



OAK BAY
COACHING & CONSULTING

From Conflict to Understanding: How to Have Difficult Conversations

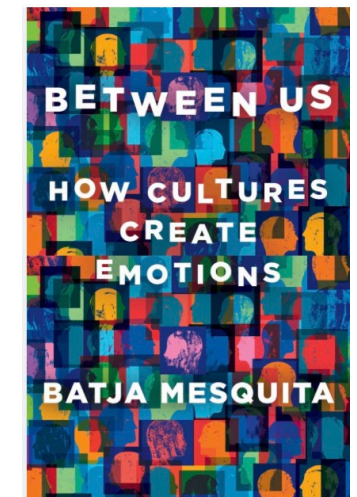
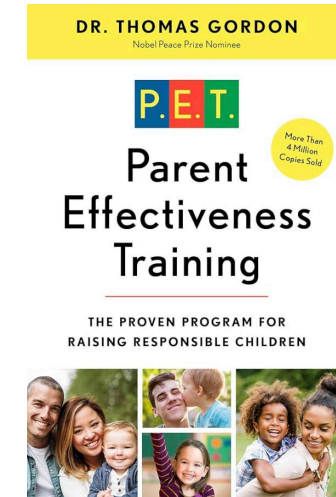
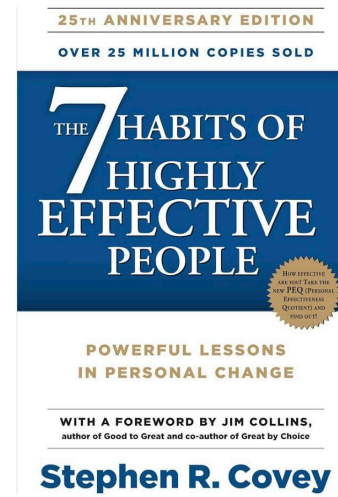
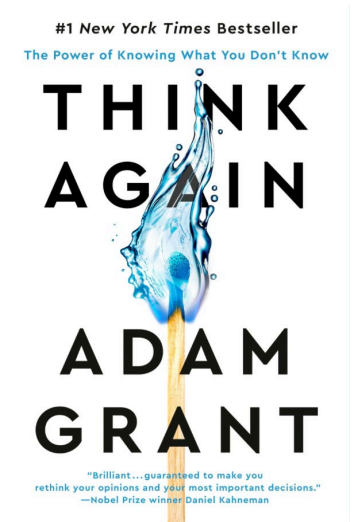
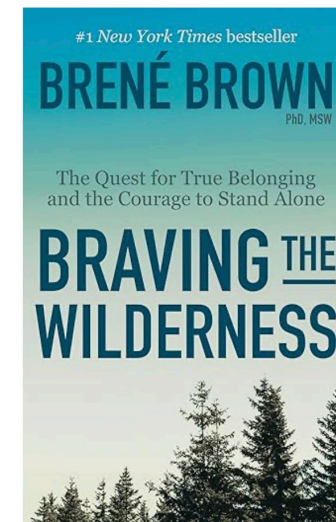
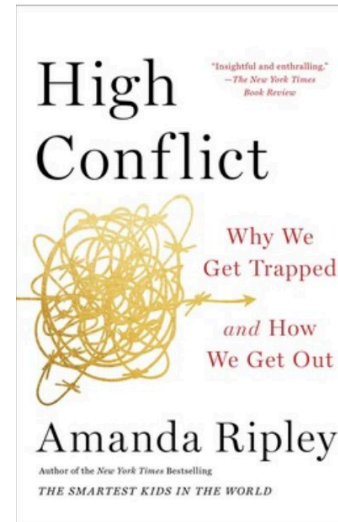
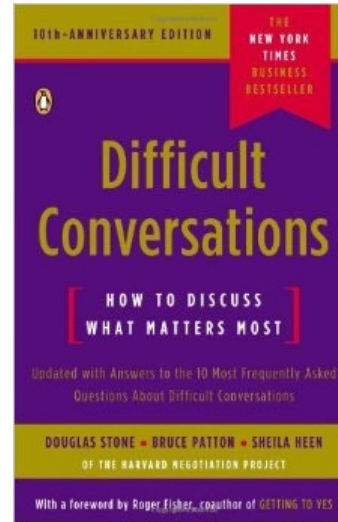
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Learning Objectives

1. Identify intercultural conflict resolution styles expected within various cultural communities
2. Differentiate the three parts of a difficult conversation
3. Describe the six steps of a “Learning Conversation”





Difficult Conversations

One of your favourite hosts hasn't submitted her annual review documents. You have to tell her you can't work with her until her file is current.

