

People seen as Difficult

Understanding, living and working well with them

Application notes from Robert Bramson's book, How to Handle Difficult
People, Maanu Graphics. New Delhi. 1988

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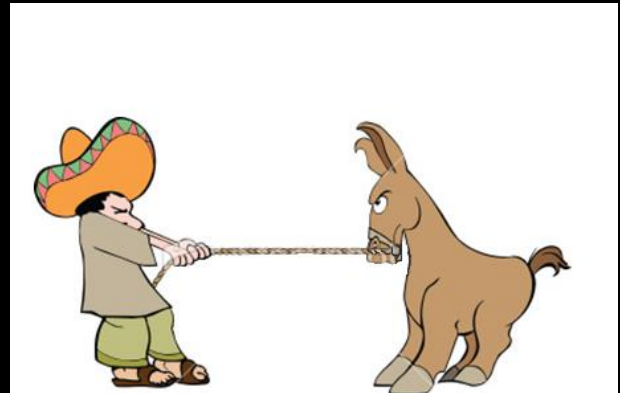


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0. INTRODUCTION

When I saw from Robert Bramson's book, *How to Handle Difficult People*, I was sure it would help me to handle some particular persons that I saw as difficult. I had heard one of these persons say he found me a difficult person, which for me was another proof that he was the difficult one, labeling people like me as difficult, while I am not.

When I read the book, I was ashamed but happy also to know that I was having some aspects of my character that qualified as difficult. So the fellow who said I am a difficult person had some element of truth. I then continued reading the book for myself rather than for others. I found it very helpful to understand, live and work well with people that I see as difficult, including myself.

After noticing that when I see people as difficult, they could also be seeing me as the difficult one, I was more aware that "difficulty" in a person may be relative, depending on the angle from which one evaluates the other. I became uncomfortable with the labeling of people as "difficult." That is why I rather propose we replace "difficult people" by "people seen as difficult."

When I applied the lessons from the book, I found that I was less stressed living and working with the people I had been seeing as difficult. Aware of the difficulties (stress, unnecessary conflict, fear, anxiety, anger...) we may go through when we insist on seeing the other as difficult, I proposed this summary, together with some additional notes that I believe will help you also in understanding, living, and working well with difficult persons.

This document starts by identifying Bramson's list of difficult people. Then it goes on describing each while proposing elements for understanding them and tips for handling them. The last part of the document is not taken from Bramson's book, but rather a compilation of helpful tips to help us understand the possible causes of inappropriate behavior and character. This understanding will help us understand, live and work better with people whose characters we see as difficult.

I. BRAMSON'S LIST OF DIFFICULT PEOPLE

1. **The hostile aggressive:** verbally or even physically attacking you, openly, or from a hidden angle.
2. **The complainer:** complains and you just don't enjoy their company.
3. **The silent unresponsive:** you wish they spoke their mind, their opinion, their point of view, their reaction; but it is not coming.
4. **Super-agreeable:** too nice to be true, too sweet. Often proved by their promising you a lot and you are full of hope, and they just let you down since they don't deliver on their promises.
5. **The negativist:** they see most things from the negative, dark point of view. They criticise, nag, and complain... till they suck your energy and enthusiasm out of you. They are exaggeratedly and unnecessarily pessimistic.
6. **The know-it-all:** they claim to know even what they don't know well. Others know it, yes, but their way of claiming their knowledge over others is annoying.
7. **The indecisive:** not making up their mind as promptly as others may wish.

II. ELEMENTS FOR DESCRIBING, UNDERSTANDING AND DEALING WITH PEOPLE SEEN AS DIFFICULT

2.1. The Hostile Aggressive

2.1.1. Description of the Hostile Aggressive

There are three types of people seen as difficult by being hostile aggressive:

- **Sherman tanks** : openly aggressive, imposing themselves, crashing others



- **Snipers**: indirectly and covertly aggressive.



- **Exploders:** quick tempered, express anger violently and inappropriately. They are adults but they throw tantrums.



2.1.2. Understanding the motivation of the Hostile Aggressive

- **Sherman Tanks think they know the right thing.** They want everybody to do what they judge to be right. They feel superior because others are inferior.
- **Snipers feel superior and see the others as inferior.** They want to feel in control of the situation while at the same time avoid being in open battle where they may lose.
- **Exploders:** by exploding, they are coping with fear, helplessness, and frustration.

2.1.3. How to handle the Hostile Aggressive

- **Sherman Tanks : stand up for yourself;** give them time to run down; don't worry about being polite , just get in; get their attention, carefully; get them to sit down; avoid a head-on fight; be ready to be friendly.
- **Snipers: surface the attack;** provide a peaceful alternative to open warfare; seek group confirmation or denial of the sniper's criticism (does



anybody else see the situation in that way (the sniper's)?"; deal with the underlying problem

- **Exploders: give them time to run down** (let them talk, however if it doesn't cool, take charge by calling their name, sitting or standing up, repeating several times something like, "Right, right."; show your serious intentions (that you are taking them seriously); interrupt the interaction (take a break, go to another place... You taking charge).

2.2. The complainer



2.2.1. Description of the Complainer

They point out real problems but in a way that is self-defeating as it does not lead to problem-solving. They whine.

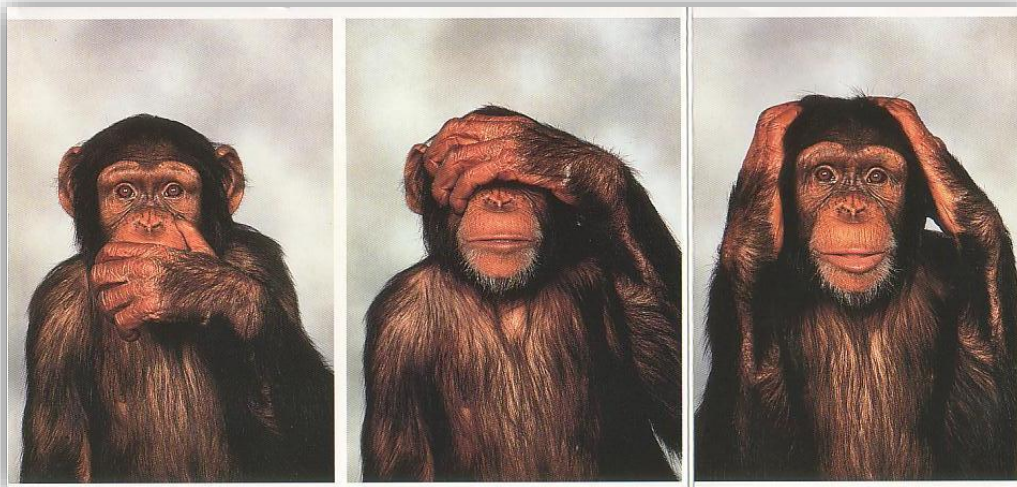
2.2.2. Understanding the motivation of the complainer

- They intend to warn people about some things that have gone wrong and that someone else must straighten out. They don't think they are whining.
- They feel powerless, prescriptive (they demand things should go a certain way), and perfectly.
- They enjoy attention given to them (being listened to when, through complaining, they give "classified" information)

2.2.3. How to handle the Complainer

- Listen attentively
- Acknowledge, but don't agree
- Be prepared to interrupt generalisations like "always"
- Use limiting responses (turn generalising words like "always" and "never" into specifics like last Tuesday afternoon)
- Avoid the Accusation - Defence - Re-accusation Sequence. State facts without comments and apology.
- Switch to problem solving. Pose specific problem-solving questions; expect some frustrations; assign limited tasks; get it in writing.
- If none of these work, talk about the way you are interacting and what s/he really wants to be the end result of your talk.

