

PRODUCTIVE CONFLICT



ASSESSMENT TO ACTION.

BETA

Bradley Brown

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WILEY

EASING IN: INTRODUCTION

What is conflict?

Bradley, when you think of workplace conflict, what comes to mind? Arguing? Compromise? Do you think of gossiping and hurt feelings? Solutions and colleagues taking ownership for mistakes? Most likely, there are numerous things you think of when imagining conflict.

Conflict is a natural and inevitable part of human relationships, including those within the workplace. Whether it involves negative and unhealthy behaviors or positive and productive ones, it can be very uncomfortable.

Conflict can look very different. It can...

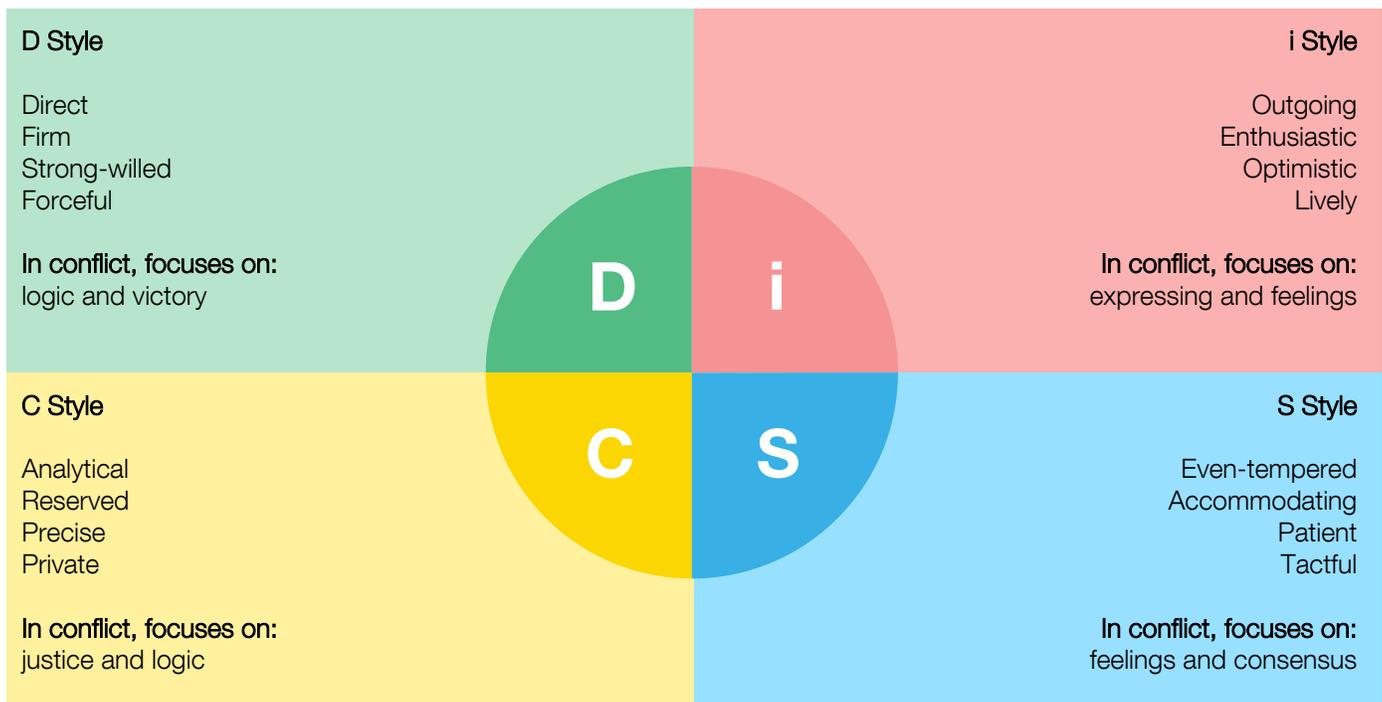
- involve different opinions between people
- stem from varying perspectives and styles
- arise from and result in strong emotions

Everything DiSC® Productive Conflict is a tool to improve self-awareness around conflict behaviors. It's designed to help you curb destructive behaviors so that conflict can become more productive, improving your workplace results and relationships.

