

Conflict at work

AUDIO - open this URL to listen to the audio:

<https://goo.gl/Pe1K42>

Questions 1-10

Complete the notes below.

Write **ONE WORD ONLY** for each answer.

Conflict at work

Conflict mostly consists of behaviour in the general category of **1**.....

Often a result of people wanting to prove their **2**.....

Also caused by differences in **3**..... between people

4..... conflicts: people more concerned about own team than about company

Conflict-related stress can cause **5**..... that may last for months

Chief Executives (CEOs)

Many have both **6**..... and anxiety

May not like to have their decisions questioned

There may be conflict between people who have different **7**.....

Other managers

A structure that is more **8**..... may create a feeling of uncertainty about who staff should report to.

Minimising conflict

Bosses need to try hard to gain **9**.....

Someone from outside the company may be given the role of **10**..... in order to resolve conflicts.

Solution:

- | | |
|----------------|---------------|
| 1. bullying | 6. confidence |
| 2. superiority | 7. visions |
| 3. personality | 8. democratic |
| 4. structural | 9. respect |
| 5. absence | 10. mediator |

Audioscript:

Over the years, attitudes towards workers have changed considerably. After all, there was a time when workers had no rights at all, and laboured in appalling conditions. Conditions have improved a lot, but conflict in the workplace is still common. And human resources managers nowadays need to be able to deal with conflict when necessary.

What is conflict in the workplace? Definitions vary, but I'm taking it to refer to a whole range of behaviour that the victim finds unacceptable, from minor, harmless arguments to at the opposite extreme - physical assault. Much of this is covered by the term bullying, by which I mean one or more people behaving abusively and aggressively against another who is in a weaker position. Although all behaviour like this is a form of conflict, not all conflict can be described in these terms.

As with all human behaviour, there are numerous reasons for it. But often it's caused by someone's desire for the need to show their superiority over someone else, in order to feel that they aren't at the lowest level in the hierarchy or a group of people.

In some cases one person simply dislikes the other, on the basis that the personality of one is in some way incompatible with that of the other person. A general habit of optimism in one person could make another intolerant of a colleague who's constantly pessimistic - not that that justifies treating them badly, of course.

Some conflicts arise when people are more interested in promoting themselves and their team than the company as a whole. These conflicts are called 'structural', and could come about, for example, when a team believe they are the only people in the business who do any useful work, and look down on other departments or scenes administrators.

Conflict obviously affects the individuals concerned - the situation is likely to be very stressful for them, resulting in their absence from work, possibly for months. For the company, if no effort is made to resolve the conflict, it can spiral out of control, and even lead to the breakdown of the business.

Some interesting work with chief executives - CEOs - has uncovered some of the reasons why they sometimes treat their colleagues badly. Many CEOs combine two opposing characteristics: confidence - that is, the belief that they are capable of great achievements - with a high level of anxiety, a fear of missing targets, whether set for themselves or by the directors of the company. This combination can make them respond badly to questions that challenge their decisions.

In a high pressure work environment, such characteristics become problematic. And it's particularly difficult to tackle the situation where colleagues, managers and board members are all trying to achieve the same thing. When they can't agree on strategic issues and on where they see the business going, there are bound to be conflicts.

For managers at lower levels within the organisation, it might seem that an autocratic form of management, where the chief executive gives orders and everyone else has to obey - would see more conflict than a more democratic approach. Interestingly, though, a company with a more democratic business model, can suffer more, when the question of about who to report to leads to conflicting demands.

Now I'll say a little about dealing with the type of conflict that has harmful effects. Of course the ideal is to prevent it arising in the first place. A good manager, at any level, will make efforts to earn the respect of the people they work with, particularly those who report to them. That will involve politeness in all communications and treating them as equals who happen to have a different role within the organisation.

Sometimes, of course, conflict does occur, and can get out of hand. In such cases the human resources department often gets involved. However, if one of the parties in a conflict sees human resources as their mouthpiece for the chief executive, then an external mediator might be able to help. By talking to both sides and trying to find the truth of what's been happening, they can build a clear picture of the situation.

feedback that both sides will accept, precisely because they're independent.