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## **Legilimens: Understanding less Confrontational Conflict Management Styles in the *Harry Potter* Series**

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### **Abstract:**

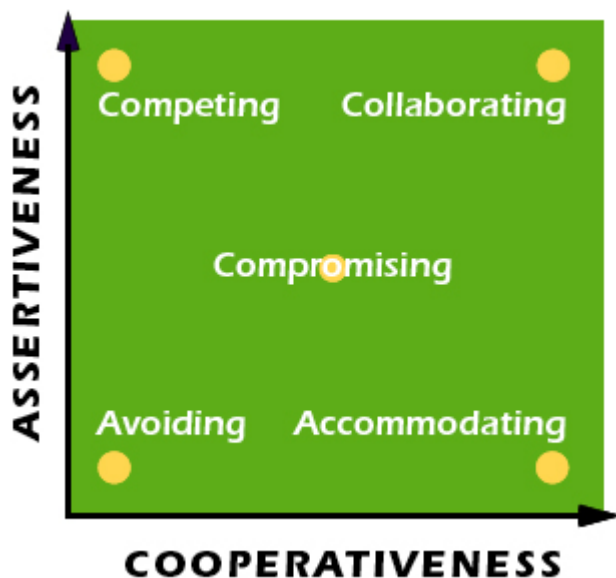
This is the first of two papers addressing the subject. Different people approach and manage conflict situations in different ways. As literature often mirrors real life, characters in texts also approach and manage conflicts in different ways. This paper uses the conflict management styles given in the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI)—developed by Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann—to analyse the conflict management styles of characters in J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series, and the characters’ reasons behind using those particular styles in their particular situations. The paper also looks at how many positive and negative characters adopt each style, to speculate on the author’s intention behind these choices. While this paper addresses the less confrontational styles, the next paper in this two-part series will address the most confrontational style. It is hoped that this paper will give young adult readers insight into why different styles are used, and reflect on their own conflict management approaches in their own lives.

**Keywords:** *Harry Potter*, Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, TKI, conflict management, young adult literature, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, collaborating.

### **Introduction**

Conflicts are inevitable in life. Where there is more than one person, there is likely to spring conflict with the passage of shared time.

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) is a self-scoring assessment that gives users an understanding of how much they use each conflict management style. In their article “An Overview of the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI)”, Thomas and Kilmann say that the TKI is designed to measure a person’s behavior in conflict situations. “Conflict situations” are those in which the concerns of two people appear to be incompatible. In such situations, we can describe an individual’s behavior along two dimensions: (1) assertiveness, the extent to which the person attempts to satisfy his own concerns, and (2) cooperativeness, the extent to which the person attempts to satisfy the other person’s concerns.



The purpose of these papers is to understand the manner in which Young Adult readers are exposed to ideas of conflict by carefully considering situations of conflict in the first seven *Harry Potter* books and how characters seek to approach and resolve them. This paper will be considering the TKI, not as an instrument, but as a guide to understanding the less confrontational styles of approaching and managing conflict, as seen in the actions of characters over the course of the series. This paper considers the approaches to conflict rather than the result of using certain approaches in certain situations. At times, it will bring to light the larger consequences of certain choices of conflict management by characters.

This paper will consider only external conflicts between characters, as the conflict management styles given by Thomas and Kilmann in the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) are not all relevant to internal conflicts.

The books which will be considered by this paper are:

- *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (referred to as *Philosopher*)
- *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (referred to as *Chamber*)
- *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (referred to as *Prisoner*)
- *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (referred to as *Goblet*)
- *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (referred to as *Order*)
- *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (referred to as *Prince*)
- *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (referred to as *Hallows*)

The recently released *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*(2016) will not be included as it was not authored solely by J. K. Rowling, as are its predecessors, and is hence not being considered a true component of the *Harry Potter* series by these papers.

This paper will be organized according to four of the five conflict management styles considered by Thomas and Kilmann, and subdivided according to the main causes of major conflicts occurring in the seven books of the *Harry Potter* series, where applicable:

- common enemy
- doing the right thing
- jealousy
- kindness
- loyalty
- powerlessness

Conflicts will be analysed based on the parties involved, their individual styles of approaching and managing conflict, and possible reasons behind characters using those particular styles in those particular circumstances.

