Impact Assessment of the UW-Extension Conflict Team Workshops A, B, C, & D Focus Group Report

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Introduction

During September and October, 2009 the Survey Research Center conducted a series of focus group sessions at the request of the University of Wisconsin-Extension Conflict Education Team. The purpose of the focus groups was to assess the impacts of the professional development workshops offered by the Conflict Education Team for UW-Extension educators. Two sets of workshops on conflict resolution have been offered:

- Introductory workshops
  - Workshop A: Communication and Styles in Conflict
  - Workshop B: Negotiation in Conflict

- Advanced workshops
  - Workshop C: Diagnosing Conflict for Effective Extension Roles
  - Workshop D: Designing and Facilitating Effective Conflict Management

Description of the Focus Groups

The Conflict Education Team identified focus group participants from both the introductory workshops, A and B, and the advanced workshops, C and D. Because there have been more participants in workshops A and B, the Conflict Education Team requested two focus group sessions for this population. A single focus group session was organized for the participants in workshops C and D. Participants came from each of the four program areas of UW-Extension/Cooperative Extension: Agriculture and Natural Resources; Community, Natural Resources and Economic Development; Family Living; and 4-H Youth Development. To avoid the cost of travel associated with a traditional focus group discussion, the Conflict Education Team decided to have the SRC implement these focus groups using audio teleconferencing and online instant text messaging. Between late September and early October, the SRC conducted three focus groups via WisLine teleconferencing technology and instant text messaging through the GoToMeeting service with six participants in each group.

Date	Group	Participants
September 23	Workshops A&B group 1	6
September 30	Workshops A&B group 2	6
October 2	Workshops C&D	6

Study Findings: Key Themes

- Participants found the workshops useful because they clarified conflict resolution concepts and tools. The participants in the advanced workshops (C and D) were more likely to report increased comfort with situations involving conflict than those from workshops A and B.
- Participants in the A/B workshops and the C/D workshops repeatedly cited the "ladder of inference" concept as a particularly helpful tool.

- Participants have applied conflict management concepts and tools in a variety of programmatic settings. They have frequently integrated conflict management into the curriculum of other programs in which they are engaged. Participants more frequently apply their conflict management skills to conflict between groups or within groups rather than inter-personal conflict between individuals.
- Clientele have explicitly recognized the contribution to conflict resolution by Extension educators and have given them positive feedback.
- Participants suggested that there are local conflicts that are too sensitive or politically charged for the local Extension educator to lead. They asked if a system could be developed for a non-local Extension educator to come and provide assistance and leadership or present a training workshop in such cases.
- Participants requested the creation of a post-workshop communication system for the exchange of ideas and support on conflict resolution topics.

I. Workshops A & B

In this section, the responses from both A & B focus groups are summarized as a group rather than individually.

Question 1. Has participating in conflict management training affected your comfort-level with conflict? If so, please describe in what way.

Overview of Responses: Most A/B focus group participants indicated that they do not necessarily feel comfortable with conflict. Some said that the workshops helped them to better understand the roots and development of local conflicts. At the same time, the workshop experience has given them tools and resources to help them when conflict arises or to better prepare for situations where they anticipate conflict. Some reported that they have developed a more positive attitude toward conflict. The following quotes illustrate these points.

- *I think that it has increased my comfort level a little bit. It does still make me queasy when I think about it, but it has changed my view of conflict.*
- *My recognition of when I'm heading into a conflict situation is heightened. I feel greater optimism about my ability to survive it and keep it in perspective.*
- *I've gotten some skills and strategies that I'm able to use to address the differences that I might have with somebody else and I'm not afraid to move into a negotiation.*

Question 2. Have you used the conflict training within your Extension office? If so, please give us an example.

Overview of Responses: Participants were likely to have utilized the workshop materials in their interactions with office colleagues or county officials, and some shared workshop content informally with colleagues with positive results. None reported leading a formal presentation for their office colleagues. They indicated that the "ladder of inference" was a particularly helpful concept. They would like to have a ladder of inference "flash card" to

remind them to be aware of their position on the ladder of inference. The following quotes illustrate these points.

- *...among colleagues, there have been bits and pieces that have informed some of my interactions.*
- *It has made a difference being able to recognize more quickly when we're heading into a conflict situation so that everyone is kind of alerted and on their toes and moving together to try to identify it and deal with it when it's a smaller problem rather than allowing it to become a bigger one.*
- *I've pulled out my binders on several occasions for ideas related to inner-office conflicts.*

Question 3. Describe any conflict education trainings you have offered to citizens in your county.

Overview of Responses: Although many participants said they have not offered trainings focused specifically on conflict resolution, most have incorporated elements of conflict management training into their regular programming activities. Most often conflict management subject matter is incorporated into a broader programmatic context, including leadership development, team-building, teen court, inter-agency program development, and families experiencing divorce. The following quotes illustrate these points.

- *In an inter-agency meeting, we had a very uncomfortable budgetary issue that we were able to infuse the steps in looking at conflict and move forward.* [The Extension educator applied the steps learned in the workshops to help the inter-agency group step back and understand their conflict, which then allowed them to manage the conflict more effectively.]
- *We have a violence visions leadership program. We spend half a day on conflict because we think that people who are going through leadership training will probably run into a lot of that in the work that they're doing. We start with them doing some self-assessments and we talk a little bit about the ladder.*
- *I'm part of a Children Caught in the Middle class. I think this helps give me a little more confidence in teaching some of that class.*

Question 4. Please describe ways you have used the conflict training when working with community groups.

Overview of Responses: Responses to this question were similar to those for the previous question. Participants cited various instances where they have applied conflict management skills with their clientele groups. Some were informal, such as facilitating a discussion to resolve misunderstandings or advising a person how to present a request to a city council for a permit. Other examples described the incorporation of conflict management techniques into the curriculum of specific classes. Often the conflict management content was part of a group of relationship management techniques that might include listening and other communication skills. The following quotes illustrate these points.

- *…some of the concepts are put into the programs when we talk about communicating with the other parent and establishing a business plan or kind of a business relationship with their former partner.*
- *I know for myself going through the conflict in-service, it helps me think about how I teach that segment of the curriculum and helping those who are in the class.*
- *I offered to sit down with her and talk through how she might work with the city council to get this going.*

Question 5. Thinking back, can you give us an example of when your conflict management work has influenced/impacted how citizens dealt with some conflict in their communities?

Overview of Responses: Some of the participants' answers to the previous questions included an assessment of the impact of their work with citizens and community groups. Some participants were able to describe at least one instance when specific feedback indicated a positive impact of their actions. The following quotes illustrate these points.

- *One thing we do know is that mediation requests have decreased as a result of people going through our program.*
- *I have heard and observed the pantry managers refer back to some of the topics that we've covered and use it as a way of explaining how they have handled certain situations as a result of the training.*
- *I've seen a change in the "I" statements and the goal orientation of stepping back down after things have gotten a little heated by some of the partners that I've worked with.*

However, other participants noted that often they do not have an ongoing relationship with the groups and as a result, they do not receive feedback regarding how the group or the individuals have utilized the information received from the Extension educators.

Lastly, some participants described situations where their efforts were not successful or where they decided against becoming involved. Sometimes there was a person who simply did not want to resolve the conflict and resorted to a power play to achieve his desired outcome. In other situations, the conflict was charged with political and social issues and was judged as too hot to handle.

Question 6. Can you share any feedback you have received, for example, from citizens, colleagues, or elected officials, regarding the "value" of some conflict management work you have done?

Overview of Responses: Feedback reported by the participants was a continuation of the types of comments offered to the previous questions describing positive outcomes resulting from their conflict management actions. Participants described particular situations in which they had been involved. The examples included inter-agency conflict related to human service program delivery and a contentious local government issue. The following quotes illustrate these points.

- *I think they were extremely pleased that we were able to take a difficult situation and move it forward towards a positive outcome for all people involved. So, yes I would say at the county board level, there was acknowledgement.*
- *The feedback that I did receive was that they found the information helpful and useful in terms of how they performed their function. They were looking for more specific answers, other than just conflict management. It set a good stage for us to begin further training.*
- *I got a compliment that I had really kept people from getting to that point of having conflict and that they appreciated that.*

Question 7. How well did the concepts in the workshops address conflict issues/concerns you have encountered? Are there any gaps in the workshops that should be addressed?

Overview of Responses: Participants expressed a variety of viewpoints in response to this question. Some participants said they found their workshop content to be very helpful and had no additional suggestions. Some had attended other workshops on similar topics that complemented what they learned in the conflict education workshops and found it difficult to remember in which they learned a particular technique. The ladder of inference was frequently mentioned as a particularly practical tool. Others expressed suggestions for improvements in the conflict education workshops. The suggestions included issues about workshop content, follow-up actions, and marketing. The following is a listing of the suggestions mentioned in the discussion:
- Use examples and case studies that are more related to Extension.
- Develop opportunities, via WisLine or other communication technology, for participants to communicate with each other and the conflict education team after the workshop. Several expressed a need to ask questions, get advice, share experiences, and learn about new research and materials related to conflict management.
- Add material on how to evaluate the nature of the conflict to determine whether an Extension educator can make a meaningful difference in a given conflict situation and how to make an entry into a conflict situation.
- Clarify marketing with a more comprehensive description of the content of each module. Promote the advanced workshops more.
- Develop a workbook like the Bryson publication for strategic planning or the Miller publication on process improvement.

The following quotes illustrate these points.

- *I think is difficult to know what pieces are in each of the trainings.*
- *What I was suggesting was some type of audio conference… so that people have the option of checking in with a group about those issues…but maybe having some checking points, that wouldn't require travel, but we could still visit about those things.*
- *The examples that we worked through weren't close enough to real world for me to get a handle on… how can I use this, personally.*

Question 8. What additional support from the conflict management team do you need to apply the conflict concepts covered in the workshops?

Overview of responses: Participants identified several ways for the conflict management team to offer additional support.

