

## **PART 3: ENCOUNTERS**

# Chapter 7:

## One-to-one encounters

The chapters in this part of the book consider whole encounters with others, such as meetings, presentations, and debates. At this higher level of analysis, the amount each person says, whether in one long exposition or in smaller sections, is usually more. It is assumed that the basic skills covered in the previous part on conversational exchanges are applied throughout.

During encounters it is important to have high awareness of the situation and choose suitable tactics. The situations considered in this book are called 'Cases'.

The Cases covered in this part start with the easiest, least combative Cases and gradually work up to the hardest. Along the way the extra challenges raised by each new Case are discussed and recommendations are made.

In this chapter the Cases involve you influencing one other person. You could be in a one-to-one conversation or speaking to an audience whose members are acting as individuals and not trying to reach a group conclusion. In all these Cases there is nobody present competing to influence the listener.

In Cases 1 to 6 the other person is cooperative but in Case 7 the other person is uncooperative. Being cooperative means they have no particular reason for holding to a position that is wrong or unfair though they might still struggle to realize where they are mistaken. It does not necessarily mean they will stick to reason and fairness during the discussion. Being uncooperative means the person has a strong, unreasonable, or unfair reason to hold to their position. They will often use tricks and abuse power in the discussion.

### Case 1: Sending familiar reasoning

This Case is the easiest encounter where you are sharing your reasoning, by speaking or in writing. It is free of various additional challenges discussed in later Cases. Consequently, the recommendations here are the basis for all other Cases where you share your thinking.

In this Case the reasoning you want to present to the person to be influenced is already familiar to them but is more than just a few sentences. They might or might not agree with the reasoning and they might or might not be right. The point is that they are familiar with it.

Presenting a familiar line of reasoning does not sound useful since they already know it but you might be:

- combining information and analysis;

- reminding them that the point is relevant to the current issue;
- letting them know where you stand on some issue;
- showing your support; or
- unsure if they know the argument already.

Usually people understand a familiar argument easily and think it was presented clearly even if the presentation is not perfect. They rarely miss familiar points. Nevertheless, many of the guidelines below aim for clarity and good understanding, which is always important.

In a discussion, the other person might listen patiently, might interact to make it a conversation, or might take control, making it more of an interrogation.

The following guidelines aim to:

- put the listener/reader in a good frame of mind;
- present information in a well-organized and logical way; and
- deal with uncertainty and errors.

## Consider the other person's mind

It can be hard to understand people but, even in this apparently simple influencing situation, it can be useful to try. Consider what they know already and what they might think you are going to say. Incorrect guesses about your thinking can be a major problem.

Understanding people is not the same as having sympathy with them, empathizing, or agreeing with their reasons.

## Get permission to share reasoning

It might not be necessary to get explicit permission but if you are going to take some time to share your material then at least implicit consent is needed. They may have reasons for not wanting to hear from you, or not yet:

- They don't have energy right now.
- They are fully occupied with other things, or perhaps something tough.
- The topic is too upsetting to them.
- They don't like you.
- They have found you too hard to understand in the past.
- They are concerned that unfair, unpleasant tactics might be used.
- They think you are so wrong on so many things that listening or having a conversation would be a waste of time.

This recommendation, combined with some others for this Case, suggest an overall outline for your communication:

- Ask for permission to share reasoning.
- Ask for reason and fairness.
- A map of your main content.
- Your conclusions briefly up front if possible.
- THE MAIN CONTENT.
- An organized summary.

E.g. Imagine a meeting has been organized to present a new work rota. Everyone attending knows this so their attendance implies permission to share reasoning. The presenter might start as follows: 'OK, thanks for coming. I know the rota is key for us and we've had some hot debates about it in the past. I'll try to tackle this as fairly and as thoroughly as I can. I will start by summarising the main issues that have led us to consider tweaking the rota, then explain the new proposals, and then explain the likely impact of the proposed changes. Then we can discuss them. The main conclusion is that we need more people working on Mondays during this winter and the easiest way to do that is probably to reduce coverage for Thursdays.' In this case the organized summary is likely to be the rota itself, or a summary of the changes and their impacts.

## Ask for rationality and fairness

Listeners can be encouraged to be more patient, thoughtful, reasonable, and fair by mentioning these qualities early on. For example, you might say 'This is an important issue and I'm going to tackle it as logically as I can.' Most people view reason and fairness positively, at least when they use them, but may benefit from a well-timed reminder.

You could also give the surroundings a thoughtful, rational look with props like books, a computer, a painting of a famous scientist, or an inspiring quote in praise of rationality.

Keep the reminder gentle. People can be sensitive to any suggestion that they are irrational or would have been irrational without your reminder. Also, people sometimes react against being told what to do even when it is a good thing. Even if you are the leader in a meeting, take care. Remind people that the task is important and point out if it is a contentious topic often causing ugly arguments. Be encouraging by showing you think being rational and fair is important and a good thing for everyone, that you will be happy if that happens, and you may even reward (in some small way) those who contribute well.

Encouraging people to use reason is part of creating a zone of reasonableness around yourself.

## Have objectives and a sensible process of analysis

It is helpful to have in mind well-defined objectives for your discussion (or the current part of it) and a sensible process of analysis to accomplish those objectives. Of course things can turn out unexpectedly and changes may be needed. However, it helps to try to be clear and organized.

Typical objectives include:

- To establish the truth, such as what happened (and why), how something works, or what is causing a problem.
- To work out a desirable course of action such as a good design, policy, or plan.

For establishing the truth, one sensible process of analysis is to think of alternative possibilities and points of evidence then work out how consistent the evidence is with each possibility and so how likely each possibility is to be true.

For devising courses of action, one sensible process is to evaluate ideas against some baseline course of action (e.g. carry on as usual) and gradually build up the details of the new course of action. Occasionally there are already fully developed courses of action competing to be used. Then they must be evaluated against each other. Identifying who is affected and how is a first major step in doing this.

## Be comprehensive

Being comprehensive does not necessarily mean providing great detail. It means covering all the areas that need to be covered at the level each deserves or trying to (and showing you tried).

For example, you might be covering all the stakeholders, consequences of a proposed plan, possible plans, sources of evidence, or possible explanations.

It also means avoiding gaps in your arguments and, where possible, completing the line of reasoning from facts about the world to proposals for action.

It means covering the issues, values, and theories that other participants have in mind, either by including them as valid or showing where they are wrong.

Being comprehensive does not require discussing every possible alternative plan or explanation in detail. This would be overwhelming and inefficient. Instead, characterize the total set of possible courses of action or explanations and then say which you will cover in detail.

