

Session #3



Relationships are consensual and never coerced

Introduction to Systems Thinking

By Connie Goodbread

General Systems Theory

Ludwig von Bertalanffy proposed General Systems Theory in the late 1940s. It is a way of organizing phenomena, physical and non-physical, as well as organic and non-organic. It is a trans-disciplinary theory that created a scientific revolution.

General Systems Theory – a scientific discipline cannot simply look at the individual parts of a system and understand the system or even the parts completely. It must look at each part and how the part came into being. Then it must look at how the parts came together and interact as a whole. Finally, it must look at the environment in which the system is functioning and its in-take and out-put.

Within General Systems Theory is Chaos Theory - every part no matter the size affects the system. An example of Chaos Theory is the Butterfly Effect - the wind produced by a butterfly's wings in China can affect the wind patterns in east Texas.

Some traits of physical systems

1. Matter is attracted to matter
2. Once the matter forms a system by its attraction, the system is more and stronger than the individual parts that make up the system
3. The system will fight to maintain the status-quo – Homeostasis
4. Each part, no matter its size, has an effect on each of the other parts and the whole
5. The whole has an effect on the each of the parts

Examples of physical systems that have these traits - the atom – the moon and the Earth
Can you think of others?

Non-physical systems

Many experts working in psychology and family therapy began to think how Systems Theory applied to their discipline.

Murray Bowen – Came back from World War II and began working with soldiers who were suffering from Battle Fatigue (Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome). He found that many who experienced the very same trauma handled it and were affected by that trauma in very different ways. Some were stoic and went on with their lives while others were devastated and paralyzed. Why? He developed the concept of Self-Differentiation. The basic idea is that the way children are raised, the tools they are given and the way they are encouraged to see themselves will help them to cope with the experiences that life throws at them. The more self-differentiated a person is the better they are at maintaining a stand without being

stubborn, setting limits without being emotional cutoff, remaining an individual when the group is urging them to go with the flow and over coming adversity by maintaining a vision of the future. – This is also said to be true of the people who survived the Nazi concentration camps, that they could maintain a vision of the future even in the face of all the horror.

His idea focused on the power and abilities that one receives or does not receive from one's up-bringing.

Edwin Friedman – Worked with Murray Bowen. He was a Rabbi and a Family Therapist. He was one of the innovators who took the Bowen idea and Systems Theory into family therapy. Family Therapy had been focused on the “sick” individual. (as all scientific disciplines had been focused on the parts not on the whole) The therapist would work on the “sick” individual, the identified patient, getting their functioning up, fixing them so to speak, and then sending them back into a broken system. It had very limited success. Friedman began Systems Thinking as a way of therapy.

1. In his Family Systems Theory we have five basic concepts.
2. The extended family field – genograms – the people in our families and their stories – our birth order
3. Differentiation of self – the ability to remain an individual in a group and still be emotional connected - maturity
4. Homeostasis – the system's need to maintain the status-quo
5. Emotional triangles – one person giving up their power and/or anxiety in a relationship to another over a third party
6. Identified patient – the issue or person where the anxiety is focused – may or may not be the real issue and in all likelihood is not

» S -elf Differentiation

» H -omeostasis

» I -dentified Patient

» F -amily Field

» T -riangulation

Friedman began to see that these five concepts could be applied to every emotional system: families, communities, towns, countries and very definitely congregations.

Peter Steinke – A Lutheran Minister and Family Therapist who worked with Edwin

Friedman, took both Bowen's and Friedman's work and began to apply it directly to congregations and ministry. He developed "Healthy Congregations" a process that helps leaders to identify their strengths and weaknesses empowering them to be the best that they can be. If the leadership of the congregation is functioning at it's best it will affect the whole in a positive way.

