



Using the TKI[®] assessment with the CPI 260[®] instrument



Introduction

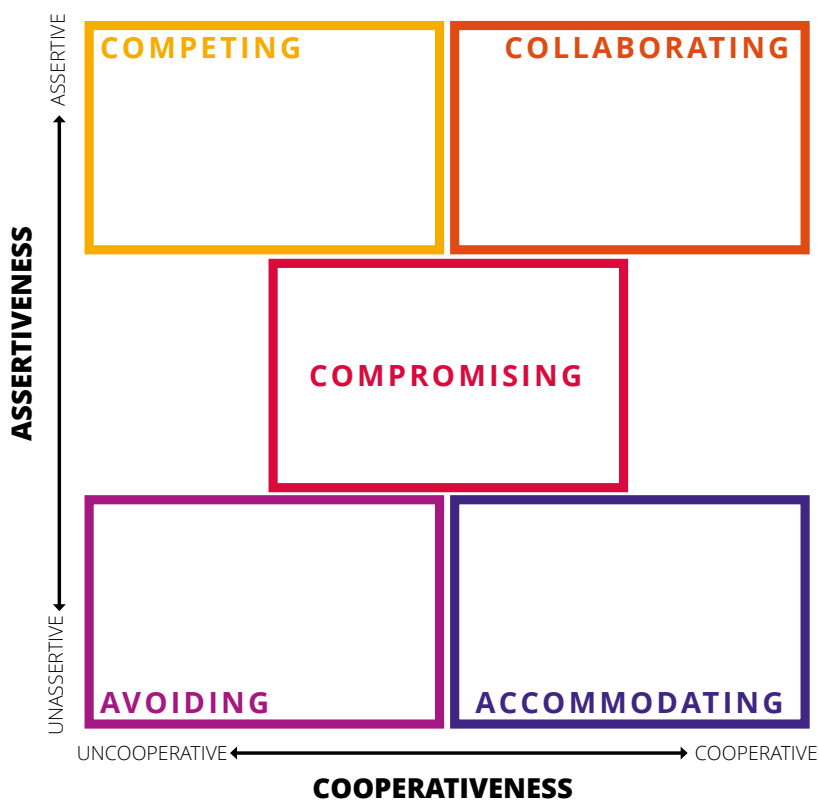
The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI®) provides both a vehicle and a language in helping people turn conflict into an opportunity for productive dialogue.

The TKI assessment identifies five different conflict-handling styles, or modes—competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating—and explains how and when each one may be used most effectively.

As shown in the figure below, these five modes represent the five major combinations of assertiveness and cooperativeness that are possible in a conflict situation.

Everyone is capable of using all five conflict-handling modes. However, most people use some modes more readily than others and thus tend to rely on those modes more heavily.

