

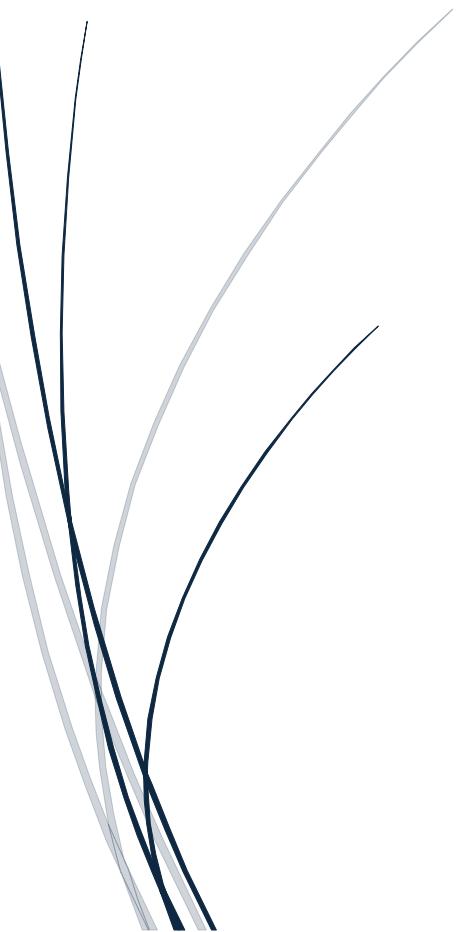
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Assignment 2: Conflict
Resolution



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Part 1: Understanding Conflict Resolution

Conflict in the workplace refers to a situation where individuals or groups perceive differences in interests, values, or goals that may interfere with their ability to work effectively together (Thomas, 1992). It is a natural part of organisational life and, if managed well, can stimulate innovation and improvement. However, when poorly managed, it can lead to stress, reduced morale, and decreased productivity (Rahim, 2011).

Types of workplace conflict:

- **Intrapersonal conflict**, which occurs within an individual, often due to competing priorities or role expectations.
- **Interpersonal conflict**, arising between two or more individuals due to differences in communication style, values, or goals.
- **Intragroup conflict**, which happens within a team when disagreements emerge about tasks or processes.
- **Intergroup conflict**, which occurs between departments or groups within the organisation (Robbins and Judge, 2019).

Effective conflict resolution involves identifying the root cause, facilitating communication, and achieving mutually beneficial outcomes. Common conflict resolution strategies include:

- **Collaboration**, where parties work together to find a win-win solution.
- **Compromise**, where each party gives up something to reach a middle ground.
- **Accommodation**, where one party prioritises the relationship over personal goals.
- **Avoidance**, where the conflict is temporarily set aside to prevent escalation.
- **Competition**, where one side pursues its own goals at the expense of others (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023).

Preventing conflict requires proactive communication, clarity in roles, and an organisational culture that values respect and inclusivity. Training in emotional intelligence and communication can further enhance the organisation's ability to manage potential tensions (Goleman, 2006).

Part 2: Reflection on a Workplace Conflict

In my role as a **Project Coordinator in the Marketing and Student Recruitment Unit** of a large South African university, I once observed a conflict between the **digital marketing** and **creative design** teams. The disagreement stemmed from a

misunderstanding about campaign timelines and ownership of creative outputs. Using the “5 Whys” method to identify the root cause, it became clear that the issue originated from *unclear communication channels and differing expectations* regarding project prioritisation.

Initially, the conflict was handled through a joint meeting facilitated by a senior manager. While the conversation allowed each team to express concerns, the tone was somewhat defensive, and no clear follow-up actions were agreed upon. Consequently, the tension resurfaced a few weeks later when another campaign faced similar delays. From my perspective, the conflict was only partially resolved, communication improved slightly, but structural issues persisted.

Reflecting on this experience, I believe the conflict could have been managed more effectively through collaborative problem-solving and the establishment of clearer processes. According to Rahim’s (2011) *Integrative Conflict Management Model*, sustainable resolution depends on addressing both substantive and emotional issues. In this case, acknowledging the teams’ shared goals, promoting the university’s brand, could have reframed the discussion from blame to partnership.

If I had been responsible for mediating, I would have applied Thomas and Kilmann’s (1974) *Conflict Mode Instrument* to assess preferred conflict-handling styles within the team. Encouraging a collaborative approach (high concern for self and others) would have promoted transparency and joint ownership of solutions. Moreover, setting up a shared project management platform could have reduced ambiguity around deadlines and responsibilities, aligning with the communication-based conflict prevention principles discussed by Robbins and Judge (2019).

This experience reinforced the importance of emotional intelligence and empathy in leadership. Recognising and validating emotions before addressing the practical problem often de-escalates tension (Goleman, 2006). Personally, I’ve learned to listen actively, use neutral language, and frame disagreements as opportunities for improvement rather than personal disputes.

To prevent similar conflicts, the department could formalise a conflict resolution protocol that includes early intervention, mediation guidelines, and periodic team debriefs. The unit currently relies on informal discussions, which are helpful but inconsistent. Establishing formal mechanisms, such as a *team charter* outlining expected behaviours and feedback processes, would provide greater structure and fairness.

Part 3: Reflective Question

If tasked with resolving a conflict between two interdependent departments, I would adopt a **collaborative and transparent approach**. My first step would be to gather information objectively from both sides to understand their underlying needs and perspectives. Next, I would convene a joint session focused on common goals, for instance, maintaining student recruitment targets, rather than on personal grievances.

To restore productivity, I would implement a mediation framework involving three stages:

1. **Clarification of issues and emotions**, allowing each party to speak without interruption.
2. **Identification of shared objectives**, reframing the conflict as a joint challenge.
3. **Action planning**, with clear accountability and follow-up checkpoints.

By promoting psychological safety (Edmondson, 2019) and modelling calm, solution-oriented communication, leaders can transform conflict into an opportunity for stronger collaboration and learning.

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