

8 Conflict – Managing it Creatively

What's Your Preferred Conflict Style?

Competitive: People who tend towards this style take a firm stand and know what they want. They usually operate from a position of power (position, rank, expertise, seniority, persuasive ability). This style is useful when there is an emergency that requires a quick decision, when the decision is unpopular, or when defending against someone who is trying to exploit the situation selfishly. However, it can leave people feeling bruised.

Collaborative: People who tend towards this style try to meet the needs of all people involved. These people can be highly assertive but cooperate effectively and acknowledge that everyone is important. This style is useful when you need to bring together a variety of viewpoints, when there have been previous conflicts in the group, or when the situation is too important for a simple trade-off.

Compromising: People who prefer this style try to find a situation that will partially satisfy everyone. Everyone is expected to give up something. Compromise is useful when the cost of conflict is higher than the cost of losing ground, when there is a standstill or when there is a deadline looming.

Accommodating: This style indicates a willingness to meet the needs of others at the expense of one's own needs. The accommodator often knows when to give in to others, but can also surrender a position when it is not warranted. Accommodation is important when the issues matter more to the other person or when peace is more valuable than winning. However, this approach is not likely to yield the best outcomes.

Avoiding: People who tend towards this style don't want to hurt anyone's feelings, and they sometimes evade the conflict entirely by delegating difficult decisions. This style can be appropriate when victory is impossible or when someone else is in a better position to make the decision. In most situations, however, it is a weak and ineffective approach to take.



Which is your preferred style? Which style(s) do you use most often in your work?

Does your preferred style serve you well?

Have you met or worked people who demonstrate the other styles?

Has your preferred style ever created difficulty for you?

Would you like to try some aspects of other styles?

Remember: It is important to adopt a style that suits the situation, resolves the problem, respects people's legitimate interests, and mends damaged relationships

[From the work of Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann (see www.mindtools.com)]