

# Managing Conflict: APS Leadership Institute Training 2014

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Scientists are recruited and hired for their scientific skills, knowledge, and potential. However, this is really only the tip of the iceberg; under the water line are the values, attitudes, beliefs, traits, character, and motives of this person. These characteristics are overlooked because they aren't immediately visible. Yet it is often these factors that lead to long-term success—and sometimes conflict. Everyone runs into conflict at some point in their professional careers, whether it is with colleagues, supervisors, or employees. As much as we would love to avoid conflict altogether, success in career and relationships often hinges on our ability to work through conflict scenarios constructively.

During the 2014 APS Leadership Institute workshop, 34 attendees learned about conflict management and received insight into how their personality affects their approach to conflict resolution. Each participant received a personalized Everything DiSC Workplace report, a specialized tool that explores values, workplace priorities, decision-making approach, communication style, and temperament. Tools like DiSC and Myers-Brigg Type Indicator (MBTI) are self-assessments designed to group people into categories or styles based on responses to a series of questions. DiSC is a four-quadrant model that describes observable behaviors as follow:

- **Dominance** (*direct, results-oriented, firm, and forceful*)
- **Influence** (*outgoing, enthusiastic, optimistic, and lively*)
- **Steadiness** (*even-tempered, patient, humble, and tactful*)
- **Conscientiousness** (*analytical, reserved, private, and precise*)

While we are a blend of all four styles, most people tend toward the behaviors in one or two styles. Assessments such as DiSC strengthen self-awareness and help us better understand the priorities and behaviors of others who may be different than us. Learning to leverage the strengths of all styles will make you and your team more successful. With a little practice, it's quite possible you can guess the personality types of yourself, your friends, and colleagues using a couple of simple questions.



*Axel Elling and Renee Rioux present an energetic analysis of "I" personalities.*

1. Are you more fast-paced, outspoken, and bold *or* calm, cautious, and reflective?
2. Are you more questioning, skeptical, and task-focused *or* more accepting, warm, and people-focused?

Combining responses to these two simple questions moves you to one of four quadrants.

- Fast-paced and questioning indicates dominance (D)
- Fast-paced and accepting indicates influence (I)
- Calm and accepting indicates steadiness (S)
- Calm and questioning indicates conscientiousness (C)

Workshop attendees also learned how people with their personality types deal with conflict. Not surprisingly, different personality types deal with conflict in different ways. D-type personalities take a very direct approach to conflict. This has advantages, in that you always know what they are thinking and D types are very willing to take on tough issues. I-type personalities are very empathic and good at understanding the feelings of others and providing reassurance. People with S-type personalities are team players and are diplomatic and effective at finding compromise. C types take the analytical approach, preferring to focus on facts and make logical decisions. People with this personality type are good at keeping conflicts from escalating by separating emotion from the situation, focusing on facts and keeping things from becoming personal.

Not surprisingly, each personality type has challenges related to their character that can make conflict resolution difficult. But there are things you can do to help.

- D-type personalities can be particularly direct and tend to emphasize quick resolution. When conflict arises with D styles, be

frank, straight-forward, and concise (get to the point). Be willing to let them know where you stand. Be firm on issues that are important to you.

- I-types may appear to be disorganized, as they might tend to rely on instincts and approaches that keep everyone happy. In the words of one I-type participant, "You can tell I'm 'I' because I wrote before I fully formed the idea." When conflict arises with I styles, be willing to acknowledge both facts and feelings and slow down if it becomes apparent that some people feel their ideas or feelings are being ignored.

- S types can overuse diplomacy and tact to avoid making decisions on difficult issues, as well as being so compromising that they tend to easily surrender their point of view. One participant described herself as "overly accommodating—if you think so!" When conflict arises with S styles, listen carefully, state your views in clear but diplomatic terms, show flexibility, and allow time for reflection.
- C types can be very analytical, with a need for accuracy that can be perceived as critical. Their thoroughness requires that they are provided sufficient time to thoroughly compile data and complete objectives. When conflict arises with C styles, focus on the facts, be willing to explore underlying issues (the current conflict may be a symptom of something deeper), and remain objective even if things get tense.

Understanding your style allows you to recognize how you might appear to others and even prevent some conflicts from occurring or escalating. During one group exercise, a participant who scored a DC (a combination of D and C personalities) made the comment "I'm not angry, I'm focused." Her comment resulted in general laughter—another great way to defuse conflict. Bottom line, conflict can be managed and having an idea what your personality type is (as well as the personality types of the other people in the conflict) can help leverage conflict into an opportunity. Workshop attendees learned that using a balanced approach that draws upon the strengths of all four personality types is really the best approach.

*(Special thanks to Erika Saalau Rojas, Renee Rioux, Chris Wallis, Gerald Holmes, and Leah Granke for contributing to this article.)* ■