

# conflict resolution

*the methods and processes involved in facilitating the peaceful ending of conflict and retribution*

We all face conflict at some point in our day, whether professionally and personally. Conflict at work, while unfortunate, is to be expected. Everyone is different. Differences lead to conflict when individuals cannot agree. And because conflict is inevitable, it's best to prepare so that we can handle ourselves when disputes arise. One thing to remember is that it's up to each of us (**not just leaders**) to understand the basics of conflict resolution.

Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann developed five conflict resolution strategies that people use to handle conflict, including avoiding, defeating, compromising, accommodating, and collaborating.

This is based on the assumption that people choose how cooperative and how assertive to be in a conflict. It suggests that everyone has preferred ways of responding to conflict, but most of us use all methods under various circumstances. It is helpful to understand the five methods, particularly when you want to move a group forward.

**Conflict Resolution Strategy #1: Avoiding** Avoiding is when people just ignore or withdraw from the conflict. They choose this method when the discomfort of confrontation exceeds the potential reward of resolution of the conflict. While this might seem easy to accommodate for the facilitator, people aren't really contributing anything of value to the conversation and may be withholding worthwhile ideas. When conflict is avoided, nothing is resolved.

**Conflict Resolution Strategy #2: Competing** Competing is used by people who go into a conflict planning to win. They're assertive and not cooperative. This method is characterized by the assumption that one side wins and everyone else loses. It doesn't allow room for diverse perspectives into a well informed total picture. Competing might work in sports or war, but it's rarely a good strategy for group problem solving.

**Conflict Resolution Strategy #3: Accommodating** Accommodating is a strategy where one party gives in to the wishes or demands of another. They're being cooperative but not assertive. This may appear to be a gracious way to give in when one figures out s/he has been wrong about an argument. It's less helpful when one party accommodates another merely to preserve harmony or to avoid disruption. Like avoidance, it can result in unresolved issues. Too much accommodation can result in groups where the most assertive parties commandeer the process and take control of most conversations.

**Conflict Resolution Strategy #4: Collaborating** Collaborating is the method used when people are both assertive and cooperative. A group may learn to allow each participant to make a contribution with the possibility of co-creating a shared solution that everyone can support. A great way to collaborate and overcome conflict is to reach out to them.

**Conflict Resolution Strategy #5: Compromising** Another strategy is compromising, where participants are partially assertive and cooperative. The concept is that everyone gives up a little bit of what they want, and no one gets everything they want. The perception of the best outcome when working by compromise is that which "splits the difference." Compromise is perceived as being fair, even if no one is particularly happy with the final outcome.

Which conflict resolution method do you currently use in your life?

Which method would be a better choice and how could you incrementally implement it in your work life?



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