7-2008

When Agencies and Families Come Together: Dealing with Conflict in Building Partnerships

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Does conflict play a role in system of care?

A recent survey* of governing boards of 86 SOC sites found all who responded reported conflicts in 10 areas:

**Prior History
Incompatible goals
Communication issues
Overlapping authority
Status inconsistencies
Interpersonal relationships
System of Care Issues
Decision-making
Incompatible rewards
Scarce resources**

All respondents (representing all stakeholders) perceived conflict as having a negative impact on SOC implementation.

*Survey conducted by FMHI as part of a study on the role of conflict in SOC funded through ORCMARCO

Conflict's role in system of care?

Survey results suggest that conflict is a common occurrence across all sites.

The more conflict people reported, the less effective they perceived their SOC;

Respondents who identified existing conflict AND perceived their system to be effective tended to view the impact of conflict more positively.
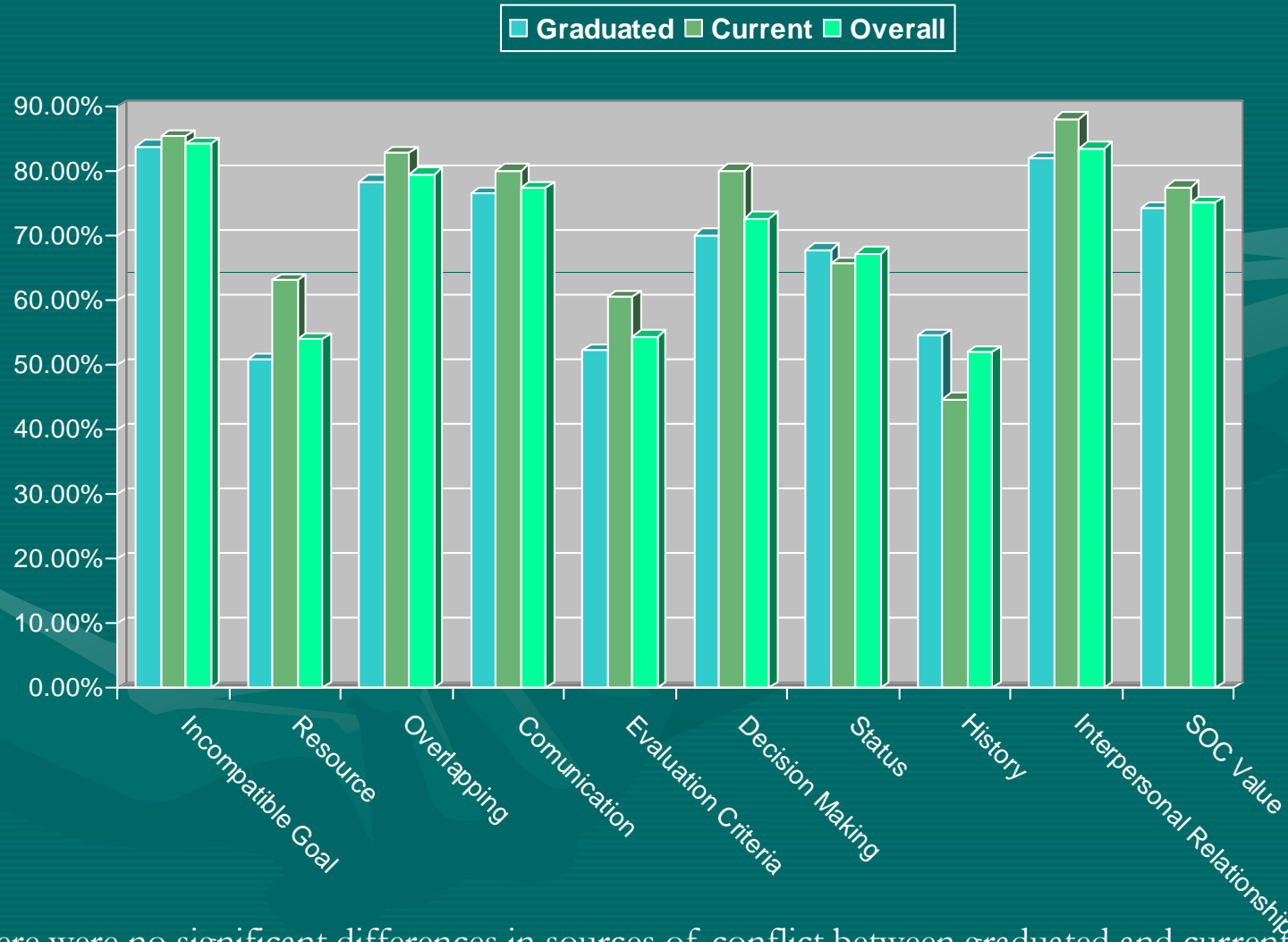
Respondents

