



Intercultural CONFLICT STYLE Inventory®

*Assessing Communication and Conflict
Resolution Styles across Cultures*

Developed by Mitchell R. Hammer, Ph.D.

Individual Profile ICS

Interpretive Guide Results

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The Intercultural Conflict Style (ICS) Inventory
ICS Interpretive Guide
ICS Facilitator Manual
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THE INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT STYLE INVENTORY

The ICS Inventory Profiles Your “Core” Approach

The Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory—(ICS) describes your preferred approach or style for communicating and resolving conflict. Completing the ICS Inventory allows you to gain valuable insight into the approach you likely use when you are personally involved in a difficult situation with another party. This information is important because when we have a disagreement with others, we often experience heightened levels of stress and anxiety.

Under these conditions, we rely more on our preferred approach for communicating and resolving conflict and less on our “adaptive” skills. That is, under stress, each of us defaults to our core style in communicating and resolving problems. However, once stress arises, our adaptability is reduced and we find we use more of the strategies and frameworks that are consistent with our core style—the communication and conflict resolution approach that is profiled by the ICS Inventory.

Thus, the ICS provides you with valuable information concerning the approach you likely rely upon when involved in an emotionally demanding and stressful situation with another person.

The ICS Inventory is “not” a Cultural Identity Measure

The Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory is not a cultural identity measure. That is, your intercultural communication and conflict resolution approach as assessed by the ICS Inventory reflects your own learned patterns for dealing with disagreements and expressing emotions under conflict conditions. Your own style may or may not be similar to the normative approach characteristic in your primary cultural community.

It should not be presumed, for example, that all European Americans (should) have a Discussion style or members of Russian culture (should) have an Engagement style, even though these styles are “normatively present” in European

American and Russian cultural communities. Because the ICS Inventory assesses an individual’s own style on intercultural dimensions, however, we are able to discuss both individual communication and conflict resolution styles and the normative styles found within various cultural communities. By doing this, you are better able to gain insight into the ways in which your approach is similar to or different from your cultural community or communities.

The Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory is designed to help you better understand approaches for communicating and resolving conflict when interacting with others.

Dimensions of the ICS Inventory

Because the ICS focuses on approaches used by people from many different cultures, you will gain insight into both your own personal communication conflict approach and intercultural styles. Knowing more about your own preferred approach, and intercultural conflict styles can help you:

- ▲ Improve your communication across cultural differences
- ▲ Resolve disagreements with people who approach conflict differently than you
- ▲ Manage the stress and anxiety present in difficult situations
- ▲ Interpret the statements and actions of the other party more accurately
- ▲ Communicate your goals and interests to others more effectively

The Intercultural Conflict Style describes your preferred approach or style for communicating and resolving conflict.



The ICS is designed to help you better understand approaches for resolving conflict when interacting with others.



Have you ever noticed that some people express their disagreements to one another in a more explicit and direct manner, while other people communicate their thoughts more indirectly? You may have also observed that some individuals express their emotions more overtly and forcefully, while others keep their emotions to themselves in communicating how they feel toward another in conflict situations. Variations in these areas provide the basis for describing differences in intercultural communication and conflict styles: (1) behavioral patterns that reflect more direct or indirect approaches for communicating about substantive disagreements, and (2) behavioral patterns that reflect more emotionally expressive or emotionally restrained approaches for communicating how each party feels toward one another. Both of these dimensions are learned from the culture groups in which we live; particularly those cultural groups we lived in during our formative years.

As you review the information presented in this Interpretive Guide about direct/indirect and emotionally expressive/restrained approaches for resolving conflicts, your cultural self-awareness will expand as you gain information about your own conflict style. How did you learn to resolve conflict in a more direct or indirect and a more emotionally expressive or restrained manner? What influence did your family have in helping establish your conflict resolution style? What other influences in your life helped refine your approach for dealing with disagreements and sharing emotion in conflict situations? Is your own conflict resolution style similar to or different from the larger cultural community in which you were raised?

You will also gain valuable insight concerning the ways in which people from other cultures deal with conflict. This increased cultural other awareness can provide an important platform for you to more accurately recognize how cultural differences emerge in conflict situations. This increased recognition can enhance your overall competence in resolving disagreements across difficult situations.

