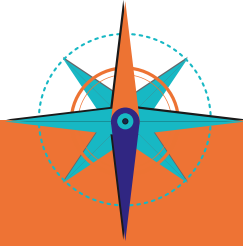




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# Manager

# Compass

Conflict Management

Tools and resources for managers



It's common for teams to experience conflict. Just like in our personal lives, disagreements can arise in the workplace – people aren't all the same and it's what happens when they express differing points of view. But allowing a conflict to set in with an employee or a team can be a ticking time bomb, leading to chronic disagreements within the team, a bad workplace atmosphere, toxic interpersonal relationships, etc. To prevent these kinds of uncomfortable situations, it's crucial for managers to be attentive to their team and take proactive steps when tensions arise.

This tipsheet will provide managers with simple techniques and concrete strategies to help them head off conflict in their teams and resolve situations pragmatically and constructively. Note that it does not apply to situations involving criminal actions or behaviour subject to disciplinary measures.



### Some examples of workplace conflict:

Work style conflicts can occur when employees take different approaches to performing their duties. Some people may be more results-oriented and attach less importance to how the work gets done.

Conflict of interest occur when two people have competing personal interests or are angling for the same goal: heading up a project, securing a promotion, getting individual recognition, etc.

Role conflicts arise when expectations are not clearly defined or when workloads are not equitably shared between employees.

Value conflicts appear when two employees don't share the same worldview or experience their environment differently.

Generational conflict can occur when employees from different generations have different work methods, communication styles and approaches to their work.



## Heading off conflict

When it comes to managing conflict, giving things time to work themselves out is a mistake you can't afford to make. As a manager, it's important to take action as soon as you see tension arise in your team to prevent the situation from getting worse. But how can you head off a conflict? What measures can you take?

### Get to know yourself better to help prevent conflict

Before focusing on the members of your team, it's important to understand your own feelings. **Letting yourself feel emotions and learning to analyse them** are tools you can use as a manager to better understand social interactions in the workplace. It can be beneficial to evaluate your own **emotional intelligence** in order to understand your own feelings and reactions, so that you can better analyse and anticipate those of others.

### Putting it into practice:

- Train yourself to observe your own behaviour and recognize what you're feeling in different situations
- Try to identify the root causes as well as the positive and negative consequences for yourself and others
- Express your feelings in a constructive manner and find the words to describe them
- Regulate your own feelings and take a step back when necessary
- Use what you and others are feeling to serve the interests of the team

## Get to know your team to head off conflict

Behaviours that can give rise to tension:

<b>Avoidance</b>	<b>Passive acceptance</b>
<b>Competition</b>	<b>Defensiveness</b>
<b>Permanent opposition</b>	<b>Unwillingness</b>
<b>Withdrawal</b>	<b>Permanent negotiation</b>

Improving your own emotional skills and situational intelligence can also help you to get to know and understand your team better, for instance getting a better idea of their strengths and weaknesses and more easily identifying their needs and expectations. Conflict can often arise from misinterpretations caused by one party not expressing themselves clearly or the other not hearing what they're saying. Good communication is key and can help prevent tensions from forming.

Official venues for sharing and receiving information in a group setting, such as team meetings, are vital for managers to get a sense of the workplace atmosphere, particularly in a hybrid environment where there's a mix of remote and in-person work. The purpose of these meetings is more than just to get a progress report; it's also an opportunity to **actively observe the team dynamic**. It can be beneficial to **go around the table to get an update from each team member**, giving everyone the opportunity to speak and share their thoughts and opinions.

After a team meeting, **sending out meeting minutes** – detailing the week's activities, work assignments and issues raised by each team member – can help provide **an overview from both team and individual perspectives**. Recognising how each member contributes to the team can help ease frustrations or defuse potential conflicts (about roles or expectations, for example).

More generally, **working as a team and involving employees in decision-making** are ways to share information (about work assignments, individual expectations, etc.) and help the team work more harmoniously together.

