

The Conflict Competent Organization

ONPHA Conference 2015

St. Stephen's
Community House

Conflict Resolution & Training

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Session Overview

Conflicts cost people and organizations time, money and morale. But we can have better, and even good conflicts, if we want to. Resolving conflicts can change our relationships in ways that nothing else can.

This session is about what organizations like ONPHA members can do to better manage conflict and to take advantage of it when it happens.

This session

- 1) The conflicts ONPHA members have
- 2) Core competencies for conflict resolution
- 3) How organizations are conflict-ready
- 4) Small groups: the opportunities you have, challenges you face, what you might do.
- 5) Summary, final discussion and evaluation.

ONPHA and conflict readiness

- ONPHA's Strategic Plan talks about healthy and vital communities, local and community-based solutions, good business practices and board and staff leadership.
- Your recent report, "*Strengthening Social Housing Communities*", says members should focus on community development, support for tenants and staff, access to information about options and eviction prevention.
- ONPHA's values include accountability, leadership and innovation, and partnerships

Three kinds of conflict

- Psychological conflicts about respect, values and standards, emotion, humanity
- Substantive conflicts about a specific issue or event(s), a sum of money, a place, “the pie”
- Procedural conflicts about how things happened and who did them or not, by whom, policies and standards, timelines, places

Conflict: who, why, when?

Who has conflicts in organizations?

- tenants with each other • tenants and providers • both at once • grievances and workplace complaints • staff conflicts (one-to-one and teams, organization-wide) • staff-management conflict • board conflict • conflict with funders, partners and others external

Why do conflicts happen?

- people's different knowledge, experiences and values and opinions • lack of personal capacities to communicate, problem-solve • competition and rivalry • misunderstandings, assumptions • workplace and external stress • inadequate or missing organizational structure • poisoned workplaces

When do conflicts happen?

- when personal relationships and organizational systems and culture can't handle levels of stress and disagreement
- gradually over time, sometimes without warning, often predictably

Core Competencies for conflict management

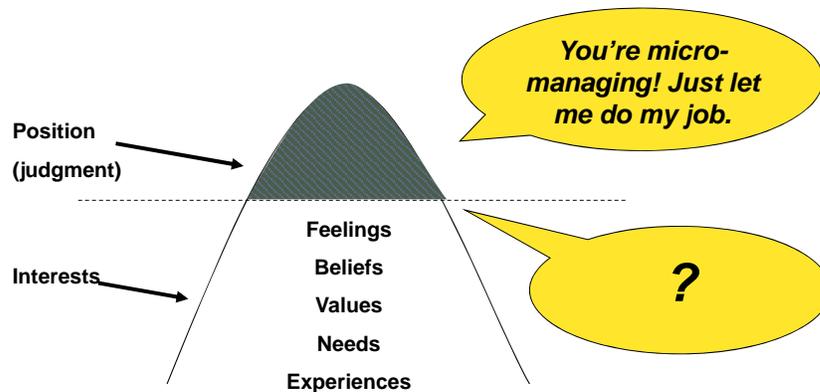
- Understanding, normalizing, embracing conflict
- Interest-based, and rights- and power-based approaches
- Good communication, understanding and empathy, accountability, skills and approaches
- Safe ways to confront and raise issues
- Dynamic planning by all stakeholders, for all kinds of conflicts

Three ways of resolving conflicts

1. Power (human rights, safety)
2. Rules and Rights (program delivery)
3. Interests (interpersonal relationships)

All are useful. Interest-based approaches are less common, but potent.

Interest-based problem-solving



Active listening and empathy

Inviting Information

- Encouraging room and body language, language
- Clarifying questions

Acknowledging Information

- Re-stating accurately
- Reflecting feelings and effects
- Validating – intentions, experiences, values

Speaking About Our Own Interests

Raising a Concern: How to do it?

- In the first person, describe the impact of a problem (conflict) you are involved in
- Explain how the problem relates to the other person, if necessary
- Ask for their understanding, make a request for help solving your problem

Conflict readiness at all levels

1. **The conflict-ready person:** able and willing to communicate well, de-escalate, problem-solve, confront, facilitate
2. **The conflict-ready organization:** accessible, effective and dynamic policies and practices, transparent, understood, accepted
3. **Organizational/community culture:** conflict will happen, it can be harmful and helpful, we are individually and mutually accountable

Some common strategies.

- Open acknowledgement that conflict is normal, necessary, even good.
- Consistent, dynamic, accessible conflict resolution policies and processes for the landlord-tenant relationship, human resources, partnerships, governance, risk management
- Training for a range of stakeholders in problem-solving, de-escalation, confronting, facilitation, team-building, supervision and other conflict related skills and approaches, followed by real practice, reflection and support.
- Diverse and multiple points of access to conflict resolution, resources and systems.
- Use existing capacity (internal and external, like at OHPHA) wherever possible, but adapt and build on it

Small groups exercise

- In small groups, talk briefly about your organizations and/or the typical ONPHA member, your existing capacity re conflict.
- Talk about the first steps you and/or the typical member could take to be conflict-ready. Outline what, how, who, when.
- Highlight the biggest challenges you face and how to deal with them.

What will you do next?

- Yourself,
- Your organization,
- Your neighbours, your board, your workplace, your community?

How can ONPHA help?

How can we help each other?

Summary

Conflict-ready organizations:

- Understand and accept conflict, take responsibility for it, and take advantage of it,
- Acknowledge that interest-based approaches to conflict are as important as power and rights-based approaches, and use them too, and
- Continuously plan and carry out both ongoing prevention and conflict resolution, and expect the same from tenants, staff, boards, partner and others.

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