

HOW DO I MANAGE DIFFERENCES?

Picture yourself in a situation where your wishes differ from that of another person.

For each of the following 30 statements, choose either A or B (with a circle) as the one which best describes how you would respond. Sometimes neither the A or B statement is typical of your response but try to choose the one that would seem most likely to be your instinctive response in that situation. Only you will see the finished exercise.

1. A There are times when I let others take responsibility for solving the problem.
☒ B Rather than negotiate the things on which we disagree, I try to stress those things upon which we both agree.
2. ☒ A I try to find a compromise solution.
B I attempt to deal with all of his and my concerns.
3. A I am usually firm in pursuing my goals.
☒ B I might try to soothe the other's feelings and preserve our relationship.
4. ☒ A I try to find a compromise solution.
B I sometimes sacrifice my own wishes for the wishes of the other person.
5. A I consistently seek the other's help in working out a solution.
☒ B I try to do what is necessary to avoid useless tensions.
6. A I try to avoid creating unpleasantness for myself.
☒ B I try to win my position.
7. A I try to postpone the issue until I have had some time to think it over.
☒ B I give up some points in exchange for others.
8. A I am usually firm in pursuing my goals.
☒ B I attempt to get all concerns and issues immediately out in the open.
9. A I feel that the differences are not always worth worrying about.
☒ B I make some effort to get my way.
10. A I am firm in pursuing my goals.
☒ B I try to find a compromise solution.
11. A I attempt to get all concerns and issues immediately out in the open.
☒ B I might try to soothe the other's feelings and preserve our relationship.
12. A I sometimes avoid taking positions which could create controversy.
☒ B I will let him have some of his positions if he lets me have some of mine.
13. ☒ A I propose a middle ground.
B I press to get my points made.

Thomas/Kilman Conflict Mode Instrument

14. ☒ A I tell him my ideas and ask him for his.
B I try to show him the logic and benefits of my position.
15. A I might try and soothe the other's feelings and preserve our relationship.
☒ B I try to do what is necessary to avoid tensions.
16. ☒ A I try not to hurt the other's feelings.
B I try to convince the other person of the merits of my position.
17. A I am usually firm in pursuing my goals.
☒ B I try to do what is necessary to avoid useless tensions.
18. A If it makes the other person happy, I might let him maintain his views.
☒ B I will let him have some of his positions if he lets me have some of mine.
19. ☒ A I attempt to get all concerns and issues immediately out in the open.
B I try to postpone the issue until I have had time to think it over.
20. A I attempt to immediately work through our differences.
☒ B I try to find a fair combination of gains and losses for both of us.
21. A In approaching negotiations, I try to be considerate of the other person's wishes.
☒ B I always lean toward a direct discussion of the problem.
22. ☒ A I try to find a position that is intermediate between his and mine.
B I assert my wishes.
23. ☒ A I am very often concerned with satisfying all our wishes.
B There are times when I let others take responsibility for solving the problem.
24. A If the other's position seems very important to him, I would try to meet his wishes.
☒ B I try to get him to settle for a compromise solution.
25. A I try to show him the logic and benefits of my position.
☒ B In approaching negotiations, I try to be considerate of the other person's wishes.
26. A I propose a middle ground.
☒ B I am nearly always concerned with satisfying all our wishes.
27. ☒ A I sometimes avoid taking positions which could create controversy.
B If it makes the other person happy, I might let him maintain his views.
28. A I am usually firm in pursuing my goals.
☒ B I usually seek the other's help in working out a solution.
29. ☒ A I propose a middle ground.
B I feel that the differences are not always worth worrying about.
30. A I try not to hurt the other's feelings.
☒ B I always share the problem with the other person so that we can work it out.

Source: Kenneth Thomas & Ralph Kilman (1976).

Your scores on the 5 styles for handling conflict

No set of scores will ever describe you perfectly. They provide a way to talk about your *most preferred and least preferred* style for handling conflict -about your conflict comfort zone. You do not always approach things in exactly the same way; but neither do you try something different each time. Your starting point for managing conflict tends to be your comfort zone.

Transfer your score from the 30 questions to this sheet by circling the A or the B letters below that you circled on each question. Then add up each column to get a score for each style.

	Competing (forcing)	Cooperating (problem solving)	Compromising (sharing)	Avoiding (withdrawal)	Accommodating (smoothing)
1				A	(B)
2		B	(A)		
3	A				(B)
4			(A)		B
5		A		(B)	
6	(B)			A	
7			(B)	A	
8	A	(B)			
9	(B)			A	
10	A		(B)		
11		A			(B)
12			(B)	A	
13	B		(A)		
14	B	(A)			
15				(B)	A
16	B				(A)
17	A			(B)	
18			(B)		A
19		(A)		B	
20		A	(B)		
21		(B)			A
22	B		(A)		
23		(A)		B	
24			(B)		A
25	A				(B)
26		(B)	A		
27				(A)	B
28	A	(B)			
29			(A)	B	
30		(B)			A
Total	Competing 2	Cooperating 6	Compromising 11	Avoiding 4	Accommodating 5

Source: Kenneth Thomas & Ralph Kilman (1976).

The maximum score for any style is 12 and the total aggregate score is 30. A score of more than 6 on any style would indicate a preference for that mode, while a score of less than 6 would indicate relative neglect.

This is only a one-point-in-time measure of your reaction to conflict situations and should not be taken as having great validity. The best way to use it is to see it as a corroborative device for your own perception of your preferred style.

FOLLOW-UP

You need practice and application if you are to develop your skills in resolving conflicts.

We may be better managers if we accept that conflict and 'politics' are part of organisational life, rather than symptoms of organisational ill health – though there may be a difference between constructive and destructive conflict and politics.

