




# ***International Introductory Award in Conflict Handling (8414)***

## ***Delegate Workbook***





***By the end of the workshop  
you should be able to:***

1. Understand the meaning of conflict, what causes it and how it builds.
2. Identify the links between internal and external customer conflict.
3. Appreciate the cost implications of conflict to the organisation.
4. Examine the different approaches to resolving conflict.
5. Recognise how to communicate effectively in conflict situations.
6. Consider how to avoid conflict through verbal and non-verbal communications.
7. Identify how to avoid conflict across a wide range of industry sectors.



## **Section 1**

# **Understand the Theories of Conflict**

### **Aims of the section**

At the end of this section candidates should be able to:

- *Understand the nature and scope of conflict.*
- *Gain an insight into the sources of conflict.*
- *Describe the differences between internal and external conflict.*
- *Identify the costs and implications of conflict to the organisation.*

### **Indicative Content**

- 1.1 Define conflict and understand the difference between conflict, indecision, disagreement and stress.
- 1.2 Consider the different ways in which conflict shows itself with internal customers ie breakdown of relationships, poor decision-making, poor performance, poor quality of working life.
- 1.3 Recognise the different ways in which conflict shows itself with external customers ie increased number of complaints, loss of business, loss of income, behavioural issues.
- 1.4 Examine the effects of conflict – costs, legal implications, lost time, poor morale, low motivation, recruitment, health and safety.



## **Section 2**

# **How to Prevent Conflict**

### **Aims of the section**

At the end of this section candidates should be able to:

- *Appreciate the importance of good customer service to avoid conflict.*
- *Understand the importance of the selling message meeting customer expectations.*
- *Identify various communication methods appropriate to preventing conflict situations.*
- *Understand the importance of creating the appropriate physical environment for customers.*
- *Ensure health and safety requirements are met in order to avoid external conflict.*

### **Indicative Content**

- 2.1 Use verbal and non-verbal communications and language to create a positive customer relationship. Don't walk away. Don't play games. Don't exploit others.
- 2.2 Ensure the selling message meets expectations – ie does the selling message realistically reflect the products or services on sale – appreciating the customer's focus.
- 2.3 Examine the importance of good customer service – ie treating the customer well, understand their needs, deliver on their expectations, add-value, create a sense of 'customer delight'.
- 2.4 Understand health and safety requirements to avoid conflict – ie creating a safe customer and working environment (local and national legislation).



## **Section 3**

# **Effective Communication skills for Conflict Situations**

At the end of this section candidates should be able to:

- *Understand the importance of using conflict handling skills to handle or prevent conflict.*
- *Describe how to use verbal/face-to-face communications in conflict situations.*
- *Explain how to use listening skills in conflict situations.*
- *Appreciate how to use the written word to handle and resolve conflict.*
- *Describe the use of non-verbal communications in conflict situations.*

### **Indicative Content**

- 3.1 See how to use a variety of conflict handling skills – self-confidence, patience, persistence, flexibility, empathy, humour, assertiveness and conciliatory behaviour.
- 3.2 Demonstrate how to show that you are listening effectively in conflict situations, including nodding, making notes, verbal and non-verbal gestures.
- 3.3 Describe how to use questioning to understand the basis of conflict – open questions, closed questions, hard and soft questions.
- 3.4 Understand how to use non-verbal behaviour effectively in conflict situations and what you should avoid doing.
- 3.5 Describe the importance of record keeping and informing your manager of conflict situations.

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## **Section 4**

# **Resolution of Conflict**

### ***Aims of the section***

At the end of this section candidates should be able to:

- *Identify possible approaches to dealing with conflict.*
- *Describe ways of handling conflict effectively.*
- *Describe different models for overcoming conflict.*
- *Understand how to overcome obstacles within conflict.*

### ***Indicative Content***

- 4.1 Consider alternative approaches to resolving conflict – accommodation and compromise, mediation and conciliation.
- 4.2 Overcome obstacles that cause conflict – culture, limited time, denial, competitiveness.
- 4.3 Recognise the possible outcomes of conflict – win-lose, lose-lose and win-win.
- 4.4 Demonstrate how to use methods of resolving conflict –conciliation and mediation.

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## ***Statement from City & Guilds***

### ***The aims of the programme and the recommended support within the workplace relating to the practical application of handling conflict.***

This one-day programme aims to develop an awareness of the key knowledge and techniques which enables candidates to consider the different approaches to conflict handling within their own and other organisations. The objectives of the programme are knowledge based and will be carried out in a classroom environment. No real-life practical workplace experience is included. Therefore it is important that delegates are supported and closely supervised and monitored, following the one-day programme, to gain practical experience in a realistic working environment.

### ***The Benefits to the Employer***

By supporting the practical sections of good conflict handling practices back in the workplace, employers will be able to benefit from competent, motivated employees, who will promote exceptional customer care and avoid conflict situations with their organisation's customers.

Candidates gain a theoretical perspective of the importance of handling conflict across a range of sectors and in a broad number of industries. Candidates will be tested in a practically applied context, ie a true/false multiple-choice test. These assessments are designed to maximise the assessment of knowledge and understanding acquired during the qualification and encourage candidates to take their success and further build on it, both in terms of personal development within the organisation and in taking further appropriate qualifications.



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## **Section 1**

# **Understand the Theories of Conflict**

### ***Aims of the section***

At the end of this section candidates should be able to:

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- *Gain an insight into the sources of conflict.*
- *Describe the differences between internal and external conflict.*
- *Identify the costs and implications of conflict to the organisation.*

### ***Conflict – what is it?***

There are different types of conflict, but those that happen in the workplace are mainly caused by tension between individuals. This can have a negative effect on performance. It is also well known that conflict often gets blown out of proportion to the disagreement that caused it.

Sometimes conflict can start between people who have the same goals but disagree on the way they achieve them. Whether these disagreements are large or small it is worth remembering that the coolest amongst us can get upset or disagreeable at times. Conflict is inevitable between people working alongside each other, in small spaces for a length of time.

Put more simply “conflict exists where two or more parties disagree about something”.

*(Masters, Robert and Albright)*

Another way of looking at conflict is a condition between or amongst individuals who feel angry, who see things as being other peoples fault, who act in ways that cause problems within the organisation.

When you look at the above, you can see that conflict relates to our human behaviour, our feelings, our views, our thoughts and our actions. As a result, conflict can become part of our human nature.

Conflict may either be stopped early on, so that it doesn't get out of control and differences can be resolved, or conflict can build and grow and often turn into formal challenges, contests or disputes, ie conflict that is taken through formal management channels and formal procedures. When conflict builds up it can often do a lot of harm to relationships and can cost organisations a lot of money.

Industry is often fraught with conflict situations on two levels:

1. Conflict between staff and the organisation or indeed between members of staff. Internal staff, usually known as the '**internal customer**', and management have a responsibility to ensure they are satisfied with their working environment.
2. Conflict between customers and staff ie customers, external to the organisation, that are unhappy with the level of service they have experienced. Customers who are external to the organisation, but buy their products and services, are known as '**external customers**' because they are external to the organisational environment.

Conflict usually arises from misunderstandings, personality factors, inflexible people and some issues that fall outside of the individual or organisations control.



Signs of friction that lead to conflict include:

- *Anger, irritability or sarcasm.*
- *Withholding of, or unwillingness to share, information needed to do a task.*
- *Lack of enthusiasm.*
- *Avoidance of responsibility.*
- *Difficulty taking part in groups.*
- *Taking frequent sick leave.*
- *Being defensive.*

All of these things can result in conflict.

**Activity**

After a long-shift in your own organisation, it is time to reflect on the week's events. List the disagreements or conflicts you had or felt this week. List the people involved and the outcome of these disagreements. Share these conflicts with the rest of the group.

