

Resolving conflict – Reaching consensus

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Session Objectives

- Look at how to keep discussions as discussions
 - Prepare & prevent discussions from escalating to damaging disagreements
- Know when a situation *is* a 'conflict' and why that can be ok
- Consensus – what it is for you & how to gauge it


Basic Premise

- Conflict & communication are inextricably linked
 - Basic “conflict” tools are communication tools, especially active listening & feedback
- Effectively managing & resolving conflict relies on a process, time & recognizing our own hot spots
- Conflict – it’s not all bad
 - We need differing opinions, viewpoints & perspectives
 - We don’t need destructive or negative conflict
 - We can manage conflict to minimize stress & adverse impacts

Both in prevention & in process

Clarity diffuses conflict.

- Conflict stems from differing opinions, beliefs, views & perspectives
 - Beliefs drive behaviours
- Boards need to have differing opinions, beliefs, views & perspectives

A group of people in a meeting, viewed through a magnifying glass. The text is overlaid on the image.

Reframe conflict as discourse & dialogue imperative to understand different lens & come up with the best solutions

Reframing



What gives conflict such a bad rap?



Conflicts

Disagreements don't need to become disruptive conflicts

- The negativity or destructiveness arrives when people introduce emotions, power plays, finger pointing, & blaming.
- Constructive is:
 - Being open to other's ideas
 - Staying objective
 - Focusing on facts & the problem
- Destructive is:
 - Blaming people
 - Taking a right/wrong approach


- To manage conflict, you must manage emotions
- Whose emotions?
- Balance fight & flight to maintain footing & focus



Managing “conflict” demands insight

- *What do you mean you won't approve the plan?*

- *We can't work with xxxx any longer — we can't move beyond this impasse - -- they are impossible.*



Ensure we are looking
through the same window

Managing “conflict” demands insight

- *What do you mean you won't approve the plan?*

- *We can't work with xxxx any longer — we can't move beyond this impasse --- “they” are impossible.*

Agreed-to Problem: we aren't being productive because of the underlying tension

What do we agree on?

What do we see differently?

What are the implications of not resolving this?

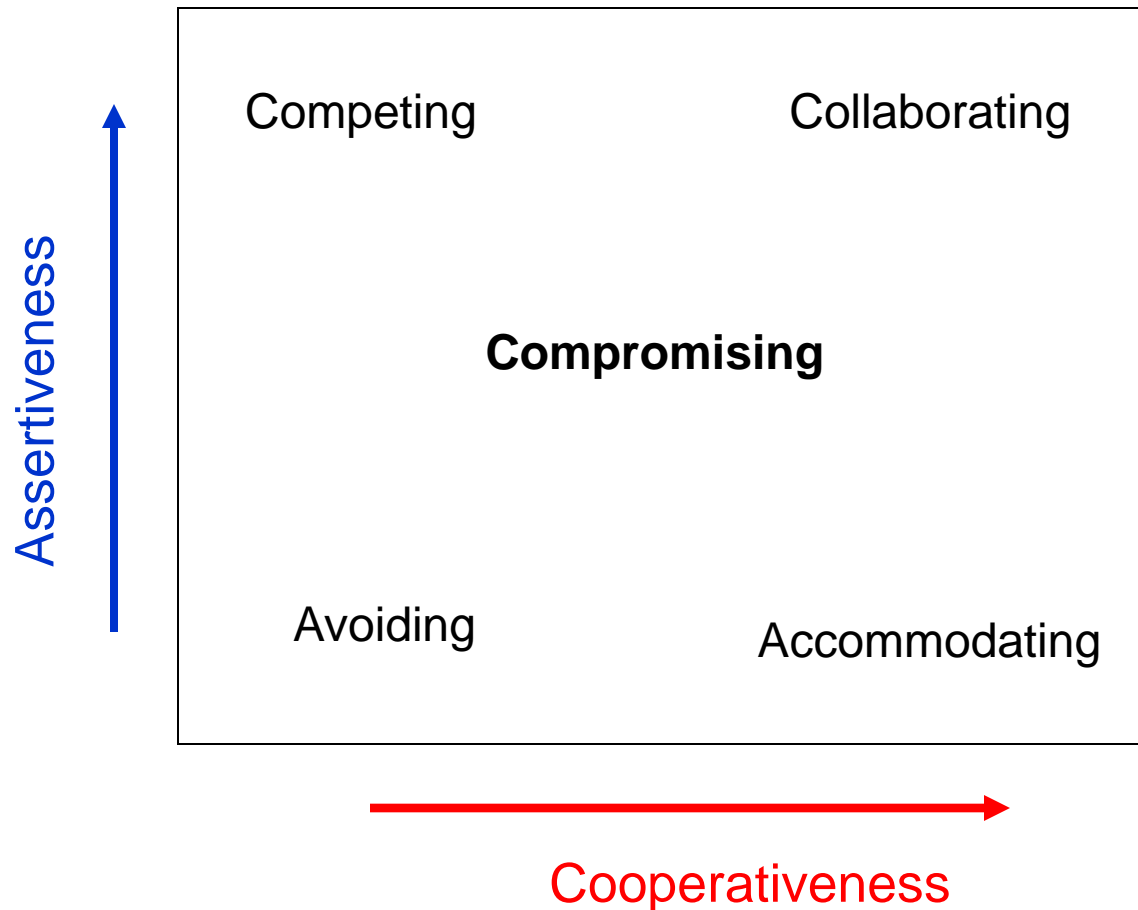
What are the opportunities when we resolve this?

