

## **PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that companies lose \$3 billion a year due to conflict in the workplace. Workplace conflict decreases productivity and satisfaction due to an increase in stress and anxiety amongst employees. Employees will feel defeated and demeaned which lowers employee moral and increases employee turnover. Handled incorrectly, workplace conflict will foster a climate of mistrust, which hinders the teamwork and cooperation necessary to reach the goals outlined by the company.

The lack of teamwork between ABC Company maintenance employees and production supervisors has become a primary concern for company executives. A recent survey of maintenance personnel revealed that there is a division between maintenance employees and production supervisors. Furthermore, the surveyed personnel believe that company executives promote fear to ensure cooperation and increased production.

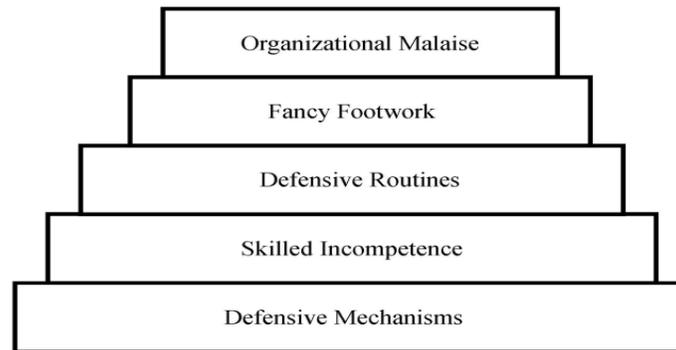
Fear can quickly spread and undermine the morale of the entire workforce. Fear is an emotion induced by a perceived threat which has a connection to the characteristics of a dysfunctional organization. The characteristics of a dysfunctional organization were first outlined by Chris Argyris (1990) who was a nationally recognized American business theorist.

### **Background Information**

Dysfunctional organizations exhibit several characteristics that are detrimental to its existence. There are five different levels of a dysfunctional organization. Figure 1 reveals that the foundation for the dysfunctional organization begins with each person's use of defense mechanisms for coping. Defense mechanisms are the unwritten rules an individual learns and utilizes to effectively deal with circumstances that are upsetting, embarrassing, or threatening. People respond to threats with resistance, defiance, rebellion, aggressive arguing, talking back, retaliation, getting even, sabotage, and even going over the leaders head by using others power to recruit allies with the intent of ganging up, and getting into physical fights. In the case of the ABC Company, the perception that fear is a controlling factor of the company's culture has prompted maintenance employees to go over the head of their manager in the company. In essence, these employees have developed defensive mechanisms that are counter productive to the goals of the company.

The second level is skilled incompetence, which is the outcome of the defense mechanisms we have internalized. When the defensive behaviors we've learned are transformed into a learned behavior, that behavior becomes a skill – albeit an incompetent skill – that we consider necessary in order to deal with issues that are embarrassing, threatening, or upsetting. A skill that is learned from the regular application of a defense mechanism has a high degree of incompetence embedded within it, because we are unaware of how this skill will impact our future. ABC Company employees have used skilled incompetence to developed behaviors that are consistent with their defensive mechanisms.

Figure 1.



Skilled incompetence transforms into a *defensive routine*. Defensive routines are the third level. When the skilled incompetence is automatically exhibited at all times, the behavior is now a defensive routine. One defensive routine that maintenance employees have developed is to supersede the authority of managers by seeking relief through other employees outside of the Pennsauken branch.

Defensive routines lead to *fancy footwork*. Fancy footwork is the fourth level. Fancy footwork happens when individuals try to deny the behavioral inconsistencies they exhibit, or else they place blame on other people, which results in distancing themselves from taking responsibility for their behavioral inconsistencies. When some ABC Company employees are confronted about the quality of the job that they are doing they respond by blaming others. In the case of maintenance employees, they have blamed other departments for their deficiencies.

