



UNIT - 5

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF ACTION PLAN

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Identify different types of teams.
- ✓ Build teamwork by recognizing and tapping into the twelve characteristics of an effective team.

Unit 5

Conflict Management and Development of Action Plan Interventions for Team Leaders

Problems and Solutions

Problem One

A team member asks questions or makes comments that are off topic.

How to Prevent It

All meetings should have an agenda so that team members know what is to be discussed. This can include a quick agenda or meeting objectives recorded on a whiteboard or flip chart.

How to Handle It

This requires tact and leadership by the chair of the meeting and the team leader (if they are two different people). You want team members to be involved and to get engaged. You also don't want to shut them down so that they no longer participate.

Suggestions:

- ✓ The leader can offer an apology to the team by saying something like: "I haven't made the objective clear. Let me try to put it clearly."
- ✓ The leader can tactfully ask: "Can you hold that comment until we finish what's on the agenda?" or "Would you like to me add that comment to the agenda (for this meeting or a future one)."
- ✓ The leader tactfully tables the comment by saying something like, "That's an interesting topic, and although we cannot add it to today's objectives, I would like to see you after the meeting to discuss it."

Problem Two

A side conversation takes place between two participants.

How to Prevent It

Set up objectives and an agenda so that everyone knows what is being discussed. Make sure the meeting is both interesting and beneficial to everyone there, and that people know why they have been included.

How to Handle It

If a side conversation develops, you should assume that it's about your topic. This gives participants the benefit of the doubt and helps to keep them positive even though they have been called on their behavior.

Suggestions:

- ✓ Your own silence may indicate that you have noticed their conversation and it's distracting. You can look at your notes if you like to indicate that the pause is for your benefit rather than theirs.
- ✓ If you feel the side conversation indicates restlessness among the group, take a short break.
- ✓ Directly ask the people talking if they would like to share their ideas with the rest of the team. This clarifies that you think they are discussing something that is on topic, and that you would like to hear it.

Problem Three

Team members seem distracted.

How to Prevent It

Your job as leader includes keeping the meeting interesting and productive so that participants are engaged. Consider where you are holding the meeting, the time of day, and competing priorities.

How to Handle It

If several participants seem distracted, stop and acknowledge what is going on. Consider a short break to allow people to deal with something pressing (although you also must consider the impact this has on others in the meeting).

If the number of distracted members is small, you could stop and ask someone to summarize what has happened so far. You could also call attention to the distraction, ask participants to set it aside, and fully engage in this commitment. Then continue on with the full participation of everyone there.

Problem Four

Two or more participants are arguing.

How to Prevent It

Clarify objectives under discussion to limit off-topic disagreements. Then, remind participants that there are suitable ways to work through a disagreement, which you will assist them with. Also remind them that their arguing is not conducive to the meeting outcomes (which you have covered in the ground rules when the team was initially formed).

How to Handle It

Your first objective is to resume control of the meeting without fueling the conflict. If the argument is the result of something that is on topic, the leader can help participants constructively work through the problem. If the disagreement is off topic, you can restate the objective being discussed, while inviting the participants to speak with you afterward (so that you can facilitate their resolving these issues quickly and effectively).

You can say something like: “I want to hear from both of you, but I am also responsible for making sure we make the best use of time here while the whole team is present. Say what you think, respectfully, but also be willing to listen to and consider the ideas of others.”

If necessary, you may have to stop the meeting to deal with hot issues before the team can resume working together again.

Problem Five

One or two participants dominate the meeting.

How to Prevent It

Sometimes this problem can be anticipated, and the leader can make the most of that knowledge by starting the meeting by reviewing some rules of conduct. Encourage everyone to participate, take turns being heard, and to support one another. If there is a particular person who frequently dominates, speak with that individual prior to the meeting and let them know you need input from all participants and directly – though tactfully – ask them to temper their responses and involvement to encourage others.

If you ask questions and then ask for input by specifically inviting people to speak, you have help to stop domination. For example, you could say, “I’d like to talk about your ideas for improving customer service. Could each of you please take two minutes and write down what comes to mind?” Then, you can call on participants to answer the question and temper the involvement of those who frequently dominate by giving them a time limit. Make sure you invite people to speak by using their name.

