

Steps to Resolve Workplace Conflict

Introduction

Conflict in the workplace is inevitable. Often, conflict erupts between people due to different values, personalities, opinions, goals, and needs. The workplace seems to foster differences and value differing viewpoints, which are the exact things that cause conflict to occur.

However, conflict is not always a bad thing. It can lead to innovative solutions that people with similar opinions and viewpoints would not likely achieve. The key to channeling conflict into a positive workplace function is to resolve it effectively. When resolved properly, conflict can cause personal and professional development that leads to employees who are more productive.

In this reading, we will look at steps that facilitators can follow to resolve conflict in the workplace.

Steps to Resolve Conflict

Conflict resolution is necessary in all types of organizations. Frequently, facilitators are assigned the role of helping employees to resolve conflict. Facilitators can be managers, leaders, or designated employees granted the facilitator role in the organization. The more educated facilitators are on how to resolve conflict in an effective and healthy way, the better the outcome will be. We will discuss four steps designed to equip facilitators with step-by-step instructions on how to effectively resolve conflict in the workplace below.

1. *Meet with the conflicting parties together.* This step is one of the most overlooked, yet necessary, steps when employees try to resolve conflict. All parties involved in the conflict should be brought together to discuss the issue at hand. Each party should present its view of the problem without interruptions from the other parties. It is important for each party to hear everyone's viewpoint and to gain a clear picture of why the parties are conflicting with each other. Ensure that each party states its case clearly and calmly without personally attacking the other parties.



2. Ask each party for specific suggestions on how to resolve the conflict.

Each party should state two to three specific suggestions on how it thinks the conflict could be resolved. For example, “I would like Tom and Susan to provide me with a project status update by Thursday at 10 a.m., so I can provide an accurate project status update to the client on Friday at 8 a.m.” Another example might be, “I would like to own both new policy requests and claims for my clients to reduce client confusion on who to contact for different requests.” These examples are very clear and precise, indicating exactly what actions need to occur and by when in order to resolve the conflict.

As the facilitator, help the parties come up with specific suggestions. Try to encourage each party to identify what action is the root cause of the problem. Then, prompt them to come up with specific ways that would resolve the issue. Asking additional questions of the employees may help trigger the parties to uncover the real problem, not just the symptom of the problem, and then to outline a specific resolution.

3. Discuss the issue and agree to make changes. Next, the parties should discuss the suggestions presented in the previous step and agree to make the necessary changes. This step is where each party engages in a negotiation to come up with a resolution plan. Depending on the complexity of the conflict, it may take some time before all parties come to an agreement on what suggestion should be implemented to resolve the conflict.

As the facilitator, ensure that each party is reasonable and professional. Do not allow the parties to be disrespectful to one another or for the discussion to turn into another argument. Act quickly to dissolve any discussions that start to escalate into another argument. Encourage each party to give and take to make sure each party feels satisfied with the resolution plan. Also, make sure you remain impartial to either party. Both sides must know that you are there as a neutral party to mediate the conflict.

4. Follow-up to ensure that the conflict is resolved. The last step is to set a date for the resolution to be implemented and follow-up on its progress. While all parties might feel better after the creation of a resolution plan in step three, the conflict is not resolved until the resolution plan has been implemented.



Conflict resolution is not an easy job. Actually, it is quite a challenge, even for experienced mediators. Facilitators play a key role in helping to maintain a healthy environment for all parties to discuss the problem and reach an agreement to resolve it. Intervening as appropriate can encourage parties to work toward a resolution before the problem gets out of hand. In addition, this practice develops your own conflict resolution skills, which is a necessity in today's business world.

Summary:

- Conflict is inevitable in the workplace, because companies foster different experiences and viewpoints.
- Conflict is not always a bad thing; healthy conflict can lead to innovative solutions that people with similar opinions and viewpoints would not likely achieve.
- There are four steps that facilitators can follow to resolve conflict in the workplace.
 1. Meet with the conflicting parties together.
 2. Ask each party for specific suggestions on how to resolve the conflict.
 3. Discuss the issue and agree to make changes.
 4. Follow-up to ensure the conflict is resolved.
- Facilitators play a key role in keeping a healthy, balanced environment for all parties to discuss the problem and reach an agreement to resolve it.

