



CONFLICT, POOR WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS OR INTERACTIONS

- 1. What is conflict, poor workplace relationships or interactions?**
- 2. Examples of conflict, poor workplace relationships or interactions?**
- 3. Impacts on workers and organisations**
- 4. Risk Management**
- 5. Control Measures**

WHAT IS CONFLICT, POOR RELATIONSHIPS OR INTERACTIONS?

Conflict or poor workplace relationships or interactions refers to the hazard arising from disagreements, tensions, or negative dynamics between individuals or groups within the workplace. It involves situations where there is a lack of cooperation, collaboration, or effective communication, leading to strained relationships, hostility, or unresolved disputes. It can include situations where there is a breakdown in relationships among individuals and teams, resulting in conflicts arising from tasks, relationships, and instances of violence or incivility.

It also includes workplaces characterised by unacceptable behaviours, gossip, harassment, or bullying. These conditions contribute to strained interactions and negative dynamics within the work environment.

This hazard can manifest in various forms, such as interpersonal conflicts, bullying, harassment, or dysfunctional team dynamics, and can have significant negative impacts on both individuals and the overall work environment. Harmful behaviours can also originate from entities such as customers, clients, patients, members of the public, or other businesses.

EXAMPLES OF CONFLICT, POOR RELATIONSHIPS OR INTERACTIONS?

Prolonged and unresolved relationship conflict can result in more extreme forms of conflict, such as bullying and harassment. Some of examples of how poor relationships can play out in the workplace include:

- Verbal or physical confrontations between co-workers or between employees and managers.
- Persistent arguments, disagreements, or hostility among team members.
- Bullying or harassment, such as belittling, mocking, or intimidating behaviour.
- Gossiping, spreading rumours, or engaging in negative conversations about colleagues.
- Abusive or offensive emails or messages.
- Threatening body language.
- Lack of cooperation and teamwork, with employees working against each other instead of collaborating.



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- Power struggles and conflicts of interest between individuals or groups within the organisation.
- Isolating or excluding workers from activities or training.
- Micromanagement or excessive control from supervisors, leading to strained relationships.
- Poor communication, including misunderstandings, misinterpretations, or withholding information.
- Deliberately withholding information needed for work performance.
- Resistance to change and conflicts arising from differing perspectives or approaches.
- Discrimination or biases that create a hostile work environment, such as based on gender, race, or age.
- Allocating some workers more tasks than others, or allocating very minimal tasks.
- Verbal and physical abuse.

Indicators include situations where there is:

- an organisational culture that permits swearing, name-calling, gossip, or impoliteness among employees.
- inadequate policies or procedures to address and manage reports of unacceptable behaviour.
- the existence of other psychosocial hazards within the workplace.

IMPACTS OF HARASSMENT AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT

The impacts of harassment, including sexual harassment, on both workers and organisations is numerous. Some impacts to consider are:

ON WORKERS

Stress and emotional distress: Workers may experience increased levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional distress due to the ongoing conflicts and negative interactions in the workplace.

Reduced job satisfaction: Conflict and poor relationships can contribute to a decline in job satisfaction and overall happiness at work.

Negative impact on mental health: Prolonged exposure to conflict and toxic work relationships can have a detrimental effect on mental health, leading to issues such as depression, anxiety, and burnout.

Physical health effects: The stress and tension associated with conflict and poor workplace

ON ORGANISATIONS

Decreased productivity: Conflict and strained relationships among employees can disrupt workflow, create distractions, and hinder collaboration, leading to a decrease in overall productivity.

Increased absenteeism and turnover: Employees may choose to take more frequent leaves of absence or resign from their positions due to the negative work environment, resulting in increased absenteeism and turnover rates.

Decline in employee morale. Negative impact on teamwork and collaboration: Conflict and poor workplace relationships can contribute to a decline in employee morale, leading to decreased job satisfaction and engagement.



PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS FACT SHEET 14

relationships can also manifest in physical health issues such as headaches, muscle tension, and sleep disturbances.

When employees are engaged in conflicts or have poor relationships, it can undermine effective teamwork and collaboration, hindering the achievement of organisational goals.

Damage to the organisational culture: Persistent conflict and poor workplace relationships can erode a positive organisational culture, creating a toxic work environment and affecting employee morale, loyalty, and commitment.

Increased costs: Conflict and poor workplace relationships may lead to increased costs associated with absenteeism, turnover, recruitment, and training of new employees.

Reputation and image damage: If conflicts or poor workplace relationships become known to external stakeholders, it can harm the organisation's reputation and image, affecting relationships with clients, customers, and partners.

Legal and compliance risks: In cases where conflict escalates into harassment, discrimination, or other forms of misconduct, organisations may face legal consequences and compliance risks, including lawsuits, fines, and damage to their reputation.

Decreased employee loyalty and commitment: Conflict and poor workplace relationships can negatively impact employee loyalty and commitment to the organisation, resulting in decreased employee retention and increased difficulty in attracting top talent.



RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk Management involves identifying potential risks, assessing their likelihood and impact, and developing strategies to mitigate or control them. It is a proactive process that seeks to prevent risks from occurring or minimise their impact if they do occur.

