



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive



## Creating a Positive Work Environment in our Health Services A Useful Guide for Staff, HR Practitioners and Line Managers

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## **Foreword**

A 'Positive' workplace can mean the difference between success and failure for an organisation. A good relationship among employees leads to improved teamwork and, in turn, to a more responsive client/patient-focused service.

Led by Human Resources staff, a Positive Workplaces Strategy Group was instigated with input from relevant stakeholders including Occupational Health service, service managers and trade union representatives. The Guide produced by this group has looked at best practice in creating a positive workplace environment at each of our locations. It includes guidance to managers on minimising the potential for conflicts in the workplace, and on managing conflicts if and when they arise. The Guide emphasises the need for early intervention by line managers to prevent workplace conflicts escalating.

The Guide does not replace existing policies and procedures such as Dignity at Work, Trust in Care or the Grievance and Disciplinary procedures. Line managers and employees may still have recourse to these if required. However, the Guide, if used properly, will promote appropriate behaviour among employees that should facilitate a positive workplace environment. It should also allow inappropriate behaviour to be identified more promptly as a potential cause of conflict so that any necessary interventions can be made.

Creating a positive workplace environment and managing conflict at work if it should arise is an integral part of good people management. The principles and good practice outlined in this Guide is a useful aide to managers and employees of the HSE.

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## **Introduction**

### ***A Positive Workplace***

A high performing and committed workforce is critical to the delivery of Health and Social Care. In the current climate, it is important that all employees work collaboratively and effectively in a spirit of co-operation and mutual respect to maximise service delivery to the public.

A positive workplace exists when employees are fully engaged and willing to help their co-workers and when staff members, managers and employers openly recognise the talents and contributions each team member brings to the work environment.

A positive workplace consists of employees who enjoy and are passionate about their work and who exhibit both personal and professional pride in the services they provide to their patients and clients. Employees who look forward to coming to work each day and who interact with their co-workers in a collaborative and collegial manner create a positive workplace. They are fully engaged with an enthusiastic approach to work and act on the belief that their working relationships have a positive impact.

Most people in the HSE work as part of a team and a positive workplace culture is created when there is a common sense of purpose and pride in the team and all team members are treated with dignity and respect. In a positive, motivating environment employees feel free to give their best effort as they believe it will yield constructive results.

Managers foster a positive working environment by engaging with their teams in a transparent and equitable manner, promoting a culture of involvement and consultation, in addition to recognising positive contributions. While a degree of challenge is inevitable where groups of people work together, and can be healthy in challenging us all about the way we operate; unresolved conflict and negative behaviours ultimately impact on the work

environment, the health and wellbeing of the employees concerned as well as the quality of service delivery.

Managers must be able to adapt their leadership to suit the demands of the situation and the people involved, maintaining ethical, personal and professional standards at all times. They should inspire others, leading by example, and maintaining a calm and controlled style across all situations, serving as a calming influence for staff when they encounter demanding situations.

### **Management Standards**

Managers should be seen to take responsibility for their own health, wellbeing and work-life balance and encourage their staff to do likewise. Going to work is generally good for us, but only if our health, safety and welfare are protected. Preventing ill-health and absence due to work-related stress is an important part of creating a good working environment for your staff.

People can get confused about the difference between 'pressure' and 'stress'. We all experience pressure regularly and it can motivate us to perform at our best. It is when we experience too much pressure and feel unable to cope that stress can result.

Managers at all levels of the Organisation should be aware of the Management Standards for tackling Workplace Stress, to help them manage the causes of work-related stress.

The Standards refer to Six areas of work that can lead to stress if not properly managed.

## Management Standards for Addressing Workplace Stress

**Demands:** This includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment.

**Control:** How much say the person has in the way they do their work.

**Support:** this includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.

**Relationships:** This includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

**Role:** Whether people understand their role or within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles.

**Change:** How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

Managers are responsible for carrying out psychosocial risk assessments at regular intervals (at least annually) and reviewing them particularly in times of significant change in the work area. Advice in relation to these assessments is available from the local Occupational health department.

