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# CREATING TEAMWORK and IDENTIFYING SOURCES OF CONFLICT

A team is any group of two or more people who work together to accomplish a task. Most people participate in many teams every day. Companies are teams. So are divisions, departments, crews, task forces, and committees. But the word "team" should not be restricted to formal groups. Any time two or more people are expected to cooperate to accomplish something together, they are a team, if only for an hour or so.

## THE CREATION OF TEAMWORK

Creating teamwork is a process of communicating, negotiating and reaching agreement in two specific areas:

### I) VISION

Vision unites us in a purpose for what we do. It provides a broader context that gives our work meaning. Vision answers the questions: What will we produce together? Why are we doing this work in the first place? How do we want to feel to be a member of this team?

### II) HOW TO GET THE WORK DONE

To create teamwork we must have agreement about how to get our work done together. Specifically, we must commit to the same Goals, Roles and Procedures. Goals, Roles and Procedures make up the Language of Team.

Teams first and foremost come from a commitment to partnership. The only way to create teamwork in a department or across department lines is for people to talk to each other.

## **PROFESSIONALIZING ISSUES**

### **Taking it Personally**

We tend to take job conflicts personally. We usually conclude that the source of our conflict is the personality of the others involved. Or we find ourselves having damaging assessments about their integrity, intentions or competence.

Once we have decided that we simply do not get along well with the people involved or that they are incompetent, conflicts become very difficult to resolve. After all, how do you talk to someone you have decided is a "jerk" or incapable of doing a good job? Then, in the absence of effective conversations to solve the problem, issues become more frustrating and emotions begin to run high.

Job conflicts all too often result in two styles of behavior--(1) we avoid saying anything about it and hope that things will improve; or (2) we angrily lash out at the way co-workers are relating to us or performing their jobs. Neither approach works.

### **Problems With Avoidance**

The most common result of avoiding conflict is that problems get worse instead of better. Avoidance usually compounds the original problem because as the situation deteriorates more drastic remedies are required. Once a problem spirals out of control, it becomes impossible to ignore, and far more stressful to talk about.

Avoiding discussions of problems violates a basic role expectation that comes with your having a job. All workers are expected to address problems in getting the job done. Yet the emotions of conflict can make it seem very risky to start a problem-solving conversation. Nevertheless, raising issues professionally is the only way to start corrective measures that nip problems in the bud.

### **Problems With Expressing Feelings**

When conflict occurs in professional relationships at work, we often fall back on the rules we have learned for handling conflict in our personal relationships. In friendships or family, telling people about your negative feelings often influences them to change their behavior. However, assertively describing your anger or displeasure with a boss or co-worker is neither persuasive nor responsible in

professional relationships.

Feeling expression on the job has several costs. In the immediate moment, it is liable to create defensiveness as people feel attacked and you are less likely to get what you want. Over time, professional relationships can be permanently damaged because of persistent bitter feelings. Even worse, highly emotional people often gain a reputation of being a complainer and hard to work with.

### Professionalizing Issues: An Alternative Approach

Breakdowns in teamwork are inevitable when people work together to achieve a common goal. After all, conditions are constantly changing, demanding a continuous adjustment on the part of team members. So conflict itself is not the problem; it comes with the territory when we work with other people. Problems occur because of our tendency to misunderstand the conflict when we are in the middle of it. We tend to take conflict personally instead of experiencing it as yet another time when a conversation about our teamwork is needed.

Co-workers have a responsibility to establish and maintain effective working relationships with co-workers to get the job done. Every time we find ourselves in the midst of conflict, we are at choice: We can take the conflict personally or we can "professionalize" the issue. In sorting out our experience of conflict, we need to remember this fundamental principle: **The true source of job conflict is almost always some ambiguity, misunderstanding or disagreement about our goals, roles and procedures.**

Professionalizing conflict is as much a perspective as it is a relationship skill. This perspective assumes that conflict will inevitably arise between co-workers. Rather than experiencing conflict as a "personality clash", we need to professionalize it. By more accurately assessing the conflict using the Language of Team, we reduce the emotional "heat" of the conflict and increase the likelihood that we can have a conversation which will resolve the matter. Our commitment to resolving the problems in goals, roles, or procedures requires that we make clear distinctions between our professional and personal perspectives on an issue.

