

Book Review

HBR Guide to Dealing with Conflict

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***HBR Guide to Dealing with Conflict*, by Amy Gallo, ISBN: 978-1-63369-215-2, 173 p. Harvard Business Review Press, 2017, Boston, MA, USA**

To begin with the conclusion: the *Harvard Business Review Guide to Dealing with Conflict* is a really useful, comprehensive little book, providing a highly structured insight into conflict. Everyone with an interest in the mechanics of conflict – both with and without experience in the field of conflict – will take something away from it.

The author has chosen to break the material down into categories, in terms of types of conflict, conflict styles and approaches to navigating conflict. There are many ways to categorise conflict and parties in conflict. In this book, clear choices are made. The author has chosen to distinguish between four different types of conflict: conflict about a relationship, a task, a process or status. She further explores conflict styles from two perspectives related to the personality types of the parties involved in a conflict. Recognising that this is over-simplified and that hybrid situations occur, a distinction is made between the conflict styles of avoiders and seekers. Avoiders shy away from disagreement, value harmony and positive relationships. They often try to placate people or change the topic because they do not want to hurt others' feelings. They do not want to disrupt team dynamics. Seekers on the other hand are eager to engage in disagreement. They value directness and honesty, while strongly advocating their own position. They lose patience when people are not being direct or honest and are not afraid to ruffle feathers. For the purpose of the book, this distinction between avoiders and seekers, which can roughly be compared to feelers and thinkers in *Type Talk at Work (Type Talk at Work, How the 16 Personality Types Determine Your Success on the Job, Kroeger, Thuesen & Rutledge, ISBN 0-440-50928-9)*, works well. It provides a simple framework to put many aspects of conflict into perspective.

Categorisations like this can prove very useful, in spite of the danger of missing out on nuance. They help to make a complicated field transparent and to find common language when dealing with conflict, certainly for people who do not deal with conflict on a regular basis. They also enable people to better understand what may be going on in a conflict and to formulate a response to it. The book offers (again four) options for addressing conflict: do nothing, address indirectly, address directly and exit. It explains the pros and cons of each and suggests many hands-on approaches to situations that can occur when conflict arises. It contains checklists for self-assessment, preparation for difficult conversations, lessons about body language and mindfulness (awareness of self-conduct and how others perceive you).

This is an accessible text that subscribes to the title of this book as a guide. The author looks at types of conflict, conflict styles, possible responses, communication techniques and checklists (e.g., preparing for a difficult conversation). It is not a philosophical treatise, but it is a very practical, hands-on tool kit for dealing with conflict.

