

Over the last few years, a working committee of senior administration and representatives of each union and association have been working jointly with the help of an outside expert on mediation.

The result of that work is the ***Dispute Prevention and Resolution Plan***, which outlines step-by-step how to address workplace disputes.

The purpose of our DPR Plan is to:

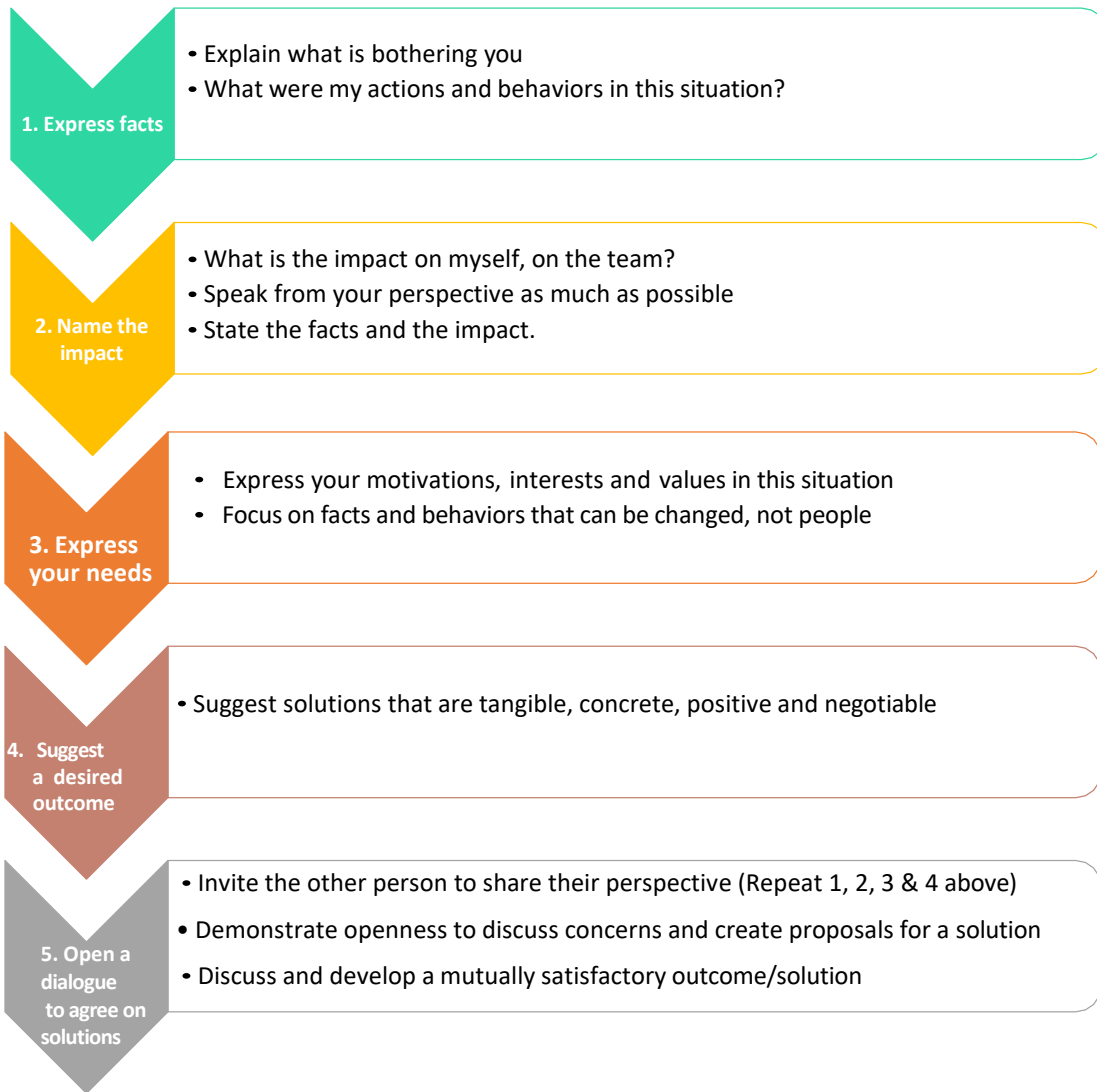
- Provide members of the organization with a DPR Process to express concerns/issues and to find effective solutions.
- Make effective use of organizational resources to guide disputes or conflicts toward constructive resolution.
- Provide mechanisms that are equitable and unbiased to support a healthy working environment.
- Prevent the escalation of problems and disputes.
- Provide all members with an outcome that is perceived as fair and just.

Our DPR plan helps coworkers find a win-win solution through effective communication, so that disputes do not escalate into conflicts.

In order for the DPR plan to be successful, we agree, the full cooperation of all WQSB employees and stakeholders is essential!



