



Conflict case study

Understanding differences is essential in learning how to resolve conflict and build effective working relationships. Use this case study to demonstrate how type can be used to help resolve a conflict, and to encourage individuals to think about how different types deal with conflict situations.

Applications

- Managing conflict
- Understanding working style

Type preferences studied

- All

Time required

- 20 minutes

Materials required

- A copy of the case study and questions (one per participant)

Instructions

- Ask participants to work together in pairs or small groups (up to 4 people per group)
- Give each person the conflict case study and Conflict Style Report (see below)
- Ask them to read the case study and answer the questions
- Debrief the exercise by asking participants for their answers to each question

Conflict case study

Jim Stark is a manager of a department in a pharmaceutical company. He sought out coaching with the aim of improving his interpersonal skills, after his manager identified this as a problem area during his appraisal. Jim agreed that sometimes his style of interaction with others may be seen by them as rather abrupt and task focused, although he maintained that the results that he achieved often justified the means. His manager knew about the MBTI® framework, and felt that this might be valuable for Jim to use.

The first couple of sessions focused on Jim's perception of his working style, and the impact it had on others. He completed the MBTI questionnaire after the initial meeting, and in the feedback established for himself a best-fit type of ESTJ, which in his case also matched his reported type. In a subsequent session, he identified one individual with whom relations were poor, and with whom he was increasingly coming into conflict. This individual, David, was a peer, and the manager of a different department. Jim agreed to spend some time over the following week examining the areas in which the two of them were experiencing most conflict.

The following week, Jim returned, having done his homework diligently. He listed the following:

David seldom answers questions in direct and simple terms. Instead, he often subtly alters the question, particularly tending to widen the subject or make associations with other subjects. This irritates Jim, who feels he "can't get a simple answer to a simple question".

When asked for a decision, David frequently describes options instead. He appears ready to end conversations without any clear conclusion having been reached. Jim gets annoyed at David's "lack of closure and focus".

David's approach is friendly and relaxed, and he likes to talk about non-work issues. He also brings up people issues at points where these seem irrelevant to Jim. Jim prefers to be "brisk and task-oriented", and David seems offended when Jim does not respond to his friendliness.

Jim's initial goal for the coaching was to "learn how to be persuasive with a wider variety of people". He was frustrated because he had to work with David in order to solve certain inter-departmental problems. Jim believes he knows the answers, seeing the changes needed as fairly straightforward, and cannot understand why David keeps "dragging his feet" on action.

Questions to consider

1. From the information given, what do you think David's type may be?

2. Jim's original goal was about persuading others. What would you expect his preferred style of influencing to be?

3. Referring to Jim's MBTI Conflict Style Report (shown on the following pages), how is he likely to experience conflict and what is his likely approach to resolving it?

How might David respond to this?

4. As a coach, how would you use the MBTI instrument to encourage Jim to re-frame this situation?

5. Jim eventually found ways to approach David that proved much more successful than his previous attempts. What do you think these more successful ways were?