

All page references are updated in this chapter.

CHAPTER

8

BUILDING EFFECTIVE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

OVERVIEW

Most people need to work with others to achieve results. The good working relationships you have with your work team, your own leader-manager and with people across and outside your organisation – your customers, suppliers and other stakeholders – help you to reach your goals. More than that, good relationships at work mean more than satisfied and engaged employees; people are naturally social creatures, and friendships and positive interactions with others are important for our psyches.

Good working relationships are critical to organisational success, too. Research has found that the single most important factor in extraordinary workplaces that are exemplars of productivity is the quality of working relationships – how people relate to each other as friends, colleagues and co-workers:

The quality of working relationships represents the central pivot on which excellent workplaces are founded, underpinned by such key variables as good workplace leadership, clear values, having a say and being safe... In excellent workplaces, the existence of mutual trust and respect is overwhelming. We became convinced that central to excellent workplaces is an understanding that to produce quality work in Australia, one must have quality relationships.¹

For quality relationships to flourish, people need to understand themselves and others. This requires well-developed interpersonal skills and the ability to build trust and confidence and to understand and navigate the sometimes stormy seas of organisational politics. It requires wide-ranging support networks for people to draw on and provide advice and assistance. And it requires clear and open communication and the willingness to recognise and deal with conflict and differences of opinion.

- How well do you understand yourself and others?
1. Can you build and sustain people's confidence and trust?
 2. Can you establish, contribute to and benefit from professional networks?
 3. Can you make organisational politics work for you and your work team to get your ideas implemented and achieve work priorities and goals?
 4. Are you able to turn conflicts into agreements?

This chapter helps you build the relationships you need to work effectively as a leader-manager.

SCENARIO

Glenys designs her future

Everyone knows that Les plans to retire sometime during the next 18 months, and Glenys decides that she wants to be offered his position as section manager. She has experienced no real problems in the many occasions she has acted in Les' position when he was away on leave, so she has no doubts about her ability to do the job from a technical point of view. But she suspects that she needs to develop more solid working relationships with her would-be staff and with the managers she hopes to make her peers.

She begins by reading up on the skills and techniques that forge effective working relationships. She finds several articles and blogs on these topics and learns that effective working relationships are based on understanding oneself and others, and on a collection of attitudes that underpin interpersonal skills.

The information she learns and puts into practice really does seem to make it easier to get along with people – staff and management alike. Of course, it isn't easy and she often feels uncomfortable but, as she read, people can't improve their skills unless they take risks and try out new things.

Everyone seems impressed with the changes in Glenys and in her overall performance and it comes as no surprise when she is appointed to succeed Les. Although she realises she still has a lot to learn, she finds, to her delight, that she is able to handle her new responsibilities. She is even able to get funds for extra staff and equipment – not an easy achievement! It seems to Glenys that all her hard work is paying off.

1. Understanding yourself and others

The basic truth: Improved productivity in Australian workplaces is the outcome of the quality of working relationships on the job.

Professor Daryll Hill (Macquarie University), *Simply the Best* (2004)²

Bad news or not, without self-knowledge, you can't improve or become wiser; you are doomed to self-delusion. Without **self-awareness**, understanding others is next to impossible, too. 'Know thyself' is even inscribed on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, in Greece; it is believed that 'knowing thyself' is the basis of wisdom and the basis of leadership.

To be an effective leader/manager, you need to understand yourself: Your values and the motives that drive your behaviour, your strengths and your limitations (discussed on page 111). You need to be aware of your **mindsets** and develop empowering mindsets (discussed on page 188). This boosts your **emotional intelligence** and **resilience** (discussed on page 196) and your ability to achieve **goals** (your personal goals and your work-related goals) and helps you build a successful career (see discussion on page 131). Self-knowledge also opens the door to understanding others, making it easier to develop effective working relationships and bring out the best in people.

ACTION!

You can pinpoint what's important to you by completing the self-test 'What do I value most?' on [CourseMateExpress](#). It is part of the student resources for Chapter 7.

The Johari Window

The novelist Aldous Huxley said, “To see ourselves as others see us is a most salutary gift. Hardly less important is the capacity to see others as they see themselves.”⁷³ Are you self-aware and open, or secretive, self-absorbed and blind to your effect on others?

The **Johari Window** can help you increase your self-awareness in this area. It looks at two dimensions to understanding yourself:

1. Aspects of your behaviour and style that are *known* or *not known* to you.
2. Aspects of your behaviour and style that are *known* or *not known* to others.

Combining these two dimensions reveals four areas of self-awareness, shown in Figure 8.1. The top left square is your public self, or the *arena*. It contains information about you that you and others know, such as your name, your job and your experience in the organisation.

The top right square in Figure 8.1 is your *blind* area. It contains information about yourself that others can see but of which you are unaware. For example, Kay is curious and keen to learn, yet is unaware that the way she asks questions often irritates people and makes them feel like she is cross-examining them.

The *closed* area in the bottom left square of Figure 8.1 contains information you know about yourself but which others do not; it might be secret information or merely information you never thought to or chose to reveal. For example, John’s boss keeps him standing during informal meetings, which annoys John, but he says nothing; until John tells his boss that he would prefer to sit, this information will remain in his closed area. Sometimes there is a good reason for privacy. Sometimes, opening up and telling others would improve communication, trust and teamwork.

The final area in the bottom right square of Figure 8.1 is the *unknown* area. This contains information that is unknown to others and to you self. This is the vast area of the unconscious.

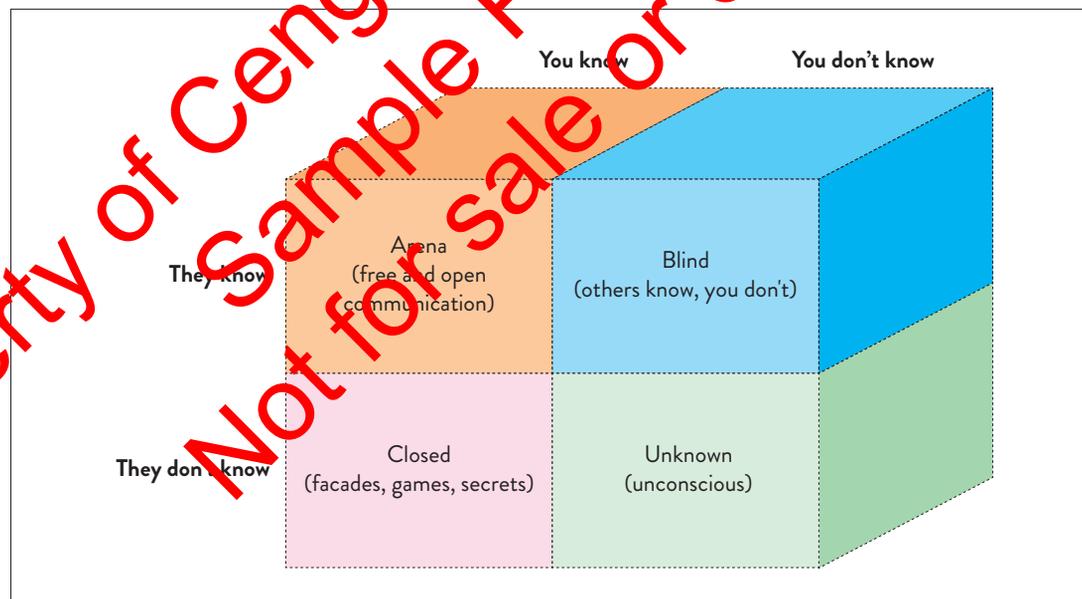


FIGURE 8.1 The Johari Window

The cubes in Figure 8.1 are shown equal in size, but for most people this is not the case. The relative size of each cube is different for everyone. Imagine, for example, expanding the *closed* area

upwards, shrinking the open *arena*; people with a large closed area are seen as puzzling, secretive and difficult to communicate with and build relationships with. Now imagine increasing the *arena* to the right, shrinking the *blind* area and indicating a greater degree of self-knowledge, and down, shrinking the *closed* area and indicating fewer 'secrets'. People enjoy working with people with a large *arena* because a large *arena* helps them communicate openly, work well with others and develop honest and trusting relationships.

THEORY TO PRACTICE

Putting the Johari Window to work

To promote effective working relationships, increase the size of your *arena* and shrink your *blind* area. You can do this through self-reflection and by asking for, listening to and acting on **feedback** from others (see page 141) and by being aware of the public aspects of yourself, such as your facial expressions and **body language**, and their impact on others. Disclosing more of yourself to people you trust also increases your *arena* by shrinking your *closed* area.

Espoused theories versus theories-in-use

Knowing your values (see page 186), acting on them and making decisions based on them, builds your integrity and self-respect and earns the respect of others.

Ah, but does it? Newspapers frequently carry stories about people who act on their values of self-interest and 'winning' at all costs. You may even know a manager who values self-preservation or self-promotion more than anything else. This is still value-directed behaviour, isn't it?

Then we have people who say one thing and do another. A manager might say: 'I believe in **participation** and I really value the contributions of my work team.' This is known as *espoused theory* – what people *say*.⁴

The way people *behave* is their *theory-in-use*. When that same manager fails to listen to team members' ideas or suggestions, the *theory-in-use* might be something like this: 'People don't have any ideas worth listening to or valuable contributions to make.'

Are these managers hypocrites? Possibly. More often, a *theory-in-use* that contradicts an espoused theory is due to one of three reasons:

1. *A person's theory-in-use hasn't yet caught up with his or her espoused theory:* For example, a manager believes in his head that people are reliable and he talks about how much he trusts his team members (espoused theory) but believes the opposite in his heart, leading him continually to check up on their work (theory-in-practice).
2. *A person feels pressured to conform to a set of values that is not his or her own:* For example, a manager who values independence and works in an organisation that values teamwork feels obliged to give 'lip-service' to teamwork but continues to praise and reward individual results.
3. *Another value, or theory-in-use, overrides the value in question, or the espoused theory:* For example, a manager who values participation and works in an organisation that punishes mistakes doesn't risk involving her team because she values staying out of trouble and keeping her job more.

Whatever the reason, sometimes people's espoused theories (what they say) and their theories-in-use (what they actually do) disagree. When people say one thing and do another, they are difficult to work with. This is often part of their blind spot (others see their inconsistency but they don't). People who have a large gap between their espoused theories and their theories-in-use lose credibility with their work teams and colleagues, harming their working relationships.⁵

To manage effectively, you need *congruence*, or agreement, between your espoused theories and your theories-in-use. This is often called 'walking your talk'.

Personality styles

Accepting that everyone has their own strengths, values and ways of working increases your flexibility and willingness to work differently with different people. Although people are extremely complex, you can learn to spot basic characteristics so that you can work more effectively with a range of people.

Part of what makes life interesting is individual differences, and it's these differences that help you and your team achieve results. The sections below describe different ways to think about people's personalities, including your own. Each approach is valuable in its own way, with each offering different strengths, shortcomings, qualities and quirks. As you read through the following ways to think about people's personalities, think about which types of personalities apply to you and the people you work with.

Extrovert or introvert?

Dr Carl Jung, building on the work of Sigmund Freud, pioneered the study of **personality types** in the early 1900s. People, he said, face the world in two basic ways: as extroverts or as introverts. Most people fall somewhere between the two types, leaning more towards the extrovert or more towards the introvert end of the spectrum.