Connie Goodbread – What is the one thing in our lives that we can control? Ourselves. The way we behave. Human beings live in emotional as well as physical systems and we are conscience beings. Therefore, we have the opportunity to behave in a conscience manner toward the outcome of everything we do. The butterfly is not conscience of the role it may play in weather patterns. We can; however, be conscience of the role we play in our congregations. We do not have to react to every emotional current that washes over us. We can stop and think. We can be very deliberate in our behavior. We can "Choose to not be offended." – Luskin. We can give and demand respect. We can look out for the good of the whole. We can remain true to the vision, righting the course when needed. This would make us non-anxious leaders – "Leading by presence and functioning not technique." – Friedman.

Answer these questions.

What would a congregation look like if its leadership, both lay leaders and religious professionals, were able to function at their best?

How would that congregation affect its members?

How would those members affect the larger community?

If I say to you, "The congregation is the curriculum." – Maria Harris – What does this statement mean from a Systems Thinking point of view?

Self-Differentiation: Discussion Outline

The listing below appears in *How Your Church Family Works* by Peter Steinke, (p. 91).

Undifferentiated	Differentiated
Quickly offended, easily provoked, too sensitive, slow to recover	Self-managing, shapes environment, shows resourcefulness
Reactive, instinctive, automatic	Responsive, intentional, thoughtful
Underhanded, covert, flourishes in the dark	Open, light-shedding, aware
Demanding, willful, stubborn, resistant (especially to reason and love), unbending	Resilient, flexible, has a sense of proportion
Think in black/white or yes/no, intolerant of ambiguity, seek final solution, want all or nothing	Have breadth of understanding, allow time for things to process
Blame, criticize, displace, fault-find, have poor discrimination	Take responsibility for self, learn when challenged, define self from within self
Uptight, serious, defensive	Relaxed, at ease, sensible
Competitive, either with or against, see life as contest, contemptuous	Take turns, collaborate, stay in touch even when tension grows
Vague, non-specific, cloaked	Clear, objective, purposeful
Create too much or too little space and one sided solutions	Create space, options, and common goals

For Small Group Discussion: Duplicate the list and distribute to participants. In small groups, have them discuss how they see themselves. In other words, where are they more undifferentiated than differentiated, and likewise, where are they more differentiated than undifferentiated.

Signs of Resistance

From *Spiritlinking Leadership* by Donna J. Markham

	INTRAORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR	BEHAVIOR IN THE MARKETPLACE
ISOLATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Little departmental exchange ▪ Cliques ▪ Little consultation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Self-sufficiency ▪ Disinterest in collaboration ▪ Adamant “stand-alone” style
PROJECTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Atmosphere of criticism ▪ Blame other leaders, committees, authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Blame external factors for operational problems
SPLITTING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overaggrandizement or hostile devaluation of individuals or groups ▪ Coalition building, covert strategizing prior to meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Public devaluation of competitors
DOING/UNDOING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Obsessive concern about and fear of making a mistake ▪ Inability to bring agenda items to closure ▪ Criticism of processes used to arrive at decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Waffling on decisions relative to realignments, partnerships, mergers
DENIAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pollyannish worldview ▪ Oblivious to problems in the organization ▪ Inability to manage discord 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of attention to or awareness of reality of environment ▪ Incognizant of emergent needs
RIGIDITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Preoccupation with policies and procedures ▪ Resort to legalism ▪ Self-righteousness ▪ Dogmatism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Heavy emphasis on tradition and history ▪ Unwillingness to modify strategies, policies in order to collaborate with others
DEPRESSION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Absenteeism ▪ Attrition of leaders ▪ Lethargy at meetings ▪ Silence, lack of initiative, enthusiasm ▪ Low energy level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Public invisibility ▪ Poor growth record

Triggers of Anxiety

The fifteen most common triggers of anxiety in congregations:

- Money
- Type of worship
- Issues involving sex/sexuality
- Pastor's leadership style
- Issues with authority and power
- Old versus new
- Growth/survival
- Staff conflicts/resignation of staff member
- Internal or external focus
- Major trauma, tension, or transition
- Harm done to or by a child/death of a child
- Property building, space, territory
- Distance between the ideal and the real
- Lay leadership's style
- Boundary issues

