

Conflict Resolution Case Studies

Unit: World of Work Skills

Problem Area: Identify the Process of Conflict Resolution

Lesson: Conflict Resolution Case Studies

■ **Student Learning Objectives.** Instruction in this lesson should result in students achieving the following objectives:

- 1 Explain team power structures and developmental stages.**
- 2 Describe skills and techniques used for conflict resolution.**
- 3 Explain how conflict resolution techniques align with team power structures and developmental stages.**

■ **Resources.** The following resources may be useful in teaching this lesson:

“Bruce Tuckman’s 1965 Forming Storming Norming Performing Team-Development Model,” *Businessballs.com*. Accessed Nov. 8, 2010.

<<http://www.businessballs.com/tuckmanformingstormingnormingperforming.htm>>.

Williams, Ron. “Self-Directed Work Teams: A Competitive Advantage,” *Quality Digest*, Vol. 15, No. 11, Nov. 1995. Accessed Nov. 8, 2010.

<<http://www.qualitydigest.com/nov95/html/self-dir.html>>.



■ **Equipment, Tools, Supplies, and Facilities**

- ✓ Overhead or PowerPoint projector
- ✓ Visual(s) from accompanying master(s)
- ✓ Copies of sample test, lab sheet(s), and/or other items designed for duplication
- ✓ Materials listed on duplicated items
- ✓ Computers with printers and Internet access
- ✓ Classroom resource and reference materials

■ **Key Terms.** The following terms are presented in this lesson (shown in bold italics):

- ▶ autocratic power structure
- ▶ clarifying team roles
- ▶ consensus building
- ▶ democratic power structure
- ▶ directing
- ▶ laissez-faire power structure
- ▶ storming stage
- ▶ voting

■ **Interest Approach.** Use an interest approach that will prepare the students for the lesson. Teachers often develop approaches for their unique class and student situations. A possible approach is included here.

■ *Facilitate a discussion using the following questions with students.* ■

1. *Think of a time when your parent told you to do something and you did not have a choice in the matter—you had to do it.*
2. *Think of a time when your parent gave you choices and asked you what you wanted to do.*
3. *Think of a time when you asked your parent if you could do something and he or she replied, “Do whatever you want to do.”*

■ *Connect question 1 to the concept of an autocratic power structure, question 2 to the concept of a democratic power structure, and question 3 to the concept of a laissez-faire power structure.* ■

CONTENT SUMMARY AND TEACHING STRATEGIES

Objective 1: Explain team power structures and developmental stages.

Anticipated Problem: What are team power structures and developmental stages?

- I. Power structures include the level of participation team members have in decision making. Three main types of power structures for teams in this lesson are autocratic, democratic, and laissez faire.
 - A. An **autocratic power structure** is a power structure in which the designated leader makes the decisions and resolves the conflicts and the team members follow directions from the leader.
 1. This can also be called a manager-led team.
 2. This is also referred to as a bureaucratic power structure—one that is rigid and inflexible in its rules, regulations, and methodologies. That is, the bureaucratic rules, regulations, and methodologies are not open to questioning or conflict.
 3. An autocratic power structure is useful in organizational work teams, such as emergency rescue teams, the police force, and the military, all of which operate in quick-moving, high-pressure situations. Members of these teams have been trained in specific methods that are not questioned while being used. For example, there should be no conflict in deciding when and how CPR should be administered, when and how an unconscious person should be removed from a burning building, when and how a firearm should be discharged by a police officer, or when and how a combat team should be navigated during warfare.
 - B. A **democratic power structure** is a power structure in which decision making and conflict resolution are managed by team members and the leader helps team members learn the needed skills in the beginning stages.
 1. This is called a self-managed team.
 2. A democratic power structure in organizations is often used when there is little or no middle management and when the few leaders delegate decision-making powers to the many employees who are performing the work. This is also known as “flattened” organization. The assumption is that the employee teams are in the best position to make decisions related to the work they are doing. The use of self-managed teams began taking off in the 1980s, as technology firms empowered their employee work teams to create innovative software.
 - C. A **laissez-faire power structure** is a power structure in which no autocratic leader resolves conflicts and no democratic leader helps team members learn how to resolve conflicts. Team members are given no guidance. This occurs, usually inadvertently, in organizations that are disorganized or do not have adequate or qualified leadership to work with employee teams.