Insight into others begins with ourselves

Know your own conflict handling style

Thomas-Kilmann
Conflict Mode Instrument

Mary Lee Kennedy



Our focus

- Negative or disruptive conflict inhibits people's abilities to work together effectively
- Causes meeting, work or business problems
 - Disrupts meetings
 - Tense, stressful environments
 - Productivity &/or quality slippage
 - Internal issues overshadow the real issues the Board needs to address

Negatively Impacting Work?

Yes?

Then address it, constructively.

Destructive conflict will not heal itself.

Clarity as a preventive measure

- Establish clear expectations, both performance-wise & other-wise
- Articulate what's acceptable
 - Many organizations use ground rules for working groups or teams as well as for meetings



*An ounce of
prevention is
worth a pound of
cure.*

Ben Franklin

Boards in a conflict



Sample preventative ground rules

- *We focus on the library as a whole and the entire community for which it makes a positive difference*
- *We recognize that only the board has the authority to act on behalf of the library; individual board members have no authority to act on their own*
- *We ensure the decisions we make support the library's mission & strategies*
- *We all share in the responsibility for the effective functioning of the board*
- *We respect each other's opinions*
- *We have one conversation at a time*
- *We enjoy humour that is mutually funny*
- *We balance our hard-work with laughter*
- *Once decisions are taken, we support them*

Consistently confirm
these & the library's
mission

Clarity: a by-product of communication

Clarity diffuses conflict.

Insights develop clarity.

Listening and feedback produce insights.

