

Project teams and stakeholder management

Managing Conflict in the Team.

Prepared by Dr. Nourhan Sayed

PMG 341

9th Lecture

Lecture (9)





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Course Outline

Lecture 1: Determining the Direction and Initial Specifications of a Project.

Lecture 2: the search for the high-performing team.

Lecture 3: Context: Laying the Foundation for Team Success.

Lecture 4: Composition: Getting the Right People on the Bus.

Lecture 5: competencies: Developing Team Skills for High Performance.

Lecture 6: Change: Devising More Effective Ways of Working Together.

Lecture 7: The Project Team's Environment (Stakeholders, Developing and Using Project Networks).

Lecture 8: Leading Project Teams.

Lecture 9: Managing Conflict in the Team.

Lecture 10: Writing Project Reports.

Lecture 9

Lecture Outline

1. Expectation Theory of Conflict.
2. Negotiating Agreements.
3. Helping Teams in Conflict or Confusion: The Role Clarification Exercise.
4. The Manager as the Center of Conflict.
5. Diversity as the Source of Conflict.
6. The Problem Member.

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Introduction:

In this chapter, we explore the basis of conflict in teams by discussing expectation theory and its application to teams. We outline the various conflict resolution methods and then focus on what to do when the manager or team leader is the problem, how to manage diversity successfully in a team, and how to deal effectively with a problem team member.

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1.Expectation Theory of Conflict:

Probably the most common explanation for understanding conflict is the theory of conflicting personalities. When two people do not get along, it is easiest to say that their “personalities clash.” Underlying this explanation is a presumption that one individual’s personality (a complex of attitudes, values, feelings, needs, and experiences) is so different from another’s that the two cannot function compatibly.

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However, attributing team conflict to personality clashes is not helpful and in fact often makes things worse, since the only way to resolve the problem would be to get someone to change his or her personality (at a deep level, none of us wants to feel that we have personality flaws that need to be changed; as a result we will be very defensive when our “personality” gets attacked) or be removed from the team.

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Typical Ways That Team Leaders Violate Subordinates' Expectations:

- Micromanaging their work (not giving them any autonomy to make decisions).
- Making decisions that affect the subordinate without asking for his or her input.
- Letting some team members shirk their duties without any negative consequences.

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- Not giving praise or any rewards for a job well done.
- Not recognizing that the subordinate has a life outside work that occasionally takes priority over work.

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Typical Ways That Subordinates Violate Team Leaders' Expectations:

- Missing or being late to team meetings.
- Not outwardly demonstrating commitment and support for the leader's agenda and priorities.
- Not completing assignments in a timely manner so the team can complete its work.
- Not letting the leader know when there are problems so that the leader isn't surprised.

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Typical Ways That Peers Violate Expectations:

- Not sharing resources (or competing for resources).
- Not sharing credit for a job well done.
- Not responding to voice mails or e-mails in a timely manner.

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2. Negotiating Agreements:

In planning a team-building session to deal with conflicts, certain agreements between the conflicting parties need to be met:

- It helps if people can agree that problems exist, that those problems should be solved, and that all parties have some responsibility to work on the issues.
- All parties must agree to meet and work on the problems.

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- People may find it easier to deal with conflict if they can accept the position that the end result of the team-building session is not to get everyone to “like” one another but rather to understand one another and be able to work together.

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3. Helping Teams in Conflict or Confusion: The Role Clarification Exercise

A particularly useful intervention for determining expectations is what we **call the role clarification exercise**. The role clarification model of team building is considered appropriate if several of the following conditions are prevalent in the organization or unit that is considering a team-building program:

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- The team is newly organized, and no one has a clear understanding about what others do and what others expect of them.
- Changes and reassignments have been made in the team, and there is a lack of clarity about how the various functions and positions now fit together.
- Job descriptions are old and not consistent with current realities.

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- Meetings are held infrequently and only for passing on needed directions.
- People carry out their assignments with very little contact with others in the same office. They generally feel isolated.
- Conflicts and interpersonal disruptions in the unit seem to be increasing.

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- The boss engages primarily in one-on-one management. Team meetings are infrequent or primarily involve listening to the boss raise issues with one individual at a time while others watch and wait for their turn.

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- People sit in their offices and wonder, “What is happening on this team? I don’t know what others are doing, and I’m sure nobody knows [or cares] what I’m doing.”
- A crisis occurs because everyone thought someone else was responsible for handling a task that was never completed.

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■ Planning

The following sections describe the steps of a role-clarification team-building exercise. Over the years, we have found this to be one of the most useful exercises for a team to engage in, with generally very positive results.

- ***Time Commitment*** For a team of eight to ten people, the minimum time needed for this type of team building is approximately one-half hour to one hour for each person, or a total of four to ten hours of meeting time, preferably in a solid block.

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- ***Resource Personnel*** If the ground rules, procedures, overall goals, and design elements are clear, a manager need not be afraid to conduct this type of meeting with no outside assistance from a consultant or facilitator.
- ***Program Design Goal*** The goal of a role clarification teambuilding program is to arrive at that condition in which **all members of the team can publicly agree that they:**

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- Have a clear understanding of the major requirements of their own job.
- Feel that the others at the team-building meeting also clearly understand everyone's position and duties.
- Know what others expect of them in their working relationships.
- Feel that all know what others need from them in their working relationships.

