



SHIV MARTIN CONSULTING
*RESOLVE CONFLICT. BUILD TRUST.
STRENGTHEN TEAMS.*

A GUIDE TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION FOR STRATA MANAGERS

Effective Strategies for Building Strong
Relationships and Resolving Disputes



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“Effective conflict resolution creates opportunities for learning, collaboration, and creative problem-solving.”



INTRODUCTION

As a Strata Manager, conflict is something you will undoubtedly face. Whether it's disputes between owners, disagreements over levies, or conflicts about building maintenance, managing conflict is part of your role. However, conflict doesn't have to derail the progress of your strata community. With the right tools and strategies, it can become an opportunity for growth, clearer understanding, and stronger relationships among stakeholders.

In my years of experience as a mediator and negotiator in strata disputes, I have supported numerous strata managers, owners, and stakeholders through challenging situations. The key is applying effective communication, conflict resolution strategies, and a clear framework to turn these disputes into opportunities for collaboration and lasting resolution.

Below is a table summarizing the key strategies that will help you effectively manage conflict, build stronger relationships, and resolve disputes within your strata community:

Strategy	Key Points
Building Strong Communication	Understand your own communication style, actively listen, and use "I" statements to prevent defensiveness.
Turning Conflict into Opportunity	Recognize conflict early, define the root causes, and engage in collaborative problem-solving.
Managing Challenging Behaviors	Stay calm, empathize with clients, and set respectful boundaries to manage emotions and maintain control.

1. BUILDING STRONG RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

“The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn’t said.” – Peter Drucker

As a strata manager, communication isn’t just about sending out notices or running meetings—it’s about fostering understanding and collaboration between all parties involved. Whether you’re dealing with disagreements about building maintenance, repairs, or the allocation of strata fees, understanding how to communicate effectively is key to resolving conflicts and maintaining positive relationships with owners, tenants, and contractors.

Key Communication Strategies

Self-Awareness: Understanding Your Communication Style

Over the years, I’ve seen how a Strata Manager’s communication style can either ease or escalate tensions. Reflecting on your own communication approach is essential. Are you listening to the concerns of owners, or just pushing through the agenda? Recognizing how your body language, tone, and choice of words influence conversations can help you communicate more effectively, especially when dealing with heated issues like disagreements over levies or building projects.

CASE STUDY 1: MANAGING DISPUTES OVER BUILDING REPAIRS

A common issue that mediators encounter in strata communities is disputes over the scope of building repairs. In one case, a group of owners were divided over whether to approve funding for urgent repairs. The disagreement quickly escalated into personal attacks, creating tension and making it difficult to reach a resolution. A mediator was engaged to assess the situation. After reviewing the issues, the mediator guided the strata manager to adopt a more empathetic approach, encouraging them to actively listen to all parties’ concerns and use “I” statements to foster understanding. This shift in communication opened up a calmer and more constructive discussion. The owners felt that their opinions were genuinely heard, which helped to rebuild trust and reduce hostility. As a result, the dispute was resolved amicably with a shared understanding of the repair costs and a collective agreement on the next steps.



Active Listening

In my experience, active listening is one of the most effective tools for resolving conflict. When owners or tenants express their frustrations, it's essential to listen with full attention—beyond the words, you must hear the underlying emotions. Whether it's a concern about the allocation of fees or dissatisfaction with building maintenance, understanding the deeper issues helps you address the real concerns, not just the symptoms of the dispute.

Using “I” Statements to Foster Cooperation

Effective communication in strata management requires carefully phrased language. Using “I” statements helps to express concerns without placing blame, which can prevent defensive reactions. For example, rather than saying, “You never pay attention to the issues raised at meetings,” you can say, “I feel unheard when concerns aren't addressed at meetings.” This simple shift helps focus on resolving issues rather than assigning blame, which is essential when managing disputes in a shared environment like a strata community.



2. TURNING CONFLICT INTO OPPORTUNITY

“*In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.*” – Albert Einstein

Conflict doesn't have to be an obstacle in strata management. In fact, when handled effectively, conflict can become an opportunity for growth, creativity, and stronger relationships within your strata community. By recognizing the signs of conflict early and approaching it with a positive mindset, you can turn even the most challenging disputes into productive discussions.

Key Strategies for Managing Conflict

Recognize Conflict Early

I've seen countless situations where conflict could have been avoided or resolved more quickly if it had been recognized earlier. Whether it's subtle tension between colleagues or a clear disconnect between a client and a government agency, the earlier you identify conflict, the easier it is to manage and prevent it from escalating. Being proactive about addressing conflict not only resolves the issue at hand but also strengthens relationships over time.

