

# DEALING WITH CONFLICT IN THE WORKPLACE THE LEADERS LENS WORKBOOK



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**THE LEADERS LENS:** A nostalgic look back at ways of developing personal growth and building leadership skills from the past that work just as well today. **DEALING WITH CONFLICT IN THE WORKPLACE**

## WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

### OVERVIEW

Conflict is an inherent aspect of human interaction, particularly in the dynamic environment of the workplace. It arises from differences in opinions, values, and interests, and can manifest in various forms, from minor disagreements to major disputes.

Understanding the nature of conflict is essential for workplace managers who seek to foster a harmonious and productive work environment.

### Catalyst for growth

By recognising that conflict is not merely a negative force but a potential catalyst for growth, managers can approach disputes with a mindset that encourages resolution and collaboration.

At its core, conflict is often rooted in miscommunication and differing perspectives. Each individual brings their unique experiences and viewpoints to the table, which can lead to misunderstandings and friction.

As workplace managers, it is crucial to cultivate an atmosphere where open dialogue is encouraged. By fostering a culture of transparency and trust, managers can help employees feel safe expressing their thoughts and concerns. This proactive approach not only mitigates the occurrence of conflicts but also empowers individuals to address issues before they escalate.

### Common Sources of Workplace Disputes

In any workplace, the potential for conflict is an ever-present reality that, when left unaddressed, can hinder productivity and morale. Common sources of workplace disputes often stem from:

1. Miscommunication
2. Differing expectations
3. The complexities of interpersonal relationships.

As managers, it is essential to recognise that these disputes can arise from seemingly innocuous situations, such as a misunderstanding in an email or the assignment of roles in a team project.

By identifying these sources early on, you position yourself to not only mitigate conflict but also foster a culture of open communication and collaboration.

One prevalent source of conflict is the clash of personalities and work styles. Each individual brings their unique traits to the workplace, influenced by their backgrounds, experiences, and expectations.

When diverse personality types interact, misunderstandings can occur, leading to polarised groups and tension. As a manager, cultivating emotional intelligence within your team can help bridge these gaps.



### Think about this

CONFLICT IS NEVER COMFORTABLE.  
IT IS SOMETHING WE STRIVE TO AVOID.  
CONFLICT IS PART OF LIFE.  
AVOIDING IT IS NEVER THE ANSWER.  
IT CAN BE A POSITIVE OCCURANCE.  
WHEN HANDLED PROPERLY CONFLICT CAN LEAD TO  
BETTER COMMUNICATIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS.

### THE COST OF UNRESOLVED CONFLICT

The cost of unresolved conflict in the workplace extends far beyond the immediate discomfort it creates; it permeates the very fabric of organisational culture and productivity.

When conflicts are allowed to fester, they can lead to a breakdown in communication, stifling collaboration and innovation. Employees may become disengaged, resulting in decreased morale and increased turnover.

The ripple effects of unresolved disputes can lead to diminished trust among team members, creating a toxic environment where fear and resentment overshadow creativity and cooperation.



### COMMON CONFLICT REACTIONS

1. IGNORE IT (Avoidance)
2. GIVE IN (Accommodate)
3. MY WAY OR THE HIGHWAY (Command)
4. SPLIT THE DIFFERENCE (Compromise)
5. COLLABORATION (Win - win)

The best way is to go to collaboration and the content in this workshop gives you tips and structure the achieve that create your template using the four action steps and improve the outcomes of many of your conflicts.

## MANAGING CONFLICTS: STRATEGIES, ADVANTAGES, AND DISADVANTAGES

As we have already mentioned conflict is an inevitable aspect of human interaction, arising from differences in values, beliefs, interests, and goals.

Effective conflict management is crucial for maintaining harmonious relationships and fostering a productive environment. Various strategies can be employed to manage conflicts, each with its own advantages and disadvantages.

Selecting the appropriate strategy depends on the specific context, the importance of the issue, and the desired outcome for the relationships involved.

### 1. IGNORE IT (AVOIDANCE)

Pros:

- Allows time for emotions to cool down, leading to more rational decision-making.
- Useful when the conflict is trivial or when more information is needed before addressing the issue.

Cons:

- May lead to unresolved issues, escalating the conflict over time.
- Can be perceived as neglecting the problem, resulting in decreased trust and respect.

