Skills4Retail
Building sustainable growth



Managing Conflict

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are, however, those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Co-funded by the European Union

Quick Discussion

What are the common causes for conflict in retail???

Co-funded by
the European Union

Overview of the Day

Agenda



- Welcome and Introductions
- Common Conflicts in Retail
- Conflict Management
- Learner Activity
- EI in Conflict
- Break
- De-escalation techniques in Conflict
- Disciplinary, Grievances, Investigations, WRC and Unions

Co-funded by the European Union

Learning Aim and Outcomes

The aim of this workshop is to equip retail professionals with the knowledge, skills, and strategies required to identify, manage, and resolve workplace conflict effectively.

By the end of this workshop, you will be able to:

1. Identify common types and early signs of conflict in a Retail environment.
2. Apply appropriate conflict management techniques to de-escalate and resolve workplace issues.
3. Understand the procedures related to disciplinary actions, grievances, union involvement, and the role of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC).

Co-funded by the European Union

Why Conflict Resolution Matters in Retail

Skills4Retail
Building sustainable growth

85%

Staff Retention

Percentage of employees who stay longer when conflicts are effectively managed

32%

Productivity Loss

Average productivity reduction in teams with unresolved conflicts

$3,400

Cost Per Conflict

Estimated cost of a single unresolved conflict between employees

67%

Customer Impact

Percentage of customers who notice employee tension and report negative experiences

Co-funded by
the European Union



Skills4Retail
Building sustainable growth

Common Conflicts in Retail

Co-funded by the European Union

Common Conflicts in Retail: Customer Related

Dissatisfied Customers: Handling complaints about products, prices, or policies when customers express frustration or anger toward staff.

Returns and Refund disputes: Navigating disagreements about store policies, particularly when customers demand exceptions or special treatment.

Wait time frustrations: Managing customer impatience during busy periods, short-staffing situations, or technical issues.

Policy Resistance: Addressing pushback when implementing necessary policies like purchase limits, age restricted goods or services or ID verification.

Co-funded by the European Union

Common Conflicts in Retail: Staff-Related

Scheduling Conflict
Disputes over work shifts, time-off requests, and holiday cover.



Work Distribution
Perceived inequities in task assignments and responsibilities.

Communication Breakdown
Misunderstandings and information gaps between shifts and departments.

Recognition Issues
Disagreements about performance recognition, promotions, and rewards.

Co-funded by the European Union

Common Conflicts in Retail: Management-Related

Skills4Retail
Building sustainable growth



Leadership Style Clashes- Differences between management approaches and employee expectations.



Policy Interpretation- Disagreements about how company policies should be implemented.



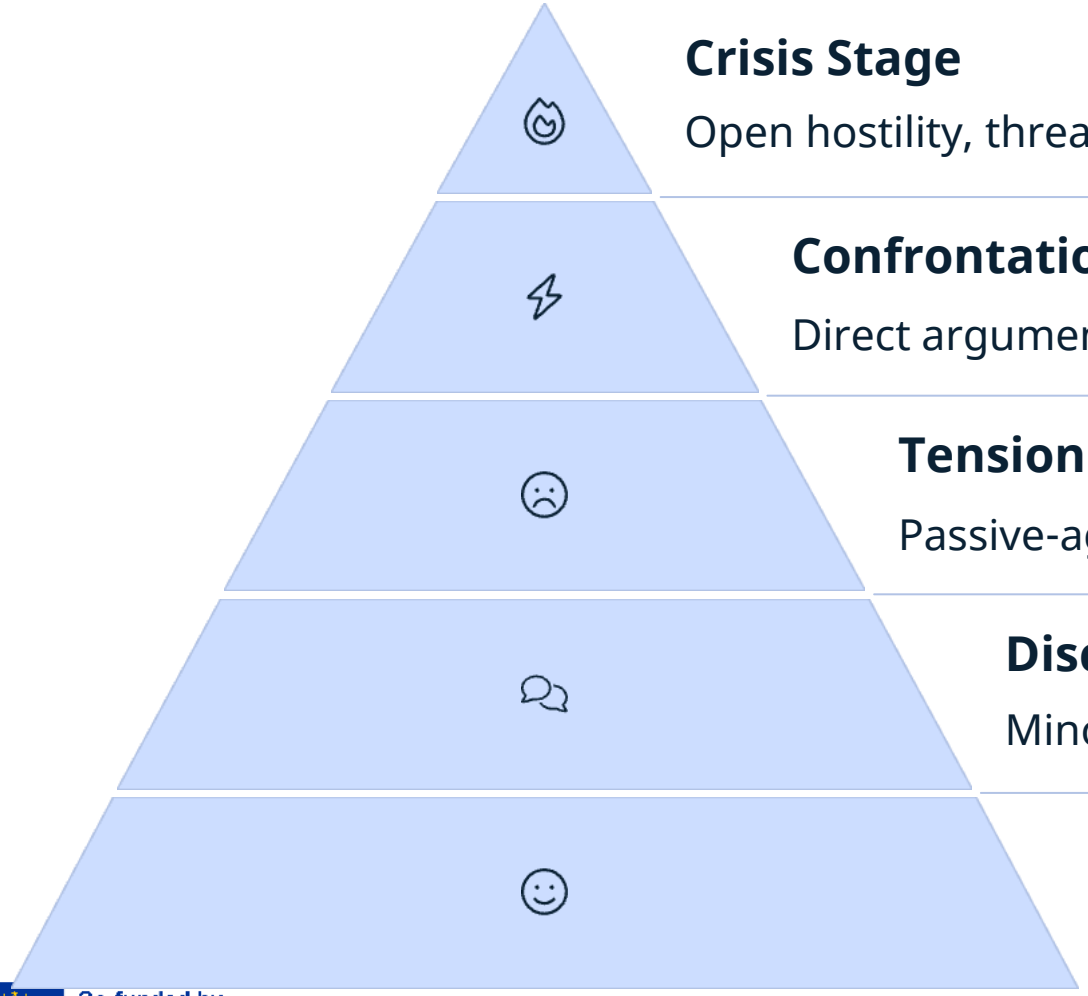
Performance Expectations- Disputes over targets, metrics, and evaluation criteria.



