SUE HASLEHURST

Handling Conflict

I am the Training and Mediation Support Officer for Bridge Builders Ministries, a small Christian charity which offers courses and workshops, and provides consultancy, facilitation and mediation services.

I came to faith as a university student and have since worked in a wide range of roles and settings (mostly without any obvious logical connection!):

- A computer analyst/programmer with a church in Austria.
- In two human rights charities and several educational settings – a college for students with physical disabilities, two university libraries and a student advice team.
- I've also worked as a mediator in neighbour disputes and as a restorative justice facilitator in probation and prisons.

As a freelancer, I now deliver training in restorative practice.

Most relevantly for Arrow, for ten years I was the primary leader of a Mennonite church in London and while there I eagerly attended all the training offered by Bridge Builders, which had grown out of the Mennonite community.

I now live near the Thames in Oxford, with my husband and two canoes, and belong to a Baptist church. We are fifteen years into a project to walk (in stages) a very wiggly, but unbroken, line joining Land's End to John O'Groats. I also enjoy looking after my grandchildren, when I have time, and drinking tea – for which there is always time.

I'm excited to be working for Bridge Builders with its Mennonite link and its commitment to the gospel of reconciliation.

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HANDLING CONFLICT
1. Patterns of Behaviour

Our Experience of Conflict

ASSOCIATED FEELINGS AND TYPES OF BEHAVIOUR

My Basic Assumptions as a Bridge Builder

- Conflict is normal: it's simply there.
- Conflict brings danger and opportunity.
- Conflict may be a sign that people care.

Swimming Against the Tide

- Our culture does not prepare us to deal well with conflict.
- To lead like Jesus means being counter-cultural:
  - ⇒ **Attitude**: open-hearted (Mt 5:44), honouring those who are different.
  - ⇒ **Actions**: taking initiatives to restore strained relationships (Mt 5:10, 5:23, 18:15).

Conflict Patterns

Each person or group of persons has a way of 'doing conflict' that is culturally determined. Earliest influences in our lives are often the strongest because the patterns we learn first are hardest to unlearn.

'Conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals.'

Interpersonal Conflict, Hocker & Wilmot

'Conflict is the tension we experience when a difference is discovered.'

Making Peace With Conflict, Carolyn Schrock-Shenk

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Matthew 5:9

God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body.

1 Corinthians 12:24

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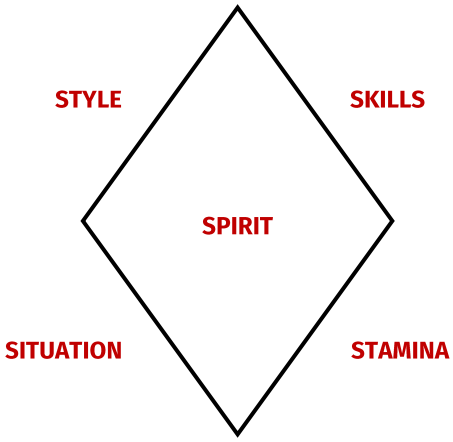
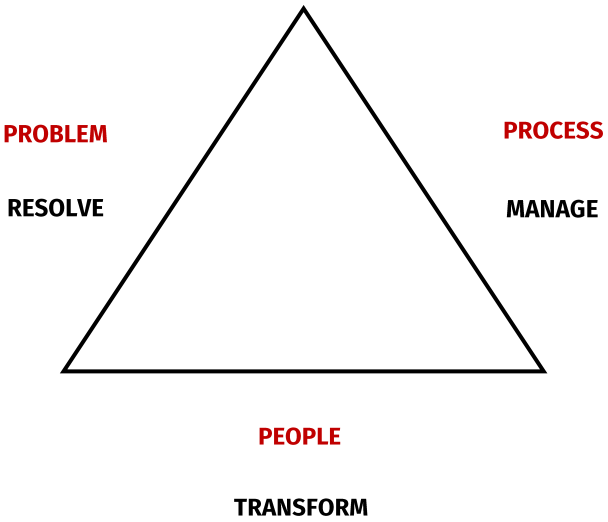
HANDLING CONFLICT
2. Different Ways of Doing Conflict

Who You Are in the Midst of Conflict



KEY Go on learning:
how I can give of my best,
how I can help others give of their best.

DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS OF CONFLICT



KEY INSIGHTS

Although he [Jesus] was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.

