

How self-organizing groups reframe conflict



Written by

Doug Nathan and Lori Kane

Contents

Why we wrote this e-book..... 3

What is a self-organizing group? 4

What is conflict? 8

What does conflict look and feel like in self-organizing groups? 8

 Example 1: Tag-teaming conflict 8

 Example 2: Enjoying conflict..... 9

 Example 3: Energized by and learning through conflict..... 10

 Example 4: Engagement overshadowing conflict 11

 Example 5: Not experiencing conflict..... 11

 Example 6: Conflict fostering reflection, action, and innovation..... 11

 Example 7: Conflict elicits more trust and honesty..... 11

 Example 8: Awareness of conflict moves us into a self-organizing group 12

 Example 9: Moving from stuck to self-organizing 14

 Example 10: Conflict provides options forward 14

How self-organizing groups reframe conflict 15

Connect to learn with us..... 17

Why we wrote this e-book

Lori's thoughts: In September 2010, I got an e-mail from Doug Nathan, managing partner of *Conflictmatters*. He liked the Collective Self blog enough to reach out and introduce himself. A few weeks later, we met for coffee, could see potential in working together (or at least in hanging out), and started meeting regularly. Today, with minimal effort, we've helped find work for each other and have begun co-creating and facilitating workshops together. Since we both love to write, co-writing seemed like a natural next step. I could invent and share a million practical reasons for writing this e-book. The truth is that I'm writing this because it means spending more time working with Doug.

Doug has spent years willingly stepping into groups experiencing destructive conflict. I've spent years doing pretty much the exact opposite: stepping into groups in which the overall group experience is so positive that conflict is experienced, described, and demonstrated to be rewarding and even fun. From my perspective, Doug and I are one of these groups—a group I would call a self-organizing group. I am thrilled to spend time with him because I can see more, do more, and learn more quickly with him than I can on my own. Case in point: it was thanks to Doug that I began to more consciously think about the experience of conflict in self-organizing groups, that I created my first graphics to describe these groups, and that I verbalized what I myself now do to recognize when I'm within my own self-organizing groups and when I'm stepping out of them. I also began to consciously watch for, ask about, and document the experience of conflict within the groups I'm part of and learning with now. Thanks Doug!

Doug's thoughts: When I read Lori's Collective Self blog, I was instantly engaged by her sense of wonder and excitement about life in these groups. I recognized that several groups I am involved with fit Lori's definition of self-organizing groups: a local roller hockey league started and nurtured for over a decade now by parents who want to share a love of hockey with boys and girls; groups within my local Rotary club that delight in finding useful, creative ways to serve community needs; and two professional groups I belong to, gatherings of individuals I could see as competitors, but instead we share a love of learning together and building relationships that sustain and deepen our professional and personal lives.

And then I reflected on other groups I spend a lot of time with. I am often invited to serve as a mediator or facilitator for groups struggling through overwhelming, destructive conflict. These groups can take various forms, from co-workers battling over working styles, to divorcing couples negotiating a parenting plan, to a leadership team fractured by the demands of running a business. Sometimes, we navigate slowly through difficult emotions, misunderstandings, and competing goals. Other times, these conflict-oriented groups seem to take on a life and momentum of their own. They share their concerns and hopes openly; they communicate respectfully, and creatively work towards solutions that benefit everyone. I realized that my experience in these groups fit the definition of self-organizing groups. I got curious about whether I could more intentionally foster the conditions that allow self-organizing groups to emerge and productively manage their conflict even with the most stuck, dysfunctional groups.

As Lori and I talked about the role of conflict in self-organizing groups, we challenged each other with questions to clarify what we believe based on our individual experiences and our collective understanding. Each of us began the conversation with a lifetime of experience in self-organizing groups (whether we defined them as such or not) and in conflict (again, whether we were intentionally engaged in it or triggered by it). This e-book is one result of our shared inquiry. Working with Lori has rekindled my passion for observing and writing about my experiences with groups and has helped me reengage my sense of wonder and delight in working with the many self-organizing groups I am lucky to be involved with.

What is a self-organizing group?

