Conflict Resolution and Employee Relations in the Workplace

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Abstract

This report will establish practical strategies for resolving conflict in the workplace among subordinates to curb it from evolving into a damaging aspect of the work environment. In line with the scenario described, the report will investigate the source of the conflict, the different communication strategies to apply within the system, the other models for conflict management, and the diverse ways people react to conflict triggers. It will equate the various models to develop the most applicable guideline that best suits the conflict situation.

For a related case-based discussion, see workplace conflict and team performance.

Introduction

Conflict is diverse and has varied meanings depending on the conflict environment. Marsen (2006) describes conflict as a consequence of individuals or groups possessing incompatible goals. Conflict is the tangible or intangible scuffle related to the acuity of contrasting or mismatched objectives, needs, demands, and desires (McLean, 2005). It is common and naturally arises with differing benefits, insufficient resources, or intrusion, but it does not inevitably refer to the existing relationship between conflicting parties as necessarily destroyed. Regardless of the setting, every relationship must undergo periods of conflict and collaboration. How we handle these conflicts will either strengthen or destroy the relationship. Instead of seeing conflict from an utterly negative point of view, we should see it as a chance to clarify, learn, grow, and even strengthen the relationship.

Conflict in the work environment

Conflict can happen in numerous diverse settings. The environment where conflict occurs will, in turn, influence how the situation is resolved. The descriptions, as mentioned earlier, of conflict engage within a larger sense, considering the situations where the conflict occurred and the context. However, in this report, importance must be placed on describing the conflict in a particular way. Workplace conflict is inimitable when equated with the other types of strife, as it happens in an

environment with a non-negotiable motivation to attain set objectives and accomplish particular necessities. This aspect makes it impossible to extract oneself from the condition or evade the persons contributing to the conflict (Mackie, 1998). Profit is the main drive for most companies, and conflict leads to the unproductivity of workers, thus leading to ineffectiveness and failure of a business. Therefore, it is fundamental that companies are in a position to resolve employee conflicts efficiently.

Context of the Situation

Company conflict between two parties, Employee A and Employee B:

- Both are subordinates at a similar level.
- Each is in charge of a team of three employees tasked with providing services to external clients.

Employee A feels frustrated by last-minute decision-making and the need to respond to artificial crises affecting their job and support staff. Employee A feels that the staff members were continuously changing priorities and managing crises due to Employee B's disorganization and poor decision-making. Employee B argues that Employee A lacks attention to detail and does not participate in planning meetings. Thus, Employee A undermines Employee B's ability to plan and create collaborative relationships between the two teams. As a manager, you invite both employees to a private meeting to resolve the situation. The meeting quickly evolves into vociferous arguments and personal attacks. Employee A claims that Employee B is disorganized and lazy and takes advantage of the team. Employee B retorts that Employee A plays favourites with the team and actively undermines any effort to create collaborations between team members.

Planned Managerial Listening Skills

Conflict is deemed to happen everywhere that communication exists. People with practical communication skills can foresee, anticipate, and frame strategies to implement when addressing conflict to resolve it successfully. The communication approach you choose will determine the outcome of the resolution. Joseph DeVito (2003) proposes multiple conflict management strategies.

Using the GRIT Method

A conflict is serious enough if the parties disagree, and the issue must be escalated to the manager. The rivalry between Employee A and Employee B will impact the other employees they supervise. It can even have the potential to spill over to external clients. This can lead to irreparable damage, and applying a good communication strategy can aid in coming to an amicable solution during negotiations. A communication strategy termed GRIT was established by Charles E. Osgood (1962)

during the Cold War. It is a good communication strategy when the conflicting parties face inert conflict. It entails one party starting a breakthrough in consenting or compromising on some of the demands that initiated the conflict. For the method to be fruitful, the other party must return the favour by conceding his demands. It is wise that the manager engages Employee A and Employee B to voluntarily consent to some of their demands without forcing any party. Doing this will build trust through reciprocating compromises till they come to a decision that does not favour any side (Psychology, 2016). The best way that the manager can apply GRIT in the situation looks like the following:

1. Get Employee A and Employee B to formally converse in the board room to solve the issue amicably. If both employees are reasonable enough, they will be able to recognize that the strife is preventing their subordinates from productively performing their duties since they have to keep taking sides, which is not suitable for the company. Employee B fully understands that impromptu decisions do not foster teamwork since Employee B's lack of organization and good decision-making undermines the spirit of collaboration. Participating in the conflict resolution process will show the willingness of the two employees to work on their relationship for the betterment of their subordinates' teams. Listening to the other party's side of the story in a mature and controlled way will foster an understanding since they are calm and are paying attention. It would be fruitful if the manager moderated the meeting to avoid interruption. In the end, they can take turns responding to the issues raised.
2. Establish common ground: Usually, when two parties are in a workplace dispute, they usually end up being individuals who share a lot in common. To initiate the resolution process, the manager must first establish the employees' points of agreement. If both parties decide that the company's success is in their interests, then it is best to start with such common goals and progress to more precise points of agreement.
3. Discuss innovative solutions to the conflict. With Employee A and Employee B present, listening to what the other party is saying, and paying attention to the other party's concerns, cooperative collaboration can start finding solutions to the cause of their conflict. Each party must be able to air their concerns and give up their lowest-priority demands as a show of good faith. If the other employee is for this, the principle of reciprocity will force them to sacrifice their lowest demand. Employees A and B will then have to review each concern until they mutually agree.

