

SECTION ONE: OBJECTIVES

- To educate participants about the nature, types and sources of interpersonal conflict in a multi-cultural society;
- To assist participants to identify specific conflicts which occur in their work with refugees and sponsoring groups;
- To identify the kinds of responses which lead to the escalation or de-escalation of conflict;
- To explore various factors, including cultural factors, which may impact upon successful conflict management/resolution;
- To consider the relationship between conflict resolution and power in our society.

Author's Note:

In these materials, we have used the term “refugee” rather than “newcomer” insofar as we are dealing here with a specific training program that focuses on refugees and their special needs, and the refugee/sponsor relationship. In this sense we are talking about newcomers to Canada who have had a refugee experience.

THE NATURE OF CONFLICT

CONFLICT IS:

- everywhere
- inevitable
- universal
- natural
- neutral
- all about Differences – in expectations, values, goals, culture
- generally perceived as negative
- can have positive or negative outcomes
- needs to be resolved

CONFLICT IS:

An opportunity for change, growth and problem-solving

A DEFINITIONS OF CONFLICT

There is no single definition of conflict. It is a complex human response that occurs along a number of dimensions:

1. **Thought** – A belief or understanding that one's own needs, interests, wants or values are inconsistent, if not incompatible, with someone else's. Conflict exists if at least one person believes it to exist.
2. **Emotion** – An emotional reaction (fear, sadness, bitterness, anger or hopelessness) to a situation or interaction that indicates a disagreement of some kind.
3. **Action** – The behaviours (actions we take) to express our feelings, articulate our beliefs, and get our own needs met in a way that has the potential for interfering with someone else's ability to do so.

(Adapted from Bernard Mayer, *The Dynamics of Conflict Resolution: a Practitioner's Guide*)

FOUR TYPES OF CONFLICT

1. INTRA-PERSONAL CONFLICTS

- Conflicts that occur within the individual
e.g. *Should I take this job or wait for a better one?*

2. INTER-PERSONAL CONFLICTS

- Conflicts that occur between different persons
e.g. *Sponsor and newcomer disagree about use of financial support.*

3. INTRA-GROUP CONFLICTS

- Conflicts between members of a particular group
e.g. *Group members disagree about who to sponsor.*

4. INTER-GROUP CONFLICTS

- Conflicts between different groups
e.g. *Sponsorship agreement holder and sponsoring group disagree about division of roles.*

CAUSES OF CONFLICT

- Unsatisfied wants
- Limited resources
- Unmet emotional needs
- Different perceptions, assumptions, values
- Lack of information or mis-information
- Competing interests
- Differences in power and authority / powerlessness
- Different perceptions of entitlement
- Ineffective communications
- Time constraints
- Failure to trust
- Different personality styles
- Cultural differences
- External pressures
- Different priorities
- Discrimination, prejudice, racism

SOURCES OF CONFLICT

Between sponsors and newcomers

1.

2.

3.

Between newcomers

1.

2.

3.

OTHER SOURCES OF CONFLICT FOR NEWCOMERS

- Employment conflicts with employers, colleagues and professional associations due to language facility, age, discrimination, expectations, Canadian experience, etc.
- Institutional conflicts with schools, social services, police, immigration services, religious organizations, debt collection agencies, vocational training agencies etc., over access to service, expectations, culturally different behaviours, etc.
- Landlord/Tenant conflicts because of communications problems, lack of information, different cultural practices, etc.

THE FIVE PHASES OF CONFLICT

1. **Latent** – Conflict is first latent in that some set of conditions (such as insufficient resources or divergent goals) comes to exist, but is not yet perceived or acted upon.
2. **Perceived** – Conflict is perceived when the latent issues reach awareness or consciousness. It is also possible for perceived conflict to exist where no latent issues exist.
3. **Felt** – Conflict is in this phase when one party's feelings for, or effect on the other, changes. In this phase the conflict becomes charged emotionally as the parties begin to experience anxiety, mistrust or hostility towards a perceived adversary.
4. **Manifest** – Manifest conflict occurs when the parties act upon their perceived and felt differences.
5. **Aftermath** – This phase involves the formation of new relationships and arrangements following the manifest expression of the conflict. Assessments are also made of outcomes.

Viewing the development and emergence of conflict from a phase model allows disputants a greater opportunity to interpret and shape their future actions and to look at conflict in broader terms.

RESPONSES TO CONFLICT

People respond to conflict in many different ways, often using different responses in different types of situations. For example, a person may clam up in a conflict with his or her employer, then explode in anger at home. How people respond to conflict also varies with their country of origin, their cultural background, their religion and social class. For example, a direct approach to conflict may be appropriate in some cultures and absolutely taboo in others. Thus, in a multi-cultural society, conflict can be much more difficult to manage because of this cultural diversity.

In general, responses to conflict fall into three main categories:

- 1. Fight**
- 2. Flight**
- 3. Collaboration or Problem-solving**

1. FIGHT RESPONSES:

- Direct confrontation
- Physical attacks, use of fists and weapons
- Name-calling
- Threats
- Use of verbal “put-downs”
- Blaming the other
- Dredging up past hurts and injuries
- Personalizing the conflict
- Emotional explosions
- Seeking to win – might is right!

2. FLIGHT RESPONSES:

- Conflict avoidance or denial
- Bursts into tears – “don’t hurt me”
- Blames self, not the other
- Doesn’t stand up for one’s own needs and interests
- Scapegoats another person
- Capitulates or gives in
- Intellectualizes
- Minimizes the problem
- Walks out and refuses to talk about the problem
- Changes the subject
- Cuts off all communications
- Makes a joke
- Apologizes
- Makes excuses, rationalizes

3. COLLABORATION OR PROBLEM-SOLVING RESPONSE:

- Focuses on the problem not the person;
- Attempts to understand the nature of the conflict and what it means to the other person;
- Seeks to understand, then to be understood;
- Looks for creative solutions to the problem that meets the needs of both disputants, i.e. a “win-win” solution;
- If no solution is possible, agrees to disagree.

CONFLICT ESCALATION / DE-ESCALATION

The way in which we respond to conflict tends to escalate or de-escalate the level of the conflict.

Conflict will probably (but not always) escalate when:

- Other persons become involved in the dispute and act as “cheerleaders;”
- The dispute becomes personalized;
- Past hurts and historical injuries are added into the present conflict;
- Emotions escalate and are acted out behaviourally;
- There is little interest on either side in maintaining the relationship;
- Important needs and interests are not identified and acknowledged;
- The parties lack the necessary skills to resolve the conflict;
- The disputants are not sensitive to cultural differences between them and engage in cultural stereotyping, racism, prejudice and discrimination.

Conflict will tend to de-escalate when:

- The disputants focus on the problem, not each other
- Emotions such as anger, fear and frustration are expressed verbally rather than physically
- The disputants stick to the current issue between them
- Threats are not made
- An ongoing relationship is acknowledged as important to both
- Needs and concerns are disclosed and discussed
- The disputants have some knowledge and skills to resolve conflict
- The disputants are sensitive to and respect each other’s race, religion and cultural differences

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT / RESOLUTION

1. Body Language:

- Direct eye contact may be a sign of attention and respect or considered rude and disrespectful (if made by a young person to an elder or a woman talking to a man).
- Sitting close and touching may be appropriate in some cultures, taboo in others. Personal space varies from culture to culture.
- Some cultures make use of expansive gestures and signs when speaking. These may appear threatening to others.
- Certain gestures have different meanings in different cultures.

2. Topics of Communication:

- In certain cultures it is not appropriate to openly discuss personal topics such as one's income, age, weight, money, sexual orientation, or feelings. This is considered to be an invasion of one's personal privacy.
- In some cultures, one may argue openly about religion and politics, whereas in others this is not permitted.

3. Saving Face:

- Saving face is very important to persons from Middle Eastern and Asian cultures. They will often go to considerable lengths to avoid embarrassing someone else or showing another person in an unfavourable light. Causing shame or a loss of respect is not easily forgiven.
- On the other hand, it may be equally unacceptable for someone in authority to admit fault and therefore to lose face in front of a subordinate.

4. The Expression of Feelings:

- Human beings across cultures exhibit similar emotional responses. If they are insulted or attacked, they respond with anger or fear. If they experience a significant loss, they grieve. If they achieve some important goal, they rejoice. But which emotions are considered acceptable and how they may be expressed, can vary tremendously.
- In some cultures the overt display of strong feelings violates important norms and is not acceptable. In others, the ability to express emotions strongly and dramatically is valued. On the other hand, expressing anger may be more acceptable than expressing grief or affection.
- In some cultures, it is acceptable to express strong emotions and then let them go, whereas in other cultures, this could lead to a serious loss of face and a permanent damage to the relationship.
- Some persons need to have their feelings openly acknowledged in order to feel heard, whereas others do not wish to have their emotions named or in any other way directly addressed. Nonverbal acceptance may be more validating and less embarrassing to them.

5. Directness of Approach in Dealing with Conflict:

- In some cultures, the parties to a conflict do not communicate directly with each another about the conflict, only through third parties (such as family members, friends and colleagues). These persons will act as go-betweens and will give suggestions and advice for the resolution of the conflict.
- In North America, the preference is to deal directly with the other person. Talking to others may be seen as gossiping or escalating the conflict.
- Cultural differences also exist around the appropriateness of raising conflicts with one's elders or superiors, and negotiating with one's subordinates.

6. Communication Styles:

- Most North Americans and Europeans value taking turns to speak and taking one subject at a time. Interrupting the other person is considered rude and discourteous. In many other cultures, overlapping conversations are the norm. Discussions are characterized by several persons talking at the same time, often about different subjects.
- In western cultures, people prefer to get to the point of the discussion as quickly as possible. In other cultures, it is considered rude to talk about problems before first engaging in social niceties, such as tea and informal conversation.
- Language differences compound communication problems. The use of translators often results in a loss of the richness, emotional nuance and complexity of a message, and may lead to misinterpretations and misunderstandings.

7. Appropriate Dress:

- Many cultures have strict rules about appropriate dress, especially for women, e.g. heads must be covered and limbs not exposed. While one need not adopt their specific dress code, one must dress respectfully so as not to offend.

8. Structures for Conflict Resolution:

- Some cultures promote a democratic and rights-based approach to conflict resolution, and have well-established and easily-accessed legal systems. Others use a more hierarchical and power-based approach. Still others have few formal structures for conflict resolution, and those that do exist are viewed with a high level of suspicion. Conflicts are resolved in a more informal and relaxed manner.
- Another structural variable is the role of family and community in conflict resolution. In some cultures, the extended family is the prevailing mechanism, while in other, more mobile societies, the extended family is much less powerful. In aboriginal communities, the group's elders are responsible for resolving all conflict.

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT / RESOLUTION

9. The Use of Third Parties for Resolving Conflicts:

- In western cultures, a neutral, arms-length professional is chosen when the parties are unable to resolve conflict on their own. The conflict resolution process is formal, with set appointments at specific times in the professional's office, a distinct dispute resolution process with a beginning, middle and end, and clear roles for the parties at each stage of the process. In other cultures, only a person known and trusted by the parties (i.e. an elder or respected family member) is acceptable to fulfill this role. This process is much more informal and the timing is relaxed. Lateness may be perfectly acceptable.
- The gender of the third party may be critical to their acceptance by the disputants.

