

Evolution of Nomenclatures of Conflict Management Styles-A Review

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Abstract

Conflict management models have evolved with time depending on the complexities involved in dealing with conflicts since 1964. There is no one single style of managing conflicts and therefore a need for the integration of different styles. The paper seeks to look into how the conflict models have evolved and their strength and weakness.

Key words: Model, conflict Management, Style

Introduction

Conflict management style has been continuously measured by a variety of different taxonomies. Researchers in social psychology and organizational behavior have proposed models that reduce the myriad tactics of conflict handling styles. The prominent conflict researchers believe that individuals respond to conflict using behavioral preferences i.e. conflict styles. Since Blake and Mouton's (1964) initial research, several two dimensional models (e.g., Rahim, 1983; Pruitt, 1983; Pruitt & Rubin, 1986) developed to depict conflict styles. Researchers identify that Blake and Mouton (1964) are considered as the pioneers to present the conceptual frameworks of conflict management or handling styles. They developed the famous managerial grid model that is most of time we know as leadership managerial grid. This grid is based on concern for people and concern for production.

Subsequent theorists then drawn on a new two-dimensional grid for classifying the styles as suggested by Blake and Mouton (1964, 1970) which is a self-oriented and other-oriented concern. Other authors have labeled the two dimensions differently (e.g., Thomas and Kilmann, 1974; Rahim, 1983a, 1986; Thomas, 1976; Pruitt and Rubin, 1986; but the basic assumptions have remained similar. Although it has also been debated that individuals select among three or four conflict styles (Pruitt, 1983; Putnam and Wilson, 1982), but evidence from confirmatory factor analyzes concluded that the five factor model has a better fit with data than models of two, three and four styles orientations (Rahim and Magner, 1994, 1995). While the conflict styles somewhat differ in terms of name, the general principles and basic descriptions of the styles appear very similar (Kozan, 1997).

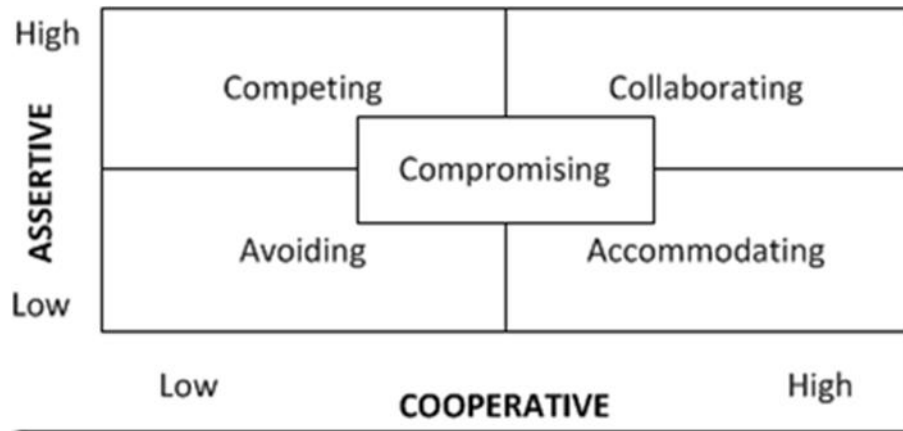
One of the first conceptual schemes for categorizing conflict revolved around a simple cooperation-competition dichotomy followed the intuitive notion that styles can be arrayed on a single dimension ranging from competition or selfishness (Deutsch, 1949, 1973).

However, doubts were raised over the ability of the dichotomy to reflect the complexity of an individual's perceptions of conflict behavior. In other words, the limitation of single-dimension model is that it fails to encompass styles that involve high concern for both self and other, and styles that involve neither high concern for neither self nor other (Ruble and Thomas, 1976; Smith, 1987, Thomas and Kilmann, 1974; Pruitt and Rubin, 1986).

Later, Thomas and Kilmann continued work out on the styles. The Thomas-Kilmann model, for example, suggests that a preference for conflict styles arises from a choice between "attempting to satisfy one's own concern" and "attempting to satisfy the other's concerns" (Thomas & Pruitt, 1974) as is shown in figure and table below.

Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (1974)

The Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument is a model for handling conflict



Source: Kenneth Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann. Adapted from „ Conflict and conflict management,” in Marvin Dunnette (ed, the handbook of industrial and organizational Psychology(Chicago: Rand McNally, 1975

Rahim and Bonoma (1979) differentiated the styles of handling interpersonal conflict along two basic dimensions: concern for self and concern for others. These dimensions explain the degree (high or low) to which a person wants to satisfy the concern for others. Studies by Ruble and Thomas (1976) and Van De Vliert and Kabanoff (1990) support these dimensions as cited by Gading in his review of Literature.

