

# Management and conflict essay sample



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Recently, many organizations have adapted internal teamwork strategies to increase creativity and productivity for business. With companies combining different departments, incorporating small group discussions, as well as developing teams for certain projects, the integration between divisions can result in conflict. Whether conflict arises among team members, with management, or because of the ethics of the company, the result can be either productive or destructive. Conflict is an important factor to consider within organizational communication systems since it happens so frequently. Organizational Communication and Conflict Management Systems: A Social Complexity Approach, written by Aula and Siira (2010) suggests, “ the complexity of conflict increases as organizations become more open and diverse...Conflict is inevitable and even desirable: To work in an organization is to be in conflict” (p. 125 ). With this being said, we should consider what factors can decrease conflict in the work place and make conflict more productive.

Themes that I consider throughout my examination of, The Problem with Teamwork, by Katherine Miller (2009), are how there is a lack of training provided for the workers by management, how personal as well as relational factors can affect the way people handle conflict, in addition to how a third party can help resolve this conflict. The case study, The Problem with Teamwork, illustrates a new internal collaboration between the manufacturing and design teams within the firm, Auto Safety Products. This company designs and produces automobile seatbelts, as well as infant and child safety seats for an assortment of vehicles. This new “ concurrent engineering” system directly involves the employees Mike Garcia, a

manufacturing manager, and Jill Hendrickson, a design engineer. Even though this new system was considered to improve all of the elements of the products life cycle and the manufacturing quality, management has not taken the time to introduce the individuals or guidelines for the group. As a result, Mike and Jill are not seeing, eye to eye while they are trying to adapt to the new process that top management developed. Mike and Jill's conflict has been noticed by the project manager, Adam Shapiro, who has decided to intervene as a mediator.

He asks each of them separately about the conflict that is occurring, and to no surprise both have very different perspectives on the issue. At the end of this case study Mike and Jill are in Adam's office and "neither of them looked particularly happy" (Miller, K. 2009 p. 176--178). Miller (2009) suggests that conflict within organizational communication is "the interaction of interdependent people who perceive opposition of goals, aims, and values, and who see the other party as potentially interfering with the realization of these goals" (p. 160). By applying this definition of conflict to Mike and Jill's situation, we can see that the differences between the two employees resulted because of the lack of training provided by management in addition to the personal and relational factors that blinded the employees. The Problem with Teamwork suggests that the collaboration between the manufacturing team and the engineering team does not seem to be working. "Management did not take the time to introduce the team management system The Real Problem with Teamwork: A Case Study Analysis {4} properly and train the people to work together" (Miller, 2009, p. 177).

In the Journal, Product Development and Learning in Project Teams: The Challenges Are the Benefits, Edmondson and Nembhard (2009) argue that there have been a number of studies done in organizations that imply, “team effectiveness is a function of a well designed team task, appropriate team composition, and availability of information, resources and rewards” (p. 124). If management would have prolonged the decision to join forces between the two departments they possibly could have found a more appropriate way to introduce the new system to the team members. They could have executed a plan on how to train the individuals effectively so that the individuals would feel informed about what they would be doing, confident about their work, and take pride in the surge between the two departments. Instead, assumptions were formed; resentments were established between the workers, and the conflict escalated. It is important to know what your job entails when involved in team work since “each member brings the expertise and perspective of his or her own field to the collaborative task” (Edmondson & Nembhard, 2009, p. 125).

To take time out of the day to help everyone understand how they contribute to the team is vital. Personal factors like gender and personality can create and influence how conflict is managed and resolved within organizations. Miller (2009) affirms that the way a person frames a conflict, will influence how the conflict will be solved. Miller introduces the term framing to refer to an individual who allows “perceptions of self, of others, or of the conflict itself” to overrule how the conflict is managed (p. 170). In the case study, Jill is described as an “assertive and strong minded” individual who feels that she has to be “effective in the male--dominated world of engineering”. As

she describes the conflict, she mentions that “ Mike will not listen to her ideas and downplays the contributions that design can make to concurrent engineering...she suspects that Mike has problems with her because she is a young woman, and this has made her push even harder for her point of view on project disagreements” (Miller, 2009, p. 177). Jill is in fact using personal factors to guide her way through conflict by the means of framing.

In the article, *Managing Conflict appropriately and effectively: An Application of the Competence Model to Rahim's Organizational Conflict Styles*, Alberts, Gross and Guerrero (2000) would describe Jill's behavior in the conflict as being a dominating style. They go on to describe dominating style in conflict as “ confrontational remarks, accusations, personal criticism, rejection, hostile imperatives or threats, antagonistic jokes or teasing, aggressive questions, presumptive remarks, and denial of responsibility at the expense of the other person”(p. 206). Jill uses several dominating characteristics to communicate what she feels is happening within the conflict with Mike. It is important to understand that there are more productive ways to handle conflict than dominating the conflict. Relational factors, in conflict, describe the relationship between the conflict parties, along with how the relationship influences the communication within the conflict. *Analyzing Interpersonal Conflict: Nature of Awareness, Type of Initiating Event, The Real Problem with Teamwork: A Case Study Analysis* {6} *Situational Perceptions, and Management Styles* describes the consequences that can occur when relational factors become an issue within organizations.