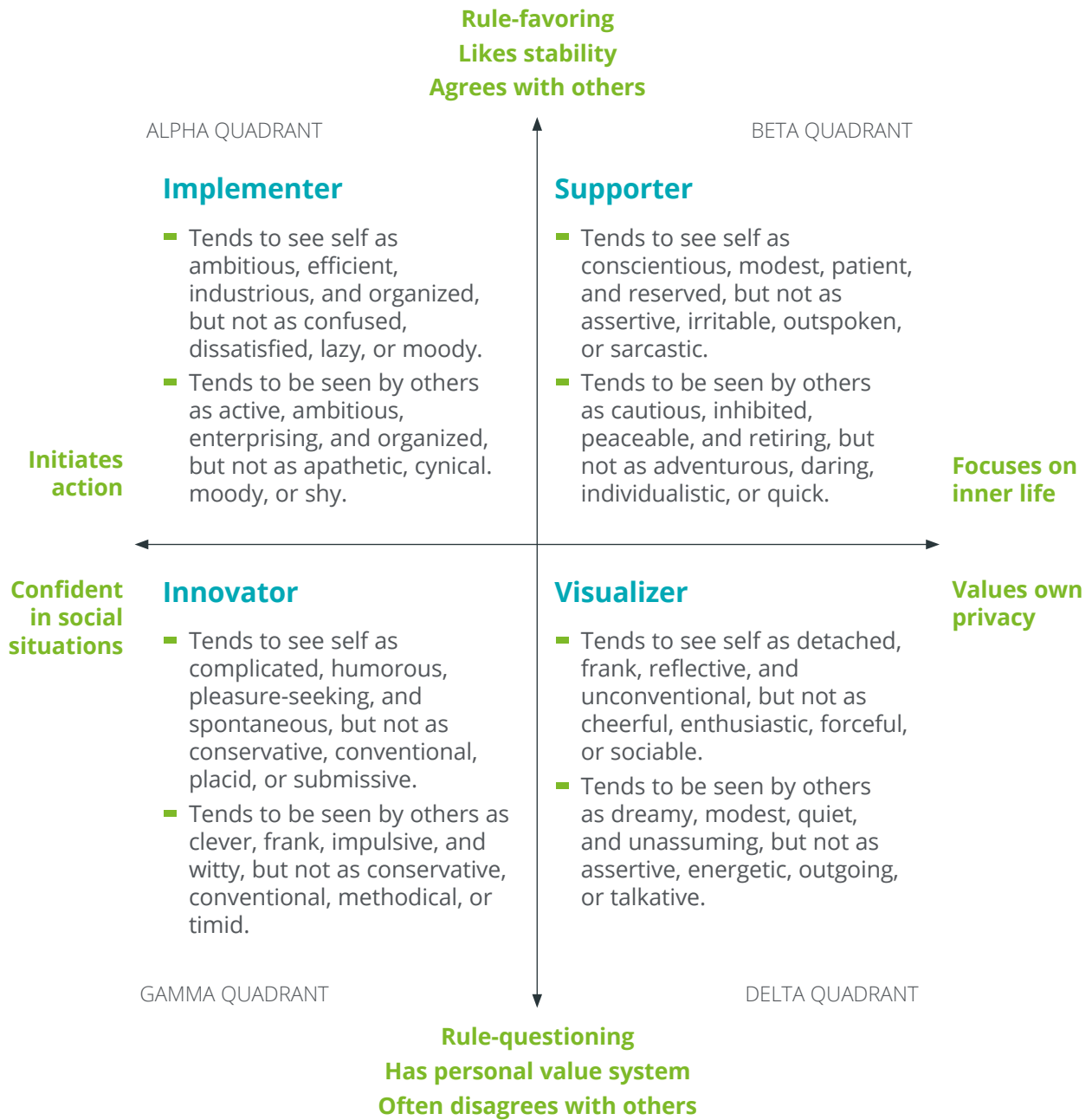
TKI conflict-handling modes



The CPI 260® instrument was developed to help people gain insight into such areas as their interpersonal style, approach to leadership, values, and motivation. As part of the assessment process, it identifies which of four “lifestyles,” or ways of living, best describes the respondent.

As illustrated in the figure on the following page, two of these lifestyles (Implementer and Supporter) tend to be rule-favoring and the other two (Innovator and Visualizer) tend to be rule-questioning. On another vector, those who favor each lifestyle tend to move

either toward other people (Implementer, Innovator) or away from other people (Supporter, Visualizer). Examining the intersection of these vectors provides insight into the thoughts and potential behaviors of people who favor each lifestyle. It is here that the information obtained from the TKI and CPI 260 instruments can be integrated most effectively. As we look at the prospect of magnifying the utility of the information the TKI assessment provides, we can blend in data from the CPI 260 assessment to explore optimal ways of making conflict productive.



Conflict modes and lifestyles

What we know about the four lifestyles from the CPI 260 assessment can provide essential information to help us understand how a client might behave during conflict. When we blend the client's predominant conflict mode identified by the TKI assessment with his or her lifestyle identified by the CPI 260 assessment, we obtain rich information

that can be helpful in planning for the person's development. Let's take a look at how the two instruments interact in terms of conflict mode and lifestyle. Later we will take a closer look at scales that may correlate with each conflict mode, but for now we will concentrate on examining what each conflict mode might look like within each lifestyle.