Overview of the Involved Parties and Issue at Hand

In every workplace, the conflict has to exist. The strategies employed to resolve the dispute will keep the company together. Employees have different ways of carrying out tasks, and contention arises if communication between the various parties lags. Employee A and Employee B have distinct forms of ensuring work is done. Employee A feels frustrated that Employee B makes impromptu last-minute decisions that force him to deal with non-existent emergencies that affect his subordinate's way of doing things.

On the other hand, Employee B is having issues with Employee A's lack of attention to detail. This lack of understanding is causing a lack of collaboration between the two employees and forcing the team members to take sides. Both employees are essential to the company, but their constant conflicts might damage the company irreparably. Solving the conflict and bringing the team back together is paramount for the company's success.

Source of the Existing Conflict

Differences between colleagues

Differences between colleagues are the primary source of conflict in the workplace. Conflicts between colleagues vary from varying views concerning issues related to work to discrepancies in work ethics. These issues have one shared feature: They tend to escalate into conflict when more than two employees fail to agree or have a different view regarding the matter.

a) Interpersonal conflict

The main factor contributing to the conflict is the differences between the employees. These differences often lead to conflict. This happens when one employee, as evident in the scenario above, is more accomplished in a similar workplace than the other employee. Marsen (2006) utilizes a technique whereby the conflict is linked with the method, and the controversy happens regarding the desired result. He explained further that dispute arises when one individual has narrow uncertainty avoidance and thus has a positive mindset about what is forthcoming. The other individual possesses high ambiguity avoidance and expects to achieve more control over the condition, leading the two individuals to choose verbal violence instead of collaborating and negotiating (Abhijeet, 2012). Effective communication is affected by the two individuals' different personalities because they approach the problem with different expectations, work habits, and emotional reactions.

b) Conflict over responsibilities

Another significant factor in this case is an unclear division of responsibility. Employee A believes that Employee B creates artificial crises through poor planning. Employee B believes Employee A fails to participate in the planning process and then complains about decisions. These accounts indicate that the teams may lack a shared system for setting priorities, scheduling work, distributing tasks, and communicating changes. A conflict that appears personal can therefore be sustained by an organizational process that encourages blame.

c) Communication failure

Communication is central to the disagreement. Employee A and Employee B are not only disputing the work; they are interpreting each other's conduct as evidence of laziness, favoritism, disorganization, or deliberate obstruction. Such attributions intensify conflict because they transform a solvable process problem into a judgment about character. A manager should redirect discussion toward observable events, responsibilities, timelines, and decisions rather than allowing the employees to debate motives that cannot be proven.

Conflict Triggers and Reactions

People respond to conflict according to personality, experience, status, culture, perceived threat, and the importance of the issue. Some become assertive or confrontational. Others avoid, accommodate, or attempt to compromise. A person may use different approaches in different situations. Employee A appears to react through accusation and frustration, while Employee B responds defensively and with counteraccusation. The manager must recognize these reactions without allowing them to control the meeting.

When emotions are high, immediate problem-solving may be ineffective. The manager should pause the discussion, restate expectations, and allow each employee to speak separately before reconvening. Listening does not mean accepting every accusation as true. It means obtaining enough information to distinguish facts, interpretations, and emotional effects.

Conflict Resolution Strategies

Different methods of handling conflict

Different strategies can be employed to handle the conflict between Employee A and Employee B. For successful handling of conflicts, one strategy may be more fruitful than the other, depending on the issues at hand. According to Buntzman et al. (2015), three strategies for resolving workplace conflict exist. There is a technique of dominating, compromising, and collaborating, but the most appropriate strategies for workplace conflicts are avoidance and collaboration. They separate the strategies for handling conflict into five: avoiding, competing, compromising, accommodating, and collaborating (Adler & Rodman, 1989). The five strategies fall under the category of mindfulness for self and mindfulness for others. One is how far a person can stretch to fulfil their selfish concerns, and the second is how extreme the individual can go to satisfy the concerns of others. Combining the two will create five ways of handling the conflict (Buntzman et al., 2015). The suitable strategy the manager will employ to handle the conflict between the subordinates is defined as follows:

1. Collaboration

According to Buntzman et al. (2015), this entails being open, exchanging information, and being willing to analyze existing differences to reach an acceptable solution for everyone. He continues to explain that this strategy is best for establishing collaboration of tasks between diverse subsystems; If the issue is complicated, utilizing the skills and information possessed by each conflicting party will enable coming up with proper solutions and fruitful implementations. In this scenario, it is appropriate for the manager to engage Employee A and Employee B in an open dialogue to foster collaboration.

