17 Alliances and Coalitions

Coalitions and alliances bolster advocacy by bringing together the strength and resources of diverse groups to create a more powerful voice for change. They help people get to the decisionmaking table. But coalitions and alliances are also difficult to form and sustain. This chapter focuses on their dynamics and ways to strengthen them, specifically how to improve communication, decisionmaking, conflict management, and accountability.

Coalitions and alliances often have difficulty managing differences. They sometimes suffer from unrealistic expectations, such as the notion that people who share a common cause will agree on everything. As they evolve, members of coalitions and alliances often realize the importance of not only finding points of agreement, but also agreeing at certain times to disagree.

Defining Coalitions and Alliances

For our purposes, it helps to have some basic definitions that distinguish coalitions and alliances. But, in practice, these terms are used flexibly.

Coalitions often have a more formalized structure, an office and full-time staff. They usually involve long-term relationships among the members. Their permanence can give clout and leverage.

Alliances generally involve shorter-term relationships among members and are focused on a specific objective. Being limited in time and goal, alliances tend to be less demanding on members.

Networks tend to be loose, flexible associations of people and groups brought together by a common concern or interest, that share information and ideas.

Okay, we know we disagree on labor issues, but we're together on the environmental clause of the trade agreement.

There are different types of coalitions and alliances. Geographically, they may be local, national, regional, or transnational. They may be formed to achieve one short-term objective. For example, the National Women's Coalition in South Africa was set up to influence the gender content of the post-apartheid constitution. But coalitions may also be set up to address one or more long-term issues. Examples include the Coalition to Save Rainforests and national NGO coordinating committees that work to advance the common interests of their members in many countries.

Coalitions and alliances also differ in terms of structure. Some may be organized formally and highly structured with headquarters and permanent staff. Others are informal, flexible, and rely on volunteers.

Donors who support advocacy are often eager to support coalitions. Coalitions have, in some cases, been promoted as the "magic bullet" for NGO collaboration. As a result, some coalitions are donor-initiated or donor-created. But coalitions are usually strongest if they grow organically out of common interests. Experi-

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Facilitator's Tip

Groups can examine the pros and cons of coalitions and the myth of coalitions as magic bullets through a simple brainstorming process. Generating a list of advantages and disadvantages allows organizations to analyze the advisability of joining coalitions.

Below is an example of common responses received during advocacy workshops in Asia and Africa.

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
- Generates more resources to accomplish your goal: alliance members can pool human and material resources and so achieve much more;	- Distracts from other work: the demands of the coalition can lead to neglect of other organizational priorities;
- Increases credibility and visibility: decisionmakers and the broader public are more likely to pay attention to a force of ten organizations that they are to one or two;	- Generates an uneven workload: weaker members of the coalition benefit from the hard work of the stronger members who may become resentful;
- Produces safety in numbers: it is more difficult for the state to crack down on several groups than it is to harass one;	- Requires compromises to keep the coalition together that some members feel dilute their objectives;
- Broadens your base of support: joining forces brings together the different constituencies that each member works with;	- Causes tensions due to inherent inequalities of power: Because members differ in terms of resources, skills, experience, etc., there are imbalances of power; a few powerful organizations may dominate, even when weaker ones have a lot to offer;
- Creates opportunities for new leaders: when existing leaders assume positions in the alliance, they can create opportunities for others;	
- Creates opportunities for learning; Working together on an issue provides lessons in democratic culture;	- Limits organizational visibility: Each member may not be recognized sufficiently for what it contributes;
- Broadens the scope of each organization's work: working in coalition adds to the activities and potential impact of each organization;	- Poses risks to your reputation: If one member has problems, there can be guilt by association; one member can hurt the coalition as a whole.
- Contributes to long-term strength of civil society: the more networking that exists among actors in civil society, the more it is capable of holding decisionmakers accountable.	

ence shows that they are unlikely to survive if they are externally imposed.

Groups form alliances and coalitions for a variety of reasons. Some of these reasons are general in nature and some are specific to advocacy.

General reasons include:

- to share information and resources;
- to provide training and technical assistance;
- to respond to a local crisis;
- to facilitate more coordinated planning and implementation;
- to avoid duplication or fill gaps in service delivery.

Advocacy reasons include:[1]

- to publicize an issue and educate constituencies;
- to strengthen political voice and power;
- to ensure a consistent message and widen the coverage for community-based civic, voter, and legal education initiatives;
- to support policies or political candidates;
- to achieve a political victory that might not happen alone.