<b>Conflicts</b>	<b>Who with?</b>	<b>Outcome of Conflict?</b>
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_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____



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**Activity**

**See if you can work out which of the following scenarios is a full conflict situation.**

***Scenario One***

Paul and Simone work closely together on the retail desk at a large fashion outlet – or at least they are supposed to. Their working areas are very close. Paul seems to move around a lot, and never stays at his station. Therefore he is never there when anybody wants him. This drives Simone crazy. “Can’t you just stay where you are supposed to be for five minutes?” she asks, her voice very tight with excitement and tension. “Do you have a medical problem that requires you to keep leaving your reception area? How do you expect me to keep coping with all of the customers at the desk when you are never here?”

“Look I need to move around, I can’t stand still all day it makes my legs ache” Paul replied very angrily. “Besides, what right do you have to complain? You wear that awful perfume all day that pollutes the atmosphere and I have to keep breathing it in. Are you trying to cover up the fact that you don’t bath?”

Paul and Simone talk to each other like this all the time.

***Scenario Two***

Clare comes home from work totally drained after another long shift at a city centre bank. She is nearly in tears with tiredness and frustration. “I don’t know if I can take another day in that place” she complains to her friend.

“What went on” her friend asked, “that made it so awful?”

“Oh it was noisy, as there is still a lot of building work going on at the back of the bank for the extension and it won’t be finished for another month. It is not just that, they have also given me yet more things to do and I cannot physically do them, I feel so stressed.”



**Question:** Which one of these scenarios is conflict?  
Explain the reasons for your choice.

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Quite often we think that conflict means indecision, disagreement or stress. These are not conflict; they are the things that cause conflict.

- **Indecision** - one of the most frustrating things we experience in life is people who seem unable to make a decision. In any business this can be annoying as employees are working in the most time limited, intensive environments, where everything has to happen quickly. In addition to this, customers who take a long time to decide what they want, and then change their minds several times can cause frustration and irritation. However, this is not conflict, annoying though it might be; it is only a contributory factor to conflict.
- **Disagreements** – during any one day we can have any number of disagreements with work colleagues, customers, friends, just about anybody we come across in our work and personal lives. As with indecision, disagreements can be the underlying cause of conflict and lead to conflict, but again they are not conflict.



- **Stress** – *we can now live in a stressful society and industry. Both public and private sectors experience high levels of stress within them. Stress, like change, is one of the constant things that exist in the work environment. Often resources are in short supply, staff turnover is high, customers are demanding, managers find their jobs too demanding. As a result, staff can suffer the result of their stressful behaviour by being shouted at and made to work in an unrealistic way. Stressful behaviour can affect the way in which we behave.*

There are many accepted working practices in any industry. For example, people work long hours, odd hours, and are constantly on the go and dealing with difficult people. Therefore it is very likely that there is more pressure upon them to get results for the organisation and to keep the customer happy.

Symptoms of stress include not being able to cope with the work, having poor working relationships, lacking the necessary information to do your job. In addition to this you fail to do your job properly, under perform and make mistakes.

All of these things add to conflict but are not conflict. Therefore, using conflict-resolving activities to solve problems such as indecision, disagreements and stress will not work.

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***How does conflict show itself with internal customers?***

When conflict arises internally it has an effect upon the people that you work with, the team you are part of, the manager for whom you work and many others. At this stage it is important to be aware of four key things that can happen to you:

1. *You experience a breakdown in relationships.*
2. *You make poor decisions.*
3. *You under-perform in your job.*
4. *You have a poor quality of working life.*

These things have already been said in different ways and are all as a result of conflict. Each of them can make your job impossible, because the circumstances effect your emotions and behaviour towards others.

***Breakdown in relationships***

It is difficult to separate the conflict from the person. As a result, if we are involved in conflict with our manager we no longer just look at the situation but look at the person. Eventually that relationship can break down as a result. Unfortunately, it may also affect other relationships, ie other team members as may feel forced to take sides within the conflict situation.

***Poor decision making***

It does not matter what level you work at in an organisation, if your mind is taken over by events of a conflict situation, then even a simple decision such as, 'which task to undertake next' can be very difficult.

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***Underperforming in your job***

When we are involved in conflict situations we are very distracted and generally slow down because we cannot keep our mind on the job. We are preoccupied and also much slower because we are involved in discussions around resolving the conflict. Therefore we start to under-perform in our job and become less productive ie failure to do our jobs properly which will cost the company money.

For example, if you work for a customer services department and you are involved in taking down orders or making bookings, it is likely that you could miss something very important because of the conflict situation you are in. You are distracted and, as a result, you may make a mistake and the customer then suffers because of the situation.

A further example could be based on the following. You work for a travel agency and are having problems with your line manager. A customer comes in and books a holiday. Because of your situation, you make a mistake and book the wrong dates. This is not noticed for a while afterwards, and it is almost too late to change the customers booking. As a result of the conflict situation, the customer suffers a lot of stress and inconvenience.





### **Competition**

This is where one party is acting selfishly and behaving badly towards the other party. They are only interested in winning the conflict. They see it as some form of competition.

For example, if competitiveness is part of your personality, then you may find it difficult to give in, when in a conflict situation, feeling the necessity to win and treating it like a competition. This often happens in a customer relationship, if the customer always believes they are right, and you do not believe they are and you will not let the situation drop until the customer backs off.

This is not good practice and is not a healthy approach to conflict. It can result in customer dissatisfaction and the customer may never use your products or services again.

Look at some of the things that happen in this situation:

- *People close rank ie people take sides and will defend closely one of the parties involved in the conflict.*
- *The working atmosphere can become quite unpleasant.*
- *People can be seen as being the enemy.*
- *People cannot see things clearly because the situation is having an effect on them.*
- *Communication breaks down – both parties fail to talk to one another effectively.*

**Other symptoms of conflict might include:**

- *Rivalry and jealousy.*
- *Low morale and frustration.*
- *Competition.*
- *Lack of information.*

You can see some of the ways that conflict affects you and the people with whom you work. In essence conflict costs. It costs time, it costs money, it costs customer satisfaction and it can cost customers.

There are other factors that affect conflict situations, which are listed below.

## **Individuals**

### **1. Personality**

For better or for worse we bring our personalities to work. Often it is personalities that clash, affecting our productivity, our health and our relationships with customers and other employees. Sometimes it is so bad that we can dread going to work.

Factors in our personalities that affect whether or not conflict arises include:

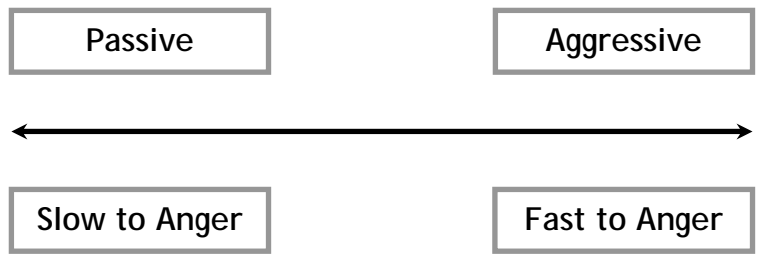
- *How introverted or extroverted are we? How bubbly or shy we are.*
- *How agreeable are we? Will we do what people want?*
- *How flexible are we? Are we prepared to do things for other people?*
- *How open are we? Do we keep ourselves to ourselves or do we tend to share what we feel with others?*
- *How honest are we? Are we really truthful?*
- *How depressed we are. Are we often down in the dumps and more likely to getting upset?*
- *Do we worry too much about what people think?*



Depending on the type of person we are and how we react to different situations, we can often find ourselves in a conflict situation. If we are always worried about what people think of us, depressed, inflexible or disagreeable we are more likely to be involved in conflict situations.

The other problem is that often we are unable to separate the problem from the person. For example, a customer has a problem with the wallpaper he has just collected, it is the wrong colour and he insists it is not what he ordered. In this situation we often think the customer is difficult or picky and cannot see the problem because the person is in the way. This is one of the greatest causes of conflict in organisations, particularly if a customer continually complains.