- Are conflict team members available to come to specific communities and lead training workshops for the local educator?
- Establish a communication system of people to contact for advice and support while planning and implementing conflict management programming
- Post-conflict assessment checklist on which the educator can reflect and assess the process after a conflict
- Short case studies (two pages) to see how conflict management concepts were applied in particular situations
- Research updates to keep participants abreast on new tools in conflict management
- A flowchart crib sheet like the one for the LOGIC model
- Certificate of completion to help increase educator credibility when engaging in conflict management programming
- Is there a place to report conflict management success stories and impact statements in the reporting system?
- Conflict management curriculum focused on intra-office conflict for county offices (train-the-trainer materials like those for Responsibility Based Culture)

The following quotes illustrate some of these suggestions.

- *Here we have invested a lot of time and effort/training of the group that has been working on conflict management program and they are experts. They are really doing a great job. So, I could use them in my community versus me becoming the expert on it.*
- *Case studies where they highlight the tools or the strategies of conflict resolution and management. Two pages max, that they have observed or collected over time.*
- *… maybe some sort of working relationship, helping us/guiding us through the conflict, making the assessment and logical steps would be helpful. [regarding assistance from a non-local Extension educator]*

II. Workshops C & D

Question 1. Has participating in conflict resolution training affected your comfort-level with conflict? If so, please describe in what way.

Overview of responses: Participants from workshops C/D agreed that the training increased their confidence and that they were able to apply the content soon after they completed the workshops. (Their level of comfort with conflict seemed much higher than among the participants from Workshops A and B.) The most frequent applications of the conflict management subject matter focused on how to be proactive designing programs and meetings

in which there was likelihood of conflict. The workshops provided tools to diagnose a situation in advance and subsequently to develop effective approaches to manage the conflict. The following quotes illustrate these points.

- *I think what I appreciated about it the most, was the fact that it gave me a tool that provided me with a comfort zone that I could diagnose things and stand back and take an objective look at the conflict that I was either in or about to get into.*
- *I was able to use it fairly soon…in terms of better framing the issues we were going to run into and how to approach different viewpoints that were coming to the table. So, not so much on an inter-personal level immediately as much as a professional level in working in my Extension role.*

Question 2. Can you describe any ways in which this training has affected your ability to facilitate conflict resolution?

Overview of responses: Participants utilized their conflict management skills in various situations. Some coached groups involved in conflict situations, including local governments, regional planning commissions, and community organizations. Others were more directly involved as facilitators with groups experiencing conflict. The following quotes illustrate these points.

- *I really used that training a lot… in terms of helping the group that was proposing this meeting to see either how else they want to run the meeting because of the potential contention and some of the background; or maybe that they would want to approach it a little differently.*
- *I've used it just recently and a number of times working with people in bankruptcy situations that need to work as a family team and have to also work with lenders. And it's very helpful to be able to have them sit back and look for the common interest, understand why people need what they need and move forward.*
- *I think in general, this training has helped me approach my work with many organizations, many communities, much of which is full with conflict in one form or another. It's just helped me take several steps back and think about how to approach people/situations.*

Question 3. Please describe ways you have used skills from the conflict management workshops when working with community groups.

Overview of responses: Participants helped groups diagnose their situation by asking pertinent questions of the group members. They helped members of community groups involved in conflicts to have a broader perspective of the situation and helped them see other points of view. Just as the participants in Workshops A and B, participants from workshops C and D found the ladder of inference to be a useful tool. The following quotes illustrate these points.

- *They've been useful to me in helping the group define what the true issues are, rather than what the verbalized issues are.*

- *I'll go back to things like the ladder of inference, just being much more thoughtful and careful about hearing people's assumptions, helping them take a couple of steps back to broaden their view perhaps.*

Question 4. Describe any conflict interventions (instances when you personally intervened) that you have provided for citizens in your county?

Overview of responses: Situations in which the workshop participants personally intervened include the following.

- Master gardeners organization
- Natural resource management issues: rising lake levels and a river that changed course after a flood
- County fair
- School district personnel

Not all interventions were successful. Participants also noted that some situations were politically charged and put the Extension educator in an uncomfortable position.

The following quotes illustrate these points.

- *I got a call from our county executive's office asking me to facilitate a group of people who…wanted to sue the county or were in the process of suing the county… I got pulled in to facilitate that and that was about a 9- month process. That one worked out well. The county was not sued.*
- *I had started to engage in a process with a number of towns who are annoyed at a few county departments, and I was asked to do that by our county board Chairman.*

Question 5. Thinking back, can you give us an example of when your conflict management training influenced/impacted how citizens dealt with some conflict in their communities?

Overview of responses: About half the participants in the discussion said they hadn't offered conflict management training to others and were not able to respond to this question. Specific examples reported by other participants include the following.

- A city administrator applied the conflict management concepts with department heads in the budgeting process.
- A County administrator used the concepts with County Board supervisors on contentious issues.
- County-based Extension educators have consulted with Conflict Management team members to receive feedback on a plan of action before implementation.
- Regional planning staff used the Extension training to work with local units of government on comprehensive planning

The following quotes illustrate some of the points in this discussion:

- *The city is much more unified in how they are going forward in the budgeting process.*
- *They're actually developing some strategies and then just checking in to see if they're on track.*

Question 6. Can you share any feedback you have received, for example from citizens, colleagues, or elected officials, regarding the "value" of some of the conflict work you have done?

Overview of responses: All participants reported receiving positive feedback from clientele regarding the impact of the Extension educator's conflict management programming. In some cases, the feedback came in the form of unsolicited comments and statements of gratitude, while some participants received their feedback as part of a structured evaluation process. In one instance, a participant reported that a local leader had moved to a different state and called to request copies of some materials used in Wisconsin that he found to be particularly valuable. The following quotes illustrate these points.

- *"...boy, you guys did a great job. Can you send me some of your information?"*
- *I went out and deliberately solicited input. They said yes, it's very helpful to have an objective person.*
- *They keep on calling. There is no shortage of work.*

Question 7. How well did the concepts in the workshops address conflict issues/concerns you have encountered?   Are there any gaps in the workshops that should be addressed?

Overview of responses: Group members again expressed an interest in the creation of opportunities for follow-up communication with others who have participated in the workshops and an interest in ways to integrate conflict management with other useful techniques being used by Extension educators, e.g., strategic planning. (These two ideas were mentioned earlier and recur throughout the discussion.) Another concern was related to managing conflict "on the fly" when a conflict develops spontaneously without time for the Extension educator to have anticipated and prepared for the situation. These workshops were based on a particular method of conflict management, and it may be helpful for participants to be aware that other methods/processes exist. The following quotes illustrate some of these points.

- *There's maybe a need or an opportunity to get back together with folks who have similar skills in co-op extension and share things that worked, things that didn't work, outcomes (good or bad).*
- *...how to marry up our strategic planning work with conflict and vise versa.*

Question 8. What support do you need to apply the conflict concepts covered in the workshops?

Overview of responses: Participants again expressed the need for a system of follow-up among workshop participants. They said this needs to be a state-level function rather than managed by the Conflict Education Team, since the Team does not have the support resources in the county offices. Participants also said there are certain conflict situations where it is not appropriate for the county-based Extension educator to be the facilitator or when the situation is too politically sensitive; in those situations, it would be helpful for a non-local Extension person to come to a county in those situations. The following quotes illustrate some of the points in this discussion.

- *One of the things that is missing is the ability to follow up and see that those things happen. It's really difficult to do from our office because we don't have the centralized support to do so.*
- *...there are situations where it's just too politically loaded or it's to close to Extension, where it's not appropriate for us to be the person.*

Recommendations based on focus group comments

In reviewing the comments from the participants, the following potential actions stand out.

- Development of a post-workshop communication system for support and the exchange of ideas.

- Identify Extension educators who are able and willing to offer conflict management programming for local educators when conflict situations are too sensitive for the local Extension educator's involvement or additional conflict management expertise is needed.

- Creation of a ladder of inference flash card and course materials (including case studies) that are more directly related to Extension activities.

Appendix A: Transcription of Focus Group AB-1, September 23, 2009

David Trechter: Has participating in conflict management training affected your comfort level with conflict, and if so, could you please describe in what way?

It's not automatic for me at this point, but I know there are resources there to help me practice the skills when I need them. So, the answer would be yes, for those reasons.

I think that it has increased my comfort level a little bit. It does still make me queasy when I think about it, but it has changed my view of conflict. I'm viewing it as more a part of everyday life.

I would say that again from a theoretical/understanding perspective, appreciation for the value of what conflict could be and can be, but I'm still not real comfortable.

I would say that my recognition of when I'm heading into a conflict situation is heightened. I'm not sure I'm handling it any better, but I kind of echo some of the other comments in that I recognize when I'm in a conflict situation and I feel greater optimism about my ability to survive it and keep it in perspective, and I think that has been an improvement for me.

I probably couldn't have said it any better than [name deleted] just said. I think just the whole educational awareness piece was extremely helpful in helping identify, name, as well as give the tool. Again, I know the resources are there and I understand and react similar to conflict areas but at least I can look at them from a different perspective and can begin to implement some of those tools.

David: Have you used your conflict training with your own Extension office? And if you have, can you give us an example.

I think amongst us, in our office, we name our style and recognize everyone's style and try to use that as a mutual understanding of why we get in the predicaments that we do and help each other move forward. I guess this would be how I would summarize what I've seen happen in our office setting.

David: Did you offer training to your staff?

I think we all (was it in our RBC format?), we somehow got into, or maybe its because we have Joan LeFebvre as one of our colleagues that we have somehow identified our conflict style within the staff and I think also just because we know each other and know the styles, its pretty easy to identify who does what type of conflict style.

I have used and will continue to use it in my role as a team coach. I'm not quite sure what the next one will look like, but there is one coming up. I think also, among colleagues or between colleagues, there have been bits and pieces that have informed some of my interactions in a liaison capacity. And in a much more general sense, here on the floor where we have conflicts that occasionally come up, generally around different position types, I would say I've tapped into some of the resources in that setting.

