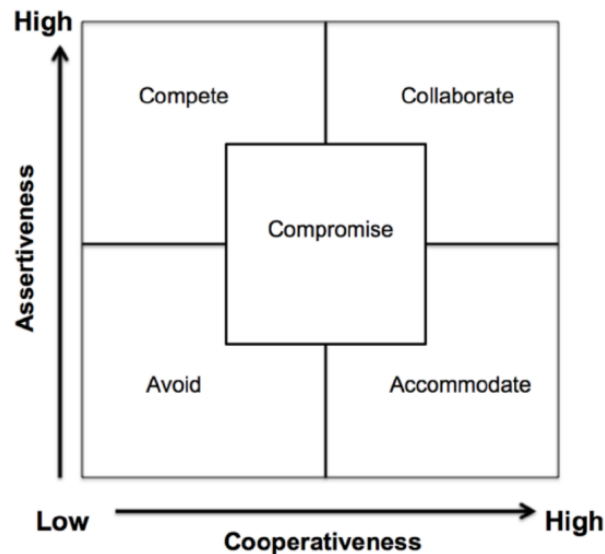


4.2: Responses to Conflict

Given these different approaches we have to conflict, two psychologists, Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann suggest that we have five options in responding to conflict.¹



1.6.1: "Thomas and Kilmann Response to Conflict" (CC BY 4.0; J.

Marteney)

As you can see on this diagram, the vertical access refers to the degree of assertiveness demonstrated by the person involved in the conflict ranging from low to high. The horizontal axis diagrams our level of cooperativeness from low to high. Given these we can see the five methods of conflict response described by Thomas and Killmann in the Kilmann Conflict Model.

Avoid: Low Assertiveness and Low Cooperativeness



1.6.2: "Alone Beautiful Dock" (CC0 1.0; Pexels via Needpix.com)

This is the action of not dealing with conflict. For whatever reason, you avoid the conflict. This action might range from totally avoiding any situation that involves conflict or merely postponing the conflict till another time. Do you dislike conflict and avoid it when you can? This action may not be totally negative as it might be a way to save time until you have more facts that you can utilize. This approach can be used when the actual issues are trivial or emotions are high. I want to see one movie, while my wife wants to see another. This is not that big a deal to me, it is a trivial decision, so I have no problem seeing the movie she suggested.

- **Benefits:** Reduce immediate stress and save the time that you would use in the conflict.
- **Costs:** Resentment and a buildup in hostility because of unresolved conflict.

Accommodating: Low Assertiveness and High Cooperativeness



1.6.3: "Submit" (CC BY-SA 3.0; Nick Youngson via Alpha Stock

Images)

This is a response to conflict where we submit to others desires and positions. Since we have low assertiveness but want to be highly cooperative, we want to make others happy and are willing to go along with the opinions and decisions of others. How many times have you gone along with others so they will be happy and not be upset with you? When accommodating, we suppress our own desires and smooth things over. This action is taken when peace is more important than a real solution to the conflict. I want to go see one movie, while my wife wants to see another. I agree with her to go see the movie she wants. I think to myself, "Happy wife, happy life."

- **Benefits:** Moves things along and build harmony
- **Costs:** Loss of credibility and influence

Competing: High Assertiveness and Low Cooperativeness



1.6.4: "Athlete Jumping over the Rod" (CC0 1.0; Pixabay via

Pexels.com)

This response to conflict occurs when you have taken the stance to be totally assertive and uncooperative towards others. Here your focus is to get what you want regardless of the position of others. You may be standing up for your ideals, or just being stubborn. This creates a win-lose situation, where you fight to win and others lose. I want to go see one movie, while my wife wants to see another. We argue as I fight to convince her that we saw what she wanted to see last time and so it is now my turn.

- **Benefits:** This approach can be useful when you need to make a quick decision and you have the power to follow through with the decision.
- **Costs:** This approach can create strained relationships.

Collaborate: High Assertiveness and High Cooperativeness



1.6.5: "Achievement Business Cheer Up" (CC0 1.0; rawpixel at

[Needpix.com](#))

This position is the exact opposite of avoiding conflicts. Here all parties work together to resolve the conflict in a manner where they can both come out with a solution that allows them to get what they want. To accomplish this, all parties need mutual respect, trust and some creative problem-solving skills

I want to go see one movie, while my wife wants to see another. We work out how we can see one movie now and the other one next week.

- **Benefits:** High quality decisions
- **Costs:** Takes time and effort.

Compromise: At the center of the model



1.6.6: "Give and Take" (CC0 1.0; Geralt on [Needpix.com](#))

Compromise is partially assertive and cooperative where both sides can get something they want, but not everything. This is the "Let's Make a Deal" approach to conflict resolution. Both sides will not be totally happy or totally disappointed with the final outcome

We often use this approach when we are faced with polarizing choices. Here, getting something is better than getting nothing. I want to go see one movie, while my wife wants to see another. We settle on a third movie that both of us can "live with."

- **Benefits:** This approach is often very pragmatic and settles, at least for the moment, the conflict.
- **Costs:** This approach partially sacrifices personal needs.

Reference

1. Kilmann, Ralph and Kenneth W. Thomas. "Developing a Forced Choice Measure of Conflict-Handling Behavior: The "Mode" Instrument." *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, vol. 37, no. 2, 1977, pp. 309-325.

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