## HOW TO PROFESSIONALIZE ISSUES

Professionalizing conflict is essentially a two-step process:

**Step One:** Diagnose the issue in organizational terms. Instead of seeing conflict as a personality clash between co-workers, define the issue in terms of ambiguity or differences involving team goals, roles or procedures.

**Step Two:** Have a conversation about the issue using the "language of team". Your primary intention in raising issues is to describe the conflict situation in such a way that the listener will be persuaded that the existing problem demands prompt action.

Raising issues requires discipline, skill and, often, advanced preparation. Your challenge is to raise an issue for discussion with someone who may be misinterpreting the problem and personalizing it. Not only are you responsible for raising the issue for discussion. You also are responsible for communicating your point of view in such a way that you defuse the emotionality which can disrupt the problem-solving process.

# MAKING THINGS HAPPEN

## 1. KEEP YOUR PERSPECTIVE PROFESSIONAL

- What "side of the line" are you on? Are you operating out of your personal or professional perspective?
- What personal feelings might interfere with having an effective conversation?
- What impact on the job are you committing to make?

## 2. SORT OUT THE ISSUES

- How does this situation involve Goals, Roles and Procedures? Decision Making? Transitions?
- What are your intentions in this encounter? What do you want to have happen with this person?

## 3. HAVE A CONVERSATION THAT MAKES SOMETHING HAPPEN

- Professionalize the issue. Make specific requests, propose specific solutions.
- Communicate how this issue affects getting the job done.
- Look for "win-win" solutions to problems.

# TEAM DYNAMICS

## INTERPERSONAL DYNAMICS

↑ OPENNESS ↓

CONTROL

INCLUSION

### TRUE-BLUE

- Self-Control
- Insight
- Problem Solving
- Solid Work
- Moderating Behavior
- Support
- "We"
- "Us"

### HOT-RED

- Me vs. You
- Unachievable Goals
- Resistance
- Excess Work
- Competition
- Conflict
- Stress

### COOL-GREEN

- Me
- Testing
- Dependence
- Procedures
- Hesitancy
- Fear
- Importance

## TASK DYNAMICS

### ORIENTATION

- Ground Rules
- Agenda
- Problem Identification

### DATA GENERATION

- Information
- Facts
- Ideas
- Testing

### PROBLEM SOLVING

- Quality
- Acceptance
- Negotiating
- Synergy
- Feedback

## TEAMWORK

TEAM DEFINITION A team is a group of people with a common purpose, in which differences are encouraged.

TEAM-BUILDING To increase the problem-solving ability of the group members.  
To build on the strengths of each other.  
To use differences toward a common purpose.

CONSIDERATIONS The task, or reaching the goals in a problem-solving manner.  
The process of the group, or meeting the needs of the group members as individuals.

ELEMENTS NEEDED A reason for working together.  
Interdependency of group members, with a need for the experience, abilities and commitment of each member.  
A commitment to the idea that more effective decisions will result from working as a team.  
Accountability to a larger context.

TEAM SPIRIT What makes the group larger than the sum of the parts.  
Can be seen only in specific behaviors.

