



Mitigating the risks of labour conflicts.

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Labour conflicts are costly and time consuming events designed to disrupt company operations and pressure it into making desired concessions. While most disruptions remain civil, they significantly impact businesses. Sometimes, labour conflicts escalate into dangerous and illegal behavior, including vandalism and violence. As such, making contingency plans for labour disputes is an important part of risk management.

Causes of labour conflicts

When workers feel they have been significantly wronged

Labour conflicts arise when workers feel they have been significantly wronged, and they believe a dispute is the only way to have grievances addressed. To properly address a labour conflict, you must understand the root of it, as each cause offers its own challenges and expectations. Common situations include:

- **Downsizing or closing of a facility.** Employees can feel unappreciated and exploited when facing unemployment. This sentiment can be particularly strong when job positions are relocated rather than simply eliminated. It is also important to recognize employees feel vulnerable and desperate. About to lose their jobs, they may feel they have little to lose in using more aggressive protest techniques.
 - **Strikes for better wages.** For years, many companies have been able to give only limited raises. But the cost of living continues to rise, and employees find it increasingly difficult to maintain standards of living. When discussions with management fail to produce desired compensation, employees may escalate the dispute into a strike.
 - **Strikes for violations of collective bargaining agreements.** Union employees may strike when an employer is viewed as acting in bad faith concerning a collective bargaining agreement.
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Tactics to pressure companies

Labour disputes affect company's operations and reputation

Labour disputes disrupt company operations. The less efficiently a business can work, the less revenue it generates. The company's reputation may also suffer, either through the publicizing of workers' grievances or through the company's inability to meet deadlines and quotas.

Strikers and protesters depend on companies concluding it is in their best interest to quickly end a dispute. Basically, they hope businesses will find it more profitable to make concessions than to endure an extended labour conflict. Common tactics in these disputes include:

- **Refusal to work.** Employees join picket lines or call in sick rather than perform their duties, disrupting production schedules.
 - **Blockading entrances.** Strikers may rob the company of other employees' labour as well as their own by making it difficult for people to enter and leave the premises. This barrier may be physical, but often it is psychological, with strikers verbally harassing those coming and going. This treatment will have similar effect on customers as well.
 - **Boycotting.** Strikers can encourage the public to refuse to purchase goods or services from the company in question, further cutting into revenues.
 - **Engaging the media.** Media campaigns can publicize and highlight perceived failures of the company, tarnishing the company's reputation.
 - **Vandalism and sabotage.** In particularly heated exchanges, employees may use physically destructive tactics. This may be as simple as graffiti or as destructive as the breaking of important equipment, further hindering company operations.
 - **Harm to others.** In a small number of cases, labour disputes escalate into violence. There may also be threats of violence, which must be addressed as seriously as violence which has already occurred.
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Preparing a crisis management plan

“Preparation time is never wasted time”

Every business should have a written crisis management plan in the event of a serious labour dispute, even if a dispute seems unlikely. Planning ahead of time will allow for much more thorough deliberation than being forced to react during a sudden conflict.

In creating a plan, consider the most likely causes of serious labour disputes for your company. If possible, address those issues before they become problematic. If that is impossible, consider the ramifications of those issues and create contingency plans based on those scenarios. It is also sound to identify individuals most likely to provoke trouble.

The crisis management plan should cover topics such as:

- Identifying vulnerabilities and how to address them;
- Ensuring business continuity;
- Securing continuity of product distribution;
- Safeguarding facility access for employees, suppliers, messengers and customers.

Because it may be difficult to access the place of business during a dispute, all stakeholders should have a personal copy of this plan. They should also understand their respective roles in carrying it out.


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Partnering with private security

Further mitigate risk by deflecting dangerous escalation

If a dispute escalates to vandalism and violence, the police should absolutely be involved. However, there are many benefits private security can provide in addition to police's. First, the police are reactive. They respond only after things have escalated while private security can step into a situation long before the scenario becomes threatening. Their pre-emptive presence of private security professionals can be a strong deterrent to those considering mischief. They may also have experience negotiating with labour leaders to bring conflicts to a timely end.

Labour conflicts present numerous challenges and risks. A sound crisis management plan can protect a business from the worst of what these conflicts can bring. Access control provides safety as well as assists in the efficient operation of the business. Clear communication channels ensure the actions of individuals and departments remain in line with the crisis management plan. A liaison with police services to coordinate appropriate responses which protect your employees and property should be a part of communication plans.



Every crisis management plan must be tailored to the specifics of the business. Identify your greatest vulnerabilities, then build contingency plans in reaction to them. Also, create more broadly applicable protocols to ensure your company continues to run during this time of disruption. Finally, consider the place of private security in your crisis management plan, helping to further mitigate risk by deflecting dangerous escalation.



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