



ISSN: 2586-6036

JWMA website: <http://accesson.kr/jwmap>doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.13106/jwmap.2026.vol9.no3.75>

A Theoretical Framework for Conflict Prevention and Community Wellbeing: A Thomas–Kilmann Application

Jung-Woo LEE¹, Kyunghwan OH²

1. First Author Ph.D. Student, Department of Theology, Chongshin University, The Republic of Korea.

Email: newbigunist@naver.com

2. Corresponding Author Professor, Department of Christian Education, Chongshin University, The Republic of Korea. Email: kyung5@csu.ac.kr

Received: May 13, 2026. Revised: June 08, 2026. Accepted: June 30, 2026.

Abstract

Purpose: This study develops a theoretical framework explaining how preventive conflict management contributes to community wellbeing through the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI). Previous studies have primarily emphasized post-conflict intervention and resolution, while relatively limited attention has been given to preventive educational approaches that influence communal interaction before conflict escalation occurs. **Research design, data and methodology:** This study adopts a conceptual research design based on an integrative literature review. Prior studies from conflict management, organizational psychology, community psychology, and social wellbeing research were systematically synthesized to identify relationships among conflict response patterns, communication structures, collaborative interaction, and communal trust formation. **Results:** The findings identify four mechanisms connecting conflict prevention and community wellbeing: self-awareness development, communicative trust formation, collaborative interaction enhancement, and relational accountability reinforcement. Preventive conflict education enables communities to recognize recurring behavioral responses before destructive escalation emerges. **Conclusions:** Conflict prevention should be understood as a foundational mechanism supporting sustainable community wellbeing, collective resilience, and long-term relational stability. Furthermore, the framework reinterprets conflict responses as learned behavioral patterns rather than isolated interpersonal failures, suggesting that educational interventions can improve communication norms, reduce relational polarization, strengthen cooperative decision-making processes, and support healthier communal environments across diverse organizational and community contexts through preventive and reflective learning.

Keywords : Conflict Prevention, Community Wellbeing, Thomas–Kilmann Model, Conflict Management, Collaborative Interaction

JEL Classification Code: D74, I31, M12, Z13

1. Introduction

Conflict has become an increasingly significant issue within modern communities and organizations, functioning not merely as an isolated interpersonal disagreement but

also as a structural and relational phenomenon that continuously shapes communication patterns, trust formation, and collective wellbeing. In contemporary society, communities are exposed to growing social polarization, individualization, ideological division, and communication fragmentation, all of which increase the

© Copyright: The Author(s)

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>) which permits unrestricted noncommercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

likelihood of recurring relational tensions. While conflict itself is a natural aspect of human interaction, unmanaged conflict frequently weakens social trust, reduces cooperative participation, and destabilizes communal relationships (Deutsch, 1973). As a result, conflict should not be understood solely as a disruptive event requiring temporary intervention, but rather as an ongoing relational process that significantly influences the sustainability of communities and collective wellbeing.

Previous studies on conflict management have primarily focused on post-conflict resolution strategies, mediation procedures, negotiation techniques, and crisis intervention mechanisms (Rahim, 2002). Although these approaches contribute to resolving visible disputes, they often address conflict only after relational damage, emotional polarization, and communication breakdown have already occurred. Such reactive approaches reveal an important limitation, as they frequently fail to address the recurring behavioral patterns and communicative structures that continuously reproduce conflict within communal environments. Consequently, many communities repeatedly experience similar relational tensions despite the existence of formal intervention systems.

In this context, increasing scholarly attention has been directed toward preventive perspectives in conflict management. Preventive conflict approaches emphasize the importance of recognizing conflict tendencies before destructive escalation occurs and strengthening communal capacities for communication, reflection, and collaborative interaction (Tjosvold, 2008). Rather than attempting to eliminate disagreement entirely, preventive approaches seek to cultivate relational environments in which conflict can be managed constructively without damaging communal trust and cooperation. This perspective is particularly important because sustainable community wellbeing is closely associated with trust, social connectedness, cooperative participation, and relational stability (Keyes, 1998).

This study adopts the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) as the primary theoretical framework for understanding preventive conflict management. Developed by Thomas and Kilmann (1974), the TKI framework categorizes conflict responses into five behavioral modes: competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating. Unlike traditional approaches that interpret conflict primarily in moral or emotional terms, the TKI model explains conflict through learned behavioral response patterns shaped by levels of assertiveness and cooperativeness (Thomas, 1976). This behavioral perspective provides an important analytical advantage because it enables communities to recognize recurring interaction patterns that may either intensify or reduce relational tensions.

The present study does not employ the TKI model merely as a diagnostic personality tool. Instead, the

framework is reinterpreted as a preventive educational mechanism capable of improving communication structures, relational accountability, and collaborative interaction within communities. In particular, this study argues that conflict response patterns are socially learned behaviors that can be transformed through reflective education, self-awareness development, and communal communication training. Such an approach expands the role of conflict management beyond short-term intervention and positions preventive conflict education as a foundational component of sustainable community wellbeing.

Furthermore, this study integrates perspectives from organizational psychology, community psychology, conflict management theory, and social well-being research. Previous studies have demonstrated that community wellbeing is strongly influenced by social trust, sense of belonging, collaborative participation, and relational stability (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Putnam, 2000). At the same time, recurring conflict escalation often undermines these communal conditions by encouraging distrust, emotional fragmentation, and defensive communication patterns. Therefore, understanding how preventive conflict education shapes communal interaction becomes increasingly important for developing healthier and more sustainable communities.

