Conflict resolution activities: eight workplace practice scenarios

Conflict resolution activities are most useful when people rehearse an ordinary disagreement before they meet a real one. This kit gives you eight fictional workplace scenarios with a brief for each side, including three difficult conversations that a manager starts, plus an observer tally and a timed 70-minute plan for trios. It is skills practice, not mediation or legal advice, and it lists what belongs with HR or a formal process.

70 minutes | 6–18 participants | Online and adaptable in person

Updated 2026-10-10

The outcome

By the end of 70 minutes each person in a trio has practised the five steps as Person A, Person B and observer, has a tally of what was heard, and has privately prepared one real, low-stakes conversation.

Before the session

- For trainers, team leads and facilitators who run conflict skills training at work, with 6–18 people in trios.
- Read “When not to use this practice” first, and for managers also “When a manager’s conversation belongs with HR”. After a complaint or in an open dispute, do not run it.
- Choose three of the eight cards: 1 to 5 between colleagues, 6 to 8 started by a manager. Give each person only their own brief. Print one observer sheet and three preparation sheets per person.
- Say that every scenario is invented. Offer the observer role or a written version, captions and cameras off.

Included in this kit

A facilitator run of show, participant worksheets with real tables, reference tables, debrief questions, adaptation notes and a follow-up plan. Use the editable Word copy to tailor examples and prompts before delivery.

Original material by Superglue. Timings are suggestions; adjust them to your participants. This resource has not been independently evaluated.

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When not to use this practice

Read this page first. This kit is skills practice for everyday disagreements between colleagues who can speak freely to each other. It is not mediation, therapy or legal advice. The situations below are not for role-play and not for a conversation between the two people alone.

Follow your own organisation's policy and local law. This table is a guide for trainers, not HR or legal advice. If someone is in immediate danger, call the emergency services.

Situation	Where it belongs	Why it is not for this practice
Harassment, including sexual harassment	Your organisation's harassment or grievance procedure, HR or a manager you trust	A person should not have to negotiate to be treated safely.
Discrimination	HR, the grievance procedure or an employee representative	It is a matter of rights and policy, not of two equal views.
Bullying or repeated intimidation	A manager, HR or the grievance procedure	A pattern of behaviour needs someone with the authority to act.
Threats or violence	Safety first: a manager, security or the emergency services	A conversation structure does not protect anyone.
A health and safety risk	The safety reporting route and the responsible manager	A risk is reported and fixed. It is not traded against another need.
Legal, contract, pay or disciplinary disputes	HR, an employee representative or a qualified adviser	The answer depends on law, contract and policy, which this kit does not cover.
Suspected fraud or serious wrongdoing	The speaking-up or whistleblowing route	Raising it with the person concerned can put you, or the evidence, at risk.
Anything already in a formal procedure	The person who runs that procedure	A side conversation can harm the procedure and the people in it.
A large power gap, or fear of retaliation	A manager one level up, HR or an employee representative	The five steps assume that both people can speak freely.
A real conflict between two people in the room	Outside the session, with their manager or a trained mediator	A training room is an audience. It is not a safe place to settle it.

The five-step conversation

A simple order for a disagreement about work. It was written for this kit. It is not a validated model and it does not promise an agreement. Either person can use it, and the steps can repeat.

Step	What you do	Words you could use
1. Describe	Say what happened in facts that both of you could check: what, when and how often. Leave out “always”, “never” and guesses about motive.	“The figures reached me after 17:00 on Thursday for the last three reports.”
2. Say the effect	Say what it meant for the work or for you, in one or two sentences. Then stop.	“Nobody checks my commentary before it goes out.”
3. Ask	Ask for the other view with an open question. Listen. Say back what you heard before you answer it.	“What does report week look like from your side?” “So the export only runs on Wednesday night. Is that right?”
4. Find the needs	Ask what the other person needs and why. Say what you need and why. Look for the need behind the first request; it is often smaller.	“What would you do with the figures on Wednesday?” “What I need most is a second check, not the final numbers.”
5. Agree and set a check date	Agree one next step with an owner and a date, and a date to check how it went. If you cannot agree, agree what happens next and who else to involve.	“You send estimates by Wednesday 12:00. Let’s look at how it went on Friday 30 October.”

