

COMMUNICATING IN HIGH CONCERN LOW TRUST ENVIRONMENTS

Communicating in high concern/low trust environments requires skill and practice. Included in the skill is the knowledge resulting from top-quality research by Dr. Vincent Covello of the Centre for Risk Communications in New York.

- 1. When deciding on trust and credibility, people consider four things, but nothing is more important than showing empathy and caring which accounts for 50% of a person's decision on whether to trust someone. The other three factors are: dedication/commitment, competency/experience and honesty/openness which each account for 15, 15 and 20 percent of the decision, respectively.**
- 2. Up to 75 percent of a person's first impression is based on non-verbal cues. In other words, it's not what you say, it's how you say it. One of the best ways to demonstrate empathy is through active listening. All non-verbal cues can be interpreted in three ways: positive, negative, or neutral. How do people decide that you care? They look for visual cues – what you look like when you are saying what you are saying and how you sound when you are delivering your message.**
- 3. People form impressions within 30 seconds, and their impressions rarely change after they are formed. Research also shows that in an environment of high concern/low trust, thought processes are confused and unable to handle much information. Therefore, it's important to reduce the amount of information you are presenting, keep it positive, and make sure it is delivered in a short time frame.**

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HOW MANAGEMENT TEAMS CAN HAVE A GOOD FIGHT: SIX STEPS TO ACCELERATED DECISION MAKING

K. Eisenhardt, J. Kahwajy, & L.J. Bourgeois wrote an authoritative article in the July-August, 1997, Harvard Business Review entitled “How management teams can have a good fight.” The article summarizes their research on conflict and decision making in twelve high-tech companies all of which “... had to make high-stakes decisions in the face of considerable uncertainty and under pressure to move quickly.” The study concluded that there are six tactics for managing interpersonal conflict. The most successful companies: 1) work with more, rather than less information, and debate on the basis of facts and real time information; 2) develop multiple alternatives to enrich the level of debate; 3) share commonly agreed-upon goals; 4) inject humour into the decision process; 5) maintain a balanced power structure; and, 6) resolve issues via qualified consensus.

The model that is reviewed in this newsletter can help all of us develop a more effective decision making process that we can be more confident in using, whether the decisions concern fast paced business decisions, complex governmental decisions, or crisis situations faced by the world’s peacekeepers. Each of the model’s six steps will be discussed and examples will be provided to illustrate each step.

1) Work With More, Rather Than Less Information, and Debate on the Basis of Facts and Real Time Information

An excellent example of the importance of facts based on real time information can be taken from the Apollo 13 mission to the moon. The first indication that the mission was experiencing difficulty was when James Lovell, the on-board commander of the spacecraft, noticed that they were venting something into space which suggested that one of the oxygen tanks might have ruptured. Shortly thereafter, there was more bad news:

Though a moon landing had been eliminated by the loss of the first oxygen tank and fuel cell, the second system should still carry the astronauts safely home. Lovell noticed, however, that the pressure needle for the second tank was falling as well.... Normally the tank should register 860 pounds per square inch (psi);

now it was approaching 300. The explosion had come at 9:07 p.m., and the clock was now just past 10:00 p.m. At that rate of loss, the spaceship would exhaust all of its electricity and air sometime between midnight and 3:00 a.m. (The Leadership Moment, pg. 69.)

The rescue mission was ultimately successful, and there were many reasons that led to its success. One of the reasons it was successful was that Eugene Kranz, the flight director, insisted on having real time factual information on which he and his team could make life and death decisions. Although most people do not have to make life and death decisions on a daily basis, they do want to make optimal decisions, and optimal decisions require real time up-to-date information based on the most accurate facts available.

2) Develop Multiple Alternatives to Enrich the Level of Debate

Even with the best troubleshooting, optimal outcomes can be blocked if all the options are not on the table. Implicit in the mission's unrelenting effort to husband power, for example, was an abiding effort not to foreclose later alternatives. Saving power would keep open the possibility that the astronauts could be landed near an aircraft carrier during daylight; a power deficit could dictate the opposite. "Being a pilot," recalls Kranz, "you always want to keep as much runway ahead of you as you can.... You always want to have as many options out in front of you, because those are the things that give you the ability to change course. It is akin to playing "multidimensional chess: You have to think options."

