

Introduction

A conflict can be defined depending on its context. It can connote a struggle of two or more opposing needs or demands that can happen simultaneously (Rohland, 2015). It can have either a positive or a negative result. Positive, if the conflict is approached directly and resolved peacefully. Negative, if the conflict is ignored or avoided. However, sometimes the source of conflict may not manifest itself clear that it becomes hard to validate that it exists. Thus, it persists, grows out of control, and leads to a destructive and costly outcome. The bottom line of a conflict is that it is inevitable. It will almost always occur as long as there is competition between people or groups vying for the same goal (Moore, 2014). For organizations, the need to prepare for resolving conflicts is a necessity. Organizations must have a conflict management system set in place to ensure that conflicts, when they happen, can be managed best. In order for these measures to succeed, management must be made aware of its role and responsibilities to afford expedient resolutions when they occur. Leaders should learn to be flexible when dealing with them as often they will be called to mediate. In this assignment, I will address briefly a few types of organizational conflicts, how they come about, and the possible conflict management resolutions; and also, to perform a critical analysis of two different organizational conflicts with which I was involved or witness of that were (1) resolved appropriately, and (2) was not correctly mediated that resulted in negative outcomes.

Types of Organizational Conflicts

Before an organizational conflict can be resolved, it is important to know how the conflict developed. The need to understand conflicts deeper through categorization is warranted. Conflicts can be categorized by the following (Jokanović, et al., 2017). The first is by interpersonal conflict. This occurs between two individuals, co-employees, colleagues, or between employees and their managers. Because people are different in terms of education, upbringing, culture, and religions, they often get ripped by their idiosyncrasies due to incompatible choices or opinions. Example of this is when a middle eastern employee takes off

for vacation in the middle of a critical release planning because it is mandated by his religion, He leaves part of his work to a colleague who is already up to his neck with related work. The colleague bears his frustration by not properly doing the required work of his middle eastern counterpart that when the latter comes back, they fight over the quality of the work that should have been done. Many times, these can be resolved by a simple communication to iron out the misunderstanding. However, if it becomes destructive, a mediator may be called in to intervene.

Another type is intrapersonal conflict. As contrasted to interpersonal, this occurs upon the person himself. An instance of this is an employee exposed to a role he is not familiar with; his level of anxiety may prop up. He may feel unsure that he can perform what is asked of him. If that is the case, that doubt will cause a psychological stress that will challenge his principles and perceived skills that can prove debilitating to him. Often times this is a very hard case to handle but through communication with other people, this could be mediated by the person having a conflict by airing out his concerns and acknowledge that he needs help.

Intragroup conflict, on the other hand, happens to members within a group who have interpersonal disagreements. This can stem from differing personalities or power struggles within a team. It can be caused by differing views on how for an example a team development process must be followed. Often this can be a part of the team building chemistry progression that can help the group come up with a good resolution. But if the intragroup conflict escalates that the productivity of the team is affected, then a mediator may need to be called to assist in smoothing out relationships between members.

Lastly, the intergroup conflict. This often occurs involving different groups within an organization. A misunderstanding can be its root. For example, the Product Management group of the department will be in conflict with the Development group. The latter has a different vision or perspective of what the client's product requirements are and the former has a different concept of how the product can only be developed thus a discrepancy occurs on what is to be

delivered. Another example can be competitions between two delivery groups, one local in the States and another offshore. Each has their own functionalities being developed within the product and often they have dependencies with the other but because of a strife, both productivities suffer.

An Organizational Conflict While in the Military – Resolved

The year was 1991. That fall, mid of August, the Philippine National Police had a fresh batch of cadres that were being trained as recruits by my unit, the Special Action Force training unit. I was the designated course chairman in charge of fifteen specially trained non-commissioned officers who act as the instructors plus a couple of junior officers who assisted in the implementation of the course programs. There were 100 fresh cadres. They were assigned to four platoons of 25 each. As a group they were required to perform a very rigid training schedule composed of early morning road runs, quick change then went to mess while in formation, then followed by military tactics and training lessons, noon mess, then a set of weapons and marksmanship lessons in the afternoon. This was followed by another set of the road-run prior mess, then an evening where they had study period in the tents provided them.