The purpose of this study is to develop a theoretical framework explaining how preventive conflict management contributes to community wellbeing through the application of the Thomas-Kilmann model. Beyond applying the Thomas-Kilmann framework as a conflict assessment tool, this study reinterprets the model as a preventive educational framework that promotes reflective learning, relational awareness, and collaborative community development. In doing so, the study extends the traditional organizational use of the TKI toward a broader educational and wellbeing-oriented perspective. Specifically, the study examines how learned conflict response patterns learned influence communication norms, collaborative interaction, relational accountability, and communal trust formation. Through an integrative literature review, this study proposes that preventive conflict education can function as a significant mechanism for strengthening collective resilience and improving long-term communal relationships.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conflict as a Structural and Relational Phenomenon

Conflict has traditionally been understood as a disruptive interpersonal event resulting from incompatible goals, emotional disagreement, or competition for limited

resources. However, contemporary conflict studies increasingly conceptualize conflict as a structural and relational phenomenon embedded within patterns of communication, organizational interaction, and social

expectations (Deutsch, 1973). From this perspective, conflict is not merely produced by individual hostility or isolated disagreement but rather emerges through recurring



Figure 1: Research Purpose of the Study

relational dynamics that shape how individuals interpret, communicate, and respond to one another within communal environments.

Early conflict theories frequently emphasized the negative consequences of conflict, particularly its association with organizational instability, emotional stress, and relational fragmentation. Nevertheless, later scholars argued that conflict itself is not inherently destructive. Instead, the outcomes of conflict largely depend upon the ways communities manage disagreement and communicative tension (Tjosvold, 2008). Constructively managed conflict may encourage innovation, reflection, participatory dialogue, and collaborative problem-solving, whereas unmanaged conflict often contributes to distrust, polarization, and social fragmentation.

This distinction between constructive and destructive conflict is particularly important for understanding contemporary communities. Communities increasingly operate within environments characterized by ideological polarization, communication fragmentation, and declining interpersonal trust. Under such conditions, unresolved tensions may accumulate over time and become normalized within everyday interaction patterns. Glasl (1982) explains that conflict escalation frequently develops through gradual relational deterioration rather than sudden confrontation.

Minor disagreements often intensify when communication patterns become defensive, interpretive assumptions become rigid, and collaborative dialogue declines.

Moreover, conflict frequently influences broader communal structures beyond immediate interpersonal relationships. Jehn (1995) demonstrated that unresolved intragroup conflict negatively affects group cohesion, participation, and relational stability. Similarly, Putnam (2000) argues that declining trust and weakened social connectedness reduce communal cooperation and collective engagement. These findings suggest that conflict management should not be limited to dispute resolution alone, because recurring relational tensions gradually reshape communal interaction patterns and weaken collective wellbeing over time.

Within this broader framework, conflict prevention becomes increasingly significant. Preventive approaches do not seek to eliminate disagreement entirely, since disagreement itself is a natural component of communal life. Instead, preventive conflict management focuses on strengthening communicative capacities, relational awareness, and collaborative interaction before destructive escalation occurs (Rahim, 2002). Such approaches emphasize preparation rather than reaction, suggesting that healthier communities are formed not by the absence of

conflict, but by the presence of constructive relational structures that enable communities to manage conflict more productively.

2.2. Theoretical Foundations of the Thomas–Kilmann Model

The Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) is among the most influential frameworks within conflict management research. Developed by Thomas and Kilmann (1974), the model explains conflict behavior through two behavioral dimensions: assertiveness and cooperativeness. Assertiveness refers to the degree to which individuals attempt to satisfy their own concerns, whereas cooperativeness reflects the extent to which individuals seek to satisfy the concerns of others (Thomas, 1976). The interaction between these dimensions produces five conflict response modes: competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating.

The competing mode reflects high assertiveness and low cooperativeness. Individuals using this mode tend to prioritize personal goals, authority, or positional control during conflict situations. Although competing behaviors may produce rapid decisions under urgent conditions, excessive reliance upon this mode often intensifies relational tension and decreases trust within communal environments (Rahim, 1983). The avoiding mode represents low assertiveness and low cooperativeness. Avoiding behaviors are characterized by withdrawal, silence, delay, or emotional disengagement. While temporary avoidance may reduce immediate emotional confrontation, prolonged avoidance frequently allows unresolved tensions to accumulate beneath surface-level harmony (Tjosvold & Sun, 2002). Consequently, communities dominated by avoidance patterns may experience hidden polarization and communicative fragmentation despite outward stability.

The accommodating mode reflects low assertiveness and high cooperativeness. Individuals using accommodation tend to prioritize relational harmony over personal interests. Although accommodating behaviors may temporarily preserve communal peace, excessive accommodation can generate emotional suppression, resentment, and long-term relational imbalance (Rahim, 2002).

The compromising mode occupies an intermediate position between assertiveness and cooperativeness. Compromising behaviors emphasize negotiation, mutual concession, and practical settlement. While compromise often produces efficient short-term agreements, it may not fully address deeper relational concerns or structural tensions within communities (Mayer, 2012).

Finally, the collaborating mode reflects both high assertiveness and high cooperativeness. Collaboration emphasizes open communication, shared problem-solving,

and integrative dialogue. According to Thomas and Kilmann (1978), collaborative interaction encourages participants to explore underlying needs and develop mutually beneficial solutions rather than merely defending positions. Consequently, collaboration is frequently associated with stronger relational trust, communicative transparency, and sustainable communal interaction. Importantly, the TKI framework does not assume that one conflict mode is universally superior. Instead, the effectiveness of each mode depends upon contextual conditions, relational structures, and communicative goals (Kilmann & Thomas, 1977). This flexibility makes the framework particularly valuable for preventive conflict education because it allows individuals and communities to recognize recurring behavioral tendencies without reducing conflict to moral judgment or personal deficiency.

