

**Lessons From Community:
Embracing and Engaging in Constructive Conflict**

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Dispute Resolution

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Chapter 1: Introduction

An intentional community is a group of people who have created a common way of life for the attainment of a certain set of goals. These communities are considered intentional because people or members are consciously and purposefully joined as a group in order to create a way of life (Shenker, 1986). Often, intentional communities are referred to as communes, cooperatives, co-housing units, intentional families or kibbutzim. No two communities are identical, even though they satisfy the criteria within the intentional community definition (Kidder, 2002). While living in an intentional community is not the norm in the United States, thousands of people live in rural eco-villages, urban housing cooperatives, and other manifestations of intentional community living. Demographic trends throughout the world indicate that more and more people are moving into urban environments (United Nations, 2003). With these trends, coupled with the rising cost of housing, one could infer that some people choose communal living out of financial necessity. Others seek intentional communities because they want to share a communal life with other people.

The primary purpose of this project is to assess the ways intentional communities prepare for and manage conflict. The importance of this project is related to the relatively high rate at which intentional communities disintegrate or fail to get off the ground. Most intentional communities that have disintegrated have not done so because of financial difficulties, lack of outside community support, or members' desire to simply leave the community. Rather, many intentional communities dissolve because of internal conflict that is not managed, which brings the community to a point where it can no longer function properly (Leaf Christian, 2003). The issue of intentional communities falling

apart is important to those currently living in community and those attempting to create new sustainable intentional communities.

This study focuses on intentional, established communities rather than more spontaneous communal living situations. However, the study's value extends to other forms of communal living and cooperative organizations. Roommates living together out of financial necessity can incorporate lessons learned from this study in order to manage conflict more effectively in their home. Furthermore, this study involves communities that generate income through some form of communal or collectively owned business. Thus, its value also extends to business organizations seeking to create conflict management systems. Family-run or cooperative businesses are the most parallel organizations.

It is important for research on the topic to address the question of how communities prepare for conflict and whether that preparation actually trickles down to daily management of conflict by community members. Some intentional communities have specific ways to address conflict and manage it, including training for members regarding conflict resolution theory and skills. Other research has illustrated that some communities never address these issues in a formal manner or provide training (Mazo, 1995). This project seeks to understand the relationship between the presence of conflict resolution preparation and its effectiveness in creating healthy dispute resolution practices in communities.

The primary research question of this project is: what are different intentional communities doing to prepare for internal conflict? And, what works about these approaches? Successfully answering these questions will begin to create answers for

those living in intentional communities about specific techniques for conflict preparation they can begin to implement. This will assist communities in becoming more sustainable and higher functioning.

Wagner (1996) describes frustration with a researcher's attempt to answer questions such as, "Why do communities always fail?" This question assumes that there is a singular set of criteria by which it is possible to judge the success of a community. Moreover, the question assumes that intentional communities always fail, an unsubstantiated claim rebutted by a number of long-term communities throughout the world. Still, many intentional communities do struggle with sustainability.

This project is not an attempt to state how communities have failed and why, but to assert that conflict exists in interpersonal relationships and that those in community can benefit from further understanding and preparing for it. This project is intended to shed light upon the issue of managing conflict in communities and creating a positive process around conflict management. Recognizing that conflict is normal, healthy, and expected within relationships can begin a positive conflict management process. This does not detract from the need for process and management skills around even small conflicts. Working through small issues and tensions will create the community glue required for dealing with larger issues and full-blown conflict. Conflict that does arise can be used as an agent for positive change within the community (Deutsch, 1973).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Within all relationships struggle and conflict will be present at some level (Deutsch, 1973). The same can be said for the relationships that make up intentional communities. A full toolbox for dealing with conflict will be beneficial for managing these routine relationship issues. Conflict is natural and necessary to any fully functioning relationship and is a potential agent of positive change (Deutsch). Deutsch also states that conflict prevents stagnation, stimulates interest, and is the root of social and personal change (1973). In the context of intentional communities, a conflict management system can be used to provide particular skills and a framework to use in handling conflict situations more constructively, by creating the ability to maintain the community through sustainable, long term approaches to conflict transformation.

Defining a Common Language

The term intentional communities must be defined more clearly in order to avoid misunderstanding or misuse. Leafe Christian (2003) defines intentional community as a group of people who have chosen to live with or near enough to each other to carry out their shared lifestyle or common purpose together. She adds the terms “land-based” and “residential” to her definition to highlight the importance of living in physical proximity. The Fellowship for Intentional Community, a resource organization, defines an intentional community as a group of people who have chosen to live together with a common purpose, working cooperatively to create a lifestyle that reflects their shared core values (www.fc.org, 2004). In addition, Kidder (2002) defines intentional communities as locations where people choose to live in order to share community life with their neighbors. In all three definitions, three characteristics are important: 1)

Intentional communities involve a group of people living in physical proximity to one another; 2) The group of people consciously and voluntarily choose to live together; and 3) The group shares a common purpose, common values and a common lifestyle. This study uses these three characteristics to define intentional communities.

Intentional communities are self-contained communities with the need to survive and function efficiently (Shenker, 1986). While intentional communities differ from ethnic groups and other collectives due to their voluntary nature, these communities are similar to groups such as the workplace, organizations and families. Baumann defines intentional communities as extended families based on something other than blood ties (2001). Common values, ideology, purpose and lifestyles are the bond that forms these extended communities or families.

As Kidder states, intentional communities practice various degrees of communalism and sharing. On one end of the spectrum, intentional communities share money, automobiles, children, housing and sexual partners. On the other end of the spectrum, intentional communities share only bylaws and agreements about living in community but do not share material resources. Unfortunately, no single practice or principle of equality or equity can guarantee peaceful coexistence and sustainability in an intentional community (2002).

Historical Perspective on Intentional Communities

According to Bauman, the 1960's saw the rise of communality, with the 70's building what would become known as intentional communities, based on shared labor, resources, consensual decision making, and private living space within a common setting. Today, there are hundreds of thousands of members of thousands of intentional

communities throughout the world. Intentional communities have often been created in reaction to society in order to create social change. Bauman states that intentional communities are part of the fabric of nonviolent dissent in America (2001).

Historically, these communities have not maintained longevity as a norm. In fact, they are marked by historical failure (Shenker, 1986). For example, in a study performed in 1972 involving 91 American communes, only 11 survived 25 years or more as a community (Hechter, 1990). More recently, Leafe Christian's (2003) study of ecovillages found that nearly 90 percent of aspiring communities did not succeed in formation because of financial problems or internal conflict. Even the kibbutz movement in Israel, one of the most successful models of intentional communities, has experienced significant decline in recent years (Sternbach, 2002). Often, intentional communities do not meet specific predetermined goals and end up disbanding for negative reasons such as internal, destructive conflict (Shenker). Nonetheless, it is difficult to analyze goal accomplishment because success of an intentional community is fully self-defined (Shenker).

Intentional Communities as Work Groups

Rioch (1975) states that humans create and enter groups easily; however the formation of a group committed to a serious task, without fanaticism or illusion, is an extremely difficult process and a rare human occurrence. One specific type of group is a self managing work group.

Hackman (1980) defines self-managing work groups as intact social systems whose members have the authority to handle internal processes as they see fit in order to generate a specific group product, service or decision. Furthermore, he posits that they

are real groups, with the members having individual relationships with other individuals in the group. In addition, they are work groups, with a defined task that will produce output. And they are self managing groups, in that members have the authority to manage their own task and interpersonal processes. Within a work group there is a primary task, defined as the task which the group must perform in order to survive (Rioch). Intentional communities are similar to self managing work groups.

Intentional communities can be defined as work groups as a whole, and in parts. When a community has a large decision to be made, members come together and hold a meeting to discuss how it will be made (Sandelin, 1999). When there is an important task to be done, the members work out a way that it will be managed (Sandelin).

In his work group definition, Hackman (1980) posits three criteria of group success. First, the output of the group meets or exceeds the prior standards of quality and quantity. Second, the group experience is more satisfying than frustrating for the individual members. Finally, the social process in place enhances the group's ability to work together. These same basic components of effectiveness can be applied to intentional communities.

Families and Family Theory

In addition to work groups, intentional communities can also fit the definition of families, when the term is defined in a broad and inclusive manner. Therefore, family theory can be applicable to intentional communities.

Definition of Family

Some family studies theorists and feminists have been arguing for the widening of the definition of family. In the United States, family has commonly been defined as a

nuclear unit of one mother, one father and children. However, this definition is not inclusive of all of the current forms of family. Sociologists have given little attention to non-kin friendships as family units (Scanzoni & Marsiglio, 1991). One researcher was unable to find any families in an urban black community until she redefined family as “the smallest organized, durable network of kin and non-kin who interact daily, providing the domestic needs of children assuring their survival” (Scanzoni & Marsiglio). When asked to define family, 75% of respondents in a national survey replied, “a group of people who love and care for each other” (Scanzoni & Marsiglio). In a zoning challenge in the early 1990s, the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled that 10 college students living together, sharing meals, chores and a checking account were the “functional equivalent” of a family (Marciano, 1991). These are general, inclusive definitions that can fit many situations and can also be expanded to fit situations such as intentional communities more fully.

Intentional communities as families. Family systems theorists and practitioners, such as Matheny and Zimmerman (2001), see families as complicated interacting systems, which may be similar to human services organizations, sport teams, businesses and family businesses. Families, as social systems, are governed by hierarchy, roles, rules, subsystems-coalitions, homeostasis, and development or growth (Matheny & Zimmerman). This more detailed and inclusive definition of family can easily be applied to intentional communities. According to this definition, it could be argued that intentional communities act as family units. In fact, many in intentional communities refer to their fellow communitarians as their family, and some community members have

taken the name of their community as their last name (Kaplowitz, 1999; Sandhill, 1997). It may be then, that family theory can be applied productively to intentional communities.

Family Systems Theory

Family systems theory focuses on the entire family unit when assessing the needs of an individual. This theory is derived from group and family models that identify problems and conflicts as the consequences of dysfunctional reflexive relationships among members (Hoffman, 1981). Building on this theory, Dr. Murray Bowen developed the Bowen family systems theory as a tool for improving individual and family functioning (Sagar, 1997). As Sagar states, it is a theory of human behavior that views the family as an emotional unit and uses systems thinking to describe the complex interactions in the unit. This theory is based on the belief that family members are intensely connected emotionally. Continuously, family members solicit each other's approval, support and attention and react to each other's expectations, distress and needs. This connectedness and reactivity make the functioning of family members highly interdependent. A change in one member's functioning is predictably followed by reciprocal changes in the functioning of others. Families differ in their degree of interdependence, but dependence is always present to some degree. When family members become anxious, the anxiety can escalate by spreading infectiously among the group. As anxiety goes up, the emotional connectedness of family members can become more stressful than comforting. Eventually, one or more members may feel overwhelmed, isolated, or out of control (Sagar).

In treatment, often family counseling, a family systems observer would provide feedback to the family about their specific interactions. Proponents believe that by

transforming the interactions in the family, anxiety-producing behaviors can be diminished. Also, Bowen posits that each member must begin to develop a strong sense of self, recognizing this is a long and never-ending process. (Sagar, 1997).

Bowen's work has been used by Comella (1995) to analyze organizational group activity. Using some of the basic elements of Bowen's theory—a function of anxiety in relationship systems, importance of definition of self—the role of a calm leader with a strongly differentiated self becomes clear. Bowen's theory posits that any individual in a relationship system can calm an anxious system by “defining a self.” An individual defines a self in the organizational context by explaining his or her position and setting the expectation that each individual has responsibility for his or her own behavior. When difficult relationships must be managed, the calming member stays connected to all parties but expects the individuals involved to solve the problem (Comella, 1995).

In organizational relationship systems, an individual has the most influence on the relationship systems at the same hierarchical level, below and just above. The more highly placed an individual is in the organization, the greater the influence he or she can have on agitating or calming the system (Comella, 1995).

Family Strategies

A systems view of families suggests that there is interdependence between the composition of the family, the tasks the family has to negotiate, and the strategies that the family uses to achieve the tasks. Anderson and Sabatelli (2003) identify five strategies to help families achieve their necessary tasks: identity strategies, boundary strategies, maintenance strategies, strategies for coping with the emotional climate, and strategies for managing stress.

This theory applies directly to intentional communities because those in an intentional community act as a deliberately chosen family. In addition, there are many tasks necessary for those in the community to complete. When these communities are also working to create an income as one unit, the importance of task achievement becomes even more pertinent. In this sense, intentional communities are similar to a family and similar to a family run business.

Identity strategies. Certain identity strategies are used in family theory. Members create a framework of meaning through family images and themes. The information in this framework, such as who each member is and how to interact with others, becomes part of the family's and the individual's identity. This also creates expectations for how others will act based on past behavior. This framework of meaning influences patterns of interaction by prescribing the expectations that all the members are to follow (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2003).

The themes that families can develop during this process are numerous, and those in intentional communities maintain numerous important identities. Describing one's family and describing one's intentional community can be very similar experiences. In each instance, issues of functionality and dysfunction come to the surface.

Boundary strategies. Boundaries delineate the family's relationship to external systems. This is directly related to the family's permeability, how easily they let others into the unit. Internal boundaries relate to the closeness permitted between members of the family. The degree to which each member's autonomy and individuality are tolerated is regulated by internal boundaries (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2003).

Maintenance strategies. All families establish priorities in terms of how they want the family to be maintained. Maintenance resources are time, money, and energy that can be put towards tasks. The manner in which decisions are made in a family creates the power hierarchy. The way the resources are used shows what the family feels are priorities. Maintenance strategies can vary from very flexible to very rigid. The family system is adequate so long as the maintenance tasks are completed (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2003). These same decisions must be made in intentional communities, often in community meetings (Sandelin, 1999).

Emotional strategies. Managing the emotional climate of the family involves the evolution of the strategies for nurturing and supporting individual family members, building family cohesion, and managing conflict and tension (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2003). The strategies families use are diverse, and become the rules of the family, although they may be experienced differently by each member. When each member's expectations for how these issues will be managed are similar, family harmony ensues. When the expectations are dissimilar, tension and conflict ensue. Building family cohesion and harmony requires strategies that distribute power in ways that allow members to feel positive about their involvement in the family. An important indication of power is what decision-making strategies the family uses. When members are perceived to have legitimate power, they are viewed as exercising authority rather than control. Non legitimate use of power is perceived as control and domination (Anderson & Sabatelli).

Families have a variety of ways to manage conflict. Some families deny its existence; others detour the conflict onto a third party; while others address conflict with

open communication (Sagar, 1997). The formation of subsystems around the detoured conflict create patterns of interaction that reverberate throughout the entire family system.