A scene from the film Apollo 13 depicts a situation wherein the astronauts would soon be asphyxiated if they could not reverse the carbon dioxide buildup in the LEM (Lunar Excursion Module). The astronauts could build a system to vent the CO₂ if they could join two pieces of equipment together. However, joining those two pieces of equipment would be like trying to put a square peg in a round hole. A team at the NASA ground station used identical pieces of spare parts that were on board the LEM and explored every possible alternative to see if they could connect the two pieces of vital equipment. The team succeeded in connecting the two pieces and the astronauts were safe – at least for the time being.

3) Share Commonly Agreed-Upon Goals

One of the most famous lines from the film Apollo 13 is "Houston, we've got a problem", the other is "Failure is not an option." Kranz used the second phrase to help all the team members focus on their commonly agreed-upon goal, which was bringing the astronauts back safely.

"At no time did we ever consider that we weren't going to get the spacecraft and crew home ..." He boldly told a press conference, "It's not a question if we're going to get them home; it's a question of how much we're going to have left when we get them home." (The Leadership Moment, pg. 82).

All successful leaders, teams, and organizations have been able to develop high levels of commitment to commonly agreed-upon goals. Eugene Kranz was one such leader.

4) Inject Humour Into The Decision Process

One of the things that effective decision makers have to be on guard against is too much conflict. Paradoxically, effective decision makers have to be on guard against too little conflict. Too little conflict results in a psychological process called groupthink. In groupthink, the group appears to have reached consensus, even though some of the group members have strong reservations. As a result, conflict is avoided and group solidarity appears intact, even though the wrong decision is being made and/or more viable alternatives exist. Two of the most well known examples of the negative consequences of groupthink are “The Bay of Pigs” invasion of Cuba and the launching of, and subsequent demise of, the space shuttle Challenger.

Humour can act as a tremendous stress reducer as well as an antidote to groupthink. Humour can accomplish this because it allows us to say things that need to be heard, but they can be heard in a half-hearted way without causing hard feelings. Let me give an example. In the Canadian Navy difficult decisions have to be made and there is a hierarchical structure. The hierarchical structure makes it more likely that “groupthink” will occur. The way humour is used in one section of the Canadian Naval Fleet Operations is that if anyone feels the group is starting to engage in groupthink that person makes a reference to “The Borgs” taking over. At that point, everyone has a good laugh, and is then more able to look at the problem from different perspectives, and subsequently, develop more varied alternatives to the problem. (The “Borgs” are an alien race from the science fiction television program -- Star Trek: The Next Generation. The “Borgs” operate as a network of beings that share their intelligence in one mind called “The Collective.” “Borgs” work to assimilate all other beings into their network, at which point, all those assimilated lose all individual freedom to act.)

5) Maintain A Balanced Power Structure

We found that managers who believed that their team’s decision-making process is fair are more likely to accept decisions without resentment, even when they do not agree with them. But when they believe the process is unfair, ill will easily grows into interpersonal conflict. [Eisenhardt goes on to state that] ... autocratic leaders who manage through highly centralized power structures often generate high levels of interpersonal friction. At the other extreme, weak leaders also engender interpersonal conflict because the power vacuum at the top encourages managers to jockey for positions. Interpersonal conflict is lowest in what we call balanced power structures, those in which the CEO is more powerful than the other members of the top-management team, but the members do wield substantial power, especially in their own well-defined areas of responsibility. In

balanced power structures, all executives participate in strategic decisions (Eisenhardt et al. 1997).

By reading the account of Apollo 13 in Michael Useem's book, or by observing the portrayal of Eugene Kranz in the film, we can see this effective power structure in action. We can also observe it in other effective organizations, and work to build it in our own organizations. There is, however, one more factor that we must look at to complete the model, and it is to that factor, qualified consensus, that we turn our attention to next.

6) Resolve Issues Via Qualified Consensus

Qualified consensus means that consensus is the "preferred" method of conflict resolution, up to a certain point. After that point, those most responsible, make a decision, rather than letting the process take so long that opportunities are missed and money and/or other resources are lost.

