

## Interpretive Guide for the MTI Conflict Assessment Instruments

MTI hosts two on-line instruments designed to assess the costs and forms of conflict that are currently imbedded in the culture, structure, and competency-base of organizations:

*The MTI Survey of Organizational Conflict Management Strategies*  
*The MTI Measure of Financial Cost of Organizational Conflict*

Complimentary public access to the instruments is provided at the Conflict Management Toolbox –  
**[www.mediationworks.com/tools](http://www.mediationworks.com/tools)**

The instruments may be administered, in combination or separately, for a variety of purposes:

1. To take a one-time snapshot of the costs and forms of conflict.
2. To benchmark the costs and forms of conflict prior to implementation of the MTI Training System or other planned-change program. The instruments can be readministered at later checkpoints or upon completion to evaluate program effectiveness.
3. To compare the costs and forms of conflict between two or more organizational departments, field facilities, demographic groups, or other discrete units.
4. To demonstrate to decision-makers the hidden costs of conflict to justify investment in planned change.

This interpretive guide is intended to assist individuals who have completed the on-line instruments to achieve fuller understanding of their results. If the instruments are being used in an organizational assessment or planned-change program, additional consultation can be provided regarding sampling methodology, research design, application of results, and strategic planning.

### **The MTI Survey of Organizational Conflict Management Strategies** (the “Strategy Survey”)

A single individual’s numerical results on the Strategy Survey are more illustrative than diagnostic. That is, it is unlikely that any one person’s perception of how conflict is managed in the organization is precisely the same as the mean of all persons’ aggregated perceptions. The Strategy Survey is designed as an organizational assessment, not an individual assessment. Careful sampling and administration of the Strategy Survey are required to ensure reliable and accurate assessment of the conflict management strategy that is currently imbedded in the organization.

An organization’s conflict management strategy is comprised of the composite of four sub-strategies. Each sub-strategy reflects the interaction between normative behavior (do organization members characteristically engage directly with others in conflict, or do they attempt to disengage from others?) and normative attitudes (do members perceive others as opponents and competitors (adversarial), or do they see others as teammates (non-adversarial)?). The following table illustrates the four possible combinations of these two dimensions.

The four sub-strategies that comprise an organization's conflict management strategy		Behavioral Dimension (how people act)	
		Disengaged from Other	Engaged with Other
Attitudinal Dimension (how people think)	Non-adversarial toward Other	<b>Detachment</b>	<b>Collaboration</b>
	Adversarial toward Other	<b>Evasion</b>	<b>Coercion</b>

The Strategy Survey yields four numbers ranging between 1.00 and 7.00. Illustration:

Non-adversarial Engagement = 1.71

Adversarial Disengagement = 5.86

Adversarial Engagement = 4.29

Non-adversarial Disengagement = 3.78

Non-adversarial Engagement is the "Collaboration" sub-strategy.

Adversarial Disengagement is the "Evasion" sub-strategy.

Adversarial Engagement is the "Coercion" sub-strategy.

Non-adversarial Disengagement is the "Detachment" sub-strategy.

Higher numbers (toward the "7" end of the scale) indicate that this sub-strategy is typical of how conflict is managed in the organization.

Lower numbers (toward the "1" end of the scale) indicate that this sub-strategy is not typical of how conflict is managed in the organization.

Each organization's conflict management strategy is imbedded in its:

**Culture** – Organizational culture is comprised of the attitudinal and behavioral norms that determine how employees must think (or portray themselves as thinking) and act to be accepted and approved of by others, and to be successful in their careers. Culture is not recorded in formal or official documents; rather, culture resides in the shared perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and values of the population of organization members as a whole.

**Structure** – An organization's structure is the totality of how it is explicitly designed, including its policies, procedures, operating manuals, organization charts, job descriptions, performance evaluation methods, announced time boundaries, "need to know" lists, and other recorded information. Structure resides in documents.

**Conflict Competencies** – Employee competencies are the skills and knowledge required to effectively manage differences, disputes, and conflicts between themselves and their peers, managers, and other entities upon whom they are dependent for information, cooperation, and other resources needed to perform their functions and to maintain their productivity. The core conflict competencies are Managerial Mediation (for those in leadership roles) and Self Mediation (for all employees). Other competencies supplement the core competencies.

The **Collaboration** (Non-adversarial Engagement) sub-strategy is most desirable. A higher number indicates that differences, disputes, and conflicts are managed by constructive, direct communication between the parties in a spirit of cooperation. Persons in authority view their role as providing support for, and removing obstacles to, the productive work of their subordinates. Employees possess and apply competencies for seeking outcomes and solutions that are acceptable and beneficial to all – core competencies for managing workplace conflict.

