

# An In-Depth Review of the Conflict Dynamics Profile



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## Focus

Unlike most conflict instruments, the CDP focuses on conflict **behaviors** rather than styles. That is, rather than identifying conflict “styles”---which represent a combination of behavior, personality, and motivation that can be difficult to change---the CDP focuses exclusively on the behaviors people typically display when faced with conflict. This action-oriented approach has two advantages. First, focusing on specific sets of behaviors allows detailed examination, and subsequently greater understanding, of how people respond to conflict. Second, it provides especially useful information to individuals whose goal is to change. The more people know about how they act before, during, and after conflict, what sets them off most easily, and what responses to conflict are especially harmful in their own organizations, then the better equipped and (it is hoped) motivated they will be to change.

## Dynamic Conflict Model

The CDP was developed based upon the Dynamic Conflict Model. The starting point for the model is a precipitating event---something that sets the stage for a conflict to develop. This event could be anything: a single behavior by another person which is upsetting or frustrating, a long-standing set of issues between people, a difference of opinion about strategy or tactics in the accomplishment of some business goal, etc. The precipitating event can be anything that places the interests of individuals in opposition to one another.

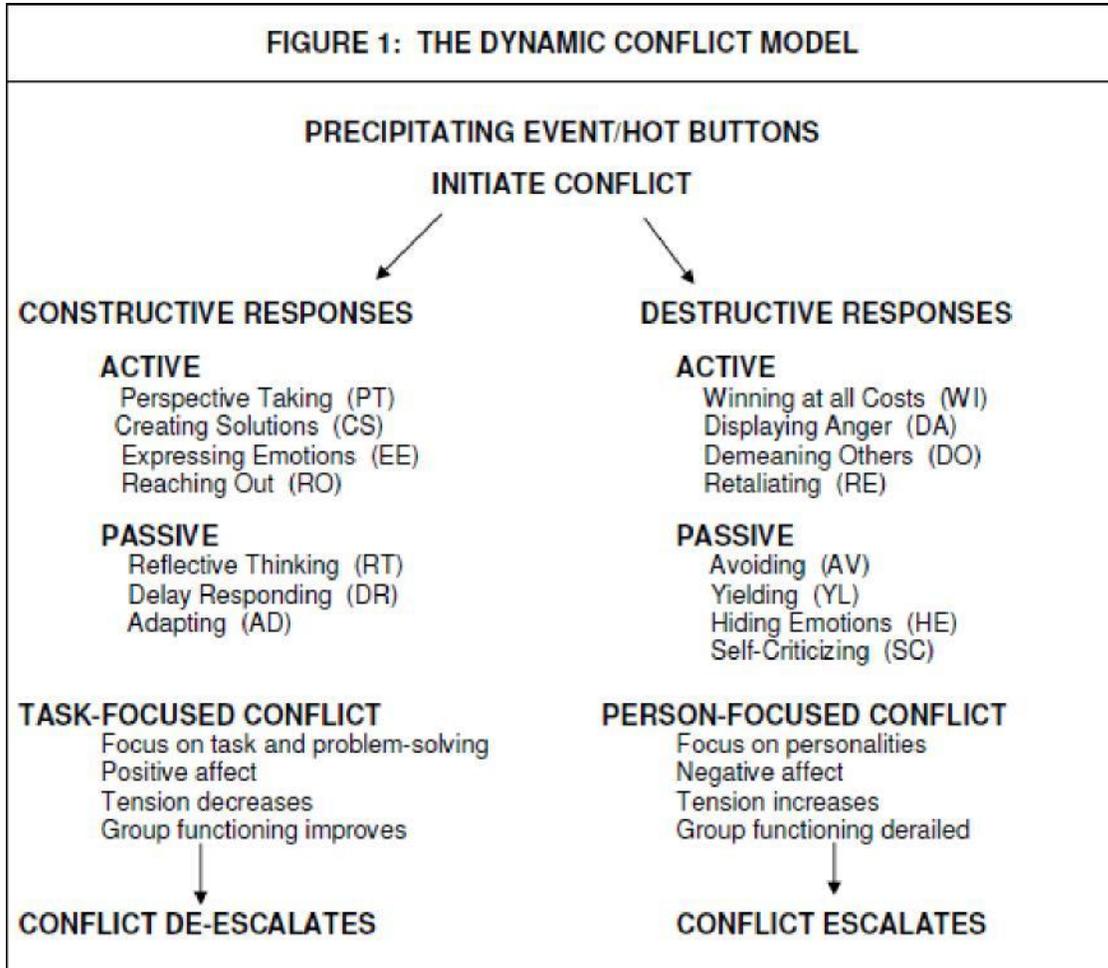
The presence of a precipitating event sets into motion the dynamics of conflict, but the end result of that process is still to be determined. One of the biggest influences on how things unfold will be the behavioral responses of the people in the conflict. That is, how an individual responds to conflict can determine whether a conflict becomes focused on problem solving or focused on personalities. Constructive responses have the effect of not escalating the conflict further. They tend to reduce the tension and keep the conflict focused on ideas rather than personalities. Destructive responses, on the other hand, tend