2.2.1. Limitations and Contemporary Reinterpretation of the Thomas–Kilmann Model

Despite its widespread application in conflict management research, the Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument has not been free from criticism. One of the most frequently discussed limitations concerns its cultural assumptions. The model was originally developed within Western organizational contexts that generally emphasize individual agency, direct communication, and personal assertiveness. Consequently, some scholars have questioned whether the behavioral dimensions of assertiveness and cooperativeness adequately capture conflict responses across culturally diverse settings, particularly within collectivist societies where relational harmony, indirect communication, and group cohesion are often prioritized over individual expression (Hofstede, 2001).

In many East Asian, African, and community-oriented cultural contexts, conflict management behaviors may be influenced not only by personal preferences but also by social obligations, hierarchical relationships, and collective expectations. Under such circumstances, conflict avoidance or accommodation may not necessarily indicate ineffective conflict management but may instead reflect culturally valued strategies for preserving social harmony and maintaining long-term relationships (Leung, 1997). Therefore, the universal applicability of the TKI framework should be approached with caution, particularly when interpreting conflict behaviors across different cultural environments.

Furthermore, critics have argued that the traditional use of the TKI framework has often focused on categorizing individual conflict styles rather than examining the broader educational and relational processes through which conflict behaviors are learned, reinforced, and transformed. Such an approach may unintentionally encourage static interpretations of conflict responses, overlooking the

possibility that individuals can develop greater behavioral flexibility through reflective learning and communicative practice (Mezirow, 1991).

Nevertheless, these limitations do not necessarily diminish the value of the TKI framework. Rather, they create opportunities for contemporary reinterpretation. Instead of viewing the model solely as a diagnostic instrument for identifying conflict-handling preferences, the present study reconceptualizes the TKI framework as a preventive educational resource that promotes self-awareness, reflective communication, and relational learning. From this perspective, the significance of the TKI model lies not in the universal classification of conflict behaviors but in its capacity to facilitate critical reflection on recurring interaction patterns and to support the development of healthier communicative relationships within communities. Such reinterpretation expands the framework beyond its traditional organizational application and positions it as a useful foundation for preventive conflict education and community wellbeing.

2.3. Educational Perspectives on Preventive Conflict Learning

Preventive conflict management involves more than the acquisition of behavioral strategies for handling disagreement. It also represents an educational process through which individuals develop greater awareness of their communicative habits, relational assumptions, and patterns of social interaction. From this perspective, conflict prevention may be understood not merely as a managerial intervention but as a learning-oriented process that encourages individuals and communities to engage in reflection, dialogue, and relational growth. Several educational theories provide valuable foundations for understanding how preventive conflict learning contributes to healthier communal relationships and long-term wellbeing.

Transformative Learning Theory provides one important perspective for interpreting preventive conflict education. According to Mezirow (1991), transformative learning occurs when individuals critically examine previously unquestioned assumptions and reconstruct their frames of reference through reflective inquiry. Conflict situations frequently expose implicit beliefs regarding authority, communication, responsibility, and interpersonal relationships. Through reflective engagement with these experiences, individuals may become more aware of habitual conflict responses and develop more adaptive forms of interaction. In this sense, preventive conflict education can function as a transformative learning process that enables participants to move beyond automatic behavioral reactions toward more intentional and relationally

responsible communication.

A related perspective can be found in Schön's (1983) concept of reflective learning. Schön argues that meaningful professional and personal development occurs when individuals engage in systematic reflection on their actions and experiences. Conflict responses are often enacted automatically without conscious awareness of their relational consequences. Reflective learning encourages individuals to examine how their communicative choices influence trust, cooperation, and relational stability within communities. Consequently, preventive conflict education may help participants recognize recurring behavioral tendencies and develop greater flexibility in responding to interpersonal disagreement.

Dialogical pedagogy further expands the educational significance of conflict prevention. Freire (1970) emphasized dialogue as a process through which individuals construct understanding, develop mutual recognition, and participate in collaborative learning. From a dialogical perspective, disagreement should not be viewed solely as a problem requiring elimination but as an opportunity for shared reflection and collective meaning-making. Preventive conflict education therefore encourages communities to cultivate communication environments characterized by active listening, mutual respect, and participatory engagement. Such dialogical practices contribute to healthier relational structures and strengthen communal capacities for collaborative problem-solving.

In addition, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) provides a practical educational framework that complements preventive conflict management. SEL emphasizes self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These competencies closely correspond to the communicative and relational capacities required for constructive conflict engagement. Individuals who possess stronger social-emotional competencies are generally better equipped to recognize emotional triggers, understand alternative perspectives, and maintain collaborative relationships during periods of disagreement. Consequently, preventive conflict education may be viewed as an important component of broader social-emotional development within communities.

Taking together, these educational perspectives suggest that conflict prevention is fundamentally a learning process rather than merely a conflict-control mechanism. Transformative learning promotes critical self-examination, reflective learning encourages behavioral awareness, dialogical pedagogy strengthens collaborative communication, and social-emotional learning develops relational competencies. Preventing these perspectives expands the traditional application of the Thomas-Kilmann framework beyond conflict classification and positions

preventive conflict education as a meaningful pathway toward relational wellbeing, communal trust, and sustainable community development.

2.4. Conflict Prevention and Community Wellbeing

Community wellbeing extends beyond individual psychological satisfaction and includes broader relational conditions such as social trust, connectedness, participation, and collective resilience (Keyes, 1998). Previous studies within community psychology emphasize that sustainable wellbeing is closely associated with healthy communication structures and collaborative social interaction (Prilleltensky, 2005). Consequently, recurring destructive conflict may significantly weaken communal wellbeing by reducing trust, participation, and relational stability. McMillan and Chavis (1986) explain that a strong sense of community emerges through shared emotional connection, membership, influence, and fulfillment of communal needs. However, destructive conflict often interrupts these communal mechanisms by encouraging suspicion, emotional distance, and defensive communication. As interpersonal trust declines, cooperative participation becomes increasingly difficult, weakening both relational stability and collective identity.

