



STARBUCK ACADEMY

Manager Skills

Manager Skills: Handling Conflict

Handling disagreement in your team, mediating between two people and preventing avoidable conflict

Five lessons, about 2.5 learning hours in total. Watch each video, then use the tool here with your own team during the week.

Name

Date

STARBUCK & ASSOCIATES

COACHING & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

How to use this workbook

This workbook goes with the five video lessons in Manager Skills: Handling Conflict. Each lesson has two pages here: a summary of the key ideas with reflection questions, and a practical tool you use at work that week.

Work at a steady pace. A practical rhythm is one lesson a week: watch the video, read the lesson page, then try the tool with a real situation in your team before moving on. Allow about 2.5 learning hours in total, including the knowledge checks and the workplace tasks.

By the end of the course you will be able to

- Tell task, relationship and process conflict apart, and spot the early signs of unhealthy conflict
- Recognise your own default conflict style and choose your response on purpose
- Uncover the interests behind people's positions and reframe complaints as needs
- Run an informal facilitated conversation between two team members
- Prevent avoidable conflict with clear roles, a team agreement and early conversations

Programme map

LESSON	TITLE	TOOL
1	Healthy and unhealthy conflict	The Team Conflict Map
2	Your own conflict style	The Mode Chooser
3	Interests not positions	The Interests Finder
4	Mediating between two team members	The Facilitated Conversation Guide
5	Preventing conflict before it starts	The Team Agreement Builder

WORTH KNOWING

This course is about everyday disagreement at work. If anyone describes bullying, harassment or discrimination, do not try to resolve it informally. Follow your organisation's policies and involve HR.

LESSON 1

Healthy and unhealthy conflict

Disagreement between capable people is normal and often useful. Your job as a manager is not to remove it, but to keep it healthy, and to notice early when it starts to turn.

Key ideas

- Task conflict is about the work: priorities, methods, deadlines and ideas. Handled well, it improves the work.
- Relationship conflict is about the people: irritation, mistrust, feeling disrespected. It usually makes the work worse.
- Process conflict is about who does what and how decisions get made.
- Task conflict turns sour when people stop talking about the issue and start talking about each other.
- Warning signs: side conversations, over-copied emails, avoidance, work routed around someone, sarcasm passed off as a joke.

EXAMPLE

Tom and Aisha disagree about how to structure a client report. At first it is a useful debate. Then Aisha's idea is dropped in a meeting without discussion, and she starts copying their manager into every email to Tom.

The report is no longer the issue. A task conflict is becoming a relationship conflict, and this is the moment for a quiet, early conversation.

Reflect

Which disagreements in my team are useful right now, and which are starting to turn personal?

What do I usually notice first when tension is building, and how early do I tend to act?

YOUR WORKPLACE TASK THIS WEEK

Use Tool 1, the Team Conflict Map, to note two or three current disagreements in your team, what kind of conflict each one is, the signs you are seeing and your next step.

TOOL 1

The Team Conflict Map

A quick way to see the conflict in your team clearly, before deciding what to do. It takes about 15 minutes. Map what you actually see, not what you assume.

How far has it gone?

STAGE	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	WHAT USUALLY HELPS
Early	An open disagreement about the work. Some frustration, but people still talk directly.	Let it run. Keep the focus on the issue and make sure a decision is reached.
Growing	Comments carry an edge. Side conversations start. People begin to take sides.	A quiet, private check in with each person. Name what you have noticed.
Entrenched	People avoid each other. Work is routed around someone. Others in the team are affected.	A planned, facilitated conversation (Lesson 4), or HR if policy concerns arise.

Your map

THE DISAGREEMENT	TASK, RELATIONSHIP OR PROCESS?	SIGNS I AM SEEING	STAGE	MY NEXT STEP

Which of these would cost the team most if I left it for another month?

TIP

If you mark something as relationship conflict, look for the task or process conflict it may have started as. That is often the easier place to begin the conversation.

Your own conflict style

When your team disagrees, you have habits too. The skill is noticing your default response so that it becomes one option rather than the only one.

