

A large, faint, orange-toned graphic of school supplies including a pencil, a ruler, and a pair of glasses, positioned behind the central text.

Understanding **leadership** styles and conflict

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An e-Book for professionals who are new to a leadership role or looking to advance at work, and want to develop their leadership skills (including managing conflict).

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One size does not fit all

When you are in the position of being led rather than leading, it is easy to be critical of the way in which the leader manages the team.

You may think that you could do a better job and although this may be true, there are many leadership styles and approaches and what will work in one situation may not work in another. It is also true that what works with one person will not work with another.

Some people like to receive a lot of guidance and instruction regarding their duties and responsibilities, while others work best when they have a high level of autonomy.

The skill of a leader is to use the right approach with each team or individual and for each situation.

A dilemma

If a leader uses a dictatorial style then some team members will feel like their leader doesn't trust them and become disengaged. If a leader doesn't give enough direction, this can result in poor performance and frustration from highly motivated individuals.

A balancing act

Leaders have to focus on 2 things:

1. Is the task getting done?
2. Is the team happy and motivated?

Some leaders focus on one aspect more than the other, but successful leaders will keep both in balance.

The following diagrams show what happens when a leader focuses too much on the **task** (Diagram A) and on keeping the **team** happy (Diagram B). The happy medium is described in Diagram C, where there are only positive outcomes.

TASK

- Teams have high status as top achievers and hard workers
- Full energy and commitment is given to getting the task done
- High levels of performance
- Individuals leave to find more supportive teams
- Lack of trust results in team needing constant supervision
- Stressful working conditions result in increased sick leave, absenteeism, and poor wellbeing

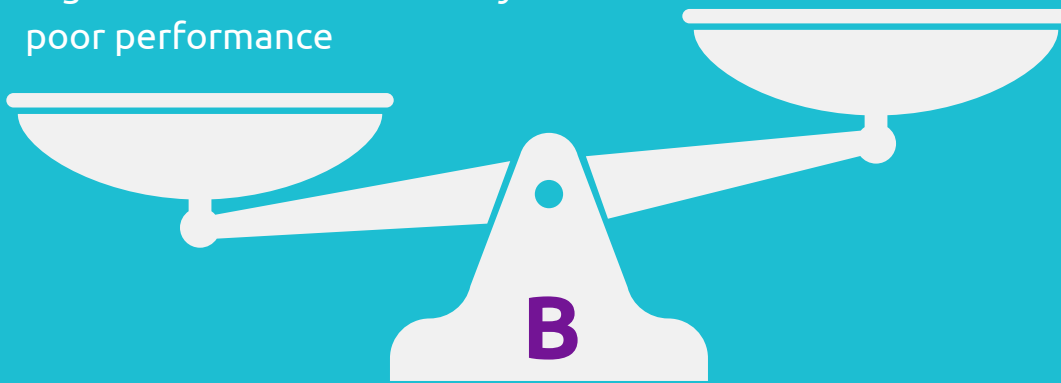


A balancing act

- Highly motivated individuals get frustrated
- Team leader takes on too much, and delegation is poor / non-existent
- Quality issues are missed
- High morale undermined by poor performance

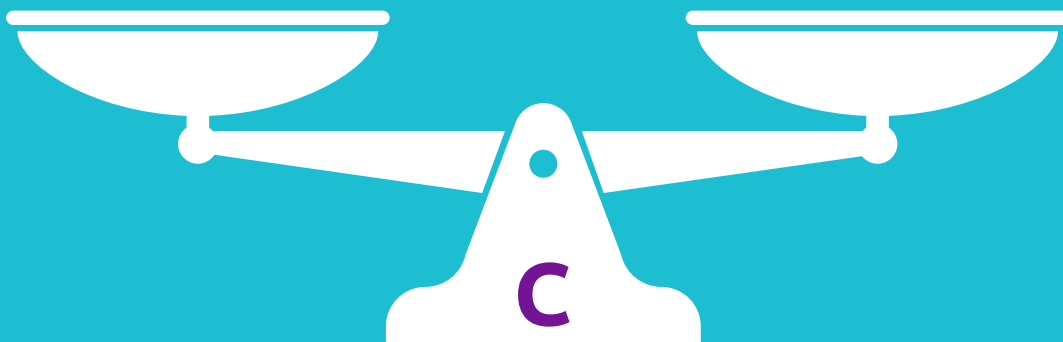
TEAM

- Individuals feel valued and part of a team
- High morale, confidence, and level of trust
- Low stress



- The task is worked on efficiently and is completed
- Moderate to high performance and quality
- Team leader delegates effectively

- The team gets clear instructions and feels valued, listened to, respected, and led in an appropriate way
- Skills in the team are used effectively



Leadership styles

The key leadership styles include:

- Autocratic: Likes to control the team
- Democratic / participative: Includes all team members in decision making
- Laissez-faire: Gives teams a lot of freedom on how they work, and asks them to set their own deadlines
- Paternalistic: Makes decisions without consulting the team, but believes they have their best interests at heart
- Transformational: Identifies changes needed and guides teams through them
- Transactional: Sets clear goals and uses reward / punishment as motivation
- Charismatic: Relies on their personality to 'win over' the team
- Servant: Focuses on the needs of others



Leadership style conflict

When applying different leadership styles, there are many areas of potential conflict.

Autocratic leadership works best with an unstructured or complex task with an inexperienced team. The manager directs or tells the staff what is required, and this can cause conflicts when team members feel disempowered or undervalued.