2.3. The Silent Unresponsive



2.3.1. Description of the Silent Unresponsive

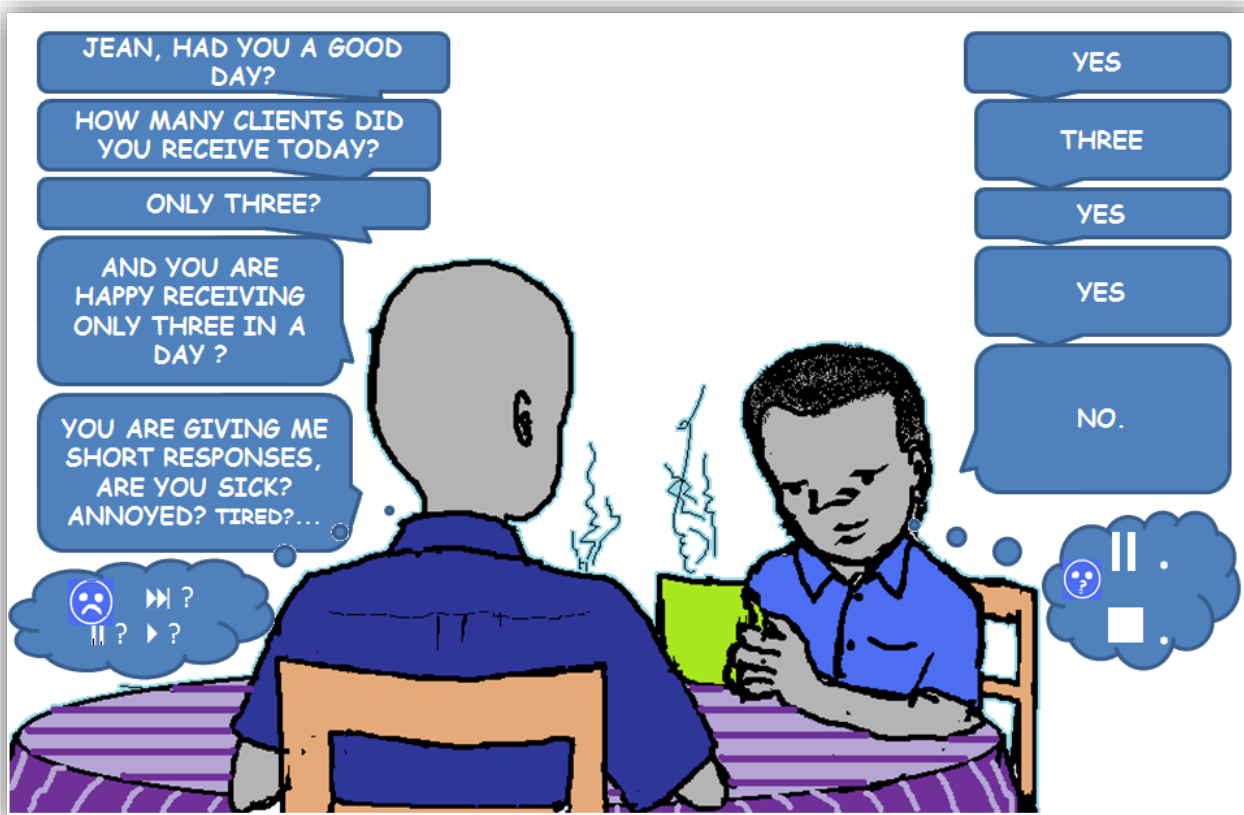
- Short-circuits to hinder communication/ conversation/ dialogue.
- Doesn't respond to invitation to dialogue.
- Keeps silent when you need to hear them.

2.3.2. Understanding the motivation of the Silent Unresponsive

- A defence mechanism to avoid difficult feelings and situations (e.g. suppose I have emptied your car's fuel tank and parked it without telling you. If I admit, you are

likely to yell at me; and if I lie, my conscience will disturb me. If I say nothing, you will soon leave me alone.)

- Passive aggressiveness
- Meant to avoid being controlled by the people who want to communicate or who need information.
- A way of avoiding to face issues which, if spoken, will come into conscience and they will feel bad.



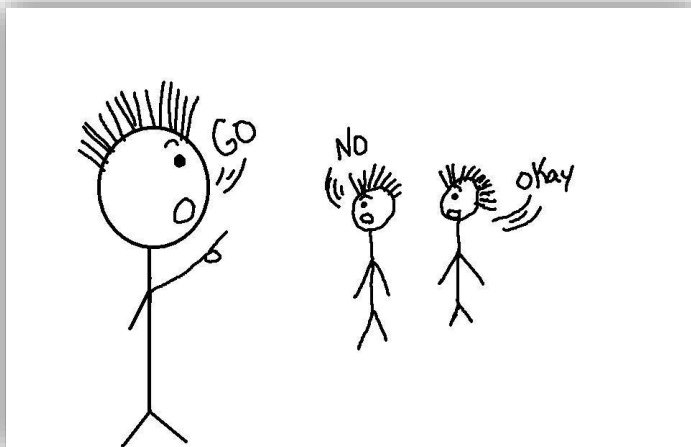
2.3.3. How to handle the Silent Unresponsive

- Read but don't interpret his/her non-verbal language. Get them to talk.
- Ask open-ended questions: if it doesn't work still, use the friendly, silent stare; don't fill the silence; comment on what's happening; recycle the question (request) if necessary; help break the tension (ask him to say what is keeping him silent); set time limits;
- If s/he says "I don't know", you can either: take this as genuine expression of not knowing; ask "what else" and keep the silent stare; or comment that this statement is a non-response and comment on the fact that the conversation is in an impasse;
- When s/he finally opens up: be attentive, listen; let them be oblique.

- When s/he stays closed: avoid the polite ending; initiate the end of the meeting; show your intention to raise the issue again. Follow through. If it still doesn't work, proceed on your own, inform him/her of your next actions. ("E.g. I assume your silence means you agree with my proposition. And so I will post the request on Monday at 15H00, unless I hear otherwise from you. ")

2.4. The Super-Agreeable

E.g. the son who said he will go to work in the farm and still he didn't go (parable of the two sons, in Mat 21:28-32)



2.4.1. Description of the Super-Agreeable

- Responsive, smiling, appears nice and supportive
- But does not deliver on promises.
- They don't follow words with action. they often make unrealistic promises (I'll type your 10 pages report and email it to you in half-an hour)

2.4.2. Understanding the motivation of the Super-Agreeable

- To be liked and loved by everyone.

- They want approval.
- They want to avoid open conflict and rejection.
- They want to make others feel happy for the moment (not so much concerned about the future).
- They don't want others to be upset.



