

Communication Capacity Building

One of the most challenging aspects of any collaborative process is the communication between participants. A single phrase uttered in contempt can undo weeks of progress. Having good communication skills is imperative to the success of an environmental policy development process (d'Estree, 2003; Manring, Nelson, & Wondolleck, 1990; Rieman, Hessburg, Luce, & Dare, 2010; Singletary et al., 2008). Littlejohn and Domenici (2001) listed three requirements for developing healthy communication and dialogue among people united only by their diversity: (a) taking time to explore experiences, ideas, concerns, and doubts; (b) listening for both differences and commonalities in the experiences and stories, as well as values, expressed by all parties; and (c) asking open, nonjudgmental, and curious questions to learn more about the others. This chapter focuses on the communication skills necessary to work through differences and craft agreements that meet the needs of those involved in the decision-making process. The key to successful collaborative processes is training in listening, good communication skills, and problem solving (Davidson & Wood, 2004). Specific skills such as listening, communicating concerns, question asking, and **reframing** will be discussed, and the development of such proficiencies will be addressed through exercises, role plays, and scenario analysis.

Communication Competency

Our approach to communication views conversational exchanges as shared understanding or systems of meaning (d'Estree, 2003). Participants in conversation create and co-create their worldviews, including the problem to be addressed and potential solutions (Dewulf, Francois, Pahl-Wostl, & Taillieu, 2007; Gordon, 2011; Walker, 2007). Successful communicators recognize this dependency and seek to jointly establish possibilities in conversation by working off of each other. Daniels

and Walker (2001) outline three dimensions of communication competence: (a) adaptability, the ability to assess situations and adapt their communicative behaviors accordingly; (b) appropriateness, knowing how and when to employ communication behaviors; and (c) effectiveness, the ability to achieve communicative goals. The key to competence is knowing and accepting that appropriate and effective communication is determined by others. Thus, it is necessary to seek to engage *with* others not merely speak at them.

Communication Capacity Building

Power-over communication, or what Floyd (2009) calls a “one-up,” is a verbal message through which the speaker attempts to exert dominance or gain control over the listener. It is to verbally establish a hierarchy through tone, word choice, and cadence. Power-over communication is not well received by others as conversation and turns into a series of power messages, leaving behind the real intent of communicating, such as understanding perspectives or advocating your view.

The alternative to power-over is power-with, or what Floyd (2009) calls “one-across.” This is a verbal message that seeks to neutralize relational control and power and establish commonality through tone, word choice, and cadence. This type of communication is inviting and engaging as communicators seek to understand and build upon the perspectives that each participant brings to the table. The following paragraphs focus on developing power-with communication skills to engage in conversation that will move participants toward understanding and agreement.

Listening and Acknowledgment

One of the most powerful, and indeed crucial, tools participants in a collaborative process must have is the ability to listen. Floyd (2009) calls *listening* the “cure for conflict” (p. 479). Active listening focuses on learning information and exploring problems (Davidson & Wood, 2004; Welton, 2002). It assumes a desire to learn from another person, thereby recognizing their perspective. Listening assumes acknowledgment and such acknowledgment is critical to the communicative process between participants (Collins, 2009; Davidson & Wood, 2004; Malouff, Calic, McGrory, Murrell, & Schutte, 2012; Welton, 2002). “Consensus building may be impossible unless the work of acknowledgement and recognition precedes the work of problem solving. . . . After recognition comes exploration, listening, learning, invention, proposals, and creative work” (Forester, 1999, p. 491). Once people feel heard, they are open to creatively addressing issues and working toward agreement.

In conflict, it is difficult to really listen to the other without hastily prejudging the other or focusing on what you will say next. To truly listen means to be present to the other, allowing the person to truly speak their mind or what Gordon (2011) calls “embracing the other” and being open to their experience (p. 48).

Active listening takes focus, commitment, and discipline and is dependent on motivation (Brownell, 2010; Daniels & Walker, 2001). If you are committed to listening and developing the necessary skills, you will be more effective in handling conflict.

Brownell (2010) presents a skill-based model of listening-centered communication. Creating an easy to remember acronym, HURIER, she identifies six critical components of good listening: **H**earing, **U**nderstanding, **R**emembering, **I**nterpreting, **E**valuating, and **R**esponding. Building on her work and incorporating the work of others, we present the **HURIER model** below.

Hearing

The first component identified by Brownell is hearing. To hear another is to make a decision about what to focus on within a context filled with many stimulus options. In order to do this, the listener must commit to understanding and prepare to listen by determining their listening goals, analyzing the listening context, and addressing the influence of listening filters such as culture, style, age, attitudes, and the like. (Thompson, Leintz, Nevers, & Witkowski, 2010). The hearer must optimize physical conditions for hearing and minimize psychological barriers. Body posture and eye contact must be directed towards the speaker so as to maximize attention and minimize distraction. Finally, the listener must receive and consciously attend to, collect, and distinguish between verbal and nonverbal messages (Bodie, Cyr, Pence, Rold, & Honeycutt, 2012).

