

The Determinants of Conflict Management Styles; A Systematic Review

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Abstract

Conflict is a natural part of organizational life, and how individuals manage it significantly affects relationships and performance. Although conflict management styles have been widely studied, existing research remains fragmented, with determinants explored in isolation across sectors. This systematic review, conducted per PRISMA 2020 guidelines, aimed to synthesize key behavioral, organizational, and contextual factors influencing conflict management styles. Relevant empirical studies were identified, screened using strict criteria, and analyzed through narrative synthesis and a literature review matrix.

Findings reveal that conflict management styles are shaped by a dynamic interplay of personal traits (e.g., personality, emotional intelligence), organizational elements (e.g., leadership, power dynamics), and cultural or professional contexts. Most studies used quantitative cross-sectional designs, with increasing application of structural equation modeling and systematic methods. Conflict management is a multidimensional process. Understanding its determinants is crucial for developing effective interventions, leadership training, and organizational policies. This review offers an integrated foundation for future research and practice.

Keywords:

Conflict management styles;
Determinants; Personality
traits; Emotional intelligence;
Leadership.

1. Introduction

Conflict is an inherent and unavoidable phenomenon in social and organizational life, arising from differences in goals, values, interests, and interpersonal perceptions. Within organizational and institutional settings, how individuals and leaders manage conflict plays a critical role in shaping relationships, decision quality, and overall effectiveness. Conflict management styles represent relatively stable patterns of behavior that individuals adopt when addressing conflict situations, commonly including integrating, compromising, obliging, avoiding, and dominating approaches. Understanding why individuals prefer certain conflict management styles over others has therefore become an important area of inquiry across management, education, healthcare, and public-sector research. Recent empirical studies demonstrate that these styles are not randomly selected but are influenced by a range of individual and contextual determinants, highlighting the need for a structured synthesis of the evidence base.

A growing body of research has emphasized the role of individual-level determinants in shaping conflict management styles. Personality traits, particularly those associated with the Big Five model, have been shown to exert a significant influence on individuals' preferences for specific conflict management approaches, with facet-level traits providing more nuanced explanatory power than broad personality dimensions (Espinoza et al., 2023). Emotional intelligence has also emerged as a critical determinant, with higher

emotional awareness and regulation capacities consistently associated with more constructive and collaborative conflict management styles (Odame & Pandey, 2025). Demographic characteristics, such as age and gender, have further been linked to variations in conflict management preferences, suggesting that developmental and socialization processes may shape how individuals respond to conflict situations (Jabeen et al., 2023).

Beyond individual characteristics, organizational and leadership-related factors play a pivotal role in influencing conflict management styles. Leadership behaviors, managerial power bases, and influence tactics have been found to shape how conflicts are addressed within teams and organizations, particularly in high-stakes environments such as healthcare settings (Abou Hashish et al., 2023). Organizational context, including institutional norms, professional roles, and sectoral characteristics, further conditions the adoption of specific conflict management styles, as demonstrated in educational and organizational studies examining leaders and managers in diverse institutional environments (Naseem, 2023). These findings suggest that conflict management styles are embedded within broader organizational systems rather than being purely individual choices.

In addition, cultural and contextual determinants have gained increasing attention in recent literature. Cross-cultural research indicates that cultural values such as individualism–collectivism and power distance significantly influence conflict style preferences, with individuals tending to select conflict management strategies that align with culturally endorsed norms and expectations (Rachwal-Mueller, 2023). Systematic and meta-analytic evidence further demonstrates that self-construal and face concerns operate as key cultural mechanisms shaping conflict management strategies across cultural contexts (Yamini et al., 2023). Despite these advances, existing studies remain fragmented across disciplines, contexts, and methodological approaches, making it difficult to draw integrative conclusions about the relative importance and interaction of different determinants.

Although several systematic reviews have examined conflict management within specific domains, such as nursing and organizational settings, the literature lacks a comprehensive synthesis that focuses explicitly on the determinants of conflict management styles across contexts (Nikitara et al., 2024). Many prior reviews emphasize outcomes or effectiveness rather than the antecedent factors that shape conflict management behavior. Consequently, there is a clear need for a systematic review that consolidates empirical evidence on individual, organizational, and cultural determinants of conflict management styles. Addressing this gap, the present study aims to systematically identify, classify, and synthesize the determinants of conflict management styles reported in the empirical literature, thereby providing a structured foundation for theory development, practical intervention, and future research.

