The Impact of Conflict on System Effectiveness

Mary E. Evans, RN, PhD, FAAN1
Robyn Boustead, MPA2
Roger Boothroyd, PhD2
Andrea Blanch, PhD1
Andrea Aderton, PhD3
Huey Chen, PhD, MSN, APN-BC4

1 University of South Florida
2 Missouri Institute of Mental Health
3 Circle of Hope
4 Georgia State University

Symposium presented at the 23rd Annual Children’s Mental Health Research and Policy Conference, March 7-10, 2010, Tampa, FL

Conflict & Its Management in Systems of Care

- Evans & Armstrong conducted a study on collaboration (1999-2004), but heard reports about conflict
- A roundtable discussion at the 2004 RTC conference focused on whether conflict plays a role in SOC development. Outcomes were that:
  - Conflict was a factor in systems of care
  - It is rarely acknowledged
  - Often impedes effective implementation
  - Is prevalent in areas of family involvement & organizations

Purpose

- To learn about the sources of conflict and its management in SOC
- Based on what we learn to develop approaches that may be useful in identifying conflict and in managing it successfully

Today’s Discussion

- Robyn Boustead describes the project’s components and highlights the findings
- Andrea Blanch & Roger Boothroyd discuss the site visits and what we learned
- Andrea Aderton describes the Circle of Hope’s experience
- You contribute your reactions & questions

Study Description

- Study funded through a subcontract with Macro International
- Three research components
  - Needs assessment of Governing Board members regarding conflict;
  - Site visit to conduct concept mapping, key informant interviews and record reviews;
  - Learning collaborative calls with local system of care leaders.

Needs Assessment responses from 59 sites identified conflict in ten areas

Prior History
Incompatible goals
Communication issues
Overlapping authority
Status inconsistencies
Interpersonal relationships
System of Care Issues
Decision-making
Incompatible rewards
Scarcity resources

Prior history was reported as the most prevalent source of conflict across all stakeholders.
Role of Conflict in SOCs
- Assessment results suggest that conflict is a common occurrence across all sites;
- The more conflict people reported, the less effective they perceived their SOC;
- Respondents who identified existing conflict AND perceived their system to be effective tended to view the impact of conflict more positively.

Site Visits
- Review of data from the site;
- Concept mapping with all members of the Governing Board;
- Individual interviews with key players representing all stakeholders, selected in consultation with Project Director;
- Record review of MOUs, written agreements about conflict, notes from Board meetings.

Learning Collaborative Calls
- Two 2-hour conference calls
- Participants included current and former PDs, family members, a youth coordinator, TA Coordinators, trainers and researcher.
- Focus questions:
  - Did you ever think your SOC was going to fall apart?
  - What concrete mechanisms did you use, or in retrospect, might have helped?

Findings
- Conflict in SOCs is generally high.
- Conflict not anticipated, understood, prepared for or valued.
- Capacity to handle conflict varies greatly
- Unacknowledged conflict can negatively affect SOC development and may amplify other problems.

Summary
- Conflict is normal and can provide necessary energy for change.
- Conflict impacts vital areas of SOC development: system change, family driven, partnering, and sustainability.
- Principles and techniques of conflict identification and transformation need to be introduced early in the development of SOC.

Site Selection
- Differing in terms of stages of development.
- Variability with respect to experiences related to conflict
- Willingness of the SOC community
- Two SOC communities
  - Site 1 was a graduate System of Care
  - Site 2 was a current System of Care
Site Visits
- Conducted two two-day site visits that included three sets of activities
  - Concept mapping with all members of the Governing Board.
  - Individual interviews with key informants representing all stakeholders, selected in consultation with Project Director.
  - Record review of MOUs, written agreements about conflict, notes from Board meetings from last 12 months.

Structured Process
- Brainstorming based on focus prompt
- Sorting and rating on unduplicated, single idea statements
- Multidimensional scaling and hierarchical cluster analyses
- Results in a pictorial or presentation that displays all of the ideas of the group’s relative to the identified topic

Focus Prompt
- “One of the things that is done at [Name of community] when we encounter a conflict or disagreement among the participants in our system of care, is …”