Similarly, Coleman (1988) conceptualizes social capital as a relational resource formed through trust, reciprocity, and stable social networks. Communities characterized by high levels of social trust generally demonstrate stronger cooperation and collective resilience. In contrast, recurring communicative breakdown and unresolved relational tension gradually erode communal trust structures. Therefore, conflict prevention should not be interpreted merely as behavioral regulation, but rather as an important mechanism supporting social capital formation and long-term communal sustainability. Preventive conflict education plays a critical role within this process. Rather than intervening only after relational deterioration becomes visible, preventive approaches encourage individuals to recognize conflict tendencies, communication habits, and behavioral responses before destructive escalation develops (Weeks, 1992). Such educational approaches promote self-awareness, reflective communication, collaborative dialogue, and relational accountability, all of which contribute to healthier communal interaction.

Moreover, preventive conflict management may strengthen collective resilience by reducing emotional polarization and encouraging participatory communication structures. Galtung (1996) argues that sustainable peace is not simply the absence of visible conflict but the presence of relational systems capable of supporting justice, communication, and cooperative coexistence. This perspective aligns closely with preventive conflict education

because both emphasize long-term relational sustainability rather than temporary dispute suppression. Ultimately, the literature suggests that conflict prevention and community wellbeing are deeply interconnected. Conflict response patterns significantly influence trust formation, communication norms, collaborative participation, and communal stability. Therefore, understanding conflict prevention as an educational and relational mechanism provides an important theoretical foundation for explaining how communities can cultivate healthier and more sustainable forms of collective wellbeing.

Table 1: Theoretical Foundations of Conflict Prevention and Community Wellbeing

Theoretical Area	Core Scholars	Key Concepts	Relevance to Present Study
Conflict Management Theory	Deutsch (1973); Rahim (2002)	Conflict dynamics; communicative tension	Explains structural and relational nature of conflict
Thomas–Kilmann Framework	Thomas & Kilmann (1974); Kilmann & Thomas (1977)	Behavioral conflict response modes	Provides analytical framework for preventive conflict management
Organizational Conflict Studies	Tjosvold (2008); Jehn (1995)	Constructive conflict; collaborative interaction	Demonstrates effects of conflict responses on group relationships
Community Psychology	McMillan & Chavis (1986)	Sense of community; communal participation	Connects relational interaction to community stability
Social Capital Theory	Coleman (1988); Putnam (2000)	Social trust; cooperative networks	Explains relational trust formation within communities
Wellbeing Research	Keyes (1998); Prilleltensky (2005)	Community wellbeing; collective resilience	Establishes wellbeing as a relational and communal condition

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a conceptual research design based on an integrative literature review approach. Unlike empirical studies that rely primarily on statistical measurement or experimental intervention, conceptual research seeks to synthesize existing theoretical discussions to construct a new interpretive framework explaining relationships among

major concepts and mechanisms (Nantharath et al., 2016; Kang, 2020; Rahim, 2002). The present study specifically aims to develop a theoretical framework linking preventive conflict management and community wellbeing through the application of the Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI).

An integrative literature review is particularly appropriate for this study because the research topic intersects multiple academic disciplines, including conflict management, organizational psychology, community psychology, communication studies, and social wellbeing research. Previous studies have often examined these areas separately. Conflict management research has primarily focused on behavioral response patterns and organizational intervention strategies, whereas community well-being research has concentrated on trust formation, social connectedness, and collective resilience (Keyes, 1998). Consequently, there remains a need for a broader interdisciplinary framework explaining how preventive conflict education influences communal interaction and wellbeing simultaneously (Woo & Kang, 2021).

The conceptual orientation of this study does not attempt to establish direct causal relationships through quantitative testing. Instead, the study seeks to identify recurring theoretical patterns and relational mechanisms across previous scholarly discussions. Through this approach, the research proposes that conflict prevention functions as a communicative and educational mechanism capable of strengthening relational stability, collaborative interaction, and communal trust within communities.

3.2. Literature Selection and Analytical Scope

The literature analyzed in this study was selected according to thematic relevance to four major conceptual areas: conflict management theory, the Thomas–Kilmann framework, preventive conflict education, and community wellbeing. Priority was given to foundational theoretical studies and widely cited academic literature that significantly contributed to the development of conflict management and community psychology research. The conflict management literature primarily includes studies examining conflict response patterns, communicative interaction, organizational conflict behavior, and relational escalation processes. Foundational contributions by Deutsch (1973), Thomas (1976), Rahim (1983), and Tjosvold (2008) were included because these studies provide essential theoretical explanations regarding conflict dynamics and behavioral management approaches. The second category includes studies directly associated with the Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument. Foundational works by Thomas and Kilmann (1974, 1978) and Kilmann and Thomas (1977) were reviewed to explain

the behavioral assumptions and structural dimensions underlying the TKI framework. Additional studies discussing conflict response tendencies and organizational application were also examined to understand the flexibility and interpretive value of the model.

The third category focuses on preventive conflict approaches and communicative intervention research. Literature discussing mediation, dialogue processes, collaborative interaction, and conflict prevention education was included because these studies explain how communities may reduce destructive escalation through reflective communication and relational awareness (Weeks, 1992; Mayer, 2012).

Finally, community psychology and social wellbeing literature were reviewed to establish the relationship between conflict prevention and communal wellbeing. Key studies addressing social trust, sense of community, social capital, and collective wellbeing were incorporated into the analysis (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). These studies provide important theoretical explanations regarding how communication structures and relational stability influence communal sustainability.

