



## **A Practical Introduction to Workplace Conflict Management for Managers and Supervisors**

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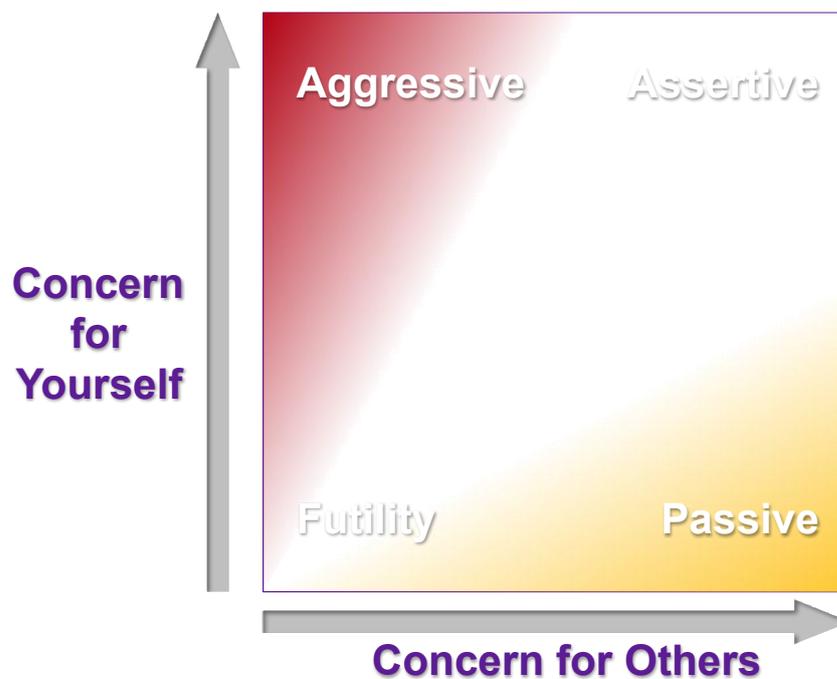
## The Rational and Irrational Sources of Conflict

### Rational Keys to conflict

- **Need:** Need drives us to satisfy need. We are prepared to do what it takes  
Conflict arises when getting what we need takes something away from others
- **Rights:** we also get into conflict to protect perceived rights.  
Conflict arises when this impinges on others' rights

### Irrational Keys to conflict

- **Fear:** Fear is the strongest emotion  
Conflict arises when fear drives us to try to take something away from or impinge on the rights of others
- **Respect:** Respect is a vital social glue that holds together our self-confidence and our relationships.  
Conflict arises when we do not show equal respect for ourselves and others.  
Too much respect for others and not enough for yourself, leads to internal conflict – that is outside the scope of this course  
Too much respect for yourself and not enough for others, leads to external conflict