Preparation sheet

Notes are enough. In a practice round, write the first three lines in three minutes. For a real conversation, check the situation against “When not to use this practice” first, and keep this sheet private.

1. What happened, in facts that both of us could check

_____

_____

2. The effect on the work or on me

_____

_____

3. My open question for the other person

_____

_____

4. What I need, and why. What I guess they need

_____

_____

5. A next step I could offer, and a date to check how it went

_____

_____

Scenario cards: Person A

Give this page to Person A only, or cut it into five cards. All five situations are fictional. Person A opens the conversation.

Card	The situation you both know	Your brief: only Person A reads this
1. The shared deadline	You write the monthly service report together. It goes out on the last Friday of the month at 12:00. Person B supplies the figures and Person A writes the commentary. For the last three reports the figures reached Person A on Thursday after 17:00. The last report went out with a wrong total.	You want the figures by Wednesday 12:00. What Person B does not know: the colleague who checks your commentary works Monday to Wednesday. With Thursday figures nobody checks your work, and you had to explain the wrong total. You need a second check more than you need final figures early.
2. The booked room	Your floor has one small meeting room with a door and a screen. Person B has a repeating booking from 09:00 to 09:45 every working day. Twice this month Person A walked past at 09:15 and the room was empty. Person A asked in the team channel for the booking to be removed. Person B replied: “We need it.”	You want the repeating booking removed. What Person B does not know: you have a client call every Tuesday and Thursday from 09:30 to 10:00, and you have taken it twice from the corridor. You need the room on those two mornings only.
3. The thin handover	Person B works the early shift on the support desk and hands over to Person A at 14:00 with a written note. Twice this month Person A heard from a customer about a promise that was not in the note. Person A said in a team meeting that the notes are “too thin”. Person B said that Person A does not read them.	You want fuller notes. What Person B does not know: you do not need more text. You need three things: promises made to customers, anything due in the next 24 hours, and who to ask. Each missed promise cost you a hard call with a customer. You wish you had raised it in private first.
4. One designer, two teams	Your organisation has one designer for internal work. Person A, from the learning team, and Person B, from the internal communications team, have each asked for the designer’s whole next week. The designer has asked you to agree between you and to reply by tomorrow.	You want the whole week for the new induction course, which starts in three weeks. What Person B does not know: you need the designer for the slide template and six diagrams only, about two days. You asked for a week because your last request was cut in half.
5. The changed slides	Yesterday you both presented to a project group from one shared slide deck. One hour before the meeting Person B changed three figures on Person A’s slides and did not say so. Person A spoke from memory and gave the old figures. Someone in the group pointed out the difference.	You want Person B to stop editing your slides. What Person B does not know: you do not mind the corrections. You mind finding out in front of the group. Your phone was on silent because you were rehearsing. A short message, or a mark on each changed slide, would have been enough.

Scenario cards: Person B

Give this page to Person B only, or cut it into five cards. All five situations are fictional. Share your hidden detail when the other person's questions or words make room for it.