The Difficulties of Coalitions and Alliances[2]

Coalitions offer many advantages for groups that need to combine strength and resources to advance their cause. But, if not organized well, they can drain resources and undermine members' advocacy efforts. The headaches associated with being in and maintaining coalitions and alliances are so serious that it probably is not advisable to join or create one unless you have done a careful analysis of major pros and cons.

Before joining a coalition or alliance, organizations should consider the following challenges:

Communication barriers

These can include technological barriers such as unreliable phone systems or the lack of a common language. Without good, ongoing communication, some members will be uninformed and excluded from decisions. This can cause the break-up of the coalition or the departure of the marginalized members. To address these kinds of differences among groups, the core members may have to use resources and time to reach out to those lacking technology or a common language.

Credibility

Organizations will not want to be formally associated with groups that may harm their reputation.

Undemocratic decisionmaking

Decisionmaking in advocacy rarely flows in a smooth predictable pattern. Generally, processes and relationships tend to work better when they are more democratic. But in ever-changing environments, decisions sometimes need to be made quickly without consultation. There needs to be some agreement about this among the coalition members. But in general, when groups feel marginalized from decision-making, they tend to withdraw. While not an easy task, the decisionmaking system must address both representational concerns and the frequent need for quick decisionmaking in advocacy.

Loss of autonomy

Smaller organizations may be reluctant to join a coalition for fear that they will be overwhelmed by the collective.

DOING ADVOCACY

Tips: Decisionmaking / Consensus-Building

To develop solid advocacy plans and strong organizations and coalitions, decisionmaking is crucial. We present two ways that can help groups set priorities and reach more informed collaborative decisions. Groups may want to adapt these to fit their own cultural or organizational circumstances.

Building Consensus

1. After a group has had sufficient time for discussion about a particular topic and proposed decision, ask all group members to indicate where they are on the decision (see Levels of Consensus below). They can do this by raising their hands or by standing along an imaginary line that indicates their position. If a quick scan of the group reveals all ones and twos, then the group can see that consensus has been achieved. If there are significant numbers in the three and four categories, or if there is even one five, then more discussion will be needed to reach full consensus.

2. Whatever the result of the poll, it is useful to ask if there is a need for further discussion or comments.

3. If even one person is in disagreement with the decision, the group needs to consider that person's viewpoint. If he or she cannot agree, then the group needs to decide whether the decision will be postponed to provide time for more thinking or research, whether discussion will continue until an acceptable solution is found, or whether to use a fall-back decisionmaking method such as voting.

Levels of Consensus

"1. I can say an unqualified 'yes' to the decision. I am satisfied that the decision is an expression of the wisdom of the group.

2. I find the decision perfectly acceptable.

3. I can live with the decision; I'm not especially enthusiastic about it.

4. I do not fully agree with decision and need to register my view about why. However, I do not choose to block the decision. I am willing to support the decision because I trust the wisdom of the group.

5. I do not agree with the decision and feel the need to stand in the way of this decision being accepted."

Multivoting

Multivoting is helpful for prioritization once a group has generated and discussed a list of items.

1. Write all items on a flip chart. Be sure there is clarity about the meaning of each point on the list. Where there is agreement, combine similar items.

2. Each person gets the same number of votes. People can cast votes in several ways, including raising their hands, making a checkmark or placing colorful dot stickers beside the items, or voting by secret ballot. Using checkmarks or dots gets people out of their seats and generates more energy and interest in the group.

3. Explain the method for vote distribution. There are two common ways. One is to say that no item on the list can receive more than one vote from one person. For instance, if individuals have four votes then they would vote for four items. The second option is to say that people can distribute their votes any way they please, placing all votes on one item or distributing them across the board. A further option is to color code the choices, for example, using red for top priority, blue for second, and so on.

4. Once the votes are counted, be clear about what happens to all the items on the list. Don't assume those points receiving fewer votes will be totally discarded. Sometimes the group will want to keep them as part of their report.

5. To determine the appropriate number of votes, use the N/3 method. N stands for the number of points on the list; divide that number by 3.

See Dee Kelsey and Pam Plumb. *Great Meetings: How to Facilitate Like a Pro.* Portland Maine: Hanson Park Press, 1999.

