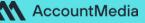# How to
RESOLVE
Employee Conflict
101

A Guide to Effective Leadership in Conflict Resolution

Introduction

Effective leaders must possess the ability to manage conflicts, arguments, and disagreements among their employees.

Conflict resolution skills are crucial for maintaining a positive work environment, driving productivity, and fostering teamwork.

In this guide, we'll explore eight theories and strategies from specialists in the field, along with examples of **employee conflict** resolution they discuss.

We will also look at the 5 ways on how not to handle employee conflict!

01 **Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (1974) Specialists:** Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) identifies five conflict-handling styles: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating. Effective leaders assess the situation and choose the appropriate style for resolving conflicts. For example, a leader might use collaboration to solve a conflict between team members with opposing ideas by finding a solution that incorporates both perspectives.

02 **Fisher and Ury's Interest-Based Relational (IBR) Approach (1981) Specialists:** Roger Fisher and William Ury Fisher and Ury's IBR approach focuses on separating the people from the problem, focusing on interests rather than positions, generating various possibilities, and using objective criteria for decision-making. In a conflict where two employees argue over scarce resources, a leader using the IBR approach would identify underlying needs and find a solution that satisfies both parties' interests.

03 **Amy Edmondson's Psychological Safety (1999) Specialist:** Amy Edmondson argues that psychological safety is vital for effective conflict resolution. Leaders should create an environment where employees feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and concerns without fear of retribution. For instance, when addressing a disagreement between team members, the leader should encourage open communication and make sure all parties feel heard and respected.

04 **Lencioni's Five Dysfunctions of a Team (2002) Specialist:** Patrick Lencioni identifies five dysfunctions that can hinder a team's performance, one of which is the fear of conflict. Effective leaders foster an environment where healthy conflict is embraced. By addressing a conflict between two employees who avoid confrontation, a leader can facilitate open dialogue to uncover the root cause and develop a mutually beneficial solution.

05 **Heifetz's Adaptive Leadership (2009) Specialist:** Ronald A. Heifetz Adaptive leadership emphasizes the importance of leaders adapting their approach to each unique situation. In a conflict where team members have differing opinions on a project's direction, the leader might step back, allowing employees to debate and collectively decide on the best course of action.

06 **Brene Brown's Empathy and Vulnerability (2012) Specialist:** Brene Brown argues that empathy and vulnerability are essential for effective conflict resolution. Leaders should model these traits by openly sharing their own feelings and actively listening to their employees. In a conflict where an employee feels unheard, a leader might share a similar experience and express understanding, ultimately helping to resolve the disagreement.

07 **Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence (2012) Specialist:** Daniel Goleman Goleman's Emotional Intelligence (EI) theory suggests that leaders who can manage their own emotions and empathize with others are more successful at resolving conflicts. For example, a leader dealing with a heated argument between two employees might defuse the situation by calmly addressing the issue and demonstrating empathy towards both parties.

08 **Stone, Patton, and Heen's Difficult Conversations (2010) Specialists:** Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen The authors emphasize the importance of understanding different perspectives, addressing emotions, and establishing a clear understanding of the conflict. In a situation where employees argue about work priorities, a leader using these strategies would acknowledge each party's emotions, explore the reasoning behind their perspectives, and facilitate a conversation to reach a consensus.

5 Ways on How Not to Handle Employee Conflict

01   **Ignoring the conflict:** Avoiding or ignoring conflicts can lead to a toxic work environment and may exacerbate existing issues. When leaders fail to address conflicts, they miss the opportunity to foster open communication, find effective solutions, and improve team dynamics. Unresolved conflicts can fester, resulting in decreased productivity, increased stress, and the potential for escalated disputes.

02   **Taking sides:** Leaders should remain neutral and objective when handling employee conflicts. By taking sides or showing favoritism, they risk losing credibility, eroding trust, and creating resentment among employees. Instead, leaders should focus on understanding each party's perspective and work towards a fair, mutually beneficial resolution.

03   **Publicly reprimanding or humiliating employees:** Addressing conflicts in public can embarrass employees and damage their self-esteem. Furthermore, public reprimands can create a culture of fear, stifling open communication and collaboration. Leaders should handle conflicts privately, providing a safe and supportive environment for employees to express their concerns and work through disagreements.

04   **Imposing a solution without considering employee input:** Imposing a solution without seeking input from the involved parties can lead to resentment and undermine the leader's authority. Employees may feel unheard and unvalued, which can negatively impact morale, job satisfaction, and long-term employee retention. Instead, leaders should actively involve employees in the problem-solving process, ensuring that their perspectives are considered in the resolution.

05   **Focusing on blame rather than solutions:** When handling conflicts, it's essential to focus on identifying and addressing the underlying issues rather than assigning blame. Focusing on blame can create a defensive atmosphere, hindering open communication and collaboration. Leaders should encourage employees to take responsibility for their actions, while also guiding them toward finding constructive solutions that address the root cause of the conflict.

Conclusion

Effective leaders understand that conflicts, arguments, and **disagreements** are inevitable in the workplace. By implementing **strategies** and theories from specialists such as **Thomas-Kilmann**, Fisher and Ury, Edmondson, Lencioni, Heifetz, Brown, Goleman, Stone, Patton, and Heen, leaders can successfully navigate these **challenging situations**.

By promoting open communication, psychological safety, empathy, emotional intelligence, and adaptability, leaders can resolve conflicts while fostering a positive, **collaborative work environment**.