Your neighbor agreed to repair your shared fence, but still hasn't gotten around to it, and your dog keeps escaping.

An important agent is demanding you move one of their students, but you know the problem rests with the student, not the host.

One of your students has said the host isn't feeding her dinner, but when you speak to the host, you hear a completely different story.

Your colleague asked you for help with preparing a presentation. A week later, you realize it slipped your mind and you don't have time any more. You dread informing your colleague.

Your Experience

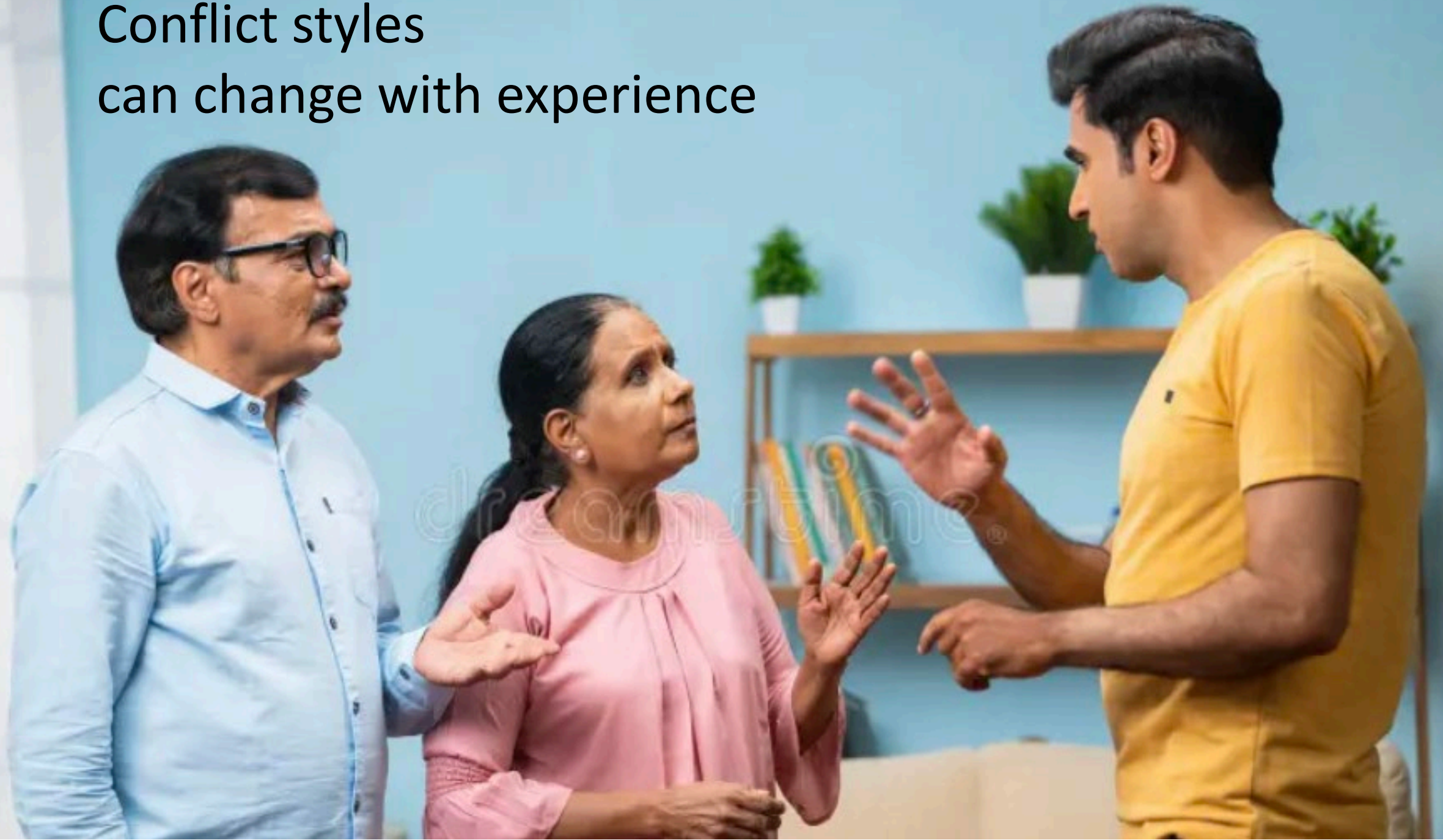
- Identify a recent example of a “difficult conversation” from your work or personal life
- Best examples involve two very different interpretations of the same pattern or event.
- Consider the story in your mind:
 - Who was involved?
 - What was their position?
 - Were there gaps in communication?