- D. Bruce Tuckman's developmental stages of a team are forming, storming, norming, and performing. The **storming stage** is the phase of team development during which team members are getting to know one another and discovering that there are disagreements or conflicts about how they will perform their work together.

Teaching Strategy: Use VM–A to demonstrate terms and concepts presented in this objective. Use the interest activity to connect team power structure concepts to student experiences. Have students visit the “Self-Directed Work Teams...” Internet resource to read more about the democratic power structure of a self-managed team. Have students visit the “Bruce Tuckman’s 1965...Team-Development Model” Internet resource to learn about the stages of team development, with an emphasis on the storming stage and its proclivity toward conflict among team members.

Objective 2: Describe skills and techniques used for conflict resolution

Anticipated Problem: What are skills and techniques used for conflict resolution?

- II. As conflict arises, different skills and techniques are used for resolution.
- A. Necessary personal skills include empathy, active listening, and problem solving.
 - 1. Empathy is sensitivity to what the other person is thinking and why he or she is thinking it—that is, the ability to put oneself into the other person’s mind.
 - 2. Active listening is the process of asking questions and repeating back to the other person to make sure one understands the other person accurately.
 - 3. Problem solving is the ability to identify the conflict exactly; understand the conflicting points of view; create a range of choices; understand the consequences of the choices; and finally synthesize the information, make a choice, and resolve the conflict.
 - B. Techniques, or methods, to resolve conflict are directing, consensus building, voting, and clarifying team roles.
 - 1. **Directing** is a technique in which a leader makes the choice and resolves the conflict, with minimal input from the employee team members.
 - 2. **Consensus building** is a technique that uses a facilitator to resolve the conflict through team dialogue and come to an agreement that everyone feels is the best alternative.
 - 3. **Voting** is a technique that involves presenting the options for resolving the conflict and having the employee team members vote for their choice.
 - 4. **Clarifying team roles** is a technique in which team members are reminded that, in some cases, certain team members have been given the responsibility to make decisions. Conflicts often occur when other team members forget that they do not have decision-making authority.

Teaching Strategy: Use VM–B and VM–C to demonstrate terms and concepts presented in this objective.

Objective 3: Explain how conflict resolution techniques align with team power structures and developmental stages.

Anticipated Problem: How do conflict resolution techniques align with team power structures and developmental stages?

- III. Conflict resolution techniques align best with particular power structures and developmental stages of the team.
 - A. The directing technique aligns best with an autocratic power structure (manager-led team). The leader decides the answer to the conflict.
 - B. The conflict resolution techniques of consensus building, voting, and clarifying team roles align best with a democratic power structure (self-managed team).
 - C. During the storming stage, a democratic power structure is a blended mix of self-managed and manager-led. While the team members are learning to work together, the leader may have to use more personal skills and be more proactive in resolving conflict until the team members are proficient at doing so themselves. In other words, the leader may have to teach the techniques of consensus building, voting, and clarifying team roles to the team members and give them time to learn these techniques. As the team creates its “rules” for working and moves into the norming and performing stages, less conflict will occur; and when conflict does occur, the team will be able to use the techniques it has been taught to resolve the conflict.

Teaching Strategy: Use VM–D to demonstrate concepts presented in this objective. Assign LS–A.

- **Review/Summary.** Use the student learning objectives to summarize the lesson. Have students explain the content associated with each objective. Student responses can be used in determining which objectives need to be reviewed or taught from a different angle. Questions at the ends of chapters in the textbook may also be used in the Review/Summary.
- **Application.** Use the included visual master(s) and lab sheet(s) to apply the information presented in the lesson.
- **Evaluation.** Evaluation should focus on student achievement of the objectives for the lesson. Various techniques can be used, such as student performance on the application activities. A sample written test is provided.

