CS 2104
Introduction to Problem Solving

Interpersonal Problem Solving

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Slides based on the "Effective Problem Solving" book

Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument

- The TKI indicates your general preferred approach to conflict resolution.

- There are two dimensions:
  - assertiveness (satisfy yourself),
  - cooperativeness (satisfy others).

- There are pros and cons to various approaches.

- When you understand how you tend to function, you can improve on it.
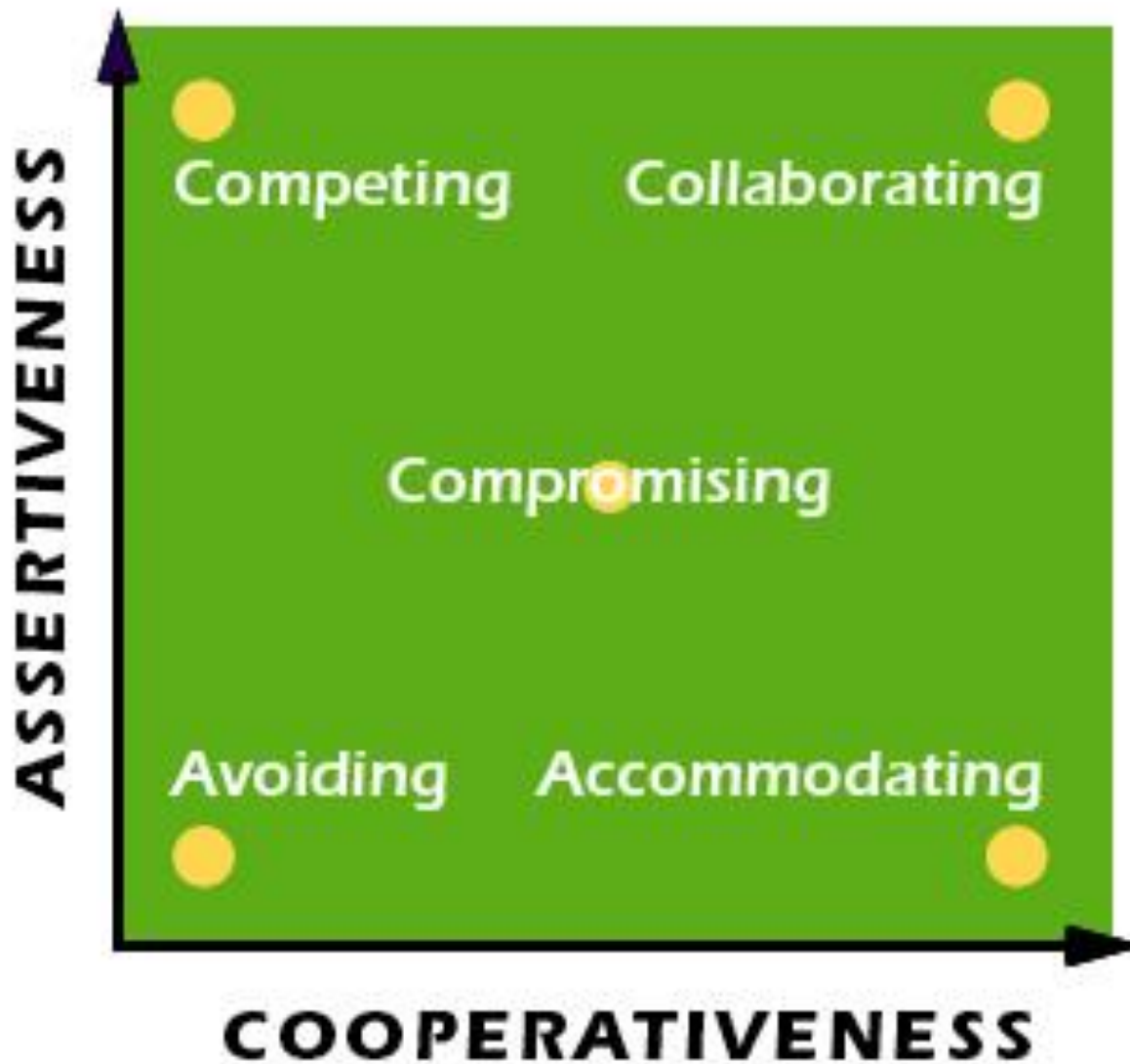
TKI Modes

- Five modes (dimension scores in parentheses):
  - Accommodating (1/9): Set aside your objectives to satisfy others.
  - Competing (9/1): Attempt to fulfil your objectives at expense of others.
  - Avoiding (1/1): Seek to avoid conflict altogether (withdraw).
  - Compromising (5/5): Seek balance in conflict.
  - Collaborating (9/9): Seek to go beyond conflict to help both sides.

