



APM Project Management Qualification
Study Guide

Competence 11
Conflict resolution

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Introduction

Our approach

We appreciate that you have a ‘day job’ and that you want us to help you spend the minimum amount of time to:

- pass the exam first time – a key goal
- gain useful skills and knowledge which will make you a better project manager.

This course is for individuals with some knowledge and experience of project management, who now wish to understand industry best practice and, most importantly, receive recognition in the form of a widely recognised professional qualification. The exam can be viewed as a form of ‘driving test’ for projects; you can drive, but afterwards you will need to hone your existing skills and learn a few more. The material covered in the course is equally applicable to projects with a business, technical, construction or procurement interest.

The examination

The PMQ is a qualification for those working in project management as specialists, who need to understand project management in order to achieve efficiency and effectiveness. The exam is designed to determine an individual’s knowledge of project management based on the PMQ syllabus.

Exam structure

The exam is online and **closed book** and lasts for two-and-a half hours, excluding a break which you may choose to take (see below).

There are 4 question types as follows:

Question type	Verb(s)	How to respond
Multiple response	Select/Choose	Select the answer option or combination of answer options that you think are correct.
Select from list	Select/Choose	Click on a ‘select from list’ symbol to open a list of options and then click your preferred option to select it.
Short response (<i>word, phrase, or sentence</i>)	Give/List/State/Provide/Identify	These command verbs will typically indicate when you need to input a single word or phrase, or a list of words or phrases, to answer the question. If more than one word or phrase is required there will be a separate answer space for each.
Long response (<i>short paragraph</i>)		You will typically need to respond with a short paragraph addressing the points requested. The size of the answer space will indicate the length of answer that is expected.
	Differentiate	Your response should include details of how the areas in the question are different.
	Describe/Explain	Your response should include details of the key characteristics, qualities, or events for the area in the question.
	Interpret	Your response should explain the meaning of the area in the question, in the given context.
	Outline	Your response should include the main points or characteristics for the area in the question.

There are 40 questions with a total of 90 marks available as follows:

Question			
Count	Type	Marks per question	Total marks for type
20	Multiple response	1	20
5	Select from list	2	10
5	Short response	2	10
10	Long response	5	50
Total			90

The pass mark varies slightly with the degree of difficulty of the paper and is typically in the range 55-60 marks (61 – 67%).

The amount of your exam that will focus on each competence area is shown below. Questions in the exam will be in a random order; they will not be ordered as shown here.

Competence	Area and proportion
1. Life cycles	Setting up for success 15-20%
2. Governance arrangements	
3. Sustainability	
4. Business case	
5. Procurement	Preparing for change 15-20%
6. Reviews	
7. Assurance	
8. Transition management	
9. Benefits management	
10. Stakeholder engagement	People and behaviours 25-35%
11. Conflict resolution	
12. Leadership	
13. Team management	
14. Diversity and inclusion	
15. Ethics, compliance, professionalism	
16. Requirements management	Planning and managing deployment 30-40%
17. Solutions development	
18. Quality management	
19. Integrated planning	
20. Schedule management	
21. Resource management	
22. Budgeting and cost control	
23. Risk and issue management	
24. Change control	

The exam is divided into two sessions, each session comprising 20 questions, and you can take a break of up to 30 minutes between the two sessions. During the exam, your progress and time remaining for the exam are displayed in a progress chart at the top of the screen. The timer will show the full duration of the exam, and **not** only the first or second part. You can take the break whenever you are ready to submit the 20 questions in the first section of the exam, but please note you cannot then return to those questions.

Competence 11: Conflict resolution

Learning objective

Understand conflict resolution as the ability to identify and address differences between individuals and/or interest groups.

Assessment criteria

- Know the sources of conflict within a project.
- Understand that conflict can have both positive and negative impacts within a project.
- Know ways in which conflict can be addressed in different situations (such as Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument).

The sources of conflict within a project.

Conflict refers to clashing viewpoints, attitudes, and behaviours among individuals and/or groups. Within projects, conflict is normal and to be expected, as different individuals and groups will have differences concerning aspects of what needs to be done; how it will be done; and who will do it. Such differences can usually be resolved with discussion. When agreement is not possible, however, differences must be resolved through conflict management.

The emergence of conflict can be gradual or sudden and can be open or hidden. Observed conflict is usually manifested in open hostility, lack of cooperation, aggressiveness, or direct challenge. Hidden conflict is more subtly expressed, but early indicators include changes in style or reduction in communication, opting out of project meetings, passive resistance, rumour-mongering or thinly veiled negative interpersonal comments (maybe humorous, but with undertones).

