

Using the TKI Assessment with the MBTI® Instrument

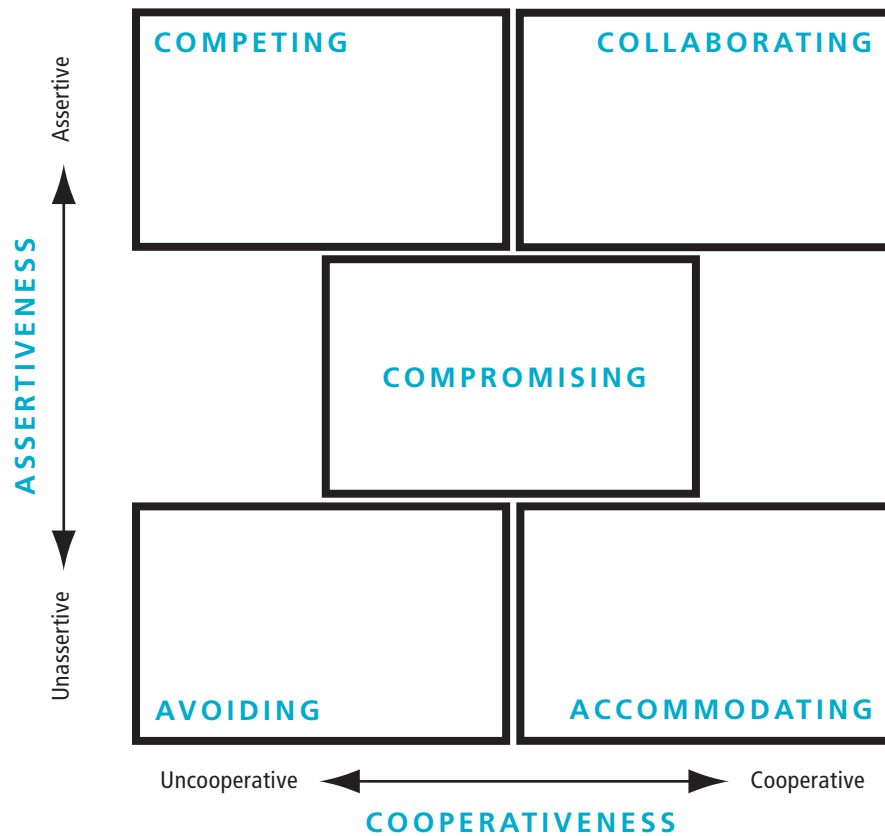
Feedback is the currency of development—whether one’s goals are personal or professional. As professional development practitioners, our job is to partner with our clients and, at times, translate the news they are receiving—good or bad—about their job performance or effectiveness into productive feedback. The assessments we use to do this help us accomplish the task at hand: to provide as much data as possible to our clients so that when we work with them to create action plans and goals, we have tangible markers to show how and where improvement is needed.

Two assessments that are well suited to this purpose are the *Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument* (TKI) assessment and the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*® (MBTI®) instrument. This guide explores how to blend these two tools to get the most out of both instruments and to maximize the data points and information practitioners have available for use in providing feedback for development.

OVERVIEW

Given the stress-inducing state of our economy, it is not surprising that conflict in the workplace—between coworkers, team members, and anyone else who might have a difference of opinion—is an ongoing challenge. The TKI assessment has been used for more than 35 years to help people understand their preferred approach to managing interpersonal conflict and learn new approaches. It 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.

For more than 60 years, the MBTI instrument has been used to help people understand the connection between their preferences and their approach to conflict. When they take the MBTI assessment, people learn about their style of being in the world, and that also speaks to their method of approaching conflict situations.



MBTI® PREFERENCES AND TKI CONFLICT MODES

Let’s take a look at the interplay between the MBTI preferences and the TKI conflict modes. The four preference dichotomies of the MBTI instrument relate to four key questions:

- How do you get your energy and refuel? (Extraversion or Introversion)
- How do you take in information? (Sensing or Intuition)
- How do you make decisions? (Thinking or Feeling)
- How do you orient and organize yourself in the world? (Judging or Perceiving)

Each of these questions is answered toward one pole or the other of its corresponding dichotomy, with varying degrees of clarity. We can combine the answers to these questions (i.e., a person’s preferences) with what we might expect within the TKI conflict modes. The chart below details how each preference might look within each conflict mode.

