

IDENTIFY YOUR DOMINANT CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLE

There are five basic ways that people behave when they respond to conflict:

FORCING
ACCOMMODATING
COMPROMISING
AVOIDING
COOPERATING

Your style may change depending on the situation you find yourself in. For instance, you may use an avoiding style when you have a conflict with your boss while you will use a forcing style when you are in conflict with your teenage daughter.

Your conflict style may also change depending on the intensity of the conflict. You will most likely conduct yourself differently when you are feeling calm than when you are in a rage.

It's no use to judge people for their particular style. However, you will find that some styles deal more constructively with conflict than others.



To identify your dominant conflict style, read the statements below and answer the questions. Forget about political correctness. Answer them honestly, keep in mind the way you think you do behave, rather than in a way you think you should behave.

Answer the questions with the following points:

- 1 Rarely
- 2 Sometimes
- 3 Often
- 4 Always

QUESTIONS

1. If I disagree with someone I argue my case to the bitter end
2. I find conflicts with others exciting and I enjoy coming out on top
3. When there is a conflict all parties should give and take a little
4. I stay away from openly debating issues when I disagree with someone
5. If I disagree with someone I try to find a way we can both get what we want
6. I feel more concerned about the other person's needs than my own
7. When I find myself in an argument, I feel uncomfortable and try to leave
8. When there is disagreement I focus on a solution, so we can all move on
9. I mostly let others have what they want and need
10. I always try to see the other person's point of view
11. I know how to resolve things in conflicts and I am most of the times right
12. I try to reach a middle ground when I have a conflict with other people
13. I try to accommodate the wishes of my peers and colleagues
14. I find it not worthwhile to discuss my differences of opinion with others
15. I explore issues with others to find solutions that meet everyone's needs

CONFLICT STYLE	STATEMENTS	TOTAL SCORE
FORCING	$1 + 2 + 11 =$	
ACCOMMODATING	$6 + 9 + 13 =$	
COMPROMISING	$3 + 8 + 12 =$	
AVOIDING	$4 + 7 + 14 =$	
COOPERATING	$5 + 10 + 15 =$	

MY HIGHEST SCORE IS	
MY SECOND HIGHEST SCORE IS	
MY LOWEST SCORE IS	

EXPLANATION OF THE CONFLICT STYLES



As we explore the different conflict styles, you will see that each carries consequences for your relationship with the other person and for your relationship with yourself.

Even though we commonly use more than one style, we tend to have a dominant one. It is worthwhile to be aware of how you generally respond to conflict and to also recognise how

others - such as the colleagues who are driving you nuts - respond to conflict. This will help you to better understand the dynamics of the particular conflict and to find ways to transform it.

To clarify and elaborate on the different conflict styles, I will use a simplified example of conflict, two people fighting over an orange.

FORCING (SHARK)



If you have a forcing style you see conflict as a competition, complete with winners and losers. And because of your competitive nature, you definitely want to be on the winning side. You have no time for losers and it is important for you to get your own way. So you concentrate on your own needs and are less concerned with the needs of others. Your focus on winning the conflict automatically implies that the other person will be the loser. In this style you, decide to go for the 'I Win - You Lose' option.

With a forcing style, when you have a conflict over an orange you end the conflict by seizing the orange, leaving the other person with nothing.

Your communication style will come across as aggressive and intimidating. People see you as someone with little or no respect for others.

The advantage of this conflict style is that you get what you want in a quick and easy way and it is clear for everyone who is in charge. However, the price you pay is a damaged or destroyed relationship. The other person whose needs are not met will be upset, even if they do not share this with you. They likely will hold a grudge against you, and this will fester.

For example: you are the manager of a team and there is a disagreement about how a certain project should be implemented. If you do not allow any room for a discussion and instead direct your staff members to proceed your way, they will most likely follow your orders. Nevertheless, they may be quite upset about not being consulted and may delay implementation of the project in subtle ways. This can make things quite difficult for you, and because they do it in such an indirect way, it will be hard for you to put your finger on it.

So your 'I Win - You Lose' approach can be counterproductive.

ACCOMMODATING (TEDDY BEAR)

If you have an accommodating style when confronted with conflict, you perceive conflict as an uncomfortable situation that needs to be resolved in a peaceful way as quickly as possible. Because conflict distresses you, you will do anything in your power to make it disappear. You have little desire to win the conflict; in fact, you would rather give in than make a big fuss so that everyone can move on and go back to business as usual.

In this style you opt for the 'You Win - I Lose' option.

When you, with your accommodating style, have a conflict over an orange, you will end it by simply giving the orange to the other person. After all, it is not a big deal for you and you are more than willing to sacrifice the orange if that makes the other person happy.

Your communication style will come across as diplomatic and friendly; you won't ruffle any feathers. People see you as a people pleaser who goes along with the suggestions and needs of others.

The advantage of this style is that any conflict in your life is solved quickly. Also, by letting go of your own needs, you don't have to engage in difficult and painful conversations with others. You find it important to be liked by others, and as long as they get their way, they will like you. The relationships you have with others remain intact and all seems well - on the surface. The disadvantage is that by focusing on the needs of others, you ignore your own. The price you pay is that you feel bad about not standing up for yourself.



You basically sacrifice your own needs for the sake of harmony with the people around you. Resenting yourself affects your self-esteem over time. Your failure to express your needs eats away at you and causes stress. You may feel that people use you and walk all over you. In addition, your relationships remain superficial because you don't tell people what is important for you.

For example, if your colleague asks if you could take over part of the client portfolio because he is too busy you may find yourself agreeing almost immediately. You want to please people so taking over a few extra clients is not such a big deal. You hear yourself say: 'No problem.'

