

U2Ch4. Applying conflict resolution techniques: Negotiation, mediation, and problem-solving

Chapter 4 · Applying Conflict-Resolution Techniques

(Negotiation · Mediation · Collaborative Problem-Solving)

1 Why Conflict-Resolution Skills Matter

- Unresolved conflict **raises stress, slows decisions, and erodes trust.**
- Resolved well, conflict becomes a **catalyst for creativity, a test of relationships, and a driver of continuous improvement.**
- Three cornerstone techniques—**negotiation, mediation, and problem-solving**—equip you to address disputes **proactively, respectfully, and productively.**

2 An Overview of the Techniques

Technique	Core Purpose	Typical Setting	Who Leads?	Key Success Factor
Negotiation	Reach agreement that satisfies each party's interests	Salary talks, contract terms, project scope	The disputing parties themselves	Thorough preparation + principled concessions
Mediation	Facilitate dialogue when parties stall or emotions run high	Workplace disputes, community conflicts, family issues	Neutral third-party mediator	Impartiality + structured process
Collaborative Problem-Solving	Jointly diagnose root causes and design win-win solutions	Cross-functional process flaws, quality issues	All stakeholders in workshop style	Shared definition of the problem

3 Negotiation — Crafting Mutually Acceptable Agreements

3.1 Preparation: The 5-P Checklist

1. **Purpose** - What do you *really* need? (e.g., a delivery date, not "to win")
2. **People** - Who must be at the table? What are their roles and decision power?
3. **Positions vs. Interests** - List *positions* ("I want ₹50 L") and underlying *interests* ("Fair pay, recognition, stability").
4. **Priorities** - Rank issues; identify trade-offs.
5. **Plan B (BATNA)** - *Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement*. Know your walk-away option.

3.2 Phases of Negotiation

Phase	What Happens	Helpful Behaviours
1. Opening & Rapport	Exchange pleasantries, set tone	Use names, express collaborative intent
2. Information Exchange	Share needs, constraints, data	Ask open questions, practise active listening
3. Bargaining	Propose options, make concessions	Trade low-priority items for high-priority gains; frame offers in terms of mutual value
4. Closing	Summarise agreement, confirm details	Restate terms aloud; put in writing
5. Implementation	Carry out commitments	Set milestones, accountability, review dates

3.3 Distributive vs. Integrative Approaches



Feature	Distributive (“Win-Lose”)	Integrative (“Win-Win”)
Resource View	Fixed pie	Expandable pie
Tactics	Anchoring high/low, limited disclosure	Full-interest disclosure, brainstorming
Outcome	One gains more; relationship risk	Mutual gains; relationship preserved

Use distributive tactics sparingly and ethically; favour integrative for long-term partnerships.

3.4 Negotiation Toolbox

- **MESOs** (Multiple Equivalent Simultaneous Offers) — present several packages of equal value to you; reveals partner priorities.
- **Objective Criteria** — reference standards (market rates, legal norms) to justify positions.
- **Concession Pattern** — small-small-large encourages reciprocity; avoid large early concessions.
- **Emotional Labeling** — “It sounds like the timeline pressure worries you.” Defuses tension.

4 Mediation — Guiding Others Toward Consensus

4.1 Roles & Responsibilities

Role	Function
Mediator	Neutral facilitator; manages process, ensures fairness, keeps focus on interests, not blame
Parties	Voice concerns, propose options, own final decision
Observers/Support Persons (optional)	Offer expertise or moral support under mediator’s rules

4.2 Mediation Stages

1. **Pre-Mediation**
 - Separate intake meetings: gather histories, set expectations, sign confidentiality forms.
2. **Mediator’s Opening Statement**
 - Explain rules, assure neutrality, outline process.
3. **Party Statements**
 - Each side speaks uninterrupted; the mediator summarises key interests.
4. **Joint Discussion & Agenda Setting**
 - Identify agenda issues; prioritise.
5. **Caucus (Private Sessions)**
 - Optional; explore sensitive interests, test options.
6. **Negotiation & Option Generation**
 - Bring parties together to co-create solutions.
7. **Agreement Drafting**
 - Write clear, actionable terms: who, what, when, review clause.
8. **Closure**
 - Sign agreement, schedule follow-up, celebrate progress.