■ **Answers to Sample Test:**

Part One: Matching

1. f

2. h
3. a
4. d
5. g
6. e
7. b
8. c

Part Two: True/False

1. F
2. F
3. T
4. F
5. F

Part Three: Short Answer

1. Answers should include two of the following: empathy, active listening, problem solving.
2. Answer should closely resemble the following: The leader is spending time helping team members learn how to resolve their own conflicts.

Conflict Resolution Case Studies

► Part One: Matching

Instructions: Match the term with the correct definition.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| a. voting | e. consensus building |
| b. democratic power structure | f. clarifying team roles |
| c. directing | g. autocratic power structure |
| d. laissez-faire power structure | h. storming stage |

- _____ 1. A technique in which team members are reminded that, in some cases, certain team members have been given the responsibility to make decisions
- _____ 2. The phase of team development during which team members are getting to know one another and discovering that there are disagreements or conflicts about how they will perform their work together
- _____ 3. A technique that involves presenting the options for resolving the conflict and having the employee team members vote for their choice
- _____ 4. A power structure in which no autocratic leader resolves conflicts and no democratic leader helps team members learn how to resolve conflicts
- _____ 5. A power structure in which the designated leader makes the decisions and resolves the conflicts and the team members follow directions from the leader
- _____ 6. A technique that uses a facilitator to resolve the conflict through team dialogue and come to an agreement that everyone feels is the best alternative
- _____ 7. A power structure in which decision making and conflict resolution are managed by team members and the leader helps team members learn the needed skills in the beginning stages
- _____ 8. A technique in which a leader makes the choice and resolves the conflict, with minimal input from the employee team members



▶ Part Two: True/False

Instructions: Write *T* for true or *F* for false.

- ☐ 1. Autocratic leadership means doing nothing to resolve conflicts, leaving things on “autopilot.”
- ☐ 2. Problem solving does not include understanding choices for resolving a conflict. It only means creating one solution.
- ☐ 3. Empathy helps you understand how another person is thinking about a conflict.
- ☐ 4. The storming stage is where teams are working smoothly.
- ☐ 5. Consensus building goes well with an autocratic power structure.

▶ Part Three: Short Answer

Instructions: Answer the following.

1. What are two basic skills needed for conflict resolution?
2. During the storming stage in a democratic power structure, the leader will be more involved with the team's conflict resolution. What is the leader spending his or her time doing with the team during the conflicts of the storming stage?

POWER STRUCTURES AND THE STORMING STAGE

- ◆ **Autocratic power structure:** The leader makes the decisions and resolves the conflicts; the team members follow directions.
- ◆ **Democratic power structure:** Decision making and conflict resolution are managed by team members; the leader helps team members learn the needed skills in the beginning stages.
- ◆ **Laissez-faire power structure:** No autocratic leader resolves conflicts; no democratic leader helps team members learn how to resolve conflicts.
- ◆ **Storming stage:** Team members are getting to know one another and discovering that there are disagreements or conflicts about how they will perform their work together.



BASIC SKILLS USED IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

- ◆ **Empathy:** Sensitivity to what the other person is thinking and why he or she is thinking it—that is, the ability to put oneself into the other person’s mind
- ◆ **Active listening:** The process of asking questions and repeating back to the other person to make sure one understands the other person accurately
- ◆ **Problem solving:** The ability to:
 - Identify the conflict exactly
 - Understand the conflicting points of view
 - Create a range of choices
 - Understand the consequences of the choices
 - Synthesize the information, make a choice, and resolve the conflict



CONFLICT RESOLUTION TECHNIQUES

- ◆ **Directing:** A technique in which a leader makes the choice and resolves the conflict, with minimal input from the employee team members.
- ◆ **Consensus building:** A technique that uses a facilitator to resolve the conflict through team dialogue and come to an agreement that everyone feels is the best alternative.
- ◆ **Voting:** A technique that involves presenting the options for resolving the conflict and having the employee team members vote for their choice.
- ◆ **Clarifying team roles:** A technique in which team members are reminded that, in some cases, certain team members have been given the responsibility to make decisions. Conflicts often occur when other team members forget that they do not have decision-making authority.

