

# THE FOUNDATIONS OF WORKPLACE CONFLICT RESILIENCE





## CONTENTS

Introduction .....	3
You need to Close, Manage and Prevent conflict .....	3
Review your Values and culture .....	5
Develop your people skills and prevent negative conflict.....	6
Skills for managing conflict .....	6
Skills for closing conflict .....	7
Summary .....	8
About CMP Resolutions .....	8



## INTRODUCTION

Workplace conflict draws in resources, compromises performance, and takes up valuable time, each of which has significant human and financial costs. If you identify these costs, and measure the savings achieved by your investment, you have your business case for investing in Conflict Competence.

*All employers spend money on bringing workplace conflict to an end. But are they spending wisely and effectively?*

Reducing the financial and human costs of conflict should underpin your strategic approach and be the cornerstone of your business case for improving how you manage conflict in your organisation.

## YOU NEED TO CLOSE, MANAGE AND PREVENT CONFLICT

Each employer needs to close existing complaints by implementing policies and procedures; it also has to manage disputes that have escalated to needing a third-party; and it needs to prevent disputes arising in the first place. We find investment in these three areas is often unbalanced:

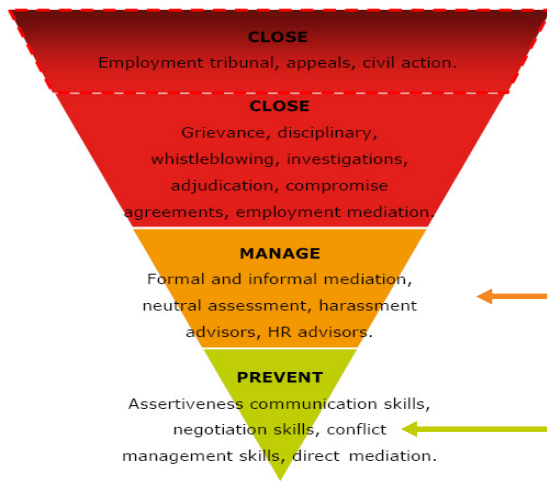
**Close** Employment tribunals are often a consequence of failing to close difficult conflicts effectively and fairly. To reduce the likelihood of employees taking employers to ET, or of protracted appeals, employers need to have access to investigators working to best practice standards, either available internally or outsourced to a professional provider. The Close level is often where employers invest most heavily – yet with the least return.

**Manage** Managing complaints properly so they do not reach a formal stage is crucial. The quality of a third party's intervention – whether a mediator, HR, Union rep or manager – will make the difference between a conflict being resolved quickly and constructively; or solidifying into a formal and positional ongoing and expensive fight.

**Prevent** Employees are expected to resolve differences directly and constructively with one another, but are not often supported in having difficult dialogues so that the conflict is resolved. Staff are enabled to talk with each other in a way that prevents conflict arising supports employee engagement initiatives and retention. Investing in this layer will have the most impact across the employee base - and prevents disputes from ending up at ETs.



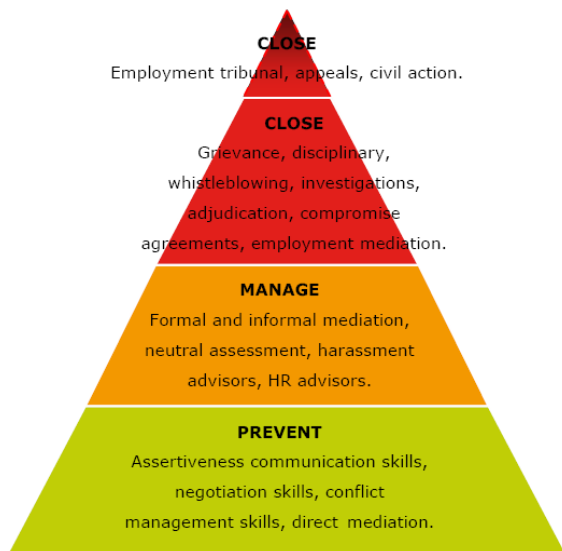
### UNHEALTHY CONFLICT PROFILE



### COST PER INCIDENT

- ← Maximum expenditure here in the £0000s
- ← Significant expenditure here at £8,000 per investigation
- ← Some investment here at £1200 per conflict
- ← Often, no investment here

### HEALTHY CONFLICT PROFILE



The CMP triangle shows the typical top-heavy expenditure with most employers concentrating their “conflict resolution” resources in the top layer, spending money on a small number of hotly contested, high-risk conflicts. Investigations or ETs often do not result in closure and have done significant personal and brand damage *en route*.

Investment in processes and skills to manage conflict is growing, but managing disputes does have a cost in terms of the expertise, time and resources needed by a third party. Enabling employees to resolve their differences directly and constructively with one another and thereby preventing conflict from escalating, often receives very little investment.

### A HEALTHY CORPORATE CONFLICT PROFILE™

An employer which wants to really minimise the impact of workplace disputes on its productivity will be investing in the Prevent layer. It may make new or continued investment in the Manage layer, and see a reduction in the costs arising at the Close layer (opposite). Organisations taking this approach are making a cultural shift away from win-lose, expensive and high risk Closing activities, and towards empowerment, responsible behaviours, dignity and respect, and will see a significant improvement in their Conflict Profile™ and consequent conflict resilience.



To cut out wasted costs and maximise your return on investment you need to be able to Close complaints – whether grievance, disciplinary, serious incidents, customer complaints or whistleblowing, swiftly, robustly and in compliance with all the relevant policies, legislation and frameworks in operation.

You also need to Manage the situations that have escalated to a full-blown conflict, for example by providing mediation, neutral assessment and harassment advisors to bring matters to a constructive end.

