

Summary

Leadership in an Intractable Conflict over Public School Sexuality Education in the United States: A Constructivist Grounded Theory Study

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Introduction

My career can be split into two distinct periods. I began my career in religious work. During that period I served as an ordained minister within evangelical Christian, and occasionally fundamentalist, traditions. I held leadership positions in local, state, national, and international organizations and groups. In the second, and most recent, period of my career I have worked in the field of sexuality education. Again, I have had the privilege of providing leadership in local, state, national, and international organizations and groups. Some might interpret these two career periods as having very little, if anything, in common. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth.

During both periods I worked with young people. Sometimes my work brought me into daily contact with young people and, at other times, I worked indirectly with them by providing support and assistance to youth serving professionals and organizations.

Additionally, in both periods, I provided sexuality education to young people. Ideologically, my approach was sometimes “abstinence-only” and sometimes “comprehensive.” As a result, I can understand both and fluently speak the language of either. My involvement in the field has also put me in the middle of the conflict over sexuality education in U.S. public schools.

Since my first experience in the conflict, I have been curious about it. I have not been curious about the issues at the center of the conflict, as those seem quite clear, and have been described very well by others. Rather, I have been curious about those of us who have provided leadership in and through the conflict. I have been curious about our motivations to lead and remain in leadership despite the conflict. I have been curious about how we learn to lead in such a niche field. I have been curious to know how we understand and relate to the conflict as persons, as well as leaders. This research has attempted to satisfy this curiosity.

This summary highlights key findings of original research conducted by the author over a four year period from September, 2009 to September, 2013. The research was conducted in partial fulfillment of the Ph.D. in Organizational Leadership at Eastern University, St. Davids, PA. Dissertation committee members included Eastern University faculty, Beth Birmingham, Ph.D. (Chair) and Heewon Chang, Ph.D., and Susan Philliber, Ph.D. of Philliber Research Associates.

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Study Significance

Studies of leaders of sexual health organizations are rare. For this reason, this study makes an important contribution to the literature in the fields of organizational leadership, sexuality, and sexuality education studies. This study develops theory to explain the motivation to lead among sexual health organization leaders within a context defined by conflict over sexuality education.

The study also has practical significance. An understanding of sexual health organization leader motivation can contribute to transforming the conflict. By more clearly and deeply understanding the leadership motives in sexual health organizations, it is more likely that strategies can be identified and implemented for changing the tone of the dialogue and moderating the conflict.

More broadly, the study has significance with regard to other intractable ideological conflicts within the larger culture war in the United States. Current and ongoing conflicts include abortion, same sex marriage, homosexuality, civil rights, global warming, immigration, gun control, education, drug policy, health care, economic growth, preventative care and others, including the political conflict that often cripples the governing process in the United States. Observers and leaders who desire to mitigate these conflicts, if not resolve them, may also find supportive ideas and strategies in this study.

The Context of Conflict

Fifteen years ago the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (1998) observed, “While the adults are arguing, the teens are getting pregnant.” In the United States the argument over sexuality is long standing. It has been, and still is, fought on many fronts: abortion, contraception, family planning, pre-marital sex, pornography, prostitution, homosexuality, same-sex marriage, vaccination for sexually transmitted infections, and the prevention and treatment of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). The argument over the sexuality education of young people in public schools has a long history. As early as 1892 the National Education Association was addressing the role of sexuality education in public schools (Carrera, 1971; Cornblatt, 2009). The first attempt to provide sexuality education in public schools was in Chicago in 1913, and lasted only a few weeks due to opposition (Cornblatt, 2009; Jensen, 2007; Jensen, 2010; Moran, 2000; Vergari, 2000). The argument over sexuality education in public schools has continued throughout the 20th century, into the new millennium, until today (Goldfarb, 2009; Irvine, 2002; Kempner, 2009; Klein, 2012; Lord, 2010; Luker, 2006). The argument has been described as a moral conflict, a disagreement pitting one group's worldview against another's (Docherty, 2001; Maiese, 2003a).

At the center of the argument over the sexuality education of young people are organizations and their leaders that have an interest in promoting their particular ideology regarding adolescent sexual health. ***The interests and motivations of these leaders and their organizations drive the national conflict over sexuality education.*** Because leaders play a critical role in sustaining the conflict, leaders play an essential role in managing, even resolving, it. “Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles” (Kotter, 1996, p. 25).

The *National Consensus Process on Sexual Health and Responsible Behavior (NCP)*, convened by former U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher, affirmed the critical role of organizational leaders in resolving the conflict over sexuality and sexuality education in the United States (Morehouse School of Medicine, 2006). The NCP brought together 28 leaders of major organizations working on sexual health issues. The leaders represented organizations with divergent perspectives on sexual health. The overarching goal of the NCP was to improve sexual health and responsible sexual behavior in the United States by developing a common vision, identifying mutual understanding of areas of disagreement, identifying potential areas of agreement, and identifying agreements in support of separate projects that implement the NCP goals. An interim report on the progress of the consensus process showed some successes and some failures (Morehouse School of Medicine, 2006). The report clearly showed the difficulty of bringing leaders with opposing interests together for consensus building. Of the 28 original invitees, three leaders refused to participate and another seven withdrew after having begun participation. Only 18 of the original invitees remained in the process (Morehouse School of Medicine, 2006). Nonetheless, Christian Thrasher, a co-facilitator of the consensus process with Dr. Satcher, remained convinced of its importance, "We need to work together. We need to respect our differences. We need to acknowledge our diversity. We need to find common ground. Doing nothing will forever continue to be unacceptable!" (Thrasher, 2009, p. 203). Strategies for moderating conflict over sexuality education will remain elusive until the interests and motivations of leaders are more fully understood.

Key Terms in the Study

Several key terms used in the study beg definition. These include: sexuality education, public schools, intractable conflict, sexual health organizations, and leader motivation.

Sexuality Education

A caveat is in order before defining sexuality education. The proponents of what I refer to as "*comprehensive*" sexuality education and "*abstinence-only*" sexuality education in this study are neither likely to prefer nor be satisfied by my definitions, as each have their own preferred definitions (see Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, n.d., para. 1 and National Abstinence Education Association, 2013, p. 6). To be clear, it was never my intent to examine and discuss the finer points of the conflict over sexuality education. This study

Study Purpose

To examine how the perspectives and experiences of an intractable conflict over sexuality education in public schools has affected the leadership motivation, behavior, and competencies of sexual health organization leaders in the United States.

Research Questions

1. *How do leaders of sexual health organizations perceive and experience the intractable conflict over sexuality education in U.S. public schools?*
2. *What has motivated leaders of sexual health organizations to take on a leadership role and sustained their leadership involvement in the contentious environment?*
3. *How has the contentious environment affected their leadership behaviors and perception of leadership competencies?*

focuses instead on leadership, the motivation of leaders, regardless of their ideological position in the conflict, and how they lead.

For this study, therefore, I have defined *sexuality education as public school curricula or programs targeted to young people that are designed to address issues related to human sexuality*. Within this broad definition, a central question at the heart of the ongoing conflict over the sexuality education in U.S. schools is one that represents two distinct ideological positions: Should sexuality education focus exclusively on promoting postponement of sexual activity until marriage (commonly referred to as *abstinence-only*); or, providing information and skills to support responsible sexual decision making, which includes the option of using birth control and condoms as well as delay of sexual activity, regardless of marital status (commonly referred to as *comprehensive*)?

Public Schools

Public schools are defined as *those institutions in the United States that are funded through federal, state, and local taxes to educate young people from kindergarten through grade 12 in public group settings (e.g., classrooms)*. I have not included in this definition home-schooled students, whose education is being paid through the same public funding systems, or students attending private schools.

Intractable Conflict

Intractable conflicts are *conflicts that persist for a long time, are waged in ways that observers and adversaries view as destructive or harmful, and seem to be resistant to ending* (Kriesberg, 2005). Intractable conflicts, however, do not need to be hopeless, irresolvable

conflicts; rather, they are conflicts that are *perceived to be irresolvable* (Burgess & Burgess, 2003). This perception is critical to managing and eventually resolving them. When parties in a conflict perceive it as intractable, they are more likely to become desperate and use tactics that, otherwise, would seem unthinkable (Burgess & Burgess, 2003). Intractable conflicts can result from moral differences between people and groups rooted in religion, culture, or worldview (Burgess & Burgess, 2003; Coleman, Vallacher, Nowak, & Bui-Wrzosinska, 2007).

These differences can be expressed as ideologies, or ideas that are the basis of a political policy or theory (Ideology, n.d.). Intractable conflict occurs when one group's ideology conflicts with another group's ideology (Maiese, 2003a). The intractable conflict being examined in this study is the long-term conflict between groups with competing ideologies over sexuality education policy and funding priorities in the United States.

Focus

This study focuses on leadership, the motivation of leaders, and how they lead, regardless of ideology. It was never the intent of the study to examine and discuss the finer points of the conflict over sexuality education.

Study Method: Constructivist Grounded Theory

The study used grounded theory (GT) methodology, a qualitative research approach designed to capture participants' experiences and their interpretations. Grounded theory is used to create theory where none exists on a topic and there are no existing hypotheses to test (O'Reilly, Paper, & Marx, 2012).

Constructivist GT emphasizes the complexity and multiple realities of individuals. Theory, then, is a construction of reality based on the experiences of participants and the meanings they attach to them, as understood and interpreted by the researcher (Charmaz, 2006).

Sexual Health Organizations

I have defined sexual health organizations quite broadly as *those organizations that intentionally and actively participate in the national dialogue on the sexuality education of young people*. These organizations include, but are not limited to: national, regional, state and local advocacy organizations, organizations providing curriculum and programs nationwide, statewide teen pregnancy prevention and adolescent sexual health promotion organizations, state and federal agencies, and community based organizations providing direct sexuality education instruction through local public schools or indirectly through training of educators and provision of curriculum. While the organizations may be widely divergent in their ideologies regarding the sexuality education of young people, all engage in the dialogue, whether in national, regional, state, or local venues.

Leader Motivation

Leader motivation refers to *the reasons individuals choose to be and remain in leadership roles in sexual health organizations*. Motivation refers to factors, which can be either internal (intrinsic) or external (extrinsic), that cause a person to do something and continue to do it (Fry, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Chan and Drasgow's (2001) "Motivation to Lead" (MTL) framework was useful in defining the parameters of leader motivation. Briefly, Chan & Drasgow's (2001) theory asserted there are three basic individual differences that explain MTL. First, *affective MTL* describes individuals who lead simply because they like to lead. Secondly, *socio-normative MTL* describes those who lead out of a sense of obligation or responsibility. Finally, *noncalculative MTL* refers to individuals who may have agreed to leadership without fully understanding all it meant with regard to costs and benefits.