Being comprehensive in this sense is a fundamental strategy in influencing by reason and fairness for four reasons:

- If you miss something it might seem you were unaware of it.
- Selective coverage is a common trick.
- Participants will not be satisfied until all their main thoughts have been covered.
- If you leave a gap then people may fill it with their own guesses about your intentions.

E.g. If you only give facts from studies of the heritability of intelligence some people might imagine you favour sterilizing low IQ people. To prevent this, you could propose a policy (not sterilization) and let people know early what policy that will be (so they don't jump to the wrong conclusions). Alternatively, you could say the evidence on heritability does not directly imply any social policies and you will not argue for any.

Political campaigners tend to craft arguments that focus on the interests of their own supporters and, consequently, are much less influential with other people.

E.g. In the UK, if you discuss an economic policy for implementation by the government but do not cover the impact on poor people then many people will be dissatisfied. Concern for the poor is common in the UK, particularly among Labour voters. Similarly, if you discuss a social programme for needy people to be implemented by the government without covering the costs then many people will be dissatisfied. Wasteful spending by government and the impact on taxpayers are important concerns for many people, especially Conservative voters.

This effect and the advantages of covering the values of others are discussed in Feinberg and Willer's 2019 review of Moral Reframing literature.

## Give a map first

A potential problem with trying to be comprehensive is that there might not be time to cover everything, especially if others disrupt the exposition. (In some of the more difficult Cases covered later in this book there are people trying hard to disrupt an orderly presentation of evidence and reasoning so having a lot to cover gives them many opportunities to be disruptive.)

It can help to provide an overview of your coverage at the start by briefly indicating the process of analysis. This could mention structure, lines of reasoning, and types of evidence.

E.g. 'To help us understand current attitudes to our products among shoppers I will describe the survey we carried out last month and the responses to key questions. Then I will summarise the most important new discoveries and suggest which aspects of our strategy we should revisit as a result.'

E.g. 'This talk will cover the evidence for the evolution of species by natural selection. In the first part I will explain evidence that was available to Charles Darwin. In the second part I will explain the more recent evidence, including that from genetics.'

If you will suggest a plan then explain what you will compare your plan to and how.

E.g. 'After explaining the new plan I will compare its likely results with what we expect if we just carry on as we are.'

When previewing lines of reasoning make clear when they are separate arguments that arrive at the same conclusion. With these, if one line of reasoning is flawed then another may still establish the conclusion. If you do not make this parallelism clear then listeners may wrongly think that one flaw invalidates the conclusion.

E.g. 'Two lines of reasoning lead to the same conclusion. I will give reasons in principle and show you the results of four practical tests.'

## State the conclusions up front if you can

If you know where your explanation leads it often helps to state the conclusions early on. Sometimes people incorrectly anticipate conclusions they will not agree with and feel they are being led gradually in the wrong direction. They may interrupt and dispute points just to avoid a conclusion they anticipate. Telling them the conclusion up front should alleviate that problem. If your conclusion really is something they will disagree with then telling them up front does not make it any harder for you.

E.g. 'In this presentation I will explain recent evidence showing that individuals respond very differently to the same physical exercises for genetic reasons and argue for tailoring school fitness programmes to individuals.'

This can be particularly important when they suspect the conclusion will be a course of action they do not want to take. If you will propose an attractive course of action then let listeners know what it is very early. Say you will explain the reasons for considering and preferring it then give more detail on exactly what is involved.

## Clarify alternatives

In particular, clarify alternative courses of action and alternative explanations. It can be inefficient to describe every alternative in detail so usually it is better to characterize the set of possibilities and then focus on leading contenders.

In decision making, alternative courses of action must be compared. You cannot meaningfully say one is a good course of action without this being a comparison with some other course of action (often 'carry on as we are'). Problems arise when it is unclear what the comparator is or when it changes haphazardly.

What obscures this logic sometimes is that our potential courses of action usually include two not recognized as such:

- carrying on as we were going to before we started considering alternatives; and
- taking time to give the decision more thought and perhaps come up with other courses of action for consideration.

Another potentially confusing complexity is that some actions are mutually exclusive while others could be done together. Where a set of basic actions can be performed in combinations the set of courses of action is, logically, every viable combination of those basic actions. It is important to clarify what can be done in combination.

When discussing alternative courses of action make the alternatives clear and when making comparisons identify the comparator.

E.g. If you are chairing a meeting you might take a moment to state clearly the alternatives the meeting is currently trying to choose between.

E.g. If you want to say a course of action is 'cheaper' then you must say what it is cheaper than.

In understanding observations (such as data from a scientific study, or a puzzling anecdote) it is important to be clear about the possible explanations under consideration. Again, it may be that with more thought we could generate more possibilities. Alternative explanations become more plausible when they are more consistent with the observations than other explanations. Even an explanation that seems very unlikely and largely inconsistent with the data can emerge as the front runner if all other explanations are even less consistent with the data.

Be clear about the set of alternative explanations, especially if the set currently being considered is not comprehensive.

## Explain more in stages

Having provided a map for your exposition the next stage depends on circumstances.

If you have little time, and especially if the listener(s) takes control, you might only be able to dip into the evidence base and give samples of what is there. With more time and control you might be able to go through everything at a high level. With more time it might be possible to go through all your material fully.

Your coverage might be pre-planned or not (perhaps with interaction driving the pathway through the evidence and reasoning).

In a later encounter there might be time and appetite for yet more detail, perhaps in some areas.

Give references to more information if it exists. If you often explain aspects of a topic then you might have a website, book, or series of videos giving more information to which you can refer people.

## Use an organized summary

Another problem that comes with trying to be comprehensive is that it is often difficult to have all the material in mind and use it to reach a conclusion. To help with this, present an organized summary of the points covered, reflecting the objective and analysis process of the discussion.

Another problem is that people tend to mentally average the strength of arguments rather than combine them in a more logical way. To avoid this leading to underestimation of the consequences, present the information in a way that summarizes all the effects.

Possible formats include (1) an overall calculation that combines all the factors, (2) a table that summarizes information using key words, star ratings, numbers, icons, or colours, (3) an argument map, (4) a causal network using word bubbles connected by arrows, or (5) a mind map.

You might begin your explanation by showing the framework you are going to use without ratings, then add ratings as you go, and end with a comprehensive assessment.

## Be open about uncertainty

We usually have less information than we need to be certain. Advocates often pretend they are certain, but it is better to be open about the limitations of your information and reasoning, even as you explain them. Even when you are not sure, your evidence and arguments may still point very strongly to some conclusions and away from others. Your objective is to provide the best reasoning you can, including reasoning about uncertainty.

