

Managing conflicts within groups

Engineering, Project Management



| Organisational Behavior Individual Course Paper | Lim Jin Sheng Jason| |
Section: ES1| | Introduction In order to meet the requirements of the individual assignment, this paper uses a specific project management experience to highlight some of the main organisational behaviour (OB) concepts in a real-world professional setting. The two main OB concepts chosen are: a) Managing Conflicts within Groups b) Multi-Party, Multi-issue Decision Making Framework

In doing so, it is hoped that this paper will highlight the importance of utilizing these OB concepts in other similar situations encountered in the future. Professional Work Experience My professional experience involves managing acquisition and R&D projects for the armed forces, under the DefenseScience and TechnologyAgency (DSTA). DSTA is the national authority for centralized defense procurement and related R&D under the Ministry of Defense (MINDEF) in Singapore.

My specific roles include managing projects related to naval systems and scouring the local/overseas defence industry for emerging naval technologies. For example, if the plans department in the Singapore Navy requires a certain naval craft to meet their operational requirements in the near term, my department will spearhead this initiative by helping to source the market for such a product, purchase it and deliver it to the users. The whole process basically involves the following:) Get approval for the operational requirements and budget to fund the acquisition project. b) Source the market for companies who are able to provide such products or services, evaluate their bids and negotiate for the eventual contract. c) Perform acceptance testing for the product/service before delivering the

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product/service to the end users. Managing Conflicts within Groups Before the initiation of a project, the envisioned operational requirements for the weapon system/service and budget required to fund it needs to be approved by the required level of authority.

Usually, a panel of experts will convene in a forum to discuss and debate the issue and will send their recommendations to the final approval authority (which can be the Minister for Defence or service chiefs, depending on the importance and value of the acquisition). In one of my projects, the requirement was to acquire several unmanned crafts to replace a fleet of existing patrol vessels to save maintenance and personnel costs. Hence, the operational requirements was done up by the plans department in the Navy and the budget was done up by my team in DSTA.

The justifications for both were well thought out and presented clearly in a paper which was submitted to the relevant forum for discussion and approval. The forum in this case was comprised of the unit commanders of all the relevant braches in the Navy (Operational, intelligence, logistics, security and training departments, etc). However, as a newly appointed project manager, I was unaware of the “ under-currents” that was brewing prior to the forum presentation.

Even though the justifications were sound on paper, there were several factions within the Navy community that were inherently against the idea. This opposition only surfaced during the day of the forum presentation and took my team by surprise. Subsequently, we had to re-work the whole approach in getting the approval from the forum. Basically, the issue was

that the replacement of an entire fleet of patrol vessels by a new technology will mean that an entire squadron will need to be downsized and re-trained.

Although the maintenance costs were lower in aggregate, this also meant the workload of certain logistics departments will more than double. Also, there was a history of bad blood between the commanding officer of the plans and squadron departments. So in reality, this means that certain members of the forum will not be happy with the proposal regardless of how sound it is and old grudges will likely flare up during the forum presentations. On hindsight, being aware of possible conflicts within a group will help to prevent this type of scenario from happening in the first place.

By understanding the different types of group conflicts (task, relationship and process) and engaging all stakeholders before the forum approval will help in reducing the effort spent and maintain good relations with all stakeholders. Multi-Party, Multi-issue Decision Making Framework Once the approval for the operational requirements and budget for this project is obtained, my team selected a suitable overseas defense contractor to build and deliver the product according to our specifications. The arduous task of negotiating for the best possible terms for the least price for this contract begins.

Due to the complexity of the equipment acquisition involved, the discussions will require many subject matter experts from their relevant domains to discuss the technical issues with their counterparts. I had an experienced procurement manager who advised the team to first agree on all the

complex issues internally first before starting negotiations with the supplier. In practice, this meant that my team had to prioritise which issues are important and non-negotiable and which issues are good to have but not essential in the success of the project.

Without this understanding, every single representative from my team will try to press for the best terms within their domains because everyone thinks their own issues are important. Furthermore, the supplier will never agree to every single issue as they will lose money on this contract. My team decided to group and consider all the issues simultaneously and agree on the relative importance of each issue before starting contract negotiations. My job as a project manager is to take a step back to keep track of the issues discussed and place focus on the “ Tier-one” issues rather than haggling for every possible terms.

This multi-issue, multi-party framework helped my team to cut down on a lot of unnecessary time and effort for future contract negotiations. Conclusion Organisational behaviour is an important and evolving topic which is important for success in managing inter-personal relationships in the workplace. As discussed using some of my personal work experiences, a good understanding and relevant application of OB concepts will help the professional to navigate through the complexities of managing stakeholders in an increasing dynamic environment.