Study Participants

I was extremely fortunate to have a willing, eager group of leaders that represented the full ideological spectrum on sexuality education as participants. I assured them of confidentiality and have also protected their identities due to the nature and intensity of the conflict over sexuality education. The participants were all leaders within sexual health organizations identified through a combination of

Participant Criteria

Two sampling strategies were used. First, participants needed to meet three criteria, a form of criteria sampling (Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2007): *The criteria for this study limited the sample to those individuals who:*

1. *Were over age 18 (adults);*
2. *Held for at least three years, at the time of the study, an executive or senior leadership position in a sexual health organization; and,*
3. *Had direct experience of personal engagement (e.g., dialogue, debate, argument, ongoing discussion either in person or via the media) in the national dialogue on the sexuality education of young people with others who hold opposing views.*

Participants for the initial sample were identified from three sources:

1. *The list of invitees to the National Consensus Process on Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior (NCP);*
2. *Recommendations from members of the Advanced Sexuality Educators and Trainers (ASET); and,*
3. *My professional contacts within the field of sexuality education.*

Second, early participants in the study referred other leaders whom they believed met the study criteria, as strategy known as snowball sampling.

The final sample size for the study was 35 leaders within sexual health organizations.

criterion and snowball sampling. A total of 35 leaders participated in the study. Twenty-eight identified as female. Two-thirds were between ages 34 and 64 at the time of the study. The leaders were well educated, with all holding bachelor's degrees and 80% holding masters or doctoral degrees. Thirty-two identified as non-Hispanic white/Caucasian.

Leaders participating in the study were very experienced in the field of sexuality education of young people and in leadership:

- *Length of time in the field:* 21.7 years (mean), ranging from 7 to 50 years.
- *Length of time in current organization:* 7.5 years (mean), ranging from less than 1 year to 43 years
- *Length of time in leadership:* 6.1 years (mean), ranging from five weeks to 43 years

Eleven leaders had less than three years in their current position but all had more than three years of leadership experience in other sexual health organizations, which included direct participation in the national dialogue on sexuality education.

The Jigsaw Puzzle: A Metaphor for the Process of Grounded Theory Analysis

If you have ever completed a 1000+ piece jigsaw puzzle without the benefit of ever having seen a picture of the complete image from the box lid, you have had a taste of grounded theory analysis.

The "pieces" are dumped in front of you and you begin to pick up and compare each piece of the puzzle with others to see which make sense, or logically fit, together. In the process you may examine each piece many, many times before you find its logical fit. Over time, as more pieces fit with others in increasingly larger chunks, the image emerges. Finally, a complete picture is presented.

Unlike a jigsaw puzzle, the complete picture (theory) presented through grounded theory research may not be the final image. As the theory is tested and retested, it will evolve to become more complete and representative of the experience.

Study Procedures

Data were collected in two stages from January to April, 2013. First, twenty-two participants responded to six open-ended questions online. In the second stage, 35 individuals participated in interviews that I conducted personally; 15 participants were interviewed in person and 20 were interviewed by telephone. Interview data were collected using a *semi-structured interview*, a form of in-depth qualitative interviewing. The interview guide ensured I would engage each person with the same line of questions and, yet, it allowed me the freedom to spontaneously and conversationally inquire more closely within particular topic areas (Patton, 2002). The interviews ranged in length from 29 to 105 minutes with a mean of 61 minutes.

A brief word of explanation about *constructivist grounded theory* analysis may be useful. Historically, theory building has been, and still is in some disciplines, an exercise in logical reasoning alone. In grounded theory, theory building still uses logic, but it is "grounded" in data. Data analysis is a repetitive process of prescribed steps that includes organizing, managing, reflecting, memoing, reading, comparing, categorizing, interpreting, describing, and finally, representing data clearly and accurately to tell the story they hold. This process is described by Creswell as a "data analysis spiral" (Creswell, 2007, p. 151). The

data analysis spiral is not unlike the process used to piece together a complex jigsaw puzzle. Specifically, a constant comparative grounded theory approach to analysis was used for *initial coding*, *focused coding*, *axial coding*, and *theoretical coding*. Initial coding means naming the data by segment, line, and even word, using codes that denote action (e.g., “looking,” “shifting,” etc.). By doing this initial coding, researchers stay grounded in the data and are able to identify areas in which more data may be needed. Focused coding uses the most significant early codes to sift through the large amounts of data collected. Researchers use focused coding to make decisions regarding which initial codes make the most analytic sense to use for categorizing data. Axial coding is then used to relate subcategories to categories, specify the properties and dimensions of a category, and reassemble the data to give coherence to the analysis. Finally, theoretical coding specifies possible relationships between categories to be articulated in theory (Charmaz, 2006).

Trustworthiness (Validity) of the Study

Because grounded theory methods are aimed at generating new theory rather than verifying existing theory, establishing the trustworthiness of study research is important yet can be challenging (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010). I have been able to establish the trustworthiness of this study in several ways: 1) *sample size* of at least 25 (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007); 2) *prolonged engagement with, persistent observation of, and triangulation of data* through the iterative process of constant comparison; 3) *member checking*, which includes verifying the researcher's understanding of responses with participants as needed; and, 4) *reflexive journaling* of my affective responses to emerging data to remain aware of my position and biases.

Overview of Study Findings

The next several pages summarize the study findings in relation to its three research questions (see page 3). For a more complete review of the study findings, I encourage you to obtain the full report.

Leader Perception and Experience of Conflict (Question 1)

I asked each participant in the study to reflect on the socio-cultural environment around the sexuality education of young people in the United States. Specifically, I gave participants two labels - "culture war" and "abstinence wars" - as descriptors of the context and asked how they felt about the characterizations.

One group embraced the terms and felt the description of the context as a war was accurate. A second group rejected the terminology and concept of war and attempted to reframe it. The third group asserted they avoided the war altogether whenever possible. ***Notably, none denied there was a conflict and all participated in it, although it was less clear whether participation was a conscious act.*** One leader described discovering an unconscious tendency to think and speak in war imagery that illustrates this. In a simulation exercise, leaders were paired together and asked to think of a courageous conversation they needed to have with someone. Then each, in turn, was asked to practice having that conversation with their training partner standing in for the actual person. The leader describes the experience in the callout box on the next page.

"When it was my turn, I knew exactly what I wanted to say...I basically made three statements and, at the end of it, [my training partner] said to me "I find it interesting that you used the words 'arsenal,' 'battle,' and 'combat.'" And I had absolutely no awareness....It's [the conflict] impacting how we are and it was invaluable to hear that I'm thinking about this. But I had no idea and that put it together. Even though my affect was so open, that this was the language of combat."

leaders claimed to be fighting from the ideological middle ground for the middle ground, even though they asserted the people in the middle were already on their side.

When the conflict was at its most intense, a few leaders feared for their physical safety and that of their families. Several feared for the damage to their personal and organizational reputations. Others worried about the stress on colleagues and staff. Nearly all feared the loss of funding that could occur if they did not fight to preserve it.

"These are things that civilizations fight over. We'll be having the same fights 30 years from now. We will always have these fights...I think the notion that a little more science can solve all of this, or the right study might solve all of this and we ultimately win, isn't realistic either....The fight is everlasting...and our job is to make sure that we don't drop it."

The price of leadership in a sexual health organization is, as these leaders have learned, engagement in the intractable conflict over sexuality education. As a result, the **leaders are forced to make sense of the conflict in a way that allows them to make peace with its presence in their lives**. To do this, some find it useful to name the conflict a culture war, others find it useful to reframe it to something easier to embrace, and others attempt to avoid it all together.

Participants regularly used the "language of combat" to describe and discuss the context. Further, they described themselves as *battling by necessity* despite the *undesirability* and *intensity* of the conflict because of its *totality* and *intractability*. **None of the leaders wanted a war over the sexuality education of young people in public schools**. However, their engagement in the conflict was total in two regards. First, when they were engaged in the fight, it tended to be all consuming of their time and effort. Second, upon entering the fight, they tended to go all in, battling in any way they could to gain the advantage. Ironically,

The conflict is viewed as intractable among leaders in the study. It is less clear why the conflict is viewed in this way. Some suggested the conflict over sexuality education merely reflects the intractability of political conflict in the United States today. Others suggested it was simply a part of how civilizations work. Some argued it was the nature of humans to be in conflict. Regardless of the root causes, there were two primary factors leaders identified as contributing to the intractability of the conflict:

1. *Funding factors* - the need to retain or regain government funding and to motivate private funders;
2. *Worldview factors* - the need to defend how one perceives and makes sense of the world in which one lives and, therefore, one's ideology or theory for how to live.

"There are only so many hours in a day and we can either use our time to be at war or we can use our time to develop something of worth.... We have more recently been...cornered into trying to fight back.... Things are said about [us and our work] on the internet and at meetings that we try to defend. We believe that if our message is going to have a place, we're going to have to fight for it. So, we've had to fight back some this past year, but we don't enjoy it."

Regardless of the strategy, every leader is pulled into the vortex of conflict and has to engage in the battle. Whether they fight regularly or only on occasion, as necessary, when they do fight the conflict is often all consuming of their time and energy. In the heat of battle there is genuine fear for their safety and some fight to defend their reputations and others to keep precious resources that are often at risk in the conflict. As much as they desire an end to the conflict, the leaders have realized the price of being at peace with the war is to accept that it is an intractable complex system of conflict.

Leader Motivation and Continuation (Question #2)

Given the contentious context in which the participants in this study have to work and lead, it is curious that they have agreed to lead at all. Yet, not only did they initially agree to take on a leadership role, they have stayed long-term.

Leaders described a variety of pathways into the work of sexuality education of young people. Whether an accident, a random act, serendipity, the emergence of an opportunity through failure, being "just one of those things," or any of the other ways leaders described their movement into the field, for most it was not a career path they had chosen or expected. ***While on their way to doing something else they stumbled into sexuality education, awakened to it, and stayed.***

Awakening to the validity and importance of the field often came as a result of *personal medical or sexual crises, emotionally powerful experiences, transforming discoveries, and even life changing academic events*. What each of these awakening events had in common is that they were defining moments, or crucibles, that also seemed to trigger their emergence into leadership (Bennis & Thomas, 2001).

Leaders described both extrinsic and intrinsic factors that motivated their move into leadership. *Extrinsic motivation* refers to activity a person undertakes because it results in an external reward or avoidance of a consequence (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008). *Intrinsic motivation* is commonly defined as doing something simply for the inherent enjoyment or satisfaction of doing so (Fry, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan et al., 2008). Among the extrinsic factors they listed were *colleague opinion and affirmation* of readiness for leadership and *practical financial necessity* since leadership roles tend to provide better compensation than educator roles. Also, *positive personal obligation*, arising as a result of program or organizational success, as well as *negative personal obligation*, arising as a result of organizational distress, were cited as motivating factors to move into leadership.

"I took the leadership role because I couldn't take the sex ed role without it. I realize that I'm considered a leader in the field and that's nice, but I can't sustain a family making \$30K or \$40K as an entry-level health educator or even a seasoned health educator."

