

FACT SHEET 9 – MANAGING CONFLICT

Conflict is a natural part of life, either between individuals or within an organisation and results where people have different opinions, interests and values.

Conflict can lead to both positive and negative outcomes. Managing conflict is a key skill of leaders where satisfactory resolutions are sought and the focus stays on the issue rather than the people involved. Conflict in organisations can arise over issues such as goals of the organisation, resource allocations or through mistrust and personality conflicts.

There are a number of steps to approaching conflict including;

1. Gather Information

Find out more about the issue, who it involves, what the history of it is, what the emotions are about and if there is an interest in resolving it. Identify your own emotions around the issue and that of others so that you can focus on the facts of the issue in gathering your information.

2. View the Issue through other people's eyes

Place yourself in the shoes of others to gain an insight or empathy for their position and views to give you clues to possible resolutions.

3. Manage Emotions

Try and approach the situation clear headed and keep your own emotions in check. Make sure that people have the opportunity to speak uninterrupted, ask open ended questions to help focus on the issue not the emotions and people. It may be that you need to allow some time for emotions to diffuse before discussing the issue. Keep calm yourself and lead rather than react.

4. Motivate towards a resolution

Your approach and language is critical to help motivate parties to seeking a resolution. You may also decide to enlist others to help focus on the issue rather than continue with the main aggrieved parties.

5. Finding suitable solutions

Seek out possibilities around which parties can agree. This may require some compromise but importantly it must result in a 'win win' outcome as some compromise leaves both parties unhappy.

For example, the President of the club, Jill, is aware that there is some unrest between the coaches and parents about playing times and fees. Some parents believe that all team members should get equal playing time whilst coaches are using their best players more often in order to win. Parents think their children are not getting 'value for money' and are upset that they are being left on the bench. In trying to resolve the situation Jill tries to find out if there are any existing club policies on the matter and discusses the situation with the coaches and parents separately to better understand their points of view and to see what solutions they may have to resolve the issue. Jill then conducts a meeting of all coaches and parents and asks each to state the reasons for their position, tries to identify where there is common ground and agreement and where differences exist. It may be that at the younger age groups, where tables are not kept, or at the lower grades there is room for compromise to ensure greater playing time for everyone whereas at the highest grades/division players are played on merit. The solution maybe to develop a new policy recognising different needs at different levels and that coaches, players and parents are clear about these and can elect to coach or participate at the level of choice.

Remember, don't let conflict get out of hand as it can have very negative outcomes for individuals and organisations. Seek to negotiate workable outcomes.