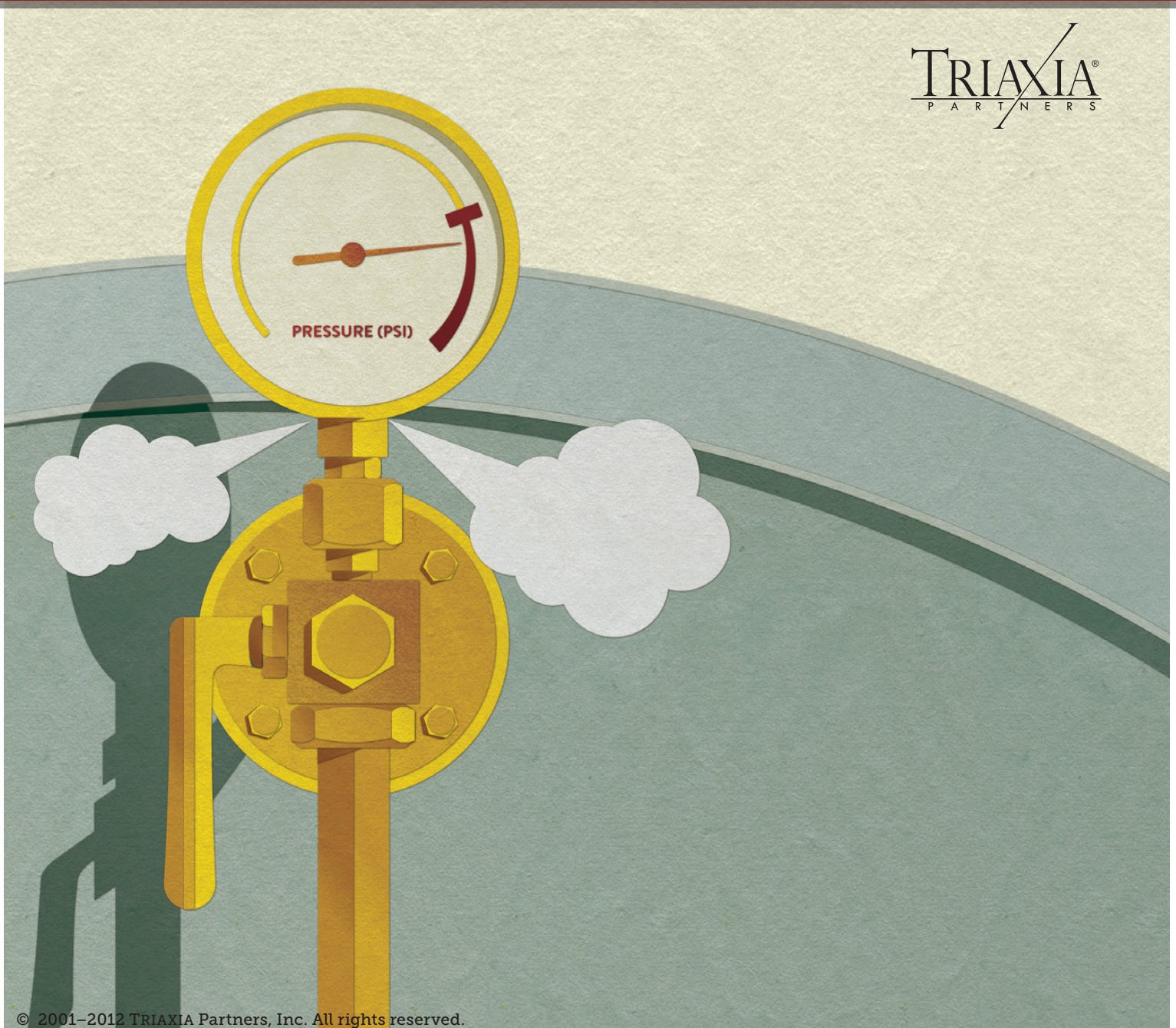


TEAM BENCHMARK™

Team Conflict Profile™

Helping your team turn strife into synergy™

TRIAXIA®
P A R T N E R S



CONFLICT – STRIFE OR SYNERGY?