From the individual perspective, a self-organizing group is a collection of living beings that creates and organizes itself and is more emergent—appearing to arise spontaneously—than planned. These groups contain at least two individual selves and at least one collective self. Collective self isn't as “woo woo” as it sounds. It simply means that from within you can experience the group moving in the world as one. I first described this experience as “Thanks to them, I have more hands.” From outside, the group can also be observed by close others as moving in the world as one.

Individual self vs. collective self

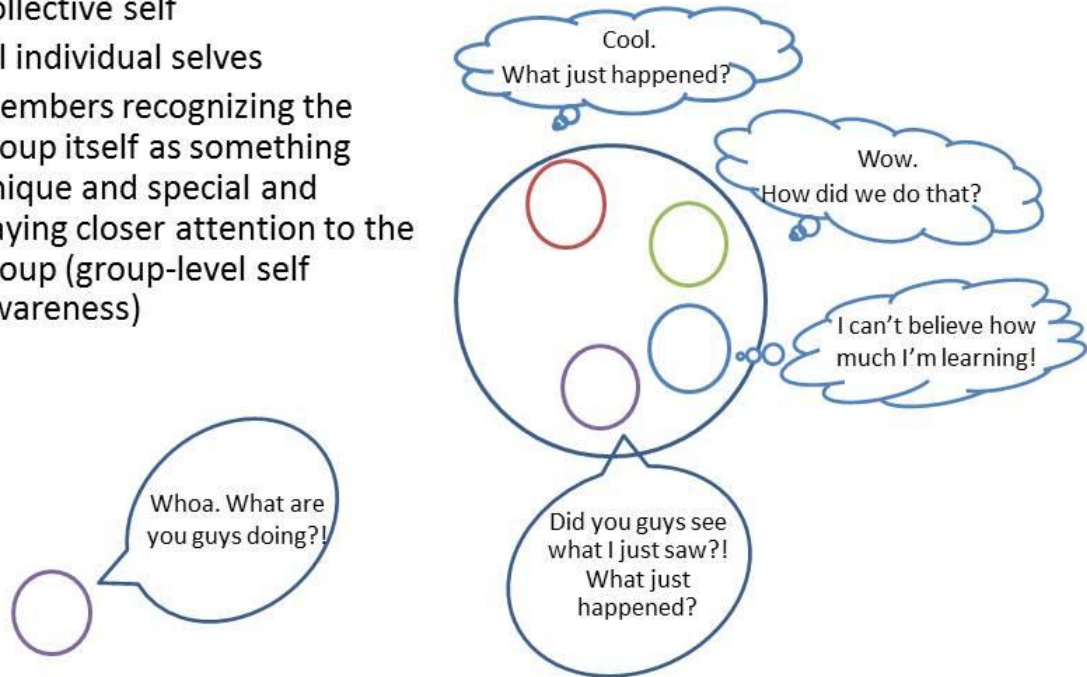


From the self-organizing group perspective, the group forms when group members and close others are surprised by and become curious about the group itself.

In a self-organizing group

Me =

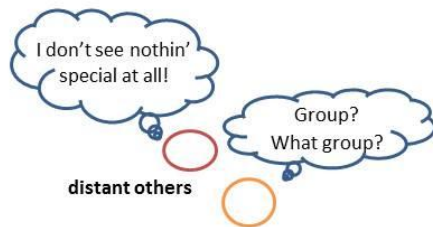
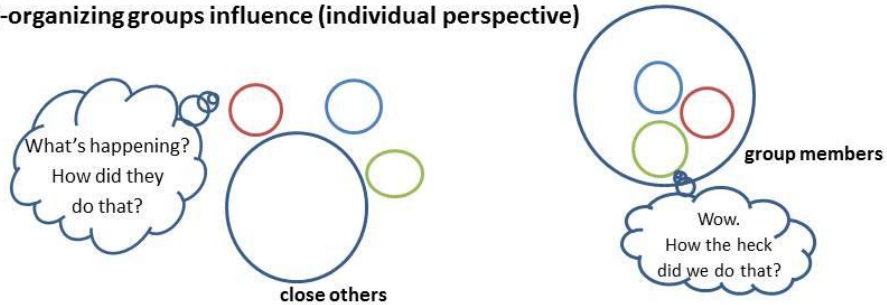
1. Collective self
2. All individual selves
3. Members recognizing the group itself as something unique and special and paying closer attention to the group (group-level self awareness)



These groups have many up sides, including increasing creativity, motivation, resilience, productivity, effectiveness, sense of connectedness, self-esteem, self-acceptance, and enjoyment of work and life. They foster gratitude and a greater appreciation for and more rapid forgiveness of our individual self, other group members, and close others.

