A Look Inside Conflict: Critical Thinking for the Conflict Resolution Professional

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Immersed in conflict, interesting things happen to us as humans. Based on the work of psychologists Rubin, Pruitt, and Kim, this session explores the socio-psychological factors behind student’s behaviors and reactions in conflict situations as a means of informing how we work with students on campus.
Session Roadmap

• We will cover:
  – Creation
  – Escalation
  – Stalemate

• We will **not** cover:
  – Settlement options or mechanisms
  – Nuances related to group conflicts
  – Conditions that discourage conflict
Where Does Conflict Come From?

• Various theories:
  – Individual/characteristic
  – Social process
  – Social structure
  – Identity
How Does Conflict Start?

Three conditions
1. Individual interests & aspirations
2. Perceived divergence of interests
3. Relative depravation
   • Alerts you to the existence of conflict
   • Creates energy for coping mechanisms
Will Conflict Escalate?

- Perceptive Factors
  - Lens of Self
  - Lens of Other

- Situational Factors
  - Personal
  - Environmental
  - Relational
  - Communal
Which Strategy Will Be Employed?

• Avoiding
• Yielding
• Problem-Solving
• Contending
Contentious Tactics

- Ingratiation
- Gamesmanship
- Guilt trips
- Persuasive argument
- Threats
- Irrevocable commitments
- Engagement
Escalation:
Structural Changes

• Tactics: light to heavy
• Size: small to large
• Issues: specific to general
  Goals: doing well to winning, to hurting other
• Participants: few to many
Escalation: Psychological Changes

- Attributional Bias
- Reactive Devaluation
- Deindividuation
- Dehumanization
Escalation:
Perceptive Changes

• Other seen as morally deficient, dishonest, incapable, unfriendly, selfish, inhumane, or warlike

• Party seen as morally virtuous, trustworthy, able, honest
Why Do Conflicts Remain Escalated?

- Residue
- Confirmatory Mechanisms
Confirmatory Mechanisms

• Self-fulfilling prophecies
• Rationalization of behavior
• Selective perception
  – Selective evaluation of behavior
  – “Discovery” of confirming evidence
  – Attributional distortion
• Autistic hostility
• Overcommitment and entrapment
Effects of Sustained Escalation

- Easier to blame other for party’s suffering
- Ambiguous actions now seen as threatening
- Inhibitions against retaliation are diminished
- Empathy is reduced
- Communication slows/stops
- Zero-sum thinking/planning
When Does Escalation Stop?

- Party Contends to Success By:
  - overwhelming other
  - taking unilateral advantage of other
- Party yields
- Party avoids
- Conflict is perceived as intolerable and as something that needs to be ended in an alternative fashion
  - STALEMATE!
Why Does Stalemate Occur?

- Failure of contentious tactics
- Exhaustion of necessary resources
- Loss of social support
- Unacceptable costs
What Happens Next?

• At first, very little…
• Reassessment of options:
  – Self-Help
  – Trial
  – Arbitration
  – Problem-Solving
    • Mediation
    • Negotiation
  – Yielding
  – Avoiding
Questions?

Comments?

Advice?

Requests?
Thank You!

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Conflict Resolution Committee Mtg.
Friday, 2:00-3:00pm - Sawgrass Room