

# 4

# Managing conflict

## 4.1 About business Management style

### Discussion

- 1 In small groups, discuss these questions.
- 1 What are the qualities you value most in these 'managers'?

a parent a teacher a sports coach a driving instructor

- 2 What experience do you have of managing other people?
- 3 What sort of manager are you or would you be?

### Reading

- 2 Work with a partner, discuss the questions before you read.
- 1 Do you think abrasive or aggressive bosses are aware they are disliked?
  - 2 Can you be disliked and still 'get to the top'?
  - 3 What sort of managers do you think these terms describe?

Field marshals Street fighters Rebels Dr Jekylls and Mr Hydes

- 4 Read *Are You the Manager People Love to Hate?* How close were your ideas to the article?

- 3 Read the article again. Explain what is meant by the following phrases:

- 1 to sugarcoat problems (line 6)
- 2 I found his style to be my cup of tea ... most of the time. (lines 19–20)
- 3 They work with blinders on (line 34)
- 4 control freaks (line 46)
- 5 a heart attack waiting to happen (line 62)
- 6 But it can also work the other way round. (lines 79–80)

### Listening

- 4 1:50 Listen to Mary Walbright, a professor at the University of Bolton-Milwaukee, presenting models for management and conflict styles. Match the charts with the people who devised them.

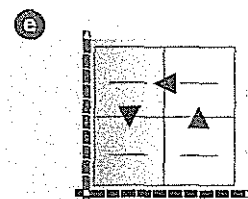
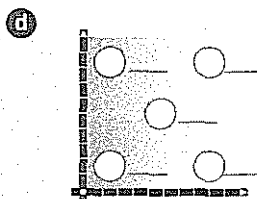
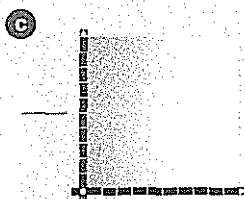
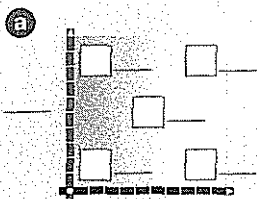
1 McGregor

2 Blake & Mouton

3 Hersey & Blanchard

4 Bolton & Bolton

5 Kilmann



- 5 Listen again and label the charts.

### Discussion

- 6 In small groups, discuss these questions.
- 1 How practical are Tony Lee's suggestions? Can managers realistically be expected to 'bend their natural instincts without becoming a phony'?
  - 2 Which of Hersey & Blanchard's management styles would be appropriate for a) a supervisor with personal problems b) an enthusiastic management trainee c) an experienced staff member who has made a serious mistake?
  - 3 What do you think happens when there is a conflict between a) a Driver and an Amiable b) an Expressive and an Analytical c) a Driver and an Expressive?
  - 4 What is the difference between collaborating and compromising?
  - 5 Which of the models in 4 do you find the most interesting, and why?

### Internet research

Search for the keywords *management style questionnaire*. Test your own management style and report back to the class on your results.



## ARE YOU THE MANAGER PEOPLE LOVE TO

## HATE?

MOST BOSSES think they do a pretty good job of keeping their subordinates happy. Don Bibeault has no such illusions. 'I'm not a jolly fellow who's fun to be with,' says Mr Bibeault, a turnaround specialist in Mill Valley, California. 'I'm extremely dedicated and determined, and I don't have time to sugarcoat problems. If that's considered abrasive behavior, so be it.' Nevertheless, Mr Bibeault says he's been trying to soften his demeanor. 'I'd like to think that I'm tough on performance and kind on feelings, but there's only so much bending of my natural instincts I can do before becoming a phony,' he says.

What's it like working for such a no-nonsense guy? 'Well, he yells a lot,' says David Corcoran, who spent almost six years reporting to Mr Bibeault in two different jobs. 'Don doesn't believe in wasting time being politically correct. He'll say, "This is my plan and that's it," which can be very upsetting to some people. Fortunately, I found his style to be my cup of tea ... most of the time.'