Cornerstone Principles

- ▶ Conflict is an **inevitable** part of workplace relationships, and it can also be **productive**.
- ▶ Your conflict interactions may be influenced by **other factors**: hierarchy, culture (organizational or social), business atmosphere, etc.
- ▶ How you respond to conflict situations is entirely **in your own control**. You cannot control how others respond to conflict.
- ▶ Learning about other people's DiSC® styles can help you **understand their conflict behaviors** and how they may differ from your own.
- ▶ You can have **productive conflict** by using DiSC to more effectively engage with others.

DiSC® can influence behavior in conflict



Your CS style in conflict

Bradley, as someone with the CS style, you probably have a fairly high need for stability in your life. And since you tend to be diplomatic, you likely remain even-tempered in stressful situations. Some may find you to be overly cautious, but for you, this is likely a reflection of your desire for harmony and accuracy. These qualities not only influence how you approach your work, but also how you respond in conflict situations.

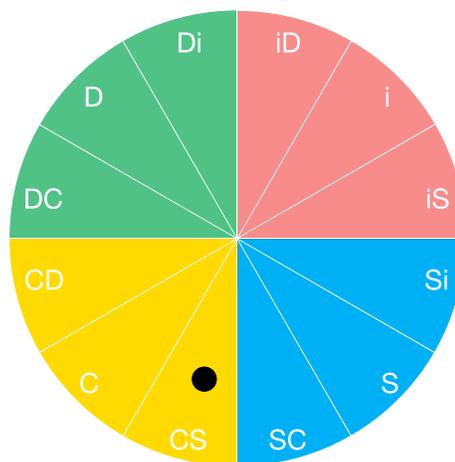
Most likely, you are motivated to keep your world orderly, finding satisfaction when there is steadiness in your work. Since conflict is anything but predictable, you probably do your best to avoid it. In an effort to keep the peace, you may tend to be tactful, think carefully before you speak, and try to appease others. However, this might lead you to withdraw or cave in when others challenge you.

Bradley, one of your most valuable contributions to the workplace may be that you take a reliable approach to your work. This may mean that you take the long way around to avoid potentially contentious situations by, for example, securing resources independently, working in the background to avoid drawing attention to yourself, or practicing the best way to ask someone for what you need. It may upset you when others aren't as courteous or dependable as you work so hard to be. However, since you aren't one to rock the boat or draw attention to yourself, you'll likely carry around your resentment rather than discuss your concerns.