Between 50 and 74% of the population are *extroverts*.⁶ They relate best to the external world of people and things and tend to be 'doers'. Extroverts love mixing with others and feel lost when by themselves. When persuading or explaining something to extroverts, show them how what you are saying fits in with other people's thinking and what others are doing, and how they can put it to immediate use.

Introverts make up the remaining 26 to 50% of the population.⁷ They are the thinkers, who prefer the inner world of concepts and ideas and are happiest when they are by themselves, doing their own thing. Although not necessarily shy, they do not seek out social or group activities. To communicate best with introverts, find out what ideas are important to them and try to fit your suggestions and instructions into that framework.

Feeler, intuitive, sensor or thinker?

Jung also concluded that people receive and deal with information in four ways: feeling, intuiting, sensing and thinking. For most people, one of those four ways dominates, two are partially developed, and one is underdeveloped.

Feelers see the world, problems and decisions – and other people – based more on their personal values and gut reactions than a technical weighing up of facts, pros and cons. They are warm and outgoing and, because they are sensitive to people's feelings, moods and reactions, they work well in groups. Feelers make good counsellors and public relations people. They can build teams, organise people and harness their enthusiasm. When you're working with feelers, make

your values explicit, so they understand ‘where you’re coming from’, and take care to make them feel supported and accepted.

Intuitors are imaginative and are good at playing around with ideas and theories; they see the strategic perspective easily but often miss the details. Their hunches are often correct. At work, intuitors are strongest at long-term planning and creative tasks. Explain your vision and ultimate goals, and then let their creative minds work out how to help you achieve them.

Sensors are down-to-earth, energetic and hard working, preferring action to words or ideas. They are practical people with a lot of common sense and are the first to roll up their sleeves and say, ‘Let’s get on with it’ – often before thinking a problem through. ‘Try it, then fix it’ is their motto because they are impatient and like to get work done. At work, sensors are usually well organised and adept at converting ideas into action, ‘getting the ball rolling’, negotiating, setting things up and troubleshooting. When you’re working with sensors, speak clearly and in practical terms and get to the point quickly, avoiding too much detail or ‘fancy theory’.

Thinkers are strong on clear, logical reasoning. They are methodical and enjoy analysing problems but are less effective when it comes to implementing solutions. You can often find thinkers working with facts and figures, in systems analysis or in research. Give them facts and sound, rational information to help them overcome their natural scepticism.

People- or task-focused?

Another basic difference between people is whether they focus first and foremost on the *task* at hand or on the *people* doing the task. Those who put the task first probably care about people too – they just concentrate on the job at hand. When you’re chatting to or meeting with task-oriented people, skip or minimise the ‘small talk’ and get down to business.

People-focused people usually care about the task too – they just consider the people aspects of a task first. When talking with people-oriented people, discuss how a decision affects people, who needs to be informed or consulted about a problem or decision and other people issues.

THEORY TO PRACTICE

The value of a cuppa

Jim Hayward, CPA, a former TAFE teacher and now a company director and consultant in South Australia, describes the value of a cuppa like this:

‘As a young man I didn’t drink tea or coffee. That was a disadvantage in my first management appointment in Ceduna. Andrew, my “2IC” always treated me very formally. There was no relationship. We had one very tough week when I decided I did need a coffee. With cuppa in hand, I walked into his office . . . and we talked.

‘I soon learnt the value of walking around with half a cuppa, when I could very easily talk with my three staff. But without a cuppa, it all became very formal – hard to build trust that way.’

Conscientious thinker, dominant director, interacting socialiser or steady relater?

Psychologists have expanded greatly on Jung’s findings. One way of understanding people combines the extroversion–introversion and people–task continuums discussed above to give four different personality types: conscientious thinkers, dominant directors, interacting socialisers and steady relaters. One type or temperament is no better or worse than any other – they are just different.

Conscientious thinkers are introverts who pay attention to the task and produce high-quality work. They look after the details, check things carefully, keep to time and produce accurate, comprehensive information. They have a strong need for achievement and ‘getting things right’. They are deliberate, well-organised people who are good at analysing problems and thinking them through. They enjoy study and analysis, weighing up both sides of an issue and examining alternatives carefully. Their approach to work is accurate, diligent, exacting, objective, orderly, systematic and thorough. Conscientious thinkers are serious and well-organised perfectionists but they can also be stuffy, fussy, judgemental, critical and slow at making decisions. A team with too many conscientious thinkers would suffer ‘paralysis by analysis’.

Don’t ask the conscientious thinkers to turn in a rushed, ‘close enough is good enough’ job and don’t ever present sloppy work to them. When you need to criticise a conscientious thinker, do so gently and tactfully. Explain decisions, problems and situations fully and carefully and include the details they crave. When you need to make changes, for example to the departmental layout, a job assignment or a procedure, spell them out clearly, allow time for questions and give them time to adjust. Don’t try to rush conscientious thinkers.

Dominant directors are extroverts who focus on the task. They provide energy, ‘set the ball rolling’ and make decisions. They are competitive, direct, outgoing and results-oriented. They are often ambitious, willing to speak up, make decisions easily, ‘set the pace’ and use their initiative. Strong-willed and practical, dominant directors often have a strong need for **power**, preferring to be in charge. They resist authority from others, often challenging the status quo. Dominant directors get to the point quickly – so quickly they can seem blunt, impatient and pushy. They are fast-paced, want things done *right now* and dislike sloppy results. But too many dominant directors in a team would be so busy fighting between themselves for control that they wouldn’t get much work done.

To work effectively with dominant directors, communicate clearly and accurately and get to the point quickly. Turn in quality work that is practical and results-oriented. Don’t try their patience with abstract theories and concepts or too much attention to people issues, which they view as ‘fluffy’. Treat dominant directors with the respect they believe they deserve and let them think they’re in charge (even when they aren’t).

Interacting socialisers are extroverts who focus on people – they like people and like to have people around them, and they enjoy working with and helping others and trying out new and better ways of doing things. They add enthusiasm, spirit and a sense of fun to the team and are impulsive, optimistic, persuasive, sociable and talkative. Interacting socialisers are good at influencing people and creating a motivating environment. They are creative, energetic and open with their feelings. They thrive on change, ideas and new trends and they need their achievements and contributions recognised. But interacting socialisers are often disorganised and inattentive to detail, excitable, manipulative, undisciplined and vain. A team might never get anything done with too many of these energetic, talkative people!

To develop good working relationships with interacting socialisers, keep details and detailed work well away from them. Focus on the strategic perspective and vision and let them talk, participate, motivate and create an enjoyable atmosphere. Treat them as friends.

Steady relaters are people-oriented introverts who pay attention to people and relationships in order to complete the task. Willing, reliable, cooperative, easy going, consistent, helpful and relaxed, steady relaters may not be balls of fire but they are valuable team players. Quiet and often unassertive, they are comfortable taking a back seat. They dislike conflict, changes in direction or goals and sudden surprises. They prefer their known and stable routine to the untried and untested. Good thinkers and

patient listeners, the stable, quiet manner of steady relaters makes them good at calming down upset people. Others sometimes see them as insecure conformists who are awkward, indecisive, possessive and unsure. Too many steady relaters could cause a team to stagnate and fail to improve.

To discover a steady relater's thoughts or opinions, ask a lot of open questions and listen carefully. Don't overlook them or take their contributions, hard work and loyalty for granted.

Analyst, empathist, legalist or realist?

You probably have a few *analysts* in your team. These are the people who work best on their own. Their ability to think conceptually, intuitively, logically and theoretically makes them valuable for their creativity and good ideas. They're competent, competitive and serious self-starters who often seem to be married to their jobs.

Keep detail, routine and practical matters away from analysts. Tell them what you want and then stand back and let them work out what to do. Give them ways of tracking their progress and ask for their thoughts, especially when you're short of good ideas.

No doubt you have a few *empathists* on your team, too. They're warm, communicative people who strive for meaning and harmony. Like analysts, they're intuitive but pay attention to their feelings as much or more than to logic. They're natural coaches, encouragers, helpers and supporters.

Give these empathic team members encouragement, 'face time' and personal instruction. See that they know the importance of the job they're doing and that you value their contributions. When you need to offer feedback, do so carefully and constructively so they don't interpret it as criticism or as a personal attack. Give empathists autonomy and a chance to learn, and don't burden them with detail.

You're bound to have quite a few accurate, conservative, loyal, practical, responsible, serious and steady people on your team, people who tend to be cautious, seek security and avoid change. Known as *legalists*, you can count on them to work well with details and work best in structured, predictable situations where they reliably apply rules and procedures, follow regulations and keep to the routines.

Give legalists the detail they need to do their work and formal recognition for their contribution and effort. Be punctual and thorough when dealing with legalists and don't spring surprises on them. Since they don't like change, explain any required changes fully and carefully.

You probably have nearly as many *realists* as legalists on your team. They're the hands-on, practical, technical people – the action-oriented trouble-shooters. Often flamboyant, fun loving, impulsive and spontaneous, they thrive on excitement. They're flexible, good at coping with change and open-minded and tolerant.

Coach realists on self-organisation and time management and give them hands-on, well-planned training. They need plenty of freedom and enough variety so they don't get bored and 'muck around'. Help them practise and perfect their skills and count on them to rise to the challenge in a crisis. Enjoy their company.

(To find out about working with people from other cultures, see page 858.)

IN A NUTSHELL

Stay flexible!

From the preceding section, it should be clear that treating everyone the same is a mistake. Adjust the way you assign and delegate work, ask for help or information and thank people for it, give information and present your ideas to suit each individual you work with.

2. Building trust and confidence

Example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing.

Albert Schweitzer (German theologian, physician, philosopher) *Brothers in Spirit* (2007)

Without trust, good working relationships cannot develop. Customer loyalty, employee attraction, retention and morale, leadership effectiveness, profitability and gaining the benefits of diversity – all depend on trust. According to leadership scholar Warren Bennis, trust ‘is the lubrication that makes it possible for organisations to work’.⁹

Departments and teams can't work without trust, either. Team members must trust each other, their leader-managers and their organisations to perform at their best. As empowerment, cross-functional teams, self-managed teams, virtual teams and telecommuting spread, not only must employees trust managers and the organisation to treat them fairly, but managers must also trust employees to do their jobs responsibly and correctly. Trust is truly a two-way street.

Because you depend on the goodwill of people above, below and at your level in the organisational hierarchy to achieve results, you need to build trust and confidence across, down and up the organisation. The way to build trust is to balance the attention you pay to the task at hand with the attention you pay to people – the two are inextricably linked.

THE STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE

Trust pays

Trust is important. But how important is it? Broken trust may harm morale, loyalty and productivity, but does it show up on the bottom line?

Research shows it does. For example, a survey of 6500 employees at 75 North American Holiday Inn hotels, using questionnaires in six languages and oral surveys for illiterate employees, asked for a response to statements such as ‘My manager delivers on promises’ and ‘My manager practises what he preaches’. Researchers then correlated the responses with customer satisfaction surveys, personnel records and financial records.

The results were conclusive. Hotels with employees who strongly trusted their managers were substantially more profitable than hotels with employees who trusted their managers an ‘average’ amount or less. The link was so strong that a one-eighth point improvement in trust increased a hotel's profitability by 2.5% of revenue, which translated to a profit increase of more than \$250 000 per hotel per year.¹⁰

Trust is an absolute. You either trust someone, or you don't. Trust is fragile: It takes time to develop but seconds to destroy and, once lost, it is difficult to earn back. An organisation's formal rules and policies can't build trust; only its culture, values and the integrity with which people work can breed and sustain trust.

