

Conflict Management Styles Guide

Introduction:

This guide provides an overview of the five main conflict management styles, helping you recognise your natural tendencies and adapt to situations for more effective conflict management.

Conflict can be viewed as a dynamic interaction between individuals, each with their own interests, needs, and goals. These interactions require individuals to choose how to respond to the situation. While some individuals prefer to avoid conflict, others may assert their opinions strongly. Recognising these differences and adjusting our approach is key to fostering a healthy, collaborative environment.

The Five Conflict Management Styles:

Each person has a natural conflict management style, influenced by their personality, experience, cultural background, and emotional intelligence. The five primary styles are:

1. **Avoidance**
2. **Accommodation**
3. **Competition**
4. **Collaboration**
5. **Compromise**

These styles are based on two dimensions: assertiveness (the degree to which one seeks to satisfy their own needs) and cooperativeness (the degree to which one seeks to satisfy the needs of others):

Style	Assertiveness	Cooperativeness	Description
Avoidance	Low	Low	Ignoring the conflict or withdrawing from it.
Accommodation	Low	High	Yielding to the other party's concerns at your expense.
Competition	High	Low	Pursuing your own needs at the expense of others.
Collaboration	High	High	Working together to find a win-win solution.
Compromise	Moderate	Moderate	Finding a middle ground, where each party gains and loses something.

1. Avoidance (Low Assertiveness, Low Cooperativeness)

Definition: Avoidance is characterised by sidestepping or ignoring the conflict. Individuals with this style tend to withdraw from the issue, avoid confrontation, or pretend that the issue doesn't exist. They might avoid direct communication, hope that the issue resolves itself, or simply disengage from the situation.

When to Use:

- When the conflict is trivial and doesn't warrant time and energy.
- If you need time to cool off or gather your thoughts.
- When you're not in a position of power and addressing the conflict could escalate it.
- In situations where the conflict could resolve on its own.

Challenges:

- The conflict may not go away; instead, it may fester and become worse.
- It can cause frustration, as others may perceive avoidance as indifference or neglect.
- Important issues may remain unresolved.

Avoidance may be necessary in some cases, but regularly avoiding important issues can harm relationships and team dynamics. It is generally better to address the issue early on before it becomes a bigger problem.

2. Accommodation (Low Assertiveness, High Cooperativeness)

Definition: Accommodation is when you prioritise the needs, concerns, or desires of others over your own. Individuals who use this style often give in to the other person to maintain harmony and avoid conflict, even if it means sacrificing their own needs or preferences.

When to Use:

- When maintaining harmony is more important than winning the argument.
- If the issue is not a priority for you but important to the other party.
- When you realise that the other party is right or has a stronger position.
- In situations where you have no power or authority to enforce your position.

Challenges:

- Overuse can lead to feelings of resentment, as your own needs are consistently overlooked.
- The accommodator may feel unappreciated and may begin to feel taken advantage of.
- The conflict may remain unresolved on your terms, leading to dissatisfaction.

Accommodation can maintain peace in the short term, but for long-term solutions, it's essential to ensure that both parties' needs are considered and balanced.

3. Competition (High Assertiveness, Low Cooperativeness)

Definition: Competition is a style where individuals pursue their own goals, needs, or desires, often at the expense of others. People who adopt this style can be very assertive and stand firm in their stance. They are typically focused on “winning” the conflict, which can sometimes lead to aggressive or domineering behaviour.

When to Use:

- When you need to make a quick decision or act on important issues (e.g., emergencies, high-stakes situations).
- When you believe your position is correct, and you need to assert it.
- When there are clear winners and losers, and a competitive approach can result in a positive outcome.
- In situations where your values or rights are being violated.

Challenges:

- It can create winners and losers, which may harm relationships in the long run.
- The competitive approach can lead to resentment or hostility, as the other party may feel ignored or steamrolled.
- If used excessively, it can breed a toxic culture of rivalry and disengagement.

While competition can be useful in specific situations, it should be balanced with respect and consideration for others’ viewpoints. Over-reliance on this style may lead to friction and strained relationships.

4. Collaboration (High Assertiveness, High Cooperativeness)

Definition: Collaboration is the ideal conflict management style for situations where both parties are committed to finding a mutually beneficial solution. It involves working together, sharing information, and seeking a win-win solution that satisfies both parties’ needs. This style requires a high degree of communication and openness.

When to Use:

- When the issue is complex and requires input from all parties to find an optimal solution.
- When the relationship between the parties is important, and you want to preserve or strengthen it.
- When the conflict is significant and requires a solution that works for both sides.
- When creativity and problem-solving are necessary.

