Conflict Support Teams

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1   CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: OVERVIEW

Why bother studying conflict....

1. Conflict is unavoidable and should be anticipated by leaders committed to serving a growing Christian community.

2. Christians are notoriously poor at dealing with conflict and often cause significant hurt to others through a failure to attend to appropriate processes.

3. The stress caused by poor conflict processes is one of the primary reasons clergy leave the ministry.

Objectives:

1. To provide a range of frameworks for thinking about conflict and practical strategies for responding to conflicted situations

2. To equip conflict consultants with strategies to facilitate healthy conflict processes

3. To enable pastors of churches and leaders of organisations to formulate, and through practice, refine a workable conflict management policy.

Learning Process:

1. **Interactive**

2. **Reflective**

3. **A note on case studies**

10 REASONS CHRISTIANS FIND CONFLICT UNIQUELY CHALLENGING AND DIFFICULT

1. Christian groups are increasingly diverse communities
    Being primarily family based, churches have always been multi-generational but often have
    been made up of families from similar cultures and backgrounds. Particularly in urban
    communities, there is now an increasing range of ethnic, socio-economic and ability based
    diversity. A recent study in the UK[1] indicated that churches lead the way for social integration,
    welcoming people of all backgrounds, abilities and ethnicities. In many faith communities,
    traditional denominational loyalty has given way to issues of style, geography and friendship
    relationships. It is not uncommon for lay leaders and even some clergy in an Anglican church for
    example to have a Presbyterian, Baptist or even a Pentecostal background. What is important
    for conflict is that most of these diversities bring with them their own assumptions about 'what
    conflict is', 'how it should be engaged' and 'who should resolve it'.   Conflict is handled very
    differently in Asian, Latin, African and Middle Eastern cultures. Sometimes conflict is more
    about how to engage conflict than the substantive issues themselves.

2. Churches meet significant spiritual, social and personal needs
    Active participation in any Christian community meets a very important range of spiritual, social
    and personal needs for individuals. It is a family for some who lack functional close family
    relationships. A place of belonging, understanding and acceptance. This is more than a club or
    society, faith communities are usually places where there is an invitation to grow, to develop, to
    learn and to receive grace and healing. Churches provide a wide range of opportunities for
    meaningful service, involvement and even leadership within an environment that is significant to
    identity and purpose. Consequently when there is conflict or when a person's place, role or
    sense of identity is threatened, this can be very challenging for individuals as the needs, values
    and interests at stake are deeply significant.

3. Churches are a community of volunteers serving together
    Churches are volunteer communities, dependent on active participants who are freely
    committed to and support the direction and vision of the community. While churches meet the
    needs of individuals, they also have their own systemic needs for active participation in church
    gatherings, support of church projects and funding of church ministries.   Managing volunteer
    communities, maintaining volunteer commitment and holding volunteers to account for their
    behaviour in community is a highly complex leadership challenge. Because there is no simple
    exchange of money for labour as in employment, the compound interests, commitments,
    motivations and values of those who invest both time and money need to be understood and
    respected. Again in conflict the ability of individuals and groups to withdraw financial support

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[1] Social Integration Commission, 2014 http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/11276878/Churches-are-best-social-melting-pots-in-modern-Britain.html

and personal involvement is a powerful tool.

4. Churches have a gospel mission of personal and social transformation
Individual Christians and church communities together are commissioned to preach personal transformation through a gospel encounter with Jesus Christ. As the gospel extends its influence we expect also to see transformation of the social order around us. This means that, Christians as part of announcing the gospel of Jesus Christ and his kingdom, point to issues of sin and evil, both personal and social, which require a gospel encounter. This prophetic element of gospel ministry actually creates a level of conflict[2] as Christians seek to be faithful to the mission they are given.

5. Christians hold beliefs, values and doctrines which are of eternal significance.
Unlike other groups which are gathered around common interests or activities, Christian communities (and other religious communities) are gathered around beliefs and values that are held as absolute truths. Doctrinal truth, over which people in the past may have given their lives, forms the basis for a strong commitment to 'tradition' within Christian communities. Because God is held to be unchanging and most Christian communities value their own theology as truth, dealing with change is a significant cause of conflict. Trying to untangle what is truth in an unchanging principle of faith, and what is truth which may be expressed in a changing practice of faith or expressed differently over time and culture, typically is a source of major tension.

6. There are unique power dynamics in spiritual communities
Added to the deeply held beliefs that Christians hold, is also the unique role in church communities of spiritual leadership. Clergy and some lay leaders, have high levels of access into the lives of their parishioners particularly at times of spiritual and personal need. Clergy teach, counsel and guide, shaping the ethical and moral belief systems of parishioners. Leaders empower and equip parishioners to serve providing or denying a sense of place, role and participation. Clergy also administer the sacraments, they intercede and bless at important moments in individuals lives. These dynamics of spiritual power, give clergy significant levels of influence within a parish. In times of conflict the existence and the use of this power can be a major source of tension. Power is also invested in lay leaders, particularly in the area of church governance.

