



# Mastering Conflict Resolution

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Keys to Leadership Success

Hire ❖ Develop ❖ Retain

# Mastering Conflict Resolution

Workplaces experience challenges when people have different opinions or ideas. Those conflicts can promote innovation and vibrant organizational success, or they can escalate into disagreements. We each have a role in analyzing how to refocus the conflict toward organizational outcomes and goals and reducing ineffective, destructive conflicts.

The constructive handling of disagreements in the workplace is central to personal satisfaction and organizational effectiveness. Improved skills in managing differences will enrich your work, your relationships, and your career.

As a result of our work on conflict management today, you will be able to:

- Identifying the sources of conflict
- Recognize what escalates and de-escalates conflict
- Learn and be able to choose among conflict resolution styles
- Recognize destructive and constructive behaviors and communication skills
- Review how to use the power of results-oriented trust behaviors and relationship building
- Practice a conflict resolution process including identifying mutual gains and focusing on desired outcomes



## How Do You Define Conflict?

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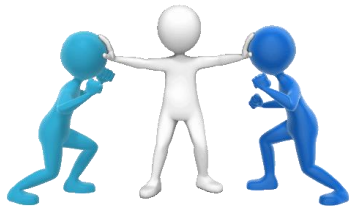
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Can it be productive? Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_



## Dealing with Conflict

Conflict is defined as any situation in which there are differences of opinion. That includes every encounter with someone whose ideas, approaches, and strategies differ from our own.

Think of a conflict as an incident in which someone is not satisfied with the outcome.



Every encounter with someone whose ideas, approaches and strategies differ from our own offers the potential for friction, wasted time, bruised feelings, and looking foolish.

Mishandling differences leaves emotional scars, diverts energy from where it's really needed, and undermines morale. No wonder so many people walk away from disagreement without resolution, escalating ongoing workplace tension and impacting ability to be effective.

Despite the risk of pain and irritation, the rewards for handling disagreement constructively are gratifying and result in improved decision making.

*"The understanding that underlies the right decision grows out of the clash and conflict of divergent opinions and out of the serious consideration of competing alternatives."*

Peter Drucker

## Sources of Workplace Conflict



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## Two Types of Conflict

### **Cognitive Conflict**

- Focuses on ideas, not personalities
- Can occur during times of creativity and productivity
- Affect is neutral, or positive
- Unrelated, or positively related, to group functioning

When was the last time you engaged in Cognitive Conflict?

### **Affective Conflict**

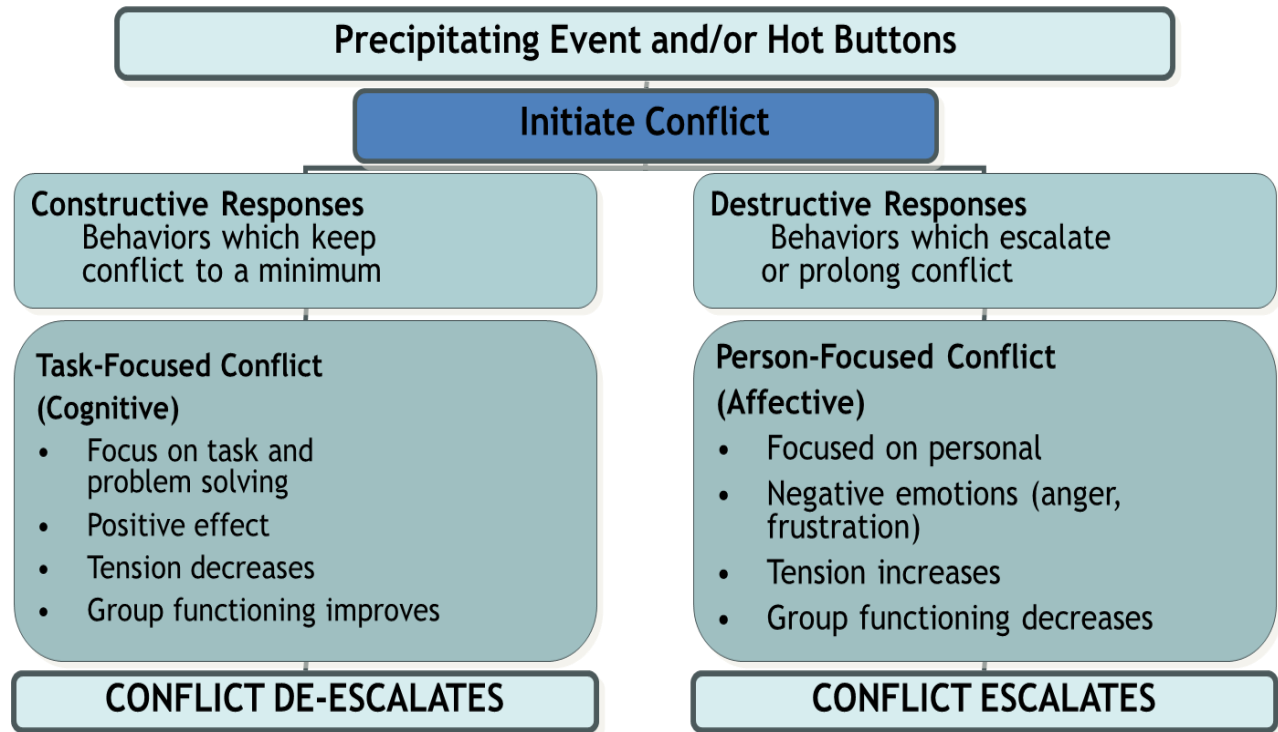
- Focuses on people, not ideas
- Can occur at any time
- Affect is negative
- Negatively related to group functioning
- Can escalate rapidly