Communication Gaps- Breakdowns in information flow from corporate to frontline staff.

Co-funded by the European Union

The Conflict Escalation Ladder



Crisis Stage

Open hostility, threats, or physical confrontation

Confrontation Stage

Direct arguments, raised voices, defensive postures

Tension Stage

Passive-aggressive behavior, avoidance, gossip

Discomfort Stage

Minor disagreements, awkward interactions

Calm Stage

Normal working relationships, effective communication

Co-funded by
the European Union

Cost of Unresolved Retail Conflicts



Co-funded by
the European Union



Skills4Retail
Building sustainable growth

Conflict Management

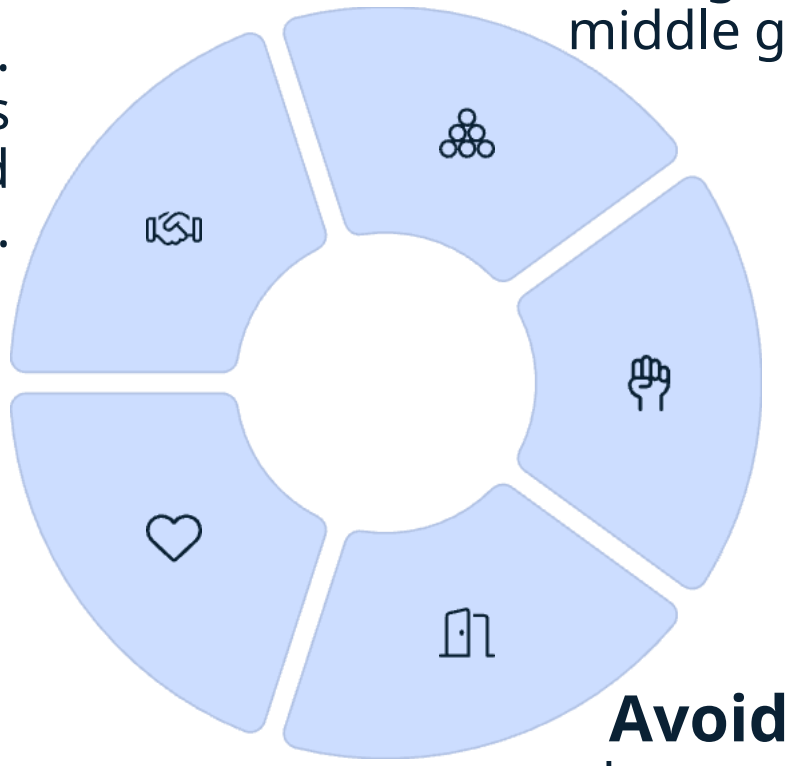
Co-funded by the European Union

Conflict Management Styles Overview

Skills4Retail
Building sustainable growth

Compromising
Moderate concern for both relationships and outcomes. Willing to give and take to find middle ground.

