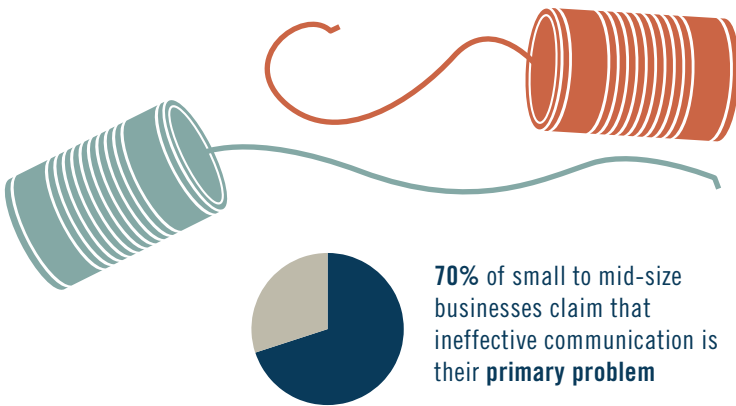# COMMUNICATION & CONFLICT

How to Build a Stronger Team

SHARED THOUGHTS FOR TURNING VISION INTO ACTION

"Don't communicate to be understood; rather, communicate so as not to be misunderstood."

John Lund

No matter what type of business you're in, productive communication is crucial. When employees communicate well, leaders are able to focus on strategic decision making and development of organizational capabilities. When conflict disrupts communication, leaders can find themselves refereeing low level issues and the organization as a whole loses focus. Communication issues have the potential to decrease employee morale, limit your team's ability to reach goals, and derail projects.

70% of small to mid-size businesses claim that ineffective communication is their **primary problem**

(source: SIS International Research)

Communication issues aren't just annoying; they're also costly. A business with 100 employees spends an average downtime of 17 hours a week clarifying communication. This translates to an annual cost of $528,443! Addressing poor communication practices can help your team minimize conflict and stay productive.

TEAM DYNAMICS

Great team communication must be engaging, motivating and authentic. In any team, it's natural for some conflict to occur. This tends to happen in the "storming" stage of group development, which often takes place when teams

are newly established or when new members are added to an existing team. With the help of good communication practices, this type of early conflict can be productive.

4 STAGES OF TEAM DEVELOPMENT

FORMING   **STORMING**

NORMING   **PERFORMING**

The current business climate frequently results in individuals being on many different teams simultaneously; regular assessment and review of the team dynamics, motivation and teamwork is required. The danger comes when teams don't communicate effectively and have difficulty moving beyond the "storming" stage. Communication problems can also hinder established teams. When unresolved conflict influences a group's normal pattern of interaction, the "performing" stage usually remains out of reach.

For any team to achieve and sustain a high level of performance, they must be able to identify the sources of their conflicts and interact productively to resolve issues.

3 SOURCES OF CONFLICT

Although there are many different reasons conflict can occur, it can help to categorize conflict as being related to tasks, processes, or relationships.

Task conflict is a disagreement about the results of a task or which task to accomplish. As long as issues of ego, intentions, and personal evaluations

are left out, this type of conflict can be very productive when addressed through communication.

Process conflict is a disagreement over the "how": the rules, norms and procedures the group uses to conduct its task. Process conflict plays a key role in determining how a group will work together, and its resolution is part of a group's norming phase. If not addressed productively, it can pose a risk to the group's ability to perform.

Relationship conflict is a disagreement over the value of people, their intentions, and their contributions. Relationship conflict is usually unproductive and can permanently hurt relationships unless handled exceptionally well within the right structure.

Conflicts that occur on the individual or interpersonal level can lead to miscommunication and group conflicts. Personal conflict can happen when an individual's natural talents do not match their assigned tasks, their boss's expectations, or their role in a group. Interpersonal conflict can occur when two or more people have a difference in beliefs or values, a difference in social styles, or contradictory understandings of a task.

TIPS FOR PRODUCTIVE COMMUNICATION

These tips for productive communication can help members of your team reduce the occurrence of conflict at any level and resolve conflicts when they arise.

Build trust. As the saying goes, people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. Encourage members of your team to build trust by making an effort to connect with each other personally and professionally.

Communicate openly and honestly. Consistent, open communication helps teams build trust; sharing information helps reduce misunderstandings. When conflict occurs, acknowledging that it exists is the first step toward resolving it.

Clarify concerns. Encourage team members to articulate the facts of the situation, their own judgments and feelings, and the outcome they desire. This helps illuminate the type of conflict and focus attention on the specific issue that needs to be resolved.

Listen and acknowledge. When discussions become heated, people tend to hear only themselves. Have team members listen to one another and repeat back what they heard to confirm they properly understand the issue before responding.

Focus on the goal. While every person on your team comes from a unique background and set of perspectives, they share common ground as members of your organization. Communicating about differences in the context of how an issue impacts the team's shared vision can help guide resolution.

SUMMARY

Productive communication is essential to good teamwork. When your team is able to communicate effectively, they can resolve conflict at the lowest level and work together more efficiently. This gives you, as a leader, the freedom to stay focused on the bigger picture.

Often, it can be difficult for members of a team to objectively evaluate their communication practices or to identify the underlying causes of conflict, particularly if the team has been working together for an extended period of time. That's where a partner like Applied Vision Works can help. We're more than consultants; we're guides who offer practical advice and consistent mentorship.

We help you and your team overcome hurdles, drive the markets you are in, and become the best you can possibly be. If you and your team are ready to achieve results that are even greater than you thought possible, give us a call.

APPLIED VISION WORKS
One Vision. One Voice. Unlimited Success.

AVW are guides who partner with leaders and teams with heart for the long term. With our programs, leaders and teams can experience a better quality of life, build stronger organizations, and achieve greater results. Our clients run organizations ranging from $10 million to $5 billion in gross revenue.