

Chapter 11

Faith-Based Disputes and Mediation Intervention

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Faith-based organizations, like synagogues, temples, churches, and others, create a reality for their membership, which defines a member's worldview and how the organization governs through interlinked systems of symbols, schemas, and standards. Talk, dialogue, and negotiation at all levels, including interpersonal, group, and organizational shape believers' identity and experience. This shared reference sustains the substance of group and individual identity. Social and religious contexts provide for experiences where believers reify virtues, priorities, and ideals of their faith culture (Goldberg & Blanke, 2011; Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009; Said & Funk, 2001; Said, Funk & Kunkle, 2003); normative practices make social interaction meaningful.

Deep-seated standards provide boundaries for achieving individual growth and transformation promised by faith-based organizations. Individual behavior must derive from and reflect organizational beliefs and higher-level cognitive schemas such as ideologies, orthodoxies, orientations, and more. Compliance with organizational values is implicit in all activities of the group. Yet, the premise of choice coupled with conviction often creates defensive communication patterns when faith-based members debate and dialogue amongst themselves. Members with minority

opinions risk persecution within the organization if they do not represent the “official” position.

Faith-based organizations typically operate in religious paradigms, which impact all aspects of group and organizational life, including setting values, solving problems, resolving conflict, and more. Conflict in faith-based organizations often is tempered with unspoken tenets threatening rupture among member believers and severance of relationship with deity, both critical for definition of self, others, and worldview. Uncertainty, which surrounds faith-based disputes, coupled with difficulty of not knowing precisely the best way to respond often starts a conflict avoidance cycle that may create an appearance of submission to organizational values when just the opposite is true.

The purpose of this chapter is to present a framework for understanding faith-based conflict and resolving believer disputes through mediation. A seven-phase model of believer conflict is described with a comparative discussion of facilitative and transformative mediation practices. Examples of ways the authors have used the conflict schema and different experiences serving as mediators in faith-based organizations are presented.

ASCHEMAFORFAITH-BASEDMEDIATORS

The seven-phase model of conflict identifies patterns of conflict behavior individuals may choose when their commitment to the organization and its members is disturbed, distressed, or deteriorating. The model hypothesizes that there are points within the seven phases in which organizational leaders can resolve developing problems in the organization.

Critical moments in the conflict process present opportunities for intervention. Organizational leaders and mediators will intervene when conflict resolution is most likely to be successful. Use of mediation in key conflict phases can reduce or prevent destructive outcomes.

The attributes of the seven-phase model as presented by Kimsey, Trobaugh, McKinney, Hoole, Thelk, and Davis (2006) include worldview, frame of irony, relational dialectics and conflict phases. Figure 11.1 presents a schema of the model.

Worldview constitutes values, attitudes and behavior, which provide meaning for an individual (Kimsey & Fuller, 1998).

The War on Terror demonstrates the power of religious paradigms for spawning different groups with similar visions about what people should believe and how they should live such as the Hezbollah or the al-Qaeda both declaring jihad against the Capitalist and Judeo-Christian worldviews.

Worldviews are reinforced by systems that justify individual beliefs. Frame of Irony deconstructs challenges to worldview by dissembling thoughts, making assertions or performing actions that negatively project the motivation behind a