Collaborative
High concern for relationships and outcomes. Seeks win-win solutions through open dialogue and creative problem-solving.



Competing
High concern for outcomes, low for relationships. Pursues own objectives assertively, often at others' expense.

Accommodating
High concern for relationships, low for outcomes. Yields own position to satisfy others' concerns.

Avoiding
Low concern for both relationships and outcomes. Sidesteps or postpones addressing the conflict directly.

Co-funded by the European Union



When to Use Each Conflict Management Style

Style	Best Used When	Example in Retail
Collaborative	Long-term relationships matter; complex issues; time available	Restructuring department responsibilities between longtime team members
Compromising	Equal power exists; temporary solutions needed; time constraints	Negotiating holiday scheduling conflicts among staff
Competing	Quick decisions needed; unpopular actions necessary; emergency situations	Enforcing safety procedures during a store emergency
Avoiding	Issue is trivial; timing is wrong; cooling-off period needed	Postponing discussion of minor display disagreements during peak shopping hours
Accommodating	Issue matters more to others; preserving relationship is priority; building goodwill	Allowing a new employee to lead a project for development purposes

Co-funded by the European Union

The CALM Approach to Conflict Management



Communicate: Open dialogue with active listening and clear expression



Assess: Identify underlying issues and interests beyond positions



Look for Solutions: Brainstorm options and evaluate potential outcomes



Move Forward: Agree on action plan and follow up on implementation

Co-funded by the European Union

Communicate: Active Listening Techniques

1. **Give Full Attention**
   Maintain appropriate eye contact, put away distractions like phones, and demonstrate engagement through body language. In busy retail environments, find a quiet space for important conversations.

2. **Use Encouraging Responses**
   Employ verbal and non-verbal cues like nodding, "I see," and "Tell me more" to show you're engaged and encourage the speaker to continue sharing their perspective.

3. **Reflect and Paraphrase**
   Summarize what you've heard in your own words: "If I understand correctly, you're saying that..." This confirms understanding and shows you value their input.

4. **Ask Clarifying Questions**
   Use open-ended questions to gain deeper insight: "How did that affect your ability to complete the task?" rather than closed questions that prompt yes/no answers.



Co-funded by
the European Union

Communicate: Assertive Communication



"I" Statements

Express feelings without blame using the formula: "I feel [emotion] when [specific behavior] because [impact]. I would prefer [solution]." This focuses on the issue rather than attacking the person.

Be Specific

Address concrete behaviors rather than generalizations. Instead of "You're always late," try "I noticed you arrived 15 minutes after your shift started three times this week."

Balance Firmness with Respect

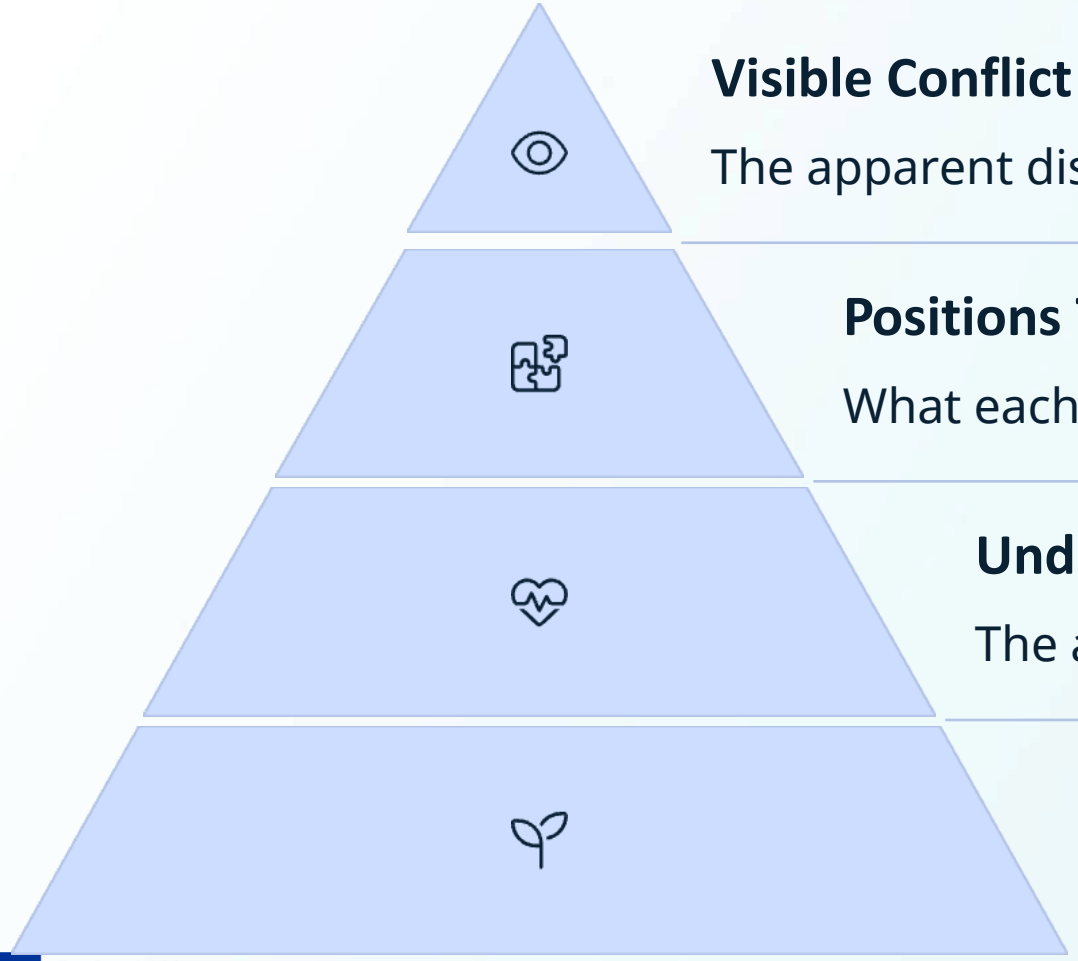
Maintain clear boundaries while acknowledging others' perspectives. "I understand you're busy, but I need the inventory count by 5 PM to meet our deadline."