7. Christian values or love, unity and peace appear to be in tension with conflict and it is often suppressed
Along with truth, unity, love, like-mindedness and peace are held as high relational values within Christian communities. Serious conflict often threatens these values and consequently is viewed as sinful, evil or ungodly in itself. There is often a failure to differentiate the three basic elements**3** which contribute to a conflict and assume it is the disagreement itself, rather than the mental attitudes and interpersonal behaviours which comprise 'sin' in a conflicted situation.

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[2] Matt 10:34
[3] Conflict comprises a) a real contradiction or disagreement, b) a mental attitude of opposition and c) behaviour which communicates rejection of one side of the contradiction or of the person.

As a consequence of the above, conflict in Christian contexts, families, churches and organisations is often denied or suppressed. Because the disagreement itself is categorised as wrong, and seen as a threat to unity, and something to be feared, it is often denied or suppressed rather than embraced, dealt with and resolved.

8. When conflict breaks out it is managed poorly
    The failure to distinguish the elements of conflict and the high expectations of Christian behaviour means that Christians often manage disagreement poorly. Because we do not easily embrace and explore conflict well at lower levels[4], when it can no longer be contained and does finally break out, conflict can erupt with fairly high levels of emotion and frustration. It is ironical that at times in their enthusiasm to defend or attack over issues of 'truth', Christians not infrequently demonstrate ungodly and sinful attitudes and behaviours and they often are not held to account within their own communities for this behaviour. Similarly some of our default processes for managing higher levels of conflict are not carefully thought through and often allow people to be deeply wounded and hurt e.g. poorly chaired parish meetings which permit slander and accusations without accountability.

9. Christians may carry deep wounds and disappointments with their own communities
    Following painful church and interpersonal conflicts, it is common for parishioners, lay leaders and even clergy to move on. Few have the opportunity to work through their pain, to resolve the issues and reconcile relationships. This history of hurt and woundedness is then brought to a new church and its relationships. Because conflict is so painful, it often then feeds the tendency to deny and suppress it with greater vigour should it ever threaten to unfold again.

10. We engage mission and also conflict within a cosmic spiritual context
    It is not without reason, that churches are nervous around disagreement and conflict. Because of the high levels of emotion, strong commitments, poor processes and painful history, it is particularly easy for conflict to degenerate into sinful behaviour[5]. However we conceptualise the 'dominion of darkness' as opposed to the 'kingdom of light'[6], we are conscious that conflict is particularly easily capitalised upon by forces of evil to cause damage to churches and the Kingdom of God. We need to be aware there is always a potential spiritual warfare element to conflict that needs to be taken into account.

This leaves us facing two realities within the church which help us understand why we find conflict such a challenge: As a community of people gathered in the way we are and given the mission we have, we are perhaps one of the most conflict prone of all groups. Because of our values and beliefs we are also particularly conflict averse. We find it difficult to welcoming or embrace it and rather tend to believe and hope it is not actually happening.
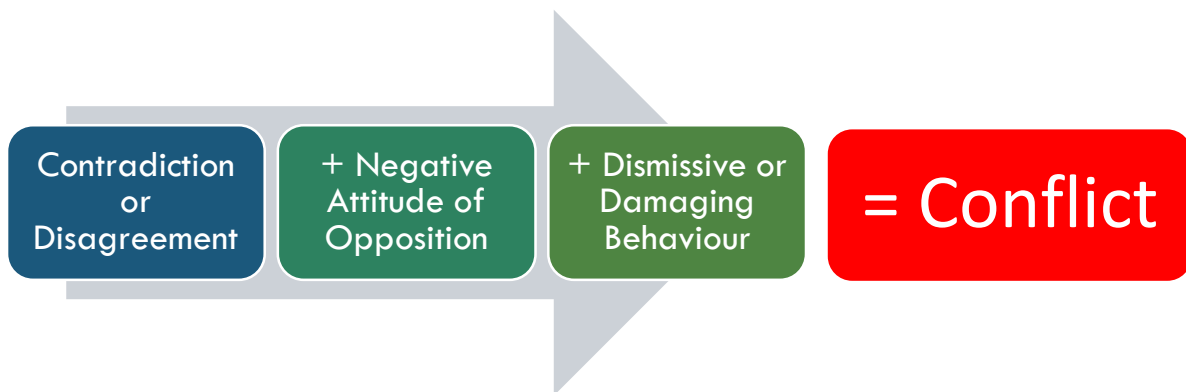
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[4] See 5 levels of conflict
[5] Paul's list in Eph 4:31
[6] Colossians 1:

3   ELEMENTS OF CONFLICT

Some of the problems in conflict work derive from the failure to observe that there are three distinct but connected elements of that together produce a hot conflict.

Prof John Galtung observes that it is easy to mix these three factors and assume that one automatically means another or that by dealing with one you are dealing with the others. Christians sometimes make these errors, assuming the Issue is the primary factor and neglecting to deal with attitude and behaviour on the basis that the contradiction is what has caused this and once it is resolved poor behaviour and attitudes will also be resolved.

