

## INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT-HANDLING BEHAVIOR AS REFLECTIONS OF JUNGIAN PERSONALITY DIMENSIONS<sup>1</sup>

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*Summary.*—This study has sought to investigate the Jungian psychological correlates of an individual's choice of different interpersonal conflict-handling modes: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating. These five modes were defined according to the two basic behavioral dimensions of assertiveness and cooperativeness and were also related to integrative and distributive dimensions. The results suggest that the Jungian functions related to judging (thinking vs feeling) and the type of enactment (introverted vs extraverted) are significantly related to an individual's conflict-handling behavior. The study concludes with a schematic illustration of these Jungian functions plotted upon the basic behavioral dimensions which define and characterize the five conflict-handling modes.

In the past ten years, a five-category scheme for classifying interpersonal conflict-handling modes has emerged in behavioral research. First introduced by Blake and Mouton (1964), and reinterpreted by Thomas (in press), this scheme includes the five modes of competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating. As operationalized in the interpersonal context by Blake and Mouton (1964) and later researchers, competing has been identified with forcing behavior and win-lose arguing; collaborating has been identified with confronting disagreements and problem solving to find solutions; avoiding has been identified with withdrawal and failure to take a position; accommodating has been identified with attempting to soothe the other person and seek harmony; and compromising has been identified with the proposal of middle-ground positions.

One of the advantages of this classification scheme is that the five specific modes reflect several more basic dimensions of interpersonal conflict behavior. As interpreted by Thomas (in press), the scheme is based upon two separate dimensions: cooperation (attempting to satisfy the other person's concerns) and assertiveness (attempting to satisfy one's own concerns). Fig. 1 uses these two dimensions, represented by the horizontal and vertical axes, to plot the five conflict-handling modes: competing is assertive and uncooperative, collaborating is assertive and cooperative, avoiding is unassertive and uncooperative, accommodating is unassertive and cooperative, and compromising is intermediate in both cooperativeness and assertiveness. Two semantic differential studies reported by Ruble and Thomas (in press) provided evidence for the general meaningfulness of this two-dimensional model to subjects. The underlying di-

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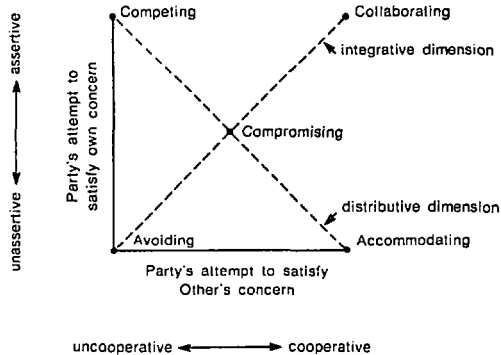


FIG. 1. Five conflict-handling modes, plotted according to the cooperation and assertiveness dimensions, also showing the integrative and distributive dimensions

mensions of cooperativeness and assertiveness corresponded strongly to the two primary semantic differential dimensions which subjects used to perceive each other in conflict situations. General support was also provided for the placement of the five modes along these two dimensions.

However, Thomas also notes that these five modes can be organized in terms of the integrative and distributive dimensions discussed by Walton and McKersie (1965). These dimensions are represented by the oblique arrows in Fig. 1. Roughly speaking, the integration dimension represents the implications of party's behavior with respect to the total satisfaction for both persons in the conflict situation, while the distributive dimension represents the proportion of that satisfaction going to each person. In other words, the integrative dimension represents the size of the pie available to both individuals while the distributive dimension represents the way they divide it up. Along the distributive, or "give-and-take" dimension, competing is the epitome of taking, accommodating represents the extreme of giving, and the three other modes are intermediate. Along the integrative dimension, collaborating attempts to contribute to the size of the pie by finding alternatives which allow both parties to fully satisfy their concerns, avoiding reduces the size of the pie by neglecting an issue, and the other three modes are intermediate.

