# NCRC THE EXCHANGE

# CULTURE, COMMUNICATION, AND CONFLICT

## Community Leaders

NCRC NATIONAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION CENTER

## COMPANION LEARNING GUIDE

# BURST VIDEO: *The Exchange*

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**REFLECT:** *What stood out in the video for you?*

**JOURNAL:** *How is this approach relevant to being a more inclusive leader?*

**CHAT WITH A TRUSTED COLLEAGUE:** *In what types of situations might this strategy be useful?*

**You may notice that this companion learning guide is different. Because the Exchange methodology is more complex, we needed more space to explain concepts, give examples, and help you learn the process. Enjoy!**

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# THE EXCHANGE

## Welcome to the Exchange!

The National Conflict Resolution Center (NCRC) began in 1983 as a community mediation center. Our early workshops centered on teaching people how to be a neutral mediator for all kinds of disputes. We began to receive requests from workplace and community leaders regarding their need for a process that considered the fact that they couldn't be neutral because they had a stake in the outcome. After conducting focus groups to understand the needs better, gathering input from business and community leaders, and rethinking our mediation strategy so that it could be adapted, we created the Exchange methodology. Our book, "The Exchange: A Bold and Proven Way to Resolve Workplace Disputes," outlines the methodology. We will include the essential information you need in this companion learning guide. You will find this guide to be informative about how to manage the process.

This innovative course adapts NCRC's time-proven conflict resolution skills and strategies to provide community leaders with a:

- structured, learnable process to address conflicts between collaborators;
- reinforcement of the communication skills necessary for a human-centered orientation; and
- an approach to address non-conflict situations, in which individuals simply need to have a more collaborative approach in working with each other.





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## Underlying Principles

NCRC's beliefs about conflict management are based on these three important principles:

- **respect for the issue:** conflicts matter to the people who have them;
- **respect for the person:** people have the resources to resolve their own conflicts; and
- **respect for the process:** when people are involved in the process, they have a stake in the outcome.

The benefits of the Exchange to a community leader are many. The Exchange...

- is an informal process;
- provides a human-centered approach to managing conflicts;
- is efficient and effective;
- encourages joint problem-solving;
- develops capacity for future interaction;
- allows for creative solutions;
- has a greater potential for mutual gain; and
- provides individuals with an opportunity to express the impact the situation has had on them

## Criteria
The following guidelines may help in determining whether a particular conflict is suitable for the Exchange process:
- individuals in conflict have a stake in resolving the matter;
- they trust your ability to manage the conflict;
- individuals share some degree of responsibility for the conflict between them;
- options exist for resolving the situation; and
- individuals can communicate effectively at some level.

## Types of Conflicts
There are as many types of conflicts as there are people in the community, but the following list highlights common issues:

- School-community issues
- Issues between members of religious communities
- Community projects
- Neighborhood disputes
- Volunteers who have trouble getting along
- Neighborhood council issues

# Managing Conflict

Obviously, part of the job of successful conflict resolution is to find ways to minimize escalating circumstances and to develop skills for handling situations that occur despite any precautions. Conflicts generally occur over three general categories of issues: **resources, needs,** and **values**.

- **Resources** are tangible (projects, funding) or measurable (time, responsibilities).
- **Needs** include physical needs for safety; psychological needs for acceptance, privacy, belonging, and respect; and social needs for being treated fairly; for having equal access to privileges; and for opportunities to interact with others.
- **Values** represent an individual's personal sense of what is right or wrong



**A Workplace Conflict**

Ximena
New Employee

Acacia
Team Member

Catherine
Long-Term Employee

**CONFLICT RESOLUTION APPROACHES**

AUTHORITY
Use of
Formal
Power

RIGHTS
Rules/
Standards
of Conduct

INTERESTS
Consideration
of Needs

There are three approaches to resolving community conflict. Overreliance on any one approach is problematic. The Exchange methodology recognizes that combining all three approaches creates the best outcome in resolving community conflict

**Authority-based conflict resolution** is often expressed through the use of authority. Leaders are often expected to use their formal and informal authority to deal with some conflicts.

**Rights-based conflict resolution** is about the "rules," written or unwritten, by which we are expected to live and work in the community group.

**Interest-based conflict resolution** is oriented toward problem-solving by looking at the needs of those involved. Individuals work together to find joint resolutions to the question: Where can/should we go from here?

All methods—authority-based, rights-based, and interest-based—can be useful and necessary in a given community situation. The focus of the Exchange strategy is to manage an interest-based process, taking into account the interests of the participants and the interests of the community.

# Interest-Based Conflict Resolution in the Community

In interest-based conflict resolution, the approach becomes more *integrative* rather than *distributive*. In *distributive negotiation*, there is a clear winner and there is competitive dialogue between participants, which leads to strained relations. In *integrative negotiation*, the interests of the individuals and the community leader are advanced and there is a collaborative conversation between the participants, which helps people in their ongoing community relationships. A human-centered approach in resolving conflicts uses an integrative approach.

When people are in conflict with one another, it isn't easy to use an *integrative* style of negotiation, so the community leader assists the individuals to move from their complaints to understanding their own needs and interests as well as the needs and interests of the others involved in the conflict.

