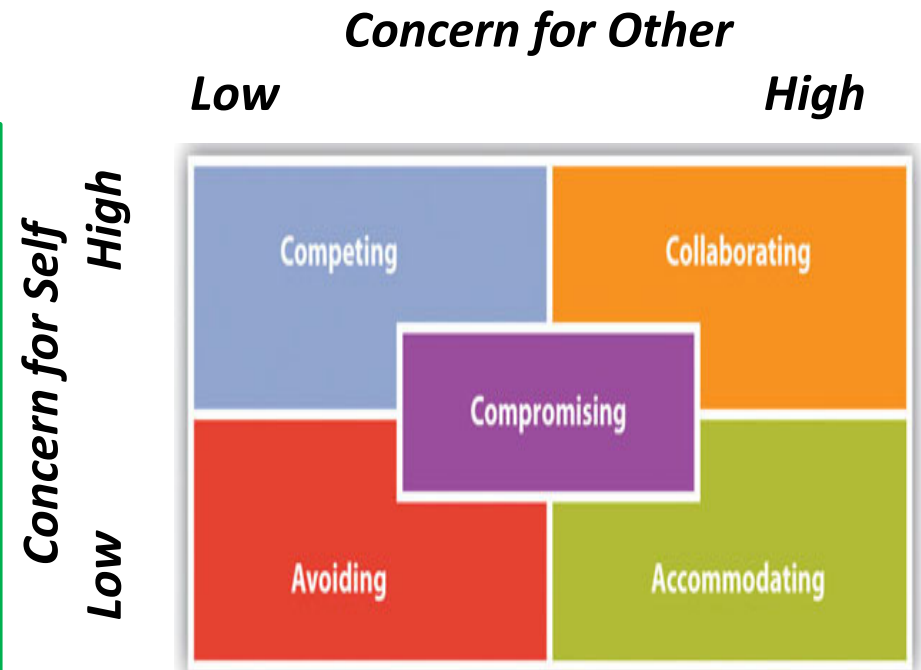# Strategies for Managing Conflict

- Competing: striving to "win" or overpower", take control at someone else's expense
  - non-coercive (suggest, request, persuade)
  - coercive (micro- or macro assertion or aggression)
- Avoiding: without a direct exchange of information, it feels there is no conflict.
  - Sarcasm and passive-aggressive behavior are both avoidance.
  - Use if conflict carries little importance, conflict is short-term, or outcome doesn't matter either way.
- Accommodating: giving in completely.
  - Being generous, b/c we genuinely want to;
  - Obeying, no choice (else negative consequences);
  - Yielding, we may give up our own views or goals due to fatigue, time constraints, or nothing to be gained.
- Compromising: each side gives up some goals
  - when time is short
  - if other solutions did not work
  - when there is equal power in the situation
- Collaborating: mutually beneficial solution arrived at; both sides work together

Concern for Other

	Low	High
High	Competing	Collaborating
		Compromising
Low	Avoiding	Accommodating

Concern for Self

"Remember, you cannot not communicate"

Final two involve the greatest exchange of information = most communication;
Last one takes the most time, satisfies both parties.

Obstacles, Conflicts, and Solutions

babs buttenfield and Laxmi Ramasubramanian

TRELIS Workshop   4-5 June 2022

What this session is about

- Strategies for recognizing and managing conflict
- Setting boundaries, negotiating, and other political survival options
- Being taken seriously in a professional setting
- Consider the language that you use, and others use…

Related Issues

- Responding to workplace bullying, intimidation, or micro-aggression (patterns of behavior that are hard to identify formally but are nonetheless troubling and stressful on the receiving end)

What will we do in this session?

