

Conflict Management:



DEFINING CONFLICT

Directions: Draw a line to connect a word and/or phrase you associate with the word **conflict** around the circle (feel free to add as many lines as needed). Review your list of associations and categorize them as positive or negative. Count the total number of positive and negative associations. Where the majority of words/phrases positive or negative?



Total # of Positive Words = _____

Total # of Negative Words = _____

DEFINING CONFLICT

-INSIGHT-

“Conflict can destroy a team which hasn’t spent time learning to deal with it.”

Thomas Isgar

Conflict can be defined as....

-INSIGHT-

“The easiest, the most tempting, and the least creative response to conflict within an organization is to pretend it does not exist.”

Lyle E. Schaller

CONFLICT STYLE ASSESSMENT

Directions: Read the scenarios below; respond to the questions that follow, while keeping in mind how *you* would respond in each specific role within each conflict. Please give honest, realistic answers to each question.

Situational Conflict #1

Johnny Jones is a student in your class this semester, and he is not doing very well. He is often late and unprepared, and he doesn't seem especially interested in class. You arrange a meeting with his father. Mr. Jones initially pleased to hear of your concerns, but soon becomes defensive. With his voice growing louder, he says that you make unreasonable expectations of your students. Kids Johnny's age have other things on their minds, he contends. You are at fault for not being more flexible or helpful when Johnny has struggled.

What behavioral response would you most likely have to this conflict?

- ☐ A. You tell Mr. Jones that you are not being unreasonable. Other kids in the class manage to get their work done, despite outside interests. Rules are rules, and you can't make exceptions for one student. If Johnny doesn't get his act together, you will have no choice but to fail him.
- ☐ B. You listen to Mr. Jones rant and rave for half an hour, which make you late for an important meeting. At the end of the conversation, you tell Mr. Jones that you will "see what you can do," but after you leave, you still have no idea how to help Johnny do better in class.
- ☐ C. You cut your conversation with Mr. Jones short, saying you have to get to a meeting soon. You tell him you will have to talk about it at another time but do not schedule anything with him or make any definite plans for dealing with Johnny in the future.
- ☐ D. You assert that you do not feel you are being unreasonable. Mr. Jones agrees to get Johnny to school on time and make sure he is completing all of his homework assignments. Several weeks later, you find Johnny is abiding by the rules, but only doing the bare minimum with no real enthusiasm for learning. You feel compelled to agree when his father says, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink."
- ☐ E. You arrange a meeting in person with both Johnny and his father. At the meeting, you and Johnny come to an agreement that if, with his father's guidance, he can make it to school on time and complete his homework assignments to the best of his ability, you will work out a more interesting reading list for the class. You will even include publications with articles about some of Johnny's favorite activities, such as mountain biking and skateboarding. You make sure both Johnny and Mr. Jones are aware that a lifelong enjoyment of reading, and open lines of communication are far more important to you than simply enforcing rules.

Situational Conflict #2

Your son, Johnny, is a student in Ms. Smith's English class, and you know he is not doing very well. You are a struggling, divorced, single parent with sole custody of Johnny. You work third shift and don't get home from work until after Johnny has left for school and you are usually still asleep when he gets home from school. You are actually a little proud of how self-sufficient Johnny has become over the last few years, especially when he helps out by cleaning the apartment. Recently Johnny brought home a note from Ms. Smith, which said he is in danger of failing, due to tardiness, incomplete assignments, and a bad attitude in class. You appreciate her concerns, but when you meet with her, you feel a growing resentment over her lack of flexibility. She has no idea how much of a struggle it has been for you as a single parent or for him to grow up without both parents. She offers only criticisms of Johnny, who is really a great kid. When she asks your opinion, you volunteer that you think she is placing unreasonable expectations on her students. She takes offense at this comment and says, "If Johnny wants to succeed in the real world, he's going to have to meet high expectations. The other kids are able to get their work done and participate in extracurricular activities. Johnny is just going to have to keep up."

What behavioral response would you most likely have to this conflict?

