

Communication Practices to Avert Liability and Focus on Success – City Conversations in a Turbulent Time

Friday, May 13th | 10:30 AM

Communication Practices to Avert Liability and Focus on Success – City Conversations in a Turbulent Time

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Agenda

Challenges and Opportunities of Conflict

Stages of Escalation

“Loss Control” Strategies to Respond to Conflict

WHY LOOK AT CONFLICT & COMMUNICATION IN CITIES?

WHAT IS THE TIE TO RISK?

Communities are Becoming More Divergent

- Public discussion is becoming more challenging
- Clashing values and inability to work together
- Relationship conflicts decrease the likelihood of a good outcome
- Escalated conflict impedes good decisions for Cities and potential to cause harm

Communities are Dealing with More Turbulence

- Financial, global, climate, technological, health risks
- *Helping elected officials and City staff manage conflict is loss control AND supports good government*

The background of the slide is a dark, textured surface filled with numerous 3D question marks of varying sizes and orientations. In the center, there is a perspective view of a city skyline with several tall buildings, appearing to recede into the distance. The overall color palette is dark, with the text in white and a solid orange bar at the bottom.

Challenges and Opportunities of Conflict



Imagine a Conflict



Conflict

Part of being human

Multiple dynamic and intertwined interactions

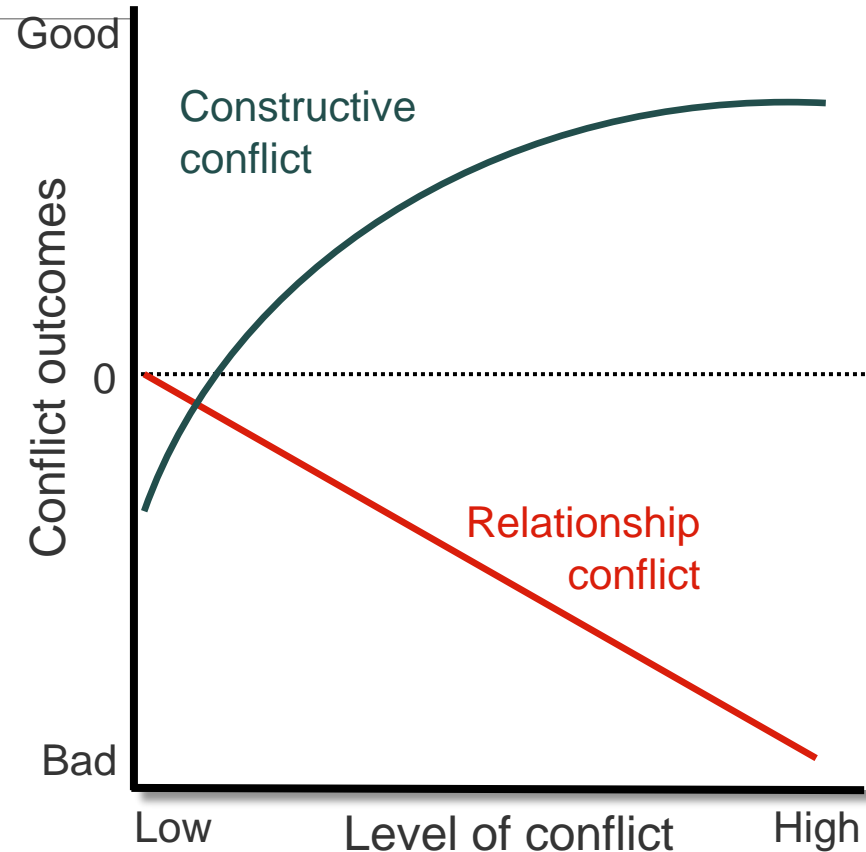
Interpersonal, relational, organizational and/or cultural systems which operate upon individuals and groups

Responding to conflict requires willingness and self-reflection

People are generally well intentioned and seek to do the right thing based on their experience and beliefs

Is Conflict Good or Bad?: Emerging View

- Goal: encourage constructive conflict, minimize relationship conflict
- Problem: difficult to separate constructive from relationship conflict
 - Drive to defend activated when ideas are critiqued





Conflict Takeaways

Multiple valid ways to experience & react to conflict

Self awareness key to managing conflict

Communication which supports understanding is the key to minimizing bad outcomes

Systems contribute to, cause, and manage conflict



Escalation

Escalation

● Distancing

● Nonviolent
Direct
Action

● Mutual
Assured
Destruction



Cooperativeness



Problem
Solving

Negotiation

Defiance

Lawsuit

Annihilation

Problem Solving Over Stuff and Things

Destroying Things and People (Us and Them)



Escalation



When worldviews are triggered, people may adhere to positions, be unable to see multiple perspectives, become disenfranchised, even be unable to make decisions in their own best interests.

