# Unit 2
## Conflict Styles and Strategies
## Instructor's Guide

**Turning lemons into lemonade**

## Public Conflict Resolution

This unit focuses on five individual conflict resolution styles and how those styles can be implemented in dealing with public conflict. The five styles include Avoidance, Accommodation, Competition, Compromise, Collaboration and Problem Solving. Participants will identify the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

**Purpose**

There are five major conflict resolution styles and strategies. The purpose of this session is for each individual to learn more about his/her "natural" conflict style. The strengths and weaknesses of each style in a public setting will be examined. Participants will also learn the difference between compromising and collaborating (also known as interest-based problem-solving).

**Objectives**

As a result, participants will:
- Learn their preferred or "default" style of conflict resolution.
- Understand that each style can become a strategy for resolving conflicts.
- Become familiar with the terms "accommodate," "avoid," "compete," "compromise" and "collaborate" as strategies to resolve conflicts.
- Learn the strengths and weakness of each conflict resolution strategy.
- Understand how to view the various responses to conflict in relation to satisfying one's own interests, and the interests of another party.
- Understand the differences between compromise and collaboration.
- Learn how the problem-solving approach is used in a public setting.

**Time**

One Hour

**Materials Needed**

Pencils/pens for each participant
Flip Chart and Easel

Markers
Overhead Projector
Question and Answer Reference for the Leader—Questions Most Often Asked About the Thomas-Killman Conflict Mode Instrument

**Overheads**

12  Thomas-Killman Conflict Mode Instrument
13  Conflict Grid
14  Assumptions of the Compromise Approach

**Handouts**

Thomas-Killman Conflict Mode Instrument for each participant.

Note: **THIS INSTRUMENT SHOULD NEVER BE** DUPLICATED.  Order from: XICOM, Woods Road, Tuxedo, NY 10987; phone: 914-351-4735 or 800-759-4266[1]

**Directions**

1.  Introduce the Thomas-Killman Instrument as a tool for individuals to understand themselves better and how they deal with conflict in comparison to other individuals in management and business settings. Indicate that individuals will not be required to tell others how they scored on the Thomas-Killman Instrument.  Assure everyone that there are no right

**Overhead 12**

or wrong answers. Use **Overhead 12** to underscore your points.

a.  Trainers should read the "Questions Most Often Asked About the Thomas-Killman Conflict Mode Instrument" before you lead Unit 2.  It can be useful in fielding questions from the participants.

2.  Distribute a Thomas-Killman Instrument and pencil or pen to each participant.  Read the "Instructions" on the first page.  Participants are asked to circle an "A" or "B" for each of the thirty statements on pages 1 through 4.  Participants are asked to stop at page 5 and not to break the seal until they are instructed to do so.

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[1] Anyone interested in the variety of applications of the Thomas-Killman Conflict Mode  Instrument should contact XICOM about their 1996 publication of *The Conflict Workshop Facilitators Guide*, a bibliographical reference guide to conflict research groups that have used the instrument.

3. After every individual has completed page 4 of the Thomas-Killman Instrument, ask the participants to break the blue seal and turn to page 6. They should circle the letters on page 6 that correspond to the circled items of the questionnaire. For example, if someone circled an A for statement #1 ("There are times when I let others take responsibility for solving the problem.") the individual should circle an "A" for #1 on page 6. Mention that you will meet with individuals privately if your instructions are confusing.

4. After each of the thirty items are circled on page 6, each participant will total the number of items circled in each column.

5. Participants are asked to turn to page 8. Each individual graphs the numbers from the bottom of page 6 onto page 8. Lines are usually drawn between the numbers.

6. Participants are told that their scores are graphed in relation to middle and upper level managers of government and business organizations. For example, if the participant received a score of 10 or above for "competing," he/she ranks among the top ten percent of test-takers who are more comfortable with this approach. Conversely, if you received a score of three or less for "competing," you probably use this approach less frequently than other leaders. Participants are urged to read pages 9-16 on their own about interpreting high or low scores. Assure the participants that the Thomas-Killman instrument does not suggest one is competent or incompetent in a particular style— it indicates what one's natural style is, and may reflect their tendency to overuse one style or another.

**Objective 13**

7. Use **Overhead 13** (Conflict Grid) to stimulate discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of each conflict approach.

8. Explain what "avoidance" means from **Overhead 13.** Follow up questions could include:

   a. Strengths of the Avoidance Approach. "Do you know of a public organization or group that has successfully used avoidance to deal with conflict?"

