MANAGING CONFLICT FOR SUPERVISORS: LEARNING YOUR STYLE

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TRAINING GOALS

• Understand the causes of workplace conflict
• Understand the leader’s role in managing conflict
• Explore both the benefits and risks of conflict in the workplace
• Learn what factors contribute to unhealthy workplace conflict
• Explore ways to avoid the least effective and use the most effective methods for resolving conflict in the workplace

WHAT IS CONFLICT?

• Conflict is any situation in which your concerns or desires differ from those of another person

From Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument

– It often involves conflicting needs, interests, wants or goals
– It can take the form of an exchange of opinions, an argument, an ongoing pattern of tension, or sometimes even a physical altercation
CONFLICT IN THE WORKPLACE

- Can often viewed as a negative experience (when it’s not managed or when it’s mismanaged). It does not have to be negative.
- In fact, conflict is inevitable and natural...a normal part of any organizational life
- When handled constructively, employees are able to challenge one another’s ideas in a supportive environment, new ideas are generated and fostered
- The manager’s goal is not to eliminate conflict but to view it as essentially healthy, to develop skills in conflict resolution and turn disagreements into ideas

BENEFITS OF CONFLICT

“Where all think alike, no one thinks very much.”
Walter Lippmann

“It is not best that we should all think alike; it is a difference of opinion that makes horse races.”
Mark Twain

WHAT CAUSES CONFLICT IN THE WORKPLACE?

- Misunderstanding
- Differences in personality
- Competition for resources or recognition
- Issues with authority
- Uncooperativeness
- Differences over methods or style to do the job
- Underperformance
- Different points of view about goals or values
- Different styles of communication that lead to different expectations
- Spending large amounts of time together
- Depending on one another to “get the job done”
SOME THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER

- Some conflicts and disagreements are inevitable but don’t have to negatively impact the workplace. They can be minimized.
- Other conflicts don’t benefit by being suppressed or smoothed over. They will only grow and can erode a positive workplace.
- A win-lose situation is not always a resolution of conflict. There are better strategies. Your conflict resolution style should match the nature of the conflict.

IMPORTANCE OF RESOLVING CONFLICT

Why not let your employees work it out on their own? Early and minor conflicts…...this may preferable.

However when conflict is left unaddressed:
- It lowers morale and productivity
- It may cause other employees to take sides or “check out”
- It creates barriers to cooperation and collaboration
- You risk losing good talent who will leave for a healthier job environment

CONFLICT IS DESTRUCTIVE WHEN:

- It takes attention away from more important issues and tasks
- It deepens differences or polarizes groups and cooperation is reduced
- The morale of the workplace suffers

Good leaders pay attention to signs that indicate one or more of these problems are occurring in the workplace
CONFLICT IS CONSTRUCTIVE WHEN:

- Important issues are brought out in the open
- There is an opportunity for self-improvement and learning, and to appreciate more about each other
- It leads to increased involvement and new ideas are generated

Effective conflict management removes barriers in helping the organization reach its objectives

CONFLICT–HANDLING STYLES

Five basic conflict-handling styles in the workplace:
1. Compete
2. Collaborate
3. Compromise
4. Avoid
5. Accommodate
   - Each person has their “default” style.
   - There is no one way to resolve a conflict, but there are generally preferred styles for most situations.
   - Supervisors need to recognize that different situations require different styles in order to reach a resolution.

WHAT’S YOUR PREFERRED OR “DEFAULT” CONFLICT-HANDLING STYLE?

- Avoid (I Lose, You Lose)
- Accommodate (I Lose, You Win)
- Compete (I Win, You Lose)
- Compromise (We Both Win, We Both Lose)
- Collaborate (I Win, You Win)

Resources: Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann, Alexander Hiam
CONFLICT-HANDLING STYLES

AVOID

Avoid: A decision to not take action
- A situation in which neither outcome nor relationship matter to you.
  - Best when:
    - Unimportant or not work related issues
    - Buying time until a resolution can be reached
  - Otherwise it is a problem
    - Consequences of conflicts not being dealt with

ACCOMMODATE

Accommodate: Allowing the other side to win
- A situation in which the outcome is not important but the relationship is.
  - Best when:
    - You want to make an active decision to "let go" vs. when another method is required
    - You want to keep the peace and maintain good will
  - Make sure the other party knows that you are accommodating and that you are allowing them to "win".
COMPETE

Compete: The need to win. Unilateral decision making
• A situation in which outcome is important, but the relationship is not.
• Best when:
  – The situation calls for quick or swift action
  – When there is no room for compromise or debate
  – When a manager must make difficult or unpopular decisions
• Risks: Can lead to ongoing conflict that is destructive towards the morale of the workplace

