Introduction: Understanding conflicts

Conflict is a normal part of any healthy relationship. After all, two people cannot be expected to agree on everything, all the time. The key is not to avoid conflicts but to learn how to resolve it in a healthy way.

Generally, conflicts can be good for the relationship because you can learn from it. Were there no conflicts, how could you learn and develop your human interactions? Thus, having a conflict can lead to a better future if it is handled properly. In order it to lead a better future, conflicts should be resolved. There is no need to escalate the conflict, as it is always better to try to solve the conflict when it is the first step, than try to solve it on higher steps. Solved conflicts lead to a stronger organisation that benefits all.

Types of conflicto

Interpersonal conflict: Between individuals based on differing goals and values
Inter-organisational conflict: Between organisations
Intra-team conflict: Conflict within a team
Inter-team conflict: Between two or more teams

In addition to types of conflicts, there are also good and bad conflicts. Good conflict makes people to be more creative and keeps people to work hard as they fear removal from the office or work if they do not work. A bad conflict causes a lot of problem, affects performance and wastes time and energy.

Good conflict:

- Promotes critical thinking
- Improves decision-making
- Brings out the best in individuals
- Strengthen goals
- Face their responsibilities
- Improves work performance
- Brings attention to problems and solutions

Bad conflict:

- Disturbs teamwork
- Creates anger, tension, and ego
- Leads to bad relationships between people
- Breaks up an association
- Leads to violence and wars
- Stops development of an association

Causes of conflicts

Conflict arises from differences, both large and small. It occurs whenever people disagree over their values, motivations, perceptions, ideas, or desires.

There are three types of ways how conflicts happen: personal, communication and structural issues. The causes are personalities, emotions, interests, needs, desires, self-perception and self-esteem, hidden expectations, and unsolved issues from the past.

Personal factors are lack of acceptance of individual differences and cultures, different values of team members, self-interest instead of collective goals and jealously.

Communication factors refer to different ways of communicating, lack of communicating, different languages, and cultures, gossiping and lies. Poor communication may mean incorrect information, distorted information, or unclear information.

Structural factors are for example no unity in board or management, lack of appreciation (people do not value the organisation or the work staff do), size of organisation, no clear division of responsibilities, exclusion and inclusion, and power struggle. For example, the larger the organisation, more conflicts. Information becomes easily distorted as it passes through many levels. Additionally, power struggle may refer to distribution of power: some members may feel that they should be consulted before any decisions are made.

Other factors may involve participation (as more people get involved, more diverse ideas and disagreements will evolve, or some members feel that their ideas are not being appreciated which may start conflicts).

7 steps of a conflicto

In a conflict only 10 percent is about the issue, whereas 90 percent is about the attitude. People tend to forget the issue and focus on the attitude. Sometimes, they tend to use the wrong word, which can cause attitude. Instead, people should focus on the issue itself, which contains 10 percent.

"10 % conflicts is due to difference in opinion and 90 % is due to wrong tone of voice" There are 7 steps of conflict:

1. Step

The first step is disagreement which is based on different opinions on an issue. If it is not handled properly, it will escalate.

2. Step

Second step is personification. In a conflict, the participants start to blame each other: "you are wrong, it is your responsibility". They start blaming each other and intervening in each other's Jobs

3. Step

Third step is expanding the problem. They start to think about the past and bring up other issues from the past.

4. Step

Fourth step is stopping the dialogue. And start gossiping with friends, with the aim of seeking allies and parties against each other.

5. Step

Fifth step is enemy images. This means, that I am making my view the truth. Telling friends that I am right and that they should trust me instead the other person. Telling them that there is no need to check the other side of the story. You are using all efforts to prove that the other one is wrong.

6. Step

Sixth step is open hostility. Making the other party not humans. You do not want to see them, do not want to talk with them, and think that "you are different from us".

7. Step

Seventh step is polarisation. You cannot stay at same place together. It results for example resignation from board, move to another place, or divorces.

6 tips for conflict resolution

There are six simple tips for conflict resolution:

1. Tell true information, do not tell lies.
2. Do not believe in gossips, face them, and solve them. It is not about winning, but it is about finding a common solution.
3. Do not be afraid of admitting that you are wrong, it is not a sign of weakness. Talk about the issue, not the person. Be constructive in the talks.
4. Separate the personal issues from the organisation issues, do not mix them.
5. After a conflict have been resolved, analyse, and evaluate the process and learn from it. What did I right and what did I wrong?
6. Both parties have a responsibility to solve conflict, do not wait the other one to approach you.

With regards to apologizing, it does not always mean that you are wrong, and the other person is right. It just means you value your relationship more than your ego. Saying "I am sorry" will save friendships and work relationships. Apologising will solve many problems and bring forward the association. Do not wait with the apology, it gets worser and not better over time.

