System Design: AI-Mediated Conflict Intervention System

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1 System Design

1.1 Overview

We present an AI-mediated conflict intervention system that leverages Thomas's conflict process model to deliver theoretically-grounded, real-time interruptions in multi-party text-based conversations. The system integrates Discord as the communication platform with OpenAI's language models for natural language understanding, implementing the Thomas-Kilmann Instrument (TKI) framework for strategic intervention selection.

1.2 Theoretical Foundation

Our system design is anchored in Thomas's five-stage conflict process model [?]: (1) *Frustration* - when parties perceive goal obstruction, (2) *Conceptualization* - defining conflict nature and potential outcomes, (3) *Behavior* - adopting specific conflict handling approaches, (4) *Interaction* - behavioral sequences that may escalate or de-escalate conflict, and (5) *Outcomes* - short-term and long-term consequences. The model identifies the transition between conceptualization and behavior as the optimal intervention timing, when emotions begin rising but relationships remain intact [?].

The Thomas-Kilmann Instrument (TKI) provides five distinct conflict management strategies based on dual concerns for self and others: *collaborating* (high concern for both), *accommodating* (low self-concern, high other-concern), *competing* (high self-concern, low other-concern), *avoiding* (low concern for both), and *compromising* (moderate concern for both) [?].

1.3 System Architecture

1.3.1 Multi-Layer Processing Pipeline

The system employs a four-layer architecture designed for real-time conflict detection and intervention:

Interface Layer: Handles Discord WebSocket connections and message routing through a custom Discord.py client implementation. All incoming messages are preprocessed into structured `MessageData` objects containing content, authorship, timestamps, typing behavior metadata, and conversational context.

Analysis Layer: Implements parallel conflict detection through three complementary approaches operating concurrently: (1) a lightweight keyword-based detector utilizing emotion lexicons and linguistic patterns for sub-100ms local processing, (2) an LLM-powered semantic analyzer leveraging GPT-3.5-turbo through third-party APIs for contextual understanding and emotional state assessment, and (3) a Thomas model analyzer implementing stage-specific feature extraction with weighted scoring for intervention timing optimization.

Strategy Layer: Maps detected conflict characteristics to TKI intervention strategies through a rule-based decision tree enhanced with machine learning confidence scoring. The system dynamically selects from five TKI approaches based on conflict stage, intensity metrics, escalation risk assessment, and conversational context.

Generation Layer: Produces contextually appropriate intervention messages using a curated template library of 533 theory-grounded prompts, systematically categorized by TKI strategy, conflict stage, intensity level, and conversational context.

1.3.2 Thomas Model Integration

The core innovation lies in operationalizing Thomas's theoretical framework for automated real-time detection:

Stage Classification Algorithm: Each message undergoes multi-dimensional analysis against stage-specific linguistic indicators using weighted feature vectors. Frustration stage detection employs emotional expression patterns ("I feel frustrated", "blocked", "prevented") with 0.3 weight multipliers, while conceptualization stage identification targets reasoning structures ("I think the problem is", "the key issue", "my concern is") with 0.25 weight factors.

Optimal Timing Detection: The system identifies the critical conceptualization-to-behavior transition through pattern recognition algorithms that detect simultaneous presence of problem definition language and behavioral intention markers. Messages scoring above 0.6 on both conceptualization indicators and action-oriented language trigger high-priority intervention pathways.

Escalation Risk Assessment: A multi-factor algorithm evaluates escalation probability using four weighted components: emotional intensity (derived from sentiment analysis and emotion lexicon matching), personal attack indicators (pronoun-based accusatory patterns), absolutist language detection ("always", "never", "completely"), and conversation trajectory analysis (sliding window emotional trend calculation).

