Conflict at work
A research report from The Myers-Briggs Company

August 2022

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Purpose and scope

Conflict takes place whenever there is a difference of opinion between two people. Though often seen negatively, healthy conflict can lead to new insights and creative solutions. To realize these positive outcomes, people need to recognize how they typically deal with conflict so they have the power to change their style when needed.

Getting the best from conflict matters to organizations as well as individuals. A recent survey in the United Kingdom put the total cost of conflict at £28.5 billion. Being able to approach to conflict constructively can reduce these costs and make a positive outcome more likely.

This study was set up to investigate how people in the workplace see conflict, and to produce recommendations as to how individuals can use a knowledge of their own conflict style (as measured by the TKI® assessment) and personality type (using the MBTI® framework) to navigate conflict more successfully.

Results

- Most people felt they managed conflict at work well, had a high degree of job satisfaction, and felt included at work. Those who had the most positive view of their conflict management skills also had higher levels of job satisfaction, felt more able to be their authentic self at work, and felt more valued by and at home in their organization.

- On average, respondents spent 4.34 hours per week dealing with conflict at work. This represents a significant cost to organizations in time lost, and there were costs to individuals too, in terms of lower job satisfaction and feeling less included at work.

- The more time that an individual spent dealing with conflict at work, the lower their job satisfaction and the less included they felt.

- Poor communication and lack of role clarity were the most common causes of conflict at work, with heavy workloads and personality clashes also fairly common. Most causes of conflict also resulted in more time being spent dealing with conflict.

- When asked who was responsible for managing conflict at work, the most common responses were 'my line manager' closely followed by 'everyone'. Seeing as line manager was the most frequent answer, it is not surprising that when asked how important conflict handling is as a leadership or management skill, 98% of respondents said that this was extremely or very important. Conflict handling is seen as an essential skill for managers.

- When asked who handled conflict most effectively, most respondents felt there was no difference between men and women, or they weren't sure. But amongst those who did have a view, women were twice as likely to be nominated as men. Female managers were more likely to be seen as managing conflict very well than male managers, and less likely to be seen as managing conflict very poorly. Overall, there is a slight tendency for women to be seen as better at managing conflict than men, by both men and women.

- Older people were much more likely than younger people to be seen as handling conflict more effectively.

- Senior employees were more likely to be seen as handling conflict effectively than junior employees.

- There was a slight increase in perceived conflict overall due to COVID and its after-effects. Non-remote workers were the most likely to say that the amount of conflict had increased, remote workers the least.

- Just over half of respondents felt that workplace conflict gave a mix of positive and negative results. Amongst the remainder, almost twice as many felt that conflict always or generally gave negative results as those who felt that it always or generally gave positive results. Those who saw conflict more positively were more likely than others to:
  - Be male.
  - Be more satisfied with their job.
  - Feel that they themselves manage conflict well.
  - Never or only occasionally have to deal with conflict.
  - See themselves as being responsible for dealing with conflict.
  - Mention changes in policies, products, organizational structures etc. as a cause of conflict, or say there was no conflict in their workplace.

- The most frequently mentioned positive benefit of workplace conflict was seen as being the opportunity to build relationships and increase collaboration and co-operation. The most frequently mentioned negative outcome was poorer relationships, loss of trust, and decreased co-operation.

- When asked 'How does conflict at work make you feel?', the most frequent answers, by some degree, were around the theme of feeling anxious, depressed, fearful, or stressed.

- On balance, respondents tended to think that their direct supervisor or manager managed conflict well. Respondents' ratings of their manager's conflict-handling abilities were not dissimilar to how they rated themselves, with a third of respondents giving themselves and their manager the exact same rating.

- Female managers were more likely to be seen as managing conflict very well than were male managers, and less likely to be seen as managing conflict very poorly.

- Respondents who thought their manager or supervisor managed conflict well also tended to:
  - Feel that they themselves managed conflict well.
  - Have greater job satisfaction.
  - Feel more included and supported by their manager.
  - Deal with conflict at work less frequently.
  - See workplace conflict more positively.

- These findings provide a rationale for helping managers to improve their conflict-handling skills. While 35% felt there was nothing more their supervisor or manager could do, 65% mentioned one or more actions. These included:
  - Listen more, ask more often for opinions, views, or information.
  - Communicate more regularly and more clearly.
  - Address conflict quickly, directly, and earlier.
  - Stop trying to please everyone, specific individuals, or senior managers.

- Survey respondents were asked the typical conflict style of their supervisor or manager. Collaborating was by far the most common choice, by 41% of the group, followed by Competing and Avoiding (both 18%), Compromising (17%), and Accommodating (7%).

- Those who perceived their manager as having a Collaborating style, and to some extent a Compromising style, had the most positive experience. Those who believed their

manager had a Competing, and to some extent an Avoiding, style had the least positive experience. The results of this study suggest that Collaborating, and to some extent Compromising, are seen by many as the most positive way of dealing with conflict. Avoiding, and to some extent Accommodating and Competing, are seen less positively.

- There was no significant relationship between an individual's conflict mode and their perception of their manager or supervisor's conflict mode. Having the same favorite conflict mode as your supervisor or manager did not result in any noticeable advantages or disadvantages.

- Respondents who had previously completed the TKI® assessment were asked in what way this had been helpful. The three options chosen by 50% or more of the respondents were all concerned with their self-awareness and understanding of themselves: increasing my self-awareness (73% of respondents); better understanding of how I impact on other people (64%); understanding my typical approach to conflict (58%).

- In terms of MBTI® personality type:
  o Individuals with a preference for Extraversion on average saw themselves as significantly better at managing conflict than did those with a preference for Introversion. Introverts were also more likely to mention feeling demotivated or discouraged by conflict.
  o There was a slight tendency for those with a Sensing preference to have a more positive outlook on conflict.
  o The results suggest that those with a Thinking preference may have a more transactional view of conflict compared with those with a Feeling preference.

Recommendations

- Dealing with conflict takes time. This is expensive for organizations and can have a negative effect on individuals. This report has outlined several possible causes of conflict, most of which result in more time being spent. It may be useful to review each of these in terms of how they might apply to organizations, departments, or teams, and how their effects might be mitigated. In particular, the three most common causes of conflict: poor communication, lack of role clarity, and heavy workloads.

- The fourth most common cause of conflict related to personality clashes. To reduce the effect of these, increasing the self-awareness of individuals, using tools such as personality or conflict style assessments, would be useful.

- Those with the most positive view of their ability to manage conflict also tended to have higher levels of job satisfaction, felt more able to be their authentic self at work, and felt more valued by and at home in their organization. Training in how to handle conflict may be useful for all workers. Resolving any issues around lack of role clarity or team dysfunction should also have a positive effect on individuals' views of how well they can manage conflict.

- Conflict management is an especially important skill for managers. Overall, the key areas where respondents felt their manager could improve included: listening more, asking more often for opinions, views or information; communicating more regularly and more clearly; addressing conflict quickly, directly, and earlier; and not trying to please everyone.

- Individuals who saw their manager as having a Collaborating conflict style had the most positive experience. In practice, a Collaborating style may well be the most suited in

some situations or interactions, but a different style in others. It is important that a manager is aware of their own typical approach to conflict and has the knowledge and ability to flex and take another approach when the occasion demands.

- People who see conflict in a more negative way are likely to feel less satisfied with their job and to feel that they handle conflict less well, while also feeling personally responsible for dealing with it. For these individuals, it will be important to point out some of the positive outcomes of conflict and what it can achieve.

- The most frequently mentioned outcomes of conflict were concerned with changes in relationships, both positive (building relationships and increasing collaboration and co-operation) and negative (poorer relationships, loss of trust, breakdown of relationships, lack of co-operation and collaboration). This points out the importance of understanding other people's approaches to conflict as a key aspect of any conflict training.

Introduction and methodology

Introduction

Background: conflict in the workplace

In its broadest sense, conflict takes place whenever there is a difference of opinion between two people. And while conflict is often seen in a negative way, this need not be the case. Exploring differences in viewpoint in a healthy way can lead to new insights and creative solutions. However, if people are to realize these positive outcomes, they need to become aware of and recognize their own typical way of dealing with conflict, and so gain the power to flex and change this style as and when the occasion demands it.

Getting the best out of disagreements and conflict is important for individuals and their relationships with other people, but also matters to organizations. A recent survey in the United Kingdom put the total cost of conflict at £28.5 billion—the equivalent of more than £1,000 for each employee (Saundry & Urwin, 2021). A constructive approach to conflict can mitigate these costs and make a positive outcome more likely.

This may be especially important today. Many commentators are predicting an increase in workplace conflict due to factors including post-COVID tensions around remote working and the demands of an increasingly diverse workforce (Shields, 2021).

Scope and purpose of this research

This study was set up to investigate how people in the workplace see conflict, in terms of:

- What causes conflict.
- How well people believe they manage conflict.
- The costs and consequences of conflict.
- Who is responsible for managing conflict.
- The extent to which conflict is seen as positive or negative.
- How conflict makes people feel.
- The role of a manager or supervisor during conflict.

In addition, the research examined how a range of other factors related to people's views on conflict, including:

- Demographic data such as age or gender.
- Views about one's job or organization, such as job satisfaction and feelings of organizational inclusion.
- The individual's typical conflict behavior, as measured by the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument® (TKI®) (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974, 2007).
- Personality type, as measured by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) model (Myers, McCaulley, Quenk, & Hammer, 2018).

The purpose of the study is threefold:

- To provide a snapshot of current attitudes to and beliefs about conflict in the workplace.
- To see how current attitudes have changed since a similar survey from 2008 (CPP Inc. & OPP Ltd., 2008).
- To produce recommendations as to how individuals can use knowledge of their own conflict style and personality type to navigate conflict more successfully.

Conflict mode: The TKI® assessment

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974, 2007) defines five "conflict-handling modes", or ways of dealing with conflict. The modes depend on the extent to which a person is co-operative and the extent to which they are assertive. Assertiveness refers to how much an individual tries to satisfy their own concerns. Cooperativeness refers to how much an individual tries to satisfy the concerns of another person. The five modes are Competing, Collaborating, Compromising, Avoiding, and Accommodating.
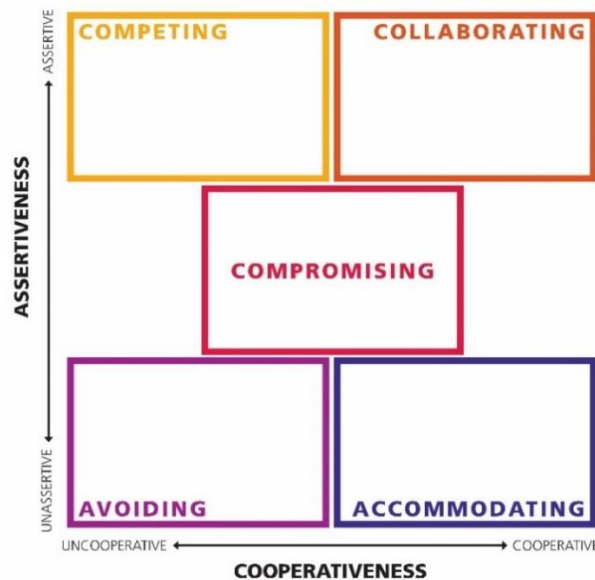
- Avoiding implies avoiding conflict, sidestepping the issue, withdrawing.
- Accommodating implies neglecting your own concerns to satisfy the concerns of other people.
- Competing implies pursuing your own goals at others' expense.
- Collaborating implies working with others to find a solution that fully satisfies the concerns of both parties.
- Compromising implies splitting the difference, exchanging concessions, or seeking a quick middle-ground position.

The TKI assessment is widely used in organizations and in conflict research. More details about the model are given in Appendix A.

Personality differences: The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) assessment

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) assessment (Myers, McCaulley, Quenk, & Hammer, 2018) is already widely used for self-development by organizations and individuals (Furnham, 2017). As such, it provides a useful basis for people to understand how their personality preferences relate to and affect their responses to conflict in the workplace. The MBTI approach looks at four areas of personality type:

- Is an individual energized by, and do they prefer to focus their attention on, the outside world of people and things (Extraversion) or their inner world of thoughts and feelings (Introversion)?

- Do they trust and prefer to use information that is practical and based on the evidence of their senses (Sensing) or do they pay more attention to connections and the big picture (Intuition)?

- Do they prefer to make decisions based on objective logic (Thinking) or based on their values and on how people will be affected (Feeling)?

- Do they prefer to live their lives in an ordered, structured, planned way (Judging) or in an open, spontaneous, emergent way (Perceiving)?

Any individual will therefore have preferences for either Extraversion (E) or Introversion (I), for Sensing (S) or Intuition (N), for Thinking (T) or Feeling (F), and for Judging (J) or Perceiving (P). The four preferences combine dynamically to give one of 16 different personality types. More detailed information about the MBTI framework is given in Appendix B. Many people around the world already use the personality type approach to build self-awareness and understand how they approach work.

Methodology

To carry out the study, we constructed and distributed two online surveys. Both contained identical questions regarding the respondents:

- Background—their gender, age, country of residence, employment status, and MBTI personality type (where known).
- Work—job level, job satisfaction, proportion of time working remotely, size of organization, how included they felt themselves to be at work.
- Self-perception of how well they manage conflict and of how much time this takes.
- Views on:
  o The causes of conflict.
  o The importance of conflict handling as a leadership or management skill.
  o Whose responsibility it is to manage conflict.
  o Who handles conflict most effectively.
  o The effects of COVID and its aftermath.
  o Whether conflict, overall, is positive or negative, and what the positive and/or negative outcomes might be.
  o How conflict at work makes them feel.
- Perceptions of their direct manager or supervisor:
  o How well their manager manages conflict.
  o What their manager could do to manage conflict more effectively.
  o Their manager's typical conflict style.

One version of the survey was sent out to individuals who had completed the TKI assessment online in the previous six months and indicated their willingness to take part in future research. In addition to the questions above, this version also contained questions asking them about the ways in which the TKI assessment had proved helpful to them.

The alternate version was publicized via LinkedIn, Facebook, online forums, and on The Myers-Briggs Company website (https://www.themyersbriggs.com) so that any interested individual could complete it. This version did not ask respondents how useful they had found the TKI assessment, as this group would not previously have completed the TKI questionnaire or had feedback. However, in addition to the questions above, this version of the survey also contained all 30 standard TKI items, allowing respondents' TKI results to be calculated (see Appendix A).

In creating the surveys, the decision was taken not to define 'conflict', but to leave this open for the respondent's own interpretation.

The analysis is based on data from 271 people who completed either of the online surveys.

Results

Who took part? Description of the sample

Group demographics

71% of the group were female, and 28% male, with 1% choosing "prefer to self-describe" or "prefer not to say". Age ranged from 18 to 82 years, with an average (mean) age of 46.

Age
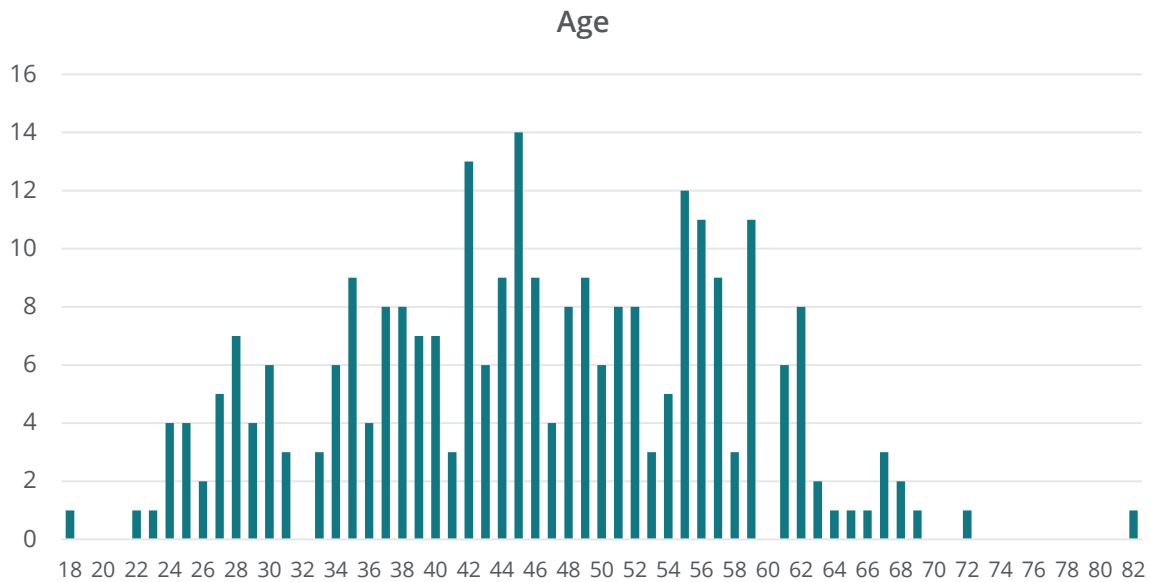
Most respondents (93%) were employed full-time in an organization. Those not in full-time employment were asked to either complete the survey in the context of a recent job within an organization, in the context of an organization they worked with, or to withdraw. 61% of respondents lived and worked in the USA, a further 19% in the UK and the remainder in several other countries around the world.

Employment status

■ Full-time   ■ Part-time   ■ Other

Country

■ USA   ■ UK   ■ Rest of Europe   ■ Rest of world
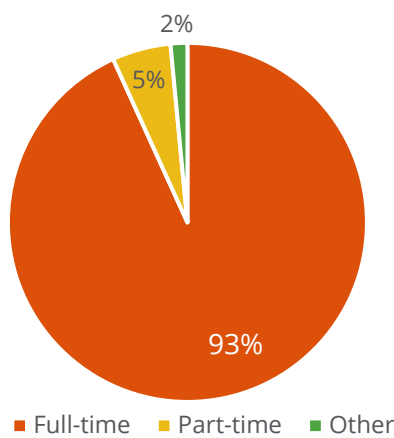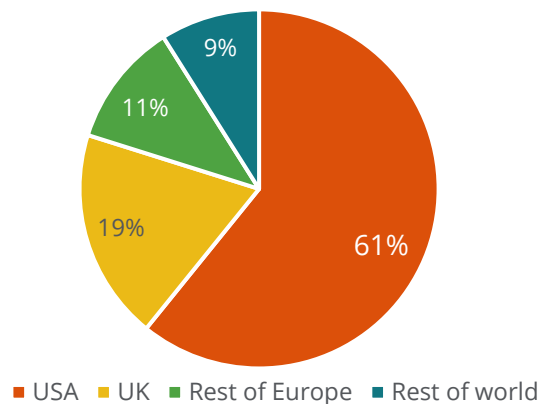
The US and other groups were not directly comparable to each other in terms of gender, age, job level, or percentage of time spent working remotely, so analyses comparing the USA to other countries or regions were not carried out.

Most respondents' jobs were at nonsupervisory or entry level, but all levels were represented:

Job level

Job level	Count
Executive/Top executive	4
Senior management/Executive	25
Middle management	12
First level management/supervisor	36
Nonsupervisory employee	167
Entry level employee	21
Other	5
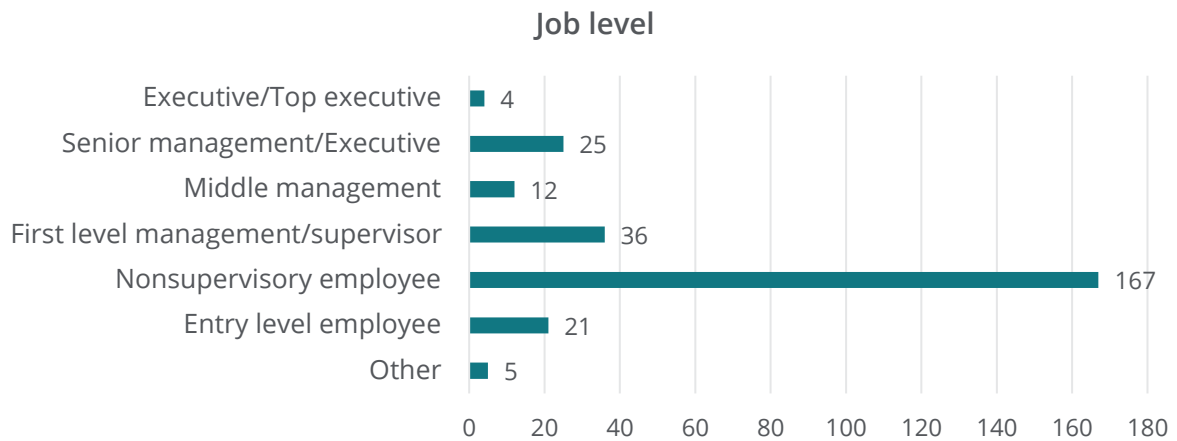
Participants varied in how much they worked virtually. 27% worked remotely none or very little of the time, 34% worked remotely all or almost all the time, and 39% worked in a hybrid way.

Percentage of time working remotely

Range	Percentage
0-10%	27%
11-20%	4%
21-30%	3%
31-40%	4%
41-50%	4%
51-60%	5%
61-70%	6%
71-80%	5%
81-90%	8%
90-100%	34%

(39% spanning 11-20% through 81-90%)
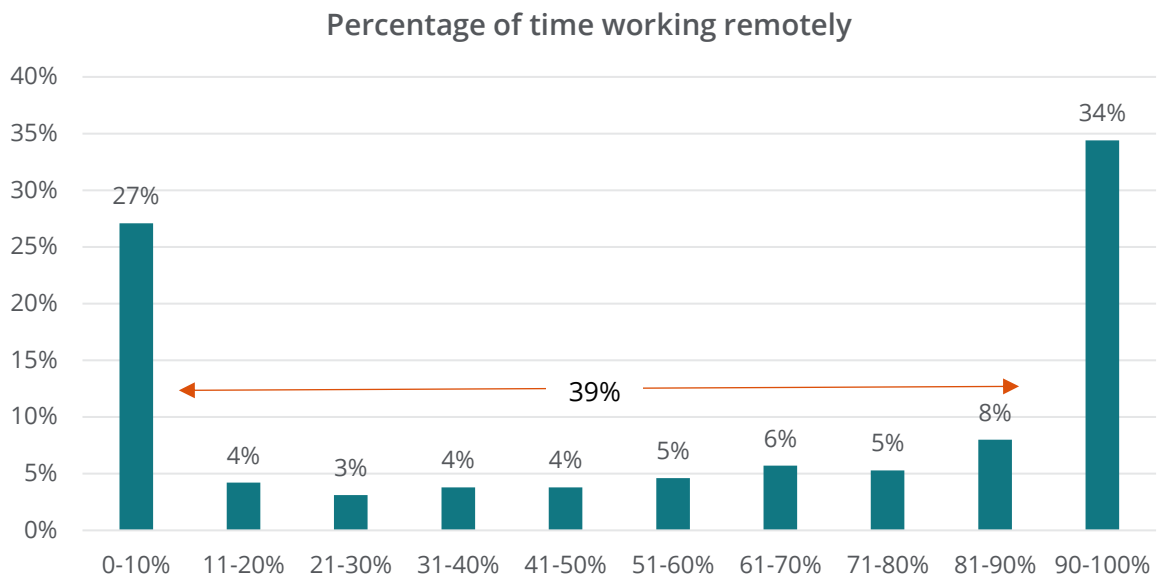
All sizes of organization were represented.

