

# CONTENTS

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Introduction                              | 1  |
| What Is Conflict?                         | 3  |
| What Are the Conflict-Handling Modes?     | 5  |
| What Kinds of Tradeoffs Are Involved?     | 7  |
| What Is the Best Way to Handle Conflict?  | 12 |
| How Can I Use Each Mode Most Effectively? | 15 |
| <i>Avoiding</i>                           | 16 |
| <i>Competing</i>                          | 21 |
| <i>Accommodating</i>                      | 27 |
| <i>Compromising</i>                       | 32 |
| <i>Collaborating</i>                      | 36 |
| References                                | 43 |
| About the Author                          | 44 |



# INTRODUCTION



If you recently took the *Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument* (TKI), this booklet is for you. It is the next step in understanding your TKI scores and improving your ability to handle conflict effectively.

First, the booklet will help you gain a better grasp of the five conflict-handling modes measured by the TKI, so that you can more easily recognize them. You will learn the primary differences among the five modes and explore common examples of each mode in use.

Then, the booklet will help you use the conflict-handling modes effectively. You will examine the costs and benefits of each mode and get detailed guidelines on when to use and how to skillfully implement each mode.

## What Is the TKI?

The TKI is a self-report questionnaire designed to measure your tendencies in dealing with interpersonal conflict. It describes five different conflict-handling modes and helps you identify which of these modes you use most often. By helping you become more aware of the

choices you and others are making in conflict situations, the TKI and its feedback materials provide a way for you to consciously steer conflict situations in constructive directions.

## Development of the TKI

The TKI was developed by Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann in the early 1970s. It is based on theoretical refinements by Kenneth Thomas of a model of managerial conflict styles proposed by Robert Blake and Jane Mouton in the 1960s (Blake & Mouton, 1964).

Thomas and Kilmann originally developed the TKI as a research tool. To reduce response bias, they wrote pairs of statements that were carefully matched for desirability, so that no conflict-handling mode sounded better than others. It soon became apparent, however, that the TKI was also a powerful training tool. People liked the idea that each of the modes was desirable in appropriate situations. This idea allowed them not only to appreciate their strengths but also to learn about the value of modes they were using less often.

## The TKI Today

In the thirty years since the TKI's inception, more than 3 million copies of the instrument have been sold and it has become the leading measure of conflict-handling behavior. It has also been used in hundreds of research studies.

Today the TKI is used in a wide variety of applications, including the following:

- Management and supervisory training
- Negotiation training
- Team building
- Crisis intervention
- Marriage and family counseling

## Using This Booklet

If a trainer or facilitator gave you this booklet, it is likely that he or she also gave you some guidance about what to focus on. If not, here are some general suggestions.

- Read through the sections at the beginning of the booklet to make sure you understand and can recognize the five conflict-handling modes.
- If you are part of a team or work group that took the TKI together, be sure to read the material on collaborating. Collaborating on important issues is a key factor in group effectiveness.

## Things to Keep in Mind

Here are some useful things to keep in mind as you apply the ideas in this booklet.

### Choosing Your Conflict-Handling Modes

- *Remember that you have choices in a conflict.* Be aware that all five conflict-handling modes are available to you. This knowledge gives you a greater sense of control. You can steer conflicts in different directions by choosing different modes.
- *Give yourself time to think.* If you find yourself reacting quickly in a conflict situation, you are

probably operating out of old habits. To choose more wisely, slow down your response time. Pause to consider which mode would be most beneficial in this particular situation.

- *Practice applying the guidelines in this booklet.* You won't be able to remember all of them, but some relevant guidelines will come to mind, such as "There's nothing to be gained from raising this issue, so I'll avoid it." Or, "This is important and we might be able to find a win-win solution, so I'll try collaborating." Keep this booklet so that you can brush up occasionally on the guidelines.

## Developing New Behavioral Skills

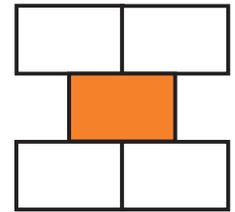
### For individuals.

- *Focus on a few new skills at a time.* Pick a few new behaviors that seem most promising, such as saying "and" instead of "but." Concentrate on working them into your behavioral repertoire.
- *Be gentle with yourself.* Skill development goes through predictable cycles, from awkwardness to polish. Don't expect polish right away. Recognize your progress.
- *Continue to add new skills.* As you master new behaviors and they become polished and familiar, you'll have some room to work on adding others. Skim through this booklet occasionally to review your progress and find new skills to try.

### For groups.

- *Appoint a monitor.* If your team is going through this training together, choose someone to monitor the group's progress on conflict management.
- *Set group goals.* Establish shared goals in terms of conflict mode use and new skills that the group wants to implement.
- *Review progress periodically.* Agree on a schedule for when the monitor will report to the group (for example, at the end of each meeting, monthly, or quarterly). Have the monitor review the group's progress toward its conflict management goals. Set new goals as appropriate

# COMPROMISING



## RECAPPING THE BASICS

Compromising occurs when you settle for a position that only partially satisfies your concerns and those of the other person. It is a win-lose mode in which you meet the other halfway—giving up something in order to gain some partial satisfaction.

### Common examples

- “Soft” bargaining (exchanging concessions)
- Taking turns
- Moderating your conclusions

### Benefits

- Pragmatism
- Speed and expediency
- Fairness
- Maintaining relationships

### Costs

- Partially sacrificed concerns
- Suboptimal solutions
- Superficial understandings

## Deciding When to Compromise

- Try not to compromise on vital issues
- Take turns bearing small costs
- Compromise on significant issues when competing and collaborating are not practical

## Try Not to Compromise on Vital Issues

It is important to realize that compromise involves partial sacrifices for your (and the other person’s) concerns. Some conflicts involve concerns so vital that even partial sacrifices would not be tolerable. Compromising on some conflict issues might bankrupt a company or undermine its ability to compete, for example, while others might undermine its integrity. On such important issues, try your utmost to use the two most assertive conflict-handling modes, competing and collaborating. Save compromise for concerns that are of *intermediate importance* to you—significant, but not vital.