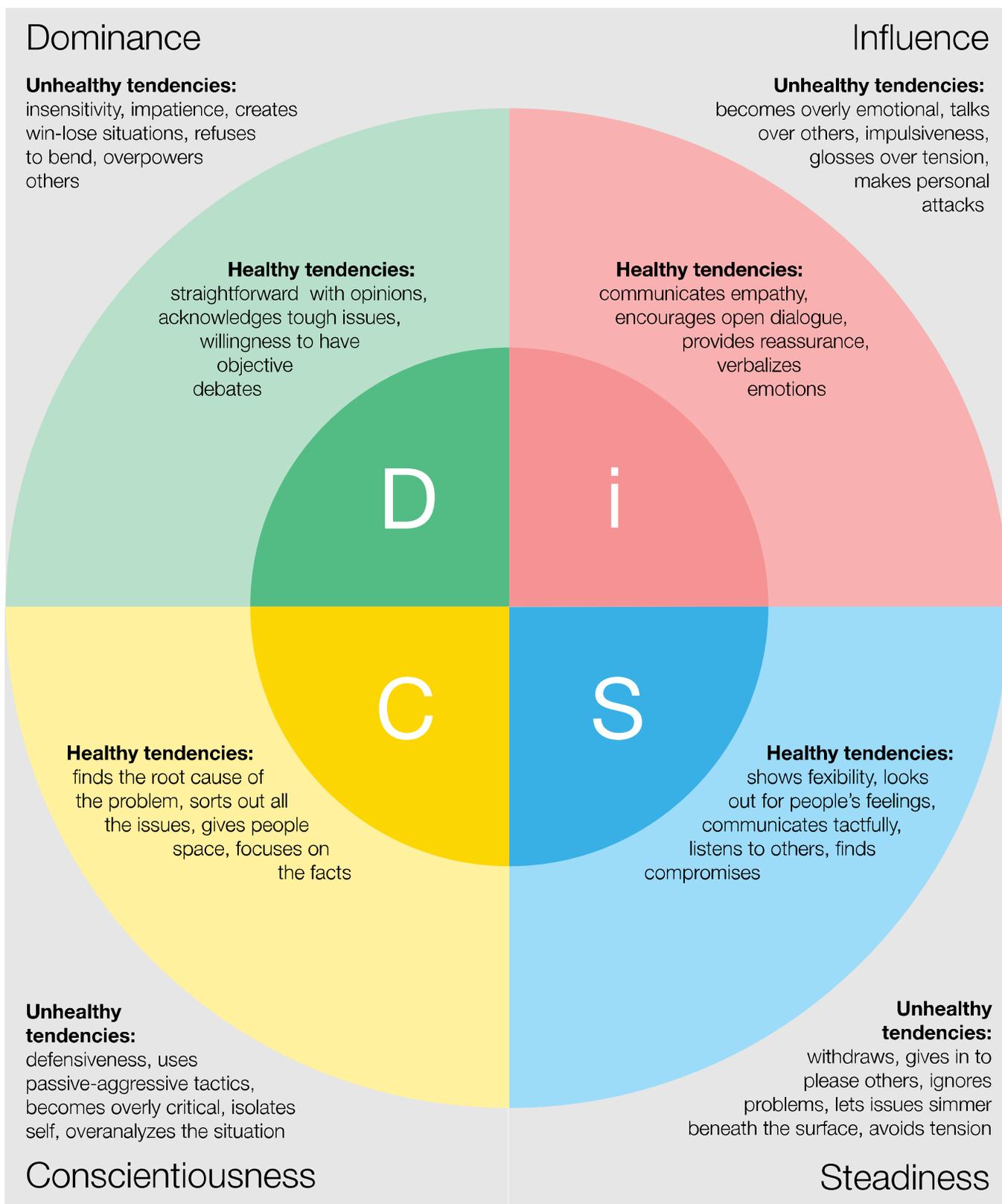
Like many other people with the CS style, when conflict does erupt, you may find the actual experience of it to be a bit overwhelming. And so, in the moment, you may find yourself tempted to freeze up, pull inward, and silently wait for the storm to pass. You may give off small external cues like nodding or short responses, but in this mode, the strategy is to simply shut out the outside world until everything returns to normal. After the fact, however, you may be frustrated that your side of the story never really got aired, and over time, this may be the source of certain resentments.

Also keep in mind how difficult it may be for other people to figure out where you stand during a conflict. They may completely underestimate how upset you are or how much turmoil is actually going on beneath the surface. Subtle acts of passive-aggression may be particularly tempting in these times because they allow someone to act on their anger without directly instigating a conflict. But just as likely, you may simply be willing to let things go for the sake of regaining harmony. Sometimes this can mean caving in. Other times, it means withdrawing from the situation. But because you tend to be so naturally humble, you may have an easier time than others taking your ego out of the equation.

While conflict can be uncomfortable and unwanted, it can help solve problems, as long as everyone feels heard and issues are resolved in a healthy way. When used constructively, your diplomatic approach, focus on stability, and tactful communication style can be great assets in resolving conflict. Ultimately, everyone can benefit from having valuable and necessary challenging conversations.



EASING IN: DiSC® AND CONFLICT



PERSONALIZATION: DESTRUCTIVE RESPONSES

People respond to conflict in different ways, and, sometimes, these responses can be more harmful than good. For most of us, conflict situations are threatening, which may lead to responses that are instinctual and defensive. It's our instinct to protect ourselves, leading to some knee-jerk responses that we may not even think about, and some that we may later regret. **You can learn more about these destructive responses in the appendix.**

In the left-hand set of boxes, put in an **X** next to the three behaviors **others** do that bother you the most in conflict. In the right-hand set of boxes, put in a **checkmark** next to the three behaviors **you** do most often in conflict.

	X Others	✓ Me		X Others	✓ Me
Arguing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Gossiping/ complaining about someone	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Belittling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Becoming hypercritical	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Caving in	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Overpowering	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Defensiveness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Passive-aggression	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dismissing others' opinions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Revenge/looking to even the score	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Becoming overly dramatic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Sabotage/ introducing obstacles	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Exaggerating the problem	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Sarcasm	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Exclusion/ leaving people out	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Stonewalling/ becoming non-receptive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Finger-pointing/ blaming/scapegoating	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Withdrawing/ clamming up	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

PERSONALIZATION: PRODUCTIVE BEHAVIORS

Not all responses to conflict are bad or destructive. The best responses to conflict are productive, inciting conversations that need to be had. Conflict is an opportunity to solve a problem that needs solving, and when teams can have productive conflict, it will ultimately lead to better results.

