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RESOLVING TEAM CONFLICT:

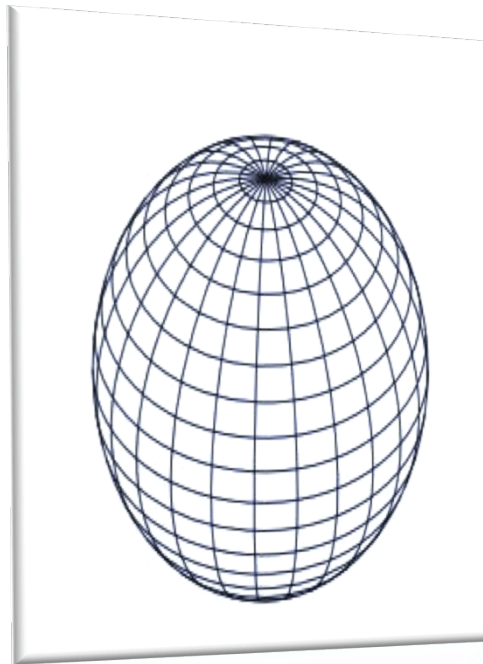## Matching Resources and Resistance

Functional Teams

And dysfunctional teams.

Conflict

Conflict is an expressed struggle between parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals.

Talk Through Conflict Using Interests-Based Problem Solving (2011).

Circle of Conflict

Why do people conflict? Identify the source of conflict in order to move beyond it.

Conflict is a signal or message that something is not working and needs to be different.

~ Talk Through Conflict Using Interests-Based Problem Solving, Education Service Center Region 4 (2011).

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Conflict Wheel

The Dynamics of Conflict, Mayer (2012)

Conflict Wheel

- If we can understand and locate the source of conflict, we can create a map to guide us through the conflict process.

- Different sources of conflict produce different challenges for conflict engagement.

Emotions

- Emotions are the energy that fuel the conflict.

- At times, emotions seem to be in control of behavior.

- Emotions are a source of power.

- Dealing with emotions typically requires the opportunity to express and release emotions.

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Communication

- We frequently rely on inaccurate or incomplete perceptions and stereotypes, and carry into our communication conclusions drawn from former interactions or experiences.

- Successful communication requires a reciprocal process.

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History

- The history of participants in a conflict, of the system in which the conflict is occurring, and the issues have a powerful influence on the course of that conflict.

- History provides momentum for the development of conflict.

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Structure

- Structural components of conflict include available resources, decision-making procedures, time constraints, legal requirements, communication mechanisms, and physical settings.

- Disputants need help identifying and accepting those structural elements that are unlikely to be altered.

Values

- When a conflict is experienced as a struggle about values, it becomes intractable.

- It is hard for us to compromise when our core beliefs are challenged because we feel we are compromising our sense of integrity.

- We are unlikely to find our way through the conflict by employing a rational problem-solving strategy.

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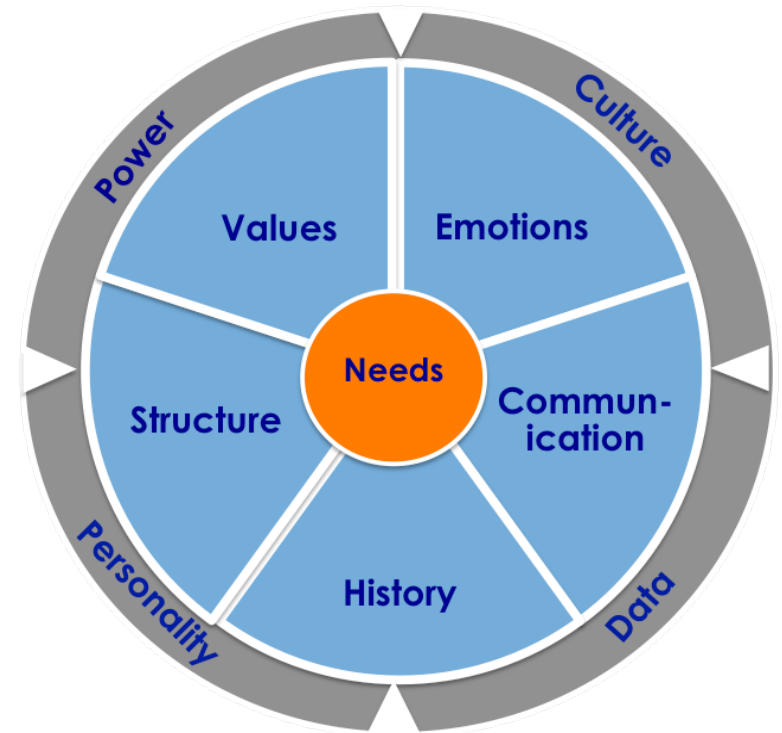
Contextual Factors

◆Culture, power, data, and personality.

