

Executive Summary of Research

Jim Tamm

This work has its roots at the State of California Public Employment Relations Board (PERB) where James Tamm was a senior Administrative Law Judge and former Regional Director for 25 years prior to becoming Managing Director of BCon WSA International. PERB is the state agency established to oversee dispute resolution among public employees. In the late 1980s, the staff at PERB sought to discover why some constituents were unable to maintain collaborative workplace environments. They surveyed over 6,000 constituents and discovered the more adversarial relationships lacked skills in **relationship building** and **conflict resolution**.

With funding provided by the State of California, and the Hewlett and Stuart Foundations, a very experiential and highly intensive training program was designed to build collaborative skills. Three studies reflect the dramatic success of the program.

This first study, conducted and published in 1991 by the Institute of Industrial Relations at the University of California, Berkeley¹ confirmed that transformations from ineffective, adversarial, non-trusting relationships into effective, cooperative and trusting working relationships were the norm, rather than the exception among participants. Some of the significant findings were:

- Prior to the training 70% of participants characterized their working relationship as adver-

sarial. After the training less than 1% said it was adversarial.

- Prior to the training 57% said their working relationship was unproductive. After the training 87% felt their working relationship was productive.
- Prior to the workshop, "a lack of mutual understanding" was the most cited characteristic of their labor-management relationship. After the training, "effective communication" became the most cited characteristic.
- Improvements were experienced in resolving conflicts and managing differences, with 89% of the participants reporting more effectiveness in this area after the training.
- Almost all the participants felt the workshops had a highly positive impact on both the process and the products of their working relationships.
- The study concluded that the beneficial results were not a momentary "honeymoon" response, but rather were sustainable gains.

In 1993 a second study was published on the impact of the training among the first 94 organiza-



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¹ *Analysis of Post Workshop Evaluation*, by Professor Clair Brown and Vince Valvano, January 15, 1991, Institute of Industrial Relations, University of California, Berkeley. This study is available through The Schutz Company, www.thehumanelement.com +1 866 302 2720.

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tions participating in the program². This research, co-authored by Judge Tamm and PERB Sacramento Regional Director Les Chisholm, studied information obtained from the State of California, which kept accurate data about all labor-management conflicts in California's almost 1,200 public school systems.

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The research documented an astonishing 85% reduction in the rate of disputes filed with the State among employers and unions which had participated in training three years earlier. Both the degree of the impact and the long lasting effect of the training were quite remarkable. Like the earlier University of California study, this research also concluded that the gains were sustainable over a long-term by the great majority of relationships.

In 1999, a third study was conducted on the impact of the program on open enrollment workshops. Professor Mayte Barba³ surveyed participants from

nine countries trained over a six-year period. Participants reported, on average, the following gains:

- A 49.5% increase in effectiveness at reducing their own defensiveness in conflicted situations.
- A 44.8% increase in effectiveness at getting their interests met in conflicted situations.
- A 31.5% increase in effectiveness at problem solving.
- A 26.4% increase in effectiveness at building and maintaining long-term climates of trust.

Like the two earlier studies, this one also concluded that the increases in effectiveness reported by participants were both substantial and sustainable over a long term. The training and research reported above makes it clear that collaboration skills can be learned quickly, and effectiveness can be dramatically improved in a short time. ■

2 Does Interest Bargaining Really Work? A Test Using PERB Data., Les Chisholm and James Tamm, 1993, California Public Employee Relations (CPER) Institute of Industrial Relations, University of California, Berkeley, August 1993, No. 101.

3 Professor Barba is currently Director of the Business Administration program at Universidad Tec de Monterrey in Cuernavaca, Mexico. Professor Barba's study Analysis of Beyond Conflict Post-Workshop Survey, 1999. Note that at the time of Professor Barba's study the Radical Collaboration program was titled *Beyond Conflict*.