

Money lost on Unreal Conflicts

HR can lead the way to increase
bottom line results and
employee engagement.

Pam Welsby

SUMMARY

80% of conflicts in organisations are not real. People have the same goals but simply disagree about how to achieve them. UK organisations are losing 24 billion pounds a year in the cost of conflicts. Imagine the savings and increase in productivity if you could help your organisation to save 80% of the cost of conflict to your organisation. These are all skills that everyone can learn. This proven approach is available in Slovenia launched by Michael Patterson from Personal Strengths Publishing US (home of the SDI).



Conflict FACTS

In 2008 the Chartered Institute of Personal Development (CIPD – the leading HR association in the UK) released a report stating: “UK businesses are losing billions of pounds in lost working days every year because workers aren’t trained in conflict management. More than half (55%) of the workforce has had no training in managing conflict, despite the fact that last year the average worker spent at least two hours a week dealing with it, costing employers more than £24 billion in lost working days.”

Personality clashes and “warring egos” were found to be the primary cause of conflicts, with stress and heavy workloads also contributing, according to the research, conducted with business psychology firm OPP.

The research was based on a survey of 5000 employees in 9 countries plus a separate survey of 660 UK HR Practitioners, and goes on to state: “Leadership, or lack of it, is also seen as a significant element in generating conflict at work. Three in ten employees see conflict arise from poor leadership at the top of the organisation, with around a quarter saying that poor line management is to blame.”

For our purposes it is useful to define conflict in the following 2 ways: warranted conflict and unwarranted conflict.

Warranted conflict means real or necessary. This means that it is absolutely real in the sense that we have different goals and want different things. Unwarranted conflict means that the conflict is not necessarily real, in the sense that we actually both want the same thing. We have the same goal however we disagree about how to get there. This ‘unreal’ conflict is mostly about a difference in personality, values and behaviours. In business the majority of conflicts (at least 80%) are unwarranted, unreal. This is because the goals of the business bring us together, we have the same focus, the same goals, even the same organisational values. We of course will have different ways in which we wish to express these things and different ways we wish to accomplish these goals, but this is why the conflict is not ‘real’.

So, if we could eliminate these ‘unreal’ conflicts then we would immediately solve as much as 80% of our problems, increase productivity, get better results and have smoother better relationships at work.

The HAVE A NICE CONFLICT Book

preventing and managing conflict that can enable us to create stronger, more productive relationships in all walks of life, as well as enable us to have a more responsible and constructive attitude and impact in our society and communities.

Conflict is much more common than you may think. As a HR Leader your ability to prevent conflict or resolve it quickly will have a significant impact on your ability to be successful. Interpersonal skills, including managing conflict, are what enable us to communicate effectively, understand our people, their needs, values and problems, motivate others and create high performing teams. If we don't understand or effectively manage conflict then this just gets in the way. It becomes a major obstacle to our success and limits our positive impact in the business.



'Have a Nice Conflict' is a book from (PSP) the home of the profiling tool, Strength Deployment Inventory, which is available from us, along with our Managing Conflict 2 day workshop. In today's economic and social environment it is perfectly timed to enable us to better understand the tensions and pressures we experience in our relationships and what we see around us. It can help to give us a strategy for

If you could get rid of unrealistic conflict it would immediately solve 80 percent of problems, increase productivity, achieve better results and create better relations in the workplace.

On December 6th – 7th 2012 at Austria Trend Hotel in Ljubljana the workshop based on the book was launched to address this issue, The programme was led by Michael Patterson, one of the owners of Personal Strengths Publishing and co-author of the bestselling business book, of the same name as the workshop, 'Have a Nice Conflict.'

Mike began his career as a U.S. Army officer and then spent 20 years in a variety of sales, marketing and training roles in the pharmaceutical industry culminating in his leadership of two comprehensive employee development programs.

