

# WORKPLACE CONFLICT RESOLUTION

# Opening

*“When I am getting ready to reason with a man, I spend one-third of my time thinking about myself and what I am going to say and two-thirds about him and what he is going to say.”*

– Abraham Lincoln

16th President of the United States

# Introduction

Conflict is a normal part of any healthy relationship. After all, two people can't be expected to agree on everything, all the time. The key is not to avoid conflict but to learn how to resolve it in a healthy way. When conflict is mismanaged, it can cause great harm to a relationship, but when handled in a respectful, positive way, conflict provides an opportunity to strengthen the bond between two people.

# Agenda

- Describe Conflict Resolution
- What Causes Conflict?
- Emotional Awareness
- Recognize Benefits of Emotional Awareness
- Conflict Resolution Strategies
- Summary

# Conflict Resolution

**Conflict resolution** is the process by which two or more parties engaged in a disagreement, **dispute**, or debate reach an agreement resolving it. Several skills are needed for you to **resolve conflicts** in the workplace effectively.

<https://study.com/.../what-is-conflict-resolution-in-the-workplace-skills-techniques-meth...>

# What Causes Conflict?

**Conflict arises from differences, both large and small. It occurs whenever people disagree over their:**

- values
- motivations
- perceptions
- ideas, or desires

# What Causes Conflict (continued)

**Differences may appear trivial, but when a conflict triggers strong feelings, a deep personal need is often at the core of the problem**

- These unmet needs can range from:
  - feeling safe and secure,
  - respected and valued, or
  - lacking greater closeness and intimacy

# The Upside of Conflict

## **Organizational Development**

Too many organizations ignore or avoid addressing internal conflict. A healthy perspective on disagreement can increase resilience and spur needed innovation.

# The Four Elements

## **The Four Elements of a “Healthy Conflict Perspective” for Organizations**

- Conflict-Competent Leadership
- Open and Inclusive Organizational Culture
- Fair and Efficient Conflict Purposes
- Respectful Relationships Founded on Conversational Competence

# Conflict-Competent Leadership

## **Conflict-Competent Leadership**

This element is dedicated to constructively address conflict early and collaboratively. If necessary, a conflict-competent leader will drive a process to change the organization's attitude and approach to conflict.

Leaders are in a unique position to improve their organization's perspective on conflict, thereby bypassing the avoidance trap.

# Organizational Culture

## **Open and Inclusive Organizational Culture**

The right culture is one in which people feel confident and comfortable being themselves, challenging the status quo, questioning ways of doing things, and suggesting new alternatives. A healthy culture of conflict is crucial for innovation.

# Open and Inclusive

## **Open and Inclusive Organizational Culture (Continued)**

The key to success in having an open and inclusive organization is encouraging an organization to make the most of different perspectives, ways of working, experiences, functions, and identities. This requires an organizational culture that encourages people to be themselves and contribute fully.

# Conflict Processes

## **Fair and Effective Conflict Processes**

These are methods that establish a coherent, organization-wide response to conflict occurring within the organization. Such processes should be at least somewhat formal and include ways of responding to and learning from intra-organizational conflict, as well as measures to prevent undue escalation, such as training, conflict-resolution approaches, ombuds, and mediation.

