

Types of Workplace Conflict

In the workplace (and almost any setting) you are likely to find two forms of conflict.

The first is conflict about decisions, ideas, directions and actions. We will call this '*substantive conflict*' since it deals with disagreements about the substance of issues.

The second form, '*personalised conflict*' is often called a personality conflict. In this form, the two parties simply 'don't like each other much'.

Substantive conflict can occur on just about any issue, but its moving force is that the two parties simply disagree about an issue.

This can be a good thing or a bad thing. Handled correctly parties in conflict can create, for themselves and those around them, the ability to resolve an issue with something creative, something better than either party's original position.

While substantive conflict, if handled correctly, can be very productive, **personalised conflict** is almost never a good thing.

There are several reasons.

First, personalised conflict is fuelled primarily by emotion (usually anger, frustration) and perceptions about someone else's personality, character or motives. When conflict is personalised, each party acts as if the other is suspect as a person.

Second, because personalised conflict is about emotion and not issues, problem solving almost never works, neither party is really interested in solving a problem...in fact, in extreme cases, the parties go out of their ways to create new ones, imagined or real.

Third, personalised conflicts almost always get worse over time, if they cannot be converted to substantive conflict. That is because each person expects problems, looks for them, finds them, and gets angrier.

What makes people angry?

Here are a few examples of what angers people of primes the conflict pump:

- Power/Status-Based Communication
- Person Centred Comments & Criticism
- Past Centred Comments
- Guilt-Induction Attempts
- Blaming Comments
- Inappropriate Reassurance and Positive Thinking
- Unsolicited Advice/Commands
- Lengthy Attempts At Persuasion
- Defensiveness-Causing Questions
- Extended Attempts To Win
- Mistrust Statements
- Overstatements and Over-generalisations

- Infallibility Comments (and qualification comments)
- Histrionic Behaviour (Over dramatisation)
- Use Of Hot Phrases and Words
- Words or phrases that suggest disinterest
- Phrases that blame or imply blame or suggest ignorance
- Phrases that suggest helplessness (brush-offs)
- Phrases that have a threatening undertone
- Phrases that challenge or dare
- Use of Code Words and Innuendo
- Passive-Aggressive Behaviour