

# Handling conflict with your peers, colleagues & faculty

## Resources:

National Center for Faculty Diversity & Development

*Difficult Conversations*, Stone, Patton & Heen

*Getting to Yes*, Fisher & Ury

# How do you naturally respond to conflict?

Spectrum of

Shy away <-----> Prepare for battle

Think of how you react - what your emotions or responses are when you think about conflict

Think about an issue you are having now, big or small, that should/could be addressed.

## Conflict in Academia (and life)

- Scientists are trained at engaging & debating about “ideas”
  - Less so on conflicts of a personal nature
- Managing conflict is easier with people that you have an established relationship with
  - Conflict is a normal, healthy, part of human relationships.
  - Problems arise when we avoid addressing it
- Power dynamics - inherent to conflict in academia
  - These shape how we respond
  - Sometimes it helps to articulate these specifically



## Difficult conversations - Facing conflict

These “difficult conversations” are really made up of three conversations

What happened

Our identity

Our feelings



## When we 'explode' with emotions

We tend to judge people who 'explode' emotionally, even if their background concerns were reasonable

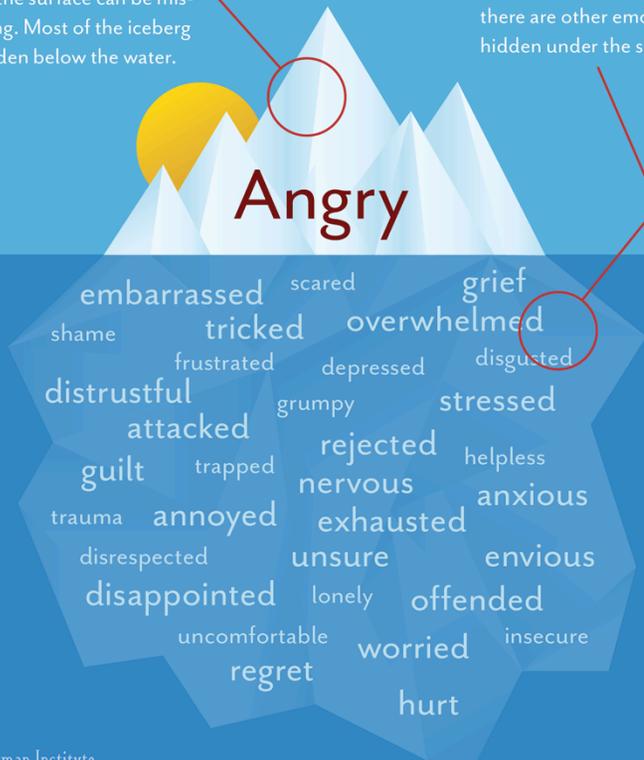
Have you ever been labeled something for responding in an emotionally strong way?

It is normal & reasonable to feel ANGRY in the face of injustice.

# Anger Iceberg

Icebergs are large pieces of ice found floating in the open ocean. What you can see from the surface can be misleading. Most of the iceberg is hidden below the water.

This is how anger works. Often when we are angry, there are other emotions hidden under the surface.



The Gottman Institute

Often in conflict, we describe ourselves as ANGRY

But anger can be a word that hides many other feelings & emotions. Try to find the feeling beneath the anger.

Illustration: The Gottman Institute

# How will you handle the conflict at hand?

Ask yourself

Do I want to step in?

What do I gain/lose in this?

What is the most effective method to handle this?

## Having healthy conflict: Strategies I

- Clarify where you are coming from
  - be clear on your goals & what you want out of this conversation
- Move *away from* blame, it hinders problem solving (including blaming yourself)
  - People have the right to hold different positions
  - Embrace the “and stance”: don’t choose between the stories, embrace both
  - People do not = their positions

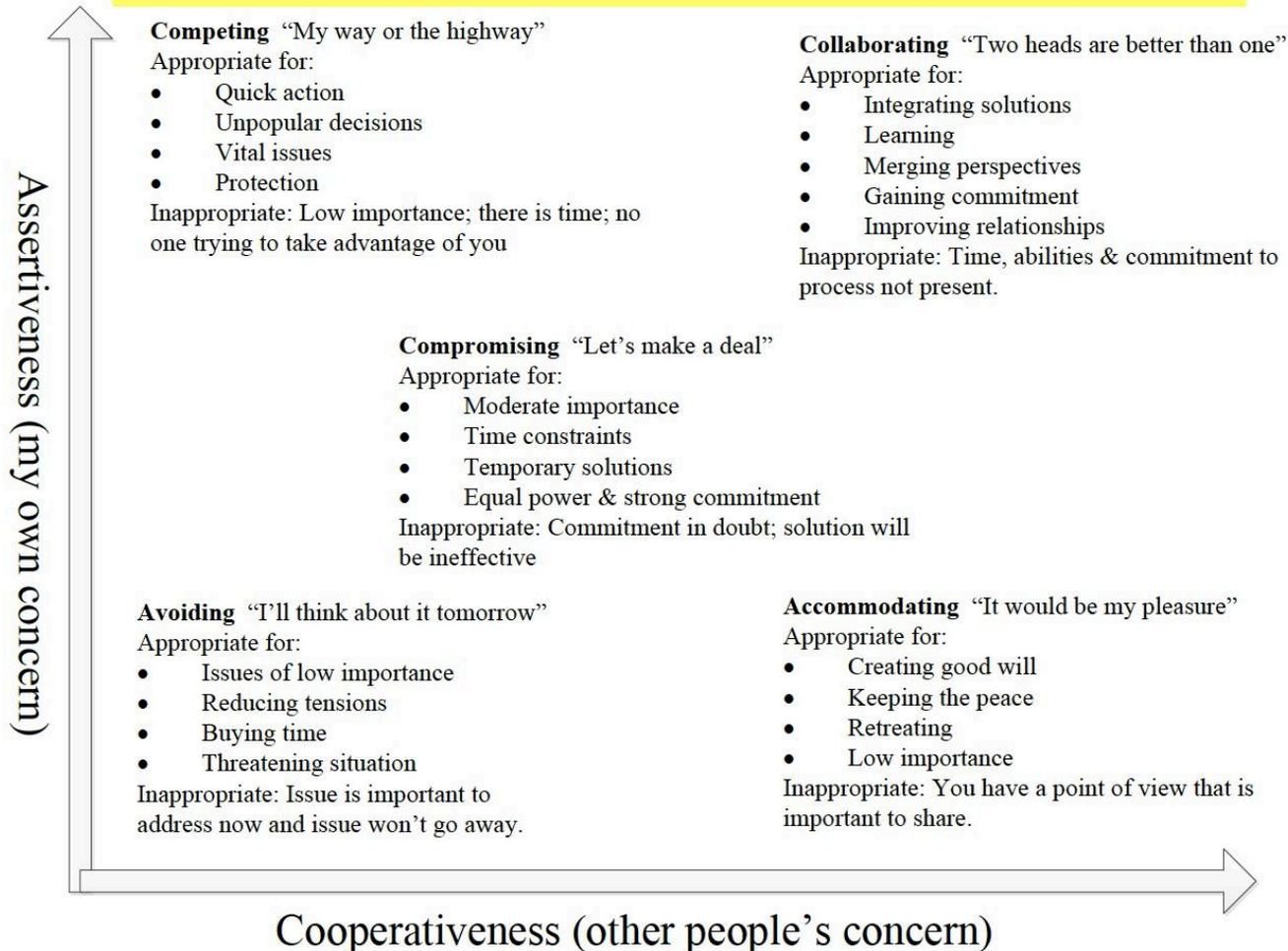
## Having healthy conflict: Strategies II

- *Move towards* understanding contribution to the problem
  - Try to be a 3rd, outside observer
  - Consider their perspective
  - ‘Map’ the contributions to the problem
- Proactively develop relationships with colleagues (this doesn’t require that you are ‘friends’ outside of work).
  - You want solid relationships before conflicts arise

## Having healthy conflict: Strategies III

- Use “I” phrases
  - “I feel frustrated when you interrupt me”
  - “I feel disadvantaged by this decision because...”
- Find common ground... it usually exists
  - Apologize if you need to (not for your views or feelings)
- Use & practice active listening
  - Reflect back to each other what you have heard.
  - “What I hear you saying is...”

## Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Model



## More serious conflicts - bullying & harassment

- Document what is happening, with specifics.
- Discuss the issue with someone you trust. You can do so 'anonymously' or 'hypothetically' if you are concerned about reporting requirements.
- Decide whether confronting the person is the right path for you.
- Universities can respond slowly, but they do have mechanisms for dealing with these cases, as do funding agencies. Get familiar with university processes and policies.

# What is the right venue for conflict?

There are pros/cons to

- Email
- Phone
- In Person

Make a plan/ notes on how you'll handle conflict

## Scenarios



- Identify the power dynamic.
- What skills can be used to navigate this conflict?
- How could this conflict have been avoided?