



PROJECT MANAGEMENT
CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE

A.J. CLARK SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING
Civil & Environmental Engineering Department



HOW TO PREVENT DESTRUCTIVE CONFLICTS ON PROJECT TEAMS

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2019 Project Management Symposium



Tercon Coaches Project Leaders and Aligns Teams Across Geographies & Cultures



Owner Companies: Chevron, Royal Dutch Shell, ExxonMobil, Saudi Aramco, Marathon, ConocoPhillips
Prime Contractors: Bechtel, KBR, Chiyoda, Technip, JGC, Foster Wheeler, Mc Dermott



Jeannette Terry, Tercon Partners



*Founder
& CEO*

- Human capital consultant with 25+ years supporting major capital projects
- Collaborates with project executives and leader to build sustainable organizational capability
- Past and current clients include several major O&G and chemicals companies



Session Introduction:

- Substantive conflicts between individuals, within teams, and across organizational boundaries seldom resolve themselves on their own.
- If not resolved, these conflicts either escalate, or go under the surface, only to pop up and get re-fought – sometimes on a different issue.
- Conflict avoidance is a losing strategy for managing conflict – *you may easily run the risk of becoming irrelevant!*
- **Bottomline: Unresolved project conflict distracts from the *real work* - and can negatively impact one or more of the five key project drivers.**



Five Self-Sabotaging Behaviors Often Used When Faced With Conflict:

- ***Avoiding - Doing nothing***
- ***Taking a “win-lose” approach***
- ***“Demonizing” the other person***
- ***Claiming “irreconcilable differences”***
- ***Talking about the other person rather than to him/her***



The High Cost of Unresolved Conflict on Projects

First Order Impacts	Second Order Impacts	Third Order Impacts
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Delayed / missed deadlines➤ Communication lapses➤ Recycling / rework➤ Leadership distraction, e.g. handling complaints, fires➤ Rumors and innuendos➤ Lack of quality concerns➤ Safety inattentions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Employee turnover➤ Loss of institutional memory➤ Increased management scrutiny➤ Split alliances – factions and cliques➤ Reduced collaboration and lowered trust➤ Lower morale and employee commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Loss of confidence for project management and/or upper management➤ Loss of senior management support➤ Loss of market share➤ A toxic culture – overall cynicism and distrust➤ Difficulty in recruitment and retention of project personnel➤ Dissatisfied customers and / or stakeholders



Project Conflicts Can Fall Into Three Categories:

- Those related to Task-System Issues
- Those related to Interpersonal Issues
- Those that arise from a blend of both Systems and Interpersonal issues



TASK-SYSTEM CAUSES

- Unclear roles
- Undefined goals
- The ranking system
- Competition for scarce resources
- Unrealistic deadlines or expectations
- Changing processes and procedures
- Inadequate staffing or inappropriate assignments
- Unclear decision-making authority
- Undefined accountabilities
- Organizational structures



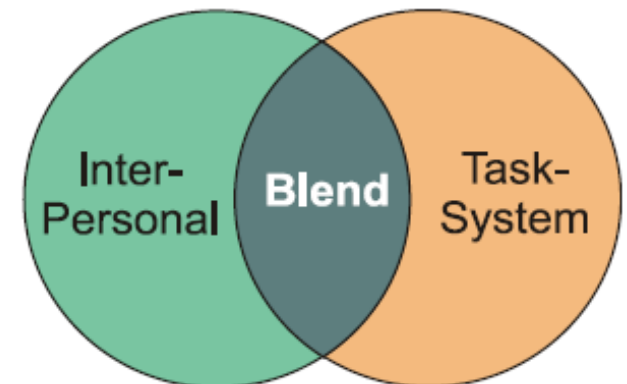


INTERPERSONAL CAUSES

- Different approaches or methods
- Different priorities
- Values differences
- Personality differences
- Work style differences
- Lack of cooperation
- Misunderstandings/false assumptions
- Cultural differences
- Age/generational differences
- Personal prejudice and conditioning

COMBINATION OF CAUSES

- Blend of task-system and interpersonal causes





Now For The Good News!

When conflicts are resolved in a timely and constructive way, these positive outcomes are likely to occur:

- Discussion opens up → issues get clarified → growth occurs.
- Alternative solutions or “Third Ways” are identified and evaluated.
- Pent up emotions and stress are safely released (See “Ground Rules for Fighting Fair”).
- Cohesiveness among team members increases significantly.
- Team members apply what they’ve learned in future conflicts



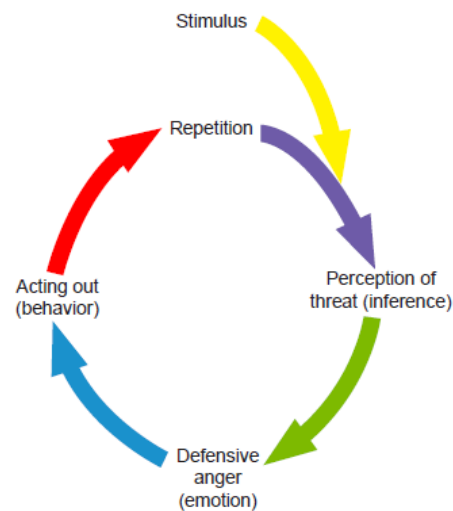
Three Tools That Support Constructive Conflict Resolution

1. Avoid the Defensiveness Spiral: What to do *immediately* when you recognize it in yourself and/or others.
2. Five Steps That Disarm an Angry Person – A formula for preventing escalation, neutralizing anger, and moving toward constructive resolution.
3. 7 Ground Rules for *Fighting Fair* – They provide a psychologically safe framework for teams and individuals to discuss emotionally charged issues that are likely to produce defensiveness and/or anger.



