

Conflict Resolution Culture Survey

2010



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“Mediator Style Training provides conflict resolution solutions for personal and professional development.”

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Introduction

The Conflict Resolution Culture Survey was conducted in October 2010 to tailor results to the 'Toxic People' workshop. A total of 10 employees completed the survey.

The Conflict Resolution Culture Survey provides insight into the conflict resolution skills, abilities and context of your employees. The quiz provides an assessment of employees:

1. Organisational Conflict Context: conflict experiences (who employees experience conflict with, how they feel, impact on work and typical conflict scenarios).
2. Self-reported conflict resolution skills (e.g., assertiveness, ability to use 'I' statements effectively).
3. Ability to resolve conflict (conflict resolution scenarios)

The following report overviews employee responses to this survey and provides recommendations for the workshop.



Executive Summary

Organisational conflict context

Do employees experience conflict at work?

60% of employees reported some form of conflict at work. However, a significant proportion (40%) of employees did not experience a great deal of conflict.

Who do employees experience conflict with at work?

60% of employees experience conflict with clients and co-workers. 10% experience conflict with a subordinate and 20% did not experience any conflict at work.

How does dealing with a difficult colleague affect employee commitment to the organisation?

The majority (80%) of employees reported that their commitment to the organisation was not affected or they did not have a difficult colleague to deal with. However, 10% reported that it affects them a lot. 10% are so affected that they would like to move companies.

Examples of conflict experienced by employees

A qualitative analysis of participant responses identified the following issues:

- Student complaints e.g.,
This pertained mainly to student complaints about fees, not being able to be assisted by HR and policies and procedures.
- Conflict being reported by staff e.g.,
Staff discussing incidents or issues at inappropriate times, staff not being satisfied with how the incident or issues is being handled, staff (managers) complaining about HR policies/procedures.
- Conflict amongst staff e.g.,
Backstabbing and staff 'gossiping' about other team members.
- Conflict around policies/procedures/systems.

Strength of employee emotional reactions to conflict

The majority (60%) of respondents reported minor emotional reactions to conflict. A significant proportion report the experience of moderate (30%) or extremer reactions (10%) which suggests a need for employees to spend some time de-stressing before they attempt to address the problem.



Types of emotional reactions experienced by employees

50% reported feeling overwhelmed or stressed when dealing with conflict while 30% of employees felt angry annoyed or frustrated. These reactions are likely to result in frozen or stuck and aggressive responses to conflict (respectively).

Self-reported conflict resolution skills

Confidence to respond to verbal abuse

The vast majority of employees (80%) agreed or strongly agreed that they had the confidence to respond to emotional abuse. 20% were neutral.

Assertiveness

The majority of employees reported average (60%) to above average (40%) assertiveness ratings.

Using “I” statements effectively

Employees reported predominantly above average (60%) to average (30%) development in the effective use of “I” statements.

Effective/active listening

Employees showed great confidence in their ability to use effective/active listening with 20% providing excellent ratings, 60% providing above average ratings and 20% providing average ratings.

Responding to resistance

All employees reported either average (70%) or above average (30%) ability to respond to resistance.

Managing emotional reactions to conflict

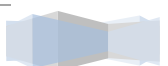
50% of employees felt they had above average skill in managing emotional reactions to conflict. 30% reported an average ability. Only 10% reported a below average ability.

Ability to resolve conflict (Difficult People Quiz)

This is a difficult quiz to complete if you don't know the principles of conflict resolution. There are no strong 'right' and 'wrong' answers just better answers and results are best discussed in a group learning format.

Recommendations

Changes to workshop material and additional training has been recommended.

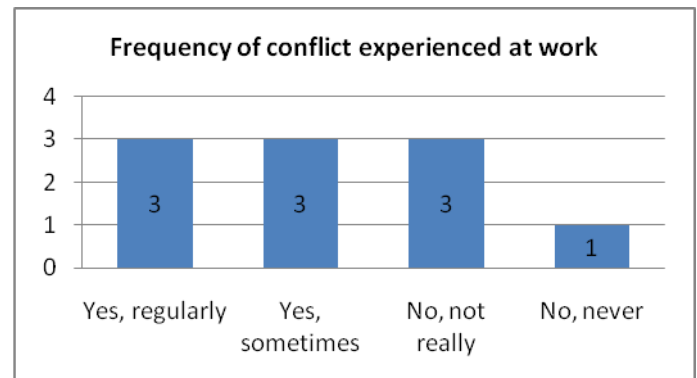


Organisational conflict context

Do employees experience conflict at work?