It is important to note that, at times, the lines between the styles are blurred due to the complexity of human behaviour and interactions. For example, there are instances in the novel that are both 'Collaborative' and 'Compromising', where characters work together to achieve a common purpose, albeit grudgingly. An example of this is Snape and Sirius working together in the Order of the Phoenix. Neither is fond of the other because of their past interactions (going back decades), but both work together against the main antagonist of the series, Lord Voldemort. In such cases, the conflict management style has been categorised according to a close understanding of the definition given by Thomas and Kilmann. Some debate among readers could arise in these cases. It is hoped that this paper's justification for the categorisation of each situation will suffice.

Certain characters are seen to use certain styles more often than others. For example, Dumbledore uses the Accommodating style often, while Voldemort, the primary antagonist, resorts to Competing behaviour. There are other instances where a character uses different styles to deal with different characters and circumstances. For example, we see Harry moving from Avoiding behaviour at the beginning of the series due to his unpleasant and neglected childhood, to Competing behaviour as his knowledge, resources and confidence increase. Both of these points are indicative of how people in the real world approach conflict too. The reader of this paper will kindly note that the Competing style will be addressed in the next paper in this two-part series.

As the purpose of these papers is to reflect the Young Adult reader's exposure to conflict management and resolution, the obvious battles between Harry and Voldemort (and supernatural conflicts) will not be included in the analysis as one feels that these are not the sort of conflicts that young adults would realistically have to face. Rather than these, the papers focus on smaller (but still important) conflicts that occur in everyday interactions between and among characters, as these are the situations that Young Adults are more likely to encounter in their own lives.

Each section will deal with the character who approached or responded to conflict in the manner described by that particular section. If the other party approached or responded to conflict in a different manner, it will be dealt with in the section relevant to that approach or response. Characters who respond using the Competing style will have their approach addressed in the second paper.

Events previously mentioned will be briefly alluded to in subsequent sections, where relevant.

After analysis of conflict situations has been completed, the paper will attempt an analysis of what sort of characters display each conflict management style. The paper will consider whether a conflict management style is adopted by characters who are portrayed as generally positive characters or negative ones. For example, Dumbledore is generally portrayed as a positive character, while Snape is understood to be a negative character. The evaluation of positive or negative is done by keeping in mind the manner in which the character is perceived by the protagonist and those who empathise with him. Therefore, although Snape is revealed to have possessed some redeeming qualities, and Dumbledore is revealed to have been flawed, the general reception of these characters is positive and negative respectively.

## **AVOIDING**

The least confrontational of the five approaches is Avoiding. According to Thomas and Kilmann, “Avoiding is unassertive and uncooperative—the person neither pursues his own concerns nor those of the other individual. Thus he does not deal with the conflict. Avoiding might take the form of diplomatically sidestepping an issue, postponing an issue until a better time, or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation.”

The main reasons for Avoiding behaviour in conflicts—in descending order of occurrence—are powerlessness, loyalty, doing the right thing, and jealousy.

### **Powerlessness**

Throughout the series, power is coveted by different characters for different reasons. Powerlessness felt by characters mainly leads to their avoiding conflict as they assess that they would be unequal to the other party if a situation of conflict does arise.

The first instance of Avoiding behaviour is displayed by Harry’s Uncle Vernon, who – at his first meeting with Hagrid – insults Professor Dumbledore, whom Hagrid greatly respects. Hagrid does not tolerate this. Vernon Dursley does not have the courage to challenge Hagrid, especially after Hagrid’s sudden appearance in the dead of the night and his easy display of strength by bending the gun “into a knot as easily as if it had been made of rubber”. [*Philosopher*, p. 48]

Later, when Harry meets Draco Malfoy at Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions, Malfoy displays his haughty attitude toward Muggles and makes Harry feel utterly inferior because of his Muggle upbringing. Harry does not argue because he has never had experience fighting back bullies, having served as a punching bag for Dudley for eleven years. [*Philosopher*, p. 60-2]

Harry’s first Potions class with Professor Snape sees Harry losing two house points for not knowing an answer and not correcting his classmate Neville's mistake. The second time, Harry is about to say something in his defence, but his friend Ron stops him, saying that he

has heard that "Snape can turn very nasty." [*Philosopher*, p. 102-4] Snape's position of authority and reputation for nastiness leave Harry powerless to stand up for himself.

