



Understanding Conflict Management Styles

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The Trouble with Snow

Over the weekend, the east coast got blasted with snow. Lauren was so happy – she couldn't wait to get out and do some cross-country skiing on Monday. She was so grateful she did not have a mediation scheduled until Tuesday.

Melinda, on the other hand, had a huge client meeting on Monday. She worked all weekend to prepare and was dismayed when she woke up at 5am Monday morning to two feet of snow. Right away, Melinda began to fret. Would the office parking lot be plowed? Would she be able to get down the walkway to the office if the path hadn't been cleared?

Lauren owns the building. It is her responsibility to call the plow company to make sure they clear the lot and walkways before any client meetings. Whenever Lauren calls the plow company, the snow gets removed right away. She and the owner of the plow company went to high school together, and the head of the plow company prioritizes Lauren's calls over all their other clients.

So, you ask, what is the problem? The problem is that Lauren only sporadically remembers to call the plow company when SHE doesn't plan to be in the office. The last time it snowed, the plow didn't show up until 11am, long after Melinda had finished shoveling. How else were Melinda's clients going to be able to park and get into the office?!

You might also ask, why doesn't Melinda just call the plow company herself? Ha. Like that would do any good. The last time Melinda tried, she got no answer, so she left several messages. The plow STILL didn't show up for many hours. Why should she expect it to be any different this time? Plus, Lauren PROMISED she would call next time it snowed. Well, Monday was the next time.

And when Melinda got to the office at 7am on Monday, not only was it still dark, the parking lot was full of snow! Melinda was mad! She used all that anger to quickly shovel out 3 spots – one for her and two for the clients. She then finished the walkway in time to get a cup of tea and reset before her clients arrived.

The next time Melinda and Lauren see each other, the conversation does not go well.



Exercise 1: Causes of Conflict at Work

Take a few minutes to brainstorm and write down your thoughts and experiences of what does or can cause conflict in the work environment.



Exercise 2: Styles in the Trouble with Snow

In small groups, take a few minutes to think about, discuss, and be prepared to share a few reflections on the following questions:

1. What style is Melinda using initially?
2. Which style should Melinda use? Why?
3. What style would be most helpful for Lauren to use in this situation?
4. What styles would go well together in this scenario?
5. Which styles might clash in this scenario?
6. What curious questions could Melinda ask Lauren?
7. What curious questions could Lauren ask Melinda?



	Avoid	Accommodate	Compromise	Collaborate	Compete
When is this style helpful?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimize tensions Buying time Let others deal with issue The issue is not important (to you) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show reasonableness Create good will Keep the peace The issue is not important to you 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quick decision Fairness and Process prioritized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrate solutions Create buy-in Merge perspectives Gain commitment Improve relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quick action – no time to debate issues Unpopular decisions Situation calls for competition
What are the strengths of this style?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to stay neutral Letting go Sense of timing Tolerance for ambiguity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forgoing your desires Selflessness Obedying orders Present sacrifice for future gain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negotiating Finding a “Middle Ground” Making concessions Assessing value 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listening, understanding, empathy Addressing situations in a non-threatening way Analyzing input Identifying underlying concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to argue, debate, and state one’s position Use of rank, position or influence Asserting opinions and feelings Standing your ground
What can happen if this style is overused?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of input from the avoider Decisions made by default Issues fester Cautious climate Lack of psychological safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ideas get little attention Restricted influence Loss of contribution Anarchy Loss of critical debate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lose big picture/long term goals Lack of values/trust Cynical climate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Too much time on trivial matters Diffused responsibility Diminished accountability Others may take advantage Can’t say no 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Others may withhold feedback and input May intimidate others Adversely impacts group learning and growth Others won’t take risks; lack empowerment Fosters ‘Yes people’
What can happen if this style is underused?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hostility/hurt feelings Work overload – too many causes Lack of prioritization and delegation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of rapport Low morale Exceptions not recognized Unable to yield 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unnecessary confrontations Frequent power struggles Ineffective negotiating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of commitment to decisions Low empowerment Loss of innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restricted influence Indecision Slow to act Instability



Conflict Management Styles in the Workplace

The PRISM Definition of Conflict

When 2 or more people have different opinions or positions about a situation in which they both have an interest.

The Styles

Competing is ... When you assert your position without considering opposing viewpoints. Competing is characterized by high assertiveness and low cooperativeness and may take the form of standing up for your rights or throwing your weight around.

Collaborating is... When you are concerned with fully satisfying both sides of an issue. Collaborating uses high assertiveness and high cooperativeness. It is working with the other person to find an optimal solution.

Compromising is ... When you find a middle ground or forgo some of your concerns to have others met. It is moderate in assertiveness and cooperativeness and can mean negotiating or splitting the difference.

Avoiding is ... When you do not address your concerns or the concerns of the other person. It is characterized by low assertiveness and low cooperativeness. You may be stalling on an issue or ignoring it completely.

Accommodating is ... When you forgo your own concerns to satisfy the concerns of another. Accommodating is low assertiveness and high cooperativeness and can mean an act of selfless generosity or going along to get along.

Leveraging Conflict Management Styles

- ❖ Understand your default conflict management style and which style triggers you
- ❖ Understand what can happen when you over or under-use your style
- ❖ Consider the context – you may need to use a style that is not your default
- ❖ Choose the style that:
 - is most appropriate for the situation,
 - gets the results you want, and
 - impacts the relationship in a way you can accept
- ❖ Use a style that helps you identify interests versus positions