



Human Resources Planning for Conflict

Years ago I was warned to beware of simplistic models. Nonetheless, I give you my handy model and invite you to make it yours. Use it to plan any problem solving, negotiation, or to plan for a conflict resolution event.

You are the center of your situation universe. That is, you have the ability to interpret situations, influence outcomes, and design processes that will meet your conflict solving needs. Overall your planned approach to a conflict will certainly influence the outcome of your resolution efforts. Here is a look at the creative planning principles and the 10 trusty steps to resolving conflict and generating mutually acceptable resolutions.

First, the principles

Where do you start? It is clear that all of us operate from a value base; the trouble is that we don't make our values explicit, so they don't help us in our efforts to resolve conflict. So, in this model we front end all problem solving with the clearest possible statement of our personal and social values, and then we link them to our goals in resolving the conflict.

Second, this model is about turning the planning process outside in. You bring the planning of the outcomes into focus and join it to your needs and interests (another way of saying goals and objectives). By doing so, you improve the clarity of your goals and objectives (another way of saying needs and interests) and therefore the likelihood of congruence between values and goals and methods (another way of saying your behavior and communication).

Third, it is not enough for you to merely be aware of resolution alternatives. In this model the mediator, facilitator, negotiator, or parent of

adolescents, actively searches for all the information about known alternatives and then goes beyond even that, to invent further alternatives. This is true for goals and alternative methods of mediating participant interaction, achieving mutually acceptable outcomes, and finalizing the agreement.

Is conflict resolution neutral?

All planning is a political act; this includes planning to resolve a dispute. If we are planning to maintain the status quo then we are wasting our time and our client's time as well. Even if we grant that a dispute with your teenager over who gets to use the car is non-political, the lack of values is self-defeating and underestimated. Any move to resolve a conflict that is not "front ended" by a defined value system is trivialized. People need to feel that their efforts to resolve a dispute are contributing to significant values. As mediators we will burn out or simply fail to plan unless we "front end" the problem solving and decision making in negotiations or conflicts with what the understood implicit values are imbedded in the process.

Value based dispute resolution

People disenfranchise themselves from life's options. It follows that a first concern – the mission and purpose of conflict resolution – is to help others (and ourselves) gain greater decision-making power over their lives, destinies and relationships. Of course this includes or leads to increased commitment to and control over their communities and society. Reflect for a moment about the reasons why you are trying to resolve this conflict and why the other side is trying to resolve this conflict. Just think about how both of you hope to gain opportunities by arriving at a mutually agreeable resolution.

As we plan and step towards these goals by planning the intervention, we construct an environment that helps people gain control over their own conflict. We do



this by designing structures and processes that give participants greater responsibility for their disputes and for the agreements achieved within the resolution process. The following scale oversimplifies our alternatives but it's useful in comparing dispute resolution approaches. I'd like to invite you to do two things:

- First, add to this scale other methods or planning you have experience with.
- Place your own planning and/or dispute resolution methods style on the scale.

Recent research indicates that disputants are more satisfied when they are able to articulate their positions and have a hand in developing outcomes that needs their needs and interests. It seems that people who have greater control over their desired outcomes believe they have achieved better outcomes. I'd be interested in your additions to the scale and your comments about what I have said in this introduction to planning.

Distinction between goals & objectives

I find it useful when planning for conflict resolution to distinguish the term goals, the broader statement of purpose, from objectives, the more precise aims to achieve those goals. When you think in terms of goals for mediating, you might have the goal: to facilitate the disputants to agreement and support the continuing relationship. You might also have the goal: to develop such an intervention so that it would protect and support the self confidence of the participants.

