

Managing Conflict

Conflict is a complex subject with negative associations. It is common for individuals to prefer harmonious relationships with others rather than engaging in disagreements and quarrels.

However, conflict can sometimes be beneficial as it can lead to the generation of more innovative solutions, like how an irritating piece of grit in an oyster can result in the creation of a pearl. Recognizing the value in differences is important, but it is also important to confront conflict instead of trying to make it disappear.

Understanding the process of conflict and having effective tools for resolution will enable you to utilize conflict in a positive way and assist others in finding more productive methods of collaboration. By highlighting differences, there is an opportunity to benefit from diverse perspectives and various approaches to tasks.

Having knowledge of the process by which conflict arises can also aid in its prevention from escalating. Conflict resolution tools are essential for understanding the causes of conflict and determining the most effective approach to resolving it.

Conflict cannot be eliminated and may not be desired. Managing conflict involves utilizing conflict situations to enhance understanding between individuals and discover collaborative methods of working together.

This activity provides techniques for effectively managing conflict in a wide range of situations. After following the provided steps and considering the information, you will be able to analyze two scenarios involving conflict and determine the most suitable course of action. Throughout the lesson, you will acquire knowledge:

- There are five conflict styles that can be used in different situations.
- This is a guide on using an integrative approach to understand the other person's position.
- Methods for handling conflicts effectively.

Interpersonal Conflict

Conflict is a constant presence in organizations. When individuals are brought together to work towards a shared objective, it is common for differing opinions to arise.

Encouraging disagreements is important as teams composed of like-minded individuals who do not challenge the status quo are likely to lack creativity and competitiveness, leading to potential blind spots in decision-making.

Conflict can lead to vibrancy and progress, as it often inspires innovative solutions. It encourages a different perspective and fosters creativity in thinking.

Some sources of conflict are unproductive. Petty jealousies and personality conflicts can have negative effects, and "office politics" can be detrimental. It is important to address illegitimate conflicts promptly and decisively.

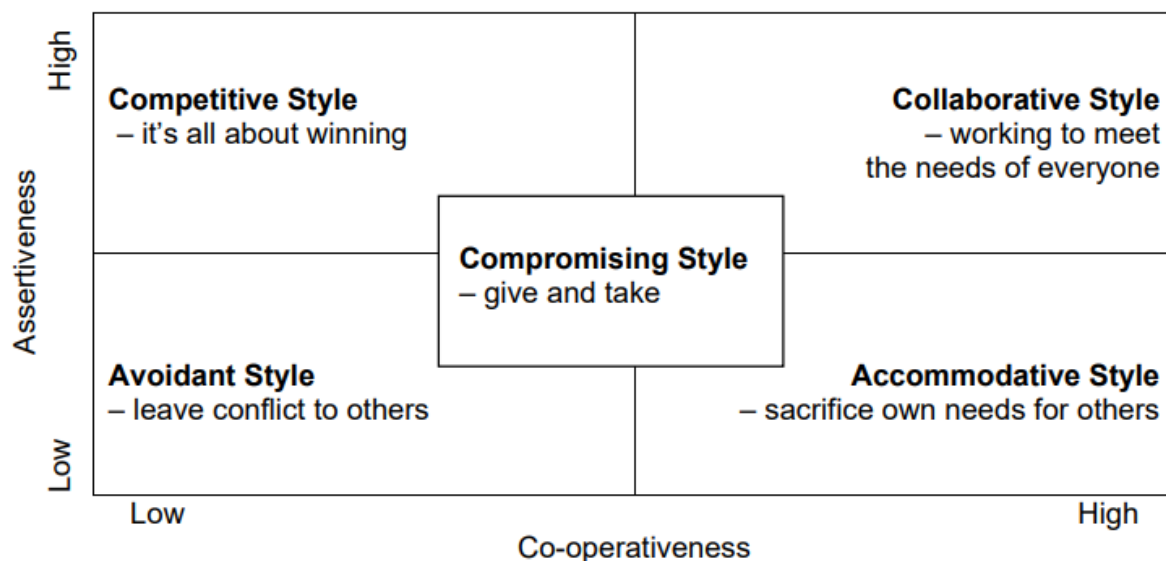
Conflict can lead to negative outcomes if not properly understood. A significant amount of anxiety surrounding conflict arises from a lack of knowledge on how to handle such situations and a lack of confidence in one's abilities to address them.