Define the Drivers of Conflict

Every conflict has an underlying cause. It's essential to assess whether the conflict is substantive (related to issues like finances, property use, or maintenance), emotional (rooted in feelings of frustration, unfairness, or powerlessness), or procedural (stemming from misunderstandings about processes or policies). Once you identify whether the dispute is procedural, emotional, or substantive, you can approach it in a way that addresses the true issue at hand. For example, in a levy disagreement, the root cause might be a misunderstanding of the payment process, whereas in a maintenance dispute, the issue could be more about emotional frustration over a perceived lack of attention.

CASE STUDY 2: RESOLVING CONFLICT OVER LEVY INCREASES

I once mediated a dispute where owners were frustrated over a proposed levy increase. The issue wasn't just the increase itself, but the lack of transparency regarding how the funds would be used.

Through collaborative problem-solving, we worked on a better way of sharing information and sharing concerns. By addressing the root concern—transparency—owners were more willing to accept the increase, and the community was able to move forward with a stronger sense of trust.

Collaborative Problem-Solving

Conflict in strata communities often involves multiple stakeholders, and resolving it requires collaboration. Engaging owners in brainstorming potential solutions creates ownership and ensures that the outcome reflects the needs and interests of all parties. I've found that when everyone has a voice in finding a solution, disputes are more likely to be resolved amicably and lead to a more harmonious community.

3. MANAGING CHALLENGING CLIENT BEHAVIOURS

“You don't have to be the smartest person in the room; you just have to be the calmest.” – Unknown

Strata managers often deal with challenging behaviors—whether it's an owner who is constantly disruptive in meetings, a tenant who disregards building rules, or a group of owners at odds with each other. How you manage these behaviors is crucial for maintaining a respectful and productive environment.



Key Strategies for Managing Challenging Client Behaviours

Stay Calm and Manage Your Own Emotions

One of the most important lessons I've learned as a mediator in strata disputes is how essential it is for the manager to remain calm, especially when clients are angry or confrontational. Whether you're dealing with a disruptive owner or an agitated tenant, staying composed helps de-escalate the situation and shows that you are in control. A calm demeanor helps create a more open space for constructive conversations.

Empathize with Owners and Tenants

Challenging behaviors often stem from frustration or a sense of powerlessness. I always encourage strata managers to empathize with the person expressing these behaviors. Acknowledging their concerns and demonstrating that you understand their frustrations can create a bridge between the parties and diffuse tension.

Set Boundaries While Maintaining Respect

While it's important to empathize with clients, it's equally crucial to set boundaries, particularly when disruptive behaviors threaten the community's well-being. A respectful but firm approach to boundary-setting ensures that you maintain control of the situation while still respecting the individual's feelings.

4. APPLYING THE CURE FRAMEWORK TO STRATA MANAGEMENT

As a strata manager, navigating conflict and ensuring positive outcomes isn't just about using techniques and strategies. It's about applying a structured, thoughtful approach that aligns with your goals and the interests of your community. The CURE framework, which I use extensively in my mediation and negotiation practice, provides a clear structure for managing conflict while ensuring both parties remain heard, respected, and empowered.

CURE Framework Applied

C: Clarity of Role and Process

In every strata dispute, whether you're managing a conflict between owners or negotiating with contractors, clarity is paramount. Ensure that both you and all involved parties understand the roles, responsibilities, and processes involved. Setting clear expectations at the beginning helps reduce confusion and sets the stage for smoother, more productive discussions. It is also helpful to contain the issues in dispute and identify the issues that you cannot assist with.

U: Understanding Before Responding

Before jumping into solutions, it's essential to fully understand the concerns of the owners, tenants, or contractors involved. I've found that active listening and asking probing questions helps clarify their needs and concerns, allowing you to respond effectively.

You can also use **open-ended questions** to explore deeper issues and encourage reflection, such as “Can you help me understand what led to this situation?” Additionally, conducting **private one-on-one meetings** with individuals can reveal insights that might not surface in group discussions. Reviewing any relevant **documentation** or communication, such as meeting minutes or email exchanges, can provide context and highlight procedural issues or misunderstandings. Combining these methods gives you a well-rounded view of the conflict’s roots—whether they are **substantive, emotional, or procedural**—which is crucial for crafting a fair and effective resolution strategy.