The “ARIA” Approach To Conflict Engagement

from *The Systems Thinker*® Newsletter Vol. 11, No. 10 by Jay Rothman

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If a leadership team asked me for the key to nurturing Tom Peters’s WOW organizations, to empowering people to learn and grow their companies *à la* Peter Senge, or to cultivating the human side of enterprise as defined by Douglas McGregor, I would advise them to focus their attention on engaging identity-based conflict within their organization. In a workplace, identity-based disputes generally center around different groups of individuals who share certain characteristics, such as doctors versus nurses or designers versus engineers. Because it involves people’s sense of who they are, this kind of conflict is often rooted in perceived threats to the groups’ collective need for dignity, recognition, safety, control, purpose, and efficacy.

However, if addressed effectively, identity-based conflict can surface people’s most profound thoughts and feelings about what gives their work—and their lives—meaning and engender vitality and dynamism in organizations. In this way, addressing identity conflict can be a source of ongoing learning and lasting change.

Engaging Conflict

Some everyday interpersonal conflict should be avoided or preempted, such as when coworkers have continued personality differences. In this case, reassigning one of the parties to another department can make sense.

However, deeper conflicts often can’t be dismissed with minor adjustments or settled with a handshake. Instead, leaders must learn how to engage these instances of ongoing strife, that is, surface, study, and generally view them as opportunities for learning. This is particularly the case with identity-based conflicts, such as when two companies merge and experience a clash of cultures. In these instances, learning itself may be all that is initially necessary or advisable. In other words, engaging conflict provides an opportunity for self-study, which will eventually enable the business to design and implement change.

Rethinking Conflict

But how can organizations ensure that deep conflict becomes constructive, and that it promotes real learning and change? The first step is to look at conflict itself with new eyes, changing the common perception of it from a destructive burden to a creative possibility. Thinking differently about conflict is a prerequisite for acting differently when it occurs.

For example, stop for a moment and reflect on an interpersonal conflict that you were involved in that ended badly. Now replay it with a positive ending. Instead of slamming the door and rushing away in anger, imagine how different it would have been had you said, “I’m really upset; I want to take a few minutes to calm down and then come back and talk with you about what is bothering me.” Or had your antagonist said, “I’m sorry I’ve made you so angry. Let’s talk; I’d like to understand why.” In this way, the engagement can serve as a catalyst for new insights. This same approach holds true when groups are locked in identity conflict. If group members can stop and learn from their difficulties, organizational transformation can follow.

Developing effective conflict-engagement skills should begin with careful consideration of several questions, such as, What is conflict in general (e.g., a bad thing, a good thing, or something that is neutral and dependent on how we respond to it)? At what level of depth and complexity does it present itself in particular instances? Why has it occurred in this case? Only after individuals gain insight into the nature of conflict and how it manifests itself can they learn new ways for effectively engaging it. One such way is the ROI-ARIA diagnostic and intervention process described below.

Step One: Diagnosis

The first step in effective conflict engagement is developing the art of going slow to go fast. When people in conflict rush to solutions before fully understanding the parameters and causes of the conflicts they seek to address, they often end up solving the wrong problems. Instead, conflicting parties need to learn new frameworks for fully defining and analyzing their conflict before selecting an intervention strategy.

I use a diagnostic tool called “ROI”—Resources, Objectives, Identity—that helps people do a full but relatively quick diagnosis about the level of a given conflict. The example of a merger between companies illustrates the differences among these three levels. In a merger, two formerly separate entities may be forced to compete for the same scarce funds. This is a conflict around “Resources.” At a deeper level, conflict may result when the management team in the acquiring company threatens or rejects the core goals of a department in the acquired company. This is a conflict at the “Objectives” level. At the deepest level, mergers often cause people to feel that their “way of working,” including their values and accepted norms, is threatened, jeopardizing their fundamental sense of who they are—both as workers and as individuals. This is an “Identity” conflict.