to make things worse; they do little to reduce the conflict and allow it to focus on personalities.

Responses to conflict also differ in terms of how active or passive they are. Active responses are those in which the individual takes some overt action in response to the conflict or provocation. Such responses can be either constructive or destructive; what makes them active is that they require some overt effort on the part of the individual. Passive responses, in contrast, do not require much in the way of effort from the person. In fact, they typically involve the person deciding to refrain from some kind of action. Again, passive responses can be either constructive or destructive; that is, they can make things better or they can make things worse. Given, then, that behaviors can be either constructive or destructive, and either active or passive, responses to conflict on the CDP fall into one of four categories: Active-Constructive, Passive-Constructive, Active-Destructive, and Passive-Destructive.

Behavioral responses to provocation, which can determine whether the potential conflict evolves in either the task-focused or person-focused direction, can also play a role later in the conflict sequence. For example, a situation can begin as a task-focused conflict centered on some non-personal issue with controllable levels of arousal, but destructive responses during this phase could change the direction of this sequence and lead to a person-focused conflict instead. Alternatively, it is possible that a dispute that started out focused on personalities could be “reined in” by careful behavioral work and transformed into a less destructive task-focused conflict.

Another important feature of the Dynamic Conflict Model is the concept of Hot Buttons--those situations and individuals that are annoying, frustrating, or upsetting. An individual's Hot Buttons can be thought of as the kinds of people or behaviors that are especially likely to serve as precipitating events for that person. When pushed, Hot Buttons can provoke one into starting or escalating a conflict. The “hottest” Hot Buttons (that is, those that are most upsetting) will be the ones most likely to evoke a quick and automatic set of destructive responses, while the “cooler” Buttons are more likely to evoke a mixture of responses that include some constructive behaviors. By understanding and examining the links between provocation and response, it becomes easier to control one's behavior. For a graphic presentation of the Dynamic Conflict Model, see Figure 1.



**Scales**

The CDP highlights the following 15 behaviors or scales:

Active Constructive

- Perspective Taking
- Creating Solutions
- Expressing Emotions
- Reaching Out

Passive Constructive

- Reflective Thinking
- Delay Responding
- Adapting

Active Destructive

- Winning at all Costs
- Displaying Anger
- Demeaning Others
- Retaliating

Passive Destructive

- Avoiding
- Yielding
- Hiding Emotions
- Self-Criticizing

## **Hot Buttons**

The Hot Buttons section on the CDP provides detailed information on the types of situations and individuals that may provoke the most annoyance and ultimately the most conflict. Hot Buttons include items such as Untrustworthy, Unreliable, Abrasive, etc.

## **Two Versions of the CDP**

There are two versions of the CDP:

- CDP-360-multi-rater instrument which produces feedback from the boss, peers, and direct reports
- CDP-Individual (CDP-I)- “self-only” assessment

### **CDP-360 Description**

The CDP-360 produces a complete “conflict profile” by providing feedback on

- what provokes an individual
- how the individual responds before, during, and after conflict
- how others view that individual responding to conflict
- which conflict behaviors harm one’s position in a particular organization.

### **CDP-360 Feedback Report**

The CDP 360 Feedback Report presents results in text form as well as in clear, understandable tables and graphs. The 22-page Feedback Report includes the following:

### ***Response Profiles***

Self ratings and ratings by boss, peers, and direct reports in four areas:

#### *1. Active-Constructive Response Profile*

Four ways of responding to conflict which require some effort on the part of the individual, and which have the effect of reducing conflict: Perspective Taking, Creating Solutions, Reaching Out, and Expressing Emotions.