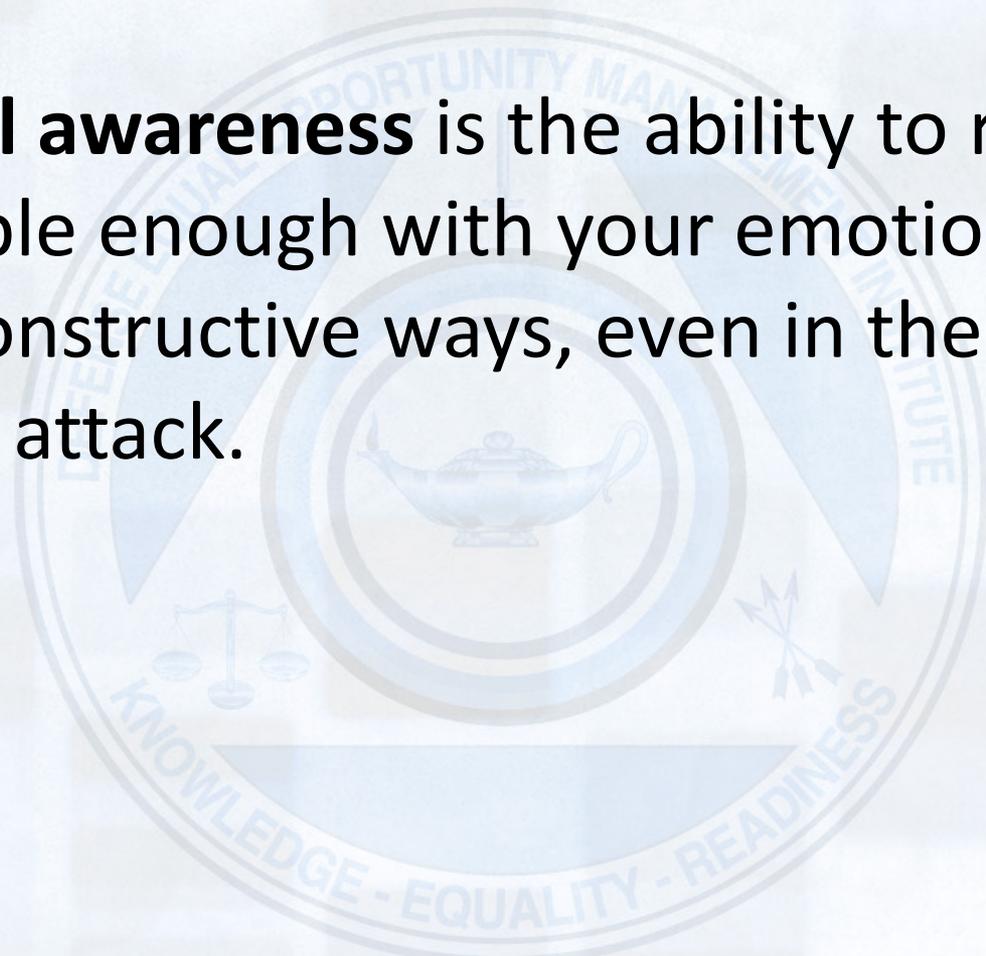
# Conversational Competence

## **Respectful Relationships Founded on Conversational Competence**

To build respectful relationships and be conversationally competent, organizations must ensure that discussions and interactions at all levels (from one-on-one encounters, to small groups, to board meetings, to organization-wide communications) be open, direct, respectful, and candid.

# Emotional Awareness

**Emotional awareness** is the ability to remain comfortable enough with your emotions to react in constructive ways, even in the midst of a perceived attack.



# Understanding Emotional Awareness

## **Emotional awareness is the key to understanding yourself and others**

- If you don't know how or why you feel a certain way, you won't be able to communicate effectively or resolve disagreements.
- Although knowing your own feelings may sound simple, many people ignore or try to sedate strong emotions like anger, sadness, and fear. Your ability to handle conflict, however, depends on being connected to these feelings.
- If you're afraid of strong emotions or if you insist on finding solutions that are strictly rational, your ability to face and resolve differences will be limited.

# Benefits to Emotional Awareness

## Emotional awareness helps you to:

- Understand what is really troubling other people
- Understand yourself, including what is really bothering you
- Stay motivated until the conflict is resolved
- Communicate clearly and effectively
- Interest and influence others

# Listening Strategies

**Listen for what is felt as well as said.**

When you really listen, you connect more deeply to your own needs and emotions, and to those of other people. Listening also strengthens, informs, and makes it easier for others to hear you when it's your turn to speak.

# Resolution Priority

**Make conflict resolution the priority rather than winning or “being right.”**

Maintaining and strengthening the relationship, rather than “winning” the argument, should always be your first priority. Be respectful of the other person and their viewpoint.

# Focus on the Present

## Focus on the present

If you're holding on to grudges based on past conflicts, your ability to see the reality of the current situation will be impaired. Rather than looking to the past and assigning blame, focus on what you can do in the here-and-now to solve the problem.

# Conflict Choices

## **Pick your battles.**

Conflicts can be draining, so it's important to consider whether the issue is really worth your time and energy. Maybe you don't want to surrender a parking space if you've been circling for 15 minutes, but if there are dozens of empty spots, arguing over a single space isn't worth it.

# Forgiveness

**Be willing to forgive.**

Resolving conflict is impossible if you're unwilling or unable to forgive others. Resolution lies in releasing the urge to punish, which can serve only to deplete and drain your mental and or emotional energy.

# Disengaging

**Know when to let something go.**

If you can't come to an agreement, agree to disagree. It takes two people to keep an argument going. If a conflict is going nowhere, you can choose to disengage and move on.

# Summary

The downsides of conflict are diffuse and seldom part of work planning, and incur expenses that are both relatively objective, such as hours spent and consultants hired, and highly subjective, such as damage to relationships and trust.

The same holds true for assessing the benefits of investments in conflict competence.

The value of having an effective conflict competence system in place and of upside gains—in creativity and effective adaptation, for example—is almost impossible to compute.

There is enough evidence to establish that the benefits are likely to far outweigh the costs.

