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Features

The Upside of Conflict

By Alan Fowler, Elizabeth Field & Joseph McMahon

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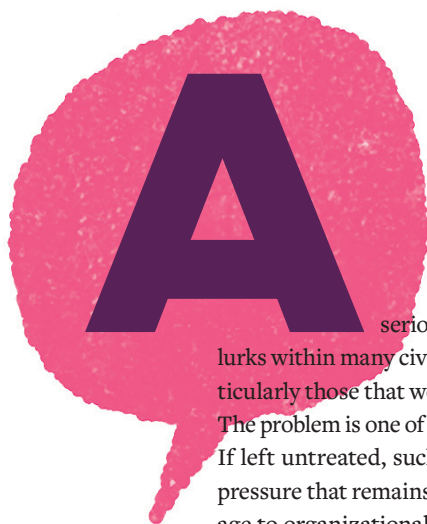


Too many organizations ignore or avoid addressing internal conflict. A healthy perspective on disagreement can increase resilience and spur needed innovation.

The Upside of Conflict

BY ALAN FOWLER, ELIZABETH FIELD
& JOSEPH MCMAHON

Illustration by James Heimer



A serious yet unaddressed problem lurks within many civil society organizations, particularly those that work internationally (ICSOs). The problem is one of destructive internal conflict. If left untreated, such strife can, like high blood pressure that remains ignored, cause lasting damage to organizational health and performance.

Intraorganizational conflict can arise from many different sources. A sudden shift in donor priorities can upend current programming. A change in politics or public policy can make an organization's mission less relevant or viable. Potential negative publicity about an overseas branch can spark heated debate about whether and how to deal with it. Substantive disagreements between boards and executives or between field offices and headquarters are common. The question is not simply whether conflicts arise, but rather whether organizations are equipped to deal with them.

Our research into the topic has revealed that they are not. We have spoken to more than 100 people working for 93 ICSOs across 23 countries. A sizable majority of respondents—60 percent—

believe that internal conflicts at their organizations are significant or commonplace, and 75 percent of respondents rate the conflicts their organizations have as moderate to severe, but a mere 5 percent think their organization has an effective conflict-resolution system. The inevitable, unwelcome conclusion is that many ICSO staff function where disputes are common and serious yet systems to solve them are absent.

Such conflicts, when not addressed constructively, often have many costs, both visible and hidden: the physical and psychological toll on staff and volunteers; energy and resources redirected from programmatic work toward crisis management; reputational damage; difficulty in attracting or retaining staff; and problems of motivation, morale, and performance among staff and volunteers. There is also an additional cost: Many ICSOs are missing the opportunity that serious disagreements offer to improve internal functioning and increase their resilience as operating conditions across the world become more turbulent.

In what follows, we analyze how ICSOs can positively address these and other unsettling issues when they uphold a healthy perspective on conflict—one that maintains the intentional and conscious view that addressing conflict can bring gains in two ways. First, these organizations can better respond to external disruptive forces (e.g., significant economic, political, relational, and social changes) by confronting difference and disagreement to build adaptive capacities. Second, they can improve their staff's work experience, thereby ensuring healthier and more productive relationships.

How an organization responds to conflict helps to determine whether the energy involved benefits

or hinders performance. By avoiding or denying internal conflict, ICSOs miss the opportunity to find the upside that can arise from successfully addressing important internal disagreements. Turning the energy of conflict into positive problem solving enables these organizations to remain relevant and effective when working in multiple countries and complex conditions.

Although our inquiry focuses on ICSOs, we believe that observations and recommendations from our work are applicable to many forms of CSOs, as well as market-sector entities, particularly when corporations embrace social responsibility. Evidence from other types of organizations indicates that, under the right conditions, internal conflict can improve performance.¹ Positive efforts to prepare for and respond to disagreements can, among other gains, meaningfully improve people's morale, working relationships, and creativity, and increase openness to change. Our survey and interviews with leaders have convinced us that ICSOs especially need to upgrade their conflict capabilities and are well positioned to do so if they choose this path.