This strategy is particularly useful when the conflict is minor or when additional information is required before addressing the issue. However, avoidance can also have drawbacks.

If the conflict is significant, ignoring it may lead to unresolved issues that can escalate over time.

Additionally, avoiding conflicts might cause others to perceive a lack of concern, leading to decreased trust and respect.



## 2. GIVE IN (ACCOMMODATE)

### Pros:

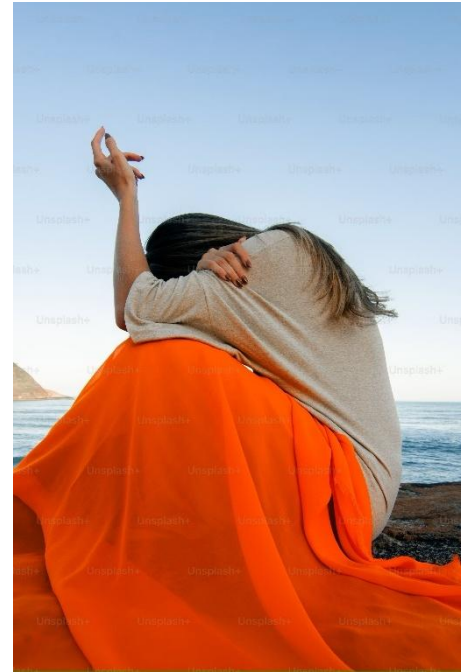
- Preserves harmony and can be appropriate in certain contexts.
- Demonstrates flexibility and a willingness to maintain relationships.

### Cons:

- May lead to feelings of resentment or being undervalued.
- Important personal or organizational goals might be compromised.

Accommodation involves giving in to the other party's demands to preserve harmony and maintain relationships. This strategy is beneficial in situations where the relationship is more important than the outcome of the conflict.

It demonstrates a willingness to be flexible and cooperative. However, consistently giving in can lead to feelings of resentment and undervaluation, as one's own needs and goals may be compromised. Over time, this can affect personal satisfaction and organizational effectiveness.



## 3. "MY WAY OR THE HIGHWAY" (COMMAND)

### Pros:

- Effective in situations requiring quick, decisive action, especially when unpopular decisions are necessary.
- Useful when standing firm on vital issues where compromise isn't an option.

### Cons:

- Can lead to strained relationships and reduced collaboration.
- May suppress open communication and discourage team input.



The competing strategy involves assertively pursuing one's own interests at the expense of others.

It is effective in situations requiring quick, decisive action, especially when unpopular decisions need to be made.

This approach is useful when standing firm on vital issues where compromise isn't possible. However, competing can strain relationships and reduce collaboration.

It may suppress open communication and discourage team input, leading to a lack of shared ownership and commitment.



#### 4. SPLIT THE DIFFERENCE (COMPROMISE)

##### Pros:

- Each party gains something, leading to a mutually acceptable solution.
- Fosters a sense of fairness and can expedite resolution.

##### Cons:

- May result in suboptimal solutions where neither party's needs are fully met.
- Potential to overlook deeper issues by focusing on quick fixes.

Compromising involves finding a middle ground where each party gains something but also gives up something. It fosters a sense of fairness and helps expedite the resolution of conflicts.

This strategy is useful when both parties have equal power and the issue is moderately important.

However, compromising may lead to suboptimal solutions that do not fully satisfy either party's needs.

By focusing on quick fixes, deeper underlying issues may be overlooked.



#### 5. COLLABORATION (WIN-WIN)

##### Pros:

- Leads to win-win outcomes by addressing the underlying interests of all parties.
- Strengthens relationships through mutual respect and shared problem-solving.

##### Cons:

- Requires significant time and effort to reach a consensus.
- Not practical in situations where quick decisions are necessary.



Collaboration is the most effective conflict resolution strategy, aiming for win-win outcomes by addressing the underlying interests of all parties.

It involves open communication, mutual respect, and shared problem-solving, leading to solutions that satisfy everyone's needs.

Collaboration strengthens relationships and fosters a cooperative environment.

However, it requires significant time and effort to reach a consensus, making it impractical in situations where quick decisions are necessary.