#### *2. Passive-Constructive Response Profile*

Three ways of responding to conflict which have the effect of dampening the conflict, or preventing escalation, but which do not require any active response from the individual: Reflective Thinking, Delay Responding, and **Adapting**.

#### *3. Active-Destructive Response Profile*

Four ways of responding to conflict which through some effort on the part of the individual have the effect of escalating the conflict: Winning at all Costs, Displaying Anger, Demeaning Others, and Retaliating.

#### *4. Passive-Destructive Response Profile*

Four ways of responding to conflict which due to lack of effort or action by the individual cause the conflict to either continue, or to be resolved in an

unsatisfactory manner: Avoiding, Yielding, Hiding Emotions, and Self-Criticizing.

### ***Scale Profile***

Snapshot picture of how an individual is perceived by colleagues.

### ***Discrepancy Profile***

The particular responses to conflict on which one's self perceptions and those of others differ most markedly; helpful in exploring "gaps" in perceptions.

### ***Dynamic Conflict Sequence***

How constructively and destructively one responds when conflict is just beginning, while it is fully underway, and after it is over.

### ***Organizational Perspective on Conflict***

The particular responses to conflict which are especially discouraged in one's organization; regularly engaging in these responses can have severe negative effects for one's career.

### ***Hot Buttons Profile***

The types of people and situations most likely to irritate the individual and provoke conflict.

### ***Developmental Feedback***

Direct, open-ended comments about one's responses to conflict from boss, peers, and direct reports.

### ***Developmental Worksheets***

Two worksheets to identify clearest opportunities for development.

### ***CDP-360 Development Guide***

Accompanying the CDP Feedback Report is a detailed Development Guide, *Managing Conflict Dynamics: A Practical Approach*. This clearly written guide provides information and tips for coping with conflict and building strong interpersonal relationships. Over 115 pages in length, this guide is one of the most comprehensive resources on conflict available. Features include:

- Constructive strategies of conflict management and how to put them into practice
- Worksheets and exercises
- Web sites, readings, and seminars on conflict-related topics

### ***CDP-Individual (CDP-I) Description***

The CDP-I is the "self-only" version of the CDP. It uses the same questions about behavioral responses to conflict and hot buttons as the CDP 360. While the CDP 360

provides richer feedback from others, the CDP-I is excellent when a simpler, less expensive assessment instrument is needed.

### ***CDP-Individual (CDP-I) Feedback Report***

The CDP-I Feedback Report includes graphs on constructive behaviors, destructive behaviors, and hot buttons.

### ***CDP-Individual (CDP-I) Development Guide***

The CDP-I Development Guide contains over 40 pages of tips for individual improvement in the area of conflict resolution. Each of the 15 Constructive/Destructive scales is featured with a description of the scale, interpretive information, and developmental suggestions for scores out of the average range. The section on Hot Buttons highlights “cooling strategies” for dealing with people and situations that are most annoying. In addition, the guide includes an action planning worksheet which outlines steps for further development.

## **Psychometrics**

### ***Item Selection and Scale Construction***

The Conflict Dynamics Profile is the result of two years of development and revision. Three preliminary versions were developed, administered, analyzed, and revised in order to produce the current CDP. Item analyses and factor analyses were carried out on each version of the instrument, and, based upon these analyses, items and item-sets were deleted, added, or in some cases combined in order to produce a cleaner and more psychometrically-sound instrument.

The rating scales used in the CDP are straightforward. Respondents indicate the frequency of occurrence of a particular Response to Conflict along a five-point rating scale continuum:

(1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Almost Always)

For Hot Buttons, respondents indicate, again along a five-point continuum, the degree to which they get upset by a particular individual or situation:

(1=Not at all, 2=A Little, 3=Moderately, 4=Considerably, 5=Extremely)

### ***Reliability***

Internal reliability estimates of CDP Responses to Conflict scales are, for the most part, quite acceptable, with alpha coefficients exceeding .70 over 80% of the time, and exceeding .80 over 60% of the time. Moreover, the fact that most of the scales consist of only four items makes the size of these coefficients somewhat more impressive.

## ***Validity***

### *Social Desirability*

Correlations between CDP scales and measure of social desirability (BIDR; Paulhus, 1998) are small and mostly nonsignificant.