UBIQUITOUS AND UNADDRESSED

In 2015, we conducted our survey of ICSOs to ascertain the presence and nature of intraorganizational conflict and to assess whether these organizations had conflict-management systems. The ICSOs we surveyed are dedicated to long-term development and humanitarian relief in countries across the world. They range in size from small organizations—those with few staff, limited outreach, and yearly budgets in the hundreds of thousands of dollars and dedicated to single issues, such as early childhood development—all the way up to massive ICSOs with many thousands of staff working in more than 100 countries, with annual turnovers exceeding a billion dollars, and implementing multiple types of projects.

What are ICSO intraorganizational conflicts often about? In addition to the major sources already mentioned, our survey respondents identified the following, in rough order of significance: conflicts about closing gaps between mission rhetoric and practice; ways of adapting organizational design to better address shifts in operating conditions; (re)distribution of authority between headquarters and country offices; dissatisfaction with attributes of leadership; inappropriate management styles; gender-insensitive behaviors; unfair personnel decisions; inadequate diversity and inclusion; unfair hiring/promoting; (im)proper use of funds; staff participation in decision making; too little or too much sensitivity to donor values when diversifying funding; altering methods of program implementation; and (mis)use of monitoring and evaluation performance information. In sum, topics span governance, policy, strategy, practice, and sustainability.

Our survey identified that intraorganizational conflict in civil society is ubiquitous and largely unaddressed. Along with these startling findings, we learned that more than eight out of 10 respondents described their organization's ability to respond to conflict as "less than adequate." Respondents also informed us that conflict was often avoided, rather than used as a source for positive organizational change. A follow-up involved confidential interviews with midlevel to senior ICSO leaders. The survey results and interviews demonstrate that ICSOs are seldom in a position to take advantage of the opportunities that conflict presents, and as a result are suf-

ALAN FOWLER is honorary professor chair of African philanthropy at Wits Business School, University of the Witwatersrand, in Johannesburg, South Africa. He has a long professional engagement with and has written extensively about the management of non-profit organizations dedicated to international development and poverty reduction. He is a cofounder of the International NGO Training and Research Centre, Oxford, UK.

ELIZABETH FIELD is the conflict advisor at the International Secretariat of Amnesty International. She is a mediator, conflict coach, facilitator, and organizational development practitioner.

JOSEPH MCMAHON is an arbitrator, mediator, and facilitator. He is manager of Collaborative Processes, LLC, and president of Inter-Mediation International.

fering the negative effects. (See "Pathways for Choice and Their Potential Outcomes," page 37.)

CONFLICT AVOIDANCE

If responding effectively to conflict is so important, why do so many organizations ignore or avoid it? Without direct information concerning the historic and current relationship between ICSOs and internal conflict, we find it worthwhile to consider whether and why their history and current context creates a predisposition to conflict avoidance. As many ICSOs came into existence during or at the conclusion of World War II, their internal conflicts may have been the last thing staff, volunteers, and humanitarian workers wished to acknowledge. Moreover, such conflict may have appeared incompatible with religious and humanitarian organizations. Instead, it was the very problem these early ICSOs sought to address—externally, rather than internally. Similarly, their subsequent growth in an era when the Cold War had come to an end enabled them to tackle agendas set out in the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals, which were essentially technocratic, not political. In the face of large-scale poverty and opportunities to act, paying attention to one's own internal difficulties could have felt self-indulgent. Whatever the case, getting on with the job of poverty reduction took hold. Putting organizational energy elsewhere was probably perceived as wasteful.

