

Conflict Resolution in Vocational Education and Training (VET)

Clip 8

The 9 Stages of Conflict Escalation

Conflicts which are suppressed or, for whatever reason, are not solved in a timely manner often escalate. Conflicts can go through different phases. Scientists have developed a nine-stage model of conflict escalation. This model applies to all forms of interpersonal conflict, also to those at work and in vocational education and training. As a rule, it is still possible to resolve a conflict in its initial stages so that all parties are satisfied. When it continues to escalate, finding a solution becomes more difficult. At a certain stage, it even becomes impossible. Bringing in an external mediator will no longer help.



Stage 1: Hardening – Spreading disgruntlement and tension in the air. The first signs of tension become apparent. Opinions clash, points of view begin to harden.

Stage 2: Debate and Polemics - The conflict is addressed. Differing opinions become entrenched. Each party insists on their point of view.

Disclaimer

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



Those involved in the conflict attempt to put pressure on one another. In this phase, it is still possible to solve the conflict amicably. Unfortunately, participants often skip this phase. Hence, the conflict hardens.

Stage 3: Actions, Not Words – Refusing to speak to one another. Conflicting parties do their best to avoid one another. Initial conciliation talks are broken off by frustrated parties. Mistrust and negative expectations increase. Empathy for the “other side” is lost.

Stage 4: Looking for allies. Each person involved attempts to get others to side with them, with the goal of strengthening their position. Stereotypes and clichés replace rational arguments.

Stage 5: Loss of Face - Attacking the “opponent’s” moral integrity. Mutual attacks become direct and personal. Those involved attempt to humiliate their opponents and challenge their moral credibility.

Stage 6: Strategies of Threats - More and more threats and ‘counter-threats’. Conflicting parties attempt to control the situation by using threats. Everyone attempts to prove their authority.

Stage 7: Limited Destructive Blows - Every trick in the book is used to harm the opponent. Those involved are willing to accept negative repercussions for themselves, assuming there are more negative repercussions for the opponent.

Stage 8: Fragmentation of the Enemy - Scathing attacks. The opponent and everyone who supports them are attacked severely. The goal is to destroy the opponent.

Stage 9: Together into the Abyss - There is a full-blown confrontation. Parties attempt to finish off the opponent. They do so even if it means risking their own vocational education and training.

Disclaimer

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.