2. Methodology

This study adopted a systematic review design to identify, evaluate, and synthesize empirical evidence on the determinants of conflict management styles across

organizational and institutional contexts. The review was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, which provide a transparent and replicable framework for reporting systematic reviews in social and behavioral sciences. A systematic review approach was considered appropriate because prior research on conflict management styles is widely dispersed across disciplines, sectors, and methodological traditions, necessitating a structured process for evidence integration. Similar PRISMA-guided approaches have been successfully applied in recent reviews examining conflict management and related constructs in organizational and professional settings (Awalluddin et al., 2023).

A comprehensive literature search was carried out across major academic databases to ensure broad coverage of relevant peer-reviewed studies. The search strategy employed predefined keywords and Boolean operators related to conflict management styles and their determinants, including individual, organizational, and contextual factors. The search was limited to English-language journal articles and doctoral dissertations to ensure methodological rigor and accessibility of full texts. The temporal scope focused on contemporary research to capture recent theoretical and empirical developments in the field. This structured search strategy is consistent with prior systematic and bibliometric reviews that mapped conflict management scholarship across multiple contexts (Caputo et al., 2023).

Eligibility criteria were established prior to screening to minimize selection bias. Studies were included if they explicitly examined conflict management styles and empirically investigated at least one determinant, such as personality traits, emotional intelligence, demographic characteristics, leadership factors, or organizational context. Both quantitative and qualitative empirical studies were eligible for inclusion. Conceptual papers, editorials, conference abstracts, and studies that focused exclusively on outcomes of conflict management without examining antecedent factors were excluded. These criteria align with determinant-focused systematic reviews in healthcare and organizational research that emphasize antecedents rather than consequences (Nikitara et al., 2024).

The study selection process involved a sequential screening of titles, abstracts, and full texts. After the removal of duplicate records, titles and abstracts were screened for relevance based on the predefined eligibility criteria. Full-text articles were then assessed to confirm their suitability for inclusion. The final set of studies included in the review formed the basis for descriptive and thematic synthesis. The identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages of this process are summarized visually in Figure 1, which presents the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram. The use of a flow diagram enhances transparency and allows readers to trace each stage of the review process, as recommended in systematic literature reviews of conflict management and emotional intelligence research (Mamata & Kavilal, 2025). Data extraction was conducted systematically using a structured template to ensure consistency across studies. Extracted information included author details, year of publication, study context, research design, sample characteristics, and the specific determinants of conflict management styles examined. The extracted data were synthesized narratively and organized into a literature review matrix to facilitate comparison across studies. This approach enabled the identification of recurring

determinant categories and supported the development of an integrated evidence base for subsequent analysis.

