



## Optimizing our Most Valuable Resource – People

### Learning from Workplace Conflict

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#### Summary

Michelle Phaneuf and Marjorie Munroe are Workplace Conflict Resolution Professionals. They have vast and varied experience with organizational conflict, teams in conflict and employees in conflict. By recounting stories based on their own experiences with workplace conflict they will share learnings to help participants shift workplace culture.

#### Introduction

Conflict can impact workplace culture in a big way. Managing conflict is an important key in many workplace undertakings such as managing change, building working relationships and achieving diversity and inclusion. Conflict and communication skills are a necessity for all employees and when applied skillfully will build a successful workplace culture.

#### Theory and/or Method

This session will be based on a TEDx style talk with visually based Powerpoint slides to emphasize important points.

#### Examples

We recently worked with a small team in which two of the members were accused of harassment by a temporary staff member. Marjorie and I were hired to coach the two employees separately to support them to develop stronger communication and conflict resolution skills. This process occurred over a period of 2 months and the employees began to use their new found skills in the workplace to some success.

One of the employees enjoyed their work, but kept to themselves with a focus on efficiency and productivity. They did not see the need for office chit/chat and did not feel spending time building relationships was important. This rubbed others in the office the wrong way. They thought the employee should be more pleasant and take part in office activities. The offsite Manager and HR professional became very frustrated that the employee was not changing their behaviour. They began to see the employee as a 'problem' employee. They warned new temporary staff about the employee before they were hired. They came on site only to discipline the 'problem' employee. The employee was now being viewed repeatedly in a negative way and began to push back displaying difficult behaviours. The Manager and HR professional stood together against the problem employee and saw every behaviour as an issue.

Focus on the business problem – not the people. Shift thinking from 'me against you' to us against the problem.

How could the Manager and HR professional have stood together with the employee to focus on the problem? What would happen if the problem was changed to - How can we all work together to ensure the office is a friendly and welcoming environment for all?

How can you shift to focus on the business problem in your difficult situation? How would you state the business problem?

## References

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Marjorie and Michelle have presented different sessions at a variety of professional conferences including:

- Canadian Corporate Council Association, 2015  
<http://www.ccca-accje.org/en/events/main/spring.aspx>
- APEGA Mentoring Conference, 2015  
[www.apega.ca/mentoringconference2015/schedule.htm](http://www.apega.ca/mentoringconference2015/schedule.htm)
- Appropriate Dispute Resolution Institute of Canada, 2015  
<http://adric.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/ADRIC2015Brochure.pdf>
- Canadian Society of Administrative Executives, 2015  
<http://www.csae.com/Education-Events/National-Conference/National-Conference-2015/Session-Details>