Getting to Healthy Conflict in Student Success Focused Reform Projects

iCUE 2025

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Agenda

- Define conflict, high conflict, and health conflict
- Identify the origins of conflict
- Recognize the impact of unresolved conflict
- Identify strategies and frameworks to restore healthy conflict, reduce high conflict, and resolve conflict



Defining Conflict

1. Conflict is a difference that matters.
2. Conflict is the energy created by the gap between what we want and what we are experiencing.
3. Conflict is generative disagreement.
4. Conflict is an argument.
5. Conflict is incompatible viewpoints, interests, beliefs, and actions.

Which of these definitions resonates with you? List the number in the chat.

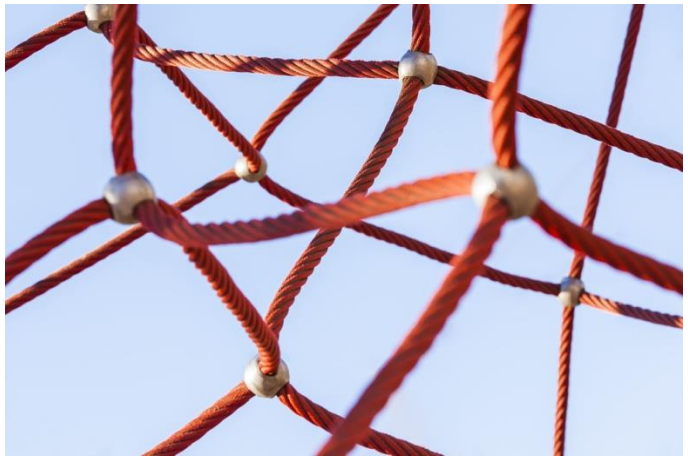


High Conflict vs. Healthy Conflict

High Conflict

Conflict that becomes stuck, binary, identity and personality driven.

- High emotions
- Taking sides
- Expands beyond the subject of the original conflict
- Seems unresolvable
- Involves people outside the original conflict
- Damages relationship