Personalities will vary. If a person is passive and slow to react then the potential for conflict is probably less. However, if we have aggressive personalities, then it is more likely that we will respond to conflict quickly in a negative way, perhaps making things worse than they really are. See the diagram below, which shows the different forms of personalities and their reactions to conflict situations.





**2. Stability**

One of the things we all crave in life is stability. However, the world we live in means that the only stable thing ie the only consistent thing, is change. Change is one of the greatest causes of conflict, not only from an employee's point of view but also from a customer's position. Change is often related to improving customer services. However, if it is not managed effectively, communicated effectively, then the customer is likely to get a poorer service as opposed to a better service. This can create tension between all parties involved and can lead to conflict between employers and employees and customers and employees.

***Workplace***

There are many things that happen within the workplace, which can lead to conflict in the organisation. It is useful for you to think about your own experience in the workplace and how your circumstances could lead to conflict situations.



**Activity**

List the factors in your own situation that could lead to internal conflict, explaining why this is the case.

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As you have probably discovered from the activity above, the job you do and the resources you use can prove to be a challenge. For example, often we find that we are employed to do one job and end up doing several others, or find ourselves in a position where we are doing a job that we are not skilled to do. This can be as a result of a lack of staff in the organisation, or even a lack of equipment to do a job. This can cause problems as we may make mistakes, it can be disruptive and decrease performance levels, which, in turn, can mean customer satisfaction is affected.

For example, if you work in a local authority housing department where you are doing two people's jobs because there is a lack of resources, the amount of work you produce, and the quality of your work, might suffer. A local elderly resident reported that her central heating was not working over a week ago, and for whatever reason you failed to report this to the Housing Repairs Team. Her family have just contacted the council and threatened them with complaining to the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive if it is not repaired today. As a result of this complaint, you and your manager are spending more time on sorting out conflict rather than actually doing the work you should be. In addition, you are now in further trouble because you made a mistake. It is times like this that conflict can seem to get worse.

Your working environment can also prove to be a challenge. If you are working in a very cramped environment or one where



health and safety is not seen as important, then accidents can happen, which cause conflict for the organisation.

For example, if there is very little space to move around and a client falls over a chair leg and breaks an arm, this could become a conflict situation if the client tries to sue the company. The same goes for you as an employee. If you fall over and hurt yourself due to the neglect of your employer, you may be entitled to compensation and in doing so may find yourself in a conflict situation, particularly if the company tries to deny any responsibility.

Below is a list of the most common causes of conflict:

- **Differences in objectives** – people going in different directions within the organisation.
- **Lack of resources** – not enough money or people to go around.
- **Disagreements about authority** – ie the use of too much authority for example internal bullying.
- **Personal differences** – personality clashes – two people having the same personalities and cannot get on, or somebody being attacked because of their beliefs.
- **Lack of communication** – means that people do not know what is going on and what needs to be done.
- **Feeling undervalued** – some people may feel that their boss or the organisation think too little of their contribution to the organisation. People who lack experience often feel insecure and then they become defensive in difficult situations.
- **Schedules/deadlines are not met.**
- **Customers do not get what they want when they want it.**
- **Administration procedures fail.**
- **Cost overruns** - sometimes an organisation can budget an amount of money to a task and if the costs are more than the ones originally set, conflict can arise.



***How does conflict show itself through external customers?***

In the last section we concluded by saying conflict costs. Later on in this section we will look more closely at the costs of conflict to the organisation. However, it is important that you understand the effects of conflict on the customer. Whether or not the conflict is internal with employees and management, or external between customers and employees, conflict shows itself in the following ways:

- *Increase in the number of complaints.*
- *Loss of business – ie customers stop buying from the organisation.*
- *Loss of income – loss of sales means loss of income.*
- *Changes in individual behaviour.*

***Increase in customer complaints***

When conflict is obvious in organisations, it is not long before customers suffer as a result of negative behaviour, mistakes being made or a fall in the standard of service. As a result, the number of complaints is likely to increase. This has a very negative impact upon the company.

For example, when a customer is unhappy about the service they have received or the product they have purchased, eg complaining that the packaging is not up to a good standard, and that the product is damaged, then they could end up in a conflict situation.



### ***Loss of business and income***

It is a known fact that when customers are unhappy, they are increasingly taking action. If you take your vehicle to a car dealership for a service, and they leave your car in an unsatisfactory state, with oil on your leather seats, then it is likely that you will not go back again. You also tell friends, colleagues and family about the situation and they will not go to that garage, and then they tell their friends, and so it goes on. If conflict becomes so bad that it affects the customer, it can be extremely damaging in the long term. If you lose customers, you lose business and then you lose income. If you lose income you lose profits and that costs jobs.

### ***Changes in behaviour***

It has been mentioned on several occasions that our behaviour and emotions are likely to change as a result of conflict situations. This again can affect customers. If we are upset with somebody or a situation, we are likely to take it out on our customers, almost without realising it. We can be rude, distant, ie not really part of a group or team and detached from everybody else, inflexible, disagreeable, all at once. We can lose control of our emotions and this can be costly to the organisation.

### ***The tactics of conflict***

Whilst above are the affects of conflict, below is a short list of things people do in conflict situations.

- ***Empire building*** – groups side with one another.
- ***Fault finding*** – always looking for something wrong.
- ***Distorting information*** – changing the context of information, what has been said, who said it etc.
- ***Withholding information*** – not passing on important information that might help the other party in the conflict situation, or just being deliberately difficult with all information.







Research in the UK has established that 42% of employees time is spent engaging in or attempting to resolve conflict. In statistics provided by the British Crime Survey, over 3.3 million work hours per year are lost as a result of conflict. Even worse is where conflict results in violence. There are 1.2 million incidents of violence and some 649,000 victims of violence. This shows how important it is to manage conflict in order to stop it from getting out of control.

Other statistics associated with customer satisfaction are that:

- *96% of dissatisfied customers do not go back and complain.*
- *Each of them tell 7 other people how bad the product or services was.*
- *Within this figure - 13% will tell at least 20 others.*
- *90% will never return.*
- *It probably costs 5 times as much to attract a new customer as it does to keep an existing customer.*

Whilst these statistics directly relate to customer services, they show you how significant the impact of conflict could be.

In closing, think about how much time you have spent in the last week dealing with problems at work, eg disagreements, arguments, lack of decision making through stress, all of which lead to conflict. You will be surprised!



***Section One Summary***

This section was focused upon introducing you to the concept of conflict and how it impacts upon the organisation.

Conflict has a very negative impact upon both people and the organisation, and can have a great financial strain upon the organisation.

Continuous research is undertaken into how conflict affects organisations which shows that a staggering 42% of employees are involved in conflict at some time.

The aim of this course is to help you understand the causes of conflict, the causes of conflict and how to avoid conflict in the future.

This section has hopefully provided you with a good understanding of the issues around conflict and given you a more awareness of some of the signals which point to conflict within any given situation.



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## **Section 2**

### **How to Prevent Conflict**

#### ***Aims of the section***

At the end of this section candidates should be able to:

- *Appreciate the importance of good customer service to avoid conflict.*
- *Understand the importance of the selling message meeting customer expectations.*
- *Identify various communication methods appropriate to preventing conflict situations.*
- *Understand the importance of creating the right physical environment for customers.*
- *Ensure health and safety requirements are met in order to avoid external conflict.*

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### ***What we can do to avoid conflict***

It is no secret that customers are increasingly expecting more from all sectors and industries. They are more concerned than ever about value for money. This goes from education to health, fashions, cars and just about anything we pay for, or pay towards. Below is a list of things that customers expect from the organisations they deal with. It is when these are not available, or if the company falls down on their duty to the customer, that conflict may arise.