Thus, this scheme of conflict-handling modes provides a rich framework for investigating how individuals approach conflict situations, i.e., situations in which individuals find that their wishes or concerns differ from those of another person. As such it appears to represent a significant improvement over the simpler cooperative-competitive dichotomy (e.g., Deutsch, 1949). Recently Terhune (1970) summarized the results of 30 studies which used 46 personality measures to predict conflict behavior, as described by the cooperative-competitive dichotomy. Finding it difficult to draw generalizations in many cases, Terhune noted that this

simple dichotomy masked the more complex intentions of subjects in the situations studied.

While several research studies have explored the relationships between the five conflict-handling modes and social and organizational situations (e.g., Blake & Mouton, 1964; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Burke, 1970; Aram, *et al.*, 1971; Thomas, 1971; Thomas & Walton, 1971; Renwick, 1972; Ryan & Clemence, 1973; Jamieson & Thomas, 1974) the deeper psychological basis of these conflict-handling modes has been largely unexamined. In this initial investigation into this area, the present study selected the Jungian dimensions of personality (Jung, 1923) as being particularly germane to conflict-handling behavior. In a recent study of the interpersonal dynamics of confrontation (conflict) versus support in a laboratory setting, Kilmann and Taylor (1974) found that the Jungian dimensions were exceedingly useful in predicting and explaining the effects of individual personality differences on these interpersonal dynamics. In essence the Jungian dimensions describe the different ways that individuals observe (perceive), assess (judge), and enact (introversion, extraversion) some behavioral choice. This conceptualization is consistent with the "process" models of conflict behavior (Thomas, *in press*; Pondy, 1967; Walton, 1969) which describe the sequencing of an individual's perception and assessment of a conflict situation and his subsequent implementation of a conflict strategy or tactic. Individual differences in psychological tendencies toward these processes were expected to influence the conflict-handling modes which the individual chooses in a given situation.

As operationalized by Myers (1962) in developing the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, there are four Jungian dimensions: sensation-intuition, thinking-feeling, judging-perceiving, and introversion-extraversion. [See Kilmann and Taylor (1974) for a detailed discussion of how these dimensions become manifested in interpersonal behavior.]

Sensation and intuition are alternative forms of perceiving, or taking in data. *Sensation* occurs when data are taken in directly by the five senses—the actual concrete details of reality. In contrast, perception via *intuition* involves "seeing" the whole Gestalt, attaching perspective, perceiving possibilities, and other associations that the unconscious generates and adds on to the data which are received. All individuals perceive with both of these functions at different times. But as Jung argues, individuals tend to develop a preferred way of perceiving, and in fact, cannot apply both types of perception at the same exact time. Since this study was intended to be exploratory, specific hypotheses stipulating the expected relationships between the Jungian dimensions and the five conflict-handling modes (including the several dimensions) were not proposed.

Thinking and feeling are alternative forms of judging, or coming to conclusions. *Thinking* is the analytical, logical, reasoning process of coming to

conclusions. In contrast, *feeling* comes to conclusions by attaching subjective, personal value to any object or phenomenon—like, dislike, appreciation, etc. Thus, however one “takes in” data (either by sensation or intuition) an individual may come to some conclusion about the data either by a logical, impersonal analysis (thinking) or by a subjective, personal, “adding value to” process (feeling). Again, an individual tends to rely on one more than the other and cannot use both at the same time.

While individuals tend to capitalize on one of two ways of perceiving and one of two ways of judging, individuals also develop tendencies to prefer perceiving to judging or judging to perceiving, as entire functions. The person who is oriented mostly to *perceiving*, tends to spend his time taking data in (either by sensation or intuition) and just living his life as it develops. The person oriented mainly to *judging*, is most concerned with coming to conclusions, making decisions, and determining the exact course of his life (either by feeling or thinking).

