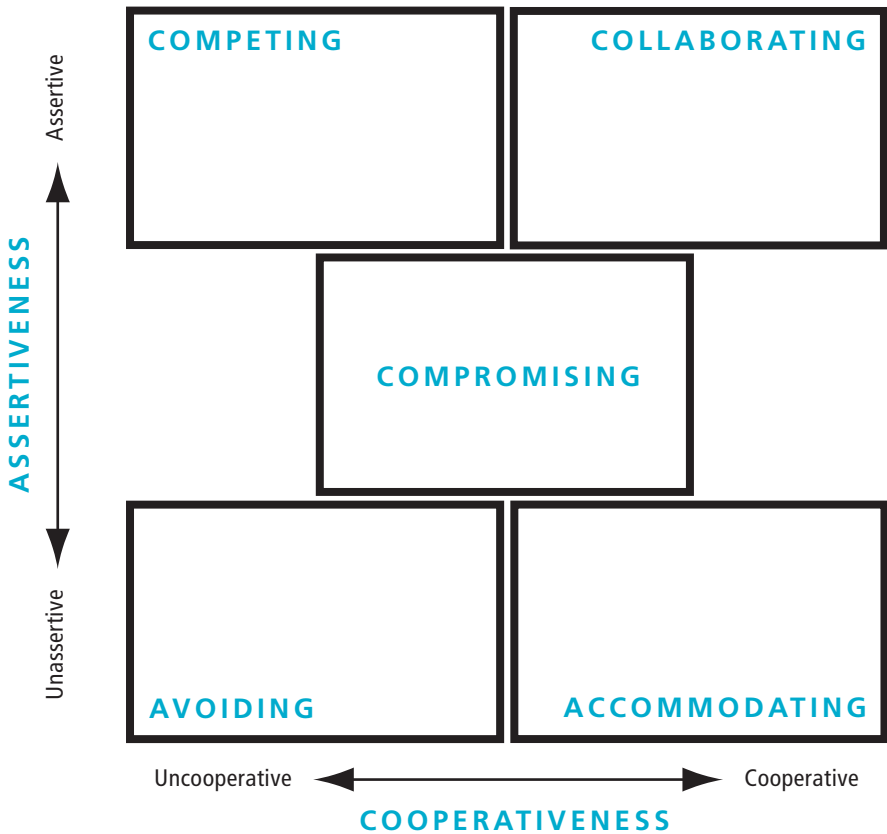


Using the TKI Assessment with the Voices® Instrument



The *Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument* (TKI) provides both a vehicle for and a language to use in helping people turn conflict into an opportunity for productive dialogue. The TKI assessment identifies five different conflict-handling styles, or modes—competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating—and explains how and when each one may be used most effectively. As shown in the figure below, these five modes represent the five major combinations of assertiveness and cooperativeness that are possible in a conflict situation. Everyone is capable of using all five conflict-handling modes. However, most people use some modes more readily than others and thus tend to rely on those modes more heavily.

TKI Conflict-Handling Modes



BASICS OF THE VOICES® INSTRUMENT

Professionals in the arena of leadership development and performance effectiveness are always on the lookout for tools that provide comprehensive real-time feedback that is immediately useable. The 360-degree *Voices*® instrument by Michael M. Lombardo and Robert W. Eichinger, published by Lominger (Korn/Ferry Powered by Lominger), is particularly successful at delivering such feedback. Organizations around the world trust the research behind the assessment and rely on *Voices* as a developmental tool in their work with both current and emerging leaders.

The goal of the *Voices* assessment is to help leaders confirm their strengths and find and address their most pressing needs. The instrument provides both quantitative (using numerical data and graphs) and qualitative (narrative) feedback. Up to twenty raters have the opportunity to rate an individual on 67 different competencies, half of which are related to emotional intelligence (EQ). Raters rate the individual on each competency using a scale of 1–5, and the person being assessed also rates himself or herself. Space is provided for raters to type in comments if they wish, which are then added to the recipient’s report anonymously. Individuals receiving feedback are compared to 500,000 people in the existing database. Depending on the report they receive, some people also receive feedback about their perceived blind spots, hidden strengths, best developmental opportunities, and “staller/stopper” behaviors.

