The Circle of Conflict Adaptation
Based on Christopher W. Moore’s Circle of Conflict
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1. What is the Circle of Conflict?

Developed by Christopher Moore, the circle of conflict identified five sources of conflict: values, relationships, data, interests, and structure. To support moving to action and results, the circle is adapted to include a sixth category – language conflicts, and expands values conflicts to include adaptive challenges.

2. Applying the Circle of Conflict

1. Observe what people are saying and doing
2. Identify and name one or more sources of conflict
3. Take action where you can to address and resolve conflict.

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If you see or hear….. | You might….
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**VALUES CONFLICTS**

- **People** leaving the room (flight)
- Strong disagreements about what is right or wrong (fight)
- Avoidance of specific topics
- Reacting to specific topics as if discussing the topic will challenge identity or assumptions the way the world is

Name the type of **values disagreements** and choose an appropriate approach.
- Adopt a group norm, such as respectful listening to address habits.
- Explore underlying assumptions and experience to develop options to address differences in principles.
- Use appreciative inquiry to explore similarities and differences in worldviews and belief systems and illuminate the benefits of working together.

**RELATIONSHIP CONFLICTS**

- People choosing where to sit to avoid someone
- Awkward silences and meaningful glances in response to who is speaking
- Tension seemingly unrelated to the substantive topic.

- Explore **relationships barriers** by noticing here and how the tension shows up - between which people or groups?
- Find ways for the people holding the tension to experience each other in new ways. As mutual understanding develops begin to address the history of their relationship through redress, acceptance, or forgiveness.

**DATA CONFLICTS**

- Differences about data relevance
- Different interpretations of the same data
- Different ways of collecting data.

- Bring the **data challenges** explicitly into the conversation and focus on the use different data, different definitions, and different interpretations.
- Encourage the use of the “best available data” and work together to develop “better data”.

**LANGUAGE CONFLICTS**

- Same words mean different things.
- People “cross-talking”, e.g., not being in the same conversation
- People “listening for” different things.

- Identify the language differences and focus on meaning underlying the words, rather than the words themselves.
- Encourage the use of common language with common definitions.
- Explore MBTI3 communication preferences.

**INTEREST CONFLICTS**

- Zero sum mentality
- People holding a position
- People not exploring each other’s interests or articulating their own.

- Illuminate the competing interests underlying people’s positions and use Interest Based Negotiation4 to achieve a 'win-win” solution by separating the “people” from the “problem”, building relationships, and adopting criteria to choose options BEFORE making decisions

**STRUCTURAL CONFLICTS**

- People looking to others for “permission” to speak
- Fear, anger about the “way things are”
- Use of hierarchical authority in collaborative settings.
- An “inner circle” with more influence
- Speech and/or behavior inferring that one gender, race, class or culture is “subordinate” to another.

- Name the structural factors influencing behavior.
- Find opportunities for people to create conversations about those factors and how they affect their roles and authority.
- Develop strategies to either:
  - Move to action on the structural factors that are within the individual or collective spheres of influence
  - Identify structural elements that others can influence and enroll them

3. **Conflict Orientation**

Everyone has an orientation towards conflict. Take time to reflect on yours conflict and that of others. The orientation that supports movement from talk to action has two elements:

1. Conflict is normal and necessary to the work of achieving results
2. It is possible to address and resolve conflicts.

Find opportunities to practice holding this orientation as you apply the Circle of Conflict.

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3 Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Consulting Psychological Press