Finally, there are two “attitudes” or directions in which the individual directs his energy, extraversion and introversion. These attitudes vis-a-vis experience determine whether the perception and judging functions are directed to the “outer” or the “inner” world of the individual. *Extraversion* occurs when effort is expended toward the outside of the person in the world of people and things—doing things, interacting with the environment, etc. *Introversion* takes place when an individual directs his energy toward his inner world of ideas and feelings—attending to his own feelings and ideas, figuring things out, coming to terms with his thoughts, etc.

A measurement technology has not yet been developed for objective or observational measures of the five conflict-handling modes, so that a definitive study of the relationship between Jungian personality dimensions and interpersonal conflict-handling behavior is not yet possible. Therefore, the present study relied upon the existing self-assessment measures of conflict behavior to find preliminary evidence of these relationships. However, within this constraint, the design makes use of multiple measures of conflict behavior as a test for consistency. It was anticipated that positive results from this preliminary study would encourage development of a methodology to test these relationships more objectively.

#### PROCEDURE

The study used 86 male students in 2 sections of a graduate course in Behavioral Science for Management at the University of Pittsburgh. At the beginning of the semester the students were administered the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, which was scored to yield continuous values on the four dimensions (Myers, 1962). Shortly thereafter, the same students completed a package of instruments including three measures of the conflict-handling modes in random

order: the Thomas-Kilmann MODE instrument (Kilmann & Thomas, 1973), the Hall Conflict Management Survey (Hall, 1969), and the set of proverbs used by Lawrence and Lorsch (1967).<sup>2</sup> During the semester, the students were administered a number of other research and personality instruments as a part of their learning experience. However, the students did not receive any information of the nature and results of the Myers-Briggs Instrument and the conflict-handling mode instruments until all were completed.

Indices of dimensions of conflict behavior were calculated on each of the conflict instruments as follows: an assertiveness index was calculated by adding competing and collaborating scores and subtracting avoiding and accommodating scores; the cooperation index added collaborating and accommodating and subtracted competing and avoiding; the distributive index subtracted accommodating from competing; and the integration index subtracted avoiding from collaborating.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows Pearson correlations between the Jungian dimensions on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and the conflict-handling modes and dimensions as measured by the three conflict instruments.

#### *Sensation-Intuition*

Relationships with the three instruments suggest that there are no significant tendencies for individuals who perceive via sensation versus intuition to describe their conflict behavior along the basic dimensions differently.

When considering the specific modes, sensation-intuition shows a significant correlation with accommodating on the MODE instrument ( $r = .27, p < .05$ ). However, this relationship is opposite to the trend-level correlation with the Hall instrument ( $r = -.19, p < .10$ ). It seems, then, that the manner in which data are perceived or "taken in" by individuals is not significantly related to their choice of conflict-handling behavior.

#### *Thinking-Feeling*

Correlations of all three instruments with the distributive index show a significant tendency for individuals who score higher on feeling to be relatively less taking than giving ( $r = -.38, p < .001$ ;  $r = -.29, p < .01$ ;  $r = -.26, p < .05$ ; for the MODE, Lawrence-Lorsch, and Hall instruments respectively). In addition, correlations with the MODE instrument suggest that individuals who tend to rely more strongly on feeling tend to be less assertive ( $r = -.27, p < .05$ ) and more cooperative ( $r = .25, p < .05$ ) than individuals who make decisions by thinking. These relationships are consistent with the other two instru-

<sup>2</sup>A fourth conflict instrument, based upon items used by Blake and Mouton (1964), was administered but not used in the analysis because of its lower reliabilities. For more details on the administration of the instruments and the assessment of their properties, see Thomas and Kilmann (1973), and Kilmann and Thomas (1973).