Implementer

Because Implementers are typically seen as go-getters who get things done, one might surmise that they would generally trend more toward the assertive side of the TKI model than toward the unassertive side. As with every behavior or quality, however, there are always exceptions to the rule.

Competing

It is likely that a significant number of Implementers favor the competing mode. Due to their need to lead others effectively and swiftly, Implementers often score high on the Dominance scale. We can hypothesize, then, that competing could be a go-to mode, especially when a leader needs to exert influence or power over others in a conflict situation that requires swift resolution.

However, Implementers who score high on the Empathy scale may resist using the competing mode because of its potential negative impact on buy-in, morale, and support from other team members if not executed effectively. Elements shared by the competing mode and the Implementer lifestyle are:

- Taking action and driving forward for decisions to make things happen.
- Imposing a viewpoint they think is best.
- Making tough decisions to follow through with necessary action.
- Defending an existing method or system that works well.
- Using their ability to persuade and influence others.

Collaborating

This conflict mode is both assertive and cooperative. Leaders who favor the Implementer style would do well to use their influence cooperatively, including others in their decision making so that the implementation is more realistically feasible and more sustainable. Leaders who score high on Amicability and Achievement via Conformance likely favor the collaborating mode.

Implementers show interest in accomplishing tasks and reaching mutual goals for both parties in a conflict if it means the conflict can be put to rest. They are likely to forge ahead with difficult discussions around each party's needs or concerns so as to expose the core issues sooner rather than later.

Implementers may have difficulty pausing during a process or an action to ensure that the information going into the decision is accurate. Implementers are active and like to get things done, so they will have to work hard not to rush through a situation to get to the bottom of it too quickly.

Elements shared by the collaborating mode and the Implementer lifestyle are:

- Trying to create a scenario in which both sides win.
- Making decisions that make sense to the business process and the bottom line.
- Paying attention to relationships and what it takes to keep people engaged and involved during conflict.
- Using conflict as an opportunity to learn more about what people need.
- Brainstorming with people involved in order to garner as much information as possible before making a decision.

Compromising

Implementers are likely drawn to the compromising mode by their need for speed. Implementer leaders like to move through problems and challenges swiftly so as to not waste time with unnecessary interpersonal problems. For Implementers, the appeal of the compromising mode is its practical, transactional nature, which fits with their desire to negotiate and bargain for something that will benefit both parties.

Implementers prefer clear goals and directives and may push hard during a conflict to establish them. However, they are savvy enough to know that in order to achieve their goals, they need people. As a result, when using the compromising mode, they will seek to find a middle ground for the sake of reaching their target with fairness to those involved.

Elements shared by the compromising mode and the Implementer lifestyle are:

- Wanting the people involved in a conflict to bring their best to the table.
- Creating an optimal solution for both parties as efficiently as possible.
- Keeping important relationships in mind for future work.
- Being committed to the organization and what may be best for the bottom line.
- Showing accountability by being flexible and recognizing that not everyone can get what they want.

Avoiding

Implementers typically know when they are in a lose-lose situation, and they won't want to waste time fighting for something that likely is not going to materialize. Implementer leaders know there are times when it is more expedient to cut one's losses and move on, and times when it is worthwhile to push ahead.

Implementers may be more accustomed to success than failure, and as a result they don't often find themselves in an at-fault situation. Thus it may be challenging for them to be accountable when they know they have damaged relationships by being too demanding or pushy, and they may respond by avoiding people or tasks altogether. This is especially true if an emotional mishap with another person occurs and is difficult to repair.

Using the avoiding mode probably does not come naturally to Implementers, with their make-it-happen nature, but at times it may be a necessity in leading others.

Elements shared by the avoiding mode and the Implementer lifestyle are:

- Not wasting time with issues that are not relevant or important to the mission or the goal of the business.
- Avoiding lose-lose situations.
- Postponing a deadline when it is not a high priority.
- Wanting to set themselves up for success.
- Ignoring an idea if it doesn't make sense to them.

Accommodating

Implementers are not likely to step aside and defer to another person's authority unless they have a very good reason. But they will do so if it aligns with their overall goal.