COMPROMISE

Compromise: Both sides win. Both sides lose.
• A situation in which outcome and relationship are both somewhat important.
• Compromise may often appear more of a resolution than it is.
• Best when:
  – Dealing with issues of moderate to high importance
  – A strong commitment is required from both parties
  – A temporary fix may be needed until a long term solution is developed

COLLABORATE

Collaborate:
• A situation in which outcome and relationship are both very important.
• Collaboration incorporates learning through the sharing of different perspectives
• Has the added benefit of improving relationships and team morale
• Best when:
  – Wanting to gain support from the entire team
  – The time is available for a longer term process that will lead to long term resolution
HOW CONFLICT HANDLING STYLE CAN AFFECT MOTIVATION IN THE WORKPLACE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Impact on Job Motivation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compete</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodate</td>
<td>Negative to neutral</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoid</td>
<td>Negative to neutral</td>
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<tr>
<td>Compromise</td>
<td>Neutral to positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborate</td>
<td>Positive</td>
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</tbody>
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THE ROLE OF THE SUPERVISOR

- To remember that conflict will always exist between employees and that’s not always bad
- To manage the conflict process and turn disagreements into ideas

WHEN SHOULD A SUPERVISOR GET INVOLVED IN EMPLOYEE CONFLICTS?

- Early! But know your role.
  - When supervisors don’t intervene early, there is a risk that the conflicts may grow
- When morale and productivity are affected as employees become distracted by the conflict
  - When teams can become divided because of the conflict
- When, in extreme instances, unresolved conflict can lead to violence or other forms of aggression (threats or harassment)
- When there is the potential for injury or legal risks
EFFECTIVE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT FOR SUPERVISORS

• You don’t need to have all the answers and it’s not your responsibility to make everyone happy all of the time

• Be a role model. Conflict will remain healthy if it is handled and resolved constructively

USING THE COLLABORATIVE STYLE

• Open by identifying the conflict and its impact on all parties affected by the conflict.
  – Uncover facts; check assumptions.
• Clarify what’s at the heart of the conflict.
  – Identify underlying causes and get both sides to agree what the disagreement is about. It may be the first thing that they agree on!
• Consider all viewpoints.
  – Why it is so important to each participant? What does each have to gain or lose in the conflict?
  – Ask open-ended questions to help gather enough information to sure that everyone understands the issue.

USING THE COLLABORATIVE STYLE (cont’d)

• Establish a common goal for all parties
• First goal: Both sides agree on wanting to end the conflict
• Next, get both sides to agree on what is the best resolution to reach desired outcome
Tips:
  – Help each determine what they can live with
  – Brainstorm all options to meet the goal
  – Explore needed resources and support
USING THE COLLABORATIVE STYLE (cont’d)

Tips:
– Determine any barriers to reaching a common goal. What can and cannot be changed in the workplace?
– Seek a win-win solution
– Specify who is responsible to maintain the solution, and consequences of failing to hold up their commitment
– Confirm how and when to track progress. Specify dates and times to review.

USING THE COLLABORATIVE STYLE (cont’d)

• Close by summarizing and confirming your confidence in each parties ability to work on resolving the conflict
  – Check and confirm their confidence level in the plan
  – Have all parties express verbally and in writing what they have agreed to. Have them use phrases like “I agree to...” and “I am responsible for...”
  – Have all parties agree that the goal is to fix the problem – not to assign blame, hurt, humiliate, or threaten, i.e. reinforce a Win-Win solution
  – Where indicated, parties commit to maintain confidentiality

REMEMBER THE IMPORTANCE OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

• Important communication skills:
  – Check for understanding with each party
  – Paraphrase what people say, confirm you are correct
  – Encourage people to restate in their own words what other party has said
  – Keep the discussion on the problem and away from personality. Encourage use of “I” statements
  – Ensure all parties are heard
  – Keep discussion on track
  – Explain in very clear terms, the consequences of failure to honor an agreement
DEALING WITH ANGER, RESISTANCE OR THREATS

- Anger
  - Acknowledge angry feelings but set boundaries on behaviors
  - Set a cooling off time all for parties to regroup later
- Resistance
  - An individual who refuses to work on resolving the conflict becomes a performance issue and he/she needs to be held accountable
- Threats
  - Any threat, direct or indirect, needs to be taken seriously. Use calming techniques, when possible remove employee from others and call 911 when necessary

SUMMARY

- Conflict is inevitable. Handled right it can be healthy, otherwise it can be destructive
- Causes of workplace conflict may include:
  - Different points of view of how to achieve goals
  - Dissimilar communication styles
  - Employees spend large amounts of time together
*these are all are no fault causes
- Unresolved conflict leads to low worker morale and decreased productivity
- It is important to effectively address conflict as soon as possible