Five Conflict Management Styles

Thomas, K.W., and R.H. Kilmann identify five conflict management styles:

1. **Accommodating**
   This is when you cooperate to a high-degree. It may be at your own expense and actually work against your own goals, objectives, and desired outcomes. This approach is effective when the other party is the expert or has a better solution. It can also be effective for preserving future relations with the other party.

2. **Avoiding**
   This is when you simply avoid the issue. You aren't helping the other party reach their goals, and you aren't assertively pursuing your own. This works when the issue is trivial or when you have no chance of winning. It can also be effective when the issue would be very costly or when the atmosphere is emotionally charged and you need to create some space. Sometimes issues will resolve themselves, but "hope is not a strategy." In general, avoiding is not a good long term strategy.

3. **Collaborating**
   This is when you partner/pair up with the other party to achieve both of your goals. It's how you break free of the "win-lose" paradigm and seek the "win-win." This can be effective for complex scenarios where you need to find a novel solution. This can also mean reframing the challenge to create a bigger space and room for everybody's ideas. The downside is it requires a high-degree of trust, and reaching a consensus can require a lot of time and effort to get everybody on board and to synthesize all the ideas.

4. **Competing**
   This is the "win-lose" approach. You act in a very assertive way to achieve your goals, without seeking to cooperate with the other party, and it may be at the expense of the other party. This approach may be appropriate for emergencies when time is of the essence or when you need quick, decisive action, and people are aware of and support the approach.
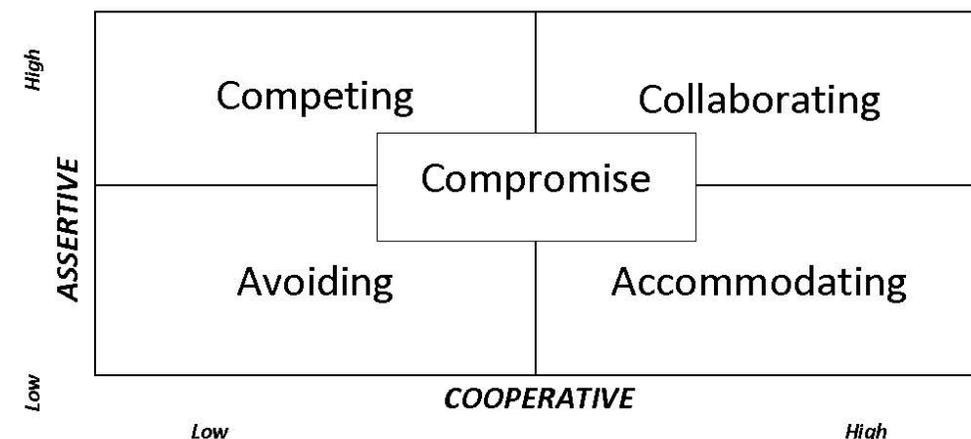
5. **Compromising**
   This is the "lose-lose" scenario where neither party really achieves what they want. This requires a moderate level of assertiveness and cooperation. It may be appropriate for scenarios where you need a temporary solution or where both sides have equally important goals. The trap is to fall into compromising as an easy way out when collaborating would produce a better solution.

By knowing your own default patterns you improve your self-awareness. Once you are aware of your own patterns, you can pay attention to whether they are working for you, and you can **explore alternatives**. By using a scenario-based approach, you can choose more effective conflict management styles and test their effectiveness of you and your situations.

Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument:

Style	Uses *Strengths and Advantages* *Appropriate*	Danger of Inappropriate Use *Weaknesses and Disadvantages* *Inappropriate*
Accommodating	• To build the relationship • When the issue is relatively unimportant to you but important to the other person • When you have less experience or expertise than the other person • When preserving harmony and avoiding disruption are especially important	• Your needs are not met • You may begin to feel taken advantage of and resentful
Avoiding	• When the issue or relationship is unimportant • To prevent an immediate conflict (e.g. inappropriate time/place or feelings are escalated) • When someone else can resolve the conflict more effectively • When you have little chance of satisfying your concerns (e.g. national policy, someone's basic personality, etc.)	• Conflict may fester until it escalates • The relationship remains superficial
Collaborating	• To find a solution that integrates both sets of concerns, as they are both important • To merge insights from people with different perspectives on a problem • When commitment and "buy in" is needed to implement a solution • When hard feelings have been interfering with an interpersonal, working relationship	• May waste time and energy on issues that are not important • As the process can take longer, it may frustrate some people
Competing	• When quick, decisive action is important, such as emergencies • When your core values need to be defended • When it is important to you to have it your own way	• May weaken relationships if it is perceived you won and other person lost • You receive less input and ideas from others • Others may not "buy in" and may try to sabotage the decision
Compromising	• When an agreement needs to be reached – time is important • When mutually exclusive goals prevent collaboration • To achieve temporary settlements to complex issues • As a backup mode when collaboration or competition is unsuccessful	• Nobody really gets what they want or need • The focus becomes what you did not manage to get regarding needs/wants • Problems reoccur as they were not fully explored and resolutions found didn't truly work for those involved