



# Book Work With Me!

## Resolving Everyday Conflict in Your Organization

Gini Graham Scott  
Davies-Black, 2000

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### Recommendation

Gini Graham Scott presents a model for handling any type of conflict using the ERI - emotions, reasons, and intuition - model. With this model, Scott calls for controlling negative emotions (E) and getting them out of the way. Then, she suggests understanding the reasons (R) for the conflict and the different conflict styles that might be used in dealing with it. The last step is and using the intuition (I) to come up with alternatives to choose the best approach. This book is well written in a clear, easy-to-understand style. The illustrations, charts, and fill-in-the-blank questions are especially helpful in showing how to apply the model in your own organization. *BooksInShort* recommends this book for executives and managers, although it can be applied by others in the workplace and in everyday life to deal with any kind of conflict.

### Take-Aways

- ERI stands for emotion, reason, and intuition.
- The ERI model provides a clear lens through which to look at and resolve a difficult situation.
- Among the biggest obstacles to resolving any conflict are the negative emotions - such as anger, jealousy, mistrust, and fear - which stand in the way.
- The first step is to get control of and deal with the negative emotions.
- The second step is to apply your reason to recognizing the factors that contribute to a conflict and to use an appropriate strategy to deal with it.
- The third step is to use your intuition to help you think about different alternatives and choose the best possibility.
- You should approach resolving conflicts as a goal-oriented, problem-solving process, and use the ERI model to help you move through it.
- You can solve conflicts better if you take into account the interests, wants, and needs - or IWNs - of different people.
- The "conflict styles model" is useful in choosing how to approach a conflict.
- Besides using the basic principles of good communication, pay attention to hidden agendas, meanings, and feelings.

# Summary

## The Pervasiveness of Conflict and Using the ERI Model to Resolve It

Conflicts and other difficult situations occur naturally and inevitably in every organization and work environment, since individuals have different interests, goals, and priorities. Conflict also occurs due to limited resources, communication problems, struggles over power, incorrect assumptions, mistaken perceptions, and personality clashes. Additionally, some people are just very difficult to work with as a matter of course.

“The basic principles of good communication may sound like little more than common sense: be clear, be direct, be complete, and be appropriate. Nevertheless, many people are unaware of these principles or they fail to observe them.”

However, you can do a better job of resolving these conflicts and other difficulties, whatever your role is at work, by treating them as problems to be solved. To reach a solution, use the three-step ERI - emotions, reasons, and intuition - model. This model includes these three steps:

1. First, you seek to "calm the emotions" in the situation, whether these emotions are yours or not.
2. Next, you "use reason to assess, understand, and evaluate the situation and the personalities caught up in it."
3. Finally, you "use intuition to think of possible solutions and alternatives." Add in a dose of reason to evaluate your possible options, and use your intuition to select the way you want to respond.

“Good communication can solve some problems, but poor communication can be the cause of many more.”

As you use these approaches, apply various techniques as appropriate to deal with each particular type of difficulty. The model may seem to involve applying each process in a linear way, in fact, these elements blend together into an integrated whole. These skills give you a repertoire of tools you can draw upon in a conflict. With practice, you can decide quickly which ones to apply in a particular situation. Or you can create priorities, so you can handle the most important problems first.

## Understanding the Basics of the ERI Model

Think of the ERI model as a "goal-oriented, problem-solving process." Minimally, you can use it to shape the way you behave. The greater your power and influence, the more you can accomplish in resolving problems. This model can help you come up with effective, creative alternatives. It will also help you decide when to stay away from a situation and not try to resolve it now.

“If you have an understanding of your organization’s cultural and political environments, you can avoid falling into some kinds of difficult situations - or, if you have fallen in, you may be able to get out more easily.”

Often it is a good idea to act to resolve problems in the early stages. This is particularly true when a workplace conflict occurs between people who will continue to work together. Otherwise, anger, confusion, and other negative emotions can build up, making the conflict worse, even when these feelings aren’t expressed openly. It is especially important to deal with the underlying source of the problem, because minor problems start to escalate and spread. In some cases, this means working out a dispute between individuals - but at times, you may need to make changes in the whole workplace, such as reassigning people to different work areas or divisions.

