

Ten Causes of Interpersonal Conflict

1. Personalities

Organizational strife is sometimes traced to "personalities." This is one person differing with another based simply on how he or she feels about that person.

Solution: Train everyone to recognize the personality types along with their inherent strengths and weaknesses so that they understand each other.

2. Sensitivity/hurt

This occurs when a person, because of low self-esteem, insecurity, or other factors in his or her personal life, sometimes feels attacked by perceived criticism or other interpersonal directness.

Solution: Adopt the empowering belief that even negative behaviours have a positive intention. Use active listening and questioning techniques to understand the root cause of the problem. Adjust your communication to match the needs of the other person.

3. Differences in perception/values

Most conflict results from the varying ways different people view the world. These incongruent views are traceable to differences in upbringing, culture, race, experience, education, occupation, socio-economic class, and other environmental factors.

Solution: Management must set and communicate the values hierarchy for the organization.

4. Differences over facts

A fact is a piece of data that can be quantified or an event that can be documented. Arguments over facts typically need not last very long since they are verifiable. But a statement like, 'It is a *fact* that you are insensitive to my feelings,' is neither documentable nor quantifiable, and so is actually a difference in perception.

Solution: Have a neutral third party or expert arbitrate the dispute.

5. Differences over goals/priorities

An argument about whether a bank should focus more resources on international banking or on community banking is a disagreement over goals. Another example would be whether or not to increase the amount of advanced professional training given to tellers.

Solution: Management must set, communicate, and enforce the values hierarchy for the organization.

6. Differences over methods

Two sides may have similar goals but disagree on how to achieve them. For example, *how* should advanced teller training be conducted?

Solution: Have a neutral third party or expert arbitrate the dispute.

7. Competition for scarce resources

Two managers might argue over who has the greater need for an assistant, whose budget should be increased more, or how to allocate recently purchased computers.

Solution: Management must set and communicate the values hierarchy for the organization.

8. Competition for supremacy

This occurs when one person seeks to outdo or out-shine another person. You might see it when two employees compete for a promotion or for comparative power in your organization. Depending on personalities, this type of conflict can be very subtle sometimes.

Solution: Management must set and communicate the values hierarchy for the organization.

9. Misunderstanding

The majority of what looks like interpersonal conflict is actually communication breakdown. Communication, if not attended to with care, is as likely to fail as to succeed. And when it does, a listener's incorrect inferences about a speaker's intent often create interpersonal conflict.

Solution: Ask the question "what else could this mean?"

10. Unfulfilled expectations

Many of the causes listed above contribute to one person not fulfilling the expectations of another. Unfulfilled expectations are the ultimate cause of divorce, firings, and other forms of relational breakdown. The major reason that expectations go unfulfilled is that they are unreasonable, inappropriate, too numerous, or unstated.

Solution: Use active listening and questioning techniques to set and clarify expectations.

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