



# Quick Guide

## To Managing conflict: why, what, how?

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### Why it matters..

Conflict can feel uncomfortable and if we give in to the temptation to avoid it, important issues may go unaddressed. Conflict can also be a source of stress for all the parties involved. This guide sets out an approach to managing conflict that can help by:

- Giving you greater understanding of your own approach to the conflict and that of the other party.
- Giving you some alternative approaches to help you to manage the conflict positively.

### What do I need to do?

Conflict is defined as: “any situation in which your concerns or desires differ from those of another person.” so conflict can come in a variety of shapes and sizes, from moderate disagreement to a fundamental breakdown in a working relationship.

Managing a conflict requires you to identify an appropriate way of approaching and responding to the other party, based on an understanding of both your and their view of the conflict.

We have preferred ways of managing conflict that we use habitually. It is important to analyse a conflict and to adopt the most appropriate conflict management mode - which may not be one that we would use instinctively.

# How it works

## 1. Think

- Change from a position of having a message to deliver to having information to share and questions to ask.
- Arguments are caused by each side having a different story, so think about the other party's story and how can their conclusions make sense within it.

## 2. Discuss

- Ask questions - aim to find out how the other party sees the situation.
- What are their specific concerns and desires?
- Explain your concerns and desires.
- Explore how you might achieve a result that meets both your concerns and desires, and theirs.

## 3. Agree

- Formalise the agreement.
- What are you and they going to do?
- When will you each start (and finish if appropriate)?
- What are the key elements in your respective action plans?
- How will you, mutually, review progress?
- How will you both know you have achieved a good result?

## How might someone react?

- Surprise: if both parties previously held entrenched positions, an open approach can come as something of a shock.

- Anger/upset: discussing matters of conflict can generate a lot of emotion – it is important to recognise that this is not unusual. Emotions may be a key part of the conflict, so it is important to acknowledge and address them.
- In kind: if we use the competing mode, the other party may respond by also using competing mode. Switching to the collaborative mode is likely to result in the other party moving to a less competitive mode.
- Positively: all five conflict management modes are equally valuable. Whilst avoiding “sounds like a bad idea”, it has advantages such as reducing stress and buying time.

## **How will I know if I have got it right?**

Managing conflict is not always easy, but it should lead to:

- A positive outcome - one that moves the situation forward.
- Greater confidence and a sense of having been listened to.
- A reduction in stress and anxiety.
- Better individual performance.
- And it will contribute to a stronger University performance.

## **Top tips for managing conflict**

- The five conflict management modes are: competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising and collaborating.
- Make sure you recognise your preferred conflict management modes and consciously use a different one if it would be more appropriate.
- Collaborating is a good starting position for many conflicts as it involves sharing aims and views.
- Be prepared to shift to a different management mode(s) as necessary as the discussion progresses.

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