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Managing Conflict at an Individual and Team Level.

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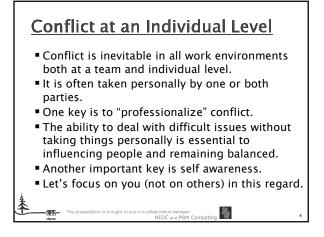
July 7, 2011

Conflict:

- Very <u>Potent</u> Form of Human Interaction.
- Conflict can be constructive or if it is mean spirited destructive.
- Often has a Negative Connotation.
- Even in great relationships or teams, it is often uncomfortable, however necessary.
- Often occurs when our beliefs, Values and Needs conflict with others beliefs, values & needs.
- Some conflicts are minor, easy to fix. (information)
- Others are the opposite and require careful strategy and time to resolve. (beliefs)

Conflict at an Individual Level

- Conflict is inevitable in all work environments both at a team and individual level.
- It is often taken personally by one or both parties.
- One key is to "professionalize" conflict.
- The ability to deal with difficult issues without taking things personally is essential to influencing people and remaining balanced.
- Another important key is self awareness.
- Let's focus on you (not on others) in this regard.

Individual Level:

- Managing our own emotions (EI) is critical to dealing with individual conflict.
- Self awareness and self control are essential.
- Ask yourself these questions:
  a) *How well do I manage my emotions at work?*
  b) *Which emotions do I express that benefit my effectiveness?*
  c) *Which emotions do I express that damage my effectiveness and relationships?*

Self Awareness:

- *Do you treat the people that report to you differently from how you treat your peers or superior?* Dig deep for your answer.
- *If so, what message does this send to your staff?*
- *What will it mean when conflict occurs?*
- *Are you willing to ask for feedback from your staff to uncover blind spots – behaviour that may lead to conflict in terms of your relationships? If not, why not?*
- Source: Coaching for Emotional Intelligence– Bob Wall

Second Key to Conflict Resolution – Empathy:

- Reflect on each peer and members of your team.
- *Do you ask enough questions & listen carefully to what is happening in their work life?*
- *Is it excuses you are hearing or is something else that is a barrier to their effectiveness?*
- *Are you aware of their needs at work in terms of clarity of expectations?*
- *Do they truly have the tools to do their job?*
- (Source: First Break all the Rules – What Great Managers Do; Buckingham/Coffman;

Third Key – Assertiveness:

- At times, it is essential to challenge others who behave inappropriately.
- Empathy cannot lead to irresponsible behaviour being tolerated.
- Watch for a tendency within yourself to avoid conflict or having a difficult conversation.
- What keeps us from having these chats?
  - A) Our fears about anger, tears, intimidation
  - B) A desire to Please
  - C) Preference for Comfort
  - D) It's not urgent enough (yet)
  - E) Fear of Hurting Someone who is already down
  - F) Conflicting Values

Keys to a Hard Conversation:

- Get the timing right.
- Assess the stakes at hand.
- Be very clear about the "what" of the conversation– the rooted, correct problem.
- Think Content, pattern, relationships.
- Make sure that it is not only "your pet peeve."
- Describe the consequences.
- Decide if you need to confront the person.
- Figure out what you want and don't want in terms of outcomes. Have a goal in mind.

Keys to Successful Outcomes:

- Go slow to go fast. Don't jump to conclusions or make assumptions. Don't charge in half informed.
- Describe the gap between what is happening and what is desired as an outcome. Describe both clearly in terms of actions and behaviours.
- Don't judge the person as bad or wants to make you suffer.
- Ask questions for clarification.

Keys:

- Make it safe for the person by being empathetic, listening well and not being judgmental. Describe what the problem is.
- Ask what knowledge and skills the person needs to act according to the outcome.
- Make it motivating in order to help the person be willing to take action.
- Motivation comes from describing natural consequences, using core values & describing the impact that the behaviour has for others.
- Using force brings resistance & kills relationships.

Keys:

- Move to discipline later if necessary.
- Know the steps and processes used in your organization.
- Partner with others such as HR specialists.
- Be serious and explain the process fully.
- Stick to your approach and stay the course.
- In all cases, develop and document a plan of action in terms of outcomes, training, other strategies, etc.
- Seek agreement and follow up.