Focus on Solutions

Move conversations toward positive outcomes rather than dwelling on problems. "How can we adjust the schedule to ensure adequate coverage while accommodating your request?"

Co-funded by the European Union

Assess: Identifying Underlying Issues



Visible Conflict

The apparent disagreement or tension

Positions Taken

What each person says they want

Underlying Interests

The actual needs, desires, and concerns

Root Causes

Systemic issues, past experiences, values

Co-funded by
the European Union

Assess: The Five Whys Technique

1. **Identify the Problem**
   "Team members are arguing about restocking responsibilities."
2. **Why 1: Why are they arguing?**
   "Because the morning shift claims the evening shift isn’t properly restocking shelves."
3. **Why 2: Why isn't the evening shift restocking properly?**
   "Because they say they don't have enough time before closing."
4. **Why 3: Why don't they have enough time?**
   "Because customer traffic has increased in evening hours."
5. **Why 4: Why hasn't staffing been adjusted?**
   "Because the increased traffic pattern hasn't been formally documented."
6. **Why 5: Why isn't traffic being tracked?**
   "Because our customer counting system isn't being monitored by time of day."

Co-funded by the European Union

Look for Solutions: Collaborative Problem-Solving



Define the Problem Together- Ensure all parties agree on what issue needs solving. Frame the problem as shared: "How can we ensure both customer service and restocking are handled effectively during evening shifts?" This creates ownership and alignment.



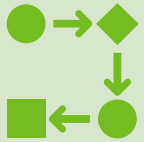
Brainstorm without judgement- Generate multiple options without criticism. Encourage creative thinking and build on others' ideas. In retail contexts, involve both frontline staff and management to capture diverse perspectives on operational solutions.

Co-funded by the European Union

Look for Solutions: Collaborative Problem-Solving



Evaluate Options Objectively- Assess ideas against agreed criteria: feasibility, impact, resources required, and alignment with store policies. Consider short-term fixes and long-term solutions to address immediate needs while working on systemic improvements.



Select and Plan Implementation- Choose the best solution(s) and develop an action plan with clear responsibilities, timelines, and success measures. Ensure everyone understands their role in the solution and has necessary resources.

Co-funded by the European Union

Move Forward: Conflict Resolution Agreements

Be Specific
Detail exactly what actions each party will take, with measurable outcomes and clear timelines. "Jane will handle customer returns while Mark manages restocking between 4-6 PM on weekdays" is better than "Jane and Mark will divide closing duties."

Document the Agreement
Create a written record that all parties acknowledge, whether formal or informal. This prevents misunderstandings and provides a reference point for follow-up discussions. For recurring issues, consider creating standard procedures.

Plan for Follow-Up
Schedule a specific time to review how the solution is working and adjust if needed. This demonstrates commitment to the resolution process and allows for continuous improvement.

Recognize Progress
Acknowledge positive changes and improvements, even small ones. Celebrating success reinforces the value of constructive conflict resolution and encourages continued effort.