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If no one responds, you could mention that for religious, ethical and practical purposes pacifists such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. avoided all conflict that involved violence. Gandhi believed it was foolish to fight violence with violence because the dominant side would always have more power. Some groups choose their battles carefully. They have limited resources and energy to get involved in all conflict situations. Hence, they avoid the smaller conflicts and focus on the bigger ones.

b. Weakness of the Avoidance Approach. "Do you know of a public organization or group that has avoided conflict in ways that hurt the organization?"

If no one responds, the trainer could refer to the Abilene Paradox in Unit 1.

9. Explain what "accommodation" means from **Overhead 13.**

a. Strengths of the Accommodation Approach. "Do you know of a public organization or group that has successfully used accommodation to deal with conflict?"

If no one responds, the trainer could mention that some public figures and organizations have publicly apologized when confronted with conflict. For example, a Lexington, Kentucky church apologized to the community for not investigating rumors of pedophilia about one of its leaders. Many small business organizations typically operate under the adage that "the customer is always right." In accommodating their customers they strengthen the credibility of the organization.

b. Weaknesses of the Accommodation Approach. "Do you know of a public organization or group that has used accommodation in ways that have harmed the organization?"

If no one responds, the trainer could mention how organizations have been taken advantage of by clients or their own members when there is excessive accommodation. The organization or group can be walked on like a doormat.

The trainer could ask if any of the participants have felt they have accommodated so much in personal relationships that it eventually led to the destruction of the relationship?  Did they feel they were taken advantage of?

10. Competition.  Use **Overhead 13** to explain the competition approach to conflict.  This approach is sometimes called "win-lose."

   a. Strengths of the Competition Approach.  "When do you think the competition approach would be especially appropriate for public groups?"

   If no one responds, the trainer could mention that some organizations have used competition because it seemed to be the most appropriate method.  For example, some inner city churches have declared a "war on drug lords." They believe it is inappropriate for them to avoid or accommodate the conflict with the drug culture. They enter the fray with idea of "winning" and the hopes that the drug culture will lose.

   Some organizations encourage healthy competition among internal teams.  For example, UPS pits different packing lines against each other with the promise of incentives to the line that is most efficient.  It is believed that this competition strengthens the entire organization.

   In other cases, groups turn to the courts because they believe they have a high probability of winning their case.  They may also want the courts to set precedents or they may want to use "competition" to publicize the intellectual, economic or moral worth of their cause. Proponents of the competition approach are willing to sacrifice money and time in order to win.

   b. Weaknesses of the Competition Approach.  "What do you think are the weaknesses with the competition approach in public settings?"

The trainer could respond with several observations.  If organizations successfully pursue a "win-lose" approach, they may permanently destroy their relationships with the "losers."  Losers may use the loss to regroup and strengthen their resources.  Eventually, the losers may find a way to get even so that the former losers become "winners" and the former winners become losers.  The win-lose approach may also lead to permanent gridlock in which each side has just enough strength to stop the other side from achieving their objectives, but not enough strength to win anything.  This is particularly dangerous for public groups.

11. Compromise Approach.  Use **Overhead 13** to explain the compromise approach.  It means "splitting the difference."  Show **Overhead 14** to list the Assumptions of the Compromise approach.

Assumptions of the Compromise Approach:
- Pie is limited
- Best solution is to divide the pie
- Win-win is not possible
- Win-lose = too many negatives
- Everyone wins something
- *But* everyone loses something

The trainer may illustrate the compromise approach with the case of two library patrons who are arguing over whether the window in the reading room should be closed or open. The librarian may seek a compromise solution and leave the window slightly open.  In essence, each party wins a little and loses a little.  Compromise is often used in public settings.  Its appeal may be rooted in our American sense of fairness.

a.  Strengths of the Compromise Approach.  "Have you seen the compromise approach used effectively in public settings?"

If no examples are offered, the trainer can mention that it works well in cases where there are two opponents with equal power who are strongly committed to mutually exclusive goals.  For example, compromise has been effective in organized labor and management disputes.  Compromise can be used effectively in organizations where goals are moderately important but

not worth the effort of more assertive modes such as competition.

    b.  Weaknesses of the Compromise Approach. "Have you seen the compromise approach used ineffectively in public settings?"

If no examples are offered, the trainer can mention that groups may have goals that are so important that compromise would only weaken the organization. They may have little choice but to pursue a win-lose strategy. In other cases, the compromise approach dissatisfies all parties because everyone wins something but they also lose something. The trainer should mention that the compromise approach, not matter how familiar it seems, is not always the best approach. Some critics of compromise say organizations should attempt to pursue a "win-win" strategy that would leave all parties satisfied.

