

Enhancing Local Government Collaboration and Communication Using Mediation Techniques

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NLC-RISC Staff Conference

October 17, 2022

Aimee Gourlay, JD
Collaboration Services Manager
League of MN Cities Insurance Trust
Agourlay@lmc.org



Overview

- ▶ Why collaboration services?
- ▶ What are collaboration services?
- ▶ Principles of collaboration to use in your work. (I'll bet you already are!)



Why Collaboration Services?

Living in a VUCA World

- ▶ **Volatility** - rapid, unpredictable change
 - ▶ Causes fear and anxiety
- ▶ **Uncertainty**
 - ▶ Causes paralysis, excessive analysis
- ▶ **Complexity**
 - ▶ Causes desire for definitive solutions when rarely available
- ▶ **Ambiguity**
 - ▶ Casts doubt, impedes decision making

Why Collaboration Services?

Behaviors in VUCA World

CONFLICT

Communication
Breakdown

Denial

Aggression


Polarity

Sickness

Hopelessness

We are right and
you are ~~wrong~~
evil

We are right
and you are
~~wrong~~ **stupid**



Why Collaboration Services?

Effects of VUCA on City Governance

- ▶ Decrease effective governance
 - ▶ Pressure on elected officials
 - ▶ Loss of officials, staff
 - ▶ Positionality - “win/lose” mindset
- ▶ Increase Risk
 - ▶ Poor process
 - ▶ Employment claims
 - ▶ Public embarrassment - in front of the legislature, press, social media
- ▶ Difficulties for Community
 - ▶ Divisive
 - ▶ Distracts from important work
 - ▶ Reduces trust in local government



Develop resources and capacity to thrive in the current environment

- Problem solving mindset
- Listening skills to understand other's needs
- Articulate needs without assumptions and blame
- Improve relationships



Become clear about what can be changed - and what can't

- Identify desired goals and outcomes
- Define boundaries



Strengthen structure

- Jointly develop clear policy, apply consistently
- Enhance meeting management skills

Why Collaboration Services? Leadership in a VUCA World

Collaboration Services

Helping People Change Gracefully

Collaboration Services Tools

Help elected officials and staff increase their ability to effectively address contentious public issues.

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| ▶ Best Practices Training | ▶ Shared Information Pool |
| ▶ Assessment | ▶ Data Gathering |
| ▶ Facilitation | ▶ Communication |
| ▶ Design Team | ▶ Team Building Across Divides |
| ▶ Facilitation/Mediation | ▶ Solve Problems, Improve Process |
| ▶ Reality Testing | ▶ Assess Risk |

Ask, not tell -
participants know
themselves best

Process is
codesigned and
participant driven

Desired outcomes
are within control
of the participants

A majority want to
collaborate - clear,
unambiguous
authorization

Environment of
respect, all
perspectives
shared

There is a ZOPA -
Zone of Potential
Agreement

LMCIT Impartiality

LMCIT
Transparency

Optimism

LMCIT Collaboration Principles

Collaboration Tools to Try

1. Strategic slow down
2. Perspective taking questions
3. Conflict limiting norms - clear and consistent process, policy, practices
4. Harness the power of interests
5. Manage escalation
6. Communication Techniques

1. Strategic Slow Down

- ▶ Does the matter have to be decided NOW?
- ▶ Is the matter within your control to decide?
- ▶ Do you have enough information to decide (or vote)?
- ▶ Have you followed process (notices, open meeting)?
- ▶ Could staff provide clarity, more information?
- ▶ Could a work session allow for more robust dialogue?
- ▶ (Note, action is ultimately taken.)
- ▶ (Note, even a brief pause, a break or deep breath, can change the dynamic.)

2. Perspective Taking Questions

- ▶ How could your way of thinking bring about positive change? How might your way of thinking be a barrier to change?
- ▶ What are the other points of view? How might others think or feel about that?
- ▶ What is your desired outcome? How does that address the needs in your community? How likely is that to occur?
- ▶ What is the bigger/smaller perspective? When this is all said and done, what would you like others to say about how you handled yourselves now?
- ▶ What questions do you have for others?
- ▶ Are you making any assumptions or missing information? How might you get that information?

3. Conflict Limiting Norms

Clear and Consistent Policy, Processes, and Practices

- ▶ *Article 3 NONE SHALL game for money either with dice or cards.*
- ▶ *Article 4 THE LIGHTS and candles should be put out at eight at night, and if any of the crew desire to drink after that hour they shall sit upon the open deck without lights.*

- ▶ Norms can be formal or informal, spoken or unspoken
- ▶ Leagues offer best practices, sample language
- ▶ The *participants* adopt and refine

4. Harness the Power of Interests

“...Interests [are] the underlying reasons for what people say they want” - *Jay Christensen-Szalanski & Lon Moeller, Making the Puzzle Pieces Fit: An interest-based approach to management and leadership*

“[Interests are] needs, desires, concerns and fears.... Interests motivate people; they are the silent movers behind the hubbub of [taking a stand]” - *Roger Fisher & William Ury, Getting to Yes*

“Interests are specific conditions (or gains) that a party must obtain for an acceptable [sense of resolve] to occur” - *Christopher M. Moore, The Mediation Process*

4. Harness the Power of Interests

Questions to Get at Interests

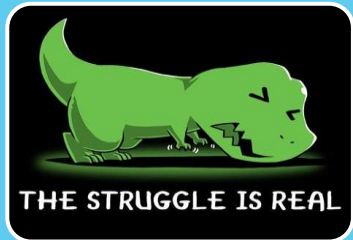
- ▶ *What makes X attractive to you?*
- ▶ *Say more about that ...*
- ▶ *If you got X, what would it mean to you?*
- ▶ *If you got x, how would that benefit the community?*
- ▶ *How would you like to be seen in this interaction?*
- ▶ *How do you perceive or want your relationships to be?*

5. Escalation and De-Escalation Models

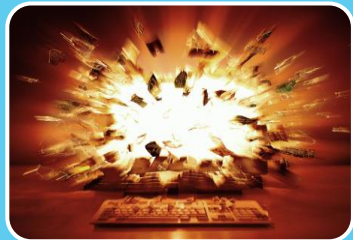
Glasl's 9 Stages of Conflict Escalation



1. Tension
2. Debate
3. Action (no more words ...)



4. Coalitions
5. Loss of Face
6. Threats



7. Limited destruction
8. Total annihilation
9. Into the abyss, together



6. Communication Techniques - Manage High Emotions

- ▶ Active listening
- ▶ Stay calm ... breathe ... not *too* calm
- ▶ Tone - low and slow
- ▶ Tone - match and move
- ▶ Mirror words to understand them
- ▶ Focus on the future
- ▶ Ask permission to change direction
- ▶ Ask questions
- ▶ Follow guidelines and be clear about behaviors which are unacceptable
- ▶ Wait until another time



6. Communication Techniques - Tips for VUCA Resilient Cities

- ▶ Communicate more, not less
- ▶ Recognize and acknowledge VUCA, talk about it
- ▶ Incorporate dealing with what happened or is happening in your processes
- ▶ Work together to develop common goals and the path forward
- ▶ Leaders model the behavior they want to encourage



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