Leading Through Team Conflict

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Disclosure

I have no conflicts of interest to disclose.
Surgical “Teams”
Surgeon OR Conflict Management

• Effective conflict management is leadership sustained through a challenging circumstance.

• There are some distinctive features of operating rooms that make conflict management there quite challenging.
Stable Team Conflict

- Complexity perspective
- Separation perspective

Notes on Surgeons in Conflict

“Physicians tend to be very temperamental and surgeons even more so. With a surgeon, they get upset with you and walk out.”

Excellent singers and story-tellers but with a propensity for violence
Presentation Objectives

• Define intra-team (interpersonal) conflict
• Describe possible conflict sources, responses and associated outcomes
• Describe a leadership approach for preventing and managing team conflict
What is Conflict?

"Conflict is a process of social interaction involving a struggle over claims to resources, power, status, beliefs, and other preferences or desires."

The Conflict “Dance”

Source

Response

Outcomes
Conflict Source Types

• Task
• Process
• Relationship

Task-related Conflict

Disagreement among team members about the content and outcomes of the task being performed
Process-related Conflict

Disagreement about logistical issues of task accomplishment
Relationship-related Conflict

Disagreement about personal issues outside the task
Relationship Conflict

“….can cause extreme negative process problems...deplete negative energy that could have been expended toward task completion.”

Responses to Conflict

• Forcing
• Smoothing
• Avoidance
• Compromise
• Problem-solving
## Outcomes

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<th>Task</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
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<tr>
<td>Problem-solving</td>
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<td>Forcing</td>
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<td>Avoidance</td>
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Conflict Transformation
Processes That Promote Relationship Conflict

• Displays of strong negative emotions
• Forceful (or harsh) responses
• Attribution or misattribution
Stable Team Conflict Management
Recommendations for Surgeon Leaders

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<td>Operation</td>
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<td>Reflect and recovery</td>
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Pre-Conflict Planning

• Anticipate when conflict will occur
• Create trust
• Develop guiding coalitions
Anticipating Conflict

“There is a good reason for the old saying, ‘It is easier to move a graveyard than change a curriculum,’ for changing a curriculum is a highly political process.”

Being Trustworthy

• Ability
• Beneficence
• Integrity

Creating a Guiding Coalition

Negotiation

• Identify your own interests
• Identify the other interest of the other party
• Identify your possible positions
• Identify the position of the other party
• Seek to satisfy all interests

Execution

- Analyze the situation
- Avoid creating relationship conflict
- Actively negotiate
- Manage the tension
Multi-Party Negotiation
Manage the Tension
Reflect and Recover

• Review your leadership performance
• Seek feedback from others
• Apologize when appropriate
Apologizing 101

• Acknowledge your action and the consequences (without excuse or explanation)
• Promise not to engage in that behavior again

Summary

• Understand that conflict occurs in every team
• Plan for situations where conflict is likely to occur
• Actively manage team conflict when it does occur
• Use each instance as an opportunity for leadership development