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Conversational Roles

VERSION 1

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Conversational Roles V.1

Who are you in the conversations you have with family, friends, and strangers? This overview may help you classify yourself and be more intentional with your interactions. This document is ever-evolving, so make sure you subscribe to the Evolving Voice newsletter to receive updates.

<u>Classification of Interactors:</u>

The concept here is to identify the types of interactors in a discussion. Once identified, people both understand the interaction dynamics but also can make a conscious decision to seek to change the structure of the interaction.

The list goes from most assertive in an effort to convince or impose a viewpoint to most resistive of such an effort. The first and ninth classifications are power based positions, the other seven relate to participants in more interactive situations. The structure assumes a bilateral interaction. Additional thought is needed to apply this to multiple party interactions or other structured interactions.

Mandator – an individual who knows the answer and has the power to impose it.
Missionary – an individual who knows the "correct" answer and whose objective is to force your agreement/conversion to that position.
Teacher – an individual who knows the answer/the substance more than the other party and whose objective is to transmit information to the other person – thereby permitting that person to reach a substantive agreement or to otherwise advance that person's thinking.
Explorer – an individual affirmatively seeking more information or insights (e.g. what are you thinking/what do you believe and why). Usually the explorer has a base of information but is seeking more. The primary objective of this person is to learn rather than to persuade.
Open/neutral/unengaged/uninterested – an individual unengaged and neutral or lacking in knowledge. Think passive.
Questioner – an individual interested in learning more but with substantive open questions about the issue/topic being discussed. If engaged, a questioner will participate and "ask questions" for information's sake.

Objector – an individual who does not open the discussion but has substantive and often deeply held views to the contrary of those of the person triggering the discourse.

Resistor – a resistor is an individual with opposing views who will activity seek to win the discussion, solicit supporters, etc.

Rejector – a power-based classification, a rejector has the ability to prevent the adoption of a viewpoint or perspective.

We need to differentiate style from goal. The above classifications apply to both substantive positions and styles. It is important that style matches goal. We have all seen or experienced situations in which a person may have one goal (e.g. explore) but is using an inconsistent style (e.g. missionary). Aligning style (what is seen/perceived by the other person) with goal (what I am trying to accomplish) is critical.

I am thinking about a diagram. As one moves "up" the list (and that is not a judgmental use of "up"), the person becomes more assertive, more desirous of changing the position of the other person and the risk of discord increases. The ends of the list are higher power states – the central is less power centric. For example, a "missionary" needs to believe that he or she can force change. The upper part of the list also reflects the initiator status versus the "recipient" status.

In any one conversation, a single person can occupy several different classifications if more than one issue is being discussed.

People are often not aware of the classification in which they fit for a specific issue.

One's classification is within one's control and can change before or during a discussion.

Process considerations/best practices

The following is a start to the identification of some best practices to advance value centric personal interactions. These can be used as part of a process to change classifications or to maximize the constructiveness of an interaction.

1. Understand your goals, style and "classification"
   a. What is your purpose? To learn, to persuade, to pass some time?

     b. How are you acting?

     c. How is that impacting the other person.

2. Ensure that your style is aligned with your goal. Goals should drive style.
3. It is usually not about winning. Remember mutual respect, kindness, consideration, openness, etc.
4. Separate the message from the messenger. I may "hate" the message but like the messenger. Don't make it personal. A differing opinion or view does not make the other person evil.
5. Listen, truly listen to the other person. Acknowledge the other person,
6. Ask questions, seek to understand rather than lecture.
    a. Why do you think X?
    b. What are the reasons, what is the basis?
    c. What are the strengths and weaknesses?
    d. Have real interest in their views and reasons.
7. Meet the other person on their ground (mental, social or physical).
8. Be prepared and willing to rationally explain your position and reasons.
    a. Not argumentative but informational.
    b. Assume good faith.
    c. Fact or policy based.
    d. Not judgmental or insulting
    e. Acknowledge differences and other views.
9. Be flexible in the interaction. Respect the other person's space and desires. They may just not want to talk at that time or may have other more important tasks.
10. Do not deny or reject your core values absent rational reasons. Demonstrate constructive disagreement.

What makes a "good" discussion

We need to understand what constitutes a "good" conversation in order to seek those outcomes and to assess whether there has been success. Here are some possible attributes of a successful discussion or interaction.

1. You learned something
2. The other person learned something
3. Each person was treated with respect, kindness, openness, etc. The value of each person was acknowledged and reinforced.
4. One preserved or enhanced the possibility of future, constructive interactions or relationships.

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   a. One has not damaged an existing relationship.

   b. There is a basis and desire for future interactions.

  5. The conversation ended on a positive with each person glad that the conversation occurred.

The indicia for success and the structure can and will vary based on the structure or setting for the interaction. Interactions will vary based on:

- Formal or informal
- "Forced" or voluntary
- Private, multiple parties or public.
- Past interactions,
- Other

<u>General thoughts/topics</u>

Here are some key topics/issues that may frame any effort or initiative. These need to be finalized and integrated.

1. Defining a successful interaction
2. Understanding the characteristics/classification
  a. Style vs. Goal
  b. How to identify
  c. How to change
  d. How to use
  e. Dealing with disconnects
3. Defining setting and participant characteristics
4. Utilizing the final version of the 10 "best practices"
5. Understanding the characteristics of the interaction and what is rational to expect. (e.g. formal v. informal, past interactions v. first time, etc.)
6. Understanding the impact of the subject. Certain topics triggered stronger or weaker reactions and characteristics. Politics and religion often trigger the most emotional reactions.
7. Defining how to and learning how to change characteristics and styles.
8. Constructive disengagement
  a. Ending on a positive
  b. Dealing with discord or controversy
  c. other

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