Strategies for resolving conflict essay

Conflict is inevitable; even though some conflict can be good most of the time other times it can be harmful to a team.

By definition conflict is any situation in which incompatible goals, cognitions, or emotions within or between individuals or groups that lead to opposition or antagonistic interactions. Conflict can be damaging but with the right skills and the ability to resolve it, it can be beneficial to the team (Bowes, 2008). Many people try to avoid conflict at all costs, but avoiding conflict will not make it go away. Some people see shades of gray or different perspectives of issues more easily and readily than others. Those who see issues as black or white and who do not see gray tones, often find it difficult to understand a different point of view or a different perspective on a topic(Porter, 2003). Some people will notice conflict but choose not to do anything about it, they may believe that if they ignore it that it will go away.

Most of the time however, the situation gets worse (Mcnamara, 2003). Any type of conflict can be a challenge but understanding the nature and causes of the conflict then applying effective strategies to resolving the conflict can benefit everyone(Bowes, 2008). The 4 main causes of conflict in a workplace are: Different interests and goals- a goal for one individual may be quality while another personal goal may be speed. Both are valid goals but they conflict and could cause problems among members of a team.

Conflicting personal values- Our personal values help us determine what a person may feel is important such as our religious and political beliefs. This causes people to form cliques which can cause work relationships to become disjointed. Interpersonal styles- shape how people view things. Some people

may be open minded and open to change while others are more narrow minded and against change. Either way conflict is sure to arise. Conflict Management Styles- Conflicting management styles could cause problems when one person refuses to compromise and one person is someone whom likes to listen and try to hear what there colleagues have to say.

The person whom refuses to budge could destroy trusting relationships rather than build them (Porter, 2003). According to MindTools (1995) conflict is not always a bad thing: if the conflict is resolved effectively it can lead to personal and professional growth. Effective conflict resolution can lead to an increased understanding, increased group cohesion, and improved self-knowledge. If conflict is not handled effectively it can be very damaging causing breakdown in teams as well as turning into personal dislike. Managing conflict and resolving conflicts are two different processes. One must understand conflict before they can manage it.

One way of resolving conflict is known as the 4R method. Reasons, Reactions, Results, and Resolution are the 4R's. In the first step Reasons, the conflict is explored and discussed in a respective manner. The second step is Reactions this occurs when individuals look at the way they reacted to the situation, if it was destructive then the person should take the steps needed to recommit to the team.

Results is where the team thinks about what would happen if the conflict was not resolved and how they will work together to solve conflict should it arise. The final step is Resolution this occurs when the team decides which approach to use to solve the conflict (Porter 2003). The website MindTools

(1995) states that Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann identified five main styles of dealing with conflict. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument also known as the TKI helps to identify which style people lean towards when conflict arises.

Thomas and Kilmann's styles are Competitive, Collaborative, Compromising, Accommodating, and Avoiding. Once a person understands the different styles they can use them to think about the most appropriate approach for their situation and how to resolve the conflict. Another theory often used is called the " Interest-Based Relational Approach" or the IRB approach. This conflict resolution strategy respects individual differences.

When using this method a few simple rules are followed. Make sure that good relationships are the first priority: Treat others with respect, speak calmly and try to be courteous to the other members of the team. Keep people and problems separate: By keeping the problem separate from the person and realizing that the person isn't just being difficult the problem can be debated without causing damage to the team. Pay attention to the interests that are being presented: Listening to the team will help with the understanding of where each person is coming from. Listen first; talk second: To solve the problem effectively each person needs to listen to the information being presented by each team member and understand where they are coming from before defending their own position.

Set out the " Facts": Establish an objective and make sure everyone agrees on what is set forth. Explore options together: Be open to other ideas a person will never know what idea is going to present itself and it just may

work for the team. If a team follows these simple rules they can often keep discussions positive and constructive. This helps a team stay on task and prevent destructive conflict that can spiral out of control and destroy a team. If conflict does occur always remember to take a positive approach to resolving the conflict.

As long as the discussions stay courteous and are done in a non-confrontational way without putting blame on other people then conflict can usually be resolved in a positive and effective way (mindtools, 1995). A third approach to conflict resolution is the E-R-I model. The E-R-I model stands for emotions, reason, and intuition. This is a step by step approach to help solve problems. Getting rid of negative emotions, feelings of anger, resentment, and fear is the first step to resolving conflict using the E-R-I method, this can be done in a number of ways. One way is to listen calmly and let the other person vent.

Another approach is to let everyone take a time out, giving them time to cool down and compose themselves. This allows the person dealing with the conflict time to gather information on why the problem occurred and how to resolve it effectively. The second step in the E-R-I approach is to use reasoning. The reasoning technique is used to get a better understanding of the conflict and discern the appropriate resolution strategies. Conflict is usually the result of bad communication, differing personality styles or conflicting interests. Through communication a person can better recognize the actual problem which helps resolve the conflict.

The final step in the E-R-I method is to use intuition. In this phase of the E-R-I a person uses brainstorming techniques to find new possibilities and alternate ways to resolve conflict. Before relying on intuition a person needs to get emotions out of the way, understand the situation and recognize how to use different approaches to resolving the conflict (Scott, 2008). According to the United States Air Force Auxiliary Civil Air Patrol (2000) small doses of conflict may be healthy to a team. Conflict can increase a team's competition and increase the efforts of the team members.

Healthy conflict is very rare and should be monitored to ensure that it does not escalate. No one strategy is appropriate in all situations. Each situation requires different amounts of time, energy, and cooperation but if a person follows one of the above conflict resolution strategy then conflict is certain to be resolved. A conflict free team is certain to be productive and able to finish projects in a timely matter. When conflict does occur it should be dealt with as fast as possible, if left unattended it could destroy a team.

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