
Conflict Management

Conflict occurs where there are different ideas and points of view. When there is no difference of opinion you need to beware of Groupthink! Difference opens up the discussion and a chance to increase creativity and so, conflict can be a proactive rather than a destructive process. *Conflict management* is the process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing the positive aspects of conflict.

This process must be viewed as fair by everyone:

- It must meet legitimate needs.
- It is intended to reach a point of agreement between the participants.
- It strengthens participant's abilities for future cooperative work.

What process will you use when conflict arises?

The following are some suggestions that each group needs to customize.

IDENTIFY THE ISSUE The very first step in managing conflict is to agree on the description of the issue or problem. This requires excellent communication.

COMMUNICATE Conflicts are often caused by problems in communication. One person may have misunderstood what the other person has said. Or the other person may not have said what they meant to say. Sometimes when we're angry we don't hear what the other person is saying. Sometimes when there is a conflict, people do not tell each other, which causes even more conflict.

LISTEN Keeping eye contact, leaning closer, nodding your head when you understand a particular point, and ignoring distractions that are going on around you are some of the ways to send the right "body talk" messages.

SUMMARIZE When a person is finished expressing a thought, summarize the facts and emotions behind what they have said so that they know you have understood what they've said and how they are feeling.

CLARIFY Ask questions to clarify or make clearer different parts of the problem to make sure that you fully understand the other person's perspective.

SPEAK CLEARLY When you speak, try to send a clear message, with a specific purpose, and with respect to the listener. Say how you are affected by the situation.

AVOID SIDETRACKERS Don't interrupt, criticize, laugh at the other person, offer advice, bring up your own experiences, or change the subject.

BRAINSTORM Once the problem is agreed on, try to come up with as many ideas as possible. During this process, any idea that comes to mind should be expressed and written down. Don't judge whether the ideas are good or bad, or even discuss the ideas. Just try to come up with as many possible solutions as possible.

WIN-WIN OPTIONS Look for ideas that could help both sides. Stick to interests and desired outcomes. When we focus on interests instead of positions we find solutions.

FIND A FAIR SOLUTION Then go through the ideas using fair criteria to see which idea might be best. Using fair criteria means to judge each idea with both people's interests in mind. Try to use reason and not emotion to judge an idea, and with respect to each person's difference in perception. A fair solution respects the interests of all sides.