Outside of official meetings (performance reviews, project meetings, etc.), **occasional informal gatherings** (lunch, coffee breaks, etc.) are an effective way to get to know your team members one-on-one and understand their personalities and how they approach their work.

Having a **routine for getting feedback from each team member** can be beneficial both at an individual level, to help you develop your own management skills, and at a team level, to get to know your team members better, improve your working relationships and curtail any potential tension that may arise.

## Equip yourself through regular professional development

There are several conflict management courses available to managers through public service training departments.

Learning the theory is important, but so is putting it into practice. Courses that incorporate case studies or role playing of conflict situations can help you develop your managerial skills. **It's important to find time in your busy schedule to regularly update your skills** in this ever-evolving area.



**You're not alone.** Your training department is sure to offer training courses. Consult your training catalogue or contact your HR adviser or department.



## Managing conflict

**With conflict, the goal isn't to rush in to intervene and resolve it.** There are a variety of ways to manage conflict, since each situation is different. There is no one-size-fits-all roadmap. Below, we describe tools and techniques to help you manage these types of situations more effectively, such as taking a step back, establishing dialogue, making clear and detailed suggestions, proposing clear compromises and bringing in a third party.

## Take a step back and make adjustments

As a manager, you should always aim to model good behaviour. This remains true for conflict situations, where it means remaining impartial. **Taking a step back – remaining calm and neutral – by focusing on active listening and proposing clear and detailed solutions** will help to calm emotions and naturally influence your employees' reactions. This approach will make it easier to begin negotiations to find the best outcome.



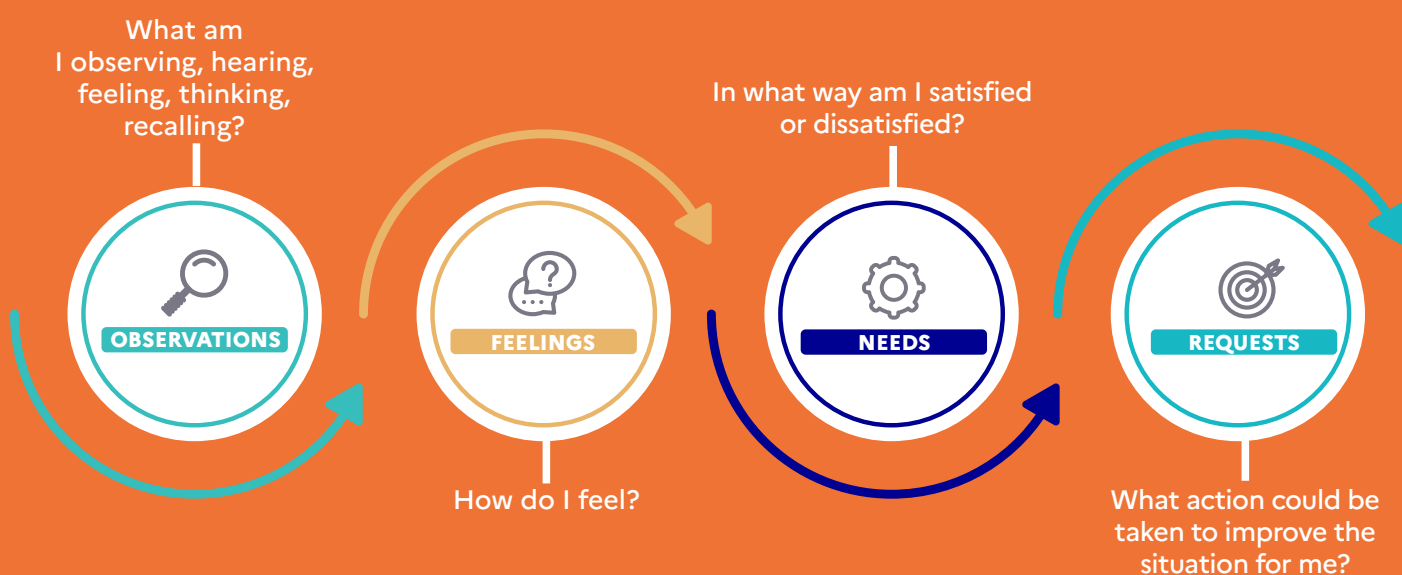
Nonviolent communication – Marshall B. Rosenberg

Nonviolent communication (NVC) is an approach to communication that focuses on giving and receiving compassionately in order to build healthy and happy relationships between co workers. It offers a way to positively reframe frustrations or negative emotions by directly stating what you want and what's important to you, expressed as a need.