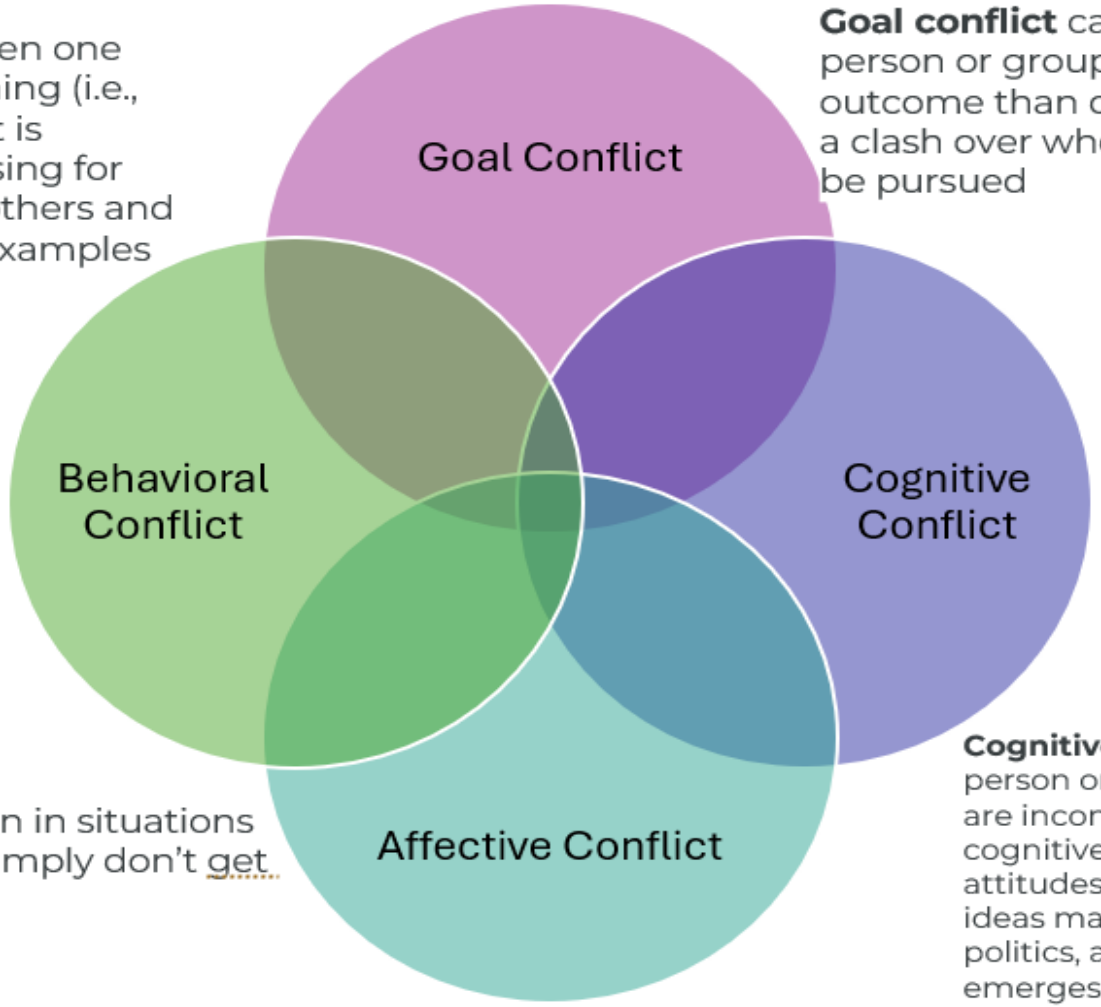
Healthy Conflict

Conflict that is honest, respectful, and focused on solving problems.

- Generative
- Allows for disagreement
- Surfaces different perspectives
- Preserves or strengthens relationships
- Respectful
- Can be highly emotional

Origins of Conflict

Behavioral conflict exists when one person or group does something (i.e., behaves in a certain way) that is unacceptable to others. Dressing for work in a way that "offends" others and using profane language are examples of behavioral conflict.



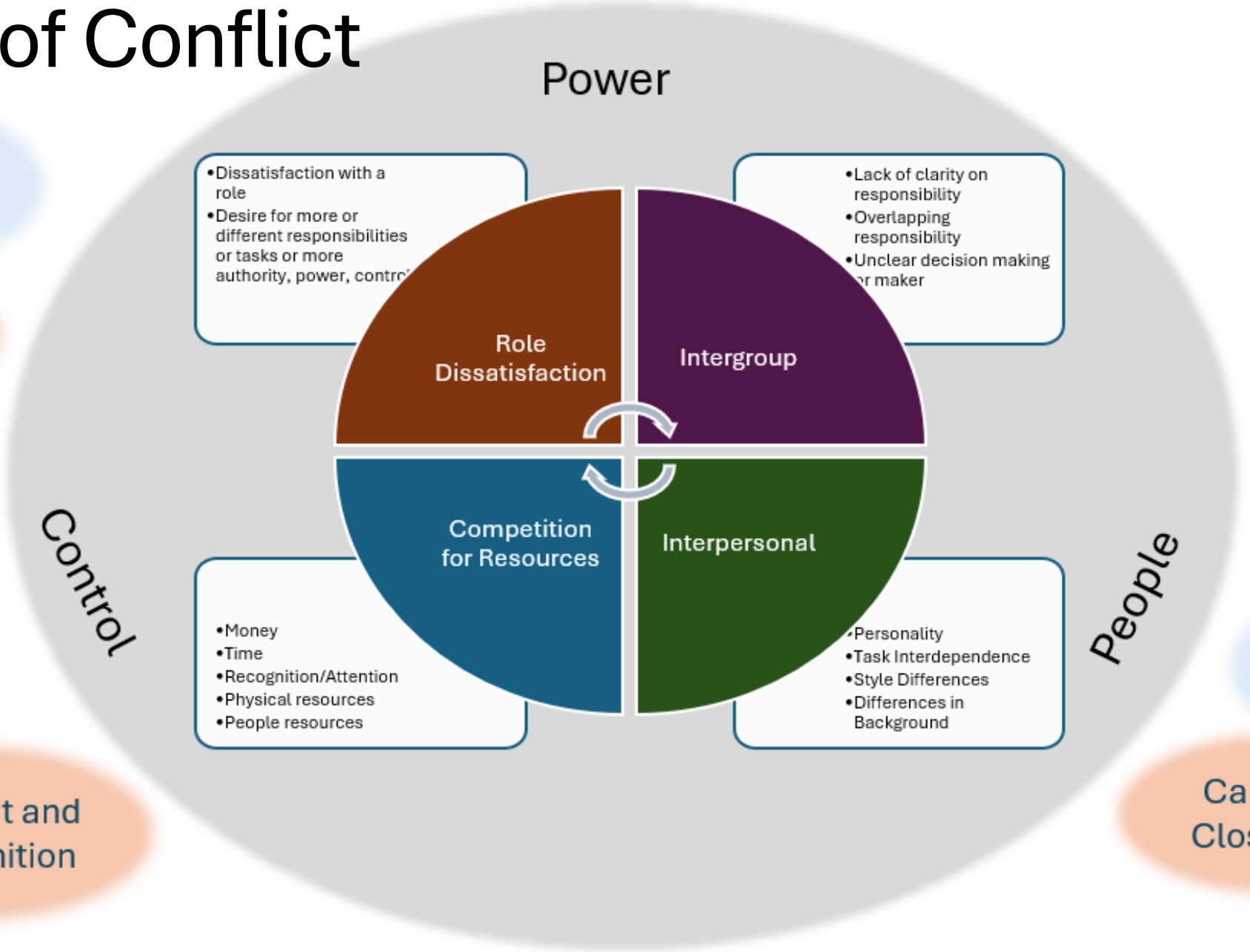
Goal conflict can occur when one person or group desires a different outcome than others do. This is simply a clash over whose goals are going to be pursued

