SUSAN S. RAINES, PhD

SECOND EDITION

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT FOR MANAGERS

RESOLVING WORKPLACE, CLIENT, AND POLICY DISPUTES

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Introduction to the Second Edition

A TALE OF TWO MANAGERS

John and Elise are managers who strive to apply the principles and practices of conflict management in their everyday working environments.[1] They come from vastly different organizations, yet both recognize the importance of proactively addressing conflict. By observing them we can see the techniques from this book at work.

MEET JOHN, DIRECTOR OF THE STATE BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

Almost every day, John dreads coming to work. As soon as he walks through the door to the State Bureau of Reclamation, his administrative assistant practically tackles him and regales him with the emergency du jour. It is these constant interruptions and daily emergencies that keep him from doing his real job, which is shaping and leading his department so that it can fulfill its regulatory mandate in an efficient and productive manner. What are these "daily emergencies"? They tend to fall into one of three categories.

Workplace Problems

Inevitably someone on John's staff calls in sick or announces that he or she is leaving for a position in private industry. Staff members cannot seem to work together well. They compete over scarce resources, blame each other for missed deadlines, or avoid talking altogether even when they are supposed to work on team-based projects. Occasionally employees file union grievances or discrimination complaints with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). John's organization "wins" nearly all of these cases, but the paperwork and drama wear him down and cost his agency tens of thousands of dollars per year. He wants his agency to be a fair and pleasant place to work, but struggles to change the existing culture and disgruntlement.

Customer Complaints

John's agency is part of the state's Department of Natural Resources. Specifically, the Bureau of Reclamation issues licenses for coal mines and ensures that all coal mines operating in the state are doing so within the bounds of applicable state and federal environmental regulations. Because the turnover in John's department is fairly high, it is difficult to meet deadlines for issuing permits and conducting mandatory audits. Sometimes his department loses applications altogether or makes mistakes in the paperwork so the applicant has to start the process over again. Every day that a mining company cannot work because of a missing license application means idle and unpaid employees as well as lost tax revenue. Calls come in nearly every day from citizens and companies who believe that the bureau is not doing its job well enough or quickly enough. When the call comes from a state legislator's office, John knows things have really gotten bad.

Regulatory Challenges

On really bad days, one of the mining companies will be in the news for some environmental mess they created or other violation of the state or federal laws that John's agency is supposed to enforce. The alleged violator will likely feign ignorance of the broken rule or law and try to avoid taking responsibility for the damages caused. The violator's legal counsel might threaten to sue the agency. Lawsuits are inevitable and unavoidable. If John does his job right, then the corporations he regulates want to sue him for his overzealous enforcement of state and federal mining laws. If he backs off a bit, then citizens' groups sue him for not adequately enforcing the laws. It is a no-win situation. No wonder turnover and absenteeism are so high in his department.

Something Has to Give

John has passion for the mission of his organization and he views himself as a committed public servant with good people skills who knows the mining industry inside and out. This should be the perfect job for him. So why is it that the bureau has not improved since he assumed command six months ago? John got this job by sharing some of his ideas for improvement with the agency's director, who quickly recognized John's passion and competence. So far, none of those ideas have been implemented due to the nonstop crisis management style in which the bureau seems to function. How can John focus on "fire prevention" when he is so busy "putting out fires" every day?

MEET ELISE, FOUNDER AND CEO OF MAIN STREET BAKERIES

Elise started with a good idea: provide local, organic, fresh foods to people in a café-bookstore atmosphere. Customers buy freshly prepared foods, healthy groceries, and gourmet items; get one-on-one consultations from certified nutritionists; and listen to guest speakers on various topics. Her stores have become gathering places and focal points for the communities in which they operate. Her

company is widely reputed to be environmentally friendly and socially conscious, a reputation gained through innovations in environmental management and significant charitable giving. She started in the early 1980s in California and has ridden the green wave into the twenty-first century by expanding from one shop to 425 stores throughout the United States and Canada. Elise plans to expand into European markets next year as well. Her company is consistently rated as one of the best places to work by *Fortune* magazine and *Working Mother* magazine. *Consumer Reports* rates Main Street Bakeries as having the highest customer satisfaction of any grocery store chain.

Does Elise love her job? Definitely. How does she do it? How did she create a workplace environment in which employees are generally happy, customers are satisfied, and the relationships with regulatory agencies are collaborative? More important, how can we learn from her example and improve our own companies?

Throughout this book we will return to John and Elise to see how Elise created and sustains a company with satisfied, dare I say, happy employees and customers. We will watch John as he transforms his workgroup into one that is less riddled with unproductive conflict and more successful at accomplishing its regulatory mission in spite of the ever-present shortage of resources common to public agencies. We will read other examples as well, including some from the nonprofit sector and from organizations of all sizes. Through these examples you will see the pitfalls of organizations that poorly predict, prevent, and manage conflict, as well as learn from contrasting positive examples of collaboratively and wisely managed organizations. By implementing the processes, strategies, and techniques in this book, you will learn the skills necessary to be a proactive conflict manager.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

You are reading this book because you are, or you hope to become, a manager who productively manages conflict to the benefit of your organization, your career, and let's face it—your sanity. Whether you acknowledge it or not, all managers are conflict managers. Whether you work in the private, public, or nonprofit sector, you are likely to spend the majority of your day dealing with conflicts between employees; disputes with clients, suppliers, or vendors; or managing relationships with myriad regulatory agencies.

The question is not *if* managers deal with conflict but *how* managers deal with conflict. Those who do not recognize it, analyze it, and design better methods for conflict prevention and resolution end up like John at the Bureau of Reclamation (but there is still hope for John, so don't quit reading now). The goal is to become adept at fostering and facilitating collaboration within your work teams and organizations so as to proactively avoid destructive conflict and harness the power of constructive change.

This book will provide readers with a knowledge base and a set of skill-building opportunities so they can reclaim their time and make their workplaces enjoyable, productive, mutually supportive, and where people want to work. Even in difficult economic times, during mergers and acquisitions and as leadership changes at the top of the organization, there will always be organizations

or departments in which employees are happy, customers and clients are satis-fied, and the problems that inevitably arise are handled efficiently and collabo-ratively. Managers in thriving workplaces are able to poach the best employees from other companies or agencies because their organizations have reputations as great places to work.

Each chapter includes exercises designed to allow you to practice these skills in your current work environment, while setting goals for continual improve-ment. The text can be read as part of a course or group-based training, or it can be used by individual managers seeking to improve their skills and work lives.

You need not be the CEO, like Elise, in order to make changes within your own work unit, as we will see from John's example. Managers at any level can change the way they operate for the betterment of their employees, themselves, and their organizations. The costs of unproductive conflict are too high to remain unaddressed for too long. Look at your most successful competitors and you are likely to find that they have put into place systems and people who manage con-flict and collaboration well.

Public Sector Managers

"Yeah, but the public sector work environment is nothing like the private sector environment," some people say. Although differences certainly exist, managers across sectors have more in common than not. They all need to be attentive to the organization's cultural norms, keep customers and those in powerful positions satisfied, solve problems efficiently, design and use tools to track progress toward goals, give and receive feedback effectively, lead productive meetings, coach and mentor employees, and be strategic about fostering a collaborative team envi-ronment. Managers in large unionized corporations may have more in common with public sector managers than they have in common with small businesses. And yes, public sector managers sometimes face problems or environments that are more rule bound, more open to public scrutiny, and with more accountability than some private sector managers.

Regulatory agencies are usually a part of the executive branch of the govern-ment at the federal or state level, and they have statutory authority to perform their functions with oversight from the legislative branch. Regulatory authorities are commonly set up to enforce standards and safety, regulate commerce, and oversee public goods such as national defense or clean air. Regulatory agencies deal in the area of administrative law—regulation or rule making. A **public good** is something that, by its nature, is supplied either to all people or to none, regard-less of whether or not each individual has paid his or her fair share for the enjoy-ment of that good. For example, national defense, clean air, public roads, and public libraries are all public goods: if they exist for anyone, then they exist for everyone. The problem with public goods is that many people try to gain the ben-efit of the goods without paying their fair share (via taxes, usually). Also, because they are owned by everyone and no one, they may not be adequately supplied or protected without governmental action. Regulatory agencies have historically had adversarial relationships with the organizations subject to their authority, but this leads to unproductive conflict and often to suboptimal outcomes for the public.

It is undeniable that government workers (i.e., public sector employees) face some challenges that are slightly different than those working in commercial enterprises (i.e., private sector employees) or for nonprofit organizations. For an organization to operate efficiently, its managers need to develop strategies and skills for collaboratively managing relationships with the overlapping levels of regulatory authority they face as well as with myriad vendors, suppliers, and others within the supply chain. This book will help you map out those necessary relationships for the success of your unit, your organization, and ultimately your career, regardless of the size or type of work in which you find yourself.

Private Sector Managers

The private sector is far from monolithic. Managers in small companies face challenges at a different scope and level than managers in Fortune 500 organizations. Small companies are nimbler and more open to changing as needed, whereas large ones seem slow to turn around even when big changes are needed. Examples throughout the book are used to illustrate the ways in which the techniques and ideas may be applied in varying contexts—from huge U.S.-based airlines to a family-owned restaurant. Most of the material presented in this book can be applied to businesses of all sizes but the relative costs of implementation for some interventions may be proportionately higher in small organizations. When this is the case, it will be noted and ideas for overcoming or reducing costs will be discussed.

Nonprofit Sector Managers

Nonprofits often combine the biggest challenges from the other two sectors. Like the private sector, nonprofits can be as small as a one-employee shop or as large as Blue Cross Blue Shield Association, with tens of thousands of employees across the United States. Similar to the private sector, nonprofits generally must find streams of revenue to support their work, often through grants, government contracts, and fund-raising events. The persistent state of budgetary uncertainty is a source of stress among employees and can lead to burnout and departure for one of the other two sectors. Similar to public sector organizations, nonprofits are generally involved with supplying public goods or private goods for which the market is not well suited (e.g., health care for the poor, emergency housing, humanitarian relief, transportation for the disabled or elderly). The importance of the mission means that most nonprofit employees care deeply about those served by their organization, yet employees may disagree strongly about the best way to serve their clientele and use limited resources. Nonprofits must keep their administrative costs down and their brand name sparkling if they are to compete for scarce funds—thereby increasing the importance of intra-office collaboration and the need to reduce the costs of conflict. Case studies and illustrations from the nonprofit sector are used throughout the book to show how collaboration and conflict management can be applied in these challenging and diverse environments.

Not a Manager Yet?

What if you are not a manager yet? The material contained in this book will assist you as you improve your communication and customer service skills and

interact with your coworkers and supervisors. As you rise in your career, you can use the material contained in these pages to improve collaboration among your peer group and to use feedback for your continued skill development. When you become a manager, you will be ahead of the pack, having already gained much of the knowledge needed to successfully lead your team and organization. Remember, when even one person in a team handles conflict better, it will positively impact the whole team.

If you are reading this book as part of a university course, you will likely have opportunities to discuss and apply the skills and concepts herein. If you are reading the book on your own, I encourage you to seek out one or more managers either within your company or outside of it in order to fully benefit from many of the skill-building exercises, role-plays, surveys, discussion questions, and goal setting tasks supplied at the end of each chapter. Old habits die hard and practicing your new skill set will improve your ability to transfer these practices from the book and classroom into the boardroom and break room.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The book is organized into three sections. The first section introduces the primary knowledge, skills and processes of conflict management on which the rest of the book depends. In this, the second edition, you'll find an expanded discussion of intercultural management and communication skills along with new exercises designed to help you take stock of your current managerial skillset.

Section II examines sources of conflict internal to an organization, such as employment disputes, turnover, dysfunctions within a team, working with union leaders, the creation of a strong organizational culture, and the common skills and practices used by ombudsmen at work. This edition focuses more heavily on the specific skills that managers and ombudsmen can use to resolve conflict at the lowest levels while also addressing the roots of dysfunctional corporate cultures that give rise to repeated problems. These are the sources of conflict that eat up managers' days, leaving them less time to build their businesses, respond to customers, and mentor their employees. A house divided will not stand.