Implementers are typically ambitious and want to do well, but leaders with higher EQ (high scores on the CPI 260 Tolerance and Empathy scales) understand that they can't always get what they want. Consequently, they will use the accommodating mode strategically, especially when they know they are outnumbered and continuing forward with a conflict would be like beating their head against a wall.

Implementers are aware of the "I'll scratch your back, you scratch mine" mentality in leadership, and will enact this practice if it makes logical sense. They may also use accommodating to repair the damage to a relationship when they have pushed their agenda too hard, allowing for a non-preferred outcome as a means of making an apology or a concession. The trick is to maintain respect for both parties without sacrificing their position as leader.

Elements shared by the accommodating mode and the Implementer lifestyle are:

- Realizing that someone else is the expert and conceding
- Using damage control to manage important relationships.
- Giving another person an opportunity to learn and have success.
- Acknowledging that they hold the minority opinion.
- Righting a wrong or correcting a mistake that was made.

Supporter

Supporters are not known for being assertive. In fact, they generally prefer to function behind the scenes. These leaders are, however, sincere, genuine, and dedicated to their role in the organization. As a result, they will step into a conflict when it involves something important to them in principle or relates to a task for which they are responsible.

Competing

Supporters take their role and their work very seriously and can be powerful leaders. This translates into high standards for themselves and others. Although Supporters tend to take a low-key approach to getting things done, they will voice their concerns when a conflict gets in the way of their performance.

Elements shared by the competing mode and the Supporter lifestyle are:

- Stepping in when there is chaos that needs to be resolved.
- Taking action when people break the rules or step out of their role.
- Holding the line when ignoring policies can be a liability for the organization.
- Creating a plan if one is needed to work through the conflict.
- Taking a stand when people or relationships are at stake.

Collaborating

It feels natural for Supporters to get behind an issue, especially if the issue falls in line with the norms of the organization. They want people to be satisfied with their contributions and their work, and in most circumstances they will do what they can to bring value to the work and relationships in which they are involved.

Supporters enjoy delving into research if it means increasing people's understanding of a critical issue so that a plan can be formulated. However, because many Supporters tend to move away from people and prefer to process problems on their own, they may find dialogue around issues of conflict challenging.

It is important to give Supporters the time and space they need to address what the issues of the conflict mean for them.

Elements shared by the collaborating mode and the Supporter lifestyle are:

- Desiring to be sincere about their needs.
- Wanting to learn more about what others need to be successful.
- Taking the time necessary to determine the best options for reaching an agreement.
- Hoping for a win-win solution but recognizing that it may not be possible.
- Achieving agreed-upon goals for the organization by managing conflicts effectively.

Compromising

Supporters work hard to provide people and the organization with what they need to make things happen. Leaders who favor the Supporter style don't want to be the ones driving the plan, but behind the scenes they can be the mastermind. The task of devising a plan during conflict is of interest to them because it is something they can do on their own and later present to others.

Additionally, using the compromising mode helps keep things running smoothly, and Supporters work best when things are status quo. In a crisis when a quick decision or action is needed, a Supporter will step in to do whatever is necessary, within reason, even if it means taking one for the team.

Elements shared by the compromising mode and the Supporter lifestyle are:

- Desiring to resolve a complex issue.
- Choosing to do what is fair, even when it may mean losing the argument or position.
- Splitting the difference in order to resolve chaos.
- Conceding some needs for the betterment of the organization.
- Wanting to fulfil their role and their responsibility to the organization by supporting others.

Avoiding

In a situation in which emotions are running high and conflict becomes personal, Supporters may lean more on avoiding than on the other conflict modes. As leaders, they tend to really care about the job they do and want to do it well. This means they also care about the relationships necessary for them to get their job done, and they find it disorienting if a conflict gets in the way of their effectiveness.

It is not easy for Supporters to speak up about something that upsets them or a situation in which they feel they have been treated poorly. They may not voice their grievances until long after the fact, when tensions have defused and people have moved on.

Supporters feel good when they are recognized for the work they do, and they may avoid situations that call their work into question or draw attention to a mistake they have made. Their desire to make things right may trump the discomfort of confronting the people involved, but their natural tendency may be to take time to think things through or even avoid the conflict in hopes that it will blow over.