What if you're the executive everyone loves to hate? Your career may have advanced nicely to this point due to your talent and expertise. But career advisers say that unless you modify your behavior, it's unlikely that top management will continue to reward you. The first step, though, is recognizing you are an abrasive boss. Many bosses who are brusque have genuine feelings for their subordinates, so they're surprised when they learn that others see them as cold and insensitive, says Val Arnold, an organizational psychologist with Personnel Decisions Inc., a Minneapolis consulting firm. 'Few managers, even those with hard-driving styles, see themselves as abrasive,' Dr Arnold says. 'They work with blinders on, looking only at bottom-line results, while all around them, subordinates and colleagues complain about them and avoid them.'

Even if they do recognize their faults, bosses don't get to be bosses by admitting to character flaws. 'They might say to their best friend, "Gee, I know everyone hates me because I'm tough," but they'd never concede that to a colleague or subordinate,' says Jan Yager, a sociologist in Stamford. To determine whether others perceive you as the Napoleon of your department, Dr Arnold has identified some problem

personalities. If one sounds familiar, there are tips on how to soften your approach:

Field marshals get things done but are control freaks who tend to intimidate others. When subordinates fail to carry out tasks, field marshals unfairly attack their lack of experience, talent or vision. Suggestion: Learn to share responsibilities. Don't bark out orders, but instead solicit ideas for how a task should be carried out. And if it's not done to your liking, don't belittle anyone; focus instead on solving the problem.

Street fighters, like Mr Bibeault, are extremely competitive, with every interaction producing a clear winner and loser.

They typically insist on having the last word and always think they're right, traits that damage their careers at companies that value teamwork. Suggestion: Determine who your real enemies are and whether cooperating makes more sense. Otherwise, 'you're a heart attack waiting to happen,' says Dr Arnold.

Rebels like being the exception to the rule, and get away with it because they're good at what they do. But rebels have trouble running companies and rarely earn

promotions when a job demands leadership and teamwork skills more than personal achievement. Dr Arnold says their numbers are on the rise because small high-tech firms and other fast-growth organizations that prize individualism encourage rebel bosses. Suggestion: If you have a different set of rules for yourself than for peers and subordinates, decide if that's in everyone's best interest.

Dr Jekylls and Mr Hydes have good interpersonal skills in one part of an organization, but have trouble with everyone else. Typically, this means they are loved by their bosses while their subordinates see them as using people for their personal gain, Dr Arnold says. But it can also work the other way round. 'Respected bosses know how to motivate people all around them,' says Ms Yager, while abrasive bosses tend to spend time with people who will boost their careers, or with those 'willing to put up with their personality.' Suggestion: Work on your relationships with colleagues other than those you're trying to impress, and you'll establish harmony and an efficient workplace.

**'Unless you modify your behaviour, it's unlikely that top management will continue to reward you'**

by TONY LEE

**Did you know?**

Conjunctions include coordinators and subordinators. There are only a handful of coordinators in English – mainly *and*, *but* and *or*. *And* is more frequent than all the other coordinators put together. In texts it accounts for one word in every 40.

**4.2 Grammar Conjunctions****Subordinators and coordinators**

**1** Fill in the spaces with an appropriate conjunction from the box.

and but so or unless provided as while  
though whereas supposing in case as if

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_ you are partly to blame, I won't make an issue of it on this occasion.
- 2 We need you to take the initiative \_\_\_\_\_ sort the problem out yourself.
- 3 I'll tell you what we could do – kill two birds with one stone: deal with Fernando \_\_\_\_\_ we are in Madrid
- 4 Don't – whatever you do – use that door, \_\_\_\_\_ there's a real emergency.
- 5 OK, you can take the day off tomorrow \_\_\_\_\_ you make up the time later in the week.
- 6 \_\_\_\_\_ no one ever mentioned it I assumed it wasn't important.
- 7 The difference is, James has apologized for being out of order, \_\_\_\_\_ you have behaved \_\_\_\_\_ you haven't done anything wrong.
- 8 I'd love to be able to tell you what went wrong, \_\_\_\_\_ I'm telling you I've got absolutely no idea.
- 9 There's no real reason for you to be at the meeting, \_\_\_\_\_ you might as well take the afternoon off.
- 10 What I'm saying is we need to get all the documentation together \_\_\_\_\_ the inspectors turn up.
- 11 You can resolve the issues between you \_\_\_\_\_ you can take the consequences – it's up to you.
- 12 \_\_\_\_\_ she doesn't agree, what should we do then?