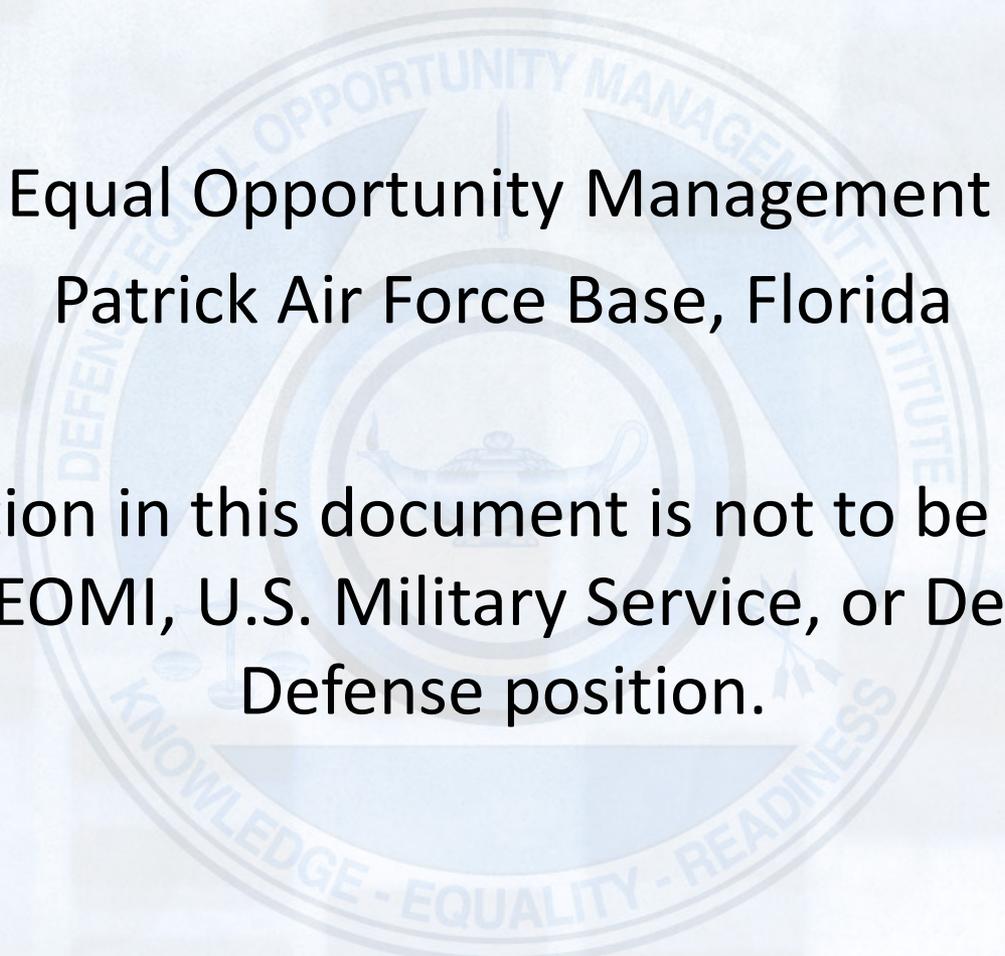
# References

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Leslie Dechurch, Jessica Mesmer-Magnus, and Dan Doty, "[Moving Beyond Relationship and Task Conflict: Toward a Process-State Perspective](#)," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, vol. 98, no. 4, 2013, 559-78.
- <sup>2</sup> David Allyn, "[Mission Mirroring: Understanding Conflict in Nonprofit Organizations](#)," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 4, 2011, 762-96.
- <sup>3</sup> David La Piana, "[The Nonprofit Paradox](#)," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Summer 2010.
- <sup>4</sup> Amitai Etzioni, [A Comparative Analysis of Complex Organizations: On Power, Involvement, and Their Correlates](#), New York: The Free Press, 1971.
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- <sup>7</sup> Dan Cable, [Alive at Work: The Neuroscience of Helping Your People Love What They Do](#), Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Business Review Press, 2018.
- <sup>8</sup> See, for example, the discussion of conflict-process design in Lawrence Susskind et al., eds., [The Consensus Building Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to Reaching Agreement](#), Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1999, 209; Carsten De Dreu et al., eds., [Using Conflict in Organizations](#), Sage Publications, 1996; and Cathy Costantino and Christina Merchant, [Designing Conflict Management Systems: A Guide to Creating Productive and Healthy Organizations](#), Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 1996.

# Additional References

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- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.
- <sup>12</sup> Carsten De Dreu et al., “[Task Versus Relationship Conflict, Team Performance, and Team Member Satisfaction: A Meta-Analysis](#),” *Journal of Applied Psychology*, vol. 88, no. 4, 2003, 741-47.
- <sup>13</sup> “A transformational approach begins with two pro-active foundations: 1) a *positive orientation* toward conflict, and 2) a *willingness to engage* in the conflict in an effort to produce constructive change or growth.” John Paul Lederach, “Conflict Transformation,” 2003, <https://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/transformation>.
- <sup>14</sup> Psychologist Ron Friedman writes about the importance of relatedness to motivation and performance in his book, [Best Place to Work: The Art and Science of Creating an Extraordinary Workplace](#), New York: TarcherPerrigee, 2015.
- <sup>15</sup> Christine Porath, [Mastering Civility: A Manifesto for the Workplace](#), New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2016. See also <http://www.christineporath.com> for videos and articles on the topic.



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