Think of trust as ‘relationship capital’. Like real capital, it takes time to amass and effort to preserve. When you keep drawing on it without replenishing it, your account quickly empties. Trust is deposited in your relationship accounts through genuineness, empathy, integrity and time; when you don't deposit enough, you can't draw on it.

IN A NUTSHELL

How to keep trust

Here are six actions that can cost you trust, with suggestions for guarding against them:

1. Creating the impression of change for the sake of change: Explain clearly what a change is intended to achieve, why it is needed and what you expect from your staff; keep communicating.
2. Failing to ensure people know where they stand: Make your expectations clear and apply your values and ethics consistently.
3. Falling for fads: Employees are sceptical of managers who constantly tout new techniques and implement them half-heartedly. Explore and experiment, but don't dabble.
4. Playing favourites: Don't spend more time chatting with one employee than another. Don't give most of the interesting assignments to one employee. Don't say 'Yes, great idea' to one employee but not to another, or in any other way show favouritism.
5. Reneging on your commitments: When you make a promise, keep it. For example, when you promise an employee he can take time off in lieu of working overtime on a project, honour that commitment when the time comes.
6. Shifting sands: Unclear and changing priorities, rules and standards that you adhere to one day but not the next, show you have a lack of values, vision and goals and shout 'inconsistency and hypocrisy'. Know your overall team purpose, and your organisation's vision and goals, concentrate on them and abide by the rules and standards you have set.

Earn trust

Trust and credibility go hand in hand, and underpinning both is honesty. People are only willing to follow leaders they believe look after their rights and their best interests. When people believe this, they are willing to follow those leaders to the degree to which they rate their competence, honesty and ability to inspire.¹¹ You communicate these qualities through your confidence and enthusiasm.

There are five components of trust:

1. Competence: Interpersonal and technical knowledge and skills.
2. Consistency: Good judgement, predictability and reliability.
3. Integrity: Honesty and truthfulness (considered the most important).
4. Loyalty: Willingness to protect people and save face for them.
5. Openness: Willingness to share ideas and information freely.¹²

Leader-managers who earn trust create an atmosphere and expectation of trust so that people behave accordingly, and they actively cultivate trust so that people feel safe. They trust others, which allows them to empower people, and use consultative and participative leadership styles. Here are some other characteristics of leader-managers who earn trust:

- They admit when they get it wrong, enabling others to do the same and learn from their mistakes.
- They are passionate about what is important to them, motivating people and making it easy for people to follow them.
- They confront people without being confrontational, for example, by tactfully tackling under-performance when necessary.
- They consider the impact of their actions or inactions on others.

- They give credit when tasks succeed and accept responsibility when they don't.
- They keep confidences, so people can confide in them and tell them the truth.
- They pursue team or organisational goals rather than personal goals.
- They speak clearly and in a straightforward manner, without hidden agendas, so that people know where they stand.
- They stay true to their values and principles, which makes them consistent and reliable.
- They use power positively, to do the right thing, not to massage their egos.

The late Maya Angelou summed it up nicely when she said, 'I've learned that people will forget what you said; people will forget what you did; but people will never forget how you made them feel.'¹³

THEORY TO PRACTICE

Jim Dawson, transformational leader

Jim Dawson joined Zebco, a company that makes fishing tackle, at a time when high-quality yet inexpensive Asian imports began to flood the US market, threatening the company's viability. Because workplace relations between employees and management were poor, it was difficult to make the necessary increases in productivity that might save the company from going out of business.

As an 'outsider', Dawson knew that trust would be an important issue in rebuilding workplace relations. He chose two highly visible and symbolic actions to reduce 'class differences' between workers and management. He discontinued the reserved parking space for management and instituted the President's Club – anyone with 100% attendance would have reserved parking space. And he walked into the factory one morning and smashed the time clock with a crowbar.

Productivity increased three-fold. Today, Zebco is the world's largest fishing tackle company.¹⁴

ACTION!

How trustworthy are you? Take the interactive self-test of the same name on [CourseMateExpress](#) and find out.

Don't blame – take responsibility

Imagine a manager who blames circumstances, the economy or other people when results are disappointing or a project doesn't go according to plan. Imagine a manager who rants and raves when people make mistakes rather than putting matters right or showing them how to avoid similar mistakes in the future. These managers would find establishing effective working relationships hard going and they probably wouldn't last long in their roles. Here's a motto they could usefully adopt: 'Don't just see problems. Solve them.'

Taking responsibility for fixing mistakes, putting plans back on track and solving problems helps you to develop and maintain effective working relationships. When people face problems and mistakes head on and do what they can to fix them, they are a pleasure to work with. Taking responsibility builds your **personal power** (see page 103 to find out more about how to do this) and increases your overall effectiveness.

People who take responsibility don't do these three things:

1. Blame themselves, others or circumstances for problems and mistakes.
2. Ignore problems and mistakes, hoping they'll go away.
3. Make excuses for problems and mistakes.

THEORY TO PRACTICE

Build trust first

Before people decide what they think of your message, they decide what they think of you. Two characteristics weigh heavily when people form an opinion of others: *trustworthiness* and *competence*. These characteristics answer two important questions:

1. What are this person's intentions towards me?
2. Is this person capable of acting on those intentions?

Without trustworthiness, even the most competent people are treated with envy or resentment. But warmth without competence elicits pity.

So what to do? According to a growing body of research, projecting strength and competence before establishing trust risks a host of unwanted responses, including fear, which ultimately drags down productivity.

It's best to establish trust first; this is where the important qualities of **employee engagement** and **influence** begin. Even a few non-verbal signals, such as a nod, a smile and an open gesture, show you're pleased to see someone and are paying attention to them. A foundation of trust, supported by competence, leads to cooperation, flexibility, information sharing, innovation and openness, and makes planning, coordinating and executing easier.

Treat people 'right' – show respect

Do you treat everyone with respect, regardless of their position or personal characteristics? Or do you grace just a select few with your consideration and high regard based, perhaps, on their seniority or on whether you 'like' them?

People who build and keep effective working relationships don't treat people differently based on what they do, where they're from or who they are. They treat **internal customers** and **suppliers** as valued colleagues, and **contractors** and **external customers** and **suppliers** as valued contacts – regardless of their size or the amount of business they do with them. (Chapter 20 explains how to develop effective relationships with customers and suppliers.)

Empathy, integrity and respect are essential ingredients of effective working relationships. According to the principle of *psychological reciprocity*, which reminds us that *mirror neurons* in the brain are designed to encourage people to treat others the way others treat them, behaving respectfully and with empathy and integrity towards people encourages them to treat you the same way.

A mindset that accepts and respects people for what they are also helps you work effectively with people from different cultures and social backgrounds and people with special needs. (See Chapter 26 for more information on working with a diverse range of people.)

IN A NUTSHELL

The politeness principle

To build effective working relationships, follow these three maxims:

1. Don't impose.
2. Give the receiver options.
3. Make the receiver feel good.¹⁶

Do the ‘right thing’

People watch what you do and they make assumptions about the kind of person you are and what you value based on their observations. People notice what you pay attention to, what you reward and what you discourage, and the way you treat people every day. People notice whether you say ‘good morning’ when you arrive at work and ‘goodbye’ before you leave the office. They notice when you ‘reply’ to their emails promptly. They notice whether you wait to sit when you enter someone’s workspace until you know they’re ready to talk. People notice whether you bypass rules, cancel meetings without explanation and ‘walk your talk’.

When you have high **self-esteem**, you automatically want to do the ‘right thing’ because you owe it to yourself and to others. Even when the ‘right thing’ is awkward, inconvenient or uncomfortable, your high standards encourage you to make the ‘right’ decision and take the ‘right’ action. Doing the ‘right thing’ involves behaving ethically and with integrity and begins with self-awareness and knowledge of your core values (explained on page 186).

How do you know what is the ‘right thing’ to do? Try the ‘mirror test’: Ask ‘What kind of person do I want to see in the mirror when I shave ... or put on my lipstick in the morning?’¹⁷ You can also ask yourself whether a decision, idea, plan or strategy is morally defensible? Whether reasonable people would agree with it? And whether it would compromise your integrity, your reputation, your profession or your organisation’s reputation? When the answers are doubtful, the right answer is probably, ‘No’. Here are some more questions:

- Is it legal?
- If someone did it to me, would I consider it fair?
- Would I be comfortable for it to appear on the front page of the newspaper?
- Would I like my mother to see me do it?

Think about the effects of your actions and decisions, too. For example, consider how your decisions or actions affect those you work with internally and externally (e.g. your work team, your customers and your suppliers) and how they affect the wider community, the environment and other **stakeholders**. Straightforward? No. Easy? No. That’s what management is all about – balancing the complex and the contrary.

THEORY TO PRACTICE

Being ‘the boss’ doesn’t mean you can avoid having to explain yourself

The more you communicate your goals and intentions, the more you build understanding and trust and therefore, effective working relationships. Rather than assume people know or understand your motivations and aims, tell them. Especially tell them when there is a chance that they could misinterpret your meaning. For example, you may have a difficult message to convey or you may have made a decision that can’t please everyone. You can help people understand your intentions in three ways:

1. *Talk specifically about what’s important to you:* the goals, purpose and values that guide your actions and decisions and the experiences that forged them. Explain both the business and personal reasons behind decisions.
2. *Through integrity:* keep your word and make sure what you do (your theory in practice) reflects what you say (your espoused theory).
3. *Through consistency:* This comes naturally when you behave with integrity and follow your values and beliefs. When there are differences, explain them.

THEORY TO PRACTICE

The psychological contract and mutual rewards

The package of unwritten and usually unspoken expectations between employers and employees, or the **psychological contract**, generally refers to intangible expectations regarding loyalty, salaries, keeping pace with market rates, work performed in certain ways, and so on. When all parties honour the contract, it works well. Violating the contract erodes trust, and relationships suffer as a result.

Make sure that your psychological contract with your team is a healthy one that respects individuals and their contributions, that it ensures that relationships are cooperative and mutually rewarding, and that it includes all the stakeholders. You may also want it to include such expectations as employees turning up on time and sharing knowledge and information freely. You may want employees to treat customers and each other with respect, and have fun and enjoy each other's company while working towards achieving their goals. In return, you might allow, for example, flexibility in timekeeping to accommodate personal needs when required, provide formal and informal training and development, keep employees informed about matters that affect them and provide informal cakes and teas to celebrate team achievements. Unspoken agreements like this lead to cooperation and mutually rewarding behaviours.

Behave ethically and with integrity

Have you ever been placed in a situation where you were tempted to take the easiest course of action even though it was not the most ethical action, particularly when you took a longer-term perspective or the needs of other people of the organisation into account? Managers often face difficult choices. Doing the 'right thing', choosing the ethical option or behaving according to your own or your organisation's set of values can sometimes be a difficult choice. What guides you in situations like this?

Acting with *integrity* means acting according to your own personal set of values and principles, which are different for everyone. Behaving *ethically* means behaving according to a set of standards that are the same for everyone, at least for everyone in the same culture. Acting with integrity and behaving ethically builds your credibility.

