

Leadership and Management

Conflict resolution



From time to time in every team there is conflict, and conflict needs to be tackled head-on, so it is effectively resolved. Conflict is a disagreement, a clash of ideas, principles, or personalities. It causes animosity and is often symptomatic of a breakdown in communication. Conflict in the workplace can be damaging and counterproductive.

In order to approach conflict positively and manage effectively, leaders need an understanding of how and why the particular conflict arose in the first place. It can stem from the act of an individual that causes offense/dissatisfaction in others, or an issue between multiple individuals that has evolved etc. Being aware of potential arising conflict can help you either to prevent it from happening or to resolve it swiftly.

As a leader you should recognise the importance of modelling an appropriate way to deal with conflict constructively and creatively.

Conflict can be caused by the following:

- Mis – or incomplete information.
- Resistance to change.
- Pressure to conform – limiting individual preferences.
- ‘Group think’ – where the group converges on a decision that seems to have greatest agreement regardless of quality.
- Dominant individuals and the consequent inequality of influence on decisions and outcomes.
- Inability to accept feedback or criticism.
- Lack of individual accountability
- Unproductive levels of competition leading to ‘winners’ and ‘losers’.

In identifying and addressing any of the above, leaders need to employ conflict resolution strategies.

These include active listening, observing, and noting non-verbal clues, helping those involved to understand and define the problem, allow feelings to be expressed, looking for workable solutions and encouraging individuals involved to take responsibility to implement these solutions.

Leaders require social skills and **Emotional Intelligence** (EI) to be able to manage conflict effectively. In the mid 90’s Daniel Goleman a renowned psychologist and scientist formed 5 essential components of EI that leaders require when managing difficulties that can arise within teams.

These are:

- **Self-Awareness** – knowing what one is feeling at any given time and understanding the impact those moods have on others.
- **Self- Regulation** – controlling or redirecting one's emotions; anticipating consequences before acting on impulse.
- **Motivation** – utilising emotional factors to achieve goals, enjoy the learning process and persevere in the face of obstacles.
- **Empathy** – sensing the emotions of others.
- **Social skills** – managing relationships, inspiring others, and inducing desired responses from them.

Task 1

With a colleague, discuss what the 5 components above mean to you:

- Why is it so important for leaders to possess these skills?
- Why do you think EI is so important when managing and resolving conflict?
- Do you possess these skills as a leader?
- Do you recognise these skills in your leaders?

Task 2

Read the case study below:

Vic is a room leader of the pre-school group in a nursery setting. He works really well with two other colleagues, Betty (who he has worked with for nearly 20 years) and Judith. When Judith begins her maternity leave, Tammy joins the team as her cover. Tammy has only recently qualified as an Early Years Practitioner and is confident and enthusiastic, with lots of ideas about how Early Years practice should be organised. Vic and Tammy establish a strong rapport, but Vic soon begins to notice a change in Betty who becomes quite withdrawn, arrives at the last minute, and leaves as soon as she can at the end of the day, contributes little to team meetings, and generally appears to be losing her enthusiasm for her work. Vic realises that this is having an impact on team morale and indirectly on the quality of provision for the children.

Reflect on the following questions and discuss with a colleague:

- What do you think is happening in the above scenario?
- What leadership skills will Vic need to manage this situation effectively?
- How will he need to engage Betty/others to resolve the issue?

Can you think of scenarios from your own practice in which conflict has arisen? What was your role in resolving the conflict? Looking back, is there anything you would have done differently? If so, why, and how?

Useful links

[Dealing With Conflicting Practitioners In The Early Years - Early Years Careers](#)

[What is Goleman's Theory of Emotional Intelligence? \(fairborndigital.us\)](#)

[4 Types of Team Conflict and How To Resolve Each Effectively | Indeed.com](#)