

CONFLICT RESOLUTION @ WORK

Self-Paced Guide



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How will this Reference Help?

The most outstanding leaders develop a preventative approach to conflict by creating a working environment in which conflict is less likely to occur, or to develop to the extremes where it becomes difficult to manage. They develop an environment in which differences are recognised, valued and utilised for the benefit of all. They recognise that most conflict occurs because people are different and not necessarily because they are wrong.

Many supervisors and managers have the potential to deal effectively with conflict. This Self Paced Guide will give you greater knowledge and understanding of the nature of conflict in the workplace and take you through a range of ideas and strategies for resolving issues. It will give you the courage and confidence to handle difficult situations and shift to a management style that emphasises anticipation, early intervention and a joint, cooperative effort at resolution.

This guide will help you to;

- understand and accept that conflict and mistakes are inevitable
- lead you to walk with your people in a cooperative, collaborative manner
- foster an atmosphere of openness, honesty and trust toward a joint problem solving approach
- follow a structured conflict resolution process
- develop coaching strategies to assist with resolving conflict

You already know how to coach your team and how to achieve. Everything you have achieved so far has been a result of using your coaching skills to assist your team in achieving goals. However, that management, coaching and conflict resolution process has been unconscious. You did it, but you don't know how. You'll learn to bring the process out into the open, so you can use it effectively to manage conflicts and issues as they arise.

Continued on next page

How will this Reference Help?, Continued

To complete this learning effectively you need to follow the instructions in this Reference Guide. Each section will help you achieve one or more of the learning outcomes.

There are a number of activities to help you develop the skills and knowledge required to resolve conflict at work. They may ask you to answer questions, discuss issues with others or find additional information.

As you follow the sections, you will notice a number of icon prompts. Each icon signals different types of activities that you may or may not wish to do.



TIP



HINT



ACTIVITY

As you progress through this guide you may wish to refer to your manager for assistance or information. Your manager is there to support your learning.

UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT

Living with Conflict

Most conflict occurs because people are different, not necessarily because they are wrong.

Conflict is a situation in which two or more people or parties compete for limited status, power, information, influence, resources or territory. It emanates from a desire of one or both parties to have or acquire something that the other one has. It occurs when one tries to change the status quo, and by so doing, gains an advantage. Conflict is an inconsistency in attitudes and actions between two parties and results in competition for limited resources. These resources might be physical, financial, communicative, ideological, political, legal, psychological or emotional.

Conflict is an inconsistency in social attitudes and may result from a perceived or real inequality in the distribution and availability of resources. It will emerge as one feels the necessity to defend one's territory, whether that be personal, family, sport, work or on a national scale.



ACTIVITY

Think now of some of the conflict or grievance situations in which you have been involved or that you have witnessed both in your personal life and at work.

How many of them have involved situations in which the other person or group has a significant difference from you?

Is it because they are a different gender? Or do the differences relate to such issues as age, influence, style of operation, wealth, attitude, etc.?

Continued on next page

Living with Conflict, Continued

Conflict can emerge as a result of differences such as;

- intelligence, thinking skills and the capacity to reason and analyse
- personal qualities, charisma and personal power
- interpersonal qualities and the ability to get on with others
- physical attributes, appearance and health
- psychological and emotional well-being
- ability to perform physical tasks
- language and dialect
- ability to communicate
- status and titles
- cultural background, values and beliefs
- religion
- qualifications
- operational style or mode
- race
- colour
- political ideology
- gender and sexual orientation
- age
- access to legal advice and support
- financial support
- access to learning and development
- access to information and the means by which it is transmitted
- living standards

It's clear that conflict is inevitable whenever human beings interact

Workplace Conflict

The workplace, like all aspects of life, consists of people who are different, and conflict in the workplace is a natural result of those differences as well as the changing environment in which people work. Consider all of the conflicts and grievances that have occurred in your workplace. They can be time consuming and therefore costly for organisations that want to minimise the time spent on unproductive activities.

Think of why conflicts occur in your workplace. Try to avoid the traditional cliché of;

“We know they are always at each other’s throats; but it is only a personality clash and there is nothing we can do.”

There is little purpose in trying to treat a personality clash by separating or transferring the combatants. Shifting a person only shifts the problem. It is essential to deal with the underlying causes. A personality clash is merely a flashing red light warning you that there is a situation that must be addressed. Those who are directly involved with the supervision or management of people, can now lift themselves above such excuses and explanations. We can look now for better ways of handling the resolution and management of conflict in a manner that will generate trust and confidence in our leadership and greater job satisfaction for those who work with us.



ACTIVITY

Many managers complain that they spend most of their time dealing with the problems of only 10 percent of their team, clients and customers. Imagine how productive their lives would be if these problems could be resolved once and for all! What causes difficult situations for you?

Continued on next page

Workplace Conflict, Continued

Most problems and conflicts in the workplace are caused by people who are considered difficult. Yet, at some time, each person in the workplace will be difficult to manage. They won't always follow our clear instruction; they will make mistakes; they will show emotions when you least expect it; they will question our management and they will generally place 'unreasonable' demands upon our limited time and resources. They also cause difficulties because they are not all the same; they don't act in concert; they require different degrees of support and guidance; they have different personalities, cultures, behaviours, language, race, gender, ages, senses of humour and styles of operation.

However, in every workplace, there are some whose behaviour and performance places them in the category of very difficult to manage – those who create the most conflict.

Bear in mind though that;

- In certain circumstances, **each one of us can be difficult** and demonstrate the behaviours you are identifying with those you see as difficult.
- You can **learn from the situations in which you behaved similarly** to the difficult person. If you can understand why you acted in that manner you will be better able to put yourself in someone else's shoes.
- **Always be prepared for the unexpected.** Don't make assumptions based on past experience and don't expect everyone to behave in the same way under all circumstances.

So it is better to change our approach to managing conflict and to create a working environment in which problems are less likely to occur and in which the creative tensions are given an opportunity and encouragement for expression and development. Instead of trying to suppress, push aside or sanction the difficult, try to identify their positive characteristics and potential.

Continued on next page

Workplace Conflict, Continued



ACTIVITY

How could we better use those talents and redirect their energies to the benefit of the team? How will you change your approach to dealing with difficult situations?

The reality for managers is to recognise and appreciate the differences in the human and other resources in the organisation. Look at what each person has contributed or could contribute with positive support and encouragement. Look to the benefits and outcomes of those contributions and the potential it opens up for further development. Then manage the tensions and conflicts between those competing forces.

The best organisations are those that are a combination of differences – in skills, backgrounds, knowledge, experiences, genders, qualifications, and values, together with a managerial attitude that attempts to combine those differences in such a manner that each will contribute to the other's development and gain from their association.