Stress. In family systems theory, stress is described as the degree of pressure exerted on the family to alter the strategies it employs to accomplish its basic tasks (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2003). Stress informs the system about the functioning of the system and the necessity for changes to enhance or restore the system. When changes are needed, the family's patterns and rules of regulation are altered accordingly. Families encounter normative stressors; those that are expected over the life course, and non-normative stressors, those that are unexpected. Coping in a family system is the enactment of strategies that minimize the stress and keep the family functioning in an efficient and effective manner. Cognitive strategies used are the perceptions and appraisals of the stressor, and the behavioral strategies used are the actions the family takes to manage the stress. The attitudes and skills possessed by each individual family member make up the properties of the family that serve to minimize vulnerability of the family to stress. Healthy coping mechanisms reduce stress while contributing to the growth and well being of each member (Anderson & Sabatelli).

In summary, literature on family systems theory is applicable to intentional communities because the members act as a deliberate family. Composition of the family, the tasks the family is engaged in and the strategies the family uses to achieve these tasks are all interconnected. Therefore, research focused on intentional communities is enriched with an understanding of family systems theory.

Issues that Threaten Intentional Communities

Similar to families and work groups, intentional communities face issues that threaten their existence. Leafe Christian (2003), after looking at why potential communities fail, argues that the kind of conflict occurring most commonly in communities is structural conflict. By structural conflict, Leafe Christian refers to problems or issues of omission in the organizational structure of the intentional community. Founding members failing to put certain group processes in place or refusing to make important decisions leads to structural conflict within the community. This threatens their existence.

Leafe Christian (2003) recommends six elements of community building founding members should address at the outset to avoid structural conflict:

1. Identifying a community vision and creating vision documents;
2. Choosing fair, participatory decision-making process appropriate for the group. And if the members choose consensus, they should get trained in it;
3. Making clear agreements – in writing;
4. Learning good communication and group process skills. Making clear communication and resolving conflicts a priority;
5. In choosing cofounders and new members, selecting for emotional maturity;
6. Learning the head and heart skills, or the intellectual and the emotional skills, necessary for communal living.

Since only ten percent of communities came to fruition in Leafe Christian's (2003) observations, she argues that it is pertinent to address these six elements in community formation. Not learning and practicing good process from the start is a set-up

for damaging conflict and potential break up of the community. Leafe Christian states, “For life in community to be better than it was before, *we’ve* got to be better than we were before”.

Research shows that in the broader context of group dynamics, destructive conflicts are often caused by a lack of solidarity (Hechter, 1990) and lack of personal and group identity (Coleman, 2000). Intentional communities have been shown to persist where the individual need for and expression of identity is respected and promoted (Shenker, 1986).

Threats to Identity

Intentional communities have the potential for disbandment when their identity, or the identity of those in the group, is threatened or not recognized. For this reason, issues surrounding identity are especially prevalent in intractable conflict (Shenker, 1986). Because identity is seen as tied to the most basic of human needs, threats to identity are seen as threatening to one’s very existence. Failure of intentional communities can often be linked to identity issues. Some identity conflicts within groups are denial of one’s personal identity; people feeling they have no voice in decision-making processes; unequal balance of in-group power; and unequal access to resources (Coleman, 2000; Fisher, 2000).

Leafe Christian’s (2003) work draws the link from these common theoretical identity themes to their existence within intentional communities specifically. She argues that conflicts within communities often appear focused on ideological issues or disputes over contradictory values. However, underneath these conflicts are often personal issues of fear, guilt and resentment. At the very core of the conflict may lie an individual’s

basic human needs for acceptance, approval, control and love. Leafe Christian illustrates that issues of identity, particularly recognition of one's worth and value, contribute to conflict within communities. Furthermore, structural problems regarding process and power imbalances can create identity-based conflict because members with no decision-making power or no resource power feel threatened and powerless within the community (Leafe Christian).

The identity of those in intentional communities varies from other types of identities in that people choose their identity in the group, and this identity can be easily shed, unlike other identities such as race or cultural upbringing. The voluntary nature of intentional communities can be seen as a benefit because it provided members with the freedom to choose to leave a community; however, it has the potential to create a more transient community because people can easily discard their identity as part of the community.

The Paradoxes of Identity and Involvement in a Group

In all groups, there is a paradox of identity between one's desire for identity as an individual and for the identity that comes from being a member of the group (Berg & Smith, 1987). The issue of maintaining individuality while a member of a group is complicated. This paradox draws on personal psychology as well as group dynamics research. Membership in an intentional community has the potential to overwhelm one's identity. Nonetheless, there is room for one to maintain individuality in a healthy community environment. As Berg and Smith state,

If the *group* is founded on similarities, then what becomes of the *individual*? The group cannot come into existence as a psychologically meaningful unit unless

individuals are able to express their individuality, their differences, so that connections can be found (p. 90)

Berg and Smith (1987) state that when a conflict arises between how an individual wants to behave, and how the group prescribes one should act, the pressure falls on the individual to change their behavior in order to adapt to the group. This is in order to maintain their group membership.

Berg and Smith (1987) argue that there is also potential within a community for an individual to take an active role in shaping the group's identity even while the group simultaneously shapes the identity of the individual.

The paradox of identity conceives of the individual as deriving meaning from membership in the group while, at the same time, the group derives meaning from its individual members. ... The struggle so often observed *between* the individual and the group is predominantly a struggle occurring simultaneously *within* the individual and *within* the group over how to live with the tensions created by the mutual process of adjustment of the individual to the group and the group to its individual members (p. 93).

When someone opts to live in a community group, there is the potential for these tensions and concerns to increase. When a community runs a business together, and share living space, identity issues may become overwhelming. If someone is spending their employment time working within the community, taking on tasks to keep up a community and socializing within the community, their sense of self identity may begin to be submerged. Berg and Smith recommend that individuals learn to gain a perspective on themselves in order to grow. This depends upon the individual's ability to get outside

of their experience while simultaneously remaining inside the experience. Recognizing the difficulty in this self-reflection, Berg and Smith advise groups to bring in an outside observer to offer reactions to the group. Fulfilling group participation must include “both experience *and* observation, action *and* reflection” for both the individuals and the group as a whole (Berg & Smith, p. 99).

The opposite of an individual’s complete investment in the group is if they hold back and refuse to engage in the group. This leaves the group “a hollow cocoon which no one wants to be a part of” (Berg & Smith, 1987, p. 100). This withholding of one’s engagement from the group is what makes a group unsafe for the other members. The varying levels of engagement between individuals in the community can create confusing expectations for members. When people personally invest into the group in an equitable manner, the connections between individuals begin to form the foundation of the group.

Baumann (2001) posits that in any familial relationship, it is healthiest when the members are well integrated and autonomous and where there is space for flexibility. The same criteria might be expected to apply in intentional communities. They persist where social meanings and social practices are well integrated but still respect the need for personal autonomy. In this way, as Baumann states, individuals are able to feel close identification with, and commitment to, their communities. Intentional communities have, in general, negotiated the tricky territory of individualized identity and group conformity. For all the diversity within and between intentional communities, they largely share amongst themselves a desire to create a better society through their very existence (Baumann).

Lack of Group Solidarity and Cohesion

Another important aspect of a community is the existence of group solidarity and cohesion. A lack of cohesion within any group is indicative of underlying conflict (Lederach, 1999). Cohesion should not be confused with homogeneity, as a balance between diversity and solidarity is important. Positive group solidarity has been shown to assist in maintaining a group's identity and longevity. In addition, group cohesion often depends on a clear decision-making process, and it is also affected by the source of authority in that process (Shenker, 1986). Clarity in the way decisions are made will create cohesion, in that members will understand how change is made (Hechter, 1990). In fact, through allowing people to express personal identity within the community, solidarity and cohesion can be created, when these expressions match or complement the community's ideological standards (Shenker).

Lack of Trust

Building trust maintains intergroup identity, cohesion and sustainability. The pre-existence of trust between members of the community makes resolving conflict easier and more effective (Lewicki & Wiethoff, 2000). In intentional communities, simple actions such as sharing meals, household duties and time might build trust, especially identity-based trust.

Identity-based trust is based in identification with another's desires and intentions (Lewicki & Wiethoff, 2000). It occurs when mutual understanding reaches a level where one party can act as an agent of another by effectively understanding and appreciating another's wants. Lewicki and Wiethoff state that certain activities strengthen identity-based trust, such as developing a collective identity, co-location, creating joint goals, and

committing to commonly shared values. These are all characteristics that most intentional communities either create or strive to create through spending time sharing personal values, perceptions, motives and goals (Leafe Christian, 2003). When identity-based trust has developed, members have the ability to know and predict other members' needs, choices and preferences. This empathy with the other allows the individual to incorporate parts of the other's psyche into their own identity (Lewicki & Wiethoff).

Conflict

It is important to define conflict in order to prepare for and manage it. Morton Deutsch (1973) defines conflict as existing wherever incompatible activities occur. Actions incompatible with other actions prevent, obstruct, interfere, injure, or in some way make the first action less effective. Conflict can exist in an implicit or explicit manner. Once conflict is acted out, it is referred to as manifest conflict. Manifest conflict is the set of specific behaviors or actions that signal and comprise the conflict. Essentially, manifest conflicts are the actions that communicate the conflict (Deutsch, 1994). In assessing conflict in an intentional community, it is important to acknowledge pre-conflict and manifest conflict stages.

According to Deutsch (1973), it is imperative to acknowledge that conflict has many positive functions. It prevents stagnation, promotes curiosity and interest. It is the means through which problems can be aired and solutions created. In fact, conflict is at the root of personal and social change (Deutsch). Furthermore, Coser (1956) states that conflict is an important agent for establishing of full ego identity and personal autonomy. From this vantage point, it is clear that the purpose of conflict management in

communities is not to eliminate conflict, but to learn how to make it productive (Deutsch, 1973).

Destructive conflict expands and escalates even if its initial cause has dissipated, especially if the focus moves from specific actions to personality conflicts. Productive conflict is understood not so much by the conflict, but by the way it is managed. Conflict that achieves social change through a mutually rewarding process would be defined as a productive conflict (Deutsch). A perspective based on creative thinking can work to make conflict more productive than destructive. Looking to Deutsch's crude law of social relations highlights this concept. The law states, "the characteristic process and effects elicited by a given type of social relationship (cooperative or competitive) tend also to elicit that type of social relationship" (1973, p. 365).

Within communities, relationships and processes that facilitate mutual problem solving, openness, and mutual enhancement elicit, and are also elicited by, a cooperative orientation (Deutsch, 1973). The bonds that exist prior to conflict arising will directly affect the way conflict is managed. In a cohesive community, where conflict is most likely to be managed well, destructive conflict is likely to be avoided simply because members can see the potential damage it does to the community or to the members of the community (Deutsch). Conflict can either tear apart the fabric of a community, or build it stronger, depending upon the social structure in which it occurs (Coser, 1956).

Julie Mazo, a member of an intentional community, posits that the enmeshing of member's lives in community makes individual differences more easily apparent and joint decision making further highlights them. Consequently, Mazo (1995) states that

intentional communities have a special need for conflict resolution and problem solving skills.

Eliminating differences is not the goal of conflict preparation, this would deprive the intentional community of the richness that diversity brings. The purpose is to work with the whole spectrum of opinions and views to arrive at a resolution that respects all positions and can be accepted by those involved (Mazo, 1995).

Concrete Tools for Constructive Conflict

Setting standards at the outset regarding how a community will deal with conflict is vital to a successful community. If parties in a conflict are part of a group committed to a predetermined framework for handling conflict situations, the conflict is less likely to escalate into intractability (Deutsch, 1973). This applies directly to the experience of those individuals living in intentional communities. A conflict orientation, Deutsch points out, that enhances mutual interests, mutual power, and defines conflict as a mutual problem is likely to lead to constructive conflict. Also, a positive interest in the other's welfare is less likely to lead to destructive conflict.

It is important to not conceal conflict, but to keep the trajectory of escalation below the groups' threshold. Deutsch (1973, p. 383) discusses the valuable role of a third party in assisting a group to address conflict and work towards constructive conflict. He lists seven key elements for the third party to adhere to in a conflict situation:

1. Help the conflicting parties identify and confront the issues in conflict.
2. Help to provide favorable circumstances and conditions for confronting the issues.
3. Help to remove the blocks and distortions in the communication process so that mutual understanding can develop.

4. Help establish such norms for rational interaction as mutual respect, open communication, the use of persuasion rather than coercion, and the desirability of reaching a mutually satisfying agreement.
5. Help to determine what kinds of solutions are possible and making suggestions about possible solutions.
6. Help make a workable agreement acceptable to all parties in conflict.
7. Help make the negotiators and the agreement that is arrived at seem prestigious and attractive to interested audiences, especially the groups represented by the negotiators.

Sustainability

Effort should be made to ensure that this process is sustainable, creating a proactive process that is capable of regenerating itself over time through the continuous building of relationships within the community (Lederach, 1999). With relationships as the focus, an infrastructure of peace and conflict resolution must be built over the long term (Lederach). Therefore, in an intentional community, long-term commitment, relationship building, and consistency must be present (Lederach). Interestingly, relationships form the key for identity-based trust as well (Lewicki & Wiethoff, 2000). As relationships develop over time, patterns of trust or distrust dominate the relationship, which creates stability (Lewicki & Wiethoff). Therefore, identity-based trust and sustainable relationships are interconnected aspects in constructive conflict resolution.

Consensus

A common method of decision making in intentional communities is that of consensus. However, it is potentially detrimental to the community if those attempting the process do not fully understand it and have not been trained in it (Leafe Christian,

2003). The basic consensus process involves discussing a proposal and when its time to decide, members either give consent, stand aside or block the proposal. According to Leafe Christian, giving consent means being able to live with the proposal. Standing aside is a signal of principled non-participation, used when a member does not fully support the proposal but does not want to block the rest of the group from adopting it. Blocking a proposal stops it from being adopted. This is a serious motion and most trained in consensus decision making will only block a proposal three or four times in their life. Blocking is intended for when the proposal would violate the morals, ethics or safety of the community (Leafe Christian). After a group has been trained in consensus, it can put an end to extended and frustrating community meetings and begin to create a philosophy of group inclusion drawing on the ideas, insights, wisdom, and creativity of each member (Leafe Christian). This is just the basic structure of one type of consensus decision making. The methods abound and finding one, or a combination, that can work for a specific community is important. Contact information and books regarding consensus decision-making training can be found in the Resource Appendix.

Nonviolent Communication

Nonviolent Communication is a communication method used to transform conflict and enhance interpersonal connection (Kashtan, 1999). Nonviolent Communication was developed by Marshal Rosenberg in the 1960's as a tool for those in conflict to use in order to remain empathetic and compassionate. It is based on the premise that the more aware one is of their own and others' feelings and needs, the easier it is to see essential similarities and create connections with others. Creating a connection and seeing

similarities is believed to lead to a higher level of compassion between those in conflict.