- ☐ A. You loudly state, "Johnny has been out in the real world more than most of the other kids in the class. What he needs is a better teacher who understands kids." You leave the meeting angry and go directly to the principal's office, where you insist that Johnny be transferred to another English class.
- ☐ B. You listen to the teacher, nodding your head in agreement, but you are convinced that she needs a better grasp of the situation. You are afraid that if you voice any further disagreement, Johnny's grade will suffer, so you leave the meeting resigned that there is nothing that can be done.
- ☐ C. You cut your meeting short saying you have to go to work. You tell her you'll have to talk about it later, but you don't schedule a follow-up meeting.
- ☐ D. You disagree with Ms. Smith, but promise you will make sure Johnny gets to school on time and completes all his homework. You can't however, make him love school. As long as he's not talking out of turn or smart mouthing the teacher, there's not much you can do about his attitude.
- ☐ E. You disagree and request a meeting that includes Johnny, since his needs are an important factor. At the next meeting Johnny explains the difficulties he has getting to school on time and getting his work done. You learn that Ms. Smith is more concerned with helping Johnny to enjoy reading than with enforcing rules, and you encourage her to add skateboarding periodicals to her reading list, to motivate Johnny to read more.

Situational Conflict #3

You are an administrator who feels overloaded with projects and paperwork. You work hard to keep things balanced, trying to provide your secretary with clear information and adequate lead time. But you are often unavailable, tied up in meetings. You recently gave him a report that you need immediately, as part of a large project to be done with other administrators. When you arrived at the office this morning, you saw a draft of the report sitting on his desk, in a stack of work to be done, not looking anywhere near completion. Shortly before 10:00 a.m., he tells you he has a 2:00 p.m. dental appointment.

What behavioral response would you most likely have to this conflict?

- ☐ A. You take the report from his pile and announce you are taking over the project. At the meeting, you present what you can, then approach the supervisor about having your secretary transferred to another department. The day after the meeting, you blame him for your poor performance in front of the other administrators and threaten him with the loss of his job.
- ☐ B. You take the report from his pile and with a sigh of resignations, tell him he is no longer responsible for it. You spend the next four hours in your office, completing the report yourself, even though it means missing two other meetings and canceling lunch with a colleague.
- ☐ C. You shrug your shoulders and shut yourself in the office all morning. At noon, you decide to make an excuse not to attend the administrator meeting. You ask your secretary to file the report when he is finished with it, but you don't ever read it.
- ☐ D. You ask your secretary about the status of the report. When he responds that he has worked on part of it, but it's not yet finished, you agree to complete a portion of it yourself, so he can make his dental appointment. You are still concerned about his completing future projects on time.
- ☐ E. You ask your secretary to take a break over coffee to go over the day's agenda. You learn he is confused about completing the report, because you have also given him some statistics to run by the end of the day. You learn, too, that the dental appointment is an emergency to correct a broken filling. You agree to devise a system for assigning priorities to future deadlines. In the meantime, you give him permission to give top priority to the administrator's report, so it will be finished by the time he needs to leave for his dental appointment.

Situational Conflict #4

You are the secretary to an overworked administrator. She is often unavailable, due to a heavy schedule, but you try to keep up and meet all of her deadlines. She recently gave you a report to prepare for an administrators' meeting today, but you have a stack of reports to compile by the end of the day. To make matters worse, you broke a filling in your tooth yesterday, and you can't get to the dentist until 2:00. You leave a memo on your boss's desk to that effect. As the morning goes on, you find the pain from the tooth even more distracting, but you keep plugging away at the reports, knowing that you also need to complete all reports by the end of the day. Later that morning, your boss takes the incomplete report from your desk without saying anything, and leaves right away for a meeting. When she returns at noon, she announces you'll have to cancel your dental appointment in order to finish the report.

What behavioral response would you most likely have to this conflict?

- ☐ A. You refuse to cancel the appointment and tell her she's impossible to work for. You tell her you have to go to the bathroom, but actually you go to your supervisor's office and complain that your boss is denying you important medical leave. You threaten to file a grievance with your union, unless something is done about your boss. The best solution would be to transfer to a more reasonable administrator.
- ☐ B. Even though your tooth is throbbing, and you don't think it's fair that your boss took the report away without asking, you cancel the appointment and stay until the report is finished.
- ☐ C. You wait until your boss is at lunch, take the rest of the day off sick, and call in a temp to finish the report.
- ☐ D. You postpone your dentist appointment until later in the day, so you can complete the report. You are rushing around so much that you never find out why your boss took the report from you in the first place.
- ☐ E. You ask your boss to take a few minutes with you, to go over the list of assignments for the day. You learn that not only did she forget that she gave you the reports to complete, but she didn't read your entire memo about the dental appointment and had no idea it was an emergency. Because she was so concerned about getting the administrator's report done, she took it off your desk so she could finish it herself, but her noon meeting ran late. Together you come up with a system for prioritizing your future workload.

