



## CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

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# EXERCISE 1

## SELF-REFLECTION ON THE PERSONAL EXPERIENCES IN CONFLICT SITUATIONS

(based on Wilmott, Hocker, 2011)

Directions: Please answer the following questions honestly and completely.

### What is your usual response to conflicts?

- Do you generally like to get everything out in the open, even if such an effort creates tension and strong feelings?
- Or do you usually seek peace, harmony, and reduction of strong emotions? How would you describe yourself?

### What emotions are most common for you when you experience conflict?

- Think of three areas of conflict: family, romantic, and work (or studies). In each area, list your most common emotions.
- If there doesn't seem to be a set of common emotions, think of one conflict as an example in each area. How did/do you feel? Be sure to use words of feeling, not judgment or description.
- Think of the most disturbing conflict you have experienced in the past half-year or so. What was your emotional response to this conflict?

### Influences

- List the 10 most important influences on your personal response to conflict, in order of importance.

### What influence, if any, does violence have on your conflict responses?

- You may answer this question in your own notebook, or to share your thoughts with others in a small group keeping your privacy in this discussion. What experiences have you had with violence, whether verbal, physical, or sexual?

- The important issue is to begin to think about the influence of violence on your life. If you did not experience violence directly, what experiences that others had have influenced you? How such experience influences your conflict behaviour?

## **WHICH CONFLICT STYLE IS MOST EFFECTIVE?**

It is important to be familiar with the results of conflict style studies and to know when these strategies are the most effective. General suggestions of Thomas and Kilmann (2010), based empirical study:

**Accommodating** is especially useful and effective:

- When person realizes that he/she is wrong – to allow a better solution to be considered, to learn from others, and to show that one is reasonable
- When issue is much more important to other person – to satisfy the needs of others and as goodwill gesture to maintain a cooperative relationship
- When person wants to build up social credits for later issues that are important to him/her
- When preserving harmony and avoiding disruption are especially important
- When person want to help others to develop by allowing them to experiment and learn from their mistakes.

**Competing** is useful and effective:

- When quick, decisive action is vital.
- On important issues when unpopular courses of action need implementing – for example, enforcing unpopular rules, discipline.
- On issues vital to person welfare and when he /she is sure in being right.
- When person needs to protect himself/herself from people who take advantage on non-competitive behaviour.

Compromising is useful and effective:

- When goals are moderately important but not worth the effort or the potential disruption in more assertive strategies.
- When two opponents with equal power are strongly committed to mutually exclusive goals.
- When person wants to achieve a temporary settlement of a complex issue.
- When person needs to arrive at an expedient solution under time pressure.
- As a backup strategy when collaboration or competition fails.



**Avoiding** is useful and effective:

- When an issue is unimportant or when other, more important issues are pressing.
- When person perceives no chance of satisfying his/her concerns- when he/she has low power or he/she is frustrated by something that would be very difficult to change.
- When the potential costs of confronting a conflict outweigh the benefits of its resolution.
- When person needs to let people cool down – to reduce tensions to a productive level and to regain perspective and composure.
- When gathering more information outweighs the advantages of an immediate decision.
- When others can resolve the issue more effectively.
- When the issue seems tangential or symptomatic of another, more basic issue.

**Collaborating** is useful and effective:

- When person needs to find an integrative solution and the concerns of both parties are too important to be compromised.
- When person's objective is to learn and person wishes to test his/her assumptions and understand others' views.
- When person wants to merge insights from people with different perspectives on a problem.
- When person wants to gain commitment by incorporating others' concerns into a consensual decision.
- When person needs to work through hard feelings that have been interfering with a interpersonal relationship.

## EXERCISE 2

### USING AUTHORITY AND CREATIVITY IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Think about a time when you used a creative solution to resolve a conflict. Briefly describe the conflict and your solution. Then do the same regarding a conflict when you simply used power.

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### General Observations and Guidelines for Using Authority and Creativity

There are two major variables conflict competent individuals can use to distinguish among the types of conflict situations within their organizations: the organizational relationship of the participants and the degree to which the person is involved in the conflict. In addition, they can use two basic tools in managing conflict: authority (direct power) and creativity.

The following guidelines should be helpful in deciding how to approach conflict:

- In conflict involving peers, superiors, or both, individuals should usually rely on creativity rather than on authority. Collaboration can be efficient strategy in such kind of conflicts.
- In conflict involving subordinates only, individuals may rely more on their own authority, use competing style, even though creativity and collaborative problem solving may still be the best way to manage conflict.
- In conflict in which their level of authority is medium to low, individuals should avoid a high level of involvement (if they have such possibility), particularly if the situation involves their superiors.

## EXERCISE 3

### SELF-SCORE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLE TEST

Think of two different contexts where you have conflicts or disagreements with someone you study, work, or live (A and B). Then, according to the following scale, fill in your scores for situations and person A, and situations and person B. For each statement you will have two scores.

**1 – never 2 – seldom 3 – sometimes 4 – often 5 – always**

#### Person A/Person B

1.  I avoid open discussion of my differences with the other.
2.  I use my authority to make decision in my favour.
3.  I try to find middle course to resolve impasse.
4.  I accommodate the other's wishes.
5.  I try to integrate my ideas with the other's to come up with a decision jointly.
6.  I try to stay away from disagreement with the other.
7.  I use my influence to get my ideas accepted.



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8. \_\_\_ I propose a middle ground for breaking deadlocks.
9. \_\_\_ I give in to the other's wishes.
10. \_\_\_ I try to work with the other to find solutions that satisfy both our expectations.
11. \_\_\_ I try to keep my disagreement to myself in order to avoid hard feelings.
12. \_\_\_ I generally pursue my side of an issue.
13. \_\_\_ I negotiate with the other to reach a compromise.
14. \_\_\_ I generally try to satisfy the other's needs.
15. \_\_\_ I try to investigate an issue to find a solution acceptable to us.
16. \_\_\_ I try to avoid unpleasant exchanges with the other.
17. \_\_\_ I use my power to win.
18. \_\_\_ I use "give and take" so that a compromise can be made.
19. \_\_\_ I try to satisfy the other's expectations.
20. \_\_\_ I try to bring all our concerns out in the open so that the issues can be resolved.

Scoring: Please transfer your scores on the following statements to the appropriate cell in the table below. Then add the columns: to obtain a total for each category.

A B	A B	A B	A B	A B
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
11.	12.	13.	14.	15.
16.	17.	18.	19.	20.
Totals:	Totals:	Totals:	Totals:	Totals:
Avoiding, withdrawal	Dominating, competition	Compromising	Obliging, accommodation	Integrating, collaboration

**Results:**

You have scores for the five conflict management strategies, across two different contexts. The column with the highest point totals shows conflict management strategy the most typical for you. Compare your score totals for both A and B contexts. If results for the most typical conflict management strategy are relatively consistent in both contexts, it means that this conflict management strategy is your consistent conflict management style.

1+6+11+16	2+7+12+17	3+8+13+18	4+9+14+19	5+10+15+20
Avoidance	Competition	Compromise	Accommodation	Collaboration

Source: Adapted from M. H. Rahim and N. R. Magner (1995).

Another interesting tool to determine personal conflict style is suggested by Cornely and Tripathy (2004). To make more valid generalization about your personal conflict style, you can compare your own results of both tests.

Source: Conerly K., Tripathi A. (2004) What is your conflict style? Understanding and dealing with your conflict style. *The Journal for Quality and Participation*, Summer, 16-20.