

Seventh-day Adventist Church
Conflict and Concord in the Family

Moving to resolution

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Objectives

1. To appreciate the values and threats of conflict in organizational life.
2. To understand the various causes for conflict within an organization.
3. To know practical ways of resolving conflict in the direction of concord.

True or False

- The presence of conflict in the church indicates a spiritual problem.
- Spending time resolving conflict in the organization detracts from accomplishing the mission of the Church.

Many Seventh-day Adventists entertain a theological and spiritual expectation of harmony in domestic and organizational life. The presence of conflict is generally viewed as negative, a sign of disloyalty, unhealthy and destructive.

Having to deal with conflicts is seen as a diversion from mission. Contention carries a stigma—and is often viewed as a sign of organizational ill health.

Perceptions about conflict:

- Almost always viewed as negative.
- A disruption of order and tranquility.
- A battle between competing and incompatible interests.
- Defines the entire relationship.
- Involves a struggle between absolutes.

Conflict in an organization can be beneficial.

One of the major reasons businesses fail or decline is that they cannot readily adapt to changing environments.

When an organization figures out what works it is tempted to become fixated on that. Unless an organization encourages regular and thorough internal challenge it is unlikely to keep up with the changing world. Persistent questioning, inquiry, is essential for remaining current. An body without conflict is dead.

Benefits of conflict/resolution

- Realization of alternative ways of thinking and behaving.
- Clarification and growth in a relationship.
- Increased confidence.
- Less anger and depression.

Benefits of conflict/resolution:—cont'd

- Greater respect from and for others.
- Greater self-respect.
- Improved team atmosphere.
- More collaboration, less competition.
- Reduction of fear.

Encouraging 'good' conflict:

- Encourage people/groups to articulate differences and opinions
- Explore perspectives. Let people know that different points of view are not threatening.
- Listen to newcomers—fresh perspective, not accustomed to status quo.

Encouraging 'good' conflict:—cont'd

- Engage committee members in analysis, evaluating options.
- Deal with one issue at a time.
- Don't tolerate inappropriate behavior—name calling, attribution of motives, discrediting another person, getting personal.
- Practice fairness—be specific, honest, allow for response.

Common sources for conflict:

- Diversity—in perceptions, needs, values, power, desires, goals, opinions. In dealing with conflict the purpose should not be to remove the differences but to use them constructively.
- Unaddressed needs—one or both parties ignore other's needs, obstruct the meeting of needs, or experience incompatibility over what the parties deem essential.