Co-funded by the European Union

Skills4Retail
Building sustainable growth



Group Activity

Co-funded by
the European Union



Skills4Retail
Building sustainable growth

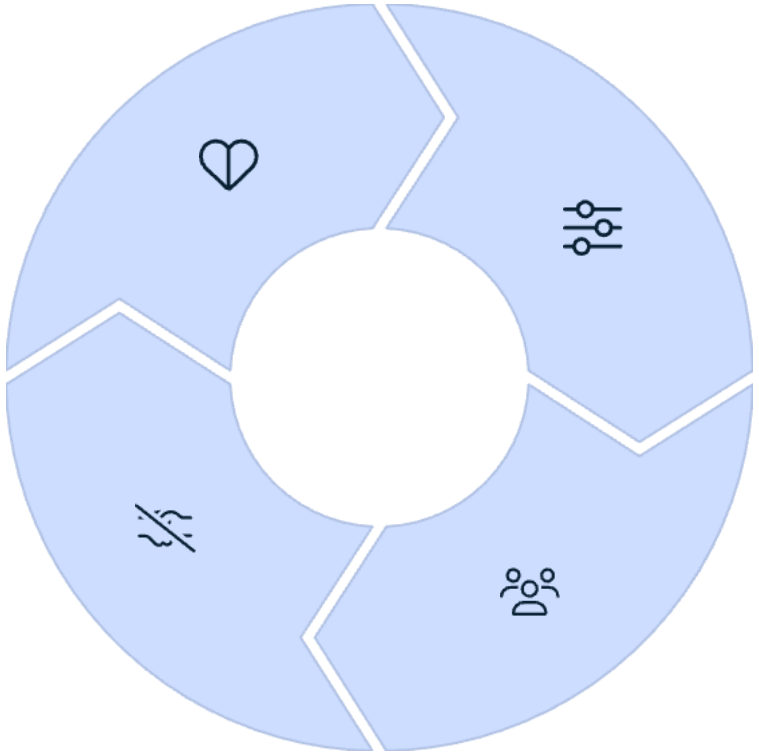
Emotional Intelligence in Conflict

Co-funded by the European Union

Key Skills: Emotional Intelligence in Conflict

Self-Awareness
Recognizing your emotions and their impact during conflict

Relationship Management
Influencing and connecting with others effectively



Self-Regulation
Managing your responses and staying calm under pressure

Social Awareness
Reading others' emotions and understanding perspectives

Co-funded by the European Union

Self-Awareness in Retail Conflicts

Recognize Triggers

Identify specific situations that consistently provoke strong emotional responses in you. Common retail triggers include feeling disrespected by customers, perceived favoritism in scheduling, or having your authority questioned in front of others.

Notice Physical Signals

Pay attention to your body's stress responses—tense shoulders, racing heart, shallow breathing—as early warning signs of emotional escalation. These physical cues often appear before you're consciously aware of your emotional reaction.

Understand Your Patterns

Reflect on your typical conflict responses. Do you tend to withdraw when scheduling conflicts arise? Become defensive when receiving customer complaints? Identifying these patterns helps you prepare alternative responses.

Practice Reflection

Maintain a brief conflict journal to record significant workplace interactions. Note what happened, how you felt, how you responded, and what you might do differently next time to build your self-awareness muscle.

Co-funded by the European Union

Self-Regulation Techniques for Retail Environments

Pause Before Responding

When confronted with an angry customer or frustrated colleague, take a brief pause before replying. Even a three-second delay can prevent impulsive reactions and allow for a more thoughtful response.

Employ Positive Self-Talk

Develop specific phrases to use internally during tense moments: "I can handle this professionally" or "This isn't personal." These mental reframes help maintain emotional balance during difficult interactions.

Use Tactical Breathing

Practice the 4-4-4 technique: breathe in for 4 counts, hold for 4 counts, exhale for 4 counts. This can be done discreetly even on the sales floor to quickly reduce stress hormones and restore calm.

Know When to Step Away

Recognize when you need a brief break to regain composure. Having a signal with colleagues to briefly tag out during escalating situations can prevent conflicts from worsening.

Co-funded by the European Union

Social Awareness in Retail Team Dynamics







Developing social awareness means becoming attuned to the emotional undercurrents in your retail environment.

Notice body language shifts that signal discomfort or disagreement before verbal conflicts emerge.

Pay attention to changes in communication patterns, such as a typically talkative team member becoming quiet, which may indicate brewing issues requiring attention.