How to Handle It

The key to your success as leader is to not embarrass your enthusiastic participant. Remember that they have good things to contribute, and it’s not that you want to exclude them, but that you are trying to increase the involvement of others.

Here are some techniques that you can use.

- ✓ Tactfully interrupt by inviting the next person to speak. You could say something like, “I think we’ve got the essence of your idea captured, Mike. Let’s see what someone else has to say. Jean, would you go next, please.”

- ✓ Give the individual a little more to do, and be specific about it. For example, “Fred, would you please make notes of the flip chart to record all the ideas we are generating among the group?”
- ✓ Interrupt the person tactfully, with something like this: “Jean, I hate to stop you there, but we’re going to run short of time and I'd like to get input from everyone here.”

Problem Six

Participants start checking their watches and/or phones, and even packing up to leave.

How to Prevent It

End your meetings on time. If the time must remain open because of a problem solving issue, let them know ahead of time by saying something like, “The meeting should finish by about 3:30 but we will stay here until we solve the problem.”

Try to schedule meetings when people are not distracted by competing issues, like having another meeting to rush off to or paychecks to issue. Also consider that they could be anxious to leave if they feel you are wasting their time or they are not able to contribute. Make sure you can plan and run a productive meeting.

How to Handle It

When you notice people are restless, you have to take action.

- ✓ Renew their interest by asking a question, returning their attention to the agenda, or engaging them in an activity.
- ✓ End the current meeting and set a time for the next meeting.
- ✓ If you’ve wandered away from the agenda, apologize and get back on track.
- ✓ Consider offering refreshments.

Problem Seven

Members of the team are not participating.

How to Prevent It

Make sure you are always engaging all members of the team, and that you never embarrass or insult anyone. Establish an environment that encourages and even teaches them how to fully participate. Keep things interesting and productive (i.e., don’t include people who don’t need to be there) and you’ll see more engagement.

How to Handle It

Your approach will depend on why people won't participate. Have you gone beyond the time you scheduled? Respect their schedules and end the meeting; you can book something else for later. Are they bored? Stimulate and engage them.

New leaders sometimes inadvertently embarrass or tease people, both of which are not appropriate. If the group has no respect for you they can be tough to engage. You can try to move on to another subject that is attention-grabbing so they can work beyond hostility, but you will have plenty of work to do in order to earn their trust.

Problem Eight

You, the leader, get off track.

How to Prevent It

You need to be well prepared and ready to meet the objectives. If you get off track it might be due to a comment by a participant, or it could be your own level of commitment to the team or the meeting. Maintain your composure, professionalism, and look after your engagement.

To prevent getting sidetracked by participants, you can learn to evaluate each comment and question that comes from the group very quickly. If the comment is not on topic, keep things on track by calling attention to the objectives and the importance of staying on track. Encourage an ongoing dialogue by recommending that discussion of that particular item be postponed until later in the meeting, or added to the agenda of a future meeting.

How to Handle It

If the leader recognizes they are off the subject an apology is all that's needed. "I'm sorry I got off the subject there. I wish we had time to explore this, but we need to focus on today's objectives first. The other topic will have to wait for now." If a participant realizes that the meeting is going off track, that participant can tactfully bring it to the attention of the leader.

Case Study

A Hidden Agenda

John came into Robin's office feeling exasperated. "I don't know what to do," he said quietly. "I've tried everything I can to get this team working together, but they won't make any decisions."

"Well, you've certainly had plenty of time," Robin said. "You were appointed to lead that task force two weeks ago, and I expected a lot by now. You should have generated at least some ideas and maybe a few proposals."

"It's like we sit down and the agenda goes out the window. I can't get them on track at all. Jorge keeps bringing up examples of failed programs in the past. Ashley interrupts all the time so I have to keep backtracking; I think she is trying to make me look foolish in front of the team. Trish never says a word

sudden, it blazes up out of control. This creates a problem that never needed to happen in the first place. Working through conflict can uncover creative and innovative ideas that you may not have heard about otherwise.