## TYPICAL COMMUNITY NEEDS

- **SAFETY**
    - Fairness
    - Psychological Safety
    - Trust
    - Accountability

- **VALIDATION**
    - Support
    - Appreciation
    - Acknowledgment
    - Professionalism

- **UNDERSTANDING**
    - Empathy
    - Respect
    - Being Heard
    - Clear Communication

- **PRODUCTIVITY**
    - Self-Expression
    - Contributions
    - Input
    - Job Satisfaction

- **COMMUNITY**
    - Acceptance
    - Connection
    - Collaboration
    - Culturally Welcoming

- **AUTONOMY**
    - Choice
    - Independence
    - Reputation
    - Competence

## The Exchange Overview: Goals

## Stage I:  Hold Private Meetings
- Gather enough information to identify key issues and concerns
- Prepare individuals for joint meeting

## Stage II:  Develop Agenda
- Develop the plan for the joint meeting

## Stage III:  Conduct Joint Meeting
- Assist participants in developing an understanding of how the situation has impacted each person and the community
- Clarify expectations of the leader

## Stage IV: Facilitate Problem-Solving
- Identify and determine possibilities for resolving the issues
- Create action plan

## DOWNLOAD YOUR CHECKLIST

# Stage I:  Hold Private Meetings



## About Stage I

Community members may have certain expectations about what will happen when they talk to you. You may have a reputation as a leader; as such, those who come to you with complaints may expect you to simply tell them what they should do. Whatever their expectations are, the Exchange process will give them a new idea about their own capabilities and the possibilities for moving forward. Your ability to engage people can set the tone to help them feel empowered to work through the issues

Making use of the Exchange process in the community will mean being flexible and willing to recognize the need for it as you do your work. It may mean that you set it up if you are formally working with a group of people, or, more likely, you merely decide to utilize it in a given moment. Someone may come to you with a complaint about a situation and, hearing the information, you may decide that the Exchange process would be an appropriate tool to help. (This is what happened in our burst video.) Many times, informality will be key. Whether you initiate the process or it surfaces naturally, the manner in which you begin Stage I will influence how "safe" it is for those involved and, subsequently, how willing they are to participate in a meaningful way in resolving the issues.

Keep in mind that it is important to allow enough time for each person to express without interruptions or challenges how they see the situation.  While listening, you can assess the key issues and concerns. Your goal by the time you have met with each person will be to make sure you fully understand each person's perspective (without seeming to take anyone's side).

## Opening from the Burst Video

**Sam:** Hi, Catherine, thank you for agreeing to talk with me to discuss your working relationship with Ximena.  As I pointed out when I set this meeting up with you, I have noted some tension so that is why I reached out to both of you. Please hold out on comments for a couple of minutes so that I can give you the big picture first, then we will focus completely on how it's been for you.  Fair enough?

**Catherine:**  Makes sense.

**Sam:** You've been with us a long time, and we respect what you do here, so we want to work through the current situation, and get you and Ximena on good terms.

I'm meeting with you individually to understand your perspectives of the situation and know what's important to each of you. These meetings will be in preparation for when we get together tomorrow.  At that time, we will be looking for ways to  improve the working relationship between the two of you. ]

To clarify, the notes I'm taking now are for planning purposes. I won't share them with anyone. When we meet tomorrow, any agreements we reach will be documented in a detailed written agreement. Each of us will keep a copy of that agreement.

If any policy issues arise, I will need to clarify and then address them, taking action if necessary.

My purpose here is to make sure you are each feeling respected and to improve your working relationship.  If you don't have any questions, let's continue

Would you please share with me how it's been working with Ximena so far?

**Catherine**: Usually, I get along with others, but it's been difficult with her. I've never had to deal with anything like this before. In this work, you don't just walk in and know everything. You listen to those who have been here. She's ignoring that.

[DEMONSTRATE UNDERSTANDING]

**Sam:** So, what I am hearing is that you pride yourself on your ability to get along with others. It's also clear that your historical knowledge has been valuable to others in the past.

[ASK QUESTIONS]

**Sam:** Tell me more about what you mean when you say that Ximena ignores that?

**Catherine**: Without consulting me, she made changes to a few protocols, ignoring why we follow them. She isn't my supervisor, I'm not hers, but it seems like we should be talking to each other before making changes that affect others.

[ACKNOWLEDGE IMPACT]

**Sam:** I can hear your frustration.

[IDENTIFY NEEDS AND VALUES]
**Sam**: I can also sense that you were hoping for a chance to give input and work more collaboratively. Is that correct?

**Catherine:** Exactly.

**Sam:** Let's go back to the start. What happened when Ximena was first hired? Typically, we have the new hire meet with each co-worker, so they understand roles and responsibilities. How did that meeting go?

**Catherine**: Like a car wreck. As you know, her name is spelled with an 'X'. I didn't know how to pronounce the 'X'. So, during our one-on-one, I said, "Hello, Mena" since it was much simpler. I thought it would be a good compromise. She didn't agree. I should have listened to Acacia.

[ASK QUESTIONS]
**Sam**: Was Acacia with you and Ximena?

**Catherine:** No, Acacia had pointed out to me that names were important when I made the first mistake in an earlier meeting, but I still did what was easy in my private meeting with her.

[ACKNOWLEDGE IMPACT]
**Sam:** Everyone makes mistakes. Given that others in the department were impacted, we will need to look at that.

**Catherine:** That's fair.

**Sam**: Just clarifying for now, you found her name challenging to pronounce, so you made up a nickname for her. Is that correct?

**Catherine**: Guilty. Then, well, she has a strong accent, so even when we got past the name disaster, I had trouble understanding her.

[ASK QUESTION]
**Sam**: When you had trouble understanding her, how did you manage that?

**Catherine**: I told her I had no idea what she was talking about, that I couldn't understand her, which was true. But in retrospect, when I picture myself saying it, I don't feel good. I was snippy. I could have said it in a better way.

