

LEADERSHIP ACADEMY (STAGE 3)

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT - SUMMERHILL HOUSING PROJECT (< 3 HOURS)

Objectives

1. Understand how conflict management plays a critical role in good local government.
2. Understand factors that create conflict and conditions for conflict.
3. Recognise the competitive patterns in our culture.
4. Identify competitive vs collaborative responses and understand their impacts on the dynamics of a situation.
5. Understand how processes to resolve community conflict can be designed and facilitated.

Introduction

Local government is full of conflicts. People and groups share a territory where they live; they have different opinions and interests. They may also have different:

- *Histories and cultures.*
- *Ideas of good and bad.*
- *Perspectives on the local environment.*
- *Expectations for local public services.*

When they fail to communicate or interact in a way that recognises and resolves these daily differences, conflict is born. Conflicts damage the quality of life of the community, reduces business opportunities, takes the focus of the municipality away from other priorities and hinders the effective running of local services.

Conflicting parties are able to choose from among many different ways to resolve their dispute. They can:

- ✓ *Have discussions and come to some form of agreement.*
- ✓ *Ask a third party to assist them in their negotiations.*
- ✓ *Ask a third party to make a decision on their behalf.*
- ✓ *Use force to defend their claimed position or interest.*

There is a continuum. At one end is “free choice of solutions through direct communication among the parties”; at the other end is “imposed solutions”. When the process moves away from the position of choice, the power of the parties over the outcome weakens; at the same time, their level of satisfaction with the process and its result often declines.

The process may also last a long time, engendering frustration; in the end, at least one party is likely to remain dissatisfied with the imposed solution.

In the session, we simulate in a game how conflict evolves and how people react and often contribute to escalation. Reflection on the conflict experience will help discussing various options to avoid conflict or turn it through negotiation to a mutually accepted solution.

At the end of the session we introduce the concept of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), where “alternative” refers to processes and techniques applied in an effort to resolve conflicts / disputes outside that of a judicial process. We discuss them as they are relatively new in Europe and but strongly recommended by EC.

Assignment

The aim of the exercise is to create a scenario in which different stakeholders meet with the leadership of a municipality to discuss a proposed new social housing development. Each stakeholder has its different interests. The Mayor has invited the stakeholders in the group to come to a meeting to consider his/her proposal. In seeking to achieve consensus, the groups will need to think about how they can acknowledge and resolve the differences of opinion and interest that will arise.

Introduction

1. (Optional) Organise the game 'Win as Much as you Can'. **(30 mins)**
2. Explain the Summerhill role play. Divide into 'stakeholder groups' of 5 (any odd person out can join a Mayor as Head of Communications). Each group will comprise: (i) the Mayor and representatives of (ii) the school's Parent Association, (iii) an Environment NGO, (iv) the Housing Association and (v) a social welfare NGO. Agree which participants take which roles. Give the Scenario to each person, and the Role Descriptions to those in the specific roles. **(10 mins)**

Task 1

3. Ask each role player to meet with his/her opposite number from the other groups ('role groups'). Each person should read the role and scenario. Each role group should consider their specific interests in the proposal. **(10 mins)**

Task 2

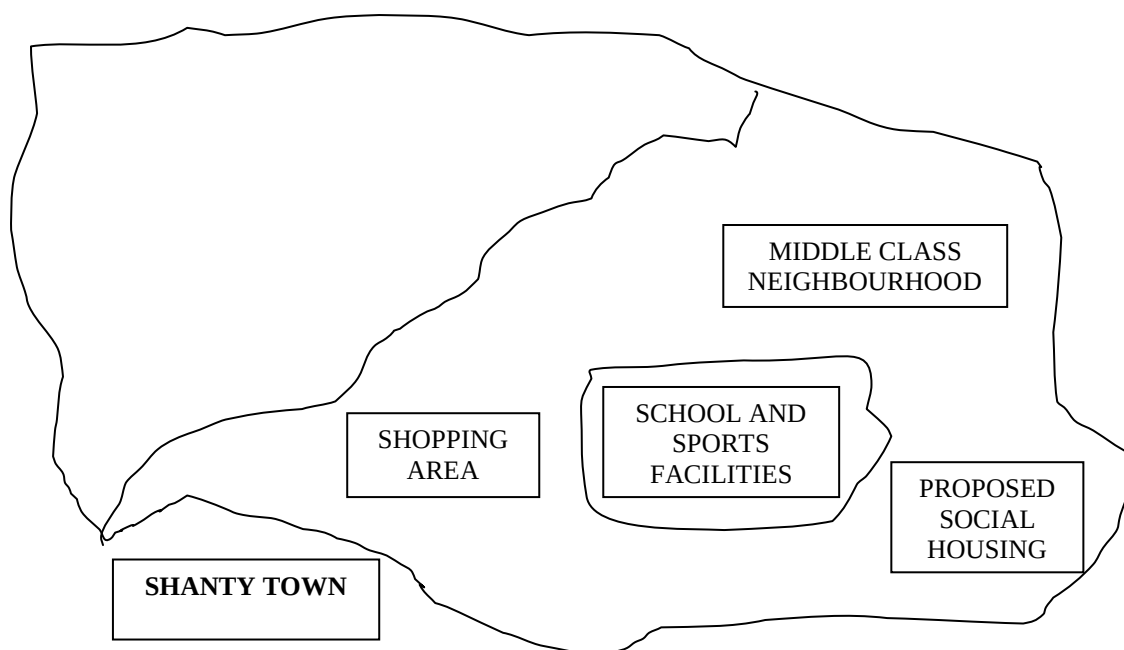
4. Form back into the stakeholder groups. The Mayor calls a **meeting** to negotiate an agreement and prepare the outline for the proposal. Finding consensus is the goal. Each stakeholder may need to compromise. **(60 mins)**
5. In a plenary session, each group should provide feedback on their negotiations and on the shape of the final agreement; this should lead to a discussion on the various conflicts that arose and how they were managed. **(15 mins)**

