

MEDIATOR'S ICEBERG

This classic metaphor is an easy way to illustrate the relationship between positions, interests and needs in conflict. The analogy helps students understand that what's immediately visible in conflict is often only "the tip of the iceberg." While the larger, more significant issues are below the surface waiting to be uncovered.

OBJECTIVES

- Students learn to distinguish between positions and interests.
- Students become create and become familiar with a list of human needs.

THE ICEBERG

Positions: in conflict, people often have very specific demands. They're usually easy to identify because disputing people are quite up front about them, "I want a turn!" "I will not be his partner!" "I think she should stop talking!" These are all positions. And it's often the case that our positions are odds with others', especially in conflict. Positions are the tip of the iceberg. They're visible but normally only a small part of the issue.

Interests: Interests are the deeper, more general desires and emotions in which positions are rooted. A desire for fairness; wanting to be comfortable with your partner; feeling heard – these are all interests. Peoples' positions represent one way to satisfy their interests, but usually there are others. Interests are the bulk of the iceberg hidden below the surface. They're harder to see, but once you do, the problem may seem more reconcilable. You may even find that the two tips are actually the same berg!

Needs: Needs are the fundamental things that all people strive to maintain. They include physical needs like food, water and shelter, as well as psychological and emotional needs like belonging, relationship, identity, love and purpose. Needs the water in which positions and interests are immersed. They're implicit to all of our actions and desires, buoying both our agreements and disagreements.

DIRECTIONS

1. Draw the iceberg diagram on the board and hand out a copy of "The Mediator's Iceberg" (p. 3) to each student.
2. Explain the difference and relationship between positions, interests and needs, and why this is useful in mediation. Use the reference on the next page for more direction.
3. As you explain, ask students for examples of positions and related interests. Fill their suggestions into the diagram.
4. Brainstorm a list of Needs with students and fill their suggestions into the "water" area of the diagram.
5. Encourage students to reference their "The Mediator's Iceberg" handouts when thinking through a conflict or conducting a mediation.

What might the water surface represent?

People are often vocal about their positions while withholding or unaware of their interests. The water surface represents this obscurity and the need to "dive deeper" to find the real source of conflict.

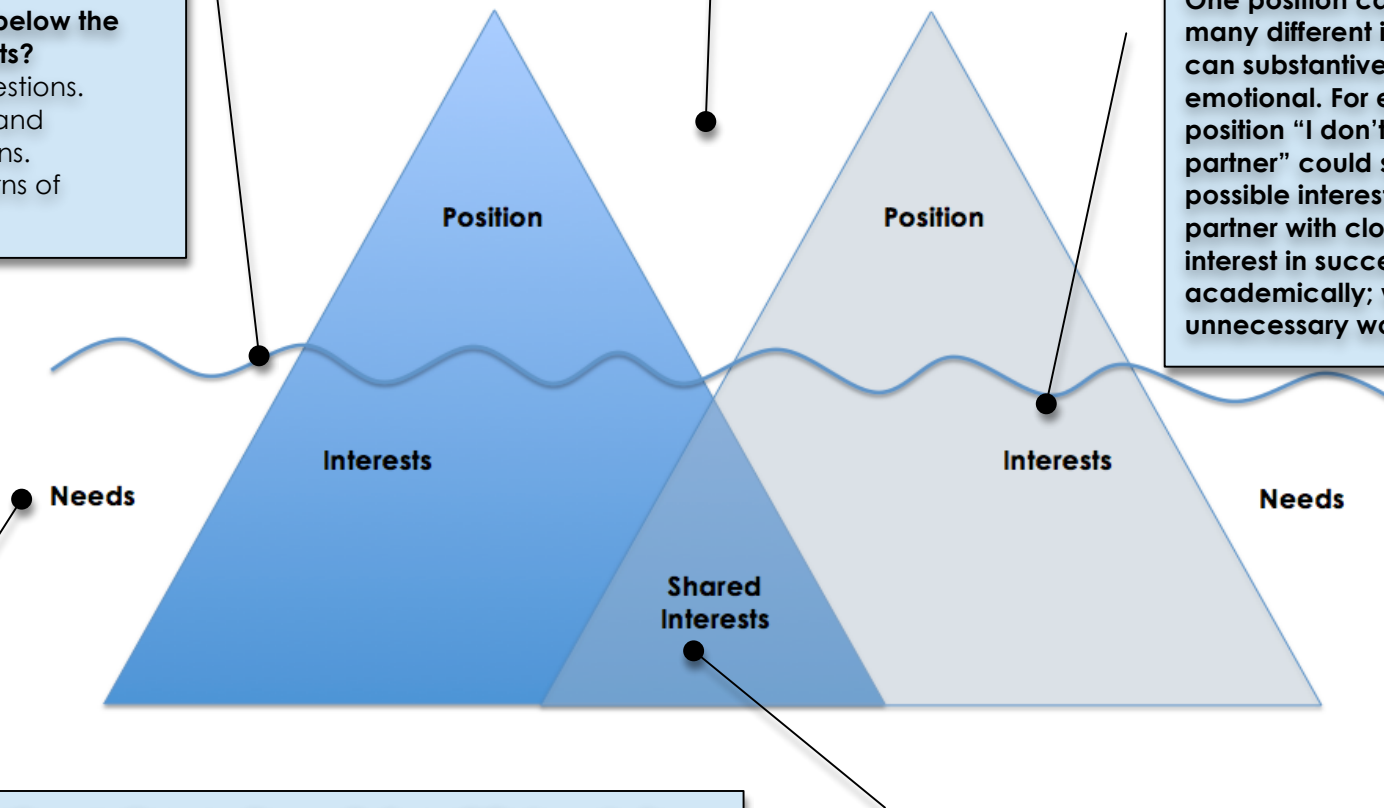
How do you get below the surface to interests?

Asking "why" questions. Acknowledging and exploring emotions. Identifying patterns of conflict.

How does the separation between iceberg tips relate to positions in conflict?

People's positions are often at odds. Their desires can seem very different and irreconcilable. It is usually only after uncovering interests that problems appear resolvable.

One position can represent many different interests. Interests can substantive, relational and emotional. For example, the position "I don't want to be his partner" could suggest several possible interests: a desire to partner with closer friends, an interest in succeeding academically; wanting to avoid unnecessary work.



Almost all negative emotions are the result of unsatisfied needs. For example, loneliness could result from a lack of companionship. When brainstorming needs a good question to ask yourself is: When I feel sad/mad/bored/scared/etc, I'm feeling a lack of what?

Why is it helpful to point out shared interests in mediation?

People in conflict often perceive the other person as their enemy. Highlighting common interests can eliminate some of that animosity and lead to further agreements.

Positions

- A demand or preferred course of action
- Positions are easy to spot (above the surface), but usually only a small part of the problem
- In conflict, people's positions are often at odds.
- Positions are rooted in interests.

Interests

- The reasons behind a position.
- Interests are often harder to see (below the surface), but account for a large part of the problem.
- People often have interests in common.
- Interests can be uncovered by asking "why" questions.
- Interests are rooted in needs.

Needs

- The fundamental things and feelings for which all people strive.
- Negative emotions are almost always caused by an unsatisfied need.
- Needs are the root of all the desires we have and actions we take.