In the left-hand set of boxes, put in an **X** next to the three behaviors **others** do in conflict that you appreciate most. In the right-hand set of boxes, put in a **checkmark** next to the three productive behaviors that you do most often.

	X Others	✓ Me		X Others	✓ Me
Apologizing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Finding compromise	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Determining the root of the problem	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Stepping back to reflect	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Separating emotions from facts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Communicating openly and honestly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Taking ownership of your contributions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Avoiding the placement of blame	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Acknowledging others' feelings/emotions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Bring in a neutral perspective	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communicating respectfully	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Seeking active resolution	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Introspecting/being aware of your own feelings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Listening to other perspectives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Giving reassurance that the relationship is okay	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Showing flexibility	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Revisiting the issue if it hasn't been fully resolved	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Giving people time and space if needed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

DEEPER DIVE: OVERVIEW

Before you change the way you handle conflict, it may help to understand the framework around it. How we participate in conflict involves both our external and our internal thought process.



Responding to conflict: we either **Engage** or **Restrain**

It's important to remember that one of these isn't better than the other. There is a healthy way to engage and an unhealthy way to engage. This is the same when it comes to restraint. Ideally, there is a balance of both based on the context of the conflict.

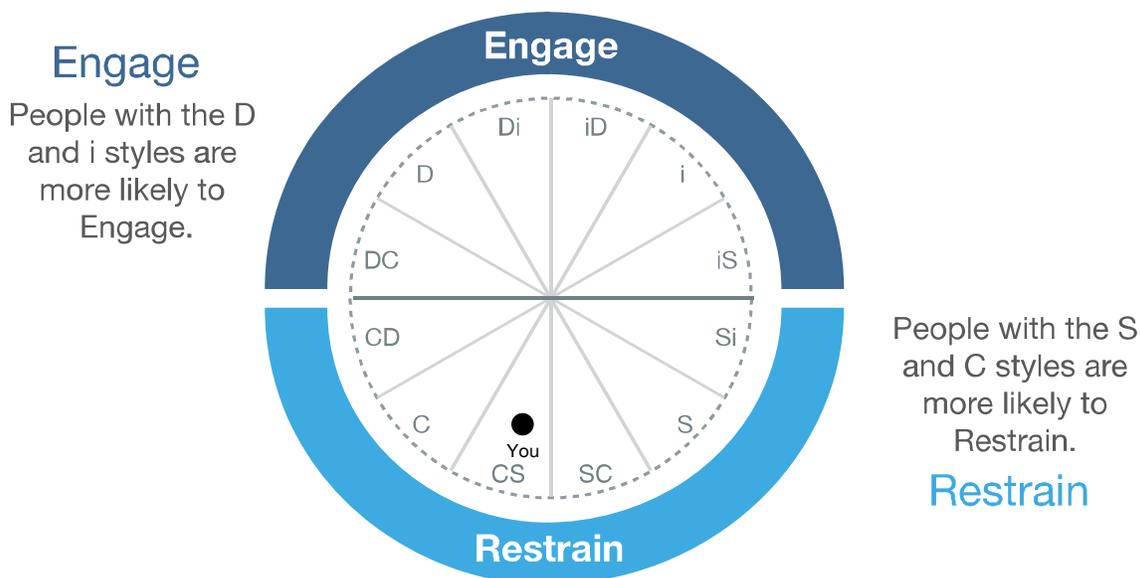
For example, becoming hypercritical and arguing are unhealthy ways to engage in conflict. It's also not productive to withdraw from the conflict or become non-receptive.

Productive conflict *does* call for a respectful level of engagement, having a calm, objective dialogue that will help solve problems. But it's also knowing when to exercise restraint, to hold back strong emotions or let the dust settle before diving in to a necessary discussion.

Processing conflict internally

On the inside, most of us initially perceive conflict as a threat, putting us on the defensive. It's easy in the heat of the moment to vilify your opponent or assume the worst. But this will only lead to damaging interactions or hidden resentment. That's why it's important to step back and think objectively about the situation, labeling your own emotions and also truly considering the other point of view.

DEEPER DIVE: YOUR CS STYLE



Do you Engage or Restrain?

