

Robert J. Bies, Ph.D.





IEDP/Georgetown Webinar March 27, 2019



Change means movement.

Movement means friction.

Only in the frictionless vacuum of a nonexistent abstract world can movement or change occur without that abrasive friction of conflict.

(Saul Alinsky)



# WHY CAN'T WE ALL GET ALONG? SOURCES AND CONSEQUENCES OF CONFLICT



### Why Can't We All Get Along?: The Nature of Conflict

- Conflict is "Hardwired" into Organizations
  - Scarcity of Resources; Different Goals/Priorities;
     Asymmetry of Information; Interdependency;
     Complexity of Task
- Conflict Behavior=f(Person, Environment)
- Task-Related vs. Relationship-Related Conflicts
  - "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly"
- Managers Spend 20% of Their Time Managing Conflict



### Sources of Conflict: The Person

- The Person as the Source of Conflict
  - Different Personal Styles, Opinions, Beliefs
  - Personality Clashes
  - Different Goals/Agendas
  - Non-Work-Related Factors



- The Environment as the Source of Conflict
  - Competition for Resources/Attention
  - Misunderstanding Due to Communication Failure
  - Role Incompatibility
  - Senior/Team Leadership Actions that Trigger Conflict—Mixed Messages, Withholding/Controlling Information, Loss of Confidence in Leaders
  - Unfair Treatment



## Consequences of Conflict: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

- The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Conflict
  - THE GOOD: Better Ideas and Creative Solutions
  - THE BAD: Growing Secrecy and Denial
  - Increasing Blame and Scorn
  - Emotional Confrontations
  - Disruptions in Cooperation and in Productivity
  - THE UGLY: Extreme Forms of Counter-Productive Work Behavior
    - Feuding and Acts of Revenge



# Sources and Consequences of Conflict: Sage Wisdom

I've always believed that a lot of the troubles in the world would disappear if we were talking to each other instead of about each other.

(President Ronald Reagan)



# MANAGING CONFLICT DURING CHANGE: THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUST



## The Importance of Trust: Sage Wisdom

Trust is like the air we breathe.

When it's present, nobody really notices.

But when it's absent, everybody notices.

(Warren Buffet)



## Managing Conflict: Confronting the Enemies of Trust

- Confronting the Enemies of Trust
  - Incomplete Communication
  - Inconsistent Messages
  - Inconsistent Standards
  - "Rumors in a Vacuum" and "Everyday Paranoia"



#### CREDIBILITY

- Align words and deeds
- Understand the power of explanation
- Share information—the less you say, the more likely you will be misinterpreted
- It's about honesty and telling the truth



#### CONCERN

- Empathy, understanding, and asking questions about what they need
- Work to help others achieve



#### COMPETENCY

- A strong foundation of business and interpersonal skills
- In the end, it's all about reliability and results:
  Over deliver, over time



# The Importance of Trust: Sage Wisdom

Trust is mandatory for the optimization of any system.

(W. Edwards Deming)



# MANAGING CONFLICT: A STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE

## Managing Conflict: Advice for Managers

- Advice for Managers
  - Don't Provoke Employees Yourself
  - Share More Information and C<sup>3</sup>
  - Be First Responder
  - Listen with Your Head and Your Heart—Don't Blame
  - Work to Build a Collaborative Solution to the Conflict Based on What You Heard
  - If Unable to Reach a Solution, You Must Impose One



### Managing Conflict: Advice for Peers/Co-Workers

- Advice for Peers/Co-Workers
  - Pay Attention—Recognize There is a Problem
  - Listen with Your Head and Your Heart—Don't Blame
  - Empathy and Explanation
  - Discuss the Problem and Possible Solutions
  - Resolve the Problem in a Mutually Acceptable Way
  - If Unresolvable, Involve Your Manager



### Managing Conflict: How Teams Can Have a Good Fight

- How Teams Can Have a Good Fight
  - Focus on the Facts
  - Multiply the Alternatives
  - Create Common Goals
  - Balance the Power Structure
  - Seek Consensus With Qualification



Honest disagreement is often a good sign of progress.

(Mohandas K. Gandhi)



# DEALING WITH CONFLICT DURING CHANGE: FINAL SAGE WISDOM



# Dealing With Conflict During Change: Sage Wisdom

Unity, not uniformity, must be our aim. We attain unity only through variety. Differences must be integrated, not annihilated, not absorbed.

(Mary Parker Follett)



When angry count to ten before you speak. If very angry, count to one hundred.

(Thomas Jefferson)