



Westerville Public Library

# PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT

Katrina Plourde, SPHR, MLHR

Human Resources Manager

Westerville Public Library

<http://www.slideshare.net/westervillelibrary/practical-strategies-for-resolving-conflict>



“Conflict is a lot like water -- it spills over; it flows downhill; and, if left unchecked, it erodes whatever it touches. And sometimes it's like red wine -- it stains.”

- Jason Fried

# WHY ARE WE HERE?



Conflict in the workplace exists. This is a fact of life. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Conflict can lead to personal and professional growth if handled well.

# WHY ARE WE HERE?



This session will outline a practical process for employees to use as a tool to resolve conflict successfully.

*This may mean we have to re-define “successfully”.*

# OBJECTIVES



Today we will look at:

1. How conflict expands our awareness of situations.
2. Examining our own goals in conflict situations.
3. How group cohesion is affected when conflict is resolved effectively and not avoided.
4. The top 10 tips to use when conflict arises.

# DEFINITION

First, let's make sure we all are on the same page with what we call, "conflict."

What comes to mind when you think of this word?



# DEFINITION

Mirriam-Webster and Dictionary.com's definitions include some pretty potent words:

“struggle for power”

“strong disagreement”

“battle, fight, quarrel”

Essentially, it is a difference that prevents agreement. There is a struggle that results from incompatible interests or ideas.



# DEFINITION

It is more than just disagreement.

Conflict is a situation in which one or both parties perceive something more is present...something that prevents trust and comfort. Conflicts trigger strong emotions.





# EXPAND OUR AWARENESS



What are some key sources of conflict in our workplace?

