



# Conflict Management In the Workplace

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# Conflict? What's the Big Deal?

- 85% of U.S. employees experience conflict and spend 2.8 hours per week dealing with it
- Significant loss of organizational productivity and resources - \$359B in paid hours/year
- 31% of managers think they handle conflict effectively – 78% of employees disagree
- 27% of employees have witnessed personal attacks
- 25% say avoiding conflict results in sicknesses/absences
- 75% of employees report positive outcomes from conflict that would not have been realized without the conflict
- **95% of those who receive training say it is the biggest driver for success** – but nearly 60% have never received training
- Every one of you has experienced conflict in the workplace

Sources:

2008 CPP Global Human Capital Report

2009 Harvard Law School Special Report on Managing Conflict

# What Would Help?

- Understanding the causes of conflict?
- Knowing how to communicate effectively to resolve conflict, or avoid it in the first place?
- Being able to deal with “difficult” personalities?
- Thinking Win/Win?

# What is Conflict

- *Psychology* A psychic struggle, often unconscious, resulting from the opposition or simultaneous functioning of mutually exclusive impulses, desires, or tendencies.
- A state of disharmony between incompatible or antithetical persons, ideas, or interests; a clash.

American Heritage® Dictionary

# Poll

How many of you feel pretty confident in  
your ability to manage conflict right now?

# Causes of Conflict in the Workplace

- Personality clashes/egos
- Stress
- Excessive workloads
- Ineffective supervision and management
- Substandard performance
- Differences in beliefs/values (facts/perceptions)
- Competition for resources
- Non-compliance with policies and procedures
- Confusion/duplication with responsibility/authority
- Semantics (ambiguous words/tone)
- Passive aggressive behaviors
- Lack of communication
- Resistance/fear of change
- Generational Tensions
- Inconsistency
- Professional Disrespect
- Inner Conflict
- Lack of recognition
- Cultural Differences
- Negative Attitudes

# Where do I Start?



That's a lot of conflict...

**What can I do about it?**

# Conflict Management Skills

- Address problems quickly
- Assert feelings without blaming
- Brainstorm win/win solutions
- Compromise to accommodate
- Meet with all involved
- Creativity in problem-solving
- Designate sanctions for non-compliance
- Draw out perceptions and feelings
- Identify triggers to conflict
- Forgive transgressions
- Formalize agreements
- Active listening
- Separate person from the problem
- Show respect
- Add space between stimulus and response
- Use “I” message
- Model reasonable dialogue
- Ask clarifying questions
- Principled negotiation
- Set ground rules
- Know appropriate methods
- Willingness to receive feedback



# Conflict Management Skills/Tools

- Address problems quickly
- **Assert feelings without blaming**
- **Brainstorm win/win solutions**
- Compromise to accommodate
- Meet with all involved
- Creativity in problem-solving
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- **Active listening**
  - Separate person from the problem
  - Show respect
- **Space between stimulus and response**
- **Use “I” message**
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  - Principled negotiation
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  - Know appropriate methods
  - Willingness to receive feedback

