

Managing Conflict

Conflict at work between two or more people or teams can take many forms. There may be clear, visible signs of conflict, such as arguments or a refusal for two parties to work together. Sometimes, the signs of conflict might be invisible or far less obvious.

What is it?

Managing conflict plays an important part in resolving issues, so that relationships can be kept positive and team and individual performance kept on track.

1. Identifying conflict

Generally, conflict has two elements – the relationship between the parties concerned and the issue which is at the heart of the disagreement. The signs that conflict is present are features of the relationship or behaviours of those involved in conflict and can include:

- Obvious changes in behaviour such as derogatory comments being made, negative body language, changes in social settings such as when or where people choose to take breaks, a poor atmosphere or an individual or team becoming isolated from others
- Signs of demotivation such as a lack of willingness to be helpful to others, not taking on voluntary tasks or not participating in meetings
- Performance issues such as uncompleted work, lack of productivity, goals not being achieved, untidiness or a lack of care and attention in someone's work
- Increased sickness absence
- An increase in complaints or a formal grievance being raised

2. Identifying its root causes

The root causes of conflict need to be uncovered and understood in order to be resolved. Common causes of conflict in the workplace include:

- Lack of clarity of goals or job roles
- Poorly-communicated changes to work areas and responsibilities
- Lack of training or support given to an individual or team
- Unfair or inconsistent treatment
- Poor management communication or a management style that is not supportive and encouraging
- Poor working conditions
- Bullying and harassment
- Issues arising from outside work that impact upon relationships at work

3. Managing and resolving conflict

There are both informal and formal ways of dealing with conflict. Which approach is appropriate will depend on the particular circumstances.

The **informal** route should generally be attempted first and can include:

- Having a quiet chat about the problem
- Trying a change of scene – taking one or both parties out of the workplace to a neutral setting
- Changing your own style as a manager

Formal systems are there to escalate the situation and can include:

- Following your organisation's grievance procedures
- Getting help from a skilled mediator
- Involving trade union representatives

Why is it important to me?

Conflict creates problems with achieving goals and objectives, and can simply make it unpleasant for everyone else at work.

As a manager or supervisor, you may find yourself in a situation where you will have to seek to resolve conflict between others, or between yourself and others. Therefore having an insight into identifying and dealing with conflict can help you to do your job better.

IQ believes that managing conflict effectively is an important skill for professionals working in the quarrying and minerals products industry. It features on our **Skills Wheel** which captures all the key

skill and knowledge areas we believe are vital to a successful career.

Where Next?

The public body ACAS runs practical training courses to help with managing conflict: www.acas.org.uk

The Institute of Leadership & Management (ILM): <https://www.institutelm.com/resourceLibrary/managing-conflict-at-work.html>

Institute of Quarrying

IQ supports professionals working within the quarrying and minerals products industry through membership and training. These factsheets are produced across a range of topics to share ideas and best practice. Further information can be found via the resources section on the IQ website www.quarrying.org.