*Supporting staff is a key organisational objective.*

*Within each service area is a dedicated Employee Assistance Programme or Service designed to assist and support staff through a number of measures. The contact details for this service are contained on Page of this Guide.*

## Conflict Management

Conflict is an inherent part of the employment relationship. Modern organisations are dynamic and complex, made up of people with increasingly diverse backgrounds, opinions, values and expectations about work. Cross – signals leading to misunderstandings, disagreements and ultimately conflicts may be due to perceptive differences, i.e. in the way that individuals see the world.

The continuous change experienced in the Health Service with an ever increasing pressure to deliver quality services to our clients, can also lead to increased conflict. Managers are tasked to provide a challenging, developmental and supportive work environment, which respects the dignity of all.

A certain degree of healthy conflict, for example, fair competition between individuals to excel in their roles, can be a good thing and can help to create innovation within teams. However, tension can lead to discord and start to create negative conflict. It is when an initial disagreement is not managed properly that the situation can deteriorate and the conflict spiral.

Line managers typically have to play multiple roles in today's workplace. It is not surprising that many shy away from having those difficult conversations with staff, particularly if they lack the skills or training to handle complex situations that have become personalised. If conflict is not managed directly and at an early stage, helping the parties to resolve their differences will be much more difficult.

Line managers often rely on their HR Departments to manage conflict, as managers shy away from managing disputes in case they do or say something that might be held against them during any formal proceedings. This approach is counterproductive, as by the time the dispute has escalated to formal procedures, opinions are often hardened and confrontational stances on both sides have developed that can be difficult to change.

To prevent this, it is essential that line managers have the skills, knowledge and confidence to identify and manage workplace disagreements and bullying and harassment complaints at an early stage. Informal and early intervention by management and the use of the confidential Mediation Process are strongly recommended to provide an early resolution option in conflict situations before engagement with formal processes.

Management style can also be a significant cause of conflict and stress at work. Managers need to have the appropriate people management skills to ensure the way they manage is not affecting the health and well-being of the individuals within their department or team. One of the challenges facing many managers is that they have been promoted as a result of their clinical or technical knowledge or skill rather than how to manage people. This guide is designed to help managers understand the positive competencies and behaviours that lead to more motivated, committed and harmonious teams.

## **Section 1: Creating a Positive Work Environment:**

### ***A Competency Framework for Line Managers***

#### **The Stages of Conflict**

It is not always easy to pinpoint when a disagreement becomes a conflict because of the different ways that people react. However, there are distinct stages in the lifecycle of conflict, where people display certain common behaviours. It can be helpful to recognise these (Table 1)

**Table 1: The conflict lifecycle**

*(Reference: Mediation: An Employer's Guide, CIPD (2008))*

<b>Stage of Conflict</b>	<b>Behaviours or signs</b>
<b>Beginning</b>	<b>Incompatible goals Open or covert conflict Avoidance of conflict Tension becomes noticeable</b>
<b>Early Growth</b>	<b>Confrontation Polarisation of positions Seeking allies More overt signs of conflict</b>
<b>Deadlock</b>	<b>Conflict at its peak Blame apportioned Communications cease between parties Entrenched positions</b>
<b>Look for a way out of the conflict</b>	<b>An acceptance that the problem needs sorting out</b>
<b>Working together for a solution</b>	<b>Collaborating Consensus</b>

## Understanding conflict styles

People have different styles in how they respond to conflict, and their styles can vary depending on their level of emotional investment in the issue at hand or their power relationship with the other party to the conflict.

The different conflict styles are commonly defined as incorporating concern for self and concern for others in varying degrees:

Concern for self	HIGH	Collaborating or Integrating	Competing or Dominating
	LOW	Accommodating or Obliging	Avoiding
		HIGH	LOW
		Concern for others	

Each of these styles has advantages and disadvantages for the individual, depending on the context in which they are used. However, it is self evident that the **collaborating style** of responding to workplace conflicts has the higher likelihood of producing outcomes for the benefit of all involved. People using this style assume a problem-solving approach, and actively aim to defuse negative emotions and find a mutually satisfying solution to problems.

