# THE EVOLUTION OF

# MEMBER CONFLICT

# IN HOUSING CO-OPERATIVES

By Mike Balkwill
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Balkwill & Associates

March, 1993

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# ABSTRACT

This study examines *identifiable patterns to the evolution of conflict in non-profit community-based organizations*, of which housing co-ops are an example, and considers the causes which might account for these patterns. The researchers worked from the premise that there exist *structural circumstances and developmental patterns of organizations which place people in inevitable situations of conflict*. This premise was tested in three housing co-operatives using a participatory group assessment exercise called Lifeline Analysis.

Through a review of the literature on conflict resolution, organizational theory and relationship theory, and drawing heavily on the conflict cycle presented by the Movement for a New Society, the Journey metaphor offered by Susan Campbell, and the Stratified System theory developed by Elliott Jaques, the authors have suggested a new paradigm and framework for understanding the evolution of conflict in housing co-operatives. *This framework places the conflict cycle of co-ops within the larger developmental process of communities as they move from young, idealistic bodies to become mature, interdependent groups.*

The authors conclude that *conflict is both an indicator of the need for growth and a catalyst for the growth process in organizations*. Housing co-operatives, and non-profit organizations, can use this framework to improve the structures of decision-making within their organizations and to better understand conflict as an opportunity for growth and development.

Includes Appendices and Bibliography.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study examines *identifiable patterns to the evolution of conflict in non-profit community-based organizations*, of which housing co-ops are an example, and considers the causes which might account for these patterns. The researchers worked from the premise that there exist *structural circumstances and developmental patterns of organizations which place people in inevitable situations of conflict*. This premise was tested in three housing co-operatives using a participatory group assessment exercise called Lifeline Analysis.

First, we noticed a pattern of similar events which occurred across different co-operatives. Second, the group conflict was often characterized by two very active groups, each usually made up of no more than five percent of the membership. Third, the overwhelming majority of the participants in these struggles were "good people", well-meaning and dedicated to fostering a participatory, democratic, co-operative community.

Why did these conflicts occur? What was behind the apparent pattern to the events and behaviours of these conflicts? Why did the conflicts seem to persist so long in the co-operatives? Why did the participants in the conflict seem to be characterized by such sincere dedication to co-operative ideals? Why did the conflicts seem to be such a baffling thing for co-op members to solve?

Whenever independent parties with different needs, experiences and values are brought together, conflict can occur. While this is true of any personal relationship, it becomes more clear and pronounced in group settings.

As well, a certain amount of conflict is built into the structural circumstances of co-operative and non-profit organizations by the confusion created about the way in which managerial responsibility should be structured in a co-operative organization. There is significant disagreement present in non-profit organizations over whether the organization should be run "like a business", or "as a community". Balancing the hierarchical management of tasks with the democratic determination of goals and values is still an embryonic art in the practice of managing non-profit co-operative organizations.

Conflict also seemed to be the result of *inter-group competition focused around issues dealing with the distribution of resources in the organization.*

Finally, conflict arises at threshold periods of organizational growth as an expression of the need for increased specialization and autonomy. *Conflict, therefore, is both an indicator of the need for growth and a catalyst for the growth process in organizations.*

It was hoped to determine from the Lifeline Analysis and a literature review what interventions, if any, might lead to the resolution of the conflicts and to the formation of skills, knowledge and confidence within the organization as a whole. Being able to identify a framework to explain patterns of conflict would give resource groups, Boards of Directors, and co-op staff a tool to plan for, and resolve, conflicts much as they plan for long-term maintenance and finances.

Through the review of the literature on conflict resolution, organizational theory and relationship theory, and drawing heavily on the conflict cycle presented by the Movement for a New Society, the Journey metaphor offered by Susan Campbell, and the Stratified System theory developed by Elliott Jaques, the authors have suggested a new paradigm and framework for understanding the evolution of conflict in housing co-operatives. *This framework places the conflict cycle of co-ops within the larger developmental process of communities as they move from young, idealistic bodies to become mature, interdependent groups.*

Participants in this study immediately applied the paradigm to identify and explain conflict issues in their cooperatives. Participants agreed that:

- there are stages to a co-op's development and that conflict is experienced at different points in the life of the co-operative;
- it is important for co-op members to recognize the inevitability of conflict as this is the first step in understanding and dealing with conflict constructively;
- many co-ops get "stuck" in the perpetual cycle of conflict and crisis;
- in order for co-ops to move through the developmental stages they need tools to help them recognize, manage and deal with conflict in a positive way; and,
- co-ops need to find a way to talk about "participation" in relation to the developmental stages using this paradigm and framework. The approach members of a housing co-operative adopt towards participation will affect their ability to move successfully through the developmental stages.

The authors conclude that housing co-operatives, and non-profit organizations, need to re-examine both the structures of decision-making within their organizations and the role that conflict plays as they continue to grow and develop.

For the purposes of this report, it was also appropriate to briefly suggest some conflict resolution strategies. The material in Appendix C is meant to give practical steps and techniques of intervention, while embedding an understanding of activities which occur during this stage within a larger conflict evolution and resolution paradigm. Initially, however, conflict must be seen as occurring along a continuum from the interpersonal, to the inter-group, to the community and ultimately the societal level. Conflict *resolution,* the authors argue, must occur at all these levels as well.

*Évolution des conflits survenant entre les*
*membres des coopératives d'habitation*

**RÉSUMÉ**

L'étude traite des modèles décelables de l'évolution des conflits dans les organismes communautaires sans but lucratif, comme les coopératives d'habitation, et examine les causes qui pourraient être à l'origine de ces situations. Les chercheurs se sont fondés sur l'affirmation selon laquelle il existe des circonstances liées à la structure et des modèles évolutifs d'organismes qui entraînent les gens dans des situations de conflit inévitables. Cette affirmation a été vérifiée dans trois coopératives d'habitation à l'aide d'un exercice participatif d'évaluation de groupe appelée Lifeline Analysis (analyse contextuelle).

Premièrement, nous avons remarqué un modèle de situations communes à diverses coopératives. Deuxièmement, le conflit était souvent caractérisé par deux groupes très actifs, chacun étant habituellement composé d'au plus 5 p. 100 des membres. Troisièmement, la grande majorité des participants à ces luttes étaient de «bonnes personnes», bien intentionnées et ayant à coeur de favoriser la participation, la démocratie et la coopération au sein des organismes.

Pourquoi ces conflits se produisaient-ils? Qu'y avait-il derrière le modèle apparent des circonstances et des comportements à la source de ces conflits? Pourquoi les conflits semblaient-ils persister au sein des coopératives? Pourquoi les participants aux conflits semblaient-ils caractérisés par une telle aspiration aux idéaux de coopération? Pourquoi les conflits semblaient-ils représenter un problème si difficile à résoudre?

Chaque fois que des partis indépendants ayant des besoins, des expériences et des valeurs différentes sont réunis, il y a risque de conflit. Bien que ce fait s'applique à toute relation personnelle, il devient encore plus évident et marqué chez les groupes.

De plus, un certain nombre de conflits sont inhérents à la structure des coopératives et des organismes sans but lucratif étant donné la confusion qui règne autour des responsabilités de gestion dans de tels organismes. Il y a une importante divergence d'opinions parmi les organismes sans but lucratif. Doit-on gérer l'organisme «comme une entreprise» ou «comme une communauté»? L'équilibre entre la gestion hiérarchique des tâches et la détermination démocratique des buts et des valeurs n'en est qu'au stade embryonnaire dans l'administration des organismes coopératifs sans but lucratif.

Les conflits semblaient également résulter d'une compétition entre groupes au sujet de problèmes ayant trait à la distribution des ressources au sein de l'organisme.

Enfin, les conflits apparaissaient à la veille des périodes de croissance organisationnelle comme le symbole d'un besoin accru de spécialisation et d'autonomie. Les conflits sont donc à la fois un indicateur du besoin de croissance et un élément catalyseur du processus de croissance dans les organismes.

On espérait déterminer, à partir de la Lifeline Analysis et de l'examen de la documentation, les interventions, s'il en existe, qui pourraient favoriser la solution des conflits et la création d'aptitudes, de connaissances et de confiance au sein de l'ensemble de l'organisation. L'établissement d'un cadre de référence expliquant les modèles de conflits mettrait à la disposition des groupes de ressources techniques, des conseils d'administration et des employés des coopératives, un instrument leur

permettant de planifier et de résoudre les conflits de la même manière qu'ils planifient à long terme l'entretien et les dépenses.

Ayant examiné la documentation relative à la solution des conflits et à la théorie de l'organisation et des relations, et s'inspirant largement du cycle des conflits présenté par le Movement for a New Society ainsi que du concept de la métaphore Journey proposé par Susan Campbell et de la théorie Stratified System élaborée par Elliott Jaques, les auteurs ont proposé un nouveau modèle et un nouveau cadre de référence pour la compréhension de l'évolution des conflits dans les coopératives d'habitation. Ce cadre de référence situe le cycle des conflits dans le processus de développement plus large des communautés au fur et à mesure qu'elles cessent d'être des groupes jeunes et idéalistes et qu'elles atteignent leur pleine maturité et leur interdépendance.

Les participants à l'étude ont immédiatement tenté de relever et d'expliquer les problèmes conflictuels de leur coopérative. Les participants ont reconnu les points suivants :

- il existe des étapes dans l'évolution d'une coopérative et les conflits apparaissent à différents moments dans la vie de la coopérative;
- il est important pour les membres des coopératives de reconnaître le caractère inévitable des conflits car il s'agit là de la première étape vers la compréhension et la négociation constructives de la situation;
- de nombreuses coopératives demeurent «embourbées» dans le cycle perpétuel des conflits et des situations de crise;
- pour traverser les étapes de leur évolution, les coopératives ont besoin d'outils qui leur permettent de faire face aux conflits, de les reconnaître et de les gérer de manière positive;
- les coopératives doivent trouver une façon de parler de la «participation» dans le contexte des étapes d'évolution à l'aide de ce modèle et du cadre de référence. La méthode qu'adopteront les membres des coopératives d'habitation à l'égard de la participation touchera leur capacité de franchir avec succès les étapes de leur évolution.

Les auteurs concluent que les coopératives d'habitation et les organismes sans but lucratif doivent réexaminer à la fois les structures de prise de décisions de leur organisation et le rôle que les conflits jouent à mesure que ces groupes croissent et évoluent.

Aux fins du rapport, il convenait également de proposer brièvement quelques stratégies de solution de conflits. Les documents de l'annexe C visent à présenter des étapes et des techniques d'intervention pratiques tout en englobant une compréhension des activités qui se déroulent pendant cette étape dans un modèle d'évolution et de solution de conflit plus vaste. Au départ, cependant, le conflit doit être perçu comme une situation survenant d'abord entre les personnes, puis entre les groupes, et finalement au niveau de la collectivité et de la société. Selon les auteurs, la solution de conflits doit avoir lieu à tous ces niveaux.

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# CONTENTS

# INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

For the past twelve years, Balkwill & Associates have been working as community development consultants with a wide range of non-profit organizations most of which have experienced conflict of one kind or another. One type of organization we have worked with is housing co-operatives. Almost all of our work with housing co-ops has been initiated by a call from a member of the co-operative or the Board of Directors to request assistance to constructively resolve a conflict. The presenting issues in these conflicts ranged from general concerns about participation, to sharp conflicts between neighbours and power competitions between committees and the Board of Directors around policy issues.

Balkwill & Associates initiated this study because we came to believe that *there is an identifiable pattern to the evolution of conflict in non-profit community-based organizations*, of which housing co-ops are an example.

First, we noticed a pattern of similar events which occurred across different co-operatives. These events included:

- high expectations with a high degree of enthusiasm, and the forging of intense friendships at the "moving in" stage of the co-operative;
- a sudden dramatic public conflict event which everyone identifies as the "end of the honeymoon";
- the breaking up of some newly-formed personal friendships in the co-operative;
- a growing tension between the founding members of the co-operative and a "new guard" that leads to the formation of groups or factions within the co-operative who oppose each other on many issues. The opposition

often leads to a kind of paralysis of the management structure of the co-operative; and,

- a keen sense of disappointment among leaders in the co-operative at the occurrence of this conflict, and a feeling that the conflict is evidence of "bad" leadership on their part.

Consistent themes emerged over time from an analysis of why these events occurred. Usually there was a long detailed history of events leading up to the dramatic public event that heralded the "end of the honeymoon", or which preceded the management paralysis of the co-operative.

Second, the group conflict was often engaged by two very active groups, each usually made up of no more than five percent of the membership. The distinct parties to the conflict remained relatively stable over the life of the community. These groups did not dissolve or re-combine according to the specific conflicts which developed. There were several other identifiable groups in the co-operative whose membership also remained stable, and whose affiliation to the other two competing groups switched based on the particular issue in play at the time. It seemed that these groups were based on friendship networks, but while inter-group competition was *between* these friendship groups, the actual arena for competition was the various committees, board and membership meetings of the co-operative.

Third, the overwhelming majority of the participants in these struggles were "good people". They were well-meaning and dedicated to fostering a participatory, democratic, co-operative community. They were not "bad people". They all believed that the success of *their* group in the conflict was critical to the community's ability to realize its co-operative ideals.

These observations raised several questions for us. Why did these conflicts occur? What was behind the apparent pattern to the events and behaviours of these conflicts? Why did the conflicts seem to persist so long in the co-operatives? Why did the participants in the conflict seem to be characterized by such sincere dedication to co-operative ideals? Why did the conflicts seem to be such a baffling thing for co-op members to solve?

Our experience with co-operative and community organizations, as well as reading we had done on this topic, led us to develop a hypothesis about the evolution of conflict in community-based organizations.

We began our current research with the premise that *the structural circumstances and developmental patterns of organizations place people in inevitable situations of conflict.* Whenever independent parties with different needs, experiences and values are brought together, conflict can occur. While this is true of any personal relationship, it becomes more clear and pronounced in group settings. Organizations are, at their simplest, webs of relationships among individuals and groups.

As well, a certain amount of conflict is built into the structural circumstances of co-operative and non-profit organizations by the confusion created about the way in which managerial responsibility should be structured in a co-operative organization. We feel that non-profit organizations are community-based businesses. They bring together the efficiency and hierarchy of tasks of the business organization, and the effectiveness of community-based, democratic, collective organizations. We have learned that a significant tension present in the structure of non-profit organizations is disagreement over whether the organization should be run "like a business", or "as a community". Balancing the hierarchical management of tasks with the democratic determination of goals and values is still an embryonic art in the practice of managing non-profit co-operative organizations.

Conflict, we proposed, seemed to be the result of inter-group competition in an organization, not of competition among individuals, although publicly the issue may appear to be between two or three individual protagonists. *The inter-group competition seems to focus around issues dealing with the distribution of resources in the organization.*

The final element in our hypothesis was the notion that *conflict is both an indicator of the need for growth and a catalyst for the growth process in organizations.* Organizations, as they grow in size, take on more complex tasks and develop functional specializations to manage them. This in turn creates the need for both autonomy and co-operation among the constituent parts of the organization. Conflict arises at threshold periods of organizational growth as an expression of the need for increased specialization and autonomy.

## AIMS AND METHODOLOGY OF THIS STUDY

To test our hypothesis, we wanted to look in a systematic way at the evolution of specific conflicts in targeted housing co-operatives. We chose a participatory assessment tool called Lifeline Analysis to gather information from co-ops selected for our sample. We chose to do a focused literature review to complement our more randomly chosen readings from our consulting experience. The literature review was undertaken while we were conducting the Lifeline Analysis workshops with the co-operatives participating in the study. There was a strong interaction, therefore, between the learning that occurred for us from the literature review, and through our field research, with each activity informing the other. Finally, we hoped to determine from both of these activities what interventions, if any, might lead to the resolution of the conflicts and to the formation of skills, knowledge and confidence within the organization as a whole.

Historically, conflict has been seen by people in the co-operative housing sector as something that is unpredictable and problematic when it occurs. However, participants at the national conference of co-op housing educators held in Paris, Ontario in September, 1990, concluded that conflict is a serious and consistent characteristic of member relations in many housing co-operatives. The conference established as one priority researching case examples of "what goes wrong" in housing co-operatives. Participants believed that having a framework to explain patterns of conflict would give resource groups, Boards of Directors, and co-op staff a tool to plan for, and resolve, conflicts much as they plan for long-term maintenance and finances.

We believe organizations have a choice in how to play out their conflicts. Groups can choose to base the conflict on issues and resolve it constructively, in public, within agreed-upon parameters. Many authors and practitioners have said that conflict handled in a constructive way is the "oxygen of change and growth". The more common occurrence, or "choice", in community groups, is a conflict based on personalities; a destructive, secretive contest played with no apparent rules.

The difficulty for people in choosing constructive ways of dealing with conflict is finding a model or framework that enables them to see the patterns in conflict, and gives them an awareness and consciousness of conflict as a "normal" dynamic in community and organizational life. We hope this study will provide

people with a first, tentative model or framework and that they will *choose* to use it, as participants, mediators and facilitators, to make conflict a more constructive and creative experience.

## LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

This study is exploratory and descriptive. The outcomes are, therefore, limited in their application. Our model of the evolution of conflict is proposed to further an understanding of this dynamic, but the study does not endeavour to demonstrate causality, outside of the context of the sample of co-operatives which participated in the study. The number of participants in the study was small. The small size of the sample allowed for a deep data-gathering process and understanding of the dynamics under investigation, however, it decreases the ability to apply the results broadly, to all co-operative organizations. Participating co-operatives are all from southern Ontario, in urban or suburban settings. There may, therefore be an "urban" bias to the findings that does not apply as well in rural, northern or international community settings.

## STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

This report is structured, as closely as possible, to resemble the actual chronology of the research. We begin, in this Introduction, with our hypothesis and reasons for initiating this study. In Chapter 1 we present the findings of the Lifeline Analysis workshops, followed by a Literature Review in Chapter in 2. We have chosen this method of ordering, even though the review and the workshops took place simultaneously, because an integrated paradigm for conflict presented itself for us from the grounding of the literature activity within the consultation process.

In Chapter 3, then, we bring together a synthesis of the literature review and the results of the Lifeline Analysis into an articulation of an integrated paradigm for understanding conflict in housing co-operatives. Chapter 4 suggests directions and strategies for the various sector players to contribute to the development of better conflict assessment guide-lines for people who live in,

manage or work with co-operative housing organizations and who are concerned with conflict resolution issues. Some general recommendations are made which will be of interest to people who are interested in developing communities with a strong capacity for self-determination.

Appendices A and B include expanded information on the evolution of conflict and the structural issues of organization. An integrated approach to conflict resolution is also presented in Appendix C.

# 1

# RESEARCH AND RESULTS

## METHODOLOGY

To test our hypothesis that the historical pattern of events leading to the development of conflict and crisis had similar themes, we decided to study a sample of housing co-operatives in southern Ontario. Our methodology included:

- developing selection criteria for the study;
- meeting with contacts in the co-op housing sector to identify potential participants;
- approaching the boards of identified co-ops to determine their willingness to participate in the study;
- involving the Board, staff and general membership of each participating co-op to determine their willingness to participate in the study;
- finalizing the sample of co-operatives to participate in the study;
- conducting Lifeline Analysis workshops in selected co-operatives; and,
- organizing follow-up consultation sessions in each region for both participating co-ops and other interested members of the housing co-operative sector, to present and discuss a draft of the research results.

## Participant Selection Process

The principal criteria for involvement in the study was that prospective co-ops have past experience with conflict but that they not be in an active crisis at the time of the study. It was also crucial to the project's success that board and staff support the decision to participate and be willing to commit time and energy to involving the general membership.

Once this criteria was established, meetings with staff at the Co-operative Housing Federation in Toronto and Niagara Peninsula Homes were arranged. With their help, the researchers identified six co-ops of various ages, sizes, locations and project type suitable for the study. Staff co-ordinators at each co-op were contacted and a summary of the research outline and tasks were sent for board consideration. Later, a meeting was arranged with the Board of Directors to explain the project in more detail, answer any questions and solicit their participation in the study.

Two of the four Toronto co-ops initially approached felt that the timing of the study was not appropriate for their co-op. One of the two Toronto co-ops which originally agreed to participate withdrew from the project after they took the proposal to a general members meeting and received little support. We then focused our efforts on the three confirmed participants: Woodrose Co-operative in Welland, Jackson's Point Co-operative in the Township of Georgina and T.C.. Douglas Co-Operative in Toronto.

## Description of the Participating Co-ops

**Woodrose Co-operative (Co-op A),** located just outside the downtown core of Welland, opened its doors to members in the fall of 1988. It is a sixty-unit co-op composed of three separate low-rise apartment buildings. At the time of the study they had two full-time staff; a co-ordinator and a maintenance person. Almost fifty percent of the units are rent-geared-to-income, and they are funded under the Federal/Provincial 56.1 housing program.

**Jackson's Point Co-operative (Co-op B),** a three-year-old, forty-one-unit townhouse complex, is situated on Lake Simcoe in Georgina Township. It is staffed by one full-time co-ordinator. Close to half of the units are rent-geared-

to-income. Unlike the other two co-ops in the study, they are funded under the federal ILM program.

**T.C. Douglas Co-operative (Co-op C)** is located near Regent Park in downtown Toronto. It is a ten-year-old, fifty-six unit co-op. Their building is split into townhouses on the ground level and one- and two-bedroom apartments upstairs. In 1983, the co-op built six additional townhouse units on land adjacent to the original co-op. They have two part-time staff; a co-ordinator and a maintenance person. Over forty percent of their units are rent-geared-to-income. Like Woodrose, they are funded by the FP56.1 program.

*Initial Contact*

The first task to involve the co-ops in the study was to meet with the Board of Directors at each co-op to:

- determine if there was sufficient support for the co-op's participation;
- describe in detail the purpose of the research and the process to be used;
- discuss any questions and concerns;
- choose a date and location for the Lifeline Analysis workshop; and,
- decide how to inform the general membership of the study.

The concerns identified by board members at each co-op focused mainly on the time involved, confidentiality, monetary expense to the co-op, benefits of participating and expectations concerning the role of the board. We prepared a one-page summary of the project describing the study's purpose, the method to be used, the time frame and the benefits to the co-op. This was distributed by each board, with a covering letter, to their co-op's members prior to the start of the study.

A meeting was then arranged with each co-op co-ordinator to gather general information and plan an initial door-knocking campaign to advertise the Lifeline Analysis workshop. By approaching members on a one-to-one basis, we were able to introduce them to the project, promote the Lifeline workshop and identify any concerns which might prevent them from participating in the research, such as childcare needs, conflicting events, or lack of interest. Between sixty and

eighty percent of the members in each co-op were successfully contacted and informed of the workshops. Although many people willingly discussed their views of the co-op and seemed genuinely interested in the study, others indicated that they had previous commitments, preferred not to get involved in any co-op activities, or did not see how the study related to either themselves or the co-op. Some were clearly angry with their board and/or certain members and were strongly opposed to getting involved in the co-op in any way. Participation at our workshops ranged from eight to twenty-five percent of the members.

## *Lifeline Analysis Workshops*

Lifeline Analysis is a participatory group assessment exercise. It incorporates popular education principles developed by Paulo Freire, the South American educator. This technique begins with the assumption that the expertise to describe, analyze and solve problems rests with the people who are involved in the situation.

The purpose of the Lifeline Analysis technique is to help a group of people generate a collective picture of the events and forces which shaped the history of their organization. In this study, the tool enabled members to arrive at a shared understanding of the history of conflict at their co-op. It also gave the various constituencies, or "factions", in each co-op an opportunity to build some trust and reach agreement in order to talk about their history together. Although it was not the goal of this study to engage co-ops in a conflict resolution process, this trust-building was necessary to bring members together to collect the data needed for the study, and to persuade them that by participating they might benefit from an enhanced understanding of the conflict dynamics within their own co-op.

The first step in the process is to break the participants into small groups of four or five to brainstorm a list of "significant events" in the history of their organization. The question can be posed in a general way, or it can be focused around a particular theme. In this study, the question was focused on the development of the housing co-operative . The participants were asked "What were the significant events, positive *and* negative, in the development of the co-operative". The participants knew that conflict was the focus of the study, however, the Lifeline question was posed in a broader way because we wanted to

see the relationship, if any, between positive events and the conflict events, which we assumed participants would identify as being negative.

Once the question was put to the participants, the facilitator encouraged them, at this point in the process, not to debate the interpretation of specific events. Participants were also asked to fix an approximate date for each of the events. The small groups then re-convened and together began to construct a chronological timeline of the events on a roll of paper. This creates a mural of historical events from the earliest date people can recall to the most recent. This first step requires two to three hours to complete, depending on the number of participants.

Additional members of the organization can join subsequent sessions and participate, even if they miss the first session. In fact, constituencies who may not have been represented at the first session can be canvassed to have representatives attend the second session. In instances where there are a large number of additional people who want to become involved, it can be useful to hold another "first" session, and then combine the lifelines produced by both groups at the beginning of the second session.

While the emphasis in the first workshop is to *describe* the history of the co-op and represent it through a lifeline picture, the emphasis in the second workshop is to *analyze* the trends and patterns in the co-op's history as represented through the lifeline picture. A second workshop is held partly because of the time constraints of bringing people together to do voluntary activity, and partly because the lifeline picture is evocative for people, and it is useful to allow time for people to reflect upon the picture, and the discussion, before further analysis of the lifeline.

The second workshop began by asking people if they had thought of any more important events since the first workshop that they wanted to add to the lifeline picture. Participants were then asked to identify *the* "critical event" in the lifeline picture, that is, the event which made those events which occurred before it and those events which occurred after it qualitatively different. There is often some discussion among people to determine what this critical event is and usually there is a high degree of agreement among people about *what* the critical event is, even when there are strong disagreements about *why* or *how* it came to be.

Participants were then asked to look at the events leading up to and following the critical event. They were asked to identify the groups of events which belonged together, and to name these groups of events in their own language.

There is no particular structure to this part of the exercise; it is the facilitator's task to help the participants hear each other, build on the groups' ideas, and test for agreement. Often, in group learning situations, a lot of time can be spent interpreting and translating the meaning of jargon or professional language that participants have acquired, or which is introduced by the facilitator. The Lifeline Analysis technique deliberately takes people out of this professional language, and for the purposes of problem assessment, invites people to create a new, common language to communicate their experiences. The mural drawing technique also removes some of the inhibitions people may feel in speaking out in meetings. This session requires at least three hours or longer since the participants find it particularly useful.

The third session was a consultation for comparison of the group's own analysis of their history with the theoretical ideas from the literature. People are often more prepared to consider and analyze theoretical ideas with confidence after they have articulated an analysis of their own, in language of their own.

The Lifeline Analysis of each co-operative participating in the study was also presented to the others for comparison and consideration. In this study, participation in the third workshop was open to anyone from the co-op sector in the geographical area of the co-operative participating in the study.

## FINDINGS

### The First and Second Workshops

A Lifeline Analysis workshop and two follow-up analysis sessions were conducted at each of the three co-ops. Participants in each of the three co-ops commonly identified significant historical events such as general members meetings, elections, board/staff changes, maintenance problems, policy developments, move-ins/outs and social events.

### Co-op A
Twenty members of Co-op A, representing twenty-five percent of the households, participated in the first workshop. Different "groups" within the co-op were identified, and representatives from each group attended the Lifeline

*FIGURE 1-1 Lifeline Analysis of the Lives of Co-ops A, B and C*

| Phase | Co-op A | Co-op B | Co-op C |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **1987 – 1989** | **1987 – 1989** | **1980 – 1981** |
| Construction/ Settling-in Phase | • Member orientation<br>• Incorporation, Board formed<br>• Move-ins (gradual)<br>• Staff hired<br>• 1st AGM, 1st Residents' Board<br>• Beginning committee formation<br>• Friendships form<br>• Very supportive, fun time, people getting to know one another, helping each other through the construction chaos<br>• Some Board training<br>• Sever ties with resource group | • Member orientation<br>• Incorporation, Board formed<br>• Move-ins (gradual)<br>• Staff hired<br>• 1st AGM, 1st Residents' Board<br>• Beginning committee formation<br>• Friendships form<br>• Very supportive, fun time, people getting to know one another, helping each other through the construction chaos<br>• Some Board training<br>• Sever ties with resource group<br>• High vacancy loss, trouble filling units (high M.R.) | • Member orientation<br>• Incorporation, Board formed<br>• Move-ins (gradual)<br>• Staff hired<br>• 1st AGM, 1st Residents' Board<br>• Beginning committee formation<br>• Friendships form<br>• Very supportive, fun time, people getting to know one another, helping each other through the construction chaos<br>• Some Board training<br>• Sever ties with resource group |
| | **1989** | **1989** | **1982 – 1983** |
| Growing Pains | • Building deficiencies appear<br>• Members start questioning decision-making process<br>• Staff changes (new staff)<br>• AGM, Board changes<br>• Committees start to struggle, "invasion of the power snatchers"<br>• Friendships begin to break up and groups form | • Members start questioning decision-making process<br>• Staff hired<br>• New Board members<br>• Board struggles with process and leadership<br>• Friendships begin to break up<br>• Division between "old guard" and new members<br>• Board splits on gender issues and values | • Questions erning participation policy, calls for stronger policing of participation<br>• Vocal GMM<br>• Friction between "upstairs" and "downstairs" members |

FIGURE 1-1 Continued

| Phase | Co-op A | Co-op B | Co-op C |
|---|---|---|---|
| Crunch | **1990 – 1991**<br><br>• Co-op crashes<br>• Some members withdraw completely<br>• Co-op splits into groups<br>• Continued move outs<br>• General feeling of burn out<br>• Board conflict, explosive AGM<br>• No communication between groups, Board and membership<br>• Widespread gossip, jealousy, favouritism | **1989 – 1990**<br><br>• Critical period<br>• Old guard withdraws<br>• Participation down<br>• Co-op splits into groups<br>• Continued move outs<br>• General feeling of burn out<br>• 3rd AGM, poor turnout, resignations from Board<br>• Frenzy of rumours and petitions<br>• More domestic violence incidents | **1983 – 1984**<br><br>• Period of high control<br>• Increasing member complaints and problems i.e. noise, parties<br>• Board never develops solutions to "problem units"<br>• General feeling of burn out<br>• Demands for strong participation policy<br>• Need to spend money on Co-op<br>• Seek outside resources and support to deal with this phase in the Co-op's life<br>• Housing crisis in Toronto district |
| Transition Period | **Present**<br><br>• Groups/factions continue to exist<br>• Maintenance and staffing problems<br>• Members not sure what's happening | **Present**<br><br>• Rumours still circulating<br>• Change in some processes<br>• Some re-vitalization happening | **1985 – 1986**<br><br>• Some Board changes<br>• Housekeeping policy solidifies<br>• Board adopts passive stance on controversial policies, issues |
| Middle-age Spread | | | **1987 – Present**<br><br>• Enjoying fruits of age and experience<br>• Past point of hard decisions, don't panic any more<br>• Take turns being active in the Co-op, can chose to withdraw and go underground<br>• Stable member population<br>• Stable political nature of Co-op |

Analysis workshop. In spite of language differences and a tension felt within the group, participants were able to construct and agree upon a detailed description of the lifeline of their co-op.

## Co-op B

Seven members of the co-op and the co-op co-ordinator participated in this workshop, representing fifteen percent of the households in the complex. A number of factors contributed to this poor turnout: the recent CHF annual conference in Hamilton, traffic problems that evening and the strong factional differences between co-op members. Even though only one of the major factions was represented at the workshop, however, there was a mix of "old" and "new" members which enabled the group to construct a detailed lifeline of their co-op. It was agreed by those present that we should contact members of the other faction to elicit their perceptions of the lifeline of the co-op. A second workshop was organized with the other group, and a similar process conducted with two members from this group.

## Co-op C

The poorest turnout was experienced at this co-op, with only seven members participating. Of those present, half had been with the co-op since its inception and were able to provide a lot of detail concerning the co-op's evolution. The low turnout may have been due in part to the fact that it was a warm, sunny evening, but perhaps of more significance was the perception of those present (contrary to the board members who had agreed to participate in the study) that there had been no major conflicts in the co-op's history. They described intervals of "high" and "low" control and participation, but did not identify any periods of "crisis". The issues they pointed out which the co-op had struggled with were similar to the other two co-ops, but the approach of Co-op C in dealing with these issues was substantially different from the other participating co-ops. They considered themselves an older, stable co-op which had passed through the turmoil of infancy as an organization and reached a more mature stage of development.

In preparation for the third workshop with each of the co-ops, we prepared a summary of each Lifeline Analysis. (See Figure 1-1) When we examined the three lifelines developed by each co-op, there appeared to be five distinct phases identified by the participants. Figure 1-2 presents these phases in a generic

**FIGURE 1-2** *Phases in the Lifelines of Participating Co-ops*

| *PHASE* | *DESCRIPTION* |
|---|---|
| **Settling-in or Construction Phase** | • characterized by staff hiring, board and committee formation, move-ins, formation of friendships and in some cases construction chaos |
| **Growing Pains Phase** | • when friendships start to break-up, members begin questioning the decision-making process, changes occur at both the board, committee and staff level and groups/factions are more clearly defined |
| **Crunch Phase** | • the phase during which the problems described in the previous phase come to a head; characterized by a wave of move-outs, widespread "gossip" and "favouritism", explosive general members meetings, withdrawal of some co-op members, overt conflict and crisis between the various groups/factions |
| **Transition Period** | • when members seem generally confused about what is going on, groups and factions are relatively quiet and inactive, and some paralysis in the decision-making process of the co-op has taken effect |
| **Middle-age Spread** | • the phase during which the co-op enjoys the "fruits of age and experience"; the member population and political nature of the co-op is relatively stable |

format with descriptions of the events typical to each phase.

