

Navigating the Storm: Strategies for Managing Conflict in Projects

Amany Nuseibeh, PMP, FPMIA, BSc, MBT, MoP Practitioner, P3O Practitioner

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/amanyuseibeh/>

X (previously) Twitter: @amanyuseibeh

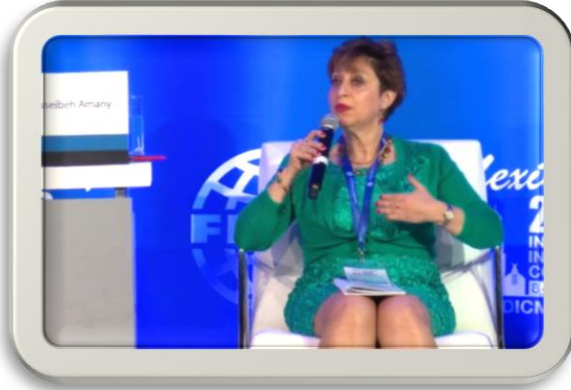
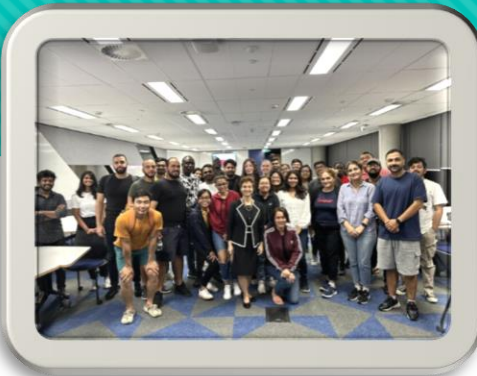
Wednesday 22nd May 2024

Paying Respect



I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the land from where I am meeting with you today. I recognise their continuing connection to the land and waters and thank them for protecting this coastline and its ecosystems since time immemorial. I pay my respect to Elders past and present and extend that respect to all First Nations people.

Amany Nuseibeh, FPMIA, BSc, Post Grad in Accounting, Diploma in Project Management, MBT, PMP, CPPD, MoP Practitioner, P3O Practitioner



Agenda

- Understanding Conflict
- The Role of Conflict Management in Project Management
- Examples that demonstrate the successful application of conflict resolution tactics and strategies in project management
- Conflict Resolution Strategies
- Transforming Conflict into Opportunity
- Practical Application
- Q&A Session

Can an organisation exist without conflict?

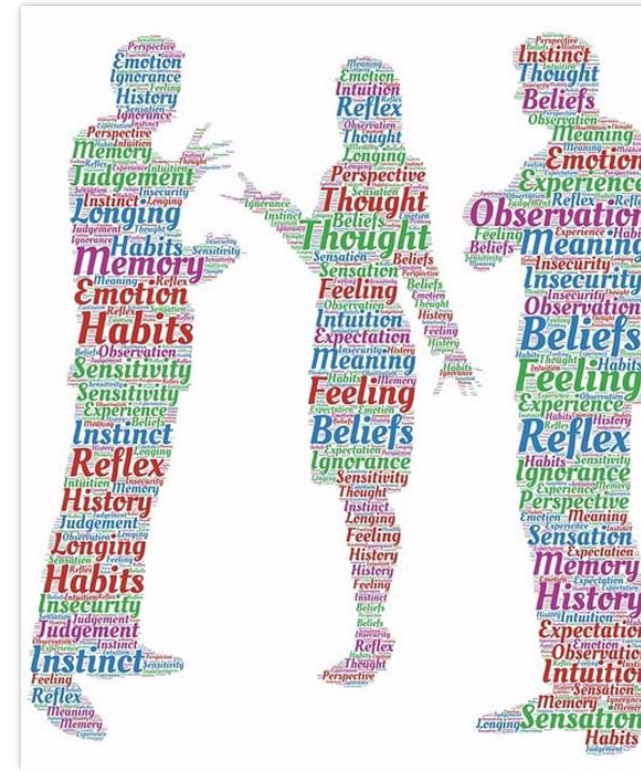
No team or organisation is without conflict or chaos, and most are surprised when those situations occur!



