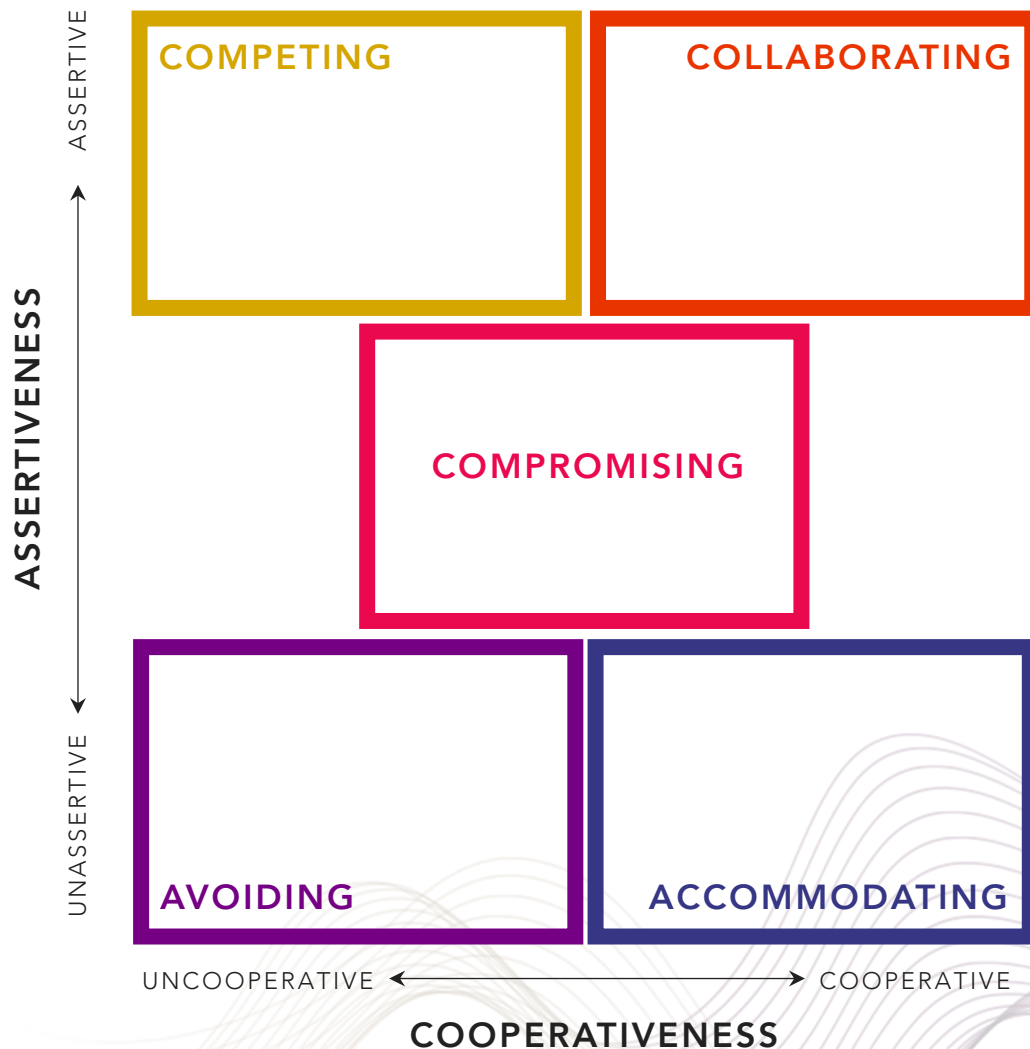


THOMAS KILMANN CONFLICT STYLES

INTRODUCTION

- The Kilmann* conflict styles categorise an individual's behaviour in conflict situations (situations in which the concerns of two people appear to be incompatible).
- In conflict situations, we can describe a person's behaviour along two basic dimensions:
 - Assertiveness, the extent to which we attempt to satisfy our own concerns
 - Cooperativeness, the extent to which we attempt to satisfy the other person's concerns
- These two dimensions of behaviour can be used to define five methods of dealing with conflict.