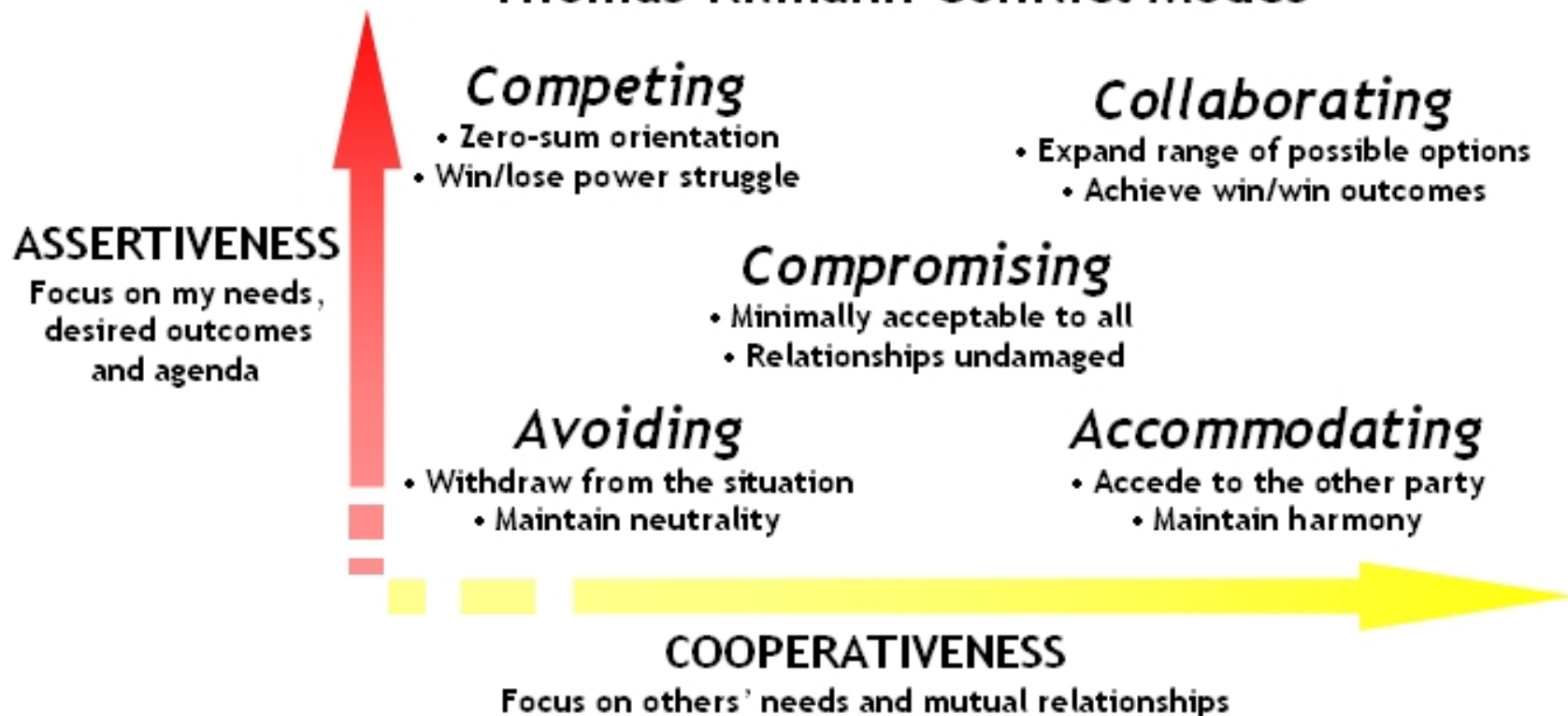
# Conflict Can Be Destructive



# Conflict Can Be Constructive



# Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Modes



# Could it be Me?



# Emotional Self-Awareness

## Reflective Brain

Conscious control centers

Reasoning

Problem solving

Communication



[www.clipartof.com](http://www.clipartof.com) · 50195

## Reactive Brain

Emotion driven

Survival Mode

Fight or Flight

# Emotional Self-Awareness

“

Whenever emotions  
conflict with thinking,  
emotion wins.

We are about as effective  
at stopping an emotion as  
stopping a sneeze.

- **Antonio Damasio**

”

“

Emotion leads to action,  
while reason leads to  
conclusions.

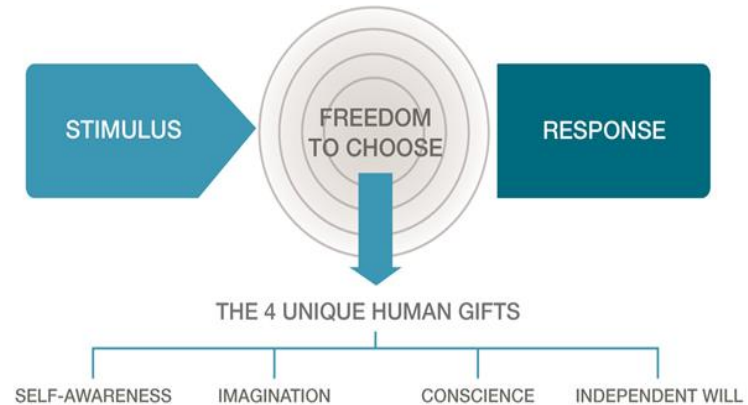
- **Donald Calne**

”

# Stimulus vs. Response



Common Practice: React Emotionally



Highly Effective Practice: Exercise Freedom to Choose

# Skill 1 – Control Your Emotions

## POLL

What strategies do/will you use for creating space between stimulus and response?



