Conflict Resolution Guidelines - Negotiation

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Importance

Negotiation is a constant process in team work. Sometimes, team members are not even aware of it. We recognize the need for negotiation only when conflict erupts and opposed positions need to be bridged. By its very nature, interdisciplinary work is conducive to conflict of opinions. These may be caused by different perspectives, attitudes and behaviour. Basic skills in conflict resolution are therefore essential if team work is to proceed smoothly.

Steps in Negotiation

Step 1	→	Plan for the negotiation
Step 2	→	Separate people from issues
Step 3	→	Emphasize win-win solutions
Step 4	→	Use objective standards
Step 5	→	Try to understand the other person
Step 6	→	Be careful about communication
Step 7	→	Think strategically

Step 1 - Plan for the negotiation

If you are involved in negotiation as party in the conflict, assess the situation as objectively as possible and define what is really important for you so as not to let emotions take over in the negotiation:

- What situation are you in (win-win or win-lose)?
- What are your goals, positions and underlying interests ? What are those of the other party ?
- What will you do if you can ’t reach an agreement? What will the other party do?
- What do you see as a fair and reasonable solution? What does the other party see as best solution?
- What information do you have ? What is the information of the other party ?
- What are your competitive advantages and disadvantages, and those of the other party ?

Step 2 - Separate people from issues

Address issues, not personalities

- If you attack the other persons personally, they will feel threatened and will defend their self-esteem, which will make a discussion of the real problem more difficult ;
- If you are attacked personally, don't react in the same way, try to understand the problem behind the aggression.

Step 3 - Emphasize win-win solutions

A win-win solution is a condition for cooperation in problem solving and continuing collaboration. Even if you stand to benefit more from a win-lose solution, emphasizing the win-win aspect is essential if you're bound to need the other party in the future. Losing can create resentment and a desire for revenge. To avoid this:

- Create additional alternatives that have value for the other party;
- Frame the options in terms of the other party's interests;
- Look for alternatives that will allow the other party to feel they have won and save face

Step 4 - Use objective standards

Negotiators need some objective standard to assess their alternatives and base their decisions on. In the absence of such standards, emotions, assertiveness and stubborness can take over. Succeeding in the definition of these common standards will also give convergence points to the negotiators.

Step 5 - Try to understand the other person

Negotiation is about reconciling different interests; understanding the other parties' situation and framing a potential solution in terms that is favourable to it is essential.

- What are their goals?
- What are their obligations?
- What are their needs?
- What is their strategy?

Step 6 - Be careful about communication

- Read body language, sense moods, and be aware of emotional issues that are not explicitly mentioned
- Be fair and impartial : make sure everyone has a chance to express their views
- Keep the discussion focussed on the issues
- Restate points in appropriate language to help each party understand the other's point of view
- Restate in neutral language those points on which the parties appear to agree
- Verify that they do in fact agree
- Use humor to bring people together and defuse tense situations

Step 7 - Think strategically

- Break disputes into manageable chunks, and resolve each chunk separately
- Postpone discussion of very tough issues to late in the mediation session. Once the parties have started agreeing on simple issues, an atmosphere of trust will begin to grow, and agreement on difficult issues will become easier
- Insist that any agreement be captured in writing before the negotiation ends

Step 8 - Negotiation techniques

- Broaden the pie : create additional resources for all the parties to reach their goals;
- Make for non-specific compensation : one side gets what it wants, the other is compensated on another issue;
- Bridging : Neither party gets its initial demands but a new option that satisfies the major interests of all sides is developed;
- Cost cutting : One party gets what it wants; the costs to the other are reduced or eliminated;
- Logrolling : Each party makes concessions on low priority issues in exchange for concessions on issues it values more highly

Caution

There is no standard method for dealing with conflict because conflict is about relations between people and these are complex and varied. People involved in negotiation need to adapt to the nature of each specific situation.

- If you are a mediator in a negotiation, a general principle of neutrality must apply.
- If you are part of the conflict, a general principle of win-win solution is essential.
- A solution found by the team themselves is better than one proposed by an outsider; the team should first try to solve their conflict through negotiation before resorting to outside intervention

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