

# NEWSLETTER

Welcome to our latest Newsletter designed to keep you up to date with our current activities.

April 2002

## Introduction

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There has been quite a gap since our last newsletter. The pressure to run an increased number of events has left little time to put pen to paper. In the last year we have carried out significant projects for Glaxo-SmithKline in India as well as working here in the UK with more and more consultants, managers and change agents who want to work in a more client-centred way.

Besides running events for consultants, we continue to apply the principles of client-centredness to a variety of leadership, team development, conflict management, and collaborative negotiation programmes. We have also been

involved in a number of individual coaching assignments. If you would like further information call Bill Evans on 01491 579949 or e.mail: omcbill@aol.com.

One of the elements of our work which continues to strike a chord with many people is "managing conflict and disagreement". We find the "Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument" to be a very powerful tool for helping people understand their own preferred conflict management style. We decided to use this edition of the newsletter to summarise some practical strategies for managing conflict collaboratively.

## Creative Collaboration

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Equating conflict with contest is a myth we have been perpetuating for centuries. Consequently we have come to associate conflict with strife, struggle, argument, hurt feelings and anger. It is no wonder that most people see conflict as something negative, to be avoided.

Yet disagreement and difference (conflict) is an ongoing part of all our working and personal lives. Rather than seeing conflict as something negative, to be avoided, perhaps we should see it as simply inevitable, indeed something to be welcomed. To achieve synergistic solutions, a variety of different points of view, ideas and approaches are needed.

Conflict can be defined as any difference between two or more people and as such is neither positive or negative. It is neutral. It is only when we decide to deal with and manage that conflict that it can have positive or negative outcomes. If we manage disagreement intent on winning and losing there are likely to be negative outcomes, - anger, frustration, defeat etc. However it is possible to manage the disagreement in such a way that people are able to learn, develop trust, move on and make creative, effective decisions.

If we manage conflict and difference as a contest there are four possible ways of dealing with it:

**Competing**, going in with all guns blazing, scoring points, putting down your opponent and winning arguments. This is a win-lose strategy and the *competitor* is determined to be the winner. There may be times when

this is appropriate but it can have significant costs in terms of future relationships.

**Accommodating**, giving in, smoothing over and letting the other person have their way. The assumption here is that rather than getting involved in a fight it is better to keep everybody happy and preserve relationships. *Accommodators* still see conflict in terms of winning and losing but it is better to lose than engage in uncomfortable combat.

**Avoiding** the issue and pretending there isn't any conflict and so ensuring you don't experience any feelings of angst and discomfort. Unfortunately you also ensure that nothing gets resolved, no-one gets their needs met and there is a lose-lose outcome.

The obvious alternative to the above strategies is the old fashioned *compromise* which gives both people at least some of what they want, though both sacrifice part of their

### THE NATURE OF CONFLICT

*Conflict is natural; neither positive nor negative, it just is.*

*Conflict is just an interference pattern of energies. Nature uses conflict as its primary motivator for change, creating beautiful beaches, canyons, mountains, and pearls.*

*It's not whether you have conflict in your life. It's what you do with that conflict that makes a difference. Conflict is not a Contest.*

*Winning and losing are goals for games, not for conflicts.*

*Learning, growing, and co-operating are goals for resolving conflicts.*

*Conflict can be seen as a gift of energy, in which neither side loses and a new dance is created.*

*Resolving conflict is rarely about who is right. It is about acknowledgement and appreciation of differences.*

*Conflict begins within. As we unhitch the burden of belief systems and heighten our perceptions, we love more fully and freely.*

**Thomas Crum - The Magic of Conflict**

goals. Often this is the best possible strategy. When buying and selling, for example, it may be necessary to 'split the difference' on price.

While compromise may offer the best solution in some conflicts, it's important to realise that both people in dispute can often work together to find much better solutions. However, to reach a *collaborative* decision it may often be necessary for there to be a significant shift in mind set. We need to believe that it is possible to reach a genuine win-win decision. This is not easy for people who are firmly entrenched in a win-lose view of conflict as contest. In any situation where you care about both the outcome and the relationship, collaboration is the optimal style. It will take energy, co-operation and time, but the results will lead to greater satisfaction and success.

The following is a list of collaboration-building techniques to help you create a framework for successful conflict management.

1. ***Insist on a collaborative process before discussion of solutions.*** If the other person presses you for a commitment before engaging in open information sharing and joint problem solving efforts, re-focus the process. Explain that you are not ready to consider offers or close a negotiation until you've had a chance to co-operate with him or her in exploring the problem more carefully.
2. ***Make sure that feelings are dealt with.*** This means exploring and listening to the other person's feelings but make sure you do so non-aggressively.
3. ***Reassure the other person that you are on the same side*** and want to find a decision to which you are both committed.
4. ***Make sure the other person shares his or her needs and objectives.*** Understanding each other's needs and objectives is essential to successful collaboration.
5. ***Express your own needs and wants,*** without making demands.
6. ***Take a creative problem-solving approach.*** When you get the other person to agree to collaborate, remember that you need to work together to understand the problem better, and then to generate creative alternatives. Only when you have some real insights

into the problem and some better alternatives should you switch gears.

7. ***Check out how everyone feels when the final decision is made.*** If anyone feels dissatisfied or uncommitted, unlistened to or frustrated, you probably haven't reached a genuinely collaborative solution.

■ **If you would like more information on Conflict Management Programmes, or about the Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, or if you would like a copy of the original, longer version of this article please call or email us at [omcbill@aol.com](mailto:omcbill@aol.com).**

## **Client-Centred Consulting - Public Programmes 2002 (5 days)**

A Client-Centred Approach to  
Managing Change  
Witney Four Pillars Hotel - Oxford

**22nd - 26th April**

**22nd - 26th July**

**14th - 18th October**

Course Fees £2000 + VAT. This includes full residential accommodation (Monday to Friday), a personal pre-course briefing, tuition and all workshop materials.

**For further information call Bill Evans on 01491 579949 or email: [omcbill@aol.com](mailto:omcbill@aol.com).**

## **CONSULTING SKILLS INTENSIVE - 3 DAYS**

- For people who simply haven't the time to do the 5 day programme.
- For people who have done Client-Centred Consulting and who want to take their skills to a new level.

*Run by Bill Evans, co-author of Consulting for Real People, this programme is an opportunity to:*

- Work in a small group of 3 or 4 people.
- Maximise skills practise with an individual client.
- Receive individual feedback and coaching on your consulting skills and styles.
- Work as a client on a significant work-based consulting issue.

**For More Details Call Bill Evans on 01491 579949 or email [omcbill@aol.com](mailto:omcbill@aol.com).**