



CLEARING THE AIR



Scan to review worksheet

Expemo code:
1CMM-164A-V9LN

1

Warm up



Watch the video below. Answer the questions in pairs.

1. According to the video, what are the four main drives of conflict?
2. What can be done in the workplace to resolve conflicts stemming from each one?





2 Vocabulary 1

Replace the underlined parts of the questions with the correct form of the words in the box. You might also have to add words and change their order. Then answer the questions in pairs.

microaggression (n)	put-down (n)
consensus (n)	mediator (n)
manageable (adj)	compromise (v)
reframe (v)	detrimental (adj)
point of contention (phr)	escalate (v)

1. Have you ever been the target of subtle insults or hostility at the office?

2. Is it always better to reach an opinion that everyone agrees with at work?

3. How can you avoid a conflict in the workplace becoming more serious?

4. Do you think you would be a good person that tries to get agreement between people? Why (not)?

5. How do you react when someone make a remark that was clearly intended to make you look bad?

6. Is conflict always damaging?

7. Is it better to deal with one reason for arguing at a time, or deal with everything together?

8. Is it better when both sides have to give up something to end a conflict?

9. Would you say most conflicts at work are possible to deal with? When are they not?

10. Are you usually able to express differently something that came out the wrong way?



3

Reading 1

Read the article and match the headings to the paragraphs.

- a. Work style conflicts
- b. Beneficial conflicts
- c. Personality conflicts
- d. Interdependence conflicts
- e. Leadership conflicts





Conflict at the workplace: what types there are and what to do in each case.

According to a survey by ACAS (the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service), conflict in the workplace costs companies around £28.5 billion a year in the UK alone. So, what can be done to reduce destructive conflict at work? (A) The first step is to identify the kind of conflict it is. Here are five major types and what can be done in each one:

1. _____

Quite often two or more employees rely on each other's work to be able to do their own and a very common form of conflict is generated when one side drops the ball, causing problems for the other. If this happens repeatedly over time, the conflict can escalate and involve other co-workers.

As with most types of conflicts, empathy is key. Rather than resorting to microaggressions or put-downs, try first to understand why this person has failed or is constantly failing to deliver. (B) Then establish a shared goal with them moving forward. If that fails, then it might be the case of getting both your managers involved.

2. _____

People are very different from one another, and personality styles can often clash. In our personal lives, we might consciously or unconsciously distance ourselves from those whose personalities don't agree with ours. (C)

Communication can be helpful in these circumstances. If you don't manage to bury the hatchet, you can at least clear the air and reach a consensus to not let your differences affect each other's work. (D) Whether that's your manager or a colleague, it is always better if they are trained as such.

3. _____

There's often more than one way to get a job done, and often employees don't see eye-to-eye about the best approach. For instance, some might prefer to tackle a task in one go. (E) That's fine when you're doing something on your own, but when it comes to working together, differences in personality might compromise an entire project.

You might want to start by finding common ground: identifying what you both want. From there, you can reframe the point of contention in a more constructive manner and find a suitable compromise.

4. _____

Managers are usually those who have to step in to resolve conflict, but what happens when they are responsible for creating it in the first place? (F) While some employees might thrive under your way of managing, others might struggle.

As a manager, the first step is to be aware of your own leadership style and the effect it has on each person in your team. (G) Although it's not always an easy process, it's much more preferable to constantly being at loggerheads with someone you should be managing.

5. _____

It's also worth remembering that not all conflicts in the workplace are detrimental. (H) If treated in the right way and used productively, differences in opinion can lead to progress and innovation within an organisation.

Sources: *leaders.com, shrm.org, business.com*



4

Reading 2

Seven sentences have been removed from the article above (A-G above). Choose from the sentences below the correct ones to complete the text. There is one extra sentence that you do not use.

