Conflict at work is certain; however, the result may be influenced by the manner in which the conflict is managed. The manner in which the conflict is managed can cause more tension in the situation rather than the conflict itself. This literature review analyzes five modes to dealing with conflict along two dimensions of behavior: competing (assertive and uncooperative), accommodating (unassertive and cooperative), avoiding (unassertive and uncooperative), compromising (falls into the middle), and collaborating (assertive and cooperative).

In a study, technologists preferred a cooperating conflict management style when feelings have not yet escalated, and a compromising conflict management style after the conflict has become heated. The study also showed education level did not have any effect on their preferred conflict management styles.

The manner in which the conflict is managed typically causes more tension in the situation rather than the conflict itself. Management of conflict is extremely important for the effective functioning of organizations and for the personal, cultural, and social development of human beings. The manner in which the conflict is managed can cause more tension in the situation rather than the conflict itself.

According to Thomas and Kilmann’s MODE instrument there are five modes to dealing with conflict along two dimensions of behavior (see Figure 1). The five modes are: competing (assertive and uncooperative), collaborating (assertive and cooperative), compromising (falls into the middle), and avoiding (unassertive and uncooperative), accommodating (unassertive and cooperative).

In a study, technologists preferred a cooperating conflict management style when feelings have not yet escalated, and a compromising conflict management style after the conflict has become heated. The study also showed education level did not have any effect on their preferred conflict management styles.

The credit earned from the Quick Credit™ test accompanying this article may be applied to the AHA human resources (HR) domain.
authority or influence by the use of open hostility. When dealing with this type of strategy frustration, irritation, or argument may be used; and conflicting parties may be fully removed from the situation by use of authority. The conflict could be temporarily lessened when competing tactics are used, but no final resolution is ever agreed upon. Competitive tactics are a “win-lose” situation, where one individual tries to pressure the other to change.

The Kraybill Conflict Style Inventory refers to competing as a directing conflict management strategy. When the individual uses a directing conflict management style there is a high focus on the agenda (conflict) and a low focus on the relationship with the other party. The directing style has an “I win and you lose” approach. When individuals use this style they more than likely hold some type of power over the other party involved and are able to demand for the conflict to be resolved in their favor. The directing approach is not always a “bad” conflict management style, it can be useful in emergency situations when decisions need to be made fast. When this style is used by a supervisor it gives the employee a sense of stability to know that their supervisor is constant in their decision making.

Collaborating
Collaborating involves finding a solution to the conflicting situation that satisfies both parties. An effort has to be made to actively pursue effective problem solving actions in order that all parties can accomplish equally satisfying results (win-win). In this strategy, individuals seem to be just as concerned with the wants of others as their own; however, they are not willing to give up their own positions to merely soothe the wants of other individuals. Innovative ideas often emerge when people use the collaborative approach to conflict management. When parties must continue to work together after a conflict has occurred, a collaborative conflict management strategy must be used to continue to work
Compromising
A compromising conflict management strategy involves trying to find a “common ground” that partly satisfies both parties. With this strategy, individuals realize that every party cannot always be entirely satisfied in every conflict situation. The parties accept that there are times when one must be ready to set apart individual wants and needs in preference for others in order to find a “common ground.” In Sportsman and Hamilton’s study of nursing and allied health students, the compromising strategy was chosen most closely followed by the collaborating style. Kraybill showed educational level was significantly more prominent when the matters instigating the conflict were of low significance. Other studies have found that nurses tend to choose the compromising conflict management strategy most often. Several studies have found that nurses tend to choose the avoiding conflict management strategy most often. The avoiding conflict management strategy involves neglecting one’s own concerns in order to satisfy the concerns of others. This strategy is regarded as the acceptance that the preservation of pleasant interpersonal affairs is more significant than forming disagreements among colleagues. Individuals adopting an accommodating style of conflict management have a high want for recognition and support from others. The accommodating individual is more apt to take a “middle of the road” attitude when an inescapable conflict emerges. These individuals tend to use apology or humor, or express their desires in an indirect way rather than coming straight to the problem.

Kraybill refers to accommodating as a harmonizing conflict response. The harmonizing style has a low focus on the agenda and a high focus on the relationship. Individuals will often use this style when they want to fit in with the other party. When this style is over-used the individual will eventually become depressed due to the fact of always
giving the other party what they want and always losing what is important to the individual.

**Situational Issues**

According to Sadri, there are four situational issues to consider when choosing the best conflict management strategy: the importance of the issue, the conflict deals with, importance of the relationship with the other party, the power one has in dealing with the issue, and the amount of time in which the issue must be resolved.11 If the relationship is an ongoing one then the importance is high; if the relationship is a one time event due to the conflict or there are alternatives to the person the relationship importance is low. The issue of power in the conflict is determined by who the conflict involves, and can range from high power to low power. For example, a conflict between peers would be of equal power and a conflict between the employee and the supervisor would be of low power. Table 1 describes when the different types of conflict management strategies are best to use by managers.

