



**CAREER COMPASS**

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# **Addressing Team Conflict in a Virtual Environment**

**Participant Workbook**

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# Introduction

## Objectives

- To understand the differences in how in-person teams and virtual teams function
- Learn how to identify and proactively manage conflict in order to maintain a healthy virtual team

## Agenda

- In-person vs. virtual teams
- Conflict
- Communications
- Expectations
- Team processes
- Feedback



## What Makes a Team?

The desired elements of a team are the same, whether they are in person or virtual:

- A common goal
- Interdependence
- Clear structure and processes
- An accountability for results



The foundation of every high performing team is trust-based relationships.

## Conflict in Teams

*Conflict- “A situation in which the concerns of two people appear to be incompatible.”*

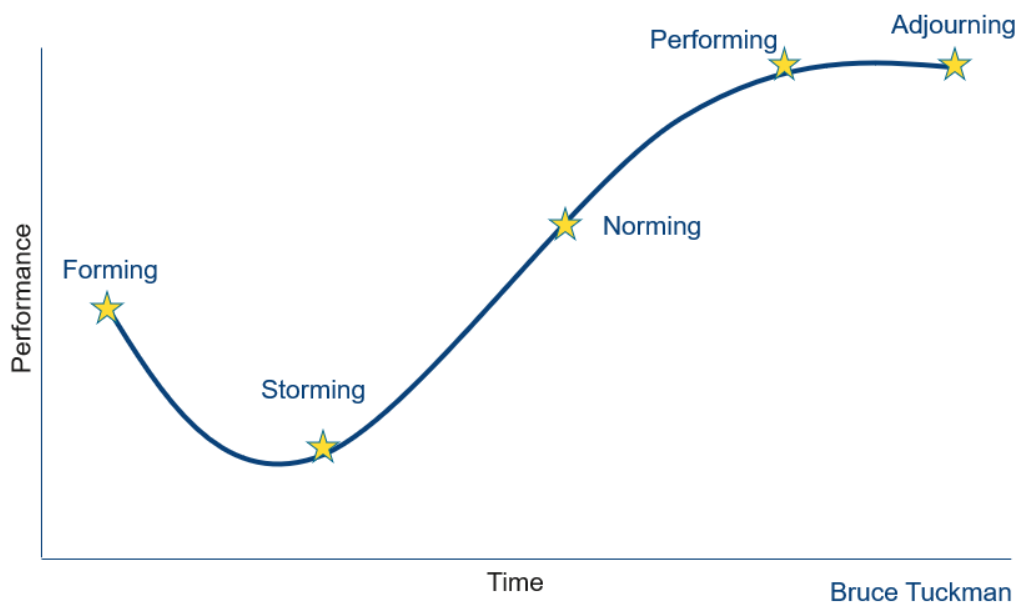
**Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann**

**What are some sources of conflict that you have run into on teams that you have been part of?**

### Common Sources of Team Conflict

- Competing priorities
- Time pressures
- Lack of trust in others delivering
- Miscommunications / misunderstandings
- Lack of clarity / unclear direction
- Insufficient processes to provide needed structure
- Lack of connection or sense of belonging
- Emotional reactions to any of the above

### Team Development Model



In his Team Development Model, Bruce Tuckman lays out the five stages of team development over time and performance.

1. **Forming**- when a team is first coming together.
2. **Storming**- a time of significant conflict as the team starts to figure out how to work together.
3. **Norming**- roles and relationships are firmly established, and the focus is now on the work of the team.
4. **Performing**- the team is running smoothly and reaching new heights. Conflicts are about making ideas better and high performance is possible.
5. **Adjourning**- when the project is complete, or when some team members move on to new assignments. Accomplishments are acknowledged and celebrated.

## How Conflict Impacts Virtual Teams

Disputes on teams that have never met face to face tend to be more negative for performance and escalate more quickly than they do when teams meet in person.

## Communication Challenges for Virtual Teams

When people lack information or when they are uncertain about why someone disagreed with them, they are much more likely to take it personally.

