

Chapter 8: Solving Problems and Resolving Conflict

Overview

This chapter discusses important issues related to working in groups and teams. Before selecting a team approach, it is important that everyone involved be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of the method. Also, In order to use a team approach effectively, all participants must be able to manage problems and conflict.

Lecture Notes

A. The Advantages and Disadvantages of Groups and Teams

1. **Advantages of Using Groups or Teams for Problem-Solving** recognize that “two heads are better than one.”
 - a. Identification of alternative solutions is greater; several people working together will develop more alternatives than individuals will. This leads to more successful solutions.
 - b. Knowledge sharing by cross-functional teams means there is an increased amount of knowledge sharing possible, especially when the group includes individuals with diverse backgrounds.
 - c. Implementation effectiveness occurs because people participate in the development of the solutions to problems. Involvement leads to ownership of the solution, and they have more at stake to ensure successful implementation.
 - d. More acceptance of decisions occurs because people at all levels are involved in the decision-making; it is not a top-down approach. There is also less chance of miscommunication.
 - e. Increased energy level occurs because of the direct involvement in the decision-making/problem-solving process. It is generated from employees who want to be involved and use their knowledge and power effectively.
 - f. Improved personal decision-making skills are developed as people participate in group decision-making situations. It is a method of personal growth.
 - g. Increased ability to solve problems occurs because of the experience with diverse sets of problems with different groups of individuals.
 - h. Creation of interactive environments allows for teams and groups to further develop.
2. **Disadvantages of Group and Team Activities** must also be considered.
 - a. Resistance to new approaches is a disadvantage that is often overlooked. Group members may be resistant to new ideas and approaches; they may only consider those that are presented the most skillfully.
 - b. Lack of group participation can lead to failure in developing good solutions to the problem.
 - c. High costs related to group problem-solving may be incurred due to the coordination and time.

- d. Free riders are members that gain benefits without contributing to the group's work. This is a big challenge to leaders and members in the group.
 - e. Barriers imposed by managers that fear for their own jobs create a major obstacle for groups.
 - f. Domination by team members; when a few dominate, it is difficult to get a good group decision. Groups can become unknown tools for advancing hidden agendas of dominating members.
3. **Potential for Conflict and Ineffectiveness** exists when disagreements and interpersonal issues get in the way.
- a. Groupthink is the tendency to conform automatically and uncritically to a group judgment even though there are dangers. It is caused by high group cohesion, five aspects in decision making (review in text), invulnerability, morality, & pressure. Combat groupthink by assigning a critical evaluator in the group to ask for input from everyone, Resistance facilitation occurs when members support resisting change. Interpersonal conflict and ineffectiveness may also occur.
 - b. Group decision-making—weighing the evidence. Collective problem-solving can be made into an asset or liability (development of creative solutions, conflicts among group members, risk involved in group decisions, group ownership of decisions, differences in members' opinions).

B. Group Problem-Solving Techniques

1. **T-Group** intervention is the grandfather of intervention techniques; it was introduced in 1947.
 - a. No agenda—no anxieties.
 - b. The goal is to get members to give non-evaluative feedback to each other (T stands for training).
 - c. The group consists of 10–15 participants with 1–2 trainers.
 - d. It is similar to sensitivity training, but sensitivity training is more structured.
 - e. The technique has advantages (opportunity for expression, rule-free discussion) and disadvantages (fear of later retribution, return to previous state once over).
2. **Delphi Technique** is a valuable approach to use in predicting future human resource demands.
 - a. Basic procedures require participants to provide their opinions independently. The technique requires two groups (monitor or staff group AND respondent or participant group).
 - b. The technique has advantages (contribute all they can, all ideas discussed fully) and disadvantages (time-consuming, voting technique).
 - c. The electronic Delphi technique reduces the time necessary by using a computer to provide summary and feedback.