Only one of the three co-ops, Co-op C, was able to describe the middle-age spread. Co-ops A and B were caught between the crunch and the transition period, with the likelihood of further conflict and crisis.


*The Third Workshop*


The summary of the phases and events described by each co-op was distributed to the members who had participated in the Lifeline workshop. They were asked to examine the results and consider how this fit with their experiences in the co-op. At the third workshop held in each region, members expressed a sense of relief at discovering that they were not alone in experiencing conflict and crisis at their co-op. Members of co-ops *not* involved in the Lifeline workshops described similar patterns and situations at their co-operatives.

There was general agreement by participants in this workshop that co-op members need tools to help them through these developmental phases. For two of the three co-ops involved in this study, their greatest concern was how to find a way out of the cycle of conflict and crisis in which they found themselves.

This third workshop was designed to be more analytical than the Lifeline workshops. At these sessions, people were asked to explore the meaning behind specific events in more detail. They were asked to identify such things as lead-up events, who was involved, and the impact on the membership. They were also asked to examine "critical time periods" and begin looking for patterns and similarities which might provide insight into how "quiet" or "inactive" times, and periods of conflict and crisis, developed in each of their co-ops.

The following is a brief synopsis of the discussions held in each of the regions.


**Welland**

Ten people participated in the follow-up meeting in Welland. Two were from a neighbouring co-op and half of the original participants from the co-op in the study attended the follow-up session. Feedback from those present indicated that the "other group" did not attend the third workshop because they did not feel the study to be a useful exercise, particularly as people were "not being honest about

what has gone on in the co-op." Those that did attend, however, found the framework useful, and were able to put forward a number of theories to explain how conflict had evolved at their co-op.

Members from the co-op participating in the study indicated that the atmosphere in their co-op at that time seemed relatively calm. They identified a number of possible explanations for the absence of conflict:

- changes at the board and staff levels;
- participation in the research project which enabled some members to view past conflicts and events from a different perspective; and,
- renewed emphasis on increasing member participation in co-op activities.

Members present also raised the possibility that the "factions" might have been using this time to "regroup" and consider future action, and so the calm was an interlude before the re-emergence of conflict.

Members from the neighbouring co-op found the description of patterns and phases useful in understanding their own situation. They considered themselves to be in the "growing pains" phase, and were concerned with finding ways to handle the anticipated "crunch". They also described themselves as feeling disillusioned. In joining the co-op they thought they would become members of a "family" of people with similar values and interests. Instead, they found themselves embroiled in conflict and discontent.

Members present agreed that exploring the transition phase further would be helpful, particularly if tools were available for co-ops to use to move successfully through the more difficult phases.

**York Region**
Fifteen people participated in the York Region session, including ten members representative of the two main factions of the co-op in the study. As well, members and staff from a number of Barrie and Newmarket co-ops attended. There was wide representation from co-ops at different evolutionary stages of development, from the "growing pains" phase to the "middle-age spread".

People present generally concurred that the description of the phases appeared to fit with their experience. People described how their co-op had tried to deal with widespread withdrawal as a result of conflict and crisis by trying to police participation. Those present were in general agreement that these attempts rarely

succeed and, in some cases, only push people farther apart. What was clear was that enforced participation is a common strategy used to deal with the dynamics of conflict and crisis.

Members of the co-op participating in the study were particularly interested in talking about how a co-op moves out of the transition phase. Like the Welland co-op, they had undergone some changes at the board and committee level, and found the atmosphere in the co-op relatively calm, albeit somewhat strained. Their questions centred on means for helping members accept each other's differences in approach and values. Concern was expressed about the possibility that their co-op would remain "stuck" in a whirlpool of conflict and crisis if factions refused to "let go" and learn to accept differences.

## Toronto

The Toronto session involved twelve people representing three different co-ops as well as a couple of sector support groups. Unfortunately, no representatives from the co-op participating in the study were able to attend. Once again, however, those present found the research useful and relevant to their own experiences in the co-op sector.

In describing the power struggle inherent in the "growing pains" phase, one member present commented that although people in her co-op were fighting, they had lost track of what they were fighting about. Participants then talked about how engaging in a process of building agreement on one issue might help to start unravel the conflict co-ops find themselves in.

Others present felt that dealing with conflict must be treated as a priority. They added that in their co-op they were trying to acquire skills to assert their needs and confront their differences. From their experience, it was important to break a skill down into manageable pieces, make it meaningful to people's everyday lives, and use it to build on people's positive energy.

# 2

# LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of the literature on conflict-intervention and conflict-resolution, which took place at the same time as our research with the three housing co-operatives, took the form of a search for a systematic description of the process of how conflict occurs and unfolds. We wanted to develop a vocabulary for talking about conflict processes, particularly one that would be useful for describing the model or framework which emerged from consultations with the co-ops. We also wanted to see what patterns, if any, other authors had identified and map them onto the experiences identified by our participating co-ops. We were interested in literature which referred specifically to housing co-ops, but also broadened our review to see if interdisciplinary approaches could be useful.

## DEFINITIONS OF CONFLICT

Some themes emerged in the review of the literature. All of the authors state that conflict requires two or more inter-dependent parties who have, or believe they have, incompatible interests.[1]

Conflict is seen by some as a natural part of growth,[2] and is defined by one author as a necessary threshold between developmental stages in the life of an

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[1] Movement for a New Society, *Building Social Change Communities* (Movement for a New Society, Philadelphia, 1979), p. 59.
Roy W. Pneuman & Margaret E. Bruehl, *Managing Conflict - A Complete Process-Centered Handbook*, (Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1982), p. 13.
Edward De Bono, *Conflicts - A Better Way to Resolve Them*, (Pelican Books, England), p. 47.

[2] Movement for a New Society, p. 58.

organization. The notion of conflict as a growth-related dynamic, and therefore as something inevitable, is a change in scholarly thinking that emerged after the 1950s.[3] Conflict has also been defined as arising whenever someone feels their potential development is being blocked.[4]

Some authors stress the difference between conflicts based on incompatible interests, and conflicts based on the perception of incompatible differences.[5] De Bono defines conflict as "a situation requiring a design effort."[6]


*SOURCES OF CONFLICT*


As organizations become larger in size and more mature in age, they are challenged to allow for more differentiation in job description, for more autonomy at lower levels of organization, and for cyclical expansions and contractions of creativity and flexibility.[7] As organizations, or communities, grow they move from one stable state to another by passing through a "zone of disruption".[8]

Conflict occurs in community organizations as people become full of doubt about their endeavors. As an organization moves through cycles of growth and decline, they typically experience "doubt". Hope and Timmel define this doubt as occurring at three levels, which they call operational, priority and ethical doubt.[9] People have different responses to the anxiety provoked by this doubt[10] and this can be a significant factor in conflict development.

There is an inadequate acculturation of the members of a community or organization to this relationship between growth and conflict,[11] which results in the denial, avoidance and suppression of conflict. This denial typically intensifies conflict.

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The Conflict Clinic, Inc, *Designing And Managing Public Involvement Processes*, (The Conflict Clinic, Inc., Virginia, 1991), p. 13.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Movement for a New Society, p. 58.

[5] De Bono, p. 47.

[6] Ibid., p. 42.

[7] Larry E. Greiner, *Evolution and revolution as organizations grow*, (Harvard Business School, Massachusetts), p. 40-44.

[8] Donald A. Schon, *Beyond the Stable State*, (W.W.Norton & Library, New York), p. 112.

[9] A. Hope & S. Timmel & C. Hodzi, *Training for Transformation: A Handbook for Community Workers*, (Mambo Press, Zimbabwe: 1990), Volume 3, p. 74.

[10] Harriet Goldhor Lerner, *The Dance of Intimacy*, p. 30.

[11] Joreen, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness", in *Radical Feminism*, (Quadrangle, New York: 1973), p. 286.

Conflict also arises in response to perceived differences. There are a number of sources from which perceived differences of interests can arise including:

- differences in culture, style, or communication;[12]
- differences in values, interests, experience or data available to members;[13]
- relationship issues of perceived trustworthiness, integrity, mental acuity and reliability;[14] and,
- projection of unresolved personal issues onto other parties to the conflict.[15]


The social structure of the family, the workplace, the organization, the community and general society can place groups so that they are competing for resources, or operating in a scarce resource environment. Real incompatibility of interest can occur in a situation which may also coincide with the different characteristics described above. The literature emphasizes that analysis is required by participants and intervenors in a conflict to distinguish between perceived and real incompatibilities.

People also have different abilities to manipulate the social structure. This is compounded when there is ambiguity in the social structure.[16] Joreen describes a natural process of group formation in organizations which leads to the development of elite and non-elite groups. Elite groups are dominant in the exercise of power and manipulation of the organization, while non-elite groups are consistently sub-dominant. This is typical of hierarchical organizations or collective organizations which do not consciously structure decision-making processes to counter those of the natural elite formation pattern.[17]

In addition, Balkwill talks of the presence of two complementary and contradictory imperatives in non-profit organizations. The community and business imperatives require that parallel and alternate processes of consensus and

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[12] Pneuman & Bruehl, p. 36.

[13] The Conflict Clinic, p. 15.
   Joreen, p. 299.

[14] The Conflict Clinic, p. 15.

[15] John A. Sanford, *The Invisible Partners,* (Paulist Press, New York: 1990), p. 10.

[16] Joreen, p. 291.
   Pneuman & Bruehl, p. 47.

[17] Joreen, p. 291.

hierarchical decision-making be developed in the successful non-profit organization.[18]

Feelings are also an integral part of conflict development and management.[19] Allowing feelings and conflict to build up, through passive behaviour, and not acknowledging conflict is itself a significant cause.[20] De Bono says that the culture of argument and language-based thinking are also significant causes of conflict.[21]

## CONFLICT IN CO-OPERATIVES

Existing literature on conflict in co-operative organizations is very limited. This literature implies that conflict is a common dynamic in co-operative organizations. James Liblet, in his book *Housing The Co-operative Way*, states that co-operative living is different because a co-operator becomes both "a landlord and a tenant, an owner and yet a part owner...this creates many conflicts and problems which are essentially the problems of any individuals who are required to consider directly the needs of a group" (p. 156).

W.P. Watkins, in *Co-operative Principles, Today and Tomorrow* , does not explicitly acknowledge conflict in co-operative organizations, however, he describes problems arising from "once democratic institutions decayed and abused by oligarchy and minority rule".

Alexander Laidlaw devotes a chapter of his book *Housing You Can Afford* to the problems experienced by housing co-operatives. He briefly describes power abuse and control issues at the board and management level and then goes on to identify other problem areas – the content and enforcement of co-op rules and issues related to the environment, design, facilities, maintenance, finances, and member behaviour. Although Laidlaw offers some suggestions on how to deal with specific situations and issues, he does not analyze in any detail events or processes which account for these problems. He does, however, confirm the fact that conflict is inevitable and even necessary:

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[18] Balkwill, Appendices A & B, (unpublished papers, 1988-1989).
[19] Movement for a New Society, p. 60.
[20] Ibid.
[21] De Bono, p. 10.

"[A] serious error is to expect and even demand conformity where it is not necessary or even desirable. In a co-op we should anticipate diversity, rather than conformity in many activities and aspects of life. The co-op should be a liberating influence, members should never feel they are in a social straight jacket." (p. 163)

Chetkov-Yanoov in *Community and Co-operatives in Participatory Development* also discuss conflict indirectly. They say the "multi-party co-operation" of the type required in housing co-operatives "is very difficult to achieve voluntarily." It is often obtained through the "considerable centralization of authority – and sometimes by resorting to direct power strategies" (p. 24). Joreen, in "The Tyranny of Structurelessness", describes a pattern of inter-group behaviour leading to conflict within collective groups. Although she does not write specifically about co-operatives, her discussion of dynamics and patterns within the women's movement suggests that an identifiable pattern of behaviour leads to conflict and crisis.

Conflict, these authors indicate, is to be anticipated and is inevitable.

## DEVELOPMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF A CONFLICT CYCLE

The most complete description of a conflict cycle comes from the authors of *Social Change Communities* published by Movement for a New Society (MNS). Other authors provide insights into particular aspects of conflict as it develops, but the MNS description provides an overall framework. The contributions of other authors are used to fill out this framework. (See Figure 2-1)

These stages describe a cycle of conflict from a beginning to some kind of resolution. Stages One to Five, inclusive, can repeat themselves without the occurrence of events which limit the scope of the conflict. This endless cycling has been described by some co-op members as the "simmer and erupt" syndrome. In this situation a co-operative appears calm on the surface. In fact, however, it is "simmering" with a constant "heat" which can "erupt" in dramatic fashion when additional heat is added.[22]

Pneuman and Bruehl attribute a pattern of passive behaviour, arising perhaps from frustration, which is characteristic of the beginnings of a conflict. From

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[22] CHF Educators Conference, (Paris, Ontario, 1988).

*FIGURE 2-1* Integration of Conflict Resolution Concepts

| MNS STAGES OF CONFLICT | EVENTS |
|---|---|
| **1.** Getting to know each other | Group formation (Joreen) |
| **2.** Early events which build tension | Formation of "Elite" and "Non-Elite" Groups (Joreen) |
| **3.** Events which surface tension (by pushing it out into the open so that both or all parties recognize it) | Resource distribution questions arise (Balkwill)<br>Group discovers differences in: experience, values, need, and style (Pneuman & Bruehl/Conflict Clinic) |
| **4.** Events which escalate tension | **Level 1** (Balkwill)<br>• Collective stress<br>• Adoption of majority rules decision-making<br>• Start – culture of winners/losers<br>**Level 2** (Balkwill)<br>• Legitimized competition among elite and non-elite<br>• Some members withdraw from involvement |
| **5.** Perpetuation (a period of time over which the conflict intensifies and escalates) | Use of "suppression and force" tactics by "elite" (Pneuman & Bruehl)<br>Use of "survival" tactics by non-elite groups (Pneuman & Bruehl)<br>Co-op polarized between "ins" and "outs" (Balkwill) |
| **6.** Venting of feelings | |
| **7.** Events which limit scope of conflict | |
| **8.** De-escalation | |

this frustration and passive behaviour arise various "escalation points".[23] This is helpful in understanding some of the internal dynamics in the first four stages of conflict. The MNS stages also describe a pattern of suppression that can be applied by the party in the conflict which has more power, and the typical responses to this suppression of the less powerful parties to the conflict.

The suppression tactic is employed, say Pneuman and Bruehl, by "those who view conflict as primarily negative [and deal] with it as a distributive process. That is, the spoils are always distributed. Someone must win, and someone must lose. If you seem destined to lose, the strategy becomes an attempt to lose as little as possible – at best, to gain a stalemate" (p. 5).

If one party thinks it has more power than the another party, its strategy is clearly to win. Force, suppression and fight are some of the tactics used. Suppression is a force tactic used by the party in a conflict who is supposedly the more powerful. It takes the form of:

- verbally or physically attacking the other party;
- using arbitration;
- segregating or using divide and conquer methods;
- discounting or questioning such things as the other's objectivity, rationality, or ability;
- negating or ignoring differences;
- using diffusion, or clouding the issues with irrelevancies or ambiguities;
- using generalities rather than specifics; and,
- distorting or blocking communication.

As Pneuman and Bruehl point out, "These tactics are demeaning and designed to force compliance and are therefore guaranteed to breed resentment and hostility. A lose-lose situation is almost certain. The vanquished survives to haunt the victor. The conflict is perpetuated by the acting out of the resentments of the "loser". Characteristically, suppression and force result in Pyrrhic victories, followed by anger, hurt feelings, low-risk conformity, shallow relationships, and mediocre performance."[24]

Pneuman and Bruehl provide a very useful description of the internal dynamic to ongoing, repetitive cycles of conflict as experienced by us in our dealings with

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23  Pneuman & Bruehl, p. 4.
24  Ibid., p. 5.

many organizations and communities in conflict. They describe a "Perpetuation Stage" which can be inserted into the MNS conflict model. The Perpetuation Stage occurs between Stages Four and Five in the MNS conflict cycle and describes a kind of "whirlpool" stage of the conflict which can continue forever. The Perpetuation Stage of the conflict is only possible when there is a dominant and sub-dominant group participating in the conflict with suppressive and guerrilla tactics respectively. A Freirean analysis might describe this shift from passive behaviour among groups to a suppression/survival relationship among groups as a shift from magical consciousness to concrete consciousness. *Magical consciousness* is the naive belief that one is an object in the world, controlled by fates and other forces outside one's control. One, therefore, behaves passively. *Concrete consciousness* is a belief that people are locked in a contest relationship, and that one's disadvantage is the result of another person's power over them. This shift to concrete consciousness makes possible the conflict described in stages Two to Five. Freire says that "concrete" consciousness is an important developmental step towards "critical" consciousness.