As Christians, we need to be clear that simple disagreement or contradiction in and of itself is not necessarily wrong or sinful. Sin easily capitalises on negative attitudes and is revealed in attacking or defensive behaviour. But conflict does not have to be like this. At other times disagreement can be helpful and constructive. It may be combined with a positive attitude of seeking truth and verbal behaviour of gentle, objective sharing. When this occurs in an environment of trust, positive conflict actually produces wisdom.

Competency in dealing with conflict involves the skills of understanding and managing self and others emotionally so that potential negative attitudes of opposition do not occur and potentailly dismissive or damaging behaviour is prevented.

See Prof John Galtung: TRANSCEND Manual
http://www.transcend.org/pctrcluj2004/TRANSCEND_manual.pdf

4   MAPPING A CONFLICT

1. **People**: Who is involved?
    a.   Primary parties in conflict.
    b.   Supporting individuals and groups
    c.   Key neutral influencers
    d.   External people

    The 20% rule – Is this an interpersonal, small group or whole group conflict?

2. **Problem**: What are the real issues?
    a.   What beliefs, assumptions, values, motivations and interests are behind the opposing positions being taken? Do each of the parties understand these of themselves and their opponents?
    b.   Are there displaced or hidden issues here?
    c.   Is there a past to this problem?
    d.   What are the complex contributing factors to this conflict?
    e.   Is this a problem which can be solved or a polarity to be managed?*
    f.   Do we have broken relationships that are clouding the differences over issues?
            How many broken or tense relationships?

    Broken relationships are a separate issue to disagreement on substantive issues. We always need to repair relationships before we work on issues.

3. **Process**: How are the parties engaging this conflict?
    a.   What conflict styles are being employed by the parties?*
            Compelling, avoiding, compromising, supporting, collaborating?
    b.   What level is the conflict at?*
            1. Open problem solving, 2. Playing the cards, 3. Win at all costs, 4. Remove the opposition, 5. Destroy the enemy

5   PERSONAL CONFLICT STYLES

We all have a natural personality based preferred style of dealing with conflict. All of these can be the right style in the right place and also the wrong style at other times and places. Leaders need to be able to use them all.

Bulls – Compelling: the I Win / You Lose paradigm:

Bulls tend to deal with conflict by bringing others around to their point of view. They are highly committed to what they believe is right and are prepared to go into battle to make sure that their solution is applied. They don't like disagreement and tend to work towards seeing firm policies applied and clear decisions taken. A distinguishing feature of this power strategy is that resolution of the problem is often unrelated to the relative merits of the arguments (e.g. "You will do what I say because I said it!"). It may take the form of "pulling rank" or simply outmanoeuvring the opposition. Those who tend to this style as their dominant strategy will typically view conflict as having two possible outcomes--winning or losing. Win, and self-esteem or competence is enhanced. Lose or be "wrong", and suffer a loss of status-- there is the sense of being incompetent or weak. The result can become an aggressive, dogmatic, inflexible and unreasonable approach to conflict management; one in which the goal is to overcome an adversary.

What are the advantages of this style?

Where and how should it be used?

Koalas – Supporting: the I Lose / You Win paradigm:

Koalas like to deal with conflict by giving in or yielding to others in order to keep the peace. They would rather miss out on their preferred solution to a conflict than cause an upset by communicating their disagreement. They tend to support others and convince themselves that it is not a 'big deal' and 'we will all get over it'. This *placate-yield* style reflects a concern for the effect of conflict on the well-being and durability of all relationships koala types enter. There is an assumption that persons and relationships can be fragile and cannot endure the trauma of working through genuine differences. So the tendency is to avoid conflict and appease others by ignoring, denying and avoiding conflict. Should differences persist, giving in, placating and submitting to another's goals are seen as effective means of self and relationship protection. (It's OK, you're right, we'll do it your way..."). One-sided domination in the relationship is the likely outcome of this strategy.

What are the advantages of this style?

When and how should it be used?

Tortoise – Avoiding: Withdraw and Retreat:

Withdrawers find it easiest to back right out of conflict situations. Turtles/tortoises "pull their heads in"! They prefer not to deal with either the issues or the people and like to get to a calm situation as quickly as possible. They often deal with conflict by disappearing or becoming silent. The strategy of overlooking the offence or difference removes the need to engage. Turtles find it more comfortable to deal with their emotions alone. In taking their 'their bat and ball' and going home, they make it impossible for anyone else to play or to resolve the conflict if their presence is needed. There is power in this position as it can bring a halt to either a heated damaging situation but also to a healthy robust resolution process.

What are the advantages of this style?

When and how should it be used?

