

ESSENTIALS OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

COLLEGE
OF THE
SISKIYOU

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PREVIEW

- TWO INTRODUCTORY IDEAS
 - Conflict Management and Opportunity
- THREE PRINCIPLES
 - Know What You Want and What's *Really* Going On
 - Do I Avoid or Engage?
 - Work with Your Expectations (the “Silent Killer”)
- THE RELATIONAL VIEW OF POWER
 - Dependence and its Antidotes
- FIVE DIFFERENT APPROACHES
 - Pros and Cons
- COMMUNICATION
 - Skills and Agreements



TWO IDEAS AS WE BEGIN....

- CONFLICT IS NORMAL, PART OF EVERY ORGANIZATION AND PART OF EVERY RELATIONSHIP OF DEPTH



- IT MAY SEEM LIKE A TECHNICALITY, BUT IT'S MORE USEFUL TO THINK OF THE PROCESS WE'RE DISCUSSING TODAY AS "**CONFLICT MANAGEMENT**" AS OPPOSED TO "CONFLICT RESOLUTION. " CONFLICTS TEND TO RETURN, WHETHER IN THE SAME FORM, OR A "NEW" ONE."
- IT WOULD BE AN UNREALISTIC EXPECTATION TO THINK ALL CONFLICT WITH A PARTICULAR PERSON WILL GO AWAY FOREVER IF WE JUST "RESOLVE" THE CURRENT ONE.
- (More on this later...)

A Mental Exercise for Our Group

- Think of a **recent conflict** in which you were directly involved, one that you were one of the “disputants,” not one when you “intervened.” It can be a personal conflict or one you’ve had at work.

CRITICAL INCIDENT

CONFLICT CAN BE POSITIVE!

CONFLICT IS NOT GOOD OR BAD IT JUST IS.

It usually “feels” difficult, frustrating, challenging, etc., but if CAN be turned into an opportunity for a positive process or outcome.

IT IS INSTRUCTIVE (AND BY NOW A CLICHÉ IN THE
CONFLICT LITERATURE) THAT THE WAY THAT
“CONFLICT” IS WRITTEN IN CHINA IS BY TAKING
THE CHARACTERS FOR “DANGER” AND COMBINING
THEM WITH THE CHARACTERS FOR
“OPPORTUNITY” AND THAT SPELLS CONFLICT.

THE WISDOM OF THE ORIENT SUGGESTS WE CAN
TURN CONFLICT INTO AN OPPORTUNITY

Chinese Symbol for “Conflict”

衝突

Danger

Opportunity

SO WHERE DO WE START?

- **THE FIRST PRINCIPLE** OF PRODUCTIVE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IS THE SAME AS THE FIRST PRINCIPLE OF PRODUCTIVE COMMUNICATION:

- **KNOW WHAT YOU WANT**

A CLEAR GOAL

HOW MANY OF YOU, IN YOUR CRITICAL INCIDENT, KNEW EXACTLY WHAT YOU WANTED?

FOUR KINDS OF (overlapping) GOALS

- TOPIC
- RELATIONSHIP
- IDENTITY
- PROCESS

TOPIC

THE WHAT
THE TERMS

THE SUBSTANCE
THE EXTERNAL

- WHO GETS THE BETTER SPACE THAT JUST OPENED UP?
- WHO WILL PERFORM WHICH JOBS?
- DO WE DO SOMETHING YOUR WAY OR MY WAY?
- HOW MUCH MONEY WILL BE SPENT?
- WILL WE SPEND CERTAIN MONIES ON X OR ON Y?
- ALL VERY IMPORTANT, HOWEVER, WITH INTERPERSONAL AND EVEN ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT, THE TOPIC GOAL IS OFTEN A “VEHICLE” FOR OTHER TYPES OF GOALS OR INTERESTS

RELATIONSHIP

- WHO ARE WE TO EACH OTHER?
- WHO IS IN “CONTROL”?
- WHO GETS TO DEFINE THE TERMS?
- HOW MUCH INTERDEPENDENCE IS THERE BETWEEN US?
- CAN INVOLVE ISSUES OF APPROVAL, INCLUSION, AND WHO GETS TO BE “RIGHT.”

