

# MANAGING CONFLICT



**FORMATION  
CONTINUE  
EN SANTÉ**



**CONSORTIUM NATIONAL  
DE FORMATION EN SANTÉ**  
Volet Université d'Ottawa

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## Targeted competency

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Use a variety of effective intervention strategies to constructively manage conflict situations in your role as a supervisor.

## Description

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At the end of this workshop, you will know how to recognize situations that could lead to conflict. With a better understanding of conflict dynamics, you will be able to respond proactively to triggers and implement more effective strategies for resolution.

## Units

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### Unit 1: At the heart of conflict

- Is conflict avoidable when supervising?
- What is a conflict?
- Is learning to manage conflicts really important?
- Two possible outcomes of conflict
- What are the consequences of conflicts?
- Conflict or opportunity?

### Unit 2: Why does a conflict arise and escalate?

- Finding the causes: The starting point
- Learning to recognize the different causes of conflict
- Individual causes: Can we act on these?
- Interpersonal causes: a different vision?  
Organizational causes: Is the workplace responsible?

### Unit 3: The dynamics of conflict

- A first step toward conflict resolution
- Understanding the dynamics of conflict
- Exploring the parties' positions and interests to better intervene
- Analyzing the components of a conflict
- Distinguishing facts from judgements
- Recognizing behaviours to avoid manipulation
- Consider the dynamics of the conflict's evolution

### Unit 4: Are you using the right conflict-resolution style?

- One more step toward conflict resolution
- Should we reach a compromise or consensus?
- What is my preferred conflict-resolution style?
- What are the different conflict-resolution styles?

### Unit 5: Communication tools in conflict resolution

- A crucial phrase in resolving conflicts
- Individual strategies
- Interpersonal strategies  
Organizational strategies

## What is a conflict?

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Conflict is natural and unavoidable, including in the context of supervision. Therefore, it is preferable to learn how to manage it rather than fleeing from it. To do so, it is important to know exactly what a conflict is.

Etymologically, the word conflict comes from the Latin word *conflictus* that means “striking together”, “clash” and “do battle” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary online).

From a literary point of view, there is voluminous literature about the concept of conflicts, but there is still no consensus in defining this notion. We will define it as:

**“A dynamic process that occurs between interdependent parties as they experience negative emotional reactions to perceived disagreements and interference with the attainment of their goals”.**

(Hartwick & Barki, as quoted by Babin, 2019, p. 17)

A conflict can also be defined as a confrontation of **ideas, interests, values, actions or perceptions between two or more individuals**.

## Do you know the causes of the conflict?

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Examining the causes of a conflict is an important step toward creating a culture of respect and collegiality in the placement setting. These same causes may also result in escalating the conflict. Thus, it is crucial to act on these causes to prevent the conflict from intensifying.

(Almost, Dewitty et al., Giebels & Janssen, as quoted by Almost et al., 2016; Ordre des infirmières et infirmiers de l'Ontario [OIIO], 2018; Wong, 2019)

The most frequent causes of conflicts fall under three types, as follows:

- Individual causes (personality, values, emotions, etc.)
- Interpersonal causes (hierarchy, intergenerational differences, etc.)
- Organizational causes (disagreement about tasks, lack of conflict resolution strategies, etc.)

**However, it is important to remember that the causes of conflicts are often multiple and rarely fall under only one category.**

(Almost et al., 2016; Bajwa et al., 2020; Kim, Botachay et al., 2017; Liddle, 2017; McKibben 2017; Wong, 2019)

## Five styles to resolve conflicts

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There is an abundance of models for managing conflicts. For this workshop, we selected the five-style model of Thomas & Kilmann. It is the model that is most frequently used in conflict resolution.

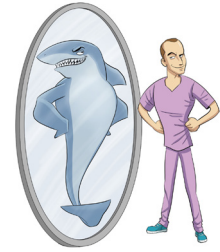
(Babin, 2019)



## Competitor

The individual challenges or competes as a shark would. He wants to win at all cost. He is determined and wants to satisfy his personal needs or put forward his values and rights, at the expense of others'. The quality of the relationship with the other person is not very important. It is a situation of "winner-loser".