Size of organization

Size	Count
One - just me	7
2 to 10	24
11 to 20	14
21 to 50	23
51 to 100	26
101 to 300	51
301 to 1,000	32
More than 1,000	83

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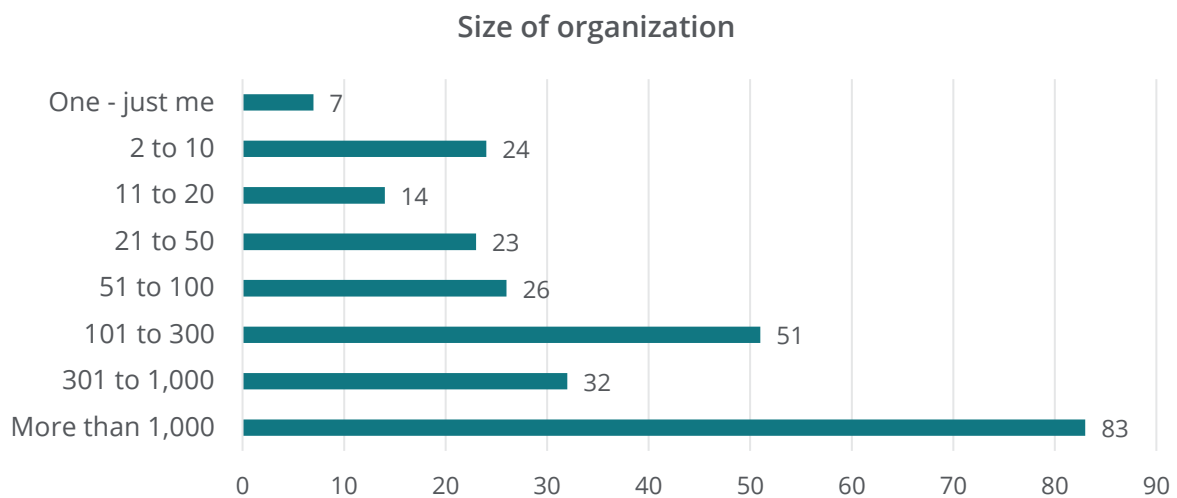
Work and managing conflict at work

Overview

Survey respondents were asked how well they managed conflict at work, and how satisfied they were with their job. A subset of the group (74 people) was also asked four questions relating to how included they felt at work.

Just over 90% felt they managed conflict at least adequately:

How well do you manage conflict?

Very well	6.5%
Quite well	34.4%
Adequately	49.2%
Poorly	8.8%
Very poorly	1.1%
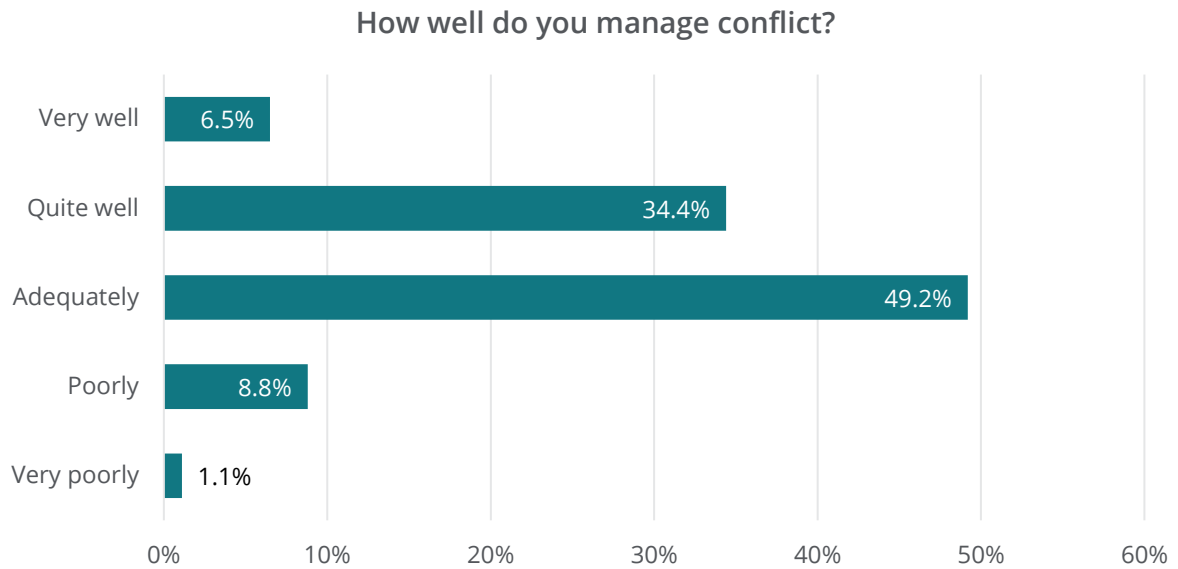
Almost three-quarters were satisfied or very satisfied with their job:

How satisfied are you with your current line of work?

Very satisfied	34.0%
Satisfied	38.5%
Somewhat satisfied	20.0%
Somewhat dissatisfied	5.3%
Dissatisfied	1.5%
Very dissatisfied	0.8%
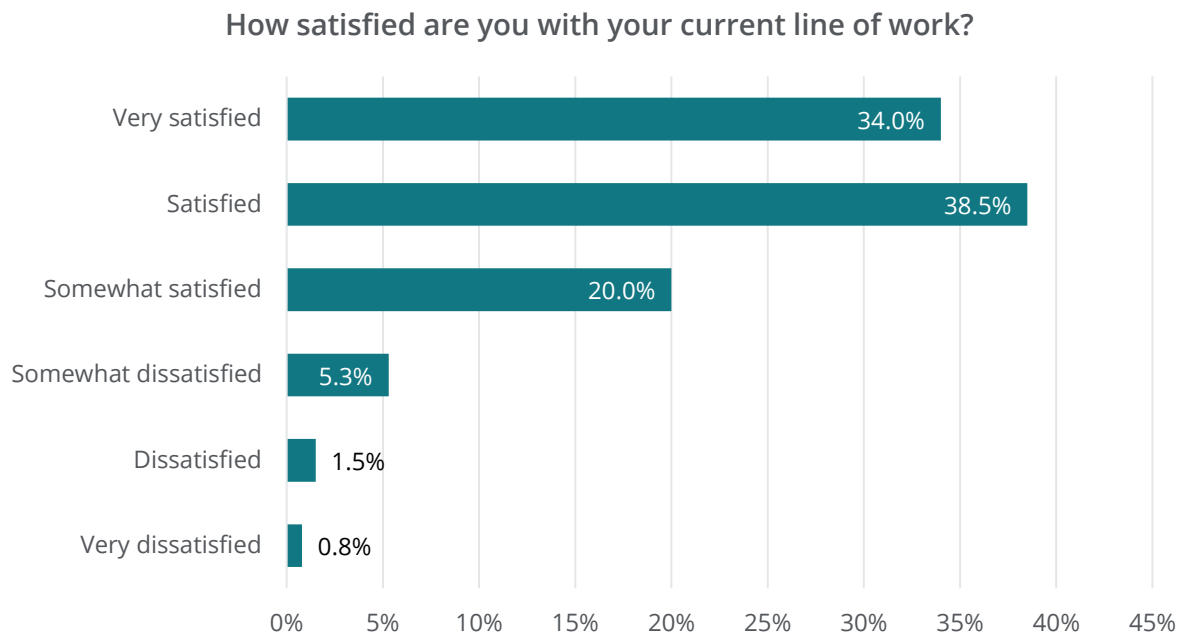
Most respondents felt included by their co-workers and their manager, felt able to speak out and be their authentic self at work, and felt valued by and at home in their organization.

Feelings of inclusion

■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree
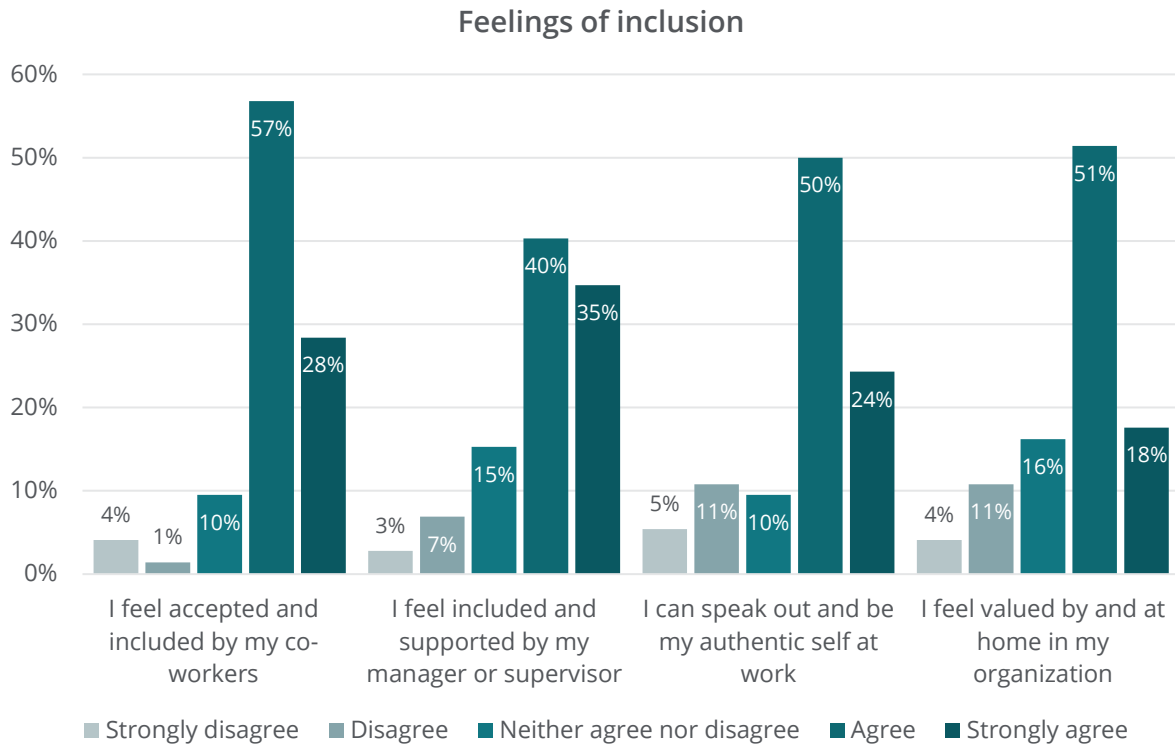
Those who felt more able to manage conflict also tended to have higher levels of job satisfaction, felt more able to be their authentic self at work, and felt more valued by and at home in their organization. Intercorrelations and sample sizes are shown in the table below:

	Manage conflict	Job satisfaction	Co-workers	Manager	Authentic self	Valued, at home
How well do you manage conflict?	1	.239** N=256	.198^{NS} N=74	.138^{NS} N=72	.258* N=74	.375** N=74
Job satisfaction		1	.229* N=74	.427** N=72	.120^{NS} N=74	.382** N=74
Accepted and included by my co-workers			1	.486** N=72	.645** N=74	.671** N=74
Included and supported by manager				1	,376** N=72	.618** N=72
Can speak out and be authentic self					1	.673** N=74
Valued by and at home in my organization						1

**Significant at the 0.01 level; *Significant at the 0.05 level; ^{NS} Not significant

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Demographic, personality, and conflict mode differences

There was only one significant relationship with demographic factors. Older people were significantly more likely to feel that they could speak out and be their authentic self at work[1].

There was one relationship with personality type. Individuals with a preference for Extraversion on average saw themselves as significantly better[2] at managing conflict than those with a preference for Introversion. 55% of Extraverts reported that they managed conflict quite well or very well, compared with 42% of Introverts.

Extraversion–Introversion and self-reported managing conflict skill
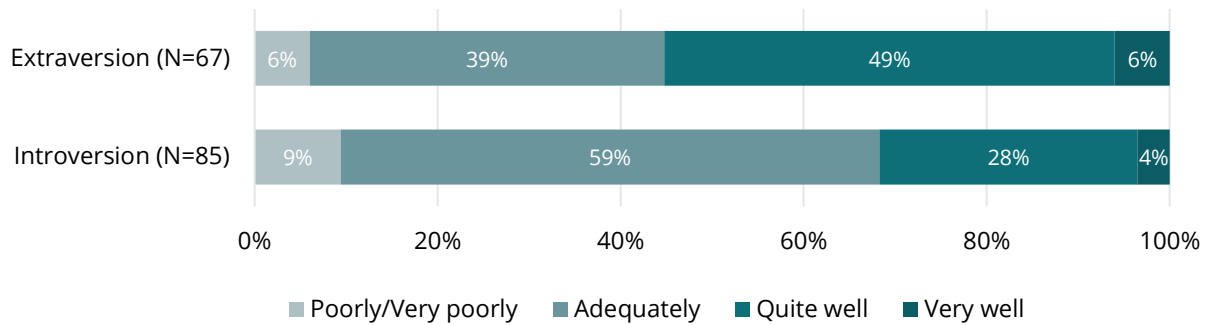
	Poorly/Very poorly	Adequately	Quite well	Very well
Extraversion (N=67)	6%	39%	49%	6%
Introversion (N=85)	9%	59%	28%	4%

Respondents who rated themselves better at dealing with conflict on average had significantly[3] lower TKI scores on Avoiding and significantly higher scores on Collaborating. It may be that Avoiding is not always seen as 'dealing' with conflict.

Mean TKI scores by self-reported managing conflict skill

	Poorly/Very poorly	Adequately	Quite well	Very well
Avoiding	8.33	7.35	6.70	5.82
Collaborating	4.47	5.72	6.48	7.18

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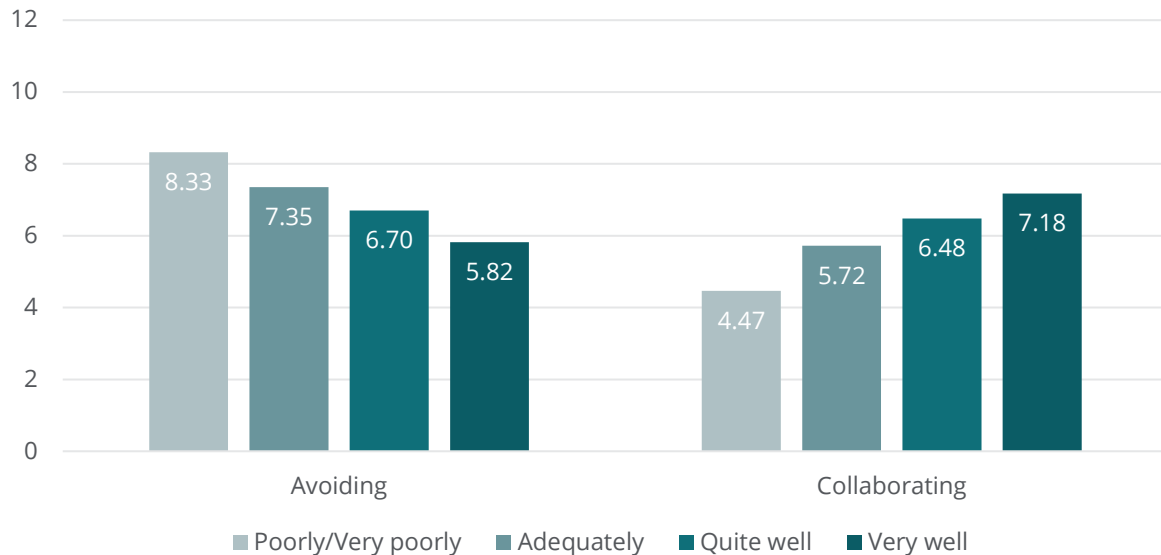
[1] Correlation=.245, N=73, significant at the 5% level
[2] Based on a χ^2 analysis
[3] Based on a one-way analysis of variance. Note that in many of the analyses in this report, TKI raw scores are used rather than percentiles. The reasons for this are given in Appendix A.

The costs and consequences of conflict

Time spent on conflict

Survey participants were asked, "How often do you have to deal with conflict at work?" and, in an open-ended question, "On average, how many hours per week do you spend dealing with conflict at work?" The answers to these questions are shown below.

How often do you have to deal with conflict at work?
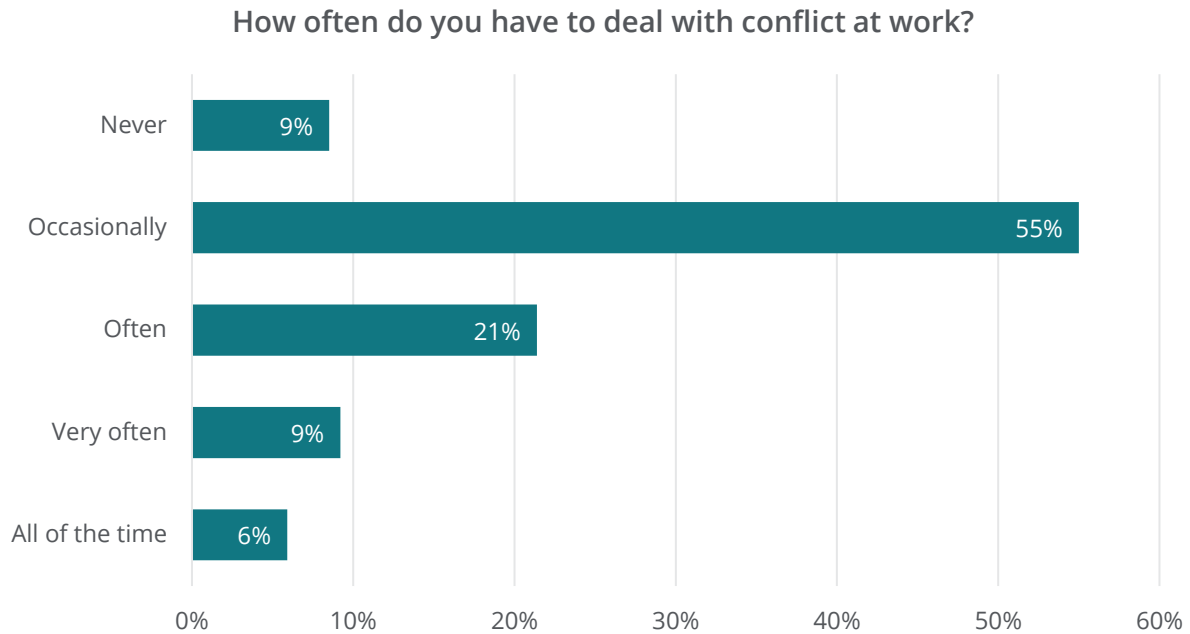
While over half of respondents only need to deal with conflict at work occasionally, over a third (36%) deal with conflict often, very often, or all the time. This number has increased (from 29%) since a similar survey carried out in 2008 by CPP Inc. and OPP Ltd, the precursors of The Myers-Briggs Company (CPP Inc. & OPP Ltd., 2008).

On average, how many hours per week do you spend dealing with conflict at work?

On average, participants in the research spent 4.34 hours per week dealing with conflict at work. This also has increased since the 2008 survey, where the average was 2.1 hours. With the costs of employment at an average of $38.61 per hour in the US (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022), and UK costs at around £23 (Office for National Statistics, 2022) per hour, this represents a significant cost to organizations.

Indirect effects of spending time on conflict

There were no significant differences in the number of hours spent dealing with conflict between men and women, between remote, hybrid or non-remote workers, between different job levels, or different sizes of organization. There were no significant relationships with TKI scores or MBTI type. However, there was a significant relationship with job satisfaction and with how included and valued people felt themselves to be. On average, respondents who had to deal with conflict at work less often had a significantly higher level of job satisfaction:

Job satisfaction and frequency of dealing with conflict

■ Mean level of job satisfaction

	All the time	Very often	Often	Occasionally	Never
Mean level of job satisfaction	4.5	4.9	4.6	5.1	5.5

How often do you have to deal with conflict at work?
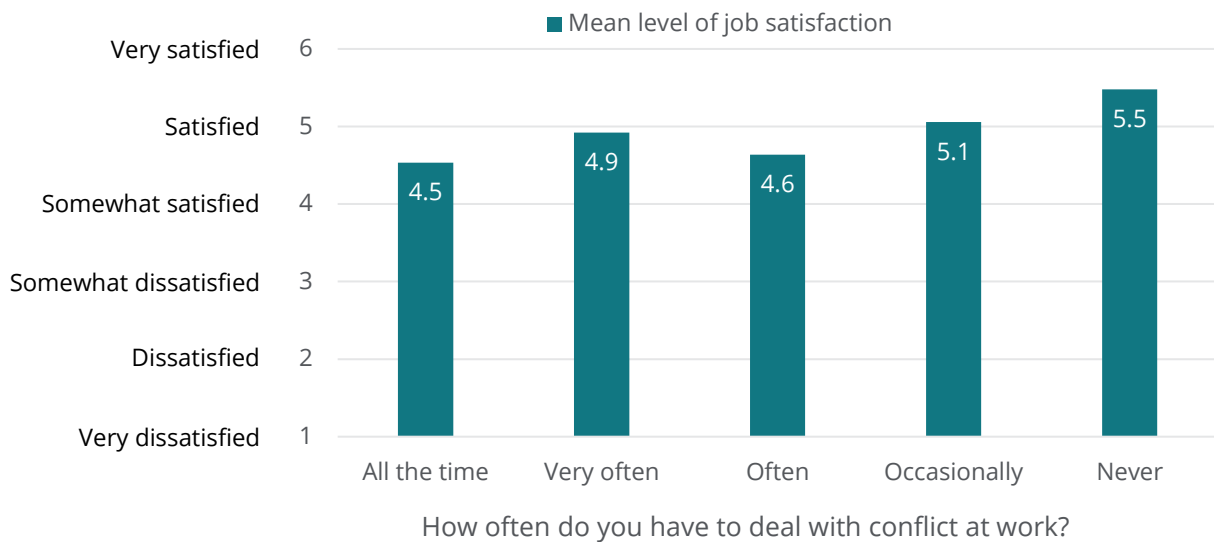
This effect was most noticeable for those who said they were very dissatisfied with their job, who on average spent significantly more hours dealing with conflict:

Mean number of hours dealing with conflict for each level of job satisfaction
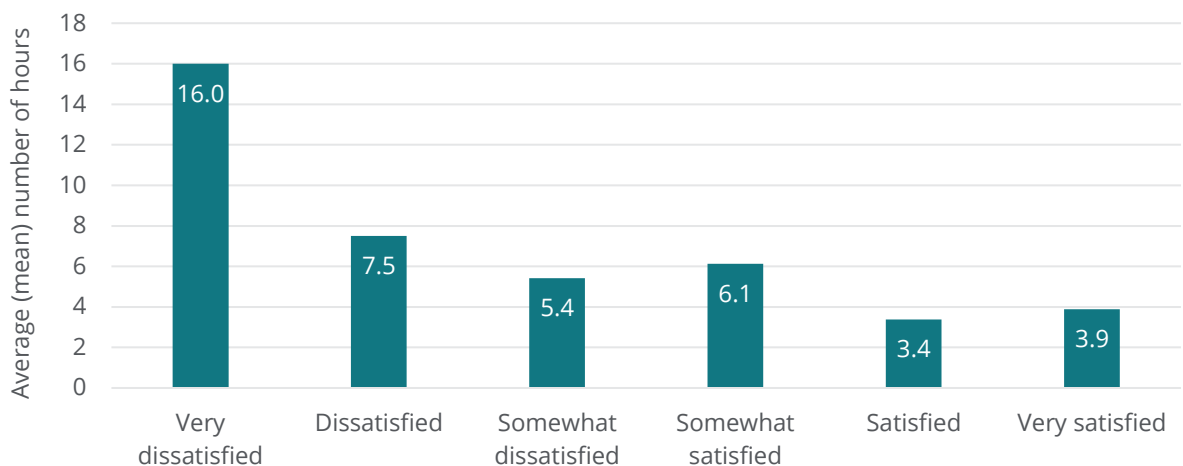
	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied
Average (mean) number of hours	16.0	7.5	5.4	6.1	3.4	3.9

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Those who agreed or strongly agreed that they felt accepted and included by their co-workers, could speak out and be their authentic self at work, or felt valued by and at home in their organization, on average spent significantly[4] fewer hours dealing with conflict:

Mean number of hours dealing with conflict for each level of inclusion

In summary, the more hours that an individual spent dealing with conflict, the less included they felt.