From an individual perspective, one apparent downside is that their influence appears to be limited to group members and close others.

Who self-organizing groups influence (individual perspective)



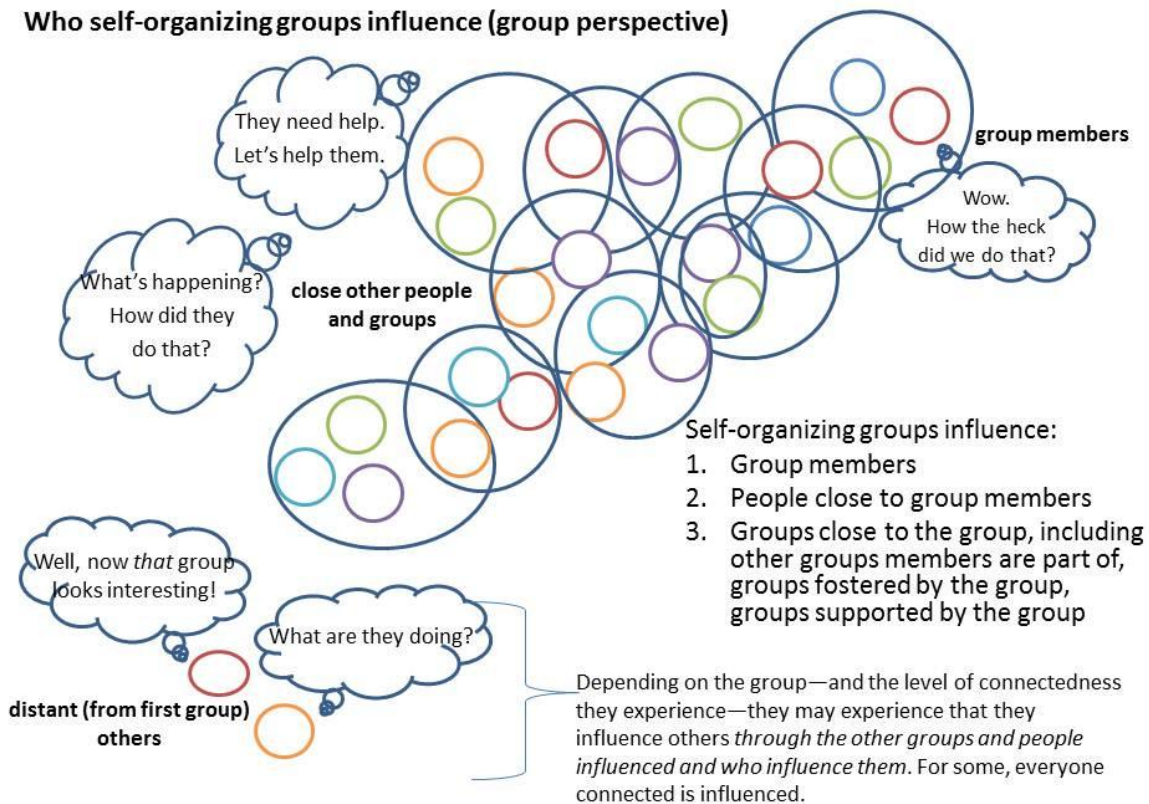
Self-organizing groups influence:

1. Group members
2. Close others

They do not appear to influence distant others.

From the group's perspective, they influence considerably more.

Who self-organizing groups influence (group perspective)



These groups find themselves with a lot more ways of being and tools (skills, abilities, perspectives, resources) available to them than the individuals within them had previously imagined possible. They communicate using more of their whole selves, for example, using collective speech, hearing, and vision. Group members often:

- finish each other's thoughts and sentences
- speak the same words or make the same sounds or gestures at the same time
- comfortably speak on behalf of the group (anticipating other group members helping out, as needed, and knowing that they'll receive rapid forgiveness when they make a mistake as an individual)
- use a shortcut language of their own (for example, shortening words and phrases, using a look instead of words, and using one word to shift mood, such as a shouted "Awk-ward!" as a standard method for easing individual tension within the group)
- listen to and understand what is said without words
- anticipate others' needs and take action prior to being asked
- honor what other group members think, say, and do and are likely to think, say, and do

They also communicate through visible collective energy and joy (demonstrated by collective agility, resilience, laughter, goose bumps, tears of gratitude, and enthusiasm), their ability to rapidly forgive and move on as a group, and the growing apparent fearlessness of the group itself.