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COMPETING

Competing is assertive and uncooperative, a power-oriented mode. When competing, an individual pursues his or her own concerns at the other person's expense, using whatever power seems appropriate to win his or her position. Competing might mean standing up for your rights, defending a position you believe is correct, or simply trying to win.

COLLABORATING

Collaborating is both assertive and cooperative. When collaborating, an individual attempts to work with the other person to find a solution that fully satisfies the concerns of both. It involves digging into an issue to identify the underlying concerns of the two individuals and to find an alternative that meets both sets of concerns. Collaborating between two persons might take the form of exploring a disagreement to learn from each other's insights, resolving some condition that would otherwise have them competing for resources, or confronting and trying to find a creative solution to an interpersonal problem.

COMPROMISING

Compromising is intermediate in both assertiveness and cooperativeness. When compromising, an individual has the objective of finding an expedient, mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies both parties. Compromising falls on a middle ground between competing and accommodating, giving up more than competing but less than accommodating. Likewise, it addresses an issue more directly than avoiding but doesn't explore it in as much depth as collaborating. Compromising might mean splitting the difference, exchanging concessions, or seeking a quick middle-ground position.

AVOIDING

Avoiding is unassertive and uncooperative. When avoiding, an individual does not immediately pursue his or her own concerns or those of the other person. He or she does not address the conflict. Avoiding might take the form of diplomatically sidestepping an issue, postponing an issue until a better time, or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation.

ACCOMMODATING

Accommodating is unassertive and cooperative—the opposite of competing. When accommodating, an individual neglects his or her own concerns to satisfy the concerns of the other person; there is an element of self-sacrifice in this mode. Accommodating might take the form of selfless generosity or charity, obeying another person's order when you would prefer not to, or yielding to another's point of view.

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COMPETING

USES

- When quick, decisive action is vital—for example, in an emergency.
- On important issues when unpopular courses of action need implementing—for example, cost cutting, enforcing unpopular rules, discipline.
- On issues vital to company welfare when you know you're right.
- When you need to protect yourself from people who take advantage of non-competitive behaviour.

SIGNS OF OVERUSE

- Are you surrounded by “yes” people? If so, perhaps it's because they have learned that it's unwise to disagree with you or have given up trying to influence you. This closes you off from information.
- Are others afraid to admit ignorance and uncertainties to you? In a competitive climate, people fight for influence and respect, acting more certain and confident than they feel. If you are doing this, people are less able to ask you for information and opinions—as a result, they are less likely to learn.

SIGNS OF UNDERUSE

- Feeling powerless in situations? People who underuse competing may be unaware of the power they have, unskilled in its use, or uncomfortable with the idea of using it. This may hinder your effectiveness by restricting your influence.
- Having trouble taking a firm stand, even when you see the need? Concerns for others' feelings or anxieties about the use of power can cause vacillation, which may result in postponing the decision and adding to the suffering and/or resentment of others.

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COLLABORATING

USES

- When you need to find an integrative solution and the concerns of both parties are too important to be compromised.
- When your objective is to learn, and you wish to test your assumptions and understand others' views.
- When you want to merge insights from people with different perspectives on a problem.
- When you want to gain commitment by incorporating others' concerns into a consensual decision.
- When you need to work through hard feelings that have been interfering with a relationship.

SIGNS OF OVERUSE

- Spending time discussing issues in depth that don't seem to warrant it? Collaboration takes time and energy. Trivial problems don't require optimal solutions, and not all personal differences need to be hashed out. Overusing collaboration and consensus sometimes represents a desire to minimise risk—by diffusing responsibility or postponing action.
- Failing to elicit collaborative responses from others? The exploratory nature of collaborative behaviour may make it easy to disregard, and others may take advantage of the trust and openness shown. Over-users may miss signs of defensiveness, competitiveness, or conflicting interests.