Key ideas

- Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann describe five conflict modes, based on how assertive and how cooperative you are.
- Competing is high on assertiveness, accommodating is high on cooperativeness, collaborating is high on both, avoiding is low on both, and compromising sits in the middle.
- Each default has a cost when you manage a team, from problems left to grow to concerns that stop being raised.
- Three questions help you choose: how much does the outcome matter, how much does the relationship matter, and how much time do I have?
- Under pressure your default returns, so build in a short pause.

EXAMPLE

Grace avoids conflict. When two of her team clash over holiday cover, she hopes it will settle. It does not, and by the summer nobody will cover for the other.

Running the three questions, Grace sees that the relationship matters a great deal and there is still time. She chooses to collaborate, and sits down with both of them the same week.

Reflect

What is my default when people in my team disagree, and what has it cost us?

Which people or situations pull me most strongly into that habit?

YOUR WORKPLACE TASK THIS WEEK

Before your next disagreement, use Tool 2, the Mode Chooser, to run through the three questions and pick a mode on purpose. Afterwards, note what happened.

TOOL 2

The Mode Chooser

Use this before you respond to a disagreement, whether you are in it or your team is. It turns an automatic reaction into a choice.

MODE	FITS WHEN	THE RISK IF IT IS YOUR DEFAULT AS A MANAGER
Competing	A quick decision is needed, or a safety or ethical line is at stake.	Things get settled fast, but people stop raising concerns.
Collaborating	Both the outcome and the relationship matter, and there is time.	Everything becomes a long discussion, and decisions slow down.
Compromising	Time is short and a middle ground is good enough.	You split the difference when a better answer was available.
Avoiding	It is trivial, or emotions need to cool first.	Problems grow until they are much harder to fix.
Accommodating	It matters far more to them than to you.	You keep the peace but lose credibility.

Three questions before you act

FOR THIS SITUATION	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
How much does the outcome matter?	☐	☐	☐
How much does the relationship matter?	☐	☐	☐
How much time do I have?	☐	☐	☐

Your choices this week

SITUATION	MY DEFAULT	MODE I CHOSE, AND WHY	WHAT HAPPENED

Interests not positions

Disagreements get stuck when people argue about what they want rather than why they want it. Getting to the why is where workable solutions come from.

Key ideas

- Roger Fisher and William Ury, in *Getting to Yes*, separate positions (what someone says they want) from interests (why they want it).
- Softer questions reach interests without sounding like a challenge: "What matters most to you here?"
- Most workplace disagreements rest on a few common needs: recognition, fairness, certainty, some control over your work, a manageable workload.
- Reframing says back what you heard as a need rather than a complaint, which lowers the heat.
- Create at least three options before choosing, and look for the one that meets the most important interest on each side.

EXAMPLE

Sam says, "Priya never tells me anything." Their manager replies, "So it matters to you to know what is changing before it affects your work."

Sam agrees, and the conversation moves from blame to a practical question: how will Sam hear about changes in future?

Reflect

In a current disagreement, what might each person need that they have not yet said?

When I ask about someone's view, do my questions sound curious or challenging?

YOUR WORKPLACE TASK THIS WEEK

Pick one disagreement in your team. Use Tool 3, the Interests Finder, to explore what each person really needs, and practise one reframe.

The Interests Finder

A question bank and a planning grid to help you get beneath positions. Choose one or two questions, not all of them, and listen properly to the answers.

STAGE	QUESTIONS TO TRY
Opening up	What has been happening, from your point of view? What is the hardest part of this for you?
Getting underneath	What matters most to you here? What worries you about the other option? What would a good outcome look like?
Testing options	What would need to be true for you to feel comfortable? What could you live with, even if it is not ideal?

Listening for the need

NEED	WHAT IT CAN SOUND LIKE
Recognition	"Nobody notices how much I put into this."
Fairness	"Why am I always the one covering Fridays?"
Certainty	"I only found out about the change on the day."
Control	"I am being told how to do every step."
Workload	"I cannot take on another project."

Your planning grid

WHAT THEY ARE SAYING	WHAT MIGHT SIT UNDERNEATH	MY QUESTION OR REFRAME

Mediating between two team members

When two people cannot resolve a disagreement on their own, a short facilitated conversation can help them find a way forward they own. Your role is to guide the process, not to decide who is right.