10. Relationship to Authority:

- Persons differ in their relationships towards authority, seeing it either as a useful resource or something to be feared and avoided at all costs.

Note: The above points are intended solely as factors to be considered when approaching any cross-cultural conflict situation and must be adjusted based on individual differences. Cultural sensitivity shows a respect for the person with whom you are having a dispute and operates to build the rapport necessary for resolving the dispute.

CONFLICT, CULTURE AND POWER

It is critical to recognize that some degree of conflict is inherent in almost any multicultural setting where relations between cultures have been socially institutionalized according to a dominant-subordinate dynamic. ... Generally, conflict increases as cultural diversity increases.

Roberto Chene

Much of what appears to be cultural conflict is really an attempt at cultural domination or forced acculturation. When one culture is in a more powerful social position and can impose many of its norms and structures on other cultures, then the dynamics of dominance and submission must be considered.

Bernard Mayer

SOME USEFUL DEFINITIONS

Culture

Culture is a pattern of learned human behaviour, beliefs and attitudes. It includes the religious structures, the intellectual and political beliefs, the language (both verbal and non-verbal) and the artistic manifestations of a given society. Culture is impacted by the unequal power relations found in all societies and is a product of both group and individual struggle over meanings, legitimacy, recognition and rewards. Culture is all pervasive – no one is without a culture.

All cultures are different, a source of conflict in a multi-cultural society.

Ethnicity

The term “ethnic” is sometimes used interchangeably with race and culture to socially define persons who share a common ancestry, history and values, and who identify themselves as members of a specific group. They may or may not speak a common language, have identifiable physical or cultural characteristics, and share a common religion or religious affiliation. Ethnicity tends to be maintained over generations because it gives individuals a sense of identity and belonging, based not only on their perception of being different, but also because they are recognized by others as being different.

(James, 1999)

Cultural Stereotyping

This is making generalized assumptions about or having standardized pictures of people from other races and cultures that represent over-simplified opinions, attitudes or judgments. The pictures may be based upon real cultural differences. However, many people from these races and cultures may not fit these standard generalizations, and making assumptions about them may be both offensive and insupportable. Moreover, such assumptions can interfere with communications and prevent us from knowing the real person who is unique as a human being.

Some examples of cultural stereotyping are:

- *Jewish families encourage achievement and professionalism in their children.*
- *Blacks are happy-go-lucky and excel in athletics.*
- *Asian women are shy, non-assertive and controlled by the men of their cultures.*
- *Anglo-Saxon whites look down on people of other cultures.*

Cultural generalizations can be helpful in that they enable us to make predictions about people and situations and cope with everyday decision-making in our lives. However, cultural stereotyping causes us to overlook individual characteristics which do not match our pre-conceived ideas. We must be ready to revise and change these generalizations when dealing with individuals from a particular cultural group, as we gain more information about them.

Becoming aware of common words, images and situations which imply that all members of a particular cultural group are the same, is a first step towards communicating effectively with persons from other cultural and racial groups and avoiding conflict.

Ethnocentrism

Refers to the tendency to see things from the perspective of your own ethnic group culture, and to see your own culture as being somehow preferable. In ethnocentrism, people operate on the basis that everyone in society, irrespective of racial and ethnic background, should speak like us, live like us, and participate in the same activities.

An example of this is when someone says, "If I went to their country, I would have to adopt their language and culture."

Culture Shock

This term refers to difficulties which arise when immigrants/refugees face the transition from one country (and its familiar culture) to another. People experience culture shock to varying degrees, but there is a predictable pattern of stages that can lead to a satisfactory adjustment in the new country:

1. **The Honeymoon Phase:** Can last from a few days to several months, depending upon how the newcomer is supported by family, friends, economically etc. During this phase everything is exciting and exotic to the newcomer, who is fascinated by the new country.
2. **Challenge and Crisis Phase:** During this phase, the newcomer experiences problems in coping with the realities of the new life (e.g. housing, transportation, employment, childcare) and perceives members of the new country as indifferent, insensitive and unsympathetic to them. There is a tendency to band together with others from their country of origin and vent some of their frustrations in criticisms of the new country, its people and its ways.
3. **Beginning Accommodation:** In this phase, newcomers have acquired language skills and are beginning to become more familiar with the customs and systems of their new country. However, around the 9-month period, a second wave of culture shock may set in, as newcomers realize just how different the new country is and what they have left behind. The newcomer may experience depression, anger over minor frustrations, great concern over minor illnesses and injuries, and a terrible longing to be "back home."
4. **The Adjustment and Acceptance Phase:** If the newcomer can make it through the critical Phase 3, there will be an adjustment to the realities of their new country. In Phase 4, the newcomer develops a greater sense of belonging and identification with the new country and its ways, and begins to feel at home.

WHO HAS CULTURE

Contrary to the beliefs of some persons (usually members of the dominant culture), no one is culture free.

(James, 1999)

Typically, when asked to identify themselves by race and culture, persons of British or Anglo-Celtic origin (especially those whose parents and grandparents were born here in Canada), tend to describe themselves as “Canadian,” meaning that is their country of nationality and citizenship. Generally, they omit referring to themselves as white and, often, they refuse to consider the origins of their ancestors, saying that this is irrelevant and unimportant since their family has lived in Canada such a long time.

On the other hand, many black persons whose ethnic ancestry is in the Caribbean prefer to identify themselves as West Indian rather than African. Some South Asians from that area might do likewise.

The point is that the members of the dominant group in Canadian society often have trouble acknowledging the reality of their own race and culture in their lives. They tend to see themselves as being without culture or culturally “neutral,” i.e. without any visible signs that would indicate their culture. They see these characteristics as significant only for “other” Canadians, i.e. those persons with visible “looks” i.e. skin colour, dress (costume), food, religious practices, etc. Thus, they unconsciously deny their own race and culture, along with the power and privileges that go with it. White culture then becomes the hidden norm against which all other cultural groups are measured.

HANDLING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN CONFLICT

Being aware of an open to cultural differences is often the key to handling conflict. However, being too focussed on cultural differences can sometimes undermine a person’s ability to deal effectively with others. An over-emphasis on cultural differences, especially by someone from a dominant culture, can be patronizing and demeaning. The ideal is to be sensitive to and respectful of cultural differences, and to relate to each other as individuals, not simply as representatives of a particular cultural group.

A DEFINITION OF POWER

Power is the ability to get what we want.

Kenneth E. Boulding, Three Faces of Power, 1989

The Oxford English Dictionary defines power as:

- The ability to do or effect something or anything, or to act upon a person or thing;
- The ability to act or affect something strongly; physical or mental strength, might, vigour, energy, force of character, telling force, political or national strength;
- Possession or control or command over others; dominion, rule, government, domination, sway, command, control, influence, authority;
- Legal ability, capacity or authority to act;
- A body of armed men, a fighting force, a host, an army.

All of us have power over others and all of us give power to others.

(Picard, 1998)

SOURCES OF POWER

THERE ARE GENERALLY TWO SOURCES OF POWER:

1. Structural Power – the power of the situation:

- Access to and control over economic/financial resources
- Formal authority
- Status (marital, professional, etc.)
- Hierarchical position (and the ability to control access to funds)
- The ability to control a decision-making process
- Legal rights
- Political realities
- Associations (connections with other powerful persons)
- Support groups
- Nuisance (the power of the flea over the dog)
- Membership in the dominant group
- The power of the “status quo”
- Moral and religious power

2. Personal Power – the power of the individual:

- Intelligence
- Knowledge
- Education
- Expertise
- Experience
- Charisma
- Self-esteem
- Language and communication skills
- Physical size, stamina and strength
- Determination and endurance
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Wit
 - The ability to tolerate hostility and conflict
 - A sense of entitlement

Those with the power to rule inevitably have the power to define.

(Kallen, 1995)

THE REFUGEE'S EXPERIENCE OF LOSS OF POWER

Feeling powerful (that is, able to significantly influence situations affecting oneself personally) is a prerequisite to constructive conflict management. Unfortunately, refugees may lack many of the sources of power identified on the previous page.

The refugee, unlike an immigrant, has not chosen freely to leave his or her country of origin and come to Canada, but generally has been forced to flee due to human rights abuses. Often the refugee has spent lengthy periods in camps in asylum countries, experiencing continued fear, threats to personal safety, malnutrition, family stress and uncertainty before being accepted for resettlement.

The typical refugee arrives in Canada with few or no worldly possessions, having lost his/her country, language, home, family members, friends, job or profession, status in the community, source of income and employment – along with his or her entire social support network. Their sense of self-esteem, faith in themselves, in others and maybe even in their god may be threatened. They may be in a state of overwhelming loss and grief.

In Canada, newcomers are faced with a new and strange culture, discrimination in the work force, problems in communicating in a strange language, and dealing with an unknown and complex system.

In terms of power, the refugee has lost many of the sources of his or her personal power, as well as his or her usual access to structural power. Whereas formerly the refugee may have been an important leader in his/her community, in Canada s/he may barely be able to make him/herself understood. The refugee who was used to looking after his/her own life back home, now is initially dependent upon strangers. Thus, a simple discussion between sponsor and refugee about turning the heat down becomes more than just that. On another level, it is about who is “in charge” of that thermostat, i.e. who has the power to control it.

All of the above factors can lead to a sense of powerlessness in the refugee and contribute to a power imbalance in conflict situations with sponsors.

THE EFFECT OF POST TRAUMATIC STRESS SYNDROME

At the same time, some refugees are ill-equipped to handle the challenges of resettlement. Many are afflicted with post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD), a mental disorder caused by the witnessing or experiencing catastrophic events such as frequently occur in a war-ravaged country – such events as an actual or threatened death, rape or serious injury to self or others. Symptoms of PTSD include chronic irritability, startle reactions, explosive aggression, terrifying flashbacks and nightmares. The refugee continues to act as if the original trauma were still in existence and compulsively replays the traumatic event.

Some refugees were victims of torture, an event that has left lasting scars, both physical and psychological. The psychological symptoms of torture frequently include anxiety, depression, irritability, paranoia, guilt, suspiciousness, sexual dysfunction, loss of concentration, confusion, insomnia, nightmares, impaired memory, and memory loss.

Survivors of torture are often unwilling to disclose information about their experiences. They may be suspicious, frightened, or anxious to forget about what has happened. These feelings may discourage them from seeking the help they need. It is important to remember that they are essentially healthy people who have been systematically subjected to treatment intended to destroy their personalities, their sense of identity, their confidence, and their ability to function socially. Survivors may need assistance in understanding their experience, and help in rebuilding their identities.

Some situations that may induce feelings of terror in survivors of terror are:

- Officials (especially those in uniform such as police, immigration officials);
- Signing forms (some of which state that false declarations may result in prosecution, fines or imprisonment);
- Disclosing personal or family details (even date of birth, residential address, etc.);
- Admission to hospitals (especially psychiatric hospitals, which may resemble prisons);
- Doctors (whom they may have encountered in prison advising the torturers);
- Staff of government agencies (whom some fear may be reporting their activities to government security agencies, and they, in turn, to representatives of the governments from which they fled).

Survivors of torture and their families may also lose some of the values and beliefs that may have sustained them before they went through trauma. They may be unable to trust people and, consequently, become disillusioned.

