

Starbucks Conflict Resolution Management Workshop

By: Abi Fritz, Kanyon Gagich, Riley Harris, Robert Cormier

Organizational Identification

Starbucks is a global coffee company and coffeehouse chain founded in 1971 in Seattle. Starbucks places strong emphasis on ethical sourcing, sustainability, and social responsibility. Starbucks invests in their employees by referring to employees as “partners,” and offering benefits designed to support their education, health, and well being. Our workshop will be working with the Starbucks locations of North Carolina. Our team will identify conflict concerns within these locations through employee feedback. Below are typical problems faced by team members surrounding conflict and conflict resolution.

What is Conflict?

Conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties, who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards or resources or expectations that are not being met, and interference from the other party or parties in achieving their goals.

What are the dimensions of conflict?

- History: experiences with the party or other conflicts.
- Source: can be the other person or something less personal.

- Perceptions: assumptions and prejudices often make us think something is true even if it is not.
- Emotions: controlling emotions in a positive manner can lead to positive conflict resolution.
- Behavior: good, controlled behavior can move us toward positive results.

What does conflict within an organization typically look like?

- Personality conflicts: arise out of differences in the collection of qualities that make people who they are but that also don't meet our expectations.
- Role confusion: lack of clarity over expectations of our position or fulfilling our job duties.
- Intragroup conflict: conflict within a group.
- Intergroup conflict: conflict between two or more groups.
- Intraorganizational conflict: conflict within an organization.

Intentions of workshop:

This workshop is intended to address the conflict concerns identified by team members at the North Carolina Starbucks locations. We hope to equip team members with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to navigate conflict in healthy and constructive ways inside their store. Through practical tools and real life applications team members will be able to deescalate situations, engage in productive conversations, and work towards "win-win" solutions.

Issues currently at Starbucks:

Starbucks has 513 locations local to North Carolina. These locations employ roughly 1,300 North Carolina employees. Each store typically has one store manager, one assistant store manager, and several shift supervisors who take on leadership roles as well. After collecting data and responses from an employee survey sent out to the email of all Starbucks employees local to North Carolina our team has identified conflict concerns involving employees feeling uncomfortable addressing conflict, believe conflicts are not handled effectively by management, and do not feel consistently supported by leadership. Employees also expressed some concerns about favoritism and unclear expectations suggesting a need for stronger conflict resolution practices and more proactive managerial involvement.

Data Collection

Data for this workshop was collected from an employee survey sent out to the email of all Starbucks employees local to North Carolina. Starbucks employs roughly 1,300 North Carolina employees and this survey received 248 responses. This survey was optional but encouraged by corporate leaders and managers. This survey asked a series of ten questions to gather information on workplace conflict and concerns. Data and information on this survey is shown below.

Employee Survey Email:

Dear Partner,

At Starbucks, we are committed to creating a respectful, supportive, and positive workplace for everyone. To help us better understand your experiences, we are asking all partners to complete a brief anonymous survey regarding workplace conflict and any concerns you may have.

Your honest feedback is incredibly important. The survey is completely anonymous, and responses will be used to identify areas where we can improve communication, strengthen teamwork, and ensure every partner feels heard and valued.

The survey will take approximately 5–10 minutes to complete. Please submit your response by 12.31.2025.

Thank you for your time, your openness, and for all you do each day to support one another and our customers.

Warmly,

Starbucks Leadership Team

Employee Survey:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdrZY0PzQFcHCf2SeiMOc9NmEviWJK0P56agwyBITY0EVORNw/viewform?usp=publish-editor>

1. Do you feel comfortable addressing workplace conflict when it arises?

2. Have you experienced workplace conflict at your store in the past six months?
3. Do you feel conflicts in your workplace are handled effectively?
4. Do you feel store managers intervene to handle conflicts between employees?
5. Do you believe store leadership takes employee concerns seriously?
6. Do you feel safe speaking up about concerns without fear of retaliation?
7. Are expectations around respectful communication clearly communicated by managers?
8. Have you observed unfair treatment or favoritism in your workplace?
9. Do you feel supported by your manager when challenges occur?
10. Additional comments or concerns?