When was the last time you got caught up in Affective Conflict?



## Path of Conflict: Escalate or De-escalate?

Throughout today's workshop, one model we will use is the research-based Conflict Dynamics model based on findings of behaviors that work best and least to manage conflicts. This graphic describes the path from their findings. [www.conflictdynamics.org](http://www.conflictdynamics.org).





## Destructive Conflict Behaviors

Place a check mark next to all that YOU have demonstrated and a dash next to those that you've observed in others. You may have a check and dash on the same line.

- Silence
- Glaring eye contact: "the look"
- Brevity or abruptness
- Sarcastic tone in voice
- Interrupting
- Snubbing or ignoring people
- Broad or extreme generalizations
- Using judgmental or evaluative comments
- Insults and put-downs
- Blaming, discrediting, or discounting
- Raising your voice
- Angry outburst or loss of control
- Making excuses
- Restricting participation in important decisions
- Creating us/them distinctions
- Reinforcing mandated structures, authority, rights
- Discrediting others' competence or willingness to take responsibility
- Undermining or sabotaging others' efforts
- Expressing cynicism





## Outcomes of Destructive Responses

- Feelings of anger and frustration
- Judgmental actions
- Getting even and keeping score
- Other party does not have needs met
- Closed channels of communication
- Refusing to deal with issues
- Decreased self-confidence
- Tasks not completed
- Team performance decreases
- Other?



## Constructive Conflict Behaviors

Place a check mark next to all that YOU have demonstrated and a dash next to those that you've observed in others. You may have a check and dash on the same line.

- Ask for their perspective
- Find common ground to agree upon
- Provide positive feedback (what are they doing right)
- Restate facts, acknowledge feelings
- Summarize before you disagree
- Honor diversity, including your own perspective
- Stay focused on facts, not personalities
- Until proved otherwise, assume the other person is expressing a legitimate concern when disagreeing.
- Attempt to understand the issue from their perspective
- Empathize by acknowledging their feelings...*"You seem frustrated that we did not contact your team before moving forward."*
- Listen with neutrality that suspends critical judgment.
- When listening, focus your attention on both the person's verbal and non-verbal messages.
- Encourage the other person to continue by acknowledging
- Maintain eye contact without staring
- Nodding, smile
- Sit on same side of table, lean forward
- Use a sincere tone
- Keep your voice calm
- Preserve dignity and respect



## Outcomes of Constructive Responses

- Win-win solutions
- Open & honest communication of feelings
- Both parties' needs are met
- Non-judgmental actions
- Not sticking adamantly to one position
- Actively resolving conflict (not allowing conflict to continue)
- Thoughtful responses (not impulsive)
- Team performance improves
- Other?



## The SCARF Model

Human beings are fundamentally wired to do two things – move TOWARDS Reward or AWAY from Threat. Some researchers have determined that there are five key domains of fundamental threat and reward that are important to our brain. In conflict situations (or just when we make others feel bad) we are most likely 'threatening' one of these areas.

**Status** – Status is our self-perceived ranking in our social group. It may relate to power, title, privileges, salary or several other items. If we feel that someone is trying to diminish our status or elevate themselves above us, we feel threatened.

**Certainty** – We like to know what's going on, the brain likes to think that we know what is going to happen next. When we can't predict the outcome of a situation, or perceive that our future is going to change, it feels like a threat.

**Autonomy** – No one likes to feel like they have no control over what is going to happen to them or their situation. When we sense a lack of control or the ability to make decisions we feel trapped. If this stressor occurs for too long and we feel we can't escape or make a change, we can experience feelings of helplessness and depression.