In a few words – use the chat



Reflect on the last work conflict you had – what advice you would give yourself?



Difference between comfort and safety *

- In a healthy organisation it's going to be **uncomfortable** – the right type of conversation, disagreed with, does not mean that you get attacked
- **Truth and dignity** are important in an organisation
- People will not agree with you, or your feelings might not be hurt if people disagree with something you believe
- That makes me feel unsafe
- **If there's trust - Vulnerability based trust** you can go into that have conflict and still feel safe in the midst of it, though ideologically you might be punched in the face but you can still deal with that.



What is Conflict in the context of project management?

Conflict, in the context of project management, **is a state of discord caused by the actual or perceived opposition of needs, values, and interests between people working together.**

Conflict can take many forms in organizations, such as **task conflict, relationship conflict, and process conflict.**

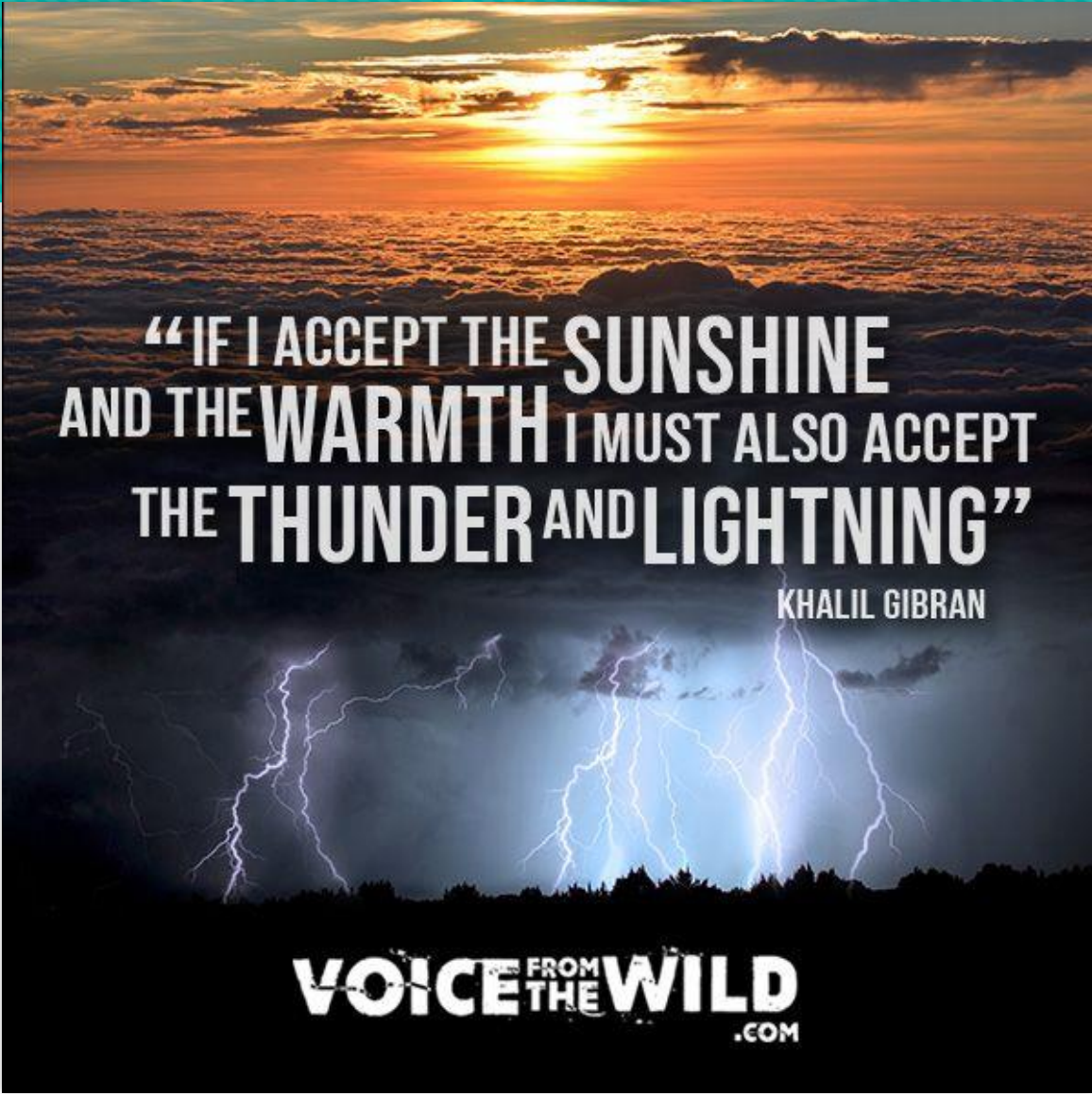


Sources of Conflict

- Miscommunication
- Differing priorities
- Resource allocation (overwhelm, burnout, understaffing)
- Personality clashes
- Poor management practices, and
- Pandemic-related, mental health, anxiety

Understanding these causes can help us manage conflict more effectively.





**“IF I ACCEPT THE SUNSHINE
AND THE WARMTH I MUST ALSO ACCEPT
THE THUNDER AND LIGHTNING”**

KHALIL GIBRAN

VOICE FROM THE WILD
.COM

Quote by Albert Einstein

“In the middle of difficulty
lies opportunity.”



If managed effectively

While conflict can disrupt workflow and create a negative work environment, it's not always a bad thing.

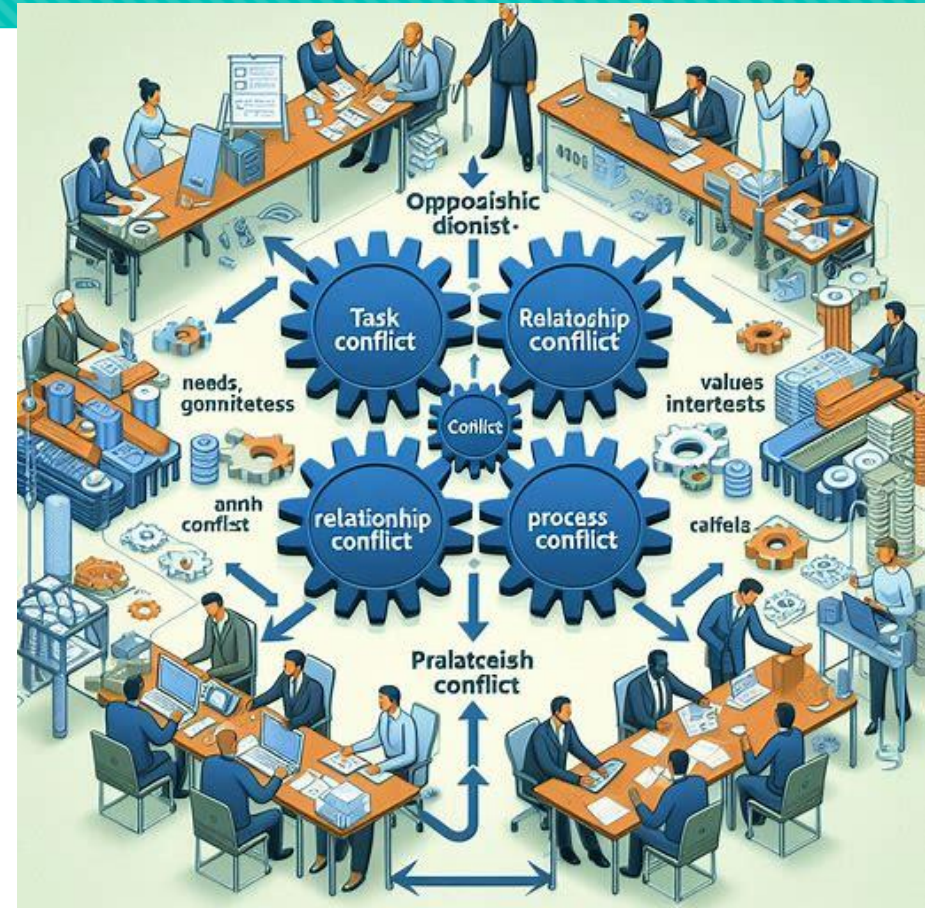
If managed effectively, conflict can present

- opportunities for innovation,
- team building, and
- improved communication.

