KEY IDEAS IN A
TKI WORKSHOP

BY ROBERT DEVINE

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) represents a very useful application of social science research, centered around the five key ways (or modes) for dealing with conflict. Such information can lead to essential learning in communication workshops and team-building programs and in sessions for employees, managers, and executives—getting them ready to deal with everyday situations in which conflict will be present.

The TKI is an ideal tool for such workshops for several reasons:

- With only thirty items, it's quick to take and easy to administer, either in its paper-and-pencil format or on our online assessment delivery site www.careerid.com.
- The paper-and-pencil version is quick and easy to score, and for the online version the scoring and reporting are done for you
- It's based on a useful and memorable model that can be immediately applied to real, everyday situations
- It offers a comparison of individual client results with those of 400+ others in managerial positions
- The TKI model, along with the interpretive suggestions from a specific set of TKI results, can lead to real learning and immediate changes with regard to attitudes and behaviors toward conflict

When I use the TKI instrument in workshops, I try to make seven key points based on the following questions:

1. What are your well-worn personal beliefs and attitudes whenever you think about "conflict"?
2. Considering the plane of conflict-handling possibilities formed by the intersection of the two TKI model axes—assertiveness and cooperativeness—what quadrant of the plane do you tend to gravitate to most?
3. What are your conflict mode reflexes? That is, which of the five modes do you automatically go to first and/or most frequently?
4. Which mode(s) do you seldom use?
5. Which mode(s) do others in a particular conflict situation appear to be using?

6. Given your analysis, which of the five-modes do you think would be most effective?
7. What can you say/do to start using the most effective and appropriate mode?

To make the point based on #1 above, I use a quick ice-breaker activity that goes like this: Flash up on the screen the word *CONFLICT* and simply ask participants to write down all of the first words and thoughts that immediately come to mind. Participants usually respond with a flurry of negative and emotional reactions: "fight," "unhappy," "danger," and "out of control" are some common ones. I take a few minutes to explore the descriptors and reactions with the group and look for common themes and reflexes, and identify the automatic angst and negative emotions that *CONFLICT* frequently elicits.

All the exercises and activities I introduce into the session are devoted to changing this belief set. This is a key teaching/learning point for my TKI workshops, one that goes above and beyond whether one's score on "Competing" is a 6 or an 8. I want participants to see that differences of position and concern between two people (or groups)—rather than just raising shoulders, blood pressure, and anxiety levels—actually present opportunities to maximize outcomes.

The workshop activities I choose emphasize that each conflict situation offers a wide range of choices—choices in how I choose to frame/interpret others' actions and behavior, and choices as to how I will respond. With awareness and foresight, I can choose to act from a rational approach based on an objective evaluation of what is happening and what is most appropriate, rather than on reflex or just the pure emotion of the moment.

I use each participant's individual TKI scores to lead the learning for #2 to #4 above, helping attendees consider whether they react to conflict out of reflex and habit rather than consideration and planning. The TKI results also provide a context of 400+ managers for comparison

purposes. Participants can gauge whether their use of a specific mode is low, about the same, or rather frequent compared to other managers. The interpretive questions provided in the TKI booklets/reports help participants reflect on the ramifications of these frequencies.

I cover #5 to #7 once everyone is familiar with the "good news" and "bad news" for each of the five modes. Before or during the workshop, I like to collect real, specific examples of situations that the group faces every day and use these to role-play how the various modes could affect outcomes. I try to keep these scenarios fun, of course, and can usually depend on the group to supply copious amounts of entertainment value. At the same time, participants get to see the five modes in action on problems that are real to them. These realistic scenarios are essential in helping lead participants from reflex to choice in their approach to handling conflict in their lives.

I usually conclude the workshop by rerunning some form of the introductory activity. I look for participants to enthusiastically respond to my "CONFLICT" stimulus with words such as "opportunity," "confidence," and "constructive outcomes." Then I know I've helped them use the TKI to start to make a difference.

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