**Expressing meanings through subordinators**

**2** Lee and Adele are discussing a conflict at work. Read the conversation and underline the two subordinators which express the correct meaning.

Lee: Did you manage to talk it through with those two?

Adele: What, Marc and Maria? Well, I wanted to check out the legal side of things first  
(1) *so that / in case / in order that* we know exactly where we stand.

Lee: OK, but we don't want to leave it too long. They need to know we're on to their case,  
(2) *since / because / unless* they might turn the tables on us otherwise.

Adele: I know what they're like. And (3) *once / while / as soon as* Hulya's come up with the right procedural stuff I'll talk to them.

Lee: I'm sure we'll be on solid ground, (4) *as / provided / as long as* they don't get nasty.

Adele: Yeah, you never know. Ever since Ruth left, Maria's been behaving  
(5) *as though / as if / even though* she's in charge.

Lee: I know. I don't like it. I guess it was Maria who actually went for the top job,  
(6) *supposing / whereas / while* Marc just complains without actually doing anything about it.

Adele: OK, but it's Marc who's always there for you (7) *as soon as / as long as / the minute* anything goes wrong. Well, for me anyway.

Lee: I wish I could agree. (8) *Whether / Whenever / When* I need him I can't track him down. Anyway, it's Maria who needs our support, (9) *although / because / since* she's the one who puts in the real work.

Adele: (10) *Rather than / Just as / Like* I thought – you always did back Maria!

**E** Work in small groups. Use an appropriate conjunction to join the groups of sentences in each section to make a coherent text.

SECTION 1

Two employees, Lee and Jasmine, are chosen to work on a special project.  
They are given their brief.  
It includes a two-week deadline to come up with a business plan for their new target market.  
They are from different departments.  
They do not know each other.  
They are expected to quickly work together.

SECTION 2

When the boss is in the room they seem to get on well.  
In private they are suspicious of each other.  
Jasmine is an outgoing person.  
Lee seems to be a rather private person.  
Jasmine's key idea is to focus on a persuasive 'hearts and minds' strategy to organically grow sales.  
Lee's plan involves an 'in your face' TV-led campaign aimed at growing sales fast.  
Jasmine argues that Lee's plan would be prohibitively expensive and too subtle.

SECTION 3

Half-way through the first week, communication has apparently broken down.  
The two employees cannot find any common ground to move forward.  
Jasmine insists on discussing their differences.  
Lee is more concerned with the deadline.  
He wants to quickly get on with the task itself.  
They agree to work independently on separate plans.

SECTION 4

Things come to a head in the middle of the second week.  
Jasmine argues that Lee is being too secretive.  
Jasmine thinks Lee is not sharing his ideas.  
Lee responds by accusing Jasmine of trying to control him all the time.

SECTION 5

Lee, meanwhile, argues that Jasmine's plans will not work.  
Her plans to build brand recognition organically through local initiatives would take too long.  
Her plans probably wouldn't work.  
Eventually Lee persuades Jasmine to go with his plan.

SECTION 6

The day of the deadline comes.  
Lee realizes that their plan is actually quite weak.  
The television network is too fragmented.  
The advertisements would not easily reach the target consumers.  
It is too late to change anything.

SECTION 7

The marketing director arrives.  
She takes one look at the plan.  
She realizes the plan is nowhere near ready.  
She blames both participants.

SECTION 8

The marketing director leaves the room.  
The participants launch into a heated argument over who is to blame.  
The marketing director returns to collect her papers.  
She witnesses the employees shouting at each other.  
She gives them each a written warning.

**Discussion**

**4** Work in small groups. Discuss the following questions about each stage of the conflict.

- 1 Who is responsible for the conflict?
- 2 How could the conflict have been avoided?
- 3 What steps should be taken to resolve the situation?

**Writing**

**5** Choose one of the employees and write a short letter to the marketing manager defending your role in the process.



**Internet research**

Search for the keywords *causes of communication breakdown*. Make a list of five common causes and compare with a partner.