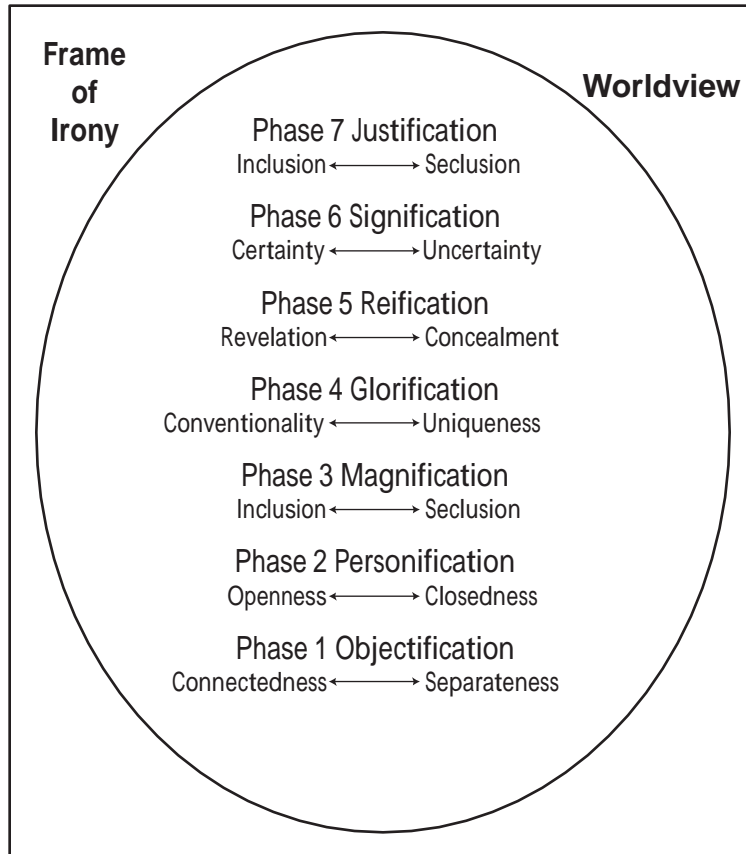


Figure 11.1
The Seven-Phase Model of Conflict

challenge. For instance, if inquiry is made why the religious leader lives a higher standard of living than the believer members, the inquiry is met with rebuke suggesting the intent behind the question reflects a critical spirit that harbors jealousy. The frame of irony serves the purpose of deflecting reasonable inquiry for finding the truth thus ensuring the existing worldview.

Relational dialectics create push-pull contradictions inherent in engaging frames of irony and making challenges to existing worldviews. Unified by interdependence, the dichotomous predispositions coexist in a nexus of tensions which achieve resolution by negating each other. The interplay between relational dialects, including *Connectedness-Separateness*, *Predictability-Novelty*, *Openness-Closedness*, *Inclusion-Seclusion*, *Conventionality-Uniqueness*, *Revelation-Concealment* and the frame of irony creates a link where the interdependence with the opposite impulse and independence from the opposite impulse occurs. The following describes the seven phases of conflict in faith-based organizations.

SEVEN PHASES OF CONFLICT

Phase 1: Objectification. The first step involves the believer objectifying self and others. Objectification is the base step for ultimately proving that one is right. When the believer objectifies he or she projects an independent reality, making another individual impersonal. In other words, people are put in categories or boxes. For example, a woman, whose name is Elizabeth, teaches Sunday school at a church and has been doing so for over twenty-five years; she is now 83. The church elders hired a young, new minister, Bob, who through his inexperience promptly dismissed Elizabeth because, in his interpretation of the Bible, women should not be teaching. The minister used his interpretation of the Bible to justify his actions—dismiss the Sunday school teacher, whom Bob has now framed as an object and does not acknowledge as a person. A dialectical tension occurs in Phase 1: Objectification, when the individual believer attempts to achieve connectedness by agreeing with the organization's worldview while at the same time attempts to speak out, knowing such boldness may pose a threat of separation.

Phase 2: Personification. The second step, Personification, starts with the believer's casual conversation with other members of the group without disclosing his or her position. Interpersonal discussion focuses now on personal deficits of others who are not like-minded, particularly those in leadership. Elizabeth, in the above example, could have challenged the minister's actions, but instead starts talking to friends and parents of children whom she has taught, asking for their opinions about her dismissal. Likewise, Bob responds to friends' and members' inquiries about the dismissal citing the Bible as his authority for the action all the while marking who agrees or disagrees with him. The relational dialectic in this phase exemplifies openness-closedness: "Do I personify by openly disclosing my position or do I remain silent and closed, not voicing my dissatisfaction?"