Owls – Collaborating: We all win together:

As a dominant style for conflict management, this approach attaches major importance to both the goals of the parties involved and to the well-being of the relationships. This is a "win-win" outcome and assumes that everyone will enthusiastically co-operate since the positive total effect is greater than what could be achieved by individual efforts. (e.g. If we work hard and pull together, we can achieve each of our goals collaboratively). Tolerance for differences and a recognition of the legitimacy of feelings are central to this strategy. Each individual must agree to abide by the rules of negotiation and agree to solve the conflict constructively. Any "hidden agendas" are brought out in the open so they may be effectively dealt with. Resolvers are prepared to work hard to find the best solution for everyone. They are keen to co-operate, to listen, to share their own views and to find a way through the conflict to a solution that meets everyone's needs. They believe that there is a solution to every conflict and are prepared to work hard to find it. While the style has many attractions, it requires significant amounts of hard work and is often highly energy draining.

What are the advantages of this style?

When and how should it be used?

Foxes – Compromising / Negotiating: The ½ way compromise:

Compromise is a negotiated resolution process based on each person making some concessions to the other (e.g. "If you will give..., I will give..."). Within this style, however, the other person may still be seen as an opponent. Compromise is often seen as a means for making the solution more tolerable to each party. It is a persuasive and often manipulative conflict management style in which both ends are frequently played against the middle in an attempt to serve the "common good" (e.g. Let's all give a little for the "good of the whole group"). Compromisers believe that the middle ground is best. It is good to be reasonable, to give and take, and work out the middle ground so that everyone has at least some of their needs met. Compromisers are comfortable with half way solutions that at least allow a way forward in reasonable time.

What are the advantages of this style?

When and how should it be used?
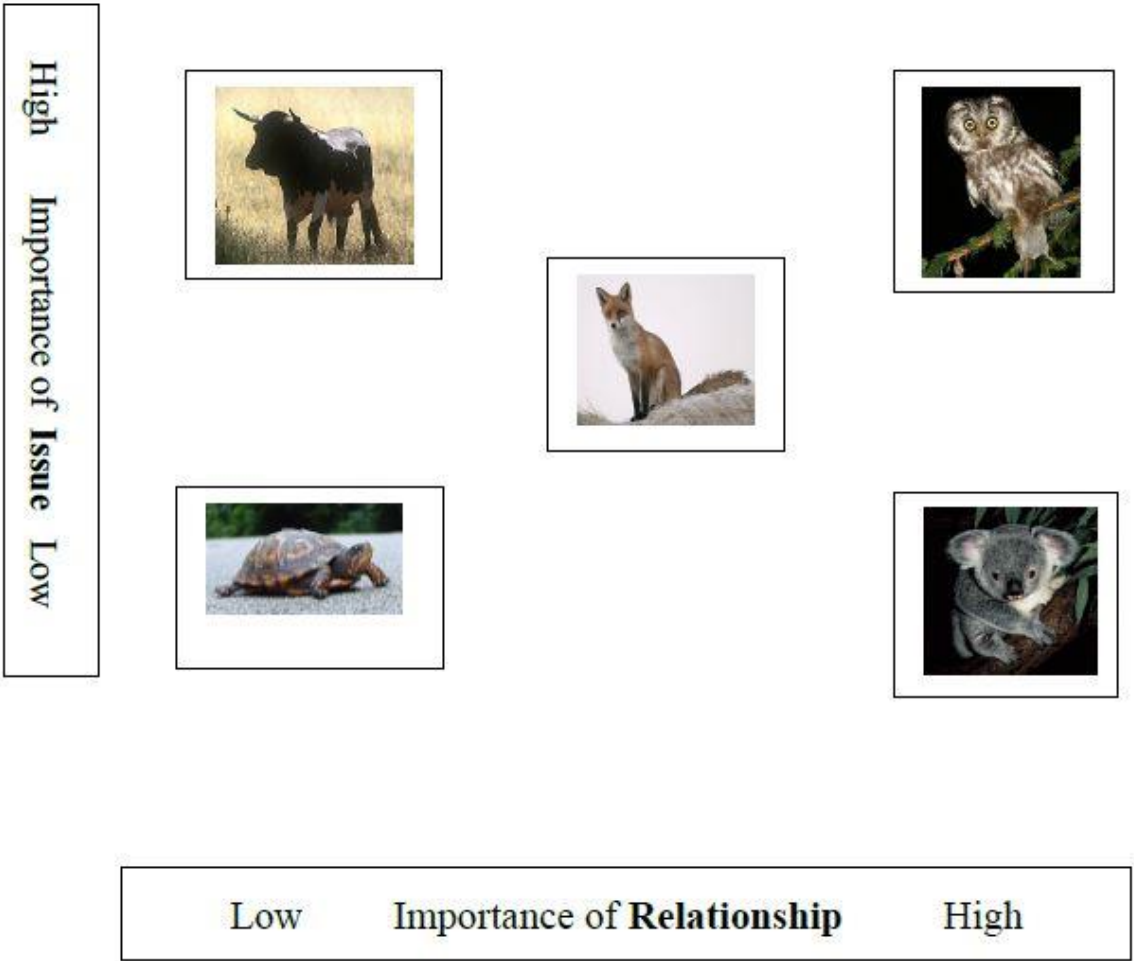
6 LEVELS OF CONFLICT

These levels are not necessarily sequential, conflicts can emerge at relatively high levels without passing through previous levels. These levels are not discreet, there can be some overlap. They do not indicate the nature of the issues at stake but do describe the capacity of the church / organisation to deal with conflict and the emotional maturity of the church or organisational system.

