

# Conflict, Polarities and Polarisation



# Conflict levels are currently rising

- Base levels of anxiety, fear and suspicion are at all time high levels following COVID19 and its social implications. Lack of connectedness is significantly impacting trust levels.
- Polarisation within society has significantly increased and is showing no sign of moving towards middle ground (social media)
- Clergy are some of the most impacted by the implications of COVID19 as many aspects of ministry and wellbeing specific to clergy changed or were restricted significantly. (The need for clergy centric ministry during COVID and the subsequent decline in attendance, resources, volunteers)
- The Christian church is facing increasing social marginalisation
- A significant amount of interpersonal communication is now online (COVID accelerator)

# Cognitive processes in conflict

- Cognitive biases impact both sides of conversation or dispute and unless taken seriously and explored through deep listening and honest sharing they tend to polarise conversations making them 'harder' than they need to be

- **1. The 'other at fault' or 'victim' bias**

When each side is invited to reflect on their frustrations and actions, they tend to explain that the issues are created by the other, they are victims of others' wilful actions and only rightfully defending themselves or others who need protecting.

- **2. The 'exaggeration' bias**

When each side describes the position of the other, both tend to see the other as more extreme or polar than in reality it actually is. This is a product of the simplification and personalisation process. When this occurs parties even describe their own position in more extreme terms than it actually is. Mediators can often be caught in this tendency to overestimate the real differences especially when polarising language is used.

# Cognitive processes in conflict

- **3. The transparency illusion**

Both parties tend to believe that they are communicating openly and clearly, that their values and needs are evident and understood. Parties believe that their emotions and body language are accurately read and perceived. This is frequently not the case. When trust decreases, capacity to accurately read other people also significantly decreases.

- **4. The subjective perception bias**

Both parties tend to unconsciously evaluate options based on perceptions other than the objective elements of a proposal or option before them. The most common of these is to assume there must be hidden elements or implications that benefit the proposer of the option otherwise it would not be proposed.

- **5. The mutually exclusive (fixed pie) fallacy**

Parties assume in discussion that a loss or concession made in negotiating an outcome automatically means a corresponding gain for the opposing party. There is an assumption that gains are always mutually exclusive – If one party gets this, the other cannot have that. In reality what each party desires is not always diametrically opposed to the desires of the other.

# Integrative Complexity

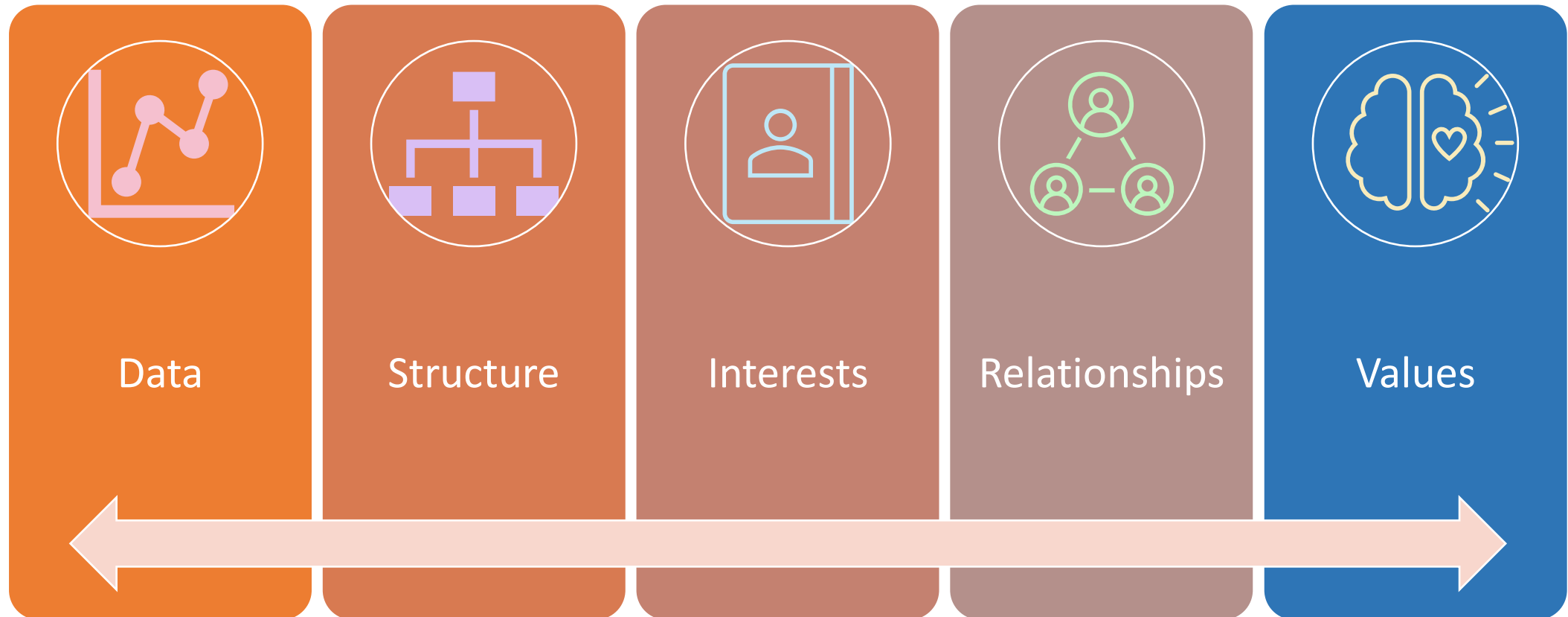
- The process of differentiation
  - Clearly and objectively delineating the differences in viewpoint
  - Positions – Needs, Interests, Values, Experiences, Concerns (NIVEC)
  - Understanding the contributors to conflict
- The process of integration
  - Clearly and objectively perceiving the connections, shared NIVEC, dependencies and areas of commonality
- The process of creativity
  - Applying insights from differentiation and integration to generating pathways forward that may not have been previously evident.