Challenges:

- Collaboration can be time-consuming as it requires open discussion and negotiation.
- Both parties must be willing to engage and communicate openly, which may not always be the case.
- Sometimes a win-win solution may not be achievable, and compromise may be necessary.

Collaboration leads to stronger relationships and more creative solutions, but it requires time, effort, and mutual commitment. Ensure that both sides are open to this approach.

5. Compromise (Moderate Assertiveness, Moderate Cooperativeness)

Definition: Compromise is about finding a middle ground. It involves each party giving up something to reach a solution that partially satisfies everyone. Compromise is often seen as a practical solution when collaboration isn't possible or time is limited.

When to Use:

- When time is limited, and a quick solution is needed.
- When the issue is important but not critical.
- When a middle-ground solution can provide enough satisfaction to both parties.
- When parties cannot fully collaborate or assert their interests.

Challenges:

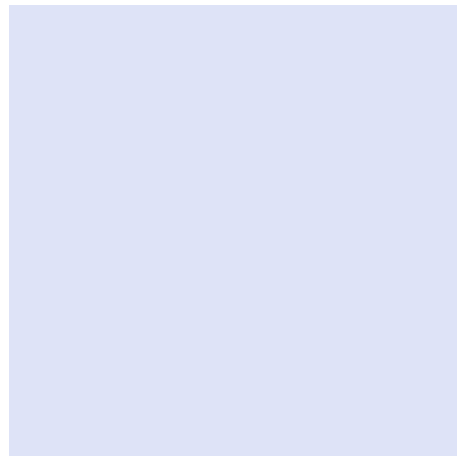
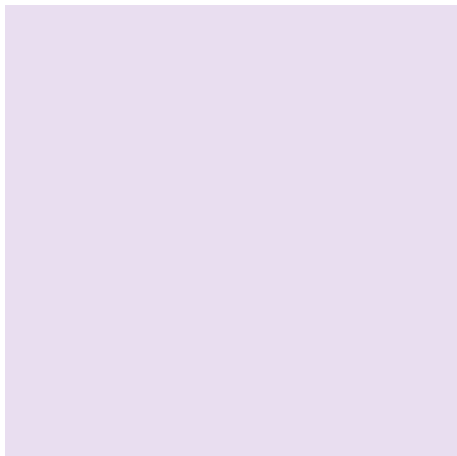
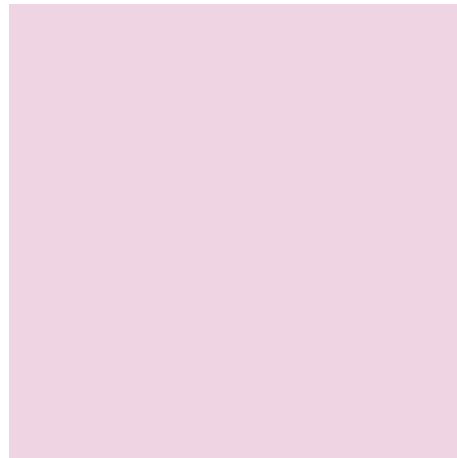
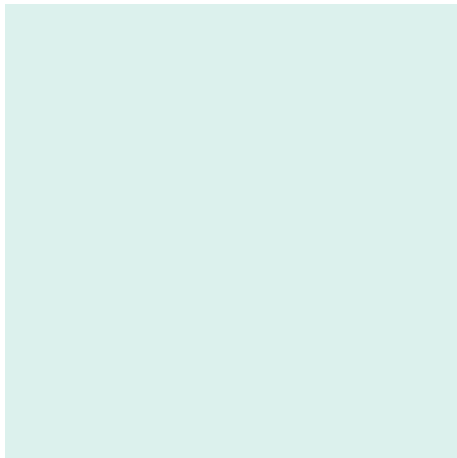
- Each party gives up something, which may lead to dissatisfaction or lingering resentment.
- Sometimes compromises can feel like neither party wins, which can leave a sense of incomplete resolution.
- If used too frequently, it can undermine the value of collaboration and prevent deeper problem-solving.

Compromise can help quickly resolve issues when both parties are willing to give up something, but it is important to ensure that the final solution is acceptable to both parties and not just a quick fix.

Conflict management styles are not fixed; they can evolve over time based on individual experiences, contexts, and training. While no one style is always right or wrong, understanding these styles and knowing when and how to apply them can significantly improve your conflict resolution skills. By recognising your natural tendencies and the needs of the situation, you can adapt your approach to ensure that conflicts are resolved in the most constructive, productive way possible.

Action Steps:

- Take time to assess your natural conflict management style and reflect on situations where it has worked or failed.
- Practice using different styles in role-play scenarios to become more flexible in your conflict management approach.
- Learn to balance assertiveness and cooperativeness to achieve optimal outcomes.



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