Draco Malfoy also displays powerlessness when he takes Neville's Remembrall and Harry chases him up in his broom. When Malfoy sees that Harry is a skilled flyer, combined with the fact that Malfoy's cronies—Crabbe and Goyle—are not up there to assist him, Malfoy backs down. This shows that he is aware of his inadequacy in a physical brawl, if it came down to having one. He knows that he needs Crabbe and Goyle to back him up.

After his first year at Hogwarts, Harry goes back to live with the Dursleys, who do not want him living with them any more than he does. Over the summer, they interact gingerly with each other, with Harry on one side and all the Dursleys on the other. The Dursleys do not know that he is not allowed to perform magic outside school. Harry, conveniently, does not mention it to them for as long as possible, as he enjoys the temporary respite from their active ill-treatment of him [*Chamber*, p. 10-23]. In this case, the Dursleys are powerless due to their fear of magic.

Another character who avoids conflict is Gilderoy Lockhart. Hired as the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher in Harry's second year at Hogwarts, he is depicted as a show-off and a braggart. When a student is taken by the monster of legend, the other teachers ask Lockhart to tackle Slytherin's monster on his own, recalling the number of times he had shown confidence on the matter. Professor Sprout says, "Weren't you saying just last night that you've known all along where the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets is?" Professor Flitwick says, "Yes, didn't you tell me you were sure you knew what was inside it?" Snape adds, "I certainly remember you saying you were sorry you hadn't had a crack at the monster before Hagrid was arrested... Didn't you say that the whole affair had been bungled, and that you should have been given a free rein from the first?" Professor McGonagall cuts off Lockhart's protests by saying, "We'll leave it to you, then, Gilderoy. Tonight will be an excellent time to do it. We'll make sure everyone's out of your way. You'll be able to tackle the monster all by yourself. A free rein at last." Once he stutters his way out, she says, "Right, that's got *him* out from under our feet." [*Chamber*, 217-8] Lockhart is powerless when faced with the prospect of actually tackling the monster he so confidently spoke about when he did not think it likely that events would take such a turn, displaying his cowardice.

Another adult depending on the Avoiding style is Peter Pettigrew. During the revelation and confrontation, Sirius and Lupin are honest about their fury at Pettigrew's betrayal. Pettigrew tries to beg for mercy but finds none. He is finally tied to Ron and Sirius in manacles. He is powerless to escape. [*Azkaban*, 269-75]

In the next year at Hogwarts, in an encounter between Snape and Barty Crouch Jr. disguised as Mad-Eye Moody, the imposter Moody hints at Snape's Death Eater mark and Snape allows him to win that encounter. He goes to bed as the imposter Moody tells him to, mainly because he does not wish to engage with a man who knows more about his past than Snape would have liked. [*Goblet*, 410-1)

The next significant instance of avoidance is when, after the death of Cedric Diggory and the re-emergence of Voldemort, Harry directs his frustration at being asked to behave himself and [not] do anything rash [*Order*, p. 14] at stirring Dudley up, "siphoning off his own frustration into his cousin". Dudley does not take the bait because he knows that Harry has his wand, making him feel powerless against his wizard cousin. [*Order*, p. 17-9]

The tables turn when Dudley brings up the topic of Harry's nightmares, revisiting the graveyard in which Cedric Diggory was killed. Harry is powerless to stop Dudley because he knows that there is no other way for Dudley to have heard Cedric's name unless, as Dudley claims, Harry had been moaning it aloud in bed during his nightmares. [*Order*, p. 19-20]

After this and several other events take place, Harry is taken to where Ron, Hermione and others who care about him, are. Harry shouts at Ron and Hermione when it seems like they have nothing useful to tell him. "Every bitter and resentful thought Harry had had in the past month was pouring out of him - his frustration at the lack of news, the hurt that they had all been together without him, the fury at being followed and not told about it." Ron and Hermione do not argue with him because they know that he is entitled to his frustration, since they had been told not to give him any important details in their correspondences. Being teenagers, they were powerless to reject this instruction given to them. [*Order*, p. 63-5]