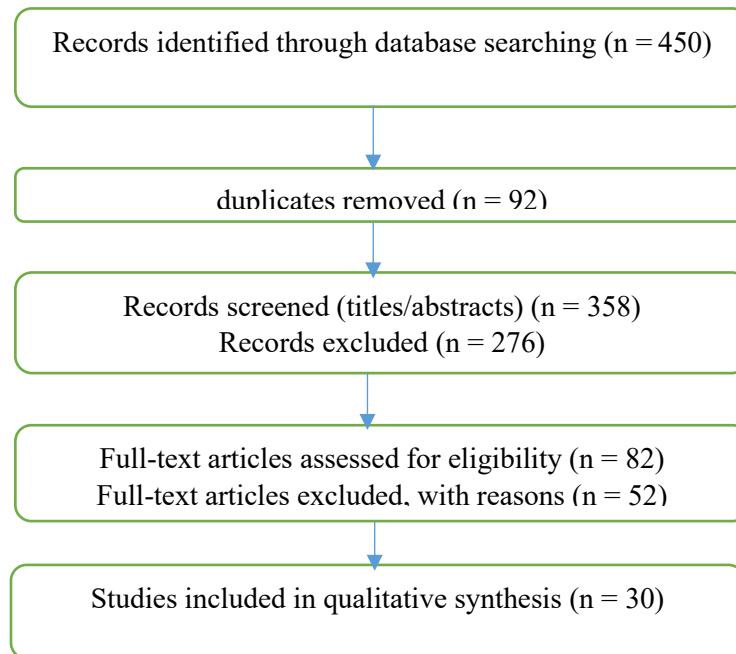


Fig. 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram

3. Results

3.1 Study Selection and Characteristics

The systematic review process resulted in the inclusion of 30 studies that explicitly examined determinants of conflict management styles and met the predefined eligibility criteria. As summarized in Table 1 (Literature Review Matrix), the included studies span multiple disciplines, including management, education, healthcare, and public-sector research, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of conflict management scholarship. The studies were published between 2022 and 2025, indicating a strong contemporary interest in understanding why individuals and leaders adopt particular conflict management styles. Most of the included studies employed quantitative research designs, using survey-based instruments to capture conflict management styles alongside individual or contextual predictors, as demonstrated in large-scale empirical investigations of personality and conflict management preferences. Espinoza et al. (2023) exemplify this trend through their use of a large sample and validated psychometric tools to examine personality-based determinants.

The characteristics of the included studies further reveal substantial variation in research settings and participant populations. Several studies focused on organizational leaders and

managers in higher education and corporate environments, highlighting the relevance of conflict management styles in leadership roles. This pattern is evident in research conducted among academic leaders and principals, where leadership responsibilities intensify the need for effective conflict handling approaches, as shown by Naseem (2023). Other studies concentrated on healthcare professionals, particularly nurses and nurse managers, emphasizing the importance of conflict management styles in high-stress and interpersonal-intensive settings. For example, Assi and Eshah (2023) examined nurse managers in hospital environments, underscoring the contextual specificity of conflict management behaviors.

In terms of determinant coverage, Table 1 demonstrates that individual-level variables were the most frequently examined factors across studies. Personality traits and emotional intelligence appeared prominently, while demographic variables such as age and gender were less consistently included. Organizational and leadership-related determinants, including managerial practices and institutional context, were also well represented, particularly in studies situated in formal organizational settings. Cultural and contextual determinants were addressed primarily in cross-cultural, meta-analytic, and systematic review studies, providing a broader comparative perspective on conflict management styles. Collectively, the characteristics summarized in Table 1 establish a comprehensive foundation for synthesizing determinants across individual, organizational, and contextual levels.

Table 1. Literature Review Matrix

No.	Author(s) & Year	Personality Traits	Emotional Intelligence	Demographics (Age/Gender)	Leadership / Management	Organizational Context	Conflict Management Styles
1	Espinoza et al. (2023)	✓					✓
2	Naseem (2023)				✓		✓
3	Odame & Pandey (2025)		✓				✓
4	Awalluddin et al. (2023)			✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Soomro et al. (2023a)	✓			✓		✓
6	Lawani et al. (2024)		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Assi & Eshah (2023)		✓		✓	✓	✓
8	Farhane-Medina et al. (2022)			✓			
9	Jabeen, Shahzadi & Amin (2023)			✓			✓
10	Alharbi & Alnoor (2024)		✓		✓	✓	✓
11	Abou Hashish et al. (2023)				✓	✓	✓

No.	Author(s) & Year	Personality Traits	Emotional Intelligence	Demographics (Age/Gender)	Leadership / Management	Organizational Context	Conflict Management Styles
12	Sayed & Sinha (2024)						✓
13	Umar & Umar (2024)				✓	✓	
14	O'Neill et al. (2024)						✓
15	Xiong et al. (2025)	✓			✓		✓
16	Shabani et al. (2022)				✓	✓	✓
17	Soomro et al. (2023b)	✓			✓		✓
18	Rismayadi (2024)				✓	✓	✓
19	Sujendran & Rajagopal (n.d.)					✓	
20	Soriano-Vázquez et al. (2023)	✓	✓		✓		✓
21	Rachwal-Mueller (2023)						✓
22	Somaraju (2023)						✓
23	Saleh, Karaeng & Akib (2024)				✓	✓	✓
24	Oyesanya (2024)		✓	✓	✓		✓
25	Thanh & Quang (2022)			✓	✓		
26	Chatzipanagiotou & Katsarou (2023)	✓			✓	✓	
27	Caputo, Kargina & Pellegrini (2023)				✓	✓	✓
28	Mamata & Kavilal (2025)		✓			✓	✓
29	Nikitara et al. (2024)			✓		✓	✓
30	Yamini, Fousiani & Wisse (2023)	✓					✓

