**Conflict within the delivery of the extended free entitlement (EFE)**

Conflict carries negative connotations. It is often thought of as the opposite of co-operation, and is most commonly associated with disruption and, for some, negative emotions such as fear, bullying and aggressive behaviour. Conflict does not necessarily mean a significant or fundamental difference and often arises because of an actual or perceived imbalance of power.

This view of conflict as negative is not always helpful. Conflict can often be a force for positive change - a visible demonstration of adapting to a new environment and can lead to dynamic and creative ways of finding new solutions to situations.

**Sources of conflict within the EFE**

* A partner does not trust the motives of another or other partners – will a partner decide to open a rival childcare facility or change the terms of a rental agreement?
* A partner perceives another partner as being less professional or their staff as being less well qualified or experienced
* A partner is worried that another partner may attempt to ‘poach’ staff

**Conflict resolution**

In any situation where there is a degree of disagreement or conflict, there are a number of options available ranging from one or other partner deciding to pull out of the partnership completely to partners working together to achieve a position in which partners feel valued and able to maintain an active presence. The decision on whether to stay involved or to pull out will depend a) on how important the partnership is to the partner(s) and b) on the degree to which the partner needs the partnership in order to achieve their goals.

It is almost always advisable to try to resolve a conflict irrespective of whether a partner decides to remain in or leave the partnership.

The role of resolving conflict does not necessarily lie with the lead partner and, in some situations where, for example one partner does not trust the motives of the lead partner, it may be advisable for another partner (or an outside party) to take on the role of conflict resolution.

Conflict resolution requires:

* Honesty and a recognition that there is conflict
* Commitment to finding a resolution
* Impartiality and objectivity
* Diffusing the emotion(s)
* Timeliness
* Being non judgemental

The matrix on the following page plots four possible approaches or strategies that a partnership can take in resolving conflict:

**Consensus -** sets out to minimise ‘trade-offs’ and their negative associations, seeking a ‘win-win’ outcome in which each partner works creatively to find a solution that everyone can support. Achieving consensus involves one or more partners talking through the issues that are creating the conflict and identifying the positive benefits of the partnership to the partner(s) in conflict.

**Compromise –** occurs when one partner values a strong and continuing relationship within the partnership above the attainment of its own specific goals; the compromising partner forgoes something but perceives that this was worth it because of the importance of the relationship.

**Withdrawal –** often happens where a partner decides that they would prefer to avoid confrontation and/or dealing with the difference(s) and that this is more important than remaining in the partnership to achieve individual or collective goals. Delay tactics and boycotting are also examples of withdrawal behaviour. If one partner decides to withdraw, the remaining partners will need to take a view on whether they wish this partner to stay within the partnership and then decide how they can achieve a compromise or consensus.

**Force –** is usually the least favoured approach and arises where one partner has the means and inclination to get what they want regardless of whether the other partner loses, and whether or not the process of winning causes damage to relationships. Force can include a real or perceived imbalance of power, a real or perceived threat associated with being part of the partnership or intimidating language or behaviour

**Conflict management strategies**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Importance of the partnership** | Very | **Compromise** | **Consensus** |
| Not very | **Withdraw** | **Force** |
|  |  |  |
|  |  | Not very | Very |
|  | **Importance of the issue in relation to achieving partnership goals** |