
Collaboration through Candid Conversation!

by



Conflict + Communication = Collaboration

Why do you care if you can skillfully conduct difficult conversations? Because being able to be candid, assertive, and cooperative—all at the same time—in difficult conversations is the ability to turn difficult conversations into collaboration opportunities.

This workshop will help you improve your ability to have difficult conversations, and therefore your ability to collaborate. You will be asked to do a lot throughout the day. You will get out of it what you put into it, so please be prepared to focus and participate.

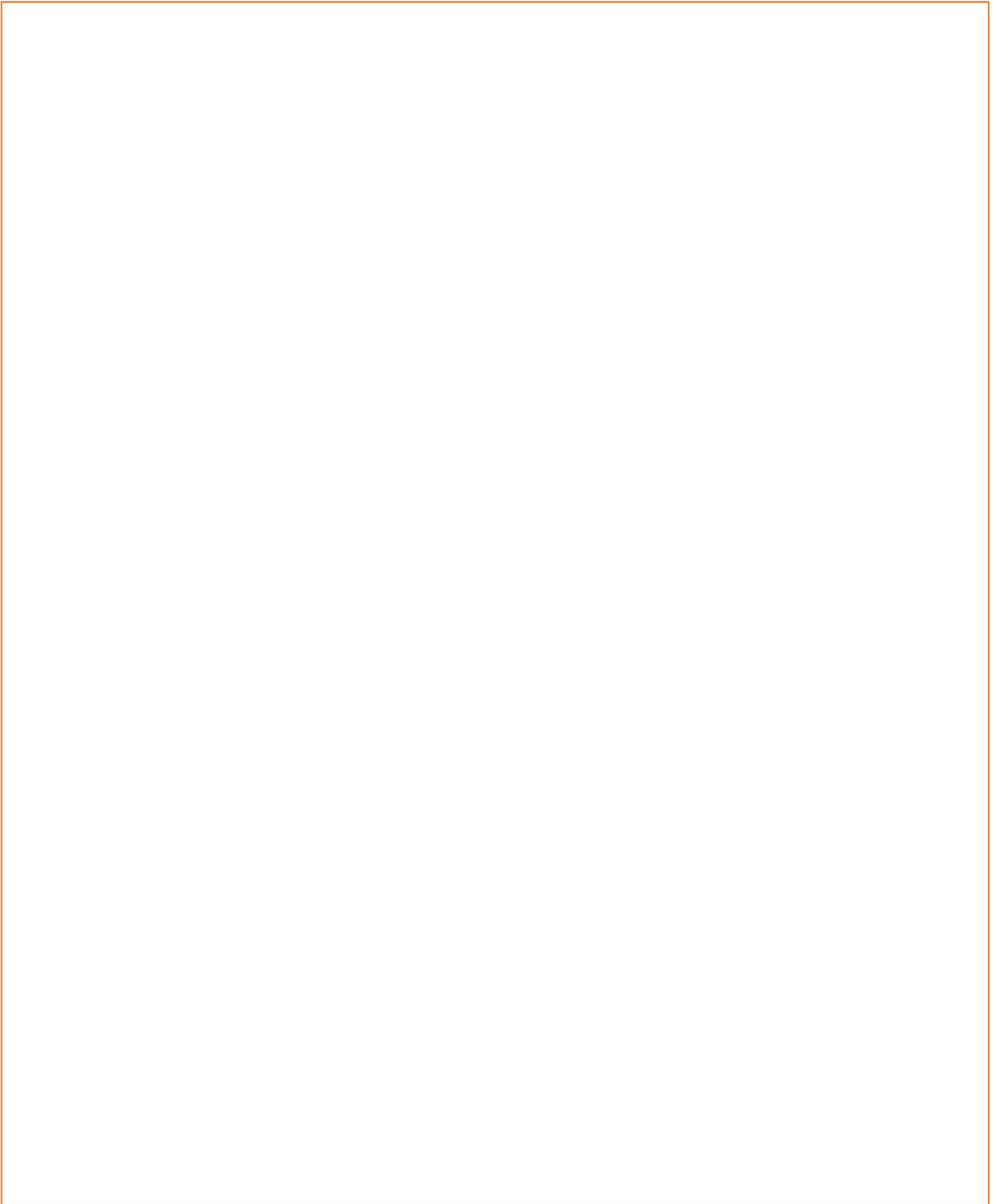
Page 2 – Notes & Doodles ----- Some learn best with the opportunity to take notes or doodle while hearing new information. This space is for you.

Page 3 – Summary & Activities ---- Some brains are distracted by taking notes, but want notes to refer to later. These notes are for you. The activities and exercises are for everyone!

Page 5 – Action Plan ----- At the end of this workshop, complete a Candid Conversation Action Plan to identify where, when and how you will continue to improve.

Candor is the key to collaborating effectively. – Ed Catmull, co-founder of Pixar

NOTES & DOODLES



TALK SUMMARY AND EXERCISES

Leading organizations is hard in the first place, and difficult conversations can make it harder. Many of us have a very hard time with conflict. Conversations that include conflict get difficult for us. We think of conflict as bad or scary, and react in a “fight or flight” mindset. Fortunately, a wealth of data and experience give us practical suggestions on how to better approach difficult conversations to achieve true collaboration. The first step is to examine our beliefs and find the value in conflict. That puts us in a better position for the next step: bringing both healthy assertion and cooperation to difficult conversations. Finally, a high level of Emotional Intelligence (EI) can help us stay on a productive path during challenging chats.

Exercise: Throughout this workshop we want you to be working with real conflicts going on for you at work. Ideally, these would be mild to moderate intensity conflicts; a very intense conflict may be more difficult to work with effectively in this workshop.

What is a recent moderate conflict you’ve experienced?

What is another moderate conflict you feel may be brewing, or coming soon?

Examine your beliefs and learn to value conflict!

Quick conversations: What does conflict mean to you? What does it mean at your organization?

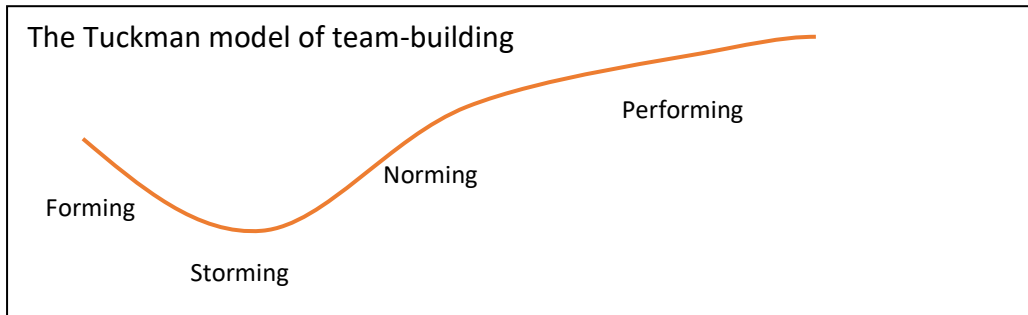
Please discuss the following questions with each other:

- 1) How do you feel about conflict? Do you see conflict as good, bad, ugly, or some mix?**

- 2) What is the culture of conflict in your organization? How is conflict handled by most? What approaches are rewarded or punished?**

Conflict is inevitable. Regardless of how you feel about conflict, it is coming your way at work. Conflict is inevitable when people are doing difficult, complex work.

Conflict is a natural part of team development. According to B. W. Tuckman, teams go through inevitable stages he calls Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing.



Forming is when a team is just coming together; *Re-forming* is a similar process that can occur when team members are added or removed. Typically, during this stage, people are acting politely and as individuals. A lack of clarity about team purpose and especially roles leads to a cautious “feeling each other out” stage.

Storming is when conflict arises as people begin to establish their place in the team. Who does what? Who decides about which issues? How are disagreements resolved? Who’s in charge? What’s bugging people? All of this gets worked through—often with conflict—during storming.

Norming occurs when a level of consensus and agreement are building in the team. Roles get clarified. Leaders help teams to norm when they help people to work through conflict and clarify roles and procedures.

Performing is when a group has clear objectives and shared vision. People in the group trust each other and know what to expect from each other. The group can operate autonomously and resolve issues positively.

While some stages may sound more appealing than others, according to this model each stage is unavoidable. Teams must go through these stages to achieve performing. Some teams, however, never reach performing. Some teams may be reorganized and return to *re-forming* before they get a chance to perform. Even worse, some teams get stuck in *storming*, and fail to move past that tumultuous stage. This workshop will give you tools to help avoid getting stuck in *storming*.

Exercise: Where is your team in the Tuckman model?

Whenever conflict comes, we tend to default to one style or another. At least when things get really difficult and tense, some of us become aggressive, some of us comply with others in order to ease the conflict, and some of us try to avoid conflict altogether. Which is your preferred style?

Exercise: What's your preferred style when it comes to conflict? What about your colleagues?



Learn to value conflict; it is incredibly useful!

The reality is that, when done well, conflict is a tool that surfaces issues that need to be addressed, rebalances when people and/or processes are out of balance, educates people, enlivens relationships, and creates innovative solutions. A few quotes from industry and academic experts helps illustrate the value in conflict.

"...by developing cooperative relationships and the skills to discuss diverse views open-mindedly, organizations can empower managers and employees to use conflict to probe problems, create innovative solutions, learn from their experience, and enliven their relationships."

—Dean Tjosvold, *The conflict-positive organization: it depends on us*, Journal of Organizational Behavior, 2007

"It is management's job to help figure out how to help others see conflict as healthy—as a route to balance, which benefits us all in the long run."

—Ed Catmull in Creativity, Inc.

What beliefs about conflict may be starting to change for you?

I came in believing that....	Now I also see that...

To collaborate, assert and cooperate.

Truly effective collaboration comes not when we approach conflict with just assertion or cooperation, but an effective blend of both. This doesn't mean being aggressive, it means asserting your needs and views calmly and early, before issues fester. It also means being willing to listen, learn, adjust, and give for the sake of the ideal outcome and good of the group.

"Organizational members often have competitive relationships and orientations to dealing with conflict that lead to conflict avoidance and escalation, approaches that sabotage decision-making and relational bonds." —Dean Tjosvold, *The conflict-positive organization: it depends on us*, Journal of Organizational Behavior, 2007

Conflict can be win/win, and must be win/win to become collaboration.

Exercise: What's the ideal outcome for a conflict you have at your organization?

Give and get SCARF to work for the win/win.

The SCARF model—introduced by David Rock in his highly recommended book *Your Brain at Work*—summarizes a large body of psychology research that suggests we all need Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness (SCARF) in order to feel safe. If you feel OK about your status, have some degree of certainty, have the ability to make choices, relate to others, and feel that a discussion partner is being fair, you will likely feel safe and relatively comfortable in a discussion. If any of those needs are being threatened, it's easy to get triggered into a "fight or flight" reaction. All of this is true for everyone involved in a difficult conversation. Give and get SCARF—Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness—to help everyone stay calmer and better able to work toward a win/win resolution to the conflict.

Cooperate in order to collaborate!

Assertion alone does not result in collaboration. To get collaboration, you must be willing to cooperate at least as much as you are willing to assert.

A great first step to making conflict more collaborative is to listen with the goal of understanding first, only later to be understood by the other people involved. This is habit #5 from Stephen R. Covey's classic book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. "Seek first to understand, then to be understood."

Exercise: What is the other people's current understanding of the situation? How do they currently see it?

Show them you understand.

Once you believe you understand the other person's position, check for understanding by paraphrasing those beliefs back to that person. This is especially important when emotions run high. When people speak to you in a highly emotional way, demonstrate that you've not only heard them, but also *felt* them, by stating that emotion back, with feeling. Use about 2/3 of the intensity that they brought to you. If they might rate their frustration a 9 on a scale of 10, say that you see that they are frustrated with intensity level roughly 6 out of 10. This will help the other party *feel felt*, as psychologists put it.

Often once someone feels understood, they start to relax. That opens a window of opportunity for you to share another perspective, or a possible solution.

Be willing to change your mind.

If you view conflict with a win/win perspective, then having your opinion changed by the other person is not losing!

"For many people, changing course is also a sign of weakness, tantamount to admitting that you don't know what you are doing. This strikes me as particularly bizarre—personally, I think the person who can't change his or her mind is dangerous. Steve Jobs was known for changing his mind instantly in the light of new facts, and I don't know anyone who thought he was weak."—Ed Catmull in Creativity, Inc.

Exercise: What can you learn? What can you give? How can you flex? How can you work for the win/win?

Assert early and calmly!

True collaboration doesn't come from just cooperating with others; it comes from asserting your view and needs at the same time. The goal is to assert early, before issues become huge festering problems. Asserting early will help you assert calmly. **Posing like a superhero before any difficult conversation will also help you stay calm and assertive.** See Amy Cuddy's TED talk, listed in Resources at the end of this handout, to better understand how that works. For the latest on the controversy around this work, please see <http://nymag.com/scienceofus/2016/09/read-amy-cuddys-response-to-power-posing-critiques.html>.)

Challenge behaviors and ideas, not people.

People feel threatened when you attack their character. It's much less threatening to have your ideas or work challenged. Don't talk about the way people are, talk about the way they behave. Don't attack people's talents, but constructively criticize their work.

On the flip side, don't be so attached to your work or ideas that you feel offended when they are challenged. Not every idea of yours—or anyone else's—is a great idea!

"This principle eludes most people, but it is critical: You are not your idea, and if you identify too closely with your ideas, you will take offense when they are challenged."
--Ed Catmull in Creativity, Inc.

Ask permission, then address directly and privately.

By asking permission, you give the other person a chance to let you know that they are not in a good space to have a difficult conversation. Always take your issue with someone directly to them first (not to someone else). Most often, a private conversation feels less threatening to the other person. If you criticize someone in a group, you are attacking their reputation. Once you have permission, talk with someone where others won't hear or see you.

Use compelling communication to get others to understand.

If the other person isn't understanding what you are saying, it is *your* job to find new ways to communicate with them. What analogies or metaphors can you use? What story could you tell?

"Instead of saying, 'The writing in this scene isn't good enough,' you say, 'Don't you want people to walk out of the theater and be quoting those lines?' It's more of a challenge."
--Ed Catmull in Creativity, Inc.

Group discussion: Communicate compellingly! Can you think of a time when you were trying to get someone else to understand something, and found a new approach that worked much better than what you were saying before? Or can you think of a time when someone used a new technique to get you to see the light?

Boost Emotional Intelligence to boost success.

According to Howard Gardner's groundbreaking theory of multiple intelligences, people are intelligent in various ways. One form of intelligence is called emotional intelligence. Daniel Goleman, a key leader in applying emotional intelligence, defines this as the ability to effectively identify, monitor, and work with emotions in yourself and others.

To see how well you are doing at identifying emotions in others, try the tests:

- http://www.greatergood.berkeley.edu/ei_quiz
- <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/10/03/well-quiz-the-mind-behind-the-eyes/>

At least as important is the ability to identify and manage your own emotions. Mindfulness meditations help you do just that.

Exercise: mindful walking meditation and body scan.

Walking meditation can center you before a difficult conversation. Try walking to a meeting and just focusing your attention on how your feet feel as you slowly walk. Another form of helpful meditation is a body scan. To do a body scan, sit comfortably, close your eyes, and focus first on the feeling of your breath, wherever you feel it: upper lip, nose, throat, chest, and/or belly. Just notice what you feel, without judging how you feel. Once you are centered, move the “spotlight” of your attention slowly around your body, focusing especially on your belly, chest, back, neck, face, and head. See what feelings you find.

Whenever you notice feelings in yourself, “name it to tame it.” Just labelling emotions helps you manage them more effectively.

Name it to tame it: what are your emotional tendencies? Some people run anxious, others angry, and others sad. When things get hard, what’s your most common emotional response?

Asking others who know you well for feedback can also be helpful: how do you seem to them? Sometimes we deny our own emotions, but others can see them and let us know. On the flip side, give others feedback: what emotions do they seem to have. Don’t tell others, but ask them. For example, you might say “You appear tense, is that how you feel?” Be empathetic to others, so you are aware of their feelings, and can, to a degree, help them manage their emotions in a difficult conversation.

Move past blame. Blaming = giving away your power.

One way of using emotional intelligence is to move past blame. Blaming others is a natural defense mechanism when things get difficult and stressful. The problem is that blaming others puts the responsibility to address an issue on others. Thus, when you blame others you give away your power to fix problems. Sometimes when we move past blaming others, we start to blame ourselves. While this might be a necessary step to realizing that we have work to do, blaming ourselves doesn’t solve anything either. Ideally you want to move past blame to true responsibility and problem solving.

Separate emotion from action. Choose to respond (not react).

When our emotions run high, we tend to move toward fight, flight, or freeze, or in the case of difficult conversations, aggression, compliance, or avoidance. Emotional intelligence including mindfulness can help us put space between our immediate emotional reaction, and the calmer response we want to choose. In addition to emotional intelligence, this often just takes time. Don’t immediately react if you notice you are highly emotional. Give yourself time to recognize and label your emotions, calm down, and respond appropriately.

Think of a recent conflict where you acted in the heat of the moment. How did doing so harm the interaction? How can you better separate emotion from action?

ACTIVITY: CANDID CONVERSATION ACTION PLAN

Think about the conflicts you brought in to this workshop. Write the most important things for you to work on in order to achieve collaboration by intelligently conducting candid conversations. Ideally, choose a person you trust with whom to review this plan. (We know this may sound corny, but reviewing it with someone will really help you make the change you desire.) Ask for their help: does the plan seem like a good one to them? Will they help you track your progress and remind you to act on your plan? Will they and/or others give you feedback to help you continue to improve?

Name:	Partner:
My Personal Action Plan: To be more effective, I will focus on doing these things:	When and where I will act on this:

*Please consider sharing your plan with others, in person or online.
When you share a plan publicly, research shows you are more likely to follow through.*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Books:

Creativity, Inc. by Ed Catmull

Crucial Conversations by Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, Switzler

Emotional Intelligence by Daniel Goleman

The Fearless Organization by Amy Edmondson

Never Split the Difference by Chris Voss

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen R. Covey

Working with You Is Killing Me by Katherine Crowley and Kathi Elster

Videos:

Amy Cuddy's TED talk on how your body language affects how you feel, and helps you stay calm and assertive:

http://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are?language=en

Kelly McGonigal's TED talk on how to befriend stress:

http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend?language=en

~5 minute guided body scan meditation by "Yoga by Candace"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dsmfIAyiois&sns=em>

~10 minute guided Body Scan Meditation by Greg de Vries, A.K.A. The Meditation Coach.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=obYJRmqrqOU>

Emotional Intelligence Tests: You can test your ability to read other people's emotions with these:

http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/ei_quiz

<http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/10/03/well-quiz-the-mind-behind-the-eyes/>

Free Newsletter: You can sign up for Happy Brain Science's occasional newsletter for more happiness activities and brain science news at www.HappyBrainScience.com. It always contains thoughts on how to apply the latest science. We never share your email with anyone for any reason.

Stay in Touch: You can find Scott on Facebook at www.facebook.com/HappyBrainScience or follow him on Twitter: [@ScottCrab](https://twitter.com/ScottCrab)

Coaching: Through coaching you will achieve better results sooner. Coaching is an investment in yourself. We will help you achieve your current goals, and also empower you to continue succeeding in the long run. You can find more information about executive coaching at www.HappyBrainScience.com/offerings/coaching.

We would love to hear from you on how this works for you, questions you have, and anything else related to your mind; please contact us using the information below. If you know of someone who might want to schedule a workshop or coaching, please let me know.

Thank you!