Our prime responsibility is to coordinate and develop those differences, and to guide and mentor the creative tensions that will arise from those differences.

As managers we are in the people business and so the coordination and development of the people who report to us is our prime responsibility.



HINT

Do not make assumptions about people or situations and then look for the evidence to justify that assumption. Clarify the factual evidence first and then base your decisions or guidance on that.

The Process of Conflict

Conflict at work or in groups will normally involve at least six phases, from problem formation through to stalemate.

This is not a linear process.

Several of these stages may be occurring at the same time or overlap and the process will not necessarily move progressively through each phase.

Phase	Detail
1.	<i>Problem formation and collaboration – awareness of a potential conflict emerges</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Partnering• Focus on issues• Commitment to remain open• Teambuilding and role clarification
2.	<i>Perception of conflict – differences uncovered</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Latent differences perceived• Tension and frustration begin to mount• Communication becomes more difficult• Normative tightening
3.	<i>Dispute – differences acted upon</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Position taken and polarisation• Information withheld• Sabotage• Competition• Information distortion• Recruitment
4.	<i>Fight and avoidance – the dispute intensifies</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoidance or withdrawal becomes a viable option• Desire to punish and inflict hurt on the other• 'Principles' becomes more important• Militants arise• Factions develop
5.	<i>Winning – one side takes the advantage</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• One side is exhausted• One or both yield• One side is overwhelmed• Unilateral advantage taken (one party 'takes' or possesses the disputed item/matter)
6.	<i>Stalemate – both sides are 'stuck'</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Both sides are exhausted• Both sides are afraid to approach each other• Demarcation lines are established• The idea of peace becomes unimaginable

Actions and Emotions

From a human emotion perspective, conflicts, if allowed to, will develop progressively from a mild irritation to a major outburst or explosion where serious damage can be done. If ignored or avoided a conflict will progress through a number of human emotions.



Irritation

In the earliest stages a difference between two people will appear as a minor irritation. At this early stage most people tend to ignore it or brush it lightly aside. They might feel uncomfortable but generally are not inclined to act because they see that to take action will increase the pressure on themselves and this they could do well without.



Discomfort

If left, the difference will develop further, with one or both sides taking more liberties. Individual actions will now cause annoyance and concern. Again, most people will walk away or try to make a joke about it in an attempt to lessen the impact.



Hurt

As the differences become magnified, the actions and reactions become more intense and as a result someone will be genuinely stressed by the incident. In these circumstances the victim might scowl, frown and posture with the body language but will still be disinclined to act directly if they see the other person as more powerful. They are also disinclined to take action if the other person is their supervisor or superior.



Pain

At this stage there is an obvious inflammation of the conflict. There is genuine anger, resentment and stress in these cases. Those that don't deal with it directly are more likely to express their feelings and work out their frustration with friends and colleagues to gain comfort and support from their warm comments and agreements. But this in itself will not solve the problems. If it is not addressed, the problem will progress further.



Agony

This is a situation that causes severe pain, extreme tension and much stress and it will seriously affect one's well-being. Other members of staff become involved and there are obvious divisions according to loyalties to one side or the other. There is extreme hurt, anger, enmity, bitterness and contempt. Much of this is expressed in exaggerated body language; but if the real causes are not addressed a major conflict will occur.



Eruption

In a conflict situation there is a loss of control, anger, fighting, bitterness and extreme stress and sickness. At this stage it is difficult to retrieve the situation and restore relationships to their original manageable positions.

Continued on next page

Actions and Emotions, Continued



ACTIVITY

If you started to observe these behaviours within your team, when would you get involved?

Too often managers enter at the point of eruption and attempt to 'fix' the conflict by transferring staff because they are having a 'personality clash' or 'can't get on with each other'.

When managing conflict, the best and first step is to break into the pattern as quickly as possible and to deal with the issues in the early stages. It is then easy to manage; the people are willing to be involved in coming to a resolution of the problem with the least disruption and maximum cooperation. At the early stages it is also more likely that parties will adopt a process of problem solving and will look for positive outcomes instead of expending valuable time and energy on negative and destructive emotions and attacks.

To assist this early intervention it is important to read the signs that indicate a potential or real conflict. Look and see, listen and hear, think and understand what is going on.

Remember! You can't do that from a closed office or by only communicating with e-mail.

UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES & OTHERS

Conflict Management

As previously stated, most conflict occurs because people are different and not necessarily because they are wrong. So, our first priority as managers is to understand the concept of diversity and difference and how that leads to a development of a conflict situation. In turn, we might then apply our skills, knowledge, awareness, understanding and experience to better manage those differences and the situations in which they operate together. We need to understand how conflict develops and how it impacts on people in the workplace.

Conflict resolution and its management is a matter of altering the status quo or changing the balance between competing forces.

The obvious starting point is to look to the different ways we operate as supervisors and managers; our leadership style; how we try to get across our messages and how we relate to those for whom we have responsibility.

Different Styles of Operation

Important note:

The following activity will help you to identify the manner in which you normally operate as a manager.

Be aware that this activity is easy to use and flexible. It does not lock you down with labels or put you permanently into any one box. This activity is just a general indicator.

Because humans act differently in different circumstances, times and places this activity can only be used as a broad indicator of your operational style and should not be set as an absolute concrete image.

Continued on next page

Different Styles of Operation, Continued



ACTIVITY

Look to the factors listed in the following four segments and tick each one that you believe to be one of your strong characteristics or to reflect the manner in which you normally operate. Tick those factors that you perceive as genuine aspects of you.

Be honest in your assessment. Do not tick merely because it is the way you would like others to view your operation. When you are finished, count the number of ticks in each of the four segments.

There is no prize for the highest number of ticks.

Segment A		Segment B	
Concentrates easily	<input type="checkbox"/>	Creates harmony	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conservative	<input type="checkbox"/>	Deep sensitivity	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conscientious	<input type="checkbox"/>	Praises rather than criticises	<input type="checkbox"/>
Restrained approach	<input type="checkbox"/>	Stable, secure	<input type="checkbox"/>
Always ready on time	<input type="checkbox"/>	Loves peace and quiet	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gives priority to detail and organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly loyal	<input type="checkbox"/>
Demands excellence	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rarely jumps to conclusions	<input type="checkbox"/>
Steady and sure	<input type="checkbox"/>	Likes helping others	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enjoys research and analysis	<input type="checkbox"/>	Quiet manner	<input type="checkbox"/>
Judgmental	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cautious until clearly convinced	<input type="checkbox"/>
Methodical	<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty saving no	<input type="checkbox"/>
Must have clear guidelines	<input type="checkbox"/>	Values cooperation over competition	<input type="checkbox"/>
Meticulous, thorough	<input type="checkbox"/>	Likes to be liked	<input type="checkbox"/>
Very orderly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tendency to procrastinate	<input type="checkbox"/>
Task-orientated	<input type="checkbox"/>	Likes to show commitment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Demands accuracy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Calming influence	<input type="checkbox"/>
Decisions based on facts	<input type="checkbox"/>	Listens attentively	<input type="checkbox"/>
Likes rules, regulations, procedures	<input type="checkbox"/>	Prefers others to lead	<input type="checkbox"/>
Careful in planning	<input type="checkbox"/>	Secure, long-term relationships	<input type="checkbox"/>
Responsible	<input type="checkbox"/>	Compassionate	<input type="checkbox"/>
Industrious	<input type="checkbox"/>	Prefers slow, controlled change	<input type="checkbox"/>
Values what we have	<input type="checkbox"/>	Expresses values	<input type="checkbox"/>
Practical	<input type="checkbox"/>	Let's think about it carefully	<input type="checkbox"/>