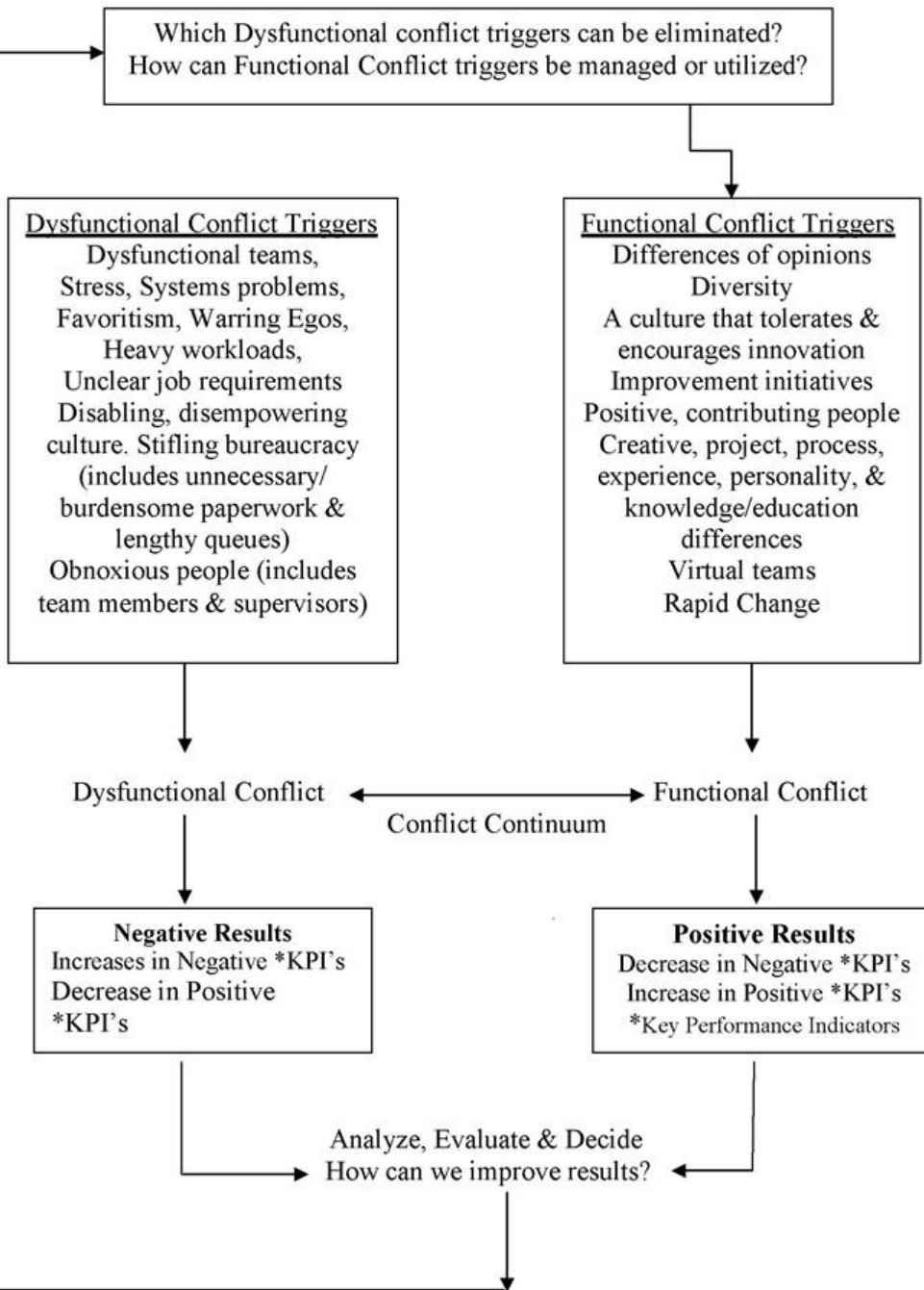
# EXPAND OUR AWARENESS



Are there certain factors in the environment that make problems worse, especially at times of conflict?

Figure 1

**Functional Versus Dysfunctional Conflict Triggers Model**



**EXPAND OUR  
AWARENESS**

# EXPAND OUR AWARENESS



Do we have channels for expressing normal problems and concerns in a predictable, reliable manner?

# EXAMINE OUR MOTIVES



Why do we avoid conflict?

Engaging in dialogue and negotiation around conflict is something we tend to approach with fear and hesitation, afraid that the conversation will go worse than the conflict has gone thus far. All too often, we talk ourselves out of potential dialogue.

# EXAMINE OUR MOTIVES



Ever heard yourself say this?

*"Why should I talk to her? She'll bite my head off and not listen to anything I have to say!"*

*What if he/she yells at me?*

# EXAMINE OUR MOTIVES

Ever heard yourself say this?

*"I should talk to him about this problem,  
but maybe it will go away on its own.  
There's no sense stirring up something that  
makes us both uncomfortable."*

*"What if talking about it makes it worse,  
rather than better?"*



# EXAMINE OUR MOTIVES



Ever heard yourself say this?

*"If I go to him, I'm making myself vulnerable. No, that's his responsibility - he should come to me and ask me to talk!"*

*"Why stir up trouble. It's not my problem."*



# EXAMINE OUR MOTIVES

Our history and our filter impact our **perceptions** of the situation and make us reluctant to begin dialogue.