Employee Survey Results:

1. Do you feel comfortable addressing workplace conflict when it arises?
 - Yes: 62.9%
 - No: 25.0%
 - Unsure: 12.1%
2. Have you experienced workplace conflict at your store in the past six months?
 - Yes: 69.8%
 - No: 20.2%
 - Unsure: 10.1%
3. Do you feel conflicts in your workplace are handled effectively?
 - Yes: 67.7%
 - No: 24.2%
 - Unsure: 8.1%
4. Do you feel store managers intervene to handle conflicts between employees?
 - Yes: 56.5%
 - No: 31.5%
 - Unsure: 12.1%

5. Do you believe store leadership takes employee concerns seriously?

- Yes: 60.5%
- No: 29.4%
- Unsure: 10.1%

6. Do you feel safe speaking up about concerns without fear of retaliation?

- Yes: 82.5%
- No: 8.2%
- Unsure: 9.3%

7. Are expectations around respectful communication clearly communicated by managers?

- Yes: 64.5%
- No: 25.4%
- Unsure: 10.1%

8. Have you observed unfair treatment or favoritism in your workplace?

- Yes: 38.3%
- No: 49.6%
- Unsure: 12.1%

9. Do you feel supported by your manager when challenges occur?

- Yes: 62.5%
- No: 28.2%
- Unsure: 9.3%

10. Additional comments or concerns?

"I don't feel like managers handle small problems early, so they grow into bigger conflicts between employees."

"There's inconsistency in enforcing rules. When managers don't correct behavior, coworkers feel like they have to police each other."

Workshop Outline

Introduction

Purpose and goals of workshop

We are here today to discuss conflict in the workplace and find better ways of managing conflict going forward. We want you to feel supported and empowered here at Starbucks to navigate conflict with ease.

Survey results (Starbucks North Carolina Employee Survey, 2026).

69.8% of respondents have experienced conflict here at Starbucks in the past 6 months.

38.3% of respondents feel they have seen unfair treatment or favoritism in the workplace.

There are concerns that management does not interact in conflict enough. Some employees feel there is inconsistency in how managers enforce rules.

So, what is conflict? (Brewer & Westerman, 2017)

What do we mean when we say “conflict”?

Conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two parties that are interdependent who perceive that they have incompatible goals, that rewards or resources are scarce, or expectations that are not being met,

and there is interference from the other party or parties in the ability to achieve their goals.

Conflict is more than just a difference in opinion.

Who participates in conflict?

Conflict is between two or more parties that are interdependent, meaning that their actions have impact on the other party or parties.

This can impact anyone in the organization.

Why does it matter?

Conflict is inevitable.

Conflict can drive innovation and change within an organization.

Conflict can also create uncomfortable situations in the workplace, and it is important to know how to navigate conflict successfully to limit this impact.

Brainstorming session: Can you think of a time you've dealt with a conflict at work?

If you feel comfortable sharing, tell us about it and whether or not you think it was handled correctly.

Workplace Etiquette Tips

Practice clear, respectful communication.

Use active listening during disagreements.

Maintain professionalism during busy or stressful moments.

Brainstorming session: What are some tools you use to stay cool under pressure?

Apply rules and expectations consistently.

Brainstorming session: Do you think your perception may shape how you view what is deemed as fair?

Address small issues early to prevent escalation.

How Perception Shapes Conflict

Perception plays a major role in how conflict develops.

Employees may interpret tone, fairness, or managerial responses differently based on past experiences.

Survey comments suggest that perceived favoritism or inconsistent enforcement can intensify tensions even when intentions are neutral (Rahim, 2017).

Brainstorming session: Has there ever been a time you have perceived something incorrectly, and it caused a conflict?

The Impact of Conflict in the Workplace

Conflict as an agent of change

When handled well, conflict can improve processes, clarify expectations, and strengthen team relationships.

Open dialogue allows teams to surface concerns and create better ways of working together. (Tjosvold, 2008).

Brainstorming session: Tell us about a time when conflict helped you or your team grow.

The downsides of conflict

When ignored or handled inconsistently, conflict can lead to frustration, decreased trust in leadership, reduced engagement, and higher turnover. Employee feedback specifically highlighted that small unresolved issues can grow into larger interpersonal problems (Starbucks North Carolina Employee Survey, 2026).

Brainstorming Session: Tell us about a time when conflict caused bigger issues for you.

Conflict Management Tools

Tips on managing conflict

Effective strategies include addressing concerns early, using neutral and respectful language, actively listening to all perspectives, documenting recurring issues, and applying policies consistently.

Managers play a key role in setting the tone and intervening before tensions escalate (Fisher & Ury, 2011; Robbins & Judge, 2019).

How we can support you

Our team will provide practical conversation frameworks, early-intervention techniques, and leadership consistency tools tailored to the realities of busy Starbucks store environments.

We will also share resources managers can use to reinforce expectations around respectful communication (Jehn, 1995).

Brainstorming session: Can you give an example of when you felt really supported by leadership during a conflict?

Conclusion

Comments, Questions, Concerns?

Thank you!

Thank you for your participation and commitment to strengthening a respectful, supportive workplace culture across Starbucks locations in North Carolina.

By addressing conflict early and consistently, we can improve both employee experience and customer service (Robbins & Judge, 2019).

Team-Building Exercises

Active Listening (20-30 minutes)

The goal of this activity is to help employees better understand how to properly hear and reflect on the things others say. This can help to reduce misunderstandings and conflict.