Understanding

The second component of good listening is understanding. Brownell (2010) defines this as having decoded both the verbal and nonverbal components and having attended to and received the message. To understand, a listener must recognize assumptions and listen to understand, rather than evaluate, their message. They are to distinguish the main ideas from the supporting evidence by recognizing patterns and focusing on the essential message rather than the detail. This is done while continually checking perceptions for accurate comprehension (Thompson et al., 2010). While listening to their message, it is often tempting to make judgments, calculate the ways you disagree with them, or formulate your response while they are speaking, but if true listening is to happen, the listener must hear the entire message without interrupting and focus on the speaker rather than their own response (Wolvin, 2010).

Remembering

Remembering is the third component outlined by Brownell (2010). This step involves understanding how current information compares to previous understandings. This is often more difficult during conflict but is necessary for the hearer to make sense of what is being said.

Interpreting

The fourth component of listening is interpreting. This is the process of assigning meaning to the message and drawing inferences from the new information. The listener must be willing to suspend personal bias temporarily as they consider the context of the communication act and factor in the understood goals of the communicator (Bodie et al., 2012; Thompson et al., 2010). In this stage, there is an increased sensitivity to both verbal and nonverbal cues as the listener engages in mirroring. To mirror another speaker is to acknowledge and repeat key phrases from the conversation. This demonstrates that you are paying attention and understanding where they are coming from (Leach, Rogelberg, Warr, & Burnfield, 2009; Malouff et al., 2012; Yukl, 2010). To encourage the speaker, it is also necessary to ask clarifying questions to make sure you understand their message and intended meaning (Bodie et al., 2012).

Evaluating

The next step in Brownell's (2010) model is evaluating the new information and making an informed judgment about the relative merits of the message. It is in this step that we make verdicts about the accuracy and validity of the message by assessing the speaker's credibility, analyzing their logic and reasoning, and identifying emotional appeals. It is at this point that the listener accepts or rejects all or portions of the message. It is important for the listener to identify their preconceived notions, assumptions, and personal biases that may skew their evaluation.

Responding

The final component of the listening model is responding to the message of the speaker. The listener is to reflect on the message by first paraphrasing or summarizing their point before responding (Cohen, 2008). This allows the speaker to feel heard and also can clear up any misunderstandings on the part of the listener. The listener is to then react appropriately to the message and sender by choosing proper verbal and nonverbal responses while recognizing the impact of the response. Becoming familiar with response options and the impact is crucial to good listening. It is with this flexibility that a listener becomes competent. Listening does not end when responding, as the responder continually monitors the nonverbal and verbal cues of the initial speaker and shows empathy and respect for the speaker (Thompson et al., 2010).

Developing good listening skills is critical to conflict management. By understanding and following the model outlined above, participants in the collaboration can have what Wolvin (2010) calls true engagement. For without such engagement, participants will not be able to come to a common understanding of the issues or jointly develop potential solutions.

Activity

Listening and Summarizing

Instructions: Please break into groups of two and role-play the following scenarios, paying particular attention to how you listen, summarize, and respond. Make sure you summarize the other's words before you respond with your own thoughts or ideas.

Scenario A: In December, 2011, the city of Leviston, across St. Peter's River from Ottawa City, Canada, proposed development of a new traffic route to ease congestion on its main thoroughfares and create a potential new zone for industrial expansion. In accordance with provincial requirements, the city prepared an environmental impact assessment, which was open to public review and comment. A municipal counselor raised several serious concerns about the adequacy of the impact assessment and of the highway extension project.

Party A: Municipal counselor—You are to communicate all of your concerns, in detail, regarding the proposed development to the project manager. They include public safety (the highway would entail a new railway crossing), increased traffic noise on several streets, and impacts on heritage and archeological resources. Be specific but develop your concerns.

Party B: Project manager—You are to listen to the complaints of the municipal counselor and then summarize his concerns to the best of your ability. Do not respond with a rebuttal, merely summarize his comments and ask for clarification.

Scenario B: In February, 2013, the state of Utah placed a \$5.00 canyon entrance fee to Bear Canyon, a widely popular canyon located in Glendale, Utah. The purpose of the fee was to generate funds for maintenance of the canyon and to increase awareness of and respect for the use of the canyon. At the base of the entrance live some of the wealthiest people in Glendale who use the canyon on a regular basis for recreational activities. On behalf of the homeowners, Barney Bennett has come to complain to your agency regarding the fee.