FYI

Code of ethics keeps everybody happy

Companies are increasingly adopting a code of ethics; for example, 96% of the FTSE100 in 2013 compared with 73% in 2001 had a code of ethics.¹⁸ Many professions and organisations have developed their own ethical standards and codes of behaviour, too. A *code of ethics* spells out an organisation's or a profession's operating guidelines, setting out the obligations and expectations from the point of view of a range of stakeholders. In so doing, it acts as a decision-making guide for the organisation's employees or profession's members. A *code of conduct* outlines the types of behaviour that are acceptable and those that are unacceptable.

When managers and corporate culture lack the strength and resilience to observe the expected standards of ethical behaviour, we end up with disasters.

Most cultures share many ethical standards, for example, not killing people, and not stealing from people. Other ethical standards are more culturally based, for example, in some societies it is expected that managers hire their relatives, even when the relatives are not particularly well suited to the job. Family responsibilities come first. Australians expect managers to hire the person best suited to the job and not show favouritism towards relatives or friends. ‘Smoothing the way’ is *hakslesh* in some cultures but bribery in others. Caring for the environment might be mandatory in one culture and a luxury in another.

Having said that, you can think of management ethics as standards that are right or moral and that every manager should follow. Working ethically often involves managing competing tensions between an organisation’s stakeholders. The ability to be **assertive** underpins your ability to behave ethically and with integrity. It helps you to state your needs, wants and opinions clearly and respectfully and to work with others to establish goals, agree responsibilities, identify and resolve problems and improve work performance. Stating your own point of view while respecting the rights of others earns you respect and a reputation for having the courage of your convictions.

THEORY TO PRACTICE

The code of conduct for the Australian Institute of Management

Australian Institute of Management members have a code of conduct that represents most codes used in business today:

1. At all times discharge allotted and accepted responsibilities as a manager with integrity and observe those standards prescribed in the Guides to Good Management Practice determined from time to time by the Australian Institute of Management.
2. Not misuse authority or office for personal gain.
3. Comply with the laws of Australia and operate within the spirit of those laws.
4. So order personal conduct as to uphold and not to injure the standing and reputation of the Australian Institute of Management.¹⁹

Check out the website of the institute at <http://www.aim.com.au> and see its code of conduct regarding ‘The Manager – the Person’, ‘The Manager and the Organisation’ and ‘The Manager and the Community’. These set out the standards of ethical conduct expected of the institute’s members and how to apply these behaviours in the workplace and in daily life. It calls on managers to exercise integrity in everything they do, to adhere to rigorous personal values in resolving potential conflicts of interest and to be accountable for their actions.

3. Establishing and sustaining networks

Though most people recognise that networking is important to career advancement and success, few fully understand that a lack of access to influential networks can become a barrier to even the most talented employees.

Laura Sabattini (US talent management strategist) 6 *Unwritten Rules to Advancement in the Workplace* (2008)²⁰

Networks are relationships of people who share similar aspirations and interests. **Networking** helps you expand and share your information, knowledge, perspectives and skills and extend your sphere of influence. The wider the variety of people your networks include, the wider the range of advice, help, information and support you can draw on.

Networking is becoming more important as organisation structures become flatter and the power that was invested in the hierarchy moves to people with strong and cordial networks – these connected individuals are now an organisation’s information brokers and persuaders.

Here’s how the Australian Institute of Management defines networking: ‘Connecting with others without the need for immediate gain. It is a proactive investment in the future aimed at building a relationship with another well before assistance is sought.’²¹

Networking is not about seeing and being seen, or petty politicking. Think of networks as strategic alliances and the people in your networks as allies. Access to the advice, contacts, emotional support, resources and technical and task assistance they provide helps you contribute to your organisation and team. And helps you to achieve your professional and personal goals more easily, effectively and quickly than you could on your own.

IN A NUTSHELL

Four characteristics of effective networks

Networking is a critical skill for managers and one of the key behaviours of effective leaders and managers. Effective networks have some or all of these four characteristics – diversity, quality, size and strong bonds:

1. The more varied your networks, in terms of people’s backgrounds, interests and skills, the more powerful they can be in supplying a wide range of information and ideas. Don’t just network with people who are similar to yourself or with whom you spend most time – mix it up!
2. Network with the best. Network with skilled, smart and influential people who have strong networks themselves.
3. Large networks have more potential for supporting you, so include lots of people from outside your organisation as well as from inside it.
4. Mature networks that have been nurtured over time have strong rapport between members, which increases their willingness to support each other.²²

You benefit from networking in three ways: operationally, personally and strategically. Make building networks part of your personal development plan.

- *Operational networks* help you manage internal responsibilities. Networks, made up of reports, peers and more senior managers, as well as key customers, distributors and suppliers, help you do your job by ensuring coordination and cooperation. Your role and responsibilities largely determine the people you include in them.
- *Personal networks* are made up mostly of a range of people outside the organisation who add to your personal and professional development.
- *Strategic networks* build business acumen and help you figure out future priorities and challenges that the organisation (and therefore you) needs to contend with.²³

Your current and former bosses, colleagues and teachers can all be valuable to include in your professional circles. Friends, relatives, neighbours and acquaintances from professional and other groups can help you build knowledge, develop your ideas and broaden your perspectives. Include some customers, competitors, consultants and suppliers, too. Page 102 lists the six types of informal networks you can link into in most organisations. Some organisations have introduced Corporate Social Networking (CSN), a type of corporate LinkedIn, to help employees connect and share

information and ideas. They can also include blogs, threaded discussion boards, Wikis and other web tools.

Add value to your networks without being asked, or you won't be in them for long. Find out what is important to people you network with, what they're thinking about and the challenges they face so you know how you can assist them. Mutual understanding helps you and the people in your networks achieve goals, develop and learn. Keep contact information up to date so that you can find each other when you need to do so. Build mutual respect and trust with everyone, concentrating your efforts on the people you plan to call on and support the most.

IN A NUTSHELL

Some ways to network

You can network anywhere. All it takes is a smiling face, a stack of business cards and some information that is useful to someone else who may pass on some of their information to you. You can do this by:

- Attending seminars and conferences
- Being a friendly face and lending a helping hand to people who join your organisation, professional association and other networks, and being open to the fresh insights these people can offer you as you help them to assimilate and adjust
- Being active in service clubs, social clubs, industry groups and associations related to your work and interests
- Being thoughtful and staying in touch with phone calls and emails or by sending a relevant article, newspaper clipping, website link or a thank-you note or letter of support to someone who has contributed something worthwhile
- Eating lunch with different people two or three days a week; in company cafeterias, sit at a long table to increase your chances of meeting people you don't know yet
- Generally getting 'out and about' and putting yourself, your industry and your organisation forward in a good light, or writing a short article for a company blog or newsletter
- Interacting formally and informally with people inside and outside your organisation
- Participating in company events and making a point of speaking to a few people you don't know
- Maintaining professional profiles on social and business networking sites and using them to extend your networks

4. Navigating organisational politics

A drop of honey catches more flies than a gallon of gall. So with men. If you would win a man to your cause, first convince him that you are his sincere friend. Therein is a drop of honey which catches his heart, which, say what he will, is the highroad to his reason.

Abraham Lincoln (US President) 'Temperance Address' (1842)²⁴

It's been called the 'shadow organisation', the political side of organisations that consists of the unspoken alliances and coalitions of influence, and the often hidden norms and networks of relationships. Politics is a reality in every organisation.

Awareness of, and sensitivity to, this shadow organisation – who is what to whom, what people want and need and why, and the patterns of loyalty criss-crossing the organisation – is known as *political intelligence*. It gives you the ability to read and understand the undercurrents of relationships and build good working relationships with the people around you, without being seen as ‘self-serving’ or labelled as ‘political’.

Should you involve yourself in your organisation’s politics? Plato thinks you should. He said that one of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors. He was thinking of the state more than organisations, but the outcome is probably the same. Certainly, some people could use the energy they expend on politicking much more productively. Fortunately, though, politicking without the underlying management and technical skills, abilities and values to support it can seldom sustain a career. When backed by sound management and technical skills, however, political intelligence increases your personal effectiveness.

Organisational politics is not about ‘protecting your turf’ or pursuing personal advantage (or it shouldn’t be). It’s about forming alliances with like-minded people across the organisation and with influential customers, suppliers and other stakeholders to help achieve team and organisational objectives. It’s about managing your image in a positive way (discussed on page 144), fitting in with and contributing to the organisation’s culture, and recognising and building networks and alliances with people who have power and influence (discussed on page 102).

Politics is about identifying your supporters and opponents and knowing how deep their support and opposition is. It’s about saying ‘thank you’ for people’s support and helping others (letting ‘one hand wash the other’). It’s about sharing the credit, making people feel good and building personal relationships throughout the organisation. Politics is about thinking ‘several moves’ ahead, finding out who to stay away from and whose opinions to listen to most carefully.

Provided you follow these four ‘prime directives’ strong political alliances can help you shape key priorities in the organisation and line up supporters to promote change and support your ideas and proposals:

1. First and foremost don’t make enemies and don’t burn bridges. Don’t whine or complain, intimidate people, make other people look bad or criticise anyone except in terms of the organisation’s interests.
2. Don’t assume anything you say stays secret. Think about what you say; don’t discuss personal problems.
3. Be worth being around. Be assertive (but not tough or aggressive) when you need to and otherwise be pleasant, laugh and smile.
4. Play the political game in a professional, ethical way at all times.

Promote your ideas

You need more than a good idea for it to be implemented. In fact, in most organisations there’s a bit of an art to promoting your ideas and getting them accepted. You need political know-how.

You need to know ‘who’s who’ in terms of influence in the organisation (see page 102) and how to persuade people by linking your idea and its benefits to their goals. You need to know what people want and why they want it, and how to help overcome any objections they may have to your ideas. To succeed at that, you need to be up to date with your organisation’s networks.

Think your idea through

First, give your ideas time to mature in your own mind. Rather than rushing off with a proposal when you have a brainwave, think about the specific outcomes and benefits your idea can achieve. Look at

what you're trying to achieve from other departments' and key players' points of view. Who is likely to resist your ideas? How can your idea help them meet their goals? Think like the decision-maker(s). What do they want? What do they want to know?

Then float your idea by a few people whose opinions you trust; find one or two colleagues you can use as sounding boards to assess the viability of your ideas and gather suggestions on how to improve them. (If you're so positive about an idea that you can't see any potential resistance to it, ask what objections people might have to your idea.)

THEORY TO PRACTICE

Some points to ponder

When developing your idea, think about:

- How your idea fits in with or conflicts with other people's and teams' main goals and how the success or failure of your idea would be advantageous or detrimental to these people and groups
- Which people and groups might help or hinder implementation of your idea: senior managers, other managers at your own level, other departments, your work team and so on
- Who might block your idea, why they might block it and what you can do to bring potential blockers on side
- Who might support your idea, why they might support it and how you can bring these potential supporters on side
- Who your idea affects and how it affects them (e.g. your idea might lower a person's or a team's visibility, importance or influence, or it might make more work for a person or group)
- Whose opinions you trust and whose support you need the most to have your idea accepted and implemented.

Lay the groundwork

Once you've discussed your idea with a few allies, thought about its ramifications across the organisation and adjusted it to make it more palatable all round, you can gradually build a coalition of supporters. Who is most likely to support you and who should you get onside before formally putting forward your recommendations?

Think about the best way and order in which to approach them. Who should you speak to face to face and who would prefer an email or a short memo? How should you communicate with each of these people to be the most persuasive? For example, who should you enthuse with the 'big sky' overview and who should you entice with the finer details? Who should you stress results with and who should you stress the people aspects with? (The first section of this chapter sheds light on this.)

