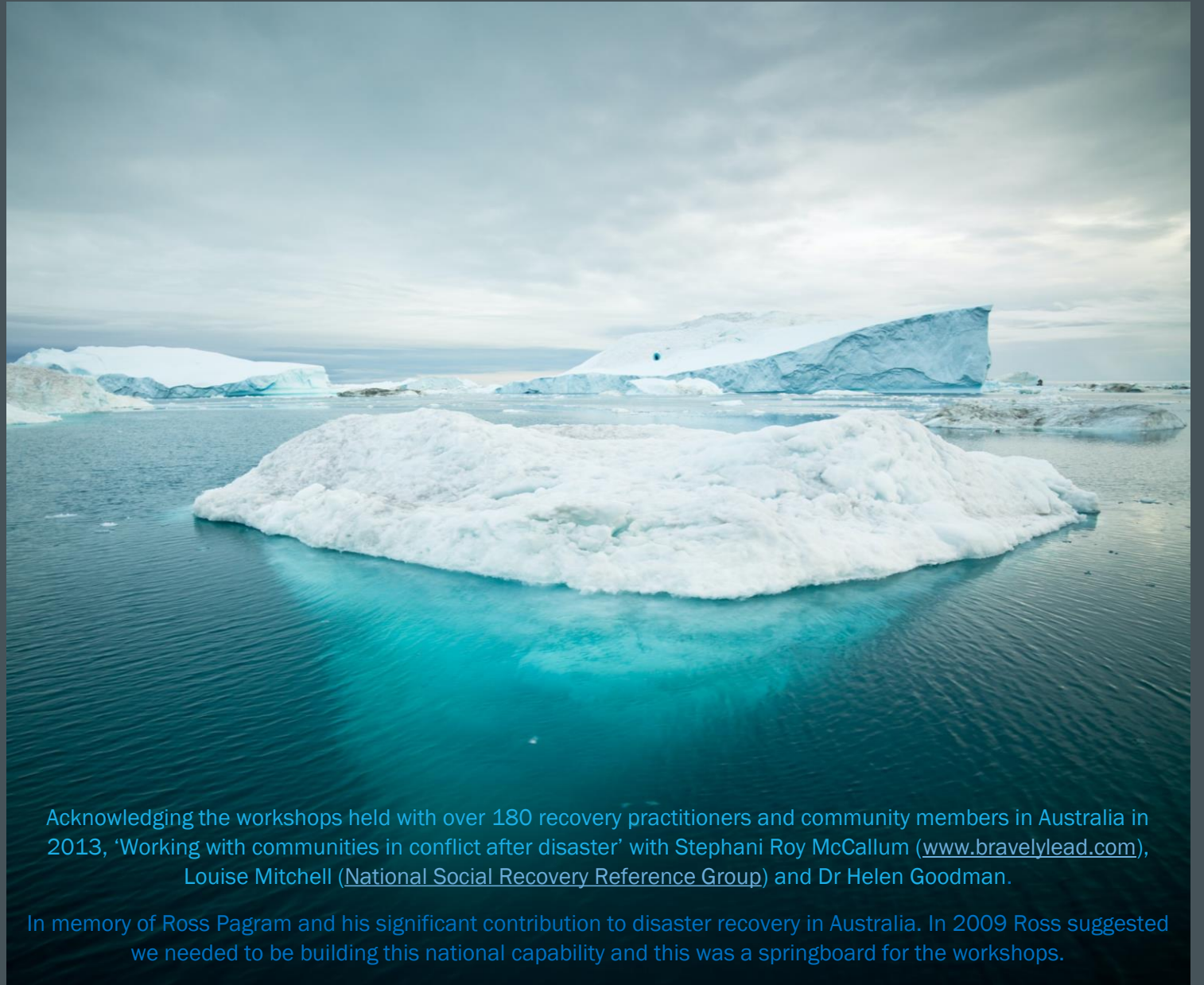# COMMUNITIES IN POST-DISASTER RECOVERY : WORKING WITH CONFLICT IN AND BETWEEN

DEVELOPED FOR **PUBLIC ORGANISATIONS** – INCLUDES LOCAL GOVERNMENT, NOT FOR PROFITS OR SEMI-AUTONOMOUS ORGANISATIONS RELYING ON PUBLIC FUNDING

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EXPERIENCING CONFLICT AFTER A DISASTER

WORKING AS A PUBLIC ORGANISATION IN COMMUNITIES

It is normal for all communities, even those with strong social capital to experience periods of conflict and fatigue after a disaster. Communities are generally not cohesive and the rich fabric of our society comes from the diversity of interests, values and relationships.