**Sam:** Okay, I hear you. I appreciate you reflecting on your behavior, and in the end, I appreciate that you're just looking for good communication. It sounds like the initial

interactions between you two got you off to a tough start. This has been very helpful, thank you, Catherine.

**Catherine**:  Could I ask a favor? When you meet with ……. Ximena, could you ask her to slow down when we meet tomorrow? I do want to understand her.

**Sam**: I will do so, and I appreciate that you are asking for what your need is to improve communication.  This is one of the goals that I have in meeting with you both.  We will be talking about this, along with input, respect, and other ways to improve the working relationship when we meet.

For homework, please practice saying Ximena's name.  You can google pronunciation guidelines for any word if that helps.

I'd like you to consider Ximena's point of view and come up with some possible steps that you could take to improve the situation and address the current issues



**BREAKOUT**

**What stood out for you watching Stage One of the Exchange process?**

**Also, discuss the following:**

- **Communication skills by facilitator**
- **Goals and benefits in the private meeting**

You will  be in a breakout to discuss the burst video, focusing on your thoughts about the structure, the communication skills used by the community leader  and what you believe the goals and benefits of the private meeting to be

**CHECKLIST Stage 1**
**Welcome**
**Acknowledgment**
**Clarify Purpose of the Meeting**
**Confidentiality**
**Ask for Their Perspective of the Issues:**
Listen Effectively, Respond Respectfully, Ask Questions
**Explain How the Process Works**
**Clarify Your Interests**
**Homework:**
Consider the Other Person's Perspective, Think About Possible Solutions

## Exchange Techniques:  Listen Effectively

Your ability to demonstrate that you are listening is extremely important when helping people resolve conflicts. When people feel they have truly been heard and understood, they are likely to feel accepted. They are willing to give more information that may be useful in resolving the conflict. Later, in Stage III, they are also more likely to hear what the other person has to say. On the other hand, if they feel no one is hearing what they have to say, they often become more rooted in their own view of the situation and in their perception that the other person is not only *wrong* but also a *rude, disrespectful,* or even *bad* person.

In considering how you demonstrate that you are listening in Stage I, most of us are aware that often it's the "how" rather than the "what" that makes an effort to communicate successful or not. Listening involves:

- Gestures
- Your face and posture
- Culturally appropriate eye contact
- Attentiveness

You will also need to pay attention to nonverbal behaviors on the part of the participants. We caution against drawing too many conclusions from behaviors. While non-verbal behaviors gives insight, don't assume that the nonverbals always reflect the person's attitudes. For example, crossing one's arms may only mean that the person is cold, not hostile. Additionally, cultural background can play a role in non-verbal behaviors, and so being sensitive to cultural variation is important in not overinterpreting behaviors.

# Exchange Techniques: Respond Respectfully

**Note that examples are used here that vary from our case study to show how the process can be used. We will finish the case study in class.**

**Demonstrating Understanding.** Like the description in The ARTful Conversation, demonstrating understanding is a useful tool. The leader does this directly in Stage I.
1. Speaker relates how the situation affected them.
2. Leader (Facilitator) recaps the key concept in different words.
3. Facilitator checks for accuracy and clarifies what was understood.

> **Facilitator:** *Can you tell me how the situation has affected you?*
> **Ximena:** *She told others that I wasn't a good "fit" for the collaborative, which was very upsetting to me.*
> **Facilitator:** *What I understand is that you found out that Catherine had said that you weren't a good fit for the collaborative, is that correct?*

**Acknowledging.** This is a technique that focuses on the emotional content of a statement or how the person was affected by what happened. Successful acknowledging statements are respectful validations of the emotional part of an incident. The value of acknowledging can't be overestimated. A great deal of the success of this technique depends on the tone you use.

> **Acknowledgment Example:** *You sound disappointed and upset that anyone would say that.*

**Identifying needs** brings out the underlying need, motivation, or hope. Instead of responding, giving advice, or telling the speaker what they SHOULD have done, the listener reflects to the speaker what the speaker's needs were.

> **Identifying the unstated need:** *Are you looking to understand the meaning of that statement?*
> **Explore what actions might have been successful:** *Would you have wanted direct communication?*
> **Examine the speaker's expectations about the other person:** *It seems you are hoping for respect and collaboration. Is that important to you?*

> **Identifying Needs Exercise**
>
> *1. We tried something like that three years ago and it didn't work. Why doesn't he ask before initiating his ideas?* Needs: _____Statement: _____
>
> *2. I have emailed him about the project at least a dozen times in the last month. He just ignores me. I don't think I should be held accountable for the fact that he didn't prioritize this project.* Needs: _____Statement:_____ ____
>
> *3. He is constantly undercutting my authority and doesn't follow my instruction. Why don't I get more support from the collaborative?* Needs:_____ Statement:_____

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## Exchange Techniques: Ask Questions

*How* a question is asked (tone of voice is not to be underestimated!) is often more important than *what* (content) is asked. Some types of questions are particularly effective. Others will make progress more difficult. This requires the use of *humble inquiry,* being careful to ask the questions in a safe way so that it doesn't appear that you are taking sides or that you already know what the answer *should be.*

### Open-Ended Questions

In Stage I, broad questions are very useful for finding out how the individuals see their situation. The rule of thumb is that open-ended questions cannot be answered with a simple yes or no response. They invite the person to share more information. Some examples of broad questions are:

- How do you see the situation?
- Would you tell me your point of view of what happened?
- What would you need to feel this session is a success?
- And then . . . ?  What else?