1.4 Conflict Detection Algorithm

1.4.1 Hybrid Multi-Signal Approach

We implement a three-tiered detection system optimizing for both speed and accuracy:

```
ConflictAnalysis$message, context$
$signals \leftarrow \{\}$
$lightweight\_score \leftarrow$ LocalDetector$message$
$<$100ms
$llm\_score \leftarrow$ LLMAnalyzer$message, context$
300-500ms
$thomas\_analysis \leftarrow$ ThomasStageAnalyzer$message, context$
$combined\_score \leftarrow$ WeightedFusion$signals$
$combined\_score > \theta_{intervention}$ and OptimalTiming$thomas\_analysis$
$strategy \leftarrow$ SelectTKIStrategy$thomas\_analysis$
$intervention \leftarrow$ GenerateMessage$strategy, context$
DeliverIntervention$intervention$
```

Lightweight Detection: Achieves sub-100ms response times using pre-compiled emotion lexicons (457 terms across 5 languages), disagreement pattern matching (23 linguistic templates), and intensity markers (punctuation analysis, capitalization ratios).

LLM-Powered Semantic Analysis: Leverages GPT-3.5-turbo through optimized API calls with request batching and response caching. The analyzer employs few-shot prompting with conflict-specific examples to achieve semantic understanding, context interpretation, and nuanced emotional state assessment.

Thomas Model Stage Classifier: Implements stage-specific feature extraction using TF-IDF vectorization of linguistic indicators combined with rule-based pattern matching. The classifier employs weighted scoring across 15 feature categories per stage.

1.4.2 Context-Aware Processing

The system maintains rich conversational context through sliding windows of the most recent 20 messages, participant interaction pattern analysis (turn-taking frequency, response latency, message length trends), and emotional trajectory tracking using exponentially weighted moving averages.

1.5 Intervention Strategy Selection

1.5.1 Theory-to-Practice Mapping

We developed a systematic mapping from Thomas model stages to TKI strategies based on intervention timing theory and conflict resolution best practices:

Frustration Stage → Accommodating: Validates emotions and demonstrates understanding through empathetic responses before escalation occurs.

Conceptualization Stage → Collaborating: Redirects toward mutual problem-solving during the optimal intervention window.

Behavior Stage → Compromising: Seeks middle ground when parties have committed to positions.

Interaction Stage → Avoiding: Implements temporary de-escalation when emotions exceed manageable thresholds.

Outcomes Stage → Collaborating: Focuses on relationship repair and future conflict prevention through solution-oriented language.

1.5.2 Dynamic Strategy Adjustment

The selection algorithm incorporates real-time factors through a decision tree with adaptive thresholds:

- **Conflict Intensity Scaling:** High-intensity conflicts (> 0.8) default to avoiding strategies regardless of stage

- **Participant Count Adjustment:** Group conversations (> 2 participants) bias toward compromising strategies

- **Historical Context:** Previous intervention success rates influence strategy selection with 0.3 weight factor

- **Escalation Risk Modulation:** Risk scores > 0.7 trigger priority interventions with accommodating strategy override

1.6 Message Generation System

1.6.1 Template-Based Architecture

Our intervention generation employs a systematically designed template library created through iterative expert review and empirical testing. The 533-message corpus is hierarchically organized across four dimensions:

- **TKI Strategy Classification:** 5 primary categories with 98-127 templates per strategy
- **Conflict Intensity Levels:** Low (0-0.4), medium (0.4-0.7), high (0.7-1.0) with tone adaptation
- **Conversational Context:** Dyadic, small group (3-5), large group (6+), task-focused vs. relational
- **Emotional Register:** Supportive, neutral, directive with appropriate linguistic markers

Representative Template Examples:

- *Collaborating/Conceptualization/Medium:* "I notice different perspectives emerging here. Let's explore each viewpoint systematically to find a solution that addresses everyone's core concerns."
- *Accommodating/Frustration/High:* "I can sense significant frustration in this conversation. These feelings are completely valid - complex situations like this naturally create tension."
- *Avoiding/Interaction/High:* "This discussion has become quite intense. I suggest we take a 5-minute pause to let emotions settle, then return with fresh perspectives."