Phase 3: Magnification. The third step, Magnification, involves the act of enlarging the rightness of one's position by complimenting others who express support. Using the same example above, having focused on personal deficits in Personification, a choice for creating facts out of unwarranted perceptions is the focus. Both the minister, Bob, and the member, Elizabeth, can spiral into detracting obvious shortcomings of one another, e.g. making comments like "He seems very legalistic about administration" or "It's really great to have more men involved in church work." The goal here is to convince oneself and other like-minded believers that what has been attributed in Personification not only exists but is supported by fact—fact often taken out of context or overstated or used as puffery. The relational dialectic of *Inclusion-Seclusion* surfaces at this point where the supportive communication achieves inclusion and defensive communication creates seclusion.

Phase 4: Glorification. Step 4, Glorification, is the act of exalting, glorifying, and venerating, often characterized by self-elevation. For instance, the glorifier

talks about other spiritual experiences and notes how wonderful, powerful, and anointed the other leaders were that led that organization to fame and blessing. Likewise, alliances emerge for the purpose of recognizing those who have been suffering under the same injustice caused by the worldview and frame of irony set in place by the other side. In the case with Bob and Elizabeth, Bob has a few men in the Church, whom he trusts, who will pray through the difficulty created by his position on women in leadership. Elizabeth, who has seen the minister's type of disingenuous acceptance of women in other churches, knows that women, in general, may harbor ill feelings over being treated as "second-class" citizens in the Kingdom of God. Also, she can prove Bob's scriptural position is too narrow. The relational dialectic for the Glorification phase is *Conventionality-Uniqueness*.

Phase 5: Reification. Reification is creating a reality, which is believed to be true by producing the behavior and actions to support that truth. In Reification, the believer creates situations that provide evidence for his or her worldview whether in error or not. It is in this phase of Reification that the believer may become more entrenched in imagination and no longer examines the accuracy of his or her actions. At this stage of the conflict progression, the believer is convinced of the rightness of his or her understanding of what is happening. It is not uncommon to see self-fulfilling prophecy expanding and being assigned greater importance than necessary. This is often the place where the believer forms his or her own frame of irony for the purpose of defending positions. For instance, Bob, who "knows" he is called of God to be positional about the place of women in the Church, and Elizabeth, who knows God has used her to touch a lot of people's lives through her teaching Sunday School, may use every example and expression of their individual work as a "see, God is in what I am doing" attitude. The dialectical tension in Reification is *Revelation-Concealment*; the believer can go along with the revelation and demonstrate the appropriate behaviors or secretly conceal disbelief. Bob and Elizabeth want the rightness of what they are doing individually to be revealed to others, while at the same time discrediting the claims of their opponent.

Phase 6: Signification. Assigning meaning for the purpose of drawing conclusions that support judgments and evaluations that have been made in Phases 1–5, is the role of Phase 6, Signification. Examples of Signification could be that the organization is beginning to suffer because of the growing disagreement between two factions that are now taking sides in the biblical interpretation Bob has placed on his action. Everything that does or does not happen in the lives of leadership or membership is used to provide proof that the individual believer, the one who assigns meaning, is right. Power derived from earlier phases makes it punishing for the believer to change his or her course, and the fundamental judgments made early in Objectification and reinforced in Phases 2–5 cannot be deserted. Justification must now be achieved; too much has been committed, too much has been ventured, and too much is public. Elizabeth and Bob point to the illnesses, problems, and crises that occur in the other's life as proof that the other is out of God's will and therefore out of God's blessing. The dialectical tension of Signification is

Certainty-Uncertainty; everything must happen in a manner that is in line with the “truths” of the believers and if that does not happen, the seeds of uncertainty are sown.