LEVEL 1: WE'VE GOT A PROBLEM LET'S WORK IT THROUGH

Objective: To solve a real problem with conventional open methods of exploratory discussion based on trust.

Identifying Dynamics: The Robust Open Discussion

> i)   Clear and specific language, ability to focus on the issues
>
> ii)   Open disclosure of all information relating to the issues
>
> iii) While there is real disagreement, significant trust exists and risk-taking in sharing honestly occurs
>
> iv)   Parties believe that open discussion and healthy communication will enable a win – win solution and are willing to work toward it

Strategies for use at Level 1:

> a)   Use high trust collaborative problem solving strategies
>
> i)   Drill down, define and clarify the all issues and aspects of the problem
>
> ii)   Gather and openly share all the facts
>
> iii) Get under the surface and identify the needs, interests and values of all parties
>
> iv)   Explore options, create opportunity for creative solutions
>
> v)   Work at the grass-roots level and encourage wide participation
>
> vi)   Encourage consensus decision making

LEVEL 2: WE WOULD LIKE TO GET THIS SORTED BUT WE NEED TO BE CAREFUL

Complex objective: Addressing the issue and protecting self /group emotionally

Identifying Dynamics: 'Playing our cards'

> i)   Acknowledgement of an emotional connection to the issues
>
> ii)   Participants admit that trust is not total
>
> iii) Sniping - jokes have a hostile edge
>
> iv)   Inaccuracies in others' ideas are pointed out mainly to score points
>
> v)   Participants look for support to deal with the situation
>
> vi)   Parties would like a win – win but are open to win some – lose some

Strategies for use at Level 2:

a) Negotiate some space. Build Trust. Encourage self / other awareness.

   i) Build trust through personal storytelling / sharing not directly related to the issues at hand – timelines, values sharing

   ii) Focus on teamwork and communication skills - use training and resources to support this

   iii) Encourage the appropriate expression of emotions

b) Then use all Level 1 strategies

LEVEL 3: WE NEED OUR VIEWPOINT TO PREVAIL AND WILL DO WHATEVER IT TAKES

Objective: To ensure our position is maintained or our view prevails. To win.

Identifying Dynamics: The 'Contest'

a) Win – lose contest language, resistance to peace-making

b) Personal attacks in order to discredit others

c) Coalitions and groups appear, uneasy relationships with others

d) Assumptions, mind-reading of the other side

e) Generalised thinking "always", "never", "everyone thinks…."

Strategies for use at Level 3: (External process assistance advised)

   i) Negotiate a ceasefire: Develop and commit to clear ground rules, covenant agreements of appropriate behaviour and agreed process

      (1) Work toward reconciling broken relationships

      (2) Teach about conflict and train in positive conflict skills

      (3) Assist each party gain insight into how they contribute to the problem

      (4) Keep focus on needs, interests and values and off positions / people

      (5) Use private sessions to enable insight

      (6) Use structured liturgical worship, intercession and prayer

LEVEL 4: THE ONLY WAY TO RESOLVE THIS IS FOR YOU / YOUR GROUP TO LEAVE

Objective: Solution through getting the other to leave

Identifying Dynamics: "Remove the opposition"

   i) Factions with leadership and tight internal boundaries

   ii) Language moves from real issues to ideological principles

   iii) No real interest in new insights - focus is invested in forcing a move.

   iv) Parties attempt to recruit outsiders for validity

    v)   Strong personal attacks and attempts at forcing the decision to leave

    vi)   'Dancing the fight' and rejection rituals

Strategies for use at Level 4:

    i)   Use only organisationally authorised processes: consultation, mediation, negotiation, arbitration

    ii)   Identify the risks of conflict at level 4: This may be "pick up the pieces"

    iii) An independent third party can work with each party individually to seek to move the conflict down to level 3

    iv) Work at higher levels with the leadership of each faction

LEVEL 5: LAW IN OUR HANDS– THIS PERSON / GROUP NEED TO BE PUNISHED

Objective: Damage or destroy the person

Identifying Dynamics: Search and Destroy

    i)   Parties perceive themselves on the side of some righteous cause to rid the church (not just themselves) of this person / group

    ii)   Means are justified by 'righteous' end – there is no attempt to withdraw, be reasonable or to control emotion

    iii) This is seen as the only option and parties present themselves as true heroes willing to do what has to be done to protect others.

Strategies for use at Level 5:

The appropriate denominational authorities must act to keep parties from destructive behaviour

    i)   Internal disciplinary processes for those who persist in destructive behaviour

    ii)   Separation can help but some form of peace-keeping force needs to be in place

    iii) Removal of persistent offenders may finally be necessary

LEVEL 0: SYSTEMIC DEPRESSION – DENIAL OF THE EXISTENCE OF CONFLICT AND HURT

Level 0 is often a post traumatic reaction to a level 4 or 5 conflict. It can exist where there has been no capacity to process the conflict and resolve any of the issues.