Section III examines conflicts external to an organization, meaning those involving clients, customers, patients, vendors, and regulators. Additionally, this section provides skill-building and process knowledge used to facilitate effective meetings and large-group collaboration such as staff and board meetings as well as regulatory negotiation.

Each chapter begins with a fictional illustration of the challenges facing two very different organizations—the Bureau of Reclamation, headed by John, and Main Street Bakeries, led by Elise. These examples are used to illustrate common sources of conflict faced by managers and then show how the concepts and tools from each chapter are applied to those scenarios. The learning objectives at the beginning of each chapter serve to outline the concepts and skills covered as well as to cue the reader as to the chapter's foci. Teachers may wish to come back to these at the end of each chapter or class to evaluate the extent to which learning objectives have been achieved and determine where further elaboration or

clarification is in order. Case studies presented throughout the book are used to show either best practices or worst-case scenarios to avoid.

This edition has incorporated a greater number of skill-building exercises into and at the end of each chapter, along discussion questions and goal-setting suggestions to allow for the active transition of this information from the printed page into your daily work life.

Note that "he/she/they" will be used alternatively throughout the book.

THE COSTS OF CONFLICT

In organizations, "the typical manager may spend 25% of his time dealing with conflicts" (Bass & Bass, 2009, p. 319). The costs of conflict include the obvious expenses of legal fees and settlements but also include the costs of lost customers, employee turnover, and damage to the reputation of the organization and the brand name. **Alternative dispute resolution (ADR)** refers to a host of processes that serve as alternatives to costly adversarial litigation, including mediation, arbitration, peer review, the use of an ombudsman, and others. According to Europe's leading ADR organization, conflicts costs British corporations more than 33 billion pounds per year (US$52 million). To give some perspective, if this sum were a country, it would be the fifty-seventh largest economy in the world. Of this amount, only about 22 percent comes from legal fees, with 78 percent stemming from lost business due to customer dissatisfaction (Amble, 2006). A 2008 study showed that U.S. employees spent an average of 2.8 hours per week dealing with overt conflicts, which equals about $359 billion worth of average hourly wages. This amount equals approximately 385 million days of work (Hayes, 2008). It is likely that this number is underestimated because many people do not accurately recognize or label conflict when it occurs, preferring not to acknowledge its presence. For managers, conflict takes up even more time, with one survey showing it takes about 42 percent of the average manager's day (Watson & Hoffman, 1996) and with Fortune 500 executives devoting 20 percent of their time explicitly to litigation. Unfortunately, these statistics are not trending in a positive direction. In 2010, the EEOC reported a record high number of lawsuits (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2010).

Numerous studies detail the costs of high employee turnover. Studies peg the costs of hiring and training a new employee to be between 75 percent and 150 percent of the employee's annual salary. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 23.7 percent of Americans voluntarily quit their job in 2006 (Allen, 2008). Let's do the math for a moment: for an organization with one hundred employees, with a relatively low turnover rate of 15 percent per year and an average salary of $50,000, this turnover rate means costs of $562,000 to $1,125,000 every year! If that much money could be saved by mechanizing or changing a manufacturing process most managers would jump at the chance to reap this much in savings. Unlike changes to the assembly line or cutting back on technology purchases, many managers feel helpless to reduce employee turnover, improve morale, or change company culture. The good news is these can be changed and at relatively low cost.

Unfortunately, many managers view employee turnover as inevitable, like the weather—something that must be endured because it cannot be changed. Yet some organizations and some managers have realized that managing conflict is crucial to retaining employees and thriving as an organization. A growing body of research links high turnover rates to shortfalls in organizational performance and low customer satisfaction. "For example, one nationwide study of nurses at 333 hospitals showed that turnover among registered nurses accounted for 68 percent of the variability in per-bed operating costs. Likewise, reducing turnover rates has been shown to improve sales growth and workforce morale" (Allen, 2008, p. 5).

Spotlight: Turnover Is Tougher on Small Organizations

The loss of key employees can have a particularly damaging impact on small organizations:

> Departing workers are more likely to be the only ones possessing a particular skill or knowledge set.
> A small company's culture suffers a more serious blow when an essential person leaves.
> There is a smaller internal pool of workers to cover the lost employee's work and provide a replacement.
> The organization may have fewer resources available to cover replacement costs.

Source: Allen (2008, p. 5).

Organizations that have high rates of employee turnover also have related problems with high levels of absenteeism, low employee commitment to the organization and its mission, employee tardiness, and overall low worker productivity (Allen, 2008).

It is a myth that employees leave primarily for higher-paying jobs. The primary drivers of employee turnover include the relationships experienced on the job (between coworkers and between employees and managers), the work environment, the quality of communication within an organization, and job characteristics such as the opportunity to advance and develop professionally (Allen, 2008). Even in a tight budget climate, when raises are hard to dole out, conflict savvy managers can increase employee retention and productivity gains. This book will examine thoroughly the ways in which managers, owners, and employees can create the kind of workplace where people feel valued, they enjoy their work, and those conflicts that will inevitably arise from time to time are handled smoothly, collaboratively, and result in strengthened rather than weakened relationships.

You can't have happy customers and high mission achievement unless you have happy employees. It isn't possible. Companies with high levels of

employee satisfaction consistently produce high levels of customer or client satisfaction (Zondiros, Konstantopoulos, & Tomaras, 2007). In addition to lost productivity at work and high employee turnover, an organization's reputation and brand name suffer due to litigation over unresolved conflicts. A study in the *Journal of Financial Economics* (Baghat, Brickley, & Coles, 1994) showed that the stock value of large firms drops an average of 1 percent on the announcement of a lawsuit against the company whereas the stock of the plaintiff's company does not increase at all. Stock prices tend to rebound when an out-of-court settlement is announced. One percent may seem small but for the companies analyzed in this study the overall drop in stock value was equal to $21 million.

According to the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution (CEDR), Europe's largest dispute resolution organization, the majority of managers state they have not been adequately trained to handle the conflicts they encounter. In CEDR's survey of conflict among managers, more than one-third of managers claimed they would rather jump from a plane in a parachute for the first time than address a problem at work! The desire to avoid confronting problems results in wasted opportunities for improved performance on the part of employees and the entire company but apparently it bodes well for the parachute business.

Gerzon (2006), a leadership researcher, emphasizes that "leading through conflict involves facing differences honestly and creatively, understanding their full complexity and scope, and enabling those involved to move beyond the powerful, primordial responses to difference that result in an 'us versus them' mentality. It requires capacities that many leaders have never developed, bringing to bear both personal and professional skills that turn serious conflicts into rewarding opportunities for collaboration and innovation" (p. 4). Conflict can be positive or negative, depending on how it is handled. By handling conflict efficiently you can harness its creative power for positive change and avoid the negative elements that give it a bad reputation.

Collaboration and collaborative management are evolving as the dominant forms of leadership, but we are not there yet. With an educated, creative, and capable workforce, dictatorial, oppressive leaders are increasingly seen as dinosaurs from the era of factory-style production. With an economy focused on knowledge-creation and service industries, management styles must change to reflect the evolving nature of work itself. Barbara Gray (1989) defines **collaboration** as having four distinct parts:

- Interdependent stakeholders (i.e., those affected by a decision)
- The ability to constructively address differences
- Joint ownership of decisions
- Collective responsibility for the future of the partnership

Collaboration is different from *cooperation* or *coordination* because these "two terms do not capture the dynamic, evolutionary nature of collaboration. Collaboration from this perspective is best examined as a dynamic or emergent process rather than as a static condition" (O'Leary & Blomgren Bingham, 2011, p. 5).

Conflict management (CM) refers to the systematic prevention of unproductive conflict and proactively addressing those conflicts that cannot be prevented. Every workplace has existing conflict management methods, but these methods may have developed in an ad hoc fashion without explicit discussion. As a result the existing methods may need to be examined and (re)designed for maximal efficiency and user satisfaction. According to Adler and Fisher (2007), two visionaries in the field of conflict management, "By necessity, leaders must be many things: strategists, warriors, moralists, peacemakers, artisans, technicians, managers, and more. Sometimes a leader becomes an 'undercover mediator' within his organization or at the negotiating table" (p. 21).

Nonprofit organizations and government agencies are not immune from the high costs of conflict mentioned already, including costs related to employee turnover problems and dissatisfied clients, customers, and citizens. For example, in 2005 the four largest counties in California paid $79.2 million in litigation costs (Citizens Against Lawsuit, 2007). Although some of this litigation may be unavoidable, these costs could undoubtedly be reduced through the judicious use of ADR processes as well as systems to solve problems in their earliest stages.

Many organizations have learned the hard way that unproductive conflicts and poor management methods hurt the bottom line. Unproductive conflicts can result in costly and unpleasant relationships between companies and regulatory agencies such as the Department of Labor, the EEOC, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and so on. But you do not have to take my word for it. Luckily there are numerous examples of companies that have turned things around by making changes to their management of conflict as well as examples of those who have experienced huge costs from not learning those lessons early enough.

Through the systematic analysis of the sources and types of disputes, organizations can engage in a process called **dispute system design (DSD)**. DSD is a process for assisting an organization to develop a structure for handling a series of similar recurring or anticipated disputes more effectively. These can be internal employment disputes or disputes with external conflicts with clients, customers, or regulators (e.g., EEOC complaints within a federal agency or environmental enforcement cases with polluters). Chapter 8 will help you with the process of assessing the disputes facing your organization and then designing processes to prevent and limit the costs from those disputes.

CONCLUSION

Knowing there is a problem is only half the solution. After reading and practicing the skills contained in this book, you will better understand the sources and solutions to conflict in the working lives of managers. The next step is the hardest one: changing knowledge into action. Managers skilled in the art and science of collaborative problem solving will bring the specific skills of mediation, facilitation, process design, and visionary leadership to their work teams and organizations. The days of hierarchically organized authoritarian rule by organizational leaders are fading fast. Dynamic, successful leader managers of today

and tomorrow will act as catalysts for collaboration, maximizing performance by drawing on the individual strengths of team members and fostering firm commitment to a shared mission accomplished through a supportive, humane, energizing work environment. If you are reading this book, you have the ability to make these changes happen. As Gandhi and others have said, "Be the change you wish to see in the world."

KEY TERMS

alternative dispute resolution (ADR)   dispute system design (DSD)
collaboration   public good
conflict management (CM)   regulatory agencies

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the sources of employee turnover in your organization? How might a collaborative manager reduce employee turnover?
2. What are the current methods for addressing conflicts with customers and employees in an organization with which you are familiar? How satisfied are the users of those processes from what you can tell?
3. How collaborative is your organization? Why? How might it benefit from a more collaborative approach?

EXERCISES

1. Analyze the conflict management system(s) within your current or a past work environment. How are workplace disputes prevented, tracked, and managed? What about disputes with clients or customers?
2. How much of your day is spent in dealing with disputes with employees or customers? Can you estimate the costs of unproductive disputing for your organization or your team?

NOTE

1 These narratives are based on an amalgamation of actual managers at real organizations and are not based on any one individual or organization.

BASIC CONFLICT MANAGEMENT KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Manager Know Thyself: The Skills and Behaviors of Great Conflict Managers

Learning Objectives

- Identify and describe the five most common reactions to conflict.
- Analyze the costs and benefits of your own habits when responding to conflict.
- Apply your knowledge of conflict styles to better communicate at work with those whose conflict styles differ from yours.
- Demonstrate active listening skills and evaluate the results of your listening experience on the speaker.
- Identify your strengths and challenges related to emotional intelligence, then set goals for your growth in one or more areas.
- Analyze your common work (or home) tasks and create a list of repetitive duties that can be successfully delegated to others.