- *Compliance with local and national health and safety regulations.*
- *Exceed the expectations of their customers.*
- *Treat customers with respect.*
- *To aim not just to satisfy, but to aim to delight.*
- *Provide answers to problems.*
- *Deliver outstanding service to their customers.*
- *Make customers feel that they are the most important part of their business ...which they are!*


### ***The use of communications in creating a positive customer relationship***

It is important to consider three things that you should **not do** if you wish to avoid conflict.

It is likely that sometimes customers may push you to the limit and really annoy you. If this is the case, you should avoid the following:

- *Walking away.*
- *Playing power games.*
- *Exploiting others.*





A typical example of this, is trying to get somebody else to undertake the duties you least like doing, or continually getting somebody to do the shift you hate the most. If you do this eventually people will start to resent you and resentment can lead to conflict.

The same applies with exploiting a customer's good nature. Quite often customers can be forgiving in part, and let minor problems go. However, if you continually repeat your mistakes, ignore them or avoid them and do not deal with their problem, it is likely that your behaviour could result in a conflict situation because the customer becomes unhappy with the situation.

### ***The importance of negative and positive language in preventing conflict situations***

Language is a powerful tool, whether you communicate orally, or in written form. The way you express yourself will affect whether your message is received negatively or positively. This is very important.

Negative phrasing and language can often have the following characteristics:

- *Tells the recipient what cannot be done.*
- *Has a slight tone of blame.*
- *Includes phrases like can not, will not, unable to, cannot do etc.*
- *Does not stress positive actions that would be appropriate.*

However, positive phrasing and language have the following qualities:

- *Tells the recipient it can be done.*
- *Suggests alternatives and choices available to the recipient.*
- *Sounds helpful and encouraging rather than negative.*
- *Stresses positive actions and positive results.*



Therefore, it is important when using verbal and indeed written communications to avoid some of the following:

- *You failed to ...*
- *You overlooked ...*
- *You state ...*
- *You claim ....*
- *You say that ...*
- *We cannot see how you ...*
- *We fail to understand ...*
- *We are at a loss to know ....*

The following phrases could also be interpreted as negative, sarcastic or patronising:

- *No doubt...*
- *We will thank you to...*
- *You understand of course...*
- *Please respond soon.*

On the other hand, in order to avoid conflict and use language carefully, it is important to elect to use positive phrasing. This will include:

- *If you can send us...*
- *The information we have suggests...*
- *Might we suggest that you...*
- *One option open to you is...*
- *We can help you to ...*

You should be aware when using voice and language that negative language conveys a poor image to customers and those around us. Negative language can sometimes cause conflict and disagreement where none is desired.

**Using verbal communications in listening** - Failure to listen or indeed show you are listening in a conflict situation will have a very negative impact overall and may lead to the conflict growing and growing beyond control. Therefore, in order to avoid this situation coming up, it is important to show others involved in the conflict situation that you are listening, assessing, reflecting and repeating in your own words by the following actions:

	<b>Example</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
<b>Verbal Noises</b>	“Ah” – “Oh”, “Humm”	Shows attention.
<b>Support statements</b>	“I see”	Shows interest and encouragement.
<b>Key Word Repetition</b>	Reflect back key words	Shows you listened.
<b>Extension</b>	“How do you mean?” “What makes you think that?”	Seeks more information.
<b>The Reflection-</b>	“You feel that...”	Explores feeling.
<b>Summary</b>	“As I understand it”	To show understanding.

### ***Ensuring the selling message meets expectations***

Often, one of the biggest problems businesses face with their customers, is that products and services do not meet customer expectations ie when a customer buys a product it often does not perform to the standard expected. For example, you buy a new printer for your computer and when you get it home, you realise that you do not have the connection cable that fits between your computer and the printer. When you get back to the store you find out that it is not missing from your package, but it is something that you have to buy separately. The customer is furious because the connection cable is necessary and should be part of the printer package. He is also furious that nobody told him he needed it. The printer cost him more than he thought and he also had the frustration of having to go back to the store.

It is the same for services, if the service delivered is not as good as expected, it makes the customer very unhappy and in some situations can lead to conflict.

All of these situations can be avoided by ensuring that the selling message reflects the products or service that is delivered.

### ***How selling objections can cause conflict***

When handling objections we will look for signs that the customer is dissatisfied with the product/service offered. Therefore, we need to find ways of overcoming their concerns. In many respects this can be seen as quite positive and should be viewed as such. Objections do not mean the customer does not want to buy, they mean that they need more convincing.

### ***The top three objections that any sales person will experience are to do with the following:***

1. *Price.*
2. *The product features and benefits not meeting their needs.*
3. *A lack of understanding of the product and the customer needs.*

Below are some suggestions that you might want to consider in order to overcome some of the objections the customer might have, which is holding them back from placing their order and making the sale.



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***The importance of good customer service in avoiding conflict***

Customer service is about achieving the above and making sure that customers feel that it is a pleasure to do business with you. **This means that the customer will return again, which will be a key benefit to the organisation and staff.**

***Why is customer service so important?***

Customer service has become a very important activity. Strong competition means that customers have a choice between many suppliers of identical or very similar products and services. Many competing businesses will often find they are virtually doing the same thing and the one thing they can do differently is customer service. Customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction comes more and more from the way the person is treated by the person who delivers the service – **you** – you are one of the people who can make the difference.

***Benefits of customer service***

There are many benefits to organisations who use sound customer service methods to understand and meet customer expectations. For example, good customer service usually means that most customers are pleased with their experience and return to the organisation over and over again. This is known as retaining your customers. Doing this is a lot cheaper than continuously advertising for new customers. This means that the organisation could become more and more profitable.

Happy customers are like missionaries, going out and telling everybody they know how their experience has been - it is like a free form of public relations or advertising. Again this brings in more people and helps profitability too.

The work environment and the customer environment tend to be much more friendly and enjoyable, as customer's needs are considered and the way in which they are served is professional and positive.







***Section Two Summary***

There are many reasons why customers become upset and then engage in conflict, not least of all because they are sold products that do not meet their expectations, or that they are on the receiving end of customer service.

It is the duty of the organisation to sell products and services in an honest and clear way that does not mislead the customer at all.

The organisation and its employees have many duties, including communicating in a positive way and maintaining health and safety requirements.

Good awareness of these issues will help you to understand customers better and consider ways of reducing customer-facing conflict in the future.







## **Section 3**

# **Effective Communication Skills for Conflict Situations**

At the end of this section candidates should be able to:

- *Understand the importance of using conflict handling skills to handle or prevent conflict.*
- *Describe how to use verbal/face-to-face communications in conflict situations.*
- *Explain how to use listening skills in conflict situations.*
- *Appreciate how to use the written word to handle and resolve conflict.*
- *Describe the use of non-verbal communications in conflict situations.*

*NB: before starting this unit, it is important to remember that your actions, be they verbal or non-verbal, written or on the telephone, are in line with the complaints/conflict handling guidelines provided by your organisation.*



***The importance of conflict handling skills***

As you can see from the previous two sections, conflict is quite complicated, because it involves human nature, emotions and human behaviour, all of which change from person to person.

***Activity***

Think about recent conflict situations you may have been involved in, or are aware of, and make a short list of the different behaviours exhibited by the other party.

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In order to resolve conflict, it is important to display the following effectively:

- **Self-confidence** – *being confident in your self and your own ability.*
- **Patience** – *be prepared to take time to resolve things.*
- **Persistence** – *the ability to keep trying until you get a result.*
- **Flexibility and empathy** – *be flexible about the situation; be prepared to consider a number of options.*
- **Humour** – *use humour, but carefully.*
- **Assertiveness** – *being strong willed but not aggressive.*
- **Conciliatory behaviour** – *being inclined to consider the other parties views and take them into account.*

### **Self-confidence**

We should aim to show some self-confidence, as opposed to arrogance. When we say self-confidence we mean that you are able to show a customer that you understand the issues and what is required and that you are not frightened by the conflict.