IDENTITY

- WHO AM I IN THIS INTERACTION?
 - HOW DO I EXPERIENCE YOU TREATING ME?
 - HOW DO YOU EXPERIENCE ME TREATING YOU?

INVOLVES ISSUES OF:

FACE

FELT RESPECT AND DISRESPECT

FELT STATUS

FELT SELF-ESTEEM

PROCESS

- WHAT PROCESS DO WE USE TO DECIDE?
- WHO GETS INCLUDED OR LEFT OUT?
- WHO GETS TO “GO FIRST” ON SOMETHING?
- WHEN DOES THE ISSUE GET WORKED OUT??
- HOW MUCH TIME DO WE SPEND ON THIS?
- WHAT IS “FAIR?”

- OK. SO WHY AM I SPENDING ALL THIS TIME ON THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF CONFLICT WE MAY BE HAVING, ESPECIALLY IF THERE IS OFTEN MORE THAN ONE GOING ON AT ONCE?

IMPORTANT NOTES

WHILE DISPUTES OFTEN HAVE MORE THAN ONE GOAL OR TYPE, VARYING IN WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT, IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT'S ***REALLY*** IMPORTANT--WHAT'S **CENTRAL** TO YOU AND TO THE OTHER--YOU WON'T GET TO **THE HEART OF THE CONFLICT**. AND THEN, THE CONFLICT WILL RESURFACE IN SOME OTHER FORM.

IMPORTANT NOTES

IN A SERIOUS INTERPERSONAL DISPUTE, ONLY FOCUSING ON THE TOPIC, OR CONTENT, IS RARELY SATISFYING....OR LASTING....EVEN IF IT'S THE LEAST "THREATENING." (It's way easier to talk about a topic goal than a relationship goal.)

- YOUR CRITICAL INCIDENT?

IMPORTANT NOTES

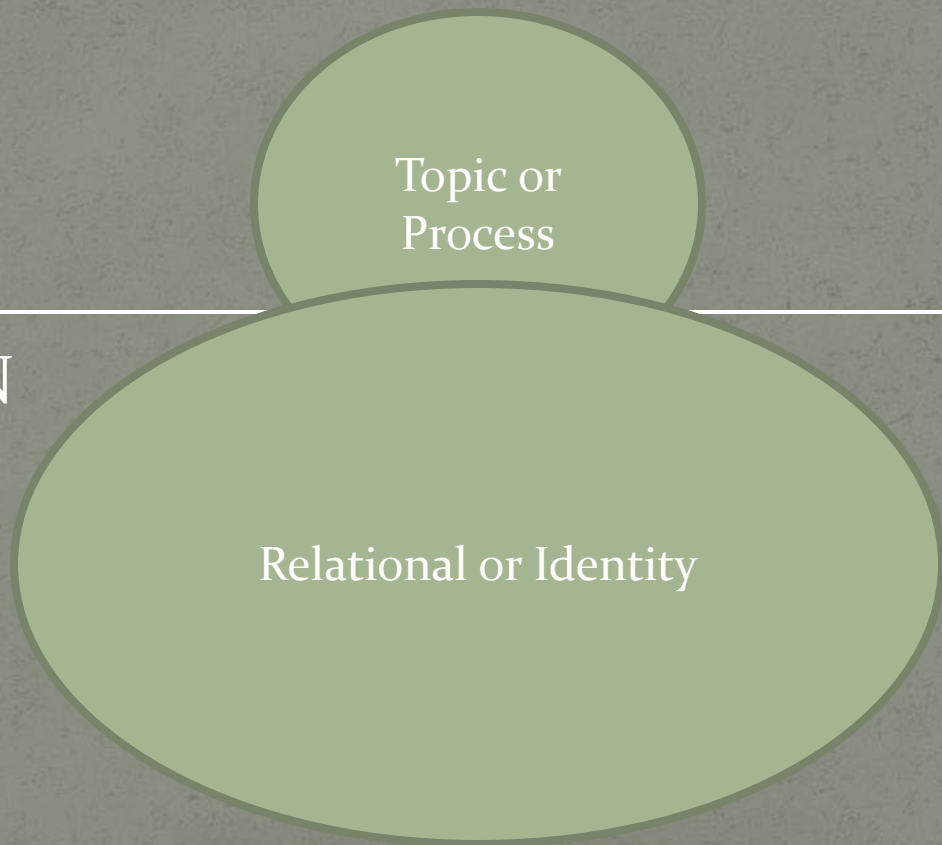
- THAT'S BECAUSE:
- IDENTITY AND RELATIONSHIP GOALS OFTEN UNDERLIE AND “DRIVE” CONTENT AND PROCESS GOALS