Elements shared by the avoiding mode and the Supporter lifestyle are:

- Wanting to keep things running smoothly.
- Preferring secure, predictable outcomes.
- Not wanting to fight for airtime in a group of people with loud voices.
- Desiring to do what is right and showing patience for others.
- Tending to protect themselves from the outbursts of others.

Accommodating

Accommodating may be the most favored common mode among Supporters, especially when they must deal with Implementers or Innovators pushing their positions. Supporters are motivated by a desire to be helpful to others, and they may use the accommodating mode as a means of accomplishing this. Furthermore, rules and regulations are important to Supporters, and if sacrificing their need is a requirement of following a rule, they will do this.

Supporters tend to feel most comfortable completing their work when no one is rocking the boat and people are getting along. In the absence of drama or conflict, all feels right with the world and Supporters feel they can focus on the task at hand. But make no mistake—if they feel a value or a person is at stake, Supporters will find their voice and advocate for that value or individual.

Elements shared by the accommodating mode and the Supporter lifestyle are:

- Deferring to another person who may have better or more information.
- Not wanting to engage with people who are volatile or unreasonable.
- Protecting themselves from public vulnerability.
- Showing patience and tolerance to others.
- Listening to others' needs in order to be helpful for the overall good of the organization.

Innovator

Innovators rely on their ingenuity and creativity to make things happen, and they don't always take the conventional path. They are not afraid to break the rules to get something done, even in the midst of a conflict—as long as the idea they are championing is a good one that could benefit the company.

If a conflict is intense and the organization is conventional, Innovators may have to expend a great deal of time and energy communicating their rationale before any movement can occur. Questioning tradition and authority may give them some pleasure, and, more important, it challenges them to create models, forms, and products beyond the scope of what has been done before.

Competing

Innovators support their ideas with conviction and the belief that what they envision can make things/processes/people better. These leaders can be vocal about their perspectives during conflict and may use the competing mode to persuade others to move ahead before they have had time to fully process the risks.

Innovators can be charming, even during conflict, and will use their sense of humor to diffuse difficult conversations. They know how to get people excited about ideas and have a flair for creating work-arounds in difficult circumstances.

Elements shared by the competing mode and the Innovator lifestyle are:

- Functioning well independently, even in the face of dissention.
- Believing 100 percent that their ideas are better than those of others.
- Enjoying a healthy debate in which people challenge their thinking.
- Desiring to move things forward and onward.
- Being confident and unafraid to state how they feel or what they think.

Collaborating

Innovators like insight when it translates to 'aha!' moments or new ideas. Thus they are not afraid to dig in deeper to get to the heart of a matter. Innovators enjoy the challenge of creating a workable, contemporary solution as a part of collaboration, and can feed off the energy and ideas of others while brainstorming options. In fact, having others available to help them follow through with ideas or initiatives works well for them.

Innovators are quite willing to roll up their sleeves and enter a heated discussion if it might lead to trying something new on the basis of shared learnings. The challenge may be their resistance to go by the book in solving problems, especially on a more traditional team where members need stability.

Elements shared by the collaborating mode and the Innovator lifestyle are:

- Wanting to learn and explore new ways of looking at the conflict.
- Enjoying the process of brainstorming and pushing the envelope toward progress.
- Alternating between flexibility and standing their ground.
- Devising multiple pathways toward one end goal or solution.
- Defusing tense situations with humour and wit.

Compromising

Innovators are prone to compromise. They can pick their battles and identify the priority when given the freedom to play with their ideas. They are especially willing to give a little when they see the other party taking risks or stepping outside their comfort zone.

Innovators see themselves as change agents and are willing to take some heat if it means moving things forward for the sake of improvement and efficiency. They are willing to bend and break the rules along the way, and sometimes this can intensify a conflict, especially if others involved like sticking to the plan and the rules of the organization.

The good news is that Innovators can be persuasive and charming because they believe so much in what they are doing, so even the most traditional person may feel obliged to at least listen to what they are proposing.

