



# From Clash to Collaboration

Building stronger teams through healthy conflict

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# What is conflict?

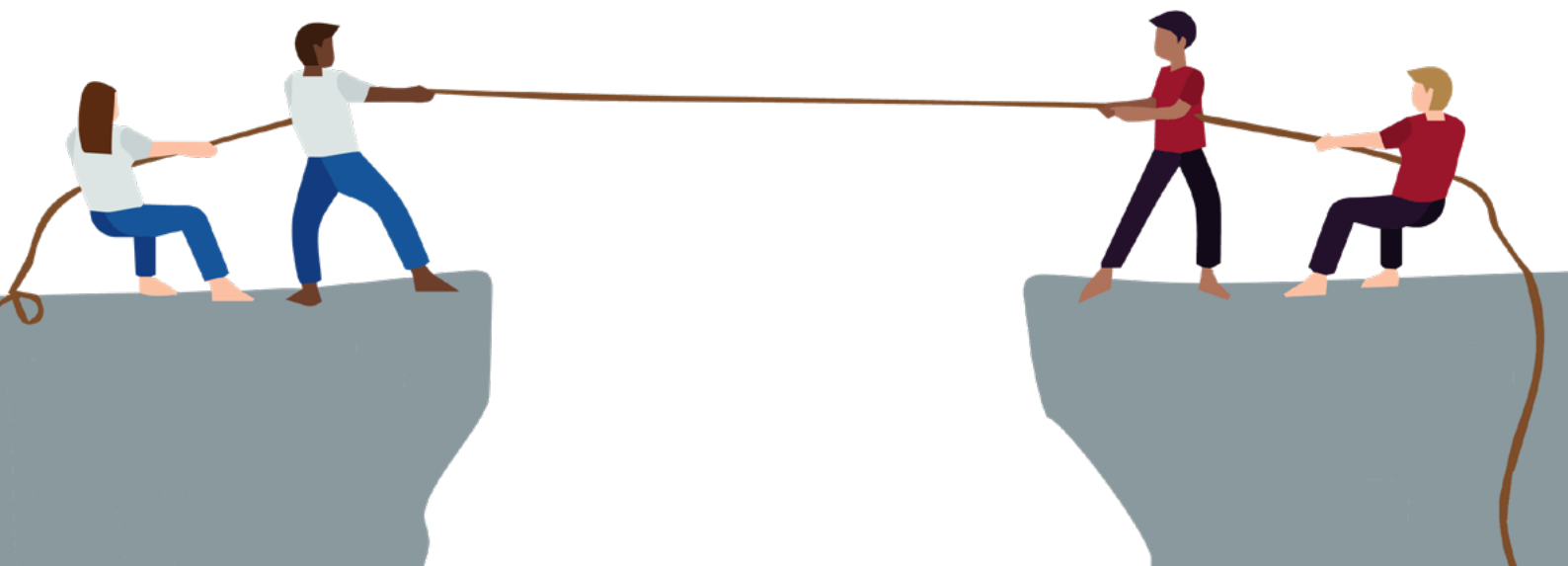
**conflict** *noun* [C or U] (ARGUING OR FIGHTING)

**An active disagreement between people with opposing opinions or principles**

Conflict. We've all experienced it at one point or another in our lives. But what does it really mean, especially in the context of our work lives? In the workplace, conflict can pop up between colleagues, teams, or even departments, often because of differences in opinions, goals, or personalities.

When conflict is handled badly at work, it can escalate quickly, creating a toxic environment filled with tension and resentment. Miscommunication, avoidance and passive-aggressive behaviour can replace real conversations, leading to loss of shared momentum, trust breaking down and innovation drying up. From eye rolls and sighs, to behind the scenes gossiping, even to all out battles, conflict can drive a wedge into workplace relationships and kill productivity.

While it might seem like a negative force, conflict isn't all bad. When managed well, it can spark innovation, strengthen relationships, and lead to better decision-making. So, let's dive into understanding and navigating this everyday challenge with ease and a dash of confidence.



