

Self-awareness, assertiveness & productive relationships



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&

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Who are we?

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- Facilitator on Divisional training courses

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- Springboard trainer
- Has worked in researcher training for 10 years

Who are you?

What are your skills and characteristics?

What motivates you?



What are your values?

How do you interact with others?

Why should we think about this?



Well, what's on your horizon?

Why should we think about this?



Self-awareness (understanding our own characters, values and motivations) can be very powerful in terms of **navigating** day-to-day interactions, making the most of **career opportunities**, and building **positive professional relationships**

Isn't this just "mumbo-jumbo"?

Maybe...

But not if you make it **practical**

In this session we want to provide some **practical tips** on **self-awareness, assertiveness, and productive relationships**, and signpost other personal development training opportunities provided by the MPLS Division

What are your skills and characteristics?

What motivates you?



What are your values?

How do you interact with others?

To answer these questions we need to look for **evidence** in our life experiences

For example, think about **your journey towards mathematical research**

- What **skills/characteristics** have you demonstrated and/or developed?
 - knowledge and technical skills, critical thinking, communication (writing, speaking, teaching, ...), negotiating, persuading, determination, perseverance, organisation, self-motivation, creativity, ...
- What **motivates** you to do it?
 - love of knowledge, excitement of discovery, “changing the world”, momentum, being occupied, others’ expectations, ...
- Underpinning this all is a set of **values**:
 - truth, integrity, rigour, collaboration/sharing, status/fame, achievement, loyalty, pleasing others, family, balance, ...
- And it requires you to **interact with others**:
 - supervisions, collaborations, conferences/workshops, funding/job applications, journal publications, teaching, admin, socialising, ...

What are “values”?

- **Values** are what we give worth to in our lives
 - money, power, reputation, authenticity, respect, ...
- Sometimes they are expressed directly in our **motivations** for doing things
- But often they lie a bit deeper under the surface
- When your values are being honoured, a situation “feels right” – high energy, motivation, fulfilment
- When a situation “doesn’t feel right”, it’s likely that **your values are not being honoured**
- Recognising this can be helpful in decision-making

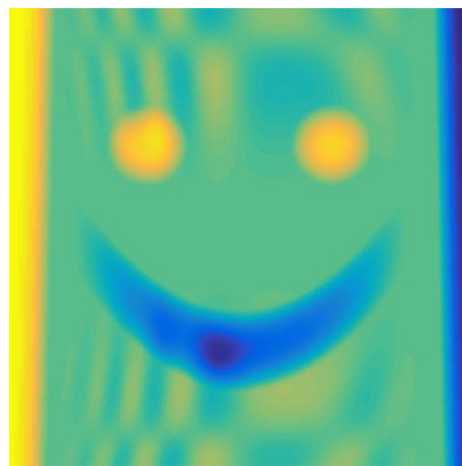
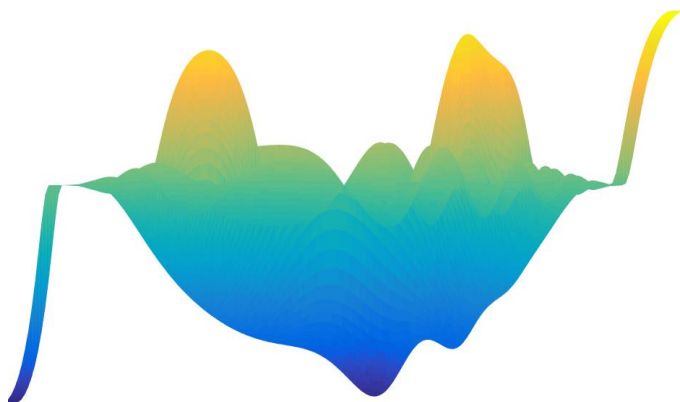
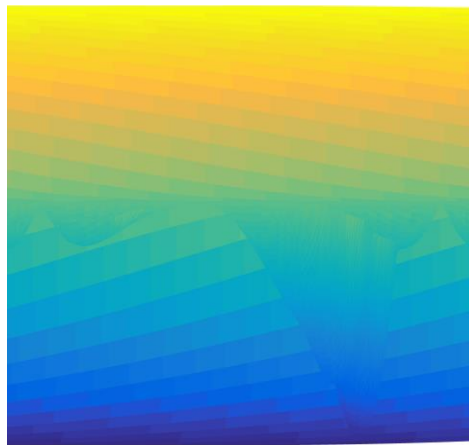
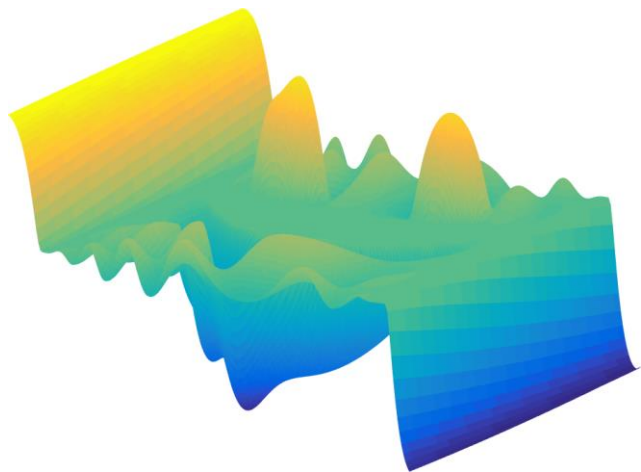
What do other people think of you? (And does it matter?!)