The more frequently employees experience conflict at work, the more stressed they become which, increases the likelihood that they experience negative conflict related outcomes.

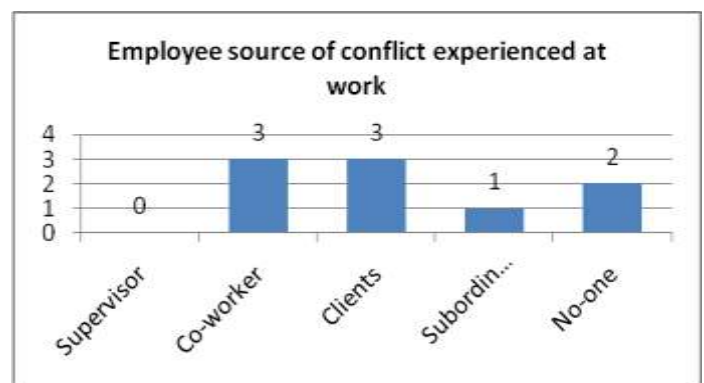
60% of employees reported some form of conflict at work. However, a significant proportion (40%) of employees did not experience a great deal of conflict.



Who do employees experience conflict with at work?

While the principles of conflict resolution remain the same for all sources of conflict, strategies differ depending on the situation. Identifying the primary source of conflict is important for tailoring workshop activities.

60% of employees experience conflict with clients and co-workers. 10% experience conflict with a subordinate and 20% did not experience any conflict at work.



How does dealing with a difficult colleague affect employee commitment to the organisation?

Dealing with difficult colleagues and clients has been shown to have a negative impact upon organisational commitment.

The majority (80%) of employees reported that their commitment to the organisation was not affected or they did not have a difficult colleague to deal with. However, 10% reported that it affects them a lot. 10% are so affected that they would like to move companies.



Examples of conflict experienced by employees

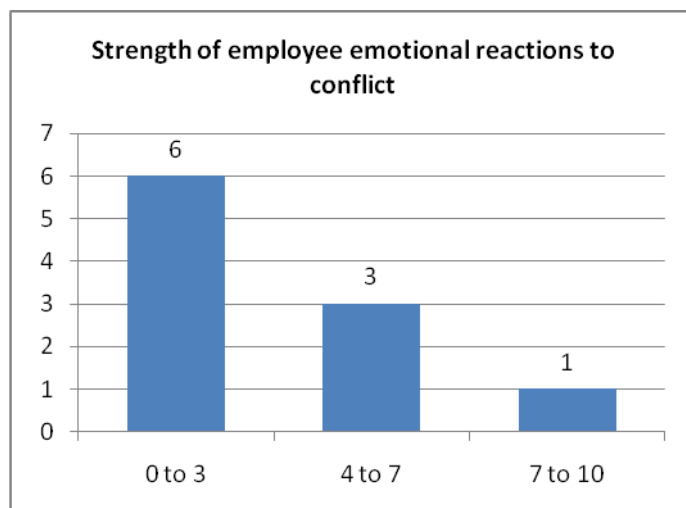
A qualitative analysis of participant responses (see Appendix A) identified the following issues:

- Student complaints e.g.,
This pertained mainly to student complaints about fees, not being able to be assisted by HR and policies and procedures.
- Conflict being reported by staff e.g.,
Staff discussing incidents or issues at inappropriate times, staff not being satisfied with how the incident or issues is being handled, staff (managers) complaining about HR policies/procedures.
- Conflict amongst staff e.g.,
Backstabbing and staff 'gossiping' about other team members.
- Conflict around policies/procedures/systems.

Strength of employee emotional reactions to conflict

Emotions play an important role in an individual's reaction to conflict. The stronger the emotional reaction, the more likely you are to make an ineffective decision when attempting to resolve conflict. When you are calm your perspective on things is not too distorted and your response to the situation can be rational and constructive.