2. Accommodation

According to Tubbs et al. (2012), this is the fulfilment of the other individual's needs prior to fulfilling your desires. Buntzman et al. (2015) explain that an individual who chooses to accommodate the other person ignores their concerns to fulfil that of the other person. This strategy is appropriate since both employees believe that their grievances are valid. Buntzman et al. (2015) state that the strategy is suitable when one of the conflicting parties is willing to give up the right to win the argument for the team's benefit.

3. Competition

Competition is recognized as a win-lose orientation or a way of extracting the exact behaviour you desire by compelling other people to win their status (Buntzman et al., 2016). This will trigger competitiveness in the other person and go against all expectations to win the goal, and more often than not, will ignore the other person's needs. Similar to the behaviour of the two employees, the extreme use of unexpected language choices and confrontational remarks is one way of competing (Tubbs et al., 2012, p. 121).

4. Avoidance

Lack of assertiveness and cooperation are behaviours that are close to avoidance. Sometimes, a choice must be made whether to deal with the existing conflict or ignore it at all costs (Tubbs et al., 2012). The strategy of avoiding is usually associated with ignoring or moving away from a state where the avoidant individual becomes unsuccessful in fulfilling the needs of others and their own. Cleary (2007) states that if the manager decides to follow this strategy, he will refuse to acknowledge that there is any issue or conflict and significantly limit the interaction with the conflicting parties.

5. Compromising

This strategy requires that Employee A and Employee B surrender something to come up with a

mutual agreement and result or reach a common ground. Buntzman et al. (1992) explain that this strategy goes against compromise as a win-win situation. In addition, it is not a good problem solver because both the employees will fail to get what they initially wanted. Tubbs et al. (2012) added that a compromise would exist if both the employees in conflict exhibit behaviours that show a balance between being cooperative and being assertive. Doing this will ensure that both parties feel victorious at the end of the day. Compromising has its disadvantages when resolving a conflict. Tubbs et al. (2012) explain that the conflicting parties can manipulate it by using it as a way out of the conflict, and at the end of the day, nobody gets what they want. Also, if the manager uses this strategy, there is a probability that the same kind of conflict may arise in the future.

Role of Non-Verbal Communication in Dealing with the Two Employees

Non-verbal communication entails immediacy cues such as eye contact, the distance between the conflicting parties, and body orientation (Argyle & Dean, 1965). Non-verbal cues have the potential to act as stimulants of conflict escalation. Distinct non-verbal behaviours can act as forces that symbolize power, dominance, and status, strategically used to acquire an advantage over the other person. It is vital to distinguish between an action used for communication and an action used as a form of expression. For example, one employee might try to gain the upper hand over the other employee by trying to degrade the other employee's intellectual capacity. This entails making fun of others by portraying inflated facial expressions of fear when they hear the other employee's claims. The outcome of this behaviour is an escalation of the conflict. For instance, Employee A might smile sarcastically while making a claim. To counter, Employee B might lean back and speak in a thunderous voice or even pat Employee A on the back. Many managers understand the role of emotions in the escalating conflict, but they do not comprehend the impact of nonverbal communication.

Justification for the Choice of Conflict Resolution Method

Every manager has a unique way of dealing with conflict. Avoidance is an option for this particular situation, but it is not the best. The method is appropriate when dealing with immediate conflict as a short-term solution, but it is not appropriate as a long-term solution because if the conflict has not been resolved, it will emerge in the future (Wilmot & Hocker, 2005). Another option is accommodation, which involves one person putting aside their personal needs and desires to be in a position to resolve the conflict (Marson, 2006). It can be argued that using this method will lead to worse conflicts in the future since a person can only suppress their desires and needs for so long. The other option is compromise since the two employees can find common ground acceptable to both. Each of the two employees sacrifices a small part of their demands (Marson, 2006). Collaboration is

the best option in this particular conflict. This is because both employees take part fully in finding a solution. This method portrays excellent thought and a solid commitment to fulfilling their wishes and needs (Tubbs et al., 2012). The methods mentioned have advantages and disadvantages, but they can be applied to solve the conflict between the two employees.

Conclusion

This report discusses the techniques for handling conflict between two employees in a workplace. It focused on the different strategies to employ when mediating a conflict between employees and the communication strategies that efficiently handle conflicts. It focused on the sources of conflict and the different ways these sources play into conflict (Van der Vliert, 1990). Based on the scenario, it is evident that it is crucial to employ the proper techniques when handling conflict, especially in a workplace, to avoid causing more strife within teams. The technique offered focuses on not only resolving conflicts but also dealing with the underlying causes of the conflicts. It is mandatory to calm the parties involved in the conflict before listening to their accounts of what transpired to offer factual and less emotional explanations. By ensuring that the root source of the conflict is dealt with, the conflicting employees will forge forward and work towards an amicable relationship because the cause of the initial conflict has been eradicated, and the conflict will not arise again.

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