

Workplace conflict examples and how to handle them



Conflict is an aspect of work that is inevitable. Disagreements in the workplace are normal and *can* promote improvement when they're constructive, but *fighting* is a negative occurrence that can tear companies apart. Here are some good examples of workplace conflict to help identify and reduce unhealthy workplace conflict in your office or job site.

We have all your conflict management solutions right here at [Businessmanagementdaily.com](https://www.businessmanagementdaily.com).

In this article, we cover:

- Workplace conflict examples
- How to prevent conflict in the workplace
- Resolving conflict

There are many different types of conflict that can most times be easily prevented or resolved by a good management and HR team.

Why does conflict happen?

Conflict in the workplace goes far deeper than just a [struggle over resources](#). The causes of workplace conflict

go beyond just simple needs and into complex psychological reasoning between employees.

It's important to remember that people hardly ever consider themselves "the bad guy" in a situation. When conflict arises, each person feels justified in their position. Needless to say, understanding common workplace conflicts is key for finding the right solutions.

Here are a few examples of conflict in the workplace, and ways to combat them for a more productive workspace

Company culture

Companies, within reason, have a right to their own opinions and policies. That means that not every employee might agree with the company and its leadership's stance on particular issues whether they be larger political issues or ones directly impacting the organization. That's ok! However, it's vital to keep in mind that not all employees likely agree with the view of upper management, and they may not support everything the company does.

Tips for improving toxic company or workplace culture

Generally try to avoid to political, ethical, and other controversial topics in the workplace that don't directly concern operations. A utility company may need to speak with employees about current debates over energy policy. However, it's probably best to avoid taking a stance on abortion both internally and externally.

The same is true for management and other employees. Just because you have a strong opinion doesn't mean you should call a meeting to talk about it.

Another way to create healthy company culture is by hiring a diverse set of employees.

Personality clashes

Some peoples' personalities don't mesh well with each other, it's a simple fact of life. People who don't like each other, or have very different communication styles, are likely to end up in conflict at some point. This doesn't necessarily mean that anyone is in the wrong (though sometimes it could).

An employee who is more reserved may respond to questions with short, to-the-point, answers that come off as rude to a more outgoing employee. On the flip side, that outgoing and extroverted employee's tendency to stop by for long discussions in the office might be seen by another employee as not being respectful of their time. Neither employee is necessarily wrong, but the differences here could create opportunities for tension.

Tips for solving personality clashes

Resolution

The ultimate goal, of course, is to resolve an issue. Generally, the human resources department is responsible for dealing with workplace conflicts. The HR team should be a mediator in any significant problems. However, an employee very well might bring up a concern about another employee to their manager first. Unfortunately, escalating an issue to HR immediately could make a problem worse between two employees. If a conflict is minor, it may be best for a manager to coach their employee on how to handle it before filing a complaint with HR.

This works in a situation where the source of conflict is minor, but would probably be inappropriate in a situation where one employee feels bullied or targeted by another. In that case, it's best to address the problem quickly and seriously.

Separation

If it becomes apparent that two employees are never going to find tranquility working in close quarters, then separation is essential. However, an employee that has problems with one employee may also have issues with another. Don't simply assume separation will solve all your problems, it's best to keep a close eye on both employees to ensure they don't have future issues pop up with others.

Cultural differences

Cultural differences happen when one employee's culture greatly opposes a practice or custom held by another employee's culture. This could be something significant, like religious differences, but it could also be something more minor.

Most times a person's diet isn't highly relevant, but a vegan/vegetarian employee might clash with an employee who loves to eat meat and frequently talks about their hunting trips.

Likewise, workers in Eastern cultures tend to speak less directly and are more comfortable with long gaps of silence in meetings leaving time to think before responding. However, in Western culture, it's generally favored to be direct and gaps in conversation are often seen as awkward. These cultural differences could create awkward meeting dynamics in a diverse work environment.

