

Understanding Conflict

Understanding Conflict – Quick Reference Notes

1. What Is Conflict?

Definition

Conflict = a perceived incompatibility of goals, values, or interests between two or more parties.

Trigger – a situation that makes the incompatibility visible (e.g., scarce resources, role ambiguity, value clash).

Key Idea

It can be **internal** (within a person) or **external** (between people, groups, or organizations).

Recognizing the trigger helps prevent escalation.

2. Types of Conflict

Category	Subtype	Typical Context
Intrapersonal	• Moral dilemma • Role conflict	Decision-making, personal values
Interpersonal	• Task conflict (differences over work content) • Relationship conflict (personal friction)	Team projects, manager-employee
Intragroup	• Subgroup rivalry • Power struggle	Departments, committees
Intergroup	• Competition over resources • Cultural/ideological clash	Organizations, nations
Organizational	• Structural (hierarchy, policies) • Strategic (mission, direction)	Company restructuring, mergers
International	• Territorial • Ideological • Economic	Diplomacy, wars, trade disputes

Tip: **Task conflict** can be constructive (sparks innovation); **relationship conflict** is usually destructive.

Understanding Conflict

3. Sources (Root Causes)

Source	Example
Resource scarcity	Limited budget, time, equipment
Goal incompatibility	Sales target vs. quality standards
Role ambiguity	Overlapping responsibilities
Personality differences	Introvert vs. extrovert work styles
Communication breakdown	Misinterpretation, lack of feedback
Values & beliefs	Ethical standards, cultural norms
Power & status	Leadership disputes, hierarchy challenges

4. Conflict Stages (Kelley's Model)

1. **Latent Conflict** – Underlying conditions exist but are not yet recognized.
2. **Perceived Conflict** – Parties become aware of a disagreement.
3. **Felt Conflict** – Emotional response (stress, anger).
4. **Manifest Conflict** – Behaviors appear (debate, avoidance, aggression).
5. **Conflict Aftermath** – Resolution, escalation, or transformation.

Understanding the stage helps select the right intervention.

5. Conflict Management Styles (Thomas–Kilmann Grid)

Style	Assertiveness	Cooperativeness	Typical Use	Pros	Cons
Competing	High	Low	Quick decisions, emergencies	Clear outcome	Can damage relationships
Collaborating	High	High	Complex problems, high stakes	Win-win solutions	Time-consuming

Understanding Conflict

Style	Assertiveness	Cooperativeness	Typical Use	Pros	Cons
Compromising	Moderate	Moderate	When both sides need to move forward	Fair, balanced	May yield sub-optimal results
Avoiding	Low	Low	Trivial issues, need for cooling ?off	Saves energy	Issues may fester
Accommodating	Low	High	Preserve relationship, low ?priority issue	Builds goodwill	May breed resentment

Choose a style based on the issue's importance, time pressure, and relationship value.

6. Effective Conflict Resolution Process

1. Preparation

- Gather facts, clarify interests, set