

Five Conflict Handling Modes

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



Competing

Competing is assertive and uncooperative, a power-oriented mode. When competing, an individual pursues his or her own concerns at the other person's expense, using whatever power seems appropriate to win his or her position. Competing might mean standing up for your rights, defending a position you believe is correct, or simply trying to win.

Collaborating

Collaborating is both assertive and cooperative. When collaborating, both individuals attempt to work together to find a solution that fully satisfies the concerns of both. It involves working hard to identify the underlying concerns of the two individuals, and to find an alternative that meets both sets of concerns. Collaborating between two persons might take the form of exploring a disagreement to learn from each other's insights, resolving some condition that would otherwise have them competing for resources, or confronting and trying to find a creative solution to an interpersonal problem.

Compromising

Compromising is intermediate in both assertiveness and cooperativeness. When compromising, the objective is to find an expedient, mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies both parties. Compromising falls on a middle ground between competing and accommodating, giving 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.

Avoiding

Avoiding is unassertive and uncooperative. When avoiding, an individual does not immediately pursue his or her own concerns or those of the other person. He or she does 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.

Accommodating

Accommodating is unassertive and cooperative—the opposite of competing. When accommodating, an individual neglects his or her 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.

Conflict Style - When to use which one

Competing:

When appropriate to use:	When inappropriate to use:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An emergency looms• You are not sure you are right and being right is more important than preserving relationships• The issue is trivial, and others do not really care what happens	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When Collaboration or cooperation have not yet been attempted• Cooperation from others is important• Used routinely for most issues• Self-respect of others is diminished needlessly

Collaborating:

When appropriate to use:	When inappropriate to use:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The issues and relationships are both significant• Cooperation is important• A creative end is important• Reasonable hope exists to meet all concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Time is short• The issue is unimportant• You are overloaded with "processing"• The goals of the other person are certainly wrong

Compromising:

When appropriate to use:	When inappropriate to use:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cooperation is important but time or resources are limited• Finding some solution, even less than the best, is better than a complete stalemate• Efforts to collaborate will be misunderstood as forcing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finding the most creative solution possible is essential• You can't live with the consequences

Avoiding:

When appropriate to use:	When inappropriate to use:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The issue is trivial• The relationship is insignificant• Time is short and a decision not necessary• You have little power but still wish to block the other person	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You care about both the relationship and the issues involved• Used habitually for most issues• Negative feelings may linger• Others would benefit from hearing information

Accommodating:

When appropriate to use:	When inappropriate to use:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You really don't care about the issue• You are powerless and have no wish to block the other	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You are likely to harbour resentment• Used habitually in order to gain acceptance (outcome: depression and lack of self-respect)• Others wish to collaborate and will feel like enforcers if you accommodate