## Cause of conflict

So just what exactly causes conflict anyway? You may get on really well with your team, have a great work-life balance, and have a dream team that works in sync together. But sometimes it's unavoidable and the stress can build up and workloads can get too heavy to bear. In fact, "62% of people report that having heavy workloads (which can be attributed to poor management), is the top cause of stress-related absence. Management style is the second biggest factor, jumping from 32% to 43% from 2018 to 2019" (CIPD, 2019). These pressures can lead to misunderstandings, missed deadlines, and frayed tempers, creating a breeding ground for disagreements. Even if your team is a well-oiled machine, it's easy for minor issues to escalate into major conflicts when everyone is overwhelmed and stressed.

Not only that, but according to over 350 HR professionals, the common reasons behind workplace conflict include:



**39%**

Personality clashes  
& communication  
differences



**22%**

Unclear  
expectations



**16%**

Unreasonable  
turnaround times

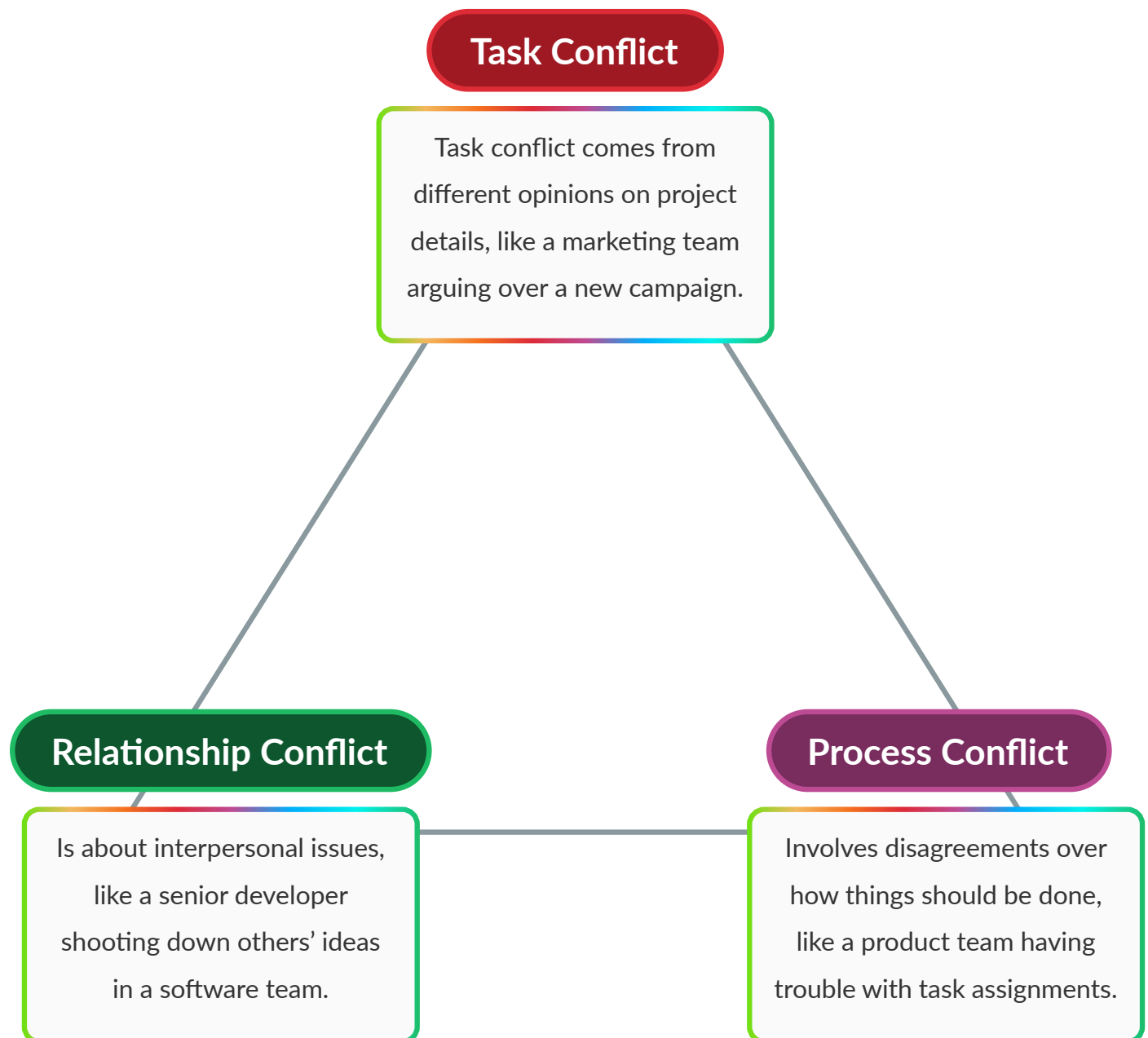


**14%**

Unclear  
performance  
criteria

# The three main types of conflict

Conflict in teams usually falls into three main categories:



By understanding and tackling these conflicts, you can turn challenges into opportunities, boosting innovation, teamwork, and efficiency. Embrace different perspectives to turn conflicts into stepping stones for team success.

## Conflict is normal

Conflict is a normal human experience. That's it. No avoiding it. It has always happened, and it will always happen. It is an inevitable part of society, and the workplace is no exception. "85% of employees at all levels experience conflict to some degree" (Psychology Today, n.d). Not only that but a shocking "38% of employees in the UK experience interpersonal conflict per year, and in the U.S., employees spend almost three hours involved in conflict every week" (CIPD, 2015). Disagreements, disputes, and clashes are a part of our daily grind. Understanding that conflict is a common part of life can help us approach it more constructively and with a clearer head.

The stats don't lie and conflicts at work come with a price tag.

## The cost of conflict at work

According to an article by the Conflict Resolutions Center, leaders dedicate a significant portion of their day to resolving conflicts in the workplace. And we mean significant. The CIPD Conflict Management survey estimates that grievance takes seven days of management time, sometimes stretching over several months (CIPD, 2011). This just adds to the pile of expenses that come with conflicts. In a time where demands are high and time is scarce, it raises a critical question – Can any organisation afford to have its leaders spend so much of their day addressing issues among employees who clash?