2.4.3. How to handle the Super-Agreeable

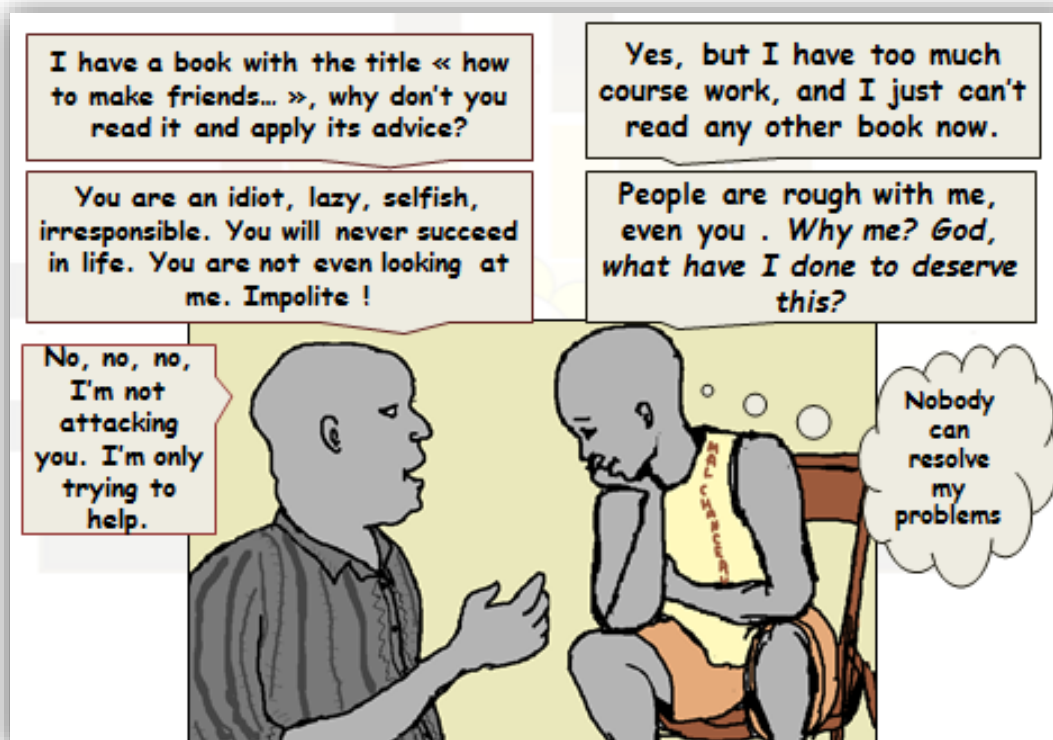
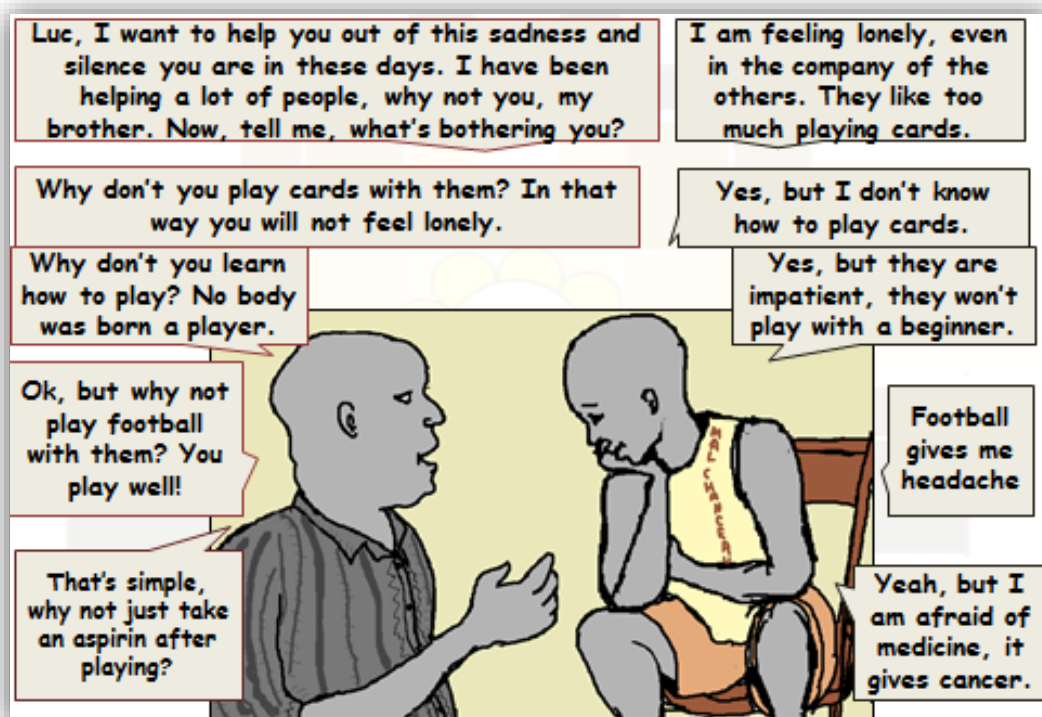
- Assure them that they can say the unpleasant truth without you rejecting them:
- Make honesty nonthreatening: e.g. "I really want to know what's on your mind because I value your friendship. I don't want to let your unspoken opinion to weaken our friendship" After they have given only appreciations, ask them to say what is good but not outstanding, since nothing is perfectly flawless.
- Be personal-when you can. Bring in questions or statements about his/her personal life: "I really like that dress."
- Don't allow them to make unrealistic commitments. Eg, "it might take 8 to 12 hours to write that report. So I will check my mails tomorrow rather than in half hour.
- Be prepared to compromise. "I still feel once a month is enough, but I'll be ready to have it twice a month if that will help."
- Listen to their humour. They use it to sweeten the bitter truth. "Here comes Mr. Old expert" may mean telling you they see you as a "know-it-all."

2.5. The Negativist

2.5.1. Description of the Negativist

- Pessimist, often saying "it won't work." "We tried it and it didn't work.", "They won't let us do it."
- They don't suggest an alternative. They just say, "There is nothing we can do about it."

A negativist playing the game "why don't your... Yes but" with his helper



PESSIMIST VS. OPTIMIST

William Arthur Ward

The pessimist finds fault;
The optimist discovers a remedy.

The pessimist seeks sympathy;
The optimist spreads cheer.

The pessimist criticizes circumstances;
The optimist changes conditions.

The pessimist complains about the apple seeds;
The optimist plants them.

The pessimist imagines impending peril;
The optimist sees signs of prosperity.

The pessimist disparages;
The optimist encourages.

The pessimist creates loneliness;
The optimist finds friends.

The pessimist nibbles at the negative;
The optimist is nourished by the positive.

2.5.2. Understanding the motivation of the Negativist

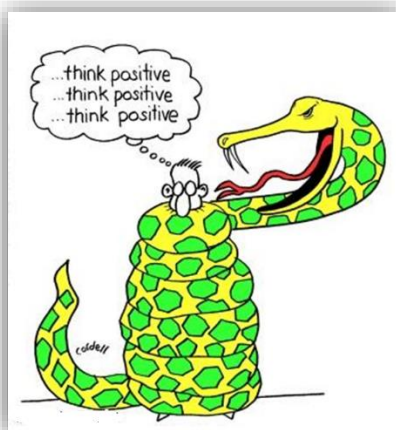
- They believe and feel that there are negative forces larger and beyond them that control events, and they can't do much about it.
- They despair. They want you to share that despair, anger...
- They have a pessimistic approach to life, and they want to prove that they are right in thinking that way.

2.5.3. How to handle the Negativist

- Don't be sucked into their depression, resentment, pessimism, despair, or discouragement.
- State your own realistic optimism. "I believe we haven't tried everything."



- Don't argue. Don't aim at convincing them they are wrong. They may be right, and it might not work. Don't rush at proposing solutions. S/he will be happy to have something to shoot down.
- Set a horror floor: "suppose we succeed, what would be the worst things that could happen?"
- Use negativism constructively. It points to a possible plan B, it counterweighs imprudent over-optimism. It helps you get cautious.



- Be prepared to go it alone: refusing to be paralysed by his/her negativity. Your optimism may later spread to others, and to him/her.
- Beware of creating negativism: very analytical people will behave like negativists if you force them to do something they have not yet understood. Give them enough time and information to understand your plan.



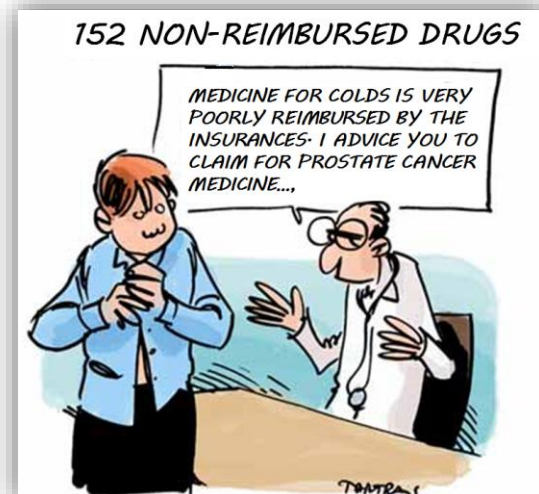
2.6. The Know-It-All

2.6.1. Description of the Know-It-All

Wants to be seen as knowing everything that can be known. Wants to be right and recognised as such. They feel superior to others, who often feel humiliated and immobilised.

Two types of the Know-it-All:

- **bulldozers** :actually know much, real exerts, they are right most of the time. But they despise others as incompetent, less intelligent...
- **balloons** :don't know as much as they claim to know. They speak with confidence even if what they are saying is mere speculation. Their knowledge may be shallow and /or inaccurate. Suppositions and speculations are taken to be the truth.



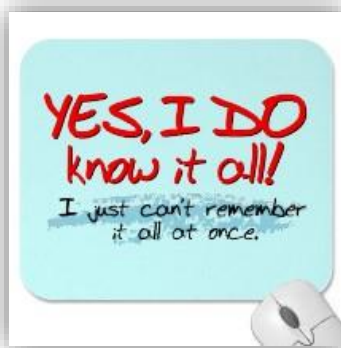
2.6.2. Understanding the motivation of the Know-It-All

BULLDOSERS:

- Look for security that comes with knowing the facts (like a person who knows it will rain and so wears his rain coat).
- They avoid differences in points of view, too unpredictable. They seek the certitude of certainty.
- They believe that they, not fate, are the cause of what happens, bad or good. So they want to be sure things are under their control, everybody should cooperate in making things go right (and that means, according to what they know to be the only truth).

BALLOONS:

- Do not intend to lie or cheat. They frankly think they know what they are talking about, even if it is wrong.



- They are out seeking for admiration and respect by the others. To be seen as important (not so much to be liked).
- They read from newspapers, a few pages of many books... And come up with half knowledge of many things.

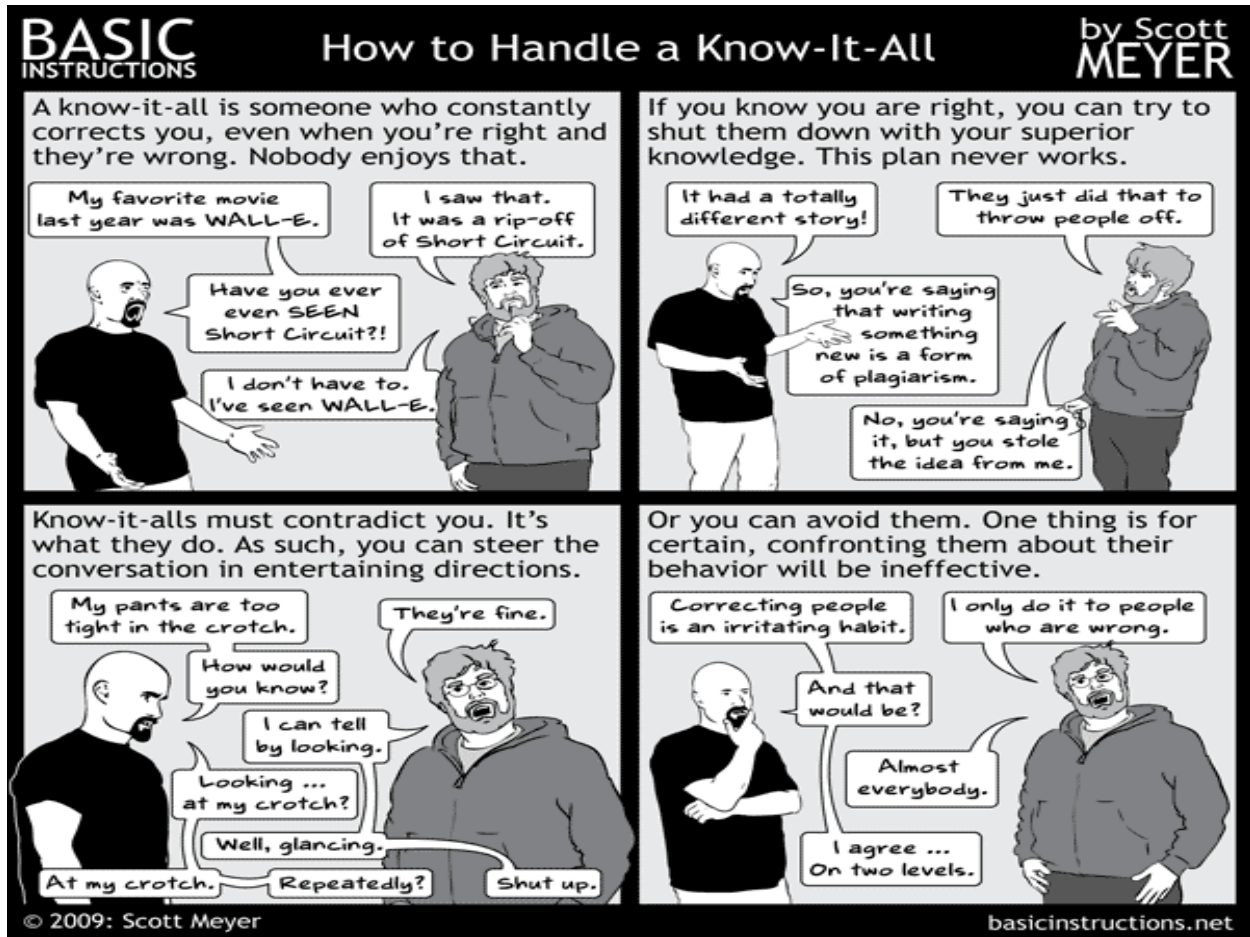
2.6.3. How to handle the Know-It-All

BULLDOSERS:

- Get them to consider alternative views while avoiding direct challenges to their expertise, otherwise they may take you as attacking them personally.
- Make adequate preparations: know your facts, be accurate, orderly, logical
- Listen and acknowledge: don't interrupt. Paraphrase
- Question and suggest, don't challenge: e.g. "I'm having a little difficulty seeing how birth control methods can be of relevance to childless couples. Will you explain that to me?" Raise your questions fully, firmly, and without equivocation. Present alternatives as detours (we might not include this in our final decision but we might get something useful from looking at the following facts...). Ask extensional questions, "How will that concept look in practice?" "Can you tell me how you envisage that program operating a year from now?"
- Monitor your own tendencies toward bulldozing. Don't be the counter-expert: listen to yourself (patronising sound, stubborn digging in, wishing to withdraw into an irritated boredom...); acknowledge the bulldozer's competence; make time for reflection (for you to reflect on his/her proposal, and for him/her to reflect on yours).
- Let them be the expert. This is when nothing else is working. It is a coping behaviour. It should be a conscious choice, not out of unconscious reactions.

BALLOONS:

- State the facts as an alternative version. Give a descriptive statement of facts
- Give the balloon a way out. Give him/her a face-serving vehicle. (If he had said convincingly and confidently that the capital city of Tanzania is Dar es salaam, you may come up with: actually the ECOMONIC capital of Tanzania is Dar es salaam, and if we want to talk of the political capital, it is Dodoma. ...)
- Be ready to fill the conversation gap yourself when the balloon is deflated into a confused silence.
- Cope with the balloon when s/he is alone, when possible.



2.7. The Indecisive



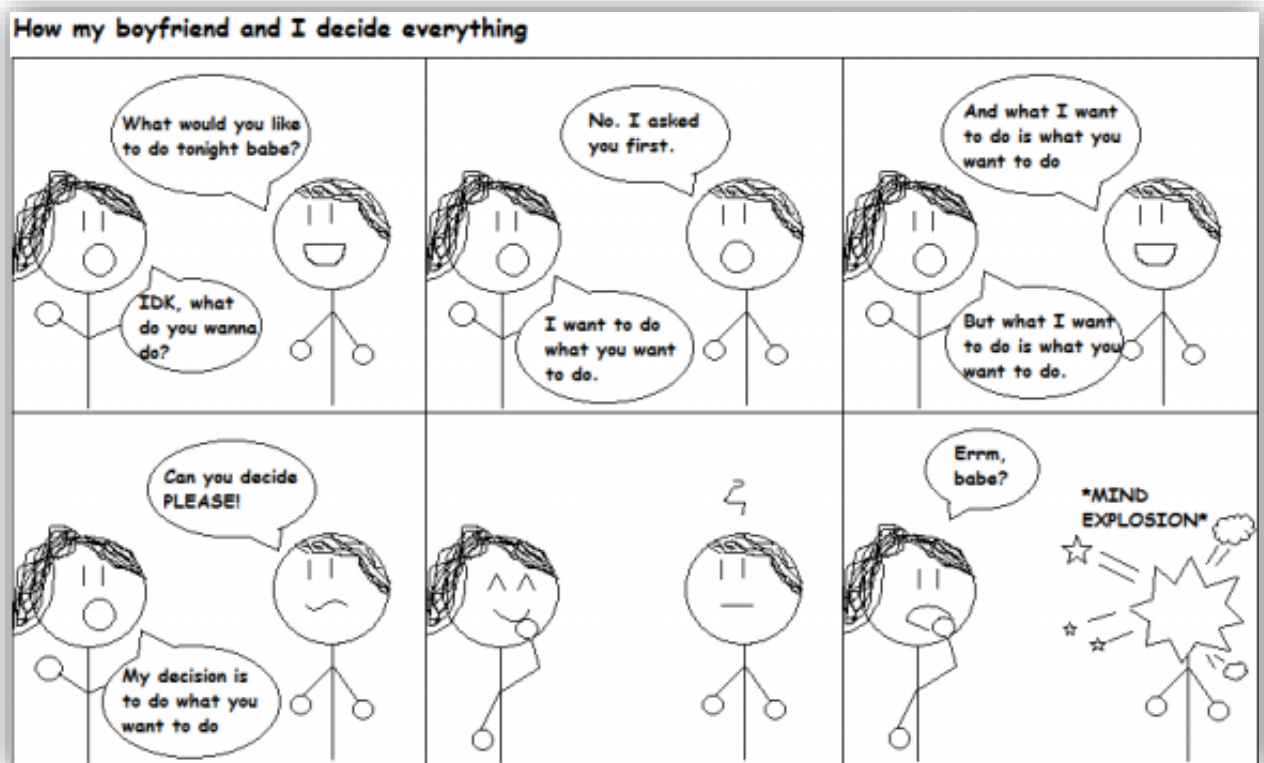
2.7.1. Description of the Indecisive

- Procrastinates, avoids taking decisions, letting others do it for him/her. Avoids taking risks. Seeks perfection.

- They avoid, not only prolong decision making. They become problematic because when they don't take decisions, projects get delayed and may become just too late to be considered.
- They are good listeners, pleasant, supportive, but they just won't decide.
- When talking, they may beat around the bush, avoiding to hurt others.

2.7.2. Understanding the motivation of the Indecisive

- They are driven by the desire to be helpful. But they are also aware that deciding potentially may bring people some distress and disappointment. "I can't make omelettes without breaking the eggs. However I decide, someone will not like it. I cannot knowingly and directly hurt anyone. What am I to do?"



- They are concerned with quality, with standards.
- They are demanding to themselves but also to you. If you don't meet their standards they may withdraw attention from you and from your request / project, although they don't tell you directly.

- In a dilemma, they escape by stalling everyone out long enough; thus the need for any decision disappears.

2.7.3. How to handle the Indecisive

- Surface the issues: make it easier for them to be direct and candid (tell them you can take it, that their message can help you more improve the situation...); pursue signs of indirection (like "generally speaking, this report is good.") like omissions and hesitations. Invite them to talk about the hinted message.
- Consider that it could be you (may be the difficulty s/he is experiencing is related with you: some feelings, reactions, fears... about you are causing him to be reluctant in taking the decision...)
- help them to problem solve
- Rank-order alternatives
- Link your plan to values of quality and service
- Give support after the decision is made
- If possible, keep control
- Watch for his/her overloads.

III. POSSIBLE CAUSES OF INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR AND CHARACTER

3.1. Ignorance of expected appropriate behaviour in the circumstances

- Not having learnt the expected behaviour patterns. E.g. small children, strangers... may not have gotten the opportunity, maturity, time, education necessary to learn the expected behaviour. E.g. someone who came from a culture that values a lot openness and truthfulness, had not yet learnt assertiveness in communication. She entered all conflicts by aggressiveness or by passive-aggressiveness. She entered a religious congregation for formation to be a nun. Some people said she was too aggressive to be a nun. A formator helped her by giving her the opportunity to learn Non-violent communication. She became assertive and was a good nun later on.
- Not having unlearned inappropriate behaviour. A boy was told regularly in his childhood that he should not talk at table, he should not look at adults when he is talking to them, and he should not sit with adults when they are talking among themselves. He was to go out of the house and play. When he was an adult, after studies, he was employed in a company where he had to attend meetings and had to meet people regularly to talk with them. He had to also attend business meals. He kept being silent at table during all the meal time. Clients complained that he was not looking at them when talking to them while in that culture people expected to be looked at otherwise they feel not respected. He also excusing himself from the meeting when topics that seemed very sensitive were tabled
- Courses in the identified social skills may be of great help for these persons. E.g. communication skills, social skills, intercultural living, community building, team building exercises...

3.2. Entropy

- Degenerative forces when efforts to grow are overpowered by
 - indifference,
 - lack of efforts,
 - laziness,
- Entropy is the opposite of evolution (which is a growth tendency). In entropy, we regress. We become worse than we were, less than we could be.

3.3. Sin

- Consciously and willingly choosing to do something evil.
- Living by the flesh rather than by the Spirit (Gal 5: 16-23). The fruits of the life in the flesh include quarrelling (common in the hostile aggressive)
- We need to ask for the grace of a life led by the spirit, confession one's sin, conversion from one's sin and aiming at a state of grace. When it is given, we need to receive it and make use of it.

3.4. Payoffs

- Payoffs are desired effects of a certain behaviour.
- Even when somebody does a very bad thing, there may be something they aim at obtaining when doing that thing. For example, the super - agreeable aim at being loved at all cost, so they may say yes to a request and still they don't deliver on time, because they just overcommitted. They may fear saying no to the request because they may lose your love. The indecisive may want to have options open, reason for not making decisions as promptly as expected.
- When we understand people's payoffs as important for them, we can understand or even tolerate their difficult behaviour and we could live and work well with them, despite their difficult behaviour, till the day they will have learnt to see the even better payoffs of outgrowing their problematic behaviour.

3.5. Psychological problems

- Personality disorders (see their list in 3.6 below)
- Defense mechanisms when they have become problematic. E.g. the know-it-all may be using the defense mechanism called denial, denying the fact that they may be wrong. The aggressive person may be using a defense mechanism called "acting out", instead of facing and managing their anger as feelings, they simply play it out directly.
- External control. This is trying to manipulate others, attempting to change make them change in order for one to be comfortable. The person practicing external control may think that they have to change you at all cost, including by acting in a way that we see them as being difficult. William Glasser identified seven deadly habits that make us difficult to relate with:
 - Blaming
 - Bribing (giving favours to someone while attaching conditions, obliging them to give us favours back). And when they don't, we react very badly, in a way that makes us appear difficult people.
 - Complaining

- Criticizing
 - Nagging
 - Punishing (like in revenge, hating,
 - Threatening (as Sherman tanks will do).
- Destructive thoughts patterns. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) has identified several thought patterns that may make us appear difficult to be with. Here are some examples.
- Demanding things should go my way only.
 - Comparing, e.g. I want to get the same treatment as I got in a former position. I want cultures to be the same as mine, and I consider inferior the ones that are different
 - Catastrophizing. This is being a prophet of doom, predicting and expecting the worst in people, in the future, and in life. Such a person may condemn and fear you before even they are sure you did something bad.
 - Overgeneralization. This includes making general conclusions about all people of a certain category after observing only a few. One may say for example that all people of a certain tribe are ignorant, they don't know anything. And therefore one may appear to those people as a problematic know-it-all.
 - Arbitrary inferences: concluding out of insufficient premises. It is a private logical system which other people may not share. Another person may draw a different conclusion from the same facts that led to mine. E.g. a know-it-all heard part of a radio program in which someone was asking if St. Francis was the founder of France. The know-it-all concluded this was obvious that this has to be the case.
- Destructive Life scripts. Transactional Analysis identifies different types of ways of thinking that may be subconscious or even unconscious, which make us function automatically according to them. Some may be in a form of orders (drivers), others appear as forbidding (injunctions).
- Don't succeed
 - Be strong
 - Try hard
 - Don't be you
 - Don't feel
 - Don't (this may make someone to behave like a super-agreeable, they promise to do something, but when they start doing it, the injunction pulls them out of action when they hear from inside the voice telling them "don't!")
 - Don't be close (this may lead someone to be a silent non-responsive). The person just stops communicating appropriately. This leads them to weakened relationships.

- Low self-esteem. Some people measure their worth not with their being but in what they are doing, having or in making sure the others are worse than them. They think, « I'm better because you are worse ». To keep you worse than them, they will treat you in a way that makes you see them as difficult persons.
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. People who experienced trauma and it has developed into PTSD may have symptoms that may make them difficult to live and work with. For example, they may have very strong emotions of terror, of rage (leading to being explosives), of depression (which may lead to their not being in the here and now, you talk to them they are not even hearing you, so they may be non-responsive).
- Addiction: addicts may deny the facts you are presenting by arguing with you, and they may tend towards know-it-all. The addict may go through very painful experiences of withdrawal (physical symptoms like sweating, high blood pressure, vomiting, headache, hallucinations... which come when the levels of the addictive substance in the body have gone low). This state may make the addict to be irritable and quite difficult to live with. Some family members prefer the drunk member to the one who is so irritable when they are in the withdrawal. Enabling them to use again the addictive substance or behavior may help the situation in the short term, normally the addict feels much better as the withdrawal symptoms may disappear, but the addiction gets even worse. The solution is sobriety, which may be reached at by professional treatment in a rehabilitation centre. Rehabilitation centres are preferable for someone who has had an advanced level of addiction and so may have very severe and acute withdrawal symptoms. Don't risk treating severe symptoms at home if you are not experts, some people have died out of them.
- Bereavement. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross identified some steps of bereavement, namely denial / shock, anger/guilt, bargaining, depression, and acceptance and moving on. Some people get stuck in one or another of these stages. A person stuck in anger, for example, may have quite inappropriate feelings or even expressions of anger even with people who didn't provoke it so much. She may appear as a difficult person. The one stuck in depression may be quite negative in her thinking, quite pessimistic in her approach, and may just be too down to be responsive. Again we can experience them as difficult persons.

Bereavement does not only happen after we have lost a loved human being related closely to us: we may have issues of bereavement even before a person dies (when someone is very sick, for example), we experience it also when we lose something, some state, some values... that mattered to us.

The good way to manage bereavement is to be aware of one's feelings, name them, express them appropriately, allow them to move on. Give the bereaved time to mourn. Let them go home, take some time off, talk to someone...

3.6. Problematic personalities (Personality Disorders)

Problematic behaviour, enduring, deep-seated, causing some suffering to the individual or to the people s/he meets/stays with. These people must be aware of and make special efforts to grow from the hold of these problematic personalities. They must learn to acquire and practice values, attitudes and behaviours that are inspired by the gospel and social norms for mature people.

You are advised not to label people using these terms. They may seem too strong and you could be wrong. These terms are given here just to help you have a vocabulary and a framework which can help you understand these people.