Competing and Energy	
<i>People who prefer Extraversion</i>	<i>People who prefer Introversion</i>
Need to be heard	Take time to formulate their perspective
May talk over others	May prefer e-mail to phone or face-to-face discussion
May interrupt to get their point across	Present ideas that are likely well thought out
May move quickly from one point to the next	May be persuasive in getting their point across
May not leave space for other points to be made	May be frustrated with Extraverts who want to talk things out in person
Competing and Information	
<i>People who prefer Sensing</i>	<i>People who prefer Intuition</i>
Use specific points to strengthen their argument	Want to focus on the big picture
Prefer an exact approach with precise information	Want to explore implications of the conflict
Refer to multiple sources of tangible data	Want to show that their perspective is better and makes more sense
Present ideas in a step-by-step way	Want to explore new ways of understanding the conflict
May feel Intuitive types' arguments lack practicality	May get overwhelmed with too many details or specifics
Competing and Decisions	
<i>People who prefer Thinking</i>	<i>People who prefer Feeling</i>
Want to show why their perspective is logical, clear, and right	Usually will want to end the conflict as soon as possible
Focus on the bottom line	Are interested in fighting for the people involved
May be aggressive in getting their ideas across	Advocate to be heard and considered
Attend to the tasks involved rather than the people	May enter conflict because of values or principles
May not pay attention to how people will be affected	May focus more on people than on facts
Competing and Orientation	
<i>People who prefer Judging</i>	<i>People who prefer Perceiving</i>
May push to end conflict quickly	May enjoy playing the devil's advocate
May not allow time to consider other views	Want to look at the pros and cons for the sake of argument
May hold rigidly to their position	Try to be flexible and open, and to encourage change
Want to have a plan in place to address the conflict if it will be ongoing	May want to keep conflict open longer than others think necessary
May close a conflict without considering that essential information may be missing	Become frustrated by being rushed to make a judgment

Collaborating and Energy	
<i>People who prefer Extraversion</i>	<i>People who prefer Introversion</i>
Prefer face-to-face conversations	Prefer to work alone or behind the scenes
Like people to “take turns” sharing information	Need time to reflect before addressing ideas from others
May throw out multiple suggestions for discussion	May want to work in smaller rather than larger groups or teams
Want to hear ideas from others	Prefer to work autonomously by dividing up pieces of the conflict to analyze
Enjoy the interplay of working with multiple viewpoints and expect quick input	May feel Extraverts invade their space and disrupt their ability to concentrate in the moment
Collaborating and Information	
<i>People who prefer Sensing</i>	<i>People who prefer Intuition</i>
Want to find the best possible outcome that will work	Search for themes to help them understand positions of the conflict
Like tried-and-true methods of working together	Enjoy the process of brainstorming solutions
Want to build on previous successful experiences	Are not afraid to take risks and see things differently
Want to dig into as much information and as many sources as possible	Build on others’ ideas
May suggest both sides bring a list of concerns	May see questions or challenges from others as not being collaborative
May see Intuitive suggestions as unrealistic	
Collaborating and Decisions	
<i>People who prefer Thinking</i>	<i>People who prefer Feeling</i>
May become defensive when their points are challenged	Work to identify the concerns of both sides
May push their own agenda more than they listen	Want to find a win-win scenario
May be more interested in winning than agreeing	May take negative comments personally
Prefer to get through issues and move on	Approach the situation trying to be helpful
May want to move through a conflict quickly if it is personal	Keep the needs of people in mind
Collaborating and Orientation	
<i>People who prefer Judging</i>	<i>People who prefer Perceiving</i>
May formulate an opinion before hearing all the facts	May feel uneasy agreeing because needs may change
Will propose a plan for moving forward	Need space to explore possible avenues for resolution
Want to organize and evaluate options	Want to brainstorm options up to the deadline
Want to align resolution of conflict with larger goals	May feel limited by a plan with too much structure
May become irritated if finding a mutual solution takes too long	Want flexibility in achieving consensus

