**Factor III: Courage**

**Cluster H: Dealing with Trouble**

### 12 Conflict Management

*Conflict is inevitable, but combat is optional.* Max Lucado – American author

#### Section 1: Your Development Need(s)

**Unskilled**
- Avoids conflict in situations and with people
- May accommodate, want everyone to get along
- May get upset as a reaction to conflict, takes it personally
- Can’t operate under conflict long enough to get a good deal
- Gives in and says yes too soon
- Gets into conflict by accident; doesn’t see it coming
- Will let things fester rather than dealing with them directly
- Will try to wait long enough for it to go away
- May be excessively competitive and have to win every dispute

*Select one to three of the competencies listed below to use as a substitute for this competency if you decide not to work on it directly.*

**Substitutes:** 2,3,4,8,9,11,13,16,31,33,34,36,37,41,50,51,52,57

**Skilled**
- Steps up to conflicts, seeing them as opportunities
- Reads situations quickly
- Good at focused listening
- Can hammer out tough agreements and settle disputes equitably
- Can find common ground and get cooperation with minimum noise

**Overused Skill**
- May be seen as overly aggressive and assertive
- May get in the middle of everyone else’s problems
- May drive for a solution before others are ready
- May have a chilling effect on open debate
- May spend too much time with obstinate people and unsolvable problems

*Select one to three of the competencies listed below to work on to compensate for an overuse of this skill.*

**Compensators:** 2,3,31,33,34,36,37,40,41,51,52,56,60,64
Some Causes

- Avoid conflict
- Can’t negotiate
- Get too emotional
- Slow to catch on
- Take things personally
- Too sensitive

Leadership Architect® Factors and Clusters

This competency is in the Courage Factor (III). This competency is in the Dealing with Trouble Cluster (H) with: 9, 13, 34, 57. You may want to check other competencies in the same Factor/Cluster for related tips.

The Map

One survey found that managers were spending 18% of their time dealing with direct face-to-face conflict. Most organizations are decentralized and compartmentalized which sets up natural conflict, group to group. Whenever you form two groups, conflict follows. Gender and race inroads have probably brought with them increased conflict. Competition has heated up, making speed and agility more important but also created more conflict and less relaxed reflection. There is data-based conflict—my numbers are better than your numbers. There is opinion conflict—my opinion has greater value than yours. There is power conflict—this is mine. And there is unnecessary conflict due to how people position themselves and protect their turf. Dealing with and resolving all these kinds of conflict is more important and frequent than it used to be.

Section 2: Learning on Your Own

These self-development remedies will help you build your skill(s).

Some Remedies

1. Caught in a win/lose predicament? Seek cooperative relations. The opposite of conflict is cooperation. Developing cooperative relationships involves demonstrating real and perceived equity, the other side feeling understood and respected, and taking a problem oriented point of view. To do this more: increase the realities and perceptions of fairness—don’t try to win every battle and take all the spoils; focus on the common-ground issues and interests of both sides—find wins on both sides, give in on little points; avoid starting with entrenched positions—show respect for them and their positions; and reduce any remaining conflicts to the smallest size possible.

2. Causing unnecessary conflict? Choose words appropriately. Language, words and timing set the tone and can cause unnecessary conflict that has to be managed before you can get anything done. Do
you use insensitive language? Do you raise your voice often? Do you use terms and phrases that challenge others? Do you use demeaning terms? Do you use negative humor? Do you offer conclusions, solutions, statements, dictates or answers early in the transaction? Give reasons first, solutions last. When you give solutions first, people often directly challenge the solutions instead of defining the problem. Pick words that are other-person neutral. Pick words that don’t challenge or sound one-sided. Pick tentative and probabilistic words that give others a chance to maneuver and save face. Pick words that are about the problem and not the person. Avoid direct blaming remarks; describe the problem and its impact.