The analytical scope of the study primarily focuses on theoretical mechanisms rather than demographic variables or institutional comparison. The study therefore concentrates on conceptual relationships among conflict response patterns, communication structures, collaborative interaction, and community wellbeing mechanisms.

3.3. Analytical Framework

The central analytical framework of this study assumes that conflict responses are learned behavioral patterns that significantly influence communal interaction and relational stability. Rather than interpreting conflict solely as an emotional reaction or moral failure, the study conceptualizes conflict behavior as a recurring communicative process shaped by relational expectations and interaction structures. Within this framework, the Thomas–Kilmann model functions as the primary interpretive mechanism for analyzing how individuals and communities respond to disagreement. The five TKI conflict modes—competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating—are examined not as fixed personality categories but as behavioral tendencies that emerge within social interaction contexts (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). This perspective is important because it allows conflict management to be understood as a learnable and adjustable process rather than a static personal trait.

The analytical model proposed in this study consists of four interconnected mechanisms. First, conflict prevention education promotes self-awareness development by helping individuals recognize recurring behavioral tendencies

during conflict situations. Second, increased behavioral awareness improves communicative trust formation by encouraging reflective dialogue and reducing defensive interaction patterns. Third, strengthened communication structures facilitate collaborative interaction among community members. Finally, collaborative interaction contributes to relational accountability and collective wellbeing by reinforcing social trust, communal participation, and relational sustainability.

This framework suggests that preventive conflict education indirectly influences community wellbeing through communication and relational mechanisms. Consequently, community wellbeing is interpreted not merely as emotional satisfaction but as a broader communal condition shaped by trust, cooperation, communication norms, and relational resilience.

3.4. Theoretical Significance and Research Limitations

The present study contributes theoretically by integrating conflict management theory and community wellbeing research into a single interdisciplinary framework. Previous studies have frequently discussed conflict resolution and community wellbeing independently, despite their strong relational connection. By positioning preventive conflict education as a foundational mechanism for communal wellbeing, this study expands the conceptual application of the Thomas–Kilmann model beyond organizational diagnosis and interpersonal dispute management.

Additionally, the study contributes to preventive conflict literature by emphasizing communicative preparation rather than reactive intervention. Existing conflict management research often concentrates on mediation procedures after visible conflict escalation occurs. In contrast, this study argues that healthier communities are formed through ongoing educational processes that strengthen reflective communication, relational awareness, and collaborative interaction before destructive conflict develops. Nevertheless, several limitations should be acknowledged.

First, the study is conceptual rather than empirical in nature. Therefore, the proposed framework is interpretive and theoretical rather than statistically verified. Future studies may apply quantitative or qualitative methodologies to examine the practical effectiveness of preventive conflict education within actual community settings.

Second, the study primarily focuses on generalized community contexts and does not fully address cultural variation across different social environments. Conflict response patterns and communication norms may differ according to cultural structures, institutional traditions, and organizational expectations. Consequently, future

comparative research may further examine how preventive conflict education operates across culturally diverse communities.

Finally, the study emphasizes theoretical integration rather than comprehensive empirical measurement. Despite this limitation, the conceptual approach remains valuable because conflict prevention and community wellbeing involve highly relational and communicative processes that cannot always be fully explained through quantitative indicators alone. Therefore, the present framework provides a foundational theoretical structure for future interdisciplinary discussions regarding conflict prevention and sustainable community wellbeing.

4. Results

4.1. Conflict Response Patterns and Communal Interaction

The literature reviewed in this study suggests that conflict response patterns significantly influence the quality of communal interaction, communication structures, and relational stability within communities. Rather than functioning merely as individual behavioral preferences, conflict responses gradually shape collective communication norms and relational expectations across communal environments. Consequently, recurring conflict patterns may either strengthen or weaken community wellbeing depending on how disagreement is interpreted and managed within everyday interaction processes.

The Thomas–Kilmann framework provides an important analytical perspective because it explains conflict behavior through recurring response tendencies rather than isolated emotional reactions (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). This behavioral orientation allows communities to recognize that destructive conflict escalation often develops through repeated communicative patterns rather than through singular confrontational events alone. In many communal contexts, individuals repeatedly employ familiar conflict responses without critically reflecting upon their relational consequences. Over time, these repeated behaviors become normalized interaction patterns influencing collective communication culture.

The avoiding mode illustrates this process clearly. Although avoidance may temporarily reduce visible confrontation, continuous withdrawal from disagreement frequently weakens communicative transparency and relational accountability (Tjosvold & Sun, 2002). Communities characterized by strong avoidance tendencies often maintain superficial harmony while unresolved tensions continue accumulating beneath formal interaction structures. Such environments may gradually discourage

honest communication because individuals perceive disagreement as relationally dangerous or socially inappropriate. Consequently, communal interaction becomes increasingly indirect, emotionally restrained, and interpretively fragmented.

Similarly, excessive competing behaviors may intensify relational polarization within communities. Competing responses frequently prioritize positional control, authority assertion, or personal victory over collaborative understanding (Rahim, 1983). While such behaviors occasionally produce efficient short-term decisions, repeated competitive interaction often reduces interpersonal trust and increases defensive communication patterns. As individuals begin interpreting disagreement through adversarial assumptions, cooperative dialogue becomes progressively more difficult.

In contrast, collaborative conflict responses generally contribute to healthier communication structures and stronger communal relationships. The collaborating mode encourages open dialogue, mutual understanding, and shared problem-solving processes (Thomas & Kilmann, 1978). Communities emphasizing collaborative interaction are more likely to develop communicative trust because disagreement is interpreted as an opportunity for reflective discussion rather than relational threat. This distinction is critical because communities capable of sustaining constructive dialogue during disagreement typically demonstrate stronger relational resilience and collective stability.