What is conflict?

Individuals often give conflict a bad rap. On our own, we tend to associate it with negative experiences, unhealthy emotions, and hurtful exchanges of words and actions. Conflict occurs when something we care about seems threatened by the ideas, values or actions of others. We react to these perceived threats in powerful ways to protect or claim what we care about, often inflicting harm on others and ourselves as we diminish the quality of relationships, ideas and results.

But that's only part of what conflict can be—the destructive part. Within self-organizing groups, conflict is also experienced as an engine for creativity. Feeling safer within these groups, we can experience conflict as a clash of ideas, of emotions, and of actions that lead to innovative thoughts and deeds that result in deeper understanding, stronger relationships and more satisfying and effective results.

How we experience conflict depends on how we see it and act on it. Self-organizing groups teach individuals within them and close to them to see and act on conflict in more constructive ways. By noticing how self-organizing groups create the conditions for constructive conflict, we gain insight into what we can become and do within our stuck groups to shift ourselves back into creative, rewarding, functional groups.

What does conflict look and feel like in self-organizing groups?

The following examples of conflict experienced within self-organizing groups come from our collective experience. Lori experienced examples 1 through 6 as she researched and recorded several different self-organizing groups. Examples 7 through 10 are drawn from Doug's recollections of groups that transformed their destructive conflict into opportunities for shared learning and effective group action.

Example 1: Tag-teaming conflict

Group member 1: And the funny part of it is, they're saying, "Man, we can't get away with anything anymore! You guys talk to [group member 4] and [group member 3]." And, I have a particular student who didn't always do his homework. Wonder who that was in [group member 4's] class?

Whole group: [collective laughter]

Member 1: And so it was great, because we could tag team. [Group member 2] had her Resource classes in the morning, so she could find out from [group member 4] at 3:00 in the afternoon, the night before, if the kid had homework and what it was, and when she went to his class, or whatever. Well, if that student showed up the next morning and couldn't show her homework, we have 50 minutes in which we can force them to do it. Not literally; it feels like that, some days. But we can say, "I notice from [group member 4] you're supposed to turn in 32 definitions today. Let me *see* them."

Member 2: We can hold them responsible for their homework, to put it in English.

Member 3: Yep, that's more professional. [*teasing group member 1*]

Whole group: [collective laughter]

Member 1: But truly, and so, then, we check in later in the day with [group members 3 and 4] to make sure that homework actually found its way to them, because we watched them complete it during our class, or whatever the case may be. So that was another thing. And the kids, on the one hand, they were saying, "Man, I can't get away with anything!" But at the end of the day, they graduated high school. And if you asked them today, for some of them, that made a huge difference.

Example 2: Enjoying conflict

This group is reflecting on what sustained the group for 20 years...

Member 1: Fellowship, the feelings we have for one another.

Member 2: We've got libertarians, we've got socialists, we've got democrats, a lot of democrats, and republicans. And we have our differences. And we have so much FUN talking about it. I do! I just enjoy, you know, [name of person] to no end.

Member 3: Yeah.

Member 2: Because he's a far right republican. And I'm a progressive, I call myself. And it just tickles me to death when we get into a discussion. And it's all friendly, you know, it's all friendship...

Member 4: Well, anger is not ever part of the conversation.

Member 2: ...and respect.

Member 5: And that part. We have mutual respect for each other's views. And, I guess that's part of being educated, maybe. [laughter]

Member 2: Well I hope so! Yeah. [laughter]

Member 4: It is a highly educated group.

Member 6: Oh, very highly educated. [laughter]

Member 4: And the wide diversity of backgrounds. We can't emphasize that enough. I mean, it's just unbelievable. Where people have been. What they've done...