Bradley, because you have the CS style, you tend to exercise restraint in most conflict situations by presenting your opinions in a clear and logical manner, avoiding exaggeration or emotional displays. And because you usually focus on the facts, you tend to keep the discussion grounded when going over different viewpoints. Furthermore, you likely strive for harmony and compromise in conflict situations, so you may often help facilitate a meeting of the minds.

At times, when you seek clarity from others about their opinions, they may feel compelled to defend their positions with logic. If their response becomes cuttingly blunt or the situation grows heated, you may become anxious or withdraw. In fact, you may find it distasteful when others engage in conflict headfirst, with no censorship of what they say or attention to who they may offend. You see the benefit in stepping back to give everyone space to gather their thoughts, and you tread carefully so things don't escalate. However, if you step too far back for too long, the conflict may seem to dissipate but remain festering in the background.

How do you Process conflict?

Bradley, in conflict, you probably exercise a lot of discipline to keep your reactions as moderate as possible. You try not to dive into extremes and take a very slow, steady approach to sorting out your feelings and options in the situation. That being said, however, your internal reactions tend to be much more intense than your external ones. Like everyone, you have times when you're really frustrated or angry, but you also have a very core desire for stability in your life. Balancing these two needs can feel extremely unsatisfying because acting on one is usually at the cost of the other. But because you tend to be disciplined, you're more likely to choose stability than gratifying intense emotions in the moment.

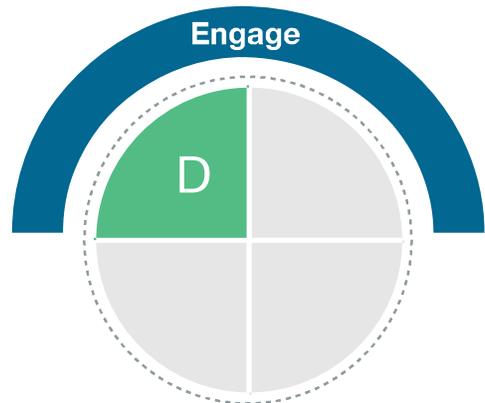
DEEPER DIVE: ADAPTING TO DiSC®

The D style tends to Engage

Unlike you, your “D” coworkers tend to engage during conflict. They’re usually quite blunt, saying exactly what’s on their minds, while you tend to exercise restraint. Most likely, it’s more difficult for you than it is for them to confront tough issues directly, especially if you sense that this will cause them to react with heightened emotions. Further, they’re also much more likely than you to dig in their heels and show absolute confidence in their position.

Tips for productive conflict with the D style:

- Remember that a serious difficulty will rarely clear up on its own.
- Speak directly about how you see the facts of the situation.
- Don’t withdraw from the situation when controversial issues arise.



How does the D style process conflict?

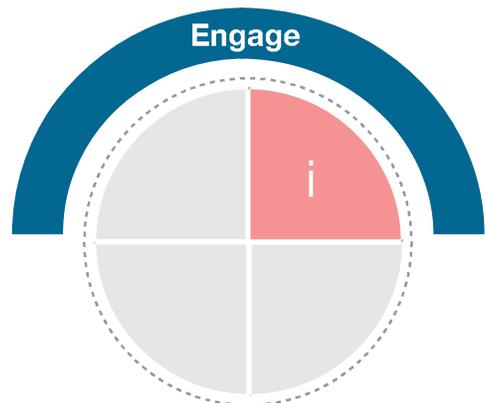
Those with the D style tend to **process** information on the spot, often “thinking out loud.” But whereas you tend to see conflicts as a threat to interpersonal stability, they’re more likely to see a disagreement as a power struggle. And so, people with the D style often have to quickly sort through a flood of passionate ideas, looking for the one that will be most powerful. You, by comparison, may take much more time to think through your arguments.

The i style tends to Engage

Unlike you, people with the i style tend to engage during conflict and may find it natural to openly express their feelings and opinions. You likely prefer to be a stabilizing force when things are chaotic, so you may be hesitant to take the lead on issues or go on at length about your emotions. Further, you are unlikely to encourage them to open up about their feelings. You look for rational ideas to solve problems and may find it awkward if your “i” colleagues need comforting.

Tips for productive conflict with the i style:

- Allow them to express their feelings about the conflict.
- Realize you can comfort them by simply acknowledging their frustration.
- Know that you have to speak up for your opinions to be heard.



