

CONFLICT WITHOUT CASUALTIES:

RESOLVING DISAGREEMENTS



How do you respond when conflict arises at work? Do you step back, give way, push firmly, split the difference, or seek a joint solution? The Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) is widely used because it captures five common approaches in a clear and practical framework. Each style has its place, but the outcome depends on how it is applied.

01 | Avoiding – Step back to cool down

When it works best: When emotions are running high and pushing forward would make the situation worse.

Objective: Diffuse tension so people can return with a clearer head.

Micro skill – Emotion Acknowledgement: Naming feelings openly helps release tension.

Example: The manager says, *"I can hear this is getting heated. Let us pause here and pick it up tomorrow."* Pausing lowers the temperature and allows a reset.

02 | Accommodating – Preserve the relationship

When it works best: When the issue matters more to the other person than to you.

Objective: Maintain goodwill at low personal cost while avoiding silent resentment.

Micro skill – Empathic Listening + Boundary-Setting: Acknowledge their priority while keeping your own needs visible.

Example: In budget planning, you see that your colleague's need is more urgent. *"I understand this campaign is critical and I support the extra allocation this round. Next quarter, let's also revisit operations funding so efficiency improvements are not overlooked."*

03 | Competing – Be clear and firm

When it works best: When safety, ethics, or compliance are at stake and compromise is not possible.

Objective: Protect critical standards with a decisive outcome.

Micro skill – "I" Statements + Referencing Standards: Avoid accusatory "You" language. Use "I" statements and reference policies to hold the line without blame.

Example: When a team member proposes skipping a safety step, the manager states, *"I cannot approve this without the safety check. Our policy requires it, even if it delays the release."*

04 | Compromising – Find workable middle ground

When it works best: When both sides have valid needs, but progress matters more than perfection.

Objective: Reach a fair trade that moves things forward.

Micro skill – Summarizing and Clarifying: Restating both sides' needs signals fairness and prepares the ground for a balanced solution.

Example: While arguing over deadlines, one needs testing time, the other must meet an executive deadline, the manager acknowledges & then proposes a balanced option. Recognizing both interests makes the compromise feel fair.

05 | Collaborating – Create a stronger solution together

When it works best: For complex, high-stakes issues requiring creativity and buy-in.

Objective: Develop a robust solution that meets core needs.

Micro skill – Reframing: Shift the focus to shared goals and invite contributions to unlock real collaboration.

Example: A leader calls for collaboration: *"Our shared goals are quality and budget control. What ideas could help us achieve both?"* Ideas flow, and the final plan blends contributions from across the team.



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