



Module 10.3 Conflict Management

Thomas Killman Conflict Mode Inventory Reading #2: (Read before Transition Meeting #1)

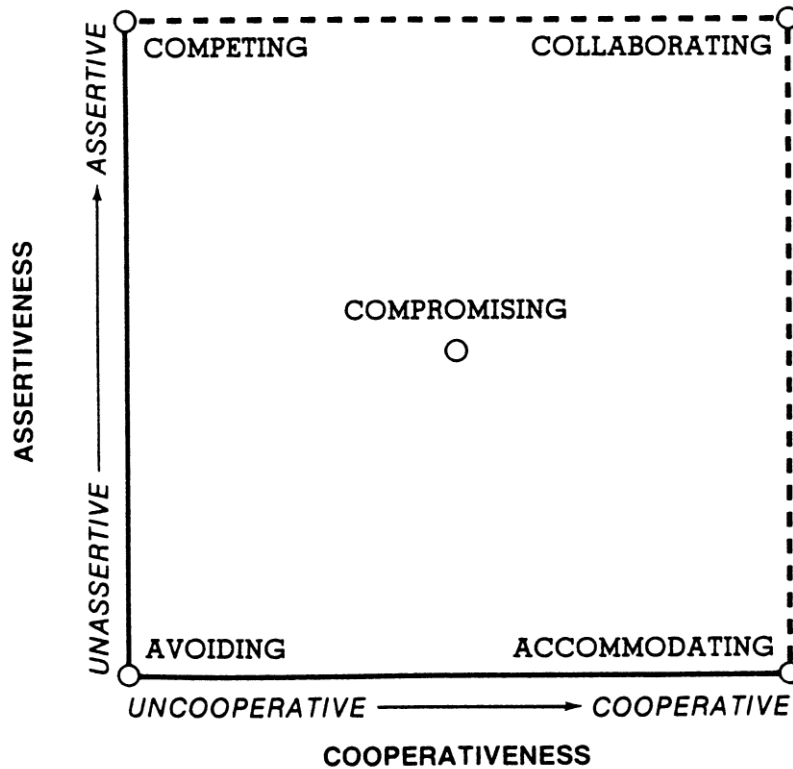
The Thomas Killman Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) is not a personality assessment and should not be referred to as your thinking or learning style. It is an indicator of how you manage conflicts and is used to help you individually clarify yours and others negotiation skills. Learning to negotiate successfully includes understanding the concept of interest-based/principle-centered vs. positional bargaining, the actual bargaining structure, and strategies with an emphasis on win-win bargaining, as well as knowing when to avoid a negotiation. The TKI is employed to support your understanding and self-assessment of the different approaches to conflict resolution resulting from the research-based and highly popular "Thomas - Kilmann Conflict Mode Inventory" and theory. Once an understanding of the TKI is mastered your understanding of when it is appropriate to use each conflict style and how to flex your preferred style to respond appropriately for consensus building will be enhanced.

INTERPRETING THE THOMAS-KILMANN CONFLICT MODE INSTRUMENT

(reprinted with permission Thomas & Killman; CPP) ***Scores are graphed in relation to the scores of the original norm group, composed of managers at middle and upper levels of business and government organizations.**

The Five Conflict Handling Modes

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument is designed to assess an individual's behavior in conflict situations. "Conflict Situations" are situations in which the concerns of two people appear to be incompatible. In such situations, we can describe a person's behavior along two basic dimensions: (1) assertiveness, the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy his/her own concerns, and (2) cooperativeness, the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy the other person's concerns. These two basic dimensions of behavior can be used to define five specific methods of dealing with conflicts. These five "conflict-handling modes" are shown below:



*This two dimensional model of conflict handling behavior is adapted from "Conflict and Conflict Management" by Kenneth Thomas in *The Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, edited by Marvin Dunnette (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1976). Another valuable contribution in this field is the work by Robert Blake and Jane Mouton in *The Managerial Grid* (Houston: Gulf Publishing, 1964).

Five Conflict Management Styles Summary (Thomas, K.W., & Kilmann, R. H.)