The majority (60%) of respondents reported minor emotional reactions to conflict. A significant proportion report the experience of moderate (30%) or extremer reactions (10%) which suggests a need for employees to spend some time de-stressing before they attempt to address the problem.



Types of emotional reactions experienced by employees

The way people feel is usually the core of the problem and difficult people often trigger emotional reactions. When dealing with difficult people, it is more effective to come at it from a positive emotional state such as calmness, strength and confidence.



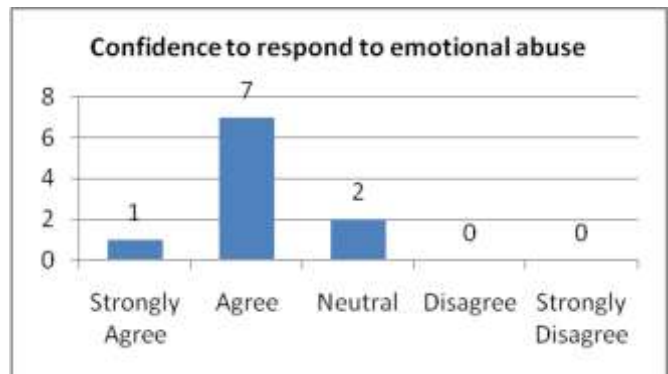
50% reported feeling overwhelmed or stressed when dealing with conflict while 30% of employees felt angry annoyed or frustrated. These reactions are likely to result in frozen or stuck and aggressive responses to conflict (respectively).

Self-reported conflict resolution skills

Employees provided self ratings of their confidence and development with respect to the skills of assertiveness, using “I” statements effectively, effective/active listening, responding to resistance and managing emotional reactions to conflict.

Confidence to respond to verbal abuse

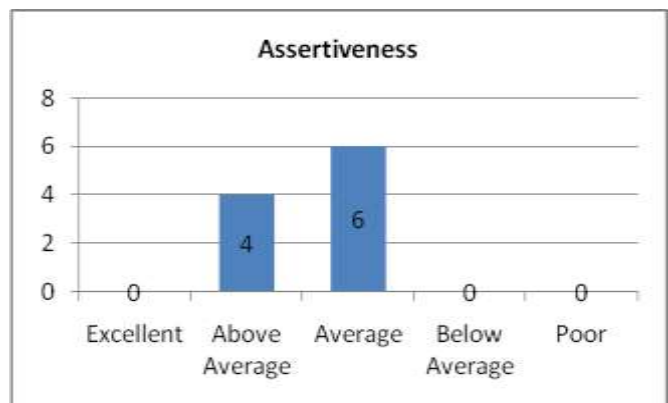
The way in which an individual responds to verbal abuse can affect the outcomes of the conflict they experience; their responses can de-escalate, inhibit or escalate the situation. It is important to have the confidence in addition to strategies to deal with verbal abuse.



The vast majority of employees (80%) agreed or strongly agreed that they had the confidence to respond to emotional abuse. 20% were neutral.

Assertiveness

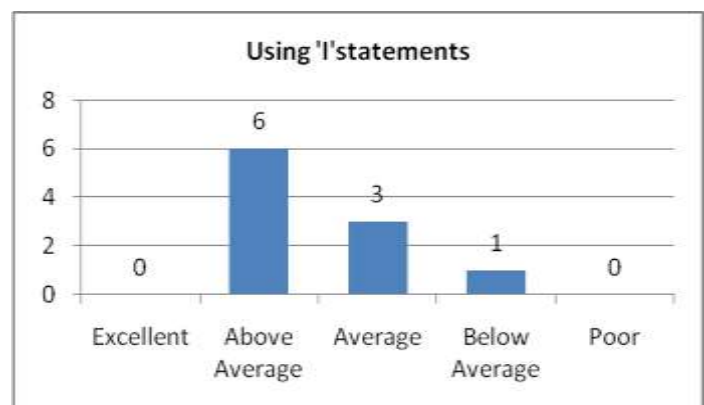
Assertiveness is the ability to express one’s feelings and assert one’s rights while respecting the feelings and rights of others. Assertive communication is appropriately direct, open and honest, and clarifies one’s needs to the other person. However, sometimes people confuse assertiveness with aggressiveness.