Ways of doing this include:

- *Using eye contact – looking directly at the other party.*
- *Speaking assertively – not angrily.*
- *Using body language carefully – not throwing our arms around.*



***Patience***

One of the things you must realise in conflict situations is that they may not be resolved overnight. Therefore we must show patience particularly with customers.

***Persistence***

Being persistent is very important in conflict handling situations. If you are not persistent it is likely that you may struggle to resolve the situation or get near it. It will be necessary to constantly push to get the conflict resolved ie keep pushing people to deal with the issues.

***Flexibility and empathy***

Conflict situations often require us to be flexible in order that a compromise or some form of accommodation can be achieved. If we are not flexible then it makes the handling of the conflict situation very difficult.

Being flexible means that there is a need to give way, stand back, and think about alternative ways of doing things and being open to suggestions. When people are flexible they are often then able to have empathy. Having empathy means that they may show some understanding of the situation, and even the views and feelings of the other people/person involved in the conflict.

***Humour***

One of the key skills in conflict handling situations is that of being able to apply humour to some situations, where and when appropriate. It may be helpful in some situations to use humour to break the deadlock or to lighten the atmosphere. It is also important to be able to see the funny side of things, even when perhaps you are the losing party. Humour often helps overcome communication difficulties. However, please note that humour must be used carefully and only when directly related to the situation.



## **Assertiveness**

Sometimes in conflict handling situations we have to be assertive in order to bring the conflict under control. For example, when a customer is really shouting and raging about the parking ticket he has just received. In order to stop him and calm things down, the traffic warden needs to be assertive. This means *carefully* using their voice and strength of character to control the situation. However, there is a difference between assertiveness and aggression. Assertiveness will mean that we are careful about what we say, and how we bring the situation under control. Aggression usually makes a situation worse.

Recently, an area in London invested in conflict handling training for their Parking Services Staff, because they face abuse on a regular basis. During their training they were able to learn about how to deal with aggression and be able to resolve conflict on a face-to-face basis. Traffic Wardens, or indeed Parking Services Staff, have a very difficult job to do and are often faced with quite serious conflict after placing parking tickets on cars.

## ***Conciliatory behaviour***

In Section 4 we will see a little more about how conciliation is used in order to overcome conflict and handle the situation. In the meantime, types of conciliatory behaviour include:

- *Being apologetic.*
- *Taking responsible for your actions.*
- *Giving way, be flexible.*
- *Expressing positive feelings.*
- *Initiating a both-gain (ie win-win) situation.*

This type of behaviour is always favourable in conflict handling situations, if you are to stand any chance of conflict resolution.



**Activity**

**Read this scenario and then answer the question at the end.**

Recently Peter and Tim have been experiencing some difficulties at work. Peter cannot understand Tim’s behaviour towards him and, as a result, they keep falling out. They both work as security guards on the night shift for a car manufacturer.

One day Tim was very distracted and made a mistake when setting the security cameras. This ended in an argument between Tim and the owner of the premises, saying that the security company is useless. Peter was really embarrassed and had a real go at Tim, asking him what he was up to and what was wrong with him!

**Question:** What conflict handling skills could Tim have best applied to this situation.

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### ***The use of listening skills in conflict situations***


An important aspect of conflict handling is to understand that communication is a two-way process. Learning to ask questions will be of little overall value to you if you do not listen carefully to the answers.

Listening is the communication skill we use most, yet the one that we receive least training on. Most of us take listening for granted, we think that because we are hearing, we are listening, but quite often nothing can be further from the truth.

What is important in a conflict-handling situation is that you show that you are listening through use of movement, body language and sound. Listening is about hearing both verbal and non-verbal communications. It is about not just reading, but seeing what we are reading, taking in the information sent to us, so that we can use it to our benefit.

Below is a list of hints and tips that may enable you to become a better listener:

- *Adapt your behavioural style to the communication style of your buyer ie if the customer is formal in their approach, you should also be formal.*
- *Create a good listening environment that is comfortable and free of interference – ie from noise, free from interruptions.*
- *Concentrate on the other party in the conflict situation – do not let other things fill your mind.*
- *Stay focused – do not let your mind slip and wander. If it does, ask the other person to repeat what they have said.*
- *Let the other party talk 80 per cent of the time.*
- *Do not interrupt, always let the other party finish what they are saying.*

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- *Do not think about what you are going to say next.*
  - *Do not keep trying to think about how you are going to answer their question before they have asked it.*
  - *Do not mentally find fault or criticise. Keep an open mind.*
  - *Pay attention to nonverbal clues. What is their body language saying?*
  - *Be alert to displays of emotion – ie are they happy, sad, cross/angry.*
  - *Encourage the other party through verbal and body language feedback.*
  - *Make notes.*
  - *Realise that listening is proactive. Listening is to hearing what reading is to seeing.*




Key skills, to use when listening and understanding, can include some of the following:

- **Paraphrasing** – *this is repeating what is said to you in your own words. This confirms that you have understood the message you have received.*
- **Reflecting the implications** – *this goes beyond paraphrasing and is building on what the customer has said in order to think about the possible outcomes of the situation. This might include sending questions back such as “Does that mean that...?” or “Would that solve the problem then...?” – This shows that you have listened, understood and, perhaps, started to go some way towards solving the problem.*
- **Reflecting the underlying feelings** – *this goes further still and tries to draw out some of the underlying attitudes, beliefs or values that may be influencing the speaker to talk this way. It has to be done in a gentle way. For example:*
  - *“I can see that this is going to give you a lot of worry.”*
  - *“If that happened to me I would not be too happy.”*
  - *“That must have made you very proud.”*

*A key point here is to make the speaker feel that they have to reveal more than they want to.*

*It is important to understand why people behave the way they do and why they have their own way of doing things.*

- **Being non-evaluative** – *This means not making a decision or having set ideas until the question has been answered. This may involve using verbal and non-verbal signs that the sender is being understood, that the feelings behind the statement are appreciated and accepted, no matter what the listener feels, and that he or she is accepted by the listener. Accepting the person for who they are and what they are is very important.*



In using 'listening skills' you must be aware that by carefully listening to our customer you can gain information that allows us to:

- *Act quickly and correctly.*
- *Deal with objections successfully.*
- *Show interest in our customers and their business.*
- *Find out feelings and attitudes.*
- *Bond with the customer.*
- *Identify new opportunities.*
- *Obtain important information.*
- *Provide the basis for further questioning.*
- *Understand problems.*

Sounds and noises are very important as part of the listening process, particularly when dealing with conflict over the telephone. Noises, statements and key words are the only proof that you are actually listening to the customer, or the employee, depending on the source and place of conflict.



**Activity** – Working in groups and using a white board – list several consequences of not listening to customers or colleagues when involved in a conflict situation.