Phase 7: Justification. The final phase of the believer conflict, Justification, involves exoneration for the purpose of normalizing assertions made earlier when no real information was present to sanction the positions taken. Phases 1–6 sequentially build to a critical mass for achieving assent to the position of the believer. A mindset of “I told you so” prevails. The goal that the believer is exact, fair, and has the heart of deity on the matters in dispute is now revealed to those objectified. Examples of this could involve being part of a plan to challenge the organization’s leadership; to initiate prayer with other members for the purpose of resisting the other side’s agenda; or even going to court to repossess the assets of the organization. In this stage, the believer is ready to take action and to fight for what he or she believes. Everything at this point is made right by winning battles; a win-lose approach concerning who is right and who is wrong is the mindset (Fisher and Brown, 1988). When the believer reaches Justification, it is often difficult to reason and turn him or her from a course that could easily take on a life of its own. In short, a movement bringing forth a new worldview for the organization could result if enough believers of a similar mentality come together as a power. In our example, both Elizabeth and Bob have now talked to enough members at all levels of the organization during the previous six phases. The results culminate in a conflict episode where there is a “showdown” to prove who is right, even to point of splitting the church. Bob is convinced he is right because Elizabeth’s actions now prove she is a power-seeking troublemaker. Elizabeth is sure she is right because Bob has proven that he is a legalistic, insensitive leader with chauvinistic values. The dialectical tension associated with Justification is *Inclusion-Exclusion*: You are either with us or against us; since we have the truth, we will watch you lose. Moving to the *Win-Lose* framework allows the conflict to be brought into the open and for the first time more clearly defined.

The seven-phase model of conflict presented in this chapter identifies a conflict continuum that mediators and organizational leaders can use to conceptualize conflict (Kimsey, et al, 2006, p. 497) (see Figure 11.2 Hypothesized Conflict Model Continuum).

When Objectification is high, the believer may be intense in judgment, but he or she is likely to be alone still in their thinking. If leadership in the faith-based organization can resolve the issue, the conflict can be contained before growing and spreading. Within the phase of Personification, leadership also has the opportunity and ability to resolve the believer’s issues, prior to critical mass growing. When members are in the process of magnifying, glorifying, or reifying, it is likely that outside mediation may be necessary. A group of like-minded believers is forming and may be resistant to the other side’s attempts to solve the issue, especially if Glorification is high or the conflict is with the leadership. Problem solving and transformative mediation practices are choices available to organizational leadership.

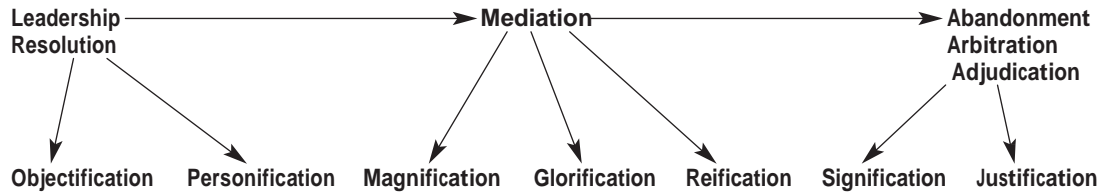


Figure 11.2

Hypothesized Conflict Model Continuum

Problem solving is recommended for non-faith related issues while transformative is best for faith related issues. When a cadre of believers has reached the point of Signification or Justification, the likelihood of successful mediation quickly diminishes. All egos are involved and too much face would be lost even in a win-win situation.

FAITH-BASED MEDIATION PRACTICES

A facilitative process, using a mediation procedure, in most instances, is perhaps the only real means of achieving reconciliation among believers. Guilt accumulated as the believer passes through each of the seven phases of believer conflict creates a critical moment during which it is imperative that intervention helps believers reframe their positional, win-lose ploys to principled, win-win approaches (Sandford, 1989; Fisher & Ury, 1991). If this does not occur, the guilt resulting from fragmenting the group will not only hurt the believer but could eventually harm the organization (Cloud & Townsend, 1999).

It is essential for the individual believer to recognize that conflict is omnipresent. The believer's testimony, regardless of the person, is all about resolving conflict as the individual progresses through life cycles, starting with conception and birth and ending with death and release.