Card	The situation you both know	Your brief: only Person B reads this
1. The shared deadline	You write the monthly service report together. It goes out on the last Friday of the month at 12:00. Person B supplies the figures and Person A writes the commentary. For the last three reports the figures reached Person A on Thursday after 17:00. The last report went out with a wrong total.	You think Thursday is early enough: the report has never been late. What Person A does not know: the system export you depend on runs on Wednesday night. Before Thursday 09:00 you can send only estimates. You could send estimates on Wednesday, or final figures by Thursday 10:00, if you knew which one helps.
2. The booked room	Your floor has one small meeting room with a door and a screen. Person B has a repeating booking from 09:00 to 09:45 every working day. Twice this month Person A walked past at 09:15 and the room was empty. Person A asked in the team channel for the booking to be removed. Person B replied: "We need it."	You want to keep the booking. What Person A does not know: two people in your team join the daily check-in by video, and the open area has no screen and is too loud for them to follow. The check-in takes 15 minutes. You booked 45 minutes to be safe. You need a door and a screen for 15 minutes a day, not the whole slot.
3. The thin handover	Person B works the early shift on the support desk and hands over to Person A at 14:00 with a written note. Twice this month Person A heard from a customer about a promise that was not in the note. Person A said in a team meeting that the notes are "too thin". Person B said that Person A does not read them.	You think your notes are good enough. What Person A does not know: you are in a fixed call from 13:30 to 14:00 every day, so you write the note in the five minutes before that call. You would welcome a short fixed format, or a rule that the note is written at 13:00. You want to hear about problems in private, not in a team meeting.
4. One designer, two teams	Your organisation has one designer for internal work. Person A, from the learning team, and Person B, from the internal communications team, have each asked for the designer's whole next week. The designer has asked you to agree between you and to reply by tomorrow.	You want the whole week for the staff survey results pack. What Person A does not know: your publication date can move by one week, but your manager expects to see the first page on Friday. You need one day this week for that page. The rest can follow the week after.
5. The changed slides	Yesterday you both presented to a project group from one shared slide deck. One hour before the meeting Person B changed three figures on Person A's slides and did not say so. Person A spoke from memory and gave the old figures. Someone in the group pointed out the difference.	You think you did the right thing: the figures were out of date. What Person A does not know: the finance contact sent corrections 70 minutes before the meeting and asked you to update the deck. You called Person A once, got no answer and ran out of time. You need an agreed way to make late changes.

When a manager’s conversation belongs with HR

For cards 6 to 8 and for real conversations that a manager starts. A difficult conversation about a work issue is a manager’s everyday job. These situations are not: they go to HR or a formal process, and they are not for role-play.

If one of these comes up during the conversation, stop and say: “That matters, and it needs the right route. Let’s pause here. I will contact HR today, and we will come back to the work question when that is in place.” Follow your own organisation’s policy and local law. This table is a guide for trainers, not HR or legal advice.

Situation	What the manager does instead	Why
Performance that stays below the standard, a formal improvement plan or a capability procedure	Follow your organisation’s performance procedure, with HR. Have an informal talk first only if the procedure allows it.	The procedure sets the steps, the notice, the records and any right to be accompanied.
Suspected misconduct: dishonesty, deliberate damage or a serious breach of a rule	Do not investigate in a conversation. Write down the facts you saw and contact HR the same day.	Misconduct needs a fair investigation. An early talk can harm it, and the person in it.
Health, disability, pregnancy or a need for adjustments	Listen, do not ask for a diagnosis, and offer HR or occupational health at the person’s choice.	Health information is private and has its own rules.
Discrimination, harassment or bullying, by or against the team member	HR, or the grievance or dignity at work procedure.	It is a matter of rights and policy, not a work issue to agree between two people.
A grievance or complaint, raised before or during the conversation	Pause the conversation, thank the person and explain the grievance route. Come back to the work issue later.	A complaint needs a formal route, and it may be about you.
Pay, grade, contract, hours or dismissal	HR and the person’s contract.	A manager’s promise here can conflict with policy or law.

Preparation sheet: a difficult conversation you start

For the person who starts the conversation, usually the manager on cards 6 to 8. In a practice round, fill lines 2, 3 and 5 in three minutes. For a real conversation, start with line 1 and keep the sheet private.

1. Check first: does any part of this belong in “When a manager’s conversation belongs with HR”? If yes, stop and use that route.

2. What I have seen myself: dates, counts and words. Not what others told me

3. The effect on the work, the team or customers

4. What I have not said before, and my own part in it

5. My open question: what I do not know yet

6. What I ask for, and what I can offer

7. My first two sentences

8. The next step, the owner, the date and a check date

Scenario cards: the manager

Cards 6 to 8. Give this page to the person playing the manager only. All three situations are fictional. The manager opens the conversation.

When a real version of a card belongs with HR instead: Card 6: The late reports are already part of a formal performance procedure, or Person B says the reason is a health condition or a disability. Card 7: A colleague has made a complaint, or the behaviour includes insults, threats or remarks about someone's background. That is a grievance, bullying or discrimination matter for HR. Card 8: The manager suspects the errors were deliberate, which is misconduct, or a formal capability or disciplinary process has already started.