(Jannas, 2019; Liddle, 2017; Poitras et al., 2018; Thomas & Kilmann, 2005)



**This style is appropriate and useful:**

- In some emergency situations that warrant immediate action
- When an individual must enforce a decision or policy that does not please everybody (restructuring positions, budget cuts, disciplinary measures, etc.)
- When you are sure and convinced that you are right about a very important matter regarding your patient's health

(Jannas, 2019; Thomas & Kilmann, 2005)

## Collaborator

This person collaborates as an ant would. He wants to satisfy the needs of the other individual, his values and his rights, without discarding or neglecting his own. His objective is to come to a solution that will satisfy both parties, a "win-win" situation

(Jannas, 2019; Liddle, 2017; Raines, 2020)



**This style is appropriate and useful :**

- When stakes are too high for a compromise
- To reduce tensions that disrupt the workplace climate
- To draw a realistic picture of the situation
- To improve learning and commitment

(Jannas, 2019; Raines, 2020; Thomas & Kilmann, 2005)

## Accommodator

The individual is very appeasing. He wants to satisfy the other person's needs, values and rights, at the expense of his own needs, values and rights. He agrees to the other person's demands, gives in and neglects his aspirations. He wants to be loved, as would be a teddy bear. He wants to be generous and accepted.

(Jannas, 2019; Liddle, 2017; Poitras et al., 2018; Raines, 2020; Thomas & Kilmann, 2005)



**This style is appropriate and useful when the individual:**

- Wants to learn from others and shows openness
- Wishes to maintain an harmonious relationship and "score points"
- Knows that the other person attaches a lot more importance to issues surrounding the conflict

(Jannas, 2019; Raines, 2020; Thomas & Kilmann, 2005)

## Avoider

The individual adopts a fleeing behaviour. He hides from the conflict, as would an ostrich. He is not interested in satisfying his needs or those of the other person. He delays resolving the conflict, hoping it will resolve itself. It is a “lose-lose” situation.

(Liddle, 2017; Poitras et al., 2018; Thomas & Kilmann, 2005)



**This style is appropriate and useful when the individual:**

- Attaches no importance whatsoever to the issues surrounding the conflict
- Does not have the power to change things
- Must let the “dust settle” before acting
- Deems the problem is small and will resolve itself

(Jannas, 2019; Raines, 2020; Thomas & Kilmann, 2005)

## Compromiser

The individual has a relatively determined and cooperative approach. As a wily fox, he agrees to yield a little to partly satisfy his needs and respect his own values and those of the other person. His approach to conflict resolution is more direct and quick than that of the collaborator, but requires that parties make allowances.

(Jannas, 2019; Liddle, 2017; Poitras et al., 2018; Raines, 2020; Thomas & Kilmann, 2005)



**This style is appropriate and useful:**

- When both parties have several contradictory needs and objectives
- To come to a solution that satisfies both parties, within a limited period of time
- To reach an interim agreement in a situation where problems are complex

(Jannas, 2019; Raines, 2020; Thomas & Kilmann, 2005)

All styles can be useful depending on the context. Among other things, the choice will depend on a detailed analysis of the conflict you will have conducted. However, some styles of conflict resolution are generally more likely to increase negative consequences (avoider, competitor, accommodator), while two styles can help moderate a conflict more positively (conciliator, collaborator).

(Friedman et al., Tabak & Koprak, DeChurch & Marks, Tjosvold et al, as quoted by Almost et al, 2016; Poitras et al., 2018)

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For the opportunity to access training on managing conflicts, register for the workshop at:  
<https://www.cnfs.ca/professionnels-de-la-sante/workshops>.

You will find more relevant information on the importance of managing conflicts in the workplace, and the potential consequences and dynamics of a conflict. Several tools are also made available, such as: talking circles, the conflict resolution map, the DESC method, etc.