- 1. Accommodating** is cooperating to a high-degree, although it can be at your expense, actually working against your own goals, objectives, and desired outcomes. This effective use of this approach is when you understand that the other party is an expert or has a better solution. You can also implement this style when you want to preserve future relations with the other party, knowing that utilizing this style will be at your expense.
- 2. Avoiding** is when you simply evade the issue by hindering the other party's ability to reach their goals or assertively pursuing your own. This style is effectively used when the issue is trivial, when you have no chance of winning, or when pursuing the issue would be very costly. Another effective use of this style is when the atmosphere is emotionally charged and you need to create some space, but sometimes avoiding because the situation is emotionally charged can escalate rather than diffuse the situation. Sometimes issues will resolve themselves, but "hope is not a strategy", and, in general, avoiding is not a good long-term strategy.
- 3. Collaborating** is when you partner or pair up with the other party to achieve both of your goals. Collaborating allows you to break free of the "win-lose" paradigm and seek the "win-win." This can be effective for complex scenarios where you need to find a novel solution. This can also mean re-framing the challenge to create a bigger space and room for everybody's ideas. The downside is that it requires a high-degree of trust and reaching a consensus can require a more time and effort to get everybody on board and to synthesize all the ideas.
- 4. Competing** is the "win-lose" approach. You act in a very assertive way to achieve your goals, without seeking to cooperate with the other party, and it may be at the expense of the other party. This approach may be appropriate for emergencies when time is of the essence, or when you need quick, decisive action, and people are aware of and support the approach.
- 5. Compromising** is the "lose-lose" scenario where neither party everything they want. This requires a moderate level of assertiveness and cooperation. It may be appropriate for scenarios where you need a temporary solution, or where both sides have equally important goals. The trap is to fall into compromising as an easy way out, when collaborating would produce a better solution.

By acknowledging the styles you underuse can help improve your self-awareness. Once you are aware of your own patterns, you can pay attention to whether they are working for you and you can **explore alternatives**. By using a scenario-based approach, you can choose more effective conflict management styles and test their effectiveness for you and your situations.

Interpreting Your Scores

Usually, after getting back the results of any test, people first want to know: "What are the right answers?" In the case of conflict-handling behavior, there are no universal right answers. All five modes are useful in some situations: each represents a set of useful social skills. Our conventional wisdom recognizes, for example, that often "two heads are better than one" (Collaborating). But it also says, "Kill your enemies with kindness" (Accommodating), "Split the difference" (Compromising), "Leave well enough alone" (Avoiding), "Might makes right" (Competing). The effectiveness of a given conflict-handling mode depends upon the requirements of the specific conflict situation and the skill with which the mode is used.

Each of us is capable of using all five conflict-handling modes: none of us can be characterized as having a single, rigid style of dealing with conflict. However, any given individual uses some modes better than others and therefore, tends to rely upon those modes more heavily than others, whether because of temperament or practice.

The conflict behaviors which individuals use are therefore the result of both their personal predispositions and the requirements of the situations in which they find themselves. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument is designed to assess this mix of conflict-handling modes.

To help you judge how appropriate your utilization of the five modes is for your situation, we have listed a number of uses for each mode – based upon lists generated by company presidents. Your score, high or low, indicates its usefulness in your situation. However, there is the possibility that your social skills lead you to rely upon some conflict behaviors more or less than necessary. To help you determine this, we have also listed some diagnostic questions concerning warning signals for the overuse or underuse of each mode.

Examples of How to Use the TKI Information:

Example 1

“When there was a big decision in the project to be made, for example in terms of what data was to be analyzed, we did not compromise and instead referenced the TKI Survey Results. One point specifically suggested to recognize that there are “win-lose issues where compromise would be unacceptable or disastrous when you need to maintain your position.... and learn to make demands or to respect counteroffers when you are clearly in the right.” We used this advice to have a discussion using the Competitive style to reach a decision on what data to analyze and changed our Ground Rules to reflect that.”