Elements shared by the compromising mode and the Innovator lifestyle are:

- Being willing to take a risk, especially when time is of the essence.
- Being practiced at making deals and splitting the difference to get things done.
- Not being afraid to enter into debate or discussion to stand up for their new ideas.
- Being confident that they can change course if the initial solution doesn't work out or materialize.
- Giving a little to get a little, and trying to present their ideas as fair.

Avoiding

Innovators work to beat the system and may push ahead regardless of any barriers in their way—even after they have been told to shift their focus. They can be stubborn, especially when their passion is strong for what they are creating. In a conflict situation, they may choose to ignore the requests of others and do things their way, mostly because they know their way is the best possible way.

If the risk doesn't pay off, don't expect a quick apology, as Innovators are not known for playing by the rules. They see the risks they take as a means to an end in the hope of enhancing or improving their work. When they come face to face with someone who has the ability or the desire to impede their progress, they may avoid confrontation until they can prove that their approach will work and is the best.

Elements shared by the avoiding mode and the Innovator lifestyle are:

- Avoiding problems that are emotional and seem to have no near or future resolution.
- Disregarding resistance because they know their idea is best.
- Putting their concerns or position first and seeing their perspective as superior—without sharing this with others.
- Feeling entitled to move forward without permission to prove their brilliance.
- Waiting until the time is right for people to be comfortable with a new initiative.

Accommodating

Although not easily convinced that their ideas are not the best, Innovators will eventually defer to others if those others have the expertise or the competence to back up what they are saying. Innovators can fight when necessary but also have the flexibility to bow out when they know they can't win. When Innovator leaders make a concession they are likely following a self-imposed alternate agenda, and the change of course indicates an alternate goal. Innovators' unique perspective and spontaneous, flexible outlook can assist them in knowing when it is time to throw in the towel.

Elements shared by the accommodating mode and the Innovator lifestyle are:

- Recognizing that alternative solutions may not be viable.
- Being flexible and able to shift gears.
- Moving on to the next new thing.
- Learning that a better opportunity is present.
- Knowing when they are outnumbered with no support.

Visualizer

Visualizers take time to reflect on the meaning and potential of a conflict. They feel able to take a step back and provide some objectivity in challenging situations, particularly because often they are on the periphery and not directly involved. They enjoy working on their own or one-on-one with unique thinkers and don't play games that may be standard in organizations.

It may be hard to know exactly what Visualizers are thinking during a conflict, and you may have to pull it out of them, as Visualizers tend to keep their opinions to themselves. Their unconventional way of looking at the world reinforces their approach of shifting or changing existing methods.

Competing

Visualizers have strong values and devote themselves to the issues they have passion for and belief in. They may have little patience for people who govern themselves in a tried-and-true way and always want to play it safe. These leaders prefer to take time on their own to devise a better way of doing things, and will likely present their improvement to a few trusted colleagues rather than a large group of people.

Usually, if a conflict is present, it is an internal conflict for Visualizers, as they are trying to make sense of the world and the people in it. They will, however, fight for what they believe in—such as a pilot program they are convinced will work—or be whatever they need to be to experiment with their ideas. Being assertive is not their typical mode of operating with others unless it intersects with their strong values, and then they will fight the good fight.

Elements shared by the competing mode and the Visualizer lifestyle are:

- Practicing their own unique way of looking at the world.
- Not being afraid to try something new if it makes sense to them.
- Being direct and frank in their communication with others when necessary.
- Being willing to speak up in defence of their position.
- Preferring to end the conflict quickly.

Collaborating

Visualizers look for solutions to conflict that provide innovation and new ways of handling old problems. They are invested in researching the best possible ways to address a challenge. Visualizers prefer to achieve this learning on their own, and they will need time to do this before bringing their ideas to the table. These leaders will be right there with you if they share a strong belief with you or back an initiative you are driving, but they prefer to implement things through fewer people rather than more.

The best-case scenario for Visualizers in using the collaborating mode is working in a small group of people who are not afraid to try things in new and different ways.