SIGNS OF UNDERUSE

- Is it difficult for you to see differences as opportunities for joint gain, learning, or problem solving? Although conflict situations often involve threatening or unproductive aspects, approaching all conflicts with pessimism can prevent you from seeing collaborative possibilities and thus deprive you of the mutual gains and satisfactions that accompany successful collaboration.
- Are others uncommitted to your decisions or policies? Perhaps their concerns are not being incorporated into those decisions or policies.

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COMPROMISING

USES

- When goals are moderately important but not worth the effort or the potential disruption involved in using more assertive modes.
- When two opponents with equal power are strongly committed to mutually exclusive goals.
- When you want to achieve a temporary settlement of a complex issue.
- When you need to arrive at an expedient solution under time pressure.
- As a backup mode when collaboration or competition fails.

SIGNS OF OVERUSE

- Do you concentrate so heavily on the practicalities and tactics of compromise that you sometimes lose sight of larger issues? Doing so may lead to unintended and costly compromises of principles, values, long-term objectives, or company welfare.
- Does an emphasis on bargaining and trading create a cynical climate of gamesmanship? Such a climate may undermine interpersonal trust and deflect attention from the merits of the issues being discussed.

SIGNS OF UNDERUSE

- Do you sometimes find yourself too sensitive or embarrassed to engage in the give-and-take of bargaining? This reticence can keep you from getting a fair share in negotiations—for yourself, your team, or your organisation.
- Do you sometimes find it difficult to make concessions? Without this safety valve, you may have trouble gracefully getting out of mutually destructive arguments, power struggles, and so on.

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AVOIDING

USES

- When an issue is unimportant or when other, more important issues are pressing.
- When you perceive no chance of satisfying your concerns—for example, when you have low power, or you are frustrated by something that would be very difficult to change.
- When the potential costs of confronting a conflict outweigh the benefits of its resolution.
- When you need to let people cool down—to reduce tensions to a productive level and to regain perspective and composure.
- When gathering more information outweighs the advantages of an immediate decision.
- When others can resolve the issue more effectively.
- When the issue seems tangential or symptomatic of another, more basic issue.

SIGNS OF OVERUSE

- Causing coordination to suffer because you have trouble getting one's input on issues?
- Creating an atmosphere of "walking on eggshells"? Sometimes a disproportionate amount of energy is devoted to caution and avoiding issues, indicating that those issues need to be faced and resolved.
- Decisions on important issues getting made by default.

SIGNS OF UNDERUSE

- Do you sometimes find yourself hurting people's feelings or stirring up hostilities? You may need to exercise more discretion and tact, framing issues in nonthreatening ways.
- Do you sometimes feel harried or overwhelmed by a number of issues? You may need to devote more time to setting priorities—that is, deciding which issues are relatively unimportant and perhaps delegating them to others.

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ACCOMMODATING

USES

- When you realise that you are wrong—to allow a better solution to be considered, to learn from others, and to show that you are reasonable.
- When the issue is much more important to the other person than it is to you—to satisfy the needs of others and as a goodwill gesture to help maintain a cooperative relationship.
- When you want to build up social credits for later issues that are important to you.
- When you are outmatched and losing, and more competition would only damage your cause.
- When preserving harmony and avoiding disruption are especially important.
- When you want to help your employees develop by allowing them to experiment and learn from their mistakes.

SIGNS OF OVERUSE

- Do you feel that your ideas and concerns sometimes don't get the attention they deserve? Deferring too much to the concerns of others can deprive you of influence, respect, and recognition. It can also deprive the organisation of your potential contributions.
- Is discipline lax? Although discipline for its own sake may be of little value, some rules, procedures, and assignments are crucial and need to be enforced. Accommodating on these issues may harm you, others, or the organisation.

SIGNS OF UNDERUSE

- Having trouble building goodwill? Accommodating on minor issues that are important to others is a gesture of goodwill.
- Being viewed as unreasonable.
- Having trouble admitting when you are wrong.
- Failing to recognise legitimate exceptions to the rules.
- Refusing to give up.