Kashtan describes the four main communication tools that this method relies upon:

1. Describe the behavior or situation observed with non-judgmental language;
2. Express actual feelings and emotions in an effort to be vulnerable and self revealing;
3. Express your own needs and values;
4. Request something, do-able actions, rather than states of being.

Further reference information about Nonviolent Communication can be found in the Resource Appendix of this paper.

Conclusion

This study focuses on intentional communities, or groups of people who have created a common way of life in order to achieve a certain set of goals. For this research project, intentional communities are defined as a group of people who consciously and voluntarily chose to live together in physical proximity. The members share a common vision, values and lifestyle.

Literature from family systems theory, group dynamics, organizational psychology and conflict resolution scholars combines with literature specifically related to intentional communities to provide an overview of the subject. Understanding conflict within intentional communities is enhanced by surveying these fields. This literature provided a backdrop for research focused on conflict resolution within intentional communities. The primary purpose of this project is to assess the ways intentional communities prepare for and manage conflict by answering the research questions: What are different intentional communities doing to prepare for internal conflict? And, what works about these approaches? That assessment began with surveying related literature.

It then involved qualitative field research in order to learn from the real life experiences of people living in intentional communities.

Chapter 3: Methods

This study seeks to assess the various ways intentional communities manage and prepare for conflict within their communities and to look at the ways in which various methods work. To determine the factors involved in this topic, I conducted a small qualitative study, an inquiry process with the purpose of understanding a social or human problem through words and reporting by informants (Creswell, 1994). The ultimate goal of this qualitative research project is to provide intentional communities—and the thousands of people who live in communal settings—with concrete suggestions for managing conflict. While some research exists on the subject, few researchers have completed field-based projects involving multiple communities. Furthermore, little research or literature on the topic has come from a dispute resolution framework.

Participant data, face-to-face interviews, survey forms and archival strategies were the main research methods used to study the way specific communities prepare for and manage conflict. Data collection occurred during community field visits, interviews and survey responses. A detailed coding system was then used to generate meaning from the resulting data.

Participants

People currently living in intentional communities served as the participants of this study. In order to provide conclusive results, this project focused on a particular set of intentional communities in the United States. Two communities were selected for site visits and 20 communities were chosen for survey evaluations based on a specific, strict set of criteria in order to ensure comparable data from a desired group of intentional communities. Eight communities responded to the surveys, including respondents from

the two visited communities. Thus, the final data comes from eight intentional communities. Causes and implications of the low response rate for the surveys are discussed below in the section on obstacles and challenges of the research.

Selection Process

As the literature review suggests, intentional communities come in various forms, from religious communities founded by one spiritual leader to urban cohousing projects. In order to narrow the scope of this project, and to access a very committed group of individuals within communities, I initially narrowed my focus to communities with four common characteristics:

- 1) A co-habitual living situation, involving no less than 10 individuals;
- 2) Self-defined identity as an intentional community including the goal of sustainability;
- 3) Continuous existence for at least five years;
- 4) An established method of generating income for the community as one unit.

After further thought about the need for a comparable sample group of communities, I added two additional criteria:

- 5) The absence of a charismatic leader, spiritual or secular;
- 6) No identification with a specific religion or sect.

I established these criteria in order to narrow the project but also to enable my research to avoid analyzing communities that were so different that I would not be able to offer prescriptive advice on managing conflict due to vastly different communal structures and ideologies. The first four criteria were important because this study seeks to focus on long-term communities with members who have a desire to keep their community

together in the future. The fourth criterion is particularly important in this process because sharing a common source of income adds a level of commitment to the community and this works toward community sustainability (Leafe Christian, 2003). I added the lack of charismatic leader criteria because I thought a collective leadership model would be important for understanding conflict management practices within communities, particularly with regard to group decision-making processes. The final criteria allowed me to avoid focusing on religious communities that form for different reasons than secular or non-sectarian spiritual communities that do not adhere to one specific set of traditional religious theology or ideology. The use of the six criteria led to a data set of communities that look similar in structure and purpose.

Methodologies Used

Information for this project was generated through the ethnographic methods of examining, experiencing and inquiring (Wolcott, 1999). Examining was used to research background information on intentional communities and to synthesize data from archival documents. Experiencing was done through site visits to specific intentional communities. Inquiring involved two methods of interviewing: structured interviewing and surveys. Using these research methods, I was able to experience intentional communities firsthand, supplementing that observation with interviews seeking group members' interpretation of their experiences. Archival research provided supplemental information to the participant observation and interviewing. In addition, archival sources provided the basis for initial information regarding the characteristics of intentional communities.

Examining: Archival Sources

The field work for this project began and ended with archival sources. Wolcott (1999) refers to “archival strategies” as using the work of others—information that has been produced or left by people in past times—as one method of ethnography. For example, rock carvings, fossil records, or near-extinct language recordings provide data for different ethnographers. Wolcott’s broad definition of archive extends to “*any* document that proves valuable as a source of information” (p. 59).

With this definition of archive in mind, I began the research project with an overall survey of the intentional communities’ landscape within the United States. The Fellowship for Intentional Communities’ website (www.ic.org) provided an excellent initial resource because it contained an extremely comprehensive list of contact information for intentional communities throughout the world. However, it did not list details about how these communities operate. In order to obtain this information, I used the most widely accepted reference book on intentional communities, The Communities Directory, a resource book describing 728 intentional communities around the world (Fellowship for Intentional Communities, 2000). This served as an archival strategy because I was using research collected by other people as a vital source for my own data. The directory was particularly useful in targeting specific communities because it described their characteristics in detail.

I used The Communities Directory to determine which communities fit the established criteria. While the directory does not list all of these specific criteria, I was able to deduce this from comparing the “cross-reference chart” and the “community

listings” sections to find communities that fit all six criteria (Fellowship for Intentional Communities, 2000). Twenty communities fit this strict criterion.

In addition to using archival strategies to sift through details about the numerous intentional communities, I used archival strategies in two other ways. First, in order to select two communities for participant observation I used other sources, primarily community websites, to select the ideal communities. The second way I used archival strategies was in comparing the data from the survey communities with other intentional communities in order to analyze my results in more detail.

Experiencing: Participant Observation

After investigating intentional communities throughout the United States and narrowing the list down to the 20 communities, I then chose two representative communities for site visits. Using Wolcott’s (1999) work on ethnography, this research draws a distinction between observation and interviewing. Recognizing this distinction allowed the researcher to remain consciously mindful of the data gathered through observing interactions outside of formal interview settings. Furthermore, participant observation required the researcher to participate in the life of the community rather than remaining a passive and detached observer. In short, participant observation refers to firsthand experience observing a particular group of people (Wolcott). Participant observation was an essential research method utilized during visits to two representative communities.

Selection and recruitment. After talking to communities within geographically attainable distance, I decided on two communities that embodied all six criteria. The two communities were long lasting, both with founding members still living within the

community. Both communities rely on sophisticated methods for creating income as one unit. While they both possess an interest in spiritual living, they do not adhere to a specific religion or follow a spiritual leader. Both communities have established methods of resolving conflict. In addition, they were also enthusiastic about sharing their lessons and discussing their communal experiences with a researcher focused on a topic they found essential to their communities' sustainability.

Participant observation methods. Essentially, the information gathered at these two communities was used as case study data to offer further insight into community life (Creswell, 1994). I made a conscious decision and agreement with the communities to spend two full days in each community as a participant observer. I participated in their daily communal life, including meal preparation, child supervision and helping with their daily chores. Participant observation also included involvement in group discussions and helping the community with manual labor for their community business. While visiting, I also observed the daily activities of each community, watching community members cross country ski in one setting and take care of children in another. When I had the opportunity, I would write notes about these observations because of their importance in capturing a complete picture of the two communities. This data collection sometimes happened immediately after events and other times took place at the end of the day.

Throughout the participant observation, I attempted to balance imposing my agenda with simply observing the daily activities and conversations of the participants (Wolcott, 1999). The risk of intrusion was particularly relevant at one community because three other researchers were observing the community at the same time I was

present. (Two were focusing on the environmental aspect of the community and one was researching the spiritual nature of the community).

Participant observation was essential to this study because it allowed me to more fully understand the daily interactions among community members and to observe the overall environment of two intentional communities. It put the research in context and provided me with a foundational knowledge about community life. The third research method provided me with the most concrete data, but it was essential to include the participant observer method.

Inquiring: Structured Interviews and Surveys

This final method involved three forms of inquiry: casual conversation, structured interviews and surveys (Wolcott, 1999). While I took field notes regarding casual conversations with community members, my research methods focused on structured interviews and surveys.

Structured interviews. I performed qualitative research interviews with eight community members, four from each community. The participants interviewed varied in age, race, gender and ethnicity. Individual interviews lasted approximately one hour. No one under 18 was interviewed. In each setting, I simply asked the community for volunteers to participate in the interview process when I arrived in the community. Interviews were conducted on site during visits to each community. Some interviews were completely private, in an area away from other members. Other interviews took place in a more informal setting, at dinner or in the living room with people bustling through. I left the location of the interviews up to each person. In order to follow

structured interview guidelines, all interviewees were asked the same core questions in the same way (Wolcott, 1999). The interview questions are in Appendix B.

The interview questions were determined prior to the interview and focused on the objectives and themes of this study (Kvale, 1996). However, I went beyond the core questions to ask additional questions where it was necessary to fill in details or to gather omitted information (Weiss, 1994). When I felt that further meaning needed to be discovered from statements, I would ask another question (Kvale). I attempted to balance building a rapport with the interviewee by asking more surface questions with not wasting their time and getting the information I needed (Weiss).

The purpose of the interviews was to gain access to the lived world of the subjects. I chose to introduce the topic and focused theme of conflict in the interview, but the subjects chose specific instances of conflict, methods of handling, and meaning of conflict to discuss with me (Kvale, 1996). Recognizing the sensitive topic and potential intrusiveness of entering someone's community—essentially the family home—to ask personal questions, I worked to respect the privileged access I had gained into the subjects lives (Kvale).

As an attempt to test the content validity of my interview questions, my final question was “are there any questions you would have thought I would have asked about conflict that I did not?” I asked this because everyone defines conflict differently, and there was a chance that I was not asking the right questions to access peoples own ideas about conflict (Bernard, 2000).

Confidentiality, informed consent, and documents. Throughout the study, no personally identifying information was collected. While I asked the interviewees if I

could tape the interview in order to have better records for writing and data collection purposes, I made it clear that the tapes would not be used by anyone other than the researcher. Each participant was asked to sign the informed consent document. First names were used in the interview process in order to facilitate the building of a relationship between participants and myself; however, all names were changed in the presentation of data.

Community Surveys

Keeping in mind the six criteria for the communities I wanted to access, I initially looked through the index of The Communities Directory. Of the 728 communities listed, 50 fit my basic criteria regarding length of existence, number of members, leadership and religious affiliation (Fellowship for Intentional Communities, 2000). I then read the self-reporting done by each community for further information regarding income generation. This process narrowed the list to 20 communities that satisfied all six research criteria. Figure 1 outlines the specific characteristics of the final list of selected communities. All names of individuals and communities presented in this study are pseudonyms.

Figure 1

Community	year formed	members	decision-making
Green Meadow	1993	16	consensus
Sprouting Hope	1972	19	consensus
Casona Coop	1980	37	consensus
Fertile Ground	1995	19	consensus
Dancing Fern	1978	74	consensus
Salama	1974	12	consensus
Birch Rising	1979	38	consensus
Earth Balance	1970	18	consensus/majority
Cedar Hill	1967	90	consensus

Sundance	1978	12	consensus
Blueberry Hill	1970	75	consensus/majority
Vegan Garden	1965	43	consensus
Shirika	1968	17	consensus
Deep Roots	1989	23	consensus
Cedar Shadows	1998	16	consensus
Weld Hill	1971	11	consensus
Kiumbe	1994	16	consensus
Windy Valley	1996	13	consensus
New Farm	1963	48	consensus
Meadow Haven	1980	12	consensus

In order to expand the data set beyond the two observed communities, the study also included surveying the 20 targeted communities. All of these communities fit the six research criteria. I sent survey packets to each of these 20 communities. The packet contained a cover letter describing my project, enough surveys for each member plus a few extra surveys, and self addressed stamped envelopes for members to individually send the surveys back to me.

The surveys sought to capture the same information as the interviews regarding the communities' dispute resolution practices. In the survey data, I chose to consider each individual the unit of analysis, but with the ultimate goal of learning about a larger unit of analysis, the community as a whole. Individuals replied to the survey, and I compiled the data to understand the experiences of those living in each community (Bernard, 2000).

Of the 20 communities, members of eight communities responded, a 40 percent community response rate. The eight communities returned a total of 20 surveys. 180 surveys were sent to those eight communities. Specific demographic questions were not asked in the surveys.

Figure 2

Respondent name or survey number	Name of community	Years in this Community
Fiona	Salama Cooperative	10
Reace	Salama Cooperative	30 (FM)
Thomas	Salama Cooperative	9
Henry	Salama Cooperative	24
James	Birch Rising Cooperative	25 (FM)
Julie	Birch Rising Cooperative	25 (FM)
Nancy	Birch Rising Cooperative	10
Thom	Birch Rising Cooperative	10

FM = founding member

Figure 2A

Community Name	Survey responses	# of members	Years in existence
Earth Balance Farm	1A, 2A, 3A,4A, 5A	18	34
Green Meadow Community	1B, 2B, 3B	33	11
Fertile Ground Cooperative	1C, 2C, 3C, 4C	57	9
Cedar Hill Farm	1D	50	37
Dancing Fern Cooperative	1E, 2E, 3E	60	26
Birch Rising Community	1F, 1F	N/A	25
Salama Cooperative	1G	33	30
Sprouting Hope Village	1H	67	32

All names listed are pseudonyms

Confidentiality and informed consent. Like the interviews, survey materials stressed confidentiality. The survey did not ask for names of individuals or communities, thus maintaining the most open and honest form of communication. Furthermore, I informed all communities that the identity of their community would also be kept confidential. The names of the communities used within this study are therefore

fictitious. Please see Appendix A for a copy of the informed consent form that was used in the interview process. See Appendix B for the interview questions. Appendix C is the cover letter that accompanied the mailed surveys. Appendix D is the survey that was mailed.

Obstacles and Challenges of the Research

The most significant obstacles in the research included getting initial access to communities, finding transportation to the communities I visited and receiving a high return rate on surveys. Survey response rates are notoriously low. However, I anticipated that by explaining my project and its benefits, by being willing to share the final written product, and sending out a large number of surveys, I would compensate for a portion of the low return rate. However, this assumption was proved to be incorrect. Without the financial luxury of including a monetary incentive for survey completion and the inability to personally visit each community, I was only able to mail forms and then follow up with phone calls.

