

Session 5: Handling Conflict

Mentor Modules adapted from Dr. Peter G. Northouse's [Introduction to Leadership Concepts and Practice: 3rd Ed.](#)

Conflict is virtually inevitable in professional (and certainly personal) settings, and handling conflict is a rather universal leadership challenge. Conflicts can arise due to stress, communication styles, competing interests, problem solving approaches, and a host of other major and minor issues. In general terms, conflict can be divided into two camps: content (related to policies and procedures) and relational (over values, beliefs, control, goals).

Discuss

Share a conflict (that you're comfortable sharing) that you've recently experienced or witnessed. Was it personal or professional? Was it a content or relational issue? How did it develop and who did it involve? Did it escalate and how? Did it affect others? Was it resolved, and how? How did you feel during the conflict? Are you satisfied with the resolution? Are there lingering effects from the conflict?

Discover

Take the "Conflict Style Questionnaire", using a personal example for "Person A" and a professional example for "Person B." Score your answers from the scale to see what your dominant styles for handling conflict were in those situations.

- Are they similar?
- Do they confirm or contradict what you understand to be your natural inclinations to be when confronted with conflict?
- If not, what do you think accounts for the discrepancy?
- What are the benefits of this method of handling conflict, and what are the drawbacks? How does the way you handle conflict benefit or hurt you or others? Why?

Develop

Handling conflict often involves not just communication skills but emotional intelligence and regulation as well. In examining and considering the way you approach and handle conflict, can you identify any steps you can take to more effectively manage conflict that arises? Can you identify any actionable steps or goals that you can put into practice so that you're better able to avoid, manage, and resolve conflict? Write those down and hold each other accountable for addressing those.

10.2 CONFLICT STYLE QUESTIONNAIRE

Purpose

1. To identify your conflict style
2. To examine how your conflict style varies in different contexts or relationships

Directions

1. Think of two different situations (A and B) where you have a conflict, a disagreement, an argument, or a disappointment with someone, such as a roommate or a work associate. Write the name of the person for each situation below.
2. According to the scale below, fill in your scores for Situation A and Situation B. For each question, you will have two scores. For example, on Question 1 the scoring might look like this: 1. 2 4
3. Write the name of each person for the two situations here:

Person A _____ **Person B** _____
1 = never 2 = seldom 3 = sometimes 4 = often 5 = always

Person A	Person B
1. ____ ____	I avoid being "put on the spot"; I keep conflicts to myself.
2. ____ ____	I use my influence to get my ideas accepted.
3. ____ ____	I usually try to "split the difference" in order to resolve an issue.
4. ____ ____	I generally try to satisfy the other's needs.
5. ____ ____	I try to investigate an issue to find a solution acceptable to both of us.
6. ____ ____	I usually avoid open discussion of my differences with the other.
7. ____ ____	I use my authority to make a decision in my favor.
8. ____ ____	I try to find a middle course to resolve an impasse.
9. ____ ____	I usually accommodate the other's wishes.
10. ____ ____	I try to integrate my ideas with the other's to come up with a decision jointly.
11. ____ ____	I try to stay away from disagreement with the other.
12. ____ ____	I use my expertise to make a decision that favors me.
13. ____ ____	I propose a middle ground for breaking deadlocks.

10.2 CONFLICT STYLE QUESTIONNAIRE

(continued)

Person A	Person B
14. ____ ____	I give in to the other's wishes.
15. ____ ____	I try to work with the other to find solutions that satisfy both our expectations.
16. ____ ____	I try to keep my disagreement to myself in order to avoid hard feelings.
17. ____ ____	I generally pursue my side of an issue.
18. ____ ____	I negotiate with the other to reach a compromise.
19. ____ ____	I often go with the other's suggestions.
20. ____ ____	I exchange accurate information with the other so we can solve a problem together.
21. ____ ____	I try to avoid unpleasant exchanges with the other.
22. ____ ____	I sometimes use my power to win.
23. ____ ____	I use "give and take" so that a compromise can be made.
24. ____ ____	I try to satisfy the other's expectations.
25. ____ ____	I try to bring all our concerns out in the open so that the issues can be resolved.

Source: Adapted from "Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict: First-Order Factor Model and Its Invariance Across Groups," by M. A. Rahim and N. R. Magner, 1995, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 80(1), 122–132. In W. Wilmot and J. Hocker (2011), *Interpersonal Conflict* (pp. 146–148). Published by the American Psychological Association.

Scoring: Add up your scores on the following questions:

AIB		AIB		AIB		AIB		AIB	
1. ____ ____	2. ____ ____	3. ____ ____	4. ____ ____	5. ____ ____	6. ____ ____	7. ____ ____	8. ____ ____	9. ____ ____	10. ____ ____
11. ____ ____	12. ____ ____	13. ____ ____	14. ____ ____	15. ____ ____	16. ____ ____	17. ____ ____	18. ____ ____	19. ____ ____	20. ____ ____
21. ____ ____	22. ____ ____	23. ____ ____	24. ____ ____	25. ____ ____					
____ ____	____ ____	____ ____	____ ____	____ ____	____ ____	____ ____	____ ____	____ ____	____ ____
AIB	AIB	AIB	AIB	AIB	AIB	AIB	AIB	AIB	AIB
Avoidance Totals	Competition Totals	Compromise Totals	Accommodation Totals	Collaboration Totals					

10.2 CONFLICT STYLE QUESTIONNAIRE

(continued)

Scoring Interpretation

This questionnaire is designed to identify your conflict style and examine how it varies in different contexts or relationships. By comparing your total scores for the different styles you can discover which conflict style you rely most heavily upon and which style you use least. Furthermore, by comparing your scores for Person A and Person B, you can determine how your style varies or stays the same in different relationships. Your scores on this questionnaire are indicative of how you responded to a particular conflict at a specific time and therefore might change if you selected a different conflict or a different conflict period. The Conflict Style Questionnaire is not a personality test that labels or categorizes you; rather, it attempts to give you a sense of your more dominant and less dominant conflict styles.

Scores from 21 to 25 are representative of a very strong style.

Scores from 15 to 20 are representative of a strong style.

Scores from 11 to 15 are representative of an average style.

Scores from 6 to 10 are representative of a weak style.

Scores from 0 to 5 are representative of a very weak style.

Building Your Leadership Profile

If you have the interactive eBook version of this text, log in to access the Leadership Profile Tool. After completing this chapter's questionnaire, you will receive individualized feedback and practical suggestions for further strengthening your leadership based on your responses in this questionnaire.