Each of the other three sub-strategies is less desirable than Collaboration.

A high **Evasion** (Adversarial Disengagement) score indicates that disputes are suppressed and avoided. Employees may believe that "we have no conflict" because there is little direct confrontation or open

hostility. There may be an atmosphere of politeness and superficial friendliness that masks underlying resentments. Trust is low; individuals recognize that others would, if given an opportunity to do so secretly, act in ways that could harm one's own interests. Persons in authority may appear paternalistic, but are viewed with suspicion and are not expected to "go to bat" for subordinates who are at risk of being harmed by some administrative action or policy. Employees do not possess or apply the core competencies for managing workplace conflict.

A high **Coercion** (Adversarial Engagement) score indicates that conflicts are acted out rather openly, with little need to hide one's anger to maintain an image of decorum. Competitiveness is viewed as a positive quality, and the "winners and losers" are publicly identified. Persons in authority exercise their power freely, feeling that it is necessary to actively control subordinates to prevent them from making mistakes or acting improperly. Employees do not possess or apply the core competencies for managing workplace conflict.

A high **Detachment** (Non-adversarial Disengagement) score indicates that employees have become disinvested from the organization; they don't care about the company, but only about their own paycheck and career. Employees view work as a means to an end (as a way to earn money so they can enjoy life away from work) rather than an inherently meaningful activity. There may be a defeatist atmosphere where employees have resigned themselves to an unpleasant situation and no longer fight against the things they view as wrong. Persons in authority may wonder why they are unable to motivate their employees to work harder or better. Incentive systems, if present, are not effective. Employees do not possess or apply the core competencies for managing workplace conflict.

Scores below 3.00 and above 5.00 are most illuminating. Low scores suggest a significantly weak presence of that sub-strategy. High scores suggest a relatively strong presence of that sub-strategy. Scores between those values indicate lower intensity and are less likely to signify a problem or area of concern.

A useful way to gain meaning from a set of four scores is to arrange them from highest to lowest to facilitate viewing the sub-strategies in a cascading hierarchy: "There is more of this than there is of that, and more of that than the next one." Reflect upon the depictions of the four strategies above to draw inferences about how conflict is managed in your organization.

To the extent that Collaboration is less characteristic of how conflict is managed than are Evasion, Coercion, or Detachment, it is probable that a hidden (i.e., unbudgeted) financial cost is being incurred.

### **The MTI Measure of Financial Cost of Organizational Conflict** (the "Cost Calculator")

The Cost Calculator yields a single value in U.S. dollars (or in the currency used by the individual completing the instrument), which is the approximate financial cost of the particular conflict that was analyzed by the respondent. This expense is unbudgeted, since the money being wasted or consumed by the conflict is nested within other budget items, such as payroll, equipment repairs, capital purchases, office supplies, and insurance premiums.

This on-line calculator contains formulas based on recent research and up-to-date industry averages. The default values of thirteen variables may differ from one organization to another. Respondents are encouraged to alter the default values to more closely reflect known facts about their own organization.

Resulting numerical values vary widely, ranging from a few hundred dollars to over \$100,000,000. The average cost of conflicts analyzed by participants in open-enrollment programs of the Mediation Training Institute usually lies between \$100,000 and \$300,000.

As in the case of the Strategy Survey, a solitary individual's result from the Cost Calculator is more illustrative than diagnostic, although the "shock value" of recognizing the hidden cost of a single conflict may help the issue conflict management rise in the list of organizational priorities.

Careful sampling and administration of the Cost Calculator to a larger number of employees provides a basis for estimating the return on investment (ROI) of any program that may impact how conflict is managed in the organization.

The Cost Calculator may be used as a benchmark measure before implementation of the MTI Training System or other planned-changed program, and readministered at later checkpoints or upon program completion to evaluate cost savings. Assuming proper sampling and administration, a decline in the mean cost of conflict indicates that the severity of conflicts as experienced by respondents has declined.

Consequently, the Cost Calculator is best used in tandem with the Strategy Survey as pre- and post-measures of conflict management improvement initiatives to provide empirical, quantifiable evidence of the cost-effectiveness of training and other organizational and employee development efforts.

A formula for calculating the ROI in conflict management training is available to the public at **[www.mediationworks.com/roi](http://www.mediationworks.com/roi)**

For more information about the MTI Training System or à la carte application of the MTI Conflict Assessment Instruments, contact MTI:

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