This training had a reputation for being very stringent and not only tasking physically but also mentally. Normally the washout rate of this type of training was 30 percent. This class was no exception. The NCO's demand for excellence in everything that the trainees did was designed to flush out any weak or not so committed cadres so that only the best cadres be retained and eventually sworn in. Often times there were NCOs who were new and would cross the gray line of giving out orders that were unorthodox and borderline near impossible. In this case, I found out later that there were a few new NCO instructors that just did that. They were in charge of a platoon. As the course chairman, I managed the conduct of the courses and I have the junior officers and senior NCOs under me that supervised the activities especially road runs, inspections and drills. These NCOs were directly involved in making sure that their platoon

performed and did exactly what was asked even beyond what was required. Because of overzealousness, they “overworked” their platoon that the cadres started complaining to the junior officers of what was going on. Then after the third week of training, one early morning, I was awakened by a senior NCO that told me that one platoon of trainees was gone, walked out, and brought their weapons with them. The majority of my training committee caught up with them marching towards the main headquarters building. When accosted by the training staff they were indignant and were adamantly saying that they wanted to speak to the Battalion Commander to air their gripes out of the “bad” training experiences they were receiving. The staff immediately disarmed them and have them all fall into formation. When I arrived, I saw that everyone was visibly upset to include the training staff. That was then that I told the trainees that they board the truck that was readied for them and that at their request would be brought to the commander for an audience. This calmed them down.

Dissecting the Conflict

This intergroup conflict was between a set of new NCOs who acted as assistant instructors and a platoon of trainees or new cadres. The trainees alleged that they were being maltreated and hazed physically and psychologically. The NCOs responded that they were simply doing the same thing that was done to them when they were trainees and that nothing was wrong with what they were requiring the platoon to perform.

I radioed the commander’s assistant that there was a situation and that there was a need for the commander to make himself available as the training committee and a platoon of cadres were approaching. When we arrived, I had the audience of the commander and briefly explained to him the situation that there was a problem with the platoon related to training and they wanted an audience with him to speak their gripes about a few NCOs that they said were maltreating them physically and psychologically.

Actions Taken to Resolve the Conflict

The first thing that the commander did was to have the trainees be confined to barracks. He then assigned a battalion officer in charge of the administration to conduct an inquiry that will gather the facts of why the recruits walked out, to mediate and come up with a recommendation that would diffuse the situation. The admin officer immediately scheduled a meeting between him and the leaders of the platoon that walked out. The information he gathered from the talk was that a couple of junior NCOs assigned to the platoon that walked out have been allegedly maltreating a few members of the platoon that were performing below the standard of what is expected of the training. The specifics of the maltreatment consist of punishments to a few of them being butt stroked by their rifles on their combat boots due to their not being able to align properly in formations. The admin officer asked the trainees for proofs and a few trainees showed their blackened toes as a result of the butt strokes. They also added that they experienced being instructed to stand against the wall and that the NCOs would test how strong they have become by a punch or two in the abdomen. They then showed their red bellies to the admin officer. There were a few more specifics examples that were disclosed by the trainees and the admin officer took them down asking if these “hazing” actions would be corroborated by the rest of the members of the platoon especially the soldiers affected. The involved members of the platoon said yes. The next thing that the admin officer did was to speak with all the training staff individually. He also spoke to me and the other officers. He gathered information on whether the alleged physical abuses did occur.

The Admin Officer Recommendations

Through the conversations the admin officer had with the training staff and the officers, the admin officer was able to get enough information to come to a conclusion. He said in his report that the complaints of the trainees have the basis of truth. He listed the pieces of evidence of blackened toes and red stomachs as indications that hazing did occur. He also added that the offense of the trainees walking out with their firearms should not be tolerated and must be dealt

with according to the military rules and regulations. He reported all this to the commander. The commander promptly called for a battalion board to address the walk out and the alleged physical abuses received by the trainees.

The Battalion Board

The battalion board was composed of five battalion staff officers and other ranking officers of the battalion. The process was quick. The recruits who were alleged victims of hazing were brought before them. They were interviewed and asked under oath what transpired that led to having one platoon of trainees walked out. They validated through their testimonies that they were physically and mentally abused by certain NCOs. They again showed the physical bruises they received. Their fellow trainees came forward to testify what they saw. The battalion board then called the NCOs who allegedly performed the hazing. They denied doing so initially but broke eventually and admitted their guilt. They further said that their actions were nothing out of the training norm as they too experienced the same when they were recruits.

The battalion board then have the rest of the platoon meet with them. They asked why they walked out. All mentioned that they did it because they felt that their classmates were being treated unduly and that their primary reason was to get the attention of the higher authorities of their plight. The board asked them if they knew that walking out is a military offense aggravated by them taking their firearms. They said that they had no choice but to sympathize with their classmates.

