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Understanding and Leveraging Conflict in Volunteer Organizations

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August 22, 2012, 3:10 p.m. - 6:10 p.m.
2012 MOWAA Annual Conference
Gaylord National Harbor Hotel

VOLUNTEER

"If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people together to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea."

-Antoine de Saint-Exupery

Interpersonal Communication 101

- Activity – Why "effective" communication can be so challenging

- Basic Principles:
  o Communication is inevitable
  o We use communication to fulfill goals
  o Interpersonal communication consists of nonverbal and verbal messages
  o Interpersonal communication varies in effectiveness
  o Every message contains both content and relational information

- Berry definition for "effective" communication:

  ### Message Sent = Message Received
  (Goal is to achieve shared meaning)

Slide 1

COMMUNICATION

RELATIONSHIP

"Understanding the interpersonal communication
process demands an understanding of the symbiotic
relationship between communication and relational
development: communication influences relational
development, and in turn (or simultaneously) relational
development influences the nature of the
communication between parties to the relationship"
(Miller, 1976, p. 15).

Slide 2

Model of Communication Competence

Motivation
Approach-Avoidance
Goals/Expectations
Commitment
Self Concept

Communication
Competence

Skill/Behavior
Encoding/Decoding
messages
Self monitoring &
Adaptability
Listening

Knowledge
Context & Culture
Communication Styles
& Types
Roles/Relationships
Channels

*"Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed
until it is faced."*
- James Arthur Baldwin (novelist and playwright)

Slide 3

Model of Communication Competence

- Communication competence is...
  - "a situational ability to set realistic and appropriate goals and to maximize their achievement by using knowledge of self, other, context, and communication theory to generate adaptive communication performances." (Phillips, 2000)
- Our ability to communicate in a competent manner is facilitated when we:
  - Are **knowledgeable** about self, other, topic, context and communication in general
  - Are **motivated** to communicate
  - Are effective and appropriate in the performance of communication **skills**
- Research suggests that interpersonal competence
  - Increases job satisfaction (Wertz et al, 1988)
  - Enables the development of meaningful relationships (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989)

By seeking a greater understanding of communication,
increased self-awareness and the ongoing practice of
appropriate skills – we are better positioned to shape the
outcomes of difficult conversations.

Model of Communication Competence

- Communication competence is a matter of...
  - Perception – self and other
    - Subjective measurement to a certain degree (art not science)
    - Is dynamic from one situation to the next
  - Appropriateness and Effectiveness
    - Fitting for the situation
    - Accomplishes goals – civil and ethical?
  - Ongoing commitment to the art
- According to Lane (2011) – like actors we should...
  - Know our lines
  - Have an impetus to act; and
 - Give a good performance

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Communication Competence (Knowledge)

Knowledge is the information that gives us power to make decisions about communicating (Lane, 2011) – includes information about ourselves, our conversation partner(s), the topic, the situation and the process itself (p. 9).

Communication Styles (Jung)
- Dominant/preferred style is relatively constant
- Can "flex" when needed
  - Direct
  - Spirited
  - Considerate
  - Systematic
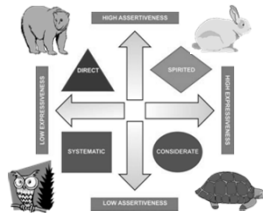
Communication Competence (Knowledge)

- Context – synonym for situation
  - Physical location or characteristics of an environment that affect communication
    - Formality
    - Historical reference
    - Relational
    - Psychological/Temporal
    - Emotional
  - Having "soft eyes" helps pick up on cues
- Roles/Relationships
  - Knowing our role within a given relationship shapes the intention behind the communication
    - Goals – self presentational, instrumental, relational
    - Expectations – who is responsible for what?