The requirement for interdependence compels believers to be in fellowship, and the expressed struggles now focus on commitment to relationships and commitment to positions, e.g. doctrine (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000). Empowering the individual believer to have high concern for both relationship and individual goals is a natural consequence of engaging doctrine and the body of faith members. It is here where the believer must make a choice to work through conflict resulting from competing worldviews, frames of irony, and difficult people while not separating themselves from the faith-based organization (Kimsey & Fuller, 1998).

Key elements in achieving principled win-win resolutions should include a) separating other believers from the problem, b) focusing on interests, not positions in

believer conflict, c) proceeding independent of trust and dependent on faith, d) achieving transparent communication with other believers for the purpose of finding options achieving mutual gain, and e) insisting on outcomes separate from individual will—yielding to principle not pressure (Fisher & Ury, 1991).

Mediation is facilitated, principled discussion with an emphasis on achieving win-win outcomes by using a neutral intervener for the purpose of equally empowering the believers to solve problems resulting from competing worldviews, frames of irony, and difficult conflict styles. The mediation procedure provides a framework for achieving the above-identified key elements in win-win resolution. The following are discussions of problem solving and transformative mediation practices used to help believers be true to themselves and allowing for what their doctrine requires while navigating organizational pressure to conform. *The Promise of Mediation: Responding to Conflict Through Empowerment and Recognition* (Bush & Folger, 1994/2005), *Mediator Communication Competencies: Problem Solving and Transformative Practices 5/e* (Kimsey, McKinney, Della Noce, & Trobaugh, 2005) and other mediation texts provide elaboration of the concepts presented.

PROBLEMSOLVINGMEDIATIONINFAITH-BASEDSETTINGS

The first step, *Introducing the Process*, involves establishing a positive communication environment. Believers in conflict and mediators meet and reach agreement, through discussion, about schedule, procedure, rules, and other matters necessary for satisfactory interaction. The purpose in the first step of mediation is to create a setting in which believers can pursue a clear and open discussion of the issues in dispute. Before meeting with believers, mediators should a) review available information about the dispute, b) discuss potential problems or difficulties, c) discuss roles, duties, and responsibilities, and d) become familiar with the physical setting selected for the mediation.

Other responsibilities of the mediator or, when appropriate, mediators should a) welcome the believers and affirm his or her choice to use win-win approaches in problem solving mediation, b) clarify the purpose of mediation, c) explain the procedure and the mediator's role and function, d) describe the potential for private caucus sessions with the parties, e) discuss confidentiality and note-taking, and f) establish rules for interaction and secure agreement from the parties.

At the conclusion of the opening phase of a mediation session, the members and the mediators should be acquainted and comfortable with each other, understand and agree to the process for discussing the conflict, feel confident that they will be treated fairly and ethically, and know that the conflict and the process are owned by the believers.

The second step, *Defining the Conflict*, provides an opportunity for each believer to disclose, as fully and as completely as possible, his or her perception and understanding of the conflict. Each member will describe the conflict from his or her perspective. The parties' description will be unrestrained and uninterrupted. The mediator will summarize each believer's descriptions and ask for elaboration, clarification, or explanation necessary for developing a complete and accurate understanding of the conflict.

The procedure in this step includes: a) each member, in turn, describes the conflict from their perspective, b) believers are encouraged to identify facts, share their feelings, and describe their desired outcome, and c) the mediator summarizes each parties' description. At the conclusion of the Defining the Conflict Step, the parties and the mediators should have a complete understanding of the conflict—the facts, and the feelings—and have identified a tentative agenda of issues to resolve.

Step 3, *Solving the Problem*, focuses on gaining consensus regarding relevant issues and develop strategies, procedures, and solutions, acceptable to all members which will allow the believers to reach successful agreement. The purpose of Step 3 is to generate positive communication interaction while creating a supportive environment.