- Preparatory tasks
  - You filled out Conflict Management Styles Assessment tool
  - You read the article "Conflict and Interpersonal Communication"

- Today's activity
  - What constitutes a conflict? What strategies can help to resolve it?
  - Reflect on an example of a conflict or obstacle from your own professional experience, and recall the solutions that you tried

- Tomorrow's activity
  - We will hand out a role-playing scenario
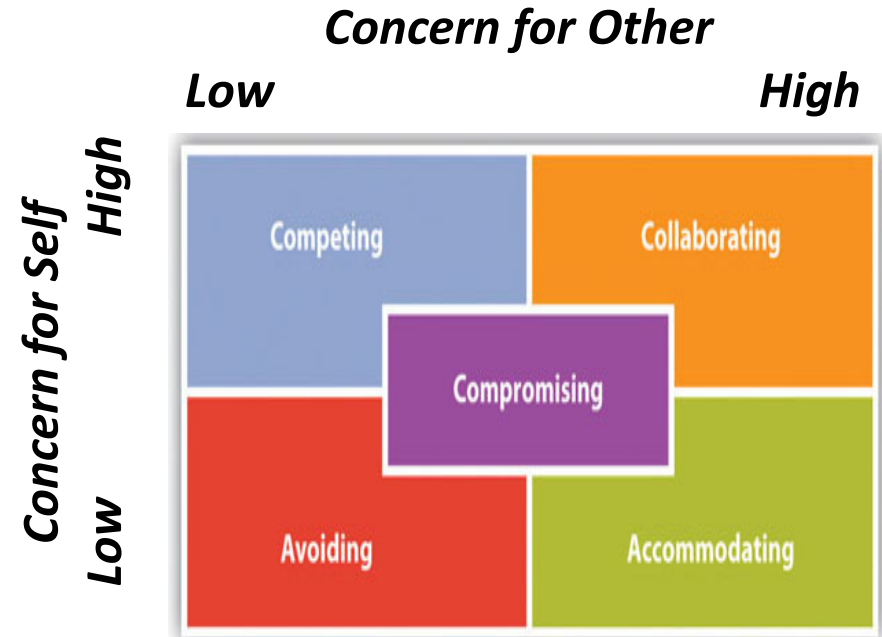 - Try your hand at dealing with a conflict with other workshop members

Managing Interpersonal Conflict

- What is interpersonal conflict?
  - Real or perceived incompatible goals, caused by scarce resources or opposing viewpoints

- Conflict isn't always negative or unproductive
  - Ways that we manage it is learned (so we can "un-learn", too)
  - There is no right or wrong way to do so…
  - When managed well, leads to richer professional / personal relationships

"Every obstacle is the opportunity of a lifetime." (Pema Chodron)

Strategies for Managing Conflict

- **Competing:** striving to "win" or overpower"; non-coercive (suggest, request, persuade) or coercive (micro- or macro assertion or aggression)

- **Avoiding:** without a direct exchange of information it feels there is no conflict. Sarcasm and passive-aggressive behavior are both avoidance. Use if conflict carries little importance, conflict is short-term, or outcome doesn't matter.

- **Accommodating:** giving in completely. When being generous, obeying or yielding
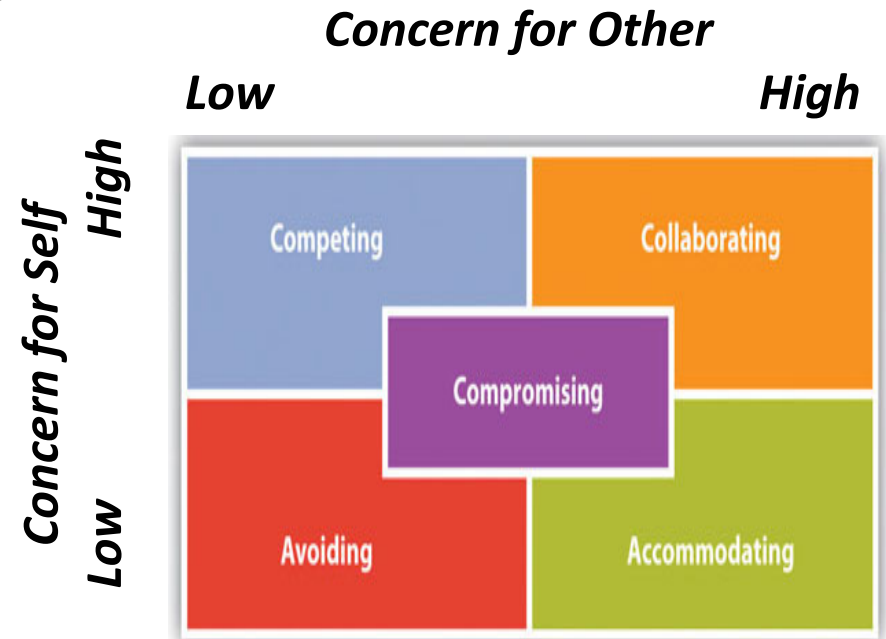
Concern for Other

Low   High

Concern for Self   High   Low

Competing	Collaborating
Compromising	
Avoiding	Accommodating

Strategies for Managing Conflict

- Compromising: giving up some goals, when time is short, if other solutions did not work, or when there is equal power in the situation.