It is important for the sponsor to recognize the symptoms of PTSD, which can lead to conflict between them. The refugee should also be helped to find professional counselling from an expert in this field, preferably one who speaks the same language.

ACKNOWLEDGING POWER AND POWER IMBALANCES IN CONFLICTS

Power is inherent in all human interactions, especially those involving conflict. Unfortunately, the people with power are frequently the least aware of, or the least willing to acknowledge, its existence. On the other hand, those with less power are often the most aware of its existence.

Power can be used negatively to dominate or to enhance our own self-esteem at the expense of others. Or it can be used positively to achieve our common goals. Power imbalances can lead to unfair or “imposed” solutions, and can even be harmful to a disputant lacking in power.

It is critical that those with power become more aware of and acknowledge the ways in which they are powerful, and the many ways in which power is distributed unequally among members of our society. Only by being honest about our own power, can we avoid abusing it and begin to share power, making decisions and resolving conflicts with others, rather than for them. Our goal should be to have “power with” others (collaborate), rather than “power over” others (compete).

TECHNIQUES OF EMPOWERMENT FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT

- First be aware of the power imbalances in the relationship and resist the temptation to use “power” to resolve the conflict.
- Be sensitive to cultural differences, while at the same time, taking care to see the other person as a unique individual.
- Ensure that both disputants have an opportunity to express their concerns (directly or indirectly, as appropriate) and preferably in their own language.
- Make sure that you understand the problem from the refugee’s point of view before you start talking about solutions.
- Allow sufficient time to resolve the conflict. Don’t be in a rush to find a solution.
- Use listening and probing questions to explore the underlying interests of the refugee which may not be expressed up front.
- Use “wise” persons from the refugee’s own community to educate you as to the importance of cultural factors and possibly to act as go-betweens.
- Reframe the conflict as a problem to be solved with input from both disputants.

EXERCISE:

1. Compare the experience of the refugee with that of their sponsors, and consider the various power imbalances that might be present in any conflict that arises between them.
2. What interventions could you make to address the power imbalances between refugee and sponsor so as to empower the refugee?

END OF SECTION 1

APPENDIX A: FEEDBACK FORM

Section

Date

Instructor

Name (Optional)

1. Did the workshop meet your expectations? If so, how? If not, please comment:
2. The most beneficial part of the workshop was...
3. The least beneficial part of the workshop was...
4. Have you any suggestions for improvement?
5. Have you any comments about the workshop facilitator?
6. Any comments on the written materials and exercises?
7. Do you have suggestions for other training that you would like to see offered? Specify.

SECTION TWO: OBJECTIVES

- To assist participants to become more aware of their own attitudes, values and beliefs, and how these personal attitudes, values and beliefs affect how they respond to conflict situations involving refugees and their sponsors;
- To educate participants about the various styles of response to conflict and how to identify their preferred individual response style;
- To raise the awareness of participants as to the role of emotions in conflict situations and to provide them with strategies for dealing with their own emotions and the emotions of others;
- To help participants identify their own personal “hot buttons” in the refugee/sponsor relationship.

Author’s Note:

In these materials, we have used the term “refugee” rather than “newcomer” insofar as we are dealing here with a specific training program that focuses on refugees and their special needs, and the refugee/sponsor relationship. In this sense we are talking about newcomers to Canada who have had a refugee experience.

PERSONAL ATTITUDES, BELIEFS AND VALUES ABOUT CONFLICT

All of us have developed our own personal attitudes, beliefs and values about conflict and how it should be approached. These generally were learned in our families of origin and reflect the attitudes of both our parents and our culture of origin. Significant life events may also impact how we feel about and respond to conflict in our personal lives.

EXERCISE:

To become more aware of our own personal attitudes, beliefs and values and the ways in which they come into play around refugee/sponsor conflicts, ask yourself the following questions:

- What are my personal attitudes towards conflict?
- Are they generally positive, neutral or are they negative?
- How were my personal attitudes, values and beliefs about conflict influenced by my family of origin? By the cultural groups with which I identify? By significant events in my life?
- What are my personal attitudes and beliefs about how conflict is expressed and resolved in other cultures?
- Is there any element of cultural stereotyping, discrimination, prejudice or racism inherent in my beliefs?

SOME NEGATIVE ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS ABOUT REFUGEES

Prejudice

A set of preconceived and rigid beliefs, generally negative, about minority groups that causes persons to relate to them in a manner that is not impartial and objective. Such faulty attitudes, predispositions and prejudgments are generally derived from inaccurate and incomplete information and, typically, are not reversed even when new information is revealed.

Discrimination

Discrimination is “applied prejudice,” i.e. what happens when we act on the basis of our prejudices. It is the process of putting our negative prejudgments, attitudes and beliefs into practice. Differential treatment is a form of discrimination which exists when members of a given group are denied the opportunity to participate in certain activities of society despite meeting all the necessary criteria.

Prejudice = prejudging people, groups, situations
Discrimination = acting on the basis of our prejudices

Racism

An ideology that unjustifiably asserts the superiority of one racial group over a colonized or subordinate group typically characterized by different physical features such as skin colour, whether black, brown, yellow, red. The subordinate group is believed to lack certain abilities or characteristics, and is viewed as culturally and/or biologically inferior.

FIVE STYLES IN RESPONSE TO CONFLICT

In any conflict, there are a variety of ways in which the disputants can respond. Drs. Thomas and Kilmann have identified five basic styles of possible response: Avoiding, Accommodating, Competing, Compromising and Collaborating.

These styles all involve two common factors:

1. The degree to which we assert our own needs in getting the dispute resolved, and
2. The degree to which we are prepared to cooperate with the other disputant to ensure that his or her needs are also met.

There is no right or wrong way of responding to conflict. However, each of these styles may be more useful or appropriate than another in a particular context, and given the issues in dispute.

How we respond may operate to escalate or de-escalate the level of conflict.

We all tend to have our favourite ways of responding to conflict. Some of these responses are culturally determined, and reflect our unique attitudes, beliefs and attitudes about conflict. It is important, therefore, to become aware of our own habitual responses. That way we can respond more effectively to conflict and use the style most appropriate to the particular conflict in which we are involved.

THE FIVE THOMAS-KILMANN STYLES ARE AS FOLLOWS:

1. Avoiding:

This is the style in which we are most unassertive and most uncooperative. In this response, we attempt to satisfy neither our own concerns nor the concerns of the other disputant. Instead we withdraw from and avoid the conflict. Generally, people avoid conflict when they feel hopeless and helpless about resolving it.

The result of avoidance can be that the conflict persists and can even escalate in intensity over time. Anger and frustration build up and can erupt later, perhaps in violence. On the other hand, it may be useful to avoid certain conflicts which are trivial in nature and not worth the time or the effort to resolve, or conflicts in which we have no possible chance of satisfying our needs and concerns.

2. Accommodating:

When accommodating, we attempt to satisfy the needs and concerns of the other disputant while neglecting our own needs and concerns. In other words, we are being highly co-operative, but also very unassertive. The accommodating person usually has a high regard for relationships and is willing to forgo personal goals in order to preserve the relationship.

Always subordinating your own needs and concerns to those of others may lead to a sense of frustration and resentment. On the other hand, accommodating may be necessary on occasions, to preserve peace and harmony and to demonstrate that you are willing to think about the needs of others.

3. Competing (Forcing);

Competing is what we do when we try to satisfy our own needs without regard for those of the other disputant. This style is high on the scale of assertiveness and low in terms of cooperation. It is the exact opposite of accommodating. Persons who take this approach seek to force their will on the other person and to win at all costs. They have low concern for the relationship.

Competing can be useful in an emergency, when a decision needs to be made and there is no time to address all of the concerns of the other person. It does not result in good relationships and may lead to resentment and retaliation if used exclusively in times of conflict.

4. Compromising:

Compromising means a willingness to give up some of our own goals and objectives, if our opponent is willing to do likewise. This style is all about splitting the difference, sharing the pie, or giving a little in order to gain a little. It is both moderately assertive and moderately cooperative. It results in a win-some, lose-some outcome. We do not get all of what we are seeking, but neither does our opponent.

Compromising can be useful, especially when we are working under a deadline, when the issues in dispute are too complex to be addressed in a timely manner, or when the disputants' goals are likely to remain incompatible. Both disputants get some measure of satisfaction. However, by compromising, they may be leaving further gains on the table.

5. Collaborating:

Collaborating is the style of conflict resolution that results in a win-win outcome. Both disputants work together to satisfy as many of their individual (and mutual) interests as possible. They are both highly assertive (with respect to their own interests) and, at the same time, highly cooperative (in regard to their opponent's interests). Collaboration satisfies the concerns of both parties to the conflict. It represents the "elegant" or "integrative" solution to the dispute.

Collaborating is the preferred method of conflict resolution when relationship issues are at stake and one does not want to put the relationship in jeopardy, and also when disputants' concerns are too important to be compromised or accommodated. Successful collaboration, however, takes time and commitment on the part of both disputants. It involves uncovering the underlying interests of both of them at all levels (substantive, emotional and procedural). This is explored further in Section 3.

THE ROLE OF EMOTIONS IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Anger

Anger is an emotion frequently associated with conflict. It is a normal and natural feeling, but one that many of us have difficulty with. When properly directed, anger is a powerful vehicle to help us get things done. When misdirected, it can lead to actions that are less productive, if not self-defeating. The expression of anger may be culturally determined. What might the appropriate expression of anger in one culture may be taboo in another. Anger is often triggered by underlying fear and it may cover up depression and sadness. The person who appears angriest is often the person who feels most threatened and most inadequate.

STAGES OF ANGER

There are certain identifiable stages in the expression of anger:

1. **The Triggering Event** – Something happens to cause us to feel emotionally or physically threatened, e.g. an argument, a disagreement, a physical attack, an upsetting comment. Our body responds and begins to prepare to defend itself.
2. **Escalation** – Our level of emotion increases and our body prepares for crisis by tensing muscles and pumping increased adrenaline into the blood stream, causing increased respiration, heart rate, and blood pressure. The skin may flush, the voice get louder and higher in pitch, and the eye pupils dilate. The body is getting ready to defend itself.
3. **Crisis** – At this stage we make the decision regarding fight or flight. The body has maximized its preparation for crisis and is at its maximum stress level. The person is ready to explode or implode. However, our quality of judgment has decreased as the level of our emotions has risen. This is not the appropriate time to attempt to resolve a conflict. This should be attempted only before the conflict escalates, or after the period of recovery.
4. **Recovery Stage** – After some sort of action has been taken, the body begins to recover gradually and our quality of judgment improves.
5. **Post Crisis Depression** – After the body calms down, we often enter a brief period of depression as we reflect upon what has happened and we experience feelings of guilt, regret or sadness. This is an important time to discuss and explore the problem.

SADNESS, LOSS, DESPAIR

Grief is an overriding emotion for many refugees. He or she has experienced massive loss in the move to Canada – loss of country, cultural context, language, community, work, professional status, not to mention family members (by death or separation, often under extremely traumatic circumstances). It is common for the refugee family to be involved in substantial grieving, particularly during their first year in Canada. Sometimes this grief may reach the level of a clinical depression.

These enormous losses can bubble to the surface at the most unexpected of times (especially from the point of view of the sponsor), often in the form of anger, e.g. on the anniversary of a war, the refugees' flight from their country of origin, birthdays and anniversaries of family members they have lost, traditional celebrations and events such as fall harvest.

