# THE IMPACT OF CONFLICT ON SYSTEM EFFECTIVENESS

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## 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

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## 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

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## 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

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## 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.

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## 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
Scarce 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.

## Concept Mapping

- 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



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| Cluster Name | Description | Sample Items |
|---|---|---|
| Agency Relationships and Shared Vision | Shared vision and positive relationships among agencies seen as key to managing differences effectively | Mutual respect about work, positions<br>Passion about families and children gets us through hard times<br>Share same philosophy |
| Collaborative Culture | History of successful conflict management created a culture that embraces differences | People see collaboration as part of job<br>History of leaders prioritizing and modeling collaboration |
| Structure and Infrastructure | Conflict anticipated and structural accommodations made to support its resolution | Policy Council is one of many interagency forums to work things out<br>Come together as a collective voice for policy concerns |
| Respectful Communication | Clear and respectful communication seen as preventing as well as helping to resolve conflicts | Communicate directly and professionally<br>Listen to each other<br>Stay focused on issues |
| Problem Solving Skills | Conflict management skills recognized, taught, modeled, and applied at policy, program and practice levels | Look at data<br>If no formal forum available, convene ad hoc meeting<br>Know about each other's programs, be accessible |

## Site #2: Conflict Sensitive



## Site #2: Conflict Sensitive

| Cluster Name | Description | Sample Items |
|---|---|---|
| Exchange Information | Conflict results from poor communication; solved by sharing information | Listen to everyone's input<br>Ensure everyone is informed on the issue<br>Focus on communication |
| Professional Topic or Workshop | Conflict results from lack of knowledge or expertise in specific professional area | Use training to explore the topic of conflict<br>Defer to people with the most expertise<br>Put the needs of families in the forefront |
| Human Resources | Conflict seen as emotionally destructive, solutions focus on individual impact and relationships | Feel the tension but don't raise it<br>Soften the issues<br>Discuss the issue with those we are most comfortable with |
| Attend to Other People's Motives | Conflict seen as reflecting power dynamics; solutions focus on political maneuvering | Figure out politics of situation and position accordingly<br>Speculate about other's motives |
| Procrastinate | Conflict avoided whenever possible | Table the issue<br>Form a committee or have a meeting |
| Nasty | Conflict seen as bringing out the worst in people's behavior | Create rumors<br>Take cheap shots<br>Threaten or make ultimatum<br>Make promises you don't intend to keep |

## 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

## Conflict Informed Site: Contra Costa County, California

- ❑ In 10<sup>th</sup> 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")

## 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

## 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

## 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
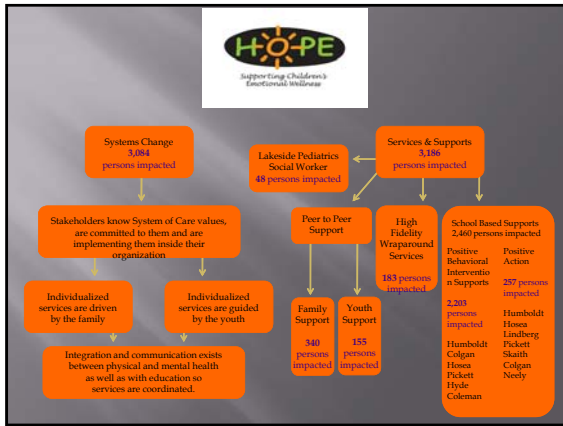- ❑ Board opened up to self examination after concept mapping exercise

## Challenges

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

## Challenges

- SOC as threat to existing operations; no safe venue for discussion
- Structural problems
- Conflict management skills need strengthening

## 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

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## Recommendations

- Training for Policy Team
- Ongoing facilitator training in conflict transformation
- Structural issues, incorporate vision into operations
- Codify processes related to conflict
- Opportunity for key leaders to strengthen systems change skills
- Committee to provide ongoing leadership
- Consider revisiting major conflict on indirect rate

## 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
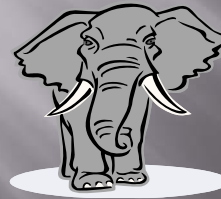


## Conflict in Systems of Care

- Cultural and structural issues
- Recognition
- Identification of informal systems
- Build consensus on formalized process
- Persistence
- Support and encouragement

## Questions