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Conflict in Crisis Management

Conflict automatically stimulates our freeze-fight-flight adrenal response, and in doing so neutralises our capacity to resolve it. In an adrenalized state, corporate decision makers cannot easily find the clarity and calm purposefulness successful conflict resolution requires. Instead, they instinctively unleash unhelpful behaviours to tackle the problem: tunnel vision, an inability to make decisions without detailed information, confirmation bias, or that curious but common phenomenon of unconsciously mistaking assumptions for facts.

Executives in crisis situations default to their preferred conflict modes regardless of their effectiveness or relevance to the situation in hand. They will either: compete and pursue a win/lose strategy to the detriment of the group; avoid conflict altogether and fail to deal with the inevitable fall out; or attempt to collaborate with a lengthy search for consensus where none exists.

Marry those unhelpful behaviours to default conflict modes in the context of an externally imposed crisis and watch the cracks appear. Ideally any group will bond in the face of a common enemy. But more commonly, the group in crisis splits into either a factional or groupthink mentality. A typical factional mentality is exemplified by a communicator wishing to get the corporate message out fast, while the legal eagle spokes their wheels in an attempt to avoid liability. Groupthink can be found anywhere there is a charismatic (or just forceful) CEO surrounded by an echo-chamber of career conscious executives keen to stay on-message. A factional mentality lacks unity or cohesion but groupthink lacks integrity. So what's the solution?

It begins with awareness. People need to understand not only their own, but others' tendencies and behaviours under pressure. *ConflictBox* uses analysis from psychometric instruments to shine a light on these. The impartiality of this scientific approach de-personalises conflict, helping the team to move away from their individual biases toward a more common purpose. This is realised by aligning objectives to the values of the organisation, not the values of any one person or faction within it.

ConflictBox uses a range of methodologies to achieve this: DeBono's *Six Thinking Hats*, a proven parallel thinking system used by organisations internationally, helps to reduce adversarial thinking and encourage clearer idea development. Another proven tool, *Focus Board*, is employed by military, government, intelligence and corporate crisis managers the world over to enable collective decision-making. These and other road-tested processes encourage individuals to stop taking conflict personally. Once those unhelpful adrenal responses have been neutralised, teams are easily persuaded to work with common purpose. And quickly. There is a solution.

07825571645

facilitator@conflictbox.com