I would say that one of the areas that I think that it has made a difference is being able to recognize more quickly when we're heading into a conflict situation so that everyone is kind of

alerted and on their toes and moving together to try to identify it and deal with it when it's a smaller problem rather than allowing it to become a bigger one. So I'd say, definitely a more pro-active approach.

I know that I've pulled out my binders on several occasions for ideas related to inter-office conflicts. In a more broad way, I've used it in my trainings with other professionals.

I can't say that I've used it per se. It's hard for me to sometimes distinguish between some of the other trainings that I've been a part of, and some of the content there, because they tend to overlap because of similar concepts. And I think the crucial conversations training was really helpful to me personally. Similar concepts, so it's hard to distinguish whether it's from that or it's from the conflict training.

Well, I believe our office has an atmosphere in which communication is encouraged. And the training, I guess more or less, emphasized the importance of communicating and talking about if there are issues on the table. I know we have monthly staffing meetings which allow staff to be able to feel free to discuss items if there are pieces that the entire office can benefit from. So, I think from that standpoint, the conflict training has been able to give more credence to what we already do.

I can say that, as an avoider of conflict style being my preference, I share office space with another avoider, and we recognize that that has a time and place, but it's been able to help us move forward and look at the tools of how to approach conflict so that it proceeds to a more productive outcome. We recognize when things aren't feeling right, and we just name it and say, "OK, we're avoiding here." So, we need to move into direct communication based on that shared common vision and goal.

Shall we say the Extension committee had some very direct expectations for a colleague that hadn't been present at the meeting. You know it would have been easy to say it's not our issue. However in the interest of the overall health of Extension in the county, it had to be addressed. So, you know strategizing as to taking that responsibility and taking it forward, I guess would be the example that comes to mind where we've used it most recently, as in this month.

David: Third question. Can you describe any conflict training that you've offered to citizens in your county?

I do a lot of work with childcare providers, and a lot of the time I'm asked to come into childcare centers and do staff development. Usually a small piece of that is related to conflict.

The conflict management that I've been working with was used primarily in our area pantries. We have a coalition of about six counties and generally when we come together, one pantry or another is handling a specific style of conflict that we sort of all pool together and try to assist with as a group. That group did receive the conflict management training from Joan LeFebvre, so we're able to jump in pretty quickly and move forward because we're all on the same page.

In an inter-agency meeting (collaboration of many partners), we had a very uncomfortable budgetary issue that we were able to infuse the steps in looking at conflict and move forward. So, I would say yes.

Actually I was asked, probably a month or two ago, to do a presentation to our department of social service staff, but I chose not to do it for a variety of reasons. But certainly, there is need out there for conflict training, but I did not fulfill that particular request.

I have not had a request to teach conflict management for what I do on my side of the family living position.

David: Can you please describe, and this is somewhat related, ways that you've used conflict training when working with committees groups.

I would say in a coaching kind of setting I alluded to earlier, literally just encouraging one or both persons to use some of the tools to work out their conflict themselves. So, in the context of coaching.

When we do co-parenting classes, which we do monthly and dating audience, so parents who have children under the age of 18, who are getting a divorce. And certainly there is usually some conflictual aura about their participation. So, some of the concepts are put into the programs when we talk about communicating with the other parent and establishing a business plan or kind of a business relationship with their former partner. So, it has the concepts of the conflict training material. It's certainly not in it's entirety by any means because we do other things in that training as well, but there is a component within there that would be a reflection of how we use some of that conflict information.

David: And recognizing that that is a very ticklish situation, what sort of success rate would you say you had in terms of moving people from direct conflict to at least having this sort of business arrangement?

I wish I could say exactly what it was. One thing we do know that is that mediation requests have decreased as a result of people going through our program and of course, mediation is used when people can't get along and figure out what they're going to do for their kids. And we do know that, of those requesting mediation, our court has felt that there is a better resolution or use of mediation, more successful mediations as a result of the mandatory education. Now what parts of that are attributed to specifically that success would be hard to say. However, on evaluation, it is not uncommon for people to indicate "I want to work on having that business relationship." People have said that in the mediation program things like, "I know we're supposed to try to hear the other person, doesn't mean I agree with them, but I at least have to hear them and respect that." And so I think, some of those concepts come through. I can't say that we're 100% successful.

I do a lot of teaching using the RentSmart curriculum. A part of the component of the RentSmart curriculum deal with communication; communication between landlord and tenant, as well as tenant and neighbor. Some of the materials that are in the curriculum deal with how to have conversations using "I" messages, having a business conversation so that emotions are not a part of the business at hand. And I know that we are just about to begin our statewide evaluation with the renewed curriculum, but I can't really say if the materials from the conflict sessions have an impact or not on that. I know for myself going through the conflict in-service, it helps me think about how I teach that segment of the curriculum and helping those who are in the class, who may or may not have had an experience renting and may or may not have had a good experience

renting, help them to see how to converse with someone you really don't know and maybe you have a difference of opinion, and to keep it very business in manner.

The only think that I have come up with isn't too specific. I think, it's just that working with individuals, I think we also are able to help them have the confidence to proceed. So, I don't have any specific examples that I'm willing to share, but that like many of us mentioned, having the tools helps those individuals who we may be in a coaching situation with be able to take the next step towards resolving their own conflict. So that's as specific as I'd be willing to get.

David: Can you give us an example when you think the conflict management worked that you've provided (the training, the workshops), has influenced or effected how citizens deal with some sort conflict in their community?

In the situation that I alluded to earlier, I have heard and observed many refer back to some of the topics that we've covered and use it as a way of explaining how they have handled certain situations as a result of the training. So, I think it's still very much a part of their thinking when they step into a conflict situation because they encounter it on a fairly regular basis and have some challenges in that respect. I think that because they're continually using it, it stayed very fresh with them, and they can recognize their ability to use it now.

Well informally coaching, I would say I've seen a change in the "I" statements and the goal orientation of stepping back down after things have gotten a little heated by some of the partners that I've worked with. Again, just that basic acknowledgement of many different parts of the conflict model and just taking it as what it is and like you said, hearing another person, not necessarily agreeing with it, but using that as a foundation to begin to move forward.

David: Can you share any feedback you've received for example, from citizens or elected officials who have commented on the value of some sort of conflict management work that you've done?

Back to the inter-agency conflict we were having, bringing that to the Extension committee and then the human services board, I think they were extremely pleased that we were able to take a difficult situation and move it forward towards a positive outcome for all people involved. So, yes I would say at the county board level, there was acknowledgement.

I don't know if it would necessarily have come as a conflict management piece, it's just that in the process it did get really ugly, and I think they were aware of some of that. So I don't know if that would necessarily look at it as conflict management only piece, but it was definitely in managing the conflict the way we took it to a successful outcome.

The feedback that I did receive was that they found the information helpful and useful in terms of how they performed their function. I think in my particular case, they were looking for more specific answers, other than just conflict management. So, it was a little bit off topic. Their expectation was that they were going to find answers at the training to their specific questions. So the feedback that I've been receiving is that they did value the training and felt that it was good information and that it was helpful, but it spawned the need for additional training.

David: So they wanted answers not process?

Right

David: Was there recognition that the process that you were presenting might get them to answers or not?

Yes. I think that they acknowledged that, but they were sort of dealing with the crisis of the moment. So, I really think it set a good stage for us to begin further training and because they are using that and when I talk to them I hear them. They may not even recognize that they're using some of those skills, but I hear it in their conversation or how they phrase things, or the resolutions that they're very proud that they came up with. So, they are using it, but I don't know that they would label it that way.

David: How well did the concepts in the workshop address the conflicts issues/concerns that you've encountered. Are there particular gaps that you think future workshops should address?

In my instance, I'm not sure where the expectations came from (what the training was going to be or how it was promoted?), but that would be something that I would look at very carefully in terms of how we are presented what it is they're going to receive at the training so that we make sure that we're all on the same page. So, I guess the promotion of the event would be something that I would focus on more closely next time.

The series of how the program was initially setup. The sequencing off it and the different pieces related to it. It's confusing. Like for example, I have written down, "Conflict resolution D is coming up," but I'm not sure which content I've taken from the previous series. So, it's just a little confusing to understand which parts of the program you've already participated in with the way it's been realigned.

David: In the very first question, a number of you said that in some way the training helped you intellectually understand conflict and deal with it at that level, but there is still hesitancy, uncertainty, perhaps lack of confidence. Are there things you think that might help you to overcome those particular concerns?

For me it's been that the actual trainings have been so long (spaced out) that I get the content and I'm really excited about it. Maybe I don't use it right then, but when it comes time, maybe 6-8 months down the road, then I kind of struggle to get back into the content. If there were maybe some offerings (maybe some shorter offerings) or some professional development in between the actual multi-day sessions, that'll keep the information fresh, gives us the opportunity to visit with one another about the conflict struggles that we've had. I think that would be very helpful to me as a newer professional.

David: What do the others think about that? It sounds like you're suggesting the modules need to be subdivided further, clarify what's in each one, offered more regularly on a shorter timeframe basis. Do others agree or disagree with that kind of idea?

Well I think it is a lot of information all at once and if you go back and you apply it right away, it has the opportunity to have a greater impact. If you're not involved in a conflict at the time, that attrition component sets in, and that's where the saw gets a little rustier, but I don't know

necessarily, looking at my schedule that more time away…I guess I'm not 100% confident that that would be the best option to fit my needs. I agree, but I don't know if the solution is the right one.

Let me further clarify what I was suggesting. I think that the sessions, the way they are set up in the two-day format are fine. What I was suggesting was some type of audio conference, like what we're participating in, or WisLine or however that needs to work, so that people have the option of checking in with a group about those issues, not just, again making it a couple times per year or once a year that we participate, but maybe having some checking points that wouldn't require travel, but we could still visit about those things.

Having some of those contacts in between might also help to keep concepts available for inclusion in existing programs. I mentioned a request to do a specific conflict management training. I think it's more realistic that one would take component parts and put them into trainings like our co-parenting I do or Covey training and when we talk about team building. You know, that issue of conflict becomes a part of these other things. And so I think, if one kept in contact about how people are using those concepts in different ways that would be helpful and keep the ideas fresh in our mind for inclusion in an existing program. Rather than a stand alone, putting it into other things that we have going.