But time has shown that the very problems that ICSOs intend to address may implicitly be the source of their own conflicts. Several authors have explored ideas of mission mirroring or the "nonprofit paradox," in which nonprofits end up importing or mirroring the issues they were set up to solve.² Some authors even speculate that certain psychosocial considerations make ICSO staff less likely to engage constructively in conflict. Nonprofit consultant David La Piana suggests that a "more insidious explanation for the nonprofit paradox is that values-driven people sometimes feel that their ethical activities entitle them to act less morally—a process that Stanford University psychologist Benoît Monin calls moral credentialing."³

Additionally, the content of the work that ICSOs cover can affect how conflict manifests and what its roots are. Staff at ICSOs may be exposed to highly stressful or traumatic materials, stories, and experiences and may themselves be at risk of developing secondary stress or trauma. Chronic stress may make collaborative conflict management and problem solving more difficult as its impact on the brain and body alters how people interact with others, especially those who are perceived as different or threatening.

Moreover, there may be seemingly good reasons for ICSOs to shun conflict or open discussion about it. They are humanitarian, and often organized as federations of multiple groups where power is widely distributed. Intercultural differences over what is or is not a conflict, and sensitivities about how it is or is not to be broached,

can hamper the creation of a recognized system to respond. In addition, internal conflict may be very difficult for ICSOs to address, much less embrace, because of the fear that doing so will generate even more conflict. An ICSO program director flagged the following concerns in her confidential interview with us:

“How would this affect our board members, on whom we rely for connections and funds? How would discussing intraorganizational conflict impact our donors? What would they think? Would addressing or admitting internal conflict be embarrassing or potentially lead to bad press? Isn’t internal conflict wholly inconsistent with our image and mission? Would raising the issue of conflict cause our staff to lose confidence in leadership? Even if we wished to better address [conflict], do we really know how to do that? Would an attempt to do so just create additional conflict? Would we just be opening a can of worms, or worse?”

These can be challenging questions for ICSO leadership—if the issue ever rises to their attention.

Sociologist Amitai Etzioni has examined the types of power that organizations deploy to ensure employee compliance. He argues that nonprofits are normatively oriented, attracting individuals motivated by value commitment and “passion.” This, in turn, suggests staff are predisposed to react emotively to internal troubles and disagreements, creating a volatile atmosphere where constructive dialogue suffers.⁴ Staff tend to bond strongly with the ICSO’s mission, which leads to the expectation that they will participate in its decisions. If this expectation is denied, it can generate extreme psychologically charged responses.⁵ In reflecting on his experience, one former ICSO leader writes:

“Because of their value-driven nature, NGOs tend to place unusually high importance on fairness, justice, solidarity, and

equality, both in their mission-related work [and] inside their organizations; this can create cognitive dissonance, sometimes quite pervasive in nature.”⁶

So, by failing to address conflicts among staff, ICSOs can actually exacerbate the problem. When significant disagreement arises, if an organization does not positively channel the energy associated with a personal commitment to a moral mission, its efforts to find resolution may increase in cost and difficulty.

THE REMEDY

But this problem also affords an opportunity: ICSOs can greatly strengthen themselves by confronting conflicts and adopting what we call a Healthy Conflict Perspective (HCP). This philosophy involves an intentional and sustained orientation to treat “disharmony” as a normal, desirable, and creative feature of organizational life.

