



Why we all count the cost of conflict

Unresolved conflict costs money and it spreads stress in the workforce, says **Julian Hall** of Beating Anger.

Conflict is natural part of life. Being human, I naturally disagree with people but it is by exploring conflicting views that I find new answers to old problems.

How I conflict with others, however, is determined by the culture of my workplace.

There are three main types of conflict in the workplace: the first is the most obvious, that being aggressive conflict where one party is aggressive and the other decides to meet aggression with aggression.

It's the easiest to spot and most organisations have policies and norms of behaviour that will regulate and minimise the occurrences of these incidents. Nonetheless when they happen they are destructive to team dynamics, respect and ultimately a productive environment.

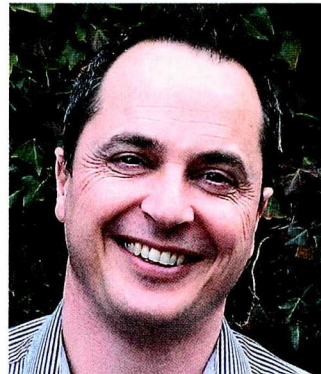
The less obvious and the most common conflict is the passive aggressive encounter. This may be in answer to open aggression or to existing passive aggression. It is characterised by team member's inability to disagree openly with each other or to recognise and admit they are in conflict.

The culture that develops is one of sarcasm, back-biting and withholding support for vital projects. It produces 'office terrorists' and often has a leader who has an open door policy that everyone else knows does not really exist.

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The third and least common conflict is one of assertive behaviour. This is characterised by people who are comfortable stating

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their needs without being overly attached to outcomes.

It is characterised by teams that work towards a common goal, respect each other and have open honest working relationships. For a leader or manager who is not secure in their own position it is the most difficult and fear inducing culture to promote. It is also, in my opinion, the most productive, fast moving and profitable culture to promote.

For the team members and employees an assertive culture is the one where they will feel safest. The most common, the passive aggressive culture, is the one where stress and depression are allowed to fester and grow.

According to the Health and Safety Commission (HSC) last year the economy lost 33 million days to illness. Of these 13.4 million days were attributable to stress, anxiety

or depression, and the number of employees suffering work related stress has doubled in the last 10 years. These are extraordinary figures and worth paying attention to.

If conflict at work accounted for just one tenth of the time lost then dealing with it effectively would provide remarkable efficiencies for your business.

We ran a survey of clients that had attended our training: 66 per cent said their anger affected them in the work place which is a substantial percentage. More importantly, 81 per cent said their employer did nothing to help them with their anger.

The survey did not just ask for yes/no responses; it also asked for additional information.

With this we pieced together the story of 'The Boss'. One respondent said: "I have lost my temper a lot with staff and some have left because they can't work with me." Another said: "I used to be very short tempered, would get easily wound up by the smallest things. I shouted a lot at my co-workers, did not cooperate. I was a very bad boss to have."

The employees' story connects well with this. One described feeling resentful towards colleagues as it was difficult to set boundaries and deal assertively with unrealistic demands. Another described getting grumpy with staff and clients to the point of losing their job.

Any employer, from small companies to medium and large ones, will know what a cost burden sickness and absence is. They will also understand the challenge of recruitment. A CIPD survey found that staff recruitment costs on average £2,930 per recruit, rising to £8,333 for senior managers and directors.

Taking care of your employee's mental health is as important as their physical health. A really positive way to start demonstrating this is to foster a culture of assertive team dynamics within your business.

By doing this, you will not only increase productivity but you will make an impact upon your bottom line costs.

Partners needed – see page 38, The Last Word



The last word

Your letters page - your chance to comment on any topic of interest. E-mail the editor: roland.curtis@dncc.co.uk or write to DNCC, Commerce House, 2 Victoria Way, Pride Park, Derby DE24 8AN

CUTS NOT SO CHARITABLE

Sir

For decades, successive governments have relied on the voluntary sector to provide services to people in need. Since the 1980s there has been a move towards charities and other voluntary groups providing more services that in the past would have been performed by social services.

If this funding is reduced or cut entirely many of these services will simply cease to exist. In 80 per cent of local authorities only those whose needs are determined as critical receive any kind of service, leaving charities and other voluntary groups to fill the gap.

If neither the state nor voluntary groups are there to provide services then who will?

One reason so many charities deliver services with funding from Government is precisely because they offer excellent value for money. Instead of paying people to operate a service, we use volunteers, which cost substantially less. Volunteers

do come at some cost however; on average £200 per year to recruit, manage, train and support each one.

In Sight Support Derbyshire our 300 volunteers deliver 31,000 hours of support each year, equivalent to 826 working weeks. This would cost over £180,000 per year if this was paid for at minimum wage.

Many voluntary groups are speaking out against the cuts out of a sense of duty for the people that they represent.

It is not a question of cuts, but a question of spending priorities and whether we wish to live in a country that supports those who cannot support themselves.

We have made significant cutbacks as well as introducing new ways to make money, but we have a duty to speak out when our service users ask us to.

Ges Roulstone
Chief executive
Sight Support Derbyshire

CYCLE OF LIFE

Sir

Now that British summer time has arrived it is time to get out on your bike in advance of the 2011 Great Nottinghamshire bike ride on Sunday 19th June.

This year will see the return of the corporate challenge and for only £250 you can enter a team of five in any of the three rides and end the day in the VIP area with your team members.

We are also offering free cycle training delivered by Ridewise (www.ridewise.org.uk) to the top fundraising team, and the first 20 teams to enter will be placed in a prize draw to win free training.

If sponsoring the event, then for only £2,500 you will get the following: title sponsorship of the event with branding on all event and marketing material; free team of five with exclusive area in the VIP tent to entertain and free cycle training from Ridewise; and inclusion in the GEM 106 radio campaign.

Email chris.simon@perfectmotion.org or call 0115 925 8777.

Chris Simon
Perfect Motion Sports Marketing

FINDING HELP

Sir

The European Satellite Navigation Competition is offering cash prizes and business incubation support to people interested turning an innovative idea into reality.

The UK leg of the competition, hosted by the GNSS Research and Applications Centre of Excellence (GRACE) at The University of Nottingham, is open for entries from anyone who has an idea that uses satellite navigation technology.

The challenge is a remarkable opportunity to anyone who has a fresh and creative idea but needs a little extra support in achieving commercial success. The UK winner will receive a prize worth over £10,000 including £5,000 cash, £5,000 of business support and office space, free UK patent advice, three

years' membership of the Royal Institute of Navigation and introductions to industry partners and potential funding opportunities.

They will also be entered in the overall European competition with the chance to win an additional €20,000.

The sponsors include the UK Space Agency, the Technology Strategy Board, EADS Astrium, the Royal Institute of Navigation, the IET, the Knowledge Transfer Network, Science and Technology Facilities Council, Inmarsat, NAVTEQ and Logica.

For details visit www.ukesnc.com. The closing date for entries is June 30th.

Paul Bhatia
General manager
GRACE

MR ANGRY

Sir

I work with individuals and groups who lose it at work and need to learn to contain and assert.

While doing that I support my clients with an online stress test that they can use to measure the effectiveness of the work they do with me.

This will soon be available to measure stress through a whole company and I am looking for partners to pilot this with. If this interests you call me on 0845 505 2450.

Julian Hall
Beating Anger