

Management of Conflicts



We get into a conflict when the person opposite to us has a different mindset. It is very common in a workplace to get into differences of opinion. Sometimes there is a conflict between two or more employees; sometimes employees have a conflict with their managers and so on. Now the question is, how can we manage disagreements in ways that build personal and collegial relationships?

Conflict management is the process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing the positive aspects of conflict. The aim of conflict management is to enhance learning and group outcomes, including effectiveness or performance in an organizational setting. Properly managed conflict can improve group outcomes.

Strong conflict management skills are an advantage in most positions, as conflict is virtually impossible to avoid. It is human nature to disagree, and disagreements are in fact healthy when approached correctly. Eliminating conflict entirely would cause its own problems: there would be no diversity of opinion and no way for us to catch and correct flawed plans and policies.

But poor communication or interpersonal tension can easily cause simple disagreements to flare up into resentment or worse. Conflicts that are allowed to fester and grow will ultimately diminish productivity and damage staff morale. This is why employers seek employees with the skills to manage and diffuse conflict.

Conflict Management Techniques

Here are five strategies from conflict management theory for managing stressful situations. None of them is a "one-size-fits-all" answer. Which one is the best in a given situation depends on variety of factors, including an appraisal of the levels of conflict.

- **Avoiding** – no winners/no losers
- **Competing** – win/lose
- **Accommodating** – lose/win
- **Compromising** – win some/lose some
- **Collaborating** – win/win

Avoiding the Conflict

Avoidance involves walking away and ignoring the conflict entirely, doing nothing that might be perceived as rocking the boat. This feels safe to the individual but does not solve the problem. The problem might even worsen if it's left unaddressed.

In a team setting, one person may pick up the slack of a co-worker who avoids conflict, which can lead to frustration and resentment. If everyone on the team has an avoidance strategy, productivity is low when a problem arises because no one wants to step up to the plate.

It's easy for someone who leans toward this conflict resolution style to accommodate another person's wishes because they'd rather agree with someone to resolve the conflict. However, their needs don't get met this way, which can cause problems down the road.

Example: Rahul and Rohit had a fight; their mother came and punished both of them.

Competing to Win Conflicts

Some people view conflict as a chance to win. They have no interest in compromising, collaborating or avoiding the conflict. They want to get their way and aren't afraid to assert their opinions.

In a team environment, a competitive attitude toward conflict can easily slide into bullying. It can also cause frustration among co-workers who don't feel like their points of view are taken seriously. As frustration builds, co-workers can end up taking a competitive approach to conflict resolution, and the problem escalates.

Compromise represents the only option that allows someone with this mindset to win, although settling on a compromise can still involve a power struggle.

Example: When in a debate the party with more facts wins.

Accommodating the Other Person

Team members who aren't necessarily afraid to talk through conflict may nonetheless never have any demands of their own. Instead, they bend over backward to accommodate the other person's demands and iron out the conflict.

An accommodating conflict resolution technique does not allow all viewpoints or information to be brought to the table. Accommodating people inevitably hold back their frustration or downplay their feelings. Over time, this can cause frustration to build and leads to an expectation among the assertive co-workers that they'll always get their way.

Ideally, accommodating people can be encouraged to state their needs during conflict management sessions to move toward collaboration.

Example: When we fight with someone we love we choose to let them win.

Compromising During Conflicts

A compromising conflict resolution strategy aims to settle on a solution that's deemed fair. Everyone works together, so no one completely gets their way. Instead, each team member makes a sacrifice to ensure everyone has a small consolation prize.

Compromise sounds excellent at the outset, but a solution that's fair is not always a solution that's effective. This conflict resolution strategy is still too focused on competition and misses a major point: What does each person need? That's where collaboration comes into play.

Example: Two friends had a fight and they decide to compromise with each other through mutual understanding.

Collaborating to Find a Solution

Collaboration maximizes the assertiveness and cooperation capabilities of each team member. Everyone speaks up to state their needs, and after the full picture has been painted, the team cooperates to do what's necessary to meet everyone's needs to the greatest extent possible. Everyone leaves happy.

Of course, collaboration may not always be possible, but it's worth striving for. Too often, conflicts arise due to misunderstandings and poor communication. If everyone on the team is willing to state their needs and help meet the needs of others, a truly collaborative environment is born.

Example: A businessman should work collaboratively with the manager to establish policies, but collaborative decision-making regarding office supplies wastes time better spent on other activities.