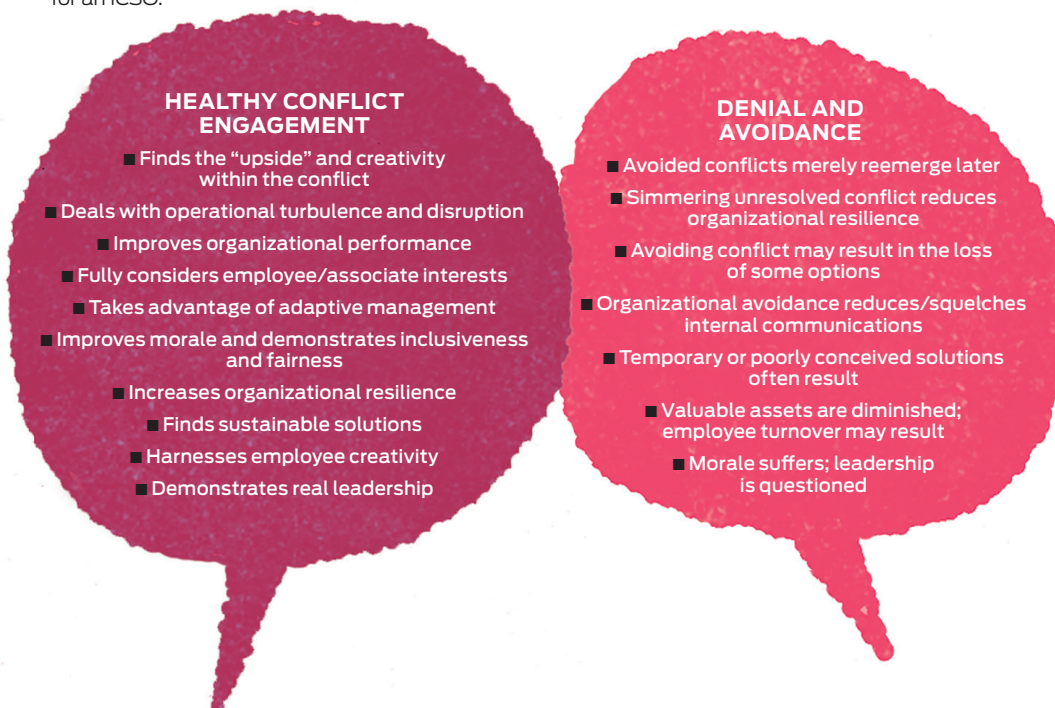
Specifically, HCP has four elements that we have drawn from existing literature, lessons from business organizations, and our own experiences in addressing conflict. (See “The Four Elements of a ‘Healthy Conflict Perspective’ for Civil Society Organizations,” page 39.) We outline the four elements below by offering a definition for each element, a brief description of some of the research that supports it, and a few practical steps that ICSOs can take to implement it. Although our study centered on ICSOs, the remedies described herein are likely to apply equally to many, if not all, types of civil society organizations and nonprofits, as well as to businesses and government agencies.

Because civil society organizations (CSOs) are idiosyncratic, we believe that they should broadly define “perspective” for themselves, based on foundational principles, rather than attempting to identify and apply an excessively detailed formula. Each CSO will need to determine how these elements best fit its own interests and context.

Element 1: Conflict-competent leadership | This element is dedicated

Pathways for Choice and Their Potential Outcomes

The decision either to address or to avoid addressing intraorganizational conflict has serious ramifications for an ICSO.



to constructively address conflict early and collaboratively. If necessary, a conflict-competent leader will drive a process to change the organization’s attitude and approach to conflict. Such a leader acknowledges that conflict is ubiquitous and often complex, while recognizing that it can be an important driver of better performance.

The survey results show that ICSO leadership tends, by and large, not to address conflict head-on and would, in the words of one survey respondent, “rather sweep it under the carpet than address it.” But by creating a climate of avoidance and fear around serious disagreement, leaders contribute to the triggering of staff’s threat defenses. Such defensiveness can show up in cognitive biases

(such as unnuanced, polarized thinking) and self-protective stances, or emotions (such as anger and shame). These tendencies inhibit learning and increase the likelihood that people will behave in a way that escalates the conflict or becomes destructive.

Leaders are in a unique position to improve their organization's perspective on conflict, thereby bypassing the avoidance trap. Our research and work experience have shown that small actions can have large effects. Even microadjustments in behaviors—welcoming questions, accepting disagreement, showing respect for difference—can ripple through an organization, demonstrating that conflict is not something to fear and avoid.