"I have accommodated myself to the fact that a lot of these kids are going to have sex. I still believe very strongly in abstinence, I support abstinence education, so I think I've changed to accommodate that, but my own views have not changed that much."

* * * * *

"In the past I may have been a little bit more liberal or a little bit more hands off as far as young people are concerned but as I've gotten older I've actually been more [hands on]. I value responsibility....Responsibility is good. Discipline is good. Structure is good....I've become less 'loosey goosey' and much more...realistic and conservative in that respect."

Among the intrinsic factors leaders cited were having a *personality* that enjoyed leadership, having a *perception of leadership* that it would be exciting and challenging, and a *personal ethic of contribution* that compelled them to make themselves available for leadership. In addition, some simply followed a natural, *unfolding path* to leadership that opened before them and some deeply *desired to lead change* in their organization.

Regardless of the factors motivating them to accept a leadership role, all of the leaders in this study still made a conscious choice to step into leadership. When asked to reflect on changes they have experienced since entering the field and their leadership role, participants indicated there had been little change in their original reasons except they had become more "expansive;" yet, as persons, they had experienced important and notable changes. By "expansive" leaders meant they came to *settle into the role* and then *re-vision* it for themselves. The most notable changes leaders described were those related to personal changes such as *maturity, shifts in perspectives, and changes in their ideological positions.*

When asked about their motivations to continue in leadership, despite the challenges presented by the conflict, study participants offered a variety of responses. While the responses individually contribute to leaders' longevity, none seemed singularly sufficient to account for it. Therefore, their responses are best understood as combinations of

intrinsic and extrinsic factors that contribute to the primary motivation. ***The primary motivation to remain in leadership is a deep, personal sense of conviction.*** Their responses describe a journey into conviction that is unique for each leader.

To more clearly understand the meaning of conviction and its process, it is important to first consider the factors leaders described. A singular extrinsic factor for remaining in leadership seemed to be at work for many: a *compassionate conviction* for the young people who would benefit from sexuality education. Several intrinsic factors, however, seemed to be in play for leaders to remain in leadership, including the *connected relationships* they feel to colleagues and community; a *cautious optimism* that their efforts make a difference; an *abiding interest* in the field that just does not wane; and, among a few, a *good-natured stubbornness.* These individual extrinsic and intrinsic factors seem to combine in ways unique to each leader to form the primary motivation to continue in leadership: conviction.

The experience of maturing into a leadership role and leading in the intractable conflict includes the confirmation of a profoundly deep and personal sense of the "rightness" of the work for the leaders in this study. This is what is meant by convincement. Convincement is typically associated with religious conversion, however, it more generally means to "realize the truth or validity of something" ("Convincement", n.d.a). It also carries the meaning of "the state of being convinced" ("Convincement," n.d.b.), indicating it is a continuous process, not a destination. For many leaders their motivation to remain in leadership is a product of their convincement of the validity of their work and the rightness of their fit in the role of leadership. The leaders are certainly capable and willing to do other things. They also may have passion and conviction, but these are not the same thing. **Convincement is a deep, inward conviction that they cannot be doing any other work than the work they are doing right now.** One leader explained this through a story about leading a local organization that was on the verge of failure and closing. Another person had encouraged the leader to give up and do something else to which the leader responded, "I can't not do this."

"I quickly realized that teen pregnancy was much more frequent among poor kids....It imposes all kinds of constraints and barriers on her and also the research shows it's not good for the baby and so it repeats itself, the generational poverty issues and lack of opportunity."

The leaders in this study came into the field of sexuality education of young people quite unintentionally where they awakened to the importance and possibilities of the field and decided to stay. Transformational defining moments propelled them further into the field, and then confirmed their decision to stay involved. As opportunities to lead emerged each agreed to the challenge though their original motivations varied. Though the leadership opportunity or its timing may not have been of their choosing, each did make a conscious choice to embrace the leadership role. The choice was often a response to positive professional and personal changes the leader experienced.

Why do leaders remain in their roles, even when they are caught in the middle of a conflict that does not get appreciably better nor show any signs of ending? There is no simple answer yet leaders have provided insights to help understand the various considerations that inform their calculation to stay. **Most experience a convincement that, after all things are considered, they are truest to themselves when they stay in leadership.**

Leadership Competencies for Intractable Conflict (Question #3)

Regardless of the strength of their convincement, leadership in intractable conflict requires certain competencies. One of the most important roles of leadership is to make sense of the context in which the organization works. Sensemaking is an internal reflective process in which leaders continually monitor and interpret the environment in which they work in order to create solutions to the problems they are trying to address (Antes & Mumford, 2012; M.D. Mumford, Friedrich, Caughron, & Byrne, 2010). In turn, they present their proposed solutions to colleagues, staff, and stakeholders as a direction for the organization that can be translated into vision, mission, goals, and work plans. A leader's sensemaking about a situation or problem, and its translation to followers, will determine specific competencies needed. As a result, leaders will need to acquire new competencies they do not possess and strengthen those they do.

Overall, study participants acknowledged that many of the competencies needed to lead in their sexual health organization were the same ones needed by leaders in other sexual health organizations as well. Others extended this perspective and argued the competencies were the same as those needed to lead any other organization. However, there was only rare agreement on what those competencies were. What emerged from the range and variety of responses was the image of a complex leadership role for which many participants felt ill prepared by their professional training.

The lack of leadership and management preparation that many leaders described may contribute to the high stress many feel in relation to their daily leadership tasks. ***There is one leadership task in particular that most leaders cited as creating more stress than any other: fundraising to sustain the organization.*** However, leaders also noted the connection between the conflict and the struggle to maintain funding. Politics can be a major battle ground upon which the conflict over sexuality education can be fought, and funding, at both the federal and state levels, can be the spoils of war.

Fundraising and sustaining the organization is a major stressor for the leaders but it is not the only one. One education department leader noted it was stressful trying to keep education high on the organization's agenda. Others noted the press of time; the physical, emotional, and psychic fatigue brought on by stress; and the isolation of leadership as factors that also make their work challenging.

"The skills needed to run these [sexual health] organizations are the same skills I'd need if I were running any other organization, and they have nothing to do with sexuality."

Leaders identified a variety of competencies they felt were important to perform their roles well, yet, there was only rare agreement on the key leadership competencies. Given the breadth of competencies described by leaders in the study, I used Hooijberg, Hunt, & Dodge's (1997) three

broad "leaderplex" framework categories - cognitive, social, and behavioral complexity - to sort the range and variety of leadership competencies described by participants. These categories were suggested by Hooijberg et al.'s (1997) as a means to understand what is needed to lead in complex adaptive systems.

- ***Cognitive complexity:*** Cognitive complexity is related to how an individual leader organizes information or constructs meaning (Antes & Mumford, 2012; Hooijberg et al., 1997; M.D. Mumford et al., 2010). Knowledge of the *core sexuality education content*, the *history of sexuality education in the United States*, and the *body of evidence for sexuality education effectiveness* was identified by leaders as useful for informing their understanding of the field and their work. Also, they noted a personal orientation to *continuous learning* was important in order remain up to date in the content.

- *Social complexity* is the ability to use one's social intelligence to better understand a situation and act appropriately (Rosnow, Skleder, Jaeger, & Rind, 1994) and is often referred to as social intelligence or emotional intelligence (Ahangar, 2012). Among the competencies leaders identified that contribute to developing social complexity were: *practicing humility, developing passion, and developing emotional resilience, networking with other leaders, and supporting their colleagues.*
- *Behavioral complexity:* Behavioral complexity refers to the range of leadership roles and tasks a leader is able to perform, and the ability of the leader to select the appropriate behavior in relation to the role or task (De Meuse, Dai, & Hallenbeck, 2010; Hooijberg et al., 1997). Effective leaders are viewed as those who are able to perform a wide range of roles and align their performance with the situation they face (De Meuse et al., 2010). In the leaderplex model, an effective leader uses social and cognitive complexity to select and use the best leadership and management behaviors to help organizations be effective in their environments (Hooijberg et al., 1997). Leaders identified a range of leadership behaviors that were important for them to be able to perform: *listening, team building, data analysis and interpretation, strategy planning, fundraising, financial management, lobbying, communication (both public and interpersonal), and effectively recruiting the right people.*

The conflict over sexuality education is a complex system in which many leaders in this study barely feel prepared to lead. While most

understand the content of sexuality education, can articulate the evidence behind their approach, and are convinced of the importance of their work, they often feel under-prepared or inadequately trained to perform the leadership and management tasks required of them. Given the workload many carry, the fast pace at which the work needs to be accomplished, and the contentious, unpredictable environment, leaders are challenged to find opportunity and energy to wrestle with the larger questions, such as, is there a way to improve the context around the sexuality education of young people in the United States? When I asked them this question, their responses did not provide much hope.

"Open dialogue with the opposite side to really find out their philosophy and where they are coming from.... Take the anger and the vitriol out of the argument because, bottom line, we know we can't force adolescents to do anything. What we can do is provide information and direction and make sure it is accurate information... Help people understand that this is not an 'either/or' issue. I think both [approaches to sexuality education] are needed."

* * * * *

"So, there isn't a whole lot of room to have that discussion. There's too much... finessed knowledge and information that confuses the general public, so it's easier to be black and white [and say]: 'Comprehensive sex ed is all bad.' 'Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage is all bad.'"

"Words are really important. You have to develop a way to talk about both, the two main solutions, abstinence and family planning... You learn a language of how to discuss this issue in ways that are most likely to avoid setting either side off."

Overall, leaders in the study described the current context, created by the contentious national dialogue on the sexuality education of young people, to be unacceptable and expressed urgency for change. Several leaders expressed frustration, even disagreement, with the interests and positions of national organizations that contribute to the conflict. Most of the leaders expressed strong concern about the conflict over sexuality education and a belief in the necessity of addressing it.

At first glance, this position may seem incompatible with the view described previously; that most see the conflict as intractable. However, ***intractability means the conflict is at a stalemate, not that it cannot be addressed.*** The state of stalemate makes it challenging to address but most leaders are convinced of the necessity of doing so. As much as leaders might yearn for the social context to change, the path to improving it is not clearly cut. Some recommended *opening intentional conversation* with opposition groups and some suggested shifting to a *holistic view of sexuality* rather than focusing so intently on sexual behavior. However, these were minority views.

The most common approach to addressing the conflict suggested by leaders was winning the peace through final and total victory. This is an approach that is not likely to bring about resolution to the conflicts over sexuality education anytime soon. It reveals a certain belief in the "truth" of one's position and an inflexibility that, in effect, becomes a call to war.

This complex system in which they work requires leaders in sexual health organizations to develop competencies that enable them to respond with cognitive, social, and behavioral complexity. Most, though, feel quite unprepared for leadership roles that are so demanding.

While nearly all leaders in this study desire to address and improve the context in which they work, most seek to do this by ultimately winning the war. Few of the leaders identified boundary spanning and peacemaking strategies, such as using intentional conversation or finding common ground with opponents through more holistic approaches. Most preferred to utilize strategies that would build a significant enough majority to achieve a final, total victory.