12. "Collaboration" or "Problem-Solving." Note that Thomas-Killman calls this approach "collaboration", but it is more commonly called "problem-solving" or "interest-based problem solving." Refer to the upper right-hand corner of **Overhead 13.**

This approach is the least understood of all five strategies. It usually involves a redefinition of the problem and then the disputants seek creative ways to address the problem. Let's take the earlier case of the two library patrons who are arguing whether the window should be closed or open (see compromise explanation — #11). The interest-based problem solving approach probes under the interests underneath the positions. The positions are clear. One patron wants the window closed and the other wants it open. But we don't know why they have such strong positions. The person who wants the window closed says that she wants to avoid a draft. The person who wants the window open says that he needs fresh air. The problem changes from "Should the window be closed or open?" to "How can one patron get fresh air while the other avoids a draft?"

The trainer asks the workshop participants to brainstorm solutions to the question : "How can one patron get fresh air while the other avoids a draft?"  The creative brainstorming by the group is reflective of how problem-solving works.

After the participants offer possible solutions the trainer reveals that this <u>real</u> case was solved in a unique way.  The librarian went into another room and raised a window which brought fresh air into the reading room but did not create a draft.

a. Strengths of the Problem-Solving Approach.  The trainer asks the participants  "Have you seen the problem-solving approach used effectively in public settings?  If so, how?"

If there is no response from the participants the trainer can mention that interest-based problem solving has been used in Washington state to address an agricultural pest problem.[2]

First discovered in Texas in 1986, the Russian wheat aphid (RWA) spread into Washington by 1988, resulting in millions of dollars of crop loss.  Since biological control was still several years away from being developed, Washington producers aerially applied the insecticide disulfoton to kill the RWA.  Producers supported the aerial applications, but challenges were raised by the nonagricultural community that was concerned about chemical drift and its impact on waterways, wetlands, and wildlife and human contact.  Other incidents of chemical contact in Washington cast the debate over aerial application of disulfoton into "pro" and "con" camps.

Hoping to end the polarizing direction of the debate, the agricultural industry supported a Washington State Conservation Commission-sponsored proposal calling for a consensus-based dispute resolution.
Before the positions became entrenched, the producers and nonagricultural parties were able to reframe the issue to reflect the key stakeholder's interests.
Originally the question was cast as "Should we permit aerial application of disulfoton, or shouldn't we?"  The

[2]Adapted from Fiske, Emmett P. 1991 (Fall) "Extension's Effectiveness in Resolving  Environmental Disputes" in *Journal of Extension* as viewed on the internet at:  http://www.joe.org/joe/1991fall/a8.txt

question became "How can we control the RWA problem while still safeguarding the environment and health of the surrounding land and people?" Notice how this question did not place people into two camps.

Through a series of meetings between the stakeholding groups, several important agreements were reached: there would be voluntary compliance among producers with the established agreements; public education about RWA and disulfoton; protection of people, wildlife, wetlands, and waterways; and ongoing monitoring and assessment of RWA potential for crop damage.

The result of these voluntary agreements included: more than 80,000 fact sheets about the possible countermeasures against the RWA and the impact on human and wildlife health resulting from disulfoton; 75% of wheat and barley growers who sprayed complied with the group's recommendations; fewer pesticides were used, and those used were more effective because of intensive management and monitoring efforts; and in the 1989 growing season there were no reported health hazards associated with disulfoton.

b. Weaknesses of the Problem-Solving Approach. "Have you seen the problem-solving approach used inappropriately in public settings?"

If no one responds, the trainer can mention that it is inappropriate if one of the key disputants/stakeholders refuses to be involved in any kind of dialogue. In other cases, it may be too time-consuming for organizations to pursue. Sometimes, it is quicker and easier if an authority figure makes a decision and sticks with it. Some disputants may want to pursue litigation in order to set a legal precedent. In other cases, it may take a lot of time to create the atmosphere of trust and openness problem solving requires.

13. Summary

    a.   The trainer mentions that each of these five approaches has strengths and limitations. Ask the participants if they understand how the five approaches work and when they likely won't work.

    b.   The trainer mentions that the participants are free to keep their Thomas-Killman Conflict Mode Instrument. They should be aware that their "natural" conflict resolution styles may be overused. People tend to overuse their natural styles because they feel comfortable with them even when it is inappropriate. **Ideally, one uses all five styles when dealing with public conflict**.

14. The next step. The trainer asks if any participant scored "high" on "collaborating" on the Thomas-Killman Conflict Mode. Most likely, very few people will have scored high. The trainer mentions that this approach tends to be underutilized and that the bulk of the training will focus on collaboration or interest-based problem-solving.

15. As a final exercise, the trainer might want to graph the collective score of the group. By making hash marks on the flip chart indicating each participants high and low score the group can gain a sense of how their scores compare to those of their peers.