## COLLABORATION: TURN DIFFERENCES INTO OPPORTUNITIES

LACK OF RESOLUTION IS THE PROBLEM.  
IT STARTS WITH LISTENING.  
ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO EXPLAIN THEIR SIDE.  
THEY WILL BE MORE LIKELY TO LISTEN TO OURS.  
LISTEN TO UNDERSTAND NOT TO RESPOND.  
SEPARATE THE INDIVIDUAL FROM THE PROBLEM.  
ASK QUESTIONS.  
STATE WHAT YOUR UNDERSTANDING IS.  
BUILD ON THE OTHER PERSONS POSITION.  
DEMONSTRATE COMPASSION AND EMPATHY.  
THE OTHER PERSON NEEDS TO FEEL UNDERSTOOD.  
ONLY THEN EXPLAIN YOUR PERSPECTIVE.  
FOCUS ON CREATIVE SOLUTION.

### Notes



## CREATIVE SOLUTION



MAKE SURE EVERYONE KNOWS WHAT TO EXPECT.  
EVEN IF YOU CANNOT GET ON IT DOES NOT MEAN  
YOU CAN'T HAVE A GOOD WORKING RELATIONSHIP.  
WORKING CONSTRUCTIVELY CAN LEAD TO BETTER  
RESULTS.

SOMETIMES MANAGERS HAVE TO STEP IN.

LISTEN TO BOTH VIEWPOINTS AND DISTINGUISH  
BETWEEN FACT, ALLEGATIONS, ASSUPTIONS AND  
OPINIONS.

BRING BOTH SIDES TOGETHER:

1. SEPARATE THE PEOPLE FROM THE PROBLEM.
2. FOCUS ON INTERESTS NOT POSITIONS.
3. INVENT OPTIONS FOR MUTUAL GAIN.
4. INSIST ON USING OBJECTIVE CRITERIA.

### Notes

## USE OBJECTIVE CRITERIA



YOU CANNOT USE EMOTION OR SUBJECTIVITY  
WHEN DETERMINING YOUR RESULTS.

WHAT SUCCESS WILL LOOK LIKE.

AS A LAST RESORT AN ARBITRATOR MAY BE  
NEEDED.

GETTING PAST BLAME IS THE FASTEST WAY TO  
RESOLVE ANY ISSUES.

DEMONSTRATE EMPATHY AND ALLOW THE PEOPLE  
TO COME UP WITH THEIR OWN SOLUTIONS.

### Notes

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## **TRANSITIONING FROM A COMPROMISE-BASED APPROACH ("SPLITTING THE DIFFERENCE") TO A COLLABORATIVE STRATEGY IN THE WORKPLACE**

Transitioning from a compromise-based approach ("splitting the difference") to a collaborative strategy in workplace conflict resolution involves shifting from merely dividing resources to jointly developing solutions that fully satisfy all parties' underlying interests. Here's how to facilitate this transition:

### **1. Initiate Open Dialogue**

Begin by fostering an environment where all parties feel comfortable expressing their perspectives and concerns. Encourage open communication to identify the root causes of the conflict.

*Suggested Approach:*

"I believe we all have valuable insights on this issue. Let's discuss our individual perspectives to understand each other's viewpoints better."

### **2. Practice Active Listening**

Demonstrate genuine interest in understanding others by listening attentively without interrupting. This builds trust and ensures that everyone's voice is heard.

*Suggested Approach:*

"Could you elaborate on your concerns? I want to ensure I fully understand your position."

### **3. Identify Shared Goals**

Highlight common objectives that all parties aim to achieve. Recognizing shared goals can serve as a foundation for collaborative problem-solving.

*Suggested Approach:*

"We all aim to enhance our project's success. How can we align our efforts to achieve this collectively?"

### **4. Develop Joint Solutions**

Encourage brainstorming sessions where all participants contribute ideas. Focus on solutions that address everyone's core interests, moving beyond mere compromise.

*Suggested Approach:*

"What are some potential strategies that could meet all our needs effectively?"

### **5. Establish Mutual Respect**

Maintain a respectful tone throughout discussions. Acknowledge each person's contributions and avoid dismissive language.

*Suggested Approach:*

"I appreciate your input on this matter. Let's consider how we can integrate these ideas into our solution."

### **6. Commit to Collaborative Implementation**

Once a solution is agreed upon, ensure that all parties are committed to its execution. Define clear roles and responsibilities to promote accountability.