Conflict Management Styles Key

Use the key below to assess your personal conflict style. Keep in mind that each different type of situation may evoke a different conflict style. This assessment may help you realize what kind of situations provoke conflict styles that are less productive and allow you to think about alternative responses.

Type	Conflict Management Style	Conflict Management Style Definition	Skills	Use When:
A.	Competing (Win/Lose)	You move directly to meet your needs in the situations, with less regard for the needs of others. This conflict style is often characterized by aggressive communication and little listening.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arguing/debating • Use of rank or influence • Standing your ground • Stating your position clearly • Asserting your opinions & feelings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick action needs to be taken; • Unpopular decisions need to be made; • Vital issues must be handled; • One is protecting self-interest.
B.	Accommodating (Lose/Win)	You yield to the needs of the other person or group, feeling that they are more important in the situation. Often characterized by submissive communication, accommodating conflict styles generally do not allow the other person to be aware of your concerns.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forgetting your desires. • Ability to yield • Selflessness • Obeying orders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You are wrong; • The issue is more important to the other person involved; • Confronting causes irreparable damage; • The relationship of greater value than your personal stakes.

Conflict Management Styles Key (Cont'd)

Type	Conflict Management Style	Conflict Management Style Definition	Skills	Use When:
C.	Avoiding (Lose/Lose)	You avoid bringing up possible differences, or perhaps deny that a conflict even exists. There is often limited communication or avoidance of contact, the issues fester unresolved.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to withdraw • Ability to leave things unresolved • Ability to sidestep issues • Sense of timing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nearing combat with an irrational individual. • It is not your quarrel, and you are not asked to help.
D.	Compromising (Win Some/ Lose Some)	You assert your position, but are willing to trade off possible solutions through negotiation with the other party. Communication is assertive and respectful, though limited by presenting positions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiating • Assessing value • Finding a middle ground • Making concessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dealing with issues of moderate importance • There's a strong commitment for resolution • Both choices are acceptable.
E.	Collaborating (Win/Win)	You assert your needs and interests clearly and specifically, while hearing and respecting those of the other person. You try to consider the big picture and maximize relationships, as well as substantive issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active listening • Identifying concerns • Nonthreatening confrontation • Analyzing input 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The conflict is important to the people constructing a solution; • When the issues are too important to compromise; • When gaining commitment, improving relations, or learning.

COLLABORATIVE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT MODEL

Six Step Process to Managing Conflict

Step # 1 Define the problem in terms of needs, not solutions.

- Defining a problem by expressing your needs allows for win/win resolutions; whereas defining problems based upon possible solutions yields win/lose results.
- To discover needs, ask *why* the other party wants the solution they initially proposed.

Step # 2 Brainstorm possible solutions.

- Think outside of the box.
- Don't evaluate; resist making the following judgmental statements:
 - ⇒ "No."
 - ⇒ "That will never work."
 - ⇒ "That is a dumb idea."
 - ⇒ "That will cost too much."
 - ⇒ "We've already tried that."
 - ⇒ "That's a terrific idea."
- Don't clarify; this interferes with the creative problem solving process. Besides, there will be time for this during step #3.
- Expand upon each other's ideas; some of the best ideas come from adding to or going beyond ideas that have already been contributed.
- Be sure to record each idea.
- Avoid "solution rigidity"; it is important **not** to come into a problem-solving session with the attitude that there is only one adequate solution to the conflict.

Step # 3 Select the solution that will best meet both parties' needs

- The following guidelines have proven helpful in evaluating what proposed solution(s) will be selected:
 - ⇒ *Ask the other party what proposed solution(s) they prefer.*
 - ⇒ *State which alternatives look best to you.*
 - ⇒ *See which solutions coincide.*
 - ⇒ *Jointly decide on one (or more) solutions.*

Step #4 Plan who will do what, when, and where.

- Write out the agreement that has been reached by both parties.
⇒ *Include details of **who** is responsible for completing **what** tasks, **where** it the task is to be performed, and **when** it is to be complete.*

Step #5 Implement the plan.

- As a gesture of good faith, it is important to complete your action steps on schedule.

Step #6 Evaluate how well the solution turned out.