Party A: Barney Bennett—You represent the homeowners in the area and are concerned at the high entrance fee. You understand the need for a fee for those who visit the canyon occasionally, but as a local member of the community who accesses the canyon on a regular basis (at least 3 times a week) you do not feel the fee is justified or fair. After all, you have to put up with the traffic of others coming into the canyon as the road is directly in front of your house and have not complained at all. You would like a break from the imposed fee.

Party B: Agency representative—You are to listen to the complaints of Mr. Bennett and then summarize his concerns to the best of your ability. Do not respond with a rebuttal, merely summarize his comments and ask for clarification.

Listening for Narratives

While listening to others in conflicts, especially conflict about environmental issues, it is essential to listen to the shared narratives (Lejano, Ingram, & Ingram,

2013). It is in narratives that deeply held values are shared. Values run deeper than interests and most often are not amenable to change, persuasion, rational argument, or even bargaining. They speak to our sense of self and are often associated to a specific environmental issue or place and are what scholars in the field call place-based identity values (Clarke, 2008; Forester, 1999; Gray, Peterson, Putnam, & Bryan, 2003). These identity values are not often articulated clearly but emerge through storytelling or personal narratives. Stories are accounts of a sequence of events, characters, and experiences that convey the meaning of this otherwise disparate assemblage. Hidden in narratives are taken-for-granted practices of power, culturally influenced beliefs, and experientially influenced sets of understanding (Goldberg, 2009). Stories help participants establish their identities vis-à-vis the other participants in the collaborative group, and when parties tell stories, they tell a lot about themselves, their histories, and their connections to the environment (Clarke, 2008). Listening to narratives and acknowledging their significance can help participants focus on, and potentially address, key issues of the conflict (Clarke, 2008; Lejano et al., 2013; Lewicki, Gray, & Elliot, 2003; Winslade & Monk, 2000).

Considering Culture

High- and Low-Context Cultures

In his 1976 book *Beyond Culture*, Anthropologist Edward T. Hall introduces the concept of high-context and low-context cultures. This refers to a culture's tendency to use high-context messages over low-context messages in communication as they relate to each other in interaction (Hall, 1976). In **high-context cultures**, nonverbal communication is emphasized and meanings are conveyed by context and behavior more than words. Thus, people rely on shared cultural understanding to give communication meaning. In **low-context cultures**, there is more verbal and direct communication with a minimal focus on contextual meaning. Words, rather than context, carry meaning and are assigned specific interpretations. This gives less leeway for implied meanings.

High Context

Nonverbal communication emphasized
Contextual, implied meaning
Indirect, covert
Implicit message
Reactions reserved

Low Context

Verbal communication emphasized
Specific, literal meaning
Direct, overt
Explicit message
Reactions on the surface

Although cultural context is relativistic rather than absolute, you can expect people living in some communities to demonstrate higher contexts than people living in other communities. Imagine that you are working with a conflict

between sea turtle biologists and residents of a small coastal village in El Salvador. Suppose that most of the biologists grew up in Australia, Germany, New Zealand, or the United States, and those that did not grow up there received their education in these countries. Suppose that the villagers grew up in El Salvador or another Central American country. One of your most challenging tasks will be to facilitate communication strategies that help both groups adapt to the other cultural context. As members of low-context cultures, the biologists may feel that asking for assistance demonstrates a lack of expertise, while the relatively high-context villagers may interpret the failure to ask for their opinion as disrespect or even a personal insult.

Advocating Your View

Peter Senge (2006), author of *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, outlines a method for using direct communication and advocating your view in an organizational setting. He suggests that when making your point or perspective known, the key is to make your own reasoning explicit, and then encourage others to explore your view and provide a different view. He argues that when inquiring into others' views it is necessary to ask questions about their reasoning and state any assumptions you are making about their view with evidence. It is important to not make it personal and to distinguish between the argument and the person. In a negotiation, it is oftentimes too easy to align a position with an individual. When the negotiation becomes personal, it is difficult to see beyond differences to the underlying issues and concerns. When this happens, suggestions are taken personally and disagreements are seen as attacks. Fisher and Ury (2011) suggest that in negotiation, one should separate the people from the problem. Or in other words, separate the substance from the relationship by focusing on specific issues rather than an organization or individual.

Activity

Advocating Your View

Team up with another member of the group and practice using direct communication with the following scenarios:

Scenario 1: You are a sergeant explaining to your colonel that he has to delay his military maneuvers to comply with the Endangered Species Act. A specific example would be the Desert Tortoise crossing the road in front of an Army caravan at White Sands Missile Range, New Mexico. The caravan was required to stop for 3 hours to wait for the tortoise to cross the road because the tortoise cannot be touched.

Scenario 2: You are a representative of the timber industry who, in response to a loss of income in the community, is proposing a timber harvest. You are speaking to an avid environmentalist who is opposed to any harvesting of timber in the area.

