

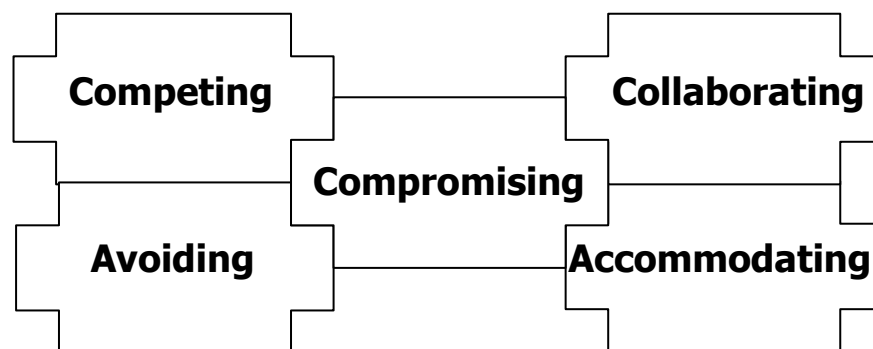
## **Conflict Management**

### **How can I manage conflict at work?**

Conflict is not always a bad thing. It can help to air differences, and very often will improve working relationships in the long term. From time to time you will need to resolve a conflict, either between yourself and a team member, or two or more team members. There will be times when you have no choice, for example when complying with an important company policy or procedure, but in many cases you will have a choice of ways of resolving it.

### **Conflict resolving methods**

There are five basic methods:



### **Avoiding**

This is a passive method of co-existing peacefully that avoids addressing conflict by smoothing out differences and emphasising common ground. It is unlikely to satisfy either party's interests, and because of this it can lead to frustration all round which may emerge later.

#### **Phrases you may hear:**

'Can we talk about that later?', 'I'm not in a position to...'

### **Accommodating**

This is another passive but very co-operative style and amounts to giving in. It will satisfy one person's needs at the expense of the others', and is likely to cause resentment that may emerge later. It may be a reaction to the other person's competing style.

#### **Phrases you may hear:**

'I'll give you that', 'I don't want to offend anyone', 'You've convinced me'

### **Competing**

This is an aggressive style that pushes for your goals at the other person's expense, and uses any advantage such as management status in order to win. It can be seen when one person knows that another will give in quickly.

#### **Phrases you may hear:**

'Just do it', 'I must make this clear', 'I'm not prepared to change', 'I need you to ...'

## Compromising

This is about finding a middle ground, mutually acceptable solution that partly satisfies both parties. It resolves issues by bargaining or negotiating and is more about accommodating differences than resolving underlying issues.

### Phrases you may hear:

'Let's split the difference', 'This'll be a quick win', 'Let's meet half way'

## Collaborating

Collaborating will generally be the most satisfactory method of resolving a conflict. It is an assertive style that involves working with the other person in order to find a solution that satisfies the both parties' needs. It means digging into the issue/s to uncover the concerns of both individuals and to find an alternative solution that may not be obvious at first. It might take the form of exploring the reasons behind a disagreement in order to gain insights into what motivates the other person, or working together to resolve an issue which otherwise would have them competing. The phrase 'creative conflict' refers to the fact that a properly made solution may leave both people in a better position than before. A key to this is that the parties concerned must create the solution; it cannot be imposed by an outside source.

### Phrases you may hear:

'Let's see what we can do about this', 'So what we agree on is...', 'Let's see what the problem is', 'How can we solve this'.

## A process for resolving conflict

The parties involved should look at the conflict in three steps:



1. **Define exactly what the issue is**, and what objectives they both need to achieve to reach a successful outcome.
2. **Devise and discuss a number of alternative solutions** that will give the desired outcome. These may include some creative ideas which although not workable themselves, could help inspire other more practical ideas.
3. **Agree on the preferred solution** or combination of solutions, and who will do what of the steps needed to reach this.

During the discussions it would be useful to remember a few ground rules:

- **Concentrate on the issue** to be solved, not the personalities of the people.
- **Get accurate and objective information**, don't rely on your assumptions about the issue.
- **Listen** to the other person or both parties.
- **Be specific** – avoid 'You always' or 'You never'.
- **Be positive** – 'How can we make this work' not 'It can't work because...'
- **Be open and honest**, and avoid hidden agendas.

- **State your feelings** where these are central or relevant to the issue, and aim to discover how others feel and why
- **Work towards a solution**, rather than going over the differences.
- **Aim for a win-win solution** that satisfies the needs of all parties

It may be useful to involve a facilitator to ensure that the ground rules are kept, and any others you may want to decide on such as 'Only one person to speak at once'. The facilitator should not take part in the content of the discussions, but is there to make sure the agreed process is followed. This is not the same as an arbitrator who will make the final decision; this is rarely of use, and will not achieve a satisfactory outcome unless both parties accept the arbitrator's decision willingly.

**For related topics see Top Tips:**

- **Development Methods**
- **Feedback**
- **Mentoring**
- **Objective Setting**
- **Rapport**