Step Two: Intervening

Once the level of the conflict has been ascertained, the appropriate intervention strategy must be selected. The four-level ARIA framework can help transform the dissonance of conflict into the resonance of creativity and cooperation as it gradually becomes a vehicle for inquiry, learning, and planned change.

The “ARIA” Process Cycle

- **Adversial Framing** Focuses on the tangible what of the conflict. Is defined in Us vs. Them terms, the resources at stake, and the opposing solutions sought. Results in **Antagonism**
- **Reflexive Reframing** Focuses on the why and who of the conflict – the identity needs of all sides, leading to **Resonance**
- **Inventing** Focuses on the how of cooperatively resolving the conflict and its core causes through integrative solutions, resulting in creative **Invention**.
- **Agenda Setting** Addresses the why and who of the conflict and the how of cooperation through the tangible what of solutions. Consolidated into plans for **Action**. Can cycle back into further **Reflexive Reframing** and so on.

The ultimate goal of the ARIA process is to foster harmony and resonance from adversaries’ full and honest expression of the deeply felt human motivations that lie beneath their conflict.

The framework consists of four phases:

- Surfacing **Antagonism** (What caused the conflict between the parties in the first place? What are the main symptoms of the problem?)
- Fostering **Resonance** (What does each side care about most and why? Where is there an overlap of underlying concerns?)
- Generating **Inventions** (What solutions can the parties apply to convert the negative dynamics of conflict to an opportunity for addressing underlying—and often shared—concerns?)
- Planning **Action** (How can the parties design a specific action plan for clarifying who will do what, why, when, and how?)

The level of the conflict determines the appropriate phase in which to start the ARIA process.

The ARIA “Steps”

- **Antagonism surfaces the battle.** It brings out festering angst and anger and puts them out for discussion. It is also useful later in providing a negative frame of reference such as, “We don’t want to that anymore!”
- **Resonance fosters a harmony** that can emerge between disputants, a harmony growing out of a deep exploration and articulation of what goes on within them. It grows from an expression of the needs and values that have been threatened or frustrated by the conflict and the relations between adversaries. They may discover that “We are in this together.”
- **Inventing is the process of brainstorming** mutually acceptable, creative, and integrative options for addressing central and underlying aspects of the conflict. They learn that “We can get out of this together.”
- **Action is then built upon previous stages,** implementing what should be done and why, by whom, and how.

For instance, in an identity-level conflict, Antagonism between the parties to the conflict must first be safely surfaced (“We didn’t ask to be bought by you!” or “Why do you resist our every step?”) before Resonance can be fostered and solutions designed (“We are in this together now, so how can we pull in the same direction?”). In an objective-level conflict, cultivating Resonance helps clarify what people care about and thus what goals any solution must seek to advance. In a resource-level conflict, inventing creative solutions for mutual gains can begin immediately. No matter where the process begins, planning Action should be the final step.

Given that we have all been “burned” by conflict, we need new ways to think about its light rather than its heat. The ROI-ARIA diagnosis and intervention process provides an effective way to promote positive engagement with conflict and transform it from an obstacle to an opportunity for creating ongoing organizational learning.

[Jay Rothman, Ph.D., is the director of The ARIA Group, Inc., a consulting firm offering training and consultation in conflict resolution and “action evaluation.” The ARIA model forms the basis of his book, *Resolving Identity-Based Conflict in Nations, Organizations, and Communities* (Jossey-Bass, 1997).]

Rev. Speed Lees - Levels of Conflict

Conflict Intensity Chart A Resource for Committees on Ministry Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Introduction

The Conflict Intensity Chart is intended to provide members of Committees on Ministry and others with a diagnostic instrument to assist in determining the intensity of a given conflict, to outline an ongoing training process and to provide relevant resources. Please note the following features of this chart:

A. Purpose is to De-escalate a Conflict:

The purpose of the chart is to provide the skills needed to de-escalate a conflict, and to lower each level above the first to a more manageable level if possible.