## Separate the person... from the problem behaviour

Focus on the behavior, not the person

Focus on their outcomes not their positions

### The Light Side

**'me'**  
Responsibility

**'you'**  
Engagement

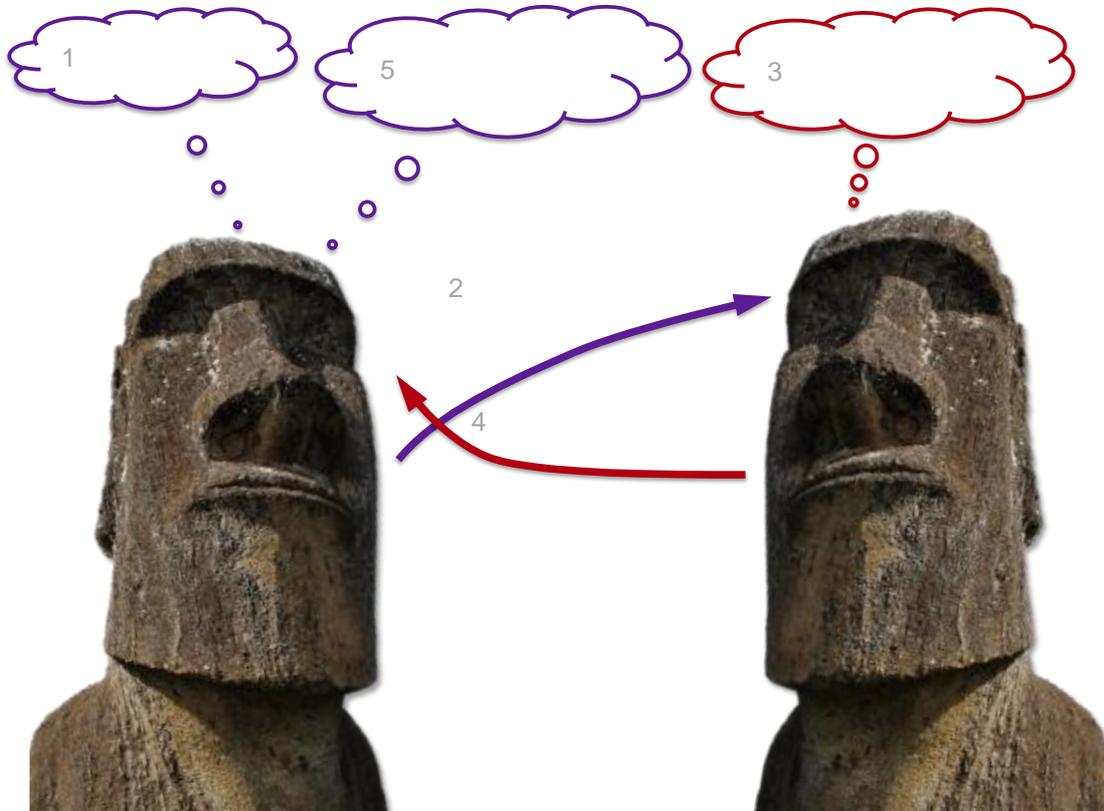
### The Dark Side

**'me'**  
Self-concern

**'you'**  
Accusatory

## How Communication Works

### Five stages



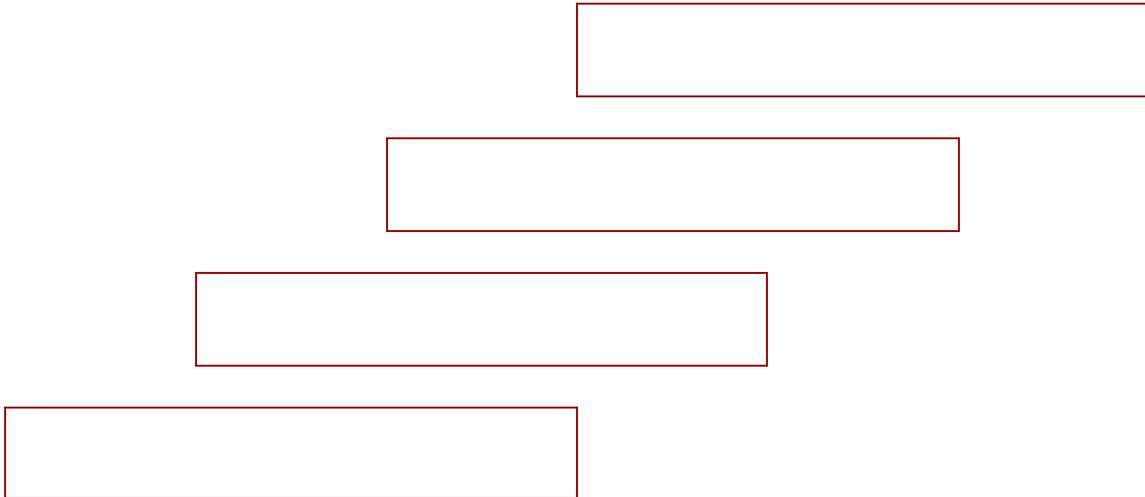
### We filter the information we get

- Delete stuff – what we don't want to hear (too much information)
- Generalize stuff – everybody says..., specifics become rules
- Distort stuff – assuming cause, assuming meaning

## Listening

**Excellent listeners listen to hear... not to respond.**

We listen at four levels...