Another obstacle to the research was the scope of the study. Fewer communities fit the six requirements than I anticipated. While various communities fit some of the criteria, the income-generating criteria disqualified many communities that would have otherwise satisfied my objectives. I thought that many communities had a common way of generating income; however, fewer communities work this way than I thought.

Nonetheless, using 20 communities as a sample seemed manageable and promising. In the end, the research only captures data from eight different communities, again a valuable sample set of data. While this data set is valuable, it can only be used in a limited way, to look at what some members reported from some communities. This data

cannot be generalized to other communities, although certain limited lessons and ideas can be drawn from it. The research project could have sought to collect more quantitative data to provide an overall study of intentional communities. Instead, I made the conscious decision to focus on qualitative data from a smaller set of communities. This was both an obstacle and a benefit of the project.

Another shortcoming to the research lies in the length of time spent observing each community. Time constraints did not allow for time intensive participant observation. Nevertheless, ethnography is usually conducted over a long period of time (Wolcott, 1999). Therefore, the participant observation data would have been more detailed and complete if I had been able to live in the two intentional communities for a considerable amount of time.

There were also challenges to the participant observation I did complete. Within observation, there is always a great risk for bias. The most pertinent for this study is selection bias. Those communities that allowed me to visit or replied to the survey are different somehow from those communities that did not respond (Judd, Smith & Kidder, 1991). Most of the communities that responded to the surveys are successful intentional communities that may not be representative of other communities, especially in terms of their conflict management systems (Judd, Smith & Kidder). Further studies might attempt to research communities that are not as long-term and committed to their sustainability in order to create a contrast group. This research demonstrates and examines successful forms of conflict resolution in community; it would be beneficial for communities to have comparable data from less successful communities in order to

understand more fully what particular practices are necessary to create an effective dispute resolution system.

Generating Meaning From the Data

While there were many challenges to the research, I was still able to generate useful data that will prove helpful to intentional communities seeking to deal with disputes more effectively. In order to analyze the data I collected, I used a detailed coding process. Codes are efficient data labeling and data retrieving devices used to speed up analysis and make it more consistent (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I used coding to begin the process of data reduction, working to select, focus, simplify and transform the words from interviews, field notes and surveys into useful chunks of data. This process occurred continuously throughout the project (Miles & Huberman). The material collected had to be moved from being facts and information, to becoming data (Burke, 1982).

Coding as Data Analysis

The first step in data analysis was the building of a start list. I created the start list of codes by thinking of significant concepts that I heard throughout the interview process and when reading the surveys (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I read through the data and began coding it from the start list, creating new codes when necessary. As I pulled out an important concept and named it, I interpreted its meaning and classified it by defining the concept (Strauss & Corbin).

The coding process continued with a deeper analysis of the data and pulling out major themes to label (Straus & Corbin, 1998). This process involved analyzing whole paragraphs for general meaning, and then pulling out details within concepts (Strauss &

Corbin). This process created sub-codes for many code categories. Throughout this process, I also recognized that not all events, objects or people fit my themes and categories to the same degree (Strauss & Corbin).

Although I did not reach theoretical saturation—the point when coding interviews develops fewer and fewer new ideas and themes until no new themes are determined—I did see similarities and repeated themes between the themes brought forth in the data.

The best way to organize these themes is through an effective coding scheme.

The following is the start list of codes and their definitions (Miles & Huberman, 1994) I created:

Tools (specific things members do to deal with conflict)
 Causes (specific things that cause conflicts)
 Training (have the communities done training together? yes/no)
 Process (what is the process that the group goes through when conflict arises?)
 Purpose (the purpose of the community as a whole)

I built on this list by creating a coding scheme. A coding scheme is a conceptual web including larger meanings and their constitutive characteristics (Miles & Huberman). To create this conceptual web, I used various coding procedures recommended by Miles and Huberman, such as filling in, the process of adding codes, and adding to the scheme as new insights and ways of looking at the data appear. Also, I went back to materials coded earlier to reexamine them for a new theme, construct or relationship. This surfaced new categories and started the bridging process of seeing new or previously not understood relationships between and within codes (Miles & Huberman).

As the coding scheme developed, further codes surfaced, and subcodes were added to the start list. The start list code of “process,” for example, evolved into a very large category, creating nine subcodes:

Ad-hoc (variety of process choices with no set order)
 Sequential (process choices are made in a certain order – if A doesn't work then B etc.)
 Meeting-facilitator (a meeting is called with a facilitator)
 Consensus (use of consensus to manage conflict)
 Retreat (community retreat is used to determine how conflict will be handled)
 Commitment (when joining, members commit to work towards resolving conflict)
 Custom style (each member has a certain way of dealing with each member)
 Committee (a committee is formed to deal with conflict issue)
 Engage (members are expected to at least engage when conflict arises)

Eventually, the code of “process” was narrowed to include only ad-hoc and sequential.

The other sub codes were included on other primary codes, the most common being the “tools” code. The tools code eventually including eight subcodes.

Three types of codes were used from the Miles and Huberman text. The coding process began with using descriptive codes, those that require little interpretation, and are based directly on the written words. Any reader can understand these codes, even if they are unfamiliar with the data set and themes. A higher level of codes are interpretive codes, these categories having a deeper meaning based on what other things learned in the research process. Pattern codes are more inferential and explanatory and are used to link codes or highlight patterns (Miles & Huberman).

To offer a deeper analysis of the data, a variable system was created. The information in Figure 1 was translated into variables so that links between information about each community could be linked to quotes from individual respondents. For example, one variable was “consensus” and each community was given either a string variable for yes or no; consensus was used as a decision making process.

Conclusion

This small, qualitative study involved eight intentional communities in the United States that share common characteristics. They are all long-term communities with the

common goal of sustainability. They all involve a communal method of income generation, which illustrates their commitment to sustainability. All consist of more than 10 individuals and have existed for more than five years. Finally, the communities avoid following one leader or one specific religion. These communities form a subset of the 728 listed communities worldwide.

The research involved three components: examining, experiencing and inquiring. It involved archival research, participant observation and two forms of interviewing: structured interviews and surveys. Data collection occurred on site at each visited community and through mailed survey responses.

After obtaining the data, the information was put into an extensive coding process to make sense of the data. This data provided intriguing results about the ways intentional communities prepare for and manage conflict.

Chapter 4: Results

As mentioned in the previous chapter, this project gathered data from experiencing, inquiring and examining. The results from this research provide insight into dispute resolution practices in eight long-term intentional communities that generate income as one unit. Analyzing data from interviews, surveys, field notes and archival sources provides insight into conflict management practices in intentional communities.

First, the research provides descriptive information about the physical settings and environments of these intentional communities, painting an important picture of the context of community conflict. Then, the data provides information about the members living in these communities. The data shows that for these communities, the membership selection process is one of the most important aspects of conflict preparation and prevention. Next, the data demonstrates that the history of each responding community directly impacts their conflict resolution processes, with more established communities adapting to resolve conflict with a more relational, customized approach. Values were also stressed as forming the basis of preparation for conflict. For these intentional communities, establishing group process was also an important factor in conflict preparation. The study illustrated that process evolved over time, typically moving from a sequential step-by-step method to a customized style as communities developed more sophisticated methods of resolving conflict.

Despite all of this work to prepare for and prevent conflict, all the communities involved in this study experience conflict. The most common causes of conflict revolved around the lack of a common philosophy, individualism and interpersonal strife. To manage these inevitable conflicts, the communities have developed several concrete

tools, including training, house meetings, outside facilitation, mediation, committee formation, and community retreats, among other tools. The data illustrated that various creative tools are used to manage conflict in intentional communities. It also suggested that each community has adopted specific practices to manage their conflict.

Physical Setting and Environment

The eight intentional communities involved in the study are located in six different states throughout the United States: New York, Massachusetts, Missouri, Oregon, Wisconsin and Virginia. The communities are located in four regions within the U.S., including the Midwest, Northeast, Northwest and Mid-Atlantic. Interestingly, none of the communities in the study are located in the South, Southeast or Southwest. Moreover, this study's sample group has a geographical breakdown similar to that of the overall intentional communities breakdown in the United States. Of the 728 communities in The Communities Directory, published by the Fellowship for Intentional Communities (FIC), 553 are located in the U.S. (2000). One hundred and forty-six communities are located in the six states represented in this study, or 26 percent (FIC, 2000).

Six of the eight communities in the study are rural ecovillages. An ecovillage, according to Leafe Christian (2003), is an intentional community that aspires to harmlessly integrate human activities into the natural world in a manner which can be continued into the indefinite future. While some of the communities in this research do not explicitly claim the description of ecovillage, all six communities are located on acres of land and are committed to ecologically-conscious living. On average, the six rural communities own 247 acres of land, Cedar Hill Farm in Virginia being the largest with 450 acres and Green Meadows the smallest with 72 acres. The rural communities in this

study all include some farmland or gardening land as well as wooded acreage. Two of the communities are urban. One of the urban communities has an additional 70 acres of woods and fields in mountains 100 miles from their urban community, and they plan to create a second community there in the future. The two urban communities, in Staten Island, New York and Madison, Wisconsin, own their housing complexes. Of the 728 intentional communities in The Communities Directory, 202 (28%) are urban; 439 (60%) are rural; and 87 (12%) are classified as both urban and rural (i.e. semi-urban) (FIC, 2000). This breakdown is similar to this study's sample group, which was 25% urban and 75% rural.

The two communities selected for field visits were both rural ecovillages. Data from field notes, interviews and archival research creates a picture of the two intentional community settings.

The Salama Community

The Salama Cooperative began in 1974 in a rural area in the Midwest. Salama is located on 135 acres of rolling hills, in a county with a population of 5,000 people. The community is located in a rural, sparsely populated part of the state and experiences typical Midwest weather with four very distinct seasons. The property consists of 60 acres of grassland and 60 acres of woods, with the remainder for buildings, gardens, orchards, barnyards, cropland and ponds. Four residences provide both private living space and public space for work and recreation.

The land includes large vegetable/herb gardens, orchards, woods, hayfields, a bee yard, cropland, a sorghum press and pasture. The community grows most of its food in organic farms. Members also raise chickens for eggs, and cows for dairy, meat, and

manure. All members work to produce and sell sorghum syrup, tempeh, honey, garlic, mustard and horseradish as a major source of their community income.

Birch Rising Community

The Birch Rising community began in 1974 on 90 acres of wooded land in the northeastern part of the United States. Over the past thirty years, the community has grown from the few original founders and the members have developed the land with sophisticated and ecologically-friendly methods. There are about six buildings on the property, organic gardens, orchards, a sweat lodge, a chicken coop and a cob house. (A cob house is a traditional, ecologically-friendly way of building, using a mixture of straw, clay and sand). Birch Rising strives to be a successful ecovillage, implementing organic gardening techniques, integrated pest management, companion planting, conscious attunement to plant energies, and a developing permaculture-oriented strategy to maintain or improve soil vitality and deliver bountiful harvests. They also use green energy locally generated to reduce dependence on practices that damage the environment, fossil fuel over-utilization, and nuclear power produced through fission. The community has a bio-diesel filling station for use in community members' vehicles. In addition, energy captured from wind and sun are stored in deep cell battery arrays and inverted as needed for home and community use. Passive solar design, super insulation and ultra efficient appliances reduce load requirements to a fraction of that generally accepted as normal or average.

The community is located in a unique part of the northeastern United States. It experiences harsh winters, beautiful autumns, short springs and mild summer weather. The community is located within short driving distance of various colleges and

universities. However, it is located in a small town in a rural environment. Many neighbors in the small town participate in the community in some capacity.

Site Visits vs. Surveyed Communities

The Salama Cooperative and Birch Rising Community are representative of the majority of the intentional communities that participated in this study. Four other surveyed communities have parallel settings in rural locations with common living space, farmland, wooded acreage and a commitment to alternative energy use and other forms of ecologically sophisticated technology. The two urban communities surveyed also share common living space and both have small urban gardens. Birch Rising and Salama are 25 and 30 years old respectively. The average age of the participant communities is 26 years. See Figure 5 for more information about the ages of participant communities. Participant observation allowed me to gather more detailed information about the two visited communities; however, surveys and archival information illustrated the parallels between the two visited communities and the communities participating in the study through surveys.

Membership and Demographics

The data also provided information about the impact of membership on group dynamics and conflict resolution methods. The overwhelming response from all the communities in this study about membership selection highlighted the importance of including conflict resolution methods in the process of recruiting and selecting new people to the community.

Overview

Specific demographic questions were not asked of each respondent; however using the Communities Directory and other responses it is possible to get a picture of the demographics of each community. Within the sample group, membership varied from 12 to 93 members, with an average of 36 members (see Figure 3). The communities had a near equitable gender split on average, with the Green Meadow Community and Salama Cooperative having two-thirds of their membership female, the only communities with more than 50 percent female membership (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Community	Members	% women	% men
Green Meadow	16	67	33
Sprouting Hope	19	33	67
Fertile Ground	19	43	57
Dancing Fern	74	40	60
<i>Salama</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>67</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>Birch Rising</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>
Earth Balance	18	50	50
Cedar Hill	90	50	50
Average	36	50%	50%

N/A-information not available, italics indicate community visited

All of the communities, except for Earth Balance Farm, are composed of a mixture of adults and children. There was no conclusive data illuminating themes about the relationship between conflict and the gender composition of a community. No interviewees or survey participants mentioned gender as an important factor in causing conflict or in their methods of conflict resolution. The research did not focus on this variable.

Income Generation

All of the participating communities in this study were income generating through a wide range of ventures, from hammock making to tinnery crafts (made from recycled cans) to more sophisticated entrepreneurial projects such as consulting companies. Most of the eight participating communities earned income by selling their fruits and vegetables through a community-supported agricultural program. However, this was never the sole mechanism for generating communal income. Another common method of earning money was through educational activities, particularly focusing on ecological education or group process training. Birch Rising is incorporated as a 501(c)(3) non-profit educational organization as one method of generating income. The community hosts conferences, retreats and workshops and provides lectures and courses in sustainable and spiritual living. The community offers an extensive apprenticeship program that trains individuals in sustainable energy technology as well as spiritual living. Other communities earned income by renting out their space for workshops and conferences on various topics as well. Figure 5 below describes how each community generates income.

Figure 5

Income Generation	
<i>Community</i>	<i>Method of generating income as one unit</i>
Green Meadow	Tinnery crafts (made from recycled cans); community supported agriculture
Sprouting Hope	Café-bookstore-gift shop; contract mail delivery; consulting and training
Fertile Ground	Barter/exchange of goods; community supported agriculture; crafts
Dancing Fern	Repair/restore furniture, clothing, artwork; conferences/workshops
Salama	<i>Food sales (sorghum, syrup, tempeh, mustard, garlic, horseradish)</i>
Birch Rising	<i>Hosts conferences/retreats/workshops; education</i>
Summit	Landlording; landscaping
Cedar Hill	Hammocks and chairs; tofu production; indexing books

The research did not focus on the impact that this variable has on conflict preparation or management. None of the surveyed communities mentioned this as impacting their communities' approach to conflict resolution. Further study would be needed to determine whether this factor has an affect on conflict resolution approaches.