Discussion of the Findings

Common Ground

Is there common ground for those involved in the intractable conflict over sexuality education? This question was at the heart of the National Consensus Process (Morehouse School of Medicine, 2006). It was not, however, a question I intended to explore in this study and I never asked participants about common ground. Nonetheless, the question arose organically and repeatedly as participants posed it implicitly and explicitly throughout the interview process. ***As leaders mused aloud, common ground was revealed, though it was based on similarity of experience, not ideology.***

Clearly, there were important differences in ideology among the study participants. Some held uncompromisingly to the position that abstinence-only was the sole, acceptable approach to sexuality education. Others were just as uncompromising in their position about comprehensive approaches. For some comprehensive proponents, the inclusion of abstinence messages was barely tolerable. Similarly, for some proponents of abstinence-only the inclusion of condom and contraceptive information was only reluctantly accepted.

Other leaders seemed perfectly at ease supporting a dual message that combined both approaches. Yet, there was no common ground on these most fundamental ideological issues. There was, however, common ground among study participants at two points in the data.

The first point of common ground was the pathway by which leaders became involved in the field and subsequently emerged into and remained in leadership.

The leaders found their way into sexuality education mostly by accident. They ascended to leadership for many of the same reasons and through many of the same processes. They were not well prepared to lead and have had to learn on the job by leaning on the advice of others, sometimes simply imitating others' leadership behaviors. They have been pulled into the larger culture war and, specifically, the intractable conflict over sexuality education, though none want the fight. They have been wounded in the battles, leaving both scars and open wounds. They are concerned about the actions of the opposition and feel vulnerable to attack and harm. While disdaining the conflict, they inadvertently, mostly unconsciously, fuel it and keep it going. This may be leading them, therefore, to view the conflict as inevitable and intractable. Final, total victory is widely viewed as the only clear path to peace. Throughout, each has reflected deeply on why they lead and how to lead effectively, though the reflective practices for most appear to be largely unconscious.

Secondly, leaders in this study were also alike in one particularly striking and disconcerting way: how they viewed and described those whom they perceived to hold different ideologies from their own.

In order to lead their organizations in the intractable conflict over sexuality education, leaders have had to develop an image of their opponents and align their strategies in accordance with it. Leaders holding the core ideologies at issue in the conflict have demonized leaders on the other side. Demonization is a common strategy in intractable conflict that makes future wrongdoing and conflict easier (Barker, 2003).

Distrust and suspicion of their "opposition" were regularly observed and heard in the individual interviews. In addition, there was a clear tendency to misunderstand and misrepresent the other. The image each had of the other seemed to be accepted as reality. For example, it was common for leaders whose ideology seemed to be aligned with comprehensive sexuality education to describe those with an abstinence-only worldview as driven by religious faith and fervor. Conversely, those who seemed aligned with an abstinence-only ideology commonly described comprehensive proponents to be unconcerned with standards for behavior

Common ground was not sought, yet it was revealed. Not in similarity of ideology, but of experience.

Neither "side" really knows their "enemy" very well at all. They know them only insofar as they resemble the image they have created to represent them.

in society. They were, as one leader put it, the "anything goes crowd." I did not find nor observe that the characterizations provided by leaders in the study of the "other" were accurate.

A Model for Understanding Leadership in Intractable Conflict

How do we understand leadership in the intractable conflict over sexuality education of young people in the United States? Figure 1 proposes a theoretical model that emerged from the data.

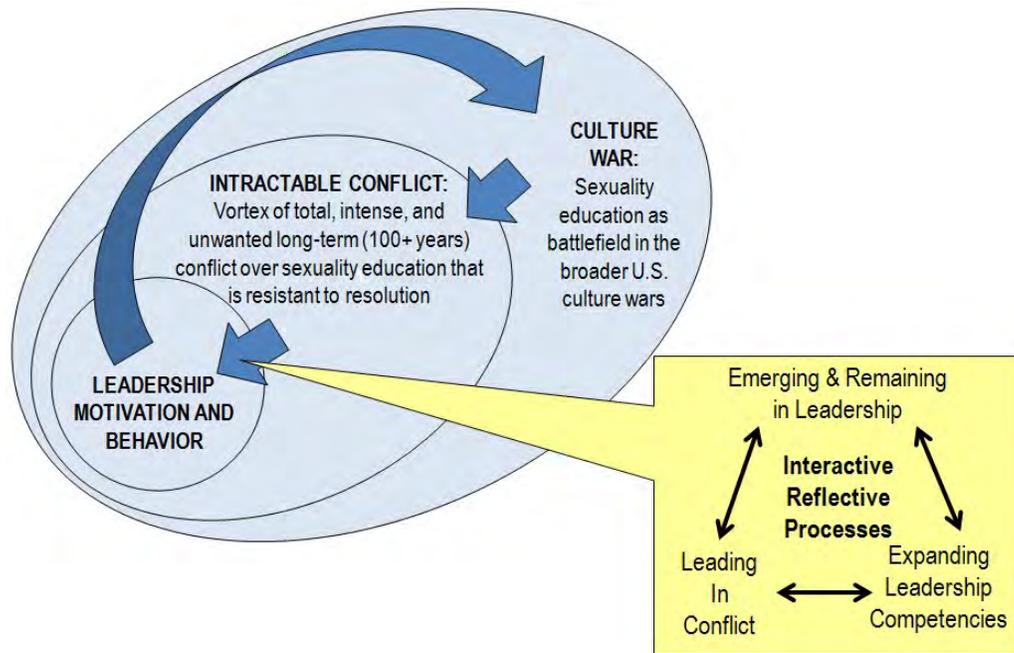


FIGURE 1: LEADERSHIP IN AN INTRACTABLE CONFLICT OVER SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

The outer and middle ellipses represent the contexts in which leaders of sexual health organizations perform their roles. The *outer ellipse* represents Hunter's (1991) culture war which forms the indirect context in which leaders work. The culture war has many battlefields, one of which is sexuality education in U.S. public schools (Cornblatt, 2009; Goldfarb, 2009; Irvine, 2002; Jensen, 2007; Jensen, 2010; Luker, 2006; Moran, 2000). At its most fundamental level, the conflict is between two ideologies represented by the terms "abstinence-only" and "comprehensive" sexuality education. The conflict over sexuality education of young people becomes intractable as it advances through several conflict stages (Brahm, 2003; Maiese, 2003a). As described by leaders in this study, the conflict is driven by several factors, yet predominantly by competition for limited funding and a difference in fundamental worldviews.

The *arrow between the outer and middle ellipse* represents that the conflict over sexuality education has become an intractable conflict that directly affects leaders in this study. Intractable conflicts persist a long time, are perceived as destructive, and resist resolution (Kriesberg, 2005). Leaders in this study described the conflict over sexuality education as undesirable, total, intense, and never-ending. Intractable conflict is resistant to change or resolution; the intractable conflict leaders described in this study has been ongoing for a century. The direct context of intractable conflict (*middle ellipse*) creates defining moments

(Bennis & Thomas, 2002) which may be in the form of crisis or, in rare circumstances, extreme events (Hannah, Uhl-Bien, Avolio, & Cavarretta, 2009) that affect motivation.

Though some defining moments and crises faced by leaders in sexual health organizations may be unique, the response required is the same as from any other leader facing crisis: leaders need to first make sense of the situation before they can formulate an effective response (Hannah et al., 2009; Hunter et al., 2011). Acumen for sensemaking requires the development of a range of leadership competencies. Sensemaking is one of the most important functions of leadership in times of crisis, such as the chronic crisis of intractable conflict (Hunter, Cushenberry, Thoroughgood, Johnson, & Ligon, 2011; M.D. Mumford et al., 2010). The sensemaking function requires leaders to develop a *descriptive mental model* to help them understand the context in which they and their organizations work. This mental model represents a kind of personal "theory" for understanding what is going on. A sensemaking descriptive mental model is important because it informs the *prescriptive mental model*, which is the interpretation leaders present to their followers that provides the rationale for action and justifies the strategies to be undertaken (M.D. Mumford, Antes, Caughron, & Friedrich, 2008). The *arrow connecting the middle ellipse with the innermost ellipse* represents the process by which leadership motivation is shaped and competencies are developed. ***That which is happening within this arrow is the domain of this study.*** The callout box from that arrow illustrates it is an *interactive reflective process*.

Reflection is a key activity in sensemaking (M.D. Mumford et al., 2010). Gosling, Jones, Sutherland and Dijkstra (2012) describe reflective leadership as being "all about thinking through the impact and ramifications of your own actions and achievements" (p.133). Strange and Mumford (2005) found that reflection is an important component for the development of vision and plans. In crisis and complex situations that require innovative approaches, reflection heightens leaders' awareness and can lead to clearer understanding of the situation and a wider range of response strategies (Zundel, 2012). T.V. Mumford, Campion, and Morgeson (2007) identified a range of cognitive skills leaders need (e.g., speaking, active listening, writing, reading comprehension, active learning, and critical thinking) which require the use of reflection.

Reflection is an important leadership function that leaders in the study demonstrated and described repeatedly in their interview responses. Several reflective processes emerged from the data that form a response to the research questions: 1) How do leaders of sexual health organizations perceive and experience the intractable conflict over sexuality education in U.S. public schools?; 2) What has motivated leaders of sexual health organizations to take on a leadership role and sustained their leadership involvement in the contentious environment?; and, 3) How has the contentious environment affected their leadership behaviors and perception of leadership competencies? Specifically, the three reflective processes are: 1) *Emerging and Remaining in Leadership*; 2) *Expanding Leadership Competencies*; and, 3) *Leading in Conflict*. These three processes are interactive, yet it will be useful to examine each process separately before considering their interactions.

Emerging and Remaining In Leadership: Convincement

The first reflective process, emerging and remaining in leadership (Figure 2), responds to a fundamental, personal question each leader in a sexual health organization needs to answer: "How am I to think about and relate to the issue of the sexuality education of young people in public schools?" Reflection on this question requires leaders to identify and embrace their internal assumptions, beliefs, and values. Thereby, at a deeply personal level, they arrive at a worldview that allows them to define and refine their ideological positions with regard to sexuality education.

During this reflection they experience their first sense of convincement and initially come to see the validity of sexuality education, the truth of their ideological positions, and the rightness of their fit in the field. Convincement is an iterative process; each time they are invited to assume leadership roles, they will need to reflect on their position again. Invitations to leadership push leaders to consider whether their convincement has become, or is equal to, the level of responsibility and risk they are being asked to assume. To be clear, convincement appears to play a minor role as leaders enter the field and begin to emerge into leadership roles, but plays a major role in later decisions to remain in the field.

