

Consensus Building to Resolve Conflicts

Powerpoint Notes

Slide 2: What Is Consensus Building?

Consensus building usually carried out by a mediator or facilitator who moves through a series of prescribed steps.

Most groups define consensus in a way that acknowledges that participants support the decision reached by the groups or at least can “live with it”

Each member can honestly say:

“I believe that other members understand my point of view”

“I believe I understand other member’s points of view”

“Whether or not I prefer this decision, I support it because it was arrived at openly and fairly and it is the best solution for us at this time”

Slide 3: What Is Collaboration?

Talked about this in an earlier session. For more information, go to the BLM NTC Resource Learning Library

Key concepts in definition of ‘collaboration’:

- Is a process or tool
- Through which two or more parties (Individuals or Organizations) work together to address a problem or issue that concerns them all and that no one is likely to be able to resolve alone.
- Diverse participants represent a broad range of interests and views

Slide 4: What Is Conflict Resolution?

Agreements reached can be more creative, satisfying, and enduring than those imposed through conventional systems of conflict resolution.

Often serves to mend or improve overall relationship between parties because focus largely on identification of interests and common goals and on cooperation while protests, appeals and litigation focused on positions and win/lose outcomes.

When parties craft a solution themselves, they are generally more committed to the agreement than when a judge or agency imposes a solution.

Preventing or resolving conflict through these processes can reduce or resolve protests, appeals, and litigation and result in savings of time, budget dollars, and public resources.

Slides 5-6: What Is the Facilitator's Role

Traditional role of a facilitator:

- Assist in developing meeting agendas
- Keep track of time, keep participants focused, assist with keeping to the ground rules
- Keep a written record of the discussion
- For multiple sessions, summarize prior sessions and prior agreements
- Assist group in developing solutions

This definition of a facilitator's role in a consensus building effort implies a different level of involvement of the facilitator early in the process by being actively involved in participant identification and recruitment. Design of the process to be used often involves the participants in this phase

These steps and this concept are from the following source:

<http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/treatment/consens.html>

Slide 8: Facilitator's Role Defined

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Slide 9: Consensus Building Tools

Consensus Associates offers a consensus building process called the Consensus Institute, a three day training program. The Institute takes the practitioner through the following 8 learning modules.

Today, we are going to talk about three of these:

- 1. The grounding**
2. The greeting circle
3. An adaptive learning process
4. Roles of the facilitator and recorder
- 5. Worst/best outcomes**
6. A process for coping with conflict
- 7. Closure**
- 8. Collective Statements**

Slide 10: The Grounding Exercise

Grounding:

- Establishes a model for listening with respect, a knowing that each person will be heard
- Establishes a verbal territory for each participant, a sense of potential equity
- Requires access to both the left and the right brain, engaging the "whole brain."
- Allows apprehensions and hopes for the meeting to be expressed
- Allows participants to express hidden agendas (like leaving early, a flat tire, a sickness, etc.)
- Brings people into the "here and now."
- Provides initial information to the facilitator

This activity introduces the notion of listening with respect to each other. It is important that the facilitator listen fully to each person so they may experience being listened to. Once listening with respect has been established in the room, it becomes a model thereafter.

First, let's look at how you personally feel about conflict and your methods for resolving it.

DIRECTIONS:

In your own words, define what conflict is. Write as many definitions as you want. For example:

- Conflict is a disagreement between two or more people that often is a lack of communication.
- It is a difference of opinion.
- Conflict is when a difference of opinion creates tension/discussion, either internally or externally, that prevents consensus.
- Conflict is a disconnect, sometimes caused by a behavior or an opinion that this expressed that caused a "stuck-ness."

Next, write down how conflict makes you feel. For example: conflict makes me feel

- Anxious
- Stressed
- Uncomfortable
- Fearful
- Defensive
- My anxiety drives me to resolve it
- I try to avoid conflict
- At times I like conflict because when opposing ideologies come together, an opportunity for learning occurs

List all the conflicts that are unresolved in your life. If you desire, you can break them into four areas: personal, family, work, and community. The personal conflicts are those you have with yourself, that go on in your mind.