3. **Nominal Group Technique** (NGT) was introduced in 1968. The group first generates a list of ideas about a given problem, discusses each idea, and then ranks the ideas. It is a popular technique for complex problems.
 - a. The process is structured with specific roles for the facilitator and individuals.
 - b. Larger groups will need to be divided into smaller groups that will come back together to rank ideas from each group.
 - c. NGT has its advantages (anyone can participate, strangers can work together, the facilitator should be trained-but not an expert) and disadvantages (participation may be uneven, conclusions may be a compromise).
4. **Quality Circles** can include large groups.
 - a. The basic structure includes line workers who do the job they are reviewing. The corporation sets rules for the process; used extensively in Japan.
 - b. Five basic steps include identify the problem, analyze it, develop a solution, propose the idea to management, and then acceptance or rejection.
 - c. Quality circles have advantages (thorough analysis, tested solutions, worked through by those closest to situation) and disadvantages (management commitment, relationships between union and management, weak implementation process, objectives and roles not clearly defined).
5. **Brainstorming** began in the 1930s to generate as many ideas as possible when addressing a specific problem. The process encourages ideas, minimizes evaluation, and encourages active modification.
 - a. Brainstorming follows a natural process; it occurs any time several people meet in an unstructured setting.
 - b. Brainstorming has its advantages (ideas explored freely, many ideas offered, criticism not personal or derogatory) and disadvantages (open to groupthink, aggressiveness).
 - c. An alternative approach uses two teams to avoid premature closure of the discussion.

C. Conflict

Conflict is a natural part of human interaction, and management of conflict is a part of human relations. Conflict occurs whenever there is a disagreement, competing interests, different expectations, or incompatible styles between two or more individuals or groups.

1. **Types of Conflict** include:
 - a. Intrapersonal conflict occurs within the individual; it arises when an individual is aware of ideas and desires that are incompatible and tries to satisfy needs and desires. Intrapersonal conflict is normal and common. There are different areas of intrapersonal conflict. They include approach-avoidance (decision with positive and negative consequences), approach-approach (two alternatives with positive consequences), avoidance-avoidance (multiple alternatives with negative consequences), double approach-avoidance (both choices have good and bad consequences), cognitive dissonance (conflicting attitudes or behaviors).

- b. Topic conflict refers to a disagreement about what is being discussed between two people that like each other. It needs to be resolved for both to protect the friendship.
 - c. Interpersonal conflict arises from incompatibility of goals, ineffective communication, or personality styles between two people that dislike each other.
 - d. Combination or multi-level conflict is a combination of disagreement on the topic being discussed and the relationship.
 - e. Organizational conflict occurs between groups in the organization. They can be horizontal conflicts (between different units of the same level), vertical conflicts (common, lower levels frustrated with upper level), and role confusion (whose job is it?).
2. **Sources of Conflict in the Work Place** come from forces that need to be recognized.
- a. Diversity leads to conflict through prejudice, discrimination, and anxiety about differences.
 - b. Competition for promotion and raises and limited rewards leads to conflict.
 - c. Turf refers to establishing territory; establishing in turn leads to cohesiveness within your group and conflict with others.
 - d. Scapegoating blames the group with the least power for failure. This can also be conflict between management and union.
3. **Conflicting Management Styles** comes from competing goals, diverse interests, and different values.
- a. Assertiveness and cooperation define two dimensions of interaction related to conflicting styles: forcing (high assertiveness/low cooperativeness), withdrawing (low assertiveness/low cooperativeness), smoothing (low assertiveness/high cooperativeness), problem-solving (high assertiveness/high cooperativeness), and compromising (moderate assertiveness/moderate cooperativeness).
4. **Resolving Group Conflict** becomes an individual and group effort.
- a. Resolutions of group conflict are necessary in order to meet goals in a meeting.
 - b. Basic steps to resolve the conflict in a meeting include fact-finding, isolating factors creating the conflict, and defusing the causes.
 - c. Resolving personal conflict is a critical first step to becoming a better manager. Four simple steps include allow time to cool off, analyze the situation, state the problem to the other person, and leave the person a way “out.”
 - d. Outcomes of conflict must be resolution in order for the business to move forward. Outcomes can be win/win, win/lose, and lose/lose—of course, win/win is the most preferred.

D. Techniques for Reducing Interpersonal Conflict

Learning effective interpersonal skills can reduce most interpersonal conflict, and those skills can be learned in many ways.