The refugee may also feel substantial guilt that he or she has survived and been given a second chance at another life.

STAGES OF GRIEF

As with all losses, there are some predictable stages in the grieving process. These are as follows:

1. **Denial** – The person is unable to cope with the enormity of the loss and uses the defense mechanism of denial to deny emotional problems.
2. **Anger** – The loss is experienced by the refugee as anger, directed at everything and everybody. He or she erupts with rage at minor frustrations. Blaming is common. The anger covers over the underlying grief and protects the refugee from experiencing deep despair over his or her losses. Some persons may become stuck at this stage and may remain embittered. Others may return to their countries of origin in an attempt to regain their former lives. It is especially important for the sponsor to recognize the enormous sadness that lies underneath the refugee's anger and rage at this stage of the grieving process.
3. **Sadness** – The sadness begins to emerge and the person experiences the symptoms of depression, i.e. loss of appetite, difficulties sleeping, feelings of hopelessness, despair about the future, loss of interest and energy to do anything, frequent bouts of tears, etc. These feelings may be exacerbated by feelings of guilt over survival. If recognized, the symptoms of depression can be treated with psychotherapy and/or medication.
4. **Acceptance** – Gradually, there is the phase of acceptance and adjustment. The refugee moves on with his or her life in their new country and progressively adapts to all of the changes. The losses gradually recede into a place of lesser prominence, even though they may always remain with the refugee and be reactivated on special occasions and significant anniversaries. The refugee begins to accept and understand the past, enjoys new relationships, and develops a new sense of identity and self-worth.

PERSONAL TRIGGERS AND HOT BUTTONS

THE THINGS THAT PUSH MY "HOT BUTTONS" WITH NEWCOMERS ARE:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

THE THINGS THAT PUSH MY "HOT BUTTONS" WITH OTHER SPONSORS ARE:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH ANGER

1. Our Own Anger:

- Be aware of your own personal triggers.
- Have strategies ready that you can use when your “hot buttons” are pushed.
- Take a few moments to calm down. Take a break, go for a walk.
- Don’t react right away. Go to the “balcony,” i.e. step back mentally (not physically) and think about the problem objectively.
- Practice stress management techniques, i.e. take several deep breaths and control your breathing
- Try to imagine yourself in the other person’s position and what they might be feeling and upset about. What might they be needing from you?
- Don’t reject their views outright. Instead of arguing or defending, take the time to listen to them first. Then, ask them to hear you out in the same manner.
- Reframe any negative judgmental comments into more positive or neutral language.

2. Anger of the Other

- Allow other person the right to feel angry. Don’t try to talk him or her out of it. Say things like “I know you’re upset.”
- Recognize the angry person may be feeling helpless and threatened and try to understand what lies underneath the anger.
- Stay calm and try to resist any temptations to respond with angry comments of your own, directed at the person.
- Instead, focus on the problem and try to co-opt the other person to do likewise.
- Use active listening responses. Determine the intensity of the feeling and acknowledge the feeling in a word that reflects that intensity.
- If the other person is escalating, remove yourself from any situation of potential danger and say you will discuss the matter further when you are both feeling less intense.

STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH GRIEF AND LOSS

- Use active listening. Try to choose a word that accurately reflects the level of intensity of the feeling that is being expressed, i.e. sorry, sad, depressed, despairing, hopeless. Acknowledge how they are sounding, using this word.
- Continue to actively listen, trying to sum up the substance of what they are saying to you.
- The feelings should subside somewhat as they begin to talk. If the feelings escalate, you should tell them what you are observing, i.e. that they seem overwhelmed by these feelings, and how you feel inadequate to help. You can help by finding them someone with necessary expertise and let them know you will accompany them personally for support.
- If the person denies the feeling, you can reflect back your observations of their non-verbal behaviour: “You say you’re not sad, and yet you look as if you have been crying.”

APPENDIX A: SELF-EVALUATION

A. WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED ABOUT OURSELVES DURING THIS SECTION? LIST THREE THINGS.

1.

2.

3.

B. WHAT ONE THING DO I WANT TO DO DIFFERENTLY IN MY RELATIONSHIP WITH NEWCOMERS, STARTING RIGHT NOW?

END OF SECTION 2

APPENDIX B: FEEDBACK FORM

Section

Date

Instructor

Name (Optional)

1. Did the workshop meet your expectations? If so, how? If not, please comment:
2. The most beneficial part of the workshop was...
3. The least beneficial part of the workshop was...
4. Have you any suggestions for improvement?
5. Have you any comments about the workshop facilitator?
6. Any comments on the written materials and exercises?
7. Do you have suggestions for other training that you would like to see offered? Specify.

SECTION THREE: OBJECTIVES

- To introduce participants to “interest based” negotiation theory so they will be able to distinguish between positions and underlying interests in conflict situations;
- To sensitize participants to the importance of our “identity” needs as individuals in a multi-cultural society;
- To teach participants some basic interpersonal skills for dealing effectively with conflicts, including cross-cultural conflicts;
- To provide participants with a culturally sensitive, problem solving model for conflict management/resolution;
- To give participants an opportunity to practice the model and skills in a simulated conflict between a refugee and sponsor.

Author’s Note:

In these materials, we have used the term “refugee” rather than “newcomer” insofar as we are dealing here with a specific training program that focuses on refugees and their special needs, and the refugee/sponsor relationship. In this sense we are talking about newcomers to Canada who have had a refugee experience.

PART 1: HOW CONFLICTS GET RESOLVED: INTERESTS, RIGHTS, POWER

THREE BASIC METHODS FOR RESOLVING DISPUTES

1. Power-Based Methods:

- Rely on who has the greater balance of power to influence the outcome of the dispute, i.e. structural or personal power.
- In a distressed system, disputes are often settled on the basis of who is more powerful, e.g. by resort to legal or illegal strikes, lock-outs, violence, war, use of authority, “pulling rank,” etc.
- In an effective system, few disputes are settled by power plays.

2. Rights-Based Methods:

- Disputes are determined on the basis of rights and entitlements, e.g. by reference to the collective bargaining or sponsorship agreement, relevant legislation, precedents, accepted norms, etc.
- Adjudicative processes such as formal grievances, arbitration and litigation are rights-based methods for resolving disputes. They look to who has the “rights” rather than to the needs of the disputants.

3. Interest-Based Methods:

- In these processes, the disputants seek to identify and reconcile their respective interests, e.g. the needs, desires, hopes, fears, concerns, etc., underlying the conflict in order to achieve a mutually satisfactory, win-win outcome.
- In an effective dispute resolution system, most disputes are resolved on the basis of the interests of the parties involved in the dispute.

Note:

•The reconciliation of the parties’ interests takes place within the context of rights and their power. The parties bargain within the shadow of the law and the fallback power positions of the disputants in the event the dispute is not resolved.

•Similarly, a determination on the basis of the parties’ rights takes place within the context of the parties’ power, e.g. one may win a favourable judgment in court, but may never have the power to collect on it.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT VS. CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflict Management

In many cases, conflict cannot be eliminated altogether. However, it may be controlled or managed so that it does not escalate in emotional intensity, spread to involve other persons and other issues, and lead to deteriorating relationships between the parties in conflict. Appropriate interventions can prevent conflict escalation and allow the disputants to continue to work productively together in future.

Conflict Resolution

In certain cases, conflict can be truly resolved in the sense that the disputants reach a mutually acceptable agreement that meets as many of their competing needs and interests as possible. There is resolution as opposed to simply a settlement (which is more along the lines of let's cut a deal).

CONTINUUM OF CONFLICT INTERVENTIONS

1. CONFLICT PREVENTION

Sponsoring groups should be familiar with the common types of disputes that arise between sponsors and newcomers (as identified in Section 1 of this workshop) and be pre-emptive in order to prevent these kinds of conflict from arising in the first place. For example, discuss right up front potential problems with excessive use of utilities. Say that problems in this area have arisen in the past. You would like to avoid these. Since many problems arise from a simple difference in expectations, tell the refugee what the sponsor's expectations are and why it is so important from the sponsor's view point to limit waste. Frame it as a problem to be solved and seek the refugee's input in problem solving.

2. CONFLICT MANAGEMENT/CONTAINMENT

Sponsoring groups should be able to recognize the warning signs of incipient conflicts with newcomers, and intervene in these conflicts as they arise and before they escalate out of control. Use the direct, interest-based problem-solving approach only after a careful cultural assessment. If appropriate, use the non-confrontational conflict management strategies set out in this section. The SAHs and sponsoring groups should develop strategies for handling certain types of common conflict and should pass these strategies on to new members of their groups.

In some cases, it is important to recognize that the sponsor and newcomer will never agree on a resolution to the conflict, and to acknowledge that fact openly. If both acknowledge this fact, then the next question is: "Can we get through this for one year even though we don't agree?" Then, come to certain procedural agreements about how they will carry on the relationship together for this limited period. This approach may work in the case of a one-year sponsorship where the refugee quickly becomes self-supporting, but not for a sponsorship involving family members of the sponsored refugees.

3. CONFLICT DIVERSION

The SAH has the duty to ensure the viability of the refugee/sponsor relationship. In cases where none of the preceding approaches to conflict are successful, it may be necessary to find another way to deal with the sponsorship.

Where personal relationships have broken down between the refugee and sponsor, the SAH may take over the funding arrangement, and may be able to find another group to take over the personal support for that particular refugee/family.

4. BREAKDOWN

In some extreme cases, it may not be possible for the sponsor/refugee relationship to continue even in altered form. In this case, the refugee/sponsor relationship is terminated.

NON-CONFRONTATIONAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Direct confrontation of a conflict may be very inappropriate in a culture where harmony or the appearance of harmony and “saving face” are highly valued. In such cultures, non-confrontational strategies are utilized before any direct approach is even considered.

The following are some indirect strategies for dealing with conflict, adapted from Augsburgers’ “*Conflict Mediation Across Cultures*”:

1. **Anticipatory management** – a conflict can be anticipated and defused in a preventive way before it becomes manifest.
2. **Negative communication** – remaining silent, avoiding, evading and being absent conveys disagreement or even anger without a direct confrontation.
3. **Situational friendliness** – allows persons who are avoiding each other to assume friendliness under certain circumstances, i.e., in the presence of guests, at important meetings, etc.
4. **Triadic mediation** – using a go-between to reduce or manage conflict. The third party assumes responsibility for the ongoing conflict and the disputants follow his or her suggestions for resolution of the conflict in order to save the go-between’s “face.”
5. **Displacement** – Anger is displaced onto a third party who is more vulnerable or less threatening.
6. **Self-aggression** – a grievance is expressed through exaggerated compliance.
7. **Acceptance** – A conflict situation is acknowledged as inevitable and accepted with resignation.

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

WESTERN V. EASTERN MODELS

Western Approaches to Conflict Resolution:

1. A formal structure with clearly defined rules of behaviour is preferred for discussing volatile issues.
2. The disputants confront and communicate with each other directly.
3. Time is linear (monochronic). Specific appointments are scheduled to discuss the conflict. Only one issue is discussed at any one time, according to a set agenda.
4. Full disclosure is made at the very beginning of the discussion.
5. The conflict resolution process is task-oriented with the goal of reaching agreement on the issues.
6. The autonomy and individualism of the disputants is central to the process.
7. A neutral third party brought in to assist the disputants will likely be a professional person unknown to either of the disputants.
8. An agreement on the issues is committed to writing and signed by the parties with no expectation of an ongoing relationship with the neutral third party.