Sources of conflict include:

- interpersonal issues – disagreement over a task, objective, decision, or action
- different interests
- conflicting values
- organisational cultures and politics
- unspoken assumptions
- technical opinions
- finance
- emotion, including stress, passion, anger, fear, envy, and excitement
- ego, perceived power, influence, and insecurity
- sense of uncertainty
- miscommunication.

Sources of conflict may vary across the project life cycle.

Concept

Developing the initial Business Case and defining the associated benefits, costs, time, risks. There may be differences in stakeholders' opinions about the overall objectives of the project and/or how to achieve them.

Definition

Developing the project management plan including required governance and controls. Some individuals may feel that there should be a high level of governance on a project; others may feel that level of control may not be warranted and is wasted time and effort. Often disagreements arise relating to the scope of the project (and what's out of scope!), and over the availability of resources (which may also be required for another project). Another key source of conflict during the definition phase is who is performing what project roles.

Deployment

There can be disagreement on how much progress is being made and whether it is being reported accurately. Issues, risks, and changes can also be a source of conflict e.g. what is the priority of this change, and should it be implemented? Requests to give up resources, missed schedule dates or milestones and divergence from agreed or mandated practice.

Transition

A significant area which causes conflict is whether the end product meets the acceptance criteria and whether it does what the users want. Lessons and how the same issues should be avoided in the future and what caused the issue in the first place (blame culture).

Adoption

An unwillingness to adopt new products and methods (for whatever reason – unfamiliarity, dissatisfaction with working conditions, unspecified but desirable features).

Benefits realisation

Benefits measures and the level of benefits realisation.

Conflict can have both positive and negative impacts within a project.

Not all conflict should be regarded as negative. Facilitating healthy conflict can support group development and learning experiences. Nevertheless, if conflict is not carefully managed it can lead to a significant loss of productivity.

Positive aspects of conflict include:

- a wider range of views can generate more options for solutions
- challenging views are thought through better
- concerns are brought into the open
- facing up to conflict can result in sustainable relationships between individuals.

However, whenever negative conflict arises it needs to be addressed before it causes substantial damage by increasing uncertainty, jeopardising morale, and undermining long-term team harmony – ultimately leading to failure to deliver objectives and unhealthy relationships and culture.

Ways in which conflict can be addressed (such as Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument).**Conflict management (aka Conflict resolution)**

The process of identifying and addressing differences that if left unmanaged would affect successful completion of objectives.

Conflict management reduces the negative effects of differences and stops them developing into conflict. Techniques include:

- definition – a clear and confirmed business case, identifying facts, evidence, and assumptions
- stakeholder mapping – recognising the various agendas of stakeholders and being aware of their relative power and influence

- team selection – consider the mix of styles and personalities within the team
- agreement – agreeing the issues to be resolved, prioritising as required
- responsibility assignment matrix (RAM) – establishing peoples’ ‘territory’, and setting out what is to be expected from individuals
- estimating – create real participation by getting input from team members when estimating size and effort
- escalation – setting out and clearly following escalation routes if resolution is not possible
- communication – remove uncertainty by providing timely information.

Conflict resolution is a complex competency. There are models that suggest mechanisms for tackling the issues. One widely used model is the Thomas-Kilman model.