# Now that I'm Here, What's Next?



# Active/Empathic Listening

## Active Listening (*Seek first to understand...*)

- Information – get a clear picture
- Affirmation – affirm, acknowledge, explore the problem
- Inflammation – Responding to complaint or attack on you

# Listening Exercise

- Pair up
- One Speaker, one listener
- Speaker tell the listener what you do, where, and typical challenges you have in your job – 2 min

# Active Listening - Information

**Aim of the speaker:** Get across what is wanted so there is no confusion

**Task of the listener:** Get details, conformation, clarity

- Ask Questions
- Check Back
- Summarize

Collect information, avoid jumping to solutions

- Enquire about needs, concerns, hidden premises

# Active Listening - Information

## Question types:

- How do you see it all? (general)
- How much does that cost? (specific)
- If they say “I can’t” ask “what happens if you do?”
- If they say “They always” ask “is there a circumstance in which they don’t?”
- If they say “it’s too many or too much” or “too little or too few” ask “compared to what?”

# Active Listening - Information

## Example:

Statement: “Your product does not have as many features as our previous product.”

Question: “What do you need it to do?”

# Active Listening - Affirmation

**Aim of the speaker:** Talk about the problem

**Task of the listener:** Listen for understanding without the intent to reply, acknowledge what the speaker is feeling

## **Empathic Listening:**

- Reflect back without probing, judging or interpreting
- Ask clarifying questions
- Confirm and explore feelings if time and receptiveness is present

# Active Listening - Inflammation

**Aim of the speaker:** to tell you that you are the problem

**Task of the listener:** Let speaker know that you have taken in what they are saying and to diffuse the strong emotion

## **Empathic Listening:**

- Reflect back without probing, judging or interpreting
- Ask clarifying questions
- Confirm and explore feelings if time and receptiveness is present



# Active Listening - Inflammation

High emotion = engage empathic listening

- Control emotion, don't exhibit defensiveness
- Deal with speaker emotion, make sure they feel heard
- Acknowledge their side



Listener wants to get the speaker to confirm that they feel heard  
e.g., “Yes, that’s what I said.”

# Active Listening - Inflammation

## As a listener, what can you change?

- Might need to change my approach
- Don't take the bait and retaliate
- Don't start justifying
- Don't act defensive
- Stay in active/empathic listening until speaker is calm
- Use phrases like, "it's making you really mad," "I can see how upset you are," "You feel like you reached your limit," "Have I got that right?" "So when I do \_\_\_\_ you get really frustrated with me."

**10% of conflicts is due  
to difference in opinion  
and 90% is due  
to wrong tone of voice**

*-Ma Mariz*  
YANILAYIONCTURBLR

# Skill 2 – Use Empathic/Active Listening

“I have never in my life seen a worse product...”

“I have been at this job for more than 20 years, and I don't think I need to be here.”

# Appropriate Assertiveness

Seek first to understand, then to be understood

Habit 5 – *The 7-Habits of Highly Effective People*

# “I” Messages

- Used to state your case without putting others on defense
- Describes how you see or feel about an issue
- Delivered not to force action but to state what you need

# An “I” Message

**is not...**

- about being polite “soft” or “nice”
- a resolution

**is...**

- a conversation starter
- about being clear in communication

# “I” Message

## What to expect from an appropriate “I” statement

- Unlikely to do harm
- A step in the right direction
- Certain to change the current situation in some way
- Can open up possibilities you may not yet see

# “I” Message

***When...*** I hear a voice raised at me

***I feel...*** threatened

***What I would like...*** is to debate an issue with you  
without feeling defensive.



# “I” Message

## Rephrase the following statements:

1. You make me angry!
2. You never listen to me.
3. You’re always giving out incorrect information.
4. You always act helpless when an issue comes up.

# Skill 3 – Using “I” Messages

## Poll

What is your confidence level in creating “I” messages?