***Hearing is a physiological response to sound:  
Listening is a mental and emotional commitment***

### Four Steps to Excellent Listening

1

2

3

4

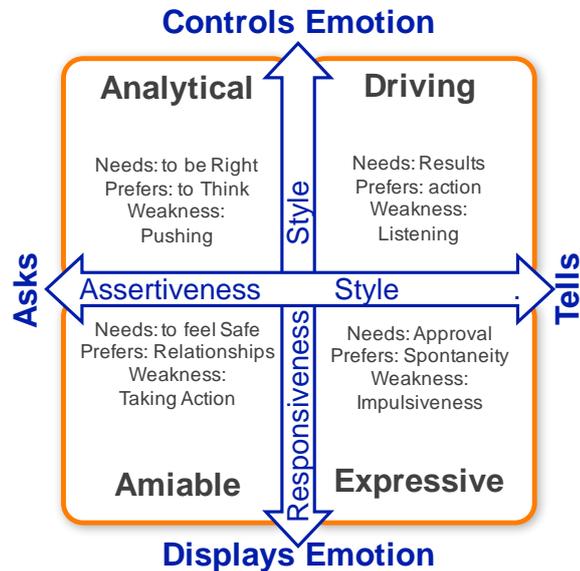
## Merrill and Reid's Social Styles

### The you that's on display

The great American author, Kurt Vonnegut, said "you are what you pretend to be." In the early 1960s, David Merrill and Roger Reid developed a model of personality focused on "the you that's on display" rather than on the inner you.

They were interested in how people behave in social situations. They chose not to concern themselves with "why".

Merrill and Reid found that people's behaviour follows two continua: assertiveness and responsiveness.



Assertiveness ranges from "asking" behaviours to "telling" behaviours, while our responsiveness varies from "emoting", or displaying our feelings, to "controlling" our emotions.

From these dimensions, they defined four behavioural styles that we each display. As with other models, we each have our preferences, but can display all of the styles from time to time. The value of the model lies in knowing how to get the best from people with each preference.

### Analytical

... values facts, logic and accuracy, presenting a disciplined and unemotional – some would say cold – face to the world. This reserve can mask a fundamental orientation towards co-operation and trust; once it is earned.

**Versatility:** How can you adapt to an Analytical?

### Driving

... typical task-oriented behaviour that is a fast-paced style, keen to make decisions, take power, and exert control. Often uncooperative, this is an efficient, results-driven behaviour, the inevitable compromise of which is to sacrifice personal relationships in the short term and, in extremis, in the long term too.

**Versatility:** How can you adapt to a Driver?

### Expressive

... assertive and uses feelings to achieve its objectives. The behaviour demands recognition and approval, and favours gut instinct in decision-making. At its best, this style comes across as charismatic, enthusiastic and idealistic. At its worst, however, the expressive style can be seen as shallow – both in relationships and thinking.

**Versatility:** How can you adapt to an Expressive?

### Amiable

... expresses concern for people above all else. Keen to share emotion and not to assert itself over others, building and maintaining relationships dominate behaviour. These concerns manifest a slow, deliberate pace, coming across as sensitive, supportive and dependable. The corollary is a certain nervousness about, and even a resistance to, change.

**Versatility:** How can you adapt to an Amiable?

## Resistance

Challenges evoke some form of reaction: an intake of breath, a mental freeze or a look of horror. This is our reflex response to threat: first fright, then either fight or flight. The ancient parts of the brain kick in and try to protect us, so the next reaction you may observe will be irrational and defensive, driven by emotion. If the idea, proposal or change is seen as threatening, that emotion can be powerful – you might expect any of anger, sadness, bitterness, frustration or fear.

But being rational creatures, our emotion will subside. It may be quick in some circumstances and can take a long time in others but, inevitably, what will follow will be reason. We will rationalise our initial response with a dozen good reasons why the idea, proposal or change is wrong, stupid or downright dangerous. This is resistance.