# Language and listening

- Language:
  - In conflict language is critical – careful thought needs to go into what our word choice, tone and timing says about what we are seeking to communicate
  - Thinking less about what we want to say and more about what others will hear.
- Listening
  - Suspending judgement on a position
  - Listening in order to fully understand the motives, needs, interests, values, experiences, and concerns of the other party.
  - The value of perspective taking – the capacity to articulate the position of the other in terms they agree is accurate, clear and reasonably comprehensive.

Differences:

MOORE'S interaction of conflict causes



# Moore's Conflict Causes

## *Five Potential Contributors to Conflict*

- *All conflict is complex and factors often interact with and impact each other*
  1. Issues over the relevance and meaning of data and factual information related to the conflict
  2. Issues to do with the structure, rules, system and authority lines in the context where the conflict exists
  3. Issues created by the personal implications of the conflict, the costs and benefits potential outcomes, personal interests impacted
  4. Issues created from the status of the past and present interpersonal relationship between parties
  5. Issues that arise from different values and beliefs which are often deeply held



# Spectrum of potential Conflict Resolution outcomes

- **Substantial win – wins**  
Parties reach a shared understanding on most key issues and agree to a way forward which substantially meets both sets of needs and interests and affirms both sets of values.
- **Acceptable win-some lose-some compromises**  
Parties both share some gains and share some losses which might be quite different for both parties. The outcome is acceptable as the overall benefit outweighs the cost of failing to reach agreement.
- **Trial outcomes**  
In situations where the impact of a decision is not able to be fully known, parties may settle for a temporary solution which can then be tested and evaluated on agreed criteria.
- **Alternation of influence outcomes**  
Parties agree to alternate when they have their interests met so that each party gains a level of satisfaction but not at the same time.
- **Sphere of influence outcomes**  
Parties agree to identify arenas within which each party has its needs met and can exercise defined decision making authority.

# Spectrum of potential Conflict Resolution outcomes

- **Partial or limited agreements**  
Parties agree on some key issues but are unable to reach agreement on others. The value of the points of agreement outweigh the significance of the points of disagreement, so there is acceptance that issues over which there is disagreement will not be pursued at this point.
- **Deferred decisions**  
After exploring issues, parties decide to delay the decision making process until further understanding of the issues, and implications of outcomes can be understood
- **Non-binding requests**  
Parties may resolve to leave the dispute open by making non-binding requests of each other. Parties agree to receive and consider the requests however compliance is neither promised or guaranteed.
- **Process agreements**  
Parties agree to a subsequent process by which they can obtain a solution to the dispute. They agree to abide by the outcome of the process.

# Spectrum of potential Conflict Resolution outcomes

- **Referral for non-binding or binding adjudication**  
Parties prepare a number of the most preferable settlement options and refer these to an acceptable third party for a non-binding or binding recommendation or decision. These options are commonly called 'Last and Best Settlement Offers'.
- **Accept a stalemate or impasse**  
Parties cannot reach an agreement or negotiations stall or breakdown. Neither party has power or will to force the issue to an outcome. Agreement about co-existence becomes the issue.
- **Shift to another method of conflict resolution** (Compelling, Withdrawal, Support)
- **Take your chances**  
Parties agree to settle the outcome on a randomised chance process (straws, coins, dice)
- **Continue negotiations**  
As agreement cannot be reached, and the issues and costs are significant, parties agree that the only real option is to continue discussion and negotiation. Alternative negotiation processes or methodologies may be sought and employed.