

Setting Expectations and Resolving Conflicts Between Faculty and Graduate Students

<http://grad.msu.edu/conflict.htm>

Program development and implementation are supported in part by grants to Dr. Karen Klomparens and John P. Beck from: The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (1997-1999) and The U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Post-secondary Education (FIPSE) (1997-2000)

Video Vignettes

- Used for training in how to resolve conflicts between faculty and graduate students
- Video vignettes address a variety of issues: unnecessary questions, double bind, etc.

Basic Assumptions

- Many issues in Graduate Education are not negotiable (Laws, Contracts, Requirements)
- Conflict itself is neither good nor bad – it's how conflict is handled that is good or bad
- The power differential between Graduate Students and Faculty will always exist
- We should not expect 100% retention or completion

Why Focus on Graduate Students?

- Nationwide, **40%** of students entering Ph.D. programs do not obtain that degree in 10 years
- Reasons for leaving before completion differ.....:
 - Differences between “early” (within 2 years) and “late” (after 4 or more years) leavers (Nerad and Miller, 1996)
 - Conflicts
 - Interpersonal relationship with faculty
 - Lack of integration into department (Lovitts, 2001)
 - Lack of adequate financial support
 - Personal decisions
 - Poor fit

Why Does the Faculty/Student Relationship Matter?

- Research mentor as a key individual
- Dependence on a small group of faculty (guidance committees)
- Decades of continuous interactions via professional societies
- Limited flexibility within a small community
- Careers depend on good letters of recommendation
- Faculty Power: stipends, work assignments, resources, advice

The Nature of Conflicts in Graduate Education

- These “significant consequences” result from the heightened drama in the situation; drama caused by:
 - The nature of the effect of the conflict (for example, loss of reputation and/or self esteem)
 - Disputes over “rights” (for example, citation of dueling rights spelled out in “Graduate Rights and Responsibilities” vs. “The Faculty Handbook”)
 - Disputes over “right” (for example, citation of moral arguments that have no foundation in any printed text)

The Nature of Conflicts in Graduate Education

- Conflict is often driven underground, as a “given” part of the experience

AND

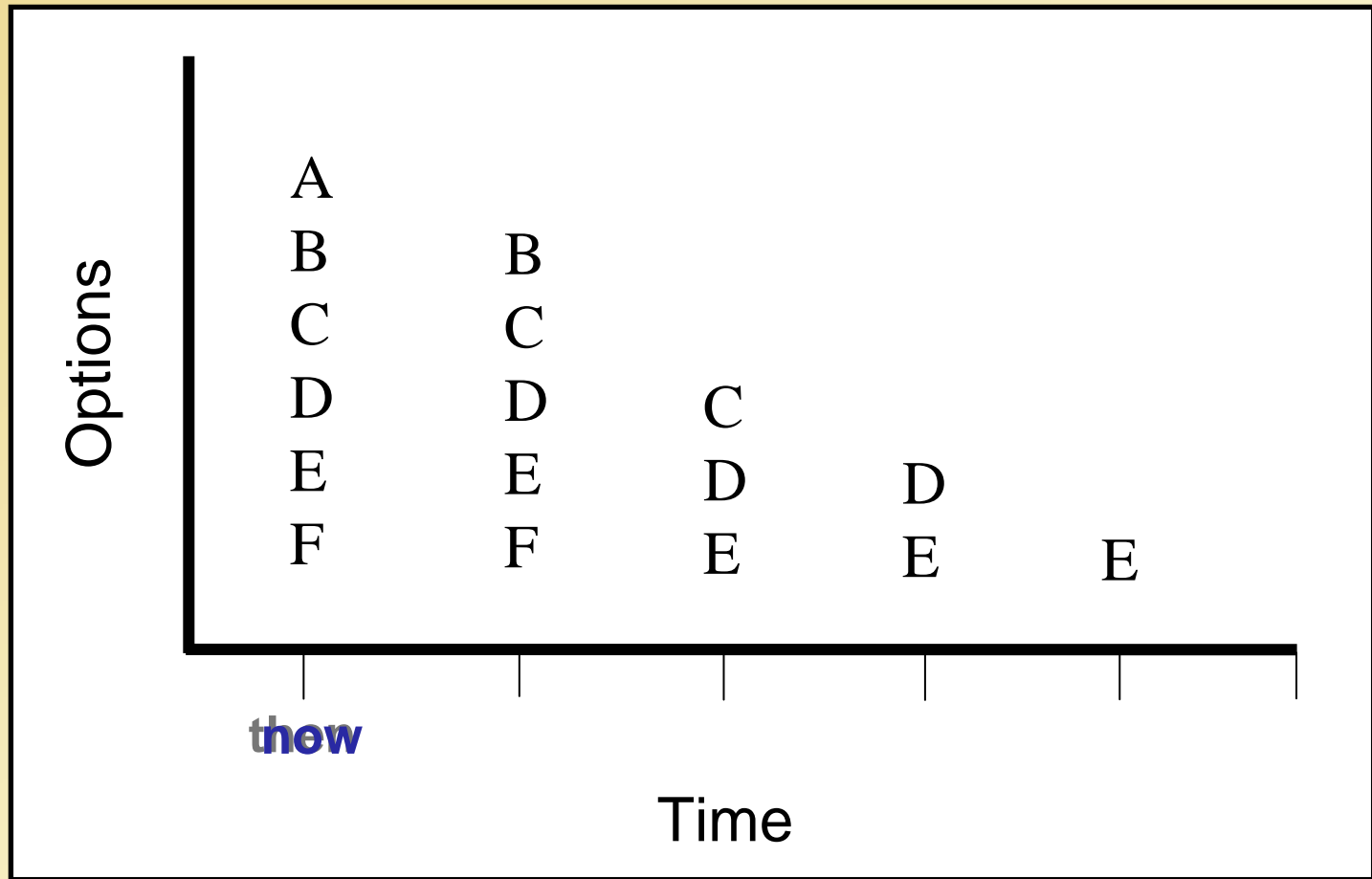
- May resurface with significant consequences for all, but mostly for the graduate student

