

Conflict Management Styles: Self-Assessment¹

Teams that engage in productive conflict are known to produce positive solutions in a short period of time. “When working in a team, tensions are to be expected and although rarely fun, tensions are not always bad. They can evoke creativity, sharpen ideas and refine analysis.”² Understanding your own relationship to conflict is the first step in being able to address conflict. What follows is a brief assessment to help you get a sense of your approach to conflict.

		Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
		1	2	3	4
1	I discuss issues with others to try to find solutions that meet everyone’s needs.				
2	I try to negotiate and use a give-and-take approach to problem situations.				
3	I try to meet the expectations of others.				
4	I would argue my case and insist on the advantages of my point of view.				
5	When there is a disagreement, I gather as much information as I can and keep the lines of communication open.				
6	When I find myself in an argument, I usually 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 to compromise when solving problems and just move on.				
9	I find conflicts exhilarating; I enjoy the battle of wits that usually follows.				
10	Being in a disagreement with other people makes me feel uncomfortable and anxious.				
11	I try to meet 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 would meet people halfway.				
14	I may not get what I want, but it’s a small price for keeping the peace.				
15	I avoid hard feelings by keeping my disagreements with others to myself.				

The 15 statements correspond to five conflict management styles. To find your most preferred style, total the points for each style. The style with the highest score indicates your most commonly used strategy. The one with the lowest score indicates your least preferred strategy. However, all styles have pros and cons, so it’s important to use the most appropriate style for each conflict situation.

¹ The Smart Workplace [Internet], 2012 [cited 26 June 2020]. Available from: <http://www.thesmartworkplace.com/quiz/conflict-management-styles-assessment-2/>

² Edmondson A. Teaming. How organizations learn, innovate and compete in the knowledge economy. San Francisco (CA): Jossey-Bass; 2012. 339 p.

Score Your Assessment

Style	Total
Collaborating (Q 1,5,7)	
Competing (Q 4,9,12)	
Avoiding (Q 6,10,15)	
Harmonizing (Q 3,11,14)	
Compromising (Q 2,8,13)	

A Description of the Styles¹

One style of conflict management is not necessarily better than another and each style has pros and cons, and each can be useful depending on the situation. This assessment is intended to help you identify your *typical response* to conflict, with the goal that when you encounter future conflicts, you will be aware of not only your instinctive reaction, but also the pros and cons of that reaction for the specific situation. Furthermore, you will also be aware of the other styles of conflict management that you could draw on to resolve the situation and identify if one of the other styles is more appropriate for the current situation.

Collaborating

People with a collaborative style highly value both their goals and their relationships. They view conflict as a problem to be solved and seek a solution that achieves both their goals and the goals of the other person. They see conflicts as a means of improving relationships by reducing tensions between two people. They try to begin a discussion that identifies the conflict as a problem and strive to resolve tensions and maintain the relationship by seeking solutions that satisfy both themselves and the other person.

Competing

Competitors typically value their goals over relationships, meaning that if forced to choose, they would seek to achieve their goals even at the cost of the relationship involved. They are typically more concerned with accomplishing their goals than with being liked by others. They might try to force opponents to accept their solution to the conflict by overpowering them.

Avoiding

People with an avoiding style tend to value avoiding confrontation more than either their goals or relationships. They often find it easier to withdraw from a conflict than to face it. This might even include completely giving up relationships or goals that are associated with the conflict.

Harmonizing

People with an accommodating style typically value relationships over their own goals; if forced to choose, they will often sacrifice their goals in order to maintain relationships. They generally want to be liked by others and prefer to avoid conflict because they believe addressing it will damage relationships. They try to smooth over conflict to prevent damage to the relationship.

Compromising

People with a compromising style are moderately concerned with both their goals and their relationships with others. They typically seek a compromise; they give up part of their goals and persuade the other person in a conflict to give up part of their goals. They seek a conflict solution in which both sides gain something; the middle ground between two extreme positions. They are willing to sacrifice part of their goals in order to find agreement for the common good.

In Summary

Conflict can be productive if teams manage to stay away from conflict that is personal. Edmondson² suggests that leaders can also play a role in cooling conflict within teams and recommends that leaders:

- Identify the nature of the conflict on the team to determine if it is interpersonal or process and task oriented;

- Model good communication by combining thoughtful statements with thoughtful questions and help those in conflict to determine the true basis of the conflict;
- Identify shared goals between those in conflict. Look to the shared values and shared purpose of the teamwork agreement to be reminded; and
- Encourage difficult conversations which will help to build resilient and productive relationships.