Fancy footwork leads to *organizational malaise*. Organizational malaise is the final level. During this phase the individuals in the organization will seek to find fault within the organization rather than accept responsibility for their actions and correct their behavior accordingly. The individual continues the process by accentuating the negative and deemphasizing the positive in an effort to cover up their actions. The organizational malaise is further exacerbated by a refusal of one or all the members to discuss their area of responsibility. The perceived culture of fear at ABC Company has culminated in blaming two executives for the organizational deficiencies. Therefore, completing the cycle by effectively making any references to their productivity undiscussible by claiming that they exist in a culture of fear.

## Methodology

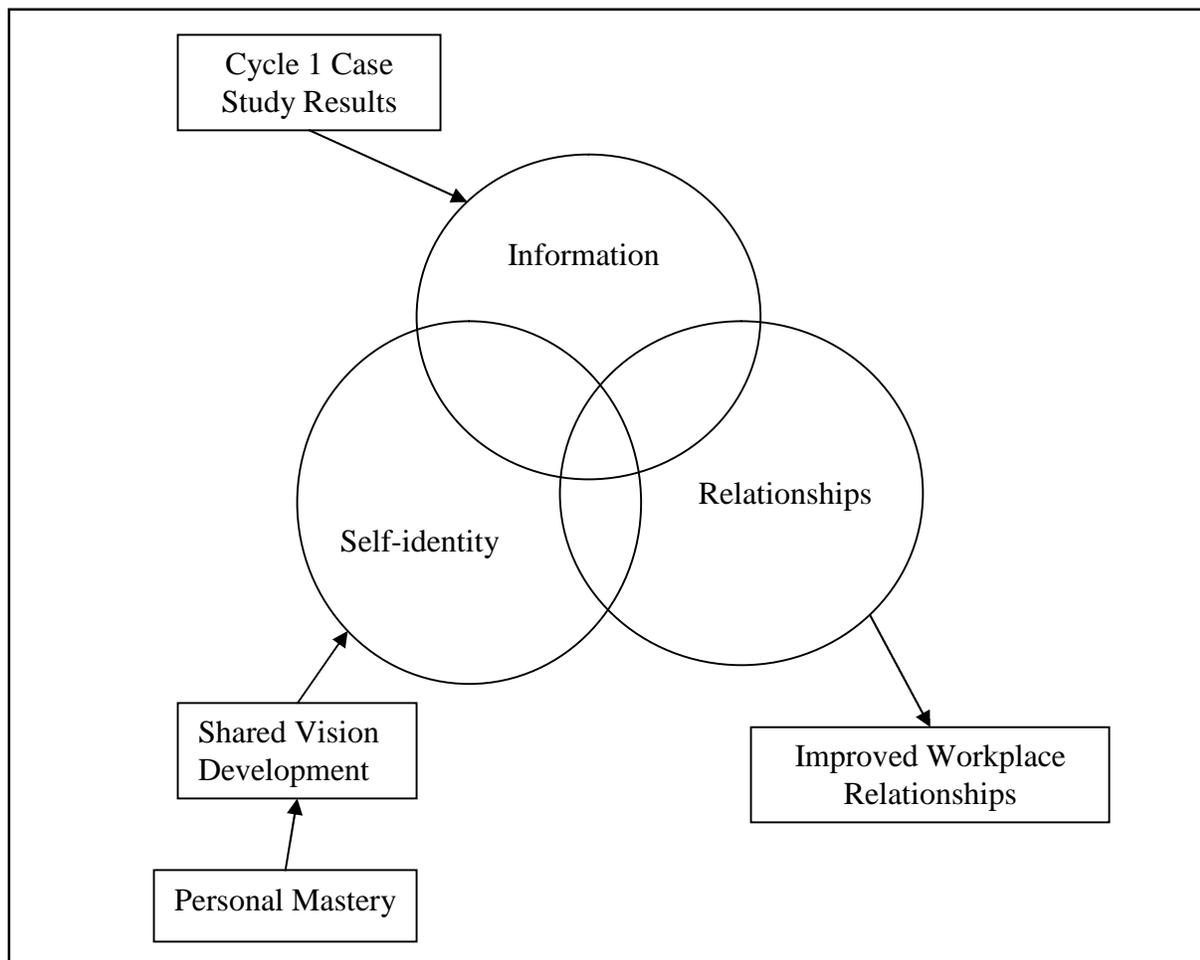
Overcoming the cycle of the dysfunctional characteristics associated with the perception of fear will require an enhancement of workplace relationships. Human beings are naturally social creatures who crave for friendships and positive interactions, just as they do food and water. So it makes sense that the better our relationships are at work, the happier and more productive they are going to be.