Skills4Retail
Building sustainable growth

Co-funded by the European Union

Relationship Management in Retail Teams

Skills4Retail
Building sustainable growth

Build Rapport Continuously

Invest in relationships during calm periods, not just during conflicts. Take a few minutes each shift to connect personally with team members. These deposits in your "relationship bank account" make conflict resolution easier when tensions arise.

Adapt Your Communication Style

Recognize that team members respond differently to various approaches. Some prefer direct communication while others need a more supportive tone. Flexing your style to match others' preferences demonstrates respect and improves outcomes.

Address Issues Early

Don't let small frustrations fester into major conflicts. Regular check-ins and an open-door policy encourage addressing concerns while they're still manageable and before positions become entrenched.

Model Constructive Behavior

Demonstrate the conflict resolution approaches you want to see. When you make mistakes, acknowledge them and apologize appropriately, showing your team that healthy conflict management includes accountability.

Co-funded by
the European Union



Break Time

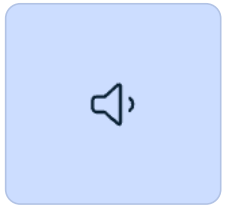
Co-funded by
the European Union

Skills4Retail
Building sustainable growth

De-escalation Techniques in Conflict

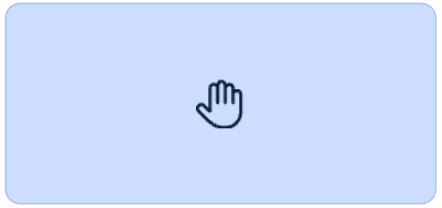
Co-funded by the European Union

Key Skills: De-escalation Techniques



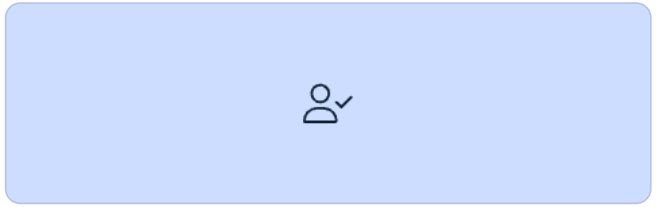
Lower Your Voice

Speak softly to encourage others to match your tone



Use Calming Body Language

Open stance, appropriate distance, non-threatening gestures



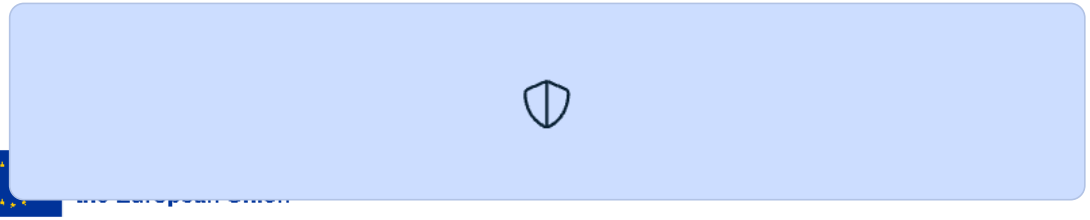
Validate Feelings

Acknowledge emotions without necessarily agreeing



Offer Options

Provide choices to restore sense of control



Set Clear Boundaries

Explain acceptable behavior firmly but respectfully

De-escalation in Action: Customer Scenarios

Scenario	Ineffective Response	Effective De-escalation
Customer angry about return policy	"That's our policy. There's nothing I can do."	"I understand this is frustrating. While I can't override our return policy, let me see what other options we might have to help you."
Customer complaining about wait time	"We're short-staffed. You'll have to be patient."	"Thank you for your patience. I know waiting is difficult. I can serve you next, and we're working to open another register in about two minutes."
Customer making personal comments	Responding with similar personal remarks or becoming visibly upset	"I want to focus on how I can help with your purchase today. Could you tell me more about what you're looking for?"
Customer using profanity	"Don't talk to me that way or I'll call security."	"I really want to help resolve this, but I need us to keep the conversation respectful so I can focus on finding a solution for you."

Co-funded by the European Union

Key Skills: Mediating Team Conflicts

Skills4Retail
Building sustainable growth

Prepare the Environment

Choose a private, neutral space away from customers and other staff. Arrange seating to minimize power dynamics (round table or equal positioning). Ensure you won't be interrupted during the discussion.

Establish Ground Rules

Begin with clear expectations: one person speaks at a time, focus on issues not personalities, commit to finding solutions. Get verbal agreement on these guidelines before proceeding with the discussion.

Facilitate Equal Participation

Give each person uninterrupted time to share their perspective. Ask clarifying questions to ensure understanding. Maintain balanced airtime, gently redirecting if one person dominates the conversation.

