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How To Identify And Improve Your Conflict Management Style

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8-10 minutes

Conflict management is a phrase we often hear in a business context. It's one of those buzz-word phrases that your manager may toss around in meetings or casual conversation that likely leaves you scratching your head.

The reality is — effective **conflict management** is one of the foundations of not just business success, but personal success. Believe it or not, you probably have your very own style of conflict management you gravitate toward when solving problems.

However, before we can address your personal conflict management style, we first need to answer the question: *what is conflict management?*

What is Conflict Management?

Conflict management is the ability to identify and navigate conflicts in a way that is efficient, effective, and fair.

Whenever people need to work together, as a part of a team or collaborative unit, it's almost inevitable that conflicts, arguments, and disagreements will arise.

We all have our own specific wants, needs, ideas, and opinions that we project when we work with others. Sometimes, these ideas and desires will mesh well with the people around us. Sometimes, they won't. . . And that's where tensions may arise.

Someone who understands the mechanics of **effective conflict management** is able to navigate arguments and disagreements among others with [competence and care](#). Everyone has their own approach to conflict management, and identifying yours may help you become a better mediator.

Conflict Management vs. Conflict Resolution

“Conflict is inevitable, but combat is optional.” — Max Lucade

It's important to note that conflict management is *not* conflict resolution.

Conflict management is the fair navigation of conflict. **Conflict resolution** involves the reduction or termination of conflict. In fact, some forms of conflict resolution seek to avoid the potential for conflict to arise in the first place.

Conflict resolution sounds pretty advantageous, doesn't it? Here's the thing: not all forms of conflict are bad. In fact, some types of conflict are quite beneficial.

Why?

Conflict is simply the opportunity for people to better understand the wants and needs of another person. It's an opportunity for growth, expansion, and improvement.

Conflict management is the recognition that conflict is inevitable, and that conflict can be good, so long as it is

handled appropriately, efficiently, and skillfully.



5 Different Conflict Management Styles

There are five different styles of conflict management according to the [Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument](#):

1. Conflict Management Style: Accommodating

This **style of conflict management** involves a high degree of cooperation, although this cooperation often comes at the expense of the mediator.

People who are interested in preserving the peace and maintaining the most harmonious circumstances possible often adopt an accommodating conflict management style. They are willing to sacrifice their own preferences and needs for the concerns of others.

2. Conflict Management Style: **Avoiding**

The avoidance conflict management style is exactly what it sounds like. When the person that should, or could, be mediating the conflict (like a manager or team leader), simply ignores that the conflict is underway.

This strategy *can* be effective when the conflict is exceedingly trivial and to pursue a solution would ultimately be time-consuming and wasteful. However, it is important to be aware that this strategy can backfire fairly quickly on the arbitrator.

Conflicts are best managed when addressed quickly and competently.

3. Conflict Management Style: **Compromising**

Compromising is a conflict management style that seeks to give both parties part of what they want. When a solution that fully satisfies both sides simply can't be found, then a compromising strategy may work best.

Some identify the **compromising conflict management style** as a 'lose-lose' approach, but if both parties are able to walk away satisfied that at least *some* of their needs have been met, then the solution was not a fruitless one.

A compromise shouldn't be the first approach in managing conflict, but it may be an effective last resort to help diffuse tension. This is the classic 'agree to disagree' arrangement.

4. Conflict Management Style: **Competing**

The competing conflict management style is an aggressive, action-

driven approach that provides one party with what they want, while the other party does not get what they want.

Often called the 'win-lose' approach, this conflict management style results in one party having their wants and needs met, while the other does not. This strategy is not very cooperative. Unfortunately, it is one that is nurtured in many of us from an early age: the idea that we must compete and beat out others in order to get what we want.

Solutions can be found outside the realm of competition. This strategy may seem effective in the short-term, but can foster animosity, bitterness, and further aggression down the line.

5. Conflict Management Style: **Collaborating**

Using a **collaborative conflict management style**, the mediator seeks to find a solution that entirely satisfies both parties.

This is a step up from compromise and involves a deeper, more involved, hands-on approach.

The exploration of [alternative ideas](#), solutions, and discussions must be had that encourage the empathy, honesty, and compassion of all involved.

Often called the "win-win" strategy, if used effectively, this can be a powerful and practical conflict management style.

Which Conflict Management Style is Right For You?

People naturally gravitate toward [different conflict management styles](#) depending on their personality.



Perhaps conflict makes you uncomfortable, and you'd prefer to avoid it. Or maybe conflict instigates a competitive streak in you, and once involved, you want to conquer your adversaries at all costs.

It's up to you to decide which conflict management style best suits your preferences. It's good to play to your strengths, but it's also beneficial to opt for approaches you wouldn't normally select.

Keep in mind that different forms of conflict will call for different conflict management styles. Where in one situation, only a compromise can be effectively met, in another, you may find that a collaborative approach is most beneficial.

Conflict Management Strategies To Try

If you'd like to further develop your mediating talents, why not try out some of these conflict management strategies?

1. Accept that Conflict is Inevitable

Conflict is a part of life! There isn't much we can do about it besides work to accept the inevitability of tensions and disagreements between others and ourselves.

When we understand that conflict is inevitable, we're better prepared to handle it when it arrives.

2. Remember: Conflict Can Be Beneficial

Conflict can be a healthy learning experience for all involved. When we butt heads with those around us, we have the opportunity to grow, expand, and become closer to those we're disagreeing with.

When you learn what makes someone tick, you're in a better position to understand who they are as a person. Embrace the benefits of conflict, and seek to find solutions that all parties are pleased with.

3. Use Neutral Language

When we're upset, we naturally gravitate toward charged, emotionally-infused language that can become accusative in a hurry. When people feel attacked, they usually get defensive, and may seek to retaliate.

This only seeks to stoke the fire of combat. Instead of emotive language, opt for neutral language. Use "I feel..." statements, as opposed to "you" statements that often sound more accusatory.

4. Agree to Disagree

Sometimes, a collaborative solution simply can't be found. In

instances like this, you may simply need to agree to disagree.

Not everyone is going to see eye to eye. If both parties can't find a way to come together and work on a solution as partners, then the conflict may need to be tabled with an 'agree to disagree' conclusion.

Here is some additional advice on conflict management by the amazing Dr. Srikumar Rao:

Which conflict management style do you naturally gravitate towards? Do you think one style is more advantageous than any other? Tell us your thoughts in the comments below!