For the purposes of this discussion, in the text that follows I will examine twenty (see list below) of the most universally relevant and commonly used competencies assessed by the *Voices* instrument. These competencies were chosen because they are important to leaders no matter what role they may play.

Approachability	Negotiating
Building Effective Teams	Peer Relationships
Comfort Around Higher Management	Personal Disclosure
Conflict Management	Personal Learning
Dealing with Ambiguity	Planning
Informing	Presentation Skills
Interpersonal Savvy	Priority Setting
Listening	Time Management
Managerial Courage	Understanding Others
Motivating Others	Written Communications

Voices reports also provide feedback on six leadership factors, each of which comprises one or more clusters of competencies. The six factors are Strategic Skills, Operating Skills, Courage, Energy and Drive, Organizational Positioning Skills, and Personal and Interpersonal Skills. I will address the factors most closely related to conflict management in a later section.

RECEIVING FEEDBACK

Now, with a basic understanding of how the *Voices* instrument works, we can begin looking at the intersection of the *Voices* and TKI assessments. First, and in some ways most important, the TKI instrument can be used to understand how a person might receive feedback. The behaviors people use when they are given feedback, particularly difficult or corrective feedback, can affect what they

are capable of hearing and integrating. The paragraphs below describe how each of the five conflict-handling modes of the TKI tool can potentially affect the way in which leaders receive feedback when in a conflict.

Competing. “I know, I know.” People who tend to lean on the competing mode during conflict may feel defensive about receiving feedback, even though they may enjoy a hearty dialogue or discussion. This is especially true if the feedback recipient has an important relationship with the feedback provider or cares about how the provider perceives him. When the individual feels vulnerable—for example, if the feedback relates to an aspect of EQ—he may experience a “fight” response, refuting the feedback and providing evidence of why it is inaccurate. When on the defensive, a person using the competing mode is not so much listening as formulating an argument against the feedback. In that situation it may be necessary to have a follow-up conversation to reiterate the opportunity to use the feedback productively for development purposes.

Collaborating. “That’s an interesting perspective.” People who tend to rely on the collaborating conflict-handling mode may not necessarily dispute feedback right off the bat, but they will probe for examples of the behaviors that led to the formation of the opinion or perspective provided. Though not convinced of the veracity of the feedback, the collaborator will at least try to see the rater’s perspective and imagine how or if it could be accurate. In some cases a collaborator recipient may offer supporting evidence to show a lack of the behavior present, but the presentation will likely seem less hostile than would that of a person using the competing mode.

Compromising. “Okay, so if I agree that’s true, then what?” When an individual who relies on the compromising mode receives feedback, the experience is transactional. The recipient may agree to concede that some information is true while arguing that other pieces of data are absolutely false. The goal is to get to the point of the feedback—the point at which an action item is created and there is a task to be accomplished. In this scenario, moving to the middle ground serves the purpose of arriving at a mutually acceptable solution that enables both parties to get at least a little of what they want.

Avoiding. “I’m not feeling well. Would you mind terribly if we were to do this later?” Receiving difficult feedback is a challenge for most people, but for people who rely on the avoiding mode, it is their worst nightmare! An avoider may put off the conversation for as long as possible and even hope that it will go away entirely. If she is not willing or ready to address the subject of the feedback, she may find the tendency to sweep things under the rug difficult to resist. The desire to avoid may be so strong that she will remove herself from consideration for an interesting project or a discussion that could help advance her career.

Accommodating. “Thanks for the feedback. You’re right!” After receiving difficult feedback, a person who leans most on the accommodating mode may need a moment to himself to process what was said—or to shield the other person from his immediate reaction to the feedback. Even if he is not sure he agrees with what is being said at the time, the accommodator will likely not dispute the information and may even indicate some level of agreement. Despite the fact that the feedback provider could have misconstrued his behavior or formed an opinion based on inaccurate information, rarely will a person using this mode confront the provider or correct the inaccuracies.

VOICES® FACTORS AND CLUSTERS

As mentioned earlier, *Voices* raters also provide feedback on six leadership factors, each of which comprises one or more clusters of competencies. The six factors are Strategic Skills, Operating Skills, Courage, Energy and Drive, Organizational Positioning Skills, and Personal and Interpersonal Skills. The skill-rating question asks: “How would you describe/rate the Learner (or Yourself) on this competency?” Raters can choose from the following responses: Towering Strength, Talented, Skilled/OK, Weakness, A Serious Issue, Don’t Know, Can’t Rate Clearly.