A typical dictionary defines conflict as a collision, disagreement, or struggle over different opinions regarding any number of things like goals, strategies, values, or even facts. A common theme in most definitions of conflict is the idea of apparent incompatibility, the thought that the opposing propositions or positions cannot both be true and, therefore, one must invariably win over the other.

In any team situation, there are a number of possible issues that can challenge the team's ability to communicate clearly (e.g., working virtually, differing perspectives, etc.). One of these is the issue of conflict and our frequent misunderstandings about it – what motivates it, what it means, and what its consequences are. When asked what comes immediately to mind when they hear the word "conflict", people most often respond with words like "fight," "anger," "lose," "hurt," "pain," and "fear." If this is the way people feel about conflict, then how do you typically handle it? Experience tells us that the answer is to avoid it, and that's exactly what many people do.

After being hurt by destructive conflict, we get the picture that conflict is something to be avoided, but the price of peace is high. Conflict is often a door to creativity, consensus, and commitment, so avoiding it can cause a team to miss out on some truly compelling interaction.

This Team Benchmark Conflict Profile will help your team assess, explore, and strengthen three important factors in resolving conflict constructively:

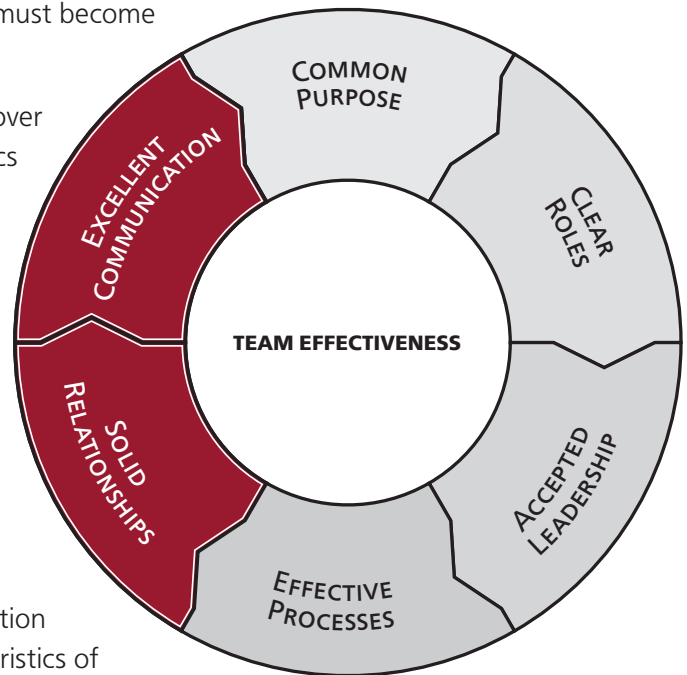
- **Skill in Managing Conflict:** Do we have the skill set it takes to focus on the issues to be resolved vs. the personalities resolving them? Can we channel our conflict into creativity or do we tend to get "stuck"?
- **Process for Working through Conflict:** Do we all agree on what steps to take when conflict inevitably arises? Do we have established processes that keep us focused on win-win solutions?
- **Relationships that Thrive through Conflict:** Do we trust and respect each other enough to handle minor skirmishes? Can we work through differing opinions and perspectives without politics and infighting?

MANAGING CONFLICT ON HIGH PERFORMANCE TEAMS

A team is like an automobile. Many of us don't understand the inner workings of a modern automobile. Should we ever look under the hood, we see an indecipherable tangle of wires, tubes, pieces, and parts, and if anything breaks down, we very often don't know how to get it running again. As with cars, if we are going to build effective teams, start stalled ones, or fix broken ones, then we must become master mechanics of team dynamics.