Pre-empting Conflict is Possible: Only If We Make the Implicit Explicit

- We need to overcome:

- Information that is incorrect or not universally shared or understood
- The lack of commonly shared and agreed upon expectations
- The lack of specific expectations between individual faculty and individual students regarding possible areas of conflict and their resolution

Options Over Time



What's an Issue?



- An issue is the immediate question(s) to which you need an answer (it may not be the only basis of conflict but it is the question needing attention now)
 - who should be on my committee?
 - when will I defend my dissertation?
- Both parties must agree on what the issue is.
What's the Question?

Positional Approach

Position(s) are:

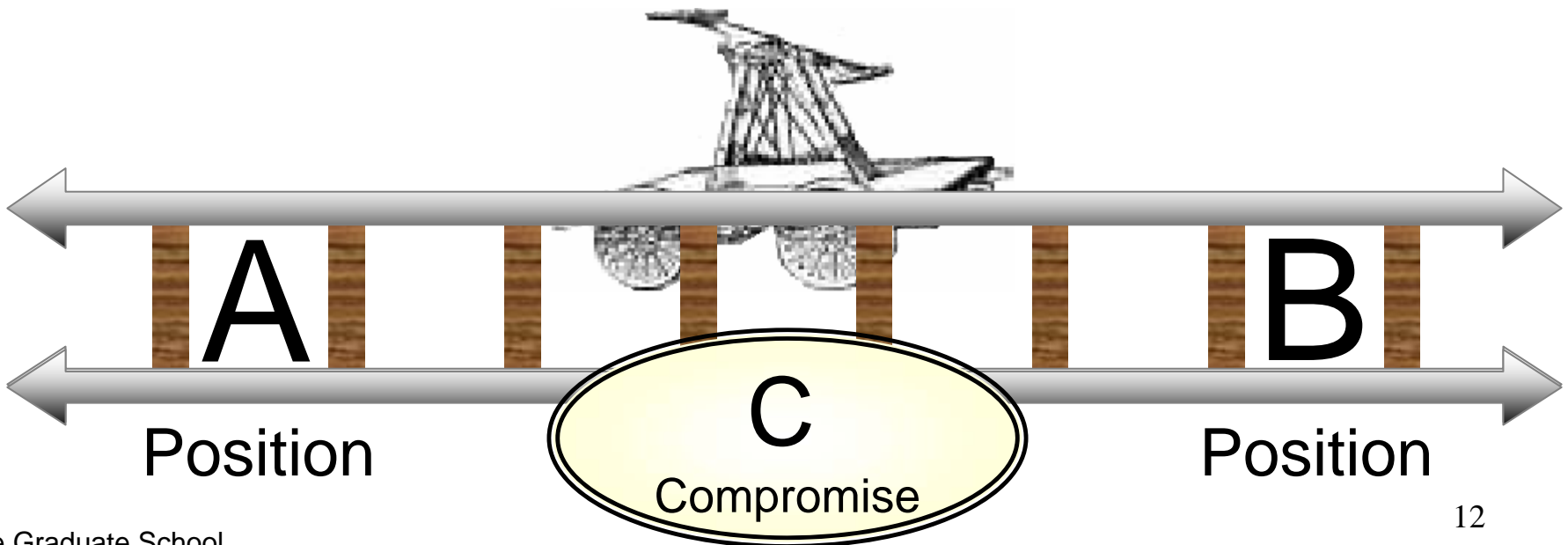
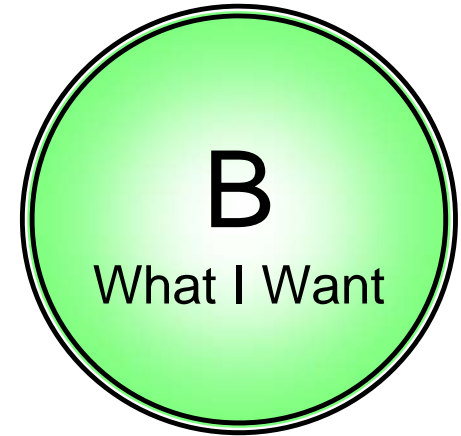
The claim(s) you are making for yourself or others concerning an issue.

A position is the single option that you state you want.

- “I want my name first in the article listing.”
- “Your dissertation is not ready to defend!”

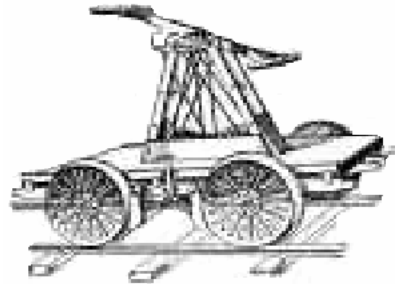
The Positional Approach to Resolving a Conflict

ISSUE



Interests

ISSUE



Interests

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 8

Interests

- 6
- 2
- 7
- 4
- 9
- 10

← common →

← common →

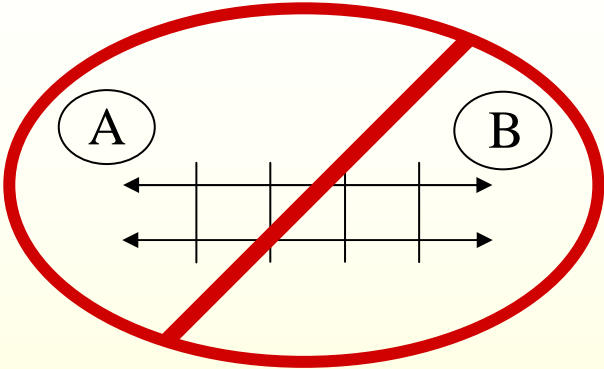
Interest-based Approach

Interests are:

Interests are the underlying values, beliefs and principles related to the issue.

- “Being listed first is important to me because...”
- “Defending my dissertation by December is important because.....” (job prospects, need for income, personal goals, family obligations).
- “Not having you defend your dissertation by December is important because... (faculty publishing deadline, # of students, quality of dissertation).

The Interest-Based Approach



Issue

Interests

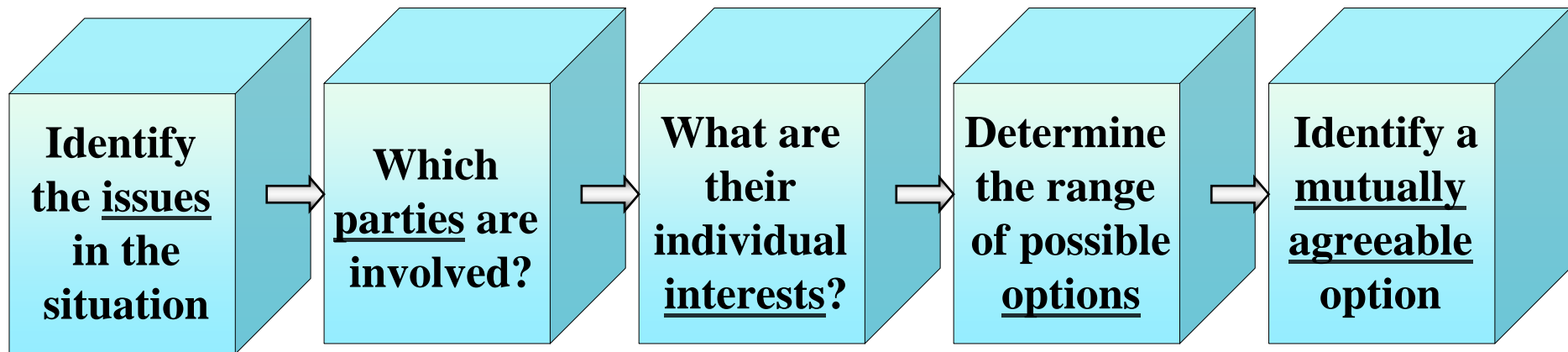
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7

Options

- A
- B
- C
- D
- E
- F
- G

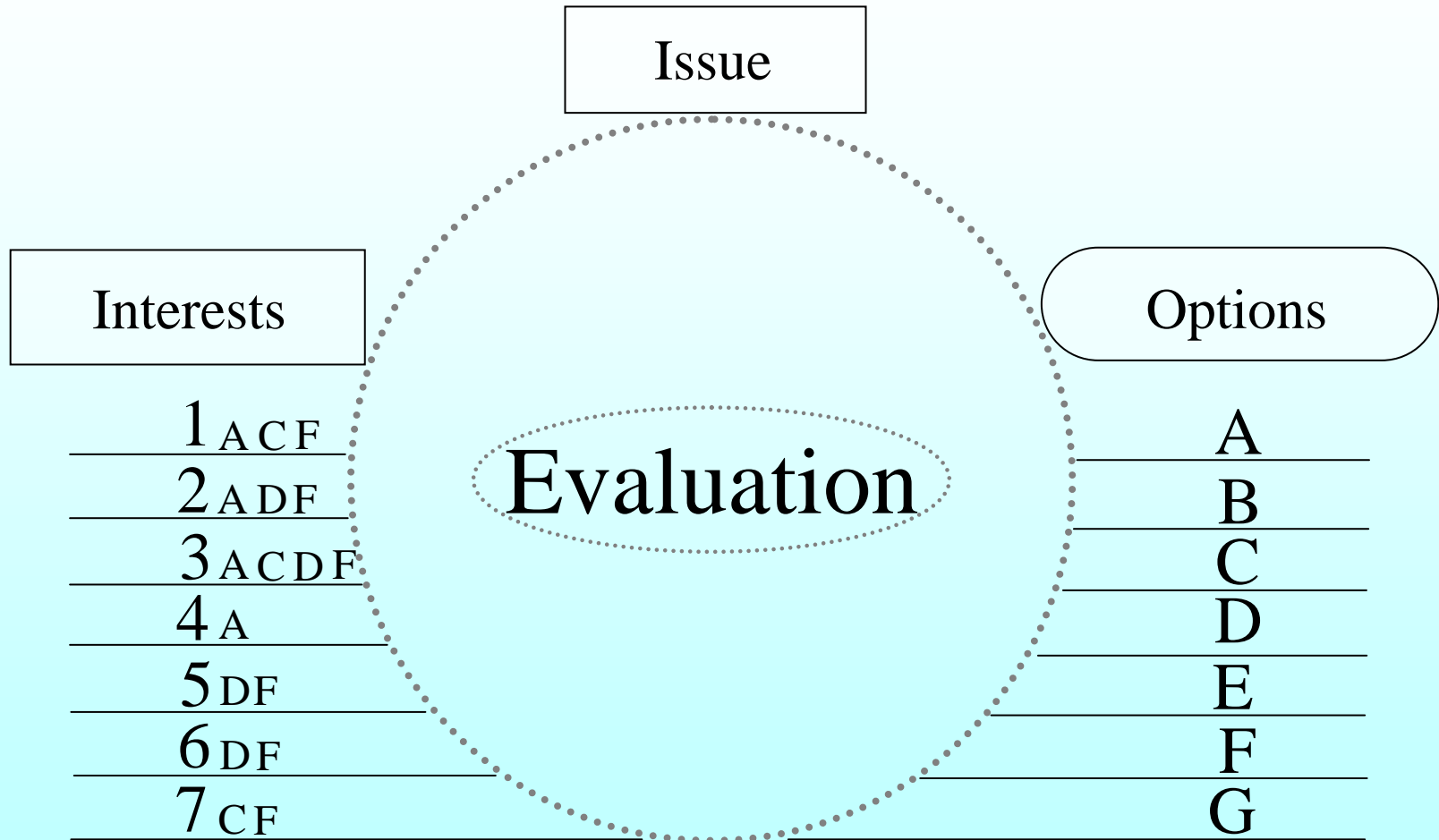
Conflict Resolution Through Interest-Based Approaches

- Interests must be the true basis for setting expectations and resolving conflict



- Within overall university and departmental guidelines
- Within individual understandings
- With no guideposts

The Interest-Based Approach



Implicit Expectations

Implicit Expectations: Not stated and rarely understood.

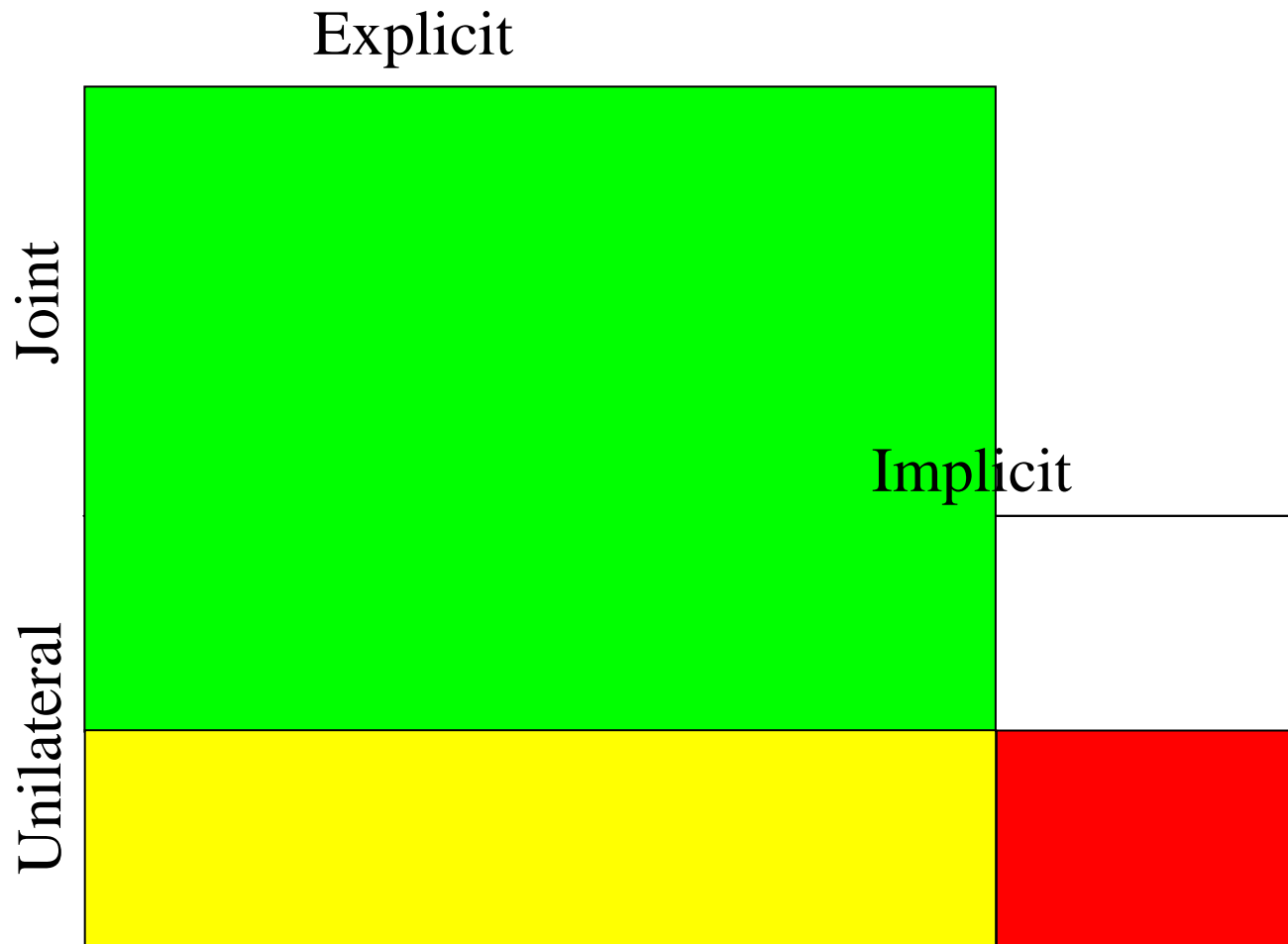
- “What didn’t you understand about what I didn’t tell you?”
- “What part of my silence didn’t you understand?”