It can challenge the status quo, encourage critical thinking, and foster an environment of understanding and cooperation.

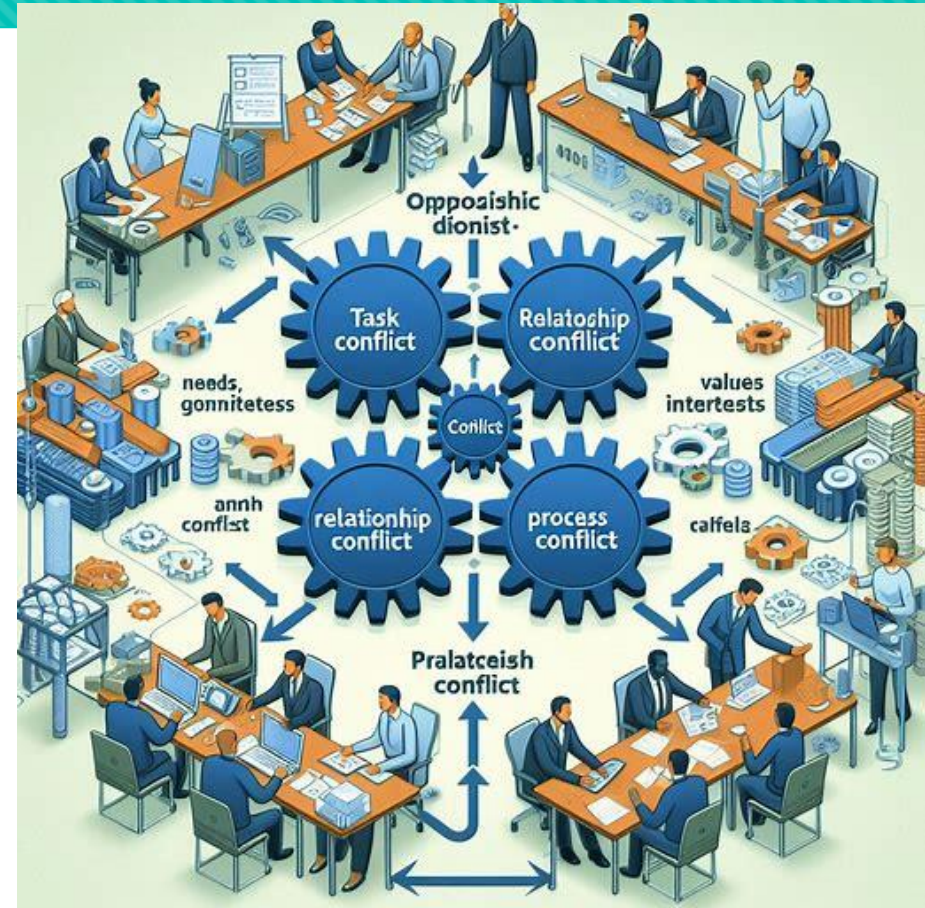
Types of Conflict in project management

- **Task Conflict:** arises when there are disagreements about the **content and outcomes of tasks** being performed. For example, team members might have different views on how to achieve a project goal or meet a deadline.
- **Process Conflict:** occurs when there are disagreements about **the logistics of task performance**, such as who should do what and when. For example, two team members might disagree on the sequence of tasks in a project.



Types of Conflict in project management (cont'd)

- **Relationship Conflict:** personal and involves disagreements based **on personal dislike or interpersonal incompatibility**. For example, two team members might not get along due to differences in their personalities or working styles.
- **Resource Conflict:** arises when there are **disputes over access to resources**, such as time, money, or materials. For example, two departments might be competing for the same budget allocation in a project.



A decision-making framework for choosing the right conflict resolution strategy:

- 1. Define the Conflict:** Clearly identify the issue that is causing the conflict. Understand the needs and interests of all parties involved.
- 2. Analyse the Situation:**
 - Importance of the Issue: How important is the issue to the project and to the parties involved?
 - Relationship Importance: How important is the relationship between the conflicting parties?
 - Power Dynamics: What is the power dynamic between the conflicting parties?
 - Time Constraints: Is there a time constraint that needs to be considered?