When a person lacks training and experience in a particular skill, their instinct is to avoid situations that require it. Leaders who utilize conflict management tools to maintain conflict at manageable levels are more likely to have productive teams and achieve creative success compared to those who do not.

Conflict Responses

There are five main categories that people's responses to conflict tend to fall into, as identified by Thomas and Kilmann in the 1970s.

The approach varies in terms of the level of cooperation and assertiveness exhibited. They can be placed in a two-dimensional model as a result.



Competitive - In this area, the focus is on satisfying one's own needs at the expense of the other person. Threats, manipulation, and the use of formal authority are commonly employed tactics in this setting. The boss will select committee members who are sympathetic to his cause to increase his chances of winning. Another person may choose to ignore a memo if it does not serve their best interests to read its contents. The attitude of considering oneself as the boss or the most important person is commonly observed here.

Accommodating –The accommodating approach prioritizes the needs of the other person over your own. What frequently occurs is that nobody emerges as the winner because attempting to please everyone is rarely a forward-moving position. By being accommodating, one may overlook critical evaluation of the situation and fail to protect the rights and interests of the stakeholders they represent. It is impossible to always please everyone.

Avoiding – The interests of both sides are not considered in this situation. Instead of addressing the problem, it is completely avoided. A common response to conflict using this approach is to dismiss it by saying, "Oh, that's just how he/it is. He/it won't change." This response can be frustrating because it prevents resolution of the conflict and makes it difficult to make progress. The situation lacks clear leadership, and individuals are unsure of where to find solutions.

Compromising – Compromising is a method that partially satisfies the needs of everyone involved. In every situation, there are both gains and losses, resulting in an overall unsatisfactory outcome. When you split the difference, you are prioritizing dispute resolution over problem solving. This may result in individuals playing games and entering with higher demands initially, understanding that their compromise position is truly what they desire from the start. There is a limited duration to maintaining peace before everything collapses.

Collaborative – Collaborative is the preferred approach as it aims to address the concerns of everyone. The solution is mutually beneficial and is commonly referred to as a win-win strategy. The focus is on comprehending the viewpoints and stances of all parties involved, and then utilizing that knowledge to discover areas of agreement. One can attempt to find a solution that is both creative and satisfactory to all parties involved, effectively resolving the issue at hand.

We will examine the following situation and observe how it is addressed using various conflict approaches.

Ann has been chosen as the Production Manager for a plastics manufacturer. Her objective is to unite the team to efficiently solve problems, enhance quality, and maximize the plant's productivity. The owner, Michael, is satisfied with her performance and acknowledges her as an asset to the team. He has observed significant progress in production during her short time with the company.

However, he has mentioned a concern about Anne's tidiness. Michael's top priority is maintaining a clean and organized plant that is visually appealing. He requires machinery to be painted in a specific color scheme, expects precise grid layout for the machines, desires workers' uniforms to be always clean, and wants the floor to be exceptionally clean.

Ann finds it challenging to justify the time and resources required to maintain strict appearance standards. Who is it impressive to? Visits to the plant by clients are infrequent. The environment is hot and has an unpleasant smell, so why is the visual aspect important?

After receiving her performance review, Ann takes note of the positive comments in the "strengths" column. However, she also acknowledges the "concerns" column which highlights the need for her to concentrate on maintaining a crisper and neater facility. It depends on her conflict style. Here's how she would respond for each of them:

Competitive – Michael, my goal is to make this plant the top plastics manufacturer in our area. To achieve that outcome, it is necessary to allow me to manage the facility in a cost-effective manner that optimizes resource utilization. I can calculate the numbers for you, but I am already aware that your "precise requirements" will have a significant impact on this plant's resources. I can do it if it aligns with your preferences, but I suggest reviewing the numbers beforehand. I am genuinely concerned about your best interests. Please review this expectation and then we can discuss it, alright?

