

# Conflict Management

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## **About Conflict Management:**

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. In any situation involving more than one person, conflict can arise. The causes of conflict range from philosophical differences and divergent goals to power imbalances. Unmanaged or poorly managed conflicts generate a breakdown in trust and lost productivity. For small businesses, where success often hinges on the cohesion of a few people, loss of trust and productivity can signal the death of the business. With a basic understanding of the five conflict management strategies, small business owners can better deal with conflicts before they escalate beyond repair.



## Strategy One: Accommodating

The accommodating strategy essentially entails giving the opposing side what it wants. The use of accommodation often occurs when one of the parties wishes to keep the peace or perceives the issue as minor. For example, a business that requires formal dress may institute a "casual Friday" policy as a low-stakes means of keeping the peace with the rank and file. Employees who use accommodation as a primary conflict management strategy, however, may keep track and develop resentment.



## **Strategy Two: Avoiding**

The avoidance strategy seeks to put off conflict indefinitely. By delaying or ignoring the conflict, the avoider hopes the problem resolves itself without a confrontation. Those who actively avoid conflict frequently have low esteem or hold a position of low power. In some circumstances, avoiding can serve as a profitable conflict management strategy, such as after the dismissal of a popular but unproductive employee. The hiring of a more productive replacement for the position soothes much of the conflict.



## Strategy Three: Collaborating

Collaboration works by integrating ideas set out by multiple people. The object is to find a creative solution acceptable to everyone. Collaboration, though useful, calls for a significant time commitment not appropriate to all conflicts. For example, a business owner should work collaboratively with the manager to establish policies, but collaborative decision-making regarding office supplies wastes time better spent on other activities.



## **Strategy Four: Compromising**

The compromising strategy typically calls for both sides of a conflict to give up elements of their position in order to establish an acceptable, if not agreeable, solution. This strategy prevails most often in conflicts where the parties hold approximately equivalent power. Business owners frequently employ compromise during contract negotiations with other businesses when each party stands to lose something valuable, such as a customer or necessary service.



**compromise**

## Strategy Five: Competing

Competition operates as a zero-sum game, in which one side wins and other loses. Highly assertive personalities often fall back on competition as a conflict management strategy. The competitive strategy works best in a limited number of conflicts, such as emergency situations. In general, business owners benefit from holding the competitive strategy in reserve for crisis situations and decisions that generate ill-will, such as pay cuts or layoffs.





Learning how to handle disputes efficiently is a necessary skill for anyone in management and the key to preventing it from hindering employees' professional growth. Here is the conflict resolution process in five steps

### **Step 1: Define the source of the conflict.**

The more information you have about the cause of the problem, the more easily you can help to resolve it. To get the information you need, use a series of questions to identify the cause, like, "When did you feel upset?" "Do you see a relationship between that and this incident?" "How did this incident begin?"

As a manager or supervisor, you need to give both parties the chance to share their side of the story. It will give you a better understanding of the situation, as well as demonstrate your impartiality. As you listen to each disputant, say, "I see" or "uh huh" to acknowledge the information and encourage them to continue to open up to you.

### **Step 2: Look beyond the incident.**

Often, it is not the situation but the point of view of the situation that causes anger to fester and ultimately leads

to a shouting match or other visible and disruptive result. The source of the conflict might be a minor issue that occurred months before, but the level of stress has grown to the point where the two parties have begun attacking each other personally instead of addressing the real problem. In the calm of your office, you can get them to look beyond the triggering incident to see the real cause. Once again, probing questions will help, like, "What do you think happened here?" or "When do you think the problem between you first arose?"



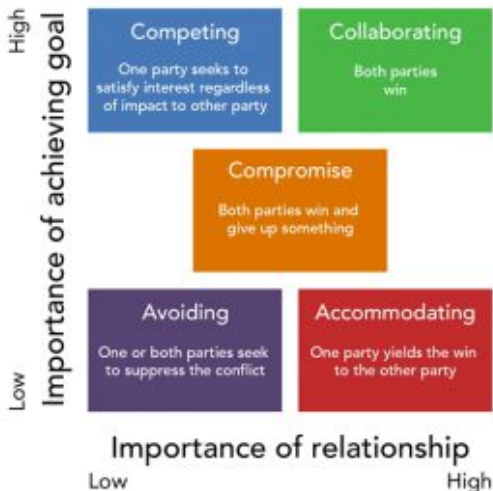
### Step 3: Request solutions.

