



## ***Conflict Management: Teams That Cook Know How to Handle the Heat***

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### **Introduction**

American baseball has had its share of interesting characters and rightly so when you consider it's over 175 years old (circa 1839). One such character is Casey Stengel. Stengel both played and coached baseball. As the expansion manager for the New York Mets, Casey Stengel had quite a following among reporters, not because of his winning ways with the Mets but because of the witty and offbeat things he would say and Casey gave us many. One of his sayings serves as starting point for our presentation today concerning conflict. It appears in column on the right.

*Getting good players is easy.  
Getting 'em to play together is  
the hard part.*

Casey Stengel

### **Teamwork is hard work**

Can I get an amen from the congregation? It is almost axiomatic to say that teamwork is hard work. Let's be honest for a moment. I suspect some of us have been on teams where we thought or expressed the feeling that we would rather work independently. What is it about being on a team that makes teamwork so difficult?

With regards to conflict, teams need to sit up and take notice when they detect its presence. Unchecked, team conflict can quickly sabotage a team and impact its ability to reach its goal. At the same time, we also need to understand this truth--conflict is inevitable. It's bound to happen to almost any team but knowing what to look for and understanding one's own personal tendencies towards conflict can go a long way in preventing conflict from becoming a tragedy. In fact, something good might come from conflict, provided the team members are willing to journey through the conflict together. More on this later.

### **Goals for today's presentation**

1. Define workplace conflict.
2. Examine common approaches when faced with conflict.
3. Identify personal tendencies we may have when responding to conflict.
4. Understand action steps to take when team conflict occurs.



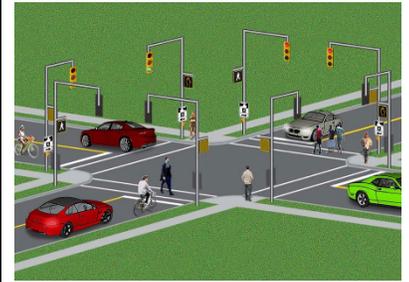
## ***Conflict Management: Teams That Cook Know How to Handle the Heat***

### **So, what is conflict?**

If we attempted to define conflict and consulted a dictionary or thesaurus, what words or ideas would you expect to find?

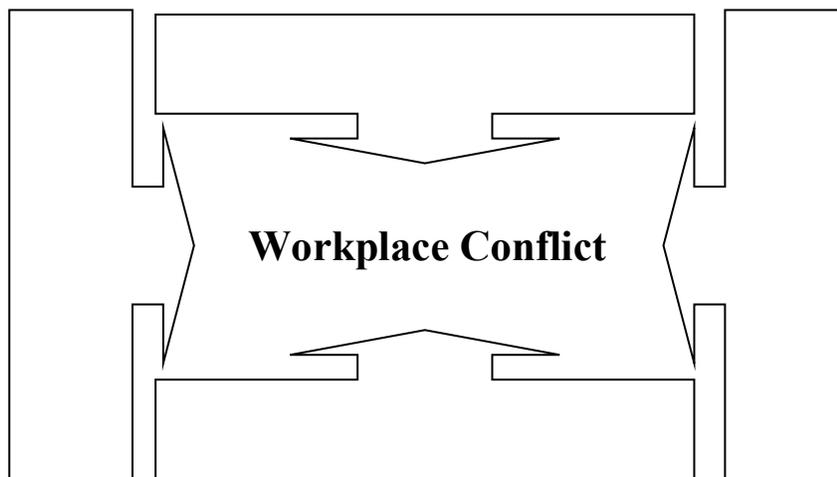
### **Another way to think about conflict**

Do these definitions share a common theme or message about the nature of conflict? Clearly, for most of us, conflict is something we try to avoid, if possible. Perhaps, we need a different way of thinking about conflict. The image shown on the right (and on screen in the PowerPoint) serves as a helpful metaphor for a different way of thinking about conflict. What do you see?



### **Conflict in the workplace**

Let's turn our attention now to some ways conflict occurs in the workplace. Typically, it can be recognized occurring at four (4) different but related levels. The diagram below may be used to depict these four types of workplace conflict.





## ***Conflict Management: Teams That Cook Know How to Handle the Heat***

### **Key elements of workplace conflict**

Dr. Daniel Dana of the Mediation Training Institute contends that workplace conflict consists of four key elements, each of which impacts our ability to be successful in our workplace and on our teams.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

### **Our biology and conflict**

Our fundamental response to conflict grows out of our basic biological reactions to it.