Eastern Approaches to Conflict Resolution:

1. An indirect process is considered more desirable in order to save face, reduce threat, balance power and equalize verbal abilities.
2. Communications are indirect and are made through others such as a go-between. The disputants' demands and counter-demands are carried back and forth by the advocates for the disputants. The terms of agreement may be suggested by multiple interested participants.
3. Time is polychronic. Multiple issues and relationships are discussed concurrently, with several persons frequently talking at the same time.
4. Disclosure follows social rituals, personal agendas and communal concerns.
5. The goal of the process is to reconcile relationships, and to resolve tension in the network and community.
6. Relationships are a priority and the resolution of specific issues and tasks comes second.
7. The responsibility of the disputants to their wider community is central.
8. Third parties brought in to assist the disputants are generally known and trusted leaders from the community.
9. Resolution occurs when the disputants give their personal word of honour and symbols of reconciliation are exchanged.

(Adapted from Lederach 1986)

FACEWORK

“Face” is important in all human relationships but is especially important in Eastern cultures. In Western cultures the loss of face is rarely considered in conflict situations. Usually it is seen as a loss of self-esteem, sense of competence or pride. In Eastern cultures, the concept is all important and is closely tied with concepts of honour, shame and obligation.

The most frequent pattern for resolution of conflict in Eastern and Third World cultures is the use of a third person – a mediator, elder, go-between, family or community leader – to defuse the anger, carry the demands and counter-demands of the disputants, and to work out a mutually agreeable solution. The use of a third person allows each of the disputants to save “face.” In Western and European cultures, on the other hand, direct confrontation and negotiation are used to resolve inter-personal differences.

Do not remove a fly from your neighbour’s face with a hatchet.

Chinese proverb

INTEREST-BASED CONFLICT RESOLUTION

PRINCIPLES AS ADAPTED FROM GETTING TO YES

1. Separate the People from the Problem

Be soft on the people and hard on the problem. This means focussing on the issues and how to resolve these, rather than blaming the persons involved in the dispute. This gets the disputants to work together, attacking the problem, not each other.

2. Focus on Interests, not Positions

Move away from positional statements and identify the individual and common interests underlying and driving the dispute. Avoid bottom lines. Do not rush to solutions before uncovering the interests i.e. the needs, desires, hopes, fears of both disputants.

3. Invent Options for Mutual Gain

Expand the possibilities for settlement beyond what was originally proposed, in order to maximize the satisfaction of all identified interests.

4. Use Mutually Acceptable Objective Criteria

To arrive at an outcome which is independent of the naked will of either party and fair to both sides, e.g. reported cases, technical criteria, precedents etc.

5. Develop the Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement (BATNA) and the Worst Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement (WATNA) for each disputant

If any proposed solution does not meet the minimum necessary for that disputant, then another alternative to the negotiation may be the preferred course of action, i.e. court. Each disputant needs to consider the best and the worst outcomes for themselves if they are unable to reach an agreement through the negotiation or problem-solving process. Sometimes, no agreement at all is better than a bad agreement. At least it may preserve their legal options if they later chose to follow a rights-based approach.

CULTURAL CONTRA-INDICATORS

The interest-based approach above reflects important Western assumptions about conflict resolution and may not be appropriate for use in every kind of cross-cultural conflict.

1. It assumes that people and problems can be separated cleanly and that problem-solving efforts can focus on interests without becoming people-oriented. However, in most cultures of the world, equal attention must be given to both the person and the problem, to relationship as well as substantive goals, and to public positions as well as private interests.
2. This model assumes that open disclosure is important to the negotiation process. In non-western cultures, this openness can make it impossible for compromise to be reached.
3. It assumes that the disputants own the dispute. In many cultures, only the person at the top of the hierarchy can make the decision. Or, members of the larger community may both observe the dispute resolution process and participate in it.
4. The western model prefers directness, decisiveness and speed in timing. Other cultures believe that the best approach is to give the matter sufficient time to allow accommodations to be made and agreement to emerge.
5. It assumes that the disputants will start the process with negotiable terms, minimal expectations and bottom-line positions. In other cultures, the disputants will traditionally ask for much more than expected, expecting their opponent to do likewise. Significant compromises are a part of the normal process.
6. The model assumes that the language of dispute resolution is reasonable, rational and responsible. In some cultures, however, the language used is very demeaning and extreme accusations and vitriolic expressions are a normal part of the process.
7. In western culture, no means no and yes means yes. In other cultures, one never says “no” and may say “yes” even if it is not meant in the same way the other side intends.
8. The model assumes that once an agreement is reached, implementation will follow. This is not necessarily the case with other cultures where there may be ongoing differences in the interpretation of the agreement as they try to implement it.

INTERESTS V. POSITIONS

DEFINITIONS

Understanding and uncovering interests

The key to effective conflict resolution is uncovering the interests of all persons involved in the dispute so that a solution can be crafted that meets as many of these individual interests as possible. The critical mistake made in most attempts at problem-solving is to move directly to a discussion of solutions right after the disputants have identified the issues. They may still get an agreement, but they may miss an opportunity to get the best possible agreement or “integrative solution” that maximizes all of their respective interests.

Positions

In any conflict, the disputants come to the negotiations with “positions” – a fixed stance or ideas about what they want or demand to see happen. A position is the perfect solution viewed from their self-interested point of view.

e.g. *“I insist that you get a job immediately, no matter what kind of job.”*

Interests

Underlying these fixed positions are the individual disputant’s interests. These are the unexpressed needs, desires, concerns, hopes and fears that underlie and inform positions.

e.g. *“I am afraid that if you don’t find work, we will have to find other sources of funding for you.”*

KINDS OF INTEREST

INTERESTS CAN EXIST ON MANY LEVELS:

1. Substantive or Content Interests

These are the needs that reflect the substance or content of the dispute – what the dispute is all about.

e.g. *“I need \$50 additional money so I can pay this utility bill.”*

2. Emotional or Psychological Interests

These are the needs that relate to the feeling or relational aspects of the dispute – the underlying feelings that are driving the dispute.

e.g. *“I need to feel capable once again of handling my own finances and my own life.”*

3. Procedural Interests

The way in which the problem is resolved may be just as important as the actual outcome itself.

e.g. *“I don’t care what the final decision is as long as you listen to my side of the story and act fairly.”*

4. Identity Interests:

Identity-based needs are the needs that all of us have for autonomy, meaning and community in our lives, i.e. what people need to preserve a sense of who they are and their place in the world. We all need to feel that there is a meaning and purpose in our lives. We also need to feel connected with groups with which we personally identify and in which we ourselves feel recognized. At the same time, we need to experience a sense of our independence, freedom and individuality.

Some conflicts cannot be resolved without addressing these deeper identity-based needs. In such cases, some kind of personal growth or social change may be required.

e.g. *“I need to be treated with respect and dignity as a member of my community.”*

Once we appreciate the interests that exist on the many different levels, a solution will evolve quite naturally that will meet as many of these underlying interests as possible. This solution will probably be quite unlike the solutions proposed originally by either of the disputants.

INTEREST-BASED PROBLEM SOLVING MODEL FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Stage 1: Pre-Negotiations - Conduct a Culturally-sensitive Assessment of the Situation

- Before commencing a direct fact-to-face negotiation, first consider whether this is appropriate in the circumstances.
- Explore the approach typically used to resolve conflict in the refugee's community of origin. What dispute resolution process fits with their "cultural common sense" i.e. a western interest-based model, use of a go-between, involvement of elders and respected others, a local or traditional process?
- What setting would feel most comfortable for everyone involved? How can the process needs of both disputants be accommodated?
- What timing framework would work for everyone? Remember that some traditions involve protracted, open-ended discussions, whereas others are more structured and focussed.
- Who should be included in the discussions? Who else needs to be involved?
- What language should be used to talk about the issues? Will translators be required and if so, who should be asked to act in this role?
- Consider the power dynamics of the situation and how the power imbalances may be addressed.
- What are the disputants' beliefs and attitudes about conflict, appropriate behaviour when in conflict, and what is private and what is public?

Stage 2: Set a Positive Environment for Conflict Resolution

- Once you have determined that a face-to-face, interest-based negotiation is appropriate, then agree on a mutually convenient time to meet to discuss the conflict.
- Agree on a mutually convenient private place to meet, one that is on neutral grounds and is free from interruptions or distractions such as ringing telephones, T.V., people running in and out of the room.
- Confirm your mutual desires to resolve the conflict.
- Set some ground rules for problem-solving i.e. Each will have an opportunity to tell his or her side of the dispute without interruption by the other. Then the other person gets to ask questions.

Stage 3: Define the Issues

- Each disputant briefly summarizes how he or she sees the problem.
- Each person uses "I" statements, telling it how it is from their own perspective, rather than blaming the other.
- Listen actively while the other person is speaking, reflecting back the essence of what you have heard and acknowledging, not disagreeing with the feelings being expressed.
- Each person asks clarifying questions of the other.
- Combine the issues raised by each of the disputants into an agenda of topics that need to be addressed.
- Reframe the issues into neutral non-judgmental language.

Stage 4: Explore the Underlying Interests of Both Disputants

- Explore what is really important to each person with respect to each of the identified issues.
- Think about the underlying needs, hopes, concerns, fears, expectations, and priorities of each disputant.
- Continue to listen actively and to restate, reframe.
- Ask open-ended probing questions to probe for and clarify interests.
- As each to listen to what is important to the other on each issue.

Stage 5: Problem Solve

- When all of the interests are on the table (and only then) begin the problem-solving phase.
- Summarize all of the interests i.e. what is important to each disputant.
- Brainstorm options to meet each of the identified interests i.e. invent options for mutual gain.
- Evaluate the options – Are they fair? How well do they satisfy the interests. Will they work out in practice?
- Put together an agreement that is mutually acceptable to both.

Stage 6: Implementation

- Form an action plan – who will do what to implement the agreement, when and how.
- Build in a “what if” clause.

PART 2: CONFLICT MANAGEMENT/RESOLUTION SKILLS

1. ACTIVE LISTENING

At least 50 per cent of a good discussion is spent listening to what the other person has to say. Listening requires patience and self-discipline. Instead of responding or reacting immediately, the listener must remain focussed on what the other person is saying. Especially if the other side is angry or upset, it is essential not to interrupt, but to offer a full hearing of the complaint – even if you think they are wrong or mistaken. Let them know you are attending to what they have to say by nodding, maintaining eye contact (if culturally appropriate) and the occasional “yes,” “I see” or “uh-huh.” Encourage them to tell you everything that is bothering them by using phrases such as “please continue,” “tell me more,” and “what happened then?” Once the person has been heard in full, his or her level of emotions will likely de-escalate and he or she will likely be more rational and receptive to conflict resolution.

It is not sufficient however, simply to listen passively. The person must know that he or she has been heard correctly. This requires the listener to reflect back to the speaker, in his or her own words, what the listener has heard. This is especially important if there is a language barrier, in order to check whether the person has been heard correctly and his or her message communicated accurately.