Membership Selection and Conflict Prevention

This study revealed that membership selection process is an important aspect of setting up a successful conflict resolution structures for intentional communities. With respect to conflict, various community members in this study articulated the importance of using the selection process as a time to address the issue of conflict resolution. Most of the communities in this study require an extensive membership selection process; however, each community has a different process for who they invite to join. At Birch Rising, prospective members go through an exploring phase, which includes orientation classes and ample time for all parties to decide whether or not the prospective member is the right fit for the community. This is typically preceded by an initial visit of two weeks or more, during which people develop a preliminary basis for understanding what responsibilities and commitments are involved in becoming a member. James, a member of Birch Rising since its inception, argues that this process enables the new member to experience conflict resolution within the community.

We talk a lot during this time about how things in the community work. I would say that by the end of this time, the person knows about how we handle conflict because there has probably been one or two while they are here. We don't explicitly say "this is our philosophy of conflict resolution," but I think that people understand how we strive to live together. People understand that we believe in harmonious living and they see that we strive to treat each other with respect and love. So, they know that we resolve conflicts with the same philosophy that we do everything else here.

Survey respondents from Birch Rising also mentioned the use of orientation training for new members to teach and stress the importance of the “non-violent resolution of conflict” within the community.

At Salama, potential members are asked to have an affinity for a rural and alternative lifestyle as well as a connection with the land; Salama seeks self-motivated, conscientious, and self-aware members. The community also seeks potential members who are willing to engage in group process work. The membership process starts with a potential member expressing interest and starting to connect with the community through contact with one member, perhaps using letters or email to communicate. Then, the potential member will come for a visit, for as long as possible. According to the community, an ideal scenario involves the potential member visiting during each season for a few weeks over the course of a year. Then, if the potential member still seeks membership and the community decides to accept the potential member through a consensus-based process, they will be invited to be a “provisional member.” During this time, they participate in the community on all levels, except they are not able to “block” any decisions in the consensus process. After the provisional time period is over, and everyone feels it is a good match, the member joins the community. Salama Cooperative makes it explicit that new members engage in conflict. As Fiona, a long-term member expressed, “At membership they say you have to be available to talk about conflict. It’s pretty express and laid out.”

Other communities in the sample group included conflict resolution in their membership selection process. Although none of the survey questions asked for specific comments about membership selection, three of the four survey responses

from Fertile Ground Cooperative mentioned the importance of membership agreements as the way the community prepares for conflict. The membership agreement at Fertile Ground includes a commitment to resolving conflict non-violently. The community also includes training as a part of new member orientation.

History and Conflict

The history of each community significantly impacted their conflict resolution processes. Conflict resolution processes have changed over time in many participant communities, and those communities with long term members have evolved more than those with a higher turnover rate. This led first to an examination of the longevity of each community. As the original criterion suggested, all of the sample communities were required to have existed for only more than five years. On average, the surveyed communities had a life span of 26 years (see Figure 4). Six of the communities in the sample group started in the late 1960s or 1970s, the peak of the intentional communities' movement in the United States (Baumann, 2001). As Figure 4 indicates below, only 210 communities from the 1960s and 1970s are still in existence, according to The Communities Directory (FIC, 2000). This suggests that the sample group represents a selection of successful communities that have been able to avoid the disintegration process that has characterized other 1960s and 1970s communities. The data also suggests that the sample group is not reflective of the overall makeup of intentional communities today. Over 39 percent of listed communities in The Communities Directory were formed in the 1990s, while only two of the eight sample groups were formed during the 90s (FIC, 2000).

Figure 4: communities active today

All Communities	
<i>Year formed</i>	<i># of Communities</i>
1990's	255
1980's	133
1970's	164
1960's	46
1950's	9
1940's	16
1930's	18
1920's	2
1910's	1
1900's	1
1890's	1

Sample Group		
<i>Community</i>	<i>Year formed</i>	<i>Age</i>
Green Meadow	1993	11
Sprouting Hope	1972	32
Fertile Ground	1995	9
Dancing Fern	1978	26
<i>Salama</i>	<i>1974</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Birch Rising</i>	<i>1979</i>	<i>25</i>
Earth Balance	1970	34
Cedar Hill Farm	1967	37
Average Year/Age	1979	26

Sample Group	
<i>Year formed</i>	<i># of communities</i>
1990's	2
1980's	0
1970's	5
1960's	1

The histories of the communities involved in this study provide information regarding the evolution of conflict resolution system changes within the participant communities. Within the interview data, three of the interview participants were original members of their communities. Two others had lived in their communities for over 20 years. These interviews shed light on significant changes within the two visited communities after conflict erupted.

Henry discusses the changes he has witnessed at Salama Cooperative over the past 24 years and offered a brief history of the community. In its initial stages, the community did not have any formal system for resolving conflict. As Henry recalled, the community started with no real understanding of how to handle conflict.

“Every so often we would have a major eruption by somebody who would have a problem or some issue would come up and we would just try to deal with it at the time, but it was pretty haphazard.”

About 15 years after its inception, the community decided to bring in an outside facilitator to work through group conflict in a retreat setting. They have brought in other outsiders since then to continue learning about other methods and techniques for handling group conflict. The change did not occur randomly. It was ignited by, Henry states, “long standing conflicts and tensions within the group.”

Birch Rising experienced similar conflict after years of communal living. This conflict led to structural changes within the community. Initially, Birch Rising had a completely communal economy. They paid all of their communal and personal expenses from a collective pot of money. Conflict ensued. As Julie, a founding member, recalls,

We would get in these big arguments about whether we could buy paper, or whether someone could go to the movies or buy clothes. It was a lot of conflict about lifestyles and what people could and could not do. It just became too much

for us, so after a few years, we developed a system: everybody is responsible for their own personal expenses. You can have whatever lifestyle you want to have, but you are going to pay for it. And then we had a communal pot for the communal expenses.

In this situation, Birch Rising chose not to create a new conflict management system to deal with the intractable conflict. Instead, they changed the community's economic structure. In this circumstance, the conflict ended because it was not fueled by competing interests.

In these two scenarios, conflict occurred because of interpersonal and structural reasons. Salama adapted to the interpersonal conflict by bringing in a third party to provide the group with the conflict resolution skills necessary to work through the long standing relationship conflicts. Birch Rising, on the other hand, experienced structural conflict with a system of communal governance. To handle this problem, the community changed its structure in order to resolve the conflict.

In this study, more established, older communities with long term members illustrated adaptability and more satisfaction with their conflict resolution methods. Members from older communities, those started in the 1960s and 1970s, articulated their satisfaction in response to the question, "Do you feel conflicts are handled satisfactorily in your community?" The unsatisfied responses came from members of the intentional communities formed in the 1990s, the newer communities, or from communities that did not have long-term members. One survey respondent, 2C, from Fertile Ground, said,

Lacking an official policy or guidelines for conflict resolution has led to disconnect between various members' expectations. Clarity and agreement here would give all a solid framework from which to proceed.

Some issues remain unanswered regarding the impact of longevity on intentional communities' conflict resolution process. This data suggests that for these communities,

as they grew older and began to adapt to conflict situations, they developed a more sophisticated dispute resolution system. The data suggests that it takes time for communities to establish a system that makes members feel satisfied. Questions also remain about the impact of founding members on the sustainability of communities. Is longevity necessarily a sign of successful conflict resolution practices? Are long-term members simply keeping the community going with their commitment to the endeavor? These are questions for further study. However, the role of relationships, an issue related to longevity, surfaced in the research.

Relationships

Respondents indicated that their communities rely on the close relationships between members to assist in resolving conflict, particularly when formal structures do not exist. Many of the participants in the study discussed the practice of crafting individual conflict resolution processes depending on the personalities involved in the dispute. Fiona, from Salama Cooperative discussed how these close relationships served as an aide for crafting specific methods for resolving conflict based on intimate knowledge of the other party.

If a conflict comes up and you don't expect it, and people are tense about it, then we are like, 'okay there is something going on, let's decide what the participants would like.' If they want to go into it further...we might need to bump this off the agenda and we need to break it down, so that everyone is there and is dedicated to participating in it. And then we know of each other what each other's tolerance is as far as how much conflict we can each handle.

Members of other communities discussed the importance of relationships in providing common ground when conflict came up. The foundational commitment to each other

allowed members to handle conflict with less antagonism. James, a founding member of the Birch Rising community, dwelled on this reality in his interview.

It all begins with the fact that we are each committed to having long term, harmonious and loving relationships with each other. That commitment is really important. That is the base for our relationships, so conflict is a lot easier when you know that the other person has the same end goal as you, harmonious relationships... When you know the other person is committed to loving relationships, it makes it easier to have problems.

However, the close nature of relationships within intentional communities was also the cause for many conflicts. Members of older communities highlighted the problems caused by long lasting relationship conflict. A long-time Salama Cooperative member, Fiona, discussed this reality in depth:

I think that because some of us have lived together for a long time, there is a lot of old unresolved tension and some of it has to do with personal style, some of it has to do with mental health and it feels like that is the stuff that really gets unearthed, and it's hard to feel like you have ever made any progress when you keep coming back to that stuff.

Recurring relational conflict can create intractable conflict. The issue of trust surfaces as an important concept in the impact relationships have on conflict in community. Again, Salama Cooperative's Fiona highlighted this point. Fiona said that after 30 years, the community is still "acquiring tools for building trust." Fiona said that trust is built through resolving conflict in a satisfactory way. Personality and relational history also plays a role in building trust. With these factors in mind, Salama Cooperative creates a customized system for resolving conflict, as Thomas highlights:

We are small enough that we can kind of customize our approach, and we know who is willing to do what so we can balance it between the people who like the general broad strokes and other times people who want it to be more specific.

Thus, while this study highlighted the fact that long-term relationships do have some negative aspects, the benefits of these long-term relationships were stressed in multiple

responses. Communities were able to create customized conflict resolution systems and to use their existing relationships to resolve conflict more effectively.

Culture

Schein defines culture as “a pattern of basic assumptions” developed by a group as it copes with “external adaptation and internal integration” problems and teaches new members the correct way to think and feel in relation to those problems (1990). Similarly, Brubaker argues that collective culture is “shaped by fundamental assumptions about reality, human nature and relationships, which are unique” (2000). Culture exists when a certain set of people has enough stability and common history to form a culture.

This study provided data about the various cultures of intentional communities. Using specific criteria in the selection process created a sample group with many similarities. Data from all the participants showed that the communities were committed to simple, healthy, ecologically sustainable lifestyles. Salama Cooperative’s culture, in many ways, can be best described by its focus on connecting to its 135 acres of land. In its commitment to an alternative rural lifestyle, the community has composting toilets, an earth-sheltered building and uses solar energy for some of its cooking, food drying and heating. The community also practices biodynamic farming and holistic healing techniques. Likewise, Birch Rising’s culture revolves around its commitment to a balanced respect for the individual, cooperation with nature, and recognition of each person’s personal growth process.

Values

An overview of the espoused values of the communities in the sample comes from the “primary purpose/focus section” of The Communities Directory cross-reference

chart (2000). Each community was asked to briefly describe their primary purpose. Green Meadow Community used the words “egalitarianism and process.” Dancing Fern Cooperative’s primary focus revolves around love, wisdom and dialogue. Salama Cooperative used “organic, equality, dialogue and fun” as its purpose mantra. Birch Rising used the phrase, “spiritual, educational, ecological.” “Egalitarian and income sharing” were the two primary focuses of Cedar Hill Farm. Earth Balance Farm was more practical with meals sharing and housing cooperative as their primary purpose. Site visits to Salama Cooperative and Birch Rising found both communities with similar values, including a simple and healthy lifestyle, equality, ecological sustainability, nonviolence, personal freedom, honest communication, consensus decision-making and emotional support.

In interviews and survey responses, participants often connected their community’s preparation for conflict to their espoused values. The three most commonly expressed values related to preparing for and resolving conflict were recognition of conflict as an inevitable part of community, a commitment to engage when conflict arises and nonviolence.

Embracing conflict. Some respondents stated that conflict plays an important role in their communities by surfacing issues that are important to address. First, they recognized that for conflict to have a positive impact on their community, members needed to accept it as an inevitability. As one Dancing Fern member, 1E, wrote, “We assume conflict is inherent in the human condition, and it is an essential element in human development.” A Birch Rising member said the community acknowledges that it is not a question of “if” conflict will occur but “when.”

In addition to embracing conflict as part of communal life, many community members also embraced the positive elements of conflict. A Green Meadow Community member, 3B, writes that the way a group handles conflict is illustrative of its health:

All groups have conflict...Having conflict is not the sign of an unhealthy group. What shows how healthy a group is the manner in which a group does or doesn't deal with conflict.

This theme surfaced in both the surveys and interview sessions. Community members saw this value as a key component of their ability to prepare for conflict.

Commitment to engage. In addition to embracing conflict, participants also highlighted their communities' commitment to engage in conflict resolution as a core communal value. While the communities had various methods of engagement, all communities in this study openly expressed their commitment to engagement. For example, when a new member enters Salama Cooperative, they are expected to, according to Reace, at a minimum, commit to engaging in conflict.

I think there is an understanding that you are expected to try to find some form of engagement on the topic with whoever has been impacted, even if you don't think it is your problem, you are obliged to make room to talk about it, and it doesn't mean you are obliged to do anything or agree to anything, but it is unacceptable to stonewall communication. You are not obliged to say yes on the spot when someone approaches you, if you want to put it off, you need to give an idea about when you can work on it and under what conditions. We use a variety of formats. It's not like there is a court or a tribunal that you have to face but you've got to give something to the group.

Other communities wrote about group expectations that members will engage with each other when conflict is present. There were numerous comments about the destructive nature of conflict avoidance and gossip. The Salama Cooperative interviews led to a deeper discussion about the details of engagement. While the community values engagement, they are also aware of the potential for harm if people are expected to

engage at all times, particularly when emotions are at their peak. The focus of their retreat this year will be on how to manage the tension between immediate engagement and allowing for time before engagement.

Nonviolence. A commitment to nonviolence affects the ways communities manage conflict as well. Respondents indicated that the way they handle conflict is affected by the nonviolent tenets of their community. These nonviolent tenets do not indicate only physical violence, but also understanding the violence in language and other forms of emotional violence. One interviewee, Thomas, articulated Salama community's attentiveness to nonviolence after a Nonviolent Communication training,

There is more awareness that there is violence in communication ... I also think many of us got a lot out of it, just realizing like I do, that I can be, violent in my communication, even though I think I am not. That awareness is helpful.