# Recognizing “Difficult” Personalities

- The “Bulldozer” - Abusive, abrupt
- The “Exploder” – Outbursts filled with rage
- The “Complainer” – Finds fault with everything
- The “Clam” – Silent, “yes” or “no”, grunt
- The “Wet Blanket” – “It won’t work”
- The “Know-It-All” – Expert on all matters
- The “Staller” – Habitually indecisive

# The “Bulldozer”

- Time to run down
- Don't worry about being polite
- Forcefully; no apologies
- Don't cut down
- Negotiation



# The “Exploder”

- Gain self-control
- Neutral phrase
- Serious
- Private setting





# The “Clam”

- Open-ended questions
- Wait for response
- Extra time
- Comment on what is happening



# The “Wet Blanket”

- Be alert
- Optimistic but realistic
- Don't argue
- Don't offer solutions
- Raise questions





# The “know-it-all”

- Be prepared
- Listen and paraphrase
- Don't over-generalize
- Watch your responses



# The “Staller”

- Be open
- Acknowledge past problem
- Give support
- Assign responsibility



# Pre-empting Conflict

- Acknowledge known concerns
- Address and acknowledge emotion
- Re-assure the path to communication
- Project confidence
- Establish “parking lot” up front

# Preparing for Conflict

- Adjust your frame of mind.
- Consider your counterpart's viewpoint.
- Look at Big Picture/organizational context.
- Prepare you message for different scenarios.
- Choose the right time and place.
- Express your feelings ahead of time.

# Conflicts With Customers

- Identify problems - Active/Empathic Listening
- Focus on solutions - Separate the person from the problem
- Clarify – Ask clarifying questions
- Get help – bring parties together/collaboration
- Check for satisfaction
- Follow up

# Conflict Resolution: Win/Win Approach

*There are two people in a kitchen. There is only one orange left and both of them want it.*

*What would you expect as the solution?*

# Conflict Resolution: Win/Win Approach

**What if they compromise and cut the orange in half?**

*One person now goes to the juicer and starts squeezing herself a rather too small orange juice. The other, with some difficulty, begins to grate the rind of the orange to flavor a cake.*

**What could have been different?**

# Win/Win Approach

**Premise:** I want to win and I want you to win too.

**Approach:** Focus on underlying needs

**How to:**

Probe below the surface with questions like

- Why does that seem to be the best solution to you?
- What's your real need here?
- What's the outcome or result that you want?



# Win/Win Approach

## Strategies

- Going back to underlying needs
- Recognition of individual differences
- Openness to adapting one's position in light of shared information
- Attacking the problem, not the people

# Win/Win Approach - Scenario

## What would you do?

You and your colleague are preparing for a customer presentation. You feel strongly that the presentation should be supported by a technologist. Your colleague feels like they can handle it and requesting a technologist will make them look unknowledgeable.

Describe a win/win agreement

# Win/Win Approach

Additional reading:

**The 7-Habits of Highly Effective People**

Stephen R. Covey

**Getting to Yes (Negotiating Agreement without Giving in)**

Fisher and Ury

# Conflict Resolution: Creative Responses

## Perfection Hat



- Right or wrong?
- Do I measure up?
- Life is a mess
- I am not capable

Promotes  
Winners and Losers

- I don't take chances
- I have to be right
- Low self-esteem!

## Discovery Hat



- Exploration
- Possibilities
- Acceptance
- Inquiry

Promotes  
Winners and Learners

- I have a choice
- I have self-esteem
- I am a learner
- Enthusiasm

# Q&A

# Creative Responses

- Proactive language
- Learning opportunities
- Puzzle
- New Challenge
- Invigorating vs. deflating

# Creative Responses: Case Study

One middle executive (at IBM) made a tactical error that cost the company \$9 million. The following week the executive, sure he was about to be fired, was called into the office of the Chairman. The Chairman started discussing plans for a huge new project that he wanted the executive to direct. After a certain point, the executive was feeling so uncomfortable he had to stop the Chairman: "Excuse me, sir, you know I'm amazed. Last week I cost us \$9 million. Why are you putting me in charge of this new project? I thought you were going to fire me." The Chairman smiled. "Fire you? Young man, I've just invested \$9 million educating you. You're now one of my most valuable assets."

# Case Study

During a training session, a customer continuously complains and speaks out against everything (including the training itself).

What would be the appropriate method(s) for dealing with her?

What skills would you employ?



