

Conflict Management

The correct way to handle conflicts is an important prerequisite for the success of a project. So that conflicts do not become an aggravation they must be recognized early, be analyzed correctly, and dealt with constructively. This systematic procedure is summed up with the term "Conflict Management". When working on a project tension and disagreements will always occur between individual employees, work groups and departments; but with conflict management they can be recognized earlier, become more distinct and are easier to handle.

Conflicts are often seen as reasons for friction. They hinder work, take up time and pollute the working atmosphere. For this reason we often try to ignore conflicts and sweep them under the carpet rather than solve them.

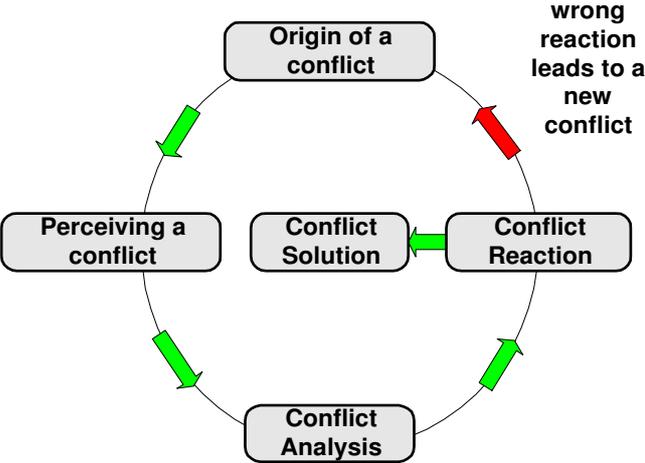


Conflicts and opposition, however, are the driving force of dynamics and development. If there is no disagreement, there cannot be change. The problem is therefore not the conflict itself, but rather the lack of ability to handle it.

Therefore, take advantage of opposition and conflicts in your project work!

Conflicts can take many different forms. They can be short or long, they can be handled objectively or aggressively, they can be openly addressed or approached indirectly. Despite this variety procedures can be found which are important for the understanding of any conflict.

If a conflict occurs, it will follow an usual course:



(1) The origin of a conflict

If the opinions, interests and wishes of one party do not coincide with those of the other party, there will be a conflict. Both parties want to push through their own goals and needs. Conflicts are much more likely, if:

- the technical knowledge and experience of employees differs greatly
- roles, functions and authorities are unclear to stakeholders in the project
- project goals are not clearly defined, known and understood.

Every project has its own potential areas of conflict. At the beginning of each project these should be recognized out in order to become sensitive to the causes of a conflict.

Many conflicts start as hidden conflicts and are often very difficult to recognize. On the other hand, extremely sensitive people tend to overestimate certain situations and make mountains out of molehills. Discuss whether others perceive the conflict as you do.

(2) Perceiving a conflict

People see conflicts from different perspectives. An objectively correct assessment of the conflict situation therefore is often very difficult.

Signs of a conflict:

- Poor team spirit
- Aggressive communication style
- Bagged down discussions
- Killer phrases, words that go below the belt
- Flogging the subject to death
- Unwillingness to compromise
- Resignation
- Refusal to take on tasks – referral to others
- Absence
- Carelessness, passiveness, avoidance of eye contact
- Escape into work which is not part of the project
- Hidden obstacles: statements and actions do not coincide
- Missed appointments
- Unpunctuality, unreliability.

(3) Conflict analysis

Solving a conflict requires analysis in advance. If a conflict has been identified, the following must be determined:

- Who is involved in the conflict?
- What does the conflict concern?
- How important is the subject of the dispute?

These determinations greatly influence the behavior of the stakeholders. It is important how differently the various ways of dealing with the problem can be perceived and how realistically the cause of the conflict is judged.

Watch out for only looking at a conflict from your point of view. Try to change your perspective to gain understanding for your situation, as well as that of your conflict partner.

(4) Conflict reaction:

After you have determined the cause of the conflict, it is up to you to decide which strategy to use to solve the conflict:

Do you want to be a victim? Therefore, do you wait to see what will happen? Or, do you try to deal actively with the conflict? Active conflict control means: you decide whether you will suppress the conflict, avoid it, or deal with it.



Sure, that's no way to solve a conflict!

There are various strategies for solving conflicts:

First of all, let's look at the **Loser - Winner Strategy**:

In this case you concede your position to your conflict partner and abandon the field to him without any opposition. This allows you to regain your emotional balance for a while, but does not solve the actual problem. Just the opposite: if you always swallow the minor things, this may even lead to an aggravation of the conflict. After a period of superficial peace you could really blow your fuse.

And the opposite? This is the **Winner - Loser Strategy**.

If you feel yourself to be at the advantage, you will achieve an early end to the conflict with this strategy. But be careful! The loser is often ready to take up the fight again. He than can be extremely aggressive and will want to flaunt his successes later.

There are no winners with the **Loser - Loser Strategy**. You and your conflict partner will find yourselves in a worse situation than before. If it shouldn't come to this point, there are two possible ways to come to a solution:

- a.) Delegation
Delegate the conflict to a neutral party and accept the verdict. Otherwise the conflict will start up again.
- b.) Compromise
Come together and try to find the modus vivendi. You must recognize that even more serious disadvantages may occur if you do not find a compromise.

The best solution to a conflict is consensus. With this strategy you break the vicious circle. Actual reunion is not in the forefront here, but rather the constructive management of the conflict. Conflicting opinions are to be discussed and combined into a better overall view. Since both parties profit from this type of solution, this is often referred to as the

Winner – Winner Strategy.

The winner of a conflict who leaves a loser behind him will be the loser himself sooner or later. Only winners can be productive performers.

Tips for solving conflicts

Time solves no conflict. At the very most, it allows a period of hibernation.

If you want to solve conflicts constructively, you have to deal with them actively.

The earlier a conflict is recognized, the better creative and controlling steps can be undertaken.

Solving conflicts means changing your attitudes and your behavior. Take your time - because this is a learning process.

Conflicts cannot be solved alone.

Try to appeal to the readiness of the persons involved to work on a common solution.