Much after this, there occurs an incident where the unpopular Professor Dolores Umbridge is silenced by Professor McGonagall when Umbridge goes to McGonagall's Transfiguration class to evaluate her. Umbridge realises that she cannot intimidate McGonagall and withdraws from the conflict situation. [*Order*, p. 285-6]

During Hagrid's time for inspection, on the other hand, he is unable to respond to her unfair questions. Hagrid is flustered and does not know how to tackle her questions, probably because he returned to Hogwarts much after everyone knew about Umbridge. Hagrid is ill-equipped to handle Umbridge and her bias against half-breeds such as him. [*Order*, p. 394-7]

At the end of that school year, following the death of Harry's godfather, Moody, Lupin, Tonks and Mr. Weasley threaten the Dursleys about treating Harry badly over the summer. The Dursleys—who have repeatedly displayed their bias against, and fear of, magic—cower and step back when Moody shows them his magical eye. As a result of this bias and fear, they are powerless when faced with people who can perform magic. [*Order*, p. 326]

### **Loyalty**

Besides powerlessness, characters sometimes avoid conflict out of loyalty. Here, loyalty refers to a character's longstanding relationship with other characters, in a way defining part of their own history and identity.

Ron and Hermione avoid each other because Ron believes that her cat, Crookshanks, has eaten his rat, Scabbers. Scabbers being a family rat, Ron's irritation with him for being a "useless" pet [*Philosopher*, 75] is forgotten as he mourns the loss of his rat [*Azkaban*, 196]. Hermione avoids confronting Ron when she sees how angry he is with her for not keeping track of her cat.

Much later, in the final book of the series, Ron returns to Harry and Hermione after leaving them in a huff. Hermione is furious with Ron for having left in the first place. Ron avoids antagonising her as much as possible, simply out of his loyalty to them and shame at having left them at all. [*Hallows*, 320]

### **Doing the right thing**

The next reason for characters to avoid conflict is doing the right thing, as perceived by the character. This means that the character identifies that there is a larger purpose served by avoiding a direct conflict situation.

This behaviour occurs twice in the series, once displayed by the Hufflepuffs and once by Hermione.

In Harry's second year, the Hufflepuffs are afraid of Harry, believing him to be the heir of Slytherin. They feel the need to protect Justin whom they are sure has been marked for death by Harry ever since he "let slip to Potter that he was Muggle-born." The Hufflepuffs keep Justin away from Harry and avoid conflict to do the right thing and protect their friend from a perceived threat – Harry. [*Chamber*, 148-50]

Next in Harry's third year, while it is widely believed that Sirius Black, the mass murderer, has broken out of Azkaban prison in search of Harry, Harry receives a new broom – a Firebolt. Believing that it could be a trap for him set by Black, Hermione reports it and the Firebolt is taken away [*Prisoner*, 172-3]. Ron and Harry are furious with Hermione, and she avoids them during this time, but she is certain that she has done the right thing by reporting this suspicious development to protect Harry.

### **Jealousy**

Jealousy is the least occurring reason for avoiding conflict, or even interaction. This occurs when Harry is chosen by the Goblet of Fire as a Hogwarts school champion, even though he is too young to enter. Ron, tired of being in Harry's shadow, refuses to talk to him because of his jealousy toward Harry. [*Goblet*, 251]

## **ACCOMMODATING**

According to Thomas and Kilmann, "When accommodating, the individual neglects his own concerns to satisfy the concerns of the other person; there is an element of self-sacrifice in this mode. Accommodating might take the form of selfless generosity or charity, obeying another person's order when you would prefer not to, or yielding to another's point of view."

In the *Harry Potter* series, characters are accommodating in the face of conflict due to—in descending order of occurrence—kindness, loyalty and a common enemy.

### **Kindness**

Kindness is an instinctive need to soften the blow felt by other characters during periods of stress.



Dumbledore, despite being a powerful wizard, displays a great deal of kindness in conflicts with characters who are dealing with their own pain and fear.

When Snape is sure that Harry helped Sirius escape the Dementor's Kiss, Dumbledore talks him down and says that Harry could not have been in two places at once. He later tells Fudge, the Minister of Magic, that Snape is not unbalanced, but that he has just suffered a severe disappointment. [*Azkaban*, 306-7] Dumbledore knows what catching Sirius would have meant to Snape, but could not allow an innocent man to be punished for a crime he did not commit. However, while he disagrees with Snape, he empathises with him in that moment.

