

FACILITATING TIPS: HOLDING CONFLICT WHEN IN A POSITION OF AUTHORITY

PURPOSE: To give further tools to surface different views in collaborations, and stay with the ‘heat’ that follows when you are in an authority position.

CONTEXT: To work with conflict productively means taking on two critical assumptions about collaborating:

1. The wisdom to work through the conflict lies with the group
2. Accepting that the work can’t be done alone

When conflict surfaces we can quickly lose our appetite and are often pulled to ‘manage’ the conflict or shut it down, losing the opportunity for learning and growth.

DEVELOP AWARENESS OF HOW YOU ARE PERCEIVED

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What do you represent in your role, culture, values, beliefs, & ideology?
- Are you perceived as neutral on this issue?
- What faction/worldview may you be perceived to represent?

SPREAD AND SHARE THE CONFLICT TO CREATE SAFETY

Spread and share the conflict when it arises so it is not owned by one person or group. This provides relief and protection to the issue and makes it safe for other alternative views to surface while loosening up the group to explore different views without it becoming personalised. You can spread the conflict by asking “Who else feels like – even just a little”?

If no-one joins the view, use yourself as data:

“Well there’s a bit of me that feels like that...let’s explore it and see what we can learn from it”

RECOGNISING WHEN YOU BECOME A LIGHTNING ROD – AS A SIGN THE SYSTEM IS DISRUPTED

People in a role of authority are often seen as the problem when the heat goes up. The role of authority can become a lightning rod for the frustrations that inevitably surface in a collaboration because they are:

- seen to represent the status quo
- not quelling the disagreement
- quelling disagreement too much
- Getting things wrong
- associated with poor past experiences with authority

This is an indicator that the system has been disrupted and is having to start to learn new ways of working. The expectation for you to return everything back to normal is high and when you don't deliver, attack is inevitable.

TECHNIQUES FOR HOLDING STEADY WHEN THE PRESSURE IS ON TO RETURN TO STATUS QUO

The task is to not get completely de-authorised, while not snapping back and shutting down the alternative views. Holding steady in this place is one of the toughest leadership challenges.

- Let others do the work
- Silence is an intervention
- Awareness of signals of impatience and frustration
- Keep people focussed on the work
- Listen
- Don't take it personally
- Sustainability
- Test Assumptions
- Take a break - recharge