*Suggested Approach:*

"We've agreed on this plan. Let's outline our individual responsibilities to ensure successful implementation."

By following these strategies, you can effectively transition from a compromise-based approach to a collaborative one, fostering a more cohesive and productive workplace environment.

## CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION:

Cultural backgrounds significantly impact preferred conflict resolution styles:

Understanding how different countries tend to approach conflict resolution can enhance cross-cultural communication and collaboration. Here's a general overview of the predominant conflict resolution styles associated with various countries:

### 1. Dominating (Competing) Style:

Countries with individualistic cultures often emphasize personal goals and direct communication, leading to a preference for a dominating conflict resolution style. This approach involves assertiveness and a desire to win conflicts. Examples include:

- **United States:** Ranked highest in individualism, with a tendency toward a dominating style in conflicts.
- **Australia:** Similar to the U.S., Australians often favour direct and assertive conflict resolution methods.
- **Great Britain:** Reflects individualistic traits, leading to a preference for assertive conflict resolution.
- **Canada:** Shares cultural similarities with the U.S., influencing a dominating conflict style.
- **Netherlands:** Individualistic tendencies contribute to a preference for direct conflict resolution.
- **New Zealand:** Exhibits individualistic characteristics, leading to a dominating approach in conflicts.

### 2. Avoiding and Accommodating Styles:

Collectivist cultures often prioritize group harmony and indirect communication, leading to preferences for avoiding or accommodating conflict resolution styles. Examples include:

- **Japan:** Emphasizes harmony and may prefer avoiding or accommodating styles to prevent confrontation.
- **South Korea:** Similar to Japan, with a tendency toward avoiding or accommodating conflict styles.
- **China:** Values group harmony, often leading to avoiding or accommodating approaches in conflicts.
- **Indonesia:** Collectivist culture that may prefer avoiding or accommodating conflict resolution methods.
- **Mexico:** Collectivist tendencies can lead to avoiding or accommodating conflict styles.

### 3. Compromising and Collaborating Styles:

Some cultures balance assertiveness with cooperation, leading to preferences for compromising or collaborating conflict resolution styles. Examples include:

- **Germany:** Values both assertiveness and cooperation, often leading to compromising or collaborating approaches.
- **Sweden:** Emphasizes consensus-building, aligning with a collaborating conflict style.
- **Norway:** Similar to Sweden, with a preference for collaborative conflict resolution.
- **Denmark:** Values cooperation and may prefer compromising or collaborating styles.

It's important to note that these are general tendencies and individual preferences may vary.

## CONFLICT ACTIVITY

Dave Smith and Mary Adams just can't get along. Dave leads the accounting team and has done so for 15 years. Mary heads up the quality control team.

Although she's been with the company less than a year, everyone agrees that her unique skill set is a perfect match for the department.

Dave and Mary have both been appointed to head up a project to find a new accounting package that will help reduce accounting errors. However, their personality conflicts have prevented them from making any headway.

### **Major problems include:**

Each person has a different idea about what the project's goal should be.

Dave thinks Mary is too new to have a full understanding of the problem and Mary thinks Dave is afraid to try new things. As a result, they don't respect each other, and their communication is very poor.

**This project was created by the GM, so the conflict needs to be resolved quickly.**

**Resolving the conflict between Dave Smith and Mary Adams requires a structured approach to address their interpersonal issues and align their efforts toward the project's success. Here's a step-by-step strategy:**

### **1. Acknowledge the Conflict**

Recognise the existence of the conflict and its impact on the project's progress. Openly addressing the issue is the first step toward resolution.

*Suggested Approach:*

"It's evident that there are differences hindering our project's advancement. Let's address these openly to find a constructive path forward."

### **2. Facilitate Open Communication**

Arrange a neutral meeting where both parties can express their perspectives without interruption. Encourage active listening to understand each other's viewpoints fully.

*Suggested Approach:*

"Dave and Mary, let's each share our views on the project's goals and challenges, ensuring we listen to understand, not to respond."

### **3. Identify Common Goals**

Highlight shared objectives, such as reducing accounting errors and enhancing the company's performance, to create a foundation for collaboration.

*Suggested Approach:*

"Both of you aim to implement an effective accounting package that minimises errors. Focusing on this common goal can guide our collaborative efforts."

