



Speed Confrontation Management

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Confrontation Management is a technique for persuading others to want what you want. It is mathematically-based and supported by a range of powerful analytical tools, including Options Boards, Tugs of War, etc. The technique is currently used by a number of global organizations. For more information, see <http://www.ideasciences.com/products/confrontationmanager/>.

OK. So Confrontation Management may be powerful, but it sounds like a lot of effort is involved in developing the skills required to use it...right? Wrong. This short article demonstrates how you can develop the essential skills within an afternoon.

Confrontation Management helps you develop a strategy for achieving your stated objectives – i.e. your position. This strategy is comprised of arguments designed to overcome (potential) weaknesses in your position – and, if necessary, to undermine (e.g. show the futility of) the positions of others. This is nothing new...or sinister. It is what happens every day in organizations – people argue for their position and, in doing so, against the positions of others. This is why Confrontation Management is actually very easy to grasp.

Start by printing out the "Tug of War" template on the last page of this article. The numbers on the Tug of War provide you with a step-by-step route through the analysis. Steps 1-3 involve defining the issue, while Steps 4-9 involve developing the strategy (i.e. arguments designed to strengthen your position). As we go through the analysis, scribble your notes on the appropriate part of the Tug of War.

It will help you get the most out of this article if you attempt to analyze a real problem. Try and identify a situation where you need someone's cooperation to achieve your objectives, but they are unwilling to assist you.

Step 1 – Define your position

What do you want people to do? What are the key elements of your position? Try not to get too detailed here – focus on the critical factors. Remember that your position includes both what the other party and *you* should do. For example, "I will assist with your project if you tighten up the quality controls."

Summarize your position and write it next to your position ellipse (#1).

Step 2 – Define the other party's position

This is Step 1, but *from the perspective of the other party*. What does the other party want people to do? What are the key elements of his¹ position? Try not to get too detailed here – focus on the critical factors. Remember that their position includes both what they *and* you should do. For example, "I will tighten up the quality controls on my project if you will assist me with it."

Summarize his position and write it next to his position ellipse (#2).

1 Parties may be, and often are, groups (e.g. management, the public), but we'll assume the other party is an individual. This has no impact on the analysis. The same basic approach is used in either case. In the interests of readability, "he" will be used as the universal pronoun throughout the article.

Note that if the issue involves more than two parties (including yourself) you can use a separate template for each of the other parties.

Step 3 – Define the threatened future

If you fail to achieve your position, you will still need to take action. The world moves on. You may explicitly state what you will do in these circumstances, or let the other party form his own conclusions. Either way, the (uncoordinated) paths that people are threatening to “fall back” on if their positions are not adopted, taken together, form the threatened future. For example, if you don't join the other party's project, he will not tighten up the quality controls – so the threatened future is one in which you don't assist with a poor-quality project.

Summarize the threatened future and write it next to the threatened future box (#3).

Step 4 – Make your threats credible

Are your stated (or implied) intentions concerning what you will do if your position is not adopted credible in the eyes of the other party? Does he believe you will follow through? If not, the threatened future is not credible to the other party (i.e. you have a Threat dilemma).

Why is this important? It's important because the threatened future is key to the attainment of your position. The other party must feel that the likely outcome of not agreeing with you is worse than your position. If he doesn't believe that the likely outcome is as stated (or implied), it will not be effective in pressuring him to adopt your position.

To make your intentions in the threatened future credible, you must look for arguments that demonstrate why you'll be willing to adopt this course of action if you cannot achieve your position. For example, “I would *never, ever*, lend my name to a project that didn't meet basic quality standards.”

Develop arguments that support your willingness to carry out your threats and write them next to your Threat arrow² (#4).

Step 5 – Undermine the credibility of the other party's threats

Just as you have “fall back” intentions, so does the other party – which are designed to pressure you to adopt *his* position. You may undermine the value of the threatened future (to him) by arguing that you do not believe he will follow through on his “fall back” intentions. For example, you could argue that not imposing quality controls on his project will only hurt his personal reputation in the long-term – and he's not the sort of person to cut his own throat (which is why he wants your assistance in the first place).

Why is this important? It's important because the threatened future is key to the other party's attainment of his position. He must make you feel that the likely outcome of not agreeing with him is worse than his position. If you don't believe that the likely outcome is as stated (or implied), it will not be effective in pressuring you to adopt his position.

Develop arguments that undermine the credibility of the other party's threats and write them next to his Threat dilemma arrow (#5).

² The Threat arrow is a placeholder for arguments designed to eliminate your Threat dilemmas.

Step 6 – Ensure that the threats against you are insufficient

Even when you have undermined the credibility of the other party's threats, the threatened future may remain unpalatable to you. However, is it less palatable to you than the other party's position. If it is, you have a problem.

Why is this important? It's important because if you find the threatened future less palatable than the other party's position, you will be under pressure to accept his position.

Develop arguments as to:

1. why the other party's position is less palatable to you than he may claim; and
2. why you prefer the threatened future more than he may claim.

Write these arguments next to the other party's Persuasion dilemma arrow (#6). This arrow is a placeholder for arguments as to why the other party is unable to convince you to adopt his position given the threatened future (i.e. why he has difficulty persuading you to adopt his position).

Step 7 – Ensure that your threat is sufficient

OK. The threatened future is now credible (in the eyes of the other party) – but is it *sufficient*? The other party believes you will carry out your intentions under the threatened future, but does he care? Is the threatened future less palatable to him than your position?

Why is this important? It's important because unless the other party finds your position preferable to the threatened future he will prefer to settle for the threatened future!

Develop arguments as to:

1. why the other party should prefer your position more than he claims to; and
2. why the other party should find the threatened future less palatable than he claims to.

Write these arguments next to the other party's Rejection dilemma arrow (#7). This arrow is a placeholder for arguments as to why the other party should be pressured to adopt your position given the threatened future (i.e. why he has difficulty rejecting your position).

Step 8 – Ensure that our promises are credible

When the threats against you are insufficient and your own threats are sufficient, the other party will be pressured to relinquish his position and adopt yours. However, he may be hesitant if he does not believe your commitment to stick to your position once it is agreed. He may think that you are advocating this position just to get his cooperation and that once he is on board, you will adopt another course of action.

Why is this important? It is important because the other party will be unwilling to sign up to your position if he doesn't believe you will stick to it once agreed.

Develop arguments as to:

1. why you prefer your position to any alternative future; and
2. why the consequences of deviating from your position wouldn't be in your best interest (this may require the introduction of sanctions to deter "cheating").

Write these arguments next to your Cooperation arrow³ (#8). This arrow is a placeholder for arguments as to why you will be willing to stick to the agreement (i.e. cooperate in the implementation of your position).

Note that Steps 8 and 9 can be applied, in reverse, to undermine the other party's position. If a party cannot be trusted to fulfill his obligations under your "opponent's" position, his position is weakened. Arguments for undermining the other parties position would probably be developed after Step 5.

Step 9 – Ensure that the other party can be trusted

Even if the other party agrees to adopt your position, can you trust him to carry it out? He may just be “agreeing” with you to buy time – or because he has a plan for exploiting your position that is not yet clear to you.

Why is this important? It is important because it undermines your position. If you can't trust the other party to play its part, your position may be untenable.

Develop arguments as to:

1. why the other party should prefer your position to any alternative future; and
2. why the consequences of deviating from your position wouldn't be in his best interest (this may require the introduction of sanctions to deter “cheating”).

Write these arguments next to your Trust arrow⁴ (#9). This arrow is a placeholder for arguments as to why you trust the other party to stick to the agreement (i.e. trust him fulfill his role in the implementation of your position).

Implementing your strategy

After completing Steps 1-9 you will have a sequence of arguments designed to convince the other party to adopt your position. This is your strategy.

Further reading

For an introduction to more formal Confrontation Management analyses see “Modeling confrontations using Options Boards”. It is available from the Idea Sciences website:

<http://www.ideasciences.com/library/papers/usingoptionsboards.pdf>

A more detailed discussion of Confrontation Management (and additional references) is found in “A C2 system for 'winning hearts and minds': tools for Confrontation and Collaboration Analysis” available from the DoD's Command and Control Research Program website:

<http://www.dodccrp.org/events/2005/10th/CD/papers/361.pdf>

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3 The Cooperation arrow is a placeholder for arguments designed to eliminate your Cooperation dilemmas.

4 The Trust arrow is a placeholder for arguments designed to eliminate your Trust dilemmas.

