



FUNCTIONAL AND DYSFUNCTIONAL CONFLICT

Lori Waterhouse

Functional and Dysfunctional Conflict

Conflict

Conflict is defined as a process that begins when one party perceives that another party has negatively affected or is about to negatively affect, something that the first party cares about.

“The absence of conflict is not harmony, it’s apathy.” (cited in Huczynski and Buchanan, 2001 p.793)

Conflict enhances understanding of choices, allowing better options thus enhancing decision making.

Functional Conflict

Functional conflict can be good for an organization. It promotes a healthy exchange of ideas, clears the air and promotes creative thinking and allow for more and better options thus enhancing decision making.

Example of Functional Conflict

Bowling party planning is a joint project between two departments at work. When we first started to book these parties, there were a lot of booking errors. Parties were overbooked and booked at times when they should not have been booked. It was frustrating for everyone involved. It resulted in upset customers, a loss in revenue and a diminished reputation.

Both departments, bowling and Boston Pizza worked together to create a shared excel file to accommodate bookings. The sheet includes both the number of seats available and the number of lanes available for every hour, every day. For any request outside of these numbers has to be run past the department manager before any booking is turned down.

There are still some issues with group bookings but when they arise, everyone is much more relaxed about the issue and everyone works together to find a solution.

Dysfunctional Conflict

Dysfunctional conflict can be like a cancer in an organization. With long lasting and far reaching effects it hinders group and the organizations performance. These effects can be classified as hard and soft costs to the organization. With hard costs being tangible, that is items that can be seen on a financial statement. Soft costs are intangible costs that creep up on you and can really affect the organizations bottom line but can’t be clearly seen on a financial statement.

Hard Costs Associates with Dysfunctional Conflict

- Wasted Time
- Lost Workdays
- Reduced Productivity
- Poor Performance and Quality
- Health Care Costs (stress)
- Sabotage and theft
- Turnover
- Termination Packages
- Legal Costs

Soft Costs Associated with Dysfunctional Conflict

- Morale
- Decreased Customer Service
- Reputation
- Loss of Skilled Employees

Example of Dysfunctional Functional Conflict

In general interdepartmental overlap causes the majority of dysfunctional conflict at my work. The example that I have chosen is one that remains unresolved. The conflict doesn't result in a stand still as we still have to operate. What the conflict does is it creates a barrier of distrust and resentment which makes all subsequent dealings strained.

The Marketing department where I work is difficult to deal with. They drop promotions with coupons without letting operations know. Since I am the one that has to program the point of sale system, this becomes an issue when customers start arriving with the coupons. It provides poor customer service as customers are delayed while operations sort out a way to deal with the new coupon. After I have resolved the situation for the guest, I have to contact marketing and get the details of the promotion so I can program it into the system. From there I have to get the information out to cashiers at eleven operations. From the perspective of the company, it creates a customer service issue that could result in a loss of business and effect the company's reputation. On a personal level I find the situation frustrating. I see it as a form of bullying by withholding necessary information that I need to perform my job to the required standard.

The Marketing department feels that by including operations in advance, operations will perceive that they have a say in the promotions. Marketing doesn't want this. In addition, marketing has been told in the past that certain things are impossible to be done based on technological limitations and control issues. By dropping these coupons and promotions without consulting Operations, Marketing "gets what they want." However they don't actually end up with what they want because the technology and control issues still exist. It's Operation though that have to figure out how to deal with the new programs. Generally resulting in more work for Operations, potential loss for the company, and a lack of the reporting that Marketing will ask for to track the promotion.

As I stated in the beginning, this conflict remains unresolved.

Conflict Resolution Suggestions

- Find common ground for more success
- Ask the other person to offer a suggestion
- Remain calm
- Let the other person talk
- Genuinely consider the other persons point of view
- Practice active listening
- Understand conflict is neither bad, wrong nor a sign of failure

Some Reasons That Conflict Remains Unresolved

- General discomfort with emotions related to conflict
- People don't know how to address conflict
- Previous attempts to address conflict have been unsuccessful
- It's easier to ignore the issue
- People say they are too busy