Competition between a coalition and its members

Coalitions can become counterproductive if their activities become too similar to those of the member groups. In such instances, instead of adding value, the coalition can usurp members' functions and funding base.

Money tensions

Money is often a source of distrust in coalitions and is one of the most common reasons for their break-up. Often, groups are unwilling to share information about funding sources. Sometimes those with greater fundraising skills feel entitled to more control.

Expectation of unity

In some cases, coalition members assume they share similar principles, perspectives, and priorities beyond the issues that bring them together. When differences arise over message, tactics, or goals, they may view disagreements as political betrayals. These kinds of ideological tensions can create stubborn divisions that undermine citizen power.

Considerations for Building Advocacy Coalitions and Alliances[3]

Setting up a working relationship with other organizations involves dealing with many practical matters. For example, it is important to define group roles and relationships while maintaining the integrity of each member organization. The structure should allow for the active participation of all members in both decisionmaking and action whenever practical and possible. At the same time, a coalition must be stronger than its constituent parts to sustain active membership and attract new organizations. Members need to feel there is a high return on their investment.

In a larger, more formal or permanent coalition, a board of directors may be helpful to determine roles and responsibilities and monitor the coalition's program, finances, and management. They may also need to create a secretariat with separate staff to coordinate coalition operations. Such coordinating structures can serve as 'honest brokers' and facilitators that represent the concerns of all members. In an informal, short-term alliance, a board of directors may not be necessary unless the alliance seeks outside funding. Instead, an advisory board can be useful for visibility, credibility, and liaison with others.

Time is often a key factor in determining the arrangements of the relationship. In many advocacy campaigns, groups come together informally in response to a political opportunity or threat. Then, with time, success, and relationship-building, they may adopt a more formal structure. There are occasions when groups may jump straight into a formalized structure, but this can be risky because it can truncate the ability of groups to build trust and effective operating relationships.

Tips for Establishing a Coalition

There is no one single way to form a coalition or alliance, but the following guidelines[4] may be useful:

1. Be clear about the advocacy issue proposed as the focus of the coalition. A written issue or problem statement (see Chapter 8) can be helpful for this purpose.

2. Develop membership criteria and mechanisms for including new members and sustainability. These criteria can help members decide whether organizations or individuals can join, whether individuals must represent a particular segment of the community, and other guidelines. Mechanisms for sustain-

ing the interest and active involvement of the membership are key for survival.

3. Resolve what the coalition will and will NOT do. Invite potential members to come together to determine, as a group, the alliance's purpose, scope, and priorities. Decide how it will make decisions.

4. If the group is large, select a steering committee of five to seven people that is representative of different membership inter- ests or member organizations. Use the steering committee to facilitate advocacy planning and strategy decisions, ensure communication and consultation among members, resolve problems, and conduct outreach. It is important to set up a process for ensuring that the steering committee is accountable and responsible to the broader group. Avoid designating the steering committee or any single person as the sole spokesperson for the coalition. Rotating opportunities for visible leadership can avoid resentment about who gets credit.

Group Maintenance & Task Needs
In order to work together, groups within a coalition have to be aware of and address a variety of needs to accomplish their goals and stay together. These needs fit into two categories: **task** needs -- those related to completing the task, and **maintenance** or relationship needs -- those related to maintaining the group. Some of these roles are outlined here.

TASK NEEDS	MAINTENANCE NEEDS
- **Starting the process** by helping the group begin a task or discussion. - **Assisting members** to set goals. - **Asking for information** Asking what information group members have and need and where information can be found on the topic. - **Providing information** when group members do not have all the relevant facts. - **Seeking opinions** and ideas. - **Explaining and defining** by giving practical examples or definitions to make a point clear. - **Clarifying and summarizing** by repeating what has been said clearly, and in a few words. - **Checking** to see whether everyone agrees. - **Analyzing the problems** under discussion. - **Making creative suggestions** to resolve the problems. - **Having and following a clear process** for making each decision. - **Evaluating strengths and weaknesses** of the group's work to see how it can be improved.	- **Supporting**, being friendly, responding to suggestions made by others, showing appreciation and acceptance. - **Giving everyone** a chance to speak, take on leadership roles, and be recognized. - **Recognizing and sharing** people's feelings. - **Encouraging silent members** to express their views. - **Resolving arguments**. - **Recognizing and accomodating differences** on all levels, while affirming common interests. - **Promoting creativity** in the group. - **Sharing responsibilities**. - **Developing the confidence** and skills of all members. - **Setting standards**, for example that no one speaks more than twice and dominates. - **Checking** to see whether people are satisfied with group process. - **Diagnosing difficulties** and admitting errors. - **Relieving tension** by bringing a problem out into the open, or making a well-timed joke. - **Compromising and offering different proposals** to help people find common ground.