4.3 Mediator Skill Set

- **Impartial Rephrasing** — neutralises loaded language.
- **Process Control** — sets ground rules, manages time.
- **Reality Testing** — probes if proposals are practical.
- **Confidential Shuttle** — moves offers between parties while protecting sensitive data.

4.4 Ground Rules Example

- Speak one at a time.
- Use “I” statements; avoid accusations.



- Confidentiality: nothing leaves the room unless all agree.
- Attack the problem, not the person.

5 Collaborative Problem-Solving — Fixing Systems, Not Just Symptoms

5.1 Seven-Step Model

Step	Key Action	Tool Suggestions
1. Define the Problem	Craft a problem statement everyone accepts	“How-might-we” framing
2. Analyse Root Causes	Look beyond surface issues	Fishbone diagram, 5 Whys
3. Generate Options	Brainstorm freely, then cluster themes	Brainwriting, SCAMPER
4. Evaluate & Select	Score options against criteria (cost, feasibility)	Decision matrix
5. Plan Implementation	Assign tasks, set timeline, resources	Gantt chart, RACI grid
6. Execute Solution	Launch pilot, monitor KPIs	Kanban board, daily check-ins
7. Review & Learn	Debrief wins and gaps; update processes	After-action review template

5.2 Mindsets for Success

- **Joint Ownership** — shift from “your fault/my fault” to “our system.”
- **Data-Driven** — agree on metrics before arguing about performance.
- **Future-Focused** — concentrate on “what now” rather than “who erred.”

6 Integrating the Techniques — An Escalation Ladder

1. **Self-Negotiation** — Resolve internally (intrapersonal conflict).
2. **Direct Negotiation** — Talk with the other party.
3. **Facilitated Meeting** — Bring in a neutral chair for structure.
4. **Mediation** — Engage a trained, neutral mediator.
5. **Arbitration or Legal Routes** — Binding third-party decision (outside chapter scope).

Move upward only when the lower rung fails or stakes warrant.

7 Practical Toolkit — Quick-Reference Cards

Situation	“First Move”	Backup Technique
Team members disagree on design choice	Use interest-based negotiation : “What purpose does each design serve?”	Bring UI lead as facilitator for a mini-mediation
Vendor misses delivery twice	Schedule fact-finding call , propose MESOs (split shipment, discount, expedited courier)	Escalate contractually with mediator present
Two departments blame each other for process delays	Convene collaborative problem-solving workshop ; map entire workflow	If blame persists, appoint mediator for relationship repair

8 Illustrative Case Study

Scenario

A hospital’s doctors and nurses clash over a new electronic charting system: doctors call it “cumbersome,” nurses find doctors’ incomplete entries risk patient safety.

Step 1 — Negotiation Attempt

Joint meeting: doctors request voice-to-text; nurses want mandatory fields. Talks stall over budget fears.



Step 2 — Mediation

Neutral health-informatics specialist mediates. Parties share interests: *efficiency* (doctors) and *accuracy* (nurses). Specialist proposes pilot of voice dictation **plus** colour-coded mandatory prompts. Consensus reached.

Step 3 — Collaborative Problem-Solving

Mixed team analyses pilot data, refines screen layout, and develops two-minute “chart-smart” micro-lessons. Charting time drops 18 %; error rates fall 22 %.

Outcome: Relationship warmth returns; hospital adopts the refined system hospital-wide.

9 Self-Practice Corner

1. **BATNA Drill** — Pick an everyday negotiation (rent, allowance). Define your BATNA, the other side’s probable BATNA, and a win-win option.
2. **Mediator Role-Play** — In trios, two argue a scripted dispute while the third practises mediation stages; rotate roles and debrief.
3. **Root-Cause Race** — Take a recent process hiccup. In teams, use 5 Whys to reach a root cause in under eight minutes. Present findings.
4. **Reflection Journal** — After any conflict this week, note which technique you used, what worked, and one improvement for next time.

Chapter Takeaways

- **Negotiation** secures mutually satisfactory agreements when you prepare thoroughly, focus on interests, and manage concessions strategically.
- **Mediation** introduces a neutral process guardian who restores dialogue and guides parties toward self-crafted solutions.
- **Collaborative problem-solving** tackles systemic or technical conflicts by marrying diverse expertise in a structured, data-driven workflow.
- Selecting and sequencing these techniques wisely converts friction into forward motion—strengthening relationships, sharpening processes, and elevating outcomes.