The Judgement

The battalion board concluded that the physical abuses did occur and that under the military ordinance, in any training, any form of hazing done by any senior soldier to a junior soldier should not be tolerated. The recommendation by the board for the commander's action is that the NCOs found should be meted their corresponding punishment. In this case, a reprimand that will enter into their records, and to take a retraining course on military courtesy and

discipline. The board also recommended that the actions of the whole platoon were considered AWOL and that the presence of the firearms in their possession during the walkout aggravated their action. They are to be terminated from the service as AWOL was a serious crime. As for me and the rest of the officers, they found us in complete cooperation with the case and that we performed correspondingly and appropriately to the situation. They recommended a reprimand that would stay in our records. The battalion commander reviewed the recommendations made by the board and signed it and made all official.

Lessons Learned

This conflict brought to light the reality in the military that hazing does occur although remotely. As that was my first role as a course chairman, in retrospect I could have been more vigilant with the actions by the officers and NCOs under me as they performed their training duties and responsibilities. We could have prevented the walk out and the confrontation if we could have been more closely supervising the training activities and opening the channels of communication with the trainees rather than just focusing on the classroom activities. If I would have known better mediation knowledge then, I could have implemented a better process that similar conflicts could be avoided. Could mediation work to make this conflict be prevented? Absolutely especially if the conflict was discovered in its infancy. According to Cheșcă, et al., (2015), mediation is the most efficient and effective method of resolving any dispute. It involves the use of a mediator using ethical principles grounded on solid legality. In this case, the military rules and regulations were followed to the letter by the admin officer and the battalion board that resulted in the case being closed with the appropriate judgment rendered.

An Organizational Conflict in the Medical Field

It was March of 1999. I was a new Physical Therapy (PT) graduate of the New Jersey University of Medicine Physical Therapy school working in an outpatient facility. The role that I was performing then was to conduct inpatient Physical Therapy works onsite for a geriatric facility in New Jersey. The duty was from 8 AM to 5 PM. My primary duties were to conduct an assessment of possible geriatric patients who may be experiencing pain or physical discomfort and to alleviate their symptoms by using exercises or other appropriate treatments. My first two weeks were routine. I went to the facility, performed physical therapy evaluations, wrote out treatment plans for any dysfunctions evaluated, have the plans signed off by the attending orthopedics doctor, went to perform the treatments, and then wrote up the progress reports of the treatments before leaving the facility by end of that day. Usually, I could find and treat about 10 to 12 patients a day. After a third week, my supervisor called me on the phone and told me that I was not treating enough patients. She informed me that I need to take up more patients. This bothered me. As a new graduate, I have a good understanding of the number of patients a PT should only treat especially if no Physical Therapy assistants are on staff which in this case was similar to mine. Ideally, a PT can treat a max of 12 patients a day in my case. The succeeding days, I did try to find and treat as many as I can find. I realized that in order for me to treat more than 12 consistently, I will need to be creative and “think up” a dysfunction on a few patients. I called my supervisor over that weekend and tried to reason out that finding patients to consistently treat within reason may not be possible in that facility. She simply said I should try harder. She added that the PT that I replaced in that facility had more than 15 patients treated each day. I was surprised and a red flag came up. So, I asked her why that many? She bluntly answered, so that the company can charge more for services. She also asked me if I have problems with it. I was silent my end for a moment and just muttered, “I see”. I said goodbye and hanged up.

Dissecting the Conflict

I considered this as an interpersonal conflict. Although my supervisor then was representing the company I worked for, it was her personality that I was in conflict with. I am interfering with her goal which was for me to treat more patients that I can legally handle. She was interfering with my goal to be able to treat patients within the confines of what my conscience and schooling would afford, and more importantly what the law would allow. It was very frustrating on my part then. True that was my first job. True also that even though I was a local graduate of a New Jersey PT school, finding a PT job then was very hard. Congress just cut the budget that year by a third so physical therapy as a profession did get a big hit slashing work by almost a third. In hindsight, I saw that as a possible reason her end.

Actions Taken to Try to Resolve the Conflict

I then spoke to my wife about my predicament. She is a registered nurse and has been in the medical field since 1986. She knew the healthcare field too well. She sympathized with me. I told her that if this continued, I might not last long in the current company I was working for. I told her that my options would be to continue on working and try to “invent” dysfunctions in patients to treat which I grossly considered unethical, or to leave. She listened and said simply to follow what my conscience was saying.