**Relatedness** – We are social beings and require relationships to others to feel safe. Being ostracized activates the same pain neural networks in our brain as physical pain. When we fail to connect with others, we can feel threatened.

**Fairness** – When we feel something is unfair, extremely strong emotions can surface. In fact, our desire for fairness is so strong that we will often sacrifice personal gain to prevent another person from receiving an inequitable outcome.



## SCARF Exercise: The Case of Ron & Sam

Ron and Sam have just arrived at work. They both work in the same department, but Ron has been there for several years, and Sam transferred in only a few months ago. They know each other, but not well, and have not had a chance to work together on any projects.

Ron: "Hi Sam, happy Monday! How was your weekend?"

Sam: "Happy Monday to you too – although, I must admit, my kids ran me ragged and I feel like coming back to work is relaxing!"

Ron: "Sorry to hear it, I had a great time this weekend and didn't want it to end. Some friends and I went to the wine country and sampled wine, listened to one of our favorite bands and had a great dinner. It was terrific!"

Sam: "Well, we hope to do that when the kids are older, sounds like fun. I need to head to a meeting, have a great week."

*A short time later Ron and Sam's boss, Amanda, calls a team meeting.*

Amanda: "Good news, we just received notice that we've been given approval to start the DART project. It's going to require a lot of work by all of us, but if we can pull it off, we'll be heroes!"

Ron: "That sounds great Amanda, do we have any schedules or deadlines at the moment?"

Amanda: "No, we're still working out the details and there is a chance that some of the funding we need may not come through until later this year."

Sam: "Will any of our other projects be put on hold? The DART project is going to require lots and lots of time."

Amanda: "Unfortunately no, we all are working hard but we're going to have to do this and manage our existing load. Just plan on extra hours!"

Ron: "Well I know I'm going to be ready to pitch in! I also know we'll need IT's help, are they going to join us on this?"

Amanda: "Well, they'll help us when they can, but their boss doesn't want anyone working overtime, so we'll just have to make do."

Sam (quietly to Ron): "Great, they don't have to work overtime but will get some of the credit. And now I have to tell my wife I won't be able to help with the kids as much!"



## Conflict Management Strategies

Avoid/Withdraw \_\_\_\_\_

Accommodating \_\_\_\_\_

Competing \_\_\_\_\_

Compromising \_\_\_\_\_

Collaborating \_\_\_\_\_



## Which Conflict Resolution Approach to Choose?

Are there conflict situations in which we might decide to choose an approach other than “win-win” – the collaborative approach? Using our debrief information from the last activity, place a check mark in the column for the conflict resolution approach(es) you think would be best in each situation below, including collaboration.

CM = Compete C= Collaborate GP = Compromise AV = Avoid AC = Accommodate

	CM	C	GP	AV	AC
1. Quick, decisive action is vital, for example in emergencies					
2. An integrated solution is important - all sets of concerns are too important to be compromised					
3. The issue is vital to organization welfare, and you know what decision needs to be made					
4. To build the relationship when you feel you can support the other solutions presented					
5. When harmony and stability are especially important					
6. When the issues are more important to others than to yourself and you can easily show cooperation					
7. When your objective is to learn					
8. When the different parties have equal power and are committed to mutually exclusive goals					
9. To achieve temporary agreements to complex issues					
10. To arrive at expedient solutions under time pressures					
11. When the conflict is small and more important issues are pressing					
12. When gathering information is important to making the decision					
13. To let people cool down and regain perspective					
14. When you are not sure you have the root cause of the issue					
15. When you are developing employees and think it is OK for them to learn by making a small mistake					

## Building Trust



Many people feel that trust is just something you 'feel' and that people either have it or they don't. But in fact, we trust someone when they have behaved in a way that leads us to have confidence in them and a sense of assurance about what they say and how they will behave in a particular situation.

Stephen M.R. Covey in his book **The Speed of Trust** lists thirteen behaviors that build trust in a relationship. Those behaviors are:

1. **Talk straight** – tell the truth, say what you mean, don't beat around the bush
2. **Demonstrate respect** – acknowledge and value others, demonstrate that you care for others and preserve their dignity
3. **Create transparency** – share information, don't hoard knowledge, don't have hidden agendas.
4. **Right wrongs** – apologize quickly, acknowledge when you have failed; don't let pride get in the way of doing the right thing.
5. **Show loyalty** – give credit freely, keep confidences, speak well of others even when they aren't present
6. **Deliver results** – get things done, don't over promise
7. **Get better** – accept and act on feedback, demonstrate humility
8. **Confront reality** – address the tough stuff directly, speak courageously about difficult issues
9. **Clarify expectations** – clearly state what you expect, make sure you understand what others expect of you
10. **Practice accountability** – hold yourself and others responsible for results
11. **Listen first** – listen more than you speak, don't assume you understand
12. **Keep commitments** – do what you say you're going to do
13. **Extend trust** – be willing to trust others, assume others are trustworthy

INSTRUCTIONS: Circle your three top trust behaviors. Put an X to the left of your 3 trust behavior biggest challenges.