The technique of paraphrasing or summarizing what the listener has heard, and then repeating or restating the main ideas and feelings back to the speaker, is known as active listening. Active listening gives the speaker the sense that he or she has been fully heard and understood by the listener, though not necessarily agreed with. It also gives the speaker a chance to correct any possible misunderstandings and for the listener to check whether his or her own understanding is correct. At the same time, it builds rapport and a sense of trust, which encourages the other person to talk even more about facts and feelings. Active listening thus facilitates good communications, and promotes conflict resolution based on full information.

WHEN TO ACTIVE LISTEN:

- Before reacting, responding, arguing, blaming or criticizing
- Whenever the speaker is expressing strong feelings or a pressure to talk
- When the speaker needs to sort out his or her feelings or thoughts

How to Active Listen: Four Basic Steps

- Concentrate** fully on what is being said and the way in which it is being said. Pay particular attention to all non-verbal indicators such as tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, posture, etc.
- Identify** the major content of the speaker's message – the speaker's main thoughts and ideas – as well as the accompanying affect, i.e. the speaker's feelings about what is being said.
- Paraphrase** (i.e. restate in your own words) what you believe to be the central ideas that the speaker is communicating, along with the accompanying feelings, using words of a comparable emotional intensity.
- Listen** for the speaker's response, either confirming that you have heard and understood accurately or correcting your misunderstanding. If your first response was not accurate, try again.

TIPS FOR ACTIVE LISTENING:

- Try putting yourself in the other person's shoes to understand how he or she might be thinking and feeling.
- Resist the temptation to argue, interrupt or finish the speaker's sentences for him or her.
- Do not offer advice, give suggestions or recount your own personal experiences to the speaker.
- Remain neutral (i.e. nonjudgmental) at all times, accepting what is being said as the views and perceptions of the speaker, even though you may not agree with them.

An example of Active Listening:

Speaker: *"People in this country don't know what it's like to live in a refugee camp."*

Listener: *"It sounds like it makes you mad that we don't appreciate the hardships you've been through."*

EXERCISE:

Practice active listening in response to the following statements. Try to paraphrase or restate the main message that the speaker is trying to communicate, together with acknowledgement of his or her feelings that accompany the message.

1. They told me that Canada was a land of opportunity. No one talked about how hard it is to get a job here.
2. Back home I could go to the village and everyone knew me and my family by name.
3. I keep trying to find out information about my family members but no one ever tells me anything.
4. Everything is so different here. My kids are learning things that I don't even know about.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT/RESOLUTION SKILLS

2 . Q U E S T I O N I N G S K I L L S

Questioning is one of the most important communication skills. By the choice of questions, the questioner determines what facts are elicited, focuses the areas for discussion, controls the direction of the conversation and uncovers the needs and interests underlying the disputant's positional statements.

ESSENTIALLY, THERE ARE TWO MAIN TYPES OF QUESTIONS:

A. Closed questions

This is the type of question a lawyer uses on cross-examination to pin down a witness to a specific answer. The closed or "leading" question, as it is also called, narrows the focus of discussion, suggests the answer to the question or calls for a "black and white," "yes or no," "either/or" response. Frequently the leading question implies the particular thinking or values of the questioner, and makes an assumption about the expected response.

Closed questions are useful when there is a need to clarify a response that is vague or unclear, to focus the attention of the person being questioned, or to bring closure to a discussion. They are not all that helpful in exploring or probing the matter under discussion because they foreclose other possible responses.

Some examples of closed questions are:

"Isn't it true that . . .?"

"Don't you agree that . . .?"

"Do you believe that . . .?"

"Are you sure that . . .?"

B. Open Questions

This is the type of open-ended or journalistic question that does not circumscribe or restrict the range of possible responses. Rather, the question encourages the person being questioned to respond in the broadest possible manner. Open-ended questions are non-directive. They do not suggest the thinking or values of the questioner, but allow the respondent to answer on his or her own terms.

Open-ended questions usually begin with the words "what" "why" "when" "where" or "how." Questions beginning with "why" may elicit a negative or defensive response, since they are often perceived as evaluation or judgmental in nature. This depends upon the tone of voice used by the questioner. Such questions can be phrased in alternative ways to achieve a more open response. E.g. "Why do his remarks offend you?" (eliciting a defensive response) can be reframed as "In what way do his remarks bother you?"

Open-ended questions are especially useful at the beginning of a discussion when you are seeking to obtain the maximum amount of information.

Some examples of open-ended questions are:

“What happened to lead you to make a complaint?”

“On what basis did you believe that you were being treated unfairly?”

“When did you start to feel uncomfortable?”

How did you respond to his behaviour?”

“In what way did you feel threatened?”

C. Probing or Follow-up Questions

These are the important follow up questions to ambiguous or vague responses which encourage the respondent to go farther, to expand upon, clarify, examine or explain their initial response.

Examples of probing questions are:

“Can you tell me more about that?”

“In what way is that so important to you?”

“Can you be more specific?”

“Explain what you mean by that.”

“Could you express that thought in a different way?”

Generally, one begins a discussion about a conflict with open questions and then moves in the direction of more closed questions. The type of question selected will depend upon its purpose.

Some reasons for using questions are as follows:

- a. To get elaboration on a point already made, e.g. *“Could you tell me more about that.”*
- b. To clarify – *“What was it in particular that bothered you?”*
- c. To summarize – *“So your most important concern at this point seems to be . . .?”*
- d. To confront – *“You said that you did not trust him at all and yet you gave him your car to drive. Help me understand why you did this.”*
- e. To focus attention – *“Can we talk about your earlier comment first and then move on to discuss this new point?”*

Sometimes your questions will go unanswered. There are several explanations for this:

- Your question was not heard;
- Your question was not understood;
- The question was too complex and required multiple answers;
- The question was perceived as insulting, intrusive, aggressive, culturally inappropriate or biased;
- The respondent does not wish to disclose the information.

It is important in these cases to analyze the reason for the failure to answer, and to act appropriately – i.e. openly acknowledge that the question may be seen as intrusive and find out what specific information the respondent feels comfortable discussing.

EXERCISE:

Ask open-ended questions about the following statements:

1. No one deserves to be treated like we are.
2. I think that we should just go back to where we came from.
3. Other families are given a lot more help.
4. Things are not what we expected here.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT/RESOLUTION SKILLS

3 . R E F R A M I N G

This technique is a potent variation of active listening, a skill which involves restating an emotionally charged, negative statement and turning it into a neutral or even positive statement, while at the same time retaining the essential content of the speaker's message. Reframing is used to de-escalate and control conflict, to facilitate positive communication and constructive problem-solving, to identify the interests underlying stated positions, to moderate demands, and to eliminate negative, value-laden language from communications. Reframing emphasizes positive goals and needs, the mutual needs of both parties to a dispute, and eliminates blaming and accusations. The reworded or reframed statement is put in terms that can be heard and understood by all disputants, rather than simply reacted to. Reframing leads to a positive outcome.

An example of a reframed statement is as follows:

Statement said angrily: *"I'm not going to sit here and listen to these crazy accusations."*

Reframed as: *"You'd like to take some more positive action to deal with the issues."*

EXERCISE:

Change the following into open-ended questions:

1. Isn't it true that you have enough support to meet your basic needs?
2. Are you expecting us to drive you everywhere?
3. Don't you agree that you could do more to find employment?
4. Are you planning to make an official complaint?

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT/RESOLUTION SKILLS

4 . C O N F R O N T I N G

This is another challenging skill to be used with caution, taking cultural factors into consideration. In dealing with cross-cultural conflict, one must always be careful to “save face.” The direct approach involved in confronting may not be culturally appropriate in the situation.

Confronting does not mean accusing another person head on, e.g., “You must be crazy to think that way.” Rather, it involves holding up to the other person – in a neutral , nonjudgmental manner – their inconsistent statements or behaviours which are confusing you and hindering effective communications. The purpose is to encourage the other person to reflect upon the inconsistencies and clarify their meaning. The speaker confronts the inconsistency, not the person, by placing diametrical opposites on the table and holding them up for inspection.

e.g. “You say that his attentions are not welcome, and yet you continue to call him up on the telephone. I don’t understand. Can you explain to me how you really feel about this person?”

This technique is useful in dealing with a person in denial, but must always be used in a nonjudgmental manner, taking care not to attack the person. The idea behind the skill is to label the inconsistency, i.e. the mixed messages being communicated, thus making the inconsistent behaviour conscious, where it can be dealt with appropriately.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT/RESOLUTION SKILLS

5. DEALING WITH INTENSE EMOTIONS

A conflict is generally accompanied by emotion on both sides. Sometimes the level of these emotions can be quite intense. Both disputants may become very angry as the level of the conflict escalates, as well as very anxious about the possible outcome and its implications.

A technique used to deal with intense levels of emotion is the same as active listening, except that the initial response is solely to the emotional aspect of the message being communicated and does not reflect the substance or the content of the communication.

Try to sum up in a single word the intensity of the feeling being communicated and reflect this back to the other person. It is important not to overstate the feeling, but to try to find a word that accurately reflects the emotional intensity. For example, some different levels of anger are: irritated, annoyed, angry, enraged, furious. Different levels of fear are: anxious, worried, afraid, terrified. Different levels of sadness are: unhappy, sad, depressed, despondent, suicidal.

By encouraging the person to talk about and expand upon the feeling, he or she experiences a form of emotional catharsis and, generally, the feeling subsides in intensity. In rare cases, the feeling level escalates and should be contained rather than encouraged. Only after the feeling has been explored and expressed do you return to the content or substance of the original message.

Example:

Statement - *"That idiot cut me off with no reason."*(pounding desk)

Response - *"You sound and look absolutely furious."*

Angry person - *"You're darned right. He had no reason to do what he did."*

Response - *"You feel that you were not treated fairly"*

Angry person - *"Yes, I certainly do."* Calming down

Response - *"So tell me why you think you were not treated fairly."* They begin to talk.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT/RESOLUTION SKILLS

6. DEALING WITH DENIAL AND RESISTANCE

In many situations, active listening will apparently fall on deaf ears and will be rejected or denied, sometimes vigorously. Denial is a psychological defense mechanism which is used to protect one's ego.

The first step in dealing with denial is to back off and try your active listening again, this time restating and reflecting back only the emotional aspect of the communication (not the substance of what is being said). Try using another, less intense word to describe the feeling being expressed. If that too fails (and the denial continues), reflect back the nonverbal behaviours that confirm what you have been observing.

Example:

Statement – *“I’ve never heard anything so ridiculous in my whole life.”*

Response – *“You sound pretty angry that she would make such a complaint against you.”*

1st person – *“Who me? Angry? Not on your life.”*

Response – *“Well, maybe not angry, but you sound upset.”*

1st person – *“She couldn’t upset me if she tried.”*

Response – *“Well, she seems to have gotten to you in some way, listening to the tone of your voice and seeing your flushed face. Can you tell me what your reaction has been?”*

7. BRAINSTORMING

This technique is used primarily to generate a broad range of options for the settlement of a conflict. The disputants identify as many options as possible to resolve the conflict, in a free flowing, uncensored, stream of consciousness. Any option, no matter how unrealistic it might first appear, is expressed and jotted down for later consideration. There is no discussion of the options as they stream forth. Once all the options have been identified, they are reviewed by the disputants. Some may be immediately discarded, while others may be improved and worked upon until they satisfy both disputants.