David: Are there things that were offered in the training that you think might go away, that weren't particularly useful?

I'm trying to think back but remember there being an example that we were talking about an athlete and it was presented as one of the conflict situations. I'm a little foggy on it right now but I was remembering when we were going through that, I would have probably found it more useful if we would have come up with an example that was a little more related to the work we do as Extension colleagues. I found it sort of difficult to try to jump into an arena that I didn't have any existing knowledge about. But that was just my personal response.

I guess if I had to be totally honest Dave, I can't remember the specifics, other than coming away seeing that there were a lot of useful things, and this was something that would really benefit me in all aspects of my life, both professionally and personally. Other than the specifics of the training, I don't have a specific recall to be honest, but I do remember coming away saying, "Wow."

I'm not sure who stated the last statement in regards to not being able to remember at all, but I would echo that. I guess there is one piece that I know was re-presented to me when I was at a state team meeting and a short presentation was done with the state team for family living programs and I know that that presentation, which I know was a review for me because it had been a part of the conflict training, I still look at that PowerPoint (I have it with my materials), from time to time, looking at that ladder like that, that has resonated with me, but as far as thinking back to the actual conflict training, nothing is registering as anything particular in my mind that I can even remember.

I would agree. The ladder of inference was very helpful. I too had experienced that from another setting, but to have that as part of the training was certainly helpful. I remember there was a red riding hood thing. Other than that I thought it was good basic information. I think I was looking

for things a little more challenging. Now I have not been to the advanced workshop, and so maybe that is happening in those, but the ones I went to, I felt were pretty basic and it didn't necessarily give me a lot of new information. It reinforced information that I had background on. So, I think, if the second set, or since there are four of them, the more advanced ones have more challenging concepts as well as situations that are related to Extension work, I think that would really strengthen them.

Maybe one last thing in hearing all of this discussion, and it may be that sometimes you just get going in your own little world. What is the expectation for continuing ed along this line. I guess I don't go out and look for it but maybe selling, other than the basic training to us, there needs to be more of an effort. Does that make any sense? I did the basic. I saw some value. I now know that I probably need to hone my skills even more and I haven't been enticed by the [???] that have been out there about these future workshops that are apparently there, that I've nibbled on them. So I guess there is a piece missing there in the marketing. What do you do after the basic concepts?

David: Well that's very much along the lines of the last question. What additional support from the conflict management team do you need to apply the conflict concepts covered in the workshops? Are there other things that you think the conflict management team should be doing to help you apply those concepts more effectively?

I just have a question. Was it last year or two years ago and I don't know if through the college you have to do the reporting Extension does, but we have not been able to report specifically about conflict and obviously I haven't been on the system to know that answer, but is there a place to report successes for conflict that we could also use as an "aha' moment in how to infuse and program conflict education?

David: Those of us with the university are supposed to do that same sort of reporting. I don't know the answer as to whether or not there is now a space for reporting conflict resolution, success stories and impact statements. We can follow up with the team to find out if that's the case.

I have an additional question. Is the conflict management team or members of this team available to come to communities and do a training rather than me trying to be the expert in that training? Are they available to do something like that?

David: And I will pass that question on.

Or is there a certificate of train to trainers that we should be looking at doing, so that we feel we have all the resources that we need to be successful?

David: To clarify that, a certificate that you all would earn by completing all four of the sessions or is this a certificate that you would bestow on citizens or groups that you've trained in your area?

I would say that we would obtain, similar to when we do strategic planning training, or Covey, or anything else that we've had extensive background

Well, that's why I was getting at that. Here we have invested a lot of time and effort/training of the group that has been working on conflict management program and they are experts. They are really doing a great job. So, I could use them in my community versus me becoming the expert on it. That would be helpful to me.

I was able to get that support when I requested a conflict management training with our group. So, I would definitely echo that it is much better to have one of the experts come in and handle that training and responsibility. Because I think it is kind of a delicate presentation that needs to happen, and the team does it so well that I think it'll be difficult for us to obtain that level of competence with just those four training modules. Maybe other people can pick up those skills more quickly than I, but it was marvelous to be able to hand that over to someone who has expertise in it.

The thing that I've noticed is that conflict is never predictable and sometimes at the county level you need to be able to react to something that is totally unpredicted, so therefore, you need to have those tools more readily available than sometimes it is, rather than getting a state specialist or somebody from the team to come and deal with it, we have to be more responsive. So maybe some sort of working relationship, helping us/guiding us through the conflict, making the assessment and logical steps would be helpful. If you look at a plan of work and everyone's availability when something arises, usually its more immediate than, "OK, I can get to that in the next four months," then the value isn't there for Extension.

David: So are there things that you can identify that you think would help you feel more confident dealing with those things on the fly?

Is it as simple as a post assessment checklist now that you've finished this training or this conflict, did you do this sort of stuff. I guess I look at it from that perspective and maybe there might be an "aha" if I would have spent a little more time on "I" statements or coming down that ladder at this level. Is there such a checklist to necessary components to assure a successful outcome?

David: So, sort of an, here are the competencies we think you should have obtained because of this training. Rate how successfully you think or self assess how successful you were in getting those competencies.

Exactly. Thank you. That's exactly what I wanted to say.

End of focus group discussion, session AB-1.

Appendix B: Transcription of Focus Group AB-2 September 30, 2009

David: Has participation in the conflict management training affected your comfort level with conflict. And if so, could you please describe in what way?

If I'm working with someone and things are moving along just fine and there is no conflict, I just totally enjoy the collaboration and partnership. Sometimes in the past when there would be conflict, I would pull away. I would try to avoid the conflict and actually, having taken a number of these trainings, I now realize that that is not the best approach. I've gotten some skills and strategies that I'm able to use to address the differences that I might have with somebody else, and I'm not afraid to move into a negotiation and try to build the relationship so that we can actually move forward together on whatever it is that we were working on. I've really been appreciative of the tools that I have gotten that have really helped me to do more than avoid.

I don't think anyone ever really thrives or enjoys conflict, and I still can't say that I enjoy it. I think I have some tools, but they need to be sharpened much more, in trying to figure out what to do when you're in the throws of the issue. I'm a thinker and a reflector and sometimes I need to step away, and I don't have the skill-set to jump right in and think about what to apply in a certain situation when it's happening.

When I went to the training, I got a lot of resources, so I think what has really helped me is that I'm more comfortable with it, I'm more comfortable stepping up and taking on some responsibilities and for resolving the conflict. I also picked up a number of resources that I've read or listened to on books on tape that has really kept my skills up a little bit more. So I try to make sure at least once per month I'm listening to one of those kinds of books on leadership or even conflict management. So I think my comfort level is higher, my awareness is much higher. I'm more aware of when conflict is coming, and it's not so much a fear but a thinking of how should I handle this in a positive way. Also, sometimes I feel like, not just with awareness of how should I handle it, but awareness of how should I be more proactive when you see something coming.

The thing that stood out for me and helped me was with our county exec., who can be interesting at times, the negotiation exercise that we went through. And I have pulled that out several times to really think more from the other person's perspective and feel more confident in my advanced preparation to different things that may come at me, that in the past, I may not have been ready to anticipate. Also, to really think about the other person's perspective and what might be in it for them. It has made me feel a little more comfortable. And I don't know if it was from the conflict workshop itself and to be honest, I had to go back and get the binder out and look at it again to see what we had covered. When I'm talking with my colleagues that are in situations of conflict with other community partners, I think it helps me do some brainstorming with them and trying to think, again, from that other's perspective.

I would divide my answer into 2 parts. I feel more comfortable with community based conflict around issues and basically just knowing that the tools are there if I need them. I don't think the conflict management training has prepared me as much for the interpersonal conflict. I think I'm getting as much out of the RBC training and the critical discussions trainings and so forth as I got out of the conflict management on an interpersonal basis where I'm a part of the conflict.

David: The second question asks about your use of the skills that were covered in the training in terms of working within your Extension office. Have you used that training within the office and if you have, can you give us an example?

I think I kind of gave an example where I will do some individual brainstorming when colleagues come to me with conflictual situations in the community. But have I taken the actual material and shared it with staff? No, I have not done that.

David: Have you used the tools in your interaction with others in your office. Like if there are differences of opinion within the Extension office, can you think of a specific instance when the tools that got in this training helped you get through the situation?

I don't want to jinx it, but we haven't had all that much conflict, so I don't know. I don't know as though I would pull things out specifically for use within the office itself.

I would agree with [name deleted]. I don't think I've had to use anything for the office.

I think I did use it when we had our budget review with the county executive and the finance director. The finance director has sometimes been a challenge for me to work with. So, in preparing for the review, I knew he was going to say, "why are you filling the 4H Position." I just sort of had that in my mind, so I had kind of thought it through of how to react. But I thought our county executive would step forward and support it because he has been a long time 4H volunteer. But he chose not to say anything at that point and time. All he said was, "Talk to me and we will work it out." So even though I had thought it through and how I thought it might go, it didn't go that way. I did have some alternative kinds of responses that I could use in my toolbox so that I could provide some of that information. It still didn't convince the finance director, but I did have a meeting after that with the county executive, and we're going forward and filling the position.

Mostly, everyone in my office is placed together pretty well. But, I'm thinking of a situation where [deleted] for a period of time provided department head responsibilities [deleted] County while no one was in the position over there. One of the first things she did in regards to the budget was to try to take the funding for parenting the first, second, and third years out of the budget, and at a staff meeting I confronted her about it because I said well that's the first thing you did in [deleted] County, and fortunately I have partners over here with the resource center and Birth to 3, who are able to pick up that expense. I also said, those kinds of partners don't exist in [deleted] County. It's quite a different situation. I was a little upset that she, from my perception, tried to cut that out of the budget again in another county. And when I confronted her on it, I realized that I was way at the top of the ladder, probably just barely hanging on, and I was on- position, and so we had a conversation where I really took the time to listen where she was coming from, and I hope she heard also my perspective. What happened was, it didn't get taken out of the budget, but she was coming at it from a different point of view than I had thought of. So, that was a time where I could actually say that I applied it to myself because I could see that I had really jumped up to conclusions and I was on position and I needed to back down the ladder to get some data, and so did [name deleted]. I think had to learn a little bit about how [deleted] County worked and how [deleted] County was different than [deleted] County. That's probably one place.