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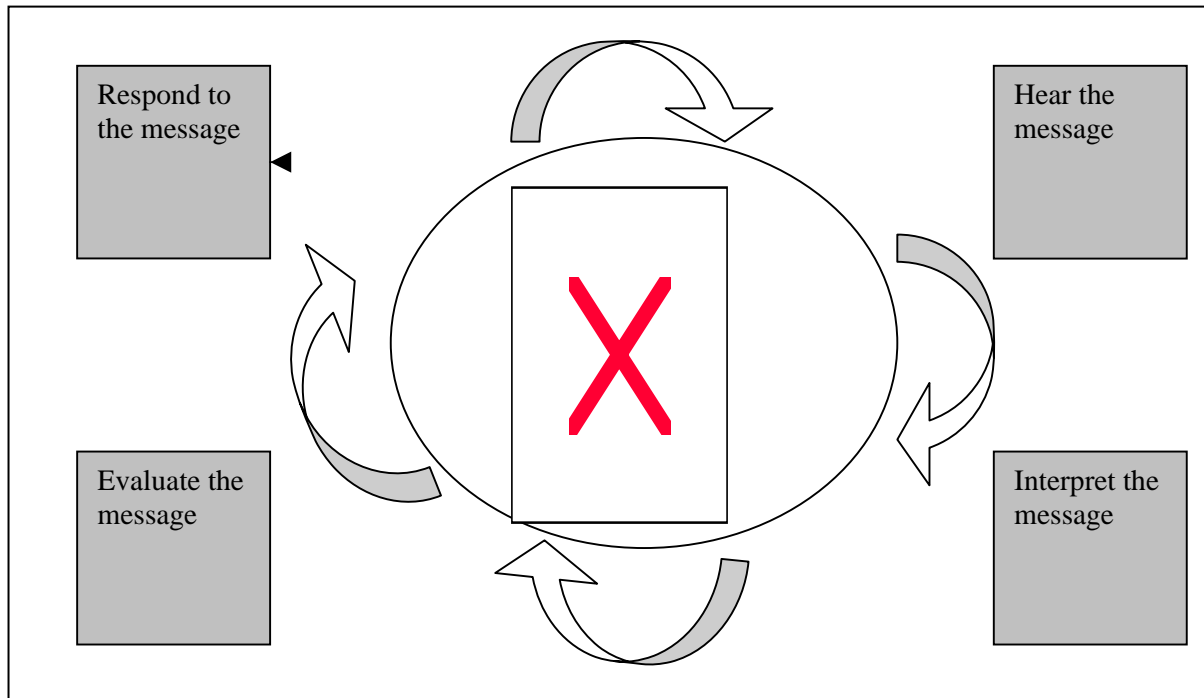
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In the figure below you can see a summary of the key sections of good listening that will be very useful in a conflict handling situation.



**Figure – Effective Listening – The four sections of being a good listener!**

Below are additional key points to the diagram:

- *Hear the message – genuinely listen to what is being said.*
- *Interpret the message – take in all aspects of body language, tone of voice and understand their importance.*
- *Evaluate the message – decide what is the actual message being conveyed.*
- *Respond to the message – give a meaningful response to the message.*

It is important for us to realise that listening, body language and use of voice are very much an integrated approach, and one very much relies on the other to get the message across. It is the use of all parts of the body that tell a person what you are thinking, what you mean and if you can be trusted.

***The use of verbal and face-to-face communications***

Understanding how to use verbal and face-to-face communications is necessary in all business situations. However, when handling conflict situations, it is extremely important to be aware that your words and actions can be easily misunderstood and can add to the conflict rather than helping solve it. We have to be careful that our own body language and responses are not in opposition to the other person's, but actually try to balance them.

We must be aware of the combined use of our voice and facial expression, as they give clear messages about who we are, what we are, how we feel about the situation and how we mean to deal with it.

The following statistics identify the following proportions of the use of words, voice, tone, pitch and body language that we use when communicating in any situation.

**7%**  
**actual words**

**38%**  
**voice, tone, pitch, pace and quality**

**55%**  
**body language.**

Therefore we should look at the way in which we use our voices and language, and we should understand the effect the different stances and gestures that we use will make.



**Posture** - can also be very telling in a conflict situation. It has been argued that posture is more likely to be open to misinterpretation than any other form of non-verbal communication. For example, a salesperson slumped in a seat during a sales meeting, is suggesting a lack of respect or a slovenly approach to work and giving the impression that they do not care. When trying to resolve any conflict between the sales person and the customer, it will be important that the sales person considers their posture, sits up in a professional manner and looks as though he is listening.

A person in a hunched posture could be displaying a shy nature and perhaps a lack of confidence. If the opposite behaviour is being displayed, ie adopting an upright posture, this can be seen as keen and attentive.

**Gestures** – this involves the use of hands and arms in conflict handling situations. The aim of this section is to give you an insight into positive body language. However, it is also useful to think about some negative behaviour that you should avoid displaying. Let us look at the following gestures and their meanings:

- *Arms crossed and avoiding gaze – suggest suspicion.*
- *Clenched fist – suggests anger or determination.*
- *Doodling – suggest boredom.*
- *Finger tapping – suggest impatience.*
- *Hands behind head while leaning back in office chair – suggests territorial dominance.*
- *Hands behind head when in an authoritative situation – suggests confidence.*
- *Occasionally covering mouth with hand while speaking – suggests nervousness or lying.*
- *Open hands – suggests open mindedness.*
- *Open hands and arms – suggests acceptance.*
- *Pointing index finger – suggests wariness and can be seen as threatening behaviour.*
- *Rubbing nose – suggests suspicion.*
- *Rubbing palms of hand together – suggests expectancy.*



- *Stroking chin – suggests person is thinking or assessing the situation.*
- *Tugging at ear – suggests nervousness.*
- *Wringing hands – suggest nervousness or frustration.*

**Activity**

Looking at the above list, which of those gestures could make a conflict situation worse?

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***Using written communication to record conflict incidents***

In the same way that companies keep accident books, many of them also keep incident books. These books record incidents within the workplace, which, in particular, involve customers. It is good practice to record the event, who was involved and an overview of the likely outcome. Should there be any come back in the future, there is a record of events so that the situation can be explained.


It is also a useful record to establish if there are particular staff who may be inclined to cause conflict through their behaviour. If this is the case, an incident book acts as a good record of past events.

The incident book should include the date of the incident, the nature of the incident, a description of what happened, who was involved and what the solution was, or indeed an agreement to move the conflict through to the next stage.

***When to involve your manager in conflict situations?***

It is preferable that if conflict exists, it is dealt with extremely quickly and involves the least amount of people as possible. However, in some instances we will need to involve at least our line manager to resolve our difficulties, be they internal or external.

It is likely that, as a more junior member of staff, you will have to call upon your manager if the customer is unhappy, and they will then resolve the difficulty with you, or for you. This is usually because they have more power to make decisions about the best course of action available to solve the customer problem. For example, if you take an item of clothing back to a retailer because it is faulty, quite often the sales assistant will call the manager over to deal with the situation.



The same applies internally within the organisation. Quite often with internal problems, they require the input of somebody more experienced to sort out conflict situations. For example, where there is a problem between two members of staff at the same level, the line manager may become involved and try to mediate between them to resolve the situation.

However, if there is a problem between you and your line manager, that is different. You should then go to the human resource or personnel manager, and they will help to sort out the situation.

Mainly, you should always go to the manager when you are unsure of the situation and what you can do to resolve the problem. As mentioned earlier, you should make sure that you know how much authority you have to resolve problems individually and when you need to bring in your manager for help and support.

It is very important that before you become involved with any customers, you ask your line manager where you go in times of trouble and difficulty, who do you ask for help and at what point should you ask for help?

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### ***Using theory and communication skills to handle conflict***

In closing this section, it is useful to combine your knowledge and skills in dealing with conflict situations. Use the following framework as a basis for handling conflict situations.

Always remember to follow your organisations complaint/conflict handling guidelines and check your authority levels when dealing with conflict and the acceptable response times.

One way of handling complaints is to use the following process:

- ***Listen***
- ***Apologise***
- ***Solve***
- ***Thank***

***Listen*** to the complaint

#### ***Apologise***

Apologise in a very positive way and thank them for bringing the problem to your attention. Remember to check-out the guidelines for suspected food poisoning complaints at your workplace. You will need to be very careful how you apologise in these situations; such cases are normally dealt with by managers.

#### ***Solve***

Find out the facts. Complaints often get blown out of proportion – what exactly is the complaint about? By rephrasing the complaint into your own words you will show the customer that you have understood what they have said. Let the customer know what you intend to do and then *act* immediately. Do not delay! You are on your way to putting things right.

