

When only one party comes to the table ...

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The conflict resolution process in which a neutral third party facilitates constructive dialogue between or among participants in a dispute is known as mediation. This process requires all the parties to come to the table and engage in a structured conversation. If only one individual is willing to attempt problem-solving, mediation cannot proceed.

Nevertheless, it is possible to develop a management plan and conflict-handling strategy even in this situation. The process is called Problem Solving for One (PS1). The individual and his/her perception of the conflict are the focus of PS1 whose goal is to reduce actual and/or potential harm from the conflict to the individual seeking resolution. PS1 can help a person who feels his/her interests are negatively affected by another party, *even if the other party is not aware of the conflict.*

A key difference is that mediation is intended to help disputing parties resolve their differences, while PS1 is designed to assist an individual to enlarge his/her perspective on conflict, methods to understand it, and skills to manage it.

PS1 Process

1. The mediator takes on the role of facilitator of the PS1 process, ensuring that the participant understands what it involves and the potential outcomes.
2. The participant describes the conflict from his/her point of view, resulting in agreement on one or more problem statements from that information.
3. The facilitator takes the participant through a review of the description, analyzing the dynamics from various perspectives.
4. From this analysis, the participant generates alternatives and options, including a cost/benefit analysis for each.
5. The chosen alternatives must be commensurate with the participant's communication skill level. Where skills are lacking the facilitator may assist by providing the opportunity to practise and polish those that require upgrading.
6. Taken together, the previous steps comprise a *conflict handling plan*. Its purpose is to guide the participant's future thoughts and actions, mitigating the most negative and damaging effects of the conflict.

Poorly handled, conflict saps everyone's energy, interferes with interpersonal relationships and prevents the participant and his/her colleagues from reaching their goals. Conversely, when people manage conflict constructively, they are able to generate new ideas for personal and organizational growth and development; solve the inevitable problems that are bound to emerge from time to time, and work more cohesively as a team.