As we have studied and researched teams and teamwork over the years, we have found similar qualities and characteristics in teams that achieve exceptional results. This list of characteristics has proven to be of immeasurable value as we have worked with clients to establish new teams or to intervene when team effort was less than effective. It's a short list; in fact, it contains only six characteristics, but each characteristic plays a specific and vital role in making the team effective and, therefore, it is worth a closer look. If one of these six characteristics is missing or inadequate, the team is, at best, limping. If two or three are lacking, this group is probably not a team at all.

Conflict resolution has a foot in both Excellent Communication and Effective Processes – the fourth and the sixth characteristics of high performance teams. Communication is critical to managing conflict effectively, and many tested techniques for resolving conflict constructively and creatively are process-driven. Teams that establish such processes and follow them skillfully have a much greater chance of finding win-win solutions in tough situations.



EITHER/OR VERSUS BOTH/AND

There are many possible outcomes to conflict, some good, some bad, and a lot that are so-so. One's perspective about conflict in general often establishes the boundaries for possible outcomes.

Many see possible conflict outcomes as a "fixed-pie" (either/or) situation – the bigger your slice, the smaller mine will be. Such a perspective will most often introduce a competitive dimension into the process. However, there is a better way.

A more productive perspective would help us see beyond "either/or" to "both/and." Figure 2 introduces such a perspective. The two axes define the underlying behaviors that drive the process:

- **Assertive** – behaviors directed toward achieving my position
- **Supportive** – behaviors directed toward achieving your position

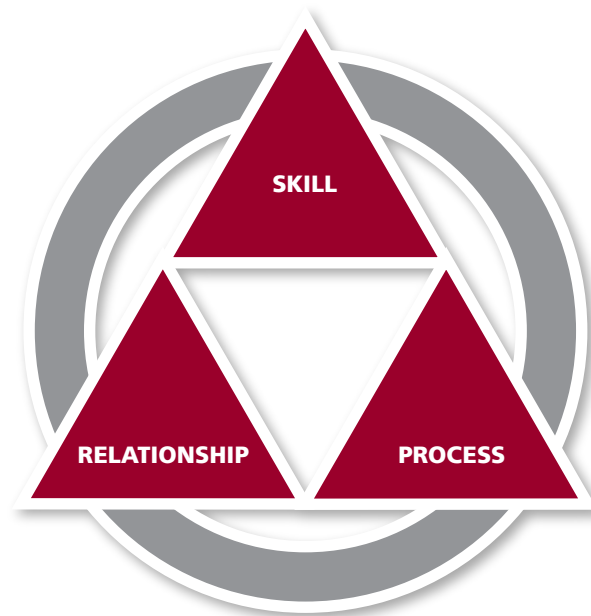
This model shows a broader array of approaches than the push and pull driven by the either/or paradigm. Looking at Figure 2, we might conclude that the best solution would be close to the upper right corner in Quadrant II. However, all of these approaches could be appropriate *in the right circumstances*.

For example, if emotions are running high, it might be best to avoid conflict until things cooled down. If something is very important to the other party and not important to you, accommodation might be the wisest approach. However, because so many people see conflict as inherently negative, they often choose the approach that will bring them the least amount of pain versus the one that will deliver the highest level solution for all of the parties involved.



© (1964) Blake and Mouton first presented a conceptual scheme for classifying the styles for handling conflict into five types; their scheme was reinterpreted by Thomas (1976) of Thomas-Kilmann, whose five terms are widely accepted today.

HOW WELL DOES YOUR TEAM MANAGE CONFLICT?



This Team Benchmark Conflict Profile allows your team to assess its conflict management skills by measuring itself against three critical Benchmark factors:

1. SKILL

Mastering the art of straight-talk without blasting the other person and knowing when it is best to hold one's ground or give way to another's interests are examples of conflict resolution skills. Taking the time to learn and master these skills will more than pay for itself in the time saved from using dysfunctional approaches to simple, straight forward conflicts.