- Collaborating: mutually beneficial solution is arrived at; both sides work together

Concern for Other

Low   *High*

Concern for Self

High

Low

Competing	Collaborating
Avoiding	Accommodating
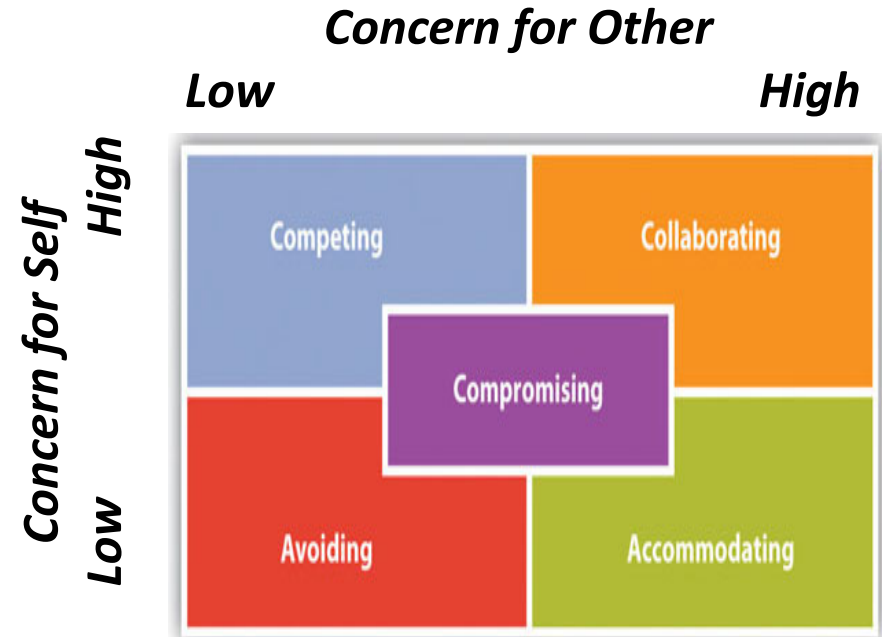
Compromising

Strategies for Managing Conflict

- **Competing:** striving to "win" or overpower"
- **Avoiding:** no exchange of info, no conflict
- **Accommodating:** giving in completely
- **Compromising:** giving up some goals to give other person the "win", often to end the conflict. Consider what you want to achieve.
- **Collaborating:** find shared goals leading to a mutually agreeable solution

Concern for Other

Low   **High**

Concern for Self   **High**   **Low**

Competing	Collaborating
Compromising	
Avoiding	Accommodating

Final two involve the greatest exchange of information; Last one takes the most time, satisfies both parties.

How to Move towards or into Collaboration

- Do not view the conflict as a contest you are trying to win.
- Remain flexible for solutions yet to be discovered.
- Distinguish the people from the problem (don't make it personal).
- Determine what are the underlying needs that are driving the other person's demands. Ask questions to seek clarity!
- Identify areas of common ground or shared interests to work from and develop solutions.
- Listen carefully and provide verbal and nonverbal feedback.

Cultural differences in adopting these strategies

- Self vs. other: individualistic and collectivist cultures
  - In some cultures, there is respect in allowing the other person to 'win', that is, in prioritizing the collective group goal, honoring an elder, or acquiescing to someone with greater experience.

  - Prioritizing interdependence rather than independence

  - Culture always adds layers of complexity to any communication phenomenon. Experiencing and learning from other cultures also enriches our lives and makes us more competent communicators.

