ideas or to ask, "What if?"
Remember, this stage is about what you can do, not what you will do.
 - It is very important not to censor yourself or the person that you are having the conflict. Record all possible ideas into a list or brainstorming diagram. If you have created a cause and effect diagram, you can record ideas for resolution right on the diagram. (Once again, sticky notes are ideal for this initial, idea-generating phase.)
 - At this stage, all your work to build common ground and positive relationships will really start to pay off. As you and the person you are in conflict with start to generate options, the positive energy will build, increasing your creative output exponentially.
 - If you are having trouble thinking of solutions, use these questions to jump-start your creativity.
 - In an ideal world, how would this conflict be resolved?
 - How do we not want this conflict to be resolved?
 - How might others resolve this conflict?

b- Then evaluate

- Once you have a good list of options, look over the list, and perform some basic evaluation.
 - Cross off options that are an absolute no-go for either party.
 - Highlight options that provide gains for both parties.
 - Look for options that can be combined for an optimal solution.
 - Make options more detailed where appropriate.
- Continue brainstorming and generating ideas.
- What if your entire list of options gets crossed off? Then it's back to the drawing board! If you are having trouble coming up with ideas, consider taking a quick break, moving the brainstorming meeting elsewhere, and/or involving outside parties.
- Think about the following aspects
 - The effort for each option (perhaps on a scale of one to ten)
 - The payback for each option (also on a scale of one to ten)
 - Your estimation as to its likelihood of success
 - Other options that could be used to complement it
 - Each party's preference for it (expressed as yes/no, or a percentage in favour)

5 - Building a solution

Once the possible solutions are laid out, it's time to move on to choosing a solution and laying the groundwork for a resolution

a- Choosing a Solution

- Choose a final solution. Remember, you can often combine multiple options for even greater success!

- Here is a checklist to evaluate the chosen solution.
 - Is it a win-win solution for everyone involved?
 - Are all needs provided for?
 - Are all criteria met?

b- Building a Plan

- Now, let's create a plan to put the solution in action. The complexity of this plan should vary with the complexity of the situation.
 - For simple conflicts, you may frame a simple agreement
 - With complex situations, such as those involving a group of people or multiple option solutions, a detailed action plan may be appropriate. It is important that each party take responsibility for implementing the solution, even if it is determined that one party is at fault.
- The action plan should also include a list of things to do if the conflict is not actually resolved after implementing the solution. Typically, the parties will re-evaluate the cause and effect diagram to ensure their analysis of the root cause was accurate. They may also want to examine their criteria and explore other solutions.