2. PROCESS

Effective conflict resolution, like decision making, planning, and problem solving, is a combination of both art and process. The art part (e.g., knowing when to remain silent, even when you have the winning point) comes with experience. The process element of conflict resolution is a more intentional pursuit. Taking the time to learn the best practices of conflict resolution has a high payoff. Working through a consensus list of conflict ground rules (e.g., establish "belt lines," call foul when a rule is broken, etc.) *before* conflict occurs will prevent a minor border skirmish from becoming an interpersonal war.

3. RELATIONSHIPS

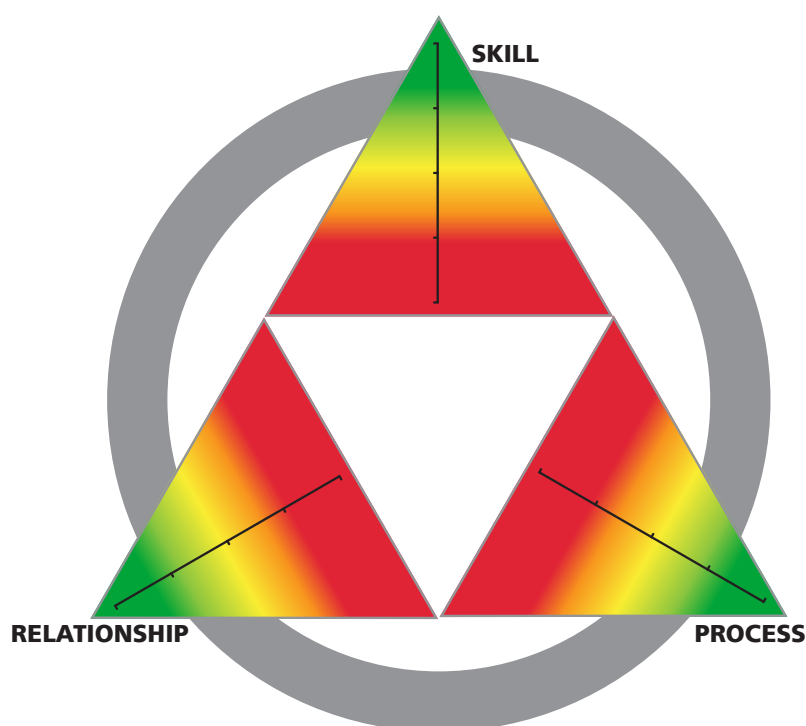
All the conflict ground rules in the world won't help if individual team members don't trust one another, treat each other with respect and courtesy, and hold each other accountable to adhere to the ground rules. Commitment to the team purpose, as well as to building solid relationships, is a critical combination on a high performance team.

INTERPRETING YOUR TEAM'S RESULTS

Each question within the Team Benchmark Conflict Profile was rated by your team members on a five (5) point scale ranging from Not at All Descriptive (1) to Very Descriptive (5). Your answers have been compiled to provide both individual scores and an average team score for each Benchmark factor.

Your team needs to function effectively in all three areas to effectively manage conflict and turn it into creativity and collaboration. A low score in any one of these areas can result in significant conflict challenges for your team, and is worthy of closer examination and a clear action plan for improvement. Use the table below to assess your overall and factor-specific scores:

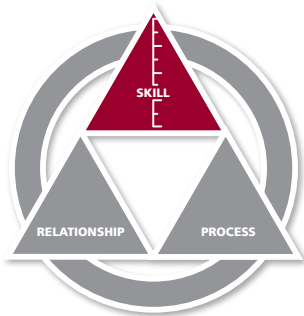
Rating Scale				
1–1.99	2–2.99	3–3.49	3.50–3.99	4.00 - 5.00
Poor	Somewhat Poor	Adequate	Good	Excellent
We avoid conflict at all costs. If we can't, it's toxic to our relationships.	We avoid conflict whenever possible, it only leads to trouble.	It's a coin toss as to whether conflicts will turn out well.	Some sticking points, but our conflicts don't create issues.	Conflict and creativity are practically the same to us!