Freire describes *critical consciousness* as the awareness that both parties to the conflict "are part of the problem", and that changes in the relationships among all people, as well as the structure and process of the community, are necessary to lead to a real resolution of the conflict. This consciousness, in a Freirean analysis, is necessary to make the transition from Stage Five (venting of feelings) to Stage Six (events which limit the scope of the conflict). Intergroup behaviour is critical to understanding the dynamics of conflict. A Freirean analysis says that group behaviour is guided by the "consciousness" of its members.[25]

Joreen's insight into typical group formation and the development of elites and non-elites describes the way well-intentioned, idealistic groups can nonetheless wind up disenchanted with each other.[26] Part of this discovery, as described by Joreen, says that although we may be avoiding the use of hierarchy in the structure of our organization, we still do not feel, behave or perceive each other equally and do not have an alternative organizational structure to the hierarchy.[27]

Another component of this discovery of difference is the normal transition from an idealized perception of others in the group to perceptions based more on

[25] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (The Seabury Press, New York: 1970).

[26] Joreen, p. 293-297.

[27] Rosalind N. Diamond, "Conflict Resolution and Democracy as a Spiritual Path", (National Conference on Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution - Institute Workshop #33, North Carolina: 1991).

reality. Diamond uses the work of another author to say that each group begins with very positive feelings about itself which is followed inevitably by a "power struggle" based upon the discovery of differences.

Diamond's insights help us to add a preliminary stage to the MNS conflict cycle during which everyone is getting to know and feel good about each other. Typically, community members tell us the transition to Stage One of the conflict is noted by someone saying "the honeymoon is over". The end of this stage and the beginning of Stage One of the conflict can be long or short, depending on the circumstances of the community. It may be useful to refer to Stages Two, Three and Four of the conflict cycle described by MNS as the "power struggle" stage.

Balkwill[28] identifies the issues which push conflict into the open as arising from questions of resource distribution. Co-operatives must decide which social activities to fund, the priority of diverse maintenance activities, or which applicants to accept into the co-operative. Inevitably, these decisions benefit some members more than others. If some members sense that there is a pattern to decision-making that benefits certain groups of members more than others, this can begin to escalate tensions. A collective stress occurs within the organization about how to confront these escalating tensions in a collective way. Most groups do not have the organizational tools or structure to successfully do this, and the social structure of the organization is manipulated by the group that is most familiar with majority decision-making mechanisms or that is most comfortable with "force tactics".

The phases of events that Balkwill has suggested previously (see Figure 1-2, page 10) provides a description of how events can unfold in Stages Two to Four of the MNS conflict cycle. The suppression and survival patterns of behaviour exhibited by the dominant and non-powerful groups respectively, is an elaboration of the tactics used by these groups as the conflict escalates and intensifies. This pattern leads to either the Perpetuation Stage where the conflict re-cycles itself over a long period of time, or to Stage Six – "events which limit the scope of the conflict". Balkwill asserts that if there is going to be a call for outside help and third party intervention, it is usually at this point that it will be made.[29]

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[28]  Balkwill, Appendix A.

[29]  Ibid.

*CAMPBELL AND THE COMMUNITY'S JOURNEY*

Susan Campbell has developed a framework which can be used to describe an even larger cycle to the rhythm of events in the community, within which this conflict cycle may fit.

To begin to adapt Campbell's analysis we must accept that communities are webs of relationships among people, and just as people grow, so do communities. She characterizes this growth through the metaphor of the "journey". The development of relationships among members of the community group or organization over time can be compared, as a process, to a journey. The community can and will go through different stages in its journey. Progress through these stages will be determined by the age of the membership, the rate of turnover in the membership, and the events which occur in the larger society around the community.

Campbell has five stages to her framework. Each stage has certain *developmental tasks* which the community needs to do or learn about. Each task must be accomplished before the community can move on to the next stage of its development. There are also *illusions* or pitfalls common to each of these stages which can act as obstacles to growth. These must be resolved in order to enable the community to move on to its next stage of development. The developmental tasks and illusions of each stage are described below.

## Stage I – Romance
The romance stage is very important to the initial bonding that is needed to assist the community in coalescing around common goals and values.

Another very important and functional part of the romance phase comes from

> "sharing hopes, and dreams and visions with each other. If these visions seem to be in harmony, we create a mutual vision. We use the relationship [as a way] to re-enforce our life goals and our way of achieving them....When we can use our romantic ideals and dreams as inspiration, our journey is off to a good start...Thus romantic feelings are vital stepping stones in the...journey. They contain an implicit map of where we wish to go together, providing direction for subsequent journeying."
> (Campbell, p. 18)

In housing co-operatives, and indeed in many social ventures, people come together filled with hope. They believe, on their own and with the support of co-op housing activists, that many things are possible through co-operation and the creation of community. Part of the romantic attachment is fueled by a desire to be saved from unhappy circumstances such as high rents, low-quality housing, and isolated neighbourhoods, and the co-operative is seen as a solution to the shortcomings of current and previous situations.

The illusion that accompanies this stage is a belief that wishing alone will make it so. In other words, all we have to do is sincerely "want" this community relationship to work and it will. This is a denial of the effort and care that is required to build any relationship in life. Rather than deny the effort required to build relationships, community members need to:

> "understand and accept that [community], like life, is a continually changing process. There are almost no insurmountable problems, since if we stay with a situation long enough it will change into something else (or at least our perspective on it will change). Yet there are almost no lasting solutions, since each "solution" sets the stage for the emergence of new problems." (Campbell, p. 5)

Another illusion is a fear that "conflict will destroy our vision". (Campbell, p. 15). Campbell feels, as do many other authors, that conflict is inevitable and is, in fact, a condition of growth. Many groups, however, for a number of understandable reasons, believe that conflict will be a threat to the relationship, and to the good feelings engendered in the Romance Stage. This fear can only be dispelled if we have a positive experience of conflict that proves that a constructive engagement of conflict actually deepens and strengthens the relationship, not destroys it.

## Stage II – Power Struggle

The events of the Power Struggle Stage flow directly from the discovery of differences in the community. When community members come together initially and talk about the possibilities in their community, they do so on a kind of faith about who the other people in the community are. They project onto their fellow community members all kinds of good and noble qualities that are not, at this point, necessarily borne out by experience. As life in the community

progresses, they discover more about the real attitudes, values and behaviours of their neighbours, and some of this causes concern. Campbell describes the emergence of the Power Struggle Stage this way:

"The power struggle emerges after the fall from grace. It springs from the seeds of disappointment sown by the hands of wishful thinking and selective perceiving. For the struggle to flourish, it requires a soil rich in unacknowledged demands and accumulated resentments."

"The struggle may centre on any issue about which [people] differ or disagree, but it only becomes a threat to the relationship when one or both of [them] is consciously engaged in either trying to get the [others] to be something [they] are not, perhaps trying to make the other [community members] more like one's romantic image, or punishing the [members] for being other than one would wish."

"The power struggle arises when hopes or expectations are frustrated, and will continue until we have worked out (via some degree of struggle) a way to satisfy these *or* until we can let go of these expectations *or* until we decide that the discrepancy between what we want and what we've got is large enough to warrant ending the relationship [leaving the community, or asking someone to leave] or altering the relationships significantly." (Campbell, p. 29, 31)

The developmental tasks of the Power Struggle Stage are for the groups in the community to learn

"to recognize and validate differing needs and perceptions and to learn to define themselves and ask for what they want." (Campbell, p. 14)

"The power struggle can be valuable as a process of pushing against each other's resistance to change or accommodation in order to develop greater mutual responsiveness. It is often necessary to strongly assert one's differing wants or needs in order to have them heard by the other. It is not that [people don't] *want* to hear, but simply the fact that the [people] are different and naturally tend to see the world through the filters of their

own wants and needs. *Thus... the power struggle is an expected, normal step toward the achievement of [community] relationship[s] where power is balanced and shared."* (Campbell, p. 31) (emphasis added)

One pitfall or illusion of the Power Struggle Stage is the belief that we can change the other people in the community to fit our image or expectations. Many people in the consultation told us about elaborate techniques and policies to be sure that everyone participated in the co-op. Often, this is an exercise in trying to get other people to conform to a standard set of expectations.

Another pitfall is the need to retaliate when we don't get what we want. Campbell calls this the "spite war". Many co-op members described to us feud-like behaviours that persisted in the co-operative long after anyone could remember what the dispute had really been about. The issue no longer mattered, but getting even, or retaliating did, and each retaliation begot another. This is an important dynamic that underpins what the MNS framework, and Pneuman and Bruehl call the Perpetuation Stage in the conflict cycle. Community members must be brought to realize that their retaliatory behaviour is an obstacle to ending the power struggle and moving on to deal with the developmental tasks of this stage, learning to recognize and validate differences while asserting one's own legitimate needs. An important intervention technique at this point is to have the community identify the costs and benefits to continued retaliation.

The power struggle must be engaged as a foundation for establishing equality. For many people this may seem counter-intuitive, as our culture views conflict, and therefore power struggle, as a bad thing, and equality as a good thing. How could a bad thing (power struggles and the attendant conflict) lead to a good thing like equality? Equality begins with a recognition of the legitimacy of the values, needs, and experiences of oneself and others.

A community is not a collection of individuals but a collection of groups which enter into a social contract to respect each other's values, needs and experiences, and to assist each other in addressing the needs which are deemed to be common. The power struggle process fosters the identification of distinct groups within the community, each with its own sets of values, needs and experiences. The Power Struggle Stage can make it "okay" to identify with a group, and to assert its needs.

The power struggle process, at its best, is a contracting process where "roles, goals, communication channels, and decision-making processes have been tested

and established". (Campbell, p. 53)  It is "the mutual establishment of [a community social] contract around these items, and the mutual establishment of a workable set of rules for negotiating [recurring] conflicts" (Ibid.) between individuals and groups that operationalizes equality in the community.

## Stage III – Stability

In this stage the community's journey is characterized by a de-escalation in retaliatory conflict behaviours.  Issues of difference will continue to persist in the community, however, these issues were perceived through a different filter by participants from one co-op in our study.  The members of Co-op C, who described this stage in their co-operative's life as the "middle-age spread", said: "we still struggle with the same issues of garbage, bicycle racks, and noise but they are just issues now, not the cause of widespread conflict, as in earlier years."

Campbell says that communities that are in the stability stage "use conflicts and disagreements as opportunities for learning about themselves, rather than as chances to win points."(p. 59)

Again, for the transition to this stage to occur, community members must "stop blaming each other for our conflicts, (and) become responsible for doing all that's in our power to resolve them.  We give up acting as if directed by forces beyond our control when we begin to be aware of how we've let ourselves play victim." (Campbell, p. 68)

There are many issues that community members bring with them to co-operative living from their general experience in society.  Most of them have been socialized, educated, and employed in organizational structures that are not as democratic and egalitarian as co-operatives try to be.  While they are attracted to the co-operative because they hope it can be a place that is different from those other experiences, their behaviour in the co-operative will be shaped significantly by their other experiences.  Many people in those situations have felt either powerless at the hands of external forces, or believed themselves to be the oppressed and powerless part of an "us and them" dynamic.  These are the attitudes Freire calls "magic" and "concrete" consciousness, respectively.

For many people, differences that existed between them and others were suppressed in the families, schools and workplaces in which they participated. The democratic structure and values of a co-operative provides a context for these differences to be asserted again.  This may raise a lot of feelings and anxieties in the community about dealing with issues that were previously

suppressed. Many of the conflicts that we have witnessed in co-operatives are around value differences. These value differences were not allowed to surface, or did not have a way to surface, in the other places where members lived. Both the strength and the challenge of co-operative living is that these differences now re-emerge for consideration in the whole community.

The co-operative provides an opportunity for people to develop an organizational and community structure that is democratic and egalitarian, and where one group does not suppress the others. It is an important step to acknowledge that in order to resolve differences there do not have to be one powerful and other powerless groups in the community (*elites* and *non-elites* as Joreen describes them) but that this can be done in some other "co-operative" fashion. This belief is necessary to break the pattern of retaliatory behaviour that characterizes the perpetuation phase as described in the MNS conflict cycle. Ventilation and de-escalation of the issues, which is necessary to make the transition to the stability phase, is only possible if the participants in the power struggle can see in a different light the roles they are assuming and playing out. To see themselves as equal participants in maintaining the struggle is the first indication of their mutual equality. This is what Freire refers to as *critical consciousness*.

The Stability Stage does not mean the end to conflict. Rather, it means a new framework for viewing differences. It sets the stage for the ongoing negotiations that will be part of the contracting between the different constituencies in the co-operative as they seek to assert and fulfill their goals and needs. This contracting extends the process of recognizing the differences among groups in the co-operative and uses this discovery as a way of helping each constituency to be more clear about its own needs and goals, but also in enabling groups to see that partnership with others will increase their ability to achieve their own goals.

It is also important in this stage for members to accept that they will make mistakes, and that groups in the community will inadvertently hurt each other in the sincere pursuit of their goals and needs. The community will need to learn to acknowledge and clarify mutual hurt and anger, and give and seek forgiveness. The community will need to learn "gentle self-discipline as a stabilizing force necessary to maintain" the relationships among groups in the community (Campbell, p. 69). The community, like any two people in a relationship, will have to give itself permission to make mistakes, to see these mistakes as inevitable steps in its journey, and use these as ways of learning about itself.

The illusion of the Stability Stage, which can be a block to moving onto the next stage, is what Campbell calls the "illusion of peace". This illusion is based on a belief by the members that once they accept that there are differences in the community, they no longer have to be confronted. This most often is conflict-avoidance. In this situation, groups "say things like we're beyond all that now, or give in too easily to each other's demands, simply to keep the peace." (Campbell, p. 73). This describes a community that is disengaged, rather than one which has found a new constructive pattern for contracting around using differences to build understanding of their own group, other groups, and by extension, of the community as a whole.

As Campbell points out:

> "True stability is not without conflict or change. Rather it recognizes differentiation or change as the one constant in all of life. Coming to terms with change – letting go of the old, embracing the new, and knowing something about when to do which – is essential for the maintenance of a stable sense of [community]." (p. 73)

The developmental tasks of this stage for the community are "to experience itself as in inter-dependent, synergistic system; and to learn to live with life's insoluble dilemmas and paradoxes." (Campbell, p. 14)

> "The stability stage [provides the community] with the insight necessary to understand their struggles. It has been, in a sense, a period of increased reflection, a calm after the power-struggle storm – thus preparing the [community] for another type of action, for commitment." (Campbell, p. 75)

> "Commitment becomes possible when [the community] stops trying to change things, to conform to our preconceived expectations. Commitment accepts the rhythms of change – the changing need for closeness vs. distance for example – between...people [in the community]. It assumes that [other groups] are basically trustworthy and will not perceive differences as threats, or changes as losses. This sense of trust has been earned through the confrontation of many differences (during the power

struggle phase) and many changes (during the stability phase)." (Campbell, p. 78)

This extensive quote from Campbell describes an aspect of community that is novel to most members. In many ways, the co-operative sector is young and has had to be pre-occupied with the instrumental aspects of financing, developing and operating housing co-operatives. Only recently has the sector had the opportunity to reflect upon what is happening in the communities that have been created. Members lack a language and analytical framework to talk about what can and will happen in these communities to help them know that they can overcome the early struggles and growing pains.

This kind of "social relationship" language may seem to be inconsistent with the tasks of financing, development and operations. Yet co-operation primarily expresses a form of social relationship which then makes possible certain economic relationships. Campbell's language is very useful for describing how these social relationships might mature and develop over time, to ensure that the economic relationships remain sound.

The community experiencing itself as a synergistic system – as a sum that is greater than its parts – occurs as a result of the social contracting described above, but also when groups understand themselves and others better through openness to difference. These differences pose paradoxes which the community must also accept and which ultimately can become rich sources of energy, creativity, learning and growth.

One of the co-ops in the sample had to manage the constant dilemma of the difference between the upstairs and the downstairs residents. The upstairs units were smaller, more affordable and did not have access to yards. They tended to attract students, single people or couples, who were more transient than the households living in the larger, street level units. How could a co-operative develop shared goals with these two fundamentally different groups of people living together? This co-op accepted, over time, that these two groups would always have different positions on certain management issues. They built into their decision-making process ways of asking and considering what the different needs of the upstairs and downstairs people would be on any particular issue.

In another consultation session, a participant from a co-operative whose membership is based on people whose career is in the arts said:

"...how can you have a co-operative community comprised of people who believe they must be fiercely autonomous in order to pursue their art? It's a contradiction in terms. On the one hand it doesn't make sense, and yet on the other hand it works!!"

It works to the degree that the community accepts and works with the contradictions.

## Stage IV – Commitment

The developmental task of the community in the Commitment Stage is to "create a structure for managing paradox – a set of flexible and self-renewing patterns of relating [and management] which give each [group], if not the best of both worlds, at least a piece of both." (Campbell, p. 94)

Balkwill (Appendix B) has described co-operative and non-profit organizations as a unique blend of community and business organizations. The combination of these two organizational forms and value systems, which at many points are in total contradiction to each other, is successful because it creates the opportunity to capture the best of the task hierarchy of business, with the effectiveness and solidarity of collective endeavour. The challenge is to create a structure that manages the paradox of these two organizational forms. The task of creating this management structure may not be possible until the community has journeyed through the other developmental stages in Campbell's framework.

