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Conflict in Organizations Assignment

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Conflict in Organizations Assignment

by

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Abstract

An analysis of a series of factors, including change, that cause conflict in organizations, and the tools for resolving and avoiding conflict. The author discusses in detail several causal factors of conflict within an organization. She also analyzes how managers can plan for changes in order to prevent conflict. The author concludes that in order to prevent and deal with conflict, management must empower the staff by implementing clear lines of communication, educating and advancing people, introducing changes gradually, and establishing a solid support foundation for the staff.

Conflict in Organizations Assignment

The world is always changing. Too often we find ourselves having to rethink our beliefs and action systems, and even trying new methods or approaches. The business world is no different. Everyday things such as sales performance and market competition can make an organization change the way it does business. Solutions that are formulated today are not written in stone and will most likely be modified with time as the objectives and vision of the organization change. One thing we can always count on, then, is change.

In organizations, changes are constantly happening at all levels. They may range from switching to a more cost effective shipping method, to establishing new ways of reporting grievances, to reviewing the paid time off policy, or even moving offices to a different city.

Change and Conflict

Regardless of the type, change will always create a certain degree of conflict because it will impact everyone in the staff differently. The staff needs certain conditions to be met in order for them to be productive and to achieve the company's vision and goals. Some of these include: feeling they are valued, being part of a cohesive team, having good communication with management, and feeling their input is valued by the organization.

If management effects change without communicating it thoroughly to the staff and listening in to their concerns, change will most likely produce resistance (Evans, Ward, & Rugaas, 2000).

Throughout my career, I have also observed that conflict occurs when resistance to change is such that it becomes disruptive to operations. Moreover, radical changes seem to draw the most resistance. Managers then have the added responsibility of spearheading change in a way that it is least disruptive to staff, operations, and therefore, to the organization's vision.

Other Factors that Cause Conflict

Wall and Callister (1995, Causes of Conflict section, ¶ 3) identified other factors that create conflict in an organization: perception, communication, behavioral, structural, previous interaction and issues. They further put forth that personal values, commitment values, effects of stress and anger, and desire for autonomy, are all most likely than individual characteristics to cause conflict (Wall & Callister, 1995, Individual Characteristics section, ¶ 2-6). Perception of facial expressions, mannerisms, body language, voice tone, and speech content, can lead to misinterpretation, anger and conflict (Wall & Callister, 1995, Communications section, ¶1). Structure can also create imbalances between staff when one party clearly benefits more than the rest.

The effects of conflict are several as explained by Wall & Callister (1995, Effects of Conflict-Issues sections, ¶ 1-9):

1. Negative attitude towards conflicting party.
2. Diminished quality of communications.
3. Overt interactions between conflicting parties may involve violent behavior or avoidance.
4. Diminished commitment to the organization with increased absenteeism, grievances and lowered productivity.
5. Simple issues become more complex as the parties fail to reach agreements.

Obviously all of these produce very negative connotations for an organization's operation.

Management Tools for Dealing with Conflict

Evans et al. (2000) put forth that "(s)taff who understand the change and need for that change are more accepting of change than those who do not have that understanding" (p. 117). Not only

understanding the reasoning behind the change, but also being allowed to offer input regarding the change, may diminish the possibilities of conflict.

Some of the tools managers can use in order to better ‘train’ the staff to handle change are: education and communication, participation and involvement, facilitation and support, and negotiation and agreement (Evans et al., 2000).

I believe the most egregious error that managers make when dealing with conflict is failing to educate people (Brown, 1985). If people are trained, their commitment level strengthens and they develop a better understanding of the company’s objectives and needs for change.

Rahim and Bonoma (as quoted in Wall & Callister, 1995, Manager’s Conflict Management section, ¶ 3) point out that resolving conflict involves diagnosing the nature of problem (interpersonal, intragroup or intergroup), finding the source of the conflict, and planning an intervention accordingly.

Practically, a manager can do this by identifying conflict roles, encouraging communication and input from all parties, and setting the stage for a resolution to take place. I strongly feel that all times the manager should communicate individually and as a group with the conflicted parties at all stages of the conflict resolution. Staff needs to know that the manager is equally concerned for everyone’s wellbeing just as much as for protecting the organization’s best interest.

If the parties’ ongoing conflict cannot be solved through these channels, I would favor mediation by involving a third party such as a human resources representative whose main focus is the employees’ wellbeing and interest. “Even when it does not lead to a conflict settlement, mediation frequently improves the interaction between the disputants” (Wall & Callister, 1995, Mediation section, ¶2). A mediator would also give the sense to the staff of having another neutral party look at the conflict with a ‘fresh set of eyes.’

In the case when this is not possible due to unavailability of such specialized staff, I would then favor a more authoritative approach that can involve revising existing communications, clarification of duties and goals, negotiating standards for appropriate behavior, and even reassigning the disputants (Wall & Callister, 1995, Manager's Conflict Management section, ¶2).

Building an Organization that Accepts Change

As organizational change cannot be avoided, managers are pressured to know not only how to resolve conflict but also to prevent it. One of the ways this can be accomplished is by building the organization in a way that it does not resist change.

I once worked at a company where change was never opposed. The way it was implemented though was smart and proactive. For example a small group of *superusers* was organized to test the viability of a new company wide operations software before it was rolled out to the rest of the staff. The *superusers* were thoroughly trained in the new program. As they utilized it in their day to day tasks, they were able to give feedback to the programmers on what features to improve, which aspects to downplay, critical needed components, and generally identified underlying issues that were smoothed out before the company wide roll out took place. Only after the *superusers* trained the rest of the staff making them feel comfortable with the change, was the new software implemented. The organization also made sure the *superusers* worked side by side with the rest of the staff by temporarily reallocating them to the affected offices. At no time did the staff resist the change. This was made possible because throughout the process their input was solicited and incorporated into the program design, they were thoroughly trained and supported, they understood the need for the change and the improvements it would make to the company's operations, and they felt valued by the organization.

All this is to say that in order to build an organization that embraces change, management must keep in mind the following points:

1. **Communication is Key** – Management should maintain frequent communication with staff to convey planned changes well in advance, explain the reasons for the change, solicit input from staff, and set milestones for implementing change.
2. **Education and Training** – Staff feels less intimidated and more confident if they are thoroughly educated and trained prior to the implementation of change. This has the added benefit that the staff will feel involved in the process which will in turn boost their confidence and trust.
3. **Support** – Staff needs to feel supported. Otherwise they might feel scared or less confident to make the change.
4. **Planning** – Change needs to be carefully planned. Individual characteristics, group behavior and organizational culture should all be taken into account when planning for change.

Conclusion

Brown (1985) put forth that management is the skilled achievement of set goals with and through the voluntary collaboration and efforts of others.

Good managers can deal with conflict and resistance to change as long as their human resources have been taking into account during the planning stages. If an organization is carefully built with these ideas in mind, it will welcome change rather than resisting it and conflict will be successfully prevented.

References

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