3.2 Determinants of Conflict Management Styles

The results of the systematic review indicate that individual-level determinants constitute a central category influencing conflict management styles. Personality traits were among the most consistently examined predictors, with evidence suggesting that stable dispositional characteristics shape preferences for specific conflict management approaches. Research grounded in the Big Five framework demonstrated that traits such as agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability are associated with more constructive styles, including integrating and compromising, while other traits may predispose individuals toward avoiding or dominating strategies. Espinoza et al. (2023) provided robust empirical support for these relationships by showing that facet-level

personality traits offer greater explanatory power than broader personality factors in predicting conflict management styles.

Emotional intelligence emerged as another key individual determinant across multiple studies. Higher levels of emotional intelligence were consistently linked to constructive and collaborative conflict management styles, particularly in professional contexts requiring emotional regulation and interpersonal sensitivity. Empirical evidence from organizational and healthcare settings demonstrated that individuals with stronger emotional awareness and regulation skills are more likely to adopt integrating and compromising styles rather than avoidance or domination. Odame and Pandey (2025) highlighted the predictive role of emotional intelligence sub-competencies in shaping conflict management preferences among executive-level students, reinforcing the importance of emotional capacities as antecedents of conflict behavior. Demographic characteristics, including age and gender, were examined as determinants in a smaller but meaningful subset of studies. Findings suggest that demographic factors may influence conflict management styles indirectly through socialization processes and role expectations. For instance, age-related differences in conflict management preferences indicate that experience and maturity may contribute to more collaborative approaches to conflict.

Jabeen et al. (2023) provided empirical evidence that age and gender are significantly associated with variations in conflict resolution styles among adults, underscoring the relevance of demographic determinants within broader individual-level influences. At the organizational and leadership level, the review identified leadership behaviors, managerial power bases, and organizational context as influential determinants of conflict management styles. Leadership-related factors were particularly salient in healthcare and educational settings, where hierarchical structures and role responsibilities shape conflict interactions. Abou Hashish et al. (2023) demonstrated that nurse managers' perceived power bases and influence tactics significantly predict the conflict management styles observed by bedside nurses, highlighting the embeddedness of conflict behavior within leadership dynamics. Organizational context, including institutional norms and professional environments, further conditioned conflict management preferences, as shown in studies conducted within educational institutions and public organizations.

Cultural and contextual determinants constituted an additional layer influencing conflict management styles, especially in cross-cultural and comparative research. Cultural values such as individualism, collectivism, and power distance were found to systematically shape conflict style preferences, with individuals selecting strategies aligned with culturally endorsed norms. Rachwal-Mueller (2023) showed that cultural dimensions are strongly correlated with preferences for avoidance, compromising, or obliging styles, depending on cultural orientation. Meta-analytic evidence further confirmed that self-construal and face concerns serve as culturally embedded mechanisms influencing conflict management strategies across societies. Yamini et al. (2023) provided comprehensive support for these relationships through meta-analytic structural equation modeling, reinforcing the role of culture as a key determinant.

3.3 Methodological Trends in Conflict Management Determinant Research

Analysis of the included studies reveals several notable methodological trends in conflict management determinant research. Quantitative approaches dominated the literature, with cross-sectional survey designs being the most frequently employed methodology. Researchers commonly used validated instruments, such as the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory, alongside standardized measures of personality traits and emotional intelligence. This trend is evident in large-sample studies examining dispositional determinants, which prioritized statistical rigor and generalizability. Espinoza et al. (2023) exemplify this methodological orientation through their extensive use of psychometric modeling and large participant samples. Structural equation modeling and regression-based techniques were widely used to test relationships between determinants and conflict management styles. These methods enabled researchers to examine direct and indirect effects, as well as mediating mechanisms linking individual or organizational factors to conflict management preferences. Studies focusing on emotional intelligence frequently employed hierarchical regression or structural equation modeling to capture the complexity of these relationships. Odame and Pandey (2025) illustrated this trend by applying hierarchical multiple regression analysis to assess the contribution of emotional intelligence sub-competencies to conflict management styles.

