



# Conflict Awareness and Management

Facilitated by

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## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

- Understand how communication influences understanding and conflict
- Use tools that can enhance listening and help build a shared understanding
- Consider how relationship, structural, data, and value conflicts influence workplace disagreements
- Understand conflict management styles.
- Articulate ways to apply conflict management in meetings.

## COMMUNICATION REFLECTION

Think of a time when you were problem solving an issue with one or more people and there was a misunderstanding. What was the intended message? What was the heard message?

Which of the following do you think contributed to the misunderstanding? (Check all that apply.)

- Passive hearing instead of active listening (someone wasn't fully engaged)
- Failure to recognize facial expression and body language
- Listener didn't take the time to try to understand
- Participants weren't aware of or didn't acknowledge how their own perceptual filters (experiences, culture, race, gender, et cetera)
- Listener failed to communicate empathy and understanding
- Listener didn't probe for clarifying information
- Interrupting
- Passing judgment
- Attempts to change the subject
- Attempts to minimize
- Closed mindedness
- Preconceived notions crowded out new ideas
- Personal attacks
- Vagueness

## ACTIVE LISTENING & OFFERING FEEDBACK

When someone tells you their phone number, you will usually repeat it to make sure that you heard it correctly. But how do you check to make sure that you understand another person's ideas, information, suggestions? How do you know that their remarks mean the same to you as it does to them?

Just like phone numbers, if you state in your own words what another's remarks mean to you, he or she can tell you if you are correct. **Paraphrasing**, or **giving feedback**, is a way of affirming your understanding of what the other person is saying.

Therefore, ACTIVE LISTENING is:

- **Paying close attention** to what the person is **saying** and **feeling**
- **Responding** to the sender's message in your own words, **verifying** your understanding of the sender's message. (Both the **words** and the **feelings**.)

What is important to active listening is to offer the speaker **consistent feedback**. Otherwise, we can never be certain we have completely understood another person. By affirming our understanding of the speaker's message, we lessen the misunderstanding and bad feelings that may occur in much of our communication with others.

**An active listener communicates these kinds of messages:**

- "I understand what you are saying"
- "I hear what you are saying"
- "I am interested and concerned"
- "I accept you as a person"
- "I respect your thoughts"
- "I am not trying to change or evaluate you"

**Active listening:**

- Shows you are concerned and interested in the speaker.
- Leads to better information about the speaker & situation.
- Encourages further communication between the receiver and the speaker.
- Usually improves the relationship between the receiver and the speaker.
- Leads to better cooperation and problem solving from others who feel they are being misunderstood.
- Can calm another person down in a heated argument and cool a "hot" situation.
- Builds on itself: when listening closely to others, they will listen more closely to you.

### SKILLS IN ACTIVE LISTENING

- a. Look directly at the speaker and keep eye contact.
- b. Focus on the speaker and try not to let your mind wander.
- c. Assume positive intentions.
- d. Encourage the speaker by nodding your head, smiling, use encouraging words like “uh huh”, “I see”, “really”, or whatever is natural to you.
- e. Pay close attention to the content (words) and feelings of a message (anger, sadness, frustration, disappointment, excitement, annoyance, et cetera).
- f. Verify what other person is saying and feeling with feedback with such statements like:  
“As I get it, you...”  
“In other words, you feel...”  
“My understanding of your situation is...”

### BARRIERS TO ACTIVE LISTENING

- a. Noisy or distracting surroundings.
- b. Finding yourself thinking about other unrelated things, day-dreaming.
- c. Thinking how to answer while the speaker is still talking.
- d. Hearing what you want to hear and not listening to what is being said.
- e. Judging the speaker or message as good, bad, or not interesting.
- f. Too much, too little, or unclear information from the speaker.
- g. Tone of voice that does not match intent.
- h. Being emotionally upset, not feeling well, or not wanting to be where you are.