- A total of 295 responses from 58 sites, including 43 graduated sites (49% response rate) and 15 new sites (60% response from sites)

- Gender: 66.4% (196) are females, 26.4% (78) are males and 7.1% (21) are unknown.

- Race-ethnicity: 61.7% (182) non-Hispanic White, 8.1% (24) non-Hispanic Black; 9.8% (29) Hispanics, and 20.3% others or unknown.

Respondents' Role
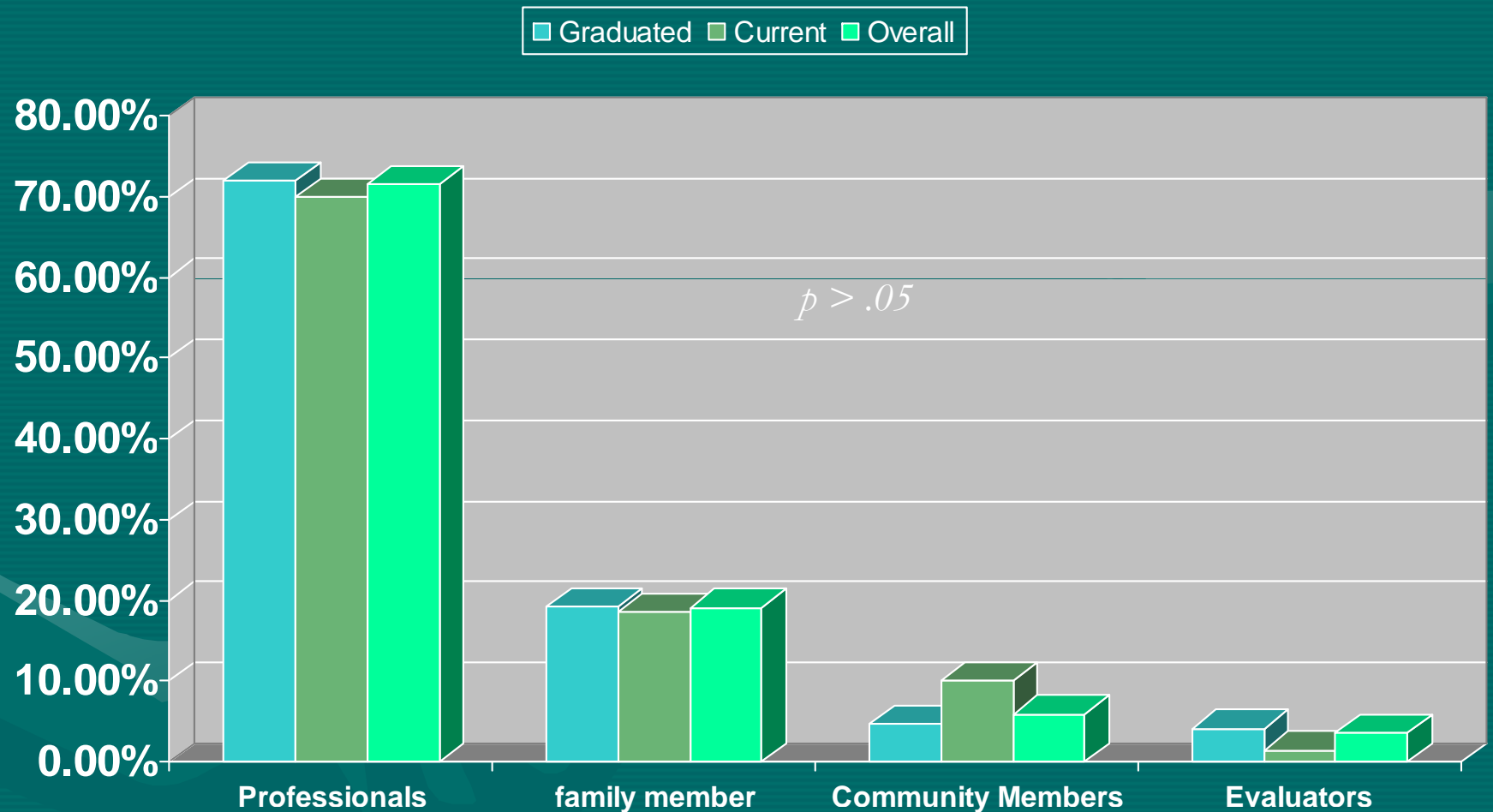
Professionals include mental health providers, physical health providers, DJJ, School,
Substance abuse services providers, child welfare, project directors, grant staff, evaluators, state and
local liaison, and community members.