Whitteman states, “ When a party compares the present conflict to previously experienced ones, the perception of an often experienced conflict

may result. When this occurs, a party may feel indifferent about knowing the conflict related thoughts and feelings held by the other since such knowledge already may have been acquired in the context of past experiences" (p. 260). Mike's perception about the conflict in The problem with Teamwork is an example of this. Mike " has always felt some animosity towards the design side of the firm...He finds the engineers " uppity" and unwilling to listen to the problems faced in manufacturing." He describes the new system as a joke and expresses that " the design engineers are still trying to push their ideas down manufacturing's throat and he's tired of the " team" façade...He refuses to simply give in to every one of Jill Hendrickson's whims" (Miller, 2009, p. 177). Mike has expressed that he has had preexisting emotions towards the engineering team, previous to this conflict, and as a result he uses relational factors to deal with the conflict at hand. It is significant to address this feature of conflict, so that we may not develop assumptions based on our past experiences.

Managing conflict situations can sometimes be hard to do. As I established before, conflict can either be productive or destructive. Deutsch (1973) classifies an interaction as destructive when " all participants are dissatisfied with the outcomes of a conflict and think they have lost as a result" (Deutsch, 1973). When conflict becomes too difficult to solve ourselves, we sometimes have to turn to others for help. The book, Collaborating: Finding a Common Ground for Multiparty Problems, suggests the use of a mediator to help solve conflicts. Gray explains, " The mediator has no power to render a decision or impose a solution. Instead, the mediator helps the parties themselves to work out their differences and to construct a mutually

acceptable solution” (Gray, 1989). In the case study, conflict escalated when Mike and Jill struggled over the equal distribution of power. When the new concurrent engineering system was put into place by upper management, the project supervisor, Adam, noticed the conflict between the two parties. He decided to step in as a third party to help resolve the conflict.

When conflict becomes overwhelming and seems to spiral out of control, it is important to acknowledge that there are third--parties to help facilitate conflicts, so that it can be a productive experience. This case study provided me with new information about conflict in organizations. When there is a lack of training for staff this can hinder the structure of an organization. If there are any negative personal or relational factors standing in the way of a person’s opinion about another party, differences can result in a destructive conflict. As soon as you feel that a conflict has escalated out of control, you can seek the help of a third party, to assist you and the other person, to find a solution to the conflict that is mutually agreed upon. As a result of analyzing the common themes mentioned within the case study, this experience has lead me to believe that there are recommendations that should be made to help improve communication within organizations. Given that “conflict is a fact of life” and it occurs naturally (Wilmot & Hocker, 2011, p. 2), I will go on to provide recommendations based off of the common themes presented above, and explain why my recommendations will work within organizations. In an organizational setting, it is important that every employee knows what is expected of them on the job, and receives the proper training on how to do that job correctly.

Whether training is conducted by an outside source, a computer mediated communication device, or by the management system, the organizations goals can be established and clarified through this process. When I interned at Six Flags Great America in the Human Resources department, I experienced the process of training and was able to facilitate training sessions. There was mandatory training sessions called Discovery that every individual had to go through in order to get into their specific department training. These trainings provided information on the history of the park, proper etiquette for workers to follow, dress code rules, safety regulations, diversity exposure, as well as many other park related topics. After an individual would pass a test on all of the information provided in Discovery training, that individual would move onto departmental training where they would learn the expectations and skills needed for their specific position. By the end of the training cycle, the employees were informed about every aspect of the park and knew what was expected of them. Creating the opportunity to educate team members on a subject matter, before it's too late, can help to improve teamwork strategies. A seminar that explains what

The Real Problem with Teamwork: A Case Study Analysis {9} destructive conflict looks like in the workplace and how it can be avoided would benefit the organization by training team members to use productive conflict strategies. At Six Flags I was able to attend a seminar on interviewing. The subjects discussed were geared towards how to be an effective interviewer, how to evaluate an individual without any biases or stereotypes attached, as well as what were questions that were illegal to ask in an interview. This seminar offered me the ability to practice correct interviewing skills along



with tactics to follow to avoid destructive conflict. Another opportunity to educate faculty members about conflict is having a workshop available for employees to learn about, how to resolve conflict while using Non-Violent Communication (NVC). Rosenberg (2003) defines NVC as “ a way of communication that leads us to give from the heart,” by observing, expressing feelings, stating needs, as well as requesting what your needs are in a situation (p. 3, 6). During my employment with Six Flags I attended a full day workshop for managers. During the day, we practiced role-playing in conflict situations and evaluated the behavior displayed, were reminded of strategies that should be used when dealing with conflict between co-workers, and were given tests to complete to reassure that we understood the information that was provided throughout the day. I received a certification of completion after I completed this all day affair.

Given that this opportunity is available, and staff members attend, productive conflict management skills can be learned. An additional recommendation that I feel could make a positive difference in organizational communication, is offer an open door policy between employees and The Real Problem with Teamwork: A Case Study Analysis {10} management, if it is not already established within the organizational structure. This step may possibly decrease existing conflict amongst employees given that the interaction between management and employees increases, and acts as a mediation tool amongst them. At Six Flags, the open door policy encouraged all of the staff members in the park to openly discuss any concerns that pertained to the job, with complete confidentiality. The article, Open Door Policy, describes the reasons why companies adopt this

approach to organizational communication. “ By listening to you, the company is able to improve, to address complaints, and to foster employee understanding of the rationale for practices, processes, and decisions” (Heathfield, 2010). When a manager’s door is open to every employee, conflicts, misunderstandings, and concerns can be discussed freely with no hesitations.

While analyzing, *The Problem with Teamwork*, I provided a brief description of Mike and Jill’s conflict and presented the main points that were critical to know in order to understand the situation. While settling the facts on how some organizations do not supply their workers with proper training for their jobs, how personal as well as relational factors can affect the way people handle conflict in organizations, as well as how a third party can be used to assist in resolving unmanageable conflicts. I was able to connect the themes to specific examples from the case study and explain why they are of significance to the organizational structure. I then gave notice to some recommendations that could be used within organizations to help modify the way communication occurs within companies.

## References

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