

# Reducing Conflict 94 Sources of Conflict

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There are an infinite number of sources of conflict at work. In my leadership classes, I like to highlight the following ten sources.

All ten of these causes are well known, so there is little need to describe them in detail. In some cases, I have suggested a helpful antidote

## **Communication breakdowns**

There can be misunderstandings and miscommunication between coworkers or between managers and employees. Lack of adequate communication is often cited as the number one source of frustration for employees. Communicate important messages in multiple ways.

## **Personality clashes**

Different personalities, work styles, and preferences can cause tension and conflict among coworkers. People seem to be preoccupied with “fixing” other people to think like they do. We all wear an “I AM RIGHT” button at times.

## **Power struggles**

Conflicts can arise when individuals or groups compete for power, influence, or resources in the workplace. There is an agenda in most communications between people, and it is often about power.

## **Workload and responsibilities**

Conflicts can arise when one person feels that they are being unfairly burdened with too much work. Since resources are usually spread thin, it is common to have many people feeling abused. “Social loafing” is the practice of goofing off, so others will do more than their share of the work.

## **Different goals and priorities**

Conflicts can arise when different individuals or departments have conflicting goals or priorities. The antidote to this common problem is to ensure the groups are properly aligned.

## **Organizational changes**

Changes in leadership, organizational restructuring, or other major changes in the workplace can create uncertainty and lead to conflicts. Succession issues often surface with extreme conflict between people.

### **Discrimination and harassment**

Conflicts can arise when employees feel that they are being discriminated against or harassed in the workplace. This situation can create a toxic work environment.

### **Performance issues**

Conflicts can arise when one person's work performance is not meeting expectations. There may be disagreements about what constitutes good performance. Consistent standards for performance can help a lot in this situation.

### **Resource allocation**

Conflicts can arise when there are limited resources, such as budget or staff. Individuals or departments compete for those resources. If you are the supervisor of a group of 12 engineers with only one administrative assistant, watch out.

### **Personal issues**

Personal issues outside of work, such as health problems or family issues, can spill over into the workplace.

### **Conclusion**

We are all familiar with these ten sources of conflict. We live with them every day. There are hundreds more, but these ten are the most common. Recognize that all of these issues are part of the human condition. Build a culture of affection and trust, and you will see the severity of these problems diminish significantly.

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