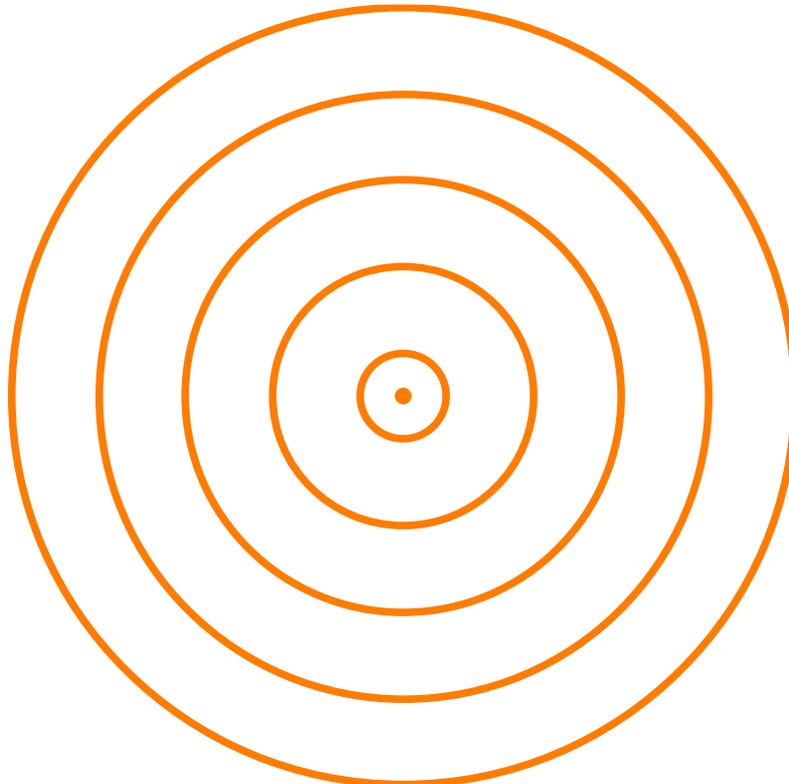
Resistance is inevitable. It is hard wired into us, like hunger, sleep and sex.

### **... So embrace it**

Don't take resistance as a negative thing: accept it as a part of the process: welcome it, embrace it, and engage with it positively. If you want to engage positively with resistance and handle it effectively, you must first understand it.

**The golden rule for handling resistance is:**

*I will always respect my resisters.*



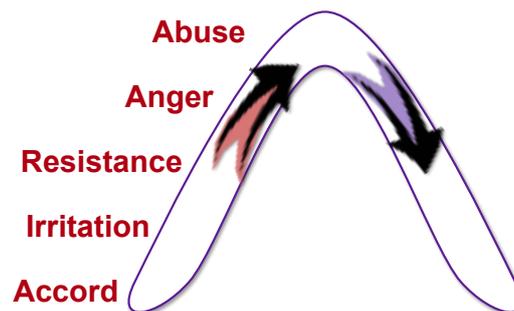
## The Signs of Rising Tension

### Body language

- Posture
  - Lean away to ease discomfort
  - Or lean in for conflict
- Gesture
- Face touching and eye blocking/rubbing = disagreement or disbelief
- Furrowed brow – stress. Touching it indicates struggling with idea
- Neck touching – collar or necklace
- Hand rubbing, wrist wringing
- Body hug and palm cleansing/thigh stroking - anxiety
- expression

## The Stages of Conflict Escalation

### One side of the conflict boomerang



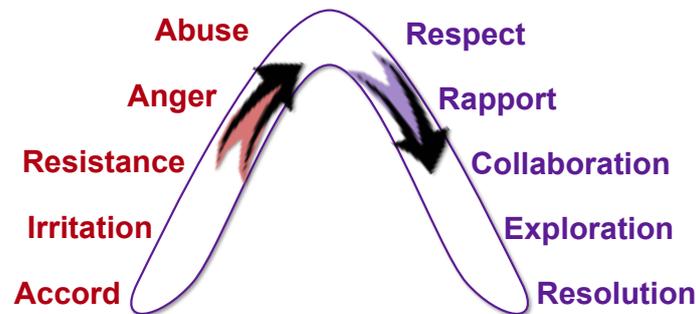
## The Strategies Available to You

### Seven Strategies

1. One-to-one chats: most informal, very effective, prepare carefully, choose your time and place.
2. Formal discussions: common workplace approach. Like the chat, but with more structure, in a more formal setting, and signifying higher stakes. Also emphasizes power differential.
3. Raise it at a meeting: deal with it publicly to harness peer pressure. Appeal to group norms and ground rules. This is not always appropriate.
4. Mediation: find someone to bring protagonists together and take heat out of relationship.
5. Arbitration: use a third party to judge and make a decision.
6. Confrontation: extreme strategy. A high-risk strategy that can go wrong. So, you need to be confident you have authority and personality to win. This is likely to damage the relationship, even if you win the specific case. It won't de-escalate the conflict, and it may escalate it.
7. Discipline: if you have more power, this can be an appropriate strategy. But you need to be sure you are right. This is your ultimate resort.