## The Five Steps to Conflict Resolution

1. **Control Your Emotions**
2. **Control Your Behaviors**
3. **Calm the Situation**
4. **Seek to Understand**
5. **Seek Resolution**

### 1. **Control Your Emotions**

Our brains are extremely responsive to the smallest stimuli and most often, we translate those stimuli as a threat and our negative emotions start to churn. Pay attention when you sense emotion becoming an issue. Avoiding or modifying the situation can often help you deal with issues you need to address. For example, if you or your colleague demonstrates emotions like anger, defensiveness, crying—taking a break may help you deal with the emotion so that it does not impede the conflict resolution process. Acknowledge the emotion, validate it, and move the conversation forward.

Anticipate the emotion you or your colleague may experience so that you can be prepared to neutralize it. This can sometimes avoid emotions taking over the conversation and interfering with resolution of the conflict. Some questions to ask when preparing for a discussion might be:

- What could the other person be thinking or feeling?
- What fears or concerns might they have?
- What has their reaction been in the past?

### 2. **Control Your Behaviors**

Our behaviors are the visible expression of our emotions and thoughts. When we don't have control, we can very quickly begin to display destructive behaviors that can damage relationships and make a conflict situation worse. At a minimum, these behaviors impede the successful resolution of the conflict. Examples of destructive behaviors are:

- Silence
- Glaring eye contact: "the look"
- Brevity or abruptness



- Sarcastic tone in voice
- Interrupting
- Snubbing or ignoring people
- Broad or extreme generalizations
- Using judgmental or evaluative comments
- Insults and put-downs
- Blaming, discrediting, or discounting
- Angry outburst or loss of control
- Making excuses
- Not sharing important information
- Creating us/them distinctions
- Undermining or sabotaging others' efforts
- Expressing cynicism

### 3. **Calm the Situation**

The environment can often contribute to conflict by making it difficult for someone to control their emotions or back away from a demanding or unrealistic stance. Conflict resolution cannot take place in a volatile situation. Take steps to create as calm and controlled environment as possible.

- Take a deep breath
- Take time out
- Find a private place to talk
- Express empathy, acknowledging not only what is being said, but the emotion behind the words
- Stress that you want to find a resolution
- Don't put up with abusive behavior

### 4. **Seek to Understand**

The fifth habit in Steven Covey's book The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People is 'Seek first to understand, then to be understood.' The basis of a lot of conflict is the failure to completely understand the other person's position.



When you listen carefully, it encourages the other person to calm down and then listen to you too.

- Use active listening skills
- Ask open-ended questions
- Maintain eye contact
- Try to sit on the same side of the table
- Don't interrupt
- Accept the information, you can dispute or correct it later
- Don't assume you already understand

## 5. Seek Resolution

It is not often that conflict can be left unresolved. While you may 'agree to disagree', in the workplace this can lead to tension and stress and eventually the conflict will emerge again. While not all parties may be totally satisfied with the final decision, it is important to agree that a resolution has been reached and that both parties felt they were treated fairly.

When you seek resolution, it is important to follow these guiding principles:

- **Preserve dignity and respect.** Keep your focus on issues, not personalities. When you show sincere respect for people who disagree with you they will be less inclined to be defensive.
- **Honor differences, including your own perspective.** People view the world differently; it is important to recognize that others can have deeply held beliefs different from your own.
- **Find common ground without forcing compliance or unwilling change.** If you accomplish anything at all, agree that you want to resolve the conflict through a consensus building process. You don't want to force your solution on the other person, just as you don't want one forced on you.



## Pitfalls to Avoid

- See the conflict as an issue that must be blamed on someone.
- Assume every conflict is a fight to win
- Focus only on what you want
- Portray the situation as “us versus them”
- Assume sole responsibility for resolving the conflict
- Assume it is the sole responsibility of the other person to resolve the conflict
- Repeat arguments in a louder voice
- Surprise and overwhelm
- Return every slight with a rebuke
- Pretend to listen
- Use the other’s arguments only to strengthen your position
- Assume the resolution is either “his way or my way”
- Equate success with getting your way
- Gloat over your victory
- Using blaming words
- Using “you” statements



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