RESPONDING TO CONFLICT AT THE BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

John Smith is not happy with his administrative assistant, Maria. On the days when John needs her most, she calls in "sick." Today, John is scheduled to begin holding one-one-one meetings required for staff performance reviews. This week, he is supposed to meet with each of his twenty employees to share his ratings of their performances over the past year, while still getting his other work done. Any deficiencies in performance must be discussed, and, unfortunately, there are plenty of deficiencies to discuss. Although John has not administered performance reviews at this agency before, he knows that everyone dreads this experience. Because Maria is not here, John will have to find all the files himself, answer calls during the meetings with staff members, and try to keep on schedule without the benefit of his assistant who should strategically "buzz" him to let him know when his next appointment has arrived. Maria left a message on John's answering machine saying that she feels that helping him manage the review process is "above her pay grade." She said that she is happy to work on other tasks but won't participate in the review-management process. John is wondering what he should do about this problem, and then it hits him: he will send

out an email to his staff, including Maria, telling them that the performance reviews are being postponed until Maria is feeling better. Sending out this email will buy him at least another day or two to get his own work done (e.g., creating schedules, ordering supplies, and publishing ads for new positions) before getting sidetracked with the drama that will likely result from the performance reviews and from dealing with Maria. Hopefully she will take the hint and "get over herself."

RESPONDING TO CONFLICT: FIVE COMMON APPROACHES

Conflict isn't positive or negative. It is our reaction to conflict that determines whether the consequence will be *con*structive or *de*structive. Conflict presents an opportunity for positive change, deepening relationships, and problem solving. How you treat the other party or parties in conflict is highly predictive of the strength and duration of the relationship in the future (Gottman, 2014). In fact, the way in which two people communicate with each other when problem solving can predict whether or not they are able to work together productively with over 90 percent accuracy (Gottman, 2014). Therefore, it is not conflict that hurts our relationships—it is the way we approach it, manage it, and communicate it. As Mary Parker Follett wrote nearly 100 years ago, "All polishing is done through friction." Tjosvold's (2008) work shows that organizations that encourage constructive debate and the open expression of disagreement among team members can greatly improve their effectiveness, creativity, and efficiency. Nevertheless, when most people use the term "conflict," there is an implied negative connotation. Is your reaction to conflict generally constructive or destructive? How do you feel after you address a problem with employees, your boss, or your clients? The post-conflict feeling can tell us a lot. Does conflict make you want to "fight" or "take flight"?

Before reading further, please read and complete the conflict styles inventory in boxes 1.1 and 1.2. This test uses a "forced-choice" methodology. This means you are forced to choose between response A or B for each question. There may be some questions where you wish you could answer "none of the above," but please select the answer that best corresponds to your preferred methods for addressing conflict, either A or B.

BOX 1.1. CONFLICT STYLES INVENTORY

Styles

Think of *two* different contexts (A and B) where you have conflict, disagreement, argument, or disappointment with someone. An example might be a work associate or someone you live with. Then, according to the following scale, fill in your scores for situation A and situation B. For each question,

you will have two scores. For example, on question 1, the scoring might look like this **1. 2 / 4**.

Write the name of each person for the two contexts here:

Person A _____ Person B _____
1 = Never 2 = Seldom 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Always
Person / Person
A / B

1. ___/___ I avoid being "put on the spot"; I keep conflicts to myself.
2. ___/___ I use my influence to get my ideas accepted.
3. ___/___ I usually try to "split the difference" in order to resolve an issue.
4. ___/___ I generally try to satisfy the other's needs.
5. ___/___ I try to investigate an issue to find a solution acceptable to us.
6. ___/___ I usually avoid open discussion of my differences with the other.
7. ___/___ I use my authority to make decisions in my favor.
8. ___/___ I try to find a middle course to resolve an impasse.
9. ___/___ I usually accommodate the other's wishes.
10. ___/___ I try to integrate my ideas with the other's to come up with a decision jointly.
11. ___/___ I try to stay away from disagreement with the other.
12. ___/___ I use my expertise to make a decision that favors me.
13. ___/___ I propose a middle ground for breaking deadlocks.
14. ___/___ I give in to the other's wishes.
15. ___/___ I try to work with the other to try and find solutions that satisfy both our expectations.
16. ___/___ I try to keep my disagreement to myself in order to avoid hard feelings.
17. ___/___ I generally pursue my side of an issue.
18. ___/___ I negotiate with the other to reach a compromise.
19. ___/___ I often go with the other's suggestions.
20. ___/___ I exchange accurate information with the other so we can solve a problem together.
21. ___/___ I try to avoid unpleasant exchanges with the other.
22. ___/___ I sometimes use my power to win.
23. ___/___ I use "give and take" so that a compromise can be made.
24. ___/___ I try to satisfy the other's expectations.
25. ___/___ I try to bring all our concerns out in the open so that the issues can be resolved.

Source: From Wilmot and Hocker (2001). Used by permission.

The **conflict styles inventory (CSI)** is a questionnaire used to assess an individual's habits in response to conflict. As the CSI indicates, there are five primary responses to conflict: avoidance, accommodation, collaboration, compromising, and competing. Each of these responses is appropriate in some circumstances and inappropriate or ineffective in others. You might have assumed that the collaboration style is the best of the five conflict styles since this is a book on the subject of collaboration. Surprisingly, that is not the case at all. Instead of pushing you toward the use of one of these conflict styles over the others, this text argues that competent conflict managers are adept at analyzing problems and consciously choosing the style most likely to produce the desired results. Sometimes accommodation is called for, while other situations call for compromise, and so on. Each conflict presents an opportunity for the parties to consciously articulate their goals in the interaction and identify the best conflict-style response to achieve those goals. Sometimes preserving or enhancing the relationship is the ultimate goal, while in other cases your goal may be to avoid a no-win situation or to make a quick and fair decision. Matching the conflict style to the particular dispute or decision-making opportunity is an important skill both at work and in our civic and personal lives.

BOX 1.2. SCORING THE CONFLICT STYLES INVENTORY

Scoring: Add up your scores on the following questions:

A/B	A/B	A/B	A/B	A/B
1. __/__	2. __/__	3. __/__	4. __/__	5. __/__
6. __/__	7. __/__	8. __/__	9. __/__	10. __/__
11. __/__	12. __/__	13. __/__	14. __/__	15. __/__
16. __/__	17. __/__	18. __/__	19. __/__	20. __/__
21. __/__	22. __/__	23. __/__	24. __/__	25. __/__
__/__	__/__	__/__	__/__	__/__
A/B	A/B	A/B	A/B	A/B
Avoidance Total	Competition Total	Compromise Total	Accommodation Total	Collaboration Total

Source: From Wilmot and Hocker (2001). Used by permission.

It can be problematic that most of us predominantly utilize only one or two of these conflict styles as we unconsciously respond to problems as opposed to analyzing situations and choosing the style that best matches the problem at hand. The best conflict management works something like good health care. When health problems are avoidable, they should be avoided through preventive

measures such as good eating habits. When health problems arise in spite of our preventive efforts, they must be diagnosed and treated based on that diagnosis. Conflict should be diagnosed and treated in a similar fashion. However, even the most stressful conflict provides you with an opportunity to showcase your conflict management skills and communicate the importance you place on treating others fairly and respectfully, even when you disagree with the outcome of a dispute.

THE FIVE CONFLICT STYLES

There are five predominant styles for dealing with conflict. Most people habitually use only one or two of these styles. Your choice of preferred styles likely depends on the culture in which you were raised and the way your family of origin dealt with conflict. Knowing your own habits will help you improve your response to conflict, while deepening your understanding of others—especially if their preferred style is different. Rather than vilifying those who seem to "fight every fight" or those who behave with passive aggression, you will come to understand why others exhibit different responses to conflict and how to work successfully with those who do not share your preferred approach.

Conflict Avoidance

Clearly, avoidance is the approach used by both John and Maria in the scenario at the beginning of this chapter. Consistent with the **avoiding style**, John is avoiding dealing with performance reviews and addressing the absenteeism problem with Maria. He has rationalized his avoidance with the thought that he is new to the position and that maybe Maria's performance over the long term will improve. Avoidance becomes the preferred conflict-management style for individuals with negative past experiences of failed conflict engagement. If avoidance is your preferred approach, then you probably view conflict as a win-lose situation, with you likely to be on the losing end. Conflict avoiders tend to be people in low-power positions, from cultures that prioritize "social harmony," traumatized by childhood conflict, introverts, and/or people with lower verbal and social skills. Remember—conflict avoiders rarely rise to upper management because leaders must manage conflict every day. While it is important to avoid "no win situations," by improving your skills or helping others to improve theirs, you can improve the ability to choose among all five styles rather than defaulting to avoidance.

John is not in a low-power position, so why did he use avoidance? In this case, he may perceive he can't influence Maria's behavior. As any psychologist will tell you, we can only control what we think, say, and do, but we cannot control what others think, say or do. If Maria wants to use her sick leave, the organization's policies allow her to do so. The fact that she uses it at the worst times doesn't change the policy. However, John does have some tools at his disposal, and, so far, avoidance hasn't solved this recurring problem. Later in this chapter we will read more about the changes he decides to make in his response to conflict.

Conflict avoidance is not always a bad or irrational response when faced with a daunting problem. In fact, avoidance is the right approach if a problem is small and likely to go away on its own. When we fight every fight, we expend energy that might be better used to address the most important problems. It is important to pick your battles. If you scored low on this style (3 or below), then you might want to be more judicious at picking your battles so that you can save your energy for problems that are more central to the mission of your work unit or to your career goals. If you scored high on this style (7 or above), then you might want to work on your framing and problem-solving skills (covered in chapter 4) so you feel confident in your ability to proactively address problems.

For many problems, avoidance works temporarily but makes matters worse in the long run. Avoiders tend to repeatedly let things go until something snaps and they explode—sometimes over a relatively small infraction. In other words, "the volcano effect" occurs (see below for more information on volcanoes at work). Large organizations are better at conflict avoidance than smaller organizations. In large organizations, if one person procrastinates about addressing a problem, then maybe someone else will take charge and deal with the issue. In smaller organizations, there are fewer people onto whom we can push our problems.

Do not confuse *conflict prevention* with *conflict avoidance*. **Conflict prevention** occurs when an individual or group examines the sources of predictable and recurring problems, and then takes reasonable steps to address the root causes so they do not occur or recur. Examples of conflict prevention within organizations may include changing overlapping job descriptions so as to have greater role clarity and accountability. On the other hand, **conflict avoidance** or the avoiding style occurs when an individual or group has evidence that a problem currently exists or will soon exist, but no steps are taken to address the problem. Conflict avoiders refuse to acknowledge the problem exists, hoping it will just go away. This may work for small, nonrecurring problems, or when you lack the authority or power to bring change. However, do not underestimate your power to bring organizational change (see chapter 6). Avoidance is unlikely to work for systemic, recurring, or large problems.

There is a clear connection between some conflict-avoidance behaviors and the psychological phenomenon of *denial*. Like avoidance, **denial** occurs when an individual or group refuses to acknowledge a reality that is highly unpleasant. Denial is a protective mechanism that comes into force when a reality is so overwhelming that to acknowledge its truth could result in a psychological or physical breakdown. One example is when an organization announces it is "downsizing" and your unit will be entirely eliminated, yet you refuse to look for other work until the doors officially close because you keep hoping some miracle will occur and the decision to close will be reversed. Denial protects the individual from the shock that the reality poses to his psyche.

If you are conflict avoidant, how did this pattern develop? Perhaps you had traumatic experiences with conflict in your family or in your work environment. Perhaps you feel a sense of hopelessness or powerlessness to positively impact decisions and fix problems. Perhaps you have a shy personality and prefer not to engage in the long conversations often needed to solve problems productively. The first step to becoming a more proactive and successful conflict manager is to

understand why you tend to prefer avoiding conflict. The next step is to work on your conflict management skills so you can feel confident in your ability to proactively impact conflicts and solve problems. The third step is to develop a plan and timeline for improving your ability to proactively address problems as they arise (see the Goal Setting section at the end of this chapter).

As you push yourself away from the default style of conflict avoidance, you may fear that you are being too confrontational with others or taking on too many problems. This is rarely the case with someone who scored high on avoidance (or, coincidentally, on accommodating). So long as you are not acting out of anger when you address problems with other people, and you use tactful and constructive language, then you are much more likely to see positive results and be viewed as a problem solver.