The objectives could fall in one of three categories:

- Planning objectives
 - Resolution or Problem Solving objectives
 - Process objectives
- Planning Objectives are:
- Be prepared by a certain date
 - The session lasts no longer than three hours

- All persons identified, notified, and prepared

Resolution Objectives:

- The participants should be able to re-build their ongoing relationship
- The participants should participate in their agreement development
- The participants should develop confidence in their participation, joint problem solving, and assume greater responsibility for resolving their disputes

Process Objectives:

- The participants should assume greater responsibility for their own problem solving
- The participants should develop confidence in their ability to solve their problems
- The participants should learn how the process works and they move toward working together and share information with each other

Bring Evaluation in from Outside

One of the reasons mediators don't evaluate is that we fear bad news – even though it is the only way we can really hope to learn what to change and improve the planning and the process. Just reflect: When do you normally evaluate? Who does it? How much influence do the participants have? What do you do with the information?

Here are some tricks you might take to help you self evaluate:

- Write your statements of goals and objectives in behavioral terms.
 - Be as specific as possible so evaluation is built into the process and results are clear.
 - Keep you evaluation as short and simple as possible; use varied strategies
- Conflict resolution always involves risk; planning helps clarify values and goals, facilitates identifying and generating alternatives and revises the goals. In the absence of plan-

ning, the mediator might go on making the same mistakes.

Creativity in Planning

There are really two levels of creativity in planning. One is to make new connections, the other is to expand the frontiers and invent new options for people to connect to. If, as you plan to mediate, you search to identify alternative goals and methods, you may use your imagination in seeking out information about goals and methods from colleagues, from similar situations in others' practices, from the journals – in other words using all your resources. Being vigilant about your information search will provide you and your disputing parties with a more focused and powerful process. But that is not being creative.

It becomes creative when you synthesize ideas you have generated from different sources into new connections for your own preparation.

When you push still further to generate and invent alternative goals and objectives this brings together both originality and imagination in planning a creative leap. You can brainstorm by yourself in preparation to help the participants coming to resolution. One caveat: very nasty people have found monstrous ways of being creative. So there is nothing casual about the insistence that creative decision-making be inextricable linked to a clear value system.

Recap of the planning principles for creative mediation

- Identify the values implicit in the decisions to conduct the mediation. Put them in writing.
- Survey the full range of possible goals. Deliberately generate alternatives, for example brainstorming.
- Use all your resources to conduct a vigilant information search for the objectives of the mediation. These objectives serve as a reference base for your values and goals.



•Decide on your process goals and objectives and relate them to some criteria. Check: Are they so clear that evaluation is built in? So clear that disputants and you know that you have made it? Or we didn't make it? Start planning your evaluation strategies.

•Thoroughly canvass the spectrum of alternative conflict resolution methods. Brainstorm new possibilities, make new connections, prepare for creative problem solving. Name your decisions - to change, to invent, to adventure.

I give you my handy model to make it yours. Use it to plan any negotiation or conflict resolution. Add to it or delete parts to suit you. Don't go too far in planning and don't start to mediate or negotiate unless you first have a clear picture of your objectives. What are you aiming for?

No one method is best for all situations or disputants. Beware of your pet methods and weak spots and try to avoid them. Aim to be less of a

sole provider of knowledge and more of a process facilitator and communication catalyst. This way you will be able to attend to the participants' varying needs, demands, and talents.

Remember, it is your plan and you can change it. Try to learn from the decisions you make as changes occur. Don't use the model in a linear fashion: start anywhere, go clockwise and anti-clockwise; just try to cover all the points at some time.

As creative mediators and negotiators we make many false starts and continually waver between unmanageable fantasies and systematic attack.

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His career has spanned more than twenty years and has included executive positions at Mercantile National Bank, as senior vice president, and Warner Bros., Inc., as director of human resources for North America. Before starting The Blake Group in 1993, Mr. Blake was director of human resources for GUESS? Inc., a leading international apparel designer, manufacturer and retailer.

His breakthrough research on mediation at Claremont Graduate University, discovered specific communication techniques that move conflicts to resolution. Dr. Blake's study has been recognized by The Harvard Law School's Program on Negotiation (PON) in their research on critical moments in negotiations and mediation.



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