The pathway into sexuality education is unpredictable. Though there is formal training that prepares one to be a sexuality educator, very few leaders in this study followed that path. Instead they made their way into the field following diverse and unlikely courses. Often they were preparing, or prepared, for another profession and vocation yet were powerfully moved by the topic and field. Each experienced a *defining moment* (Bennis & Thomas, 2002) that initiated, informed, or catalyzed the *tugging* they felt. Some defining moments were based in external events, but the tugging was within them, and it nagged for an answer. For some the tugging was curiosity, fascination, and wonder. For others it was moral outrage and a deep sense of duty. For others it was a calling. For all, the tugging could not be ignored and it begged to be answered.

The first part of the answer to the tugging was to enter the field and the second was to follow the prompts and opportunities to leadership. As they responded and followed the pull of the tugs, they began to change as persons. One significant change was indicated by the process of settling in and *emerging into leadership* roles, thus affirming the direction of the tugging they had felt. Over time other changes occurred, many at a personal level that compelled them to continue in leadership. As they *matured* as people and as leaders, they grappled with key issues such as their own sensemaking of the conflict, their ideological positions, their level of

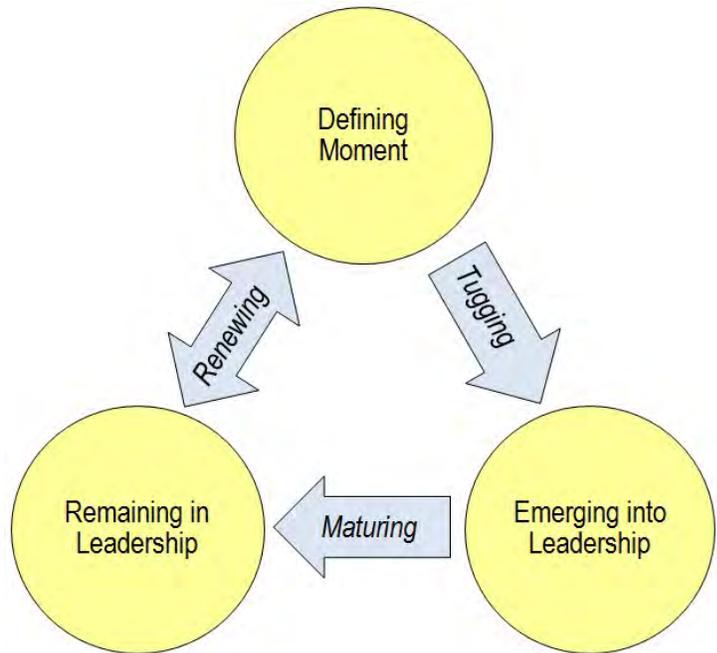


FIGURE 2: EMERGING AND REMAINING IN LEADERSHIP: CONVINCEMENT

engagement in the battles, and their personal commitment to the field. Though their first foray into leadership may have been tentative, maturation eventually resulted in a conviction of the validity, truth and rightness of their ideology, their work and their role, compelling them to remain in leadership. Therefore, a sense of conviction may not be what puts them in their leadership role, but it may be what keeps them in it.

Though conviction conveys a sense of permanence of decision, in fact, it has to be *renewed*, especially during those times when the intractable conflict is taking its toll. The renewal typically occurs as the leader reflects on the affirmation and support of friends and family, success of the organization, impact of the work on young people, and the meaning of the work at the deepest personal levels. This reflective process in itself provides yet another defining moment of clarity when it becomes apparent to leaders that they need to remain in leadership.

Conviction makes it difficult to turn from a fight, especially when there is a perceived need to defend a personal ideology.

The intractable conflict over sexuality education is often fought over limited resources and funding priorities. Organizations unable to sustain funding in this context are short lived and their leaders may have even shorter tenures. The leaders of sexual health organizations, who aspire to long tenures, often have to become adept at continuously learning new competencies outside the scope of their professional expertise for their organizations to remain viable and competitive.

Expanding Leadership Competencies

Expanding leadership competencies (Figure 3) is a process that requires leaders to reflect on the needs of their organization, often with reference to the external environment, through this or a similar question: “How am I to effectively lead this organization?” The process, therefore, is concerned with learning the leadership competencies that are needed to lead and manage the organization. Leaders in this study frequently described feeling “in over their heads” particularly as managers of their organizations.

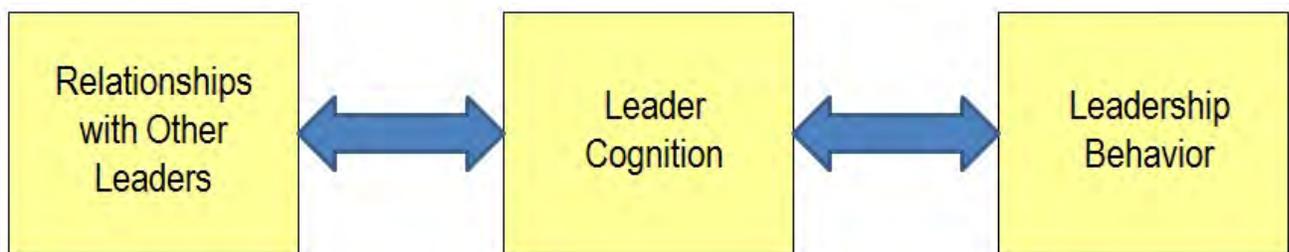


FIGURE 3: EXPANDING LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES: PLAYING ABOVE THE HEAD

The concept of *playing above the head* is derived from a phrase often used about athletes who seem to be less talented and skilled than their opponents, yet find a way to keep up and occasionally win. **A sense of conviction is fully adequate for helping leaders develop a personal vision and deep commitment with regard to their work. It is less useful to them in learning how to perform the management functions of the leadership role.**

The day-to-day work of leadership and management is far different from those few occasions when leaders are called upon to inspire, rally, and show the way to others through visionary and inspirational leadership. It is right after those moments, when the staff asks with regard to the day-to-day tasks, "What do we do now?" and "How do we do it?" that leaders struggle. Add to this, that organizations function as complex adaptive systems within constantly shifting environments. Their training as educators, public health analysts, clinicians, and social workers seem woefully inadequate to provide sufficient answers.

Given the lack of preparation described by leaders in this study, it seems remarkable that they have been successful in sustaining their organizations. Yet, from another perspective, their success makes sense. **Though they may often feel in over their heads, the leaders in**

this study expand their leadership competencies by playing above their heads. The data suggest

leaders in this study often feel like they are at a disadvantage, yet they continue to survive and thrive as leaders. Hence, they are playing above their heads. How are they doing this?

The data suggest there is greater value and importance on leader's possessing content knowledge, and having ideologies that align with their "side," than on having critical leadership and management skills.

The leaders in this study have largely relied on *relationships with their peers* to develop their own *leader cognition* and, in turn, inform their *leadership behaviors*. Peers from among their colleagues are often easily accessed with a phone call or email to arrange a time to talk. These relationships are a source of experiences (case studies) that inform the daily management and leadership chores, as

well as conflict engagement and management. It is a reflective cognitive process, like that described by M.D. Mumford et al. (2010), in which leaders will assess and analyze the advice before determining a course of action.

Having made a decision, formed a plan of action and tried out the recommended leadership behavior, leaders assess it on the basis of the outcome. If the behavior leads to success, leaders will add it to their repertoire of competencies to be used again as needed. If an experience provided by a peer is relevant, useful, and especially, successful, leaders will have greater trust for the colleague who offered it. If not, then leaders may be more reticent to seek the peer's advice again.

The leaders in this study identified field specific content knowledge, such as core sexuality education content, history of sexuality education, evidence for sexuality education effectiveness, and human behavior, to be most important for them. **This list, however, does not include knowledge or information related to any number of leadership and management roles, processes, and strategies, even though they described their preparation in these areas as inadequate.** While leaders in this study had a limited view of the range of knowledge they needed, they did identify leadership roles and tasks they know they need to perform well. They may not have the knowledge of how to perform specific leadership and management roles and tasks, but they know what they need to learn.

Emerging and Remaining in Leadership (Figure 2) describes a deeply personal and internal reflective process that draws leaders into a sense of conviction that explains their motivation

to emerge and remain in leadership. Expanding Leadership Competencies (Figure 3), on the other hand, describes a process that is internal but less personal, as it depends upon others to build their cognition. The third process is focused exclusively on the direct context in which leaders and their organizations do their work.

Leading in Conflict

Leaders of sexual health organizations do not just lead the day-to-day work of their organizations. Since they are drawn into the intractable conflict over sexuality education, they have to provide leadership to their organizations in the midst of conflict. Figure 4 represents a highly personal and internal reflective process, yet it also involves others when strategic organizational decisions need to be made. In this reflective process, at a most personal level, leaders are asked to consider a question like, “How do I relate to the intractable conflict that surrounds my work?” When the organization moves closer to engaging in the conflict, the wisest leaders will invite board members, staff, and other stakeholders to reflect on the question together. The advice of peers may also be sought out, as they are perceived to be veterans of the conflict whose experience is often considered to be invaluable at such times. Figure 4 represents the personal reflective process aligned with the stages of conflict and intractability identified by Brahm (2003) and Kriesberg (2005).