See *Training for Transformation*, Volume II, Mambo Press, Zimbabwe 1996.

5. Establish task forces to plan and coordinate different activities, such as advocacy priorities, specific agendas, publicity, outreach, lobbying, fundraising, and procedural matters. Involve all members of the coalition in at least one committee and encourage development of new leadership.

6. Assess progress periodically and make whatever changes are necessary. This assessment should examine decisionmaking structures, effectiveness of the coalition in meeting the advocacy objectives, opportunities for constituents to take on leadership roles, and other relevant areas. Assessment is often neglected but it can be a useful opportunity for building shared understanding and commitment to a coalition's directions and activities. Ongoing consultation among members helps avoid duplication of activities and acrimony caused by misunderstanding of actions and motives.

7. Develop a code of conduct to ensure mutual respect and responsibility. If this is drawn up collectively, member organizations can more easily be held accountable without finger-pointing and resentment. Remember that each member will have different strengths. Ensure that your rules of collaboration acknowledge diversity in capacity and resources.

Ideally, coalitions operate on the basis of written principles. In particular, clear policies on leadership and decisionmaking should be established from the beginning. Coalitions may want to allow members to opt out of positions taken on specific controversial issues.

Facilitator's Tip: Assessing Teamwork

For individuals, use the chart "Group Maintenance and Task Needs" as a way for people to assess their own behavior in groups. Identify and assess other behaviors that affect teamwork such as blocking, dominating, being silent, talking too much, not listening, having a hidden agenda, etc.

For groups, ask members to assess their own effectiveness as a team by asking themselves:

Task Functions:
- How clear are the goals of the team/ group?
- How strongly involved do we feel in what this team is doing?
- How well do we diagnose our team problems?
- How do we usually make decisions and how effective is the process?
- How fully do we use the resources, talents, and creativity of our members?

Maintenance Functions:
- How much do members enjoy working with the others in the team?
- How much encouragement, support, and appreciation do we give to one another?
- How freely are our personal and group feelings expressed?
- How constructively are we able to use disagreement and conflicts in our team?
- How sensitive and responsive are we to the feelings of others, especially those not being explicitly expressed?

DOING ADVOCACY

Three examples from the Philippines show how decisionmaking structures affect a coalition. Democratic structures help establish common purpose, responsibility, and ownership and hold together ideologically diverse groups. Decisionmaking structures also determine effectiveness. Coalitions that employ separate secretariats do not drain as much time from member organization personnel but require more resources and a longer time frame. The secretariats are more easily seen as representing the concerns of all members. The following coalition snapshots illustrate different approaches.

Example 1: Urban Land Reform Coalition

The Urban Land Reform coalition was able to make rapid decisions and respond in a timely fashion to advocacy opportunities but lacked formal accountability and representation structures. When a decision was needed quickly, the coalition secretariat would convene a meeting and whichever members were present made the decision by voting. This *ad hoc* process allowed for prompt responses but did not ensure full representation. The secretariat was accountable for the decisions taken by those present at a given meeting, but there was no mechanism of accountability to the coalition as a whole. The secretariat's commitment to keeping members informed and involved provided an informal channel for participation. However, important groups were not always represented in crucial decisions, which generated serious tensions and resentments among the members.

> "Attention to who is making decisions and who holds power in a coalition is extremely important. . . . Coalitions should be operated as models of shared power, which means that special efforts need to be made to include all groups and perspectives in the decisionmaking body."
>
> From the Ground Up, 1995

Example 2: Coalition of Fisherfolk for Aquatic Reform

The nationwide Coalition of Fisherfolk for Aquatic Reform (NACFAR) developed a decisionmaking mechanism that incorporated speed, flexibility and a more direct process of representation and accountability. Its governing board included the elected officers from member fisherfolk federations and was responsible for making key decisions. Board members, together with four secretariat staff members, made up NACFAR's advocacy and lobby team. Working within the coalition's general guidelines, this team made and implemented decisions on advocacy strategies. Because of its small size, it was able to respond quickly to the political dynamics of the campaign. With structures of accountability and representation and an efficient secretariat, NACFAR was able to ensure effective participation and a high degree of member commitment. Among the coalitions studied it was the most successful in winning policy gains and in strengthening its membership base.