Despite the strengths of quantitative dominance, the review identified a relative scarcity of qualitative and longitudinal research designs. Qualitative studies, though limited in number, provided contextual insights into how conflict management styles are enacted within teams and organizations. Rismayadi (2024) offered a qualitative perspective by examining conflict management strategies within human resource work teams, highlighting interpersonal processes that are often underrepresented in survey-based research. The limited use of longitudinal designs also suggests that most studies capture conflict management preferences at a single point in time, restricting the ability to assess developmental or causal dynamics. Finally, systematic reviews, bibliometric analyses, and meta-analyses contributed to consolidating knowledge and identifying research gaps within the field. These studies employed rigorous review protocols and advanced analytical techniques to synthesize existing evidence and propose future research agendas. Nikitara et al. (2024) demonstrated the value of systematic synthesis by identifying influencing factors of conflict management styles in nursing contexts, while highlighting methodological heterogeneity across primary studies. Overall, the methodological trends observed in this review indicate a mature but still evolving field, with opportunities for greater methodological diversity and longitudinal inquiry in future conflict management research.

4. Discussion

4.1 Interplay of Behavioral, Organizational, and Contextual Determinants

The findings of this systematic review demonstrate that conflict management styles are shaped by a dynamic interplay of behavioral, organizational, and contextual determinants, rather than by isolated factors. At the behavioral level, individual characteristics such as personality traits and emotional intelligence consistently influence how individuals perceive and respond to conflict situations. Evidence indicates that dispositional tendencies guide the selection of conflict management styles by predisposing individuals toward constructive or avoidant approaches depending on their emotional regulation capacities and interpersonal orientations. Espinoza et al. (2023) showed that facet-level personality traits provide nuanced explanations for variations in conflict management styles, suggesting that behavioral determinants operate at a fine-grained psychological level. However, behavioral predispositions do not function independently of organizational environments. Organizational and leadership-related determinants interact with individual characteristics to either reinforce or constrain preferred conflict management styles. Leadership practices, power structures, and managerial influence tactics shape the context within which conflict occurs, thereby influencing whether individual tendencies are expressed or suppressed.

In healthcare settings, leadership power bases have been shown to significantly predict conflict management styles adopted within teams, highlighting how organizational authority structures mediate behavioral expressions of conflict handling. Abou Hashish et al. (2023) provide strong empirical support for the argument that conflict management styles emerge from the interaction between individual perceptions and organizational leadership dynamics. Contextual and cultural determinants further add complexity to this interaction by embedding conflict management behavior within broader social and cultural norms. Cultural values such as individualism, collectivism, and power distance influence the social acceptability of specific conflict management styles, thereby shaping individual preferences and organizational practices. Individuals tend to adopt conflict management strategies that align with culturally endorsed expectations, even when these preferences diverge from their personal dispositions. Rachwal-Mueller (2023) demonstrated that cultural dimensions are systematically associated with conflict style preferences, underscoring the contextual embeddedness of conflict behavior. Meta-analytic evidence further supports this interactional view by showing that self-construal and face concerns mediate the relationship between individual orientation and conflict management strategies across cultures. Yamini et al. (2023) reinforce the argument that conflict management styles are best understood through a multi-level lens that integrates behavioral, organizational, and cultural determinants.

4.2 Policy, Practical, and Theoretical Implications

The findings of this review have important implications for policy and practice, particularly in organizational and institutional settings where conflict is frequent and consequential. From a policy perspective, the evidence suggests that conflict management training initiatives should move beyond generic skill development and instead be tailored to

individual and organizational characteristics. Policies aimed at improving workplace conflict management may benefit from incorporating emotional intelligence development as a core component, given its consistent association with constructive conflict management styles. Odame and Pandey (2025) highlight the value of emotional intelligence competencies in shaping effective conflict responses, indicating that policy frameworks supporting emotional skill development can enhance organizational functioning. Practically, organizational leaders and managers can use the insights from this review to design targeted interventions that align leadership practices with desired conflict management outcomes. Leadership development programs that emphasize appropriate use of managerial power, influence tactics, and relational leadership behaviors may foster more collaborative conflict management environments.

