

Navigating issues in the workplace

For this activity, you'll read through three office conflicts and answer questions that require you to consider each person's point of view. To get started, create a group with two of your classmates, then spend five minutes discussing each scenario and the corresponding questions. When the 15 minutes are up, you'll come back together as a class to reflect as a group.

Scenario 1:
Hans recently found he was passed up for a promotion he thought he was sure to get. He's been working toward it for over a year - bringing in new clients, offering innovative ideas, mentoring new employees, and regularly receiving positive feedback from his boss, Carmen. It turns out Jermaine, whose parents went to college with Carmen, was given a promotion instead, and Hans believes this affiliation had something to do with her choosing him for the role. In reality, Carmen wasn't aware that Hans was interested in a promotion because he hadn't mentioned wanting to take on a leadership role and, as an introvert, seems to be happy as an individual contributor. Jermaine, on the other hand, has been very open about his desire to lead others and, unbeknownst to Hans, recently took a leadership workshop through the company's training program.

1. What assumptions did each person make and how did they influence the situation?
2. What could each person have done differently to avoid miscommunication?
3. What actions should each person take next to resolve negative feelings and better clarify expectations in the future?

Scenario 2:
Charlotte and Demitri split management responsibilities for the same team. They often talk through ideas to get each other's feedback and come up with a cohesive approach for department-wide initiatives. Recently, they decided they would update the team's flexible work policy. While Charlotte meets with human resources, determines eligibility criteria, and maps out an action plan, Demitri doesn't contribute anything to the execution because he feels Charlotte has it handled. During the next monthly management meeting, without discussing with Charlotte, Demitri tells the team about the new initiative and how he believes it will boost employee engagement and morale – all without mentioning Charlotte's

involvement. The team's vice president praises Demitri and thanks him for his hard work. Charlotte is stunned but doesn't say a word. After all, it's not about her, it's about the impact to the team.

1. What could each person have done differently leading up to the meeting to avoid this conflict?
2. Should Charlotte have spoken up during the meeting? If so, what could she have said?
3. What should be done after the meeting to resolve any negative feelings and avoid this situation in the future?

Scenario 3:
Sandra has impressive technical expertise and is an amazing problem solver, which has made her a go-to person on the team. Unfortunately, her people skills aren't quite as strong. She often rubs people the wrong way with her abrasive humor, which has made some colleagues hesitant to approach her. Justin often complains about Sandra's humor to Ricky and tells him how he goes out of his way to make sure she doesn't join the group for lunch. One day, after witnessing an unpleasant situation between Sandra and another colleague (Jill), Ricky pulls her aside as curiously asks, "Sandra, is everything alright? I didn't mean to eavesdrop, but Jill seemed a little uncomfortable with your joke." Sandra was surprised because she didn't notice Jill's reaction, but after talking through the situation with Ricky, thanked him for saying something and said she would be more mindful of her jokes in the future.

1. What factors led Sandra to continue telling uncomfortable jokes?
2. Was Justin's behavior surprising? Why or why not?
3. Was Ricky's behavior surprising? Why or why not?