What Scores Mean

- Differences in scores indicate strength of preference.
  - Highest score is your dominant preference.
  - Most people can use all five modes to some degree.
- Low differences mean ease of moving between modes.

Preceding Problems

Preceding kind of problems have two common features:

- Another person was not in the center of the problem. (physical situation: repair a toaster or

   a symbolic situation: math problems or puzzles)
- They engaged the mind in a pure way.

- Another person is seen as having created the problem or is part of the obstacles.
- That person must be considered or dealt with in solving the problem.

Interpersonal Problem Solving

- Goal: When dealing with people, take a "problem-solving stance".

- This will increase your chance of a satisfactory outcome.

- In contrast, our own emotions might make us blind to solutions, or unable to implement recognized solutions.

An Interpersonal Problem

John, a student living in the dorms, has for a neighbor a fellow who parties and plays music set at full volume almost every night into the small hours of the morning. John, a serious student, is unable to sleep for the noise. He clearly has a problem, one caused by another person.

Interpersonal Problems

- How does this differ from our earlier types of problems?
  - Another person's (conflicting) goals/needs are involved
  - The solution does not depend solely on intellectual skill
  - Our own emotions tend to get in the way of successful problem solving
  - Problem-solving strategies still apply

You in the Situation

- Focus on what constructive action you can take
  - Focus on the future (what changes you want to see from here on)
  - Take responsibility for producing changes
- In contrast to:
  - Focus only on what the other person should do
  - Focus on the past (dwelling on problem)

Problem Solving Stance

- Get into the habit of seeing interpersonal difficulties as problems to be solved, as engaging the mind.
  - This is in contrast to reacting emotionally.
- "I don't like this situation, how can I change it?"
  - Now you can invoke all the problem-solving machinery to generate potential solutions.

Example

The husband of a young wife would go out with one of his buddies "for an hour" and would come back two or three hours later. Resentment at being left alone builds up in the wife, and when the husband returns she starts scolding and yelling at him. This sequence, his staying out longer than he said and her yelling at him, would repeat itself two or three times a week.

Potential Solutions

- (When calm) Talk problem over.
  - Make him aware of your needs, etc.
- Rekindle romance (he stays home).
- Join him with friends sometimes.
- Have friends come over sometimes.
- Develop similar interests to why he goes out with friends.
- Find other things to do those nights for yourself.

Why the Problem Solving Stance?

- Why not react in anger if that is what the person deserves?

- You want to find a solution without bad "side effects".

  - Collaborating mode, win-win.
  - Otherwise, risk increased conflict in future.

Example

George is a neat person. He has a good roommate, except for one thing. The roommate leaves dirty clothes around. George grumbles in silence for weeks. On the eve of a big date, George cleans up, and then the roommate comes in and leaves dirty cloths around. George blows up in anger.

Solutions

- **Keeping quiet**
  - Doesn't solve the problem

- **Getting angry**
  - Might solve the immediate problem, has side effects

- **Dumping roommate**
  - Undesirable side effects

True goal: Neat apartment AND good relationship

Noise Example: Solutions

- Talk to the other person
  - How to do this effectively?
- Offer to buy him headphones
- Sleep with earplugs, add insulation
- Bring in rules enforcers
- Change rooms

Talking to the Other Person

- Talking to the other person often involves delivering criticism.
  - How can we do this effectively (solve problem without unwanted side effects)?
- Goal: Use "right speech".

Presenting Yourself Well

- Make eye contact
  - In informal, conversational way.
- Use medium tone of voice.
- Humanize the situation.
  - Be friendly.
  - Use other person's name.
  - Be polite, use "please".
- Describe, not condemn:
  - "How I feel" more than "what you did".
  - Not "you are a slob", but "I have this problem with this behavior".

Presenting Yourself (cont)

- Goal: To get the other person to cooperate.
  - You want to be effective, not be right.
  - Have the other person see your rights, rather than just hear a demand.
- Anger creates Einstellung – avoid it.
- Visualize/rehearse the conversation.

Mediation

- A mediator is an (independent) third party who helps the involved parties negotiate a dispute.

- Why mediation can work:
  - Parties get to vent (as a first step).
  - Parties hear other side (perhaps for first time).
  - Parties hear the problem-solving approach as an alternative to conflict.

If you are asked to mediate:

- Don't judge.
- Don't dictate solution.
- Your job is to help parties find a solution.
- Adopt the problem-solving stance.
- Use "right speech".
- Use lateral thinking, suggest creative alternatives.
- Present them as "what if" possibilities.