The illusion that accompanies the Commitment Stage is that the community may now believe it has achieved some balance or harmony within the community and feels its "work is complete...we need not concern ourselves with the world beyond" its borders. (Campbell, p. 15) A co-operative at this stage may see itself as separate from its neighbourhood, or from other co-operative organizations in the sector. Of course, the social and economic forces of the outside world always intrude upon or exercise influence on every community. This reality sets the scene for the last stage in the community's journey, which Campbell calls "co-creation".

## Stage V – Co-creation

The co-creation stage bears the strongest connection to the movement aspects of co-operative housing, and of other social endeavours. The developmental tasks of this stage are:

> "to learn to co-operate with the forces that be, toward creating a saner and more humane world. The community experiences itself as interdependent with all of life."

At this stage the community has a sense of itself as a synergistic entity which is larger than the sum of its parts. The social contracting process among the constituencies within the community is advanced, and many things are being achieved within the community. The community is now able to see the connections between its issues and the forces in the larger society. With a clear sense of its abilities and limitations as a community it can enter consciously into exercising influence in the larger society, and participate intentionally in helping to create (i.e. co-create) a co-operative sector and movement. Again, a vocabulary does not really exist to describe this stage in the life of a community. In Campbell's words, however,

> "Our co-creative expression responds both to our [community] needs and resources and to the needs and resources of some aspect of our environment. We are in the same way applying, beyond our [community] relationship, the same values and principles we have been applying within it." (p. 104)

> "[Communities] are part of an essential unity which becomes clear to us in stages over time. These...learnings prepare the [community] for conscious participation in the work of the world, toward the creation of a higher quality of life for all. It has become clear at this stage that without such a conscious aim, we often feel buffeted about by forces...of which we are only dimly aware. As [communities] become more conscious of the principles and laws which provide the context for all relationships, we begin to understand that we can choose to participate with these laws towards the ends they seem to be fostering. We can co-operate consciously in the evolution of humanity rather than experiencing ourselves as pawns in the game of life." (p. 106)

The co-operative housing movement, as with many other social movements, is inspired by a vision of humanitarian values, goals and principles, which somehow

seem to feel diluted in everyday practice and implementation. A sense of this vision being achieved can be seen in the life of a mature co-operative. In fact, a major insight to be derived from Campbell's journey metaphor, is that there is a significant developmental path which co-operatives *must* pursue in order to reach the co-creative stage which allows these values to be fulfilled at a societal level.

The illusion of the co-creation stage, is a "tendency to focus too much attention on the world and too little on the "care and feeding" of the [community]." (p. 14) Too often we see co-operative housing activists (and other activists) focusing attention on the larger issues without maintaining the quality of life of their own co-operative or organization. As one co-op member stated "it's like the person who fights for lights in the street, but their own house is in darkness."

The developmental tasks and illusions for each stage in the community's journey are shown in Figure 2-2. This metaphor is intended by Campbell to be used as a map for recognizing certain stages in a community's life, and not as a tool for predicting specific events. As with any metaphor, it has its uses and its limitations. Campbell outlines some of these limitations:

> "No [community] goes through each stage, one-two-three-four-five neatly and smoothly with no hitches...Some [communities]...stay at one of the stages for a very long time because there is a particular issue they need to learn about more than the others. [Communities] who have a considerable need to work out issues of power, for example, may spend most of their time at this stage. Each [community] is unique and there is no "right way" to (complete the journey)." (p. 116-117)

> "As with all developmental processes, there is rarely a distinct point of division between one stage and the next. As [communities] begin to resolve some of [their] power issues, [they] are also beginning to develop greater stability; as [communities] become able to act with committed intention, [they] are also moving toward co-creation. And so forth. Useful as it is, a map is too much like a still snapshot to accurately portray the dynamic movement of the [community's] journey." (p. 118)

*FIGURE 2-2 Campbell's Five Stages in a Community's Journey*

| STAGE | DEVELOPMENTAL TASK | ILLUSION/PITFALL |
|---|---|---|
| Romance | • gain a sense of possibilities | • fear conflict will destroy vision |
| Power Struggle | • learn to value different needs and perceptions | • can change others to fit image<br>• need to retaliate when don't get what is wanted |
| Stability | • take responsibility for differences | • don't need to confront differences anymore |
| Commitment | • experience as inter-dependent part of a bigger community<br>• accept paradoxes and insoluble dilemmas | • in harmony and don't need to be concerned with the world beyond |
| Co-creation | • co-operate with forces toward creating a saner and more humane world | • tendency to focus too much attention on the world and too little on "care" and "feeding" of the inner community |

The value of the journey metaphor is that it

> "does reflect an ordering and patterning of events that are somewhat consistent over many cases,...even though no one [community] will fit it exactly. Thus attraction (romance) does generally precede differentiation (power struggle). Commitment does generally need to be based on a foundation of attraction, differentiation, and stability." (Campbell, p. 117)

To the extent that Campbell's journey framework does describe a knowable "ordering and patterning of events" it has implications for the development of an effective social movement. Specifically, this framework gives us a larger context within which to see the conflict that occurs in housing co-operatives. The patterns and events that were seen in all three co-operatives in the study fit within the "power struggle" stage of Campbell's framework. Each co-operative experienced a "romance" stage, although the length of it varied for each co-operative. One of the co-operatives appears to have exited the power struggle stage and moved onto the "stability" stage. While we still speculate on *why* this co-operative has moved on to this third stage, it is worth noting that this development took seven years.

There is a pattern to the events in the power struggle stage that is well expressed by the conflict cycle from the MNS authors. It is like a wave that rises and falls, and repeats itself before resolving into the stability stage of Campbell's framework. The relationship between co-op events, the MNS conflict cycle and Campbell's Five Stages of a Community's Journey framework is analyzed in Chapter 3.

## CONFLICT AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Co-operatives do long-term planning for maintenance and finance of the co-operative, but do *not* do long term planning for community development. This may be due in part to lack of a language for describing the maturation issues in their community's life. Campbell's framework, and the integrated conflict evolution framework articulated in this report, may provide the language to enable this kind of planning. Some study participants called this "being conscious about developing a culture in the community." Private sector management

theorists and consultants have been attending to the importance of culture in organizations for some time (Morgan, p.121). This notion needs to be applied to co-operatives, but in a broader sense than it is applied in private sector corporations.

Co-operatives hold values about their goals, structure and process that vary in significant ways from private corporations. Co-operatives therefore seek a different style of management structure and process from the "hierarchical" organization of private corporations. However, as Joreen forcefully demonstrates in her article, it is fine to reject hierarchy, but it must be replaced with a structured alternative. If a structured alternative is not put in place, hierarchy will re-emerge. But an invisible hierarchical form, masquerading as a co-operative form, is, in some ways, worse than visible and acknowledged hierarchy. The ambiguity of structure in housing co-operatives is a significant determinant of conflict. Developing an alternative management structure and process for co-operatives is a larger task than can be accommodated in this report, but the literature shows several directions worth consideration. Joreen, for example, talks about the importance of

> "specific tasks being delegated with specific authority to specific individuals by democratic procedures and requiring those who were selected to then be responsible to those who selected them. Distribute authority among as many people as is reasonably possible, and rotate tasks among individuals. Allocate tasks along rational criteria. Diffuse information to everyone as frequently as possible, and create equal access to the resources needed by the groups." (p. 298, 299)

These techniques are especially useful within smaller working groups or committees in organizations, and can be used in the creation of ad hoc committees and work groups.

There is also the issue of the number of levels of management within co-operatives, given the level of business they have to conduct. Co-operatives talk about participation in management without clarifying what this means. Elliott Jaques has written about the different levels of management complexity within organizations. He describes seven levels (or strata) of increasing complexity of work, where complexity is defined "in terms of the number of variables operating in a situation, the clarity and precision with which they can be

identified, and their rate of change. The complexity in a task lies not in the goal, but in what you have to do in order to get there." (p. 23)

These different levels of complexity are defined in terms of the time-span that the work takes. The first level (Jaques refers to levels as strata) is work which must be completed in a time span of three months or less. This means any work that can be completed in a period of minutes or hours within a day, or within several days in a month, or a set of activities requiring up to three months to complete. The time spans for all the strata are listed below.

| Strata | Time Span |
|--------|-----------|
| I | Three months or less |
| II | Three months to one year |
| III | One year to two years |
| IV | Two years to five years |
| V | Five years to ten years |
| VI | Ten years to twenty years |
| VII | Twenty years to fifty years |
| VIII | Fifty years or more |

Although Jaques' stratification suggests that there are different levels of management to which the organization must attend, many business and non-profit organizations, including co-operatives, only reach Strata III at their highest management level.

How does the democratic management participation ethic of co-operatives meet the challenge of ensuring effective participation at different levels of management complexity? Co-operatives have stressed the need for high quantity of participation, without addressing the question of how participation is best made effective at the different levels of management. Some of the conflict in co-operative organizations comes from too much participation at the wrong level of management complexity. For example, many co-operatives and other non-profit organizations find themselves discussing and deciding operational issues (which Jaques would define as Strata I) during members meetings instead of providing input to the more complex planning and problem-solving issues typical of Strata III and IV. In other words, the problem in these situations is high quantities of participation at low levels of management complexity, and little or no participation at higher levels of management complexity.

The co-operative sector still needs to invent a method for combining collectivist participation with the realities of hierarchical task complexity, and the management of that work. Jaques gives us a language for naming the hierarchical requirements of management complexity. It needs to be blended with the structured decision-making behaviours described by Joreen, then applied appropriately within each level of management complexity.

The Community Journey framework adapted from Campbell suggests that developing the capacity to move through all the stages is a multi-year endeavour, perhaps as high as Strata V or VII, using Jaques model. The responsibility for community development, therefore, needs to be built into the highest levels of management in each individual co-operative, and in the co-operative sector generally.

The democratic decision-making structure of the co-operative may better facilitate the constructive resolution of conflict if there is a forum for inter-group problem-solving in addition to the one member, one vote format of a general members' meeting. Some housing groups, (such as the Affordable Housing Action Association) have been experimenting with affinity groups as the basic building block of democratic governance. General members meetings often become a masked forum for inter-group competition, so consideration should be given to decision-making methods that name the process for what it is – inter-group negotiations. In general this kind of clarity tends to support the constructive resolution of conflict.

# 3

# ANALYSIS AND
# CONCLUSIONS

The third workshop session, held in each region, began with a presentation of the findings from the Lifeline Analysis workshops, as described in the first chapter. The second half of the third workshop included the presentation of a paradigm and framework for understanding the evolution of conflict in housing co-operatives, as derived from a blending of the co-op events, the MNS conflict cycle, and Campbell's Five Stages of the Community's Journey. This framework is shown in Figure 3-1.

Participants' response was very positive as evidenced by their immediate application of the paradigm to identify and explain conflict issues in their cooperatives. Participants agreed that:

- there are stages to a co-op's development and that conflict is experienced at different points in the life of the co-operative;
- it is important for co-op members to recognize the inevitability of conflict as this is the first step in understanding and dealing with conflict constructively;
- many co-ops get "stuck" in the perpetual cycle of conflict and crisis, and some never make it through the transition to the middle-age spread, or stability stage;

*FIGURE 3-1 Summary of Evolutionary Stages from the Literature and Consultation Process*

| Co-Op Events From The Consultation | MNS Conflict Cycle | Five Stages In A Community's Journey |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Settling-in/construction | 1. Getting to know each other | Romance |
| 2. Growing pains | 2. Early events which build tension<br><br>3. Events which surface tension | Power Struggle |
| 3. The crunch | 4. Events which escalate tension | |
| 4. The transition period | 5. Perpetuation<br><br>6. Venting of feelings<br><br>7. Events which limit scope of conflict<br><br>8. De-escalation | |
| 5. Middle-age spread | | Stability |
| | | Commitment |
| | | Co-Creation |

- in order for co-ops to move through the developmental stages they need tools to help them recognize, manage and deal with conflict in a positive way; and,
- co-ops need to find a way to talk about "participation" in relation to the developmental stages using this paradigm and framework. The approach members of a housing co-operative adopt towards participation will affect their ability to move successfully through the developmental stages.

Participants confirmed that a key characteristic determining the escalation of conflict in organizations and communities is the behaviour which occurs among the groups in the co-operative, especially in the arenas of the formal power structures of the organization – such as the Board of Directors, committees, general members meetings and staff hierarchies. The details of the inter-group dynamics were described by participants in this research in an anecdotal manner. A systematic gathering of this information, checked against the formal minutes of the organization and through other means, was not within the parameters of this study.

## "SIMMER AND ERUPT": THE PERPETUATION STAGE OF CONFLICT

The consultation data from the co-operatives, and the synthesis of concepts from the literature review, produced a paradigm of developmental stages in the life of community-based organizations. Within this paradigm is a developmental stage during which there exists the possibility of a repetitive cycle of conflict becoming part of the ongoing pattern in the co-operative. This stage we have called the Perpetuation Stage. Co-operative members described the *events* of this stage as the "simmer and erupt" syndrome. They describe a period when organizational life can seem calm on the surface, but conflict can erupt into a public event, quickly, and with intensity.

The "simmer and erupt" metaphor accounts for the underlying tension of this stage, and helps us understand how crisis can be "perpetuated" over a long period of time. The non-resolution of core issues means that the different groups or factions to the conflict can use a variety of tactics to maintain a low intensity

power struggle, and specific events or tactics trigger the more dramatic moments of conflict.

This state of affairs can become normal within the co-operative. Usually, two groups become the major factions to the conflict – a dominant and a rebellious faction – and other groups stay out of the low intensity part of the conflict. They then become involved only in the dramatic "erupting" conflict moments. In fact, it may be the ability of the dominant or the rebellious factions to draw the otherwise "non-aligned" factions into taking sides on a particular issue that escalates the conflict from simmer to eruption. The dominant and rebellious groups need each other to sustain the conflict and a "lose-lose" pattern of conflict gradually develops. Only one co-op in this study had progressed beyond the stage of perpetual crisis.


## AN INTEGRATED PARADIGM: CONFLICT ANALYSIS AND RESOLUTION

The synthesis of the literature review provides a description of a complete conflict cycle. The seven steps in a conflict cycle described by MNS is enhanced with insights from other authors which can be applied at four levels – individual, group, organizational and social movement level. The most heartening aspect of this analytical framework is that the power struggle experienced in co-operatives, and in many community-based movements and organizations, is a struggle that need not be futile. It can be seen as an understandable and ultimately important stage in the growth of the community. Residents of these communities, the activists who develop and support these communities, and policy practitioners who support social and economic self-determination at the community level need to understand conflict as a natural and important phenomenon and develop strategies to support its growth potential.

This theoretical paradigm was accepted so strongly by participants in the follow-up consultations that it tended to provide a floor for a new discussion on intervention techniques, rather than be the source of much debate. People observed that the conflict paradigm applied to *all* levels of relationship in the co-operative. The paradigm described, for participants, the dynamics of *inter-personal* relationships, relationships between groups in the co-operative (*intra-organizational* level), relationships between co-operative organizations (*inter-*

*organizational*), and the whole set of relationships among organizations in the co-operative sector (*movement* level).

## DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES AS APPLIED TO ORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

As we have stated above, we believe that organizations are, at their simplest level, webs of human relationships. These webs are constructed as a social tool to extend the ability of individuals to influence their environment. The dynamics of organizations are the result of the dynamics at the inter-personal levels, cascading upwards through the group level, to the organizational level, and then to the inter-organizational and movement levels.

We further assume that in new organizations, such as a new housing co-operative, each set of relationships must go through similar developmental processes – that is, they must begin in the romance stage, proceed to the power struggle stage, and then to the stability, commitment and co-creation stages. In addition, organizational capacity develops along a continuum, from the level of inter-personal relationships to the formation of group relationships and inter-group relationships. It is the set of *inter-group* relationships which actually constitutes the "organization". In turn, it is the set of *internal* relationships which shapes the behaviour of the organization toward other organizations, and which then determines the dynamics of the movement. We can expect that each of these combinations of relationships will need to go through the same developmental stages.

Figure 3-2 below depicts, on the vertical axis, the levels of relationship which comprise a typical organization and movement. On the horizontal axis are arranged, in sequence, the developmental stages through which each level of the organization and movement must proceed, according to the conflict model described earlier.

Figure 3-2, therefore, illustrates that *new organizations develop simultaneously in two directions*. Since inter-personal relationships are the building block of organizational relationships, the organizational level of relationship takes shape as group relationships coalesce and the groups interact with one another. The image we have used to try to depict the simultaneous

development of relationship formation at multiple organizational levels, and the movement of these relationships through the developmental stages over time, is the *shaded* arrow-shaped area.