**Education and Conflict Management Styles**

With the introduction of the CARE bill, individuals will be required to possess a formal education in medical imaging. Over half of all radiology programs in the country reported full enrollment and had to turn an average 39.5 students who are eligible away from the program. This number is only going to rise due to the CARE bill.12 These students might someday become leaders in the field and must know how to effectively manage conflict situations.

Possessing a higher level of education can play a vital role in helping new employees adapt to the uncertainty of organizational life and handle work associated conflict.13 Students benefit from learning conflict management strategies by being able to recognize types of conflict and making the proper communicative answers to the conflict. Conflict management education should be included from the start of the professional socialization course.14 Conflict management strategies are either acquired or taught. When supervisors were taught about conflict management strategies their stress levels decreased significantly because they had the tools (ie, communication skills) to deal with the conflict.15,16

In a study of nurse managers, education level showed to play a part in the conflict management style used by nurses.17 Nurses with master’s degree or a bachelor’s degree with specialized diplomas showed to use a compromising conflict management style. The nurse managers having only a bachelor’s degree with no specialized diploma used an integrating style, and the nurse managers with only a diploma used a dominating conflict management style. Another study of nurses yielded similar results: nurses with a bachelor’s degree were found to be more thinking and less competing, and managers with associate degrees showed to be more competing and more feeling.18 The nurses possessing associate degrees were usually in lower level positions which could make competing essential in their workplaces. Al-Hamdan stated that “knowledge confers power,” and that someone with a lower education level could feel powerless when related to someone with a higher education level (university degree).17 When people are in positions of power and only possess a diploma, they tend to try and accommodate their supervisors and avoid conflict because they have no knowledge of conflict management strategies.

Most people in the healthcare field are taught technical skills for the delivery of healthcare services, but are not formally educated in relationship building skills.19 Relationship building skills are crucial to negotiation, interpersonal communication, and collective problem solving among coworkers. Educators can help prepare students for dealing with conflict by first discussing the different types of conflicts they will most likely face in the work setting.13 Students’ communication strategies for dealing with conflict can be enhanced by educators. Students will be prepared to deal with conflict as an employee when they experience it as a student in a learning environment.

**TABLE 1. Situational Issues for Conflict Management Styles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Issue Importance</th>
<th>Relationship Importance</th>
<th>Time Limits</th>
<th>Power Over Issue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competing</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Equal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Equal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodating</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Survey Methods**

The survey adopted for this project is Style Matters: The Kraybill Conflict Style Inventory, which is divided into two sections: calm and storm. The calm section deals with the respondents’ conflict management style in the beginning of the conflict situation when feelings have not yet escalated. The second section of the survey, storm, deals with the respondents’ conflict management style after the conflict has become heated and gotten stronger. After the responses are
calculated, each respondent will have a preferred conflict management style for the calm and storm settings.

Similar to the conceptual arrangement for methods of managing conflict by Thomas and Kilmann, the Kraybill Conflict Style Inventory also has five styles of responding to conflict on a two-dimensional level (see Figure 1). Where Thomas and Kilmann used competing, collaborating, and accommodating; Kraybill has used directing, cooperating, and harmonizing. The two dimensions Kraybill’s model uses are focus on agenda (assertiveness in Thomas and Kilmann’s model) and focus on relationship (cooperativeness in Thomas and Kilmann’s model).

The study subjects were a sample of radiologic technologists from six local hospitals in the Shreveport and Bossier City areas. A total of 219 technologists were administered the survey electronically.

Results and Discussion

Overall, the technologists that participated in the survey preferred a cooperating conflict management style during the calm setting. The storm setting showed the technologists to prefer a compromising conflict management style. The study also showed the education level of the technologists did not have any effect on their preferred conflict management styles. See Table 3.

The technologists’ preferred conflict management style for the calm setting was cooperating (Table 4). On the Kraybill Conflict Style Inventory scale this relates to having a high focus on the agenda and a high focus on the relationship with the other party involved in the conflict. The cooperating conflict management style is synonymous with the collaborating conflict management style from Thomas and Kilmann. The collaborating style is high on the assertiveness dimension and high on the cooperating dimension. Both cooperating and collaborating have “win-win” outcomes. This conflict management style is appropriate to use when both parties must continue to work together; hence the high focus on relationship.