Conflict styles are Learned in Childhood



Conflict styles
can change with experience



Conflict Styles: Direct or Indirect?

“Say what you mean and mean what you say.” *American Proverb*

“Nothing done with intelligence is done without speech.” *Greek proverb*

“It is good to know the truth, but it is better to speak of palm trees.” *Arab proverb*

“Hear one and understand ten.” *Japanese proverb*



Conflict Styles: Direct or Indirect?

Direct	Indirect
Meaning is “inside” the message	Meaning is “outside” the message
Precise and explicit language	Ambiguous and vague language
Reliance on face-to-face	Reliance on 3 rd party
Speaking your mind	Discretion in voicing goals
Verbally assert difference of opinion	“talk around” disagreements
Persuasion through reasoned argument	Persuasion through facework
Focus: On the disagreement	Focus: on repairing the relationship

Conflict Styles: Direct or Indirect?



Juno and Ty work as Administrative Assistants in the International Center at a local university. Recently, Juno noticed that Ty seems withdrawn and rarely talks with Juno and others.

Ty has also been arriving late for work for the past two weeks. Juno has been concerned so she bought Ty a box of candy yesterday.

Today, Juno mentioned to Ty that “the weather in the past has been very good, the sky has been clear and sun shining. Lately, however, the sky has been cloudy and none of us really know why.”

Ty looked at Juno, thanked her for the candy and said that “the weather is not so bad and I am sure it will be sunny soon.” Juno smiled and left.

Conflict Styles: Emotionally Expressive or Restrained?

“After a storm, fair weather, after sorrow, joy.” *Russian proverb*

“What is nearest the heart is nearest the mouth.” *Irish proverb*

“Silence produces peace, and peace produces safety.” *Swahili proverb*

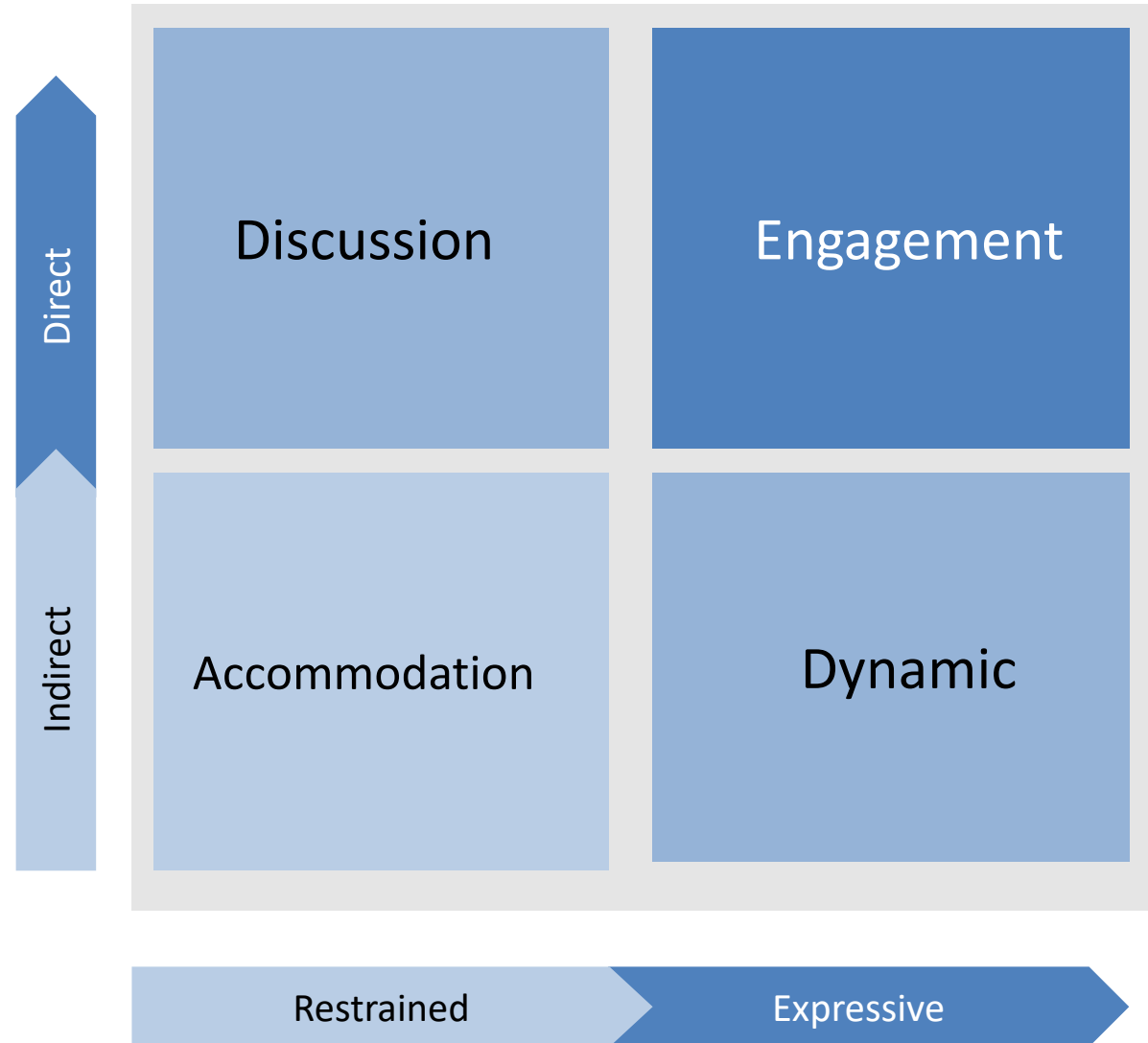
“The first to raise their voice loses the argument.” *Chinese proverb*



Conflict Styles: Emotionally Expressive or Restrained?

Expressive	Restrained
Overt display of emotions	Disguised display of emotions
Control emotions by externalizing	Control emotions by internalizing
Nonverbal behavior = visible display of feelings	Nonverbal behavior = minimal display of emotions
Expansive vocalization	Constrained vocalizations
Sensitive to constraints on expression	Sensitive to hurt feelings of other party
Relational trust through emotional commitment	Relational trust through emotional maturity
Emotional expression = credibility	Emotional suppression = credibility

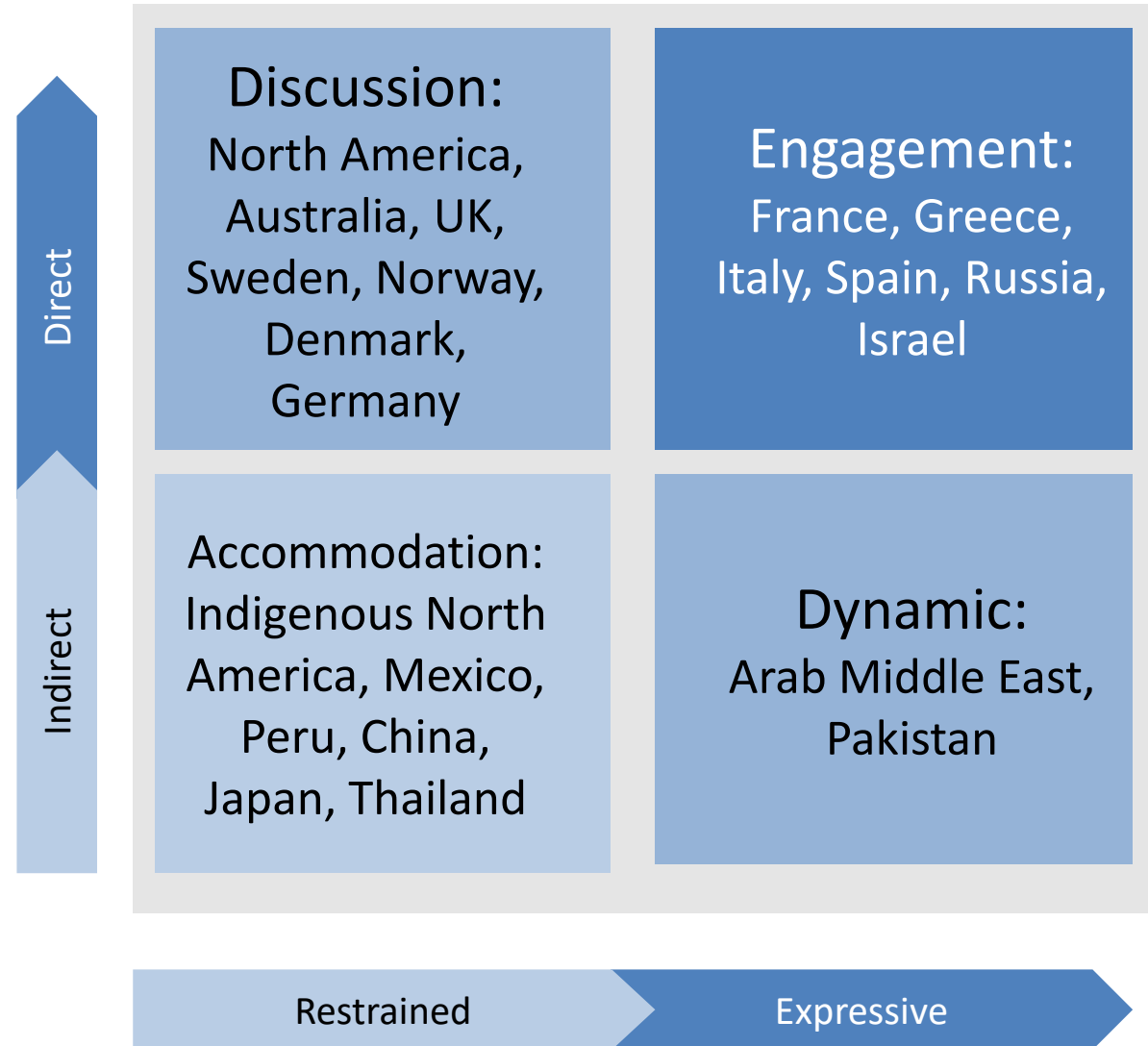
Four Intercultural Conflict Styles



- All patterns appear in all cultures
- Each family and individual will have their own styles
- Styles can change depending on the context (like work or family)



Intercultural Conflict Resolution Styles





A Battle of Messages





A Learning Conversation



Every Difficult Conversation is actually *Three Conversations*

The “what happened” conversation

The “feelings” conversation

The “identity” conversation



The “What Happened” Conversation



We struggle with our different stories about:

- Who's right (**Truth**) → Know that we all have different information; explore each other's stories
- Who meant what (**Intentions**) → Don't assume what they're thinking; disentangle intent from impact
- Who's at fault (**Blame**) → Abandon blame; look for how you've contributed



Livid	Panicked	Frustrated	Shocked	Stunned	Energised	Thrilled	Ecstatic	Euphoric	Exhilarated
Enraged	Terrified	Peeved	Worried	Annoyed	Positive	Connected	Joyful	Enthusiastic	Elated
Irate	Frightened	Angry	Nervous	Concerned	Glad	Inspired	Happy	Motivated	Excited
Furious	Anxious	Agitated	Unsure	Excluded	Amused	Focused	Cheerful	Proud	Surprised
Disgusted	Scared	Troubled	Restless	Embarrassed	Satisfied	Polite	Hopeful	Optimistic	Lively
Apprehensive	Ashamed	Guilty	Deflated	Complacent	Easy-going	Safe	Chilled	Respected	Blessed
Sullen	Glum	Disheartened	Discouraged	Bored	Relaxed	Secure	Content	Thankful	Fulfilled
Exhausted	Fatigued	Sad	Miserable	Pessimistic	Thoughtful	Composed	Calm	Grateful	Tranquil
Alienated	Depressed	Disappointed	Tired	Confused	Mellow	Peaceful	Balanced	At Ease	Collected
Despair	Inconsolable	Anguished	Hopeless	Lonely	Listless	Sleepy	Restful	Comfy	Serene

The “Feelings” Conversation

The “Identity” Conversation

**YOU ARE
WORTHY
OF LOVE**

Learning Conversations

1. Check your purpose and timing
2. Get curious and identify your story
3. Begin like a friendly observer
4. Listen with genuine curiosity
5. Speak to the heart of the matter
6. Work together to find options

Check Your Purpose & Timing

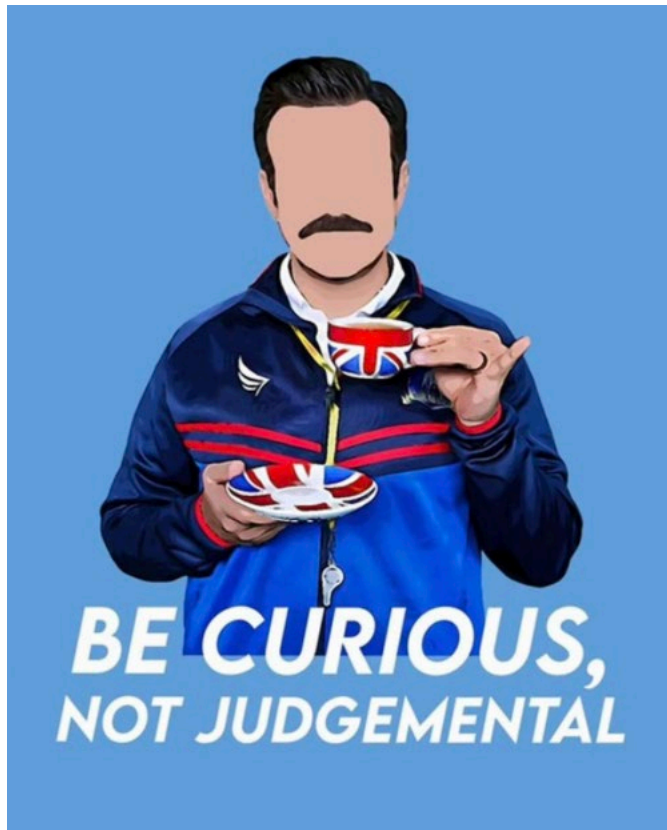


Learning Conversations

1. Check your purpose and timing
2. **Get curious and identify your story**
3. Begin like a friendly observer
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Get Curious & Identify Your Story

Curiosity cannot live with judgment; it builds trust where judgment breaks it down.



- What do you want to understand about the other side?
- What do you want the other side to understand about you?
- What's the question nobody's asking?
- Where do you feel torn?
- What role is culture playing?
- What are you feeling, and what do you think they're feeling?
- What are your intentions?
- What's the story you're telling about this situation?

Learning Conversations

1. Check your purpose and timing
2. Get curious and identify your story
- 3. Begin like a friendly observer**
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Begin Like a Friendly Observer

Learn to describe the gap between your story and the other person's story:

Tell the “Third” Story

Seema's story	Rafael's story	Third Story
Do I have to do everything around here? You can't let dishes sit this long – it's a health risk. We need to talk about your problem with getting the dishes done.	We need to talk about the fact that you are so annoyingly anal about the dishes. Last night you practically cleared the table before I was finished eating. You need to relax.	Seema and Rafael have different preferences around when the dishes are done, and different standards for what constitutes appropriate or obsessive cleanliness. Each is unhappy with the other's approach.



Examples: the Third Story

Opening Lines	Third Story
If you keep lying to me about your smoking, you're going to have to move out.	I wanted to talk about your smoking. You and I obviously have different understandings of what is appropriate. I want to understand how you see things and share with you my perspective and feelings.
I was very upset by what you said in front of our boss.	I wanted to talk to you about what happened in the meeting today. I was upset by something you said. I wanted to explain what was bothering me, and also hear your perspective on the situation.
<i>What's YOUR story?</i>	<i>What's the THIRD story?</i>

Learning Conversations

1. Check your purpose and timing
2. Get curious and identify your story
3. Begin like a friendly observer
- 4. Listen with genuine curiosity**
5. Speak to the heart of the matter
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Listen Curiously

Inquire

- Can you say a little more about how you see things?
- What information do you have that I don't?
- How do you see it differently?
- What impact have my actions had on you?

Paraphrase

- So, part of the problem is that...
- You feel like ...
- So you're afraid that...



And then,

Loop for Understanding:

“Did I get that right?”

Acknowledge

- It sounds like you're really upset about this.
- This seems really important to you.
- If I were in your shoes I'd probably feel confused too.

Learning Conversations

1. Check your purpose and timing
2. Get curious and identify your story
3. Begin like a friendly observer
4. Listen with genuine curiosity
- 5. Speak to the heart of the matter**
6. Work together to find options

Speak to the Heart of the Matter

- Start with **what matters most**
- **Say what you mean** – don't make them guess
- Acknowledge your intercultural **conflict style**
- Don't make your story simplistic... use "AND" not "BUT"
 - *I do think you are bright and talented, **and** I think you're not working hard enough.*
 - *I feel badly for how rough things have been for you, **and** I'm feeling disappointed in you.*
 - *I'm upset with myself for not noticing that you were so lonely. **And** I was also having problems during that time.*

Learning Conversations

1. Check your purpose and timing
2. Get curious and identify your story
3. Begin like a friendly observer
4. Listen with genuine curiosity
5. Speak to the heart of the matter
6. **Work together to find options**



Work together to find options

1. Gather information and test your perceptions
 - Propose crafting a test of assumptions
 - Say what is still missing
 - Ask what (if anything) would persuade them
 - Ask their advice.
2. Invent options
3. Ask what standards should apply
4. If you still can't agree, consider your alternatives



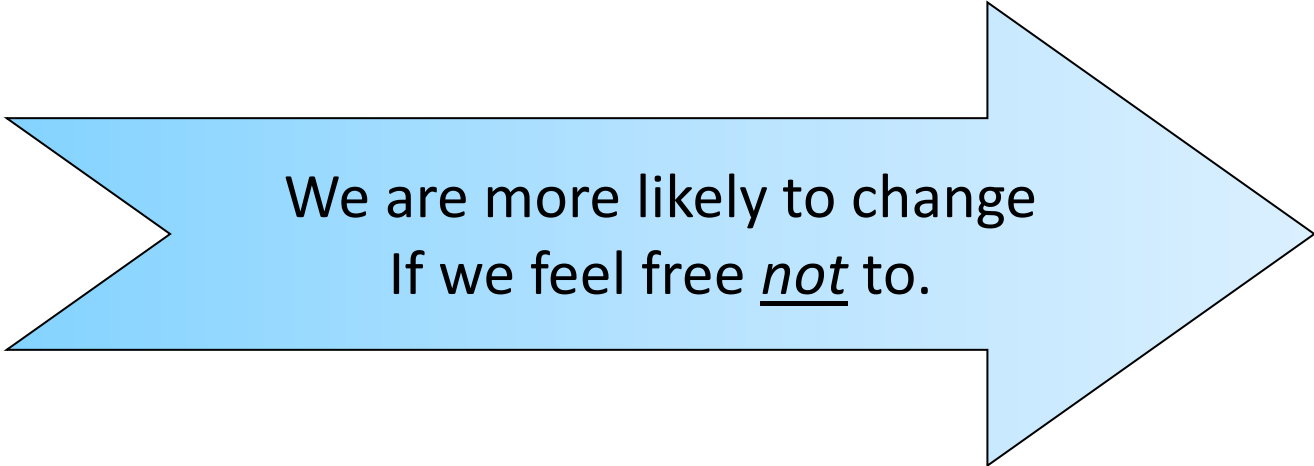


Finding Options

Distinguish helping from fixing.
Give up the illusion of control.

We can't change someone's mind or force them to change
their behaviour.

Engaging someone in a conversation where mutual
learning is the goal often results in change...

A large, light blue arrow pointing to the right, with a black outline. It has a decorative notch on its left side.

We are more likely to change
If we feel free not to.



Reflection

1. What specific cultural differences in conflict style make a difference in your job?
2. When have you seen different intercultural conflict resolution styles in action?
3. How will you apply what you've learned today?

Recommended Reading

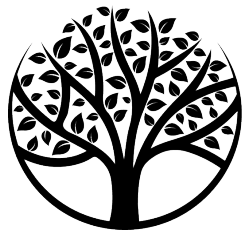
- Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton & Sheila Heen, *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*
- Amanda Ripley, *High Conflict: Why We Get Trapped and How We Get Out*
- Brené Brown, *Braving the Wilderness*
- Adam Grant, *Think Again: The Power of Knowing What You Don't Know*
- Susan Scott, *Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work & in Life, One Conversation at a Time*
- Stephen Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*
- Batja Mesquita, *Between Us: How Cultures Create Emotions*
- Harriet Lerner, *Why Won't You Apologize? Healing Big Betrayals and Everyday Hurts*
- Oscar Trimboli, *How to Listen: Discover the Hidden Key to Better Communication*
- Kim Scott, *Radical Candor: Be a Kick-Ass Boss Without Losing Your Humanity*
- Amy Edmundson, *Right Kind of Wrong: The Science of Failing Well*

Thank you!

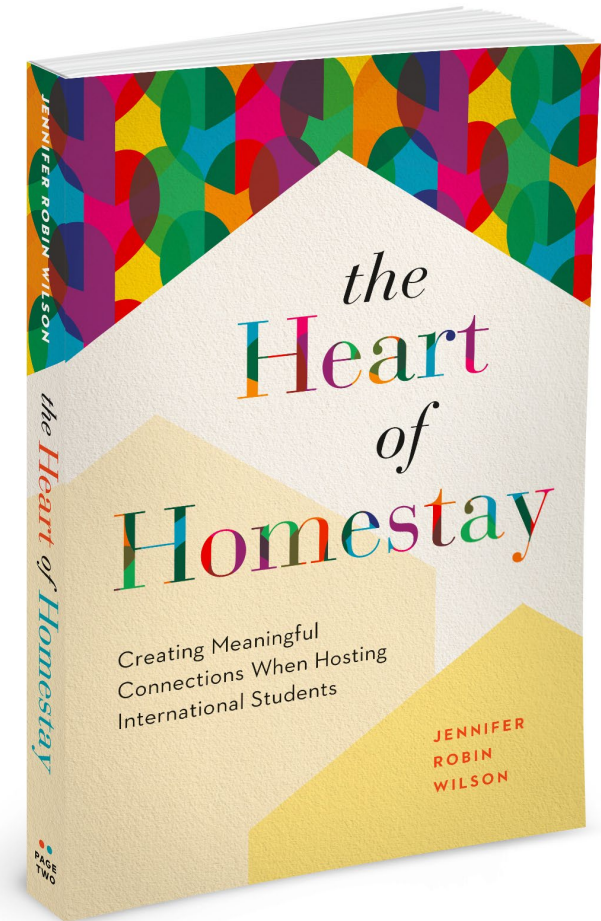
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The “What Happened” Conversation

	A Battle of Messages	A Learning Conversation
Truth	<p>Assumption: I know all I need to know to understand what happened.</p> <p>Goal: Persuade them I’m right.</p>	<p>Assumption: Each of us is bringing different information and perceptions to the table; there are likely to be important things that each of us doesn’t know.</p> <p>Goal: Explore each others’ stories: how we understand the situation and why.</p>
Intentions	<p>Assumption: I know what they intended.</p> <p>Goal: Let them know what they did was wrong.</p>	<p>Assumption: I know what I intended, and the impact their actions had on me. I don’t and can’t know what’s in their head.</p> <p>Goal: Share the impact on me, and find out what they’re thinking. Also find out what impact I’m having on them.</p>
Blame	<p>Assumption: It’s all their fault.</p> <p>Goal: Get them to admit blame and take responsibility for making amends.</p>	<p>Assumption: We have probably both contributed to this mess.</p> <p>Goal: Understand the contribution system: how our actions interact to produce this result.</p>

Watch for Hidden Challenges





Hard-to-spot Contributions

Four hard-to-spot Contributions	Means...
Avoiding until now	You haven't addressed this issue earlier... you complain to a third party instead of the person... you haven't wanted the hassle...
Being unapproachable	You contribute by people experiencing you as being uninterested, unpredictable, short-tempered, judgmental, punitive, hypersensitive, argumentative, or unfriendly...
Intersections	Conflicting assumptions about communication and relationships. Eg. Raising problems immediately vs. not reacting too quickly and nurturing space to reflect
Problematic role assumptions	How people interact, eg. "leaders set strategy, subordinates implement it"...



The “Feelings” Conversation

The question is not whether strong feelings will arise, but how to handle them when they do.

A Battle of Messages	A Learning Conversation
<p>Assumption: Feelings are irrelevant and wouldn't be helpful to share. Or my feelings are their fault and they need to hear about them.</p> <p>Goal: Avoid talking about feelings. Or, let 'em have it!</p>	<p>Assumption: Feelings are the heart of the situation. Feelings are usually complex. I may have to dig a bit to understand my feelings.</p> <p>Goal: Address feelings (mine and theirs) without judgments or attributions. Acknowledge feelings before problem-solving.</p>



The “Identity” Conversation

What am I saying to myself about me?

When your self-image is challenged by the situation... we get knocked off balance

A Battle of Messages	A Learning Conversation
<p>Assumption: I’m competent or incompetent, good or bad, lovable or unlovable. There is no in-between.</p> <p>Goal: Protect my all-or-nothing image.</p>	<p>Assumption: There may be a lot at stake psychologically for both of us. Each of us is complex, neither of us is perfect.</p> <p>Goal: Understand the identity issues on the line for each of us. Build a more complex self-image to maintain my balance better.</p>