B. Levels are not Discrete:

There usually are not clear distinctions between conflict levels, and there is often overlap of characteristics. Intensity levels will vary from individual to individual and from group to group, requiring a consultant to examine a broad database before deciding the conflict level.

C. Characteristics are Inclusive:

As a corollary to the above note, the diagnosis of a particular conflict level of intensity ought to be derived from looking at all characteristics, rather than one or two that seem to dominate.

D. Team Approach should be Considered:

The suggested leadership skills acknowledge that no one person may have all the skills needed to manage a higher-level conflict. Other team members are needed to share insight and, especially at higher levels of intensity, to share the emotional stress of conflict intervention.

E. Training Required for all Intensity Levels:

It is recommended that all members of a Committee on Ministry be trained to handle level one conflict. For those persons identified to act at levels two and three, additional training is required. Level four and five usually require professional outside consultants in conflict management.

LEVEL ONE - PROBLEM TO SOLVE

Characteristics:

1. Issue = Real disagreement; conflicting goals, values and needs etc.

2. Emotions = Short-lived anger quickly controlled; parties begin to be uncomfortable in presence of other.
3. Orientation = Tends to be problem oriented rather than person- oriented.
4. Information = Open sharing of information.
5. Language = Clear and specific.
6. Objective = Solving the problem. Move toward unanimous agreement. Utilize collaborative style.
7. Outcome = Collaborative agreement if possible. Win/win final resolution with acceptable, mutually agreed solution.

Skills Needed

1. Trust/rapport building skills.
2. Ability to think theologically.
3. Good listening skills.
4. Working knowledge of the Book of Order and of the church
5. Problem-solving and decision-making skills.
6. Consulting skills
7. Knowledge of available resources

Training Strategies

1. Skills to be taught leadership on a continuing basis.
2. Develop resources using audio, visual and printed materials (including VCR)
3. Use of case studies and role playing for skills training

LEVEL TWO: DISAGREEMENT

Characteristics:

1. Issue = Real disagreement; mixing of personalities and issues; problem cannot be clearly defined.
2. Emotions = Distrust beginning. Caution in association; less mixing with the "other side."
3. Orientation = Begin personifying problem; shrewdness and calculation begin.
4. Information = Selective holdback of information occurs on both sides.
5. Language = More vague and general; "some people..." "they..." hostile humor, barbed comments and put-downs
6. Objective = Face-saving; come out looking good. Tend to move toward consensus. Not yet win/lose conflict.
7. Outcome = Attempt collaborative solution; or negotiate acceptable agreement; win/win with real effort.

Skills Needed

1. All skills under level one; in addition;
2. Analytical skills.
3. Understanding of power dynamics and issues.
4. Mediation skills.
5. Self-awareness skills.

Training Strategies

1. Selected persons from Committee on Ministry with additional specialized training/leadership.
2. Regionally-based year-long training in 5-6 segments or,
3. Attendance at weeklong workshop.
4. Use of simulation for training.

LEVEL THREE - CONTEST

Characteristics:

1. Issue = Begin the dynamics of win/lose. Resistance to peace overtures. Focus on persons representing the enemy.
2. Emotions = Not able to operate in presence of "enemy"; however, admire worthy opponent. Not willing/able to share emotions/feelings constructively.
3. Orientation = Personal attacks. Formation of factions/sides Threat of members leaving. Need third party consultant from Committee on Ministry or outside.
4. Information = Distortion is major problem. Information shared only within factions.
5. Language = Overgeneralizations: "You always..." "We never..." Attribute diabolical motives to others.
6. Objective = Shifts from self-protection to winning. Objectives are more complex and diffuse; clustering of issues.
7. Outcome = Decision-making=mediation, compromising, voting. Possible that some will leave the church.