Make your approach one of sharing your idea and involving others in shaping and strengthening the idea into its final form. Ask for people's views on your idea and listen to what they say, particularly when they have reservations with your thinking. Pay attention to their body language, tone of voice and other clues to gauge how much they really support, or don't support, your idea.

Expect some opposition. With every proposal, some people and teams stand to lose, just as some stand to gain. Don't take opposition personally and avoid becoming defensive – people naturally try to protect themselves and stay in their comfort zone. Think of resistance as a file to help you smooth off your idea's rough edges. Ask questions and try to see doubts from the resisters' points of view. People are more likely to open up to your ideas when you acknowledge their opinions. When 'my idea'

becomes ‘our idea’, people respond more positively. Show people how you have incorporated their input to help them feel some ownership of the idea.

As you sound out the idea to a wider audience across the organisation, keep track of the responses, concerns and questions so you can prepare more thoroughly for your final presentation. Running your ideas by several people first also provides a ‘comfort level’ down the track.

THEORY TO PRACTICE

Selling your idea to your team and colleagues

The decision-makers aren’t the only ones you need to convince. Your colleagues, team and other stakeholders may not be the ones to give your idea the go-ahead, but you probably need to sell it to them just the same. Get their input and build in their ideas – right from the beginning.

Consider your idea from their viewpoints, both its advantages and its disadvantages. Write the advantages and disadvantages down and identify one or two of the most important benefits and one or two of the most important drawbacks. Then revise your proposal to minimise the drawbacks (or at least make them more manageable) and increase the benefits. Try to include a WIFM (what’s in it for me) for everyone.

Try saying ‘What would you think of doing it this way?’ rather than ‘This is how we should do it.’ The former seeks their input and gives them a say. Make sure they understand that doubts and constructive thoughts are what you’re after.

Present your idea

It goes without saying that your idea needs to be well thought out, practical and cost-effective. It’s usually the best-packaged idea that wins approval, not necessarily the best idea.

Your first step is to frame your idea so that it meets the organisation’s main aims and strategy. For example, when cost containment is an important theme in the organisation, show how your idea limits or reduces costs. When building a cooperative professional culture is the current priority, show how your idea helps build that culture. Clearly state the business benefits (e.g. the bottom line, effect on morale, public image). When people know you’re motivated by the benefits to the organisation, they’re more likely to support you than when they think you’re out to feather your own nest.

Your proposal must do more than address the organisation’s needs, though. This means you need to tell not just its logical components, by supplying the objective information the decision-makers need, but also the emotional component, by subtly showing how it benefits the main decision-makers and the people it most directly affects.

So present facts and numbers by all means, but remember that people’s hearts, as well as their heads, must support ideas. Saying ‘because’ after a statement greatly increases your chances of a ‘Yes’ because accurate facts and figures appeal to a person’s sense of logic and reason – that’s the head. Use the heart to strengthen your arguments further by aligning your ideas with the decision-makers’ values and aspirations.

Position your idea so that it is ‘our idea’, the ‘our’ being influential key players, including experts and the decision-makers’ peers, who have given you a positive response. The clearer it is that many people have been involved with and support your idea, the harder it is to reject it. When you can, link your idea with what the decision-makers have gone on record as saying they want or value, because people want to be consistent with what they have said or done in the past.

 FYI

One bite at a time

According to recent research, it's better to dole out your evidence one point at a time rather than all at once because it leads people to conclude the evidence is stronger.²⁵

Take into account how your idea will be evaluated and who the decision-makers might consult so you can link your idea into their priorities, too. Do the decision-makers have any positive or negative emotional attachments you may be asking them to accept or agree with? Have they had any previous positive or negative experiences with something similar? If it's positive, how can you link your idea to it? If negative, how can you show your idea is different from their past experience?

Know the financial cost and the risks of implementing your idea and how the risks can be addressed. Know the consequences of *not* implementing your ideas and be ready to present them. Should the mood of the decision-makers be 'Let's wait and see,' you'll be armed with what the cost of waiting is.

Make it easy for the decision-makers by making your recommendation or proposed actions easily understood. Think about how your idea can roll out when it is accepted: once that first step is completed, what comes next? When there are a number of steps, use a table to show who does what by when. Once your idea is up and running, how do you plan to make sure it doesn't collapse? (That's your 'keep it in place' strategy.)

Finally, show that you have considered the pros and cons of your idea and weighed them carefully; have your answers ready for probing questions about the pitfalls of your idea.

When deciding how to best present your idea, think about the decision-makers' preferred modes of dealing with information (e.g. considering the overall picture or knowing all the details, as discussed in Section 1 of this chapter, 'Understanding yourself and others'). When you present your idea in writing, explain it clearly and persuasively and set it out well (see Chapter 6). When you present your idea verbally, present information in chunks that the decision-makers can easily 'digest' and slowly enough that they can follow your argument. When you rush or when your proposal is complicated, they may reject your idea rather than work hard to understand it (see page 199 for more information on making presentations.)

Work well with your boss

Your most important working relationship is probably the one you have with your manager. Although it can take time and energy, developing and nurturing it (yes, it's your responsibility, too) almost certainly increases your job effectiveness and avoids a host of problems and frustrations, and may open the door to interesting projects and career moves.

You need a good understanding of both yourself and your manager, particularly regarding strengths, weaknesses, working style and foremost concerns and goals. Find out what concerns and problems are uppermost in your boss' mind, what your boss' organisational and personal objectives are and what pressures are on your boss from his/her boss and colleagues. Use your empathy and pay attention to behavioural clues.

Find out how often your boss wants you to report progress and general information and in what format – for example, all the details or just the end result, in writing or verbally. Does your boss prefer formal meetings or informal discussions? Does your boss prefer information to be presented with diagrams, illustrative examples or statistics? Do you know how to avoid wasting your boss' time? This

way you can fit in with your manager's working style and provide more effective (and appreciated) support. Otherwise, you're flying blind and misunderstandings are inevitable.

Find out about your boss' background and interests, management style and values, what your boss appreciates most in team members, and how your boss fits into the organisation's unofficial power structure. You can find some of this information online and from the grapevine and some through careful listening during general conversations with your boss. The more you know about your manager's 'world', the more effectively you can work together.

Anticipate your manager's concerns and address them ahead of time, or as they surface, without being asked to do so. Volunteer to take on tasks you know your manager would rather not handle. Fit in with your boss' routines and make your priorities reflect and support those of your boss. Here are some questions that help you understand your boss' world:

- How did my boss come into her current job?
- How well does my boss get on with his boss?
- What are my boss' career aspirations?
- What does my boss do outside of work?
- What was my boss' previous position?
- What does my boss value in the job?

THEORY TO PRACTICE

Find out the basics

Here are four key questions to discuss with your boss:

1. What are my key result areas and main goals?
2. How can we best measure my performance?
3. What operating guidelines do you want me to work within?
4. How can I support you do your job better?

Maybe you already know the answers to these questions. If so, what does that tell you about your relationship with your boss and your organisation's culture?

Make it easy for your boss to give you feedback. Ask questions when you need to, listen to any tips your manager passes on about how you can do your job better and put those tips into practice. When your boss praises you, don't feign modesty – say 'Thank you' with confidence.

Schedule regular meetings to update your manager on your work, what you've accomplished, what improvements you and your team have made, what problems you have resolved and are working on, and generally how the task is going. Be prepared, don't ramble. Be objective and factual to avoid bragging. Anticipate problems and solve them before they grow. Report any problems you can't fix early on and have the facts with you. Pass on any interesting information you've heard that might affect or interest your boss.

See yourself as your manager's partner in achieving results. Just as you depend on your manager for help, guidance, resources and information, your manager depends on you for support and cooperation. Do what you're asked. When you disagree, explain why and offer an alternative. Accept your manager's decisions and ideas and work to make them succeed.

Don't expect your manager to be perfect – no one is. Find out what your manager expects of you and find ways to let your manager know what your own needs and expectations are. If you're unhappy with your boss' management style, suggest ways you could work better together, explaining what you would like (not what you don't like) in objective, uncritical terms. Focus on the future and what you'd like to happen.

Don't take yourself too seriously. Your manager is an individual, not a job title. Show interest in your manager as a person and share a smile.

FYI

How to disagree with your boss

Here's how to open a discussion when you and your boss don't see eye to eye:

1. Pick a good time and place to discuss the situation, a time when your boss is most likely to be receptive and when you're not angry, emotional or upset.
2. Find out what your boss thinks and any background information you may not know.
3. Offer your views; put them in positive terms and frame them as suggestions for your boss to consider and word your comments so you don't appear to be dogmatic or aggressive, (e.g. 'I agree with ... On the other hand, I think we may get a better result by ...').

Here are some other pointers:

- Aim to see the situation from your boss' perspective as well as from your own.
- Choose your 'battles' wisely so you aren't seen as argumentative or disagreeable.
- Don't get personal: Stay factual, objective and professional, respectful and thoughtful.
- Identify what you agree on.
- Show how your ideas benefit the boss and the team.
- Speak about common interests and needs.
- Unless you are speaking on behalf of others with their agreement, say 'I' rather than 'we'.
- Your goal isn't to 'win' but to agree a course of action that benefits the team and the organisation.

Your position is stronger when you have built a good working relationship, consistently made your boss look good, have shown you are committed to the overall success of your team and organisation and when you're straight forward and don't play games.

Reporting to more than one boss

Convention has it that an employee should report to only one person. Called **unity of command**, this is based on the thinking that having more than one boss can create conflict and confusion. This principle flourished in the days of hierarchy and **bureaucracy** but is eroding in today's organisations in which flexibility and responsiveness to the environment are critical.

Temporary teams, for example, often form to undertake special **projects** and then disband; contractors and part-time workers are often brought in to work in one or more areas or in **matrix teams**. Employees are often temporarily seconded to other areas; and some organisations have opted for **matrix organisation** structures.

Reporting to several managers, each making requests of you, each with their own agenda and priorities, can be tricky. You're in danger of:

- Competing demands on your time: Which boss' work gets priority? This can be very tricky when each boss thinks their work deserves precedence.
- Conflicting messages: Different bosses have different expectations and communication styles and they can unintentionally undermine each others' messages.
- Work overload: This occurs especially when each boss treats you as if you work only for her or him.

To protect yourself, work out who your primary boss is. This is the person you formally report to, who does your final performance review and who makes decisions about your pay. Make sure you have regular, at least monthly, meetings with this boss and ask for his or her help in mentoring or **coaching** you to work well with your other bosses.

Be open about your workload so all your bosses know your commitments. Share your electronic calendar with them and block off specific times for working on different projects and assignments so they know when not to interrupt you. Provide each with a document updating your progress on all of your projects and other work. However briefly, check in with each boss face-to-face or virtually once a week to maintain your good working relationships.

When you have several bosses, it's probably fair to ask each to adjust to your preferred working style so you don't have to keep chopping and changing, which is stressful in itself. Let them know whether you prefer to receive questions and requests via email, meetings or in some other way. Agree on mutual expectations regarding response time for queries, regularity of meetings and regularity and format of update briefings. Try to agree on one way that works for everyone.

As with working for one boss, be clear about your deadlines and **deliverables** (as explained on page 110), focus on results and keep communication flowing.

Reporting to a remote manager

What if your manager is in Singapore and you're in Sydney? Because you can't see each other 'in the flesh' it's easy for each of you to miss the signals of energy, mood, personality and so on. When you report to a manager in a different location, it's critical that you communicate efficiently and build trust quickly.