The majority of employees reported average (60%) to above average (40%) assertiveness ratings.

Using “I” statements effectively

"I" statements put the focus and responsibility on the communicator. Thus, they are a lot less likely to be resented. Unlike "You" statements, which put the receiver of



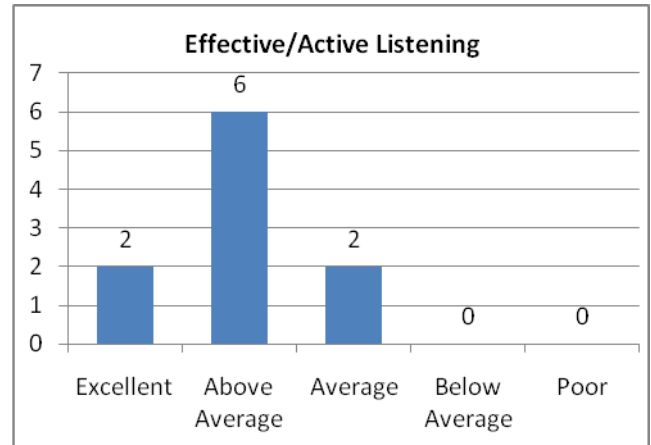
the communication on the defensive, "I" statements are a way to convey your message without immediately alienating your listener.

Employees reported predominantly above average (60%) to average (30%) development in the effective use of "I" statements.

Effective/active listening

Listening plays a vital role in conflict resolution and mediation. It is the first thing we forget to do when we become stressed, which is why it is so important to remember to do this.

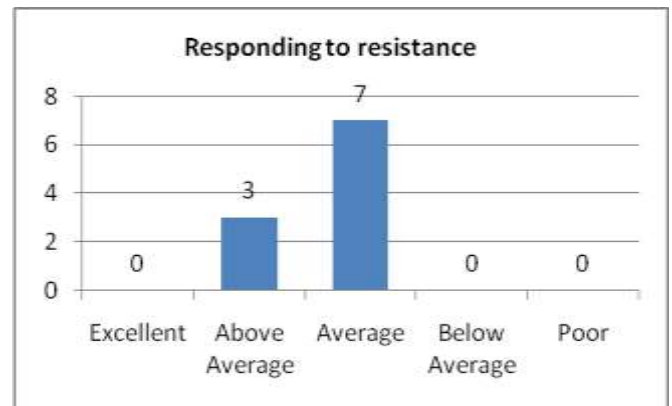
Employees showed great confidence in their ability to use effective/active listening with 20% providing excellent ratings, 60% providing above average ratings and 20% providing average ratings.



Responding to resistance

Ratings of ability to respond to resistance reflect an employee's degree of success in resolving conflict.

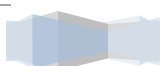
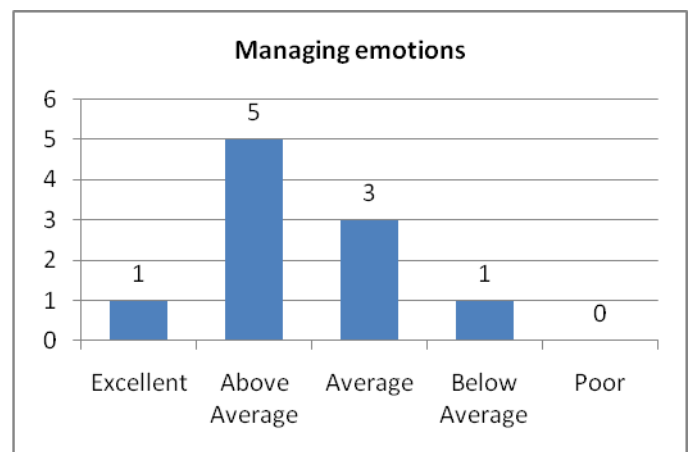
All employees reported either average (70%) or above average (30%) ability to respond to resistance.



Managing emotional reactions to conflict

The stronger the emotional reaction, the more likely you are to make an ineffective decision when attempting to resolve conflict. Greater self-reported abilities to manage conflict reflect either low stress, or high emotional control.

50% of employees felt they had above average skill in managing emotional reactions to conflict. 30% reported an average ability. Only 10% reported a below average ability.



