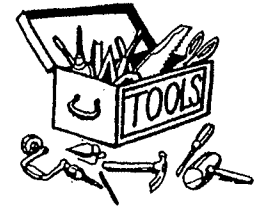


# Thomas-Kilmann Model of Conflict Management Styles



PAGE 1 OF 3

In any conflict situation, you may respond in one of several ways: by competing, accommodating, avoiding, collaborating, or compromising. Which of these conflict management styles you choose should depend on the nature of the situation, rather than your particular personality traits. Read the descriptions below to learn more about the five styles and their applications.

**Competing** is assertive and uncooperative—an individual pursues their own concerns at the other person's expense. This is a power-oriented mode, in which one uses whatever power seems appropriate to win one's own position—one's ability to argue, one's rank, economic sanctions. Competing might mean "standing up for your rights," defending a position which you believe is correct, or simply trying to win.

## Uses:

1. When quick, decisive action is vital—e.g., emergencies.
2. On important issues where unpopular courses of action need implementing—e.g., cost cutting, enforcing unpopular rules, discipline.
3. On issues vital to the organization's welfare when you know you're right.

4. To protect yourself against people who take advantage of noncompetitive behavior.

**Accommodating** is unassertive and cooperative—the opposite of competing. When accommodating, an individual neglects their own concerns to satisfy the concerns of the other person; there is an element of self-sacrifice in this style. Accommodating might take the form of selfless generosity or charity, obeying another person's order when one would prefer not to, or yielding to another's point of view.

## Uses:

1. When you realize that you are wrong—to allow a better position to be heard, to learn from others, and to show that you are reasonable.
2. When the issue is much more important to the other person than to yourself—to satisfy the needs of others, and as a goodwill gesture to help maintain a cooperative relationship.
3. To build up social credits for later issues which are important to you.
4. When continued competition would only damage your cause—when you are outmatched and losing.

# Thomas-Kilmann Model of Conflict Management Styles

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CONTINUED 2 OF 3

5. When preserving harmony and avoiding disruption are especially important.
6. To aid in the managerial development of subordinates by allowing them to experiment and learn from their own mistakes.
5. When gathering more information outweighs the advantages of an immediate decision.
6. When others can resolve the conflict more effectively.
7. When the issue seems tangential or symptomatic of another more basic issue.

**Avoiding** is unassertive and uncooperative—the individual does not immediately pursue their own concerns or those of the other person. They do not address 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.

## Uses:

1. When an issue is trivial, of only passing importance, or when other more important issues are pressing.
2. When you perceive no chance of satisfying your concerns—e.g., when you have low power or you are frustrated by something which would be very difficult to change (national policies, someone's personality, etc.)
3. When the potential damage of confronting a conflict outweighs the benefits of its resolution.
4. To let people cool down to reduce tensions to a productive level and to regain perspective and composure.

**Collaborating** is both assertive and cooperative—the opposite of avoiding. Collaborating involves an attempt to work with the other person to find some solution which fully satisfies the concerns of both persons. It means digging into an issue to identify the underlying concerns of the two individuals and to find an alternative which meets both sets of concerns. Collaborating between two persons might take the form of exploring a disagreement to learn from each other's insights, concluding to resolve some condition which would otherwise have them competing for resources, or confronting and trying to find a creative solution to an interpersonal problem.

## Uses:

1. To find an integrative solution when both sets of concerns are too important to be compromised.
2. When your objective is to learn—e.g., testing your own assumptions, understanding the views of others.

## Thomas-Kilmann Model of Conflict Management Styles

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CONTINUED 3 OF 3

3. To merge insights from people with different perspectives on a problem.
4. To gain commitment by incorporating other's concerns into a consensual decision.
5. To work through hard feelings which have been interfering with an interpersonal relationship.

**Compromising** is intermediate in both assertiveness and cooperativeness. The objective is to find some expedient, mutually acceptable solution which partially satisfies both parties. It falls on a middle ground between competing and accommodating. Compromising gives up more than competing but less than accommodating. Likewise, it addresses an issue more directly than avoiding, but doesn't explore it in as much depth as collaborating. Compromising might mean splitting the difference, exchanging concessions, or seeking a quick middle-ground position.

### Uses:

1. When goals are moderately important, but not worth the effort or potential disruption of more assertive modes.
2. When two opponents with equal power are strongly committed to mutually exclusive goals.
3. To achieve temporary settlements to complex issues.
4. To arrive at expedient solutions under time pressure.
5. As a backup when collaboration or competition don't succeed.

