Navigating Conflict in the Workplace

Deb Assheton

Wednesday 3 May 2023

Wolters Kluwer

THE AMPLIFY Group

How to participate today
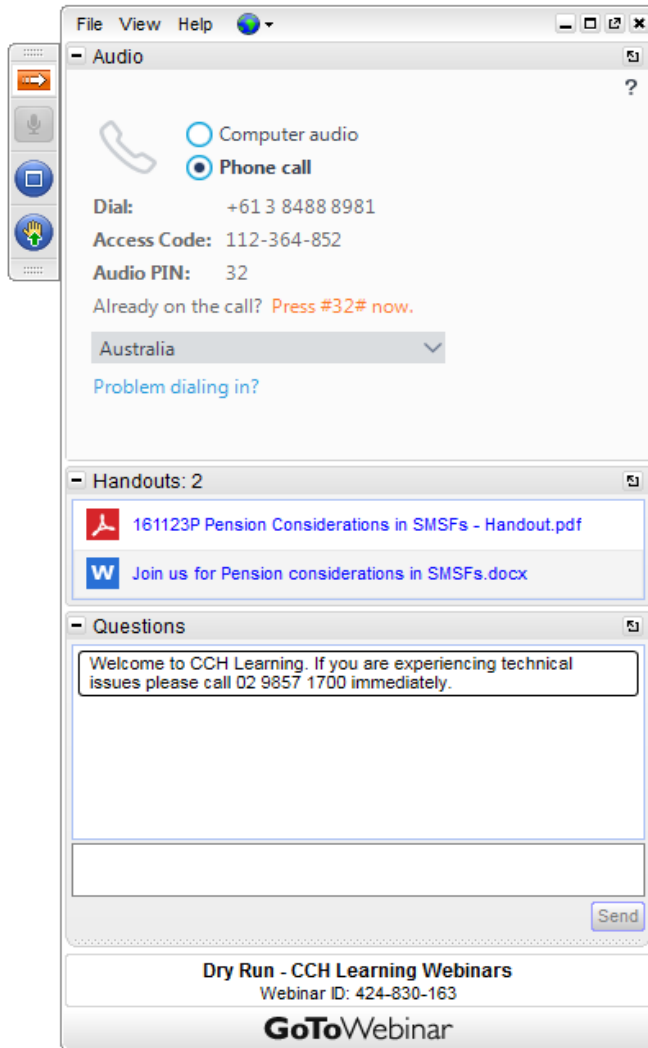
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Susannah Gynther
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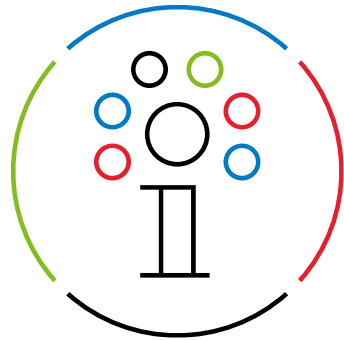
au-cchlearning@wolterskluwer.com

