

The Big Six

Developed by Larry Hoover, UC Davis Mediation Services, Maureen Brodie UC Davis/UCSF Office of the Ombuds

Most workplace conflicts have, at their core, six main themes. While **The Big 6** can be expressed in myriad behaviors, the experience of parties in conflict generally reflects at least one, if not several, of the following elements:

Communication: Ombuds visitors describe broken lines of communication, either because communication is limited, confusing, misleading, or offensive. Timely, clear, responsive communication is most valuable. Email/text communication lacks the benefit of real-time response and nuanced dialogue but can be useful to ensure a consistent message across a group. As conflict escalates, in-person (or Zoom/phone) communication can more effectively address concerns.

Recognition: When people cite a lack of recognition for hard work, accomplishments, or level of contribution, the result is often a breakdown of a working relationship. What's important to note is that different people find different forms of recognition meaningful, ranging from "shout-outs" or recognize@ucsf.edu, to opportunities for promotions or reclassification, to inclusion in decision-making. The key skill is for supervisors/leaders to identify and deliver forms of recognition that are valued by individual members of their team while ensuring equity and inclusion for all.

Respect: Noted as one of the PRIDE Principles, feeling respect is fundamental to one's engagement and well-being at work. Respect improves collaboration and creates a fair workplace. The lack of respect is stated by over half of Ombuds visitors as a primary contributor to their conflict. Respect is demonstrated through integrity, open-mindedness and professionalism—the way you speak to people, both verbally and non-verbally; and the way you listen and consider the input of others.

Style: Conflicts can arise when people's work styles clash, i.e., when one person thinks to speak and another speaks to think, or when one embraces participatory decision-making while another practices independent decision-making. Individual styles differ according to the interpretation of the task at hand and the relationship to the other person. Different work styles are most productive when everyone understands and works with, not against, the other style(s) in a spirit of accomplishing the shared goal.

Role Clarity: Conflicts that are experienced as interpersonal can have an origin in a lack of clarity about who is responsible for which task, who has responsibility for which decisions, or who has authority to authorize which actions. Lack of role clarity is not uncommon during the development of new teams or when teams are undergoing organizational change. To minimize role clarity conflicts, it is best to develop clear job descriptions with explicit responsibilities and accountability; clear reporting relationships and lines of communication; and regular team meetings to check-in and discuss any gaps, overlaps or other concerns.

Trust: Trust is often referred to as the foundation for all team interactions. It defines relationships between individuals and the group and is the “cement” that binds people together. Teams low on trust often resort to dysfunctional behaviors (e.g., gossip, camps, passive-aggressive communication) to cope. Low trust teams respond poorly to change, thus directly impacting productivity. Creating a high trust team is a challenge faced by all managers and leaders. It requires consistent practices that promote a relationship-oriented culture without compromising the work at hand. Recommended resources that include strategies are:

[How the Best Leaders Build Trust](#)

[What Google Learned from its Quest to Build the Perfect Team](#)

[Teamwork: The Five Dysfunctions of a Team](#)