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[4] These significant differences, and those on the previous page, are based on a one-way analysis of variance.

The causes of conflict

What are the main causes of conflict?

Based on previous research (CIPD, 2021; CPP Inc. & OPP Ltd., 2008; Egerová & Rotenbornová, 2021; Jha & Jha, 2010), respondents were presented with 17 possible causes of conflict and asked, "What are the main causes of conflict in your workplace? Please check up to three boxes." The chart below shows the percentage of respondents who chose each cause as one of their top three.

What are the main causes of conflict in your workplace?

Cause	Percentage
Poor communication	47%
Lack of role clarity	42%
Heavy workloads	38%
Personality clashes	37%
Changes in policies, products, organizational structures etc.	30%
Dysfunctional teams	27%
People with very different values	25%
Inadequate resources	24%
Lack of transparency, openness, and honesty	23%
Poor senior leadership	19%
Inadequate training	17%
Poor line management	14%
Recruiting or selecting the wrong people for the job	12%
Bullying or harassment	10%
Discriminatory behavior	5%
Other	7%
None - there is no conflict in my workplace	8%

Poor communication and lack of role clarity were the causes of conflict chosen most often, quoted by 47% and 42% of the group. 8% said that there was no conflict in their workplace.

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Relationship with conflict management, job satisfaction, and inclusion

The table below, based on results from independent-samples t-tests, shows whether those who mentioned each cause reported significantly more or less job satisfaction, felt they managed conflict more or less well, dealt with conflict more or less often, and spent more or less hours dealing with conflict, compared with those who did not mention this cause.

Cause	Job satisfaction	How well do you manage conflict	How often do you deal with conflict	Number of hours
Poor communication	Lower satisfaction	-	More often	More hours
Lack of role clarity	Lower satisfaction	Less well	More often	-
Heavy workloads	Lower satisfaction	-	More often	-
Personality clashes	-	-	-	-
Changes in policies, products, organizational structures etc.	-	-	-	-
Dysfunctional teams	Lower satisfaction	Less well	More often	More hours
People with very different values	-	-	More often	More hours
Inadequate resources	Lower satisfaction	-	More often	More hours
Lack of transparency, openness, and honesty	-	-	More often	More hours
Poor senior leadership	Lower satisfaction	-	More often	More hours
Inadequate training	-	-	-	More hours
Poor line management	Lower satisfaction	-	More often	More hours
Recruiting or selecting the wrong people for the job	-	-	-	-
Bullying or harassment	-	-	More often	More hours
Discriminatory behavior	-	-	More often	More hours
None - there is no conflict in my workplace	-	Less well	Less often	Less hours

Where any cause other than *personality clashes*, *changes in policies*, and *recruiting or selecting the wrong people* was chosen, more hours were spent dealing with conflict, or conflict had to be dealt with more often, or both. In addition, where a lack of role clarity or the presence of dysfunctional teams was a cause, people felt they managed conflict less well. This may indicate areas to

address in future conflict training. Seven causes also had an impact on job satisfaction: *poor communication*, *lack of role clarity*, *dysfunctional teams*, *inadequate resources*, *poor senior leadership*, and *poor line management*. In addition to lowering job satisfaction because of conflict, all of these may also be direct causes of low job satisfaction.

Not surprisingly, individuals who chose *None – there is no conflict in my workplace* reported spending very little or zero time on conflict, and few or no hours. On average, however, they also thought they managed conflict less well than others. It may be that some of this group felt they had insufficient experience of dealing with conflict.

Five causes also showed a relationship with the questions concerning inclusion.

Cause	Accepted and included by co-workers	Included and supported by manager	Can speak out and be authentic self	Valued by and at home in organiz-ation
People with very different values	Lower	Lower	Lower	Lower
Inadequate resources	-	-	-	Lower
Lack of transparency, openness, and honesty	-	-	-	Lower
Poor senior leadership	-	Lower	-	-
Discriminatory behavior	-	-	Lower	-

The presence of people with very different values had the greatest effect on inclusion.

Demographic differences

There were a small number of significant relationships with remote working status and job level, and three with age.

Cause	Percent of each group mentioning cause		
	Non-remote workers	Hybrid workers	Remote workers
Poor communication	56%	47%	36%
Inadequate resources	13%	30%	24%
Lack of transparency, openness, and honesty	18%	32%	17%
Poor line management	7%	24%	9%
None - there is no conflict in my workplace	10%	2%	12%

Non-remote, office-based workers were the most likely to choose *poor communication*. Hybrid workers were the most likely to choose *inadequate resources*, *lack of transparency*, or *poor line management*, and the least likely to say that there is no conflict in their workplace.

Cause	Percent of each group mentioning cause	
	Non-managers	Supervisors, managers and execs
Personality clashes	33%	50%
People with different values	19%	42%
Poor line management	10%	26%

Non-supervisory staff were less likely than others to mention *personality clashes*, *people with different values*, or *poor line management* as causes of conflict.

Those mentioning *poor communication*, *dysfunctional teams,* or *inadequate training* were, on average, significantly younger than those who did not.

MBTI® and TKI® differences

There were a small number of significant personality type differences:

- *Bullying and harassment* was mentioned by 15% of those with a preference for Intuition, but no-one with a Sensing preference chose this as one of the top three causes.

- 36% of those with a Judging preference mentioned *inadequate resources*, but only 19% of those with a Perceiving preference mentioned this.

- No-one with SF preferences chose *poor senior leadership* as a cause, but 32% of those with ST preferences, 26% of NF, and 25% of NT individuals did.
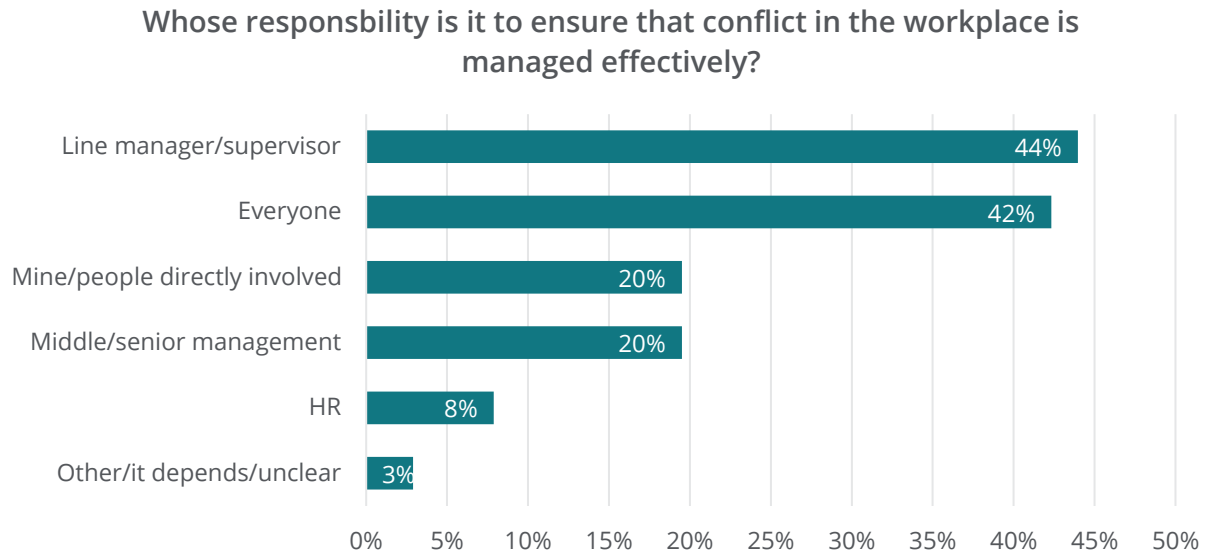
There were a small number of statistically significant but objectively small TKI differences. Three causes were more likely to be chosen by respondents with lower Avoiding scores, and one by those with lower Collaborating scores.

Average TKI scores for those choosing specific causes or not
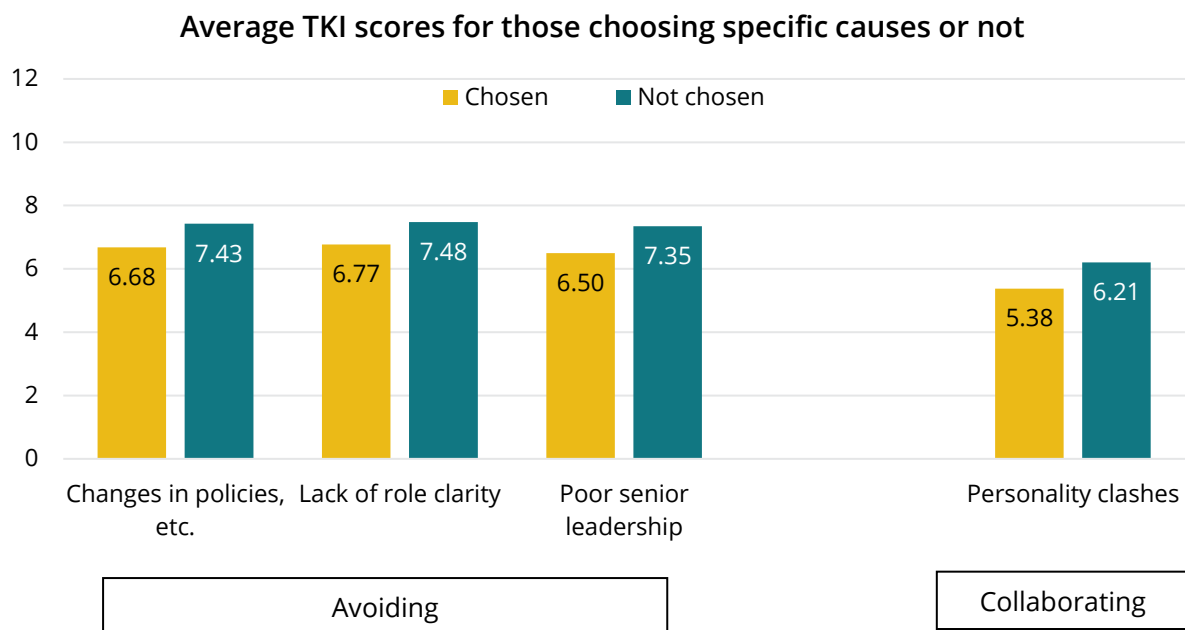
Managing, leading, and handling conflict

Who is responsible for managing conflict?

In an open-ended question, survey respondents were asked, "Whose responsibility is it to ensure that conflict in the workplace is managed effectively?" 241 individuals responded, and their answers were categorized into themes.

Whose responsbility is it to ensure that conflict in the workplace is managed effectively?

Category	Percentage
Line manager/supervisor	44%
Everyone	42%
Mine/people directly involved	20%
Middle/senior management	20%
HR	8%
Other/it depends/unclear	3%

Note that percentages total more than 100%, as several respondents mentioned more than one group (for example, "everyone but especially my line manager"). The most common answers were the immediate line manager or supervisor, or everyone, with 20% mentioning the individuals directly involved (including the respondent themselves) and/or more senior managers or leaders.

There were a small number of statistically significant[5] group differences in the answers to this question:

- Those who mentioned *everyone* were on average slightly younger than those who did not.

- Only 5% of non-management respondents mentioned *HR*, compared to 16% of managers, senior managers, and executives. This may imply differences in how managers and non-managers deal with conflict.

- Those who mentioned *middle or senior management* tended to say they dealt with conflict more often and on average spent more hours doing so (7.8 compared with 3.9). It is possible that this may reflect organizations where leaders have not created a culture where conflict is effectively dealt with, resulting in more time being spent on it.

There were no significant relationships with personality type. Those who mentioned 'Everyone' on average scored higher on Accommodating than those who did not.

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[5] Based on independent samples t-test or χ^2 analysis, depending on data type.

How important is conflict handling as a leadership or management skill?

Survey respondents were asked, "How important is conflict handling as a leadership or management skill?" Almost all respondents, 98%, said this was extremely or very important.

How important is conflict handling as a leadership or management skill?
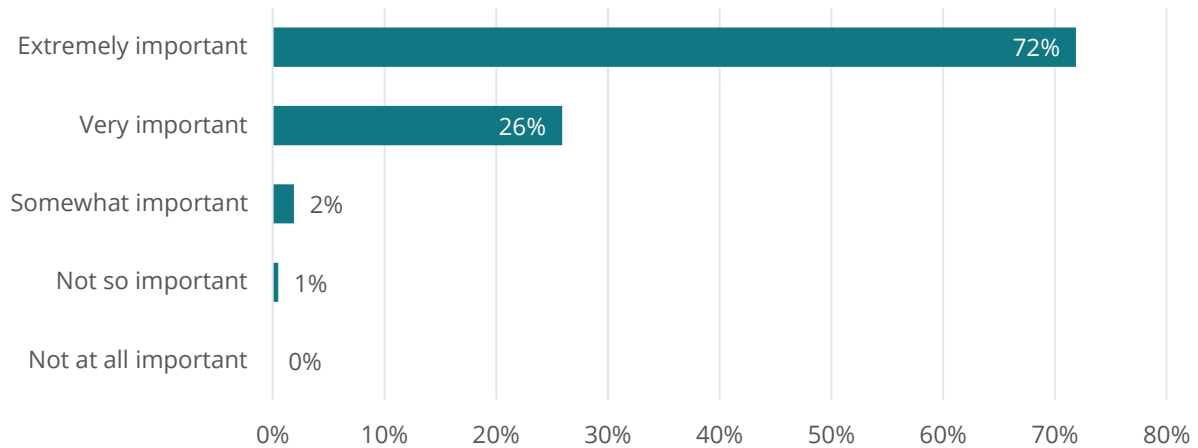
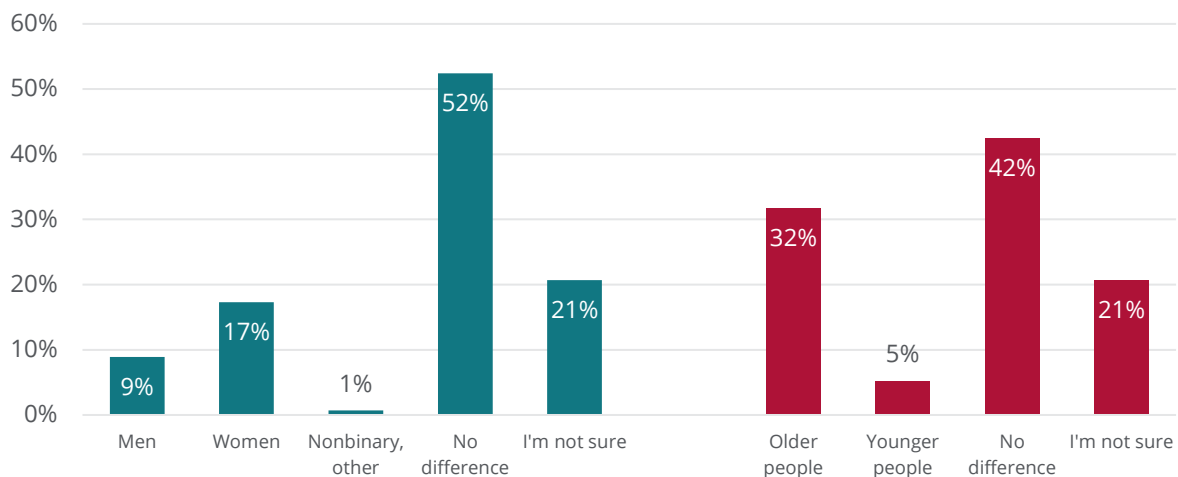|	
Extremely important	72%
Very important	26%
Somewhat important	2%
Not so important	1%
Not at all important	0%

Non-managerial employees were more likely than managers or executives to rate conflict handling as extremely important as a leadership or management skill. This may link with the finding that non-managerial respondents were less likely to see managing conflict as being the responsibility of HR.

Who handles conflict most effectively?

Survey respondents were asked to choose between different groups in terms of who they felt handles conflict most effectively.

Who handles conflict most effectively?

| Men	Women	Nonbinary, other	No difference	I'm not sure	Older people	Younger people	No difference	I'm not sure
9%	17%	1%	52%	21%	32%	5%	42%	21%

Most respondents felt there was no difference between men and women or weren't sure, but amongst those who did have a view, women were twice as likely to be nominated as men. Female respondents were more likely than male to say that there was no difference between the sexes, or that they weren't sure.

Overall, older people were much more likely than younger people to be seen as handling conflict more effectively. There was, however, a tendency for younger respondents to say that younger people handled conflict more effectively. The mean ages of those who chose older people, who chose no difference, or who chose I'm not sure, were 47, 46, and 43 respectively. The mean age of those who chose younger people was 35.

Who handles conflict most effectively?
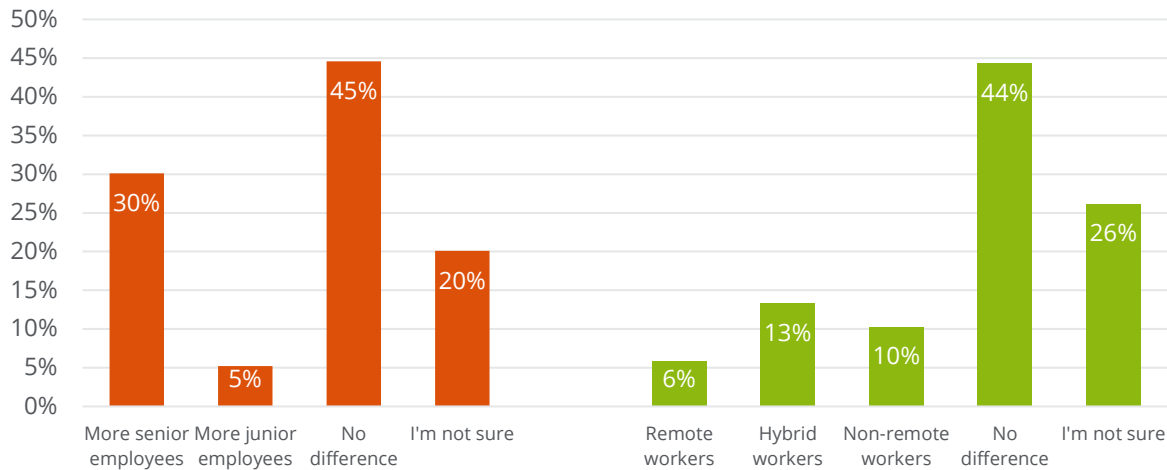
More senior employees were more likely to be seen as handling conflict effectively than were more junior employees. There was much less difference between how remote, hybrid, and non-remote workers were perceived, but there was a relationship with the respondent's own remote working status. Where they expressed a view, respondents were more likely to see their own type of worker as handling conflict most effectively.

Respondent's remote working status	Who handles conflict most effectively?				
	Remote workers	Hybrid workers	Non-remote workers	No difference	I'm not sure
Remote worker	10%	10%	3%	58%	19%
Hybrid worker	2%	21%	10%	40%	28%
Non-remote worker	7%	8%	17%	38%	30%
Total group	**6%**	**14%**	**10%**	**45%**	**25%**

Effects of COVID-19

Survey respondents were asked how COVID-19 had influenced conflict at work.

How has the COVID-19 pandemic and its after-effects influenced conflict in your workplace?

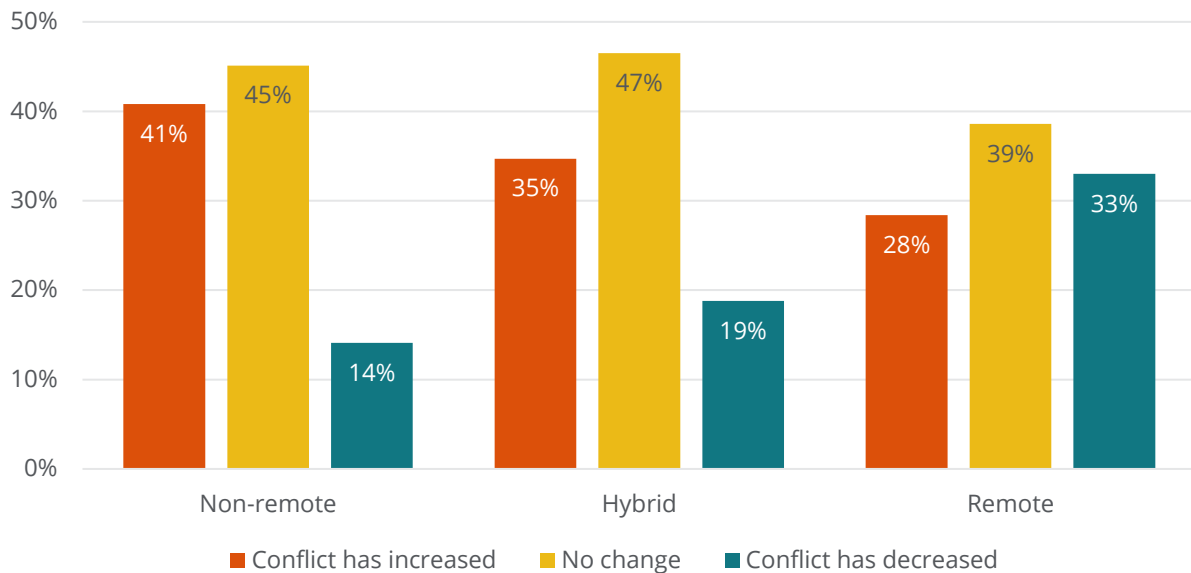|	
The amount of conflict has increased	34%
The amount of conflict has not changed	44%
The amount of conflict has decreased	22%
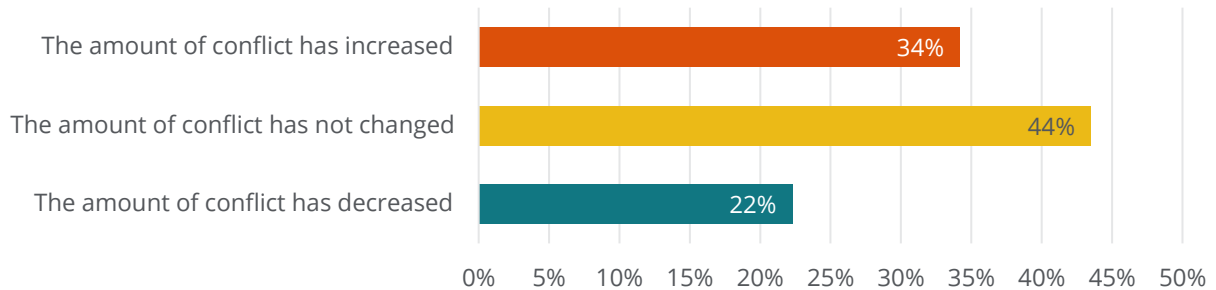
While many respondents felt that the amount of conflict had not changed, there was a slight increase in perceived conflict overall. This is not surprising given the degree of change associated with the post-COVID workplace. Other studies have found an increase in conflict in specific jobs or contexts (for example, Lam et al, 2022).