# Case Study

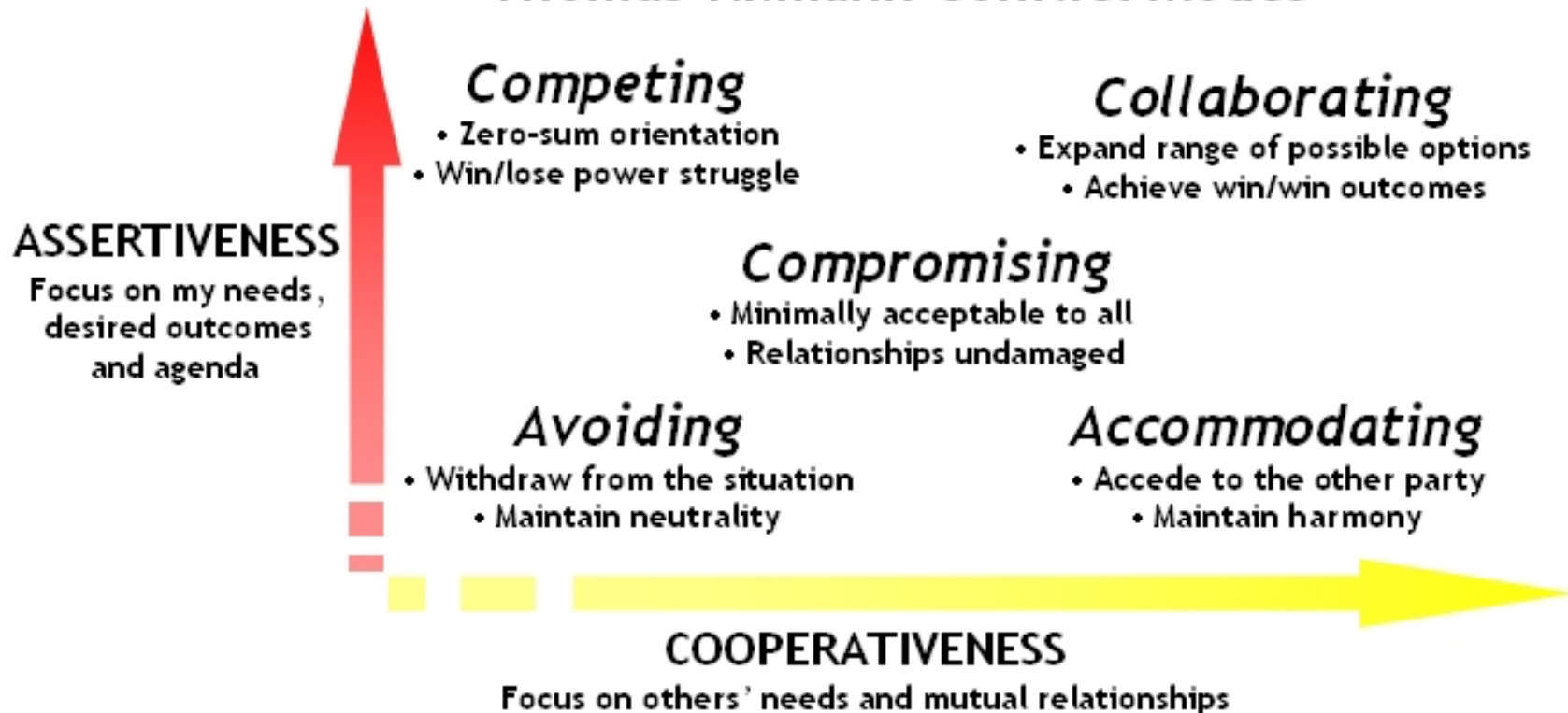
- Customer complains about product and vocalizing dissatisfaction with having to use your product
- Method(s)
- Skills

# Case Study

A co-worker is giving a customer presentation and providing information that is incorrect. How do you re-direct?

- Method
- Skill
- Concerns

# Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Modes



# Case Study

A misunderstanding or misinterpretation of information causes customer to attack you verbally.

- Method
- Skill

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJH0XV9jGIE>
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFf88IVl\\_Wc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFf88IVl_Wc)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZOVWzKzpNg>
- [Dealing with difficult people](#)

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