Comments from our survey reinforce this point. As one senior ISCO staff member wrote:

“We moved from a leader who was combative to one skilled in conflict. ... What a big difference it made. ... Leadership is calm and does not back up from conflict. ... We [the staff] received positive messages from leadership about being a great team. ... The new leadership demonstrated personal commitment. ... Leadership action is symbolic.”

People take cues from their social environment about their behavior, and leaders are essential in shaping that environment.

To put this element into practice, senior leaders need to model the desired attitudes and behavior, and both support each other and hold each other accountable. Simple steps—such as reflecting at the ends of meetings about whether they have understood differing opinions and inputs, listened to each other, and given constructive feedback—can help shift the dynamic. Additional steps include:

- Destigmatize conflict as a topic; prepare people for disagreement by talking about how it is normal and healthy.
- Develop skills that enhance conflict competence: empathy, communication, cross-cultural awareness, listening, and emotional intelligence. Integrate these skills into leadership-development programs, trainings, and other channels.
- Assess your conflict styles and develop skills in areas where they are weak. (Programs such as the Thomas-Kilmann Instrument or the Kraybill Conflict Style Inventory can help you to achieve this objective.)
- Start a conversation about how an HCP can fit into your organization. To tailor an HCP effectively, leaders need to monitor and adjust interventions. Leadership using a facilitation team to work on a conflict culture and developing an HCP should stay closely involved.

Element 2: Open and inclusive organizational culture | The right culture is one in which people feel confident and comfortable being themselves, challenging the status quo, questioning ways of doing things, and suggesting new alternatives. Staff are able to take (calculated) risks and experiment without fear of negative emotional sanctions, such as blame and shame. Mutual trust is developed, sustained, and valued. People are honest and open about divergent ideas and interests, and treat differing viewpoints as an asset.

Like functional conflict, diversity is positively correlated with organizational performance. The key to success is to encourage an organization to make the most of different perspectives, ways

of working, experiences, functions, and identities. This requires an organizational culture that encourages people to be themselves and contribute fully. Social psychologist Dan Cable writes about the “seeking system”—the part of the brain that craves exploration and learning and motivates us to explore our environment, grow, change, and make meaning—and its importance in creativity. Under the right conditions, the seeking system, according to Cable, is better able to help individuals solve problems and think analytically.⁷ By contrast, if they don't feel safe and perceive that the threat is coming from within their group, they are more likely to withdraw and conform.

A healthy culture of conflict is crucial for innovation. As a director of strategy at a midsize ICSO said, “Good innovation comes when poking holes in another's ideas—this means conflict.”

Some ways to put this element into practice include:

- Have well-known, identified spaces, places, and moments for dialogue outside formal meetings and routines. Beware of the meeting with a fixed agenda that does not allow for social interactions.
- Cultivate mindful meetings and practices. Pay attention to the pace and how meetings are run, and be sure to include input from all participants.
- Declare respect for each person's dignity. Establish norms for treating one another with dignity and accepting one another's identity.

Element 3: Fair and effective conflict processes | These are methods that establish a coherent, organization-wide response to conflict occurring within the organization. Such processes should be at least somewhat formal and include ways of responding to and learning from intraorganizational conflict, as well as measures to prevent undue escalation, such as training, conflict-resolution approaches, ombuds, and mediation. More formal processes, such as a grievance system or dispute-review panels, may also be included but should be used more sparingly. The system covers all types of conflict likely to occur within the organization—from one-on-one interpersonal disputes to fights between organizational divisions to broad and overarching disagreements about organizational purpose and management. The core components of conflict processes should be written and made broadly available.

Although each process can be tailored to individual ICSO needs, an organizational document or framework describing the process should include at least two parts: (1) the principles and values that guide how the ICSO intends to address intraorganizational conflict, and (2) an adequate description of the processes to be used to handle various types or expressions of conflict.