Public organisations can be in a unique position to help moderate or resolve conflicts before they escalate.

Sound community development and engagement practice ('power with' approaches) and the provision of emotional support and resources after a disaster can enable shared understanding in communities and result in more positive mental health recovery and community resilience.

UNDERSTAND: WHAT IS THE ROLE OF A PUBLIC ORGANISATION?

- A public organisation hears alternative perspectives from people in communities

- They are a site of continuously working out public purposes which involve working for the common good.

- Public organisations hold all the different perspectives of people in communities and these can inform ways of resolving conflict or systemic issues that are manifesting in the community or society.

Significant stressors and value conflicts or moral indifference around important issues

Delivering services	Enabling societal self-governance

Differences in culture, faith, lifestyle and values placing public organisations at the intersection of conflicting needs and alternative definitions of the common good.

Public Organisations and where conflict can arise

After Hoggett, 2006

STEPHANI ROY MCCALLUM, COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP PROJECT (WWW.BRAVELYLEAD.COM), LOUISE MITCHELL, NATIONAL CONSULTANT TO THE SOCIAL RECOVERY REFERENCE GROUP & DR HELEN GOODMAN, NOVEMBER 2020

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A LIVING DEMOCRACY
WHAT CAN HAPPEN IN COMMUNITIES AFTER A DISASTER? (1)

Disasters impact on communities both in very physical ways and also less visibly – in our societal decision making and democracy:

"The human heart is the first home of democracy. It is where we embrace our questions. Can we be equitable? Can we be generous? Can we listen with our whole beings, not just our minds, and offer our attention rather than our opinions? And do we have enough resolve in our hearts to act courageously, relentlessly, without giving up — ever— trusting our fellow citizens to join with us in our determined pursuit of a living democracy?

Terry Tempest Williams

"There is a need for robust private conversation about what really matters and what this means for the wider population…. How can we talk about this with less fear? Use wise language?"

Bringing people together: "…Curating spaces of dialogue gives possibility for us to be brought into deeper belonging so that we can turn to each other and have generative human encounter."

Padraig O'Tuama

STEPHANI ROY MCCALLUM, COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP PROJECT (WWW.BRAVELYLEAD.COM), LOUISE MITCHELL, NATIONAL CONSULTANT TO THE SOCIAL RECOVERY REFERENCE GROUP & DR HELEN GOODMAN, NOVEMBER 2020

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A LIVING DEMOCRACY:
WHAT CAN HAPPEN IN COMMUNITIES AFTER A DISASTER? (2)

Dealing with issues of perceived fairness, equity and justice and making meaning in our society is not limited to disaster recovery, but the focus on these issues after a disaster can be a driver of significant emotion, individually and at the community level. Issues might include:

- **who benefits** in the post disaster system, for example who finds a job, who has their house rebuilt and how quickly, who paid insurance and who didn't, what grants are received by who; and

- **who can understand and navigate** the newly created structures of recovery and who is or is not - experiencing barriers, marginalization and exclusion as a result. If someone has been significantly impacted by disaster materially, physically, socially or emotionally this may impact their ability to navigate the structures

- **how we determine the common good** when there are competing values such as environmental and developmental issues, health of the most vulnerable and the economy.

TIPS FOR PREVENTING CONFLICT AFTER A DISASTER...

"The effects of a disaster on an impacted community are compounded by the nature of the disaster and of the community itself, as well as complex considerations such as human behaviour and relationships and the evolving needs of recovery. In working with the affected community, suggestions include:

• Refer to the National Principles for Disaster Recovery and understand the context and complexity.

• Be as inclusive as possible in identifying and assessing the 'affected' community.

• Recognise that significant impacts can be experienced by those not considered 'directly affected'.

• Remember that not everyone who is affected will live in the same area.

• Understand that people will not all respond or react in the same way.

• Plan collaboratively with the community.

• Tailor and adapt plans to meet changing community needs.

• Identify and work through community leaders (or they may wish to be called 'connectors' or another term and not 'leaders').

• Reinforce shared responsibility between all sectors of the community."   *Community Recovery Handbook, p6.*

WHAT IS CONFLICT?
"WE DEFINE CONFLICT AS A SIGNAL THAT SOMETHING NEEDS TO CHANGE."

~STEPHANI ROY MCCALLUM

HOW DO YOU SEE IT/FEEL IT?