◆Culture affects conflict because it is embedded in communication styles and structure.

◆Power can obscure the roots of conflict.

◆Personality is understood in terms of style of conflict engagement or avoidance.

◆Misunderstood data can exacerbate conflict.

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Conflict and Negotiation

- This next clip is a great example of value differences in conflict and what can happen if common values are discovered.

- Use the Conflict Wheel to identify the sources of conflict.

- Find the mismatch!

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The Space of Change

How can we create it?

Space of Change

The concept of space is both mental and physical. Be strategic in creating the space of change.

Speak when you are angry and you will make the best speech you will ever regret.
~Ambrose Bierce

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Space of Change

Creating the space of change refers to:

- Balancing power,
- Cultural sensitivity, and
- Preparing the physical environment.

Balance of Power

- Assess the factors contributing to the impression of power. (Education, representation, language facility, resources. . .)

- Balance the power with intentional, directed conversation.

- Explain the process, encourage participation, etc.

Cultural Sensitivity

- Guard against *reactive devaluation*, or the tendency to dismiss or devalue the content of a message based on negative feelings about the person delivering the message. *Meierding (2012).*

- Be mindful of language and cultural barriers.

- Avoid assumptions.

- ACTIVITY: Stand up and turn around. Listen. Describe what you hear. Describe the images you see in your mind.

Environment & Power

- Adjust for an imbalance of power or cultural factors.
- The space should emanate respect and be comfortable.
- The facilitator must arrange the room and set the tone.
- The facilitator remains forward facing.

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Mind Chatter

The mindset of change.

What is wrong with this picture?

Change Your Focus: What is Right?

Be Intentional

- Eliminate the *mind chatter* regarding your preconceived negative beliefs or assumptions.

- Model respectful, culturally neutral behavior to the parties.

- Be intentional in your quest for an open mind.

The art of dealing with conflict often lies in finding the narrow path between the useful expression of emotions and destructive polarization.
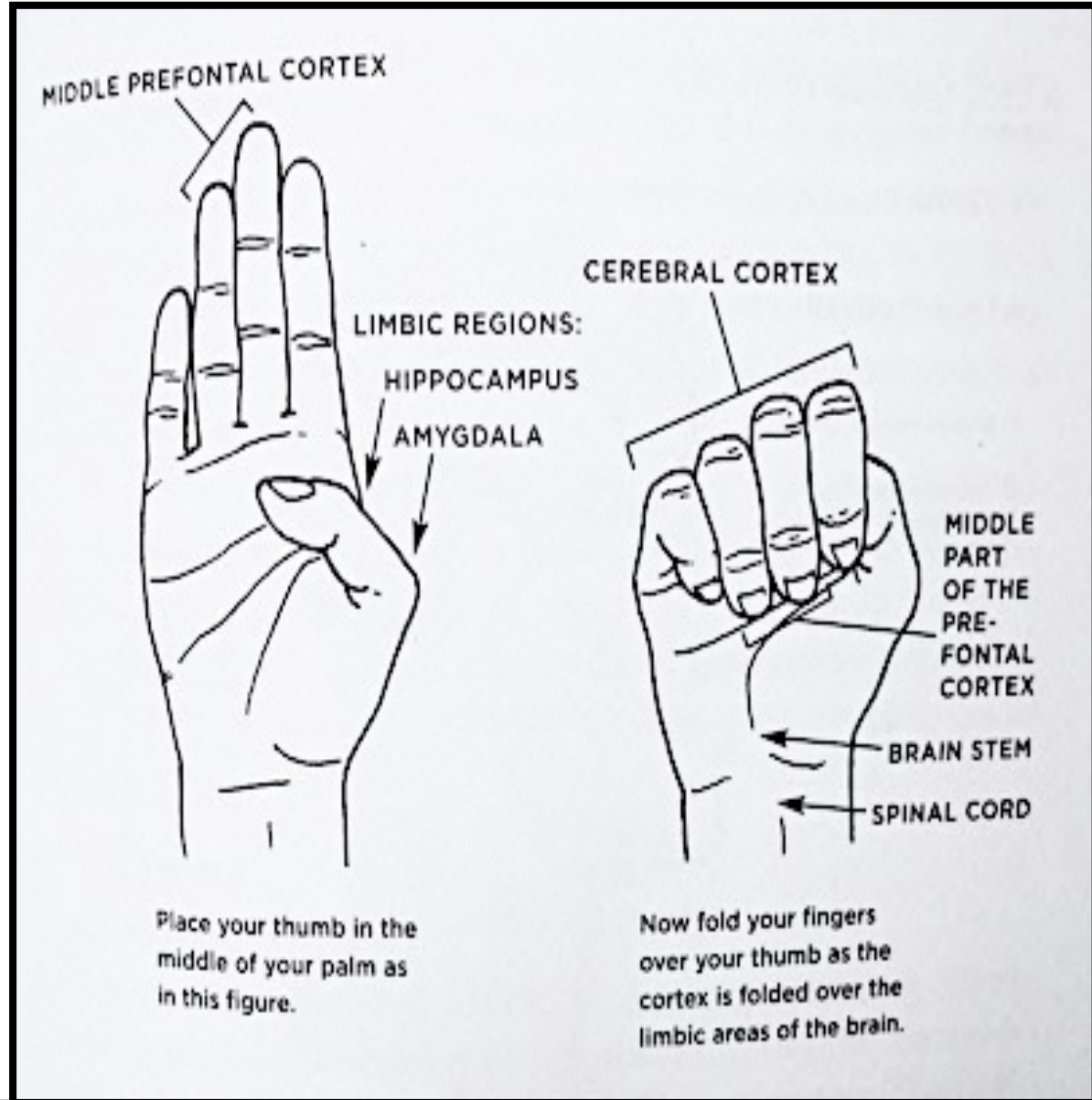
≈ Bernie Mayer ≈