One of the social goals of the housing co-operative movement is to develop "community" over a continuum of levels from the individual to the societal. The community development strategy of the co-operative movement has been to introduce the co-operative "organizational form" as the vehicle to then develop community at the inter-personal and ultimately the societal level. The creation of a housing co-operative is the focus to bring together people who otherwise wouldn't know each other, and form them into an organization. This provides a site for the natural human process of inter-personal and group formation activities in a context where co-operative, rather than competitive, behaviours, attitudes and values can be developed.

*FIGURE 3-2 Developmental Stages of Relationship*
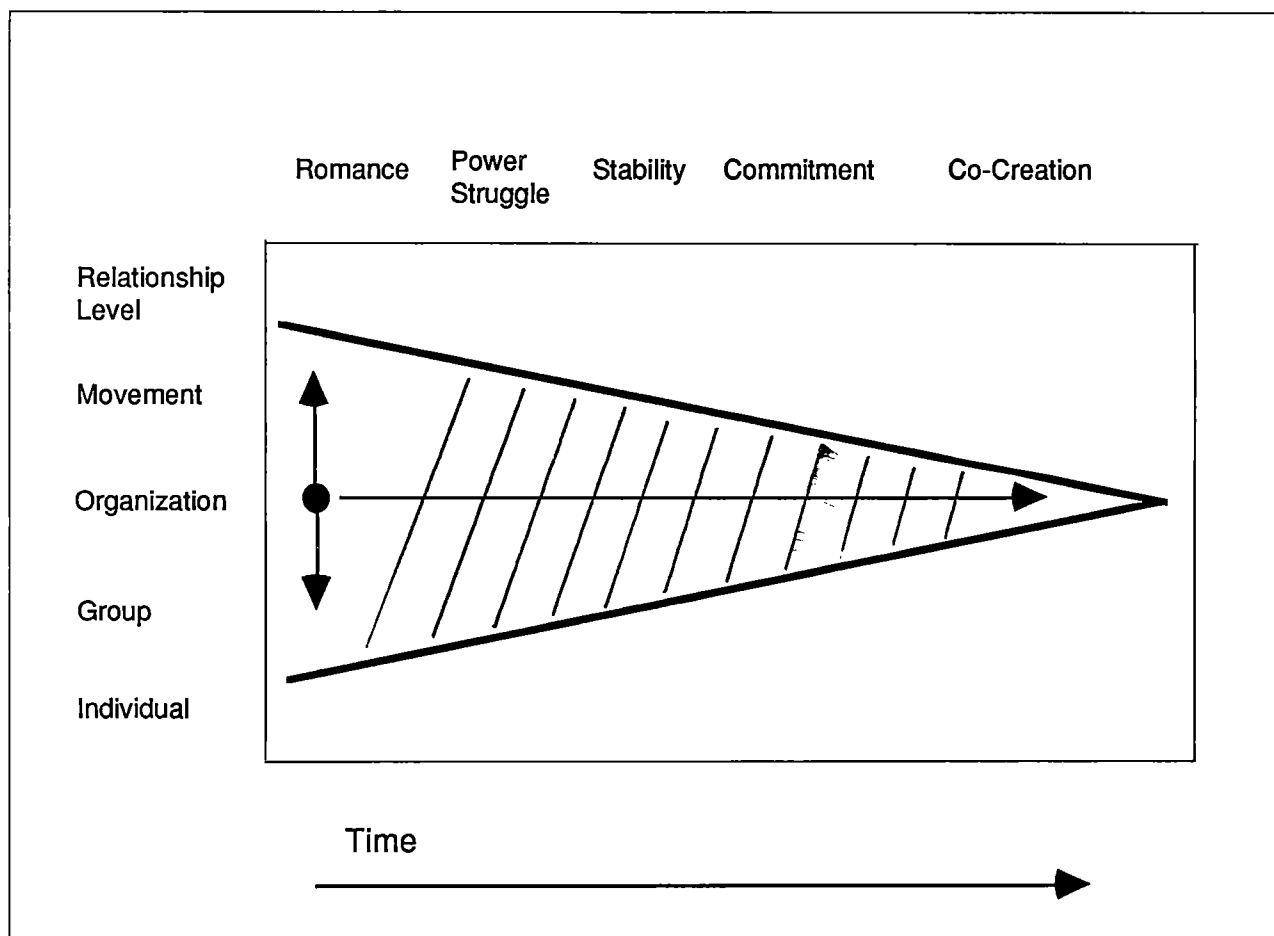
At first, people who are disillusioned with competition are drawn to the co-operative setting by the belief that social and economic relationships can be different. This is the romance stage of co-op living. However, people soon employ the competitive behaviours, attitudes and values, with which they are already familiar. Soon, the power struggle stage is engaged as people discover that other participants are different, and this is both initiated and re-inforced by the use of competitive behaviours and the display of competitive attitudes and values.

Co-op activists can become quite discouraged at this point and feel they have failed. In frustration, they also resort to suppressive strategies. This often has the unintended and opposite effect of intensifying the power struggle. Although co-op activists feel disappointed by this evolution of events, when looked at from a different perspective, the development of conflict is proof of the co-op's advancement through the romance stage to the power struggle stage. It does not represent failure on the part of the co-operative housing movement, but rather success manifesting itself in a different way than imagined.

Activists and leaders in the co-op movement have previously articulated excellent social and economic goals and a program for implementation. Their success is demonstrated by the levels of government funding which the co-op housing program has enjoyed, and the large numbers of people across the country who have applied for and moved into housing co-operatives. Their strategy for building community by fostering the development of relationships among members, and between co-operatives, has been successful. The difficulty is that the leaders and activists didn't and couldn't know that the process of developing these relationships would be so intense, or that a period of "power struggles" was a necessary and important step in achieving their goal of creating viable co-operative organizations.

Although leaders and activists in the housing co-operative sector are feeling badly that the romance stage is over, the perpetuation of this stage would be unrealistic. The co-operative housing sector needs to understand the developmental tasks, and pitfalls, of this stage and move on to the next. They *do*, however, need to be concerned about their co-operative and their movement becoming stuck in the power struggle stage.

There is a theme in the history and progress of many social movements, which is articulated as "we make the road as we go". Although housing co-op leaders and activists feel "bogged down" in the road, they made the road to get to this

point, and they can get through this tough part also. They need to understand that this place (the power struggle stage) is an important developmental stage that has its own lessons and tasks, which *can* be resolved, and which sets the stage for the next period of growth.

Figure 3-2 above shows the organizational level (meaning the housing co-operative) as the point of introduction of relationship activity. Then, radiating out from the centre, it shows much of the focus of current activity located in the second stage. Some co-operatives, such as Co-op C in this study, have experience in moving on to the next stage. Assuming that many, if not most, co-operative housing organizations are stuck in the power struggle stage, an important task for the future is to develop and implement appropriate conflict resolution strategies. For the purposes of this report, however, it is appropriate to briefly suggest some conflict resolution strategies for this stage, which can be found in Appendix C.

The additional considerations of organizational structure and its role in supporting the evolution and perpetuation of conflict through the inappropriate distribution of management tasks at various decision-making levels, must also be addressed when searching for solutions to the problems identified during the consultations.

## CONCLUSIONS

An analysis of the findings of the co-op consultations and the review of the literature strongly suggests that there is a pattern to the evolution of conflict. Conflict in communities, such as housing co-operatives, involves groups of people, even when the presenting conflict appears to be between two people. Because of the normal process of group affiliation and development in communities, whole networks of people can be affected by, and become involved in, an inter-personal conflict.

In housing co-operatives these inter-group conflicts usually emerge at the time that decisions are made about the distribution of resources (Appendix A). These conflicts may in turn reflect disagreement about deeper, underlying values, but they usually become expressed at the point that resource distribution decisions are posed.

There also emerged a pattern to the presentation, escalation, perpetuation and de-escalation of these inter-group conflicts, as described by the MNS model. This cycle of conflict, in turn, can be seen as an important developmental stage, which we have called the Power Struggle stage, in the life, or journey, of a community. It is overwhelmingly at this point in the life of the community that the co-ops get "stuck" in a cycle of conflict. While sector members and activists see this conflict as "bad", conflict resolution theorists and practitioners see it as an inevitable circumstance, and see conflict resolution as an opportunity for growth and development. Without the proper tools, or even a framework for understanding this cycle of conflict, co-ops may be destined to repeat the cycle to their own detriment and that of the movement.

# 4

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations of this study focus on strategies which would improve the ability of the co-operative housing sector to promote an understanding of conflict, and conflict resolution, as an important aspect of community development within the co-op housing sector. These strategies can be used to guide action by individual housing co-operatives, by regional, provincial and national co-operative housing sector organizations, by managers, and Boards of Directors from the general area of social housing, and by social housing policy practitioners in the provincial and federal governments.

We fully believe that it is possible for people to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence to engage conflict and to foster an organizational and movement culture that enables conflict to be an experience of learning and growth.

## PREPARING FOR CONFLICT

We were unable to find anything in the conflict-resolution literature that talked about preparing people for conflict. The specific events which form and shape the evolution of a conflict in any particular co-operative (or community) cannot be predicted, or prevented. However, the members of a co-operative (or any other community) *can* be prepared to recognize, acknowledge and act with intention and confidence when conflict emerges.

It is important, therefore, to prepare co-operative members generally for conflict in their organization by talking openly about it in the early phases of

development and operation. In the consultations, co-op members responded positively to identifying conflict as an inevitable dynamic. They were relieved to see that the conflicts were part of an overall pattern, and not the result of "bad" behaviour on their parts. The fact that conflict is unavoidable made intuitive sense to them, although the more general attitude that conflict is bad, suppressed those intuitive feelings. The conflict frameworks presented in this study gave co-operative members a language to articulate what they already suspected. It made sense to people, too, that a community would mature only over a longer period of time, and that there could be specific stages within that maturation process. Co-operative members found the explanatory value of the analytic frameworks to be so powerful, that they saw its application immediately in their family life, and the life of their workplace, and other organizations where they volunteered.

It is also very important to prepare board members and staff for the conflict dynamic as it will emerge in the management of the co-operative. Board members and staff have a leadership role to play in modeling the constructive resolution of conflict. The opportunity for conflict is bred into every decision that boards and staff make, particularly in the early years of the co-operative. It is in this early period that groups will question vigorously the values that are used in making decisions, and the perceived "fairness" of which groups will benefit or not benefit from the allocation of resources within the co-operative. In this early period the manner in which conflict is handled sets the tone for the community. Constructive modeling of conflict resolution by the Board of Directors and the staff may have a significant impact on how the community gets started.

Further, if boards and staff are not prepared for conflict to be a typical and normal part of co-operative living, and therefore of co-operative management, they may experience the conflict as personal criticism and personal failure. (This sense of failure as managers and leaders because of conflict in the co-operative was a theme expressed by many participants in the study). Feeling that they are criticized, or failing, may condition board members and staff to form coalitions with groups in the co-op that they see as sympathetic to them. This can actually increase the intensity of the conflict, as boards' and staff's sympathy with one group will be seen as bias against other groups. Experiencing the conflict as personal criticism also heightens the chances of staff and boards feeling justified in retaliating against certain groups in the co-operative. Finally, feeling criticized can prevent board and staff members from exercising the leadership of

their position to help shape emerging conflicts into legitimate and constructive resolutions of inter-group differences.

While this preparation for conflict applies at the level of the individual co-operative, it applies to other aspects of the sector also. Resource groups, federations and provincial and national organizations can apply these lessons to their role in assisting member co-operatives in a conflict, and to their own relations and work with co-operatives.

The conflict frameworks outlined in this report demonstrate that conflict occurs because it is the inevitable companion of co-operation. Conflict is in fact the oxygen of change and growth! This connects with the vision of the co-operative sector which encompasses social change and economic growth, and should enable sector activists to work to ensure that the energy of conflict is constructive for them and for the co-operatives they are developing.

## NEEDS ASSESSMENTS/SOCIAL AUDITS

Co-operatives must build community needs assessments into the early phases of development and operations. This needs assessment process has been called by different names, including social audit, and it may be an extremely beneficial developmental task to prepare co-operatives for the constructive and creative resolution of conflict.

This process creates a public context for identifying groups, their differing needs and values, and establishes a public, acknowledged and safe forum for the negotiation of common values and goals for the co-operative. It also fosters a public consciousness of the informal, or social process of decision-making in the community, which the formal management process can work with in making economic decisions.

## SUPPORT FOR THE USE OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Most conflict intervention techniques require participants to assess and articulate their own goals and needs, listen to the goals and needs of others, and participate in problem-solving and negotiation techniques to reach a mutually satisfactory

solution. If one or more parties to the conflict is not interested in participating in problem-solving or negotiation because it seems not to be in their short-term self-interest, then the conflict may perpetuate itself for a long time. This is expensive in human, and often financial, terms for the co-operative. *The sector must develop a rationale and contracting method to support intervention in conflicts, to ensure that conflict is a productive, not an expensive, experience.*

The belief that conflict can be a growth and learning opportunity implies that people see the benefits of taking the risk to meet conflict in a new way. This benefit needs to be demonstrated to people, and they need to be supported in taking these risks. We have heard many times about the ways in which some co-op members have attempted themselves to intervene in emerging conflicts, with the intent to make them constructive, issue-based negotiations, only to be subjected to intimidating and retaliatory behaviour by other constituencies in the co-operative. Usually, sector organizations stand by and watch these conflicts from a distance, because they feel they lack the right or sanction to intervene. This is a serious issue for the sector, since constructive leadership efforts by some co-op members in conflict situations, if left unsupported, can lead to these members withdrawing from involvement in the co-op, or, in more extreme cases, leaving the co-operative. This is a net loss of leadership and skills to the sector as well as to the individual housing co-operative.

In most situations resistance to conflict resolution efforts comes from the party which still believes that it can "win" if the conflict is allowed to run its course. In reality, many conflicts become, and remain, "no-win" contests. *Co-operative sector organizations must commit themselves to the idea of "win-win" conflicts, and support and initiate interventions in co-operatives to this end.* In some ways, it may be the extent to which the co-operative sector can meet this challenge which will enable it to be different from the private economic sector. It is important, however, to recognize the real obstacles that exist for the sector in implementing such an approach.

If the sector can find mechanisms to support conflict resolution initiatives, there is still the pressing issue of acquiring resources for such activities. Co-operative housing budgets are tightly controlled on the operational side. At the time of writing, the Ontario Ministry of Housing limits total administrative expenses to no more than 6% of the total operating budget of the co-operative. This generally provides staff for property management and maintenance, but not for community development, which is the area in which the responsibility for the

development of the capacity for conflict resolution lies. To effectively support the development and use of conflict resolution strategies in the co-op housing sector, *governments must allow for and fund increased budgets to cover the costs of adequate and appropriate community management.*

There are some significant and important programs being carried out in the co-op housing sector, especially in the area of mediation. These have been undertaken with relatively few resources, and generally in situations where the need for conflict resolution services exceeds demand. In addition, at the time of writing, the federal government has canceled the federal co-operative housing program. These trends must be reversed. The co-operative housing sector needs support to *expand* on these initiatives if it is to realize the development of strong conflict resolution programs.

The co-operative sector itself also needs to develop a strategy to support conflict resolution. This strategy should include:

- supporting the development of skills, knowledge and confidence about conflict and conflict resolution among co-operative members, educators and resource group personnel. Training should be continued and expanded with co-op members on techniques for inter-personal communication, since clear communication about tasks, relationships, values, needs, goal and feelings is integral to conflict resolution;

- fostering the belief that conflict is inevitable, is an opportunity for growth and learning, and is an important developmental stage in the life of co-operatives as communities;

- initiating discussions about management structures and processes which recognize differences among constituencies within co-operatives, and which recognize the importance of inter-group problem-solving as a key to successful democratic governance;

- encouraging the development of a network of people with conflict resolution experience, so that this experience can be shared, and be a source of learning to the sector. As an extension of this, exploring the formation of regional groups to provide support to co-operative members who need assistance in resolving conflicts in their co-operatives in a more constructive way;

- identifying and developing accountability mechanisms which allow for sector organization conflict resolution initiatives in individual co-operative organizations at the request of any party to the conflict;
- identifying conflict resolution resources in the community (outside of the co-operative sector) and finding ways to access these resources;
- promoting the responsibility of community development as a task for the highest level of management in the co-operative and in the sector generally;
- supporting further research into management structures and community development and conflict resolution processes which create the capacity for achieving effective management at several levels of complexity, and which promote optimal member participation and democratic management at all levels of management complexity; and,
- encouraging the preparation of detailed case examples, including the histories of conflicts, and the use of conflict resolution interventions, in housing co-operatives, and other similar, community-based housing organizations.

# APPENDIX A

*THE EVOLUTION OF INTER-GROUP CONFLICT IN HOUSING CO-OPS*

This document begins by exploring the evolution, in co-ops, of conflict among groups, and the management inadequacies in the operation of co-ops.

