

# Taking Control of Conflict

## How to Resolve and Minimize Workplace Disputes

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Municipal Technical Advisory Service  
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# Course Objectives

## **This course will increase your ability to:**

- Identify your preferred strategy for handling conflict.
- Understand the characteristics and drawbacks of each typical approach to conflict.
- Recognize the various sources of conflict that most often occur in the workplace.
- Implement strategies for effectively resolving conflicts that stem from each source.
- Practice behaviors that minimize tension and conflict.
- Proactively address issues before they escalate into problems.



# Conflict Comes in All Forms...



# My Cousin Steve...



**Module 1:**

**Typical Approaches to Conflict**

**Module 2: Sources of Conflict**

**Module 3:**

**Best Practices for Conflict  
Prevention**



# Module 1: Typical Approaches to Conflict



# Introduction

- Think of a conflict you were involved in (directly or indirectly) at work that resulted in a negative outcome—hurt feelings, lost productivity, a negative environment, damaged relationships, etc.
- Next, think of a conflict you were involved in (directly or indirectly) at work that resulted in a positive outcome—an innovative solution, improved relationships, positive growth, etc.
- Why did one conflict result in a negative outcome and the other in a positive outcome?
- Let's see if we can find out why!

# The Positive Definitions Game

- Have pen and paper
- Divide your page into two sections, and write the terms, “Negative Problems”, and “Positives Outcomes”
- Answer the following questions:
  - **What negative problems might be caused by conflict in the workplace?**
  - **What positive outcomes can result from conflict in the workplace?**

# What's Your Approach to Conflict?

- You're working with a team of five other people on a new project. One of the team members is Erica, a veteran who has worked at the organization years longer than everyone else and insists on making the decisions herself. You believe that the team would be better off if each person had equal input on decisions. How would you most likely handle this conflict?
1. I would actively push to change the way decisions are made and try to enlist other team members to take my side.
  2. I would request to be transferred to another project that hopefully has a more inclusive team dynamic.
  3. I would talk to Erica privately and try to get her to agree to include the rest of the group in some of the decisions.
  4. I would set up a meeting for the team to brainstorm how it can both encourage all members to offer suggestions and benefit from Erica's experience.
  5. I would let it go in order to maintain a good relationship with Erica.

# What Would You Do???



- What would you do if two teammates refused to speak to each other and used you as an in between?
- What would you do if your boss took credit for your work during a meeting?
- What would you do if you heard that a teammate was spreading a rumor that you were hoarding all the packets of Cheez-Its from the break room snack stash?
- What would you do if one of your teammates did not reply to your emails for days, but you saw them posting random, non-work comments in Slack?