DISCUSSION

1. Overall, which of the three factors was rated the strongest – Skill, Process, or Relationships?
2. Weakest?
3. Are there significant score differences among team members?
4. What accounts for these differences?
5. As a result of your scoring and discussion, which of the Benchmark Conflict factors, if strengthened, could most improve team effectiveness?

SKILL



DISCUSSION

1. In your opinion, what are the key challenges for your team in regards to its skill in managing conflict?

2. What are the consequences of these issues for your team and what will happen if it does not address them?

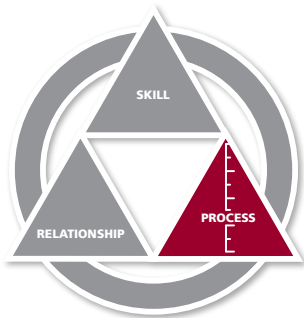
3. What are some specific actions you can take as a team to address these challenges?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

PROCESS



PROCESS DISCUSSION

1. In your opinion, what are the key challenges for your team regarding its process for conflict management?

2. What are the consequences of these issues for your team and what will happen if it does not address them?

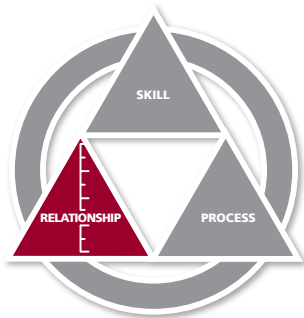
3. What are some specific actions you can take as a team to address these challenges?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

RELATIONSHIPS



RELATIONSHIPS DISCUSSION

1. In your opinion, what are the key challenges for your team in regards to managing its relationships during conflict?

2. What are the consequences of these issues for your team and what will happen if it does not address them?

3. What are some specific actions you can take as a team to address these challenges?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

DETAILED RESULTS

Below you will find your team's average response to each question in order from the highest score to the lowest. As a team, review the results and discuss where you may have been surprised – or not surprised – by what you discovered.

DETAILED RESULTS DISCUSSION

1. Do you, as a team, believe this is an accurate reflection of where your team is regarding how it manages conflict?

2. Were the scores for the individual team members relatively close? How did your team members' assessments compare?

3. Based upon this summary, can you identify your team's three biggest barriers to effective conflict management?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

COMPLETING THE ACTION PLAN WORKSHEET

This Action Plan Worksheet is a template on which your team can design a development strategy for each selected item. Like any of the worksheets in this document, it is merely a framework you can use as a guide. Feel free to change or adapt it to make it best suit the needs of your team.

Before you complete the worksheet, make copies to use for additional action plans as you continue to develop your team to new levels of effectiveness.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Review each of the possible action items your team listed for each factor.

2. Choose the top three issues that most need developing.

-
-
-

3. Prioritize these issues according to their importance:

- a.
- b.
- c.

4. Develop an action plan for each of these three using the worksheets on the following pages.

5. Commit to implementing your ideas over the next 90 days.

TURNING PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE

Here is your opportunity to turn principle into practice—to take a meaningful first step in becoming a more effective team.

1. Question #	Factor	Question
6	Skill	We focus on the root of the problem

2. What are the current consequences of this conflict challenge (e.g., feelings, results or impact, etc.).

3. Identify the root causes of the current situation (e.g., attitudes, lack of knowledge or skill, lack of resources, outside pressures, etc.).

4. Describe the **desired** situation.

5. What specific steps will you take as a team to address the root cause and transform the current situation into the desired situation? Who is responsible for what? By what date?

Action Step	Responsibility	Date

6. Specifically, how will you measure progress as you work in this area? Can you state it in terms of output (e.g., increased production, decreased costs, etc.)?