And it's not only time that is being wasted on conflict, but skilled employees are being lost and vast sums of money are going down the drain. Acas estimates that around 485,800 employees quit each year because of workplace conflicts. Hiring replacements costs about £2.6 billion annually, and the hit to productivity while new hires get up to speed adds another £12.2 billion, totalling a whopping £14.9 billion each year (Acas, 2021).



**66%**

66% of employees say that their performance declined due to conflict



**3.2%**

3.2% of all UK employees took some time off sick as a result of conflict



**24%**

HR spends 24% of its time managing conflict



**81%**

81% of HR professionals have experienced an employee resigning as a result of conflict

# The benefits of conflict

Our perception of conflict is informed by our family, communities, culture, life experiences, and more. The problem with conflict is that we see conflict as a problem. It's all about our perception and our relationship with it. Conflict tends to get a bad rap because it's associated with tension and hostility. The stomach-churning anxiety that you could say the wrong thing, the feeling that heated arguments that can quickly get out of hand, and the concern it could permanently damage the relationship. And it's just that, a perception of conflict.

Here's the thing - conflict isn't inherently negative. In fact, it can be beneficial. When handled constructively, conflict can lead to great things like higher productivity, stronger relationships, and better team collaboration. It builds our problem-solving skills. Conflict can simply mean that people disagreed at first but then found new hybrid approaches, turning what might have been a stumbling block into a stepping stone towards progress. It doesn't have to be a war.

## Here is how conflict can benefit us:

- Conflict opens our eyes to new ideas / opinions
- Conflict helps us learn to listen
- Conflict gives us the opportunity to open up about our own needs
- Conflict lets us hone our communication skills
- Conflict leads to solutions



# Constructive conflict

Constructive conflict is all about daring to disagree. Instead of trying to avoid conflict altogether, the focus needs to shift towards changing how we perceive and respond to conflict. Having different opinions isn't always a bad thing – it can actually be a chance to learn and grow. So instead of dodging conflict, why not see it as a way to shake things up with your team and come up with fresh ideas?

