

Office of the Ombudsperson

Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Styles

COMPETING STYLE

Individual needs are prioritized over those of others; often characterized by aggressive or combative communication; tends to result in conflict escalation.

Can be useful when:

- you are certain that you are correct *and* being in the right is more important than preservation of the relationship
- the issue itself is very low/no stakes

Can be problematic when:

- collaboration has not been attempted
- other party's cooperation is or will be needed
- utilized as a fallback style for most issues
- other party is likely to feel injured or diminished by the process

COLLABORATING STYLE

Parties work toward common objectives inclusive of all needs and goals; often produces better outcomes than individuals independently envision; integrative.

Can be useful when:

- the issue and relationship are of significance
- cooperation and creativity are values
- all concerns and issues appear ripe for mutual address

Can be problematic when:

- the matter is time-sensitive
- the issues are unimportant
- parties are over-extended
- other party's goals/needs are objectionable, indefensible, etc.

COMPROMISING STYLE

Involves trade-offs, resulting in limited sense of satisfaction, but often there is no real exploration of the underlying needs and interests of the disputing parties.

Can be useful when:

- cooperation is important but time or resources are limited
- when finding a viable solution, not necessarily the best outcome for any party, is preferable to no resolution
- when efforts to collaborate were not successful or risk being misunderstood in some way

Can be problematic when:

- finding the most creative solutions possible is essential
- when you cannot give in your position, needs, or interests and settle with the results

AVOIDING STYLE

Disagreements and concerns are not expressed, often worsening the circumvented conflict and fracturing the relationship between disputants.

Can be useful when:

- the issue and relationship are of little importance
- time is short and a decision is not necessary
- you have little power but wish to prevent another party's desired outcome

Can be problematic when:

- the issue and the relationship are meaningful
- negative consequences can result (hurt feelings, mistrust, etc.)
- the other party would benefit from candid, caring dialogue

ACCOMMODATING STYLE

Individual needs are secondary to others' needs; characterized by deferential communication; perhaps overly diplomatic.

Can be useful when:

- you are not deeply invested in the issue
- you have little or no power but have no wish to prevent another party's desired outcome
- you realize you are wrong or otherwise shift in your position

Can be problematic when:

- concession will foster resentment
- overly-used as a means of gaining acceptance or "keeping the peace"
- others wish to collaborate or engage in a process to achieve resolution