Avoiding and Energy	
<i>People who prefer Extraversion</i>	<i>People who prefer Introversion</i>
May distract from the conflict with unrelated ideas	May not speak up about their position
May speak about the conflict with everyone but the people involved	May ignore the requests or needs of others
May express a need for more time to talk through the meaning of the conflict	May use the need for processing time as a reason for not engaging
May be less engaged in the process if the conflict produces stress	May hope that having no contact will allow the conflict to blow over
May allow the conflict to go on for too long by being unavailable to talk about it	May build up resentment if they have previously not felt heard or considered
Avoiding and Information	
<i>People who prefer Sensing</i>	<i>People who prefer Intuition</i>
May experience "analysis paralysis" and get lost in research	May get stuck in the brainstorming phase without reaching resolution
May replay pieces of the conflict over and over again	May get overwhelmed by the gravity of the conflict
May feel the solution on the table is not yet perfect or good enough	May focus on worst-case scenarios rather than productive solutions
May use mistrust of information as a reason for not making a decision	May have difficulty solidifying their viewpoint or argument
May feel that options are not solid enough to move forward	May feel shot down by questions from Sensing types
Avoiding and Decisions	
<i>People who prefer Thinking</i>	<i>People who prefer Feeling</i>
May create a logical argument for not moving forward	May find the discomfort of the conflict intolerable
May stall by spending too much time on agendas and pros-and-cons lists	May not state their needs in order to end the conflict early
May create a stalemate by clinging to their position	May be passive-aggressive rather than clear about their position
May avoid conflict altogether if the other party seems unreasonable	May worry about hurting the other person's feelings
May have difficulty accepting how they affect others emotionally	May feel paralyzed by their emotional experience of the conflict
Avoiding and Orientation	
<i>People who prefer Judging</i>	<i>People who prefer Perceiving</i>
May be confused when too many options are presented	May procrastinate until the problem is solved naturally
May bow out rather than agree to disagree	May appear relaxed with a state of ambiguity
May be stressed without closure	May want to do what feels good in the moment
Are usually decisive and likely will create a rationale for not moving forward	May camouflage a lack of decisiveness with a flexible approach
May change priorities to artificially create a sense of closure	May want to move forward without a resolution

Accommodating and Energy	
<i>People who prefer Extraversion</i>	<i>People who prefer Introversion</i>
Seek to express agreement and cooperate	May use silence as an expression of agreement
Want to be seen as a team player	Tend to show support quietly
May not share their concerns about the conflict	Carefully choose how to give feedback
May convince themselves that the popular opinion is the best even if they don't agree	Don't like having to make a quick decision without time to process
Can be suspicious of Introverts who don't share their perspective	Can become resentful if not allowed time to reflect on the best course of action
Accommodating and Information	
<i>People who prefer Sensing</i>	<i>People who prefer Intuition</i>
May find information to support ending the conflict	Create options that will enable both sides to feel somewhat satisfied
Look for data that build a bridge between arguments	Look for new information that provides consensus
Listens for details that reflect common ground between sides of the conflict	Use their flexibility to sacrifice their needs for the greater good
Need information to be reliable and accurate to move forward	May continue to brainstorm even after a solution is reached
Desire to honor tradition and what has been maintained before	Seek to identify key issues and then prioritize the needs of the group
Accommodating and Decisions	
<i>People who prefer Thinking</i>	<i>People who prefer Feeling</i>
May convince themselves that the conflict is not a priority for them	May be passive-aggressive at any point during the conflict
Consider their agreement a charitable act to others	Have difficulty sharing concerns they know will not be addressed
Will remind people of their option to choose even when they sacrifice their needs	See themselves as working toward the greater good
Try to not see yielding as giving up or losing	Are relieved to end the discomfort of being in a conflict
Are satisfied if the decision to move forward makes sense, even if they disagree	Work to show compassion for other people's perspectives