Some sources of conflict in the post-COVID working environment may be linked to a return to the physical workplace, such as concerns about contracting COVID or resistance to a forced return to the office. This is supported by the data. Non-remote workers were the most likely to say that the amount of conflict had increased, remote workers the least[6].

Views on conflict post-COVID by remote working status

	Non-remote	Hybrid	Remote
Conflict has increased	41%	35%	28%
No change	45%	47%	39%
Conflict has decreased	14%	19%	33%

For those respondents where conflict had increased, job satisfaction was significantly lower, and more time was being spent in dealing with conflict[7].
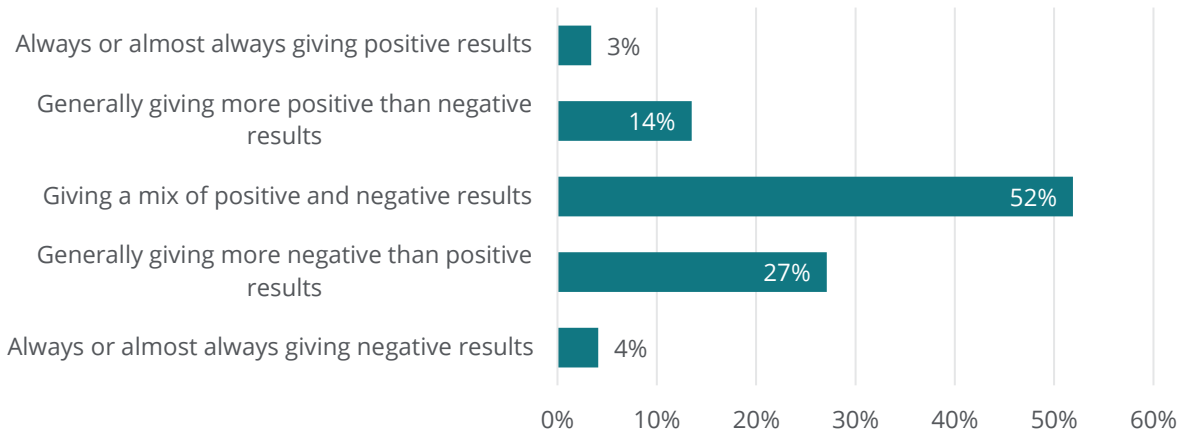
[6] Significant effect based on a chi-square analysis
[7] Based on one-way analysis of variance

Is conflict positive or negative?

Overall results

Survey respondents were asked how, overall, they saw conflict.

Overall, how do you see workplace conflict?

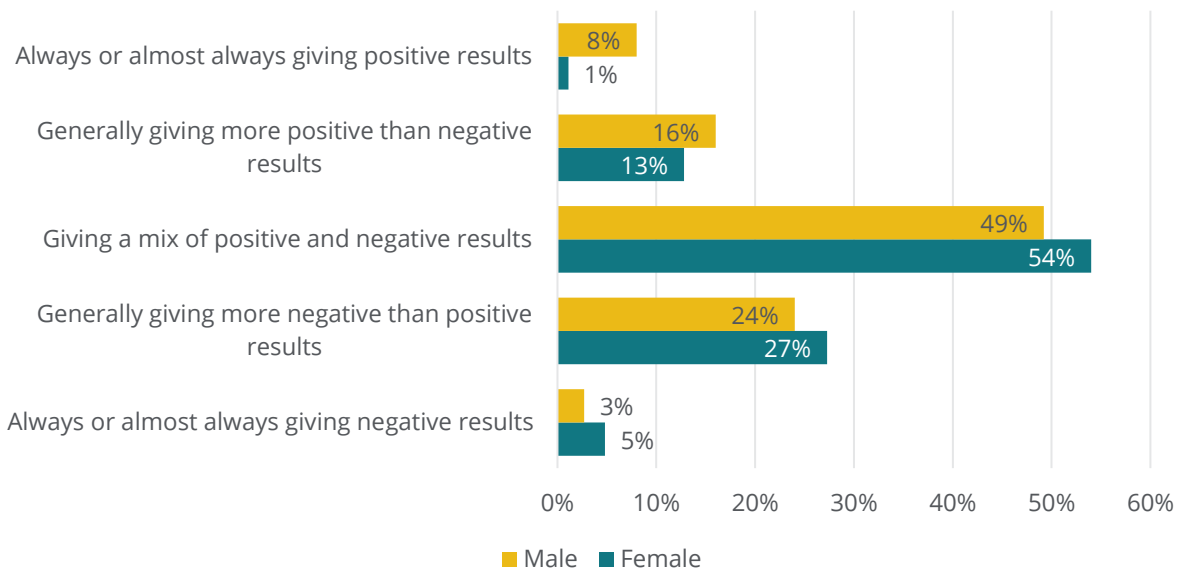| Response	Percentage
Always or almost always giving positive results	3%
Generally giving more positive than negative results	14%
Giving a mix of positive and negative results	52%
Generally giving more negative than positive results	27%
Always or almost always giving negative results	4%

Half the group felt that workplace conflict gave a mix of positive and negative results. Almost twice as many (31%) felt that it was more negative compared with those (17%) who felt that it was more positive. Very few felt that it was entirely positive or entirely negative.

There were several relationships[8] with demographic and other factors:

- Men were more likely to see conflict as positive. 24% of men chose one of the top two options (always or generally positive) and 27% chose one of the bottom two (always or generally negative), compared with 14% and 32% respectively for women.

Overall, how do you see workplace conflict?

Response	Male	Female
Always or almost always giving positive results	8%	1%
Generally giving more positive than negative results	16%	13%
Giving a mix of positive and negative results	49%	54%
Generally giving more negative than positive results	24%	27%
Always or almost always giving negative results	3%	5%

■ Male ■ Female

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[8] All differences quoted are statistically significant

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- Those who saw workplace conflict positively were more likely than others to:
    o Be more satisfied with their job.
    o Feel that they themselves manage conflict well.
    o Never or only occasionally have to deal with conflict.
    o See themselves as being responsible for dealing with conflict.
    o Mention changes in policies, products, organizational structures etc. as a cause of conflict, or say there was no conflict in their workplace.

- Those who saw workplace conflict negatively were more likely than others to choose *bullying and harassment*, *dysfunctional teams*, *people with very different values, personality clashes,* or *poor senior leadership* as a cause of workplace conflict. Conflict from these causes may have greater negative connotations than conflict from other causes.

There were no significant relationships with personality type. However, those who saw conflict positively had a significantly higher score on the TKI Collaborating scale, and a significantly lower score on Avoiding, compared with those who did not[9].
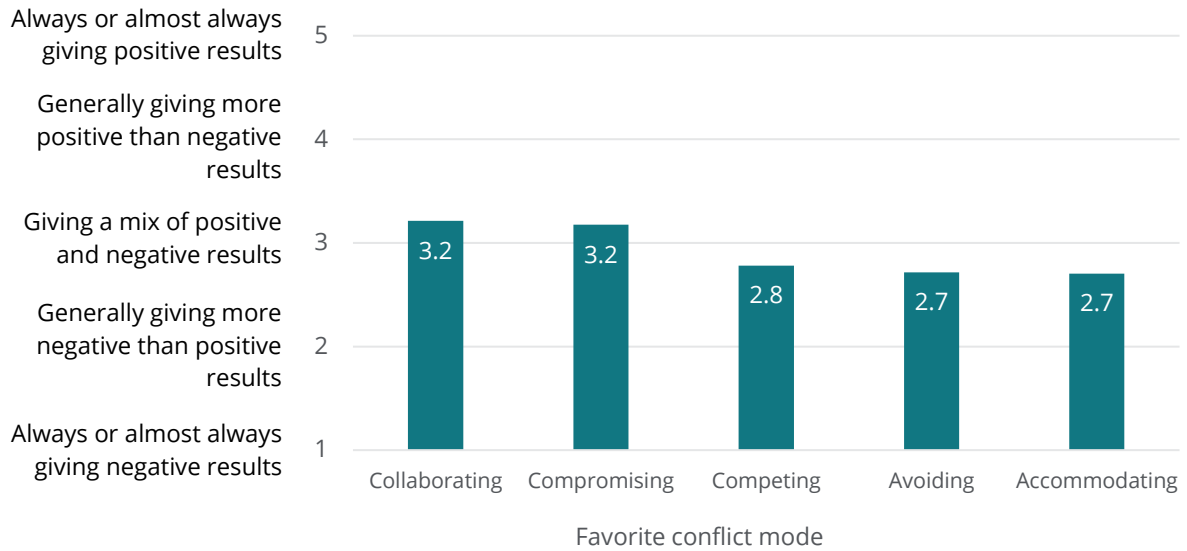
Mean Collaborating and Avoiding by perception of conflict

Overall, how do you see workplace conflict?

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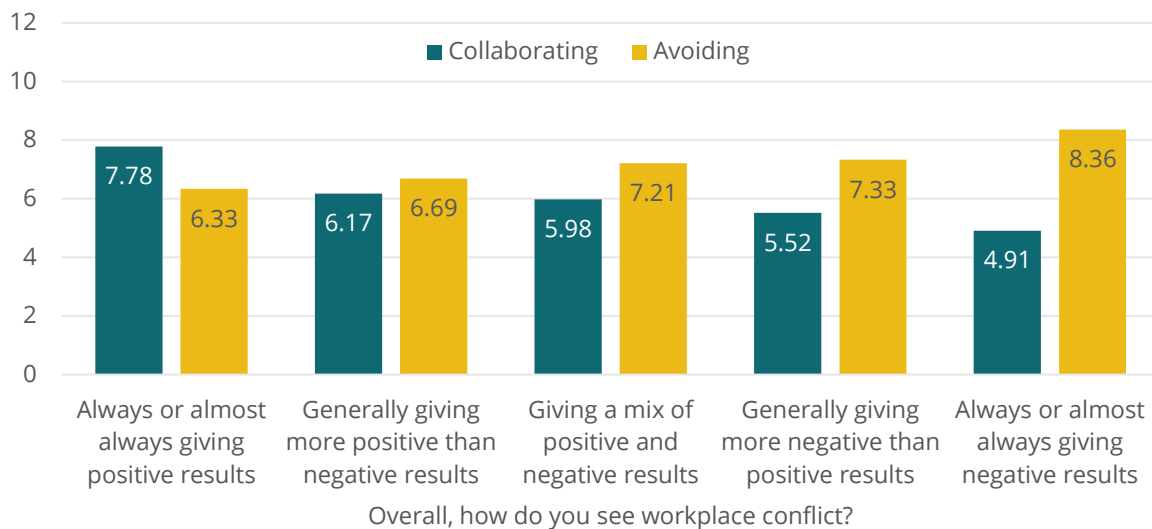
[9] Based on chi-square analysis

Respondents whose favorite mode was Collaborating or Compromising had the most positive view of conflict. Those whose mode was Avoiding or Accommodating the least[10].

Mean view of conflict by favorite conflict mode

Scale	Value
Always or almost always giving positive results	5
Generally giving more positive than negative results	4
Giving a mix of positive and negative results	3
Generally giving more negative than positive results	2
Always or almost always giving negative results	1

Favorite conflict mode	Value
Collaborating	3.2
Compromising	3.2
Competing	2.8
Avoiding	2.7
Accommodating	2.7

Favorite conflict mode

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[10] Significant effect, from a one-way analysis of variance

The Myers-Briggs Company

Positive and negative aspects of workplace conflict

Survey respondents were asked, "What positive outcomes of workplace conflict, if any, have you experienced?" Their answers were categorized into themes.

What positive outcomes of workplace conflict, if any, have you experienced?

Category	Percentage
Building relationships, collaboration, co-operation	28%
Achieving a better solution, getting results	23%
Change, innovation, new ideas, new perspectives	16%
Greater self-awareness, individual growth	13%
Clearing the air, moving on	12%
Better communication	11%
Better understanding of systems, policies, processes, etc.	9%
Other	6%
No positive outcomes	10%

The greatest positive benefits were seen as *building relationships*, *collaboration, and co-operation*.
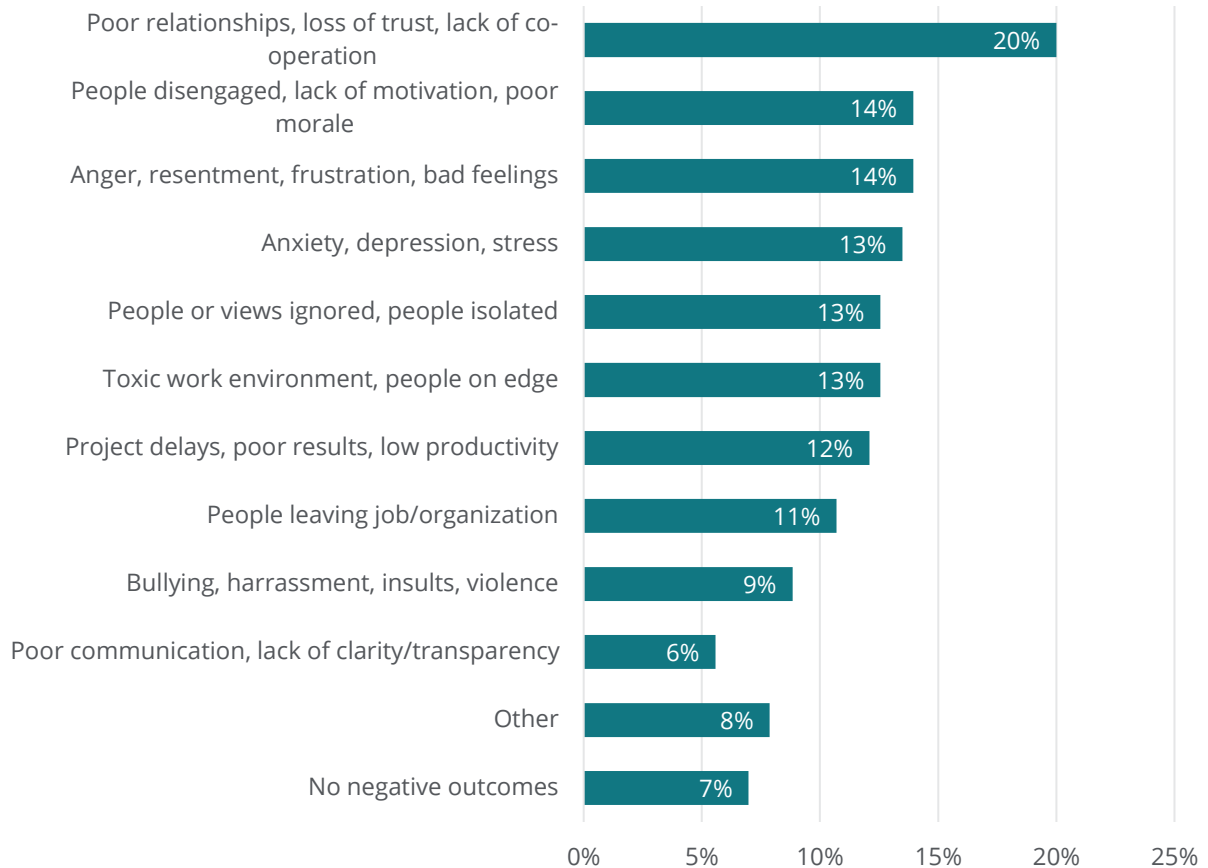
There were several significant[11] relationships with other factors:

- Women were more likely than men to mention outcomes around *building relationships, collaboration, and co-operation*.

- Respondents who mentioned outcomes around *building relationships, collaboration, and co-operation* tended to spend a greater proportion of their time working remotely compared with those who did not. They also gave a higher rating to the importance of conflict handling as a leadership or management skill.

- Those who mentioned outcomes around *achieving a better solution* tended to rate their ability to manage conflict more positively.

- Those who mentioned outcomes around *change, innovation, or new ideas* were more likely to mention changes in policies, products etc., and a lack of transparency as causes of conflict.

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[11] Based on chi-square analysis or one-way analysis of variance, depending on type of data

Survey respondents were also asked, "What negative outcomes of workplace conflict, if any, have you experienced?" As with positive outcomes, their answers were then categorized into themes.

What negative outcomes of workplace conflict, if any, have you experienced?

Category	Percentage
Poor relationships, loss of trust, lack of co-operation	20%
People disengaged, lack of motivation, poor morale	14%
Anger, resentment, frustration, bad feelings	14%
Anxiety, depression, stress	13%
People or views ignored, people isolated	13%
Toxic work environment, people on edge	13%
Project delays, poor results, low productivity	12%
People leaving job/organization	11%
Bullying, harrassment, insults, violence	9%
Poor communication, lack of clarity/transparency	6%
Other	8%
No negative outcomes	7%

Although building relationships was the most quoted positive outcome of conflict, the breakdown of relationships, trust, and co-operation was the most mentioned negative outcome. Conflict can build or destroy relationships at work.

There were several significant[12] relationships with other factors:

- 25% of men mentioned an outcome on the theme of *anger, resentment, frustration or bad feelings* but only 11% of women did. 32% of men mentioned *poor relationships, loss of trust or lack of co-operation*, but only 16% of women did.

- Older respondents were more likely to mention *bullying or harassment*.

- Respondents in more senior roles, and those who needed to deal with conflict at work less frequently, were more likely to say that there were *no negative outcomes*.

- Those who dealt with conflict at work more often, and who spent more hours doing so, were more likely to mention *anxiety, depression or stress*. Those who spent more hours dealing with conflict were also more likely to mention *people leaving their jobs*.

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[12] Based on chi-square analysis or one-way analysis of variance, depending on type of data

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- Respondents who mentioned dysfunctional teams as a cause of conflict were less likely to say there were *no negative outcomes*.

- Those who quoted poor senior leadership as a cause were more likely than others to mention *people being ignored or isolated* and *people leaving the organization* as outcomes and were less likely to say there were *no negative outcomes*.

- Those who mentioned inadequate training as a cause were more likely to mention *project delays, poor results, or poor productivity* as an outcome.

- Those who mentioned recruiting the wrong person as a cause were more likely to mention *people leaving* as an outcome.

- Respondents who mentioned bullying and harassment as a cause were more likely to mention *bullying, harassment, insults, or violence* as an outcome.

There were some personality type differences:

- 8% of those with a Sensing preference mentioned an outcome of *disengagement, low motivation, or poor morale*, compared with 24% of those with an Intuition preference.

- 5% of those with a Judging preference mentioned *anger, resentment, frustration, or bad feelings*, and 5% mentioned *bullying, harassment, insults, or violence*, compared with 20% and 20% respectively of those with a Perceiving preference.

In terms of the TKI results:

- Respondents who mentioned outcomes of *people or views ignored, people isolated*, or of *poor communication, lack of clarity, or transparency*, scored higher on Accommodating.

- Those who mentioned outcomes on the theme of *project delays, poor results, or poor productivity* scored lower on Avoiding.

- Respondents who mentioned an outcome of *anxiety, depression, or stress* scored higher on Collaborating and lower on Compromising than those who did not.

- Those who mentioned an outcome of *anger, resentment, or bad feelings* scored higher on Competing than those who did not.