Example 2

TKI: Overall the team was identified as an avoiding team by the TKI survey. An approach to a few conflicts reinforced the label at first, but more recently a variety of the conflict management styles have been employed. One of the first team conflicts was designating responsibilities not explicitly assigned to the team leader, recorder, and oral presenter in the guidelines. At first the conflict was avoided. Remarks were made such as “we will allocate the duties when the time comes”. While for certain task this might be the case larger responsibilities proved to not to fit well under the avoiding conflict style. When the due date arrived for these larger responsibilities it was awkward in team meetings. No one wanted to take the task at hand. At this point I decided to assign all the larger tasks amongst the team members along with their support. I would characterize this solution as the collaborating style. I suggested the assignment of individual tasks to the team members and they agreed as long as they had some input in their assignments. The team negotiated the assigned tasks I thought that they should individually take on. Another conflict arose when we were deciding on the technical course of the project. Many ideas were being proposed by team members with regards to the direction of the project. The discussion continued for several meetings with no apparent conclusion. During the discussions the team was using the collaborating conflict style, however in this case the style was overused. To put an end the discussion we brought up the issue to the TA and the professor in a faculty meeting. They both gave practical advice that provided enough info to make a decision on the right course for the project. Overall the team has not used the competing and compromising conflict styles. The avoiding conflict strategy is still overused, however, as in the example mentioned above the collaborating method is being used more regularly.”

Using the MBTI

Example of how to analyze the MBTI Information

MBTI: The project leader received the ESTJ label on the test. In summary I am practical, realistic and matter of fact. B received ENTJ indicating that he is frank, decisive, and assumes leadership readily and J received INTJ indicating that she has a strong desire to implement her goals and has a strong sense of commitment to these goals.

As project leader with the ESTJ style I view conflict as something that needs to be resolved quickly so that progress can continue. When I disagree with the idea of a teammate I assert my position with confidence. If an idea is proposed that is far fetched I am quick to criticize the idea directly with little concern for the individual’s feelings. I must keep in mind that others as well as myself feel passionately about their views and it is counterproductive to insult a colleague. Yet another potential weakness of my conflict style is when a team member violates the team rules. I am likely to become frustrated with the team member and approach them with an angry attitude. I must keep in mind to first think through the situation and take on the appropriate leadership style after consideration of the circumstances. I must also watch out for not offering

positive feedback to my team when they accomplish a task. I am more likely to look at the failures of the group than the successes. From my teammates I need a willingness to drop conflicts that have previously been discussed and resolved. I agree with this synopsis. I too often dwell on the fact that people may be upset with me despite the conflict being addressed and handled.

B uses the ENTJ style indicating that he will take on the project leader position with a strong interest. He will view conflict in a similar manner to myself. Any time a conflict arises he will make an effort to put an end to it as quickly as possible. He views the world as full of incomplete and inefficient procedures that are waiting to be optimized and corrected. He will view conflict as an inefficient part of the project. In times of stress he should guard against being close-minded, overly aggressive, and focusing on the project solution as opposed to the problem itself. Fellow team members should show respect for the rules and the organizational structure of meetings and lab time. I look forward to working with him as he takes on the new responsibility as team leader. His passion for the project approach to conflict will serve him well in leading the team.

J's categorization identifies her as viewing conflict as an issue that needs to be resolved so that she can get on with her life. She has a strong drive to accomplish long-term goals, yet views life as a continuous journey for fulfillment. She enjoys working with lab equipment and setting up experimental apparatuses. She is very comfortable working independently. Conflict may arise when she views another team member as incompetent or when she has to continually justify her actions. She should be careful to not to jump to conclusions rapidly and consider others take on her decisions as project leader. As a team we should give her time to process group decisions and not be overly forceful with our ideas.

Overall I found that we are a team with similar MBTI styles. There are many positives to this result: we have similar values, increased openness, and supporting each other's ideas. However we should keep in mind the weaknesses of having a similar MBTI style. The main weakness that I have already observed is the development of blind spots. Because we all are similar we are likely to all miss the same aspect of the project. Each member's role as team leader will provide at most a small change in team dynamics. I am confident that we will continue to function productively as a team.