

# Courageous Conversations

There are many instances where situations, behaviours and circumstances need to be challenged and talked about whilst working to build networks. We want to move away from calling these 'difficult conversations' and create a feeling that these are about being brave and having the courage and skills to talk about the challenging issues that need to be discussed. People often think of difficult situations as:

**'Conflicts are experienced by people as aggressive or negative behaviours that have the potential to escalate into hostile, abusive or threatening situations'**

When people think of these kinds of conflicts they think of people in opposition, with tension emerging, and words like argument or battle. It is seen as a struggle between at least two interdependent parties, who are experiencing strong emotion resulting from a perceived difference in needs or values. The highlighted words reflect some of the key images and feelings which conflict conjure up in many people's mind. However conflict itself is not necessarily a negative process, but can signal a greater message about what is happening between people generally.

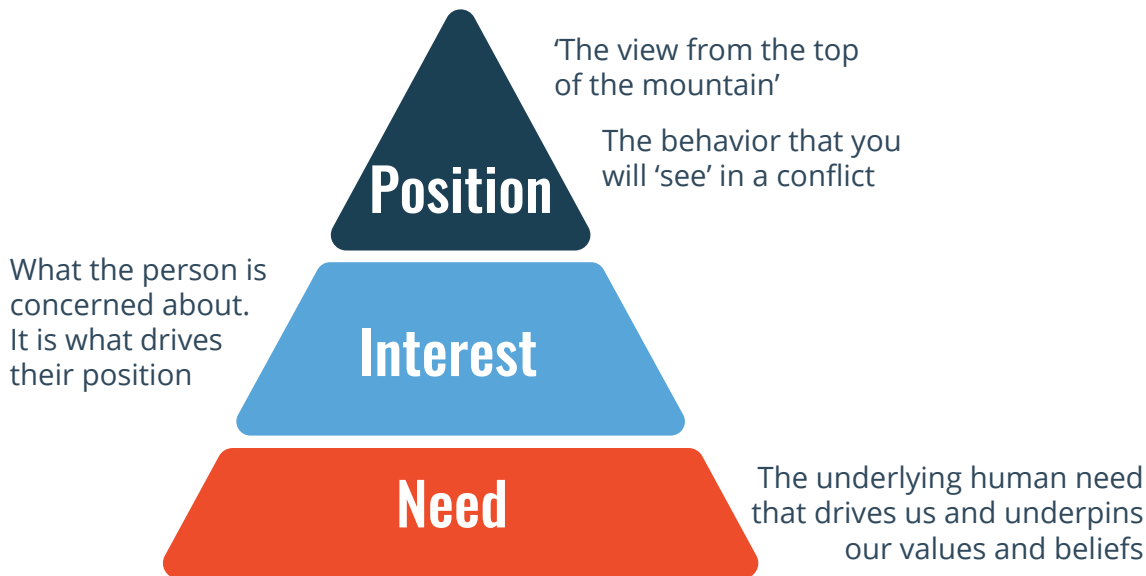
## Conflict and change

Conflict and change are inextricably linked. Change often involves tension, a feeling of interests pulling in different directions, goals and hopes not being achieved, struggle, and strong emotions like fear and anger. In an organisation or group, changes potentially affect everyone as there are links and dependencies, which may shift out of recognition and this, can lead to personal discomfort and group dysfunction. In creating or developing decentralised networks, where power is devolved, there can be confusion over decision making and different perceptions of where power is held. Traditional ways of working and thinking are challenged and the ground often feels as though it is shifting and if this is not managed well, it can seriously inhibit growth and innovation.

## How to use this resource

This resource has a number of useful tools and checklists to help you plan manage and deliver courageous conversations. It is designed as a starter tool to help with your thinking around conversations.

# Understanding where conflict comes from - the PIN model



## What is a position?

A position is someone's perceived solution to their conflict which they have decided upon regardless of the other person. It is their view of a solution or type of 'behaviour' that addresses their concerns and meets their needs. Positions are linked to values and beliefs, often built on assumptions about and ritual responses to others. They often feel comfortable and offer us a sense of self-protection.

## What is an interest?

An interest is what a person is concerned about. Get below the initial position and you find the prompts for the position; interests are what someone is concerned about. Positions are often mutually exclusive, but parties' interests overlap and may share common ground, although expressed from conflicting perspectives.

## What is a need?

The human needs we all have for belonging, being heard, being respected, being accepted for who we are, being loved, being powerful over ourselves.

**Key learning:** Recognizing when someone is being positional (and getting into a conflict) and remember the PIN model. Then rather than reacting to their position, use the checklists below to explore their interests and needs. This gets you BOTH into a win/win mindset to find common ground.



# WIN/WIN Problem solving checklists:

## How can you tell that you are in a conflict or that positions are emerging?

- People expressing a strong sense of grievance
- Naming - attaching that grievance to a person or people, and blaming them
- Positioning - thinking their solution is the only one and not being prepared to budge
- Validating and invalidating - each person collecting evidence to prove to themselves and others that they are right and that the other side is wrong
- People ignoring any common ground and focusing only on their differences
- People seeking allies
- Polarisation with each side unwilling or unprepared to lose face
- One or both will seek to win at the expense of the other party

