

**BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION**  
**FACULTY OF COMMERCE**  
**GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS**  
**MASTER OF BUSINESS LEADERSHIP AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE**  
**CONFLICT MANAGEMENT (MLC 506)**  
**EXAMINATION PAPER**  
**DURATION: 3 HOURS 30 MINUTES**

NOV 2024

**Instructions and Information to Candidates**

1. Section A is compulsory and carries 40 marks.
  2. Answer 'Question 1' from Section A and any three (3) questions from Section B.
  3. The paper carries six questions.
  5. All questions in Section B carry equal marks of 20 each.
  6. The use of cell phones is not allowed in the examination.
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## **SECTION A [COMPULSORY]**

### **QUESTION 1**

#### **CASE STUDY: WHEN TWO LEADERS ON THE SENIOR TEAM HATE EACH OTHER**

Lance Best, the newly appointed CEO of Barker Sports Apparel, was meeting with Nina Kelk, the company's general counsel, who also oversaw human resources at the company's headquarters in Birmingham, England. The two were going over the evaluations of each of Lance's direct reports. Lance was struck by what he saw in CFO Damon Ewen's file. Most of the input was neutral, which was to be expected. Though brilliant and well respected, Damon was not the warmest of colleagues. But one person had given him the lowest ratings possible, and from the written remarks, Lance could tell that it was Ahmed Lund, Barker's head of sales. "These comments are pretty vicious," Lance said. "You're surprised?" Nina asked. "I guess not," Lance acknowledged.

His CFO and his sales chief had been at loggerheads for a while and Lance really turned a blind eye to this problem since he took over as chief executive two years earlier, when he had stepped into his role. Ahmed's 360 report also contained a few pointed complaints about his working style no doubt from Damon. Lance sighed. He had been focused on growing the company that his father, Eric, the previous CEO had founded. Barker licensed the rights to put sports leagues' logos on merchandise and partnered with large brands to produce it for retail markets, and when Lance took the company over, its revenues were about £100 million. Soon after, he had landed the firm's biggest partner, Howell. Negotiating the deal with the global brand had been a challenge, but it increased business so much that Lance and his direct reports still felt they did not have enough hours in the day to get everything done. They certainly did not have time for infighting like this.

"So what do we do with this info?" Lance asked. Nina shrugged. "This is the first time I've been through this process myself." "Right. Clearly I've got to do something, though. I know that Ahmed and Damon aren't mates, but I do expect them to be civil."

Nina nodded, but Lance sensed she was biting her tongue. "You can be honest with me, Nina. I need your counsel." "Well," she said tentatively, "I think that's part of the problem. The expectation is that we're civil, but that doesn't translate to collaboration. We all trust you, but there

isn't a whole lot of trust between the team members". "So does everyone think Damon is awful?" he asked, pointing to the report. Nina shook her head. "It's not just about him. You can see from the feedback that Ahmed isn't a saint either. He picks fights with Damon, and the tension between them and their teams has been having a ripple effect on the rest of us. You see the finger-pointing. It seems like everyone is out for themselves." Although Lance hated hearing this, it was not news. He had just tried to convince himself that the problems were growing pains and would sort themselves out. After all, sales and finance were often at odds in organizations, and the conflict had not had a big impact on Barker's revenues. They had grown 22% the previous year and 28% the year before that. None of that growth had come easily, and opportunities had certainly been missed. Barker had dropped the ball on inquiries from several retailers interested in its products by failing to coordinate getting them into the company's system quickly. Now, Lance realized that might be a sign of more fallout to come.

He needed to fix this. The next morning, Lance was in his office when he got a text from Jhumpa Bhandari, the head of product and merchandising: Can you talk? Knowing this couldn't be good, Lance called her immediately. Skipping the formalities, she launched in: "You need to get them on the same page." Lance did not have to ask who "them" was. "Ahmed has promised samples for the new line on the Clarkson account, but his order exceeds the limits accounting set, so we need Damon's sign-off, and he won't give it." This was a recurring fight. Ahmed accused Damon of throwing up roadblocks and using his power to undermine the sales department. Damon retorted that Ahmed was driving Barker into the ground by essentially giving products away. Lance went back and forth on whose side he took, depending on which of them was behaving worse. But he did not want to intervene again.