As with any manager, agree on your **job purpose**, your **key result areas (KRAs)** and your **SMART targets** and find out your manager's preferred working style so that you can fit in with it. What is the best time of day to contact her or him? What is the preferred method of contact? Do they prefer progress reports in virtual person, or in writing? How much detail should be included? Does the boss prefer to take queries or receive results feedback as they occur, or in regular batches?

One of your initial goals should be getting to know your boss; when you can't meet face-to-face, make good use of virtual meetings and the telephone. Small talk is important, so avoid the temptation to move straight into task talk.

Provide regular progress reports and updates, with the frequency depending on you and your manager's agreed plan. Involve your manager in what he or she should be involved in (but avoid information overload). Make sure you aren't forgotten by establishing subtle routines; for example, phone at a certain time every day with a quick update or email a lunch-time status report in addition to your other regular reports.

Schedule regular virtual meetings with an informal agenda and prepare the agenda to go to your boss in advance. This is your opportunity to summarise what you've achieved since your last virtual meeting. Ask any questions you have now and finish with an outline of the next steps you are taking to achieve your mutual goal.

Confirm your commitments in a follow-up email, including date and time of your next scheduled virtual meeting. Design the email's content so that you can print it off to use as a checklist, or to list goals and create work schedules and plans to achieve them.

IN A NUTSHELL

Eight ways to nurture effective working relationships

Strong and professional relationships with your work colleagues can improve your position in their organisation and improve their positions as well.

1. Even when you can spare only five-minute breaks, devote a portion of your day to building good working relationships. Ask a colleague for advice, be generous with another, check Twitter or LinkedIn, tell a joke, share a laugh, show appreciation of your team.
2. Fit in with people's preferred working styles and personality styles (explained on pages 137 and 212).
3. Give colleagues a newspaper or journal article on a subject that interests them.
4. Have lunch with colleagues to get to know them.
5. Include people in relevant emails.
6. Invite a new team member or colleague from another area to join you for a quick coffee.
7. Make a point to drop by your colleagues' workspaces, especially when they aren't on your regular path.
8. Pay attention to how people use language and personal space and adjust your own style to be more similar.

5. Turning conflicts into agreements

People who fight fire with fire usually end up with ashes.

Al Gail van Buren (JS agency aunt) *It's the Customer, Stupid!* (2011)²⁶

Who do you know who has never had a conflict with anyone? No one? That's not surprising. Courteous and clear communication helps avoid some conflicts. Other conflicts, though, are inevitable because people are bound to have different opinions and want different outcomes. Some differences are merely minor irritations that people can quickly and easily forget, while others are more serious and can do lasting damage when not handled promptly and skilfully.

Think of conflict as verbally and/or non-verbally expressed disagreements between individuals or groups. It can occur between two individuals – between a manager and an employee or between a customer and an employee, for example – or between team members. It can occur between an individual and a group, between groups in the same organisation or between organisations. Conflict can even exist within an individual; for example, when one part of you wants to stay in bed and sleep, while another part of you knows you should get up and go to work.

Direct or indirect aggression, such as backbiting, gossiping, malicious compliance, passive compliance and scapegoating are all consequences and signs of underlying, unresolved conflict. Unresolved conflicts can poison the atmosphere of a workplace. The responsibility for seeing that doesn't happen usually falls to the team's leader-manager.

You may be called upon to resolve conflict between work teams within the organisation and, occasionally, between an employee and the organisation. As organisations strengthen relationships with contractors, customers, outsourcers and other suppliers, you may need to manage apparent conflicts with them, too. You may also have to resolve conflicts with other managers in the organisation when the needs of your respective departments seem to be at odds. Clear thinking and the ability to communicate clearly and sensitively can help you reach solutions that are acceptable and beneficial to everyone in all of these situations.

Conflict can be useful

Conflict can lead to clashes of will and the formation of ‘camps’ (taking up strong stances), ‘either/or’ thinking, power struggles, quarrels, resentment and self-righteousness. It can be destructive, disagreeable, disruptive and stressful, leading to anxiety, anger and frustration, harming morale and productivity and weakening the teams and the organisation.

But that doesn’t mean that the absence of conflict is good. Lack of conflict can indicate stagnant relationships or that people aren’t sufficiently interested in an issue or each other to better resolving their differences. At least when people argue, it shows that they care about the issue and each other.

In fact, some conflict is healthy, and it can be productive. So conflict itself isn’t a problem. How people resolve it can be a real problem. When people’s energies are pointed in the right direction – the team’s purpose or organisation’s **vision** – conflict can:

- Allow people to discover the best way to resolve a situation
- Bring hidden feelings into the open so people can deal with them constructively
- Develop confidence in and even enhance a relationship
- Move a relationship out of a rut
- Result in better ways of working.

Assertiveness and conflict

When what you want differs from what someone else wants, how do you approach it? Do you want to have your way no matter what? Would you do just about anything rather than have an open disagreement over it? Or do you want to figure out how you can both be satisfied?

The first way describes an aggressive, competitive, **win–lose** approach to conflict: ‘I win–you lose’, ‘me versus you’ or ‘us versus them’. When you adopt an aggressive win–lose approach, you’re sure to meet compliance, hostility and resentment rather than cooperation and goodwill. You need to rely on threats and your formal authority to deal with the situation and the outcome is never fully satisfactory.

The second stance is **passive**; it describes an avoiding, submissive or accommodating **lose–win** approach: ‘I lose–you win.’ When you take a passive approach – ‘don’t make waves’, ‘peace at any price’, ‘sweep it under the carpet’ – you’re likely to find that people take advantage of your good nature and difficult issues remain unresolved; resentment can build up to such an extent that an aggressive ‘explosion’ occurs.

The third describes an assertive, collaborative, **win–win** approach: ‘Let’s see how we can both win.’ The focus is ‘us together’ versus ‘the problem’. When you confront and deal with conflict openly and constructively, seeking a ‘win–win’ result that satisfies all or both parties, you keep exploring options until you find the one that is most acceptable to all parties. This style helps turn conflicts into agreements, or at least into satisfactory outcomes.

Causes of conflict

See if you recognise any of these top 10 sources of conflict:

1. Barriers, such as preconceived opinions, prejudice and selective hearing (explained on page 151).
2. Competition for limited resources.
3. Content matters such as who said what about plans, policies and priorities.
4. Differences in expectations, goals, needs and wants.
5. Differences in values.

6. Emotional issues, such as fear of what people might lose (including 'face').
7. Perception, for example, who has authority? Who knows best? Whose job is it?
8. Personality clashes.
9. Poor communication such as an inability to listen reflectively, lack of assertiveness, lack of empathy and poor summarising skills.
10. Role pressures.

When you are aware of these common causes of conflict you can avoid unnecessary problems. Keep an eye open for tension brewing around you and do what you can to address it.

Common responses to conflict

The only internal responses to conflict available to a person lacking assertiveness skills are 'fight' (aggression), 'flight' or 'freeze', (submission) all of which are stressful. Stress responses to conflict include breathlessness, 'butterflies' in the stomach, clenched fists, a clenched jaw, grinding teeth, a thumping heart and tightening of the vocal chords (resulting in a higher than usual, or shrill, voice or the need for repeated throat clearing). When conflict is unresolved or unsatisfactorily resolved, long-term stress responses such as problems associated with tension or substance abuse and domestic problems can result. (See page 197 for more information on the fight, flight or freeze response, and on stress and stress management.)

People who have learned to deal with conflict successfully, either by watching others deal effectively with conflict or through formal or self-guided training, are better able to respond assertively, avoiding much of the stress that conflict can cause.

IN A NUTSHELL

Hurting and helping responses to conflict

How you survive conflict depends on how negative or positive you can be. Table 8.1 contrasts the two types of responses.

TABLE 8.1 Conflict resolution: Hurting versus helping

Hurting responses	Helping responses
Apologising inappropriately	Clearly stating your position and goals
Being negative	Staying positive and showing mutual respect
Changing the subject	Isolating what you disagree about and what you agree about
'Either/or' thinking, unwillingness to explore options or compromise	Knowing what you want and your own limits and being willing to 'move' on some points
Getting angry	Keeping calm
Giving up and giving in – playing the martyr, pretending to agree	Agreeing shared goals and outcomes
Lack of empathy	Empathy
Personal attacks	Willingness to listen and respond objectively and non-judgementally, appointing a 'referee' if necessary
Refusing to see the other's point of view	Trying to understand the other's point of view

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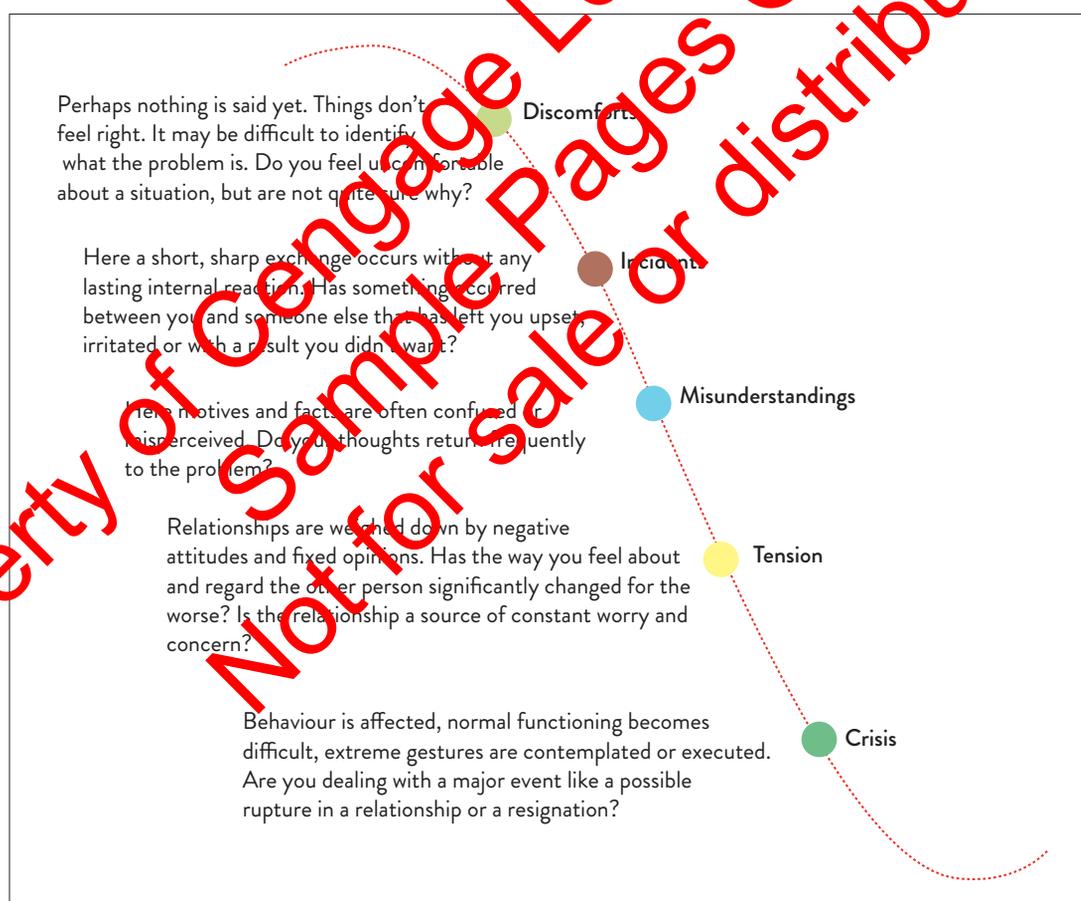
TABLE 8.1 Conflict resolution: Hurting versus helping (Continued)

Hurting responses	Helping responses
Trying to turn the conflict into a joke	A genuine desire to resolve the conflict, remaining respectful and polite while working towards a resolution
Win-lose or lose-win mindset	Win-win mindset

Hurting responses can create deadlocks, prevent mutual understanding, and leave losers resentful and even inclined to sabotage. Helping responses can unlock creativity, build stronger relationships and achieve mutually satisfying outcomes.