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MONITOR AND MEASURE

1. Set a date to review your progress with the team.
2. Review your Action Plan.
3. What is working? Not working?
4. Are we achieving our desired results? If so, how can we continue to leverage our effectiveness?
5. If not, what must we start doing?
6. Stop doing?
7. What changes will we implement going forward?

PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE

ACHIEVING EXCEPTIONAL RESULTS THROUGH EFFECTIVE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

CONFLICT JUST MEANS YOU'RE COMMUNICATING

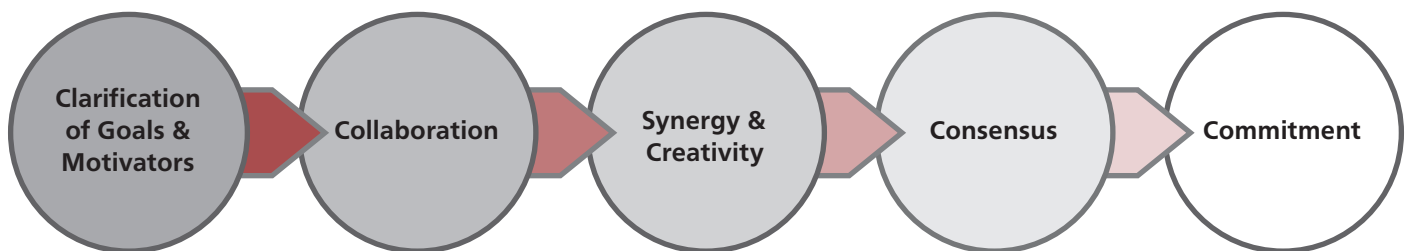
Clear communication always has the potential to lead to conflict and ***the clearer the communication, the faster conflict seems to arise***. Most people sense this intuitively. When there is the potential for disagreement, they create a gap between how they feel versus what they say. If we see conflict as a negative force to be avoided, and most people do, then we tend to make the communication muddy.

What we need is a new perspective on conflict, one that doesn't see it as either good or bad, but as an indication of a difference in interests, opinions, and points of view. Mary Parker Follett¹ laid the foundation for more effective conflict resolution strategies of today when, nearly 70 years ago, she observed that conflict cannot be avoided and, therefore, must be managed and made to work for us.ⁱ

So how does resolution find its way to collaboration? For conflict to be productive, it must move through five distinct phases of interaction (Figure 3). First, we must clarify the facts or the issues over which we disagree. In most points of disagreement, we put forth a position (what we want) and then fortify and defend it. The other party does the same. The positions are either offensive or defensive, and the more one is forced to defend a position, the more difficult it becomes to "suspend our assumptions." Like an iceberg, it is what's under the water line that really counts. Our underlying interests and motives (why we want what we want) live beneath the surface. Without trust, we are unlikely to reveal them to others in fear that they may use this knowledge against us. However, when trust is present, we are more open and willing to reveal the fundamental needs driving us to push for one position or another.

CONSTRUCTIVE CONFLICT

Figure 3



Clarification of goals and motivators leads to collaboration. A team can work collectively to engineer optimal solutions that escape the magnetic pull of compromise. Many see compromise as the high side of conflict resolution. In reality, it is a tepid resolution – a so-so outcome that basically says, "If we're going to be unhappy about this conclusion, let's be equally unhappy." Follett observed that, because in compromise, we give up part of our desire, conflict is bound to surface again one form or another as we later attempt to attain the whole of our desire.ⁱ

Collaboration introduces the possibility of synergy, and the creativity needed to discover a win-win solution that more effectively meets the needs of all parties. Again, Follett pioneered a creative insight for repositioning

¹ American social worker, management consultant and pioneer in the fields of organizational theory and organizational behavior. Along with Lillian Gilbreth, Mary Parker Follett was one of two great women management gurus in the early days of classical management theory.

conflict. She explained that compromise does not create, but rather deals with what already exists. However, an integrative solution creates something new.ⁱⁱⁱ Thus the creative dimension of conflict is introduced.

