When Communication Breaks Down:
Practical Strategies for Resolving Conflict
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I have no financial conflicts of interest to disclose.

Objectives

• Examine the five modes of dealing with conflict
• Recognize the difference between positions and interests
• Explore how reframing conflicts in terms of interests rather than positions can lead to collaborative resolutions

Case:

• Dr. Chief and Dr. Faculty are physicians in the same division
• 3 days ago Dr. Faculty received an e-vite for a meeting with Dr. Chief
• At the meeting, Dr. Faculty finds out that Dr. Chief submitted her name for a hospital committee
• Dr. Chief is taken aback when Dr. Faculty straightaway declines

What’s going on in

Dr. Chief’s mind?  Dr. Faculty’s mind?

Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument

COMPETING  COLLABORATING

COMPROMISING

AVOIDING  ACCOMMODATING

ASSERTIVENESS  COOPERATIVENESS

Ralph H. Kilmann and Kenneth W. Thomas
Developing a Forced-Choice Measure of Conflict-Handling Behavior: The "Mode" Instrument
Framing the conflict using **positions**:

- **Dr. Chief**
  - Dr. F should join this committee
  - I should not have to waste my time convincing Dr. F
  - I have a right to be offended
  - Dr. F should be more grateful

- **Dr. Faculty**
  - I do not want to be on that committee
  - Dr. C should be satisfied with the amount of time I devote to this job
  - I have a right to be offended
  - Dr. C should ask instead of presume

**Positions**

- Are what you say that you want or what you believe **ought** to happen
- Arise from values and priorities
- Are strongly held and strongly defended
- Are difficult to impossible to change

Moving beyond positions:

- **Dr. Chief’s story**
  - 65 years old with grown children
  - Tight schedule with countless responsibilities
  - Committed to faculty promotion

- **Dr. Faculty’s story**
  - 38 years old with 2 young children
  - 8 clinical sessions a week; hard work not reflected on CV
  - Committee is good fit, but meets @ 7

Why is it so important to know these stories?

Reframing the conflict

- **Positions**
- **Interests**

Reframing the conflict

- **Dr. Chief’s positions:**
  - Dr. F should join this committee
  - I should not have to waste my time convincing Dr. F
  - I have a right to be offended
  - Dr. F should be more grateful

- **Dr. Chief is interested in ...**
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**Reframing the conflict using interests:**

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We guard positions but we often share interests.

- What might be a next step for Dr. C and Dr. F to move forward?

- Could this help prevent conflict in the future?
Take away points

• Conflicts arise from opposing positions.

• Because positions arise from values and priorities, they are like trees: strongly rooted and solidly planted.

• In contrast, interests are like roots and can be shared.

• Collaboration toward conflict resolution is more fruitful when we focus on interests rather than on positions.

References