### C.O.R.R.E.C.T. MODEL OF EFFECTIVE LISTENING

**C- Concentrate** on what is being said

**O- Observe** facial expression and body language

**R- Respond** by using your eyes, voice, gesture, and posture to communicate empathy and understanding

**R- Reflect** the information you hear by repeating and paraphrasing

**E- Elicit** more information by asking questions

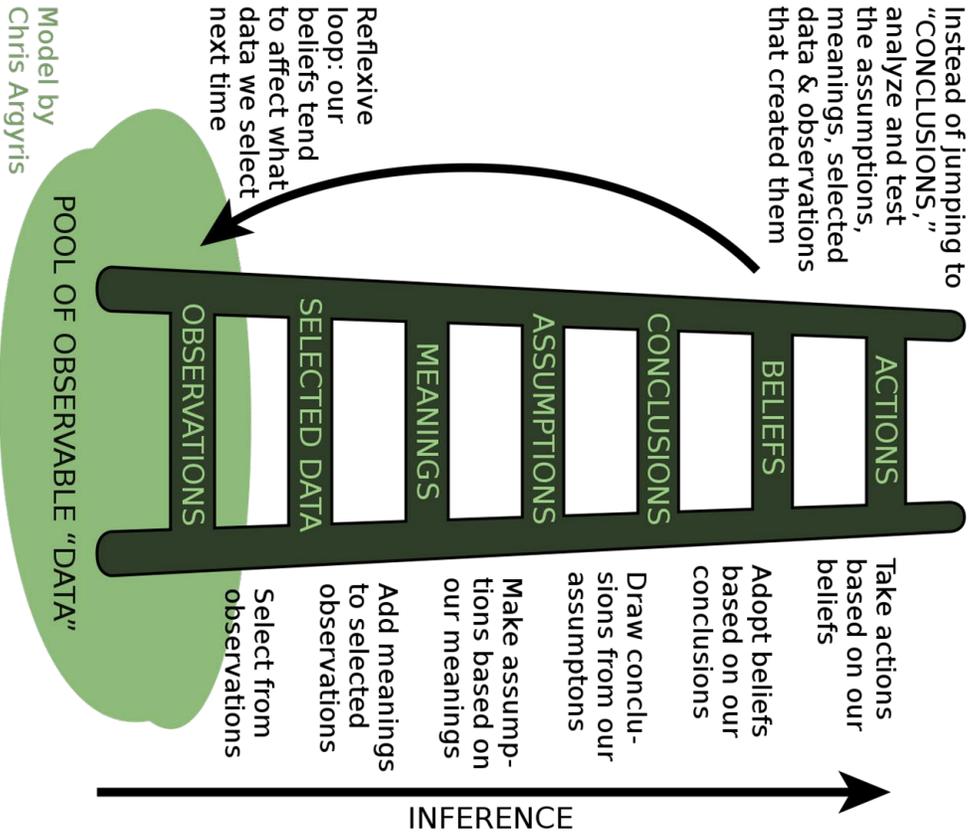
**C- Control** the desire to interrupt, pass judgment, or change the subject

**T- Take** advantage of lag time between mental activity and speaking time to notice the speaker’s language, nuances, and body language



# LADDER OF INFERENCE

Instead of jumping to "CONCLUSIONS," analyze and test the assumptions, meanings, selected data & observations that created them



**ACTIONS**  
Take actions based on our beliefs

**BELIEFS**  
Adopt beliefs based on our conclusions

**CONCLUSIONS**  
Draw conclusions from our assumptions

**ASSUMPTIONS**  
Make assumptions based on our meanings

**MEANINGS**  
Add meanings to selected observations

**SELECTED DATA**  
Select from observations

**OBSERVATIONS**

## SHORT-CIRCUITING YOUR LADDER

- Are you **acting on** assumptions, conclusions, and beliefs that **could be false**?
- Do your **beliefs come from potentially invalid conclusions**?
- Have you **drawn conclusions based on false assumptions**?
- Have you made **unsupported assumptions**?
- Have you **attributed meaning** not supported by observations?
- Are your **being selective in your observations**?

