

Navigating a Polarized World

Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution

Ty Olson, M.A.
He/Him/His

Jessica McLaughlin, Ph.D.
She/Her/Hers

Learning Objectives

At the end of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Identify and define the key elements of emotional intelligence (EQ)
2. Identify and define the key concepts and frameworks of conflict engagement (CE)
3. Describe the connection between emotional intelligence and conflict engagement
4. Utilize emotional intelligence and conflict engagement approaches to constructively navigate difficult conversations

Emotional Intelligence

What is Emotional Intelligence?

Emotional intelligence is “a wide range of **emotional skills** that profoundly affect [our] thinking and actions” (Bariso, 2018, p. 7).

Your emotional intelligence quotient, or EQ, is the degree to which you can “**make emotions work for you**, instead of against you” (p. 8).

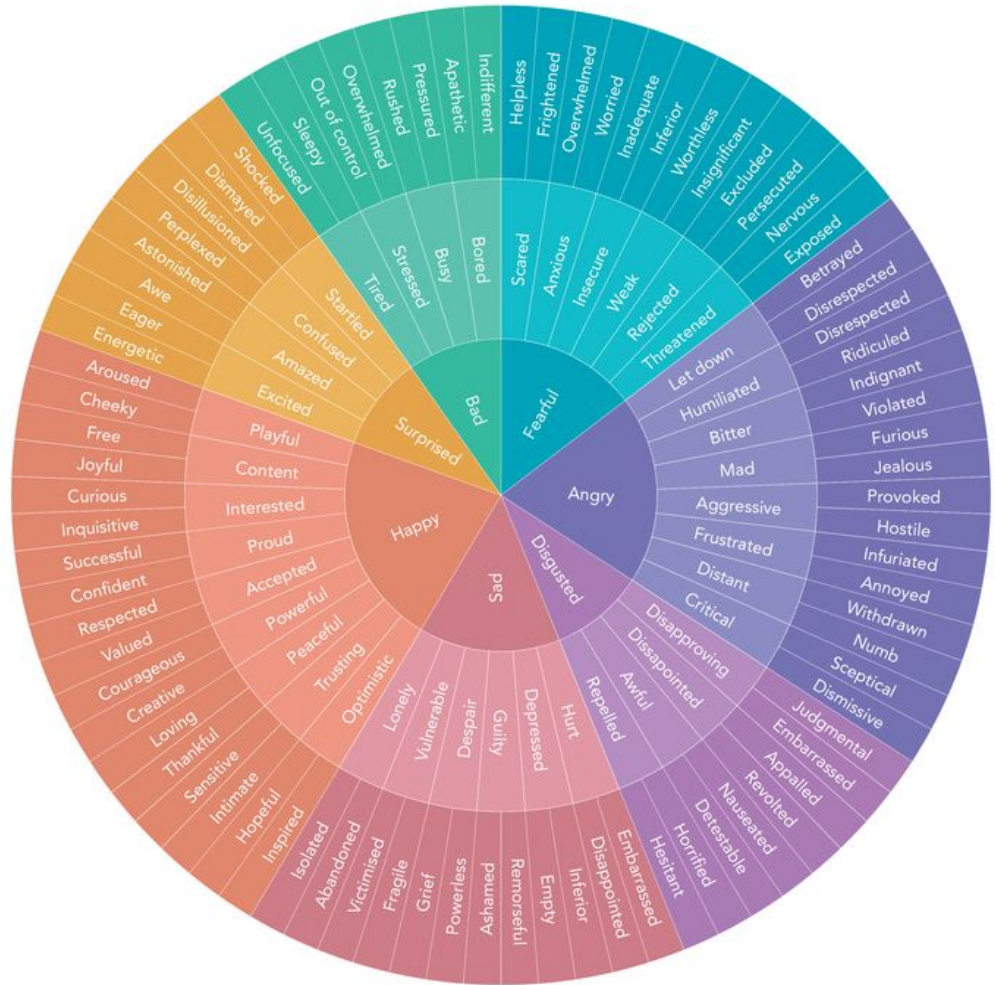
...but what does this actually look like?

Emotional Intelligence Has 4 Elements

What are you doing with the emotions?

		What are you doing with the emotions?	
		Knowing	Managing
Whose emotions?	Self	Self-awareness of one's own emotions	Controlling one's own emotions
	Others	Recognizing emotions in others	Managing relationships

The Feeling Wheel



Kay is having an argument with their boyfriend, Amir. Amir is insisting that they attend a large family wedding for Amir's sister. Kay does not want to go because of the pandemic and most of the attendees will not be wearing a mask at this indoor event. At this point, the argument has turned into a shouting match. Amir, teary-eyed, has just yelled, "You don't care about my family! And if you don't care about my family, you don't care about me!" Kay has just responded by yelling back, "What are you talking about?! That's not what this is about! It's like you aren't even listening!"

How could Kay show the 4 elements of emotional intelligence?

- Self-awareness of one's own emotions
- Controlling one's own emotions
- Recognizing emotions in others
- Managing relationships

Why Is EQ Important?

EQ helps in **all facets of life** - work, academics, social relationships, and personal wellbeing. High EQ is linked to:

- Doing better in school, having higher self-esteem, and getting along better with one's peers in grade school
- Being more productive, more effective, and better able to bounce back from setbacks
- Fewer negative effects when stressed
- Higher life satisfaction

Conflict Resolution

Conflict is...

Normal, common, inevitable, and something most individuals don't enjoy.

“Conflict is the perception of differences of interests among people.” (Thompson, 1998, p. 4)

Conflict **occurs** when an individual's or group's **interests**, **needs**, **values**, and/or **identities** are threatened, or there is a perception that they are being threatened.

Conflict as a threat (or perceived threat)

- **Interests** - Transitory desires / "wants" or "preferences" (short-term, mid-range, and long-term)
- **Values** - Often culturally specific motivations and/or guiding principles
 - beliefs – religious, social, political, structural, etc.
 - individual ethics & morals – honest, fair, hard-worker, loyal, kind, etc.
- **Needs** - Requirements for human development that are universal (physical and psychological)
- **Identity** - The beliefs, qualities, appearance, and disposition that form an individual or connect one to a larger group

Conflict Resolution or...*Conflict Engagement*

Conflict Resolution → Focuses on working to resolve (or solve) the issue/conflict that is occurring.

Conflict Management → Focuses on working to manage and control the conflict, not allowing it to get out of hand and attempting to harness it in a way that promotes positive outcomes.

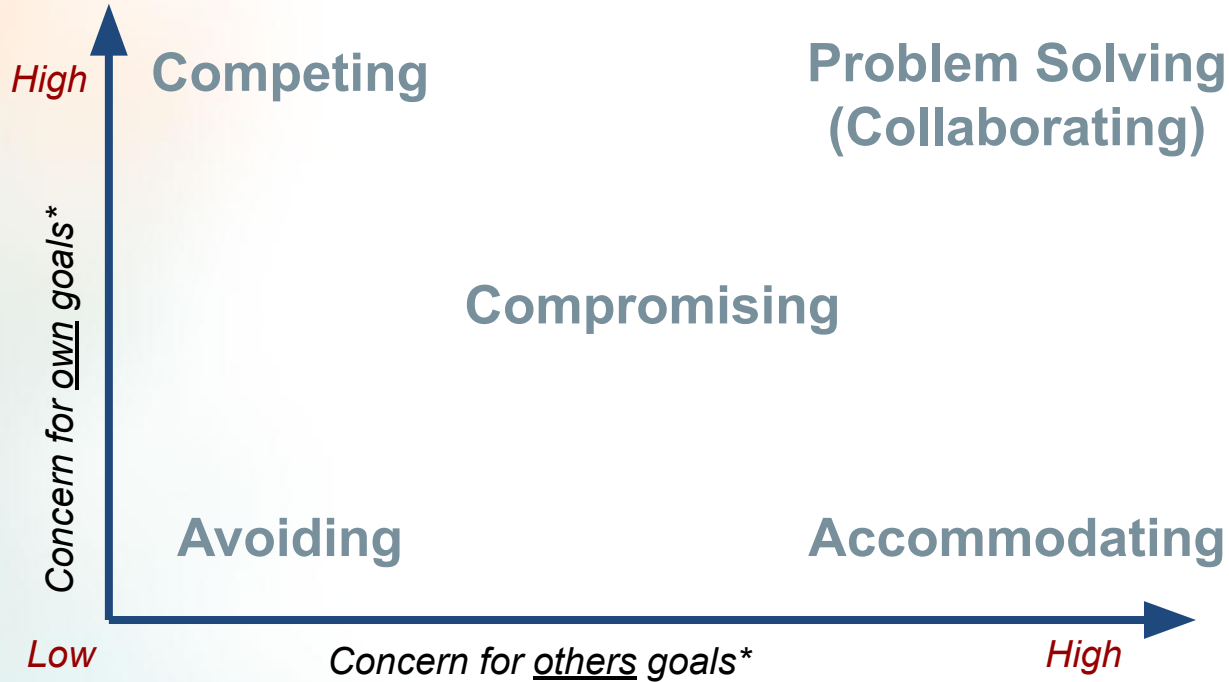
Conflict Transformation → Focuses on long-term changes in relationships and social systems, and encourages people to look at “why” the conflict is occurring in the first place.

Conflict Escalation → Focuses on bringing attention to injustices and inequities, so as to move toward a just and equitable resolution or transformation.

Conflict Styles (Responses & Reactions)

- **Competing (Dominating)** - Doing whatever it takes to get what you want. (Fighting, negotiating, yelling, becoming violent, bullying, manipulating, etc.)
- **Avoiding** - Physically or psychologically distancing yourself from others (especially when there is tension).
- **Accommodating** - Not offering any feedback or resistance, and just going with the flow (oftentimes neglecting to voice one's needs, fears, and concerns).
- **Compromising** - Making a deal. (“I’ll only do this, if you do that.”)
- **Problem Solving (Collaborating)** - Airing concerns, listening to other perspectives, and working together to come up with a solution that is suitable to all parties.

Understanding Conflict Styles



**Goals - in this case includes interest, values, needs, and identity (plus power)*

Using EQ and CE to Navigate Difficult Conversations

Empathy and Perspective Taking

Empathy is “the ability to understand and share the thoughts or feelings of another” (Bariso, 2018, p. 72).

Empathy helps people feel heard and understood, and lowers defensiveness.

Key Ways to Show Empathy When Navigating Conflict:

- **Identify their emotion** and ask yourself, “When have I felt this way? What helped me when I felt this way?”
- Don't assume - remember that you don't have the whole picture.
- **Paraphrase** what the other person has said.
- Consider the importance of **intent** vs. **impact**...Own your impact!

But also...don't fall in the “empathy trap”!

Mindfulness - Being Present

Mindfulness - paying attention to the present moment purposefully and nonjudgmentally; doing one thing at a time wholeheartedly

This is harder than it sounds, especially during conflict!

3 Ways to Practice Mindfulness When Navigating Conflict:

- **Drop in on yourself.** Are you actually where you are? What is your mind doing? Bring yourself back to the present (nonjudgmentally).
- Engage in **active listening** - listen with intent and without judgment.
- Be aware of the **core you** and transient “weather patterns.”

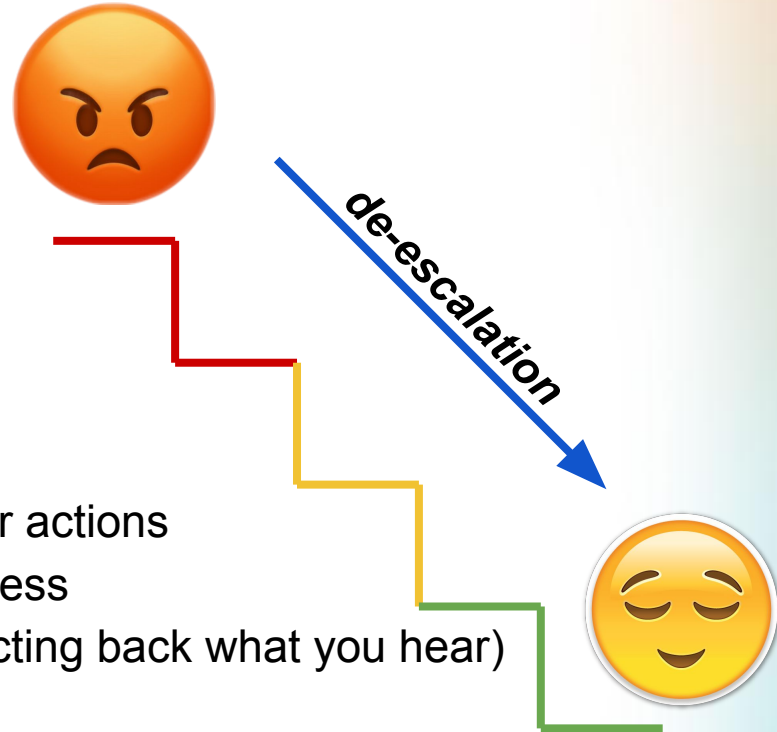
Practicing mindfulness outside of difficult conversations will help too!

De-escalation

De-escalation - The process of calmly communicating with an agitated individual so as to bring down the level of tension and provide space for effective communication.

6 Essential Steps for De-escalating Conflict:

1. Respond, don't react
2. Remain calm and suspend judgement
3. Validate feelings, as opposed to statements or actions
4. Give space - don't rush the conversation/process
5. Practice active and "reflective" listening (reflecting back what you hear)
6. Don't take it personally!



Note: it is almost impossible to reason with someone who is angry or agitated.

Understanding Relational Dynamics

Relational Dynamics - The interpersonal dynamics that play a role in conflict situations.

By being aware of the following dynamics, it can help you more constructively navigate conflict.

3 Key Relational Dynamics Questions to Ask Yourself:

1. What is the nature of our relationship?
2. What power do I have in this dynamic? What power do *they* have?
3. How do our social identities play a role in this situation?

Asking for What I Want/Need - Assertion Skills

Too many of us struggle with asserting ourselves. Instead people tend to be too *submissive/passive* or too *aggressive*.

Assertion skills help us find the middle ground, by helping us get across what we **want/need**, while not threatening the other party (or parties) in the process.

Think of it as a continuum...



What are the benefits and pitfalls of each of these places on the continuum?

Three-Part Assertion Messages

Step #1: Describe the behavior

- Describe the specific behavior of the other person.
- To be effective, this should be a nonjudgmental description.
- Note: It can be a *desirable* or *undesirable* behavior.

Step #2: Describe how you feel (disclosure of your feelings)

- Describe how the behavior makes you feel.
- Be clear, concise, and do so with a minimal amount of emotional display.

Step #3: Show the larger/wider effect of their behavior

- Describe the concrete and tangible effect of the other person's behavior.
- This may include how it triggers you and/or others to behave (how you/others react to what they do--verbally, physically, emotionally, etc.).
- This may include how it affects other people, situations, and things.

Let's Practice!

Em is visiting with her extended family. During a conversation that has turned to politics, she hears her uncle say, “That Black Lives Matter stuff is nonsense! That’s like saying the rest of us don’t matter – it’s racist towards us white people. Whatever happened to equality? I’m glad no one in this family is stupid enough to fall for that garbage.” Although Em sees some heads nod in agreement, this topic is deeply important to her. She feels compelled to speak up by saying, “Actually, I attended a Black Lives Matter rally last month.” Her uncle, looking horrified, blurts, “Emily! I didn’t take you for a rioter and police hater!”

Which EQ and CE skills could Em use in this situation and how?

- Empathy and perspective taking
- Mindfulness
- De-escalation
- Relational dynamics
- Asking for what we want/need

Avery is a second year student working to complete their Associate of Arts. During one of their philosophy classes, the topic of vaccinations came up halfway through a small group discussion on the ethics of mandated vaccinations. Tim, one of the other students in their group stated, “It is my God given right to choose not to be vaccinated if I believe the vaccination is not proven to be effective.” Avery responded by saying, “Sure, but there is a greater potential that you may spread COVID-19 to others if you get it and don’t have the vaccine.” Tim became irate, raised his voice, and said forcefully, “How dare you blame me for giving others COVID! It is fake anyway. Can you prove that it is even real?! It is just the media making things up to sell news! You are being brainwashed just like everyone else!”

Which EQ and CE skills could Avery use in this situation and how?

- Empathy and perspective taking
- Mindfulness
- De-escalation
- Relational dynamics
- Asking for what we want/need

References and Resources

Bariso, J. (2018). *EQ applied: The real-world guide to emotional intelligence*. Germany: Borough Hall.

Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. New York: Bantam Books.

Thompson, L. (1998). *The mind and heart of the negotiator*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Willcox, G. (1982) The feeling wheel. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 12, 274-276.



Thank you!

Contact us at:

ty.olson@tri-c.edu

jessica.mclaughlin@tri-c.edu