Accommodation

Accommodation occurs when an individual has a preferred outcome but is willing to sacrifice his preference so the other negotiator can realize his own conflicting preference, thereby ensuring no harm enters the relationship. Those who use the **accommodating style** care deeply about the feelings of others and seek to maintain harmony in their relationships and work environments. If you scored high on this style (7 or higher), then you may believe it is often necessary to place your own wishes as secondary to others' in order to maintain positive relationships. While this belief is certainly true in some situations, a high score here indicates you are probably "too nice." You may seem too indecisive when difficult decisions need to be made at the managerial level. Your desire to please others and to be liked by those you manage may mean that some people take you for granted or take advantage of you, with suggestions like, "Ask Barbara to work late, she never says no." Another example would be, "Try to get Jose to work that holiday since you have plans. He's such a nice guy." While everyone needs to "take one for the team" now and then, accommodating people tend to sacrifice more than their fair share. But why not, since it does not seem to bother them? Constant accommodation *does* bother them, yet, they have learned to keep their opinions to themselves. Accommodators sometimes experience negative health or psychological effects from holding in their frustration and bottling up their emotions.

Conflict accommodators struggle with openly sharing their ideas, feedback, and concerns so as not to offend others. As a result, the team often misses out on the full contribution these team members could make, and so their ideas do not surface. Accommodators have difficulty delegating work to subordinates because they worry it will upset others. Inability to delegate is a recipe for disaster in a manager's career. The ability to delegate reasonable tasks to others by using clear direction and adequate oversight is crucial for maintaining efficient workflow and for reserving the manager's time for truly management-level decisions.

In contrast, if you scored low on this measure (3 or lower), then you may want to consider being a bit more flexible, accommodating, and occasionally making concessions to others so that you are viewed as more of a team player. This shows you care about others and are willing to engage in the give-and-take necessary

for healthy teamwork. Those who seldom act in an accommodating manner are viewed as pushy, selfish, and not team players.

Accommodation can be the best approach to conflict when an individual is in a low-power position, with little hope of achieving the preferred outcome; when an issue is of relatively little importance to you but of higher importance to others; when you seek to demonstrate you are reasonable and build goodwill. However, if you find yourself repeatedly accommodating others, and it is becoming frustrating, then you may not be adequately communicating or asserting your own needs. When accommodators learn how to identify situations calling for a more collaborative, competitive, or compromising approach, they can then use their assertion skills to frame their comments in a way that allows them to share their concerns or ideas without alienating or angering others (framing skills will be covered in greater depth in chapter 2).

Collaboration

A high score in the collaboration category indicates a preference to work together with others to achieve outcomes that meet the needs of all. Collaboration occurs when two or more individuals work together to share information and make joint decisions. If you scored low on this measure (3 or lower), then you may have trouble delegating and/or sharing decision-making authority with others, even when their buy-in is crucial to the implementation of decisions. If you scored high on the **collaborative style** (7 or higher), you likely view conflict as an opportunity to solve problems by working positively with others. Some have called this the "win-win" viewpoint, meaning that for one person to win in a negotiation or conflict, the other person's needs must also be met (meaning they must also win). You are not willing to win at the cost of the relationship, but you believe that by putting your heads together, you can generally find mutually acceptable solutions to the problems at hand.

Collaboration is important in workplace teams. Workplace teams with cooperative approaches to conflict management, as opposed to competitive approaches, exhibited higher levels of trust between team members (Hempel, Zhang, & Tjosvold, 2009). Chan, Huang, and Ng (2008) found that managers with a cooperative style showed more concern for their employees as people, and this concern fostered more trust. The deeper levels of trust between cooperative managers and their employees leads to greater deference to those same managers when difficult decisions have to be made or when the manager intervened to resolve conflict.

So why isn't collaboration the "best" style of conflict management? Not all problems call for collaboration. Imagine the following scenario. The captain of the Titanic realizes there is an iceberg off the starboard bow. He quickly assembles all the officers on the bridge of the ship and asks each one, "What is the best response to this problem?" Just then, the ship hits the iceberg, and the rest is history. There are times when a quick decision by our leaders is called for, and times when it is not. Collaboration takes time. When time is short, leaders must act swiftly and decisively. In other situations, the decision is not important enough to justify bringing together everyone to jointly reach a decision. If you have laid the groundwork by building strong relationships with others in your

organization, then they will typically trust your judgment when decisions must be made quickly or do not warrant the time it takes to engage in collaborative decision making.

The larger the group, the harder it will be to obtain 100 percent consensus on any issue. Imagine trying to get 100 people to agree on whether to order Chinese or Mexican food for lunch. This would not be a good use of time, may create conflict, and a competent leader could make an executive decision on this matter without much pushback. While an open and collaborative discussion of issues is often warranted, sometimes it is necessary to adopt a decision rule that allows for something less than 100 percent consensus, especially in large groups. Requiring 100 percent consensus gives extraordinary power to potential "spoilers" who enter into a process with the intention of derailing any agreement or stalling as long as possible. If the decision is made to use a collaborative style, it will be helpful to clarify the decision-making parameters at the outset. For example, will the manager seek input and brainstorming from the group, but then retain final decision-making authority, or will the manager defer to the expressed preferences of the group? If the latter route is adopted, decisions will require 100 percent consensus or something less, such as a simple majority vote, a supermajority vote, or consensus minus one or two. Voting is a process that matches the competitive style of decision making, yet it can be combined with participant input, dialogue, and collaboration to create a process deemed fair, participatory, and efficient.

As a manager, you cannot seek consensus on every decision. Employees do not want to be bothered for their input on issues they view as noncritical or decisions they feel should be reserved for managers. The more they trust their managers, the less they feel their input is needed on small decisions. The tricky part is for managers to have a good understanding of where these lines are drawn. Sometimes, a collaborative manager should seek input from one or more employees by asking whether this is a decision in which they wish to be involved. Sometimes they will say, "No thanks. I trust your judgment on this one." In that case, your inquiry has signaled that you value their feelings and that you understand the decision will likely impact them and their work. Reserve the use of collaborative decision making for the following instances: when others have the information needed to make a good decision; when buy-in will be needed in order to effectively implement the decision; when there is likely to be push-back if input is not sought; when there is adequate time for input and discussion; and when you seek to build or repair relationships with others.

Compromise

The **compromising style** indicates a preference for "splitting the difference" between the negotiators' positions. Compromise can be a quick, efficient way to reach a solution. For example, in hiring negotiations an employer offers the prospective employee a salary of $60,000 and she counters with a request for $70,000. The two quickly decide the most efficient and fair outcome would be to settle at $65,000. Both got part of what they wanted and left the negotiation feeling that the process was fair. The negotiation was relatively short and painless.

The compromising style is appropriate when a decision is not highly important, the time for negotiation and discussion is relatively short, and the process needs to be viewed as fair to all parties. One risk of using compromise is that value might be left "on the table," so to speak. For example, what if the employee offered to take on additional duties that would have otherwise required the hiring of a part-time employee in exchange for the previously requested $70,000 salary? By engaging in discussions to learn more about each negotiator's needs, it may be possible to reach a solution that is better for everyone. Compromise often misses these opportunities.

One of the most widely known stories of compromise comes to us from the biblical, Judaic, and Qur'anical traditions: the story of wise King Solomon. In the story, a mother had accidentally rolled over on her own baby and killed it as they both slept. In her grief, she stole another woman's baby and claimed it as her own. The two women came before King Solomon, asking him to determine the true mother of the infant. In his wisdom, Solomon stated that he intended to use a sword to cut the baby in half, so that each mother could lay claim to half the child (the compromising style). One of the mothers cried out that she would give up her claim to the baby and allow the other mother to have the child (the accommodating style). King Solomon knew this was the baby's true mother and awarded the baby to her (competitive style).

This story illustrates the largest flaw in the compromising style. It focuses on creating a fair process (you each get equal amounts) but can ignore even better solutions that lie unexplored. The compromising style encourages game-playing rather than open and sincere expression of needs, goals, and limitations. It encourages parties to "start high" instead of telling each other what is desired and why. It sometimes leads negotiators to miss opportunities for joint gains that might occur if a more collaborative style were used. To return to the earlier salary negotiation example, the employer may have been willing to go as high as $80,000 but she started small so as to make it look like she was "being nice" by agreeing to a higher salary. While the higher salary of $65,000 was appreciated, what if the job applicant really wanted a flexible work schedule and was willing to sacrifice some pay in order to obtain that type of schedule? Perhaps this would have been acceptable to both sides in the negotiation, yet the needs beneath the monetary amounts were not fully discussed. So they walked away with an agreement, but not one that met all of their needs as fully as a collaborative negotiation could have accomplished.

If you scored high on compromising and on accommodating (7 or above), then you may leave negotiations feeling a bit disrespected or taken advantage of. You generally start off your negotiations using the compromising style because you see it as fair, but if the other individual is a tough negotiator, you give in rather than risk the chance of hurting the other person's feelings or damaging the relationship.

You can improve this by choosing carefully among the different conflict styles to utilize the one that best matches your needs in any particular situation. Be sure you have a number (or other end result) in your head that is your "bottom line" before you enter the negotiation, and only change that bottom line if new information comes to light during the negotiation that justifies reconsideration.

Communicate to the other party about *why* you are asking for X or Y. Invite the other party to brainstorm solutions that are mutually satisfying in regard to solving the problem or reaching a negotiated agreement. If the other person is unwilling to engage in this type of conversation or unwilling to reach what you view as a fair compromise, consider walking away from the negotiation and telling him you need time to think about it. This may make the person reconsider his willingness to compromise or to engage in collaboration with you. See chapter 3 for more on negotiation theory and skills.

Competition

The **competitive style** indicates a preference to "win as much as you can," even at the expense of the other side or damage to the relationship between negotiators. You have probably heard that individuals tend to have either a "fight or flight" response to conflict. It is apparent that the responses we are examining here are much more nuanced and varied. However, if the avoidant style represents "flight," then the competitive style represents "fight." High scores on the competitive style (7 or higher) tend to reflect individuals with strong opinions and a tendency to make decisive unilateral decisions. Competitors tend to communicate directly and are more concerned about the outcome of a decision than they are about the feelings of others. We call this a focus on "task over relationship." They may err in believing that many interactions are competitions with zero-sum outcomes, when in reality the situations are more amenable to negotiations that yield joint gains for both parties, also known as "win-win" outcomes. Individuals scoring high on the competitive style are often viewed by others as overly assertive, abrasive, or insensitive. Individuals who scored low on this style (3 or lower) tend to score high in either the accommodating and/or avoiding conflict styles. As a result, these individuals are often seen as "pushovers" who will not adequately advocate for themselves or their team.

When does a competitive response to conflict make sense? Some situations such as elections or sporting events are inherently structured as competitions and call for competitors. However, many organizations inject competition into the workplace in ways that result in unintended negative consequences. For example, an internal sales competition may result in attempts to steal clients from other team members rather than from other firms or to sabotage the efforts of team members in order to win. The trick with the competitive spirit is to harness its energy in positive directions while remembering to correctly identify those areas in which competition results in the best possible outcomes. When done correctly, competition can result in increased productivity and healthy camaraderie. When done poorly, competition pits team members against each other, leading to hard feelings and negative outcomes.

A competitive style of decision making is called for when a unilateral, swift decision is needed because time is short and you, as a manager, believe that your preferred outcome is the only one that is acceptable or in the best interests of the company. It is better to be transparent about this assessment than to pretend to engage in collaboration or compromise, knowing that in the end, your decision will be final.

CHOOSING BETWEEN THE CONFLICT STYLES

As a child, you began learning about conflict management by watching your family members and others in your environment. You may have adopted the conflict techniques exhibited by one or more of your family members, or you may have developed a style that is the opposite because you determined theirs to be dysfunctional. Whichever style(s) you adopted, you have had many years to develop your current conflict habits. Changing habits feels awkward at first, and mistakes or backtracking is to be expected. Eventually, with practice and reflection, choosing the best style or approach will become habitual. Until then, it helps to ask yourself some explicit questions about the problem, decision, or conflict in question.

