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PARTICIPANT'S HANDBOOK

**MODULE: COMMUNICATION AND
CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

TOPIC 5: CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

DURATION OF THE SESSION: 120 MINUTES

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I. Theoretical concept

In this module we will talk about **communication** within **conflict management**.

Every company or project wants the work to proceed smoothly and efficiently. However, many times this is impossible, since **unforeseen situations** arise during the course of work that degenerate into a **conflict**, either due to making a decision or as a result of tension between colleagues. These conflicts interrupt the good development of the project, since they break the rhythm of work and it is necessary to dedicate a specific time for the **resolution** of said conflict. To better understand how conflicts affect a company, various studies have determined that **conflict resolution accounts for 20% of work time**, which means a loss of productivity and profitability.

For this reason, it is important to be able to **manage conflicts**, both large and scandalous as well as small and less important, to reduce the impact and damage of conflicts on the pace of work and productivity of a company or project, and for this communication will play a fundamental role.

In this sense, throughout this module we will work on content related to the **definition of conflict management**, steps to **manage them**, what **types of conflicts** exist, strategies and **techniques to resolve conflicts**, the figure of the **moderator** ...

First, let's **define what conflict management** is.

Conflict management is the ability to prevent and/or reduce the destructive power of a conflict, in such a way that it alters as little as possible the natural rhythm of work and favors the resolution of the problem as soon as possible. This implies **conflict transformation**, that is, following a process whereby the unresolvable conflict becomes a resolvable problem, either through conflict resolution (such as negotiation or mediation) or through the courts.

Therefore, to manage conflict, there must first be a good attitude and willingness to deal with conflict. Some **tips for managing conflict** are:

- Pay attention to signs to prevent conflict, such as a colleague's overreaction to a trivial comment, frequently contradicting others regardless of the topic, disrespect, little or no communication ...
- Be interested in resolving the conflict before it happens, don't wait for it to explode. If you see any signs that indicate a possible conflict, prepare, analyze and try to resolve it. To do this, the best way to start is by talking to stakeholders.

- Listen, don't get carried away by prejudice. You have been able to detect a possible conflict, but do not try to guess what it is and resolve it on your own, but speak and listen to the interested parties, thus avoiding misunderstandings and new conflicts.
- Prepare and analyze. As in negotiation, it is important to be well prepared to manage a conflict, for which it is essential to analyze the situation, see what the problem is, what causes it has, what its effects are, how it can be resolved ...
- Find a good time to talk, where stakeholders are willing to discuss the problem and solve it. Prioritize the problem and don't scatter or change the subject. Avoid prejudices that may exist and use language that favors the resolution of the conflict (avoid, as far as possible, the use of words with negative connotations, such as problem, impossible, difficulties ...)
- Put yourself in the place of the other, that is, be empathetic, try to understand their actions, emotions and thoughts, so that you become a trusted person for them.

II. Types of conflicts

When it comes to conflicts, it seems that all **conflicts** are the same, but this is **far from the truth**. A personal or internal conflict, where the only person involved is oneself, is not the same as an intergroup conflict, where two or more groups of people intervene.

In the same way that a conflict varies **depending on the number of people involved**, conflicts also vary **depending on the issue** to be resolved, since a spiritual conflict is not the same, where everything that was considered absolute truth is questioned, than a conflict over where to place a plant within a room.

Therefore, it is important to know the **different types of conflicts**, so that, when the time comes, you will be able to recognize which conflict you are facing and select the technique or strategy that best suits that conflict.

The **types of conflicts can be classified** as follows:

- Depending on its **veracity**.
- Depending on the **number of participants**.
- Depending on the **theme**.

a. Depending on its veracity

The first classification of conflicts can be made based on their **veracity**, that is, the conflict **really exists** or the conflict is the result of a misunderstanding or invention of one of the parties, so there really is no conflict.

Therefore, **conflicts can be organized** as:

- ***Conflicts of real origin***

They are those conflicts that really **have a real origin**, that is, they are consequences of real elements and situations, such as economic, legal, work, responsibilities ...

An example of this type of conflict may be that the company delimits the workspaces for the different work teams, and one of them intentionally occupies part or all of the space of another team.

- ***Conflicts of imaginary origin***

This type of conflict is where conflicts that do not really exist are collected, since they are **products of misunderstandings**, and once the error is understood, the conflict disappears.

An example of an imaginary conflict could be that the project manager will not receive the relevant task within the established deadline and at the established email address, causing the possible dismissal of the responsible person. However, the responsible person did turn in the assignment on time, but the email address provided by the project manager was wrong.