TABLE 1  
PEARSONIAN CORRELATIONS BETWEEN JUNGIAN PERSONALITY DIMENSIONS AND  
CONFLICT-HANDLING MODES AND DIMENSIONS, AS MEASURED BY  
THREE CONFLICT INSTRUMENTS ( $N = 76$ )

	Sensation-Intuition§			Thinking-Feeling§		
	MODE	Lawrence Lorsch	Hall	MODE	Lawrence Lorsch	Hall
Conflict Dimensions						
Assertiveness	-.09	.07	.18	-.27*	-.41‡	-.11
Cooperativeness	.18	.07	.10	.25*	.07	.27*
Distribution	-.19	-.02	.05	-.38‡	-.29†	-.26*
Integration	.04	.10	.20	-.06	-.20	.12
Conflict Modes						
Competing	-.11	-.03	-.16	-.21	-.12	.07
Collaborating	.00	-.03	-.05	-.13	-.26*	.18
Compromising	-.16	-.02	-.12	.08	-.11	.17
Avoiding	-.02	-.11	-.19	-.02	.01	.10
Accommodating	.27*	.00	-.19	.35†	.29†	.22
	Judging-Perceiving§			Introversion-Extraversion§		
	MODE	Lawrence Lorsch	Hall	MODE	Lawrence Lorsch	Hall
Conflict Dimensions						
Assertiveness	-.17	-.13	-.12	.28*	.21	.35†
Cooperativeness	.10	.08	.10	.13	.23*	.23*
Distribution	-.20	-.14	-.15	.16	-.05	.09
Integration	-.07	-.01	-.02	.29†	.32†	.43‡
Conflict Modes						
Competing	-.17	-.10	-.15	.13	-.00	.07
Collaborating	-.08	-.07	-.05	.16	.20	.17
Compromising	-.10	-.18	-.08	-.07	-.13	.04
Avoiding	.13	-.06	-.03	-.20	-.24*	-.12
Accommodating	.23*	.10	-.06	-.07	.07	.01

§The hyphenated Jungian dimensions are labelled so that high scores indicate greater tendency toward second term.

\* $p \leq .05$ , two-tailed. † $p \leq .01$ , two-tailed. ‡ $p \leq .001$ , two-tailed.

ments and are significant for the assertiveness dimension with the Lawrence-Lorsch instrument ( $r = -.41$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and for the cooperative dimension with the Hall instrument ( $r = .27$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

Examining the specific conflict-handling modes suggests that the most consistent and significant relationship is that individuals who rely more strongly upon feeling tend to be more accommodating ( $r = .35$ ,  $p < .01$ , for the MODE instrument;  $r = .29$ ,  $p < .01$  for the Lawrence-Lorsch instrument; and  $r = .22$ ,  $p < .06$ , for the Hall instrument). The correlations also show that feeling is negatively related to collaborating on the Lawrence-Lorsch instrument ( $r = -.26$ ,  $p < .05$ ). However, this relationship is nonsignificant for the MODE instrument and inconsistent with the Hall instrument.

In general, then, the consistent findings indicate that greater reliance upon feeling tends to accompany greater accommodation toward others. And this emphasis on accommodation seems to be reflected in a tendency for feeling individuals to be less assertive, less willing to compete (as opposed to accommodate) on the distributive dimension, but more willing to be cooperative. Greater reliance upon feeling may make it more difficult to pursue one's own concerns without consideration of the other: the value process of feeling may be more related to empathy, compassion, and identification, than is the more impersonal, analytic process of thinking.

#### *Judging-Perceiving*

The correlations between the Jungian dimension of judging-perceiving and the conflict behavior dimensions yielded only one relationship that tended toward significance: perceiving is negatively correlated with distribution, i.e., taking as opposed to giving, on the MODE instrument at the trend level of significance ( $r = -.20, p < .10$ ). Correlations on the other instruments, although in the same direction, were weaker. The only significant relationship involving the specific modes also occurred on the MODE instrument: perceiving correlates with accommodating ( $r = .23, p < .05$ ). This relationship is consistent with that of the Lawrence-Lorsch instrument but inconsistent with the Hall instrument. It does not seem, therefore, that the judging-perceiving distinction is consistently related to individual choices of conflict-handling modes, nor to the basic dimensions that define and describe the modes.