Sources of Conflicts between Graduated and Current SOC communities

Legend: Graduated, Current, Overall

Categories (x-axis): Incompatible Goal, Resource, Overlapping, Comunication, Evaluation Criteria, Decision Making, Status, History, Interpersonal Relationship, SOC Value
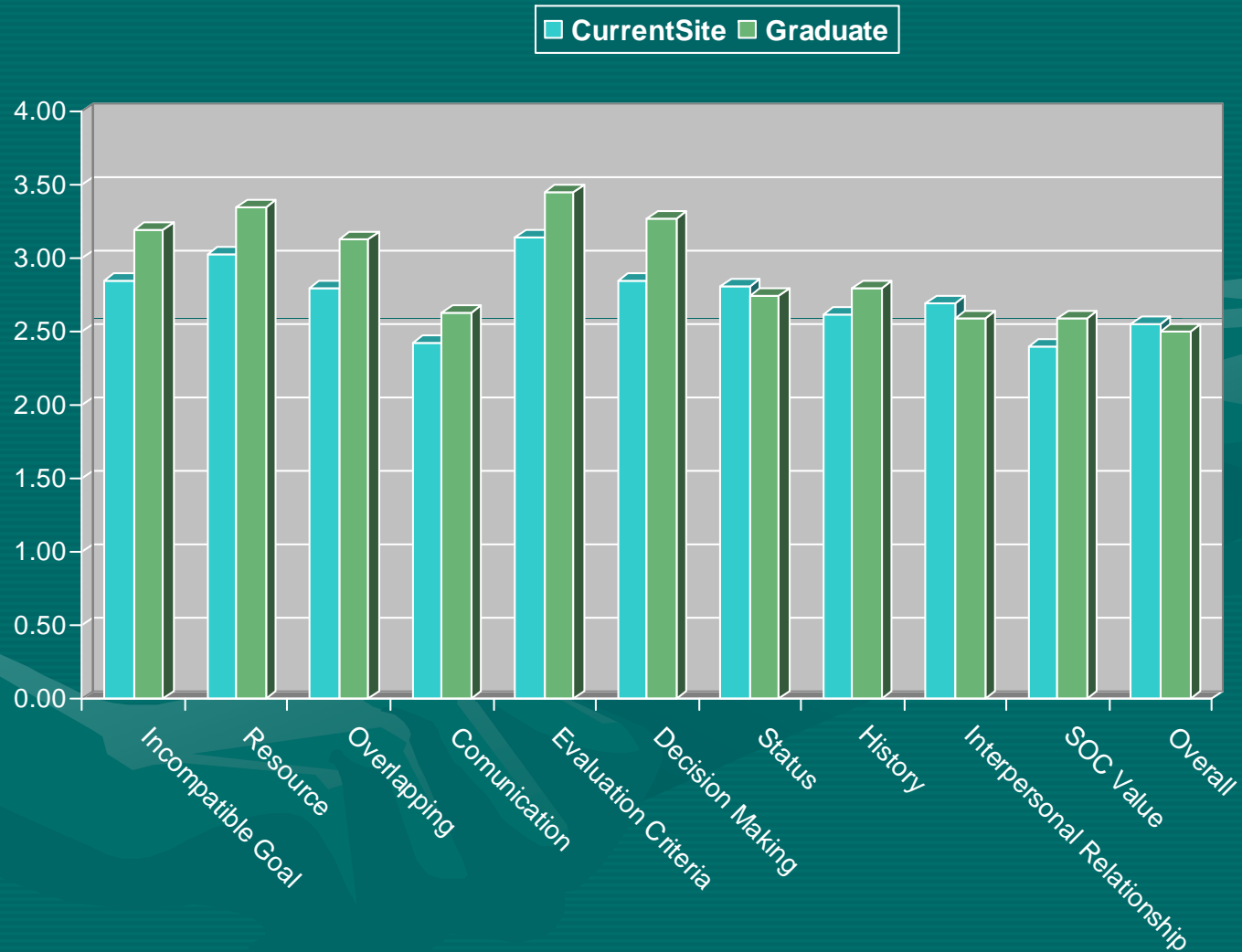
There were no significant differences in sources of conflict between graduated and current sites

