

Exercise Two

Conflict Management Styles

There are five generally accepted styles for dealing with conflict issues: avoidance, accommodation, collaboration, compromise, and competition. Nothing is inherently right or wrong with any of these styles. Each can be appropriate and most effective, depending on the situation, issues to resolve, and personalities involved.

Let's take a closer look at each of the styles:

- **Competing** is an aggressive and totally antagonistic style. A “competitor” pursues his or her own views at a colleague’s expense. This is a power-oriented mode in which a group member uses whatever means seem appropriate to win. Competing could mean “standing up for your rights,” defending a position which you believe is correct, or demonstrating a no-holds-barred, win-at-all costs attitude.
- **Accommodating** is an unassertive, self-sacrificing, and hospitable style that is in direct opposition to competing. Colleagues who use this approach relinquish their own concerns to satisfy the concerns of another employee. Accommodating usually takes the form of selfless generosity or blind obedience and yielding completely to another’s point of view.
- **Avoiding** is an unassertive, side-stepping, and retreat-oriented conflict management style. An “avoider” generally chooses to dodge conflict at all costs. Avoiding might take the form of diplomatically side-stepping an issue, postponing an issue until a better time, or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation (emotionally, physically or intellectually).
- **Collaborating** is a (more) cooperative, synergistic, multilateral conflict resolution style. Collaborators find mutually satisfying solutions. They dig into an issue to identify underlying issues and find mutually satisfying Band-Aids or remedies. Collaboration involves demonstrating musketeer-like team focus, agreeing not to compete for resources, and using confrontation to find creative solutions to mutually engaging problems.

- **Compromising** involves finding expedient, mutually acceptable solutions that partially satisfy both parties. Compromising means that both parties “split the difference” in order to settle disagreements. It might mean exchanging concessions, or seeking quick, middle-ground solutions.

Each of these conflict styles is an effective approach to conflict resolution of used appropriately. Conflict is characterized by different degrees of volatility that require a different conflict-management style to handle discord, clashes or disputes. Once managers discover how a particular conflict-management style affects their ability to resolve conflict, the art of creative fighting becomes a powerful people-moving skill.