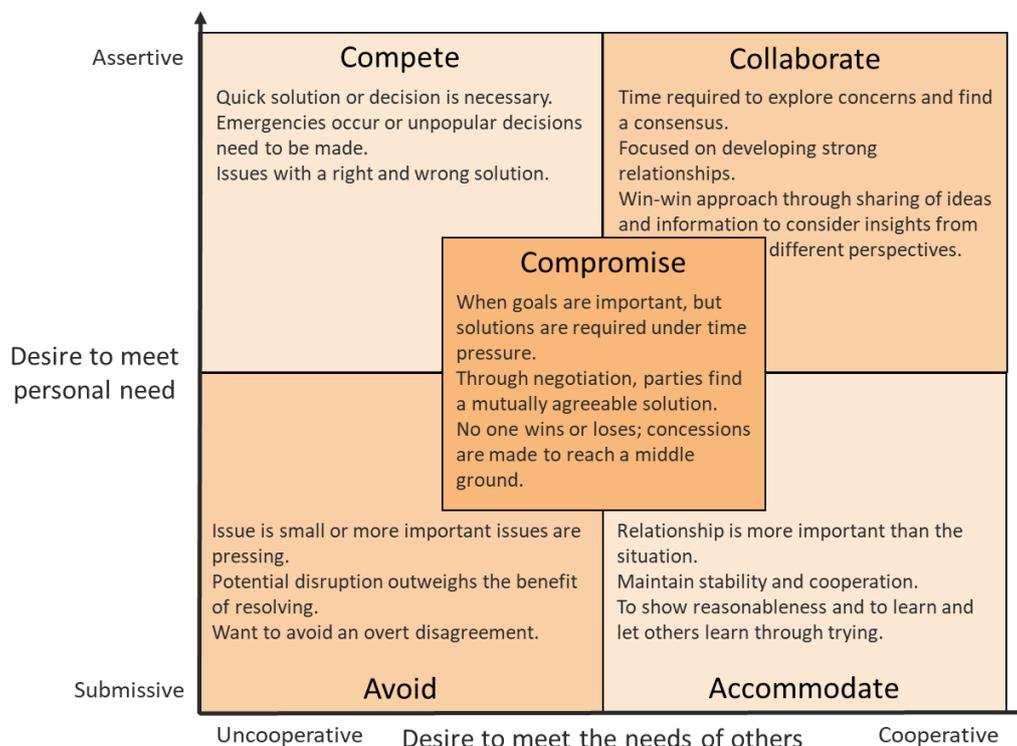


Fig. 33. Thomas-Kilman conflict resolution model.

Figure adapted/modified from the TKI Conflict Model, copyright © Kilman Diagnostics LLC, 2009-2023. All rights reserved. Original figure is available at: <http://www.kilmandiagnostics.com/overview-thomas-kilman-conflict-mode-instrument-tki>; Reproduced with permission. © Kilman Diagnostics LLC, 2009.

Mapping assertiveness (the meeting of one’s own needs) and cooperativeness (the willingness to take into account others’ needs), as shown in figure, generate five options for the project manager:

- avoiding (low assertiveness, low cooperativeness) – ignoring the conflict; it may be appropriate when minor in nature
- competing (high assertiveness, low cooperativeness) – insisting on meeting one’s own needs; appropriate when there is too much to lose, it relates to safety or legal issues, or when used as a considered negotiating tactic

- accommodating (low assertiveness, high cooperativeness) – complying with the other party’s view; appropriate when a clearly better case has been made, the other party has more power/authority/expertise, or for building a relationship, or when the issue is minor
- compromising (medium assertiveness, medium cooperativeness) – seen as the ‘negotiated’ solution where both parties concede some aspect in order to reach agreement. Often accepted as the expected approach for the project manager. It does, however, risk accepting a sub-optimal solution as both parties are losing something of what they set out to achieve
- collaborating (high assertiveness, high cooperativeness) – a solution is sought which meets all parties’ needs to a large extent.

Managing conflict requires sensitivity and empathy, in conjunction with objectivity and an ethical stance. Developing conflict resolution competency requires mastering the following skills:

- facilitation – guiding communication by questioning, encouraging, controlling, and summarising. Other processes can be used, such as empathy building (asking participants to list reasons to support the other party’s view)
- arbitration – where stakeholders are in conflict. Must be seen to listen objectively and equally to all parties, to test the willingness of the parties to support the eventual decision, and to explain the basis of the eventual decision
- assertiveness – standing up for one’s own rights while acknowledging the rights of others – a vital characteristic in project managers. The technique: showing acknowledgement for the other person’s view, explaining one’s own view, proposing a positive way forward.

Resolved conflicts should be kept under observation in case only the symptoms of the conflict have been resolved. Cross-cultural conflict adds a further dimension. Points to consider include: loss of ‘face’, degree of openness, potential for offence or unintentional insults and language problems.

Important considerations for conflict resolution	
Anticipate	Anticipate different people being involved with different perceptions, agendas and outcomes to be achieved.
Acknowledge	Acknowledge that very rarely does it just go away.
Resolve	Resolve and avoid placing blame. Work through solutions that will support achieving the project’s aims.
Encourage	Encourage the sharing of perspectives. Open and honest dialogue will enable better solutions.
Facilitate	Facilitate collaboration to explore resolution options.
Neutral	Keep things neutral, using neutral tones, language and body language to avoid defensiveness.

Fig. 34. Conflict resolution considerations.

Summary

Please remember that this study guide is intended to be used alongside your training course. It can be also used as a reference guide when you are back at work applying your knowledge. Remember, the PMQ examination is based on a Body of Knowledge. The material contained within this study guide is designed to assist you in increasing your knowledge and understanding of project management. However, it will never be the definitive guide to project management – after all the body of knowledge on project management is constantly changing to reflect emerging best practice and therefore it is always being updated.