There are several advantages to open-ended questions. The person will:

- Feel more comfortable telling the story without interruptions, and this will help you to establish rapport.
- Provide the context so you will hear the story from their viewpoint rather than your own.
- Speak more freely when following their own train of thought.

### Clarifying Questions

Below are some questions that are useful when you are having difficulty recognizing what the participant is saying or would like you to learn more about their perspective. These questions, in particular, use a *humble inquiry* approach.

*Help me understand more about…*
*Tell me more regarding…*
*Were you expecting…*
*It seems that you…*
*I get the impression that…*

**Avoid "Why" Questions Whenever Possible.** They often sound accusatory and ask the listener to account for their behavior. The following are substitutions for "why" questions:

- *What was the reason that you were unable to finish the project?*
     Not: *Why didn't you finish the project?*
- *Were you aware that other people could hear music being played at your desk?*
     Not:  *Why do you play your music so loud?*

**Use Yes/No Questions Sparingly.** A person is clearly limited in their response to yes/no questions. Such questions may cut off information that the person would otherwise offer and may encourage the person to guess which answer you want and make a response calculated to please you rather than to give a truthful response. However, sometimes yes/no questions can lead you to another type of question or they can help you know which direction to go.

**Using Questions to Encourage Reluctant Participants**

The participants may have thought a lot about what their complaints are and what they want. Very often they have not thought about what they will do or what you will do if the conflict continues. Reality testing is an opportunity to explore the whole picture and think about why this is so important and to plan for the consequences of not reaching an agreement. The more concrete the plan, the better it will be complied with afterward.

- What will it be like in the neighborhood when this conflict is over?
- What is the worst thing that could happen if you don't reach an agreement?
- What do you think they will do if we don't resolve it today?
- If we don't talk through this, you will both still be in the collaborative. How will that be?
- What are you going to do if we don't work through this issue?

Questions are an invaluable tool for facilitators. Keep them simple and nonthreatening in order to move the process forward.

## Closing Stage I

In a final note to Stage I, keep in mind:

- **Refrain from agreeing or disagreeing with the individual.** Showing compassion for their experience without reinforcing their position is key. Starting your sentences with phrases such as "For you…,"  "From your point of view…," and "The way you see it…" helps this.

- **As much as possible, point out their needs in the situation.** By doing this, you are helping them move away from their positional thinking to what is most important to them. Framing their needs in a question helps them refine their thinking and become more oriented to problem-solving, rather than just complaining.

- **Policy/Group Agreements.** If any policy issues or established group agreements arise, these private meetings are the time to talk about them and problem-solve with the individual if possible.

## Stage II: Develop Agenda

### About Stage II
After Stage I, take time to organize and structure an agenda based on the topics from the private sessions. This will be your guide for Stage III. Don't try to analyze the participants' underlying personality traits. Just focus on the topics that need to be covered. The agenda is a flexible plan that allows you to respond to the participants' needs, the community's interests, and any new information gained. It opens with an Icebreaker, then moves to the Impact of the situation on each person, and lastly covers the specific Issues in dispute. In working through developing their list, most facilitators prefer to first consider the Issues in dispute (those are the most important to resolve) then reflect on the Impact, and lastly develop an appropriate Icebreaker. Stage II takes facilitators five to ten minutes.

### Issues
The issues are concrete topics that the participants need to resolve: the substance.

### Impact
The second type of discussion topic is how the conflict has affected each person and their reaction to the situation. If it is not acknowledged, it may block their willingness to listen to and understand the other's point of view. **The best way to frame this is to prepare a simple question:** *How has the situation impacted you?*

### Icebreaker
Identify a topic that can open the conversation in a positive way. It should allow speakers an opportunity to express something important to them in their community work that is not an issue of dispute. It may point to a positive or neutral common ground between participants. The benefit of doing this is to set a conciliatory mood and build confidence that the situation can be resolved.

**Examples of Discussion Topics**

**Issues**
Examples might be *the project, communication, or roles and responsibilities.*

**Impact**
Typical concerns are *anger, frustration, disappointment,* and the *sense of being treated unfairly.* These are not issues to "fix" but simply to acknowledge as part of the conflict. Simply requesting each person discuss how the situation has impacted them is often the best way to approach these concerns. Many times, when they express this in Stage III, it will be the first time the other has heard this.

**Icebreaker**
Topics might include the following: *What are two things that you like about this project? What do you enjoy about your community work? What is the best thing you have done here since you started? What are two skills you bring?*


# Developing the Agenda Example

**EXAMPLE**

Ximena and Catherine work in the same organization. Though they are supposed to work on a subcommittee together, they have stopped talking to each other. One of them requested that you help them talk through the issues.

Ximena's concerns are that Catherine created a nickname for her (Mena) that is not her own, and that Catherine doesn't try to understand her accent.

Ximena also is concerned that Catherine expressed to others that Ximena was not a good fit for the organization.

Catherine's concerns are that Ximena does not show respect for her long-term community knowledge, nor ask for input. She has a hearing problem, which makes it difficult to understand Ximena.

**ISSUES**

*Input*
*Communication*
*Styles*
*Working Relationship*

 **IMPACT**

*How has this situation impacted each of you? How has it been?*

**ICEBREAKER**

*What are two skills that you bring to the organization?*

## Stage III: Conduct Joint Meeting



### About Stage III

Stage III is the heart of the Exchange process. You will have met with each person separately and you will have a good understanding of each perspective. Stage III is the time for you to help the participants do the same. After the preliminary welcome discussion, state your agenda. By stating the agenda first, you are reassuring the participants that their issues will be dealt with in the session. The agenda is a flexible guide to the discussion.

