

Managing Conflict and Challenging Conversations at Work



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Today's Goals

1. Discuss common sources of conflict, particularly in professional or work relationships
2. Present an Assertiveness/Cooperation approach to conflict management
 - Assertiveness/Cooperation Exercise
3. Introduce Assertiveness and Assertiveness Techniques
 - Assertiveness Exercises
4. Review foundations of Assertiveness

Conflict often arises when people feel their goal or their ability to achieve it is threatened.

Workplace conflict often arises not because individuals disagree on the outcome, but due to differences in approach, or what each person needs to be successful.

We can de-escalate conflict by first trying to understand how our needs or approach contrasts that of the other person.

Understanding Work Styles

- Think and Problem Solve in a Group VS Think and Problem Solve Alone
- Start and Work on Projects with Long-lead Times VS Start and Work Under Short-lead Times
- Need High Structure (agendas, schedules) VS Need Less Structure
- Value Hierarchical Relationships VS Value Flat Relationships
- Hands-off Approach to Delegation VS Hands-on Approach to Delegation

Understanding Work Styles

One approach to resolving conflict is to balance the protection of your needs/approach (Assertiveness) with that of the other person's (Cooperativeness).



Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Grid

Assertiveness



Cooperativeness

Sam, a new colleague, has recently joined your group. Your supervisor has asked that you onboard Sam and get Sam up-to-speed. Your supervisor has assigned both of you to work together on a new and exciting project. You are each responsible for a different set of tasks, but you need to coordinate frequently to hand off parts of the project and prepare communications about the project.

You're excited to work with a new colleague, and diligently spend time and effort helping Sam learn how your group approaches projects like these. You and Sam also agree to have regular meetings to discuss your projects and next steps.

Over the past few weeks, you've become increasingly frustrated. Sam consistently shows-up more than 10 minutes late to meetings. Ultimately, the meetings are successful, and the project is moving smoothly. But Sam's tardiness throws a wrench in your schedule, and quite frankly it frustrates you and makes you feel unappreciated and disrespected.

You are currently waiting to meet Sam, who is now 9 minutes late.

What is your Thomas-Kilman approach? Why?

Assertiveness

Assertiveness is based upon the premise that we all have the right to express:

- Thoughts & Feelings
- Needs
- Rights

Assertiveness emphasizes *expressing* these in a *respectful* way, focusing on *conveying information*.

Assertiveness

Assertiveness states everyone has the right:

- To ask for what we need
- To express feelings
- To make our own decisions and be held accountable for them
- To make unintentional mistakes

Assertiveness

- Assertiveness does not guarantee you get what you want - nor provide a way to force your way or change someone else's behavior.
- Assertiveness provides for you to take into consideration others' needs, but not at the sacrifice of your own.
- Assertiveness emphasis making plain and clear assertions and (if needed) statements of consequences.

Assertiveness

- Assertiveness Training is shown to reduce anxiety, depression, and improve interpersonal relationships.
- Learning to be assertives takes time - you will not be an 'expert' over night.

Assertiveness Techniques

Basic Assertion: direct statement of feelings, thought, belief, or need.

- I need to leave at 5 PM today.
- I was surprised by your response.
- I had not considered that outcome.

Empathic Assertion: basic assertion that also recognizes the other's feelings, thoughts, or needs.

- I appreciate you don't like the policy, but I need you to follow it.
- I realize you are busy, but I need to discuss something urgent.

Assertiveness Techniques

Consequence Assertion: clearly stating outcomes with consideration of your need, right, approach (basic assertion)

- Since you [xxxx], I had to [yyyy].
- If you we are agreeing it do it that way, then I need [zzzz].

Your supervisor presented you with a new project idea that you were really excited about. It complements your existing work, it's on a topic you care a lot about, and you'll get to pick up some useful new skills along the way. You dive right in, and start compiling information, resources, and create a plan for moving forward. Your supervisor signs off on the plan, and you go about implementing the project.

You're two months into project implementation, and things have taken an unexpected turn in the last few weeks. Your supervisor keeps approaching you with new ideas and changes that you could make to the project, and after several weeks of this, the project has morphed into something entirely different from what was previously proposed. This is very different from your initial plan, which your supervisor signed off on! You're frustrated and having a hard time keeping up with all the changes. This project, which was initially supposed to be a side project, is taking up the majority of your time, and your supervisor is hinting that your other work is falling behind. They remind you that an upcoming deadline for a different project is quickly approaching.

Today when you check your email, you see a message from your supervisor saying they have another exciting idea for the new project and want to meet today to discuss it.

Using Assertiveness when Responding to Criticism

Assertiveness can be helpful in responding to criticism.

- Listen to criticism, resisting temptation to immediately ‘jump to your defense.’ If you need time to process your response, state so (basic assertion).
- Decide what you need to respond to and what changes are reasonable.
- Respond assertively, using one or many of the assertive techniques.

Assertiveness & Challenging Conversations

Combining Assertiveness with clearly communicating your understanding of the other person's needs, approach, or concerns can help with challenging conversations

(Situation/Action/Impact/Feedback Model)

- Describe the situation objectively - do not judge, label, or interpret
- Describe the impact - be clear and specific and do not over generalize
- Describe your feelings/thoughts/needs (Assertiveness)
- Suggest or state the preferred resolution or behavioral change (Assertiveness/Cooperation)

Assertiveness & Challenging Conversations

State the constructive purpose	I want to talk about ... I believe we need to discuss
Described what you observed	When you were doing Yesterday I observed you I noticed your email was
Describe the impact	As a result I need ... Now I must
Give the individual a chance to respond	Does this seem accurate to you? Is there something I am missing or not understanding?
Offer specific feedback	My strategy for dealing with XXX is.... What ideas can we come up with together to solve this?
Summarize and express support	I think we agree... I appreciate your effort in ... And I know you will continue to...

During staff meetings your coworker interrupts you often. You can never get through your presentation, getting stuck on tangents or pulled off topic. Your boss has started to comment that you are unfocused. You feel like your coworker is trying to one-up you or make you look bad.

Yesterday your coworker interrupted you four times and you have had enough!

Assertiveness

Assertiveness isn't just a way to approach conversations. It is feeling *confident in expressing* your thoughts, needs, rights.

Assertiveness requires you to be consciously aware of your needs, rights, and styles.

Assertiveness works best when you seek to understand the other person's needs, rights, and styles; and balance it with cooperation.

Assertiveness is developmental - you improve and increase in confidence the more you use it.