### *Scale Intercorrelations*

Intercorrelations among scales within the same general domain (e.g. Active-Constructive) were always positive in sign, and in every case statistically significant. With regard to correlations across domains, the scales in the Active-Constructive and Passive-Constructive domains were almost all positively correlated with one another, and in many cases these associations were substantial. Correlations between Active-Destructive and Passive-Destructive scales were smaller, indicating that these two types of responses are more independent of one another.

### *Relations Between Self-Ratings and Ratings by Others*

Each of the 45 correlations was positive in sign, and 40 of the 45 were statistically significant, thus supporting the validity of the 15 Responses to Conflict scales of the CDP.

### *Relations with Other Conflict Measures*

Correlations between the 15 Responses to Conflict scales on the CDP and scores on two existing conflict measures, The Thomas-Kilman Instrument (TKI) and the Negotiating Styles Profile (NSP), are consistent with the intended content of the CDP scales.

### *Relations with Broad Personality Measures*

Correlations between the 15 Responses to Conflict scales on the CDP and scores on two broad personality measures, the NEO-PI (Costa & McCrae, 1985) and Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers, 1962), are consistent with the intended content of the CDP scales.

### *Relations with Related Constructs*

Correlations between the 15 Responses to Conflict scales on the CDP and scores on three other related constructs, the Buss-Durkee hostility measure (1957), Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub's (1989) COPE scale, and Roger and Najarian's (1989) measure of emotional control, are also consistent with the intended content of the CDP scales.

For more information on the psychometric structure of the CDP, please refer to the Conflict Dynamics Profile Technical Guide.

## **Applications**

Since the topic of conflict is so universal, there are numerous ways to use the CDP. Although the instrument can be given to individuals at all levels and in different types of organizations and settings, the primary applications are as follows:

- Conflict Resolution
- Leadership Development

### **Career Development/Individual Coaching**

- Team Building
- Organizational Development
- Change Management
- Succession Planning
- Needs Analysis (Group Profiles)
- Relationship Counseling

### ***Conflict Resolution***

One of the primary uses of the CDP is to help individuals, teams, and organizations resolve specific conflict issues. Not only can it be used as a “preventative” tool to reduce the amount of conflict in the future, but it also can be used to address current, ongoing situations. The conflicts can range from a one-on-one disagreement, to a dysfunctional team, to an overall pattern throughout an organization of destructive conflict management. Whatever the scenario, the CDP can identify the problem areas and target specific areas for improvement.

### ***Leadership Development***

Our research suggests that effective conflict management is one of the primary development needs of leaders and managers. Specifically, skill in the four Active/Constructive scales (Perspective Taking, Creating Solutions, Expressing Emotions, and Reaching Out) is related to promotion and the perception of excellent leadership skills.

Given how pervasive conflict is, it is essential that people have the skills to handle it effectively. By focusing specifically on this one topic, the CDP provides managers with in-depth feedback on their responses to conflict and how their behaviors impact others.

### ***Career Development/Individual Coaching***

The CDP can be used alone or in combination with other assessment tools to help talented managers and individual contributors move into more complex or demanding roles and prepare them for future career growth. In some cases, employees have a distinct development need in the area of conflict resolution, and the CDP can provide thorough information as to what specific areas need to be addressed. This approach is often used in one of the three following scenarios:

1. The employee has attended some type of training program either within the organization or from an outside vendor and would like additional, follow-up coaching specifically in the area of conflict resolution;
2. The employee does not particularly like group learning environments and prefers a one-on-one setting; or
3. The employee, although a high performer, does not handle conflict effectively and needs targeted assistance.

In each of these cases, feedback on the CDP and subsequent developmental planning with *Managing Conflict Dynamics: A Practical Approach* can be very beneficial. A combination of coaching by telephone, face-to-face goal-setting sessions, on-site

“shadowing,” ongoing evaluation of progress, and reassessment over a designated period of time can result in great improvement.

### ***Team Building***

Unresolved conflict can be devastating to a team. Communication breakdowns often lead to avoidance and resentment which, in turn, lead to lower satisfaction and productivity. Conducting a team intervention with the CDP (and possibly other assessment tools) can be the starting point for establishing guidelines for handling conflict in the future. Even with high functioning teams, there usually are areas of conflict, which, if not addressed, have the potential to derail the team.

Having each member of the team receive feedback on the CDP helps team members identify problem areas and foster a more cohesive and supportive team environment. Facilitating open and honest discussions about specific issues can really improve the team dynamics and provide an enhanced working environment.