Brain Science and Conflict

- The *limbic system* is the portion of the brain that deals with three key functions: emotions, memories, and arousal.

- The *frontal lobe of the cerebral cortex* is associated with most complex thinking.

- The *amygdala* is responsible for the fight or flee response activated by trauma or conflict.

- Dr. Siegel's explanation is very helpful.

Siegel (2011).

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Dr. Siegel's Brain Science Model

MIDDLE PREFONTAL CORTEX

LIMBIC REGIONS:

HIPPOCAMPUS

AMYGDALA

CEREBRAL CORTEX

MIDDLE PART OF THE PRE-FONTAL CORTEX

BRAIN STEM

SPINAL CORD

Place your thumb in the middle of your palm as in this figure.

Now fold your fingers over your thumb as the cortex is folded over the limbic areas of the brain.

Emotionality

- Dealing with intense emotions often associated with conflict usually requires finding some opportunity to express and release emotions and to experience empathy. *Mayer (2012).*

- The facilitator creates the space for emotional release and models empathic listening.

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Disagreement

Can be the catalyst of change.

Conflict is just energy in the system – nothing more, nothing less.

≈ Garmston & Wellman ≈

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Conflict is Necessary

- Disagreement or conflict is a necessary ingredient in the growth and development of individuals, families, communities, and societies.

- Conflict can help build community, define and balance needs, and make difficult choices.

- Working through conflict can be an important bonding experience.

Mayer (2012).

Stretch Yourself

Neutral Language

The power of words.

Language Is Loaded

- Language is laden with emotions and values.

- People will use language they know will anger, hurt, or frustrate the other party.

- The person receiving this loaded message may become defensive and respond with an equally loaded message.

Language Is Loaded

- Neutral language involves changing the "red" flag words to different words with more neutral meaning.

- You are detoxifying and laundering the language.

Talk Through Conflict Using Interests-Based Problem Solving, (2011).

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Toxic Language

- This next clip from *Erin Brockovich* is a great example of polarizing, toxic language.

- Note what NOT to do!

Every person is 100% responsible for his or her half of a verbal interaction.

≈ Author Unknown ≈

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Positions vs. Interests

Agreement lies in finding the interests.

- **Issue:** It is an identifiable and concrete question that must be address in order to reach agreement.

- **Position:** It is where a party stands on an issue.

- **Interest:** It is what motivates people. It is a concern, desire, need or something a person values.