Communication Competence (Knowledge)

- Culture – shared assumptions, values, and beliefs of a group of people result in characteristic behaviors (Lane, 2011)
  - o Individualist vs. Collectivist
  - o Organizational
  - o Difference in meanings
  - o Beware of ethnocentrism!
    - Confront your stereotypes

Communication Competence (Motivation)

Motivation is our desire to engage in communication. It is shaped by our:
- Self-concept & Self-esteem
  - o Open – we know and others know
  - o Hidden – we know and others do not
  - o Blind – others know and we do not
  - o Unknown – yet to be discovered
- Approach/Avoidance Strategies
  - Social anxiety (communication apprehension)
    - o Self talk
    - o Self fulfilling prophecy
  - Seeking forgiveness
- Commitment – to becoming increasingly self aware
  - o Genuine desire

Communication Competence (Motivation)

- Goals/Expectations
  - o Perceived reward?
  - o Self disclosure – potential negative outcome?
- Sensitivity
  - o Perception checking – recognizing and appreciating differences
  - o "Walk a mile in my shoes"
  - o Managing and owning our emotions

Communication Competence (Skill)

"Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do."
– Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (German Playwright)

Skills refer to goal-oriented actions or sequences that are performed – observable behaviors we can master and repeat (Lane, 2011).

- Encoding/Decoding verbal and non-verbal messages
  - ○ Using specific and concrete words to convey meaning
  - ○ Recognizing the interaction of verbal and non-verbal cues to convey meaning
    - Paralanguage
    - Be careful of asymmetric communication!
- Active & Empathic Listening
  - ○ Different than hearing – involves interaction
  - ○ Listening barriers – noise and selective attention

Communication Competence (Skill)

- Adaptability/Self-monitoring
  - ○ "Possessing and utilizing a diverse behavioral repertoire, avoiding overly stylized behavior patterns and effectively adjusting to changes in the surrounding context" (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989)
  - ○ Creativity in novel situations
  - ○ Emotional Self Management (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009)
  - ○ Cope with problematic situations
    - Maintain "face" of fellow interactants during conflict
- Conversational Management
  - ○ Opening lines
  - ○ Cooperation in turn taking
  - ○ Special considerations for organizational communication

Conflict – Challenge or Opportunity?

- Conflict defined as "disagreement between two interdependent people who **perceive** that they have incompatible goals" (Guerrero, Anderson & Affifi, 2011).
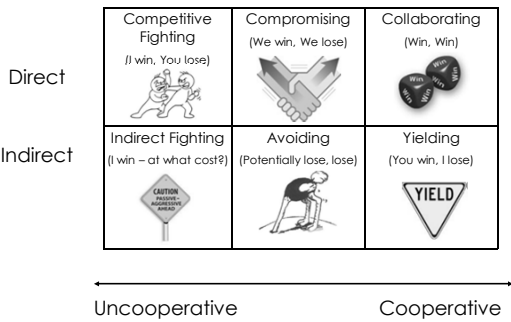
Reframing Conflict as Opportunity

"Peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of creative alternatives for responding to conflict -- alternatives to passive or aggressive responses, alternatives to violence."
– Dorothy Thompson (Renowned Journalist)

- Conflict is not <u>inherently</u> negative – it is all about how it is managed
- Conflict is inevitable
  o Advantages – stronger relationships, diversity of ideas and options to explore
- Important to recognize conflict styles – and that they are dynamic according to relationship and context
  o Cooperative vs. Uncooperative
  o Direct vs. Indirect

Understanding Conflict Styles

	Competitive Fighting (I win, You lose)	Compromising (We win, We lose)	Collaborating (Win, Win)
Direct			
Indirect	Indirect Fighting (I win – at what cost?)	Avoiding (Potentially lose, lose)	Yielding (You win, I lose)

Uncooperative ———————→ Cooperative

Identifying and Managing Conflict

- We can't always prevent conflict so we have to be prepared to address it
- Tips:
  o Assess the situation – recognize the power of "perception" and the tenets of "communication competence"
    • Remember… You are only ½
  o Take a deep breath - open your eyes and ears
  o Visualize a positive relational outcome

