

LEVELS OF CONFLICT

Based on Spead Leas, Moving Your Church Through Conflict

For it to be a system conflict a significant percentage of people, or people with significant influence, need to be upset with the practices/policies/style/person of the current leadership.

A task of leaders is to develop the organization’s capacity to solve problems and manage the “rubs” that are a normal and useful part of organizational life. This allows the organization to be a more productive and satisfying environment while also heading off serious conflict. As part of its life an organization needs to be engaged in a developmental process of building trust, developing communication and negotiating skills, and establishing processes to manage concerns and new ideas. This gives people the ability to keep conflict at the lower levels. As conflict moves to higher levels people tend to resist skill development, elaborate problem solving methods, the introduction of new ground rules, etc. So, these things are best done when the organization is not in conflict.

LEVEL	SYMPTOMS	STRATEGY
I PROBLEM TO SOLVE	<p>Objective of those involved: fix the problem</p> <p>Tone/behaviors: optimistic, collaborative, problem not person focus, rational; language is clear, specific, here and now, adult; real differences over goals, values, needs, plans, information; people understand each other and disagree.</p>	<p>1. Facilitate decision making by <u>collaborative problem solving</u>, or if not possible, by <u>negotiation</u>, or if not possible, by <u>formal authority action</u> (by voting or leader decision.)</p> <p>2. <u>Methods</u> -- establish meeting norms, use a facilitator and a disciplined process, brainstorm and prioritize, use communication skills, etc.</p>
II DISAGREEMENT	<p>Objectives: self protection, not getting hurt; solve the problem</p> <p>Tone/behaviors: cautious, not hostile; general language to protect people and self, e.g., “there is no trust”, “we need more openness”; hostile humor, distancing comments; withhold information that might serve the other side or damage your side.</p>	<p>1. <u>Reduce tension and facilitate people’s work together</u> --the need here is to keep people close enough to work though their differences and not engage in withdrawal or begin to get aggressive. Encourage people to “hang in”, attend and prepare for meetings; coach people to act, to be assertive, help people fully express their concerns and to listen to the concerns of others; provide ways to build relationships, ways for people to know each other as people, to speak with each other about common interests and needs.</p> <p>2. <u>Methods</u> -- role reversal, expectations clarification, paraphrase and itemized response, brainstorm and prioritize, use facilitator, etc.</p> <p>2. <u>Establish ground rules</u> -- get agreement about how we will work on the issue, e.g., no threats, identify sources of information, direct sharing of differences, no personal attacks, no withdrawing; norms for meetings, etc.</p> <p>3. <u>Make decisions</u> -- collaborative problem solving --- negotiation --- formal authority</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">III CONTEST</p>	<p>Objective: win, not yet at level of wanting to hurt the opponent. Tone/behaviors: win/lose dynamics, threatening, difficult, resistance to peace overtures, hanging back waiting for others to show weakness, personal attacks, emotional appeals, limited social contact; language is distorted - overgeneralized (“you always..”, “everyone..”), exaggerated, making a case, expecting magic or rapid change, expecting others to read your mind, extreme, only two sides, lose the shade/gray.</p>	<p>The overall need is to reduce fear and distorted thinking; to provide a sense of order.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All the strategies mentioned for Level II, as possible. 2. <u>Structure the process</u> -- work out a clear process; dates of meetings, time lines, etc. Revise it as needed; but work at maintaining a sense of order and direction. There is a high need for a process that is seen as fair, open, and legal. 3. <u>Use an external consultant</u> 4. <u>Contact between parties to the conflict needs to be carefully managed</u> -- opportunities for people to express feelings and clarify their interests need to be provided for each side; this usually needs to first be done apart from the other side; when they are ready to work together, then have a carefully facilitated meeting. 5. <u>Decision making</u> -- the same sequence as at other levels; however, the more persuasion, compelling and voting the more likely that people will leave the organization.
<p style="text-align: center;">IV FIGHT/FLIGHT</p>	<p>Objectives: hurt/get rid of the others; being “right” Tone/behaviors: factions inflexible, clear lines, strong leaders emerge; language becomes ideological - about principles, truth, rights; parties detached, causing each to lose sense of the pain they cause; attempt to enlist outsiders in the cause, parties will not speak with each other, self righteous, cold</p>	<p>More tension will require more structure.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>Use an external consultant/mediator</u> -- this can not be someone from the central office. 2. <u>Follow the book</u> -- legal issues may be involved, trust is very low; follow the organization’s standards. 3. <u>Communicate through third parties</u> -- seek an agreement for third parties to serve as “go-betweens” to carry messages, look for possible areas of agreement, Most likely to be useful when the issue is clear. 4. <u>Be tougher about the ground rules</u> --enforce expectations about personal attacks, loaded language; might have a group that monitors agreements and gives feedback to violators. 5. <u>Decision making</u> -- likely to be by formal authority. Some are likely to leave.
<p style="text-align: center;">V INTRACTABLE SITUATION</p>	<p>Objective: destroy the others Tone/behaviors: attempts to do serious damage to the other’s reputation, position, well being; attempts may continue after the parties have been separated</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The conflict is no longer manageable. - Outside authority will need to make difficult decisions. - The parties need to be separated. - Some people may need to be asked to leave.