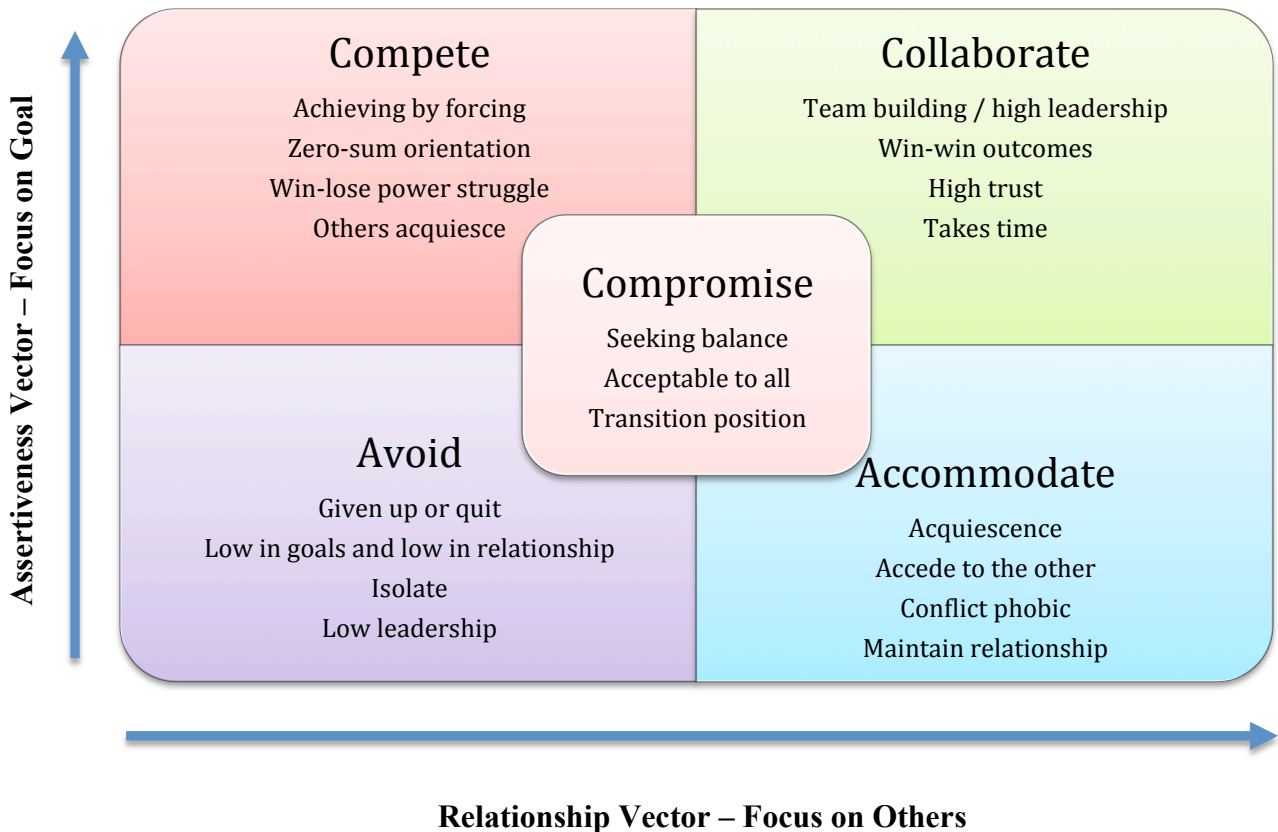


Thomas – Kilmann Conflict Model

We all have a preferred mode of handling conflict

A fundamental skill in managing conflict is to understand the idea of preferred styles of handling conflict. It is important to recognize our own preferred mode and the preferred mode of those around us.



Compete: A high degree of assertiveness and a focus on accomplishment, mixed with a lower degree of connection with the other, can create a "I win, you lose" scenario, a.k.a. competing or domination or forcing (upper left quadrant). An efficient way to get things done (e.g. when the house is burning down!) but dismissive of people with a lack of empathy or concern for others.

Collaborate: When one rates highly on both assertiveness and accomplishment and desire to maximally cooperate with another; this is the collaborating quadrant and is demonstrated as "win-win" in the conflict: "I win and you win, too." Takes a lot of time and effort and is almost never achieved though often ascribed to.

Avoid: A low degree of assertiveness, mixed with a low degree of cooperation to resolve a conflict, creates an avoiding or neglect creating a "lose-lose" situation. "I lose and you lose, too because, for some reason, I don't want to address the conflict between us."

Accommodate: Then there are those obliging types (lower right quadrant; appeasement), these people count the relationship as more important than the goal. This involves a recognition of others gifts and strengths and is essential for making teams work well. It is also often co-dependent on others and afraid of personal conflict.

Compromise: When one demonstrates both a moderate degree of self-concern and assertiveness, and a willingness to cooperate with another, the tolerant behaviour of compromise (middle of the quadrant model; sharing) is plotted. This is considered to be the position of the “common good” or “common ground.” The compromiser is an important transition step between Avoidance / Accommodation to Collaboration / Competition. It is the place where conflict resolution initiates with the good intention of moving to the top right quadrant (“collaborate”).

There is not any one conflict management strategy which works with all of the people all of the time. There are both effective and ineffective moments to demonstrate each of these behaviours. Although you may prefer one conflict management style over another, it's valuable to release your "inner chameleon" and sincerely learn how to flex your conflict reactions.

Compete when:

- there's an emergency or crisis to resolve; a "fire" to put out
- there's an unpopular decision to make (and you must make it!)
- you're certain that you're correct about a critical issue or situation

Collaborate when:

- you must get "buy-in" from others for a successful result
- bringing a variety of views to light on an important issue
- seeking consensus

Compromise when:

- there's some latitude about "what you can live with"
- two people of equal influence and strength have reached a stalemate
- competing or collaborating has failed

Avoid when:

- the payoff for resolving the conflict is lower than the damage which may be created by pushing your point
- you need more time to examine the issue and / or to think
- someone else can take care of it better than you

Accommodate when:

- the other's position makes more sense, has more validity, etc., than yours
- you genuinely are in agreement and the other expresses what seems to make good sense
- the other has all the power and influence, you know it, and you are okay with it

Note: The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Inventory can help you figure out your primary conflict and leadership style according to this theory. It is often used in people-oriented organizations (e.g. church, non-profits, community organizations, schools) and is accessible by computer with a decent print out of information. I use the TKCI with students at Regent College and Carey Theological College in the M.Div. programs as part of their ministry assessment and preparedness. To complete the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Inventory, you may contact me or search online for other providers.