Begin by asking these questions: How important is this issue? Is there passion around this issue among my employees, superiors, or clientele? What will likely happen if no action is taken or if action is delayed? How soon is a decision needed? Who will be impacted by the decision, and who will be tasked with implementing the decision? Would a decision that had the input and expertise of other stakeholders likely be a better, more substantive decision for addressing the problem? Do I have the information I need to make a good decision? How much buy-in will be necessary for the decision to be implemented smoothly? Do I have the power or authority necessary to make a unilateral decision? How will a unilateral decision be received by others? Do others in my organization trust that I will make the best decision possible, even if they are not particularly happy with the outcome of the decision? How are my pre-existing conflict management habits biasing my answers to these questions?

BOX 1.3. CHOOSING THE BEST RESPONSE TO CONFLICT

1. Is this a "no win" situation due to a power asymmetry that is working against you? If so, consider choosing the avoidant style.
2. Do you need "buy-in" from those impacted by a decision in order to get it implemented? If so, consider using the collaborative style.
3. Does a quick, authoritative decision need to be made? If so, consider the competitive style.
4. Does your colleague care passionately about this issue even if it is of minor or moderate importance to you? If so, consider the accommodating style.
5. Is time short? Do you need a fair process that allows you and the other negotiator to both get something out of the deal? If so, then consider the compromising style.

It is also important to note that your choice of a specific conflict management response will need to take into consideration the context of the dispute, its importance to the organization and individual employees, whether the conflict or project is in its early or late phases, and the preferred style or approach of those with whom you work.

As you strive to be more analytical and proactive in your approach to dealing with conflict, do not be too hard on yourself or on those around you. You are developing a deeper cognitive framework for understanding conflict and its management, but changing patterns of behavior takes time and practice. Allow yourself a "do-over" when you catch yourself falling back into old, destructive patterns of communication or decision making. If you are explicit with others about your desire to improve these skills, you are likely to find that your colleagues and employees are not only open to working *with* you, but they will also appreciate that you are trying to develop your abilities in these areas. At the end of this chapter, review the goal setting section to get started on making improvements in your conflict management habits.

THE LANGUAGE OF CONFLICT

We learned how to manage conflict the same way we learned language—by watching and listening to those around us. The way in which we communicate our approach to conflict includes both verbal and non-verbal signals we give to others, either purposefully or subconsciously. Just as every spoken language has rules of grammar and punctuation, so does the language of conflict. However, for most people, the unspoken rules or norms of conflict management, also known as the language of conflict, have never been explicitly discussed except at the most obvious level, with statements such as, "Tommy, we don't hit," or, "We have a zero-tolerance policy for bullying." The rules vary within each family or organization and within each of the five conflict styles discussed in this chapter. When an individual exhibits a conflict style that is different than that of the group's style (such as with one's coworkers or with one's in-laws), it seems as if he is breaking an unwritten and unspoken rule, one that everyone should know. Because we learned our language of conflict through the osmosis of watching the world around us, we implicitly believe that everyone saw the same world that we saw, and therefore they should have learned the same lessons. When someone's communication mode or approach to problem solving irritates you, ask yourself, "What approach to conflict is he using, and how different is it from my preferred approach?" You may find that it is the difference in styles that is the obstacle to smoother interactions rather than the preferred outcomes voiced by each party about the conflict.

Let's revisit the scenario at the beginning of this chapter with John and Maria. At the Bureau of Reclamation, Maria has previously called in "sick" when she was dreading her work more than usual. She has even told John why she is calling in sick: "I hate performance review season." Her direct, rather competitive approach is at odds with that of her boss. John has not complained before, which is an avoidant approach. Maria has concluded that it must not bother him too much when she calls in sick. For them to communicate more proactively, they would need to sit down together to explicitly discuss what is or is not working about this approach to problem solving and, hopefully, brainstorm ways to address the problems so that avoidance feels less necessary. In other words, a collaborative conversation is called for. John could use his authority to instruct

Maria *not* to miss any more work, which would be a competitive approach. However, she could quit or simply ignore him, so long as she has enough sick leave to use. Since he cannot force compliance, collaboration would be the best option.

BOX 1.4. COMMUNICATION RULES IN AGGRESSIVE ORGANIZATIONS

1. Survival of the fittest.
2. Be blunt and to the point, no matter if it hurts someone's feelings.
3. Stake out your positions early and don't compromise.
4. Have an audience when you engage someone in conflict.
5. People who don't engage this way are weak.

John comes from an avoidant and accommodating conflict culture in which emotion is typically conveyed indirectly. Rather than verbally expressing a problem, in John's family they might slam doors, pout, give the silent treatment, or avoid each other until the problem "blows over." It bothers John that Maria calls in sick so much when she is not really sick. He believes she should be able to pick up on his anger through the indirect signs he sends her such as how he tries to avoid her when she returns to work while he calms down. John is conflict avoidant, so he has not said anything to Maria before about this problem, but he has had all he can take. He has put up with this behavior for too long, and this is the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. In a fit of frustration, John calls Maria and yells into the receiver, "If you value your job, you will be back here tomorrow morning at 8 a.m. sharp and ready to do your part with the performance reviews! Good-bye!" This is the "volcano effect." Like volcanoes, John's anger and frustration has been bubbling below the surface for a long time, yet on the outside, he has appeared placid and calm. When something bothers him, he tries to ignore it for as long as possible. Then, something seemingly small triggers a reaction, or an over-reaction, and his anger can no longer be contained. He lets his temper get the best of him, and he erupts like a volcano. This time, he lashed out at Maria, the source of his frustration. But sometimes when his temper erupts, his anger spills out to hurt innocent bystanders or even follows him home. His temper is not helping his health either, as he keeps increasing his dose of antacids and blood pressure medicine.

BOX 1.5. COMMUNICATION RULES IN CONFLICT AVOIDANT ORGANIZATIONS/INDIVIDUALS

1. Walk away from conflict whenever possible.
2. Don't express strong feelings.

3. Sulking, snide comments and the "silent treatment" are acceptable means of expressing dissatisfaction.
4. Others should be able to tell when something is bothering you.

John and Maria communicate in very different ways. In Maria's family, if someone is angry, upset, or hurt, he or she directly tells the other person what is on his or her mind. For example, Maria's husband recently asked her what she wanted for her birthday, and she said, "Nothing really. Just let me go 24 hours without cooking or doing laundry," and she meant it. There was no gift she was secretly wanting, no surprise party in the back of her mind. John's wife communicates indirectly, like her husband. If she says she does not want something for her birthday, what she really means is that he should know what she wants without her having to tell him. Because John knows his wife so well, he knows that she will be offended if he does not get her a nice gift for her birthday, so the goal is to surmise what it is she really wants. By spending time with her and investing in their relationship, he is able to pick up on her subtle cues. Alternatively, perhaps he will call one of her girlfriends to see if she might have a gift idea to share.

In collaborative organizations and families, individuals share their concerns and preferences tactfully and openly. They listen to one another, convey empathy, and seek out mutually acceptable solutions to problems. They do not yell or throw temper fits. They do not avoid one another, sulk, or use the silent treatment when a problem exists. They express confidence that the problem can be solved through respectful and considerate dialogue, taking turns, and sharing in the costs and benefits of any eventual decisions.

BOX 1.6. RULES IN COLLABORATIVE ORGANIZATIONS/ INDIVIDUALS

1. Have regular meetings to discuss challenges and make decisions together.
2. The expression of strong feelings is allowed, but sulking and passive aggression is not.
3. Good listening and framing skills are used by all.
4. Strong relationships are built through shared activities and time spent together.

TRAITS AND BEHAVIORS OF EXCELLENT MANAGERS

Reflect back on the best manager you have ever had. It could be your little league coach, the supervisor at your first job, or if you are lucky, it could be your current manager. What *traits* made him or her an excellent manager? Traits include

patience, kindness, and flexibility. What specific *behaviors* did this manager frequently engage in, which led you to think of him as your best boss? For example, some managers respond promptly to email, sponsor social events, recognize the birthdays of their employees, provide needed resources to employees, advocate up the chain of command, or listen empathetically. While personality traits may seem hard to acquire, each of us can engage in more of the behaviors exhibited by effective managers. By making a list of the behaviors of effective managers, you can set your own goals as a manager (or manager in training). Which behaviors would you like to increase or decrease?

When asked to create lists of effective managerial behaviors, employees frequently respond with the following inventory. Great managers show they care; get to know employees as individuals; lead from the front; communicate what they need from each employee (and why) and what they will give back (and why); listen with empathy; nurture, train, support, and hold accountable; are open to new ideas and ways of operating; advocate for the needs of their team; are proactive problem solvers; invite input; share rewards and recognition; and they engage in strategic thinking and planning.

A body of management theory known as **leader-member exchange theory** has become popular since the 1980s. This research examines the types of relationships that form between leaders and organizational members as well as the benefits that accrue to leaders and members as a result of these relationships. This approach posits that the best managers develop positive relationships with organizational members based on "trust, respect, loyalty, liking, intimacy, support, openness and honesty" (Wilson, Sin, & Conlon, 2010, p. 358). Leaders provide members with goods such as access to information, assignment to interesting projects, and recommendations to higher managers, whereas members supply commitment, engagement, and loyalty. Both accrue benefits from the nurturing of close, effective relationships that include recognition of their interdependence.

In early 2009 Google began "Project Oxygen," an internal study aimed at identifying the characteristics of the company's most successful managers. Luckily, what they found applies not only to Google managers, but also to management generally. They mined performance reviews, employee feedback surveys, and nominations for top manager awards to find out what makes the best managers (Bryant, 2011). The Project Oxygen team asked employees to rank the qualities that made for the best managers. The research team predicted that technical expertise would be high on the list of attributes found among the best managers—after all, when employees get stumped on a technical matter they are supposed to turn to their managers for assistance. Yet technical abilities ranked last out of eight attributes of great managers. "What employees valued the most were even-keeled bosses who made time for one-on-one meetings, who helped people puzzle through problems by asking questions, not dictating answers, and who took an interest in employees' lives and careers" (Bryant, 2011, p. 2). Making a connection to employees and being accessible were key qualities of great managers. A study by Watson and Hoffman (1996) found that the most successful and powerful managers engaged in cooperative behaviors with their colleagues and employees whereas lower-power managers attempted to make gains by resorting to authoritarian and competitive practices. Table 1.1 examines the findings from Project Oxygen, showing the habits and behaviors of effective managers.

Table 1.1 Eight Habits of Effective Managers

Habit	Description
1. Be a good coach.	Provide specific, constructive feedback with regular one-on-one meetings.
2. Empower your team. Don't micromanage.	Balance employee freedom and give advice. Allow employees to grow skills with new challenges.
3. Express interest in employee success and wellbeing.	Get to know employees as people outside of work. Ease transitions for new employees with warm welcomes.
4. Be productive and results oriented.	Help prioritize work. Remove roadblocks. Focus on goal setting.
5. Be a good communicator; listen to your team.	Two-way communication is key: listen and share, encourage open dialogue, hold regular meetings for all team members.
6. Help employees with career development.	Learn about employees' career goals and ways you can empower them to achieve those goals.
7. Have a clear vision and strategy for the team.	Involve the team in drafting and updating its vision and goals.
8. Have key technical skills.	Work beside employees when needed. Understand the specific challenges of each team member's job.

Source: Adapted from Blodget (2011).

Table 1.2 Pitfalls of Poor Managers

Pitfall	Description
1. Trouble transitioning to team leader	A great individual performer; lacks knowledge and preparation for management role or is an outside hire who doesn't understand organization's culture or processes
2. Lacks consistent approach to performance management and career development	Not proactive—waits for employees to come to him or her; does not coach employees for their development; fails to communicate what the organization needs or wants to employees
3. Spends too little time managing and communicating	Doesn't hold regular group and one-on-one meetings; doesn't listen well or invite feedback or ideas

Source: Adapted from Blodget (2011).

