

Leadership Bites: Conflict Management

LEADERSHIP LEARNING IN 20 MINUTES

NHS

Leadership Academy

South East

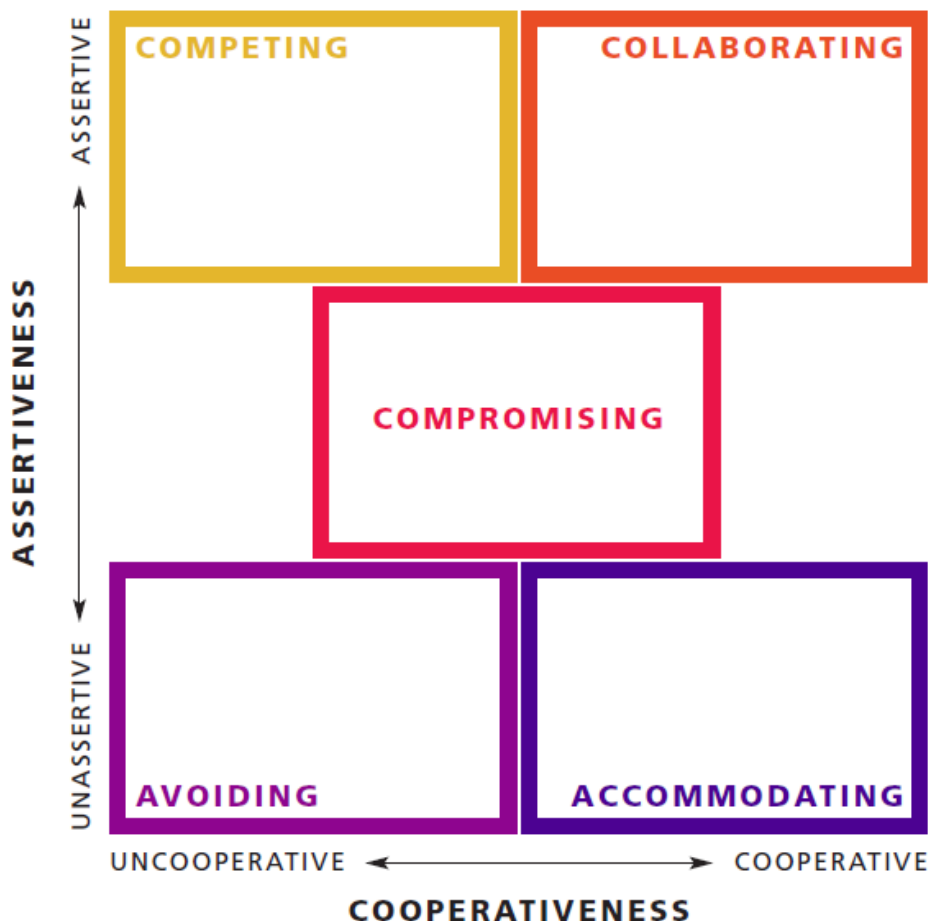
Introduction

Conflict can be described as a clash between individuals arising out of a difference in thought process, attitudes, values, requirements and sometimes perceptions.

When we experience conflict with another person, there are different strategies that we can use. Thomas Kilmann described 5 different 'modes' of dealing with conflict.

Competing

Competing is assertive and uncooperative, a power-oriented mode. When competing, an individual pursues his or her own concerns at the other person's expense, using whatever power seems appropriate to win his or her position. Competing might mean standing up for your rights, defending a position you believe is correct, or simply trying to win.



Competing is especially useful and effective:

- When quick, decisive action is vital—for example, in an emergency
- On important issues when unpopular courses of action need implementing—for example, cost cutting, enforcing unpopular rules, discipline
- On issues vital to company welfare when you know you're right
- When you need to protect yourself from people who take advantage of non-competitive behaviour

To help you determine if you are overusing or underusing competing, consider the following questions:

Signs of overuse	Signs of underuse
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Are you surrounded by "yes" people? ○ Are others afraid to admit ignorance and uncertainties to you? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do you feel powerless in some situations? ○ Do you have trouble taking a firm stand, even when you see the need

Collaborating

Collaborating is both assertive and cooperative. When collaborating, an individual attempts to work with the other person to find a solution that fully satisfies the concerns of both. It involves digging into an issue to identify the underlying concerns of the two individuals and to find an alternative that meets both sets of

concerns. Collaborating between two persons might take the form of exploring a disagreement to learn from each other's insights, resolving some condition that would otherwise have them competing for resources, or confronting and trying to find a creative solution to an interpersonal problem.