3. Tensions escalating? Practice Aikido. Aikido is the ancient art of absorbing the energy of your opponent and using it to manage him/her. Let the other side vent frustration, blow off steam, but don’t react. Listen. Nod. Ask clarifying questions. Ask open-ended questions like, “What one change could you make so we could achieve our objectives better?” “What could I do that would help the most?” Restate their position periodically to signal you have understood. But don’t react. Keep them talking until they run out of venom. When the other side takes a rigid position, don’t reject it. Ask why—what are the principles behind the position, how do we know it’s fair, what’s the theory of the case. Play out what would happen if their position was accepted. Then explore the concern underlying the answer. Separate the people from the problem. When someone attacks you, rephrase it as an attack on the problem. In response to threats, say you’ll only negotiate on merit and fairness. If the other side won’t play fair, surface their game—“It looks like you’re playing good cop, bad cop. Why don’t you settle your differences and tell me one thing?” In response to unreasonable proposals, attacks, or a non-answer to a question, you can always say nothing. People will usually respond by saying more, coming off their position a bit, or at least revealing their true interests. Many times, with unlimited venting and your understanding, the actual conflict shrinks.

4. Too focused on differences? Seize on common points of agreement. Almost all conflicts have common points that get lost in the heat of the battle. After a conflict has been presented and understood, start by saying that it might be helpful to see if we agree on anything. Write them on the flip chart. Then write down the areas left open. Focus on common goals, priorities and problems. Keep the open conflicts as small as possible and concrete. The more abstract it gets, “We don’t trust your unit,” the more unmanageable it gets. To this respond, “Tell me your specific concern—why exactly don’t you trust us, can you give me an example?” Usually after calm discussion, they don’t trust your unit on this specific issue under these specific conditions. That’s easier to deal with. Allow others to save face by conceding small points that are not central to the issue, don’t try to hit a home run every time. If you can’t agree on a solution, agree on a procedure to move forward. Collect more data. Appeal to a higher power. Get a third party arbitrator. Something. This creates some positive motion and breaks stalemates.
5. **Too emotional? Keep your cool.** Sometimes our emotional reactions lead others to think we have problems with conflict. In conflict situations, what emotional reactions do you have (such as impatience or non-verbals like flushing or drumming your pen or fingers)? Learn to recognize those as soon as they start and substitute something more neutral. Most emotional responses to conflict come from personalizing the issue. Separate people issues from the problem at hand and deal with people issues separately and later if they persist. Always return to facts and the problem before the group; stay away from personal clashes. Attack the problem by looking at common interests and underlying concerns, not people and their positions. Try on their views for size, the emotion as well as the content. Ask yourself if you understand their feelings. Ask what they would do if they were in your shoes. See if you can restate each other’s position and advocate it for a minute to get inside each other’s place. If you get emotional, pause and collect yourself. You are not your best when you get emotional. Then return to the problem. *More help?* – See #11 Composure and #107 Lack of Composure.

6. **Each possesses something the other wants? Seek opportunities to bargain and trade.** Since you can’t absolutely win all conflicts unless you keep pulling rank, you have to learn to horse-trade and bargain. What do they need that I have? What could I do for them outside this conflict that could allow them to give up something I need now in return? How can we turn this into a win for both of us? *More help?* – See #37 Negotiating.

7. **Not getting your message through? Deliver clear, problem-focused communication.** Follow the rule of equity: Explain your thinking and ask them to explain theirs. Be able to state their position as clearly as they do whether you agree or not; give it legitimacy. Separate facts from opinions and assumptions. Generate a variety of possibilities first rather than stake out positions. Keep your speaking to 30-60 second bursts. Try to get them to do the same. Don’t give the other side the impression you’re lecturing or criticizing them. Explain objectively why you hold a view; make the other side do the same. Ask lots of questions, make fewer statements. To identify interests behind positions, ask why they hold them or why they wouldn’t want to do something. Always restate their position to their satisfaction before offering a response. *More help?* – See #27 Informing.

8. **Hopelessly stuck? Go to arbitration.** When there is a true impasse, suggest a third equal-power party to resolve the remaining conflicts. Use a third party to write up each side’s interests and keep suggesting solutions until you can agree. Or if time is an issue, pass it on to a higher authority. Present both sides calmly and objectively, and let the chips fall where they may.
9. Easily provoked? Identify conflict triggers. Do specific people, issues, styles, or groups set you off and make you handle the conflict poorly? Write down the last 20 times when you handled conflict poorly. What's common in the situations? Are there three to five common themes? Are the same people involved? Different people but the same style? Certain kinds of issues? Once you have isolated the cause, mentally rehearse a better way of handling it when it comes up next time.