1. Have participants break off into pairs. Have them begin activity by one person asking the other a question.
2. The second person can respond to the question, or respond and follow up with a question that builds upon the first.
3. The challenge here is to see how long they can carry on a dialogue using a single question as foundation for the conversation. Encourage them to ask open questions instead of closed questions, which just require a yes or no answer.

4. After about 5 minutes of discussion, have partners switch and go through the process once more.

Once complete, make sure to have a discussion about what employees have learned from this activity and how it can inform better question asking during a conflict.

Problem-Solving Circles (30-45 minutes)

The goal of this is to get practice working with a team and practicing conflict management.

Required materials: flip chart or whiteboard, markers, conflict scenario cards, notepads/scratch paper and pens for participants

1. Have participants get into groups of 4-8 and sit together in a circle.
Emphasize the importance of active listening, showing respect for other's opinions, and working towards a common solution.
2. Present the conflict scenarios to the groups and ask teams to spend a few minutes reading the scenarios.
3. Give the groups 20 minutes to discuss the problem and brainstorm ideas and suggestions for a potential conflict resolution.
4. After 20 minutes, have each group provide two suggestions on solutions for the problem and list the solutions on the board.
5. Collaborate with the entire group about picking the best solution from the list.

Discuss how participants feel about the chosen solution, how the discussions went and how important listening skills were to the activity.

Conflict Escalation Ladder (30-45 minutes)

The goal of this activity is to use visuals to assess how “bad” a conflict is and give ideas for the best and most appropriate solution.

Required materials: large poster paper or whiteboard, markers and pens, sticky notes

1. On the board, draw a large thermometer and draw lines to create 6 sections on the thermometer labeled with words representing the level of conflict, such as “mild” or “severe.” The highest level of conflict goes on top and the lowest on bottom.
2. Give each participant a pre-prepared conflict scenario on a sticky note. These scenarios should range from minor issues to major disputes.
3. Participants will read their scenario and place their sticky note where they think it belongs on the thermometer. As they do this, have them read out their scenario to the group and let other participants agree or disagree with the placement.
4. Finally, have a group discussion regarding the finalized thermometer and talk about possible solutions to the conflict and best practices for managing the conflict going forward.

Make sure presented solutions follow the principles outlined in the workshop and encourage participants to apply the skills they have learned when considering solutions.

Workshop Schedule

9:00AM - 9:30AM	Welcome + Coffee Social Distribute handouts + breakfast/coffee provided by Starbucks
9:30 AM - 11:30AM	Deliver presentation
11:30AM-12:00PM	Workshop Discussion Discuss outcomes of workshop, generate ideas going forward
12:00PM-1:00PM	Lunch Catered by local business
1:00PM-3:00PM	Team-Building Exercises Practice different conflict scenarios and conversations
3:00-3:15PM	Afternoon Coffee Break Provided by Starbucks
3:15PM-4:30PM	Final Thoughts + Wrap-Up Reflect on exercises, brainstorm solutions, and answer any final questions.

Handouts

Strengthening Our Store Culture: Communication & Conflict Support

Conflict Resolution Workshop

- Conflict is inevitable in workplaces.
- Perception shapes how conflict escalates.
- Early intervention prevents larger issues.
- Effective communication strengthens team culture.

What Employees Reported:

- Nearly 70% experienced workplace conflict in the past 6 months.
- 1 in 4 do not feel comfortable addressing conflict.
- 38% have observed unfair treatment or favoritism.
- Many employees feel that small issues are not addressed early.

These findings show the need for proactive communication and consistent leadership support.

What Is Conflict?

Conflict occurs when individuals perceive incompatible goals, values, or expectations.

It becomes harmful when:

- Issues are ignored
- Communication breaks down
- Assumptions replace clarification

These findings show the need for proactive communication and consistent leadership support.



Conflict Management Tools

- Address concerns early
- Use “I” statements
- Ask clarifying questions
- Listen to understand

Reflection

1. One workplace conflict I could have handled differently:

2. One communication habit I need to improve:

3. One strategy I will apply moving forward:

Citations

- Brewer, E. C., & Westerman, J. (2017). *Organizational Communication*. Oxford University Press Academic US.
<https://appstate-bookshelf.vitalsource.com/books/9780190200466>
- Fisher, R., & Ury, W. (2011). *Getting to yes: Negotiating agreement without giving in* (3rd ed.). Penguin.
- Jehn, K. A. (1995). A multimethod examination of the benefits and detriments of intragroup conflict. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40(2), 256–282.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2393638>
- Rahim, M. A. (2017). *Managing conflict in organizations* (5th ed.). Routledge.
- Robbins, S. P., & Judge, T. A. (2019). *Organizational behavior* (18th ed.). Pearson.
- Starbucks North Carolina Employee Survey. (2026). Internal report.
- Tjosvold, D. (2008). The conflict-positive organization: It depends upon us. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 29(1), 19–28. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.507>