Communicating Your Concerns

Scholars of communication and conflict management advocate the use of *I* statements when addressing conflict or communicating concerns (Abigail & Cahn, 2011; Cohen, 2008; Daniels & Walker, 2001; Davidson & Wood, 2004). Using statements that begin with *I* communicates the impact of situations, actions, or another's communication on oneself without attacking or blaming the other. For example, instead of saying, "you are so inconsiderate when . . ." you would say, "I get frustrated when . . ." Using *I* statements allows you to own your own perspective and focus on actions that can be changed rather than making a definitive statement about a person or situation. "This is how I see the situation . . ." rather than "you are selfish and don't care about this community." The former focuses on impact of an action or situation, whereas the latter makes a character statement that will most likely spark a debate rather than an exploration of how to solve an issue. Using *I* statements also helps to avoid victim discourse, which is language that focuses solely on blame. While understanding a contribution to a situation is important in developing solutions, focusing on blame keeps the emphasis on the past instead of the future where potential solutions can be developed and implemented (Stone, Patton, & Heen, 2000). Instead, identify behavior or situational characteristics and name the consequences of those behaviors or situation on yourself.

In addition to using ***I* language**, it is also necessary to avoid vague or generalized statements and be specific in your concerns. Describe as accurately and objectively as possible the behavior you see that concerns you. This will help move the conversation from intangible themes, which are abstract and difficult to address, to a conversation about specific instances or issues that can more easily be attended.

In conflict, we often assume that the perspective of the other is the same as our own and then become frustrated when they do not act as we want them to act. Our judgments then become limited by our cognitive capacity (Gillespie & Richardson, 2011). We assign intent and meaning to actions, and then look for evidence to prove our assumptions correct instead of having an authentic conversation about perceived differences. To avoid this, check your assumptions about feelings, intentions, and meanings you perceive rather than assume them to be true. This is particularly important when interpreting nonverbal behavior. Checking assumptions can save time in any negotiation and move the conversation to the real issue more quickly.

A powerful tool or communication exercise to overcome divergences of viewpoints is perspective taking (Betancourt, 2004; Cohen, 2008; Gillespie & Richardson, 2011; Senge, 1994). This is the act of putting yourself in another person's shoes to recognize and legitimize their viewpoint, emotions, and interests. Asking them where they are coming from allows you to see the situation from a different and equally valid position and is a necessary step to move toward a common understanding of the issue and possibilities to solve concerns.

In any discussion, the receiver should not be made to feel as though they are getting scolded. The goal is to articulate clearly the impact of behavior and request a change, not to rebuke and offend. Asking questions and involving them in a possible solution instead of talking at them can lead to a more authentic discussion,

eventually solving the conflict. It is also a good idea to leave the discussion open or arrange to revisit the conversation in time.

How to Communicate a Concern

1. Name a specific behavior and name the consequence of the behavior
When you do this _____, what happens (happened) for me/others is/was _____.
2. Check your assumptions
What I assume is true is _____. Is this correct?
3. Articulate feelings, impacts, or responses
I feel _____ (name the feeling or the response)
4. Give the other person an opportunity to speak and listen to understand their intent
Will you tell me what is going on? (Ask questions, check assumptions, and clarify).
5. Be specific and detailed in your request for new/different behavior
What I want from you is _____ (this must be a behavior)
6. Offer support to the change
What do you need from me to support this change? What do you need me to do differently (behavioral)?
7. Leave the conversation open to an arranged revisit in the future

Activity

Communicating a Concern

Please team up with another person and use the following activity to practice giving constructive criticism.

Scenario A

Mediator: You are working with participants in a policy development process concerning the designation of critical habitat for the Florida Key Deer. One of the participants named Matt represents a local environmental organization and is very passionate and knowledgeable about the species. Matt can sometimes be

(Continued)

(Continued)

condescending to other participants in the group. Others have described him as elitist and patronizing. When he begins to speak, people begin rolling their eyes and instantly dismiss his comments, even when his comments may have merit.

Scenario B

Mediator: You are working with the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and local farmers on a nonpoint source Total Daily Maximum Load (TMDL) process. One of the farmers is quite vocal and dominates group discussions, frequently talking over people or dismissing what they say. A few of the members have complained that they might stop coming to meetings because they feel their perspectives are not heard or valued.

Considering Culture

Developing Cultural Fluency

In their book *Conflict Resolution Across Culture: A Unique Experience of Bridging Differences*, LeBaron and Pillay (2006) define what it means to be culturally fluent in cross cultural communication and conflict resolution. **Cultural fluency** dynamically grows in a social context of interdependence between self and others, enhancing our ability to “anticipate, internalize, express and help shape our process of meaning-making” (p. 58). The authors further define each element of cultural fluency as they provide ways to develop **anticipatory capacity**, **embeddedness**, and **expressive capacity**.