A common trick is to push the burden of proof on to an opponent. The atheist expects the theist to prove their god exists; the theist asks the atheist to prove the god doesn't. In legal cases, switching the burden of proof can make a huge difference to who can win a case. In null hypothesis significance testing (an approach to statistical inference) the presumption is that the null hypothesis is true unless strongly discredited.

A heavy burden of proof pressures one side to create a strong, certain case to compensate for the head start given to the other side. This does not help reach the truth.

Logically, it is better to treat all theories equally. Every theory should be weighed against all the evidence and the theories that fit best will emerge as the more likely to be true. Logically, there is no burden of proof and no value in pretending to be more certain than you should be.

## Respond appropriately to your mistakes

Acknowledge your errors and their impact because failing to is typical of unscrupulous advocates. Show how your thinking has been adjusted to the error discovered. Apologize if relevant.

## Case 2: Receiving familiar reasoning

This can range from listening to a presentation where you cannot speak to an interview where your questions direct the conversation. It also includes reading. It includes situations where you agree with the reasoning, where you disagree, and where you are not sure.

The common factor is that you are familiar with the reasoning and so find it easy to understand what is being said, even if the explanation is poor.

This is the first section about being a good listener. Some of the guidelines also apply to reading.

The guidelines aim to:

- help a speaker communicate effectively; and
- assimilate the material in a well-organized and logical way.

## Give permission to share reasoning

Explicitly or implicitly, let the other person know they have permission to share their thinking with you.

## Use questions to direct the flow if necessary

If you can ask questions and the presentation of information would be disorderly otherwise then ask questions to control the flow of information. Try for systematic coverage. Start with questions that identify all areas to cover and then cover them with more specific questions.

As usual with asking questions, reassure that you are only asking for information to gain understanding. Ask so it does not sound like an aggressive challenge or Socratic trap but do evaluate and check what you are hearing and probe potential problems. Here are examples of disrespectful and respectful wording.

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### Disrespectful

### Respectful

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What?!

I'm surprised by that. Would you like to explain the reasons behind it?

Surely you're not...

What do you mean by X?

Would you like to clarify your definition of X?

So what you're saying is <straw man/offensive misrepresentation>.

Are you saying that <accurate/optimistic interpretation>?

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## Relate the material to an objective and analysis process

If the speaker has not established a clear objective for the discussion or a suitable analysis process then it may help to suggest one. Information from the speaker can then be slotted into place and evaluated for its contribution to the analysis.

## Use an organized summary

If what is being explained is quite complex and the speaker has not provided an organized summary then it may help to draw one yourself. This might be a table or diagram. The speaker might even participate in drawing it as the conversation unfolds. An organized summary makes it possible to see more of the problem at once and not just focus on the latest piece of information or idea.

## Case 3: Sending unfamiliar reasoning

In this situation the listener (or reader) to be influenced is not familiar with the reasoning at the outset. Consequently, they have more to learn, will need to do more work, and are more likely to make mistakes in understanding and forget points. Listeners are less likely to judge your exposition clear – even if it is – and less likely to enjoy listening.

E.g. Imagine you have a new idea and want to explain it to your busy boss. You have worked out the details very carefully and know they will take at least several minutes to explain.

All the techniques suggested under Case 1 are relevant (as will always be the case) but some new techniques become important in Case 3.

The following guidelines build on those for sending familiar reasoning and aim to:

- support a rational decision by the listener/reader to attend to the new material and work hard to master it;
- present in a way that makes understanding mentally feasible despite the challenging new material;
- check that understanding was achieved; and
- encourage building long term knowledge.

## Give reasons to make the effort

Listeners must work hard and, at the outset, might not have a rational reason to do so and give permission for you to share your reasoning. They need short, easy to understand information to help them make that decision at the start. This might relate to:

- the importance of the reasoning on offer;
- the effort that went into developing it;
- the information used;
- the approach taken;
- who was involved (and their credentials perhaps);
- the objective (especially if this is shared by the listener);
- interesting ideas the listener already agrees with; and/or
- a rough estimate of the time needed to absorb the reasoning.

E.g. An email to make a suggestion to the head teacher of a primary school might start like this: 'This email is to suggest a simple way to improve safety outside the school gates at pick-up and drop-off times. I have been a parent with children at the school for three years and have been making notes on what happens each day for two weeks to clarify a particular problem. The attached document explains the background and my suggestion, which is about signage.'

E.g. An email asking for time with a senior manager might start like this: 'As you know, the new regulations on effluent come into force at the start of next year. My team and I, working with the Engineering team, have done a detailed analysis of the implications for our company and identified the two most promising ways to comply efficiently. I would like about half an hour with you to explain the main

challenges and what we suggest. The initial explanation will take about 10 minutes, leaving time for discussion. There will be a document with detail but it is not quite finished and is already over 50 pages, so I thought a personal briefing would be more efficient at this stage.'

E.g. An email to share an idea with someone campaigning for sustainable packaging might start like this: 'This email is in response to your article last month on packaging for fruit, where you suggested three alternatives to the plastics currently used. My company is working on another alternative but it is not well-known at present. The details are still a commercial secret but I could give you more information about the inputs used, the performance of the packaging we can create, and how our company is developing if you are interested. We would like more people to know about us because we are looking for funding and business partnerships.'

It is better to give this information before you start the main explanation than start without it, lose their attention and good will, then try to get them back by giving reasons for listening.

In a complex case those first reasons for listening might lead to a few minutes of conversation that then leads to a meeting to go into more depth, and then to a project to investigate and develop the reasoning further. There is progressive investment of effort justified at each stage by the judged value of going further.

Giving reasons to make the effort is especially important when the listener is stressed, time pressured, tired, lazy, a poor thinker generally, or lacks relevant knowledge. They may be reluctant or unable to think long enough or clearly enough. Consequently, they may prefer to stick with what they already know and do, go with what seems to be popular or typical, and prefer the status quo.

It is rational to weigh the cost of thinking against its benefit and a person who finds thinking harder will need to anticipate greater potential benefits to justify the effort. Differences in thinking ability can be huge and so too can legitimate differences in willingness to think. Suggestions made in earlier sections can help tackle this.

Sometimes people are reluctant to admit that the effort is too much for them and instead make excuses and even attack others verbally for 'making things complicated' or 'overthinking'. This is a trick, and a suitable response is to neutralize the trick and continue.

E.g. 'I'm afraid this problem is a bit complicated, unavoidably. But if it's not thought through properly then...'

This recommendation, combined with one other for this Case and the recommendations from Case 1, suggest an overall outline for your communication:

- Give reasons for making the effort to listen or read.
- Allay time concerns.
- Ask for permission to share reasoning.
- Ask for reason and fairness.

- A map of your main content.
- Your conclusions briefly up front if possible.
- THE MAIN CONTENT.
- An organized summary.

E.g. Suppose a senior software manager has asked a team member for some new ideas to address a serious and complex problem. The team member comes up with something that is new and, not surprisingly, complicated. The team member asks for a meeting to explain the new proposals, writing in an email: 'You asked for new ideas on the performance problem and I have been looking at this in detail for several days. I have something that should work and I have examined potential problems carefully as well as discussing the idea with Peter in Core Architecture. I would like to brief you on this new approach. It is, not surprisingly, quite complicated but I think we can go through the main logic in about 10 minutes. Perhaps we should allow at least 30 minutes for the meeting.'

In the meeting, the explanation might start with: 'The approach combines three ideas, one of which over-turns a convention we have been using for several years. This needs to be considered very carefully and I have given the possible ramifications extra focus. I will start by summarising the main issues we thought we had with this software and then explain some additional issues I have discovered. Then I will explain the three design ideas I have in mind and how they address each of the issues. Then I want to go through the convention this violates and how we can avoid resulting problems from this. I will conclude that it is probably time we dropped the convention completely and used this new approach instead more generally.' The organized summary might be a diagram showing the proposed system and summarizing the behaviour of each element.

## Allay time concerns

Listeners may worry there will be too little time for them to take in the new information. To reassure them:

- arrange for enough time;
- do not waste time with irrelevant remarks, especially at the start of a presentation;
- make sense and do not rush;
- do not creating the impression of a talk far more complex than it really will be (e.g. Do not say 'We need to understand a complex network of socio-technological and anthropological causal factors in order to ...'); and
- show them the ground to be covered at the start.

If there isn't time to cover everything then you may have to outline the ideal coverage, briefly explain the analysis you have done, then give some details on the

most important areas. Remember that you will probably give more detail in stages as discussed in Case 1.

Sometimes the information can be delivered in a series of expositions, as with a series of lectures or a television series.

## Use a gentle pace

Your exposition must allow the listener time to build new memories. At times this may be a little slower than feels comfortable and the listener may need silence to think, without you talking.

## Use plain, literal language

In written presentations use plain, descriptive headings like a textbook. Do not use intriguing but mysterious headings. Label content for easy access at any point.

Metaphorical language is less clear and often a cover for rhetorical tricks, so using it makes listeners wary. Avoid metaphorical language and flowery or old-fashioned rhetoric. Stick to words with clear, familiar meanings as far as possible and define clearly any new or unfamiliar words you need.

## Correctly sequence the exposition

Sequence your exposition so it never relies on concepts, terms, facts, or conclusions that have not already been put in place (i.e. the listener already knows them or the information has been provided *and learned* earlier in the exposition). This can be tricky because even one mistake can cause deep confusion.

## Check their understanding throughout

With unfamiliar material the risk of misunderstanding is high. When listening – especially to something difficult, new, and badly explained – it is natural to form hypotheses (i.e. make guesses) about what is being communicated and then try to test them (e.g. with questions). Sadly, people sometimes omit testing.

Occasionally I have seen people overlook innovative material. They guess the meaning of the material is something familiar and do not realize their mistake.

More testing by you, the explainer, is probably a good idea. In a written document or presentation you could use:

- statements designed to ring alarm bells in the reader's mind if they have misunderstood;
- examples or illustrations that show theory applied; or
- questions for the reader with answers revealed later.

In a conversation you can use similar tactics.

## Encourage retrieval practice

The listener or reader needs to build new knowledge to understand your reasoning and make use of it. A powerful way to build memories that last longer is to practise retrieving those memories. Encourage listeners/readers to use the knowledge you are explaining. This may be a by-product of asking questions to check understanding.

## Case 4: Receiving unfamiliar reasoning

This Case could be anything from a presentation where you must listen without speaking to an interview you control by asking questions. You might agree with the speaker, disagree, or be unsure.

The common factor is that a lot of the reasoning is unfamiliar to you, and so understanding it is hard work with higher risk of misunderstanding and overlooking errors in the reasoning.

All the guidelines for receiving familiar reasoning in Case 2 apply (often more strongly) along with the following further guidelines.

These guidelines aim to:

- check that the effort is likely to be worthwhile;
- make learning mentally feasible despite the challenging new material;
- check that you are understanding correctly; and
- build knowledge that lasts as long as needed.

## Check the likely value

Because taking in unfamiliar reasoning, especially if there is a lot of it, is time consuming and tiring, you are entitled to check it will be worth the effort. What will you learn? How long is it likely to take? Is the explanation likely to be clear and easy to follow or chaotic and confusing?

Review any information already available (e.g. publicity for a lecture, clarity of previous explanations from the same person or in the same domain) and consider asking questions that will help you assess the likely value.

## Prepare if possible

Mental preparation can make the listening or reading much easier. If you can read about a topic before listening to someone talking about it then that could make the difference between a useful talk and you being hopelessly confused.

Check in advance for new terminology, new notation, the overall conclusions, and the main topics because all these will make listening and understanding easier.

## Gain the time you need

During the interaction try to get the time you need to take in the new material. You may be able to pause the conversation briefly to allow you to think, ask for a point to be repeated, or ask for a jump in the argument to be explained.

## Pay attention to detail

When new reasoning is presented, it is common to be confused by missing key details. Explanations may hinge on subtle distinctions between similar terms, tiny differences in notation, or subtle logical distinctions.

Definitions are almost always worth special attention to detail.

E.g. You might think an adult of working age would either be employed or unemployed. However, official statistics on employment distinguish a further category: those not participating in employment (i.e. do not want a job).

E.g. During 2020 in the UK, statistics were released daily showing how many people had died from COVID-19. Later it emerged that this was in fact the number of people who had died and at any time previously tested positive for the virus, which included a growing number of people who had died from something else. The definition was revised along with the numbers.

E.g. In mathematics there will usually be a big difference between  $x$  and  $x$ , between  $s$  and  $\hat{s}$ , and between  $y$  and  $Y$ .

E.g. When reading about a government's financial problems you will be confused if you do not know that a government's debt is different to its deficit, but government debt is the same as national debt and sovereign debt.

E.g. In UK tax rules there is a distinction between a good that has no Value Added Tax (VAT) added to its sales price because it is zero rated and one that has no VAT added because it is outside the scope of VAT.

## Check your understanding throughout

With unfamiliar material the risk of misunderstanding is usually high. You may think you know what was intended even if the words were ambiguous, incorrect, or meaningless.

Take care to ask for clarification without being insulting.

E.g. Imagine someone says 'Because women are smaller and lighter than men they have an advantage in horse riding competitions.' Almost certainly they mean women are *usually* smaller than men, not that all women are smaller than all men and so all women have an advantage over all men in horse riding competitions. The wrong way to eliminate the slight ambiguity would be to ask 'So are you saying women are always smaller and lighter than men?' Picking this unlikely interpretation as the most likely tells the speaker you think they are stupid and is insulting. Instead, if you even need to check then a better question would be 'Can I just check? You're saying that women are usually smaller and lighter than men, not always, and so usually have an advantage. Yes?'

## Practise retrieval

With unfamiliar material listening is not enough. You must also learn, which requires building memories. A powerful way to do that is to recall what you have heard, seen, or read. Take some time soon after receiving the new reasoning to recall as much of it as you can, in detail, because this will make those memories accessible to you for much longer.

## Case 5: Correcting misconceptions

The problems of sending unfamiliar reasoning are magnified if the listener or reader begins with misconceptions. These could include:

- incorrect or just different use of terms;
- beliefs that are factually incorrect; or
- incorrect reasoning previously accepted as logical.

This Case concerns isolated misconceptions held by people with no real objection to learning the truth. They do not resist strongly and, instead, actively participate in correcting their misconception.

A misconception may be due to factually incorrect knowledge, perhaps from reading about research or theories later shown to be wrong.

E.g. Many people still think the usual cause of stomach ulcers is stress because this was the accepted view until it was found to be the bacterium *Helicobacter pylori*. This discovery was made in 1982 by Robin Warren and Barry J Marshall, two Australian scientists.

Alternatively, a misconception may be due to an understandable intuition.

E.g. Many people think that if you throw a ball up into the air it has a force pushing it upwards after it has left your hand until the moment when it stops rising and starts to fall. This understandable intuition is wrong. The upwards force stops when the ball leaves your hand. After that the only forces acting on the ball are air resistance and gravity, both downwards, causing deceleration.

Some misconceptions are so common that people just absorb them as generally accepted knowledge.

E.g. The end of the second millennium was thought by many to be at midnight on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1999. This mistake was so common that people who knew the truth had to shut up and put up with it. The first year AD (or CE if you prefer) was year number 1 and, therefore, the end of the second millennium was 31<sup>st</sup> December 2000 (i.e. the end of the 2000<sup>th</sup> year).

Most misconceptions you tackle will be common ones you have already identified in a population and then suspect are held by an individual.

In addition to previous guidelines here are some to tackle these relatively straightforward misconceptions.

The guidelines aim to:

- prepare the other person for the potentially uncomfortable experience of having a misconception revealed;
- correct the misconception; and
- help the other person assimilate the correction and embed it into their thinking permanently.

## Test for the misconception

People with misconceptions have often heard correct explanations without changing their view and may have rationalizations that protect their incorrect belief. So it is important to highlight the misconception as clearly as possible. Test that it is present, perhaps with questions. This also alerts the listener.

This recommendation, combined with some others for this Case and the recommendations of Case 1, suggests an overall outline for your communication:

- Test for the misconception.
- Ask for permission to correct the misconception.
- Explain why the misconception is common, which justifies asking for reason.
- A map of your main content.
- Tackle the main factual error.
- Explore related misconceptions and the implications of the correct information.
- An organized summary, probably focusing on the implications.

E.g. Suppose that a team is planning an away day to help a busy team think through some difficult strategy choices. New ideas are needed. One team member is keen to 'brainstorm' to generate the ideas and imagines all 23 team members together just throwing in ideas, the crazier the better.

This looks like the common misconception of thinking that large meetings are good for generating new ideas. In fact, many scientific tests have shown that people are more distracted than inspired by having others making suggestions in one big group.

One of the team asks, 'Are you thinking that this style of meeting is good for generating new ideas?' The large-meeting enthusiast agrees. The response is 'Perhaps surprisingly, they are not ideal and I wonder if you would mind me explaining what is now known about organizing meetings to generate ideas?' The enthusiast agrees cautiously. The explanation goes like this: 'A lot of people think that this kind of brainstorming is good for generating new ideas. It goes back to a guy called Alex Osborn who popularized the idea in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It does seem to make sense. People are trying to generate new ideas and they get to hear ideas from other people that might inspire them. However, research into this has found that any inspiring effect does not compensate for the time lost waiting

for others speak and the distraction. Better results are achieved with much smaller groups, more writing, and preparing people in the right way.' There is some discussion of this information and alternative meeting formats are considered with this in mind.

## Get permission to tackle it

Since discovering a mistake in your thinking can feel unpleasant it often helps to get explicit permission before tackling a misconception, unless you already have a relationship that permits correcting misconceptions. This is particularly so with misconceptions based on understandable intuitions and widespread misunderstandings.

E.g. The YouTube channel Veritasium (2011) reported that viewers learn more from videos on physics that carefully target and debunk their misconceptions than from videos that simply explain the correct view. However, viewers like debunking videos less.

People are less likely to be sensitive over beliefs based on superseded published evidence. They may even be eager to acquire the latest knowledge.

## Explain why the misconception is common

People are also less likely to be unhappy if you can give a reason for a misconception being widespread.

E.g. Many people think body language conveys much more information than words. To prepare the way for explaining that this is false, you could say that the claim that only 7% of our meaning is conveyed by our words is often made in advice on public speaking and comes from a longstanding misinterpretation of two very limited studies published in 1967 (Mehrabian and Ferris, 1967, and Mehrabian and Wiener, 1967). To then debunk the idea, you could suggest people imagine watching a newsreader saying the news with the sound switched off. We would have little idea of the details being explained. You could also explain that the 1967 studies showed only that when what someone says about their feelings conflicts with the way they say it, others usually believe the body language.

## Tackle the main factual error

A misconception may be surrounded by other linked misconceptions. (This chapter is only concerned with situations where this is a small effect.)

Tackle the main factual error with evidence and explanations to secure the point before considering ramifications.

## Give time

The person with the misconception will often need time to process the new information. They must memorize the new ideas and search for implications that may affect other beliefs they have. Be patient and help if you can.

## Help uncover implications

If you know about typical related misconceptions then you may be able to help the person, gently, think through the ramifications.

E.g. If someone has genuinely believed that only 7% of their meaning when they speak is conveyed by their words then they may have over-prioritized body language and paid too little attention to clear explanation and speech. Body language still matters (especially when feelings are the topic) but needs to be consistent with what is said. These are points that could be carefully explored after initial debunking.

## Encourage practice of new thinking

Misconceptions dispelled often return. People forget what they have learned and go back to believing what they previously believed. The most effective way to secure the new memory is to practise retrieving it. Give people the opportunity and encouragement to do that. Perhaps give them a task that requires them to (1) recall the correct understanding and (2) list related misconceptions or implications.

## Case 6: Behaviour change

The extra challenge in this Case is that the other person might end up changing their behaviour. Although this Case is for behaviour change that will not be resisted for difficult reasons (e.g. addiction, vested interests, ideology), almost all behaviour changes require more thought and adjustment than is usually recognized. We must work out exactly how to behave instead and often make arrangements such as changing our schedule, changing agreements with other people, learning skills, or buying things we will need.

These guidelines aim to:

- establish that discussing behaviour change is justified;
- develop a plan for a potential behaviour change; and
- choose whether to adopt the plan.

## Understand your basis for discussing behaviour

Understanding your basis for discussing another person's behaviour is important when seeking their permission to share your reasoning (i.e. talk to them about it).

When using reason and fairness it is rarely appropriate to give orders. Instead we share thinking, give information and explanations, and make suggestions or recommendations.

Nevertheless, people can be reluctant to discuss their behaviour. If they say it is a matter for them alone you must be clear why it is fair to raise the topic.

Out of care for the other person, we might want to try to develop a behaviour that is better for them. A family member or friend might do this. Alternatively, the other

person's behaviour might be causing problems for us or someone we care about, in which case we are entitled to at least let them know. Or a change might be beneficial for both sides, or for some other person.

E.g. Imagine a friend at college has started smoking cannabis. You have noticed the smell and they have been absent from classes more and more often. You are concerned and wonder if you should talk to them about it but worry that they will say it is their personal choice and nobody else's business. However, you would be acting as a friend if you alerted them to the pattern in their behaviour and its possible consequences, and suggested they stop or get professional help. You would also be justified as a citizen in raising their behaviour because it is harming others too, or could. The friend is wasting a place on an educational course. They are damaging their lungs and possibly causing memory problems that will make them less productive later and more likely to consume healthcare resources. Since they are lighting up in a house shared by other people and owned by someone else, they are increasing the risk of a fire that affects others. In paying for the cannabis, they are helping to fund an industry that is doing its best to expand, which would harm more and more people. Because smoking cannabis is not just a personal matter, other citizens can fairly raise it.

Public servants often intervene in the interests of other citizens.

E.g. It is the personal responsibility of every citizen to obey the law, including not committing murder, theft, burglary, or robbery. However, some people still commit these crimes and we are grateful to police forces and the justice system, organized by the government we have elected, who tackle this problem.

## Check if the prospects justify exploration

Establish whether the prospects for a worthwhile behaviour change justify the effort required to work out that behaviour change in sufficient practical detail, decide to go ahead, and put the new behaviour in place. (Putting it in place means getting everything arranged, not actually doing the new behaviour.)

This initial decision can be made on the basis of high-level considerations e.g.:

- How the change has helped others.
- The reputation of the improvement principle behind the change (e.g. the good reputation of prevention rather than cure, prioritization, and reducing errors).
- The prospects based on first principles (e.g. of physics).
- The authority of a person or organization asking for the change.
- A penalty that will be imposed if the behaviour change does not happen.

## Help develop a plan

A more reliable decision on whether to go ahead with a new behaviour can be made with a more detailed design for the new behaviour and arrangements to put it in place. Usually, the more time we spend thinking about these the more detailed and

refined our design. This usually makes the new behaviour more attractive, though sometimes awkward practicalities are found that make it less attractive.

Either way, it is better to think in detail before deciding finally whether to go ahead with change.

You may already have a detailed plan to offer, but usually at least some interaction is needed to tailor this to the other person's circumstances. They may need time to learn the new plan or new skills. They might do this during your conversation, during a later encounter, or independently.

## Help evaluate and choose

With a more detailed plan of action devised, it is possible to take the final decision on whether to go ahead with the new behaviour. The choice will usually be between carrying on as now or changing to the newly developed alternative behaviour, having taken the necessary steps to put it in place.

## Case 7: An uncooperative person

This Case is about one-to-one encounters where the other person has a strong personal reason for being unreasonable and for aiming to get their way even though it is not fair. As a one-to-one encounter this is simpler than encounters involving more people but the chance of positive progress is still tiny.

Typical reasons for resisting reason and fairness are:

- A vested interest (i.e. an illegitimate interest) such as financial gain for a person who should take a decision independently of their personal interests (e.g. a politician, manager, jury member).
- A stubborn belief in a particular way of getting something done, perhaps because it is consistent with a more general preferred way of acting.
- An addiction, a psychological compulsion such as an eating disorder or hand washing problem, or a phobia.
- An unreasonable ideology (e.g. a religion, an unreasonable political ideology), usually linked with a powerful desire to belong to a group of fellow believers.

Motivations like this can create extreme sensitivity to anything that threatens the person's preferred position or behaviour, along with well-developed defences that include rationalizations and deflections.

E.g. I once exchanged emails with a dedicated beer drinker who told me he drank 3 or 4 pints of beer most days and that this was reasonable. He dismissed the National Health Service (NHS) recommendations as influenced by 'partisan abolitionists' and based on nothing much. (The NHS recommendation is to drink no more than 14 units of alcohol per week, not the 44 units he was drinking, and it is now known that there is no safe level of alcohol consumption.) He suggested that going to a pub to drink is good because, compared to drinking at home, you get more social contact and some useful exercise if you walk there. Although I did

not specifically ask him to change his drinking behaviour, I did outline the harms done by drinkers to other people and society in general. He said this 'smacked of preaching'. In other respects this person is a gentleman and very reasonable but when the topic is his addiction his behaviour changes and no rationalization or deflection is too absurd.

You may find your reasoning is having no effect because of a connection to their problem behaviour they spotted long before anyone else. They may also be persistent and imaginative in generating arguments that protect and promote their problem behaviour.

E.g. A person with an eating disorder may offer to cook for everyone. This seemingly generous act gives them control of the ingredients and portion size for their meal and the opportunity to make their preferred serving look like everyone else's.

They may also benefit from learning tricks already circulating in our society, having been devised by others with similar motives.

E.g. The tradition of buying 'a round' of drinks strongly supports alcohol consumption. It is hard to refuse a free drink and, once you have accepted one, tradition demands that everyone in the group buys a round for everyone else. That initial free drink becomes a social mechanism for pushing everyone, including yourself, to have several more drinks.

