

History and Validity of the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI)

History

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) was developed as a research tool by Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann in the early 1970s. The instrument is based on theoretical refinements by Kenneth Thomas of a model of management styles proposed by Robert Blake and Jane Mouton in the 1960s.

The TKI model is based on a five-category scheme for classifying interpersonal conflict-handling modes: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating. Thomas and Kilmann ensured that the TKI statement pairs were evenly matched in terms of desirability, so that no conflict-handling mode sounded more attractive than the others.

The TKI has been used for more than 35 years and is the leading measure of conflict-handling behavior. For most of that time the instrument was available only in a self-scorable paper-and-pencil format, which made administration easy but also made it difficult to retrieve a large group of client results and conduct analyses on those results. In 2002, the TKI assessment became available via the Internet using CPP's online assessment delivery system, the SkillsOne® Web site. With online administration, data are collected as part of CPP's ongoing commercial operations.

Over time these operations created a large archive of completed TKI assessments. The archive provided a vast pool of participants from which a large representative norm sample could be developed, making it possible for CPP's Research Division to develop updated norms for the instrument to use as the basis for scoring and determining results.

The renorming project, completed in 2007, is composed of 4,000 men and 4,000 women, ages 20 through 70, who were employed full-time in the United States at the time they completed the assessment. Data were drawn from a database of 59,000 cases collected between 2002 and 2005 and were sampled to ensure representative numbers of people by organizational level and race/ethnicity.

Today the TKI is available in online and self-scorable formats and is used in a wide variety of applications, including

- Management and supervisory training
- Negotiation training
- Team building
- Leadership development
- Safety training

For more information on the updated TKI normative sample and implications for use, [read the Technical Brief](#).

Validity

The TKI measures preferences for five different styles of handling conflict, called conflict modes: Competing, Collaborating, Compromising, Accommodating, and Avoiding. The five modes are described along two dimensions—assertiveness, or the extent to which one tries to satisfy his or her own concerns; and cooperativeness, or the extent to which one tries to satisfy the concerns of another person:

- Competing: assertive and not cooperative
- Collaborating: assertive and cooperative
- Compromising: in the middle on both dimensions
- Accommodating: cooperative and not assertive
- Avoiding: neither assertive nor cooperative

The current norm sample for the TKI consists of 8,000 employed individuals (50% women, 50% men) who completed the assessment between 2002 and 2005. The respondents were chosen to roughly approximate the distribution of organizational levels of users of the TKI assessment. The norm sample was also chosen to mirror the racial and ethnic distribution of the U.S. workforce as closely as possible. Initial analyses on the norm sample indicate that median differences on TKI scores between men and women, different ethnic groups, organizational levels, and educational levels are negligible in terms of practical importance (Schaubhut, 2007).

Several studies have supported the validity of the TKI (Ben Yoav & Banai, 1992; Van de Vliert & Kabanoff, 1990). Other research has been conducted on the relationship of the TKI with the MBTI® assessment (Johnson, 1997; Percival, Smitheram, & Kelly, 1992), as well as on constructs such as behavioral patterns (Volkema & Bergmann, 1995) and organizational communication styles (Morley & Shockley-Zalabak, 1986).

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