R: Responding, Redirecting, and Reality Testing

Once you understand the issue, respond thoughtfully, redirecting the conversation toward problem-solving. Reality testing involves assessing whether the proposed solutions are feasible and fair for all parties. In my experience, by redirecting the conversation to focus on solutions, you empower owners to engage more constructively and set realistic expectations.

E: Empowering and Ending

The final step in the CURE framework is to empower those involved in the conflict. By providing them with the tools and resources to continue the conversation and action plan on their own, you foster long-term trust and sustainability within the community.

As a strata manager, one of your key responsibilities is not only resolving conflicts but also empowering the parties involved to manage future conflicts on their own. This can be achieved by fostering a culture of open communication, respect, and self-awareness within the community. You can begin by providing clear information about the **strata rules and processes**, ensuring that all owners and tenants understand the framework within which disputes should be handled.

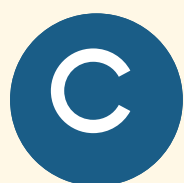
Encouraging proactive problem-solving is also vital; for example, guiding parties to engage in **constructive conversations**, where they express their concerns openly but respectfully, can help them develop confidence in managing their own conflicts. By **teaching conflict resolution techniques**—such as active listening, using “I” statements, and focusing on common interests rather than positions—you equip community members with the tools they need to handle disagreements effectively.

Additionally, establishing **clear escalation procedures** can give parties the assurance that, should issues persist, there is a structured process to follow. Ultimately, by promoting understanding, collaboration, and clear communication, you empower owners and tenants to address issues independently, leading to a more harmonious and self-sufficient community.



SHIV'S CURE FRAMEWORK

A UNIVERSAL APPROACH TO CONFLICT MANAGEMENT



CONTAIN AND CLARIFY

Be clear in your explanations & expectations in order to save time and build trust.



UNDERSTAND

Build rapport and listen, to understand we need to dig a little deeper.



RESPOND

Problem solve, generate options, consider alternatives and maybe shift perspectives.



EMPOWER AND END

Reinforcing autonomy and choice.



5. WHEN TO CALL IN HELP: THE ROLE OF MEDIATORS AND FACILITATORS IN STRATA DISPUTES

As a strata manager, there will be times when conflict becomes too complex, entrenched, or emotionally charged to resolve on your own. In such cases, it may be necessary to call in external help. This is where mediators and facilitators come in. As an expert mediator, I've seen firsthand how professional mediation can help break through the barriers that prevent resolution. Here's a snapshot of the mediation process:



Mediators are neutral third parties who facilitate communication between disputing parties, helping them understand each other's perspectives, manage emotions, and work collaboratively toward a solution. By bringing in a mediator or facilitator, you can save time, reduce the emotional toll on your community, and reach more effective, sustainable resolutions to disputes over levies, maintenance, or building use, ensuring the continued harmony and functioning of your strata.

ABOUT SHIV MARTIN



Shiv Martin is a highly experienced mediator and trainer with extensive expertise in dispute resolution across Australia and New Zealand. She has worked with a wide range of conciliation and dispute resolution processes that are legally compliant, fair, and effective.

Shiv combines her background as a lawyer, mediator, and trainer to provide practical guidance and tailored training. Her deep understanding of both the legal and human dimensions of conciliation makes her a trusted advisor and leader in the field.

The Mediation Process in Five Stages



Pre - Mediation

Assess suitability. Wellbeing Check.
Prepare parties for Mediation.



Introductions

Introduce role of mediator, parties provide opening statements, agenda setting.



Exploration

Share information. Understand different perceptions.
Unpack assumptions. Explore relevant law or policy.



Private sessions

Private, confidential check ins with mediator to discuss options, alternatives and shift to a future focus.



Negotiation and Agreement

Generate options, negotiate a range of outcomes and move to agreement



SELF CARE IN CONFLICT WORK



"By focusing on what we can control, we can develop a sense of inner calm and resilience that helps us to cope with the challenges of life."

– Donald Robertson (2013, p. 59)



SELF CARE TIPS

Strata Managers working in conflict face emotional challenges that can lead to burnout and vicarious trauma. The greatest risk in conflict work is not physical violence, but the psychological harm it can cause. Here are three essential self-care tips:

1. Set Clear Boundaries

Establish boundaries between work and personal life to preserve emotional energy. Define clear start and finish times for work, and make time to relax, ensuring you can recharge and return with a fresh perspective.

2. Engage in Reflection and Supervision

Regular reflection and supervision are key to managing emotional stress.

Discuss difficult cases with trusted colleagues or supervisors to gain insight and support, preventing burnout and fostering professional growth.