1. In the workplace, however, quite often we don't have that luxury. _____
2. In fact, lack of disagreement, often called groupthink, can be just as or even more damaging. _____
3. Others would rather break it down into more manageable pieces. _____
4. The first step is to identify the kind of conflict it is. _____
5. While your intentions might be the best, that might be a costly mistake. _____
6. By understanding yourself better, you can make adjustments that will bring out the best in your team. _____
7. It might be a good idea to involve a third person to act as a mediator. _____
8. At the same time, make clear to them the effect that it has on your work. _____
9. There are a range of leadership styles, and employees respond in different ways to them. _____

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Vocabulary 2

Part A: Look at these sentences from the article. What do you think the underlined words and expressions mean?

- If you don't manage to bury the hatchet, you can at least clear the air and reach a consensus to not let your differences affect each other's work.
- There's often more than one way to get a job done, and often employees don't see eye-to-eye about the best approach.
- You might want to start by finding common ground: identifying what you both want.
- ... it's much more preferable to constantly being at loggerheads with someone you should be managing.



Part B: Complete the sentences below with one word from the box. Then discuss the sentences in pairs.

advocate
pick

at
set

bad
slate

fence
splitting

1. It's always better not to _____ a bone with someone in a higher position in the company.
2. Sometimes you have to resort to a bit of flattery when you're in your manager's _____ books.
3. It's useful to ask someone to play the devil's _____ in a discussion to make sure you're considering all angles.
4. If you are dead _____ against something at work, you should make it clear from the beginning.
5. It's never worth being always _____ odds with someone in the office.
6. If you don't have enough information about a controversial topic, it's better to sit on the _____ and not take either side.
7. Some people can't get beyond a conflict because they insist on _____ hairs about unimportant issues.
8. Even though you have solved the conflict, it's not always easy to wipe the _____ clean.





6

Language focus 3

Read the Language focus box. Then use hedging techniques to make the sentences below more diplomatic.

Language focus box: Hedging

Hedging is a technique that is used to sound more diplomatic, especially in situations like managing conflict. Examples of hedging include:

Modals

There might have been a mistake with the report.

You may want to consider the implications of that decision.

That clauses

It might be that this is not the best option.

It would seem that your view is mistaken.

I sentences (instead of You sentences)

I'm struggling to understand the situation here.

I feel I'm not getting the message across here.

Adverbs and adverbials

Presumably he had a good reason for doing that.

It's a fairly good result.

She was right to some extent.



1. Your productivity hasn't been satisfactory lately.

2. You're not making sense.

3. Your proposition is absurd.

4. She did it on purpose.

5. This report is rubbish.

6. You're not listening to me.

7**Speaking 1**

In groups of three, role play the situations below. In each situation, change the roles.

Situation 1

Student A	Student B	Student C
Student B has been constantly late in delivering their work, which affects your productivity and makes you look bad. You have spoken to them repeatedly, without any results.	A colleague left the company recently and you have taken over some of their work. For that reason, you have been late with some things. Student A doesn't understand that and is constantly bothering you, which makes the problem worse.	You are the manager of the department. Two of your staff members were involved in a discussion and it is affecting the work atmosphere. You have decided to have a meeting with them to address the issue.

**Situation 2**

Student A	Student B	Student C
<p>You are the manager of the department. Two of your staff members were involved in a discussion and it is affecting the work atmosphere. You have decided to have a meeting with them to address the issue.</p>	<p>You and Student C are involved in a project, but you think it would be better to work together on it, while they think you two should just split the tasks and do it separately. They seem very individualistic and stubborn.</p>	<p>You and Student B are involved in a project, but you don't have the time to have endless meetings with them about it. Whenever you meet, they just want to talk about office gossip. You think it's better to split the tasks and work individually.</p>

Situation 3

Student A	Student B	Student C
<p>Student C has joined the company recently, and you have been having issues with them. They refuse to do things the way they've always been done. You have been in the company for a long time, and have offered several times to help them, but they refuse.</p>	<p>You are the manager of the department. Two of your staff members were involved in a discussion and it is affecting the work atmosphere. You have decided to have a meeting with them to address the issue.</p>	<p>You have joined the company recently and have identified ways to optimise several processes. Student A insists on you doing things the 'old way' though, but you think there's more than one way to get a task done, and Student A's methods are old-fashioned.</p>

8**Talking point**

Here are some ideas from this worksheet. In small groups, discuss if you agree with them.