Guide Toward Resolution

Help identify areas of agreement first, then work on addressing differences. Remain impartial while keeping the discussion solution-focused. Document specific agreements and follow-up plans.

Co-funded by the European Union



Skills4Retail
Building sustainable growth

Disciplinary, Grievances, Investigations and WRC, Unions

Co-funded by the European Union

Formal Disciplinary Procedures: Overview

Verbal Warning

Initial discussion of performance/behavior concerns, documented but not formal part of record

Written Warning

Formal documentation of issue, improvement requirements, and potential consequences

Final Warning/Suspension

Last opportunity to correct issues before termination, may include paid/unpaid leave

Termination

Employment ended due to failure to meet requirements or policy violation



Co-funded by the European Union

Conducting Effective Disciplinary Meetings

1 **Prepare Thoroughly**

Gather all relevant evidence, documentation, and policy references. Review the employee's file for previous incidents or patterns. Consult with HR if available to ensure procedural compliance.

2 **Choose Appropriate Setting**

Hold the meeting in a private location where you won't be overheard or interrupted. Schedule enough time for a thorough discussion without feeling rushed. Consider having an appropriate witness present.

3 **Present Clear Information**

State the specific issue, providing examples and evidence. Reference relevant policies or performance standards. Allow the employee to respond and provide their perspective on the situation.

4 **Document Thoroughly**

Record the meeting outcomes, including specific improvement requirements, timelines, and consequences if standards aren't met. Have the employee acknowledge the discussion, even if they disagree with the assessment.

Co-funded by the European Union

Performance Improvement Plans (PIPs)

PIP Components

An effective Performance Improvement Plan includes:

- Specific performance/behavior concerns clearly identified
- Measurable improvement targets
- Resources and support being provided
- Timeline for improvement milestones
- Regular check-in schedule
- Consequences if targets aren't met

Implementation Best Practices

When implementing a PIP in a retail environment:

- Focus on specific behaviors rather than attitude
- Set realistic goals considering the retail environment
- Provide concrete examples of expected performance
- Schedule reviews during non-peak business times
- Document all discussions and progress
- Balance accountability with appropriate support

Co-funded by the European Union

Employee Grievance Procedures



Informal Resolution

Employee discusses concern directly with supervisor or colleague

Formal Grievance Filing

Written submission of complaint with specific details and requested remedy

Investigation

Gathering of evidence, interviews with relevant parties, and documentation review

Decision

Formal determination of findings and appropriate actions to be taken

Appeal (if applicable)

Review of decision by higher management level or designated committee

Co-funded by the European Union

Handling Employee Grievances Effectively



Respond Promptly

Acknowledge grievances quickly, even if full resolution takes time. Provide realistic timeframes for investigation and keep employees updated on progress to maintain trust in the process.

Listen Without Judgment

Give employees your full attention when they raise concerns, avoiding defensive responses or premature conclusions. Sometimes, being heard is the first step toward resolution.

Investigate Thoroughly

Gather information from all relevant perspectives, maintaining confidentiality while ensuring a fair and comprehensive review of the situation.

Focus on Resolution

Work toward meaningful solutions that address the underlying issues, not just surface complaints. Follow up after implementation to ensure effectiveness.

Co-funded by the European Union

Conducting Workplace Investigations

Determine Investigation Scope
Clearly define what issues will be investigated, what evidence is needed, and who needs to be interviewed. For retail environments, this may include reviewing sales records, security footage, or customer feedback in addition to employee statements.

Collect Evidence Systematically
Gather relevant documentation, conduct interviews in a consistent manner, and maintain detailed notes. In retail settings, physical evidence like damaged merchandise or register discrepancies may be important components of an investigation.

Analyze Findings Objectively
Review all evidence without bias, considering multiple interpretations. Distinguish between facts, assumptions, and hearsay. Look for patterns or inconsistencies that help establish what likely occurred.

Document and Report Results
Create a comprehensive record of the investigation process, findings, and recommended actions. Present conclusions based on evidence rather than speculation or personal opinion.

Co-funded by the European Union

Interview Techniques for Workplace Investigations

Skills4Retail
Building sustainable growth

Prepare Thoroughly

Review relevant policies and existing evidence before interviews. Develop a structured question list for each interviewee while remaining flexible enough to explore new information as it emerges. Arrange a private, comfortable setting for interviews.

Start Appropriately

Begin by explaining the purpose of the interview, confidentiality parameters, and the process being followed. Clarify that you're gathering information rather than making accusations. Establish rapport before addressing sensitive topics.