As a consultant and master facilitator, Mike has worked with a wide variety of global organisations, and is a frequent conference and keynote speaker. In addition to his work with organisational clients like the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, American Express, Xylem Water Solutions, and Arbor Pharmaceuticals, Mike is an adjunct professor teaching leadership at Concordia University—Irvine and in the doctoral program at Pepperdine University's Graduate School of Education and Psychology.

As HR Managers we are faced everyday with 'people problems'. Managers have problems with their teams, team leaders struggling to get the day-to-day tasks done on time and teams disagreeing about actions to be taken and missing deadlines. 80% of these 'conflicts' could disappear if we learned how to prevent and manage conflicts. As HR we are uniquely placed to spread this learning and these skills throughout the organisation, demonstrating our direct contribution to the business whilst still taking care of our most precious resource – our people

Questions & ANSWERS

During Mike's visit to Ljubljana we spoke with him to find out more about the basis of the book and the workshop and to find out if this could really help us to reduce conflicts:

Which came first the book or the workshop?

We wrote the book first, but from the outset, we had a vision that we would base a learning experience on the book. They simply go together.

What was the inspiration behind writing the book?

The book is intended to bring complex and powerful ideas to life in a simple, understandable, and engaging way. We also recognized that people learn through stories, so we wanted to write a story that people would enjoy and remember, as well as developing characters that readers could identify with.

What is the substance behind the story that we are really learning as we read about John Doyle?

The story and the workshop are based on ideas that have been proven in organizations all around the world. We have been helping people improve relationships and manage conflict since 1971. Everything in the book and workshop is built on a strong foundation of Relationship Awareness Theory, a set of practical ideas that help us understand how people relate to one another in relationships. Relationship Awareness Theory considers relationships under two conditions--when things are going well for us, and when we are faced with conflict. It truly reflects the human experience.

Did you base the main character and his experiences on a real person or is John Doyle just made up to illustrate the conflict theory?

The character, John Doyle, is largely based on my own experiences. My personality is very similar to my character John's personality and I spent many years as a sales manager just like John, so many of the scenes in the story relate to things that happened or certainly could have happened in real life. Although I didn't have a great personal coach like John had in the book, I was introduced to Relationship Awareness Theory and the Strength Deployment Inventory (SDI) learning tool about 14 years ago, and it helped me understand myself in a much deeper way and made a tremendous difference in my relationships at work and at home.

What do you hope people gain from reading this book?

I want each reader to recognize that people see the world differently and want different things in their relationships. When we recognize this for ourselves, we begin to understand the affect we have on other people who might see things differently and how this can be a source of conflict. Self-awareness is the beginning of growth and development, so it is always a great starting point. I also want people to recognize that these differences do not have to be stumbling blocks. We can develop our skills and make better choices so that we can connect with people more productively and prevent many of the conflicts that cause trouble in our lives.

What does the workshop give us that the book doesn't?

The book lays the foundation with some very powerful ideas and some general insights about how we can improve our relationships, while preventing and managing interpersonal conflict. The workshop personalizes the learning because each participant completes a series of inventories that allow them to understand their motives and strengths, and how they typically respond to conflict situations. In the workshop, we are also able to practice the five crucial skills necessary for managing conflicts.

Is the workshop just for those people who are involved in conflicts or disagreements at the moment?

No. Actually, we spend most of the time in the workshop understanding ourselves and then using this insight to prevent conflict in our lives. Of course, we help people who are presently in conflict to manage it more productively. The workshop is very practical in nature because we encourage participants to take what they learn and apply it immediately.

Will attending the workshop mean we never have any conflicts again?

I wish I could say this was the case. In reality, the workshop gives us some insights and tools that will help us prevent many conflicts, but when we can't prevent them, we will be in a better position to manage the emotion of conflict more productively.

As the co-author of the book and workshop do you no longer experience conflict yourself?

Again, I wish this were the case. I do, however, understand conflict more completely and can identify it quickly—in myself and other people. This allows me to apply the skills that can help resolve the conflict more quickly.