## A Win / win problem solving process

1. **Clarify issues, thoughts and feelings with the other person** – use questions to explore what they are feeling, make sure you understand
2. **Identify and acknowledge current positions** – don't disregard their point of view. Remember their position comes from an underlying need and interest. Be clear with yourself about your interests and needs, be open and honest in your conversation
3. **Get people to move from positions to interests** – use the questions below to help you
4. **Manage expectations** – there may be boundaries on what is possible, (time, resources,) be clear about what these are and why
5. **Seek outcomes which meet people's interests and needs** – a solution that speaks to one person's needs and not the other is not win/win, so it is important that it meets both of your needs or some is prepared to compromise
6. **Explore win/lose options if win/win is not possible** – if it is not possible to find a solution that works for both parties, then consider other options; people may be prepared to compromise if they feel they have been heard and considered



## Getting from positions to interests

- Use questions to draw out positions  
"How do you see the situation being resolved?"  
"I want an apology!"
- Acknowledge positions without blaming  
"so you feel that strongly?"
- Check the interest behind the position  
"How would this make the situation better for you?"  
"At least I'd know you had noticed how I'm feeling"
- Reflect and acknowledge the interest  
"So you want me to know how you're feeling?"
- Help people identify other solutions which meet their interests  
"How else could we achieve that?"

## Win/win problem solving strategies

- Emphasise common ground
- Keep people on the issues which are within your control
- Seek clear statements of needs
- Get people to say how they feel and what they want rather than labelling or blaming
- Keep signpost what your trying to achieve e.g. finding the best solution for everyone
- Explore a variety of possible ways forward where possible / appropriate
- Rule out options early if they are not possible
- Take it steady
- Be positive.



# What's your conflict management style?

It is useful to recognise the way you respond to conflict given certain conditions, and think whether or not your preferred conflict management strategy is getting you the right outcomes, or enabling you to resolve conflict most effectively.

## You're an Ostrich

You withdraw from the conflict altogether. You may choose to leave physically, or emotionally by ceasing to talk or changing the topic. You may justify this action by saying that withdrawing means you're not arguing but it is a conflict management strategy

Start here

When you are arguing about an issue, do you find that you start to focus on sorting the issue out rather than the relationship with the other person?

No

Withdraw

You worry about the relationship and getting along with people; as the conflict heats up you find yourself going quiet. Do you prefer to wait and see what the other person is going to do or withdraw completely from the situation?

Yes

As the conflict heats up do you find yourself getting more 'competitive' and wanting to 'win' the argument?

Wait

## You're a rabbit

You tend to freeze in a conflict situation. You do nothing and/or wait for the other person to 'make their move'.

Yes

## You're a Shark

In conflict you are highly task focused and really want to achieve the outcome but you tend to believe that your way is the only way. You try to impose your preferred solution on the other, usually by insisting, blaming criticising accusing, shouting, using your 'power'

No

## You're a Dog

While you feel the task/issue is important you are willing to lower your aspirations and settle for things you don't like in order to preserve the relationship. You would do this by, giving in, giving up, and surrendering to the other person's wants.



**Key learning:** People use different conflict management strategies in different situations; you may find that you adopt different aspects at different times with different people. To be more effective in managing your responses we recommend that you:

- recognise your own patterns of behaviour, and under what circumstance you might adopt a particular conflict management style
- understand how this might influence your response to different situations
- understand what conflict responses in others will be challenging for you
- be able to manage yourself and your own feelings effectively
- know what alternative strategies are available
- develop a variety of skills so that you can adapt the way you respond to conflict
- match your strategy to the situation

# When to interrupt an argument between two or more people when you are not directly involved

## Allow the argument to continue when...

- People are saying new things, exchanging new information
- People seem equally comfortable and able to hold their own in the exchange
- People are hearing one another and responding to each other's statements
- People are signalling a desire for movement

## Interrupt an argument when ...

- People keep repeating themselves, and going off the issues
- Anyone seems frightened or intimidated
- People are seeming increasingly rigid in their positions
- Accusations or name calling are getting brutal or deliberately hurtful



# Additional resources

CMP Resolutions – [www.cmpresolutions.co.uk](http://www.cmpresolutions.co.uk)

Crawley, J. (1992) *Constructive Conflict Management - Managing to Make a Difference*, London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

Crawley, J. and Graham, K. (2002) *Mediation for Managers – getting beyond conflict to performance*: NB Books.

Coleman Peter T., Deutsch Morton & Marcus Eric C. (2006) *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*: Jossey Bass

Cornelius Helena and Shoshana Faire (2006) *Everyone Can Win: Responding to Conflict Constructively*, Australia: Simon & Schuster

Fisher, R. and Ury W. (1982) *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, London: Hutchinson

Fisher, R. and Shapiro, D. (2005) *Beyond reason - Using Emotions as You Negotiate*: Viking - Published by the Penguin Group

Kahane Adam (2007) *Solving Tough Problems: An Open Way of Talking, Listening, and Creating New Realities*: Berret-Koehler publishers

Rosenberg Marshall B. (2003) *Nonviolent Communication: A language for life*: Puddle Dancer Press

Stone, D., Patton, D. and Heen, S. (1999) *Difficult Conversations*: Penguin

Stone Douglas, Patton Bruce & Heen Sheila *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*: Penguin 2000

Tannen, D. (1992) *You just don't understand – men and women in conversation*: Virago Press

Ury, W. (1999) *Getting to peace - transforming conflict at home, at work, and in the world*: Penguin

Ury, W. (2007) *The Power of a positive NO (How to say no and still get to yes)*: Bantam Books Bantam Dell

Ury William (2000) *The third side: Why we fight and how we can stop*: Penguin Putnam

Try also this blog [julianstodd.wordpress.com](http://julianstodd.wordpress.com) Julian presents interesting thoughts on building social networks and managing the challenges around trust and devolved power.