Another Salama Community member, Fiona, expressed a similar belief,

Obviously we are a nonviolent community, and that is a basic tenet of the community. And you learn about that very quickly, certainly physical violence is not tolerated and verbal violence is really examined when it comes up.

Both visited communities highlighted nonviolence as an essential value in their community. None of the survey questions asked specifically about nonviolence, but six different respondents said it was important in the way they prepared for conflict.

Nonviolence training is an essential component of two surveyed communities. In addition, all four respondents from Fertile Ground commented on the importance of nonviolence in their communities' approach to conflict. At Fertile Ground Cooperative, committing to nonviolent forms of communication is included in the membership agreement. The community was trained in Nonviolent Communication (NVC), a conflict resolution method developed by Marshall Rosenberg and discussed in Chapter 2.

Spirituality. In addition to the three values listed above, spirituality surfaced as a core value for the Birch Rising Community and an important aspect of their approach to conflict. Survey respondents did not mention spirituality as a factor at all. However, in The Communities Directory description of each community, several participating communities mentioned spirituality as an important aspect of their community (2000). While not adhering to any specific formal religion, Salama Cooperative has adopted a spirituality based on a blend of practices and beliefs about living in harmony with the earth and about the power of community in uncovering the joy and love within all human beings.

One of the most important aspects of Birch Rising's culture is its spiritual identity; however, the community does not subscribe to one particular religion.

Julie, a founding member of Birch Rising, states:

I think that might be one of the things that makes us different from other communities. We are really focused on inner transformation. We think that people in conflict are often expressing their inner anger and their frustration on other people. We focus on that healing within that must take place for people to be able to be in community with other people. That is really important. I can't stress it enough. It is part of our community, this self-transformation. People don't want to look in at what they are contributing most of the time, but we always have some responsibility.

She continues:

We focus on meditative consensus as a way to make decisions. It can be used as a tool to find out what is underneath problems, what is deeper than the surface level issues. It is a tool to find what is going on innerly, deeper... We also have a spiritual commitment to a higher power that is basic to our philosophy. So, those are the principles that guide our conflict resolution, basic to our way of solving conflict.

Birch Rising's spirituality revolves around the practice of meditation. Three important spiritual practices Birch Rising maintains are: keeping integrity with one's

word, participating in conflict resolution process as a medium of self-examination, and community governance through consensus. The spiritual focus of the community is evident in group reflection before meals, group meditation practices and a communal language reflecting similar spiritual focuses.

Group Process

When describing group processes, respondents discussed two methods for managing community conflict. Either they had a somewhat customized process, entailing a number of options for managing conflict but no set order to in which to choose them, or the communities had a more sequential process of elimination. The sequential process involved trying one method when conflict arose, and if that did not work moving on to another method, and then another, until a method was found that worked to solve the issue. There does not seem to be any evidence that customized or sequential is preferential to the other. Satisfaction with conflict resolution did not correlate to this variable. However, in each community it was apparent that they had devised a conflict resolution process in order to fit their specific needs as a community. Process was context specific and evolved over time, typically moving from sequential to customized as communities developed more sophisticated methods of resolving conflict. Initially, this reality seems counterintuitive, but it illustrated that communities needed structure at the beginning of their formation but were able to become more fluid as they matured.

Sequential Processes

The best example of a purely sequential process comes from one of the youngest intentional communities. All three survey respondents from the Green Meadow Community detailed a simple two-step process for resolving conflict. First, members are

expected to talk to one another to attempt to work out the conflict. If that does not work, a “process team” will intervene to mediate. The process team is a group from within the community that offers support and resources for people in conflict. Respondents said the process team also keeps an eye on “hot” issues in the community that might cause conflict to come up. Other communities had similar step by step processes that usually started with one-to-one conversation and led to a third party intervention and then a community-wide discussion if necessary.

For example, the Dancing Fern Cooperative has an established conflict resolution method of Feedback Learning. The sequential process involves: a) an attempt by the individuals to work out the conflict together; b) outside help from housemates, friends or the Central Group; c) small community discussion; and d) the Central Group will call a Planning Session to deal with the conflict. In the Cedar Hill Farm community, the sequential process involves these steps: a) individual conversations; b) the involvement of one outside third party from the community; c) larger committee meetings to manage the conflict, most typically run by the Process Team.

Customized Processes

In this study, the more established, long-term communities tended to utilize a more fluid, customized approach to solving conflict. They have no established protocol and, more importantly, did not express any interest in creating a formal process. These communities relied on the various established methods at their disposal to use when faced with conflict. Salama Cooperative utilized this “eclectic approach” for handling conflict, as Henry describes:

Oh well, so we have tried different things and the last few years we have tried several different methods. And different approaches. So it is just kind of

eclectic... Sometimes it is worked out in meetings. Other times people talk about it privately when it is convenient for them. Sometimes there is an intervention by another member or person maybe whoever is around and you can get at it that way.

Birch Rising uses more of an ad hoc approach as well. They have used a number of different processes, and they search for the right one to use in each setting. Usually, they start with one-to-one communication. Julie from Birch Rising says,

If that does not work, we will bring it to the core group and have them *meditate* on the issue and try to work it out with the people in conflict. We don't just use our rational minds, we seek the answers from within. If we cannot find consensus, if the time is not right or we do not have all of the information, we may bring in someone to mediate or send the conflicting members to counseling or some outside source. On a few occasions none of this has worked and we have been forced to ask someone to leave. But usually, we can resolve the conflict as a community using some variety of methods.

As Fiona, a member of Salama community for ten years, states, their method of managing conflict has grown over time to become based on relationships and personal history. She stated that since most members of their community had been involved for many years, each person knows the others' capacity for handling conflict, and what works best for each community member.

It is just very different styles and a lot has to do with personal history. So, we are small enough that we can kind of customize our approach and we know who is willing to do what so we can balance it between the people who like the general broad strokes and other times people who want it to be more specific.

The one exception to the customized/sequential split along age of the community came from the results of surveys from Fertile Ground, a community formed in 1993. Fertile Ground did not utilize a sequential process because they were "still fine tuning an official policy." Unlike the older communities, Fertile Ground consciously chose a context specific approach, and did not move to this approach after years of utilizing a

sequential approach. This was a cause of great concern for one survey respondent, 2C, looking for a clear policy:

Lacking an official policy or guidelines for conflict resolution has led to disconnect between various member's expectations. Clarity and agreement here would give all a solid framework from which to proceed.

Interestingly, a number of Fertile Ground respondents were not satisfied with the way their community handled conflict (see conflict resolution section). Thus, the lack of a sequential process was problematic for some in the Fertile Ground community perhaps because they did not craft a customized approach based on a maturation process as other, older communities had. Instead, they simply created a customized process at the outset of forming the community. From this data, it appears that the older communities have grown into their current approaches to conflict. However, what cannot be determined from this data set collected at one point in time, is exactly why this trend is present for these communities. It could be that the adaptability of the communities led to their longevity, or that over time successful communities develop a conflict management system that works, or the presence of founding members, or many other possibilities. This is one area that would be interesting for further study.

Decision-Making Processes: Unanimous Consensus

All of the sample communities use consensus-based decision making processes. Of the 728 communities listed in The Communities Directory, consensus is the preferred method of making decisions (FIC, 2000). However, only 493 (67%) use consensus, while 100 percent of our sample use consensus (FIC, 2000). Decisions are made at Birch Rising through a consensus process modeled after the Quaker and Iroquois, in that it includes a component of meditation intended to further one's ability to see beyond the

scope of emotional or intellectual bias. At Birch Rising, what serves the greater welfare is given precedence. Birch Rising members call their method of consensus “meditative consensus.” The group believes in the power of meditation to help guide people’s decision-making. Therefore, they always include meditation as one part of their decision-making process. Consensus was used by Birch Rising as a method for preparing for and preventing conflict because of its potential to allow all members to have their voice heard, which can prevent conflicts caused by members who may not initially feel valued.

As stated, all the communities involved in this study reported the use of consensus, as seen in the survey responses to the question, “How are conflicts resolved in your community?” For example, one respondent from Fertile Ground community responded in this way:

We make decisions by consensus, so we are determined to figure out how to meet everyone’s needs when making group decisions.

Another survey respondent, a community member from Sprouting Hope replied in this way:

We use consensus based decision making model.
Commitment to positive relationships with others.

A third survey respondent, from the Salama cooperative wrote:

Major decisions are made by consensus, with others left to individual discretion.
How we reach decisions is as important as what we decide.

Causes of Conflict

While the question, “what causes conflict in your community?” was not specifically asked, respondents often told stories and mentioned causes of conflict without being prompted. From this data, several causes of conflict were brought up repeatedly. The

most common causes of conflict reported were: the lack of a common philosophy, individualism, and interpersonal issues.

Lack of Common Philosophy

Respondents talked about the importance of having a philosophy that draws members together and connects them. Some indicated this as a method of preparing for or preventing conflict. Others cited not having this common thread as a cause of conflict or disintegration of a community. A founding member of one community, Julie from Birch Rising, had this to say in an interview:

If people do not have a clear vision at the beginning of what they are trying to do, it is problem from the start. You have to have a vision, an idea that sustains the group, that goes beyond a few people who want to start something new. We had a problem with that at the beginning here. We were trying to be all things to all people. David Spangler is a philosopher. He came and he said, “you know, you have to get clear about who you are.” It is important to understand that not everyone in the world needs this experience, not everyone in the world needs to be here. Some people need to be elsewhere, and by us trying to accommodate ourselves so that certain people could be here, we were actually doing those people a disservice because their calling is to be somewhere else. Really figuring out who we were and what we wanted to be really helped a lot. It is important that we not try to be something we are not and that we are clear with potential members about who we are.

This member had lived in other communities as well and highlighted this as the cause for many failed communities. Julie, later indicated that conflict can be avoided if the members of a community have a common philosophy.

If you do not have a higher set of principles or, you know, something that supercedes personality then it becomes really hard to overcome those personality clashes. Or, sometimes a commitment to a political cause or some other cause...I think that a commitment to something beyond this gratification of the self is extremely important in helping communities succeed.

In addition to Julie from Birch Rising, three other participants mentioned the lack of a common philosophy as a cause of community conflict, Fiona from Salama and two

survey respondents: (1H) from Sprouting Hope and (3B) a respondent from Green Meadows. Julie's comment about the need to transcend the "gratification of self" relates to the second most reported cause of conflict: individualism.

Individualism

Respondents indicated that some people are not ready for community living due to the individualistic nature of our society. One member of Salama, Henry, who has lived there for 25 years spoke eloquently to this issue.

I haven't seen a lot of groups fall apart, I know that a lot of groups have. Earlier. But lately I think it's somehow that we were really raised to be individualistic in what I want. What I need is paramount. We are not ready to think in terms of group needs. Or, family needs, even though we grow up as part of a family, a group. Everyone just takes off and does what they want to do and follows their own individual desires and we are taught that individual achievement is the highest goal. If you can't find it here, then you can find it elsewhere. And hardly anybody ever talks about what the group needs. I think about it as being part of an organism. Why do I think groups fail? Its like, we as individuals don't want to put group needs more importantly than individual needs.

Fiona, from Salama also described individualism as the cause of conflict with relation to individual issues, such as substance abuse, depression or workaholism. Again, these respondents offered this information without prompting. They argued that the tension between group identity and individual identity often created conflict.

As discussed in Chapter 2, group members may experience a crisis when determining their identity as an individual or a member of the group. Connecting the work of Berg and Smith (1987) to intentional communities, one community member expressed this paradox. Reace, a founding member of Salama Cooperative, works as a conflict resolution practitioner and group process facilitator outside his community. However, he has to find the fine balance between attempting his work in his home community, and working with other communities:

I do professional work with groups and I can't do anything like what I do professionally, at home, I mean I am not allowed. It's not taken as constructive. I get paid a lot of money to do it and do it successfully and it doesn't work here. It doesn't work here because I am part of the community and, certainly part of the time, I am part of the conflict and so my motivation is different. Even when I am not part of the conflict, there is not agreement that the way I think about this (conflict management) is what people want to do.

Contrary to what I expected to hear, none of the other respondents mentioned this type of paradox, or even discussed the need for balance between the individual and the group.

Interpersonal

As in other groups and organizations, interpersonal differences are a major cause of conflict in intentional communities. The participants in this study cited interpersonal romantic relationships as one of the most common causes of group conflict. Romantic conflict between two people affects the entire community, according to multiple respondents and interviewees. For example, Reace says, "You have to understand that when relationship issues leak over into community, the people in the community are stakeholders and they have a right to bring that up." Julie from Birch Rising also spoke to this issue,

We had a couple who came here to the community as a couple. The man got involved with another woman while he was here, and there was this great battle between the two women. It involved the community process a whole lot, and a couple months of processing. We realized that we could not solve their relationship problems within the community because it was too divisive. So, we told them they would have to get counseling outside of the community. The wife has large amounts of emotional stress and was causing ripples in the community, and maybe justifiably so. We thought they needed some outside help to deal with some of these issues. The wife refused to do so, and we asked her to leave because it was such a strain on the entire community.

In addition to romantic relationships, respondents mentioned other forms of interpersonal personality issues that caused conflict. Interestingly, only two respondents mentioned conflict regarding how the communal business should be run as a primary cause of conflict. Unclear expectations, power struggles and poor communication were also mentioned by two survey respondents and two interview participants.

Conflict Resolution Tools

The respondents discussed several concrete tools used to manage community conflict. Respondents spoke about using training as one preventative tool. Once conflict emerges, house meetings serve as a management tool and sometimes include facilitators during the meetings. They also spoke of the process of using “clearings” during meetings. Also, respondents highlighted the importance of mediation, committees, community retreats, self-reflection, and a decision book as tools for managing conflict in their communities.

Training

Respondents from six of the eight communities discussed having participated in formal conflict resolution training as a community. Others spoke of personal investigation into conflict resolution methods, including group study of certain texts related to dispute resolution. Two communities expressed having had no formal conflict resolution training, but in one case, the respondents discussed some form of informal training. Only Earth Balance Farm reported having no form of conflict resolution training. This high level of training within the sample communities may be why these members were willing to reply to my survey. They may have self selected on the basis of being comfortable with writing or talking about conflict in their community because they

have participated in a conflict management training. However, their responses, limited as they may be, regarding their training experience were valuable.

Types of training varied in the six communities that experienced formal training. Some wrote about having an outside facilitator come in and work through certain issues as a type of training. Reace, a Salama Cooperative founding member, said that communities have experienced an evolution from excluding outside trainers to an acceptance of the value of outside facilitation. Reace's career involves facilitating, group process training and conflict resolution training with communities.