## COMMON CONFLICT TRAPS

### **Good vs. Evil**

This occurs when people view each other as opposites. Each side believes it is reasonable and right which makes the “other” side out to be wrong and “evil”. Within this viewpoint there is no, motivation to understand any other point of view.

### **Filtering**

Each side sees only what it wants to see. Any information that is contrary to their viewpoint is interpreted as sick or crazy or ridiculous and is filtered out.

### **Double Standard**

Each side believes that their situation is different from their opponents in important aspects that entitle them to take liberties with the ground rules while their opponent may not. (i.e., It’s a dirty trick if he does it, but if I do it, it’s called “good business.”)

### **Fixed Positions**

This occurs when each side gets locked into one position that they must achieve to win. They understand their goal as forcing their adversary into unconditional surrender. This leaves no room for compromise or for making trade-offs that may be beneficial to both. Every conflict is rich with multiple, intertwining issues which, if they were separated out, would provide ample opportunity for both sides to advance their interests.

### **Hot Buttons**

This occurs when certain words, phrases, and gestures upset people to the point where they focus on retaliation rather than the issue at hand.

### **One Upmanship**

This occurs when the needs to outperform the other side and to “get the last word in” overrides the issue at hand.

MANAGING CONFLICT

Consider Maria & Justin. Identify observed or potential sources of conflict.

Relationship Conflict	
Observed:	Potential:
Structural Conflict	
Observed:	Potential:
Data Conflict	
Observed:	Potential:

Underlying Interests:

Value Conflict	
Observed:	Potential:

Now think of a major conflict you've experienced at work. Briefly describe the conflict:

Relationship Conflict	
Observed:	Potential:
Structural Conflict	
Observed:	Potential:
Data Conflict	
Observed:	Potential:

Underlying Interests:

Value Conflict	
Observed:	Potential:

## CONFLICT INTERVENTIONS

Relationship Conflict
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control expression of emotions through procedure</li> <li>• Promote expression of emotions by legitimizing feelings and providing a process</li> <li>• Clarify perceptions / build positive perceptions</li> <li>• Improve quality, quantity of communication</li> <li>• Block negative repetitive behavior by changing structure</li> <li>• Encourage positive problem-solving attitudes</li> </ul>
Structural Conflict
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearly define / change roles</li> <li>• Replace destructive behavior patterns</li> <li>• Establish a fair and mutually acceptable decision-making process</li> <li>• Modify means of influence used by (less coercion, more persuasion)</li> <li>• Change physical/ environmental relationship of parties (closeness/distance)</li> <li>• Modify external pressure on parties</li> <li>• Change time constraints</li> </ul>
Data Conflict
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reach agreement on what is important</li> <li>• Agree on a process to collect data</li> <li>• Develop common criteria to assess data</li> <li>• Use third party experts to gain outside opinion or break deadlocks</li> <li>• Agree to disagree</li> </ul>
Value Conflict
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid defining problems in terms of value</li> <li>• Allow parties to agree to disagree</li> <li>• Create spheres of influence where one set of values dominates</li> <li>• Search for a subordinate</li> </ul>

## INTEREST-BASED CONFLICT Resolution:

- Use problem solving/negotiation process
- Focus on Interests not Positions
- Look for objective criteria
- Develop integrative solutions that address all parties' needs
- Search for ways to expand options or resources

**ABBREVIATED THOMAS-KILMANN CONFLICT MODE QUESTIONNAIRE**

\*For the complete tool, visit [kilmanniagnostics.com/overview-thomas-kilmann-conflict-mode-instrument-tki/](http://kilmanniagnostics.com/overview-thomas-kilmann-conflict-mode-instrument-tki/).

Consider situations in which you find your wishes differing from those of another person. How do you usually respond to such situations?