Table1. A diagrammatic Representation of Rahim/Bonoma 1979 management conflict model

Conflict Style	Concern for Self	Concern for Others
Integrative	High	High
Distributive	High	Low
Obliging	Low	High
Avoidant	Low	Low

It was Rahim’s (2002) idea that “organizational participants must learn the five styles of handling conflict to deal with different conflict situations effectively”. The five conflict styles that emerge from various combinations of these two dimensions are described below:

Rahim (2002) noted that there is agreement among management scholars that there is no one best approach to make decisions, lead or manage conflict. In a similar vein, rather than creating a very specific model of conflict management, Rahim created a meta-model (in much the same way that De Church and Marks (2001) created a meta-taxonomy for conflict styles based on two dimensions, concern for self and concern for others)

Table 2: Styles of handling interpersonal conflict and the situation where they are appropriate and inappropriate according to Thomas 1974

Conflict management style	Situations where appropriate	Situation where inappropriate
1.Integrating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Situation are complex -synthesis of ideas is needed -commitment is needed from the other party -Time is available -one party alone cannot solve the problem -Resources from both sides is needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -problem is simple -immediate decision is needed -When the other party is unconcerned about the outcome -other party do not have problem solving skills
2.Obliging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -when you believe you may be wrong -issue is important to the other party -You willing to give up something in exchange for something later -when dealing from a position of weakness -you want to preserve a relationship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -When issue is not important to you -when you believe you are right -the other party is wrong or unethical

<p>3. Dominating</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -issue is trivial -speedy decision is needed -unpopular course of action needs to be implemented -unfavorable decision by the other party may be costly to you -issue is important to you -subordinates lack expertise to make technical decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -issue is complex -issue is not important to you -both parties are equally powerful -decision doesn't need to be made quickly
<p>4. Avoiding</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When the issue is trivial - When the costs outweigh the benefits of resolution - To let the situation cool down - When getting more information is imperative - When others can solve the problem more effectively - When the problem is a symptom rather than a cause 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -issue is important to you -it is your responsibility to make decision -parties are unwilling to resolve the problem -prompt attention is needed
<p>5. Compromising</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -goals of the parties are exclusively mutual -parties are equally powerful -consensus cannot be reached -integrating or dominating is not unsuccessful -temporary solution to a complex problem is needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -one party is more powerful -problem is complex enough needed problem solving approach.

Source: Rahim (2002, 2004). Managing conflict in organizations

Alternative Relation of Self and Others: Eastern Spiritual Traditions Model (2006)

To help deal with concern for self that compete with the concern for others in the earlier models since the mid-19th century, Western philosophers and writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Carl Jung, and William James have adopted elements of Eastern spiritual traditions into their work. These elements re-emerged through the underground 12-step movement (Kurtz, 1977) and then again for a mass audience in the 1960s and have been bastardized to varying degrees in the “New Age Movement.” In the past 15-20 years, however, core beliefs and practices of Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism (and in small part Catholic mysticism) have been adopted by what could now be called the “mindfulness” movement. Several studies have linked regular meditation and the adoption of key Eastern principles with improved cardiovascular health, immunity, disease recovery, and mental health (Boryshenko, 1993; Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

Lydia Tolar, M.S. & Associates (2006) asserts that the knowledge of Zen Buddhist koans and Brahmic Upanishads helps one detach himself or herself from the conditioned mind. The aim is to open up an aware “space” in which one is highly alert but as free as possible from the chattering of the conditioned mind. In so doing, one is better able to experience the present, including the presence of others, from as neutral, non-judging and non-defensive. As ego is deflated, there is room for new ideas, creativity, openness to others, or what people variously refer to as inspiration (which literally means infused with spirit), higher consciousness, God, or universal intelligence, for example. In Eastern traditions, full enlightenment occurs when one completely relinquishes one’s attachment to self and one’s bodily form (i.e. dies to this world, an element in Christian mysticism as well), becoming a being through which the “light” of fresh consciousness continually emerges and who is free from “incarnating” new constructed selves in defensive response to the limitations of the world.

Table 3: Conflict styles based on ego-to-others ratio across dimensions of passive vs active interaction with others and world

Passive	Active
OTHERS Accepting Detachment	integrative
Avoidance Dominance	compromising
EGO ingratiating Immersion	Distributive

Explanation

Change in ego-to-others ratio. Where the ego is most inflated, the individual is immersed in “me-against-the-universe” thinking, with only complex, fear-based strategies of control to keep perceived threats at bay. As one works to keep their ego (fears, desires, thought forms) in perspective, the world of others and creative possibility greatly opens up. One might even refer to this as self-empowerment, or in enlisting strength from sources outside themselves, “source empowerment.”