8 . M A K I N G “ I ” S T A T E M E N T S

People in conflict often blame each other for the dispute. Accordingly, they tend to frame their communications beginning with “you,” i.e. “You always forget to tell me what I am supposed to do.” This kind of blaming language tends to escalate conflict and discourage listening. The person on the receiving end of a statement beginning with “you” is generally busy framing a defensive response rather than listening to the communication.

When involved in a conflict, we should try to have each persons state what is bothering them, in the first person, and to refrain from making “you” statements. The focus of the communication should be on the behaviour and its effect on the other person, rather than on the person.

Three steps to making “I” statements:

- a. State your feeling, beginning with the word “I,” e.g. *“I feel worried . . .”*
- b. Describe the behaviour which is causing a problem for you, e.g., . . . *when you don’t contact me or keep your scheduled appointments with me . . .*
- c. State the consequence for you, e.g. *“because I think something awful might have happened to you.”*

TIPS FOR PREVENTING AND CONTAINING REFUGEE/SPONSOR CONFLICT

Questionnaire to Sponsors

- Orient the newcomer as soon as possible to the motivation and expectations of the sponsor, i.e. we want to help and support you in your resettlement, but we are going to make mistakes. Let's talk about problems as soon as they arise.
- Designate one person on the sponsoring committee to handle money issues who does not have any other relationship with the newcomer. This allows for a "scapegoat" and does not place an expectation of friendship between the newcomer and the "banker."
- Train sponsors in cultural awareness, including "balance of power" issues.
- Learn from past mistakes – listen to more experienced sponsors.
- Take time to listen and learn. Use community resources for training.
- Remain as neutral as possible and try to understand the newcomer's self-interest and agenda.
- Inform oneself about our multi-cultural society by attending cultural festivals, artistic events, traditional celebrations of newcomers, cultural exchanges and workshops.
- Hold cultural awareness and conflict resolution training programs for members of sponsoring groups and exchange views on a regular basis with refugees.
- Network with other sponsoring groups.
- Be aware of one's own strong ideas and beliefs and avoid discussing these with newcomers.
- Develop a handout for members of sponsoring group clarifying roles.
- Use persons of the same culture as the refugees as resource persons. Find elders or community leaders who have settled earlier and use them to help resolve problems.
- Move the newcomers out of the homes of relatives if conflicts are unmanageable.
- Provide counselling for both parties to the conflict.
- Develop a list of do's and don'ts to help prevent conflict.
- Discuss problems as they arise and try to resolve these smaller problems before they grow into bigger ones.

END OF SECTION 3

APPENDIX A: ROLE PLAY 1

THE OPARO FAMILY

General Instructions

The Oparo family are a Congolese family of five persons who came to Canada as refugees about 4 months ago. They were sponsored by a group who heard about the plight of the Congolese refugees and decided to help out by sponsoring a refugee family. Sponsorship money was raised by the group through a number of activities, including garage sales, car washes, and bingos, and donations were solicited from church members and merchants in the community. When the family arrived, there was lots of publicity in the local newspaper about the family and the activities of the sponsoring group.

The family consists of the father, Jean-Claude, presently unemployed; the mother Christine, a full time homemaker; and their three children, a daughter Marie age 9 years; and two sons Emile and Michel ages 5 and 7 years. The father, Jean-Claude, was a shopkeeper in his native land and was well respected in his local community. He is the only adult in the family who speaks English, although his language skills are not very good. The family were forced to flee under threat of their lives during the war in the Congo. They had only the clothes on their backs and a few personal belongings. Everything else was left behind.

The family spent several months in a refugee camp before coming to Canada. Many of their relatives fled with them and are still in the camp hoping to go home or be resettled. Others stayed behind in the Congo. Some were killed in the conflict. The family is still unsure about the fate of others.

Jean-Claude comes to Sam(antha), a member of the sponsoring group, seeking additional money over-and-above the family's regular monthly allotment. In fact, this is not the first time this has happened. It seems that every month there is something else. A school trip for the daughter so she will not feel left out at school. A new coat for the mother who rejected the second hand coat she was given. Extra money to pay for the utility bills during the recent cold weather. Money to pay for numerous long distance calls to family members in asylum countries.

In the past, Sam(antha) has always chided Jean-Claude for what s/he sees as his unwise spending habits, especially the fact that he smokes more than a pack of cigarettes each day. When Sam(antha) went to visit the family during the recent cold snap, s/he found the apartment was excessively hot and the thermostat was up to 80 degrees. Some windows in the apartment were actually open. The children were wearing light cotton clothing and no sweaters. S/he walked over to the open window, closed it and then turned the thermostat down. S/he suggested that family members put on more clothes like Canadians do during the cold weather months. The family just stood by and watched.

Each time in the past that Jean-Claude has asked for more money, Sam(antha) has begrudgingly given it. This time, Sam(antha) has had enough. S/he asks Jean-Claude to report in minute detail how he spent the allotment money this month. In frustration s/he says, "Didn't you listen when we went over the budget together?" Jean-Claude responds by saying, "You didn't give us enough money. Other families get a lot more."

Role play this scenario, using the interest-based conflict resolution model and skills which you have just learned in this section.

APPENDIX B: ROLE PLAY 2

THE KHAN FAMILY

General Instructions

The Khan family arrived here in Canada as refugees from Afghanistan approximately 8 months ago. They consist of the father, Osman, formerly a university professor in Kabul, his wife, Wahida, and their two pre-school age children. The Khan family were sponsored jointly by the husband's brother, Hassan, and by the sponsoring group. The sponsoring group is supplying partial funding and the brother is providing accommodation for the family.

The husband's younger brother, Hassan, immigrated to Canada over 10 years ago. Since then he has held a steady job at a local manufacturing plant, married a Canadian woman, and is now quite well integrated into Canadian society. The two brothers had not seen each other since the younger brother came to Canada.

When Hassan learned of his older brother's need, he offered to take the family into his home temporarily, while they got settled in Canada. He and his wife approached a sponsoring group to assist with funding.

Since the Khan family arrived and moved into the younger brother's home 8 months ago, things have deteriorated steadily. Osman has not yet obtained employment to his liking and continues to hold out for a university position similar to that he had in Kabul. Meanwhile, Wahida has found work in a local factory. She works shifts and is not able to care for the pre-school children. This task has fallen to the Hassan's wife since the professor refuses, saying he must study to improve his language skills instead.

Hassan and his wife are now quarreling. He comes to the sponsoring group and tells them that Osman and his family must move out of the home immediately, or his own marriage will fall apart.

How would you help this family deal with their conflict? Identify the issues and discuss what steps you would take to problem solve. Then role play a meeting between the sponsor, Osman and Hassan.

APPENDIX C: FEEDBACK FORM

Section

Date

Instructor

Name (Optional)

1. Did the workshop meet your expectations? If so, how? If not, please comment:
2. The most beneficial part of the workshop was...
3. The least beneficial part of the workshop was...
4. Have you any suggestions for improvement?
5. Have you any comments about the workshop facilitator?
6. Any comments on the written materials and exercises?
7. Do you have suggestions for other training that you would like to see offered? Specify.

SECTION FOUR: OBJECTIVES

- To provide participants with specific skills and techniques for dealing with conflicts within and between sponsoring groups.
- To teach participants processes for reaching consensus in group meetings and for group problem-solving.
- To give participants an opportunity to practice group conflict resolution skills in role play simulations.

Author's Note:

In these materials, we have used the term “refugee” rather than “newcomer” insofar as we are dealing here with a specific training program that focuses on refugees and their special needs, and the refugee/sponsor relationship. In this sense we are talking about newcomers to Canada who have had a refugee experience.

CONFLICT WITHIN REFUGEE SPONSORING GROUPS

1.

2.

3.

GROUP DECISION-MAKING

HOW GROUPS MAKE EFFECTIVE DECISIONS WHEN THEY DO NOT AGREE

- **Majority Rule** – The decision is made on the basis of a fixed majority vote of members. Majority rule voting encourages competition in which the goal for each side is to win, often at the expense of the legitimate concerns of the opposing members.
- **Minority Rule** – The decision is made by a subgroup for the group as a whole.
- **Autocracy** – The decision is decreed by a single person in authority.
- **Autocracy with Polling** – The decision is made by a single person in authority after members have given their input.
- **Unanimity** – Each group member fully agrees to the decision and to fully support it.
- **Consensus** – The whole group agrees to the best decision to which all members can commit themselves at the time.
- **Decision by Non-Decision** – No conclusion is reached because the group is unable to reach agreement on any other decision.

THE NATURE OF CONSENSUS

What is Consensus?

A consensus process is one in which all those who have an interest or stake in a matter, aim to reach a mutually acceptable agreement without imposing the views or authority of one member or members upon the others. In a consensus process, people work together as equals in a problem solving process which maximizes their ability to resolve differences. Although all members of a group may not agree with all aspects of the ultimate agreement, consensus is reached if all of them are willing to “live with” the total package worked out by the group. Even if all matters are not resolved, the consensus process can crystallize discussions, clarify underlying issues, identify options for dealing with outstanding disagreements, and build respect and understanding among group members.

Consensus is not...

a majority vote, as this means only the majority of the group gets something they are happy with.

The Guiding Principles of Consensus:

In a consensus process, everyone is respected and all contributions are valued. Ideas and concerns are expressed first, before any conflict resolution or debate on the issues occurs.

After discussion, if an unresolved concern remains, the concerned person must decide either to stand aside (thereby giving consent) or to withhold consent (thereby raising a question of blocking). A block occurs when the entire group agrees that the person's concern is based upon the group's very principles and foundations. If this is the case, the decision may be blocked.

Standing Aside vs. Blocking

Periodically, a group member may be unable to agree with an important decision and may effectively “block” consensus. In this situation, the group may delay a resolution until further information can be gathered. A deadline for a final decision must be determined.

Rather than block consensus on a decision, however, the member may agree to “stand aside” under certain circumstances. These circumstances may include:

- Not requiring this group member to work on implementation of the decision
- Recording the dissenting viewpoint in the minutes
- Stipulating that the decision does not set a precedent and therefore, cannot be used as the basis for future decisions
- Setting a trial period for testing the decision and its implementation

The Consensus Environment:

For consensus to work well, the process must be conducted in an environment which promotes:

- Trust
- Respect
- Unity of Purpose
- Nonviolence
- Shared empowerment
- Cooperation
- Constructive Conflict Resolution
- Commitment to Group
- Active Participation
- Equal Access to Power
- Patience

The Characteristics of Consensus Decision-Making:

- Each group member feels that he or she has been heard and understood by the rest of the group
- Each group member feels that he or she can live with the decision
- Each member is willing to commit to his or her role in carrying out the decision, or at least will in no way block or hamper its implementation.

When to Use Consensus Decision-Making

- When the issue is important
- When group unity is significant
- When there are a number of alternatives and problems may arise if one alternative is chosen over another
- When the process of reaching a decision is as important as the decision itself

Required Behaviours for Consensus Decision-Making:

- Seek to understand and to be understood.
- Use active listening skills.
- Express constructive criticism - do not make personal attacks.
- Listen to the opinions of others; test them and build on them – be open-minded.
- Allow sufficient time to discuss all of the different viewpoints.
- Ensure the participation of all group members.
- Search for mutually supported alternatives.
- Determine between factual and non-factual information.
- Acknowledge the feelings of all group members in a non-judgmental way.
- Think creatively.
- Strive to give consensus decision-making a real chance.