Procedures for the Solving the Problem Step require the mediator to a) facilitate identification of issues in conflict, b) prioritize issues for discussion, c) pursue discussion of interests and positions concerning each issue, d) encourage members to dialogue relevant to issues under discussion, e) provide periodic summary of progress and positive reinforcement, and f) caucus when necessary to overcome impasse or explore ideas privately.

At the conclusion of the Solving the Problem Step; the members and mediators should have reached an oral agreement concerning each issue, be satisfied that all dimensions of each issue have been considered; be satisfied that the believers have been given full opportunity to participate in the discussion; and be confident that the strategies, procedure, and solutions are fair, ethical, and practical.

The last step, *Implementing the Agreement*, provides a device to insure, to the degree appropriate and possible, that the believers accept responsibility for implementing their agreement and providing documentation, if necessary, of that commitment. The purpose of Step 4 is to bring the mediation session to a close and provide for some documentation of what has been agreed and what has been resolved.

Procedures for facilitating the Implementing the Agreement Step are for the mediator to a) write a statement of agreement, if needed, in clear and precise language and b) specify who is agreeing to what, when, and how. At the conclusion of this step, the members and mediator should achieve some closure with specific understanding of what is resolving the conflict and be satisfied with the steps taken for resolution.

It is in facilitated discussion where the individual believer now has a greater appreciation for his or her conflict over worldview, frame of irony and difficult believers. Engaging the conflict using a principled win-win procedure like mediation allows all involved to find individual growth in their faith experience while engaging the relational dialectics inherent in organizational pressures for conformity. The promise of mediation achieved through empowerment and recognition provides the believer the opportunity for solving problems in several of the seven phases of believer conflict while transforming the individual believer according to his or her faith structure. Transformation of the inner person for believers is a lifelong pursuit and a lifelong challenge, and most faith-based organizations provide some approaches for achieving those goals. The following section describes how transformative mediation works.

TRANSFORMATIVE MEDIATION AND FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Transformative mediation is defined as “a process in which a third party works with parties in conflict to help them change the quality of their interaction from negative and destructive to positive and constructive as they explore and discuss issues and possibilities for resolution” (Bush & Pope, 2002, p. 83). The goal of a transformative mediator in faith-based organizations is to help believing members identify the opportunities for empowerment and recognition shifts that arise in their own conversation, and to choose whether and how to respond to these opportunities (Della Noce, Bush, & Folger, 2002, p. 51). Thus, competent mediator practice focuses on (1) fostering empowerment shifts by supporting each believer’s efforts at deliberation and decision making at every point in the session where choices arise, and (2) fostering recognition shifts by supporting, but not forcing, each member’s freely chosen efforts to achieve new understandings of the other believer’s perspective (Bush & Pope, 2002, p. 84). This means that the transformative mediator maintains a dual goal focus throughout the mediation process.

The transformative model presumes that transformation of the interaction is what matters most to members—even more than a tangible settlement agreement (Della Noce, Bush, & Folger, 2002, p. 51). Success is measured not by a settlement agreement, but by member shifts toward empowerment and recognition. The mediator observes these shifts in the believers’ interaction.

The mediator in a faith-based organization begins the mediation session by having an opening conversation with the believers. A transformative mediator relies on the metaphor of conversation to convey to the members the nature of the process in which they are taking part. The opening conversation between the mediator and the believers emphasizes empowerment and recognition. Transformative mediators focus attention on the conversational quality of the members’ interaction; emphasize believer autonomy, choice, believer-to-believer communication

and understanding; and frame settlement as one of a number of possible valuable outcomes.

The transformative mediator listens to the members' conversation with an ear to opportunities for empowerment and recognition. The mediator "punctuates" the conversations occurring in the mediation. The mediator does not lead the discussion; the believers lead the discussion. The transformative mediator does not intervene each time he or she hears an opportunity in the conversation; the mediator remains quiet and allows for silence and space so the members hear and respond to each other.

