

Collaboration @ Work: Turning Conflict into Consensus

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**Alternative
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“Planning for catastrophes is positive thinking. Not doing so is a disaster”.

Source: Microsoft advertisement



Understanding Conflict



- Conflict defined
 - Act of striking together; disagreement; war; collision
 - Results from differences in goals, interests, perceptions or values
 - Results from misunderstanding and ineffective communication
- Characteristics of Conflict
 - Occurs regularly in every relationship
 - A process often beginning with a small issue and escalates if not addressed
 - Can be competitive or cooperative

Negative Aspects of Conflict



- Saps resources
- Lost efficiency
- Weakens relationships and organizations
- Causes low morale and tension
- Reduces cooperation and commitment to individuals and organizations

Positive Aspects of Conflict



- Creates energy and growth
- Provides insight into values
- Provides opportunity to express concerns
- Strengthens relationships

Conflict Handling Modes

- Compromise-*"Let's make a deal"*
- Accommodation-*"It would be my pleasure"*
- Avoidance-*"I'll think about it tomorrow"*
- Collaboration-*"Two heads are better than one"*
- Competition-*"My way or the highway"*



Based on the work of Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann and the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument

Competition

Characteristics

- Use of rank, position, influence
- Arguing, debating
- Asserting opinion and feelings
- Useful in emergency situation
- Making unpopular decisions

Cautions

- Decreased learning
- Lack of feedback if overused
- Reduced empowerment



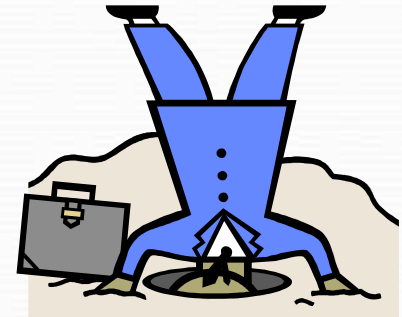
Avoidance

Characteristics

- Allowing others ownership
- Buying time
- Leaving unimportant issues alone
- Withdrawing, sidestepping

Cautions

- Decisions made by default
- Climate of caution
- Issues fester due to lack of input



Accommodation

Characteristics

- Showing reasonableness
- Creating goodwill
- Selflessness and obedience
- Ability to yield

Cautions

- Restricted influence
- Overlooked ideas
- Lack of rapport



Compromise

Characteristics

- Resolving issues of moderate import
- Dealing with time constraints

Cautions

- Lack of trust
- Power struggle
- Loss of big picture perspective



Collaboration

Characteristics

- Identifying underlying concerns
- Improving relationships
- Gaining commitment
- Ability to listen, understand and empathize
- Integrating solutions

Cautions

- Too much time on trivial matters
- Work overload
- Diffused responsibility



Tips for Building Collaboration @ Work

- Listen
- Is a collaborative solution possible? Appropriate? If so,
 - Involve the relevant stakeholders
 - Identify problem broadly-
 - Separate the position from the interest
 - Separate the people from the problem
- Generate solutions before evaluating them



Positions v. Interests

Positions

- Issue narrowly defined
- Focus on self interest
- Focus on past
- Omits analysis of problem
- Assumes one right solution
- Solution evaluated in terms of self interest only

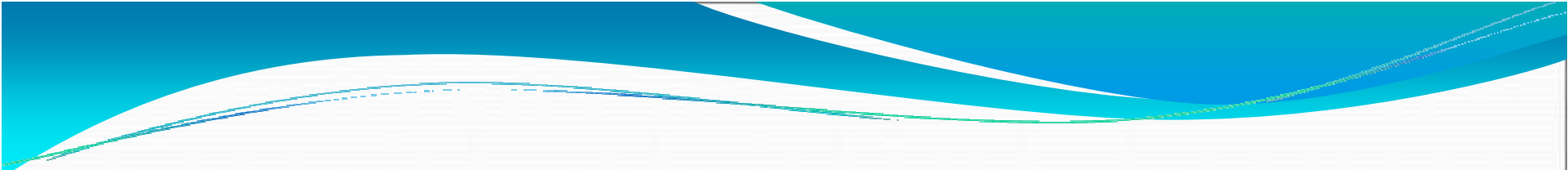
Interests

- Issue broadly defined
- Focus on multiple interests
- Focus on future
- Analysis of underlying factors
- Assumes multiple possible solutions
- Solutions evaluated in terms of objective criteria

Collaborative skills & mindsets

- Proactive listening
- Brainstorming
- Suspend judgements
- Patience
- Big picture approach





“Conflict is not a contest. Winning and losing are goals for games, not for conflict. Learning, growing and cooperating are goals for conflicts.”

*Thomas Crum, *The Magic of Conflict**

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