Aviation Leadership Development – Considering Conflict in the Workplace and Conflict Management

Sofema Online (SOL) www.sofemaonline.com considers the best practices to achieve the desired outcome when dealing with Workplace Conflict & Conflict Management within an Aviation Environment.

Leadership Considerations

- Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.
- Leadership can also be characterised as the ability to inspire trust, build relationships, encourage followers.

Introduction – What do we Mean by Conflict?

Conflict is something which may occur between individual people or within various groups in all kinds of business situations.

Even it could be said that a degree of conflict is a positive because a total lack of conflict could be an indicator of an absence of effective interaction.

Because conflict can result in emotions that can make a situation uncomfortable, it is often avoided.

We can experience feelings such as guilt, anger, anxiety, and even fear this can often become the reason for individuals to try to avoid it.

Defining Conflict

What is conflict? - Conflict can mean different things to different people, therefore it is somewhat difficult to come up with a universal or true definition. However, for our purpose conflict can be described as a disagreement among two parties that may even be portrayed by a degree of hostility.

Conflict can also occur at different levels of the human experience, which include: interpersonal, intrapersonal, intergroup, and intragroup conflict levels.

Even we could have a situation when one side may feel that they are in a conflict situation, whilst the other side may see it as a simple discussion only concerning differing opinions.

Types of Conflict

Economic Conflict -This type of conflict typically occurs when behaviour and emotions of each party are aimed at increasing their own gain. (In the context of Business Area or Business Objectives for example allocation of the Organisations Funds)

Value Conflict - Essentially this is a fundamental incompatibility in the ways of doing business based on ideologies and principles. This type of conflict can be very difficult to resolve because the differences are belief-based and not fact-based.

Power Conflict - Typically occurs when each party is trying to exert and maintain its maximum influence within either a business relationship or social setting.

To be successful this requires, one party must be stronger (in terms of influence) than the other. This conflict is evident when one party chooses to take a power approach to the relationship.

Conflict Management is a Skill

Not only is Conflict management a skill it is one that we as leaders or aspiring leaders must be able to employ!

Without the ability to deal with conflict we will undoubtedly experience negative outcomes. It is important to understand that we can reach positive outcomes through effective conflict management and resolution.

If we can view conflict as an opportunity for learning and development, we have an opportunity to drive towards positive outcomes.

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How to Handle Conflict? (Thomas-Kilmann Method)

Essentially there are 5 basic possibilities related to the challenge of dealing with Conflict they are -

- Avoiding
- Accommodating
- Competing
- Collaborating
- Compromising

Let's look at each one in turn and consider the merits and negative points -

Avoiding - This approach is low assertiveness and low cooperative. The leader withdraws from the conflict, and therefore no one wins. (could even be perceived to be running away)

- The leader may deal with the conflict in a passive attitude in hopes that the situation just "resolves itself."
- Whilst avoiding conflict may be effective and seemingly beneficial it prevents the matter from being resolved and can lead to larger issues.
- Useful when emotions are elevated and everyone involved needs time to calm down

- If the issue is of low importance, the team is able to resolve the conflict without participation from leadership

Important Note This approach should not be used when the conflict needs to be resolved in a timely manner and there is no sound business reason to avoid.

Accommodating - This approach is low related to assertiveness and high in relation to cooperation.

- The leader ignores their own personal concerns in order to fulfil better the concerns of others.
- Essentially they are willing to sacrifice their own needs to "keep the peace" within the team.
- A potential Downside is that the leader appears to lose and the other person or party wins.
- Whilst this approach yields an immediate solution to the issue it has the potential to reveal the leader as lacking in strength.
- When the issue is more important to the other person (Builds social credits for future use)
- When damage may result if the leader continues to push their own agenda

Note - This approach should not normally be used when the outcome is critical to the success of the team

Competing - Highly assertiveness and low in terms of Co-operation

- Fulfils their own concerns at the expense of others.
- Uses any appropriate power they have to win the conflict.
- Whilst can be an effective conflict-handling mode it can lead to new conflict
- Useful when

  - An immediate decision is needed,
  - An outcome is critical and cannot be compromised,
  - Strong leadership needs to be demonstrated,
  - Unpopular actions are needed,
  - When company or organizational welfare is at stake, and
  - When self-interests need to be protected.

Note 1 - This approach should be avoided when: relationships are under pressure as this may lead to retaliation.

Note 2 – Consider the "Risk" of this approach which should also be avoided if the outcome is not perceived as important due to the potential for a lower level of support in the future.

Collaborating - High assertiveness as well as high in cooperation.

- Both individuals or teams win the conflict.
- The leader works with the team to ensure that a resolution is met that meets the objective
- Typically, will require a lot of time, energy and resources to identify the underlying needs of each party.
- Typically, the outcome is a solution to the conflict that would not have been produced by a single individual.
- Many leaders encourage collaboration because it leads to positive outcomes, as well as a stronger team structure and creativity within the workplace
- Situations when this mode is useful include:
  - The issues to be resolved are too important to be compromised
  - To address issues which been interfering with team dynamics
  - To improve team structure and commitment,
  - To take the opportunity to merge ideas from individuals with different viewpoints on a situation

Note - Should be avoided in situations where time, energy and resources are limited or where a quick and vital decision needs to be made.

Compromising – Consists of a mixture of moderate assertiveness as well as moderate cooperation

- No Winners or Losers
- An acceptable solution that is reached by
  - Splitting the difference between the two positions
  - Seeking a middle ground.

- Leaders may allow others to take advantage resulting in a negative outcome who use this conflict-handling mode may be able to produce acceptable
- Can lead to a less optimal outcome because less effort is needed to use this mode.
- Effective when
  - A temporary and/or quick decision to a complex issue is needed
  - The welfare of the organization will benefit from the compromise of both parties
  - Both parties are of equal power and rank
  - When other modes of conflict-handling are not working
  - When the goals are only moderately important and not worth the time and effort.

Note – Should be avoided when partial satisfaction of each party's concerns may lead to propagation of the issue or when a leader recognizes that their team is taking advantage of their compromising style

Final Comments

The means in which conflict is managed will determine whether the outcome will be positive and productive, or negative and destructive.

We can address conflict by seeking consensus related to change, development, and transformation in organizations.

Next Steps

Sofema Online offers the opportunity to enrol in Aviation Leadership and Management Skills Development Diploma – see here for details. https://sofemaonline.com/lms/courses/268-aviation-leadership-and-management-skills-development-diploma/preview

For further guidance or if you have a question please email team@sassofia.com