2022 Summary of Participant Responses (Individual Questions)

Responses w/ highest average scores

- Avoidance Being at odds with someone makes me uncomfortable and anxious (highest average score)
- Accommodating (tied for 2nd highest)
  - I try to meet the expectations of others
  - I accommodate the wishes of my friends and family
- Collaborating (tied for 3rd highest score)
  - I explore issues with others to find solutions that meet everyone's needs
  - I gather information and keep lines of communication open
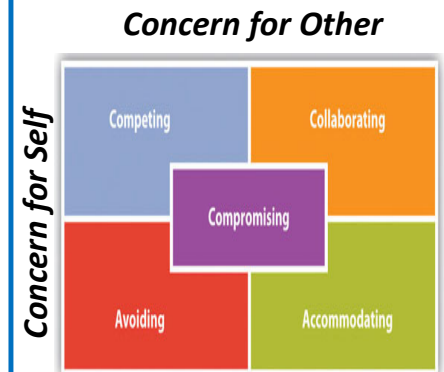
Responses w/ lowest average scores

- Competing
  - Conflicts are exhilarating; I enjoy the battle of wits (lowest score)
  - I insist on merits of my own point of view (2nd lowest)
  - I am usually right (4th lowest)
- Avoiding
  - In conflicts I say little and leave as quickly as I can (tied for 3rd lowest)
  - Keep disagreements with others to myself (tied for 4th lowest)
- Collaboration   I try to see conflicts from both sides (tied for 3rd lowest)

Concern for Other

Concern for Self

Competing	Collaborating
Compromising	
Avoiding	Accommodating
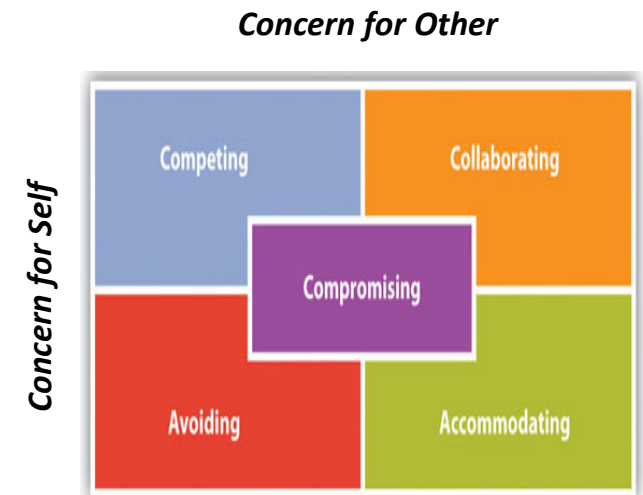
Summary of All Responses (Five Strategies)

	Average (Std Dev)	Participants	Leaders
Competing	1.73 (0.67)	**1.67 (0.66)**	1.81 (0.68)
Avoiding	2.29 (0.97)	**2.43 (1.01)**	2.10 (0.89)
Compromising	2.69 (0.71)	**2.53 (0.78)**	2.90 (0.54)
Collaborating	2.84 (0.67)	**2.60 (0.62)**	3.19 (0.60)
Accommodating	2.65 (0.68)	**2.73 (0.83)**	2.52 (0.68)

*Concern for Other*

Concern for Self

As a cohort, you are willing to try to manage conflicts rather than Compete (great!).

But more often you Accommodate (give up totally) when you could try first to Compromise (give up a little bit) or Collaborate (offer a solution), which would mean you thought through what you want to achieve and what you are willing to give up.

Summary of Responses (Five Strategies)

Scale is 1-5
N = 17

	Average (Std Dev)	Participants	Leaders
Competing	1.73 (0.67)	**1.67 (0.66)**	1.81 (0.68)
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Concern for Other

Concern for Self

Competing	Collaborating
Compromising	
Avoiding	Accommodating
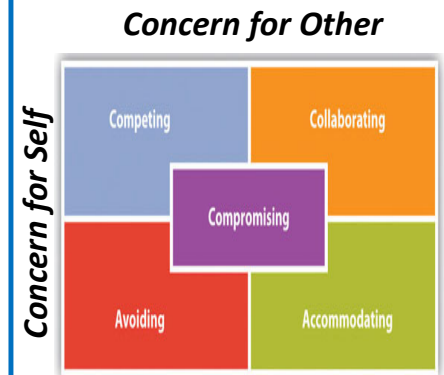
Compromise may be the right strategy when time is short, when prolonging a conflict makes little sense or could damage the relationship, when parties have equal power, when you hold more power, or when other strategies fail.