These findings suggest that conflict response patterns should not be interpreted merely as interpersonal behaviors. Instead, they function as broader communicative mechanisms shaping communal culture, participation patterns, and relational expectations. Consequently, preventive conflict education becomes increasingly important because it enables communities to identify destructive communication tendencies before relational fragmentation intensifies.

4.2. Preventive Conflict Education and Self-Awareness Development

One of the most significant findings emerging from the literature review is that preventive conflict education strengthens self-awareness regarding behavioral conflict tendencies. Previous conflict studies frequently focused on external intervention strategies after disputes became visible. However, preventive approaches emphasize the importance of helping individuals recognize their habitual communicative responses before destructive escalation occurs (Weeks, 1992).

The Thomas–Kilmann framework contributes substantially to this educational process because it provides

a shared behavioral language for interpreting conflict situations. Rather than moralizing disagreement or assigning blame, the TKI framework encourages individuals to reflect upon their own communicative tendencies and relational assumptions. This reflective process reduces the likelihood of interpreting conflict solely through emotional defensiveness or interpersonal accusation.

Self-awareness development is particularly important because many destructive conflict behaviors operate automatically within relational interaction. Individuals frequently repeat familiar response patterns without recognizing how these behaviors influence communal communication structures. For example, avoidance behaviors may be interpreted as humility or relational patience, while competitive responses may be justified as principled leadership or decisiveness. Nevertheless, repeated reliance upon rigid behavioral patterns often produces relational imbalance and communicative distortion within communities.

Preventive conflict education interrupts this automaticity by encouraging reflective awareness regarding behavioral responses and relational consequences. Mayer (2012) argues that conflict engagement becomes more constructive when individuals recognize how their communication patterns contribute to relational escalation. Similarly, De Dreu et al. (2001) suggest that behavioral flexibility significantly improves conflict management effectiveness because individuals become more capable of selecting contextually appropriate responses rather than mechanically repeating habitual reactions.

Moreover, self-awareness contributes directly to relational accountability within communities. Individuals who understand their own conflict tendencies become more capable of recognizing how their communication behavior influences collective interaction. This process encourages greater emotional responsibility, reflective listening, and communicative transparency. Consequently, preventive conflict education supports not only individual behavioral adjustment but also broader relational maturity within communal environments.

Importantly, the findings also indicate that self-awareness alone is insufficient without communal reinforcement. Behavioral reflection becomes sustainable when communities establish communication norms supporting collaborative dialogue and constructive disagreement. Therefore, preventive conflict education should not be limited to individual training programs alone but should instead function as a broader communal learning process shaping interaction structures collectively.

This communal learning process may be interpreted through the lens of transformative and reflective learning theories. As individuals become more aware of their habitual conflict responses, they are encouraged to critically

examine underlying assumptions regarding communication, authority, and interpersonal relationships. Such reflective processes support behavioral flexibility and contribute to more constructive forms of communal interaction. Preventive conflict education therefore functions not only as conflict management training but also as an educational process promoting relational growth and communicative maturity (Biasin, 2018).

4.3. Communicative Trust and Collaborative Interaction

The literature further demonstrates that communicative trust functions as a central mechanism connecting conflict prevention and community wellbeing. Trust is not formed merely through emotional closeness or organizational stability; rather, it develops through repeated experiences of reliable communication, mutual accountability, and collaborative interaction (Coleman, 1988). Consequently, conflict management practices significantly influence the long-term development of communal trust structures. Communicative trust becomes particularly vulnerable during recurring destructive conflict. Communities characterized by unresolved disagreement frequently experience increasing interpretive suspicion and emotional defensiveness. As communication becomes increasingly polarized, individuals begin protecting themselves through silence, withdrawal, or adversarial interaction. Such patterns weaken collaborative participation because members no longer perceive communal interaction as psychologically safe or relatively supportive.

Putnam (2000) explains that declining trust significantly reduces collective participation and communal cooperation. Communities experiencing prolonged relational tension often demonstrate lower levels of engagement, weaker social connectedness, and decreasing commitment to shared communal goals. This finding suggests that conflict prevention is deeply connected to the sustainability of communal participation itself. Preventive conflict education contributes to communicative trust formation by encouraging collaborative interaction structures before relational fragmentation develops. Collaborative communication emphasizes active listening, reflective dialogue, and mutual problem-solving rather than positional confrontation or emotional avoidance (Tjosvold, 2008). Such interaction patterns increase relational predictability and reduce interpretive hostility within communities.

Furthermore, communicative trust strengthens collective resilience during periods of disagreement. Communities possessing strong relational trust are more capable of sustaining dialogue despite ideological differences or interpersonal tension. Rather than immediately interpreting disagreement as relational betrayal,

members within high-trust communities are more likely to maintain cooperative engagement throughout conflict situations. Consequently, trust functions not only as an outcome of healthy communication but also as a protective mechanism supporting communal stability during relational stress.

The literature therefore indicates that collaborative interaction and communicative trust reinforce one another reciprocally. Collaborative communication strengthens trust, while increased trust further supports cooperative dialogue and relational accountability. This reciprocal relationship forms one of the most important mechanisms through which preventive conflict education contributes to sustainable community wellbeing.

4.4. Conflict Prevention as a Mechanism for Community Wellbeing

The findings of this study ultimately suggest that conflict prevention should be understood as a foundational mechanism supporting sustainable community wellbeing. In the present study, community wellbeing is conceptualized primarily as relational wellbeing, referring to the quality of trust, communication, participation, and collaborative engagement among community members.

