

The Four Options Model:

A Tool for Conflict Resolution Specialists and Other Leaders

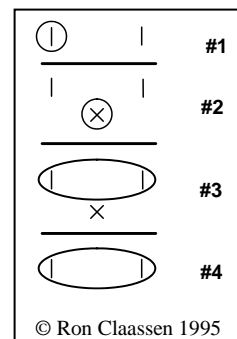
By Ron Claassen

Introduction

A model, like a mathematical formula or proof, is most helpful when it is simple yet represents a complex reality. You can tell if a model is valuable by noticing if people point to it as they talk and attempt to communicate. A model makes it possible to communicate with fewer words and at the same time with greater clarity. A model can help one think, analyze, and decide about something in new ways. A good model can be understood and utilized at many different levels of complexity. A good model stimulates dialogue which often leads to new insights. Those who have used the "Four Options Model" confirm all of these.

Understanding the Model

The model describes four basic response options and an infinite number of variations illustrated by the I's, X's, and circles or ovals and by the lines that separate them. While the Model looks like it applies to just two party conflicts, each "I" may represent any number of persons.



Definitions

The "I's" represent the people in the conflict.

The "X's" represent *outside* people (or perhaps outside objective criteria) who become involved in the conflict but are initially not part of the conflict.

The circle or oval is around the one(s) who have the ability (for some reason) to make the decision or control the situation. The circle relates to power.

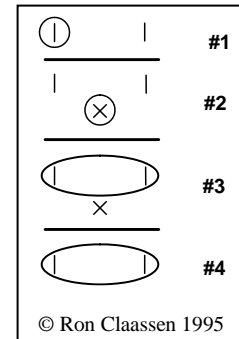
The lines between the options serve the purpose of helping clarify that, although there is a continuum, crossing the line indicates that the decision-maker(s) have changed.

The continuum between lines represents the infinite variety of nuances within each option.

Each "I" may represent any number of people. Each "X" may also represent more than one person. (Some like to add "I's" and "X's" but I generally do not.)

Describing Each Option

Option #1 is where the "I" who is in the circle has the ability (for some reason) to control the situation or decision and the other "I" goes along (willingly or resenting having the other in control). The ability to control the situation is often based on positional power that may or may not be seen as giving legitimate authority to the "I" in the circle to make decisions for, or in some other way control the "I" outside the circle. Other factors influencing the ability of an "I" to control the situation or decision may, or may not, include a



high degree of respect, the ability to threaten and hurt another (perhaps with a weapon), relative age, level of education, race, substantial physical size difference, verbal advantage, gender, race, or any other power factor.

Examples of #1:

Police officer making an arrest.

A respected elder making a decision for a group.

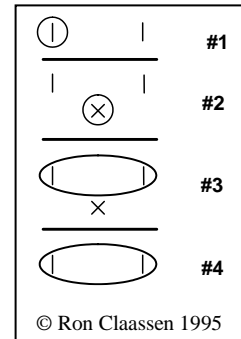
Parent picking up and moving a small child.

Supervisor making a decision that has an impact on an employee
without consulting the employee.

Fireman clearing people from a burning building.

A person with a gun making demands on a victim.

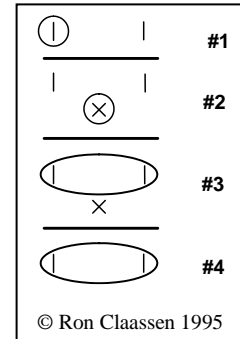
While one can speculate on which option was used, the only way one knows for sure which option has been used, is discovered when a trusted person, in a safe setting, asks the parties involved. If Option #1 has been used, the



"I" outside the circle will say something like, "it was not my decision to make" or "I trusted them to make the right decision" or "I felt like I had no choice" or "I had to go along." Sometimes the "I" outside the circle will be upset or even very angry and sometimes will be in agreement with this arrangement or even thankful. The "I" inside the circle might say, "it was my decision to make," "I don't care what she thinks," "he wanted me to make the decision," or "it was my responsibility to make the decision." Sometimes she might be unaware of the power or may even think that the power was shared. If at least

one of the parties views himself as outside the circle and another party as inside the circle, then it was a #1.

Option #2 is where the "X" (at least one outside party or an objective criteria) makes a decision for the "I's," the ones in the conflict or the ones needing a decision. The "X," may listen to the experiences, concerns and preferences of the "I's," the parties in the conflict, but the decision is made by the "X." The "I's" may both like the decision or at least accept it. Sometimes one may like it and the other not like it and sometimes both don't like it. Sometimes the "I's" have mutually chosen a



trusted person to be the "X." Sometimes the "X" is unknown to both parties. Sometimes one of the "I's" has chosen this option and the other has had little or no choice.

Examples of #2:

Court with judge or jury making the decision for the litigants.

Arbitrator making a decision for the disputants.

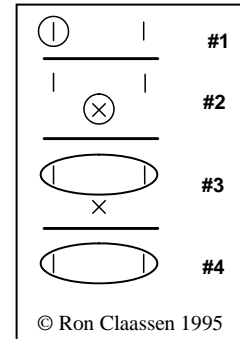
A wise and trusted elder making the decision for the disputants.

A vice principal making the decision for two students in conflict.

If it is really option #2, when a trusted person not involved in the conflict asks the "I's" and the "X" individually and in a very safe setting, each will say that the "X" made the decision. If an "I" thinks that the other "I" and the "X" teamed up together inside the circle, then it was really an option #1. If

the “I’s” all think they really made a joint decision, with some help from the “X,” then it was an option #3.

Option #3 is similar in some ways to Option #4 and yet very different in some ways. They are similar in that the oval encircles both "I's" which indicates that the ability to make the decision resides with the two of them and not with one of them as in option #1 or with the "X" as in option #2. This means that there is no decision made or action taken until they agree.



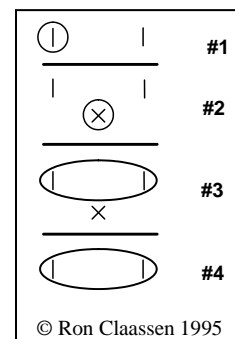
Option #3 includes an "X" outside the circle meaning that there is some outside involvement. The role of the "X" is to assist, in some way, the "I's" inside the oval to arrive at a point where the “I’s” agree on the decision or the action to be taken. The role of the "X" may range from mere presence to very active involvement in either or both process and content (the role of an “X” will be discussed in detail later). The number of people in the “X” role may vary.

Examples of #3:

- A professional mediator with two or more parties in a dispute.
- A respected elder assisting members of their group resolve a dispute.
- Student mediator(s) with two or more other students.
- A supervisor helping two employees decide how to solve a problem.
- A person helping a victim and offender decide how to make things right.
- A facilitator helping a group make a decision.

A mediator helping representatives of two or more countries decide how to live peacefully together.

If in a safe setting the "I's" say, we didn't really make the decision, it was really made by the "X," then it wasn't a #3, it was a #2. Or, if in a safe setting, one of the "I's" says I didn't really have a choice because the "X" teamed up with the other "I" and they made the decision,



then instead of a #3 it was a #1 (the "X" became an "I" in the circle). Or, if in a safe setting, one of the parties says I didn't really have a choice because the other "I" was the one who made the decision then it was a #1 with both the "I" and the "X" outside the circle.

Option #4 does not include an "X" meaning the decision made or the action taken is something that is agreed on by the "I's" with no outside involvement. It may not be the first choice of one or the other or both, but it is something they voluntarily and cooperatively agreed on. It does not mean that their power was equal (two parties never have equal power) but it does mean that in a safe setting both would say, "yes, I helped create and craft our decision and I am in agreement with our final decision" or "I know that I have other options but I decided to voluntarily go along with our decision. I am in agreement with our final decision." They may have arrived at their agreement through informal conversation or by following a structured process.

Examples of #4:

Two people agreeing where to eat lunch together.

Two employees agreeing how to share a piece of equipment.

A teacher and student agreeing how to handle a missed homework assignment.

An employee and a supervisor agreeing how to solve a problem.

Representatives of two countries agreeing how to repair violations.

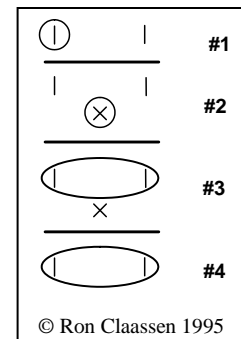
If in a safe setting, one or more of the “I’s” says, “I really had no choice” or “I don’t agree with the decision,” then it wasn't really a #4, it was a #1. The critical factor is if they agree, not if they have the same amount of power.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is it really possible to do #4 when the one “I” has substantially more power than the other, as with a teacher and student? This model recognizes that

power is a factor in all four options.

Power (the ability to make things happen or at least influence how they happen) is different for each individual. Some power comes from position in an organization, some from information, some from verbal



ability, some from size, some from financial resources, some from race, some from gender, some from experience, some from willingness to walk out, etc.

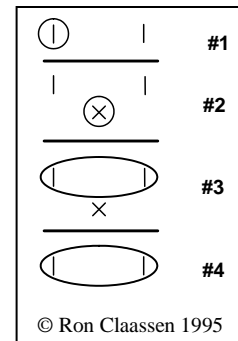
This is not an exhaustive list, but is intended to point out that no two people ever have the same amount of power.

When the power is substantially in favor of one of the “I’s”, to use a #4, the one with the greater power has to make a conscious choice not to use it

to dominate (power over) or make the other go along. Instead, they use their sources of power to empower (power with) the other(s) so they can arrive, as close as possible, at a mutually satisfactory agreement. Remember, even when #4 or #3 is attempted, it is not known if it has been accomplished until, in a safe setting, each party agrees that it really was #4 or #3.

Isn't a leader giving up power when moving voluntarily from using #1 to #4? For many leaders who have the ability to be inside the circle in #1 (like a teacher or supervisor), voluntarily using #4 rather than #1 feels like they are moving from the "I" inside the circle to the "I" outside the circle in #1. It feels

like they are giving their power away. It is essential to recognize the difference between an exchange of places in #1 and moving to #4. Consciously moving from a #1 (power over) to a #4 (power with) means that the one with the greater power is inviting the other to join her in



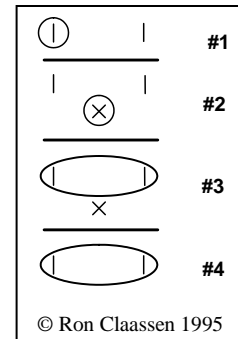
making a decision that both can agree on. In this case, both are empowered and no decision is made until they both agree.

Why didn't you number the options in the reverse order so that your preferred option would be #1? I started out working on a model to help me understand the categories of Power, Rights, and Interests described in *Getting Disputes Resolved* by Ury, Brett, and Goldberg. I think that at first I simply used their order. Later I chose to leave the order because I came to see significant symbolism in the order. The ability to have *power over* is often seen as desirable and as having become #1. It also seemed like an appropriate

way to name coercion, where the focus is on the one in the circle, big #1. In #4 the focus is on how to share power. Leaving the order as it is symbolizes the reversal that I think is needed if we are going to live together in ways that are civil, just, and peaceful.

Why focus so much attention on Agreements? Folger and Bush in their book *The Promise of Mediation*, stimulated a constructive and broad discussion about what is more important, “agreements” or “empowerment and recognition.” They describe how “empowerment,” the ability of parties in a mediation to make choices and to participate meaningfully and “recognition” of each party’s concerns, fears, and interests by the other party are of primary importance and “agreements” are secondary.

I think significant empowerment and recognition are essential to accomplish a #3 or #4 agreement. Without empowerment and recognition, at least one of the parties, in a safe setting, will probably say that it was really a #1 or #2 rather than a #3 or #4.



The reason I think agreements are so important is because they are so closely related to trust. "Trust increases when agreements are made and kept and trust diminishes (or becomes distrust) if parties are unwilling to make agreements or if they make agreements and don't keep them" (Claassen, 1992). By definition, #3 and #4 are agreements. When #3 and #4 are utilized frequently, many agreements are made, and when follow-up confirms that the agreements have been kept, trust increases. If agreements are either not

made, or there are assumed agreements that are not clear, and therefore not kept or not accepted as agreements by at least one of the parties, trust diminishes.

History and Development of the Model

I was stimulated to develop a model in 1988 while reading *Getting Disputes Resolved* by Ury, Brett, and Goldberg. They said that the number of options for responding to conflict or making decisions are three: "Power, Rights, and Interests" (1988, p. 4). This proposition intrigued me, perhaps in part because my first area of study was mathematics (I have an MA in Mathematics). I found myself wanting to draw a diagram or picture that would illustrate these options. In my study of mathematics, I had discovered that if I could draw a diagram or picture of a complex problem, I gained understanding in the process and knew I understood it if I could use the picture or model to explain the problem to someone else.

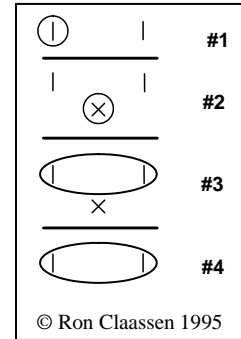
The Model I finally settled on has some close parallels to "Power, Rights, and Interests" and some differences. Creating the model did expand and deepen my understanding of the possible options. I added a category and chose not to use words in order to increase the scope of the Model.

While working on the Model, I encountered a proposition that presented a very different view from the limited "Power, Rights, and Interests." Willmont and Hocker in *Interpersonal Conflict* wrote, "Once a conflict begins, each person has an almost limitless supply of tactical options.

If you were to list the possible moves that could be made, the choices would probably reach into the hundreds" (1991, p. 99).

I am suggesting that these hundreds of moves, or even thousands of moves, even when influenced by many different cultures fit into four basic categories of the Four Options Model.

In the early development stage of the Model, I found that using the Model helped clarify the options by making them visual. There seemed to be value in being able to look at a simple picture that described very complex interactions. When I used it in discussing a



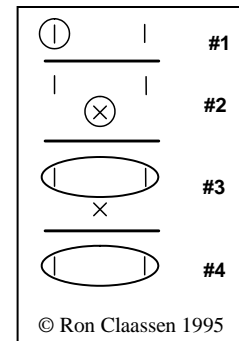
conflict with others, they would often point at it to help illustrate their ideas. Using the Model helped us name what was happening and what was not happening in a particular conflict.

It became a tool for analyzing a conflict situation or decision-making process, and identifying potential alternative options. I was encouraged when others, who had been introduced to the Model, would tell me about an experience where they found it helpful.

I began to use the Model as a tool when working with clients to help them understand their options and decide which they preferred and which could be back-up options. I found that using the Model saved time, clarified roles, and increased personal or corporate responsibility and accountability. Using the Model empowered some parties while encouraging others to restrain their use of power.

I began describing the Model in my classes and training events and giving an assignment. The assignment I gave was, “Before our next meeting, describe the model to someone you make decisions with, discuss together how decisions are made or conflicts handled in your relationship, and then write a one-half page reflection on the experience.” The reports and reflections in our next session were always interesting. For example, a pastor reported talking with his wife about the Model. When he asked her

which option she thought they usually used, she said, "I know that you think we use this one (pointing to #4) but I think it is usually this one (pointing to #1)." He added, "We had a great discussion. I learned something. We



had never had a tool to discuss this before and we plan to use it as we make our next decisions to help us really do #4." A parent reported that when she discussed the Model with her teenage daughter, with whom she had been having frequent arguments about watching too much television, her daughter said, “I’d love to do #4. Usually you just do #1.” She said that instead of arguing, they really shared concerns and came up with an acceptable plan for both. She said it was almost too good to be true. Each class of twenty brought back twenty interesting stories. It was amazing to hear that the model was useful to such a wide range of ages and on many levels of complexity. It was helpful for the novice mediator and the seasoned reflective professional mediator. It was useful for parents with small children and attorneys with large corporate clients.

Based on these experiences, it seemed that the “Four Options Model” warranted continued use and more exploration. The Model had value beyond its original intention which was just to help me understand *power, rights, and interests* described by Ury, Brett, and Goldberg. In March of 2005 I completed my dissertation/project entitled, *The Four Options Model: A Leader’s Tool for Conflict Management, Peacemaking, and Restorative Justice*. Below are a few of the research findings.

Research Methods and Findings

The research explored whether utilizing the simple technique of having disputants look at and discuss the “Four Options Model” early in a conflict would influence the process used to address the conflict and/or the outcome. The research was conducted with leaders who had learned about the Model as part of a training or class (minimum four-day training) and had personally used the Model at least six times in real situations in their area of influence.

The initial research plan was to gather this data only through interviews but as I talked to several leaders about my plan, they encouraged me to gather some quantitative data in addition to the interviews, which would explore the same questions, in order to strengthen the conclusions. Based on this encouragement, I designed a questionnaire. The questionnaire and interviews asked leaders to reflect on their experiences using the model when compared with similar experiences but without using the model.

The research subjects were leaders who:

1. Represented a wide range of professions.

2. Had used the “Four Options Model” in at least six real situations, not role-play situations.
3. Represented a range in number of experiences: some who had just a little experience using the model and some who had extensive experience (some indicated using the model more than 200 times).

The questionnaire addressed five primary questions:

1. To what extent do those introduced to the model understand it?
2. Does using (verbal and visual) the “Four Options Model” change the likelihood that the response to the conflict was more or less constructive?
3. Does using (verbal and visual) the model change the likelihood of the response to conflict being a cooperative response?
4. Does using (verbal and visual) the model change the stress level of the leader?
5. Does using (verbal and visual) the model change the effectiveness of the leader?

Additional questions were designed to provide demographics of the leaders, their sphere of influence, and the number of times the leader had used the model. The mailed questionnaire required forced choice responses but space was provided and comments were invited. As it turned out, many did add comments.

Three hundred fifty one questionnaires were mailed and 67 were returned completed. Since 56 were returned due to wrong addresses, the

response rate was 22.7%. 64% were from school personnel (teachers, counselors, or administrators), 15% from pastors or chaplains, 8% from supervisors in organizations or businesses other than schools and churches, 8% responded as parents, and 5% from personnel related to court (civil and criminal). Seventy two percent of those responding had consciously used the Model in six or more situations. One leader responding to the questionnaire had used it in more than 50 situations. The mailed questionnaire responses represent reflections on approximately 820 conflict situations in which leaders (sometimes as an outsider and sometimes as a disputant) consciously used the Model to decide, with the disputants in a conflict, which option they would use.

The interviewees had more educational background regarding the Model and related topics and more experience (more than 2000 experiences) using the Model than those who were invited to respond to the mailed questionnaire. The interviewees completed the same questionnaire to make it possible to compare and contrast their responses with those who completed the mailed questionnaire. The interviews, in addition to asking them to complete the same questionnaire, focused on “why” they chose to mark their responses to the questions as they did. They were also invited to comment on any of their experiences with the Model and add their insights and reflections.

All of those interviewed had studied in the Fresno Pacific University Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies graduate program. Two had completed MA degrees, two had completed fifteen unit graduate level

Certificate programs, and the other two had at least a four day training plus ongoing conversation over several years. The interviewees included an Attorney/Mediator, Elementary School Principal, Eighth Grade Teacher, Pastor, Retired Teacher now School Counselor and volunteer VORP Mediator, and a retired Chief Probation Officer who is now practicing as a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist.

Question – Understanding

In your experience, after introducing (visual and verbal) the “Four Options Model” to each participant in the conflict, did each participant understand the options?

Questionnaire responses. 97% indicated that those introduced to the model gained significant understanding (3 or more on a 5 point scale) and 83% approached full understanding (4 or more).

Summary/Interpretation of Interviews. All (100%) of the interviewees indicated that people introduced to the Model (the basic differences of the four options) understood it quickly and with significant understanding (4 or more). The primary reason given was because the Model is very simple and the visual helps people gain insight. The threshold for understanding seemed to be just above 3 years old.

Several reported that for many disputants, seeing and understanding the model was a significant experience leading to new insights regarding the function of power in relation to making decisions or solving problems. One interesting interviewee comment was that some (especially those with

significant positional power) resist the Model and its explicit visual description of the role of power due to their preconceived notions of hierarchy. He added that this was interesting since the model itself does not value one of the options over another.

Using the Model helped young children and adults learn complex ideas quickly. Both young and old pointed to the parts of the Model while discussing the concepts. This physical experience, visual and pointing, when combined with the discussion appeared to the interviewees to increase the disputant's understanding.

Question – Constructiveness

Compared to your past experience, did using the “Four Options Model” change the likelihood that the response to the conflict was a more or less constructive response?

Questionnaire responses - Constructive Responses when Using the Model.

98% of all leaders indicated that using the Model changed the likelihood that the response to the conflict was *more constructive* (6 or more on a 10 point scale) and 89% indicated that the response was *much more constructive* (8 or more on a 10 point scale).

Summary/Interpretation of Interviews. The interview conclusions agree with the questionnaire: that using the model results in more constructive responses.

Some attribute this to the value of the Model in clarifying roles and power relationships. Using the Model raises the consciousness of the parties regarding their role, and when they consciously chose a process and role, they

also chose to be more constructive. Using the Model in conflict situations (for those not immediately related to safety), slowed down the responses and reduced the immediate, and often unconstructive reactions using of #1 or #2, and increased more thoughtful and constructive responses, usually the use of #3 or #4.

These leaders describe their leadership as more constructive when they utilize the Model. The reasons provided for why the results were more constructive: the model provided hope, provided handles for understanding options, clarified roles, and made it easier to communicate.

Question – Cooperativeness

In your opinion, did introducing (visual and verbal) the “Four Options Model” change the likelihood of participants using a cooperative process (#3 or #4) rather than using an outside authority (#2) or coercive power (#1)?

Questionnaire responses - Cooperation When Using the Model. 98%

indicated that using the model increased the likelihood of using a cooperative process (#3 or #4) rather than using an outside authority (#2) or coercion (#1) to resolve the conflict.

Summary/Interpretation of Interviews. All interviewees (100%) indicated that using the Model (verbal and visual) increased the likelihood that people in conflict would use the cooperative options (#3 or #4) rather than use outside authority (#2) or coercion (#1). The primary reason given for this was that people of all ages generally want to have an influence over what happens to them or to participate in decisions that affect them. Looking at and

understanding the Model helped them realize what would happen if they didn't choose to cooperate, meaning that they would often lose the ability to influence the decision or that they would not have the buy-in of the other. Several interviewees reported that disputants, when seeing the Model for the first time, said that observing the four different options gave them insight into a way of doing things that they didn't really know about, at least in a conscious way. When they understood the options, they generally concluded that it was in their best interest (and others) to choose a cooperative option.

Several reported that when a group used the Model and agreed to #3 or #4, the knowledge and understanding that they would all be inside the circle gave both those with greater and lesser power (sometimes due to majority and minority status) the patience and willingness to listen to the others and to search for cooperative resolutions since each knew all would be invited to contribute their interests and concerns and have a voice in any decisions or agreements.

Interviewees reported that using the Model influenced not only the cooperativeness of the disputing parties, but also their cooperativeness as leaders. Using the Model, the leader (especially an adult with a child) invited one behaving badly to enter the circle in #3 or #4 much sooner. Without using the Model, they tended to tolerate bad behavior, of those they supervise, longer. What they realized was that while doing this, they were using #1, but allowing the other to be inside the circle. Then, when "fed up," the leader would take an action (usually a punitive one), one that put the leader back in

the circle but would leave the child out of the circle. The conclusion was that by using the model, they used the cooperative options more and coercive less.

Several interviewees noted the value of being able to point to the Model as an aide to expressing ones preference, both for the leader and the participants.

Question – Stress

In your opinion, when comparing your experience in conflict situations without using the Model, did using the “Four Options Model” change your stress level while responding to the conflict?

Questionnaire responses - Stress When Using the Model. 82% of the respondents indicated that using the Model in a conflict situation decreased their stress level, 11% indicated that using the Model increased their stress level, and 9% indicated no change. This question had the widest range of responses.

Comments on the questionnaire included that the forced choice format of the questionnaire meant that the participant had to choose one response. Several indicated in their comments that this didn’t allow them to express the complexity they experienced. Several who indicated that using the model increased their stress wrote in the comments that their initial stress was greater using the Model due to their natural preferred response of avoiding conflicts. Using the Model meant that they confronted, rather than avoided, the problem and that added stress initially. Those same persons indicated reduced stress later on. Some felt more stress using the Model at first due to their

unfamiliarity with it, but later, after they became more familiar with it, experienced reduced stress. Those who indicated reduced stress said it was because it provided a tool, a map, boundaries, and guidelines. Stress was reduced because of confidence gained that the disputant choices, when using the Model, would be more cooperative and constructive.

Summary/Interpretation of Interviews. Responding to this question was also complex for the interviewees. They wanted to address whose stress was reduced or increased (leader or parties) and when it was decreased or increased (before, during, or after the conflict was resolved). They uniformly expressed amazement at how something so simple could have such a significant and profound positive effect on reducing stress.

One reason given for reducing the stress was that disputants could see that while using a cooperative option, nothing bad could happen to them since they would have a say in any decision. During the process of using #3 or #4, the stress was reduced even more as parties saw it working and gained confidence that they would be able to stay in #3 or #4.

They reported increased stress in their early usage of the Model for several reasons. While still feeling unfamiliar and lacking confidence in how people in conflict would respond, using the Model increased stress. Another reason for increasing stress was just that using the Model, for some, was a very unusual way of responding to a conflict. Practice and familiarity changed this feeling so that with experience, using the model gave them confidence and reduced, rather than increased stress.

Initially, using the Model increased stress for some because it invited them to change their own responses, to be more reasonable, to be fair, and to be open to negotiate, rather than using power to control others and simply be “in charge.” Those who reflected on this experience noted that using the Model changed their mode of responding and that after gaining experience using the Model, their stress was significantly reduced.

Stress was reduced when all parties chose to cooperate, which was very common. Stress was also reduced on those rare occasions when the choice of parties in a conflict was for the leader to make the decision, because the parties, knowing they had refused the option to cooperate, were more willing to accept and work the decision of the leader.

Stress was reduced for some disputants because the Model helped externalize and objectify the situation. Considering the model diverted the attention away from the emotion and intensity of the conflict. Using the Model reduced stress because, for the first time, they could visualize a range of options and felt empowered to help decide which option to use. This knowledge and the ability to choose an option reduced stress.

Stress was reduced because using the Model reduced fear. It reduced fear for both the leader and the parties in a conflict. When #3 or #4 was chosen (and the likelihood of it being chosen was high), it reduced the need for the leader to “make” someone do something. It reduced the negative stress for the disputants for the same reason.

Stress was reduced in an organization when the leader consistently used the Model. When students saw their principal (one they knew used the model) observing them, they learned to interpret the leader's potential intervention in a positive, helping way, rather than in a way intended to punish them for doing something wrong. Knowing this reduced stress for the students.

Using the Model reduced stress for one interviewee who was supervised by a person who constantly used #1, often in ways that felt disrespectful. Knowing the options of the Model, and sharing them with her supervisor, provided a frame from which to analyze what was happening, and a tool to help them to develop some more cooperative and less stressful patterns.

Question – Effectiveness

In your opinion, did using the “Four Options Model” change your effectiveness as a leader in dealing with the conflict?

Questionnaire Responses - Effectiveness of a Leader When Using the Model. 95% of the respondents indicate that using the model made them, as leaders, more effective. No respondents indicated that it made them less effective. 5% indicated “no change.”

Summary of Interviews Regarding Effectiveness of the Leader. The interviews clearly demonstrated that using the Model, in the minds of those interviewed, increased their effectiveness as leaders.

Perhaps the strongest and most frequently mentioned reason was that using the Model gives people choices, and when they chose to cooperate, the leader could lead more effectively.

The Model helped clearly define the roles, including both the role of the parties and the leader. When the roles were clear, people knew what to expect of each other and the leader. This clarity of roles significantly contributed to the effectiveness of the leader.

The Model provided the disputants, even those with few constructive skills and strategies, a picture of the options. Given this picture, they frequently chose a cooperative option. In some rare occasions, they chose to have a leader make a decision for them. The interviewees defined this as effective leadership.

When leaders used the Model, members in the organization saw their leadership as fair. Interviewees said that to be seen as an effective leader, one must also be known by those in the organization as a fair leader.

The Model provided a tool which, when used consistently as a guide, helped people know they could count on the leader to be willing to search for agreements on process and on the substance when possible. Since a leader needs trust, and since making agreements and keeping them builds trust (Claassen, 1992), using the model helped these leaders be more effective.

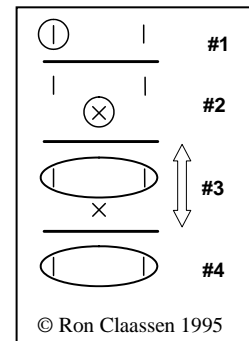
Using the Model helped leaders share the leadership with others without feeling threatened. Being able to share the leadership and not feel threatened increased effectiveness.

On many occasions, using the Model helped these leaders get the focus off how upset they were and onto the process they would use to resolve the conflict. Interviewees observed this happen over and over and considered this a major contributor to their effectiveness as leaders.

Doug Noll, an Attorney/Mediator and one of the interviewees said, when asked if he wanted to add anything else: “Like all brilliant things in life, it is elegant, simple, and unfortunately, not well enough known. We need to spread it out. When people begin to grasp its significance it will be even more powerful. It has the power to transform our society.”

Mediation - Option #3

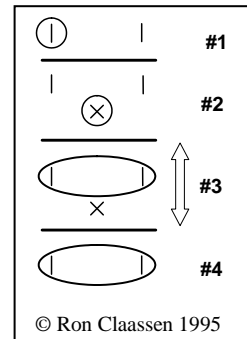
One value of a model is to help us talk about ideas and experiences. I think that the Four Options Model contributes to the discussion of mediation and the role of a mediator. The Model provides a tool for analyzing and clarifying the potential roles of the "X"



(mediator) in #3 and for clarifying the definition of mediation. These insights emerged when I recognized and explored the vertical continuum in #3, ranging from the line at the top of #4 to the bottom line of #2. Exploring this continuum also led to greater clarity in defining mediation. In addition, exploring the continuum has stimulated a number of significant questions that will be referred to, but not explored, later in this article.

Mediator Role

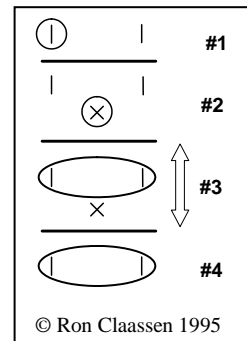
As the "X" moves up on the continuum in #3, getting closer to #2, the "X" would begin acting in ways that look more and more like a #2 "X." The parties speak more to the "X" and less to each other. The "X" makes more content suggestions. The "X" uses more caucuses, perhaps even moving people into separate groups and carrying information between them. As the "X" moves closer to #2, the "X" exerts more and more influence, not only on process but also on content, but stops short of making the decision. The "X" is still a mediator as long as she has not crossed the line into #2. If the "I's" say that the "X" made the decision, then although the "X" set out to help them do #3, they really did #2 and the "X" had become an arbitrator or judge. The model suggests that it is possible for the "X" to move very close to #2 and begin looking a lot like the "X" in #2 but in the end the "I's" in the circle, in a safe place, all indicate that they made the final determination, not the "X."



As the "X" moves down on the continuum in #3, getting closer to #4, the "X" would take a less active role and near the bottom, begin to disappear or become almost invisible. It might be that the parties are working so well together, that the "X" refrains herself from intervening, lets them talk freely, and exerts almost no influence on either process or substance. It may be that just having the "X's" presence (perhaps one or more highly respected people) is enough to cause the parties to be able to work well together, when they couldn't without the presence of the "X." Near the bottom of the continuum,

the “I’s” would say that the “X” was present and a factor in helping them get to their decision but they made the decision and the “X” almost disappeared.

One value of recognizing the continuum in option #3 of this Model is to help mediators increase awareness of the range of styles. The model can be used as a tool to increase awareness of and discuss the potential movement of the "X" on the continuum.



A supervisor or mediation instructor/evaluator

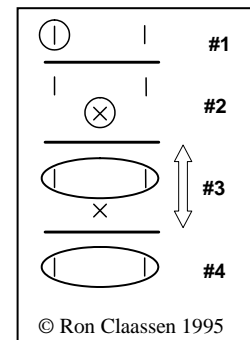
could use the Model to interview a potential "X" or to debrief with a mediator after a mediation. I use the model in an advanced mediation class to help students prepare for their mediation experiences by discussing the continuum and where they plan to start and under what conditions they might move up or down. We also use it to reflect on their role after the mediation.

A client could use the model to interview a potential mediator. When I am considering becoming an "I" in a #3, I want to know where the "X" intends to start on the continuum? Will the "X" move during the mediation and why? Will they move up or down at our request? Will the "X" suggest movement on the continuum when, in her judgment, it would be helpful? If an "X" doesn't have answers to these questions or hasn't thought about movement on such a continuum, I would be very unlikely to choose that "X."

Some “X’s” (mediators/facilitators) have never really thought about where they are on the continuum and what difference it might make. Others are very sensitive to where they are on the continuum and move as needed to

assist the “I’s.” Some "X’s" are very convinced, or stuck, in one style or strategy and do not move at all on the continuum. Some "Xs" move a lot on the continuum, searching for what will work but they are not aware of their movement. A reflective mediator, as described by Lang and Taylor in *The Making of a Mediator*, could utilize the model for preparation, discussion with the parties during a mediation and for reflection, using the insights gained to become a better “X.”

Some Co-Mediators have a very difficult time working together and others work well together. One reason may be related to their positioning on the continuum in #3. Certainly if one prefers mediating close to #4 and another close to #2, they will have



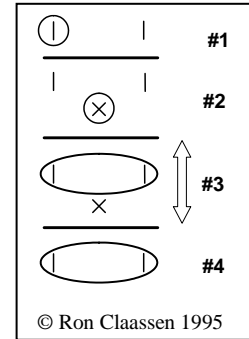
problems if they are not aware of this and develop a plan to work together. Co-mediators could benefit from a discussion about the continuum, their preferred starting points, willingness to move on the continuum, etc.

In #3 the "X" is the outside person(s) who assists the "I's" as they attempt to find agreements that will resolve the conflict or make the decision. It is clear that the "X" is not one of the decision-makers anywhere along the continuum in #3. However, I think the presence of a continuum within #3 of the model suggests that the role of the “X” may change substantially. This change of roles along the continuum helps illustrate and clarify some of the differences and disagreements within the mediation field.

Since the "I's" are the decision makers should they also be the judges of the process? Should they have ultimate control and ability to ask the "X" to move on the continuum? If the "I's" do not approve of the location or movement of the mediator on the continuum, are they free to select a new "X?"

Defining Mediation

In the development of the field of mediation, not only has the role of the mediator been controversial, even what can be called mediation has been hotly debated. It was in this context that the language of facilitative, evaluative, transformative, and problem-solving mediation have emerged. My view is that each of these descriptions contributes to the discussion and points to significant distinctives within mediation. I think that using the Model could be helpful when discussing

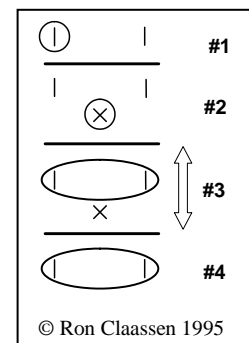


differences and similarities of the various named styles of mediation. For example, using the Model, I would say that evaluative mediation is generally closer to #2 and facilitative is nearer the middle of the continuum. Would transformative mediation, as described by Folger and Bush in *The Promise of Mediation*, be near the lower part of the continuum? I would say all of these styles are mediation if they fall within #3. If a “mediator” moves to the extreme and crosses the line, then I would no longer describe what he is doing as mediation.

Using the “Four Options Model” I would suggest defining mediation by saying that it must be a #3, that all locations within the continuum of #3 are mediation, and that the “X” in #3, regardless of style, is a mediator. To accept this definition would mean several things:

1. That the decision-makers in a mediation are always the “I’s,” or parties, inside the circle, never the “X.” If the “X” becomes a decision-maker it was a #2 or a #4 (where the “X” became an “I”).

2. That the “I’s” must all agree to the final decision for the process to be called mediation. If there is not agreement of all “I’s,” then it was really a #1 or a #2. It could be said that a mediation was attempted but not completed.



3. That each “I,” in a safe setting after the process is completed, is the final determiner of whether the process was actually a #3 (mediation), the “X” does not have this authority.

4. That the mediator(s) are the “X’s” and they must always be outside the circle, meaning that they do not have a say in the final decision or in the determination of whether the process was actually a mediation. This is not intended to suggest that the “X” didn’t exert any influence but that in the end, the “I’s” made the decision.

5. That the “X” has some role in assisting the parties but that role is limited. Influence over content and process may increase but is limited and cannot cross into #2, in which the “X” makes the decision. Influence over

content and process may decrease but is limited and cannot cross into #4 in which the “X” disappears. Either might be desirable in some cases but could not be called mediation.

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