What for you is the most important learning that comes from the 'Have a Nice Conflict' learning experience?

We don't have to be controlled by conflict; rather, we can control conflict by the choices we make. We have the power to choose our perceptions and our behaviour. The greater we perceive our choices to be and the more skilful we are in making those choices, the more effective we will be in our relationships.

So, Mike, for those who were not able to make it to the workshop, what is the one piece of advice you would give to people if they want to address a specific conflict in their life at the moment?

Try to understand what is really important to you and the other people involved. When you can have a conversation about values—what's most important—then you are well on your way to breaking down the barriers that stand between you and the other person. It is hard to dislike someone you know well. Understand yourself and get to know the people with whom you are in conflict, listen, learn, and in most cases, you can work through the emotions of the conflict and bring everyone to a place where they can deal productively with their differences.

And as this was your first time to Slovenia, can you share with us, how did your experience of facilitating the workshop in Slovenia compares with groups in other parts of the world?

My experience during this trip was very similar to other experiences I have had. The learners were fully engaged, made great contributions, and sincerely wanted to better understand themselves and others. I was impressed with everyone's English language skills and the ease at which we communicated. All in all, it was an excellent experience and I hope to come back again in the future.

Are people's experiences of conflict really the same no matter what culture they are from?

Each person sees the world through filters. Our culture and experiences influence these filters, but our personality has the greatest effect on the way we see the world. So even though there are differences, we all have this in common: every person, no matter who they are or where they are from, wants to experience a sense of self-worth; they want to feel valued and respected. When people feel devalued and perceive that they are not able to get what they want in their relationships, there is the potential for conflict. Conflict is an emotional reaction to a perceived threat to self-worth.

From your short visit to Slovenia how would you describe the people you met and their attitude to learning and self-development?

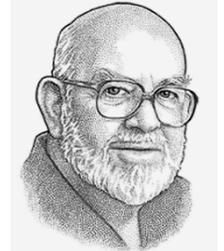
Each person I met during this trip was open, sincere, and truly interested in developing themselves. It was a pleasure to work with such enthusiastic learners.

The Theory behind

HAVE A NICE CONFLICT

The Strength Deployment Inventory (SDI) is a globally recognised tool for improving relationships and managing conflict. It is used in businesses for leadership training, team building, conflict management and a host of other applications. It is used in counselling for understanding motivations, conflict triggers and interpersonal communications among many other issues. It is completed by approximately 650,000 people worldwide each year.

Relationship Awareness Theory, the theoretical basis of the SDI, was created and developed in the mid-twentieth century by Elias H. Porter, colleague of Carl Rogers. Porter was a clinical psychologist and worked at the University of Chicago before moving to UCLA where he spent the rest of his academic career. He founded Personal Strengths Publishing in 1972 and was owner and CEO until his death in 1987.



Porter's work aligns with the humanistic movement in psychology represented by Rogers, Tolman, Maslow and others. His goals in his work were to provide a means for continuing development of the 'healthy individual'. That is to say, while traditional psychotherapeutic counselling focused more on pathological behaviour, Porter wished to give all individuals tools for self-actualisation.

Porter's development of a psychometric tool is a departure from the pure humanistic psychological movement in that he has shown that we have much in common with other humans and understanding motivations as well as the differences in motivations between individuals. This can help us to communicate better, to recognise and avoid conflict, or if already involved in a conflictual situation, to give us tools for managing it.