How conflict grows

Each conflict is different. Having said this, most conflict passes through the predictable phases, as shown in Figure 8.2. These stages are shown against a curved line. Think of this line as a hillside and think of the conflict as a ball. As a ball moves down a hill, it gains momentum and becomes increasingly difficult to stop. Like the ball, conflict gains momentum as it progresses through the



Source: Conflict Resolution Network, <http://www.crnhq.org>.

FIGURE 8.2 Stages of conflict²⁷

stages and becomes increasingly difficult to deal with. This makes it important to stay alert to signs of potential or underlying conflict and address it early.

When you ignore conflict, it can become increasingly serious until it reaches a crisis. When a 'scene' is not possible, one or both of the parties may 'vote with their feet', for example by resigning. Or the people involved may become depressed, impatient, intolerant, irritable, moody or stinky – costly in terms of morale, productivity and team harmony.

Five ways to manage conflict

The conflict modes shown in Figure 8.3 illustrates the five approaches people can take to conflict. The model is based on a person's or group's intentions along two dimensions: How much effort or energy they put into satisfying their *own concerns* and how much energy they devote to cooperation and satisfying the *concerns of the other party*. Each style is appropriate in some situations and inappropriate in others, so you need to be able to use each of them as well as know when to use them.



Source: Adapted from K Thomas, R Kilmann, *Conflict Mode Instrument*²⁸

FIGURE 8.3 Conflict management styles

Accommodate

Accommodating takes cooperation to its extreme – you put the other party's wishes before your own. The message is 'I give up' or 'Go ahead – walk all over me' or 'I don't care – do what you want'. It is often passive or submissive and might take the form of agreeing to someone's request when you would rather not or resentfully carrying out someone's request. Accommodating can also be selfless generosity or charity, or yielding to another's point of view against your better judgement.

Even when they are sure they are right, some people don't like taking a stand. Some leader-managers might be uncomfortable about using their power or afraid of losing the goodwill or

cooperation of their staff and think it safer to 'give in'. The danger of too much accommodating or inappropriately accommodating is that others seldom take accommodators or their ideas seriously.

You might sometimes *choose* to accommodate and when that's a choice, rather than an automatic reaction, it's assertive. Accommodation can be a good choice when:

- the relationship or building the relationship is more important than the issue
- you have no hope of having your wishes met and accommodating minimises your losses and maintains a climate of cooperation with the other party
- your 'stake' in the conflict or issue isn't high.

Avoid

When you avoid conflict, you pursue neither your own concerns nor those of the other person. Instead, you 'let sleeping dogs lie', pretending that the conflict isn't there or hoping it will go away. Automatically avoiding issues when you shouldn't leads to displacing your feelings (the proverbial 'kicking the dog'), and general discontent and resentment, which in turn leads to griping and gossiping.

Avoiding the conflict might be a good – assertive – choice when neither the relationship nor the issue is important to you. Many potential conflict situations are just not worth the time and effort of taking a stand and sometimes it isn't really your place to become involved. Avoiding can also have its uses, particularly when you want to:

- collect more information before taking action
- diplomatically sidestep an issue
- postpone discussion until a better time
- withdraw from a threatening situation
- wait, to let people 'cool down'.

Collaborate

Collaborating is cooperative, and almost always assertive. The opposite of avoiding, it involves establishing an atmosphere of constructive cooperation and working with the other party to find an outcome that satisfies you both. It might take the form of exploring a disagreement to learn each other's concerns, needs, wants, perceptions and positions, and then working together to come up with a satisfactory resolution. This is not easy and it takes time, effort and skill in communication and problem-solving, and the willingness to remain objective and impersonal while searching for a solution.

This 'let's fix it together' approach is particularly useful in situations where both the issue and the relationship are important to you and you want an outcome that satisfies both parties. Use it when you need all parties to be committed to the solution and when you need a creative solution, too.

THEORY TO PRACTICE

Agreement management

Think of conflict management as agreement management. How can you reach a mutual understanding? What goals do you share? How can you move towards the same side? How can you best reach agreement on this issue? How can you prevent similar problems or misunderstandings from occurring again?

Compete

Competing is uncooperative and aggressive when you automatically pursue your own concerns at the expense of the other person. This win–lose method of managing conflict relies on power (e.g. the ability to argue forcefully, pull rank or use financial incentives) to impose a solution on the other party. The usual response is antagonism, hostility, lack of cooperation and resentment.

‘Do it my way’ is the message of the competitor, so it isn’t surprising that ‘yes men’ and ‘yes women’ often surround managers who continually compete in conflict situations. People consider such managers hard to get on with as they don’t know when to admit they are wrong. Not surprisingly, habitual competitors find it difficult to form effective working relationships.

This is not to say, however, that competing is never an appropriate response to conflict. When decisiveness and speed are essential, as they are in emergencies, and when the issue is more important than the relationship, consciously taking a ‘do it my way’ approach might be the best option, at least in the short term; for example, when:

- nothing else has worked and ‘no’ isn’t an option
- safety issues are at stake
- you need to make a difficult or unpopular decision
- you’re in conflict with parties who refuse to cooperate and who are trying to take advantage of you.

When you assertively choose a competitive stance, be aware that you are likely to damage the relationship. Behaving assertively, not aggressively, and explaining your reasons, can help lessen the negative responses a competing style brings out.

Compromise

Compromising is the middle ground between accommodating and competing, where you give up more than in competing but less than in accommodating to arrive at a solution partially acceptable to both parties. ‘Splitting the difference’ or ‘making a deal’ is quicker and easier than collaborating. However, while it addresses issues more directly than avoiding them, it doesn’t explore the issues in as much depth as collaborating.

Sometimes, settling for a workable compromise is the best you can do, so you might assertively choose to collaborate. Some other occasions to consider looking for a compromise are when:

- collaboration or competition has failed
- time is running out
- you need a temporary, short-term solution to a conflict while collaborative discussions continue
- you want a quick solution and are willing to live with the fact that neither party is fully satisfied.

IN A NUTSHELL

Win–lose, win–win and lose–win attitudes

The goal is to achieve a win–win outcome. The challenge is to work out how to achieve it. Table 8.2 can show you how.

TABLE 8.2 How to be a win–win leader–manager

Win–lose leader–managers	Lose–win leader–managers	Win–win leader–managers
I'll 'attack' you personally if I have to.	Let's not argue.	Let's deal with this objectively.
I must win this battle.	Have it your way.	Let's solve your problem.
I want a quick fix.	I want a quick fix.	We both need to be satisfied long term.
I want total victory.	You win.	Let's see if we can both be satisfied.
Me against you.	You against me.	We're in this together.
My goals are most important.	Your goals are more important than mine.	Let's see if we can meet your goals, too. What are our common goals?
My way or the highway.	Yours is the way to go.	How can we resolve this?
This is a fight.	Let's not fight.	Let's deal with this amicably.
This is how it is.	We'll do it your way.	Here's my point of view; what's yours?
We're on opposite sides.	We're on opposite sides.	We're on the same side.

THEORY TO PRACTICE

To speak or not to speak

Is it wise to say something or not? When deciding, think about your goals, the issue and your relationship with the other person. How important to you is each? Say something when both your goals and the relationship are important to you. Say something when the issue alone is extremely important to you. Save your breath when neither is that important.

Four steps for reaching agreement

You can reach agreement, even in the most difficult situations. These four steps will help get you there.

1. Open a discussion

Make sure you have enough time to discuss the issue. Begin with a **framing statement**: a short, clear statement that 'sets the scene' and explains what you want to discuss. Make it clear that your aim is to reach an agreement that satisfies everyone. (You can find out more about framing statements on page 468.)

2. Give useful information

Helping the other party see the situation from your point of view can increase their willingness to collaborate. State it clearly, accurately and objectively, and stick to behaviour descriptions so the other person doesn't feel under attack. Explain the tangible, or real, effects the conflict or issue has on you using neutral, non-emotive language, or **'I' language**. State your point of view as objectively and congruently – look as though you mean what you say. See 'Theory to Practice 'I' language versus 'you' language', to see the different effects. Which would you rather hear?

THEORY TO PRACTICE

'I' language versus 'you' language

Table 8.3 contrasts the difference in expressing how a situation makes you feel, rather than directing the problem at the other person.

TABLE 8.3 How 'I' language helps solve conflict

'I' language	'You' language
I can't think when you raise your voice.	Don't shout.
I feel I'm being pushed into a corner here. I need some time to think it through.	You can't force me to ...
Let me show you a better way to do that.	You did that the wrong way.
I'm not following you.	You're confusing me.
I need you to be on time.	You're late again.
I see it differently.	You're wrong.
I'm annoyed because ...	You're annoyed me.

3. Gather useful information

Listen to the other person's point of view. Use empathy and reflective listening to make sure you fully understand them. Ask clarifying questions and summarise to check your understanding whenever you can, especially when the other person is using jargon or speaking indirectly or vaguely. Avoid becoming defensive, taking a hard-line approach, attacking the other person or telling the person what to do, which would escalate the conflict. Remember, you only have to understand the other person's viewpoint, not necessarily agree with it. Don't move on to Step 4 until you are sure you understand each other's points of view. You often begin to see a problem differently as you discuss it.

Discussing and listening to each other's views, *self-disclosure*, or explaining how the subject of a conflict makes you feel, can help to bring your discussion back into perspective. It can also result in similar responses from the other party, leading to greater understanding of the issues involved in the conflict. (See 'Theory to Practice: Self-disclosure' for some examples of self-disclosure.) Calm discussion can keep each person on the discussion if it tends to stray and keep you cool if the discussion threatens to become heated.

The same is true for *relationship statements*, or saying what you think or feel about the person with whom you have a conflict. For example, you might say, 'I'm really uncomfortable discussing

this with you (self-disclosure using 'I' language) because I'm worried that it will damage the good working relationship we have and which I'd really like to see continue (relationship statement using 'I' language).'

If a discussion becomes heated: Stop! Ask for some time out. For example, say, 'I'd like a minute or two to digest what you've said. How about a short break?' or 'I'd like to take a break now; can we meet again this afternoon?' Better still, suggest a break when you feel yourself tensing up or becoming angry – before tempers flare.

THEORY TO PRACTICE

Self-disclosure

Self-disclosure means letting people know what's going on for you. Table 8.4 shows how expressing feelings can help in the conflict resolution process. Choose one of these three categories and use the self-disclosures appropriate for you.