Card	The situation you both know	Your brief: only the manager reads this
6. The late weekly report	Person B prepares the weekly bookings report. It is due on Wednesday at 16:00. In the last six weeks it arrived late four times, by between three hours and one day, with no message before. Person A, the team manager, has asked Person B for 20 minutes in private.	You want the report on time. What Person B does not know: you read it on Wednesday evening for the regional meeting on Thursday at 09:00, and twice you went in without figures. A Thursday 08:00 deadline would also work. A date that moves without warning does not. So far you have only sent a message asking where the report is.
7. Talking over colleagues	In the weekly team meeting Person B often answers before others have finished. In the last two meetings Person A, the team manager, saw two colleagues stop mid-sentence when Person B came in. Person A has asked to talk after the next one-to-one.	You want everyone to be able to finish. What Person B does not know: a colleague also mentioned it to you in private and asked not to be named. Describe only what you saw yourself, and do not name or quote the colleague. You value Person B's ideas and want them heard, later in the turn.
8. Errors in client bookings	Person B enters course bookings for client organisations. In October, 4 of 31 bookings had a wrong course date and two people came on the wrong day. One client complained to the director. Person A, the team manager, has asked Person B to meet.	You want the errors to stop. What Person B does not know: you are not looking for someone to blame. The director asked what you will change, and you need a check that works. You also know that nobody showed Person B the new booking form in September.

Scenario cards: the team member

Cards 6 to 8. Give this page to the person playing the team member only. All three situations are fictional. Share your hidden detail when the manager's questions or words make room for it.

Card	The situation you both know	Your brief: only the team member reads this
6. The late weekly report	Person B prepares the weekly bookings report. It is due on Wednesday at 16:00. In the last six weeks it arrived late four times, by between three hours and one day, with no message before. Person A, the team manager, has asked Person B for 20 minutes in private.	You know the report has been late. What the manager does not know: since September another team lead has asked you for an urgent data pull every Tuesday afternoon, and you thought you had to say yes. You did not want to complain about a colleague. You want to know which work comes first.
7. Talking over colleagues	In the weekly team meeting Person B often answers before others have finished. In the last two meetings Person A, the team manager, saw two colleagues stop mid-sentence when Person B came in. Person A has asked to talk after the next one-to-one.	You did not know there was a problem. What the manager does not know: the meeting always runs over, and you have a customer call at 10:00 straight after it, so you try to speed things up. You would welcome a fixed end time, or a turn for each person.
8. Errors in client bookings	Person B enters course bookings for client organisations. In October, 4 of 31 bookings had a wrong course date and two people came on the wrong day. One client complained to the director. Person A, the team manager, has asked Person B to meet.	You feel bad about the errors and expect to be blamed. What the manager does not know: since September the booking form fills the date field with today's date and you type over it. When you are interrupted, the default stays. You have a fix in mind: an empty date field, or a second person checks the dates every Friday.

Observer sheet

One sheet per round. Make a mark each time you hear a behaviour, and write exact words where you can. This is a count of what you heard. It is not a score of the person, and a higher count is not always better.

Card: _____ Person A: _____ Person B: _____ Round: 1 / 2 / 3

What to listen for	Person A	Person B	Exact words
Described what happened as facts			
Said the effect on the work			
Asked an open question			
Said back what they heard			
Named a need and its reason			
Offered or asked for an option			

Did each hidden detail come out? Which question or sentence made room for it?

_____

_____

What was agreed: the step, the owner, the date and the check date

_____

_____

One thing to keep and one thing to try

_____

_____

Filled example: preparation for card 1

A fictional round of card 1, “The shared deadline”. These are Person A’s notes from the three minutes of preparation.

Part	Person A’s notes
What happened, in facts	The figures for the last three reports reached me on Thursday after 17:00. The last report went out with a wrong total.
The effect on the work or on me	Nobody checks my commentary before it goes out. I had to explain the wrong total to the department head.
My open question	“What does report week look like from your side?”
What I need, and why	A second check on my commentary. My reviewer works Monday to Wednesday.
What I guess they need	Enough time to get the figures right. I do not know what decides their timing. I will ask.
A next step I could offer, and a check date	Figures, or something I can write against, by Wednesday 12:00. Look at how it went after the October report, on Friday 30 October.

Filled example: observer notes for card 1

The observer’s sheet for the same fictional round. Times heard: Person A 10, Person B 7, 17 in the round. All six behaviours were heard at least once, and five of them from both people.