Anticipatory Capacity

Anticipatory capacity is the ability to anticipate a range of possible scenarios about how relationships will evolve in unfamiliar cultural contexts. To build anticipatory capacity, LeBaron and Pillay (2006) suggest the following techniques:

- Observe patterns of being and doing demonstrated by others, taking into consideration how they characterize who they are and what they care about.
- Articulate what others' patterns of meaning making are, but keep your cultural interpretation tentative and subject to revision.
- Reflect on how your own meaning-making patterns have been shaped by reflecting on how you have come to perceive who you are and what you care about.
- Consider the interactions of both patterns (theirs and yours) and how they cocreate the present.
- Remain willing to reshape your imperative lenses by continually adding new insights gained from both observation and self-reflection.

To be able to abide in uncertainty and be open to surprises while at the same time anticipating differences places a communicator in a position to not only better understand, but work through, cultural differences.

Embeddedness

Lebaron and Pillay (2006) define *embeddedness* as one's ability to remain conscious of unfamiliar cultural influences that come to be embedded in our meaning making. Or in other words our ability to check our cultural assumptions and understand our unconscious patterns of thinking. To do this, they suggest the following:

- Acknowledge deep assumptions that affect your way of sense making.
- Ask yourself why you are unfamiliar with cultural outsiders when a difference is felt, keeping in mind how your own cultural assumptions have helped to shape the perceived difference.
- Explore a cultural assumption by naming it and articulating it.
- Reflect on your upbringing and how this has shaped you.
- Reflect on their upbringing and how their assumptions are shaped by their experience.

The idea of understanding the cultural assumptions of others is also called cultural perspective taking and can assist those involved in environmental conflicts in working through their differences. In Australia, a conflict between white and aboriginal Australians over forest management pitted two cultures against each other. When those involved in forestry, tourism, farming, and conservation were asked to compare their own feelings of spiritual or sentimental connection to the forest with the kinds of attachments they thought the other might have to their homelands, there was a shift in the conflict. It wasn't until both sides explored the cultural significance of the forest from the perspective of the other were they able to come to a settlement and sign the Western Australian Regional Forest Agreement (Trigger & Mulcock, 2005).

Expressive Capacity

To be able to communicate cultural differences during conflict, you need to be able to express your cultural assumptions in an authentic way that is understandable to others who are unfamiliar with your way of sense making. This skill is called expressive capacity and can be developed in the following ways:

- Articulate what you care about by unpacking and explaining the meaning.
- Encourage others to articulate their meaning making in the same way.
- Suspend value judgments as you probe and explore both meaning-making patterns.

Recognizing and communicating the interdependency of all participants in a collaborative process can help them productively navigate cross-cultural dynamics to co-create a constructive shared meaning and potential solutions.

Developing cultural fluency is critical to addressing environmental conflict in cross-cultural contexts. By learning how to anticipate difference, recognize cultural assumptions, and express those assumptions, participants in conflict will be more able to have genuine conversations that lead to the potential development of solutions.

Question Asking

Question asking is a vital communication skill in conflict management. Good questions can help gather important information, provide an opportunity to learn and explore options, support creative thinking, test assumptions, and provide a reality check (Senge, 2006). In Chapter 9, we discussed the importance of moving from positions to interests to move beyond bottom-line reasoning and support creative alternative development (Abigail & Cahn, 2011). Asking good questions can focus the conversation on interests and possibilities instead of blame and bottom lines (Senge, 2006). When using questions to explore options and generate alternatives, it is important to ask questions that do not demand justification, cross-examine, or hold judgment. The goal is not to interrogate but to understand, learn, and explore ideas (Bodie et al., 2012). Thus, questions should be open-ended and focused on possibility (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2001; Malouff et al., 2012). Daniels and Walker (2001) distinguish between different types of appropriate questions. *Clarification questions* are meant to better understand and focus on the who, what, or when. For example, “what is the city’s main purpose for a landfill in this community?” *Probing questions* are meant to learn more, such as why and how. For example, “what concerns you about the development of a landfill in this community?” *Hypothesis questions* are meant to explore alternatives or introduce new perspectives such as, “are you open to other community economic development ideas?” Finally, *evaluative questions* are used to assess ideas and proposals. “What are the economic advantages of having a landfill in this community?” is an example of an evaluative question.

Question asking can also be a way to genuinely empower others and address interpersonal conflict. Asking a good question can allow another person to be heard, reduce aggressiveness and defensiveness, evoke willingness, and secure commitment (Welton, 2002). To ask a good question means to listen to the concerns of others and provide acknowledgment of their ideas and interests. Questions should be focused on future possibilities and not previous events. They should be thoughtful and constructive and lead others to explore new areas of thought in a safe manner. This will allow creative ideas to emerge and potential solutions to develop.

