

Negative and Positive Conflict

By

Deryl G. Hunt, Ph.D.

Culture and Conflict in Inclusive Community Building

- Culture simply is seen as a way of life, and people's cultural perceptions influence their interpretations of their multiple realities and, subsequently, of conflict.
- Therefore, vectors of diversity –political, religious, ethnic/racial, gender, or class, and otherwise—could all inform their cultural dispositions and drive the way people live, behave, and respond to conflict
- Cultural norms influence conflict resolution either negatively or constructively. The sources of conflict and how conflict is addressed are functions of socialization, a means by which societies instill their values and norms into succeeding generations.

Dual Heritage

- **The people of African descent would be rooted in their cultural heritage, which draws from both the communal values of their African ancestry and Western concepts of individuality.**
- **The communal values of African ancestry seek to resolve external conflict at the community level, whereby the community may be as large as the nation or as small as an organization, a neighborhood or a family.**
- **However, Western individualism focuses on the rights and privileges of each single person to be free from conflict.**
- **The ICB Conflict Resolution Model is a framework wherein conflict resolution is viewed as a unitary process, which empowers the individual to overcome conflict from outside forces and from within**

Advantages in Managing Conflict

- Conflict fosters an awareness that problem exist.
- Discussing conflicting views can lead to better solutions.
- Managing conflict is quicker and more efficient than letting conflict fester.
- Challenging old assumptions can lead to changes in outdated practices and processes.
- Conflict requires creativity to find the best outcomes.
- Conflict raises awareness of what is important to individuals.
- Managing conflicts appropriately helps build self-esteem
- Managing conflicts well is a sign of maturity.
- Conflicts can create opportunity for growth

Negative Conflict

- *Negative conflict* is the result of dissonance or a gap between one's expectations and his or her reality.
- The origin of one's expectations projects his or her reality. In most cases these origins are based on cultural values, which have been embedded in the individual through socialization, and it is only when a person is in a state of internal peace that his or her expectations and reality can be perfectly aligned.
- Negative conflict is always internal and starts at the level of the individual. It is designed to create a permanent separation between two parties or two points of existence.
- This permanent separation may also be referred to as 'irreconcilable differences.' The Ellison Model calls this *Discommunity Building.*, which results in a backward and counterproductive progression.

Constructive Conflict

- Constructive conflict may be internal or external depending on the activity.
- Like negative conflict, constructive conflict also involves distance between two points. In this instance, the gap may exist between the spoken word or promise of a supervisor and what is observable by those he/she supervises.

Constructive conflict may also involve the gap between what is revealed to or what is known by the subconscious and what is hidden from the conscious mind.

- Unlike negative conflict, however, constructive conflict is designed to bridge gaps between two parties or two points of existence.
- The Ellison Model calls this *Inclusive Community Building* (ICB).

Conflict Resolution Requires Trust

- Constructive conflict provides a wonderful opportunity for individuals within organizations to prove their trust that those occupying roles of leadership and mentorship within those organizations will serve in a manner that is beneficial for all.
- In all cases of constructive conflict, resolution comes without arrogance. Therefore, it can be said that the resolution of conflict, whether negative or constructive, is a manifest display of acceptance and willingness by an individual to assume the role of humility.

Style of Conflict-Avoidance

- Avoidance: avoidance is characterized by behaviors that either ignore or refuse to engage in the conflict.
- While avoidance is presented by some theorists as a negative style that shows low concern for both one's own and the other party's interest, there are sometimes strategic reasons to avoid conflict.
- For example, when the relationship is short-term and the issue is not important or when the situation has a potential to escalate to violence, avoidance may be the prudent choice.

Examples of avoidance

- - Saying the issue isn't important enough to spend time on
- Being overly polite
- Defining any emotion as discord and calling for objectivity when discussing differences
- Smoothing over discord whenever a difference arises, so differences never are discussed
- Focusing on details to the exclusion of the real issues
- Attacking the other person verbally
- Using evasive remarks to avoid the sensitive topics
- Shifting the topic away from the conflict
- Avoiding topics where conflict may occur
- Making noncommittal statements that sound like, but are not really, agreement
- Keeping conversations at an abstract level
- Joking to distract from the real issue in a conflict

Style of Conflict-Competition

- Competition or win/lose, is a style that maximizes reaching one's own goals or getting the problem solved at the cost of the other party's goals or feelings.
- While win/lose competition has negative repercussions for relationships, businesses and cultures, it is used if the other party is firmly fixed in a competitive style or there are genuinely scarce resources.
- ICB Competition or win/win, focuses on the positive side of competition where the needs of each party is served through the competition requiring a right attitude for the behavior to be right.

Competitive Tactics Include:

- Lying
- Concealing one's own goals
- Concealing one's own interest
- Attacking or criticizing the other person verbally
- Becoming positional, and then incrementally compromising toward a middle ground
- Elevating one's own arguments
- Denigrating or rejecting the other's arguments
- Threatening and Bluffing
- Denying responsibility
- Pretending to be or actually being hostile

Style of Conflict- Accommodation

- Accommodation involves giving in to the other's wishes or smoothing the choppy waves of a conflict.
- Accommodation sacrifices one's own goals for the sake of the other person.
- Accommodators often use phrases like:
 - “Whatever you want is fine with me”.
 - “The boss said it; it must be so”.
 - “I have no intention of rocking the boat”.
 - “I'm a short termer”.
- When one party in a conflict genuinely does not care about the outcome of the conflict, accommodation may be the right choice for that situation. However, if accommodation is the only style a person utilizes, he or she is advised to learn more skills.

Style of Conflict-Collaboration

- Collaboration occurs when parties cooperatively work together until a mutually agreeable solution is found.
- Collaboration is a process of participation through which people, groups and organizations work together to achieve desired results.
- Starting or sustaining a collaborative journey is exciting, sometimes stressful, and even new for many.
- The end process builds trust and helps to change conflict into cooperation
- Conclusion: A competent conflict manager will prefer collaboration, but recognize that the timing or conditions may not always allow collaboration to occur.
- Consequently, a skillful conflict manager will be adept at selecting the right style for the right situation and then engaging each style in a humane and non-harmful manner.