Example 3: Congress for People's Agrarian Reform

The Congress for People's Agrarian Reform was a coalition of peasant federations. It had a much slower, more formalized decisionmaking process with strict adherence to consensus building. To make important decisions, each federation consulted its members internally and then had to reach consensus with all other member federations. This process held the ideologically diverse coalition together. However, despite an excellent secretariat of professionals and peasant leaders, the lengthier decisionmaking structures and processes made quick responses and effective advocacy difficult.

Valerie Miller, *NGOs and Grassroots Policy Influence: What is Success?* Institute for Development Research , Boston, MA 1994.

Purpose

To identify some challenges of decisionmaking in coalitions and alliances and develop recommendations to address those challenges.

Process

(Time: 1 ½ hours)

1. Divide the group into three teams, each representing a different organization. Their task is to develop a decisionmaking process and structure for a new national coalition that will advocate for greater legal protection for street vendors. There are 18 organizations that are considering becoming members of the coalition. They range from service organizations, groups of lawyers, and advocacy groups to vendor's associations and research institutes. The three organizations have been asked to come up with recommendations for a decisionmaking structure for the coalition.

   - **The first team** consists of representatives of a street defense organization that provides temporary shelter to migrant and homeless vendors. This group has extremely limited resources, and consists of a few paid staff members and many volunteers, including vendors. They make decisions by consensus and include everyone who works in the organization in the process. They are concerned about how vendors, especially the poorest and women vendors, can represent themselves and have a voice in decisions.

   - **The second team** is a nonprofit group of lawyers with elected officers and a professional staff. Decisions are made by senior management with staff input. The board makes decisions affecting fundamental policy. This group wants to ensure that legal issues are taken seriously by the other members.

   - **The third team** is a small advocacy organization that focuses on a range of issues affecting the urban poor. Decisions on issues, positions, and strategy are decided by vote of professional staff in monthly meetings or whenever necessary. This organization wants to ensure that decisions are made in a timely and effective fashion, and that strategies do not conflict with their efforts to promote justice and political power for the other affected groups that are part of the urban poor.

2. Each group meets separately and responds to the following questions.
   - Who should make decisions for the coalition regarding key issues such as coalition budget, content of legislative proposals, legal battles, advocacy strategies?
   - What should the process be for making those decisions? Be specific. For example if it's by vote, what percentage of the membership will be required?
   - Who will make decisions on day-to-day tactics such as lobbying, public relations, media? How will timeliness be ensured?
   - How will the coalition handle disagreement?

3. In plenary, share results, note points of agreement and difference and develop recommendations for the full coalition to consider. Use the *Tips for Establishing a Coalition* on page ### to highlight key points.

Conflict in Coalitions and Alliances

To maximize the likelihood of success in a coalition or alliance, there must be a clear process and commitment to preventing and handling misunderstandings that produce divisive conflicts. When conflicts arise, they need to be dealt with in a constructive way. Different countries and cultures deal with conflict and conflict resolution very differently. What is constructive for someone in Nicaragua might be completely unacceptable for someone in Thailand. There are similar differences within countries when people from different cultures are brought together. Effective communication helps in resolving disputes and managing differences. In fact, there is considerable evidence from research on coalitions that strong alliances rely on the superb interpersonal skills of their leaders. (See the Annex for tips for improving communication.) However, good communication skills are required at all levels of an organization or coalition to ensure effective negotiation of institutional commitments, interests, and resources.

Pacts and Common statement of principles

Coalitions and alliances can create pacts or agreements that spell out common principles, expectations, and processes of group interaction and responsibilities. Pacts help members develop systems that facilitate problem solving and decisionmaking and avoid misunderstandings and conflicts. They also avoid false assumptions about group solidarity. As we discussed in chapter 16, poor people, women, and other excluded groups are not homogenous and do not share the same goals or values. Experience indicates that collaboration needs to be based on commonly shared concerns and principles, and take into account members' strengths, weaknesses, and relative power. Pacts can also streamline decisionmaking by providing the leadership of a coalition clear guidelines and thus, enable

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Advocacy Coalitions and Alliances: Political Responsibility

In building advocacy alliances, participating groups confront political and ethical challenges. In particular, certain members will face greater risks and repercussions than others. Certain members will commit more resources and have greater responsibilities than others although everybody may benefit from the successes. Some members will do more behind-the-scenes work while others will have more visibility. These differences pose a number of challenges to alliances. When campaigns involve a mix of NGOs and popular organizations such as peasant movements or community groups, those challenges increase.