Continued on next page

Different Styles of Operation, Continued

Segment C		Segment D	
Persuasive	<input type="checkbox"/>	Interactive	<input type="checkbox"/>
Forceful	<input type="checkbox"/>	Outgoing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pragmatic	<input type="checkbox"/>	Informal	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pushes for tangible results	<input type="checkbox"/>	Likes friendly and open environment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Likes a challenge	<input type="checkbox"/>	Expressive communication	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clear personal goals	<input type="checkbox"/>	Energetic and active	<input type="checkbox"/>
Willing to confront	<input type="checkbox"/>	Intuitive	<input type="checkbox"/>
Very direct	<input type="checkbox"/>	Emphasises enjoyment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Makes decisions easily	<input type="checkbox"/>	Creative	<input type="checkbox"/>
Keen to test it	<input type="checkbox"/>	Flamboyant	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gets bored with details	<input type="checkbox"/>	Prefers broad approach	<input type="checkbox"/>
Likes to progress	<input type="checkbox"/>	Likes working in groups	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has a sense of urgency	<input type="checkbox"/>	Creates motivational environment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Likes clearing obstacles	<input type="checkbox"/>	Expresses emotions	<input type="checkbox"/>
Acts with authority	<input type="checkbox"/>	Often acts on impulse	<input type="checkbox"/>
Handles crises	<input type="checkbox"/>	Willing to express feelings	<input type="checkbox"/>
Likes to lead	<input type="checkbox"/>	Enjoys discussing options	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enjoys solving problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	Likes a changing environment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Brings about change	<input type="checkbox"/>	Innovative	<input type="checkbox"/>
Resourceful	<input type="checkbox"/>	Flexible	<input type="checkbox"/>
Let's do it	<input type="checkbox"/>	Risk taker	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deals easily with the unexpected	<input type="checkbox"/>	Visionary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action person	<input type="checkbox"/>	Let's change it	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do not put yourself into neat little pigeonholes!

We are human beings, not physical structures. We are flexible and changeable and while we might display a general pattern of behaviour, there is quite a deal of variation within that pattern. It is what makes people management the most interesting aspect of your responsibility as a leader. It will also cause you the most headaches if you don't get it right, because people don't always follow the rules and prescribed patterns as does a piece of machinery. The exercise of putting ticks in each segment is only the preliminary exercise.

Continued on next page

Different Styles of Operation, Continued



ACTIVITY

Now follow the seven steps to determine your preferred style or styles.

Step 1 – Look to your strengths in each segment

How many ticks did you have for each segment...

Segment A		Segment B		Segment C		Segment D	
--------------	--	--------------	--	-----------	--	--------------	--

Review the descriptions and reflect to what degree you can identify your operational style.

Am I more of a traditional well-organised person from Segment A?

People who have most ticks in this segment are usually more ordered in their life; systematic; disciplined and they proceed by the law, policy, guidelines and regulations. They are very strong on detailed correctness and fit comfortably into roles associated with administration, coordination, financial management and construction. They are strongly focused on task, function, process and product. They usually focus more on efficiency and output than effectiveness and outcomes.

They are recognised by others for their great value in maintaining good order and discipline in the organisation and bringing order out of chaos, but they are often seen by others as pedantic and too bound by rules and regulations. These are not necessarily faults as they are a necessary component of a good organisation, but they irritate others and so are potential issues for conflict.

Continued on next page

Different Styles of Operation, Continued

Do I lean more strongly to a people focus in Segment B?

People strong in this segment are more inclined to desire a secure, stable, working environment and do not like change. They are usually very dedicated, loyal, hard working, enthusiastic workers who like to be told what to do and then left to get on with it uninterrupted. They are sensitive to others in the group and will provide the necessary emotional and compassionate support to those in trouble, but they do not like dealing with the difficult crises and do not adapt easily to change. They have strong attributes in the people business. They have good personal qualities and strong interpersonal relationships.

Organisations realise that these are the dependable people who get the work done and who are very valuable to the team; but others sometimes see them as soft or getting too distracted by emotional issues.

Am I more an active, dominant, leader type from Segment C?

Dominance in this segment reflects a person who is very directive; someone who wants to take the lead. They are not afraid to take risks and make decisions. They are action people. They work well as project managers where they can bring together a wide range of physical and human resources to achieve positive outcomes in a new area of endeavour. They like taking an organisation through a change process but are less comfortable in a stable or consolidating environment.

Despite these good qualities, others sometimes see them as too dominant and less tolerant of the needs of others.

Am I more a creative visionary from Segment D?

Strength in this segment reflects a person who is creative, visionary, flamboyant, usually talkative and expressive. They enjoy social events and show strength in planning and development, public relations and presentations. They are more inclined towards intuitive thinking rather than practical doing. They provide a very good balance in a team to Segment A people.

Others sometimes see these people as unreliable and disorganised.

Continued on next page

Different Styles of Operation, Continued

Step 2 – How balanced are you across the four segments?

Nobody is totally in one segment. Many of us have a reasonably even balance of ticks in all segments, and therefore have the potential to be good negotiators and mediators because we can see issues from all sides and thus can assist disputing parties to walk together towards agreement and resolution.

Look to your own balance. Where are your strengths? In which areas do you depend on other people to meet your shortfall? In what areas should you consider further development to enhance a shortfall?

Step 3 – How do you create the best teams?

The best teams and, therefore, the ones in which conflict is better managed are those that have a combination of different people from different backgrounds so that each complements the others and adds to their qualities and strengths. The main difficulty for you is to manage and coordinate those differences in a manner in which all parties will make significant contributions to the team. Aim for a cohesion where those contributions are valued by all concerned, where the total is more than the sum of the parts, and where the different skills and experiences will be combined as a cooperative strength.

Step 4 – How will we change over time?