And you need to Prevent negative workplace conflict from arising in the first instance, by ensuring people know how to behave with each other, which crucially needs to include knowing how to raise difficult issues and have difficult conversations with one another.

Most organisations spend far more on the Closing activities than they do on their Manage and Prevent activities; they lack the resolution skills and infrastructure truly to nip conflict in the bud.

## REVIEW YOUR VALUES AND CULTURE

You may have the most comprehensive strategy in place to deal with workplace conflict and the most up-to-date policies and procedures, but none of this is worth the paper it is written on if people do not feel able to speak out. Whistleblowing cases in the NHS and elsewhere have demonstrated the human and financial costs of ignoring this foundation stone of good dispute resolution.

To be successful, your strategy needs to operate in a climate in which people hold the justifiable belief that they can:

- 🔥 Speak out and be listened to
- 🔥 Raise problems and have them taken seriously
- 🔥 Challenge the behaviour and actions of colleagues, even those more senior than themselves
- 🔥 Ask for help with specific development needs
- 🔥 Tackle difficult situations with the support of the organisation behind them

Your organisational values and culture will make the difference to whether or not you are able to make the cost-savings you have identified in your business case.



## DEVELOP YOUR PEOPLE SKILLS AND PREVENT NEGATIVE CONFLICT

Your organisational values should be the cement that holds people's relationships at work together, even when things go wrong. But if a situation starts to drift towards a conflict, when should you intervene in a low-level conflict, and how?

Giving people the skills to handle conflict confidently and competently is a vital element of your prevent conflict strategy.

### STEPS YOU CAN TAKE NOW TO PREVENT NEGATIVE CONFLICT

- 🐠 Bullying and harassment programmes – anti banter, equality and dignity at work, awareness raising, skills development, the legal aspects, policies and procedures
- 🐠 Collaborative relationships programmes – dealing with difficult people, having difficult conversations, effective performance management, managing power and influence
- 🐠 Resilience and stress management training – tools and techniques for developing resilience

## SKILLS FOR MANAGING CONFLICT

But conflict can be healthy, and can help organisations to develop and progress. The problem comes when healthy conflict turns sour, because individuals lack self-awareness or insight into the impact of their behaviour, or have an inadequate skills 'tool kit', and are reluctant to address issues until they get out of hand. Or it may be that people need a better understanding of what constitutes bullying or harassment, and what your organisation's stance is on this type of behaviour. If a manager has the skills to address low-level disputes through discussion, it will save valuable management time in the long run, and avoid the negative impact of a conflict that has escalated.

### STEPS YOU CAN TAKE NOW TO STRENGTHEN HOW YOU MANAGE CONFLICT

- 🐠 **Conflict coaching:** with managers or individuals who have a propensity to trigger conflict, helping them to understand their own and others' behaviour and to try different approaches
- 🐠 **Mediator and mediation skills training:** giving your own people the skills to defuse and manage interpersonal conflict so that you always have



someone available to act quickly but informally to rebuild problem relationships

- 🔥 **Handling difficult conversations courses:** classroom and e-learning programmes designed to give managers the tools and the confidence to deal with problems early and effectively
- 🔥 **Bullying and harassment prevention training:** our approach is as straightforward as ABC. We can work with your organisation to Alter attitudes, Build better behaviour, and Change commitment and compliance
- 🔥 **Neutral assessment skills:** how to assess a complex conflict and identify possible ways forward
- 🔥 **Harassment advisor training:** for those tasked with supporting the victims of bullying and harassment

## SKILLS FOR CLOSING CONFLICT

Taking a strategic approach to workplace conflict resolution will deliver a marked reduction in formal grievances, disciplinaries and Employment Tribunals. However, any organisation needs to be prepared to handle its most difficult complaints robustly and fairly, with a view to reaching resolution quickly and professionally. This is where good-quality investigations, fair and objective findings and settlement mediation skills come into play.

## STEPS YOU CAN TAKE NOW TO STRENGTHEN HOW YOU CLOSE COMPLAINTS

- 🔥 **Professionalise your investigation managers** and grievance resolvers by training them to accredited standards
- 🔥 **Train your hearing managers** or deciding officers to ensure fair, balanced and consistently applied disciplinary and grievance outcomes
- 🔥 Train or refer to an external **settlement mediator** to obtain a successful outcome when negotiating exits.



## SUMMARY

Organisations that invest in conflict prevention are characterised by having:

- 🔥 A clear set of values which are brought to life in how people behave day to day
- 🔥 A robust set of policies and procedures to handle everything from whistleblowing through customer feedback to grievance resolution
- 🔥 Confidential helplines to capture and manage whistleblowing claims and to support employees who are affected by conflict
- 🔥 Trained individuals to help people experiencing what they believe is bullying and harassment to decide how they wish to handle their situation
- 🔥 Access to an external or in-house team of mediators
- 🔥 Trained investigators to carry out investigations into all types of workplace complaints in a timely and professional manner
- 🔥 Management development programmes that include the soft skills involved in behaving with dignity, managing and preventing conflict, and achieving positive results from difficult conversations
- 🔥 Highly trained customer feedback professionals, who are skilled in dealing with complaints and empowered to improve the customer experience

## ABOUT CMP RESOLUTIONS

We have an in-depth understanding of how conflict escalates, why people fall out with each other, and what tools and techniques are effective in taking the heat out of a difficult situation. We know how to embed soft skills and to change behaviour. Whatever your needs, CMP is here to help.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT

**RICHARD PEACHEY, SALES AND MARKETING MANAGER**

**T: +(44) 01763 852225**

**E: [RICHARD.PEACHEY@CMPRESOLUTIONS.CO.UK](mailto:RICHARD.PEACHEY@CMPRESOLUTIONS.CO.UK)**