A decision-making framework for choosing the right conflict resolution strategy: (Cont'd)

3. Evaluate Conflict Resolution Strategies:

3. **Avoidance:** Is the issue trivial or unimportant? Is there no chance of winning?
4. **Accommodation:** Is maintaining harmony and relationships more important than winning?
5. **Competition:** Is quick, decisive action needed? Is the issue very important?
6. **Compromise:** Is it important for all parties to have their interests partially met?
7. **Collaboration:** Is the issue and the relationship important? Is there enough time and trust for open discussion?

4. **Choose and Implement the Strategy:** Based on the analysis, choose the most appropriate strategy. Implement the strategy while maintaining open communication and respect for all parties involved.

5. **Evaluate the Outcome:** After the conflict has been addressed, evaluate the outcome. Was the conflict resolved effectively? What could have been done differently?

The first conflict conversation is with YOURSELF



Use the Chat



Do you stay silent
when conflict
arises?



Use the chat



Why it is important
NOT to stay silent ?

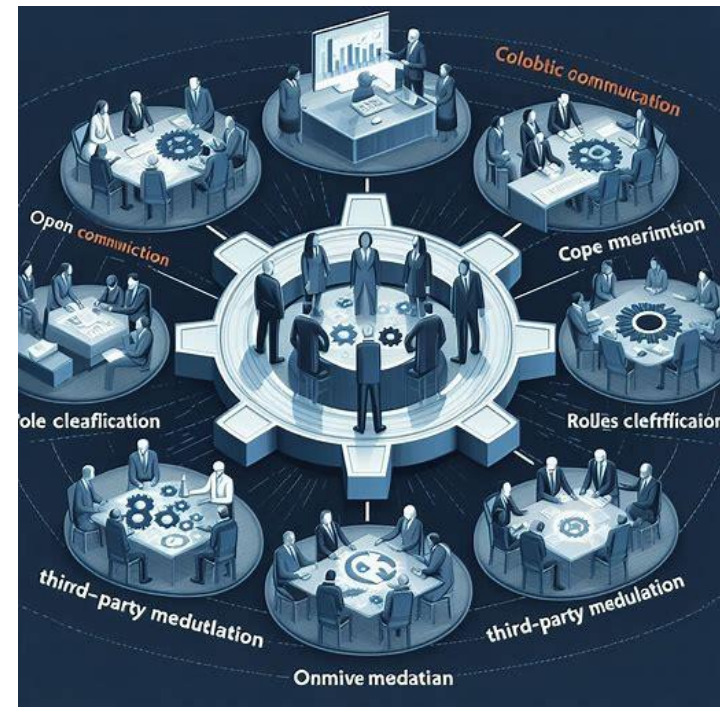


Which conflict resolution strategy to use

- **Importance of the Issue:** If the issue at hand is of **high importance and a specific outcome is needed**, strategies like **competition or collaboration** might be more appropriate. If the issue is of low importance, avoidance or accommodation might be sufficient.
- **Importance of the Relationship:** If maintaining a good relationship is important, **accommodation or collaboration** might be the best approach. If the relationship is less important, competition might be an option.
- **Time Constraints:** If there is a time constraint, a quick resolution might be necessary, making strategies like **competition or compromise more suitable**. If there is more time, collaboration might be the best approach as it can lead to a win-win outcome but can be time-consuming.
- **Power Dynamics:** If there is a significant power imbalance between the parties, **competition or accommodation** might be used. In more equal power dynamics, **compromise or collaboration** might be more appropriate.
- **Cultural Differences:** Different cultures have different norms and expectations around conflict, so it's important to consider this when choosing a strategy.

Conflict Resolution Strategies

- Open Communication
- Collaborative Problem-Solving
- Role Clarification
- Third-Party Mediation
- Conflict Management Training



Common Mistakes to Avoid

- Avoiding the Conflict
- Jumping to Conclusions
- Focusing on Personalities Instead of Issues
- Forcing a Solution
- Neglecting Follow-Up



Master any Workplace Conflict

The following slides are from a recent webinar by Karin Hurt and David Dye

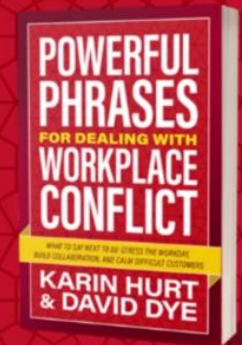
“Powerful Phrases for Dealing with Workplace Conflict”

300+ phrases

Master any
Workplace
Conflict

HOW TO DEAL WITH...