Two of the six factors play a significant role during conflict situations: (1) Courage, and (2) Personal and Interpersonal Skills. The clusters and competencies related to these two factors are listed below.

COURAGE

Cluster: Dealing with Trouble

- Command Skills
- Conflict Management
- Confronting Direct Reports
- Managerial Courage
- Standing Alone

Cluster: Making Tough People Calls

- Hiring and Staffing
- Sizing Up People

PERSONAL AND INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Cluster: Relating Skills

- Approachability
- Interpersonal Savvy

Cluster: Caring About Others

- Caring About Direct Reports
- Compassion

Cluster: Managing Diverse Relationships

- Boss Relationships
- Customer Focus
- Managing Diversity
- Fairness to Direct Reports
- Peer Relationships
- Understanding Others

Cluster: Inspiring Others

- Motivating Others
- Negotiating
- Building Effective Teams
- Managing Vision and Purpose

Cluster: Acting with Honor and Character

Ethics and Values

Integrity and Trust

Cluster: Being Open and Receptive

Composure

Humor

Listening

Patience

Personal Disclosure

Cluster: Demonstrating Personal Flexibility

Dealing with Paradox

Personal Learning

Self-Development

Self-Knowledge

Cluster: Balancing Work/Life

Work/Life Balance

Not all of these areas are directly affected by which conflict mode on the TKI assessment is enacted most of the time. I will break things down by section to address the interchange between the *Voices* and TKI data.

Courage

Clearly, this is an area in which one's natural approach to conflict matters! This section examines the following questions:

- Do you confront your direct reports if they are not performing appropriately?
- How do you show courage as a manager?
- How do you feel when it is necessary for you to stand alone or champion an idea on your own?
- Are you a good judge of character?
- How do you manage conflict?

Now, let's address these questions as they pertain to the conflict modes.

Do you confront your direct reports if they are not performing appropriately?

Here is a situation in which using the **competing** mode makes sense. Being direct and clear about what the direct report is not doing and indicating what needs to be changed would come easily to a manager using her skills in the competing mode. A manager using the **collaborating** mode might spend some time trying to discover what issue or challenge is keeping the direct report from achieving peak performance. Then he would make suggestions about potential next steps to improve performance. A manager using the **compromising** mode might ask what the direct report needs in order to do his job well and offer to provide more of those resources in lieu of others. The

core issue of why the performance has changed might not be addressed in this conversation. A manager with an **avoiding** style might wait until the performance issues come to a head and then address them in a roundabout way or hope that they will change on their own. Finally, an **accommodating** manager would likely have a conversation with the direct report to show support and understanding, but ultimately this manager might step in and do the work herself in order to avoid the conversation or conflict.

How do you show courage as a manager?

The **competing** manager will likely step in and share his thoughts, ideas, and concerns, even if they are unpopular. The **collaborating** manager might provide some risky or innovative suggestions as a means of using insight to move forward. The **compromising** manager might push for negotiation to reach a solution. An **avoiding** manager might struggle to show courage overtly and instead might lead by example through her actions and behavior. The **accommodating** manager would advocate for someone else before himself.

How do you feel when it is necessary for you to stand alone or champion an idea on your own?

People who use the **competing** mode often emphasize their own interests first and foremost and probably are experienced in fighting for the things they want. When **collaborators** stand alone, they likely have important information or insight that is inspiring them to do so. **Compromisers** are willing to stand up if it means they will also get a little bit of what they need. **Avoiders** may feel anxious or nervous speaking up for something, and when they do it likely intersects with a principle or value that is incredibly important to them. **Accommodators** will stand up if they feel another person lacks the power, ability, or opportunity to speak for himself. Though it may be challenging for them to deal with dissent, they will forge ahead as an advocate for another person.

Are you a good judge of character?

People who use the **competing** mode may not listen enough to get the information they need to make a sound assessment because they are so busy pushing their agenda. **Collaborators** are likely to dig in to learn about the person and as a result may create sound hypotheses. **Compromisers** may be more interested in resolving the conflict than in determining whether the person is demonstrating appropriate behavior, but they could learn about the person through the negotiation process. **Avoiders** may have their own ideas and opinion but will likely be reluctant to share them. Because they likely have had little interaction with the person, they may have inconclusive data and be unable to form an accurate impression. **Accommodators** are so concerned about being judged themselves that they will likely give anyone the benefit of the doubt.

