



Loughborough
University

EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION SERVICES



LET'S TALK EDI TOOLKIT : PARTICIPATING IN RESPECTFUL CONVERSATIONS

A guide to enhance skills and to optimise your experience and participation when discussion involves potential conflict and disagreement.



Shared principles of engagement

- Shared principles of engagement for the session ensure that all participants know what behaviours are expected of them.
- Shared principles of engagement help the conversation to happen in a bounded way and increases a sense of safety for participants.
- Participants are invited to add any principles to the list and asked for verbal consensus immediately before starting the main part of the session or when they register online for the activity or event.



Some examples of principles to adapt and agree at the start of the discussion

- Agree boundaries of confidentiality beforehand
- All respectful comments are welcome
- The right to free speech does not give a right to be discriminatory or deliberately inflammatory
- The primary aim is to deepen understanding, not to win an argument
- Do not use any derogatory or abusive language
- Know that it is ok to disagree with another person/group of people's point of view



Some examples of principles to adapt and agree at the start of the discussion - continued

- Understand that your response to another person's opinion e.g. taking offence, does not take away another person's right to expression as long as it is not discriminatory, inciteful, inflammatory or attacks anyone personally
- Be mindful that different people have different lived experiences
- Feel free to leave the room at any stage to protect your wellbeing
- Have an awareness of the limits of your own knowledge and awareness and ask if you need clarification about what someone has said.
- Do not make any personal remarks – keep your comments to the issues, opinions and concepts.



The Art of Disagreeing Well : to see the potential for growth, understanding and mutual respect.

- There is potential for conflict in discussions whenever people disagree, but it is entirely possible to disagree without conflict.
- Disagreement should not be feared or viewed as necessarily negative, if conducted well there is potential for beneficial outcomes for all parties involved such as, gaining a different perspective expanding understanding.
- Mastering the Art of Disagreeing Well is an important life skill. Not only does it help to avoid conflict but it also enhances our ability to influence, and be influenced by, others.
- **For these reasons, to commit to disagreeing well is a form of mutual respect.**



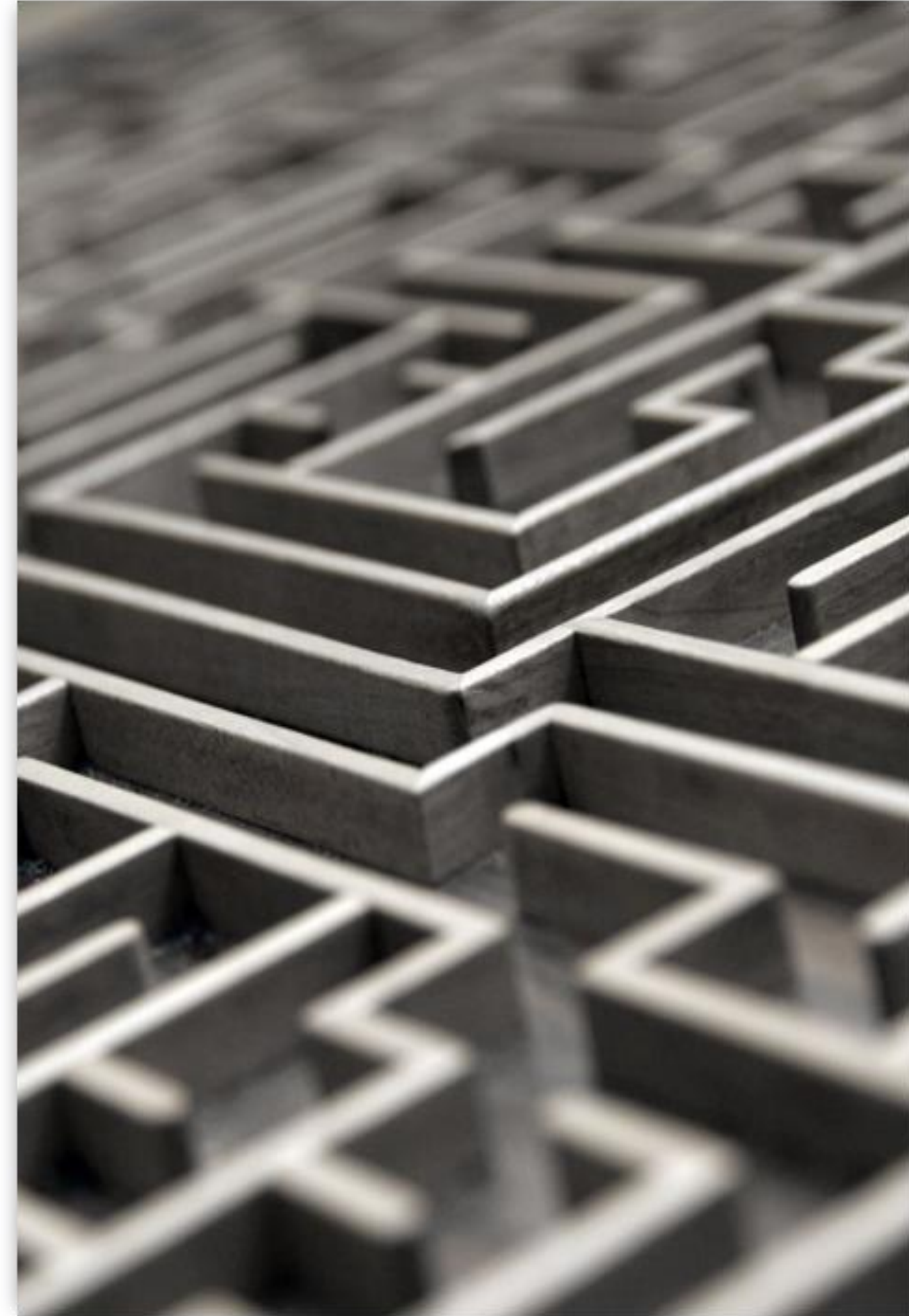
The Art of Disagreeing Well :is to take personal responsibility for your response to conflict

- We all have a responsibility to understand how we *choose* to behave and our impact on others during discussions. When disagreeing well there are two aspects to managing the conflict **assertiveness and empathy**.
- **Assertiveness** refers to the ability to speak up and stand by your opinions. Being assertive is not the same as being aggressive because the intention is to express yourself effectively and be heard rather than suppressing or undermining anyone one else.
- **Empathy** refers to understanding another person's point of view and their feelings. When you empathize with someone else, you're able to put yourself into that other person's situation. As a result, you will be in a better position to manage any conflict by demonstrating that they have been heard and understood. Empathising doesn't necessarily mean that you agree with their opinion, their argument or even their approach.



Use of language

- Choosing the right words can feel like walking through a maze. One of the greatest anxieties for some people when discussing EDI related matters is getting the language 'wrong' and causing offence or being thought of as racist, sexist, homophobic etc.
- During these discussions everyone is at a different stage of learning and development. Use of language can be subjective too so it is not about 'getting it right' because we can never get it right for everyone all of the time.
- It is about being open to challenge or correction, reflecting and being willing to clarify our use of words or terms, especially when they are potentially inflammatory.
- The following slide is an example of why it is important to select terms carefully and be clear about intended meaning.



Example – use of the term 'white supremacy'

- There's much debate about what the term 'white supremacy' means. This is because the meaning has changed, for some people, over time while for others it hasn't. Historically, the term 'white supremacy' referred to the belief or theory that white people are inherently superior to people from all other racial and ethnic groups, especially Black people, and are therefore rightfully the dominant group in any society.
- Over time theorists have vastly expanded their understanding of white supremacy. There is now a broader definition that 'white supremacy' is enacted through unconscious or implicit bias which leads to a misuse of power that systematically privileges white people. This means that even when people explicitly reject the theory of white superiority they can still be defined as belonging to a white supremacist system.
- Some people are unaware of these shifts in thinking and only associate 'white supremacy' with far-right movements such as Nazism, Apartheid or racial segregation. As such, these people vehemently reject the notion that they are white supremacists and don't recognise how their attitudes or behaviour could fit this definition.
- A lack of clarification of how this term is being used may cause misunderstanding and unintended offence. See the next slide for two things that can be done to avoid potential mis-understandings ...



Our responsibility is to understand and be understood

1. Be mindful that not everyone is at the same stage of awareness and, as far as possible be aware of the layers of meaning some terms hold and be clear about our use of language.
2. Be mindful of the gaps in our own understanding , ask for clarification and be willing to learn. Acquiring new knowledge and understanding doesn't mean we have to agree.



Choosing a strategy (based on Thomas Kilman model)

There are five conflict resolution strategies you can choose to take at any point in a discussion each has benefits and disadvantages

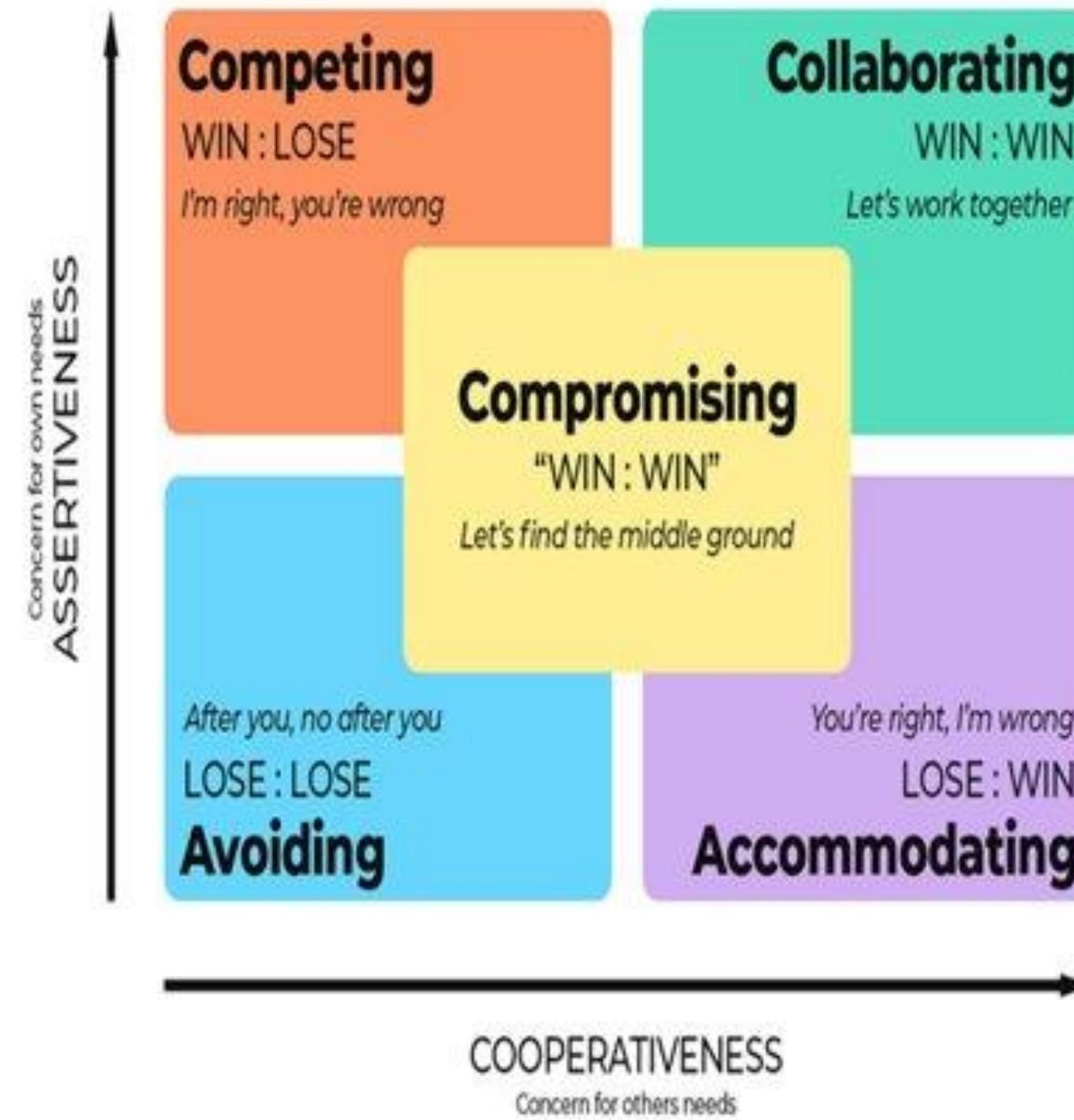
Part of the art of disagreeing well is to be aware of these strategies and to use them all appropriately and intentionally depending on the situation.

We can become over reliant on certain strategies because they feel most comfortable. Do you do this?

The five strategies are:

- **Competing**
- **Avoiding**
- **Accommodating**
- **Collaborating**
- **Compromising**





Source: Thomas-Kilmann Instrument



Competing

High on assertiveness
(or even aggression)

Low on empathy and is
low on cooperation.

- Competing has benefits e.g. in the context of sport having the competitive edge helps us to achieve our goals. However, this strategy has some drawbacks in respectful conversations if it is the only strategy used because the intended outcome is to win rather than to understand.
- If there are 'winners' there are 'losers' and losing can lead to anger, frustration, aggression and hostility.
- Competing in conversations doesn't help to build good relationships because people don't tend to listen to each other .



Avoiding

Avoiding is low on assertiveness and low on empathy.

This means an individual or groups position isn't asserted (leaving no opportunity for it to be understood) and there is no consideration of or empathy with the other party's position.

- Avoidance tends to be used when people do not believe that they have sufficient power or authority in a situation or over another person.
- We therefore often see this used in hierarchical relationships and there are many of those in university settings.
- There certainly are times when avoidance is the best option because it isn't safe to challenge the other party, but it can be dissatisfying if it is the only strategy ever used.
- The art of disagreeing well is to establish at the outset that the views of everyone, regardless of role or grade or popularity, are equally valid as long as they are communicated in a respectful way.



Collaboration

Collaboration is
high on assertiveness and
high on empathy

- This strategy involves balancing power between both parties by finding common ground.
- If you come to a natural agreement in discussion, it can be a useful way for both parties to gain a new perspective.



Compromising

Compromising means agreeing to specific points and giving up on certain others.

This strategy usually gives the feeling of a win-win scenario, where both parties feel that they have gained something out of the discussion however it is equally valid to 'agree to disagree' without compromising on your point of view.



Accommodating

Accommodating is low on assertiveness and high on empathy and involves making concessions to the other party.

- You may assertively disagree with the other persons over all argument but let them know that you agree with a specific point in their argument.
- This is a good way to remain assertive while managing any conflict and it stops the discourse from becoming stuck or polarised.



The Art of Ending Well

A well facilitated discussion should close with a summary of the main points and key arguments on all sides.

Any strong feelings should be acknowledged, particularly if matters feel unresolved.

Any points of commonality or shift in viewpoint should be identified .

There is sometimes a temptation to want to avoid conflict, but it is important to state where there remain any residual conflicts (or newly created ones) in a positive way, celebrating the diversity of views, thanking people for their contributions and for demonstrating the ability to disagree in a healthy way.



Signposting support for students

This support is available for all students, explicitly including all those affected by the conflict in the Middle East and those who have experienced conflict elsewhere in the world.

Student Services (Email: studentwellbeing@lboro.ac.uk, Tel: 01509 222765) offers a range of support, including [mental health and wellbeing](#), and advice specifically for [international students](#). One-to-one support with an advisor is also available. If you would like to access this support, please complete the [online referral form](#) or call the number above.

The [University Chaplaincy](#) (Email: cfschaplains@lboro.ac.uk, Tel: 01509 223741) offers a space for quiet reflection. University Chaplains are here to listen, here to care, and here to help all staff and students. No appointment is necessary.

If you feel your studies are being affected, you can contact your Academic School and/or Personal Tutors so that we can provide the right support to you. If you wish, you can also submit an individual Mitigating Circumstances claim to explain how you have been impacted by recent events. More information on this can be found in the [Student Handbook](#).



Signposting support for staff

This support is available for all colleagues, explicitly including all those affected by the conflict in the Middle East and those who have experienced conflict elsewhere in the world.

Colleagues can access emotional support through our [Employee Assistance Programme](#). More information can be found on our People and Organisational Development [website](#).

Should you need some time away, we would like to draw attention to our [compassionate leave arrangements](#), including our specific policy related to race-based stress, which offers pre-approved compassionate leave for the reason of race-based stress.

