Organizations consist of individuals, groups within themselves, as well as, groups among themselves. In order for an organization to be successful and achieve its goals, intergroup cooperation must exist. This is due to the fact that individuals or groups may depend on one another for information, assistance and coordinated action. Intergroup cooperation may be inhibited by dysfunctional conflict. Dysfunctional conflict is negative interaction between groups that harms an organization or hinders the achievement of organizational goals, as opposed to functional conflict that enhances an organization’s performance. An optimal level of conflict exists in every organization that is highly functional.

My current “local” work group must receive raw expense data files from the corporate group in order to proceed with our planning and analysis. Once our work is complete, we send the results back to corporate to be uploaded into various reporting tools for the entire organization. This sequential interdependence has created dysfunctional conflict between the corporate and local groups. Corporate is usually late in sending the monthly raw data expense files. This delay causes us to have to turnaround the files in less time than originally planned because they don’t reestablish the deadline in consideration of their tardiness. Our “local” group is left scrambling and working very late hours to meet the corporate deadline. Occasionally it is impossible to get the data back to them in the format corporate expects within the inflexible deadline. As a result, we are also late.

This sequence of events causes much resentment for the local group. As a result of corporate’s tardiness, we have to work ridiculous and unreasonable hours. The resentment becomes mutual when we in turn, are late submitting our data files although we do everything in our power to meet their deadline. My group usually complains and vents our displeasure by focusing on the activity of how good we are at what we do. Our perception of the corporate group changes and we discuss how inept they are and how they are lacking in talent. We also become very focused on the getting our files completed quickly. If someone takes a personal phone call or “steps away” from the office for too long it is looked upon very badly. Our emphasis is on getting the task completed as soon and as accurate as possible.

One reason this type of conflict occurs is from lack of management planning. This conflict is detrimental to the organization. It weakens the cohesiveness and efficiency between work groups and among individuals, leads to
poor performance and even to resignations. I have seen a change in the way one of my group members works. She becomes despondent and very difficult to work with. At times, she becomes rude toward the corporate people, which in turn hurts the entire “local” groups image and relationship with the corporate group.

Managers must be aware of how destructive dysfunctional intergroup conflict can be. They must confront the problem and manage it. There are various techniques managers can use to correct conflicting situations depending on what the situation is. If it is not effectively managed, the negative feelings will spread and create a very unpleasant and inefficient working environment. Managers must keep up with what and why something is happening. In addition, they must learn when to “push back” on corporate expectations, especially when the expectations are unreasonable and unnecessary.