10. Committing blunders? Navigate the political terrain. Organizations are a complex maze of constituencies, issues and rivalries peopled by strong egos, sensitives, and empire protectors. Political mistakes come in a variety of shapes and sizes. The most common is saying things you shouldn’t. Next are actions that are politically out of line and not right for the context. Worst are politically unacceptable moves, initiatives, tactics and strategies. Last are unnecessary conflicts, tensions, misunderstandings and rivalries created because you took after a specific person or group. Work to understand the politics of the organization. Who are the movers and shakers in the organization? Who are the major gatekeepers who control the flow of resources, information and decisions? Who are the guides and the helpers? Get to know them better. Do lunch. Who are the major resisters and stoppers? Try to avoid or go around them or make peace with them. In the special case of dealing with top management, sensitivities are high, egos are big, sensitivity traps are set and tensions can be severe. There is a lot of room for making statements or acting in ways that would be seen as exhibiting your poor political judgment and causing conflict. More help? – See #38 Organizational Agility, #48 Political Savvy and #119 Political Missteps.

Section 3: Learning from Feedback

These sources would give you the most accurate and detailed feedback on your skill(s).

1. Development Professionals

Sometimes it might be valuable to get some analysis and feedback from a professional trained and certified in the area you’re working on—possibly a career counselor, a therapist, clergy, a psychologist, etc.

2. Human Resource Professionals

Human Resource professionals have both a formal and informal feedback role. Since they have access to unique and confidential information, they can provide the right context for feedback you’ve received. Sometimes they may be “directed” to give you feedback. Other times, they may pass on feedback just to be helpful to you.

3. Natural Mentors

Natural mentors have a special relationship with you and are interested in your success and your future. Since they are usually not in your direct chain of command, you can have more open, relaxed, and fruitful
discussions about yourself and your career prospects. They can be a very important source for candid or critical feedback others may not give you.

4. Peers and Colleagues

Peers and colleagues have a special social and working relationship. They attend staff meetings together, share private views, get feedback from the same boss, travel together, and are knowledgeable about each other’s work. You perhaps let your guard down more around peers and act more like yourself. They can be a valuable source of feedback.

Section 4: Learning from Develop-in-Place Assignments

*These part-time develop-in-place assignments will help you build your skill(s).*

- Integrate diverse systems, processes, or procedures across decentralized and/or dispersed units.
- Manage the furnishing or refurnishing of new or existing offices.
- Relaunch an existing product or service that's not doing well.
- Handle a tough negotiation with an internal or external client or customer.
- Manage a dissatisfied internal or external customer; troubleshoot a performance or quality problem with a product or service.
- Resolve an issue in conflict between two people, units, geographies, functions, etc.
- Make peace with an enemy or someone you’ve disappointed with a product or service or someone you’ve had some trouble with or don’t get along with very well.
- Do a postmortem on a failed project, and present it to the people involved.
- Be a member of a union-negotiating or grievance-handling team.
- Work on a crisis-management team.

Section 5: Learning from Full-Time Jobs

*These full-time jobs offer the opportunity to build your skill(s).*

1. Change Manager

The core demands to qualify as a Change Manager are: (1) Leader of a significant effort to change something or implement something of significance. (2) Success and failure will be evident. (3) Always something new and unique to the organization. (4) Must get many others to buy in and cooperate. (5) Involves cross-boundary change. (6) High visibility sponsor. (7) Exposure to significant decision makers and key stakeholders. (8) Resistance is expected and near-universal. (9) Cost of failure is significant.

Examples include: (1) Total Work Systems like TQM, ISO, or Six Sigma. (2) Business restructurings like a move away from a core competence and into a new product space or industry, i.e., American carmakers move into smaller, more fuel-efficient products. (3) Installing major systems (like an ERP or HRIS) and
procedures for the first time. (4) M&A integrations, responding to major competitor initiatives that threaten the organization. (5) Extensive reorganizations. (6) Long-term post-corporate scandal recovery.