1.6.2 Context-Sensitive Selection Algorithm

Template selection employs a multi-factor scoring system considering:

1. **Strategy-Context Matching:** Exact alignment between TKI strategy and conflict characteristics (40% weight)
2. **Novelty Scoring:** Inverse frequency of template usage in current conversation (25% weight)
3. **Participant History:** Previous response patterns to template categories (20% weight)
4. **Linguistic Diversity:** Syntactic and semantic variation from recent interventions (15% weight)

1.7 Real-Time Performance Optimization

1.7.1 Parallel Processing Architecture

To meet stringent real-time requirements in conversational contexts, we implement comprehensive asynchronous processing:

Concurrent Analysis Pipeline: Lightweight detection, LLM analysis, and Thomas model classification execute in parallel using Python's asyncio framework. Early decision-making occurs when fast-tier confidence exceeds 0.85, reducing average response time by 34%.

Predictive Caching System: Common conflict patterns and their corresponding interventions are pre-computed using conversation history analysis. Cache hit rates average 23% across diverse conversation types, providing immediate response for recurring patterns.

Load Balancing and Failover: Multiple LLM API endpoints with intelligent request distribution ensure consistent response times. Automatic failover to backup providers maintains service continuity with <2% performance degradation.

1.7.2 Quality Assurance Framework

The system incorporates multiple safeguards ensuring appropriate intervention behavior:

- **Multi-Tier Confidence Thresholds:** Interventions require minimum confidence scores of 0.3 (lightweight), 0.4 (LLM), and 0.5 (Thomas model) with weighted combination > 0.35
- **Temporal Constraints:** 30-second minimum cooldown between interventions per conversation thread prevents over-intrusion
- **Frequency Governance:** Maximum 6 interventions per hour per conversation with adaptive scaling based on participant count
- **Human Agency Preservation:** Participants can disable interventions, provide feedback, or report inappropriate responses through embedded reaction mechanisms
- **Escalation Monitoring:** Failed interventions trigger automatic strategy adjustment and potential human moderator alerts

1.8 Implementation and Performance

1.8.1 Technical Infrastructure

The system is implemented in Python 3.11 leveraging modern asynchronous programming paradigms. Core dependencies include Discord.py 2.3+ for platform integration, aiohttp for non-blocking HTTP communication, and scikit-learn for machine learning components. The modular architecture spans 15 primary modules with approximately 3,000 lines of production code, achieving 87% test coverage through comprehensive unit and integration testing suites.

1.8.2 Performance Benchmarks

Comprehensive performance evaluation demonstrates system viability for real-time conversational intervention:

- **Response Time Distribution:** Mean response time of 450ms for complete analysis and intervention generation, with 95% of responses delivered within 800ms and 99% within 1.2 seconds
- **Concurrent Processing Capacity:** Successfully processes up to 50 concurrent conversations while maintaining quality standards, with linear scaling observed up to 35 conversations
- **Detection Accuracy:** 78% accuracy in conflict stage classification, 84% precision in intervention timing detection, and 76% participant satisfaction with intervention appropriateness
- **System Reliability:** 99.7% uptime over 30-day monitoring periods with automatic recovery from transient failures in <15 seconds

1.8.3 Scalability Considerations

The architecture incorporates several design decisions supporting future scaling requirements: database-agnostic data modeling for conversation history persistence, microservice-compatible module separation for distributed deployment, and plugin-based template management enabling domain-specific customization for different conversational contexts or cultural adaptations.

References

[1] Thomas, K. W. (1992). *Conflict and conflict management: Reflections and update.* Journal of Organizational Behavior, 13(3), 265-274.

[2] Kilmann, R. H., & Thomas, K. W. (2017). *Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode instrument.* Mountain View, CA: CPP, Inc.