Hebrews 5:8

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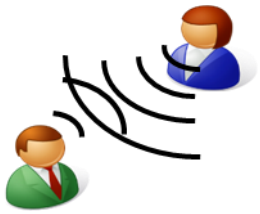
HANDLING CONFLICT
2. Different Ways of Doing Conflict

Accommodating/ Harmonising	**Analysing/ Preserving**
Achieving/ Directing	**Affiliating/ Perfecting**

ACCOMMODATING/ HARMONISING 	**ANALYSING/ PRESERVING**
ACHIEVING/ DIRECTING	**AFFILIATING/ PERFECTING**

Everyone draws on all four styles. The extent to which we draw on different styles is different for each of us. The ease with which we draw on different styles is also different for each of us.

Every style can lead.

Every style has strengths and excesses.

Understanding style can help us understand and manage ourselves and understand others

KEY INSIGHTS

As in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

Romans 12:4-5

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HANDLING CONFLICT
2. Different Ways of Doing Conflict

THINKING ABOUT YOUR OWN STYLE PROFILE:
- Which style seem to fit your experience of yourself?

THINKING ABOUT STYLES IN CHURCH LIFE:
a. When is each style is appropriate as a way of approaching conflict?
b. What is the negative impact of each style if over-used in leadership?

EXPLORING STYLES IN YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE:
- Think about an example of a conflict between you and another person (or two). Looking at the four styles outlined above, reflect on the styles that you and the other person (or people) have drawn on.

- Looking first at yourself, **which style(s) have you primarily drawn on**?

- Looking next at the other person (or people), **which style(s) do you think they have primarily drawn on**?

- Reflecting on the styles that you each drew on, **to what extent might some of your conflict be attributed to the interaction of your respective styles**?

If you have time:
- Looking at the excesses of your predominant style(s), to what extent might **your excesses** have come into play? How might you notice and avoid this in future?

- Looking at the material on **getting the best out of other styles**, how might you approach the other person (or people) in future?

SKILL
Practise noticing style differences and the strengths and excesses of my own style profile

TOOL
A three-dimensional perspective on conflict (see p2).

KEY INSIGHTS

'Using your style profile you can better understand your strengths and vulnerabilities and your habits and preferences. The more you understand yourself, the better you are able to manage yourself in the world...

By learning about your style, you will better understand that some things seem natural and are easy for you to learn and some things seem foreign and are difficult for you to learn... [Understanding style] helps you accept basic differences between yourself and others; it makes you more tolerant. It helps you plan how best to approach another person...'

The Friendly Style Profile, Susan K. Gilmore, Patrick W. Fraleigh

The Friendly Style Profile:
https://friendlypress.com/the-friendly-style-profile-2.

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HANDLING CONFLICT
Gilmore Fraleigh Style Profile

An Overview of the Four Styles

Accommodating-Harmonising	
PERSONAL PURPOSE	To help others and to see them happy; to have fun; to avoid disapproval or censure.
PACE AND INTENSITY	Quick and responsive, low intensity.
STRENGTHS	• Sees others' point of view. • Can subordinate own preferences to resolve conflict. • Will spend time to find win/win solution to problems. • Very flexible and adaptable. • Light touch and sense of humour; avoids situation getting overly serious. • Puts people before task. • Genuinely pleased when others are happy. • Quick to forgive and forget.
EXCESSES	• Loses track of personal goals in deference to others. • Avoids conflict at all costs. • Says 'Yes' when means 'No' to get pressure off. • Is wishy-washy, unreliable and inconsistent. • Can be silly or inappropriate. • Can lose track of the task and fail to meet deadlines.

Analysing-Preserving	
PERSONAL PURPOSE	To be safe and certain; to avoid foolishness and failure on the road to success.
PACE AND INTENSITY	Slow and steady, low intensity.
STRENGTHS	• Willing to pore over the detail before taking action. • Knows value of tried and tested methods. • Won't get caught up in impractical scheme. • Completes on time and keeps track of time. • Will forego expression of own feelings for sake of progress. • Rarely confrontational. • Enjoys sorting data.
EXCESSES	• Analysis-paralysis: inflexible and indecisive. • Unwilling to try new things. • Pessimistic and suspicious. • Preoccupied with time. • Overwhelmed by emotionality in others. • Can be cold or aloof. • Can overwhelm others with details.

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HANDLING CONFLICT
Gilmore Fraleigh Style Profile

An Overview of the Four Styles

Achieving-Directing	
PERSONAL PURPOSE	To demonstrate competence; to address challenges, have impact and get things done.
PACE AND INTENSITY	Fast and forceful, high intensity.
STRENGTHS	• Accepts challenges and takes risks. • Source of ideas, options and new possibilities. • Optimistic and forward looking. • Takes the initiative. • High energy and endurance. • Appears capable and wins confidence of others. • Inspires others to perform to a high level. • Expects accountability for results.
EXCESSES	• Tackles non-feasible tasks. • Innovates to avoid boredom. • Unrealistic about limitations of time and resources. • Gets over-extended and over-committed; overworks. • Intimidates others. • Unwilling to delegate. • Manipulates others' loyalty. • Sees end justifying the means.

