

# 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



Rogers DA, Lingard L, Boehler M, et. al. Teaching operating room conflict management to surgeons: clarifying the optimal approach. Med Educ 2012;45:940-6.

# 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.”

Kressel K, Kennedy CA, Lev E, et. al. Managing conflict in an urban health care setting: what do "experts" know? J Health Care Law Policy 2002;5:364-446.



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

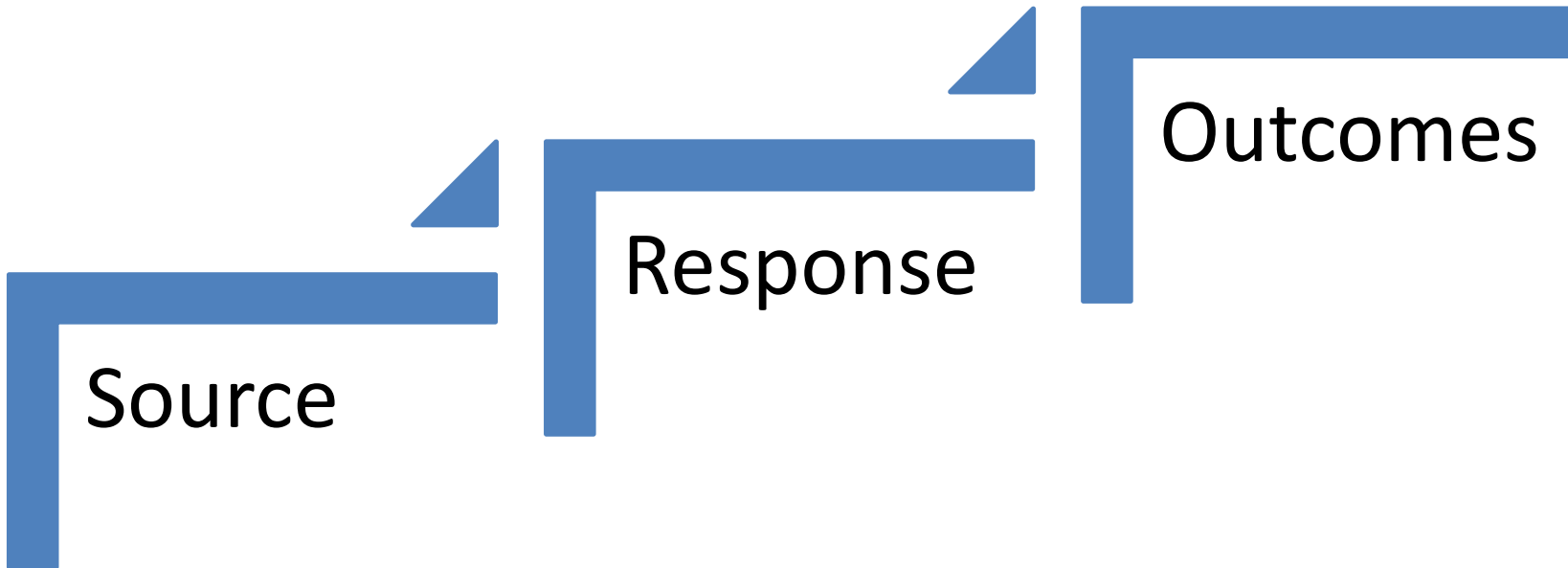


# What is Conflict?

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

Rahim MA. (2001). *Managing Conflict in Organizations*. Third Ed. Westport: Quorum Books.

# The Conflict “Dance”



# Conflict Source Types

- Task
- Process
- Relationship

Greer LL, Saygi O, Aldering H, et. al. Conflict in medical teams: opportunity or danger? Med Educ 2012; 46: 935–42.

# 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.”

Jehn KA. Conflict Diversity, and Faultlines in Workgroups. In: DeDreu DW, Gelfand MJ. (2008). The Psychology of Conflict and Conflict Management in Organizations. Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc.

# Responses to Conflict

- Forcing
- Smoothing
- Avoidance
- Compromise
- Problem-solving



# Outcomes

	Task	Relationship
Problem-solving	+	+
Forcing	+	-
Compromise	+/-	+/-
Smoothing	-	+
Avoidance	-	-

# 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

## Surgical Stages

Preoperative planning

Operation

Reflect and recovery

# 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.”

Bland CJ, Starnaman S, Wersal L, Moorhead-Rosenberg L, Zonia S, Henry R.  
Curricular change in medical schools: how to succeed. *Acad Med* 2000;75:575-94.

# Being Trustworthy

- Ability
- Beneficence
- Integrity

Mayer RC, Davis JH, Schoorman FD. An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust. Acad Manag Rev 1995;20:709-34.

# Creating a Guiding Coalition



Kotter JP. John P. Kotter on What Leaders Really Do. Harvard Business Review Press; Boston, MA, 1999.



# 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

Fisher, R., Ury, W. and Patton, B., 1987. Getting to yes. Simon & Schuster Sound Ideas.

# 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

Simons T. (2008) The Integrity Dividend. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

# 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