It was about the ladder of inference. You know that would make a nice little card or something as a prompt because I've forgotten some of the realms, and those are big steps between those realms if you are missing one or two. A little flashcard or something would be pretty cool.

That's a great idea, but we would have to ask the people who created it for permission or whatever. It would help you remind yourself that you're way up to conclusions and you have to back down all the way to the data and then get the perceptions and interpretations. You're right, there are big steps between.

What I found was that, as I look at the different styles that are included in here, what I found is that if it's a challenging situation that I have to deal with, then I'll bring it back to, "It's my perspective, this is what I see, this is what I feel," versus using an attacking mode. And I usually will step back and think about it before I approach those situations and not only bring it from my perspective, but try to frame something positively so that there is a solution or an alternative there that seems positive to them as well. So in some way, you can say I'm compromising or accommodating.

David: Can you describe any conflict management training that you've offered to citizens in your county. So this question focuses on trainings that you've done dealing with conflict resolution in your area.

Some years ago, I tried to do a facilitated process that was as much a training as it was a "try it on thing" around some land use issues, and I used the "getting to yes" framework. Creating mutual gains, de-personalize the issues, and stuff like that, and it didn't really go that well. It was too much to try to teach in one evening/sitting.

I'm part of a children caught in the middle class that's taught every month for families going through a divorce, so I have not taught the specific concepts that we've learned. But the underline of what are you seeing and hearing and collecting information and how are you having the conversation with the other parent and are you keeping your children out of the middle, why do you believe in certain things. So it's not a true blue application, but it's woven in, and I think this helps give me a little more confidence in teaching some of that class. I teach it with family court mediators.

We have a [deleted] Visions leadership program, which meets from December through June, once per month, full days. One of the sessions, usually the 2nd or 3rd session, we spend half a day on conflict because we think that people who are going through leadership training will probably run into a lot of that in the work that they're doing, even volunteering, etc. I've been facilitating that. We start with them doing some self-assessments, and we talk a little bit about the ladder, and eventually we take them to a situation where they have to negotiate some difference in a simulation. So, we found that to be pretty successful. One of the women, who is a school board member, this last year, I do a focus group discussion at the last session, their graduation session, to just get feedback for improving things. And she had scored "0" on the Thomas Kilman instrument on collaboration, and when I asked, "Had there been any changes for you?" She says, "I'm doing a lot more collaborating," and the whole group busted out laughing. They totally got a kick out of it because she probably had done some collaboration in her life but she had a vocabulary and an understanding for distinguishing the various types of dealing with conflict. I think every time she sees me, she says something about it. So, it really made a difference for her,

I think, in how she approaches things. Distinguishing between particularly compromising and collaborating. But that has been something that we've been doing with the leadership program probably for about 4 or 5 years at least. I play some games, "Win as much as you can," and they really get a lot of that through that. And then, last summer, the food pantry in the [deleted] area had experienced a great increase in the number of recipients, going from 100 the previous summer to 250, and they were having a lot of conflict. They have a coalition, Hope for the Hungry, that they approached and ended up inviting me to a training for all of their volunteers. What was happening was people were showing up in the parking lot, they get a number when they come in, and based on that number, that's how they get served. Well, they don't open their doors until about 8 or 9 am in the morning. Well at 3 am, there were altercations in the parking lot, and the police had to be called in because people were already standing in line, kind of like getting tickets for the Super Bowl or something. Then, many of the volunteers are all these really good-hearted people, recipients would say, "Well I don't have enough money to get home, I need some cash for gas," or if they didn't get an early number, when they got to the dessert table and no pies were left, they were upset. People wouldn't stand in line next to others who had children or Native Americans, and so I did about a 4 hour training where I took them through sample situations, and I have them process them after we had some information. Actually, the whole rest of the coalition then a few months later asked for the training for all of the volunteers at the food pantries as well. So, I think that was a very successful training in terms of the comments and reactions and their usefulness for what they could do at a moment's notice but also because they kind of marketed it to the rest of the food pantries in the region here.

Our UW-Extension department is under human services and so the head of the economic support unit said, "Do you do team building training?" And what I found out is that there are about 9 people from different parts of economic support that had come together and become the team for the [deleted] Reporting Center. Many of them were not happy about it. They were their high performers and they said, "This is what we get for thanks" So, my role was to facilitate some kind of a day together, and we focused a lot on some listening. I gave them different things where they had to sort of talk about where they were coming from and their memory about how other teams had worked. I think I used some tools out of the National Network of Childcare or something on communication styles, and a good part of it talked about how conflict was inevitable and what was their plan as a team to deal with it. It was actually kind of nice. I got to work with them before they actually started working together, so that they could think about some of these things ahead of time. I had no stake in this at all. I was very neutral to come in and kind of push on some of the tough questions that maybe they didn't really want to address. It was a prevention thing. And they're still going. The team is strong, so that's good.

We have Leadership [deleted] County and they do a training. We have [deleted] in our office, so he kind of does the training for us. I also used it for my teen court group, it's a bunch of young people who serve on a panel, kind of like judges, and so they see conflict often. And so I asked [deleted] to come in and do a session for them for our teen court training.

I have worked with what has now become known as [deleted], and it was represented from seven or eight counties coming together to form the regional long term care consortium that we have here. Initially I started out, I facilitated their overall meetings coming together as they were determining to form the separate entity. And out of it, we ended up with an ADRC, what we now call north and south. The south was a natural formulation of something that was already

happening, but the north group had one county who had an active operating ADRC, but there were 3 or 4 other counties that needed to either join this one county or form their own in order to get the funding and additional funding. So I was asked to mediate the sessions between these other outlying and the one who had the ADRC who also didn't have a permanent director but an acting interim director at the time. I used a process where we worked through step-by-step, having them get to know each of the counties priorities and what they wanted to come out of this. But this is an example of an unsuccessful attempt because after we had worked about four different sessions with them, one of the members of the team was actually a county board chair for an outlying county and basically manipulated the process at the last session because he was tired of trying to work things out. He wanted it to go his way, and so when it came down to trying to determine the ultimate process that they were going to use, or which ultimate format they were going to be in, he just took over with this is what [deleted] County is going to do and we invite the rest of these counties to go along with it. They then formed their own ADRC, leaving the one that was already organized and formulated to operate on it's on. So, if you don't have players there that are really going to be interested in coming to a consensus, but as I think back on the process and how we operated through the whole thing, in his mind, in the very beginning he wanted that county to be in charge of the ending result and that's what he got.

David: Can you describe ways that you've used conflict trainings when working with community groups?

Not sure that this fits but I'll start. There is a woman here who had opened a group home for placement of youth. She had also been in our [deleted] program a couple years ago, and she asked me to do a training on brain development, and I asked her how the group home things were going because it was a new business in town. It had just been featured on the news a couple days prior, and she said actually that she was having some problems because she had gone to the city council and gotten them to approve up to age 13, but she probably wouldn't be able to make a go of it unless she can get them to agree to let her have up to age 17. And so, I started talking to her about it and she explained that she had gone to the first council meeting and handed them a thick packet of materials with all of the laws and everything, and they all just kind of sat back in there chairs and then they got worried about the kids shoplifting or creating other problems in the community, and they were all worried about the safety and so on. So several months later she wanted to go back to them for approval for 17 and she was concerned that they might not agree to that. So, I offered to sit down with her and talk through how she might work with the city council to get this going. I actually asked the CNRED agent to come with me. At one point she said," When I go in, I think I better have my boxing gloves on" and "I just have to duke it out with them." I told her that, if she could build a relationship, which is part of that model, and think about them being on the same side of the table as you all working together towards a common end. and we helped her come up with some topic points. And every question that she anticipated the city council might ask, we talked about how she might address that to put their mind at ease. About three or four weeks later, she stopped by the office with a cheesecake and a thank you, because the city council had approved going up to age 17.

One small example was our HCE scholarship committee. There were five people at the meeting. I was not at the meeting, but I heard talk of what had happened and different interpretations of things. So, we called the group back together because there was some discourse about how the decision had been made and who abstained. So we had to gather the information and listen to

people's stories and then think about what did that mean for us and what did that mean for us in the future. And as a result, the group did rewrite their guidelines for next year and hopefully it will be a smoother process in the future.

David: Have you watched or observed community groups working something out which looks as though that work was influenced or impacted by the conflict resolution training that you had brought to them? So, can you think of ways in which your conflict management work has influenced or impacted how citizens in your area dealt with some sort of conflict?

I was thinking about the [deleted] Visions group but I was actually thinking of a situation where three of our leaders had decided to work with the humane society and what they found out was that all of the dogs that are currently at the humane society are from a Native American community. So they had decided to go over to the tribal community to see what was going on over there. They basically decided that it was such a political hot potato, that there was no way to address that concern, and they decided to do something very "low key". Maybe what they learned is that, sometimes when the conflict is too hot, it's appropriate not to deal with it and to wait until emotions or the situation kind of calms down. Timing is critical.

I just wanted to add Dave, sometimes when we do trainings, we don't have ongoing relationships with the people. You know, you sort of do it, and then you don't necessarily see them again. So it's kind of hard to answer that question.

We did a training for the Upward Bound counselors. The Upward Bound Program, most of you probably know about, but it's a summer program for youth the are in high school that will be the first to go to college in their families. And they had a group of counselors, I believe about three or four, that go to particular campuses or sites with these youth for several weeks in the summer to provide sort of an orientation experience. I guess the summer prior, some of the counselors had had inter-counselor difficulties, but also with some of the youth there had been conflict, so they had asked for a training in June. I had asked for the person who arranged for the training for some feedback but I haven't gotten it, but informally she said that several of them were able to work out some of their difficulties with one another because they go back to the training and had a common language for talking about what was going on with their interactions, when previously they hadn't had that.