# Thomas-Kilmann CONFLICT MODE Instrument

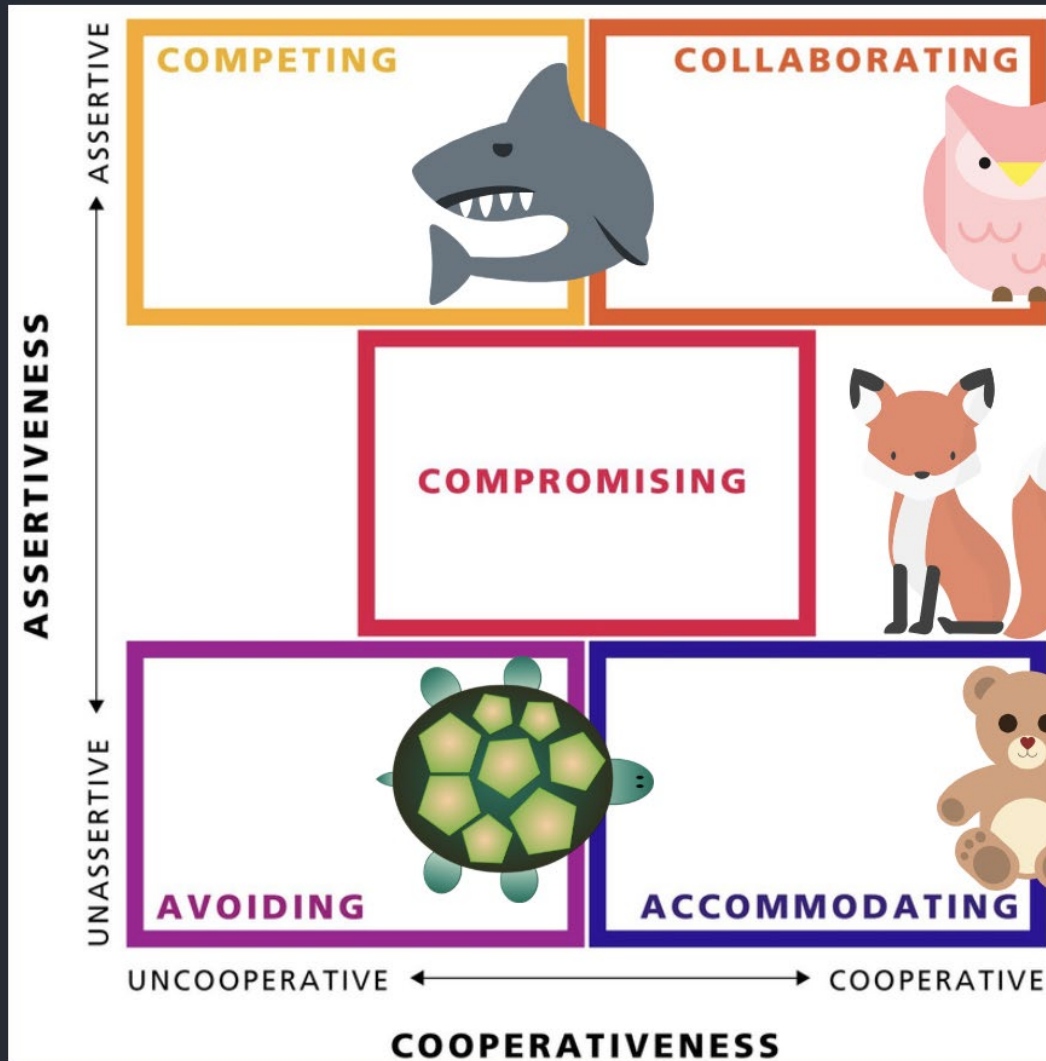
KENNETH W. THOMAS • RALPH KILMANN



# Conflict Styles

- Five styles of conflict response
  - Avoiding
  - Accommodating
  - Compromising
  - Competing
  - Collaborating
- We use them situationally, but each of us has a dominant, or “go to” style

# THOMAS KILMANN CONFLICT MODEL





# UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE



# Personal Styles of Dealing with Conflict

## Avoidance

Completely evades the conflict. You would neither pursue your beliefs nor those of the others involved. Simply, you would continuously postpone or completely dodge the conflict whenever it comes up.

This style could be appropriate to use when the conflict seems trivial, you don't have the time or need more time to think, you feel as though you have no chance of winning, or you're afraid of being met with resentment.



# Avoiding

## Characteristics:

- Leave issues unresolved by sidestepping them or withdrawing.
- Ignore their own needs.
- Have a fear of conflict.



# Avoiding

## **If you're stuck in a rut:**

- List reasons for resolving the conflict.
- Write down what you would like to happen.
- Meet with the other person.





# Personal Styles of Dealing with Conflict

## Accommodation

An accommodating style forsakes your own needs or desires in exchange for those of others. This style usually takes place when you either simply give in or are persuaded to give in.

Could be appropriate to use when you care less about the issue than the others, want to keep the peace, feel as though you are in the wrong, or feel like you have no choice but to agree.



# Accommodation/Smoothing

## Characteristics:

- Yield to others, willingly giving up their own goals.
- Be selfless.
- Gloss over conflict to maintain harmony.



# Accommodation/Smoothing

## **If you're stuck in a rut:**

- Rate the importance of the issue to you.
- Learn to say no.



# Personal Styles of Dealing with Conflict

## Compromise

A compromising style attempts to find a solution that will at least partially please all parties. You work to find a middle ground, which would typically leave people unsatisfied or satisfied to a certain extent.

This style could be appropriate to use when it's more important to reach a solution than for the solution to be great, a deadline is rapidly approaching, you're at an impasse, or you need a temporary solution for the moment.



# Compromising

## Characteristics:

- Concede a need/goal to have another satisfied.
- Negotiate.
- Find middle ground.



