

Managing conflicts in workplace teams

Conflict in the workplace can be identified as insults, lack of cooperation, bullying, anger, personality clashes and poor communication, and it is inevitable in an environment where employees come from different backgrounds, different work styles, a current political state of division and racial inequity. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development identified through a survey that four out of ten employees from the UK experienced in the year 2015 some form of interpersonal conflict at work. In another survey conducted by SHRM in 2020, 44% of HR professionals reported intensified political volatility at work. SHRM (2021) also identified that the leading causes of workplace conflict include differences in personalities, irritating behaviours, unmet needs, inequalities of resources, unclarified roles, poor implementation of job roles, mismanagement, poor communication, differences in goals and perspectives, certain circumstances such as mergers, acquisition, slowdowns and others. In order to solve these conflicts, the managers are responsible, and it is important to follow a correct approach and apply conflict resolution skills such as being proactive, observing the conflicts, being fair and impartial, stepping up when needed, avoiding assumptions and being patient (Mind Tools, 2021). The framework developed by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development identifies that the main steps that need to be followed when a conflict is identified include speaking to members individually without making assumptions, in a confidential way and asking each party the same questions, bringing people together, asking the wider team for ideas, drawing up a plan with actions for reconciliation and following up in order to ensure that the issues were adequately solved.

The first step in managing conflicts in the workplace is preparing for conflicts through creating a psychologically safe environment where employees feel safe to communicate task conflicts without creating emotional problems and allowing constructive controversy. Some of the most important steps include developing trust and cooperation between teams, teaching employees how to handle a difficult situation, developing norms for management in communication in a team and reducing the destructive impact of conflict (Sagepub, 2021). Although avoiding conflict in the workplace is preferable, some situations cannot be avoided or identified beforehand. The response to conflict is one of the essential steps in order to solve the

problem and avoid negative impacts on the company, the employees and the project. One of the most important steps in cultivating self-awareness to the physical and emotional reactions in the situation of a conflict. Some of the most common responses include avoiding the conflict by not dealing with the problem and accommodating one of the parties through compromise, collaboration and competition. Based on the nature of the conflict, the most used and effective response is a combination of compromise and collaboration through open-mindedness and perspective for a positive outcome. The main healthy sources of conflict are the focus on the task issues, the legitimate differences of opinion, the differences of values and perspectives, and the different expectations on the impact of decisions, while the unhealthy sources of conflict include the competition overpower or rewards, the conflict between different goals on an individual and team level, the poorly run meetings, the personal grudges and the faulty communications (Sagepub, 2021). In order to overcome conflict, the most important ways of dealing with it include attacking the problem and not the team member, focusing on what can be done instead of what cannot be done, listening to other people's points of view, showing respect for that point of view, solving the problems and building the relationship. To also create a positive change and become more productive, the managers need to spot the signs of the conflict, speak to people individually, focus on relationships, create a plan, follow up, invest in skill-building and avoid the conflict by creating a culture of expectation (Moberly, 2021).

In the workplace environment, some of the most common conflicts identified include the conflicts with the boss such as the employee being overlooked for a promotion, clashes in ideas, confidence in skills, micromanagement, or different priorities, the conflicts with colleagues such as unfair workloads, recognition, favouritism, egos, personal values or office politics, and the conflicts with direct reports such as assigning responsibilities, adaptation to the new situation, self-esteem, personal goals, values or needs (Employment Hero, 2021).

According to a journal article by Overton and Lowry (2013), various models of successful conflict management have been identified, the main themes and underlying principles of them all being that the management of conflict is extremely important and can have both negative and positive consequences, active management results into a more positive outcome rather than avoidance, conflict can be addressed through motivation, some of the most important skills to be acquired are behavioural, cognitive and emotional skills that require self-awareness, and the

environment must be safe and neutral. Wang and Wu (2020) suggested in their article that conventional approaches such as negotiation, arbitration and litigation were the most accepted and effective methods in order to solve conflicts in the workplace and influenced project performance, resource management, design optimisation, space management, and the overall objectives of the projects. On the other side, there is one benefit of conflict in teams in order to operate effectively, and this is cooperative conflict. Cooperative conflict can contribute to easier decision making and problem solving by motivating the employee to examine the situation or the problem. Conflict can also bring new and innovative ideas to the surface through bringing the differences of people and developing intensity and creativity. Another benefit of this type of conflict is free communication, better understanding and listening, openness, and a better connection between employees (Innovative Team Building, 2021).

The last step that will improve conflict management in the future is reflecting on the way the conflict was dealt with, the outcome of it and the conflict management skills that need to be developed further. An important step is asking for feedback from the team members involved and creating improvements such as setting clear goals for every team member, ensuring the responsibilities match the skills and using one on ones to avoid future conflicts (Mind Tools, 2021).

In conclusion, effective management of conflict in the workplace and between stakeholders overall can drastically reduce negative impacts such as stages of latency, feeling, perception, manifestation and aftermath, and it is currently considered one of the key competencies for managers, especially project managers. Although conflict is impossible to avoid when working with people from different backgrounds and nationalities, it is important to create an effective plan to deal with conflicts that may arise in the workplace in order to make sure that these situations will not affect the employees and will even create positive benefits for the teams and the company.

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