Example 3: Energized by and learning through conflict



Flash mob rehearsing in Cal Anderson park in Seattle

At a recent flash mob rehearsal, about two hours into rehearsal, one of the dancers screamed out “Stop him! He just stole my purse!!” In the busy, urban park where we rehearse, a teenager had grabbed her bag where it lay on the ground and taken off running. My neighbor Rachelle turned, pointed, and yelled “He’s over there! There he goes!” and the whole mob (not to mention a hundred plus mob rehearsal observers and park goers) turned to see where he went. Roughly 30 people—maybe half flash mobbers and half mob observers who heard Rachelle—leapt up and took chase. Simultaneously, somebody else in the flash mob group called the police. My neighbor Scott, a mob observer, got on his bike and joined the chase. Within minutes, the group caught up to the person (actually one of the mob organizers was the first person to reach him) and the purse was returned to its rightful owner with everything inside still intact. Everybody started cheering and clapping. When word spread that the mob organizer was the first person to reach the guy, more clapping erupted and one of his friends called out “Never mess with a butch gay man!!” The entire 100+ person group burst into laughter. Three minutes later, we were back to rehearsing and more energized than ever.

As a group member, I thought about that experience all the way home on my 12-block walk. I thought about how remarkably fast the group moved into action. I thought about how ingenious people were in the moment: from the people who yelled out, to the people who took chase, to my neighbor thinking to use his bike, to the person who cracked a joke that seemed to instantly eliminate all last remnants of tension. I thought about how connected I feel to my neighborhood and how beautiful the people in my diverse and energetic neighborhood are. I came to feel pity for the kid who stole the purse—being chased down by 30+ people. That must have felt horrible.

Since then, the community has figured out that when we rehearse in busy parks, the best thing to do is to put all valuable possessions into one big pile at the center of the rehearsing group instead of around the edges. We’ve rehearsed for other mobs in many different urban parks since then and haven’t had theft problems since.

Example 4: Engagement overshadowing conflict

Member 1: Last time I'll bug you this week! [Another member] has asked if we could move the June meeting to 10 a.m. to noon.... That time works for [the rest of us], would it work for you? Thanks.

Member 2: [name] You can "bug" me any time! I do not feel bugged. I feel engaged. That is a very good thing.... I can do [that time]. Have a good weekend.

Example 5: Not experiencing conflict

Member 1: Sorry about the delay in responding. Enclosed is a paragraph summary and a photo...

Member 2: I didn't experience a delay in your response. Thanks for this. It'll go up tomorrow.

Example 6: Conflict fostering reflection, action, and innovation

Member 1: What are you saying? That individuals can only learn from individuals and small groups can only learn from small groups within self-organizing groups?

Member 2: Well, I, uh, hmm. No, that's not what I meant. It's less about learning and has more to do with, um, visibility, and, um, influence. I need to think about that more and get clearer. I'm still fuzzy on it.

Member 1: You should get more clear on that. I'm curious about it!

Member 2: *(responding via blog post, attempting to move the group in the direction of understanding what she'd been seeing in the groups she studies):*

<http://www.collectiveself.com/uncategorized/for-doug-early-thoughts-about-group-size-influence-and-self-organizing-groups/>

Example 7: Conflict elicits more trust and honesty

Steve and Rico. Construction workers, a laborer and his skip level manager. They were also family friends, Steve the son of the construction business owner, Rico, friends with the owner for years before signing on as an employee. They came ready to get better results. Ready to talk and share in ways they hadn't over the course of 2 years working together. They exhibited a level of openness in the mediation they hadn't experienced before with each other. They shared their views of the events that led them to the conflict experienced with each other.

Rico talked about how he liked Steve, related with his situation. He too had worked for his dad's construction company. But he was careful to keep the roles of son and worker separate, if not concealed. He didn't want others to think he was getting preferential treatment. He mentioned that Steve might be creating problems for himself on the crew because he refers to the owner as Dad, not as

the boss. They guys look at him differently, won't respect him for his abilities, will always suspect Steve gets what he wants because he's a daddy's boy. They won't trust him.

Rico's concern for Steve's experience in the group helped Steve feel appreciated. The tone of sharing started not with Nick or Tom's first words, but as they entered for the mediation. There was something about meeting in a neutral space (as opposed to a worksite), alone together (without other workers around to overhear) that encouraged them to dig deeper, discover and share what really mattered to them.