People usually associate consensus with harmony, but we found the opposite: teams that insisted on resolving substantive conflict by forcing consensus tended to display the most interpersonal conflict. Executives sometimes have the unrealistic view that consensus is always possible, but such a naïve insistence on consensus can lead to endless haggling. As a vice president of engineering at Mega Software put it, "Consensus means that everyone has veto power. Our products were too late, and they were too expensive" (Eisenhardt et al. 1977).

At this point in the drama the crippled Apollo 13, with the help of the moon's gravitational force was heading back to earth. The astronauts hadn't slept for twenty-four hours and were long overdue for their six-hour rest period. The rest period would also mean that the crew would be utilizing less of the mission's critical remaining oxygen supply. Lastly, the crew would have to be fully alert during the critical re-entry maneuvers, so a well rested crew was imperative. On the other hand, other members of mission control were strongly advocating an immediate PTC (Passive Thermal Control) roll. They felt strongly that the PTC roll was necessary because one side of the Apollo 13 had been pointing toward the sun and one side had been pointing out toward space for a prolonged period of time. If they didn't do something soon, they would, "freeze half their systems and cook the other half." Others, however, contended that the remaining power on Apollo 13 was so limited, that they needed to husband all of their electricity for re-entry. Therefore, they could not afford to use the power necessary to execute the PTC roll.

The three-way argument escalated for several minutes, with each point and counterpoint more fiercely asserted than the last. Kranz said little throughout, mainly listening to what his three superiors had to say. Finally, he held up his hand, and they stopped speaking.

"Gentlemen," Kranz said, "I thank you for your input." The discussion was over, his decision made: "The next job for this crew will be to execute a thermal roll.

After that, they will power down their spacecraft. And finally, they will get some sleep. A tired crew can get over their fatigue, but if we damage this ship any further, we're not going to get over that."

Effective decision making also requires adjudication of conflicting claims. Kranz did not avoid this task even when all the claims were meritorious and all were coming from above.... The fact that two of his three bosses, including his mentor, had vigorously urged against his chosen course slowed him not in the least. "Firmness at the helm," he recalls, "was the only thing that was going to get us through it" (Useem, 1998, pg. 86).

I have been studying capable leaders, effective decision-makers, and those who resolve conflicts creatively, for many years. The model that was developed by Kathleen Eisenhardt and her colleagues is the best decision making models I have seen. If it is true that good theory leads to good practice, and good practice leads to better theory, then the model which is presented in this newsletter can help all of us and all of our organizations build a future with more optimal solutions in the fastest time possible.

REFERENCES

Eisenhardt, Kathleen, Kahwajy, Jean, & Bourgeois, L.J. (July-August, 1997). "How management teams can have a good fight." Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Business Review.

Useem, Michael. (1998). The leadership moment: Nine true stories of triumph and disaster and their lessons for us all. N.Y. Random House.

The Master Negotiator's Preparation Form™

Interests	
My Interests	Their Interests
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.

The Prize: The Ultimate Outcome from the Negotiation	
My Prize	Their Prize

Options for Creative Solutions	
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

Standards/Objective Criteria (Objective standards or objective criteria help the parties look at the negotiation much more objectively and make it easier to reach an agreement)	
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

BATNA (Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement)	
Our BATNA	Their BATNA

WATNA (Worst Agreement To a Negotiated Agreement)

Leverage	
Our Leverage	Their Leverage

Possible Trade Offs/Concessions	
Our Trade Offs/Concessions	Their Trade Offs/Concessions

Type of relationship I would like to have during and after the negotiation

Negotiation Style	
Our Negotiation Style	Their Negotiation Style

My Opening Statement (should be short and to the point)

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The Seven Strategies of Master Negotiators

I would be interested in receiving additional information from Brad:

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Please fill in completely or fill in name and leave your business card.

Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

Position: _____

Company Name: _____

Email Address: _____

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My overall evaluation of the presentation content was:

Poor						Excellent
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please list one specific thing you learned from this presentation:

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THANK YOU