

The Third Entity™ Exercise

Your How-to Guide

Perhaps there's a difficult conversation you know you need to have. A colleague you're not seeing eye to eye with? Got someone in mind?

Bring that person to mind and imagine the relationship you have with them as a triangle. I'm inviting you to listen to this relationship from three positions: Yours, Theirs, and the Relationship itself.

The Third Entity exercise works off the premise that "everyone is right, only partially!" and it assumes you care about this relationship and want it to be successful. Do you?

Step 1: Physically get up and stand in 'your' corner of the triangle. Imagine them standing in their corner. (Really imagine. What are they wearing? How are they standing?) Speak to them directly and by name about the issue. What do you feel? What do you want? Own your position and speak up firmly using 'I' statements such as "I feel", "I want".

Step 2: Physically walk over to the corner of the triangle representing the other party's position. Take a moment to arrive in their shoes. If you can, stand the way they stand. Try to embody how they might be feeling. When you're ready, I want you to really take on their point of view – I know this is hard! Address your original corner firmly as though you were this other person speaking about the issue and not you. Again, use firm 'I' statements such as "I feel", "I want" – but from their perspective. Turn the dial up as much as you can take it, and then go a little further. What do you think they would really want to say to you, if they could?

You may want to **repeat steps 1 and 2** a couple of times, each time getting clearer, firmer and more to the point with what each position really thinks and feels. And remember, feelings are important. We ignore them at our peril, so don't skip the 'feels'.

Step 3: Move to the third position of the triangle – you should be standing between the two other positions and at a little bit of a distance so that you can take in both positions at once. Did you know that there is a **third entity** in this scenario – the *relationship* itself. It is not you, and it is not them. It is the ‘we’ or ‘the relationship’. It is bigger than the sum of its parts with its own distinct presence and perspective. It might help to put your arms out, as though putting an arm around each of the two other parties – because without either of these the ‘we’ would not exist!

Now, from the perspective of ‘the relationship’ ask and respond to these questions:

1. What does the relationship feel as it looks at these two people in conflict?
2. What does the relationship know that they don’t know?
3. What does the relationship need from them as a pair to move forward?

Step 4: Move back to your original position – ‘your’ corner. What is new for you now? And what is one action you’d like to take knowing what you know now?

This is an **intuitive empathy-building exercise** that comes from the ORSC™ playbook, a methodology I am passionate about for its unique approach to revealing the relationship systems intelligence (RSI) behind everything we do, and that underpins my work with organisations, leaders and teams.

You can do this alone, or you could run this with a partner asking the questions from the side. It’s also great to do in pairs in a relationship where both individuals care about each other and the health of the relationship. Many approaches we now use regularly in organisation development and change come from the world of family therapy – and that is of course because human relationships are at the heart of both families and organisations.

Here's to you and to great relationships in the workplace!

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