Skills Needed

1. All skills under level one and two; in addition;
2. Designing and negotiating contracts.
3. Clear recognition of one's own limits.
4. Understand interaction of personality types.
5. Facilitator in-group process.
6. Skilled in developing clear process of decision-making.

Training Strategies

1. Presbytery-based crisis intervention team screened by Committee on Ministry and trained by experiential methods.
2. Facilitator's limits have tested in advanced experiential training.
3. Long-term, continuing training through national and regional training events.
4. Have access to individual trained to administer and interpret instrument for self/other awareness, e.g., Myers/Briggs Type Indicator.

LEVEL FOUR: FIGHT/FIGHT

Characteristics:

1. Issue = Shifts from winning to getting rid of person(s). No longer believe other can change, or want to change.
2. Emotions = Cold self-righteousness. Will not speak to other side.

3. Orientation = Factions are solidified. Clear lines of demarcation. Last place for constructive intervention by third party consultant.
4. Information = Limited only to the cause being advocated; will not accept/listen to contrary information.
5. Language = Talk now of "principles," not "issues." Language solidifies into ideology.
6. Objective = No longer winning; now eliminate other(s) from the environment. Hurt the other person/group.
7. Outcome = High probability of split within the church with significant number of persons leaving church.

Skills Needed

1. All skills under level one, two and three; in addition;
2. Ability to assess need for additional skill building.
3. Proven experience (track record).
4. Knowledge of broader more specialized resources.
5. More formal networking (i.e., Assoc. for Creative Change); knowledge of those qualified to work in related areas.
6. Careful adherence to the Book of Order.

Training Strategies

1. Ability to determine if a commission is needed.
2. Member of an identified cadre.
3. Practical training based on skills/needs assessment.
4. Acknowledgement at this level, intervention is helpful to "pick up the pieces" and negotiate a settlement, not to resolve the issue.
5. Use of specialists in networking. (See skills needed #5-- above.)

LEVEL FIVE: INTRACTABLE

Characteristics:

1. Issue = No longer clear understanding of issue; personalities have become issue. Conflict now unmanageable.
2. Emotions = Relentless obsession in accomplishing the objective(s) at all costs. Vindictive. No objective control of emotion.
3. Orientation = Sees person as harmful to society, not just to the offended group or person.
4. Information = Information skewed to accomplish the objective at any cost.
5. Language = Focuses on words that imply the destruction and/or elimination of the other.
6. Objective = To destroy the offending party/persons; i.e., to see that the fired pastor does not get a job elsewhere.
7. Outcome = Highly destructive. Use of compulsion to maintain peace. May be necessary to remove members from church. Possible formation of administrative/judicial commission.

Skills Needed

1. All skills under level one through four; in addition;
2. Adequate personal support system and strong inner resources. Able to practice personal stress management techniques.
3. Careful adherence to the Book of Order, especially the Rules of Discipline." It is acknowledged that at this level no reconciliation is possible. Consultant's purpose is to minimize damage of conflict and enable person/institution/group to be able to function again.

Training Strategies

1. Develop plan for the rebuilding of relationships.
2. Support for all members of the church.



Styles of Conflict Management

Collaborating

Also described as:

Problem solving

We both win.

"Two heads are better than one."

Description: Assert your views while also inviting other views. Welcome differences; identify all main concerns; generate options; search for solution which meets as many concerns as possible; search for mutual agreement.

Perspective on Conflict: Conflict is natural, neutral. So affirm differences, prize each person's uniqueness. Recognize tensions in relationships and contrasts in viewpoint. Work through conflicts of closeness.

Collaborating IS good when:

✎ you have the time and want to work something out that satisfies all sides.

✎ you care about the other person(s) and also feel strongly about the issue.

✎ you want to get thoughts and feelings out on the table and deal with them, so they don't cause problems later.

"But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits. and a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."
-James 3:17-18 (NRSV)

Collaborating is NOT good when:

✎ you don't care that much about the issue.