Perceived Effects of Conflicts by Professionals and Families
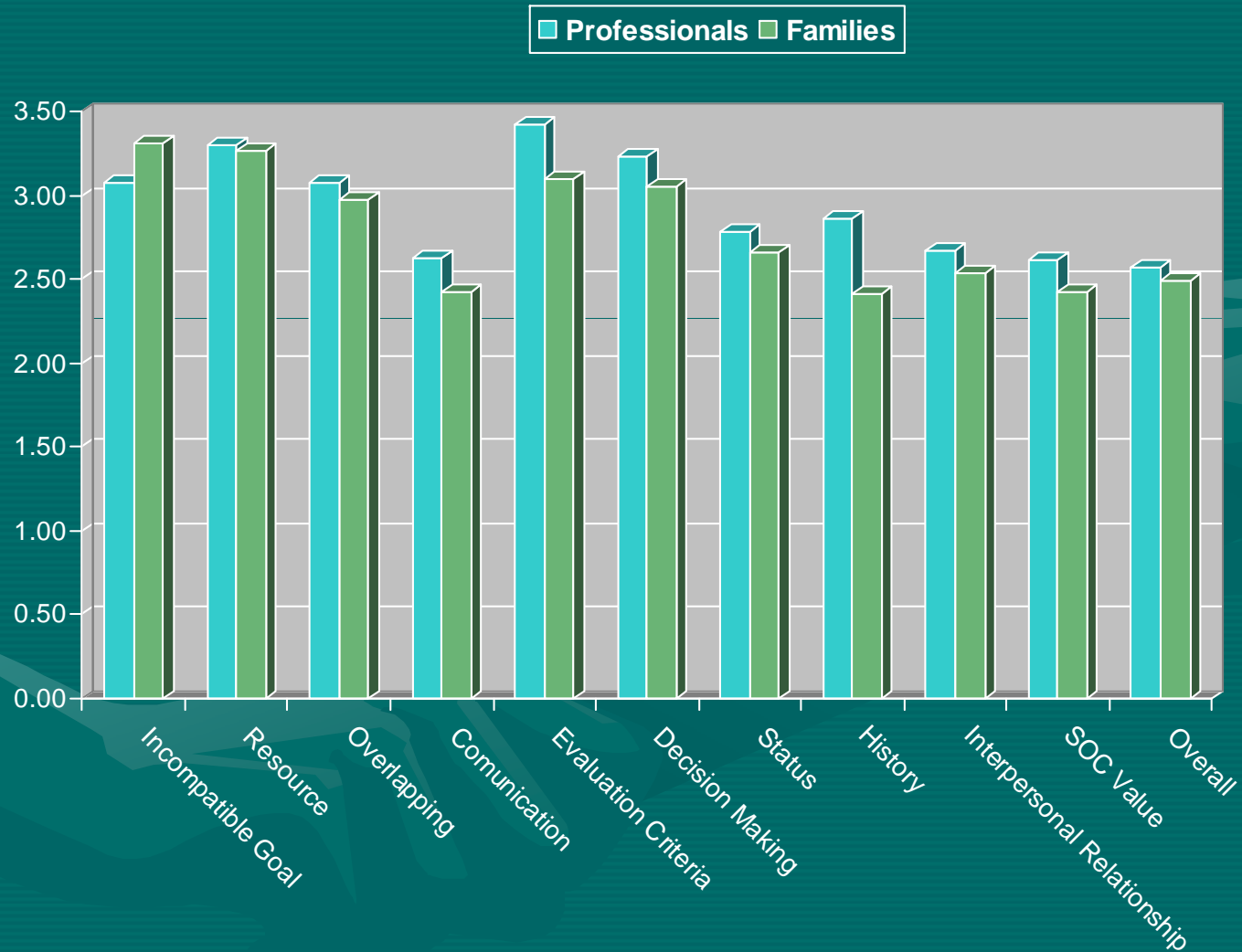
# Perceived Effects of Conflicts by Current Sites vs. Graduated Sites