Conflict is remains unresolved but is collectively kept suppressed

There can be a 0 - 4 - 0 – 4 pattern over years unless the systemic issues are carefully addressed.

7 CONFLICT COMPETENCIES IN LEADERSHIP

Within conflict management theory, attention has recently become focussed on clearly identifying which internal mindsets or attitudes and which external behaviours are most closely associated with positive and constructive outcomes to conflict.   This research also identifies mindsets and behaviours which tend to exacerbate conflict. The following behavioural continuums have been developed from a variety of sources but are in significant part based on Becoming a Conflict Competent Leader © 2007, Jossey-Bass by Craig Rundle and Tim Flanagan.   In my experience, demonstrating these constructive behaviours is associated with effective leadership in situations of tension.

Unhelpful mindsets and behaviours   **Constructive Conflict Management Skills**

Mark your self assessment (|) in the appropriate column for each behaviour

	This is an issue for me, I tend to be more like this.	I am aware of the need to modify my conflict behaviour	I am actively seeking to acquire this constructive skill	I am tending more and more to use the constructive skill	I am proficient in this skill and mostly use this	
Behaviour						
Losing emotional control In conflict, I fairly easily end up being hurtful by dismissing, demeaning or belittling others through inappropriate words, comments in emails or texts, and displays of anger.						*Regulating emotions* Even though I am tempted to react and retaliate when I am hurt, I work hard at managing my emotions and not losing control. I find appropriate ways to manage and regulate my personal emotions.
Behaviour						
Hiding emotions When things get tense, I prefer to hide my true feelings and not express my fears, anger or disappointment. I am not confident of how I would communicate or others would react to me. I am not sure I would feel safe to honestly open up.						*Expressing feelings* When things are tense, I see that it is important that both sides understand the real feelings of the other. I take responsibility for my own emotions but also work hard at expressing my feelings in "I feel..." language without blaming others. I work to find the right time and place to do this.
Behaviour						
Withdrawing When there has been some hurt, I tend to withdraw and avoid contact with those who have hurt me or whom I have hurt. I do not easily take initiative and seek reconciliation.						*Taking initiative to reconcile* I feel the tension when there has been a break in relationship, and I am usually willing to make the first move. I tend to fairly quickly seek reconciliation, being willing to apologise where necessary and to initiate communication when I have been hurt.
Mindset						
Tendency to Personalise I easily lock in to blaming another person for a conflict. If someone openly disagrees with me, I find it quite hard to relate to that person. I find it hard to see beyond the hurt I am experiencing. I also find it difficult to see how I have contributed to a conflict.						*Moving toward Objectivity* I work hard at separating people themselves from the issues that we disagree on. I can usually put my own needs and interests on hold, while I work carefully to understand the other's needs, interests and values. I can also easily perceive where I have personally played a part in what has happened.
Mindset						
Simplifying I tend to see conflict as relatively simple and straightforward. I have trouble seeing how others could disagree with me and do not accept my position.						*Complexifying* I recognise that there are many different contributing factors to a conflict. I easily see the need to understand other's perspectives. I am conscious that seeing all the contributing factors may help me find a way

	This is an issue for me, I tend to be more like this.	I am aware of the need to modify my conflict behaviour	I am actively seeking to acquire this constructive skill	I am tending more and more to use the constructive skill	I am proficient in this skill and mostly use this

forward.

Behaviour

Being stubborn					**Creative thinking**
Sometimes in frustration, all I can do is to repeat my position and re-assert I am right. I find it hard to back down in a conflict.					I try to carefully and critically think the issues through from various angles and viewpoints. I try to be open to change my mind on issues and admit I might have been wrong.

Behaviour

Resorting to force or manipulation					**Trusting process**
I am prepared to use whatever means that might be at my disposal to get my way. Even if I have to manipulate others to get the outcome I think is right.					I do trust a fair and reasonable process which allows for including everyone and all viewpoints. I recognise we may have to make a hard decision, but if the process is fair, I will accept it. I remain committed to the people if the process has been fair.

Behaviour

Giving up					**Working situations through**
If things go against me, I would probably give in and just not care about the outcome.					I am concerned enough about everyone's needs to want a solution in which everyone finds some of their needs met. So I try to 'hang in' even if it is hard.

Behaviour

Punishing or criticising self					**Maintaining Engagement**
If things go badly, I only have my-self to blame. It will be my fault if I fail and I will have to wear it.					If things don't turn out the way I would want them to, I still would want to participate in the process to ensure that at least some of my own and other's needs would be met.

Select 2 of your strongest areas and reflect on how to enhance these strengths, write down one practical step to continue to develop each of these.

1.

2.

Select two areas in which you need to acquire more constructive conflict management skills. Based on where you assessed yourself, look at the description and the column headings and write down one practical step to take to develop behavioural skills in these areas.

