



## 7.5 Five Styles of Conflict Management Handout

- ❑ How did we learn to handle conflict?  
Childhood, culture, gender, generation and position also may have an impact.
- ❑ Confront conflict openly and respectfully.
- ❑ Offer well-reasoned arguments when you disagree with others.
- ❑ Remain patient and receptive when others disagree or challenge your point of view.
- ❑ Try to clarify and explore points on which you differ or disagree with others.
- ❑ Leave the emotion out of the picture!

According to Thomas-Kilmann, there are five styles of conflict management.

Accommodating — This approach is helpful when preserving harmony and avoiding disruption are very important. Accommodation acknowledges that the issue is more important to the other party than it is to you, so you let them *win*. Accommodating is effective when you want to avoid a dispute, when you want to show others that you can be flexible or if you realize that you are not going to be successful. Avoid accommodating if you will resent the outcome, if others think you always sacrifice your concerns and if safety issues are at risk.

Avoiding — This technique may be appropriate if the potential damage of conflict outweighs the benefit of a resolution. Avoidance, or ignoring the conflict, can be a good technique if time is needed to calm down, there is no privacy or you need to find out more information. Avoiding also can be effective if you have no power in the situation and others may be able to solve the conflict more effectively. Note that avoiding can lead to unresolved conflicts that will affect relationships and may even escalate the conflict if it is allowed to fester.

Collaborating — This approach can be a valuable when both concerns are too important to be compromised. Collaboration happens when all the parties work together to find a mutually satisfactory solution. It is the most time consuming conflict management strategy, but it also can produce the best results. Collaborating is important to consider when you want to increase morale, you believe there is a solution that can satisfy all the parties, the solution needs to reflect the different perspectives and when none of the other conflict management strategies have worked.

Competing — This conflict management technique can be used when quick, decisive action is necessary to address vital issues. Competing works best when you have power and it involves *winning*, so one or more parties will *lose*. This, of course, does not support a win-win situation for all involved. It can be effective, and necessary, when a decision needs to be made quickly, when the stakes are high and there are no other options. Downsides to the competing style include making others resentful and risking your job security.



Compromising — This conflict management style can be used to expedite solutions under time pressure and when the outcome or goals are moderately important. Compromise means that all of the parties involved with the conflict have given something up in order to get something. This is a good option when each party has equal power but mutually exclusive goals. Compromising also can help build relationships because all the parties involved feel like they got *something*. However, compromising usually does not actually resolve conflicts, particularly if any of the participants are dissatisfied with the outcome.

Weigh the importance of the outcome and the importance of the relationship when deciding which technique to use. There are conflict situations where any one of these five conflict management techniques might be considered most effective.