Here are the 5 sorts of conflict strategies we often see at work, and how effective they are at managing and producing constructive conflict:

## Danger Zone



### Avoidance

The most commonly used and arguably, the worst strategy. When the pain of confrontation is too much, we can bury the issues, allowing them to fester.



### Competition

Usually very disruptive, where differing points of view are unacknowledged, leaving key issues within the conflict to be overlooked.

## Middle Ground



### Compromising

Compromising can blend both the assertiveness and willingness to negotiate. This can satisfy some interests, but often leaves some ignored.



### Accommodating

Putting your teams interests ahead of your own can lead to you being taken advantage of. It can often lead to keeping the unresolved issues, well - unresolved.

## Winning Combo



### Collaboration

Collaboration is recognised as the best way to create constructive conflict. Encouraging the team to work together to create a win-win scenario is the best way to ensure all issues are addressed. It brings the whole teams' input together and gives the team a much better chance of making sure that everyone is satisfied with the solution.

# Here's how our individual qualities play out during conflict



Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.

Viktor E. Frankl 

Each of us has our own way of dealing with conflict. Our individual qualities impact how we respond to it and how we can be perceived when responding to it, leading to more tension. So, here are the common behaviours we often observe in teams and how they can be beneficial towards constructive conflict, but also how they might be unproductive when we're Overextended.

## Inspiration Driven (Adaptable, Flexible, Spontaneous)



Encourages creativity, adaptability, and responsiveness to change, helping the team navigate challenges and seize opportunities. It fosters a dynamic and innovative work environment.



Overextension may result in a lack of focus, inconsistency, and chaotic work processes, leading to confusion and instability. It can cause conflicts over priorities, deadlines, and perceived lack of discipline.

## Discipline Driven (Purposeful, Structured, Reliable)



Brings organisation, reliability, and clear expectations to the team, ensuring tasks are completed on time and to a high standard. It supports a structured and predictable work environment.



When Overextended, it can become inflexible and resistant to change, causing frustration and conflict with more adaptable team members. It can lead to conflicts over rigidity and micromanagement.

## Big Picture Thinking (Conceptual, Imaginative, Radical)



Effective Big Picture Thinking promotes innovative solutions and visionary ideas, fostering unity and shared goals within the team. It encourages a forward-thinking approach, which can pre-empt potential issues.



When Overextended, it can lead to impractical or overly complex ideas, neglecting practical details and immediate concerns. This can cause frustration and misunderstandings among team members focused on execution.

## Down to Earth (Practical, Evidence-Based, Cautious)



Grounded in reality, this Aspect ensures decisions are practical and based on evidence, providing clear direction and stability. It helps avoid conflicts by mitigating risks and uncertainties.



Overextension may result in excessive caution and resistance to new ideas, stifling creativity and causing friction with more innovative team members. It can lead to conflicts over missed opportunities and rigidity.

## Extraverted (Sociable, Demonstrative, Takes Charge)



Promotes open communication, enthusiastic engagement, and effective leadership, fostering an inclusive and dynamic team environment. It helps prevent misunderstandings and builds strong relationships.



When Overextended, it can become overwhelming, dominate conversations, and impose ideas, causing feelings of being unheard or undervalued among introverted team members. This can lead to power struggles and resentment.

## Introverted (Observing, Measured, Intimate)



Provides thoughtful and well-considered input, ensuring decisions are made with care and attention to detail. It supports deep, meaningful relationships and reflective problem-solving.



Overextension can result in withdrawal, lack of communication, and perceived detachment, causing misunderstandings and a sense of isolation. It can lead to conflicts due to unvoiced opinions and disengagement.

## Outcome Focused (Tough, Competitive, Logical)



Drives the team towards achieving goals efficiently, ensuring high performance and accountability. It promotes clarity and directness in communication.



When Overextended, it can lead to overuse which can appear insensitive or overly critical, creating a hostile environment where team members feel pressured and undervalued. It can lead to conflicts over perceived harshness and lack of empathy.