After Sirius' untimely and sudden death, Dumbledore calmly allows Harry to rage in Dumbledore's office. He tells Harry that there is more that Harry needs to know, which is the only thing that calms Harry down enough to listen to what Dumbledore has to say. [*Order*, 726-7] Being the Headmaster, Dumbledore could have chosen to exercise his authority and not allow Harry to throw things around his office, but recognising Harry's pain, Dumbledore allows him to vent his anger before he gives him more information that he feels Harry needs to know.

Even before Dumbledore's death, Draco Malfoy—readying himself to kill Dumbledore—mocks him. Dumbledore is gentle with Draco and asks him to join the forces opposing Voldemort. [*Prince*, 545-53] Dumbledore understands that Draco has no choice but to try to kill him, and is kind with him because he does not blame the boy.

Another character who displays this line of wisdom is Hermione. While Harry is hunting down Hallows, Harry is angry after reading part of Rita Skeeter's book about Dumbledore. He is conflicted by how he feels about Dumbledore and how Dumbledore felt about him. [*Hallows*, 294-5] Hermione empathises but does not engage in conflict with Harry, as he is already in a great deal of pain after the loss of his Headmaster.

### **Loyalty**

Loyalty in this context refers to a character's faith in (and allegiance to) others, placed due to the length and quality of their relationship.

When Lucius Malfoy asks Dumbledore to step down and gives him the news that he has been suspended by a vote taken by the twelve governors, Dumbledore seems to give in easily, but hints that he will "only truly have left the school when none here are loyal to [him]." [*Chamber*, 194-6]. Dumbledore is displaying his faith in the loyalty of the people he counts as being on his side in the fight against evil and wrongdoing.

When Rita Skeeter publishes an article revealing that Hagrid's mother was a giantess, Hermione hastily says that she wants Hagrid back while Harry is discussing the topic. Hermione was actually happy with a Care of Magical Creatures about unicorns—conducted by another teacher—but gives a different response when put on the spot by Harry. [*Goblet*, 384] This happens because of her loyalty to both Harry and Hagrid, whom she likes as a friend but not necessarily as a teacher.

After Harry's wand is destroyed in Godric's Hollow, Harry does not want a conflict when Hermione says he "just need(s) to practise", and that using the stolen Snatcher's wand is "all a matter of confidence." Harry is upset about his own wand breaking and wishes to say that Hermione could give him her wand if it only takes practice, but he decides against it, as he wants peace among the three of them again. [*Hallows*, 318]

### **Common enemy**

Self-sacrifice being one of the characteristics of the accommodating style of approaching conflict, a character who uses this style to further the cause of good is Ron. Ron sacrifices himself at the chess game so that Harry and Hermione can move forward in their attempt to foil what they think is Snape's plan to bring Voldemort back to power [*Philosopher*, 205-6]. Seeing that they all have a common enemy (Voldemort) Ron allows himself to be sacrificed so that the enemy can be defeated.

## **COMPROMISING**

According to Thomas and Kilmann, "the objective [of compromising] is to find some expedient, mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies both parties. In some situations, compromising might mean splitting the difference between the two positions, exchanging concessions, or seeking a quick middle-ground solution."

Compromising does not occur often at pivotal moments in the series. Snape shows an inclination to compromise on three occasions, one with Dumbledore another with Sirius, and yet another with Voldemort. The reason the following instances have been categorised as 'Compromising' is because Snape is unhappy about the more powerful party's decision in both situations. He does not wish to kill Dumbledore, nor does he wish to die. However, in both situations, he only attempts to compromise with Dumbledore and Voldemort, although he is unsuccessful.

### **Loyalty**

As per the agreement between Snape and Dumbledore, Snape must be the one to kill Dumbledore. However, the reader is unaware of this arrangement until one reads the last book in the series. Misdirection by Rowling makes the reader believe that Snape has committed a heinous crime by killing a helpless old man [*Prince*, 556], but it is actually an act of mercy. Snape grudgingly agrees to Dumbledore's request because of his relationship with Dumbledore, which brings one back to the idea of loyalty and faith.