1. **Borderline personality disorder:** impulsivity, quick temper, difficulties controlling emotions, problems forming and keeping relationships, dramatic mood swings (from very positive to negative to positive...), frequent boredom and depression which may lead to being suicidal in some cases.
2. **Narcissistic personality disorder:** a grandiose sense of self, exaggerated sense of one's achievements, demanding attention, favours and consideration from others while at the same time not giving attention/favours/consideration back to others, poor empathy.
3. **Affective personality disorder:** 3 types:
 - Depressive: often sad, negative view to life, difficulties enjoying life, predicts the worst...
 - Excessive high spirited: excessive optimism, being frequently cheerful but in ways that are sometimes inappropriate, poor judgement .
 - Alternating between depressive and cheerful states.
4. **Paranoid personality disorder:** very suspicious and distrustful of others who are believed to be planning an attack on the individual.
5. **Passive-aggressive personality disorder:** indirectly expressing aggressiveness and other negative attitudes and feelings, deliberately chooses not to succeed and make others not to succeed.
6. **Antisocial personality disorder:** impulsive, irresponsible, reckless, and destructive behaviour in the society / community (eg. destruction of property, theft, deliberate breaking of safety rules, cheating, breaking relationships, incapacity to love...) without feeling remorse or guilt.
7. **Obsessional-compulsive personality disorder:** oversensitivity to criticism, exaggerated moral standards, difficulties adapting in new situations, indecision, miserly, lack of humour.
8. **Dependent personality disorder:** weak willed, difficulties taking a decision, clingy, searching to please others at all cost, too compliant, difficulties saying no, avoiding responsibility.
9. **Avoidant personality disorder:** too sensitive to rejection, desiring acceptance and affection but the fear of rejection makes the individual prefer withdrawing, entering in a relationship only when is assured that the others will guarantee unconditional

acceptance. Problems initiating or keeping relationships, low self-esteem, exaggerating the gravity of own shortcomings.

10. **Explosive personality disorder:** impulsive; while not having social problems like in antisocial personality disorder, the individual has episodes of uncontrolled outbursts of anger or of violence that are disproportional to their apparent cause.
11. **Schizoid personality disorder:** withdrawn, turned into self and poor in forming and maintaining intimate relationships with others, secretive, shy, more comfortable in an inner and fantasy world than in social contacts.
12. **Schizotypal personality disorder:** odd speech, behaviour, and thoughts. Interest in practices like superstition, magic and clairvoyance... Poor in communication and in social skills.
13. **Histrionic personality disorder:** immature; preoccupation with getting other's attention and with one's image; manipulating others, self-centredness, seeking and expressing intensity in relationships but tending to dramatise.

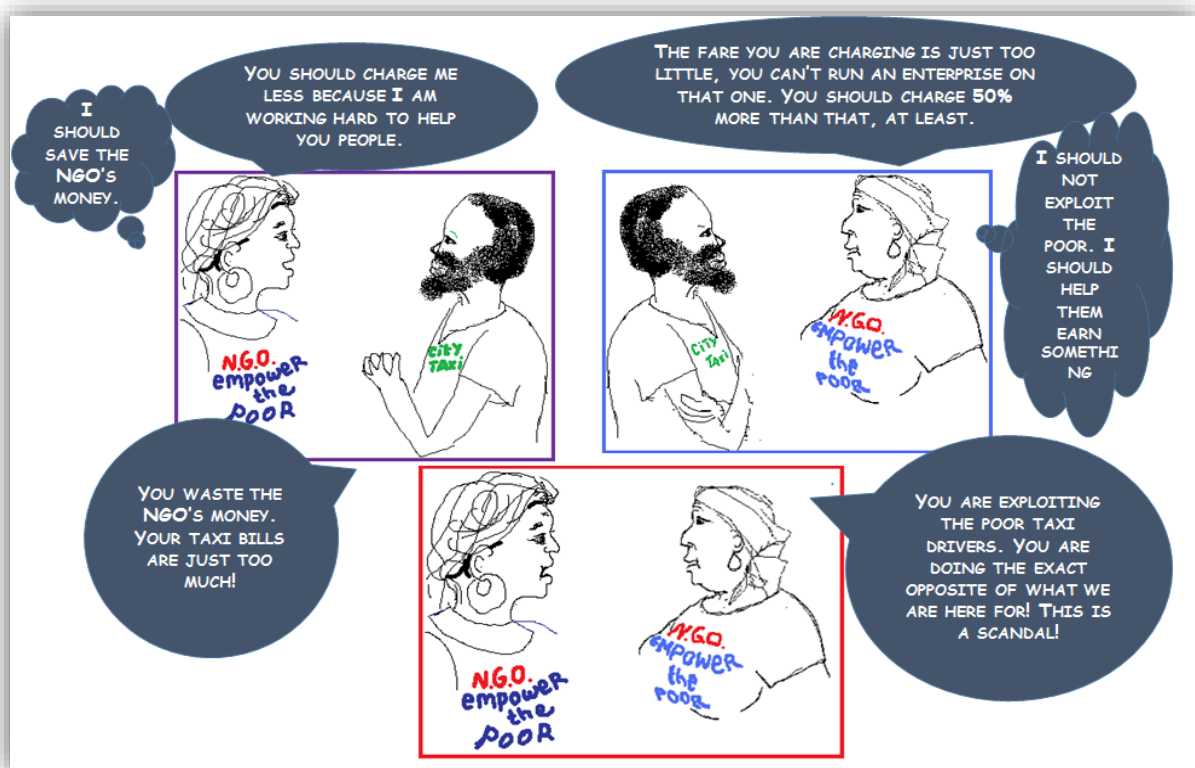
3.7. Normal group (community) dynamics

- Normal conflict. People who are different (in character, in culture, in convictions, in education, in generation...) normally may go through days of differing. The difference may be a very good opportunity to talk about it in a way that each person's needs, opinion, values, strengths, weaknesses, talents... are brought to light. Assertive way of communication can help people to talk it over and come up with a better mutual knowledge. Allow each person to bring in the community their best, understand their weaknesses without judging the person, allow individuals to feel free to open themselves to talk even about their weak areas. Let them feel loved and accepted despite their weaknesses.
- Stages of development of a community: Scott Peck talks of four stages of community development:
 - pseudo-community (other experts call it forming). In this stage, people tend to act as super-agreeable. They don't express their disagreement. It is a normal stage when the community is just forming and is new. Leaders need to take advantage of this stage by giving clear goals, directions, norms, vision, guidelines... of the community they are forming. The stage will pass once people feel free enough to express their differences. People enter then into stage 2, chaos.
 - chaos (other persons call it storming). During this stage people may insist a lot on their being different. There is likely to be some people behaving like hostile aggressive. Defense mechanisms of projection, transference, and displacement are quite common here. People should learn to fight not against someone, but for and with that person. Instead of fighting in a manner that is of hatred, let members learn to express their differences in a non-violent way.
 - Emptying: each person speaks about themselves, their particular experiences, conviction, goals, limitations... that make them do and be who they are. Each person speaks to inform rather than to blame or put down the others. The others

listen to understand rather than to find points of weakness to attack. It is very high levels of intimacy. This is actually one of the best ways to understand even people we consider difficult.

- Real community. Here persons live well together because of their differences which enrich their interpersonal relationships. One is loved not because they are only perfect without fault, but despite one's weaknesses that are made known by a sincere sharing about them. Each one contributes to the community what is their best, and her weaknesses are complemented by the goodness of the other members. This way of living is the best way of understanding, living and working with people we may have considered difficult.
- Power struggles. Even children may have sibling rivalry among them, they compete for attention, love, influence... This tendency to struggle for influence may continue in us when we are adults in a way that may be quite strong in some people, and we may find those adults difficult to be and work with. Servant leadership may really help us manage such situations.
- Differences (intercultural, interpersonal, characters, age, level of spiritual development, (the person you see as difficult may actually be seeing you as the difficult one.)

3.8. Differences in people's systems /hierarchies of values



- Difference in what people consider very important values for them. In the above image, each person may find the other a bad and difficult person. In this case we must be aware that even the other may be finding us the ones who are difficult. It will be helpful to have an empathetic understanding of the other person's point of view, what values are guiding their decisions.
- Vices / evil: by choice (blindly) following or continuing some philosophy based on vices or on evil. Some people may have chosen a particular vice (like revenge, fighting, inflicting unnecessary pain in others or even on themselves) as being very important for them. Some chose to follow Satan rather than God, and this has implications on their value systems. They see some values as vices, and vices as values. They may appear very difficult to live with if you are not sharing their system of values.

We must add that not all people who see vices as values are evil by choice. Some picked this system of values innocently from their surroundings. For example, children raised by parents who inculcated in them these vices instead of values may actually believe they are doing well when they live according to the vice they learnt at home. You may see them as very difficult, but once you understand them, you stand a chance of giving them an opportunity to rethink their value system. It helps to have done a bit of training in intercultural living, which insists in a way of encountering people from different cultures with an attitude of respect and dialogue. Intercultural living enables each person to bring their best, to learn the good in the other, while remaining members of their former cultures.
- Undervaluing the importance of what you consider a very important value. For example, James is so much interested in writing books. He needs a lot of time alone in his room in order to write them. He is an introvert and a number 5 in the Enneagram. He lives in community with John, who is an extravert, number 7 in the Enneagram, who likes spending time together watching football in the evenings. John believes in talking together as much as possible, partying for hours whenever there is an opportunity, and if there is an interpersonal conflict, it must be raised and talked about immediately before it sours the relationship. James and John see each other as difficult persons. James believes that community partying is good, yes, but far less important than reflecting and writing alone in one's room. John would put community partying as first priority, not last as James would.
- Exaggeration of a particular virtue / value. When a person is behaving in a way that we see as difficult, they may have a value they are trying to attain. I once was at the immigration office, queueing. I was carrying a computer bag on my back. The young fellow behind me chose to stand on my left hand side instead of standing behind me. I wondered whether he was attempting to get served before me. I was completely uncomfortable. I thought of him as a bad person, unmannered, uncouth, uncultured... When I could not take it anymore, I reminded him that since I came before him I will get served before him. He calmly assured me that he agreed with me. He added that he stood on my left side in order to keep me assured that my things in my bag will not be stolen, he explained to me that he once had a lady worry of her things being stolen by the person behind her as he would just open the zips of the bag on her back and serve himself. I thought that he acted following the value of assuring me. But I thought it was a bit exaggerated in a way that it created an impression of undermining a more important value of order, harmony...

Exaggerations also can be seen in a person who values her freedom of expression so much that she believes it is more important than listening to others' points of view. A community member was very aggressive to others and when confronted about it she said she wanted to exercise her right and freedom of expression. She forgot that she also had the duty of respecting the dignity of other people. Hence the importance of formation in a healthy hierarchy of values in which the Gospel values of the Kingdom of God (like service, love, charity, piety, forgiveness...) are taken as highest, followed by social values (helping us to live well among ourselves, these include respect, sacrifice, order, punctuality, duties...), and the values for one's own good (like freedom of expression, rights... come lower. Counter-values (like libertinage, quarrelling, tribalism, rebellion, sectarianism, lies, corruption...) should be buried and not allowed to guide our behavior. We become difficult when we are guided by anti-values, or when we take lower values as higher than the ones that should be higher. Formation should help people to develop and live according to an appropriate system of values.

- Indifference. Some people are not necessarily choosing to be bad or difficult. They just have not chosen to be good. If they were driving an automatic geared car, they have it on Neutral gear. At that position, one has not chosen any particular direction in life. Any force (or trend of thought) will equally influence them. There is some liberalism and some relativism that are influencing our world in a negative way today, they foster this indifference. If you are engaged in a particular direction in life, you have values and priorities, you may find the people who are indifferent quite difficult to live or work with. Let us say you believe in chastity, in sobriety, and in honesty as values you would not compromise. When you live with a person who relativises these values (for example, by imposing themselves sexually on you, telling you you are too rigid, old fashioned...) you may find them very difficult to live with.

It really helps when society invests in formation of its members since their childhood. The formation should not only be on academic subjects, it should also include formation in values that matter for that group. This is what was being done by initiation ceremonies and family / community life. Formation process is the passing on of the values important to the society / community. It helps us to understand, live and work well even with people we would otherwise have found too difficult.

0. CONCLUSION

Bramson identified seven types of characters in people that we may find as difficult to live and to work with. These are the hostile aggressive, the complainer, the silent unresponsive, the super-agreeable, the negativist, the know-it-all, and the indecisive.

The "difficulty" in people we see as difficult is not necessarily something objectively and permanently fixed in them. We may learn to live and treat with those persons in a way that will allow understanding, living and working well with them.

I wish to end by summarizing the dispositions we may take in order to get to the point of understanding, living and working well with the persons we see as difficult. It is a combination of 3 Cs that I learnt from Sr. Josephine Nafula, MMM.

- Be caring. As we have seen, the person behaving in ways that may seem difficult for us, is possibly having some reason to behave so. Caring for her may simply be through listening empathically, trying to understand their needs, values, goals, feelings and opinion from their point of view. It is giving them the opportunity to have their needs met and their value system respected. Caring also means taking them seriously rather than disparaging them.
- Be in Charge. There are some of the behavior we see as difficult which are also not helpful in moving things forward. For example, when a person keeps exploding, or is not responding to what you are saying, they cannot lead your relationship or your team work towards some good future. In this case, you need to take charge of the situation, take the lead, and propose the next step forward. E.g. ask them to sit down, to take a break and meet with in a neutral place tomorrow at 15h00.
Be in charge (in control) also of your own feelings and emotions. Very big is the temptation to react out of a strong emotion occasioned by the other person's difficult behavior (like reacting by slapping the aggressive person, refusing to talk to the unresponsive silent person....) because we are hurt. In this case we will become wounded wounders. When you react out of a strong emotion, you will appear now to be the one who is a difficult person. The other will feel justified in reacting back to you in a way that will make them appear even more difficult to you. And the situation spirals down to a very bad state. Your controlling your reactions, emotions and feelings will be crucial when dealing with the person you experience as difficult.
- Be Calm. Calmness is contagious. It creates an atmosphere of peace. To get genuine calmness, you need to stand on a spiritual basis (as Jesus tells us to build our house on him, the sure rock). You may need to do some relaxation exercises in order to enhance your calmness. If you are not managing to be calm, it may be crucial to reschedule your meeting with the person you find difficult. Fix an appointment in the nearest possible future when you think you may have calmed a bit. Fix a precise time and place.