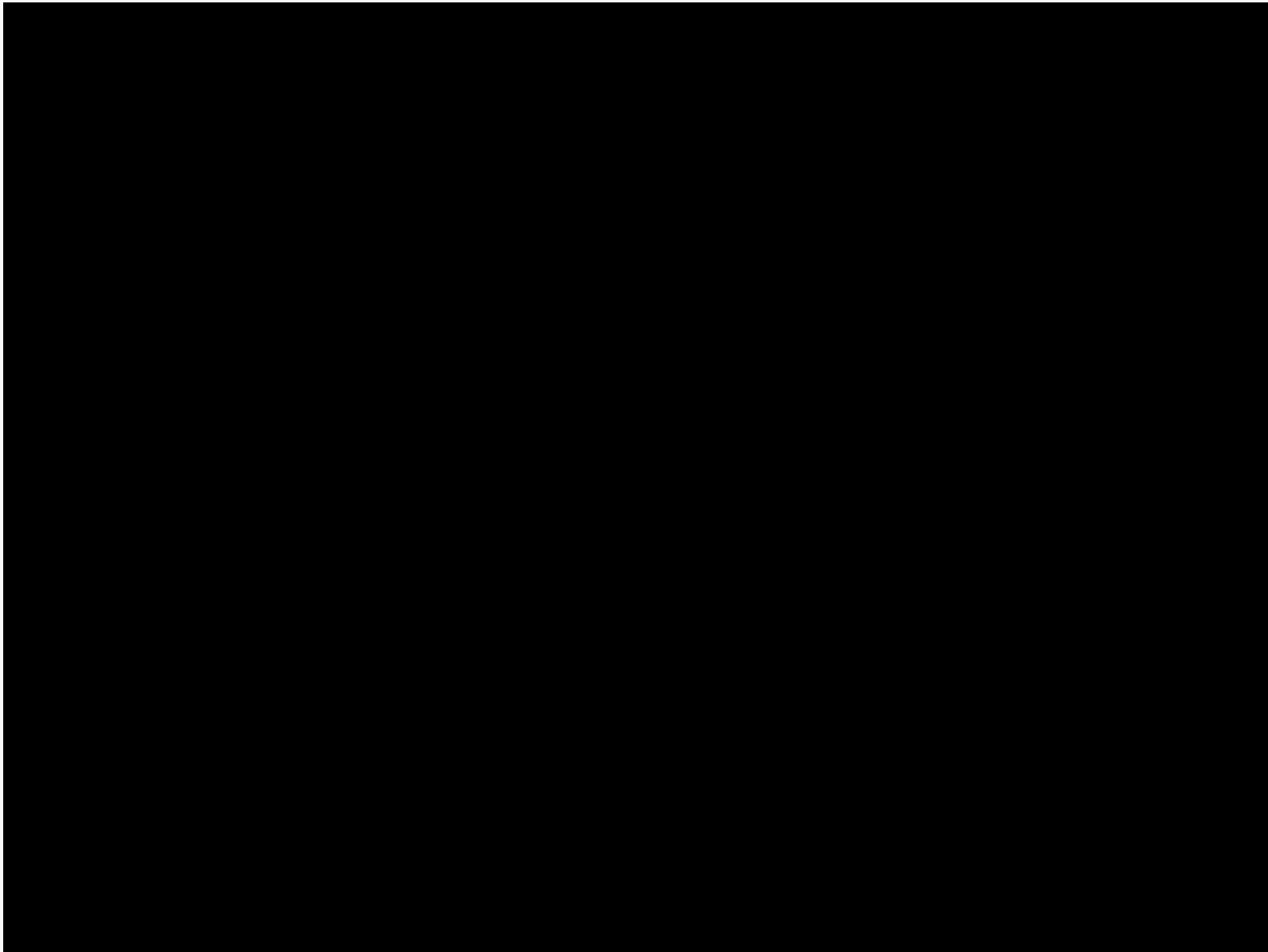
It's MUCH easier to avoid the situation.



# EXAMINE OUR MOTIVES

Let's look at some of the barriers to addressing conflict by Harry Webne-Behrman from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.





# EXAMINE OUR MOTIVES



So we have Personal, Interpersonal, and Structural barriers we need to hurdle to even get off the ground with dealing with conflict.

# EXAMINE OUR MOTIVES



Let's listen to Cricket Buchler talk about a 'fundamental attribution error' that might help us see our motives clearly.

She also talks about personal, social and structural influences that impact our dialogue with others.

# EXAMINE OUR MOTIVES



***VIDEO INSERT:***

***Crucial Confrontations | Cricket Buchler***

***Video on YouTube***

***<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=riq3VhjJhw8>***

***View first 3:17 of the video.***

# EXAMINE OUR MOTIVES



Have you have made assumptions about the other person's intentions or actions that need to be checked out?

What are your expectations of the other person or of the situation and in what ways were your expectations were not met? Would the other person be aware of or share your expectation?

# GROUP COHESION

Does avoidance solve the conflict?

Tensions simmer and eventually the problem comes back – often with a vengeance.





# GROUP COHESION

When disagreements worsen and become unmanaged conflict there are often negative results for an employee.

People may feel threatened – this feeling of threat can be physical but is often emotional, such as a threat to goals, status, job security, values or preferred outcome.



# GROUP COHESION



Ineffectively managed conflict can impact the workplace in many ways including:

loss of sleep

anxiety

lowered morale

decreased job satisfaction

# GROUP COHESION

It can, on occasion, also take on a life of its own, drawing in other people or departments.

If the conflict grows - people, departments and the organization - all pay the price of deteriorating work performance. In very extreme circumstances it can lead to workplace violence.



