

What's your style?

Competing (forcing) is seen as assertive and uncooperative – individuals pursue their own concerns at the other person's expense. This is a power-oriented mode, in which one uses whatever power seems appropriate to win one's own position – one's ability to argue, one's rank, and economic sanctions. Competing might mean 'standing up for your rights', defending a position which you believe is correct, or simply trying to win.

Accommodating (smoothing) is seen as unassertive and cooperative – the opposite of competing. When accommodating, individuals neglect their own concerns to satisfy 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 one would prefer not to, or yielding to another's point of view.

Avoiding (withdrawing) is seen as unassertive and uncooperative – individuals do not immediately pursue their own concerns or those of the other person. They do 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.

Collaborating (problem-solving) is seen as both assertive and cooperative – the opposite of avoiding. Collaborating involves an attempt to work with another person to find some solution which fully satisfies the concerns of both persons. It means digging into an issue to identify underlying concerns of the individuals and to find alternatives, which meets both sets of concerns. Collaborating might take the form of exploring disagreements to learn from each other's insights; concluding to resolve some condition which would otherwise have them competing for resources; or confronting and trying to find a creative solution to an interpersonal problem.

Compromising (sharing) is intermediate in both assertiveness and cooperativeness. The objective is to find some expedient, mutually acceptable solution, which partially satisfies both parties. It falls on middle ground between competing and accommodating. Compromising might mean splitting the difference, exchanging concessions, or seeking a quick middle-ground position.

Interpreting your scores

People want to know: "What are the right answers?" In the case of conflict-handling behaviour, there are no universal right answers. All five modes are useful in different situations: each represents a set of useful social skills.

Conventional wisdom recognises, for example, that

Two heads are better than one	(Collaborating)
Kill your enemies with kindness	(Accommodating)
Split the difference	(Compromising)
Leave well enough alone	(Avoiding)
Might makes right	(Competing)

Each of us is capable of using all five conflict-handling modes none of us can be characterised as having a single, rigid style of dealing with conflict. However, individuals use some modes better than others and therefore, tend to rely upon those modes more heavily than others, whether because of temperament, personality, practice or environmental conditioning.