How does the i style process conflict?

Those with the i style like to **process** by expressing their thoughts and feelings. Their values and emotions play a big role in how they think about a conflict situation. Along with being empathic, they’re also quite optimistic, sometimes turning a blind eye to unpleasantness or tension. And compared to you, they’re much more likely to think that a discussion about feelings and relationships is just as valid as a discussion about facts and personal rights.

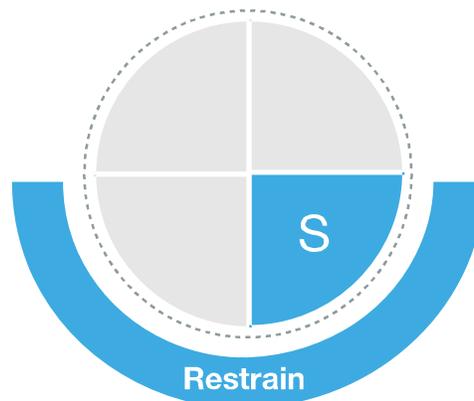
DEEPER DIVE: ADAPTING TO DiSC®

The S style tends to Restrain

Like you, your “S” coworkers tend to restrain in conflict and be agreeable and cooperative. You are likely to look for logical solutions and are willing to support other people if you believe that their ideas are solid and workable. In addition, you are unlikely to get pushy or insensitive, which they will appreciate. Still, you both want to avoid conflict, so neither of you is likely to bring up sensitive issues. While you may often make compromises, deeper, touchier issues may be left ignored.

Tips for productive conflict with the S style:

- Take time to champion your own ideas.
- Don't immediately dismiss ideas that seem illogical.
- Don't withdraw or allow them to withdraw if things get tense.



How does the S style process conflict?

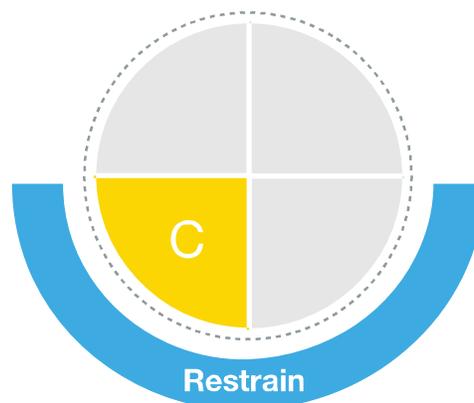
Those with the S style **process** things within. Like you, they don't see themselves as having a lot of control over people or the external world, but they have a firm grasp over their feelings and inner thoughts. What they share is limited and filtered, so the depth and breadth of what they're thinking isn't usually knowable to others. Therefore, you may have differing ideas about whether an issue is resolved, perhaps even hanging on to hidden, but lingering resentment.

The C style tends to Restrain

Like you, people with the C style tend to restrain in conflict. You both value personal space and an emphasis on the facts. Though you don't like to express your feelings, you'll likely take theirs into account and give them the space they need to reflect. While you both look at situations objectively and strive for logical solutions, you may neglect to bring up sticky issues that involve emotions, which could allow resentment or the issue itself to linger.

Tips for productive conflict with the C style:

- Work toward compromise.
- Realize that a solution based upon logic may not always be possible.
- Be sure the issue is fully resolved before moving on.



How does the C style process conflict?

Those with the C style appreciate the opportunity to **process** things internally, which is something you can probably identify with. If they are ensnared in an open-ended disagreement, they'll likely devote time to consider all the angles and details and then revisit the subject when they feel prepared. Their cool demeanor isn't so different from your sense of reserve, but you may still sometimes wonder or worry about what they're thinking and not saying.

CHANGE: PLAN FOR IMPROVEMENT

Step One: Stop the Destructive



Using page 5 as a reference point, list the destructive response to conflict that has caused the most trouble for you:

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Think of a conflict situation from your life that illustrates this behavior and its negative impact. In three or four sentences, describe the situation.

- How did you feel during the conflict? After the conflict?
- How did it affect your relationship?
- Why is this behavior so tempting and/or natural for you?

Step Two: Start the Productive



Using page 6 as a reference point, list one productive behavior you plan to use going forward:

-

Where/How can you develop this behavior? Who can help?

What will be most difficult for you?

Thinking back to your example in step one, how might the situation have turned out differently if you had used this (or another) productive behavior instead of responding in a destructive way?