Mean TKI scores for those mentioning specific outcomes or not
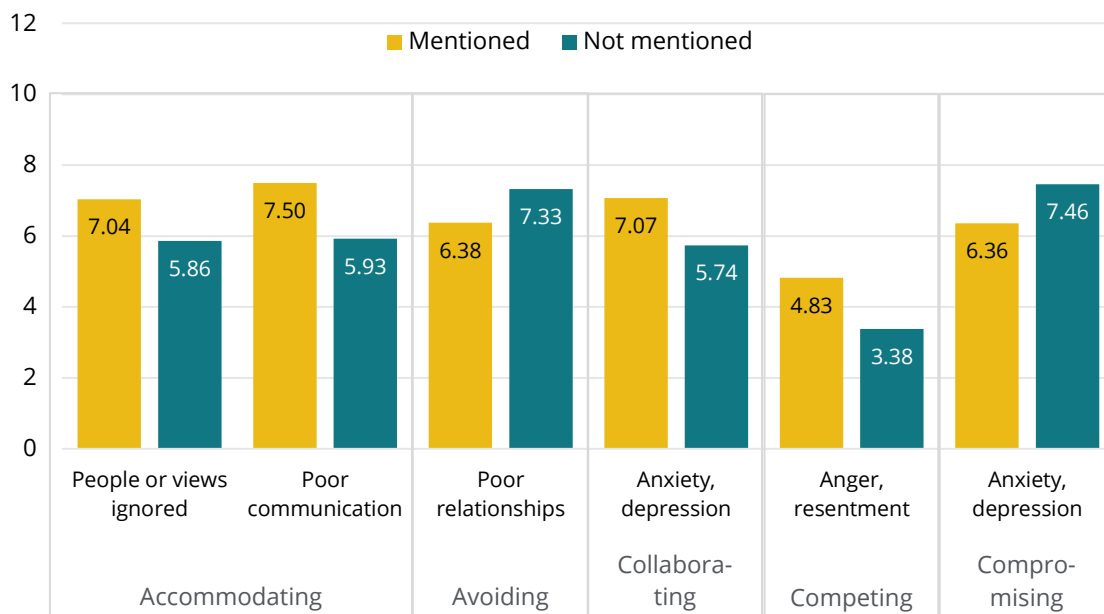
- 32% of those whose favorite TKI mode was Collaborating mentioned an outcome on the theme of *anxiety, depression, or stress*, followed by Accommodating (19%), Avoiding (11%), Compromising (6%), and Competing (4%).
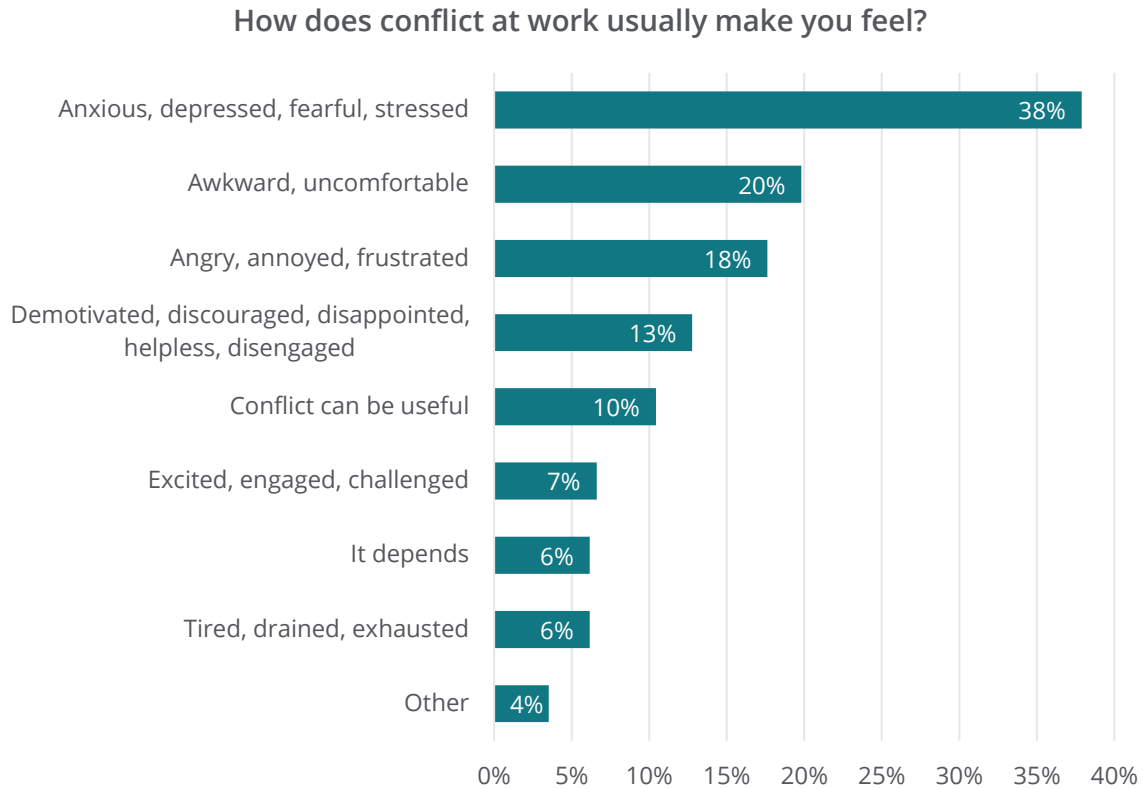
Favorite mode and mentioning anxiety, depression, or stress

■ Percentage mentioning anxiety, depression or stress
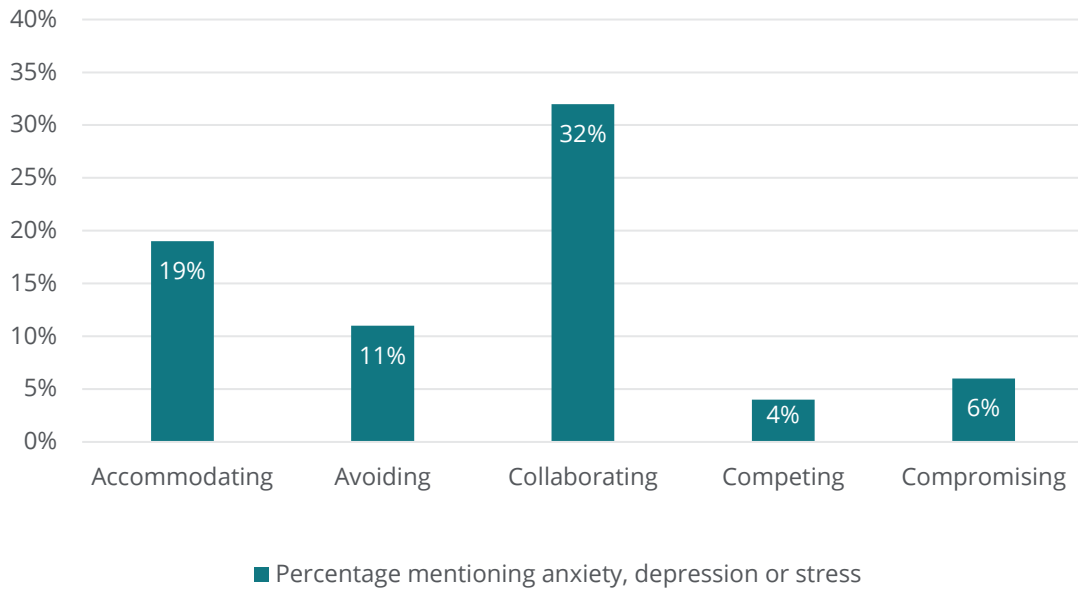
How does conflict make you feel?

Overall results

Survey respondents were asked, "How does conflict at work usually make you feel?" Their answers were categorized into themes.

How does conflict at work usually make you feel?

Category	Percentage
Anxious, depressed, fearful, stressed	38%
Awkward, uncomfortable	20%
Angry, annoyed, frustrated	18%
Demotivated, discouraged, disappointed, helpless, disengaged	13%
Conflict can be useful	10%
Excited, engaged, challenged	7%
It depends	6%
Tired, drained, exhausted	6%
Other	4%

Most respondents had some negative feelings about conflict at work, with the most common feelings concerned with *anxiety or stress*. However, 10% accepted that *conflict could be useful* in specific contexts, 7% were *excited, engaged, or saw conflict as a positive challenge*, and 6% said that their feelings very much *depended on the specific situation*.

There were several significant[13] relationships with other factors:

- 43% of women mentioned feelings of *anxiety, depression, or stress* but only 26% of men mentioned this. Conversely, 14% of men mentioned feeling *excited, energized, or challenged*, but only 4% of women did.

- Feelings of *excitement and engagement* were more likely to be reported by those working in smaller organizations.

- Respondents who felt *awkward or uncomfortable* about conflict at work had higher levels of job satisfaction, and said they had to deal with conflict less often, than those who did not.

- Those who mentioned feeling *demotivated* said that they had to deal with conflict more often than those who did not, and those who mentioned being *angry, annoyed, or frustrated*, and those who mentioned feeling *demotivated*, on average spent more hours

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[13]Based on chi-square analysis or one-way analysis of variance, depending on type of data

dealing with conflict than those who did not. Spending more time dealing with conflict at work may result in more extreme negative feelings about it. Spending less time may result in the less extreme feeling of awkwardness.

- Respondents' self-perception of their ability to manage conflict affected their feelings about it. Those who mentioned feeling *anxious or stressed* rated themselves as less good at managing conflict than those who did not. However, those who mentioned being *excited or energized*, or who said that *conflict can be useful*, rated themselves as better at managing conflict.

- Those who mentioned discriminatory behavior or dysfunctional teams as a cause of conflict were more likely to feel *demotivated* than those who did not.

- Those who said that poor senior leadership was a cause of conflict were more likely than others to feel *tired, drained or exhausted*.

There were a number of personality type differences.

- 18% of Introverts mentioned feeling *demotivated or discouraged* but only 7% of Extraverts.

- 14% of those with a preference for Thinking said that their feelings *depended on the situation*, but only 1% of those with a Feeling preference.

- 40% of respondents with a Sensing preference and 36% of those with a Feeling preference mentioned feeling *awkward or uncomfortable.* But only 22% of those with preferences for Intuition and 19% of those preferring Thinking mentioned this. This is reflected in differences between MBTI functional pairs.

Functional pairs and feeling awkward or uncomfortable

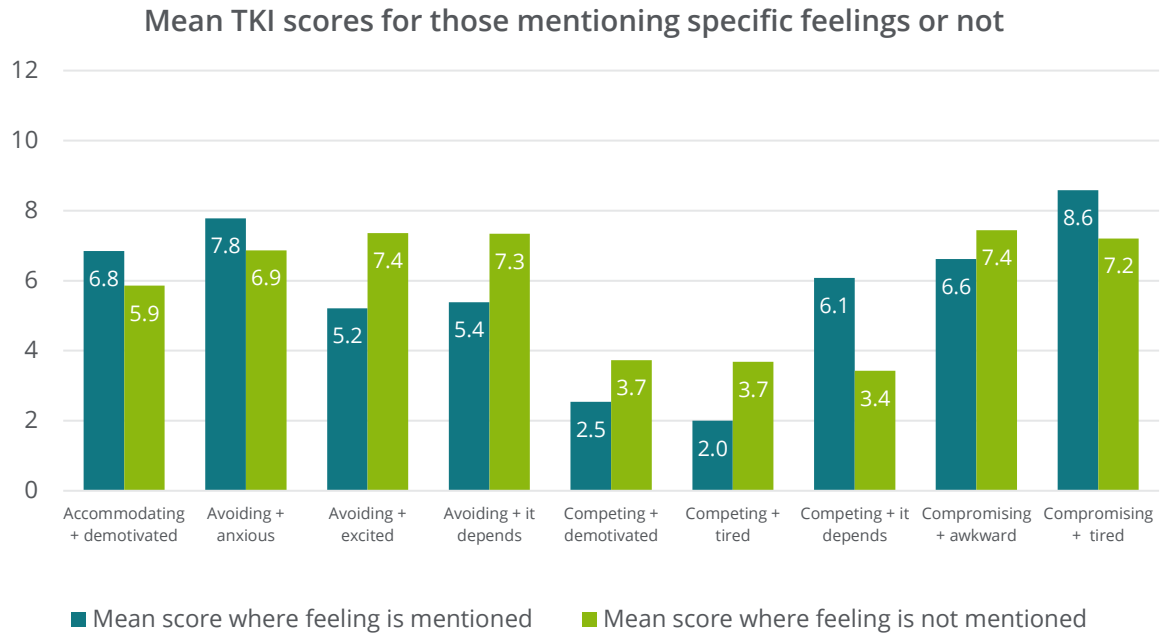Percentage feeling awkward or uncomfortable during conflict at work
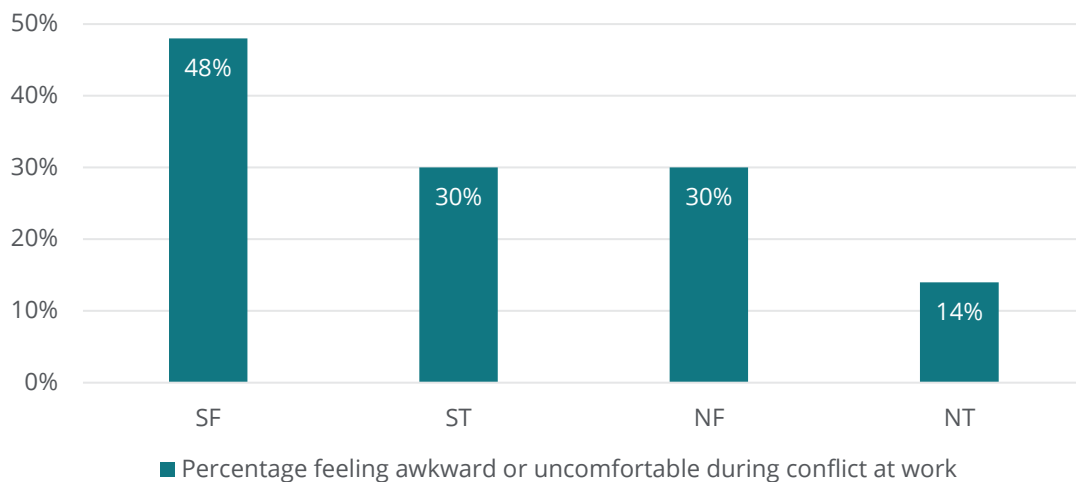
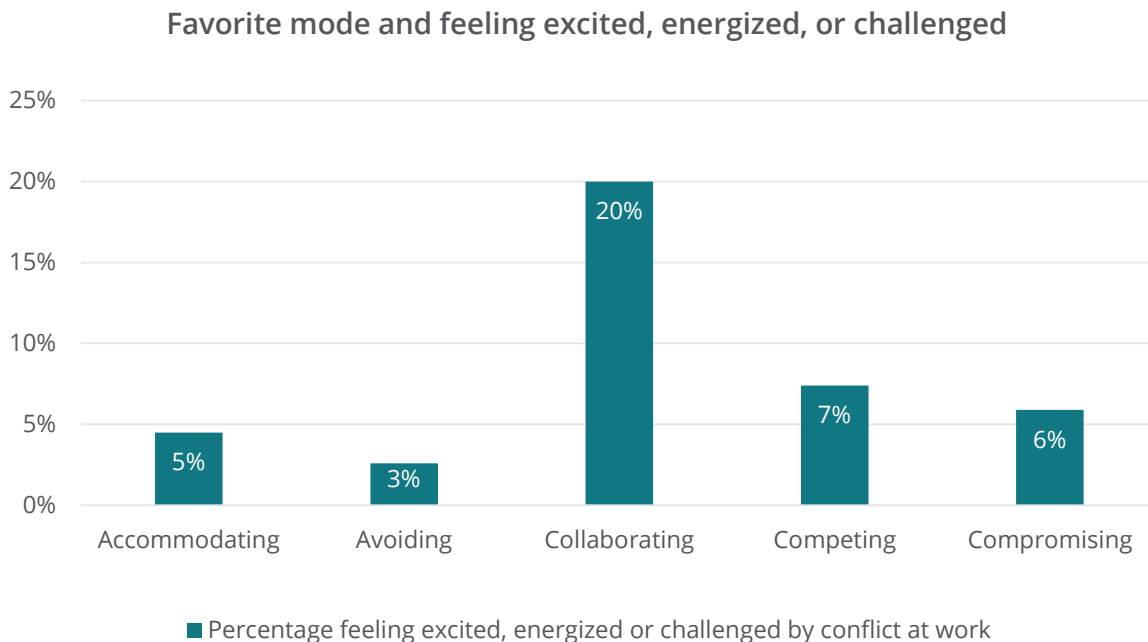There were several relationships with TKI scores.

- Those who mentioned feeling *anxious, depressed, or stressed* scored significantly higher on Avoiding than those who did not.

- Those who mentioned feeling *awkward or uncomfortable* scored significantly lower on Compromising than those who did not.

- Those who mentioned feeling *demotivated or discouraged* scored significantly higher on Avoiding and lower on Competing than those who did not.

- Those who mentioned feeling *excited, engaged, or challenged* scored significantly lower on Avoiding than those who did not.

- Those who said their feelings *depended on the situation* scored significantly lower on Avoiding and higher on Competing.
- Those who mentioned feeling *tired* scored significantly lower on Competing and higher on Compromising than those who did not.

These relationships are summarized in the following chart:

Mean TKI scores for those mentioning specific feelings or not

	Accommodating + demotivated	Avoiding + anxious	Avoiding + excited	Avoiding + it depends	Competing + demotivated	Competing + tired	Competing + it depends	Compromising + awkward	Compromising + tired
Mean score where feeling is mentioned	6.8	7.8	5.2	5.4	2.5	2.0	6.1	6.6	8.6
Mean score where feeling is not mentioned	5.9	6.9	7.4	7.3	3.7	3.7	3.4	7.4	7.2

■ Mean score where feeling is mentioned ■ Mean score where feeling is not mentioned

Those whose most favored TKI mode was Collaborating were more likely than others to feel *excited, energized, or challenged*.

Favorite mode and feeling excited, energized, or challenged

Accommodating	Avoiding	Collaborating	Competing	Compromising
5%	3%	20%	7%	6%

■ Percentage feeling excited, energized or challenged by conflict at work
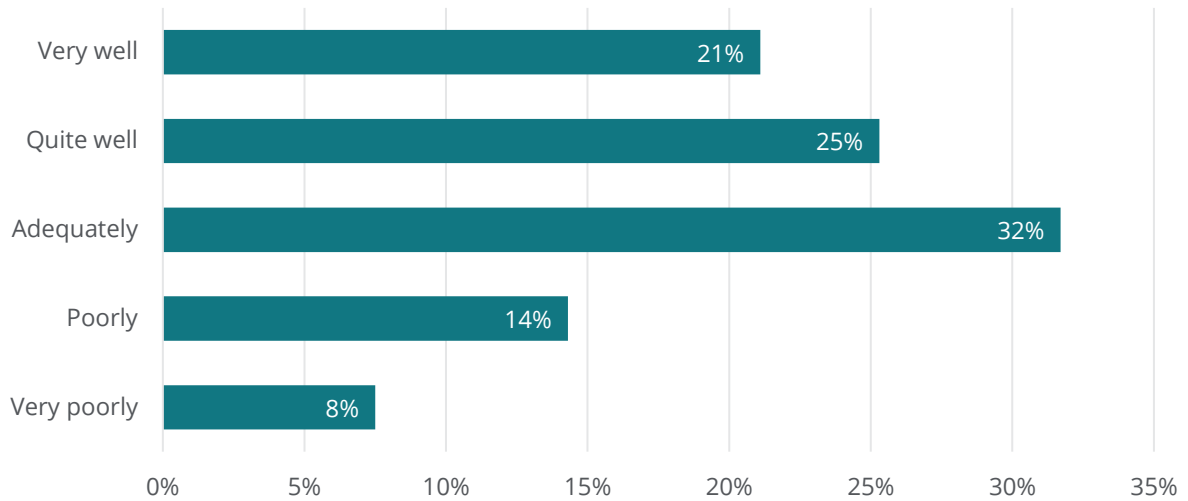
Conflict and your manager
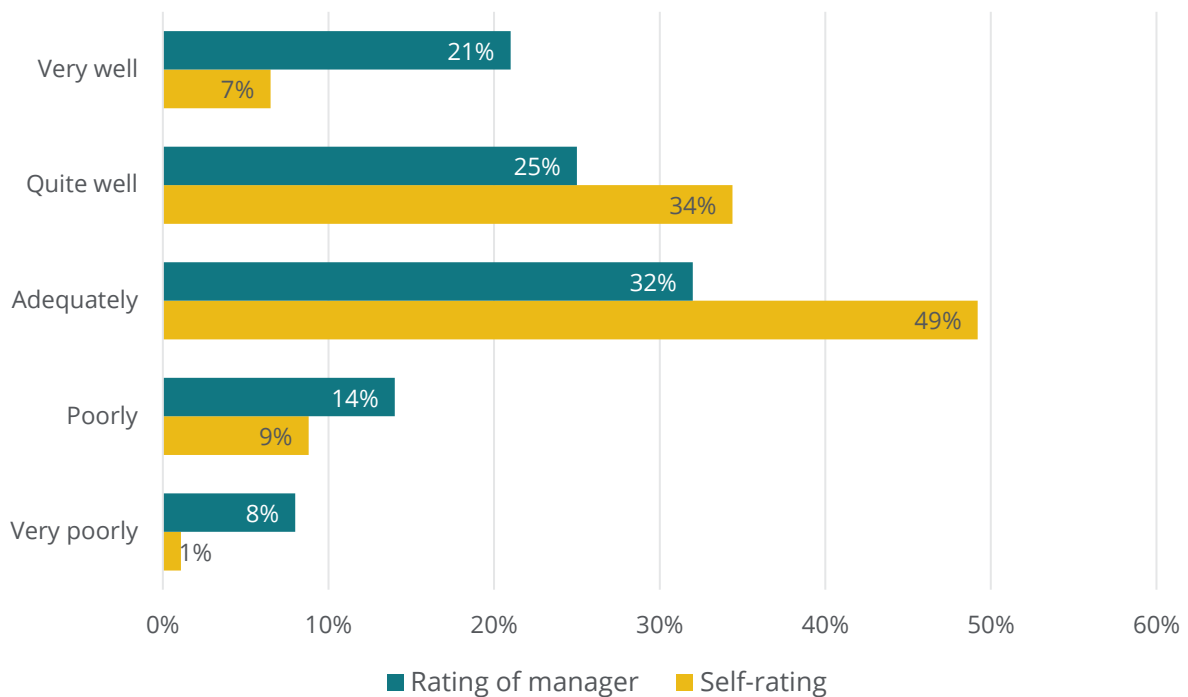
How well do managers manage conflict?

Survey respondents were asked, "How well does your direct supervisor manage conflict?" Just under half said that their supervisor managed conflict very or quite well.

How well does your direct supervisor manage conflict?

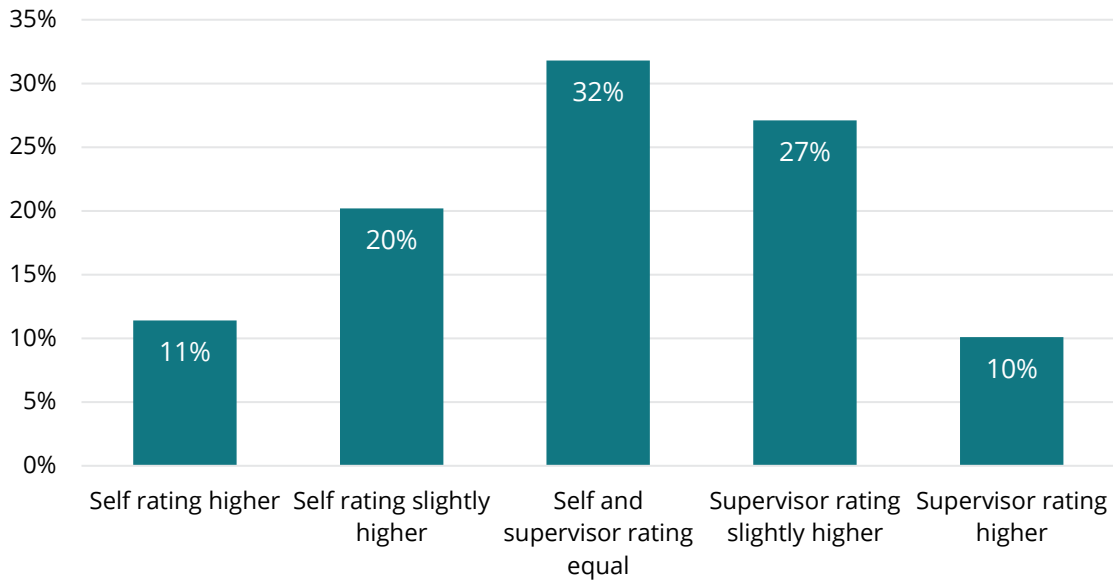|	
Very well	21%
Quite well	25%
Adequately	32%
Poorly	14%
Very poorly	8%

Compared to their self-ratings, respondents were more likely to see their manager as managing conflict either very well, or poorly or very poorly.

Managing conflict: manager rating and self-rating

	Rating of manager	Self-rating
Very well	21%	7%
Quite well	25%	34%
Adequately	32%	49%
Poorly	14%	9%
Very poorly	8%	1%

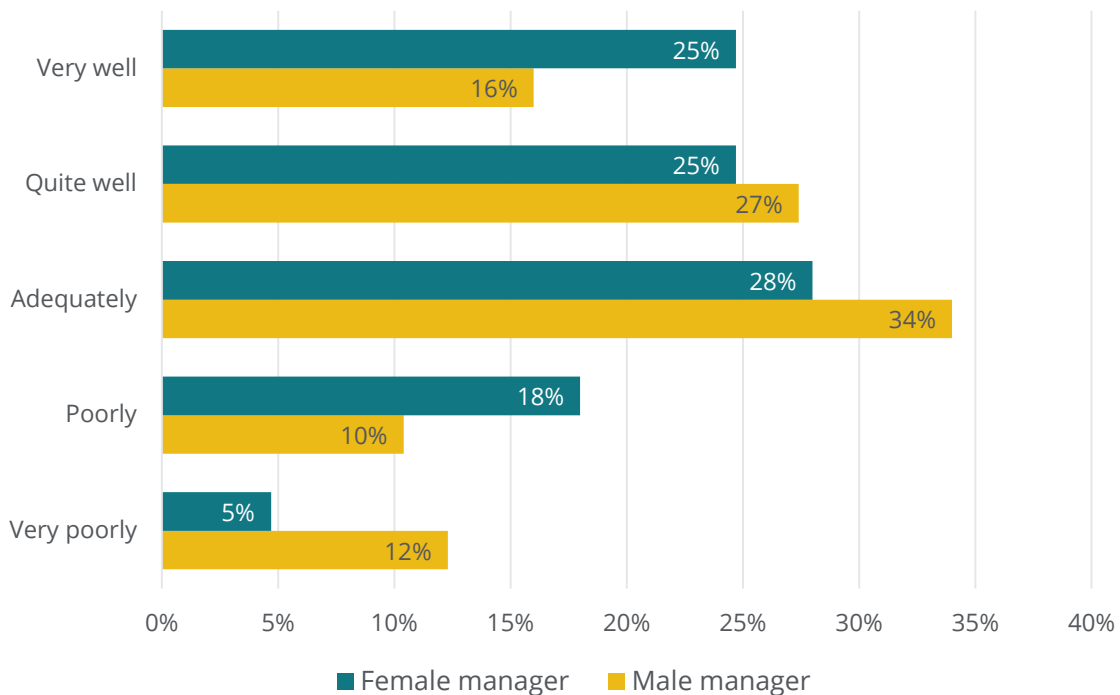■ Rating of manager   ■ Self-rating

Difference between self and supervisor rating

Female managers were more likely to be seen as managing conflict very well than were male managers, and less likely to be seen as managing conflict very poorly.

How well do male or female supervisors manage conflict?

Several other factors related[14] to this rating:

- Remote workers had the most positive view of their supervisor's conflict-handling skills, hybrid workers the least positive.

Remote working status and rating of supervisor's conflict handling

Mean score for "How well does your direct supervisor manage conflict?"
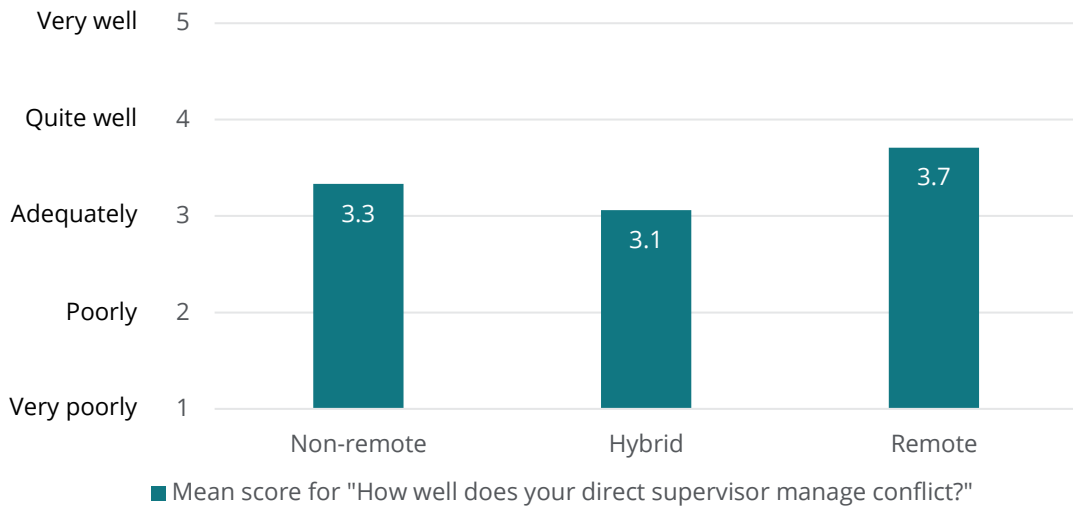
- Respondents with higher levels of job satisfaction tended to rate their supervisor more positively.
- Respondents who believed they themselves managed conflict well also tended to think that their supervisor handled conflict well.
- Respondents who dealt more frequently with conflict at work were less likely to think that their supervisor handled conflict well.
- Respondents who saw workplace conflict more positively were more likely to think that their supervisor handled conflict well.
- Respondents who felt more included and supported by their manager or supervisor were more likely to think that their supervisor handled conflict well.

These results are summarized in the following correlation table.

| Correlation with "How well does your direct supervisor manage conflict?"				
Job satisfaction	How well do you manage conflict?	How often do you have to deal with conflict?	How do you see workplace conflict?	I feel included and supported by my manager
.275**	.239**	.267**	.292**	.429**
N=259	N=258	N=.265	N=262	N=72

** Significant at the 1% level

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[14] Chi-square analysis, one-way analysis of variance or correlation, depending on data type.

- There was one relationship with type. Individuals with a preference for Sensing on average rated their supervisor significantly more positively than those with a preference for Intuition.
- No TKI scale showed any significant relationship with how respondents rated their supervisor or manager.

What could supervisors or managers do to deal with conflict more effectively?

In an open-ended question, survey respondents were asked what their direct supervisor could do to deal with conflict more effectively. Their answers were categorized into themes.

What could they do to deal with conflict more effectively?
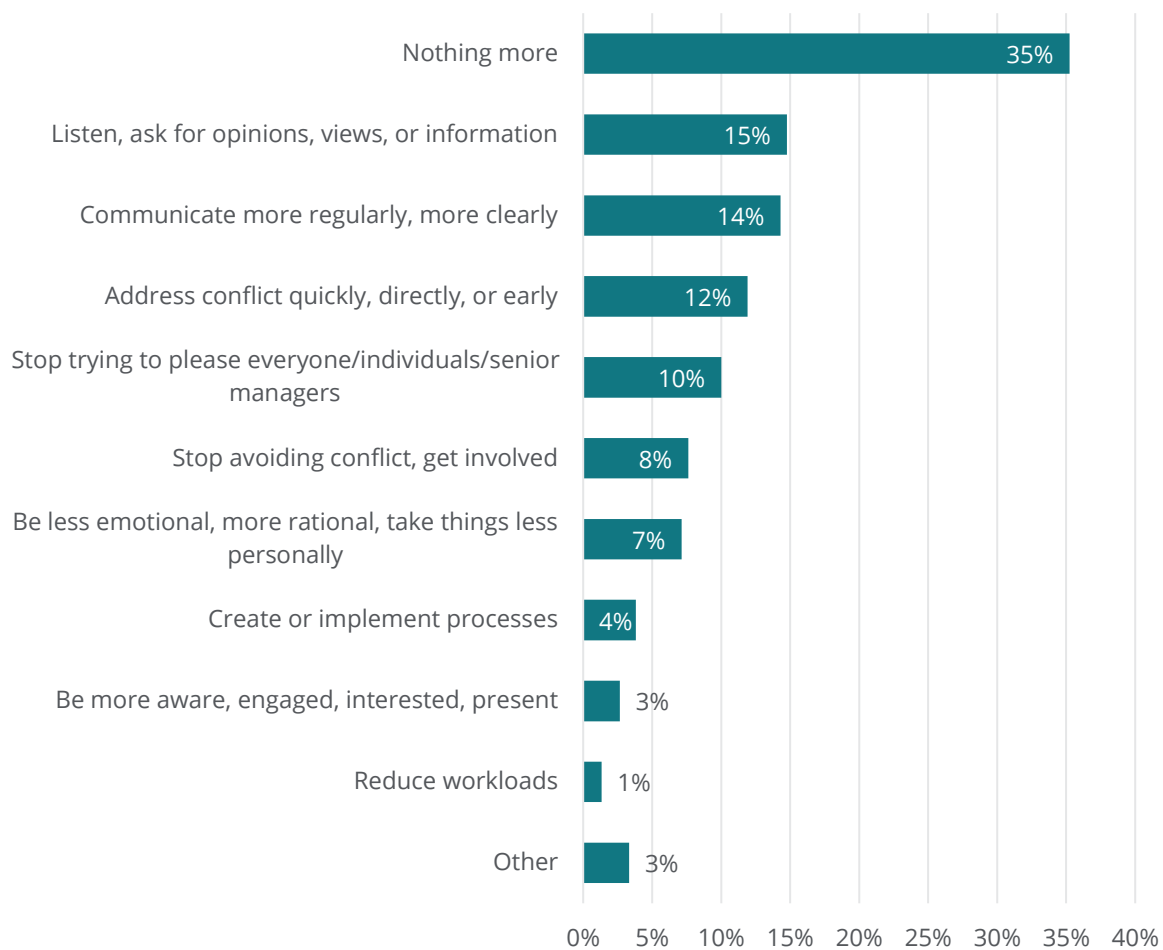
While 35% felt there was *nothing more* their supervisor or manager could do, 65% mentioned one or more actions.

Not surprisingly, those who rated their supervisor's skill at handling conflict highly were more likely to say that there was *nothing more* their supervisor could do. They were less likely to say that their supervisor should *communicate more clearly or regularly*, should *stop avoiding conflict*, should *stop trying to please everyone*, or should *implement processes around conflict*.

There were no significant differences between male and female supervisors in the actions their direct reports thought they could or should do. However different groups of respondents felt their supervisor could carry out different actions in order to deal with conflict more effectively[15].

- Hybrid workers were less likely to say that there was *nothing more* that their supervisor could do to deal with conflict more effectively. This tallies with the finding that remote workers had the most positive view of their supervisors' conflict-handling skills and hybrid workers the least positive. Hybrid workers were also more likely to say that their supervisor could *communicate more regularly or clearly*.

My supervisor could:	Percentage mentioning this action		
	Non-remote	Hybrid	Remote
Do nothing more	43%	17%	47%
Communicate better	9%	23%	10%

- Individuals who said that there was *nothing more* that their supervisor needed to do had, on average, higher levels of job satisfaction and had to deal with conflict at work less often. Those who said that their supervisor could *be less emotional and more rational*, or should *stop trying to please everyone*, had lower levels of job satisfaction.

- Those who mentioned bullying or harassment, dysfunctional teams, heavy workloads, or inadequate resources as a cause of conflict were less likely to say that their supervisor could do *nothing more*.

- Those who mentioned bullying or harassment as a cause were more likely to say that their supervisor could *be less emotional, more rational, and take things less personally*.

- Those who mentioned heavy workloads as a cause were more likely to say that their supervisor could *address conflict more quickly, directly, or early* and that they could *reduce workloads*.

- Those who mentioned inadequate resources as a cause were more likely to say that their supervisor could *listen and ask for opinions and views more often* and that they could *be less emotional, more rational, and take things less personally*.

- Those who felt than men handle conflict more effectively than women were more likely to say that their supervisor *could be less emotional, more rational, and take things less personally*.

- Those who felt than senior employees handle conflict more effectively than junior employees were more likely to say that their supervisor could *be less emotional, more rational, and take things less personally.*

- Those who felt angry, annoyed, or frustrated were more likely to say that their supervisor *could reduce workloads*.

- Those who felt demotivated, disappointed, helpless, or disengaged were more likely to say that their supervisor could *listen and ask for opinions, views, and information*, or that they could *create or implement processes*.

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[15] Based on chi-square analysis or one-way analysis of variance, depending on data type.

- Those who saw workplace conflict positively were more likely to say that their supervisor could do *nothing more*, and less likely to say that their supervisor should *stop trying to please everyone*.

There were a few personality differences. 40% of those with a Sensing preference said there was *nothing more* their supervisor could do, compared with 20% of those with an Intuition preference. No-one with a Feeling preference mentioned *creating processes*, or that their supervisor should *be more aware, engaged and present*, but 7% of those with a Thinking preference mentioned the former and 6% the latter,

There was one relationship with the TKI scales. Those who said their supervisor should *stop avoiding conflict* on average scored significantly higher on Collaborating.

Supervisor conflict style

Survey respondents were asked, "Which one of the following best describes the typical conflict style of your direct supervisor or manager?" with the following options:

- Avoiding (avoiding conflict, sidestepping the issue, withdrawing).
- Accommodating (neglecting their own concerns to satisfy the concerns of other people).
- Competing (pursuing their own goals at others' expense, possibly including yours).
- Collaborating (working with others to find a solution that fully satisfies the concerns of both parties).
- Compromising (splitting the difference, exchanging concessions, or seeking a quick middle-ground position).

Collaborating was the most frequent perceived style, accommodating the least.

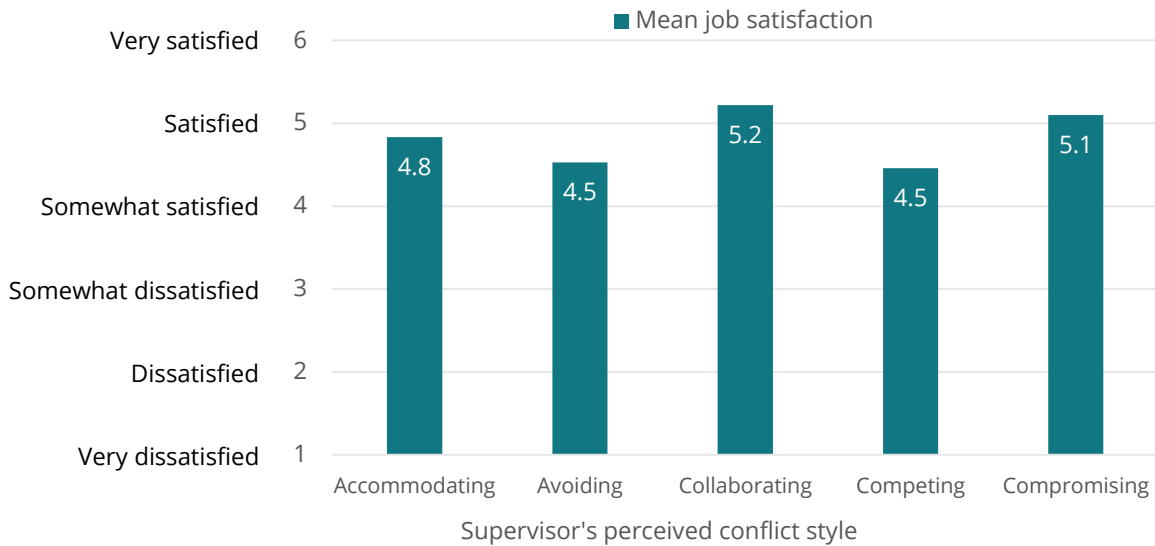### Direct manager/supervisor perceived conflict mode
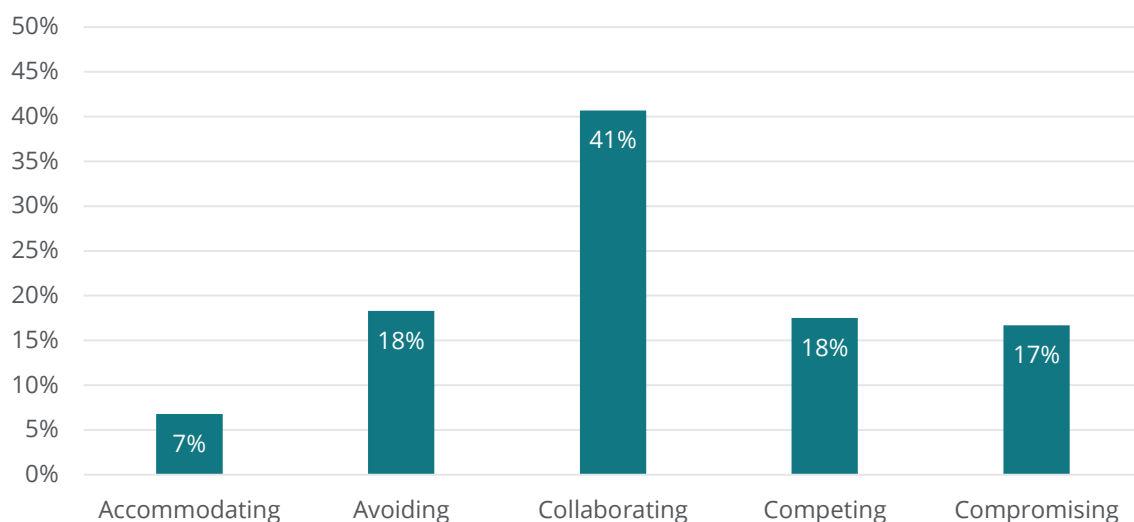
There were several relationships with other factors:

- There was a significant relationship with job satisfaction. While most respondents were satisfied with their jobs, those who saw their supervisor as having a Collaborating style
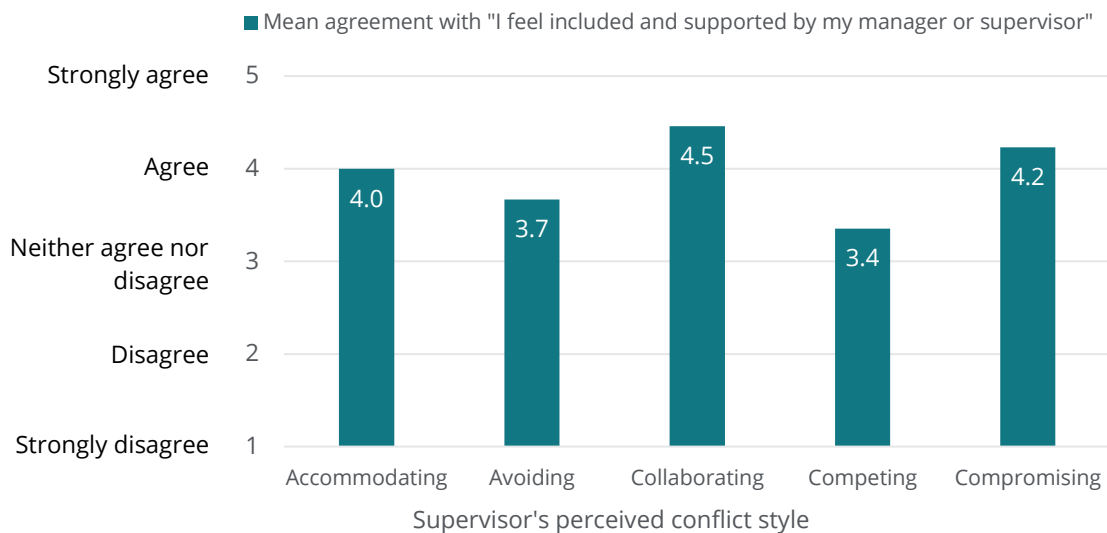
had significantly higher job satisfaction than those who believed their supervisor had an Accommodating, Avoiding, or Competing style. Those who felt their supervisor had a Compromising style had significantly higher job satisfaction than those who believed their supervisor had an Accommodating or Competing style.

Supervisor's perceived conflict style and job satisfaction

■ Mean job satisfaction

Satisfaction level	Value
Very satisfied	6
Satisfied	5
Somewhat satisfied	4
Somewhat dissatisfied	3
Dissatisfied	2
Very dissatisfied	1

Accommodating	Avoiding	Collaborating	Competing	Compromising
4.8	4.5	5.2	4.5	5.1

Supervisor's perceived conflict style

- Those who saw their supervisor as Competing reported dealing with conflict more often than those who saw their supervisor as having a different style.
- Those reporting to managers who were seen as Collaborating felt the most included by that manager, those with Competing styles the least.

Supervisor's perceived conflict style and perceived inclusion

■ Mean agreement with "I feel included and supported by my manager or supervisor"

Agreement level	Value
Strongly agree	5
Agree	4
Neither agree nor disagree	3
Disagree	2
Strongly disagree	1

Accommodating	Avoiding	Collaborating	Competing	Compromising
4.0	3.7	4.5	3.4	4.2

Supervisor's perceived conflict style

In summary, respondents who perceived their manager as having a Collaborating style had the most positive experience, those who believed their manager had a Competing style the least.

There were several relationships with the perceived causes and outcomes of conflict:

- Respondents who chose discriminatory behavior as a cause of conflict were more likely to see their supervisor as Competing and less likely to see them as Avoiding or Accommodating.

- Those who chose dysfunctional teams or lack of role clarity as a cause were more likely to see their supervisor as Avoiding and less likely to see them as Collaborating.

- Those who chose a lack of transparency, openness, and honesty as a cause were more likely to see their supervisor as Avoiding or Competing.

- Those who chose poor line management or poor senior leadership as a cause were more likely to see their supervisor as Avoiding and less likely to see them as Collaborating or Compromising.

- Those who said there was no conflict at their workplace were more likely to see them as Collaborating and less likely to see them as Avoiding or Compromising.

- Those who saw change, innovation, and new perspectives as an advantage of conflict were more likely to see their supervisor as Competing.

- Those who said there were no negative outcomes to conflict were more likely to see their supervisor as Collaborating.

As might be expected, respondents' views of what their supervisor could do to deal with conflict more effectively related to their perception of their supervisor's conflict style:

- Those who said that there was nothing more that their supervisor could do to deal with conflict more effectively were more likely to see their supervisor as Collaborating or Compromising, and less likely to see them as Avoiding or Competing.

- Those who saw their supervisor as Avoiding were more likely to say that their supervisor could:
  o Stop avoiding conflict and get more involved.
  o Address conflict quickly, directly, or early.
  o Stop trying to please everyone/individuals/senior managers.

- Those who saw their supervisor as Collaborating were less likely to say that they could:
  o Stop avoiding conflict and get more involved.
  o Listen, ask for opinions, views, and information.
  o Be less emotional, more rational, take things less personally.
  o Be more aware, engaged, interested, present.

- Those who saw their supervisor as Competing were more likely to say that they could:
  o Listen, ask for opinions, views, and information.
  o Be less emotional, more rational, take things less personally.

  And less likely to say that their supervisor could:
  o Stop avoiding conflict and get more involved.
  o Address conflict quickly, directly, or early.
  o Stop trying to please everyone/individuals/senior managers.

- Those who saw their supervisor as Compromising were more likely to say that they could:
  o Be more aware, engaged, interested, present.

  And less likely to say that their supervisor could:
  o Be less emotional, more rational, take things less personally.

Overall, respondents who viewed their manager or supervisor as having a Collaborating style had the most positive view of conflict and the most positive view of their manager.

There was one significant relationship with personality type. Compared with Sensing individuals, those with a preference for Intuition were more likely to see their supervisor as having a Competing style and less likely to see them as having a Collaborating style.

Based on a chi-square analysis, there was no significant relationship between an individual's conflict mode and their perception of their manager or supervisor's conflict mode. The two matched 21% of the time—almost exactly what would be expected by chance. There were no significant relationships between whether or not the respondent's conflict mode and that of their manager matched and other factors such as job satisfaction or perceptions of the effectiveness of the manager's conflict handling. In other words, having the same favorite conflict mode as your supervisor or manager did not result in any noticeable advantages or disadvantages.

How has the TKI® assessment been helpful?

Overall results

Respondents who had previously completed the TKI assessment (166 people) were asked, "In what way(s) has completing the TKI assessment (the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument) been helpful to you? Please check all that apply" with 10 options to choose from.

In what way(s) has completing the TKI assessment been helpful to you?
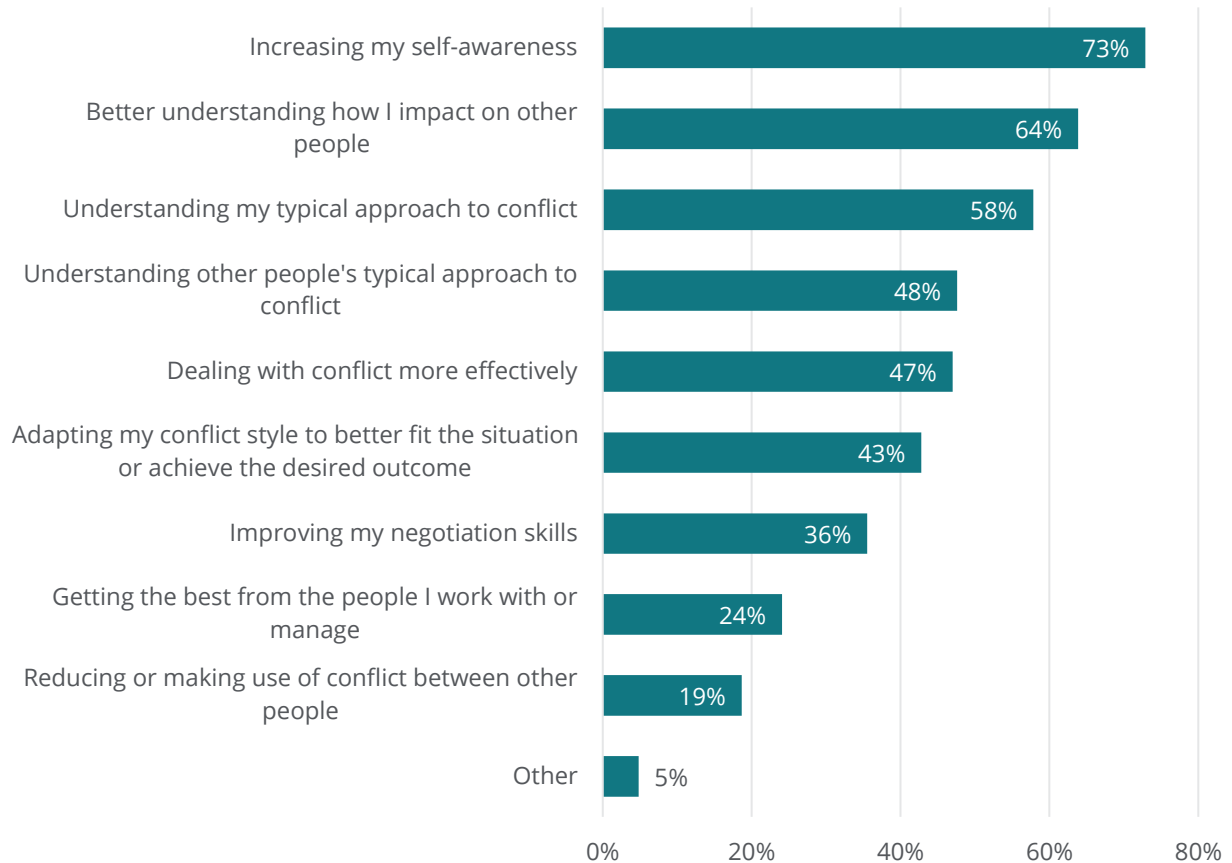
Option	%
Increasing my self-awareness	73%
Better understanding how I impact on other people	64%
Understanding my typical approach to conflict	58%
Understanding other people's typical approach to conflict	48%
Dealing with conflict more effectively	47%
Adapting my conflict style to better fit the situation or achieve the desired outcome	43%
Improving my negotiation skills	36%
Getting the best from the people I work with or manage	24%
Reducing or making use of conflict between other people	19%
Other	5%

The three options chosen by 50% or more of the respondents were all concerned with their self-awareness and understanding of themselves.

Relationship with other factors

There were no gender differences, but there was one age difference. Those who chose *understanding other people's typical approach to conflict* were on average slightly younger than those who did not (42.7 years compared with 46.7 years).

Those who chose *reducing or making use of conflict between other people* were more likely than others to think that non-remote workers handle conflict more effectively.
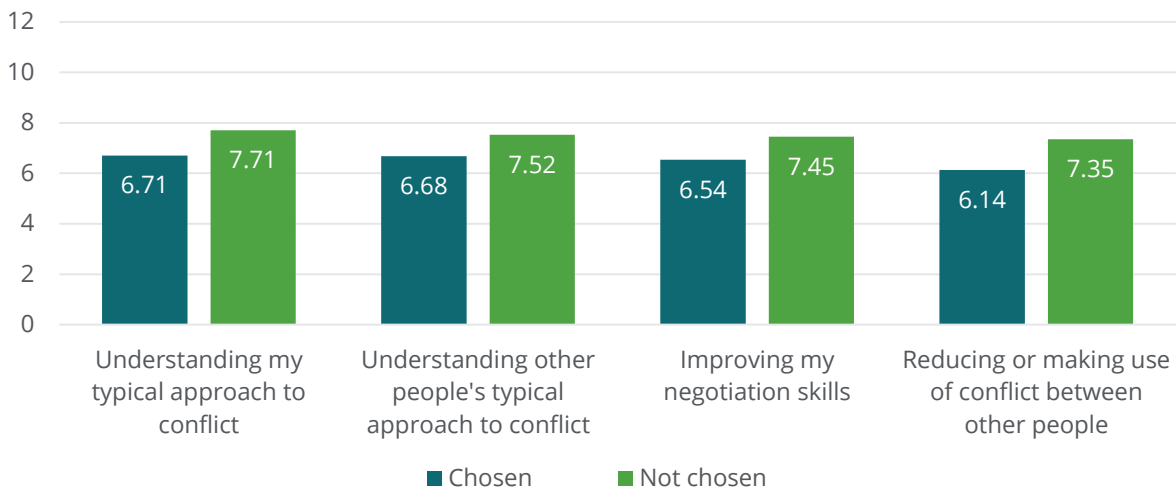
Those who chose *Understanding my typical approach to conflict* rated their own conflict management abilities lower than those who did not. Those who chose *adapting my conflict style to better fit the situation or achieve the desired outcome, improving my negotiation skills* or *getting the best from the people I work with or manage* rated themselves higher.

Helpfulness of TKI and self-rating of conflict handling skill

	Understanding my typical approach to conflict	Adapting my conflict style to better fit the situation or achive the desired outcome	Improving my negotiation skills	Getting the best from people I work with or manage
Chosen	3.29	3.54	3.63	3.68
Not chosen	3.54	3.30	3.27	3.31

■ Chosen ■ Not chosen

Those who chose *Understanding my typical approach to conflict, Understanding other people's typical approach to conflict, Improving my negotiation skills* or *Reducing or making use of conflict between other people* scored lower on the TKI scale of Avoiding than those who did not.

Helpfulness of TKI and Avoiding score

	Understanding my typical approach to conflict	Understanding other people's typical approach to conflict	Improving my negotiation skills	Reducing or making use of conflict between other people
Chosen	6.71	6.68	6.54	6.14
Not chosen	7.71	7.52	7.45	7.35

■ Chosen ■ Not chosen

Respondents with an Extraversion preference were more likely to choose *increasing my self-awareness* or *adapting my conflict style* than those with an Introversion preference.

Way in which the TKI has been helpful	Percent of E choosing	Percent of I choosing
Increasing my self-awareness	100%	65%
Adapting my conflict style to better fit the situation or achieve the desired outcome	64%	30%

The **Myers-Briggs** Company

# TKI® and MBTI® results

Group results on the TKI® assessment

Each TKI mode has a possible minimum score of 0 and a possible maximum of 12. Summary statistics for the group are shown below.

TKI Mode	Mean	SD	N	Median percentile
Accommodating	6.02	2.36	255	62
Avoiding	7.19	2.49	255	65
Collaborating	5.91	2.43	255	41
Competing	3.58	2.63	255	31
Compromising	7.25	2.04	255	41

When using the TKI assessment, raw scores are converted to percentiles. These show the percentage of a reference group (the *norm group*) that an individual has scored higher than. For example, a score of the 60% percentile on Accommodating shows that an individual is more accommodating than 60% of the norm group. The final column of the table shows the average (median) percentile for the group who took part in the research when compared to the standard TKI norm group, which is a large reference group of 8,000 people broadly representative of the US working population (Schaubhut, 2007). This shows that, on average, the research group were more Accommodating and Avoiding than the norm group, and less Collaborating, Competing, and Compromising. With reference to the underlying dimensions of the TKI, they were less assertive.

People will often respond habitually to conflict, using one or two modes automatically. Across this group, Avoiding was the most frequently used mode, and Competing the least. This contrasts with respondents' views of their manager or supervisor's conflict style, where Collaborating was the most common choice and Accommodating the least.

Favorite TKI mode and manager's perceived TKI mode
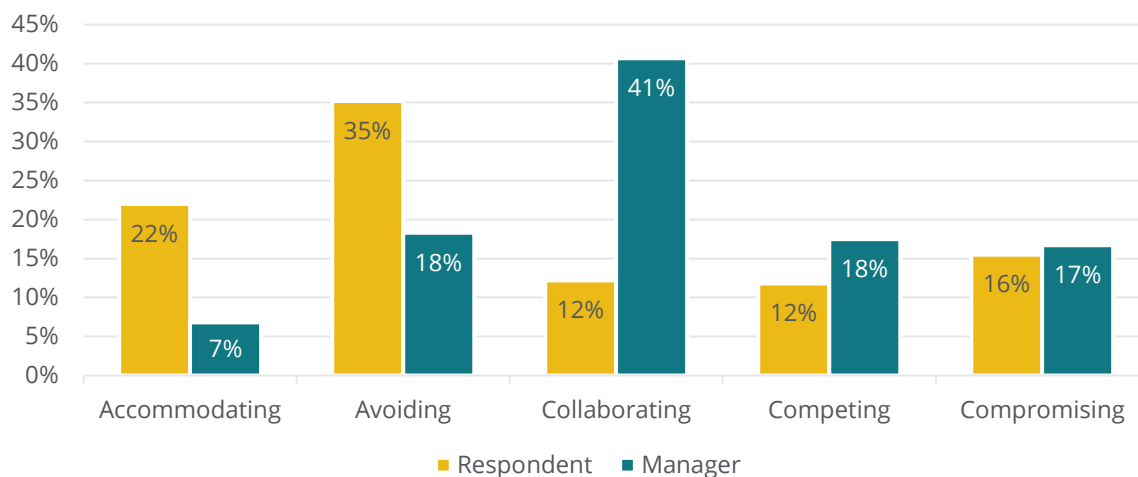
MBTI® type distribution

Type data was available for 152 individuals. A type table for this group is shown below:

ISTJ	ISFJ	INFJ	INTJ
N=9	N=6	N=20	N=18
5.9%	3.9%	13.2%	11.8%
SSR=0.51	SSR=0.29	SSR=8.77	SSR=5.64
ISTP	**ISFP**	**INFP**	**INTP**
N=4	N=3	N=9	N=16
2.6%	2.0%	5.9%	10.5%
SSR=0.49	SSR=0.22	SSR=1.35	SSR=3.19
ESTP	**ESFP**	**ENFP**	**ENTP**
N=3	N=4	N=12	N=9
2.0%	2.6%	7.9%	5.9%
SSR=0.46	SSR=0.31	SSR=0.97	SSR=1.85
ESTJ	**ESFJ**	**ENFJ**	**ENTJ**
N=7	N=13	N=11	N=8
4.6%	8.6%	7.2%	5.3%
SSR=0.53	SSR=0.70	SSR=2.89	SSR=2.92

Type	N	%
E	67	44.1%
I	85	55.9%
S	49	32.2%
N	103	67.8%
T	74	48.7%
F	78	51.3%
J	92	60.5%
P	60	39.5%

The SSR (Self-Selection Ratio) compares the sample to the general population. Types with an SSR greater than 1 are over-represented in this group compared with the general population.[16] Almost all Intuition types are therefore over-represented, and all Sensing types under-represented. This is not uncommon in a group of people interested in personality type. However, there are enough individuals of each type in the sample to carry out meaningful analyses at the preference pair level and for a number of type combinations or lenses.

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[16] The US national representative sample was used as a reference group.

Demographic differences

On average, women were significantly higher on Accommodating than men, and significantly lower on Competing.
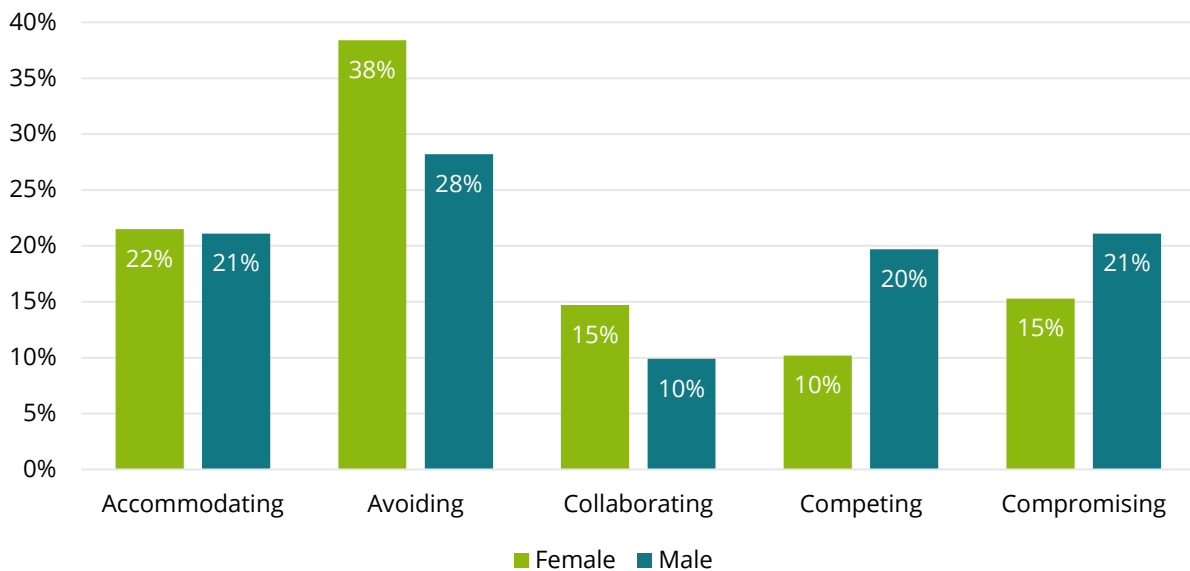
Female-male differences in TKI raw scores
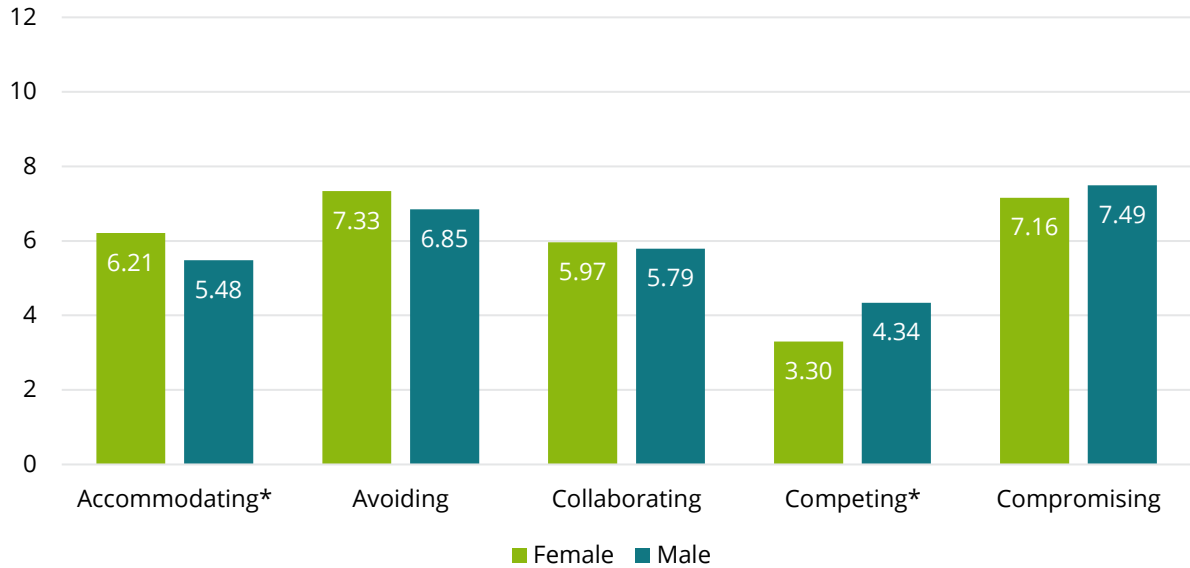
*Statistically significant difference (based on an independent-samples t-test)

However, Avoiding was the most common top TKI mode for both women and men (38% and 28% respectively).

Female-male differences in favorite TKI mode

TKI scores did not show a significant correlation with age, or significant differences by country of residence, job level, percentage of time working remotely, or size of organization.

Regarding the MBTI data, there were gender differences at the preference pair level for Thinking–Feeling and Judging–Perceiving. 57% of women had a preference for Feeling, but 62% of men had a preference for Thinking. 66% of women had a preference for Judging, but 54% of men had a preference for Perceiving. Looking at favorite processes (dominant functions), introverted Thinking and extraverted Thinking were over-represented for men, and extraverted Feeling was over-represented for women.

Relationship of the TKI scales to MBTI type

Two TKI scales, Accommodating and Competing, showed a significant difference[17] between MBTI preference pairs.

On average, respondents with an Extraversion preference had a lower score on Accommodating and a higher score on Competing when compared with those with an Introversion preference. Respondents with preferences for Thinking had on average a lower score on Accommodating and a higher score on Competing than those with a Feeling preference. In TKI terms, Accommodating (high co-operative, low assertive) and Competing (low co-operative, high assertive) can be seen as opposite approaches to managing conflict.

The relationship of Thinking–Feeling to Accommodating and Competing has been found in previous research (e.g. Kilmann & Thomas, 1975; Mills et al, 1985; Percival et al, 1992; Johnson, 1997; Schaubhut et al, 2009; Johnson et al, 2014). The relationship of Introversion to Accommodating or Competing was also found in some, but not all, of these studies. However, all the studies mentioned also showed a relationship between Introversion and Avoiding, with those with an Introversion preference scoring higher on this scale or more likely to have an Avoiding style. This was not found, to a significant extent, in the current study.

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[17] Based on independent-samples t-tests

Conclusions and recommendations

Summary of results

Overall findings

Conflict management, job satisfaction, and inclusion

Most people felt they managed conflict at work well, had a high degree of job satisfaction, and felt included at work:

- Only 10% felt they managed conflict poorly or very poorly, 49% that they managed conflict adequately, 41% that they managed conflict quite well or very well.

- 73% were satisfied or very satisfied with their current job.

- 85% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt included by their co-workers, 75% that they felt included and supported by their manager, 74% that they could speak out and be their authentic self at work, and 69% that they felt valued by and at home in their organization.

Those who had the most positive view of their ability to manage conflict also tended to have higher levels of job satisfaction, felt more able to be their authentic self at work, and felt more valued by and at home in their organization.

Impacts of the time spent dealing with conflict

While 55% of respondents only needed to deal with conflict at work occasionally, 36% dealt with conflict often, very often or all the time. Only 9% said that they never dealt with conflict at work. There was a wide variation in how many hours per week were spent in dealing with conflict at work, from 0 hours up to 40, but the average was 4.34 hours. This represents a significant cost to organizations in time lost.

There are costs to individuals, too. Individuals who had to deal with conflict at work less often had, on average, a significantly higher level of job satisfaction. Those who said they were very dissatisfied with their job on average spent significantly more hours dealing with conflict. Those who agreed or strongly agreed that they felt accepted and included by their co-workers, could speak out and be their authentic self at work, or felt valued by and at home in their organization, on average spent significantly fewer hours dealing with conflict. The results suggest that time spent dealing with conflict reduces job satisfaction and tends to result in workers feeling less included.

The causes of conflict

Poor communication and lack of role clarity were the causes respondents chose most frequently, followed by heavy workloads and personality clashes. The first three issues may be able to be addressed at an organizational, departmental, or team level. Resolving personality clashes may involve individuals raising their self-awareness and understanding their personality preferences and conflict style.

The presence of most causes of conflict also resulted in more time being spent dealing with conflict. In addition, where a lack of role clarity or the presence of dysfunctional teams was felt to be a cause, people said they managed conflict less well. This may indicate areas to address in future conflict training. Seven causes also had an impact on job satisfaction: poor communication, lack of role clarity, dysfunctional teams, inadequate resources, poor senior

leadership, and poor line management. In addition to lowering job satisfaction because of conflict, all of these may also be direct causes of low job satisfaction.

Who is responsible for managing conflict at work?

When asked who was responsible for managing conflict at work, 44% of respondents mentioned their line manager or supervisor, 42% said 'everyone', 20% said the people directly involved (including themselves), 20% said middle or senior management, and 8% said HR (percentages sum to more than 100% as some respondents quoted multiple types of people). Given that line manager or supervisor was the most frequent answer, it is not surprising that when asked how important conflict handling is as a leadership or management skill, 98% of respondents said that this was extremely or very important. Conflict handling is seen as an essential skill for managers.

Do some groups handle conflict more effectively than others?

Survey respondents were asked to choose between different groups in terms of who they felt handles conflict most effectively:

- Most respondents felt there was no difference between men and women or weren't sure, but amongst those who did have a view, women were twice as likely to be nominated as men.

- Older people were much more likely than younger people to be seen as handling conflict more effectively.

- More senior employees were more likely to be seen as handling conflict effectively than were more junior employees.

- There was little difference overall between how remote, hybrid, and non-remote workers were perceived, but there was a relationship with the respondent's own remote working status. Where they expressed a view, respondents were more likely to see their own type of worker as handling conflict most effectively. Remote workers saw remote and hybrid workers as best, hybrid workers saw hybrid workers as best, and non-remote, office-based workers saw their group as best.

The effects of COVID

While 44% of the group felt that the COVID-19 pandemic had not changed the amount of conflict it the workplace, there was a slight increase in perceived conflict overall. 34% felt that conflict had increased but 22% that it had decreased. This is not surprising given the degree of change associated with the post-COVID workplace. Some sources of conflict in the post-COVID working environment may be linked to a return to the physical workplace, such as concerns about contracting COVID or resistance to a forced return to the office. This is supported by the data. Non-remote workers were the most likely to say that the amount of conflict had increased, remote workers the least. For those respondents where conflict had increased post-COVID, job satisfaction was significantly lower, and more time was being spent in dealing with conflict.

Does conflict at work give more positive, or more negative, results?

Just over half of respondents felt that workplace conflict gave a mix of positive and negative results. Almost twice as many (31%) felt that conflict always or generally gave negative results as those (17%) who felt that it always or generally gave positive results. Very few felt that it was entirely positive or entirely negative. Those who saw conflict more positively were more likely than others to:

- Be more satisfied with their job.

- Feel that they themselves manage conflict well.

- Never or only occasionally have to deal with conflict.

- See themselves as being responsible for dealing with conflict.

- Mention changes in policies, products, organizational structures etc. as a cause of conflict, or say there was no conflict in their workplace.

The most frequently mentioned positive benefit of workplace conflict was seen as being the opportunity to build relationships and increase collaboration and co-operation. This was followed by achieving a better solution and getting results, and then facilitating change, innovation, new ideas, and new perspectives. 10% of respondents said that there were no positive outcomes to conflict at work.

The most frequently mentioned negative outcomes were poorer relationships, loss of trust, and decreased co-operation. Next was people becoming disengaged, demotivated, and with lower morale, followed by anger, resentment, frustration, and bad feelings. 7% said there were no negative outcomes.

It is interesting that changes in relationships were seen as both the most frequent positive, and the most frequent negative, outcome of conflict at work.

How does conflict at work make people feel?

When asked 'How does conflict at work make you feel?', the most frequent answers, by some degree, were around the theme of feeling anxious, depressed, fearful, or stressed. The second and third most common themes were around feeling awkward or uncomfortable, and around feeling angry, annoyed, or frustrated. There were some more positive feelings or ambivalent feelings, with a minority saying that they felt excited, engaged, or positively challenged, and others saying that conflict can be useful or that their feelings depended on the situation.

How well do managers handle conflict?

On balance, respondents tended to think that their direct supervisor or manager managed conflict fairly well. 46% said that their supervisor managed conflict very or quite well, 32% said they managed it adequately, and 22% said poorly or very poorly. Respondents' ratings of their manager's conflict-handling abilities were not dissimilar to how they rated themselves, with a third of respondents giving themselves and their manager the exact same rating.

Female managers were more likely to be seen as managing conflict very well than were male managers, and less likely to be seen as managing conflict very poorly.

Respondents who thought their manager or supervisor managed conflict well also tended to:

- Feel they themselves managed conflict well.

- Have greater job satisfaction.

- Feel more included and supported by their manager.

- Deal with conflict at work less frequently.

- See workplace conflict more positively.

What could managers do better?

These findings provide a rationale for helping managers to improve their conflict-handling skills. To investigate what this improvement might look like, survey respondents were asked what their supervisor or manager could do to deal with conflict more effectively. While 35% felt there was

nothing more their supervisor or manager could do, 65% mentioned one or more actions. The top four of these, mentioned by 10% or more of respondents, included:

- Listen more, ask more often for opinions, views, or information.
- Communicate more regularly and more clearly.
- Address conflict quickly, directly, and earlier.
- Stop trying to please everyone, specific individuals, or senior managers.

Manager or supervisor's conflict style

Survey respondents were given short descriptions of each of the five TKI conflict modes and asked which best fitted the typical conflict style of their supervisor or manager. Collaborating was by far the most common choice, chosen by 41% of the group. This was followed by Competing and Avoiding (both 18%), Compromising (17%), and finally Accommodating (7%).

The results suggest that those who perceived their manager as having a Collaborating style, and to some extent a Compromising style, had the most positive experience. Those who believed their manager had a Competing, and to some extent an Avoiding, style had the least positive experience:

- Those who saw their supervisor as having a Collaborating style had significantly higher job satisfaction than those who believed their supervisor had an Accommodating, Avoiding, or Competing style. Those who felt their supervisor had a Compromising style had significantly higher job satisfaction than those who believed their supervisor had an Accommodating or Competing style.
- Those reporting to managers who were seen as Collaborating felt the most included by that manager, those with Competing styles the least.
- Those who saw their supervisor as Competing reported dealing with conflict more often than those who saw their supervisor as having a different style.
- Those who said that there was nothing more their supervisor could do to deal with conflict more effectively were more likely to see their supervisor as Collaborating or Compromising. They were less likely to see them as Avoiding or Competing.

Based on a chi-square analysis, there was no significant relationship between an individual's conflict mode and their perception of their manager or supervisor's conflict mode. The two matched 21% of the time—almost exactly what would be expected by chance. There were no significant relationships between whether or not the respondent's conflict mode and that of their manager matched and other factors, such as job satisfaction or perceptions of the effectiveness of the manager's conflict handling. In other words, having the same favorite conflict mode as your supervisor or manager did not result in any noticeable advantages or disadvantages.

How has completing the TKI® been helpful?

Respondents who had previously completed the TKI assessment were asked in what way this had been helpful. The three options chosen by 50% or more of the respondents were all concerned with their self-awareness and understanding of themselves: increasing my self-awareness (73% of respondents), better understanding of how I impact on other people (64%), and understanding my typical approach to conflict (58%).

Demographic, personality, and conflict style differences

The research results showed several differences in views about conflict between different demographic groups (men and women, different job levels, etc.) and different personality preferences relating to conflict style. These are summarized in this section.

Gender

Men were more likely than women to see conflict as positive. 24% of men said that conflict was always, almost always, or generally positive, and 27% that conflict was always, almost always, or generally negative. This compared with 14% and 32% respectively for women. When asked in an open-ended question for their feelings about conflict, men also expressed somewhat more positive views. 43% of women mentioned feelings of anxiety, depression, or stress, but only 26% of men did. Conversely, 14% of men mentioned feeling excited, energized, or challenged, but only 4% of women did.

Most respondents either felt there was no difference between the ability of men and women to handle conflict or weren't sure if there was a difference, but amongst those who did have a view, women were twice as likely to be nominated as men. Female managers were more likely to be seen as managing conflict very well than were male managers, and less likely to be seen as managing conflict very poorly. Overall, there is a slight tendency for women to be seen as better at managing conflict than men, by both men and women.

Age

Overall, older people were much more likely than younger people to be seen as handling conflict more effectively. Older people were also significantly more likely to feel that they could speak out and be their authentic self at work. There were several more specific age differences, including:

- Those who chose poor communication, dysfunctional teams, or inadequate training as a cause of conflict were on average significantly younger than those who did not.

- Those who said that everyone was responsible for dealing with conflict were on average slightly younger than those who did not.

- Older respondents were more likely to mention bullying or harassment as a negative outcome of conflict.

- Those who chose understanding other people's typical approach to conflict as the way in which the TKI had been helpful to them were on average slightly younger than those who did not.

Remote working status

Non-remote, office-based workers were the most likely to choose poor communication as a cause of conflict. Hybrid workers were the most likely to choose inadequate resources, lack of transparency, or poor line management. They were the least likely to say that there is no conflict in their workplace.

There was little difference overall between how remote, hybrid, and non-remote workers were seen as being able to manage conflict, but there was a relationship with the respondent's own remote working status. Where they expressed a view, respondents were more likely to see their own type of worker as handling conflict most effectively.

Some sources of conflict in the post-COVID working environment may be linked to a return to the physical workplace, such as concerns about contracting COVID or resistance to a forced

return to the office. This is supported by the data. Non-remote workers were the most likely to say that the amount of conflict had increased, remote workers the least.

Remote workers had the most positive view of their supervisor's conflict-handling skills, hybrid workers had the least positive view. Hybrid workers were also the least likely to say that there was nothing more their supervisor could do to deal with conflict more effectively, and they were the most likely to say their supervisor could communicate more regularly or clearly.

Job level

Non-supervisory staff were less likely than others to mention personality clashes, people with different values, or poor line management as causes of conflict. Only 5% of non-management respondents said that HR was responsible for dealing with conflict, compared to 16% of managers, senior managers, and executives. This may imply differences in how managers and non-managers deal with conflict.

Non-managerial employees were more likely than managers or executives to rate conflict handling as extremely important as a leadership or management skill. This may link with the finding that non-managerial respondents were less likely to see managing conflict as being the responsibility of HR.

More senior employees were more likely to be seen as handling conflict effectively than were more junior employees.

Respondents in more senior roles were more likely to say that there were no negative outcomes of conflict.

Personality type

Extraversion–Introversion

Individuals with a preference for Extraversion on average saw themselves as significantly better at managing conflict than did those with a preference for Introversion. Introverts were also more likely to mention feeling demotivated or discouraged by conflict. Those with an Extraversion preference were more likely to choose 'increasing my self-awareness' or 'adapting my conflict style' as something they had gained from completing the TKI assessment than were those with an Introversion preference.

Sensing–Intuition

Overall, there was a slight tendency for those with a Sensing preference to have a more positive outlook on conflict:

- 8% of those with a Sensing preference mentioned an outcome of disengagement, low motivation, or poor morale, compared with 24% of those with an Intuition preference. 40% of respondents with a Sensing preference mentioned feeling awkward or uncomfortable but only 22% of those with preferences for Intuition mentioned this.

- Bullying and harassment was chosen as a cause of conflict by 15% of those with an Intuition preference, but no-one with a Sensing preference chose this as one of the top three causes.

- Individuals with a preference for Sensing on average rated their supervisor significantly more positively than those with a preference for Intuition. 40% of those with a Sensing preference said there was nothing more their supervisor could do, compared with 20% of those with an Intuition preference.

Compared with Sensing individuals, those with an Intuition preference were more likely to see their supervisor as having a Competing style and less likely to see them as having a Collaborating style.

Thinking–Feeling

The results suggest that those with a Thinking preference may have a more transactional view of conflict compared with those with a Feeling preference:

- 14% of those with a preference for Thinking said that their feelings about conflict depended on the situation, but only 1% of those with a Feeling preference said this. 36% of those with a Feeling preference mentioned feeling awkward or uncomfortable but only 19% of those with a preference for Thinking did.

- When asked what more their supervisor could do, no-one with a Feeling preference mentioned creating processes, or that their supervisor should be more aware, engaged, and present. But 7% of those with a Thinking preference mentioned the former and 6% the latter.

Judging–Perceiving

36% of those with a Judging preference mentioned inadequate resources as a cause of conflict, but only 19% of those with a Perceiving preference mentioned this.

When asked about possible negative outcomes of conflict, 5% of those with a Judging preference mentioned anger, resentment, frustration, or bad feelings, and 5% mentioned bullying, harassment, insults or violence. This compared with 20% and 20% respectively of those with a Perceiving preference.

TKI® conflict mode

The results of this study suggest that Collaborating, and to some extent Compromising, are seen by many as the most positive way of dealing with conflict, with Avoiding, and to some extent Accommodating and Competing, seen less positively:

- Respondents who rated themselves better at dealing with conflict on average had significantly lower TKI scores on Avoiding and significantly higher scores on Collaborating.

- Those who saw conflict positively had a significantly higher score on the TKI Collaborating scale, and a significantly lower score on Avoiding, compared with those who did not.

- Respondents whose favorite mode was Collaborating or Compromising had the most positive view of conflict. Those who favored Avoiding or Accommodating had the least positive view.

- Those whose most favored TKI mode was Collaborating were more likely than others to feel excited, energized, or challenged by conflict.

- Respondents who viewed their manager or supervisor as having a Collaborating style had the most positive view of conflict and the most positive view of their manager.

- Those who said that there was nothing more their supervisor could do to deal with conflict more effectively were more likely to see their supervisor as Collaborating or Compromising, and less likely to see them as Avoiding or Competing.

- Those who saw their supervisor as Collaborating were less likely to say that their supervisor should make changes in their behavior, including:
  o Stop avoiding conflict and get more involved.
  o Listen, ask for opinions, views, and information.
  o Be less emotional, more rational, take things less personally.
  o Be more aware, engaged, interested, present.
- Those who saw their supervisor as Avoiding were more likely to say that their supervisor could:
  o Stop avoiding conflict and get more involved.
  o Address conflict quickly, directly, or early.
  o Stop trying to please everyone/individuals/senior managers.

Those choosing changes in policies, products, organizational structures etc or lack of role clarity or poor senior leadership as one of the top three causes of conflict on average scored lower on Avoiding than those who did not. Those who chose personality clashes were lower on Collaborating.

Those who said that everyone was responsible for dealing with conflict on average scored higher on Accommodating than those who did not.

There were a number of relationships with the perceived outcomes of conflict:

- Respondents who mentioned outcomes of people or views ignored, people isolated, or of poor communication, lack of clarity or transparency, scored higher on Accommodating.
- Those who mentioned outcomes on the theme of project delays, poor results, or poor productivity scored lower on Avoiding.
- Respondents who mentioned an outcome of anxiety, depression or stress scored higher on Collaborating than, and lower on, Compromising than those who did not.
- Those who mentioned an outcome of anger, resentment, or bad feelings scored higher on Competing than those who did not.

And with feelings about conflict:

- Those who mentioned feeling anxious, depressed or stressed scored significantly higher on Avoiding than those who did not.
- Those who mentioned feeling awkward or uncomfortable scored significantly lower on Compromising than those who did not.
- Those who mentioned feeling demotivated or discouraged scored significantly higher on Avoiding and lower on Competing than those who did not.
- Those who mentioned feeling excited, engaged, or challenged scored significantly lower on Avoiding than those who did not.
- Those who said their feelings depended on the situation scored significantly lower on Avoiding and higher on Competing.
- Those who mentioned feeling tired scored significantly lower on Competing and higher on Compromising than those who did not.

Other than Collaborating and Avoiding, which show all positive and all negative views respectively, other conflict modes showed a mix of positive and negative views when applied to a manager or supervisor's conflict style.

Recommendations

- Dealing with conflict takes time. This is expensive for organizations and can have a negative effect on individuals, so any actions that can be taken to better understand conflict, manage it more effectively, or resolve it more efficiently are likely to pay dividends. This report has outlined several possible causes of conflict, most of which result in more time being spent. It may be useful to review each of these in terms of how they might apply to organizations, departments, or teams, and how their effects might be mitigated. In particular, the three most common causes of poor communication, lack of role clarity, and heavy workloads.

- The fourth most common cause of conflict related to personality clashes. To reduce the effect of these, increasing the self-awareness of individuals, using tools such as personality or conflict style assessments, would be useful.

- Managing conflict at work is a useful skill for everyone. In our research, those who had the most positive view of their ability to manage conflict also tended to have higher levels of job satisfaction, felt more able to be their authentic self at work, and felt more valued by and at home in their organization. Training in how to handle conflict may be useful for all workers. Resolving any issues around lack or role clarity or team dysfunction should also have a positive effect on individuals' views of how well they can manage conflict.

- Conflict management is an especially important skill for managers. In our research, 98% of respondents said that conflict handling was an extremely important or very important leadership or management skill, and 'my manager' was the most common response to the question 'who is responsible for managing conflict at work'. While most managers were seen as handling conflict at least adequately, over a fifth were said to be poor or very poor. People reporting to these managers had lower levels of job satisfaction, saw conflict more negatively, and felt less included and supported. Conflict training may be especially useful for managers. Overall, the key areas where respondents felt their manager could improve included: listening more, asking more often for opinions, views or information; communicating more regularly and more clearly; addressing conflict quickly, directly, and earlier; and not trying to please everyone.

- Individuals who saw their manager as having a Collaborating conflict style, and to some extent a Compromising style, had the most positive experience. Those who believed their manager had a Competing, and to some extent an Avoiding, style had the least positive experience. In practice, a Collaborating style may well be the most suited in some situations or interactions, but a different style in others. It is important that a manager is aware of their own typical approach to conflict and has the knowledge and ability to flex and take another approach when the occasion demands.

- Though conflict is often seen negatively, it can result in very positive outcomes, such as those mentioned by respondents to our survey. However, those who see conflict in a more negative way are likely to feel less satisfied with their job and to feel that they handle conflict less well, while also feeling personally responsible for dealing with it. For these individuals, it will be important to point out some of the positive outcomes of conflict and what it can achieve.

- The most frequently mentioned outcomes of conflict were concerned with changes in relationships, both positive (building relationships and increasing collaboration and co-operation) and negative (poorer relationships, loss of trust, breakdown of relationships, lack of co-operation and collaboration). This points out the importance of understanding other people's approaches to conflict as a key aspect of any conflict training.

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Appendices

Appendix A: The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (the TKI®)

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (the TKI) (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974, 2007) defines five conflict-handling modes, or ways of dealing with conflict, according to how cooperative and how assertive a person is. Assertiveness refers to the extent to which an individual tries to satisfy their own concerns, and cooperativeness refers to the extent to which try to satisfy the concerns of another person. The five modes are Competing, Collaborating, Compromising, Avoiding, and Accommodating.
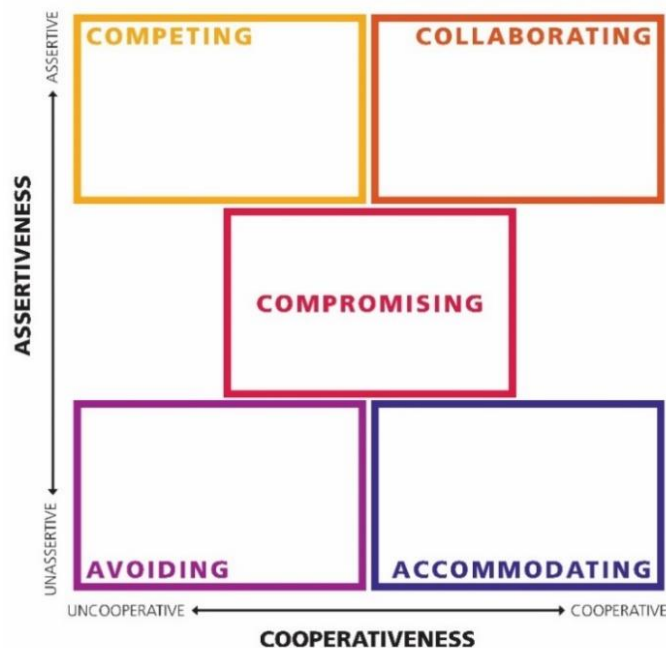
Avoiding corresponds to low cooperativeness and low assertiveness. Conflict is seen as an interruption or a disruption, diverting energy from the task and causing unnecessary stress. It implies avoiding conflict, sidestepping the issue, or withdrawing. Issues may be allowed to remain unresolved.

Accommodating corresponds to high cooperativeness and low assertiveness. Conflict is seen in terms of relationships or social issues. The focus is on being supportive and sensitive; relationships are seen as important and worth preserving. It implies neglecting your own concerns to satisfy the concerns of other people.

Competing corresponds to low cooperativeness and high assertiveness. Conflict is seen as a contest to win between opposing positions or people having the courage of their convictions. It implies pursuing your own goals at others' expense.

Collaborating corresponds to high cooperativeness and high assertiveness. Conflict is seen as a problem to be solved with others, in order to make quality decisions. It implies working with others to find a solution that fully satisfies the concerns of both parties.

Compromising is a middle position. Conflict is seen as a chance to find the middle ground and an opportunity to make deals. It implies splitting the difference, exchanging concessions, or seeking a quick middle-ground position.

There are 30 questions in the TKI questionnaire. Each question contains two options, one referring to one conflict mode and the other to a different mode. The respondent chooses one of the two options, and in doing so adds one point to the score for the corresponding mode. There are 12 questions for each mode. resulting in a raw score for each mode between 0 and 12. A score of 0 would mean that in every paired question where that mode appeared, the option corresponding to that mode was never chosen. A score of 12 would mean that options corresponding to that mode were always chosen.

The raw scores are then converted to percentiles. These show the percentage of a reference group, or norm group, that an individual has scored higher than. For example, a score at the 60th percentile on Accommodating would show that an individual was more accommodating than 60% of the norm group. The TKI norm group is a large reference group of 8,000 people broadly representative of the US working population (Schaubhut, 2007). The higher the percentile score, the more likely it is that this will be an individual's favorite conflict mode.

Any individual can use all five conflict-handling modes. However, most people use some modes more readily than others, develop more skills in those modes, and therefore tend to rely on them more readily. Indeed, many have one mode that that they use significantly more than any of the other four. Once an individual has identified their favorite mode(s) and becomes aware of the other ways of dealing with conflict, they can modify their behavior to suit the conflict situations in which they find themselves.

Although percentiles provide a useful way to understand and interpret TKI results, they have some limitations for use in statistical analysis. Technically, they are 'non-linear', and many common techniques, such as calculating the mean value, cannot be applied. Therefore, where appropriate, raw scores have been used in analyses for this report.

Appendix B: Psychological type and the MBTI® assessment

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) assessment is probably the most widely used personality questionnaire in the world. It does not measure our ability or skill, or how much of a particular personality trait we have. It looks at whether we have an in-built preference to do things in one way or in another way. It looks at four pairs of preferences:

Opposite ways to direct and receive energy	
Extraversion (E)	**Introversion (I)**
Gets energy from the outer world of people and experiences	Gets energy from the inner world of reflections and thoughts
Focuses energy and attention outwards in action	Focuses energy and attention inwards in reflection

Opposite ways to take in information	
Sensing (S)	**Intuition (N)**
Prefers real information coming from five senses	Prefers information coming from associations
Focuses on what is real	Focuses on possibilities and what might be

Opposite ways to decide and come to conclusions	
Thinking (T)	**Feeling (F)**
Steps out of situations to analyze them dispassionately	Steps into situations to weigh human values and motives
Prefers to make decisions on the basis of objective logic	Prefers to make decisions on the basis of values

Opposite ways to approach the outside world	
Judging (J)	**Perceiving (P)**
Prefers to live life in a planned and organized manner	Prefers to live life in a spontaneous and adaptable way
Enjoys coming to closure and making a decision	Enjoys keeping options open

For convenience, these pairs of preferences, or pairs of opposites, are often called type preference pairs. So, we might talk about the E–I preference pair, the S–N preference pair, the T–F preference pair, or the J–P preference pair.

In each pair, we will have a preference for one type. So, for example, we might prefer E rather than I, and spend much more of our time and energy doing things typical of Extraverts, and little

of our time or attention on activities and ways of doing things typical of Introverts. Or we might prefer I rather than E. Whatever our preference, however, we will spend some time and carry out some activities associated with the other side. The same applies to S–N, T–F and J–P. In each case we will have a preference, but we will visit the other side from time to time. We will use all eight modes at least some of the time.

The MBTI assessment is a method for helping individuals to work out what their type preferences are, so you may hear people say things like "I'm an ESTJ" or "I've got preferences for INFP" or "I'm definitely a Perceiving type". They can then use this knowledge to help them with their development as human beings. The four letters can be combined to give 16 different types, but this four-letter type formula should not be used to 'put people in a box'. The MBTI instrument is used to open up possibilities, not to limit individuals.

The 16 types are often illustrated using a *type table*, as shown here. Each of these 16 types has a particular characteristic taking the lead in directing their personality—what's often called their favorite process.

So, for ISTJ and ISFJ for example, introverted Sensing (S^i) leads. Central to their personality is the importance of lived experience and drawing on their rich store of memories.

For ESTP and ESFP, it is extraverted Sensing (S^e)—experiencing the moment and the here and now with all their senses—that leads, and so on for all 16 types. See the table below.

Types	Favorite process
ISTJ, ISFJ	Introverted Sensing (S^i)
ESTP, ESFP	Extraverted Sensing (S^e)
INFJ, INTJ	Introverted Intuition (N^i)
ENTP, ENFP	Extraverted Intuition (N^e)
ISTP, INTP	Introverted Thinking (T^i)
ESTJ, ENTJ	Extraverted Thinking (T^e)
ISFP, INFP	Introverted Feeling (F^i)
ESFJ, ENFJ	Extraverted Feeling (F^e)