

Three distinct roles exist for people who want to work with conflict professionally or develop their conflict skills. They are often confused, and the differences between them matter enormously for how you develop, where you work, and what kind of impact you make.

---

## DIALOGUE FACILITATOR

*Creating conditions for genuine conversation*

A dialogue facilitator's role is not to drive people toward an agreement but to create the conditions in which genuine understanding can emerge. The facilitator holds the space — managing energy, protecting dignity, cultivating curiosity — without directing the outcome.

### CORE SKILLS

- Holding space for complexity, ambiguity, and silence
- Cultivating empathy between parties — not just toward them
- Building and honoring narrative as a path to understanding
- Reading and managing group energy and dynamics in real time
- Knowing when to speak and when silence is the more powerful intervention

### WHERE IT IS MOST NEEDED

Social and community contexts, organizational culture work, deeply divided groups, and any situation where understanding matters more than agreement.

### NATURAL FIT

Harmonizer and Puzzler dispositions with relational and thinking strengths.

---

## MEDIATOR

*Helping parties negotiate their way to a durable agreement*

A mediator is a third party who helps people in conflict reach an agreement they could not reach on their own. The mediator is actively impartial — not neutral — and may intervene as truth-teller, validator, translator, and protector to ensure the process remains fair and productive.

### CORE SKILLS

- Active impartiality — equal commitment and honest intervention for all parties
- Process design, sequencing, and agreement architecture
- Reframing positions toward interests — from what they want to why they want it
- Evaluating proposals with honesty and care
- Writing durable agreements in the parties' own voice

**WHERE IT IS MOST NEEDED**

Workplace disputes, organizational conflicts, commercial disagreements, community mediation, and any context where a durable agreement is the goal.

**NATURAL FIT**

Puzzler and Bargainer dispositions with thinking and execution strengths.

---

**NEGOTIATOR**

*Advocating effectively for your own interests*

A negotiator is a party in the conflict — you have a stake in the outcome and you are advocating for your own or your organization's interests. Effective negotiators know their interests deeply, understand the other side equally well, and find the overlap without sacrificing what matters most.

**CORE SKILLS**

- Interest-based bargaining and BATNA awareness
- Strategic communication, persuasion, and framing
- Reading power dynamics, leverage, and timing with precision
- Knowing when to hold firm, when to concede, and how to do both well
- Building coalitions and managing multiple parties

**WHERE IT IS MOST NEEDED**

Commercial deals, organizational negotiations, resource allocation, and any context where you are a party rather than a third party.

**NATURAL FIT**

Bargainer and Puzzler dispositions with influence and execution strengths.

---

**THE KEY QUESTION**

Ask yourself: in this situation, do I have a stake in the outcome? If yes, you are a negotiator. If no, and your goal is agreement, you are a mediator. If no, and your goal is understanding, you are a dialogue facilitator. The same person can occupy different roles in different contexts — clarity about which role you are in is essential.

*Discover which track fits your natural strengths at [conflictmanagementspace.com](https://conflictmanagementspace.com)*