

# **Conflict Management Styles**



## **OWL Collaborating I win, you win**

Owls highly value their own goals and relationships. They view conflict as a problem to be solved and to seek solution that achieves both their goals and the goals of the other person. Owls see conflicts as a means of improving relationships by reducing tensions between two persons. They try to begin a discussion that identifies the conflict as a problem. By seeking solutions that satisfy both themselves and the other person, owls maintain the relationship. Owls are not satisfied until a solution is found that achieves their goals and the other person's goals. They are not satisfied until the tensions and negative feelings have fully resolved.



## **Turtle Avoiding I zig, you zag**

Turtles withdraw into their shells to avoid conflicts. They give up their goals and relationships, they stay away from the issues over which the conflict is taking place and from the persons they are in conflict with. Turtles believe it is easier to withdraw from a conflict than to face it.



## **Shark Competing I win, you lose**

Sharks try to overpower opponents by forcing them to accept their solution to the conflict. Their goals are highly important to them, and relationships are of minor importance. They seek to achieve their goals at all costs. They are not concerned with the needs of others and do not care if others like or accept them. Sharks assume that conflicts are settled by one person winning and one person losing. They want to be a winner. Winning gives sharks a sense of pride and achievement. Losing gives them a sense of weakness, inadequacy and failure. They try to win by attacking, overpowering, overwhelming, and intimidating.



## **Teddy Bear Accommodating I lose, you win**

To Teddy Bears, the relationship is of great importance while their own goals are of little importance. Teddy Bears want to be accepted and liked by others. They think that conflict should be avoided in favor of harmony and that people cannot discuss conflicts without damaging relationships. They are afraid that if the conflict continues, someone will get hurt and that would ruin the relationship. Teddy Bears say "I'll give up my goals and let you have what you want, in order for you to like me." Teddy Bears try to smooth over the conflict out of fear of harming the relationship.



## **Fox Compromising You bend, I bend**

Foxes are moderately concerned with their own goals and their relationship with others. Foxes seek a compromise; they give up part of their goals and persuade the other person in a conflict to give up part of their goals. They seek a conflict solution in which both sides gain something; the middle ground between two extreme positions. They are willing to sacrifice part of their goals and relationships in order to find agreement for the common good.

## Conflict-Management Style

In this section you will have the opportunity to examine your own conflict-management style and techniques you tend to use in conflict situations, particularly under stress. The exercises that follow will enable you to gain insight in to strategies you might choose to incorporate into your behavior in handling disputes and differences.

### Conflict-Management Style Survey\*

This Conflict-Management Style Survey has been designed to help you become more aware of your characteristic approach, or style, in managing conflict. In completing this survey, you are invited to respond by making choices that correspond with you typical behavior or attitudes in conflict situations.

#### Section 1: Survey

This survey identifies twelve situations that you are likely to encounter in your personal and professional lives. Please study each situation and the five possible behavioral responses or attitudes carefully and then allocate ten points between them to indicate your typical behavior, with the highest number of points indicating you strongest choice. Any response can be answered with from zero to ten points, as long as all five responses for a given situation add up to ten points, as shown in the following example:

EXAMPLE SITUATION: In responding to a request from another for help with a problem, you would:

- 4   A. Clearly instruct him or her how to proceed.
- 2   B. Enjoy the strategizing and the challenge.
- 3   C. Help him or her take responsibility for the problem.
- 1   D. Find it unnerving but agree to help.
- 0   E. Avoid the invitation at all costs.
- 10  TOTAL

Please choose a single frame of reference (e.g., work-related conflicts, family conflicts, social conflicts) and keep that frame of reference in mind when responding to all the situations. And remember, as you complete this survey, that it is not a test. There are no right or wrong responses. They survey will be helpful to you only to the extent that your responses accurately represent your characteristic behavior or attitudes.

*SITUATION 1:* Upon experiencing strong feelings in a conflict situation, you would:

- A. Enjoy the emotional release and sense of exhilaration and accomplishment.
- B. Enjoy the strategizing involved and the challenge of the conflict.
- C. Become serious about how others are feeling and thinking.
- D. Find it frightening because you do not accept that differences can be discussed without someone's getting hurt.
- E. Become convinced that there is nothing you can do to resolve the issue.
- TOTAL

*SITUATION 2:* Consider the following statements and rate them in terms of how characteristic they are of your personal beliefs:

- A. Life is conquered by those who believe in winning.
- B. Winning is rarely possible in conflict.
- C. No one has the final answer to anything, but each has a piece to contribute.
- D. In the last analysis, it is wise to turn the other cheek.
- E. It is useless to attempt to change a person who seems locked into an opposing view.
- TOTAL

*SITUATION 3:* What is the best result that you expect from conflict?

