



# **Making Conflict Work: Navigating Disagreement Up and Down Your Organization**

*Peter T. Coleman , Robert Ferguson*

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**Making Conflict Work: Navigating Disagreement Up and Down Your Organization** Peter T. Coleman , Robert Ferguson

**A practical guide to navigating workplace conflicts by better understanding the power dynamics at play in every interaction**

Conflicts at work are as inevitable as they are frustrating. In *Making Conflict Work*, Peter Coleman and Robert Ferguson's leading experts in the field of conflict resolution address the key role of power in workplace tension. Whether you're butting heads with your boss or addressing a direct report's complaint, your relative position of power affects how you approach conflict.

Coleman and Ferguson explain how power dynamics function, with step-by-step guidance to determining your standing in a conflict and identifying and applying the strategies that will lead to the best resolution. Drawing on the authors' years of research and consulting experience, the book gives readers effective strategies for negotiating disputes at all levels of an organization.

*Making Conflict Work* includes self-assessment exercises and action plans to guide managers, mediators, consultants, and attorneys through any conflict. This powerful approach can turn workplace tensions into catalysts for creativity, innovation, and meaningful change.

## Making Conflict Work: Navigating Disagreement Up and Down Your Organization Details

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Author : Peter T. Coleman , Robert Ferguson

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# From Reader Review Making Conflict Work: Navigating Disagreement Up and Down Your Organization for online ebook

## Emiko says

I highly recommend this to anyone in any leadership capacity, as this may very well be a preemptive resource for conflict management. However, this book reminds us conflict happens everywhere, on every level, but to varying degrees... which we may have something to do with, positively or negatively. Coleman's experience does not fail to address personality, ethical reasoning and moral codes for assessing and engaging conflicts appropriately. As well, he and Robert Ferguson (psychologist and executive coach of 20+ yrs) offer a balanced approach of empirical and practical facts, making it a very hands on tool for anybody, not just those in occupational settings. Although, I would give it as a gift to anyone celebrating a new management position.

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## Ilona Buts says

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## Sarah Martin says

Really easy to pick up and read through while giving you moments to pause and reflect on the different chapters. Suggestions and philosophies were backed up by examples, research and interviews.

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## Iryna Chorna says

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## Chan Oga says

I recommend this to people dealing with conflicts. Well researched, great anecdotes, well structured with self assessments to understand ourselves, our environment, summary at the end of each chapter and well articulated pros and cons of each tactic. Can't say this enough: well written.

Good complimentary reading to The Subtle Art of Not Giving a Fuck, and The No Asshole Rule.

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## **Michael Griswold says**

Conflict is a part of life and human beings unfortunately tend to make conflict worse. Nowhere is this tendency more apparent than the workplace. That is the premise that the authors of *Making Conflict Work: Harnessing the Power of Disagreement* start with. Don't worry though because conflict does not have to lead to ruined relationships, endless verbal sniping, and a generally toxic work environment. Peter Coleman and Robert Ferguson discuss several different ideas for dealing with conflict that is basically certain to occur in life. This of course relies on a properly reading the conflict situation because misreading and using the wrong strategy could actually make things worse.

I feel that this book is ideal for courses on leadership because of the bullet point summaries of the points covered in each chapter, the self-assessments which allow students to determine if they use the tactic too much or too little, and most importantly sections that detail the pros and cons of each approach. One could very easily devise some conflict situations/simulations to use the material in this book as part of a leadership course.

Even though this book is listed as a business book, one does not have to be in the business world to make use of it. This is because everyone experiences conflict whether it be with friends or family and we all could use better conflict management skills. I was very impressed with this volume and give it my highest recommendation.

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## **Meg says**

This was such a great book. Conflict is inevitable, but this book has great strategies on how to deal with it. The greatest lesson I learned was being adaptable to different situations by using different strategies.

I only had to read a couple chapters for grad school, but I ended up reading more. I am excited to be able to learn from the author when he comes to guest lecture in our class in July.

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## **Madison says**

Full disclosure: I won this book but my husband actually read and critiqued it as he has worked in the high tech industry for many years as a manager as well as an individual contributor.