Global advocacy coalitions work in local, national, regional, and international arenas and tap the expertise of member organizations that can best operate in each of these different arenas. In using this expertise, the coalitions have an obligation to be responsible to members. International activists emphasize that risks must be "assumed only in regard to the burden that can be borne by the most vulnerable." To address this concern, agendas and strategies need to be developed collaboratively, taking into account the potential risks facing all members.

It helps when coalitions acknowledge differences among the members, both with regard to what each group brings to the coalition and the responsibilities they handle. Problems arise when the members closer to policymaking and information become more important than the groups doing grassroots organizing. Part of the task of accountability and responsibility is ensuring that each type of role that is performed in a coalition is validated and recognized.

See "Political Responsibility in Transnational NGO Advocacy" by Lisa Jordan and Peter Van Tuijl in World Development Vol. 28 No. 12, pp 2051–2065, 2000.

them to make certain kinds of decisions when fast-moving politics demand urgent responses.

Conflict Management and Coalitions[5]

Even when groups come together around a common issue, conflict is unavoidable. The dynamic nature of advocacy and the frequent changes in politics and coalition size, membership, interests, and other areas will often result in conflict. Yet conflict is a natural part of coalitions, advocacy, and politics and is not something that should be avoided, but rather, recognized and managed. Again, different cultures and social groups have different norms and approaches to conflicts which makes it hard to provide a one-size-fits-all formula for dealing with them.

Conflict management is essential for coalition development. "Bargaining, trade-offs, negotiating, compromise, and agreement are basic coalition-building strategies. Coalitions really function as mediating structures, balancing differences among their members, and striving, not for unanimity, but for a way in which their members can work together."[6]

The following guidelines offer useful suggestions for managing conflict in a coalition:

• Preserve the dignity and self-respect of all stakeholders.

• Listen with empathy.

• To maximize understanding, ask clarifying questions.

• Disagree with ideas, not with people. Don't accuse or blame. Don't make personal attacks.

• Always define the issue as shared. For example, it's best to say: "We do not agree about the division of labor" rather than "John refuses to do his share of work."

• Don't polarize the conflict by posing it in

terms of mutually exclusive positions. For example, it's more effective to say: "We need to figure out how to reach the most people in the shortest time" and not "Gloria wants to go door to door and Jose thinks a mailing will be better."

• Allow time to resolve conflicts. If discussions in regular meetings do not solve the conflict, set up a special process for dealing with it.

Despite good conflict management, sometimes differences will be unresolvable and certain organizations will resign from coalitions. In the long run, this may lead to more unified positions and more effective advocacy.

Styles of Conflict Behavior

There are different ways in which you can behave when there is conflict:

• You can approach the conflict competitively,

• You can attempt to cooperate, while acknowledging the existence of a conflict, or

• You can try to ignore the situation and maintain the status quo.

People use a variety of strategies to respond to conflict. Some approaches produce gains for all involved; others do not. Generally coalitions do best when they use 'win-win' strategies in which all groups are satisfied with the solution. However sometimes strategies that do not result in clear victories for everyone are appropriate. Such 'win, lose, or draw' approaches may be useful when ceding a point or smoothing over a disagreement in order to advance the agenda. These different strategies are elaborated in the box on the following page.

DOING ADVOCACY

Conflict Response Strategies for Organizations

Creative use of conflict is possible when you are flexible in your approach. Effective coalitions change the style of conflict resolution behavior according to the situation.

'Win, Lose, or Draw' Strategies

Avoiding

Withdraw from the conflict situation or refuse to deal with it. This is useful to buy time and when damage caused by confrontation will outweigh benefits.

Smoothing

Preserve relationships by emphasizing common interests or areas of agreement and downplaying areas of disagreement. This is useful when maintaining harmony is important. However, if this approach is always adopted, you lose the possibility of a more mutually satisfactory solution.

Accommodation

Agree to the other party's solution. This is useful when the issue means more to the other party, when harmony is important, when you are open to a solution other than your own.

Domination

Force compliance or resist. One side causes the other to acquiesce, and gets what it wants at the other's expense. Common mechanisms are yelling, physical force, punishment, and sarcasm.