Activity

Conflict Management and Choice Making

The object of this exercise is to practice the art of question asking through assisting another person to think through a choice. The goal is to assist them in coming up with choices or solutions that are clear, realistic, and acceptable to them.

Instructions: Ask the other person to describe a conflict or a choice (decision) they have to make. Ask them to be as specific as they can and to describe the circumstance and people involved. Do not give any advice. Ask clarification, probing, hypothesis, and evaluative questions to empower them to make their own decision.

Sample questions to empower others include the following:

Describe/Define an Outcome

- What do you want?
- What is most important to you in this conflict?
- What experience are you looking for?
- What is at stake for you in this situation?
- What are the givens in this situation?
- How would you like this experience to end? For you? For the other person?
- How will you know when the conflict is over? What does resolution look like?
- What can you do now to end the conflict?

Determine Long-Term Interest

- Where do you want to be with this conflict 2 months from now? Six months? A year from now?
- How do you want to feel about this down the road?
- What can you do now to get what you want?

Explore Options/Alternatives

- What have you done so far to get what you want?
- What are you willing to do to solve this conflict?
- What are you *not* willing to do to solve this conflict?
- What are your alternatives? Worst? Best?
- What are the consequences of each alternative?
- What is the best option you have now to deal with this issue?

Reframing

Frame theory contends that collaborative group members bring experiences that shape their respective frames for conflict (Campbell & Docherty, 2004; Goffman, 1974; Gray, 2004). Originally developed by Goffman (1974) and built on by others, frame theory suggests that social events are governed by frames, which provide an “organization of experience” and help individuals make meaning out of everyday activity (p. 11). This includes previous attitudes toward the issue, previous interactions with the other participants, or previous experience in similar negotiations. They are, in effect, how participants frame the issues, prioritize elements of the conflict, and make sense of the situation. Thus, a frame can be considered a sense-making device (Dewulf et al., 2007; Gray, 2004; Weick, 1995; Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000). “When we frame a conflict, we develop interpretations about what the conflict is about, why it is occurring, the motivations of the parties involved, and how the conflict should be settled” (Gray, 2003, p. 12). The cognitive frames people develop of a situation lead to various behaviors and

approaches and affect their decision-making process in terms of both the nature of the situation as well as the choices available to them. “An important challenge in these cross-disciplinary endeavors is dealing with the diversity of frames or perspectives that people use to make sense of the issues” (Dewulf et al., 2007, p. 14). Framing then plays an important role in the creation, evolution, and perpetuation of environmental conflicts.

Scholars have used frame analysis to better understand environmental conflicts and their potential for collaborative resolution. Riemer (2004) demonstrated how frame analysis can help make sense of environmental and cultural conflict of Chippewa spearfishing in northern Wisconsin. Fischer and Marshall’s (2010) analysis of landscape frames in the Scottish moorlands and Fletcher’s (2009) analysis of language used to frame climate change in the U.S. identify similar opportunities (Dewulf et al., 2007; Fischer & Marshall, 2010; Fletcher, 2009). Robinson (2013) used frame analysis to understand how communities in Vancouver, Canada, and Stockton, California, strategically positioned themselves politically in relation to the privatization of water. Similarly, Dewulf et al. (2007) analyze dialogue during an interdisciplinary research collaborative centered on conflict over water management and contend that in order to achieve improved water management, participants must understand and acknowledge each other’s social frames. They developed a template of steps participants from different backgrounds can use to develop common sense-making or mutual framing. Steps include (a) understanding each other’s frames, (b) acknowledging differences, (c) translating other’s frames into one’s own terms, (d) exploring each other’s frames, and finally (e) integrating frames by constructing a new and jointly created system of meaning.

Lewicki et al. (2003) and Brummans et al. (2008) offered framing as an especially promising approach to intractable environmental conflict. Frame analysis enables a more complete understanding of a conflict’s interaction dynamics (Brummans et al., 2008; Lewicki et al., 2003). Similarly, Peterson (2003) argues that practitioners need to develop a deep understanding of conflict participants’ frames before they suggest possibilities for improving the situation. By analyzing communication interactions of dispute participants, environmental practitioners (process mediators) can discover the operative frames parties bring to a negotiation and can then use that knowledge to encourage more productive relations among stakeholders (Gray, 2003; Webb & Raffaelli, 2008).

