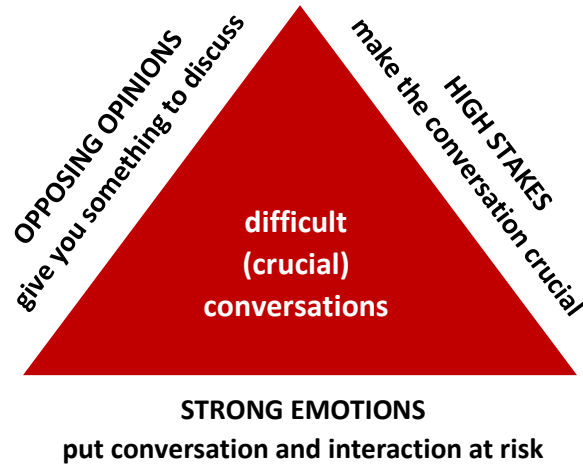


Holding Crucial Conversations

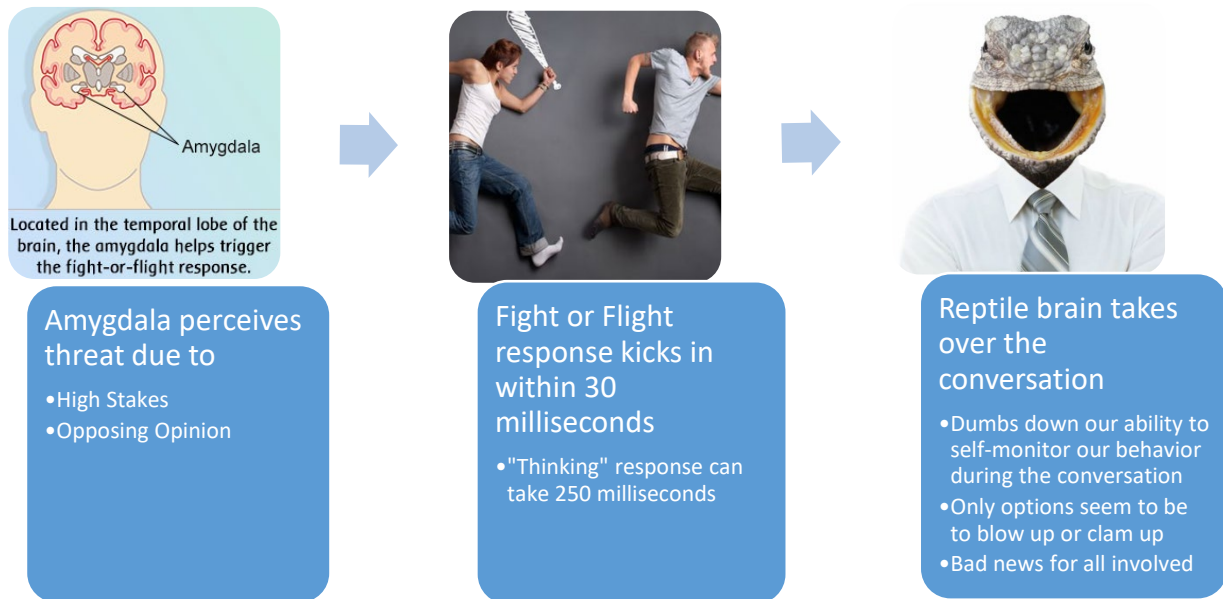
Marie Wehrung – Talent and Organizational Development – Rice University