### **4. Clarify Roles and Responsibilities**

Define clear roles for each leader, leveraging their expertise to contribute to the project's success.

*Suggested Approach:*

"Dave's extensive experience in accounting and Mary's fresh perspective on quality control are both valuable. Let's each other's responsibilities that play to these strengths."

## **5. Establish a Unified Project Plan**

Develop a project plan that incorporates input from both parties, ensuring alignment with the company's strategic objectives.

*Suggested Approach:*

"We'll create a project plan that integrates your insights, aligning with the department goals to enhance accuracy and efficiency."

## **6. Implement Regular Check-Ins**

Schedule consistent meetings to monitor progress, address concerns, and maintain open lines of communication.

*Suggested Approach:*

"Regular check-ins will help us stay aligned, address issues promptly, and adapt our strategies as needed."

## **7. Seek External Mediation if Necessary**

If conflicts persist, consider involving a neutral third party to facilitate resolution and provide objective insights.

*Suggested Approach:*

"If we encounter ongoing challenges, we might engage an external mediator to help us navigate and resolve our differences."

By following these steps, Dave and Mary can move beyond their personal differences, fostering a collaborative environment that drives the project's success and contributes positively to Acme Auditing's objectives.

## **Activity 2**

Norma has been with We Care Catering for three years. She works the day shift and is therefore responsible for opening the shop in the morning, taking customer orders, and helping out in the kitchen as needed. Recently,

We Care Catering's owner hired Shawna to help Norma out in the daytime. Norma is having a difficult time working with Shawna; she wants to do everything her own way and seems not to care about Norma's plans and processes.

One day, Shawna washes the floor with the wrong cleaning solution, making the floor very slippery. Norma gets very upset. It is your responsibility to deal with this and rectify the conflict. How will you do it?



## DEALING WITH CONFLICT TEMPLATE

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## TAKE AWAY

## GRAHAM TAYLOR-EDWARDS

### ABOUT US

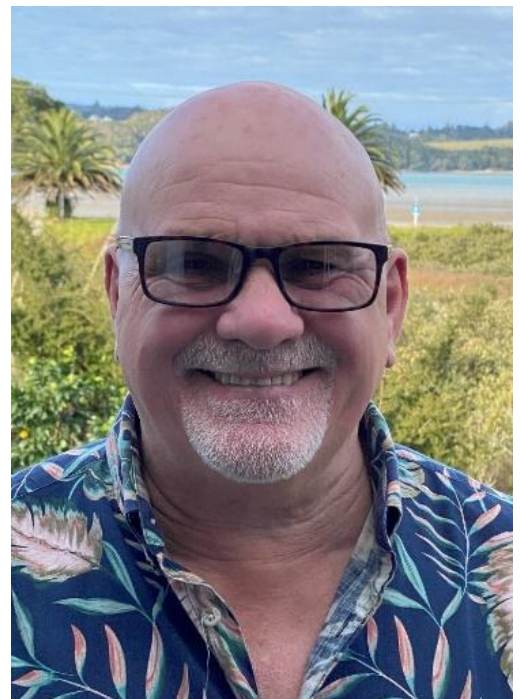
Graham (GTE) leads over 100 workshops annually, focusing on leadership, sales, fixed operations, and customer experience. He's the founder of Success Resources International, a Registered Training Organisation based in Brisbane, and the Managing Director of GTE Training and Development in New Zealand.

Originally from North Wales, Graham has spent 17 years in Australia (2001 – 2019) after more than two decades in New Zealand. His background includes service in both the Royal Navy and the Royal New Zealand Navy.

He's married to Shelley, a Kiwi from the Bay of Islands, and together they have two children Mackenzie and Gareth, along with four grandchildren: Hudson, Avyana, Reo and Vivienne.

Graham (GT) is a highly regarded coach and workshop facilitator specialising in leadership, sales, service and customer experience. He brings a wealth of expertise with the following qualifications:

- Advanced Diploma of Leadership and Management
- Diploma in Automotive Management
- Diploma of Training and Education and Design
- Certificate IV in Finance and Mortgage Broking
- Certificate IV in Business Sales
- New Zealand Certificate in Marketing
- NLP Practitioner



GRAHAM TAYLOR-EDWARDS

Graham's diverse skill set quips him to empower individuals and organisations to achieve their goals