### **Common Enemy**

Another example of compromising is Snape working alongside Sirius in the Order of the Phoenix, purely because they are working against a common enemy, doing their best to prevent or delay Voldemort's rise to power. Again, Snape displays his ability to compromise by working with one of the people who used to actively trouble him while they were students at Hogwarts. Despite Snape having been traumatised by James and Sirius' treatment of him in school, he agrees to work with Sirius and Lupin (who was then a passive observer to James and Sirius' often cruel tricks) solely due to the Order's dedication to opposing Voldemort and his return to power.

### **Powerlessness**

Before Snape's death, Voldemort confronts Snape about the Elder Wand's allegiance. Snape knows that his life is in danger, but tries to convince Voldemort that he is on his side. Snape tries to bargain for his life because of his position of powerlessness in front of Voldemort. [*Hallows*, 526-7]

### **COLLABORATING**

According to Thomas and Kilmann, "Collaborating involves an attempt to work with others to find some solution that fully satisfies their concerns. It means digging into an issue to pinpoint the underlying needs and wants of the two individuals. Collaborating between two persons might take the form of exploring a disagreement to learn from each other's insights or trying to find a creative solution to an interpersonal problem."

The only instance where collaboration occurs as an approach to conflict management is an accidental occurrence. It is the beginning of the friendship among Harry, Ron and Hermione. When Harry and Ron accidentally lock Hermione in the girls' toilets, they go back to fighting the mountain troll they unwittingly locked in with her [*Philosopher*, 129-32]. She becomes their friend after that. Again, this style is brought about by having a common enemy, in this case, the mountain troll.

The reason for which the working together of Sirius and Snape has not been included here is because collaboration implies that the parties are looking for mutual benefit, which is not the situation between Sirius and Snape; they have a common enemy they wish to see destroyed. Neither is concerned with the other's benefit.

### **Characters**

So far, this paper has shown that young adult readers reading the *Harry Potter* series are shown a fair number of examples of behaviour that are relatively low in Assertiveness and high in Cooperation.

In addition to this, it is important to recognise how many of the characters portraying each style are perceived as positive and how many, negative. Characters who are more or less neutral or unremarkable have been classified according to how they are portrayed by the end of their major role in the series. For example, Gilderoy Lockhart, while amusing and at times irksome, has been classified as a negative character because of his cowardice and desire to wrongly take credit for discovering the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets.

Of the 15 characters who display Avoiding behaviour in the face of a conflict, 6 characters (Harry, Ron, Hermione, the Hufflepuffs, Prof. Trelawney, Hagrid and Prof. Slughorn) are positive while 7 (the Dursleys, Gilderoy Lockhart, Xenophilius Lovegood, Draco Malfoy, Peter Pettigrew and Umbridge) are negative. This is a fairly even distribution of positive and negative characters using the Avoiding style.

Of the 6 characters who are Accommodating, 3 (Dumbledore, Ron and Hermione) are positive characters while 2 (Draco Malfoy and Snape) are negative. This could be an implicit message by the author, saying that people who choose to use this style must possess certain likeable or admirable qualities that those who do not choose it, may not.

The fact that Snape and Sirius are the only characters who use the Compromising style at important parts of the series, reveals the similarity in their personalities. Snape and Sirius are both characters who are put in positions of powerlessness at various points of their lives. For the purpose of analysing the characters using the Compromising style, this paper must temporarily consider Snape to be a positive character, as it is only through his memories that we realise that he has compromised on his own wishes. Since his memories force readers to empathise with him, Snape cannot be considered a wholly negative character while his memories are being recalled for evidence. Sirius, while flawed too, is also a positive character. Here also, the author could be showing readers the strength required even to attempt a compromise.

Similarly with Collaboration, the only notable incident is the one which began the friendship among Harry, Ron and Hermione. In trying to correct their mistake of hurting Hermione's feelings, Harry and Ron work together with her to defeat the troll. This is possibly another subtle message about the potential long-term benefits of using this style to overcome differences.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

This paper has examined the less confrontational styles of conflict management adopted in the *Harry Potter* series, up to and including *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. The next paper will address the single most confrontational style of conflict management – Competing. That paper will also contain conclusions regarding the overall distribution of the different conflict management styles used throughout the series.

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