

# Conflict resolution in a virtual environment essay sample



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The human mind is a unique filter and for this reason, every one of us thinks and perceives situations in our own way. One crisis that might be diminutive in nature for one person can be colossal in nature to another person. This dichotomy gives rise to differences of opinions, and different opinions can lead to arguments. If arguments are weighed purposefully and fairly in conflict, then resolutions can lead to a meaningful outcome. However, if arguments are just for the sake of arguments, this might lead to an undesired situation leading to conflicts among people. Conflicts among people, especially when you are working in a team, can become very problematic in an organization. Unaddressed Conflict results in negative mental and physiological states in working teams by lowering their performance levels and by affecting overall organizational goals. According to research, “ conflict may be defined as a circumstance in which one party negatively affects or seeks to negatively affect another party” (Baack, 2012, p. 7. 3). In this paper, I will describe a conflict that occurred within a virtual team. A virtual team is a group of individuals who work via the web using information technology in an organizational setting. In addition, I will identify and describe the source and level of the conflict with the virtual team and support it with evidence.

Furthermore, I will describe the steps taken to resolve the conflict and, if it is an ongoing conflict, propose steps to resolve the conflict. Lastly, I will provide a minimum of three conflict outcomes that could reasonably occur because of the conflict resolution, and support my reasoning for each possible outcome. IBM, where I work, is a large corporation with many departments. In my department, I work as a client representative. My duties

consist of providing virtual administrative and logistical support for IBM clients locally and internationally. Since my job exists in a virtual environment, our teams “ employ Internet and digital technologies to achieve common goals, such as collaborating, sharing information, solving problems, and scheduling activities” (Baack, 2012, p. 6. 2). Consequently, the benefit of working in a virtual environment is that teams avoid more frequent confrontations that arise from daily co-worker interaction and thus they are more focused on their work. However, in the virtual setting, conflicts do emerge to challenge team members. For example, recently, a conflict arose between a team member and me regarding an assigned task. The team member wanted me to schedule an “ All Hands Meeting” in our department.

The meeting invitation involved local and international members. The team member asked me to schedule the meeting through blueprint. Blueprint is a special format in scheduling when a meeting involves more than 400 people; this meeting consisted of 800 people. The conflict arose because there was a difference in opinion in how to deliver the meeting to all the members through blueprints. The team member wanted me to send two blueprint meeting invitations with a time adjustment for one invitation. The team member stated he wanted one invitation sent to senior management, which consisted of at least 50 people, and the other invitation sent to the remaining team members. Moreover, the team member wanted one of the meetings to begin 15 minutes early so the senior management can discuss any details for the “ All Hands Meeting”. However, my feelings were if you

send two invites for such a large meeting, then it would be redundant and inconsistent with blueprint procedures.

My thoughts were that there could be one meeting scheduled 15 minutes early for senior management to discuss details of the “ All Hands Meeting” before the members joined the meeting. Thus, the conflict caused me and the team members to waste time corresponding back and forth via email defending our position on the best avenue to schedule the meeting. These emails turned into a workplace disagreement. The differences in opinion caused the meeting to be rescheduled. The affect hindered our organizational performance. In my conflict, we need to examine different reasons for conflicts. According to research, “ latent conflict represents all of the potential sources of conflict at the individual or group level” (Baack, 2012, p. 7. 3). For example, the source of the conflict between the team member and me was a difference in opinion on how to organize the group assigned task. Again, not all conflicts are the same, and for this reason, management should have a heightened awareness of the different levels of conflicts in the workplace. According to research, “ Resolving conflict cannot take place until the level has been properly identified” (Baack, 2012, p. 7. 3).