Relationship Awareness Theory is based on 4 basic principles that form the foundation of all work with the SDI. These are as follows:

1	We all want to feel good about ourselves. This is the motive behind all behaviours	This means that everything we do, we do because we believe it will satisfy our particular motivational needs. It has a positive intent.
2	We behave one way when things are going well and another way when we are faced with conflict.	This means that we have a typical way of behaving and a 'contingency plan' for when things aren't working out the way we expected.
3	A personal weakness is no more than the overdoing of a personal strength.	This means that the intention of our behaviour is always positive and it only looks like a weakness because sometimes we use our strengths inappropriately.
4	Our motivational values affect the way we see others.	This means that our 'profile (colour in SDI terms)' affects how we see others. How a red sees another red is quite different to how a green sees a red etc

These principles are very important because when we understand their implications we understand why many conflicts arise, what has triggered the conflict and what we need to do to reduce the conflict. Perhaps a personal experience will make the situation easier to understand.

EXAMPLE

A number of years ago I was working in a large organisation where I was responsible for training and development in one area and I had a colleague who had similar responsibilities in a different area. We really didn't get along with each other. It was obvious to everyone that neither of us particularly liked the other. I thought that she was very 'nit-picky', put time and attention on irrelevant issues and could never see the 'big picture'. Meanwhile I'm quite sure that she saw me as unprofessional, not paying attention to details and somehow 'all over the place'. Our usual strategy was to avoid each other, and this seemed to work well enough.

Then along came a new project meaning that she would be involved in a new development program, which in turn I would have to learn from her and she would need to 'approve' if I was ready and capable to run the programme. My first response was one of horror; there was no way this was going to work. She would never give me the approval no matter what I did and I was extremely uncomfortable at having to get her 'approval' anyway.

Then I realised here was an opportunity to apply what I knew. And so I began to prepare a plan for the week that we would be spending together. First I sat down and thought, in SDI terms, about everything I knew about her. I decided she was probably 'green'. She was very analytical and logical, paid attention to the details, behaved in a very professional manner. She thought about things a lot before taking action and was quite cautious in ensuring no mistakes could be made. So, if I wanted to get along with her I would need to behave in a similar way. So, I thought about what she would expect from me regarding this project; a professional attitude, attention to the details, checking and clarifying before acting, and taking time to really think things through.

So, first I did my research. I found out as much as possible about the programme before we met and set up a file, colour coded and labelled into different sections with all the information I had. I then read everything carefully and made a list of the things I thought I should know more about.

When we met I worked at matching her style, her way of speaking and body language. This generally meant that I spoke a little slower than usual, was calmer and took things at a slower, steadier pace. I controlled my usual enthusiasm and instead spoke in a calm, professional, objective manner. I listened carefully to everything she said, made notes and asked many questions. After 2 days she told me that she felt the week was going very well and perhaps we should have dinner together tonight to clarify a few more details. My first thought was 'Oh no, not spending the evening together too', but then I quickly realised that it was a sign that things were going well and she was feeling more comfortable with me. My strategy was working. So, we had dinner together and the rest of the week passed and I gained my 'approval'.

I'm quite certain that without this approach it would have been a very different story. Was it easy for me to do this? No - but it definitely got easier and easier as the week progressed and we both began to feel more comfortable with each other. Did it significantly change our relationship? Well I wouldn't say we became best friends but we definitely both developed a mutual respect for each other that made it much easier to work together in the future. Was it worth the effort to do this? Most definitely. Without this approach the situation could easily have spiralled down into a conflict situation which could have resulted in no 'approval' for the project and little chance to resolve the situation for the future.

Imagine

THE FUTURE

So, imagine your life if you could dramatically improve just one or two of the more challenging relationships with which you are currently struggling. Would you have less stress? Be happier? Enjoy greater productivity? Feel free to pursue your dreams? The secret to better interpersonal relationships is often a matter of seeing the people involved more clearly and then responding to them in different ways when a conflict is triggered. It is also largely a matter of managing your own perceptions. These are all skills that can be learned.

Written by Pam Welsby, CEO and Owner of FastForward International d.o.o.

To buy the 'Have a Nice Conflict' book or for more details of our Managing Conflict workshop based on the book contact pam@fastforwardonline.com

You can also find the book on Amazon and in Mladinska Knjiga stores around Slovenia.

