

Managing Conflict in the Workplace

- Acknowledge that there will be conflicts to manage
- Conflict can encourage us to come up with new ways of doing things which could be of benefit to individuals and the organisation

Typical reasons for conflict

- Different communication styles and levels of sensitivity
- Prejudices – we probably all have some of these
- Mismatched goals, expectations and values – different people are motivated by different things, value their work more than others
- Lack of understanding of the “bigger picture” and organisational constraints
- Making assumptions about existing knowledge and understanding

Five conflict handling strategies

- **Avoidance:** ignore the problem and it will go away...
- **Accommodation:** try to please everyone and in reality please no one
- **Competitive:** may the best or toughest person win
- **Compromise:** give in on one area with the idea that others will give in on other areas
- **Collaboration:** work together to find a solution

Generally speaking, collaborative effort should be the option to select as it involves people working together for the common goal.

Resolving conflict

Whilst we accept a certain amount of conflict is probably inevitable and may be beneficial, the tensions can be destructive unless dealt with appropriately and assertively.

- **Identify the issue:** what is the real problem? Your perception of the problem may be different to that of your colleague's
- **Take everyone's concerns into account:** set aside time and space and practise active listening and repeat back what the other person has said for clarification
- **Avoid interrupting:** let each person have their turn to speak
- **Be creative when considering possible solutions:** evaluate the options and make a note of the advantages/disadvantages of each option
- **Take a break from the meeting if necessary:** reflect on the points raised and/or calm down
- **Look internally: try and be objective:** have you played a role in creating the tensions? What could you do differently?
- **Aim to negotiate a satisfactory solution, acceptable to all parties**
- **Accept that friendship is not necessarily the goal at work:** getting the job done is; colleagues may never become great friends but they should be able to work together productively