Collaboration is the better first choice. Communicates investment in the relationship, in the outcome of the conflict situation. It may take the most time, and always requires negotiation.

Let's talk about negotiation skills for a moment.

Sidebar: About Negotiation

- Negotiation means attempting to change conditions within a relationship. It's a mutual agreement, not a manipulation.

- Negotiation stages
  - Pre-negotiation: prepare for the encounter – what are your goals and theirs?
  - Initiation: set a tone for discussion – the other person will likely reciprocate
  - Exploration: exchange information (ask questions, listen actively)
  - Bargaining: offer multiple proposals (be flexible, respect others' goals)
  - Settlement: decide with each other on one proposal and record the decisions made (and any related concessions)
  - No matter what happens, thank the other person for collaborating

Reflections on one conflict or obstacle from your own professional experience, solutions that you tried

• babs' example – scheduling a class to accommodate personal needs

• Laxmi's example – dealing with a male full professor who belittled and intimidated a female associate professor

• Reflect on some conflict in your work experience and how you managed it. What strategies were used by you, by others? Which ones did or did not lead to a solution?

Conflict is inevitable and it is not inherently negative.

Developing interpersonal communication competence involves being able to effectively manage the conflict you will encounter in all your relationships.

One key part of handling conflict better is to notice patterns of conflict in specific relationships = criticism, demand, cumulative annoyance, rejection

Generally have an idea of what causes you to react negatively and what your reactions usually are. Respond rather than react (easier said than done, but it's a good goal to keep in mind.) Take a breath first, then speak.

Scenarios and Role Playing

Three breakout groups of 6 people (4 participants and 1 TRELIS leader). One participant will be a note-taker who takes notes on what happens, and works with the TRELIS leader to summarize a 5 minute report back to the full group.

- For each scenario:
  - Spend 5 minutes choosing who will play each role (4 roles and 1 note-taker)
  - Spend 15 minutes role playing and using negotiation strategies, with one member taking notes about how conflict is being managed. Observers (TRELIS leaders) can answer questions but should not intervene otherwise.
  - Spend 10 minutes sharing personal experiences in the group (was the conflict difficult or easy to handle, was it resolved effectively, which of the five conflict management styles came into play, and which negotiation tactics).
  - Along the way, think about how language was used, and negotiation strategies…

Scenario – Athletic vs. Academic Priorities (~30 minutes)

Scenario: A student athlete is missing class and falling behind on assignments. The professor has talked with the student, who is sincerely worried about their class performance. The professor sets up a meeting with the Athletic Department to discuss how to address the issue and help the student to catch up, miss fewer classes, and possibly to get some tutoring.

Roles:

- The professor: "I want to help but can't work effectively without athletic department cooperation, such as notifying me about planned team activities that lead to the athlete being absent."

- The athletic director: "Why can't faculty simply accept that academics are second priority insofar as athletes are concerned? Is this really an Athletic Department problem?"

- The athletic staff coordinator: "We have lots of funding to pay tutors, so the professor should find a tutor and figure out a way to schedule tutoring sessions around (unannounced) team activities."

- The team coach: "Whatever happens, don't take this student off my (winning) team."

- The note-taker records how the scenario works out. Is the conflict resolved? To whose satisfaction? The note-taker will work with the TRELIS leader (observer) to summarize and then present to the full workshop when groups return to plenary session.

Note-taker should not intervene in the actual role-playing.

The Observer role is to clarify the scenario, facilitate role-playing and <u>keep track of time</u>.

Re-group and De-brief

- (5 minutes) Jot down 1-2 insights from scenarios experience
  - For role-players: What was it like to play a role? Stressful? Close to a similar experience?
  - For note-takers: What was it like to observe a scenario? Did you want to intervene?

- (For each group, note-takers will take ~5 minutes to summarize what happened and offer group members a chance to add comments)
  - What negotiations were used? Were any particularly effective?
  - What impact did you see from communication cues (verbal or non-verbal)?
  - Did any role fit particularly into one of the five conflict handling strategies?
  - Did any one strategy seem to escalate or de-escalate the situation?

- Summary of the activity (5 minutes): Discussion about which strategies were new, and which ones might you try to resolve future obstacles and conflicts.