

The Relationship Between Planning, Performance and Conflict

In the 1987 *Wall Street* movie, the character Gordon Gecko proclaimed, “greed is good.” While I am not a corporate raider but rather a behaviorist and organization builder, I will borrow from Gecko’s speech by positing: **“The point is, ladies and gentleman, that conflict, for lack of a better word, is good. Conflict is right, conflict works.”** I will pause while your nervous system adjusts. Why would you want *more* conflict?! Whether in the boardroom, backroom, or bedroom, conflict is not only essential in a healthy relationship, it brings at least five goods when managed productively!

Conflict is particularly valuable in the C-suite and should be nurtured as part of your organizational culture. As I write this, the Fortune 500 are completing their 2026 business plans while most small and medium organizations haven’t started. The most successful leaders prepare now, so their people will be prepared. Yet smaller organizations lack effective planning systems, ignore conflicts and consequently fail to align priorities, strategies and timelines. This results in poor execution and missed goals simply because conflicts – the elephants in the room - were avoided.

Conflict is Essential for Excellence

Enhance Communication and Relationships: Healthy conflict encourages participants to actively listen, express their views clearly, and address underlying issues. This process can lead to a deeper understanding of others' perspectives and ultimately strengthen both personal and professional relationships.

Boost Creativity and Innovation: Debates and disagreements that focus on ideas rather than personalities can stimulate new ideas and perspectives. This open exchange of different viewpoints can lead to more innovative solutions to complex problems.

Improves Problem-Solving and Decision-Making: When diverse perspectives are shared, teams can consider a wider range of options and potential pitfalls before making a decision. This process ensures that decisions are more robust, well-rounded, and lead to better outcomes.

Promotes Personal and Professional Growth: Navigating conflict requires individuals to control their emotions, practice active listening, and develop assertiveness. These experiences provide valuable opportunities for personal development and learning how to effectively communicate and collaborate with others.

Builds Trust and Team Cohesion: When people feel psychologically safe expressing differing opinions without fear of judgment or retribution, it builds a stronger sense of

trust within the team. Successfully navigating these discussions can foster greater commitment and a unified approach to shared goals, leading to stronger teamwork.

Obstacles and Opportunities to Improve

Many aging organizational cultures struggle to create and maintain trust. Fewer still have an effective conflict resolution process when planning in the C-suite. When one or more leaders do not support a plan's objectives or strategies, but go along anyway, execution will suffer. 100% agreement is not necessary. Consensus is. Without commitment, the team struggles with accountability and goal achievement. HR does not create the culture and should never be the arbiter. Sure, bodies may still show up in the boardroom or office the next day. But, they are dead inside - like a zombie. Just still on your payroll!

Ironically, it is often the very good people on your team that are the biggest part of the problem. We all know bad players. 2022 Gallup polls suggest up to 18% of your workforce lies, cheats, is disengaged or sabotages mission. They are obvious. But silence can be as good as a lie. When the good people don't push back, won't confront their uncomfortableness, won't lead and instead act in fear of conflict and consequences, you have dysfunction. Keeping the peace leads to disconnection and resentment. Productivity falls, customer service languishes, relationships die and turnover increases.

With five generations in the workforce, we must begin to both plan and manage conflict differently. Latchkey Gen Xers are now in leadership roles. Millennials and Gen Z lean hard into "go along to get along" philosophy, until they don't. They are demanding alignment and purpose. They led the quiet quitting movement during Covid and the latest growing trend is "revenge quitting" and "resenteesim." We only have to look at the culture to understand what happens when the good men and women do nothing.

Ultimately, conflict is inevitable. The solution starts in the C-suite with your values, beliefs and actions demonstrating a healthy conflict culture. This is not the culture you have now, but one you need to create to attract, engage and retain a competitive workforce. Here's your litmus test. Where can my people easily observe our values each day in our company? What changes will I make this year starting with my planning process to encourage excellence? How will I handle conflicts differently in my organization?

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