Mediators can also provide disputants with opportunities to engage in *frame shifts* or reframe conflicts in more productive ways (Brummans et al., 2008; Lewicki et al., 2003). Reframing is the art of shifting the meaning people make of their experience of issues, events, relationships, and circumstances. Reframing occurs when participants develop a new way of interpreting or understanding the issue and engage in perspective taking (d’Estree, 2003; Gray, 2003, 2004). Practitioners can encourage reframing by helping disputants develop more realistic expectations and identify potential shifts within the conflict. This can be done with process techniques such as imaging, narrative forums, group modeling, or perspective taking exercises to lead participants to strategic framing of the problem to be solved (Dewulf et al., 2007; Gray, 2004). As they learn to interpret their situations differently, disputants become

more open to new alternatives and possibilities for resolution (Lewicki, Saunders, & Minton, 1999; Moore, 1996; Putnam, Burgess, & Royer, 2003).

In addition to reframing exercises, mediators can help parties shift their frames by use of communicative reframing through the isolation of negative words and reframing those words into something neutral or positive (Asah, Bengston, Wendt, & Nelson, 2012). A reframe is built on positive intent and should always be an expansion of an idea to create the possibility of more interpretations, options, and alternatives (Asah, Bengston, Wendt, & Nelson, 2012; Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2012; Lewicki et al., 1999; Moore, 1996). Communication techniques include the following:

- *Using different words to interpret the meaning of something differently or cast an event, action, or person in a different light.* For example, if someone is described as having “constantly irritating behavior,” a reframe might sound like, “They approach things differently” or “have a different style of communicating.”
- *Turning a negative into a neutral or positive.* For example, a criticism of someone might sound like, “he’s nitpicky and can’t get beyond the fine print and footnotes.” A reframe might be, “he pays careful attention to details.”
- *Turning a demand into an interest.* A demand such as, “It’s not fair that we should have to pay for a permit into the canyons when it’s our back yard. It makes sense that people who don’t live here should have to pay for entrance, but it’s insulting that we have to pay when we’ve been taking care of this place for years. It’s our land—we pay taxes—what are they for if not access to our land?” This could potentially be reframed by responding to the interest of the speaker. “You want a fair permitting process and would like your connection to this area to be taken into account.”
- *Turning a complaint into a request.* A complaint against a development company might sound like, “Our community has put up with that company’s lies for long enough. Sure they provide jobs, but at what cost? The lives of our children? The health of our community? It has been their way long enough. They never listen to what we want. They have to pay and things will be our way for a change.” A reframe focused on what the participant is requesting might sound like, “You want your desires to be heard and acknowledged. You want immediate change and action to be taken as well as compensation for your loss.”

It is important to note, however, that when introducing new language, it has to make sense within the existing frame (Lakoff, 2010). Therefore, it is a good idea to test the reframe with the participant. Simply asking “is that a fair interpretation of your concern?” will allow the participant to correct any misunderstandings while empowering them by giving them another opportunity to clarify their concerns. It is also appropriate to ask the participant questions that will lead to their own reframing. “Is there a different explanation for this situation? Could the person’s actions be interpreted differently?” These are examples of questions to ask to lead the participant to their own reframing.

When reframing, use empowering words that elicit a more positive response, such as explore, consider, generate, gather, put together, discuss, describe, collect, look for, sound out, think out loud about, propose, suggest, and come up with.

Avoid using negative blocking verbs such as judge, assess, label, evaluate, rate, compare, categorize, grade, rank, order, analyze, criticize, classify, diagnose, monitor, assume, and claim.

It is very important to not change anything factual about what the person has said, deny or minimize anything they have said, or patronize or condescend when reframing. Your intent must not be manipulative. Disingenuous reframes will make a stakeholder feel like they are being handled and will only act to escalate conflict. If done with a genuine intent to better understand someone's perspective and move the collaborative forward, reframing negative or combative comments from participants during a collaborative or the general public during public involvement activities helps to reduce hostility, enhance the desirability of the options and alternatives presented, validate perspectives, enhance communication between stakeholders, and help to establish a common ground as a basis of agreement (Folger et al., 2012; Lewicki et al., 1999).

Activity
Reframing

Keeping in mind the direction above, reframe the following statements as if you were responding.

"I've worked with this agency/organization in the past and they're not interested in a fair agreement. They don't care about our children or their future. They are only concerned with looking good on paper and are only asking our input because it's required for the NEPA process. I'm sick of putting in my time when in the long run it won't do a damn bit of good."

"If we had all the money that environmentalists do, we could hire professional lobbyists to stand up for our beliefs. They buy billboards spreading propaganda against logging and mining, usually using grant money from the very people they attack."

"No one has even asked us what we want. This is our home. They think that just because we are poor, they can come in here and force us out so they can build their fancy new federal courthouse. We're not going to just sit by and let that happen. We have our rights."

“When I agreed to come to this meeting, I didn’t agree to sit and listen to this crap. The greens have been dictating to everyone how they should live their lives for decades. I will decide where I will and won’t drive my ATV and I don’t feel I should have to answer to some out of town environmentalists who don’t even know what it’s like to live here.”