Ratings
- Level of importance
- Level of effectiveness

Site #1: Conflict Informed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Sample Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Structural and relationship</td>
<td>Conflict results from poor communication resolved by clear and respectful communication</td>
<td>Communicate directly and professionally, listen to each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Professional topic and workshop</td>
<td>Conflict results from lack of knowledge or expertise in specific professional area</td>
<td>Use training to explore the topic of conflict, defer to people with the most expertise if no formal forum available, convene ad hoc meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Human resources</td>
<td>Conflict seen as emotionally destructive, solutions focus on individual impact and relationships</td>
<td>Feel the tension but don’t raise it, soften the issues, discuss the issue with those we are most comfortable with, deal with issues, not people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cluster Name | Description | Sample Items |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Vision</td>
<td>Shared vision and positive relationships among agencies serve as key to managing differences effectively</td>
<td>People see collaboration as part of job, history of leaders prioritizing and modeling collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Culture</td>
<td>History of successful conflict management created a culture that embraces differences</td>
<td>Reviews and supports and structural accommodations made to support its resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Structure and infrastructure</td>
<td>Effect of different structural accommodations made to support its resolution</td>
<td>Return to work things out together as a collective voice for policy concerns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Site #2: Conflict Sensitive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Sample Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Professional topic and workshop</td>
<td>Conflict results from poor communication resolved by clear and respectful communication</td>
<td>Communicate directly and professionally, listen to each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Human resources</td>
<td>Conflict seen as emotionally destructive, solutions focus on individual impact and relationships</td>
<td>Feel the tension but don’t raise it, soften the issues, discuss the issue with those we are most comfortable with, deal with issues, not people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cluster Name | Description | Sample Items |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Vision</td>
<td>Shared vision and positive relationships among agencies serve as key to managing differences effectively</td>
<td>People see collaboration as part of job, history of leaders prioritizing and modeling collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Culture</td>
<td>History of successful conflict management created a culture that embraces differences</td>
<td>Reviews and supports and structural accommodations made to support its resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Structure and infrastructure</td>
<td>Effect of different structural accommodations made to support its resolution</td>
<td>Return to work things out together as a collective voice for policy concerns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Site #1: Conflict Informed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Sample Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Culture</td>
<td>History of successful conflict management created a culture that embraces differences</td>
<td>People see collaboration as part of job, history of leaders prioritizing and modeling collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>Reviews and supports</td>
<td>Reviews and supports to work things out together as a collective voice for policy concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Return to work things out together as a collective voice for policy concerns</td>
<td>Reviews and supports and structural accommodations made to support its resolution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Site #2: Conflict Sensitive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Sample Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Topic or Workshop</td>
<td>Conflict results from lack of knowledge or expertise in specific professional area</td>
<td>Use training to explore the topic of conflict, defer to people with the most expertise if no formal forum available, convene ad hoc meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>Conflict seen as emotionally destructive, solutions focus on individual impact and relationships</td>
<td>Feel the tension but don’t raise it, soften the issues, discuss the issue with those we are most comfortable with, deal with issues, not people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cluster Name | Description | Sample Items |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>Shared vision and positive relationships among agencies serve as key to managing differences effectively</td>
<td>People see collaboration as part of job, history of leaders prioritizing and modeling collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>History of successful conflict management created a culture that embraces differences</td>
<td>Reviews and supports and structural accommodations made to support its resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure and Infrastructure</td>
<td>Effect of different structural accommodations made to support its resolution</td>
<td>Return to work things out together as a collective voice for policy concerns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Focus Prompt
- “One of the things that is done at [Name of community] when we encounter a conflict or disagreement among the participants in our system of care, is …”

Ratings
- Level of importance
- Level of effectiveness

Site Visits
- Conducted two two-day site visits that included three sets of activities
  - Concept mapping with all members of the Governing Board.
  - Individual interviews with key informants representing all stakeholders, selected in consultation with Project Director.
  - Record review of MOUs, written agreements about conflict, notes from Board meetings from last 12 months.
Stages of Development

- Conflict Avoidant Sites
  - Deny conflict exists or is a problem
- Conflict Sensitive Sites
  - Acknowledge conflict but remain uncomfortable
  - Uneven conflict management skills
- Conflict Informed Sites
  - See conflict as normal and as a source of creativity
  - Teach and model conflict management skills
  - Have established problem-solving processes

How Did They Get There?

- Early conflict between agency heads required formal mediation
- Facilitation team used to deal with ongoing tension between agencies
- Open skepticism about family involvement accepted as a challenge
- Conflict normalized by making it part of the job description “dealing with differences”
- Used every opportunity for training and systems redesign

Platform for Change

- Commitment of governing board to effective and sustainable SOC
- Effective past use of consultants
- Innovative procedures to ensure family voice provided example of success
- SOC leadership took on the issue
- Board opened up to self examination after concept mapping exercise

Conflict Informed Site: Contra Costa County, California

- In 10th year and sustaining well
- Low to moderate reported conflict
- Collaboration defined as changes in agency behavior
- Excellent conflict management skills
- MOUs and structural mechanisms for surfacing and resolving differences
- Positive view of conflict (“differences”)

Conflict Sensitive Site: Circle of Hope

- Third year, significant reported conflict
- Collaboration defined as exchange of information
- MOUs stress collaboration without definitions
- Productive & nonproductive responses
- Focus on personalities not system
- Most conflict not making it to the table
- Major “elephant in the room”
- Mediation proposed but dismissed
Challenges

- Community/Professional Culture
  - History
  - Concept of Failure
  - Power Dynamics
  - Avoidance
  - Addressing issues indirectly

- Stakeholders know System of Care values, are committed to them and are implementing them inside their organization

- Individualized services are driven by the family
- Individualized services are guided by the youth

- Integration and communication exists between physical and mental health services as well as with education so services are coordinated.

Strengths of COH

- Commitment and persistence of PT
- Open to self-reflection and discussion of conflict
- Recognition of complex relationship between federal, state and local
- Structure for effective family participation
- Willingness to try new solutions
- Staff trained in conflict management are using new skills
**Action Steps**
- Concept mapping process
- Policy Team planning
- Revisit values - define
  - Behavioral steps at 3 levels of the system
- Values integration process
  - Transparency and Collaboration
- Evolution of the role of project staff
- Modeling/reinforcing of the process

**Indirect Rate**

**Conflict in Systems of Care**
- Cultural and structural issues
- Recognition
- Identification of informal systems
- Build consensus on formalized process
- Persistence
- Support and encouragement

**Questions**