They both had prepared themselves to be honest and share. They obviously both respected and admired the other's abilities. Steve said he looked to Rico as a mentor, wanted to learn from him, wanted to gain skills and develop a career and saw Rico as a valued teacher. They were able to craft verbal agreements about their expectations and things they would do individually and together to work together better.

Towards the end of the mediation, Steve asked to meet in private caucus with Rico, kicking me out of the room. When I returned, Steve had been crying and Rico was in the bathroom. I asked if everything was alright. Yes, he said, I needed to talk with him about some other stuff. They left the mediation together, and stood by their cars continuing the conversation for several minutes before getting into their cars and driving off.

So, was this really a self-organizing group? From my perspective, yes. We saw ourselves as resilient enough to make decisions about how and who we shared our stories with, knowing that not everyone needed to know everything, and we had confidence that others would understand and still be there for each other.

Example 8: Awareness of conflict moves us into a self-organizing group

I began this mediation with a co-mediator. As we discussed the usual opening statements to identify any conflict of interests, one of the clients said she remembered mediating with my co-mediator. We asked if she was comfortable going forward with us as mediators. She hesitated, and then said no. Not with my co-mediator. I asked her if she would be comfortable working with just me as mediator. She was. I asked the other client, and he was, so we continued minus the other mediator. I had been looking forward to co-mediating with this person, but was also relieved we'd be able to salvage the mediation.

This involved an employee and his skip level manager. The employee, a man, was also a union rep for the local union. The manager wasn't involved in negotiations with the union, but clearly their relationship had two aspects to it: their daily work roles as manager and employee, and their roles as management and labor representative. The employee charged the manager with discrimination based on his perception of not being able to do his union work; there was also an allegation about sex abuse due to rumors he believed she spread about having a relationship with him.

So, trust levels were very low when they came to mediation. They also didn't want mediation. They wanted to have a place to talk. I agreed not to "hold a mediation" but wasn't sure what role they wanted me to play.

"Just facilitate the conversation," they said.

“Okay, then I’ll sit here and listen to the conversation and if it seems useful, I’ll say something. Would that work for you?”

They agreed. So, I threw out everything I knew about running a mediation process and just listened to their conversation.

We all sat quietly for a bit, and then I suggested someone might want to start. Neither one did. I said, “Often, the person who called for the mediation, or facilitation in this case, starts. Does that help?”

“I guess I could begin...”the man said. As he spoke, he tended to characterize the manager as out to get him. She denied it, but as he spoke I could tell he didn’t believe her and really thought she intended to harm him. With each denial, he seemed more intent and justified to accuse her.

After a while, I asked him some questions about what he’d said her intentions were, and helped him question whether he might have misunderstood, whether the events could have been different than he thought. He started talking with less certainty about how evil she was, actually started realizing he might have been misreading her and the situation. This opening allowed him to hear her more clearly. When she explained what her intentions really were, it helped him to reshape his thoughts about her.

He also shared that he had been a manager at one point in his career. I was able to help him look at their situation from the perspective of that role. When he did, he was able to see the situation more objectively and even agree with some of her actions.

They decided they needed to take a short break, during which he went to the bathroom and she made a call to her lawyer to check whether she could discuss one of the issues of concern. I listened in on the conversation as she spoke. The way she described the conversation with him made me realize that she had also constructed a villain story about him, and was not noticing how her actions were influencing his thoughts about her.

When she hung up, I asked if I could share my observation, which I did. It was an “aha” moment for her. She had thanked me for helping him see that he had unjustly characterized her as a villain at the beginning of the break, and now she realized that she was doing the same thing to him.

When he came back into the room, she apologized to him. They were able to talk openly about their desire to improve their working relationship, create more opportunities to talk openly in the workplace by holding a standing weekly meeting for them to talk about things as needed. They both left the mediation relieved and more comfortable with each other, committed to bringing the goodwill they’d experienced in the mediation back to the workplace.

From my perspective, we had become a self-organizing group, during this three hour facilitation. Our awareness of roles shifted to accommodate how we functioned together; I moved from co-mediator to facilitator; they shifted from seeing each other as villains to coworkers who they could care about again; as we worked together, our levels of trust and respect improved. I was able to hold trust for the group, which allowed them to discover it again as we explored intentions and rebuilt respect. By the end of the meeting, they expressed their surprise at what we had accomplished and were visibly relieved and happier.