People hiding a powerful vested interest may have gone to considerable lengths and involved others by conspiracy or coercion. What they are doing might be unethical or even illegal and, if it was revealed, they could be in serious trouble.

Finally, people with a powerful personal reason for not cooperating may become hostile towards anyone they see as a threat. They may be difficult, dismissive, impatient, unpleasant, or unwelcoming even without being unnecessarily antagonized.

The consequence of all this is that positive progress is unlikely. However, there are some tactics that can be tried before resorting to fair use of a lot of power (if available).

Your best response depends on several factors. If the discussion is just an opportunity to influence each other as to truth, with no course of action considered, then the stakes are low and the situation relatively simple. You could leave the discussion and do something else or continue. You might continue if it would be rude to leave, you want to practise difficult conversations, or you think there still might be progress.

If the discussion is about a course of action then your options could be:

- Continue with reason and fairness in the hope of an improvement in the discussion.
- Use power fairly to try for a deal now.
- Pull out now and at a future encounter try for a better outcome by reason and fairness or by making a deal with power.

- Pull out now with no deal and do not try again.

The following guidelines aim to:

- encourage uncooperative people to use reason despite their apparent reluctance;
- impose a fair outcome if possible; and
- otherwise get the best outcome possible under the difficult circumstances.

## Understand the situation and choose wisely

Choosing the best response to complete lack of cooperation could be crucial to results. Before and during the encounter think clearly about the situation, considering these points:

- **The available opportunities:** Is the discussion about what is true or what should be done? Is there an opportunity to agree a helpful course of action (anything from what to say in a sensitive document to starting a massive civil engineering project)?
- **The chance of progress in this encounter:** Is this person completely uncooperative or is there still some hope of progress? Are they selfish or mistaken? When they have had a chance to think after this encounter might they come back to the next with a different position?
- **Whether it is possible to stop with nothing resolved and have another encounter in future:** Some encounters do not have this option. An agreement must be made now or not at all.
- **The best alternative to reaching no resolution:** If a course of action is not agreed, what is the best that can be done otherwise? This is crucial to knowing whether an agreement in this discussion is progress.
- **What the other person most wants and can most easily give:** If it comes to negotiation, what can they concede easily and what will they most want?
- **What you want and can most easily give:** Again, in a negotiation what can you concede easily and what do you most want? The best combinations are points they want that you can easily concede and points you want that they can easily concede.
- **Who might attend future encounters:** The problem in the encounter is that the other participant is uncooperative. Could that be different in future encounters? Are there cooperative people who are not present now who might join next time and make a big difference to the discussion? Would having others to observe make the uncooperative person listen better?
- **How power is arranged now and might change over time:** Do you have enough power to impose a fair resolution if necessary? If not, what power do you have, what do they have, and how will that change in future? For example, when

construction companies bid for projects, they usually have less power than the winner will have once the project is underway and everyone is committed.

- **How other conditions might change for future encounters:** Will the person have more time to think? Might something happen to shake up their thinking before the next encounter?

With these points in mind, choose carefully how to proceed.

## Mention others

People being uncooperative and selfish tend to forget about others. In a one-to-one encounter they may be aware of you but forget about others and how they would view the selfish behaviour. Remind the selfish person of other people and their likely reactions. This is particularly useful where the uncooperative person has more power than you (e.g. is your boss at work).

E.g. Imagine you are a consultant in a meeting with your boss about how to charge for some work. Your boss tells you a 25% discount on standard daily rates has been agreed with the client and then says 'What shall we say our standard rates are?' He is suggesting cheating the client. You reply 'We should tell them our standard rates are what they actually are. Imagine if they found out we had done anything else.' Your boss goes quiet for a moment then changes the subject. The idea of cheating is dead.

## Continue with reason and fairness anyway

Sometimes it is worth continuing with influence by reason and fairness even though it looks like a waste of time. If the end result is valuable enough then even a tiny chance of success may be enough.

If you could somehow speak to 1,000 seemingly uncooperative people you would probably find that some, perhaps just a few, are open to reason and respond to fairness to some extent. Perhaps they have a vested interest but it is not so pressing and the implications for other people are a revelation for them. Perhaps their addiction is something they have been consciously battling and they are open to help with it. Perhaps their faith in an ideology has recently been shaken or has been weakening for years.

Some people have a poor understanding of the impact of their actions on others and themselves. When you discuss the practical impacts for everyone affected, including the uncooperative person, you might be able to draw out knock-on implications or use survey data to quantify effects that contradict the impression given by a striking example.

E.g. People who smoke are likely to be reassured by the example of a smoker in their 80s. That one example seems to show that you can smoke and still live a long life. You can, but statistics show the odds are poor.

Acknowledge practical problems, especially as-yet unsolved problems, as hurdles to clear but do not accept 'psychological' or 'emotional' reasons for delay or not changing. These are to be cleared away by thinking.

Tackle obvious false dichotomies and other illogical excuses. For example, with a committed drinker:

- **Excuse:** 'If I don't go to the pub I won't see my friends.'  
**Response:** 'You can go to the pub without drinking booze, see other friends, or make new friends.'
- **Excuse:** 'But I enjoy beer.'  
**Response:** 'You can enjoy other drinks too, or other activities that you do to relax with friends. It's not beer or nothing.'
- **Excuse:** 'But walking to the pub is my only exercise.'  
**Response:** 'It doesn't have to be. Go to the pub without boozing, or walk somewhere else, or both.'

It may not be possible to get through the entire process of developing alternative behaviours and evaluating the new plan. Respond to fierce complaints with neutralization and continuation. For example:

- **Complaint:** 'Don't tell me what to do!'  
**Response:** 'I'm not ordering you because I don't have the authority. But I can make recommendations to you if it is for your benefit, and I can ask you to do things if your behaviour is affecting me or others.'
- **Complaint:** 'Don't preach at me!'  
**Response:** 'I'm not preaching; religion is not involved. I'm talking about the effects of your behaviour.'
- **Complaint:** 'Stop moralizing!'  
**Response:** 'I'm not moralizing. I'm talking about the effects of your behaviour.'
- **Complaint:** 'Don't lecture me!'  
**Response:** 'I'm telling you about the consequences of your actions.'

These complaints are trying to stop you tackling the issue. The tactic is to say that the way you are talking is making it hard for them to be open to change; if you would only stop talking about it then they would be able to change. Obviously, if you drop the issue, it is much more likely that they will happily stop thinking about it and make no change whatsoever. At some point you will need to stop but pushing through initial resistance may be necessary.

It is legitimate to want someone who is doing something harmful to others to stop, to ask them to stop, and to give reasons why you are asking. They might reasonably think they are doing no harm and something subtle they do avoids the harm. There might be some uncertainty and a worthwhile discussion to be had.

You might also want someone to change purely for their own benefit. Here they are entitled to refuse the advice and avoid the conversation.

## Discuss what is best for them

People who want more than is fair and do not care much about the interests of others may still be willing to discuss alternative ways to get what they want. Sometimes they can be interested in proposals that are in their interests. At other times they are not open to alternatives and just fix on a particular plan.

Sometimes a person driven by a personal motive to be uncooperative has wrongly decided that a particular conclusion or course of action is best for them. A better alternative exists and would be better for others too, so fairer.

Talking to them about how their preferred option is bad for others might be useless but talking about how an alternative could be better for them might be influential. This is another technique that is particularly useful when the other person has more power than you.

E.g. Imagine a property developer wants to build a block of flats in a conservation area (i.e. somewhere that new developments are given special scrutiny to make sure that they do not damage the character of the area). The design she submits for planning permission is not sensitive to the local architecture and is rejected. It looks nothing like the detached Victorian homes along the rest of the road. She tries again, reluctantly submitting plans for a slightly smaller block, but still with no attempt to match the look of surrounding buildings. Again, her application is rejected but this time a local architect who has been arguing against her ugly developments suggests a different scheme. The alternative looks like the existing Victorian buildings but cleverly divides into larger flats. Although construction cost would be higher and there would be slightly fewer flats they would sell for more and the owners would be more similar financially to other residents in the road. The total returns for the developer would be about the same but gaining permission would be much easier. The developer is still angry but, fearing more rejections, begins to prefer the alternative approach.

E.g. Suppose a company has been providing a service for many years in a particular way that is somewhat flawed. An employee realizes this and devises a better alternative. She prepares to talk to the person in charge of the service. If she talks mostly about the problems, pointing to customers who were unhappy, she might get the defensive responses the company has been using to placate unhappy customers for years. Instead, if she focuses on the design details of her new approach and mentions how the company can expand its service, gain more revenue, or cut costs then this may bypass the usual defensiveness.

Often there will be a better way because of the logic of enlightened self-interest. Being cooperative and fair instead of uncooperative and selfish is usually better for everyone in the long run.

E.g. Imagine a company has its accounts audited and the auditors wrongly conclude that there is a large error in the accounts. The whole problem is handled badly and ends with bitter litigation. Eventually the auditors are found to have failed and the Chief Finance Officer (CFO) is exonerated. Later, the CFO feels so angry about it that he develops a general distrust of auditors and starts to research their legal powers and limitations. He puts videos online about how to

avoid answering questions and giving auditors information. People follow his advice and he gets positive feedback from some others who have had a hard time from auditors (though often for good reason).

Unfortunately, most people who follow his advice find it backfires badly. Auditors naturally find the uncooperative, negative attitude extremely suspicious and increase their requests for information instead of backing off. Eventually these requests are escalated to the top of companies where an executive is legally obliged to answer questions and angrily demands to know why these routine issues are requiring senior attention. The advice in the videos is harming the very people it is supposed to help. Bringing this to the attention of the CFO would be a good way to encourage him to take the videos down and promote cooperative relationships instead.

When a person is fighting on behalf of another person or group, they may be less aware of when their approach is counter productive.

E.g. Imagine a campaigner is arguing for a costly and unfairly discriminatory new scheme to increase the proportion of people of a particular demographic group that go to university. They do not care about the unfairness and aggressively promote their scheme.

The scheme probably will get more people from that demographic group going to university but almost none of the extra students will successfully complete respected courses at leading universities. Instead, almost all will struggle at bottom tier universities, take on a student debt, miss three years of potential earnings, and not improve their employability. In short, most would be better off not going to university. This issue can be pointed out safely by starting with the interests of the demographic group, despite the campaigner's aggressive approach.

## Point out that manipulation harms credibility

Tricks and abuses of power harm credibility and explaining this can encourage uncooperative people to behave slightly better. Do not say directly that the uncooperative person is using a trick or abusing power; just point out when something they are doing is likely to backfire.

E.g. 'I know you are determined to help poor people but the statistics you have just shown us are plainly unreliable for the reasons I explained. If you use them without acknowledging the problems then you damage the credibility of your argument. How about ...'

If your objective was to win an argument then this would be a bad tactic because it helps the other side. However, since your objective is influence, this is a good tactic that improves the quality of the discussion and guides the other person to use reason rather than get lost in their own lies and motivated mistakes. They might even realise they have misunderstood.

## Impose a fair outcome if you can

If it becomes clear that reason and fairness will not prevail in the conversation and you have sufficient legitimate power then switch to explicit use of that power to impose a fair outcome. For example:

- 'It looks like no new facts or insights are likely to be gained by further discussion so it's time for me to make up my mind.'
- 'It seems to me that this discussion is not producing any insights or progress so let me be quite clear. This project will get no practical support from me unless the requirements I have explained are met.'
- 'Since it's obvious we are not going to get further by discussion I think we should go to a third marker now.'

Your power moves might include:

- Impose something, because you have the power (e.g. just refuse to give them money they want).
- Refer the matter for arbitration.
- Call in law enforcement, forum moderators, or similar.
- Delay for a better time with more power.

## Negotiate

If you need to agree a course of action and do not have power to impose a fair one then you may still have enough power to negotiate. Understanding the situation is crucial, as discussed above.

Remind them of what you provide and how that might depend on what is agreed.

E.g. 'I understand you are very keen to get this document finished, but I am also working on two other documents for you and one for Mr Giles. If I put your urgent document first, I may have to delay your other documents or tell Mr Giles that you insisted on priority.'

E.g. 'I am fed up with the smell of your cigarettes in the flat and the butts dropped in the garden. Sharing this flat involves a lot of cooperation and it's much easier if we are considerate to each other over use of the kitchen and bathroom in particular.'

Explore priorities. Search for concessions they can easily make that are valuable to you and concessions you can easily make that are valuable to them. These are crucial to bargaining. What would be going too far and trigger sanctions?

Be open to a variety of possible gains and losses, and search for creative solutions that do more than just balance the interests of both sides.

## Exit the conversation

In addition to sparing yourself wasted time and frustration, exiting the conversation may reduce the opportunities for cheats to wheedle for more or make their demands seem reasonable with tricks. It may be appropriate to cut them off just after their worst behaviour and highlight their vested interests.