- After implementing a plan to resolve conflict, both parties should come back to the table and reflect back on the process. Some things to discuss include:
⇒ *How each person in general feels about how the problem was solved and the outcome of their collaborative effort.*
⇒ *What each party liked/disliked about the process.*
⇒ *What could each party do better in the future.*

SCENARIO

-INSIGHT-

“In conflict, being willing to change allows you to move from a point of view to a viewing point- a higher more expansive place, from which you can see both sides.”

Thomas Crum

Parents Joe and Jane run a busy household consisting of 4 kids and only 1 car; both are highly active volunteers. As can be imagined, conflict has generated around the use of the family car. When they tried to define their problem, Joe said, “I must have the car to go to my PTA meeting tonight at 7pm.” Jane said, “But I need the car to go to the community social action meeting at 7pm (on the opposite side of town).”

Define Joe and Jane’s conflict in terms of their needs.

-INSIGHT-

“Our ultimate freedom is the right and power to decide how anybody or anything outside ourselves will affect us.”

Stephen Covey

“Actions Speak Louder Than Words”

Each step of this collaborative conflict management model has an important mutually affirming message that may be communicated at a conscious or subconscious level. The table below illustrates the message associated with each step.

Step	Message
1. Define the problem in terms of needs.	Your needs are important to me; you are important to me. I am important enough to have my needs expressed and heard. We really can understand one another.
2. Brainstorm solutions.	I value your creative thinking and input, and believe that together we can be even more creative in dealing with our common problem.
3. Select the solution that will meet both parties' needs.	I want you to have your needs satisfied, I want my needs satisfied, and I won't accept either one of us denying our uniqueness.
4. Plan who will do what, where, and by when.	You and I are willing to make joint decisions and coordinated plans to assist each other in getting our needs met.
5. Implement the plan.	You and I have the power to change our behaviors in ways that can enhance our lives and improve our relationship. Our commitment to each other is expressed in action as well as in words.
6. Evaluate how well the solution turned out.	<p>You and I want to continually improve the way we resolve problems that arise between us. Therefore, we will discuss our feelings about our individual roles in the process and whether the selected solution helped to resolve our issue once implemented.</p> <p>We are not locked into any solution, policy, or program. If our decision is not as good for us as we had hoped, we have the power to remake it-better.</p>

COLLABORATIVE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT MODEL

Seven Common Traps to Avoid

1. ***Not handling the emotions first.*** If emotions are high, they need to be brought into a normal range before the collaborative conflict management process begins.
2. ***Not defining the problem properly.*** Many people do not listen long enough or effectively enough to understand the other person's need. And they may not have specified their own need accurately enough. Sometimes people try to use this method when no tangible needs are involved-only values issues. This process is not intended for use in values conflict.
3. ***Evaluating or clarifying during brainstorming.*** Evaluations, clarifications, comments, and examples hinder and may ultimately kill effective brainstorming. Since the quality of your solution hinges so largely on the effectiveness of your brainstorming, it is important to avoid falling to this trap.
4. ***Not working out the nitty-gritty details.*** Once a mutually agreeable solution is discovered, many people end the collaborative conflict management process. It seems to some people that it signals a lack of trust to work out the details of implementation at this time. Other people become impatient. They are not used to spending so much time working out problems with other people. So they do not spell out the specific next steps to be taken; the solution does not get implemented and they are apt to say, "The process just doesn't work."
5. ***Not following-up to see that the action steps are carried out.*** Just because you arrive at an agreement doesn't mean it will be put onto action. Many people have over crowded schedules, numerous priorities, and other complications that may interfere with their efforts on behalf of your common plan. Lack of follow-through on the other person's part doesn't necessarily mean that they don't care about you or about the agreed-upon solution. It can be important, therefore, to set and use realistic checkpoints to evaluate the progress you are making in the resolution of your problem.
6. ***Not looking at hidden agendas.*** Sometimes when adequate progress is not being made in the process, it is due to an underlying problem that has not been brought into the open. When this seems to be the case, offer a "door opener" like, "Seems like something is hanging us up. Is there something else in our relationship that we should talk about first?"
7. ***No willingness to recycle the process.*** Oftentimes when you cannot reach consensus on a solution it is because one or two steps in the process need to be done more effectively. The problem usually becomes evident at step 3 (selecting the solution). It is often helpful to try again; many times a mutually beneficial solution is reached on the second time through the process.

NOTES