What to listen for	Person A	Person B	Exact words and notes
Described what happened as facts	2	1	A: “The figures reached me after 17:00 on Thursday for the last three reports.”
Said the effect on the work	1	0	A: “Nobody checks my commentary before it goes out.”
Asked an open question	3	1	A: “What does report week look like from your side?” B: “What would you do with the figures on Wednesday?”
Said back what they heard	1	2	B: “So it is the check you need, not the final numbers.”
Named a need and its reason	2	1	A: “I need a second pair of eyes, and my reviewer works Monday to Wednesday.”
Offered or asked for an option	1	2	B: “I could send estimates on Wednesday and final figures by Thursday 10:00.”
Hidden details	–	–	Both came out. B’s after A’s first open question. A’s after B asked what A would do with the figures on Wednesday.
What was agreed	–	–	B sends estimates by Wednesday 28 October 12:00 and final figures by Thursday 29 October 10:00. A swaps the numbers in. Both look at how it went on Friday 30 October at 14:00.
One thing to keep, one to try	–	–	Keep: “What would you do with the figures on Wednesday?” It found the real need. Try: A said “late as usual” once. Give the time and the count and leave out “as usual”.

Facilitator run of show

1 Open, and say what this practice is not | 7 minutes

Two minutes: explain the purpose. Say: “We will rehearse ordinary disagreements with invented situations, so that the words are ready when we need them. This is skills practice. It is not mediation, therapy or legal advice.” Three minutes: show the table “When not to use this practice” and let people read it. Say: “If a situation of yours is on this list, the right step is a manager, HR or the formal procedure, not a better sentence.” Two minutes: agree the rules. The scenarios are fictional, nobody plays a real conflict with a person in the room, observers count words and do not judge people, and anyone can pause a round or pass. With managers using cards 6 to 8, show “When a manager’s conversation belongs with HR” in the same three minutes and say: “Performance procedures, misconduct, health, discrimination and grievances go to HR or the formal route, not into a practice round.”

2 Show the five steps and demonstrate an opening | 8 minutes

Three minutes: walk through the five steps: describe, say the effect, ask, find the needs, agree and set a check date. Three minutes: take a card you will not use in the rounds and play Person A with a volunteer as Person B. Open badly on purpose: “You always block that room and you never use it.” Stop after one minute. Two minutes: ask the group which words would make Person B defend, then open again with a fact and an effect: “The room was empty at 09:15 on two days this month. I took a client call from the corridor.”

3 Round 1 | 13 minutes

Form trios: Person A, Person B and an observer. Three minutes: A and B each read only their own card and note a first sentence and one open question on the preparation sheet; the observer reads the observer sheet. Six minutes: the conversation. Person A opens. Four minutes: the observer reads out the tally and the exact words for two minutes, then B and A each take one minute on what they would keep or change. On cards 6 to 8, Person A is the manager and opens; Person B is the team member. The manager uses lines 2, 3 and 5 of the manager preparation sheet in the three minutes.

4 Round 2 | 13 minutes

Rotate the roles: A becomes the observer, B becomes A and the observer becomes B. Use a new card and the same timing. Say: “This time, do not offer a solution until each of you has said back what the other needs.” In a group of four, one observer tallies Person A and the other tallies Person B.

5 Round 3 | 13 minutes

Rotate again so that each person in a trio has held each role once. Use a third card and the same timing. Say: “End with one next step, an owner, a date and a check date. If you cannot agree, agree what happens next and who else you would involve.” Walk between the groups and listen for check dates.

6 Group debrief | 9 minutes

Six minutes: bring the trios together and ask for words, not people. “Which question brought out the hidden detail?” “What did the other person need that you had not guessed?” “Which check dates did you agree?” Collect useful phrases on a shared list or in the chat. Three minutes: ask, “How would these scenarios have to change before a peer conversation is the wrong tool?” Connect the answers to the table from the opening.

7 Prepare one real conversation and close | 7 minutes

Four minutes of private writing on a clean preparation sheet. Each person chooses a real, low-stakes disagreement about work with someone who is not in the room, checks it against the table, and writes the facts, the effect and one open question. Nobody shares the situation or a name. Three minutes: each person shares one phrase they will use, aloud or in the chat, or passes. Managers who will start a difficult conversation use the manager preparation sheet instead and answer line 1, the HR check, before anything else.