3.

4.

Share these with a mentor, supervisor, accountability partner or support person and work together on how you might implement these. Work through the list again in 3 – 6 months and reflect on whether there has been some change.

Church Conflict Process

Conflict incidents

Create Space

through Negotiating Process, Reconciling Relationships and Teaching Skills

Conflict Tools

Ground Rules
Covenant Commitments
IP Reconciliation
Teaching Conflict

Facilitate Exploration and Understanding

Clarify and re-frame the issues

Draw out interests, needs and values. assumptions of all groups

Understand history

Complexify

Brainstorming all possible Causes and Contributors
Storytelling
'Cards on the table'
Private coaching sessions
Facilitated group work
Polarity Mapping

Generate and Evaluate Multiple Options

Creatively articulate multiple options

Draw up criteria for evaluation

Collectively evaluate options

Listen for what this step reveals

Brainstorming options
Round robin work
Delta sharing
Traffic lights
Mapping exercises

Discern and Decide

Agree on discernment or decision making process
Decide and Implement

Reflective and spiritual discernment processes
Constitution / Rules
Consultation Report with Recommendations
Implementation Plan

Healing Processes

Steps toward Relational Reconciliation

If you have been involved in a church or organisational process of consultation or facilitation you may have identified tense or broken relationships which are preventing you from contributing fully and effectively to managing or resolving the issues.

You may be a hurt or injured person in this context. You may also be aware that you have said or done things which have injured or hurt others. It is likely you will be both.

You will also have heard that it is necessary to reconcile relationships before work on the differences and issues can begin. It is important that issues are separated from relationships and the two are dealt with independently because if relationships are not reconciled any work on the issues gets reinfected by the anger, resentment and anxiety of unresolved relationships.

The opportunity to meet one to one with people in this situation who have hurt you or whom you have hurt is only one small part of the process but it is an important beginning. A couple of points:

- These meetings are simply about **putting the relationship itself right** not about discussing or attempting to resolve the substantive issues or disagreements.

- The **questions** here are: What has been said or done which has injured another? Am I willing to hear how I have hurt another? Am I willing to honestly share my hurt? Am I willing to offer an apology? Am I willing to request and receive forgiveness for my actions? Am I willing to forgive the person who asks me for forgiveness?

- **Reconciliation is not the same as restoration**. Reconciliation puts the relationship right. It does not immediately restore it to what it was before. Restoration takes time as it is a rebuilding of trust. It does not always happen. Relational reconciliation (or putting the relationship right) should however be a priority.

If you are an offending party (most of us are in times of conflict)

The first step is to listen and to reflect. If you are aware or become aware through listening of how you have hurt another person, it may be helpful to consider what elements to include in an apology to make it most effective and constructive. Many people actually appreciate a written apology. This implies time and effort put into this step toward reconciliation and can be given to the other person in a session together.

It is important however, before apologising, to ensure you have **taken the time to understand** the situation, to reflect on your behaviour and on its consequences. This is important if the confession and repentance is to be genuine. If you do not fully understand the impact on the other person, take the time to listen and then to reflect before offering an apology. While there may be a complex set of factors which contributed to your behaviour, you need to accept responsibility for it and be clear about this in your communication. Avoid "if", "but" and "however". For this reason, it may be valuable to write down what you want to say and even get some godly assistance in important situations to ensure you are honest and clear.

An appropriate apology includes confession, repentance and the request for forgiveness. It looks something like this:

1. Begin with an acknowledgement that you have done wrong, not just generally, but specifically against this person. Let the party you've offended know that you acknowledge your wrongdoing against them and accept full responsibility for your behaviour. There are three parts to this acknowledgement. 1. It can help to be **specific** about the behaviour involved indicating you are aware of exactly what was done. 2. It is helpful also to be clear that this is **wrong** and that you are aware that the behaviour is unacceptable. In other words, you pass judgement yourself on your behaviour. 3. Finally it is important to acknowledge that the behaviour offended a specific **person**. It is against this person that you have done wrong.

2. Acknowledge the **personal hurt and harm** your offence has caused. It is important to acknowledge that your behaviour has had consequences for the person and for your relationship. You are owning up not only to the offence but also to the harmful consequences your behaviour brought about.

3. Express **regret** (remorse) for the action and its consequences. Sharing a reflection of genuine regret is important. This is where saying the words, "I am sorry for" is important.

4. Demonstrate repentance by identifying an **alternative biblical behaviour**. Show that you have truly considered your behaviour by sharing what you should have done instead. Show what the appropriate alternative behaviour would have been and commit to acting this way in the future. This is an indication of time taken to consider the situation, its causes and the changes which will need to take place in you. Sharing this is a commitment to repentance.

5. Conclude by a **request for forgiveness**. Acknowledge that if the offence has been deeply damaging this may take time and may not be easy for the other person to act on. In making a genuine apology however you have taken the first step in reconciliation.