“There are three sides to every story: yours, mine, and the truth.” (Robert Evans, film producer)

Theorem: To every story involving me and n other people there are $n+2$ sides:
yours, yours,...,yours, mine, and the truth.


n times

The point: **everyone has a different perspective**



So...

- Our perceptions of each other are at best a low-dimensional projection of the “truth”
- Everything has to be viewed through the lens of character, motivation and values
- Remember this when comparing yourself to others, and when interacting with them

What image do you want to project to others?

Why?

How can you achieve this?

Developing self-awareness

Peculiarities of academia: often no obvious hierarchy; “managers” often have little management training. You have to be **proactive** and **take control**.

- Personal reflection – **notice** your behavioural patterns, preferences, preconceptions

An enlightening exercise: ask yourself

- What 5 adjectives best describe you?
- What’s holding you back?

What answers would your best friend/boss/student give?!

- **Ask for constructive feedback** regularly from a range of sources
- Identify and approach possible **mentors** (either formal or informal)
- Ask an experienced colleague to help you carry out a **“360 degree review”**



A model for good feedback:

B	Balanced
O	Objective
O	Observable
S	Specific
T	Timely

How do you interact with others?

- Do you generally have positive or negative interactions?
- What is your “team role”?
- What are your colleagues’ characters, motivations and values? Do they align with yours?
- What’s your preferred communication method? Does that align with your colleagues’?
- How do you respond to criticism or adversity?
- What preconceptions, behavioural patterns and emotional responses might be affecting your behaviour?

Responding to a negative interaction

- **Let off steam** (tea, exercise, socialising, music, meditation, ...)
 - anger is a bad basis for analysis or decision-making
- Then, **review the interaction objectively** – what happened, and why? How did you respond, and why? **Own your emotional reactions**, but try to move beyond them
- Remember our **different perspectives** - play “Devil’s Advocate” (or find a trusted friend to do it for you)
- Follow up with those involved if necessary
- **Formulate action points** to improve outcome of future interactions, **consistent with your character, motivations and values**
 - Prepare more thoroughly?
 - Clarify your expectations?
 - Brief participants in advance using an alternative communication method?
 - Develop strategies for recognising/managing your emotional reactions?
 - Ask someone else to advise/mediate?

Assertiveness skills – a tool for:

- Building positive and productive relationships
- Working in situations or with people where preferences and values are different to yours



Assertiveness skills

- Skills are learnt, developed and practised
- Start in small ways where the investment and risk is small
- Do it consciously as you would with a more measurable skill, and build it up
- Remember it's a skill in your toolbox so you don't have to do it all the time – use it when appropriate



What do you think of this behaviour?

[https://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=Ymm86c6DAF4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ymm86c6DAF4)

- **Aggression:** winning at the expense of others
- **Passivity:** pleasing others above yourself/ not being clear about what you want
- **Passive aggression:** making the other person feel bad

- **Assertiveness:** balance – fair balance between your needs/wants and those of other people

1. Develop your self-awareness and with it a sense of your own value, your rights, and self-respect.

Know what you feel, what you think and what you want.

Other people value you to the extent that you value yourself

Create space for yourself

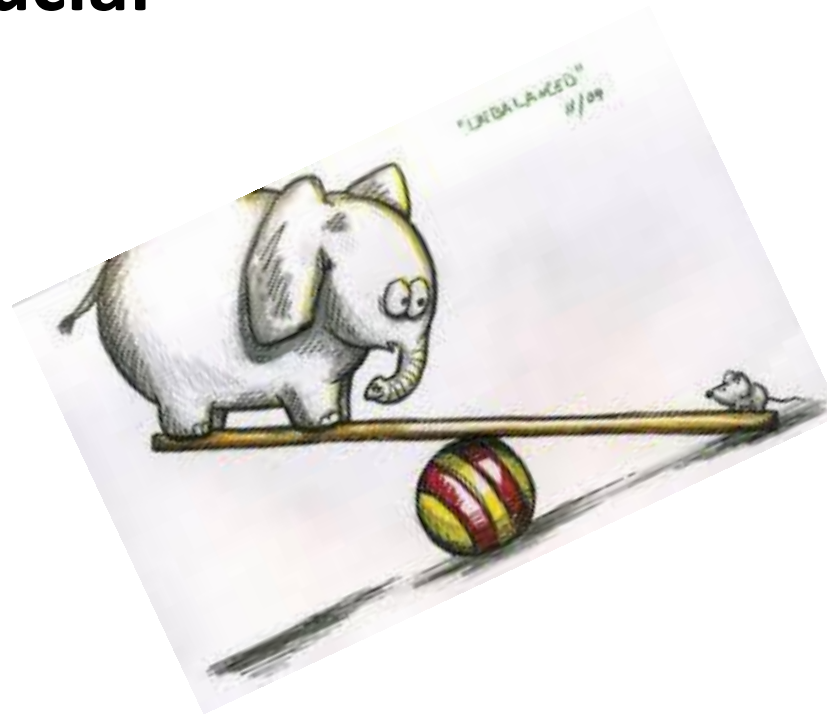
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2. Develop that same respect for others. If assertiveness is about balance, then equal respect for yourself and for others is crucial



Be curious - work to **understand** the other person's point of view and what they want;

Acknowledge their point of view and what they want

But remember:

- Understanding and acknowledgment \neq agreement
- Others' emotions and reactions are not your responsibility

Create the same space for others

What are their skills
and characteristics?