'Win-win' Strategies

Nonresistance

Offer no resistance to the other party's views, finds ways to blend your ideas with theirs.

Co-existence

Establish a way in which both parties can maintain their differences but still work together.

Decision-rule

Set rules for how differences will be handled. This can be win-win if everyone helps to set the rules.

Compromise

Each side obtains part of what it wants and gives up part. For example, you can split differences, make trade-offs, or take turns. This approach achieves a temporary settlement, when there is limited time and when you have mutually exclusive goals.

Problem-solving

Agree to cooperate and find a solution that will meet the needs of both sides. This approach is useful when concerns are too great to compromise, when solutions have long term effects, and when the decision will greatly affect all involved.

Adapted from *From the Ground Up*, 1995 and *Resolving Conflicts at Work*, 2000

General Approaches For Dealing with Conflict

When conflict erupts in a coalition, determine what it is really about. If the conflict is over issues, deal with the issues. If it is personal, try to improve the relationship. Conflicts over values can be addressed by reaching some understanding about what each party believes. If the conflict is not being expressed directly, bring it out in the open.

There are several general strategies that can help resolve conflicts:

- helping people vent feelings, raise questions, and clarify issues through the use of special feedback meetings or retreats;
- finding areas of agreement and opportunities for collaboration;
- focusing on common ground and playing down differences;
- arranging opportunities for the organizations involved to talk about their differences, remove misunderstandings, and build relationships;
- helping members to recognize the conflict and to explain conflicting views;
- deciding in advance on criteria for decisions and using these as a basis for conflict resolution;
- discussing acceptable and unacceptable aspects of each position;
- breaking down broader conflicts into manageable elements and obtaining agreement incrementally;
- working with facilitators who help create a safe environment, suggest processes for resolving conflicts, and make sure each side is really listening to the other.

Adapted from AHEC/Community Partners, *A Workbook on Coalition Building and Community Development,* Amherst MA, 1995

When Coalitions Break Up

Coalitions do not last forever. There will be times when individual organizations decide to leave because differences become irreconcilable. There may also be times when coalitions themselves decide to fold because of changing circumstances. These occurrences can be a sign of success, and if less positive, should not be seen necessarily as failures. They may in fact represent strategic choices. If possible, breakups should be dealt with in a way that facilitates future cooperation.

One of the three examples from page 34## from the Philippines[7] also illustrates how departures can be handled in a way that makes future cooperation possible. In the early 1990s some members of the Congress for People's Agrarian Reform decided to leave the group because they felt the government was responding to their needs. The remaining members believed that the government was co-opting the departing groups with empty promises. But, rather than criticize or attack those leaving, the coalition leadership decided to end the relationship with a party celebrating the victories they had won together. The leaders believed that it was important to maintain good relationships because when circumstances changed in the future, there would be new opportunities for alliances with the departing groups. By not cutting off relations, they left the door open for future collaborations.

Purpose

To analyze a conflict situation in an organization and identify strategies for addressing it.

Process

1. In plenary ask participants to think about a past or present conflict in their coalition or a conflict in other coalitions.

2. Divide the participants into small groups, and ask each group to develop a role play portraying a particular conflict. The role play should include the key characters, the context, and whatever background information is needed.

3. In plenary, have the groups present the role plays. Analyze each one using the following questions:

   • What are the critical issues?

   • What is each party's stake in this conflict?

   • What conflict behavior and style are being used?

   • How open and accurate is communication between parties?

   • Do the parties have any misunderstandings or lack important information?

   • How can this conflict be managed? List all possible solutions.

   • What will the final agreement look like? What will each party agree to?

Dealing with conflict by competing

Dealing with conflict by ignoring it

Dealing with conflict by collaborating

Adapted from *From the Ground Up*, 1995

NOTES

[1] Adapted from *Organizing for Social Change*, ibid.

[2] Adapted from *Human Rights Institution-Building*, published by The Fund for Peace in association with the Jacob Balustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights.

[3] Adapted from SEGA, ibid.

[4] The book *From the Ground Up* provides valuable insights on how to manage conflicts in coalitions and is the major source for this section.

[5] Ibid.

[6] ?

[7] Part of the reason that all of our coalition examples are from the Philippines is that this country is particularly well-known for alliances and coalitions, and partly, because Valerie Miller has had the opportunity to work with and document them closely.