# Compromising

## **If you're stuck in a rut:**

- Allow dissension during discussions.
- Closely examine potential solutions.
- Strive to reach the best overall solution for all involved.

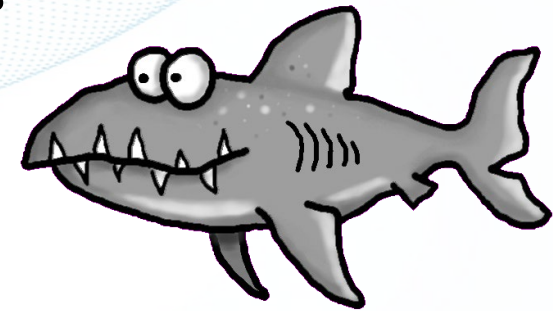


# Personal Styles of Dealing with Conflict

## Competitive

A competing style takes a firm stance and refuses to see the perspectives of the other parties. You keep pushing your viewpoint at others or keep rejecting their ideas until you get your way.

Could be appropriate when you have to stand up for your rights or morals, need to make a quick decision and force others to get on board, need to end a long-term conflict, or have to prevent a terrible decision from being made.



# Competing

## Characteristics:

- Disregard goals of the other party.
- Argue or debate.
- Become firmly entrenched.
- Use influence to direct the outcome.
- Desire to “win.”



# Competing

## If you're stuck in a rut:

- Think about the other person's needs.
- Listen carefully.
- Allow the other person to have the last word.
- Let go of your need to be right.
- Think about the best long-term outcome.



# Personal Styles of Dealing with Conflict

## Collaborating

A collaborating style attempts to find a solution that will meet the needs of all parties. Rather than trying to find a middle ground solution, you would aim for a solution that actually satisfies everyone and ends up being a win-win situation.

This style could be appropriate when multiple perspectives need to be addressed, there is an important relationship present between the parties, the final solution is too important for anyone to be displeased, or the beliefs of multiple stakeholders must be represented.



# Collaborating/Intergrating

## Characteristics:

- Find mutually beneficial solution.
- Practice active listening.
- Identify shared needs and values.
- Engage in creative problem solving.



# Collaborating/Integrating

Offers the most beneficial long-term solution.

Provides two types of satisfaction:

- **Objective**
- **Subjective**



**It's likely that a person employs more than one style, depending on the situation, but usually one style dominates.**



# How Would You Like to Respond?

1. What is your typical approach to conflict?
2. How would you like to behave differently the next time you are involved in a conflict?
3. How could you make this change?
4. What physical responses do you frequently experience in conflict situations?
5. What specific thoughts do you frequently experience in conflict situations?
6. What steps can you take to retrain your body and mind to allow you to act (instead of *react*) in a conflict situation?

# Module 2: Sources of Conflict



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# Let's Get Ready to Rumble!



# Exercise

- Find a partner
- Assume the “ready position”
- Only two things you must know:
  1. You get a point if the back of your partner’s hand touches the table
  2. You want to get as many points for yourself as possible. You don’t care about anyone else.
- You have 10 seconds...

# Exercise

- By a show of hands, how many of you got...
  - 0 points?
  - 1-5?
  - 6-20?
  - More than 20?
    - How did you get so many? What was said between you?

# Exercise

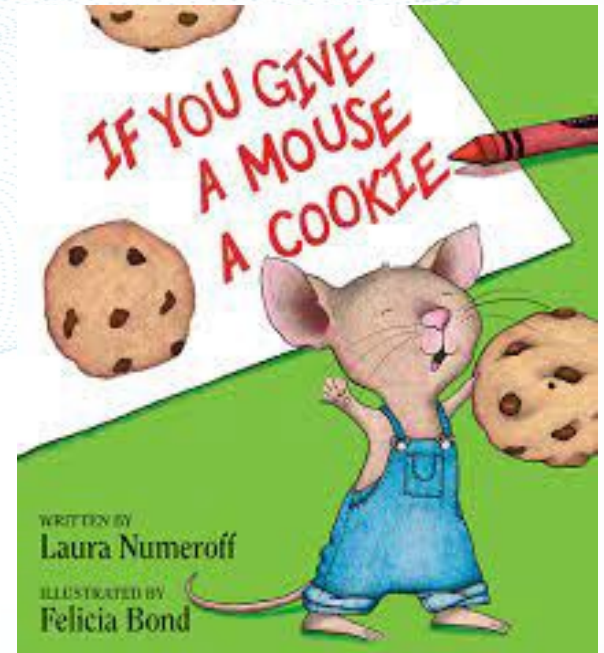
- For teams that got few points, did these factors play a role?
  - We assumed no communication
  - We assumed we had to keep our hands together
  - We didn't trust each other
  - We assumed the rules were set