For the storm setting, the technologists had a more compromising conflict management style (Table 5). This style has a medium focus on the agenda and a medium focus on the relationship with the other party. Thomas and Kilmann also refer to this style as compromising. This style requires for both parties to reach some form of “common ground” where both are partly satisfied. The compromising conflict management strategy can be classified as functional conflict due to the fact that new ideas are created through the resolution process.

The education level of the technologists did not show to have any significant effect on conflict management strategy. The findings of this study are inconsistent with previous studies of nurses that showed the education level does play a role in conflict management style. Most of the technologists from this survey possessed a bachelor’s degree, which could contribute to the findings being insignificant. See Figure 3. However, even though the results were insignificant in education level contributing to conflict management style, the results show that cooperating and compromising were the preferred conflict management style of the technologists. Since most of the technologists from this survey possessed a bachelor’s degree, it would make sense that the overall conflict management strategies were cooperating and compromising. Individuals with a higher education are able to handle work associated conflict more easily. The results from this survey coincide with Al-Hamdan’s

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**TABLE 2. Preferred Conflict Management Style (n=37)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calm</th>
<th>Storm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooperating</td>
<td>Compromising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>Cooperating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmonizing</td>
<td>Harmonizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>Directing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directing</td>
<td>Avoiding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 3. Conflict Management Style by Education Level (n=37)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>Calm</th>
<th>Storm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School or Equivalent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>Directing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>Cooperating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Degree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>Cooperating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Cooperating</td>
<td>Cooperating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Degree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Cooperating</td>
<td>Compromising</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Less than high school was omitted for this table due to no technologists selecting this education level. The calm setting represents the time period before the conflict situation is heated, while the storm setting represents after emotions have gotten high.
A study that showed nurses with a master’s degree or bachelor’s degree used a compromising conflict management strategy; however, Al-Hamdan’s study showed that education level has a significant effect on the conflict management style used.17 Although the different education levels did show different conflict management styles in the both calm and storm settings, they were not statistically significant. One might assume that the cooperating conflict management style is best because of the high focus on the agenda and the relationship, but this is not always true.7 When a person is attempting to cooperate, time is taken away from other tasks that may be more important than the conflict; however, cooperation can build trust between the conflicting parties. The compromising conflict management style is the middle of all of the five styles. This style can be used to resolve conflicts more rapidly and create an emphasis on equality. When the compromising style is used for a conflict that requires more discussion, it can fail because no party gets what they really want. When technologists are educated in conflict management styles, they are able to recognize the situations where cooperating and compromising conflict management styles would fail.

**Significance of Findings**

This study did show that technologists possessing a bachelor’s degree used a cooperating conflict management style in both the calm and storm settings. Cooperating from Kraybill’s Conflict Style Inventory scale is equivalent to collaborating from Thomas and Kilmann’s scale. When individuals use a cooperating conflict management strategy, there is better communication between the two parties because the individuals are trying to work out the problem so both parties can win.8,9 By using a cooperating conflict management style innovative ideas are developed due to the individuals using a collaborative approach to solve the conflict.11 The cooperating style creates functional conflict because the

### Table 4. Calm Frequency (n=37)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooperating</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>54.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmonizing</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5. Storm Frequency (n=37)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooperating</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>62.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmonizing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
results are positive (win-win outcome). By educating radiologic technologist students about conflict management styles they will be able to manage conflict in a functional and constructive way.\textsuperscript{22} When the conflict is over patient care and the cooperating style is used, not only do the opposing parties win, but the patient benefits also.\textsuperscript{23} Cooperating conflict management styles require the problem to be tediously thought out by all conflicting individuals and coming together to mutually agreed upon resolution.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. First was the low response rate. The survey was sent to 219 technologists selected by convenience sampling, but only 41 responded. Of those 41 responses there were only 37 completed surveys. The low response rate could be due to the fact that one of the facilities was undergoing new ownership, and another facility had just gone through Joint Commission inspection. Another limitation of the survey is that over 40% of the respondents held bachelor’s degrees. This data was not spread out evenly among different education levels.

Because of the small sample size the results of this survey cannot be generalized to the entire radiologic technologist population. A larger, random sample should be used in order to generalize the results. By having a larger sample size the education level of the technologists would also be diverse which could lead to more significant findings.

Conclusion

This study did not show education to have a significant effect on the type of conflict management style used by radiologic technologists; however, being educated in the different conflict management styles can only benefit individuals. Learning the different conflict management styles will enable individuals to be flexible in their response to the conflict situation.\textsuperscript{7} Learning the different conflict management strategies will enable others to understand the value and recognize the strengths and weaknesses of each style. There is always a correct conflict management style in different conflict situations.

