

Conflict Resolution in the Board Room

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Today's complex and fast changing culture inside and outside of all organizations presents itself on many different levels. Change is certain to bring tension, disagreement and conflict in the boardroom and among executive teams. This reality elevates when the focal point of change strikes hard against personal or organizational values. Nowhere is this more evident than with the changes taking place regarding same-sex relationships. The US Supreme court's June 26th ruling on same-sex marriage heightens the need for institutional reflection on workplace policies and procedures.

Dealing with cultural shifts and conflicting personal and organizational values is not easy and can often stall or sabotage the mission and goals of the organization. Having knowledge of and ready skills regarding conflict management across the board should be an essential component of the organization's risk management plan. It is in the best interest of the organization and the mission to work at these dynamics proactively.

Here are four proactive steps that will help your organization and those you serve.

First, it is wise to start with assessing the relational health and trust levels within the board. Teams that resolve difficult conflicts are those that have respectful relationships and good communication skills, which is necessary to create a safe and confidential space. Having a safe place means that all participant voices matter and will be valued in

spite of diverging opinions and values. Effective conflict management is all about seeking individual input as the group keeps an open mind seeking a mutual solution to the issue at hand. The emphasis is to proactively cultivate healthy team function so that when difficult issues arise there is a reservoir of relational and historical trust.

Second, know and improve your own conflict management style. For some, the default response is to avoid conflict at all cost, and for others it is to accommodate the strongest opponent or to push through a conflict using coercion expecting others to agree while having little patience for dialogue, collaboration and mutual discernment. Knowing your own conflict management style is a priceless gift to bring to the table. Good conflict management sees conflict as a natural part of growth and transformation.

Third, identify and remain focused on the mission and purpose of the organization. What is it that we do and who do we serve in the organization? When the conversation begins to break down or is sidetracked, revisit this alignment of purpose. Moral and value based conflicts are not the kind that will resolve on their own if one person just backs down. *Continued page 2*

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These issues affect morale, productivity and the whole organization's success. Staying focused on the big picture of the overall mission and purpose increases the probability of a successful resolution and is the bridge to new opportunities and growth.

Fourth, name and be willing to wrestle and live with the ambiguities of a faith-based organization that employs and serves the public. Name and be willing to embrace the tension of being faith-based and yet not being congregational or exclusively denominational. This tension brings both complexity and opportunity. Our most faithful response may be to embrace both-complexity and opportunity.

For more insight into how to respond and resolve these complex and difficult issues see the MHS document [Sensitive Conversations](#).

For Discussion

1. Is there conflict within your board? What is the cause of this conflict?
2. Can diversity be the cause of conflict? Why or why not?
3. Do you think diversity is important on your board?

RESOURCES/SAMPLES FOR REFERENCE:

[Sensitive Conversations](#) – Piece developed for MHS Members

[Steps to Rebuild or Build Trust within an Organization](#)

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