OPEN

Topic or
Process

HIDDEN

Relational or Identity



SOME IMPORTANT NOTES

DIFFERENT PEOPLE OFTEN FOCUS ON ONE KIND OF GOAL VERSUS THE OTHERS

EXAMPLES:

- SOME PEOPLE STUCK IN HOW THEY ARE BEING TREATED (feeling “victimized”). (IDENTITY).
- OTHERS MAY BE FIXATED ON WHAT’S “FAIR” (PROCESS).
- OTHERS NEED TO BE RIGHT ALL THE TIME (RELATIONAL).
- STILL OTHERS MAY BE “STUCK” IN THEIR FEELINGS (RELATIONAL).

IMPORTANT NOTES

DO REMEMBER: IT'S NOT ONLY CRITICAL TO KNOW WHAT *YOU* WANT, IT IS HELPFUL TO THINK ABOUT WHAT THE OTHER WANTS. THAT IS, WHAT ARE *THEIR* PRIMARY GOALS (topic, relationship, identity, process)?

IF YOU KNOW, THEN YOU CAN ACT ACCORDINGLY.
[More on this later.]

THE SECOND PRINCIPLE

YOU MUST CHOOSE:

AVOID OR ENGAGE

MANY TIMES IT'S USEFUL TO AVOID:

WHEN THE ISSUE IS TRIVIAL, "NO BIG DEAL."
WHEN YOU KNOW YOU WON'T COME OUT
WELL
WHEN IT'S BAD TIMING
AND OTHER TIMES TOO.

HOWEVER....

RISKS OF AVOIDANCE INCLUDE:

- THE ISSUE OFTEN KEEPS SHOWING UP
- THINGS THEN BUILD UP AND CAN EXPLODE
- A CULTURE OF DENIAL IS CREATED
 - PEOPLE NO LONGER TRUST THAT ISSUES WILL BE ADDRESSED SO THEY DON'T FEEL SECURE. THEY SEE OTHERS ACTING WITHOUT ACCOUNTABILITY AND THEN WONDER WHY THEY SHOULD ACT HONORABLY.



PLUS:

- IT CAN LEAD TO COVERT FEELINGS AND
THOUGHTS OF PAYBACK



THE THIRD PRINCIPLE

IS ABOUT
EXPECTATIONS

PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT VARIABLE IN
CONFLICT

Your critical incident?
Was your conflict based on either

- A **failed prediction** of what was going to happen?

Or maybe

- What you thought “**should**” happen, but did not?



Expectations

Slightly
Off Kilter
REALITY



EXPECTATIONS
ARE
CRITICAL!

OK, SO WHAT DO I DO ABOUT THAT?

CLARIFY EACH OTHERS' EXPECTATIONS

DEVELOP AGREEMENTS

and

PRACTICE NON-ATTACHMENT (if possible)

(More on non-attachment and agreements in a bit)

POWER

ANOTHER CRITICAL VARIABLE IN CONFLICT

WHAT ARE THE POWER DYNAMICS IN THIS
CONFLICT AND HOW DOES THAT AFFECT
THINGS?



POWER: HOW IT WORKS AND HOW TO INCREASE YOUR PERSONAL POWER

FIRST: WHAT ARE SOME POWER “CURRENCIES” or “LEVERAGE”

- Resource Control
- Interpersonal Linkages
- Needed Expertise
- Communication Skills
- Non-tangibles (e.g., charisma, likeability)

THE RELATIONAL VIEW OF POWER

Power is a property of the relationship.

