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KNOWHOW> CARING FOR YOUR MIND> CONFLICT



CONFLICT
more

Caption

Conflict, it is often said, brings out the worst in us. There is some truth in this, but it is much more likely to bring out the past in us. When challenging or threatening conflicts arise, they tend to echo, or **re-stimulate**, similar situations in the past, provoking a variety of **defensive reactions**. This seriously limits the choices we have in the present and, when it happens to several people at the same time, it can temporarily extinguish choice altogether.

In addition and as fundamental—to be alive, needing to adapt and survive—is to experience conflict of one sort or another. Our self-interest may often overlap with others' interests but also at times it is certain to differ from them. In some people's life stories this divergence is strongly expressed through rebelliousness; in others through devotion and loyalty. I see these variations in the way that self-interest influences behaviour as one of the fundamental sources of human conflict and disagreement.

The following screens show how the overlaps and divergence of our own and others' interests can be consolidated into a map of the *territory of conflict*.

more

Systems of punishment generate four basic responses. We can comply, rebel, withdraw, or manipulate. Another sort of response is possible... resistance... action that does not accept the terms of the system, action that creates a new reality.

STARHAWK TRUTH OR DARE

Mapping the territory of conflict

Conflict has many roots and no single scheme can do justice to all of them. However, a combination of mathematics and some of the insights from groupwork can be assembled to create a useful map of the ‘territory of conflict’.

Based on developments in Catastrophe Theory—a precursor of complexity theory—it maps the way in which the strength of the rapport between people is greatly influenced, on the one hand, by how much zeal, commitment, and energy we and others put into a situation, and on the other, by how we manage the balance between our own and/or others’ interests.

The result is not a means of measuring or controlling conflict, more a contour map that supports our intuitive understanding of the ways in which conflict unfolds. It brings into focus common conflict-related expressions such as the ‘last straw’, ‘the straw that breaks the camel’s back’; or ‘if you are not for us, you are against us’; and the common experience that, after a row or deep disagreement, recovery requires a ‘cooling off period’ before we can reconnect with each other.

The following screens take you through a step by step outline of the map. When you feel you’ve grasped it, see if you can use it to map any of your current, recent, or up-coming conflicts.

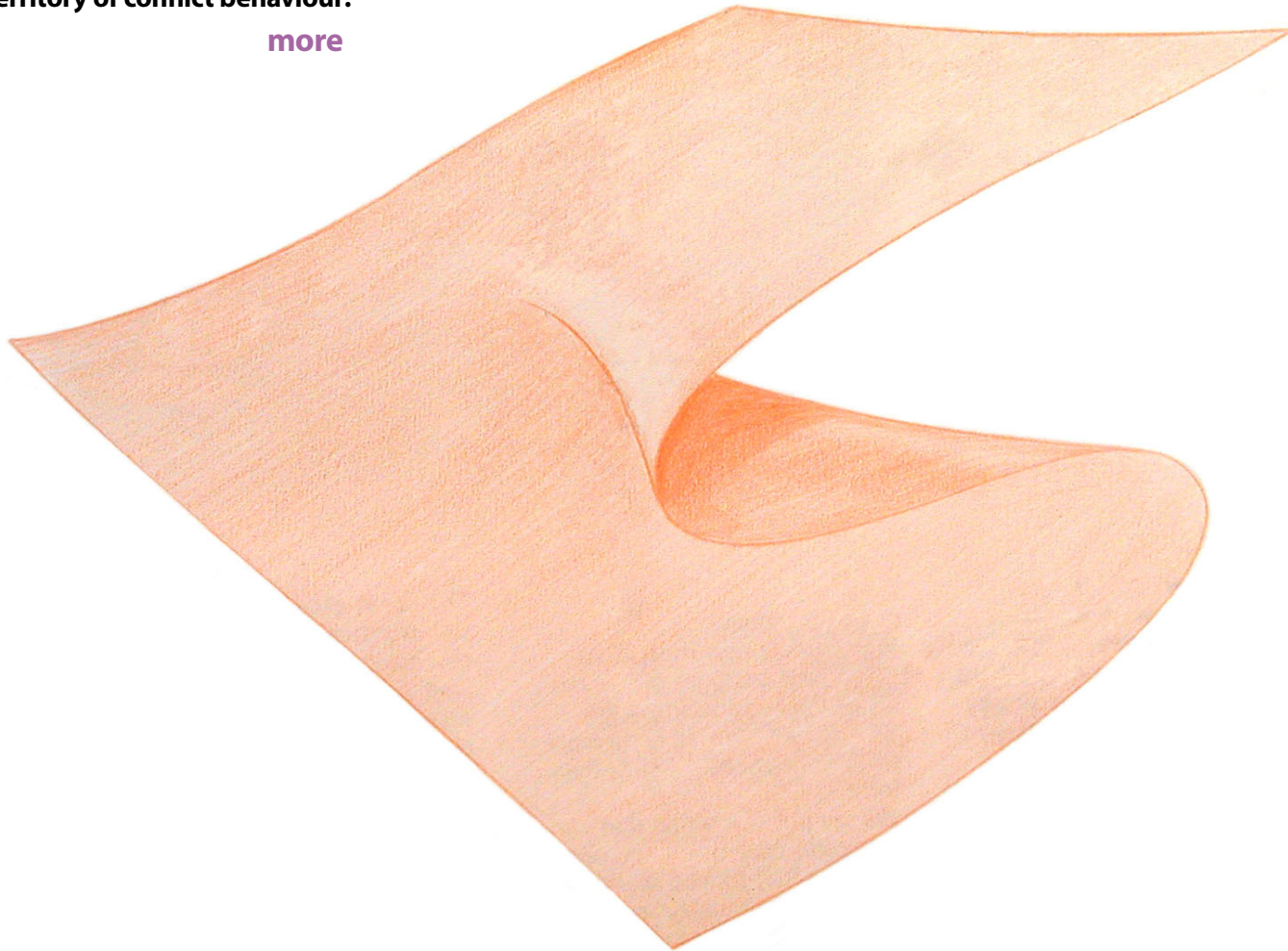
[more](#)