I haven't done my evaluations yet for the year. We do that in January, so I haven't heard anything directly, but working with young people sometimes that don't say, yea I used this specific thing. They don't really think of it that way. It doesn't really come up in conversation I guess.

I got some feedback recently from a meeting where I was facilitating discussion among some town people about their sustainable program. And it's a very energetic town, and they have a lot of debates over every issue, and I don't think I was consciously trying to use conflict management because I didn't see conflict per se. But I think the tools enabled me to keep the conflict from happening. As someone mentioned before, we don't have conflict here, well this is a town known for conflict, but this process went very nicely, and I got a compliment that I had really kept people from getting to that point of having conflict and that they appreciated that.

This is just a side comment. Some of what we do, it's hard to separate it out as conflict management or is it just good group process, is it good communication maintenance and those types of things. And the answer is, yes. They all kind of blend together, and so if I sound a bit non-responsive, that's probably because I feel some of these skills have been internalized, and I don't think of them as conflict management skills.

I can't think of anything.

Since I really haven't done training, its kind of hard to get feedback on it.

And that would be similar for me. I haven't done any formal conflict management training sessions.

David: How well did the concepts that were covered in the workshops address the conflict issues or concerns that you've encountered? And what are the gaps that should be addressed in future trainings?

The examples that we worked through weren't close enough to real world for me, to get a handle on, OK, how can I use this, personally. I think that in the first class that had tried to do something with County Fair, and that was too close to for people and hit too many buttons. But the examples we worked on were kind of removed, and I had trouble then applying it to real life Extension.

One of the reasons that I'm a little quiet on this one is because I've gone to other things, so it's hard to sometimes break apart the different things, because when you go to a different session on something else and then the leadership academy now and we've sort of gone through some of these similar issues, you kind of tie them together and link things. So that's why I'm having a hard time picking out things I needed because sometimes it's hard to not distinguish between the things that build onto something else.

I can think of one. And I only went to Part A. A colleague came to me about a coalition that really is in a tremendous amount of conflict. I think there are some cultural differences as well and as I listened to her and kind of thought through, boy that would take so much time because all of the listening that would have to go on and to try to get people to come to the table and understand each other, that I just felt like I didn't have the time to do that. So I don't know if there is a tool that helps us think when we should take on something and bring in an educational role around conflict and when it's better politically in several different ways to just not get involved. I don't know. Is there something in there like that that helps us think through when to step forward and when just to stay where you're at?

Especially with conflict, the hours can get consumed. I really would prefer the prevention side of it versus when they're really into it. So, it's figuring out the time investment that it'll take as well as some of the different organizations, especially a coalition. If it's not done well, it can do a lot of damage to Extension's reputation.

I think besides knowing when, one of the things that I lacked from the training, was knowing how to step into the fray and practicing that. We practiced a lot of diagnostics and some communication skills and things, but you don't land like Superman at a crime scene and get

away with it. That just doesn't work, and I just don't know how sometimes to just step in and say, Hi, I'm [deleted]. I'm here to solve your problems." That, I think, was lacking.

To build on that, as I recall from the trainings, and I did both workshop 1 & 2, first off, if they're going to have exercises and activities that people aren't a part of, I guess I suggest that they have copies, so that people have that in front of them to be able to take a look at the specifics that relate to it because they would read it and identify a source where you could find it and it's like that's gone because it isn't going to happen afterwards. The second was a comment that I had written down for myself. We need a workbook similar to either Bryson's workbook on strategic planning or Miller and his process improvement books. They have this sort of step-by- step process. If it's this, then these are alternatives that you can use. If it's this, then these are alternative you can use. I would put the respective concepts and the experiential leaning opportunities together in a sequence so that then you can either draft or adapt what's needed for whatever respective group or opportunity that you're working with at the time. And maybe even a flow chart of the process with options.

I really don't know quite how to respond because I've taken so much additional training since I attended these workshops that for me it was just a start. It sounds like [deleted] has done a lot of other things as well. I went down to take mediation training and several other things that I think have really added to my tool kit. I don't think a day-long program is enough for anybody to help them totally to be able to deal with conflict situations, which I still sometimes feel inadequate to deal with.

David: What additional support from the conflict management team do you think you need to help you apply the concepts covered in the workshops? So what sort of ongoing assistance?

I think some case studies where they highlight the tools or the strategies of conflict resolution and management. Two pages max, that they have observed or collected over time. That might be helpful. Have these be real community or organizational or other intra-office conflicts. Change the names but make them real.

In a perfect world, I would say that we could have a brush up course, because I don't remember what book I was listening to or I heard that they talk about how in technology, things end up jumping forward all of a sudden and sometimes it's a new item and sometimes it's just the older item repackaged in a different way. They talked about how in human interaction, it doesn't really happen that often. So, I'm thinking in a perfect world, it would be great if we could get together and refresh, but with upcoming budget issues and stuff like that are coming around, it's sometimes hard to get people together, so I'm kind of struggling with that because I don't know what is feasible. I think it's almost like a self study kind of thing that I've done. Maybe even keeping us up on what resources are currently available. What things have come out. New books that have been written about conflict management. That sort of thing would be nice because I learn better by having a book on tape when I'm traveling four hours across the state and listening to that because I learn well that way. But that's one way I can keep on top of it and keep myself fresher.

I would echo that. Keeping us abreast on new tools that are out there from the new book and other resources websites that are reputable. I don't know who can do that and who has the time or resources to keep up on that, but it would be in our face more often and would be a reminder

that this is something that you're working on. And a lot of that is personal too. How personally driven we are, but often conflict takes up a lot of time as someone said, and I think if we could have better tools in dealing with it, I think it would help us in the long run.

As I think about what was covered as I look through this binder and the part that I struggle with, and I think even that day, we do a lot with communication within families and decision making and problem solving and all that. As an adult learner, it kind of gets muddled all in together for a while and I'm not sure it's clear yet. I think too, the context of the trainings, so how does this relate to the crucial conversations that we went to, where do the models align, where are there some differences, RBC would be another one. I think we did quite a bit on conflict resolution within the training. Department heads can go out to the training at Ohio State. That's where they do a lot of observing of how we deal with conflict, so it's the context of how this fits into other things that we have had available and what's the uniqueness with conflict resolution training and then what else is out there to help us think more.

I was thinking about my earlier comment about the ladder of inference, and I went back and looked at it and it's pretty basic but it's good. I'm wondering if we could take that as the core of a flow chart type of crib sheet like we have for the LOGIC model and have some other core skills or competencies on there or something that keeps that in front of us in very shorthand version as some sort of idealized visual model, like we've done with the LOGIC model. I realize that's a tall order for something as complicated as conflict resolution, but I'm overwhelmed by all of the material that was taught in four workshops, but I lost all of that detail. If I had a way of organizing with a simple mental model, that would be great.

I'm wondering if there's an opportunity for a train-the-trainer model, like with Responsibility Based Culture, how we bought modules back and shared it with the rest of the staff. What are some components that would be helpful for our entire staff talking about conflict and how we're going to deal with it in the office? It's kind of like the elephant in the room some days.

David: So are you for some sort of curriculum specifically aimed at intra-office?

Yes.

End of focus group discussion, session AB-2

Appendix C: Transcription of Focus Group CD October 2, 2009

David: The first question asks whether or not the conflict resolution training that you're had has affected your comfort level with conflict and if you could give us anecdote demonstrating that, if it's true.

Even after the initial workshops that help lay out some framework, I was able to use it fairly soon to help as we were going into a comprehensive land use planning work in terms of better framing the issues we were going to run into and how to approach different viewpoints that were coming to the table. So, not so much on an inter-personal level immediately as much as a professional level in working in my extension role.

I took the training a number of years ago. I can't even remember when, but I was able to use parts of it right away and I've used it mostly in my work as opposed to the inter-personal. My applications are more of how I think about designing meetings that may have some contentious issues in them. I start to look at them a little differently in terms of getting issues versus positions. That kind of stuff is part of the meeting design and really helping me make a better meeting that's going to be more productive.

Thinking back to when this information was provided, it was most helpful to me in understanding the design of the process. Specifically, I was working with a Chamber-City dispute that I remember, I came away from the workshop thinking, well now I understand where I want to take them. I understand possible roles I could take in the process, and then I got from the workshops some ways of questioning different methods of inquiry that helped me.

I would say that I haven't used it in a programming manner but more in working with volunteers at board meetings, in terms of that they are really looking at the issues, they may want to get there in a different way but they both want to get there. They have a common direction, I guess.

I think for me, it did definitely give me some comfort, and I used it especially in thinking about meeting design and also perhaps, especially working with a colleague to deal with what may be more conflictual, higher profile issues in [deleted} County. Also the predecessor training that was brought to us by the North Carolina Natural Resource Institute, which was really kind of a founding thing for the conflict team getting started, both those things gave a boost of confidence to try to help design, convene and facilitate some higher profile conflict meetings.

I think that's what I appreciated about it the most, was the fact that it gave me a tool that provided me with a comfort zone that I could diagnose things and stand back and take an objective look at the conflict that I was either in or about to get into.

I don't think I would say comfort as much as I would say courage because when you're asked to do something and when people start explaining what's going on, you just don't want to do it and it gave me enough courage to say at least, "I'll try."

David: Can you give us an example in which the conflict training that you facilitated got some sort of conflict resolution?

I worked for a while on helping design a process that never actually happened, but it was fairly contentious between the community and a regional planning commission and some other players

about what to do with these particular locks on the [deleted] River. [Deleted] and I were brought in at various points to talk about what the meeting would look like. I really used that training a lot in terms of helping the group that was proposing this meeting to see either how else they want to run the meeting because of the potential contention and some of the background or maybe that they would want to approach it a little differently. So, I can't say that we actually facilitated a resolution to conflict, but it was certainly useful to me, maybe as more of an objective advisor to the group of people looking to host the meeting and do some planning on this and sort of, maybe not understand the full context of what was going on.