Affective conflict is seen in situations where two individuals simply don't get along with each other.

Cognitive conflict can result when one person or group holds ideas or opinions that are inconsistent with those of others. Often cognitive conflicts are rooted in differences in attitudes, beliefs, values, and worldviews, and ideas may be tied to deeply held culture, politics, and religion. This type of conflict emerges when one person's or group's feelings or emotions (attitudes) are incompatible with those of others.

Four types of Conflict reproduced from "Psychology of Human Relations" (image developed from content)CCBY 4.0

Origins of Conflict



Emotional Avoidance

Power and Control

Emotional Indulgence

Respect and Recognition

Hurt

Care and Closeness

Origins of Conflict

Source	Description
Needs and Interests	Competing Desires, goals, or priorities
Values and Beliefs	Deeply held principles that feel incompatible
Identity and Ego	Perceived threats to status, expertise, or worth
Role and Patterns	Repetitive, unproductive, interpersonal dynamics
Structures and Systems	Organizational barriers, unclear processes, competition, role and jurisdictional ambiguity
History and Memory	Unhealed wounds, long standing unresolved conflicts, lack of trust based on past experiences



Recognizing High Conflict and Unresolved Conflict



Figure 9.3 "Conflict Escalation Tornado," by the Dispute Resolution Office, Ministry of Justice (Government of Saskatchewan), redesigned by JVDW Designs, is licensed under CC BY 4.0. Reproduced from Leadership and Influencing Change In Nursing by Joan Wagner. Color altered from original.

What Unresolved Conflict can look like

- Passive Aggressive Behaviors
  - Gossiping
  - Sarcasm
- Stonewalling
- Exaggerating
- Avoiding
- Withholding
- Absenteeism
- Decline in Productivity
- Increased Error Rate
- Lack of decision making
- Competing

Recognizing Unresolved Conflict

- **Silent Reflection-** Take a couple minutes and think of a conflict you observed recently that has not been resolved- even if it has been ended.
    - Maybe you were part of it.
    - Maybe it happened around you.
    - Maybe you just heard about it.
- Consider the how that conflict manifested- what you observed
    - **Conflict behaviors- What did that conflict look like?**
        - Consider the direct, obvious behaviors
        - Consider the indirect, less obvious behaviors
        - Consider the individual behaviors and group behaviors
    - **Consequences of unresolved conflict-**
    - **What are the consequences of that conflict being unresolved?**
        - Consider the obvious and hidden consequences
        - Consider the short-term and long-term consequences

Add your ideas to this shared document:



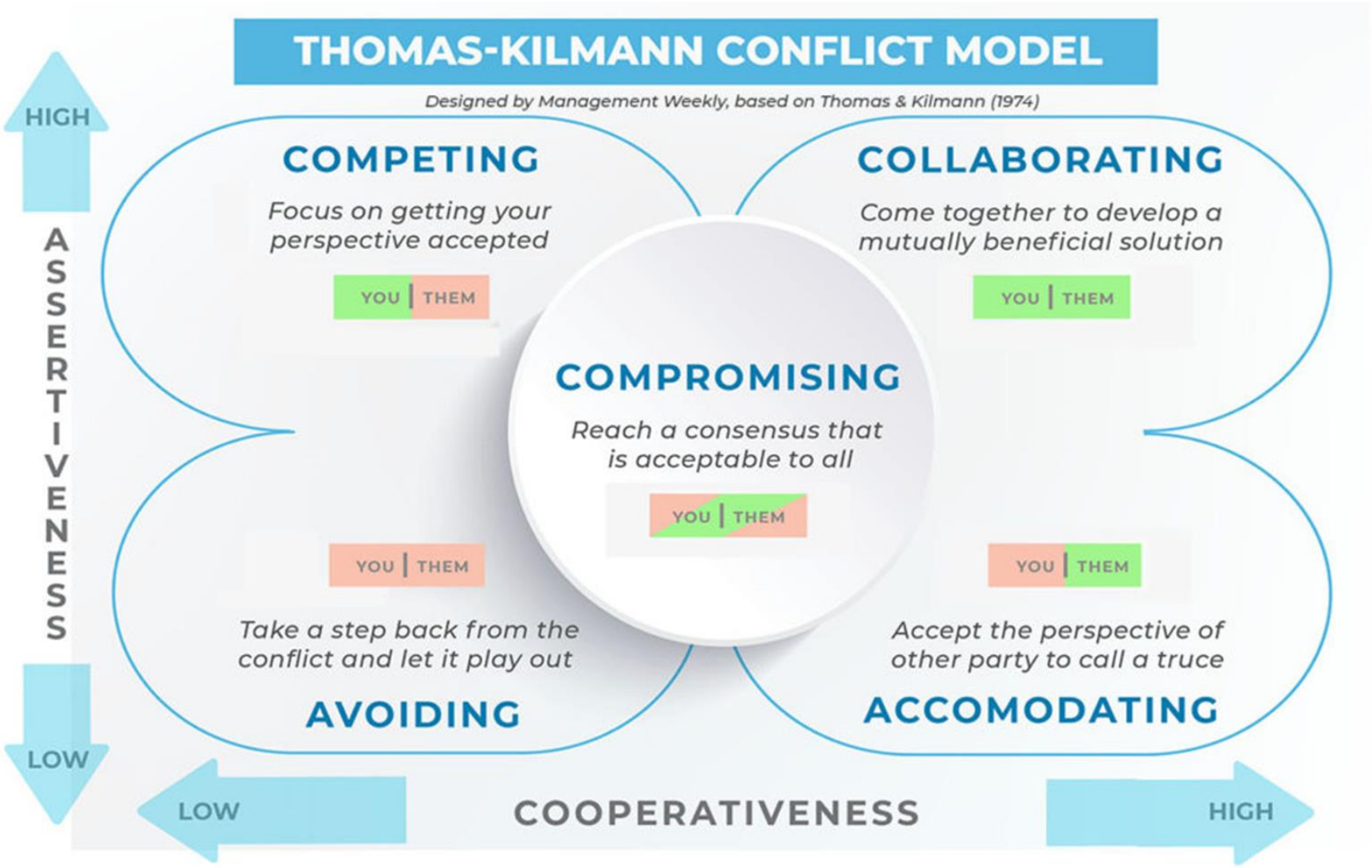
Frameworks for Approaching Conflict

Healthy conflict is curious, complex, and connected. It allows people to disagree without dehumanizing each other—and to work through differences toward shared goals.

Strategies	Description	Actions
Complicate the narrative; reduce false binaries	High conflict thrives on **simplified stories** ("us vs. them"). Healthy conflict invites **complexity, contradiction, and nuance**.	Ask good questions that surface multiple truths. • "What am I missing?" • "What's the other side of this that people miss? • "What's one thing that XXX gets right about this topic?" Emphasize listening rather than responding for all involved.
Humanize and build connection	Interpersonal connection humanizes the "other side" and creates space for listening.	Use moderated conversations. Foster sharing of stories interpersonal connections, encourage curiosity. Celebrate different perspectives and opinions.
Create conflict rituals or boundaries	Healthy conflict needs structure—spaces to engage and disengage safely.	Set ground rules, hold structured dialogues, and take breaks when needed. Bring in an external facilitator.
Reduce the Conflict Entrepreneurs	These are people or systems that **profit from division**—they escalate conflict through blame, exaggeration, or fear, us vs. them framing, amplifying outrage, exaggerating the negatives or threats. Catastrophizing.	Reduce their influence and avoid amplifying them

Amanda Ripley: *High Conflict: Why we get trapped and how we get out*

Framework for Resolving Conflicts



The Karpman Drama Triangle



The Persecutor

In this mode the person doesn't value other people's views and integrity

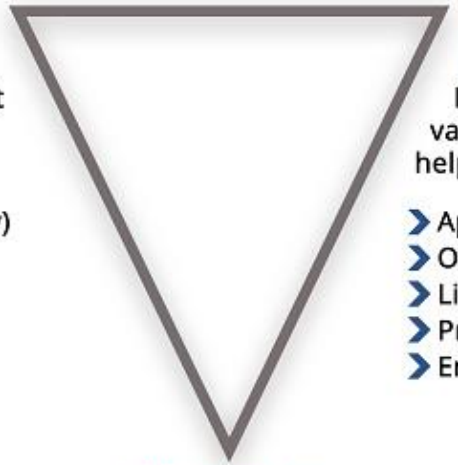
- Angry (opening and passively)
- Aggressive
- Judgemental
- Bullying
- Demanding
- Spiteful and scornful



The Rescuer

In this mode the person doesn't value other people's capacity to help themselves

- Appear self sacrificing
- Over helfpul and facilitative
- Like to be needed
- Prone to meddling unnecessarily
- Engulfing



The Victim

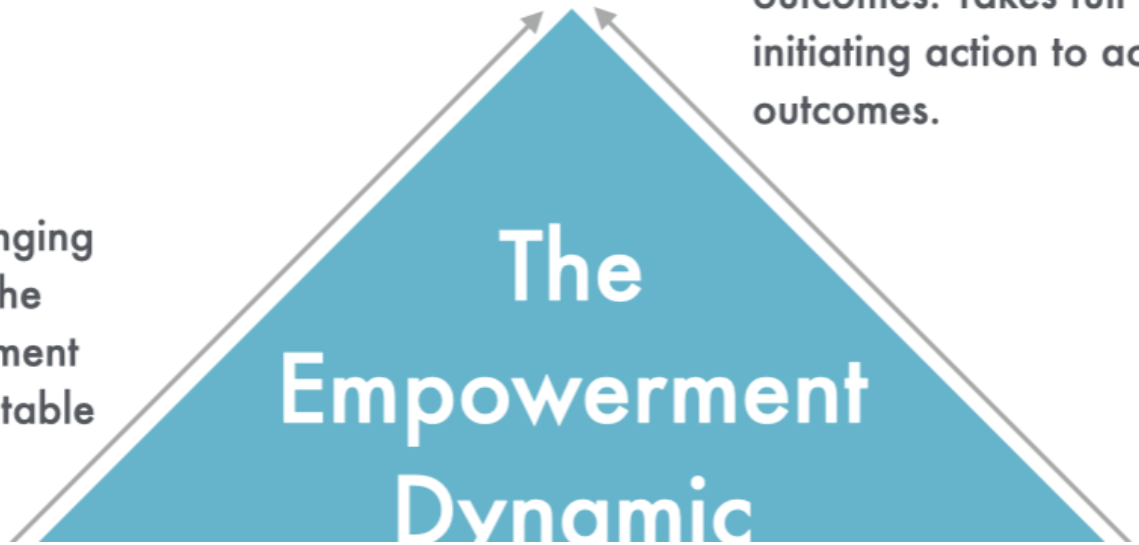


In this mode the person doesn't value self and defers to others

- Manipulative
- 'Poor me' syndrome
- Helpless and needy
- Complaining and whinging
- Fretful
- Downtrodden
- Blaming others

The Empowerment Dynamic

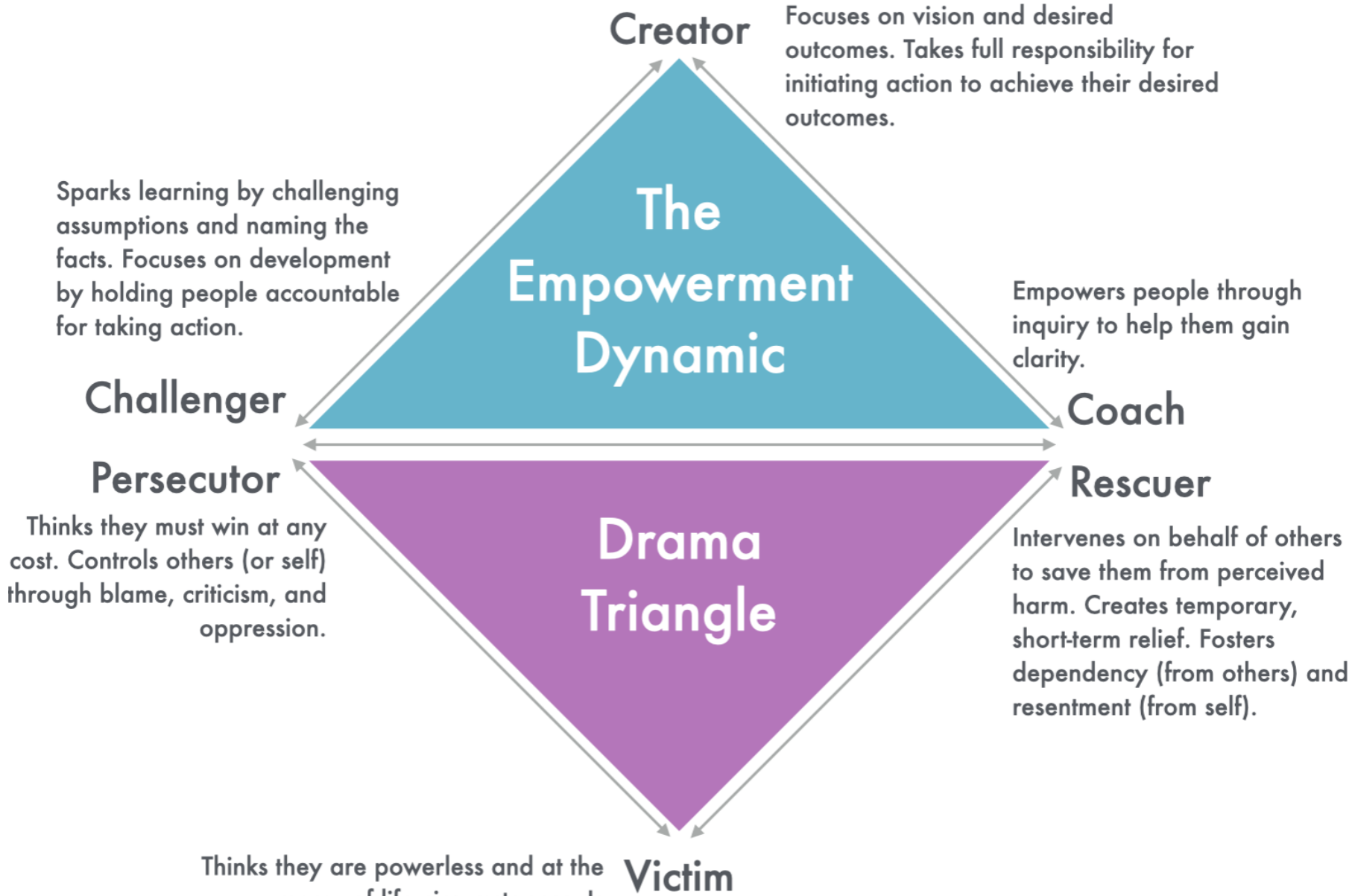
Shift into the Empowerment Dynamic by moving from Victim to Creator; Rescuer to Coach; and Persecutor to Challenger.



Focuses on vision and desired outcomes. Takes full responsibility for initiating action to achieve their desired outcomes.

Sparks learning by challenging assumptions and naming the facts. Focuses on development by holding people accountable for taking action.

Empowers people through inquiry to help them gain clarity.


Creator
Focuses on vision and desired outcomes. Takes full responsibility for initiating action to achieve their desired outcomes.
The Empowerment Dynamic
Sparks learning by challenging assumptions and naming the facts. Focuses on development by holding people accountable for taking action.
Challenger
Empowers people through inquiry to help them gain clarity.
Coach
Drama Triangle
Persecutor
Thinks they must win at any cost. Controls others (or self) through blame, criticism, and oppression.
Rescuer
Intervenes on behalf of others to save them from perceived harm. Creates temporary, short-term relief. Fosters dependency (from others) and resentment (from self).
Victim
Thinks they are powerless and at the mercy of life circumstances. Is unwilling to take responsibility for what happens in their own life.

Conflict Analysis

1. Go back to the conflict you identified earlier.
2. Using the conflict analysis worksheet as a thought starter and the summary of conflict framework worksheet, jot down some ideas about how to approach this conflict.
   - *Is there one framework that resonates with you more?*
   - *Does a combination resonate with you?*

Conflict Analysis Worksheet

Conflict Frameworks

Final Thoughts

- Who is ultimately responsible for resolving conflict?
- What kinds of tools and strategies might you use to approach conflict in the future?
- Who at your institution might be able to help you?
- What supports would be helpful?





Questions?

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