Conflict Style Assessment and Analysis Paper

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# Introduction

If you would have asked me to define my *conflict styles* two months ago, I probably would have furrowed a brow at you in confusion. I am no stranger to conflict, but the idea that there are specific conflict styles that are used, has never really crossed my mind before, at least not intentionally. However, had you asked if I was any good at handling conflict, I would have easily expressed that I feel I am not.

Throughout this semester, I have been forced to look inward at how I handle conflict parallel to studying these styles of interpersonal conflict - and I have definitely learned a thing or two about myself in the process. I have evaluated my styles in both a personal setting as well as professional and have asked those I am closest with in each environment to assess my styles using the *Assessing Your Conflict Style* worksheet (Hocker & Wilmot, 2018, p. 154-155). Much to my surprise, my styles between these two worlds were not as similar as I started out thinking, yet not as different as I expected they might be either.

# Background/Research

Conflict - that word - makes my heart flutter slightly, my palms clam-up, and brings upon a flood of negative memories. For the most part, conflict is a bad situation that I look for every opportunity to get out of quickly. However, our book points out that conflict itself, is not necessarily good or bad, yet the way we perceive conflict is affected by our worldview and experiences (Hocker & Wilmot, 2018, p. 41). One of the first things I learned in this course is that my past has formed a negative response to conflict as I could fully identify with a statement in this section: “Anger is the only emotion in conflict interaction” (Hocker & Wilmot, 2018, p. 46). I also feel that I have been subjected to many years of the misconception that “Emotions are for the powerless (women, children, and marginalized people)” (Hocker & Wilmot, 2018, p. 198), further hindering my ability to successfully learn from and about conflict as I continuously internalized my feelings.

The thought that conflict could be positive challenged my ways of thinking. However, early on within this course, I began to understand how others viewed conflict positively while reading through our weekly discussions. Many of my classmates pointed out that dealing with conflict appropriately can become a catalyst for other positive outcomes, so long as the parties involved can remain respectful. Taking the time to identify and understand the goals each party is striving towards is also helpful in dealing with conflict positively. Using the acronym TRIP, I am able to assess goals in *Topic, Relationship, Identity* and *Process* more effectively (Hocker & Wilmot, 2018, p 77). I have used TRIP a handful of times already outside of class and found that taking the time to dissect the conflict using this tool, gives me time to cool down and evaluate what the root cause actually is. Furthermore, it allows me to distance myself from strong emotions that would have otherwise negatively escalated the conflict.

# Analysis

Prior to assessing my conflict style, in just reading over the descriptions in the book, I felt that I identified mostly with *Avoidance*. I am a relatively quiet person who does not like to make a scene and hates being put on the spot. My upbringing taught me that you speak when you are spoken to and most importantly you do not say anything at all if you have nothing nice to say. But in the recent past, I have learned that this idea of being “nice” all of the time to everyone is not rational. The book points out that you cannot ignore emotions (Hocker & Wilmot, 2018, p. 197) and I have personally learned through counseling, that attempting to do so may cause other adverse effects. The book also highlights how anger can be expressed responsibly, although I feel that the same concept can span other emotions as well. The idea that verbally and bluntly stating I am angry just as I would state I am hungry is a great way to clarify how I am feeling to the other party, removing any confusion and taking responsibility for my feelings (Hocker & Wilmot, 2018, p. 222). In an attempt to lessen or remove the personal stigma that revolves around anger in conflict, I have been allowing myself to feel the raw emotions while working on my own confidence in hopes that I will better be able to manage my emotions during conflict, as conflict is undoubtedly a part of life.

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| Conflict Styles Assessment  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | **Who was evaluating?** | **Avoiding Totals** | **Dominating**  **Totals** | **Compromising**  **Totals** | **Obliging**  **Totals** | **Integrating**  **Totals** | | Me | 20 | 11 | 17 | 19 | 17 | | Boss | 16 | 10 | 19 | 20 | 20 | | Father | 20 | 12 | 19 | 19 | 18 | | Step Mom | 19 | 14 | 19 | 14 | 19 | |  |  |  |  |  |  | | ***Average*** | ***18.75*** | ***11.75*** | ***18.5*** | ***18*** | ***18.5*** | |

Interestingly enough, my boss scored me in *Avoidance* on the lower end of the assessment, while that was the highest total in my father’s assessment. This leads me to believe that I operate in my work environment differently than my personal life and at the same time the results are not very surprising to me. I am very close with my father and he has been the person to see the most of my life, unedited and in the trenches. This is very much the opposite of the person my boss sees daily being in a professional environment. Even though I believe we have a pretty close relationship, which is why I asked her to assess my style, I like to keep it professional and that means that she does not get to see the deepest conflicts I go through at their heart. The other areas of the assessment scored similarly across the board, confirming that I am definitely not strong in a dominating/competing style, rather my strengths lie when working *with* people. In most aspects of my life, I appreciate and strive for creativity and collaboration. “Two heads are better than one and three are better than two” is a personal belief and something I say often. I expected that my conflict style would also reflect this type of thinking.

# Conclusion

In the past, I have been overly tolerant in areas that I should have done a better job of standing my ground in. Many times, I tucked my head and walked away from conflict, hoping it will somehow magically disappear. The authors of our book are spot-on by stating “Avoiding a conflict...does not prevent it.” (Hocker & Wilmot, 2018, p. 159). Conflict has found me in a difficult place dealing with my ex-husband regarding our daughter many times. Although taking this course was initially a requirement to complete my degree, I can reflect upon it and instead call it more of a happenstance now, as this course has given me great tools to better manage the less enjoyable parts of my life where conflict runs rampant.

Before beginning this course studying interpersonal conflict, I am not sure I would have been able to define my style with anything other than saying I knew that I never handled conflict well. This semester has taught me a lot regarding how I handle conflict. I can now tell you that my first method is *Avoidance* and while there are strengths within that style, being proficient in other styles is beneficial when it comes to negotiation. My personal preference showed through in my assessment but also highlighted that I am comfortable and willing to work with people to come to the best solution for us all. Overall, studying conflict this semester has allowed me to reflect upon common conflict in my life and has given me tools that I can improve upon my own personal styles, helping me to better manage conflict in the future.

**References**

Hocker, J. & Wilmot, W. (2018). *Interpersonal conflict.* New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education.