Don't Get Trapped in the Defensiveness Spiral

People tend to become defensive when they feel they are being judged, controlled, discounted or distrusted, which threatens their SELF-ESTEEM.



From *Managing Differences: How to Build Better Relationships At Work and Home*, Daniel Dana, Ph.D., MTL Publishers, 1997.



How to Disarm an Angry Person – *Go through the anger to the answer!*

Step One: **Acknowledge** their concern or point of view.

- “I understand this is a big problem from your perspective.” Or,
- “I see that you’re very concerned about...”

Step Two: **Express Regret** (*if you can do it sincerely*)

- “I’m sorry to hear that happened.” Or,
- “That should not have happened.”

Step Three: **Empathize** (*if you can do it sincerely*)

- “Your frustration is understandable.” Or,

- “I would have had a problem with that also.”

Step Four: Find something to **Agree** with.

- “I agree – that should not have happened.” Or,
- “You’re right, we need to get on this immediately.”

Step Five: Propose a **Solution** or next step.

- “Here’s an idea that might work.” Or,
- “Would you be open to another view on how to go forward?”

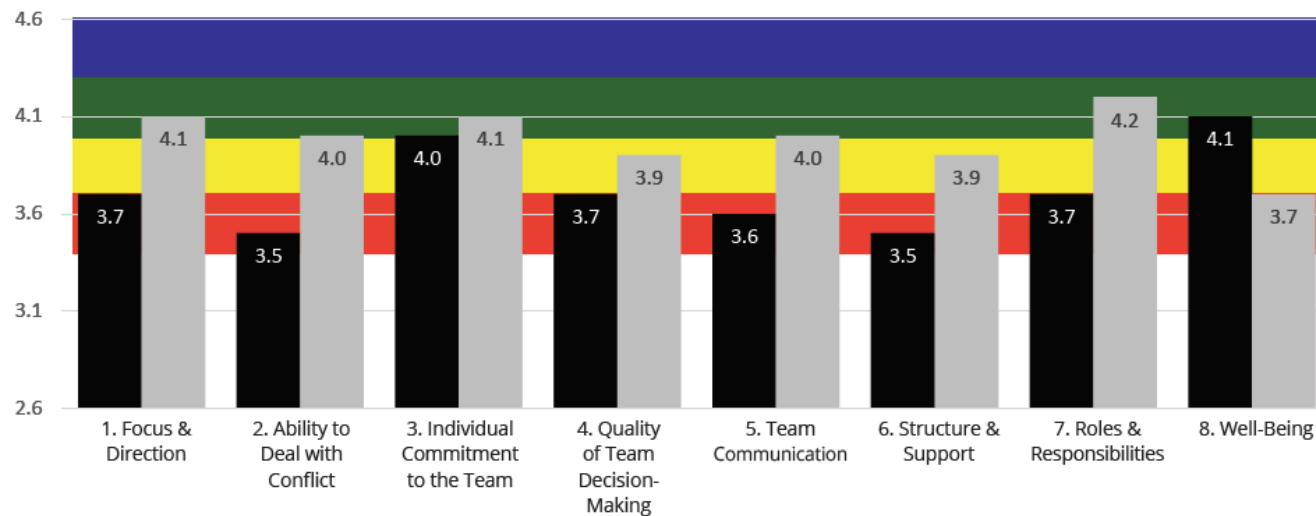


"Ground Rules For Fighting Fair"

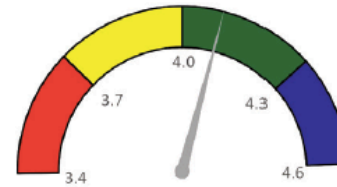
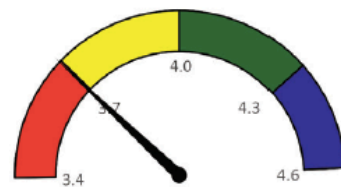
This tool helps level the playing field when a Leadership Team, Functional or Discipline Team, or Owner/Contractor Team have dicey issues that must be aired out and settled constructively.

Members must agree to follow the rules themselves and also hold others accountable for following the rules.

- Speak only from personal experience.
- Refrain from blame-placing.
- Avoid trying to prove "right" or "wrong".
- Remain outcome-focused.
- Allow equal "air time" for different points of view.
- Keep things discussed confidential, unless otherwise agreed.
- Agree not to "bad-mouth" each other after the meeting.



February-17 December-17



LEGEND:

