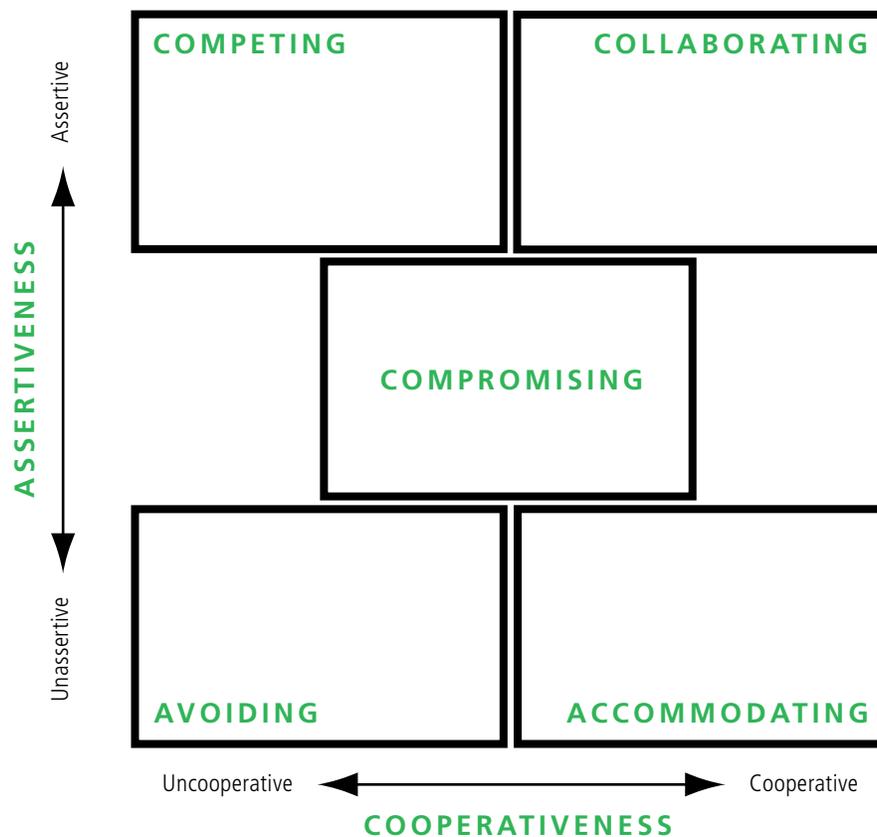


THE FIVE CONFLICT-HANDLING MODES

The *Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI)* assesses an individual's behavior in conflict situations—that is, situations in which the concerns of two people appear to be incompatible. In conflict situations, we can describe a person's behavior along two basic dimensions*: **(1) assertiveness**, the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy his or her own concerns, and **(2) cooperativeness**, the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy the other person's concerns. These two dimensions of behavior can be used to define five methods of dealing with conflict. 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, 1994).

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, an individual attempts to work with the other person to find a solution that fully satisfies the concerns of both. It involves digging into an issue 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 side-stepping 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.

YOUR TKI PROFILE

Your profile of TKI scores indicates the repertoire of conflict-handling modes you use in the kinds of conflicts you face. Your score profile can be graphed on page 10 of this booklet.

In the graph on page 10, the five conflict-handling modes are represented by the five columns labeled “Competing,” “Collaborating,” and so on. In the column under each mode is the range of possible scores on that mode—from 0 (for very low use) to 12 (for very high use). Circle your score on each of the five modes.

Each possible score is graphed in relation to the scores of a representative sample of 8,000 employed adults who have already taken the TKI. The horizontal lines represent percentiles—that is, the percentage of people in the sample who scored the same as or lower than you on each mode. If your score falls above the “80%” line on competing, for example, that would mean that you scored higher in competing than 80 percent of the people who have taken the TKI—that you are in the top 20 percent on competition.

The heavy lines at the 25th and 75th percentiles separate the middle 50 percent of the scores on each mode from the top 25 percent and the bottom 25 percent. Scores that fall in the top 25 percent are considered high. Similarly, scores that fall in the bottom 25 percent are considered low. Scores that fall in the middle 50 percent are considered medium. Look at your scores to see where they fall within this range.

INTERPRETING YOUR SCORES

When you look at your results on the TKI, you probably want to know, “What are the correct answers?” In the case of conflict-handling behavior, there are no right or wrong 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), and “Might makes right” (competing). The effectiveness of a given conflict-handling mode depends on the requirements of the specific situation and the skill with which you use that mode.

You are capable of using all five conflict-handling modes; you cannot be characterized as having a single, rigid style of dealing with conflict. However, most people use some modes more readily than others, develop more skills in those modes, and therefore tend to rely on them more heavily. Many have a clear favorite. The conflict behaviors you use are the result of both your personal predispositions and the requirements of the situations in which you find yourself.

To help you judge how appropriate your use of the five modes is for your situation, we have listed a number of uses for each mode. The uses are based on lists generated by company presidents. In addition, because your predispositions may lead you to rely on some conflict behaviors more or less than necessary, we have also listed some diagnostic questions concerning warning signs for the overuse or underuse of each mode.