- A. Conflict helps people face the fact that one answer is better than others.
- B. Conflict results in canceling out extremes of thinking so that a strong middle ground can be reached.
- C. Conflict clears the air and enhances commitment and results.
- D. Conflict demonstrates the absurdity of self-centeredness and draws people closer together in their commitment to each other.
- E. Conflict lessens complacency and assigns blame where it belongs.
- TOTAL

*SITUATION 4:* When you are the person with the greater authority in a conflict situation, you would:

- A. Put it straight, letting the other know your view.
- B. Try to negotiate the best settlement you can get.
- C. Ask to hear the other's feelings and suggest that a position be found that both might be willing to try.
- D. Go along with the other, providing support where you can.
- E. Keep the encounter impersonal, citing rules if they apply.
- TOTAL

*SITUATION 5:* When someone you care for takes an unreasonable position, you would:

- A. Lay it on the line, telling him or her that you don't like it.
- B. Let him or her know in casual, subtle ways that you are not pleased; possibly distract with humor; and avoid a direct confrontation.
- C. Call attention to the conflict and explore a mutually acceptable solution.
- D. Try to keep your misgivings to yourself.
- E. Let your actions speak for you by indicating depression or lack of interest.
- TOTAL

*SITUATION 6:* When you become angry at a friend or colleague, you would:

- A. Just explode without giving it much thought.
- B. Try to smooth things over with a good story.
- C. Express your anger and invite him or her to respond.
- D. Try to compensate for your anger by acting the opposite of what you are feeling.
- E. Remove yourself from the situation.
- TOTAL

*SITUATION 7:* When you find yourself disagreeing with other members of a group on an important issue, you would:

- A. Stand by your convictions and defend your position.
- B. Appeal to the logic of the group in the hope of convincing at least a majority that you are right.
- C. Explore points of agreement and disagreement and the feelings of the group's member, and then search for alternatives that take everyone's views into account.
- D. Go along with the rest of the group.
- E. Not participate in the discussion and not feel bound by any decision reached.
- TOTAL

*SITUATION 8:* When a single group member takes a position in opposition to the rest of the group, you would:

- A. Point out publicly that the dissenting member is blocking the group and suggest that the group move on without him or her if necessary.
- B. Make sure the dissenting member has a chance to communicate his or her objections so that a compromise can be reached.
- C. Try to uncover why the dissenting member views the issue differently, so that the group's members can reevaluate their own positions.
- D. Encourage the group's members to set the conflict aside and go on to more agreeable items on the agenda.
- E. Remain silent, because it is best to avoid becoming involved.
- TOTAL

*SITUATION 9:* When you see conflict emerging in a group, you would:

- A. Push for a quick decision to ensure that the task is completed.
- B. Avoid outright confrontation by moving the discussion toward a middle ground.
- C. Share with the group your impression of what is going on, so that the nature of the impending conflict can be discussed.
- D. Forestall or divert the conflict before it emerges by relieving the tension with humor.
- E. Stay out of the conflict as long as it is of no concern to you.
- TOTAL

*SITUATION 10:* In handling conflict between your group and another, you would:

- A. Anticipate areas of resistance and prepare responses to objections prior to open conflict.
- B. Encourage your group's members to be prepared by identifying in advance areas of possible compromise.
- C. Recognize that conflict is healthy and press for the identification of shared concerns and/or goals.
- D. Promote harmony on the grounds that the only real result of conflict is the destruction of friendly relations.
- E. Have your group submit the issue to an impartial arbitrator.
- TOTAL

*SITUATION 11:* In selecting a member of your group to represent you in negotiating with another group, you would choose a person who:

- A. Knows the rationale of your group's position and would press vigorously for your group's point of view.
  - B. Would see that most of your group's judgments were incorporated into the final negotiated decision without alienating too many members of either group.
  - C. Would best represent the ideas of your group, evaluate these in view of judgments of the other group, and then emphasize problem-solving approaches to the conflict.
  - D. Is most skillful in interpersonal relations and would be openly cooperative and tentative in his or her approach.
  - E. Would present your group's case accurately, while not making commitments that might result in obligating your group to a significantly changed position.
- TOTAL

*SITUATION 12:* In your view, what might be the reason for the failure of one group to collaborate with another?