People with habitual **avoiding or dominant** styles often antagonise others and produce further conflict by their manner of communication. People with a habitual **accommodating** style can frustrate others and develop feelings of resentment over the neglect of their own needs, which again can feed future conflict.

It is useful for staff and managers to develop an awareness of their predominant style of responding to conflict, and to recognise the impact of the different conflict styles on others. With practice and motivation people can learn to adopt and use new conflict styles according

to the needs of the situation. Through counselling, conflict coaching or training in conflict resolution staff can be made aware of the characteristics of each conflict style and how each contributes positively and negatively to the course and outcome of conflict.

As manager you may note chronic low level disagreements where one or more staff are displaying signs of avoiding, dominating or accommodating behaviours. You should consider whether these are warning signs of potential conflict requiring intervention and support for staff.

### **Why intervene?**

When managers encounter disagreements or problematic behaviours in their staff they may assume the attitude of "it will pass" or "they're adults, they can sort it out for themselves". They do so at risk of minor disagreements or misunderstandings escalating over time into full-blown conflict, with negative behaviours that can affect a whole team.

Some of the negative effects of unresolved conflict are:

- › time and energy is diverted away from activities to accomplish organisational goals
- › inappropriate behaviours, disharmony, poor communication and/or lowered morale
- › poor cooperation, reduced motivation and collaboration, and/or lowered productivity, and
- › stress-related symptoms, absenteeism and/or staff resignations

Timely intervention that is positive, inclusive and thorough has the following benefits:

- › workplace culture that can tolerate creative tension
- › reduces the risk of escalation and people becoming entrenched in their respective positions
- › provides the opportunity for exploring ideas and alternative approaches to problems
- › enables a deeper and broader understanding of issues impacting on staff or project progress
- › increases staff members desire to collaborate and strengthens their commitment to work together to achieve workplace goals

***Choosing not to intervene in a timely manner can make a conflict situation often more difficult to resolve in the long term***

This guide draws on the key management behaviours that are important in helping line managers prevent and manage conflict in the workplace, focusing on the informal processes available to resolve issues.

**Table 2: Creating a Positive Work Environment: A Competency Framework for Managers**  
 (Reference: CIPD Guide: Managing Conflict at Work, A Guide for Line Managers (2008) / Office for Health Management: Management Competency User Pack)

**Creating a Positive Work Environment:  
 A Competency Framework for Managers - Action Orientation (i)**

Competency	Indicators of effective manager behaviour	Indicators of less effective management Behaviour
<u>Dealing with Issues</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Intervening in a timely and constructive fashion to resolve conflict between individuals or groups.</li> <li>&gt; Dealing with conflict head-on</li> <li>&gt; Dealing with a disruptive team member when necessary</li> <li>&gt; Follow up on conflicts after resolution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Avoiding confrontation, allowing conflicts to remain unresolved to the detriment of efficiency and harmony in their area.</li> <li>&gt; Leaving conflicts between team members to sort out themselves</li> <li>&gt; Not addressing inappropriate behavior</li> <li>&gt; Allowing situations to develop before intervening</li> <li>&gt; Stepping in to intervene in conflicts without understanding the issues</li> </ul>

**Creating a Positive Work Environment:**

**A Competency Framework for Managers - Action Orientation (ii)**

Competency	Indicators of effective manager Behaviour	Indicators of less effective management Behaviour
<p><b><u>Knowledge and Use of Official Processes</u></b></p> <p><b><u>(Dignity at Work, Trust in Care, Grievance &amp; Disciplinary Procedures)</u></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Communicating policies and procedures to each staff member</li> <li>› Intervening early and resolving conflicts unofficially, if possible</li> <li>› Use of all available processes to deal with serious incidents</li> <li>› Escalation of issues to senior management where appropriate</li> <li>› Referral of cases to the mediation service where appropriate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Making a complaint official before seeking to resolve locally</li> <li>› Making a complaint official against the complainant’s wishes</li> <li>› Not following correct policy and procedure in dealing with an issue</li> </ul>