Accommodating – I understand your perspective, Michael. It is necessary to maintain a cleaner plant floor. It may be challenging to locate the resource, but I am committed to doing so without jeopardizing the progress we have made this year. I could consider taking on some of the supervisor's tasks so that they can allocate their responsibilities more efficiently, allowing for additional time during each shift for cleaning, painting, and other necessary duties. I won't disappoint you!

Avoiding – Thank you for the review. I'm happy to be here. I believe we've had a great year and I'll do my best to maintain this momentum. If there are no further tasks, I will return to work. Thank you once more.

Compromising – Hmmm... well I see here you want me to work on the neatness and crispness of the plant. I am currently using all my available resources. There is nothing extra. What if we reduce production numbers on the third shift to allocate some hours for daily cleaning and maintenance on the shop floor? I cannot guarantee that the floor will be clean enough to eat off, but it will create a good impression for any visitors who come by. Our progress may be slower this year, but we will work towards achieving the desired appearance of the plant. What's your opinion?

Collaborative – I appreciate your feedback, Michael. I notice that you have some concerns about the plant's appearance. What is the significance of this issue to you? It is not a top priority for me because I am currently prioritizing production goals and reaching capacity. We need to determine sustainable growth for the plant to maximize its potential with available resources. Ultimately, it is important to create a facility where individuals take pride in their work. There must be a way to effectively organize people and resources to accomplish this goal. I would like to schedule a meeting later this week to discuss and develop a plan for number crunching.

The outcome varies depending on the conflict approach chosen. The decision of which approach to take is yours to determine. As a general rules.

- In important matters, both competitive and collaborative approaches can be utilized.
- In important relationships, it is beneficial to use accommodating and collaborative approaches.
- Avoidance is typically suggested when there is an equal balance of power and little hope for reaching a mutually agreed upon solution.
- When there is limited time, it is worth considering being competitive, accommodating, and avoiding.

Creating effective collaboration

The optimal approach is collaboration. This situation requires a successful negotiation to find a solution that benefits both parties. Collaboration requires more skill and time compared to accommodating or compromising. Imposing your will or giving in is much simpler. The key to successful collaboration is having a set of tools that can benefit all parties involved.

At times, one may find themselves initiating conflict, while in other instances, they may be on the receiving end. It is important to focus on managing conflict by understanding that you can only control your own actions and responses in any given scenario.

Initiator: The objective is to retain ownership of the problem. When experiencing frustration, it is important to address the issue. It is important to identify the source of your frustration before approaching someone for assistance in resolving the issue. Failing to do so usually leads to expressing frustration or releasing anger, which might provide temporary relief but does not solve anything. Additionally, not identifying the true cause of the problem can result in appearing foolish.

- Describe the problem in concrete terms by constructing a “When you do X, Y happens, which makes me feel Z.”
 - Please identify the behavior(s) that are causing you concern. (X)
 - Identify the consequence of that behavior. (Y)
 - Please describe your feelings when that happens. (Z)
- Stay objective and keep in mind that the person likely has reasons beyond just trying to spite you. Do not make assumptions about their motivations.
- Ensure clear communication.
- Dialogue is encouraged.
- It is advisable to address one issue at a time when dealing with a complex problem.
- Seeking common ground can provide a foundation for finding a solution.

Receiver: The goal of the receiver in a conflictive situation is to demonstrate concern and a sincere interest in finding a resolution. This requires a response that demonstrates understanding and acknowledges the other person's perspective. Being open to problem solving is a crucial step in conflict resolution, especially if your behavior is perceived as problematic.

- **Gather additional information.** Please provide specific examples of the behavior you are referring to.
- **Identify a point of agreement within the complaint.** Even if one does not agree with their own behavior, it is important to validate the complaint by acknowledging some aspect of the other person's position. This indicates that you are interested in collaboration.
- **Request to hear the suggestions of the other person.** This shifts the discussion to a more positive direction and encourages both parties to work together to find a mutually beneficial solution.

The key responsibility for both roles is to ensure that there is consensus on a plan. Please make sure to verify your understanding of the issue and confirm your commitment to specific actions.

Another important aspect is follow-up: when resolving a conflict, it is necessary for it be thoroughly addressed and not simply temporarily concealed. It is important to create plans, track progress, and adjust as necessary.