These are primitive and automatic responses to real or perceived threats to our survival. They are a kind of “*genetic wisdom*” that helps protect us. When we are in this mode, our brain chemistry is dramatically altered and our genetic programming says, *Don’t think—get ready to fight or to run away.*

Such responses are excellent in matters of physical survival. But, what happens when the issue is not physical survival but just going to work or having a disagreement with a coworker and team member? Clearly, these cannot be our only options, especially if we want our workplaces and our teams to be effective and productive.

*So long as we work together in teams and organizations, and people care about what they are doing and how they are treated, we will have disagreements and conflict in the workplace.*

Robert Bacal  
Bacal & Associates



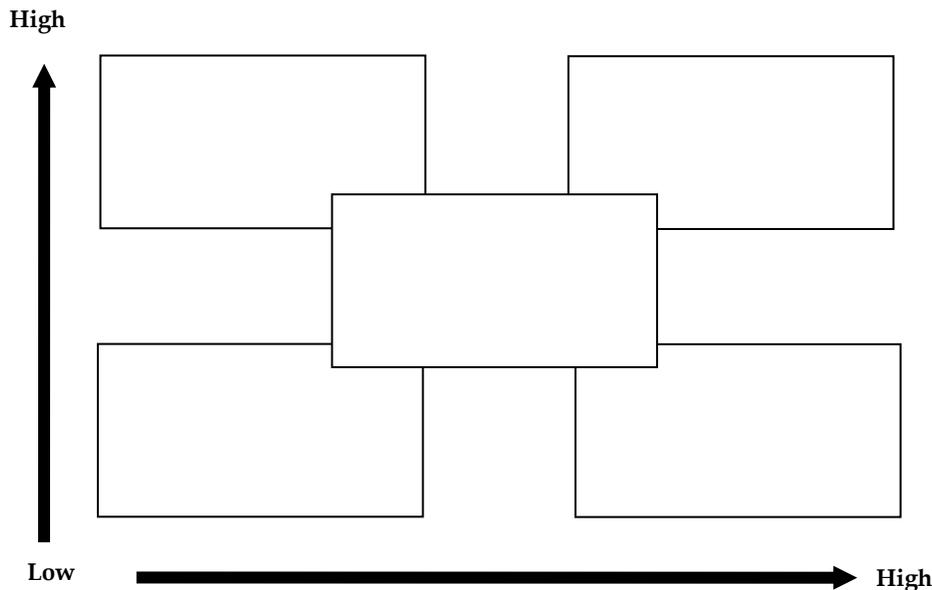
## ***Conflict Management: Teams That Cook Know How to Handle the Heat***

### **Common approaches to conflict**

We will examine five (5) common approaches or styles that are used when faced with conflict. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode instrument (TKI) is one of the most well-known tools for assessing how one approaches conflict. Because it is copyrighted, we can't use it without paying some hefty fees. However, there's another tool we will use in its place. This assessment tool is based on work by David Johnson and describes five (5) types of conflict and uses memorable animal images to designate the different conflict styles. We will use Johnson's model and make comparisons to the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode instrument (TKI). The assessment is only fifteen questions, easy to administer and should take about 5-10 minutes to complete and score. The assessment is found on pages 11-12 of this guide. Please listen for further instructions from your facilitator.

### **Overview**

Both the TKI and the Johnson model view conflict as the intersection between two dimensions. Using the graphic shown below, let's do a quick overview of the two dimensions and then identify the five conflict styles or approaches.



*Conflict is simply the condition in which people's concerns—the things they care about—appear to be incompatible.*

Kenneth Thomas  
Introduction to Conflict  
Management



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### **Walking through the five approaches or styles**

1. Competing style (TKI) – Animal type \_\_\_\_\_

*There is no single best way to handle conflict. Each of the five conflict handling modes has costs and benefits. Each can be highly effective when used in the right circumstances and when applied skillfully.*

Kenneth Thomas  
Introduction to Conflict  
Management

2. Collaborating (TKI) – Animal type \_\_\_\_\_

3. Avoiding (TKI) – Animal type \_\_\_\_\_



## ***Conflict Management: Teams That Cook Know How to Handle the Heat***

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4. Accommodating (TKI) – Animal type \_\_\_\_\_

*Unmanaged conflict is the largest reducible cost in organizations today, and the least recognized.*

Dan Dana, Founder of  
Mediation Training Institute

5. Compromising (TKI) – Animal type \_\_\_\_\_

### **Interpreting your scores**

Like many tests of this type, there is always the possibility of error due to test taker differences, misunderstanding of the questions, and just general measurement errors. Remember that this assessment has not been scientifically validated so the chances of error may be higher. Even so, it can be a useful tool for discussing tendencies in terms of how one approaches conflict. What do you think about the assessment? Did the results surprise you? What questions do you have about your results?