- ***Conflicts of invented origin***

These conflicts are not real, but they are **promoted by one of the parties to try to get some kind of benefit.**

For example, a person from the company claims that, because of the schedule, she cannot pick up her children from school, and therefore asks to leave an hour before work to pick them up. However, the person in question does not have that problem, either because they do not have children, or it is someone else who picks them up normally, and creates this conflict to be able to leave before work without suffering penalties.

b. Depending on the number of participants

The number of **people involved in a conflict** directly influences the way the conflict is managed, since an internal conflict of a person is not the same, where all the decision-making power falls on that person, than a conflict between different teams of work, where several people have different points of view on the conflict and have to reach an agreement, often with the help of an impartial person.

In this sense, **conflicts can be classified** as:

- ***Internal or personal conflict***

These kinds of conflicts are those that occur within each person, that is, their doubts, indecisions, weaknesses or any other type of thought, opinions, emotions or values. In this way, within this typology is where the questions about life are also collected: Who am I? Where I go? Why do I exist? ...

An example of this type of conflict, within the workplace, could be choosing which work team to work with, or more generally, what you want to dedicate to in your working life.

- ***Interpersonal conflict***

Two or more people are involved in this class of conflicts, since they are the result of interaction with other individuals. These conflicts can arise at any time and without prior notice, since it only takes a person to feel offended or mistreated for the conflict to arise, which, in many cases, can be an invented conflict, since its origin is a misunderstood.

A good example of this kind of conflict is when two co-workers argue about how to perform a certain task.

- ***Group conflict***

Conflicts of this type are the evolution of interpersonal conflicts, since in this type of conflict two or more people also intervene, but with the difference that the conflict does not only affect the opposing parties, but also affects, directly or indirectly, to the other members of the group. The causes of this type of conflict can be disagreement with the decisions made, poor relationship with the group or organization, problems with the group's hierarchy ...

The main problem with these types of conflicts is that, if they are not resolved quickly, they produce a chain reaction, where one problem generates another problem, and then another, and another, and so on, until the point is it is impossible to resolve the main conflict, as well as the derived conflicts, so the only option is to dissolve the group.

An example of group conflict may be the interest of a group member to lead the work team, for which they constantly confront and discredit the group leader, which generates division within the work team, hinders the productivity of the group, generates discomfort among colleagues, they stop delivering tasks,

- ***Intergroup conflicts***

These are the conflicts that can involve the greatest number of people. These conflicts never have an imagined origin, since, due to the large number of people involved, it is very difficult for the conflict to be the product of a misunderstanding, since someone would quickly realize it. On the other hand, the main causes of conflicts are usually due to conflicting ideologies, opinions, religion or hobbies.

The main danger of this conflict is that it can lead to extreme violence, that is, the two groups physically confront each other with the objective of, on the one hand, defending their position, while on the other hand they use violence as a means to reinforce the feeling of belonging and unity of the group, which offers them a reason to justify, to themselves, the violence used.

The clearest extreme example is the confrontations between hooligans of two soccer teams.

In the business field, a good example would be the conflict between two work teams to perform the same work, where each work team is dedicated to discredit and hinder the work of the opposing work team.

c. Depending on the theme

Finally, conflicts can also be **classified according to the theme of the problem**, since a sentimental conflict, whether personal or interpersonal, is not the same as a conflict over the leadership of a company or due to economic interests.

Based on their theme, conflicts can be classified as:

- ***Conflicts in relationships***

These conflicts take place in groups, of two or more people, who share some type of relationship: family, affection, friendship or love. It is not the same to have a conflict with your brother or friend than with a stranger on the street, since you know your brother or friend, you know his story and you can have a better idea of how to solve the conflict at the same time that you look for the best way to maintain the relationship. In short, you are looking for the best solution to the problem.

However, in this type of conflict the problem is magnified, since, since there is a relationship of prior trust and emotional connections, the conflict can be understood as a betrayal, complicating it and making it more difficult to solve than it is between strangers.

For example, the lack of communication between two colleagues, who work together on a daily basis, will generate constant conflicts over trifles, which can end in great hostilities between them and irretrievably break the working relationship.

- ***Interest-based conflicts***

These conflicts are based on the motivations or objectives of the parties involved, whether between two or more people. Here the economic, work, family or sentimental interests, among others, of one or both parties to the conflict come into play.

A clear example of interest-based conflict is when a worker demands a salary increase for his work and the company refuses to grant it.

- ***Conflicts based on values and ethics***

These kinds of conflicts are complicated, since in these conflicts what is discussed are the absolute truths of each person.

Each individual grows in a specific environment and culture, acquiring a certain way of living life, with certain concepts and truths that will define their way of acting. These personal truths are questioned in this kind of conflict by another person or group, which causes a greater resistance to accept a change, since it would mean accepting that you have lived wrong all your life.

A business example of this kind of conflict could be that, in a family business, where it is instilled that the family always comes first, a father is forced to fire a son for his constant zero productivity.