Collaborating is especially useful and effective:

- When you need to find an integrative solution and the concerns of both parties are too important to be compromised
- When your objective is to learn, and you wish to test your assumptions and understand others' views
- When you want to merge insights from people with different perspectives on a problem
- When you want to gain commitment by incorporating others' concerns into a consensual decision
- When you need to work through hard feelings that have been interfering with a relationship

To help you determine if you are overusing or underusing collaborating, consider the following questions:

Signs of overuse	Signs of underuse
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do you sometimes spend time discussing issues in depth that don't seem to warrant it? ○ Does your collaborative behaviour fail to elicit collaborative responses from others? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is it difficult for you to see differences as opportunities for joint gain, learning, or problem solving? ○ Are others uncommitted to your decisions or suggestions?

Compromising

Compromising is intermediate in both assertiveness and cooperativeness. When compromising, an individual has the objective of finding an expedient, mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies both parties. Compromising falls on a middle ground between competing and accommodating, giving 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.

Compromising is especially useful and effective:

- When goals are moderately important but not worth the effort or the potential disruption
- involved in using more assertive modes
- When two opponents with equal power are strongly committed to mutually exclusive goals—as in resource-management bargaining
- When you want to achieve a temporary settlement of a complex issue
- When you need to arrive at a quick solution under time pressure
- As a backup mode when collaboration or competition fails

To help you determine if you are overusing or underusing compromising, consider the following questions:

Signs of overuse	Signs of underuse
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ • Concentrating so heavily on the practicalities and tactics of compromise that one loses sight of larger issues. ○ • Creating a cynical climate of gamesmanship. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ • Do you sometimes find yourself too sensitive or embarrassed to engage in the give-and-take of bargaining? ○ • Do you sometimes find it difficult to make concessions?

Avoiding

Avoiding is unassertive and uncooperative. When avoiding, an individual does not immediately pursue his or her 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.

Avoiding is especially useful and effective:

- When an issue is unimportant or when other, more important issues are pressing
- When you perceive no chance of satisfying your concerns—for example, when you have low power or you are frustrated by something that would be very difficult to change
- When the potential costs of confronting a conflict outweigh the benefits of its resolution
- When you need to let people cool down—to reduce tensions to a productive level and to regain perspective and composure
- When gathering more information outweighs the advantages of an immediate decision

- When others can resolve the issue more effectively
- When the issue seems tangential or symptomatic of another, more basic issue

To help you determine if you are overusing or underusing avoiding, consider the following questions:

Signs of overuse	Signs of underuse
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Does coordination suffer because people have trouble getting your input on issues? ○ Is there an atmosphere of “walking on eggshells?” ○ Do decisions on important issues get made by default? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do you sometimes find yourself hurting people’s feelings or stirring up hostilities? ○ Do you sometimes feel overwhelmed by a number of issues?

Accommodating

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 you would prefer not to, or yielding to another’s point of view.

Accommodating is especially useful and effective:

- When you realise that you are wrong—to allow a better solution to be considered, to learn from others, and to show that you are reasonable
- When the issue is much more important to the other person than it is to you—to satisfy the needs of others and as a goodwill gesture to help maintain a cooperative relationship
- When you want to build up social credits for later issues that are important to you
- When you are outmatched and losing, and more competition would only damage your cause
- When preserving harmony and avoiding disruption are especially important
- When you want to help your employees develop by allowing them to learn from their mistakes

To help you determine if you are overusing or underusing accommodating, consider the following questions:

Signs of overuse	Signs of underuse
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do you feel that your ideas and concerns sometimes don’t get the attention they deserve? ○ Is discipline lax? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do you sometimes have trouble building goodwill with others? ○ Do others sometimes seem to regard you as unreasonable? ○ Do you occasionally have trouble admitting when you are wrong? ○ Do you recognize legitimate exceptions to the rules? ○ Do you know when to give up?

Using the different modes

In the case of conflict-handling behaviour, there are no right or wrong answers. All five modes are useful in some situations: each represents a set of useful social skills. Our conventional wisdom recognizes, for example, that often “Two heads are better than one” (collaborating). But it also says, “Kill your enemies with kindness” (accommodating), “Split the difference” (compromising), “Leave well enough alone” (avoiding), and “Might makes right” (competing). The effectiveness of a given conflict-handling mode depends on the requirements of the specific situation and the skill with which you use that mode.

Give it a try

Why not buddy up with a peer and practice conflict management in safe surroundings before stepping into the real challenge? Give some thought to your ‘bottom line’ when approach situations where you anticipate some resistance of conflict and have confidence in the rationale behind it. Practicing the words you want to say and the way in which you want to get them across will give you more confidence to do so in person.

Further learning ...

For further information and learning, as well as suggested activities, feel free to visit the People.NHS.uk website or our [South East Leadership Academy site](#).



Time to reflect...



Leadership Academy

South East

Take some time to note down your thoughts on what you've learned;

What resonated?

What has made you curious?

What small changes could you make to start having an impact differently and quickly?

What might you need to share with your team, and commit to 'testing and learning' together?

A large, empty rounded rectangular box with a blue border, intended for writing reflection notes.