Conflict is a signal that something needs to change

If we view conflict as neither 'good' or 'bad', but as a signal, we can start to unpack the next step – what is the wise question to ask in this situation:

Seek to understand:

- What happened there? (CAUSE of conflict)

- What do you see? (TYPE or ESCALATION of conflict)

Choose whether and how to act:

- What are the next wise steps as a person in a public organization that you could try?

CAUSES OF CONFLICT – WHAT HAPPENED THERE? (1)

1. Information and Communication

- During and after a disaster – difficulty in sourcing information at times.

- Who has access to it?

- What is the quality, reliability and timeliness?

- Who is listened to?

- Misunderstanding of what actually happened and why – at any point from before the disaster, during the response, into relief, and months on.

2. Structures and Resources

- What is present in structures, roles, rules, available resources to cause or contribute to conflictual situations?

- What issues are arising due to lack of clarity or ability to negotiate authority in decision making.

- For example: organizational, service, grant boundaries that are not natural community boundaries; authority held to allow for effective engagement for purpose.

- Perceived and real structural and systemic inequities, e.g. insurance and assistance.

3. Interests

- Conflict can arise from the differences in what people want.

- Are there differences in what organisations/staff member or community members have interests in?

- Belonging to community may be a fundamental and deeply rooted 'interest' or 'want'. Belonging both creates us as human beings and undoes us when it feels like it has gone. This includes our relationship to country, our sense of place.

CAUSES OF CONFLICT – WHAT HAPPENED THERE? (2)

4. Values

- Values conflict may involve cultural, social, organizational or personal values that differ. For example, Hierarchical vs consultative organizational culture, speed vs deliberation

- Even different approaches and experiences of holding the tension of difference can bring conflict

- Judgement around perceived suitability for positions of power in decision making can be value laden.

- Conflict that is values based includes also judgement about perceived fairness, equity, or actions seen as 'rorting the system'.

5. Relationships

- Conflict in relationships may be individual to individual, community group to community group, organization to organization, and between organizations and community groups or individuals.

- Contributions include trauma driven behavioural changes, prior relationship patterns, matters of personality, means of expressing emotion, different communication styles and the presence or absence of trust

- Where there was relationship conflict before the disaster, it can be exacerbated by the event

- In recovery this can occur because of displacement of what existed before, perception of hidden agendas, polarization of existing relationship issues, difficulty choosing representation or spokespersons for a community.

Also the influence of: Power

Defined as the ability to pull levers to affect change.

Different types of power include visible power, hidden power and invisible power.

It is important to understand the influence of power in a conflict situation including the ways in which we hold power :

- "power to" where an individual has the ability to make change for others,

- "power within" which involves self-worth, value, hopes and aspirations,

- "power with" others. This involves a working together collectively to achieve things.

TYPES OF CONFLICT – WHAT DO YOU SEE?
WHAT TYPE(S)/ESCALATION OF CONFLICT DO YOU THINK IS OCCURRING?
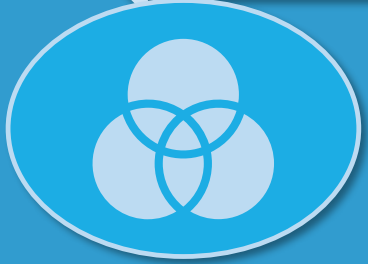
Productive Conflict

Recognition that the problem is a shared one. All parties recognise that there is a problem, but the disagreement is on how best to resolve it. It is therefore an opportunity which is presented, to frame, and reframe. Examples in the recovery environment include the resolution of public infrastructure projects, memorials, donations management, visioning, representation.

Personalised Conflict

This can often be experienced as conflict 'behind closed doors'; personal attacks are made, and there is little or no communication between the parties. Examples from experiences in recovery described no communication, stalled negotiations, an inability to come to some agreement, or jealousies between organisations.

Destructive Conflict

Includes many and multiple issues and the experiences of conflict are often unrelated to the trigger of the conflict.
In this type of conflict there is a lot of 'digging up the past'.
Examples include public meetings with outright blame, also perceptions of not being heard and not having power or control.

Hostile Conflict

This is where the conflict is openly public. Often one party is presented as being 'wronged' and the other as the cause of the conflict.

Polarised Conflict

The most escalated level of conflict is the polarized conflict where groups are unable to tolerate each other, there may be negative public banter, and physical force involved.

HOW TO DEAL WITH CONFLICT - A CAUSES LENS

1. Information & Communication and 2. Structures

- Bring all the information into the conversation – welcome it (this requires resources)
- If meeting with a group: The bigger the group of participants, the better your chance of having a conversation and resolving because of the diversity of perspectives to work with (smaller groups get stuck faster and often tend to think alike)
- Get people to speak from the "I", speak for themselves.
- If this is public event– deal with the emotion first. Put this in the room before you begin to talk about the issues. This may need to be done in waves, for example, discussing the issue in the context of emotion. Choose techniques suited to dealing with high emotion.
- Use purpose and start and finish times, but not agendas with time frames. Allow the conversation to go where it needs to go.