POWER STRUCTURES AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION TECHNIQUES

	Leader Uses Conflict Resolution Skills: Directing	Team Members Use Conflict Resolution Skills: Consensus Building, Voting, and Clarifying Team Roles	Combined Leader and Team Member Conflict Resolution Skills Used
Autocratic Power Structure	X		
Democratic Power Structure		X	
Laissez-Faire Power Structure		X	
Democratic Power Structure: Storming Stage			X

Conflict Resolution Case Studies

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to analyze conflict resolution case studies.

Objective

Read and analyze conflict resolution case studies, and formulate answers to related questions.

Materials

- ◆ lab sheet
- ◆ paper and writing utensil or computer with word processing

Procedure

1. Read each conflict resolution scenario.
2. Answer the questions after the case study.

Case Study #1

Company P is a small pizza restaurant that is family-owned and managed by Tom, one of the owners. The restaurant has been in business for 15 years and has a good reputation in the community. It provides many high school students with part-time jobs.

Tom has a reputation among his employees as a “heavy-handed, impatient person, who likes things done his way.” Tom trains new employees and shows them specifically how he wants things done. Sometimes, Tom randomly watches employees and corrects them on little details that the employees do not think are very important. Most of the time, Tom works the cash register and is not around the employees as they do their jobs. Tom assumes that the employees are doing their jobs the way he has trained them and does not like it when there is disruption or disagreement among the employees. Tom is more of a “task person” than a



“people person” and just wants employees to do their jobs without any problems. When there is a conflict, Tom usually becomes a little irritated and quickly solves it by telling the employees what to do.

One Saturday night a problem arises when two delivery drivers have a disagreement. Two orders have been phoned in and are ready for delivery at the same time. One delivery is to an address that is far away and will take a long time. The other delivery is to a closer address and to a customer the drivers know always gives a good tip. Both drivers want to deliver to the closer address with the good tip. Neither driver wants to deliver to the farther address because it will take too long and result in missed opportunities to make other deliveries. The drivers have a conflict.

Question 1:

In this case study, based on what you know about Tom, what do you think is the power structure of the restaurant? *(Circle your answer.)*

- a. Democratic
- b. Laissez faire
- c. Autocratic

Question 2:

Based on what you know about Tom and the power structure of the restaurant, which conflict resolution technique do you think would be used to resolve the conflict with the drivers? *(Circle your answer.)*

- a. Voting
- b. Directing
- c. Consensus building

Question 3:

What is the exact conflict between the pizza drivers? Why do both want the same delivery? What exactly is it about the other delivery that repulses them both?

Case Study #2

Now assume *you* are the manager of Company P. Tom has left his job, and the other owners want you to work with the employees to teach them how to solve their problems and conflicts more independently. You have worked in the restaurant for a couple of months and have started training employees on how to listen better to each other, how to empathize with each other, and how to solve a conflict by identifying the exact problem, coming up with a list of possible solutions, and agreeing on a solution. This is a new experience for most of the employees.

Let's assume the same conflict between delivery drivers comes up again: One Saturday night a problem arises when two delivery drivers have a disagreement. Two orders have been phoned in and are ready for delivery at the same time. One delivery is to an address that is far away and will take a long time. The other delivery is to a closer address and to a customer the drivers know always gives a good tip. Both drivers want to deliver to the closer address with the good tip. Neither driver wants to deliver to the farther address because it will take too long and result in missed opportunities to make other deliveries. The drivers have a conflict.

Question 4:

When talking to the drivers about this conflict, what technique from the list below would you most likely use? (*Circle your answer.*) Explain your answer by stating why the other two choices would not work and why your choice would be better for this situation.