Affiliating-Perfecting	
PERSONAL PURPOSE	To work hard in the service of a noble cause or respected leader; to improve self, others, the world.
PACE AND INTENSITY	Urgent, high intensity.
STRENGTHS	• Willing to put in extra effort to produce excellence. • Wants to learn from past and to do better next time. • Can challenge if principle or process are not right. • Cooperative and compliant with respected authority. • Empathises, compassionate and understanding of others. • Committed and loyal team player. • Service-minded and selfless.
EXCESSES	• Fault-finding, never satisfied. • Ruminates on flaws / failures. • Can be stubborn, inflexible, and unable to compromise. • Defensive or reactive to negative feedback. • Preoccupied by others' pain. • Disabled by doubts about own skills and experience. • Over-serious, martyred.

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HANDLING CONFLICT
Gilmore Fraleigh Style Profile

Compatible and Contradictory Elements of the Styles

Each style shares aspects which are in common with the other three styles, and other aspects which are at odds with them. It's helpful to understand:

- Within you, how aspects from different styles may be interacting; and
- Between you and someone with a different style, how your styles may be interacting.

Accommodating-Harmonising AND **Analysing-Preserving**

COMPATIBLE ELEMENTS

- Avoid confrontation and conflict.
- Avoid lengthy discussion of deep personal feelings.
- Avoid hostile discussion of strong negative issues.

CONTRADICTORY ELEMENTS

- Warm, friendly, open **vs.**
  Cool, private, reserved.
- Fun-loving, playful, sociable **vs.**
  Serious, quiet, solitary.
- Don't like getting locked into a rigid plan **vs.**
  Have a plan and stick to it.
- Process more important than outcome **vs.**
  Outcome more important than process.

Accommodating-Harmonising AND **Achieving-Directing**

COMPATIBLE ELEMENTS

- Full of ideas and ready to act.
- Optimistic, positive, hopeful.
- Routine and follow-through are boring and unpleasant.

CONTRADICTORY ELEMENTS

- Want to please everyone **vs.**
  Want to get the job done.
- Acquiescent **vs.**
  Assertive.
- Easily distracted **vs.**
  Doggedly determined.

Accommodating-Harmonising AND **Affiliating-Perfecting**

COMPATIBLE ELEMENTS

- Seek affirmation and approval of others.
- Sensitive to feelings of others.
- Prefer not to work in isolation.
- Process more important than outcome.

CONTRADICTORY ELEMENTS

- Minimise problems vs.
  Emphasise problems.
- 'It's not so bad' vs.
  'It's worse than you think'.
- Expedient vs.
  Perfectionist.
- Loyalty to the team vs.
  Loyalty to the leader.

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HANDLING CONFLICT
Gilmore Fraleigh Style Profile

Compatible and Contradictory Elements of the Styles

Analysing-Preserving	AND	Achieving-Directing
COMPATIBLE ELEMENTS		**CONTRADICTORY ELEMENTS**
• Task focussed and results oriented. • Rational-thinking and problem-solving. • Seek concrete evidence of progress towards goals.		• Slow paced **vs.** Fast paced. • Want to limit **vs.** Want to expand. • Cautious and pessimistic **vs.** Risk-taking and optimistic. • One-dimensional **vs.** Multi-dimensional.

Analysing-Preserving	AND	Affiliating-Perfecting
COMPATIBLE ELEMENTS		**CONTRADICTORY ELEMENTS**
• Lengthy data-gathering and analysis prior to decision-making: both are question-askers. • Appreciation of history, context, principles, ideals, expectations attending any issue. • Focus on the weakness, vulnerability and uncertainty of any idea or system. • Ruminative and persistent thinkers.		• Emotional sameness and stability **vs.** Emotional intensity and volatility. • Unaware of personal needs **vs.** Preoccupied with personal needs. • Detached, and keeps own counsel **vs.** Attached, and consults with trusted authority.

Achieving-Directing	AND	Affiliating-Perfecting
COMPATIBLE ELEMENTS		**CONTRADICTORY ELEMENTS**
• Prefer intense, complex stimuli • Often provoke conflict; often lack a mechanism for avoiding confrontation. • Passionate commitment to people, ideas and projects. • Energy and enthusiasm.		• Prefer to lead and monitor **vs.** Prefer to be led and monitored. • Hard and unfeeling **vs.** Wear heart on one's sleeve. • Task and outcome focussed **vs.** People and process focussed.