A strategic element of the structure, the **Icebreaker**, is an approach to open the conversation to help the employees speak to each other in a non-adversarial tone. It is also an important way to introduce new material that can serve to lower emotional barriers.

The **Impact** is addressed next, because if it is not addressed, it blocks movement. Issues rising to the level of conflict have emotional components to them that keep the participants attached to their positions. NCRC's model provides a structured way to discuss (not resolve) these emotional blocks in order to move past them.

After discussing the Impact, direct the participants to talk about the **Issues** in a structured way. Raise these issues one at a time. Develop each issue by asking each person to discuss their perspectives. The length of time varies more in Stage III and IV, because the length depends on the people involved and the complexity of the issues. Most facilitators need thirty minutes to an hour for Stage III and Stage IV together.

## WATCH VIDEO OF STAGES III AND IV CASE STUDY

## Sample Opening Stage III

Note that the examples used here vary from our case study to show how the process can be used. We will finish case study in class.

| | |
|---|---|
| **WELCOME AND ACKNOWLEDGE** | Thank you, Ximena and Catherine, for coming to discuss what's working together been like. Let's get started because I know how busy you both are. Your work is very important to this department. |
| **CLARIFY INTERESTS** **EXPLAIN HOW PROCESS WORKS** **CLARIFY PURPOSE OF MEETING** | My goal here is to help the two of you talk through this so you have a better relationship and an improved work environment. That starts with   each of you getting the respect you deserve.  For the next 30 minutes or so, we're going to talk through the concerns you have about working together. |
| **DISCUSS CONFIDENTIALITY** | Before we do, keep in mind, this is a confidential meeting between the three of us. I will keep a record of agreement we reach and email a copy of it to each of you. We may need to discuss what you want to share about any agreements with other team members.   If clear policy violations have occurred, I am obligated to report that. |
| **GIVE AGENDA.  Briefly state the issues that will be addressed** | Specifically, we are going to talk about your communication with one another, the process for giving input, and your working relationship. |
| **Ground rules** | I'm going to ask that we all treat each other with respect and allow each person to finish before we speak. Agreed? |

## Exchange Techniques: Listen Effectively

Your role in managing the process is more active in Stage III. You will have two conflicting parties to manage in the joint meeting, so effectively listening also means managing the discussion well. Managing this conversation includes:

- the strategic ordering of the discussion (Icebreaker, Impact, and Issues);
- listening carefully to the participants' responses;
- asking appropriate follow-up questions;
- ensuring that the participants have been heard in the way they want to be heard; and
- "listening" to body language.

# Exchange Techniques: Respond Respectfully

**Demonstrating Understanding.** It is especially useful to demonstrate understanding when the issue has emotional relevance for the participants. In Stage I, the facilitator demonstrates understanding directly, but in Stage III the facilitator may ask the participants to do it after each person has discussed the **Impact** of the situation.

1. Individual relates how the situation has affected them.
2. Facilitator asks the other person to recap the key concept in different words.
3. Facilitator checks for accuracy with the speaker, if not, the listener is asked to try again.

Examples provided on this page are from a different case to show the variety of cases.

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**Manager:** *John, can you tell us both how the situation has affected you? Suni, before he does that, I'm going to ask that you recap what you hear in a few minutes so that he is heard the way he wants to be heard.*

**John:** *She always wants me to focus on her projects. When I approach her with a concern about my projects, she always brushes me off. I am tired of it. I just feel disrespected.*

**Manager:** *What did you hear, Suni?*

**Suni:** *John wants me to pay attention to his projects, like he says he does for me. He says I don't respect him but I have just been so busy…*

**Manager:** *We will get to your perspective in a few minutes, Suni. But for now, did Suni capture the essential piece of your concern, John?*

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**Acknowledging.** This is a technique that focuses on the emotional content of a statement or how each person was affected by what happened. When both people are in the room, the facilitator can acknowledge that the situation has been difficult for both of them without taking one person's side.

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Acknowledgment Example: *This has been extremely challenging for both of you.*

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**Identifying Interests** brings out the underlying need, motivation, or hope. Instead of responding, giving advice, or telling the speakers what they SHOULD have done, the facilitator reflects what the speakers' interests were. Throughout the discussion, the facilitator points out the interests of the individuals as well as the community's interests.

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**Suni:** *We tried something like that three years ago and it didn't work. Why doesn't he ask before initiating his ideas?*

**Facilitator:** *It sounds like it is important to you that you have input into the project, and that we look at the history of the community regarding that approach. Ultimately, you are looking for the success of the initiative, which is something you have also expressed, Suni. Is that correct?*

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## Exchange Techniques: Ask Questions

Questions are as important in Stage III as they are in Stage I.  One important difference, however, is the type of question that is most appropriate in each part of the process. In Stage I, there is a good reason to ask open-ended questions. *How do you see the situation? What are the issues between you? Would you tell me your point of view of what happened?* These questions allow the participants to speak freely about their perspectives regarding the situation.