Explicit Expectations

Explicit Expectations:

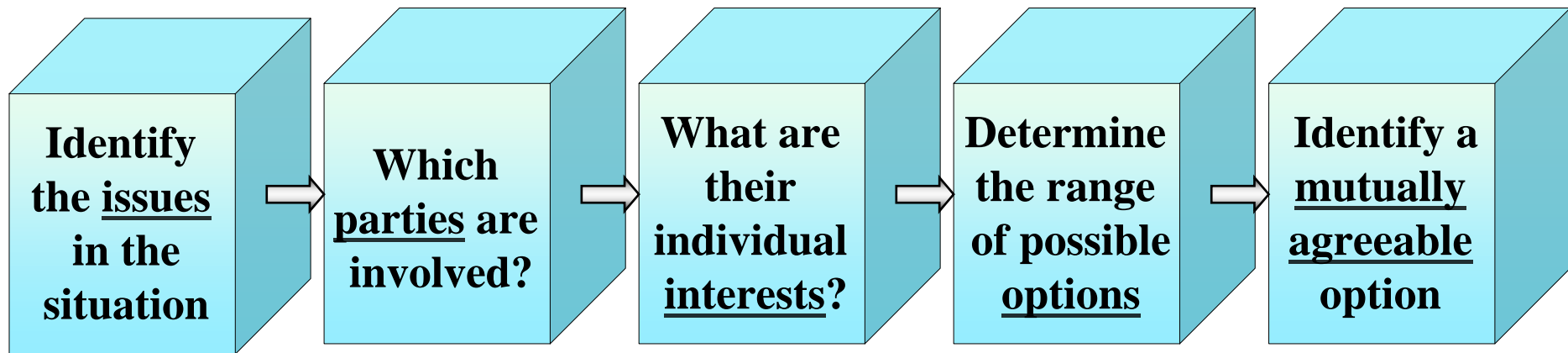
- Clearly Stated (verbally or in written form)
- Checked for understanding
- Unilaterally or jointly set

Window of “Negotiable” Expectations



Conflict Resolution Through Interest-Based Approaches

- Interests must be the true basis for setting expectations and resolving conflict



- Within overall university and departmental guidelines
- Within individual understandings
- With no guideposts

Conflicts

are resolved by examining, in this order:



Expectations

are made jointly explicit by examining, in this order,