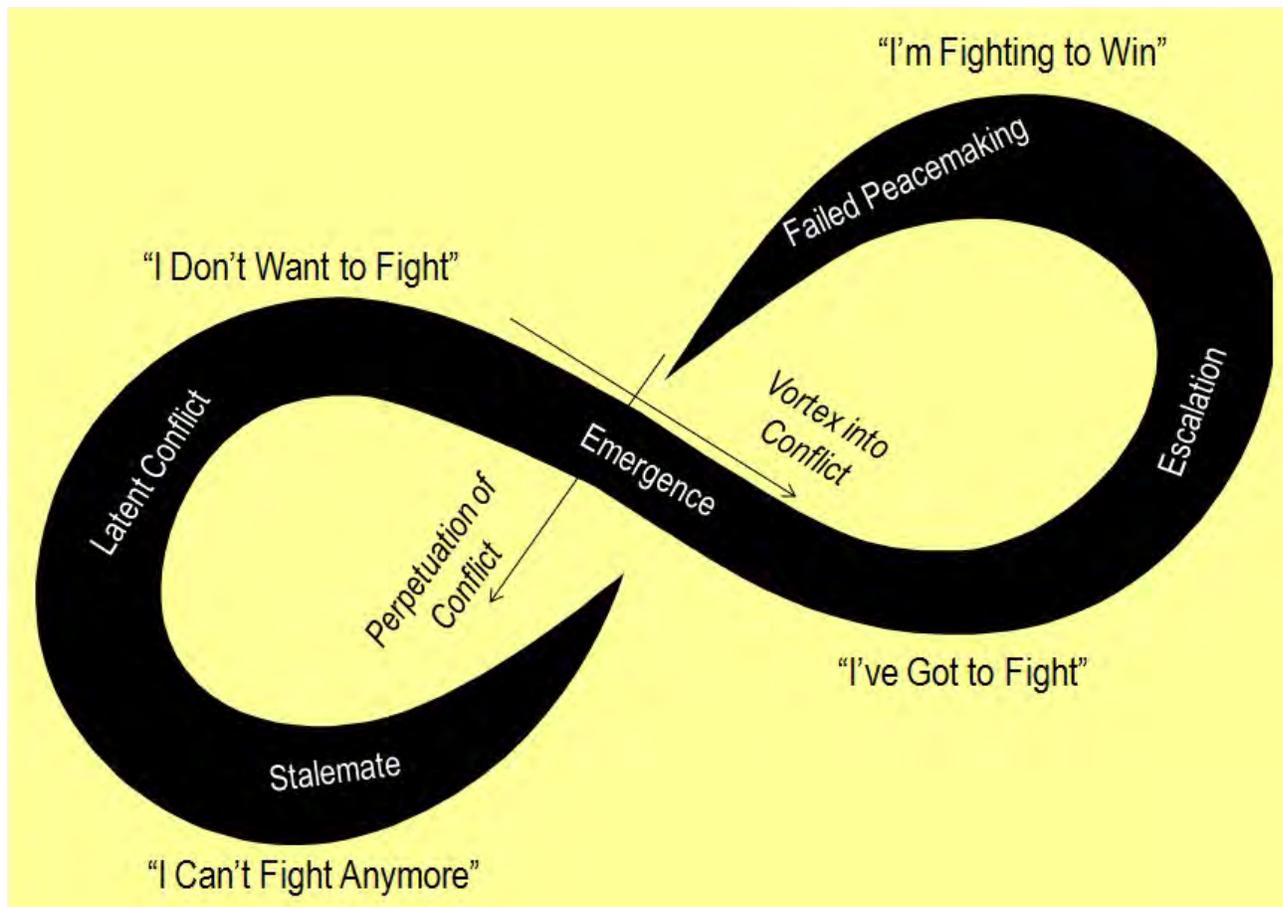


FIGURE 4: LEADING IN CONFLICT: INSTITUTIONALIZING CONFLICT THROUGH LEANING RELUCTANTLY INTO THE FIGHT

"I think it's important [to address the context]....What we're doing now is not valuable... I do know that more and more of 'Let's all dig in our heels' is not needed....It may be human nature to say, 'Oh yeah, I want us to all get along,' but I really do wonder if it's in leaders' self-preservation interest not to get along."

* * * * *

"So, in terms of how important would it be to change the context? I think that ideally I would love to change it, but I think that trying to do this now...it's just not effective....People need their conflict - they need their heroes and they need their villains, and this is a really good topic for heroes and villains."

Few leaders in this study were comfortable naming the conflict in the United States over the sexuality education of young people as a "war". Others preferred to call it by another name, while some indicated they simply wanted to avoid it, whatever "it" was called. Yet the language of combat was commonly used to describe the conflict and to talk about it. Moreover, the leaders, regardless of ideology, asserted they did not want the fight. They described from experience what it was like to be in the midst of the war. They described, sometimes in excruciating detail, the war's intensity and totality, as they explored the price they, their families and their organizations paid.

However, the ongoing state of intractable conflict has become the norm for the leaders. For a few, it has become so normal they even asserted it was not the conflict that stressed them as much as the day-to-day task of leading and managing. They have also come to see it as an intractable conflict that is unlikely to end any time soon. The expectation of conflict as a result of its institutionalization, is captured by the phrase "leaning reluctantly into the fight." Though they do not want to fight, the normalcy and inevitability of conflict keeps leaders on the ready and prepared to join the battle. A brief tour of the model, following the stages of conflict, will be illustrative.

- ***Latent conflict.*** Leaders are not typically engaged in the conflict every day. As with any conflict, the times of intense fighting are separated by periods of relative peace.

Because it is an intractable conflict, though, the peace is not permanent. In fact, it is not even peace. Conflict in its latent stage lies just below the surface creating the illusion of peace, like a dormant volcano, awaiting its next eruption. Eventually the conflict flares and the leaders are drawn back into the fight. Typically there is a triggering event (Brahm, 2003) that makes the latent conflict obvious, ending the illusion. Study participants described several triggering events, such as negative letters to the editor of local or regional newspapers, media attacks, threatening phone calls, funding cuts, and unanticipated legislative maneuvering by opponents.

- ***Emergence.*** Though they may resist responding to the triggering event and entering the conflict at first, their resistance is futile. They perceive the issues to be important, the stakes are high, and their sense of conviction compels them to take a stand. Hence, as the conflict emerges, the issues at stake become more clearly known, leaders reflect on the costs and benefits of participation, and the vortex begins to turn, slowly pulling them toward the center of the fight. Most often at stake, the primary reasons for fighting are the necessity to sustain funding for their organizations and to remain congruent with their ideology.

- *Escalation.* Leaders understand the importance of improving the contentious context in which they work. Yet, when asked how they could do this, they described strategies and tactics for gaining strategic advantage to increase numbers of supporters for their sexuality education ideology. ***Interestingly, and somewhat surprisingly, though participants were a group of leaders who held diverse and opposing ideologies, each claimed the ideological middle ground and declared the majority of Americans were with them.***

Ironically, the strategies and tactics they outlined were designed to win the majority who, they claimed, were already in the middle with them. Once leaders have joined the fight, they go all in to win. This was most clearly demonstrated when leaders explained how finally winning the war was the path to improving the contentious context in which their organizations worked. This approach reveals, however, a conviction in the rightness of one's position and an inflexibility that is viewed by opponents as an invitation to fight harder and longer. For a time, then, all are engaged in the fight and the war rages.

Once leaders have joined the fight, they go all in to win.

- *Failed Peacemaking.* As the fighters punch and counter punch, neither going down for the count, efforts at peacemaking may be initiated. In recent years, one of the most concerted efforts to find common ground and establish peace in the national dialogue on sexuality education was the consensus process convened by former U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher. Eventually the participants in the battle exhaust their available resources of time, energy, talent, and funds only to stand motionless in the ring, staring at each other, and with little, if any, progress to show for the effort.
- *Stalemate.* As the conflict reaches the stalemate, leaders begin to see the conflict as intractable and endless. It is during these times that the conflict reverts back to a latent conflict. These are times when leaders begin to say again, "I don't want to fight." If the opponents in the conflict assess that the pain or losses associated with continuing the fight are greater than the value of maintaining the conflict, it becomes known as a "hurting stalemate" (Zartman, 2000). Brahm (2003a) has described a stalemate, particularly a hurting stalemate, as a prime opportunity for negotiation and settlement. This, however, is an opportunity rarely seized by leaders of the sexual health organizations in this study. Instead, distance is kept and the illusion of peace is enjoyed until a new triggering event pushes leaders back into the vortex. And so it goes.

This iterative cycle represents the institutionalization of the intractable conflict over the sexuality education of young people in the United States, which is now 100 years old. Institutionalization of conflict means that "at first, destructive behavior surfaces as the only viable means of interacting with one's counterpart, but over time, what was seen as a last resort becomes an expected and even functional pattern of behavior" (Gray, Coleman, & Putnam, 2007, p. 1421). Lord (2010), in her history of the U.S. Public Health Service's role in sexuality education, has effectively documented the institutionalization of this conflict. Indeed, as previously described, leaders in this study have also come to see the intractable conflict as the norm for the context in which they work.

Interaction of the Processes

The three interactive reflective processes (*Engaging and Emerging into Leadership*; *Expanding Leadership Competencies*; and *Leading in Conflict*) converge and interact to profoundly inform the motivations and behaviors of leaders in intractable conflict (Figure 1, page 16). All three processes are mutually reinforcing to each of the others. Leaders' growing conviction of the validity of their work, and the truth of their ideology, position them as strong candidates for leadership opportunities in their organizations and the field. Emerging as leaders, they often feel ill prepared for the leadership and management tasks, yet their conviction regarding rightness of fit opens them to learning what they do not know. When faced with unfamiliar tasks and challenges, they leverage relationships with trusted peers to expand their leadership competencies. They reflect on the advice and counsel of their peers, decide on a plan of action and try it. In this way, they build their competencies for leadership which helps them feel more comfortable and confident with the role. Feeling more confident, comfortable, and competent, leaders become more convinced of their rightness of fit in leadership. Hence, they become more inclined to remain in leadership.

Leaders will have the experience of leading in conflict. The intractability of the conflict assures it. The motivation for engaging and remaining in leadership is a conviction of the rightness and truth of the work. Hence, a deep sense of conviction makes it difficult, if not impossible, for leaders to stay out of intractable conflicts, especially

Conviction is a deeply reflective process. It validates the truth of leaders' ideological positions and rightness of fit with the leadership role.

when they perceive their own ideology to be under assault. The ability to lead their organization in conflict is, yet, another competency that leaders need to develop, therefore, they turn again to trusted peers whom they perceive to have relevant experience from which they can learn. Also, in the midst of battle, leaders often fight alongside their peers and learn from them through observation and imitation. Increased competency in battle and comfort being in a fight makes it less likely that a

leader will turn from a future fight. Though they may be leaning reluctantly into the fight, the leaders have learned the skills for playing above the head in the conflict, too. Through their own experience of conflict, leaders may become less dependent on their peers for guidance, yet they continue to acquire new competencies. Their expanding competencies for battle, in turn, make them more effective in future battles.

The experience of leading in conflict tends to validate the leaders' sense of conviction with regard to the leaders' ideologies, their rightness of fit in leadership, and choice to remain in leadership. While leaders may not like the conflict and may even desire an end of hostilities, the intractability of the conflict and its vortex makes it unavoidable for them. At this point, conviction may justify the need to continue in the fight, even though the leaders state a preference for peace.

Conviction is a deeply reflective process that validates the truth of leaders' ideological positions and rightness of fit with the leadership role. **Intriguingly, it does not seem to include reflection on the necessity of the conflict and the role leaders play in perpetuating it.** For example, leaders in this study hold incongruent positions with regard to

the conflict. First, they describe the conflict as unwanted and undesirable, yet they hold nothing back in the fight. This becomes most apparent as leaders appear to select and use disguised strategies automatically, without regard for how these communicate a lack of integrity, foster mistrust, and contribute to the escalation and perpetuation of the conflict. Secondly, incongruence is apparent in the approach leaders take to addressing the conflict: peace through total victory. ***Given the significant capacity for reflection demonstrated by leaders in this study, it is puzzling that they do not appear to use reflection to resolve the incongruity of these positions.***

Their failure to resolve these incongruities and address their roles in institutionalizing the conflict, contributes to perpetuating the conflict within the culture war (arrow connecting innermost ellipse with outmost ellipse in Figure 1, p. 16). Without intentionally reflecting on and resolving the incongruities, leaders default to attitudes and behaviors that seem to merely fuel the fight. Demonizing the behavior of their opposition, leaders justify taking actions that allow their opponents to similarly demonize and act against them. Though decrying and bemoaning the conflict, they value it for the contribution it makes to the annual budget of their organizations. While pleading for peace, they prepare for the next battle. The peace they yearn for is believed to be accomplished, only, through a final and total victory in which their ideological position prevails.