In addition to yielding these eight habits of successful managers, the Google study also found three pitfalls common to their worst managers (see table 1.2). The first pitfall is that great workers do not always make great managers. A hard working frontline employee may or may not have the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully transition into the management role. Organizations can ameliorate these deficits through training programs designed to help employees transition successfully to managerial roles or through tests of these skills as part of the promotion process. When organizations choose to hire managers from outside rather than promoting from within, it is crucial that new hires take the time to learn the organization's processes, policies, and culture during their transition phase. The second and third pitfalls deal with managers who do

not communicate consistently, proactively, and effectively. Ineffective managers hold meetings only when a crisis emerges. They don't follow up to ensure their employees' career development needs are being met and they don't listen well.

Great managers are rarely born; they are made. They seek continuous improvement in their skillset no matter how well they manage already. One thing is clear: to be a great manager, you must be a great listener.

LISTENING SKILLS: THE FOUNDATION OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Few managerial skills are as neglected as listening skills. Listening skills are the foundation for most forms of collaboration, problem solving, and dispute resolution. Everyone can improve personal listening skills, and when you work on these, people notice. Most managers believe they already have good listening skills, but would their employees agree?

In a typical conversation in English-speaking countries, there is an overlap of one to two syllables that occurs when the speaker slows down and the listener jumps into the conversation, thereby becoming the next speaker (see figure 1.1). Culture influences speech patterns, therefore not all English speakers will conform to this pattern, although it will apply to the majority of English speakers. Two problems arise when this listening pattern is used. First, there is an overlap during which the person who is supposed to be listening starts to speak before the speaker has completed his statement. Second, instead of listening to understand, the listener listens to respond, especially in situations of conflict. This means the listener is preparing a rebuttal, an evaluation, or a question of interest to the listener rather than focusing on what the speaker is saying and any emotional needs that underlie his or her speech. The first step to solving problems is to understand the nature of the problem and the various parties' perspectives and views of the conflict. By **listening to respond**, people generally listen to figure out when they can jump into the conversation and get out their view, opinions, and thoughts. Instead of listening to respond, the first step in a problem-solving conversation is **listening to understand**. Listening to understand requires listeners to suspend judgment and their own need to drive the conversation. Instead of listening for the moment to jump into the conversation, the goal of listening to understand is to allow the speaker to completely share his or her thoughts, concerns, or emotions with the listener, uninterrupted. This calls for active listening.

Before you can know how best to respond to a concern or problem, you must seek to understand it. Most listeners listen to respond rather than listening to understand. In other words, we listen in order to find a brief opening so we can jump into the conversation as a speaker rather than remaining in the role of

Speaker A -------------   --------------   -----------------

Speaker B   ---------------   ---------------

Figure 1.1 Common English Speaking-Listening Pattern

listener. When the speaker pauses to take a breath or to see if we are still pay-ing attention, we jump in and offer our own observations, insights, or opinions. However, when someone is upset or a problem exists, we need to listen first and problem-solve later. Listening to understand is the first step to becoming a better manager, spouse, parent, or friend. Through the application of active listening skills, you can gain the ability to understand the concerns at hand while convey-ing that the other person's needs are important to you. **Active listening** refers to a set of techniques often used by counselors and conflict resolution specialists intended to help the listener focus on the speaker, elicit detailed stories related to conflicts or problems, build rapport between the listener and speaker, and form the foundation for later problem-solving efforts.

Step 1: Determine the purpose of the conversation. Not all conversations require active listening. When someone comes to you with high emotional energy because they are excited, upset, or frustrated, then you have an opportunity to increase your understanding and show you care about this relationship by engag-ing in active listening. Sometimes they seek your help to solve a problem, but equally often, they simply seek someone to listen empathetically. A general rule to follow is to refrain from offering problem-solving advice unless the speaker requests it or you have ascertained that they genuinely seek your input. Some conversations serve a solely recreational purpose. For example, two or more peo-ple can discuss a recent soccer match over the water cooler or complain about the bad food in the cafeteria. Rather than seeking to solve a problem, seek cama-raderie as an end in itself. Identifying the purpose of the conversation helps you determine when to apply active listening skills.

Step 2: Give the speaker your undivided attention. In the era of smart phones and omnipresent TV monitors, this is increasingly difficult. When someone is upset or excited, we need to set aside all distractions and give the speaker our full atten-tion. Even if we think we know what he or she is about to say, by allowing them the space to say it and listening without distraction, we send the signal that they are important to us. We build rapport. Close the door to make a quiet environment. Silence your cell phone. What if you cannot drop everything when they need to speak to you? Let them know you want to make time to listen to them uninterrupted. Tell them you will circle back to them when you are finished with your conference call (or whatever task is monopolizing your attention), but make sure to follow through.

Step 3: Your body language, eye contact, and non-verbal signals should con-vey, "I'm listening." Turn your chair toward the speaker, look them in the eye, and clearly convey this time is theirs to share their concerns.

Step 4: Use door openers, check-ins, and summaries to encourage them to tell their story fully. Start with an open-ended question that allows the speaker to tell their story fully such as "What is going on?" or "Tell me how you are feeling about this," or "What's happened?" Then, as they speak, if they pause to see if you are still listening, you can offer a check-in, which can vary by listener and culture. It could be as simple as a head nod or a short phrase such as, "uh-huh." A longer check-in can summarize the emotion you hear the speaker conveying: "You sound frustrated." The listener's goal is to refrain from saying anything that could take the speaker in a different direction or take the focus off the speaker and onto the listener.

In other words, avoid the temptation to build rapport through shared experi-ences by stating, "That happened to me once. Let me tell you all about it." When

the speaker is finished, summarize what you heard so he or she feels understood. Be sure to include a reference to not only the speaker's perceived facts of what happened but also the emotional importance of the event to them. For example, you can say, "It sounds like you are really angry and frustrated because you feel you were passed over for that promotion." As a manager, you may need to respond with your own perception or facts, but not before ensuring the speaker feels heard.

Step 5: Develop a response to the concerns raised by the speaker, if appropriate. After using steps one through four, if the speaker is seeking a response or resolution from the listener (the manager, for our purposes), then the listener should convey a desire to respond to the legitimate needs of the speaker, even if that response requires time for reflection and information gathering. For example, you can say, "I would like to speak to the human resources representative to learn more about this hiring concern and then get back to you in a few days." If the goal of the conversation is joint problem solving, then each person should leave the meeting with an understanding of the next steps in the process, any action items to be accomplished and by whom, and a timeline for decision or action. However, do not shorten the first four steps in an effort to get to step five. Remember, it is often worth asking the speaker to share his or her ideas for problem solving as well. Not every problem is the manager's to solve.

Be sure to avoid common listener pitfalls that either derail the speaker's train of thought by interjecting the listener's own experiences ("That happened to me once and it was even worse!") or by offering judgments or advice. Agreeing or disagreeing with the speaker may swing the conversation onto a different path or may simply be inappropriate in your role as manager. You will be tempted to interrupt by asking clarifying questions. Hold these until the end if possible. When you summarize what you heard, you can ask for clarification then. You will find that some people cognitively process difficult decisions through the act of speaking. For these individuals, all they need is a good listener, and they can solve the problem themselves. In fact, they will often thank you for being a good listener rather than asking you what to do. Avoid interrupting—even when you believe you know what they are going to say—because the act of listening is to not only understand the speaker but also show respect and build rapport. Plus, you will be surprised at how often you actually did *not* predict what they were going to say. Remain open to hearing them and being surprised.

BOX 1.7. KEYS TO ACTIVE LISTENING

Avoid distractions.
Make eye contact (when culturally appropriate).
Use open body language.
Listen to understand.
Use conversation starters and openings.

Summarize what you've heard.
Avoid judging what you hear (positively or negatively).
Avoid trying to solve problems.
Avoid statements that take the focus away from the speaker.

Why would a book on conflict management suggest that listeners avoid trying to solve problems? Good conflict managers have one main tendency in common. We tend to be fixers. We want to help others fix their problems by imposing our solutions on them. Sometimes, this is necessary and appropriate. Fixing the speaker's problem is rarely, if ever, appropriate at the active listening stage. If need be, the time for fixing the problem may come after deep listening has occurred. Additionally, there will be times when it is most appropriate for parties to generate their own solutions to the problems they face. They will usually be more satisfied with solutions they generate themselves—even if it is the same exact solution you would have recommended or imposed (review the procedural justice discussion in chapter 2). The time to worry about problem solving is after all parties have had an opportunity to listen actively to each other and to their manager.

Opportunities for active listening occur regularly, but we tend to miss them. Look for signs of high emotional energy on the part of the speaker: excitement, frustration, anger, weariness, or anxiety. Try to identify these opportunities, and you will see noticeable improvements in your relationships and problem-solving abilities

A colleague once told me that he earned money as a lumberjack during his summers in college while he was studying to be a therapist. He claimed that he was significantly more tired at the end of the day as a therapist than as a lumberjack because active listening can be exhausting. Try it out with your colleagues and family members to see for yourself.

In summary, use these active listening techniques to listen for understanding rather than listening solely to respond. Later in the exchange, you may get to problem solving, but the success of the problem-solving phase will depend upon how well you lay the groundwork through listening to understand, which builds rapport and trust between the speaker and listener.

Questioning

Whether you are acting as a facilitator, an informal mediator, or simply trying to better understand a problem or person, questioning skills are critical for good communication. The first step in selecting the appropriate question is to consider the question's purpose. Questions may be used to elicit information, to promote reflection or analysis, or to challenge the speaker. The next step is to select a question type: "general (open-ended), opinion seeking, fact finding, direct-forced choice, or leading questions" (Hughes & Bennett, 2005, p. 95).

To elicit the most comprehensive information, open-ended questions may be most useful. Open-ended questions ask speakers to share any information they

deem useful with which to answer the question. For example, "Please tell me how this problem started and evolved?" An example of an opinion-seeking, open-ended question might be, "What kind of solutions would you like to see?"

When more specific information is needed, questioners may turn to fact finding (slightly more general) for forced-choice (more specific) questions. For example, a fact-finding question would be, "What kind of employment information did you include in your application?" A similar question posed as a forced choice would be, "Did you tell us of your previous termination on your employment application?" These questions provide precise information needed to better understand the problem. These tend to be relatively low-risk questions, but expect defensiveness to decrease as openness of the question increases.

Questions designed to promote reflection or analysis are used to get speakers to think through the consequences of potential solutions or to better understand their own role in the problem or solution. These are often phrased as opinion-seeking questions, such as, "If we moved Bob to another team, would your team be short-handed?" or "Can you think of any options or changes that you can make that would lead to a better outcome than before?" Depending on how they are phrased, questions demanding reflection and analysis can be incredibly useful during a problem-solving or decision-making process. It is important for questioners to have developed rapport and trust with the speaker so that they do not become defensive during the use of these questions.

Questions that challenge the speaker are the riskiest of all. They are not truly part of a problem-solving or decision-making process but are instead used to express frustration or judgment by the questioner. These are often leading questions that are an indirect way for the questioner to make a statement rather than ask a question. Such a question might be, "Don't you think you overreacted?" or the famous standby, "When did you stop beating your wife?" A leading question can be difficult to answer without sounding defensive or guilty. In general, leading questions are not commonly used in problem-solving processes.

Leading questions lead us to the important issue of framing and reframing. As chapter 2 describes, the framing effect is a cognitive bias that occurs when the same option is presented in different formats or with different phrasing (it is framed differently), and the choice of format or phrasing unduly influences one's opinions or preferences on the matter (Druckman, 2001). Therefore, framing refers to the language used to put one's thoughts into words. During conflicts or tense decision-making processes, it is important to choose your words carefully. The wrong word choice can lead parties to question the neutrality of the mediator or facilitator. The words used to describe a thought or situation can reveal implicit judgments or biases that influence the course of a conversation or conflict. Additionally, individuals generally seek to avoid losses more than they endeavor to seek out equivalent gains. People tend to avoid risk when a negative frame is presented but seek risks when a positive frame is presented (Kahneman & Tversky, 1972). For instance, if the organization's leaders are seeking to solidify employee support for a proposed merger, they might focus on the risks to the company's survival if they remain small and less competitive in an increasingly globalized world. Framing also speaks to the procedural justice issues raised in chapter 2. For example, a facilitator at a contentious zoning meeting might avoid this framing:

"Where will the big-box stores be built?" and instead ask participants, "What is your vision for the economic future of our town?"