What motivates
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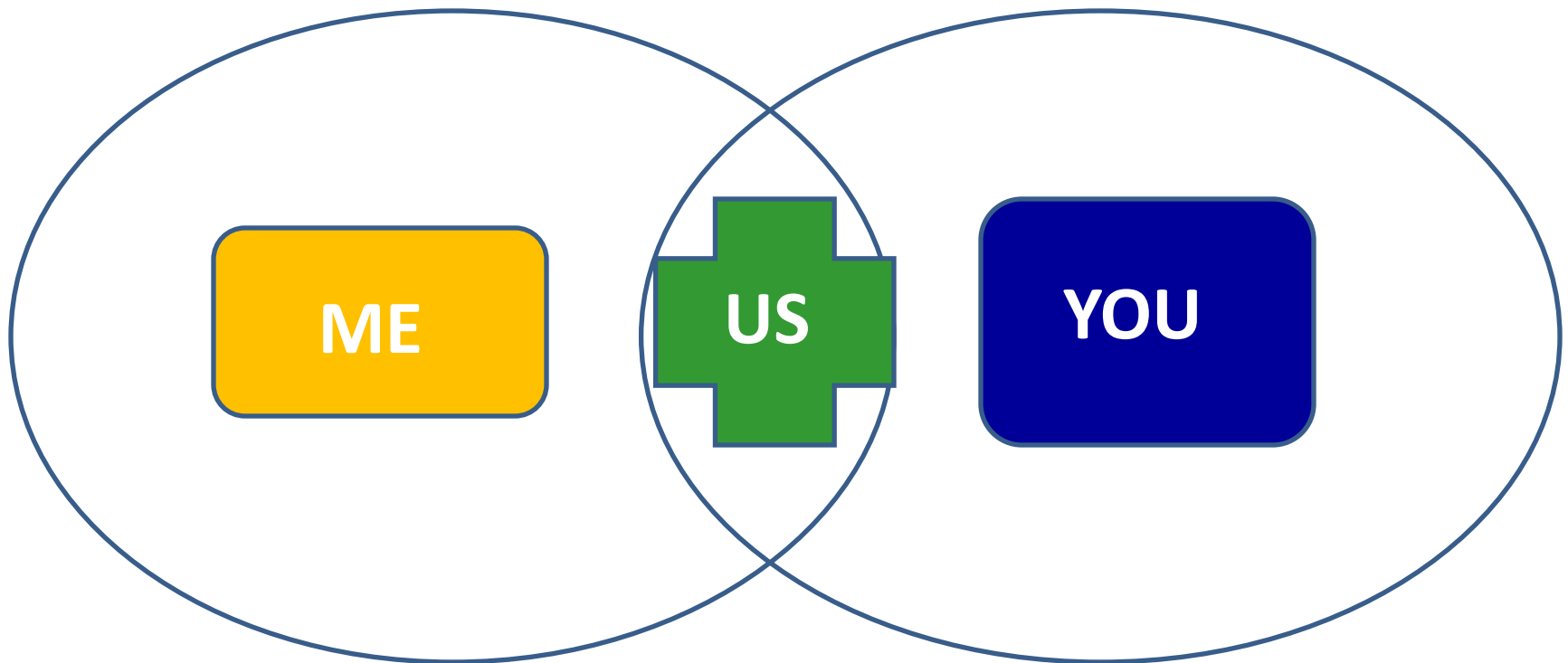
What are their
values?

How they interact with
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3. Articulate clearly how you feel / what you think / what you want

Make sure it is realistic and possible, and articulate it clearly using 'I'.

4. Work collaboratively to create action or future direction



Some important additional points:

- Notice your body language and your tone of voice. Practice conveying a consistent message
- What happens if you don't get what you want?

5. Practice!

Practice in small ways where the investment and risk is small

Be flexible with the different steps – what's important is that you include them all

Practice just noticing your reactions and behaviour in different situations (and maybe that of others!)

Case study

You are a junior researcher involved in a collaborative project. You are worried that the project direction isn't providing you with the opportunities you need to progress your career. You are finding it hard to express your concerns as you don't like speaking up in front of a group, especially one involving senior colleagues.

How could you apply the techniques we've discussed in this session?

Sources:

[https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/Assertivene
ss.htm](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/Assertivene
ss.htm)

[http://www.centreforconfidence.co.uk/projects.php?p
=cGlkPTU5JmIkPTQ0Nw==](http://www.centreforconfidence.co.uk/projects.php?p
=cGlkPTU5JmIkPTQ0Nw==)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ymm86c6DAF4>

Springboard Programme:

[http://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/training/course-programme-
for-graduate-students/springboard-programme-for-
women](http://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/training/course-programme-
for-graduate-students/springboard-programme-for-
women)

MPLS Divisional courses and resources to explore these topics in more depth:

Springboard: <http://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/training/course-programme-for-graduate-students/springboard-programme-for-women>

Navigator: <http://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/training/course-programme-for-graduate-students/navigator-development-programme-for-men>

GRAD Challenge (for DPhil students only):

<http://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/training/course-programme-for-graduate-students/grad-challenge>

Coaching sessions: <http://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/training/course-programme-for-graduate-students/coaching-sessions>

These slides available at people.maths.ox.ac.uk/hewett/F4.pdf