Why would there be conflict?

Developing systems of care inevitably involves

- organizations & individuals with differing agendas, histories of past conflict, & failed collaborations;
- differing missions, funding sources & evaluative criteria of key entities;
- alignment of values, cultures & practices;
- sharing power & decision-making.

Differing Individual Responses to Conflict

5 Common Responses to Conflict
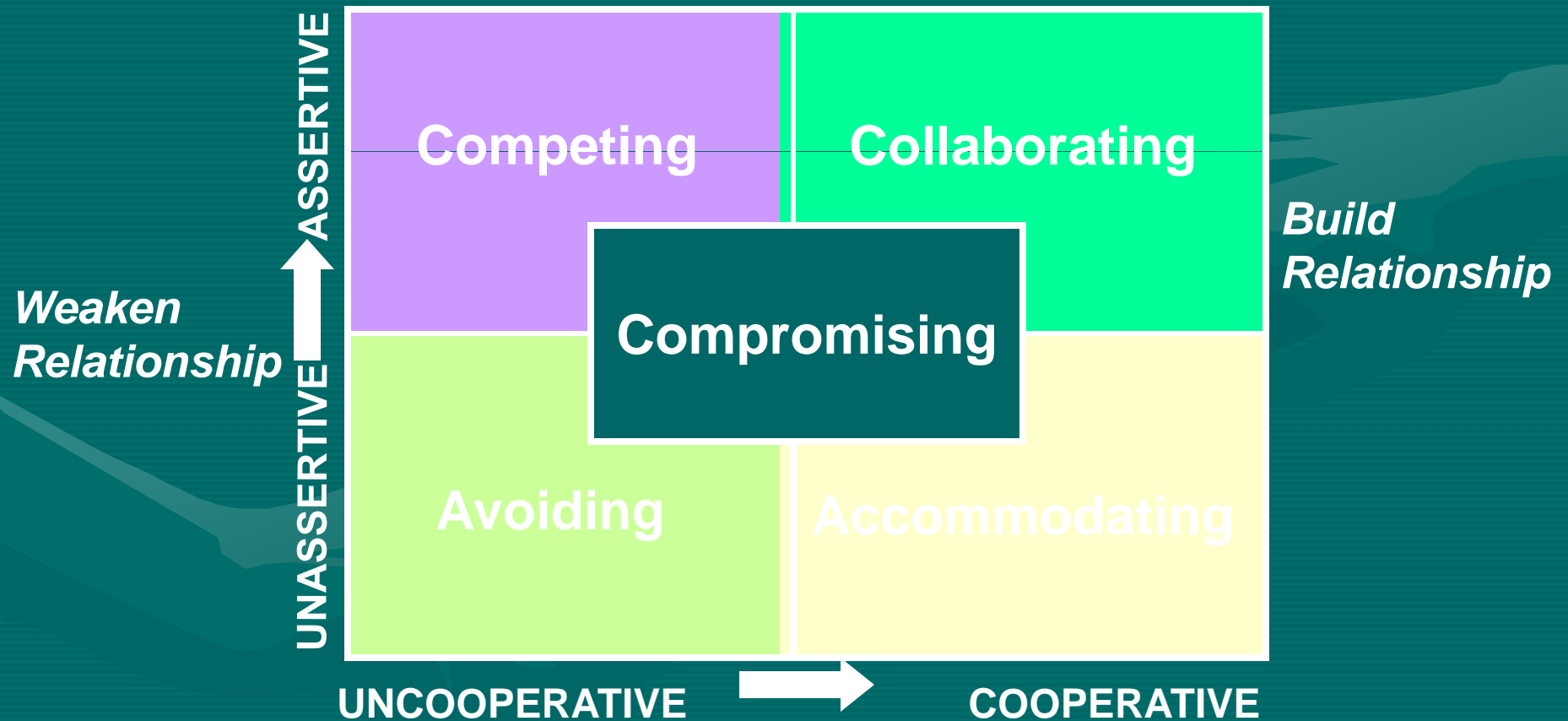
Adapted from Thomas-Kilman Conflict Mode Instrument by Kenneth W. Thomas & Ralph H. Kilman, Xicom, Incorporated, 1974.