Lance thought back to the last time he had sat down with Ahmed and Damon. Each had brought a binder filled with printouts of the e-mails they had exchanged about a missed sale. Lance had marveled at how long it had probably taken each of them to prepare. "Let me look into it," Lance said. This had become his default response. Jhumpa suggested to have both of them fired and later said "What about having them work with a coach? I mean, we could all benefit from having someone to help us talk through how we handle conflicts and from establishing some new norms." After they hung up, Lance was still thinking about the idea of letting Ahmed and Damon go. Terrifying as the thought was, it might also be a relief. He had heard of CEOs who had cleaned

house and replaced several top execs at once. He could keep Jhumpa, Nina, and a few others and bring in some fresh blood. It would be one sure fire way to reset the team dynamics.

Later that afternoon, at the end of a regular meeting with the finance team, Lance asked Damon to stay behind. "Is everything OK with you guys?" "Same as usual. Why? What's going on? We're doing just fine." "I agree on one level, but I have concerns on another. It's taking six months to get on board new customers at a time when everyone is fighting for them." "Of course it is. I'm the CFO and he's in charge of sales. If we're both doing our jobs well, there's going to be conflict. And that's what I'm doing: my job. I'm the keeper of the bottom line, and that means I'm going to butt heads with a few people." Lance had heard him say this before, but Damon took it one step further this time. "Your discomfort with conflict doesn't make this any easier." OK. I hear you on that," Lance finally said. "That's on me. But you also need to think about what you can do to improve this situation."

Later Lance telephoned Eric for advice. "You're not considering firing anyone, are you?" Eric had personally hired all the senior executives now on Lance's team and was almost as loyal to them as he was to his own family. "To be honest, it's been on my mind. I'm not sure what I would do without Ahmed or Damon. They're an important part of why we make our numbers each year. They help us win. But I look back and wonder how we did it playing the game this way. I need a team that's going to work together to reach our longer-term goals." When Eric had retired, he and Lance had set a target of reaching revenues of £500 million by 2022. "This group feels as if it could disintegrate at any moment," Eric said. "Well, one thing is certain: You're the boss now. So you'll have to decide what to do." Lance tends to avoid conflict himself, is struggling with how to respond.

*(Adopted from the Harvard Business Review Magazine, 2022)*

**Required:**

With regards to this case study:

- (a) Establish Lance's biggest conflict management any **two (2)** mistakes that he made when he was appointed the CEO of Barker Sports Apparel. (8 marks)
- (b) Determine any **four (4)** effects of conflict to Lance's organisation. (12 marks)

(c) Provide any **five (5)** options on how Lance would handle the conflict between Damon and Ahmed. **(20 marks)**

**[Total: 40 marks]**

**SECTION B: Answer any three (3) questions from this Section**

**QUESTION 2**

Using relevant corporate illustrations, demonstrate any **five (5)** justifications for managing conflicts at the workplace. **[20 marks]**

**QUESTION 3**

Supporting your answer with relevant examples, assess how the understanding of any **five (5)** conflict management techniques affects Leadership in an organisation you are familiar with. **[20 marks]**

**QUESTION 4**

Substantiating your answer with examples, examine the influence of the Thomas Kilmann Model to leadership in managing conflicts in an organisation you are familiar with. **[20 marks]**

**QUESTION 5**

Basing on your understanding of conflict management, critique any **five (5)** major factors that influence conflict in organisations. **[20 marks]**

### **QUESTION 6**

‘Conflicts are inevitable in organisations.’ In light of Pluralistic perspective of conflict, with practical examples, deliberate on this assumption. **[20 marks]**

**END OF EXAMINATION PAPER**