How do you manage conflict?

This question is being addressed throughout this guide, so I will not address it here.

Personal and Interpersonal Skills

Listed below are some questions related to the Personal and Interpersonal Skills factor.

- Do people at all levels of the organization feel comfortable coming to you with comments, suggestions, or problems?
- Do you show compassion for colleagues and direct reports when they are struggling with personal or professional challenges?
- Can you be objective regardless of your opinion about what is right or the best option?
- Do you attempt to understand why people do the things they do and what motivates them?
- Are you willing to give up some of what you want in order to get more of what you need?
- Do you take time to listen to others as opposed to formulating your next comment or question as they are speaking? Do you allow others the time and space to share their viewpoint?
- Do you take time to know your assets and vulnerabilities well?

Now, let's examine these questions as they pertain to the conflict modes.

Do people at all levels of the organization feel comfortable coming to you with comments, suggestions, or problems?

People's approachability is determined by a variety of characteristics—including their demeanor, their reputation, their degree of openness, and whether and how they make themselves available to others. If an individual uses the **competing** mode most of the time, others may see her as a "my way or the highway" type of person and may choose not to waste their time sharing ideas or concerns with her. In contrast, people who rely on the **collaborating** and **compromising** modes pay more attention to what other people may want or need from them, and, as a result, they may appear to be more open to interactions with others. If someone has a reputation for **avoiding**, others may think he does not want to be bothered with problems—no matter how big or how small. **Accommodating** people, however, likely seem very open to developing relationships with others and probably have a warm, friendly approach that makes others feel comfortable approaching them.

Do you show compassion for colleagues and direct reports when they are struggling with personal or professional challenges?

When people are using the **competing** mode, bulldozing ahead to try and get what they want in a conflict, they do not have the luxury of caring about what other people need or think. Even if they do see another's point of view, their mission is to get what they need to win, and feelings may just get in the way of accomplishing that goal. By necessity, people using **collaborating** and **compromising** have to be at least a little concerned with what the other party wants or needs, or they likely will not get what they want or need. People using the **avoiding** mode may lack interest in other people or fear confrontation; either way, their anxiety or fear may conflict with their ability to have compassion for others. The challenge we often see with **accommodating** people is that they care too much at their own expense.

Can you be objective regardless of your opinion about what is right or the best option?

People who tend to rely on the **competing** mode during a conflict are often viewed by others as being unfair. Their concern for winning trumps all else, and people on the opposite side of their argument may be left drowning in their wake. Competing people often manage up well but have difficulty getting buy-in from people around and below them because their reputation precedes them. People who use the **compromising** and **collaborating** modes balance between asserting their own needs and addressing and attending to the needs of others. This generates goodwill among colleagues and provides opportunities for effective working relationships to develop. People who use the **avoiding** mode may appear to be checked out or uninvolved. This affects others' ability to trust and lean on them for support. Consequently, avoiders are often excluded from important decisions because of the way they are perceived by their peers. People who use the **accommodating** mode may establish a reputation as someone others take for granted. People often walk all over individuals who are overly accommodating and in the process lose respect for them as a professional.

Do you attempt to understand why people do the things they do and what motivates them?

Understanding and motivating others requires some degree of emotional intelligence. Managers who rely on the **competing** mode may understand the needs of others but choose not to address them as a part of their strategy or argument. This can cause serious morale and loyalty issues among employees. Managers who tend to use the **collaborating** and **compromising** modes are perceived as being willing to address the concerns and needs of others, and to at least try to understand their perspective. When employees feel heard and their concerns are addressed, the result is a motivated workforce in which people feel valued. Managers who rely on the **avoiding** mode may find themselves facing a wall of resentment between them and their employees. If employees feel abandoned or left on their own without resources, they will likely lose motivation and may even leave their role to work for someone who is more plugged in. Managers who rely on the **accommodating** mode may serve their peers and direct reports well and in return receive praise and appreciation for their efforts. However, this continual sacrificing for others can come at a price. Although these managers' teams may feel motivated and supported, the managers themselves are on the road to burnout!