As far as trends, I see that there is a greater willingness today than ever...to ask for help; groups are more open to it. We never asked someone from the outside to come help us for 20 years, we were too stupid. Our willingness to do this has sort of coincided with my career area, and now we do this once a year and there are more people asking for help. So, if people get it, there is more that can be done within the group, and it's not a negative reflection on your group to ask for help rather than toughing it out. That's a big change. And there are more people out there to go to with these problems. There are more demands by the groups to have it.

However, participants were not always satisfied with outside trainers. Reace expressed frustration with not being able to find a qualified trainer because of the complex issues involved in intentional communities.

I have a prejudice, which isn't very surprising considering where I come from—that is if you can do the work successfully within an intentional community, then you can do it anywhere. That is my experience because it is so rich and complex. We have brought in people with national reputations on working with group dynamics, and they have no idea what to do. Because it's so complex, and we have to hold their hand and it's embarrassing because so much of their experience is in the business field and the context is much shallower. And the day to day living makes it much deeper, so if you can do it there then you can do it anywhere.

Other types of training were specific to each community. Fertile Ground refers to its Nonviolent Communication workshops as conflict resolution training. Cedar Hill Farm

uses their concept of Feedback Learning as their form of conflict resolution training; Feedback training attempts to teach people to learn to listen and ask questions instead of just relying on intuition or instinct. Birch Rising incorporates conflict resolution training into its orientation process.

House Meetings, Facilitation and Clearings

Not only are house meetings used as a tool for managing general community issues and processes, but they can also be used to work through conflict as a group. One hundred percent of the communities indicated the importance of the space in house meetings being used to deal with community conflict.

Sometimes, people associated with the conflict leave the community. Depending on the magnitude of the conflict, there will be community meetings and a team of people who propose solutions to resolve the conflict. Also, facilitation is provided for people to resolve the conflicts.

As the last quote from a survey respondent, 1B, from Green Meadow Community indicates, facilitation of meetings is important, especially if the meeting is being used as a tool to manage conflict. One member will take on the role of facilitator during the meeting, or the community will ask a member of another community to step in. Two of the communities involved in the study call on other intentional communities in physical proximity to serve as outside facilitators when they feel it is necessary in their community meetings.

Within meetings, Salama and other communities have adopted a tool called clearings or cleanings, processes that take place in the community to clear the air, or clean up messy interactions. These are used to let off group steam, to prevent major conflict from blowing up and bring out issues that are important for the whole community to be a part of. Henry, a member of Salama Cooperative, describes them well:

We have these things that we call clearings in our meetings. We have business meetings and we have check-in meetings. At business meetings we have kind of a format. The first part is just day to day business, when is the next meeting, what is everybody doing what is what do people need help with, are there any visitors, etc. And then, at the end of that, “are there any clearings?” and clearings is something if somebody had a funky interaction with somebody else that they didn’t like, and either they tried to clear it up in the moment, or they didn’t, and they thought well I’ll just bring it up with the group. Because they wanted total group participation in it.

In another community, clearings are used to “get assistance with disagreements, hold them with detachment, compassion, and not just avoid each other.” The clearings are facilitated by various community members.

Committees/Specific Roles

Another tool described was the use of committees or specific roles for community members dealing with conflict management. Having facilitators designated to run a community meeting is one example of this. Every reporting member of the Earth Balance Farm, five surveyed members, mentioned the importance of forming a committee when an issue came up that needed to be dealt with by the whole community, forming a committee to set policy, sooth conflict, and determine group process. Two of the four respondents from Fertile Ground Cooperative indicated the importance of what they call a “process team” to work through conflict, and a “community dysfunction committee” to make process decisions. Respondent 3C from Fertile Ground wrote about this topic:

The situation I alluded to in the previous answer led to our formation of a Community Dysfunction Committee. This committee proposed a process by which to communicate various people’s concerns to the member in question. The idea is that this will lead to more open dialogue about those concerns.

The most common committee within the communities participating in the study is some form of a process team that deals specifically with conflict management issues.

Mediation

Mediation was described as an important part of the customized and sequential conflict resolution systems. All eight of the communities mentioned mediation as an integral part of their system. The communities used both internal mediators and outside mediators to varying degrees.

Community Retreats

Salama Cooperative, Birch Rising and Fertile Ground all mentioned the importance of their community retreat held at regular intervals. Members of Salama spoke of the retreat as a turning point in the life of the community and as an important way to reestablish culture and group norms every year. Henry describes the historical process of starting and maintaining a community retreat at Salama Cooperative.

But then, I don't know the year exactly, I'd say around about 1990, we as a community decided we had some long standing conflicts and tensions within the group and we needed some outside help. At that time we started basically, I don't know if you would call it a tradition, an annual retreat. We would hire somebody from the outside to come in and once a year take stock and try to work through existing tensions or look ahead. ... For example our retreat coming up just two months away, we have a first session called Salama Cooperative culture. Just how do we want to be, how do we want to deal with each other. A big part of that is what do we do when there is conflict, what do we want, how do we deal with it. A big part of that is what do we do in the group, what do we do spur of the moment, right then when it comes up or do we deal with it one on one in a controlled fashion step by step, what do we want to do. And then we do it.

Self Reflection

Birch Rising community members spoke in the most detail about the importance of each member participating in self-reflection. In fact, one of the values at Birch Rising is that of member self-examination, and using the community as a place to create that process. Nancy explains this value within the Birch Rising community.

I think that might be one of the things that makes us different from other communities. We are really focused on inner transformation. We think that people in conflict are often expressing their inner anger and their frustration on other people. We focus on that healing within that must take place for people to be able to be in community with other people. That is really important. I can't stress it enough. It is part of our community, this self-transformation. People don't want to look in at what they are contributing most of the time, but we always have some responsibility.

Other communities referred to forms of self-examination, often through meditation, as a tool for conflict management, arguing that everyone has a responsibility for conflict and therefore need to look at and understand their personal contribution to conflict situations.

Decision Book

Only one community, Salama Cooperative, spoke of a "decision book" used to record important community decisions. Fiona indicates the importance of this tool:

Every meeting we bring the decision book out and when an agenda item comes up that requires a decision and we actually consent something it gets written down in the decision book. You know so you can go back and look, a historical perspective. Whereas before when it was a smaller group and probably a higher level of trust, so we didn't have a need for the decision book. So it makes sense in a lot of ways, in one way it really marks the moment, we are making a decision now and this is what it is and lets all be clear on it but it does often happen that everyone hears what they want to hear and you can get disagreements later about what was actually you committed to so it makes a lot of sense.

These are just nine of the numerous tools used in intentional communities to manage conflict. These eight communities use a variety of conflict resolution tools to work through their internal conflicts.

Satisfaction

While some respondents, in both interviews and surveys, reported that they were both satisfied and unsatisfied with how conflict was managed in their community, it was especially interesting to look at how satisfaction intersected with a commitment to engage in conflict. Of those respondents who stated their community embraces conflict and

readily engages in it, they each also stated they were satisfied with how conflict was managed in their communities--one from Green Meadow, all three respondents from Dancing Fern, four respondents out of five from Birch Rising, and four out of five Salama House respondents. This parallel is drawn by looking at individual respondents' satisfaction. While no definition of satisfaction was given, it is pertinent to see that for these individuals, there was a link between satisfaction and their communities' commitment to engage in conflict when it arose.

Conclusion

Through the research methods of experiencing, inquiring and examining, insight into the dispute resolution practices of eight long-term intentional communities was developed. Conflict management practices in these intentional communities are vital and important to learn from. Those in other groups, such as work groups and families, can learn from these established communities that make it a point to address conflict issues and work toward productive conflict. The conscientious level of preparation that these communities reach is a viable goal for younger communities as well.

Beginning with the membership selection process, members create a conflict management system that embraces conflict as an inevitability. The study illustrated that group conflict processes evolved over time, typically moving from a sequential step-by-step method to a customized style as communities developed more sophisticated methods of resolving conflict. To manage these inevitable conflicts, these communities have also developed several concrete and creative tools that work specifically for their community.

The results from this study lead to intriguing questions regarding broader implications for intentional communities and other similar organizations. These questions deserve serious attention.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The major lessons coming out of this research relate to the importance of preparation for conflict, including recognizing the significance of the membership selection process, consciously creating group values that embrace conflict as a positive force for group sustainability, and establishing a culture that is sensitive to managing conflict once it arises. The communities involved in this study offer examples how these lessons can and have been implemented. There is no monolithic conflict resolution system that should be implemented in every intentional community. These structures can look different for each community, the key being that they are well thought out and agreed upon by the membership.

Transferable Lessons

Do lessons from research gathered from eight intentional communities about resolving conflict have far-reaching implications for other settings? While this study has been careful not to make generalizations beyond the data's scope, the research provides undeniably transferable lessons for all intentional communities, other group living situations, families, family-run businesses and other cooperative corporations. The results from this research are not quantitative; the study did not provide an overview of the intentional communities' landscape or provide data regarding trends within the communities movement. However, its qualitative data examines the practices of eight long-lasting communities in detail. Results from the interviews and surveys uncover significant lessons about group conflict, its causes, and successful examples for how to manage it when it arises.

In many ways, this study gathered data from an unusually successful sample group. The criterion set out in the selection process suggested that the communities in this study would have model, or at least satisfactory, conflict resolution practices. Selecting long-term communities meant that the research would focus on groups that had managed to avoid the common fate of many failed intentional communities. Focusing on communities with a particularly high level of commitment, illustrated by group income generation, also guaranteed that the research would highlight groups with an investment in sustainability. The number of effective tools for conflict resolution and sophisticated methods of group process are just two examples of the selection process' impact on the study.

Other intentional communities can benefit from intentional communities that have lasted for many years. This is not a new idea. The Communities Magazine and Communities Directory, both cited often in this paper, rely on community members offering insights into the failures and successes of their community endeavors in their publications. A clearer relationship could be built with a mentor system between communities that have existed for many years and ones that are newly forming. This research adds to that conversation by including an outside perspective. In addition, the research was done through the lens of conflict resolution studies, an area where there is space for growth in the literature regarding intentional communities. The comparative nature of the research also adds to articles and essays written by or about one particular community. While not representative of all communities, the focus on eight different communities adds breadth to a field of literature often using only one community as a case study. I avoided focusing on only one or two communities because I wanted to add

comparative research to the field. Future research including a broader scope would build on this project and allow conflict scholars to provide more generalized findings to communities.

It is important to recognize that the sample group in this study was not necessarily chosen because they have model conflict resolution systems. The requirements for participation created a group of communities that had conflict resolution systems in place. The age of a community is an indicator of its success, although it does not singularly define success. Other factors have to be addressed as well.

Furthermore, lessons from the research extend to other group settings. Intentional communities could be considered a type of extreme work group, considering that they work together, perform important tasks together and also live together as a type of family. This complicates issues and leaves space for deeper relationships to be built. An intentional community is similar to a family in that members share intimate details of their lives, monetary advancement is shared, care for children is often collective, and intimate relationships are formed on many levels (Baumann, 2001). We can look into our own families of origin to compare the levels of conscious preparation and investment in conflict process that is made, in comparison with these intentional communities. Clearly, many families have a great deal to learn from the methods of conflict preparation used by intentional communities. Finally, lessons from this research are also applicable to other organizations, particularly family-run or small cooperative businesses.

Preparation

In general, people tend to have more negative experiences with conflict than positive, which may be related to lack of preparation for constructive conflict. For this

reason, intentional communities have to be deliberate in the way they prepare for conflict. This study sought to focus on the issue of conflict preparation and to provide concrete advice about how communities could better prepare for conflict, with the secondary goal of dealing with the issue of managing conflict once it becomes manifest. The research has allowed us to accomplish this goal.

As the data in this research illustrated, preparing for conflict before it surfaces is essential to satisfaction with conflict management for community members. Preparation can be a vague term involving many complex variables. However, this research suggests that there are three important aspects of preparation that intentional communities should adopt in order to create a culture that can prevent destructive conflict and one that is sensitive to conflict when it becomes manifest. Those aspects include establishing conflict resolution values, recruiting and selecting new members in a strategic way and establishing a toolbox of conflict resolution tactics in order to create a customized conflict management system that best fits the community and its individuals.

Values

When asked about preparing for conflict, many of the participants in this study discussed shared values that formed the basis of their conflict resolution practices. Communities are shaped and defined by values. For people interested in forming communities, it is important to recognize the significance of being explicit about the group's shared values. When the values of community members are different, tension and conflict ensue, as described in Chapter 2 regarding family systems theory.

The values of a community define the way its members handle conflict. This is also true of organizations. All of the communities in this study expressed similar values,

with egalitarianism, simplicity, environmental stewardship, and education as the most common themes. This research suggests that three values are important for communities to adopt in creating successful conflict management systems: embracing conflict as a healthy and inevitable reality, committing to engage in conflict resolution and a preference for nonviolence.

Embracing Conflict as Inevitable. As conflict resolution practitioners, we are taught to see the positive elements of conflict. The term conflict resolution is often misleading, implying that resolution is both possible and the ultimate goal. There are often connotations involved with the phrase suggesting that conflict is destructive and something to avoid at all costs. However, conflict resolution scholars have sought to correct these false assumptions. Deutsch and others have argued that conflict's positive elements include giving voice to marginalized individuals in groups, alleviating stagnation in a group and contributing to positive social change. As Deutsch argues, conflict is the medium through which problems can be brought up and solutions created. It is the root of personal and social transformation (1973).

These positive elements of conflict are true in communities as well. Within communities, conflict can enhance internal cohesiveness, revitalize group purpose and create new group norms. As interviewees discussed specific scenarios of conflict within their communities, this reality was apparent. One of the most conclusive results of the study was that members in the sample group of intentional communities all discussed their communities' belief in the inevitability of conflict, that it cannot be suppressed or eliminated. Although no questions in the survey specifically asked about this value, members said this was essential in their approach to conflict situations. This value

allowed these intentional communities to benefit from the positive elements of conflict because they embrace it as a healthy aspect of group life rather than avoiding it as many people do.

Commitment to Engage. Recognizing the inevitability of conflict is one thing. Making a formal commitment to engage with others when conflict arises potentially separates the communities in this study from other groups in society. This commitment looks different for every community and for every member in a community. Stonewalling communication and avoiding conflict are common ways for people to manage conflict. A commitment not to respond this way is a strong indication of the respondents understanding of conflict and processes that can positively manage it.

Valuing engagement does not mean prescribing one specific method for handling all conflicts. One of the most conclusive results from this project is that communities use a variety of creative options for attempting to resolve conflicts. There was no evidence that one method produce more satisfaction with conflict resolution than another. What was evident is that communities that had consciously chosen to engage with conflict had more satisfaction than those communities that had not made this a part of their communal language, membership process or culture.

