

Five Methods for Managing Conflict

Conflict has many sources in the workplace. It is borne out of differences and will arise in any situation where people are required to interact with one another. Dealing with conflict effectively is a key management skill. This article outlines five different approaches to conflict management and the situations they are most appropriate for.

1. Accommodation

This is a lose/win situation. The accommodation approach is generally used when one party is willing to forfeit their position. It is best used in situations where:

- One party wishes to indicate a degree of fairness.
- People wish to encourage others to express their own opinion.
- The issue or problem is more important to the other party concerned.
- It is more important to safeguard the relationship rather than argue about the issue.

2. Compromise

This is a win/lose – win/lose situation, i.e. everyone involved gains and loses through negotiation and flexibility. Each will win some of what they desire while at the same time giving something up. The main goal of this approach is to find common ground and maintain the relationship. Compromise is best used:

- To achieve an agreement when all parties have equal power.
- To reach a temporary resolution in more complicated matters.
- To achieve a settlement when time or other circumstances are constrained.

3. Avoidance

This is a lose/lose situation. Neither party takes action to address the issues involved in the conflict, meaning that it will remain unresolved. This approach is best used:

- If all concerned feel that the issue is a minor one and will be resolved in time without any fuss.
- When the parties need a chance to cool down and spend time apart.
- If other people are able to resolve the conflict more effectively than the parties concerned.
- When more time is needed before thinking about dealing with the issues.
- If the impact of dealing with the situation may be damaging to all parties involved.

4. Competition

This is a win/lose situation. One party attempts to win the conflict through dominance and power. This approach is best used:

- When all other methods have been tried (and failed).
- In emergency situations when quick, immediate and decisive action is called for.
- In situations where unpopular changes need to be applied and discussion is not appropriate.

5. Collaboration

This is a win/win situation. It is the most effective but most difficult way of managing differences. It requires trust and commitment on all sides to reach a resolution by getting to the heart of the problem. All parties need to be willing to empathise and try to understand each other's situation. Collaboration is most appropriate:

- When all parties are willing to investigate alternative solutions together that they may not necessarily have thought of on their own.
- When trying to get to the source of problems that have continued for a long time.
- When upholding objectives that cannot be compromised on any side while still preserving the relationship.
- When parties from different backgrounds and experiences are involved.

Related Items

Related Resources

- [Resolving Conflict](#)
- [Analysing Conflict Styles](#)
- [What's My Conflict Management Style?](#)