Nobody is exactly the same throughout one's working life. People mature and develop as they are influenced by others or different circumstances. Each of us has a hidden potential that will gradually emerge as we mature. We will often make significant changes in direction following those experiences and the emergence of our potential.

By providing different responsibilities you can help to develop each of your teams underlying potential.

Step 5 – What is my potential?

Try to look for indicators of untapped potential. Look particularly at areas of your strong interests that might not yet be fulfilled.

Your role as a manager is to develop the potential of your staff by placing them in situations that encourage potential to emerge. Suppressed potential leads to frustration and conflict.

Continued on next page

Different Styles of Operation, Continued

Step 6 – Utilise your strengths according to the situation

If you recognise your strengths in each of the segments you can call upon any of these to meet particular circumstances.

In the real world you will use a combination of strengths to best handle difficult situations and conflicts. This will be easier if you know the strengths upon which you can depend.

Step 7 – Differences have the potential for conflict

On a personal level and in the workplace most conflicts occur because of differences rather than fault. In a group situation the person most likely to conflict with others is the one who shows extremes towards one style of operation.

These are the people who have the least understanding or tolerance towards others. The people least likely to cause conflict and best able to manage it are the ones with an even balance over the four segments. These people are good negotiators and mediators because they can understand the direction from which each person comes.



TIP

Having now worked through this exercise you need now to look for indicators that will point you in the direction of your strengths, or clarify areas for which you will require further development in order to improve your management style and your ability to manage difficult situations.

Reactions to Power and Conflict

Most people are not comfortable or confident in dealing with conflict. They see it as an unnecessary interruption or distraction from what they want or need to do; what they perceive as the important issues of the day; tasks, functions, processes or products that clearly fit into their area of responsibility. They see also that involvement in handling conflict is too stressful and so they will avoid it at all costs. Because of this avoidance, conflict will often develop further.

Others deal with conflict through aggression because it appeals to them as the quickest and easiest solution. They gain some satisfaction from their overt display of power and authority to 'cure' it. It establishes for them, and they hope for others, a recognition of their control and territory.



ACTIVITY

From your experience think of those at your workplace who bark, bite and symbolically mark their territory to establish their power, authority and status. How many of these people effectively resolve conflict, reach agreement on critical issues or create a better environment in which people have trust and confidence?

Recognise that these people might achieve a quick solution to a perceived problem at a relatively low cost in the short term, but what are the long-term costs in relation to cooperation, collaboration, contribution, cohesion and teamwork?

Continued on next page

Reactions to Power and Conflict, Continued

As someone responsible for the supervision or management of people, you can no longer avoid being directly involved in conflict resolution or dealing with difficult situations. Your success as a leader will depend on your people skills.

This will include your ability to;

- Analyse and understand those with whom you associate;
 - Your effective communication with them;
 - Your recognition of their differences;
 - Your skill in handling their tensions and grievances;
 - The manner in which you address their critical needs and concerns; and
 - Your involvement in their professional growth and development.
-

Understanding Emotion and Empathy

To cultivate effective people skills you will need some insight into the emotional response of others and an ability to empathise without surrendering.

Emotion

Conflicts always contain some element of emotion that might range from mild tension to full-blown aggression. Because emotion is potentially stressful, most people will try to avoid it. Our emotions can be so powerful that they can have a negative impact on us and make it difficult to focus on the priorities at hand.

Human contact and interaction is charged with a variety of emotions. It is a normal way in which those relationships are expressed and developed. Emotions such as love, laughter, enjoyment and excitement can be very pleasurable. The manner in which someone reduces built-up tension and stress varies from person to person.

It is therefore important to transmit your feelings and emotions in such a manner that others can understand how you are reacting to the situation and the extent of the damage or benefit you have from it. It is also important to read your own feelings and to try to understand them.



HINT

Try to avoid returning to the same situations that created the conflict in the first place. For each crisis try to work together to achieve a positive and cooperative outcome.

Develop the future rather than dwell on the past. So many dispute resolution procedures are cut dead by constant reference to related and unrelated past incidents and associations. This achieves very little in your attempts to walk together to agreement and a positive outcome.

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Understanding Emotion and Empathy, Continued

Empathy

Empathy is a relationship between people in which there is a flow and understanding of feelings and motives. Empathy produces a sensitivity and compassion towards, and understanding of, the other person that in turn allows for more effective communication.

Having empathy for someone else does not mean that we must subjugate ourselves to their thinking or actions. It means that you can have respect for them even when they have different values, backgrounds, styles of operation and opinions. We will be able to work with these people even when they come from a different direction and we can value what they contribute to the process although it might differ from our own contributions.



HINT

The more the empathy sensitivity and compassion, the better the communication. Positive expressions of emotion will increase the empathy and breakdown, or remove blockages in the path of communication.

RESOLVING CONFLICT AT WORK

Basic Principles of Conflict Resolution

There are some basic principles that underlie the management of conflict in the workplace.

- The first priority is to create a working environment in which conflict is least likely to occur.
 - Relationships are open and honest, and individuals have access to information, training, guidance and job opportunities.
 - Policies, procedures and strategies are communicated clearly to the staff through positive development programs.
 - Management walks with the staff instead of at them to ensure that employees have a sense of ownership of their programs.
 - Management is in a position to anticipate and deal with problems before they develop.
 - When conflict does occur it is dealt with quickly before it develops further.
 - In the first instance, conflict is dealt with informally, with time and space given to establish the facts and clear away irrelevant matters.
 - The prime objective is an agreed resolution with a commitment from all concerned to a common course of action.
-

As a leader you can no longer avoid being involved in disputes and their resolution. Your ability to handle these matters is one of the most important aspects of your work. Be clear in identifying your roles and responsibilities. Be certain that all staff members understand their responsibilities and how you want them to interact with and relate to you. Provide clear guidelines, policies and procedures to all members of staff. Plan for the management of grievances and establish mechanisms for handling disputes.



HINT

Question, listen, hear, clarify and analyse your team and the people around you on a daily basis so that you know what is going on. Be in a position where you can anticipate most of the problems before they happen or, at worst, be in a position where you can take action in the early stages of a dispute.

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Basic Principles of Conflict Resolution, Continued

By developing a positive preventative approach to people management, it is more likely that problem-solving and dispute resolution will be tackled by using the expertise of the team members collectively. Individual staff members will be more likely to become involved in team activities when they know that their concerns are being addressed quickly, fairly, openly and honestly.

Staff will support each other as difficulties arise and be more willing to be flexible in their work practices to meet fluctuations in work demands. A healthy balance between the needs and expectations of the individual and those of the group and the organisation will develop over time, and as people gain more confidence in themselves, others and you, this will accelerate.

The best operators in handling difficult situations between conflicting parties strive to achieve resolution by commitment to an agreed action through a combined effort of problem solving.