In Stage III, however, you **want to control the conversation so that participants speak** only about one issue at a time.  The strategy of asking for the **Icebreaker**, **Impact**, and then the **Issues**, one at a time, is useful to frame the discussion. **By asking one clarifying question about each of these topics, you disaggregate the dispute into smaller, more manageable discussion topics.**

With the Icebreaker in the example below, the facilitator asks the participants to describe two skills that they bring to the project. Other possible questions could include two reasons why they chose to be involved in community work, or an accomplishment they are particularly proud of in their community work. In each case, the. **The specificity of the question helps the participants stay on task with the Icebreaker**, rather than using a more general, open-ended question, which may lead to a rambling discussion, or worse, an opportunity to say something negative about the other person.

| Facilitator sets out the Icebreaker | **Sam:** Let's start with something on a positive note – What are two skills that you bring to the workplace? Catherine, you go first. You have been with us for 15 years, what skills do you have that contribute to your team? |
| --- | --- |
| | **Catherine**: I would say that I'm a sounding board for new ideas. People love to talk to me about ideas so that I can help them think through them. The other thing is that I'm very detail-oriented, something that helps the whole team. |
| | **Sam:** Thank you, Catherine. What about you, Ximena?  What are two skills you bring to your work? |
| | **Ximena**: I love innovation ~ that is one thing that they reacted to in my interview, seeing what I had done at my previous position.  And I am very social, friendly, outgoing. |
| **After each person has spoken, the facilitator acknowledges** | **Sam**: Thank you, Ximena, I would like to just pause for a moment to recognize that you have some common ground with innovation ~ with Ximena enjoying creating new ideas and Catherine enjoying analyzing those new ideas. Though described differently, you also both mentioned that working well with others is an important |

| | contribution you make to the team. What that tells us is that once we have greater understanding of each other's perspectives and work through the differences, there is the potential for creating a more effective working relationship. |
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| **the commonalities** | |

When asking the participants to discuss the Impact, use a very simple question to initiate the discussion. ***How has this situation impacted you? How has it been?*** In this way, participants can speak at the level at which they are most comfortable. Listen carefully to the answers given here. If one person attacks the other, you can guide them to comment on how the situation has been for them, instead of allowing the attack.

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| **Facilitator transitions to Impact** | **Sam:** One concern seems to be a concern about respect in how you treat each other. How has this been for you, Ximena? Catherine, before she answers, do know that I will ask you to recap what she says here. You will have an opportunity to share your perspective next. |
| **Facilitator asks one person to discuss the Impact of the situation**<br><br>**Facilitator asks the other to demonstrate understanding**<br><br>**Facilitator helps the employee demonstrate understanding effectively.**<br><br>**Note the emphasis on clarifying the difference between intention and impact** | **Ximena**: I felt disrespected when Catherine didn't even try to pronounce my name correctly. She just called me by a name she made up. That's offensive to me since my name is part of my cultural identity.<br><br>**Sam**: Catherine, can you recap what Ximena is saying?<br><br>**Catherine**: Well, the spelling of her name makes it hard for me to pronounce. And what's wrong with calling her Mena? To me, it's a sign of comradery, but nowadays everything is identity politics.<br><br>**Sam**: Sorry Catherine, let me just clarify what my question was. I asked you to tell us what Ximena just said. You will have a chance to tell your perspective in a few minutes.<br><br>**Catherine:** Well, it wasn't my intent to upset her, so…<br><br>**Sam:** I think it's important that we do consider intention, Catherine, so thank you for that. One thing I'm going to ask you both to do is to also consider the impact each of your actions had on each other as that is also important. What was it that you heard?<br><br>**Catherine**: Okay, she feels disrespected, especially when I don't say her name correctly because that's very important to her.<br><br>**Sam**: I recognize that this is challenging. But in this part of the conversation, I want to make sure that each of you is heard the way |

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| | you want to be heard.  Ximena, did Catherine capture what you wanted her to hear?<br><br>**Ximena**: Well, in the end she did capture it, but I'm upset that wanting my name pronounced correctly is somehow "identity politics." Catherine, can you at least try to understand why correct pronunciation of a person's name might be important to them?<br><br>**Catherine**: Well, when you put it that way, it makes more sense. Maybe "Identity politics" was overstating it.<br><br>**Sam**: Thank you for raising your concern, Ximena, and thank you for being willing to take responsibility for your words, Catherine. |
| **For balance, the facilitator asks the other person the same question** | **Sam** : Let's continue. Catherine, can you tell us about how you have been impacted by?<br><br>**Catherine**: I have worked here a very long time; other people know and respect that. I'm hurt that it does'nt seem to matter to Ximena. She never asks for input.<br><br>**Sam:** Okay, Ximena, what do you hear Catherine saying?<br><br>**Ximena**: well, Catherine believes I don't respect her institutional knowledge from years of experience, and it upsets her.<br><br>**Sam:** Catherine - Is that correct?<br><br>**Catherine**: It is. |

A **question about expectations** often helps to clarify different assumptions the individuals came into the relationship with.  Though it doesn't have a tangible outcome, it benefits the process and participants because it **gives them greater understanding** so moves the **process along to reconciliation**.

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| **Facilitator asks about expectations**<br><br>**Encourages dialogue to reveal new information** | **Sam**: Catherine, what were your expectations when you first started working with Ximena?<br><br>**Catherine**: I expected her to come to me and ask my opinion about things in the department, to get my insights, especially before changing protocols that affect everyone.<br><br>**Sam**: Ximena, what about you? |

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| **Allowing direct dialogue when it is productive**<br><br>**Acknowledge impact and needs** | **Ximena**: Well, I might have done that, but I expected Catherine to ask me how to pronounce my name, as others do.   When Catherine said that it's an impossible name --in front of everyone at a team meeting -- I didn't feel welcome.  I also overheard her complain that I'm hard to understand and that I'm not a good fit for the department. All of that made me feel uncomfortable addressing her at all.<br><br>**Catherine**: I'm going to be honest here. I have a hearing problem, so it has been hard to understand you. I guess I can see that I didn't make it easy for you to approach me though. And I'm embarrassed that you heard me say what I did that day, in my frustration.<br><br>**Sam**: Sounds like these initial interactions made a very uncomfortable situation for each of you.  It seems that you both want to feel respected and valued, is that correct?<br><br>*Ximena and Catherine nod.* |

Sometimes **new information surfaces** so the facilitator may want to follow up with a question that was not on the agenda. The facilitator can **follow up with additional questions to clarify** perspectives.