Reframing refers to the language used to summarize, paraphrase, and reflect back on what a party has said but using a different frame than originally intended with the goal of altering the course of the communication between two or more parties. To illustrate, if two employees come to their manager with complaints about how the other is not doing her fair share of work on a joint project, the manager might begin to reframe the discussion to refocus on the importance of teamwork by saying, "I can tell that getting the work done well and on time is important to you both. What ideas do you have for improving your teamwork?" The manager is beginning her interaction by reframing the dispute as an opportunity for collaboration rather than competition. If taken to extremes, this technique runs the risk of being seen as manipulative or putting words into the mouths of others, so use caution when reframing the words of others.

Facilitators, mediators, and conflict managers often use reframing techniques when creating an agenda based on the expressed positions or concerns of the parties. To exemplify, if a party says, "I'll agree to her demands over my dead body!" a neutral reframing might be, "I can tell you have strong feelings about this. Please tell me more about why you feel this way." Reframing can be used to move parties from a past to a future focus, to depersonalize comments away from a personal attack to an attack on the problem, or to redirect parties from an adversarial to a collaborative focus. There are ethical implications of reframing because it can be used to manipulate a party's statements or to put words in their mouths. When used correctly, reframing helps refocus a conversation from a destructive to a constructive focus.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE COLLABORATIVE MANAGER

Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the ability to perceive, control, and evaluate emotions in oneself and others (Cherry, 2012; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Emotional intelligence can be further broken down into five facets: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. While some of the facets of EI are related to personality or intelligence and are therefore unlikely to change, others can be increased through goal-setting and skill development.

Great managers tend to have high EI scores.

Individuals vary in their ability to correctly perceive the emotional states of others through the interpretation of body language, tone, and facial expressions. Emotion plays an important role in the prioritization of tasks, determining the importance of different events or activities, and motivating our responses to these events. Some individuals are better at using emotion for these purposes than others. Individuals differ greatly in their ability to manage their emotional states or react to the emotional states of others. This is particularly important in the field of management since supervisors and managers are asked to respond to crises, make decisions that impact many people, and communicate the reasons behind those decisions to the impacted populations. Employees who are upset with customers, co-workers, or company decisions come to us to vent

their frustrations and seek redress. The best managers convey empathy and compassion while maintaining healthy boundaries with employees. This requires well-developed EI.

Research into EI remains in its early stages, and evidence for the linkages between EI scores and leadership abilities has not been proven (Harms & Credé, 2010). As this research evolves, what we can say from anecdotal evidence is that managers with good emotional control and empathy tend to create more stable and pleasant working environments. Employees or managers who struggle with emotional outbursts or insensitivity to the emotions of others can create difficult working environments.

BOX 1.8. ELEMENTS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

1. Self-awareness: The ability to understand your own emotional state and the impact of your emotional state on others and the ability to have, convey, and build self-confidence.
2. Self-regulation: The ability to regulate rather than over-react to your own emotions while conveying self-control, adaptability, trustworthiness, openness to new ideas/innovation, and conscientiousness or accountability for your choices.
3. Motivation: The sense of drive, commitment, initiative, and optimism.
4. Empathy: The ability to recognize and respond effectively to the emotions of others including your service orientation, awareness of political dynamics at work, desire to develop others, and your willingness to cultivate diversity as a positive team attribute.
5. Social Skills: The ability to influence others, manage conflict, collaborate, lead, inspire, send clear messages, and initiate and manage change.

CONCLUSION

The first step to improving your managerial skills is to take stock of them: understand how you communicate and respond to conflict. Improve your listening skills while identifying managerial behaviors you seek to improve in your own performance. Know your own level of emotional intelligence and find strategies to compensate for areas of weakness (using listening skills more purposefully, wording comments constructively, and regulating your own emotional responses to others). Understanding common responses to conflict will help you choose among those responses more explicitly when problems arise.

Look around your organization or at your competitors. Describe the skill-sets of the best managers—those with low turnover, high productivity, and

high employee/client satisfaction levels. How do they communicate with their employees, peers, and superiors? How do they respond to inevitable problems? Managers who understand themselves will be able to better understand and respond to others.

JOHN AT THE BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

What can John do? Can he control whether Maria calls in sick? No, but he can communicate his needs in a way Maria will understand as well as create and enforce incentives for productive workplace behaviors. When Maria called in sick before, John might have considered having a one-on-one discussion with her to learn more about her concerns, to convey his own concerns to her, and to let her know that he wants to work with her to make her work environment as positive as possible.

In order to address this problem as a proactive conflict manager, John called Maria and said, "I know that some days are harder than others around here. I was dreading these reviews myself, but without your help, I don't think I can get them done. What can we do together to make the hard days easier for the both of us? How can we work together as a team to handle problems or challenges that might be too much for one person to handle? Can you recommend any changes for me to consider so that this process (or others) can be made better for all of us? In the future, when you feel that sense of dread coming on, can you discuss it with me so we can try to get to the root of the problem? While I can't fix everything, there may be ways we can make improvements so that we both look forward to working here." These are examples that accomplish four tasks: ask questions and listen to Maria's concerns; convey a sense of understanding and sympathy for Maria's feelings; clarify John's needs and concerns in a neutral way; and invite Maria to engage in joint problem-solving with John. While John retains the final decision-making authority as the manager, he has made it clear that he is open to Maria's ideas for ways to improve things at work and that he cares about her as an employee and as a person.

KEY TERMS

accommodation	compromising style
accommodating style	conflict avoidance
active listening	conflict prevention
avoiding style	conflict styles inventory (CSI)
collaborative style	emotional intelligence (EI)
competitive style	leader-member exchange theory

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. While the CSI was developed as an individual-level tool, we often see analogous behaviors within work teams (e.g., departments or units) as well as entire organizations. Which style best describes the unit in which you

work or manage? Why? Which style best describes your organization as a whole? How does your individual style fit in with those in your work environment? Discuss.

2. Think about a current or previous problem or conflict in your work environment. Which of the five conflict styles best describes your approach to that conflict? Which style best describes the style(s) used by others in the conflict? Was the conflict or problem successfully resolved? Why or why not? In groups of two to five people, share your stories. What might have happened if you used one of the other conflict styles? Analyze these questions collectively and/or individually.

3. Who is the best listener you know? What makes them such a good listener?

EXERCISES

1. Either individually or in small groups, develop a list of interview questions that you could use for potential new hires. These questions should give you a sense of how this person responds to conflict and how well he or she will fit into your team's environment. In addition to designing appropriate interview questions, what other sources of information will provide clues as to how this person deals with problem solving and teamwork?

2. Choose the best style of decision making for this scenario. In the last month, three out of ten of your employees have come to you to complain that one of their co-workers is shirking by coming in late, leaving early, and leaving his work for others to finish. You were hoping this employee would "take the hint" from his co-workers and start to do his fair share of the work, but this has not happened. What would it look like if you addressed this situation using each of the five conflict styles discussed in this chapter?

3. In groups of three, practice being the speaker, the listener, and the observer. Have the speaker tell a short story about some problem or concern he or she has had in a past or present work environment. The listener should use the skills described in this chapter, including the use of a summary statement at the end. The observer will provide feedback about the listener's eye contact, body language, use of door openers, ability to refrain from judging or evaluating, and the summarization at the end. Rotate roles every five to seven minutes. Discuss these debriefing questions: how did it feel to be the listener? How did it feel to be the speaker? Which skills do you need to practice more?

4. *Exercise: Traits and Behaviors of Great Managers*. This can be done as a group or individual brainstorming exercise. Sample answers are listed as follows. The responses listed here are simply common examples. Using the table, list the "Great Manager" traits and behaviors you already do.

Then add a few you seek to improve over the next few weeks. Set a goal to work on at least two traits or behaviors.

Traits	Corresponding Behaviors
Empathetic	Gets to know employees as individuals. Shows concern for us and our lives. Good listener.
Fair	Gathers information before making decisions. Holds us all equally accountable. Transparent.
Present	Leads from the front. Has an open door when we have problems. Wants to hear input.
Ethical	Treats everyone with respect. Adheres to policies. Does not discriminate based on identities.

My Managerial Traits	My Managerial Behaviors
Friendly	Greets everyone each morning.
Punctual	Turns in needed report on time and sets a good example for others in terms of punctuality.

GOAL SETTING

You now have a better understanding about your own conflict management habits and tendencies. How are these working for you? Is there room for improvement? Are you able to consciously choose the best style for each problem you encounter? If not, ask yourself this question: "On a scale of zero to ten, where zero equals a conflict management train wreck and ten equals masterful conflict management, where do I fall?" Now, imagine what behaviors you would need to change in order to move your score up by only one or two points. Write down those behavioral changes as goals to pursue this week. Revisit this question next week and see if you have made any progress and whether new goals are appropriate. Sample questions may include the following:

a. Do I take time to reflect before responding to conflict?
b. How well do I make room for others to share ideas and concerns?
c. How efficiently do I deal with problems that arise rather than put off addressing them as long as possible?
d. How well do I communicate to my employees that I care about them as people?
e. How well do I create opportunities for my employees to get to know each other and develop strong interpersonal relationships?
f. How well do I analyze the extent to which a decision should be reached unilaterally versus through a collaborative process?
g. How well do I listen to others?
h. How well do I invite feedback?
i. How well do I communicate my vision to my employees?

j. How well do I model the behaviors I seek for others to follow?
k. How well do I regulate my emotions so as to create a positive, consistent work environment?

SUGGESTED SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS

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2

Theory to Practice: The Root Causes and Cures of Conflict

After reading this chapter, revisit these learning objectives to assure you have mastered the chapter's content. All future chapters refer to material contained in this one, so it is important to have clearly understood the material reflected in the learning objectives before moving on.

Learning Objectives

- Demonstrate an understanding of the root causes of unproductive conflict.
- Diagnose the causes of unproductive conflict within an organization.
- Explain the differences among key conflict theories such as attribution theory, procedural justice theory, conflict ripeness, and others.
- Describe the differences between structural and nonstructural sources of conflict.

ELISE AND UNPRODUCTIVE CONFLICT AT MAIN STREET BAKERIES

This morning Elise got a call from Ben, her director for human resources (HR). Ben told her he has been asked to find yet another assistant manager for store number seventy-five because the one they had just resigned. This makes four assistant managers in less than two years. The turnover level for the other employees at store number seventy-five is 65 percent higher than for the rest of the company. In general, Main Street Bakeries holds onto its employees for many years, so it is surprising to see this level of turnover. Ben wanted to bring this issue to Elise's attention and he recommends that either he or Elise should visit this store (more than one thousand miles away from the corporate office) in order to find out what is happening. Elise agrees and decides that Ben should do the initial digging and make recommendations to her about possible next steps.

⋆ ⋆ ⋆

There are many ways to think about the origins of conflict and theories of conflict resolution with research coming from diverse areas of the behavioral sciences, social

sciences, and physical sciences. A brief examination of some of these key theories is indispensable to a manager's ability to predict, diagnose, and intervene successfully in conflicts. This chapter begins with explanations of conflict's origins, which come from the physical sciences, then progresses to social science explanations of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intergroup conflict. These theories are linked to managerial conflict resolution through examples and illustrations throughout the chapter. Once managers understand the root causes of conflict, they are better able to find creative and constructive approaches to managing conflict at work.

BIOLOGICAL, PHYSIOLOGICAL, AND EVOLUTIONARY THEORIES OF CONFLICT AND RESOLUTION

Recent research has yielded great insights into the biological, physiological, and evolutionary sources of human behavior. Scientists are learning more every day about what makes us tick, including common sources of and responses to conflict and cooperation.