## De-Escalation Process: Seven Steps

**Find common ground where You can both agree...**  
**It is easier to build agreement from agreement**



### Escalation

Conflict has a way of escalating out of control. Our objective is to resolve it at the lowest level possible - making resolution easier and safer.

### Resolution

There is no single process for conflict resolution. However the common features will be a series of steps to de-escalate and generate agreement.

## A Seven Step Process

### *Demonstrate Respect*

1. Make the choice to engage positively
2. Make contact

### *Build Rapport*

3. Appreciate the courage the other person is showing  
Demonstrate empathy and show you understand their position
4. Understand each other's points of view  
Share facts, feelings, perspectives, concerns and definitions to build rapport

### *Collaborate*

5. Agree criteria for a resolution  
what are your respective absolute requirements and desired outcomes?

### *Explore*

6. Explore options and possible solutions

### *Resolution*

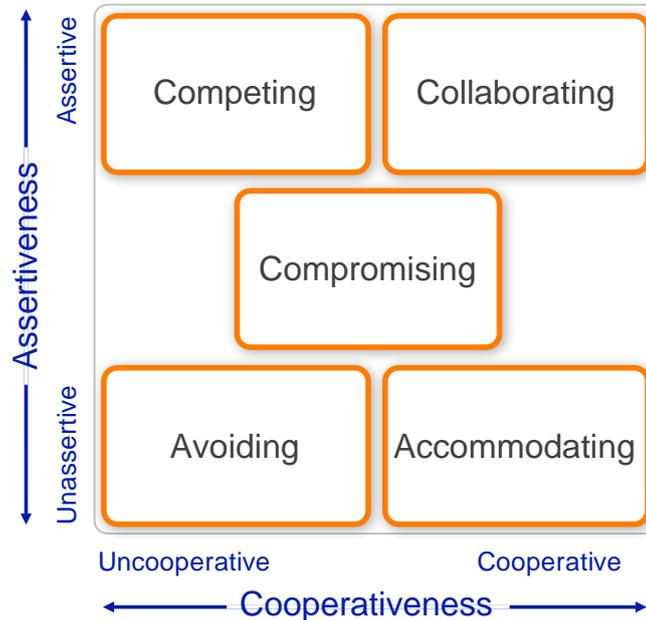
7. Offer a resolution  
Come to a decision and agree next steps

## Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Modes

Sometimes conflict is inevitable. The outcome often depends on the response you choose. So how do you deal with conflict?

Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann are neither the first nor last to categorise your possible responses but, measured by popularity, they are by far the most successful.

The first axis is **Assertiveness**, or the extent to which we focus on our own agenda. The second is **Cooperation**, or our focus on our relationship with the other person.



### The Five Modes

There are five Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Modes. A high degree of assertive behaviour, with little focus on the relationship, is referred to as **Competing**. In this mode, we seek to win above all else. It is a suitable style when success is vital, you know you are right, and there is a time pressure.

The opposite extreme is **Accommodating**. Highly cooperative and non-assertive behaviour is useful when you realise the other person is right, or when preserving the relationship or building emotional credit is foremost in your strategy.

When we want to invest little effort in the conflict, we use the **Avoiding** mode. With no effort deployed in either getting what we want or building a relationship, this is appropriate for trivial conflicts, or when we judge it is the wrong time to deal with the conflict. This may be due to hot tempers or a lack of sufficient preparation.

The good old 50-50 solution is **Compromising**. When you and I give up equal portions of our objectives, neither gets what we want, but it seems fair. Likewise, whilst our relationship is not optimised, neither is it much harmed. Compromise suits a wide range of scenarios.