Use Effective Questioning

Employ open-ended questions that encourage detailed responses. Follow up with specific inquiries to clarify important points. Avoid leading questions that suggest particular answers or multiple questions asked simultaneously.

Document Accurately

Take detailed notes during or immediately after the interview. Consider recording interviews with permission where appropriate. Have interviewees review and sign statements confirming their accuracy.

Co-funded by
the European Union

Working with Unions in Retail Environments

Understanding Union Relationships

In unionized retail environments, collective bargaining agreements outline specific procedures for handling workplace conflicts and disciplinary matters. These agreements typically establish:

- Progressive discipline requirements
- Employee rights to representation
- Formal grievance procedures
- Seniority considerations
- Dispute resolution mechanisms

Co-funded by the European Union

Working with Unions in Retail Environments

Effective Collaboration

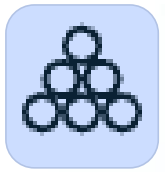
Successful management in unionized settings involves:

- Building productive working relationships with union representatives
- Thoroughly understanding the collective agreement provisions
- Documenting issues consistently and thoroughly
- Following established procedures precisely
- Addressing problems early before they escalate to formal grievances
- Focusing on mutual interests rather than adversarial positions

Co-funded by the European Union

The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC)

Skills4Retail
Building sustainable growth



WRC Purpose

The Workplace Relations Commission provides impartial dispute resolution services, helping employers and employees resolve conflicts through mediation, conciliation, and adjudication when internal processes have been exhausted.



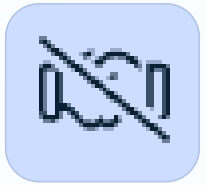
WRC Services

Services include information provision, workplace mediation, conciliation conferences, adjudication hearings, and inspections to ensure compliance with employment legislation.



Complaint Process

Employees must typically file complaints within specific timeframes and demonstrate they've attempted to resolve issues through internal procedures before the WRC will intervene.



Employer Participation

When faced with a WRC complaint, employers must respond to allegations, provide relevant documentation, and participate in good faith in mediation or adjudication processes.

Co-funded by
the European Union

Preparing for WRC Proceedings

Gather Documentation

Collect all relevant records, correspondence, and evidence

Review Resolution Options

Consider acceptable settlement terms prior to proceedings



Consider Representation

Determine whether legal or HR specialist support is needed

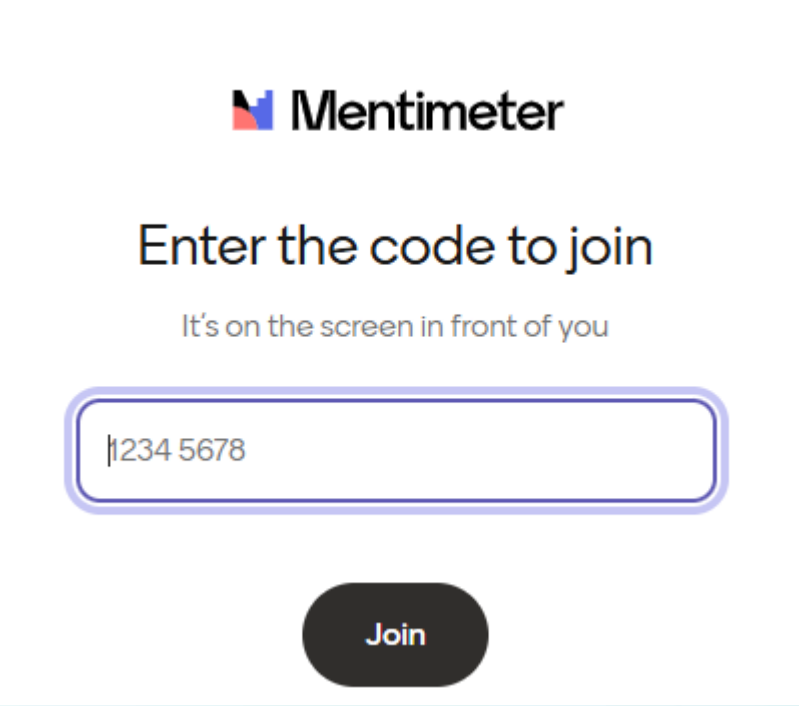
Prepare Your Case

Organize timeline, identify witnesses, and anticipate questions

Co-funded by the European Union

Mentimeter Feedback

- Please type into your web browser menti.com and the screen shown should appear.
- Once you are on menti.com please enter the code to access the feedback questions
- Complete the feedback questions from today.



Skills4Retail
Building sustainable growth



Managing Conflict

Thank you for your time

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are, however, those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Co-funded by the European Union