From Tension to Progress: Managing Conflict in the Workplace

Conflict in the workplace is inevitable. When deadlines are tight, resources are stretched or perspectives differ, even the most cohesive teams can run into friction. For professionals in finance and beyond, conflict often arises as a result of competing priorities or just simply communication breakdowns.

JPMorgan Chase Chairman and CEO [Jamie Dimon](#) urges managers to address conflicts immediately. "Conflicts don't age well," Dimon said. "Deal with issues sooner rather than later as they don't resolve themselves. They get worse."

Left unchecked, these disputes can hurt morale, impact productivity or damage professional relationships. When handled effectively, conflict can also spark innovation, strengthen collaboration and lead to better business outcomes.

Differences in management styles or personalities can also cause workplace conflict. As a manager, you can't deal with everyone's problems. It's too easy to get swept up in the issues thinking you have all the answers. The key to conflict management is to apply proven strategies that can transform disagreement into positive outcomes.

Here are 7 conflict resolution strategies for the workplace:

Deal with Conflict Early

Conflict doesn't always begin with shouting matches. It often begins with subtle cues such as passive resistance, miscommunication or visible changes in body language.

Left unresolved, small conflicts can often escalate into larger ones. Be proactive when you suspect something isn't right. Deal with the problem right away rather than pretending to be unaware. Encourage a culture of openness where employees raise concerns quickly without fear of reprisal. Managers should create a safe environment where individuals can speak up. For example, a weekly team check-in can help surface tensions before they grow.

In finance, where deadlines are non-negotiable (e.g., audit cycles, reporting), addressing issues early can help prevent costly delays.

Stay Away from Personal Attacks

Personal attacks only deepen conflict and shift attention away from the issue at hand. Focus on what happened and not the person involved. Instead of saying "You never take other people's ideas seriously" say "The client presentation was delayed because we had differing views on how to proceed."

If you separate the person from the behaviour, they will be less defensive and you increase the chance of making progress.

Choose the Right Resolution Strategy

Every conflict calls for a different approach. The [Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI)](#) outlines five strategies to conflict resolution: Avoiding, Competing, Accommodating, Compromising and Collaborating. Each represents a different approach based on how assertive or co-operative someone is during a conflict.

Avoiding is best suited for situations where the relationship's importance and goal are both low. Competing might not be useful in workplace situations as it's high in assertiveness and low on cooperation. The Accommodating strategy means you give in to the other person's needs where the relationship means more than the goal. Compromising is a "lose lose" strategy where both parties forfeit some of their demands to reach an agreement (neither party achieves their full goal). Collaboration is ideal for most workplace conflicts as both parties work together to find an outcome that meets all needs. In this case, it's a "win win" as the goal and relationship are equally important.

Clarify the Issue

Take time to find out what's really going on. Don't rely on company rumours and check your sources. Getting it wrong can escalate the issue so be sure to approach the right people and ask the right questions.

Practice active listening and focus on shared goals. Identify the root causes of the conflict. Is there an innovative way to solve the problem that satisfies both parties?

Communicate Effectively and Use Emotional Intelligence

Miscommunication is one of the most common drivers of workplace disputes. Practice active listening and repeat back what you've heard. Empathy goes a long way in acknowledging the other person's perspective. Asking clarifying questions signals respect and helps reduce defensiveness. Invite colleagues to a face-to-face meeting in a neutral location where concerns can be aired.

Avoid using "you" statements (which sound accusatory). Instead use "I" statements (ie. "I felt concerned when deadlines shifted without notice"). Be sure all written communication is clear, neutral and professional to avoid misunderstandings.

Focus on Issues Not Positions

Effective negotiators dig beneath stated positions to understand underlying interests. For example, an accountant pushing for a new software license may not just "want" a tool - they may need it to meet regulatory deadlines. By reframing the discussion around shared goals (accuracy, efficiency, compliance), solutions become collaborative rather than adversarial.

Monitor and Follow Up

Check back in to see the results of your negotiations. Is everyone following the agreement? Are both parties satisfied with the results? Are boundaries being respected? Does the situation involve a second conversation and de-escalation?

If needed, revisit your action plan. Communicate your willingness to meet again to review progress.

Conflict doesn't have to be disruptive. If addressed thoughtfully, it can be a catalyst for growth and innovation. By focusing on clear communication, mutual respect and solutions that balance both organizational and individual needs, professionals at every level can turn tense situations into opportunities for stronger collaboration. Whether you're leading a finance team, managing cross-departmental projects, or simply navigating day-to-day interactions, effective conflict resolution is an essential skill for building a healthier, more productive workplace.