

# Conflict Management

## CAP Officer Basic Course

### Introduction

"Conflict Management" is defined by the American Management Association "as recognizing the potential value of conflict for driving change and innovation. This means knowing when to confront, and when to avoid a conflict and understanding the issues around which conflict revolve". It means looking for those win/win solutions and seeking agreement on a solution while eliciting commitment to making it work effectively in points).

### 1. Describe the concepts of conflict and conflict management.

WHAT IS CONFLICT?

Webster's New World Dictionary defines Conflict as follows:

1. a fight or struggle, especially a protracted one; war
2. a sharp disagreement or opposition, as of interests or ideas; clash
3. an emotional disturbance resulting from a clash of opposing impulses or from an inability to reconcile impulses with realistic or moral considerations
4. [Rare] a collision of moving bodies

Synonyms for the word conflict are fight , struggle, contention, and contest.

Antonyms for the word conflict are accord and harmony

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For the purpose of this lesson , **individuals or groups are in conflict when one or both parties are not now getting what they need or want and are actively pursuing their own goals.** Conflict is the difference in perspective that is inherent in every organization. Diversity of perspective approaches with an organization help generate ideas and facilitate change. In other words, conflict can be considered as an opportunity, if it is managed wisely.

Therefore, effective CAP leaders often see conflict as a source of vitality and impetus for changes. By recognizing and accepting disagreement, CAP leaders not only model ways to analyze the conflict, they can also model strategies for managing and resolving the conflict.

Effectively managing and resolving conflicts, however, requires a safe and supportive organizational climate, where relationships are based on trust and mutual respect. Only then will CAP members feel safe to express differences of opinion, and jointly develop strategies for resolving conflict so that everyone wins.

How do CAP leaders recognize that conflict exists? By understanding and discussing the symptoms and the sources of conflict, individuals can truly grasp the underlying themes that create conflict situations. Following are examples:

- Symptoms of conflict include:
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  - Increased tension among members.

- Increased disagreement and complaints.
- Avoidance among members.
- Increased blaming.
- Sources of conflict may include.
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  - Misunderstanding or communication failures.
  - Values in goal differences.
  - Differences in methods and approaches to work.
  - Conflict in job roles and responsibilities.
  - Lack of cooperation.
  - Authority issues.
  - Noncompliance issues are differences in the interpretation of rules, policies, or standards.

## **2. Explain typical approaches to dealing with conflict.**

Conflict can be a creative force or a disruptive one, depending on how it is managed.

There are three critical steps that can be taken to manage conflict constructively.

- a. First is understanding the patterns and appearances of conflict, how it looks when it rears its ugly head, as well as knowing what options and alternatives are for dealing with conflict.
- b. Second is assessing and understanding one's own natural or most typical approach to dealing with conflict.
- c. Third, and most difficult, is developing skills and methods that are needed to apply effectively one's knowledge of how to make conflict work in constructive ways.

How do leaders recognize when conflict is constructive? Conflict is constructive when it:

- Results in clarification of important problems and issues
- Results in solutions to problems
- Involves people in resolving issues important to them
- Causes authentic communication
- Helps release emotional anxiety, and stress

- Builds cooperation among people through learning more about each other; joining in resolving the conflict
- Helps individuals develop understanding and skills

While there are **many skills and methods** for dealing with conflict, and reaching a resolution, we are providing a group of five methods to consider. This group recognizes Five (5) Strategies and Techniques of Conflict Resolution (with their advantages and disadvantages). All five methods can be used on any one conflict, but with differing results. Therefore, it is important to know your preference in choice of style, and the use of others.

See the chart below.

<b>5 Strategies and Techniques of Conflict Resolution</b>	
<b>(In Suggested Order of Use)</b>	
<b>Direct (Direct Discussion):</b> Individuals involved in a conflict talk openly with one another about their perception of the problem, their feelings about it, and possible solutions.	
<b>Advantage:</b> The conflict is clear and understood by the involved people. Resolution of the conflict is supported by the participants, since they came up with it.	<b>Disadvantage:</b> Involved individuals may not have the skills to engage in constructive confrontation and they feel worse after it. Time and commitment to this process may be lacking.
<b>Policy and Procedures (Power or Authority):</b> An authority, position, majority rule, or a persuasive minority settles the conflict. Power is used to impose a solution.	
<b>Advantage:</b> When speed or efficiency is most important, this style may be effective. It also demonstrates the status of the person or group in authority.	<b>Disadvantage:</b> The people who "lose" the conflict may feel devalued and/they may cause disruptions in the future to "get even".
<b>Group Consensus:</b> Using a group to share ideas about resolving a conflict and coming to a group decision on action that is agreed to by the whole group.	
<b>Advantage:</b> A group may come up with better ideas for resolving the conflict than an individual alone. Agreement of the whole group to a resolution is a powerful, non-authoritarian influence on the people in the conflict.	<b>Disadvantage:</b> This style is usually very time-consuming. The group may avoid facing the difficult issues and concentrate on a relatively unimportant aspect of the conflict.
<b>Third Party Intermediary:</b> Two are more people who are having a conflict use a third person as a "go-between" to convey messages to each other. Direct mention of the problem to involved people is avoided, but go-between is aware of everyone's position.	
<b>Advantage:</b> This style allows the preservation of surface harmony while still addressing the conflict and possibly resolving it.	<b>Disadvantage:</b> The conflict may become confused and more complicated because of misinterpretations by the third-person intermediary. Persons involved in the conflict may not feel their feelings have been sufficiently understood.