In general, a description of the approach to conflict will state how the processes are initiated and how the organization will respond to a given conflict. This statement may define the participating actors from the organization—conflict advisor, coach, conciliator, ombud, convener, group facilitator, confidential listener, dispute review board, conflict coach, mediator, and so forth. It is useful to provide multiple options for conflict support—from a first port of call for conflict advice (such as a conflict advisor) to conflict coaching to trained networks of listeners who can attend to the issue and refer people on.

The Four Elements of a “Healthy Conflict Perspective” for Civil Society Organizations

CONFLICT-COMPETENT LEADERSHIP

- Be the example
- Destigmatize conflict as a topic
- Avoid avoidance; take responsibility
- Show strong, sustained commitment to HCP
- Show that candor and humility are strengths
- Have periodic “barometers”

OPEN AND INCLUSIVE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

- Have identified spaces, places, and moments for dialogue outside formal meetings and routines
- Develop, sustain, and value mutual trust
- Make honesty about divergent ideas and interests the norm
- Treat differing viewpoints as an asset, not as disloyalty

RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS FOUNDED ON CONVERSATIONAL COMPETENCE

- Conversation and dialogue replace debate
- Participants speak to bring about understanding and listen to understand
- Difficult issues are properly and carefully raised, not avoided
- Processes used are designed for the needs of the issue and have appropriate time, data, and resources available
- The interests of all participating are adequately discussed and understood
- Participants work to have similar and realistic expectations
 - There is a mix of creativity, pragmatism, and risk
 - Conversational leadership is shared, rather than positional
- Participants or groups of participants appropriately engage in self-reflection

FAIR AND EFFICIENT CONFLICT-MANAGEMENT PROCESSES

- Aim for transformation of a conflict to an “upside” condition, not merely resolution back to the status quo
- Work on the principle of fairness with processes that generate respect for the outcome
- Don’t overspecify steps or stages—have just enough form to show a practical way forward
- Designate a first port of call for conflict advice
- Have a clear communication policy, strategy, and practice

Informal processes should also be available and used to the greatest extent feasible. We suggest that ICSOs not overspecify steps or stages; processes should not be mechanical but should follow just enough form to show a practical way forward. On the other hand, where the processes need to be adjudicatory (i.e., those leading to decisions affecting rights, such as termination of employment), they should be adequately detailed to let participants know how the process will unfold. In every form of conflict process, fairness is essential to generate respect for the outcome, even if it has adverse consequences for some.

The business, education, and policy spheres have long advocated and employed conflict processes.⁸ This is why it is so shocking that conflict-sensitive response systems are seldom in place or in use at ICSOs. Our work consistently demonstrates that sufficiently detailed conflict processes give participants the comfort and satisfaction of generally knowing how such problems will be addressed. Perceptions of fairness are important across many organizational exchanges.

Studies demonstrate that fair exchanges are intrinsically rewarding and unfair exchanges generate threat reactions and other negative behavioral outcomes (such as lack of empathy for people who are believed to be unfair).⁹ Perceptions of fairness also influence how people deal with conflict,¹⁰ and employees’ ability to voice concerns upward at least partly informs such perceptions.¹¹

Conflict management systems are not likely to be fully effective without the other elements of the HCP. For instance, having such systems in place can give the false impression that the problem is resolved. Additionally, a “system” that focuses only on grievance or formal procedures (also called rights-based procedures) will not succeed. Grievance and rights-based processes in general have less satisfactory outcomes for disputants and do not necessarily address the needs of the parties. Rights-based procedures tend to be legalistic and focus on the issue immediately confronted—and often ignore the larger, systemic organizational context in which the true cause for conflict has arisen. A conflict management system should be dynamic, adaptable, and responsive. The work is not “done” when the system is implemented, but it must continually evolve and respond to the users’ needs, expressed via built-in feedback loops. Omissions and inadequacies in organization conflict processes can generate significant problems for ICSOs—problems that can be remedied easily.