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- ***Preparation*** This part of the team-building activity can be done prior to the session or done first by each member of the team in private as the team session begins. **Each person should prepare answers to the following questions:**

1. What do you feel the organization expects you to do in your job? (This may include the formal job description.)
2. What do you actually do in your job? (Describe working activities and point out any discrepancies between your formal job description and your actual job activities.)

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3. What do you need to know about other people's jobs that would help you do your work?
4. What do you think others should know about your job that would help them do their work?
5. What do you need others to do in order for you to do your job the way you would like?
6. What do others need you to do that would help them do their work?

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▪ Meeting Design

Managing the role clarification meeting is an important role for the team leader or consultant. **Following are the goals, ground rules, and steps in role clarification.**

Goals The goals of the team-building meeting should be presented, clarified, and discussed. Everyone should agree on the goals or hoped-for outcomes of the sessions.

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Ground Rules Ground rules should be developed by the team, written on a sheet of paper, and posted for all to see. Some suggested ground rules are as follows:

1. Be as candid and open as possible in a spirit of wanting to help improve the team.

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2. If you want to know how another person feels or thinks about an issue, ask that person directly.
3. If the meeting becomes unproductive for you, express this concern to the group.
4. Every member should have an opportunity to speak on every issue.
5. Decisions made should be agreeable to all those who are affected by the decision.

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▪ Role Clarification

Each person will have an opportunity to be the focal person and will follow these steps:

1. The focal person describes his or her job as he or she sees it.
2. All others indicate that they understand what the focal.

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3. If the focal person and others have differences in expectations about the focal person's job, they should be resolved at this point, so that there is a common agreement about what the focal person's job entails.
4. After agreement has been reached about the nature of the job, the focal person talks directly to each person on the team, identifying what he or she needs from the other in order to do the job as agreed on.

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Managing Conflict in the Team

5. The others then have the opportunity to tell the focal person what they may need in return or what additional help the focal person might need from them so that the focal person can accomplish the demands of the position.

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4. The Manager as the Center of Conflict:

It is rather common to find that the center of conflict is the manager or team leader. Sometimes the problem is between the manager and the whole group and sometimes between the manager and one or two members of the group. In either case, unless the superior is aware of the situation and is willing to take steps to remedy the problem, it is difficult for team members to open up the issue and deal with it.

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Managing Conflict in the Team

It is also not uncommon for the superior to be totally or partially unaware of the extent of the emotional breach that has occurred. **In power relationships**, subordinates learn to become quite skilled at masking negative feelings and pretending everything is going well when in fact there are problems. Sometimes feelings are not completely masked, and instead a form of passive-aggressive resistance occurs that the superior may see but not understand.

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When any of the major symptoms of team difficulties emerge, the team leader should ask, “Is it possible that I am at least partly responsible for these problems?” How does a team leader get an honest answer to this question?

1. Ask the team members.
2. Use an outside resource.
3. Use survey instruments.
4. Undertake laboratory training.

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Although the superior wishing to find out if his or her performance is causing conflicts in the team may take a variety of actions, a more difficult issue remains if the leader is unaware of his or her impact or does not seem to want to find out. In such a situation, **here are some ways for team members to get data to the leader:**

1. Suggest a role clarification session.
2. Give direct feedback.
3. Use an outside person.

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5. Diversity as the Source of Conflict:

Diversity is another common source of conflict for teams today. Diversity in teams is the result of several forces. More and more, various groups once considered minorities in business (women, African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, the aged, and others) are being represented on decision-making teams. Also, businesses are becoming more international to capture foreign markets.

Lecture 9

Managing Conflict in the Team

When diversity is not managed **effectively**, differences can split people apart, cause endless arguments and bickering, and result in bitter feelings, resentment, and less productive work. The issue is how to make diversity work in a positive way to capitalize on the richness of difference that is in every team. When team members have obvious differences, one of their goals should be to achieve a level of **constructive controversy**.

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Used in this context, controversy is defined as the willingness to explore all sides of every issue. Achieving controversy is therefore a desired goal, not something to avoid. **Here are some of the key ingredients for building constructive controversy into the team:**

- Common goals or vision.
- Diversity as a value.
- Guidelines for work.
- Critiquing.

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6. The Problem Member:

One of the most common questions we hear is, What do you do when one member of the team continually disrupts the rest of the team? This person may always take a contrary point of view, vote against proposals everyone else supports, take a negative or pessimistic position on everything, and frequently miss meetings or not follow through on assignments.

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If a manager or supervisor is trying to build a team and one person won't buy into the process, some method of removing that person from the team (such as transfer, reassignment, or even firing) may be necessary. **The following actions have also been found to be successful in some cases:**

Lecture 9

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- Direct confrontation between the team leader and the problem person.
- Confrontation by the group.
- Special responsibility.
- Limited participation.
- External assignment.

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Chapter 8