TIP

The emphasis has to be on achieving agreement. It does not require a feeling of win-win. It does not require the parties to love or even like each other, or to like you as the manager of the situation.

Hopefully, if you have achieved agreement, there will be a respect for the manner by which you handled the process. If you can achieve that, then the likelihood of resolution the next time improves, and your employees will gradually see you as someone who is open, honest and fair and in whom they have trust and confidence. This in turn will have a multiplier effect on all other areas of the workplace and management.

Continued on next page

Basic Principles of Conflict Resolution, Continued



HINT

Consider the following points;

- When **both parties agree to a resolution** there is a greater commitment by both sides to the outcomes of that agreement
 - For that to happen **something, or someone, must change**
 - The **first thing to change is your approach** to dealing with and managing disputes
 - The **implementation of the agreement must be monitored**
 - Because they are in a dispute situation **assume that the parties lack some vital knowledge, skills, experience** and the inability to handle difficult situations
 - **Guidance, support and development is required** by the parties to assist them to manage the agreement.
-

Conflict is a Dysfunction

Dysfunction or friction within groups can very often be traced back to breakdowns in communication. If we neglect to speak and hear precisely, our understanding will always be flawed.

UNDERSTAND?

*I know you believe that you understand
that which you think I said;
but I am not sure you realise that,
what you thought I said
was not really what I understand
that which I believe
I really meant to say.
If you know what I mean.*

Other factors might or might not be present but you can guarantee that poor communication will always be a factor of dysfunction.

Continued on next page

Conflict is a Dysfunction, Continued



ACTIVITY

Look through the following list regarding problems in communication over the transmission of the message, the distortions that occur along the way and difficulties with the receiver. Relate these to your own experience and the workplace in which you operate.

Transmission	Distortions	Receiver
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unsure of what should be communicated• Uncertain about issues, ideas or proposal• Have limited access to information• Lack commitment to the message• Lack clarity in their own beliefs• Have unreal expectations• Use different channels for communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Denying any involvement or responsibility• Noise: raising voice or shouting• Showing anger and aggression creating fear• Insinuating or stating others guilt• Employing strong power plays• Manipulating others• Withholding information• Giving misinformation• Criticising or physically attacking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Being inattentive• Having inadequate confidence and self-esteem• Interrupting• Tuned to a different channel• Having different values• Believing there is a perceived or real threat• Being aggressive• Being defensive• Having inadequate interest• Being inexperienced• Having inadequate time to deal with the matter

Put all of these matters in the context of conflicts in which you have been involved or which you have witnessed and circle those items that played a significant part in the commencement, development and resolution of the conflict.

Look then to the manner in which you will overcome these problems and improve communication to reach agreement and resolution.

Continued on next page

Conflict is a Dysfunction, Continued

The best leaders of conflict management are those who have developed excellent skills of questioning and listening and use them to good effect to tease out the facts and explore options. They constantly feed back information and viewpoints to test their understanding of what others have said, and use a range of questions to search for the detail. They also invite cooperation from others by promoting the feeling that the other person's views are valued and will be taken into consideration in determining the outcomes.

These leaders create a positive environment in which to conduct interviews – one which encourages people to be open, forthright and honest.



HINT

When dealing with someone who is aggressive; shouts, screams aggressive body language and intense displays of verbal abuse, while they are venting, take notes. When they run out of steam, read back what they have said to test that you have an accurate record of their concerns.

Follow this with questioning to bring out the facts and necessary detail. Who? What? When? Where?

Then investigate those concerns.

When you are convinced you have all the facts, have another meeting to feed back your findings to them.

Approaches to Conflict

Under pressure, people tend to adopt one or more of three stances: to fight, to stay and hide or to run. In a conflict situation some will be aggressive, some will walk away and make themselves inconspicuous, while most will run away to avoid any involvement in the conflict situation or its resolution.



ACTIVITY

Look to your own work situation and identify where each person generally fits into this framework. Who are the aggressors, who hides and who walks away to avoid the situation?

As a Manager, how do you react in most cases to a conflict situation?

There is a forth position that people may adopt; that of a mediator. Someone who takes charge of the situation and works with the disputants towards resolution and agreement.

When a crisis occurs, is there anyone that always steps in, takes charge and manages the situation calmly and effectively?



ACTIVITY

What is it that those that mediate have that clearly identifies them as being able to handle these situations?

Continued on next page

Approaches to Conflict, Continued



TIP

Observe other people in your workplace to note those situations where people adopt a particular defensive approach to a difficult situation, such as storming out, having tantrums, bursting into tears, playing the victim, fantasising, moralising, making excuses, rationalising, being obsessive, threatening, blackmailing, preaching, delaying, withholding information or passively resisting. How often do you witness physical, verbal or emotional head butting?

Towards a Joint Approach

Traditional dispute settlement tended to take on a legal persona that, by its very nature, was adversarial, emphasising rights and wrongs, trying to establish guilt and innocence, polarising the differences between the parties and concluding with sanctions and penalties.

Under these circumstances not only was the conflict very stressful and destructive, but the process of resolution was negative and punitive. This traditional approach tended to be very directive and coercive and while it might have achieved quick results it rarely satisfied the parties involved in the dispute.

Today, the best managers work more using a joint problem-solving approach that emphasises collaboration, participation and the empowerment of the people concerned.

By adopting this approach you, the leader, will be more able to gain the cooperation of the participants, and then guide them to agreement.



HINT

You might ask: “When am I going to get time to do all of that when I have all of these important things to do?”

If you establish these people matters as your priority you will significantly reduce the time you spend cleaning up problems and dealing with conflicts and grievances after the event, and you will shift the balance of importance from tasks to a more even balance of task and people, their development and support.

You might ask the obvious question: “How can I change this when I am already surrounded with conflict?” Should you not focus on your main role and responsibility of people management and **results through others**, you will always be fighting conflict.

Continued on next page

Towards a Joint Approach, Continued

A major shift in your style of management will not happen overnight and don't be discouraged when the world does not turn right side up immediately. It takes time, patience, commitment, determination, persistence, courage and confidence.

By making this change, you will create an environment in which conflict is less likely to occur. When it does occur, you will be in a position to become involved at an early stage when its management is easier and more likely to have positive outcomes for all.



TIP

The place to start in changing your approach and management is to;

- Try to understand your own behaviour and how you impact on others
 - Change yourself and the manner in which you approach other people
 - Attempt to take greater control of yourself before you try to influence or control others
 - Not try to change others until you fully understand and change yourself.
-

In this way you are more likely to work together towards a resolution instead of butting heads.

Steps to Managing Conflict

Now that you have a better understanding of the nature of conflict, we will walk through the process of management.

