

# Kluwer Mediation Blog

## Is there a connection between leadership types and conflict management styles?

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Peter Drucker once famously said, “*the only definition of a leader is someone who has followers*“. While we do agree that Peter Drucker is a magnificent thinker and writer, his definition sounds a bit too simplistic. The followers are an important “ingredient” to leadership, but what if the followers do not follow the leader? Is then the leader still a leader? Or should there be something more than just having followers to define a leader?

We think that being a genuine leader means having the ability to inspire and direct people to achieve more than if they are left alone. Leaders are those who establish a sense of direction, a sense of purpose and inspire individuals and teams to work together effectively and develop their full potential. Effective leadership creates a positive working environment, improves communication and decision making and helps followers develop a sense of belonging and a shared identity.

### Leadership types

There are many different leadership styles, and various leaders may use them depending on their organization or group’s context and specific goals and objectives. Here are some common types:

- 1. Autocratic Leadership:** This style is also known as “authoritarian” leadership. Autocratic leaders make decisions independently and without consulting the group. They have a high level of control and power over their followers and tend to give clear directions and closely supervise their subordinates.
- 2. Democratic Leadership:** This style is also known as “participative” leadership. Democratic leaders involve their followers in the decision-making process and value their input. They create a climate of openness and trust and encourage collaboration, participation, and communication.
- 3. Laissez-Faire Leadership:** This style is known as “delegative” or “free-rein” leadership. Laissez-faire leaders delegate responsibilities to their followers and provide minimal direction or supervision. They let their followers make decisions and take the initiative.
- 4. Transformational Leadership:** This style is also known as “inspirational” leadership. Transformational leaders inspire and motivate followers to achieve a shared vision or goal. They

focus on the development and growth of their followers and create a positive work environment that encourages creativity and innovation.

**5. Servant Leadership:** This style is also known as “humility” leadership. Servant leaders put the needs of their followers first and seek to serve and empower them. They create a culture of trust, integrity, and respect and focus on serving the community.

**6. Transactional Leadership:** This style is also known as “managerial” leadership. Transactional leaders focus on achieving specific goals and use rewards and penalties to motivate their followers. They establish clear expectations, set performance standards, and closely monitor performance to ensure goals are met.

Certainly, these styles are not mutually exclusive, and leaders can adopt different types depending on the situation, context, and specific needs of the group there are leading.

But leadership also plays an important role in conflict management, as leaders can influence how conflicts are addressed and resolved. They do it for themselves and others that they may represent. Good leaders can detect when conflicts are brewing under the surface. They might use their skills, knowledge and authority to manage them effectively by selecting an appropriate management style and encouraging communication, cooperation and problem-solving among the parties involved. They can also serve as a mediator by facilitating communication and negotiations or by providing guidance, training and education to help parties improve their conflict management skills. All of these bring us to consider the matter of conflict management styles and their connection to leadership.

## Conflict management styles

Conflict management styles refer to the different ways in which individuals or groups approach conflicts. There are several common conflict management styles, and various individuals and groups may use different styles depending on the context and the specific situation they face.

Here are some common conflict management styles (Thomas and Kilmann, 1974):

**1. Competing:** This style is also known as “assertive” or “competitive.” It involves taking a strong stance to achieve one’s own goals, even if it means disregarding the concerns and interests of others.

**2. Accommodating:** This style is also known as “cooperative” or “unassertive.” It involves giving up one’s own goals and interests to resolve a conflict and prioritize others’ concerns and interests.

**3. Avoiding:** This style is also known as “withdrawal.” It involves avoiding conflict by not getting involved or postponing a decision or discussion.

**4. Compromising:** This style is also known as “reconciling.” It involves finding a middle ground acceptable to all parties and finding a mutually beneficial solution.

**5. Collaborating:** This style is also known as “integrating” or “problem-solving.” It involves working with others to find a solution that addresses the concerns and interests of all parties and leads to a win-win outcome.

Many researchers agree that there is a significant correlation between leadership types and conflict management styles. Leadership types can affect how conflicts are managed and resolved. For example, authoritarian or directive leaders may adopt a more competing conflict management process, imposing their own solutions and quelling divergent opinions. In contrast, others may adopt a more democratic or participatory style and involve all parties in decision-making, depending on the situation and the organization or community they lead. A transformational leader is more likely to facilitate a collaborative and problem-solving approach to conflict management by creating an environment of trust and open communication. On the other hand, the transactional leader may be more inclined to use a more controlling and authoritative approach to conflict management, focusing on maintaining the status quo rather than encouraging change or innovation.

Additionally, most leaders are not purely autocratic or democratic but fall between these two extremes, as different situations may call for different leadership styles.

## Mediation

In mediation, participants are leaders representing themselves, their families, communities, groups or organizations. For a mediator, it is critical to understand the representation mechanism and how their leadership types influence their conflict management approach and the process outcome. This understanding can inform the preparation process, the mediation's effectiveness and the sustainability of the results. Before anything, it helps a mediator adopt a strategic approach to mediation that matches the situation and feels appropriate to the parties and their representatives.

Finally, mediators are leaders themselves. They have been trusted by the parties to manage processes that should be efficient in helping them improve their communication and relationship, addressing important concerns and mapping out the next steps acceptable to all. While mediators have different mediation and leadership styles, they all work to inspire a collaborative response from parties in conflict. If one asked if parties are to be seen as followers, we would say yes, as long as the mediator's attitude says, *"Follow me; I am right behind you."*

### References:

- Thomas, K. W. & Kilmann, R. H. (1974). Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument. Mountain View, CA: Xicom, a subsidiary of CPP, Inc.

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