### ***Organizational Development***

The CDP can be used on a company-wide scale to maximize the potential of the entire organization. Before implementing any organizational development initiative, there is great value in first diagnosing and understanding the role of the organization’s “culture” and its impact on the new initiative. The CDP looks specifically at the Organizational Perspective on conflict and which responses to conflict are especially problematic in a particular organization.

Widespread feedback throughout an organization establishes the foundation needed for changing an organization’s “conflict culture” to one where effective responses to conflict are the norm rather than the exception. Every job, no matter what level or type of organization, requires some aspect of dealing with conflict, so a comprehensive approach can benefit the organization as a whole.

### ***Change Management***

The CDP can be used with organizations during transitions or restructurings to deal more effectively with the misperceptions, anxieties, and culture clashes which often arise during times of change. Although recurring change is the norm in organizational life today, people often underestimate the emotional and intellectual challenges that come with it. Using the CDP during these times can surface issues that may be causing problems and conflicts among employees. The written CDP feedback is especially useful during mergers and acquisitions to help establish the guidelines for future interactions in the “new” company.

### ***Succession Planning***

The CDP can be used as one of the factors considered in promoting decisions. In combination with additional assessment tools and other methods such as in-depth interviews, simulation exercises, and job fit analyses, the CDP adds a comprehensive and objective view of a candidate’s behavior in dealing with conflict, a key skill as a manager progresses up the ladder.

### ***Needs Analysis***

Composite information (Group Profiles) on the CDP can be invaluable in determining future training needs. Areas of strength can be celebrated, and development areas can be specifically addressed in targeted, follow-up training. Group Profiles can be produced for intact teams, specific departments, or the organization as a whole.

### ***Relationship Counseling***

The CDP can be used in counseling settings as one strategy of building mutual understanding and cooperation. Many of the scales on the instrument directly address common communication issues which often arise in interpersonal conflict. Once identified through the CDP, these issues can become the focus for improving the relationship.

## **How is the CDP different from other conflict instruments?**

The CDP focuses on conflict behaviors, not styles. Since behaviors are more susceptible to change, the CDP is designed to bring tangible improvements to a person's performance. The CDP is also available in both multi-rater (CDP-360) and self-only (CDP-I) versions. The CDP-360 delineates feedback among boss, peers, and direct reports and produces a complete "conflict profile" by providing feedback on

- what provokes an individual
- how the individual responds before, during, and after conflict
- how others view that individual responding to conflict
- which conflict behaviors harm one's position in a particular organization.

### **What are the benefits of using the CDP?**

- Provides a strategy for addressing workplace conflict
- Improves individual and team performance
- Reduces management time spent dealing with conflict
- Increases leadership capabilities by developing stronger conflict resolution skills
- Builds a win-win conflict culture

### **When should the CDP be used?**

- Managers spending too much time dealing with conflict
- Team efficiency is compromised
- Organizational culture is undergoing change
- Productivity is decreasing
- New Leaders need improved conflict resolution skills

### **When do you use the CDP-360 vs. the CDP-Individual?**

Although both versions of the CDP offer feedback about conflict behaviors, there are differences between the two instruments which should be considered before planning training/coaching interventions. The primary distinction is that the CDP-I is a “self-report” (it only looks at how you view yourself), whereas the CDP-360 is a full-spectrum tool which gives not only your self-view but also delineates feedback from boss, peers, and direct reports. In addition, the CDP-360 feedback report is much more extensive than the CDP-I feedback report and offers an in-depth view of a person’s responses to conflict.

Given this difference, some users choose the CDP-I for introductory programs, situations where the participants are less experienced, or as part of a longer program where many topics are being discussed. The CDP-360 is ideal for mid to upper-level managers who want concentrated feedback, programs specifically on feedback, or instances where a person has already taken the CDP-I and would now like to go further with their developmental planning. Much depends on the objectives of the intervention, the person’s previous experience with assessment instruments, and the overall context in which the feedback will be given.

#### **How much does the CDP cost?**

The cost varies depending on the number of reports purchased at any one time, and the debriefing requirements and other service options chosen by the purchaser. Please **contact Talent Tools** to discuss your requirements.

[Team@TalentTools.com.au](mailto:Team@TalentTools.com.au)

1800 768 569 or 61 416 010701

Skype: Talent.Tools