When appropriate, transformative mediators use three kinds of responses: reflecting, summarizing, and questioning. Reflection is powerful in supporting both empowerment and recognition. Mediator reflection amplifies the conversation for each believer; the members hear and understand what is being said. Mediator reflection confirms and elicits an immediate affirmation.

Mediator summary amplifies and clarifies the developing conversation between the believers. The summary makes the believers' conversation an entity unto itself; it includes the differences revealed and the choices offered, more "visible" so the members can make clearer choices about what to do. The parties respond to the mediator's summary by moving the conversation forward and often in new directions.

Mediator questioning and checking-in are used when members request help. While transformative mediators favor open-ended questions, "checking-in" is a particular use of a closed ended question. A check-in focuses on a decision about the mediation conversation itself, e.g., "You just said . . . is that what you want to do now?" or "Did I miss anything, what are you really wanting done?"

Mediator questions provide opportunities for a believer to elaborate on and get clearer about what he or she has said. Questions stimulate recognition shifts by letting the non-speaking member hear different elaborations of what the believer is saying, which may lead to new understandings.

Check-in allows a member to correct a mediator reflection or summary, and maintain some control. Mediator check-ins emphasize decision points and support recognition shifts by allowing each believer to become aware of the choices and priorities of the other, as decisions are faced and made in different ways.

Separate meetings are used often between the transformative mediator(s) and one member. Separate meetings help believers think through goals, resources, options, alternatives, and consequences. The mediator helps a believer to explore new information, to consider what new understandings he or she could extend to the other, and to explore whether there is something else that may need to be disclosed. The transformative mediator suggests separate meetings by checking-in with the members.

In recessing and resuming after separate meetings, the mediator discusses what is happening and why. The mediator instructs how information shared in separate session is handled, e.g., if there are confidentiality issues. The mediator facilitates the conversation, during separate session, about what a member wants to share,

and how he or she might do so. Finally, the mediator summarizes what has happened in the joint session before adjourning and after starting in a subsequent session.

At the conclusion of a transformative mediation, believers have a better understanding of each other's position, what is wanted, and where they would like to go. Because of the emphasis on conversation, the members have openly clarified their perceptions and with new understanding can proceed to a more harmonious relationship. Out of the *Nova Harmony* they are better equipped to continue.

SELECTING BEST MEDIATION PRACTICE

Criteria for selecting the appropriate mediation practice, problem solving or transformative, are suggested as follows:

Criteria	Practice
* Faith related problems	Transformative Mediation
* Non-faith related problems	Problem Solving Mediation
* Compounded issues	Either Mediation Approach

A compounded issue may combine these mediation practices. Analyze the parts; the faith portion and non-faith portion may each be isolated, proceed then to mediate separately.

In order to assist understanding for making a selection of mediation practice, which is best suited to the issues, the following examples are offered.

Dispute Category	Mediation Practice
1. Philosophies	Transformative
2. Redemption/Sin	Transformative
3. Abortion/Right to Live	Transformative
4. Same Sex Marriage	Transformative
5. War/Peace	Transformative
6. Administrative	Problem Solving
7. Communication	Problem Solving
8. Education	Problem Solving
9. Divorce	Problem Solving
10. Marriage & Family	Problem Solving
11. Worship/Traditions	Either
12. Political Responses	Either
13. Community	Either
14. Medical vs. Faith Healing	Either
15. Sacraments	Either

Faith-based members in low-context societies typical of Western countries often associate with people in short time increments across a variety of contexts. Language, knowledge, and rules define how members in faith-based organizations problem-solve and build community. Relationship development for faith-based members is often driven by deterministic thinking emphasizing personal achievement. Judeo-Christian worldviews not uncommon in Western psyches are, generally speaking, empirical, cause-effect, linear, solution oriented, individualistic, and motivated toward managing the individual rather than the group. The drive toward solution inherent in the facilitative, problem solving mediation practice often assumes a low-context individualistic approach to conflict resolution.