- ***Conflicts for the power struggle***

This is a typical conflict of groups or organizations, where one or more people prefer to command to obey, or they want the work to be developed in another way.

However, these conflicts do not only affect people interested in power, but the entire group or organization may be forced to choose a side, which generates distrust and disunity within the group or organization, which will affect productivity in the job.

- ***Personality conflicts***

Each individual has a specific personality. However, not all personalities are compatible with each other. This makes, in very specific cases, an individual's personality unbearable, generating conflicts over trifles and unconsciously.

This type of conflict has a big problem when it comes to solving them, and that is that you cannot change a person's personality, so you have to use patience and good will on both sides to be able to solve the conflict.

An example of this type of conflict could be that a partner has a tone of voice that makes you nervous, which makes it difficult for you to relate and communicate with him, causing conflicts due to lack of communication.

III. Techniques and strategies for managing conflicts

Managing and resolving conflicts is **not usually easy**, whether you are a party involved in the conflict or the person responsible for resolving conflicts in the work team, since you expose yourself to criticism and threats, which is not pleasant for anyone.

However, fear of being criticized should not be a reason to avoid or ignore conflicts, as all conflicts end up exploding and become more complicated than the original conflict.

Therefore, it is important to **recognize the signs of conflict** and act accordingly as soon as possible. Some signs that can be detected are:

- Avoid the other person. One of the first signs of conflict between two people is when they try not to be in the same room or communicate with each other.
- Body language. The body transmits more information than is transmitted verbally, so observing the body language of your companions will help you identify possible conflicts, since if two companions are in the same room talking calmly, but their body language indicates that they are defensively, these people may have a latent conflict.
- Verbal communication. If a person with whom you trust begins to communicate with you in a formal way, they may have a conflict with you and try to create distance from you through language.
- Violence. Violence, both verbal and physical, is a clear sign of conflict, so if two partners, every time they are in the same place, argue with each other and are disrespectful to each other, they will surely have a conflict.
- Rumors. Conflicts can be tried to hide or ignore, but eventually other people discover or intuit a problem and rumors begin to emerge about the conflict and who it influences.

Once the conflict is discovered, it is necessary to begin to manage and resolve it. For this, it is important to know how to identify and recognize the different types of conflicts, since it is the first step to manage and resolve conflicts, because knowing the type of conflict, as well as its characteristics, that you face, will guide you towards the best way to solve it. For example, it is important to know if the conflict is real, since if its origin is due to a misunderstanding or because of the invention of the other party, the conflict is resolved quickly and without negative consequences. Furthermore, it is not the same to resolve a personal conflict or a conflict with a family member, where the conflict can be resolved intimately and in a climate of trust, than a conflict within a work team or with another group, where many intervene people and the introduction of an impartial third person may be necessary.

Some techniques or strategies to manage and resolve conflicts are:

- **CCST model**

- **Harvard method**
- **Mediator**

a. CCST Model

This technique to solve conflicts consists of following a **series of phases** or stages that each person, involved in the conflict, must follow to manage and solve the problem, either individually or in a group.

The name of the technique comes from the acronyms of the different phases, which are:

Clarification

In this first phase, it focuses on understanding the conflict, that is, what the conflict is, why the conflict arises, who people are involved in the conflict, what are the factors or elements that intervene in the conflict ...

In this way, in this first phase, conflicts based on misunderstandings are eliminated and the bases are laid to study the conflict objectively and resolve it.

Causes

Now it is time to analyze what have been the causes that have caused the conflict, for which it is important to remain calm and think about the possible causes in the most objective way possible. This is a slow process that requires time and, optionally, the participation of people outside the conflict.

Solutions

Once the causes that have provoked the conflict have been identified, the next phase is to seek a solution to the conflict jointly, among all the parties involved in the conflict. A solution will only be reached when all parties agree with the proposed proposal and are willing to carry it out to the end.

Transfer

This is the last phase of the CCST Model. It is in this phase that the solution agreed in the previous phase is carried out, with the commitment of all the people involved to comply with the proposed solution. It is important to establish mechanisms or agreements so that the causes of this conflict do not generate new conflicts in the future.

During the development of this last phase, it is possible that new unforeseen conflicts may arise, for which it is advisable to manage them also with the CCST Model.

b. Harvard method

This method, as its name suggests, was developed at Harvard in the 1980s.

This method does not seek only to resolve conflicts, but to seek the best solution for all those involved in the conflict. For this, the goodwill and commitment of all those involved in resolving the conflict in the best way is very important.