I'll give you two examples. One of them would go back to a couple of iterations of the comp. planning efforts and it was using that interest space approach to work with the City of [deleted]l and all of the surrounding towns. So there was conflict between each one of the towns. between themselves and with the city. How we were able to look for some common ground interest, then we were able to explore some different options which actually led to some boundary agreements. And you scale that down to the family level. I've used it just recently and a number of times working with people in bankruptcy situations that need to work as a family team and have to also work with lenders. It's very helpful to be able to have them sit back and look for the common interest, understand why people need what they need, and move forward.

I have worked with an organization that was having some conflict in [deleted] County. I helped them work through a diagnostic process and then helped provide for them some next steps. And really I guess the process has helped me be able as an educator to coach this group on some of the organizational development needs that they have. This group had identified what they thought would be one potential source of conflict, and that person ending up leaving the organization and there's a sense under the organization that everything is "hunkee-doree" and the fact is that not everything is "hunkee-doree" yet. In that particular instance, it has allowed me to provide some objective outside resources to help them move through an ongoing process. And I think in general, this training has helped me approach my work with many organizations, many communities, much of which is full with conflict in one form or another. It's just helped me take several steps back and think about how to approach people and situations. So, I haven't necessarily used the tools to teach people directly, but it's very helpful in framing my facilitation coaching work in a lot of instances.

Some ways in which this training has really helped me facilitate: 1. The training was my first exposure to the [???] negotiation method. And after learning that 7 step method, I think when I started assessing certain projects, I realized the importance of getting out values and interests early-on before we started and then how I structured moving in some cases. A couple of the specific things was looking at lake-level management where we have a chain of glacial lakes that run though 11 different jurisdictions, and people want them at different levels depending on their interests; one level for fisheries, another level for boats, another level for the wetlands, etc. So, it helped structure a process where you can really get and hear those various viewpoints, keeping any kind of decision-making very separate from the learning phase, so that everyone sort of comes up to speed and has more system type knowledge of the situation. One final thing that is very recent is [deleted] and I worked with the public participation portion of comprehensive planning here in [deleted] County, and also for some of the towns. And that also was very controversial. In the four years of our work, we didn't facilitate every meeting, but a role we had early on and throughout it was training all of our senior planners on how to effectively deal with

conflict, then to come in and coach. So, that coaching role and working behind the scenes sometimes, viewing meetings and helping staff from other departments be able to run effective meetings that are fraught with conflict has been another way that this training has really helped me.

David: Can you describe how you've used the skills of conflict management workshops when you're working with different community groups?

What comes in mind is, when you're with a community group, whether there is a conflict there or not, I think some of the tools come in handy that just help me ask questions of the group. For example, the ladder of inference, as a group is discussing things and you're listening, as a coach or meeting facilitator, it helps you ask questions to either get down to why they're saying some things, what are the facts. So, those are some of the ways the skills have been helpful to me. Also, I start to see the same tools in some of the other pieces that we learn in Extension, whether it's systems thinking, strategic planning, and there's definitely a lot of linkages there and that's really helpful to see how they connect to some other skills that we use.

I'll echo what [deleted] said. Specifically with the ladder of inference, and I would even back up I guess a step, that just simply understanding my own conflict style, helps me when I interact with other people, not only understanding my own, which is really useful, but then having a framework or point of reference to understand how other people may have different conflict styles. And that has helped me be able to interact in situations where other people are having conflict. And I guess, I'll go back to things like the ladder of inference, just being much more thoughtful and careful about hearing people's assumptions, helping them take a couple of steps back to broaden their view perhaps.

I'll talk about the diagnosis skills. They've been useful to me in helping the group define what the true issues are, rather than what the verbalized issues are. The diagnosis has helped me help the clients look at the problems with different lenses, different perspectives and that relates back to the understanding that there are different lenses and how to get to them is all part of the diagnosis for me.

While I was in [deleted], there was a group that was struggling with an estuary. And the property owners looked out their back windows and saw stinky, smelly weeds and the other side of the paper, the DNR fish biologist was looking at this wonderful fish growing habitat. It took a great deal of discussion and analysis to get to those points. They were sitting on the position that the property owners just wanted the weeds gone and the fish biologist said nothing can be cut, but they didn't say why. And then after a bunch of discussion, the property owners realized that it's a benefit to them to have this wonderful fish growing habitat, and the DNR biologist thought about what they could do to this estuary to address the needs of the property owners. So, it was all in understanding the perspectives, the lenses that the clients were looking at the problem from.

Diagnosing. I think my skill set has really increased because of some of the things that I've learned, some exercises that you can use with groups to get them to see other people's points of view in the ladder of inference. One final thing that I think was very useful was the difficult conversations piece of understanding the emotions and identity and sorting out exactly what has happened. One of the specific cases in which that was used, I also sit on the systems thinking

team and the use of dialogue and dialogue technique has helped too. And [deleted] County this year is trying to develop a sustainable ag. policy and as we were having some pre-planning meetings, only then did I realize just how full of conflict that is. That there are a number of people who feel that any farmer who raises corn and soybeans and uses any kind of chemical inputs at all, is not sustainable and shouldn't be included and shouldn't be a part of the conversation on sustainable ag in the county. And when you start looking at big barriers and dividers like that and trying to figure out how the county agriculture can have a sustainable policy, it became clear that we needed very specific processes to try to get all of the viewpoints heard and allow people to save face and have a very structured set of meetings in which things won't get out of control. And I will confess, there were a couple of times of people out in the far extremes, not wanting to be inclusive at all, but these skills really help with things like that to pull what you can out of the bag and try to make things more holistic.

Where I'm using the skills currently is more with the volunteer groups I work with. I can always use the ladder of inference and so really looking at the issues and how I ask questions and helping them move forward so that they have more in common and we are really looking at, we know the facts.

David: Can you describe a conflict intervention, where you personally intervened and provided your skills to citizens of your county?

A group of master gardeners that had a real culture of conflict going on and a colleague came and really provided some assistance to me in going through that situation and that's the situation that I was most involved with. There are a lot of other opportunities for conflict intervention with local government in [deleted] county. And I had started to engage in a process with a number of towns who are annoyed at a few county departments, and I was asked to do that by our county board chairman. But then after I had started the initial diagnosis steps, we got a new county board Chairman who essentially said, "Don't worry, I'll take care of this" nearly two years ago, and now things are not resolved, in fact they've probably gotten worse. I have not stayed engaged in that process because I didn't have any authorizing entity, and it seemed a bit dicey, so I've stayed out of it and just watched this conflict situation grow.

I'll give three little cases, and one didn't work magic. They're not always successful, and a couple of these were in the crisis stage. The first one is I got a call from our county executive's office asking me to facilitate a group of people, some of which wanted to sue the county or were in the process of suing the county because they had dredged the [deleted] River right before it enters into Lake [deleted]. And we have major marinas up there and the only place you can get gas on that lake there. There was a flood. And we've had a lot of flooding, a significant flood, a 500 year flood. And it blew out five acres of wetland at the mouth of the river, changed the course of the river. Those communities along with the marinas had paid three-fourths of a million dollars to dredge a channel, and it was promised by the county to last 50 years, and it lasted four. So these communities and businesses were still paying on a 10 year loan for this and it was in default. So, I got pulled in to facilitate that, and that was about a nine month process. That one worked out well. The county was not sued. They formed new teams and it really worked by the books. It was very nice. But one that didn't work so well is some other lakes in the northern part of [deleted] county that had been rising. The water levels have been rising six feet over the last 30 years, and they're flooding out town roads, agricultural areas. There were a number of lakefront homes that had to fill in their basement because they were perpetually

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flooded and some houses that are going to be condemned, so the county, emergency management and a number of departments had failed to be able to work effectively with the people there. So they asked me to facilitate a process to work with these people, and the county wanted a certain thing. They really wanted to be able to use FEMA money and buy out those Lakefront homes and be done with it. But, we ran a long process and just because you have the facts at the table, there were some of those difficult conversations, the facts didn't get into the way of what people wanted. And it ended up that I was facilitating a process where the county didn't get what they wanted. They now have 24/7 pumping of those lakes into the Wisconsin River, which the locals wanted, but our county didn't want and really the DNR was not in favor. That really told me how you have to not take sides and when you're working for the county on a project where the county has deep vested interest, be very careful of how you facilitate, otherwise, I could have lost my job on that one.

Some of our failures also kind of turn into some positives and you were talking about volunteer groups and contentious issues and many times we get into public forums it's actually [????], because sometimes you can move to logic and it's open. And actually working with some of the volunteers and community groups can be more contentious because people take a stake and they just won't deviate from that opinion and there's no financial or vested interest. It's mainly "just because." We had an example like that having something to do with a fair. I'm sure nobody else has those types of problems with their fair, but it became obvious. The failure was that we did some numbers in the community that just plain and simply, would not acknowledge the interest of other groups. But because we had a process to talk about interest and how you can collaborate, at least it was then obvious to those who wanted to move forward that that was the sticking point. So they understand why there was the problem that we have, and then they could move beyond that and say they're not going to go there. And so it provided a good tool to at least let the leadership know that they were going to continue to have headaches around that, but identify them ahead of time and be able to do some work around them. So, in some ways it didn't work because you have people stuck in their positions and a lot of egos tied up in it. On the other hand, it also provided some objectivity so that the group could move forward and make some progress.

I work in counties where we have really small school districts for the most part. The school Superintendent called and asked if I could help with the volleyball coach and athletic director. And the situation that's going on is, in order to trim the budget, they decided to use adult volunteers for a lot of the athletic events. The responsibility was passed to the athletic director to round up volunteers for the season and the athletic director decided that this new requirement of him wasn't something he was happy with, so he didn't do it. And all of the teams showed up and it became a big problem for the volleyball coach and she blew up and then it got back to the Superintendent and he didn't want to deal with it because it was his policy, so they asked me to come in. And I've been working with the coach and actually went back to the Superintendent to talk about was this really a wise policy and what the ramifications of making policy without really bringing in all of the players during the process, and it's still going forward in trying to convince the individuals that they need to step up rather than having an intervener as a side issue in this. So, it's something that going on right now and it's not a big organization.