Key ideas

- Informal mediation suits disagreements about work, style or communication, where both people are willing to talk.
- It never replaces a proper process. Bullying, harassment, discrimination or a formal grievance must follow your organisation's policies and involve HR.
- Meet each person separately first to listen and check they are willing to meet.
- Open with your role and simple ground rules, and ask each person to summarise the other's view until it is agreed as fair.
- End with a specific written agreement and check in with each person a week or two later.

EXAMPLE

Ben and Chloe have stopped speaking after a dispute about a shared client. Their manager meets each of them for twenty minutes, then brings them together for an hour.

By the end they agree who leads on which accounts, and a weekly ten minute catch up. Two weeks later, the manager checks in with each of them separately.

Reflect

Is there a disagreement in my team that the two people are unlikely to resolve alone?

Where might I be tempted to take sides, and how will I stay neutral?

YOUR WORKPLACE TASK THIS WEEK

Use Tool 4, the Facilitated Conversation Guide, to plan each stage of a conversation between two people in your team, including your opening words and ground rules.

The Facilitated Conversation Guide

A simple structure for an informal conversation between two team members. Allow about an hour for the joint conversation, in a private, neutral space.

- 1 **Check it is the right route.**
Any concern about bullying, harassment or discrimination, or a formal grievance, goes to your organisation's process and HR instead.
- 2 **Meet each person first.**
Ask what happened, how it affects them and what they need to move on. Check they are willing to meet.
- 3 **Open the conversation.**
Explain you are there to help them talk, not to judge. Agree ground rules.
- 4 **Hear both sides.**
Each speaks without interruption. The other summarises it back until it is agreed as fair.
- 5 **Explore interests and options.**
Ask what matters most to each of them. Aim for at least three options before choosing.
- 6 **Agree and follow up.**
Write down who will do what, by when. Check in with each person a week or two later.

Your plan

STAGE	WHAT I WILL SAY OR ASK
My opening words	
Our ground rules	
If it gets heated	
How I will follow up	

Preventing conflict before it starts

Much of the conflict managers spend time untangling could have been avoided. Clear roles, a shared team agreement and early conversations remove much of the fuel.

Key ideas

- Recurring conflict often comes from the conditions around people: unclear roles, shifting priorities, competition for resources, unexplained decisions.
- For each important piece of work, agree who does it, who decides, and who is consulted or kept informed.
- A team agreement sets out how you raise concerns, make decisions when you do not all agree, and handle disagreement that gets personal.
- Raise small frictions early, privately and specifically: "Can I mention something while it is still small?"
- Review the agreement every few months, and model it yourself.

EXAMPLE

Lena's team keeps clashing over who approves changes to the shared schedule. Rather than dealing with each argument, she spends twenty minutes of a team meeting agreeing who decides and how changes are shared.

The clashes do not vanish, but they become quick conversations rather than long disputes.

Reflect

Which recurring friction in my team is really about roles, priorities or resources?

How do I handle small frictions myself, and what does that teach my team?

YOUR WORKPLACE TASK THIS WEEK

In your next team meeting, use Tool 5, the Team Agreement Builder, to agree who decides what, how you raise concerns and how you handle disagreement. Set a date to review it.

TOOL 5

The Team Agreement Builder

Use this in a team meeting of about twenty minutes. Agree the answers together, write them down and keep them somewhere everyone can see.

Part 1: Who does what

IMPORTANT PIECE OF WORK	WHO DOES IT	WHO DECIDES	WHO IS CONSULTED OR INFORMED

Part 2: How we disagree

QUESTION	WHAT WE AGREE
How do we raise a concern?	
How do we decide when we do not all agree?	
What do we do if it gets personal?	
When will we review this?	

EXAMPLE

"We raise concerns directly with the person first, within a day or two. If we do not agree, we each make our case, then the project lead decides and we all back it."

What I am going to do

Two or three small changes that you actually make will do more than a long list you never start.

My three actions

WHAT I WILL DO	WHEN	WHO I WILL TELL

Coming back to this

Put a date in your diary about a month from now and answer these three questions.

What has changed since I did this workbook?

What did I not get to, and what got in the way?

What am I carrying forward?

KEEP GOING

Manager Skills: Handling Conflict

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