A manager who avoids conflict sets a workgroup or an organization on a calamitous course. For example, maybe you have an employee who is constantly late for work, but you let the situation ride without dealing with it. Not only will you reinforce bad work habits, but you will lose the respect of those who see you not dealing with the conflict.

On the other hand, you can't go around confronting everyone and everything. If you read the riot act to an employee who is late for work for the first time, you won't earn respect. You will be seen as a tyrant. This leads to the questions: when do you ignore and when do you confront?

Here are some guidelines that might help you. You should consider confronting employees when:

- ✓ An employee's performance impedes your organization's goals or slows down production.
- ✓ An employee's actions will impede your own success. Ask yourself: Can I afford to ignore this?
- ✓ Other employees ask you to intercede. Internal bickering can cause low morale.
- ✓ The people involved ask you to intercede because they are unable to resolve their differences themselves.

You also have to stop and ask yourself if you are doing anything that contributes to this problem.

Even members of the most exceptional team will occasionally find themselves locked in conflict. Sometimes you, as team leader, are reluctant to ask for your team's help in resolving conflicts because you feel that the burden for conflict resolution rests entirely on your shoulders. This is not only inaccurate; it can also be detrimental to you and your group in a number of ways. Team leaders who appoint themselves sole arbitrators and harmonizers for their teams are headed for disaster.

Resolving Internal Conflict

When a team is in internal conflict, what can you do?

Remove all masks.

Sincerity is the ideal mindset for conflict resolution. If we cannot achieve sincerity, at least aim for authenticity. Being authentic means not hiding behind masks, but showing up as yourself.

Identify the real problem.

Often the real problem lurks somewhere behind or underneath the apparent problem. Conflict will not be resolved until the process can address the true problem.

Give up a must-win attitude.

When players compete too hard all the time, a good deal of life passes them by. They go to the wall to defend a position and will go down screaming, taking as many people with them as possible. Conflicts are not won; they are resolved.

Develop several possible solutions.

In reality, most situations can go in a variety of directions. It may be up to you to create the choices.

Evaluate options and select a solution.

Choose the best workable choice from the possibilities you have gathered. The goal is to choose the possibility that will hold the most for both you and the other party.

Communicate in a manner certain to be received.

A great idea goes nowhere if you don't communicate it to others. Only when someone feels you have heard their message are they ready to listen to yours, so listen actively. Communication that is full of anger, lacks clarity, and has no commitment behind it, will not bring about action.

Acknowledge and preserve the value in the relationship.

Resolving conflict is about preserving relationships. If that were not so, people would not try to resolve their conflicts. Disputes would just fester and eventually destroy the relationship.

To provide a temporary time-out for individuals who feel they are locked in conflict, ask questions such as these:

- ✓ How do you think we are doing?
- ✓ Are we making progress on this issue?
- ✓ Do you feel your views are being heard?

Preventing Internal Conflict

To prevent internal conflict, keep in mind what Dale Carnegie said:

- ✓ Talk about what the other person is interested in.
- ✓ Be genuinely interested in people.
- ✓ Ask WIIFM (What's In It For Me?).
- ✓ Make them feel important.
- ✓ See things from the other person's point of view.
- ✓ Smile! 😊

Role Play

SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. SWOT analysis is used for understanding your Strengths and Weaknesses and for looking at the Opportunities and Threats you face. In a business sense, it can help you carve out your niche in the market and can help your business grow in the right way. In a team sense, it is used for identifying a team's strengths and weaknesses, and for areas of growth and potential problems that lie ahead. It can even be used in a personal sense to develop your career.

It is a good idea to perform a SWOT analysis of your team at pre-defined points in time. These points depend on the type of team and how often it meets. For example, a team responsible for publishing a daily company newsletter may want to do a SWOT analysis as often as every two weeks. If the team was responsible for publishing a quarterly newsletter, however, the analysis would probably only be necessary once or twice a year.

As well, a SWOT analysis of the company can also help direct the team and make it more productive. For example, if the newsletter team knows that the company has a great opportunity to extend its market into Canada, it may discuss ways that the team can help the company achieve this goal.