1. Conflicts are always generated by either the need for appreciation, the need for affiliation, the need for autonomy, or the need for status.
2. Conflict is only negative when it is not resolved adequately.
3. With some types of conflict, it is better to get management level involved.
4. Sometimes it isn't possible to solve a conflict completely, but you can reach a consensus so it doesn't affect work.
5. Managers should adapt their leadership style to individual team members.
6. *Groupthink* is extremely damaging to any work environment.



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Extension activity 1

How many words from the worksheet can you remember? Test yourself! Write a paragraph summarising the main ideas from the worksheet. Use as many words below as possible.

1. What N is part of the phrase in a ... and means a condensed version of something? _____
2. What A means a feeling of belonging to something? _____
3. What R means express or think of something differently? _____
4. What E means become more serious? _____
5. What M means possible to deal with? _____
6. What M is a person that tries to get agreement between others? _____
7. What C is part of the phrase point of ...? _____
8. What P is a remark that was clearly intended to make you look bad? _____
9. What I is a cause of conflict when one person's work relies on another? _____
10. What B is part of the phrase drop the ...? _____
11. What H is part of the expression to bury the ...? _____
12. What S is part of the expression to wipe the ... clean? _____
13. What B is part of the expression to pick a ... with someone? _____
14. What O is part of the expression to be at ... with someone? _____
15. What F is part of the expression to sit on the ...? _____

10

Extension activity 2

Imagine you work at the Human Resources department of your company. Record a video for a training session on conflict management based on the concepts in the worksheet and your own ideas.



Transcripts

1. Warm up

Speaker: How to resolve workplace conflicts, in a nutshell.

Speaker: Workplace and family conflict and stress accounts for millions of pounds of lost revenue every year in the UK, and a great deal of unhappiness. The good news is that much of this can be avoided, but the question is of course, how.

Speaker: To start with, conflict in the workplace, at home or anywhere for that matter, is perfectly normal. Arguments take place every day and are resolved every day. It is not conflict itself that is damaging but conflict, which remains unresolved.

Speaker: So, what can we do about this? In this video, I will focus on four core human concerns which are at the heart of most arguments and unresolved conflict. Using this information, you simply need to apply what I call a lens and a lever approach. First, identify which core concerns are at play - the lens or analysis stage - and second, do something positive which stimulates a positive emotion - the lever. These core concerns are the need for Appreciation, the need for Affiliation, the need for Autonomy, and the need for Status.

Speaker: Appreciation - If someone is feeling unappreciated, do something to make them feel more appreciated. This might simply involve some positive acknowledgement, confirming that you understand their concerns.

Speaker: Affiliation - If someone doesn't feel part of the team, do something positive that gives them a better sense of belonging.

Speaker: Autonomy - If someone feels that their views are not respected, find ways to include them more in the decision-making process.

Speaker: And finally, Status - if someone feels that their role at work is being undermined, which is so often connected with a person's sense of identity, focus on that.

Speaker: Find ways to recognise them and their achievements.

Speaker: Now, it may well be that more than one or indeed, all of these areas of concern, are affected but, if you can have an open, honest discussion with that person, understand what it is that's underlying any of the four core concerns being expressed - Appreciation, Affiliation, Autonomy and Status - you can do something about them.

Speaker: Good luck and thanks for watching.



Key

1. Warm up

5 mins.

Ask students what they know about workplace conflict. Elicit some ideas and put them on the board, but do not provide much information at this stage. Students watch the video and discuss the questions. Elicit the answers as a whole class.

1. The need for appreciation, the need for affiliation, the need for autonomy, and the need for status.
2. Appreciation - do something to make them feel more appreciated, e.g. positive acknowledgement, confirming that you understand their concerns; Affiliation - do something positive that gives them a better sense of belonging; Autonomy - find ways to include them more in the decision-making process; Status - find ways to recognise them and their achievements.

2. Vocabulary 1

5 mins.

Ask students to look at the words and think about what they mean. They then replace the underlined parts of the questions with the words in the box. Remind them that they may have to change some of the words, as well as their order. After correction, students answer questions in pairs, and then elicit some ideas as a whole class.