No person should be injured in their workplace, including psychological injury. To meet their duties to ensure health and safety, employers must identify and eliminate or minimise psychosocial risks so far as is reasonably practicable. How long (duration), how often (frequency) and how significantly (severity) workers are exposed to psychosocial hazards impacts the level of risks. Hazards interacting or combining with each other may also impact this. Further guidance on the risk management process is available in the Code of Practice: [***How to manage work health and safety risks.***](#) For more information on the risk management process for psychosocial hazards, please view [***Section 2 of the Model Code of Practice.***](#)

Mind Your Head advocates for *prevention* – that is, identifying risk, implementing or changing systems to prevent worker harm or injury *before it occurs*.

Examples of Risk Management Strategies for Conflict or Poor Workplace Relationships or Interactions include:

- **Establish a positive work culture:** Foster a work environment that promotes respect, open communication, and teamwork.
- **Develop clear policies and procedures:** Implement policies and procedures that define acceptable behaviour, provide guidelines for conflict resolution, and address issues of harassment, bullying, and discrimination.
- **Provide training and education:** Offer training programs on conflict management, effective communication, and promoting positive workplace relationships to enhance employees' interpersonal skills.
- **Encourage reporting and provide support:** Create a safe and confidential reporting mechanism for employees to report conflicts, harassment, or other inappropriate behaviour. Ensure that employees are aware of the support resources available to them.
- **Conduct regular assessments:** **Regularly** assess the workplace climate, employee satisfaction, and organisational culture to identify any potential conflicts or areas of improvement.
- **Foster teamwork and collaboration:** Implement team-building activities and initiatives that encourage cooperation, collaboration, and mutual respect among employees.



PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS FACT SHEET 14

- **Promote diversity and inclusion:** Embrace diversity and inclusivity in the workplace, valuing different perspectives and creating an environment where all employees feel respected and included.

WAYS TO MANAGE RISKS

Consult workers and HSRs. Establish Health and Safety Committees with at least 50% representation from workers. Encourage feedback, especially on any changes.

Consider how long, how often and how severely workers are exposed to hazards. The longer, more often and worse the low job control, the higher the risk that workers may be harmed.

Utilise surveys and tools to assess psychosocial risks in the workplace, particularly for businesses with over 20 employees.

Establish a system for workers to report their concerns, while ensuring anonymity and treating their concerns with respect and seriousness to encourage reporting.

Observe work and behaviours, such as prolonged work duration, excessive paperwork, or customer frustration, which may indicate low job control.

Review available information, including employee retention, incident reports, complaints, time-off records, injuries, incidents, and workers' compensation to identify potential hazards.

Identify other hazards present and evaluate how they may interact or combine to create new, heightened risks. For instance, low job control could pose a greater risk in workplaces with high job demands if workers are unable to take breaks or switch tasks to manage fatigue. Finally, consider the duration, frequency, and severity of workers' exposure to hazards, as prolonged and severe exposure to low job control could increase the risk of harm.

CONTROL MEASURES

Control measures are specific actions or procedures that are put in place to manage or mitigate identified risks. They are reactive measures that are implemented after risks have been identified and assessed as part of the risk management process. Control measures are designed to reduce the likelihood or impact of risks, and they can take many forms, including administrative controls, engineering controls, and personal protective equipment.

Mediation and conflict resolution: Provide access to mediation services or conflict resolution processes to help employees resolve conflicts in a fair and constructive manner.



PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS FACT SHEET 14

Clear communication channels: Establish effective communication channels to facilitate open dialogue and encourage employees to address conflicts or concerns directly.

Regular feedback and management: Implement regular performance evaluations and feedback mechanisms to address any behavioural issues promptly and provide constructive guidance.

Anti-harassment and anti-bullying measures: Implement strict policies against harassment, bullying, and other forms of inappropriate behaviour. Ensure that all employees are aware of these policies and the consequences for violating them.

Encourage leadership accountability: Hold leaders and managers accountable for promoting positive workplace relationships and addressing conflicts promptly and effectively.

Provide resources for conflict resolution: Offer access to conflict resolution professionals and Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) to provide support and guidance to employees dealing with workplace conflicts.

Ongoing training and development: Continuously provide training and development opportunities to enhance employees' interpersonal skills, conflict resolution techniques, and emotional intelligence.

DO

foster a positive work culture that promotes respect, open communication, and collaboration.

establish clear policies and procedures to address conflict resolution, unacceptable behaviour, harassment, and bullying.

provide training and education on effective communication, conflict management, and promoting positive workplace relationships.

encourage employees to report conflicts or issues and provide them with appropriate support.

address conflicts promptly and fairly, using mediation or other conflict resolution techniques.

promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace and value different perspectives.

hold leaders and managers accountable for promoting a respectful and inclusive work environment.

DO NOT

tolerate or ignore disrespectful behaviour, harassment, or bullying in the workplace or allow unacceptable behaviour to continue.

neglect to establish clear policies and procedures for addressing conflicts or unacceptable behaviour.

overlook the importance of providing training and education to employees on conflict resolution and interpersonal skills.

discourage employees from reporting conflicts or issues, or fail to provide them with necessary support.

delay or avoid addressing conflicts, as unresolved issues can escalate and negatively impact the work environment.

overlook the significance of diversity and inclusion in fostering positive workplace relationships.

ignore leadership responsibilities in promoting a respectful and inclusive work culture.