References

\textsuperscript{12}American Society of Radiologic Technologists. \textit{Enrollment snapshot of radiography, radiation therapy, and nuclear medicine technology programs-2012.} ASRT website. 2013.
\textsuperscript{17}Al-Hamdan Z. Nurse managers, diversity and conflict management. \textit{Diversity in Health and Care.} 2009;6:31–43.
\textsuperscript{19}Femia J. Conflict in the radiology department. \textit{Advance for Imaging & Radiation Oncology.} 2013.
Continuing Education

Conflict Management: A Literature Review and Study

Home-Study Test

1.0 Category A credit • Expiration date 10-31-2016

Carefully read the following multiple choice questions and take the post-test at AHRA's Online Institute (www.ahraonline.org/onlineinstitute)

The credit earned from the Quick Credit™ test accompanying this article may be applied to the CRA human resources (HR) domain.

QUESTIONS

Instructions: Choose the answer that is most correct.

1. The manner in which the conflict is managed typically causes:
   a. Less tension in the situation rather than the conflict itself
   b. More tension in the situation rather than the conflict itself
   c. Is unrelated to situation
   d. None of the above

2. According to Thomas and Kilmann’s MODE instrument, there are:
   a. 10 modes to dealing with conflict along 5 dimensions of behavior
   b. 7 modes to dealing with conflict along 3 dimensions of behavior
   c. 5 modes to dealing with conflict along 2 dimensions of behavior
   d. 2 modes to dealing with conflict along 1 dimension of behavior

3. The avoiding mode is characteristic of:
   a. Assertive and uncooperative
   b. Assertive and cooperative
   c. Falls into the middle
   d. Unassertive and uncooperative

4. Competitive tactics, where one individual tries to pressure the other to change are what type of situation?
   a. Lose-lose
   b. Lose-win
   c. Win-lose
   d. Win-win

5. Innovative ideas often emerge when people use the collaborative approach to conflict management.
   a. True
   b. False
6. The collaborating style is synonymous with which style under the Kraybill Conflict Style Inventory?
   a. Directing
   b. Cooperating
   c. Compromising
   d. Harmonizing

7. In Sportsman and Hamilton’s study of nursing and allied health students, the compromising strategy was:
   a. Chosen most closely followed by avoidance
   b. Chosen equally with accommodating
   c. Chosen second to collaborating
   d. Surprisingly not chosen

8. The compromising type of conflict style can often:
   a. Fully satisfy individuals
   b. Allow each party to get what they want
   c. Lead to problems
   d. None of the above

9. The avoiding strategy is characterized by individuals who are:
   a. Not likely to be self-confident
   b. Fail to pursue support from coworkers
   c. Incapable of taking a strong stand on conflicting issues
   d. All of the above

10. One study describes two types of conflict management strategies:
    a. Agreeable and disagreeable
    b. Acceptable and unacceptable
    c. Satisfying and unsatisfying
    d. Willing and unwilling

11. When the avoiding style is used over a period of time within a department, it can lead to:
    a. Change
    b. Modification
    c. Stagnation
    d. Transformation

12. The harmonizing style has:
    a. Low focus on the agenda and relationship
    b. Low focus on the agenda and a high focus on the relationship
    c. High focus on the agenda and relationship
    d. High focus on the agenda and a low focus on the relationship

13. According to Sadri, how many situational issues should be considered when choosing the best conflict management strategy?
    a. One
    b. Two
    c. Three
    d. Four

14. In Table 1, the style which has a low issue importance, low relationship importance, and low power over issue, but high time limits is:
    a. Accommodating
    b. Avoiding
    c. Compromising
    d. Competing

15. The introduction of which bill requires individuals to possess a formal education in medical imaging?
    a. NURTURE
    b. TREATMENT
    c. CARE
    d. X-RAY

16. Most people in the healthcare field are taught technical skill for the delivery of healthcare services and formally educated in relationship building skills.
    a. True
    b. False

17. Which style(s) of responding to conflict does the Kraybill Conflict Style Inventory used?
    a. Directing
    b. Cooperating
    c. Harmonizing
    d. All of the above

18. For the storm setting, the technologists preferred a:
    a. Cooperating conflict management style
    b. Directing conflict management style
    c. Compromising management style
    d. Avoiding management style

19. Most of the technologists in this study possessed a:
    a. High school equivalent
    b. Associate degree
    c. Bachelor degree
    d. Graduate degree

20. Of the 219 technologists selected by convenience sampling for the survey, how many responded?
    a. 41
    b. 87
    c. 145
    d. 196
"I find one of the most valuable aspects of the IAC CT accreditation process to be the Standards, particularly as they relate to Quality Improvement. Through participation in the required meetings, it is reassuring to see my staff invested in providing quality imaging to our patients. I'd like to think that we would perform QI measures on our own, but I think it's a good thing that the IAC requires it as part of the accreditation process."

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