Facilitating Change:
Supporting the Work and Managing Resistance

Important achievements require a clear focus, all-out effort,
and a bottomless trunk full of strategies. Plus allies in learning.

- Carol Dweck in *Mindset*

If you want to go quickly, go alone.
If you want to go far, go together.

- African Proverb

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Group wise: How to turn conflict into an effective learning process
by Robert J. Garmston
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Luci considers her options as she designs the agenda. Teachers are at odds with one another about student discipline. They have different procedures from classroom to classroom, and school wide practices vary. Some teachers feel others are not meeting their responsibilities for disciplining students. At the next day's meeting, the group will explore the assumptions that inform their different perspectives.

Conflict in schools is not unique. All schools have internal conflicts relating to differences of opinion, contrasting ideologies, diversity, change, issues of civility, scarcity, or power and control. In fact, Stephen Ball (1987) wrote, "Schools are arenas of struggle, poorly coordinated and ideologically diverse, making conflict, not cooperation, the norm." Luci knows that conflicts can be constructive or destructive. What makes the difference is how they are addressed. She knows she must facilitate this meeting in such a way that cognitive conflicts can be expressed and affective conflict avoided.

Cognitive conflict is disagreement about ideas and approaches. Issues are separated from people. Cognitive conflict is a characteristic of high-performing groups. Affective conflict is interpersonal, with either person-to-person or group-to-group antagonism. Affective conflicts sap energy, sidetrack tasks, and block work.

As long as disagreements among team members focus on substantive, issue-related differences of opinion, they tend to improve faculty effectiveness. Such cognitive conflict is a natural part of a properly functioning team. Cognitive conflict occurs as team members examine, compare, and reconcile these differences. Some cognitive conflict is necessary to improve school functioning and student learning. It focuses attention on the assumptions that may underlie a particular issue.

Affective conflict lowers a faculty's effectiveness by fostering hostility, distrust, cynicism, avoidance, and apathy among team members. This type of conflict focuses on personalized anger or resentment usually directed at individuals or groups rather than ideas.

As can be seen in the chart below, schools improve when group members disagree about ideas without feeling interpersonal tension. Three resources are required to work productively with conflict: group member skills, meeting protocols, and appropriate use of processing time.

Outcomes of conflict in teams	
Cognitive Conflict	**Affective Conflict**
Better decisions	Poorer decisions
Increased commitment	Decreased commitment
Increased cohesiveness	Decreased cohesiveness
Increased empathy	Decreased empathy
Increased understanding	Reduced progress
Adapted from Amason, Thompson, Hochwarter, & Harrison, 1995	

 [section omitted]

Meeting protocols

Certain strategies provide psychological safety. This feeling of safety is necessary for candid engagement with others. Safety for some can mean knowing one is protected from verbal attack. Or it can mean

having a sense that one's contributions are recognized, perhaps not agreed with, but understood. It can mean not losing face, not being embarrassed, or avoiding feelings of inequality. It can mean freedom from a fear of retribution. For some members it can mean time to reflect before talking. It can mean conversations not dominated by the voices of a few highly verbal members. Very importantly, it also means freedom from having to be certain. One of the greatest barriers to learning and working effectively with conflicts is believing that one must speak with certainty.

Without protocols, groups tend to either avoid hard-to-talk-about topics or do so in ways that evoke affective conflict. Protocols provide safety by shaping conversations. They provide a focus for talking, name strategies to be used, indicate the cognitive skills required, and set boundaries for behavior and topic. Members need a sense of safety to risk putting ideas on the table and to participate, but protocols go beyond comfort. Members are likely to be uncomfortable. This is to be expected, is normal, and is valuable - discomfort often is a window to learning.

Facilitators choose strategies along a continuum of loose to tight structures depending on the group's skills, members' emotional intensity, and the cognitive complexity of the issue….

Processing time

The third resource necessary for effective conversations is what Michael Doyle and David Straus (1993) call a proper allocation of gum and chewing. "Gum" is the content of the meeting. "Chewing" is the interactive process and strategies you provide with which participants can reflect, hear others, state thoughts and opinions, and generate and test ideas. How much "gum" and how much "chewing" you provide becomes a dominant concern in meeting design.

As a rule of thumb, the more emotion involved, the greater the complexity, and the larger the ideological challenges, the more process time is required. Although content-process ratios can't be described in percentages, a logical progression of increased processing time exists in proportion to the factors noted above.

The purposes and types of processes will vary according to the meeting goal. To generate information, meetings are either information-intensive or composed of strategies in which the group assembles data. Organizing information demands greater cognitive complexity and cooperation. Members must clarify understandings, search for and agree to categorization schemes, and develop some initial levels of consensus. As the challenges grow more complex, different protocols and extended periods of processing may be required. For emotionally challenging issues, the group must move slowly to ensure members are understood.

Luci feels secure in the faculty's ability to communicate effectively, thus helping the teachers stay free from affective conflict as they work through their differences. One of her goals will be to keep members focused on principles, not preferences. She will use strategies that allow members to speak freely and challenge the premises of other members' viewpoints without the threat of anger, resentment, or retribution. And, essential to achieving her goals, she will be strategic with processing time.