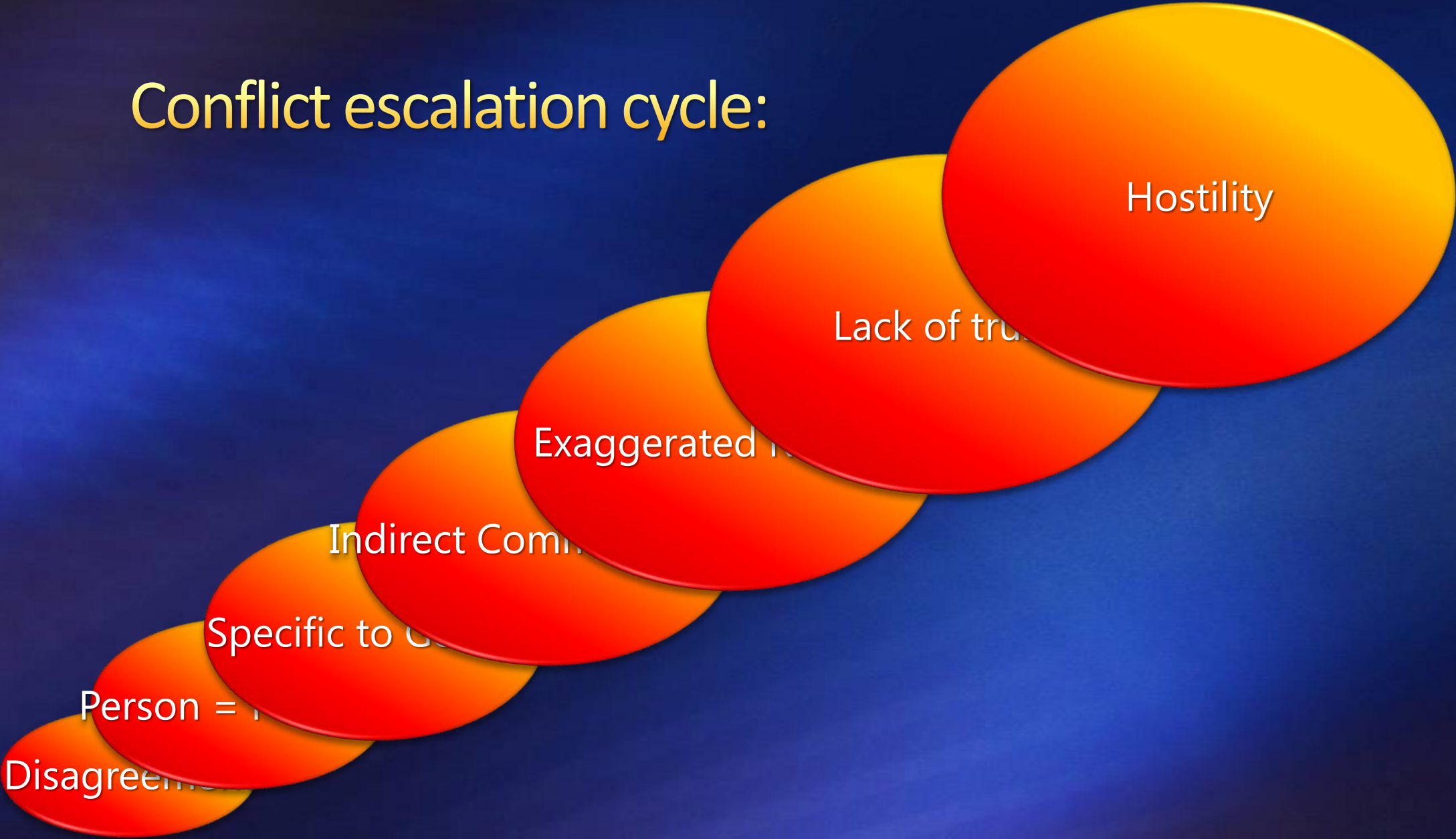
Common sources for conflict:—cont'd

- Perceptions—of self, other, situation, expectations, threat.
- Power—the capacity to act effectively and ability to influence. How power is defined and used plays a role in almost every conflict. Misuse of power to control or gain advantage leads to damaging conflict...

Common sources for conflict:—cont'd

- Values and principles.
- Feelings and emotions.
- Lack of clarity in systems/responsibilities.
- Behavioral styles.
- Communication styles.

Conflict escalation cycle:



Behavioral types (DISC system)

| Focus | Approach | |
|------------------|----------|------------|
| | Fast | Methodical |
| On Tasks | | |
| On Relationships | | |

Behavioral types (DISC system)

| Focus | Approach | |
|------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| | Fast | Methodical |
| On Tasks | Dominance | Conscientious |
| On Relationships | Influence | Steadiness |

What happens under stress:

- High dominance people can become dominating and controlling.
- Influence people become manipulative and overly emotional.
- Steadiness people become passive and give in to others too easily.
- Conscientious people can become paralyzed by their perfectionism and high expectations.

If you understand these differences you can deal with conflict in a way that is productive rather than destructive. One cannot treat these differences as issues of right and wrong—or else chances of resolving conflict in a healthy manner are greatly reduced.

Behavioral styles in an elevator:

- High dominance—step into elevator and push the “close door” button.
- High influence—step into elevator and say, “Come on, there’s room for all.”
- High steadiness—lets everyone step in and waits for the next elevator.
- High conscientious--steps in, sizes up everyone, and then looks at the weight limit charts on the elevator wall.

Conflict resolution behaviors:

- Denial/Avoidance
- Competition
- Accommodation
- Compromise
- Collaboration

Choices when dealing with conflict:

- Avoid
- Give in
- Be passive-aggressive (aggressive behavior that is indirect)
- Bully
- Compromise
- Problem solve
- Honor

Traditional approaches to conflict resolution: negotiation, mediation, arbitration. Each approach seems to reward the party who could find a way to get more out of his/her/their demands, or who could make fewer concessions, or who could perform better on conflict resolution competition. These resolution strategies are primarily adversarial rather than collaborative.

Ineffective conflict resolution:

1. Conquest: often uses power in destructive ways, he who has the power at the start usually has an advantage, polarizes attitudes, “loser” is necessary, does not heal relationships.

Ineffective conflict resolution:

2. Avoidance: Tempting to believe that conflict will disappear if ignored. Merely postpones necessity of dealing with conflict. Deprives opportunity of personal growth and redefinition of relationships.

Ineffective conflict resolution:

3. Bargaining: Each gives up something but remains unsatisfied. Defines power in terms of what one can coerce from the other. Fails to assess needs, values, perceptions, goals and feelings of participants. Tends to focus on arithmetic of negotiation, obscures the relative values of needs and interests held by the parties.