# Sources of Conflict

- Conflict of values
- Interpersonal conflict
- Conflict of goals
- Poor performance
- Power struggle
- Limited resources
- Organization-based conflict

# All Conflict Has a Beginning...

- “If you give a mouse a cookie, he’s going to ask for a glass of milk.
- When you give him the milk, he’ll probably ask you for a straw.
- When he’s finished, he’ll ask you for a napkin.
- Then he’ll want to look in a mirror to make sure he doesn’t have a milk mustache....”



# If You Send Your Boss an Email

- If you roll your eyes at your coworker
- If you give a client an ultimatum
- If you give a teammate an impossible deadline
- If you ignore your teammate's question
- If you ignore your teammates request for an update
- If you share some juicy gossip



# Conflict of Values

- Incompatibility of the beliefs and principles that guide people's behavior.
- Usually can't be resolved through negotiation, reason, or persuasive arguments.



# Conflict of Values

## How to identify:

- Insulting someone's character or beliefs.
- Don't understand reasoning.
- Behavior elicits intense reaction.



- Principle of the matter is more important than situation itself.

# Interpersonal Conflict



- Often arises around communication preferences and work style.
- Typically reflects superficial differences.

# Interpersonal Conflict



## How to identify:

- Frustrated with another's "annoying habits."
- Desire to change the other person.
- Emotions out of balance with conflict's importance.
- Tempted to argue.

# Conflict of Goals

- Typical scenario:

Two people fight for personal goals, ignoring welfare of team or organization.



# Conflict of Goals

## How to identify:

- Involves concrete decisions/actions you disagree with.
- Your approach would provide you—not the other person—with the best outcome.



- Can be resolved with rational problem solving.

# Small Group Exercise

- Stan and Lynn work for a large insurance agency. Stan is an actuary, and his most important goal is accuracy. Lynn is an insurance agent, and her highest priority is serving her customers. She wants the underwriting done as quickly as possible to satisfy her customers. When Stan takes longer than Lynn expects to underwrite a policy, Lynn gets upset and frustrated with Stan because she worries that the customer might become impatient and walk away. Stan maintains that he must always take as much time as necessary to ensure that the policy is underwritten correctly.
- Thoughts?

# Poor Performance (Interdependence Conflict)

- Negatively affects others who depend on that person's work to complete their own.
- Becomes a conflict when the under-performer doesn't recognize his/her part in the situation.



# Poor Performance

## How to identify:

- Work too slowly.
- Make mistakes frequently.
- Don't follow through on commitments.
- Don't meet expectations.



# Power Struggle



- Results when people try to pressure or manipulate others to gain power and status.