THE CONSENSUS DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

1. Introduction of Proposal or Issue:

- Clarify the issue or proposal prior to discussion so that all participants understand what is about to be discussed and the process for discussing it.
- Present the proposal or issue to group.
- Answer any questions to clarify the presentation.

2. Conduct a Broad, Open Discussion:

- Have a broad, free-ranging general discussion on the proposal or issue.
- Call for consensus.
- If there is no consensus, move to next step.

3. Identify Concerns:

- Poll the group to identify all of their concerns about the presentation.
- Write down group-related concerns on a flip chart.

4. Resolve Concerns:

- Discuss grouped concerns, one group at a time.
- Call again for consensus.
- If there is no consensus on all issues, restate the remaining concerns.
- Ask questions to clarify the remaining concerns in depth.
- Discuss and attempt to resolve one concern at a time.
- Call again for consensus.
- If there is no consensus, move to next step.

5. Alternative Closing Options to Consensus:

- Consider outcomes if no consensus is reached.
- Brainstorm possible options to consensus e.g. alternative forms of decision-making.
- Discuss options and their potential outcomes.
- Call for consensus on a “procedural” solution:
 - send the issue or proposal back to committee for further discussion;
 - declare a block;
 - get the agreement of those opposed to “stand aside”;
 - “park” the issue for further discussion at a later date;
 - seek additional information and input;
 - call upon an outside facilitator to continue the discussions;
 - call a vote to be carried by the majority or a fixed percentage of members, etc.

MAKING GROUP MEETINGS WORK

KEY FACTORS

1. Prepare Ahead for a Focussed Meeting:

Before the group meets –

- Think about the purpose and the desired outcomes of the meeting.
- Determine the topics to cover and the best format for discussing each topic – set an agenda.
- Estimate the required length of the meeting.
- Identify who needs to be present.
- Plan for someone to take notes of all important decisions.
- Communicate the purpose and desired outcome to all participants.

At the start of the meeting –

- Restate the purpose and desired outcomes of the meeting.
- Review the agenda.
- Develop or review ground rules for discussion.
- Provide any key information.

2. Encourage Diverse Points of View

- Agree on the type of participation desired by members.
- Show that you value the ideas, opinions and questions of others.
- Clarify and paraphrase key ideas to make sure you understand correctly.
- Be selective about contributing your own ideas and opinions – don't dominate discussions.
- Seek out different points of view.
- Use brainstorming techniques in cases of impasse.
- Record ideas on a flip chart.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Protect new ideas.
- Focus on the ideas, not the people who make them.
- Use positive reinforcement to encourage everyone to contribute.

3. Keep Focussed and Moving Right up to the End of the Meeting

- Pay attention to the flow of the meeting.
- Acknowledge and reinforce constructive contributions.
- Use agenda, desired outcomes, ground rules and structured discussions to stay on track.
- Adjust the pace to suit the discussions.
- Keep aware of where you are in the process.
- Periodically summarize key points and ask for agreement.
- Reach conclusions, discuss implementation and the next steps with appropriate time frames.
- Write down agreements so all participants can review and ratify them.

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

- Members should attend all meetings.
- Members share responsibility for meeting effectiveness.
- Group uses an agenda.
- Members listen carefully to other members.
- All members participate in discussions.
- Members remain positive and keep an open mind.
- Members are patient and tolerant of each other.

SOME NONPRODUCTIVE GROUP BEHAVIOURS AND HOW TO HANDLE THEM

- Attacking other group members personally –
- Agreeing with everything –
- Being inconsistent –
- Changing the subject –
- Chatting –
- Complaining –
- Criticizing –
- Anger –
- Dominating –
- Distracting –
- Escaping e.g. to take phone calls –
- Glossing over problems –
- Hairsplitting –
- Interrupting –
- Misinterpreting –
- Missing meetings –
- Not completing tasks –
- Talking too much –
- Withdrawal –
- Others –

GROUP PROBLEM-SOLVING PROCESS

Identify the Problem:

- Clearly define the actual problem(s).
- Agree on agenda.
- Search for underlying concerns and interests.
- Distinguish between issues and personalities.
- Frame the issues as joint problem-solving tasks.

Generate Options:

- Develop a safe and creative environment.
- Brainstorm options – “anything goes”.
- Fine tune the brainstormed ideas into possible options.

Establish Objective Criteria:

- Determine mutually acceptable interests, principles and standards.
- Set criteria against which the options will be measured.

Problem Solve:

- Evaluate the Options.
- Determine which options meet the agreed criteria
- Prioritize the options to determine a solution

Implement the Solution:

- Determine who has to do what, when and how.
- Ensure that the decision is communicated and that all parties know their roles.

Evaluate the Solution:

- Did the solution work?
- If not, return to step one.

GROUP ROLE PLAY SIMULATION #1

CONFLICT WITHIN THE SPONSORING GROUP

HOW MUCH DO WE GIVE?

General Instructions

The sponsoring group is meeting to discuss their ongoing relationship with a refugee family originally from Iraq. They sponsored this family to Canada approximately 6 months ago. The family consists of a father (Hussein), a mother (Sufia), and their four young children, ages 3, 5, 7 and 8. The father has a university education from Iraq. He held a management position with a large corporation prior to the family fleeing for political reasons. Since coming to Canada, he has been unemployed. He says that he still has to improve his language skills before he is able to work. His wife has never worked outside of the home, and stays at home looking after her family. Sufia has never left her children alone at home with their father.

The members of the sponsoring group are:

1. **Jack** – The leader of the sponsoring faith community. Jack is supportive of the refugee program but is also very concerned about raising funds for the new community youth centre, proposed as an extension to his building. The refugee program was already in existence when Jack came to this community 1 1/2 years ago. He does not personally have a lot of knowledge about refugees.
2. **Carlos** – a former refugee from Latin America. Carlos joined the faith community and is now active in the sponsoring group helping other refugees come to Canada. Carlos was very successful in adapting to his new culture. He speaks English very well, found a job without much difficulty, and has married a member of the faith community.
3. **Janice** – the sponsoring group member assigned as liaison with this particular family. Janice has been active in refugee work for over twenty-five years. She feels confident that she “knows the ropes” and how to deal effectively with refugee problems. Janice is white, middle-aged and a member of one of the leading families in the community. She and her husband have been major contributors to the building programs.
4. **Gloria** – a young single woman, age 28 years. Gloria is a social worker by profession. She works with low income families, many of whom are newcomers to Canada. Gloria traveled all over Africa and South-East Asia following her graduation from university. She considers herself quite knowledgeable about cultural differences.
5. **Rosemary** – a full time homemaker, mother of four school-aged children, and active church volunteer. Rosemary has taken on a number of the practical aspects of the sponsorship.

Issues that have been raised for discussion at this evening's meeting include:

- a) Transportation for the mother – should she be driven where she needs to go by the sponsor or should she now use public transportation?
- b) Work for the father – how is the sponsoring group going to assist the father move the family toward self-sufficiency?
- c) Should the sponsoring group purchase a washer and dryer for the family, and a new, coloured television set (they were given an old, black and white one)?

Discuss the above issues as a group, using your active listening and probing questioning skills, and the group problem-solving process set out in this section.

GROUP ROLE PLAY SIMULATION # 2

CONFLICT BETWEEN SPONSORING GROUP AND LOCAL SERVICE PROVIDER

The Main Street Group and the St. Francis Settlement House

This is a conflict between a sponsoring group, and the local settlement service provider.

Angelina and her two young children arrived in Canada 8 months ago under a Joint Assistance sponsorship. She and her children fled from Sierra Leone after her husband was killed, and suffered great trauma during their refugee flight. Angelina has been identified as a Woman at Risk. She attended English classes for a few months, but she has told her sponsoring group that she would now like to find a job.

The Main Street Group are her sponsoring group, and have spent a great deal of time with Angelina and her children. The group members have driven her to all of her appointments and activities, and have often looked after her children on very short notice. The group has also worked hard to help Angelina budget the funds she is provided under the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP), but find that they often have to come up with a little bit extra to make sure that she can pay her bills, and provide for her children.

Angelina has attended English classes and the employment workshops at St. Francis Settlement House, the local settlement service provider, and she often goes to meet with Maria, one of the settlement workers.

The sponsoring group has given Angelina a number of leads to follow up for employment, and have driven her to several appointments. She was offered a position that they hoped she would accept, but she thought it was too long a commute on the bus. As Angelina says she is now confident enough to go alone to job interviews, the sponsoring group has encouraged her to take public transit to the appointments. However, she missed the last appointment that was set up for her by a group member.

Angelina has recently complained to Maria that her group isn't providing her with enough support. She says that she can't count on them to help her with her children, or find work, and that she had hoped for more understanding from them. She tells Maria that she is upset that the sponsoring group is putting pressure on her to be more independent, and that she isn't ready. She tells Maria that she is having difficulty with her landlord, but she hasn't told her sponsoring group this because they don't want to hear about her problems. Knowing that Angelina is still suffering from the effects of trauma, Maria is upset that the sponsoring group is so insensitive to Angelina's needs, and that they are pushing her too fast.

Maria arranges a meeting with members of the Main Street Group. She feels this volunteer group needs to understand Angelina's needs better.

Sources of Conflict:

- Different information provided by Angelina to her sponsoring group/ local settlement agency.
- Cultural differences in roles and expectations.
- Impact of post traumatic stress disorder.

The participants in this role play are as follows:

Maria: An experienced settlement worker who is very familiar with refugees from Sierra Leone and the traumas which many of them have faced. Maria thinks that the expectations of the Main Street Group for Angelina are too high, and that Angelina tells them what they want to hear, not what she herself wants. Maria recognizes that Angelina is very ambivalent about leaving her children to go off to work and afraid that something will happen to them while she is away. She also realizes that Angelina was deeply effected by the traumatic loss of her husband, even though she rarely discusses this with anyone. Angelina is now riddled with anxieties and fears which she tends to keep to herself and her family.

Beverly: A homemaker who has done most of the driving and child care for Angelina and her children. Beverly is upset and angry that Angelina made complaints to the settlement worker about a lack of support from her group. Why didn't she tell Beverly if she was upset about something?

George: A senior citizen who spearheaded the Joint Assistance sponsorship. George personally came up with several employment leads for Angelina. He is getting frustrated that although she says she is ready to find work, she has either not followed up or not accepted offers made to her. He suspects that she really isn't ready to work, but doesn't want to dissuade her if she thinks she is ready! George is embarrassed that he has asked his friends to hire Angelina and she has let him down.

Ambrose: worked in Sierra Leone with a government relief agency and got involved in refugee sponsorship when he returned to Canada. Ambrose understands the kinds of horrific experiences many refugees underwent. He has never talked to Angelina about this. Ambrose would like to see Angelina become more independent so that the group can sponsor another refugee family.

APPENDIX A: FEEDBACK FORM

Section

Date

Instructor

Name (Optional)

1. Did the workshop meet your expectations? If so, how? If not, please comment:
2. The most beneficial part of the workshop was...
3. The least beneficial part of the workshop was...
4. Have you any suggestions for improvement?
5. Have you any comments about the workshop facilitator?
6. Any comments on the written materials and exercises?
7. Do you have suggestions for other training that you would like to see offered? Specify.

