Organizational Behavior Article

“Make Your Enemies Your Allies” and “Why We Fight at Work”

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**Summary**

Workplace rivalries are nothing new in the business world. Whether through disliking the other’s personality or competition for an upcoming promotion, people are bound to have at least one business rival during their working life. From an organizational perspective, these rivalries are detrimental to the workplace environment. It is better for the organization’s environment that these rivalries transition to allies instead. However, this process is difficult. Brian Uzzi and Shannon Dunlap, in the Harvard Business Review, share one method of making your enemies your allies (2012). They briefly examine some causes of workplace rivalries, and then create the 3Rs as a method for alleviating these rivalries.The 3Rs are redirection, reciprocity, and rationality.

**Cause of Rivalry**

 According to the article, the base of all relationships is trust. Trust is influenced from both reason and emotions. Therefore, if someone carries negative emotions towards another, this influences how they trust that person. This manifests itself most evidently in rivalries, and why reason will not always work to fix a rivalry. The authors describe how many executives will attempt to fix rivalry through reason and facts, but this approach will not work if the cause is emotional (Uzzi & Dunlap, 2012). The case study used for this article is from Xerox, examining the tense relationship between John Clendenin and Tom Gunning. Clendenin received a promotion that Gunning felt he should have received, and this creates negative emotions from Gunning towards Clendenin. The 3Rs are derived from Clendenin’s response to Gunning and attempting to turn his rival into an ally.

**Redirection**

The main goal of redirection is to redirect all negative emotions away from the other person. To accomplish this, Clendenin took Gunning out to lunch for a one-on-one meeting. The article highlights that Clendening took Gunning out to lunch instead of meeting him in his office. Meeting in the office would only remind Gunning of the promotion he did not receive, and taking Gunning out to a place he likes to eat demonstrates that Clendening values Gunning (Uzzi & Dunlap, 2012). The next step is then to redirect the negative emotions once in this meeting. Clendening leads off the meeting by stating that a third party was responsible for their current position because Xerox is the one who made the decision, not either of the men. Despite its transparency, these statements of redirection are still effective. The article compares this to stage magic, in that the audience knows there is redirection but they still accept and appreciate it. Redirecting these negative emotions leads right into the next step, reciprocity.

**Reciprocity**

The basic principle of reciprocity is to give something of value to the other person without asking for something in return. Not asking for something in return is important, as otherwise it becomes a transaction and not the start of a relationship. In the case study, Clendenin offered to support Gunning’s future advancements and leadership development. Clendenin made this concrete by offering Gunning the ability to attend the next few executive-level meetings. This further cements that Gunning carries value to Clendenin, and provides future opportunities for positive contact. Additionally, this specific gift would allow them to work together during these meetings, which would help establish a mutually beneficial relationship. Both workers are talented and will benefit from becoming allies after this rivalry has been eliminated. After this initial redirection and reciprocation, it is time for the third and final step, rationality.

**Rationality**

 The third step is a to be rational and sincere going forward into the relationship. It must be clear that the other person is a valuable, but not indispensable, ally. Clendenin gave Gunning a choice of whether to accept the offer, but made it clear that it was not specifically Gunning that Clendening needed. If the rival is made to believe that they are the only choice, then two possible scenarios occur. The rival can accept the offer only because they think they are the only option, and this results in an insincere cooperation. The other possibility is that the rival accepts the offer and uses their position as leverage in future. The rivalry would still exist and now one person would be being taken advantage of. For the case study, making the offer a choice means that there will be loss if the rival denies the offer. This makes the offer more appealing, as many business people want to avoid loss whenever possible.

**Compare and Contrast**

 In dealing with workplace rivalries, it is useful to examine the root causes of why people fight at work in the first place. In the Harvard Business Review, Annie McKee states that the main causes of workplace conflict are: “personal insecurity, the desire for power and control, and habitual victimhood” (2014). Personal insecurity is negative behavior that results from insecurity, such as lashing out or avoiding constructive criticism. As with trust in the other article, this shows an interaction between emotions and reason. From a logical perspective, healthy debate and constructive criticism are almost always welcome. However, emotions and insecurity can affect the perception of these activities. This extends to emotions towards another person, like how someone is less likely to accept constructive criticism from someone who they hold negative emotions towards.

In interacting with coworkers, a desire for power is also often a source of conflict. This means wanting a position above others, as opposed to simply working with others. A desire for power is the root cause of the Xerox case study in the previous article. This is one of the main weakness of that article, in that the 3Rs only work for rivalries caused by a desire for power. Conflict that originates from personal insecurity or habitual victimhood cannot be addressed as effectively with the 3Rs method. Some of the principles, such as rational relationships and valuing the other person, can be applied to most conflict situations, but the 3Rs method cannot be followed verbatim for every kind of conflict. The final source of conflict is habitual victimhood. Habitual victimhood is consistently denying any control over the situation and complaining in different scenarios. An example is one person complaining constantly about how a coworker gets away with something all the time, but denying that they can do anything about it (McKee, 2014). Habitual victimhood means denying control, always having an excuse, and not being held accountable as a result.

**Conclusion**

Workplace conflict is a pervasive issue in the business world. Addressing these conflicts is key to creating a healthy organizational environment. Conflicts can develop from personal insecurity, a desire for power, and habitual victimhood. Rivalries typically develop from this desire for power and control. For rivalries, the 3Rs method can be used to redirect negative emotions, reciprocate something of value, and create a rational relationship between people who were once rivals. The interaction of emotions and reason is the underlying component in all conflict types. For leadership, knowing when the problem is emotion or reason based is essential to efficient conflict resolution. Both articles are well-structured guides to workplace conflict and resolution that are useful in different situations.

References

McKee, A. (2014, June 13). Why We Fight at Work. Retrieved May 01, 2017, from https://hbr.org/2014/06/why-we-fight-at-work

Uzzi, B., & Dunlap, S. (2012, May). Make Your Enemies Your Allies. Retrieved May 01, 2017, from https://hbr.org/2012/05/make-your-enemies-your-allies