Dr. Michael Nagler



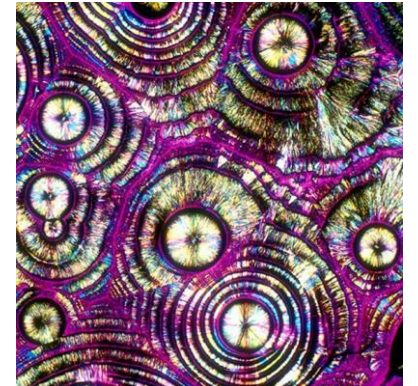
Escalation Takeaways

Intergroup interaction declines and in-group interaction increases as conflict escalates

Perspectives narrow, perceptual bias increases

There is a point of “no return” when de-escalation is very difficult

People may not act in their own best interests



A grayscale photograph of chess pieces on a dark board. In the foreground, a white king piece stands on the left, and a black king piece lies on its side on the right. Other pieces are blurred in the background.

Strategies to Respond to Conflict and Escalation

Two Types of Strategies* – Value Claiming or Value Creating

TURN INWARD – IN GROUP STRATEGIES

Convince/Inform

Debate

Search for “Proof”

Contest of Wills

Concessions = Weakness

TURN OUTWARD – INTERGROUP STRATEGIES

Problem Solve

Dialogue

Mutually Acceptable Solutions

Building Understanding, Seeing Other
Perspectives

Shared Power

*A third strategy is to do nothing – avoidance is sometimes the right strategy.

Two Desired Outcomes –

CONTAINMENT

“Manage” conflict

Prevent Escalation

Focus on Behaviors

Respond in a way that does not acknowledge the (entire) conflict directly

Narrow focus

AMPLIFICATION

Acknowledge differences

Collaborate

Focus on Attitudes

Respond in a way that encourages communication across differences

Broad focus

Strategies for Distancing

	Turn Inward	Turn Outward
Contain	Educate <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Roles & Responsibilities• Open Meeting Law• Enforce Policies• Follow Process	Build Capacity <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Skills Training• Tailored Education and Discussion
Amplify	Reinforce Position <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide Legal Information• Explain Best Practices• Help Gather Documentation	Solve Problem <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Negotiation• Facilitation• Mediation

Orange Boxes = Loss Control Activity




Strategies for Direct Action

	Turn Inward	Turn Outward
Contain	Respond to Other Position <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Formal Responses• Third Party Decisions	Manage Behaviors <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agree on Protocols• Separation
Amplify	Build Support <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Air Differences in Public• Lobby Constituents• Denigrate Others	Signal Willingness to Address Differences <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Concessions• Symbolic Gestures• Tension reducing Measures• Confidence Building Measures

Strategies for Mutual Assured Destruction

	Turn Inward	Turn Outward
Contain	Cannot be Contained	Cannot be Contained
Amplify	Encourage Destruction <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Undermine• Lie• Justify• Harass	Encourage Reconciliation <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recognition of “problem”• Cost of Conflict is higher than the Cost of Reconciliation

LEVEL OF ESCALATION

		Turn Inward	Turn Outward
Difference	Contain	Educate	Build Capacity
	Amplify	Reinforce Position	Solve Problem
Direct Action	Contain	Respond to Other Position	Manage Behaviors
	Amplify	Build Support 	Signal Willingness to Address Differences 
Destruction	Contain	Cannot be Contained	Cannot be Contained
	Amplify	Encourage Destruction 	Encourage Reconciliation

Reconciliation

Disengagement

- Truce
- Withdrawal
- Attrition

Convergence

- Communication
- Sharing
- Future Focus

Implementing New Reality

- Reconciliation
- Acknowledgement
- Regret
- Forgiveness



Collaboration Services – Assistance Turning Outward



BEFORE POINT OF NO RETURN

Listening

Assessment

“Just in Time” Training

Capacity Building

Coaching

Facilitation

Mediation

AFTER POINT OF NO RETURN

Listening

Assessment

Facilitating Ripeness

Negotiating “Truce”

Reconciliation

Healing

Team Building

Planning for the Future



Strategies Takeaways

De-escalation and reconciliation are possible – and it is easier to address conflict sooner rather than later

Conflict can result in positive outcomes for cities

Strategic conflict intervention can help control losses

There is no “easy” button

Strategies work when people want to participate



Questions and Comments

Thank you!

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