“Negative emotions - anger, mistrust, fear, jealousy, envy, guilt, shame - contribute to problems and stand in the way of solutions. They are like a wall of fire: the intense heat of these emotions pushes people apart, and the emotional ‘smoke’ of the conflagration prevents clear vision.”

The ERI model can help you decide the best approach, since it gives you a clear lens through which to view problems in a calm detached way. This perspective can help you detect and cool off other people’s emotion, analyze what is going on, and determine the best approach. Use your intuition to help you decide.

“The ERI model offers a clear lens through which to view difficult situations. Once you yourself have achieved the necessary calm detachment, you are more able to detect and cool down the emotions of others, analyze the problem, and assess what to do - drawing, as necessary, on your intuition in your efforts to help.”

Think of the ERI model as the three angles of a triangle. The emotions (E) are at the top, the intuition (I) is on the left, and the reason (R) is on the right. You have to deal with the emotions first, so they are calmed down and out of the way. Then, you can draw on your reason and intuition to help you set a strategy for approaching and resolving the conflict. Follow these three steps: notice when difficulties occur, decide if the problem is serious enough for you to intervene at this time, and, if so, take action, based on knowledgeably determining what to do to achieve the best outcome.

## **Working With Your Emotions**

One of the biggest obstacles to resolving any conflict is the negative emotions which get in the way. These emotions include feelings such as anger, jealousy, mistrust, and fear. At times, people may express these feelings openly, when they explode with anger or retreat in fear. Often, these feelings are kept out of sight under the surface, but they are reflected in a variety of destructive actions such as quiet sabotage and back stabbing.

“It is impossible to avoid conflict entirely, but there are three keys to resolving or minimizing conflict. The first is to recognize difficulties when they occur. The second is to decide when a problem is serious enough to warrant intervention, and the third is to take action that is based on knowledge of what should be done to achieve the best result.”

It is important to bring your unconscious emotions to the surface, so you can deal with them. You might notice you have feelings, such as a strong reaction to someone or some event. Regard such outward behavior as a signal that something is wrong. Ask yourself the reasons for your reaction.

Once you have your own emotions in check, then you can help the other person deal with his or her emotions. If someone is angry, you can suggest a cooling-off period. Or, you can listen to their reasons and show that you really want to understand and help deal with the problem.

## **Resolving Communication Problems**

Communication problems are often a source of conflict. Communication can break down for many reasons: not being clear, not listening well, or someone says one thing and the listener thinks you mean something else. Whatever the reason, communication problems often come from negative emotional states, which cause even further communication breakdowns.

“The basic way to use the ERI model is to regard each conflict or difficult situation less as a conflict or difficulty per se than as a problem to be solved.”

Use the basic principles of good communication: be clear, direct, complete, and appropriate in what you say. When it is feasible, help others do the same. Pay attention to hidden agendas, meanings, and feelings. They often signal looming conflicts. Notice discrepancies between nonverbal and verbal communication. Be alert for the signs of negative feelings, such as anger and resentment. Pay attention if someone is expressing positive support and agreement verbally, but using body movements, gestures, or a tone of voice that does not fit their words. That discrepancy can signal underlying disagreement, reluctance, or even hostility. Be aware of your own and other's assumptions as well, since conflicts often result when people act on hidden or mistaken assumptions.

“Reason, the second element of the ERI model...allows you to do two fundamental things: recognize the factors that may be contributing to a particular situation, and use an appropriate strategy for approaching and resolving the situation.”

Good listening is another key to good communications. Practice "active listening," which involves being truly present when another person communicates with you and listening with understanding and interest.