Step	Action
1	Establish the facts
2	Identify the real issues, hidden agendas and underlying causes
3	Put it in the appropriate context
4	Identify the participants
5	Analyse
6	Clearly identify any common ground
7	Establish a willingness and commitment to move towards resolution and agreement
8	Canvass the range of possible strategies for resolution
9	Agree
10	Monitor the follow-up



HINT

As you go through the process, ensure you always **stick to the facts**. There is a danger in assuming that what is being told to you by a complainant is the truth and that you are expected to gather the evidence to confirm it, in order that appropriate action might follow against the other person in the conflict. Don't assume anything! Take any allegation, complaint or situation and investigate it by gathering facts and analysing the evidence. Try to establish if there is any corroboration to support or refute the allegations.



ACTIVITY

Read through the steps in more detail on the following pages.

As you are doing so, keep in mind the following question;

Given that you may feel stressed when handling your next conflict, how will you ensure you remain calm, stay focused on the facts, transmit your emotions so others understand, stick to the process and, most importantly, achieve resolution?

Continued on next page

Steps to Managing Conflict, Continued

Step 1

Step 1 is to **establish the facts.**

Get the FACTS, clear the PHOGE

A brief assessment of a conflict situation will help you arrive at the best way to resolve it.

Disputes are charged with emotion: some people play games to distract you towards their side of reason; others are so confused that they do not know how to act rationally; while others will pressure and intimidate.

In these circumstances PHOGE (philosophy, hearsay, opinion, gut feeling, emotion) clouds reality. These need to be cleared away to get to the facts.

Philosophy

It is easy in the emotional atmosphere of a conflict situation to make sweeping general statements that assume the grandeur of truth and knowledge and hope that they act as a means of diverting other people's attention from the real issues.

Hearsay

Many will resort to hearsay. If a person wishes to pursue this line, ask them to provide concrete evidence of their allegations and the names of those who can corroborate their statements. Inform them that you will advise the other of their allegations so they have the opportunity to respond.

Opinions

Test the quality of opinions against the facts, evidence, policies, guidelines, best practice and the desired outcomes. When it does not meet these criteria clear it away and get back to basics.

Gut feeling

If you are to have intuitive thoughts about an issue then do your research and test their veracity against the facts and the evidence. Otherwise your gut feelings are mere distractions and will make no valuable contribution to the resolution process.

Emotions

Conflicts are charged with emotions that divert attention from what has to be done to achieve an agreed resolution. Manage the emotions first and then refocus on the issues at hand.

Continued on next page

Steps to Managing Conflict, Continued

Step 1 (continued)

Look and see, listen and hear, question and analyse, think and understand. Interview all the relevant people in the dispute. Question, question, question and then attempt to test the veracity of the evidence against other information.

If others can see that you are open, honest, fair, transparent and unbiased at this stage they are more likely to walk with you through the remainder of the process.



HINT

Once we have the facts, we need to piece the relevant matters in logical patterns. By doing so, it will help us to show the important linkages. It will not only show us what we do know but, more importantly, what we do not know and when we have to do more research and information gathering to fill in the gaps. It will assist in identifying extraneous and irrelevant material that is clouding the issue and needs to be put aside.

For most of us a picture, drawing or map is easier to read than a disconnected assortment of written notes and verbal messages. However you draw or map the conflict is up to you, as long as you follow the process.

Step 2

Step 2 is to identify the real issues, hidden agendas and underlying causes.

During a dispute other issues will emerge that might not be directly related to the specific conflict at hand. Put these aside to be dealt with at a later time.

Look particularly to relationships between the players and the manner in which people use power to influence or intimidate others. Question whether the display of conflict is displaced from somewhere else. Eg. Family or personal issues.

Feedback your interpretation of the issues to test their understanding of them and to ensure that you are focused on the real substance of the conflict. Explain to the party/parties why the other extraneous matters will not remain on the agenda.

Continued on next page

Steps to Managing Conflict, Continued

Step 3

Step 3 is to **put it in the appropriate context.**

Try to identify the area, section, unit or environment in which the conflict occurred or developed. In some cases, a minor dispute might be made out to be much larger than it is because one or both parties want to give the impression that they are not the only ones involved. In other cases, what appears to be a minor dispute between two people might be a reflection of a deep problem.

Step 4

Step 4 is to **identify the participants.**

Clearly identify the major parties in the conflict and then show the relationship of the others to the main participants. Eliminate those on the fringe who cannot contribute to the resolution.

Clarify each participant's perception of the problem. Consider their needs, concerns, relationships and what they can contribute to the truth of the matter.

Step 5

Step 5 is to **analyse.**

Having gathered the facts, analyse them and put them in logical patterns. Show the relationships and then determine whether it is necessary to seek further information and, if so, where it can be found.

Use the information to test the validity of the issues raised by the participants. Look for inconsistencies and gaps. Show where one piece of information can corroborate others. Isolate information that cannot be corroborated and those situations where there is a disagreement based on one person's word against another's.

Step 6

Step 6 is to **clearly identify any common ground.**

Identify points of agreement between the parties. Confirm with all parties those facts, issues and other matters for which there is agreement. In particular, identify options for solutions that are agreed to by all or most of the parties. This can be a good starting point towards resolving the problem because at least these matters have their agreement.

Continued on next page

Steps to Managing Conflict, Continued

Step 7

Step 7 is to **establish a willingness and commitment to move towards resolution and agreement.**

Try to obtain the agreement of the parties that there is a problem, then an agreement to the nature of the problem and then a commitment that they recognise to be in their own interests, to work together towards an agreement. Are there any indicators that this is possible?

While there may be some disagreements on interpretation, look for any commitment or willingness to resolve the situation. Try to establish in their minds that you will assist them to work together in solving the problem and that it will be for the benefit of all concerned. As a last resort, in more serious cases, you may have to spell out the consequences of not working together towards agreement.

Step 8

Step 8 is to **canvass the range of possible strategies for resolution.**

Try to involve all parties in designing strategies for resolution. Each party will be more committed if they feel that they have had input into the outcomes and agreement. The best resolutions are those for which there is agreement and commitment between the parties. Don't be restricted to only one course of action. The resolution might involve a combination of strategies.

Step 9

Step 9 is to **agree.**

When both parties have reached agreement, lock it down and, if necessary, have each party sign an agreement. Build in a time line with appropriate ongoing monitoring. Identify the support structures that will be there to assist the parties to implement the follow through.

The next section offers some strategies you can use to gain agreement.

Step 10

Step 10 is to **monitor the follow-up.**

Build into your plan the means by which the implementation of the strategies can be monitored and modified as the need arises.

**ACTIVITY**

Now that you have read through the process, how will you ensure you follow it to effectively resolve conflict?