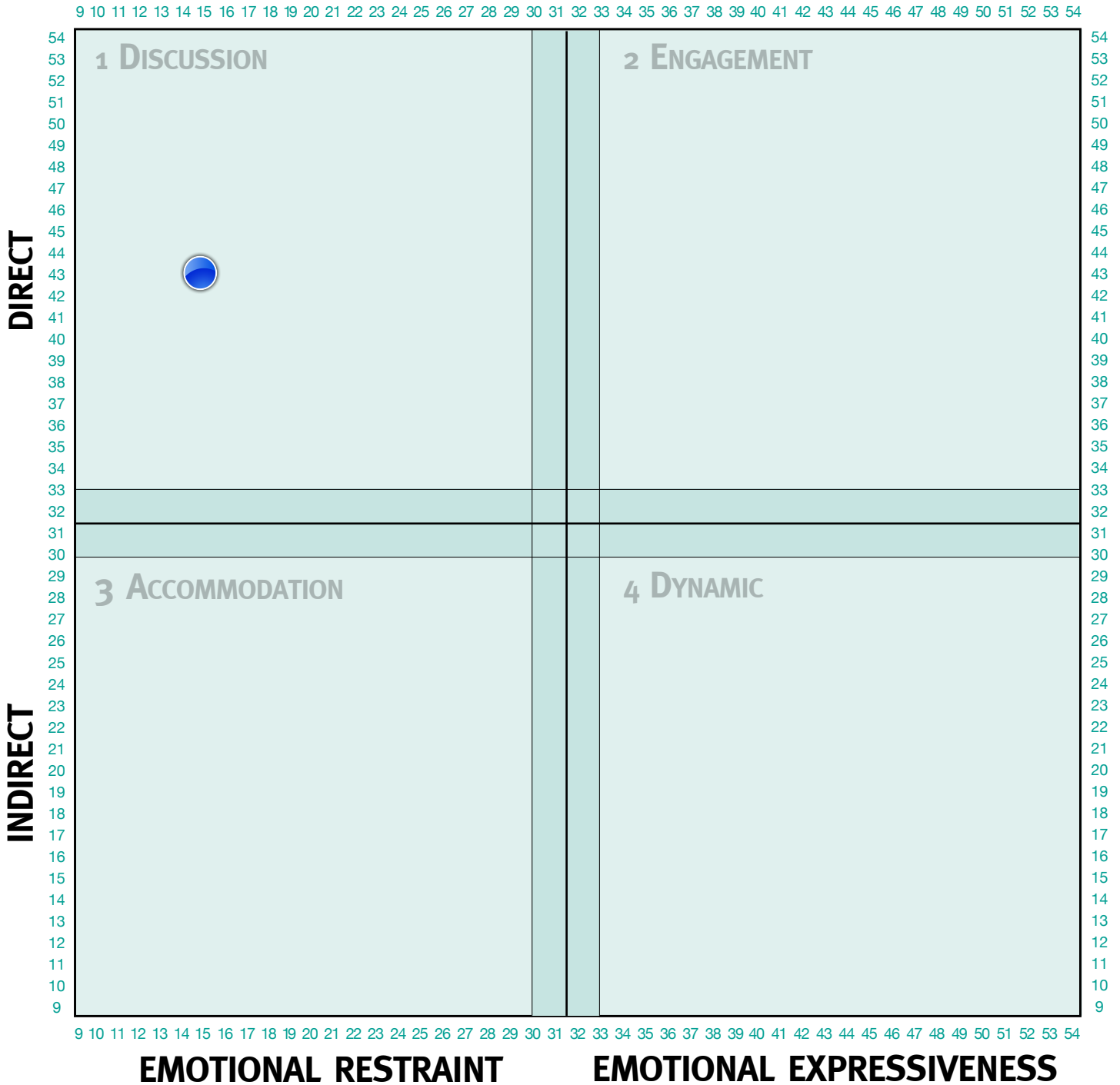
The Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory measures two fundamental approaches for responding to stress and conflict. One core aspect of communication and conflict style is the degree to which you use more *Direct* or *Indirect* strategies. The D/I scale (Direct/Indirect scale) assesses your preference for using more direct approaches or more indirect ways of responding to stress and conflict.

A second core aspect of communication and conflict style is the degree to which you prefer to use more emotionally *Expressive* or emotionally *Restrained* approaches. The E/R scale (emotionally Expressive/Restrained scale) measures the degree to which you prefer to resolve conflicts and handle stress using more emotionally expressive or emotionally restrained approaches.

On the following page are the results from your completing the Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory (ICS). Your core approach to solving problems and resolving conflicts, as assessed by the ICS Inventory, is identified in Figure 1. This indicates how direct or indirect you are in resolving disagreements, and how emotionally expressive or restrained you are in dealing with your own and other's emotional upset. Did you respond to each item of the ICS Inventory in terms of how you would resolve conflicts or disagreements if there were no negative consequences? If so, then your responses reflect your core intercultural conflict resolution approach. If not, you should re-take the ICS Inventory again in order to identify your core approach for solving problems and resolving disagreements.

FIGURE 1

YOUR INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT STYLE



YOUR INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION STYLE

Is your core ICS approach more Discussion, Engagement, Accommodation or Dynamic? Here is a summary description of each one of these styles. More detailed information is presented in subsequent pages of this Interpretive Guide.

1. Discussion Style. The Discussion style describes an approach to conflict resolution that emphasizes a verbally direct approach for dealing with disagreements, and a more emotionally restrained or controlled manner for communicating with one another. The Discussion style emphasizes precision in language use and generally follows the maxim, “say what you mean and mean what you say.” Further, this style views more intense expressions of emotion as potentially dangerous and generally inhibiting “effective” conflict resolution processes. Talking about the disagreement directly to one another is a comfortable approach for this style, yet this “discussion” should be based on objective facts, if possible, and each person should be cautious in injecting his or her own personal feelings into the process.

People with a Discussion style typically see their own strengths as:

- ▲ Confronts problems
- ▲ Elaborates position or argument
- ▲ Maintains a calm atmosphere

However, people from other styles may view Discussion strategies as:

- ▲ Having difficulty “reading between the lines”
- ▲ Too logical and unfeeling
- ▲ Uncomfortable with emotional arguments

2. Engagement Style. The *Engagement* style emphasizes a verbally direct and confrontational approach toward resolving conflict that is accompanied by an emotionally expressive demeanor. This style views the overall sincerity of each person toward resolving disagreements as grounded in the concern that is demonstrated through more intense, verbal and non verbal expression of emotion. This style is more comfortable than the Discussion style with personal confrontation between the parties where disagreements are directly addressed and emotion is “put on the table.”

People with an Engagement style typically see their own strengths as:

- ▲ Provides detailed explanations, information, instructions
- ▲ Freely expresses opinions
- ▲ Shows feelings

However, people from other styles may view the Engagement style as:

- ▲ Unconcerned with the views and feelings of others
- ▲ Dominating and rude
- ▲ Uncomfortable with viewpoints that are disconnected from emotion