Conflict Management Styles

Cooperative Problem Solving [Collaboration]
Competing
Compromising
Avoiding
Accommodating

Research on conflict management styles has found that each of us tends to use one or two of the above five strategies more than the others. For instance, some people predominantly use collaborating when in interpersonal conflict situations. In other words, although there are five different ways to handle conflicts, such a person is more likely to collaborate than they are to force, accommodate, avoid, or compromise. There are many advantages to using a collaborating strategy to handle interpersonal conflict situations. Collaborating with the other party promotes creative problem solving, and it is a way of fostering mutual respect and rapport. However, collaborating takes time, and many conflict situations are either very urgent or too trivial to justify the time it takes to collaborate. Many conflict situations should be handled with one of the other four conflict management strategies rather than collaboration. Managers who are very skilled at conflict management are able to (a) understand interpersonal conflict situations and (b) use the appropriate conflict management strategy for each situation.

To help understand what is meant by the various conflict management styles, each style is described below along with a type of animal that fits the style. Other animals or items can be used to describe the style but for this paper, we have used Dolphins for cooperative problem solvers, Lions for competing, Zebras for compromising, Turtles for avoiding, and Chameleons for accommodating.

Cooperative Problem Solving [Collaboration] – Dolphin

Choosing a cooperative problem-solving style enables people to work together so everyone can win. Using this style, people try to find a solution that will help everyone meet their interests and help everyone maintain a good relationship.

A dolphin usually chooses a cooperative problem-solving style. Dolphins use whistles and clicks to communicate with each other to catch food cooperatively and to summons help. For example, when a dolphin is sick or injured, other dolphins will help it to the surface so it can breathe.

Although the dolphin usually chooses to be a cooperative problem solver, it can also choose other styles depending on the situation. For example, if a dolphin has a baby and a shark is in the area, the dolphin will choose to use a competitive style to deal with the shark. Continuing to use its favorite style of cooperation would greatly endanger the life of the baby dolphin.
Competing - Lion

Choosing a competitive style means that a person is putting his/her interest before anyone else's interests. In fact, sometimes people who use the competitive style try so hard to get what they want that they ruin friendships.

A lion can be a symbol of a competitive style. The lion's roar helps the lion to satisfy its interests. For example, if the lion's family is hungry and needs food, the lion may use its strength and loud roar to get the food because it is important for the family.

However, the lion can also choose to use a compromising or accommodating style when playing or resting with a lion cub.

Compromising - Zebra

People choose a compromising style when it is important for them to satisfy some of their interests, but not all of them. People who compromise are likely to say, "Let’s split the difference" or "something is better than nothing."

A zebra can be a symbol for the compromising style. A zebra's unique look seems to indicate that it did not care if it was a black horse or a white horse, so it "split the difference" and chose black and white stripes.

However, a zebra may not choose a compromising style for all things. A zebra may choose a cooperative or competitive style like the dolphin or lion depending on the situation.

Avoiding - Turtle

People who chose the avoiding style do not get involved in a conflict. A person choosing the avoiding style might say, "You decide and leave me out of it."

A turtle is a symbol for the avoiding style because it can avoid everything by pulling its head and legs into its shell to get away from everyone.

A turtle also chooses other styles at times. It does not always choose to stay in its shell, because it would miss out on everything from eating to swimming.

Accommodating - Chameleon

People who choose an accommodating style put their interests last and let others have what they want. Many times these people believe that keeping a good friendship is more important than anything else is.
A chameleon is a symbol of the accommodating style because it changes its color to match the color of its environment. By changing its color to accommodate its surroundings, the chameleon fits quietly into its environment.

Although the chameleon may always change its color to accommodate its surroundings, it may choose other styles when it is hunting for food, taking care of its young, or hiding from enemies.

Which of these animals or styles describes your leadership preference?

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