



What attitude should you adopt when a conflict arises in your team?

The challenge

The tension and confusion caused by a conflict often make those concerned feel that there is no solution. What manager has never been then tempted to resolve the problem him/herself – for the sake of simplicity or efficiency – by dictating a solution? For lasting results however, it is generally better to encourage the people involved in the conflict to look for an issue themselves. The manager's attitude plays a decisive role in this respect.

Four key attitudes

Your attitude should create the conditions for constructive dialogue between the people involved in the conflict.

Show optimism

Conflict drives everyone into their own corners, creating the feeling that there is no way out of the situation. You need to help your team adopt a more positive attitude:

- **Play things down:** point out that conflict is a normal and natural phenomenon – due to differences in personalities, diverging interests, etc. – but also highlight how it is in everyone's best interests to find a solution.
- Show the parties that they **don't disagree about everything**: underline the points on which they seem to agree and those on which they could build to find a solution.
- Insist that **every concerned person gets involved** in finding a solution. Lost time will probably be made up for by a better solution and everyone's support.

Be methodical

In the heat of a conflict, emotions often get in the way of objectivity. Try to bring method to put an end to this confusion.

- Invite everyone to **take time to express their position** in clear and precise terms. You will minimize the risk of hasty or biased misinterpretations.
E.g.: "First of all, tell me, in turn, how you perceive the situation".
- Show that it is **legitimate that everyone should have their own interests**, and that understanding this is essential in finding an issue to the conflict.
E.g.: "From X's point of view, the priority is to..., but for Y, we can understand that it is..."
- Help everyone **separate facts from feelings**.
E.g.: "When you talk about aggressive attitude, is it factual or do you feel it to be aggressive? Could you interpret it differently?"

Four key attitudes

Appease tension

Conflict stirs up feelings of anxiety which hinder communication between individuals. Your attitude can help restore a certain serenity:

- Be **calm in your attitude and speech**. You will notice your correspondents tending to do the same by imitation.
- **"Depersonalize"** the conflict.
E.g.: Get back to the facts, underline that personal attacks are not relevant, etc.
- Invite **people who are less emotionally involved** in the conflict to express themselves: this is often a way of escaping the simple "who is right?" logic.
- Make sure that everyone **listens** to each other, and that they do so to understand the other's point of view better rather than to answer back better.
E.g.: Invite one person to paraphrase another.

Analyse thoroughly

It is tempting to accept a superficial solution – giving the feeling that the conflict has been resolved – while the real problem is more deeply rooted. Your role is to encourage the people involved in the conflict to go further in their analysis.

- Put the problem into **its context**. The current situation may only be a symptom of a wider problem.
E.g.: Is it the first time that this problem has arisen? Are the same people involved? Etc.
- Identify and clarify the **underlying messages**.
E.g.: "When you say that X doesn't take on his responsibilities, do you mean that you don't agree with the definition of his role?"
- Invite everyone to **pursue their line of thinking** until they identify the real causes of the problem.
E.g.: Always ask "why", re-formulate your perception of the situation and encourage reactions to it.