**Creating a Positive Work Environment:**

**A Competency Framework for Managers - Team Focus (iii)**

<b>Competency</b>	<b>Indicators of effective manager Behaviour</b>	<b>Indicators of less effective management Behaviour</b>
<b><u>Participative Approach</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Remaining neutral in a conflict situation</li> <li>› Speaking individually to each party</li> <li>› Bringing both sides together to communicate and gather ideas of how to address their issues</li> <li>› Supporting both sides in any complaints procedure</li> <li>› Gather ideas of how to address the issue with the team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Taking sides</li> <li>› Not giving equal time to each side of the conflict</li> <li>› Not listening to employees complaints</li> <li>› Failing to consult with those involved in addressing the issues</li> </ul>
<b><u>Monitoring Team Relationships</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Being aware of tension and keeping it at a low level</li> <li>› Picking up on disagreements before they lead to conflict</li> </ul>	

## Creating a Positive Work Environment:

### A Competency Framework for Managers - Personal Style (iv)

Competency	Indicators of effective manager Behaviour	Indicators of less effective management Behaviour
<b><u>Acting as a Role Model</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Maintaining professionalism, acting in a manner that is consistent with the organisation's values and vision</li> <li>› Being clear about expectations of team conduct</li> <li>› Not tolerating backbiting in the team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Taking sides</li> <li>› Not giving equal time to each side of the conflict</li> <li>› Not listening to employees complaints</li> <li>› Failing to consult with those involved in addressing the issues</li> </ul>
<b><u>Integrity</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Keeps employee issues private and confidential</li> <li>› Treating all employees with the same importance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Not treating all staff with dignity and respect</li> <li>› Making public where complaints have come from</li> <li>› Threatening staff unfairly with disciplinary action</li> </ul>

## **Dealing with Issues**

It is important that line managers have the knowledge, skills and confidence to be able to intervene at an early stage in disputes before they escalate.

### ***Intervening quickly in cases of conflict***

Managers should be sensitive to when banter becomes bickering or when teasing starts to have a hurtful edge. They should be prepared to step in and have a quiet word with the team members involved. The manager should inform those involved that while lively interaction is encouraged, it is important that there is mutual respect and that certain standards of behaviour are expected in the workplace. The manager should have noted examples of types of behaviour or language that have been used that are inappropriate so that those involved will understand what is unacceptable.

It is much easier to have this conversation as soon as the manager starts to have concerns about behaviour or early signs of conflict to prevent habits from being formed and to ensure that the manager is taken seriously. Similarly where a manager has appeared to give certain behaviours tacit approval by letting a situation continue for weeks or months, it has the potential to become contentious and detract from the team dynamic or workplace environment.

### ***Dealing with conflict head on***

Taking action to manage conflict is a core part of a manager's role and responsibilities. If managers ignore unacceptable behaviour, problems will escalate until the disciplinary process has to be used or a grievance lodged, by which time it will be more difficult to achieve a successful resolution.

Some examples of behaviour and performance that can cause conflict include:

- › Being overly critical
- › Having a short temper

- › Taking out personal problems on people at work
- › Making personal remarks
- › Not sharing information
- › Talking about people behind their backs
- › Avoiding unpopular team tasks
- › Poor time-keeping or attendance

Managers should not ignore underlying tensions that are developing in their teams, being mindful that it is the more subtle behaviours that over time, if not confronted, will lead to workplace disputes. It is vital that line managers have one-to-one conversations and catch-ups with people they manage so that these kind of issues can be aired naturally where possible. Managers must also be proactive and initiate informal discussions if they think a problem is brewing.

If a major disagreement occurs and someone loses their temper it is important that they are taken out of the situation or away from the person or people that the dispute is with until they calm down. If this does not happen then the possibility exists that someone will say or do something that could become a bigger source of grievance than the original problem.

Once the disputing parties have been separated it will be possible to have a calmer and more rational conversation about what sparked the disagreement and start to consider a possible resolution.

Conflict at work can lead to absences, so return-to-work interviews are also a good opportunity for managers to ask questions about conflict issues that might be affecting employees.

### ***Dealing with a Disruptive Team member***

In some circumstances there may be personality clashes that are hard to resolve and remain an ongoing source of stress or tension, or a particular member of staff who consistently causes tension or conflict. In some cases it may be possible to consider moving an individual to another job, role or team, which they may be more suited to. This should only be considered following full consultation with the individual.