1. Have you ever been the target of microaggressions at the office?
2. Is it always better to reach a consensus at work?
3. How can you avoid a conflict in the workplace escalating?
4. Do you think you would be a good mediator? Why (not)?
5. How do you react when someone make a remark that was clearly a put-down?
6. Is conflict always detrimental?
7. Is it better to deal with one point of contention at a time, or deal with everything together?
8. Is it better when both sides have to compromise to end a conflict?
9. Would you say most conflicts at work are manageable? When are they not?
10. Are you usually able to reframe something that came out the wrong way?

3. Reading 1

5 mins.

Ask students to read the article (ignoring the letters in brackets for now) and match the headings to each section. After correcting as a whole class, elicit some personal reactions to the text, such as: Have you ever experienced or witnessed these types of conflicts?

- | | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Interdependence conflicts | 2. Personality conflicts | 3. Work style conflicts |
| 4. Leadership conflicts | 5. Beneficial conflicts | |

Sources:

<https://leaders.com/articles/productivity/workplace-conflict/>

<https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/employee-relations/pages/talent-2022-address-workplace-conflict.aspx>

<https://www.business.com/articles/5-tips-for-managing-conflict-in-the-workplace/>



4. Reading 2

10 mins.

Students complete the article with the missing sentences. When correcting, ask students why they chose that particular sentence (e.g., reference words, meaning, etc).

- | | | |
|------|-------------|------|
| 1. C | 2. H | 3. E |
| 4. A | 5. Not used | 6. G |
| 7. D | 8. B | 9. F |

5. Vocabulary 2

5 mins.

In pairs, students discuss the meanings of the underlined expressions. Elicit the correct meanings (below) and tell students to complete the other idiomatic expressions to do with conflict. When correcting, elicit the meaning of the phrases and further examples. Then they discuss the sentences, saying if they agree or not with them.

bury the hatchet = overcome definitively a conflict

clear the air = defuse a tense situation

not see eye-to-eye = not agree on something

find common ground = reach a compromise

be at loggerheads = be constantly in conflict with someone

Part B

- | | | | |
|---------|----------|--------------|----------|
| 1. pick | 2. bad | 3. advocate | 4. set |
| 5. at | 6. fence | 7. splitting | 8. slate |

6. Language focus 3

10 mins.

Read the Grammar box with the students or give them time to read it on their own. Then ask them to complete the sentences below using the techniques learnt.

(The answers below are suggested. Other answers are possible.)

1. It would seem that your productivity has dropped lately.
2. I can't seem to understand this.
3. It's a rather unorthodox proposition.
4. Presumably, she had a good reason for doing it.
5. The report has some fairly good points but still needs some work.
6. I'm not managing to get the message across to you.

7. Speaking 1

10 mins.

Form groups of three and ask students to prepare for each situation. Ask them to make notes and encourage them to think of ways of hedging to sound more diplomatic. While students role-play, monitor and assist when necessary. As a whole class, elicit some reactions and outcomes from each group.



8. Talking point

10 mins.

Students discuss the ideas from the Warmer video and the reading text in small groups. Elicit some ideas as a whole class.

9. Extension activity 1

15 mins.

This task revises language from the worksheet. You might decide to ask students to put away the worksheet and do it orally. It can also be done individually, in pairs or in small groups. Ideally, there should be an element of competition. For example, it could be used for a running dictation, or you could have a point system (one point for each correct word and an extra point if only one student/pair/group got it right). After correction, ask students to use the words to summarise the ideas in the worksheet.

- | | | |
|---------------|----------------|--------------------|
| 1. nutshell | 2. affiliation | 3. reframe |
| 4. escalate | 5. manageable | 6. mediator |
| 7. contention | 8. put-down | 9. interdependence |
| 10. ball | 11. hatchet | 12. slate |
| 13. bone | 14. odds | 15. fence |

10. Extension activity 2

15 mins

In small groups, students prepare and record a training video about conflict management. They should include what they have seen in this worksheet but can add ideas of their own. Play the videos for the class to see and hold a vote to decide which is the best video.