Reference tables

Filled example: manager preparation for card 6

A fictional manager's preparation for card 6, with the HR check first.

Part	The manager's notes
HR check	None applies. No formal procedure has started, and nothing points to health, misconduct or a complaint. If Person B raises one, I pause.
What I have seen myself	The report arrived after Wednesday 16:00 on 4 of the last 6 Wednesdays, between three hours and one day late. No message came before any of them.
The effect	I went into two regional meetings on Thursday at 09:00 without figures and sent them afterwards.
Not said before, and my part	I never said why Wednesday matters. I only ever asked where the report was. I have not asked what else is on Person B's desk.
My open question	"What do Tuesday and Wednesday look like for you at the moment?"
What I ask for, and what I offer	The report by Wednesday 16:00, or a message by 12:00 if it will be late. I can move the deadline to Thursday 08:00, and I can speak to anyone who asks for urgent work.
My first two sentences	"I want to talk about the weekly report. It came in after Wednesday 16:00 four times in the last six weeks, and I went into two regional meetings without figures."
Next step and check date	Agreed on Monday 19 October: the report by Wednesday 16:00 from Wednesday 21 October, or a message by 12:00. I speak to the other team lead about Tuesday requests. We check on Thursday 5 November, after three reports.

What the observer counts

The observer makes one mark each time a behaviour is heard, for Person A and for Person B. The count guides the notes. It is not a score of the person.

Behaviour	What counts	Example words
Described what happened as facts	A time, a date, a count or an event that both people could check. "You always" and guesses about motive do not count.	"The room was empty at 09:15 on two days this month."

Behaviour	What counts	Example words
Said the effect on the work	What it meant for the work or for the speaker, without blame.	“I took a client call from the corridor.”
Asked an open question	A question that starts with what, how or which and that the speaker did not answer for the other person.	“What do you use the room for at nine?”
Said back what they heard	A summary of the other person’s words before replying to them.	“So you need a screen for 15 minutes. Is that right?”
Named a need and its reason	Their own need with the reason, or a question about the other person’s need.	“I need the room on Tuesday and Thursday, because of a client call.”
Offered or asked for an option	A concrete option, or a request for one. Not a demand repeated.	“Could the booking end at 09:20?”

Choose three cards for your group

For the 70-minute session, pick three cards. Cards 1 and 2 are the easiest to start with. For difficult conversations training with managers, use cards 6, 7 and 8, one per round. Keep one spare card for the demonstration.

If your group disagrees about…	Use card	What makes it hard
Deadlines and late input	1. The shared deadline	Each person thinks the other’s date is a preference. Both dates have a reason.
Shared space and bookings	2. The booked room	The first exchange was a short message in a channel, and both people dug in.
Handovers between shifts or projects	3. The thin handover	A criticism was made in front of the team, so there is something to repair first.
Priorities between two teams	4. One designer, two teams	Both people asked for more than they need, and there is a deadline to reply.
Changes to someone else’s work	5. The changed slides	One person was embarrassed in public. The other thinks they did the right thing.
A manager raising missed deadlines	6. The late weekly report	So far the manager has only asked where the report is. The reason sits with another team lead.
A manager raising behaviour in meetings	7. Talking over colleagues	The manager must describe only what they saw, without naming the colleague who spoke up.
A manager raising a quality problem	8. Errors in client bookings	The team member expects blame. The cause is partly a form nobody explained.

Debrief and next steps

Questions for reflection

- Which exact question brought out the other person’s hidden detail, and what had you assumed before you heard it?
- What did the other person need that was smaller, or different, than what they first asked for?

- Which words made it easier to keep listening, and which words made you want to defend yourself?
- What check date did you agree, and what will each of you look at on that date?

