Dealing with Differences

Effective Conflict Resolution Skills for Project Managers

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What is it about conflict that is so troubling?

• Who in this room is comfortable with conflict?
• Why?
• What would need to change to help you become more comfortable?
What do you do when confronted by conflict at the personal level?

- Withdraw?
- Engage?
- Ask questions?
- Pause?
- Blame yourself?
- Blame the other?
- What else?
Conflict in team settings – why does it happen?

- Simple or complex misunderstandings
- Lack of communication protocols
- Competing Commitments
- Active/Passive Engagement styles
- Inability to disagree productively
- Ambiguous decision-making
- Procedural and Substantive differences of opinion
Deal with Differences as *problems to be solved*, not battles to be won
Lack of Communication Protocols

Develop an Insurance Policy for difficult conversations

- **A** • Agree on a set of **ASPIRATIONAL** behaviors

- **C** • Decide when **CONSENSUS** is needed (not always)

- **S** • **SILENCE** means ascent

- **C** • Insist on being Unconditionally **CONSTRUCTIVE**
Examples of Communication Protocols

- 24 hour response time to voicemail
- Questions about meeting topics raised the day before the meeting
- Suspend judgment during brainstorming
- Reality-test commitments during meetings
- PM check’s in on commitments made after meetings
Conflicts & Difficulties that Confront PM’s

Ambiguous or non-existent assumptions about:

- Core team values
- Team roles & responsibilities
- Deadlines and commitments
- Critical path dependencies

Inability or unwillingness to ask for help

Reluctance to Reality Test (aka: irrational optimism)

Start with a discussion about individual values

1. Ask your team the 4 questions for effective team performance
2. SWOT analysis of your team
3. Develop a reward system for performance
4. Focus on a collective gains thru future focused questions
5. Build better questioning and listening skills
Asking Better Questions

Focus on questions that matter rather than speeches that don’t.

Open-ended questions connote interest and curiosity, rather than judgment or positioning.

‘Why’ and ‘what if’ questions stimulate curiosity and connection and open up possibility.

Focus on what’s possible rather than what won’t work – separate inventing from deciding.
Dealing with Time Constraints in Groups?

- Talk about accountability as a core value
- Ask about time management early in the process
- What’s on the critical path and what isn’t?
- What are the implications of missing a deadline?
- Is the right person assigned to get the work done?
- Ask for verbal progress reports
Questions for me?

How do you____________?

What do you do when________________?

What do you say when they________________?

How do you deal with ultimatums over________?