

## CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES: HISTORICAL EVOLUTION, PERSPECTIVES AND RATIONALISATION

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### ABSTRACT

This study is a historical account of the development and uses of conflict handling styles. The evolutionary trends of the styles right from 1940 to when they were actually hypothesized in 1974 were elucidated. The styles as well as their identities were analyzed to bring to fore their inherent textures and properties for better understanding in order to enhance their usage proactively by individuals. Therefore, it was argued that the adoption of conflict management styles should be guided by the understanding of conflict type, the significance of a conflict to an individual, and the issues at stake in a conflict. Equally, evaluating the resources that will be used in the process of mitigating a conflict for functional outcome should be determined. A successful determination of these issues will depend on individuals' ability to understand the principles and perspectives that underline conflict dynamics and their management styles, which are analyzed in this review to enhance learning

**KEYWORDS:** Conflict management, conflict management styles, .conflict perspective, rationalization

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Conflict management has become the centre of gravity of human activities. The inevitability of conflict in social relations has made conflict management as essential element for human adaptability and survival. This is because the approach adopted to mitigate conflict will determine one's survival instinct and adjustment patterns in terms of how to live amicably with people to achieve set goals. The issue is that to live amicably with people call for the understanding of conflict dynamics and its management approaches in a society. There are different conflict management styles that can be adopted by individuals in conflict situations. However, it is important to note that the same conflict style can be used by people at different points for distinct conflict situations. The conflict orientations of people, nature of an emerging conflict, status of the conflicting parties as well as the context of conflict are crucial issues that will determine the adoption of a particular conflict management style.

It is worthy to note that the use of a particular style does not necessarily mean that conflict will automatically come to an end. However, the conflict management style adopted can either make conflict to subside for easy resolution or cause conflict to escalate, thereby making the situation more complex to tackle. Thus, whatever outcome that ensues, it is the product of the form of conflict management style adopted at the instance of a conflict. Whitfied (1994) averred that conflict can cause a great deal of injury and /or a great deal of good, depending on the management style of an organisation. The

idea that conflict is inevitable, suggests that the only way out is to contain it for meaningful interaction to continue among people. Going by this, conflict cannot be eliminated or cut-off from human experience. The best thing that can be done is to understand its nature and dynamics in order to know what can be done to transform it into a positive force for the growth and development of a society. According to Bloomfield and Reilly (1998), conflict management addresses the more realistic question of managing conflict: how to deal with it in a constructive way, how to bring opposing sides together in a cooperative process, how to design a practically achievable, cooperative system for the constructive management of difference.

The goal of conflict management is how to reduce conflict level to the point where it becomes a positive instrument in social relations and organisational development. Conflict is not totally a bad omen that should be eliminated as posited by the classical theorists. It should rather be seen as a work in progress that can constructively be managed to bring about innovation, creativity and growth in social relations. Conflict management does not imply elimination or termination of conflict, rather it involves designing effective macro-level strategies to minimise the dysfunctions of conflict and enhancing the constructive functions of conflicts in order to enhance learning and effectiveness in an organisation (Rahim, 2002). Conflict management has become a significant factor in human relations and organisational development. This is because its knowledge is required for actions to be properly carried out in order to increase learning for efficient and effective operations and to promote positive interpersonal relationship. Therefore, to achieve the specific objectives of this review, discussion is centred on the under listed thematic areas:

- (i) Conceptualisation of Conflict Management
- (ii) Understanding of Conflict Management Styles
- (iii) Historical Evolution of Conflict Management Styles
- (iv) Perspectives and rationalisation of Conflict Management Styles

### ***2. Conceptualisation of Conflict Management***

Conflict management significantly resonates the fact that conflict is inevitable in social relations, and that it cannot be eliminated or terminated, but should be constructively handled to get the best out of it. Conflict management consists of interventions designed to reduce excessive conflict or in some instances to increase insufficient conflict (Hellriegel and Slocum, 1996). It also involves the diagnosis of and intervention in conflict with the appropriate styles and strategies in order to accomplish organisational and individual goals (Gumuselli and Hacifazlioglu, 2009). These definitions show that conflict management is a process that involves the adoption of approaches capable of reducing the volume and intensity of conflict to create positive climate that will encourage the promotion of peace in a society.

Conflict management equally involves increasing the dosages of conflict where it is considered insufficient to induce the needed energy to foster growth through innovation and creativity. Conflict management is about ensuring the existence of a minimum level of conflict to keep a group “viable, self-critical and creative” (Fuller and Fritzen, 2007). These ideas bring to mind the fact that conflict can either produce functional or dysfunctional outcome depending on how it is managed at a particular time and place. In line with this idea, Best (2006) described conflict management as a process of reducing the negative and destructive capacity of conflict through a number of measures and by working with and through the parties involved in a conflict. It should be noted that the idea of conflict management suggests that:

- (i) certain types of conflicts, which may have negative effects on individual and group performance, may have to be reduced. These conflicts are generally caused by members (e.g. personal attacks on group members, racial disharmony, sexual harassment).

- (ii) there are other types of conflicts that may have positive effects on individual and group performances. These conflicts relate to disagreements over tasks, policies, and other organisational issues. These types of conflict should be encouraged.
- (iii) organisational members while interacting with one another will be required to deal with their disagreements constructively. This calls for learning how to use different conflict-handling styles to deal with various situations effectively (Amason, 1996; Rahim, 2002).

Equally, the above ideas critically revealed some of the functions of conflict management, which are:

- (i) overcoming the negative effects of conflict by reducing its volume and intensity in social relations.
- (ii) increasing the positive effects of conflict by encouraging such conflict in an organisation.
- (iii) encouraging constructive or proactive ways of managing conflict that may confront individuals.

Given the constancy of conflict in social relations, it becomes imperative to understand that conflict management skills should be taught and promoted for people to understand the art of handling conflicts. When people are aware of the various conflict management styles, and understand how and when to use them, they will be able to determine the appropriate style to use at a particular time. Thus, conflict management styles are designed for individual usage at micro-level of social engagement. The usage of these styles varies from one person to another based on personal, situational and contextual factors surrounding the occurrence of a conflict. In this regard, the skills and knowledge which individual possesses on conflict management will play crucial role in understanding which of the styles to adopt in addressing conflict for positive results. It is important to understand that conflict management is a set of skills that can be acquired by people for making appropriate choice of conflict strategies in order to proactively contain conflict for positive results. Having a firm grip of conflict management styles will aid in the achievement of its fundamental goals which are “to make conflict remain on the creative and useful side of an invisible but critically important line that separates the good or the natural conflict from that which is bad or unnatural” (Kahn and Boulding, 1967).

### 3. CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES: A CONCEPTUAL DESCRIPTION

Wilmot and Hocker (2011) considered conflict management styles as patterned responses or clusters of behaviour that people use in conflict through diverse communication tactics. It is a behavioural orientation of how to approach and handle conflict, with individuals choosing a pattern of principles to guide them through the conflict process (Copley, 2008). The evolution of the patterns into actions and reactions become known as their “style” (Rubie and Thomas, 1976; Thomas and Kilmann, 1978). Hammed (2000) averred that style is a general expectation about how best to deal with the other party. Therefore, the adoption of a style is an orientation and a decision making process that involves the use of approaches that will guide an individual during conflict situation. It is choosing the degree to which parties will be cooperative and/or assertive (Hammed, 2000). Hocker and Wilmot (1995) raised some significant assumptions about conflict management styles as:

- (i) people develop patterned response to conflict
- (ii) people develop conflict styles for reasons that make sense to them
- (iii) no one style is automatically better than another.
- (iv) people’s styles undergo change in order to adapt to the demands of new situations.

Conflict management styles are the approaches or strategies that can be employed to make conflict become uncomplicated for parties to handle as expected to achieve their goals. There is no best style because variations in time and season often influence their efficacies. This is the reason why an effective conflict management style is considered as one that should reduce the volume and intensity of conflict to a level bearable for parties to achieve positive change. Conflict

style is a reflexive, habitual way of responding to conflict with the intention of achieving a predetermined end-state. Almost, everyone has a predominant style, but depending on the circumstance surrounding a conflict, style may change. Thus, there is not a single best style to utilise; the use of a style may vary from one situation to the next (Center for the Prevention of School Violence, 2002). This calls for a critical examination of the situation that gave rise to a conflict as well as the parties involved before progressively making choice of a style. The understanding of conflict management style as trait-like skills that contribute to performance and promotion to higher level (Blake and Mouton, 1964), is centred on the idea that people overtime develop interest in a particular style. However, it noteworthy to stress that the dynamism surround the world of today validate the fact that a given situation may render a particular style inadequate to use, if the expected result is to be achieved.

Therefore, conflict styles at higher levels can be interpreted as learned adaptations to the role demands of those positions (Chusmir and Mills, 1989). No matter the status, position or degree at which one is operating, conflict management styles are influenced by situational and dispositional factors. These factors are essential ingredients that parties to a conflict should have comprehend to know what to do, how and when to do it for effective handling of conflict to achieve a desired goal. The flexibility of the situational and dispositional factors makes the styles highly subjective at any time and point. Implying that the adoption of a particular style is a function of certain elements which should equally be adjustable to the reality on ground before adoption.

#### 4. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES

Conflict and its management are issues that occupied human mind right from time immemorial. Rapoport (1960) pointed out that conflict is a theme that has occupied the thinking of man more than any other issue except for God and love. The age-old thinking about conflict has actually metamorphosed into volume of ideas on the subject and how it can be handled. While conflict can be managed using various strategies, conscious efforts on evolution of conflict management started in the 1940s. In 1940, Mary Follett was the first to suggest three main styles of handling conflict, namely: domination, compromise and integration. She later added two other styles, which are: avoidance and suppression, making the styles a total of five. According to Owens (2001), the work of Mary Parker Follett marked a move from traditional organisation theory of scientific management toward the human relations movement and contingency theory. In 1949, Morton Deutsch developed a classification of conflict management styles which are made up of cooperation-competition dichotomy.

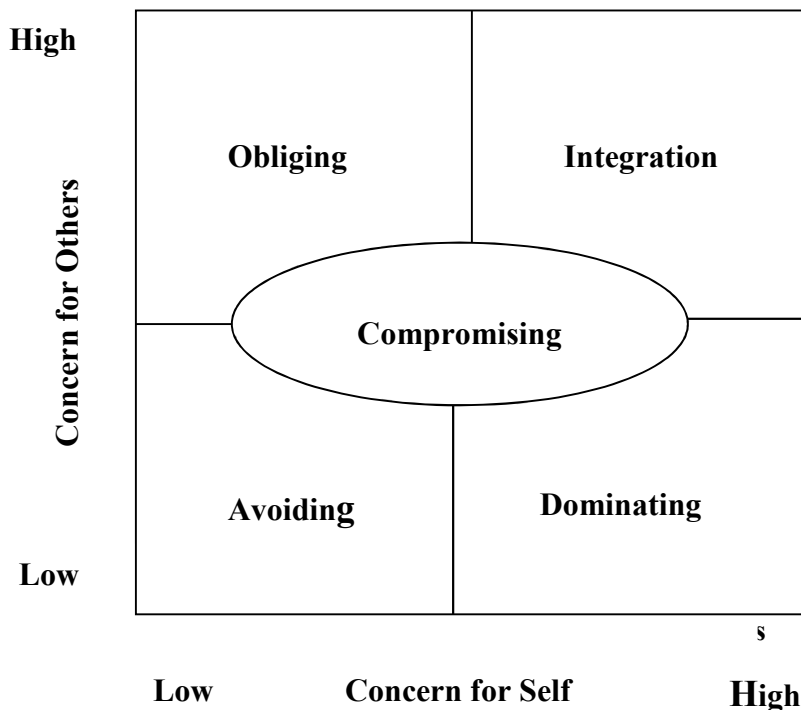
The classification was based on the idea that conflict is an incompatible interaction between two individuals, where one is interfering, obstructing or in other ways making the behaviour of another less effective. It was concluded that the outcome of a conflict episode depends on how the conflict is handled, either cooperatively or competitively (Deutsch, 1949). The conflict management styles of Deutsch did not gain much popularity in its usage to determine individual's styles of handling conflicts because doubt was raised concerning the ability of the dichotomy to reflect the complexity of an individual's perceptions of conflict behaviour (Ruble and Thomas, 1976). In 1962, Kenneth Ewart Boulding came up with three methods of managing conflicts, namely: avoiding, conquest, and procedural resolution of some kind, including reconciliation and/or compromise and/or award. Boulding (1962) went ahead to caution that "the biggest problem in developing the institutions of conflict control is that of catching conflicts young. The problem is that conflict situations are frequently allowed to develop to almost unmanageable proportions before anything is done about them, by which time it is often too late to resolve them by peaceable and procedural means".

This statement points to the need for people to consciously develop knowledge of conflict strategies and the competence to rightly apply them so as to contain conflicts early enough before it escalates. While it will not be out of place to argue that the ideas of Boulding (1962) rightly reflected the work of Follett (1940), they also show wider conflict management strategies which border on reconciliation and award. These conflict management strategies are based on the

involvement of a third party in conflict resolution spectrum. Considering the ideas of Mary P. Follett (1940), Robert Blake and Jane Mouton in 1964 developed a two dimension grid, which later evolved into five conflict handling styles, namely: forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising and problem-solving.

The two-dimension grid was actually based on the dual concern model. This model was used to categorize the attitudes of managers into concern for production and concern for people. Thus, Blake and Mouton (1964) argued that managers using problem-solving have high concern for productivity and people, those using forcing show high concern for productivity and low concern for people, managers employing compromising show moderate concern for productivity and people, those using smoothing show low concern for productivity and high concern for people and managers using withdrawal have low concern for productivity and low concern for people. In 1974, Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann using the ideas of Blake and Mouton developed a model for managing conflict based on competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising and collaborating. Thomas (1976) amplified the model on the basis of two-dimension behaviour, namely: assertiveness and cooperativeness.

Assertiveness indicates individual's attempt to satisfy one's own concerns, while cooperativeness shows a situation whereby an individual attempts to satisfy the other person's concerns. In 1979, Afzalur M. Rahim and Thomas V. Bonoma keyed into the existing ideas about conflict management to develop a two dimension model of conflict management, which are based on concern for self and concern for others. The concern for self explains the degree at which a person attempts to satisfy his or her own needs or concerns, while the concern for others is the degree at which a person attempts to satisfy the needs or concerns of others at the expense of his/her concern. The combination of the two dimensions brought about five scientific conflict management styles, namely: avoiding, obliging, integrating, dominating and compromising. Avoiding style is characterised by both low concerns for self and others, while obliging style shows low concern for self and high concern for others (Rahim and Bonoma, 1979). Integrating style is associated with high concerns for self and others; dominating style indicates high concern for self and low concern for others, while compromising style is characterized by intermediate concern for self and for others. The figure below shows the conflict management styles of Rahim and Bonoma (1979).



In 1982, Linda Putman and Charmaine Wilson introduced the three-conflict management styles model. The model consists of three variables, namely: non-confrontation (obliging), solution-oriented (integrating) and Control (dominating). The non-confrontation or obliging style is used to manage conflict by simply avoiding disagreements or by minimising it. The solution-oriented or integration style is used when searching for innovative, creative and integrative solutions. The style can also be employed when one intends to compromise. The control or dominating style is associated with persistent demand for one's position through argument or use of strong nonverbal signals to press home one's demand. In 1983, Pruitt basing his ideas on the work of Blake and Mouton (1964) proposed four styles of handling conflict: yielding, problem-solving, inaction and contending. The styles were equally based on the two dimension model, consisting of concern for self (high or low) and concern for others (high or low). In 1986, Stanley A. Deetz and Sheryl L. Stevenson proposed five conflict styles in which the first style was avoidance, followed by pacification, the second type, third style is competition, compromise is the fourth style and the fifth style is creative integration. Avoidance in this case was based on blocking any discussion relating to the conflict.

Deetz and Stevenson (1986) recommended that the avoidance style should be employed when the issue "isn't really worth the effort". Pacification, on the other hand intends to minimize or maximize the conflict. They also noted that it should be employed to "subvert the conflict discussion." Therefore, the style should be applied appropriately to reduce conflict where it is high and a dosage of it induced where it is non-existent. Competition style however is based on an individual getting what he/she wants by all means. The style indicates that people will struggle to satisfy their own concern at all cost. Compromise is a strategy that places the parties on the template to feel that everyone is satisfied fully. The creative integration style, according to Deetz and Stevenson (1986), aims at breaking "the perceived conflict context by finding options outside that context. This style involves four steps, which are:

- (i) Identify the goals of each participant.
- (ii) Combine the goals of all participants and think of them as if they were all the desires of each.
- (iii) Identify activities and resources that they accomplish many, or ideally all, of the listed goals and needs.
- (iv) Select and implement a course of action (Deetz and Stevenson, 1986)

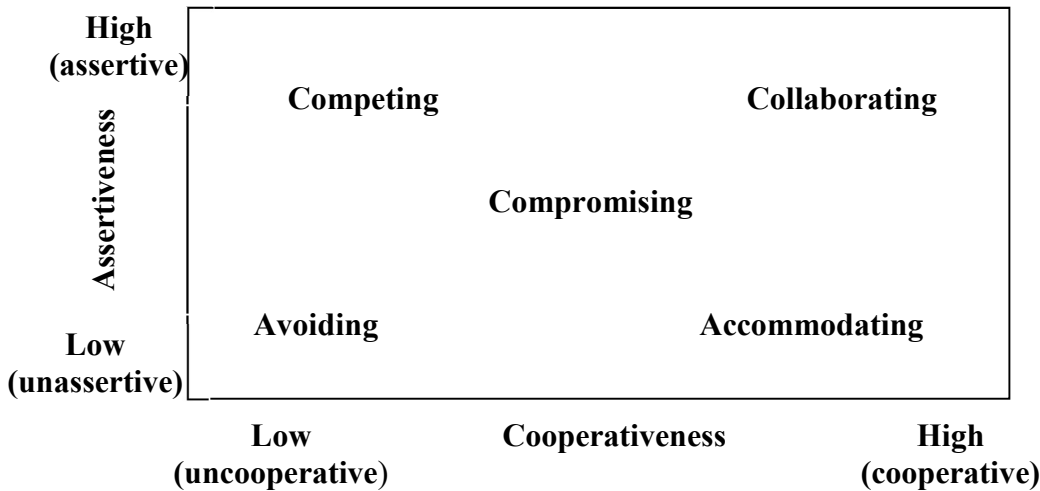
There are other researchers who have developed styles ranging from two (Knudson, Sommers and Golding, 1980; Faria, 1982; and Billingham and Sack, 1987); three (Sillars, 1980; Putnan and Wilson, 1982); four (Smyth, 1979; Cheung and Chuah, 2000) to eight (Nicotera, 1993), which implies that this historical voyage did not exhaust all the styles that were developed at different times in Peace and Conflict Studies. One major element that is crystally clear was the fact that most of the styles have bearing on the dual concern theory. Although, the theory at a point was challenged and criticized by (Nicotera, 1993), but it is a major breakthrough in the understanding of the different styles that individuals can adopt to mitigate conflict. The dual concern theory remains the most widely discussed and used in handling intra and interpersonal conflicts. Rose *et al* (2007) asserted that researchers are still widely using the dual concern model in studying conflict. Vokic and Sontor (2009) posited that the most acknowledged and utilised framework of styles of resolving interpersonal conflicts is the one developed by Thomas and Kilmann (1974) and Rahim and Bonoma (1979), following the work of Blake and Mouton (1964), particularly their managerial grid. In the same vein, Pruitt and Rubin (1986) supported the idea that an infinite number of conflict management strategies may be conceived of, but, conflict research and theory tend to converge on dual concern theory. In this review, the works of Thomas and Kilmann (1974) was adopted for furthering the explanation on how conflict styles can be employed and at what point should they be used.

Their conflict management model was utilised as a reference point in this study because, according to Suping and Jing (2006), it is the most widely used approach in both academic and applied domains. The model is of two dimensions, which are based on: assertiveness (i.e. attempt to satisfy one's own concern) and cooperativeness (i.e. attempt to satisfy the concern of others). The assertiveness is labeled on the x-axis and cooperativeness on the y-axis. The model was used to generate

five different forms of conflict handling styles, which individuals can use to address conflicts that may confront them on a daily basis.

5. PERSPECTIVES AND RATIONALISATION OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES

The issues discussed within the scope of ‘perspectives’ and ‘rationalisation’ are analysing the different forms of conflict management styles, how and when they can be used for positive results. Therefore, for a better understanding of the conflict management styles, Thomas and Kilmann (1974) model is presented as follows:



Source: Thomas and Kilmann (1974)

Fig. 2: Thomas-Kilmann Model of Conflict Management Styles

The five conflict management styles presented by the model are competing, avoiding, compromising, accommodating and collaborating. Competing and avoiding are stationary at the horizontal axis, which indicates assertiveness and the accommodating and collaborating styles are represented at the vertical axis, signifying cooperativeness. Compromising is located at the intermediate level of both assertiveness and cooperativeness. These conflict styles show how people strive to satisfy their own concern, that is, the assertive dimension, and the degree at which they attempt to satisfy the concern of others; that is, the cooperative dimension. In discussing the styles, one will discover that the avoiding style is low in assertiveness and low in cooperativeness. It is a lose-lose mode and has been described as a decision not to decide. According to Rahim (2002), avoiding style has been associated with withdrawal, buck passing or sidestepping situation. An avoiding person fails to satisfy his or her own concern as well as the concern of the other party. It is a style in which an individual or group withdraws from conflict situation (Hammed, 2002). In avoiding conflict, Bateman and Snell (2002) argued that “people do nothing to satisfy themselves or others. They either ignore the problem by doing nothing at all or address it by merely smoothing over or deemphasising the disagreement”.

A typical avoiding behaviour may include sidestepping, postponing or simply withdrawing/ignoring a conflict situation. Lee (1990) explained that this style is useful when the issues are trivial or when the potential dysfunctional effect of confronting the other party outweighs the benefits of the resolution of conflict. Albert (1999) posited that “this kind of response to a conflict situation compounds problems as the party that is “avoided” will later seek other means of being listened to. Such people usually resort to violence”. Truter (2003) argued that avoidance is not a successful method for achieving a long-term solution since the original cause of the conflict remains. According to Barki and Hartwick (2001),

alternative labels for this style include withdrawing, evading, escaping and apathy. The competing style is assertive and uncooperative. It is a win-lose style. It emphasizes that a party tries to satisfy its own concern and disregard the concerns of other people. It shows an unwillingness to satisfy others' concern to even a minimal degree (Hammed, 2002).

Connelly (1998) stated that this style is a power-oriented style, in which one uses whatever power seems appropriate to win one's position. Rahim (2002) argued that this style is appropriate when the issues involved in a conflict are important to the party or an unfavourable decision by one party may be harmful to the other party. In using this style, the competitors' attitude is that their own ideas, values and goals are extremely important and in their eyes conflict is equal to competition and even war (Suping and Jing, 2006). The style involves an attempt to use any means to defeat the other party. This can be subtle or aggressive in nature. The style does not respect the feelings and aspirations of the other party as attention is concentrated on self alone. Competing style can be utilised in an emergency situation, where an individual is convinced and certain that he/she is right about the issue under contention.

According to Ojiji (2006), competing style is rooted in power relationships where one party perceives that it has more power over the conflict issue than the other party or parties. Alternative labels for this style include asserting, dominating and forcing (Barki and Hartwick, 2001). The accommodating style is cooperative and unassertive. This style stresses that the individual neglects his/her own concerns to satisfy the concerns of the other person (Connelly, 1998). In using this style, the underlying value here is that of self-sacrifice which may be a manifestation of self esteem order. In such a situation, the person is meek so that he or she readily gives in to the demands of other people. Other times, it may be a reflection of the desire to ensure personal and social harmony and to preserve relationships at one's cost (Ojiji, 2006). People using this style "give in to demands, even unreasonable ones, to avoid disagreement (Tonsing, 2005). The style can also be referred to as cooperating, obliging, yielding and sacrificing (Barki and Hartwick, 2001). Compromising style is intermediate in assertive and cooperative. It results in no-win/no-lose or win-lose-win-lose outcome. Copley (2008) observed that compromising style is associated with an intermediate level of concern for both self and others. This style typically involves "give and take" where both parties involved relinquish some aspects in order to arrive at a mutually acceptable decision (Copley, 2008).

According to Ojiji (2006), compromise becomes necessary in situations where the positions of the parties are so incompatible that the two cannot be reconciled without one of them losing something in the process. This method of resolving conflict puts the conflicting parties at the verge of being satisfied with their demands because both parties will let go certain measures of their demands to come to agreement. Thus, compromise often allows each side to gain at least some measures of what they are seeking. Barki and Hartwick (2001) indicated that the alternative names given to this style include sharing and splitting the difference. The collaborating style is a situation in which the conflicting parties "work with each other to find a solution that is satisfactory to both of them. It is about dialogue in which the parties listen actively and gain understanding of the other party as well as their own. That understanding enables them to develop a solution that satisfies the concern of both parties" (Ojiji, 2006). Supping and Jing (2006) pointed out that collaborating style encourages mutual respect, open communication and full participation by all parties. Collaborators believe that conflict itself is neither good nor bad, effective solutions that everybody supports will maximize the interests of all people (Suping and Jing, 2006). Pruitt and Carnevale (1993) are of the opinion that this mode of handling conflict is the most likely to occur when there is an expectation of a long-term dependency on the other party. This style can also be referred to as integrating, cooperating and problem-solving (Barki and Hartwick, 2001). The characteristics, when to use and when not to use each of the styles are presented below.

**Table 1: Details of the Conflict Management Styles**

<b>Conflict Management Style</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>**When to Use</b>	<b>***When Not to Use it</b>
<b>Competing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- it is power oriented in nature.</li> <li>- It results in win- lose outcome.</li> <li>- It is high in assertive and low in cooperative.</li> <li>- Individuals employ every means necessary to achieve their goals.</li> <li>- Individuals gain at the expense of the other party.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When rapid decision making is critical</li> <li>- Where issues are critical and unpopular decisions must be made.</li> <li>- Where issues are critical to the company and the decision-maker is confident of their decision.</li> <li>- In a competitive environment, where you risk being taken advantage of by being non competitive.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- issue is complex.</li> <li>- issue is not important to you.</li> <li>- Both parties are equally powerful.</li> <li>- Decision does not have to be made quickly.</li> <li>- Subordinates possess high degree of competence.</li> </ul>
<b>Collaborating</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It results in win-win outcome.</li> <li>- It is high in assertive and high in cooperative.</li> <li>- It is directed towards achieving creative solution to problems.</li> <li>- It has the potential of effectively preserving existing relationships.</li> <li>- It promotes openness, communication, understanding differences, trust and learning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When goals of both parties must be met.</li> <li>- When the process of understanding your own goals and those of your competitors are critical.</li> <li>- When incorporation of multiple perspectives is critical.</li> <li>- When commitment is critical.</li> <li>- When it is necessary to resolve past feeling of ill will.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Task or problem is simple</li> <li>- Immediate decision is required.</li> <li>- Other parties are unconcerned about outcome.</li> <li>- Other parties do not have problem-solving skills.</li> </ul>
<b>Compromising</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It is “give and take” in nature.</li> <li>- it results in no-win/no-lose or win-lose-win-lose outcome</li> <li>- It involves intermediate assertive and cooperation.</li> <li>- Parties to conflict are partially satisfied.</li> <li>- It leads to the achievement of a middle ground position by parties.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When objectives are only somewhat important and disruption is the greater risk.</li> <li>- When strong opponents pursue mutually exclusive objectives.</li> <li>- When time is critical.</li> <li>- When collaboration or competition fail.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- One party is more powerful</li> <li>- Problem is complex enough needing problem-solving approach.</li> </ul>

<b>Avoiding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It is low in assertiveness and low in cooperation.</li> <li>- It leads to lose-lose outcome.</li> <li>- It takes the forms of sidestepping, postponement, withdrawing and ignoring of conflict situations.</li> </ul> <p>It makes conflict to remain largely unsettled.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When an issue does not warrant attention.</li> <li>- When potential for success is limited.</li> <li>- When risk exceeds potential benefit.</li> <li>- When reflection is warranted.</li> <li>- When more information is required.</li> <li>- When others can resolve the situation more readily</li> </ul> <p>When the issue is related to another more fundamental issue.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Issue is important to you.</li> <li>- It is your responsibility to make decision.</li> <li>- Parties are unwilling to defer; issue must be resolved</li> <li>- Prompt attention is needed.</li> </ul>
<b>Accommodating</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It is low in assertiveness and high in cooperation.</li> <li>- Its outcome is win-lose in nature</li> <li>- It involves a high degree of sacrifice from a party to the conflict.</li> <li>- The views of the opponent are easily considered.</li> <li>- Individuals become useful and helpful to the opposing party.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When your position is indefensible</li> <li>- When the issue is unimportant to you.</li> <li>- To gain favour</li> <li>- When you are about to lose.</li> <li>- When preserving the peace is critical.</li> </ul> <p>To allow others to learn from experience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Issue is important to you.</li> <li>- You believe that you are right.</li> <li>- The other party is wrong or unethical.</li> </ul>

**Sources: Adapted from Thomas and Kilmann (1974) and Rahim (2002)**

The effectiveness of each of the style depends on its potency to mitigate conflict. Hence, no style can be adjudged as the best, except its utility leads to amicable resolution of conflict. Each style changes, depending on the personalities concerned, the exigencies surrounding its adoption and the conflict dynamics. Research findings support the idea that people develop stable methods of dealing with conflict (Folger, *et al*, 1997; Sternberg and Soriano, 1984) and that they have the capacity to change and modify their conflict management styles to suit particular situations and circumstances (Folger, *et al*, 1997; Papa and Natalle, 1989). Equally, Rahim and Bonoma (1979) and Thomas (1983) argued that circumstances dictate the most appropriate style to use.

The research works of Blake and Mouton (1964), and Rahim (1992) suggested that integration or problem-solving seem the most desirable style for managing conflict. According to Rahim (1992), integration and to some extent compromising styles can be used in dealing with conflicts involving strategic or complex issues. The remaining styles can be used to effectively deal with conflicts involving tactical, day-to-day, or routine problems. The selection and use of a style can be considered as a win-win outcome, when parties graciously accepted the result of a conflict, because it enhanced individual and organisational effectiveness and learning. However, situations and personal disposition are important factors that determine the adoption of the styles, and the effectiveness of the styles is a function of their potency to minimize conflict to a bearable level for the existence of meaningful interaction and engagement.

### 6. CONCLUSION

Conflict handling styles are the major instrument for addressing conflicts that may confront individuals on a daily basis. The inevitability of conflict in social relations, suggests that conflict will always occur and that individuals should learn about the styles, and when to adopt them to deal with conflict proactively on a daily basis. Therefore, in this historical account, issues revolving around conflict management, its conceptualisation, styles, forms and usages were lucidly articulated to bring out the importance of the various styles and the conditions that support their usage. Obviously, conflict management has nothing to do with the termination or elimination of conflict, neither is it an art of permanently resolving conflict. It is a phenomenon that intends to reduce the volume and intensity of conflict where they are excessive and too high for people to actively socialize. Where the existing conflict level is insufficient to induce the required force for innovative and creative power to make things move as expected, conflict management advocated for the conflict level to be increased for a better result. Conflict management is a skill that needs to be learnt by people to enable them understand how they can adequately handle conflict in order to get the best out of it.

Therefore, to manage conflict, various styles exist for people to use. These styles were examined in details to promote their understanding for appropriate usage. Also, it is important to note that the nature of conflict, the issues at stake and the conflict orientations of parties are elements that will help people to know what to do, how and when to act during conflict. This historical account brought to bear the evolutionary trends of the styles from 1940 to when they were concretized in 1974 for a better understanding of their developmental trends. The classification of the styles in terms of their identities and what they represent were equally elucidated. When to use each of the style and their characteristics were analyzed to bring to fore their properties to promote learning and understanding in order to enhance their usage by individuals to mitigate conflicts.

### 7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This review has implications for policy. It was clear from the historical account that conflict is inevitable. However, the style adopted for its containment is an the ultimate factor in the determination of the nature of the outcome that will emerge. Therefore, conflict outcome can either be positive or negative, depending on the type of conflict management style used in the process of mitigation. The adoption of any of conflict handling style should not be instantaneous without due consideration of the nature of the conflict, the parties involved and circumstances surrounding the conflict. The dynamic nature of a conflict and attitudes of the conflicting parties should be carefully analyzed and understood before the adoption of a particular style. These issues are central to determining the conflict management styles that should be adopted for constructive resolution of a conflict. However, the conflict management styles are influence by situational and dispositional factors, which are equally flexible in nature. Therefore, the effectiveness of the styles is a function of some salient elements which have been explored in this study. In view of this, the imperativeness of conflict management styles have been brought to the limelight for the public to understand that amicable resolution of conflict brings about progress and peace at the micro and macro-levels of engagement in a society.

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