Issues, Positions & Interests

Confusing Interests with Positions, **University of Colorado.**

Positions vs. Interests

- A person will fight hard if there is encroachment on values.
- Interests provide the basis for positions.
- When we understand the interests, we are better able to find a solution.

Greater Satisfaction

- Reconciling interests tends to generate a higher level of mutual satisfaction and better relationships.

- Focusing on interests enables the parties to identify win-win solutions.

*Interests, Positions, Needs, and Values* (2012).

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Difficulty with Identification

- Parties in dispute don't always identify their concerns, needs, and interests in a clear or direct manner. Reasons include:
  - **Lack of awareness.** Parties often don't know what their genuine interests are.
  - **Strategy.** Parties sometimes hide their true interests believing they will gain more from demands.

Difficulty with Identification

- **Emotional attachment.** Sometimes parties have advocated so zealously for a certain position that the underlying interests are obscured.

- **Unaware.** The parties may be unaware of how to move away from positions to their underlying interests.

Moore (2014).

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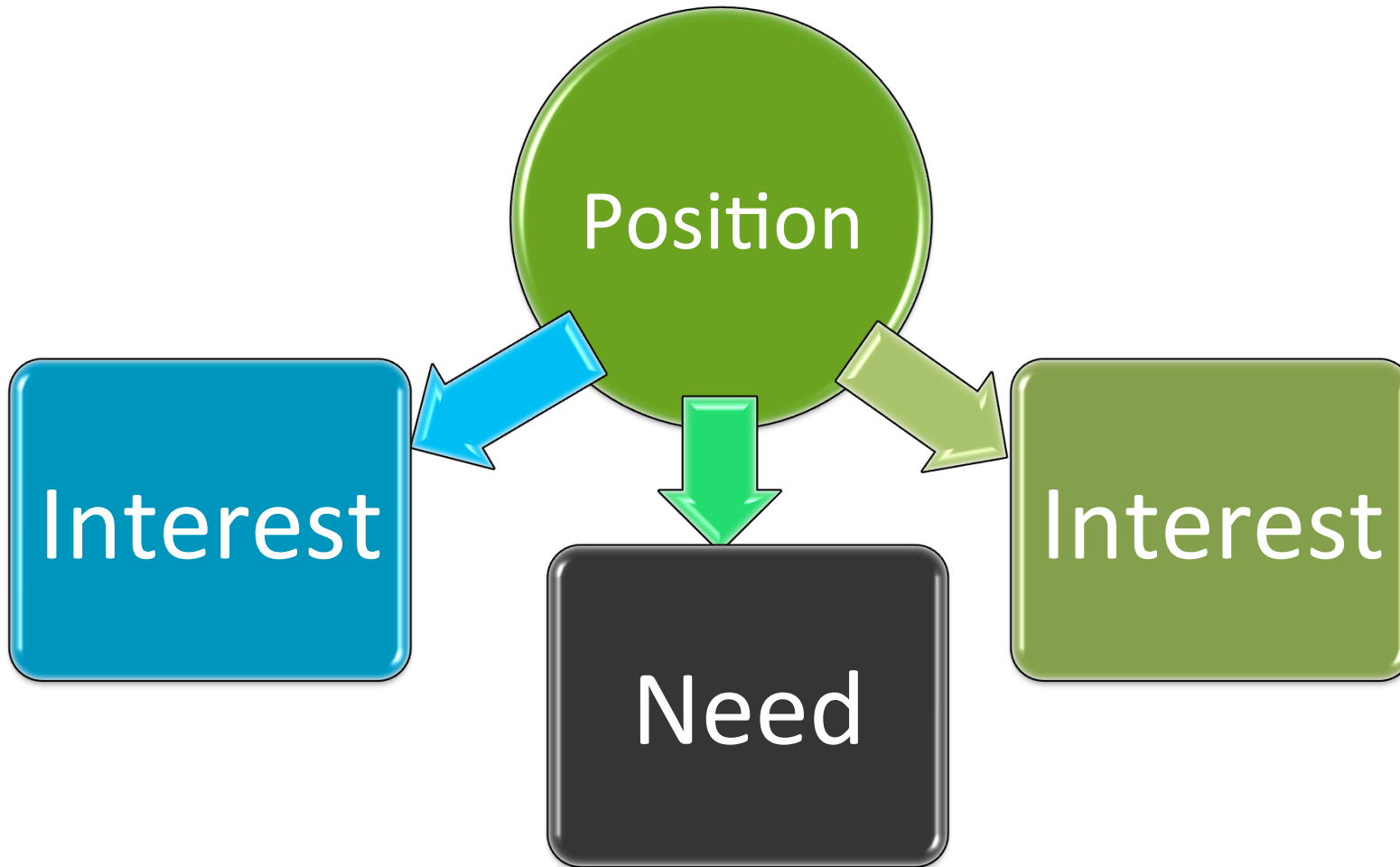
Strategic Questions

Find out what is at the heart of an issue.