The Evolution of Cooperation and Conflict

Good managers understand how to motivate their employees to perform at a high level and to cooperate with each other successfully. By understanding the mechanisms through which cooperative behavior in humans has evolved, managers are better able to harness motivating forces in the service of conflict prevention and early resolution.

In order for human beings to live and work successfully in groups, we have had to develop the ability to differentiate those who will likely cooperate for mutual gain from individuals who will seek individual gain at the group's expense. Game theorists label this latter group as *defectors*. Game theory uses a combination of mathematics and economics to predict human behavior in circumstances with varying incentive structures (see von Neumann, 1944). For example, how can managers discourage shirking in group environments? One lazy worker can drive a small office crazy as the sense of unfairness rises among those who have to pick up the slack. Game theorists have much to tell us on this issue.

Game theorists as well as evolutionary biologists have long sought to uncover the mysteries that explain why we do what we do. For example,

> Being nice made evolutionary sense when we lived in small bands surrounded by relatives because helping them helped our genes survive. And we had a direct incentive to be fair to people who would later reciprocate kindness or punish selfishness. But why even consider returning a stranger's wallet you find in a taxicab? Why leave a tip in a restaurant you'll never visit again? (Tierney, 2010)

Yet people do. Most people are honest and try hard to be good public and corporate citizens even when there is little overt incentive to do so. However, how do we explain and deal with the occasional individual who claims the work of others as his own or fails to deliver on deadlines and promises, leaving others to hold the bag?

Game theorists have learned that cooperative individuals are better off if they can find other cooperative people with whom they can trade, unite for mutual defense, reproduce, and otherwise work with for mutual gain (Vogel, 2004). The work of biologist William Hamilton (1964) shows us that humans and other animals cooperate with family members, even at their own individual expense, in order to ensure that their gene pool is passed on to future generations. Robert Trivers (1971) took this research to the next step by showing how cooperation with unrelated individuals can benefit the altruist as long as one's cooperative or altruistic acts can be expected to be reciprocated in the future. In common terms, this is akin to "what goes around comes around"; doing good works now will reap rewards in a society in which reciprocity and reputation are valued.

Taking this concept even further, Nowak and Sigmund (2005) have developed a theory called *indirect reciprocity*, which predicts that people are willing to help a stranger as long as others witness the helpful act, thereby enhancing the altruist's reputation as a cooperative, generous person in the community. This reputation effect works to increase the likelihood that others will be willing to cooperate with the altruist in the future.

Yet an unscrupulous individual could take advantage of a group of collaborators by feigning cooperation, only to dupe them in the end and abscond with benefits beyond what they are due. Human societies have generally established social rules that reward cooperators and punish defectors through ostracism or by other means (for example, think of tax evaders, thieves, and so on). Once defectors are identified, they are typically punished and often banished from the group. Ostracized or banished individuals are less likely to survive and less likely to reproduce. Therefore, individuals with tendencies toward cooperation and collaboration are able to more effectively reproduce and form societal majorities, and defectors make up a relatively small percentage of individuals in any society. According to scientists, as cooperators pass on their genes, and defectors do so less frequently, our world is evolving into one where cooperation is increasingly common and defection is increasingly less common. Believe it or not, violent crime has gone down in the United States since the 1980s and fewer people are dying from war worldwide than in any previous century.

Why do some individuals fail to cooperate? Neuropsychologists are doing path breaking work on the connection between biochemistry and aggression versus altruism in humans and nonhuman animals. When individuals act altruistically, the parts of the brain responsible for human bonding and positive feelings are stimulated. In sum, altruistic acts *feel good* at a biological level in biologically normal people. Similarly, the strength of this response varies among individuals, making some more likely to behave altruistically than others (Vedantam, 2007). Literally, some people are born "helpers." On the other end, multiple studies (Gunnar & Fisher, 2006) have concluded that levels of cortisol, a hormone in the brain, rise when animals are under stressful conditions in order to help them cope. Chronically low levels of cortisol are correlated with aggressive and antisocial behaviors in human beings, meaning that some people cope more poorly with stress and are prone to act on violent impulses in reaction to stress, particularly children (*Science Daily*, 2000).

Cortisol levels likely have some genetic influence but also can change because of the environment and exposure to chronic stress during pregnancy, infancy, and childhood, when the brain is developing (Gunnar & Fisher, 2006). Children who have been abused or neglected have a higher likelihood of experiencing chronically low levels of cortisol, resulting in antisocial and aggressive tendencies (Gunnar & Fisher, 2006). Some forms of autism have been correlated with unusual levels of cortisol (Brosnan, Turner-Cobb, Munro-Naan, & Jessop, 2009).

Biologists have uncovered important information about the role that oxytocin plays in increasing empathy and trust between individuals or, by contrast, the role it plays in the absence of empathy and trust.

> Researchers found that genetic differences in people's responsiveness to the effects of oxytocin were linked to their ability to read faces, infer the emotions of others, feel distress at others' hardship and even to identify with characters in a role-play exercise. (Angier, 2009, p. D2)

In fact, individuals with one type of oxytocin receptor (type A) are more likely to display signs of autism and poor parenting skills than those with the other type of receptor (type G) (Angier, 2009). So at a very basic level, some individuals are hormonally predisposed to be more or less trusting and empathetic than others. This does not explain trust and empathy in all situations, of course, but it does lay the groundwork for a deeper understanding of these issues. Indeed, some individuals are simply more willing to trust than are others.

For managers this means that some employees and customers will simply be more difficult to deal with than others because they are inherently more aggressive, impulsive, antisocial, or untrusting than others. Rather than taking this behavior as a personal affront to the manager or others, it can be helpful to remember that each person has a different biological endowment that may result in varied coping abilities. Some employees may be better at working collaboratively with others in high-stress environments, whereas some employees may need to have greater isolation from stress or work more independently. This information has many potential implications in the workplace.

Although this summary of evolutionary and biological explanations of trust and cooperation is necessarily short, it indicates that there are likely physical and biological differences that explain why two people react differently to the same situation. This may help us to depersonalize conflict when it occurs, meaning that we need not attribute aggressive or antisocial behaviors as signs of personal affronts but instead understand myriad reasons why an individual may struggle to behave constructively in difficult situations.

This does not definitively answer the nature-versus-nurture question but it does indicate that the role of nature is likely stronger than previously believed. Understanding the evolution and science of aggression and cooperation is a crucial step for successful conflict management interventions. Although science is just scratching the surface of the nature-nurture debate, this information helps us to better understand that some individuals are simply better at dealing with stress and social interactions than others. Regardless of an individual's natural

endowment in these areas, these skills can be increased and improved through a variety of interventions discussed in this book.

The good news is that human beings are significantly more likely to cooperate with others than to take advantage and that cooperation feels "right" to most humans. Cooperation and helping others are the norms, not the exceptions. For individuals with abnormally poor social skills or maladaptive behaviors traceable to a medical condition, treatments may be available now or in the near future that will help them improve their ability to interact and cope successfully with stressful situations, particularly when combined with training designed to enhance these skills and abilities. Hiring managers may wish to develop and use scenario-response questions designed to determine how well potential applicants work with others, deal with stress, trust others, are trustworthy, and so on. This information can help ensure an appropriate match among employees, job duties, and team members.

In-group/Out-group Theory

According to Tajfel and Turner (2001 and earlier editions) there is an important qualifier to the evolution of conflict and cooperation. **In-group/Out-group theory** states that individuals and groups tend to define themselves by stating who they are in reference to who they are not. When a person perceives themselves as part of a group, this is termed their "in-group." Each of us tends to afford more trust and assume there are more shared values between those who share our "in-group" compared to the "out-group." Each of us has multiple identities. For example, you may be a father, son, brother, engineer, manager, vegetarian, runner, amateur painter, dog-owner, Indiana University graduate, fraternity member, and so on. Conflict is more likely to occur when we view others as part of our out-group rather than in-group. In fact, when genocide or terrorism occur, they are nearly always framed as in-group/out-group conflicts. We tend to "dehumanize" those from our out-group with whom we have conflict. This means we are more likely to dehumanize them, thereby rationalizing violence or negative treatment. This theory has three parts: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison.

Social categorization refers to the human tendency to apply labels or categories to individuals in order to better understand them and predict their behavior. For example: Republican/Democrat, black/white, professor/student.

Social identification refers to our tendency to model our behaviors and values upon those in our in-group. Meeting the expectations of our in-group is central to positive self-esteem.

Social comparison is when, once we categorize ourselves as a group member and identify with that group, then we compare our group to other groups. To protect or increase our self-esteem, humans tend to seek out information that confirms the superiority or positivity of their in-group compared to out-groups. This is the root cause of prejudice, discrimination, and even genocide.

In summary, while the human race is becoming less violent, conflict is more likely between out-groups. Our brains categorize our own identity in opposition to the identities of others. This tendency makes it easier to predict the behaviors

of others and unite with our kin (and other in-groups) against outside threats. While this aids in identity formation and in-group unity, it tends to bias us against others, thereby creating or increasing conflict.

PERSONALITY AND INDIVIDUALLY BASED CONFLICT THEORIES

Individual personalities and previous life experiences may create fertile ground for misunderstandings and conflict. When managers equip themselves with an understanding of the interplay between personality characteristics and conflict behaviors, they can use this information to depersonalize the behaviors of others, to gain a deeper understanding of the motivations underlying those behaviors, and to develop customized approaches for working successfully with individuals displaying a variety of personality traits. We started this discussion in chapter 1 with an examination of the conflict styles inventory. In this chapter we will extend this understanding of individual-level responses to conflict including need theories, psychodynamic theories, and other theories.

   Need theories refer to those explanations for human behavior, including conflict, based on the unmet needs of individuals. More than fifty years ago Abraham Maslow articulated a theory of human motivation that remains crucial to our understanding of conflict today (see figure 2.1). According to Maslow (1954) people seek to meet their needs but some needs take precedence over others. To
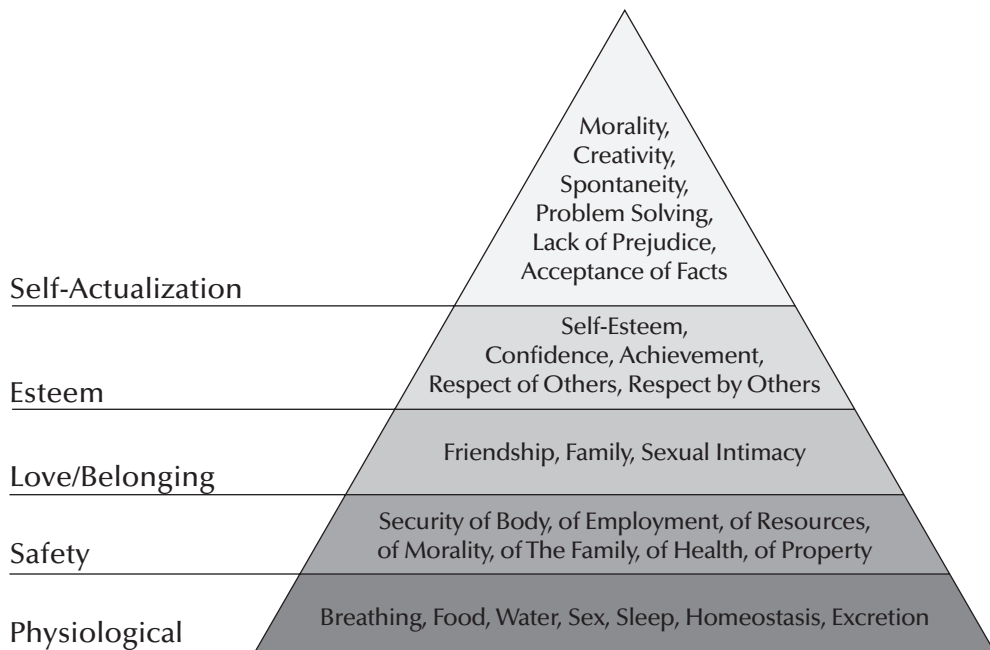
Figure 2.1   Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs