

MANAGING CONFLICT APPROPRIATELY AND EFFECTIVELY: AN APPLICATION OF THE COMPETENCE MODEL TO RAHIM'S ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT STYLES

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The competence model of conflict communication suggests that individuals who use various conflict styles will be perceived differently in terms of appropriateness and effectiveness. A simulated organizational decision-making task involving 100 randomly-paired dyads consisting of business students suggested that an integrative conflict style is generally perceived as the most appropriate (in terms of being both a polite, prosocial strategy and an adaptive, situationally appropriate strategy) and most effective style. The dominating style tended to be perceived as inappropriate when used by others, but some participants judged themselves as more effective when they used dominating tactics along with integrating tactics. The obliging style was generally perceived as neutral, although some participants perceived themselves to be less effective and relationally appropriate when they employed obliging tactics. The avoiding style was generally perceived as ineffective and inappropriate. Finally, compromising was perceived as a relatively neutral style, although some participants judged their partners to be more effective and relationally appropriate if they compromised. Overall, these results and others provide general support for the competence model's predictions, while also suggesting some modifications and directions for future research.

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Within organizations, individuals who manage conflict effectively are perceived as competent communicators and capable leaders. Indeed, those who are unable to manage conflict effectively may have trouble reaching organizational goals (Mathur & Sayeed, 1983; Nicotera, 1995), maintaining positive relationships and cohesiveness (Canary, Cupach, & Messman, 1995; Coser, 1956), and solving problems (Hall, 1986). Individuals who have difficulty handling conflict are also more likely to be dissatisfied with their jobs (Infante & Gorden, 1985a, 1985b, 1991; Infante, Anderson, Martin, Herington, & Kim, 1993). Thus, it is imperative that researchers determine how competent various styles of conflict management are perceived to be.

Rahim's (1985, 1986; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979) work has uncovered five conflict styles used in organizations: avoiding, compromising, dominating, integrating, and obliging. These styles associate with a variety of organizational variables (Rahim, 1985, 1986; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979), such as organizational position, organizational climate, job burnout, job satisfaction, gender, and education (Lee, 1990; Posner, 1986; Rahim, 1990). These styles are also likely to be associated with perceptions of competence. Indeed, work on the competence model of communication as applied to organizations (Papa & Canary, 1995) suggests that Rahim's five conflict styles differ in terms of how competent they are perceived to be. The present study tests this assumption by examining the associations between the five conflict styles and competency judgments after dyads complete an organizational decision-making task. Before making predictions about these associations, we turn briefly to a general discussion of the competence model as applied to organizational conflict behavior.

Competent Communication: Effectiveness and Appropriateness

The competence model of conflict focuses on three dimensions of competent communication: effectiveness, relational appropriateness, and situational appropriateness. *Effective communication* achieves the valued objectives or goals of the organizational member (Papa & Canary, 1995). Thus, communication that is personally rewarding, helpful, useful, and successful is perceived as effective. Within the competence model, appropriateness is defined somewhat differently than it is in the management literature. Specifically, appropriate communication involves avoiding violating relationally or situationally sanctioned rules (Papa & Canary, 1995). *Relational appropriateness*, which Canary and his colleagues labeled as specific appropriateness (Canary & Spitzberg, 1987, 1989; Papa & Canary, 1995; Spitzberg & Canary, 1985), refers to behavior that is generally prosocial and constructive in nature. Thus, individuals who are rude or make tactless comments will be perceived as low in relational appropriateness. *Situational appropriateness*, in contrast, refers to a more global assessment of a speaker's style, which includes the ability to carry on a smooth conversation and to successfully adapt to the needs of a given situation.

Canary and his colleagues have used the term "general appropriateness" to refer to this type of competence.

The way that people perceive their own and their partners' conflict styles is a key determinant of competence. In fact, according to the competence model of conflict (Papa & Canary 1995; Spitzberg, Canary, & Cupach, 1994), perceptions are just as important, if not more important, than actual communication. Furthermore, individuals may see themselves as highly effective and appropriate when using certain strategies, such as dominance, which allow them to fulfill their personal goals. Their partners, however, may see these same strategies as inappropriate. Thus, Canary and Spitzberg (1987, 1990) suggested that people use different criteria to judge themselves versus their partners. Specifically, they argued that effectiveness may be best assessed from the actor's point of view because the actor is the best judge of whether her or his goals were met. Appropriateness, however, may be best judged from the partner's perspective. Based on this reasoning, this study includes people's perceptions of their own conflict behavior (self-reports) and their partner's conflict behavior (partner-perceptions).

In general, the more effective and appropriate an organizational member is perceived to be during a conflict situation, the more competent he or she will be judged. It is important to note, however, that people can be effective without being appropriate, and vice versa. An executive who simply tells her employees that they must engage in a task even though they would prefer not to (or else they could risk losing their jobs) is effective in the short term even though her behavior may be considered inappropriately threatening. Similarly, an executive who defers to the wishes of his mid-level managers on issues that are within their domain may be seen as appropriate, but if the mid-managers give him poor advice, this strategy would be ineffective. Thus, depending on the situation, the same strategy can be viewed as more or less competent.

Associations Between Conflict Styles and Competency Judgments

Despite situational variability, certain conflict styles are generally perceived to be more competent than others. Research on conflict styles typically examines the characteristic or habitual way that an individual handles disputes (Blake & Mouton, 1964), as does Rahim's model (Folger & Poole, 1984). Rahim and Bonoma's (1979) system was based on Blake and Mouton's (1964) grid of managerial styles as well as the Thomas-Kilmann MODE instrument (1974). Specifically, Rahim and Bonoma confirmed and refined the factor structure of the managerial grid through contact with over 1,200 corporate managers across the United States (Rahim, 1983). This work led them to identify five specific conflict styles, which were derived based on two dimensions: (1) concern for self (production-oriented) and (2) concern for others (people-oriented).

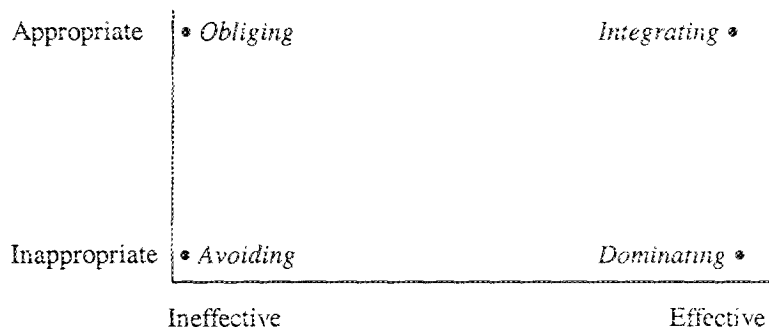
Individuals who manifest a high concern for self focus on achieving individual goals. This position includes privileging the final outcome of a conflict episode in terms of profits or physical results (Blake & Mouton, 1964, 1970, 1978). Organizational leaders expect their employees to be productive. Content goals focused on self can be associated with a concern for production because they represent what to do, what decisions to make, where to go, how to allocate resources, and so forth (Hocker & Wilmot, 1998). Thus, the production-based aspect of conflict appears to be focused on effectiveness rather than on appropriateness. The bottom line is: Did the individual accomplish her or his goals effectively? In order to accomplish individual goals, one may find that a direct approach is usually more effective than an indirect approach (Blake & Mouton, 1964). Therefore, strategies focused on production are often assertive rather than passive.

In contrast, those who manifest a high concern for others focus on how decisions affect the other person's goals. This concern for people involves privileging the relational needs that underlie the conflict, including issues of trust, understanding, and social support (Blake & Mouton, 1964, 1970, 1978). Such a focus also involves maintaining a positive relationship that sets the stage for smooth future interaction and for granting the partner some level of influence (Hocker & Wilmot, 1998). This dimension appears to be more focused on issues of appropriateness than of effectiveness. It is important to engage in behavior that is relationally and situationally appropriate in order to maintain positive relations with others. Thus, individuals who are focused on other people tend to use constructive or cooperative conflict styles, rather than more destructive, uncooperative styles (Blake & Mouton, 1964).

The five conflict styles that emerge from various combinations of these two dimensions are: (1) *integrating*—high concern for both self and others, (2) *dominating*—high concern for self and low concern for others, (3) *obliging*—low concern for self and high concern for others, (4) *avoiding*—low concern for both self and others, and (5) *compromising*—moderate levels of concern for both self and others. According to Papa and Canary's (1995) model, each conflict style is associated with a unique profile of perceptions related to competence, as shown in Figure 1 (see also Spitzberg et al., 1994).

Rahim's model focuses on specific behaviors that are enacted during conflict, such as trying to find solutions that are satisfactory to both parties (integrating), using authority or interpersonal influence (dominating), giving in to the wishes of the partner (obliging), trying to avoid disagreement or unpleasantness (avoiding), and proposing a "middle ground" solution (compromising). According to the dimensions underlying these five strategies, some should be seen as more concerned with the self (which is related most closely to effectiveness) while others should be seen as more focused on the other (which is related most closely to appropriateness). However, research

Figure 1
Overlay of Competence Dimensions onto ROCI-II Styles
as Predicted by Papa and Canary (1995)



has yet to confirm that people's perceptions of these five strategies do indeed fall in line with these predictions. This study attempts to confirm that the five conflict strategies are indeed perceived differently in terms of effectiveness and appropriateness. In addition, this study examines how the various strategies that fall on similar ends of the self-other continua are distinguished in terms of competency. For instance, the dimensions underlying Rahim's model suggest that both integrating and obliging are other-focused, appropriate strategies. However, it is possible that integrating is seen as the most appropriate strategy because it allows both people to be part of the decision-making process. Similarly, Rahim's model suggests that both integrating and dominating include a focus on the self. Nonetheless, the integrating style may be seen as most effective because it also includes a focus on the partner, allowing a mutually efficient and collaborative solution to emerge. The present study, therefore, attempts to determine how various strategies that fall on the same end of a given continuum fare when it comes to competency judgments. It is unlikely that there is simply a direct correspondence between behaviors showing concern for self and effectiveness, or behaviors showing concern for others and appropriateness. Rather, it seems likely that the unique combinations of concern for self versus others that are represented in Rahim's five conflict styles will produce distinctly different perceptions related to effectiveness and appropriateness.

It is also noteworthy that although there is some conceptual correspondence between the concern for self dimension and effectiveness (because both focus on achieving goals), as well as the concern for other dimension and relational appropriateness (because both focus on prosocial, constructive behavior), situational appropriateness is not as clearly related to either dimension. Instead, situational appropriateness deals with more global judgments of style, which

include how smoothly an individual manages interaction, and how appropriate one's behavior was within a given situation.

To gain a more complete understanding of the associations between conflict styles and competency judgments, this study also includes both self-reports and partner-perceptions. As Canary and Spitzberg (1989, 1990) suggested, a strategy that is seen as effective by one person may not always be seen as effective by that person's partner. Still, based on Papa and Canary's (1995) model, some general predictions can be made for each of the five styles.

Integrating Style

The integrating style focuses on problem solving in a collaborative fashion. Individuals with this style face conflict directly and try to find new and creative solutions to problems by focusing on their own needs as well as on the needs of others. Integrating behaviors include analytic remarks (such as descriptive, disclosive, qualifying, and soliciting statements) and conciliatory remarks (such as supportive statements, concessions, and statements showing acceptance of responsibility). Communication focuses on reaching a successful resolution that keeps the relationship in tact for future interaction (Hocker & Wilmot, 1998). The integrating style is assumed to open lines of communication and increase information seeking and sharing. This style is both direct and cooperative (Blake & Mouton, 1964).

According to the competence model, an individual who meets the expectations of the other person and still achieves her or his desired objectives engages in an *optimal response* to conflict (Spitzberg et al., 1994). Thus, the integrating style is believed to be both effective and appropriate in managing conflicts and, therefore, is perceived as highly competent. The integrating style is competent because it provides each disputant with access to the other person's perceptions of incompatible goals, thereby enabling them to find a solution that integrates the goals and needs of both parties (Tutzauer & Roloff, 1988). Indeed, studies of romantic partners and roommates have found that the integrative (or collaborative) style is usually seen as effective, appropriate, and generally competent (Canary & Spitzberg, 1987, 1989, 1990; Sillars, 1980). However, this finding has yet to be extended to the organizational context. Thus, the first set of hypotheses are advanced:

Hypothesis 1a: Perceptions that a partner used an integrating style will be positively associated with perceptions that a partner's behavior was effective, relationally appropriate, and situationally appropriate.

Hypothesis 1b: The extent to which individuals perceive themselves to use an integrating style will be positively associated with self-perceptions of effectiveness, relational appropriateness, and situational appropriateness.

Dominating Style

The dominating style relies on the use of position power, aggression, verbal dominance, and perseverance. This style is direct and uncooperative (Blake & Mouton, 1964). Forcing or competing behaviors associated with a dominating style include confrontational remarks, accusations, personal criticism, rejection, hostile imperatives or threats, antagonistic jokes or teasing, aggressive questions, presumptive remarks, and denial of responsibility at the expense of the other person (Hocker & Wilmot, 1998). Within interpersonal contexts, the dominating (also called the competing or distributive) style has been found to be associated with low levels of effectiveness and appropriateness. However, Papa and Canary (1995) suggested that the dominating style might be somewhat effective in organizational contexts when there are production-related goals. In this case, an individual might use power strategies and aggression to effectively accomplish a goal, even though these strategies may be seen as inappropriate at a relational level. Thus, when the competence model is applied to the organizational context, Papa and Canary suggest that a person who is low in appropriateness but high in effectiveness manages the dispute to her or his benefit regardless of the other person's goals and needs. Like Spitzberg et al. (1994), they term the dominating style as the *maximizing response* to conflict, because it maximizes the importance of one's own needs at the expense (or minimization) of the other individual's needs. Therefore, the dominating style may be seen as effective but not appropriate. This reasoning leads to the next set of hypotheses:

- Hypothesis 2a:* Perceptions that a partner used a dominating style will be negatively associated with perceptions that a partner's behavior was relationally and situationally appropriate.
- Hypothesis 2b:* The extent to which individuals perceive themselves to use a dominating style will be negatively associated with self-perceptions of relational and situational appropriateness.
- Hypothesis 2c:* Perceptions that a partner used a dominating style will be positively associated with perceptions that a partner's behavior was effective.
- Hypothesis 2d:* The extent to which individuals perceive themselves to use the dominating style will be positively associated with self-perceptions of effectiveness.

Obliging Style

Individuals who use the obliging style put other people's needs before their own interests. Obliging is associated with accommodating behaviors that include putting aside one's own needs to please the partner, passively accepting the decisions the partner makes, making yielding or conceding statements, denying or failing to express one's needs, and explicitly expressing harmony and cooperation in a conflict episode (Hocker & Wilmot, 1998). These types of conflict strategies are indirect and cooperative (Blake & Mouton, 1964). Oblig-

ing behaviors are sometimes seen as cooperative and appropriate, particularly when one person feels strongly about the issue and the other person does not. In cases such as this, it is appropriate for the person who feels less strongly to "give in" to their partner's wishes. Obliging may also be a particularly appropriate strategy when the conflict cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of two parties. Even in these cases, however, the obliging party is ineffective in reaching her or his own personal goals.

According to Spitzberg et al. (1994), an individual who accommodates to the other person's expectations without achieving her or his own goals engages in a *sufficing response* to conflict. This type of response is adequate and comfortable; it does not cause further disagreement or escalations in conflict. Because the obliging style allows the other party to achieve her or his goals, it is thought to be relationally appropriate. However, the obliging response is not very effective. Those who use the obliging response are unlikely to reach their personal goals, which could put strain on them over time. In addition, obliging leads to a one-sided decision-making process that is less creative than collaboration or compromise. To put it simply, the obliging individual does not add to the discussion in any meaningful way. Thus, Papa and Canary's model predicts that individuals who use an obliging style will be perceived as appropriate but not effective.

Hypothesis 3a: Perceptions that a partner used an obliging style will be positively associated with perceptions that a partner's behavior was relationally and situationally appropriate, but negatively associated with perceptions that a partner's behavior was effective.

Hypothesis 3b: The extent to which individuals perceive themselves to use an obliging style will be positively associated with self-perceptions of relational and situational appropriateness and negatively associated with self-perceptions of effectiveness.

Avoiding Style

Avoiding or withdrawing occurs when people physically or psychologically remove themselves from the conflict scene or episode often by denying the conflict, being indirect and evasive, changing and/or avoiding topics, employing noncommittal remarks, and making irrelevant remarks or joking as a way to avoid dealing with the conflict at hand (Hocker & Wilmot, 1998). The avoiding style is indirect and uncooperative. It can be frustrating to interact with someone who uses the avoiding style. One individual may want to talk about issues and solve problems, while the other recoils from interaction. This can leave the conflict issue to stew, creating what has been termed the "chilling effect" (Rolloff & Cloven, 1990), with disputants becoming increasingly cold and withdrawn. Indeed, researchers studying romantic couples have discussed a preva-

lent conflict sequence termed the demand-withdraw interaction pattern (see Gottman & Levenson, 1988). This type of sequence occurs when one person wants to engage in conflict, and the other responds with avoidance. Typically, this interaction pattern escalates, with conflict engagers increasing their demands for discussion as they become more desperate to face and solve problems, and conflict avoiders becoming increasingly stubborn in their efforts to dodge discussion and withdraw from interaction that they perceive as unpleasant and/or unnecessary. The demand-withdraw pattern of interaction is generally seen as a highly incompetent form of dyadic communication (Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Gottman & Levenson, 1988).

Consistent with the literature on the chilling effect and the demand-withdraw pattern, Papa and Canary (1995) posited that the avoiding style would be viewed as low in both effectiveness and appropriateness. Moreover, Spitzberg et al. (1994) described this type of conflict style as a *minimizing response* to conflict, because it downplays the importance of self and other goals. Research conducted in the contexts of relationships between romantic partners and roommates has generally confirmed this line of reasoning. Several studies have shown that the avoiding style is negatively correlated with perceptions of appropriateness, effectiveness, general competence, and relational satisfaction (e.g., Canary & Spitzberg, 1987, 1989, 1990; Sillars, 1980), although there may be some situations where avoidance may be appropriate (e.g., such as when an issue cannot be resolved to either of the disputants' satisfaction, and discussing the issue makes matters worse). The next set of hypotheses extends these findings into the context of organizational decision-making.

Hypothesis 4a: Perceptions that a partner used an avoiding style will be negatively associated with perceptions that a partner's behavior was effective, relationally appropriate, and situationally appropriate.

Hypothesis 4b: The extent to which individuals perceive themselves to use an avoiding style will be negatively associated with self-perceptions of effectiveness, relational appropriateness, and situational appropriateness.

Compromising Style

The compromising style is unique in that it represents the mid-point on the dimensions of production orientation versus people orientation. As such, it is somewhat focused on individual goals, as well as on the needs of others. This style is also seen as moderately direct and cooperative (Blake & Mouton, 1964). Compromising requires searching for an intermediate position, through strategies such as splitting the difference, meeting the partner halfway, suggesting a trade-off, maximizing wins while minimizing losses, and offering a quick, short-term resolution to the conflict at hand (Hocker & Wilmot, 1998). As such, compromising typically satisfies some of each person's needs, but not all of them. When people have radically different goals and cannot collaborate to cre-

ate a solution that will satisfy all of their needs, compromising is often seen as the best option.

When applying the competence model to organization conflict, Papa and Canary (1995) did not include predictions for the compromising style. However, based on the fact that the compromising strategy is at the midpoint of both the production-oriented and people-oriented dimensions, one could argue that this style would also be judged to be only moderately effective and appropriate. Based on the logic behind the competency model, it seems reasonable to predict that compromising will associate positively with the competency measures, but not as strongly as integrating. Thus, the following hypotheses are advanced:

Hypothesis 5a: Perceptions that a partner used a compromising style will be positively associated with perceptions that a partner's behavior is effective, relationally appropriate, and situationally appropriate, although these associations will be weaker than for the relationship between integrating and the competency measures.

Hypothesis 5a: The extent to which individuals perceive themselves to use the compromising style will be positively associated with self-perceptions of effectiveness, relational appropriateness, and situational appropriateness, although these associations will be weaker than for the relationship between integrating and the competency measures.

Method

Participants

Students ($N = 200$) enrolled in management and other business-related courses at a large university in the southwestern United States volunteered for this study in exchange for extra credit. These individuals were paired into 100 dyads consisting of 25 female dyads, 25 male dyads, and 50 opposite-sex dyads. Within the opposite-sex dyads, the female partner was designated as "Partner A" in 25 of the dyads, whereas the male was designated as "Partner A" in the other 25 dyads. Thus, the data were balanced in terms of the sex composition of the dyads.

The mean age for participants was 23.71 years with a range of 18–57 years old. The ethnic background of the sample was as follows: 2% Native American, 9% Latin/Hispanic/Mexican/Central/South American, 3% Black/African American, 3% Asian/Asian American, and 83% Caucasian/Euro American. Participants' average number of years of work experience was 6.76 years, with a range of 1–41 years. Nearly 81% of the participants classified themselves as "employees," 13% marked that they were "first-level managers or supervisors," 4% were "middle level managers," and 2% were executive or senior level managers.

Procedures

Participants reported to a research site. To ensure a balanced sex composition across the dyads, same sex dyads were solicited before mixed sex dyads. Participants were assigned as either Partner A or Partner B and then placed into dyads as they entered the research site. Once 25 male dyads and 25 female dyads had participated, subjects were assigned to mixed sex dyads using the same process. For same-sex dyads, a coin was flipped to determine whose data would be designated as Partner A versus Partner B. For cross-sex dyads, the questionnaires were color coded to represent dyads wherein the male or the female would be designated as Partner A or Partner B. A coin flip was used to determine which of the two colored questionnaires the dyads would receive. Thus, all participants were randomly assigned as either Partner A or B.

In this study, participants were asked to make a joint decision in an organizational simulation on downsizing and to complete a written report arguing for their decisions. To encourage initial incompatibility of goals, the two participants in each dyad were given opposing private motivations for keeping and dismissing different employees. In the simulation, both members of each dyad were given a detailed description of a retail organization in the midst of a downsizing and a description of four employees from which the participants must choose two for dismissal. The descriptions for both members of the dyad were exactly the same except each was given a different set of private motivations. One set of motivations asked participants to keep the employees who have a "professional appearance," and to please your supervisor who plays golf with one of the four employees from which you must choose. The second set of motivations asked the participants to keep the employees whose sales performance was "the best," and to dismiss marginal performers "for the company's survival." Private motivation 1 or private motivation 2 was assigned randomly after each participant was assigned as either Partner A or B. A coin toss determined whether Partner A was given the first private motivation and Partner B was given the second motivation ($n = 47$), or vice versa ($n = 53$). Thus, the motivations were nearly balanced across the various dyad combinations. Dyads had approximately 50 minutes to complete the downsizing task and write a brief report. To complete the task, each partner read her/his own copy of the simulation, each with her/his private motivation. Afterwards, each member of the dyad began talking with his/her partner to work toward a mutual agreement on who to dismiss and who to keep. Once an agreement was reached the dyads had to mutually compose a brief report arguing for their choices. After this task was completed, each participant independently completed a questionnaire containing several different instruments, including the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory (ROCI-II) (Rahim, 1983), and Spitzberg and Canary's (1985) Interpersonal Communication Competency Scale (ICCS). All participants completed the ROCI-II (Form C), and the ICCS for themselves (self-reports) and their partners (partner-reports).

Measures

The Rahim Organizational Conflict Instrument (ROCI-II). Form C (peer-peer) of the ROCI-II was used in this study. In past studies, Cronbach's α coefficient for each of the ROCI-II's subscales has ranged from .77-.83 for integrating; .68-.72 for obliging; .75-.79 for dominating; .72-.86 for avoiding; and .67-.74 for compromising (King & Miles, 1990; Weider-Hatfield, 1988; Womack, 1988). In the present study, scoring for the ROCI-II followed the procedures developed by Rahim, with higher scores indicating that people were perceived as using more of a particular conflict style. The ROCI-II was completed four different times following each dyadic interaction, with Partners A and B both completing the measure for self and partner. The following α coefficients, which represent averages across the four measures, were obtained on the ROCI-II for this study: Integrating = .86 (range = .84-.89); avoiding = .84 (range = .81-.87); dominating = .77 (range = .72-.81); obliging = .83 (range = .82-.85); and compromising = .78 (range = .74-.82). The dominating subscale was initially unreliable. However, the deletion of two of the items substantially improved the reliability of this subscale (with the improved α coefficients reported above). Therefore, a 3-item subscale was used to measure the extent to which people perceived their partners to use a dominating style. All other subscales from the ROCI-II were used in their entirety.

Competency Measures. The Interpersonal Communication Competency Scale (ICCS), Spitzberg and Canary (1985) measures three dimensions of competence: effectiveness, relational appropriateness, and situational appropriateness. In the ICCS, effectiveness is measured with 11 items, which relate to whether or not the speaker accomplished his or her perceived goals. All items are measured using 5-point scales. Examples of items measuring effectiveness include: "My partner obtained her or his goal in the conversation," and "My partner seemed to find the conversation to be very useful and helpful." Relational appropriateness is measured by 4 items that tap into particular behaviors enacted during the episode, and how suitable or proper these behaviors were. Examples of items measuring relational appropriateness include: "Some of the things my partner said were embarrassing to me," and "My partner said some things that should not have been said." Situational appropriateness, in contrast, is measured by 5 items that assess a person's general behavior across the entire episode. Example items include "My partner was a smooth conversationalist," and "My partner's conversation was very suitable to the situation."

Previous studies employing Cronbach's α coefficient have shown the ICCS's subscale reliabilities range from .85-.91 for the appropriateness subscales, and .85-.93 for effectiveness (Spitzberg & Canary, 1985; Canary & Spitzberg, 1987). In the present study, four reliability coefficients were calculated for each of the three competency measures: Partner A's report of self and

partner, and Partner B's report of self and partner. Cronbach's α showed the relational appropriateness (range = .73–.89), situational appropriateness (range = .75–.82), and effectiveness (range = .87–.92) subscales to have average reliabilities of .81, .78 and .90, respectively.

Analysis and Results

Data Analysis Plan and Preliminary Analyses

Hierarchical regression analyses were utilized to test all the hypotheses. As described next, the first two blocks of the analyses contained sets of covariates related to: (1) sex and motivation, and (2) the corresponding partner scores. After these two blocks were entered, the predictor variables were entered using the stepwise method.

As mentioned earlier, private motivations and dyadic sex composition were nearly balanced across the design. We used ANOVAs and regression analyses to examine whether these variables had main or moderating effects on perceptions of conflict style and competency. These tests showed that motivation and sex had minimal effects. In fact, only three main effects emerged across 32 analysis of variance tests and no moderating effects emerged in the regressions. Nonetheless, these variables (motivations, biological sex of person A, and biological sex of person B) could impact the analyses. Therefore, they were entered as covariates in the first block of the regression analyses.

Because dyadic data were collected for this study, the analyses were conducted twice to avoid problems of nonindependence. Specifically, analyses were run separately for Partner A and Partner B. However, there were only a limited number of significant correlations reflecting interdependence. For partner-perceptions, A and B's scores were significantly correlated for dominance [$r(99) = .26, p < .01$] and integrating [$r(99) = .26, p < .01$]. For self-perceptions, A and B's scores on dominating [$r(99) = .21, p < .05$] and integrating [$r(99) = .22, p < .05$] were again significantly correlated. No other significant correlations emerged between Partners A and B. Nonetheless, because the measures used for analyses reflect an interdependent activity, when the regression analyses were conducted, corresponding partner scores were entered in a second block to partial out the effects of nonindependence. For instance, if the predictor variables in the regression analyses were Partner A's perceptions of B's conflict style, Partner B's perceptions of A's conflict style were entered into the second block of a hierarchical regression analysis.

Main Analyses

The hypotheses were addressed using 12 hierarchical regression models. In each of these models, motivation and sex were entered in a first block, and the corresponding partner's scores were entered into a second block using the standard enter method. For example, in the model testing how Partner A's perceptions of B's conflict style affect A's perceptions of B's competence, B's per-

ceptions of A's conflict style were entered into the second block of the regression analysis after the first block (consisting of motivation, sex of person A, and sex of person B) was entered. In this way, the correlations between dyadic partners' scores were partialled out of the regression analyses, leading to a clean assessment of the independent relationship between perceptions of conflict styles and perceptions of competence. Next, the predictor variables (e.g., Partner A's perceptions of B's conflict styles) were entered into the regression analyses using the stepwise method. Separate regression analyses were conducted for each of the three criterion variables (effectiveness, relational appropriateness, and situational appropriateness) across Partner A's self- and partner-reports, and Partner B's self- and partner-reports, resulting in a total of 12 analyses. A summary of the statistics associated with each of these regression models is provided in Table 1.

Partner-Perceptions of Effectiveness. The first model examined Partner A's perceptions of B, with partner-perceptions of conflict serving as the main predictor variables, and partner-perceptions of effectiveness serving as the criterion variable. Blocks 1 and 2 did not produce significant findings. When integrating was entered, the model emerged significant. Avoiding and compromising entered the analysis in the fourth and fifth steps respectively, improving the model still further. In the final model, none of the control variables were significant. Integrating [$\beta = .30$, $t(89) = 2.99$, $p < .01$] and compromising [$\beta = .27$, $t(89) = 2.26$, $p < .05$] were positively associated with effectiveness, whereas avoiding was negatively associated with effectiveness [$\beta = -.29$, $t(89) = -2.94$, $p < .01$].

The same regression model was conducted for Partner B's perceptions of A's effectiveness, with somewhat different results. The model was nonsignificant after the first block was entered. After the second block containing the corresponding partner scores was entered, the model was significant. Avoiding entered on the third step and significantly improved the model. In the final model, one of the variables in the second block was significantly associated with B's perceptions of A's effectiveness—When A perceived B as integrating, B perceived her or his partner as more effective [$\beta = .27$, $t(90) = 2.03$, $p < .05$]. The only predictor variable that added significantly to the model beyond this was avoiding. B's perceptions of A as avoiding associated negatively with B's perceptions of A as effective [$\beta = -.34$, $t(90) = -3.65$, $p < .001$].

Table 1
Regression Analysis Results

Criterion Variable	Predictors	R^2	df	F
Effectiveness				
A's Perceptions of B	Block 1		(3, 96)	2.35
	Block 2		(8, 91)	1.99
	Integrating	.22	(9, 90)	2.87**
	Avoiding	.27	(10, 89)	3.22**
B's Perceptions of A	Block 1		(3, 96)	.55
	Block 2	.11	(8, 91)	2.50*
	Avoiding	.21	(9, 90)	4.00***
	Dominating			
A's Self-Perceptions	Block 1		(3, 96)	1.11
	Block 2		(8, 91)	1.15
	Integrating	.23	(9, 90)	3.00**
	Avoiding	.29	(10, 89)	3.62***
B's Self-Perceptions	Block 1		(3, 96)	1.88
	Block 2		(8, 91)	1.31
	Integrating	.20	(9, 90)	2.56*
	Obliging	.26	(10, 89)	3.14**
	Dominating	.30	(11, 88)	3.41***
Relational Appropriateness				
A's Perceptions of B	Block 1		(3, 96)	2.24
	Block 2		(8, 91)	1.93
	Compromising	.26	(9, 90)	3.51***
	Dominating	.30	(10, 89)	3.81***
B's Perceptions of A	Block 1		(3, 96)	.68
	Block 2		(8, 91)	1.27
	Avoiding	.20	(9, 90)	2.81*
	Dominating	.25	(10, 89)	3.01**
A's Self-Perceptions	Block 1		(3, 96)	1.69
	Block 2		(8, 91)	1.82
	Integrating	.30	(9, 90)	4.35***
	Dominating	.34	(10, 89)	4.55***
B's Self-Perceptions	Block 1		(3, 96)	2.36
	Block 2	.16	(8, 91)	2.12*
	Integrating	.24	(9, 90)	3.16**
	Obliging	.31	(10, 89)	3.91***
Situational Appropriateness				
A's Perceptions of B	Block 1		(3, 96)	1.54
	Block 2		(8, 91)	1.35
	Integrating	.20	(9, 90)	2.43*
	Dominating			
B's Perceptions of A	Block 1		(3, 96)	.65
	Block 2	.18	(8, 91)	2.57*
	Dominating	.27	(9, 90)	3.65**
	Integrating			
A's Self-Perceptions	Block 1		(3, 96)	.29
	Block 2		(8, 91)	.36
	Integrating	.19	(9, 90)	2.01*
	Dominating			
B's Self-Perceptions	Block 1		(3, 96)	2.11
	Block 2		(8, 91)	1.78
	Integrating	.18	(9, 90)	2.17*
	Dominating			

Note. Block 1 included three covariates—private motivation, sex of person A, and sex of person B.

Block 2 included the corresponding partner scores. For all analyses, $n = 100$.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Self-Perceptions of Effectiveness. The next set of regression analyses examined whether or not self-perceptions of conflict styles predict self-perceptions of effectiveness. First, Partner A's self-perceptions were examined. After the first two blocks were entered, the model was nonsignificant. The model emerged as significant when integrating entered the model in the third step, followed by avoiding. In the final model, integrating associated positively with self-reports of effectiveness [$\beta = .36$, $t(89) = 3.74$, $p < .001$], whereas avoiding associated negatively, [$\beta = -.26$, $t(89) = -2.70$, $p < .01$].

Next, Partner B's self-perceptions of conflict styles and effectiveness were examined. Neither of the first two blocks contributed significantly to the model. In step three, integrating entered the analysis, making the model significant. Obliging and dominating entered the model in steps four and five respectively, improving the model significantly. In the final model, self-reports of integrating [$\beta = .54$, $t(88) = 4.82$, $p < .001$] and dominating [$\beta = .21$, $t(88) = 2.18$, $p < .05$] were associated positively with effectiveness, whereas obliging was associated negatively [$\beta = -.30$, $t(88) = -2.78$, $p < .01$].

Partner-Perceptions of Relational Appropriateness. The next model examined whether A's partner-perceptions of B's conflict style affected how relationally appropriate A saw B. After the first two blocks were entered, the model was nonsignificant. When compromising and dominating were added in the third and fourth steps, respectively, the model was significant. In this final model, compromising associated positively with relational appropriateness [$\beta = .36$, $t(89) = 3.83$, $p < .001$], whereas dominating associated negatively [$\beta = -.21$, $t(89) = -2.26$, $p < .05$].

A different model emerged for Partner B's perceptions of A. Again, after the first two blocks were entered, the model was nonsignificant. This time, however, the avoiding style entered the model at step three, making the model significant. Dominating entered the model at step four. In the final model, avoiding [$\beta = -.27$, $t(89) = -2.83$, $p < .01$] and dominating [$\beta = -.23$, $t(89) = -2.34$, $p < .05$] were both associated negatively with partner-perceptions of relational appropriateness.

Self-Perceptions of Relational Appropriateness. The next two regression analyses examined whether conflict styles predict self-perceptions of relational appropriateness. In the first analysis, Partner A's self-perceptions were investigated. Neither of the first two blocks was significant. Integrating and dominating entered the model on the third and fourth steps, respectively, improving the model significantly. In the final model, integrating was positively associated with relational appropriateness [$\beta = .43$, $t(89) = 4.60$, $p < .001$], whereas dominating was negatively associated [$\beta = -.20$, $t(89) = -2.17$, $p < .05$].

In the next analysis, Partner B's self-perceptions of relational appropriateness were examined. The first block was nonsignificant. When the second block of variables was entered, the model emerged as significant although none of the individual variables (representing the corresponding partner scores) was signifi-

cantly associated with relational appropriateness. The addition of integrating and obliging in the third and fourth steps improved the model significantly. In the final model, none of the covariates were significant. Integrating [$\beta = .46$, $t(89) = 4.25$, $p < .001$] was associated positively with relational appropriateness, whereas obliging was associated negatively [$\beta = -.31$, $t(89) = -2.89$, $p < .01$].

Partner-Perceptions of Situational Appropriateness. First, A's perceptions of B were examined in regard to situational appropriateness. The first two blocks were nonsignificant. Integrating entered the model in step three, making the model significant. In the final model, only integrating was associated with situational appropriateness [$\beta = .34$, $t(90) = 3.16$, $p = .01$].

Next, the same analysis was conducted for B's partner-perceptions, producing different results. The first block of covariates was nonsignificant. The second block, which contained the corresponding partner scores, was significantly predictive of situational appropriateness, with dominating emerging as a significant predictor. Partner-perceptions of dominating entered in the third step, improving the model still further. In the final model, when A perceived B to use a dominating style, B was less likely to see A as situationally appropriate [$\beta = -.24$, $t(90) = -2.44$, $p < .05$]. Similarly, when B saw A as dominant [$\beta = -.33$, $t(90) = -3.19$, $p < .01$], B was also likely to judge A as less situationally appropriate. Thus, both partners' perceptions of dominating influenced how situationally appropriate Person A saw Person B.

Self-Perceptions of Situational Appropriateness. The last two regression analyses focused on how self-perceptions of conflict style predict self-judgments of situational appropriateness. First, Partner A's self-perceptions were examined. Blocks 1 and 2 were nonsignificant. In step three, integrating entered the model, improving it significantly. Integrating associated positively with self-perceptions of situational appropriateness [$\beta = .37$, $t(90) = 3.57$, $p < .001$].

The model for Partner B's self-perceptions produced similar results. The two blocks of covariates were nonsignificant. The model obtained significance when integrating entered in the third and final step. Once again, self-perceptions of integrating associated positively with self-perceptions of situational appropriateness [$\beta = .22$, $t(90) = 2.17$, $p < .05$].

Summary of Results as Related to the Hypotheses and Research Questions

Table 2 presents a summary of findings from the regression analyses. Overall, these analyses provide partial support for the hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 predicted that an integrating style would be associated positively with perceptions of effectiveness, relational appropriateness, and situational appropriateness for both self- and partner-perceptions. This hypothesis was partially supported—in three out of the four relevant regression analyses, integrating was positively correlated with perceptions of effectiveness (see Table 2). Integrating was also significantly predictive of relational and situational appropriateness in all of the analyses utilizing self-perceptions. Thus, when

people perceived themselves to use the integrating style, they also tended to perceive themselves as relationally and situationally appropriate.

Table 2
Summary of Significant Variables in the Final Regression Models

Criterion Measure	Control Variables	Predictor Variables
Effectiveness:		
A's Perceptions of B	none	integrating (+) avoiding (-) compromising (+)
B's Perceptions of A	integrating (+)	avoiding (-)
A's Self-Perceptions	none	integrating (+) avoiding (-)
B's Self-Perceptions	none	integrating (+) dominating (+) obliging (-)
Relational Appropriateness:		
A's Perceptions of B	none	compromising (+) dominating (-)
B's Perceptions of A	none	avoiding (-) dominating(-)
A's Self-Perceptions	none	integrating (+) dominating (-)
B's Self-Perceptions	none	integrating (+) obliging (-)
Situational Appropriateness:		
A's Perceptions of B	none	integrating (+)
B's Perceptions of A	dominating (-)	dominating (-)
A's Self-Perceptions	none	integrating (+)
B's Self-Perceptions	none	integrating (+)

Note: Control variables refer to the corresponding partner scores on the five conflict styles. The (+) and (-) designations indicate if the association was positive or negative, respectively.

Hypothesis 2a predicted that a dominating style would be negatively associated with relational and situational appropriateness. This association emerged in half of the relevant regression analyses. In three of the four analyses predicting relational appropriateness, the dominating style emerged as a significant predictor. The dominating style obtained significance only in one of the four analyses predicting situational appropriateness. Thus, Hypotheses 2 received partial support. Hypotheses 2b predicted that the dominating style would be

perceived as effective. Only one of the four relevant regression analyses supported this hypothesis.

The first part of Hypothesis 3 predicted that an obliging style would be positively associated with perceptions of relational and situational appropriateness. This hypothesis was not supported. Obliging emerged as a significant predictor in only one of the eight relevant analyses. Furthermore, in the one analysis where obliging had a significant effect, the association between obliging and relational appropriateness was negative. The second part of Hypothesis 3 predicted that an obliging style would be negatively associated with effectiveness. This hypothesis received very limited support. Obliging was predictive of effectiveness only in one out of the four relevant analyses. Specifically, when people in Group B reported that they used an obliging strategy, they also saw themselves as less effective.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that the avoiding style would be negatively associated with effectiveness, relational appropriateness, and situational appropriateness. The regression analyses produced mixed results in relation to this hypothesis. Three out of the four analyses predicting effectiveness produced a significant negative association between avoiding and effectiveness. However, the avoiding style was only negatively related to relational appropriateness in one of the analyses, and it was unrelated to situational appropriateness in all of the analyses.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that compromising would be positively associated with relational appropriateness, situational appropriateness, and effectiveness, but not to the same extent as integrating. Compromising was a significant predictor only in two of the analyses. Participants in Group A saw their partners as more effective and relationally appropriate when they compromised. As predicted, integrating had more positive effects than compromising.

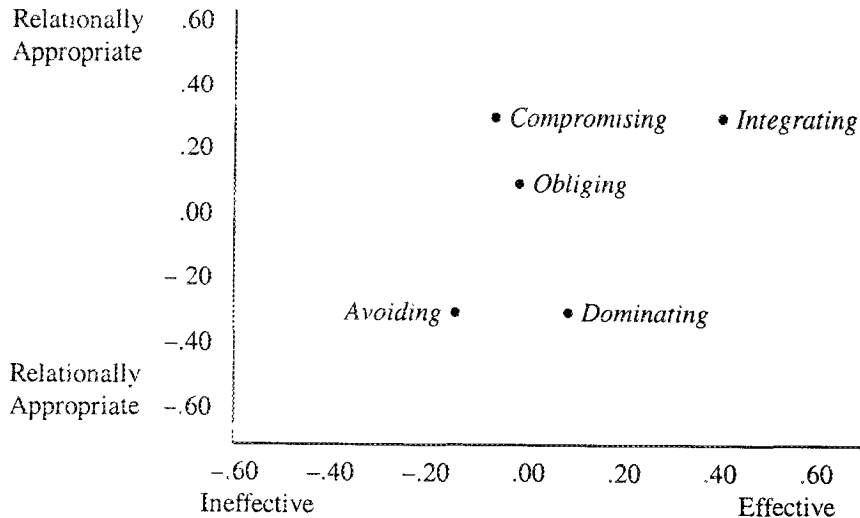
Discussion

In general, the results of this study support the competence model of conflict, which suggests that conflict styles are associated with unique perceptions of effectiveness and appropriateness. However, even though the associations found in this study followed the general pattern predicted by Papa and Canary (1995), the precise placement of the conflict styles in relation to one another and the competence dimensions showed some important deviations from Papa and Canary's predictions, suggesting that some modifications of the competence model may be in order. For example, although dominating was seen as less appropriate than effective, while obliging was seen as more appropriate than effective (which is consistent with the competence model), neither of these conflict styles was perceived to vary high or low on the effectiveness or appropriateness dimensions.

To understand how the findings from the present study both complement and differ from Papa and Canary's (1995) predictions, it may be helpful to

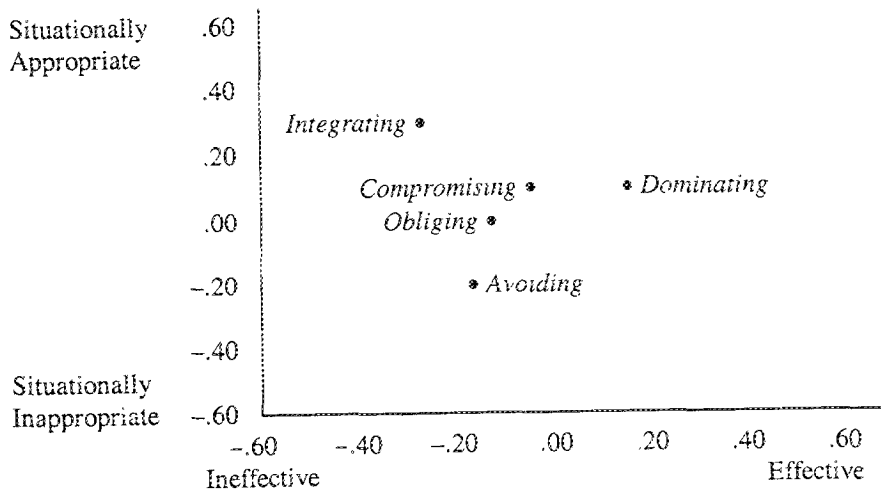
examine where each of the conflict styles falls on the effectiveness and appropriateness dimensions. As illustrated earlier in Figure 1, Papa and Canary posited that the integrating, dominating, avoiding, and obliging styles would fall in different corners of the dimensional plot. Data from the present study suggest that only the integrating and avoiding styles were perceived to fall near the corner of the dimensional plot. To demonstrate this, the average standardized regression coefficients have been plotted in Figures 2 and 3. These coefficients were taken from the regression models reported earlier. To be consistent with Canary and Spitzberg's (1987, 1989, 1990) work on the competence model, data from self-perceptions were used to plot the conflict styles on the effectiveness dimension, whereas data from partner-perceptions were used to plot the styles on the appropriateness dimensions. As Canary and Spitzberg have argued, effectiveness may be best judged by the self, but appropriateness is probably best judged by the partner. When interpreting these plots, it is important to keep in mind that they are anchored by .60 and $-.60$ rather than by 1.0 and -1.0 . Thus, even the integrating and avoiding styles, which fall closest to the corners of the plots, do not have particularly strong associations with the competence measures.

Figure 2
Average Standardized Regression Coefficients as Plotted on the
Relational Appropriateness and Effectiveness Dimensions



Note. Coordinates (relational appropriateness, effectiveness) for the above figure are as follows: Avoiding ($-.23, -.19$), Compromising ($.26, -.13$), Dominating ($-.22, -.07$), Integrating ($.24, .45$), and Obliging ($.17, -.17$).

Figure 3
Average Standardized Regression Coefficients as Plotted on the
Situational Appropriateness and Effectiveness Dimensions



Note: Coordinates (situational appropriateness, effectiveness) for the above figure are as follows: Avoiding (-.20, -.19), Compromising (.16, .13), Dominating (.15, .07), Integrating (.27, .45), and Obliging (.16, -.17).

As Figures 2 and 3 illustrate, the integrating style is clearly perceived most favorably since it occupies a position near the corners of the both plots, with these corners representing an optimal combination of both effectiveness and appropriateness. In contrast, the avoiding style is perceived quite unfavorably because it occupies the corners that represents the poorest combination of effectiveness and appropriateness (see Figures 2 & 3). Obliging, dominating, and compromising occupy more central positions on both plots. Dominating, however, is positioned as less relationally appropriate than either obliging or compromising. This suggests that Papa and Canary's (1995) prediction that obliging and dominating would be differentiated by high versus low appropriateness has merit, but that neither style may be perceived as particularly effective or ineffective. In addition, obliging and dominating appear to be differentiated by relational appropriateness but not situational appropriateness. Finally, Papa and Canary (1995) did not make predictions for the compromising style, although from their reasoning it could be argued that compromising would occupy a central position in the dimensional plot, as it does in Figures 2 and 3. Of course, data from this study produced more complex patterns than represented in these simple two-dimensional grids. Thus, more detailed comparisons between the conflict styles are presented next.

Integrating versus Dominating Styles

As predicted, the integrative style was generally seen as both appropriate and effective. Three of the four regression models predicting effectiveness included the integrating style as a positive influence on effectiveness judgments. For the regression models predicting relational and situational appropriateness, five of the eight models included the integrating style as a positive force. Thus, the integrating style was most consistently judged as highly competent. This finding is similar to those obtained in previous studies of conflict in close relationships (Canary & Spitzberg, 1987, 1989, 1990; Sillars, 1980). Thus, an integrative conflict style, which is direct and cooperative, may be perceived as the most competent across relational contexts inside and outside the organization.