3. Prioritise Physical and Mental Health

Take care of your body and mind. Regular exercise, good nutrition, sleep, and practices like mindfulness or meditation can help maintain clarity and emotional resilience.

Three Reflective Practice and Debriefing Approaches

Peer Supervision Groups

Share experiences and insights with colleagues to provide mutual support and reduce stress.

Journaling

Reflect on cases and your emotional responses to identify stress triggers and promote self-awareness.

Mental Health Supervision

Consult with a mental health professional to develop coping strategies and resilience.

Focus on what you can control—your approach, boundaries, and self-care. Understand that not all conflict conversations will go as planned. The greatest risk is psychological harm, so by embracing challenges and using support systems, you can maintain resilience and continue your valuable work.





CONCLUSION

MASTERING CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN STRATA MANAGEMENT

As a strata manager, conflict is an inevitable part of the journey. But I've learned through years of experience—whether navigating disputes over levies, building maintenance, or management responsibilities—that conflict doesn't have to be a barrier. By building strong communication skills, recognizing conflict early, and managing challenging behaviors with empathy, respect, and composure, you can turn conflict into an opportunity for growth, stronger relationships, and more successful outcomes.

In my experience, managing conflict effectively is the key to building lasting relationships with owners, tenants, contractors, and other stakeholders. By embracing these strategies and continuously refining your conflict management skills, you'll enhance your ability to navigate challenges and turn disputes into opportunities for a more harmonious and thriving strata community.

[LEARN MORE ON MY BLOG](#)



FAQ

1 What is the most important skill for managing conflict in strata management?

A: In my experience, active listening is the most important skill. When you listen attentively, you can understand the root causes of the conflict, which allows you to address the real issue, not just the symptoms.

2 How do I stay calm when an owner becomes aggressive or disruptive in meetings?

A: The key is to manage your own emotional responses. Pause before reacting, take a deep breath, and remember that your calm demeanor will help de-escalate the situation. Acknowledge the owner's feelings and set respectful boundaries.

3 How do I manage multiple parties involved in a complex strata dispute?

A: When multiple parties are involved, it's important to ensure clarity of roles and expectations from the start. Use the CURE framework to guide the conversation and ensure all parties feel heard and respected. Collaborative problem-solving works best when everyone is engaged and focused on a shared goal.

4 How can I foster collaboration among owners with conflicting interests?

A: I encourage creating a safe space for open dialogue, where owners can express their concerns without fear of judgment. Use active listening and empathy to ensure all voices are heard, and facilitate discussions that focus on common goals, rather than individual interests.

5 How can Shiv Martin Consulting support our strata team with conflict resolution?

A: At [Shiv Martin Consulting](http://ShivMartinConsulting.com.au), we offer tailored mediation, facilitation, and training services specifically designed for strata communities and committees. Whether you're navigating interpersonal disputes between residents, managing tensions within the committee, or facing difficult conversations with contractors or stakeholders, we can help.

Our approach combines legal insight, structured communication frameworks, and emotional intelligence to resolve issues early and preserve relationships.

We provide:

- Neutral mediation for escalated conflicts
- Conflict coaching for strata managers and committee chairs
- Training workshops on communication, by-law enforcement, and de-escalation
- Facilitated meetings to help teams make decisions when tensions are high

WHAT NEXT?

Now that you have an overview of the managing conflict as a strata manager, let me know if you need more support putting your learning into practice! Managing conflict requires a range of skills and process knowledge to navigate unpredictable and emotional circumstances. I can support you through training, coaching and co-mediation to get you started.

FEEDBACK FROM SHIV'S CLIENTS

Dear Shiv, I'd just like to say how useful I found the masterclasses. You have been so generous in the information and references you have provided and your enthusiasm has been a great source of motivation for me. Thanks so much for sharing your knowledge and expertise in an excellent package.

Lisa – Senior Project Officer/ Registration Delegate National Native Title Tribunal

I loved your workshop – it was expertly facilitated and very relatable. You were able to create a safe space for open discussion and reflection with non-clinical examples. I would highly recommend anyone who works in a team environment attend. Nicole – Staff Specialist | Royal Brisbane and Women's Emergency and Trauma Centre

I recently attended a two-day training course led by Shiv Martin, and it was an exceptional experience. She was incredibly warm and approachable, making the learning environment comfortable and engaging. Her depth of knowledge, experience and practical insights into mediation were truly impressive. I left the course feeling confident and equipped with valuable skills. Highly recommend Shiv for anyone looking to enhance their mediation abilities!

Natalie – HR Business Partner, Local Government



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