There is a typical process of group formation that occurs in any community or organization. It is based on affiliation among people according to similarities and common interests. The structure of a housing co-operative also promotes the formation of groups through committees and boards. The committees and the Board have some power within the organization according to the levels of decision-making and authority with respect to the allocation of resources.

The evolution of inter-group conflict in housing co-operatives seems to occur as interest groups seek to acquire and exercise power through the structure of the Board and committees. Typically, one or two groups are more successful in concentrating organizational power among the members of their interest groups. A recognizable pattern of negotiation and contest plays itself out, usually with reference to decisions affecting the distribution of resources. These contests often evolve into a condition of disengagement among most members, punctuated by acute conflicts.

The next few pages describe the evolution of this conflict in some detail, drawing heavily on an article entitled "The Tyranny of Structurelessness" by Joreen. A system for classifying "crisis" in co-ops is also reviewed. It should be noted as well that this document does not contain an analysis of conflict based on power and gender or power and race. Gender and racial discrimination are very real dynamics in co-operative organizations, as in all other organizations in our society. Subsequent editions of this paper will attempt to speak more about the exercise of power according to gender and racial criteria and their function in the evolution of conflict in co-operatives.

*Group Formation in Co-ops*

At the start of the co-operative's development, the membership is a collection of individuals, some of whom are already connected to each other through friendship or family ties. Individual members begin to connect with each other and form small groups, most often according to similarities in background and experience, personality or availability of time. (Joreen, p. 240)

A major focus and opportunity for like-minded members to identify and connect with other members is through the committee structure of the co-op. People move relatively freely in and out of co-op committees until they find a group of people, or task, they either feel comfortable with or fit in with. For example, social, maintenance, finance and membership committees across co-ops seem to attract similar kinds of people to such an extent that we can talk about the "typical" maintenance committee member, the "typical" finance committee member, etc. As well, like-minded people may group themselves within the co-op but outside of committees. We talk, for example, of people who live at "that end of the street", or who always sit in the back at members' meetings.

These groups become centres of self-interest, influence and power within the co-operative. They tend to have very similar interests and attitudes on co-op issues and when individual members of a group hold differing opinions, they can still act together through loyalty to their group.

*Formation of Elites*

The formation and maintenance of these kinds of groups within the co-operative is not problematic by itself; indeed, it is typical of human group behaviour in any neighbourhood or organization. Difficulties develop when one group captures power within the co-operative, and exercises this over others in an authoritarian way.

Joreen uses the following as the definition of an elite, and it is a useful concept to understand a fundamental aspect of conflict among groups in co-ops:

> "...an elite refers to a small group of people who have power over a larger group of which they are part, usually without direct responsibility to that larger group, and often without their knowledge or consent."

In our experience there is an "elite" in each co-operative. Their power stems from the authority associated with positions they may hold on the Board and other committees. But often, influential members of the elite do not hold "formal" positions of authority. They may be charismatic or intimidating personalities, and they may be "experts" or "just plain folks". But in every co-op there is a group of people who share some self-interests and who use their informal network to exercise power over the larger group. These groups are not invisible. In every community, people can tell you who the "in" people are. At committee and members' meetings characteristic patterns of interaction are also noticeable:

> "The members of a friendship group will relate more to each other than to other people. They listen more attentively and interrupt less. They repeat each other's points and give in amiably. The "outs" they tend to ignore or grapple with. The "outs'" approval is not necessary for making a decision, but it is necessary for the "outs" to stay on good terms with the "ins"".
> (Joreen, p. 288)

This kind of behaviour is true of the "elite" group (the one that is most influential), but also true of the other groups in the co-operative. The membership of different groups interact with each other in a way that allows an observer to determine who is "in" and who is "out", in any particular group.

Conflict within the co-operative, therefore, is often felt, seen and understood as occurring between the "ins" and the "outs", or between "them" and "us". Participants in, and observers to, the conflict can usually tell you also how the outcome of the conflict is important to one group or the other. These groups are identifiable and have names, both those they give themselves and those given to them by others.

The process of one interest group becoming more powerful and becoming the "elite" is not an intentional one.

> "Elites are not conspiracies. Very seldom does a small group of people get together and deliberately try to take over a larger group for its own ends. Elites are nothing more, and nothing less, than groups of friends who also happen to participate in the same political activities. They would probably be involved in political activities whether or not they maintained their

friendships. *It is the co-incidence of these two phenomena which creates elites in any group and makes them so difficult to break."* (Joreen, p. 289) (emphasis added)

The "political" activities which are the focus of "elite" involvement and shared interest centre on the business of managing the co-operative. It is the "co-incidence" of developing friendship networks, and developing committee and board structures, that makes these factions so difficult to "break" or overcome in housing co-operatives.

## Elites and Resource Distribution

Co-op members can recognize the "elite", and the power they exercise, but are often baffled as to why a group would *want* to acquire and maintain power over the other members of the co-operative.

The answer, in large part, is that there are "real" resources which must be distributed in the co-op, including membership (whose friends or what kind of people get in, or are excluded), maintenance of units, budget of funds for community projects, and hiring of co-op members or their friends to do work on co-op contracts. In addition, there are appeals by members for exemption from specific co-op policies, from pets to visitors to re-decorating. There is also the issue of staff hiring and compensation which often gets tied to issues of reward and punishment for outcomes of other co-op issues. The dynamics around distribution of these resources is the same as those which characterize any "government".

In fact, the similarity of municipal government behaviour to co-op Boards of Directors in particular is striking. (Every co-op board, for example, has its "pothole fixers".)

## EMERGENCE OF THE ELITE

Resource distribution issues occur in the development period and early months of the co-op's operating phase, when the "elite" emerges as the interest group which is most successful in the decision-making and negotiation of these early issues. As these issues are being negotiated the different groups in the co-op bring to the

negotiations different past experiences, different values and different present needs regarding these issues. The groups wind up negotiating from different starting points, and towards different ends. The "disagreements" the groups have can be categorized according to these differences in experience, needs and values.

For example, one group of members may have had a "bad experience" where fences created division among neighbours, and doesn't want to experience that again in the co-op. Another group, which had a "good experience", may have felt the privacy allowed neighbours to have more cordial relations. This is a "different experiences" type of disagreement.

Another group of members may believe the co-op should spend capital money only on goods which all people can benefit from (i.e. members without back-yards can't benefit from fence expenditures) and another group believes that all "external" (not inside the unit) items should be capital expenses. This is a "different values" type of disagreement.

Still another group of members may have small children they would like "contained" in a fenced yard, so that they can do other things around the house and worry less about their children's safety. An opposing group, with older children, feel they would benefit from unfenced yards that created a kind of "common area" which allows for group play. This is a "different needs" example. In fact, with this "fence" example, there could be six different opinions in conflict, representing the different sides of the "experience, values and needs" positions!

## Unstructured Decision-Making Process

As various points of view are expressed, all groups become confused about how to arbitrate between these differing sets of experiences, values and needs. The following questions are raised:

- Is one orientation (experience, value or need) more important, or a more "fair" measure than another? (This is assuming the different orientations are identified, understood and recognized as legitimate.)
- How, if at all, should a group problem-solve in a fair way around these differences and different orientations? Does the co-op's decision-making process provide for consideration and problem-solving of these differences, or is it a "majority rules" process?

- If "majority rules" is the formal decision-making process, and one group of members with a particular self-interest about the issue also happens to be the majority membership of a committee (or the Board) which is dealing with this issue, is it fair or unfair for it to act upon its own self-interest? Should it somehow be required to be objective, or value-free in its deliberations? (This article assumes that being free of "values" is not possible or desirable.)

The bottom-line in these matters, and in co-op conflicts, is "is it fair"?

Rarely does the membership stop to reflect on these questions publicly, and to consider how their decision-making process might be structured, or facilitated, in order to deal with these questions. In fact, usually the opposite is true. There is an urgency felt by the membership to make a decision, either to move ahead on the issue in question, (e.g. build or not build the fences) or in order to relieve the collective "stress" of not being able to easily develop and participate in a decision-making process that sorts out the members' differences of experience, values and needs.

This collective "stress" arises in part because the membership has not developed a pre-determined set of guiding principles, or process, for determining or negotiating what is fair. In other words, it has not structured *how* it will make decisions in the face of these competing criteria.

## Reliance on "Structured" Authority

There is, however, some structure about who has the authority to make decisions (the Board of Directors), and many issues get referred to this group as a way out of the stressful dilemma of sorting out the members' different experiences, values and needs. A culture develops within the organization that "the Board" must decide things *and* that if you want to influence things you need to be on the Board of Directors. Consequently, the different interest groups in the co-op proceed to try and elect their members, or people most like them, to the Board. The group which has the most representatives on the Board of Directors gains a powerful advantage in becoming the "elite" of the co-operative.

This is not an overtly hostile or conspiratorial process in the early phases of the co-operative. In fact, the membership believes this competition to be a "fair"

process and accepts the results, partly because they believe the elected group will govern fairly and be accountable.

The notion of "majority rules" is also a deeply entrenched value in our North American culture. We believe it to be fair. Its simplicity relieves groups of the stress described earlier of having to develop and participate in a decision-making process which treats differences of experience, value and need among interest groups as legitimate differences warranting reconciliation, or accommodation.

*The "Business Imperative"*

The other culturally-based value that supports the formation of the elite, is the primacy of business imperatives over community imperatives. (See Appendix B for a more complete description.)

The "business" of the co-operative (i.e. resource distribution decisions) must be conducted in an efficient and financially responsible way. This translates into an unwillingness by the majority of the membership to take time to make decisions by any method other than "majority rules". There is also a tendency to ignore differences in experience, value and need, and the social or human solutions that accompany these, and to make decisions which support "technical" solutions. (e.g. spend money on fences to keep kids from cutting through yards, rather than spend time developing relationships with kids that foster accountability and respect.)

*CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EMERGING ELITE*

The "elite" becomes the interest group that:

- most effectively captures positions of authority on the co-operative's Board of Directors and committees;
- is most effective in "naming" some issues as "business decisions" (thus making them important) and other issues as "community issues" (thus making them unimportant);
- is most effective in advocating for "majority rules" as the most appropriate and effective method of decision-making;

- is most intimidating in sanctions it applies to individuals and groups which resist the consent or process of their decisions; and,
- has the most time to talk to people to be persuasive, and to make "deals" on other decisions that will be made, and benefits they can deliver.

Obviously, then, if one works full time or has a similar major commitment, it is usually impossible to join (the elite) simply because there are not enough hours left to go to all the meetings and cultivate the personal relationships necessary to have a voice in the decision-making. That is why formal structures of decision-making are a boon to the overworked person. Having an established process for decision-making ensures that every one can participate in it to some extent. (Joreen, p. 291)

The other condition which makes the evolution and maintenance of elite formation possible, is the absence of any other process to "structure" the community around how decisions get made.

## CONFLICT PATTERNS IN HOUSING CO-OPERATIVES

The conflict pattern illustrated in Figure A begins with the inter-group negotiation of the original set of resource distribution issues which arise in the co-op. The collective "stress" which accompanies the absence of guidelines to make decisions when faced with competing experiences, values and needs among groups, is next, and this is followed by a reliance on majority rules as a decision-making remedy. The emergence of the culture of the Board as all-around decision-maker, and the consequent emergence of one group as the co-op's elite are also identified.

What follows these is a set of elite and group interactions, wherein the elites gradually consolidate their hold on decision-making, and other groups move from believing the game is "fair", to believing it is fixed. At that point the groups (and general membership) withdraw from participation, re-involving themselves either for the occasional conflict with the elite, or an all-out protracted "war". These inter-group behaviours deteriorate either into a crisis, (characterized by internal management paralysis) and outside assistance is requested, *or* they evolve into an endless cycle of relatively quiet periods of

*Evolution of Member Conflict in Housing Co-operatives*

### FIGURE A *Patterns in Evolution of Conflict in Housing Co-ops*

**1**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Resource distribution questions arise<br>E.g. Membership criteria<br>    Internal moves<br>    Subsidy allocations<br>    Staff salaries | Groups discover differences in member experience, values, needs | Collective stress arises from inadequate guidelines and process for decision-making to competently deal with differences | "Majority rules" style of decision-making is adopted as process to solve stress | Culture of Board as decision-maker and problem-solver | Beginning of culture of winners and losers which grows over time, and is a significant element as conflict evolves |

**2**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Board elections as legitimate competition among interest groups | Members believe process is fair, and assume Board will be fair and accountable<br>NOTE: Fairness and accountability are defined as "majority rules" and accountability to majority voters | Policies and procedures are defined as decision-making guidelines | Policies and procedures are applied selectively "Ins" get better treatment than "outs"<br>Some members withdraw from involvement | Formal campaigns for fairness, organized protests to Board, committees, and members meetings<br>Groups run for Board or attempt to take over committees to restore "fairness" (whatever that is) |

**3**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Boards improve a bit, or accommodate selected demands of other groups and/or initiate overt and covert campaigns against opposition<br><br>More members withdraw from participation | Renewed competition for Board elections and committee positions – active organization, public criticism of groups, pronounced sense of winners and losers<br>Members continue to withdraw | Accumulation of members withdrawal from participation in co-op activities becomes more acute. Few people do a lot and feel "burned out" | Co-op becomes polarized between "ins" and "outs" and a large group of withdrawn members in the middle. This goup becomes involved only around issues that affect them directly, either to support or to fight with elite | Serious mismanagement occurs, personal stress on elite escalates, hostility in co-op becomes overt, call for outside help<br>Ongoing cycle of quiet disengaged phases, punctuated by acute conflicts and occasionally violence<br>Occasional replacement of elite, until it can regroup and fight back and sustain the cycle |

disengagement, punctuated by acute inter-group conflict and occasionally, violence.

## *FAIRNESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY*

Fairness and accountability become defined in practice when the co-op chooses "majority rules" as its decision-making process, and allows the Board of Directors to become arbiters of all issues.

"Fairness" comes to be understood as "*who* you know, not what you know", as the elite shows preference for friends and their own self-interest in decision-making. "Accountability" gets translated into "kick me out at election time if you don't like what I do." This is very dissatisfying in the resolution of month-to-month issues, and in fact, it becomes very hard to "de-elect" the elite. The resources and skills used in becoming the elite, help them sustain their influence. As well, the process of conflict causes many members to withdraw, or disengage from involvement, so people are less interested and less hopeful that the elite can be successfully challenged, or that "fairness and accountability" can be restored.

A clear culture of "winners" and "losers" begins at the point that "majority rules" and "decisions by Boards" becomes the standard way of doing things.

# APPENDIX B

*COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS DYNAMICS IN NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS*

This paper looks at the ways that the larger dynamics of the relationships between organizations and their environment play themselves out in organizations, from the perspective and experience of people who work as staff, or serve as volunteers on the Board of a non-profit organization. The characteristics of the "ideal business organization" and "ideal collectivist/democratic organization" and why the combination of these within a non-profit organization produces contradictory tensions, is described below.

Table A* provides a description of the value positions of ideal business and community organizations across the organizational dimensions of authority, rules, social control, social relations, recruitment, incentive, social structure and division of labour.

The Business Organization is characterized by hierarchically-organized responsibility, fixed, universal rules, direct controls, impersonal relations, and a division of labour and social status according to privilege. The value which underlies this structure is *a desire for efficiency in task achievement.* Centralized control, impersonal rules and relationships and division of labour are the methods through which the organization seeks to achieve efficiency.

The Democratic Organization is characterized by shared responsibility, individualized decision-making, member self-control, personal relations, shared labour and equal social stature. The *value of equality* underlies the organizational structure. Broad-based participation, personal relationships and generalization of labour are the methods through which the organization seeks to achieve equality.

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* Adapted from Joyce Rothschild-Whitt, "The Collectivist Organization: An Alternative to Rational Bureaucratic Models" in *Organizations: Structure and Process*, Richard Hall, 3rd Edition, 1982, p. 33-34.

***TABLE A*** *Comparisons of Two Ideal Types of Organizations*

| Dimensions | Business Organizations | Democratic Organizations |
|---|---|---|
| *Authority* | • Authority rests in individuals by virtue of their "office" or expertise. Hierarchical organization of positions. Compliance to universal fixed rules as implemented by "office" incumbents. | • Authority resides with membership as a whole. Authority delegated, if at all, only temporarily and is subject to recall. Compliance is to the consensus of the membership, which is always fluid and open to negotiation. |
| *Rules* | • Rules are fixed, formalized and universal. Decisions are calculated and appealed on the basis of correspondence to the formal, written law. | • Minimum number of rules. Decisions are ad hoc and individually considered. Some ability to calculate and appeal decisions on the basis of knowing the substantive ethics of the situation. |
| *Social Control* | • Organizational behaviour subject to control through direct supervision or standardized rules and sanctions. Indirectly controlled through choosing homogeneous members. | • Social controls based on personal or moralistic appeals, and the selection of homogeneous members. |
| *Social Relations* | • Ideal of impersonality. Relations based on role (e.g. Director or member), position, responsibility. Related to product accomplishing tasks. | • Ideal of community. Relations are personal, holistic, of value themselves. |
| *Recruitment* | • Based on specialized training and formal certification. | • Based on friends, social-political values, personality attributes, informally assessed knowledge, skills. |
| *Incentive* | • Do it for money (wages). | • Do it for reasons based on values and beliefs. Material incentives are secondary. |
| *Social Structure* | • Privilege, power, prestige distributed on basis of position in hierarchy. | • Egalitarian. Differences in rewards limited by membership. |
| *Division of Labour* | • Maximum division of labour-separation of intellectual work, manual work; of administrative, performance tasks.<br>• Specialization of jobs, functions -ideal of the specialist - expert. | • Minimal division of labour-division of intellectual, manual work reduced; administrative, performance tasks combined.<br>• Generalization of jobs and functions -ideal of the generalist-amateur. |

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

A non-profit organization has elements of the value basis of *both* of these ideal organizational types.