For each pair, please circle the "A" or "B" statement which is most characteristic of your own behavior. In many cases, neither the "A" nor the "B" statement may be very typical of your behavior, but please select the response which you would be more likely to use. When done answering, transfer your answers to the scoring sheet on the last page, and sum each of the columns.

1.     A. There are times when I let others take responsibility for solving the problem.  
       B. Rather than negotiate the things on which we disagree, I try to stress those things upon which we both agree.
  
2.     A. I try to find a compromise solution.  
       B. I attempt to deal with all of another's and my concerns.
  
3.     A. I am usually firm in pursuing my goals.  
       B. I might try to soothe the other's feelings and preserve our relationship.
  
4.     A. I try to find a compromise solution.  
       B. I sometimes sacrifice my own wishes for the wishes of the other person.
  
5.     A. I consistently seek the other's help in working out a solution.  
       B. I try to do what is necessary to avoid useless tensions.
  
6.     A. I try to avoid creating unpleasantness for myself.  
       B. I try to win my position.
  
7.     A. I try to postpone the issue until I have had some time to think about it.  
       B. I give up some points in exchange for others.

8. A. I am usually firm in pursuing my goals.  
B. I attempt to get all concerns and issues immediately out in the open.
9. A. I feel that differences are not always worrying about.  
B. I make some effort to get my way.
10. A. I am firm in pursuing my goals.  
B. I try to find a compromise solution.
11. A. I attempt to get all concerns and issues immediately out in the open.  
B. I might try to soothe the other's feelings and preserve our relationship.
12. A. I sometimes avoid taking positions which would create controversy.  
B. I will let another have some of their positions if they let me have some of mine.
13. A. I propose middle ground.  
B. I press to get my points made.
14. A. I tell another my ideas and ask them for theirs.  
B. I try to show him the logic and benefits of my position.
15. A. I might try to soothe the other's feelings and preserve our relationship.  
B. I try to do what is necessary to avoid tension.
16. A. I try not to hurt the other's feelings.  
B. I try to convince the other person of the merits of my position.
17. A. I am usually firm in pursuing my goals.  
B. I try to do what is necessary to avoid useless tensions.
18. A. If it makes the other person happy, I might let them maintain their views.  
B. I will let the other person have some of their positions if they let me have some of mine.
19. A. I try to get all concerns and issues immediately out in the open.  
B. I try to postpone the issue until I have had some time to think it over.

20. A. I attempt to immediately work through our differences.  
B. I try to find a fair combination of gains and losses for both of us.
21. A. In approaching negotiations, I try to be considerate of the other person's feelings.  
B. I always lean toward a direct discussion of the problem.
22. A. I try to find a position that is intermediate between mine and another person's.  
B. I assert my wishes.
23. A. I am often concerned with satisfying all my wishes.  
B. There are times when I let others take responsibility for solving problems.
24. A. If the other's position seems important to them, I would try to meet their wishes.  
B. I try to get the other person to settle for a compromise.
25. A. I try to show the other person the logic and benefits of my position.  
B. In approaching negotiations, I try to be considerate of the other person's wishes.
26. A. I propose a middle ground.  
B. I am nearly always concerned with satisfying all my wishes.
27. A. I sometimes avoid taking positions that would create controversy.  
B. If it makes the other person happy, I might let them maintain their views.
28. A. I am usually firm in pursuing my goals.  
B. I feel that differences are not always worth worrying about.
29. A. I propose middle ground.  
B. I feel that differences are not always worth worrying about.
30. A. I try not to hurt the other person's feelings.  
B. I always share the problem with the other person so that we can work it out.

**SCORING**

Look at your answers. Circle the letter (A or B) in each row. Then total the number of letters circled in each column.

