

Determining Your Preferred Conflict Management Style

Below are four situations. Rank all five alternative actions from 1, the first approach would use (most desirable), to 5, the last approach you would use (least desirable). Don't try to pick a best answer. Select the alternative that best describes what you would actually do in the situation based on your past experiences.

1. You are the general manager of a manufacturing plant. The purchasing department has found a source of material at a lower cost than the one being used. However, the production manager says the current material is superior, and he doesn't want to change. The quality control manager says that both will pass inspection with similar results. You would:

- _____ a. Decide who is right and make the other comply.
- _____ b. Do nothing; let the purchasing and production managers work it out between themselves.
- _____ c. Suggest having the purchasing manager find an alternative material that is cheaper but acceptable to the production manager.
- _____ d. Have the purchasing and production managers find a quick solution that partially meets both of their requirements.
- _____ e. Get the purchasing and production managers together and work out an agreement acceptable to both parties.

2. You are a professor at a college. You have started a consulting organization and have the title of director of consulting services, which the dean has approved. You run it through the business department, using other faculty and yourself to consult. It has been going well. Randy, the director of continuing education, says that your consulting services should come under his department and not be a separate department. You would:

- _____ a. Suggest that some services be under continuing education, but that others, like your consulting service, remain with you in the business department.
- _____ b. Do what you can to stop the move; you go to the dean and request that the consulting services stay under your direction in the business department, as the dean OK'd originally.
- _____ c. Do nothing. The dean will surely see through this "power grab" and turn Randy down.
- _____ d. Go and talk to Randy. Try to come up with an agreement you are both satisfied with.
- _____ e. Go along with Randy's request. It's not worth fighting about; you can still consult.

3. You are a branch manager for a bank. One of your colleagues cut you off twice during a managers' meeting which just ended. You would:

- _____ a. Do nothing; it's no big deal.
- _____ b. Discuss it in a friendly manner, but try to get the colleague to stop this behavior.
- _____ c. Don't do or say anything because it might hurt your relations, even if you're a little upset about it.
- _____ d. Forcefully tell the colleague that you put up with being cut off, but will not tolerate it in the future.
- _____ e. Tell the colleague that you will listen without interrupting if he or she does the same for you.

4. You are the human resources/personnel manager. You have decided to have visitors sign in and wear guest passes. However, only about half of the employees sign their guests in before taking them to their offices to do business. You would:

- _____ a. Go talk to the general manager about why employees are not signing in visitors.
- _____ b. Try to find a method that will please most employees.
- _____ c. Go to the general manager and request that he require employees to follow your procedures. If the general manager says to do it, employees will.

- _____ d. Do not require visitors to sign in; only require them to wear guest passes.
- _____ e. Let employees do things the way they want to.

To determine your preferred conflict management style, place your numbers 1-5 on the lines below.

Situation 1

- _____ a. _____
- _____ b. _____
- _____ c. _____
- _____ d. _____
- _____ e. _____

Situation 2

- _____ a. _____
- _____ b. _____
- _____ c. _____
- _____ d. _____
- _____ e. _____

Situation 3

- _____ a. _____
- _____ b. _____
- _____ c. _____
- _____ d. _____
- _____ e. _____

Situation 4

- _____ a. _____
- _____ b. _____
- _____ c. _____
- _____ d. _____
- _____ e. _____

Now place your ranking numbers 1-5 that correspond to the styles from the four situations in order; then add the four numbers.

Situation 1	Situation 2	Situation 3	Situation 4			
_____ A.	_____ B.	_____ D.	_____ C.	=	_____ total,	_____
_____ B.	_____ C.	_____ A.	_____ E.	=	_____ total,	_____
_____ C.	_____ E.	_____ C.	_____ B.	=	_____ total,	_____
_____ D.	_____ A.	_____ E.	_____ D.	=	_____ total,	_____
_____ E.	_____ D.	_____ B.	_____ A.	=	_____ total,	_____

The total with the lowest score is your preferred conflict management style. There is no one best conflict style in all situations. Like situational supervision and communications, the best style depends upon the situation. The more even the totals are, the more flexible you are at changing conflict management styles. Very high and very low totals indicate less flexibility. It is also helpful to identify others' preferred styles in order to plan how to resolve conflicts with them.