

What's My Preferred Conflict-Handling Style?

When you differ with someone, how do you respond? Use the following rating scale to record your answers:

1 = Practically never

2 = Once in a great while

3 = Sometimes

4 = Fairly often

5 = Very often

1. I work to come out victorious, no matter what.

1 2 3 4 5

2. I try to put the needs of others above my own.

1 2 3 4 5

3. I look for a mutually satisfactory solution.

1 2 3 4 5

4. I try not to get involved in conflicts.

1 2 3 4 5

5. I strive to investigate issues thoroughly and jointly.

1 2 3 4 5

6. I never back away from a good argument.

1 2 3 4 5

7. I strive to foster harmony.

1 2 3 4 5

8. I negotiate to get a portion of what I propose.

1 2 3 4 5

9. I avoid open discussions of controversial subjects.

1 2 3 4 5

10. I openly share information with others in resolving disagreements.

1 2 3 4 5

11. I would rather win than end up compromising.

1 2 3 4 5

12. I go along with suggestions of others.

1 2 3 4 5

13. I look for a middle ground to resolve disagreements.

1 2 3 4 5

14. I keep my true opinions to myself to avoid hard feelings.

1 2 3 4 5

15. I encourage the open sharing of concerns and issues.

1 2 3 4 5

16. I am reluctant to admit I am wrong.

1 2 3 4 5

17. I try to help others avoid losing face in a disagreement.

1 2 3 4 5

18. I stress the advantages of give-and-take.

1 2 3 4 5

19. I agree early on, rather than argue about a point.

1 2 3 4 5

20. I state my position as only one point of view.

1 2 3 4 5

To obtain your score for each of the five categories mentioned, add the ratings for the items noted for that category.

ANALYSIS

Research has identified five conflict-handling styles. They are defined as follows:

Competing = A desire to satisfy one's interests, regardless of the impact on the other party to the conflict. Items 1, 6, 11, and 16 in this instrument tap this style.

Collaborating = Where the parties to a conflict each desire to satisfy fully the concerns of all parties. Items 5, 10, 15, and 20 in this instrument tap this style.

Avoiding = The desire to withdraw from or suppress the conflict. Items 4, 9, 14, and 19 in this instrument tap this style.

Accommodating = Willingness of one party in a conflict to place the opponent's interests above his or her own. Items 2, 7, 12, and 17 in this instrument tap this style.

Compromising = Where each party to a conflict is willing to give up something. Items 3, 8, 13, and 18 in this instrument tap this style.

Your conflict-handling score within each category will range from 4 to 20. The category you score highest in is your preferred conflict-handling style.

Your next-highest total is your secondary style. Ideally, we should adjust our conflict-handling style to the situation. For instance, avoidance works well when a conflict is trivial, when emotions are running high and time is needed to cool them down, or when the potential disruption from a more assertive action outweighs the benefits of a resolution.

In contrast, competing works well when you need a quick resolution on important issues where unpopular actions must be taken, or when commitment by others to your solution is not critical.

However, the evidence indicates that we all have a preferred style for handling conflicts. When "push comes to shove," this is the style we tend to rely on. Your score on this instrument provides you with insight into this preferred style. Use this information to work against your natural tendencies when the situation requires a different style.

Source: Based on conflict dimensions defined in K. W Thomas, "Conflict and Conflict Management," in M. Dunnette (ed.), *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1976), pp. 889–935.