Arguing



Arguing is unhealthy when it becomes about winning and losing, when the emphasis is no longer on getting at the truth or the best solution. It becomes about protecting our ego and putting other people in their place. And so, like any competition, the “best” strategy is to give up as little ground as possible to your adversary. As a result, any chance for empathy goes out the window. Therefore, in the midst of an argument, one of the most important things we can do is be honest with ourselves about our real motivations. What emotions are fueling me right now? How much is this about winning?

Belittling



By belittling someone, we create a demeaning, one-dimensional caricature of them. Not only does this make it easier to dismiss their opinions, but it can feel extremely satisfying. The power in belittling often comes from putting a label on someone that sums up all of the negative attributes we want to call out. It channels all of the frustrations we have into a single powerful word. And once that succinct label is out there, we can use it to easily dismiss anything else the person has to say.

Caving in



Caving in can be particularly tempting because it often feels like the absolute quickest way to end a disagreement. Even though it typically means sacrificing our legitimate rights, the pain of being in a conflict can be so excruciating that we take immediate shelter in this option. Of course, this short-term gain is often at the expense of long-term satisfaction and can eventually create very unbalanced, unhealthy power dynamics within a relationship.

Defensiveness



When we trust that things will be okay no matter what the outcome of the conflict, there’s no reason to be defensive. We can be open to different opinions. On the other hand, at the heart of defensiveness is insecurity. We don’t want to admit failure or weakness or inappropriateness. When our brain is telling us that the stakes are incredibly high, we cover up any vulnerabilities or weaknesses. And even when we recognize our defensiveness, it can still be difficult to ask ourselves what, beneath it all, we are *really* afraid of.

Dismissing opinions



Dismissing opinions is a blocking strategy to win an argument, but is also a common way to protect our ego. We do this when we’re scared of the thoughts or views expressed by another person. We are afraid to give them space to paint a picture that we don’t like. And because we feel challenged, insecure, and fearful, we adopt the strategy of overriding the other person. We exude absolute certainty in our position and effectively relieve ourselves from any obligation to hear the other side of the story. And by making the conversation as one-sided as possible, we feel empowered and righteous.

Drama



On the surface, melodrama may seem like a simple inability to reign in one's emotions, but this behavior is not always about yelling or acting out. In essence, when we create drama, we are drawing attention to a situation that is troubling for us. This attention validates that the dilemma is, in fact, extremely important and that the injustice that's been done to us is, in fact, extremely unjust. Creating drama can also produce a feeling of control in a situation where we otherwise feel powerless.

Exaggerating



Sometimes a minor offense can still make us extremely upset. In fact, sometimes it's tough to justify the intensity of our emotions given the actual situation. Exaggeration is a way of making a situation sound as bad as it feels. Exaggeration is also empowering. It makes our case seem that much more powerful and defensible because it makes the other person's behavior seem that much more awful.

Exclusion



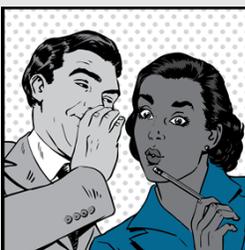
During a conflict, it's not uncommon to exclude someone because we simply don't want to spend time with them. But even if we don't want to admit it, exclusion is also a means to emotionally hurt the other person and an attempt to damage their connection to other people in the group. By disrupting their standing in the group, we gain support for our side of the story. We can shape how people perceive the conflict. Further, we're most likely to use this strategy if we have greater social status than the other person.

Finger-pointing



Finger pointing feels like a very aggressive behavior, but it usually stems from defensiveness. We're diverting attention away from our own shortcoming or failure by pointing it out in someone else. Often, we'll home in on one particular action of the other person that contributed to a problem. The goal is to make this action seem as awful as possible, to make it seem like this action is, in fact, the *heart* of the problem. As a result, our contributions don't seem nearly as bad. By shifting the blame, we've saved our reputation in the short-term, but may have also unwittingly damaged our reputation for integrity.

Gossiping



Gossiping can feel good for a lot of reasons. First of all, venting our frustrations can be cathartic. And because we tend to gossip with people we trust, they usually validate our opinion. Not to mention, it can be deeply satisfying to tear down someone who has hurt us. But gossip is also about power. It helps rally people to our side. We get our perspective out into the world first and most convincingly. And, for people who are insecure about their status in the organization, gossiping can create a perceived sense of authority as co-workers turn to them for inside knowledge.

