

# **Finding Common Ground: Strategies for Resolving Conflict**

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**Presenters: Gayl Bowser, MS.Ed**

**Beth Poss, M.A., CCC/SLP**

# Beth Poss

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Speech Language Pathologist and Special Educator

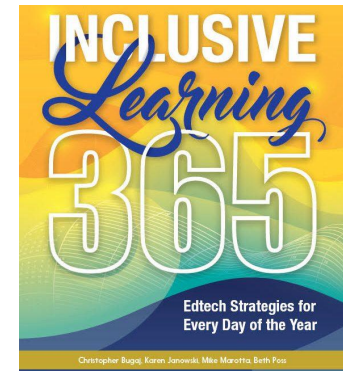
Director of Educational Programs for LessonPix

Editorial Board for the Assistive Technology Outcomes and Benefits (ATOB) Journal

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Co-author of Inclusive Learning 365: EdTech Strategies for Every Day of the Year

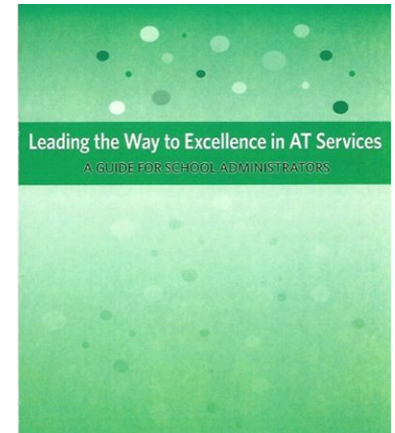


# Gayl Bowser

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**Gayl Bowser, M.Ed.** is an independent consultant whose work focuses on the creation of effective, legal and high-quality service systems that encourage integration of technology into educational programs for students with disabilities.

Formerly the Coordinator of the Oregon Technology Access Program (OTAP) and the U.S. State of Oregon's Specialist in Assistive Technology, Gayl provides consultation, professional learning opportunities, mentoring and technical assistance throughout the United States and internationally.



With skills to speak your mind  
honestly and respectfully,  
you'll collaborate better, make  
better decisions, and foster  
workplace cultures of trust  
and respect.

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**CRUCIAL LEARNING**  
**OCTOBER 28, 2021**  
Email communication

# Learning objectives

## Participants will...

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- Be able to describe the differences between disagreement and conflict.
- Identify their own communication style and approach to conflict and disagreement.
- Describe 5 Dysfunctions of a Team.
- Use the Knoster model to consider the sources of conflict.
- Describe typical dynamics of group decision-making.
- Use inquiry and advocacy in team decisions.

*Whenever people are asked to change without their buy-in, we create resistance.*

Dale Carnegie Institute



# Change is often a source of disagreement or conflict

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*Assume that conflict and disagreement are not only inevitable, but fundamental to **successful** change.*

○ *-Fullan (2005)*

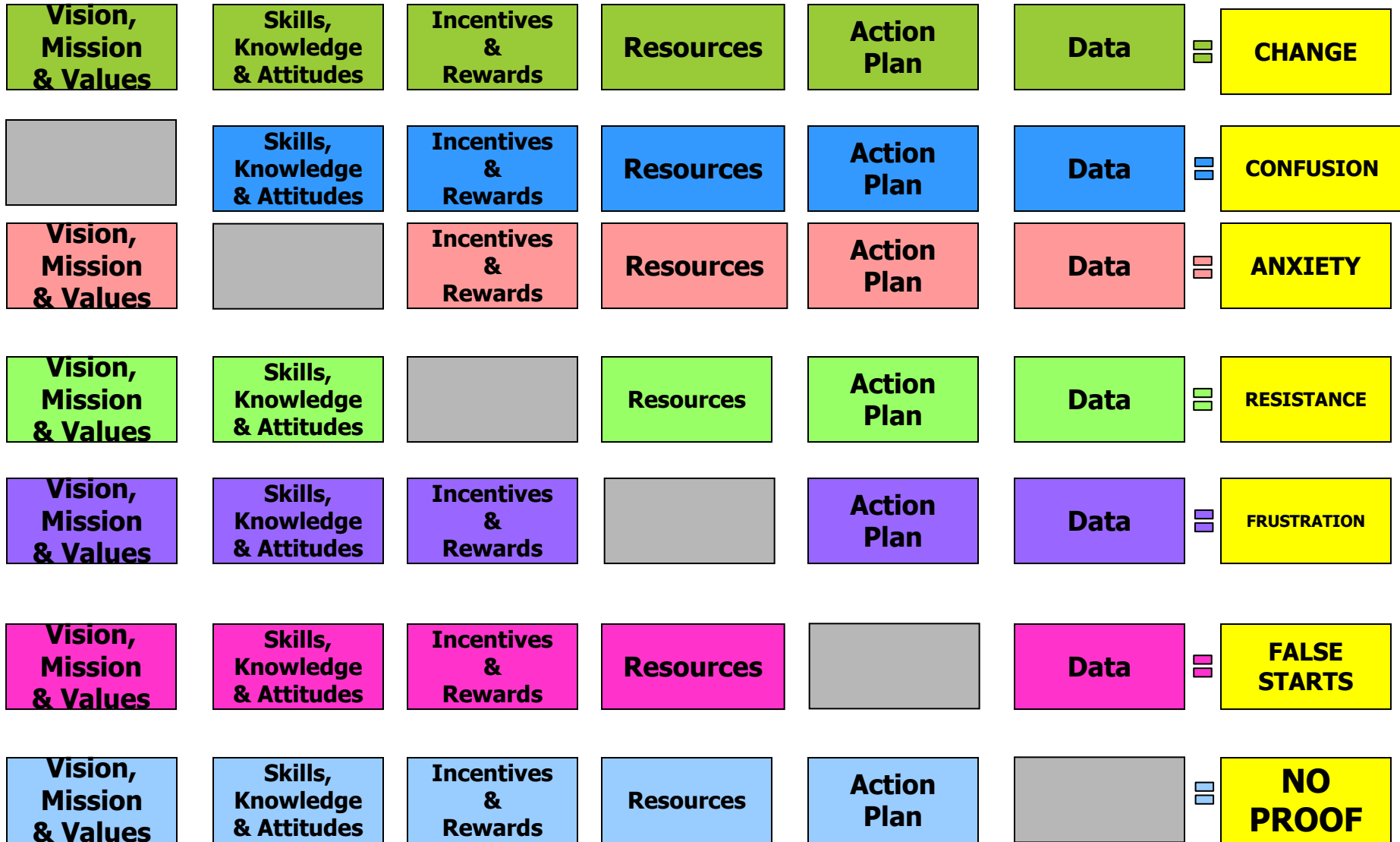
# The Knoster Model

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In assessing the condition and climate of an organization, this model offers a potential remedy by identifying the symptom and then providing an opportunity to target the missing component. In some schools, the problems are so severe that multiple missing links have created a challenging environment that is difficult to sort through.







Model for Managing Complex Change  
Adapted from Knoster, 1991



# CONFLICT OR DISAGREEMENT?

# Conflict

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***Conflict*** is a strong disagreement or collision of values, needs, interests, or intentions .... Conflict is seen as dysfunctional, unhealthy competition, loss of affinity, hostility, suspicion, and distrust. Conflict occurs when basic needs are not met, or when an individual or group is perceived to be obstructing an individual's or group's attaining of certain goals. Conflicts often involve struggles over allocation and use of resources and power.

# Disagreement

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*Disagreement* is a difference of opinion based upon one's personal orientation system, including values, needs, interests, or intentions. Disagreement should be seen as functional and/or positive. To disagree is natural. How strongly one feels about something is directly related to one's tolerance for disagreement.

We all have opinions and ways of doing things. As long as our tolerance level is not overstressed, we often communicate no verbal disagreement and very little nonverbal disagreement.

# Products of Conflict

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- Barriers/end to communication
- Anger
- Escalation
- Polarization



# Products of Disagreement

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- New ideas
- Better ways of doing things
- Change and innovation
- Better use of Resources
- New Skills



[dreamstime.com](http://dreamstime.com)

The absence of disagreement is not harmony, it's apathy.

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Please tell us your thoughts.  
You can type in the chat or speak your response.

## **Discussion:**

In your experience, when conflicts have arisen about AT, on what has been the central issue?

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# SOURCES OF CONFLICT



# Sources of Conflict

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- Lack of **shared vision, mission or values** (opposing agendas)
- **Skills, knowledge, and attitudes** are at odds (differing philosophies, working in silos)
- Insufficient **incentives and rewards** (lack of commitment, lack of recognition)
- Sparse **resources** (fear of failure)
- No **action plan** (lack of accountability)
- Lack of **data** (inattention to results)

**Vision,  
Mission  
& Values**

**Skills,  
Knowledge  
& Attitudes**

**Incentives  
&  
Rewards**

**Resources**

**Action  
Plan**

**Data**

# Your Approach to Conflict

1. I usually find it productive to smooth over the other person's feelings when I am involved in a disagreement; I do not get upset or make waves.
2. For me, a disagreement situation is a real challenge. Since there is usually one who is right and one who is wrong, I don't want to be wrong so I'll make my point.
3. In a disagreement situation, I usually sit down and try to work out the disagreement.
4. When disagreements occur, both sides have to be prepared to give a little.
5. I don't like hostility and tension that result from disagreements. I try to avoid disagreements entirely and not deal with confrontation and disputes.

<https://www.bumc.bu.edu/facdev-medicine/files/2010/10/Leadership-Matrix-Self-Assessment-Questionnaire.pdf>

## The Blake and Mouton Managerial Grid

### Leadership Self Assessment Questionnaire

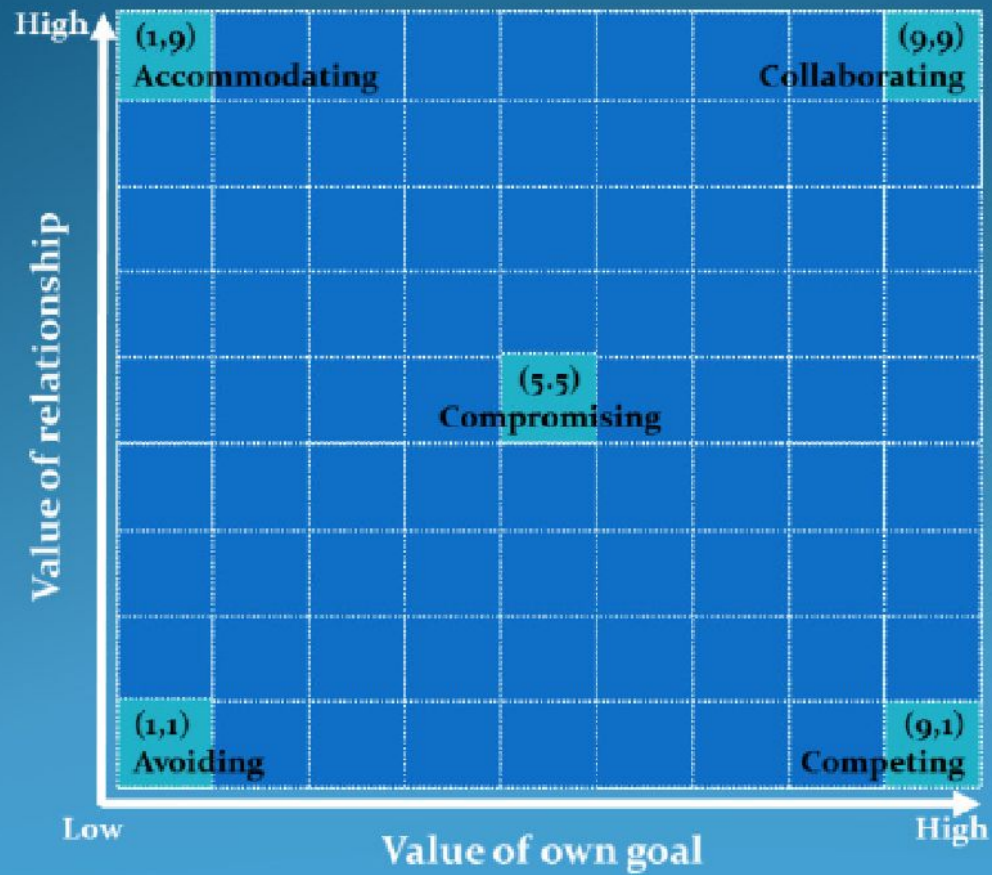
Below is a list of statements about leadership behavior. Read each one carefully, then, using the following scale, decide the extent to which it actually applies to you. For best results, answer as truthfully as possible.

**never**                      **sometimes**                      **always**  
0                      1                      2                      3                      4                      5

1. \_\_\_\_\_ I encourage my team to participate when it comes decision-making time and I try to implement their ideas and suggestions.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Nothing is more important than accomplishing a goal or task.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ I closely monitor the schedule to ensure a task or project will be completed in time.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ I enjoy coaching people on new tasks and procedures.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ The more challenging a task is, the more I enjoy it.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ I encourage my employees to be creative about their job.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ When seeing a complex task through to completion, I ensure that every detail is accounted for.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ I find it easy to carry out several complicated tasks at the same time.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ I enjoy reading articles, books, and journals about training, leadership, and psychology; and then putting what I have read into action.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ When correcting mistakes, I do not worry about jeopardizing relationships.
11. \_\_\_\_\_ I manage my time very efficiently.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ I enjoy explaining the intricacies and details of a complex task or project to my employees.
13. \_\_\_\_\_ Breaking large projects into small manageable tasks is second nature to me.
14. \_\_\_\_\_ Nothing is more important than building a great team.
15. \_\_\_\_\_ I enjoy analyzing problems.
16. \_\_\_\_\_ I honor other people's boundaries.
17. \_\_\_\_\_ Counseling my employees to improve their performance or behavior is second nature to me.
18. \_\_\_\_\_ I enjoy reading articles, books, and trade journals about my profession; and then implementing the new procedures I have learned.

Creative Property of The Vision Council

## Conflict Resolution Approaches



# Mouton Conflict Scale



1. **Competing** – I win, You lose
2. **Accommodating** – I lose, You win
3. **Avoiding** – I lose, You lose
4. **Compromising** – I win some, You win some
5. **Collaborating** – I win, You win

# To Tell the Truth



# Your Style for This Challenge

Moulton Style	Your poll selection
Accommodating	1. I usually find it productive to smooth over the other person's feelings when I am involved in a disagreement; I do not get upset or make waves.
Competing	2. For me, a disagreement situation is a real challenge. Since there is usually one who is right and one who is wrong, I don't want to be wrong so I'll make my point.
Collaborating	3. In a disagreement situation, I usually sit down and try to work out the disagreement.
Compromising	4. When disagreements occur, both sides have to be prepared to give a little.
Avoiding	5. I don't like hostility and tension that result from disagreements. I try to avoid disagreements entirely and not deal with confrontation and disputes.

# Know your style

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Knowing this model will not directly help you deal with conflict resolution issues.

There are no specific right and wrong answers to the situations that arise.

Our goal is to find the best approach that our personality and inclination can adapt to and execute

The Blake Mouton Managerial Model Adaptation to Conflict Resolution  
<http://quantmleap.com/blog/2013/02/the-blake-mouton-managerial-model-adaptation-to-conflict-resolution/>



## **Your thoughts...**

Think about an experience with team disagreement and conflict. What was your style in that situation. How might it help you to know your own and other peoples' style when conflict arises.

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# **YOUR STYLE**

Productive	Unproductive
Raising a concern	Nitpicking-Questioning or objecting to every possible detail of the plan.
Asking questions	Missing details-Constantly asking questions because you were not paying attention.
Ownership	Possessiveness-Refusal to allow anyone to alter or critique the work you have done.
Principled	Uncompromising-Never accepting any proposed changes or compromises.
Listening & Reflecting	Lurking-Never contributing in meetings or other times.
Staying in Touch	Nudging-Always sending reminders and not allowing members reasonable time to respond.
Following Procedure	Inflexible-Not allowing for changes in plan or agenda.
On Top of Things	Micromanaging-Not allowing others to contribute.

# When conflict is recognized and addressed directly...

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- compromises,
- trade-offs, and
- negotiations

become possible.



**The health of a relationship,  
team or organization is a  
function of the average lag  
time between identifying and  
discussing problems.**



## Reflection:

Think of someone you wish you could have an honest crucial conversation with.

Who is it?

How long have you wished you could have that conversation?

How could you create an environment where the lag time is as short as possible?

**Please tell us your thoughts.**

**You can type in the chat or speak your response.**

“Whatever the problem, effective teams identify, raise, and resolve it. If it’s keeping them from reaching their goal, effective teams try to do something about it. They don’t ignore it and hope it goes away.” By not addressing conflict, the leader risks sending the message that conflict is unmanageable and cause vested members to become complacent or feel their input is not valued. “

Managing Groups and Teams/Conflict

Think of a team  
you work with  
that is trying to  
make a decision  
OR SOLVE A  
PROBLEM.

At what stage is  
your team in  
moving toward  
the decision?

## Put in the chat where you are

1. We have just identified a new topic.
2. We are all over the place with ideas.
3. We are still identifying divergent ideas.
4. We are struggling “in the service of integration”.
5. We are beginning to come together toward a solution.
6. We have reached a decision!

# The Five Dysfunctions of a Team

Patrick Lencioni

Inattention  
to Results

Avoidance of  
Accountability

Lack of Commitment

Fear of Conflict

Absence of Trust





# Trust as the Foundation

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“Great teams do not hold back from one another. They admit their mistakes, their weaknesses, and their concerns without fear of reprisal”

Trust in team members is being able to be comfortable being vulnerable with each other.

Teams without trust:

- conceal weakness and hide mistakes
- hesitate to ask for help
- fail to provide constructive feedback
- jump to conclusions
- hold grudges
- dread meetings and spending time together



Trust

# What Does Trust Look Like?

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- Admitting that you don't know something
- Taking responsibility for a mistake or misstep
- Asking for help
- Accepting input and guidance from other team members
- Taking risks in offering feedback
- Appreciating others skill sets and experiences
- Offering and accepting apologies without hesitation
- Looking forward to working together as a group, rather than in a silo



Trust

# Building Trust

- Personal Histories Exercise:
  - Low Risk
  - Go around the team and answer non-intrusive questions such as:
    - Number of siblings
    - Hometown
    - Unique challenges of childhood
    - Favorite hobby
    - First job/Worst Job

Trust

# Building Trust

- Team Effectiveness Exercise
  - More risk
  - Identify the single most important contribution that each of their peer makes to the team
  - Individuals respond with something they want to improve upon/change

Trust

# Engage in Conflict

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Teams that fear conflict:

- have boring meetings
- have environments where back channel politics thrive
- create informal groups and underground networks
- ignore controversial topics that are actually critical to the team's success
- fail to assess the perspectives of all team members



Engage in Conflict

Trust

# What Does Engaging in Conflict Look Like?

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- Having lively meetings where disagreements are explored
- Extracting and examining the ideas of all team members
- Solving real problems quickly
- Putting critical topics on the table for discussion
- Admitting that differing ideas enrich the conversation



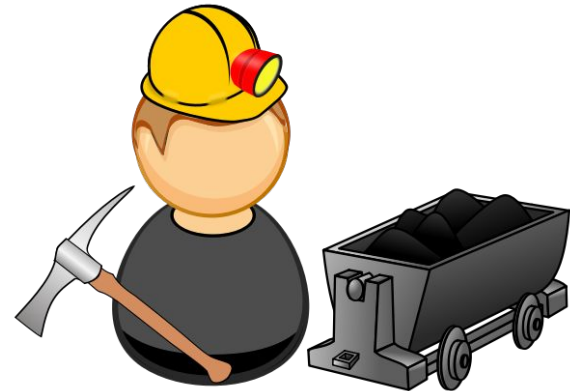
Engage in Conflict

Trust

# Overcoming a Fear of Conflict

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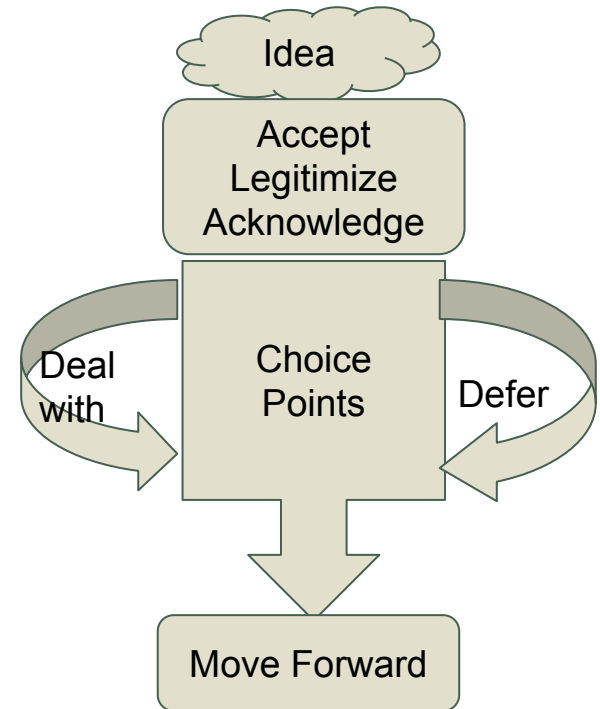
- Miner of Conflict--Can be the leader or create a role on the team (rotating) who will bring disagreements into the light. For the duration of a discussion/meeting the miner is objective and facilitates discussion.
  - “You seem to be hesitant. Will you please share your concern?”
  - “I sense you may not agree. Do you have a different thought?”



Engage in Conflict  
Trust

# Overcoming a Fear of Conflict

- Accept, Legitimize, Deal With or Defer
  - Respond neutrally to someone in conflict with the majority
  - Legitimize the concern and the contribution
  - Agree together how to move forward



**Engage in Conflict**

Trust



# Shared Pool of Meaning

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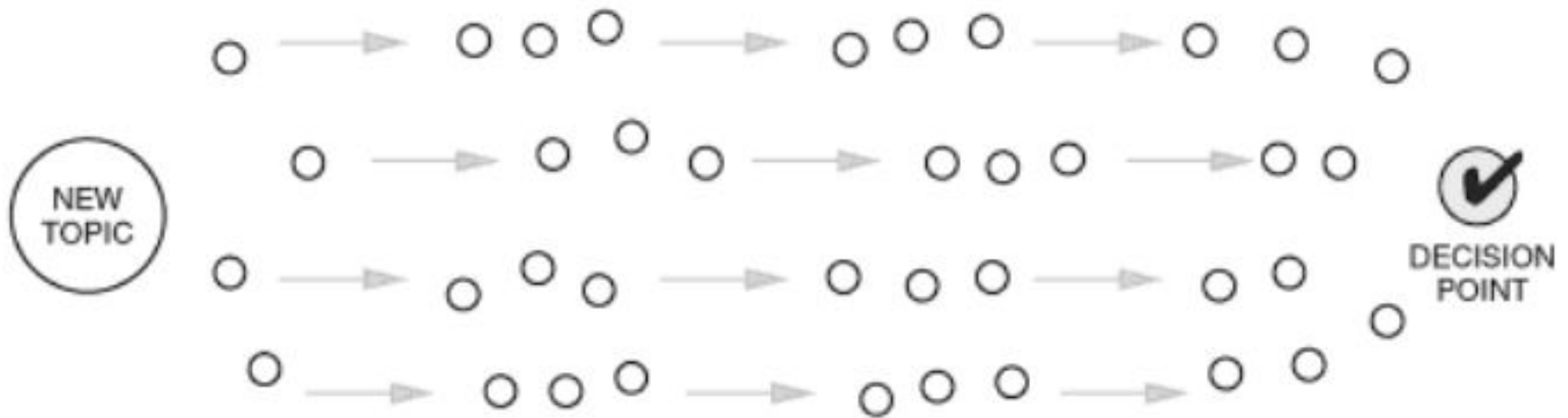
*In order to perform our best, we must find a way to explain what is in each of our personal pools of meaning-especially our high-stakes, sensitive and controversial opinions, feelings and ideas and help others to share their pools.*



# DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING

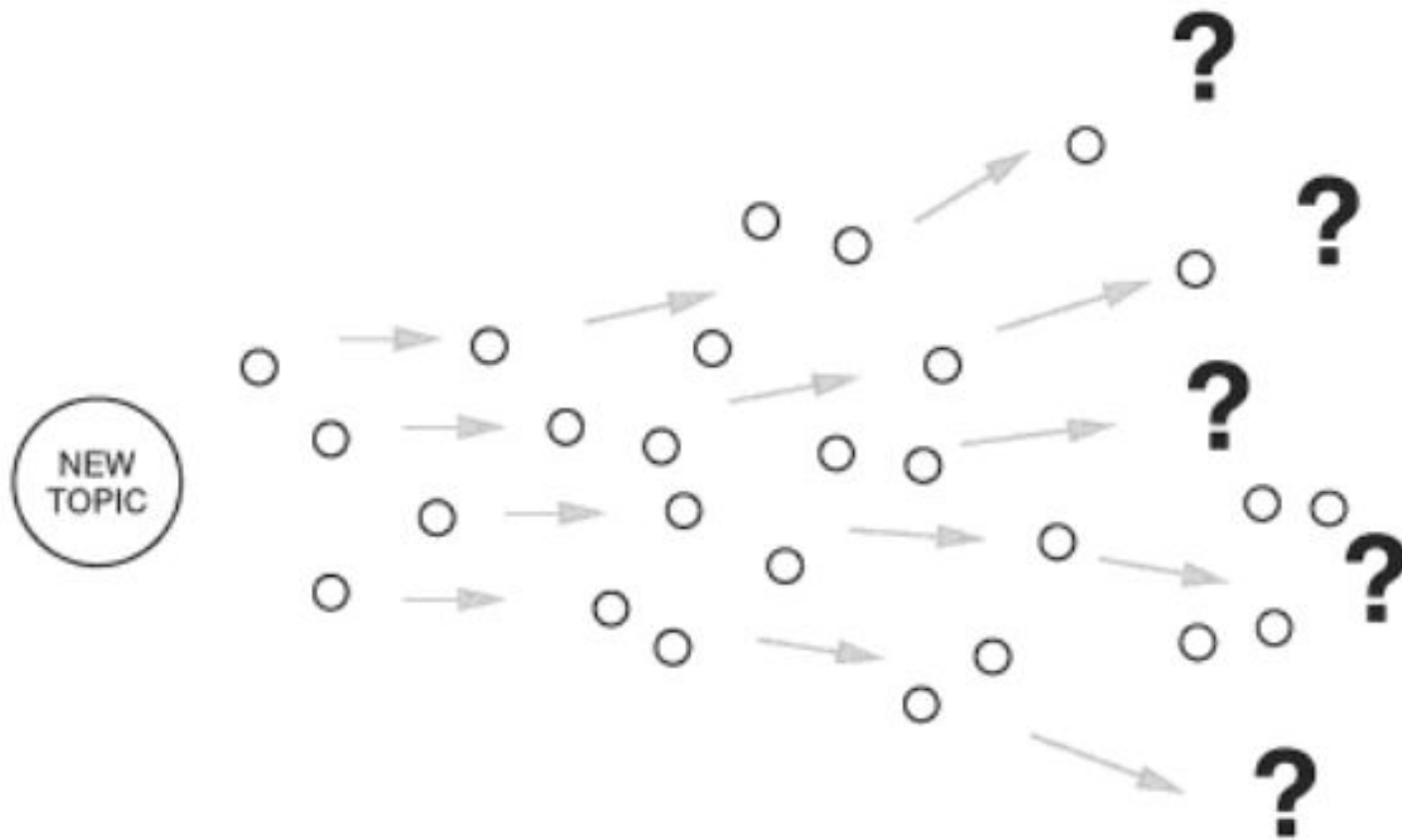
## INTRODUCTION

*Kaner, S. (2014) Facilitators' Guide to Participatory Decision Making, San Francisco, Josey-Bass*



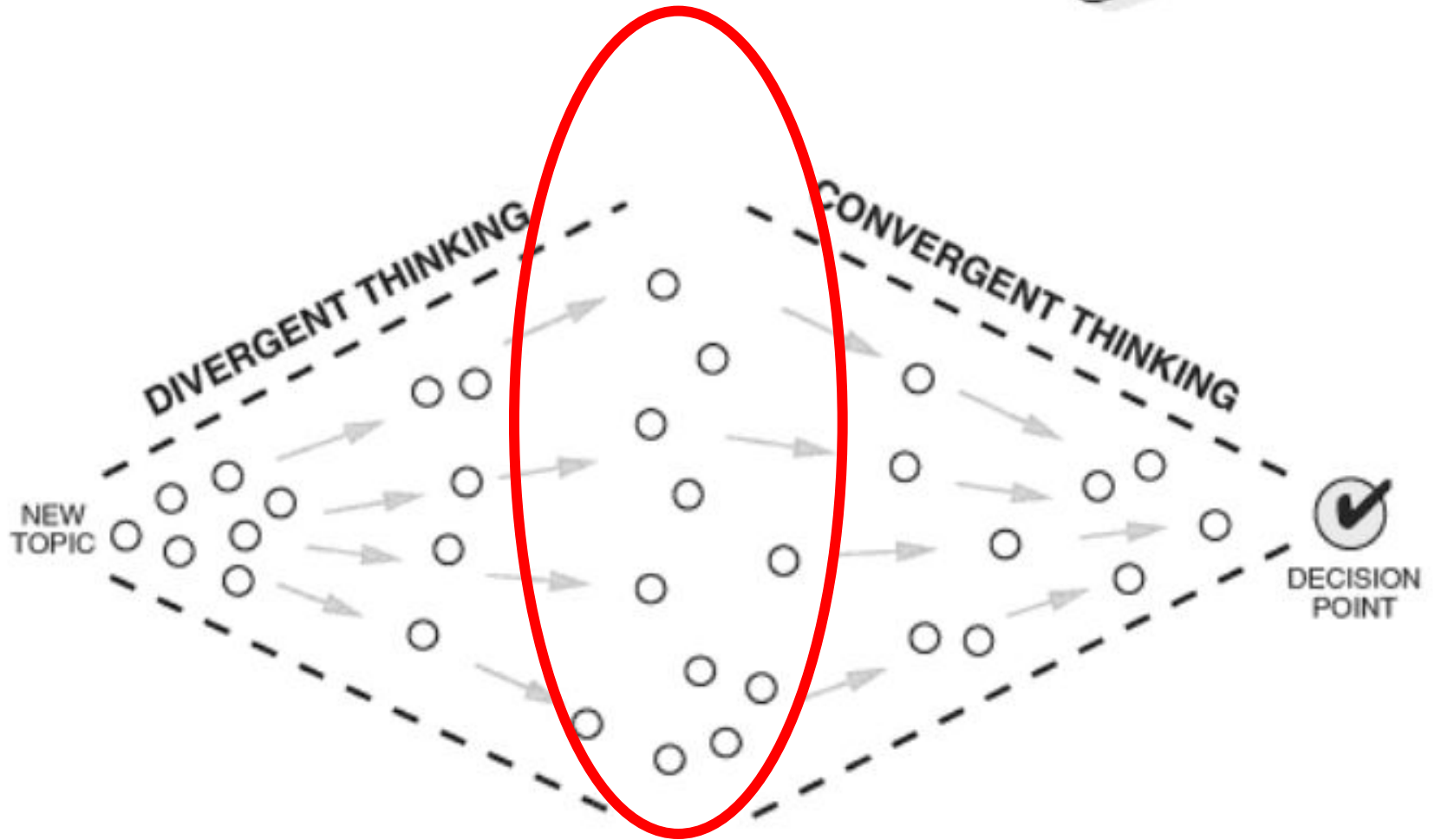
# DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING

SAD BUT TRUE



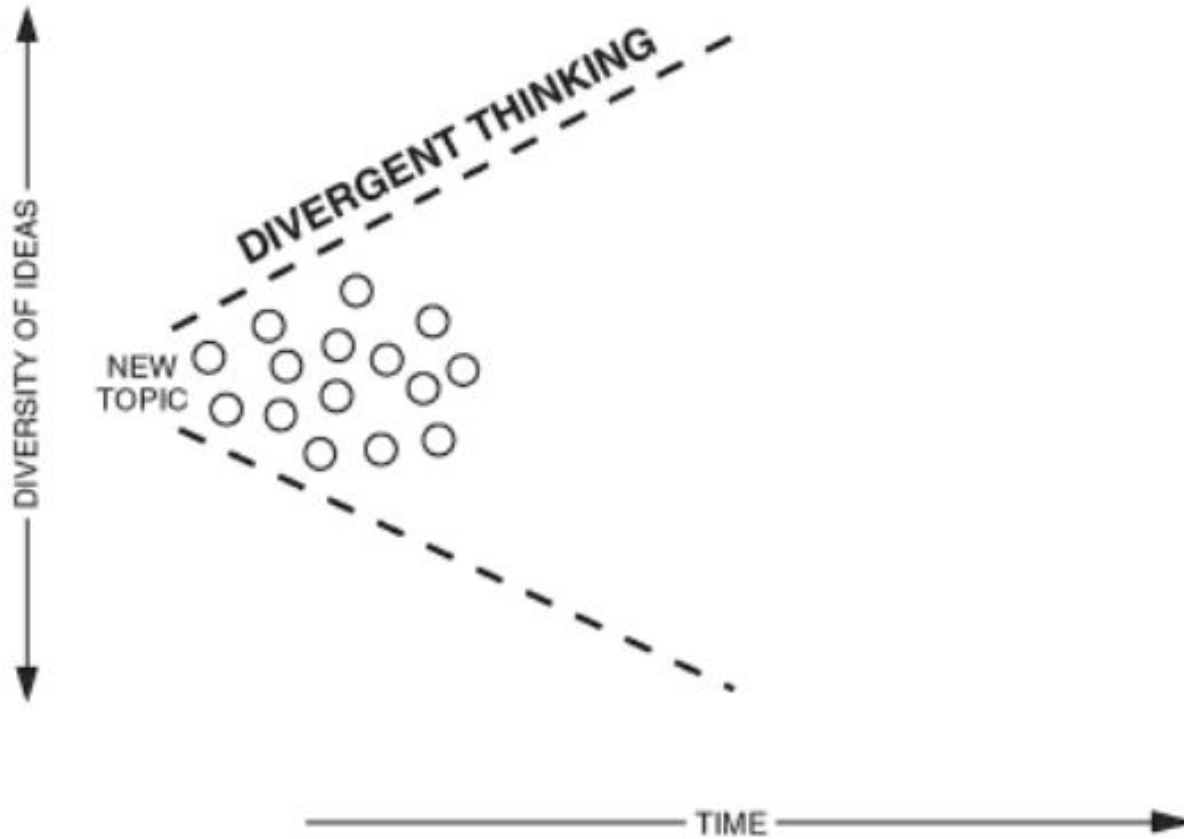
# DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING

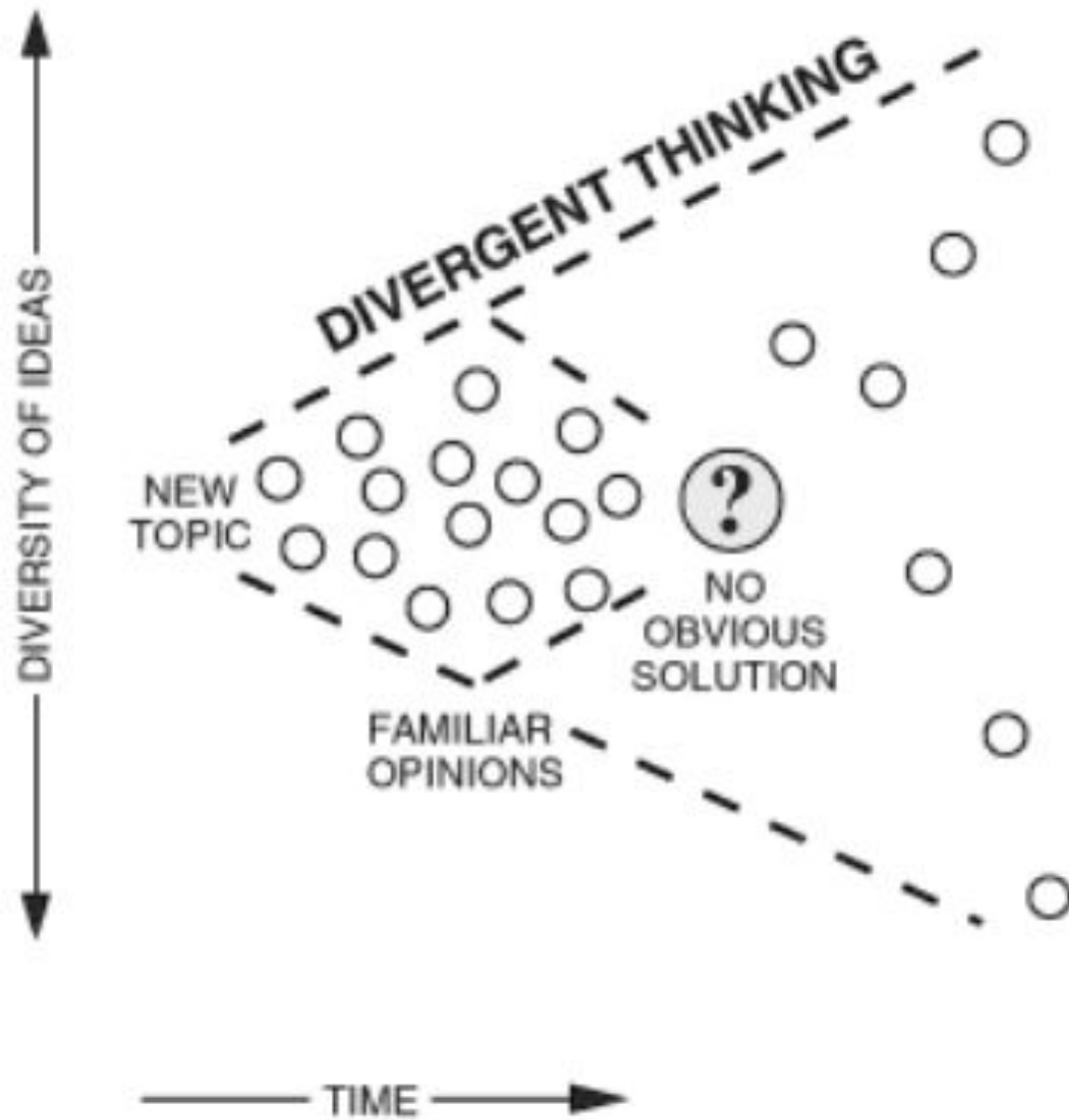
CLOSER TO REALITY



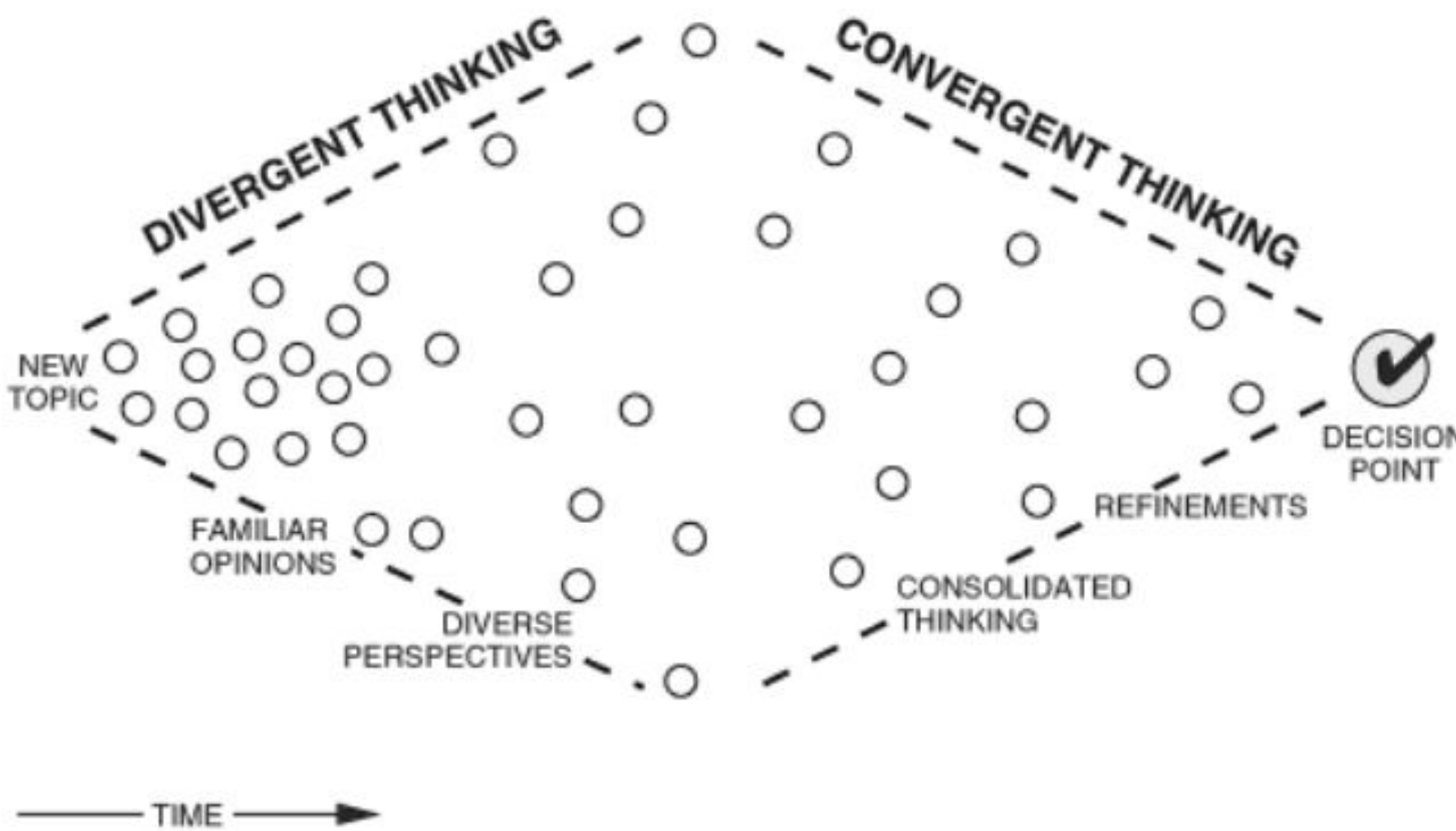
# DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING

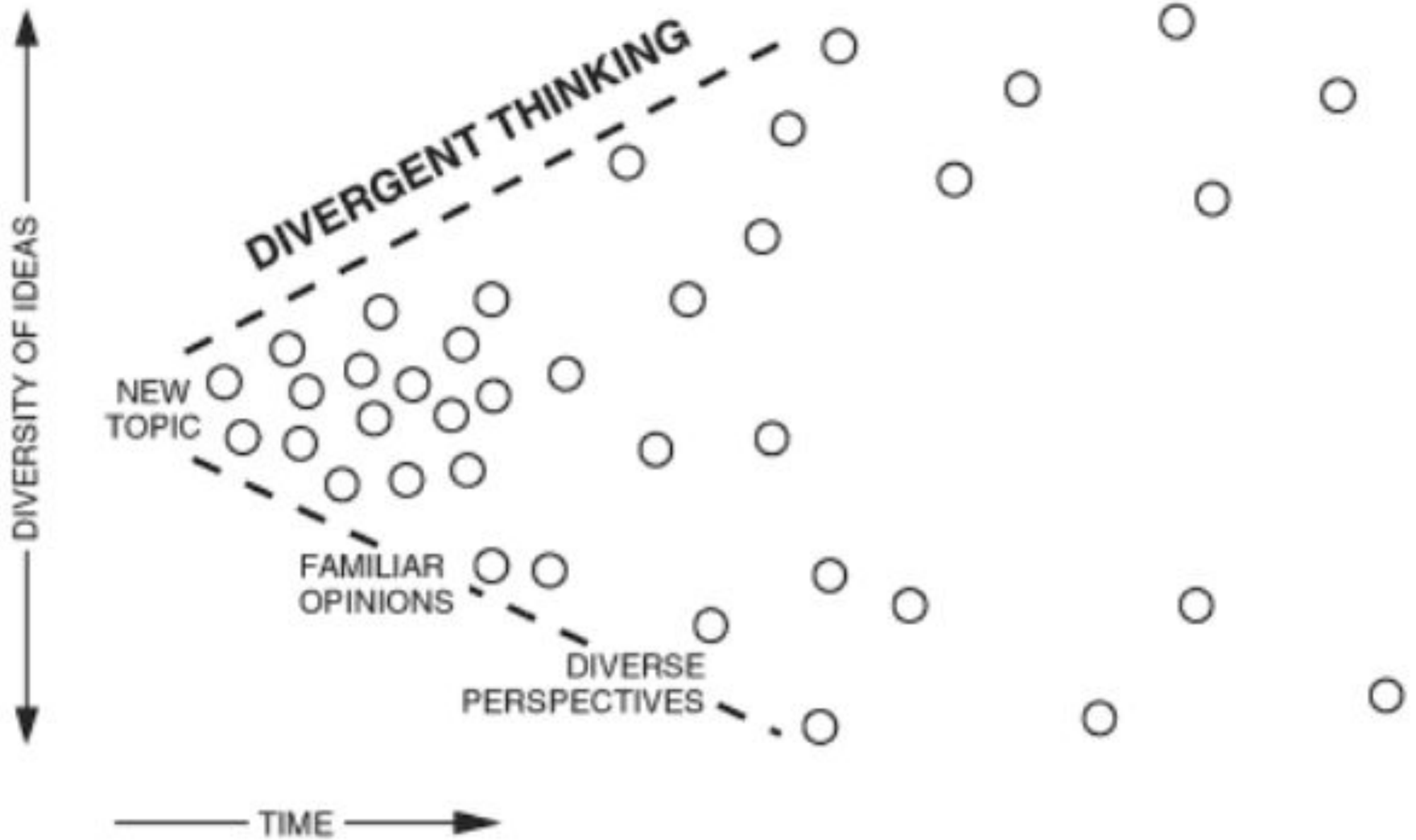
DISCUSSION  
BEGINS





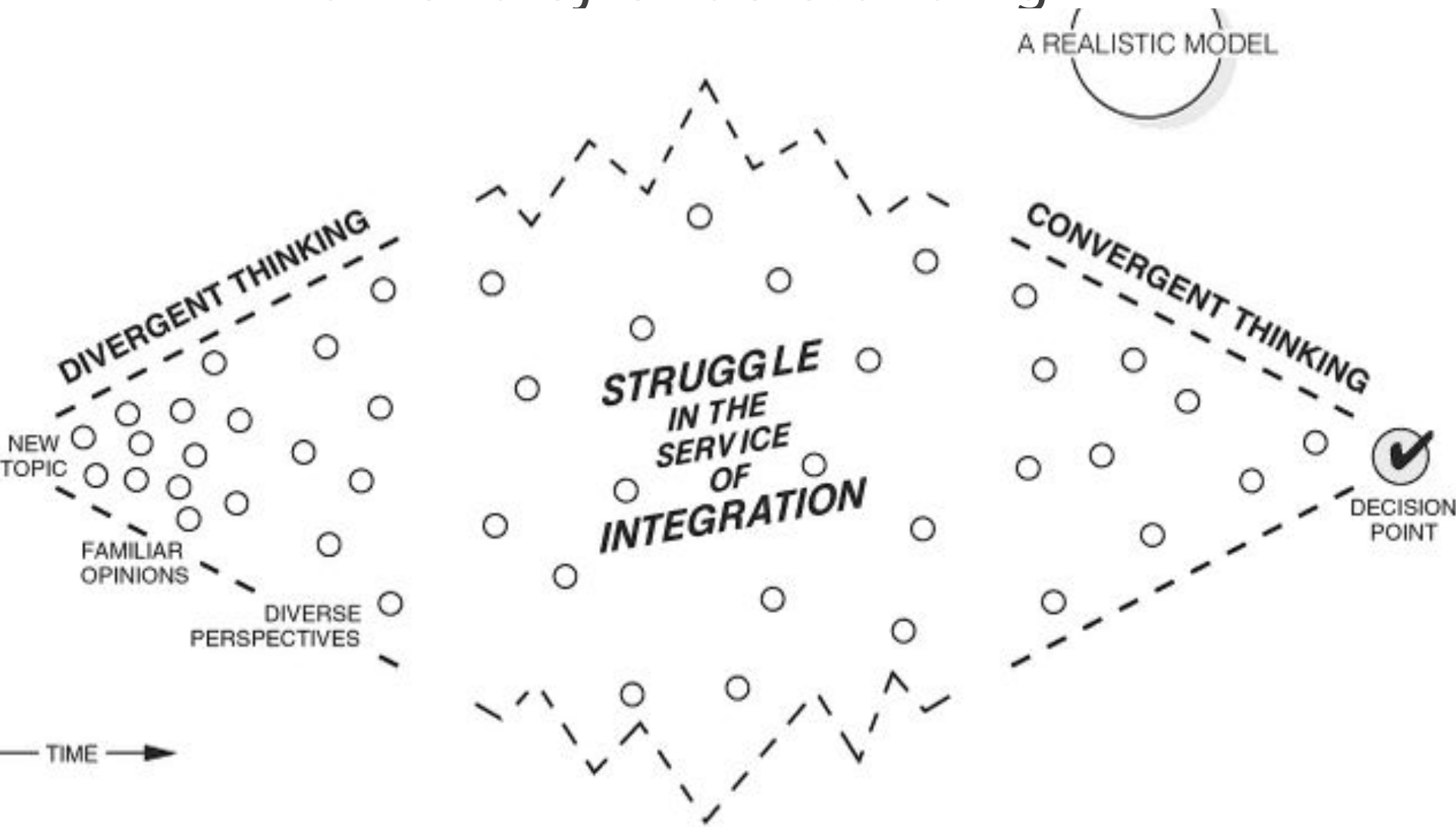
DIVERSITY OF IDEAS







# Diamond of Understanding



# Shared pool of meaning

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Whatever the decision-making method, the greater the shared meaning in the pool, the better the choices, the more unity and the stronger the conviction of the team-whoever makes the choice.

Time you spent up front establishing a shared pool of meaning is more than paid for by faster, more unified and more committed action later.

# Attributes of Effective Discussions to Resolve Differences

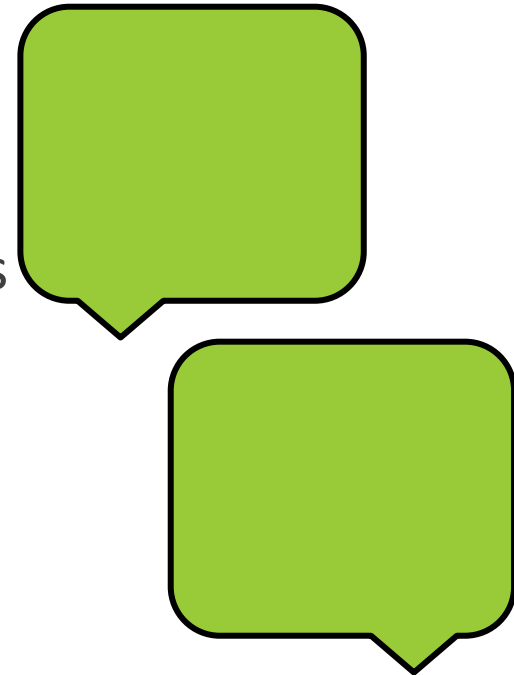
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**Collaborative:** The intention to act in a cooperative and supportive manner

**Strategic:** The mental process for selecting an appropriate pathway or approach to the conversation in order to achieve desired results

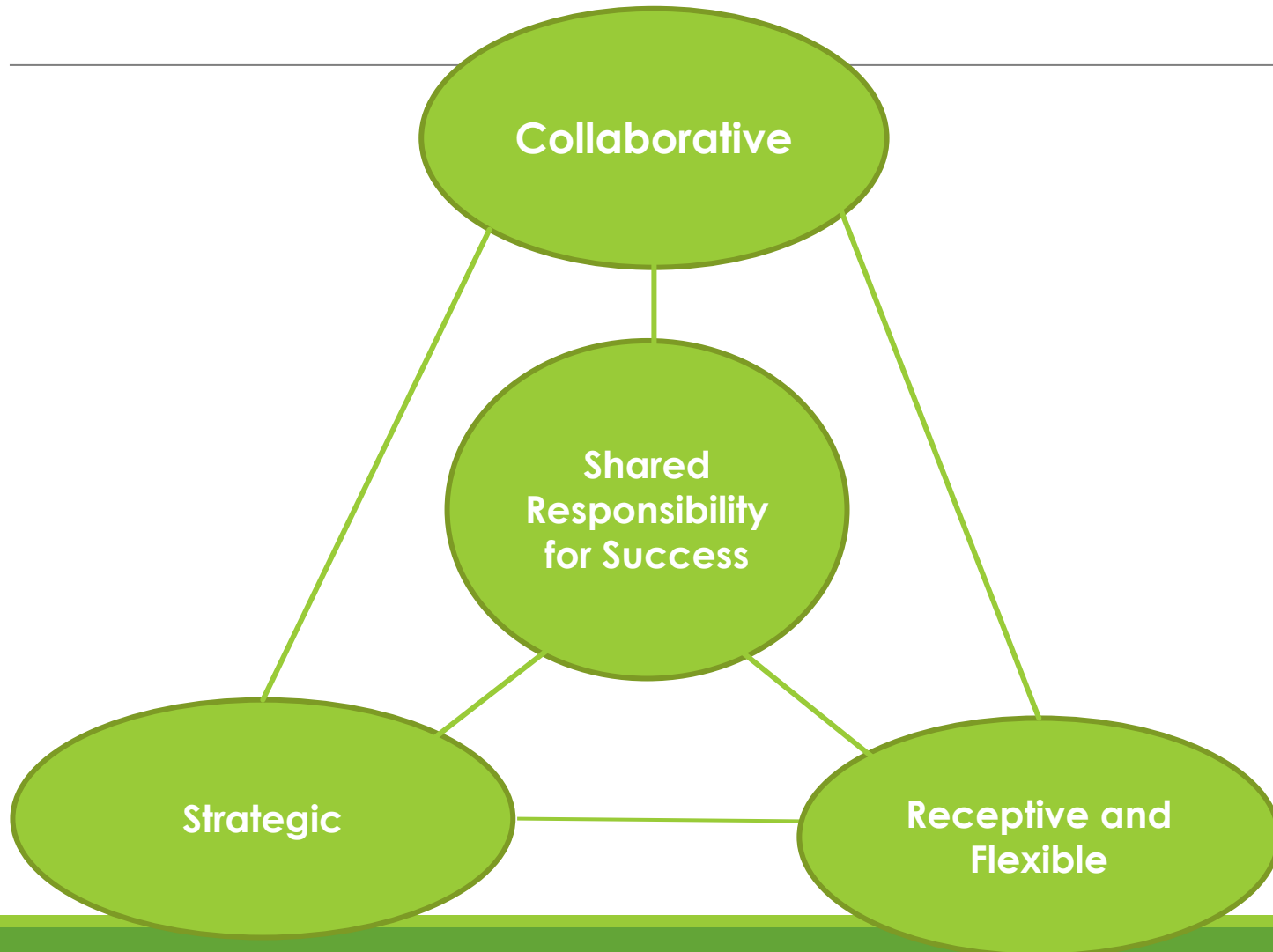
**Receptive and Flexible:** The demonstration of openness to alternative ideas and the willingness to adjust based on new information

**Shared Responsibility:** Playing an active role in the conversation and holding oneself and each other accountable for success



# Creating Opportunities for Collaborative Discussion to Resolve Conflict

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# Inquiry and Advocacy: Part of Your Collaborative Toolkit

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## **Inquiry**

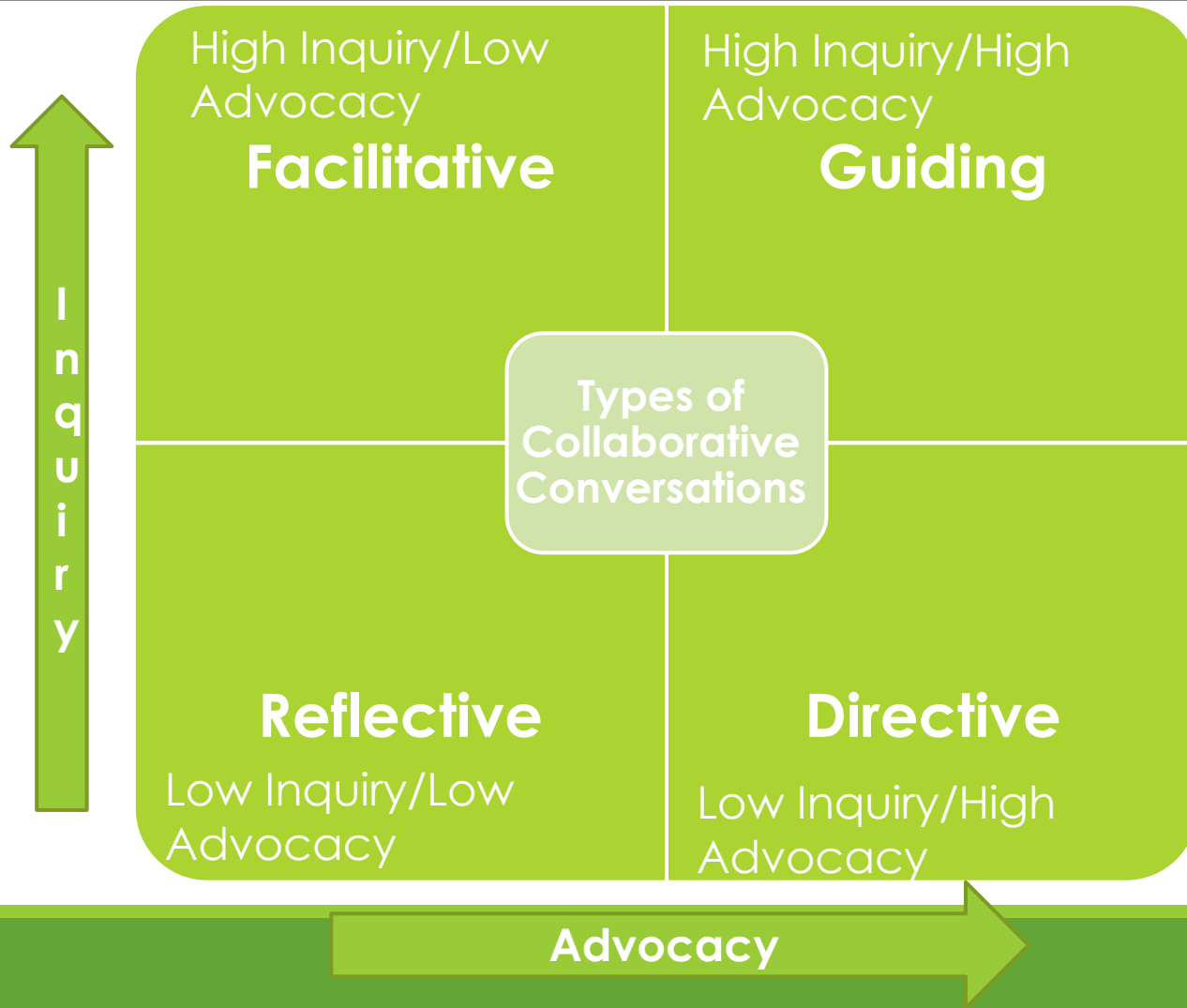
A process for understanding someone else's point of view by exploring their thoughts, feelings, and reasoning.

## **Advocacy**

A process for influencing someone's thinking and behavior by stating your opinions and suggestions and outlining a rationale for each



# Inquiry and Advocacy: A Continuum



# Inquiry Techniques

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**Bracket:** Active listening to create an open mind so that you can listen free from your own filters, to the other's point of view.

- Remind yourself that it is both useful and respectful to understand the speaker's words, thoughts and feelings.

**Paraphrase:** Validates and confirms what you think you heard your conversation partner say.

- Listen for key words or phrases and restate them using your own words.

# Inquiry Techniques

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**Check Perceptions:** Confirm or clarify something you believe your conversation partner may be thinking or feeling in order to deepen your understanding and empathize with them.

- “I’d like to check something with you. I’m wondering if you are concerned that there is not a safe way to provide access to communication on the bus?”

**Ask Probing Questions:** To gain more information and deepen the group’s understanding of the issues at hand.

- “Can you tell me more about...?” “Help me to understand...”



# Using Inquiry Techniques: Case Study

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In your every-other-week visit to a self-contained classroom, the teacher tells you that one of the other service providers who sees the child has made a new recommendation. The recommendation affects the program that you have set up for the child and you have deep concerns about it.

You feel that you need to talk with your co-worker about the new approach. When you try to do that, she insists that the change is essential to the child's progress and safety.



Bracket

Paraphrase

Check

Perceptions

Ask Probing

Questions

# Advocacy Techniques

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Acknowledge the disagreement

Inquire before you advocate

State your advocacy

Outline the data and explain the reasoning for your advocacy

Check the conversation partner's understanding of your advocacy and provide clarification

Encourage inquiry from others and alternative points of view



# Using Advocacy Techniques: Case Study

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You have just learned that the curriculum department for your agency is looking at purchasing a new online science curriculum. You have heard that the curriculum being considered has text-to-speech options but no other accessibility features.

When you speak to the head of the curriculum and math departments, they indicate that the committee will be meeting. You have concerns and would like to give input.



Acknowledge  
Disagreement  
Inquire First  
State Advocacy  
Data and  
Reasons  
Check for  
Understanding  
Encourage  
others inquiry

# Decisions and Agreement

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Do not confuse unanimous agreement with:

- Majority rule
- Minority rule
- Authority rule



# Case Study



You are part of a committee that has been tasked with determining a way to increase the use of consultation and coaching in your service model and identify the times when direct student intervention is warranted. The task force was formed by your program administrator who will participate in the work.

How might you begin this discussion?

How might you ensure that all voices are heard?

How might you work together to reach consensus?

- Open
- Narrow
- Close

# Just Dipping Our Toes In

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- Team Decision Making
- Difficult Conversations
- CPR Conversations
  - Content
  - Process
  - Relationship



# Recommended Reading

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