

RESOLVING CONFLICT

Pocketbook



A pocketful of tips and techniques to identify and understand the different causes of conflict - between individuals and within teams - and how to reach a positive resolution

**Max A. Eggert &
Wendy Falzon**

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THE RESOLVING CONFLICT POCKETBOOK

Max A Eggert and Wendy Falzon

Drawings by Phil Hailstone

Dedication

For Kerry, whom we both love dearly and hope that all her conflicts will be minor.

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INTRODUCTION

FROM THE AUTHORS



Daily life is full of the possibility, if not of overt conflict, then of disagreement, simply because there is not enough of what everyone wants to go around. Conflict and disagreements occur over money, goods, services, power, possessions and more. If something exists and more than one person wants or needs it, you have potential for conflict.

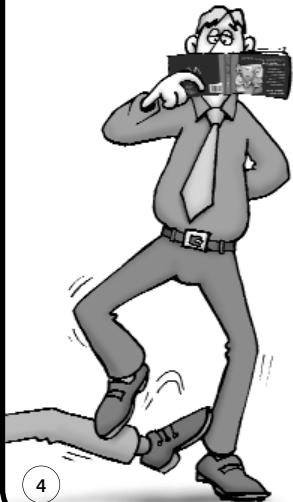
Conflict takes place at home and at work, between individuals, teams, groups, tribes, clans, nations and states. In fact, conflict is pretty ubiquitous. Where there are people there is usually conflict. Whether you are negotiating with your spouse or on behalf of your country, you have to learn the skills of empathy, listening and rapport, along with the ability to balance your emotional needs with your thinking. If you have power, coercion is easy, but it does not work in the long run.

Today the *win/lose* approach, risking a *lose/lose* outcome, is no way to resolve conflict. You might win the argument but lose the relationship. Win now, only to lose later.

Since conflict then is so endemic, perhaps even natural, it would be wise first to attempt to understand it and then consider ways to resolve it or use it positively. We hope that this book goes part way in assisting you in working through the inevitable conflict that you meet from time to time. Peace be with you.

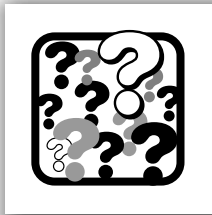
INTRODUCTION

HOW THIS BOOK WILL HELP YOU



Once you have worked through this book you should be able to:

- Understand what conflict is about
- Recognise the signs of conflict
- Understand how people react to conflict
- Develop strategies for dealing with conflict
- Understand conflict in organisation and work settings
- Have some ideas about how to resolve difficulties
- Have a better understanding of two important categories of conflict at work:
 - bullying
 - sexual harassment



WHAT IS CONFLICT?

WHAT IS CONFLICT?

DEFINITION



Conflict happens when two or more parties (point 1, below), one usually with more power (2), assert that they have a right to a limited resource or a course of action (3) and those involved in the situation can frustrate the desires of the other(s) (4).

Points to note:

1. Conflict can occur between more than two parties.
2. If one party has absolute power then there may be a need for conflict resolution but there is no negotiation. *Might becomes right* and what is wanted is just taken. Remember the old joke: 'Where does a 6-foot 6-inch, 20 stone man with a sub-machine gun sit in a packed underground carriage?'. Answer: 'Anywhere he pleases!'
3. With an unlimited resource, such as the air we breathe, there would be no conflict. Usually if you put a price on something it can lead to conflict.
4. Each of the parties can counter or frustrate the requirement of the other(s). If they cannot then there will be no conflict, but point (2) above will still apply.

WHAT IS CONFLICT?

DEFINITION



The content, requirements or *fuels* for conflict are:

- Two or more parties wanting a limited resource
- A perceived legitimacy to that resource by the parties
- Interdependency of the parties - they need each other
- No gross differences in power

Note: It could be said that if one party had absolute power and took the disputed resource from the other party or parties, there would still be conflict, because those dominated would feel aggrieved. This would be so, but in such cases any conflict resolution methods, and certainly the ones outlined here, would not help. A subject cannot negotiate with a dictator; only another dictator can do that. Unfortunately, history has taught us that *might is right* (see page 16).

WHAT IS CONFLICT?

BENEFITS OF CONFLICT



- ✓ Conflict promotes growth, through learning to overcome challenges in unison with others
- ✓ It promotes creativity and innovation as solutions are suggested to overcome the differences between the stakeholders
- ✓ It promotes the development of interpersonal skills, as individuals strive to get on with each other in spite of their differences
- ✓ It promotes mutual understanding of different values, aspirations and cultures (sometimes people are not trying to be difficult, they just have a different mind-set)
- ✓ It promotes social change and progress, as society changes and develops and a culture unfolds
- ✓ It promotes growth as the process of resolution overcomes the stagnation of the status quo (necessity is the mother of invention and conflict is one of necessity's prodigies)
- ✓ It can promote originality and reflection when your viewpoint is challenged

WHAT IS CONFLICT?



ADVERSE COSTS OF CONFLICT

- ✘ Higher stress amongst the parties
- ✘ Lower productivity as effort and resources are redirected into the conflict and away from the work in hand
- ✘ Lower interpersonal cohesion as individuals - and their supporters - take sides and begin to stereotype each other
- ✘ Time spent in resolution is taken away from other, more important matters
- ✘ Inappropriate decisions are made to support the various causes and positions of the parties
- ✘ Status and ego become more important than reason and reality
- ✘ The possibility of increased costs to cover negotiation preparation, negotiation time, mediation and/or arbitration costs and, perhaps, legal costs