Nonviolence. Another value espoused by many of the communities surveyed is a commitment to nonviolence. This commitment extends to physical violence, but also goes deeper to begin to understand and work against verbal violence and emotional violence. Marshal Rosenberg's theory of nonviolence is one way to practice nonviolent communication; however, it is not the only way to express a commitment to nonviolence. The concept of nonviolence permeates the culture within the respondent communities.

This aspect of culture is developed when the community begins to determine acceptable behaviors and prepare for conflict.

Membership Selection

When participants in this study were asked about how they prepare for conflict, an overwhelming number referred back to their membership selection process as one significant way they prevented destructive conflict from engulfing their community. Members mentioned that it was essential to include an extensive new member process in order to avoid common communal failure. This relates back to the parallels between intentional communities and families. Family systems theory argues that one individual has the power to change the whole unit. Understanding the interdependent nature of communal settings and the central role relationships play in intentional communities, each individual member alters the group's dynamics in a significant way, particularly when these communities all rely on consensus to make decisions and include not only living cooperatively but some form of communal work. The extensive interviewing and exploratory phases in the communities' membership selection process might seem excessive to the outside observer, but it is an essential function that protects communities from destructive conflict by ensuring that new members are prepared to be a part of the intentional family and that the family is prepared to take in the new member.

A major difference between families of origin and intentional communities is that we are born into families, and we choose intentional communities as adults. (Unless we are born into them, but that is a separate master's project). Once we reach adulthood we have a great deal more "psychological baggage," life experience, and set ways than we did as children. In addition, we have the experience of our biological family behind us, to

base our future experience on. This can be a minefield of potential conflict and strife in the community, especially as members of intentional communities work to create a family. Community and group processes can be used as powerful opportunities for personal growth, if the stepping stones are in place for success.

Orientation. One additional aspect of new membership highlighted in this research was the use of orientations and new member rituals as a method of preparation for conflict. New member orientation at some communities in the study included training in conflict resolution, nonviolent communication or Feedback Learning. In addition, training should include the storytelling of the community's past and the values that form its character.

A Toolbox of Conflict Resolution Tactics

Certain tools for conflict preparation were highlighted in this study. One method that community members described was to have check-in time at the beginning of community meetings, space to air issues that have been bothersome since the last meeting. Or whole meetings, perhaps monthly, with the purpose of airing concerns about the community or certain members. Such meetings are intended to let off steam a small amount at a time. This can be a very dangerous process if all the community members are not prepared. Again, members have to be prepared for a method for managing conflict such as this, and enter the community understanding the method.

One way to begin preparation, as respondents highlighted, is to have a community retreat at the formation of the community and once every year. This time can be spent preparing for conflict through training, doing group study, revisiting decision making processes, discussing cultural norms, strengthening relationships and setting

group structures. Some communities have an annual retreat to learn new process or communication skills. Bringing in a consultant from outside the community is beneficial because those inside the community cannot offer unbiased interpretation of conflict situations. Communities spoke about using a facilitator from the community for day to day issues and meetings to make sure that the group stayed on task and to lead the meetings. Also, communities in close proximity talked about relying on those from other communities to come in and facilitate a difficult meeting if it was decided that no one from the community could do it. Members also rely on books and consultants for additional assistance, some of which are listed in Appendix F.

The purpose of describing these tools is to highlight the wide variety of creative options available to communities as they create their group process and culture. As communities in this study evolved, they seemed to incorporate more conflict resolution practices into their community and were able to use these practices to fit specific contexts. Having structures in place does not necessarily mean that communities will create rigid sequential processes for handling conflict. However, it does mean that the community consciously chooses what methods of conflict resolution to use that best fits their needs. Two specific tools stand out as particularly effective from this study.

Training. Preparing for conflict requires proper training in conflict resolution skills. This highlights the space within the intentional communities movement for qualified conflict resolution practitioners to share skills and knowledge with those working toward living communally. Bringing in someone from outside the group adds insight into group dynamics and potential issues. While the communities involved in this study did use some training mechanisms and members felt like they were knowledgeable

about group process and communication skills there seems to be space for additional quality training in topics such as mediation, consensus-building and other forms of dispute resolution.

Consensus. According to family systems theory discussed in Chapter 2, as in families, building community cohesion and harmony requires strategies that distribute power in ways that allow members to feel positive about their involvement in the community (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2003). One indicator of power distribution is the decision-making strategies the family, or community, uses. Family decision making structures are similar to those in intentional communities in that when members are perceived to have legitimate power, they are viewed as exercising authority rather than control. Non legitimate use of power is perceived as control and domination (Anderson & Sabatelli).

Consensus is a common decision making structure, as also described in Chapter 2. There are many methods of consensus decision making and taking the time to study the options and choose one that feels comfortable to each member can aid in the conflict preparation process. Writing down the reasons for choosing one method and expectations of how the method will be used in community documents can be helpful for clarification later.

The struggle of identity is apparent when anyone joins any group, struggling with what they will have to give up in order to belong to a group of their choosing (Berg & Smith, 1987). One way for an intentional community to ease this tension is to create group norms or boundaries in a straightforward manner. This is not a prescription for how members have to act, but group understandings about what is acceptable, and what

will be done in the group if someone's behavior is not acceptable. Essentially, consciously creating community culture.

It seems that a community that is able to embrace the individuality of each of its members will ease the tension and grow from this experience. If one's behavior is deemed detrimental to the group and they are asked to leave, predetermined process must exist around this matter. In order for this process to feel fair to all members, everyone should know how this will be managed prior to having to deal with it. Consensus can be used in this decision as well. If it is handled properly, this experience can be less than negative and possibly positive for everyone involved.

Third Party Intervention

Deutsch (1973) offers suggestions for third party intervention in groups, as listed in Chapter 2. The following are those suggestions, slightly altered in order to address the potential needs of intentional communities. When combined with a community that recognizes the legitimacy of each member, mutual respect of all parties, the desirability of mutually satisfying agreement, and open communication, the following has the potential to facilitate positive approaches to inevitable conflict (Deutsch).

1. Avoid the suppression of conflict;
2. Create a safe space in which to bring conflicts;
3. Acknowledge conflict in a community as positive and as an agent of social change;
4. Make training in communication and conflict resolution available for community members;
5. Ensure a supportive, experienced, neutral, skilled third party is readily available when needed;

6. Ensure systems are available for an individual to leave the community fairly easily, and a more complicated system in place in order to ask a member to leave by the community;
7. Create a sense of shared responsibility for the community.

Setting standards similar to these allows an intentional community to openly address conflict situations when they arise. As Deutsch suggests, communities must create a safe space in order to bring up issues of conflict and tension.

Conclusion

With various members of differing personalities living together in close proximity, conflict will inevitably engulf intentional communities. Indeed, it has been the cause for many failed communities. Scholars and community members tend to focus on the conflict management systems in place in order to handle conflicts. However, we often neglect the importance of the preparation process, attempting to solve the problem without analyzing its roots. This study has allowed us to examine conflict through the lens of eight intentional communities. It has illustrated the importance of preparation in allowing communities to benefit from conflict rather than succumbing to it. Respondents spoke of various community structures that increase their ability to manage conflict and create a community culture capable of embracing conflict. Again, those communities accessed in this research are ones that have structure and policies in place to manage and prepare for conflict. As I learned through this project, they are the experts in this arena.

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Appendix A Informed Consent Form

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I am conducting interviews to look at the ways that different intentional communities manage internal conflict. Hopefully, the final paper will be distributed to all those who participate, after all identifying information has been removed. I am a graduate student at the University of Massachusetts, Boston and I live in a small intentional community in Boston.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked participate in an interview, which will take about an hour. Participating in this interview is completely voluntary. You can choose not to answer any question at any time. Your responses will be treated with strict confidence. Due to the nature of the questions, you may become uncomfortable; you can stop the interview at any time. It is my belief that you will experience no more than minimal (what you would experience on an average day) risk by participating in this interview.

This interview will be audio-taped and listened to only by Sarah, the Principle Investigator. If you don't want your interview to be audio-taped please let Sarah know.

If you have any further questions about the study, please feel free to follow up with the Principle Investigator and interviewer, Sarah Gyorog at (617) 522 7719. You can also email Sarah at sarahgyorog@yahoo.com. My supervisor, Eben Weitzman is also available at (617) 287-7238 or at eben.weitzman@umb.edu. In addition, this research is validated by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. You can contact them with concerns at (617) 287 5370 or at human.subjects@umb.edu

I have read and understand the above statement. The tasks involved in this research have been explained to me. I consent to participate in this study without waiving my right to discontinue my participation at any time without recrimination. I am over 18.

Participant's printed name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____ Interviewers signature _____

In addition, I give full consent to the audiotaping of my interview.

Participant's printed Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____ Interviewers signature: _____

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Tell me the story of joining your community.

Specifically, how does your community prepare for conflict?

Has your community completed any type of conflict resolution training?

How are conflicts resolved in your community?

Do you feel conflicts are handled satisfactorily in you community?

If yes, what makes it feel satisfactory?

If no, what makes it feel unsatisfactory?

Tell me a story about a conflict in you community—how did it escalate? How was it resolved, if it was?

Appendix C Survey Cover Letter

Date

Sarah Gyorog
50 Spring Park Avenue
Boston, MA 02130

Community address

Dear _____ Community:

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I am conducting a study to look at the ways that different intentional communities manage internal conflict. Hopefully, the final paper will be distributed to all those who participate. I am a graduate student at the University of Massachusetts, Boston and I live in a small intentional community in Boston.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to fill out a survey regarding your community. It should take about 30 minutes. You can choose not to answer any question. Please try to ensure that each adult (over 18) member of your community has the opportunity to fill out a survey. You can use the addressed and stamped envelope to return your surveys to me.

Your responses will be treated with strict confidence, and will remain anonymous, do not put your name on the survey. If you become uncomfortable at any point you can stop answering the questions. It is my belief that you will experience no more than minimal (what you would experience on an average day) risk by filling out this survey.

If you have any further questions about the study after you finish the survey, please feel free to follow up with the Principle Investigator, Sarah Gyorog at (617) 522 7719. You can also email Sarah at sarahgyorog@yahoo.com. My supervisor, Eben Weitzman is also available at (617) 287-7238 or at eben.weitzman@umb.edu. In addition, this research is validated by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. You can contact them with any questions or concerns at (617) 287-5374 or at human.subjects@umb.edu.

Please attempt to mail the surveys back to me by February 23, 2004.

Thank you in advance for taking the time to fill out this survey.

Take care,

Sarah

Appendix D

Survey

Hello! Thank you for agreeing to fill out this survey. This research project will produce a document regarding conflict management in intentional communities that can be shared with those who participated in the study.

Specifically, how does your community prepare for conflict?

Has your community completed any type of conflict resolution training?

How are conflicts resolved in your community?

Do you feel conflicts are handled satisfactorily in you community?

If yes, what makes it feel satisfactory?

If no, what makes it feel unsatisfactory?

One more question on the next page!

Tell me a story about a conflict in your community—how did it escalate? How was it resolved, if it was?

Thank you for filling out this survey!

Sarah

Appendix F

Resources

Workshops and Trainers

Cultures Edge Workshops

www.earthaven.org

Earthaven Community in North Carolina offers workshops and internships in consensus, governance, permaculture and forming new intentional communities

Ecovillage Training Center

www.thefarm.org

The Farm community in Tennessee offers workshops and apprenticeships in ecovillage design, renewable energy, environmental building, and sustainable agriculture.

Lost Valley Educational Center

www.lostvalley.org

Workshops and community apprentice programs in sustainable living skills including personal development, community living and ritual.

Foundation for Community Encouragement

www.fce-community.org

Teaches principles and values of community through workshops and training worldwide.

Creating a Land Based Intentional Community

www.oaec.org

Weekend and five-day courses in starting a community, community living and sustainable living at Sowing Circle in California. Also, individual consulting available.

Books and Magazines

Communities Magazine

Published by the Fellowship for Intentional Communities

Magazine covers a wide variety of topics, authors are primarily communitarians

Community Building

The Cohousing Handbook: Building a Place for Community

Chris Scott-Hanson, 1996, Hartley and Marks

Creating a Life Together: Practical Tools to Grow Ecovillages and Intentional Communities

Diana Leafe Christian, 2003, New Society Publishers

Cooperative Housing Compendium: Resources for Collaborative Living
Lottie Cohen and Lois Arkin, 1993, Co-op Resources and Services Project

Creating Community Anywhere: Finding Support and Connection in a Fragmented World
Carolyn Shaffer and Kristin Anundsen, 1993, Putnam Books

Guidebook for Intentional Communities
Grisom Morgan, 1988

Builders of the Dawn: Community Lifestyles in a Changing World
Corrine McLaughlin and Gordon Davidson, 1985, Stillpoint Publishing

On Creating a Community: A Guide for Organizations, Personal Productivity and International Peace
William Polowniak, 1994

Getting Real: 10 Truth Skills You Need to Live and Authentic Life
Susan Campbell, 2001, New World Library

Conflict in Community

Creating Harmony: Conflict Resolution in Community
Hildur Jackson, Editor, 1999, Gaia Trust/ Permanent Publications

Resolving Conflicts With Others and Within Yourself
Gini Graham Scott, New Harbingers Publications

Nonviolent Communication

Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Compassion
Marshal Rosenberg, 1998, PuddleDancer Press

A Model for Nonviolent Communication
Marshal Rosenberg, 1983, PuddleDancer Press

Decision Making and Consensus

Building United Judgement: A Handbook for Consensus Decision Making

Michel Avery, et al, 1981, Fellowship for Intentional Community

Facilitators Guide to Participatory Decision Making

Sam Kaner, Lenny Lind, Duane Berger, Catherine Toldi & Sarah Fisk, 1996, New Society Publishers

Democracy in Small Groups: Participation, Decision Making and Communication

John Gastil, 1993, New Society Publishers

Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making

Sam Kaner, 1996, New Society Publishers

Introduction to Consensus

Bea Briggs, 2000, Self-Published

On Conflict and Consensus: A Handbook on Formal Consensus Decision-Making

CT Butler and Amy Rothstein, 1991, Food Not Bombs Publishing

Group Meetings and Facilitation

Great Meetings! How to Facilitate Like a Pro

Dee Kelsey and Pam Plumb, 1997, Hanson Park Plus

A Manual for Group Facilitators

Brian Auvine et al, 1978, Fellowship for Intentional Communities

Organizations

Fellowship for Intentional Communities	Northwest Intentional Communities Association
www.fic.org	www.ic.org.nica
Global Ecovillage Network	Ecovillage Network of the Americas
www.gaia.org	www.ecovillage.org
Federation of Egalitarian Communities	Communal Studies Association
www.thefec.org	www.ic.org/csa/
Center for Communal Studies	Society for Utopian Studies
(812) 464 1727	University of Maine
University of Southern Indiana	www.utoronto.ca/utopia/