

HOW TO RESOLVE CONFLICTS IN YOUR TEAM

Conflicts, whether you want them or not, will always occur. And not all conflicts are bad. Some conflicts are not only useful, but necessary to spark innovation. Innovation happens when people of differing opinions can work together to create a new and unusual solution to a problem. To maximize your potential for capitalizing on constructive conflicts, you should have team members with different innovation styles. You also need to take an active role in making sure that your team members appreciate each other's strengths and the specific roles they play.

But when unconstructive conflicts happen, you need to focus on the source of the conflict and reframe the problem so that it can be addressed and solved. At the start of teamwork, take time to make sure that everyone understands the different ways to resolve conflicts and agree on particular rules or norms to resolve conflicts.

Step 1: Analyze the Situation and Find the Most Appropriate Strategy

Approach	What It Is	When to Use	Disadvantage
Avoid	One or more team members avoid or ignore the issue and do nothing	Problem cannot be solved, issue is not relevant or critical, or when people need time to calm down and reconsider	Conflict is never resolved, which may resurface at another time, and differing opinions are not voiced, groupthink
Accommodate	One or more team members appease the demands or conflicts to keep peace	One side is wrong, issue is not as important to one side as it is to the other, relationship is more important	Issues are not explored, the "winning" side does not elicit any opinions from the other, lack of idea exchange
Compromise	All sides look for common ground and give up some things to get other things they want	Sides cannot agree (stalemate), decisions need to be made (no time)	Can be adversarial, all sides lose some things
Compete	One or more team members are willing to do whatever it takes to "win"	The right decision is more important than the relationship	Very adversarial, relationship may never recover
Collaborate	Everyone understands and faces the core issue and wants a win-win situation	There is time to discuss the issues deeply and arrive at decision	Takes a long time, effort, and negotiation skills

Step 2: Understand the Problem and Reframe It

Convene your team and have each side answer the following questions to reframe the problem.

What's wrong? Be specific.	
Why do you have this problem?	
What does this problem stop you from doing? How does it limit you?	
Who is the origin of this problem?	
How did it surface?	
How long have you had this problem?	

Step 3: Find Out What You Want

Ask the following questions to see the outcome each side wants and find a way to move forward.

What do you want?	
When do you want it?	
How will you know you have achieved it?	
How will your situation change after you get what you want?	
What internal and external resources do you have to help you get what you want?	
How can you best use the resources you have?	
Who can help you get started?	
How can the other side help you get what you want?	

Each side needs to take time to listen to each other and understand the other's point of view to start resolving the conflict in a productive way.

Step 4: Analyze the Appropriate Decision-Making Strategy

Types of Decisions	What It Is	Strengths	When to Use	Weaknesses
Power Structure	The group leader decides	Fast and easy	There is a clear expert in the group	People may not own the decision and feel unheard
Group Silence	One or more people voice their opinions and assume assent because of the lack of response	Fast and easy	Decision not important	No discussion, conflicts may arise again later
Minority	Small group of people agree and move forward without consulting the rest of the group	Fast and easy	Decisions are not important to the rest of the group	No discussion, people may split into competing subgroups
Compromise	With no ready agreement, a new option is made that everybody can live with	Lots of discussion of the issues, everyone wins	Issues are important to everyone, there is time	No one gets everything they want, it takes time to negotiate
Voting	All options are presented and everybody votes	Everybody has a voice, there is a clear outcome	There is no time for prolonged negotiation, one or more sides won't budge	One side may feel unwanted and seek to undermine the decision
Consensus	Everybody gets their say and discusses a solution that everyone agrees to and feels good about	Collaborative, everyone is heard and owns the decision	Issue is very important to everyone, there is time to seek agreement	It takes a long time and requires negotiation skills

You always want to strive for a consensus, unless you have no time to bring everyone together. You need to work with the constraints you have and adjust your strategy as needed. Remember that people with different innovation styles expect different outcomes and communicate differently. Be adept at understanding your teammates and learn how to talk to them effectively.