Similar to every book I have read on conflict in the workplace. There's nothing radically new there.

Well thought out but similar to company's human resources tutorial on conflict resolution publications.

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## **Ms. Reader says**

I received this book on Goodread First Reads in exchange for an honest review.

I was actually surprised on what a coincidence I won this book at my certain time in life. I work in a VERY stressful, high-conflict work area and I'm also currently in the middle of some ugly drama with my personal life. When I got this book in the mail, I couldn't wait to start reading it and see how it would benefit me.

This book was very well organized and neatly put together, the details were decently written, and it even though certain areas did slack off onto the dark side of boredom, making me a tad bit yawn-worthy, the majority of the book made up for it! The author covers VERY good discussions all revolving around resolving conflict, as well as how to make it benefit you to your best knowledge. He touches a few other similar topics, but nonetheless doesn't stray to much with this book. He was good at making it less of a challenge to read, unlike a lot of guidance books. It is, nonetheless, very seriously written and everything is backed up with excellent examples, strategies, reviews, and scientifically proven making it a very beneficial book. I was very impressed with this read and highly recommend it!

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### **Rebecca says**

The concepts aren't groundbreaking, but the book is well layed-out and offers good opportunities for self-reflection.

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### **Psykeactiv1 says**

This book was read right on time. Avoiding an anecdotal paragraph I will say this: prior to reading the strategies outlined in this book, I was totally unaware of how inflexible and mal-adaptive I have been throughout my life in dealing with interpersonal conflicts.

Often times, agents involved in a situation are unaware of how they are blinded by the emotions that the situation they're in elicits, and fall for the trap of impulsive reactivity.

This book not only provides internal checks and balances whereby one can assess the appropriateness of response, it allows you to home in on situational awareness, whereby you become cognizant of the salient events, actions, and reactions of those around you.

The book first outlines seven common conflict management styles, and the leverages involved with each position, to conclude with a mental model that allows one to integrate them all for a more comprehensive and adaptive approach.

This is important, because if one wishes to expand, rather than shrink their circle of influence, understanding how to work and live with people throughout life must be of value, and of continuous improvement. I vow to make this commitment to and for my life, and the loved ones therein.

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### **Andriy Rushchak says**

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## **Alain Burrese says**

“Making Conflict Work: Harnessing the Power of Disagreement” by Peter T. Coleman and Robert Ferguson provides seven strategies and seventy tactics to make conflict work up and down the ladders of power in organizations. It's backed with science, examples and illustrations of how the strategies and tactics work, as well as self-assessment evaluations to determine the strategies and tactics you use the most, and which you might want to incorporate more.

This isn't a “simple” book, but one that takes a serious look at conflict and deserves a serious read to incorporate the information provided effectively when dealing with conflict, especially in the workplace. The book is aimed at managers, mediators, consultants, and attorneys who deal with conflict, and I'd echo those as the target readers, but would also include anyone wanting to be in those positions or better understand conflict and how they can approach it differently to help increase the amount of positive resolutions.

One of the things I really like about this book is that it looks at conflict, and the various ways you can deal with it for different outcomes. It allows the reader to choose strategies and tactics that will work the best in certain situations, while acknowledging that completely different strategies and tactics will be needed when in conflict with a different person or over a different matter. I also like the self-assessment exercises that provide insight to your own preferred conflict styles. Knowing this helps when making choices to best deal with disagreements and other conflicting situations.

The book also discusses power imbalance and strategies and tactics geared toward being the person with more power, or the person with less power. I found this very informational, because most of the time there will be a power imbalance.

How well you manage conflict with your boss or other superiors at work, or with the more difficult employees you need to supervise, will be an important consideration in your continued success. This book will help you assess and determine your own responses and outcomes when conflict is involved, and mastering the strategies and tactics will undoubtedly help you succeed in any organization or field that involves conflict.

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## **Philippe says**

„The world may now be flat, but most organizations are not.” Indeed, for a few decades there has been a storm of rhetoric about disappearing hierarchies and the rise of self-organization. The reality is that organizations are still very much driven by differences in status and power play. And with power often comes conflict. And vice versa conflict is complicated and aggravated by power.