Tips for improving cultural differences

Team building exercises can be a great way to get people to forget their cultural differences and get along with each other. These exercises can also help employees better understand one another's perspectives. However, do be cautious that if certain employees already have engaged in conflict with one another, they could see this as an opportunity to continue. Each employee needs to approach the activity by putting in genuine effort.

Leadership style

It's no lie that some people just don't like their bosses. And obviously, some bosses simply don't enjoy being around certain employees. Extreme or unreasonable leadership styles can create resentment in employees and result in workplace conflict.

It's important to remember that while some employees may love public recognition, others may clam up at the idea of being called out in front of their peers. Similarly, a manager may see a more hands-on or hands-off approach as a positive, while a direct report may see it as either micromanagement or in the latter case disinterest in their work.

Tips for improving leadership style

Management positions pay more because it's harder to be a manager. They hold more responsibility for failures and are responsible for the performance of employees beyond themselves.

Proper management training is essential for a well-functioning workplace. On top of properly trained managers who know how to handle employees, companies should be hiring top-notch management that has ample experience in the specific field of work. There is nothing worse than a manager who knows nothing about the line of work.

However, skill isn't the only thing a manager needs. They also need to understand their direct reports. Don't simply assume that every employee likes to be managed the same way. Have a meeting with each employee and ask how they like to be recognized for their work, what management style works best for them, and anything else they need to be successful.

You can't *always* accommodate an employee's peculiarities. For example, an employee that doesn't love performance reviews may be out of luck if that's a key component of qualifying for promotions and raises. However, you could schedule regular less formal check-ins with them to discuss performance issues and cut back on the stress of formal reviews. Making an effort where you can makes a huge difference.

Miscommunication

Miscommunication is a classic cause of arguments and problems in the workplace, so that's why training employees to communicate well with each other is a great tool for success.

Tips for improved communication in the workplace

Because poor communication is one of the most common causes of conflict, the solution is to help employees communicate better with each other. This could mean prohibiting headphones in the workplace, or it could mean calling daily meetings to let employees interact with each other and talk about problems that may be happening. Either way, it's necessary to understand what the communication issue is related to.

If an employee doesn't feel expectations are clear, then perhaps having a project brief step could improve clarity. If the team isn't on the same page, weekly meetings may be all that's needed. If important information isn't being communicated to the right people, that could be an opportunity for process improvement.

Physical confrontation

Violence is never acceptable in the workplace. However, simple conflicts could escalate to a point where it becomes a physical altercation, though just the threat of violence should also be taken equally seriously. Additionally, it's important to record any instances of violence or threats for use in potential lawsuits or as reason for termination.

Tips for handling physical confrontation in the workplace

Physical confrontation is absolutely unacceptable, and it should be disciplined to the fullest.

Termination

Employees who assault other employees should be immediately terminated. The threat of violence also likely merits termination, regardless of the degree.

Police report

Get the police involved when necessary. If a physical assault actually takes place, then a police report likely needs to be filed. Additionally, if there's fear that an employee may engage in violent behavior, then report it to the police so it can be investigated.

Point of view

Differing points of view between co-workers will sometimes result in some type of conflict. Some disagreements may be silly, like over the use of the breakroom, or completely unrelated to work (remember, try to avoid talk about controversial topics!). However, other times different points of view can be relevant, like disagreeing on how to approach a particular project. Regardless of the reason, differing points of view certainly can spark conflict at work.

How to handle conflict related to different points of view

Although minor arguments may be easily settled, more intricate disagreements are a difficult issue. When differing points of view on work-related topics are creating conflict, then it's best to discuss these and weigh the merits of each. Different points of view are valuable, and conflict over them doesn't necessarily have to become toxic. Allow employees to share their perspectives. In some cases, something in the middle may be the best path forward, in other cases, it won't be.

Either way, employees don't have to agree with a decision in all cases. Many businesses operate on a 80/100 rule. You may only agree with the decision 80%, but you should be 100% committed to executing on it.

