

Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Styles

Sources: Excerpted from *Becoming a Master Manager*, 1996.
Copyright 1974, Xicom, Incorporated, Tuxedo, NY.

Avoiding: A person neglects his or her own concerns as well as those of the other person by not raising or addressing the conflict issue.

When to use the Avoiding Style

- When an issue is trivial, or more important issues are pressing.
- When you perceive no chance of satisfying your concerns.
- When potential disruption outweighs the benefits of resolution.
- To let people cool down and regain perspective.
- When gathering information supersedes immediate decision.
- When others can resolve the conflict more effectively.
- When issues seem tangential or symptomatic of other issues.

Potential Negative consequences of Avoiding

- Decisions made by default
- Unresolved issues
- Energy sapped by sitting on issues
- Self-doubt created through lack of esteem
- Creative input and improvement prevented
- Lack of credibility

Accommodating: One seeks to satisfy the other person's concerns at the expense of one's own.

When to use the Accommodating Style

- When you find you are wrong-to allow a better position to be heard, to learn, and to show your reasonableness.
- When issues are more important to others than to you-to satisfy others and maintain cooperation.
- To build social credits for later issues.
- To minimize loss when you are outmatched and losing.
- When harmony and stability are especially important.
- To allow subordinates to develop by learning from mistakes.

Potential Negative consequences of Avoiding

- Decreased influence, respect, or recognition by too much deference
- Laxity in discipline
- Frustration as own needs are not met
- Self-esteem undermined
- Relinquished best solution

Competing: The opposite of accommodating; one uses whatever seems appropriate to win one's own position.

When to use the Competing Style

- When quick, decisive action is vital.
- On important issues where unpopular actions need implementing.
- On issues vital to the organization's welfare, and when you know you are right.
- Against people who take advantage of noncompetitive behavior.

Potential Negative consequences of Competing

- Eventually being surrounded by "yes" people
- Fear of admitting ignorance or uncertainty
- Distorted perceptions
- Reduced communication
- Damage to relationship
- No commitment from the other person
- Having to keep "selling" or policing the solution during implementation

Collaborating: The opposite of avoiding; one works with the other person to find a solution that fully satisfies both one's own concerns and those of the other

When to use the Collaborating Style

- To find an integrative solution when both sets of concerns are too important to be compromised
- When your objective is to learn
- To merge insights from people with different perspectives
- To gain commitment by incorporating concerns into consensus
- To work through feelings which have interfered with a relationship

Potential Negative consequences of Collaborating

- Too much time spent on an insignificant issue
- Ineffective decisions made from input from people unfamiliar with the situation
- Unfounded assumptions about trust

Compromising: One seeks an expedient middle-ground position that provides partial satisfaction for both parties

When to use the Compromising Style

- When goals are important, but not worth the effort or potential disruption of more assertive modes.
- When opponents with equal power are committed to mutually exclusive goals.
- To achieve temporary settlements to complex issues.
- To arrive at expedient solutions under time pressures.
- As a backup when collaboration or competition is unsuccessful.

Potential Negative consequences of Compromising

- No one fully satisfied
- Short-lived solution
- A cynical climate through perception of a sell out
- Losing sight of the larger issues, principles, long-term objectives, values, and the company welfare by focusing on practicalities