In the relational view, power is *given* to others by choice (like credibility), though it's often given non-consciously, that is, out of our awareness.

That's right, we give power away...by our choices.

$$(P_{a/b} = D_{b/a})$$

THE POWER OF PERSON A OVER PERSON B IS
EQUAL TO THE DEPENDENCE OF B ON A

Dependence is a function of:

- 1) Your perception of other ways to achieve your goals, and
- 2) How much importance you *attach* to the goals the other person can influence.

NON ATTACHMENT

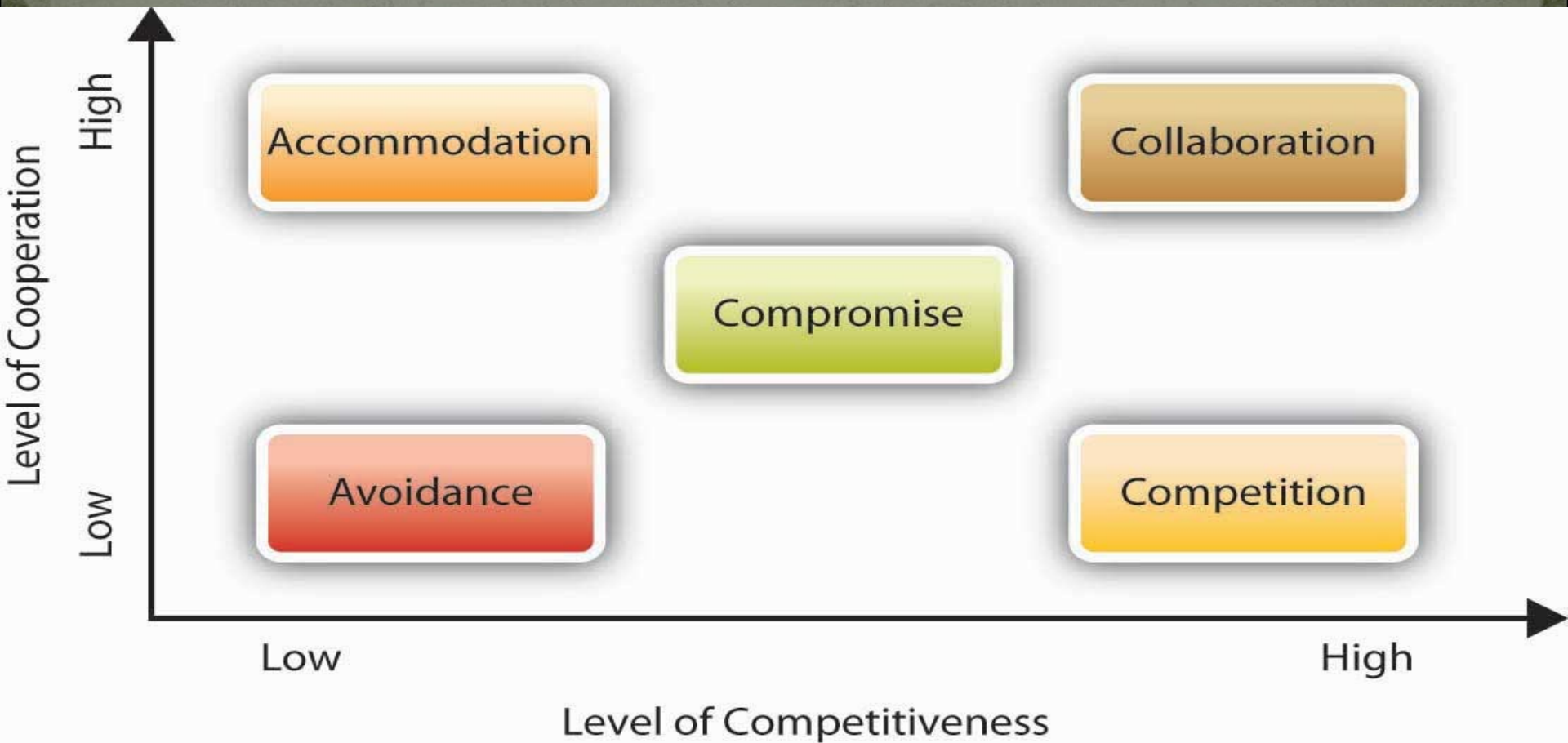
is like

NO EXPECTATIONS

which gives you

INCREASED POWER

FIVE CONFLICT APPROACHES (STYLES)