***If you work or have worked virtually in the past, what has been the biggest communication challenge for you in a virtual workspace?***

## Online Disinhibition Effect

People say and do things in cyberspace that they wouldn't ordinarily say or do in the face-to-face world. They feel more uninhibited and express themselves more openly. Sometimes people share very personal things about themselves, or sometimes they use rude language and harsh criticisms, and even threats. This leads to more emotional and aggressive responses that are more likely to escalate the conflict than would happen face to face.

## Communication Norms

Managers must set explicit norms and expectations with teams on communication:

- What channels to use for which messages
- Expectations of responses
- Assumption of positive intent

## Engage Conflicts Early

- Address any conflicts immediately; do not allow issues to fester
- Watch for signs of conflict and address early:
  - Changes in language and tone in emails
  - Less participation or engagement in team calls or message boards
  - Avoidance of teammates by specific people
- Snuff out passive aggressive behaviors:
  - Sarcasm
  - Gossip
  - Resistance or stalling
  - Backstabbing

## Pay Attention to What Is and Is Not Being Said

Pay attention to the emotional tone of responses and ask follow-up questions based on tone. For example:

- I get the sense that you're not all on board, am I right?
- Am I wrong in thinking that this may mean more work for you?
- I hear what you are saying, but your tone says something else. Tell me more about that.
- In your opinion, what is the best approach?

When using MS Teams or other video services, establish a norm for turning your cameras on. This will help with non-verbal communication.

## Virtual Messaging Boards

When using an online messaging board like Teams Channels, follow these guidelines:

- Focus on technical merits
- Promote transparency of thought
- Engender a sense of fair play
- Bolster trust within the team

***Does your team have best practices for virtual communications? What are they?***

## Manage Conflict with Active Engagement



Check-in regularly one-on-one with teammates



Engage the team to set processes and norms



Encourage team members to engage in informal connections



Start meetings with an ice breaker for people to get know each other on deeper levels

## Review and Update Processes

When there is a change to a team's makeup, leadership, or operating environment, there will be unforeseen impacts to a team functioning. Take a half day or day to pause and examine your current processes as a team.

- What is working?
- Where are you getting stuck?
- What would you like to do differently moving forward?

***Use the space provided here to capture your thoughts.***

## Establish Clear Expectations: Communication



What to communicate



Which channel to use



Who should get the information



When do they need it



What will happen if communication breaks down



## Establish Clear Expectations: Decision Making



**Role based  
decisions**



**Process for  
escalation**



**Process for  
group decisions**

## Establish a Process for Managing Conflict

Establish rules that make conflict a competition of ideas and hold team members accountable for them.

- Assume positive intent
- Everyone participates
- Value added after a decision is not valuable
- Focus on ideas

## Develop a Culture of Feedback



Make feedback a frequent conversation



Situation – what was going on or being done



Behavior – what was done or said



Impact – The impact of what was done or said



Moving forward

## Final Reflection

- What are somethings that stood out to you today that you want to remember?
- What is something that you will do moving forward to help manage conflict on your team??

***Use the space provided to capture your response.***

## Contact Information

**BD17 Contact Information:** Write to us! We are always seeking to improve our learning and development products and encourage your feedback. Please email us with your suggestions and we will incorporate them into future work. Additionally, we are available to answer any questions about the content you may have and provide additional resources to support your learning endeavors.

- NAVFACHQTotalForceDevelopment@navy.mil

## Development Resources

**Career Compass Resource Center:** An online source of information that provides NAVFAC civilian employees access to professional growth and development opportunities.

- <https://www.navfac.navy.mil/ccrc>

To access more content specific to the **Conflict Management** competency:

- <https://www.navfac.navy.mil/conflict-management>

**Career Compass Catalog:** an online tool which provides you with information to help you take ownership of your professional development. It identifies options to assist in planning and creating a successful career path within NAVFAC.

- <https://www.navfac.navy.mil/ccc>

## Course Credit

You will receive credit for participating in this course. Email the address below. Make sure to include all the following information:

Component	Include in Email
<b>Address</b>	W_NAVFAC_PRTN_NITC_NFI_ADMINS_US@navy.mil
<b>Email Subject Line</b>	Self-Certification – Addressing Team Conflict in a Virtual Environment
<b>Course Name</b>	Addressing Team Conflict in a Virtual Environment
<b>Course Completion Code</b>	Code will differ for the live versus recorded webinar and will be available at the end of each respective course.