## People Focused (Accommodating, Collaborative, Empathetic)



Builds strong relationships, promotes a supportive team culture, and ensures everyone feels valued and heard. It reduces interpersonal conflicts and fosters cooperation.



When Overextended, it may lead to neglecting personal needs, avoiding necessary conflicts, and passive-aggressive behaviour. This can cause unaddressed issues to fester and create long-term resentment.

## Conflict Continuum



When we avoid conflict, we often end up in artificial harmony, like a plaster over the wound instead of addressing the issue and letting it truly heal. It's just a temporary fix that hides the underlying issues but doesn't resolve them. On the other side, constantly seeking conflict can be just as damaging, creating a toxic environment where people are always on edge. The key is striking a balance when Overextended between being People Focused and Outcome Focused. The middle ground allows us to address the issues directly and constructively, leading to genuine resolution and stronger relationships.

# How to turn clashes into collaboration



**70%**

70% of workers see managing conflict as a critically needed skill



**72%**

72% of employees say effective conflict management leads to successful project execution

So how can we flip the script on conflict and turn it into a positive force? Well, to start, prevent unhealthy conflict by handling issues sooner rather than later. It's important to address issues sooner rather than later. If issues aren't addressed straight away then tension can grow, and things can escalate into a full-blown war.



## Embrace differences

Clashes often come from different perspectives and backgrounds. Encourage everyone to see these differences as strengths instead of sources of conflict. When you embrace diversity, you get a mix of ideas and approaches that can lead to unique solutions.



## Keep the conversation open

Make sure communication is a two-way street. Encourage everyone to share their opinions, concerns, and ideas without worrying about backlash. Set up regular team meetings or even anonymous suggestion boxes so everyone feels heard and valued.



## Find common ground

When conflicts pop up, look for what everyone has in common rather than what divides you. Focus on shared goals and values as a starting point for collaboration. This way, you can shift from conflict to cooperation and have more productive discussions.



## Listen up

Teach your team to really listen to each other. Encourage them to repeat back what they've heard to make sure they understand and show they care. Active listening helps build trust and makes it easier to find solutions everyone can agree on.



## Use conflict resolution strategies

Give your team the tools they need to handle disagreements constructively. Encourage a problem-solving approach, focusing on solutions instead of blame. Offer training in negotiation, mediation, and compromise so everyone feels equipped to resolve conflicts together.

Now that we see how conflict can be beneficial, how can we use conflict constructively? These are the four pillars of psychological safety that we can apply to constructive conflict. Without these in place there will not be the necessary psychological safety and therefore, no constructive conflict.



## The roundup

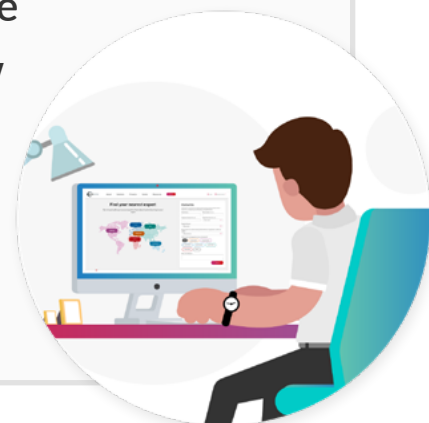
Conflict in the workplace is inevitable and it can either hinder or enhance your team's performance. By recognising that conflict is a natural part of work life and learning how to handle it constructively, you can transform potential obstacles into opportunities for growth. Effective conflict management can lead to stronger relationships, better communication and a more collaborative environment, allowing productivity to thrive. By embracing conflict as a tool for positive change and equipping your team with the strategies needed to navigate disagreements confidently, then you can turn clashes into collaboration and lead everyone towards success.

# Discover the psychometric revolution for working better together.



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Get to know why organisations are switching to Lumina Spark for smarter, behavioural change with a precise and practical perspective on how their people, teams and leaders connect.



Just fancy exploring more of the trending behavioural challenges influencing outcomes right now? Take a look at what people are gathering for at our free community events.



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