So, why talk about conflict?

- While conflict is a normal and inevitable outcome of trying to make dramatic changes in the way people think & act; it can also be uncomfortable, painful, even scary.

- Ignored or unresolved conflict may result in damaged relationships, undermine collaboration, sabotage system integration, and effect sustainability.

- Conflict can also be a motivating energy that stimulates change.

Conflict from the Family Perspective

Family members reported* somewhat more negative perceptions regarding the impact of conflict compared to professionals in all areas except overlapping authority.

In talking about their experience of conflict in working in systems of care, families report feeling the conflict at a very personal level.

* FMHI Survey on Role of Conflict in System of Care

Is conflict an issue?

On your board/team, do any team members

- withdraw from potentially heated/emotional discussions?
- force a solution to disagreements?
- smooth over/explain away problems?
- push for resolution too fast?
- ignore members who raise problems?
- recycle the same disagreements/discussion?

On your board/team

- meetings are boring with little lively discussion?
- more discussion happens after the meeting?
- the group ignores/defers controversial topics?
- decisions on some agenda items seem predetermined?
- the group spends lots of time on small disagreements?
- members stop coming to meetings?

Resources for Resolving Conflict

Strategies to reduce/address potential conflict within teams

- Clarify values and agree on a shared vision
- Establish ground rules
- Training on building good communication skills
- Pre-plan how group makes decisions & handles differences
- Use of a neutral facilitator for meetings.
- Learn about different conflict management styles
- Build conflict management skill
  - ➢ finding common ground
  - ➢ negotiating
  - ➢ clarify issues
  - ➢ use tools from conflict resolution process

When conflict arises

- Take time to listen and learn each other's issues and why there is concern;
- Understand the underlying interests;
- Clarify key points in discussion/disagreement;
- Explore other potential resolutions that meet the need;
- Assure all issues are addressed;
- Use of formal conflict resolution techniques
  - ➢ Facilitation
  - ➢ partnering
  - ➢ structured dialogue
  - ➢ arbitration

For more information go to

The Collaborative for Conflict in Mental Health at
http://newsite,fmhi.usf.edu/Content/Mediation