



Exercise 3:

Handling conflict and people management issues

This exercise forms part of the support materials designed to help you explore and develop your management capability. It aims to provide ideas and inspiration relevant to handling conflict and people management issues.

Handling conflict and problems is about taking an objective approach to employee conflict, dealing with it as soon as it arises and following through to make sure it is resolved; it is also about addressing people management issues (such as bullying and unacceptable behaviour) in a supportive way and getting support yourself if needed.

If you haven't already done so, use the step-by-step guidance to help you get feedback, identify strengths and areas to develop and plan the action you will take. There is also an action plan sheet, which can be used to note down and track your actions.



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Activity	What have I learnt from reflecting on this?	What will I do differently as a result?
<p>Understand the signs: how can you spot conflict and people management issues in your team as early as possible?</p> <p>Being aware of the signs of conflict is vital to being able to address problems early, which is when you are most likely to be able to resolve them. Reflect on how you can best be aware of these signs.</p> <p>Obvious forms of conflict at work and people management issues include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• bullying behaviour or harassment• discriminatory behaviour• unacceptable language• heated arguments. <p>Less obvious forms of conflict include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• simmering tensions due to differences in personality style or• ways of working• not valuing other people's views, background or experiences• talking over people in meetings• ignoring people or not including them in meetings, emails or social events• being discourteous. <p>Getting to know your team members is a key part of being able to spot these kinds of problem: it will allow you to monitor for any signs that something is going awry. (See exercise 5 for more information on building relationships.) In addition, you can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use one-to-ones and informal conversations to pick up any issues that might be building beneath the surface.• Explicitly encourage people to talk to you if they have concerns. <p>Reflect on whether there is more you need to do to build this awareness and be in a good position to spot early warning signs.</p>		



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<p>Check your objectivity: how can you stay impartial?</p> <p>To effectively resolve conflict in the team, it is vital that managers are seen as impartial and objective. Reflect on how you can ensure that you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make no assumptions, keep an open mind and give people space to talk the situation through.• Avoid taking sides and instead focus on helping both/all individuals discuss their options and reach resolution.• Maintain confidentiality and only pass on information when you have permission• Act with integrity, fairness and honesty. <p>What more might you do to help you stay impartial?</p> <p><i>Continued on next page</i></p>		
<p>Reflect on your approach: do you address issues as soon as they arise?</p> <p>Many conflict situations and people management issues start as mild disagreements or discomforts. If they are addressed straight away, they are much more likely to be resolved quickly and without too much fallout. If they are left to fester, they can escalate into major rifts or crises.</p> <p>Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Challenging any hint of inappropriate behaviour (for example, a sexist remark or personal insult) immediately. This not only prevents it from escalating, it also sends a clear message to the whole team that such behaviour will not be tolerated.• Acknowledging when a team member is behaving in ways that lead to disharmony, for example, being overly critical, not sharing information, avoiding tasks, being late or not turning up. <p><i>Continued on next page</i></p>		



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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talking to all the individuals concerned as soon as you identify anything amiss. Intervening quickly in cases of conflict, dealing with issues in a sensitive, fair and constructive way. <p>As you reflect on your own approach, consider whether you are addressing issues as early as you can.</p> <p>In some cases, a team member may feel that it is you, their line manager, who is behaving in inappropriate and unhelpful ways. Do you provide opportunities for people to talk to you when they feel uncomfortable? Do you make sure that they know who else to talk to if they don't feel they can address it with you directly? Do you respond with care and concern if people raise an issue like this? (See exercise 1 for more on taking a positive, respectful, open approach.)</p>		
<p>Understand what needs to happen: do you need to engage in a clear resolution process?</p> <p>Where a conflict or people problem requires active resolution, the following steps allow a logical process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider all perspectives and understand the causes – talk to everyone involved individually and get their perspectives; make no assumptions, but instead explore what underlies the problem. Listening is key here. (See exercise 1 for more on listening.) Bring people together to communicate – encourage people to listen to each other and acknowledge one another's views and concerns. Explore solutions – if possible, work with those involved to generate solutions; encourage them to discuss any changes that can be made to solve the situation and move forward. It might be helpful to familiarise yourself with the company policies regarding conduct. <p><i>Continued on next page</i></p>		



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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan and take action – ensure the agreed solutions are implemented. If you feel unsure of the best approach or would like support, ask HR or others for advice and support (see more below). Follow up – don't assume that the problem has gone away, but instead follow up with all involved to check that it is fully resolved and hasn't reoccurred. Have a contingency plan – consider developing a back-up plan that provides alternative solutions in case things go wrong or unforeseen knock-on problems arise. <p>Do you need to adopt this process to deal with anything in your team at the moment? How might you make sure you follow the steps above if/when you need to?</p> <p><i>Continued on next page</i></p>		
<p>Identify when the situation becomes more serious: how can you protect employees?</p> <p>If the conflict has become particularly heated or the situation is one of abuse, harassment or bullying, you may need to take further steps to protect your employees and resolve the situation. If you are dealing with this kind of situation in your team, consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you need to discuss your approach with HR before you take action? What kind of action do you need to take to protect employees? <p>Examples might include removing team members from the conflict situation or temporarily separating those who are in conflict.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are you at the point where informal problem solving has been unsuccessful and/or is the misconduct so serious that it demands a more formal approach? In this case, a formal procedure (for example, formal investigation or grievance process) might be needed to resolve the situation. 		



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<p>Consider your limits: do you need to seek support?</p> <p>If you are unfamiliar with dealing with conflict and people management issues, you might find it helpful to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask for some learning and development input on how to manage conflict.• Seek support from HR to help you deal with problems when they arise.• Get support from a mediation service if the conflict seems too severe for you to resolve alone.• Ask advice from an occupational health professional if the situation is health-related. For example, if a team member is suffering from a health problem that is affecting their work, it may be helpful to get advice on what adjustments you need to make to their working hours, location, tasks etc in order to support them.• Consider putting in place strategies to prioritise self-care and seeking support for yourself if you are finding things difficult: overseeing a conflict or disciplinary can be challenging and place an additional pressure on you as a manager.		