If an individual's behaviour is consistently disruptive and does not improve after attempts to resolve matters informally then the line manager will have to consider utilising the disciplinary process. This will ensure that the individual concerned understands the seriousness of the situation, and the standards of behaviour and performance that are expected going forward.

Recognising the point at which formal disciplinary action must be taken is an important judgement that line managers have to make. Human Resources can provide useful advice at this point.

### ***Following up on Conflicts after Resolution***

Managers need to be aware that even after a conflict has been resolved, it is important to continue to monitor the situation, as one party or another may continue to feel aggrieved. Managers need to talk to the individuals informally to determine whether there are any renewed tensions or conflict, and to ensure that old disagreements are not brewing again.

## **Use of Official Processes**

### ***Communicating Policies, Procedures and Services available***

Line managers should ensure that all staff understands the Human Resource policies that are in place including the Dignity at Work and Trust in Care policies as well as the formal Grievance and Disciplinary procedures.

Managers should be proactive in utilising these resources, policies and procedures when the situation demands it.

Used properly, these procedures can reassure those involved that the matter is being taken seriously and dealt with consistently and fairly.

These policies involve a combination of formal and informal approaches. Line Managers should attempt to resolve issues as informally as possible, seeking advice if necessary from more senior management or from their local or central human resource departments.

## **Appropriate Referral of Cases to the Mediation Service**

The Mediation Service provides a confidential and independent service within the Human Resources Department, working with individuals and teams to assist them in addressing and resolving conflict by reaching mutually acceptable solutions and getting working relationships back on track.

The mediators on the Mediation Service panel are based in locations across the whole health service. Each mediator is trained and accredited to the standards set out by the Mediators' Institute of Ireland (MII). Each mediator is also a member of the MII.

All cases are dealt with in accordance with the principles of impartiality, integrity, fairness and confidentiality, with respect for all parties to the dispute and in accordance with the Code of Ethics of the Mediators' Institute of Ireland.

Cases can be referred to the service by the Employee Relations Departments, Human Resources and Service Managers across the HSE, Union Representatives as well as direct referrals by individual staff members.

The Dignity at work policy promotes the use of mediation in bullying and harassment cases.

***Mediation is also useful in other types of workplace disputes such as:***

- › Interpersonal disputes
- › Conflicts arising from equality and diversity
- › Manager/staff difficulties
- › Breakdown of a working relationship
- › Issues arising from a grievance or disciplinary procedure

***Managers should encourage engagement in the mediation process when:***

- › Attempts by the manager to resolve the issues locally have been unsuccessful
- › Either party is unwilling to discuss issues with the manager
- › The Manager feels that they will be seen as biased towards one of the parties if they intervene
- › The parties in conflict have different line managers
- › The conflict is between the manager and a staff member
- › A staff member makes a formal complaint. The use of mediation should always be explored before commencement of an investigation

**To access the Mediation Service, contact your local HR department or the National HR Employee Helpline by phoning 1850 444 925**

## **Participative Approach**

### ***Remaining Neutral in a conflict situation***

All managers should have informal mediation skills to allow them to step in and attempt to resolve disputes before they escalate. The manager should be careful not to take sides but should simply assist the individuals to reach resolution.

Line managers can help parties in dispute identify the root cause of their disagreement, what their needs are and what changes are required to resolve matters or move forward and any changes or compromises they're prepared to make in their behaviour or attitudes.

### ***Speaking to each party individually***

The starting point for the manager is to have informal one-to-one conversations with the parties in dispute to identify the crux of the problem and hear the different individual perspectives on what is happening and the grievances they bear.

### ***Bringing both sides together to communicate***

Once a manager has a clear understanding of the problem and the individuals' different perspectives on the problem, they can bring the parties together and act as an objective broker to help find common ground and changes that can be made by either side to help find a solution.

### ***Supporting both sides in a complaints procedure***

Where informal attempts to a dispute fail and matters deteriorate to the point where one or both of the parties submit a formal grievance, it is important that the manager remains impartial. This will help to reduce tension once the formal process has been completed and any disciplinary sanction imposed.