- Engaging in a difficult conversation? Take it step by step and remember to use **DICE** ☺
  o **D**iscover
  o **I**nterpret
  o **C**larify
  o **Ex**plore Solutions

Having Difficult Conversations

"It is not enough to know that they see things differently. If you want to influence them, you need also to understand empathetically the power of their point of view and to feel the emotional force with which they believe it."
(Fisher & Ury, Getting to Yes)

- **D**iscover
  - Enter with curiosity – ask questions, no assumptions
- **I**nterpret
  - Digest their POV and explain back what you have understood
    - "Did I get that right?"
- **C**larify
  - Connect similarities and clarify your POV without minimizing theirs
- **E**xplore Solutions
  - Brainstorm options for resolution – find aspects of your partner's solutions you like and build on them
  - Maintain an attitude of inquiry
    - If becomes adversarial return to "discover"

Tips and Tactics for Preventing Conflict

- Remember that the small stuff counts
  - Transparency in communication
  - Communicate early and often
  - Onboarding
- Give volunteers "real" assignments
  - Duties and training
  - Provide growth opportunities
- Involve volunteers in planning
  - Co-leadership or decision making when possible
- Recognize and value contributions
- Periodically…
  - Discuss the volunteer relationship
  - Analyze/Evaluate the role of volunteers – need to recognize the "uniqueness"
- Don't accept poor work

Resources

- Bradberry, T. & Greaves, J. (2009). Emotional Intelligence 2.0. New York: Fireside.
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- IMAGO Dialogue - http://gettingtheloveyouwant.com/articles/imago-dialogue-101
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- Miller, G. R. (1976). Explorations in interpersonal communication. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Ragan Healthcare Newsletter – http://www.healthcarecommunication.com/Main/Articles/8626.aspx
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- Teven, J. J., Richmond, V. P., McCroskey, J. C., & McCroskey, L. L. (2010). Updating relationships between communication traits and communication competence. Communication Research Reports, 27, p. 263-270.
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Difficult Conversations: Understanding and Leveraging Conflict in Volunteer Organizations
August 22, 2012, 3:10 p.m. - 6:10 p.m.
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2012 MOWAA Annual Conference
August 23, 2012
Difficult Conversations: Understanding and Leveraging Conflict in Volunteer Organizations
Presenter: Corinne N. Berry, M.A., Adjunct Professor, George Mason University

Outline for Workshop:

I.   Introductions & Activity - Why "effective communication" can be so challenging
    a. Interpersonal Communication 101
II.   Communication Competence – we can only seek to improve ourselves

"Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced."
– James Arthur Baldwin (Novelist and Playwright)

    a. Knowledge – By understanding communicative behaviors (our own and others) and the environmental impact, we are better positioned to shape the outcomes of difficult conversations.
        i. Communication styles
        ii. Context & Culture

    b. Motivation – By continually increasing our self-awareness and renewing our commitment to dialogic communication, we can potentially reduce the frequency of personal conflicts.
        i. Sensitivity & Commitment
        ii. Approach/Avoidance

    c. Skills – By practicing communicative skills that are appropriate and effective for the given context, we are more likely to experience positive outcomes and improved relationships following conflict.
        i. Verbal and non-verbal messages
        ii. Active & Empathic Listening (Listening barriers)
        iii. Adaptability

III.   Reframing Conflict – Challenge or Opportunity?

"Peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of creative alternatives for responding to conflict -- alternatives to passive or aggressive responses, alternatives to violence."
– Dorothy Thompson (Renowned Journalist)

a. Conflict styles
    b. Identifying and Managing conflict (DICE)
        i. Discover
        ii. Interpret
        iii. Clarify
        iv. Explore solutions
    c. Tips and tactics for preventing conflict

IV.   Recap and Discussion