

# 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**

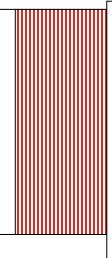
Parties work toward common objectives inclusive of all needs and goals; often produces better outcomes than individuals independently envision; integrative.

#### 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