Chapter 4

Integrative Conflict Resolution: Tools for Loving Praxis in Organizational Leadership

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the use of integrative conflict resolution as a foundational means for loving praxis to emerge in effective cross-cultural organizational leadership. The work of Mary Parker Follett is introduced, and is recognized as formative to the disciplines of conflict resolution and organizational development. Follett’s work is compared and contrasted with other strategies for conflict management, with attention to the advantages of an integrative approach. Integrative conflict resolution is situated within a loving praxis, which occurs when the theory of loving is brought into practice to strengthen organizational leadership, specifically within the increasingly diverse landscape of globalization. Curiosity, creativity, and compassion are understood within the context of integrative conflict resolution, and are recommended as key tools for achieving a loving praxis within organizational culture.

INTRODUCTION

Organizational leaders increasingly require a strong cross-cultural orientation in the ever-changing and quickly diversifying landscape of globalization. Conflict is inevitably present within organizations, and the globalized marketplace requires strong leaders with conflict resolution skills to manage the increase in complexities, and in ambiguities, that result from greater diversities of people, perspectives, and cultures (Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs, & Fleishman, 2000). This chapter celebrates Mary Parker Follett’s groundbreaking construct of integrative conflict resolution, which established the prevailing practice of conflict resolution, and inspired the foundational work of Fisher and Ury (2011) and their Harvard Negotiation Project. Starting with Follett’s work, I expand the ideas of integrative practice into a model of loving praxis in cross-cultural organizational leadership, building upon emerging scholarship that operationalizes the idealized value of loving. The notion of loving praxis is introduced as a way to frame the value of integrative conflict resolution, and specific elements of transformative conflict resolution practice are recommended as tools to engage a loving praxis within organizational culture.

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Integrative Conflict Resolution

In the course of this chapter, I use my own experiences as a practitioner, researcher and academic, and also as an inheritor of the complex intergenerational and multicultural conflict, to exemplify the practice of integrative conflict resolution, and to introduce vital tools that facilitate the creation of loving praxis in organizational leadership.

BACKGROUND

Identity and Cultural Conflict

Although cultural identities are deeply imbedded within each of us, they can be difficult to articulate until we are in some way confronted, or presented with a conflict that causes us to reflect on our own values and beliefs (Avruch, 1998; Lederach, 1995). Even if we have not previously reflected on how our cultural identity influences us, conflict can provide a powerful catalyst to recognize the distinctiveness of our values and beliefs, and to find their origins in our cultural identity. This phenomenon is especially true in countries where populations are diverse, such as in the United States, and is due in part to the ways in which power and privilege operate (Johnson, 2006).

Members of cultural groups that are dominant within society are less likely to face the kinds of challenges that require them to examine their identities, their relative power, or the privileges that result from their identity group; whereas, members of non-dominant or subordinate groups regularly experience challenges that require them to examine the lack of power and privilege that result from their particular identities (Johnson, 2006; Feagin, 2014). In the United States this can be most clearly illustrated in terms of race. People of color are structurally marginalized in the United States, and experience regular opportunities to acknowledge, understand, and reflect on their marginalization (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Feagin, 2014). Michelle Fine explains, “…the cultural gaze of surveillance – whether it be a gaze of pity, blame, or liberal hope – falls on persons of color” (1997, p. 64), providing ample opportunities to reflect on what it means to be a person of color, and to be outside of the dominant racial group.

In contrast, white people have structural advantages in the United States that can make them unaware of their whiteness (Johnson, 2006; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Feagin, 2014). The norms and behaviors associated with dominant white culture are viewed as normal by dominant culture, often regarded as plain, natural, average, and right, and wholly exempt from ‘cultural’ influences. The behaviors associated with non-white groups, by comparison, can be regarded as exotic, novel, inappropriate, deviant, or simply wrong (Feagin, 2014). While this is most true about race in the United States, this pattern can be seen in the intersectionality of non-dominant social identities throughout the world, including (but not limited to) religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, disability, and/or class.

Culture and Conflict Resolution

Understanding the cultural identity of everyone, regardless of whether they are part of dominant or subordinate groups, is a first step in recognizing the corresponding advantages and disadvantages that begin to explain complex conflict behaviors. Stella Ting-Toomey (1999) developed the cultural variability perspective, a conceptual framework to explain her understanding of cultural values in a general sense, and to give specific attention to how these diverse perspectives influence conflict behaviors. While the term conflict suggests a dispute more substantive than cultural misunderstandings (Avruch, 1998; Kriesberg, 1998; Lederach, 1995), a solid understanding and ample vocabulary of cultural differences are essential for successful conflict management in a multicultural workplace. Building upon the work of intercultural communication theorists (Hall, 1989; Gudykunst, 2005), Ting-Toomey places cultural values on a continuum between