There are four steps to the NVC approach:

- ➔ **Observe the behaviour that's affecting you:** This involves describing the facts in a non-judgmental manner, without analyzing them yet.
- ➔ **Name your feelings:** This involves expressing what you feel, without making accusations or assigning blame.
- ➔ **Translate your feelings into needs:** This involves analyzing your feelings and expressing them as concrete needs.
- ➔ **Make requests:** This involves formulating an explicit request for positive, concrete actions from others in response to the need you identified.

Examples of questions to ask:



## Establish dialogue and let others speak

Dedicating time for discussion is a good way to facilitate dialogue with and between employees. When doing so, it can help to **choose a calm and comfortable space, if possible, and a convenient time**. During these discussions, it's important to **focus on the facts as opposed to personal interpretations of what happened** in order to have as thorough and accurate an understanding as possible of the situation. That doesn't mean people's individual accounts don't matter – it's important for everyone to express themselves – but you shouldn't let them cloud the facts.

In cases where tension or conflict involves employees from different departments, it's vital for the managers to meet with each other first to align their approaches with their respective teams.

**Before any group discussions between the concerned parties, hold one-on-one meetings where your employees can express themselves more freely. As a manager, these meetings are an opportunity for you to show your commitment and your intention to resolve the issue at hand. Understanding your employees' mindsets and what they're feeling are important inputs that can help you take appropriate action.**

**After these one-on-one meetings, hold a group discussion involving the concerned parties. The goal is to improve dialogue between the concerned parties, or re-establish it if things have completely broken down. Let your employees take turns expressing themselves, sharing their positions and hearing what their colleagues have to say. The goal is for everyone to listen to each other. As manager, your role is to act as a moderator for the discussion to facilitate dialogue and keep things on track.**

## Position yourself as the negotiator and propose clear and realistic solutions to resolve the conflict

In addition to acting as a moderator, you can also play a role as an **intermediary**. After all, as manager, you're the person your employees will naturally turn to in order to resolve a situation.

During group discussions, your role is to **encourage your employees to propose solutions**. This is a key step: it helps people see past their disagreements and look ahead to the future.

Based on the suggestions that are made and your own read on the situation, you can choose the solution you consider most appropriate. But it's important to ensure **accountability for the decision doesn't lie solely with you** as manager. The goal isn't to find the perfect solution that addresses everyone's expectations. **Rather, it's to find a concrete and mutually satisfactory solution, one that everyone can agree with, that lets everyone put the conflict behind them and get on with their work.**



### Tips for effective cooperation:

- For meetings, draft an agenda and set a clear objective shared by all parties
- Make sure the discussion stays on track
- Encourage employees to come up with a solution themselves, to ensure they're on board with it and see it through later
- As manager, share your own point of view, even if it doesn't align with that of your employees
- Propose a solution that is equitable in terms of the commitment or workload it requires from your employees
- Summarize the main points of the solution to get all parties on board and resolve the conflict



### Seek out support

Remember that you're not alone. You don't have to single-handedly resolve every challenging situation on your team. If you're faced with a complex interpersonal conflict, you can:

- **Turn to your own manager, an HR officer** or your local HR manager, or an occupational health professional or social worker, if appropriate.
- **Seek help from a "third-party" support service available to you**, such as a ministerial support team, mediation services, etc.