Adapt the session

- For 3 to 5 people, run one trio, a trio and a pair, or a group of four with two observers. A pair works without an observer: after the conversation each person fills in the observer sheet for the other and they compare.
- For a 45-minute version, keep the opening (7 minutes) and the five steps with the demonstration (8), run two rounds (26) and close with one phrase each (4). Do not shorten the opening. With two rounds, each person in a trio holds two of the three roles.
- Online, use breakout rooms of three and send each brief by private chat before the rooms open. Share the observer sheet as an editable document and paste the round timing in each room. Cameras are optional; the observer can work from audio or captions.
- For people who prefer not to role-play, offer the observer role in every round, or a written version: Person A writes the first three sentences, Person B writes a reply, and both mark the five steps in the text. Passing is always allowed and needs no reason. Send the cards as plain text a day early to anyone who asks.
- To write your own cards, keep them fictional and low-stakes: a disagreement about time, space, tools or priorities between people of equal standing. Give each side one detail that the other does not know. Do not use a real dispute from the team, and do not use any situation from the table “When not to use this practice”. For difficult conversations training with managers, run cards 6, 7 and 8, one per round; the timing stays the same. Do not use a real case from a manager’s team, and do not write a card about anything in “When a manager’s conversation belongs with HR”.

After the session

Send the five steps and the table “When not to use this practice” to the group within one working day. Ask each person to use the steps once in a real, low-stakes disagreement within two weeks, and to note afterwards whether a next step and a check date were agreed. At the next session, spend five minutes on what people noticed, without names or details of colleagues. If someone tells you about a situation from the table, do not coach them through it; point them to their manager, HR or the formal procedure. Managers who prepared a real difficult conversation keep the preparation sheet private and check line 1 again on the day.

Questions people ask

What are good conflict resolution activities for adults at work?

Short role-plays of ordinary disagreements, with a separate brief for each side and an observer, work well: each person holds a detail the other does not know, so the conversation only moves when someone asks and listens. This kit uses five fictional situations between colleagues: a shared deadline, a booked meeting room, a thin handover, one designer wanted by two teams, and slides changed without notice. Three more cards are difficult conversations that a manager starts.

Which conflicts should not be practised or handled this way?

Harassment, discrimination, bullying, threats, safety risks, legal, contract, pay or disciplinary disputes, suspected wrongdoing, anything already in a formal procedure, and any situation with a large power gap or a fear of retaliation. These belong with a manager, HR or the formal process. Nobody role-plays a real conflict with a person in the room. The table “When not to use this practice” is the first sheet in the kit.

Is this mediation, or a conflict style test?

No. It is skills practice for a conversation between two colleagues, or between a manager and a team member. It is not mediation, therapy or legal advice, and it does not train mediators. It uses no conflict-style questionnaire and no personality typing; the five steps were written for this kit and are not a validated model. The observer counts behaviours heard, which is not a score of the person.

How is this different from the communication skills activities and the feedback training exercises?

The communication role-play cards practise six everyday moves where nobody disagrees, such as explaining a change. The feedback training exercises practise one person giving feedback to another. Here both people want something different, each holds a hidden detail, and the round ends with a next step and a check date. The active listening exercises are a useful warm-up for step 3.

Can I use this for difficult conversations training with managers?

Yes. Cards 6 to 8 are difficult conversations that a manager starts about a work issue: a report that keeps arriving late, a team member who talks over colleagues and errors in client bookings. Each card has a brief for both sides, and the team member holds a detail the manager does not know. Use the manager preparation sheet and the table “When a manager’s conversation belongs with HR”: performance procedures, misconduct, health, discrimination and grievances go to HR or the formal process, not into a practice round. The 70-minute plan and the trios stay the same. The new manager training kit practises a different conversation: a first one-to-one that sets expectations before any problem.

What is included in the free and editable files?

The open PDF has the table of situations not to practise, the five steps, the preparation sheet, the Person A and Person B cards, the HR boundary for manager conversations, the manager preparation sheet, the manager and team member cards for cards 6 to 8, the observer sheet, three filled examples and the 70-minute facilitator plan. Subscribers also receive the editable Word file, an Excel workbook with the session plan, all eight cards, a manager preparation sheet that checks the HR boundary first, an observer tally that counts what was heard in each round, a trio planner and a next-step tracker, and a CSV of the session plan.

Use and sharing

Free to use and adapt in your own training sessions, including paid client work. Do not resell or redistribute the unmodified download as a standalone product. Share the resource page instead.