Compromising and Energy	
<i>People who prefer Extraversion</i>	<i>People who prefer Introversion</i>
May shout out multiple solutions quickly when brainstorming or during a meeting	Prefer to see “deal breakers” in writing before meeting in person
Attempt to bargain by offering various perspectives and options	Desire equal time during a dialogue
State their case and the elements they are least likely to give up	May not fight for airtime when many people are speaking at once
Use a rapid pace to identify the main issues quickly	Are likely to share only their most important points or needs
May become frustrated if Introverts need more time to formulate their opinions	Should not be seen as agreeing just because they haven’t spoken up
Compromising and Information	
<i>People who prefer Sensing</i>	<i>People who prefer Intuition</i>
Shoot for the solution that makes the most logical sense	Tend to challenge ideas to fit into the larger scope of the conflict
Look to maintain the status quo	Need to understand the vision of what the solution will do
May be persistent in stating their case	Innovate to find a positive middle ground
Need to see how the solution will be implemented	Consider numerous possibilities before landing on a solution
Will expect certain standards to be met before any compromise is made	Want to keep things moving toward exploring shared ideas
Compromising and Decisions	
<i>People who prefer Thinking</i>	<i>People who prefer Feeling</i>
May have difficulty giving up pieces of their argument	Want both parties to leave happy with the outcome
Are not usually the first to sacrifice what they want or need	Desire to find mutually agreed upon solutions quickly
Will push for their priorities to be satisfied before considering the needs of others	Are willing to split the difference in hopes of reaching a resolution more quickly
Are likely to move on and not look back after a decision is made	Appreciate efforts to consider their feelings and perspective
May think expending too much effort on people’s feelings is a waste of time	May hold a grudge if they feel unheard or bulldozed
Compromising and Orientation	
<i>People who prefer Judging</i>	<i>People who prefer Perceiving</i>
Find relief when a solution is reached quickly	Want freedom to choose which aspects of the conflict to focus on
Are comfortable making decisions without complete or thorough investigation	Resent it when people are overly task oriented or drive too hard toward closure
Expect follow-through once a decision is made	Will rebel in the face of rigidity
Want a plan that honors both perspectives	Prefer to keep options open
Will organize their thoughts to assess best ideas swiftly	May change their mind and priorities mid-discussion

THE ROLE OF TYPE DYNAMICS IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

We must also consider the role of type dynamics in the way individuals approach conflict. As a review, type dynamics looks at four functions:

1. **Dominant**—the function people feel most natural using and thus rely on most of the time
2. **Auxiliary**—supports the dominant function, like a wingperson who sweeps in to make sure that what needs to happen will happen
3. **Tertiary**—balances the auxiliary function
4. **Inferior**—largely unconscious; tends to surface when people are experiencing stress or when things in their life are not balanced

The Grip Experience

Type dynamics dictates that the functions operate in the order listed above (i.e., 1, 2, 3, 4) when life is going as expected and people are doing well. However, when conflict arises, the resulting stress may put people “in the grip” of their inferior function. At that point they begin to rely on their inferior (largely unconscious) function rather than their dominant function. In addition, a person who typically prefers Extraversion now becomes temporarily Introverted, and vice-versa. Another consideration is that, for some people, entering a conflict almost instantaneously sends them into a “grip” experience and the use of their inferior function. It is important that individuals keep this in mind during a conflict and remind themselves that the people involved may not be operating from their dominant function and therefore may not be using the best parts of themselves or their best judgment.

The grip experience can also play a role in an individual’s use of the TKI conflict modes. Just as people have a preferred conflict mode that they are most comfortable with and use most often, they have less preferred and possibly less comfortable modes. When they are in the grip of stress, they may lean on their preferred conflict mode, even if it does not suit the situation at hand, because it feels more comfortable than using a less familiar mode. The key to using the TKI conflict modes effectively is learning to recognize and apply the optimal mode—preferred or not—in a given situation. However, when people are in the grip, they may not have the resources to choose the best possible TKI mode with which to deal with the current conflict.

MBTI® Function Pairs and TKI Conflict Modes

Now let’s look at how the function pairs—the two middle letters of each type—can help us understand more about people’s approach to conflict. Examining the MBTI function pairs in conjunction with the TKI conflict modes presents useful information about how conflict is created, managed, and resolved.

First, we can explore some typical conflict triggers in the workplace for people with each of the function pairs.

- **STs** experience conflict when an established process is ignored or people don't follow protocol. STs want people to approach their work methodically, accurately, and thoroughly.
- **SFs** experience conflict when people are overly critical of them or impersonal in their approach. Relationships are important to SFs, and they do what they do in the service of people. When others do not step up to do their part, SFs will, albeit reluctantly, stand up to advocate for people who will be affected by it.
- **NFs** desire harmony above all else, but will be the first people to jump into a conflict when others disregard their values or principles. NFs serve to empower and inspire others by the work they do and feel resentful when people get in the way of their accomplishing this effectively.
- **NTs** experience conflict whenever someone questions their competence. They pride themselves on their vast fund of knowledge and will enter the ring with anyone who doubts that they are an expert in their area.

