



Conflict Management

Conflict is neither good nor bad but it is inevitable because we all differ to our friends, partners, colleagues, and so on. In conflict scenarios, two or more parties are (or appear to be) incompatible suggesting that the parties' sets of goals are different. However, understanding why conflict occurs can help in choosing responses to manage it.

Conflict represents more than a difference of opinion as there are various underlying factors in our sets of interests, knowledge, values, style, opinions, perceptions, expectations, etc. It is important to consider how you respond to conflict physically (e.g., shallow breathing, butterflies in stomach), emotionally, (e.g., calm, fearful, angry) and cognitively (e.g., clear or muddled thinking; confident or aggressive) and what it says about you and the relationship with the other party. Consider if the type of conflict that occurs is healthy for you, the other, or the relationship.

Whilst some people might thrive on conflict and excessively argue thereby damaging the relationship, many of us prefer to avoid conflict thereby missing valuable opportunities for growth and letting issues worsen. Either way, when conflict does eventually arise, typical unhealthy responses include: Disregarding and not accounting for the other parties' viewpoint; becoming angry and nasty; withdrawing pleasantness and/or love; and unwillingness to yield or compromise. However, there are various styles (say Thomas and Kilmann) in conflict that people use, using a pick and mix approach in their life depending on the circumstances; mainly though, people default to one:

1. **Competing:** Typically, a winner/loser scenario. This style depends on aggressive communication, coercion, power, and little concern for the relationship or feelings of others. Pros: Goal-oriented; quick. Cons: May breed hostility.
2. **Avoiding:** Typically, a loser/loser scenario. This style depends on ignoring issues so that they dissipate or disappear, which often results in feelings remaining unexpressed and unreleased, parties feeling unappreciated, and the issue growing or deepening. Pros: Does not escalate conflict; postpones difficulty. Cons: Unaddressed problems; unresolved problems.
3. **Accommodating:** Typically a lose/win scenario. This style depends on complying to and placating the other's viewpoint to keep the peace, to be accepted, at the cost of own needs and respect. Pros: Minimizes injury when we are outmatched; relationships are maintained. Cons: Breeds resentment; exploits meek and weak.
4. **Compromise:** a win-some/lose-some scenario. This style depends on partly yielding to the others' viewpoint and having yours yielded to also. Can be a short-term fix as parties remain unsatisfied and (become) bitter. Pros: Useful in complex issues without simple solutions; all parties are equal in power. Cons: No one is ever really satisfied
5. **Collaborative:** a win/win scenario. This style depends on focused collaboration to problem-solve to gain the best possible solution for all parties; respecting, acknowledging, and understanding each others' viewpoint. Pros: Creates mutual trust; maintains positive relationships; builds commitments. Cons: Time consuming; energy consuming.

Naturally, each style has its merits and neither is better; the overall aim is a balanced use of these styles. For instance, sometimes we need to "stand and fight" our corner, sometimes we need to strike when the "Iron is Cold", sometimes we need to yield and learn. Key to understanding our appropriate use of styles is to consider how, where, when, and why we use these styles as it will help us to respond better to fulfil our needs. Knowing these styles can also give an insight into how others operate.

Dealing with Conflict

1. Talk with Self: What are the effects of the situation? Is there a need to discuss this? Can it be let go?	2. Talk with Other (if needed): When is the best time for parties? Often, nearer the event as possible; other times, cool-down period is needed.	3. During the Talk: What do you need to help you to talk, to be heard, and to hear? Likewise, other party. Be focussed, clear, accepting, encouraging, open, responsive, and respectful; speak for self and reflect back what you hear. Don't guess or judge.
4. After the Talk: Give time and space to soothe and process. Is a follow-up talk required?		



Conflict Management Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is merely to indicate what style of conflict management you might typically use. Answer the questions below by indicating how you would behave rather than how you think you ought to behave. Each question relate to a particular style. Rate each item on a scale of 1 to 4.

Conflict Management	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
	1	2	3	4
1. I explore issues with others to find solutions that meet the needs of everyone.				
2. I try to negotiate whilst adopting a "give-and-take" approach to problem situations.				
3. I try to meet the expectations of others.				
4. I argue my case and insist on the merits of my point of view.				
5. When there is a disagreement, I gather as much information as possible to keep the lines of communication open.				
6. When I find myself in an argument, I tend to say very little and try to leave as soon as possible.				
7. I try to see conflicts from both sides. What do I need? What does the other person need? What are the issues involved?				
8. I prefer compromising when solving problems; just move on.				
9. I find conflicts challenging and exhilarating. I enjoy the battle of wits that usually follows.				
10. Being at odds with other people makes me feel uncomfortable and anxious.				
11. I try to accommodate the wishes of my friends and family.				
12. I can figure out what needs to be done and I am usually right.				
13. To break deadlocks, I meet people halfway.				
14. I may not get what I want, but it is a small price to pay for keeping the peace.				
15. I avoid hard feelings by keeping my disagreements with others to myself.				

Total the points in the respective categories to find your conflict style. The category with the highest score indicates your most commonly used strategy. The one with the lowest score indicates your least preferred strategy.

Style Corresponding Statements: The numbers represent the questions above: Your answer: Total.

- Collaborating: 1, 5, 7
 _____ + _____ + _____ = _____
- Competing: 4, 9, 12
 _____ + _____ + _____ = _____
- Avoiding: 6, 10, 15
 _____ + _____ + _____ = _____
- Accommodating: 3, 11, 14
 _____ + _____ + _____ = _____
- Compromising: 2, 8, 13
 _____ + _____ + _____ = _____

Assertive
(Confrontive)

Behaviors that are Focused on Self

Unassertive
(Avoidant)