To put this element into practice, keep the following in mind:

- Identify the likely problems and disagreements the conflict processes will address.
- Recognize that the ways in which conflicts are managed are as important as the sources of conflict, whether it is functional, healthy conflict about how to do the work (“task conflict”) or dysfunctional, unhealthy conflict (“relationship conflict”).¹²
- Emphasize early interventions and the prevention of conflict escalation.
- Keep the process as simple as you can while maintaining fairness, efficiency, and effectiveness. The perception of fairness generates respect for the outcome (as painful as the outcome may be for some).
- Distinguish between “conflict transformation” (the highest goal) and merely “resolving” the conflict.¹³ Conflict transformation seeks to address the root causes of the conflict, rather than just the immediate problem. It is long-term and relationship-centered. Alternatively, resolution often seeks to make a decision and move on.
- Consider multistep approaches, beginning informally and at the point of conflict, and treat “adjudicatory” approaches as a last resort. In this context, a multistep approach means

making initial efforts to address the conflict at the point at which it arose and ensuring that the disputants retain ownership over the outcome. The approach then, as needed, directs the conflict to a higher level in the organization (such as conciliation, followed by more formal mediation and, if necessary, the involvement of more senior management), rather than preemptively starting at a higher, more formal level. We use the term “adjudicatory” to mean that the final and binding resolution is left to a party outside the conflict.

- Ensure that a wide range of informal and collaborative processes—such as mediation, group facilitation, and dialogue—is available and used readily.
- Don’t overspecify steps or stages. Such processes should have just enough form to show a practical way forward.
- Review the literature on creating such processes. While there is no cut-and-paste approach that will succeed, ICSOs can adopt the general principles we have discussed to make the changes in their organizations necessary to benefit from internal conflict.

Element 4: Respectful relationships and interactions founded on conversational competence | To build respectful relationships and be conversationally competent, organizations must ensure that discussions and interactions at all levels (from one-on-one encounters to small groups to board meetings to organization-wide communications) be open, direct, respectful, and candid.

Additionally, we take conversational competence to mean that robust discussions are valued and that participation is seen as a

positive attribute. Participants are patient, listen to obtain better understanding, and speak to aid understanding. Where conversational competence exists, difficult issues are properly and carefully raised—not avoided or hidden behind a mask of politeness. Conversational competence focuses not only on the issue at hand but also on how it is addressed. From time to time, people assess how well they are conversing and adjust the process as needed.

Listening and speaking respectfully are important components of conversational competence. These skills also affect staff’s ability to contribute at work. Conversations are crucial to building relationships, which in turn drive individual performance and motivation.¹⁴ When people feel connected, heard, and understood, they are happier, more productive, more fulfilled, and more engaged. Management professor Christine Porath’s research¹⁵ on workplace incivility and rudeness has found that such negative environments shorten attention spans, disrupt short-term memory, and impair immune systems.

People commonly assume that anyone can carry on a conversation, but conversations can be quite difficult when they involve conflict. Therefore, participants must try to ensure that the conversations do not turn into debates that simply (re)state opposing positions. Every conflict process, at its core, relies upon communication—generally via some form of conversation. This is certainly true in coaching, facilitation, mediation, dispute-review boards, and similar forms of conflict resolution. Even processes that are principally adjudicatory, such as arbitration or hearings, use the conversational question-and-answer format to convey data and information. Through such discussions, participants can express their interests

and seek outcomes that satisfy those interests. This is why communication is essential to fostering collaborative processes, which rely on interest-based bargaining.

To develop conversational competence, organizations need to recruit, teach, nurture, and reward at all levels the skills, behaviors, and aptitudes we have identified. When conversations lack a basic level of respect, the participants’ ability to resolve a conflict is significantly diminished.

To put this element into practice, organizations should take the following steps:

- Exhibit conversational competence in all organizational communications, from informal hallway communications to board meetings.
- Model good communication habits in mid- and senior-level management conversations.
- Make a review of not only *what* was discussed but *how* it was discussed a regular part of meetings, and make corrections in light of such reviews.
- Make conversational competence a core component of your organization’s efforts at diversity and inclusion.