#### *Introversion-Extraversion*

The strongest and most consistent correlations for this dimension are with the integrative dimension of conflict behavior, indicating that individuals higher on extraversion are more likely to strive for integrative solutions ( $r = .29, p < .01$  for the MODE instrument;  $r = .32, p < .01$  for the Lawrence-Lorsch instrument; and  $r = .43, p < .001$  for the Hall). There is also a tendency for extraversion to be related to assertiveness on all three instruments ( $r = .28, p < .05$  on the MODE instrument;  $r = .21, p < .10$  for the Lawrence-Lorsch; and  $r = .35, p < .01$  for the Hall), and to cooperativeness on the Lawrence-Lorsch and Hall instruments ( $r = .23, p < .05$  for both).

Looking at the specific conflict-handling modes, the MODE instrument and the Lawrence-Lorsch show tendencies for extraversion to vary negatively with avoiding ( $r = -.20, p < .10$ , and  $r = -.24, p < .05$  respectively) and the Lawrence-Lorsch instrument shows a trend-level tendency for extraversion to vary with collaborating ( $r = .20, p < .10$ ), with this last relationship being consistent but not significant for the other two instruments.

In general, then, individuals who are higher on extraversion tend to be more integrative and somewhat more assertive and cooperative, although there were

no tendencies for extraversion to be related to giving vs taking, i.e., the distributive dimension. These relationships are reflected in weaker tendencies for extraversion to be negatively related to avoiding and positively related to collaborating.

### CONCLUSIONS

The results of this preliminary study suggest that the Jungian functions related to judging, i.e., thinking vs feeling, and the type of enactment (the "attitudes" of introversion vs extraversion) may be significant influences upon conflict-handling behavior. Because of the relatively strong and consistent relationships between the introversion-extraversion, feeling-thinking dimensions, and the basic conflict behavior dimensions (assertiveness, cooperativeness, integrativeness, and distributiveness) across the three instruments, a particular schematic correspondence between these concepts is suggested.

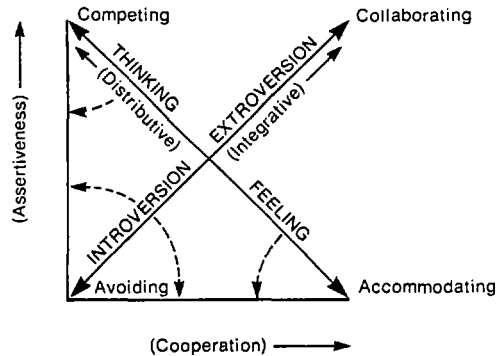


FIG. 2. Conflict-handling behavior as a reflection of the Jungian dimensions of Thinking-Feeling and Introversion-Extraversion

Fig. 2 plots the two Jungian dimensions mentioned above in terms of their relations to conflict-handling behavior. As can be seen from the figure, the extraversion-introversion dimension maps onto the integrative dimension of conflict behavior and the thinking-feeling dimension maps onto the distributive dimension. This correspondence was chosen because it was most strongly supported by the data in this study. The dotted arrows in the figure indicate that the Jungian dimensions are secondarily related to the assertiveness and the cooperativeness dimensions (which is supported by the correlations in Table 1, although the correspondence is not as strong as to the distributive-integrative dimension). It should be noted, however, that the thinking-feeling dimension in the figure does not rotate to the integrative dimension, and the introversion-extraversion dimension does not rotate to the distributive one.



It should be emphasized that these implications and suggestions follow from correlational data obtained solely by self-report descriptions of conflict-handling behavior. While the results suggest that basic psychological predispositions may influence the choice of conflict-handling modes, this study was only exploratory. Supporting and extending these findings and implications will require independent assessments of individuals' conflict-handling behavior. However, these results do serve to encourage additional research in this area. Moreover, the results provide a preliminary indication of the potential of the five-category representation of conflict-handling modes, with their related dimensions, as well as the usefulness of the Jungian dimensions, in documenting and explaining psychological bases of interpersonal behavior.

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