Conclusion

The focus of this chapter has been the art of developing good communication skills to help participants in a collaborative process be more successful. Learning how to better communicate concerns can reduce hostility, improve relationships, and help resolve disputes (d’Estree, 2003).

Case Study Application

As you move through the policy development process steps outlined in Chapter 7, use and practice the communication techniques suggested above. Pay careful attention to how you listen, acknowledge, ask questions, and reframe your words as you negotiate your interests in the collaborative process. Practice advocating your view and communicating concerns through power-with communication. Listen and acknowledge the perspectives of others, ask good questions, and use reframing as a technique to meet each other on common ground.

Voices From the Field

Understanding Cultural Impact: Uses of the Yellowstone River Cultural Inventory Reports

Damon M. Hall

Center for Sustainability

Saint Louis University

The Yellowstone River (Montana, USA) is the nation’s longest undammed river. In addition to the recreational amenities this natural feature offers, the river also

(Continued)

(Continued)

exhibits natural flood cycles when upstream mountain snow melts each June. In 1996 and 1997, the valley experienced severe floods, prompting riverfront landowners to build hardscape structures to reduce stream bank erosion. Conflict arose over the unknown negative effects of these new structures on the river's ecology.

Funded by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the Yellowstone River Conservation District Council (Council), the Yellowstone River Cultural Inventory (YRCI) was one study within a comprehensive research project examining the cumulative impacts of bank stabilization projects on the river's social and ecological systems. Researchers conducted and documented in-depth conversations with 313 riverfront landowners, recreationalists, civic leaders, Native Americans, and agriculturalists along 515 river miles to assess the diversity and magnitude of concerns about riverbank erosion, general river management, user conflicts, understandings of the river's natural features and processes, and long-term desires for the river. A 787-page report was generated to share these findings with government agencies and interested members of the public. The report design enabled resource agencies to systematically listen to citizens organized by topic. The report conglomerated the spectrum of river users' comments, concerns, and ideas for management in verbatim quotes organized by both topic and geographic area.

The USACE used the report to provide content for the public comment and social and cultural resources sections of the Yellowstone River Cumulative Effects Study (2011) and Upper Yellowstone River Special Area Management Plan (2009). The Council used the reports to assess public information needs in specific geographic reaches. The reports enabled them to produce targeted educational and outreach materials for their programming. The Council also used the reports to identify pressing conservation practices desired most by residents. This led to an emphasis on exotic invasive vegetation management as a top priority.

Other local, state, and federal agencies indirectly involved in the cumulative effects study also used the YRCI. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency wrote about the YRCI as a means of engaging the public in a regional newsletter. When the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks Agency acquired approximately 3900 acres of riverfront land, they used the relevant geographic segment of the YRCI to inform planning the new Yellowstone River State Park's recreational amenities and infrastructural needs.

Individual resource managers have used the reports in unique ways. A water quality specialist with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality working in eastern Montana has given colleagues in Helena (the capitol) copies of the Eastern geographic segments to illustrate how Eastern Montanans' concerns differ from Western Montanans. When a new agent joins his region, he requires them to read the report to improve their understanding of how Eastern Montanans think about resource management and agencies. A Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks fisheries biologist has used the fisheries relevant sections in his publications and interactions with citizens.

Citizens involved in water planning also use the reports. In 2013, the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation established the

Yellowstone River Basin Advisory Council (BAC) to solicit public input on basin-wide water planning issues for Montana’s 2015 State Water Plan. Several BAC delegates reported reading the YRCI reports to prepare for their responsibilities in water planning. A regional grassroots environmental organization used portions of the YRCI reports to evidence their position and advocate recommendations concerning the Upper Yellowstone River Special Area Management Plan.

The Western Heritage Center in Billings, Montana, has used the reports to develop a museum exhibit documenting the voices of the Yellowstone River. Although this use falls outside of natural resource management, it does speak to the spectrum of uses and broad appeal of this type of cultural assessment document.

Further Reading

Gilbertz, S., Horton, C. C., Hall, C., & Hall D. M. (2007). *Yellowstone river cultural inventory*. United States Corps of Engineers and the Greater Yellowstone River Conservation District Council. Available at <http://www.yellowstonerivercouncil.org/dev/resources.php>

Hall, D. M., Gilbertz, S., Horton, C., & Peterson, T. R. (2012). Culture as a means to contextualize policy. *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences*, 2(3), 222–233.

DOI: 10.1007/s13412-012-0077-9

Key Terms

anticipatory capacity	embeddedness	I language
Communication	expressive capacity	low-context cultures
Competency	high-context cultures	reframing
cultural fluency	HURIER model	