Here's a good rule of thumb you can use with this particular assessment. In about 10-12 weeks take the assessment again. If your scores are pretty similar, then this may be fairly accurate. If you want to take the TKI, there are many online places you can go to and purchase the TKI with an accompanying report. You can then compare the two. The cost of an online TKI assessment is about \$50. See the resource list for some online locations.



## ***Conflict Management: Teams That Cook Know How to Handle the Heat***

### **Using this information**

A good first step in becoming successful in the management and resolution of conflict begins with an understanding our own personal tendencies toward conflict. Conflict does not exist in a vacuum and it's critical that we first understand our own personal tendency or tendencies when facing conflict with a team member or coworker. With that information firmly in hand, we can then consider others on the team or in the workplace and their possible approaches toward conflict. Here's something to consider. It might be a good idea to use this simple assessment to better understand the team's composition and overall tendencies towards conflict.

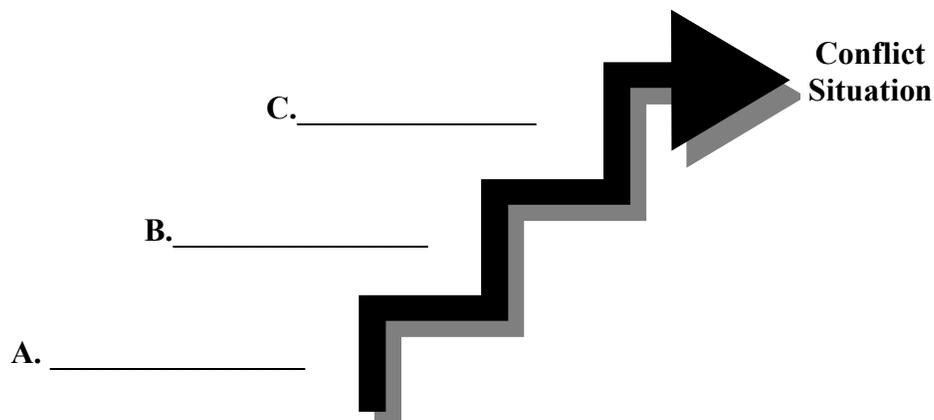
In the sections that follow, we will discuss some action steps and tips to remember when tackling team conflict.

### **Recognize your role**

Managing conflict is a lot like a drama and each of us play a role in this drama. Our role is based, in part, on the approach we tend to use when facing conflict. Our role is also affected by a series of decisions that we face when conflict comes our way.

### **Choices to be made**

At least three key decisions are required to address every potential conflict situation. The graphic below depicts these. A discussion of each point follows.



*"It is the acid test of nonviolence that in a nonviolent conflict there is no rancor left behind, and in the end the enemies are converted into friends."*

Gandhi



## ***Conflict Management: Teams That Cook Know How to Handle the Heat***

### **Participation**

Each and every conflict begins with the decision on how you will participate. Sometimes that decision operates at an almost unconscious level. The real danger is that we may choose to follow what Daniel Dana calls “*wrong reflexes.*” Dana tells us that we cannot manage or resolve conflict if we do not choose to be actively engaged in the process.

The question most of us have to answer next is this. How comfortable am I when it comes to responding to conflict? Am I willing to jump in when it first becomes obvious that there is conflict? Note the quote on the top of the column on the right. How do you understand what Dana is saying?

### **Escalation**

When it comes to conflict, each of us probably has an imaginary line in the sand that we do not want to cross. There can be many reasons for where we have drawn our line in the sand. However, these lines can keep us from moving forward. The nature of conflict is such that emotion and emotionalism are part and parcel of the package. Note the quote on the bottom right of the column. What’s your first reaction?

According to Dana, some escalation will be a necessary part of getting to resolution. Our first impulse is to say, “*Ok but how long is long enough.*” Dana doesn’t say. Instead, he calls attention to some important processes that serve to shift the conflict in a new direction—from a “*me against you*” to “*us against the problem.*”

Dr. Dana suggests two processes that can lead to a directional shift, which can begin to mediate escalation.

- 1.
- 2.

