Conflict resolution in project management

Engineering, Project Management

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Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

What is the best way of conflict resolution and why in the projectenvironment?

In the business industry and life in general, various stakeholders involve a team of professionals and workers in projects of varying nature and sizes. Conflicts arise in projects due to differences in opinions, interests, values and needs with changes in earlier project speculation. These conflicts are therefore of different origins, in very different kinds of projects and concerning varying categories of industries. Due to these facts, as enumerated in the introductory parts of the document, the nature of the method that should be applied to best help in the resolution of the conflict heavily depends on the project itself and the source of the conflict, as well as the situation created by the conflicting parties.

First, proper measures can be taken by the project managers to minimize the occurrence of conflicts in a project, but when the conflict is already there, seeking for a solution is vital to the success of the project. The best way to solve a conflict therefore depends on the project manager. He should be able to identify the conflict on time, determine the nature of the conflict by assessing the parties involved, determine the stakes involved, and based on his judgment on these variables, he should make some resolution in one of the many ways possible.

If a conflict involves limited liability of parties and there is need for goodwill, smoothing would be a consideration. This would lead to limited time wasted. If a conflict occurs where the stakes are high and an immediate decision has to be made, the project manager should apply force. An example is when death is a possibility in a medical situation. If the manager sees no chances of wining and stakes are low, avoidance should be considered. Compromising and confrontation are each applied considerably where a win-win situation arises, with regard to the time left to complete the task. Various models also exist under confrontation describing the details of analysis required of the manager before making a decision on which solution to apply. The key thing is; recognition, investigation and analysis are a must in the process for proper handling of conflicts. The results of secondary research provided support to the conclusion that confrontation is therefore the most effective way of solving conflicts in projects. The parties involved in the conflict are made to discuss and finds the solution by creating a common ground. The win-win situation created makes sure that there is a longlasting solutionto the problem.

As a strong word from the review of the construction industry conflict solving, avoiding litigation and court ruling is a great way of saving the project teams heavy losses that would have been incurred as legal fees. In both methods of partnering and ADR, there is emphasis on avoiding legal matters and focus is on involvement of the professionals of the industry and the project team in working out the conflict through negotiations and cooperation. These methods of involving both sides and finding a solution through interactive discussion in the construction industry makes the parties

learn much about conflicts and avoid such instances in future, while providing a similar solution to the confrontation method. In conclusion, any of the methods of confrontation or partnering where the parties discuss and find a solution together, resulting in a common decision is best for ensuring project success.

What role does conflict management play in project success orfailure?

The success of a project is usually based on the achievement of the objectives within the specified amount of time in the project proposal. Disputes and conflicts arise when the targets of the project start to seem unattainable due to lack of enough funding, change in specifications according to engineering demands or unexpected outcomes in implementation process. When these things happen, the initial plan of the project has to be altered so that the process can continue. Without resolving the conflict, the project cannot be completed. If for example there was a litigation which ended up with one party winning, it would lead to a complete fall out and the project cancelled, whether the winner gets compensated or not. Therefore, conflict management is fundamental for the successful completion of projects.

While it might be very hard to avoid conflicts in projects, they form an important positive role in project implementation as through solving them, the unforeseen problems in the design of a project are overcome. Projects often involve huge investments and proper conflict management ensures that these investments don't go to waste by enabling project completion.

Poor conflict management can lead to the parties disagreeing completely or some methods determining a winner and a loser, like the forcing method, leading to a complete halt of the project. This is considered a project failure. A case like this could be where the initial estimate of cost was found to be less than the project would require for completion and on a ruling that the contractor has lost and should complete the project without any more funds, the project stops at that point.

Therefore, the success or failure of a project lies in the kind of conflict management carried out by the project manager.

Recommendations

Depending with the nature of the industry involved, project managers should try and avoid the methods of conflict resolution that lead to a win-loose situation where there is no lasting solution. According to the primary research, the first and second questions in the questionnaire which were suggesting forcing and smoothing methods had 49% and 32% support respectively. As the managers' votes suggest, these methods are being phased out of use in project management. The only practical reason could be failure of the methods to lead to desirable outcome with experience of the managers involved in the procedure of filling the questionnaires in their duties as heads of the projects. Withdrawal seemed as a unique case which is likely to just end up in a postponed conflict rather than a solved one. 71% of the respondents disagreed with withdraw being effective in solving conflicts. From the same source of facts, a method like confrontation was supported by 85% of the managers, meaning that it has been successful in practice. I would therefore recommend the use of such a method by any

project manager in a situation that the conditions of stake involved and time factors allow. In the construction industry, partnering should be applied whenever necessary. As from the results of the study, sourcing outside support was supported by 65% while 95% were against litigation. The managers should therefore avoid litigation in any case possible while upholding dialogue and sorting help from uninterested parties in creating understanding from both sides and finding a permanent solution.

The studies also involved secondary sources that clearly indicated that smoothing and withdrawal were not upheld as long lasting solutions according to Ohlendorf (2007) and Richardson (1995) respectively. I would therefore recommend the managers to avoid using search methods. In construction, secondary sources like Stephenson (1996) indicate that partnering help in making long lasting solutions between conflicting parties in a project.

On the other hand, the study involved primary research through questionnaires and only details captured from the specific questions asked could be retrieved. For more detailed future search of evidence on this area of research, I would recommend the use of interviews with the managers and contractors involved in projects in different industries. This method would give some divergence to the value of information obtained, although cumbersome to carryout and analyze the data. The issue of management touches managers as well as the subordinates they head and the contractors they negotiate with. In the primary data collection, other parties can be involved and data from both sides compared to obtain impartial views for a more solid conclusion and checks for consistency of the data.

Another improvement to this field by future research would be to obtain archived data on projects performed by firms that usually handle multiple projects and analyze possible documentation of conflicts that arose and were solved during the implementation of the projects. This approach could be more expensive, take more time and be more involving and challenging, but for the sake of getting more concrete data that represent not the views of the managers but documented evidence from firms' past projects, it could be carried out.