DEVELOPING A POSITIVE CONFLICT CULTURE
When discussing organizational culture, people often talk in terms of task and relationships. That is, how does the work get done around here? How do we implement plans and evaluate performance? How are relationships handled? How do we motivate employees?

Task and relationships are important issues when considering the conflict culture of an organization as well.

The “How do we manage conflicts?” question affects everything from productivity to interpersonal interactions. This article explores tips for cultivating a positive conflict culture.
Traditionally, organizations have viewed conflict as a negative force which needs to be eliminated by imposing more structure or uniformity.

Today, though, successful organizations are more likely to embrace diverging views, realizing that they can lead to increased creativity, opportunities to improve, and greater productivity.

Rather than eliminating conflict, the goal is to better manage the conflict that inevitably comes with the open exchange of ideas.
Having a set of guidelines as to how you’re going to resolve differences is very beneficial.

An example might be “We listen to each other without interrupting.”

Publish these guidelines and post them in a visible spot in the office.
EIGHT SIMPLE STEPS TO ESTABLISHING GROUND RULES*

1. Review the team’s mission and context.
2. Discuss the desired climate.
3. Brainstorm suggestions for creating the climate.
4. Combine similar suggestions.
5. Prioritize suggestions.
6. Behaviorize the remaining suggestions.
7. Record and distribute the list.
8. Review and finalize agreements.

*Building Conflict Competent Teams, Craig Runde and Tim Flanagan
One of the most damaging responses in the face of conflict is avoidance or some other form of non-action.

Nothing frustrates people more than when a conflict comes to light, and nothing is ever addressed. Even worse, the conflict may be acknowledged, but “stalling” tactics such as collecting more data or saying “it’s under consideration” are used.

When problems arise, don’t wait to take tangible steps to resolve them, particularly if you are the boss.
Many organizations struggle with ongoing issues that lead to conflict: limited resources, constant change, multiple communication styles, etc.

What differentiates organizations, though, is how they manage these common problems.

When you start to see the effects of unresolved conflict on a continual basis such as reduced collaboration, low morale, frequent complaining/arguments, and lack of productivity, it is time to intervene before these responses become systemic.
Of course it is essential that the senior executives in an organization model constructive behaviors when dealing with conflict because these people of influence set the tone for the entire organization, but it’s equally important that all employees buy into the “way we do things around here.”

Everything, including the daily routines, the rewards systems, the power structures, and the communication pathways, should reflect that differences are valued and respected here.
Seven Constructive Behaviors scales that are critical for effective conflict resolution.

The Conflict Dynamics Profile® (CDP)

- Perspective Taking
- Creating Solutions
- Expressing Emotions
- Reaching Out
- Reflective Thinking
- Delay Responding
- Adapting

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With the ever increasing demands on today’s employees, work environments can be incredibly serious.

The chances of making mistakes or having a short fuse on any given day multiply.

Do your best to lighten things up when appropriate. Having a little fun with your colleagues can foster connectivity and a common desire to work through tough issues amicably.
The Mediation Training Institute (MTI) ® is the foremost provider of training, certification, licensing, and consulting in workplace conflict management and mediation. Through the Institute, we offer programs and products for conflict resolution and mediation including a variety of mediation certification programs. Our flagship product, the Conflict Dynamics Profile (CDP), is a behaviorally-based assessment that helps individuals identify how they respond to conflict. Two versions of the instrument – the CDP-Individual (CDP-I) and CDP-360 – provide practical solutions for promoting more effective conflict resolution.

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