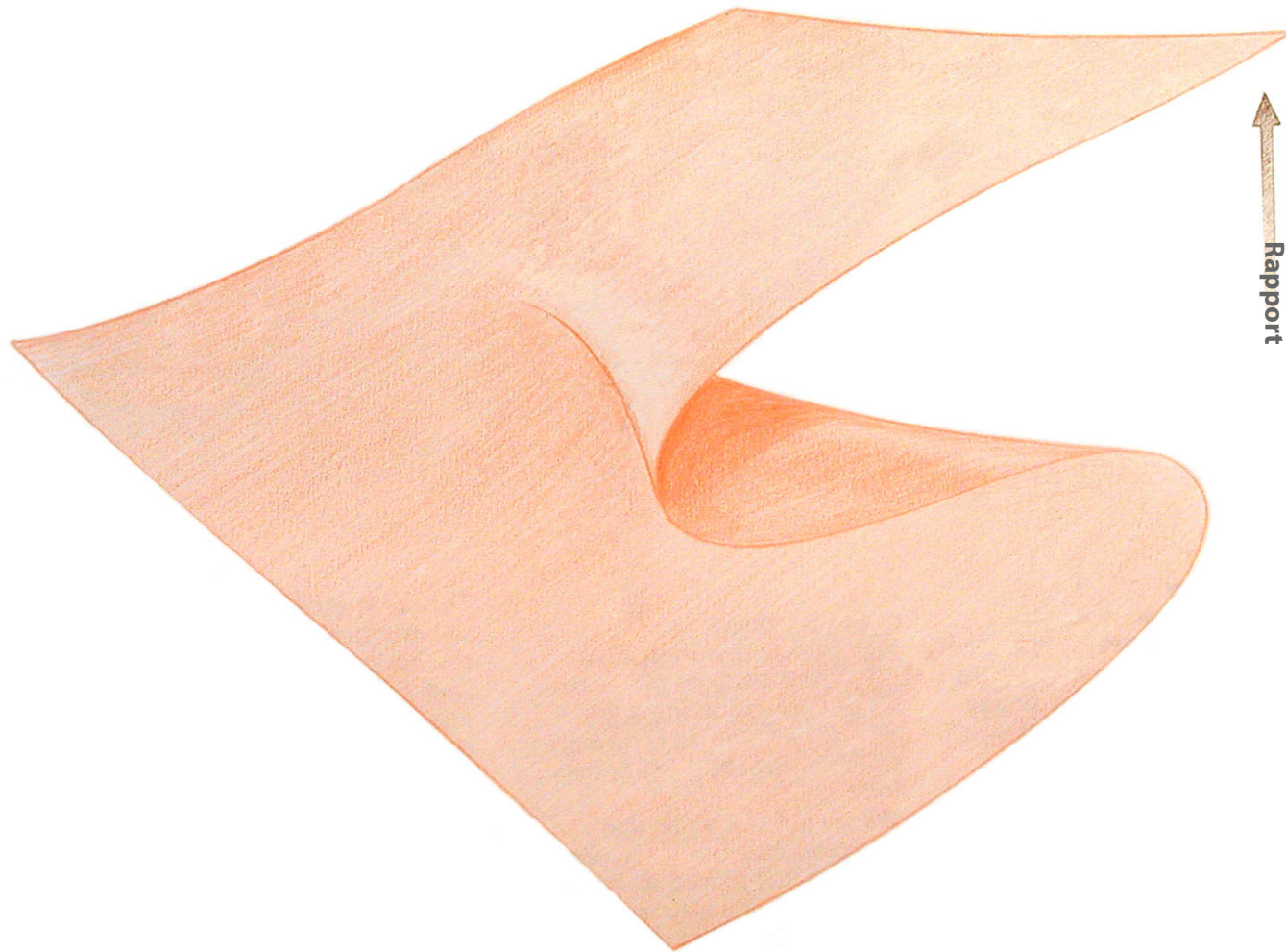
Five zones of conflict behaviour

Catastrophe Theory mathematics shows that certain combinations of influence give rise to a folded surface which has some valuable properties.

It is used here to map **a territory of conflict behaviour.**

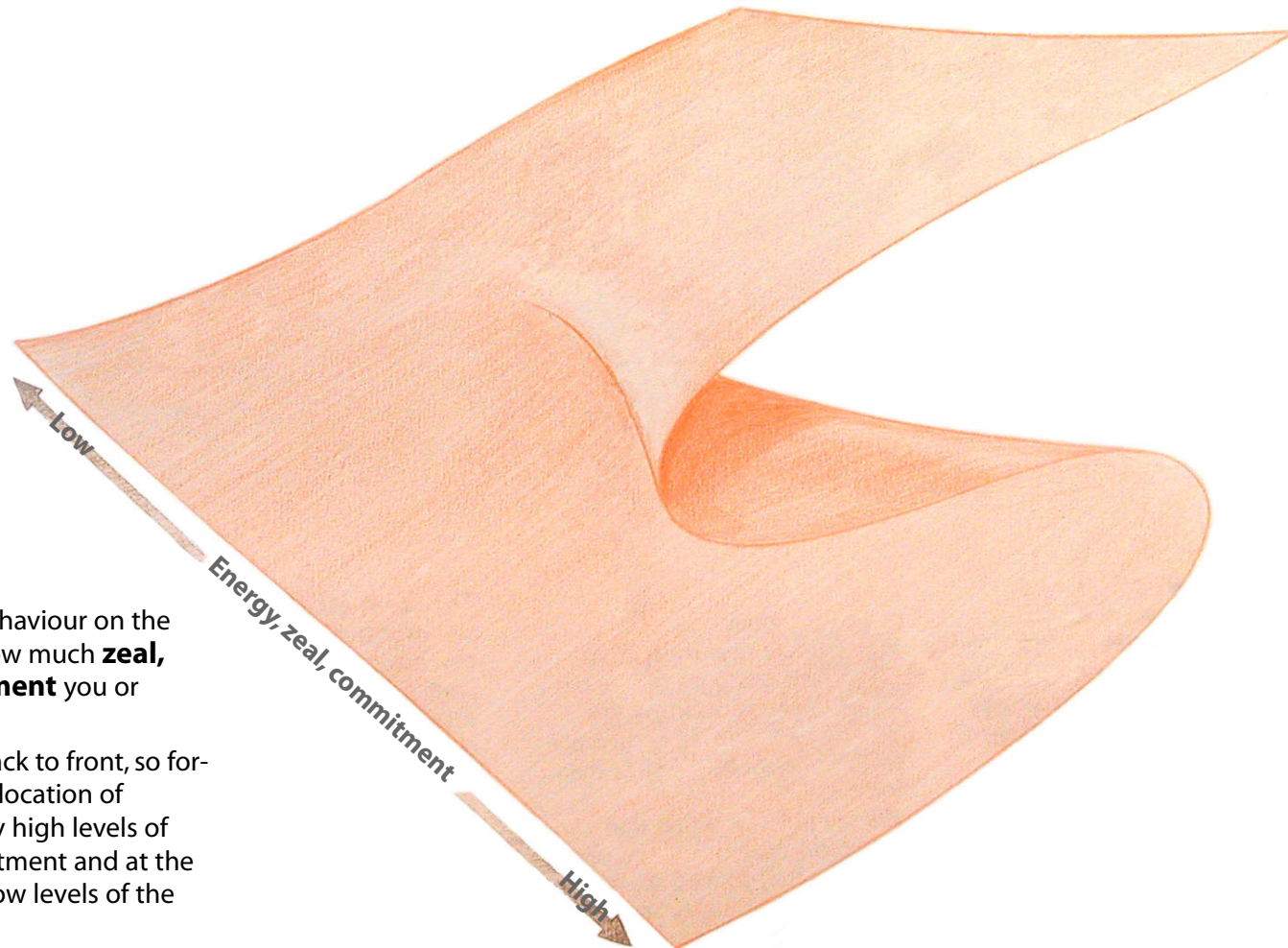
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The map's surface displays a range of conflict behaviour. High up on the surface means stronger **rapport** with others. Low down indicates low rapport or antipathy.

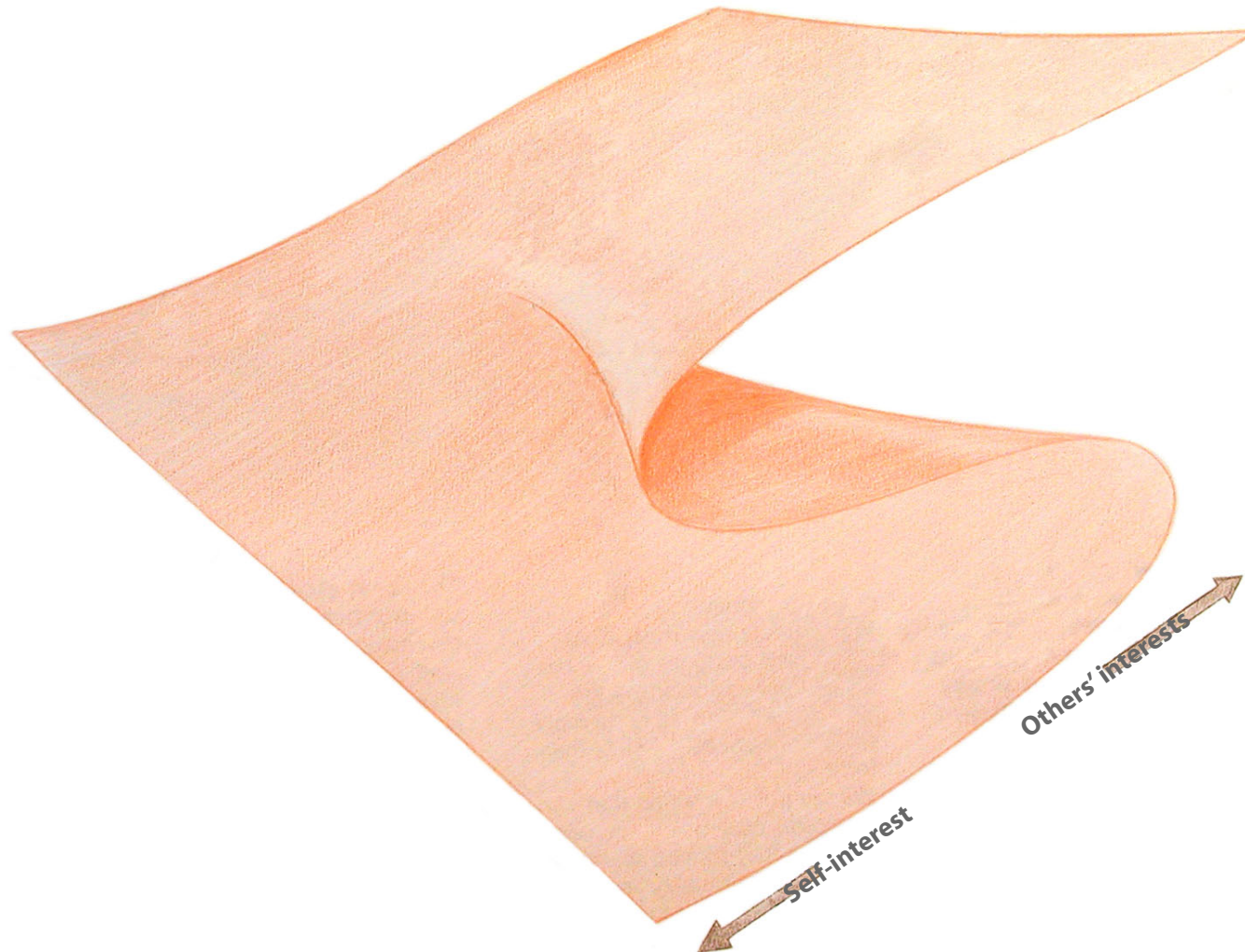
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The range of conflict behaviour on the map is influenced by how much **zeal, energy and commitment** you or others contribute.

This increases from back to front, so forward on the map is the location of behaviour influenced by high levels of energy, zeal and commitment and at the back, correspondingly low levels of the same influences.

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The range of of conflict behaviour on the map is also influenced by how you manage the balance between **your interests** and **others' interests**.

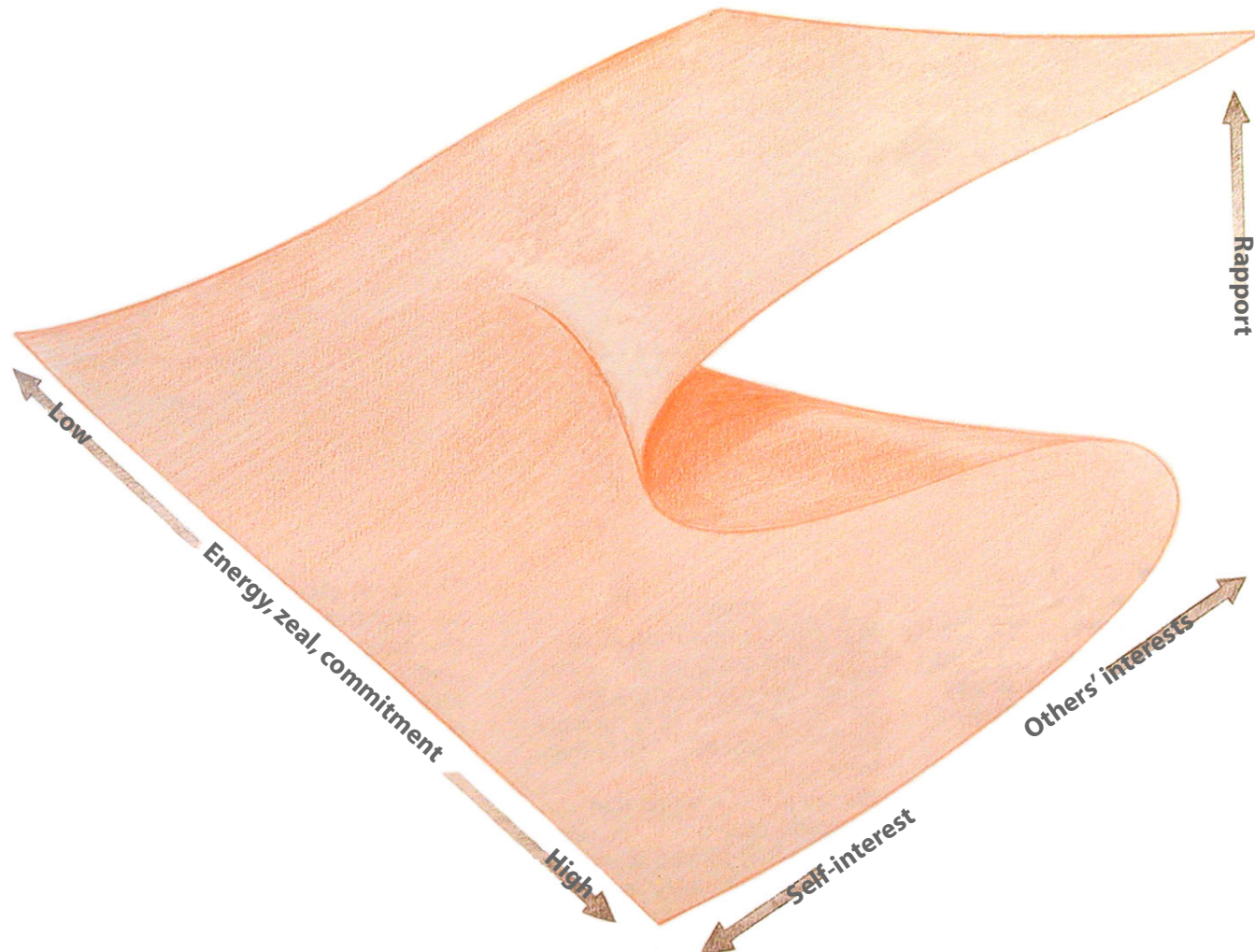
This increases from side to side, so that behaviour influenced by high levels of self-interest is located toward the left of the map and behaviour influenced by high levels of others' interests is located toward the right of the map.

[more](#)

Among the many variations of conflict behaviour, five zones on the map are of special interest.

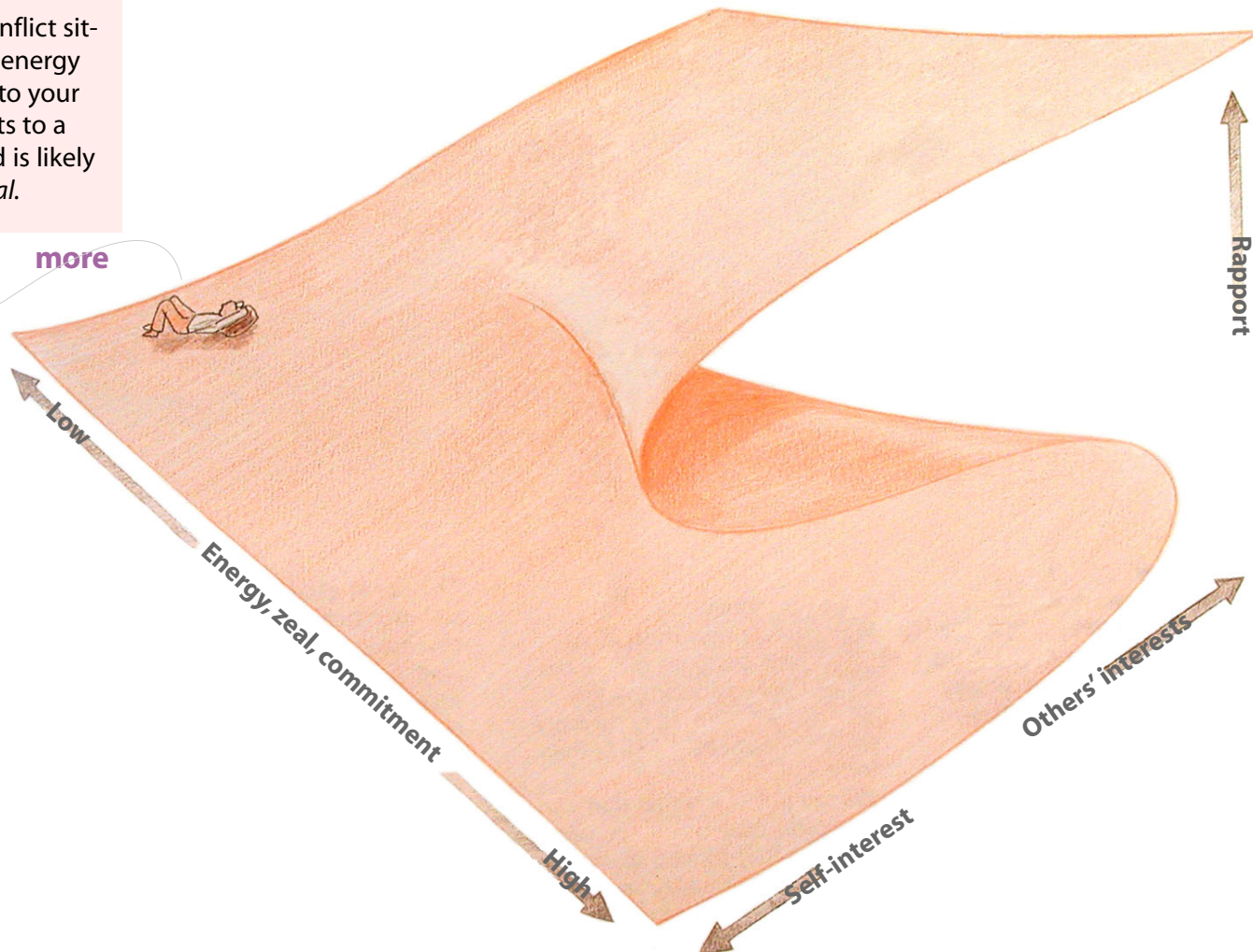
The next few screens take you through them one at a time.

[more](#)



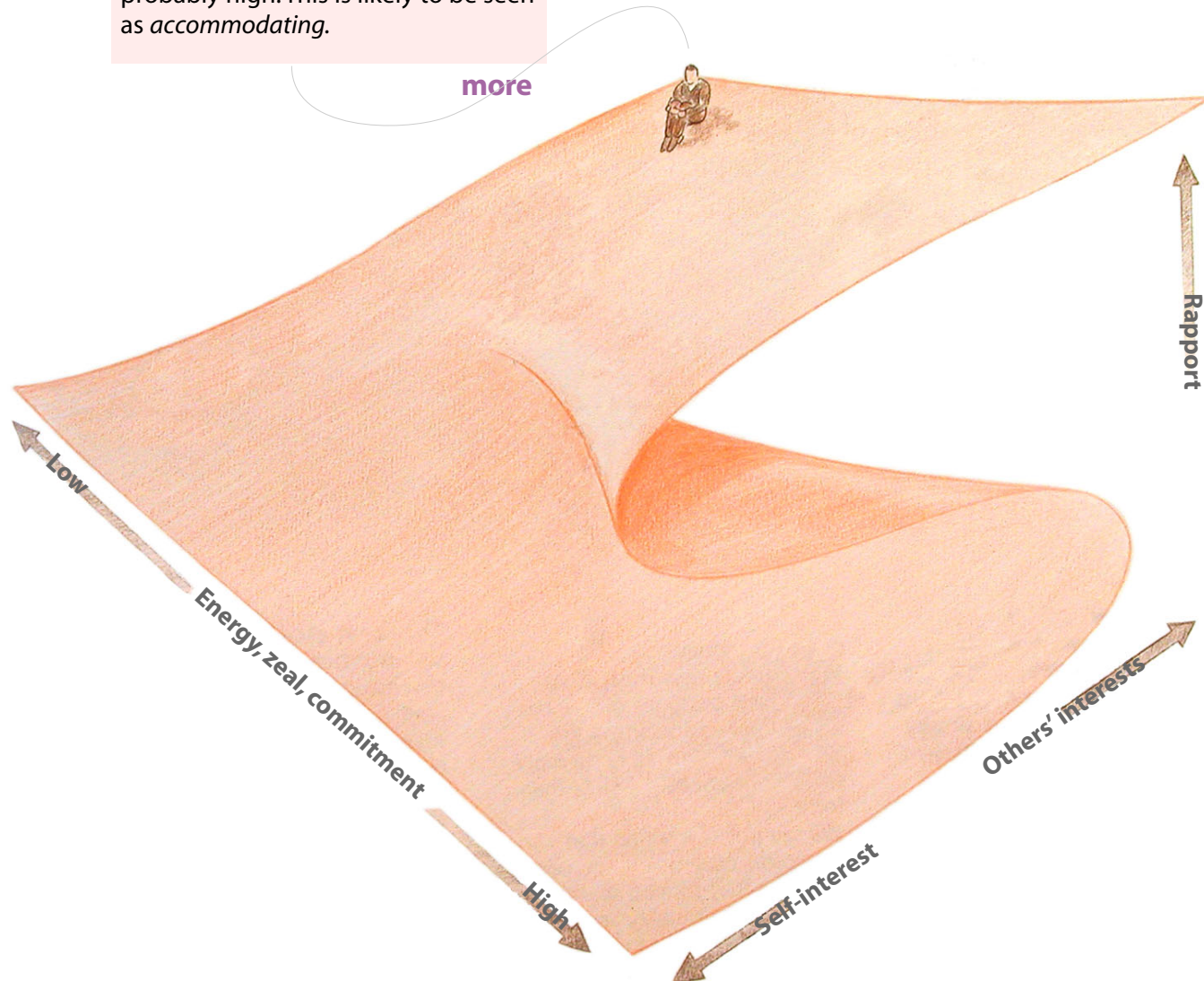
Withdrawal

If your response to a conflict situation is to give it little energy while paying attention to your own interests, this points to a low level of rapport and is likely to be seen as *withdrawal*.



Accommodate

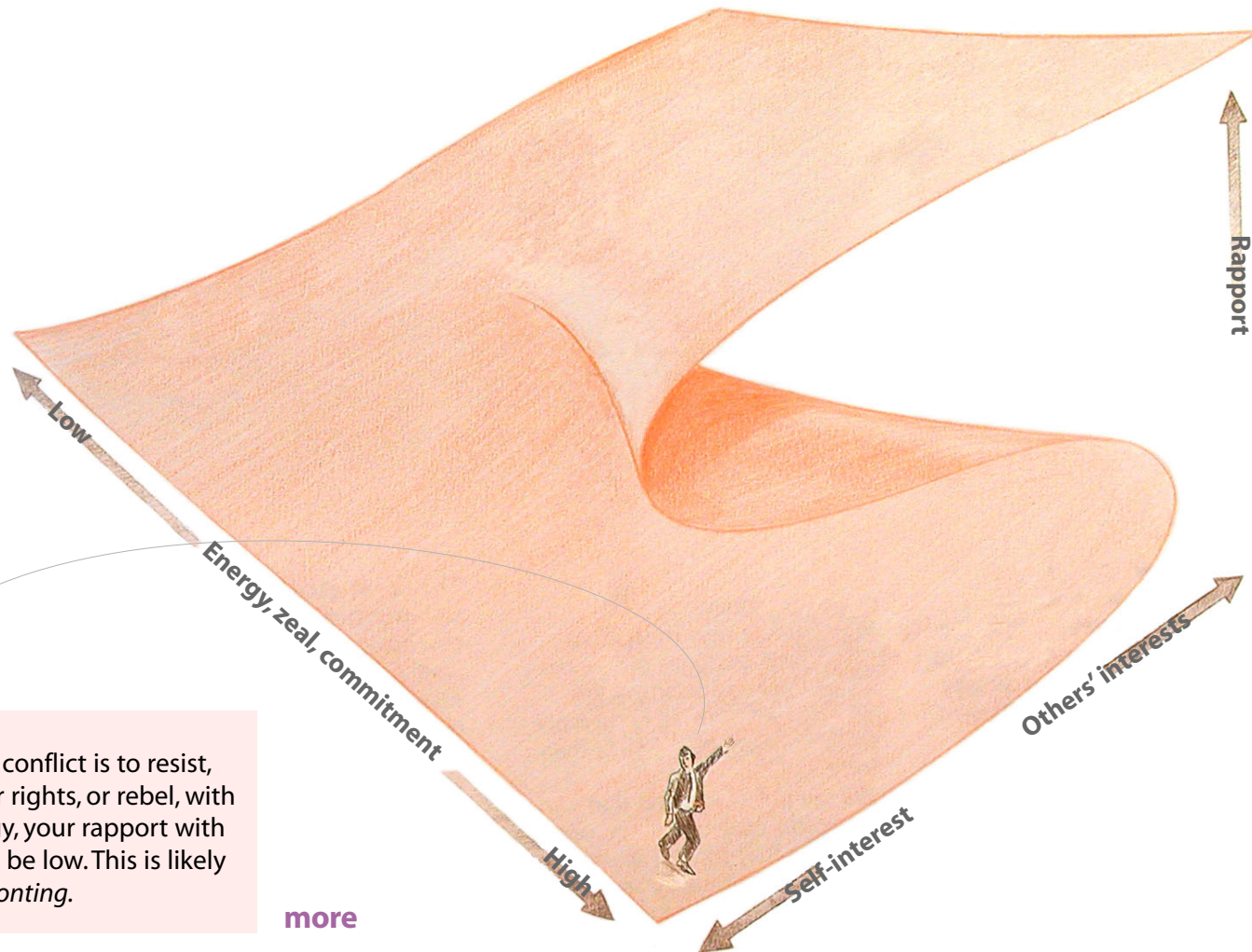
If your response to a conflict situation is to be obliging to others, looking after their interests but with little energy, your rapport with others is probably high. This is likely to be seen as *accommodating*.

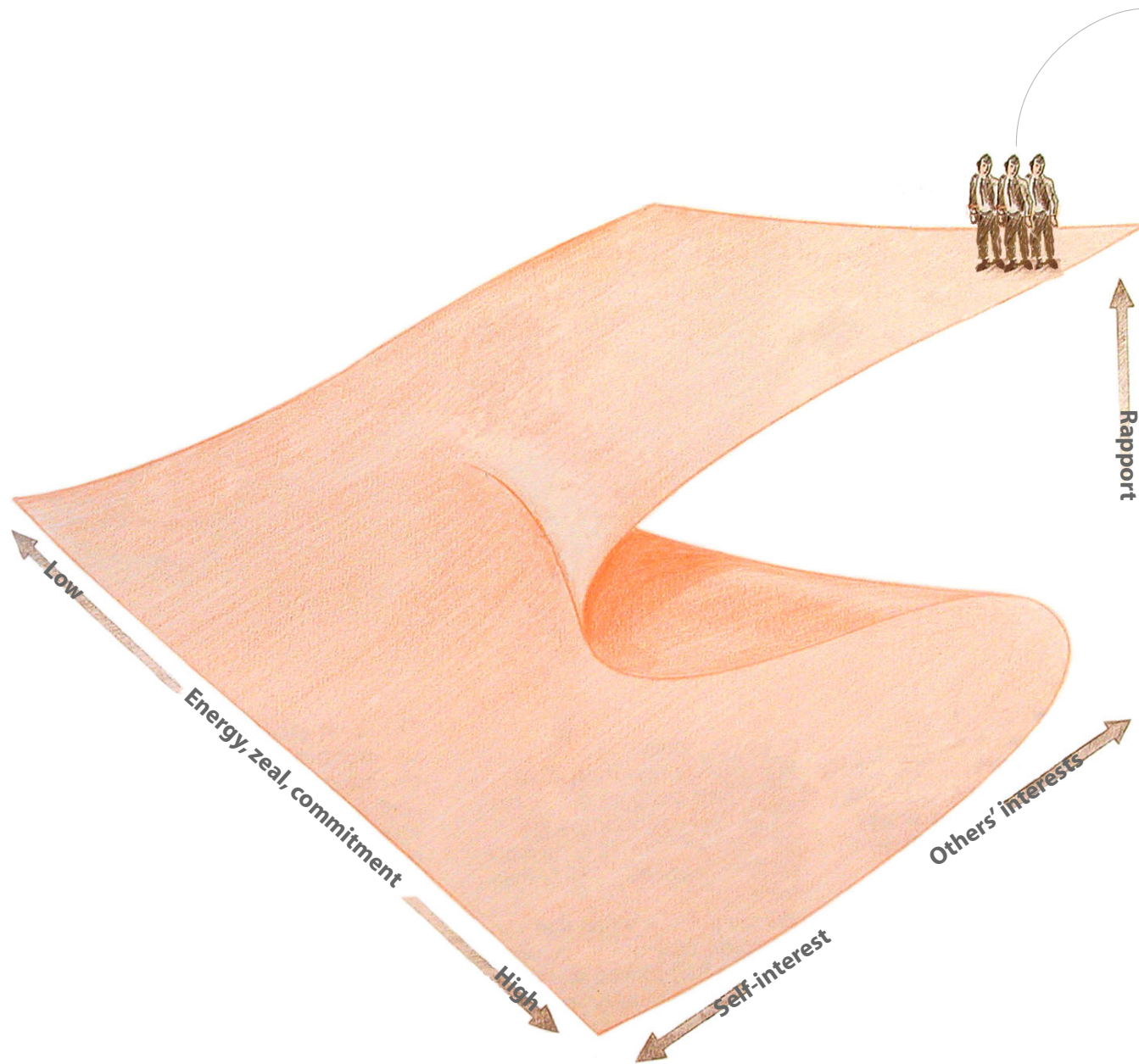


Confronting

If your response to conflict is to resist, object, defend your rights, or rebel, with considerable energy, your rapport with others may tend to be low. This is likely to be seen as *confronting*.

more



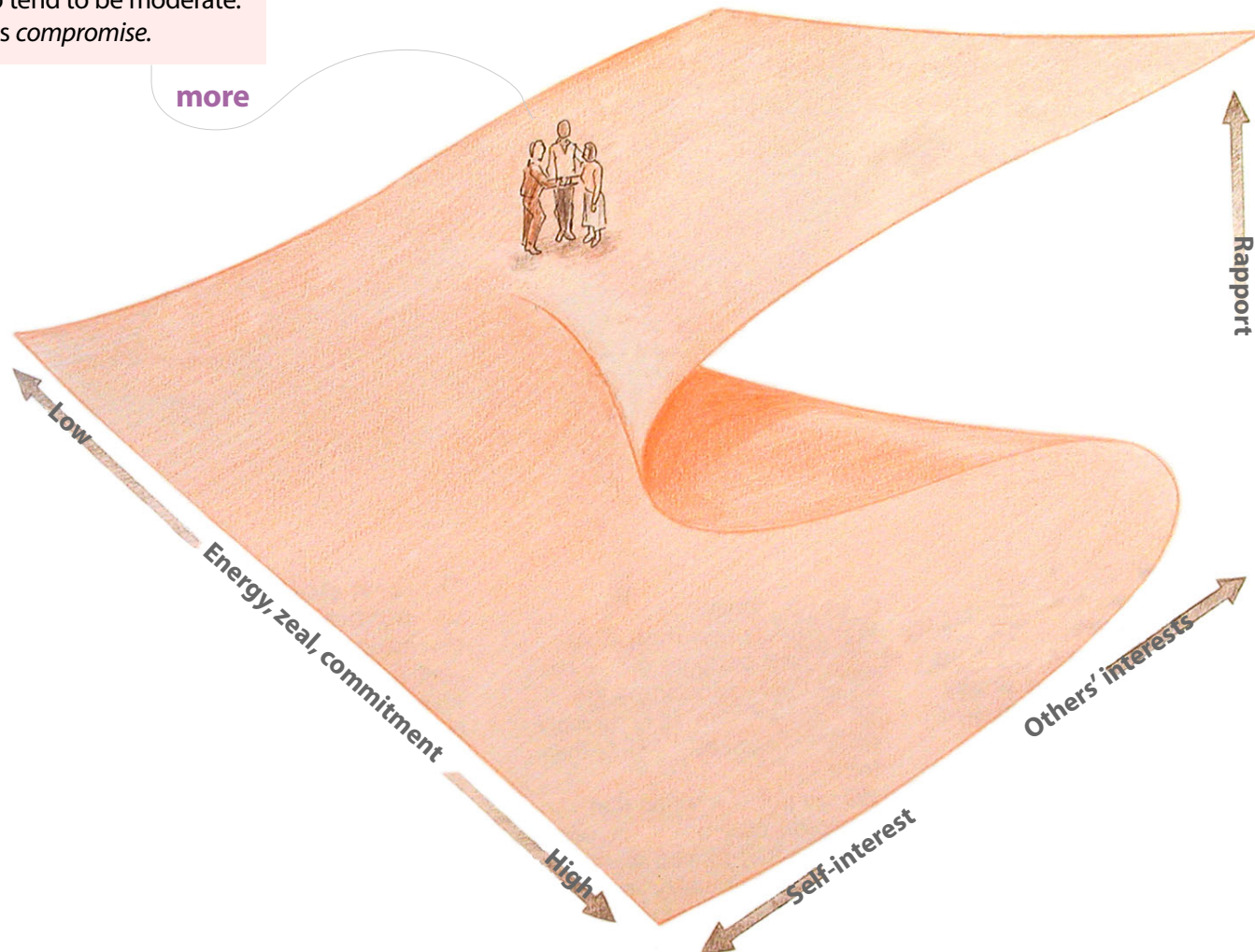
**Smooth**

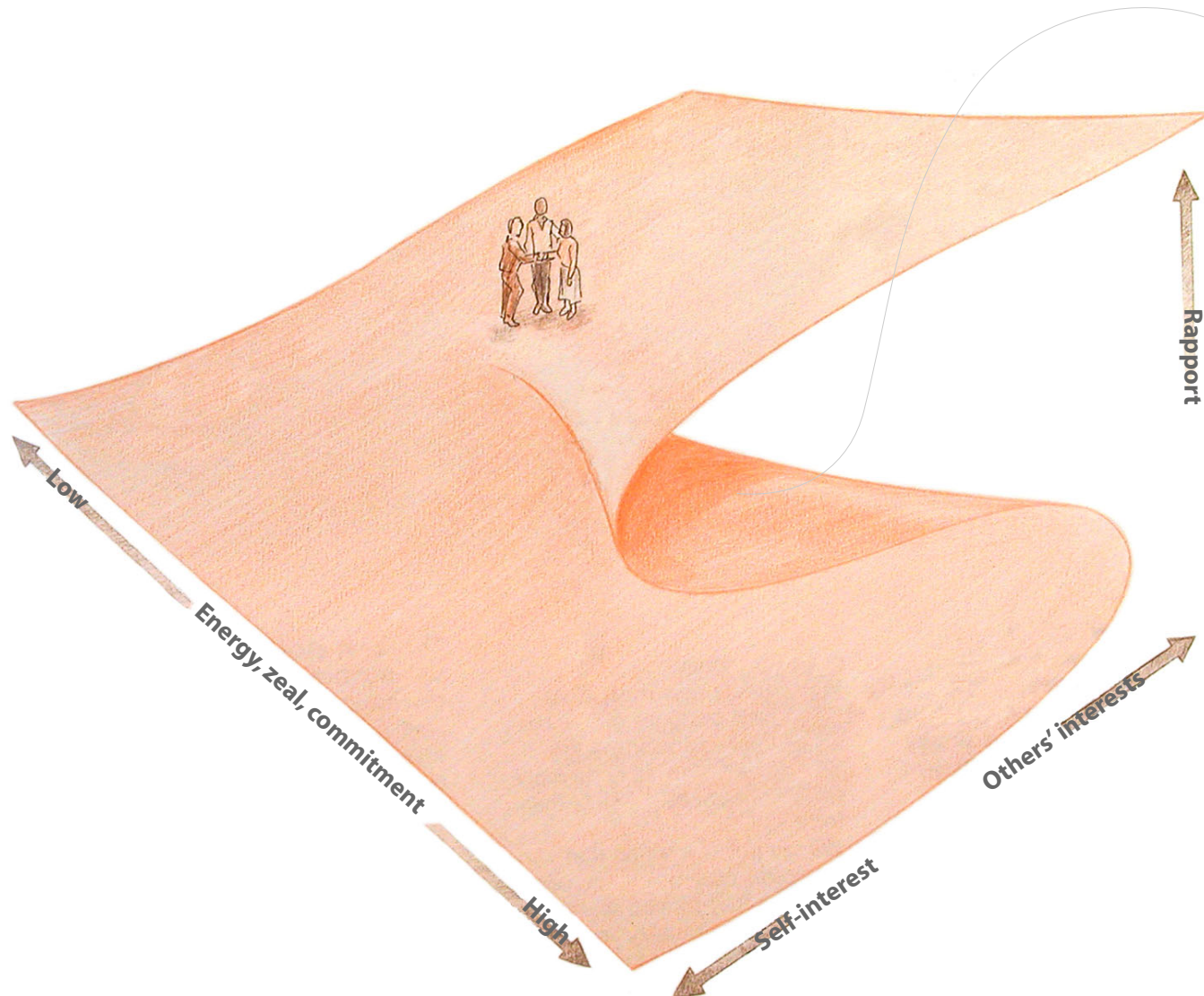
If your response to conflict is to 'pour oil on troubled waters, or to make strong demands for loyalty, your rapport with others will probably tend to be high. This is likely to be seen as *smoothing*.

more

Compromise

If your response to conflict is conciliation, or negotiation, trying with low or moderate energy, to bring opposing views together, your rapport with others will also tend to be moderate. This is likely to be seen as *compromise*.



**Middle ground**

One of the special features of this map is that it shows how, if we pursue either our own or others' interests very energetically, the middle ground of compromise disappears.

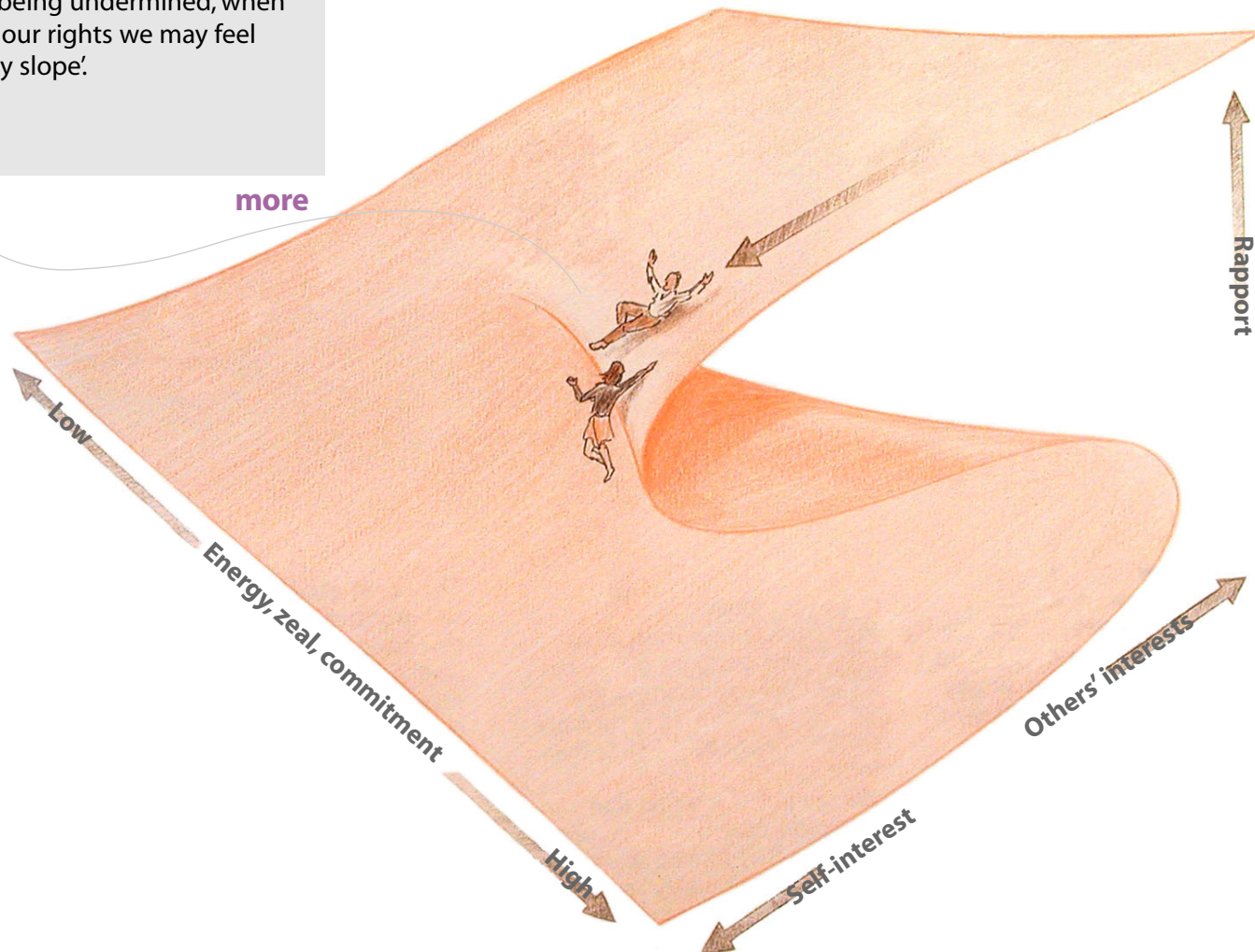
This is why reaching a compromise often means 'backing down', 'backing off', or a 'cooling off' period, i.e. reducing the amount of energy, zeal, or commitment we apply.

[more](#)

Moving around the map

As the two kinds of influence change, our behaviour will vary.

If we usually smooth over conflicts, but then feel that our self-interest is being undermined, when we do start to insist on our rights we may feel 'edgy', or on the 'slippery slope'.