Are you willing to give up some of what you want in order to get more of what you need?

Managers who use the **competing** mode may see only one side of the negotiation—theirs. They tend to present themselves as uncooperative and unreasonable, and they will give up little of what they want for themselves. This makes them unsuccessful as negotiators. **Collaborating** and **compromising** managers are typically successful negotiators because they are willing to give a little to get a little. Those who use the **avoiding** mode may not even want to be present for the negotiation, and may give up their position or voice. **Accommodating** managers tend to give up their position too easily in order to appease or please others, which speaks to a lack of skill in negotiating.

Do you take time to listen to others as opposed to formulating your next comment or question as they are speaking? Do you allow others the time and space to share their viewpoint?

Competing people are not known for their listening skills and patience. They tend to be impatient, going so far as to interrupt others. Their drive to move things along and need to win can leave others not feeling (or being) heard. People who use the **collaborating** and **compromising** modes may be impatient when asserting their agenda, but they realize that listening to others is a necessary element in resolving conflict. Thus, they learn the value of listening as a skill that will help them reach their goal of resolution. People who use the **avoiding** mode may not want to hear what others have to say in an argument, and they communicate just that by avoiding. They may patiently wait out a conflict and hope it blows over to a natural resolution. People who rely on **accommodating** use both listening and patience as means of understanding people and allowing them to feel heard and appreciated. Their patience is commendable, but, as noted before, sometimes they employ it at their own expense.

Do you take time to know your assets and vulnerabilities well?

As a key component of emotional intelligence, self-knowledge can make or break a leader. Knowing one's strengths and limitations is an asset in negotiating relationships and conflicts. People who tend to rely on the **competing** mode during conflict may know about the qualities they possess but choose not to develop them. Their behavior may be reinforced by their success in getting what they want more often than not. This actually does them a disservice because there is little opportunity for insight when one usually gets what one wants. The presence of tension or pain makes people examine the source or reflect on their behavior. In the absence of that tension, self-knowledge may be out of reach. People who use the **collaborating** and **compromising** modes may be a little more interpersonally savvy in terms of knowing what works well to get others on board. They can choose to use their skills of self-awareness for their own benefit without ignoring the needs of others. Additionally, as they listen to what other people need, they may learn more about themselves. There are times when using the **avoiding** mode is appropriate, giving up what one wants for the greater good or taking one for the team. This serves as an opportunity for people who use the avoiding mode to learn to self-sacrifice strategically in order to position themselves advantageously within the organization. When people use the avoiding mode unproductively, however, self-knowledge may be a tougher goal because they are not motivated to examine their behavior in order to learn. People who lean on the **accommodating** mode tend to know that they will most often consider the concerns of others. They may exhibit this behavior consciously by choosing to be giving. Or they may use the accommodating mode because they do not have a perspective or opinion of their own. This may be a lost opportunity for self-development—in exploring their perspective further.

NEXT STEPS

Now that we've taken a look at the intersections between the conflict modes and the factors/clusters, we can think about next steps. When an individual receives his *Voices* feedback, it is important to look at his top, middle, and lower third scores as a means of identifying strengths and

opportunities for development. Once those areas are identified, we can ask questions around enhancing the strengths, improving functioning in areas that are average, and thinking about the efforts required to change ineffective behaviors. As with any 360-degree feedback instrument, choosing appropriate raters is key.

For more information on using the *Voices* instrument, see *FYI: For Your Improvement, A Guide for Development and Coaching*, by Michael M. Lombardo and Robert W. Eichinger (the authors of the *Voices* tool). This book offers people an opportunity to continue to explore the results of their 360-degree feedback and carve out an action plan for development. The goal ultimately is to get the most possible out of the data to inform the path they choose going forward.

CONCLUSION

Conflict—and how people manage it—can make or break relationships, opportunities, and careers. Given the chance to navigate conflict productively, leaders can choose a more emotionally intelligent way of understanding both themselves and others under less-than-ideal circumstances. This guide combines information and data from the TKI and *Voices* assessments to explore optimal ways of making conflict productive. If our job as practitioners is to encourage self-awareness for the purpose of development, helping our clients examine and possibly enhance their conflict-handling style can serve as an opportunity to turn some lemons into lemonade.

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