

Conflict Management

Why is coping with conflict important?

Differences of opinion are part of life. Conflict is not always bad, but it does need to be managed at work and at home.

Where does conflict come from?

People in the same situation can have very different feelings or ideas about what to do. For example, one supervisor may yell at a late employee while another may ignore him.

Conflict may arise over power. For instance, a couple may have conflict over who should make decisions about spending money.

Is conflict healthy?

Conflict can be healthy when it brings differences out into the open so they can be talked about. Differences of opinion help people develop a sense of who they are, a sense of self. Conflicts help people to take responsibility for stating how they feel. Conflicts can lead to people being more motivated and creative due to being open to new ideas and ways of thinking other than their own.

How do people manage conflict?

Because people are not the same, they deal with conflict differently. Also, some conflicts are small and easily managed. If a conflict is not very important to you, you may give in without feeling that too much was lost.

There are several ways people manage conflict:

- If your style is to compete, you may feel that if you do not win, you are a loser. You try to make sure that your way is the way things are done.
- If your style is to avoid, you may not want to talk about the issue.
- If your style is to accommodate, you give in to the other person's idea.
- If your style is to compromise, you address the conflict openly so that both people get some of their needs met.

Most people have one style of managing conflict that comes naturally to them. It is important to be able to use any of the styles. People can be taught to manage conflict. For example, you need to be able to compromise if you are a natural competitor. Decide whether an issue is important to you, whether the other person's feelings are important to you, and what you will win or lose by using a certain conflict strategy with that person.

What are the key steps to resolve conflict?

Major conflicts can be resolved in the following way if both parties are willing to participate:

1. Set aside a time and place to deal with the conflict. Choose a period of time, like an hour, and stick to it. This keeps conflict from dragging on in an unhelpful way.
2. Each person writes down his view of what the conflict is and reads it aloud to the other person.
3. Each person writes down and reads aloud to the other his feelings and dissatisfactions about the conflict.
4. Each person writes down and then reads aloud to the other what he needs and wants and what his goals are in relation to the conflict.
5. During steps (2), (3), and (4), each person listens carefully to the other.
6. In a role reversal, each person argues the other's point of view (rather than his own) to make sure that each really listened to the other.
7. Each person lists and then shares aloud with the other how goals can be achieved, using compromise if needed.
8. Focus on "win-win" situations in which both people feel that some of their needs are met.
9. If necessary, use a facilitator (any neutral third party who can listen well) to keep the process on track and on time.
10. Write a contract for a plan of action, including what each party agrees to do, how they will do it, and by when.
11. Agree on how the contract will be put into effect and set up a follow-up meeting to see how things are working out.

How can conflict be avoided?

Conflicts sometimes happen because people have not been listening to each other or have been pursuing their own goals without paying attention to others. Since conflict is harder to resolve when it has gone on for a long time, being able to prevent conflict can be important.

Conflicts can sometimes be prevented if you:

- Use active listening skills, such as making eye contact and repeating the key points you have heard to show you understand.
- Balance being assertive with accommodating, so that your point is heard and becomes part of the compromise.
- Try to be more tolerant and accepting of others.
- Acknowledge other's point of view and let them know that you understand their position.

Unresolved conflicts can lead to blaming others, angry feelings, fear, and hurt feelings. When conflicts are resolved, people can work better together as a team

(raising children, for example) and have the boost in self-esteem that comes from working through something difficult.

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