IN CHOOSING WHICH APPROACH TO USE—
AVOIDANCE, ACCOMMODATION, COMPROMISE,
COMPETITION, OR COLLABORATION--HERE ARE
SOME OF THE POSSIBLE OUTCOMES ASSOCIATED
WITH EACH.

MANY TIMES IT'S USEFUL TO AVOID:

- WHEN THE ISSUE IS TRIVIAL, “NO BIG DEAL.”
- WHEN YOU KNOW YOU WON'T COME OUT WELL
- WHEN IT'S BAD TIMING
- AND OTHER TIMES TOO.

However,

- THE ISSUE CAN COME BACK TO HAUNT YOU LATER
 - THINGS BUILD UP AND EXPLODE
 - A CULTURE OF DENIAL IS CREATED

FOR BOSSES: PEOPLE NO LONGER TRUST THAT ISSUES WILL BE ADDRESSED SO THEY DON'T FEEL SECURE. THEY SEE OTHERS ACTING WITHOUT ACCOUNTABILITY AND THEN WONDER WHY THEY SHOULD ACT HONORABLY.



MANY TIMES IT'S USEFUL TO ACCOMMODATE

- IT'S A **GREAT THING TO DO** IF THE ISSUE IS LESS IMPORTANT TO YOU THAN IT IS TO THE OTHER.
- FOR MANY OF THE SAME REASONS IT IS USEFUL TO AVOID.
- IT CAN BE DONE AS A KINDNESS AND WANTING TO HELP.
- ACCOMMODATION CAN CALM THINGS DOWN.



HOWEVER,

- YOU DON'T GET WHAT YOU MIGHT REALLY WANT
- PEOPLE MAY BEGIN TO REGULARLY TAKE ADVANTAGE OF YOU
 - CAN LEAD TO **RESENTMENT**
- CAN LEAD ONE TO FEEL DISEMPOWERED AND RESULT IN **PASSIVE AGGRESSIVENESS**
- Let's talk about passive aggressiveness.

MANY TIMES IT'S USEFUL TO COMPETE IN CONFLICT

- IF THE OTHER INSISTS ON COMPETING
- IF THE EXTERNAL GOAL (TOPICAL CONFLICT) IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE RELATIONSHIP
- YOU GET WHAT YOU WANT *IF* YOU “WIN”
- IT CAN BE QUICK
- SHOWS COMMITMENT TO THE ISSUE



HOWEVER...

- IT CAN HARM THE RELATIONSHIP
- CAN LEAD TO ESCALATION, SOMETIMES
COVERTLY
- OFTEN LIMITS OUTCOMES TO “WIN-LOSE”

MANY TIMES IT'S USEFUL TO COMPROMISE

- IT'S A GOOD WAY FOR PARTIES TO “GIVE IN ORDER TO GET”
- CAN SAVE TIME
- IT OFTEN REFLECTS A FAIR OUTCOME
- VERY MUCH LIKE “COLLABORATION”

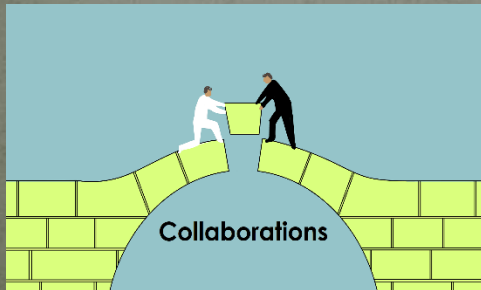


HOWEVER....

