

Resolving conflict in the workplace

One of the most challenging skills faced by managers is the ability to handle and positively resolve internal conflict in the workplace.



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"In today's fast paced business environment resolving conflict amongst employees is crucial in ensuring tasks are performed quickly and effectively," says Neville De Lucia New Business Development Director at Dale Carnegie South Africa. "The ability to deal with people in the correct way is a skill that is becoming more prominent in the workplace and as a manager it's essential to be able to resolve conflict and follow due process."

In order to foster a more productive environment, conflict resolution strategies should be implemented depending on the circumstance.

Here are 5 common conflict areas found in the work environment and the resolution strategies to help managers manage and resolve conflict:

Process conflict:

Resolving conflict is a process, so determining how much control you have as a manager over the process conflict, is the first step.

Identify the root cause of the problem and pin point who can take ownership of the issue so that the resolution is not just on your shoulders, but all involved can take responsibility. Discuss the problem and establish a workable solution and action plan that is agreed upon by all. The owner of the process should follow-through on the plan but as the leader, even though you may not be implementing the resolution plan; it is your job to show recognition where necessary.

Role conflict:

When conflict arises due to different roles within an organisation, it's important for each person to perceive their own role in

relation to others who are also involved.

Each person will need to take responsibility for their own actions as it pertains to the issue and be prepared to change their perception of their role should the need arise. You won't receive the desired results if one or more parties are not interested in resolving the situation. All involved will need to be on the same page and will need to show willingness to be flexible in achieving the organisations goals. If you are in the middle of the conflict, it's imperative for you stay positive and view any role changes in terms of a new opportunity. This indicates the importance of keeping our attitude in check as managers and team leaders.

Interpersonal conflict:

Everyone has their own personal opinion about things, but the problem comes when people believe their opinion is prevalent to everyone else's.

As a manager you cannot always get people to agree, especially when it comes to personal ideas or biases. In a situation where two employees are constantly knocking heads, sit them down individually and ask them to write down three behaviours they could change to help reduce the conflict.

In a South African context, there may also be prejudices at play. It is of vital importance that these are managed in a working environment. Take it a step further and get them to write down 5 strengths they recognise in the other person, to simply take the focus off of themselves. For the next three months ensure they are accountable to you until you start to see a difference in their behaviour.

Direction conflict:

When there are many decision makers working on one project, it is almost natural for each person to have their own opinion on which direction to take. The solution to resolving directional conflict is to get each individual to clarify the discrepancies they have so that it can be described in neutral words.

Do this in an informal meeting ensuring each person is friendly and non-confrontational, ultimately resulting in agreement. If there are differences in values, as a leader make the call to always go with the higher value.

External conflicts:

External situations out of your control can easily arise in the workplace, consequently resulting in conflict among employees or among clients. Establish how much control you actually have over the situation and carefully choose which battles are worth fighting, bearing in mind you may still need to liaise with the person in the near future.

To resolve the issue, focus on the things you can do rather than complaining about the things you can't do to change the situation, while maintaining perspective. If things get too out of hand talk to someone you trust and who is able to offer you reputable advice.