April 2022

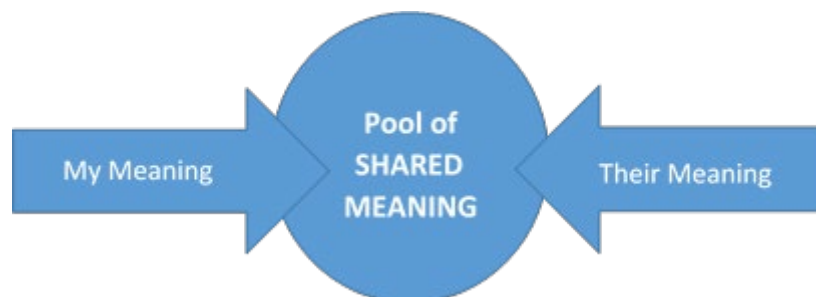
What makes a conversation difficult . . . or crucial? Three elements:



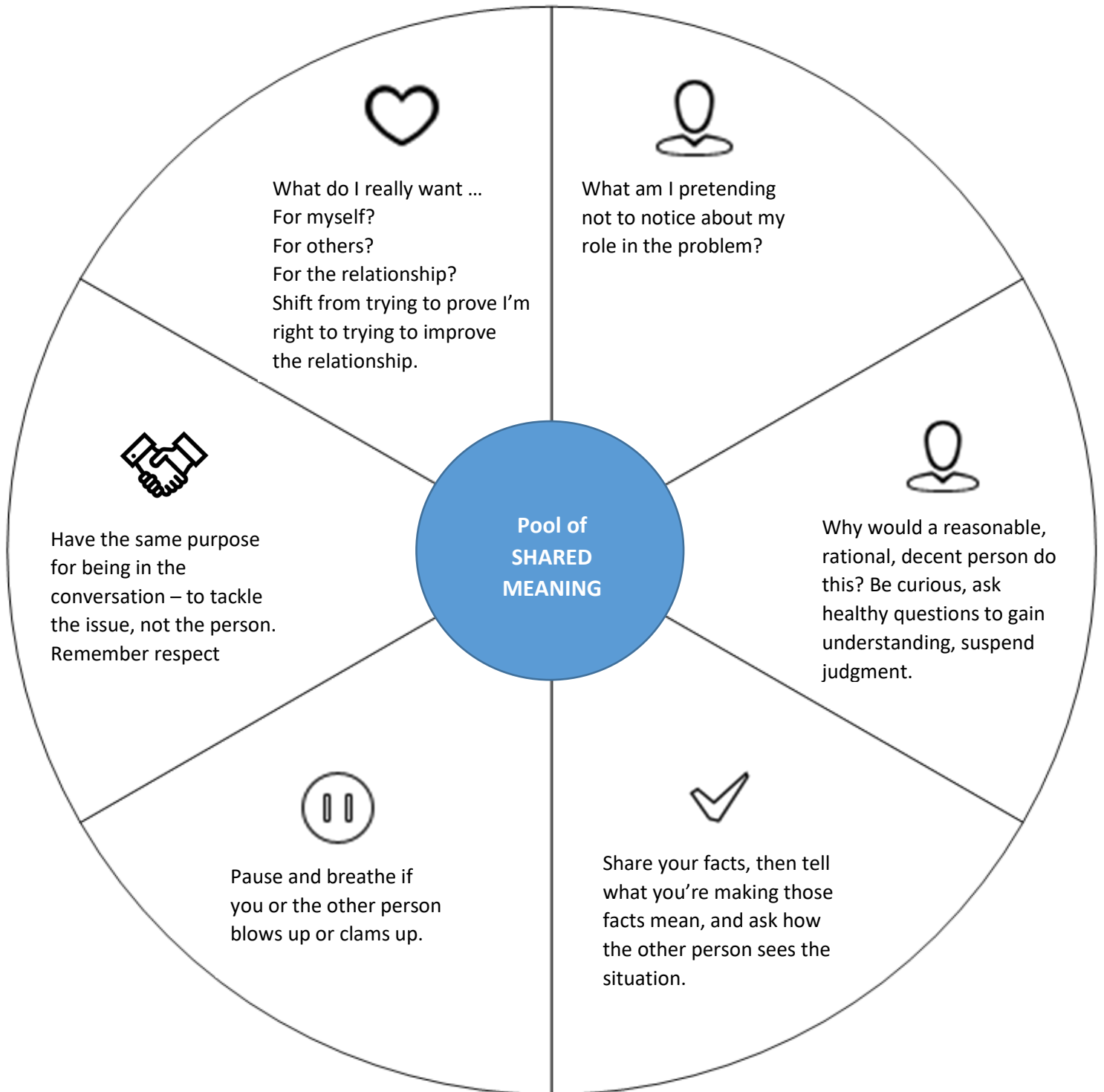
Blame physiology.



The solution? Manage our emotions to make it safe to be in, and contribute to, the conversation.



When taking on these high stakes, difficult conversations, it's important to ensure everyone's meaning gets into the pool – that everyone in the conversation understands and is understood by one another. To do that, consider ...



By asking yourself these questions, starting with your facts, and pausing when someone isn't feeling safe (you'll know this because you and/or the other person will "blow up" or "clam up"), you'll engage the thinking center of the brain and move away from the emotional fight or flight response. This will help you make it safe for everyone to participate in the conversation, contribute meaning to the pool, have a conversation that's honest AND respectful, and gets results.

One way to manage those emotions? “Master My Stories”

- Stories color our interactions with others (and often not in a positive way)
- We see or hear something, then act out, but miss a couple of steps that happen with lightning speed (and affect how we act)
- We want to learn to retrace our “path to action”
 - **See** or **Hear** something
 - **Tell a Story** about what just happened
 - **Generate a Feeling** based on our story about what just happened
 - **Act**



What do you do when someone:

- suddenly pulls in front of you in a lane of traffic?
- stands on the side of the road, holding a sign asking for food or money?
- who identifies with a different political party than you do starts talking about politics?

It’s your turn. What’s a situation you experienced recently (perhaps even today)?

How can you retrace YOUR path to action, and create a different path that leads to different actions?

What you Saw or Heard:	
The Story you told yourself	A DIFFERENT Story you could have told yourself
The Feelings you experienced because of that Story	DIFFERENT Feelings you might have experienced with a Different Story
Your Actions	DIFFERENT Actions you might have taken because of Different Feelings from a Different Story

Crucial Conversations Scenarios

Using these new tools, how might you plan to approach a Crucial Conversation in the following situations?

- One or two students are late during an excursion and make everyone else wait for them on the bus
- One or more students are not respecting the language pledge, and keep using English to interact with classmates instead of sticking to the target language
- You're not getting enough food for breakfast or dinner from your local family
- Your host family has a younger child who wants to play with your phone and be with you, but you need more privacy
- You notice that some students are forming groups and not including everyone in them
- You have a strong personality, and are having a hard time dealing with a fellow student who has some social anxiety
- You have some social anxiety, and are having a hard time dealing with a fellow student who has a strong personality
- You're having trouble getting along with someone during the program

Step 1: Consider whether you'd want / be willing to engage in a Crucial Conversation. Think about...

How do any of these situations make you feel?

Why does it matter whether or not you hold these conversations?

What could happen if you engage the person(s) in the Crucial Conversation?

What could happen if you don't engage the person(s) in the Crucial Conversation?

Step 2: If you choose to engage in a Crucial Conversation, use the *Worksheet to Plan Out a Crucial Conversation* to guide you...preferably BEFORE you open your mouth!

Worksheet to Plan Out a Crucial Conversation

with _____

about _____



What do I really want:

For myself?

For the other person?

For the relationship?

For the department?

What could I say to make what I really want clear?



What stories am I telling myself about the situation or the person?

What am I pretending not to notice about my role in the problem?

Why would a reasonable, rational, decent person do this?



What are the facts? What am I making the facts mean? What will I say to ask for the other person's input?

The Facts	My Interpretation	What I'll Ask

Worksheet to Plan Out a Crucial Conversation

with _____

about _____



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