1.				A	B
2.		B	A		
3.	A			B	
4.			A		B
5.		A		B	A
6.	B			A	
7.			B	A	
8.	A	B			
9.	B			A	
10.	A		B		
11.		A			B
12.			B	A	
13.	B		A		
14.	B	A			
15.				B	A
16.	B				A
17.	A			B	
18.			B		A
19.		A		B	
20.		A	B		
21.		B			A
22.	B		A		
23.		A		B	
24.			B		A
25.	A				B
26.		B	A		
27.				A	B
28.	A	B			
29.			A	B	
30.		B			A
TOTAL					
	Competing	Collaborating	Compromising	Avoiding	Accommodating

There are no "right" answers. All five modes of handling conflict are useful in various situations, and each represents a set of useful skills.

**FIVE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLE OPTIONS**

<p><b>COMPETE - I win/you lose</b>          COMPETITORS pursue their own needs - even when this means others suffer. They usually don't want to cause others to suffer and lose, they are just so narrowly focused on their shorter term gains that they plunder obliviously through conflict situations like a pirate. They often use whatever power and tactics they can muster, including their personality, position, economic threats, brand strength or size or market share. At its extreme others call their behavior aggressive or psychotic.</p>	<p>Use when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issue is trivial</li> <li>• Issue is singular</li> <li>• Speedy decision is needed</li> <li>• Unpopular course of action is implemented</li> <li>• Unfavorable decision by the other party may be costly to you</li> <li>• Issue is important to you</li> </ul>
<p><b>ACCOMMODATE – I lose/you win</b>          The opposite of competing. For ACCOMODATORS, the relationship is everything. They think that the route to winning people over is to give them what they want. They don't just give products and services, they are generous with information too. ACCOMODATORS are usually very well-liked by their colleagues and other parties.</p>	<p>Use when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You believe that you may be wrong</li> <li>• Issue is more important to the other party</li> <li>• Preserving relationship is important</li> </ul>
<p><b>AVOID - I lose/you lose</b>          This is sometimes referred to as "passive aggressive." People who habitually use this style really dislike conflict. Rather than talk directly with you about the issue, AVOIDERS may instead try to take revenge without you knowing about it. The avoid style can be a typical reaction to high compete individuals. Parties often choose to share their best ideas with non-avoid profiles.</p>	<p>Use when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issue is trivial</li> <li>• Potential dysfunctional effect of confronting the other party outweighs benefits of resolution</li> <li>• Cooling off period is needed</li> <li>• Parties are not interdependent</li> <li>• Bad time</li> <li>• Issue not a priority</li> </ul>
<p><b>COMPROMISE - I win some/you win some</b>          Compromising is the style most people think of as negotiation, but in reality compromising is usually just haggling. Compromising often involves splitting the difference, usually resulting in an end position about halfway between both party's opening positions. In the absence of a good rationale or properly exchanged concessions, halfway between the two positions seems "fair". What compromising ignores, however, is that the people that take the most extreme positions tend to get more of what is on offer.</p>	<p>Use when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goals of parties are mutually exclusive</li> <li>• Parties have equal power</li> <li>• Consensus cannot be reached</li> <li>• Temporary solution to a complex problem is needed</li> </ul>
<p><b>COLLABORATE – I win/you win</b>          Often confused with the compromising style, "Win/Win" is about making sure both parties have their needs met, creating as much mutual value as possible. COLLABORATORS usually grow into this style; and can more easily revert to one or two of the other styles when pushed or when the situation calls for it. COLLABORATORS are adamant that their needs must be met - but acknowledge that the other party has needs that must be met, too. Often referred to as 'expanding the pie', COLLABORATORS are willing to invest more time and energy in finding innovative solutions, feeling secure in the fact that there will be more value to share later.</p>	<p>Use when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Synthesis of ideas is needed to come up with better solutions</li> <li>• Commitment is needed from other parties for successful implementation</li> <li>• Issues are complex</li> <li>• Time is available for problem solving</li> <li>• Resources held by different parties are needed to solve common problems</li> </ul>

Source: *Negotiation Conflict Styles*, by Calum Coburn - <https://hms.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/assets/Sites/Ombuds/files/NegotiationConflictStyles.pdf>