With a win-win solution, we can gain consensus and, consequently, the commitment that channels the team's energy into execution unencumbered by unresolved conflict. In this way, conflict opens the door to creativity, consensus, and commitment. If the group has an unhealthy view of conflict or doesn't have the skills or process by which to manage it constructively, they will never attain this level of synergic communication, and the exceptional levels of performance it supports.

FINDING THE WAY TO COLLABORATION

To consistently and effectively work through this process and find your way to Quadrant II (Figure 4), your team must master three important dimensions of constructive conflict management:

1. CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS

Understanding the basic principles of constructive conflict resolution, mastering the art of straight-talk without blowing the other person out of the water, and knowing when it is best to hold one's ground or give way to another's interests are all examples of conflict resolution skills. Taking the time to learn and master those skills will more than pay for itself in the time saved from following dysfunctional approaches to simple, straightforward conflicts.

2. EFFECTIVE CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROCESSES

Effective conflict resolution, like decision making, planning, and problem solving, is a combination of both art and process. The art part (e.g., knowing when to remain silent even when you have the winning point) comes with experience. The process element of conflict resolution is a more intentional pursuit. Taking the time to learn the best practices of conflict resolution has a high payoff. Working through a consensus list of conflict ground rules (e.g., establish "belt lines," call foul when one is broken, etc.) before conflict occurs will prevent a minor border skirmish from becoming an interpersonal war.

3. SOLID TEAM RELATIONSHIPS

Healthy team relationships are a critical ingredient for win-win solutions. Relationships on a high performance team could be described as follows:

- **Trust** – We must trust others in three key categories before it is real:
 - › Character – others will do what they say they will do
 - › Competency – they will do what they've promised with excellence
 - › Concern – they have others' best interests in mind



The first victim of low trust is clear communication, and clear communication is a prerequisite for effective conflict resolution. No trust means no real resolution.

- **Acceptance** – Acceptance is the bridge that connects differences. To accept is to approve of someone, even though that person may be very unlike us.
- **Understanding** – Even though team members don't need to know each other all that well personally, they do need to have a mutual understanding of each other's job and potential contribution. Indeed, the deeper the level of understanding, the greater the potential for effective collaborative effort, particularly in the less structured, ambiguous circumstances confronted by most teams on a regular basis. Understanding is a key step to trust, and trust is a key element for interdependence and team effort. When it comes to communication and conflict, understanding what puts others under stress or creates a sense of vulnerability will go a long way toward mitigating some of the often unintended aspects of conflict resolution.
- **Respect** – To respect someone in a team setting means to show honor and esteem for his or her contribution. Everyone brings something to the table. Without that something, what we are attempting to accomplish will not be possible. Every team member and their contribution is important. High performance teams treat the input of every member with respect and appreciation, showing no partiality for one person's role, contribution, or opinion over that of any other.
- **Courtesy** – Courtesy is one of the most visible indicators of team relationships. Of particular interest is how the team members treat one another when the team is under stress, as we almost always are in circumstances involving conflict.
- **Accountability** – The final relational quality that is indispensable in a team setting is mutual accountability. When effectively practiced, accountability can be very liberating for both the team and the individual team members. The climate will resound with the understanding that we are all in this together and we will succeed or fail as a team. It creates the freedom for team members to proactively share ideas and needs and to ask for help. In the case of the latter, effective team accountability is like an early warning system that can alert the team if it is getting behind or off course when a team member gets stuck, overloaded, or over their head. It makes it easy for team members to yell for help. It also makes it more comfortable for team members to share ideas and suggestions with those outside of their area of expertise or responsibility.

As your team focuses on and develops each of these critical areas, an interesting transformation will happen. You will discover that the very climate in which you operate will become one in which effective communication and, therefore, effective conflict, will naturally start to take place.