Ensure to add any areas you feel you may wish to develop further into your action plan.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Strategies to Manage Conflict

Now that you understand the process to manage conflict we will look at a range of practical strategies from which you can choose the most appropriate to meet the situation at hand at any given time. A better understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of the various strategies will give you the confidence and courage to act quickly and effectively in any conflict situation.

Firstly, there is no single magic solution to dealing with all conflicts. There are many different approaches you might take to handle a problem and you will select the one that will be most appropriate at the time, according to the circumstances and the people involved. You might even change the strategy during the process. The one thing that is key to any successful solution is the use of coaching.

Whatever strategies you adopt, the common objective is to move the various participants towards resolution by common agreement. This can best be achieved;

- if you obtain a commitment from them that there is a problem,
- that they agree on the nature of the problem, and that
- it is best that they work together with your guidance towards resolution.

They must also be committed to the follow-up.

This might sound easier said than done and, in some cases, it is extremely difficult, but the alternative of doing nothing is not an option.



HINT

Be careful not to move into professional fields for which you have no expertise, training or experience. In some situations there could be an underlying factor of physical, psychological or psychiatric disorder with one of the parties. While you might involve yourself in gathering the facts that point to this condition you should avoid further involvement in prescribing the remedies. Bring in the experts. If in doubt seek further advice for HR before proceeding.

Continued on next page

Strategies to Manage Conflict, Continued



TIP

Too often people will approach you with complaints about another person, make allegations and then state their concern in not wishing to play a part in discussing it with the person in question or resolving the issue.

Let these people know that you fully appreciate their concerns but make it clear that the allegations will be put to the other person for their response and that the matter will be investigated. Ask them to name other people who can corroborate their story. Clarify for them the options for resolving the issue and the role that they, the other person and you will take in the process.

Give the person against whom the allegations have been made the opportunity to respond to them and for them to raise any other issues to be taken into consideration. It is natural justice for each person to be given the opportunity to defend themselves against allegations or charges and they must be given reasonable time to prepare their defence. They are innocent until the facts prove otherwise.

Coaching is Key

As we have already pointed out, coaching is the most effective approach for handling conflict as a preliminary to a more major process. It is a skill that you use as part of your everyday people management and when others see it in this light, it is a natural part of the environment and does not generate anxieties and fear that a one-off consultation creates. It will be a normal part of your guidance, mentoring and development of those who report to you or with whom you work.

There will be many occasions when you could be approached for advice and support in difficult situations. You will often be asked for guidance from people who work in your area or from colleagues in other areas. In taking on that role you will be in a position to assist them to clarify the issues and the possible outcomes. Help them to come to terms with handling their own problem. You might suggest to them a number of options and, together with them, brainstorm the advantages and disadvantages of each option.



TIP

Avoid becoming entwined in their emotions. You should not be seen as being totally supportive of their anger and resentment against another party. Be objective in walking them through the stress towards more positive outcomes and resolutions. Help them to look at themselves and the other people in the dispute.

Clarify in the first instance that it is not your role to make judgements or take sides and that others must be given the opportunity to respond to the allegations and have the opportunity to present their own case and suggestions for change.

Coaching, if well conducted, will break down the normal barriers between staff, supervisors and managers because people will see it as a support mechanism that works.

Facilitating Resolution with Coaching

Facilitation is just one coaching strategy for dispute resolution. It involves a third party assisting the process but, in this application, the person does not make decisions or recommendations. The coach controls or facilitates the process. They will assist by clarifying the issues to be addressed, determining who will speak and when they will speak, organising the place and setting of the meeting and the conduct of the meeting.

Facilitation is a means by which you, as the independent coach, can assist the others to focus on a joint problem-solving approach to their differences.

As far as possible the coach should try to be independent even though at times it may be difficult to appear to be so. In its purest sense, facilitation does not allow the third party to recommend or decide the outcomes or the direction that the agreement should take. This has the positive aspect of encouraging each side to contribute to the final agreement and therefore have greater commitment to its follow-up actions.

This type of coaching can be conducted informally or formally, depending on the seriousness of the dispute and the willingness of the parties to participate. It is probably best to use the informal approach early in a dispute as it is less threatening and is more likely to result in a speedy resolution with least disruption to each side. The formal approach is used in more serious cases or when the conflict has developed to extremes of behaviour or other attempts to get the parties together have failed.



TIP

- Arrange a suitable meeting place that is comfortable and non-threatening.
 - Clarify to both parties how the meeting will be conducted and how and when they will take an active part.
 - Encourage them to avoid 'you' statements and to concentrate on how they see the issues and their desired outcomes.
 - Emphasise that each will have an equal opportunity to participate and a chance to respond to the issues and proposals of the other person.
 - Throughout the meeting encourage both parties to concentrate on 'I' statements with the emphasis on what each person is willing to contribute.
 - Discourage 'you' statements that are accusatory and demanding of the other person.
-

Continued on next page

Facilitating Resolution with Coaching, Continued

You may wish to;

- Break up the proceedings into a number of bite-sized sections. Do not try to deal with the whole dispute at one time because it will be daunting to all.
- If emotions are high, occasionally call a break to have each individual focus on a particular issue or proposal in private.
- Keep asking questions and feed back their answers to allow both parties to hear what they are saying or proposing.
- Cut short any matters that cannot be resolved. Put them aside so that they don't cloud the main agenda.
- Ask each person to think what it would be like to be in the other person's position. Ask them to consider the effect that the proposals will have on them.
- Diffuse the desire of each to punish the other side.
- Halt proceedings from time to time to summarise progress and to refocus on the next issue.
- Conclude the proceedings by giving a copy of the agreement to both people with an agreed time line for implementation of any follow-up action.
- Name those who might be involved in providing support, counselling and development in the future.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The coach is independent• The parties work together towards resolution• There is a greater commitment to achieving the outcomes• It is a joint problem-solving approach• It is a controlled process• It is less expensive and traumatic than legal proceedings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It can be time-consuming• It can be more difficult when there is an imbalance of power between the parties• It takes time for people to accept it as a positive strategy

Negotiating Resolution with Coaching

Negotiation is the process by which two people or parties talk with each other, raise issues, explore options and hopefully reach a common agreement. No third party is involved.

The successful management of almost every dispute, grievance and conflict and the resolution of problems will involve an element of negotiation even when a third party is involved. So the knowledge and skills of the process and practice of negotiation are essential elements of your leadership qualities.

Negotiation is a process of communication involving interaction and reaction. It starts from a point of difference or polarisation of ideas, values or practice that has resulted in disagreement.

The object of negotiation is for both parties to recognise their differences, then to agree to resolve them in a situation where both are able to put their case, after which they will work together towards an agreed position. To be effective there has to be commitment by both parties to want to solve their problems and differences even though each will be striving to gain the most and give up the least.