The steps to resolve a conflict according to the Harvard method are:

- **Present the facts objectively:** In conflict management, emotions only complicate problem resolution, as they magnify and misrepresent the facts with prejudices or stereotypes. For this reason, it is necessary to be able to separate the emotions from the facts, so that when managing the conflict, only the facts are taken into account as they are, without double meanings or prejudices.
- **Be open:** The people involved in the conflict must be sincere and make it clear what their goals and objectives are in the conflict, since otherwise a climate of trust and cooperation could not be created between both parties.

By revealing which are the objectives to be achieved, it is discovered that these are very similar to the goals of the other side.

- **Work together:** Both parties must find a way to resolve the conflict, not only looking for the best option for themselves, but also looking for the best alternative for both parties. Therefore, the people involved will propose various solutions, without any limitation, and both parties will study and discuss them until they reach the best solution for all.
- **Evaluate the solution:** Before starting to propose solutions, both parties will agree on a series of objective criteria to evaluate the validity of the solution, so that the resolution of the conflict is as fair as possible for all.

In the event that some of these steps are not completed by any of the people involved, especially those steps that refer to trust and goodwill, the method will stop and will not resume until the real commitment to comply with the rules by the offending person. If deemed necessary, the parties involved may appoint an impartial person to act as arbitrator or mediator.

c. Mediator

On many occasions, people involved in a conflict are unable to manage or resolve the problem, which is why they request the help of one **person**, or several, who is **impartial** and unrelated to

the conflict, to help them resolve the conflict. Depending on the level of involvement of the neutral person, the performance of this person will be:

- **Arbitration:** When the parties involved in a complicated conflict seek a quick solution, they delegate the responsibility of resolving the conflict to a neutral person, who acts as arbitrator of the conflict. Therefore, the arbitrator will be in charge of determining the solution to the problem, which will be respected and applied by the parties involved in the conflict, even if this means that the solution benefits one of the parties more.
- **Facilitator:** The neutral person does not make decisions, he simply favors dialogue and respect between the parties involved in the conflict, so that they are the ones who reach an agreement and not the neutral person. The facilitator often intervenes in minor conflicts.
- **Inquiry:** Here the neutral person seeks to offer a new vision of the conflict. When the parties involved in the conflict do not make progress in managing the problem, they request that a person, or persons, study the conflict and propose recommendations to resolve the conflict, which will be reviewed by the parties involved and will determine a possible solution.

Apart from these three figures, there is also the **figure of the mediator**, which is very similar to the facilitated but more formal, that is, while the figure of the facilitator can be assumed by anyone (friend, relative, co-worker ...), to be a good mediator it is necessary to have certain knowledge and skills for conflict management, as well as to be patient, sensitive, natural, understanding, communicative, discreet, persuasive and knowing how to listen, among other characteristics.

The importance of the **figure of the mediator is recognized and respected** as a good technique for conflict resolution, since it has great advantages over other strategies, such as:

- The solution is designed and approved by the people involved.
- It is a cheap and fast technique.
- It is voluntary, so no party involved feels oppressed.
- It favors communication.
- Encourage the creation of creative solutions.
- Both parties feel heard and respected.

However, this is not a perfect technique, so it also has certain drawbacks to take into account, such as:

- Not all conflicts have a solution acceptable to everyone.
- The presence of the mediator must be accepted by all parties involved in the conflict.

- In bullying cases, it is not advisable to use a mediator.

Finally, the mediator technique is a formal technique, so, unlike the previous figures (arbitration, facilitator and inquiry), the mediator must follow a series of steps to be able to carry out the technique efficiently and productively:

Step 0: Before starting the mediation process, the mediator will meet with each of the parties involved individually, to explain how mediation works, listen to their arguments and assess the viability of mediation in this conflict.

Step 1: The mediator will bring together all the parties involved in the conflict and will explain to them the basic rules of mediation, such as: the process is voluntary and confidential, the opposite may not be attacked (neither verbally nor physically) respect the turns of word and maintain a positive and willful attitude to resolve the conflict.

Step 2: In this step, the parties involved take center stage, as they will be able to present their arguments regarding the conflict. The role of the mediator in this step is to listen and encourage dialogue with the parties involved, for which he can make use of questions such as: What has happened to you? How you feel? Why do you think you have acted this way? ...

Step 3: In this step, the mediator will try to determine the key elements and causes of the conflict, as well as the goals of each side, for which he will promote dialogue through questions such as: Why? what do you want? What do you need?...

Step 4: Once the causes and objectives of the conflict have been determined, the mediator will promote dialogue between the parties involved in order for them to find a satisfactory solution for both parties. To guide them in the process of finding solutions, the mediator will ask questions such as: What would you do to solve the problem? What would be the consequences if the conflict was not resolved? ...

Step 5: Both parties agree on a fair, concrete, balanced and realistic solution for all. The mediator will monitor the conflict resolution process, so he or she can make new appointments with the parties involved to assess the correct implementation of the agreed solution.