# GROUP COHESION



Good ideas remain unspoken, people create silos, and leaders don't get the information they need because everyone is afraid to bring up potentially contentious issues.

# TOOLS - TOP TEN TIPS



So now let's look at the top ten tips for successfully dealing with conflict.

# TOOLS - TOP TEN TIPS



#1

**Take a breather.** Avoid saying something in the heat of the moment you may later regret. If needed, take a moment to compose yourself before continuing the discussion.

# TOOLS - TOP TEN TIPS



#2

**Listen.** Let everyone speak and tell their point of view. Actively listen to each person and be respectful of any differences.

# TOOLS - TOP TEN TIPS



Why we need feedback.

The Johari Window

What You Know

What Others Know	Open	Hidden	What Others Don't Know
	Blind	Unknown/ Unconscious	

What You Don't Know



# TOOLS - TOP TEN TIPS

## The Johari Window

Increasing the “window pane” made up of what you know and what others know about you reduces any “blind spots” we might have - situations where others have information gained through their direct experience of our words and actions but we are largely unaware of their impact.



# TOOLS - TOP TEN TIPS



#3

**Choose your battles.** Not every difference needs to start World War 3 in the office. Realize there will be differences in opinion and personalities and be selective in what you fight for.

# TOOLS - TOP TEN TIPS



#4

**Avoid gossip.** Not everyone needs to know your thoughts and opinions on a certain conflict. Keep things between you and the other co-worker (and management if it has escalated). Likewise, do not seek out the details on a conflict that does not involve you.

# TOOLS - TOP TEN TIPS



#5

**Use business-like language.** Make sure to use professional and objective language. Focus on the problem, not the person.

# TOOLS - TOP TEN TIPS



#6

**Expect conflict.** With so many differing personalities trying to work together, conflict will arise. Take it in stride and work to resolve the issue.

# TOOLS - TOP TEN TIPS



**#7**

**Have an open mind. Be open to compromise.**

# TOOLS - TOP TEN TIPS



#8

**Find a mediator.** If the problem has risen to such a level that you are unable to come to a resolution, find an impartial third party to help sort it out.

# TOOLS - TOP TEN TIPS



#9

**Be proactive.** Resolve conflict in the early stages, if possible. It will save time and resources in the long run.



# TOOLS - TOP TEN TIPS



#10

**Ensure the problem is resolved.** Not everyone may be happy with the outcome, but as you accept the decision, you can move forward and put it all behind you.

# TOOLS - REVIEW

Here is another fun video to put together some of our tips and show what it might look like.

In the video they talk about three steps:

- Easy and relaxed (*take a breather*).
- Facts and consequences (*use business like language*).
- Limit the scope (*pick your battles*).



# TOOLS - REVIEW



***VIDEO INSERT:***

***Dialogue Example | Shared Visions***

***Video on YouTube***

***<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kde9fIV3OIE>***

***View full video 3:20 minutes.***

# RESOURCES

- Singleton, R. , Toombs, L, Taneja, S., Larkin, C. and Pryor, M. *Workplace conflict: a strategic leadership imperative [Figure 1]*. International Journal of Business and Public Administration, Volume 8, Number 1, Winter 2011.
- Patterson, Kerry; et al. *Crucial Conversations*, VitalSmarts.
- Tim Ursiny, *The Coward's Guide to Conflict: Empowering Solutions for Those Who Would Rather Run Than Fight*.
- *Managing Conflict Dynamics: A Practical Guide available from the Center for Conflict Dynamics*.
- Webne-Behrman, Harry. University of Wisconsin-Madison, Office of Human Resources, *"Confronting Conflicts"*.
- Vancouver Island University, *Managing Workplace Conflict*.  
<http://www.viu.ca/conflict/index.asp>
- Muir, Jeffrey. Conflict Resolution Survival Guide for Business Leaders, 2012.
- Buchler, Cricket. (Author (2012, December 17). Crucial Confrontations – Cricket Buchler. *YouTube*. [Video podcast]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=riq3VhjJhw8>
- Shared Visions, S. (Producer) (2012, November 12). Dialogue example - steps to mastering a crucial conversation. *YouTube*. [Video podcast]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kde9fIV3OIE>