Hypercriticism



Hypercriticism is an indirect strategy we use to get back at someone. We decide that we'll make a point of objecting to as much about the person as possible. We shoot down their suggestions. We find holes in their logic. We scrutinize their output for mistakes. Basically, we try to punish the person. It's a strategy that's particularly appealing when we recognize that the thing we're *actually* mad about is a little on the petty side. We know we can't complain about it directly. And so, becoming hypercritical is a way of acting on our anger without having to admit that we're really angry.

Overpowering



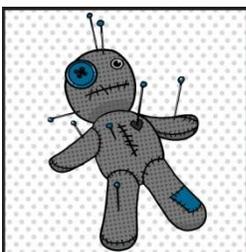
Overpowering involves drawing on all the sources of power at our disposal to defeat someone during a conflict. Sometimes that power is social or organizational authority, but sometimes it's simply using the force of a strong, vocal personality. Overpowering deliberately keeps others off balance and attempts to eliminate the possibility of a fair, even-handed discussion. In this regard, domineering behavior overrides logic, objectivity, and personal rights when resolving a dispute. This strategy is particularly tempting when we are overcome by a strong, almost primal, urge to "win" the conflict.

Passive-aggression



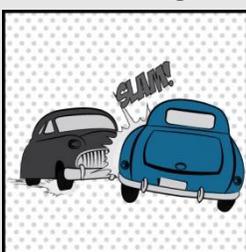
We can all think of occasions when we desperately wanted to express anger at someone, but didn't want a full-scale conflict. Passive-aggression can feel like the perfect solution. We get to subtly punish someone—enough that they notice, but not so much that they can call us on it. Its many forms (e.g., ignoring, eye-rolling, nit-picking) make it endlessly flexible. Sometimes the goal is to bother someone enough that they initiate the confrontation, at which point we have an invitation to let loose on them. But whatever the end goal, we may take more satisfaction from it than we care to admit.

Revenge



Revenge in the workplace is usually fairly subtle, but we do it to restore justice and/or reassert ourselves. And even though taking revenge is technically an external action, it's usually the end result of some pretty deep internal rumination. We stew over being hurt or mistreated, and fantasizing about getting even can feel good—even if we don't like to admit it. Of course, acting on those fantasies takes things to a whole different level. Most of us recognize that overt revenge won't be tolerated, but this still leaves plenty of creative, backhanded, and petty ways to inflict damage on someone.

Sabotage



Sabotage is about making sure someone else fails. It can be social in nature (e.g., lying, spreading rumors) or can actually involve physical tampering. Sometimes we choose this extreme path when we lack the power to truly confront the other person and sometimes it's simply because we want to express our anger without a direct clash. Either way, there is usually a satisfaction in seeing the other person fail. Ultimately, sabotage usually requires us to suspend our normal understanding of right and wrong so that we can rationalize a behavior that, under normal circumstances, we would find reprehensible.

Sarcasm



In conflict, sarcasm is a close cousin of passive-aggression. It allows us to take a shot at someone or express our hostility without being too obvious about our real motivations. It's for when we're not quite committed enough to yell at someone, but still want to take them down a peg or two. And sarcasm is such a tempting tool in the midst of conflict because we can always claim that "I'm just joking... seriously, lighten up." We feel like the "just kidding" excuse gives us immunity after subtly attacking or demeaning someone.

Stonewalling



When we stonewall, we make it clear to the other person that communication is completely shut down. We deliberately let them know that their behavior is so unacceptable that we are unwilling to compromise or even discuss a resolution. And although we may hate to admit it, stonewalling can be gratifying. We get to punish the other person while telling ourselves that our behavior is strong and dignified. And, as a bonus, we don't have to wade through the untidiness of conflict. Therefore, this can become a self-preservation strategy when we feel overwhelmed by a swirl of uncomfortable emotions.

Withdrawing



Not many people actually enjoy conflict, but it is much more painful to some of us than others. We may not even know why conflict is so uncomfortable; we just know that it feels like a whirling jumble of anxiety, anger, insecurity, and danger. Every instinct is urging us to return to stability and safety. Withdrawing or clamming up can provide immediate relief by simply shutting out the emotional messiness. We hunker down and wait for it to pass. Of course, this means we don't get to assert our own side of things, but in the moment, deliberately engaging in a conflict can feel overwhelming.