*In the life cycle of every conflict, there is a point when it's large enough to be recognized, but small enough to be resolved.*

Dan Dana  
Mediation Training Institute

*The reason that conflict doesn't work itself out in everyday life is not that we argue too much. It's that we don't argue long enough at one time.*

Dan Dana  
Mediation Training Institute



## *Conflict Management: Teams That Cook Know How to Handle the Heat*

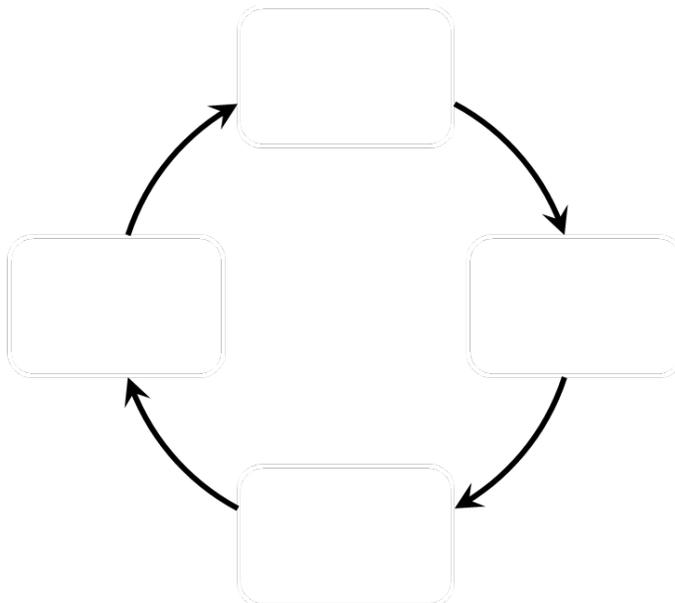
### **Resolution**

In the same way we decide to be engaged in the process of conflict management and to accept tension and escalation as inevitable parts of the process, we must also decide if we will (or can) settle for anything less than full and complete resolution of the conflict. If we don't aim for complete resolution, we probably should not expect the conflict to go away.

Not every workplace conflict can be resolved. Some may need outside assistance or an external mediator. Even so, if we set our sights on anything short of resolution, we may be raising a white flag of surrender and give over our team and workplace to an enemy of productivity. In so doing, we turn our offices and cubicles into prisons.

### **Stopping the conflict spiral**

Conflict is like a dance and this dance floor has a spiral shape to it. The challenge we face, whether team leaders or team members, is to accept responsibility for controlling and redirecting the energy and the downward spiraling nature of conflict. Left unchecked and unchallenged, conflict will spiral out of control. Let's use the diagram below to trace the steps in this dance of conflict.



*Out beyond the ideas of wrong doing and right doing there is a field. I will meet you there.*

Rumi  
13th Century Persian poet



## ***Conflict Management: Teams That Cook Know How to Handle the Heat***

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### **Where do we go from here?**

In the final analysis, this question can only be answered by you and the members of your teams. You must decide that living in conflict with team members, co-workers, or whomever is not how you want to spend your days at work.

You have a choice to make as this session comes to an end. Do you want to deal with conflict successfully or allow yourself and your teams to become a victim or worse, a prisoner to unresolved conflict?

The first step is realizing and understanding your own tendencies towards conflict. Next you need to decide to use this information to help you and your teams understand what steps to take in order to resolve the conflict.

Make a decision to take ownership of the conflict you encounter at work and in your work teams. Accept the challenge of conflict head on. Because when you and your team are willing to embrace the conflict and journey through it together, the results can be incredible. For you see, great teams are not immune from conflict, they just know how to handle the heat.

*When one is willing to see all conflicts-whether physical, emotional, or mental-as dances of energy, and to accept them and to blend with them, options and opportunities for successful resolution emerge, powerfully and elegantly.*

Thomas Crum  
The Magic of Conflict

**For questions or follow-up with the presenter:**

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(817) 291-3883**

*Our task is not to fix blame for the past, but to fix the course for the future.*

John F. Kennedy



## ***Conflict Management: Teams That Cook Know How to Handle the Heat***

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### **Conflict Assessment**

Below are 15 statements. Each statement represents a possible style or approach someone might choose when they find themselves in conflict with another team member or co-worker. Please don't over think your response or speculate on how you "should" answer. Read the statement and respond according to your first impulse.

