

Managing Team Conflict – Exercises

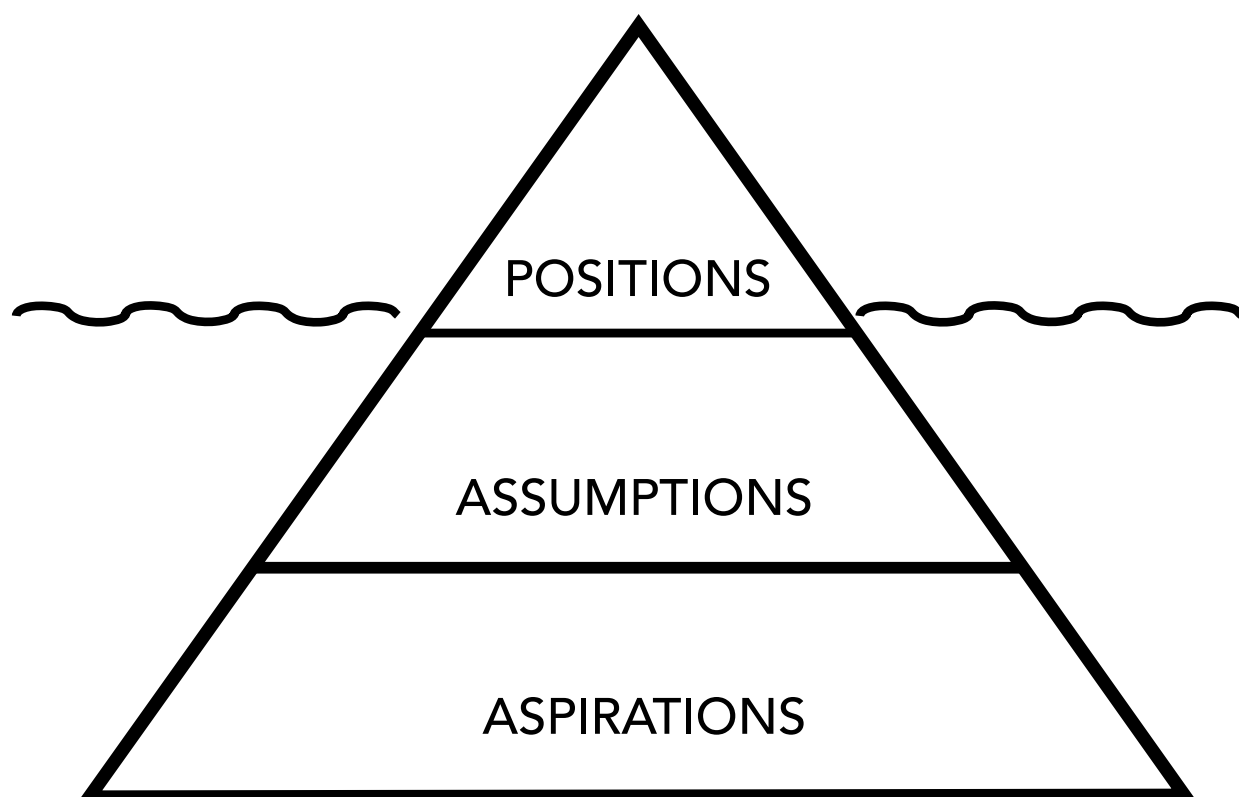
Exercise: The Conflict Iceberg

What's the Conflict Iceberg?

The Conflict Iceberg Tool can help you better understand both yourself and the person who you're in conflict with before you make a decision about how to respond in a conflict situation.

At the heart of any conflict is a "story." You may consider it "the truth" about a situation. Instead, think of it as "my truth" about the situation. The "story" is the set of positions, assumptions, and beliefs each of us has about a situation. It becomes the lens through which we view the situation.

In my book *Wired for Authenticity*, one of the seven practices of authentic and agile leaders is "stay curious." Staying curious allows you to dig deeper to see your own story and that of the other person. This will help you make a wiser choice about how best to respond.



How to Use the Conflict Iceberg

1. Create your own Conflict Iceberg for a conflict situation. Note down:

Your position and behavior

- What would an objective observer notice about your behavior?
- Your position or perspective (what's the ideal outcome for you)

Your assumptions

- Your assumptions or judgments ("your truth" about yourself, others, and the situation)
- Underlying emotion that is created by the assumptions or values (for example, frustration when you perceive others as not adhering to how you think something "should be")

Your beliefs and values

- Beliefs that underlie your assumptions (for example, it's good to plan and be organized)
- Values that underlie your assumptions (for example, I value work-life balance)

Since your own "story" is part of any conflict and also the key to resolving it wisely, ask yourself if you know this story to be the absolute truth. Ask yourself, what would be possible if you chose to let the story go? Asking yourself this question will help you be more flexible in your thinking and willing to explore alternatives that may create breakthroughs in the conflict.

Developing your own Conflict Iceberg will also help you to get clear about your positions and how important they are for you so you can stand up more powerfully for yourself and your needs.

2. Create your team member's Conflict Iceberg for a conflict situation.

Often while we can observe someone's behavior or their stated position, we know very little about what's driving that behavior. At the heart of the conflict is usually a judgment we have about the other person where we are making them wrong (and ourselves right). Our judgment (even if it's not stated) may create negative feelings which impact the relationship. Letting go of this judgment, being genuinely curious, and asking open-ended questions can help us create an environment of trust and dialogue.

The other person's position and behavior

- What would an objective observer notice about the behavior?
- The other person's position or perspective. What does success look like to him or her?

The other person's assumptions

- You can ask "How do you see this situation? What experience or information can you share that's driving your perspective?"
- What emotion is present? You can ask "How does this make you feel?"

The other person's beliefs and values

- You can ask "What's important to you in this situation?"
- Or "I can see you feel strongly about this. What's driving that?"

Often, when I have done this exercise, I find that when I get to the level of beliefs and values, it helps me to find common ground with the person and thus come up with breakthrough ideas. Based on this new information, you can then decide how to best handle the conflict situation. (See the worksheet "Five Styles of Conflict Management.")