1. LAZY COWORKERS
2. KNOW-IT-ALLS
3. CHRONIC COMPLAINERS
4. BULLIES
5. WORKPLACE GOSSIPS
6. IDEA CRUSHERS
7. PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE COWORKERS
8. DIFFICULT CUSTOMERS



HARPER COLLINS
LEADERSHIP

The Four Dimensions of Constructive Conflict

Connection – Do we have one another as human beings?

Clarity – Do we have a shared understanding of success?

Curiosity – Are we genuinely interested in other perspectives and what's possible?

Commitment – Do we have a clear agreement?



4 Dimensions of Productive **Conflict** and **Collaboration**



“Powerful Phrases for Dealing with Workplace Conflict” Karin Hurt and David Dye



CONNECTION

We know one another
as human beings



“Powerful Phrases for Dealing with Workplace Conflict” Karin Hurt and David Dye



"Tell me more."

"It sounds like you're feeling _____, is that right?"

"I care about (you, this team, this project), and I'm confident we can find a solution we can all work with."



“Powerful Phrases for Dealing with Workplace Conflict” Karin Hurt and David Dye

“What would a successful outcome do for you?”

“What I’m hearing you say is _____, do I have that right?”

“Let’s start with what we agree on.”





CURIOSITY

We are genuinely interested
in other perspectives
and what's possible



“Powerful Phrases for Dealing with Workplace Conflict” Karin Hurt and David Dye



"I'm curious how this looks from your perspective."

"What do you suggest we do next?"

"What can I do to support you right now?"



COMMITMENT

We have a clear agreement



“Powerful Phrases for Dealing with Workplace Conflict” Karin Hurt and David Dye

“What’s one action we can both agree to as a next step?”

“To recap, we’ve agreed to _____. Is that your understanding?”

“Let’s schedule time to talk about this again and see how our solution is working.”



Applying the G.O.A.T.s



1. "I care about (you, this team, this project) and I'm confident we can find a solution..."
2. "Tell me more."
3. "It sounds like you're feeling ____, is that right?"



1. "I'm curious how this looks from your perspective?"
2. "What do you suggest we do next?"
3. "What can I do to support you right now?"



1. "What would a successful outcome do for you?"
2. "Let's start with what we agree on."
3. "What I'm hearing you say is ____. Do I have that right?"



1. "What's one action we can both agree to as a next step?"
2. "To recap, we've agreed to _____. Is that your understanding?"
3. "Let's schedule time to talk about this again and see how our solution is working."



You have a
teammate who
crushes all your
good ideas.

“Powerful Phrases for Dealing with Workplace Conflict” Karin Hurt and David Dye

Applying the G.O.A.T.s



1. "I care about (you, this team, this project) and I'm confident we can find a solution..."
2. "Tell me more."
3. "It sounds like you're feeling ____, is that right?"



1. "I'm curious how this looks from your perspective?"
2. "What do you suggest we do next?"
3. "What can I do to support you right now?"



1. "What would a successful outcome do for you?"
2. "Let's start with what we agree on."
3. "What I'm hearing you say is ____. Do I have that right?"



1. "What's one action we can both agree to as a next step?"
2. "To recap, we've agreed to _____. Is that your understanding?"
3. "Let's schedule time to talk about this again and see how our solution is working."

Connect

“I’d like to explore this with you.”

“Would you be open to hearing my idea to dramatically reduce...?”

“I imagine you have concerns about...Here’s what I recommend.”

Help with **Clarity:**

“Here’s exactly how we can make this happen.”

Move to **Commitment:**

“Here’s the support I would need from you... Can we do this?”

You are
overwhelmed
and need
to **say “no”** to
new projects



“Powerful Phrases for Dealing with Workplace Conflict” Karin Hurt and David Dye

Applying the G.O.A.T.s



1. "I care about (you, this team, this project) and I'm confident we can find a solution..."
2. "Tell me more."
3. "It sounds like you're feeling ____, is that right?"