What can be better than compromise? When the matter is sufficiently important, it is worth putting in the time and effort to really get what you want ... and build your relationship at the same time. This is the **Collaborating** mode, sometimes called "win-win". Reserve it for when the outcomes justify the investment it takes.

## How to recover a Broken (Professional) Relationship

**When you are wrong admit it... apologise, and move on**

Relationships break down, especially in workplace environments. This could be two colleagues, a boss and their staff member, a supplier and their customer, or representatives of two organisations working together.

If you want to reverse a breakdown, you need to build back trust and a commitment to work together. What makes breakdowns difficult – and even more so, conflict, which is in the last section of this chapter –, is that rapport has gone. Declaring the Breakdown (step 1) is important, because it is something both of you can agree on. It is therefore a basis for starting to re-build rapport.

The process below is one you can drive, a stage at a time, to try and build back your relationship. Although it looks superficially different to the seven step process for Complicated Conversations, the two are consistent. The numbered boxes in the diagram indicate which steps each stage corresponds to.

### Declare the breakdown

You need state that a breakdown has occurred and what you perceive it to be. Getting this bit right will be the first step in building trust, so talk about why it matters to you. If you did something wrong, say so and apologise. But don't ask for or expect forgiveness or approval. That is not the purpose of this process.

*"Last time we spoke, things went wrong"*

### State your outcomes

What is the goal you want to work towards?

*"What I would like to achieve is ..."*

### Invite my outcomes

Ask me what I want to work towards. I may be content to let the breakdown stand, but this is unlikely. Mending our relationship will be based on the overlap between your and my desired outcomes.

*"What would you like us to achieve?"*

### Share the facts

Be honest about what happened, your own shortcomings, and your emotions. Give examples if they are not obvious to both of you, but avoid blame. Be prepared to acknowledge your different interpretations of events and how you contributed to the problem. Take care to distinguish facts from opinions, and share how you feel about the situation.

*"What happened last time was ..."*

### State your commitments

This may include a recap of what you have been committed to in the past, but must focus on what you are committed to now, to help achieve your outcome.

*"I am committed to ..."*

### **Invite my commitments**

Again, be prepared for me to decline to make any at this stage. However, if you do have shared outcomes, and you have got this far, there is probably some rapport and I will probably feel that I do want to offer some commitments of my own, in return for yours.

*“What are you committed to, now?”*

### **Look for what is missing**

There may be missing information, a step in the process, understanding of how each of us feels, or there may be a gap between our perceptions of what is possible. Steer clear of assuming you know what I intended or was thinking, or offering recriminations. If you do, I will stop being honest with you.

*“What was missing for me was ...”*

### **Look for options**

What are the different ways we could mend the breakdown? If we agree we cannot mend the breakdown, what are our alternatives? Is there a way to deal with things we both need to contribute to, without a good relationship? How?

*“Here are some possible ways forward for us... What ways can you suggest?”*

### **Put together a plan**

What are the actions, requests, promises, resources and timing that we commit to, to mend our relationship?

*“This is what I propose to do... and this is what I would like from you.”*

### **Reiterate your commitment.**

Explicitly state what you are committed to doing, and then invite me to do likewise.

*“I think this plan is a good one, and I am committed to pursuing it as best I can.”*

## Good Conflict and bad conflict

### Not all conflict is bad

- Remember that conflict can drive better decisions
- It can challenge established and weak ideas
- It's a force for creativity and new ideas
- It can drive learning
- It builds mutual understanding
- It is a driver of change
- ...and can therefore lead to growth

## The Secret of Avoiding Conflict

### The secret of avoiding conflict

- constant self-awareness
- mindfulness
- calm

**Whether you can avoid conflict, or you need to apply some of your conflict management skills...**

**Good Luck**

*I wish you even greater success with your handling of difficult behaviours and conflict*

*Mike*

*Mike is author of thirteen print books, including **Brilliant Project Leader, The Influence Agenda, Handling resistance How to Speak so People Listen and Smart to Wise***



*And, most recently:*



**Powerhouse (n):**

*Somebody who is full of energy, highly effective, and therefore very productive.*

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