Managing Conflict:

- Managed appropriately, conflict increases creativity, encourages various points of view and can lead to consensus decision making.

- Conflict can be difficult both on an individual level and in teams. Properly addressed however, it can result in higher morale and higher quality decisions.

- Poorly managed conflict on the other hand is destructive and can be explosive.

Awareness of Conflict in our Lives:

- Conflict is literally unavoidable, quite necessary and will cause many more problems <u>if ignored</u>.

- People differ in terms of what they want, need, believe and how they feel about things.

- Most people have not learned or been taught how to deal with conflict effectively.

- Conflict = Opportunity to gain new knowledge and resolve issues or problems.

Awareness of Conflict in our Lives:

- A crucial context for success is to determine the <u>root causes</u> of a conflict and not focus on the symptoms or behaviour alone.
- Very common to see in consulting activity.
- **What gets in the way of getting to the root of a conflict in your view?** (communication, relationship issues, control, poor management, lack of motivation, lousy policy, etc.)
- A win-win solution is preferable and will last.
- Problems can't be resolved without exploring the differences respectfully and talking in a more in-depth way.

Personal Growth from Conflict:

- Very little real growth or change can take place without some degree of conflict. (individual and collective)

- Some basic skill acquisition about how to deal with it can make a real difference in our effectiveness.

- We can also discover more about ourselves in terms of our perceptions, our assumptions and the way in which we tend to respond.

Five Major Styles of Responding to Conflict:

- Directing or Competing
- Avoidance
- Accommodating or Harmonizing with the other party
- Collaborating/Cooperating
- Compromising
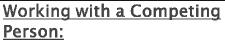- **What would you suggest as your primary style?**
- (Source: Thomas-Kilmann Model)

Competing Style:

- Can be useful when quick action or an urgent decision is needed.

- Appropriate when an unpopular course of action is needed.

- Protects against those who would take advantage of other styles.

- Can bring short term success. Win/Lose.

- **Skills:** Arguing, debating, assertiveness, etc.

Working with a Competing Person:

- Remember that these folks are often highly productive and task oriented.

- Affirm your commitment to **resolve** the issue.

- Help/remind them of the relationship context. (needs of others)

- Don't be passive or withdraw from the process without discussion.

- If things get hot, ask for a cooling off period and return to the matter as agreed upon.

Accommodating or Harmony/Deferring Style :

- This response is to focus on the other person's interests to the exclusion of your own. "The customer is always right."

- Bend over backwards to make the other person happy. (could be your boss, Board of Directors, your most difficult staff, the union steward)

- Apologize, defer and hope for the best.

- Can be flexible, strategic.

Working with a Harmonizing Style:

- Harmonizers want to please and be pleased.

- They appreciate thoughtfulness.

- First, connect with them at a human level and not at a task level.

- Settle in to business following.

- Stay light as heavy discussion brings anxiety to harmonizers.

- Harmonizers hate to be negative or directive.

Avoidance Style:

- Avoids the confrontation or move away from the issue and focus on other things.
- Matter is trivial and not a priority.
- High tensions require a cooling off period.
- Not enough information is available to make a good decision.
- It's really the tip of an iceberg.
- Style is to withdraw, leave it unresolved for the present time.

Working with an Avoiding Style:

- Give them time and space as necessary to think things through, as this is a preference.
- Let them know what you want and ask them to think about it.
- Stay low key and don't be demanding or intense. They will go into withdrawal.
- Move slowly, one step at a time.

Collaborate/Cooperation Style:

- When you try to satisfy the needs and interests of both parties without compromising the quality of the result or the needs of either party.
- Parties will work together until a fully satisfactory agreement is reached.
- Can bring empowerment, respect, idea generation, relationship building, etc.
- Brings buy-in from all parties to the action.

Working Effectively with a Cooperator/Collaborator:

- Be direct and clear about what you want and need with them, as they **want to hear from you** as well as express their own views.

- Don't over harmonize/accommodate as they don't want to feel that they are directing.

- Blend both task and relationship focus.

- Keep them informed about the issue/conflict.

- Don't withdraw without an explanation.