The chart below summarizes the interaction of the MBTI function pairs and the TKI conflict modes.

Conflict Mode	STs	SFs	NFs	NTs
Competing	Stress specific facts as vital	Consider the impact on people tremendous	Strive to help people grow	Innovate to make systems better
Collaborating	Collect a wealth of information	Want to serve people on both sides accurately	Ultimately seek harmony	Brainstorm for the best possible solution
Compromising	Use data to justify important positions	Believe everyone can benefit if facts are shared	Want to understand the concerns of both parties	Will split the difference to be fair
Avoiding	Resist change that lacks meaning	Don't want to hurt anyone's feelings	Hope the issue will blow over	May rebel if they don't get their way
Accommodating	Will yield in the absence of supporting data	Will change first if more people will benefit	Will agree to take one for the team	Will lose the battle to win the war

CONFLICT MODES AND TYPE FLEXING

In a conflict situation, the question of what people value and what they are willing to do to preserve what they value comes into play. Most people will keep what they value top of mind when entering into a conflict with others. There is some overlap between the TKI and MBTI tools in this area.

Competing

People who tend to use the competing mode to deal with conflict value asserting their position, sometimes even at the expense of preserving relationships. They will go to great lengths to justify their position and even their behavior during the conflict. For them, the debate may actually be enjoyable at times, and being right or winning may be their ultimate goal. Even if people don't verify as a Thinking type on the MBTI assessment, it is likely that they flex their preference to Thinking when they use the competing mode. This works well when a decision needs to be made quickly, or when a group is unable to make a clear decision.

Collaborating

Collaborating is helpful when a win-win solution is a real possibility. When there is ample time to process the meaning and implications of a conflict, people may be more likely to use the collaborating mode. Collaborating may also be the preferred mode when relationships are vital to the functioning and well-being of the organization. Here it is important for people to flex to their Feeling preference. Furthermore, when buy-in is needed for successful execution of an idea, taking the time to collaborate may yield greater benefit than will using the competing mode or focusing on “winning” in the long term. People are likely to learn more from others when they are able to listen to one another’s arguments and use their ability to collaborate. Ideally, the result is the best possible solution to the problem.

Compromising

When time is of the essence, people using the compromising mode are usually at least partially satisfied. Flexing to the Thinking preference to use negotiating skills is important when compromising, as is flexing to the Feeling preference to consider other people’s needs and concerns. People who tend to lean on the compromising mode are trying to be fair, and are willing to give up a little bit if it means something better will be created in the long run. But they will not always be the ones to give it up—they expect the same in return from others down the line. The same conflict may resurface in the future with an opportunity for a different solution the next time.

Avoiding

Avoiding may be practical when there is no clear “win” in sight for either party involved in a conflict. People who tend to rely on the avoiding mode may feel so uncomfortable with conflict that they would rather tolerate their feelings of anger or disappointment than experience what they go through during conflict. There are times when using this mode is beneficial, such as when someone is being unreasonable and spending time trying to understand what that person wants is not productive. Avoiding may also be appropriate if the debate would be more meaningful at a later time when more information becomes available.

The challenge of using the avoiding mode is that people may end up feeling like they never get what they want or that things don’t get resolved. People may tend to use the avoiding mode more when personal feelings are involved or if they think the other person is being irrational. Thinking types will need to flex their desire to win, and Judging types will need to flex their desire for closure. Extraverts may want to continue to talk it out but may need to force themselves to walk away from a difficult situation.

Accommodating

Often people who lean on the accommodating mode are trying to be helpful by deferring to someone with more experience or expertise. This mode can be used to save a relationship or to keep things on an even keel for a team. If you are in the minority during a conflict and people want to move forward regardless of your position, you will have to flex to your Perceiving and Intuition

preferences to be open to the possibility that someone else knows better than you, or has more power or authority to move forward. Thinking types will also have to flex to their Feeling preference and curb their arguments for the sake of reaching a solution. This may occur as a means of damage control—for example, if a person with a Thinking preference has hurt someone’s feelings or needs to comply as a way of mending fences in order to be able to work together.

CONCLUSION

It is easy to see the interconnection between the TKI and MBTI assessments, as there are many commonalities between conflict modes and type preferences. The goal is to use the TKI conflict modes and the MBTI preferences appropriately in the hope of engendering optimal functioning during a conflict for successful resolution in moving forward.



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