TYPES OF TEAMS There is great variation in teams, depending on the purpose of the group and the desires of the manager or designated leader.  
Roles may be the same or highly specialized; the members may operate in an independent manner or with strong collaboration; individual performance or group goal attainment may be called for; work may pass from person to person or may be handled from start to finish by one individual.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF A WELL-FUNCTIONING EFFECTIVE WORK TEAM

- ATMOSPHERE** Informal, comfortable, relaxed.  
No obvious tensions or signs of boredom.  
People involved and interested.
- DISCUSSION** A lot of it, with virtually everyone participating.  
Pertinent to task.  
Brought back in short order if it moves off task.
- TASK OR OBJECTIVE** Well understood and accepted by all.  
Freely discussed until everyone committed to it.
- NEW IDEAS** Every idea given a hearing, with members listening.  
People do not appear to be afraid to be foolish.
- DISAGREEMENT** Differing is acceptable and comfortable.  
People live with basic disagreements that cannot be resolved.
- DECISIONS** Usually based on consensus, with voting rare.
- CRITICISM** Frequent, frank and relatively comfortable.  
Constructive and oriented toward removing an obstacle that prevents getting the job done.
- AGENDA** Expression of both feelings and ideas on problems and group operation.  
Little pussyfooting around and few hidden agendas.  
Everybody knows how everybody else feels about the agenda.
- ASSIGNMENTS** After group action is taken, clear assignments are made and accepted.
- LEADERSHIP** No one dominates or defers unduly, as leadership shifts in the group.  
Little evidence of a struggle for power, with the issue not who controls but how to get the job done.
- SELF-EXAMINATION** Group self-conscious about its operations.  
Group may stop to examine how its work is going or if anything is interfering with task accomplishment.



## STRUCTURE ISSUES FOR TEAMS

### BEHAVIOR

#### NORMS

- Norms = behaviors.
- Norms are the common beliefs of a group regarding appropriate behavior for members.
- All groups have norms, set either informally or formally.
- Norms are the expectations people have of each other.
- They are very powerful influences on behavior, though rarely stated clearly.
- They may vary for different people in the group.
- Norms exist to help a group accomplish its task.
- They need to be set up by the group, recognized openly, accepted by all, enforced immediately and consistently, with flexibility.
- Norms have a 'must' or 'ought to' quality.

### REWARD

#### SYSTEMS

- Rewards are how the goodies are passed out and by and to whom.
- They are both positive and negative in character.
- They need to be tied to specific behaviors.
- They are usually informal.
- They come from both the system and individual authorities.

### FEEDBACK

#### MECHANISMS

- Feedback is how people receive information about what they have done, both well and less well.
- Feedback needs to come from peers as much as from superiors.
- Criteria are specificity, immediacy and linkage to individual and group goals.
- They can have a celebrative character.

### COMMUNICATION

#### NETWORKS

- The sharing of information - how, what and with whom.
- The informal networks are usually more powerful than the formal.
- The issue may be how people are listened to and on what subjects.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

#### SYSTEMS

- How people know where they are going.  
what they are to do.  
when they are to do it.  
when the job is completed.  
who will do it with them.
- Knowing who has the responsibility and with what parameters is critical.

## GUIDELINES FOR GROUP NORMS

Norms are the common beliefs of a group regarding appropriate behavior for members. Norms both guide behavior and help group interaction. All groups have norms whether they are set formally or informally.

The following points are important to consider if a group is to reach its goals effectively and if group members are to experience the greatest personal satisfaction and growth.

### OWNERSHIP

Norms set up and agreed upon by all members are most readily internalized and accepted as behaviors for all group members to follow.

### ACCEPTANCE

Norms will be accepted and the internal commitment to them strengthened only if they are followed in visible ways by all members.

### GOAL-DIRECTED

Norms must not only be seen as helping in reaching goals, but the linkage between norms and goal accomplishment must be clarified openly.

### ENFORCEMENT

The enforcing of norms on each other is best if done immediately after a violation and with consistency.

### MODELING

Members need opportunities to practice desired behaviors, preferably with appropriate models and examples.

### GENERAL NORMS

Cultural norms of social responsibility, fair play and reciprocity are very helpful for timely goal accomplishment and group maintenance and growth.

### FLEXIBILITY

The needs of groups constantly change and, as these changes take place, it is vital to substitute more appropriate norms at any time that group effectiveness can be served.