## **Work With Reasoning**

Use reasoning to discern the major factors contributing to conflicts and the types of approaches you might use to deal best with different situations. First, pay attention to three types of organizational factors: your organizational culture, organizational politics, and the individual stakes or interests which people have in different outcomes. Your organizational culture, which includes your company's traditional way of doing things, and its written and unwritten rules and policies, can affect the types of conflicts that occur. So can office politics and personal concerns. For example, one woman was constantly in conflict with her employer and co-workers because she was very aggressive and brash. The others had a much more laid-back style. Often she triggered hidden resentments and outward antagonism. In the end, the best solution was for her to leave the company because she just didn't fit the organizational culture.

“After you have recognized that there is a problem - whether you're confronting a conflict, a difficult person, or another issue - a key step is to generate and weigh different possibilities for solving that problem.”

A second major consideration is that different people have different IWNs - interests, wants, and needs. Thinking about how to satisfy other people's IWNs will help you achieve your own. Create a list of the motives you believe impel those involved in a conflict. Consider the parties' primary stated interests, wants, and needs, as well as possible hidden ones. Think about which individuals or groups are most important to satisfy when there are conflicting IWNs.

## **Working with Difficult People and Selecting an Appropriate Conflict Style**

You can handle conflict resolution more effectively if you know the interests, needs, and wants of difficult people. Some respond to conflicts emotionally. These types include the Exploder, Complainer, Sulker, Sensitive Soul, and Worrier. Other personalities use their power to manipulate and control others. These types include the Pusher, Judge, Steamroller, and Control Freak. Some are difficult because of the way they deal with rules, i.e. being too rigid, ignoring rules, or making up their own. This group includes the Clock Watcher, By-The-Booker, Tit-For-Tatter, Do-It-My-Wayer, Nay-Sayer, Super-Agreeable Flake, and Procrastinator. Recognize these groups and use different conflict resolution strategies with each different type.

“There is no one right approach, but if you are aware that there are various specific styles of handling conflict, and if you have some knowledge of the circumstances in which each style is most likely to be effective, you can draw as necessary on these styles.”

When you are dealing with different types of people and situations, you can use a widely used model of conflict styles, originally conceptualized by Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann in the early 1970s as the Conflict Mode Instrument. It offers five styles of handling conflict based on how assertive you are in expressing your own interests and how cooperative you are in taking into account other's interests. These five styles are:

1. The Competing style, where you are more forceful and confrontational.
2. The Collaborating style, where you take time to discuss each other's concerns and interests.
3. The Accommodating style, where you go along with what others want.
4. The Avoiding style, where you avoid or delay dealing with a conflict.
5. The Compromising style, where you and the other party each give up a little to resolve the problem.

Selecting the best approach includes weighing the particular circumstances, the personality factors, organizational culture, the IWNs of the various parties, and other considerations. Using compromise or collaboration, you can resolve a conflict better knowing how to negotiate effectively and working toward a win-win solution.

## **Use Your Intuition to Put It All Together, Decide What to Do, and Take Action**

Once you understand the reasons for the conflict and the different approaches available, use your intuition to make critical decisions on how to resolve problems. Your intuition will help you make choices and feel confident that you have chosen the best approach. One technique is brainstorming. Though it is often done in a group, you can do it on your own. Get relaxed and ask yourself specific questions. Write or tape your responses. Think of as many answers as you can without trying to judge them. Review these ideas and choose the best ones.

You can also use visualization and self-talk. Consult your "inner expert" by going into a meditative state. Visualize your inner expert's

face as if on a TV screen or computer monitor. Ask your inner expert questions, and listen to the answer. If you are less visually oriented, you may prefer using self-talk, where you listen internally to a free flow of thoughts or words after you ask yourself a question.

## About the Author

**Gini Graham Scott, Ph.D., J.D.**, is a nationally-recognized author, organizational consultant, speaker, and seminar leader in the areas of conflict resolution, organizational development, social dynamics, and creativity. She is the author of the classic *Resolving Conflict* and, most recently, *Making Ethical Choices*, *Resolving Ethical Dilemmas*. She has written more than thirty books on a variety of topics, including conflict resolution, business law, groups and organizations, social dynamics, lifestyles, and creativity. She is founder and president of Changemakers and of Creative Communications and Research.

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