After getting each party's viewpoint, the next step is to get them to identify how the situation could be changed. Again, question the parties to solicit their ideas: "How can you make things better between you?" As mediator, you have to be an active listener, aware of every verbal nuance, as well as a good reader of body language. You want to get the disputants to stop fighting and start cooperating, and that means steering the discussion away from finger pointing and toward ways of resolving the conflict.



## Step 4: Identify solutions both disputants can support.

You are listening for the most acceptable course of action. Point out the merits of various ideas, not only from each other's perspective, but in terms of the benefits to the organization. For instance, you might suggest the need for greater cooperation and collaboration to effectively address team issues and departmental problems.



## Step 5: Agreement.

The mediator needs to get the two parties to shake hands and accept one of the alternatives identified in Step 4. The goal is to reach a negotiated agreement. Some mediators go as far as to write up a contract in which actions and time frames are specified. However, it might be sufficient to meet with the individuals and have them answer these questions: "What action plans will you both put in place to prevent conflicts from arising in the future?" and "What will you do if problems arise in the future?"



## How to Handle Conflict in the Workplace

1. Talk with the other person. ...
2. Focus on behavior and events, not on personalities. ...
3. Listen carefully. ...
4. Identify points of agreement and disagreement. ...
5. Prioritize the areas of **conflict**. ...
6. Develop a plan to work on each conflict. ...
7. Follow through on your plan. ...
8. Build on your success.

Conflict management, problem solving and decision making are topics that are generally considered to be distinct, but are actually interconnected such that they are used together to come up with the most feasible solution.

To come to the best possible outcome of a problem on the basis of sufficient information, certain problem solving steps need to be used. Some of these are as follows:

- Scrutinizing the problem
- Outlining the issue; solutions depends on the way it is outlined

- Detecting the main reasons which allowed the problem to occur
- Identifying the series of techniques to apply, and their outcomes
- Produce alternative options through processes such as brainstorming, discussions between groups and other discrete processes
- Choosing the simplest method that resolves the root cause
- Implementing the chosen method
- Monitoring and reviewing the execution

The flaw with this process is that it assumes there exists an ideal outcome, the information is available to reach this outcome, and the people taking part in the process are acting rationally. Unfortunately, this situation is extremely unusual.

Another flaw is the emotions of people involved in decision making. The core focus of conflict management is to reduce the effect of people's emotions and make them think rationally. The typical solution choices are:

- 1. Forcing/Directing** – A method whereby a superior with autonomous power has a right to force the decision

- 2. Smoothing/Accommodating** – Negotiating the matter and trying to settle down the dispute
- 3. Compromising/Reconciling** – A give and take approach where each side surrenders something in order to come to a solution. The extent of dispute limits the generation of options.
- 4. Problem-solving/Collaborating** – Refers to collective decision making to come up with a solution that is conventional
- 5. Avoiding/Withdrawing/Accepting** – A method which may not settle the dispute but allows time to calm the emotions

Any of these approaches can be used for conflict management depending on the nature of conflict, although their primary focus is to control the level of the dispute. But, in due course, the underlying problems of the conflict need to be solved in its entirety. To make the right decision, availability of sufficient and precise data needs to be present. Some decisions are not as simple, and data about them is not easily available.



The problems you can face range from simple to wicked problems.

- 1. Wicked Problems** are the kind of problems that continuously alter and demand the participant's complexity and emotions. An iterative approach is best for these kinds of problems, as decision to every step simplifies the problem.
- 2. In Dilemmas**, you have to choose the solution which is the least worse as there is no right answer to these problems, but choosing a solution is always better than not making a decision.
- 3. Conundrums** are complicated questions that have speculative or hypothetical answers.
- 4. Puzzles and mysteries** need superlative judgment in certain circumstances. Lack of time to contract these decisions to simple problems is a constraint in this approach, although you can apply processes to a point.
- 5. Problems** require hard work to be solved. Carefully and properly designed execution of problem solving processes can show the best outcomes.

In order to come to the best possible conclusion, an understanding and balance of the following points is essential:

1. Characteristics of problem at hand
2. Emotion and conflict of stakeholders
3. Features of different type of decisions
4. Pick up the single best decision using your best judgement in given circumstances

The core of all the above is choosing & implementing the best decision, followed by a continuous review of the decision, making changes as quickly as possible, and providing a feedback.





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