The interaction of *Emerging and Remaining in Leadership, Expanding Leadership Competencies*, and *Leading in Conflict* is a powerful reflective process that builds leaders. ***However, without serious reflection on the leaders' incongruities with regard to the conflict, it creates leaders who are most effective as warriors for their ideologies and for their organizations. As a result, leaders in sexual health organizations define and sustain the contentious context that informs their motivation to lead and leadership behaviors.*** It is no wonder the intractable conflict over the sexuality education of young people is now over 100 years old and growing older.

Recommendations

The *Leadership in Intractable Conflict* model (Figure 1) offers descriptions of how leaders currently perform their roles in sexual health organizations based upon data collected in this study. The nature of the conflict over the sexuality education of young people, now 100 years old, suggests this model, or something close to it, has been in play for a long time. This section offers recommendations that look to change the status quo by taking alternative approaches to both leadership development and conflict management.

Three important assumptions underlie the recommendations offered here. First is the assumption that participants in this study accurately represented their desire for a change in the contentious context in which they work. Secondly, the conclusion of the analysis, as presented in the *Leadership in Intractable Conflict* model fairly, and accurately, represents the data gathered from the leaders. Thirdly, leaders desiring change will receive the support and

Few would agree that the conflict over the sexuality education in U.S. public schools really serves the interests of young people. Indeed, as a leader expressed, "when two elephants fight, it's the grass that gets hurt."

collaboration of colleagues, funders, constituents, and even opponents, as any personal changes in leadership are more easily maintained in supportive external environments.

There are four core recommendations. The first two are in support of the development of both current and future leaders and the second two are focused on creating an environment in which the intractable conflict is managed more effectively.

Building Management Muscle

Building Management Muscle is about training leaders to effectively handle the most essential management tasks of organizational leadership. Leaders readily acknowledged their own lack of preparation, either by training or experience, to lead the management of their organizations. Once in the field of sexuality education, the pathway to leadership is experience and proven success as an advocate, educator, clinician, or in another similar programmatic role in the organization. As a result, leadership in the field is dominated by people who have to learn the management tasks in real time while on the job. The need for stronger management skills is widely felt among leaders in this study.

The line between leadership and management can be very slight and the two often overlap. According to Carlson and Donohoe (2010), *leading* is concerned with setting direction and focusing on key relationships within the environment, *managing* is concerned with tactical plans that keep the organization sustainable and effective, and *supporting* is focused on helping skilled board, staff, and volunteers carry out the work of the organization. Leaders can easily, inexpensively, and quickly gain the needed management skills through a variety of means - webinars, books, courses (both online and in person), consultants, and even an extensive free online management library. Nonetheless, leaders do not feel they are getting the management preparation, training, and support they need.

Building Management Muscle is about training leaders to effectively handle the most essential management tasks of organizational leadership.

The data offer help in understanding why leaders are not getting what they said they need. One reason is the intense and all-consuming nature of the conflict into which leaders are often thrust at the outset of their tenure. Even before they can find the office supply cabinet, they can be quickly overwhelmed by the challenge of addressing the conflict, and its collateral damage, for their organization. Another is the necessity of non-stop fundraising described by leaders. Often leaders feel as though there is no time for anything but fundraising, hence their own professional development can be put at risk. Also, while several leaders indicated they had been helped by their participation in various leadership institutes sponsored by local chambers of commerce and funders, these did not fully meet the needs for the management skills they desired.

A final important clue is found in how they have become accustomed to acquiring the competencies they need to do their work. They have compensated for the lack of formal professional training by leveraging relationships with experienced peers to quickly acquire the needed skills and competencies. Usually they do this as the management need arises, or in the midst of crisis, and not regularly with intentionality, which may partially explain why, despite this strategy, they are still feeling they are lacking. Additionally, the quality of the competencies

they acquire through a peer's experience are only as good as the source. The strategy of consulting peers assumes the person to whom the leader is turning has a breadth of the most current and accurate information, has been successful in similar situations, and whose past success is still relevant to the present needs. Often the perceived experience of a peer is what validates their guidance.

Unfortunately, while experience is an important variable in leadership, it is only one of many variables that affect the outcome. ***While leaders in this study tend to rely heavily upon the peer relationships, the data also suggest this is still inadequate and does not compensate for the lack of formal preparation or professional development.*** The peer relationships seem to have been more useful in acquiring content knowledge and aligning ideology.

Current and future leadership development approaches for sexual health organizations needs to prioritize *Building Management Muscle* for their leaders. Many leaders have difficulty prioritizing this for themselves; therefore, boards of directors, supervisors, and funders can play an important role in supporting leaders to get what is needed. If leaders in sexual health organizations are to build their management muscle, it will be necessary for them, their staff, and the boards of directors to become intentional and collaborative to accomplish it. To provide the management muscle leaders need, it requires a straightforward process of identifying their capacities and needs; creating a plan and budget for the needs in a timely and thorough manner; developing a staffing plan that provides coverage for leaders to have the freedom to participate in development opportunities; and the will to implement and stick to the plan.

Expanding the Imagination of Leadership

Leadership development also needs to focus on *Expanding the Imagination of Leadership* among leaders in sexual health organizations. This does not mean expansion of opportunities to lead or the number of leadership positions. Rather it means expanding the vision of what it means to be an effective leader in a complex environment. The leaders in this study most often described personality, skill or style orientations to leadership (Northouse, 2013). None of these approaches, however, is adequate for addressing the complexity in which leaders of sexual health organizations function.

In the midst of complexity, when the path forward is not always clear, good theory provides grounding and guidance for the next steps in leadership. Adaptive leadership holds promise for developing effective leaders of sexual health organizations and other complex adaptive systems (De Meuse et al., 2010; Hannah, Waldman, Balthazard, Jennings, & Thatcher, 2013; Heifetz, Kania, & Kramer, 2004; Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). Adaptive leadership invites leaders to imagine and innovate solutions that are not limited to the range of behaviors, skills, styles, strategies, actions, and approaches described by leaders in this study. It is designed to address a complex context like that created by the conflict over sexuality education. Heifetz et al. (2009) differentiate between *technical problems* and *adaptive challenges* in a way that is useful to leaders of sexual health organizations. A technical problem is one that has a known solution and

Here is a peculiar paradox of leading in complexity: Effective leaders need to understand the context of the leadership moment, yet the context can be so complex that understanding it may be all but impossible.

is usually resolved when experts apply past or current experience, knowledge and strategies to fix the problem. Adaptive challenges require "changes in people's priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties" (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 19) and such changes typically require learning, innovation of new strategies, and experimentation. The issue of sexuality education and its context, as described by leaders in this study, presents sexual health organizations with complex challenges for which technical problem-solving skills are not adequate (Heifetz et al., 2004).

Expanding the Imagination of Leadership means expanding the vision of what it means to be an effective leader in a complex environment.

The practice of adaptive leadership involves three activities performed in an iterative process (Heifetz et al., 2009). The first activity is *observing* (Heifetz et al., 2009). The authors offer the metaphor of moving up to the balcony in order to get an unobstructed view of what is happening on the floor. Leaders observe the environment,

the context, the challenge, and how they and their organization are responding to it. Leaders in this study described their observation typically extends to consulting their peers to understand what is happening.

The second activity is to *interpret or diagnosis the situation* (Heifetz et al., 2009). Appropriate diagnosis requires leaders to bear in mind they are not likely to simply maintain status quo. When status quo is attained, the authors argue, it is achieved by applying solutions that were innovative in the past and worked in the past. **However, the past solutions are not likely to work effectively in the present because the challenge is different and the status quo is not likely to be maintained.** As a result, there is a continuous need to innovate new solutions.

Understanding this second activity is critical to differentiating between the ability to adapt demonstrated by leaders in this study from adaptive leadership. Day and Vance (2004) observed that adaptability does not rely on success in similar previous situations to acquire the

Adaptive leadership is focused on forecasting and addressing emergent situations; not the flexibility to react to current situations using past or present knowledge and experience.

answer for a current problem. Leaders in this study have learned to adapt to changing conditions but they do so reactively and mostly to hold on to what they already have (status quo). That is, they have learned to adapt once the change has occurred. In this regard, adaptation, when it works at all, will, at best, only stem losses. "Status quo functions elegantly to solve a stream of problems and opportunities" that occurred in the past (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 49). Adaptive leadership, however, is focused on forecasting and addressing emergent situations (Heifetz et

al., 2009; M.D. Mumford et al., 2010). Also, the strategy of consulting peers used by leaders in this study is a valid one for using the experience of veteran leaders to inform the current situation. However, it can be risky if the experiences are not carefully analyzed and thoughtfully applied to the current situation. The practice of adaptive leadership, however, includes employing discreet strategies for analyzing current situations in order to more effectively forecast and implement the necessary strategy (Heifetz et al., 2009).

The third activity of adaptive leadership is to *try the innovation* and see what happens. It is an iterative process; therefore, the leader moves back up to the balcony to observe how the organization is now responding to the adaptive challenge and, in turn, innovates the necessary adjustments or, if necessary, scraps the innovation and tries again. Leaders in sexual health organizations, like all leaders, are accustomed to the "trial and error" method which this seems to suggest. Unlike simple trial and error methods, leaders practicing adaptive leadership employ a variety of strategies designed to test and assess innovation (Heifetz et al., 2009).

The practice of adaptive leadership is not as simple as this brief description suggests. Indeed, M.D. Mumford et al. (2010) include these three activities within the nine or so they propose in their model of leader cognition. Whether adaptive leadership is a matter of three or nine activities, it can be learned. Indeed, the process suggests the importance for leaders to possess social, cognitive, and behavior complexity in order to be most effective in adaptation (Hooijberg et al., 1997). Hence, this recommendation is for leaders in sexual health organizations to extend their complexity competencies and expand their imaginations of leadership by learning and practicing an adaptive leadership approach.

Pursuing a Third Way

A "Third Way" refers to "any option regarded as an alternative to two extremes" ("Third Way," 2013).

Pursuing a Third Way is about intentionally choosing to address the intractable conflict over sexuality education differently than it has been addressed in the past. The two extremes that have typically prevailed in the conflict over sexuality education have been known to either coexist in a state of latent conflict awaiting the next flare up, or to be engaged in full-on battle until a new stalemate is reached. **As a result leaders move from latent conflict to stalemate, and back to latent conflict on a continuous, never-ending cycle. This cycle has become wearisome, frustrating, and disheartening to leaders in this study. For many it also feels hopeless.**

It is at just such a moment as this that leadership makes a difference. John Kotter, writing in *Leading Change*, wrote, "Only leadership can motivate the actions needed to alter behavior in any significant way. Only leadership can get change to stick by anchoring it in the very culture of an organization" (1996, p. 30). **Leadership can bring change in an organization, a community, a nation, and even a culture, if it is willing.** Being willing to lead change, especially when one is not clear what the change will finally be, is a fundamental barrier to *Pursuing a Third Way*. What seems to be holding leaders of sexual health organizations back is the mistrust, wounds, and misinterpretation of opponents that was observed throughout the interview process.