David: So, this is not you personally, but can you think back and give an example where your conflict management training influenced or impacted how citizens dealt with some conflict in their community?

I've got two different examples, both of them are community based. The City of [deleted] used it to deal with department issues, trying to get departments working more closely together especially right now with budget cuts. And even though there are still headaches there, the city administrator will tell you that it's been very helpful and the city is much more unified in how they are going forward in the budgeting process. From the county administrative coordinator's standpoint, a similar type approach but in working with county board officials and helping them move forward whenever there is a contentious issue that has come around. And with that, they both, as they approach it, feel real comfortable coming to my office and proposing, "This is what I think I should do. What do you think?" So, it's not asking me to come up with it, but they're actually developing some strategies and then just checking in to see if they're on track.

I don't really have any examples because I don't feel like I have moved to that next level yet, where I'm actually teaching people the skills that I'm still working on developing and utilizing myself..

I haven't taught it, I've just been using it personally and modeling it.

I would echo that same thing. I have not taught it.

Well from my perspective, and I wouldn't use the term students, but there have been a lot of colleagues throughout Extension, who have taken the training and have a very good idea of what they want to do. And they just touch bases with me and say, "Here is what I'm thinking of. Give me some advice/critique or how else could I make it better." They had a very good idea of what they wanted to do and they were just, in the grand tradition of Extension, touching the network a little bit to give themselves the comfort.

I've done some training here in the county. One for comp planning. A colleague and I decided that the best use of our time would really be to train our senior planners, people from the city, really our multi-staff team. We did formal training with them and then came back and did refreshers and coaching. I think that paid off. Because then, they were the ones who actually ran the meetings instead of us always having to be at every single meeting. I also did conflict training. We had a large batch of AmeriCorps volunteers working at our community center, and working with 4H, did a half-day training on conflict issues and conversational issues and facilitation, as they were going to be working with youth in the county. And the final one, and I don't know how the connection was made, there was a national conference here for shoreline managers and it was a part of EPA that deals with shorelines and floodplains and those shoreline managers have to run public meetings all over the country if there are flooding issues or other sorts of issues. That may be floodplain delineation where they're dealing with conflictual public meetings, and they asked me to run a full day of training in effective facilitation communication on conflictual issues and so, I've done that. I haven't followed suit with them to see how they've used it but I would say one other thing. What happens here in the county, I've been working this area for a while, and the people who have been a part of, especially longer term processes to see how they're designed, often time, are part of the design team, so they understand the fundamentals of why we're doing what we're doing with facilitated processes on conflictual relationships. That's how they want to do business. A lot of our departments now. I would say our lakes and watershed division and our land and water resource department and some of the county board supervisors who have been involved with those and who are still with us, like that process. They see it might take time. The DNR is another member of that group because my

colleague and I did the first public facilitated process with dam removal. They were very skeptical at first whether it could work because dam removal projects often tear communities apart. They tried it, and it worked here for the [deleted] dam and they have since wanted to use that sort of conflict facilitated process and design around the state now.

David: Can you give us any example of either, pats on the back or kicks in the butt from citizens, colleagues, or elected officials regarding the conflict work that you've done?

I can go back to the administrative coordinator. What's really interesting is that I just got an email from him a week ago and he was in a training on conflict and resolution in Minnesota for city administrators and he said, "Can you send me some of your material. They're missing out on all kinds of things here." And it was basically, the approach that we've taken, the interest-based approach, and looking for collaborative arrangements and moving beyond the typical conflict-based, competitive type arrangements, has really run true with these folks. When somebody calls, after getting into a new job and has been gone for a while and says "Boy you guys did a great job. Can you send me some of your information?," That just very reaffirming that we've got something really unique here that people respect .

In fact, I went out and deliberately solicited input from that time I was the objective facilitator between the county and the towns on land use planning. I needed some feedback anyway for other purposes, but wanted to see how they viewed that role in the work that I was doing facilitating the discussion. We never painted it as "conflict work", but they said yes, it's very helpful to have an objective person, the role that I played was very important. What I did mostly was look at interest, look at reason, try to come up with policies and statements that were acceptable by everyone around the table and they felt that was very valuable. They felt that having someone objective and not the county planner or the town association rep. or the realtor's rep., really made that process work.

I can think of an example with the master gardener work I've done. With a colleague's assistance, we have gotten feedback of a very positive nature from a number of co-op extension administrators. My district director, as well as administrators in the program area, and the coordinator of the Wisconsin Master Gardener Association have indicated that our work, even though on the ground level, I don't necessarily feel like it's finished by any stretch of the imagination, but it has helped get them through their immediate log jams and so they have been highly appreciative at the state level.

"You're a great leader". That's as much as they say. It isn't very detailed, but that's what they say.

When [deleted] and I did the [deleted] dam, and a couple other longer facilitated processes, we try to do an evaluation with the people who participated in that process. One of the things we learned from the [deleted] dam is that sometimes people don't want to be as involved in the process design and from that we learned that often times it's much better to draft a process and draft a decision-making protocol and have them react to it, than try to spend their time developing those things. So the first time around, we did try to spend more time in having them develop everything, so the whole process was really theirs, but from the evaluation, we learned that that was painful for them. And I think they felt, let's do something else with our time. So, from that sort of evaluation I have learned to draft things and have people react to them for the

process design and to see that in little bits during the process. They may not need a decision-making tool right away, but they will need process design right away, so kind of interspersing it is one of the things I've learned. I think I've gotten some letters from different departments and things but I think that one of the things that lets them know it's valued is they keep on calling. There is no shortage of work.

David: Are there any gaps that you can identify in the workshops that need to be addressed to help you better address conflict issues and concerns?

I don't know how to verbalize this, but I'll just kick things off. I don't know if it's actually a gap, but it just seems like it would be very helpful if we had some time to practice these skills and then come back together. I don't know that this is practical. I'm realistic in that even taking the time to go through the training was a big commitment. Hence I don't know if there is time and money to come back together again, but it just seems like there's some follow-up that's potentially missing because I left the workshop with some knowledge but not necessarily feeling comfortable in my skill-set. And then I feel like there's maybe a need or an opportunity to get back together with folks who have similar skills in co-op extension and share things that worked, things that didn't work, and outcomes, good or bad. I don't know if it's a gap in the training itself, as much as maybe a gap in what happens after the training.

The gaps that we might have in our training are actually things that I like to cover when I do leadership classes and other trainings that I've done. Because we're trying to coordinate between each other and not deviate too much from the curriculums that we've developed, there's a couple of things that I insert when I do trainings. One of them is the information out of the participatory facilitation guides and that is in the time, the whole idea of [????]. Where do these kinds of tools fit into community and group decision making. I think [deleted] kind of led into this very early in this discussion, but how do we use these in strategic planning? In other words, how to marry up our strategic planning work with conflict and vise versa. And how those can inter-play between each other. That's stuff that we kind of get into in Workshop D, but it's an area I think we still have to explore so that we see how these different things that we teach can be integrated and used in our own training. So, it's that coming back together that we just heard about to say what's working and what's not and how does this fit in with other things that we do.

I'll just add that I agree with what has been said. It's been so long since I've taken a workshop, I don't remember. But a gap that I think I've learned since the workshop is conflict resolution on the fly, when you're not really working on something that started out as conflict, but it's a potentially conflictual situation or meeting or public meeting that becomes that way. So, the examples we were working on in the training were, here's the situation and we work through the conflict but sometimes that's not the premise of why we're having a meeting with a group. So, I think, the point about how we just sort of fold this into the other ways that we work with groups or communities, would be helpful.

You know the strategic planning group did do a 201, where they brought people together just to do some reflection, and that seemed to be pretty effective when I went to that a number of years ago. Like OK, now you've practiced it for a while, now let's come back together and really talk about what you've learned and what has worked and what has gone wrong.

To follow up on the previous comments, they made me think that we are proposing one method or process, one theory of managing conflict. There are other methods, that while the team trainings may not get as into depth, it would be useful I think, to at least introduce other processes and methods so that if we did have a chance of following up, then the folks might come up with additional scenarios to where these other methods and processes may be applicable.

David: What support do you need from the conflict resolution team to apply the concepts covered in the workshops?

Those who have been on the team know this. They know the headache it is trying to do this just from a county basis without some type of centralized support because some of the things, and we've touched on them already, are exploring the different ways that we can interact with each other and toss out ideas and how do we perhaps, post a situation and whether it's something we're in the middle of or about to head into, into a blog or some type of process where we can engage on a discussion on how we could possibly approach it. First off all, it makes us write it down, the situation and analyzing it. Just to write down a situation requires a reflection and then be able to, when you have time to interact a little bit. One of the things that are missing is the ability to follow up and see that those things happen. It's really difficult to do from our office because we don't have the centralized support to do so.

I think it would be great if Extension could somehow provide a non-county based person that we could count on so that in some situations, we aren't the face. We can be part of the process and the diagnosis but we aren't the person sitting across the table in that situation so that it doesn't come back to us who live in that county.

And I would echo that loudly, because there are situations where it's just too politically loaded or it's too close to Extension, where it's not appropriate for us to be the person. I've talked about the possibility of a network of trained people where you can swap. Actually there was one instance where a colleague came into [deleted} County to help. It just seems like some [????] at the state level and maybe also the ability to help each other more locally.

Not that I had the experience personally, but I've seen situations where agents were talking about contaminated water, possibly from the landfill. An Extension agent tried to voice how it felt to her as a parent living near this, and they couldn't separate that she was talking as a parent but she was an Extension agent. So I think these points are very well taken. I think that sometimes these things get so politically charged that it's pretty scary out in the county, especially with tough budgets.

End of focus group discussion, session CD