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| **Facilitator follows up with a question that goes deeper into clarifying the meaning for each person**<br><br>**Facilitator allows a dialogue between both because this is important new information** | **Sam:**  We are making progress. I appreciate both of you being willing to work through these issues. Catherine, when you say that your hearing problem makes it difficult to understand Ximena, can you tell us more about that? Since you raised the concern, are you comfortable explaining?<br><br>**Catherine**: Yes, I can explain. I want to understand what Ximena is saying, but I have a processing issue. If people speak quickly, or if there's an accent I'm not used to, I just can't process the language well. It is related to hearing, but a bit more complex.<br><br>**Ximena**: I had no idea that was an issue for you. I honestly believed that it was your bias against me, which isn't fair to you.<br><br>**Sam:** What I am understanding is that it is important for you to be able to process, Catherine, and it is important to you to be heard respectfully, Ximena. |

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| **Facilitator moves to problem solving on this issue** | **Sam:** What are some suggestions for how you can both meet the needs of the other person?<br><br>**Ximena**: I can slow down when I talk to Catherine.<br><br>**Catherine:** I would appreciate that. I will let you know when I need things repeated, without insulting you.<br><br>**Sam** (while writing) : Capturing what you just agreed to. |

Topics can arise that were not raised in the initial meetings. The facilitator will need to address those in the moment, as many times they are the cause of some of the ongoing friction between people.

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| **Participant raises new issue** | **Ximena**: I appreciate that we are making progress, but I need to bring up a concern that I have. It's a bit awkward. I wasn't going to say anything because I didn't trust what would happen here.<br><br>**Sam**: Do you want to share your concern now?<br><br>**Ximena**: I believe there is more to the situation than not seeking input from Catherine – that she has another reason for saying I'm not a good fit. We saw each other at a rally that I attended. She just happened to be walking by. I think seeing me there has caused Catherine to judge me.<br><br>**Sam**: Would you like to respond, Catherine?<br><br>**Catherine**: Well, um honestly, I was shocked to see you at a rally in support of those extreme political ideas.<br><br>**Ximena, upset:** Equity and fairness are not extreme political ideas!<br><br>**Catherine:** I'd say that personal responsibility and self-reliance is the answer to that issue. that is what America is made of.<br><br>**Ximena**: The idea of self-reliance on this issue is a fallacy because of the history of…<br><br>**Sam (Interrupting):** Excuse me, Ximena and Catherine, I would prefer not to turn this into a dialogue about your differences about politics. However, if you two would like to further explore your political beliefs with one another, we do have staff trained in managing those conversations. There is a code of civil discourse that you would agree to before the session. |

| Clarify policy | I would like to clarify our policy regarding political activity before we move on.

**Sam**. Our policy about this is very clear. It states that *we will not set any policy that prevents employees from engaging in political activity or try to control or direct employees' political activity*.  With that clarified, are you both comfortable returning to the working relationship?

**Catherine**:  I respect that, I can work with people of different beliefs.

**Ximena;** Me too, and I will definitely check out those facilitated dialogues. |
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Notice below that the **facilitator simply raises the issue** in a non-escalating way, without asking a specific question.  Here, there is no real discussion needed and the participants want to go directly to problem-solving.

| **Facilitator brings up one of the issues in dispute**

**One participant goes to problem-solving** | **Sam, checking notes:**  Let's see, it seems that by clarifying expectations a few minutes ago, we covered a bit about improving the communication between you.

**Catherine:** I must admit that I have not communicated effectively since I felt disrespected. I will communicate directly to you if I have concerns.

**Ximena**: I appreciate that. I think that will work. |
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The facilitator sometimes **raises issues that are important to the community** or team.  Additionally, the **facilitator may reject a solution—either because it does not meet the community's interests, or it goes against the collaborative's group agreements/ mission**.  This interaction between the facilitator and the participants in the process is a realistic part of resolving issues:  It is truly a three-way conversation and the needs of the community are just as important as resolving the issues between the participants. The collaborative attitude of the facilitator helps retain the problem-solving tone of the process.

| **Facilitator acknowledges progress and transitions to the next issue**

**Here the situation could have escalated, so the facilitator** | **Sam:** Well, we have come a long way in a short time. We still need to cover input, developing a respectful working relationship, and what you'd like to convey to the team.