There are 5 simple tips to handle a conflict properly. Don't avoid it. Don't think "winning", but rather think "constructive resolution" instead. All parties in the conflict should separate the problem from the person when identifying the root cause of the conflict and resolutions. Be curious and ask questions to better understand the other parties in the conflict. Take responsibility to solve the conflict. There are 7 steps to step down a conflict, these are:

1. Take direct contact to the other parties, do not talk through other people
2. Get confirmed that all parties have a wish to find solutions
3. Allow all parties to tell their versions, how do they see the conflict?
4. The main issues behind the conflict should be uncovered
5. Each party's interests and needs should be mapped to understand why the people are reacting in these ways and to indicate which solutions are acceptable for them
6. Brainstorm solutions taking into account interest, needs, and the main issues
7. Making concrete agreements on the way forward using one or some of the solutions brainstormed

Transforming Conflict into Collaboration

Engaging in conflict does not have to be negative or counterproductive. In fact, it can be positive. Conflict can be helpful in making necessary changes within a work environment. It can be a win-win situation. You could choose an option where those involved in the conflict work together to discover a win-win solution, which is a collaborative solution. Conflict can clear the underlying tensions and bring out issues so the team can deal with them and learn from them. However, just because conflict can produce a beneficial outcome does not mean it is comfortable. Still, the best approach is for a team to deal with conflict and to accept that it is a normal part of working together, and that it can even benefit the group. Conflict, in the right setting and handled in the right way, can be constructive. It is through conflict that an awareness of the need for some necessary changes can be found.

Good discussion: Roosenberg model (2005): Non-violent communication
To avoid any misunderstandings or conflicts, or when resolving a conflict, it is important to have a clear communication. You should clearly explain first your observation: what happened. Second, explain your feelings: what do you feel when it happens? Then you should explain your needs. Lastly, you should suggest a concrete example what can be done differently to improve this situation.

Observation Tell exactly what the other did, that you don't like	I see that the task you where supposed to do have not been completed, which make me think that you don't prioritise it.
Feelings What do you feel when this happens?	It's annoying, because we work in a team and it makes me feel insecure about my job.
Needs What needs have not been satisfied?	I have a need to feel secure, because otherwise this will also affect the work that I do. I want to perform as good as I can in this work.
Wishes What can be done differently in the future? This needs to be something concrete.	My suggestion is that we go through the tasks together, and see if we can split the burden differently so that we both can be able to do our tasks on time.

Work or board related conflicto

For national association, it is important to understand how misunderstandings and communication problems remain one of the most common sources of workplace or board conflicts. Generational differences, personal management styles, educational background and cultural diversity are all potential sources of work / board related misunderstandings. Conflict is a natural and normal feature of the workplace. It occurs in every organization. For any team that strives to attain its goals, conflict is inevitable. Although differences will occur, the outcome does not have to be negative. Conflict can provide opportunities. Conflict challenges us to think harder, to be more creative, to develop greater understanding, and to search for alternative avenues that are more efficient, more effective, and more productive. Unresolved conflict, however, can result in the breakdown of a group. When unaddressed conflict occurs in the workplace, it can reduce morale, hamper performance, and increase absenteeism. It leads to increased stress among employees, decreased productivity, and at worst, aggression, or violence.

Be specific in formulating your complaints. "I'm never invited to meetings" is not as effective as "I believe I would have been able to contribute some ideas at last Thursday's office meeting."

Resist the temptation to involve yourself in conflicts that do not directly involve you or your responsibilities. Even if someone has clearly been wronged, allow him or her to resolve the situation as he/she chooses.

Try to depersonalize conflicts. Instead of a "me versus you" mentality, visualize an "us versus the problem" scenario. This is not only a more professional attitude, but it will also improve productivity and is in the best interests of the association.

If an extended discussion is necessary, agree first on a time and place to talk. Pick a time when you are both free to concentrate on the problem and its resolution. Take it outside and away from the group of inquisitive co-workers if they are not involved in the problem. Do not try to negotiate when the office gossip can hear every word.

Limit your complaints to those directly involved in the workplace conflict. Remember, you need to preserve a working relationship rather than a personal one, and your opinion of a co-worker's character is generally irrelevant. "He missed last week's deadline" is OK; "He's a total idiot" is not.

Know when conflict is not just conflict. If conflict arises due to sexual, racial, or ethnic issues, or if someone behaves inappropriately, that's not conflict, it is harassment. Take action and discuss the problem with your supervisor.

Consider a mediator if the problem gets out of control, or if the issue is too emotional to resolve in a mutual discussion. At this step, your supervisor should be involved. You can consider using a neutr