

RESOLVING WORKPLACE CONFLICT:

*How to use "conflict and climate
assessments" and their results*

-- Discussion Outline --

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Handout Scenario:

A Typical Situation

Multidisciplinary & Other Expectations of Mediators

- Mediator style and role expectations
- The "facilitated conversation" alternative
- "Process" coaching/mentoring
- The growth of the Ombuds function
- Training (trust, communication, conflict mgmt)
- Group facilitation
- "Team building" & organizational development
- CONFLICT (OR CLIMATE) ASSESSMENT

Conflict (or Climate)

Assessment is Helpful When:

- An organization has signs of continuing overt & overt discord and conflict – e.g., multiple complaints, signs of distrust, low morale
- The conflict is beyond the ordinary, and substantially affects productivity & mission
- Management, at a high level, is committed to understanding and improving the situation

Assessment Involves:

1. Trustworthy (credible, neutral, impartial) third person/s who understand conflict & organizational discord & have the skills & knowledge to engage people at all levels, inside & outside, the organization
2. Various processes to find out the nature of the conflict & discord (more below)

Assessment Involves (con't):

3. A report and recommendations on possible actions to respond to concerns
4. As agreed, follow-up actions such as group-problem solving, coaching, training, management directives, etc.
5. An overall tone of future orientation and positivity.

First Steps In Assessment

- Who is the primary client?
- What is the client's motivation & willingness to try to change things?
- Who needs to be involved?
- "Contracting" up front – clarifying overall expectations about roles, desired outcomes

The Inquiry Process

- Clear expectations for everyone (e.g., memo to all staff, consultation w/union)
- Anonymity vs. confidentiality
- Expression of management commitment
- Common Inquiry techniques:
 - Questionnaires
 - Personal interviews
 - Group data-gathering & problem-solving

Reporting Results

- Written? To whom provided? Who gets copies?
- Succinct and redacted from individual comments into *themes*
- Includes suggestions for actions
- Generally accompanied by a meeting with management to discuss report and next steps

Common Follow-up Steps

- Clearly stated new expectations for selected managers/supervisors, accompanied by coaching or mentoring
- Training for managers, supervisors, & employees in communication skills, trust-building, conflict management, EEO subjects
- Establishment of employee task groups to make recommendations on subjects of interest – e.g., cross-training, organizational realignment, teleworking criteria
- Individual mediations, “facilitated conversations”

Common Follow-up Steps (con't)

- Training on how to hold *effective* meetings
- “Retreats” to focus on workplace improvements
- Increased employee recognition mechanisms
- Focus on ways to increase top-down (and bottoms-up) information flow
- Increase use of mentoring for employees
- “Shadowing” assignments
- Training in trust-building (see Attachment A)

Important Top Management Commitments:

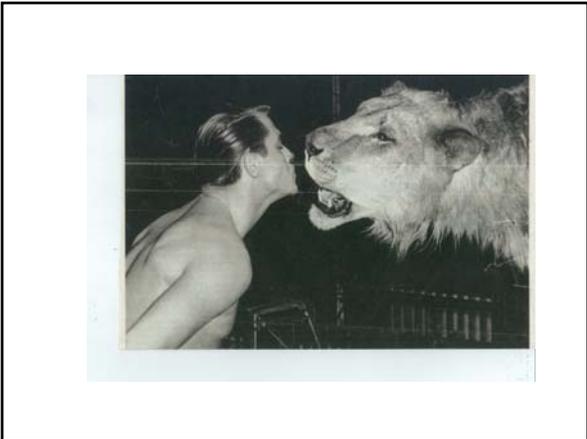
- Make promises to employees based on the report, and keep those promises
- Hold subordinate supervisors and employees accountable for actions
- Follow up periodically to assess progress

Appendix A:
Material on Trust & Distrust

Perspectives - 1:

“Trust” is confident reliance on someone when you are in a position of vulnerability.

Prof. Robert Hurley, Fordham University



Perspectives -- 2:

“Distrust” is negative expectations about someone – signaling fear or dislike of them, a propensity to attribute sinister intentions to them, and a desire to buffer oneself from their conduct.

Prof. Roy Lewicki, Ohio State University

The Neurobiology Of Trust

The production of oxytocin, a peptide produced in the brain, affects and is affected by social behavior. Experiments show that human oxytocin levels increase in response to “trust signals” (behavior that is perceived as trustworthy), and then in turn increase trusting behavior.

“The Neurobiology of Trust” by Paul Zak, Director of the Center for Neuroeconomics Studies at Claremont Graduate University, in Scientific American, June 2008

Behaviors That Build Trust

(1)

Actions that enhance communication, dispel misunderstanding and rumors, and aid clarity:

- Hold people accountable, *but be clear on expectations*
- Strive for *transparency* – the “what” & the “why”
- Share info, & promote a culture of such sharing
- Be *PRESENT* – continuously *accessible*, both physically (“MBWA”) and emotionally “EI”)
- LISTEN – and use “active listening” skills
- Practice good meeting management
- Respond *timely* to issues and concerns
- Understand how to use *e-mail* properly
- Emphasize *the future and solutions*, try to escape the *past*

Behaviors That Build Trust

(2)

Actions that enhance faith in your *good character* and deter suspicions about your *motives*:

- Be honest & tell the truth – even hard truths
- Say what you mean and mean what you say
- Highlight *interests* – yours, theirs & the overlap
- Strive for *consistency* -- base decisions on objective factors & behaviors & strive to display fair, non-arbitrary treatment
- Make promises, & keep them
- Be aware of how things look – *people’s perceptions are their reality*
- Seek the best *outcomes* for people and the organization, not merely *winning*

Behaviors That Build Trust

(3)

Actions that display your competence and show others that you recognize and want to enable their competence:

- Acknowledge what you don't know, ask for help, and don't be afraid to admit mistakes
- "Be the first to trust" – *extending your trust to others builds their trust in you*
- Empower, give responsibility, and "get out of the way"
- Be respectful, in word and deed; avoid gossip
- "Praise publicly, reprimand privately"
- Show gratitude, recognize good work
- Give constructive feedback, and respond to theirs
- Follow up on their ideas and suggestions
- Give them room to make mistakes and learn

Building Back From Distrust

- Identify the nature of the distrust & its effects
 - Conduct "climate assessments"
- Develop a change strategy
 - Get top management involvement & *support*
 - Report to staff on outcome of climate assessments
 - Involve staff in planning and delivering on responses
 - Acknowledge or reframe the past & *focus on future*
 - Shift from blame to problem-solving & responsibility
 - Establish expectations for objective change
 - Continually assess and report on progress