- IT CAN SHORT CIRCUIT A “WIN-WIN”
- YOU MUST GIVE UP SOMETHING TO GET SOMETHING
- MAY BE DONE TO AVOID “DEEPER” ISSUES”
 - SOMETIMES UNFAIR IF THERE IS A SIGNIFICANT POWER IMBALANCE TO BEGIN WITH

MOST OF THE TIME IT'S USEFUL TO COLLABORATE

- CAN SATISFY ALL PARTIES.
- GENERATES FUTURE GOOD WILL AND CONFIDENCE; IT'S GOOD FOR LONG TERM RELATIONSHIPS.
- CREATES “MORE TOGETHER” THAN ANYONE CAN CREATE ALONE.



HOWEVER...

- MIGHT NOT BE WORTH THE TIME AND ENERGY
 - CAN BE SUBJECTED TO “PSEUDO-COLLABORATION”
- OFTEN REQUIRES COMPROMISE ANYWAY

REMEMBER:

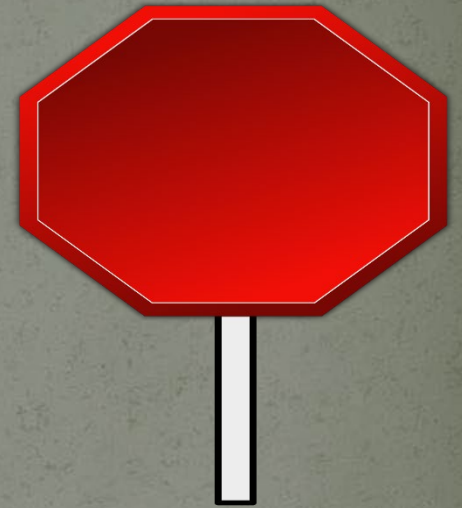
S.T.O.P.

STOP

TAKE A BREATH

OBSERVE

PROCEED



Now you know which approach would best fit the situation

COMMUNICATION AGREEMENTS

WHEN WE DON'T S.T.O.P. TO THINK, **THE FIGHT OR FLIGHT**
(COMPETE OR AVOID) REFLEX OFTEN EMERGES.

AS WE'VE SAID, NOT ALWAYS THE MOST USEFUL APPROACHES.



SOMETIMES ONE OF THOSE STRATEGIES
MAKES SENSE, BUT BETTER TO DEVELOP A
SELF-BUILT SET OF **COMMUNICATION**
AGREEMENTS (LIKE A CODE) ON HOW WE
WILL ENGAGE IN CONFLICT.

WHY COMMUNICATION AGREEMENTS?

PROVIDES “ROAD MAP” FOR BEHAVIOR DURING
CONFLICT

PROVIDES PSYCHOLOGICAL
SAFETY (SAFETY FIRST!)

PROVIDES BEST CHANCE OF USEFUL OUTCOMES

COMMUNICATION AGREEMENTS

SOME SAMPLE AGREEMENTS:

When we have conflict...

- We agree to listen to and consider the other person's point of view.
- We agree to arrange an appropriate time to talk.
- We agree to be honest.
- We agree to "own our part."
- We agree to clarify our expectations.
- We agree to go directly to people with whom we "have an issue," and not share it with others.
- We agree to hold each other accountable to these agreements.



GENERATING COMMUNICATION AGREEMENTS

REQUIRED:

MUST BE BY THE GROUP, FOR THE GROUP,
CREATED BY THE GROUP (SELF-BUILT, NOT TOP DOWN)

AND...EVERYONE MUST BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE
TO THE AGREEMENTS

THE ESSENTIAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

- DON'T SPEAK RIGHT AWAY (S.T.O.P.)
- WHEN YOU DO, SPEAK FOR YOURSELF
- OWN YOUR PART
- BE CLEAR ABOUT WHAT YOU WANT
- LISTEN CAREFULLY
- LET THE OTHER KNOW YOU'VE HEARD (REFLECT, or PARAPHRASE, or PERCEPTION CHECK)
- COLLABORATE IF YOU CAN

CITATION NOTE

*

I am indebted to my colleagues Joyce Hocker and (late) friend Bill Wilmot. Much of the material in this presentation is adapted from their book (with Keith Berry, 11th ed.), Interpersonal Conflict (2022), McGraw-Hill.

QUESTIONS?