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HANDLING CONFLICT
Gilmore Fraleigh Style Profile

Bringing out the best in others' styles

Accommodating-Harmonising

For getting the best out of someone with an **Accommodating-Harmonising** style, here is advice that person might give you:

- Be personable and friendly with me before focussing on tasks to be done or problems to resolve.
- Affirm my strengths, especially if sharing criticism – sandwich concerns with praise or positive acknowledgement of what I do and who I am.
- Send a clear message that you value my perspective (especially if different from yours), and enquire about my preferences.
- If you're skilled, use a light touch of humour to draw me back from excess.
- Offer help in areas that I may find difficult, or my potential excess, such as:
  - ⇒ Timing, deadlines, and focus.
  - ⇒ Conflict and confrontation.
  - ⇒ Inappropriate humour.
- Provide reassurance and state clearly if you want to hear a different view from your own, or 'bad' news.

Analysing-Preserving

For getting the best out of someone with an **Analysing-Preserving** style, here is advice that person might give you:

- Avoid surprising or pressuring me, and use a two-step process:
  1. Provide the context and background information.
  2. Give me time before seeking a decision.
- Aim to have lots of information available to answer my questions if you want me to accept your proposal.
- Be prepared to let me explore "worst-case scenarios" and fall-back options, and to want to consider what will be done to avoid problems occurring.
- Receive my questioning as information-gathering, rather than indicating any disapproval or distrust.
- Respect my emotional reserve as a basis for my stability and reliability; don't see it as any lack of concern on my part.
- Focus on tasks to complete; avoid pressing me for information on my emotions or personal matters.

Achieving-Directing

For getting the best out of someone with an **Achieving-Directing** style, here is advice that person might give you:

- Be clear in explaining your own purposes, and check my readiness to receive feedback.
- Respond promptly and clearly, even forcefully. If you feel rushed, be direct and let me know that you think the matter merits more time to process, or that you need me to slow down.
- Affirm what you value about my position, then clarify where you differ. Don't be worried about disagreeing with me.
- If you sense that you're not being listened to, try to:
  1. Summarise my position to show that you understand it
  2. Explain that you would like to be heard as well, when I am ready to listen.
- Continue to stand firm in confronting me and see the matter through. Redirect me by stating your purpose and paraphrasing my view.

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HANDLING CONFLICT
Gilmore Fraleigh Style Profile

Bringing out the best in others' styles

Affiliating-Perfecting	
For getting the best out of someone with an **Affiliating-Perfecting** style, here is advice that person might give you:	• Try to cope with, and accept , expressions of my intense negative feelings and my confusion and anxiety. • Understand that as a strong ethical person I can feel overwhelmed and inadequate at times. • Be prepared to listen to me for as long as it takes, but gently set clear boundaries if needed, particularly if I seem stuck in ruminating/obsessing. • Recognise that I may take time to process and understand my own strong feelings, and don't press for information too quickly. • Own up to your own shortcomings or flaws, which will help me get mine in perspective. Laugh at yourself, but not at me! • Affirm the significance and value of my concerns. Reassure and listen– but avoid arguing and debating, otherwise I'll think you're trying to minimise my concerns.

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HANDLING CONFLICT
3. Getting Below the Surface of a Conflict

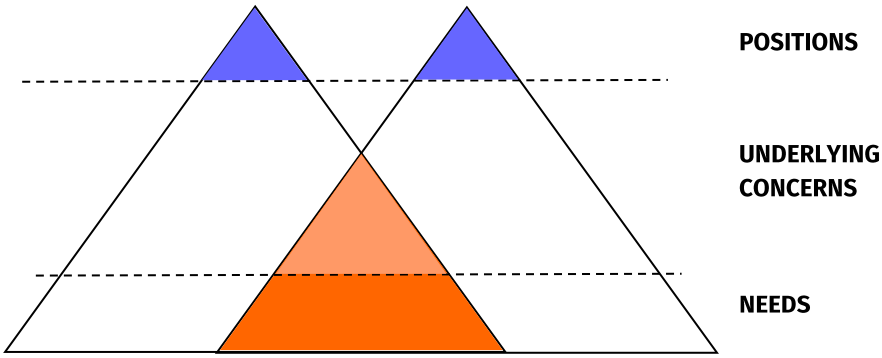
Addressing Entrenched Positions in Conflict

TOOL A map of what lies 'underground'.