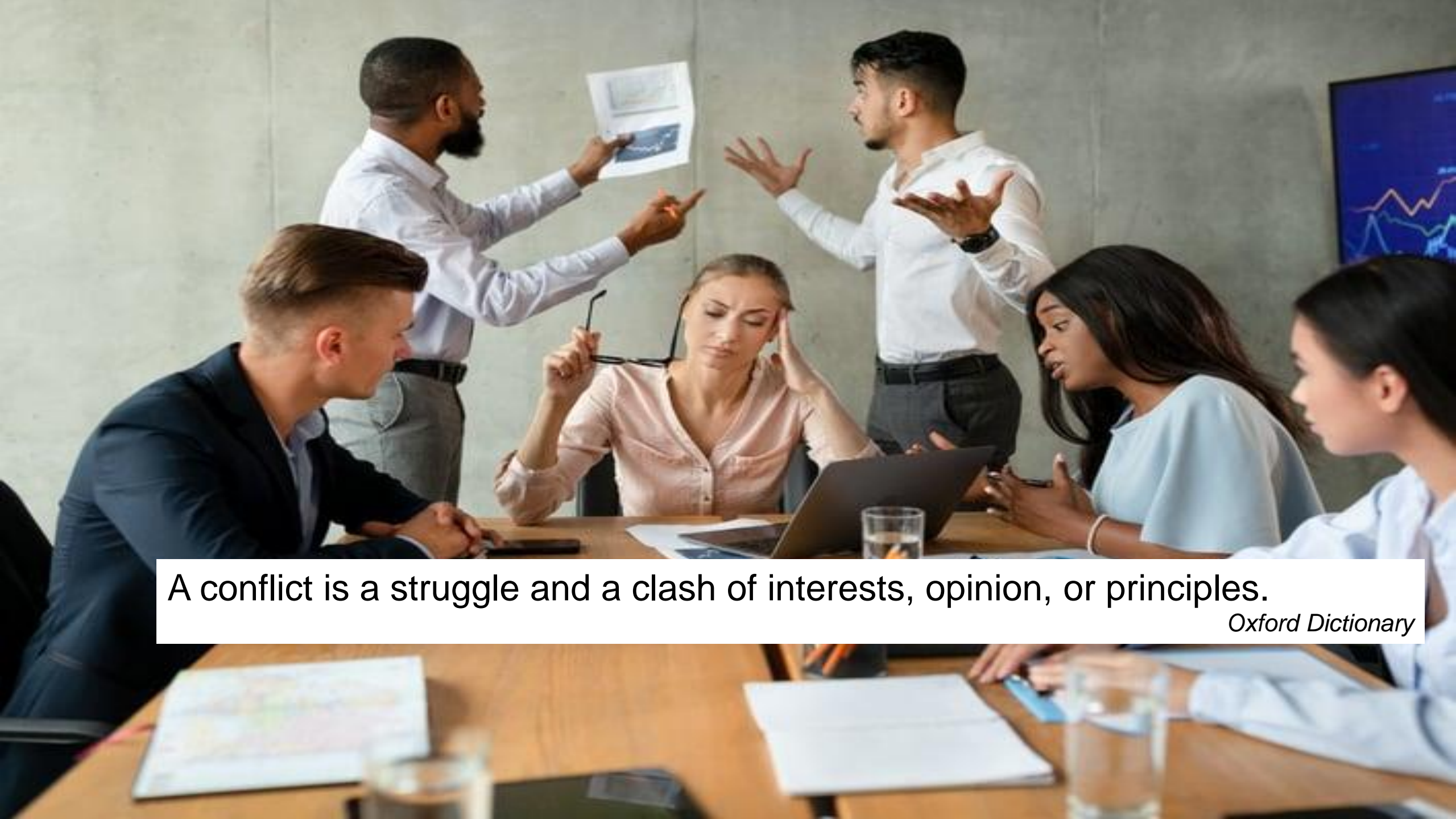# Your Presenter

- Deb Assheton
- Director
- The Amplify Group

Today's session will cover

Title

- What is conflict
- Workplace conflict
- Constructive Conflict
- Leading for constructive conflict
- Framing constructive conflict

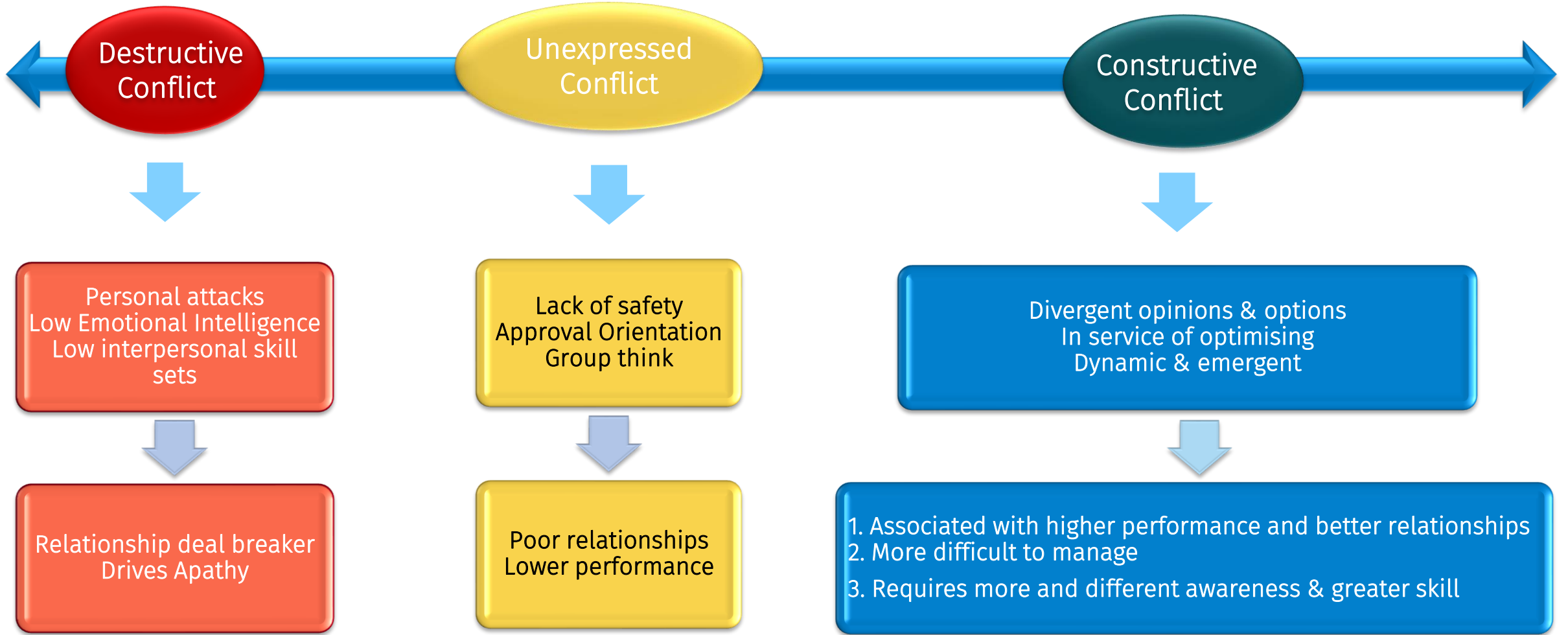A conflict is a struggle and a clash of interests, opinion, or principles.

Oxford Dictionary

The struggle or clash can be explicit or implicit

Workplace Conflict

Destructive Conflict

Personal attacks
Low Emotional Intelligence
Low interpersonal skill sets

↓

Relationship deal breaker
Drives Apathy

Unexpressed Conflict

Lack of safety
Approval Orientation
Group think

↓

Poor relationships
Lower performance

Constructive Conflict

Divergent opinions & options
In service of optimising
Dynamic & emergent

↓

1. Associated with higher performance and better relationships
2. More difficult to manage
3. Requires more and different awareness & greater skill

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In my workplace I see or feel

a) Mainly constructive conflict

b) Mainly unexpressed conflict

c) Mainly destructive conflict

d) I am not sure
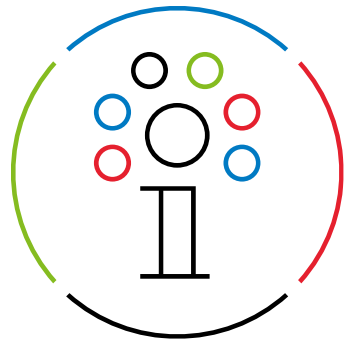
The Global Environment

Volatility Uncertainty Complexity Ambiguity

For Leaders VUCA is…

Creating more change catalysts

Changing the nature of challenges

Elevating the importance of constructive conflict

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Symmetra

VUCA is changing the nature of our problems & challenges

Historically Leaders have solved mainly technical challenges

Technical challenges are:

- Easy to identify
- Can be solved by the knowledge of experts
- The link between problem, solution and implementation are clear
- Resolution is easily identifiable
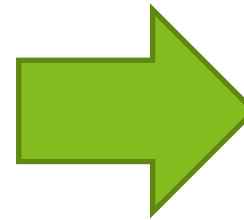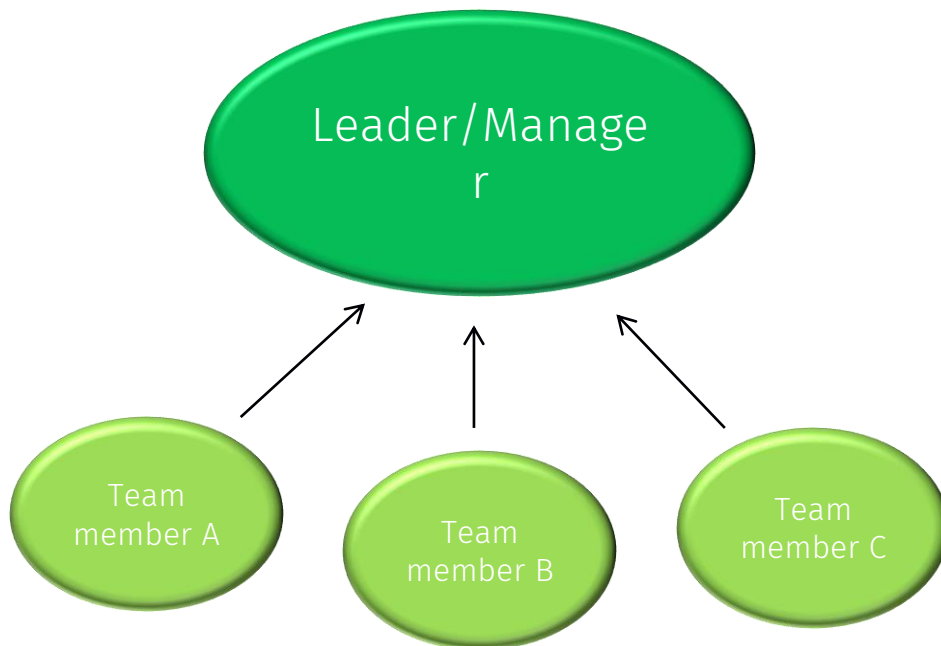
Adaptive Challenges

Adaptive Challenges

- The problem is hard to define
- There is often no one clear solution
- Is easy to resist or ignore – generate disequilibrium and avoidance
- Have a longer timeframe than technical challenges
- People need to solve adaptive changes through a process of experimentation
- Leaders need to be able to generate and sustain productive discomfort

Goal orientation in teams

Typical Team Orientation

High-performance Orientation

Source: Locke and Latham 1990, 2002, 2011, 2013

Goal orientation in teams

Team member A

Team member B

Team member C

Leader /Manager

GOAL
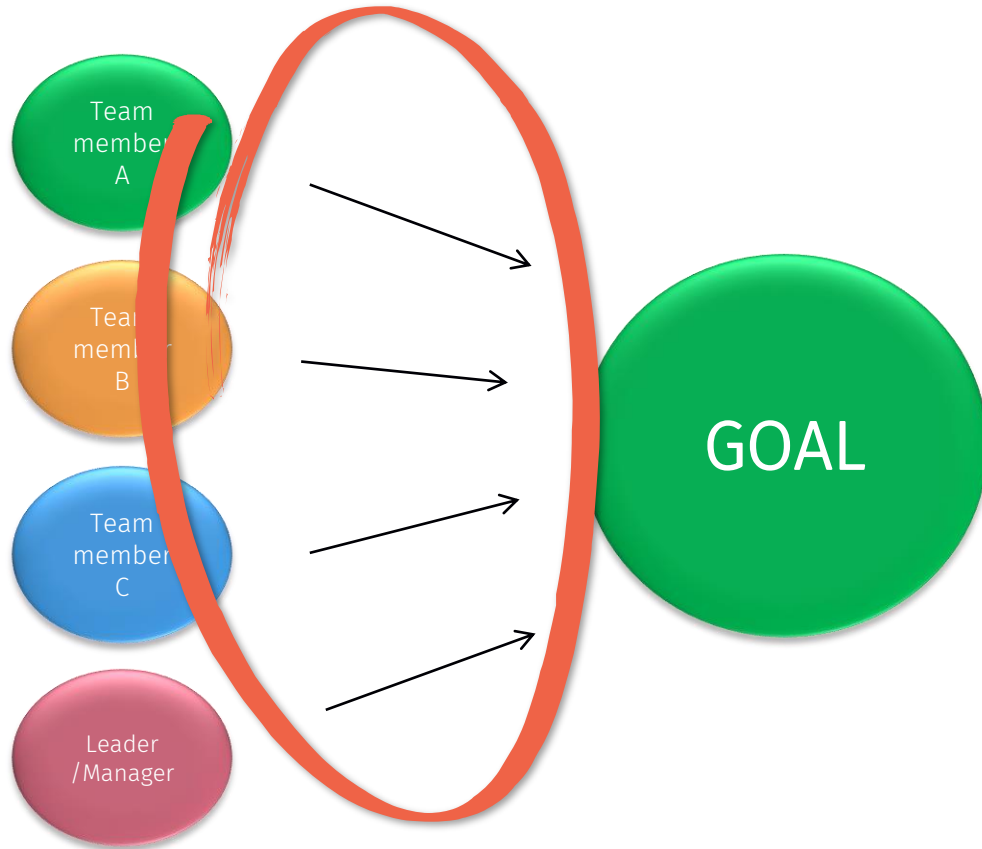
This space is where conflict can happen, and where constructive conflict becomes an asset for the team, and its Leader

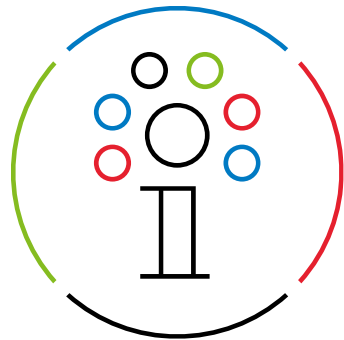What happens to you when conflict emerges?

What is your default response to conflict?

a) Fight

b) Flight

c) Freeze

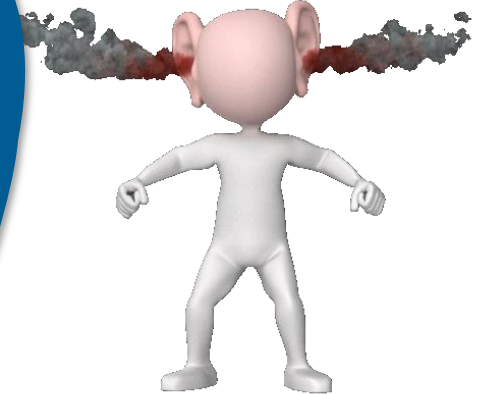d) I don't know

Processing difficult emotions

Repress
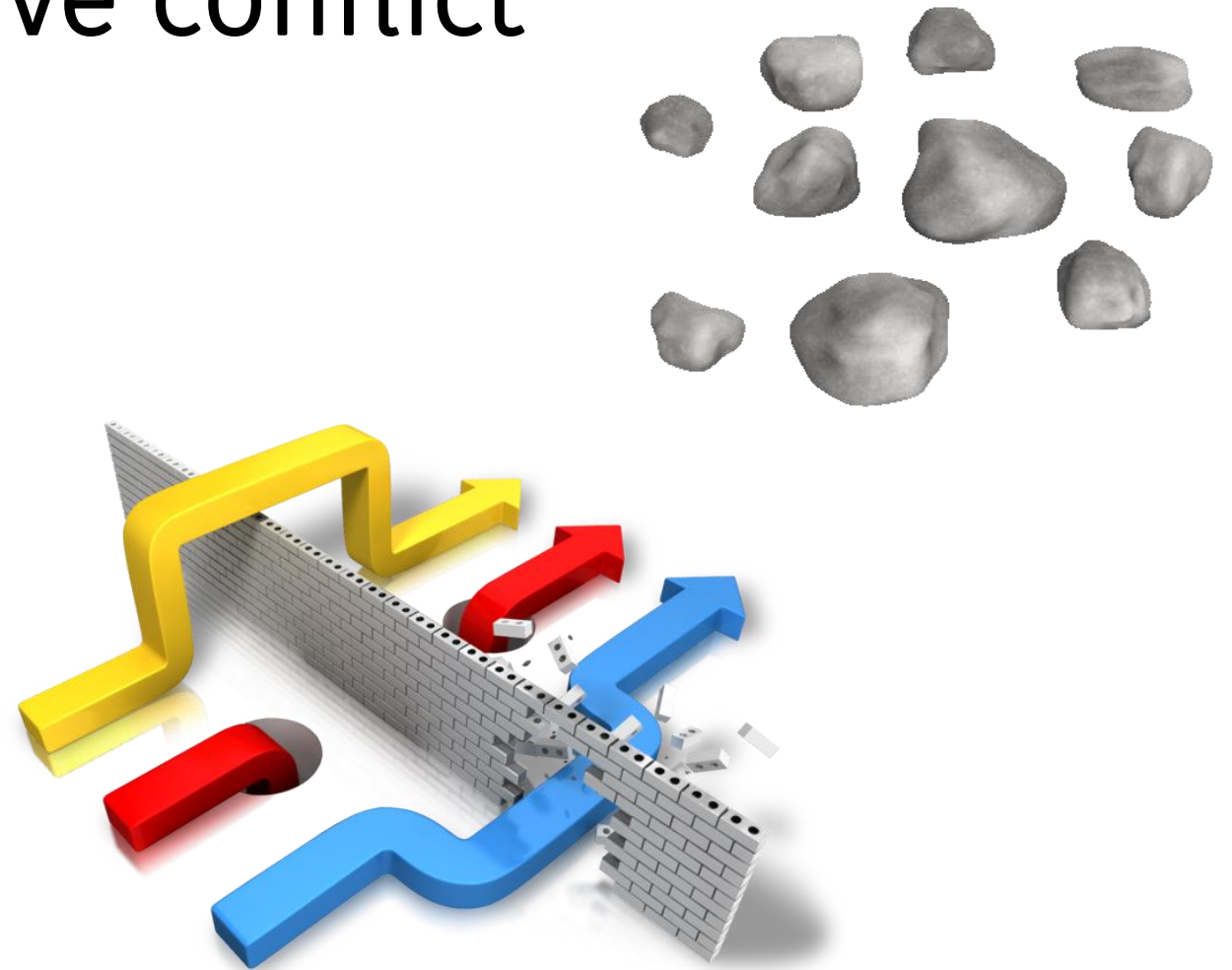
Experience

Express

Explode

Hallmarks of constructive conflict

- ✓ Focussed on ideas
- ✓ In service of improvement
- ✓ Equitable
- ✓ Respectful
- ✓ Iterative
- ✓ Shared Ownership
- ✓ Optimal solution/s
- ✓ Inclusive

Constructive conflict is a
team THINKING

How do we make conflict constructive?

1. Be **explicit about wanting debate**
2. Ask for *difference* – views, options, approaches and risks
3. Schedule time for **debate** in meeting agenda's, and use pre-work to prepare
4. **Frame debate and hold it** *in play* – resist the urge for consensus and completion
5. Increase **participation rates** in meetings as much as possible – consider turn taking
6. Create an environment where **different thinking is actively sought and valued**

What is a current issue of conflict in your workplace?

Free text response. Just provide a two sentence summary

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Framing conflict

Relationship

I know [topic] is important to everyone here, and that there are a number of views about [it]

I want to acknowledge that we have [topic] issue right now, and that the situation needs to be better managed

I feel that there has not been enough discussion about [topic] despite it being a really big issue for us right now

<AND>

Performance

I would like us to hear and debate these different points of view with a view to finding a way forward

I would like us to robustly debate [topic] to generate new ways of responding to the challenge

I want to open this meeting to debate and discuss how you are feeling, and what your suggestions are for responding to [topic]

Establish the ground rules - together

➢ We let everyone finish speaking
➢ We all agree to contribute (there may be turn-taking)
➢ Once an idea is shared, it's our idea to explore and build on
➢ No shutdowns, only questions
➢ The goal is to find a way, not to be right, win, lobby or coerce
➢ State whether today is about debate or decision making

Constructive Conflict *Leadership Shifts*

FROM

- ☒ Avoiding conflict or seeing it as 'bad'
- ☒ Tolerating low-grade conflict
- ☒ Ignoring tension about an issue or person
- ☒ Dominating discussion yourself
- ☒ Rushing to solution, especially yours
- ☒ Listening only to voices that align to your view
- ☒ Not encouraging 100% participation

TO

- ☑ Intentionally framing robust debate and conflict of thinking about ideas/decisions and options
- ☑ Holding robust debate in play until an issue is fully debated
- ☑ Actively framing constructive conflict as a path to DoT and speak up culture
- ☑ Leading and facilitating constructive conflict in your team as a performance asset
- ☑ Ensuring that everyone contributes
- ☑ Integrate thinking and options (including yours) to anchor high-quality thinking

Questions?
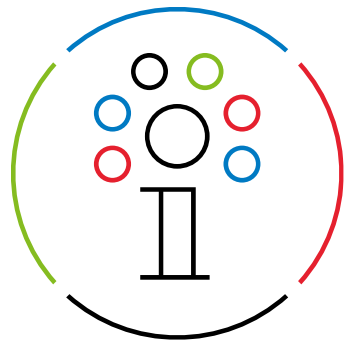

Susannah Gynther
Moderator

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- 4 May – Work-related Expenses Hotspots

- 10 May – It's Nearly Financial Year End - SMSFs and Getting ready for the Annual Audit

- 11 May – Asset Reduction Strategies for Pension and Aged Care

- 11 May – The New IFRS S2 re Climate-related Disclosures

- 18 May – How to Increase Your Fees AND Keep Your Clients

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Questions

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Thank you for attending

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