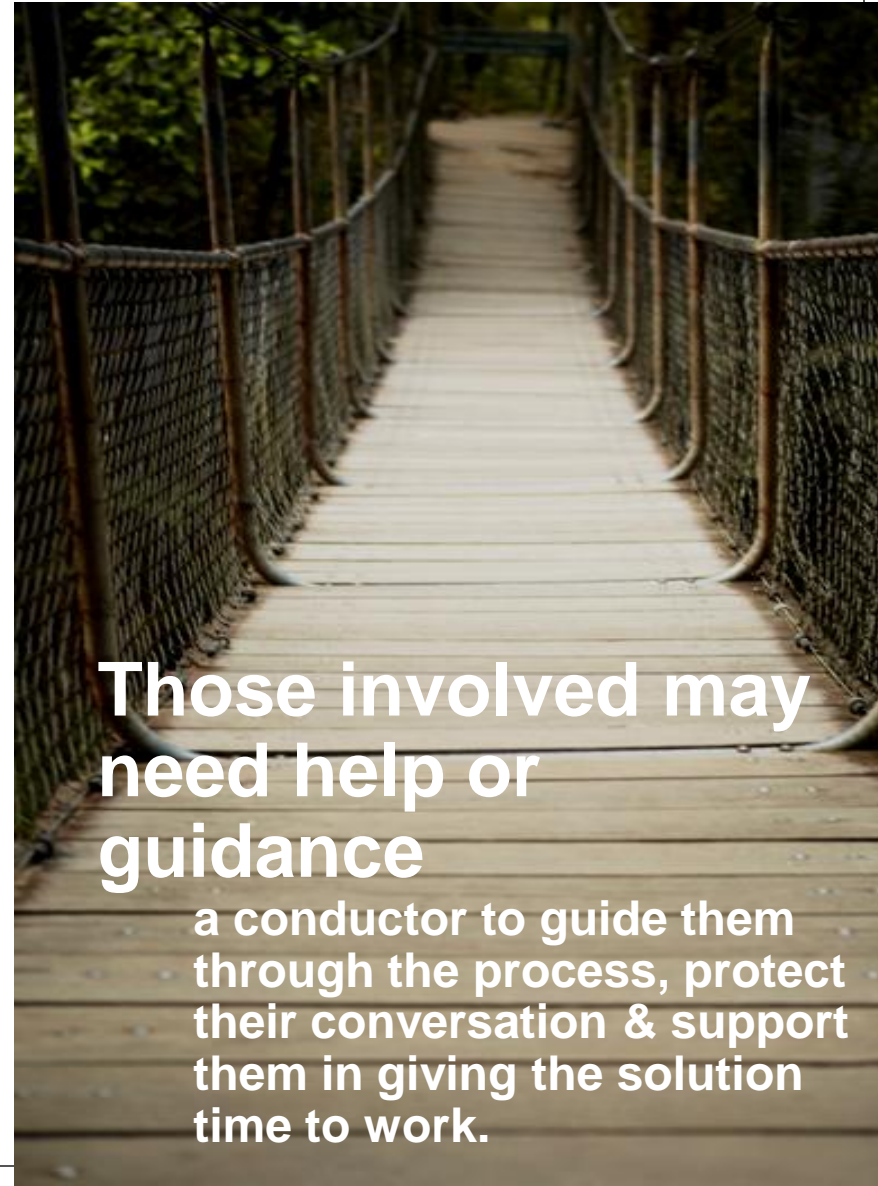
We communicate to gain **sight into each other's perceptions,
intentions & approaches.**

There's no resolving without talking

- Active listening is hard work, but the send-receive bridge isn't an obvious route for most people
- Most people prefer to stay on the SEND highway
- Use your own language
- Your intent is to find out what their perceptions are — what their view is

Road to resolution

- Purpose of a resolution is to lay the foundation for a better future
- Begin by defining the problem, agreeing to address it & arriving at an equal-gain solution.
- To travel toward that solution, people must converse using the send-receive bridge.



Those involved may need help or guidance

a conductor to guide them through the process, protect their conversation & support them in giving the solution time to work.