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**Assertive**—the extent to which the member attempts to satisfy his or her own concerns; and

**Cooperative**—the extent to which the member attempts to satisfy the other person's concerns.

These two basic descriptions can then be used to understand five options for handling conflict:

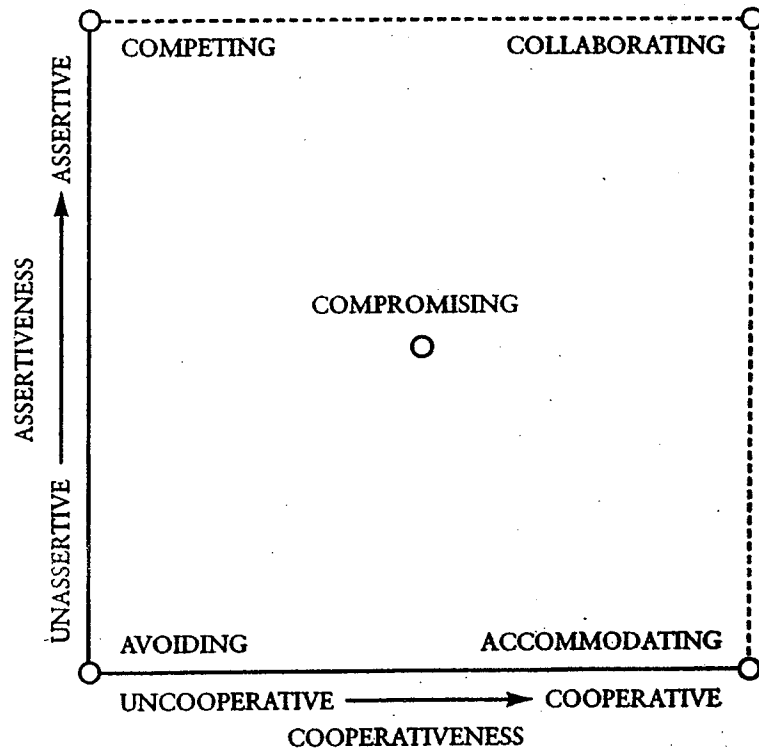
**COMPETING**—a power-orientated mode. You want to get your way at the other person's expense.

**ACCOMMODATING**—the opposite of competing. You neglect your own concerns in order to satisfy those of the other person. There is an element of self-sacrifice in this mode.

**AVOIDING**—choosing not to address the conflict by postponing, side-stepping, etc. You don't pursue your goals or those of the other person.

**COLLABORATING**—the opposite of avoiding. By collaborating you attempt to involve the other person to find a solution to the issue at hand. It means digging into the issues to find an appealing alternative.

**COMPROMISING**—you try to find some expedient, mutually acceptable solution that is at least somewhat satisfactory to both of you.



**Conflict Management Styles**

Two men were walking along a crowded sidewalk in a downtown business area.

Suddenly, one exclaimed, "Listen to the lovely sound of that cricket!" But the other could not hear. He asked his companion how he could detect the sound of a cricket amidst the din of people and traffic.

The first man, who was a zoologist, had trained himself to listen to the voices of nature, but he did not explain. He simply took a coin out of his pocket and dropped it on the sidewalk whereupon a dozen people began to look about them. "We hear," he said, "what we listen for."

Shagwan Shreeh  
Rajneesh  
"The Discipline of  
Transcendence"

No one of these conflict management options is "the best." The basic point of the model is to make you aware of the choices and of people's tendency to use one mode more often than another. All five options are useful depending on the situation. The effectiveness of a given option depends on the requirements of the specific situation and the conflict management skills of the people involved. If you find yourself confronted with serious conflict situations, you may want to study some of the books on conflict management recommended in the bibliography in Appendix A. You may also want to consider enrolling in a focused workshop that provides guided practice in negotiation and mediation skills.

In your tool kit you'll find more information and examples of the Thomas-Kilmann model.

#### REFERENCES

Pages 21 and 22 adapted from: Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, by Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann. XICOM, 1974.

## CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SIX STEP MODEL FOR REACHING AGREEMENTS

The thought of managing conflict can sometimes be very stressful. It sometimes help for you to focus on a model to assist you to work through a conflict. The following six step model can assist you to work through a conflict.

### 1. STATE THE PROBLEM

Frequently each participant is focusing on a totally different problem. Write down the problem so that each of you are focusing on the same issue.

### 2. RECOGNIZE YOUR COMMONALITIES

There are many things which you may have in common even though you are currently in conflict. You may believe in the same mission, have an on-going relationship, both want to provide a quality product or service, or possess similar interests or concerns. You may want to state these similarities to remind each other that you are not negotiating with Attila the Hun.

### 3. STATE YOUR NEED (OR THE ACTUAL PROBLEM), NOT YOUR POSITION

A major mistake when attempting to manage conflict is to come to the session with a solution. Participants need to understand what is important to each other or what they need, it will clarify the conflict and lead to possible solutions.

### 4. ASK THE OTHER WHAT HE/SHE NEEDS, OR WHAT YOU CAN GIVE HIM/HER IN RETURN.

Once again, it is important to identify the needs or wants of the other party. You may or may not be in conflict once the needs are identified.

### 5. ENTER INTO PROBLEM-SOLVING WITH THE OTHER, GENERATING A VARIETY OF WAYS TO MEET THE NEEDS OR SOLVE THE PROBLEM(S).

Generate a variety of ways to solve the problem. Which one best meets the needs or concerns of the parties involved?

### 6. FOLLOW THROUGH IS CRITICAL - WHO IS GOING TO DO WHAT? HOW?

Wow, the conflict has been resolved. Everyone walks away, but who is going to do what? It is important to discuss follow through. What is going to happen next? Who is responsible for this action? What is to be done? How will the task be completed? How will we know if we have accomplished what we set out to do?