✎ you need to do something quickly. ("Fire! Everybody out!")

"...clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other."
-Col. 3:12-13 (GNB)

Compromising

Also described as:

We meet half-way.

"Let's split the difference."

Description: Urge moderation; bargain; split the difference; find a little something for everyone; meet them halfway.

Perspective on Conflict: Conflict is mutual difference best resolved by cooperation and compromise. If each comes halfway, progress can be made by the democratic process.

Compromising IS good when:

✎ you need a quick solution and can both give up something.

✎ you both want exactly the same thing and it can be divided up or shared.

✎ you are willing to let chance decide it (flip a coin).

✎ you have tried to satisfy each one completely and it isn't possible (or would take too long).

"Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him."

–Matt. 5:25 (NRSV)

Compromising is NOT good when:

✎ you might work a little longer and find a solution that pleases each one better.

"In everything do to others as you would have them do to you."

–Matt. 7:12 (NRSV)

Accommodating

Also described as:

Giving in

I give in.

"I don't care that much; have it your way."

Description: Accept the other's view; let the other's view prevail; give in; support; acknowledge error; decide it's no big deal or it doesn't matter.

Perspective on Conflict: Conflict is usually disastrous, so yield. Sacrifice your own interests, ignore the issues, put relationships first, keep peace at any price.

Accommodating IS good when:

❗ you are, or were, wrong about something.

❗ you care more about the other person than you do about the issue.

"Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way."
—1 Cor. 13:4-5 (NRSV)

Accommodating is NOT good when:

it happens a lot and you wish you could speak up more often.

"Instead, by speaking the truth in ... love, we must grow up in every way to Christ, who is the head."
—Eph. 4:15 (GNB)

Avoiding

Also described as:

I leave.

"I'd rather not deal with it now."

Description: Delay or avoid response; withdraw; be inaccessible; divert attention.

Perspective on Conflict: Conflict is hopeless; avoid it. Overlook differences, accept disagreement or get out.

Avoiding IS good when:

you don't care that much about the issue.

you (or someone else) are very angry and need time to cool off before discussing the issue.

🚫 you are in a dangerous situation and don't need to be there.

"Do everything possible on your part to live at peace with everybody.
—Rom. 12:18 (GNB)

Avoiding is NOT good when:

🚫 you rarely want to deal with the conflicts in your life.

you care about an issue but are afraid to speak up.

you keep being bothered by a disagreement with someone you care about.

"Let ... us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another.
—Eph. 4:25 (NRSV)

Forcing

Also described as:

I take charge.

"Might makes right."

Description: Control the outcome; discourage disagreement; insist on my view prevailing.

Perspective on Conflict: Conflict is obvious; some people are right and some people are wrong. The central issue is who is right. Pressure and coercion are necessary.

Forcing IS good when:

you need to do something quickly.

your conscience tells you to do or not do something that displeases others.

you know you are right and it is important to you that the others recognize that.

"[The high priest said] 'We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name [of Jesus]'. . . . But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than any human authority.'"
—Acts 5:27-29 (NRSV)

Forcing is NOT good when:

✎ you use it often with people you care about or will need to spend time with in the future.

you want people to feel they can discuss and disagree with you openly.

"You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself."
—Lev. 19:18 (NRSV)

Credits:

Compiled from various sources by Anne Myer Byler, from the website <http://peace.mennolink.org>

"The Personal Conflict Style Inventory is a rudimentary form of Ron Kraybill's widely used Style Matters, a 22 page, five-styles-of-conflict inventory with many additional features including special instructions for people of diverse cultural backgrounds, extended interpretation, extensive hot tips for each style, and discussion questions for groups, available for \$3.95-\$5.95 from RiverhouseePress.com. The version on our site was published in the Mennonite Conciliation Service, *Mediation and Facilitation Training Manual*, 4th ed., 2000 (Akron, PA: MCS), p. 64-66, and is here by permission of the author and publisher.