

60 Second Leader

Is Your Team Arguing Enough?

When it comes to teams, research and experience show that while too much conflict is destructive, **too much harmony is unproductive.**

Conflict

- some people thrive on conflict
- most are uncomfortable with it
- many positively avoid it

Identifying Conflict

The Thomas-Kilmann test can help us identify our individual preferences when conflict arises, although learning to act in a way contrary to our own natural preferences requires hard work and energy.

Part of the challenge is to disentangle the material dimension of conflict (*we see this differently*) from the personal dimension (*who are you calling stupid?*).

A team stuck in personal conflict cannot progress until the issues are faced, but a team without significant material conflict is unlikely to be fulfilling its potential.



Pete Dowse is Managing Director of **Cygnet**.

He graduated from Cambridge in Maths and Management.

Pete has 25 years experience in leadership, consultancy and training, including a spell as Chief Executive in the voluntary sector.

He has been involved with Cygnet since its inception. Pete has experience with clients at all levels, including board level. He is in particular demand for strategy meeting facilitation for SMTs and Boards.

Cygnet can help your organisation achieve its business goals by partnering with you to develop your

Fear of Conflict

Patrick Lencioni puts *Fear of Conflict* at number two in his *Five Dysfunctions of a Team*. Vigorous debate and passionate argument based on being honest about our own opinions produces the best solutions and also has the best chance of getting us on-board because we will feel listened to and taken seriously. Teams that thrash out their different views are more likely to give their all to deliver an agreed plan.

Promoting Conflict

So how do you promote productive conflict? Apart from simply being more assertive with each other, one step, according to Lencioni, is to get to know each other better in a **focused** way. Doing a personality-based test together (such as *Myers Briggs* or *Thomas International*) can help to develop trust, understanding and mutual respect. So can some honest sharing of your hopes and fears. This will make it more likely that you can have constructive and productive conflict without damage.

So, is your team too guarded or do you honestly and passionately say what you think about the issues you face?

**people as leaders
and managers.**



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