This book starts from the premise that power differences are an important variable that needs to be factored into conflict management. In this it addresses a blank spot in scholarship. Remarkably the interlinkages between power and conflict have not been thoroughly studied.

The book's aim is to bolster the reader's conflict intelligence so that confrontations can be productively integrated in the flow of organizational life. Conflict intelligence is a boon to both those higher up and lower down the chain of command. Because often those in high power stand to lose as much as their subordinates because of conflict: they don't get what they want, lose time and energy, waste social capital and fail to create value from the confrontation. In other words, there is a fairly high opportunity cost associated to \*not\* investing in acquiring conflict intelligence for all parties involved.

Conflict intelligence requires first and foremost a capacity to read and understand a conflict situation. Usually we don't bother to reflect. We tend to go mindlessly along with a default response that emerges at the intersection of many personal influences and the particular situation we find ourselves in. To override our dominant responses we need a grid to analyze and frame a conflict situation. The authors construct that model around three key elements in conflict: how important are the other disputants to me? Are they with me or against me? Am I more or less powerful than them, or are we equals? Different answers to these questions shape different conflict situations. The argument is further developed around seven archetypal situations that are labeled as follows:

- Compassionate Responsibility
- Command and Control
- Cooperative Dependence
- Unhappy Tolerance
- Independence
- Partnership
- Enemy territory

For instance, the Unhappy Tolerance situation is one where you find yourself in low power, with purely competitive goals, and yet with a high need to remain in the relationship with the disputant. Experienced from a position of authority this situation then turns into Command and Control.

Each of the seven situations are then matched by a mindset that is most appropriate for that conflict situation. For instance, a situation of Unhappy Tolerance benefits from being approached with an Appeasement mindset. On the other hand, someone in a Command and Control situation does well to contemplate Dominance as a possible strategy. Altogether, the authors discuss three baseline strategies that are basically cooperative in nature (Benevolence, Cooperation, and Support), three strategies that are more susceptible to escalation (Dominance, Competition, and Appeasement) and a withdrawal strategy (Independence). Conflict intelligence then consists of being able to read different conflict situations, mastering the various mindsets and being able to switch from one to the other as and when the context requires.

Coleman's model is elegant and not so difficult to understand. However, its application may be less straightforward. I did a few thought experiments retroactively analyzing some of the conflictual contexts I had been part of. It was not always easy to answer the three basic questions. Were our goals aligned? Well, at one level certainly, but another level not (which is why there was a conflict). Was there a power difference? I considered us to be peers but the disputant may well have perceived herself in a position of authority. How important was the relationship really to me? It seemed important at the time but less so now that I started to think about it. Clearly, how we approach these questions will be filtered through our temperament and evaluated against our goals. Personally I tend towards strategies of cooperation and withdrawal. It will be very hard for me to frame a situation in terms that will lead me to approaches that are competitive or very explicitly play on a power differential. As a result of these thought experiments I am guessing that it is perhaps harder to break out of our default response attractor than the book leads us to believe.

Coleman and Ferguson acknowledge that conflict intelligence has its limits. We may find ourselves in situations that are simply wrong, immoral, illegal or stupid. Then we need to forfeit adaptiveness and opt for Principled Rebellion. This strategy boils down to naming and shaming your opponents to bring them back in line with what is legal, fair and ethical.

Making Conflict Work provides a lucid and well argued perspective on conflict management. It's basically a manual with scholarly pretensions. It seems that everyone can benefit from working through this book. Fortunately the authors went out of their way to make it an agreeable reading experience. Their prose is accessible but doesn't fall into the trap of excessive chumminess. The book is clearly structured which makes it very easy to navigate. Short surveys help readers to assess their personal fit with the strategies discussed. The myriads of real-life examples that are woven into the argument strike me as fresh and alive and they are narrated with empathy. The notes section at the end of the book contains abundant pointers to relevant academic literature. I certainly recommend this book.

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