Passive/active dimension With regard to a particular conflict, individuals at different stages of ego-to-others ratio may approach the conflict more actively or more passively.

Six representative conflict styles (See Table Three).

In ego-immersion, one seeks to control others one way or another, because to admit to the freedom of another individual to have their own view and come to an agreement in an open way is inconceivable

Ingratiating conflict styles entail the projection of enormous unwarranted power onto another human being, which is not openness to the perspective of a fully human, limited other. It is using that person in service of an ongoing narrative that sustains one’s ego. In ego-predominance, one

perceives conflict with a greater awareness of the positions of others. Openly working with others from a position of self (or source) empowerment is too threatening to the ego-narrative, but more active engagement might include compromising to end the conflict. Avoidance also entails enough of a recognition of the other person’s position that there is some detachment (hence avoidance is posited up the scale from ingratiation), but engagement is more directly avoided.

In ego-detachment, an individual operates from a position of humility, self-empowerment and openness to others. This paves the way for an “integrative” conflict management strategy that can foster new, creative solutions. However, from this position of detachment, one may ultimately recognize that the parties, or other external circumstances, are simply not going to change. The strategy of the detached individual is acceptance, not agreement, that there are some situations over which they are powerless. Walking away from a particular conflict, once the other party’s position or the structural problems have been fully understood, and even leaving the organization, may be healthy strategies in this context.

Following Table 2 presents the summary of the conflict management techniques/models identified by different researchers

Table 4: Summary of Conflict management models

Models	Description	Techniques
Thomas-Kilmann (1974) model	indicates that choice of conflict modes, or styles, is derived from "attempting to satisfy one's own concerns" and/or "attempting to satisfy the other's concerns."	Competing (high concern for self, low concern for others); collaborating (high concern for self and for others); compromising (moderate concern for self and for others); accommodating (low concern for self and high concern for others); and avoiding (low concern for self and for others).
Rahim (1983)	depicts two dimensions, "concern for satisfying self" and "concern for	dominating, integrating, obliging, compromising, and avoiding

	satisfying other,"	
Pruitt (1983) and Pruitt and Rubin (1986)	depict two dimensions, "concern about own outcomes" and "concern about other's outcomes," as the bases for choosing one of four conflict strategies	contending, problem solving, yielding, and inaction
Van de Vliert (1997)	provides an exhaustive review and extension of dual-- concern concepts. Based on the dual-concern perspective, he hypothesizes that the interaction of concern for other and self should explain choice of styles	
Mark A Hyde.	5 Keys to resolve employees conflicts	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inform about employees about the categories of conflict outlined 2. Teach employees how to explain you 3. Eliminate the he said, she said Dilemma 4. Don't encourage outside mediator for employee conflicts 5. keep senior leaders involved
De church & marks meta taxonomy(2001)	<p>Activeness and agreeableness1.conflict behavior makes direct impression</p> <p>2.conflict behavior makes a relaxed and pleasant impression</p> <p>3.High agreeableness satisfies all parties</p> <p>4.High activeness-solves conflict while holding on their own interest</p>	Integrating, compromising, competing, Avoiding, obliging
Rahim meta model(2002)		Integrating, compromising, Competing, Avoiding, Obliging
Lydia Tolar, M.S. & Associates (2006)Eastern spiritual Tradition model	<p>-Change in ego-to-others ratio</p> <p>--Passive/active dimension</p> <p>-Detachment from self</p>	Accepting,Avoidance ,ingratiating, Integrative, compromising, Distributive

	-domination by self -Immersion in self	
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Conclusion

Researchers identify that Blake and Mouton (1964) are considered as the pioneers to present the conceptual frameworks of conflict management or handling styles. They developed the famous managerial grid model that is most of time we know as leadership managerial grid. Subsequent theorists then drawn on a new two-dimensional grid for classifying the styles as suggested by Blake and Mouton (1964, 1970) which is a self-oriented and other-oriented concern. Other authors have labeled the two dimensions differently (e.g., Thomas and Kilmann, 1974; Rahim, 1983a, 1986; Thomas, 1976; Pruitt and Rubin, 1986; but the basic assumptions have remained similar. In the past 15-20 years, however, core beliefs and practices of Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism (and in small part Catholic mysticism) have been adopted by what could now be called the “mindfulness” movement. Several studies have linked regular meditation and the adoption of key Eastern principles with improved cardiovascular health, immunity, disease recovery, and mental health (Boryshenko, 1993; Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Lydia Tolar, M.S. & Associates (2006) asserts that the knowledge of Zen Buddhist koans and Brahmidic Upanishads helps one detach himself or herself from the conditioned mind.

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