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Causes of conflict in the workplace

3-4 minutes

Every employee has needs and certain expectations at work, and **conflict could arise in the workplace** when people feel that these are not being met or are being ignored.

What causes workplace conflict?

Conflict in the workplace could be the result of:

- poor management
- unfair treatment
- unclear job roles
- inadequate training
- poor communication
- poor work environment
- lack of equal opportunities
- bullying and harassment
- significant changes to products, organisational charts, appraisals or pay systems

Major causes of workplace conflict

Other major causes of conflict in the workplace include:

- **Personality clashes** - the 'personality mix' within a team can be upset when a new member of staff joins or if two colleagues suddenly fall out. Individuals may also respond to difficult or challenging situations in an unhelpful or unproductive way.
- **Unrealistic needs and expectations** - conflict at work can often be caused when employers ignore the needs of employees or set unrealistic expectations. For example, arranging hours that make it difficult for employees to carry out childcare responsibilities.
- **Business values** - most people have very clear ideas about what they think is fair, and your organisation's procedures and policies must reflect this. For example, giving someone a fair hearing or explaining the reasoning behind a decision.
- **Unresolved workplace issues** - for example, an employee might ask to be moved to another team because of their manager's 'aggressive' leadership style. However, the employee may have other reasons - for example, they may blame their manager for a lack of training or career progression.
- **Increase in workload** - sometimes workplace conflict is caused because people feel they are being pushed too hard and resentment sets in if they feel their workload is unmanageable.

Establish the root cause of workplace conflict

It is important to **understand the root cause** of an individual's or group's unhappiness. For example, a person in a team may seem to be struggling with an unmanageable workload, but they may be resentful of another employee who appears to have less work to do. It may also be a result of organisational changes, restructuring, or promotions given to other staff.

To help you manage workplace conflict, look at the previous relationship between the employee and their manager, and their peers for signs of past conflict and feelings which may influence them.

Prevent workplace conflict

You can put policies and procedures in place to help **prevent and manage workplace conflict**. For more information see [preventing conflict](#).

Coping with change

Change can make employees feel vulnerable and uncertain, as they worry about their future career prospects. Therefore, managers should communicate and consult with employees about future changes so that they don't feel alienated and raise grievances.

Read more on [change management](#).