Evidence from healthcare and educational contexts suggests that leadership behavior significantly shapes conflict management norms within teams. Abou Hashish et al. (2023) demonstrate that leadership power bases are directly linked to conflict management styles, reinforcing the need for leadership-focused interventions. From a theoretical perspective, the findings contribute to conflict management theory by reinforcing the value of integrative and multi-level frameworks. Rather than treating conflict management styles as static individual preferences, the reviewed evidence supports conceptual models that position these styles as outcomes of interacting personal, organizational, and contextual influences. Personality-based explanations of conflict management are strengthened by incorporating emotional intelligence and contextual moderators, as demonstrated in recent empirical research. Espinoza et al. (2023) provide a theoretical advancement by illustrating how personality facets interact with situational demands to differentiate conflict management styles, offering a more refined understanding of behavioral determinants.

4.3 Comparison with Existing Reviews, Limitations, and Future Research Directions

When compared with existing reviews, the present study extends the literature by offering a determinant-focused synthesis across multiple contexts, rather than limiting analysis to specific professions or outcomes. Prior systematic reviews have often concentrated on particular sectors, such as nursing or organizational settings, or emphasized the prevalence and effectiveness of conflict management styles. Nikitara et al. (2024) focused primarily on conflict management styles among nurses and highlighted influencing factors within clinical environments, whereas the current review integrates evidence across education, healthcare, management, and cross-cultural research to provide a broader determinant framework. Despite its contributions, this review has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the reliance on English-language publications may have excluded relevant studies published in other languages, potentially limiting cultural representativeness. Second, the predominance of cross-sectional quantitative designs within the included studies restricts the ability to draw causal inferences about determinant-style relationships.

Third, variability in measurement instruments and research designs introduces methodological heterogeneity that may affect the comparability of findings across studies. Mamata and Kavilal (2025) similarly noted methodological fragmentation in emotional intelligence and conflict management research, underscoring this as a persistent limitation in the field. Future research should address these limitations by employing longitudinal and mixed-methods designs to capture the dynamic evolution of conflict management styles over time. There is also a need for greater exploration of interaction effects among behavioral, organizational, and cultural determinants to better understand how these factors jointly shape conflict management behavior. Cross-cultural comparative studies that move beyond broad cultural dimensions and examine context-specific mechanisms would further advance theoretical development. Yamini et al. (2023) highlight the value of advanced meta-analytic approaches in resolving inconsistent findings, suggesting that future research may benefit from similar methodological rigor. Collectively, these directions can support the development of more comprehensive and context-sensitive models of conflict management styles.

5. Conclusion

This systematic review set out to synthesize the existing empirical evidence on the determinants of conflict management styles and to provide an integrated understanding of the factors that shape how individuals and leaders manage conflict across diverse contexts. The findings demonstrate that conflict management styles are not the result of isolated choices but emerge from the interaction of multiple determinants operating at the individual, organizational, and contextual levels. Behavioral factors such as personality traits and emotional competencies influence individuals' predispositions toward particular conflict management approaches, while organizational structures, leadership practices, and professional environments condition how these predispositions are expressed in practice. In parallel, cultural and contextual influences embed conflict management behavior within broader social norms and expectations, reinforcing the need for a multi-level perspective. The review highlights that individual characteristics alone are insufficient to explain variations in conflict management styles without considering the organizational and contextual settings in which conflict occurs. Leadership roles, institutional norms, and sector-specific demands significantly shape conflict management preferences, particularly in environments characterized by high interpersonal interaction and accountability.

Moreover, contextual and cultural determinants contribute to systematic differences in conflict management styles across societies and professional domains, underscoring the importance of aligning conflict management strategies with both organizational goals and cultural expectations. Overall, this review contributes to the literature by consolidating fragmented evidence into a coherent framework that emphasizes the interconnected nature of conflict management determinants. By shifting the focus from outcomes to antecedent factors, the study provides a foundation for developing more targeted interventions, leadership development programs, and organizational policies aimed at improving conflict management practices. Future efforts to enhance conflict management effectiveness should therefore adopt an integrative approach that accounts for behavioral tendencies,

organizational dynamics, and contextual realities, ensuring that conflict management strategies are both effective and contextually appropriate.

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