Elements shared by the collaborating mode and the Visualizer lifestyle are:

- Working with others to push forward new ideas.
- Standing strong around their personal values.
- Choosing to first divide and conquer, then share appropriate information.
- Being interested in learning if it expands their worldview.
- Building respect to ensure more autonomy moving forward.

Compromising

Their unassuming and fair nature makes the compromising mode familiar stomping grounds for Visualizer leaders. The need for quick decisions helps ensure that required face time with the group will be minimal, which means Visualizers can get back to business as usual.

At times these leaders have difficulty understanding where others are coming from, and at times they may be confused about why people are reacting to them as they are. They can sometimes get lost in their own world, but, given enough time to weigh the conflict and challenge, they can reflect on the most appropriate course of action. Because Visualizers tend to be on their own much of the time, when they split the difference in terms of what is expected as a result of the conflict, the contact may actually be satisfying to them.

Elements shared by the compromising mode and the Visualizer lifestyle are:

- Sharing strong values and listening to the values of others.
- Achieving expedient resolution with minimal face time.
- Sharing their unique worldview when necessary.
- Meeting in the middle to lessen visibility.
- Bringing passion to the situation in the hope of starting something new.

Avoiding

Because Visualizers feel most content when left to their own devices, the avoiding conflict mode can be a good fit. Visualizers don't want to sweat the small stuff, preferring to let go of things that don't really matter to them. They prefer using their energy to create something unique on their own.

Visualizers need time to integrate their thoughts and ideas, especially when faced with a conflict that means something to them. They feel overwhelmed and attacked if they don't have that opportunity to think things through first. Furthermore, they would rather sidestep the politics of being involved in something that doesn't affect their day-to-day role.

Elements shared by the avoiding mode and the Visualizer lifestyle are:

- Wanting to be left alone.
- Believing that, in the interest of time, their best work is done without input from others.
- Preferring small groups to large groups.
- Not wanting to participate in any unnecessary "drama".
- Tending to feel detached from conventional thoughts and processes.

Accommodating

Visualizers prefer to focus on their own agenda. They don't want to spend time arguing over things that have little meaning for them. They will, however, step forward when the source of a conflict makes a difference in their job or in what is expected of them. Visualizer leaders are willing to make a sacrifice—when it makes sense to them—in order to move the organization forward.

However, they will expect something in return later in the form of autonomy or allowances regarding their personal projects. Relationships are sometimes difficult for Visualizers, and they don't want to stir the pot when it is not necessary. They will be the first to cut their losses when a fight is not worth fighting.

Elements shared by the accommodating mode and the Visualizer lifestyle are:

- Letting bygones be bygones and moving on.
- Leaving well enough alone after the fact to focus on what matters.
- Not indulging people who want to create drama for drama's sake.
- Staying away from politics and organizational games in which they have no interest.
- Wanting to stay out of the limelight, especially in contentious times.

CPI 260® scales and the TKI® conflict modes

After this thorough examination of lifestyles and conflict modes, we can also hypothesize which scales from the CPI 260 assessment might have the greatest influence on a person's ability to use each conflict mode appropriately. The chart below details these connections.

TKI conflict mode	CPI 260 scales involved
Competing	Dominance Capacity for Status Social Presence Self-acceptance Independence Sensitivity
Collaborating	Dominance Sociability Self-acceptance Empathy Tolerance Achievement via Conformance Insightfulness
Compromising	Dominance Self-acceptance Sociability Empathy Responsibility Self-control Flexibility
Avoiding	Sociability Self-acceptance Independence Responsibility Achievement via Independence Insightfulness
Accommodating	Dominance Social Presence Self-acceptance Empathy Tolerance Achievement via Conformance Flexibility Amicability

Conclusion

Conflict—and how people manage it—can make or break relationships, opportunities, and careers. Given the chance to navigate conflict productively, leaders can choose a more emotionally intelligent way of understanding both themselves and others under less-than-ideal circumstances.

This guide combines information and data from the TKI and CPI 260 assessments to explore optimal ways of making conflict productive. If our job as practitioners is to encourage self-awareness for the purpose of development, helping our clients examine and possibly enhance their conflict-handling style can serve as an opportunity to turn some lemons into lemonade.

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