I followed up three months later. That goodwill had lasted two months, but then their old habits returned. They weren't meeting any longer. She believed that he was manipulating his contact with her for other purposes (related to union activities). Trust was low again. On their own, they didn't exhibit the resilience we had shared as a self-organizing group during that facilitation. As individuals, they were experiencing the fear, disconnection, exhaustion and frustration that come with destructive conflict. Self-organizing groups are more emergent than planned, and they have unique life-spans. While this one lasted only three hours, it had positive resonance back in the workplace for months. And for me, it's been several years now that I've reflected on how well we worked together to uncover a source of their discord and generate creative agreements that improved their working relationship, at least for a while.

Example 9: Moving from stuck to self-organizing

Six hours into the mediation we had our break through. One of the nurses started crying again—her third time. Another of the nurses yelled, “Stop it! Just stop it. I hate when you do that!” The nurse in tears looked stunned and said nothing. I asked the other nurse, “What do you believe she's doing?” “What she always does. She cries so we'll feel sorry for her and stop talking. She's trying to manipulate us.”

“Is that why you're crying?” I asked her.

“No, I'm just stressed out. It's what I do when I'm stressed. I don't want them to stop talking or feel sorry for me.”

“What do you want?” I asked.

“I want them to keep talking. If I start crying, I don't want them to feel like they need to take care of me. I can take care of me. Just keep talking. I might cry, but it's just how I release stress.”

“Does that work for you?” I asked the other nurse. “If she does cry, she says she doesn't want you to feel sorry for her, she just wants you to keep talking, and she'll take care of herself. Would that work for you?”

“Yes I didn't realize that's what's going on for her.”

This exchange helped the nurses learn about how they manage stress as a group—one cries, the others interpret that behavior negatively, as manipulation, causing them to doubt her goodwill, suspect her motives to be selfish, not for the good of the group, and caused them to see her as the problem in the group. With this new insight, they recast their stories about her, saw her as both vulnerable to stress, and able to manage it. They also realized they were acting in ways that increased her stress levels. As they began talking about ways to improve working with each other back at their job site, I noticed the tenor of the conversation had shifted. I could hear more curiosity and compassion for each other, and felt their confidence to work through the remaining issues increase.

Example 10: Conflict provides options forward

I was hired to mediate a dispute between eight shareholders of a private company. Three years earlier, in order to save their failing company and their jobs, eight employees decided to buy the business. They formed their new organization on a philosophy of equality which meant they would be paid equally,

despite different roles they played in the org, and different rates of pay their roles would garner on the open market. They also valued work-life balance and encouraged each other to flex their work hours to accommodate their other interests. After three years, they had turned the business into a profitable practice.

Over the course of two months we had four mediations. During the first one, the group identified two primary issues that they wanted to explore: whether they would recommit as a business to a new lease, and who wanted to stay on as shareholders. Many of the shareholders had grown tired of the fighting that had grown to characterize their experience over the last several months since a new bonus plan had been implemented. The new bonus structure awarded those who worked more hours. One shareholder, Annie, believed she was being penalized for wanting to continue to work part time.. She believed the group was being manipulated by two people who wanted to work more and be paid more. She believed this violated their shared values of work/life balance and equal pay. During the meeting, there were significant moments of silence. They seemed reticent to talk about the issues for fear of getting into another shouting match with Annie.

During our second mediation, Annie had to leave early. Without her, the group unloaded their feelings and frustrations about her freely. We talked about how they way they choose to handle this situation as a group will shape how they deal with these kinds of challenges in the future. They all agreed they liked Annie personally, and respected her professional work with clients, but that they had a really hard time working with her. They were getting to the point where they didn't want to work at the company anymore. The group was fracturing. By talking about it, they realized they'd each been thinking along similar lines but hadn't been talking about it with each other.