# Power Struggle

## How to identify:

Territorial  
behavior

Large ego

Hoarding  
information

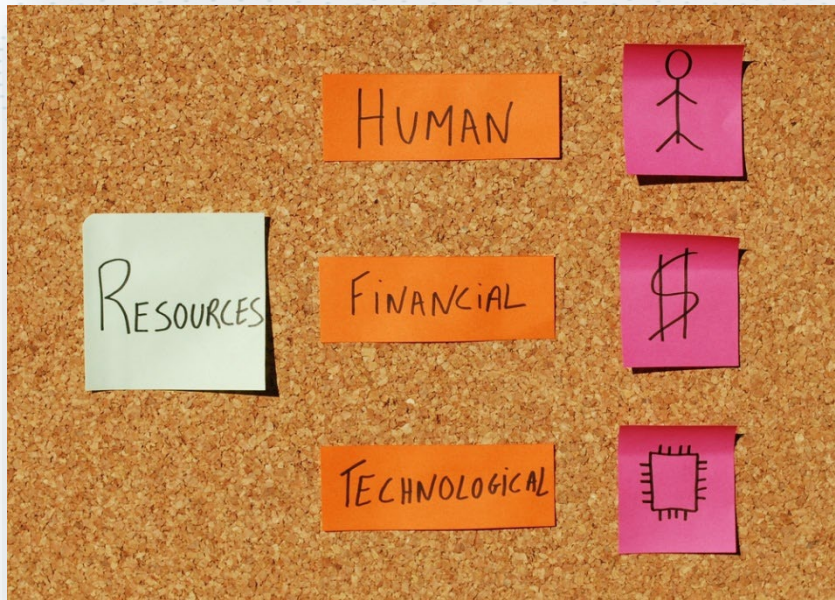
Desire to win  
& be right

Extreme need for  
control

Pressure  
tactics



# Limited Resources



## How to identify:

- Disagreements over money, staffing, time allocations, supplies/equipment, or space.

# Organization-Based Conflict

## How to identify:

- Confusion about policies or procedures.
- Lack of clarity about job responsibilities or reporting relationships.



# Peeling the Onion

- The bigger the conflict, the more likely it is that multiple sources are involved.



# Module 3: Best Practices for Conflict Prevention



## Strategies to Minimize Conflict at Work

1. Be a model of right behaviors.
2. Identify and address underlying tensions before things go wrong.
3. Provide more clarity over what's expected.
4. Manage toxic individuals who create conflict more firmly.
5. Improve consultation in day-to-day management.
6. Act as mediators when conflict develops.
7. Not let their egos get in the way.

# Creating Positive Outcomes

- Address the issue without delay.
- Use neutral words.
- Describe the positive outcome you want.
- Embrace differences of opinion.



# Creating Positive Outcomes

- Focus on actionable solutions.
- Be detail-oriented.
- Follow up.



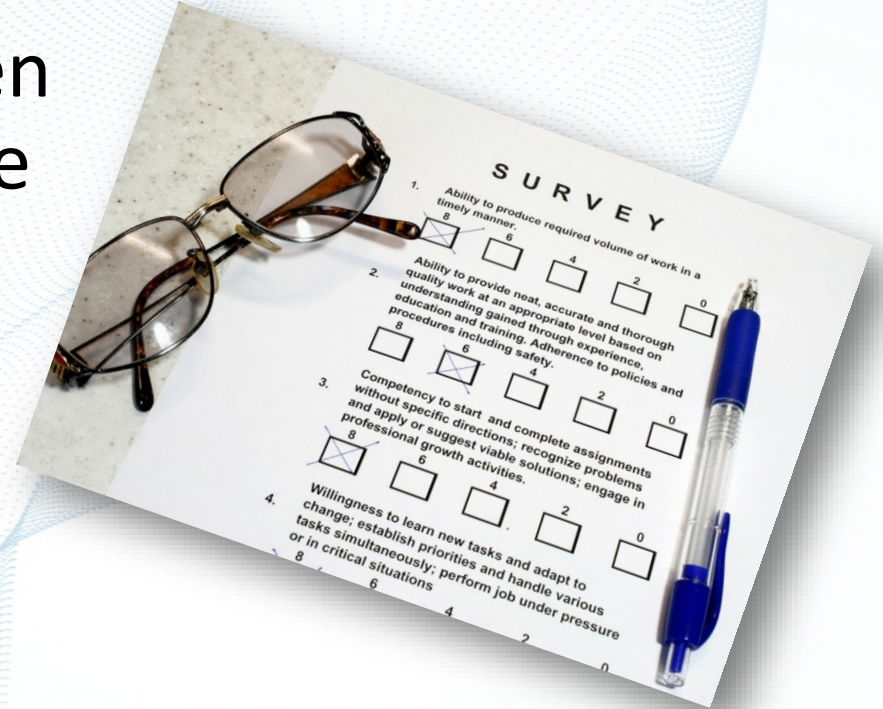
## If Feelings Escalate

- Take a break.
- Hold out an olive branch.
- Apologize for behavior without apologizing for your needs.
- Let the other person save face.



# Establish Expectations

- **Formal:** Generally written down and apply to entire organization.
- **Informal:** Acceptable behaviors, may not be written down.



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# Thank You!

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