

## Workplace conflict

There are broadly two kinds of workplace conflict: when people's ideas, decisions or actions relating directly to the job are in opposition, or when two people just don't get along. The latter is often called 'a personality clash'. A conflict of ideas on any aspect of business can often be productive, if the parties involved are willing to 'brainstorm' solutions together. Sometimes, the compromise can be better for business than either of the original ideas. Conflict of this kind often generates better work practices and initiates positive changes that would otherwise never have occurred.

Personality clashes, on the other hand, are very rarely productive. A clash may start with a dispute on business practices and escalate from there to mutual loathing, or else the two people may simply have disliked each other from the beginning. This type of workplace conflict is bad for business, because it can lead to downturns in productivity and increases in absenteeism. On an individual level, workplace conflict is stressful and unpleasant. This anxiety may spill over into other areas of life and disrupt, for example, personal relationships.

### Telling the difference

It is important to work out whether the conflict is caused by a personality clash or due to a dispute over business ideas, decisions or actions. This may be difficult if the conflict has been raging for some time. Some questions to think about:

- Do you get frustrated or angry with the other person all the time, or just when particular work-related issues are raised?
- If you feel angry about their views on work-related issues, is your anger unreasonable or out of proportion? Would you feel as mad if someone else in the office had a similar viewpoint?
- Do you respect the other person in any way?

### Conflict over business ideas, decisions or actions

If the conflict is caused by opposing ideas, you could:

- Try to stick to the issue in all dealings. This will encourage the other person to do the same.
- Appreciate that other people have different opinions that are just as valid as yours.
- Work out whether the issue really means that much to you, or whether your dislike for the other person has hardened your stance.
- Decide that your aim is to solve the problem, rather than 'win' the argument. Be prepared to compromise.
- Push aside feelings or judgements about the other person, and try hard to listen and understand their point of view.
- Get others to mediate.

### Personality clashes

If the conflict is caused by personality clashes, the conflict will most likely continue unless attitudes and behaviours are changed. Suggestions include:

- Accept that people are different.
- Think about how much energy you are wasting in your dislike for the other person, and how you could invest that energy in more productive ways.
- Don't gossip or complain about the person to others.

- Try to be reasonable and polite, or at least neutral, to the other person.
- Work towards making your workplace a friendlier environment.

## Workplace violence

Workplace violence is conflict escalated to the point of threats, insults, racial abuse, sexual harassment or physical contact, such as pushing or punching. Under Victoria's *Occupational Health and Safety Act 1985*, employers are strictly responsible for workplace violence and have a duty of care that can't be delegated. The affected worker should approach their employer, occupational health and safety representative, personnel manager or human resources officer. The person's union or the Victorian WorkCover Authority can also offer help and advice.

The Victorian WorkCover Authority investigates breaches of the Occupational Health and Safety Act, and is involved in issues such as workers compensation. Document your experience of workplace violence as thoroughly as you can, such as taking photographs of injuries and keeping a diary of all incidents.

## Criminal acts

Some acts of workplace violence, such as physical assault, are criminal acts and the police should be contacted.

## Where to get help

- Your employer
- Relationships Australia (Victoria) Tel.(03) 9205 9570
- Job Watch Tel. (03) 9662 1933 or 1800 331 617
- WorkCover Advisory Service Tel. 1800 136 089
- ACTU Workers' Line Tel. 1300 362 223

## Things to remember

- There are broadly two kinds of workplace conflict: when people's ideas, decisions or actions relating directly to the job are in opposition, or when two people just don't get along.
- Workplace conflict is bad for business because it can lead to downturns in productivity and increases in absenteeism.
- On an individual level, workplace conflict is stressful and unpleasant.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Monash Alfred Psychiatry Research Centre, School of Psychiatry and Psychology

Content on this website is provided for education and information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. Content has been prepared for Victorian residents and wider Australian audiences, and was accurate at the time of publication. Readers should note that, over time, currency and completeness of the information may change. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions.

For the latest updates and more information, visit [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)

**Copyright** © 1999/2012 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel ([www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.