From an educational perspective, community wellbeing is strengthened when communities cultivate opportunities for reflective dialogue, participatory learning, and relational understanding. Consistent with dialogical pedagogy, preventive conflict education enables disagreement to become a source of shared learning rather than relational fragmentation. Consequently, community wellbeing may be understood not only as a social condition but also as the outcome of ongoing educational and communicative practices within communal environments (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021).

Previous studies on wellbeing frequently emphasized psychological satisfaction, emotional stability, or individual happiness. However, community psychology literature increasingly recognizes that wellbeing also depends upon relational structures such as trust, connectedness, participation, and collective resilience (Keyes, 1998). From this perspective, destructive conflict represents more than temporary interpersonal disagreement. Recurring communicative breakdown gradually weakens relational cohesion, collective participation, and communal identity. Communities unable to manage disagreement constructively frequently experience emotional fragmentation, declining cooperation, and weakened social trust over time.

Preventive conflict education addresses these challenges by strengthening communal capacities for reflective communication and collaborative interaction before

destructive escalation becomes normalized. McMillan and Chavis (1986) emphasize that a strong sense of community develops through shared emotional connection and participatory interaction. Preventive conflict approaches support these communal conditions by encouraging communication norms based upon dialogue, accountability, and relational understanding.

Additionally, preventive conflict education contributes to collective resilience by reducing communicative rigidity and emotional polarization. Galtung (1996) argues that sustainable peace depends upon the presence of relational systems capable of supporting cooperation and justice rather than merely suppressing visible disagreement. Similarly, the present study suggests that healthier communities are formed not through conflict elimination but through relational structures capable of managing disagreement constructively.

Importantly, the proposed framework also reinterprets conflict itself. Conflict should not be viewed solely as a disruptive social failure requiring suppression or avoidance. Instead, conflict may function as an important communicative signal revealing relational tensions, structural imbalance, or unmet communal needs. When communities possess preventive communication structures and collaborative learning environments, disagreement may contribute to communal reflection and relational growth rather than fragmentation.

Therefore, the present study proposes that community wellbeing is deeply connected to the quality of communicative interaction within communal environments. Preventive conflict education strengthens self-awareness, collaborative dialogue, relational accountability, and communicative trust, all of which contribute to healthier and more sustainable communal relationships. Ultimately, conflict prevention emerges not merely as a managerial strategy but as a broader relational mechanism supporting long-term communal wellbeing and collective resilience.

5. Conclusions

This study developed a theoretical framework explaining how preventive conflict management contributes to community wellbeing through the application of the Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI). While previous conflict studies have primarily emphasized post-conflict intervention, mediation, and dispute resolution, the present study argued that preventive educational approaches provide a more sustainable foundation for relational stability and communal wellbeing. By integrating conflict management theory, organizational psychology, community psychology, and social wellbeing literature, this study conceptualized conflict prevention not merely as a strategy for reducing disagreement, but as a communicative and relational mechanism supporting healthier communal interaction.

The findings suggest that conflict should not be understood solely as an isolated interpersonal problem or emotional disruption. Rather, conflict functions as a recurring structural and relational phenomenon that significantly shapes communication patterns, trust formation, collaborative participation, and collective resilience within communities. In many communal environments, destructive conflict escalation develops gradually through repeated behavioural responses, defensive communication structures, and unresolved relational tension. Consequently, communities frequently experience weakened trust, emotional fragmentation, and declining cooperative participation when communicative conflict patterns remain unaddressed over extended periods.



Figure 2: Theoretical Mechanism Linking Preventive Conflict Management and Community Wellbeing

Within this context, the Thomas–Kilmann framework provides important theoretical value because it interprets conflict responses as learned behavioural patterns rather than fixed personality traits or purely moral failures. The five conflict modes—competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating—offer a structured framework for understanding how individuals repeatedly respond to disagreement within communal settings (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). More importantly, the framework enables communities to recognize that recurring conflict behaviours influence broader communication norms and relational expectations across communal interaction systems.

The study identified four major mechanisms connecting preventive conflict management and community wellbeing. First, preventive conflict education strengthens self-awareness development by helping individuals recognize habitual behavioural tendencies during conflict situations. Increased self-awareness encourages reflective communication and reduces automatic defensive reactions. Second, preventive approaches contribute to communicative trust formation by improving relational transparency, emotional accountability, and mutual understanding. Third, collaborative interaction enhancement emerges through participatory dialogue and cooperative communication structures that encourage shared problem-solving processes. Finally, relational accountability reinforcement supports collective resilience by strengthening communal responsibility and long-term relational stability.

These findings indicate that preventive conflict education plays a significant role in strengthening sustainable community wellbeing. Community wellbeing extends beyond individual emotional satisfaction and includes broader relational conditions such as social trust, connectedness, participation, cooperation, and collective resilience (Keyes, 1998). Consequently, destructive conflict patterns gradually undermine communal wellbeing by weakening communication structures and reducing collaborative participation. Preventive conflict education addresses these challenges by establishing healthier communication norms before relational polarization becomes normalized within communal environments.

Furthermore, this study contributes theoretically by expanding the application of the Thomas–Kilmann model beyond organizational conflict diagnosis. More specifically, the study reinterprets the Thomas–Kilmann framework as a preventive educational model rather than merely a conflict classification instrument. By integrating perspectives from transformative learning, reflective learning, and dialogical pedagogy, the framework is repositioned as a tool for cultivating relational awareness, communicative responsibility, and community wellbeing. Previous applications of the TKI framework have frequently

concentrated on workplace management, leadership development, or interpersonal negotiation processes. In contrast, the present study repositioned the framework within a broader community wellbeing perspective by connecting behavioural conflict responses to communicative trust, collaborative interaction, and communal sustainability. This interdisciplinary integration provides a broader conceptual understanding of how preventive communication structures influence collective wellbeing across diverse community settings.