1. **Sensitivity Training** is the oldest type of HR training program; it started in 1946 at the National Training Laboratories. The focus is being sensitive to and aware of attitudes and feelings of others.
 - a. Methods of sensitivity training include encounter groups, T-groups, and cultural awareness seminars. They all include free expression and focus on interpersonal tension and anxiety.
 - b. Training goals relate to the process used to train people to be sensitive to others. (*Review list in text.*)
 - c. The effectiveness and consequences of the training have been questioned; however, it is still widely used.
2. **Assertive Training** relates to ability to express your feelings with confidence. The method became popular due to Arnold Lazarus, but it has continued with many others.
 - a. Assertive behavior requires a distinction between getting your way and standing your ground. Assertive people have a sense of confidence that allows them to compromise their position and not their sense of self or integrity.
 - b. Assertiveness can be contrasted with aggressiveness (insist on having their own way without regard for others) and passiveness (consistently trying to accommodate others without regard for themselves) and passive-aggressive behavior (combination of the styles).
 - c. Assertiveness training requires the distinction of getting own way and standing one's ground.
3. **Transactional Analysis** provides a means of conceptualizing the types of interactions using a simple formula of identifying behavior toward others.
 - a. Three personality states are part of the transactions: parent-ego state, adult-ego state, and child-ego state.
 - b. Transactions identify behaviors; they can be complementary (people behave in same ego states, crossed (one is parent and other adult), or ulterior (appear in one state, but really another).
 - c. Scripts (preprogrammed transactions) and strokes (behaviors that recognized others) relate to people communication rules.
4. **Motivational Training** focuses on excitement and energy toward a specific outcome.
 - a. Goal setting is one aspect of motivation that can be covered in a seminar or training session.
 - b. Self-concept is a critical component of motivation.
 - c. TQM (Ch. 4) is an all-around philosophy that is incorporated into all aspects of life.
5. **Adventure Training** (outdoor training) is popular with youth and management teams; it is used to build trust.

- a. Challenges may be emotional and/or physical.
- b. Working together is required to build trust.
- c. Success as a team member is learned through accepting roles and taking pride in team successes.
- d. Transfer to the workplace is a major assumption in this type of training.

Additional Resources for Students

Recommended readings (no texts should be more than two years old):

- Bateman, Thomas S. and Scott A. Snell. *Management: Building Competitive Advantages*. Irwin/McGraw Hill.
- Bittel, Lester R. and John W. Newstrom. *What Every Supervisor Should Know*. McGraw-Hill Book Co.
- Carrell, Michael R. *Human Resources Management*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- David, Fred R. *Strategic Management: Concepts & Cases*. Prentice-Hall.
- Davis, Fruehling, and Oldham. *Psychology: Human Relations and Work Adjustment*. McGraw-Hill Book Co.
- DeCenzo, David A. and Stephen P. Robbins. *Human Resource Management*. John Wiley and Sons.
- Dessler, Gary. *Essentials of Management*. Prentice-Hall.
- Dessler, Gary. *Human Resource Management*. Prentice-Hall
- DuBrin, Andrew. *Human Relations: A Job Oriented Approach*. Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Gomez-Mejia, Luis, David Balkin, and Robert Cardy. *Management Human Resources*.
- Griffin, Ricky W. *Management*. Houghton Mifflin.
- Haimann and Hilgert. *Supervision*. South-Western Publishing Co.
- Harris, Michael. *Human Resource Management*.
- Hersey, Paul, Kenneth H. Blanchard, and Dewey E. Johnson. *Management of Organizational Behavior*. Prentice-Hall.
- Ivancevich, John M. *Human Resource Management*. Irwin/McGraw Hill.
- Milkovich, George T. and John W. Boudreau. *Human Resources Management*.
- Mondy, Noe, and Premeaux. *Human Resource Management*. Prentice-Hall.
- Robbins, Stephen P. *Organizational Behavior*. Prentice-Hall.
- Robbins, Stephen and Mary Coulter. *Management*. Prentice-Hall.
- Sherman, Arthur W. Jr. and George W. Bohlander. *Managing Human Resources*. South-Western Publishing Co.

- Stoner, James, R. Edward Freeman, and Daniel R. Gilbert, Jr. *Management*. Prentice-Hall.

Current issues of periodicals or business publications are also an excellent resource. Some of the following periodicals have an accompanying Web site.

<i>Current Periodical</i>	<i>Web Address</i>
<i>BusinessWeek</i>	http://www.businessweek.com
<i>IAAP Complete Office Handbook</i>	http://www.iaap-hq.org/products/handbook.htm
<i>Modern Office Technology</i>	
<i>OfficePro</i>	http://www.iaap-hq.org/officepro/toc.htm
<i>The Office</i>	