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Clarifying Questions

- The facilitator must be careful not to ask questions in a manner that suggest merits on either parties' position.

- Equal care should be taken to avoid putting participants on the defensive.

- Strive for symmetry in the way parties are treated.

Straus Institute (2014).

Focus on Open Ended

Clarifying Questions

Open Ended

Problem Solving

Directed Yes/No

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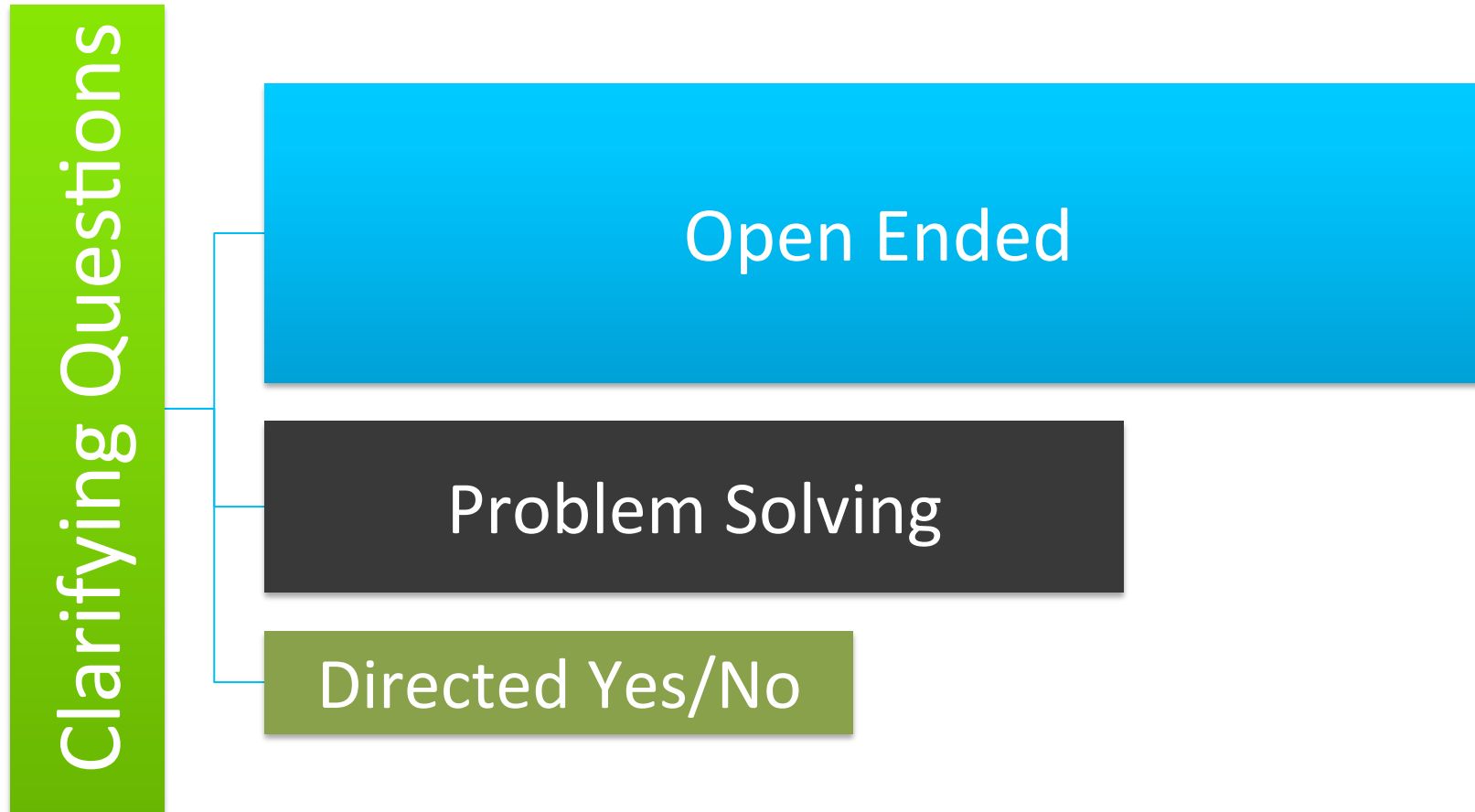
Open Ended Questions

- Tell me more about . . .
- How do you feel when . . .
- Is there anything else you believe is pertinent . . .
- Help me understand . . .

Open Ended Questions

- What is your main concern about . . .

  - Please explain in more detail . . .

- What goes through your mind when you hear . . .

- What other factors should be considered?

Straus Institute (2014).

Problem Solving Questions

- Find out what really motivates the parties. Ask WHY:

  - Why is it that you want . . .

  - Help me to see why this is important to you.

  - I'm not sure I understand why you want . . .

Problem Solving Questions

- Ask WHY NOT:
  - Why do you not want . . .
  - Why not try . . .
  - What is the down side of . . .

Problem Solving Questions

- Ask WHAT IF:
  - What if the IEP incorporated . . .
  - What if the teacher was able to . . .
  - What if the student struggles . . .
  - What might happen if . . .

  Ury (1993).

Paraphrasing

Help a speaker feel heard.

Paraphrasing

- Paraphrasing is fundamental to active listening.

- It is the most straightforward way to demonstrate that a person's words were heard.

Paraphrasing

- The power of paraphrasing is that it is nonjudgmental and validating.

- Paraphrasing is the tool of choice for supporting people to think out loud.

Community at Work (2007).

How to Paraphrase

- In your own words, say what you heard the speaker say.

- Occasionally preface with "It sounds like you're saying . . . Let me see if I understand . . ."

- Look for reaction or confirmation. "Did I get that right?"

Mirroring

Help a speaker feel understood.

Mirroring

- Mirroring is a highly structured, formal version of paraphrasing.
- Mirroring is seen as evidence of the facilitator's neutrality.
- It speeds up a slow moving discussion.

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Mirroring

The more the facilitator feels the need to establish neutrality (build credibility), the more frequently she should mirror rather than paraphrase.

Community at Work (2007).

How to Mirror

- Repeat back single sentences or key words and phrases.
- Use the speaker's words, NOT your own words.
- Mirror the speaker's words, NOT tone of voice.
- Be yourself with tone and gestures.

Reframe Language

And remove the toxicity.

Negative to Neutral

Reframing

- *Reframing* means redirecting a party's attention away from positions and toward the task of identifying interests and inventing creative options. *Ury* (1993).

- *Reframing* has to occur through an interactive communication process. It has to be done WITH the parties, not TO them.

Mayer (2012).

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Reframing

- *Reframing* involves receiving information, processing and reformulating it in an acceptable way, and relaying this information back to the parties.

- The challenge is to convert polarizing language into neutral terms, removing bias or judgment without diluting the intensity or favoring either side.

  Zaffar (2008).

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Reframing

- Eliminating emotionally charged terms from the disagreement allows the parties to focus on elements of the dispute rather than the emotions generated by the parties.

    Zaffar (2008).

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Reframing

REFRAME THIS ISSUE:

You can't suspend my child. I know the law.

You want to protect your child and have him be welcome.

Reframing

REFRAME THIS ISSUE:

That teacher is dishonest. She doesn't like my child. Everything is his fault.

You have concerns about the accuracy of the report, and want your child treated fairly.

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Reframing Exercise

Match Resources to Resilience

In order to resolve underlying conflict.

Make Connections

Once you have determined needs,
facilitators help the parties find satisfiers for
the identified needs.

Make Connections

- Examples in the IEP process:
  - A parent is adamant that her child is being treated unfairly by a general education teacher. The district suggests that the student receive counseling.

Make Connections

- Another example:
  - The school agrees to provide a 5 day per week, 2 hours per day ESY program for a student. The parent says "No way will that work." The school immediately bristles and retorts that is more than any other student receives.

Make Connections

- The parent responds that it won't work. because the family is going to be on vacation.

MISMATCH!

- Notice the mismatch between satisfiers and needs.

- How do you know how to connect solutions to needs? Here are some tools.

Inadequate Information

Can be a source of resistance.

Lack of Information

- Parties may have insufficient information to make an informed decision.

- In IEP meetings, this may surface as a data or progress monitoring need, or the right person isn't present, or even withholding information because it is embarrassing.

Matching Resource

- Brainstorming can be an effective technique to bring more information to the table.

- Ground rules for brainstorming are simple:

  1. Every contribution is worthwhile;

  2. Suspend judgment; and

  3. Get as many ideas as possible.

Kaner (2014).

Mismanagement

Of expectations can be a source of resistance.

Mismanagement

- When other sources of information create an unrealistic set of expectations, it can be an impediment.

- In IEP teams, it may be information from outside the process.

- This can be a very difficult source of resistance.

Matching Resource

- Move away from the resistance by identifying the underlying interests.

- Don't rule out an unrealistic expectation, move around it to the interests underneath.

- This technique can be referred to as *facilitation jujitsu*.

Principles & Emotionality

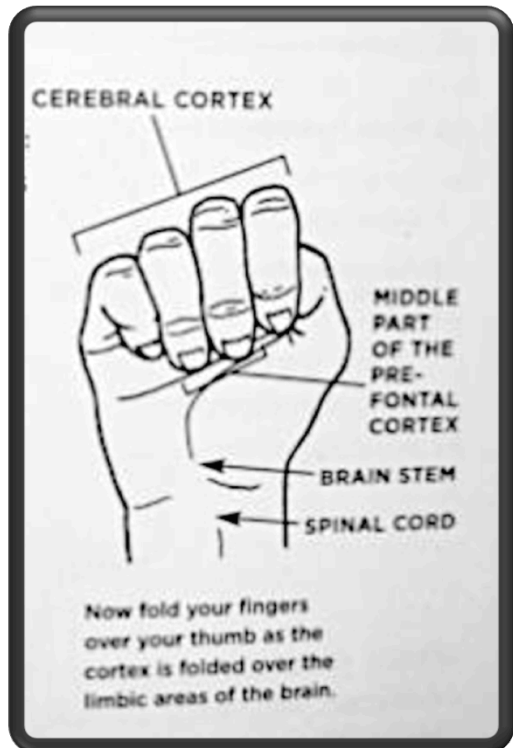**Can be the highest hurdle.**

Principles & Emotions

- Because our work focuses on a child, a person's underlying beliefs, values, and morals lead to high emotionality.

- Dealing with high emotions usually requires finding an opportunity to express and release.

- Validate the strong feeling without endorsing the cause.

Mayer (2012).

Matching Resource

- Model empathy.

- Provide a safe environment for the release of intense emotions.

- Consider a private meeting if it results in destructive polarization.

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CEREBRAL CORTEX

MIDDLE PART OF THE PRE- FONTAL CORTEX

BRAIN STEM

SPINAL CORD

Now fold your fingers over your thumb as the cortex is folded over the limbic areas of the brain.

If you want clear thinking, you have to resolve the high emotions.

Cognitive Overload

Guard against it.

Overloaded Participants

- Too much information too fast can overwhelm participants.

- The amount of information is so great that the processing demands go beyond the processing limits of the listener.

- The listener is unable to integrate new information with what they already know.

Overloaded Participants

- Cognitive overload produces stress and anxiety.
- In IEP team meetings, this type of resistance can have several sources, including grief, new to the complex process of special education, or disability.
- Meaningful participation cannot be attained with overloaded participants.

Matching Resource

- Slow down!

- Use visual aids.

- Take a break.

- Accumulate agreements in parts.

Scarcity

Or lack of authority as a source of resistance.

Scarcity of Resources

Scarcity of resources may impede agreement through:

- Not having enough of what a party wants, i.e. a teacher's individual assistance, a 1:1 paraprofessional, etc.

- Not having the authority to commit scarce resources.

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Matching Resource

- Stay focused on student **needs**, not wants.
- Rely on data to guide the discussion of student needs.
- Ensure that the right participants are at the meeting.
- Use your best jujitsu to move around intractable conflict to potential mini-agreements.

When the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to treat everything like a nail.

≈ Abraham Maslow ≈

- **Resolving team conflict:**
  - Helps IEP teams stay positive;
  - Improves working relationships;
  - Is invaluable to resolving disagreements long before they turn into disputes;
  - Improves outcomes for students with disabilities.
- INTEGRATING conflict resolution skill is a WIN-WIN for all team members.
- Don't be a "hammer." Keep your unrelenting focus on the child.

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