

## Module 4 Group Discussion

### Conflict: Destructive or Constructive?

The field of organizational development has evolved to recognize that conflict often plays a functional role in an organization and may even be beneficial in some situations. However, we all have experienced situations when conflict has derailed an activity or decreased an organization's effectiveness.

- 1) Break into two groups, each discussing one perspective on conflict.

Group 1: Discuss the potential benefits of accepting—even provoking—conflict. Use the following assertions as a starting point for brainstorming:

- *Conflict is a means by which to bring about radical change.*
- *Conflict facilitates group cohesiveness.*
- *Conflict improves group and organizational effectiveness (e.g., begets innovation, teamwork, etc.).*
- *Conflict brings about a slightly higher, more constructive level of tension (e.g., providing motivation).*

Group 2: Discuss the disadvantages of conflict. Use the following assertions as a starting point for brainstorming:

- *The negative consequences from conflict can be devastating (e.g., poor relationships, decreased morale, inefficiencies).*
- *Effective managers build teamwork, and conflict works against teamwork.*
- *Competition is good for an organization, but not conflict.*
- *People who accept and stimulate conflict don't survive in organizations.*

- 2) Bring the groups back together. Present the main points from each group's discussion. What is the group's conclusion—is conflict destructive or constructive? Is your answer different for conflict **within** an organization, program, or team, and conflict **between** organizations, programs, or teams?

*This exercise is adapted from Stephen P. Robbins, Organizational Behavior, Prentice-Hall, 1998, pp. 467-8. Text in italics is a direct quote.*