☐ 2. Crisis Manager

The core demands to qualify as Crisis Manager are: (1) Leader responsible for an unpredictable, unique crisis of significant proportion. (2) Success and failure will be evident and visible. (3) Takes Herculean effort to solve. (4) Learning something on the fly. (5) Solution requires cross-boundary team. (6) Leader will be a spokesperson and potentially subjected to media scrutiny. (7) Hostile questioning and suspicious atmosphere is common. (8) Time pressure is extreme. (9) Solution involves working with parties outside the organization. (10) Usually short-term (up to three months). (11) Other parts of job would have to be temporarily set aside. Examples of crisis management would be: (1) A product safety recall; product or system failure. (2) Unexpected death of a CEO or senior corporate executive. (3) Unexpected termination or scandal involving a CEO or senior corporate executive. (4) Trouble with a key customer or supplier that decreases revenue or production. (5) Natural disasters. (6) Terrorist attacks. (7) Kidnapping or arrest of employees; violent crime against employees.

☐ 3. Fix-Its/Turnarounds

The core demands to qualify as a Fix-it or Turnaround assignment are: (1) Clean-ing up a mess. (2) Serious people issues/problems like credibility/performance/morale. (3) Tight deadline. (4) Serious business performance failure. (5) Last chance to fix. Four types of Fix-its/Turnarounds: (1) Fixing a failed business/unit involving taking control, stopping losses, managing damage, planning the turnaround, dealing with people problems, installing new processes and systems, and rebuilding the spirit and performance of the unit. (2) Managing sizable disasters like mishandled labor negotiations and strikes, thefts, history of significant business losses, poor staff, failed leadership, hidden problems, fraud, public relations nightmares, etc. (3) Significant reorganization and restructuring (e.g., stabilizing the business, re-forming unit, introducing new systems, making people changes, resetting strategy and tactics). (4) Significant system/process breakdown (e.g., MIS, financial coordination processes, audits, standards, etc.) across units requiring working from a distant position to change something, providing advice and counsel, and installing or implementing a major process improvement or system change outside your own unit and/or with customers outside the organization.

☐ 4. International Assignments

The core demands to qualify as an International assignment are: (1) First-time working in the country. (2) Significant challenges like new language, hardship location, unique business rules/practices, significant cultural/marketplace differences, different functional task, etc. (3) More than a year assignment. (4) No automatic return deal. (5) Not necessarily a change in job challenge, technical content, or responsibilities.
Examples of International assignments would be: (1) Managing local operations for an office located outside your home country. (2) Leading the expansion into new global markets. (3) International sales position. (4) Country/region head. (5) Managing transition for outsourced operations at an international location. (6) Head of supply chain or manufacturing for global business. (7) Global compliance manager at an international post.

☐ 5. Significant People Demands

Core demands required to qualify as a Significant People Demands assignment are: (1) A sizable increase in either the number of people managed and/or the complexity of the challenges involved. (2) Longer-term assignment (two or more years). (3) Quality of people management is critical to achieving results. (4) Involves groups not worked with before (e.g., union, new technical areas, nationalities). Examples of Significant People Demands jobs would be: (1) Downsizing a department—making staff changes. (2) Leading an organization through a reorganization or restructuring. (3) Managing a newly merged business unit comprised of people from disparate units/cultures. (4) Rebuilding a team that has a history of conflict or hardship. (5) Mentoring and coaching inexperienced people. (6) Leading geographically distributed teams. (7) Absorbing a new team/unit into an existing structure. (8) Leading a company or function with a rapidly growing employee base.

Section 6: Learning from Your Plan

These additional remedies will help make this development plan more effective for you.

Learning to Learn Better

☐ 1. Rehearse Successful Tactics/Strategies/Actions

Mentally rehearse how you will act before going into the situation. Try to anticipate how others will react, what they will say, and how you’ll respond. Check out the best and worst cases; play out both scenes. Check your feelings in conflict or worst-case situations; rehearse staying under control.

☐ 2. Study Your History of Conflicts for Insights

List the people and situations which cause you trouble. What are the common themes? Why do those kinds of people and/or those kinds of situations set you off? Do they have to? Was the conflict really important? Did it help or block your learning and getting things done? Try to anticipate those people/situations in the future.
3. Sell Something to a Tough Group/Audience
Think of the person or group who will be the toughest to sell, the most critical, skeptical, or resistant, and sell that person or group first. Take time to understand the opposing viewpoints. Find common ground and leverage points; line up your best data and arguments and go for it.