Absenteeism

Some employees have a serious problem with being absent or tardy. These absences, especially when unscheduled, can cause hardships on other employees. Likewise, a late employee may cause another employee to have to stay late to cover until they arrive. These conflicts are understandable, however it's still necessary to handle them professionally.

Tips for handling tardiness and absenteeism

First, a positive attitude always helps when dealing with an employee who isn't always punctual at work. Being negative won't help a slacker be better — encourage them to get better. Management should have compassion over employees who miss work(to a point) and recognize the fact that employees are human and have flaws. If these absences or bouts of tardiness are newly occurring, have a chat about what's going on in their life.

These issues *should* be addressed by management, however. After all, it's not a coworker's fault that an employee is missing work, and they shouldn't have to suffer the burden unassisted. If this is a recurring issue, address it quickly, and provide support for employees who have to pick up the extra workload.

Traits to teach employees in the workplace

Encouraging specific qualities in the workplace can reduce the risk of conflict. As an employer, you have a huge influence on your employees (they are with you all the time!!)

Giving employees incentives for good behavior by administering weekly or monthly performance reviews is one of those easy ways to create productivity. However it's also a benefit to simply remind and encourage employees to behave well, exhibit good teamwork, and to follow certain guiding principles. Even more importantly, ensure that the work environment actually supports that. Telling employees to take time for themselves or to have casual social conversations with coworkers to foster relationships is great. However, if you then schedule those employees in 8 hours of meetings on top of existing hard deadlines, it's nearly impossible for them to do those things.

Here are a few traits to encourage your staff members to have *or work on*:

Problem-solving

Business owners love when employees are capable of solving problems by themselves. Good problem-solving in the workplace means less hiccups and even better *more profit*.

Good communication

Facilitate active listening into your employee's regiment. Encourage a process that requires employees to interact with each other in positive ways. Check out pages like [this](#) for a more in-depth approach on how to help employees communicate better with each other.

Teamwork

There are countless teambuilding exercises that will help your team work more efficiently. Do a quick internet search to find articles like [this](#) that will help you find some good exercises to help improve teamwork in your work area.

Identifying problems

Seeing the common causes of problems before they happen makes work that much more simple. An employee who identifies problems has the potential to save companies from disaster and eliminate potential conflict downstream.

Self-awareness

Encourage employees to take criticism and mesh their work styles with other employees. The ability to take responsibility for mistakes is an attribute that the best employees have. Self-awareness can help smooth out many work-related problems.

Kindness

Kindness is the best way to minimize problems in the workplace, employees who are kind and empathetic are less likely to escalate conflict. Kind people are the ones who resolve conflict. Gathering team members together for a nice meal or showing appreciation in other ways is a good way to show kindness.

Career goals

Ask each employee where they see themselves in the next year and try to help them achieve their goals in every way possible. Employees that feel fulfilled are more likely to be good teammembers.

Record everything

Part of proactive conflict management is recording everything that happens.

For example, most restaurant owners typically have cameras in the kitchen, so they can hop on their smartphones and see what's going on in real-time. Using tools like surveillance will help keep employees honest, and it is also useful to record events like disagreements and accidents. However, this level of surveillance could also make many employees uncomfortable, so think long and hard before implementing it.

Otherwise, you can use other methods like documentation. HR may wish to use a voice recorder when meeting with an employee to talk about a conflict. Files and documents should be added to employee records when issues come up. Remember, workplace conflict can and does result in lawsuits, so any and all recorded information can be used to help sway decisions in the courtroom.

Make a plan for the right solution to workplace conflict

Now that you have brushed up on all the common conflict examples that happen in the workplace, you'll need a plan for what to do when conflict does break out.

Each case is different and requires a separate plan of action, so the best thing management and HR can do for avoiding workplace conflict is to be prepared for anything! Murphy's law is a real thing. *Anything that can go wrong will go wrong.* Good luck!