In the third meeting, one member, John, did a remarkable thing. He was the person closest to Annie. They had shared similar views about the new bonus plan. He didn't like it either, and at earlier meetings had forcefully talked about it. But at this meeting, he talked about how he realized he had been acting from a place of wanting what was right for him, not taking into account what the group wanted or why. He also realized he had acted like a jerk, and that was the real issue for him. He could believe whatever made sense to him, but how he brought the issue to the group was what mattered. He apologized to the group and promised to engage more productively. He also apologized to Annie for not being available to help her put together a plan for an alternative bonus plan that he had agreed to help her create.

From that moment, John shifted into a new harmony with the group, and with Annie. I think it helped Annie gain clarity about two things: she really didn't agree with the group; and she didn't want to fight either. It was as if the group was now working together to help Annie leave in a way that met all of their needs related to respect and fair compensation, which was the focus of the fourth and final mediation.

How self-organizing groups reframe conflict

What themes did you experience across the examples of conflict within 10 different self-organizing groups? Here's our experience.

Doug sees that conflict can be a generative catalyst for self-organizing groups. Conflict presents opportunities for the group to explore its differences, experience honest expressions, build trust, and

form relationships that help raise its collective awareness. In Doug's role as mediator, he helps groups tap their innate abilities to foster this orientation to conflict and to each other. With this reframing, groups re-engage a willingness to work together, often discovering that they want to learn more so they can improve their skills working with each other, and move forward with more confidence, better results, and more appreciation of what they are able to achieve together.

Lori sees how you are currently experiencing conflict as an indicator of whether you are currently a self-organizing group or currently an individual. She believes that individuals experience conflict as a negative, destructive force, so they smartly do what they can to avoid it, ignore it, or battle it out until somebody "wins." She believes that self-organizing groups, when experiencing conflict, experience it as a good thing—a bringer of change, an igniter of co-ideas, a ground ripe for learning—both in the moment and in hindsight. So they smartly embrace it.

Individual selves play key roles in self-organizing groups. One important role is that individuals are *boundary keepers*. Individuals experience the boundaries of self-organizing groups—they feel them from within. As an individual, am I:

- Feeling lucky to be part of the group?
- Surprised by what we're becoming and doing together?
- More motivated? Energized? Curious? Creative? Connected? Agile? Resilient? Open? Reflective? Effective? Visible? Happy? Content? (*insert whatever words matter most to you and those you care most about*)

When I am, I know that I'm within my self-organizing group.

As an individual, am I experiencing:

- Fear?
- Frustration?
- Disconnection?
- Anger?
- Destructive conflict?
- Isolation?
- Exhaustion?
- Overwhelmed?
- Depression?

When I am, then I'm nearing the boundary—or outside the boundary—of my self-organizing group. These are some of the important tools of the individual.

Individuals also serve as *namers*. That is, it's up to us, as individuals, to recognize and name our groups as self-organizing. We create and join these groups for ourselves, from within. Nobody else can do this for us. We can't be put in one unless we agree. We can't be told that we're in one or not in one unless we agree. You'll never hear "Go stand in that self-organizing group over there!" or "Sorry. We've

reorganized. You're now in this self-organizing group instead of that one." Or "The mandatory self-organizing group training is about to begin." If you do, move away as quickly as you can.

Our time as self-organizing groups has made us acutely aware of when we're within and outside of them. Within them, we spend the majority of our time experiencing people:

- teaching and learning from themselves and each other
- stretching themselves and each other
- adjusting their own behavior so that the group stays together
- enjoying themselves
- sticking together through, and even enjoying, disagreements and conflict
- being honest
- surprising themselves
- co-creating their work and their lives
- reflecting and reminiscing on their time together
- receiving help when they need it, even when they don't ask
- learning to view their individual flaws, mistakes, and weaknesses as gifts, or at least as opportunities for connection and learning
- rapidly forgiving each other, as needed

Within our self-organizing groups, we pay closer attention and notice our own perspective change. We notice ourselves learning. Together we re-experience, re-imagine, and reframe conflict, coming to see much more in it, including the many benefits that conflict brings.

Connect to learn with us

This document summarizes what Doug and Lori were learning together the spring and summer of 2011. We're still learning right now...

Doug Nathan

Website: www.conflictmatters.com

Email: doug@conflictmatters.com

Lori Kane

Website: www.collectiveself.com

Twitter: CollectiveSelf

Facebook: www.facebook.com/collectiveself

Email: lori@collectiveself.com