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***Thank***

Thank them for bringing the problem to your attention. Stress that it is the only way you can find out about any problems and put them right.

Remember that support is often available in the workplace to help you with customer complaints and conflict; do not feel you must always do this alone. You will need to practice under supervision and shadow other people, until you develop your own appropriate style and feel comfortable and confident.

***Section Three Summary***

One of the greatest causes of conflict in any organisation is mis-communication, both in terms of how information is relayed to employees and customers and also in terms of the way in which we communicate with one another.

Listening to what somebody has to say in a conflict situation is only half of the picture. Being able to listen to what they say and watch what they mean are two entirely different things and can give a much clearer meaning as to the feelings and intentions of an individual.

Hopefully this section has created a greater awareness in you of your own communication skills and how they could be improved to reduce the amount of possible conflict situations as a result of your communication messages.

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## **Section 4**

# **Resolution of Conflict**

At the end of this section candidates should be able to:

- *Identify possible approaches to dealing with conflict.*
- *Describe ways of handling conflict effectively.*
- *Describe different models for overcoming conflict.*
- *Understand how to overcome obstacles within conflict.*



***Management and organisational approaches to resolving conflict***

At the end of section 1, it was clear to see that conflict is something that seems to be a common part of our daily life, affecting everybody in the organisation from the employees through to the customers. We also noted that conflict comes at a great cost if it grows into a big argument where resolution seems impossible to achieve.

The purpose of this section is to provide you with understanding of the methods used by organisations when dealing with conflict, should it get out of control.

There are two aspects that this chapter covers:

1. ***Conflict from a management perspective*** *ie the methods that organisations use to solve large-scale conflict. It is important that you understand this as, depending on whom you work for, you could find yourself involved in internal conflicts. Therefore the conflict may not be personal to you as such, but you are involved because of where you work.*
2. ***Conflict from an individual's perspective*** *ie a person working in a face-to-face, front-line environment. How can we manage to solve conflicts that directly relate to us and are within our scope to deal with? For example, an irate customer, or an argument with somebody we work with. Some of these things we can deal with ourselves, and we need to examine the best ways of doing this.*

The alternative approaches appropriate for resolving conflict are:

- *Accommodation.*
- *Compromise.*
- *Conciliation.*
- *Mediation.*

### ***Accommodation***

This method of overcoming conflict is based upon one party in the conflict giving way to the others position.

For example: You work as a front-office receptionist for an insurance broker, dealing with customers who come in to settle their insurance premiums. A customer is less than happy with the standard of service and is refusing to pay his bill. If this situation arose, it is likely that you would talk to your manager and that he or she would be able to use an accommodation strategy to resolve the conflict. This means that the manager, on behalf of the organisation, will listen to the customer, and agree a discount on the premium to take into account the customer's dissatisfaction, if it is valid, and bring the conflict situation to a close.

However, it is unlikely that junior staff will be involved in such strategies for concluding conflict situations, because they will not have the authority to offer discounts of this nature.

### ***Compromise***

This is where one or both parties are keen to resolve the situation and are inclined to settle their differences with the other party.

Compromise is often one of the most popular means of resolving conflict. It often means that each party gives way on their principles in order to be able to move on from the situation and re-establish the relationship on a firm footing. Compromise is about coming to a satisfactory agreement to end the conflict, which means that the situation is resolved and less likely to rise again in the future.

No matter what type of approach we take to resolving conflict, there is still a need for certain methods of discussion

that will assist in resolving the conflict in a way that will benefit everyone involved.

- *Conciliation.*
- *Mediation.*

It is very unlikely that you will be at the centre of conciliation or mediation as these again are very much management activities. However, we should always be aware that personally we can also aim to be conciliatory, to try and overcome a conflict situation.

### ***Conciliation***

Conciliation is something that can be a major activity within an organisation, ie where a leading organisation steps in to a conflict situation to try and enable the parties involved to resolve it.

However, on an individual level, being conciliatory is something that we can be, both within the organisation and externally, with our customers.

Conciliation means that we must try and move towards the other party involved in a conflict and look together for ways or resolving that conflict.

This involves the following actions:

- *Apologise.*
- *Take responsibility.*
- *Give way.*
- *Express positive feelings for the other party involved in the conflict.*
- *Initiate a both-gain approach to the problem.*





**Mediation**

Sometimes conflict can be so difficult to resolve that it needs somebody else to come in and talk to both parties about the situation. For example, if you are disagreeing with a tax officer and you cannot agree on how to overcome your tax situation, often a more senior manager will come in and intervene, in fact mediate in the situation. This means:

- *Keeping the people involved in the conflict and look for a way of resolving it.*
- *Using verbal statements to try and focus their minds on what they are saying and what they are expecting. Ask them questions.*
- *Waiting again and letting the people in conflict resume their discussion and see if they can now overcome it.*
- *Try to ensure that there is a change in attitude between individuals, looking at the problem rather than each other.*

You will be unlikely to mediate on behalf of your company, but it is useful for you to understand that this is a possible outcome to dealing with more serious conflict situations. In fact, when we ourselves are involved in internal conflicts with other employees, our managers can use mediation to try and resolve these problems.

When mediation does take place, your manager and you should be aware of the following principles of mediation.

**Mediators should never:**

1. *Give advice or offer suggestions.*
2. *Put forwards ideas or solutions.*
3. *Probe with 'why' questions.*
4. *Give their own opinions.*

Mediating is about helping an exchange between other people. If the mediator starts giving advice, they can be seen to be taking sides without even realising it and the situation can get even worse.



### ***The Nine-Step Model for Resolving Conflict***

The basis of this model allows you to consider a way of overcoming conflict and aiming to resolve conflict by reaching an outcome to the conflict situation, with which both parties are happy. The nine steps to conflict resolution are as follows:

1. *Take a step back and analyse the situation.*
2. *Confront the situation.*
3. *Sit back and listen to the problems.*
4. *Understand the seriousness of the situation.*
5. *Explore the options for overcoming conflict.*
6. *Assess whether or not agreement is possible.*
7. *Propose a solution.*
8. *Reach an acceptable outcome.*
9. *Build and repair relationships.*

*This model was adapted from Conflict Management by Masters, Roberts and Albright, AMACOM – American Management Association (2002)*





When resolving one-to-one conflict you often decide to talk out the conflict. When doing so consider the following. Please note that this is something for you to personally consider in one-to-one situations, as well as your manager considering it when dealing with one-to-one employee situations.

- *Plan a place that might help both parties feel relaxed.*
- *Ensure it is private.*
- *Avoid answering the phone.*
- *Make it clear nobody is to disturb you.*
- *Ensure you have enough time.*
- *Avoid noise.*
- *Always show you appreciate the other person's willingness to talk.*
- *Be optimistic.*
- *Do not push your solution.*
- *State the issues.*
- *Do not run the show – ie do not take over the whole meeting.*
- *Highlight the positive and avoid the negative issues.*
- *Allow the other party to put their side of events.*
- *Do not be passive or aggressive.*

One-to-one conflict is something we can come across every day. Sometimes it can end up being unimportant, other times it can get out of hand. If it grows into a real problem then the list on the previous page is very valuable in providing you with a way forward. But as with the nine-step process, mediation and conciliation is essential if the conflict is going to be resolved.



Other means of resolving conflict might include:

- *Offer other ideas, suggestions to resolve the situation.*
- *Make it OK for other people to feel the way they do – understand them, empathise with them.*
- *Make it easy for them to change positions without losing face.*
- *Do not force them to prove that you are right.*
- *Say what you want to, if necessary, through someone else to soften the blow!*

**Activity**

Discuss as a group the ways that you currently use to overcome one-to-one conflict with either customers or colleagues. Discuss situations where you might use the one-to-one approach to resolving conflict.