Overheard from ICSO Employees and Associates about Conflict Processes

“There is a need or a systematic approach [to conflict]. It will help the organization.”

“I don’t observe a lot of overt conflict management attempts ... [but I see] a fair amount of reverting to passive-aggressive kinds of approaches.”

“When conflict is acknowledged, the ‘resolution’ is often just to agree to disagree, even about critical issues such as mission, organizational structure, staffing, and personnel. Further, the ‘resolution’ is typically addressed or discussed only among senior management behind closed doors, with limited to no communication to other staff. As a result, staff are left in the dark about the resolution, or, worse, they may hear rumors that—to the extent that the ‘resolution’ doesn’t really solve the problem—serve only to add fuel to the fire.”

“The system [at our organization] is at a more superficial level, and while it may give order and procedure, it does not build trust.”

“I think we are very conflict-averse and avoid addressing the hard issues, so conflicts end up using up a lot of management time.”

“As far as I know ... no such [conflict] procedures exist. But I could be wrong.”

“[We] lack the tools and approach to understand and actively tackle many conflicts.”

Survey Highlights on Conflict Processes

- The vast majority of respondents indicated that their organization did not have a conflict management system that was comprehensive—only 5 percent indicated that a system was even in place—and used regularly and effectively.
- Approximately 70 percent of respondents believed that moderate to severe conflict either was not addressed or was not sustainably addressed.
- More than half of respondents characterized their organization's answer to conflict as inconsistent and not coherent.
- Where conflict management systems were absent, 60 percent of the respondents believed such systems should be put in place.

A FINAL WORD

Designing and implementing a process to improve intraorganizational conflict can itself generate conflict. The process for each organization will be idiosyncratic. Nevertheless, there are guidelines we believe to be relevant to almost any such effort:

- Form a team that includes leadership, management, and staff to plan and make recommendations about design and implementation.
- Monitor and adjust leaders' interventions to tailor HCP to their particular organization. Leaders should also assess their own conflict competence and take steps to improve it, if necessary, and should stay closely involved, whether they use an external consultant or an internal team.
- Assuage employee/staff fears ("Oh no, not another change program") by being inclusive, responding to organizational needs, and communicating the benefits. Help to mitigate fears by demonstrating how systemic efforts are fully supported by senior management, not a "flash in the pan."
- Don't rush the process. Maintain reasonable expectations for the nature and size of your organization. As with other substantial change programs, the process can take a year or more.
- Try to use internal resources for approaches that arise from within the organization; use outside parties cautiously. Endogenous repairs can be promoted by having a facilitation or mediation team composed of current staff, who can respond quickly to address conflict. Existing staff with specialized training or skills better understand the local context and may be more immediately trusted than outside consultants.
- Consider whether existing management and organizational development processes that encourage feedback, equal participation, and collaborative problem solving will help to increase participation in and ownership of any change process.

- Use tried and tested techniques like 360-degree feedback (a feedback process that involves multiple sources, such as an employee's colleagues, supervisees, supervisors, and self-evaluation) and Open Space Technology (a participant-driven process for running meetings).
- Keep employees and associates informed of efforts and progress.

Intraorganizational conflict in ICSOs is inevitable, even more so when they operate in a highly disruptive environment. We need not question whether conflict works for or against organizational effectiveness. The outcome lies in the hands of ICSO leadership and boards.

The downsides of conflict are not easy to assess and quantify. They are diffuse and seldom part of work planning, and incur expenses that are both relatively objective, such as hours spent and consultants hired, and highly subjective, such as damage to relationships and trust. The same holds true for assessing the benefits of investments in conflict competence. The value of having an effective system in place and of upside gains—in creativity and effective adaption, for example—is almost impossible to compute. But becoming conflict-competent need not require a leap of faith. There is enough evidence to establish that the benefits are likely to far outweigh the costs. ■

NOTES

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