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## Conflict Resolution Issues

This activity was created to be used primarily with:

### 6. Conflict Resolution

Secondary skills include:

2. Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
4. Integrity
5. Work Ethic
8. Respect for Diversity
10. Teamwork
11. Big-Picture Thinking
14. Efficiency and Productivity
16. Information Security
17. Information Technology
20. Professionalism
22. Workplace Safety

Intro:

If you work around others (or even remotely within an organization), you will experience a variety of conflicts. Conflicts among coworkers, between workers and management, and quite possibly, between workers and ownership. Let's not forget customers. That's why employees with conflict resolution techniques are a valued at any level because conflicts hurt business and destroy morale and work ethic. However, competition can create healthy conflict that sparks energy and creative solutions, so one needs to understand the difference between positive and negative conflict. One also needs to understand how management views conflicts and when it is time to involve a mediator or decision maker at a higher level to settle disputes. The general rule is to resolve matters on your own, unless you were told not to, and only involve management or higher levels when you cannot work it out on your own and productivity or company reputation is at stake.

### 1. Teacher will define Conflict Resolution as:

- **negotiating diplomatic solutions:** typically conflicts involve people who have particular goals or expectations that appear at odds. They get stuck, and you could be one of those parties or you might be involved between parties (be sensitive to this and most of the time, avoid involving yourself unless it affects your work or productivity). You need skills to negotiate: observation, communication, insightfulness, fairness. Negotiation works by each party giving up something to arrive at a solution. The problem is, no one wants to give up anything. To resolve workplace conflict, you must begin with the trying to understand what would be best for the work itself. Take your own feelings out of the equation and remain professional.



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- **to interpersonal and workplace issues due to personality:** conflicts based on personal preference, dislikes, issues happening outside of the workplace, work style, and general biases.
- **culture:** this is about fitting in to the style and spirit held among coworkers in the workplace that are a reflection of company values. Workplace culture has a lot to do with morale, work ethic, and sometimes unwritten expectations. You will see company values in the formal mission and vision statements and they can help you understand your behavioral expectations and attitudes. A workplace culture can be positive or negative.
- **work style:** how you prefer to organize and complete your work. In a single workplace, there are many different types of workers, all of which thrive in various environments, which is why during the pandemic, when environments changed drastically for so many, workers needed to adapt to new styles.
- **or performance:** this has more to do with pure productivity or output, or execution.

2. Teacher will present various strategies students could use to resolve conflicts. Use this example to get them started:

**Example:** You have been working at a company for five years and you have a great team leader (manager/supervisor) who successfully fights on her team's behalf, for new ideas and work expectations. The team works well together and the company is benefitting. However, she leaves for a new job and the company hires a new team/department leader from outside the company. This manager's style is less friendly and more autocratic, no longer open to your team's ideas. Morale suffers and your peers resent the new manager. Conflict arises between your peers who say that their work responsibilities are different now and expectations are unfair. They don't feel listened to or valued.

**Problem:** Team members are no longer clear about their roles. New leadership has caused unrest among your team and productivity is slipping.

**Note:** Have students really think out these issues. Most will argue on behalf of the team members against the new manager. But do they consider the position of this new manager? There are many issues related to just being new and people need a period of working together before they really know where they stand. Just because there is initial conflict and distrust between the team and the manager, doesn't mean that the manager is ineffective. One must see both sides of the issue before attempting to resolve it. Remember, each side should be asked to give something up in a negotiation.

**Ask for conflict resolution strategies (solutions).**

**Solutions:** This is really an issue about adjusting to a new management style. Without appropriate communication both sides are hurt. The team should call a meeting first without the



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manager to discuss and understand what they really "want" to change. They need to speak as a unit and be on the same page before going to management. Certain personal expectations should be identified and left off of this essential list of "desired outcomes." In addition, they might resolve to give the manager more time. Perhaps they are just being reactive to change, which most people dislike, though change is a given and necessary for a company to survive. If so, set a date, perhaps after your next round of evaluations. During that time, write everything down, all decisions, all changes, all conflicts and work disruptions. Documentation protects good workers and gives you evidence and might open your eyes to new problems or even successes and progress. However, if by that date, morale and productivity continues to be negatively affected, a representative should call for a meeting with management to discuss issues, now neatly documented. This meeting, if granted, should be approached with a cool head in a professional, respectful manner. The main issue continues to be about clarifying job roles, so that is the lead issue. All other issues about leadership style should be secondary or left out altogether. Try to demonstrate how confusion and unhappiness over this single, main issue, is hurting the team and, therefore, the company.

Teachers may lead them through this exercise by taking the role of the new manager. This meeting is really the negotiation. What will the manager be willing to change and what will the team? Use the scenario of your current course or CTE program to provide the workplace context.

**Assignment:** Have students submit other common workplace conflicts and describe how they might be resolved. These conflicts could be non-work related and out of their personal experiences. Also, the teacher could work with stories in the news or industry partners (or other CTE instructors) to present real-world problems to students. (Students work in teams to choose the issue, define the conflict, and negotiation, or what each party in the conflict might sacrifice.

Note: One final point of negotiation workers always have is their ability to resign and seek new employment elsewhere. However, it should never be threatened unless employees are prepared to have their resignation accepted immediately. There is no threat behind it, in fact, but is offered as an ultimatum to force a change. Quitting is always part of the understanding of employment, so it doesn't need to be stated. It is usually taken as insolence and a reluctance to work through issues.

#### **Additional resources:**

The Five Cs Approach to Conflict Resolution in the Workplace:

<https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/350374>

Common Workplace Conflicts and How to Overcome Them:

<https://online.csp.edu/blog/business/common-workplace-conflicts/>