High-context societies found in Eastern countries typical of Asia or the Middle East are often characterized as placing emphasis on process and ceremony over content and structure. They are less direct and give less information in written form. Emphasis on group identity, setting strong boundaries over who is or is not accepted and the importance of “face” creates complex frameworks making problem solving techniques difficult (Ting-Toomey, 2005). The transformative method, being non-directive, member driven, allows for more conversation which is consistent with high-context signification of situations and relationships. Faith-based organizations rely on high-context events and rituals which serve to justify choices made for the group and the believer member. Problem solving mediation may achieve outcomes typical of transformative practices, e.g. empowerment, recognition, etc.; yet the transformative process often is longer in duration, mediator authority less noticeable, outcomes may appear less clear and, perhaps even less controllable than problem solving. This is evident, particularly, with a first time introduction to transformative. Faith-based leaders favor transformative practices over problem solving mediation when the issues of the conflict are over values, beliefs, or doctrines and not about disputes over administration.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

With practice, discerning which mediation method to use will become clearer. The believer’s choice for faith-based mediation is usually difficult to initiate for the members who are more comfortable thinking that working on their issues separately without confrontation will make the problems go away. Therefore, many times there will be approach/avoidance with the idea of mediation for fear of escalation of the conflict. The parties’ concern may be that open discussion through mediation may expose their true position and somehow make them appear to be less worthy in the eyes of deity, when in reality the very opposite holds true. Mediation offers an organized direct approach to solving issues without either party losing.

Case Study: Charismatic versus Seeker Sensitive Focus

A non-denominational church with a charismatic focus, approaching the celebration of their 15th year anniversary has been considering for some months how best to move forward and meet the evangelistic goals in their strategic plan.

The charismatic focus has been on praise and worship, experiencing the gifts and visitation of the Holy Spirit and allowing prophecies to be spoken on Sundays. Many meetings become very emotional and uplifting for the congregation and validates that God is present and blessing this group. Emphasis is on the biblical mandate to win the lost at any cost; weekend morning services are directed toward reaching the un-churched. However, the administration and many members of the governing body have concluded that the evangelistic goals can be best met by changing the focus from charismatic to a seeker-sensitive orientation with a more traditional church atmosphere. Citing that the highly emotionally charged atmosphere has been proven in sister churches to scare away new members, the decision is announced for consideration.

This positioning had been discussed in private throughout the membership for months. The final announcement came forth with the following rationale. God is tired of us proclaiming the truth on street corners, like the man with a loudspeaker. In fact he will go as far as to say that Christians who try to witness to their friends and preach the gospel to them are down right annoying. Our Church needs to be purpose driven and we need to make our Church so appealing that the whole world will want to be part of it. We don't need to drive Jesus down the visitors' throats; we'll let people decide for themselves as our Church meets their needs. But we need to get them through the Church's doors first.

Shortly after the announcement of the Church's new direction, conflict erupted among different groups: the praise and worship team over songs and style of presentation, Sunday school teachers over programs and materials, youth group leaders seeking appropriate direction, the finance committee on budget allocations, and other staff. Reports began streaming into the administrative staff regarding increased disagreements and divisions. The congregation was splitting right before their eyes. The administrative board is split on administrative issues. The board of elders is split on spiritual issues and doctrine.

Seeking the outside counsel of the Community Mediation Service, their problem was broken down into two types of conflict. The first was administrative issues, the second category was spiritual. The mediation service recommended the administrative board meet first to mediate conflicts over finance, programs, and staff issues. Secondly, the administrative board would agree to allow the elders to mediate on behalf of the spiritual issues related to worship service, sermons, youth group issues, doctrine, and the prophetic direction of the Church.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Where in the Seven-Phase Model of Conflict would you say the Church presently finds itself? Why?
2. What style of mediation practice, problem solving or transformative, best fits the conflicts? Why?
3. If mediation is not successful, what methods of negotiation could be used to reach a satisfactory solution?

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166 Readings & Case Studies in Mediation

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