DPR Plan – Step 1: Constructive Conversation



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10 Tips for Effective Communication to Resolve Disputes (Tool A)

1. Make sure this is a good time and place to have a conversation. When one or the other is feeling emotional, this may not be the right time to have the conversation.
2. Agree together to end the conversation (for now) if one or both become too emotional to have a productive conversation.
3. Describe the concrete behaviour (eg. "I missed my lunch when you didn't come to relieve me.")
4. Use "I" statements rather than "You" statements (eg. "I'm feeling angry" rather than "You upset me.")
5. Describe the impact of the behaviour (eg. "I need a break at lunch and when you arrive late, I feel disrespected.").
6. Avoid words such as "always" and "never" (eg. "You're always doing this").
7. Avoid presenting the behaviour as a personal characteristic (eg. "You're selfish").
8. Hear the other person's perspective and listen attentively. Let the other person know that you have heard them by telling them what you heard.
9. Engage with the other person for ways to move forward (eg. "What are your ideas for how we can work together as a team?").
10. Try to build a win-win solution together that meets your needs and the other person's which will allow goodwill to continue.



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Step 1 of WQSB DPR Plan asks for employees to attempt to speak with the other individual(s) involved when experiencing a dispute or a conflict.

In that context and for some people, having to voice concerns, participate in a dialogue and work on solutions can be challenging. The COGHO tool has been developed to support individuals in having these discussions with confidence.

The creation of this tool is inspired by concepts developed by Terrell (2011).

Principles

The four principles of a COGHO conversation are:

- Speak **C**ourageously
- Receive opinions and criticisms **G**racefully
- Be **H**umble
- Be **O**pen to Learn

Speak **C**ourageously

Many people avoid or ignore disputes and conflicts, usually out of fear - not feeling enough trust and safety in the relationship to speak up.

Avoidance of conflict can lead to the eradication of mutual trust and lead to more disputes and conflicts further down the road.

Speaking the truth (even when it is difficult) allows for trust to be maintained or rebuilt. Therefore, it is important that employees speak courageously. Open communication when a conflict occurs is key to a safe and healthy work environment.

Thence, you must speak whenever possible, especially in situations of conflict.

Receive opinions and criticisms **G**racefully

When receiving diverging opinions or criticisms, one must accept it **gracefully**, e.g., not firing back a reaction rooted in emotion.

If you are able to process the emotion you feel when hearing what you perceive as negative comments, that will give you a mental space and time to think about the situation, welcome the other person's perspective and allow for self-criticism.

It's also about being able to express being frustrated or angry (or other types of strong emotions) by what you are receiving without yelling, stomping one's feet or reacting with incivility.

Be **H**umble

One must deal with diverging opinions or criticisms with **humility**. In most disputes or conflicts, the individuals involved hold some form of responsibility for the mishandling or escalation. Thus, it is important to be open to look into oneself and assess in good faith what you might need to change.

This is so much more important because there is a common understanding in our society that one is not always right and that nobody can do everything perfectly. Thence, in responding to criticism, an individual is expected to make a judgment about his/her own behavior, about the mistakes he/she might have made, with the objective of improving. If this does not occur, it will make it more difficult to solve the dispute or the conflict, and will erode trust even further.

Be **O**pen to Learn

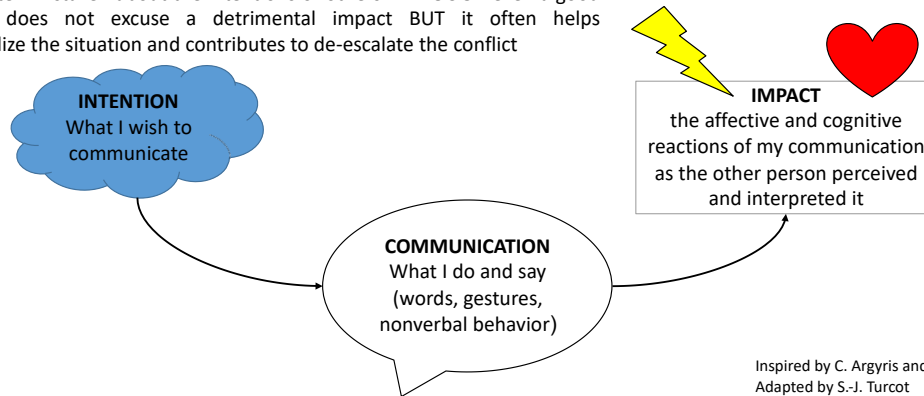
It is important to show **openness** to learn. Be curious and ask questions about what you might have said, or do, that in the perspective of the other individual contributed to the situation.

This is an essential part of a constructive communication between individuals faced with a dispute or a conflict.

Once both individuals can communicate effectively about the problems at the root of a dispute or a conflict, if they both are willing to learn about why it occurred in the first place and they are engaged in finding solutions to address them, they will not only have solved the dispute or conflict at hand, but also prevented potential related disputes or conflicts from happening in the future.

I.C.I. – TOOL C

We are often mistaken about the intentions of others ALTHOUGH even a good intention does not excuse a detrimental impact BUT it often helps contextualize the situation and contributes to de-escalate the conflict



One important factor leading to disputes or conflicts is the difficulty of many of us to separate the intention from what a person has said or what it did provoke as negative impacts or effects. In these circumstances, we tend to be led by our feelings and by the sentiment of being unjustly treated. This results in believing that the other person had bad intentions or willfully intended to hurt you and create negative impacts.