Ability to resolve conflict (Difficult People Quiz)

This is a difficult quiz to complete, there are no strong 'right' and 'wrong' answers and results are best discussed in a group format.

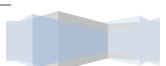
A boss or supervisor angrily criticizes you in a condescending manner because you didn't do something "correctly" (i.e., the way they wanted). You realize you could have done the task differently if you had been given the proper instructions and you're uncomfortable with their angry intimidating approach. How do you respond?

%	N	Options
10	1	1. Get mad and emphatically tell them that you don't appreciate being spoken to so rudely and then tell them to please stop.
10	1	2. Do nothing at first. Complain about them later to your friends or co-workers. Consider filing a grievance against them with higher management.
70	7	3. Talk to them and try to get them to see how they contributed to the problem. Tell them calmly, "It's not fair to get angry at me when you didn't give me the proper instructions in the first place!"
10	1	4. Say, "If you get angry and rude I'll probably get flustered and make more mistakes, but if you can be patient and respectful I'll do my best. Which would you prefer?"

The majority of respondents (70%) selected the answer 3. Even if carried out in a polite way, this response is likely to inflame the situation with a difficult person.

Explanation

1. If you assert yourself in this aggressive way they are likely to feel defensive, they are also less likely to listen to your explanation that they never gave you proper instructions
2. If you don't address the issue they are likely to think that you are 'at fault' and be more inclined to jump to this conclusion in future
3. If you politely assert yourself you are likely to initiate an argument about what they did or did not tell you when giving you instructions. This will hinder your attempts at resolution.
- 4. This is the better option, remember they are your boss so it's good to not overtly criticise them. You calmly and politely outline the consequences of being aggressive and rude and the benefits of treating you better. They have the choice about how to change behaviour which gives them a greater sense of control. If they choose to be polite, gently explain that you must of made a mistake with instructions because you thought they asked for x,y,z and do your best to deliver. If they choose to be rude, then get flustered and make more mistakes. When they pull you up on it, give them the options again.**



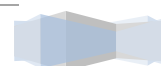
A friend or co-worker has the annoying habit of always interrupting you in mid-sentence and talking over you. You feel angry because they are constantly controlling conversations in this manner. How do you bring up the issue with them?

%	N	Options
20	2	1. Wait for just the right moment and when they interrupt you again say emphatically, "Stop interrupting me! That's so rude!"
40	4	2. When they interrupt you comment in a light-hearted tone of voice, "I can't help but notice that you're interrupting me again. Are you worried about what I might have to say?"
10	1	3. Just avoid the person and find other friends who can communicate better.
30	3	4. Just accept the situation let them do all the talking. Eventually, they'll become more interested in what you have to say.

The most common response was option 2 (40%); the best response as it represents a light hearted response that makes the point in a very subtle way.

Explanation

1. This is a direct, confronting way to address their habit. You may not get a positive response or you could really hurt their feelings.
2. **This is the better option. It's light-hearted and makes the point in a very subtle way. Though, you may have to repeat this a few times to get the message across.**
3. You might find that you are missing out on some of the benefits of the relationship by doing this. Try applying strategy B a few times before you give up.
4. Responses 2 and 4 are expressions of powerlessness and are both simply ways of avoiding the situation. Nothing will change and eventually option 4 will lead to option 3 or 1 if unaddressed.



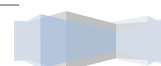
You are a team leader and one of the members of your team often does not show up for meetings despite frequent reminders and yet you are accountable for the work they perform. How do you deal with their irresponsible attitude?

%	N	Options
30	3	Meet with the person and explain that they are expected to attend meetings even if it seems like a waste of time to them.
60	6	Approach them and say, "I can't help but notice that you weren't at the meeting. Is there a problem?"
10	1	Talk to the employee and explain that since they didn't come to the meeting you assumed they were on top of things and would be OK with whatever was decided. Since there was an extra piece of work that no one else felt they could take on, you decided that it would be OK to pass it to them.
0	0	Tell them that their irresponsible attitude reflects on the entire team and that you all have to work together.

The majority of respondents chose option 2 (60%) which is an ineffective method to use with someone who has had frequent reminders and this response is unlikely to result in a change in their behaviour.