“Reaching consensus”

- Define it as a group before hand
- It does not mean everyone is in agreement
- It does mean everyone can live with the result
- Gauge the level of agreement



Individuals in conflict



Understanding your reactions



Individuals in a Conflict

- Sam & Tara – 2 Board members
- Bob & Marg – Chair & Vice Chair
- Sam & Tara are constantly sniping, disagreeing in meetings, blaming each other for issues, etc.
- Bob & Marg are concerned about the impact this has on meetings & Board effectiveness
- Bob feels he can't be objective & Marg offers to talk with Sam & Tara if Bob will help her work thru the process

The Process: Step 1

- Marg & Bob tell Sam & Tara their conflict is impacting performance – the Board's & theirs as Board members
- Marg & Bob are very clear that this is a Board problem that must be addressed & resolved for a go-forward situation

**THEY ARE PROVIDING INSIGHTS TO HELP PROVIDE
CLARITY to Sam & Tara**

- Marg sets up a joint problem-solving meeting with them & asks them to think about a solution

The Process: Step 2

- Marg's preparation for the meeting:
 - Meets individually with Sam & Tara, "Tell me how you see the problem"
 - Keeps them focused on the Board impact, conveying understanding but neither agreement/disagreement
 - Learns what is really at issue so that she can better manage the discussion & prevent unnecessary hurt feelings
 - Reiterates need to have a more effective future
 - Arranges for neutral room, with seating across from each other, for 90 minutes
 - Develops meeting agenda, objectives, problem definition, & ground rules

The Process: Ground Rules

- Focus on the problem, not personalities
- Focus on a future effective working relationship, not past actions
- “Us” vs. the problem, not “You” vs. “Me”
- Seek/generate ‘both-gain’ opportunities
- Identify balanced, equal-gain solution
- Engage fully in meaningful discussion, with no walk-aways & no power-plays
- Support decisions taken at the meeting
- Give the approach - & working relationship time & a chance

The Process: Ground Rules

- If at all possible, the one word that should never be used in this process is:



But...

The Process: Step 3

- In the meeting
 - Mutually define desired future state**
 - Give individual perspectives
 - Summarize perspectives, looking for common elements**
 - Review/refine Problem Definition**
 - Generate Solutions
 - Agree to Specific Solution**
 - Commit to Solution & Follow-up Meeting

The Process: Step 3

- Follow-up & commitment to see the situation improve
- How?
 - Encouragement
 - Informal & formal follow-up
 - Consistent messages
 - Reference common elements

Will it work?

- Depends on:
 - Willingness & commitment of those involved
 - Clarity of work-related problem
 - Transparency of the process
 - Preparation for working through the process
- Also depends on.....individual's knowledge of their hotspots!
 - Fight or flight?
 - Need to “be liked?”
 - Need to be decisive or “solve problems”?

What derails most conflict management efforts?

US

- Our fear of emotional behavior...avoidance...dislike of one person.....our hot spots

Chair or Management role

Do:

- facilitate
- listen
- be calm
- know when to stop
- model the behavior
- be sensitive to all
- concentrate on getting the job done
- clarify “rules” & desired results
- ensure people know how to problem-solve

Don't:

- wait
- stay in same place or a place of “authority”
- assume anything
- look for trouble
- take sides

Individual's role in resolving conflicts

- Honestly determine if it is a conflict or a personality issue
 - How is it impacting your ability to perform effectively?
- Have a conversation with the other person, actively listening & crossing that send-receive bridge
- Engage in problem-solving
- Seek things to go in the common frame: what can you agree on?
- Ask for chair or management help

Critical success factors in resolving conflicts

People involved:

1. agree that their conflict is a productivity problem
2. agree to work together to resolve
 - Using a problem-solving process
 - Focusing on situation & actions, NOT people
3. jointly scope the problem: situation analysis
 - Each objectively present ideas & views
 - If possible, gather these as: What? When? Where? How? How often? Extent? Facts?
 - Figure out the REAL problem...

Critical success factors in resolving conflicts

People involved:

4. talk....that's they only way to get to the REAL problem
5. jointly re-define problem & agree that THAT problem must be solved
6. generate potential solutions
7. select preferred solution
8. commit to their individual & collective next steps
 - Document, in writing – right there!
9. schedule follow-up meeting

Can conflicts be managed & resolved?

Depends totally on people's willingness to try, to risk, to practice,
and to recognizing that each of the skills involved are

ART:

acknowledgement, respect & trust