Good working relationships provide several other benefits. Work is more enjoyable when employees have good relationships with those around them. Employees are more likely to go

along with changes that executives want to implement. Establishing and maintaining good work relationships is the key to a positive workplace.

Margaret Wheatley (1999), a national management consultant who studies organizational behavior, developed the basic model for developing positive relationships. Dr. Campbell has enhanced the model to simplify and accelerate the process for promoting positive relationships. Figure 2 Self-knowledge model reveals that the central components are self-identity, information, and relationships.

Figure 2. Self-knowledge



The process for improving workplace relationships between maintenance employees and production supervisors at ABC Company begins with a case study. The case study will help to analyze the present condition of maintenance and production supervisor workplace relationships. The case study will include an qualitative and quantitative analysis.

The qualitative analysis will begin with interviews. I suggest interviewing twelve employees. The twelve employees should include three executive level managers, three maintenance

employees, three production supervisors, and three lay employees. In addition to interviews, I will need specific quantitative documents that pertain to maintenance employees and production supervisors. Once the case study analysis has been accomplished a determination the project should proceed into the second phase.

The second phase will begin with recruiting the project team. The project team should begin with one executive management level personnel, one maintenance supervisor from each shift, one production supervisor from each shift and one lay employee from each shift. It is important to recruit persons who desire to volunteer to become part of this project. A person who desires to volunteer will want the team to be successful and will not have a hidden agenda which could negatively impact the initiative to improve workplace relationships between maintenance employees and production supervisors. .

The next step is to define the parameters for self-identity. According to Wheatley (1999), people need to be connected to the fundamental identity of the organization or community. This process will begin with personal mastery. Personal mastery begins with developing a personal vision. The development of the personal vision will focus on improving maintenance employees and production supervisor workplace relationships. Afterwards, the team will develop a shared vision. The team members will need to be connected to a fundamental vision to ensure the success of the project and ensure that they stay on the target of improving the workplace relationships between maintenance employees and production supervisors. .

Next, the team members will need to be connected to new information. This new information was developed in the first phase in the format of a case study. The team will review this new information and develop an initial strategy for improving the workplace relationships between maintenance and production supervisors.

The final and third phase will include team meetings every other week to implement strategies that will improve maintenance employees and production supervisor relationships. The team members will agree on strategies, implement those strategies, and report their findings back to the team. After their reports, the team will decide if this strategy should be used through out the entire company. This phase will also includes the recruitment of "connectors", "mavens", and "sales persons" to ensure sustainability of the initiative within the company.

## **Measures of Success**

### ***Workplace Cultural Transformation***

- Do maintenance employees and production supervisors employees continue to believe that ABC Company fosters an environment of fear?

### ***Increased Employee Collaboration***

- Is there evidence that maintenance and production supervisors have increased collaboration?
- Is there evidence that other employees have increased collaboration?

### ***Improved Workplace Relationships***

- Is there evidence that maintenance and production supervisors have improved workplace relationships?
- Is there evidence that other employees have improved workplace relationships?

### ***Sustainability***

- Do other employees continue to believe that ABC Company fosters an environment of fear?
- Is there evidence that the new initiative will have a positive impact on ABC Company in the future?

### **Assessment Instruments**

- Employee Interviews
- Direct Observations
- Document Analysis
- Workplace Climate Survey