

A QUICK ROUTE TO RESOLVING CONFLICTS

This tool describes a process for resolving both organizational and personal conflicts. By following this map, you will be able to identify the kind of conflict you encounter, determine your role in it, and figure out the shortest, easiest path to resolving the conflict. Both individuals and groups can use this tool.

I. The Types of Conflict

A. Organizational

- Conflicts over outcomes – what results are envisioned
- Conflicts over process – how decisions are being made, failures to communicate or engage people in the process
- Conflicts over people – who's being utilized to do what, who manages what (not personal)
- Conflicts over resources – how money is to be utilized, who gets what money

B. Personal

- Emotional dislike for someone or some group stemming from perceived “wrongs” or abuses
- Emotional antipathy toward someone or some group stemming from competitive feelings
- Emotional dissatisfaction with yourself, stemming from a feeling of shame or that you've done something badly

II. A Quick Path to Resolving Conflicts

1. Name the conflict. Be clear on the nature of the conflict before you attempt to address it with anyone. Most conflicts that rise beyond mere disagreements are a blend of organizational and personal conflict. Name the types and the sources. Be as specific as you can. Write them down.

2. Assess your role. Be clear on whether you are a bystander, a peripheral player, or a central player in the conflict. Again, assess it both from the organizational and personal perspective. Write your role in the conflict down. In the process of naming something and writing it down, you can look at it more objectively and get a clearer grasp of your role.

3. Brainstorm the options. Analyze the options you have for resolving the conflict. Do you have the authority to take on the organizational conflict? Or are you merely a witness to it? What would be the most direct route to addressing the problem? Who would need to be involved in communication about it? If you can play a role in resolving the conflict, continue. Otherwise, stop wasting your time. It is generally safe to say that if

you've determined you have no role in the conflict in step 2, then you are not in a position to help resolve the conflict.

4. Communicate your findings. Share with the relevant people your identification of the conflict, your appraisal of your own role, and your brainstorming. Use our related tool called "Inner Scripts" to get uncomfortable, "x-rated" thoughts and feelings on the table.

5. Engage in problem solving. Work with the relevant people to: 1) envision a better future together; 2) identify the rationales for change; 3) enroll other people to help support the change; 4) commit time and resources to improvement; and 5) focus on a few actions that are relatively easy to implement.

6. Build systems of communication. As you begin to implement the change, make sure you communicate frequent status reports and build feedback loops so that you can monitor results. Keep asking people: Is this change helping? Are we doing better? How do we know? Are we clear in our communications? Building systems for ongoing communication and feedback is the surest way to minimize and eliminate conflict in the future.