References

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Ball, S.J. (1987). *The micro-politics of the school: Toward a theory of school organization.* London: Methuen.

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<div align="center">EXCERPT FROM</div>

Reducing Resistance to Change and Conflict: 3 Questions to Reduce Misunderstanding
<div align="center">by Stephen Haslam and Robert Pennington, Ph.D.</div>

There are so many books and trainings on the topic of active listening one would think that by now everyone would have become an expert. Unfortunately, in the middle of a disagreement or misunderstanding most people are hit by an automatic emotional wave that knocks all communication skills out of the window. So it is actually important to have some very basic guidelines that may seem ridiculously simple. The simpler they are, the easier they are to practice. Here is a simple analogy to keep in mind the next time you feel your emotional wave overflowing.

[Picture two water glasses, each full of water. One glass] represents you, and the water is your thoughts. [The other glass] represents the other person, and the water in that glass represents his thoughts.

[Picture water splashing around both glasses.] The splashing water . . . shows you what an argument looks like. You are trying to get some of your thoughts into him, and he is trying to get some of his thoughts into you. A little exchange is actually happening, but generally it just makes a big mess.

What would happen if you just started pouring your water into his glass? Of course, it would overflow all over the floor. He is too full of his ideas, so there is no room for yours. You need to create some openness. Some people try to do this by punching a hole in the other person's cup, puncturing his ego by pointing out that he is wrong. But if you attack the other person, he is not likely to want to listen to you. He may go back to friends who agree with him, until his ego is repaired. Then he will return to argue with you again because he knows you did not understand him.

It is true that you need the other person to be more open, but there is another way to accomplish this. [Picture your glass temporarily empty.] Take your thoughts and set them aside for a moment. These thoughts will be there when you get back. Create some openness in yourself first, and just as he expects you to argue with him, stop and say,

1. **"This is really important. What is it you want me to know?"** Become a receptive force, drawing information out of the other person. He will pour his "water" into you. Repeat his words back without adding any of your own "water glass thoughts" **. . .** just to make sure you are clear.

2. And then you say, **"Is there anything else?"** What do you think is the likelihood that the other person has more thoughts that he has not yet shared? Pretty good. He will pour some more water, while you repeat his words just to make sure you are clear.

3. Finally you say, **"Is that all?" Pause**, and give the other person time to think. You want to squeeze all water you can out, to create as much open space as possible for him to consider your ideas.

The simple truth is this**: If you want to get people to become open to your ideas or suggestions, first be open to considering theirs.** This is the simple principle of "seek first to understand." (Covey 1989)
<div align="center">http://www.resource-i.com/PDFs/Leadership_series.pdf, pp. 31-32</div>

Protocol: **First Turn/Last Turn**

Source: *Groups at Work*, by Lipton and Wellman, p. 46

Purpose: Structure conversation to help groups explore an idea more deeply before moving on to another. This protocol is particularly useful with content that is challenging, may be emotionally charged, or controversial.

Goal: Provide equity of voice while fostering psychological safety and increasing listening.

Group size: 4-6

Leader Facilitation:
Share WHAT and WHY of the protocol.
Provide text for all to read individually. Explain process for groups before all begin to read individually.
Cue groups to monitor the protocol and circulate to help groups adhere to it.

Directions:
On your own - Silently read the article. As you read, mark a few words, phrases, or sentences that strike you, and be ready to share them with your group.

In your group –
Round 1
1st person- read aloud a key phrase/ sentence you marked. Make NO comment about it.
All pause to think. Next person – comment about first person's idea.
Go around group until all have commented on 1st person's phrase/sentence.
1st person ends with the LAST TURN.

Round 2
REPEAT whole process beginning with the next person and that person's key idea.

Continue until each group member has had opportunity to have the FIRST TURN.

Protocol: **Conflict Conversation Template**

Source: *Groups at Work*, by Lipton and Wellman, p. 43

Purpose: Structure conversation to help groups explore conflicts.

Goal: Provide psychological safety while creating space and opportunity for variety of perspectives to be shared.

Group size: 4-6

Leader Facilitation:
Identify a conflict to explore, especially one that may be persistent and recurring.
Share WHAT and WHY of the protocol.
Post or provide prompts below and provide time for thinking.
Have group members record their responses on index cards, one card per prompt.

Directions for sharing within groups:
For each round, used round-robin pattern to share your response.
After one response has been shared, paraphrase to find common ground and clarify differences.

Round 1:
What is your relationship to this conflict?
How do you feel about this conflict?

Round 2:
What are the best possible outcomes of this conflict?
What are the worst possible outcomes of this conflict?
What are the worst possible outcomes for not addressing this conflict?

Round 3:
What do you think the best possible outcomes for this conflict are for the other party?
What do you think the worst possible outcomes for this conflict are for the other party?

Round 4:
What are you willing to do to achieve the best possible outcome?
What would you like the other party to do to achieve the best possible outcome?