



Should Leaders Prioritize Conflict Mitigation Or Conflict Resolution?

By Anna Shields, Consensio, 29 September 2025

Conflict resolution has been on the organizational agenda for a long time, but LinkedIn's "Skills on the Rise" for 2025 revealed something striking. Conflict mitigation is now the second fastest-growing in-demand skill that companies are hiring for, just behind AI literacy.

As a conflict management professional, this shift is encouraging. For years, I've seen many leaders struggle to acknowledge the presence of conflict in their workplaces. Now, with the demand for conflict skills rising, it raises an important question about where the focus should be. Let's look at conflict mitigation and conflict resolution, why conflict mitigation skills have become more important, and how organizations can develop these skills.

Conflict mitigation and its growing importance in the workplace

What is conflict mitigation?

Whereas conflict resolution focuses on finding a solution to a conflict, conflict mitigation implies reducing the severity of conflict to make it less painful or damaging. When conflict escalates, it is costly both in terms of resource as well as the personal impact on individuals and teams. These costs include lost productivity, management time, HR, and legal support. Mitigating these effects is therefore sensible from both an individual and an organizational point of view.

What's particularly useful about conflict mitigation, is that it shifts the focus away from resolution as a fixed end result. Workplace mediators will tell you that it's not always helpful to focus on solutions. Mediation parties who feel pressured into resolving conflict tend to push back, especially if this pressure is applied early in the mediation process. There is not always a clear path to resolution, and a "good" outcome may differ depending on who you ask.

Why conflict mitigation is becoming increasingly important

Terminology aside, the skills needed to navigate conflict at work are now more essential due to an increase in workplace conflict. A recent report by ACAS cites two in five workers as saying that conflict in their workplace is rising. LinkedIn cites possible drivers behind the demand for conflict mitigation skills, such as tension over return-to-office policies and the challenges of leading intergenerational teams.

The increase in the use of AI, which automates some jobs and changes others, is leading to increased uncertainty, another factor which fuels conflict. The jobs that remain will also require advanced management and interpersonal skills, such as conflict mitigation. Other global trends that are

increasing conflict at work include a decline in emotional intelligence (EQ) and the arrival of Gen Z, which is changing team dynamics at work.

As workplace conflict increases, so do the associated costs, with workplace conflict costing UK organizations an estimated £28.5bn per year. Mitigating these costs and the reputational risk of high-profile conflict is likely another reason why conflict mitigation skills are high on the board agenda.

What should leaders prioritize in terms of conflict skills?

As leaders seek to minimize the adverse effects of conflict, a focus on conflict mitigation makes sense. Yet there's a danger that when conflict is seen in purely negative terms – as a cost to be reduced or a risk to be mitigated – leaders will miss the opportunities that constructive conflict can bring. When conflict is handled well, it can foster innovation, improve processes, increase collaboration, and build stronger relationships.

The answer is not to get hung up on terminology, or choose one term over another. Instead, leaders should look to build a range of conflict competencies across the organization to enable staff to navigate conflict earlier and more effectively.

A strategic approach to building conflict skills

So, what does this look like in practice? Here are five steps leaders can take to embed conflict competence across the organization.

1. Recognize that conflict management is a strategic priority.
2. Define the conflict competencies and skills that your team needs.
3. Identify skills gaps, both in specialist functions like HR, and across the wider organization.
4. Upskill your workforce with training that builds self-awareness and confidence to navigate conflict issues.
5. Ensure access to informal resolution through policies that promote constructive conflict management, and provide access to support when needed, such as via workplace mediation.

How leaders can build conflict mitigation skills in the workplace

Whether it's conflict mitigation or conflict resolution, it's less about the lexicon and more about equipping staff with the skills to handle conflict. Leaders play a key role in setting the expectation that constructive conflict is a normal part of organizational life, and in role-modelling respectful conflict behaviors. That will enable organizations to mitigate the negative impacts of conflict and benefit from the opportunities it presents: more collaboration, stronger relationships, and business growth.