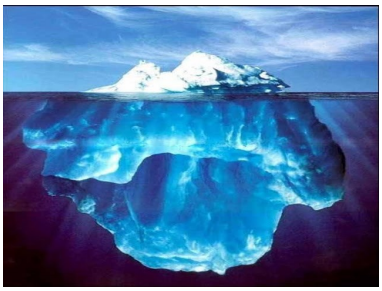
People often view a conflict only in terms of competing demands ('positions'). One way of getting things unstuck is to change the focus of attention. In circumstances where there is an obvious presenting issue, it is often possible to find a way forward by exploring *why* positions are being adopted, and thus to 'dig down' to the level of underlying concerns and basic needs.

SKILL Drawing out the *underlying concerns*.

Searching for Common Ground



KEY INSIGHTS



Let each of you look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.
Philippians 2:4

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HANDLING CONFLICT
3. Getting Below the Surface of a Conflict

Holy Trinity Church: A Case Study in Church Conflict

The church is just off the High Street. The church car park is in front of the church, when full it can hold 20 cars. It is a gravel car park, without markings for spaces. To prevent non-church people from parking there the church has a chain across the entrance during the week. There is a notice: 'this is a private car park, please do not park here'. Parking space in the village is at a premium. A few months ago the local Estate Agent approached the church to ask if they could rent car parking space for their three staff who have cars. After making tentative enquiries it seems there are a number of businesses that would be willing to pay for parking spaces.

Andrew and Barbara are both on the Church Council, which will be discussing the idea at the next meeting.

Andrew: I like the idea of letting spaces in our car park during the week. We have an old church building that needs ongoing investment and repairs. We could make good use of the extra income. Parking is at a premium in the village. We could let parking spaces for 6 or 12 months. It would be a great service to the local businesses.

Barbara: I want to keep our car park for our use. There are times in the week when people from church need to park here – the flower team, the choir practice and, of course, funerals. I'm concerned that we wouldn't be able to do funerals with dignity if the car park is full of cars from the village.

Andrew: During the week the church is usually closed with a big empty parking space and a sign telling people they're not welcome. I think opening up the car park will make us look more friendly. People will hear what we've done and think well of us, serving our local community.

Barbara: I worry about the costs we would incur in maintenance and upkeep. The wear and tear would result in extra expense. There aren't any white lines, what would happen if people took up too much space and there wasn't enough room for everyone? Someone would have paid for their space and not be able to use it. There might be complaints.

Andrew: I've been talking to people and we think the people who are against this idea are being small minded and selfish. We think they're being short-sighted. Why can't they see the financial benefits make sense? Why don't they understand that this would build the church's reputation in the village?

Barbara: I've been talking to people and we think the people who are in favour of this idea are irresponsible and reckless. We don't think they've thought this through properly. Why can't they see this could be a drain on our finances? Why can't they see that this could be a cause for complaints and arguments?

- What is the presenting issue? (Try to frame this impartially: 'What to do about X?')
- What position is each party taking on this issue?
- What underlying concerns of each party need to be acknowledged?
- What common ground is there to work with?
- Suggest some ways forward that might build on the common ground and address underlying concerns of all parties.

KEY INSIGHTS

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HANDLING CONFLICT
4. Constructive Communication

Being Less Reactive

Conflicts are fuelled by emotional reactivity, much of it expressed non-verbally. The crucial contribution from a leader is to be a calm presence in the midst of other people's emotional storm. This can help make it possible for them to start communicating more constructively (or at least less destructively).

Typical Forms of Reactive Behaviour

DEFEND ATTACK WITHDRAW

Handling Difficult Conversations

SKILL Listening in a way that demonstrates understanding.

Summarise, using your own words

- Do it face to face.
- Invite and allow the other person to speak.
- Press the pause button.
- Acknowledge strength of feeling.
- Ask 'Is there is anything more?'
- Be cautious in rushing in with your own view.

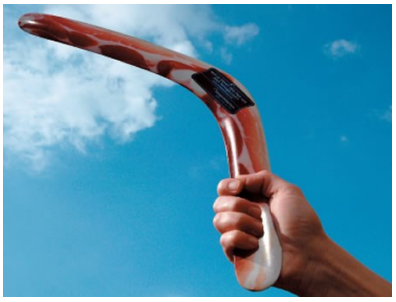
SKILL Confronting in a way that minimises threat.

Use 'I - messages'

- Be clear about your purpose.
- Focus on the impact of actions.
- Maintain emotional contact.

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7



God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

2 Timothy 1:7

Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness.

James 1:19-20

Speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head. ... Putting away falsehood, let us all speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another.

Ephesians 4:15, 25

'Conflicts in the church can seem such a distraction from getting on with the real work; but *this is the real work*. When people come near such a community they will instinctively know how real the relationships are.'

Being Human, Being Church, Robert Warren

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