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### ***Overcoming Obstacles to Conflict Handling***


Whether you are handling conflict or aiming to resolve conflict, you will often come across barriers, things that make resolution difficult. If we fail to resolve the conflict, then we should be aware that the conflict becomes destructive, negative and very damaging to the organisation.

There are four important obstacles to overcoming resolution that make resolving conflict more difficult. These are:

1. *Organisational Culture.*
2. *Time.*
3. *Denial.*
4. *Competitiveness.*

### ***Organisational Culture***

Often the type of organisation we work in and the culture of the organisation will influence how easily we fall into conflict situations and also how easily they can be overcome.



A further issue is the nature and culture of management, particularly when an organisation has a leadership that likes full control of the situation and tends not to give employees a say in what goes on. With this sort of leadership, conflict seems to be all the more likely, between employees and management, and between employees and customers. If a manager is continually telling his/her subordinates what to do without asking, eventually they will resent him/her. The resentment may come out in the way in which they deal with customers, possibly abruptly or angrily.

***International culture***

We will now consider how cultural differences, in particular language differences, cause frustration, misunderstanding, and differences of many types that can end in conflict.

Every effort must be taken to understand cultural differences, language differences. We should learn to make allowances for international customers, show patience, tolerance and understanding.

***Time***

Due to the increasing demand on employees, the speed at which they are expected to work can at times appear to be unacceptable. As a result, staff cannot always do all the tasks required of them, or they fail to do them properly.

There are two issues with time, one is the lack of time to do the job properly, and two, the fact that time limits do not allow conflict to be either handled or resolved very easily.

***Denial***

One of the biggest barriers to conflict is denial ie ignoring or denying the fact that there is a problem and that conflict exists. Often it is because we worry that an admission or acknowledgement of the conflict situations means we are ready to give in. Unfortunately, when this happens conflict can grow and become very difficult to resolve.





### **Competitiveness**

In Section 1, we saw that some people handle conflict in a competitive way, they have to win, no questions asked. It has to go their way or it is not settled. Where the organisational culture encourages competition, or where competition is a part of our personality, it can be difficult to overcome the wish to win in order to accommodate, or indeed compromise, in conflict situations.

### **Possible Outcomes of Conflict Handling**

When handling or resolving conflict there are three possible outcomes that may be achieved:

1. *Win-Lose.*
2. *Lose-Lose.*
3. *Win-Win.*

**Win-lose** – this is where “I win and you lose” (and vice versa). A win-lose outcome assumes that the ‘winner takes all’ outcome is possible. In other words, one party gets what (s)he wants at the expense of the other.

For example, a customer complains bitterly that the level of legal service provided when they were moving house was below that expected. As a result he is insisting that he will not pay the full amount for the legal services provided. However, the solicitor denies all the claims the customer has made. The more the solicitor denies the claims, the more the customer stands his ground. In this situation, one of you feels you must win; therefore somebody has to back down considerably for one party to win.

**Lose-lose** – this is where you say ‘If I am going to lose I will make sure you lose too!’ A lose-lose situation implies that losing is unavoidable, which, in most peoples mind, is not ideal, but acceptable should the other person be seen to have to back down also. Another way of looking at this type of situation is to accept that neither party gets what (s)he really wants.

However, the question must arise – what do we do in a situation, where there is no way out, where the argument is

lost by both sides? How do the people involved in the conflict move on from this situation?

If you look at this from an external view, if the conflict was serious, then it is likely that the customer will not use your services or purchase your products ever again and this could be quite damaging, particularly if it is a customer who is very important to the organisation.

However, internally, this is much more difficult to manage, as it can result in a lot of discomfort and tense atmospheres within the workplace environment. This can result in the tension rising and the conflict spreading. It can also result in disciplinary action for some people because their behaviour becomes unreasonable as they find the loss of face difficult to cope with. It can result in people leaving their employment and it can destroy relationships that have been established over long periods of time.

It is important to consider the cost of a lose-lose situation, and always try to get a resolution that all parties find acceptable ie of benefit to all parties involved in the conflict.

If you recall in Section 1, we considered the cost of conflict to the individual. In a lose-lose situation, individual ego's are damaged and it can take a lot of time for those involved in the conflict to recover from the situation.

**Win-Win** – here you might be heard to say “Look we can both benefit from this situation”. This is more likely where a compromise is arrived at. Win-Win implies that both parties aim to resolve the conflict by searching for a common aim to serve the common good.

In the example given above, each of the people involved in the conflict may have realised that their behaviour and response has been unacceptable and perhaps aim to be a little more conciliatory towards one another. This would be the first stage of compromise that could lead to an outcome which both parties are happy with.

However, you must understand that a 'win-win' situation is not always possible, but working towards it is really important, and often, in doing so finds a compromise which is acceptable to both parties.

You should also understand the tactics used by the 'winners' and the 'losers' in conflict situations, as it is important to know how to behave and react in these situations.

### **Winners**

The tactics used by winners in a conflict situation may include:

- *Retain your original position.*
- *Be relaxed.*
- *Show concern.*
- *Be self-assured and confident.*
- *Be suitably conciliatory even though you may feel triumphant.*

### **Losers**

The tactics used by losers in a conflict situation may include:

- *Denying defeat is possible.*
- *Losing their position.*
- *Being in a fighting mood.*
- *Tending to have to learn from situations.*
- *Tending to apportion blame to others.*
- *Having to try being accommodating.*

When handling conflict, you must learn to give and take, hear both sides of the story and assess the situation, as outlined in the nine-step approach to resolving conflict and the five-step model. In doing this, it is far more likely that conflict will be handled properly, and resolved.

### ***The Benefits of Resolving Conflict***

In resolving conflict, we can feel better about ourselves, what we have achieved, what we have learned, what we have saved from the situation, and most of all how we have moved on, how we can change in the future and how we can stop similar situations from happening again.

Personal change in us is very important if we are going to move on and learn from the situation. As a result, if we can achieve a conflict resolution the following things can then happen:

- *Respect for one another grows.*
- *Change takes place.*
- *Other difficulties are faced and resolved.*
- *People can improve.*
- *New ideas develop.*
- *Future conflicts are addressed early on before they escalate.*
- *A new team spirit and competitive edge grows.*



**Section Four Summary**

Some people would say that there are no winners in conflict, because it always causes so much trouble and can bring up a variety of different emotions within us all.

However, whenever conflict does arise, every effort should be made to reduce it as early as possible. Remember at this level, it is likely that someone will be assisting you in resolving a conflict situation. Where you are left to resolve a customer conflict alone, the principles in this section should come in useful.

There are both extended and simple models for resolving conflict, all of which lead to being able to discuss openly the source and cause of the problem and negotiate ways around it.

This section should provide you with some helpful insight in to the ideas of winning and losing in conflict, hopefully, it will provide you with an insight into the emotions aroused in conflict, and how they can best be overcome to keep a positive atmosphere in the work place.



## ***Glossary of Terms***

### ***Accommodation***

This is a method of overcoming conflict based upon one party in the conflict giving way to others in the conflict.

### ***Avoidance***

This is where a party ignores, denies, escapes and deliberately avoids confronting the other party involved in the conflict.

### ***Compromise***

This is where a party is willing to resolve the conflict and agrees to settle its differences with the other party.

### ***Conciliation***

This is where you try to arrive at a compromise or where you try to accommodate the other party involved in the conflict situation.

### ***Facilitating***

The role of the mediator is to facilitate the discussion between the two conflict parties. The mediator encourages both sides to speak calmly and positively. He/she can do this by asking questions and leading the discussion in a positive way.

### ***Formal Conflict***

This is where the conflict situation is reported to people within the organisation and that certain organisational procedures are carried out in order to resolve the conflict. This conflict situation could also involve conciliation, mediation, accommodation and compromise.

### ***Full Conflict***

Full conflict is where the situation goes beyond an argument and becomes a more serious situation, which often requires the involvement of other people to resolve it.