



# Information and Development Seminar

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**LGA Independent Group**

# **Managing Political Conflict**

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# What this session will cover

- What is conflict
- Levels and types of conflict
- Causes and sources of conflict
- Constructive vs Destructive conflict
- What has worked for you?
- Methods for dealing with conflict
- Tips for personally managing conflict
- Councillor-officer conflict
- Dealing with trolls
- Personal characteristics

# What is conflict?

Conflict can be defined as:

***‘The behaviour by a person or group intended to inhibit the attainment of goals by another person or group’***

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# Fact of life

Wherever there are people, there always will be conflict. It's a simple fact of life.

Opinions vary, and miscommunications and misunderstandings occur. People have differing values and priorities, and most of us resist change. All of these things create conflict in our life and work.

In politics, the adversarial nature of relationships creates conflict and is a major part of political life.

However, conflict becomes nasty when it turns into bullying and harassment.

The problem is not conflict itself, but rather how we deal with it. Effective conflict management strategies can be learned and mastered.

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# Levels and types of conflict

## Levels of conflict

## Types of conflict

**Organisation**

- Within and between organisations

**Group**

- Within and between groups

**Individual**

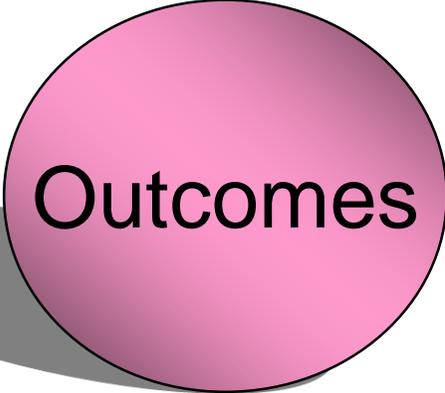
- Within and between individuals
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# Causes of Conflict

- Misunderstanding
- Personality clashes
- Competition for resources
- Authority issues
- Lack of cooperation
- Differences over methods or style of working
- Low performance
- Value or goal differences
- Differences in political ideology

***(any others?)***

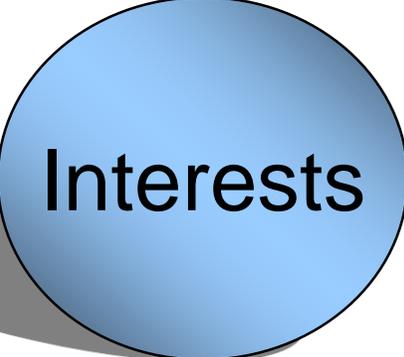
# SOURCES OF CONFLICT



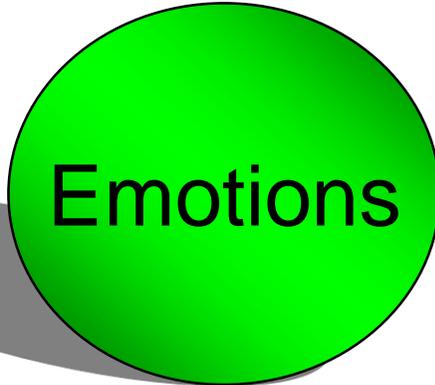
Outcomes

Not sharing, seeing, or  
buying into the Vision

Personal, business or  
financial interests  
adversely affected.  
(What's in it for me?)



Interests



Emotions

Perceive adverse  
impact on values or way  
of life

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# Constructive vs Destructive Conflict

## Conflict is destructive when it:

- Diverts energy from more important issues and tasks
- Deepens differences in values
- Polarises groups so that cooperation is reduced
- Destroys the morale of people or reinforces poor self-concept
- Causes stress
- Becomes personal and nasty

## Conflict is constructive when it:

- Opens up issues of importance, resulting in issue clarification
- Helps build cohesiveness as people learn more about each other
- Causes reassessment by allowing for examination of procedures or actions
- Increases individual involvement
- Can bring about positive change

# How do you personally deal with conflict?

- Depending on whether you are a 'step in' or 'step out' person you will want to deal with this differently
  - Myers-Briggs personality types might help us understand which we prefer
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# STEP OUT OR STEP IN

Thinking type	Feeling type
Steps out of situations to analyse dispassionately	Steps into situations to weigh human values & motives
Uses Logic & objectivity <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Seek objective truth</li><li>• Focus on task / issue</li></ul>	Uses Values & personal convictions <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Seek harmony</li><li>• Focus on relationships</li></ul>

# Your thoughts

What ideas do you have on managing conflict:

- What has worked for you?
- What has not worked for you?

# Methods for dealing with conflict

There are 7 basic methods for dealing with conflict:

- 1.Forcing** – resolving conflict by using aggressive behaviour
- 2.Avoiding** – by hiding feelings, changing the subject, leaving the room, quitting, etc
- 3.Accommodating** – by emphasizing the things conflicting parties have in common while de-emphasizing the differences
- 4.Compromising** – by making concessions to each other to peacefully resolve the issue
- 5.Collaborating** – by deciding to put differences aside and work together
- 6.Bargaining/Negotiating** – by finding a mutually acceptable agreement
- 7.Mediation** – by using a third party to intervene in the interest of finding a solution

# Some tips for personally managing conflict

1. **Avoid troublemakers as much as possible** - They will suck you in and drag you down. Don't engage in gossip or backstabbing.
  2. **Choose your battles and work to minimize conflict** - decide which issues you can live with and which need addressing.
  3. **Work on your own communication skills** - The ability to express yourself clearly will allow you to say what's on your mind, ask for what you want and need and get your point across effectively.
  4. **Build good relationships before conflict occurs** - Get to know people. Be friendly and sociable.
  5. **Respect differences** - Everyone has different needs and priorities and comes from different cultural/social backgrounds.
  6. **Acknowledge feelings before focusing on facts** – be self aware and drop negative thoughts
  7. **Do not let small problems escalate** - deal with them as they arise.
  8. **Focus on solving problems** - not changing people.
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# Continue...

9. ***If you cannot resolve the problem*** - turn to someone who can help, particularly when it turns into bullying and harassment. Invoke the council's own policies and procedures on bullying and harassment.
  10. ***Adapt your style*** - to the situation and persons involved.
  11. ***Be yourself*** - without defensiveness or hidden agendas, and share your experiences and feelings to establish empathy.
  12. ***Maintain your assertiveness*** - but avoid displays of unnecessary emotion (weakness or aggression).
  13. ***Keep people and problems separate*** - recognise that in most cases people are not just 'being difficult'.
  14. ***Explore options together*** - be open to the idea that a third position may exist and you can get to this by collaboration.
  15. ***Conflict needs to be dealt with*** - deal with it. Think it through and talk it out - face to face.
  16. ***Listen first and talk second*** – understand where others are coming from before you defend 'your position'.
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# Councillor-officer conflict

- Although by no means the norm, conflict between Councillors and officers is not irregular
- As with conflict in any working environment, personalities and everyday pressures can put strain on relationships
- For Councillors and officers, however, conflict often emerges from within the dynamics of local government itself
- Political undercurrents can introduce tension, complexity, misunderstanding and miscommunication
- The major cause of conflict between Councillors and Officers occurs around roles and responsibilities

***It's all about relationships and communication!***

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# Quick guide to some of the distinct roles

## **Members:**

- Accountable to the electorate
- Community leader for a ward
- Add a political dimension
- Set high level policy/strategy
- Executive members involved in chief officer appointments

## **Officers:**

- Accountable to the council
  - Serve the whole council
  - Politically Impartial
  - Ensure operational delivery
  - Day to day staff management
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# Tips for effective working

## **Do be:**

Impartial

Professional

Authoritative

Respectful

Sensitive

Positive

Communicative

Discreet

Reliable

Friendly

## **Don't be:**

Unhelpful

Jargonistic

Arrogant

Deferential

Subservient

Imprudent

Indiscriminate

Evasive

Reliant

Friends

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# Dealing with online trolls

1. **Establish a policy for user comments** – be clear about what kind of comments are allowed on your online account
  2. **Listen** - sometimes people just want to be heard. Hear them and try to help
  3. **Ignore them** – trolls want attention. They want to get you angry, frustrated and uncomfortable. So ignore them
  4. **Make it light of the situation** – humour can be one of the best ways to handle trolls
  5. **Don't provide a platform** – delete offensive comments or ban members
  6. **Create unified community** – your loyal members will deal with trolls
  7. **Fight back with facts** – target rumours or misinformation with facts
  8. **Correct mistakes** – if you make a mistake then correct it as soon as possible and apologise
  9. **Unmask them** – trolls thrive on anonymity. Take away this power
  10. **Use social media wisely!** – know your stress levels and when it gets too much, switch off
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# Interpersonal skills - influence

Personal characteristics that can help to influence others without confrontation:

- Energy and enthusiasm
- A calm, even tempered, disposition
- An ability to be flexible and adaptable in different situations
- Strong listening and observation skills
- An ability to act impartially or with neutrality
- Self confidence and gravitas
- Demonstrable empathy and perception

## Contact details



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