### *Using Third-Party Mediation Services, by Stéphanie Salen, mediator and head of the internal mediation team at the Public Finances General Directorate (DGFIP)*

Stéphanie Salen is a public finances administrator and has been head of the DGFIP's internal mediation team since 2021. She is a certified mediator with the Paris National Conservatory of Arts and Trades and a facilitator belonging the Bercy facilitators' network.

At the DGFIP, managers from all departments, anywhere in France, can request the services of internal mediators. Our team also offers an innovative "project mediation" service, which is a structured process that helps new teams develop cooperation and communication skills, as well as webinars to teach managers how to identify and prevent conflict. It's part of a preventive approach to mediation that is ingrained in the organisation's internal culture, which helps teams build interpersonal skills.

Our support services are designed to round out actions taken by managers and HR professionals. Our aim is always to empower and enable the people we help to come up with reciprocal commitments and concrete actions that are suitable for their situation.



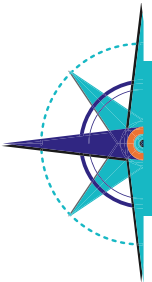
When internal mediators are asked to help resolve an interpersonal conflict, it's because there have been a breakdown in communication with differing points of view. In these kinds of situations, there's often a conflation between the problem and the person. The approach used in this type of situation is as follows:

- Identify the root of the tension
- Re-establish communication
- Address hurt feelings
- Restore a calm work environment
- Encourage the parties to find mutually satisfactory solutions leading to concrete action

For managers, using mediation services can help to:

- empower and enable employees with regard to their individual actions and the way they work together as a team, recognising everyone's rights and responsibilities
- leverage mediation as a solution to create or re-establish dialogue
- demonstrate that they've used every measure at their disposal to resolve the workplace conflict

**For more information:** [mediationinterne@dgfip.finances.gouv.fr](mailto:mediationinterne@dgfip.finances.gouv.fr)



## Conflict as opportunity

Like with any management experience, there can be something to take away from managing a conflict. **Adopting a continuous improvement approach is a win-win:** it helps you develop your own skills as a manager, and it helps the team work better together.

It can be rewarding to reflect on what you want to keep as best practices, and also to identify areas for improvement.

There are a number of potential takeaways:

### For the manager

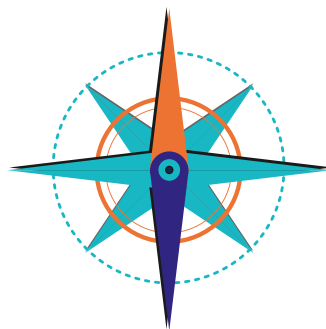
- Gain a better understanding of your personality, your emotions and your ability to react and make decisions
- Gain a better understanding of your work environment
- Get to know your employees better, as well as their needs and expectations
- Establish your role as manager after resolving a conflict

### For the team

- Feel supported and listened to by management
- See mutual trust established between employees and management, helping to improve team engagement
- Experience stronger team relationships after going through a difficult situation together, helping to re-establish an atmosphere of respect and harmony and reset the team dynamic

## Further reading

- ➔ **Prévenir et résoudre les conflits (page 130) – Guide de l'encadrante et de l'encadrant dans la fonction publique – DGAFP (2017)** <https://www.fonction-publique.gouv.fr/files/Publications/Coll%20cadres%20de%20la%20FP/Guide-de-l-encadrant-web.pdf> (available in French only)
- ➔ **« Travailler autrement » grâce aux sciences comportementales – Training offered by the Interministerial Directorate for Government Transformation (DITP) (available via the MENTOR programme or directly from the DITP)** <https://www.modernisation.gouv.fr/outils-et-formations/une-formation-pour-travailler-autrement-grace-aux-sciences-comportementales>
- ➔ **« Télétravail et travail en présentiel » – Guide published by the DITP and the Directorate General for Administration and the Civil Service (DGAFP) (2020–2021)** <https://www.modernisation.gouv.fr/outils-et-formations/teletravail-et-travail-en-presentiel> (available in French only)
- ➔ **The DESC method, Gordon H. Bower and Sharon Anthony Bower (1976)**



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