The four levels of conflict are intrapersonal or intra-psychic conflict, interpersonal conflict, intra-group conflict, intergroup conflict. In my situation, the level of conflict with the team member was an intra-group conflict. According to research, “ Intra-group conflict refers to incidents between members of a group. Disagreements about goals, methods of operation, and leadership create intra-group conflicts. When conflicts are not

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properly managed and resolved, the end results can be poor decisions and ineffective group functioning” (Baack, 2012). The source of the intra-group conflict was task related. According to studies, “task conflict arises when group members offer different task-related perspectives and ideas. In this sense, task conflict is a collective phenomenon that occurs when task ideas put forward by group members are met with opposing ideas from other members”(Chun & Choi, 2014, p. 99). A task conflict can be the most beneficial type of conflict in an organization because it can bring about creativity, healthy competition and can provide a positive outcome through constant discussion of different perspectives.

In virtual teams, the goals are to keep task related conflicts from getting personal. When an intra-group conflict does occur, it is important to resolve the conflict as soon as possible. According to research, conflict resolution involves different styles and methodologies to adopt to resolve different levels of conflict. The conflict resolution process involves certain steps to follow to come to a resolution (Baack, 2012). The follow steps are as follows; identify the parties involved, identify the issues, identify the positions of the parties, find the bargaining zone, and make a decision. Since my job is task-oriented in a virtual environment, the steps in resolving a conflict would differ in its process from a traditional workplace setting. According to research, the proper procedure in identifying parties in a virtual environment would be through an online discussion board in a shared virtual workspace (Harvard Business Publishing, 2012). The discussion board is a platform that allows all team members to resolve conflicts. The forum allows team

members to discuss the issue, identify position of each member, find the bargaining zone and make decisions.

The shared virtual workspace resolve issues of team members very quickly. According to research, “ Team members can study an issue and then offer their input, and they can comment on others’ suggestions online so that every proposed solution gets properly vetted. Moreover, team members can be encouraged to contribute and comment on all aspects of a project, not just the parts that might concern their specific area of expertise” (Harvard Business Publishing, 2012). In a shared virtual workspace, when a problem creates a crisis, a facilitator is the point person responsible for seeing that issue through to its resolution. According to research, as a “ facilitator, a leader is charged with fostering collective effort, facilitating participation, and resolving conflict. Differences in opinions among group members, concerning how and what the team does, may be reduced by facilitating the exchange of ideas and perspectives. Although the facilitator role encourages the expression of opinions, it also seeks consensus and negotiates compromise” (Wakefield, Leidner& Garrison, 2008, p. 8) The facilitator keeps track of the discussion thread, solicits everyone’s feedback and, after people have had a sufficient time to contribute, summarizes the various arguments.

The issue is submitted as an agenda item for an upcoming meeting where the final decision will be made. (Harvard Business Publishing, 2012). The advantages of shared virtual workspace are conflicts can be resolved quickly and new ideas formed. This is a win-win solution and all parties achieve their goals. Research says, “ The final decision determines the outcome of the conflict and a win-win solution allows all sides to make gains, similar to those

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in negotiations” (Baack, 2014, p. 7. 4). The steps in resolving conflicts can have many outcomes, and According to research, “ the goal of any conflict resolution should be to reach a functional settlement” (Baack, 2012, p. 7. 3). Some conflict resolution outcomes in a virtual team environment are higher productivity, teams are empowered to communicate, and teams express their ideas, which lead to more productivity. According to research, virtual teams are “ more open in discussing differing opinions and tend to play a more active role in solving their differences” (Pizer, 2012). Research shows, that the feeling of achievement and job satisfaction are higher in these types of organizations (medpartner, 2013).

In conclusion, Conflicts among team members can be very problematic because it interferes with virtual teams completing their tasks so that they fulfill overall organization goals, and if these conflicts are not resolved quickly and weighed fairly by acknowledging the various levels of conflict, then they can result in communication breakdown, withheld information, incomplete projects and inerrant tasks. Thus, it is important to identify the source and to isolate the level of the conflict, and take steps to resolve the conflict. Finally, the outcomes from conflict can foster higher productivity within a team and improve job satisfaction for the overall survival ability of an organization.

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