    E.g. "*Peter, I need to apologise for my angry and ungracious words to you on Saturday evening a couple of weeks ago, I was upset, angry and worried, and I let these things get the better of me, and ended up hurting you through my careless and insulting words. This was wrong of me and I feel embarrassed and ashamed of my behaviour to you. I know I hurt you deeply and caused a break in our relationship. I am sorry for what I said. I recognise now I should have collected myself, calmed down and thought about things before speaking. I think I would have handled the situation differently if I had been patient and a little gentler. I am prepared to make a commitment to work on this area of my life. I apologise unreservedly to you and I ask you to extend forgiveness to me for what I have done*"

If you have been hurt and are feeling injured (most of us also fit into this category)

First a little self- reflection is in order here. Remember to watch for the log in your own eye before alerting a brother or sister to the splinter which pricked you. If you have considered this and can honestly say before God that this is not a situation which cannot be overlooked and needs to be addressed for the sake of the relationship, then finding some way to share this with the other person is appropriate.   Biblically the appropriate pathway is to go them first alone and take another if this fails to get anywhere. Think carefully about how you express your injury. "I" statements are always better than "you" statements.

> *Mary, I wonder if we can talk privately for a few minutes. I need to share with you how I am feeling. .... On Saturday night after our conversation, I felt humiliated and deeply hurt. What I heard from you really stunned me and left me feeling like I wanted to give up this ministry. I know we do things differently, however I feel like my contribution is not up to your expectations and not valued. I need to let you know just how painful for me our conversation was. Could we talk about how to get our relationship back on track as I feel we need this put right between us.*

Relational reconciliation is only the first step in conflict resolution. It is however necessary and essential. We cannot get to work on major issues if relationships are not put right.

If this initial step fails, the next is to move toward mediation or a facilitated conversation.

 "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you. Ephesians 4:32

Covenant Commitments for Christians in Times of Tension

"Making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:30)

As both individual members and as the body of Christ, we commit that we shall:

IN OUR THINKING	
Accept conflict	Acknowledge together that conflict is a normal part of our lives. It arises from different needs, values, interests and viewpoints. It is healthy if handled well. *Romans 14:1-8, 10-12, 17-19; 15:1-7*
Affirm hope	Affirm that, as God walks with us in conflict, we can work through to a place where we can continue together and grow through the experience. *Matt 18:15-20, Ephesians 4:15-16*
Commit to reflection	Be willing to engage in thoughtful reflection about our own attitudes, the part we are playing in this conflict and the unhelpful expectations we may be carrying. *Matthew 7:3*
Commit to prayer	Admit our needs and commit ourselves to pray for a mutually satisfactory outcome for all involved (i.e. we do not pray for our success or for the other to change, but for a joint way forward) *James 5:16*

IN OUR ACTIONS	
Go to the other...	Go directly to those with whom we disagree; avoiding behind-the-back criticism, waiting the other person out, or playing games about who should 'go first' *Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15-20*
...in a spirit of humility	Go in gentleness, patience and humility. Be prepared to own our part in the conflict instead of pointing out others wrongdoing. We will be prepared to share our needs, interests and values *Eph 4:25, Gal 6:1-5*
...to seek and to offer forgiveness	We will be prepared to offer an apology for any hurts we have caused the other and to seek their forgiveness. We will be prepared to receive an apology, and before God, will seek to offer forgiveness as it is requested of us. *Ephesians 4:32*
Be quick to listen	Listen carefully, ensuring we understand what is being said and why, before responding. We will seek as much to understand as to be understood. *James 1:19; Proverbs 18:13*
Be slow to judge	We will suspend judgments and will avoid making assumptions of others motives. *Matt 7:1, Romans 2:1-4; Galatians 5:22-26, Romans 14:13*
Guard our tongues	We will avoid sharp, barbed comments or replies which are hurtful. We will take great care to guard against 'labeling', threats, or words that carry a negative connotation. *James 3:5, Ephesians 4:29*
Be willing to talk and work through differences	We will work through the disagreements constructively. We will grant space for all to reflect and think with compassion. We will find ways to honour each other's interests, needs, values and concerns. We will agree to a fair and reasonable process of how the outcome will be determined. We will engaging in co-operative discussion about the options and considering each fully. We will accept the emerging outcome and working with it, not against it *Acts 15; Philippians 2:1-11*

IN OUR LIVES	
Be steadfast in love	Be firm in our commitment to seek a mutual outcome; be stubborn in holding to our common foundation in Christ; be steadfast in love. *Colossians 3:12-15*
Be open to mediation	Be open to accept skilled help. If we cannot reach agreement among ourselves, we will use others with gifts and training in mediation, consultation, facilitation and negotiation. *Philippians 4:1-3*
Trust the community	We will trust the community and if we cannot reach agreement or experience reconciliation, we will turn the decision over to others in the congregation/denomination or from the broader church community. *Acts 15*
Be the Body of Christ	Believe in and rely on the solidarity of the Body of Christ and its commitment to peace and justice, rather than resort to the courts of law. *1 Corinthians 6:1-6*