That week, I worked as hard I could do to be more productive without being inventive of trying to find phantom dysfunctions. By the end of the week, my supervisor called again. She asked me why the number of my patients did not significantly increase. I told her that I cannot find any more dysfunctions to treat and that having no PT assistant prevented me to be able to treat more than 12 patients as treatment protocols forbid. She raised her voice and told me that I had no right to talk to her about protocols and that she had been a PT for more than 10 years and that protocols to her were not real rules to follow. I was floored. I told her that I used to be a military officer and that I was trained to follow rules and regulations to the letter. She mumbled

something and then said that still, I need to find more patients or else. She did not finish her statement then told me to call her by the end of next week for any progress. Upset, I told my wife of our conversation. That Monday morning after work, an admin assistant from the company I worked for called me. Her message was simple. My probationary status was terminated, that I was no longer employed by them, and to expect my final check in the mail.

Lessons Learned

This conflict was one of the most frustrating experiences I had since coming to the States. In retrospect, what went wrong? I have been dissecting the situation since then. Until now, I could not think of anything that could have happen that would not involve me separating ways with that company. If they did not release me, I probably would have ended my relationship with them that week. The only thing that I could think of that was wrong my end was that I should have resigned earlier than when they fired me.

Comparing the Two Conflicts

These two are different foremost on their results. The first was that there was an appropriate resolution. The process leading towards the judgment was clear with a mediation method followed (Brubaker, et al., 2014). The tools (or processed) used here were that there was an initial investigation performed by the admin officer to gather the facts on the opposing parties surrounding the conflict; from the initial investigation resulted the calling of the battalion board who formally performed a trial with an inquest to determine what actions were committed against military law; and produced a judgment based on the merit of the evidences presented. On the other hand, the second resulted in me being released by the company. There was no process followed except perhaps that my supervisor recommended my dismissal over the weekend. I was not given due process to defend myself through a board or a mediating individual.

In terms of communication, the first followed the proper chain of commands communication. Everyone involved made themselves available for a meeting with the admin

officer and followed the military justice protocols with the admin officer (who paralleled as the mediating officer) using investigative techniques to talk to opposing parties involved in order to gather the information needed to come up with the correct actions/recommendations to take (Jameson, et al., 2010). As for case number two, I considered the communication a one-way street. It was a typical power imbalance situation between my supervisor and myself (Lee, 2010). The unprofessional behavior that my supervisor displayed through our communication and her impending actions were typical characteristics of one abusing of a position and authority. Orta (2015), validated this. Her leadership style and actions impacted me of the true color of the culture that the company hired me then. The way I perceived the rest of the company's culture was obscured because of the way she acted. Wiltermuth, et al. (2013) mentioned that people with an increased sense of power have the tendency to use a more severe form of punishment; this would have been the case. Eric et al, 2016 corroborated this. In their report, they said that low-status/high-power positions can be an unequivocal cause of interpersonal conflicts resulting in a demeaning form of conduct by the one perceived to be more powerful. The company would have benefited with a communication program by companies providing health services. It could have provided education to health care providers to possess independent thinking in settings especially when power differences exist (Tsai, et al., 2013).

In addition, what else could have been done in situation two to achieve a positive result would have been to report the alleged illegal practices that were being required from me by that company to the Physical Therapy Board of New Jersey in order to have my case heard as that behavior could be considered fraud. That way, a legal path would have given me a more positive result. I could have retained my job and would probably put the supervisor into her proper place. But as a new Physical Therapist then, I could not think in those terms as a whistleblower. What could have been done better other than that? I was not sure even now if I could have done anything better than just being truthful of my convictions based on what I have learned from my

education and from my past professional experiences through my communication with her. I believed I was right in informing her where my conscience was and that I found it was not legally and ethically proper to treat patients who do not have dysfunctions for the purpose of being able to charge them of services not deserving. However, at the very end, it must be underscored that even if sometimes communication is hard with another person, I should not have given up (Rooni, 2013). According to Jameson, et al., (2010), had I been trained of the rights I have in this kind of conflict, I would have used a different approach by using a more appropriate expression on my position in that situation and that the use of a more emotional communication to underline interests would have also led to a more positive conflict transformation my end.

Conclusion

This last assignment put into a good perspective the lessons learned in this class. Conflict is inevitable. As many kinds of personalities fill an organization, it will come as expected. As leaders, there is a need to be skillful on mediating it. There are many tools that can be used to come up with a peaceful resolution. One of them is the proper setup of a mediating process that the organization can use as guidelines when conflicts arise. Implementing a remediation process require educating employees of what it is for, training of good remediators, and the support of management. Another is through the use of good communication. Communication is central to making people bond and has the power to clear misunderstandings. The absence of it can be the cause of split-ups. On the other hand, good communication and interpersonal skills can cause a good relationship to flourish. As a leader, it is very important for me to know where my skill level is in mediation and to continue on to strive to make it better.

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