TABLE 8.4 Stating your feelings can assist in conflict resolution

Your situation	Your self-disclosure
How you are feeling	'I feel angry and disappointed to have to bring this up again. However ...' 'I feel uncomfortable discussing this with you right now.' 'I'm at a loss to know where we should go from here.'
How you are thinking	'As I see it, there are two options open to us right now ...' 'I think it would be a good idea to take a break and continue our conversation this afternoon.' 'I think we've made excellent progress.' 'Our next step appears to be ...'
How you are reacting to something	'I really appreciate that. Thank you.' 'I'm confused – would you go over that again?' 'I'm too upset to discuss this right now. Can we meet this afternoon?' 'It seems to me we're going round in circles.'

Self-disclosure sometimes requires courage, trust and a willingness to take a risk to build a better working relationship.

4. Problem-solving

When both parties understand each other's views, you can turn to problem-solving. Here are the steps:

1. Summarise the problem: What is the issue? What are the facts? What are the feelings and concerns of each party? Define the problem in terms of conflicting needs, not as a conflict between competing solutions. Make sure you agree on your differences.
2. Search for mutually acceptable solutions: Think of as many ways to resolve the conflict as you can; the more solutions you have to choose from, the more likely you are to resolve your

conflict successfully. It can be difficult to come up with a good solution right away, so be patient. (Chapter 18 has more information on problem-solving and generating solutions.)

3. Evaluate the possible solutions: It generally becomes apparent when to move on to this step. Are there any reasons that a solution might not work? Might a solution be too hard to carry out or implement? Is each solution fair to each party? Remember, you are trying to reach a good, workable solution, not just any solution.
4. Decide together: Shared commitment is essential. Choose the solution that is most acceptable to both parties and plan how to implement and evaluate its effectiveness together. Don't make the mistake of trying to persuade or push a solution onto the other party. When people don't freely choose a solution, they're unlikely to abide by the decision or implement it fully. If the chosen solution doesn't work, meet and begin the problem-solving process again at Step 1.

THE STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE

Take the opportunity to learn

After you've resolved a conflict, review it and learn from it.

- What caused it? Have you removed the cause so it won't occur again?
- What helped you resolve it? What obstacles were in the way?
- What signs were there that the conflict was brewing? Would identifying and addressing them earlier have helped? What could you have done? What should you bear in mind for the future?

IN A NUTSHELL

Tips to reach agreements

When you reach the stage of agreement to end a conflict, try these handy tips:

- Act, don't react: Pause and think, 'What outcome am I after and how can I best achieve that outcome?'
- Adopt a problem-solving approach: See the disagreement as a problem to solve rather than a battle to win.
- Agree on the content: State your position and your understanding of the other party's position clearly to make sure you are both talking about the same issue.
- Agree on the process: Right at the beginning, agree how to approach the discussions.
- Bring in a trusted third party: **Mediators** can often clarify the issues and help both parties see them and deal with the conflict objectively.
- Don't assume you have all the facts: Find out what other facts the other person has and what 'facts' you may have wrong.
- Don't assume you know what the other person wants or needs: Find out by asking questions and listening.
- Emphasise the relationship: When you clearly state that you want a continuing good relationship, it's easier to work towards that end.
- Interpret demands as opportunities: Thinking of demands as a way to spot more ways of resolving the problem lessens possible resistance.

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- Keep a long-term view in mind: This helps to keep what you say in perspective.
- Keep all verbal 'weapons' out of reach: Hiding behind an outdated or irrelevant corporate 'policy', point scoring, pulling rank or threatening only adds fuel to the fire.
- Keep early discussions informal: It's easier to 'toughen up' than to 'soften down'.
- Limit each discussion to a few issues: This helps to ensure that the 'mountain' doesn't appear insurmountable.
- Listen carefully and summarise frequently: This ensures that the other person knows you have heard and understood their point of view. Recap the other's point of view, especially before disagreeing.
- Look for and foster flexibility and creativity: How can you both get what you want? Don't limit yourself by grasping the first solution that comes to mind.
- Recognise that you're as likely to be biased as the other person: Respect each other's points of view, even when you don't agree.
- Respect the other party: Put-downs and personal attacks damage the relationship and lessen the likelihood of a successful resolution. Don't back the other person into a corner.
- Search for common ground: Once you have identified an outcome you both want or want to avoid, you can begin working with, not against, each other. Find your common ground and work out how to reach it.
- Stick to the facts: Becoming personal really heats up a conflict.
- Test your assumptions: Identify any assumptions clearly and verify them. Making assumptions about what the other party does or doesn't know or want can be a recipe for going around in circles.
- Try tackling the easier problems first: This doesn't mean you're avoiding the tough problems. The progress you make solving easier problems can encourage you to find solutions to the tougher problems.



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QUICK REVIEW

1. Explain why people need to understand themselves before they can understand others, and review some of the ways people can understand themselves and think about others in order to work more effectively with them.
2. Explain how earning trust, taking responsibility, treating people with respect and behaving ethically and with integrity are linked and how they help develop effective working relationships.
3. The ability to network is becoming a key skill of employees at every level in the organisation. Discuss.
4. Why do managers need to be able to engage in organisational politics? At what point do you think politicking becomes counterproductive?
5. Discuss the types of conflict that you are likely to meet and explain the most effective way to deal with them.

BUILD YOUR SKILLS

1. Referring to the Aldous Huxley quote on page 210, discuss this advice in terms of establishing effective working relationships.
2. Explain why the ability to network may be more important for employees at all levels in the organisation today than it was 40 years ago.
3. Do you think the ability to understand and employ organisational politics is more or less important today than it was 40 years ago? Why?
4. Explain why assertion can be mistaken for aggression if the asserting person isn't careful to respect the other person's rights, as well as protecting his or her own. Give an example to illustrate your explanation.
5. If you have studied Chapter 7, discuss the mindsets that help managers establish and maintain effective working relationships with their staff, their colleagues and their customers.

WORKPLACE ACTIVITIES

1. List the people you work most closely with, including your reports, your manager, peers and internal customers and suppliers. Develop a matrix and, working through Section 1 of this chapter, 'Understanding yourself and others', note each person's characteristics.
2. Which manager in your organisation do you trust most? Brainstorm the characteristics and behaviours of this person that you believe earns this trust.
3. Give an example of a psychological contract at your workplace and explain how understanding and honouring it helps people's working relationships. What is your role, as a manager, in establishing and maintaining the psychological contract?
4. Find out whether your organisation has a written code of conduct or ethics policy and an anonymous mechanism for reporting misconduct, fraudulent practices or dishonesty at work. If it does, review and summarise them.
5. What are your personal and professional networks and how do the networks you belong to help you to do your job well and manage your career? Provide two or three specific examples.

6. Who in your organisation is able to 'make things happen' and obtain approval for their proposals? To what extent is this person's political intelligence helpful? Give one or two examples of how you have achieved outcomes you may not otherwise have achieved had it not been for political astuteness.
7. Describe a recent workplace conflict you have witnessed or been a party to and discuss its cause. Was the conflict useful or destructive? How did the parties deal with the conflict and how satisfactorily was it resolved?

CASE STUDY 8.1

DELUSIONS OF GRANDEUR?

David finally gets the break he has been hoping for. He is appointed team leader of the technical trainers of his company's learning and development unit. Now he really has a chance to show management what he is made of! His career is about to begin.

First, he intends to make some important changes in the way the team operates. He calls a team meeting and announces that, from now on, everyone is to adhere strictly to the standard working hours stated in their job contracts. Also, he intends to check everyone's expenses quite carefully when they return from their frequent interstate training trips. Under no circumstances does he intend to let his budget blow out.

The trainers point out that their frequent travels are often done outside working hours and a lot of their preparation for training is undertaken in their personal time. They see some of the 'relaxed' timekeeping when they back at head office as *quid pro quo* – normal give and take. David replies that, on the contrary, this is a normal part of the job and they'd better start getting used to it. Seeing which way the wind is blowing, the trainers keep the rest of their thoughts to themselves.

The next item on David's agenda is the training program he ran last week. The training manuals and training aids didn't turn up. 'Sheila was supposed to send them and, as usual, she messed up. I intend to find a replacement for her as soon as possible. I won't have my unit looking unprofessional in front of the trainees.'

Later, in the canteen, the trainers have quite a few words to say among themselves. 'Fancy him checking up on our expenses – he's the one who over claims, not us!' They all agree on that point. 'David always says one thing and does another. And if he thinks I'm doing any travel or preparation in my own time, he's got another think coming!' Once again, there is agreement all round.

'What really gets me,' says Margot, 'is that the only way David seems to feel good about himself is by putting others down. He even does it in training sessions. He's always flying off the handle, too. I've seen him rip into trainees when they don't understand what he shows them first time around. All the trainees hate him – what in the world could management have been thinking when they made him team leader?'

'Perhaps they just wanted him out of the training room,' suggests Andy, only half-jokingly. 'Great! So now he can take all his inadequacies out on us.'

'Poor Sheila. She never makes mistakes on our programs – only David's. That's because he leaves her such poor instructions about what he wants. I wonder how we can help her?'

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'He won't listen to us. He always has to be the one with the answers and the good ideas. We might as well forget about suggesting anything or pointing anything out to him. I'm off to polish up my résumé and reach out to my networks!'

'Me too! He's such an aggressive little fella! I don't want to stay around here any longer than I have to.'

With that, the technical trainers amble back to their workstations.

Questions

1. Where is David going wrong in his working relationships with his team?
2. What advice can you give David to help him develop more effective working relationships with them?
3. Thinking about the Johari Window, what might some of David's blind spots be? If you were going to help David understand some of his blind spots, how would you go about it? Explain the general approach you would take and write down your opening comments.
4. Is David building trust with his team or is he draining his account? Explain your thinking.
5. David seems to be heading for conflict with his team. What do you suspect is his natural style for handling conflict? How would you advise David to handle any conflict between himself and his team? What skills would he need to use to notice that conflict is looming?

CASE STUDY 8.2

A 'TIMID MANAGER'

Annya is leaving next month to take up a new position and Zed is clearly the best suited employee in terms of skills, knowledge and experience to replace her as the service centre manager. Yet one thing worries Russell, the customer service manager, as he contemplates the decision: Can Zed develop effective working relationships with his team and their customers? Can he deliver the difficult messages that managers often need to deliver and still maintain staff and customer goodwill and confidence?

As Russell reflects on the service centre's performance over the past 10 months, he realises it has had its fair share of 'uneasiness' and even conflict. Certainly, Annya's management style was rather aggressive, and the recent technological changes probably didn't help, either. And, according to a few comments that Annya had made to him as they discussed her handover process, there were one or two 'bad apples' in the centre who loved a good argument, especially when it involved 'riding' the boss.

Zed has always struck Russell as rather timid, although that doesn't mean that he is. Perhaps he could stand up to these difficulties as well as anyone; perhaps he could do it without the aggression Annya sometimes displayed. Perhaps he could re-build a few crumbling bridges. What to do ... ? A mistake could mean disaster in such a key part of the business.

'Can I coach Zed to build trust and resolve conflict amenably or get him some training?' wonders Russell. 'I could support him through the first few months until he finds his feet, but perhaps I shouldn't take the risk,' he thinks. Yet Zed is, in all other respects, by far the best choice for the job.

Questions

1. Russell is confident that Zed is technically competent; what can he do to find out whether Zed has the skills to develop effective working relationships and to handle the conflict and discontent in the service centre that Annya has referred to?
2. Assuming that Zed needs coaching and training in developing effective working relationships and managing conflict, what skills would you advise him to concentrate on?
3. If Russell is correct in his guess that Zed is timid, what conflict-management style would he be most likely to adopt? What would be the repercussions of this style?

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