

# Reducing Conflict 95 Conflict as a Game

By Bob Whipple MBA CPTD



Most people dislike conflict, but some people see conflict as a game. This article will describe several situations why conflict can be a game. Some of these are legitimate, and some of them are simply ways to cause havoc.

Some people do it to stir things up, and others see it as a way to get attention.

## Why would someone consider conflict as a game?

There are people who engage in conflict for personal gain or for entertainment. Individuals may use conflict to exert power, control, or dominance over others. These people might derive satisfaction from manipulating or exploiting others. They enjoy the competitive nature of conflict or seek personal advantages at the expense of others.

Unfortunately, these individuals destroy trust within an organization. Integrity and transparency often are lost when people feel manipulated. In high-trust groups, people do not play games with each other.

Gamers are a blight on society because they cause damage wherever they go. They need to be confronted and taught how to be more caring of others. Their exploits are rooted in selfishness, and they cause severe damage in organizations.

## Other more benign conditions for conflict

In certain situations, conflict may be approached strategically, resembling a game-like scenario. It often appears in military operations or strategic negotiations. Such situations involve careful planning, decision-making, and execution, often with specific objectives and rules. The benefit of these confrontations is the learning that goes on for the people involved.

## Use of conflict in training

I often put people in conflict situations in my leadership training so they can do a role play of how they would react. These scenarios are particularly challenging, and the debrief is a way to teach proper reactions.

For example, in one role-play exercise, I pit a disgruntled employee against her manager. The employee has just been passed over for a promotion in favor of another woman. She was obviously the best candidate but was not selected because the

manager's boss had a crush on the other woman. The manager was ordered to not divulge the reason for the selection when the employee complained.

In this scenario, it was the manager who was in the hot seat. He had advocated for the employee as the best candidate but was voted down by his superior. Since he was told not to divulge the information, he had no reasonable defense when the employee complained. The lack of trust between the manager and his superior was the root cause of the problem.

### **Learning opportunity**

Putting people in "no win" conflict situations for role play really helps them grow. They see themselves trying to operate in an unfair world and learn some valuable lessons. It is better to confront these situations in the classroom where coaching is available than in the real world.

### **The ramifications of conflict can be very severe.**

Considering conflict as a game or pursuing it solely for personal gratification can have severe consequences. It will harm others and perpetuate violence or injustice. Conflict should ideally be addressed through peaceful means, such as negotiation. Dialogue and mediation can lead to resolutions that are fair and just for all parties involved.

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of *The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals*, *Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online*, and *Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind*. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations.