Tools for Advancing Alignment

There are a number of communication tools that may help grantmakers become more effective in advancing alignment on values and practices within their organizations. Below, we highlight and describe the following tools:

- Engaging in Inquiry Before Advocacy
- Building Coalitions for Change
- Moving from Positions to Interests to Options
- Having "Courageous Conversations"

Engaging in Inquiry Before Advocacy

Inquiry—i.e. asking questions about the other person's concerns and motivations—is one of the most effective tools of persuasion. Intuitively, this makes sense: How can you persuade someone to do something unless you know what their concerns are? But when people feel strongly about something, they often don't do this because they want to convince the other person, and they think that in order to be convincing they need to be talking. This shows a fundamental misunderstanding of persuasion. When you listen you are learning new information, you can use that information to influence the other person's choice.

Our advice when you are trying to influence colleagues towards better aligning your practices with your values is to engage in plenty of inquiry before you engage in advocacy. You want to try to cultivate your own curiosity about how they see the situation, and listen to learn more. Then when it comes time to assert your own perspective, you can match your responses and your advocacy to their concerns.

Use the following guidelines to engage in effective inquiry and advocacy.

Inquiry

Cultivate your curiosity

- The less you agree the more you need to understand
- Find respect for others even if you question their motives and conclusions
- Inquire into the impact of your actions on others

Practice strategic listening

- Quiet your internal voice
- Listen with heart and mind

- Listen to learn
- Test for their intentions (and don't assume you know them already)

Earn the right to inquire

- Express and test your understanding
- Build on the aspects of their view that you share
- Be prepared to do what you ask of them

Advocacy

Invite discussion

- Use "testable" advocacy—i.e. frame your advocacy in the form of suggestions to "test"
- Share your perceptions of the "facts" and reasoning
- Test their understanding as you go

Match responses to their concerns

- Take their concerns seriously
- Give them the benefit of the doubt
- Seek and offer responses to their core concerns

Seek trade offs

- Use the word "AND," not "but" when suggesting alternative ideas
- Consider options that address your needs and theirs

Building Coalitions for Change

In order to build broader coalitions for change across your organization, you need to consider who to approach, how, and when, and what your message should be. We suggest three steps towards building coalitions for change:

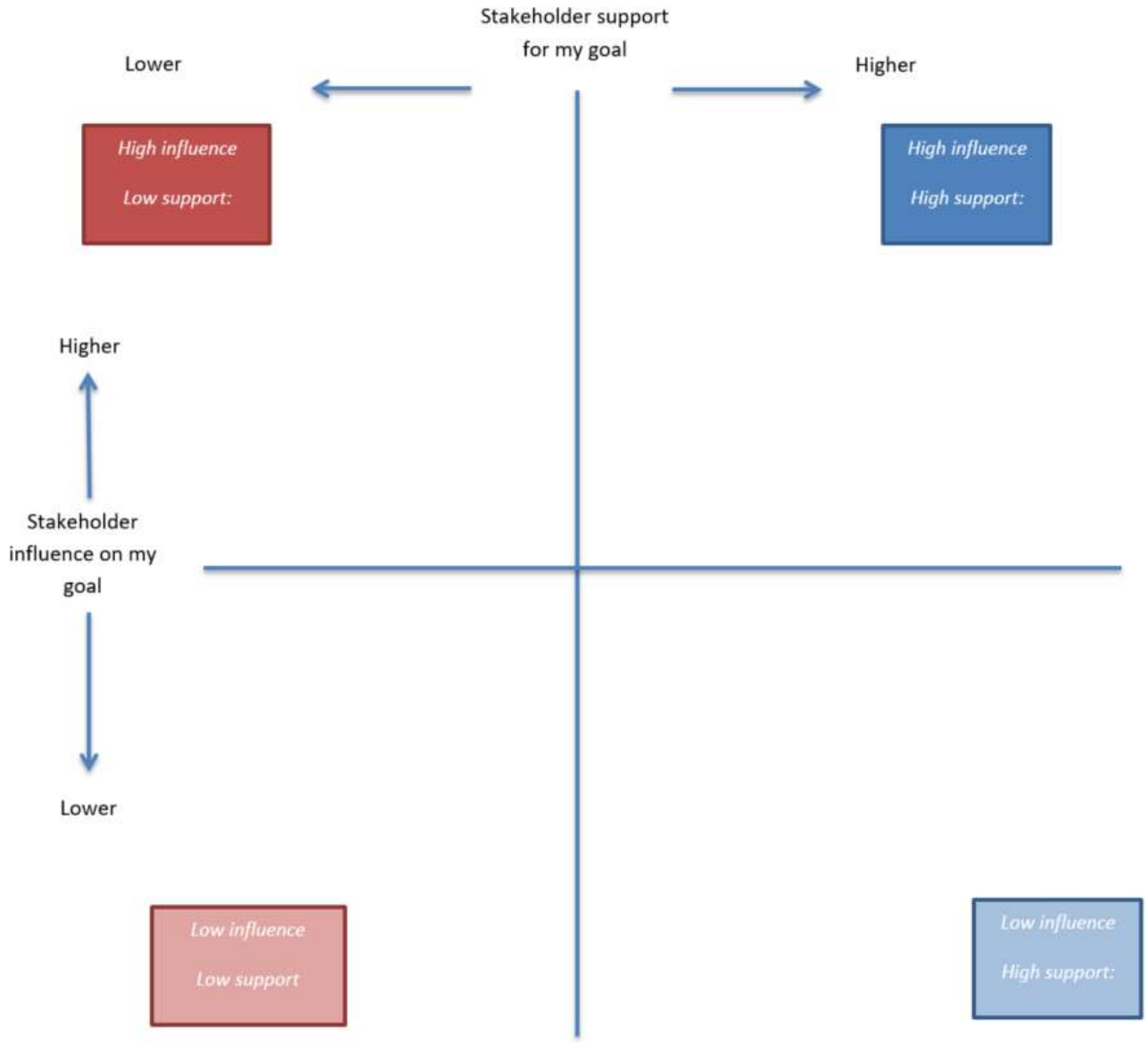
- First, you want to clarify what exactly it is that you want to accomplish. For example, are you trying to change a specific practice that requires buy-in from higher ups? Are you trying to encourage your organization to engage in more systematic conversations about its values and its practices?
- Second, you want to do some kind of assessment and "mapping" exercise, where you assess the interests of the key stakeholders. Who supports your goal and why? Who might oppose it and why? Are

there other potentially overlooked stakeholders who might offer some more support? You will likely want to start engaging in conversations with key stakeholders to learn more about what matters to them and why. We present one "mapping" tool on the next page, but the key point is you want to get a sense of the lay of the land so you can engage strategically.

- Then, finally, you want to tailor your message based on what you learned from your assessment/mapping, and engage strategically to build your coalition or change.

Stakeholder Mapping Tool

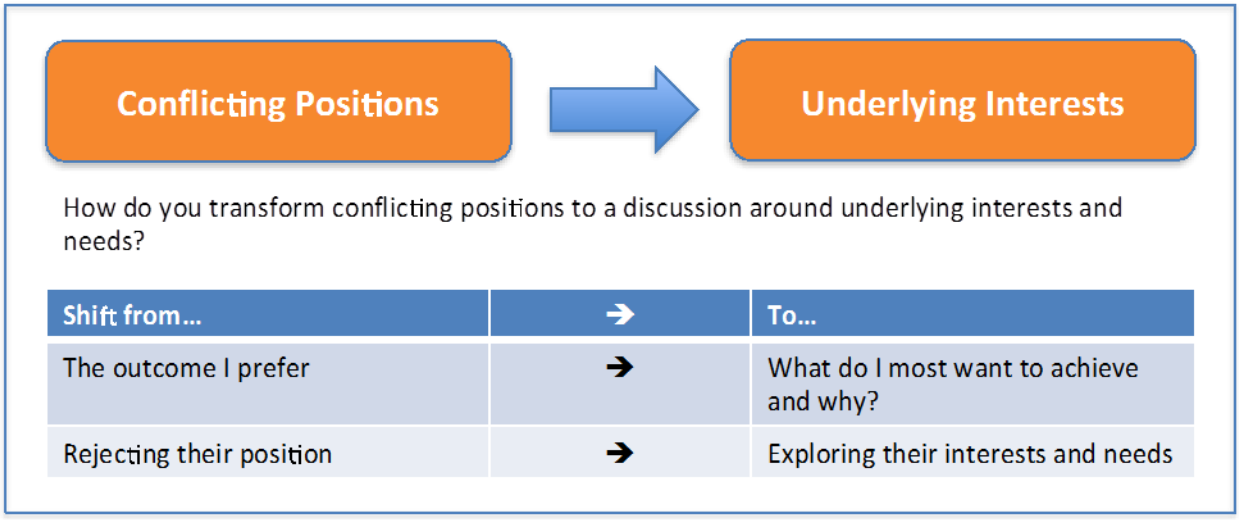
We suggest you consider using the following mapping tool to help identify key stakeholders, and who to approach and how. To use the tool, place the names of key stakeholders in differnt locations on the “map” below according ot their support for your goal and their degree of influence.



Moving from Positions to Interests to Options

To find out how to move forward as a group, it is essential to explore you and your colleagues' interests, rather than simply restate your positions. Instead of telling you ten reasons why your proposal will not work for me, I should find out from you why you want what you want, and then use that information to construct "what if" scenarios with you: "what if we tried a different option that could work for me and, if I'm understanding your interests, could work for you?"

I should also be trying to get you to understand the reasons behind the things I want, rather than restating my position. I should realize that you can only help me meet my interests if you are informed about those interests. Together, we can create options that are closer to both of our aspirations.



In order to find options that potentially meet both of our needs, it is necessary to suspend judgment about the ideas we raise, and to invent options without committing. The more options I can come up with, the more likely I am to find something that will work for you. However, I don't want to be locked in to an idea that I have raised before we have explored all the potential options; for this reason, the use of "what if" can be very helpful.

One tool for generating options that might be especially relevant to aligning values and practices is using "contingent commitments." A key barrier towards change may be risk aversion among board members and leadership. Grants managers may be more eager and willing to reform practices than others, who may be more pessimistic about the likelihood of success or concerned about the consequences of failure. Contingent commitments can be a way around these different perceptions of the future. The basic idea is that you commit to

enact some change within your organization but make it contingent—if a downside risk materializes then you've already agreed on how you'll adjust your practices to minimize it.

In other words, instead of arguing about uncertainties, you should use "if-then" formulations to account for multiple potential outcomes. You should also make sure to allow time needed to implement change well, develop monitoring arrangements and clear assessment strategies, and set up a follow-up plan for coming back together to assess results.

Having Courageous Conversations

As noted above, some subset of your conversations around managing conversations will be more challenging—in particular when they bump up against different ideas about what your organization is or should be doing, or issues that touch on deeply-held personal values that may be in tension or that people may not always agree on. Like a medical doctor trying to address a range of symptoms, your first task when facing such a conversation is diagnosing the underlying cause of conflict. A good diagnosis allows you to select a response that can transform the situation into a more production interaction. The following are helpful questions related to diagnosis.

Perceptions ("Facts")

- What's my story? What is their story?
- What are each party's contributions?
- What are the intentions? Impacts?

Emotions

- What feelings are involved for each of us?
- How are feelings translated and tangled with the "facts"?
- How should we express our feelings?

Values and Identities

- What are my core values and how can they be upheld?
- What are their core values and how can they be upheld?
- What are each party's identities in this context? What does the situation say about us?

The basic idea of the courageous conversations framework is that in any tough conversation there is not just one conversation going on. There are actually three of them—at least in a metaphorical sense. At one level, there's usually a conversation about our perceptions or the "facts." What happened to get us where we are, why, and what was the effect? Often if there's a problem, both sides have a feeling that they are right, and that the problem is their fault. We may each ascribe negative motivations to the other side. All of this limits the opportunity to really learn and connect.

At the same time, whether explicit or not there is often a conversation about how we feel about the situation. We may be angry, anxious, ashamed, or embarrassed, and whether we name these emotions or not we will be communicating them to the other side through our body language, tone, and the "words beneath our words." And they'll be communicating their emotions to us. Not recognizing our own feelings or effectively responding to their strong feelings can derail conversations.

Third and finally, we're usually engaged in a conversation about our values and our identities. What does this situation, what happened, and my feelings about it say about who I am? What does it say about who they are? How does it implicate my and their core values? When core identity and values issues are at play, it can interfere with effective communication.

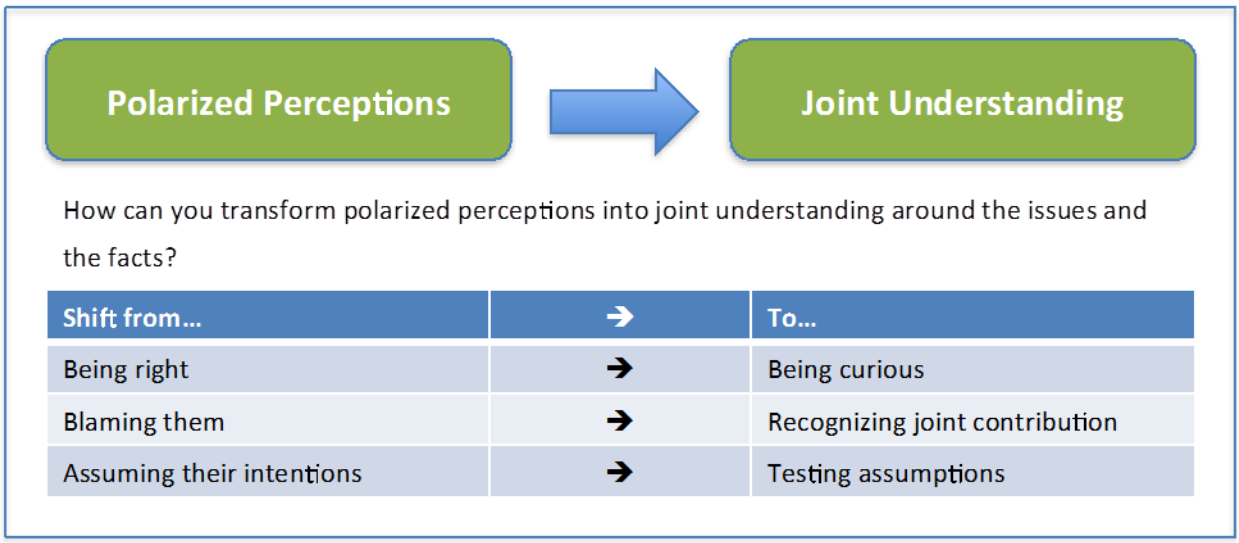
Transforming the Drivers of Courageous Conversations

When faced with a courageous conversation, your goal should not be to tamp down the conflict, but rather to transform it into a useful conversation. Engaging effectively with respect to each of the three levels of a courageous conversation requires a different kind of strategic shift.

Managing the "Facts"

When perceptions are polarized and there are disagreements over the "facts," the key shift is to cultivate curiosity about their view. Consider the following pieces of advice:

- Treat your perspective as legitimate but limited
- Set your purpose as understanding why you see it differently
- Balance advocacy with plenty of inquiry
- Inquire into their data, reasoning, and interpretations to understand
- Share your own data, reasoning, and conclusions



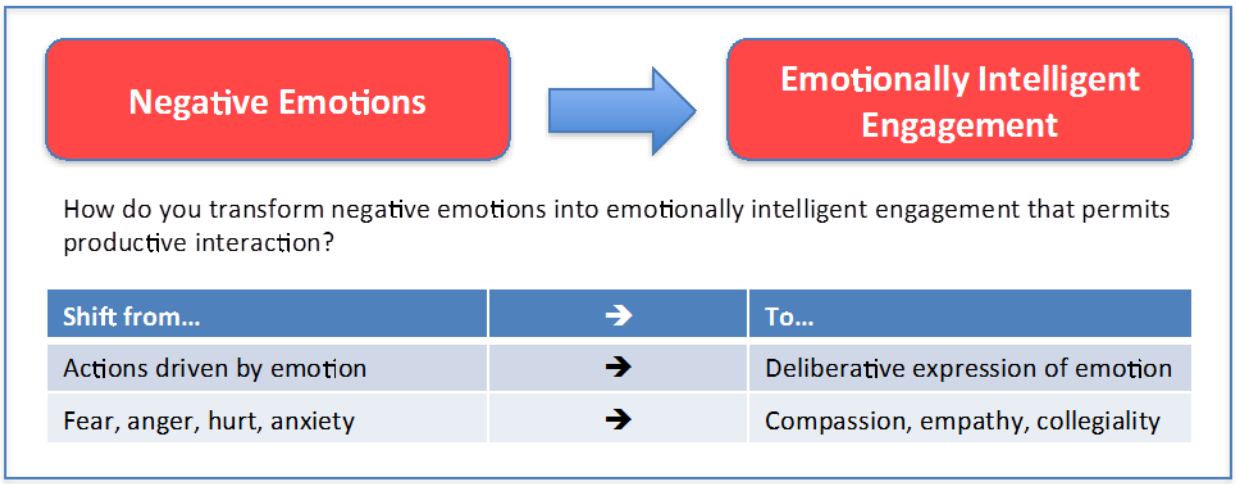
Shift from…	→	To…
Being right	→	Being curious
Blaming them	→	Recognizing joint contribution
Assuming their intentions	→	Testing assumptions

Managing Emotions, Values and Identity

For the second and third conversations around "emotions, values and identity" we suggest using the tool of acknowledgment. Acknowledgment means listening for the feelings or values beneath the words you're hearing, and verbally attending to these feelings or values, not just "the facts." Often, just naming the emotion or values issue you're observing or experiencing can help unlock a stuck conversation and move it forward. For example, you might say, "It seems like this issue really hits close to home for you. I can tell it matters to you a lot." Or, "What you're describing sounds really upsetting." Or you might just open up a space for people to express how they're feeling. For example, "It seems like we've been talking about this same issue for ten minutes and people are getting pretty frustrated. I wonder if we could take a pause and give folks a chance to share what's going on for them in this moment."

In short, our advice is to pause and acknowledge emotions:

- Listen for the emotions underlying judgment, criticism; hear them as markers for feelings
- Attend to the feelings, not just the words

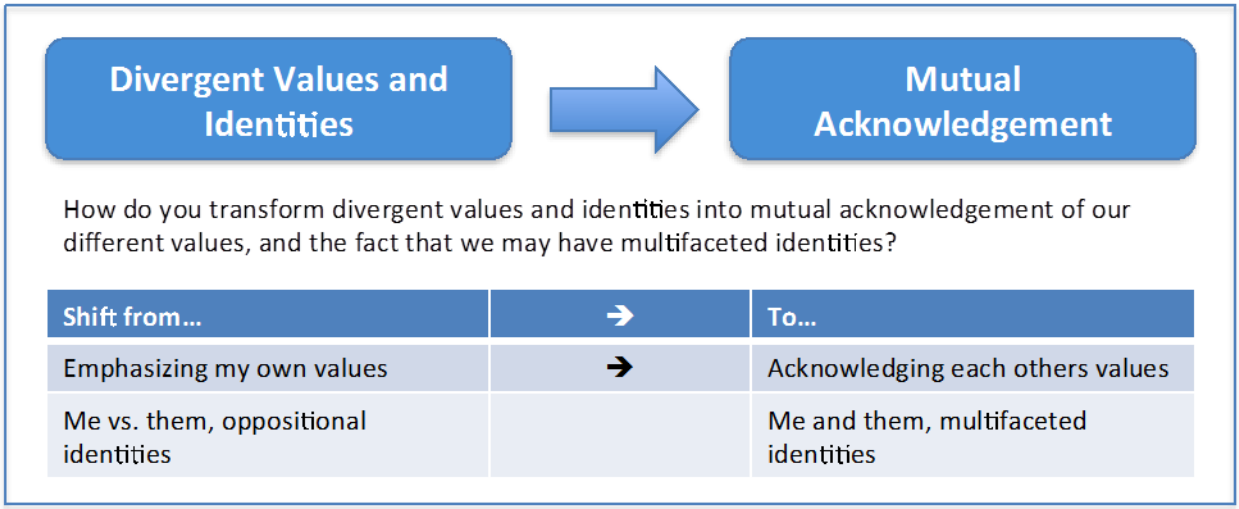


How do you transform negative emotions into emotionally intelligent engagement that permits productive interaction?

Shift from…	→	To…
Actions driven by emotion	→	Deliberative expression of emotion
Fear, anger, hurt, anxiety	→	Compassion, empathy, collegiality

With respect to values and identity, we suggest using acknowledgment to try to come to a joint understanding:

- Acknowledge their values, explain your values, and try to identify common values
- Remember, acknowledgment does not mean sanctioning or agreeing!



How do you transform divergent values and identities into mutual acknowledgement of our different values, and the fact that we may have multifaceted identities?

Shift from…	→	To…
Emphasizing my own values	→	Acknowledging each others values
Me vs. them, oppositional identities		Me and them, multifaceted identities

To help you prepare to use all of the above tools, we have created a comprehensive preparation worksheet, which is available in your Workbook.