



# CONFLICT IN THE WORKPLACE

Conflict arises as a result of people having differing opinions, expectations, needs and often very different perspectives on how to approach any given situation. Despite conflict being an inevitable aspect of human relationship and interaction, there is opportunity to learn and grow through experience of what is known as conflict resolution.

Conflict resolution involves recognition and management of the particular conflict when it arises. It is crucial in the workplace that practical strategies are implemented to quickly and effectively resolve conflict before it escalates.

Unresolved or inadequately handled conflict, whether it be with clients or amongst staff can have a negative impact on ongoing relationships. This can lead to poor performance, particularly in terms of employee's motivation levels and capacity to work as a cohesive and efficient team. Eventually, the workplace becomes less productive and employees feel dissatisfied.

## COMMON RESPONSES TO CONFLICT

- **Avoidance or withdrawal** – eg. “Let's not talk about it”. Avoidance will only lead to pent up feelings, un-expressed views and eventually the conflict festers until it becomes too big to ignore.
- **Overgeneralising / the blame game**– eg. “you never”, “you always” serves to maintain or escalate the conflict.
- **Inappropriate use of power** – eg. “I am your manager, you should do what I say” statements or this type of attitude



will likely exacerbate the conflict.

- **Passive-aggressive** – eg. not talking to one another or making sarcastic remarks that serve to escalate the conflict.
- **Compromise or submission** – usually leaving at least one or both parties feeling dissatisfied, submission means the issue is not discussed and communication is cut off.





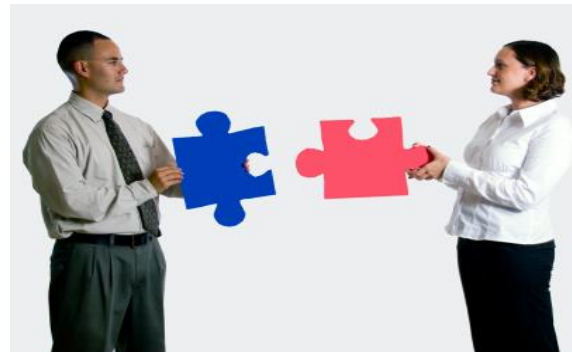
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## DEVELOPING A LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING AROUND HOW TO MANAGE CONFLICT INCLUDES IMPLEMENTING PARTICULAR COMMUNICATION TOOLS

**Identifying the underlying issue** – ie that is the root cause of the issue. It is also crucial that the underlying emotion is identified in order to move forward in resolving the conflict.

**Non- aggressive/ assertive communication techniques** – Assertive communication is fundamental to conflict resolution. Assertive communication means stating one's feelings and identifying a specific issue in a calm and clear manner without blaming. Listen to the other party without interrupting; ask for feedback if you need to clarify your understanding of the issue. Using "I" statements are helpful in avoiding arousing the defenses of the other person by stating how it is for you.

**Keep the communication open** – The ultimate goal in conflict resolution is for both parties to resolve the issue between themselves. It is important for both parties to be able to express their viewpoint. The idea behind this discussion is to pinpoint the underlying issue causing the



conflict and to address that issue in a way that both parties are satisfied with.

**Focus on the problem, not the individual** – Avoid pre-conceived attitudes about individuals. A person may not be the most affable individual or there may be a personality clash with someone on your staff. This does not mean they do not have a genuine issue or concern. When identifying and resolving the conflict, work toward a solution both parties can have some of their needs met. This is known as a win/win outcome, when after discussion and negotiation both parties are satisfied with the proposed solutions to the issue.

**Offer mutual respect** – Accept and respect that individual opinions may differ, do not try to force compliance, instead work to develop common agreement and work with areas where there is room for negotiation. Creative problem-solving strategies are essential to the adoption of positive approaches to conflict resolution. It is advisable to have some ideas about what your ideal outcome might look like, what your real needs are and





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what values are important to you in this situation so you are clear on this before approaching the other party.

**Collaboration** – Often called the ‘win-win’ approach is the amalgamation of individual needs and objectives toward a common goal. Collaboration requires assertive communication and co-operation in order to reach a solution that is better than that the individual could have reached on their own. Collaboration takes the approach of consensus and offers the concept of an integration of needs and looks at new possibilities to resolve the dispute in a meaningful way.

**Stress / Anger management techniques** – Finally, managing your personal stress and anger levels is very important when dealing with conflict. In relation to anger, if you are feeling

particularly emotional, it is a good idea to postpone the discussion till a time when you have calmed down and have had time to gain some clarity around the issue. In relation to stress, conflict can take a toll on the mental health of employees. It is therefore advisable to deal with the issue in a timely fashion. If dealing with the conflict directly with the parties involved is not an option or the conflict escalates and cannot be dealt with between the conflicting parties, it is advisable to inform HR or the site manager of the concern and arrangements should be made for meditation and resolution of the issue in a more structured format.

To access further information and support on managing conflicts in the workplace, contact your EAP coaches, mediators and counsellors on 1300 796 640 or [info@pureinsights.com.au](mailto:info@pureinsights.com.au).