While the finding that the integrating style is generally perceived as effective and appropriate is wholly consistent with the competence model, when the findings for both integrating and dominating are considered together they are not completely in line with Papa and Canary's (1995) model. According to their model, dominating and integrating styles should be seen as equally effective. However, this study suggests that integrating is the more effective style. Furthermore, the analysis suggests that a concern for self is not isomorphic with effectiveness, which involves actually achieving one's goals. Indeed, although both dominating and integrating strategies focus on the self, the integrating style appears to be perceived as much more effective. Thus, one's success at achieving one's own goals may be contingent not only on advancing one's own point of view, but also on considering the viewpoints of others.

It is noteworthy that the dominating style was seen as effective in one of the regression analyses examining self-perceptions. However, this analysis showed that both integrating and dominating were significant positive predictors of effectiveness, with integrating accounting for more variance than dominance. This suggests that dominating is most likely to be perceived as an effective strategy when combined with high levels of integrating. For example, an organizational member who uses an integrating style most of the time but becomes dominating when necessary may view her or himself as highly effective. Taken together, these results suggest that Papa and Canary's (1995) grid might be modified by placing dominating in a more central position on the effectiveness continuum, while integrating would remain at the extreme end.

Dominating versus Avoiding Styles

According to Papa and Canary (1995), both the dominating and avoiding styles should be seen as inappropriate. However, their model also predicts that these styles should differ in their levels of effectiveness, with the dominating style perceived as relatively effective as compared to the avoiding style. Indeed, according to the competence model, the avoiding style is the most incompetent of the five styles identified in Rahim's inventory (Papa & Canary, 1995) because it will be perceived as both inappropriate and ineffective. Results from the present study generally support this prediction, but with a caveat—avoidance may

be a stronger predictor of ineffectiveness than inappropriateness given that the avoiding style emerged as a negative predictor in three of the four models focusing on effectiveness, but only in one of the eight models focusing on appropriateness.

Dominating behavior may be reciprocal. In some of the analyses, the corresponding partner score on dominating negatively affected judgments of effectiveness and situational appropriateness. This suggests that dealing with a dominating partner may be difficult, affecting one's own display of conflict styles. Indeed, bivariate correlations showed that only perceptions of dominating and integrating were similar across partners. In other words, when one person perceived that the partner engaged in dominant behavior, the other person was also likely to see her or his partner as displaying dominance. Thus, dominance may beget more dominance. Avoidance, in contrast, did not show any reciprocal effects. Thus, dominance may be ineffective because it both ignores the other person's concerns and creates a reciprocal hostile environment. Avoidance may be ineffective because it shuts off communication and leaves issues unresolved.

Taken together, the regression analyses and beta weights suggest that rather than placing the avoiding and dominating styles on opposite ends of the effectiveness dimension in the competence model's grid (with avoidance seen as ineffective, and dominance seen as effective), it may be more accurate to predict that avoidance is the most ineffective strategy, whereas dominance is somewhere closer to the middle of the continuum.

Obliging Style

The competence model predicts that individuals using an obliging style are perceived as appropriate but ineffective (Papa & Canary, 1995). In the present study, there was little support for this prediction. Only two findings emerged for obliging across the regression analyses: First, when individuals designated as Partner B saw themselves as obliging but not as integrating or dominating, they tended to see themselves as ineffective. Second, when individuals designated as Partner B reported using the obliging style but not the integrating style, they perceived themselves as relationally inappropriate. Given the limited significant findings for obliging, this strategy may generally be perceived as relatively benign, and therefore as neither effective nor highly appropriate. However, there may still be times when obliging communication is seen as a relationally positive strategy, especially if one person has more expertise than the other, or one person cares a lot more about the conflict's outcome than the other. Obliging may also be seen as more appropriate for subordinates to use with superiors than vice versa. Thus, future studies may benefit by looking at how the obliging style functions outside of the types of peer interactions investigated in the present study.

Compromising Style

The competence model does not make specific predictions regarding the compromising style (Papa & Canary, 1995), although one could argue, based on the logic behind the model, that the compromising style would be seen as moderately effective and appropriate. This prediction received mixed support. Some of the analyses suggested that compromising may be perceived as somewhat appropriate and effective, although integrating is seen as even more competent. However, other analyses failed to show a significant association between compromising and the competency measures. These findings could be interpreted (albeit cautiously) as suggesting that the compromising style falls somewhere on or near the midpoint of the appropriateness and effectiveness dimensions specified in the competence model, although in some cases compromising is perceived as a moderately appropriate and effective style.

Limitations and Additional Directions for Future Research

Although this study yielded promising results that both add to and challenge existing theory and research on the competence model of conflict communication, a few limitations should be kept in mind. First, the participants in this study were strangers and casual acquaintances. Therefore, they had little or no history with one another, and may have had low investment in the task. To try to combat the low investment issue, a prize was awarded for the best essay. Still, this extrinsic motivation may have been insufficient. Thus, our results may be best applied to similar situations between coworkers who do not know one another very well, and who are working together to make decisions that affect others, but not themselves.

Another limitation is that this study examined perceptions stemming only from interaction between peers. As Rahim's work (Rahim, 1985, 1986; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979) suggests, there may be important differences in how conflict styles are perceived based on whether the disputants are co-workers, superiors, or subordinates. It would be informative for researchers to determine whether the dominant style is seen as more appropriate and effective when used by superiors as compared to subordinates or peers. Similarly, the obliging style might be most appropriate when used by subordinates who are interacting with supervisors.

Perhaps the most significant limitation of this study is that our data are from a simulated task performed by undergraduate students. It would be beneficial to repeat the study using organizational members engaged in an actual work-related task, or to have organizational members view group conflict interaction via videotapes to rate how appropriate and effective the styles of the group members are.

Finally, one of the most puzzling aspects of the present study is the inconsistency between Partner A and Partner B's perceptions. Given random assignment, we did not expect such inconsistency to occur. After checking for signifi-

cant group differences in the demographic variables we collected (e.g., age, career status) and failing to find any, we remain puzzled. Perhaps moderating variables such as liking, trust, attraction or perceived expertise were distributed differently across the two sub-samples despite random assignment. Unfortunately, these types of moderating variables were not measured in the present study, leaving the door open for future research to test their effects.

Summary and Conclusion

In summary, data from this study demonstrate that an integrative conflict style is perceived as both appropriate and effective, a dominating style is perceived as particularly relationally inappropriate, and an avoiding style is perceived as particularly ineffective. The data also suggest that the compromising style may be perceived as moderately appropriate and effective in some situations. These conclusions provide strong support for some of the competency model's predictions, particularly in regard to the integrating, dominating, and avoiding styles. Yet the study also points to some potentially important modifications. The predictions for the dominating and avoiding styles may need to be fine-tuned so that the dominating style is theorized to be more relationally inappropriate than the avoiding style, whereas the avoiding style is theorized to be more ineffective than the dominating style. Finally, this study suggests that the integrating, dominating, and avoiding styles associate more strongly with perceptions of competence than do the obliging and compromising styles, and that effectiveness, relational appropriateness, and situational appropriateness are distinct components of communication competence. As more research is conducted, the links between these five conflict styles and the three competence measures will become even clearer, so that researchers and organizational members will have access to helpful information on how to best manage conflict during the decision-making process.

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