**Ximena**: I am not sure what the issue with input is. I did go to others for input after those initial meetings but felt uncomfortable returning to Catherine. |
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| interjects with clarification of the workplace culture and invites the participants to clarify each perspective | **Catherine:** As I mentioned, you changed some protocols that affect my team without talking to me about it. I understand now about your being uncomfortable, but that's how we do things here; people ask for input. |
| | **Sam**: Let's talk about that. It is our approach to get buy-in from people, but there is autonomy for employees as well. We have to consider what are areas that make the most sense to collaborate on, and what are areas that are within your own purview? |

In the examples above, it is noted that the **facilitator moves from Stage III to Stage IV on each issue**. We find this to be a practical way to manage the process. The recommendation is that the facilitator should **follow the process in this way**:

| ICEBREAKER | Stage III discussion, no Stage IV necessary. Purpose is to create a human-centered discussion. |
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| IMPACT | Stage III discussion, no Stage IV necessary. Purpose is to create a human-centered discussion. |
| ISSUES | Move between Stage III and IV with each issue: **DEFINE.** Participants state their perspective on the issue **DETERMINE.** Facilitator identifies needs and interests **DEVELOP.** All explore possible solutions **DECIDE.** All decide best options on the issue |

## Stage IV: Facilitate Problem-Solving
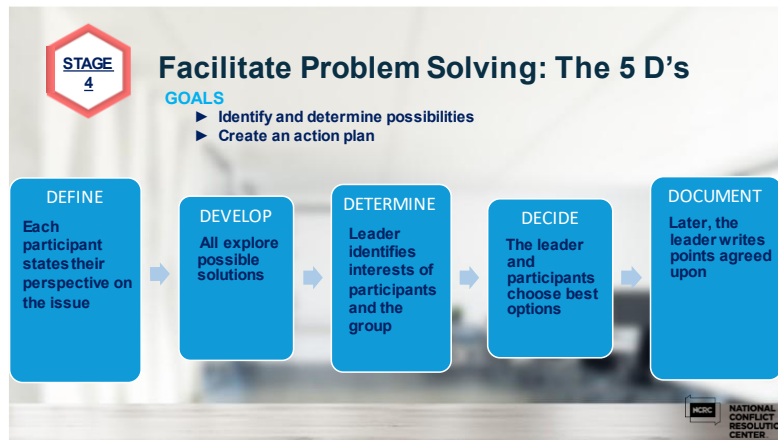


**Tasks:**
- Generate and discuss possibilities
- Decide on next steps
- Discuss disclosure to others

**Techniques:**
- Encourage input
- Use SMART criteria for the plan

### About Stage IV

We find that a clear Stage III discussion of the **Icebreaker** and how the situation has **Impact**ed the participants is critical before any meaningful conversation about problem-solving the **Issues** is possible. This also maintains a human-centered approach even in the problem-solving phase. There is no need for Stage IV for the icebreaker or impact questions. Problem-solving focuses on solutions for each of the issues, one at a time.

Stage IV involves examining expanded options and making agreements that are uniquely suited to the individuals participating in the process while still maintaining fairness to others involved in the community. Eventually, you and the participants will choose what to do. Those choices are better if they come from a thoughtful process rather than only the most obvious ideas.

As the facilitator, you help the participants assess what would meet their needs and what meets the interests of the community group. You will work with the participants to identify their interests and the standards/criteria by which the options can be measured. In this way, the participants will make better decisions about which options they can agree to, and they will be able to justify those decisions to themselves and others.

The facilitator's role in this stage is crucial. Unfocused or vague agreements are less likely to be carried out and, may, in fact, lead to further conflict. Participants who are not

clear about what they are agreeing to do may not follow through with their agreement or worse, may simply do nothing.  You may want to include a provision for what happens if there is a problem keeping the plan.  Finally, you may want to have a discussion about how their agreement (and the session itself) can be discussed with each other or with others in the community.  Others often know there has been a problem, so some planning on how to speak about the session can be helpful.

NCRC highly recommends the **SMART** test to evaluate options.  Agreements should be focused on behaviors rather than platitudes or attitudes such as "*We agree to be nice* or *friendly*." Instead, they should be **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic, and **T**imed. It should be very clear who is to do what, by when, and how. It should be possible to know when a task has been accomplished. People should agree to do only those things they are capable of doing and that they are likely to do. By making a **SMART** and balanced agreement, you make it easy for people to succeed.

## Tips for Developing and Deciding Options for Best Outcomes

Looking at the recommendations from the previous section for managing the transition from Stage III to Stage IV of the Exchange process, *Defining* and *Determining* could be seen as elements of Stage III, while *Developing* and *Deciding* might be seen as elements of Stage IV.

| **ISSUES** | Move between Stage III and IV with each issue: |
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| **Stage III:** | **DEFINE.** Participants state their perspective on the issue<br>**DETERMINE.** Facilitator identifies interests |
| **Stage IV:** | **DEVELOP.** All explore possible solutions<br>**DECIDE.** All decide best options on the issue |

When facilitators help the participants explore possible solutions, some questions that are helpful include:

- *Now that we have a clear understanding of each of your perspectives and interests on this issue, can we look at possible solutions that would work for you?*
- *What are you willing to do to improve the situation?*
- *That puts everything in a different light. What are we going to do about it?*

During the discussion, the facilitator ensures that BOTH participants are engaged and contributing to solution building. The focus should be on what participants WILL do, not what they WON'T do.

After all decisions are reached about the **Issues**, important elements of a successful closure include clear expectations of follow-up, clarification of what will be shared with others, and letting participants know that you appreciate their efforts in working through the issues.

## Closing Thoughts

Conflicts, disagreements, and honest differences are a normal part of life. When they are ignored or dealt with in unproductive ways, they can escalate into more serious conflicts that take time, damage relationships, undermine effectiveness and reduce feelings of community for people in conflict and those around them. The Exchange training gives you new tools for managing conflict so that creative resolutions can be reached that reenergize the sense of purpose and bring new ideas to old problems. The hope is that these tools will give you greater confidence in your ability to handle conflicts successfully. By working together to understand the facts, the feelings, and the potential solutions, the outcome can create a healthier and more inclusive environment for all.

> **REFLECT:  What are the ways that the Exchange methodology blends a problem-solving approach and a human-centered approach?**
> **How is a human-centered approach helpful for problem-solving?**