However, a few minutes later, you realise that you are actually pretty busy yourself in the coming weeks and you regret having said yes. At the same time, you do not have the courage to tell your colleague that you would like to reconsider your decision as you don't want to rock the boat. You end up being quite upset - with yourself and with your colleague. You won't express this to your colleague but you may have a sleepless night over it.

This style can therefore be quite harmful for your own well being.

AVOIDING (TURTLE)

If you have an avoiding style when confronted with conflict, you actually don't want to know about the conflict at all. In fact, you hope that by ignoring the conflict it may just go away. So you pretend that there is no conflict by withdrawing, walking away or delaying any discussion and saying to yourself: what conflict? You think that by being silent you can save the relationship.

By using this style you opt for an 'I Lose, You Lose' situation.

If you have a conflict over an orange, as a typical avoider, you don't even bother discussing who should have the orange. You just walk away.

Your communication is virtually non-existent. You don't talk and refrain from expressing your needs or discussing the other person's needs.

The advantage of this style is that you fool yourself for a while into the belief that there is no conflict.

The disadvantage is that it is frustrating for everyone involved. By not engaging with each other, nobody's needs are expressed or met; neither your own needs nor the needs of the other person. The result of such non-communication is that the already shallow relationship suffers a serious break-down.

In this situation, all parties miss out. Not just you but also the other person as it is frustrating for them not to have an opportunity to clarify issues and talk about needs, no matter how hard they try.

As for you, you know deep inside that avoiding the conflict does not make it magically disappear. Like the accommodator, you will feel bad about not being able to stand up for yourself and express your needs. This will have a negative impact on your self-esteem and self-worth and you worry that people may perceive you as weak.

For example: your boss has been trying to talk to you about your role in an incident which resulted in a client leaving the firm. The first two times she wanted to sit down with you, you managed to come up with a valid excuse not to attend the meeting. However, your boss insists and has now booked an official meeting. You are quite panicky about the whole thing and after a sleepless night you decide to call in sick the day of the meeting. You don't know what to do and feel disempowered and your boss probably feels the same.

So this 'I Lose – You Lose' approach is disadvantageous for all involved.



COMPROMISING (FOX)

If you have a compromising style, you do acknowledge conflict and you are keen to solve it, sooner rather than later. You believe that in every conflict, people have to give and take a bit. If the parties can meet halfway, you can all agree and move on while the relationship remains intact. Because of your eagerness to find a quick solution, you look for different options and trade-offs that can be used to satisfy all.

This style's slogan is 'I Win Some - I Lose Some / You Win Some – You Lose Some'.

As a compromiser you cut the orange in half when in conflict so both parties can have half of the orange: problem solved, how easy was that?

Your communication style is fairly shallow because you don't truly connect with the other person as you are so focused on finding solutions. So there is no clarification about your own needs and the needs of others.

The advantage of this style is that you solve the conflict in a relatively quick process: there is a conflict, people come together, meet each other halfway, give a bit and take a bit, find an agreement and get on with their lives.



The disadvantage, however, is that although it may look as though the conflict has been resolved, in the end, neither party actually knows what the other party needs. Another disadvantage is that nobody got what they need and each has settled for less than what they hoped for. So in fact there are winners and losers on both sides.

For example, two units are having a conflict about who is doing what in the organisation. The Chief Executive has indicated that a deadlock is not acceptable and that a solution must be reached. The units sit down together and try to find quick solutions as to who is going to do what. There is a bit of wheeling and dealing going on, some trade-offs are exchanged and within one afternoon the whole issue is settled.

The Chief Executive is informed that all is sorted. However, later it becomes apparent that some of these hasty decisions do not make sense and are actually ineffective.

The lack of communication about the underlying issues and needs happened because everyone was so focused on finding a quick solution. Eventually the way in which the conflict was solved had an adverse impact on the organisation.

So this 'I Win Some and I Lose Some – You Win Some and You Lose Some' approach can be disadvantageous for all involved.

COOPERATING (OWL)

If you have a cooperating style, you see conflict as an opportunity to clarify issues, to learn from each other and to grow as an individual. It is important for you to not only explain where you are coming from and what your issues are, but also to fully understand what is vital for the other person. You prefer an open and honest conversation so everyone's needs are integrated. The relationship is important and you wish for a win-win outcome for everyone.

You opt for an 'I Win – You Win' approach.



If you have a cooperating style, you initiate a conversation about the orange. You ask why the other person needs the orange and you explain why you need the orange. By communicating thoroughly, the issues become much clearer. You may find out that while you need the orange because you are thirsty, the other person needs the orange to bake a cake. By knowing this you can create a win-win situation for all; you can drink the juice and the other person can use the peel of the orange.

As a co-operator, your communication style is assertive and open. You are not afraid to stand up for yourself and your needs in a respectful way

and, at the same time, you are willing to respectfully listen to the other person and their needs.

The advantage of this style is that it is beneficial for relationships as parties respect each other and all needs are equally valued. The open and honest communication allows both parties to gain a better understanding of all issues at play.

The disadvantage is that it can take a long time to discuss all issues. Also some people may misconstrue your consulting approach as that of a 'weak' leader who can't make decisions.

For example, if your business is going through a serious reorganisation and there are different views as how to do so, a cooperating leader would want to involve all staff in the decision process. This would mean establishing a workgroup consisting of staff members from all layers of the organisation. There would be meetings in which all the issues and their pros and cons would be discussed extensively.

After two months of deliberations, a draft report would be presented to all staff members and amendments would be made before a final report would be released.

By having a cooperating approach the chances are that eventually the reorganisation will be a great success as all people will feel involved and heard.

WANT TO CONTINUE YOUR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT?

Scan the QR code to explore TLC Leadership Group's leadership coaching, training, facilitation, and speaking services.



Practical solutions. Real-world impact.