- A. Lack of a clearly stated position, or failure to back up the group's position.
  - B. Tendency of groups to force their leadership or representatives to abide by the group's decision, as opposed to promoting flexibility, which would facilitate compromise.
  - C. Tendency of groups to enter negotiations with a win/lose perspective.
  - D. Lack of motivation on the part of the group's membership to live peacefully with the other group.
  - E. Irresponsible behavior on the part of the group's leadership, resulting in the leaders' placing emphasis on maintaining their own power positions rather than addressing the issues involved.
- TOTAL

## **Section 2: Scoring**

### *Step 1*

When you have completed all items in Section 1, write the number of points you assigned for each of the five responses for the twelve situations in the appropriate columns on the scoring form (figure 26). Add the total number of points for each column, then check that the totals for each column add up to 120.

### *Step 2*

Transfer your column total scores onto the form showing the ideal order (figure 27).

### *Step 3*

Transfer the style names, in order of the highest score first, on the figure 28, which shows your order, and then enter the scores in the adjacent blank spaces.

### *Step 4*

Record your scores in the appropriate blanks on the Conflict-Management Styles Scoring Graph (figure 29). (You may wish to refresh your memory by reviewing the material describing the five conflict styles presented earlier in the subsection entitled A Two-Dimensional Model of Conflict.)

Situation	Response A	Response B	Response C	Response D	Response E	Total
1	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	10
2	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	10
3	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	10
4	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	10
5	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	10
6	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	10
7	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	10
8	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	10
9	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	10
10	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	10
11	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	10
12	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	10
<b>TOTAL:</b>	=====	=====	=====	=====	=====	120

**Figure 26.** Scoring form.

	STYLE	Score
1. Collaborator	(Column C)	_____
2. Compromiser	(Column B)	_____
3. Accommodator	(Column D)	_____
4. Controller	(Column A)	_____
5. Avoider	(Column E)	_____
<b>TOTAL:</b>		=====

**Figure 27.** Ideal order.

Choice	Style	Score
1st	_____	_____
2nd	_____	_____
3rd	_____	_____
4th	_____	_____
5th	_____	_____
<b>TOTAL:</b>		=====

**Figure 28.** Your order.

*Competing/Controlling* is assertive and uncooperative – an individual pursues his or her own concerns at the other person’s expense. This is a power-oriented mode, in which one uses whatever power seems appropriate to win one’s own position – one’s ability to argue, one’s rank, economic sanctions. Competing might mean “standing up for your rights,” defending a position which you believe is correct, or simply trying to win.

*Accommodating* is unassertive and cooperative – the opposite of competing. When accommodating, an individual neglects his or her own concerns to satisfy the concerns of the other person; there is an element of self-sacrifice in this mode. Accommodating might take the form of selfless generosity or charity, obeying another person’s order when one would prefer not to, or yielding to another’s point of view.

*Avoiding* is unassertive and uncooperative – the individual does not immediately pursue his own concerns or those of the other person. He or she does not address the conflict. Avoiding might take the form of diplomatically sidestepping an issue, postponing an issue until a better time, or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation.

*Collaborating* is both assertive and cooperative – the opposite of avoiding. Collaborating involves an attempt to work with the other person to find some solution which fully satisfies the concerns of both persons. It means digging into an issue to identify the underlying concerns of the two individuals and to find an alternative which meets both sets of concerns. Collaborating between two persons might take the form of exploring a disagreement to learn from each other’s insights, concluding to resolve some condition which would otherwise have them competing for resources, or confronting and trying to find a creative solution to an interpersonal problem.

*Compromising* is intermediate in both assertiveness and cooperativeness. The object is to find some expedient, mutually acceptable solution which partially satisfies both parties. It falls on a middle ground between competing and accommodating. Compromising gives up more than competing but less than accommodating. Likewise, it addresses an issue more directly than avoiding, but doesn’t explore it in as much depth as collaborating. Compromising might mean splitting the difference, exchanging concessions, or seeking a quick middle-ground position.