Compromising Style:

- Compromise is to bargain and get what you can in terms of a solution. Meets the other party in the middle.

- This is often used in negotiation with teens. (If you do this, I will arrange that).

- Things will get done; allows time for other options.

- Works well in non-critical situations for temporary solutions to complex matters.

- Useful when you need a solution that satisfies both parties at least for the present.
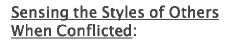

Working with a Compromising Style:

- Compromisers value fairness and moderation.

- Leave room to negotiate when you offer a solution or make a request. If you do so, they will likely reciprocate.

- Think and speak along these lines. (give & take, reasonable, etc.)

- Conclusions should be balanced and will be disturbed by directive actions.

- Trust will suffer in any win-lose scenario.

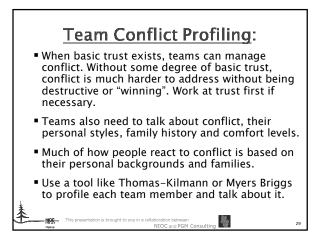## Sensing the Styles of Others When Conflicted:

- People have different styles that tend to predominate. Some are task oriented in conflict, others are relationship oriented.

- I encourage you to be purposeful in understanding the use of all five styles rather than rely only on your natural – and sometime inappropriate –tendencies.

- Once you sense a style in another, you can also adjust your response and resolve conflicts much more effectively as a result.

Team Conflict Profiling:

- When basic trust exists, teams can manage conflict. Without some degree of basic trust, conflict is much harder to address without being destructive or "winning". Work at trust first if necessary.

- Teams also need to talk about conflict, their personal styles, family history and comfort levels.

- Much of how people react to conflict is based on their personal backgrounds and families.

- Use a tool like Thomas-Kilmann or Myers Briggs to profile each team member and talk about it.

Conflict at a Team Level:

- Conflict is essential for Team success. (buried treasure)
- Without diversity of views, creativity and improvement cannot occur.
- Teams need norms or rules of engagement.
- A) Productive conflict is necessary to success.
- B) Diversity of views is encouraged/required.
- C) We will put important (conflict laden) issues on the table and we will comment.
- D) We will never attack or personalize conflict under any circumstances.

Role of Team Leaders:

- Monitor the conversations.
- Encourage diversity and yes some degree of disagreement. (other views)
- Remind staff that this is okay! Give them permission!
- Use meetings as a vehicle for the structured use of conflict. It makes meetings more meaningful and often produces better decisions.

Mission and Vision:

- Clarity of why we exist and where we are going also help to reduce conflict.
- Teams need purpose, vision and clarity in other words.
- Ask the following questions of your Team:
- **Who are we?**
- **What do we do?**
- **For whom do we do it? Who are the customers?**
- **Why is our work important?**

Exercise to Overcome Team Conflict:

- Discuss each area & don't judge.
- Do it at an individual level, then in pairs and finally as a full group.
- Ensure that the resulting "mission statement" defines the meaning of the work that you do.
- Describe what future success should look like in your service area. Describe it in inspiring terms of no more than 3 paragraphs.
- Link to the organization's strategic plan if it exists.

Phase Two – Vision of Success & Group Principles:

- Now, create 5-6 guiding values or principles for: a) the work that you do; b) your team;

- Write your principles in one sentence statements; e.g. We will be open to disagreement and encourage diversity."

- Set some specific norms if necessary.

- Develop some goals for the team as well as the service.

Barriers to Conflict Resolution:

- Relationship History
- Poor communication skills
- Lack of honesty or integrity
- Inability of people to not take things personally. (emotional or social problems)
- Boring meetings that lack sanctioned conflict
- Occasional personal conflict that prevents people from debating in the future.
- (Source: Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of Teams – Patrick Lencioni)

Other Barriers:

- Lack of information.
- Lack of directed and focused time to discuss conflict.
- Lack of mission and vision
- Lack of Team rules.
- Lack of skills of one or more team players or personality traits that minimize easy resolution.
- Trust is an essential component of more challenging forms of conflict.

Depth-Frequency Conflict Model

High

Rare but Substantive Conflict	Frequent & Substantial Conflict
Rare & Minimal Conflict	Frequent but Minimal Conflict

Low

Low ————————————————— High

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