Despite these, it is not clear whether the conflict has brought leaders to the point of experiencing a hurting stalemate. Presently it appears the benefits to engaging in the conflict still seem to outweigh the costs, especially for leaders who, for the moment, are on the winning side.

Pursuing a Third Way does not ask leaders with divergent ideologies to come together to find common ground, build consensus, share limited funding and resources, or try to work together.

Pursuing a Third Way is choosing to address the intractable conflict differently than it has been addressed for the past century.

However, Pursuing a Third Way does not ask leaders with divergent ideologies on the sexuality education of young people to come together to find common ground, build consensus, share limited funding and other resources, or similarly try to work together. These difficult to achieve outcomes remain elusive because they ask opposing parties to deal with specific need or resource based interests prematurely. To achieve them they require negotiation of specific issues related to sexuality education, yet such negotiation is not possible until the parties have successfully addressed the dynamics of the relationship and the patterns of interaction between them that keeps them in conflict (Coleman et al., 2007).

The recommendation of *Pursuing a Third Way* does ask leaders, organizations, funders, and other stakeholders in the conflict to be willing to try something different, to try to understand and manage ideological differences.

Practicing the Discipline of Dialogue is, first, an internal conversation before it becomes an external one. Its purposes are learning and informing.

Managing ideological differences and intractable conflict includes the necessity of changing both cognitive and affective responses to one's opponent. Cognitively, it means allowing one's

frame or beliefs about another to be changed, and then adopting a different perspective toward the other (Campbell & Docherty, 2004; Coleman et al., 2007; Gray et al., 2007). This frame, or belief changing, is what Schein (1999, p. 61) refers to as "cognitive restructuring" and involves learning that: 1) words mean something different than what one assumed ("semantic redefinition"); 2) concepts can be more broadly interpreted than what one assumed ("cognitive broadening"); and 3) the measures by which one evaluates another are not absolute and if another measure is used the evaluation changes ("new standards of judgment or evaluation"). Affectively it is to "imagine others' hurt and to relate it to the hurt we would experience if we were in their place" (Forni, 2002). The importance of and need for managing ideological differences in the conflict over sexuality education was punctuated by the frequent misunderstanding and misrepresentation of opponents' beliefs and values observed during interviewing. This phenomenon was common among participants regardless of their ideology and was most recognizable in the frequent use of stereotyping to characterize their opposition.

The fourth and final recommendation suggests a strategy for *Pursuing a Third Way*.

Practicing the Discipline of Dialogue

The *Discipline of Dialogue*, as used in this recommendation, is not discussion, conversation, consensus building, sharing, problem solving, negotiation, mediation, discourse, storytelling, or debate. It has no fixed agenda and its purpose is not to convince others, evaluate ideas, or justify and defend assumptions (Maiese, 2003b). The purpose of the *Discipline of Dialogue*, instead, is to inform and to learn. The *Discipline of Dialogue* refers to a specific practice described by social psychologist Edgar Schein (2003). Schein's approach is characterized by a reflective communication process that allows individuals to identify the "culturally learned assumptions and categories of thought" that create barriers to hearing and understanding others (Schein, 2003, p. 33). These assumptions and categories create a filter through which opponents in a conflict hear and experience the other. As a result each will unconsciously bias and distort the perception of the other. Schein's (2003) approach is to use *suspension*, a

reflective act through which individuals become aware of when their own assumptions and categories are impacting their ability to hear and understand their opponents.

In this way dialogue is first an internal conversation before it becomes an external one. Through the technique of suspension, individuals first listen to themselves in order to become aware of their perceptions, and misperceptions of others, conscious of their own thought process by which the perceptions are created, and then aware of the effect of these perceptions and process on how and when they choose to engage the other (Schein, 2003). As participants examine first their own presuppositions, beliefs, and feelings that influence the interaction they have with others, they are then able to more fully examine, understand, and interrupt, when needed, the ways they make communication better or worse.

Key to effective dialogue is the effective use of suspension: the act of waiting and listening before speaking or responding, especially when one perceives their point has been misunderstood or misrepresented.

The goal of dialogue is to help the parties more clearly and deeply understand the others concerns, fears, and needs (Maize, 2003b). Dialogue does this by creating *valid communication* (Schein, 2003). Valid communication means that participants in a dialogue are using words in

the same way and are holding the same images and ideas in their minds, or mental models (Schein, 2003). Only with dialogue "is it possible to determine whether or not the communication that is going on is valid" (Schein, 2003, p. 29). ***Dialogue, resulting in valid communication, builds trust and facilitates the management of ideological differences and similarities discussed in the previous recommendation.*** To be clear, Schein's (2003) dialogue is not a conflict resolution technique that ends the conflict over sexuality education of young people. Rather, it can create the conditions by which the conflict can be managed more productively.

Dialogue can assist parties to bridge the "moral empathy gaps" that prevent them from feeling what the other feels (Ditto & Koleva, 2011, p. 331). It unleashes the creativity of people to address and manage their differences and similarities through reflective self-awareness, listening without prejudice and fear, clear and valid communication, deeper understanding, empathy, and, ultimately, trust. It is upon this foundation that efforts can then be made to negotiate specific issues such as common ground, consensus, and resource sharing. Dialogue is, according to Schein (2003, p. 29), "at the root of *all* effective group action."

Dialogue is not a conflict resolution technique; rather it can create the conditions by which the conflict can be more productively managed.

Dialogue is a discipline that needs to be learned. The skills of dialogue include internal listening, accepting differences, confronting one's own and others' assumptions, revealing feelings, trust building, and identifying and creating new shared assumptions (Schein, 2003). However, leaders should be undaunted by the recommendation for practicing the *Discipline of Dialogue*. The *Discipline of Dialogue* has elements of the practice of sensemaking that, as previously described, is a critical function of a leader. Through their reflective efforts to make

sense of the contentious context in which they work, and the self-examination that leads them to a sense of conviction, leaders in this study demonstrated the capacity to engage in the *Discipline of Dialogue* that can lead to a Third Way.

Four recommendations have emerged from the data in this study:

Building Management Muscle recommends leaders and organizations become intentional and focused about helping leaders acquire the management capacity they need to lead their organizations. *Expanding the Imagination of Leadership* recommends leaders more fully embrace the complexity of their work and environment by learning to use an adaptive leadership approach to creatively imagine and innovate the solutions they need. *Pursuing a Third Way* recommends breaking the cycle of institutionalized intractable conflict by willfully seeking an alternative way to address it. *Practicing the Discipline of Dialogue* recommends one way of pursuing a Third Way by learning and engaging in Schein's (2003) model of dialogue with those who hold different ideological positions. Each recommendation is quite straightforward and each is reasonable for leaders to act upon. Acted upon alone, and separately, each recommendation has the potential for strengthening leaders and making modest contributions to changing the contentious context in which they work.

However, taken together, and acted upon as a whole, these recommendations can have a profound impact on the competencies and motivations of leaders. Even more, a greater impact will be seen as courageous leaders take steps, together with their opponents, to mitigate a destructive, difficult intractable conflict over the sexuality education of young people that is the context in which they lead.

Closing Thought

In the introduction to this summary I described the curiosity that drove me to undertake this study. The previous pages have presented some of the answers I have found. The answers are far from complete and they are certainly not final. As with most research, this attempt to find answers has resulted in both greater clarity and more questions. Though the journey to greater understanding has been a fascinating one, I find myself having made less progress than I imagined I would have hoped to make when I started out four years ago. Hence, the journey continues. By sharing what I have learned thus far, however, I hope to have inspired others to join me on the journey.

Recently I attended a conference in which one of the plenary speakers repeatedly encouraged the audience to think differently about tough problems that are difficult to fix. Rather than falling into forecasting what will happen or trying to prescribe what should happen, the speaker encouraged us to think about what could happen. This slight reframe can make an amazing difference. It gives permission to go beyond the doomsday or prescription scenarios to consider the possibilities of what a successful resolution looks like. Since then, I've wondered what a successful resolution to the intractable conflict over public school sexuality education could look; what it could mean to leaders in sexual health organizations and how it could benefit young people. I've also begun to wonder if others in the field might be willing to join me in exploring what the future could be, including those who participated in this study.

This closing can be read as an invitation to come along with me. Indeed, it is.



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Tom Klaus is a "pracademic" who has a deep appreciation for theory and yet possesses the ability to translate it into effective practice. One of Tom's favorite quotes is from Kurt Lewin, the father of organizational psychology and action research, who said: "There is nothing so practical as a good theory."

From 2005 to 2013 Tom was Director of Capacity Building & Sustainability at Advocates for Youth in Washington, DC. During that time Tom served as a project director and as a technical assistance provider for a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) funded teen pregnancy prevention project. In the role of project director he managed the daily work of the project. As a lead TA provider he created and provided organizational and leadership development training, coaching, materials, and support to local, state, regional and national organizations on a variety of issues, including controversy management, project and organizational sustainability, collaborative partnerships, and organizational change. From 2010 to 2013 Tom led the development of an innovative community mobilization and sustainability framework that is being adopted for use by the CDC in its teen pregnancy prevention grantee sites across the United States.

Tom came to Advocates for Youth in December, 2005, from his home state of Iowa, where he had been the executive director and a founding board member of Iowa's statewide teen pregnancy prevention organization; a developer and master trainer of several teen pregnancy prevention programs; a writer of numerous articles, curricula, and books; a youth worker and counselor; and had held local, state, regional, national, and international leadership positions in both religious and public service organizations.

Tom Klaus is an alumnus of the Greater Des Moines Leadership Institute and a trained facilitator in *Appreciative Inquiry*, an asset-based change and development model for organizations. Tom earned degrees in religion and English at William Penn University, a Master of Science degree in counseling from Drake University, and the Doctor of Philosophy in Organizational Leadership at Eastern University.

Since leaving Advocates for Youth in February, 2013, Tom Klaus has been continuing his research, writing and beginning a consulting practice. *Tom Klaus & Associates* is focused on building the leadership and organizational capacity of social sector (non-profit) organizations to be fit, strong, and effective in the cause of social good. In addition to his research on leadership in intractable conflict, highlighted in this summary, his research and consulting work has included community engagement, program and organizational sustainability, conflict management, leadership development and coaching, organizational analysis, and board development.

Tom is known by his colleagues and clients as an authentic transformational leader; an innovative and focused strategic thinker and planner; a creative problem-solver; a talented trainer, teacher, and motivational speaker; an award-winning writer of numerous books, popular press articles, and professional research publications; and an effective relationship builder with a warm and engaging personality, appreciative management style, and a keen sense of humor.

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