### ***Gather ideas of how to address the issue with the team***

Managers should include reflective practice as appropriate at team meetings, to enhance development, identify learning needs and highlight competencies. It can also aid in identifying trends and patterns with a view to mitigating problematic issues and minimising conflict.

Managers can help to avoid conflict by having regular consultation with their team to ensure that their views are taken into account before making changes that affect their work or working environment.

Where disputes affect the whole team, for example as a result of tensions that arise from meeting particular deadlines or changes to working practices, managers can help find solutions that the whole team can buy into, by having an open discussion with their team to find possible solutions.

Managers can use one-to-one meetings with staff to get a clear picture of what is creating team disharmony from different people's perspectives.

### **Monitoring Team Relationships**

#### ***Being aware of tension and keeping it at a low level***

In any team there will be tensions or disagreements that arise from time to time, but line managers should be aware of signs that more serious disputes are developing.

Line managers should also be aware that different personality types will deal with conflict in different ways, for example:

- › *Some people will show their annoyance very quickly and openly, for example by confronting someone as soon as their behaviour bothers them, or making their displeasure over work issues very clearly known.*
- › *Other people may on the surface appear more tolerant and laidback but will gradually get more annoyed by a colleague, their manager or a work problem until they lose their temper, often over something quite minor that has proved to be the last straw.*

› *Some individuals will become withdrawn when they have a grievance.*

Therefore managers should get to their staff as people and find ways to have regular informal conversations to help them pick up on issues that can be festering away beneath the surface.

### ***Picking up on disagreements before they lead to conflict***

Many disputes will start off as innocuous disagreements that appear to be resolved or forgotten straight away. However, where such issues recur on a regular basis, managers should intervene and talk to the individuals concerned about what is happening and how to prevent the problem occurring in the first place.

If it becomes obvious that it is a particular individual that is causing disharmony, managers must be prepared to step in and talk to the individual as soon as it becomes obvious they are creating problems. In many cases they may be unaware of how they or their behaviour is perceived by others, and they will respond quickly with a quick word.

### **Acting as a Role Model**

#### ***Maintaining Professionalism***

Managers must maintain sound ethical and professional standards at all times. They must be seen to set an example by following the organisation's policies and procedures. If managers don't comply with these then it is difficult to expect team members to adhere to the policy.

Managers must also set an example by being consistent in how they deal with the team and not showing favouritism, inspiring members of their team to work to high standards.

### ***Being clear about expectations of team conduct***

As well as being clear about what behaviour is not tolerated, managers should also demonstrate what positive behaviours staff should aspire to in terms of how they interact with each other and other staff in the organisation, as well as patients, clients and the public.

### ***Not tolerating backbiting in the team***

Managers should discourage staff from talking about other people in the team or department behind their backs. Ignoring this type of behaviour will lead to resentment building, cliques developing and encourages a work culture where bullying is more likely to occur. It should be established by the manager if there is a genuine problem and then deal with it openly by talking to the individuals concerned.

## **Integrity**

### ***Keeps employee issues private and confidential***

If managers are to create a working relationship with the individuals that they manage that is based on mutual trust and respect, then they have to make sure that they protect people's privacy and respect confidential information. When staff trust their line manager they are more likely to talk to them if they are having difficulties, whether in the workplace or at home, that might lead to or contribute to conflict at work.

### ***Treating all employees with the same importance***

Managers who are not even-handed in how they deal with staff will struggle to build working relationships based on mutual trust and respect. Any sign of favouritism is also likely to lead to resentment and may well be the cause of conflict in itself.

## Section 2: Effective Performance Management

Often those accused of bullying find it difficult to recognise themselves as behaving in a bullying or aggressive way. Conversely, some managers are concerned about tackling poor performance and being accused of bullying.

When line managers find themselves having to deal with a low-performing team or individual, part of their role is to motivate the team to perform more effectively. The process of bringing about changes to improve performance includes:

- › Setting clear standards
- › Identifying and dealing with errors and mistakes
- › Increasing efficiency
- › Greater flexibility of roles
- › Changing priorities
- › Reducing expenditure and increasing value for money

Managers must ensure that each individual employee is fully informed of their role, responsibility and accountability in any given project or task.