Explanation

1. This is not an effective way to change their behaviour. You have tried this several times and it does not seem to be working. They might also take offense to the assumption that you think they don't want to go.
2. While this is a useful strategy to use in the beginning, the recurrent nature situation calls for a more effective strategy that initiates behaviour change.
- 3. This is the better option. By giving them more work you create a small nuisance for them, a consequence of not attending the meeting. They are more likely to change if they experience more immediate or direct consequences as opposed to simply letting down the team and being simply reprimanded.**
4. The more assertive response may get the results you need but they are motivated because of fear, not because of a genuine desire to improve their behaviour.



A co-worker is saying negative things about you behind your back and seems to be trying to undermine your position. You think they want to take over your job or get you fired. What do you do?

%	N	
0	0	1. Confront them by making it clear that you are onto them, that you won't tolerate backstabbing and that if they want a fight then they've got one.
60	6	2. Complain to the management about this person's manipulative behaviour and give them detailed examples.
10	1	3. Talk to other people in your workplace and explain to them what is happening in order to get them on your side.
30	3	4. Talk to people in your workplace and explain that you know the person is saying negative things about you, but you understand because they obviously must find it hard to be up front about issues of concern to them.

The majority (60%) of respondents selected option 2. This option is focused on the negative behaviour, not the intended goal or outcome. Most people think only about what they would like to stop happening, not how they would like things to change.

1. If you confront them in an aggressive manner, they may stop out of fear, but are likely to resent and complain about you even more.
2. This is a good back-up measure, record their behaviour but hold off making the formal complaint until you have tried option 4.
3. This may make you appear as unprofessional as them, lending more validity to your colleagues complaints.
4. **This is the better option. To your peers you will be more likely to be seen as the bigger person. Try to understand their point of view and give them alternative options to gossiping behind your back if they have a problem.**



When dealing with someone who frequently complains and usually has a negative attitude (i.e., they usually complain about what is wrong rather than appreciating what’s going right), what do you do?

%	N	Options
0	0	1. Say something like, “Oh, put a sock in it! Quit being such a complainer!”
20	2	2. When they complain about something join in and add your own criticism or complaint about the thing they are complaining about. Then strongly suggest that they talk to the person, write a letter or do some other thing to really address the issue.
30	3	3. Just sigh and try to change the topic and accept that they’ll never change.
50	5	4. Say, “Things just aren’t going right for you today.” Then, the next time say, “Things just aren’t going well for you today are they?” Then, the next time, “Boy things just aren’t going your way, are they” and the next time, “Things are still not going very well. Is something wrong?”

The majority of respondents chose option 4 (50%) which; is a reasonably effective way to change their behaviour.

1. Option 1 is nothing more than complaining ...to the complainer ...who will now have a reason to complain about you.
2. **Option 2 is likely to be the most effective in changing their behaviour. The complainer wants the easy way – to complain and not actually DO anything. When you join them and suggest that they do something that resembles work or responsibility, they’ll take their complaining elsewhere ...to someone who will just listen.**
3. Thinking that people will never change or cannot change (as in 3) is just a way of doing what the complainer is doing – adopting a victim attitude. It’s easier to complain about the complainer (or any other difficult person) than it is to do the work of creating a positive change.
4. Option 2 and 4 could both work. With this option the complainer may say to themselves after several expressions of your concern, “Gee, I must be sounding pretty unhappy. Maybe I should change my tune.”



Recommendations

1. It is recommended that the 'toxic people workshop' material emphasises the following topics:
 - a. Managing emotional reactions to conflict
 - b. Managing difficult clients
 - c. Strategies to manage difficult behaviour (Difficult People Quiz)
2. A group activity should be conducted to help participants apply skills learnt to resolving client complaint scenarios.
3. Correct responses to the (Difficult People Quiz) be reviewed in the workshop.
4. Employees are made aware of grievance policy and procedures.
5. Grievance procedures and grievance officer training be reviewed by Mediator Style Training.

Thankyou for participating in the Conflcit Resolution Culture Survey process, we hope you find these results useful and informative. If you have any further questions please don't hesitate to give us a call.

Kind Regards,

Heidi Smith

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Principal

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