Learning from Experience, Feedback, and Other People

4. Getting Feedback from Peers/Colleagues
Your peers and colleagues may not be candid if they are in competition with you. Some may not be willing to be open with you out of fear of giving you an advantage. Some may give you exaggerated feedback to deliberately cause you undue concern. You have to set the tone and gauge the trust level of the relationship and the quality of the feedback.

5. Feedback in Unusual Contexts/Situations
Temporary and extreme conditions and contexts may shade interpretations of your behavior and intentions. Demands of the job may drive you outside your normal mode of operating. Hence, feedback you receive may be inaccurate during those times. However, unusual contexts affect our behavior less than most assume. It’s usually a weak excuse.

6. Openness to Feedback
Nothing discourages feedback more than defensiveness, resistance, irritation, and excuses. People don’t like giving feedback anyway, and much less to those who don’t listen or are unreceptive. To help the feedback giver, be open, listen, ask for examples and details, take notes, keep a journal, and thank them for their interest.

7. Giving Feedback to Others
Most managers complain they don’t get enough useful feedback. Ironically, their direct reports and peers offer the same complaint! Getting serious about feedback for yourself involves giving more feedback to those around you. As you practice giving more feedback to others, you will receive more by the example you set and will become more sensitive and receptive to your own.

8. Learning from Bad Bosses
First, what does he/she do so well to make him/her your boss? (Even bad bosses have strengths.) Then, ask what makes this boss bad for you. Is it his/her behavior? Attitude? Values? Philosophy? Practices? Style? What is the source of the conflict? Why do you react as you do? Do others react the same? How are you part of the problem? What do you do that triggers your boss? If you wanted to, could you reduce the conflict or make it go away by changing something you do? Is there someone around you who doesn’t
react like you? How are they different? What can you learn from them? What is your emotional reaction to this boss? Why do you react like that? What can you do to cope with these feelings? Can you avoid reacting out of anger and frustration? Can you find something positive about the situation? Can you use someone else as a buffer? Can you learn from your emotions? What lasting lessons of managing others can you take away from this experience? What won’t you do as a manager? What will you do differently? How could you teach these principles you’ve learned to others by the use of this example?

9. Learning from Limited Staff
Most managers either inherit or hire staff from time to time who are inexperienced, incompetent, not up to the task, resistant, or dispirited. Any of these may create a hardship for you. The lessons to be learned are how to get things done with limited resources and how to fix the people situation. In the short term, this hardship is best addressed by assessing the combined strengths of the team and deploying the best you have against the problem. Almost everyone can do something well. Also, the team can contribute more than the combined individuals can. How can you empower and motivate the team? If you hired the troublesome staff, why did you err? What can you learn from your hiring mistakes? What wasn’t there that you thought was present? What led you astray? How can you prevent that same hiring error in the future? What do you need to do to fix the situation? Quick development? Start over? If you inherited the problem, how can you fix it? Can you implement a program of accelerated development? Do you have to start over and get new people? What did the prior manager do or not do that led to this situation in the first place? What can you learn from that? What will you do differently? How does the staff feel? What can you learn from their frustrations over not being able to do the job? How can you be a positive force under negative circumstances? How can you rally them to perform? What lasting lessons can you learn from someone in distress and trouble? If you’re going to try accelerated development, how can you get a quick assessment? How can you give the staff motivating feedback? How can you construct and implement development plans that will work? How can you get people on-line feedback for maximum growth? Do you know when to stop trying and start over? If you’re going to turn over some staff, how can you do it both rapidly and with the least damage? How can you deliver the message in a constructive way? What can you learn from having to take negative actions against people? How can you prevent this from happening again?

Learning from Courses
10. Insight Events
These are courses designed around assessing skills and providing feedback to the participants. These events can be a powerful source of self-knowledge and can lead to significant development if done right. When selecting a self-insight course, consider the following: (1) Are the skills assessed the important ones? (2) Are the assessment techniques and instruments sound? (3) Are those who are providing the feedback trained and professional? (4) Is the feedback provided in a user-friendly and “actionable” format?
(5) Does the feedback include development planning? (6) Is the setting comfortable and conducive to reflection and learning? (7) Are the other participants the kinds of people you could learn from? (8) Are you in the right frame of mind to learn from this kind of intense experience? Select events on the basis of positive answers to these eight questions.

*Don’t be afraid of opposition. Remember, a kite rises against, not with, the wind.* Hamilton Mabie – American essayist
Suggested Readings