Team climates that are described as high trust, safe, valuing candor, respectful of people promote effective communication and constructive conflict resolution. Unsafe, low trust environments have the opposite effect. High performance teams have healthy climates that facilitate achieving creative and mutually acceptable conflict outcomes.

ⁱ Pauline Graham and Mary Parker Follet, *Prophet of Management*, ed., Boston, MA, Harvard Business School Press, 1995, pp.67,68

ⁱⁱ Ibid., p. 72

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., p..71

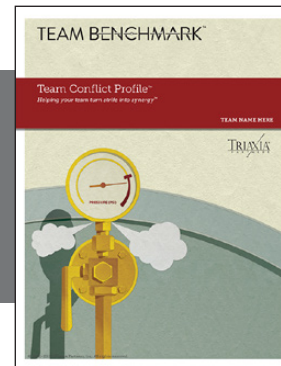
SUGGESTED READING

Fisher, Roger; Brown, Scott (1988). *Getting Together, Building a Relationship that Gets to Yes*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Fisher, Roger; Ury, William (1991). *Getting to Yes, Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In, Second Edition*. New York: Penguin Books.

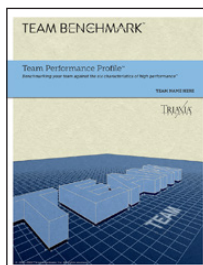
Jandt, Fred E. (1985). *Win-Win Negotiating, Turning Conflict Into Agreement*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

YOU'VE COMPLETED THE TEAM CONFLICT PROFILE™ REPORT



Also available from

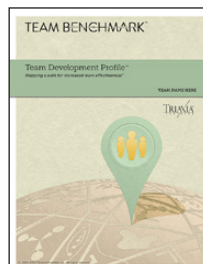
TEAM BENCHMARK™



TEAM SKILL SURVEY™

MEASURE YOUR TEAM AGAINST THE SIX CHARACTERISTICS OF A HIGH PERFORMANCE TEAM.

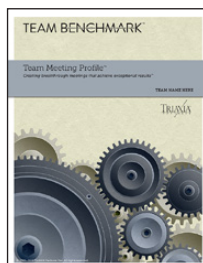
The Team Skill Survey™ assists your team in evaluating its strengths and weaknesses against in each of the six characteristics of a high performance team. The resulting Team Skill Survey Report is designed to prioritize allow your team to attack its development needs with the confidence of knowing they are targeting the right issues.



TEAM DEVELOPMENT PROFILE™

FIND YOUR PLACE ON THE ROAD TO HIGH PERFORMANCE TEAMWORK.

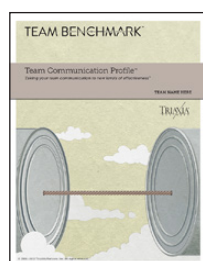
The Team Development Profile™ enables your team to visually identify its current stage of team development, and better understand its potential for greater synergy and team effectiveness.



TEAM MEETINGS PROFILE™

ACHIEVE UNCOMMON RESULTS ON COMMON GROUND.

This powerful meetings diagnostic will provide your team with unique insight on how well they are managing meeting together. Meetings are the playing field for high performance teams. Effective or not, meetings cost money and consume valuable resources. The real issue is not the cost of meetings but rather, the cost of poor meetings. High performance teams master the three critical dimensions needed for effective meetings: the people, the purpose, the process. This diagnostic allows your team to graphically identify strengths and weaknesses across each of these three meeting components.



TEAM COMMUNICATION PROFILE™

ACCELERATE TEAM PERFORMANCE WITH CRYSTAL CLEAR COMMUNICATION

The Team Benchmark™ Team Communication Profile™ diagnostic helps the team to assess their ability to effectively communicate with one another. Effective team communication doesn't just happen, but demands the application of time-tested principles and processes. This communication inventory enables team members to identify and address specific issues that clutter and confuse team communication.