The study also contributes to preventive conflict literature by emphasizing educational preparation rather than reactive intervention. Many existing conflict management approaches primarily address disputes after visible relational damage has already occurred. However, the present framework suggests that healthier communities are formed through continuous relational learning processes that strengthen communication awareness, behavioural reflection, and collaborative interaction before destructive escalation develops. In this sense, conflict prevention should be understood as an ongoing communal learning process rather than a temporary managerial technique.

Nevertheless, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, this study adopted a conceptual research design based on an integrative literature review rather than empirical field investigation. Therefore, the proposed framework remains theoretical and interpretive rather than statistically verified. Future studies may employ qualitative interviews, longitudinal observation, or quantitative survey analysis to examine the practical effectiveness of preventive conflict education within actual community environments.

Second, the present study focused primarily on generalized communal contexts and did not fully address cultural variation across different societies and organizational systems. Communication norms, relational expectations, and conflict behaviours may differ according to cultural background, institutional structure, and social hierarchy. Future comparative studies may therefore explore how preventive conflict education operates across culturally diverse communities and organizational environments.

Finally, future research may further examine how digital communication environments influence conflict prevention and community wellbeing. As online interaction increasingly shapes communal relationships, communities face new forms of communicative fragmentation, emotional polarization, and relational distance. Preventive communication education may therefore become increasingly important for maintaining collaborative interaction and relational accountability within digitally connected social environments.

In conclusion, this study argues that conflict prevention should be understood as a foundational mechanism

supporting sustainable community wellbeing rather than merely a strategy for reducing interpersonal disputes. By reframing conflict responses as learnable behavioural patterns and emphasizing preventive communication structures, the proposed framework demonstrates that healthier communities are built not through the absence of disagreement, but through the presence of reflective dialogue, collaborative interaction, relational accountability, and communicative trust. Ultimately, preventive conflict education provides an important pathway toward stronger communal resilience, healthier relational structures, and more sustainable forms of collective wellbeing.

References

- Biasin, C. (2018). Transformative learning: Evolutions of the adult learning theory. *Phronesis*, 7(3), 5-17.
- Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, S95-S120.
- De Dreu, C. K. W., Evers, A., Beersma, B., Kluwer, E. S., & Nauta, A. (2001). A theory-based measure of conflict management strategies in the workplace. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 22(6), 645-668.
- Deutsch, M. (1973). *The resolution of conflict: Constructive and destructive processes*. Yale University Press.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.
- Galtung, J. (1996). *Peace by peaceful means: Peace and conflict, development and civilization*. Sage.
- Glasl, F. (1982). The process of conflict escalation and roles of third parties. In G. B. J. Bomers & R. Peterson (Eds.), *Conflict management and industrial relations* (pp. 119-140). Martinus Nijhoff.
- Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions and organizations across nations* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Jehn, K. A. (1995). A multimethod examination of the benefits and detriments of intragroup conflict. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40(2), 256-282.
- Kang, E. (2020). The relationship between reinforcement of employee's customer-centric behavior and employee motivation factors. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 7(7), 338-347.
- Keyes, C. L. M. (1998). Social well-being. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 61(2), 121-140.
- Kilmann, R. H., & Thomas, K. W. (1977). Developing a forced-choice measure of conflict-handling behavior: The "MODE" instrument. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 37(2), 309-325.
- Leung, K. (1997). *Negotiation and reward allocations across cultures*. In P. C. Earley & M. Erez (Eds.), *New perspectives on international industrial/organizational psychology* (pp. 640-675). Jossey-Bass.
- Mayer, B. (2012). *The dynamics of conflict: A guide to engagement and intervention* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. Jossey-Bass.
- McMillan, D. W., & Chavis, D. M. (1986). Sense of community: A definition and theory. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 14(1), 6-23.
- Nantharath, P., Kang, E. G., & Hwang, H. J. (2016). Investment analysis in the hydroelectric power sector of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). *Journal of Distribution Science*, 14(8), 5-8.
- Prilleltensky, I. (2005). Promoting well-being: Time for a paradigm shift in health and human services. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health*, 33(66 Suppl), 53-60.
- Prilleltensky, I., & Prilleltensky, O. (2021). *How people matter: Why it affects health, happiness, love, work, and society*. Cambridge University Press.
- Putnam, L. L., & Wilson, C. E. (1982). Communicative strategies in organizational conflicts: Reliability and validity of a measurement scale. In M. Burgoon (Ed.), *Communication Yearbook 6* (pp. 629-652). Sage.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon & Schuster.
- Rahim, M. A. (1983). A measure of styles of handling interpersonal conflict. *Academy of Management Journal*, 26(2), 368-376.
- Rahim, M. A. (2002). Toward a theory of managing organizational conflict. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 13(3), 206-235.
- Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Basic Books.
- Thomas, K. W. (1976). Conflict and conflict management. In M. D. Dunnette (Ed.), *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology* (pp. 889-935). Rand McNally.
- Thomas, K. W., & Kilmann, R. H. (1974). *Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument*. XICOM.
- Thomas, K. W., & Kilmann, R. H. (1978). Comparison of four instruments measuring conflict behavior. *Psychological Reports*, 42(3 Suppl), 1139-1145.
- Tjosvold, D. (2008). The conflict-positive organization: It depends upon us. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 29(1), 19-28.
- Tjosvold, D., & Sun, H. F. (2002). Understanding conflict avoidance: Relationship, motivations, actions, and consequences. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 13(2), 142-164.
- Weeks, D. (1992). *The eight essential steps to conflict resolution*. Tarcher/Perigee.
- Woo, E. J., & Kang, E. (2021). The effect of environmental factors on customer's environmental protection pattern: An empirical text analysis in the literature. *International Journal of Environmental Sciences*, 7(1), 1-15.