One Minute Friday - Resolving Team Conflict

Team conflict cannot be resolved with group meetings or 'away day' events; conflict grows over time and takes time to resolve. In order to begin the process of resolving conflict within a team a manager has to clearly identify the issues and commit to leading the team through change.

Below are some reflective questions I have designed to help you start this process

1. List the types of conflict you have in your team, categorise them in to 'Task,' 'Process,' 'Status' or 'Person' (Watch the Twitter Video 23rd September 2022 or see notes below)

2. How long have these conflicts existed for?

3. How long have you led your team for?

4. What has your contribution been in allowing these conflicts to arise or continue?

5. What do you want your team look like in the future?

6. What actions do you need to take in order to manage the different conflicts you have in your team?

Task Conflict

Sometimes there is friction between team members over tasks or processes that need to be completed. These conflicts usually focus on whether something should be done or whether it should be a priority. As a manager you can't expect staff, regardless of their seniority, to always reach consensus about their priorities, this is why managers are required!

Task based conflict is ultimately the fault of the manager for not making and owning a clear decision. A manager has to give clear instruction to the team about the tasks that will be completed and leave no room for misunderstanding, even if this makes them unpopular.

High performing teams can often resolve task based conflicts internally, however, low performing teams will initially need a strong leader to make decisions give clear instructions and frequently check in on progress to make sure the team are following instructions rather than fighting internally. If the team want to disagree about a task or process, make sure the disagreement is with you, rather than with each other.

Process Conflict

The good news is that the team agree on the task that needs to be done and the priorities you have set, the bad news is that they disagree on the 'right way' of doing something or have differing perspectives of 'best practice.'

In these scenarios you need to listen carefully to the various factions within the team and acknowledge their perspectives. Often people are more annoyed about not being listened to than not being agreed with and showing all parties that their views have been heard is very important.

As with the Task based conflict, if the team reaches a point where it can't resolve conflict internally you have to make the decision about the 'process' and stick with it. Conflict is stoked by indecision from managers, whilst you need to grow the team's ability to work together over time, in the short term you have to provide a clear method of working that everyone adheres to.

Status Conflict

Where people argue about who should or shouldn't be doing different tasks you should talk to them in private about why they are or aren't the best person to undertake the task. As with the above scenarios you have to own the decision. The team have to recognise you are the person calling the shots and if they want to disagree they should knock on your door rather than fight with each other. Be aware that ego can also play a part in status conflict, if staff don't like your allocation of work point out that expertise and seniority are separate concepts and that person X may be better placed to deliver an action than person Y based upon this. You aren't there to make friends but you aren't there to make enemies either. You are there to run the service as effectively as possible and you need to communicate this to your team.

Person

Where conflict reaches the 'person' level it may become a conduct issue. You have three options;

- Deal with it as an HR issue taking appropriate action against one or both parties for breaches in your organisations code of conduct.
- Deal with it by way of mediated conversation involving both parties and a suitable third person
- Deal with it at a 'Standard Setting Meeting' where both parties are met on a 1-1 basis, issued with a copy of the organisations code of conduct and clearly told the standards that are expected of them and that this will be monitored going forward

As with the other forms of team conflict, you have to take control in order for the team to unify and start to work together.

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Team conflict is complex and it is common that more than more than one of the above factors will play a part in a team breakdown. If you have a team that is constantly in a conflict cycle I can provide bespoke interventions to help you find the peace of mind you are looking for! Feel free to get in touch for a conversation by emailing richard@richardburnell.com