Case Study

Background

Fuel Majesta provides an environmentally responsible fuel that can be distributed throughout the country. The fuel is highly concentrated, non-toxic, and is produced in a highly secret process that is conducted with thermal heat, so there is almost no environmental impact in producing this fuel.

Since being founded by a small group of energy experts five years ago, Fuel Majesta has generated a lot of industry buzz and solid revenues. However, they face some significant human resource challenges. Although there are three local universities and a trade college that offer programs with skills that Fuel Majesta needs, there are four other smaller fossil fuel companies locally that attract most of the candidates graduating from these programs. The current Human Resources director prefers hiring candidates who apply rather than using alternative methods like networking and headhunting.

As well, the current Human Resources director previously managed an organization that had many excellent procedures and programs in place. However, their team has not had the time or resources to get these programs in place for Fuel Majesta. Existing programs like employee development, onboarding, and orientation have been neglected.

Fuel Majesta has also struggled to keep people in leadership positions. The Health and Safety team manager resigned last week, and the Director of Finance was placed on long term medical leave just last month. There are also many openings for support staff, including a daytime receptionist.

Task

Complete a SWOT analysis of Fuel Majesta’s Human Resources team. This means that you need to consider elements of hiring, turnover, succession planning, absenteeism, labor relations, compensation, and benefits.

		<i>INTERNAL</i>	<i>EXTERNAL</i>
<i>P O S I T I V E</i>		Strengths	Opportunities
	<i>N E G A T I V E</i>	Weaknesses	Threats

STIS
Staff Training Solutions

Developing Team Action Plans

Planning Tools

After working with your team to identify a tentative solution, you must move on to the next phase, and create a realistic and achievable action plan together. When you create the plan together, you get their support. Make sure that the plan is clear and concise (as opposed to ambiguous or vague) so that people know what is coming up. Good action plans include all of the following:

- ✓ What is achievable? What amount of improvement can we implement over the course of the plan?
- ✓ What's reasonable? How can we assign and undertake work so that everyone on the team gets involved and has a high level of commitment and buy in?
- ✓ What help do we need? We operate as a team within a larger organization or system, so perhaps we have access to people with resources, ideas, and more. How can we solicit their help or input?
- ✓ What could go wrong? We need contingency planning to prepare for anything that can or will likely put us off track.

Making Your Team Improvement Plan

There are five steps to constructing a team improvement plan:

1. Identify what's required in terms of action steps
2. Define goals agreed upon by the group
3. Decide who is responsible for what through assignments or people volunteering
4. Create a chart or some kind of clear tool that shows what's taking place
5. Create a contingency/troubleshooting plan

Intention vs. Actions

A frequent problem with teams is that they have wonderful intentions that are rarely translated into actions. To prevent this, use action statements instead of intention statements. Here are some examples.

Team Improvement Area	Intention	Action
We seem to lack foresight. Team members are too often taken by surprise with performance problems, such as errors or project delays.	We'll pay more attention to our planning.	During the next six weeks, each project leader will create a troubleshooting checklist detailing potential obstacles and indicating appropriate preventive actions.

Communication breakdowns are occurring within the team.	We'll schedule more meetings.	During the next three weeks, we will schedule two videoconferences and set up a shared web space where we can collaborate and have discussions about where things are at.
We're experiencing a lack of direction. There is some confusion within our team regarding our objectives and direction over the next few years.	During the next week, we will survey the team for their perspective of the team vision.	By the 15 th of this month, the team will meet to draft a vision statement. Prior to this meeting, each team member will have reviewed their projects and compiled a list of forecasted changes in our customer base as well as production results, while considering what they know of direction for the next two years.
We're receiving an increasing number of complaints from our internal customers.	We'll survey internal customers and ask for formal feedback on our performance.	On the 23 rd of next month, department leaders will host a focus group of internal customers to resolve these complaints and move ahead.

Action Planning Chart

Template

Here is a chart that can be used to plan out your team's actions to make sure its intentions are fulfilled.

Action To Be Taken	Team Member(s) Responsible For Action	Date This Action Will Begin	Date This Action Will Be Completed	Date For Team Review

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Further Reading: