

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflict Overview

Definition: 2 or more people having different viewpoints, and at least one of those people is having emotional distress about it.

Despair about resolution keeps people from trying. We lack these skills as a culture.

But actually conflict is natural, not a bad sign. It shows that people are invested. And diversity is a strength.

With some skill-building, you and the people you work with really can get better at this.

Motivation: carrying around tension from unresolved conflicts is uncomfortable both for the person(s) doing it and for others who it impacts. After you work it out you will feel happier!

Analysis

It's more effective to observe and analyze what is happening before assuming we know the right thing to do. Create the response to fit the situation.

Is the conflict *structural*? For example, voting sets up winners and losers.

Process? For example, if not everyone can tell when the proposal is still under discussion and when a decision has already been made.

Interpersonal? For example, two people may have a bad history that doesn't actually relate to the issues that are up in the meeting.

Archetypal? Are people enacting roles in the group, such as "protector" or "scapegoat"?

Reflective Listening Guidelines

This is a key skill to use during conflict resolution. In your reflections, seek to:

1. Keep your attention focused on the other person (don't go into your own story)
2. Be non-judgmental
3. Listen with compassion
4. Seek the essence of what the other person is trying to convey

One possible procedure for conflict resolution:

1. Observations—what's happening
2. Feelings—how do you feel about it
3. Requests—what do you want to do about it; be specific
4. Agreements—what can we agree on to do about it

Reflect back at each step

WORKING WITH BLOCKS & CONCERNS

Listen for the truth in each person's expression.

Reflect back the feelings.

Look for what needs are underneath the concern.

Remember that differing opinions are a resource. What can you learn from these different opinions?

Seek common ground. What part of the proposal can everyone agree to?

Assume good-faith intentions.

Act as an ally of the person with the concern, while still holding the needs of the rest of the group.

Ask questions:

- How do you see this idea?
- What are you worried might happen?
- How will that follow from this decision?
- Could we monitor that problem?
- Can you entertain the possibility, given the considerable energy invested?
- What parts of the proposal *do* you support?

Analyze what the origin of the difficulty is. Problems might arise from:

- Genuine disagreement.
- Process issues (e.g. feeling rushed)
- Interpersonal conflicts
- Structural challenges

Listen closely.

Engage the people with concerns in solving the problem. Ask them what would work for them that would also meet others' needs.

Options, if a concern is unresolved and time is finished:

1. Lay it over to a future meeting
2. Send it to committee, with the person blocking included
3. Talk during a break or outside the meeting— “coffee”
4. Mediation (if interpersonal conflict)
5. If correct block, lay down the item