Task 3

6. Interactive presentation and discussion of the PowerPoint slides 'Conflict Resolution' **(45 mins)**

SCENARIO - SUMMERHILL HOUSING PROJECT

MAP OF GOOSEFIELD SUBURB IN SUMMERHILL TOWN



Description of Summerhill and the housing proposal

We are in the year 2020. Summerhill is a town with 30,000 inhabitants in the centre of the country. It has a Mayor who is serving his third term; he is known for his commitment to improving the life of the city and all its inhabitants. Summerhill is a prosperous town that is beginning to catch up again after a long financial crisis. New businesses are opening up and the local economy has started to regain momentum.

Goosefield is a relatively nice middle class housing area in Summerhill. It is very popular as it is close to the centre and just beside the large traditional market and shopping area of the city.

Until the last few years, Summerhill had a relatively stable population, but in 2012 many people lost their homes. The cause was that during the years between 2002 and 2007 many inhabitants took loans to buy new apartments in the area of Goosefield.

At the moment when they took the loans, they had jobs and the conditions of the loans were excellent, but during the financial crisis of 2010-2015, many lost their jobs; they could not pay their debts and lost their homes. Many of these families moved to small cottages that were built in an area (shanty town) at the edge of the town (see map).

In this area there are no utility services or schools, or any public services available. Within a couple of years the area was transformed into a shanty town. Inhabitants

rapidly lost their social status and disintegration of the community speeded up during the last few years.

Today, most people living in the shanty town are unemployed. They try to find some possibilities by begging on the streets of Goosefield and the neighbouring shopping area and by offering services (eg ironing, window-cleaning) to local people. The families live in impossible conditions, often breaking up; many children from there drop out of school.

The shanty town is beyond the built-up zone of the city. According to national regulations, no construction permit can be issued there. The infrastructure costs would anyhow be too high as all utilities and networks would have to be newly built. There is no chance for rehabilitating the area.

In Goosefield, there is a school (grade 1-8) owned by the municipality that is under-utilized. This school has all the sports facilities that it needs; but it also has a large open area that is now covered by grass and used only occasionally by the students as a playground.

The Mayor has a proposition to build social housing, owned and managed by the municipality, in this open school area for the inhabitants of the shanty town. The plan is to build 100 apartments with a subsidised rent and offer them to those inhabitants of the shanty town who had moved there when they lost their apartment in Goosefield some years before. The goal is to offer them a way back to the city and give them a new chance to reintegrate.

SCENARIO - SUMMERHILL HOUSING PROJECT

ROLES

The trainer should cut out each role and distribute them to the participants as selected. Participants should not share their roles with other participants in the stakeholder group in advance.

Mayor

You are the mayor of Summerhill. You are a socially committed person who always wanted to keep all members of the community together.

You are serving your third mandate and you are planning to run for election to Parliament in two years time.

The situation of the shanty town has always bothered you but up till now you had no chance to do something on behalf of the people there. Now you deeply believe that the new rental housing concept will help them.

There are additional factors that push you to act. You were the Mayor when these people lost their homes and you could do nothing about it. This has bothered you since then. The other factor is that a very well known - both nationally and internationally – a human rights group has started a long campaign on behalf of the shanty town inhabitants; they urge for public action.

The school's open area is municipal property. You can allocate the construction costs in your budget. All existing public facilities have sufficient capacity for the new inhabitants. Your advisers also say that, if the intervention is successful, in the mid-term you could save on the municipality's social costs.

Middle class Housing Association

The members of the Association are the home-owners in Goosefield; the Association is their formal representative body.

The home-owners do not like the idea of the social housing. They feel they have suffered enough from these people who frequent their streets, beg and look for simple jobs. The children who come to schools from the shanty town area are often dirty and badly dressed. Most of them have poor results in school.

You do not want to mix even more with “those people”!

Parents' Association of the school

The children who come to the school from the shanty town are often dirty and badly dressed. Most of them have poor results in school. Many of them are problematic kids; some steal; some drop out; few continue their studies. This renders the performance indicators of the school lower and degrades its reputation.

You have long fought with the school to introduce special support services for these kids (social workers, teaching aids, special training....). This never happened. You are convinced that, without special support, most of these kids will not be able to integrate.

As middle class kids are not allowed to visit the shanty town, you do not really know the exact conditions where these kids have to live and learn.

Environment NGO

You do not want to lose the green area beside the school. Even if it is not a public park, at least it is a green field that is an important element of the active green areas of the town.

You have long defined your position about development. Your position is that there are not enough active green areas in the city. Every area must be maintained! You have a good relationship with the press.

For a risky social intervention, you cannot sacrifice the environment!

Social welfare NGO

You welcome the initiative. You are convinced that if help is given, these families can reintegrate. They are not families who had been marginalised for generations; they are rather "newly marginalised". This gives hope! They have skills; they want to work. The loss of their homes was the only cause of their decline.

Their kids could also catch up if the right conditions for their development and learning are provided. You think it is the responsibility of all to help these people to restart a normal life.

You do not have many resources, but know possible social service providers who could help with various reintegration programmes of adults and children if sponsors could be found. You are also skilled at using the power of the media.