3. Interests

- What is above the table and is visible to most?
- What is under the table and not visible to most?

- Get the hidden interests out into the open.

Foundational to working with conflict:

- Understand the visible power, hidden power and invisible power present in a social system.
- Approaches need to be thought through carefully.
- Use one to one, or smaller groups who know and trust each other. If a larger groups where there may be the potential for conflict – care & preparation through conversation and skilled facilitation is needed.
- Consider 'Theory U' as an approach to operating from a space of future possibility.

4. Values and 5. Relationships

- These bases/foundations of conflict are often Hostile and Polarised (see escalation).
- To deal with these:
  - get them out in the open by naming them, without resolving them;
  - get into relationship by engaging in conversation;
  - if meeting together, help people in the room to suspend their judgments;
  - ask for their expectations for how others will participate.

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WHAT IS POSSIBLE?   TRANSFORMING CONFLICT...

WHAT ARE THE NEXT WISE STEPS THAT YOU COULD USE IN SITUATIONS OF CONFLICT?

- Know your own style, your triggers, and seek support if you need it. It is important to have some sense of being able to work (in your locus of control) with the dynamics which are often strongly and passionately expressed. If you are 'independent', enabling fair governance, the task is to maintain objectivity and distance, yet care about the issues.

- Use the appropriate approach (community engagement and community development fields have a wealth of approaches –Community Recovery Handbook, p36).

- Tailor strategies to the context – cause and extent (type) and escalation of conflict.

- Recognise that everyone will be constructing and reconstructing their identity as a survivor of loss, in negotiation with others, in a social context. Find the common ground, common values, common interest to set a foundation for dialogue or action. Get the hidden 'stuff' out into the open. Ensure both feelings and facts are mutually understood.

- Who might be best to lead or support the work? Consider the following:
  - Clearly define who I am working for, and the agenda I need to serve.
  - Determine if there is a conflict of interest involved and, if so, where does this lie?
  - Explore the known benefits of having an independent facilitator who is also committed to the process and outcome.

REMEMBER:

- Conflict is real and can undermine a good process if not managed

- Conflict will almost always be present in some form

- Pay attention and support people and relationships moving through conflict

- This is stressful work, so reach out for support from colleagues to assist in keeping yourself grounded

- Conflict can be a creative force in your process

- When working in conflict situations, employ your own strategies for wellbeing and reach out for the supports you need on the way.
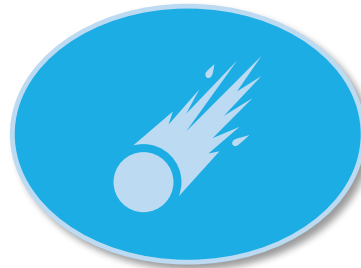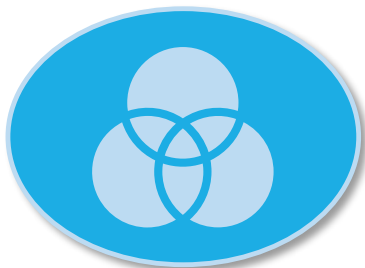
A LIVING DEMOCRACY:
WHAT CAN HAPPEN IN COMMUNITIES AFTER A DISASTER? (3)

Five years after the 2008 Cedar Rapids floods in Iowa in the USA, and in the midst of conflict, Parker Palmer and Carrie Newcomer were invited to work with four hundred local community leaders*. They explored what was happening through the lens the "habits of the heart" that sustain and build democracy. These habits are deeply ingrained ways of seeing, being and responding to life that involve our minds, our emotions, our self-images and our concepts of meaning and purpose. How might your work with your communities grow these habits and build thriving communities?

Chuck Peters, Cedar Rapids, personal communication with Louise Mitchell, 2018

Habits of the Heart that sustain and build democracy (Parker J Palmer)				
1. An understanding that we are all in this together.	2. An appreciation of the value of 'otherness', diversity, hospitality.	3. An ability to hold tension in life-giving ways, holding them creatively, to generate new understanding.	4. A sense of personal voice and agency. Contributing through checking our truth with the truths of others.	5. A capacity to create community. This enables 'power with' and speaking and acting as citizens.
HUMILITY			CHUTZPAH (confidence/boldness)	