Participative leadership occurs when a leader with an experienced team consults and uses the input of their staff to achieve goals. The leader makes the final decisions, but the expertise of the team is valued and utilised. This can also lead to conflict when the team feel pressured to participate, or feel there is a lack of direction from the leader or a lack of agreement on decisions.

Teams with a **laissez-faire leader** will have high job satisfaction, but there can be issues with time management, missed deadlines, and team work.

Remember

It often seems like the easiest way to resolve conflicts is to take the work on yourself, but this has a negative impact on your capacity and stress levels, and the way the team sees you.

Dealing with conflict

Leaders do a lot of juggling. They are constantly assessing priorities, planning, communicating, revising plans, supporting and monitoring performance, and evaluating overall success. A good leader cannot afford to take their eye of the ball and must react quickly when there are signs of pressures, conflict, or issues within the team.

Dealing with conflict is a skill that every leader has to learn as conflict is inevitable in most teams. Everyone is different and has different needs and opinions, so it is not always possible to come to a collective agreement.

Team members spend a lot of time together and, no matter how well they get on, there will always be a risk of conflict. It can have a number of causes, including a difference of opinion, cultural differences, someone's frame of mind, a misunderstanding, poor communication, poor training, a lack of clarity within roles and, of course, tone of voice.

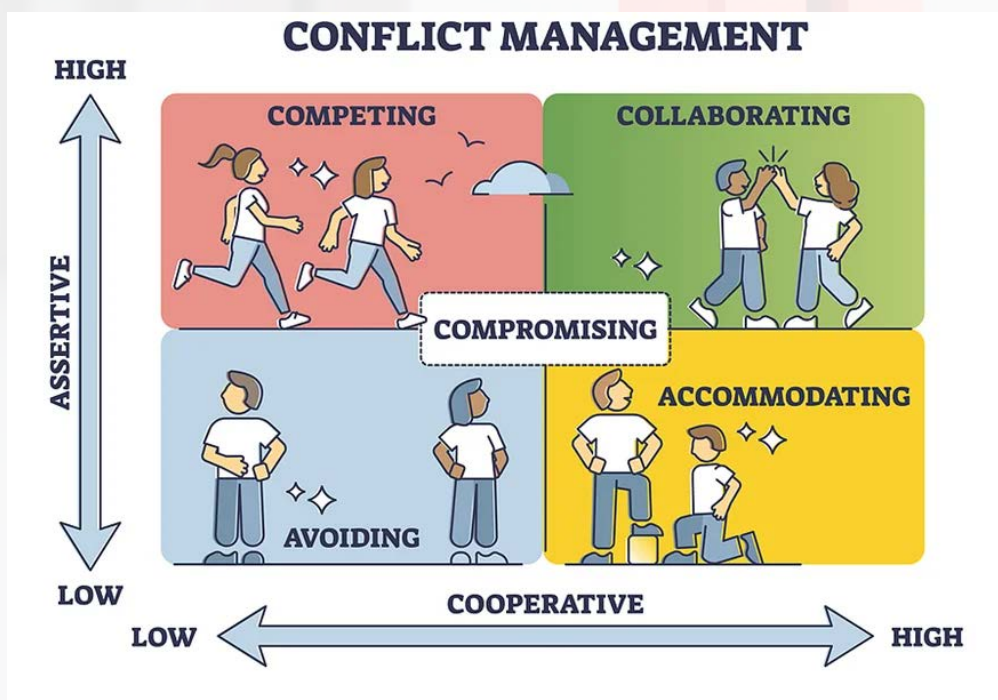
Did you know?

The most common causes of conflict is poor communication, not just a lack of communication, but also the communication style. For example: If someone raises their voice, we're likely to feel angry, upset, or defensive, and react accordingly.

Reducing conflict

The personal skills needed to be able to reduce the potential for workplace conflict include:

- Being an active listener
- Not apportioning blame
- Not jumping to conclusions
- Being respectful of other opinions
- Being approachable and empathetic
- Understanding and reading body language
- Being assertive, clear, and concise with solutions
- Being willing to compromise, and encouraging others to do the same
- Accepting responsibility and not being defensive if you contributed to the conflict



Reducing conflict

Often, managers can prevent conflict from arising or escalating by setting clear ground rules and goals. Encouraging team members to agree on their 'team values' can help, such as communicating in a respectful way and helping others when they see them struggling with their workload. Team values and common goals should be discussed and agreed with the team (participative leadership style), as opposed to the manager dictating them.

Some people are less confident and comfortable sharing their opinions and feelings than others, and avoid conflict situations. They may feel like their opinions will be ridiculed or just be shouted down / talked over by other, stronger personalities. It is important that these people are encouraged to share their views, perhaps in a more private 1:1 setting if needed, so you can understand the conflict situation fully before moving forward.



Unresolved conflict

Most disagreements are about minor issues, but if left to build, will create a serious situation that is difficult to resolve.

It is better to deal with potential conflict as soon as you become aware of it, or when someone brings it to your attention. If it is left, the situation may become inflamed as past issues are likely to be brought up. This, in turn, can lead to a decrease in productivity, frustration, stress, low morale, external arbitration, and possibly even staff leaving.

Unresolved conflict can lead to:

- Stress-related illness
- Anger and frustration
- Feelings of resentment
- Low self-esteem and motivation



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Laser Short Courses, including 'Understanding leadership and management', 'Conflict management' and 'Building a team', can be found here:

www.lasershortcourses.co.uk/courseList.php

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