Successful negotiations require each group to consider the other's proposals, to accept, reject or modify them and then propose the alternatives for the other to consider. Eventually, if successful, they will move towards a common position and agreement.

The two key words in negotiations are 'if' and 'then'. Eg 'If I agree to unpack the stock then I would expect you assist with service.'

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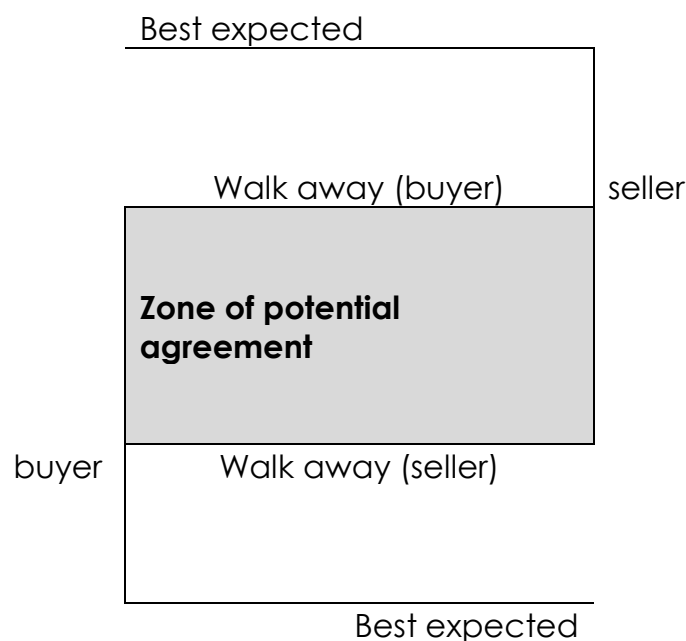
Negotiating Resolution with Coaching, Continued



ACTIVITY

Try this simple exercise. Grab a friend to work together on this. Sit down at a table together and place a valuable item such as a watch or a piece of jewellery in front of you. You are not allowed to speak and the only thing you can write down is the amount you are willing to offer and the counter-offer by the other person. You may use body language but no words are to be spoken. How long does it take you to agree on a price?

In the beginning you may find that the owner will demand a very high price for the item. This is their ambit; or best expected outcome. In return you will offer a ridiculously low price, which sets the lower limit which is your best expected outcome. You will then proceed to negotiate an agreement between those limits. There is a zone in the middle where the serious negotiation takes place and the only place where agreement is reached.



If the lowest sum the seller is prepared to accept is greater than the highest sum you are prepared to pay then agreement cannot be reached and vice versa. Although it is easy to visualise this when we are negotiating the sale of a tangible, visible item, it is more difficult when we are discussing matters such as workload, the same basic principles still apply.

Continued on next page

Negotiating Resolution with Coaching, Continued

Negotiation is a process by which the parties reach agreement by resolving their differences. It does require some degree of trust because no other parties are involved. The best negotiations take place when there is respect on each side for the other person, an appreciation of where they are coming from, and an understanding of the pressures they are facing.

If the parties cannot come to agreement through one-to-one negotiation, or are not demonstrating the basic respect of each other required, then look for another strategy to solve the problem.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It involves both parties directly in the process• It is their decision, not that of a third party• There is a sense of ownership. Both parties know the resolution is theirs• There is a better understanding and appreciation of the other side• It will expose the reasons for deep-seated feelings• It will bring out hidden agendas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It can be very time-consuming• It requires a commitment from both parties to participate• If prolonged it can be costly• Some people are disadvantaged by poor negotiation skills and lack of experience• Some people lack the confidence and courage to negotiate on equitable terms• There can be imbalances in power, authority and influence• There can be inequities in resources and access to information

Advising Resolution with Coaching

Advising is another coaching strategy in which the disputing parties put their case to a third party who attempts to guide them towards a resolution and agreement. It differs from other strategies as the independent person will make recommendations.

You, as a manager, can use this coaching strategy to great effect in the workplace across a wide range of disputes from the simple to the more serious.

The coach takes on a role of facilitator, not judge. If they see value in a proposal, they will suggest to the other party that they might give it serious consideration. In this way they can look beyond the dispute and its high emotion to the possible resolution and agreement. The best coaches when using this strategy sense when to pause, break or accelerate according to the mood and momentum of the meeting.



TIP

When advising, be confident in asking questions of either side to clarify issues, discover what each side wants for themselves. Clarify their expectations of the others and seek their support for positive proposals. Be clear in your direction, particularly when the proposal is unacceptable. Use your personal power and influence and extensive knowledge and experience to guide and control the meetings in a manner that generates trust and confidence in your management.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is an independent third party• It is not confrontationalist• It attempts to get the parties to talk with each other• The parties feel they are contributing more to the outcomes• It places options on the table for consideration• It is more flexible• It uses the guidance and expertise of the coach• It sets strong direction through recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recommendations are from a third party• The parties not necessarily committed to the recommendations• It has a quasi-legal atmosphere• There is a disguised threat of penalty if they don't agree• It does not require an agreement• It is often seen as merely a pause or cooling off in the dispute

What if they can't agree?

It is far more sensible to have disputants try to work together towards an agreement under the guidance of a coach than to move to a more formal process.

Unfortunately though, at times the conflicting parties may not be able to reach agreement and further strategies will need to be adopted.

In these instances, it is best to contact your Human Resources representative to discuss further.



HINT

To continue to improve your conflict resolution and coaching skills, always:

- **Ask for feedback.** Have several friends/colleagues evaluate each of your attempts to resolve conflict.
 - **Seek out every possible opportunity to practise** your coaching skills. Reflect often on your progress and, where possible, ask for feedback. The comments made will enable you to develop your skills further.
 - **Be aware of what is happening around you.** As you go about your day-to-day duties, watch others and learn to recognise behaviours that detect conflict at the early stages. Become sensitised to the specific techniques others also employ to handle conflict effectively.
-

REVIEW YOUR LEARNING

What have you learnt?

As well as being aware of how conflict develops and the observable emotions and actions that will draw them to your attention, for positive application of conflict resolution you need to know and use all of the activities and techniques until they become your normal way of doing things.

Over the coming weeks, notice the ways you have changed what you do because of the learning activities you have completed in this Guide.

To assist you in your reviewing your learning, compare your performance against the learning outcomes;

- understanding and accepting that conflict and mistakes are inevitable
 - leading you to walk with your people in a cooperative, collaborative manner
 - fostering an atmosphere of openness, honesty and trust toward a joint problem solving approach
 - following a structured conflict resolution process
 - developing coaching strategies to assist with resolving conflict
-

CONGRATULATIONS on resolving conflict @ work!