Exploring the definition of conflict allows one to deal with this more as an abstract concept, with less personal attachment.

Exploring "unresolved conflict in your environment" allows one to explore the specific reality of conflict in a more emotional context.

Slide 11: Worst Possible Outcomes Exercise

It is more important to explore the worst fears before the best hopes. This leaves the image of the best outcome in the participants minds.

Fears are uppermost in the minds of those who are apprehensive, uncertain, unwilling. It is normal and right to fear the worst outcome of any situation.

Example: Think of a time when you were sleeping and the phone rang early in the morning. What did you think? How did you feel?

How about the time a child ran toward the road. How did you react? Did you yell to the child and demand they stay away from the street? Even though there are no cars there, you experience the worst possible outcome – THE CHILD BEING HIT BY THE CAR. Not only that, you feel the potential emotion of that moment just as if it happened.

PEOPLE FEAR THE WORST OUTCOME OF ANY SITUATION AND OPERATE EMOTIONALLY OUT OF THAT FEAR JUST AS IF IT WERE REALLY HAPPENING. THIS IS A MAJOR MOTIVATOR FOR MOST CONFLICT.

WORST POSSIBLE OUTCOMES are:

- feared future imagined outcomes
- often based on past experience
- with a presently experienced emotion, biochemical and physical reaction
- when people believe them, they affect their perceptions, beliefs, values and strategies
- they tend to be self-fulfilling prophecies when strongly held

DIRECTIONS:

Select one area of conflict in your life. First, write down as many worst possible outcomes of confronting conflict that you can think of. Do not hesitate to write the worst of the worst. Don't hide anything from yourself. The more you disclose to yourself, the most likely you will learn how to resolve the situation. For example:

- It brings up fear of uncontrollable chaos
- People are going to get angry at me
- It will make things worse
- We lose our ability to do what we want to do because we have to compromise
- Confronting conflict creates more conflict

Second, write down worst possible outcomes of not confronting conflict. For example:

- If it isn't resolved, it becomes imbedded in the community, becomes multi-generational.

Slide 12: **Best Possible Outcomes Exercise**

Once fears have been adequately expressed, then hopes seem more possible, easier to express and believe. This also leaves the images and words of the best hopes in the minds of the participants.

All events /issues have a potential worst or best outcome. Either is possible. Typically, some of us choose to focus on either the worst or the best outcome (pessimists and optimists). When these views become pitted against each other, we tend to see the worst outcome or the best outcome as the exclusive possibility. This results in polarization of views.

The best outcome is often not experienced by people in conflict because they get focused on talking about the worst possible outcome.

The best outcome is just as possible. It is a way of expressing the potential in any event or issue.

It is a goal, a direction that we can agree to seek. It focuses on the positive efforts of people who are seeking the best.

Consensus recognizes the possibility of the worst and the best outcome. This is called POSSIBILITY THINKING, an acknowledgement that both worst and best outcomes are present and inherent in each moment, up to, and often after the event.

BEST POSSIBLE OUTCOMES are:

- Hoped-for future imagined outcomes
- Sometimes not previously experienced
- With a presently experienced emotion, biochemical and physical reaction
- When people believe them, they affect their perceptions, beliefs, values and strategies
- They tend to be self-fulfilling prophecies when strongly held

Slides 14, 15 and 16: Collective Statements

Collective Statements can be done for both worst and best outcomes. When time is limited it is better to move toward the positive and develop the collective statement around the best outcomes.

In our example – we were all talking about our individual conflicts, so our collective statement is not quite the same as a group that is experiencing a conflict that is a “shared” experience. However, this tool, a collective statement demonstrates how you take the building blocks of consensus building tools to move into consensus.

We have provided one element of a collective statement where participants words were grouped by like themes. This is from the Scarcity Workshop and the best possible outcomes of having collaborative partnerships. THE CONSENSUS INSTITUTE BEYOND CONFLICT TO CONSENSUS WORKSHOP; THRIVING IN TIMES OF SCARCITY REPORT AND LEARNING MANUAL will be posted on the Managing by Network, NTC: Knowledge Resource Center webpage.