1. "I'm curious how this looks from your perspective?"
2. "What do you suggest we do next?"
3. "What can I do to support you right now?"



1. "What would a successful outcome do for you?"
2. "Let's start with what we agree on."
3. "What I'm hearing you say is ____. Do I have that right?"



1. "What's one action we can both agree to as a next step?"
2. "To recap, we've agreed to _____. Is that your understanding?"
3. "Let's schedule time to talk about this again and see how our solution is working."

When you need to say **NO** to your **boss**:

“I’m deeply committed to the success of the group and to this project. What you’re asking me to do here would mean _____. Which concerns me because of _____. An alternative approach might be_____.”

Immediate Attention: Signs of an Escalating Conflict

- **Increased Emotional Intensity:** If the emotions involved in the conflict become more intense, this could be a sign that the conflict is escalating. This could include increased frustration, anger, or resentment.
- **Personal Attacks:** When disagreements shift from the issue at hand to personal attacks, it's a clear sign that the conflict is escalating. Personal attacks can include name-calling, blaming, or criticizing someone's character.
- **Avoidance or Withdrawal:** If team members start avoiding each other or withdrawing from group activities, this could indicate that the conflict is escalating.
- **Decreased Productivity:** Conflict can lead to decreased productivity. If you notice a significant drop in the quality or quantity of work, it might be due to an escalating conflict.
- **Increased Complaints:** An increase in complaints, either to management or among team members, can be a sign of escalating conflict.
- **Formation of Cliques:** If cliques or factions start to form within the team, this could be a sign of escalating conflict.
- When you notice these signs, it's important to address the conflict immediately. Ignoring it can lead to further escalation and potentially damage the team's dynamics and productivity.

Strategies for addressing conflict proactively during project kick-off

- **Set Clear Expectations:** Clearly define the project's goals, objectives, and deliverables. Make sure everyone understands their roles and responsibilities. This can help prevent misunderstandings that could lead to conflict.
- **Establish Communication Guidelines:** Define how the team will communicate, including how often meetings will be held, how decisions will be made, and how disagreements will be handled. This can help ensure that everyone feels heard and understood.
- **Create a Team Charter:** A team charter is a document that outlines the team's mission, objectives, and norms. It can include guidelines for how the team will work together, how conflicts will be resolved, and what behaviours are acceptable and unacceptable.
- **Encourage Open Dialogue:** Encourage team members to express their thoughts, ideas, and concerns openly. This can help prevent conflicts from escalating and can foster a culture of trust and respect.
- **Conflict Resolution Training:** Provide training on conflict resolution techniques. This can equip team members with the skills they need to handle conflicts effectively when they arise.
- **Build Relationships:** Encourage team building activities to help team members get to know each other on a personal level. Strong relationships can help prevent conflicts and make it easier to resolve conflicts when they do arise.

Challenges in cross-cultural communication during conflicts

- Language Barriers
- Non-Verbal Communication
- Different Conflict Resolution Styles
- Different Values and Beliefs
- High Context vs. Low Context Communication
- Power Distance

Applying the conflict resolution framework in cross-cultural situations

- **Understand Cultural Differences:** Different cultures have different norms, values, and communication styles. It's important to understand these differences and how they might impact the conflict and its resolution. For example, some cultures might prefer direct communication, while others might prefer a more indirect approach.
- **Respect Cultural Differences:** Show respect for all cultures involved in the conflict. This includes respecting different viewpoints, communication styles, and conflict resolution preferences.
- **Adapt Your Approach:** You might need to adapt your conflict resolution approach to fit the cultural context. For example, a collaborative approach might work well in cultures that value consensus and harmony, while a competitive approach might be more effective in cultures that value assertiveness and individual achievement.
- **Seek Help if Needed:** If you're unsure how to handle a cross-cultural conflict, don't hesitate to seek help. This could be from a colleague who understands the culture better, a cultural consultant, or through further training and education.
- **Communicate Clearly and Effectively:** In cross-cultural situations, clear and effective communication is key. Be mindful of potential language barriers and use simple, clear language to avoid misunderstandings.