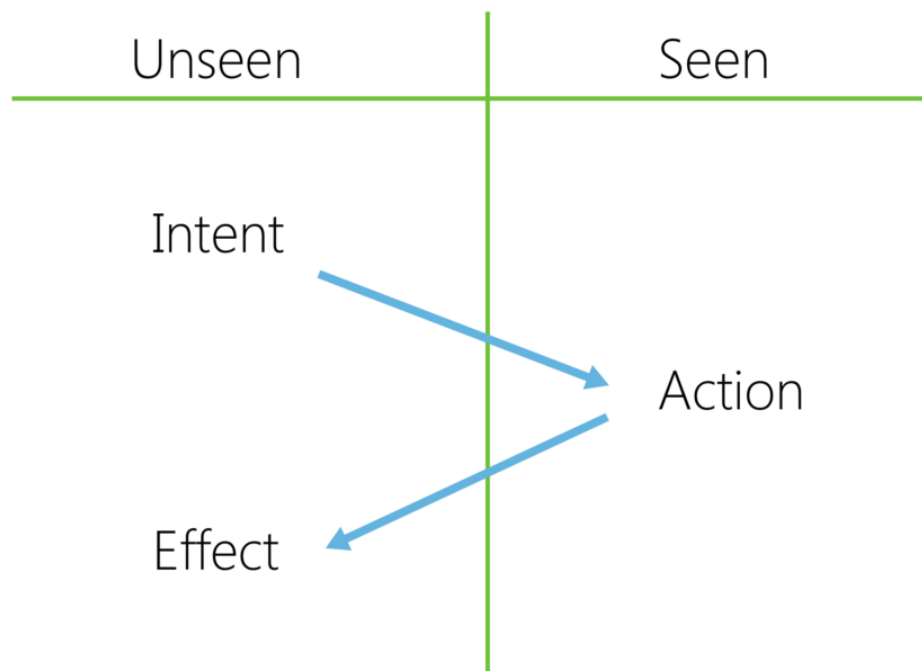
Definitions

- **Intent:** Our intentions influence our outward behaviors. It's the meaning or purpose behind our communication.
- **Communication:** Carrying out our intentions through what we say and do.
- **Impact:** How the other person interprets our communication and what was the impact of it (positive/negative). It's all about how it landed with them, based on their own personal experience and existing relationship with the person.

Dynamic between intent, communication, and impact

Most of the time when people are in a positive and trustful professional relationship, they tend to attribute good intent and to forgive the other when that person has miscommunicated, e.g., when what they said or did was wrong or perceived as wrong and/or generated a negative impact.

However, in situations where trust has eroded or does not exist, communication would generally already be of low quality between the individuals involved. This is when the unseen (intent + effect/impact) plays a role in escalating problems into disputes and conflicts. One or both individuals involved automatically interpret what is seen (action/communication) as being negative.



(Skelly, 2022)

Tips - constructive conversation and problem-solving

It is important to take a step back and think about the situation before having a difficult conversation with the other person. Ask yourself what positive intentions the other person might have had even although what they said or did seem to you to be negative or had a harmful effect on you.

You must remain open to the fact that you might have misinterpreted the intent of the other person or misjudge their communication, and vice-versa. Stay curious. Ask the question directly: “What was your intent?” Remember that you cannot know the other person’s intentions before they share them with you.

And always remind yourself that a good intention does not excuse a negative communication and the detrimental impacts it had on others. However, voicing intentions and ensuring they are well understood by all individuals involved does contribute to de-escalate disputes and conflicts as well as open a path towards solutions.

Negotiation: Dynamic process in which parties that have common and conflicting interests are trying to reach an agreement

Partnering: Guided by a neutral third-party expert, a process that promotes open communication between team members and focuses on the prevention and resolution of conflicts that may occur during the execution of their work

Facilitation: Set of dynamic functions that are performed by a neutral third party before, during and after structured meetings to help individuals, a team, or a group of people to achieve their goals, including solving problems and disputes

Mediation: Process conducted by a neutral and impartial third-party specialist, who is chosen by two or more parties, to help them resolve disputes, conflicts, or litigation

Conciliation: Confidential process conducted by an impartial third party, chosen or imposed, to assist parties to a dispute, conflict, or litigation to reach a negotiated agreement that is mutually acceptable to them, often by providing opinions and recommendations on settlement proposals

Med/Arb or Arb/Med: Process of conflict resolution or litigation that combines mediation and arbitration. Initially, the parties attempt to reach an agreement through mediation conducted by an independent third-party. If no agreement is reached or certain issues are not resolved through mediation, the independent third-party, an arbitrator, renders a binding decision

Arbitration: Process by which parties entrust an independent third-party with the mission to settle a dispute or litigation in accordance with the law and, if necessary, to determine damages and other legally binding remedies.