For each statement, provide a rating (i.e. a numerical value) corresponding to the rating values shown below:

5 = Routinely	4=Very Often	3=Sometimes	2=Not Very Often	1=Rarely, if ever
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- \_\_\_ 1. I will be assertive with my team members and coworkers to demonstrate the merits of my ideas and the positions I take.
- \_\_\_ 2. I will push for give and take to reach a settlement to conflict that exists between team members.
- \_\_\_ 3. I will attempt to meet the expectations of others on my team when we are experiencing conflict.
- \_\_\_ 4. I will investigate issues creating the team conflict to discover and reach solutions that are mutually acceptable to the concerned parties.
- \_\_\_ 5. I will be firm in my resolve when it comes to defending my beliefs/ideas about a position I have taken.
- \_\_\_ 6. I will avoid being singled out, preferring to keep conflict with others on my team to myself.
- \_\_\_ 7. I will push for my ideas/solutions to be heard and considered when in conflict with team members.
- \_\_\_ 8. I will bargain with others on my team so we can reach a solution to conflict we are experiencing.
- \_\_\_ 9. I will trade important information with others so problems caused by conflict can be solved cooperatively.
- \_\_\_ 10. I will avoid discussing my differences or disagreements with other team members.
- \_\_\_ 11. I will adjust to the ideas and concerns of my team members and coworkers.
- \_\_\_ 12. I will push to bring everyone's concerns out into the open to resolve the conflicts between us.
- \_\_\_ 13. I will put forward middle positions to break deadlocks and impasses that keep us in conflict.
- \_\_\_ 14. I will go with the recommendations & opinions of my team members and co-workers.
- \_\_\_ 15. I will get around hard feelings by keeping my disagreements with team members to myself.



## *Conflict Management: Teams That Cook Know How to Handle the Heat*

### Scoring Your Assessment

**Scoring:** The 15 statements are listed below under five categories. Each category contains the statement number. Record the numerical value you placed next to each statement. Calculate a total score for each row. You will then add up the values across each row and place the total value for each row in the cell on the right most column.

Style/Approach	Statement Value			Total Points
<b>A:</b>	1 =	5 =	7 =	
<b>B:</b>	4 =	9 =	12 =	
<b>C:</b>	6 =	10 =	15 =	
<b>D:</b>	3 =	11 =	14 =	
<b>E:</b>	2 =	8 =	13 =	

**Results:** Add up the statement point values for each row and then please complete the three statements shown below. If you happen to end up with tied values list each style type with the associated statement.

1. Your dominant style is: \_\_\_\_\_ (Style receiving the highest score)
2. Your back-up style is: \_\_\_\_\_ (Style receiving the second highest score)
3. Your least preferred style: \_\_\_\_\_ (Style with the lowest score)

Remember that each style has its pros and cons. Problems emerge when we tend to overuse certain styles to the exclusion of the other styles. In other words, effective conflict management matches the style to the needs of the situation and the relationship we have with the other parties involved in the conflict.



## ***Conflict Management: Teams That Cook Know How to Handle the Heat***

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### **Resources**

#### **Books:**

Crum, T. F. (1987). *The Magic of Conflict: Turning a life of work into a work of art*. New York, NY: Touchstone Books.

Dana, D. (2001). *Conflict Resolution*. New York: NY: McGraw Hill

Dana, D. (1997). *Managing Differences*. Prairie Village, KS: MTI Publishing.

Johnson, D.W. (1990). *Human relations and your career*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall

#### **Web Resources**

Kilmann Diagnostics – Free online resources and information related to conflict and the TKI assessment tool. Link to purchasing online TKI at a cost of \$45 - <http://www.kilmanndiagnostics.com/catalog/thomas-kilmann-conflict-mode-instrument>

Discover Your Personality.Com - <http://www.discoveryourpersonality.com/tki.html>. TKI price appears to be \$55.00

Resource Connection - <https://www.resourceconnection.com/tki.htm>. TKI price is \$37.00

Paper version of TKI can be ordered from CPP, publisher of many personality assessments such as the Myers-Briggs and others including the TKI. The paper version includes the assessment and how to score it. Costs is about \$18.50 each. Assessments may also be purchased in bulk quantities.

<https://www.cpp.com/en/tkiitems.aspx?ic=4813>

United States Institute of Peace - <http://www.buildingpeace.org/conflict-styles>. Appears to offer a free download of an assessment that looks very similar to the TKI.

Conflict mediation training and resources - Mediation Training Institute International - <http://www.mediationworks.com/> (Organization founded by Dr. Daniel Dana)