Ineffective conflict resolution:

4. Bandaid: Quick-fix approach. Creates the illusion that fundamental issues have been addressed. Often produces a heightened lack of confidence in conflict resolution procedures. Parties involved do not develop a process of addressing future issues.

Ineffective conflict resolution:

5. Role-player: Boss-subordinate, teacher-student, parent-child, etc. Relates to roles and structures rather than to persons. Perpetuates a fixed relationship that blocks needed changes. Options for resolving conflict are reduced. Creates an adversarial relationship.

Bible counsel on resolving conflict:

- “..endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” —Ephesians 4:3
- “...that they may be made perfect in one.” —John 17:23
- “...let each esteem others better than himself.” —
Philippians 2:3
- “First go and be reconciled to your brother.” —Matthew
5:24

Bible counsel on resolving conflict:

- “If your brother sins against you, go...” —Matthew 18:15
- “...forgiving...as God...forgave you.” —Ephesians 4:32
- “...speaking the truth in love...” —Ephesians 4:15
- “...apostles and elders came together...” —Acts 15:6

“How” things are said is important:

“In the right key one can say anything. In the wrong key, nothing; the only delicate part is the establishment of the key.”

—George Bernard Shaw

“Words have the power to both destroy and heal.
When words are both true and kind, they can change
our world.”

—Buddha

“Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.”

—Ephesians 4:25

Statements that use “but”:

“I love you but you always burn the toast.”

OR

“You always burn the toast but I love you.”

Statements that use “but”:

“It was wrong of me to get so angry, but your behavior really frustrated me.”

OR

“Your behavior really frustrated me, but it was wrong of me to get so angry.”

Embracing and resolving conflict:

1. Address anger appropriately ('cool off' first)
2. Seek understanding (identify the reason)
3. Assume the best (we all get/give filtered info)
4. Share feelings honestly
5. Speak truth respectfully
6. Attack the problem, not the person
7. Deal with specifics, one at a time
8. Ensure a fair process
9. Accept responsibility for mistakes
10. Focus on the future

Conflict management or resolution?

- Conflict management: refers to processes that regulate conflict behavior.
- Conflict settlement: a temporary arrangement or procedure for dealing with a specific problem.
- Conflict resolution: the problem is cleared up, a joint agreement that is self-implementing, does not sacrifice any genuinely important value.

Eight essential steps:

1. Create an effective atmosphere—your personal preparation, timing, location, and initial opening statements. Avoid locking yourself into rigid demands of what the solution must be. Choose a time that does not give an advantage to one. Choose a place that is non-threatening. Try to create a partnership atmosphere.

Eight essential steps:—cont'd

2. Clarify perceptions—Is the conflict over one isolated event or over a consistent pattern of events? Is it over values or preferences, needs or desires, goals or methods. Identify the specific components of the relationship. Begin working on a component that stands a good chance of being resolved. Avoid stereotyping of other party. Use good communication skills

Eight essential steps:—cont'd

3. Focus on needs not demands—individual and shared needs. Try to outline and prioritize specific needs.

Eight essential steps:—cont'd

4. Build shared positive power. Avoid negative power—focuses on attempts to gain advantage over the other, emphasizes power over rather than power with, requires a loser or a subservient rather than a partner. Positive power seeks to promote the constructive capabilities of all parties involved in a conflict.

Eight essential steps:—cont'd

5. Look to the future, then learn from the past. Every relationship has a past, present and future. Try first to focus on the present-future. Temptation will be to focus only on past because that is where injury, suspicion or mistrust began to occur.

*Forgiveness looks forward,
vengeance looks backward.*

Eight essential steps:—cont'd

6. Generate options. Look for more than packaged standard responses. Generating options can often break through preconceived limitations.

Eight essential steps:—cont'd

7. Develop specific action steps. Not satisfactory to merely identify a desired outcome.

Eight essential steps:—cont'd

8. Make mutual benefit agreements. Become a caretaker of the partner's welfare. Clarify specific responsibilities. Understand and respect the needs of each other.

1. What conflict situations are reported in the Bible and how can we learn from them?
2. What should be done when conflicts apparently cannot be resolved?
3. What current conflict situations do we face in the Seventh-day Adventist Church? What resolution principles will help the most in dealing with these situations?

- *Leadership & Conflict*, Speed B Leas, Abingdon, 1982
- *Mastering Conflict and Controversy*, Dobson, Leas, Shelley, Multnomah Press, 1992
- Notes from conflict management seminar (Randall Wright) conducted at General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, August 13, 1996
- *The Coward's Guide to Conflict*, Tim Ursiny, Sourcebooks, Inc. 2003
- *The Eight Essential Steps to Conflict Resolution*, Dudley Weeks, Tarcher/Putnam, 1994