A. Competing

Uses:

- When quick, decisive action is vital, e.g. emergencies
- On important issues where unpopular courses of action need implementing, e.g. cost cutting, enforcing unpopular rules, discipline
- On issues vital to company welfare when you know you're right
- To protect yourself against people who take advantage of non-competitive behaviour

If you scored High:

- Perhaps people 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 subordinates afraid to admit ignorance and uncertainties? In competitive climates we fight for influence and respect. This means acting more certain and confident than one feels. People are less able to ask for information and opinion – they are less able to learn.

If you scored Low:

- Do you often feel powerless in situations? Are you unaware of the power you do have, unskilled in its use, or uncomfortable with the idea of using it? This may hinder your effectiveness by restricting your influence.
- Do you have trouble taking a firm stand, even when you see the need? Sometimes concerns for others' feelings or anxieties about using power cause us to vacillate. Postponing may mean delay and adding to suffering and/or resentment of others.

B. Cooperating

Uses:

- For an integrative solution where both concerns are important and not to be compromised
- When the objective is to learn, e.g. testing assumptions, understanding others' views
- To merge insights from different perspectives
- To gain commitment by incorporating other's views into a consensual decision
- To work through hard feelings that interfere with an interpersonal relationship.

If you scored High:

- Do you spend time discussing issues in depth that do not seem to deserve it?
- (Collaboration takes time and energy-perhaps the scarcest organisational resources. Trivial problems don't require optimal solutions, and not all personal differences need to be hashed out. The overuse of collaboration and consensual decision making sometimes represents a desire to minimise risk-by diffusing responsibility for a decision or by postponing action.)
- Does your collaborative behaviour fail to elicit collaborative responses from others?
- (The exploratory and tentative nature of some collaborative behaviour may make it easy for others to disregard collaborative overtures; or the trust and openness may be taken advantage of. You may be missing some cues which would indicate the presence of defensiveness, strong feelings, impatience, competitiveness, or conflicting interests.)

If you scored Low:

- Is it hard for you to see differences as opportunities for joint gain as opportunities to learn or solve problems?
- (Although there are often threatening or unproductive aspects of conflict, indiscriminate pessimism can prevent you from seeing collaborative possibilities and thus deprive you of the mutual gains and satisfactions which accompany successful collaboration.)
- Are subordinates uncommitted to your decisions or policies? (Perhaps their own concerns are not being incorporated into those decisions or policies.)

C. Compromising

Uses:

- When goals are moderately important, but not worth the effort or potential disruption of more assertive modes
- When two opponents with equal power are strongly committed to mutually exclusive goals - are in labour-management bargaining
- To achieve temporary settlements to complex issues
- To arrive at expedient solutions under time pressure
- As a backup mode when collaboration or competition fails to be successful

If you scored High:

- Do you concentrate so heavily upon the practicalities and tactics of compromise that you sometimes lose sight of larger issues-principles, values, long-term objectives, company welfare?
- Does an emphasis on bargaining and trading create a cynical climate of gamesmanship? (Such a climate might undermine interpersonal trust and deflect attention away from the merits of the issues discussed.)

If you scored Low:

- Do you find yourself too sensitive or embarrassed to be effective in bargaining situations?
- Do you find it hard to make concessions? (Without this safety valve, you may have trouble getting gracefully out of mutually destructive arguments, power struggles, etc.)

D. Avoiding

Uses:

- When an issue is trivial, of only passing importance, or when other more important issues are pressing
- When you perceive no chance of satisfying your concerns, e.g. when you have low power or you are frustrated by something which would be very difficult to change (national policies, someone's personality, etc.)
- When the potential damage of confronting a conflict outweighs the benefits of its resolution
- 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 conflict more effectively
- When the issue seems tangential or symptomatic of another more basic issue.

If you scored High:

- Does your coordination suffer because people have trouble getting inputs on issues?
- Does it often appear that people are “walking on eggshells?” (Sometimes a dysfunctional amount of energy can be devoted to caution and the avoiding of issues, indicating that issues need to be faced and resolved.)
- Are decisions on important issues made by default?

If you scored Low:

- Do you find yourself hurting peoples' feelings or stirring up hostilities? (You may need to exercise more discretion in confronting issues or more tact in framing issues in non-threatening ways. Tact is partially the art of avoiding potentially disruptive aspects of an issue.)
- Do you often feel harried or overwhelmed by a number of issues? (You may need to devote more time to setting priorities – deciding which issues are relatively unimportant and perhaps delegating them to others.)

E. Accommodating

Uses:

- When you realise that you are wrong – to allow a better position to be heard, to learn from others, and to show that you are reasonable.
- When the issue is much more important to the other person than to yourself – to satisfy the needs of others, and as a goodwill gesture to help maintain a cooperative relationship.
- To build up social credits for later issues which are important to you?
- When continued competition would only damage your cause when you are outmatched and losing.
- When preserving harmony and avoiding disruption are especially important.
- To aid in the managerial development of subordinates by allowing them to experiment and learn from their own mistakes.

If you scored High:

- Do you feel that your own ideas and concerns are not getting the attention they deserve?
- (Deferring too much to the concerns of others can deprive you of influence, respect, and recognition. It also deprives the organisation of your potential contributions.)
- Is discipline lax?
- (Although discipline for its own sake may be of little value, there are often rules, procedures, and assignments whose implementation is crucial for you or the organisation.)

If you scored Low:

- Do you have trouble building goodwill with others? (Accommodating on minor issues which are important to others are gestures of goodwill.)
- Do others often seem to regard you as unreasonable?
- Do you have trouble admitting it when you are wrong?
- Do you recognise legitimate exceptions to rules?
- Do you know when to give up?

