



February 2022



Conflicts – causes, prevention and resolution

Conflict in the workplace is inevitable because of the natural differences between people due to their beliefs, values and personalities. According to Joyce Weiss, a master coach specialising in communication strategy, **90 per cent of problems in companies boil down to a lack of communication.**

This is because people are afraid to be honest and say what they think so as not to anger anyone or cause conflict. Unfortunately, this alone can lead to a dispute.

Conflicts in the workplace can be caused by:

- personality differences
- poor communication
- opposing positions and power struggles
- ego and pride
- jealousy and competition
- unmet needs and wage problems
- recognising inequality and injustice
- unexplained or ambiguous roles
- emotional problems and stress.

The different causes have a similar effect – a clash between workers. It is therefore useful to know how to prevent conflict situations and how to resolve them.

- **Be direct, honest and fair** as a leader, this will help you gain credibility. Make all rules and communications consistent and clear. Define acceptable behaviour and eliminate ambiguity.
- **Make everyone responsible for conflict resolution.** This is another tip for managers. You have to make sure that everyone is committed to avoid and solve problems.
- **Do not ignore conflict.** 'Hit it' with all your strength. Be proactive. Be aware of areas of potential dispute and intervene before the problem escalates. Both managers and employees can do this.
- **Put yourself in the other person's shoes** or, if you are a manager, try to understand both sides of the conflict. This is where the WIIFM factor comes in (What's In It For Me, what are the needs of both parties in the conflict). Understanding this is key to understanding the emotions underlying the conflict.
- **See conflict as a learning opportunity.** See what you can learn from it, what can be positive and beneficial.
- **Improve morale** by introducing team building exercises, conflict resolution workshops and other ways to ensure a good atmosphere in the workplace.
- **Use non-judgmental language.** Don't blame yourself, treat each conflict as a separate case, understanding that situations vary according to circumstances.

Conflicts in the workplace are inevitable but manageable. As a leader, you can take many measures, such as those described above, to try to prevent or mitigate them at work.



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