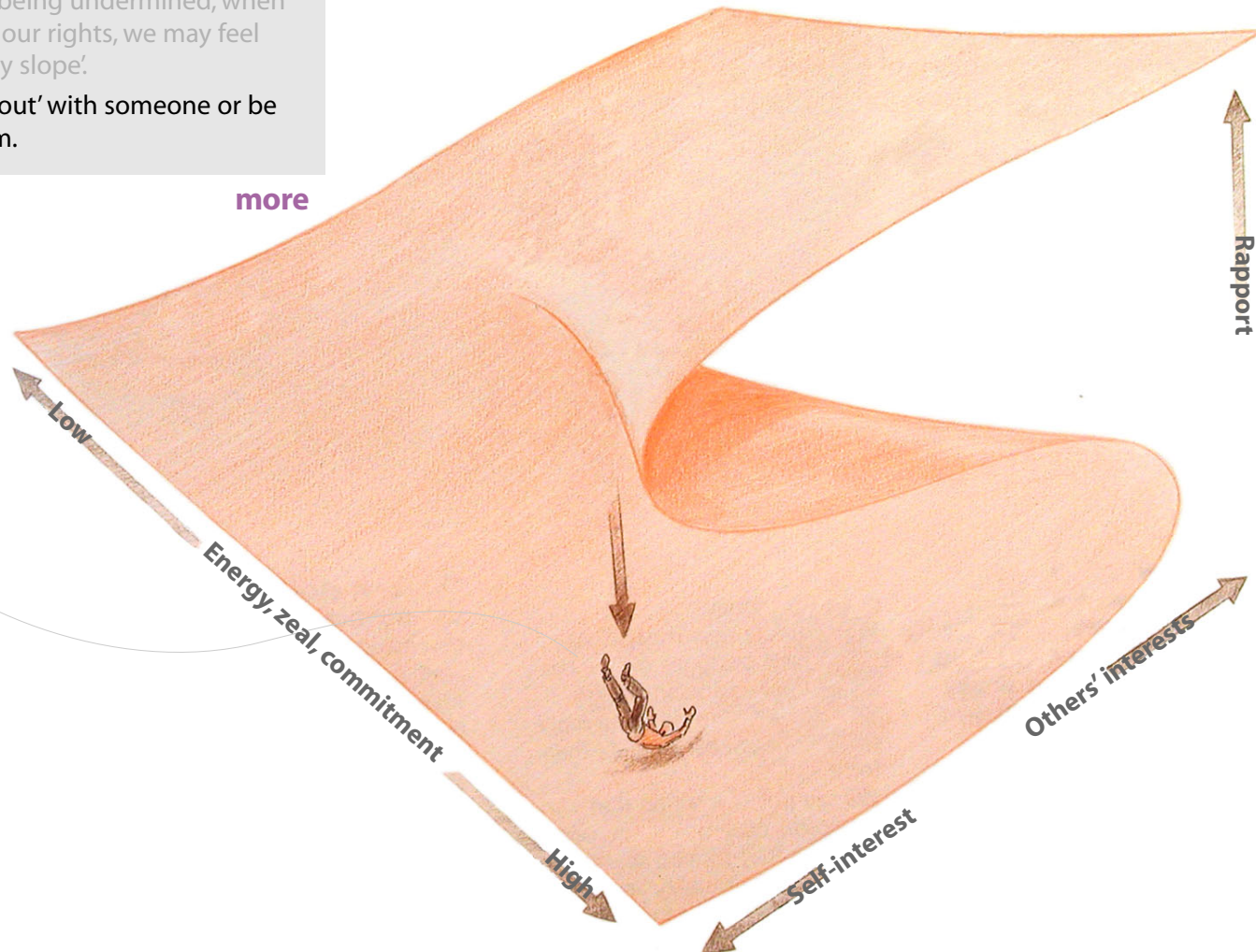
Moving around the map

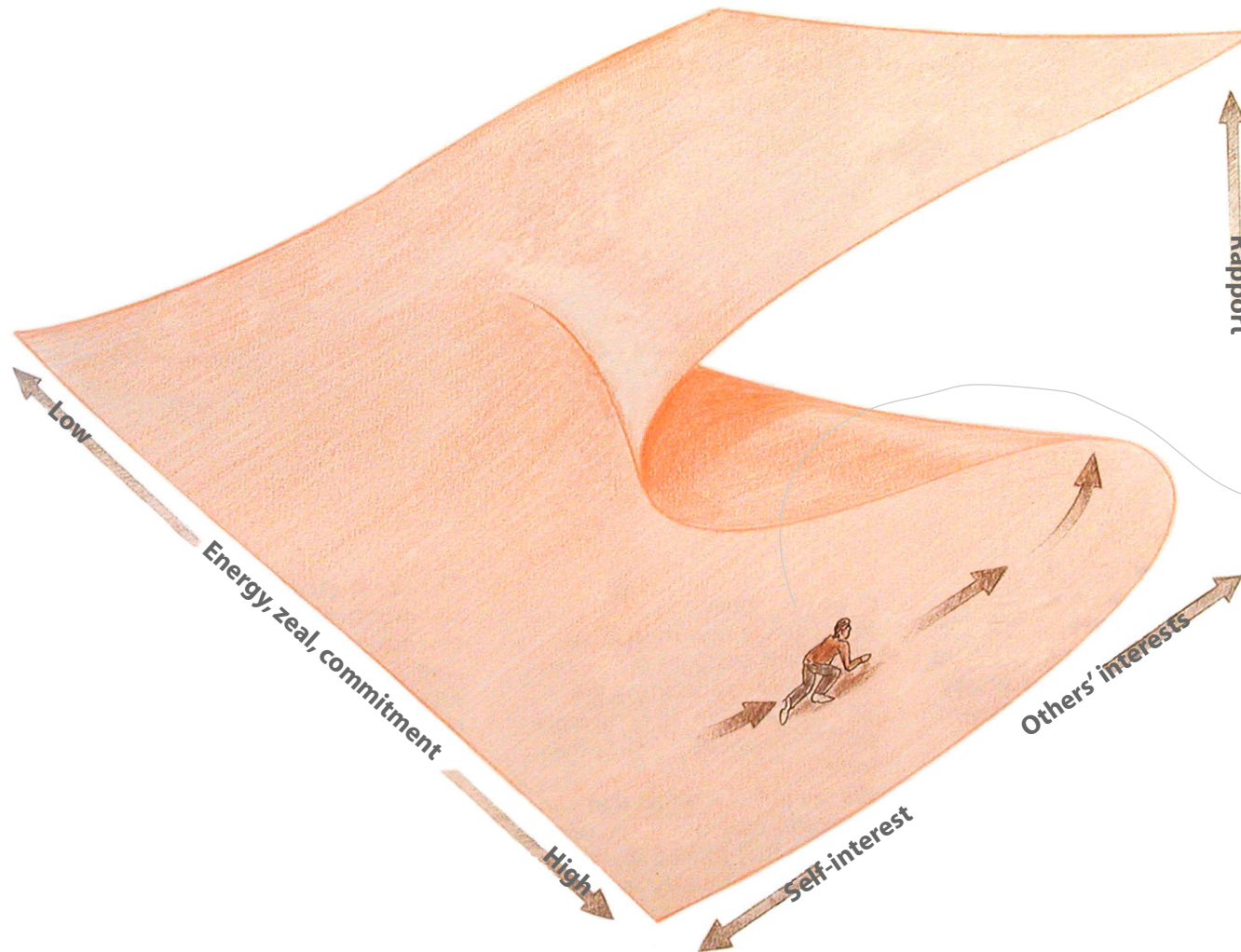
As the two kinds of influence change, our behaviour will vary.

If we usually smooth over conflicts, but then feel that our self-interest is being undermined, when we do start to insist on our rights, we may feel 'edgy', or on the 'slippery slope'.

Eventually we may 'fall out' with someone or be 'dropped' from the team.

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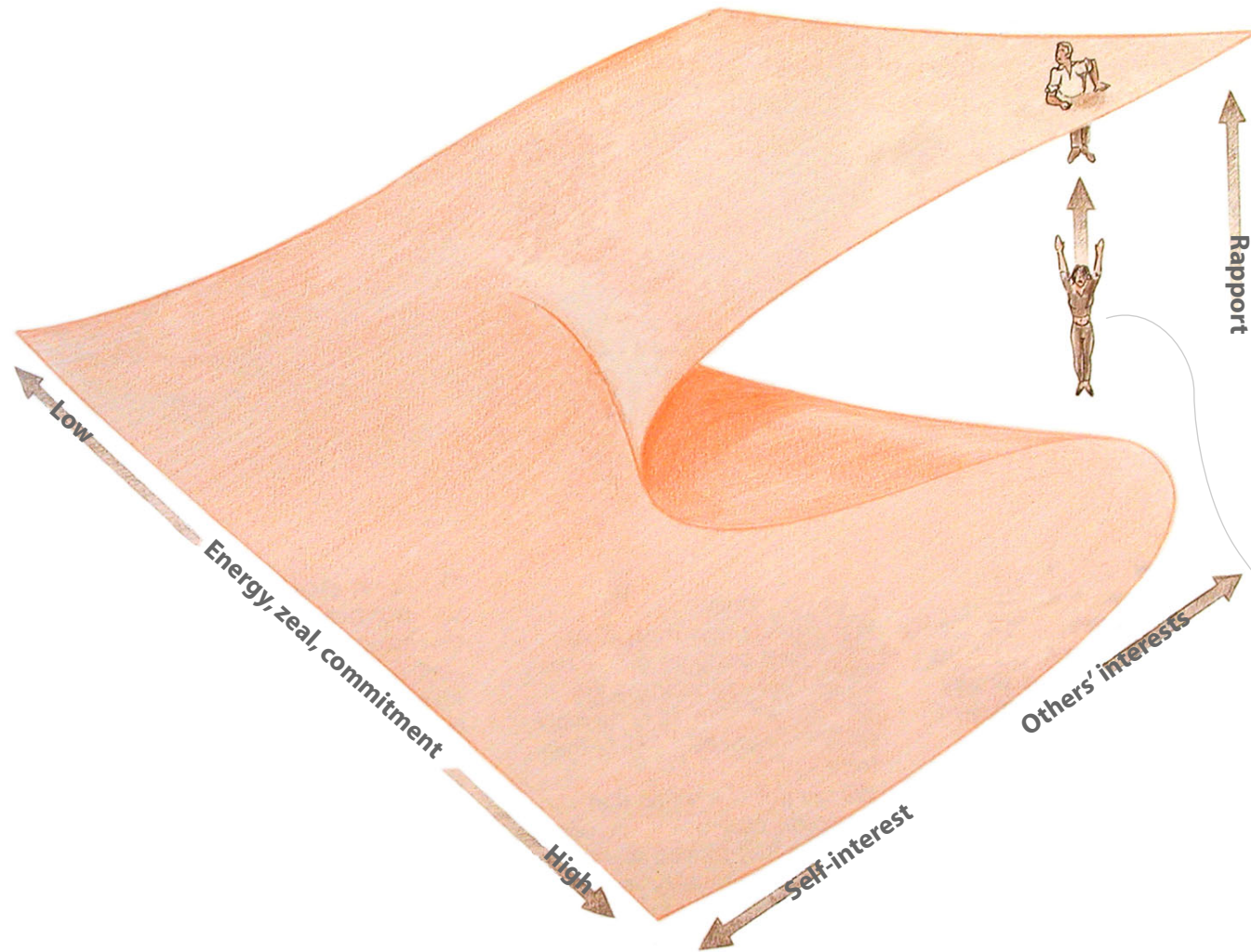




Moving around the map

As the two kinds of influence vary, our behaviour will change. If we have been acting in opposition to others but gradually realize that this was mistaken or unfair, we may have to 'go a long way towards meeting their needs', i.e. move a considerable way across the map before a reconciliation becomes accessible.

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Moving around the map

As the two kinds of influence vary, our behaviour will change.

If we have been acting in opposition to others but gradually realize that this was mistaken or unfair, we may have to 'go a long way towards meeting their needs' i.e. move a considerable way across the map before a reconciliation becomes accessible.

Eventually we may be able to 'make up', or 'return to the fold', or 'get back on-side'.

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Out of the frying pan into the frying pan

So far as we are able to keep in mind the range of possibilities that the map on the previous screen shows, we are likely to be able to navigate better when conflict looks set to arise or when we are immersed in it.

However, it should be clear from the map that none of the behaviours that it maps have any special virtue, indeed all have some disadvantage. 'Withdrawal' implies alienation and disconnection. 'Confronting' may be essential in the pursuit of justice and rights but can lead to a maverick position that attracts scapegoating. 'Compromise' is likely to be dull and unattractive. 'Accommodation' may be liveable in the short term but is likely to breed resentment due to the neglect of self-interest. The high rapport of 'Smoothing' seems to be a key aspect of communal living—it is often accompanied by 'loyalty oaths', collusion and feelings of betrayal or guilt when something happens that leads to a re-evaluation of what counts as self interest.

[more](#)

Conflict and the exercise of power

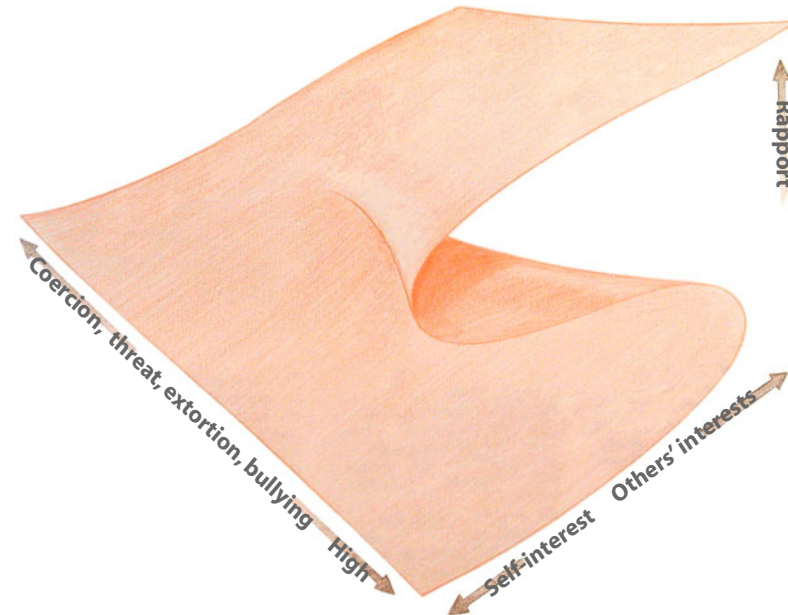
In much the same way as the exercise of power tends to be concealed in everyday life, so the even-handedness of the way I have framed the conflict map on the previous screens masks the extent to which it is also a terrain of the exercise of power. A less even-handed version of the map could substitute threat, extortion, coercion, bullying, i.e. dominance, for energy, zeal and commitment.

The more zealously fundamentalist the coercion, or threat, the more our rapport with others will be polarized into high or low, of 'belonging to the herd', or of becoming an 'out-caste' or a 'maverick'. We will appear to inhabit an 'either-or' world, in which 'If you are not with us you are against us', people are either 'winners or losers', or judged in terms of 'success-failure'.

The greater the differences in the level of rapport, the more the split between 'us' and 'them' becomes problematic, and the less susceptible to healing or conciliation. People with whom we are out of rapport may become 'the enemy', 'evil-doers', the 'infidel', even non-persons, 'unmenschen', 'persons whose lives are devoid of value'. In contrast, 'we' may believe ourselves to be upholders of 'civilized values', defending them against 'barbarians'. We may 'gang up' with others to 'enforce order' and 'create stability'. People who resist this as 'oppression' or 'injustice', may be labelled 'trouble-makers', 'dissidents', or even 'terrorists'.

Feeling forced to make 'either—or' choices, or indeed forcing others to make such choices, not only feeds conflict, are core characteristics of **cultures of domination**.

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See also ▼

Synergy and conflict

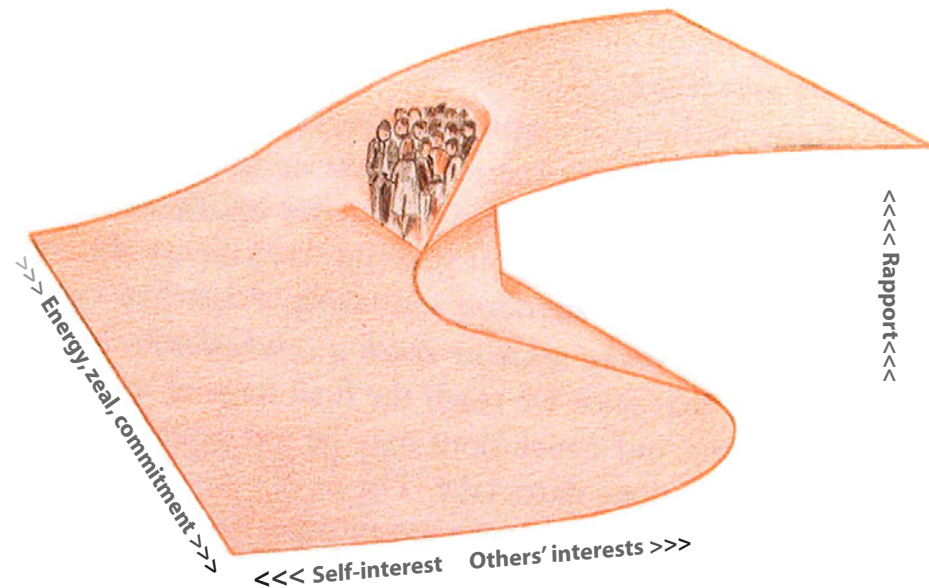
It would be foolhardy to express much optimism about the chances that dominance as a way of structuring either conflict or daily life is on the way out. However the **evolution of child-care** points at least to the possibility that a less bullying or coercive culture could be on the way.

Alongside that, an extension of the terrain of conflict map displays a promising option for flourishing within **cultures of cooperation**. So far as a group of people have developed significant **emotional competence**, another zone of behaviour may open up on the map.

Emotionally competent people can, on their own initiative, recognize and deal effectively with unaware projections both on to, and from, other members of a group or team, and distress arising from the task in hand, and are much more likely to recognize and interrupt coercion.

In so far as they can do this, such people are able to balance their own and other people's interests very much farther up the scale of energy, zeal and commitment creating the conditions for a zone of high energy co-operation, or synergy.

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