**Do Nothing (Denial or Suppression):** Person tries to solve problem by denying its existence. Differences are played down and surface harmony is preserved.

**Advantage:** If issue is relatively unimportant, this style allows a cooling off period or simply lets time "heal" the problem.

**Disadvantage:** If the issue is important, this style allows problem to build into a more severe situation that is more difficult to resolve.

Remember our goal in conflict management is three fold: To drive change and innovation which benefits the unit/mission. Create those win/win solutions and eliciting commitment to making the solutions work effectively.

### EXERCISE

Describe (not give an example) the type of situation in which each of the above methods should be applied. Describe a situation when each method should not be applied.

Some methods will be more effective with some people than with others. The "most effective method" may be different because of the maturity, personality, relationship, skill level, and the amount of experience in CAP that the individuals involved have. Describe the type of person you should/would not use each of the methods with.

### 3. Apply conflict resolution techniques in constructive ways.

#### EXERCISE

In order to fully understand the concepts described in Objective No. 2, please apply the concept to the case below. In the case, the aforementioned Strategies and Techniques can be utilized by placing the appropriate initial next to the narrative ( **D** -Direct, **PP** -Policy and Procedure, **GC** -Group Consensus, **TP** -Third Party, and **DN** -Do Nothing) that meets the identified criteria. Note that this exercise does not provide a "school solution." Your task is to evaluate each strategy based on the case presented to see how strategies work in different situations.

**CASE:** : *Major Raul Martinez, Squadron Commander, has observed that Captain Ted Kelly (Deputy Commander for Cadets) seems depressed. He is concerned about Ted's mental welfare, and about the potential impact of his performance in dealing with cadet leaders. As Major Martinez, correctly identify the strategies listed below:*

	Ignore the situation at this time; it's Major Kelly's private business.
	In the form of a memo, tell Major Kelly he is heading for a deep depression, and that he better "get a grip".
	Enlist the aid of a designated "mentor" in the squadron to offer counseling.
	Discuss the issue in a staff meeting.
	Share your observations with Major Kelly, and invite him to talk about his problems with you.

(Answers: DN, PP, TP, GC, D)

How would you handle this conflict? Why did you choose this method? In your opinion, which of the above methods would be the best method to use? What are the advantages (other than those listed above) to that method? How might they play out in this situation?

What are the disadvantages (other than those listed above) for that method? How might that play out in this situation? How would you know if the conflict is beyond your abilities?

### Example

<b>Example CASE 2 : Lt Colonel Tom Smith (Wing Chief of Staff) has developed a plan for providing feedback to improve work performance of the wing staff members. Wing Public Affairs Officer, Major Van Tran (who reports to Tom) believes that the plan may offend some of the members. As Major Tran, <u>correctly</u> identify the strategies listed below:</b>	
	Talk to your family and friends about how to handle this situation.
	Just keep quiet. It probably won't be much of a problem.
	Go to a person in authority and tell her/him your concerns about this possibly insulting project.
	Talk to Lt Colonel Smith and tell him honestly about your concerns. Tell him you can help him work out a better solution.
	Go to an older friend who is a friend of Tom's and explain your concern. Maybe he/she can talk to Lt Colonel Smith about this problem.

(Answers: GC, DN, PP, D and TP)

How would you handle this conflict? Why did you choose this method? In your opinion, which of the above methods would be the best method to use? What are the advantages (other than those listed above) to that method? How might they play out in this situation? What are the disadvantages (other than those listed above) for that method? How might that play out in this situation? How would you know if the conflict is beyond your abilities?

### Example

<b>Example CASE 3 : Captain Janice Jones, Composite Squadron Commander, has noticed that several of her adult members have been arriving late to meetings. The tardiness is being noticed by the cadets. As Captain Jones, <u>correctly</u> identify the strategies listed below:</b>	
	Discuss this matter with each of the latecomers separately.
	File a written reprimand, warning them of the consequences of their behavior.
	Ask the whole senior member staff to meet together to consider a general method for ensuring timeliness.
	Since most of the work is getting done anyway, don't make an issue of this minor matter.
	Mention your frustration to your vice-commander, and suggest that she/he might pass it along.

(Answers: D, PP, GC, DN and TP)

How would you handle this conflict? Why did you choose this method? In your opinion, which of the above methods would be the best method to use? What are the advantages (other than those listed above) to that method? How might they play out in this situation? What are the disadvantages (other than those listed above) for that method? How might that play out in this situation? How would you know if the conflict is beyond your abilities?

## **Lesson Summary and Closure**

There are many approaches to conflict management, depending on the nature of the conflict, and the people involved in the conflict. This lesson introduced members to a process for both assessing and being successful in conflict managements.

The conflict management method chosen sometimes reflects the leader's leadership style. For more on that, see the Leadership Style lesson in this course.

Should you feel that you are not in an appropriate position to handle a conflict or that it is beyond your ability to handle to the betterment of your unit and the individuals involved you can call on your unit chaplain. Many chaplains are trained in conflict management and coupling. For more information on how chaplains can help see the Chaplain Corps lesson in this course or speak to a chaplain.

It is hoped that this lesson leaves the CAP member with the ability to:

- Understand another person's perspective during a discussion or disagreement
- Confront and facilitate conflict in a way that helps people engage in conversation to yield a better solution
- Identify the likely source of conflict before taking action
- Coach others on how to resolve conflict in a constructive manner

## **Works Cited**

1. The AMA Guide to Management Development, AMACOM Publications, Tobin and Petingell, [www.amacombooks.org/go/AMAGuideMgmtDevelop](http://www.amacombooks.org/go/AMAGuideMgmtDevelop), 2008.