**Table 3** below distinguishes between positive ways of tackling poor performance and motivating staff, keeping employee distress levels to a minimum, and more negative management behaviour, increasing stress levels on the team, which can ultimately lead to increased absenteeism and complaints under the Dignity at Work policy or the Grievance procedure.

Table 3

(Reference: CIPD Guide: Managing Conflict at Work, A Guide for Line Managers (2008))

Dealing with Performance issues / Motivating Staff	Positive Management	Negative Management
<b>Identifying the performance issue</b>	Involves looking at all the potential reasons for poor performance, for example people, systems, training and equipment	<b>No attempt to identify the nature or source of the poor performance</b>
<b>Seeking the views of the team or individual to identify the cause of the unacceptable level of performance</b>	The team or individual takes part in looking for the source of the problem and helps the manager identify solutions	<b>No discussion of the cause of the performance deficit, or opportunity for the team members to discuss their difficulties</b>
<b>Agreeing new standards of performance with all the team members</b>	Involves setting and agreeing standards of performance and behaviour for each team member and the manager	<b>Imposing new standards without team discussion on appropriate standards of performance or behaviour</b>
<b>Agreeing the method and timing of monitoring team performance</b>	Wherever possible the team or team member is involved in the monitoring process. The outcome of the monitoring is openly discussed.	<b>Without agreeing standards, the monitoring can occur at any time and can involve areas that are unexpected by the team</b>
<b>Failure to achieve standards of performance is dealt with as a performance-improvement issue</b>	Opportunities are taken to identify individuals are struggling to meet standards and support is provided	<b>Individuals who fail to achieve the standards are put under pressure to conform. This may include ridicule, criticism, shouting teasing or sarcasm.</b>
<b>Recognising positive contributions</b>	<b>Recognises and acknowledges improvements in performance, attitudes and behaviours</b>	<b>With no monitoring, it's impossible to recognise where there have been positive contributions. Recognition and acknowledgement is therefore arbitrary and open to acts of favouritism.</b>

## **Conclusion**

All employees have a responsibility to their managers, their colleagues and most importantly themselves to create and maintain a positive place to work that is respectful of all and to ensure that their behaviours do not contribute to negative conflict or dignity at work issues.

It is important for managers to distinguish between a certain amount of competition, which is normal and important in working life, and more destructive situations which involve unfair and unethical behaviours that can cause high levels of stress and disruption to the individual, department and ultimately the wider organisation.

Line managers must be sensitive to how staff members within the team are interacting, how they are handling any increase in their workloads or organisational change. They must be confident to intervene at an early stage if there are signs of dispute or any hint of inappropriate behaviour emerging, or of indications that anyone is suffering from stress.

Managers are best placed to establish the cause of any problem as soon as it emerges and find a resolution before attitudes have hardened and confrontational stances have had time to develop.

Creating a Positive Work Environment and managing conflict at work is an integral part of good people management. To a large degree it is good communication, providing ongoing feedback and effective coaching and development. It is also about recognising and acknowledging good work, effective performance management and being proactive in dealing with issues as they arise in a fair and transparent manner.

## **Useful Contact Number for Staff**

National HR Employee Helpline Phone: 1850 444 925

## **References:**

CIPD Guide: Managing Conflict at Work, A Guide for Line Managers (2008)

Office for Health Management: Management Competency User Pack

Mediation: An Employer's Guide. CIPD (2008)

## **Online References & Useful Links:**

[www.healthy-workplaces.eu](http://www.healthy-workplaces.eu)

[www.hsa.ie](http://www.hsa.ie)

[www.managingwellbeing.com](http://www.managingwellbeing.com)

[www.hse.ie/eng/staff/Resources/hrppg/Policy%20for%20Prevention%20and%20Management%20of%20Stress%20in%20the%20workplace.html](http://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/Resources/hrppg/Policy%20for%20Prevention%20and%20Management%20of%20Stress%20in%20the%20workplace.html)