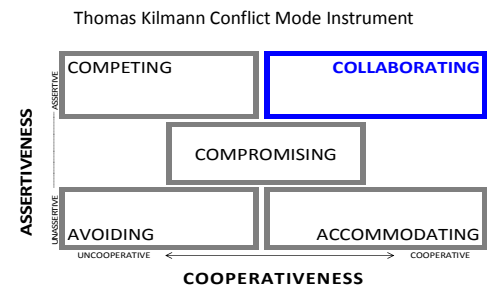


**When Communication  
Breaks Down:  
Practical Strategies for Resolving Conflict**  
Aimee Biller MD  
August 2016

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



Ralph H. Kilmann and Kenneth W. Thomas  
Developing a Forced-Choice Measure of Conflict-Handling Behavior: The "Mode" Instrument  
Educational and Psychological Measurement July 1977 37: 309-325, doi:10.1177/001316447703700204

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?

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**



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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

<b>Dr. Chief's positions:</b>	<b>Dr. Chief is interested in...</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. F should join this committee</li> <li>• I should not have to waste my time convincing Dr. F</li> <li>• I have a right to be offended</li> <li>• Dr. F should be more grateful</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting his faculty</li> <li>• Putting Dr. F on this committee</li> <li>• Keeping Dr. F in his division</li> <li>• Having a good relationship with Dr. F</li> </ul>

### Reframing the conflict


<b>Dr. Faculty's positions:</b>	<b>Dr. Faculty is interested in...</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I do not want to be on that committee</li> <li>• Dr. C should be satisfied with the amount of time I devote to this job</li> <li>• I have a right to be offended</li> <li>• Dr. C should ask instead of presume</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting his faculty</li> <li>• Putting Dr. F on this committee</li> <li>• Keeping Dr. F in his division</li> <li>• Having a good relationship with Dr. F</li> </ul>



### Reframing the conflict


<b>Dr. Faculty's positions:</b>	<b>Dr. Faculty is interested in...</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I do not want to be on that committee</li> <li>• Dr. C should be satisfied with the amount of time I devote to this job</li> <li>• I have a right to be offended</li> <li>• Dr. C should ask instead of presume</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking care of her family</li> <li>• Professional opportunities that fit her schedule</li> <li>• Having a good relationship with Dr. C</li> <li>• Validation and promotion</li> </ul>

### Framing the conflict using **positions**:



<b>Dr. Chief</b>	<b>Dr. Faculty</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. F should join this committee</li> <li>• I should not have to waste my time convincing Dr. F</li> <li>• I have a right to be offended</li> <li>• Dr. F should be more grateful</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I do not want to be on that committee</li> <li>• Dr. C should be satisfied with the amount of time I devote to this job</li> <li>• I have a right to be offended</li> <li>• Dr. C should ask instead of presume</li> </ul>

### Reframing the conflict using **interests**:



<b>Dr. Chief is interested in...</b>	<b>Dr. Faculty is interested in...</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting his faculty</li> <li>• Putting Dr. F on this committee</li> <li>• Keeping Dr. F in his division</li> <li>• Having a good relationship with Dr. F</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking care of her family</li> <li>• Professional opportunities that fit her schedule</li> <li>• Having a good relationship with Dr. C</li> <li>• Validation and promotion</li> </ul>

### 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?

Other examples?

### 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

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