*Authority* rests within the "offices" of the Board, board officers, and perhaps staff and committee chairpersons. Authority *also* rests with the general membership. Members are expected to "comply" with policies as established by the Board of Directors, but may appeal these at any time to the general membership.

*Rules* are usually written down in formal policies and applied by the Board, staff or committees, but any decision may often be appealed to the general membership.

*Social control* is exerted on members through the application of policies by the Board and staff, but may be ignored if the majority of members/clients consider them to be unfair.

*Roles* are fluid and changeable and members step in and out of their formal positions as Directors, committee personnel, or members. People may "vote as a Director" at one meeting, and vote the opposite way "as a member" at another meeting.

*Recruitment* to some positions such as Treasurer or President is often based on specific skills, whereas recruitment to other committees is often based on friendship networks.

*Incentive* to volunteer varies, with some members hoping primarily to get paid or to keep the costs of service down. Others feel an obligation to the clientele, general public or other members in the organization.

*Social Structure* is divided according to the value placed on "privilege". Some members feel they deserve special treatment, befitting their role in

the organization as a Director or committee person. Other members feel that equality, and the absence of special privilege is most important.

*Division of Labour*, in non-profit organizations, board and committee work is divided along "deciding and doing" lines where some volunteers act as corporate decision-makers, and others work as unpaid staff and have no say in decision-making. There are also numerous examples where there is no such separation. Some organizations select volunteers based only on their specialized credentials and others where people are encouraged to take responsibilities for which they have no specialized previous experience.

Elements of these ideal types of business and community organization can be found within non-profit organizations. Each organizational type is based on different values, however, and an ongoing tension is created.

The centralized control, written rules and relationships, and division of labour of business organizations are in opposition to the broad-based participation, situational ethics model of decision-making, and generalization of labour of the community organization.

The overall value conflict of these two organizational types can be described as a tension between the *efficiency* of business and the *effectiveness* of democracy. This a tension which is rooted, in turn, in the value conflicts in our general society about the purpose and organization of social and economic activity.

The tension between the conflicting values and corresponding structures of the business and democratic organization is at the root of the participation problem in non-profit organizations, and becomes apparent in the participation behaviour of the members. Inadequate participation occurs when the members get turned off by the centralized control and impersonality of the "business" aspects of the non-profit or by the "inefficiency" of the democratic aspects of the non-profit. This in turn "starves" the business of the volunteers needed to achieve its tasks.

## DIRECTIONS

Board members can endeavour to articulate the values and experiences they bring with them to their work in the non-profit organization. It may be useful to use community and business frameworks described here to identify which orientation predominates among board members on particular issues. This can be used to negotiate a group contract about the issues people agree on and the issues that are going to be "hot". This helps people see that the controversy is rooted in an *issue* and not in personalities, or the rightness or wrongness of particular values.

It is probably helpful for people to adopt the value that they are going to have to develop some creative blend of community and business values to make a non-profit organization be successful, and not retain a position in favour of *either* the business *or* community value set.

The emphasis in the organization is not always going to be balanced between its community and business aspects. Organizations will move through particular phases where one aspect of the organization will dominate for a while. It can be very useful for the organization to be able to identify these phases as they occur, or as part of their planning.

*(Note: both of the attached unpublished papers - Appendix A & B - were written by Mike Balkwill, as part of contract work undertaken during 1988/89)*

# APPENDIX C

As mentioned earlier in this report, it is most often when the conflict is in the perpetuation stage that the request for conflict resolution comes. The organization requesting intervention wants to know what steps can be taken to resolve the conflict, without having a framework for knowing or defining why the conflict is occurring, and, therefore, what resolution might look like. Similarly, conflict managers, consultants, and interested others want to know techniques for intervention. The section below is meant to give practical steps and techniques of intervention, while embedding an understanding of activities which occur during this stage within a larger conflict evolution and resolution paradigm.

To begin with, however, conflict must be seen as occurring along a continuum from the interpersonal, to the inter-group, to the community and ultimately the societal level. Conflict *resolution,* therefore, must occur at all these levels as well.

## *OVERVIEW OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION TECHNIQUE*

### *Inter-personal Conflict*

Much of the intervention technique and theory in the conflict resolution field focuses on the inter-personal level, and, therefore, much of the intervention technique focuses on improving inter-personal communication. These techniques promote active listening, problem-assessment, problem-solving and negotiation. A number of mediation programs have been developed for use in a variety of settings, and some of these have been used in the co-operative housing sector with good results.

*Organizational/Community Conflict*

The first step in intervention technique involves assessment. Conflict resolution practitioners undertake an analysis of the stakeholders to the conflict, an analysis of the history of situation, and an analysis of the resources available to resolve the conflict. (Conflict Clinic, p. 51) Some of this analysis can be done by the practitioner on their own, and some can or must be done in concert with the parties to the conflict.

The next step is a process of developing preliminary plans for the conflict resolution process, and negotiating agreement for the process to be used in resolving the conflicts. (Conflict Clinic, p.51; Pneuman and Bruehl, p. 100-110) The negotiation of an agreement actually allows participants to vent feelings associated with the build-up of the conflict, and to form the basic inter-group relationships that will be required to resolve the conflict. Only after this preparatory work is done, can the actual process to resolve the conflicts be initiated.

The first step in the process is to generate problem definitions that are shared and then to generate solutions and agreements to solve these problems. The final stage is to act on the implementation of these solutions. (Conflict Clinic, p. 51) There are many detailed resources with guidelines on how to conduct the activities appropriate to each of these steps.

The literature is much less clear, however, on describing how conflict resolution practitioners actually get invited into a conflict setting. Discussion with practitioners at the National Conference on Peace and Conflict Resolution* indicated that most practitioners are associated as staff or volunteers with formalized mediation services, community-based justice centres, or university-based programs (all of which are more prevalent in the United States than in Canada), or operate as independent consultants. It was our impression that many

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*NOTE: The authors attended the "National Conference on Peace and Conflict Resolution" held in Charlotte, North Carolina in June of 1991. The workshop topics fell generally into three categories - interpersonal mediation techniques and issues; techniques and process for intervening in public disputes (e.g. city planning or environmental assessment issues); review of national and international conflicts and peace efforts in those situations (i.e. South Africa, Middle East). These workshops were very interesting. There was little if any focus on the issue of conflict within specific organizations, or self-contained communities such as housing co-operatives. There was also little focus on understanding the characteristics of how conflict emerged, rather the focus was on how to resolve conflict once it had developed. We approached several practitioners who presented at the conference, and who had much experience, to ask for direction to people or sources who had addressed the question of how conflict evolves. These practitioners responded by saying the evolution of conflict is an area to which not much attention has been paid. They encouraged us in our research, and expressed an interest in the results.

more conflict situations occur than there are resources to provide in resolving them, and that it is a separate and difficult process to get organizations and communities to make use of conflict resolution services. This reluctance on the part of groups in conflict to make use of conflict resolution services makes sense given the attitudes of denial towards conflict in our culture.

## AN INTRODUCTION TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES

The identification of the need for conflict resolution usually occurs during the "perpetuation" stage of the conflict. Identification occurs at this point, and not earlier, because the co-op has evolved into a set of constituencies, of which a dominant and a counter-dominant faction are the primary parties to the conflict. The call for "help" usually does not occur until these two groups have reached some kind of stalemate. If one constituency still felt it had a chance of "winning", (or retaliating, or "changing" the other constituency), it would not call for help in the form of conflict resolution. The crisis which is precipitated by the stalemate between the dominant and counter-dominant factions actually creates a "teachable" moment which makes some kind of intervention possible.

### Two Types of Intervention

Pneuman and Bruehl describe two possible types of intervention: authority-based and interactional. They believe authority-based interventions "are the most numerous. By virtue of (their) managerial authority, (managers) are expected and required to manage a myriad of conflicts daily. (The manager's) skill in maintaining a functional part of the organization requires (the manager) to balance and to manipulate financial, material and human resources in an efficient and creative way."

> "Literally each decision (the manager) makes is conflict management, and most all are based on the managerial authority. A simple decision to attend a meeting is an example of an authority-based decision. It probably means you have given priority to that meeting in preference to a number of other

options...Every manager faces time-scarcity conflicts constantly, and handles most of them on the basis of managerial authority."

"Most conflicts that involve the people who are subordinate to (the manager) are managed by authority. Normally, (the manager) would use, or modify, organizational structures, conditions, or procedures to manage such a conflict situation."

"Therein lies the inherent advantage and disadvantage of an authority-based intervention. Though normally quick and efficient, it does prevent the participation of subordinates and/or peers in the management decision. As a result, such interventions lack creativity and are subject to resentments and lack of commitment on the part of the conflicted parties."

Pneuman and Bruehl say that interactional interventions are "much more unusual and less numerous, (and) by their very nature interactional interventions are costly in terms of time, people, and financial resources...a choice to pursue interactional management often involves taking the people involved from their regular work activities to devote the time to conflict management."

"The inherent advantages and disadvantages (of interactional conflict interventions) are just the opposite of those for authority-based interventions. Unfortunately, interactional interventions often become necessary under crisis conditions, because they are postponed too long. Conflict situations that fester through mismanagement by suppression or passivity often eventually develop conditions that demand interaction under the worst possible circumstances."

"Successful interactional management (of conflict) is difficult, but can be extremely rewarding to the manager and the organization. The process involves you in one of two ways: either as manager of the several parties to the conflict, or as one of the conflicted parties. In either case, an interactional intervention brings the conflicted parties together for

interaction with the goal of mutual satisfaction of all parties in the eventual management solution."[30]

Pneuman and Bruehl's definition of intervention methods poses the first question to be answered in considering a conflict resolution intervention. When the conflict is best intervened in by a manager (staff or Board of Directors), the role of the intervenor is to provide advice, analysis and coaching to that manager. When the conflict is best managed through an interactional intervention method, possibly because the conflict has "festered", the role of the intervenor is to act as a third party mediator or consultant.

Pneuman and Bruehl say that "choice of an intervention method is essentially the choice between expediency and efficiency (Authority) on the one hand and creativity and...participation or commitment (Interactional) on the other. Most managers will use these in combination at times...The source of the conflict is the key to the content of the intervention and determines the method to use."[31]

This introduces the importance of assessing the causes of conflict *before* intervention. Many third party mediators get called for help with intervention at the time the conflict has reached an intense pitch, and after it has been perpetuated for a period of time, with a long history of suppressive and retaliatory behaviours by the parties to the conflict.

The conflict literature provides a range of analytical approaches for assessing the causes of conflict. An inventory of the specific techniques is a task outside the scope of this research report. The techniques do allow a conflict manager to consider the possible causes of conflicts at the personal, inter-personal, inter-group, inter-organizational and societal levels. The level of analysis employed can be as integrated, or as narrowly focused, as the participants to the conflict, and the conflict manager choose. There is advice in the literature on everything from ways to conduct the exploratory meeting with the parties to a conflict[32], to detailed analytical methods for stake-holder analysis in multi-party public disputes.[33]

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[30] Pneuman and Bruehl, p. 71/72.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., p. 100-111.
[33] Conflict Clinic, p. 19-30.

## THE RESOLUTION PROCESS

The intervention strategy described by the authors of the Movement for a New Society handbook, is a useful and accessible generic approach to conflict resolution.   Each stage in the process of resolution is related to a conflict phase within the "power struggle" stage of the life of the organization.

| **Conflict  Phase** | **Resolution  Process** |
| --- | --- |
| • early events which build tension<br>• events which surface conflict by pushing it out into the open<br>• an event(s) which escalates tension<br>• escalation and intensification of conflict<br>• perpetuation of the conflict | *Conflict Analysis* |
| • venting feelings | *Conciliation* |
| • initiating events which limit the scope of the conflict | *Negotiation* |
| • de-escalating the conflict | *Implementation* |

## *Conflict  Analysis*

The following general questions are useful in analyzing the conflict.  Again, complete books have been written on the reasons and methodologies for asking these questions, but in this form they provide a concise guide to someone interested in intervening in a conflict situation.

1) What is happening (feelings, history, events, behaviour)?
2) Who are the people involved?
3) What surfaced the conflict so that both parties involved recognized it?
4) What are the issues, goals, and needs of the people in the conflict?
5) How can the problem be broken into solvable parts?

These are questions to ask before initiating an intervention or resolution process, and which guide the consultant or conflict manager through the next three phases of activity.

## *Venting of Feelings Stage/Conciliation Activities*

The Movement for a New Society article describes conciliation as the appropriate step for venting of feelings. It defines conciliation as "action which psychologically prepares people to change their relationship to one another."[34] They further define conciliation as comprising five important elements:

"1) *making contact* between the people who are in conflict

2) *handling the feelings* of the conflicting people

3) *building trust* - dissolving stereotypes, affirming the good aspects of the people in the conflict, identifying points which the people hold in common, and affirming the relationship itself

4) *getting the conflicting parties to agree* to talk about the feelings and the issues

5) *setting up guidelines* for the discussion/negotiation"

"All of the actions above are important steps in de-escalating a conflict on the feeling level. Once feelings are dealt with, the community members can move ahead to the negotiations which will re-structure their relationship and eliminate the cause of (this) conflict."[35]

## *Events Limiting the Scope of a Conflict/Negotiation*

Again, there are many good books on negotiating and bargaining, but the following five steps are generally part of the negotiation process:

"1) *Clarify what happened.* Each person or a representative of each group should be allowed time to describe how they see the conflict. History, precipitating events, crisis event(s), and feelings should be presented. The central and peripheral issues to the conflict should be identified and

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[34]  Adam Curle, *Making Peace*, (Tavistock, London: 1971), p. 2.

[35]  Movement for a New Society, p. 67.

defined. In clarifying what happened, the people involved are building an argument for the goals and needs which they would like to see met.

2) *Clarify goals and needs.* Goals and needs may differ, so each group should clarify theirs. It is important to realize that the goals and needs as stated at the beginning of the bargaining session are just that - an opening statement and not the final word. In the process of discussion the (groups) may realize that certain goals or needs are not realistic and modify their expectations. Note: needs are not always rational and therefore are not always subject to "rational" resolution methods.

3) *Divide the problem into several smaller problems* If there are component parts of the problem which can be identified and separated from the central issue, (then) these smaller parts are frequently easier to solve than handling the whole problem at once. Also, handling some of the problems successfully, even though it is a small part, gives the people in the situation a feeling of success and encourages them to find solutions to other parts of the problem.

4) *Select one of the sub-problems and generate solutions for it.* Solutions may be generated by a process of brainstorming; through conversation; through a process of individual reflection; etc.

5) *Select a solution.* Selection of a solution in the bargaining process, is very much like making a consensus decision in a large group. In making a decision it is important to define long-range goals for the relationship, as well as short range goals. (The) decision (on a solution) should be consistent with both sets of goals (long and short range) for the relationship. If it is not, the end result will be more conflict in the future."[36]

These negotiation activities help to un-pack a conflict into its manageable, component parts. Often, what creates a crisis in an organization, is the complexity of the conflict, which may have many parts, most of which are not

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[36] Ibid., p. 71/72.

named or understood, and they re-inforce each other, making resolution of the conflict even more difficult. The identification of component parts, and generation of solutions for the various components, are the activities which allow the scope of the conflict to be limited.

## De-escalation Stage/Implementation Activities

It is important to implement the solutions developed, especially as the contracting involved to produce agreement on the solutions often involves new behaviours, attitudes and relationship arrangements. These usually represent consolidation of the developmental tasks of the "power struggle" stage ( recognition and validation of differing needs and perceptions, and learning to say who we are and what we want), and the engagement of the developmental tasks for the "stability" stage in the community's journey.

Implementation involves consideration of:

"1) what each group has agreed to, with restatement of the final agreement
2) how long the parties have agreed to do it for
3) what to do if a problem arises again
4) whether either of the parties need any help in order to adhere to, or carry out the decision
5) when to evaluate the solution to determine if any modifications or new solutions need to be found."[37]

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[37] Ibid., p. 72.

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