- a. Directing
- b. Consensus building
- c. Voting

Question 5:

As the facilitator teaching the drivers how to resolve the conflict, you first need to identify the exact point of conflict. In this example, what is the exact point of conflict that you would first clarify with the drivers?

Question 6:

As the facilitator teaching the drivers how to resolve the conflict, what possible solutions might you present for the drivers to choose from?

Question 7:

How could you use the technique of clarifying team roles to help the drivers solve this conflict if it were to come up again in the future?

Case Study #3

You have been hired to work at a manufacturing plant that produces plastic toys. You are on a self-managed team with four other people. Your team's job is to run and maintain the machinery that makes the toys, check the toys for quality as they come off the conveyor belt, keep the area clean and safe, and meet the daily production goals created by sales orders. The average daily sales orders are around 150 toys. Assuming that the toy machines are working the whole eight hours of the work shift, production could be 200 toys. Each day, there is usually enough spare time for the team to clean and maintain the machines and area while still meeting the production goal within its eight-hour shift.

One Friday a machine broke down for a couple of hours. That day, there were 200 toys ordered that needed to be shipped before the team could leave. To meet its goal, the team would need to stay late to finish the order. Your four teammates were Bob, Stan, Tina, and Beth. It was 3:00 p.m., and the machine had been repaired and working for a few hours, but your team estimated that it would take an extra three hours to meet the production goal. At least four members of your team would need to stay three extra hours. Your team met to discuss what to do.

Bob had no plans for the night but said that he would not stay since he had warned the team that the machine was having problems several days ago, but no one listened to him.

Stan said he could not stay because he had dinner plans with his wife.

Tina said that she could not stay because she had a birthday party for her youngest daughter that night.

You and Beth were willing to stay but needed at least two of the others to stay also to run the machine properly and safely.

Question 8:

What is the exact conflict?

Question 9:

Which of the techniques could you use in this power structure?

Question 10:

What possible solutions to this conflict can you think of that you would discuss with team members?

Conflict Resolution Case Studies

Question 1:

- c. Autocratic

Question 2:

- b. Directing

Question 3:

The exact conflict between the drivers is that both want the best opportunity to make the most money, but only one of them can have that opportunity.

Taking the closer delivery with the better tip provides the opportunity to make more money.

Both drivers are repulsed by the other delivery because it would take them a long time to get there and back, there is no guarantee of a good tip, and they might lose other deliveries because of the time required to get to and from the distant address.

Question 4:

- b. Consensus building

Consensus building would involve talking with the drivers and agreeing on the best solution to the conflict.

Directing would not fit the power structure because your goal is to teach the drivers how to solve their own problems.

Voting would not work because only two people are involved and they would have tied—each would have voted for himself or herself to be the one making the delivery.

Question 5:

The exact point of conflict is that each driver wants the best opportunity to make the most money, but only one of them can have it.

Question 6:

Answers will vary. Following are some examples.

Possible solutions you could share with the drivers include:

- ◆ Flip a coin to see who gets the delivery.

- ◆ Arrange to split the tip from the closer delivery.
- ◆ Have one driver “buy” the better delivery from the other driver.
- ◆ Have one driver take both deliveries and the other driver stay and take all the other deliveries that come in the meantime.

Question 7:

You could use the technique of clarifying team roles by designating one of the drivers (maybe the one with more seniority) as the decision maker if this situation were ever to come up again.

Question 8:

The exact conflict is that three of the teammates do not want to stay late, but two of them will need to stay late.

Question 9:

You could use the voting technique to choose which two would stay late. You could use the consensus-building technique to discuss which two might stay late and have everyone agree on which two would stay late.

Question 10:

You could discuss the rationale for having each person stay late.

For example, Bob might stay because he does not have plans, but Tina and Stan do have family plans for the evening.

Stan might stay because he could have dinner with his wife later that night.

Tina would probably be the least able to stay since she is to have a birthday party for her youngest daughter that night.

The team could make arrangements to rotate staying late if this situation were ever to come up again.