Case Study: Conflict Resolution in a Multinational Corporation

- In a multinational corporation, a conflict arose between the marketing and product development teams. The marketing team wanted to promote a new feature that the product development team was not ready to implement. This led to a conflict, as both teams had different priorities and deadlines.
- Instead of letting the conflict escalate, the project manager decided to intervene. They organized a meeting with both teams to discuss the issue. During the meeting, both teams were encouraged to express their concerns and viewpoints.
- Through open dialogue and mutual understanding, the teams were able to find a solution. The marketing team agreed to delay the promotion, and the product development team agreed to prioritize the development of the new feature.
- This resolution not only resolved the conflict, but also led to growth and development. The teams learned to communicate more effectively and understand each other's perspectives. They also realized the importance of coordination and collaboration in achieving common goals.
- This case study demonstrates that conflict, when managed effectively, can be a catalyst for growth and development. It underscores the importance of effective communication, understanding, and mutual respect in conflict resolution.

Measuring the success of conflict resolution

- **Resolution Time:** Track the amount of time it takes to resolve conflicts. A decrease in resolution time over the course of the project could indicate that your conflict resolution strategies are becoming more effective.
- **Recurrence of Conflicts:** Keep track of how often the same conflicts reoccur. If the same issues keep coming up, it might suggest that the conflicts are not being fully resolved or that underlying issues are not being addressed.
- **Team Satisfaction:** Conduct regular surveys or feedback sessions to gauge team members' satisfaction with the conflict resolution process. This can provide valuable insights into how well conflicts are being managed and where improvements can be made.
- **Project Performance:** Monitor project performance metrics, such as meeting deadlines and staying within budget. Effective conflict resolution can lead to better team collaboration, which can positively impact project performance.
- **Team Dynamics:** Observe changes in team dynamics, such as improvements in communication and collaboration, or a decrease in tension and hostility. These can be indicators of successful conflict resolution.
- **Individual Growth:** Look for signs of growth in team members, such as increased confidence, improved communication skills, or better problem-solving abilities. These can be signs that the conflict resolution process is contributing to personal development.

Key Takeaways

- **Understanding Conflict:** Conflict is a natural part of working in teams. It can arise from various sources such as miscommunication, differing priorities, and resource allocation.
- **Conflict as a Challenge and Opportunity:** While conflict can pose challenges such as disrupting workflow and creating a negative work environment, it can also present opportunities for innovation, team building, and improved communication when managed effectively.
- **Role of Conflict Management in Project Management:** Effective conflict management plays a crucial role in project management. It can enhance team morale and productivity, and transform disagreements into opportunities for growth and creativity.
- **Conflict Resolution Strategies:** Various conflict resolution strategies such as **avoidance, accommodation, competition, compromise, and collaboration** can be used depending on the situation. Each strategy has its pros and cons.
- **Practical Application:** Conflict resolution strategies can be readily incorporated into project management practices. Regular evaluation of the outcomes can help in improving these strategies and managing conflicts more effectively.
- **Cross-Cultural Considerations:** In cross-cultural situations, **understanding and respecting cultural differences is key to effective conflict resolution.**

References

- PON - Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School
- PMI.org
- intechopen.com
- researchgate.net
- ginaabudi.com
- emerald.com
- lifecoachtraining.co
- slideteam.net
- proofhub.com
- onethreadapp.com
- shrm.org
- Powerful Phrases for Dealing with workplace conflict - Let's Grow Leaders (letsgrowleaders.com)
- wcu.edu
- conflict-resolution-training.com
- effectiveprojectmanager.org
- wrike.com
- 221. Uncomfortable Safety | The Table Group
- (4) GRACE under pressure: John Baldoni with William Ury | LinkedIn
- 7 Strategies for Conflict Resolution in Project Management - Effective Project Manager
- Pictures Generated by AI –Designer
- Suggestion were sought from AI-Copilot GPTs

Thank You



Khalil Gibran/rumihugs

No matter how long the storm lasts,
the sun always shines behind the clouds.

<https://i.pinimg.com/originals/f2/3d/7a/f23d7a444e9ccd138e98ecd871feedda.jpg>