

Study on Importance of Emotional Intelligence in Conflict Management

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Abstract – This paper studied the importance of emotional intelligence in conflict management. Conflict is not by nature good or bad. It simply means a difference of opinion or interests. It is also an inevitable occurrence in any workplace. Conflicts can occur because co-workers bring with them differing perspectives and backgrounds, or in some cases, because employees have unclear expectations of their responsibilities. Poor communication is a major contributor to conflict. This can include reading body language, failure to share information, or receiving

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INTRODUCTION

People with high emotional intelligence EQs are clearly more effective in resolving conflict than low-EQ people.

$EQ = W * IQ \text{ \& } IQ = MA/CA$

Where W =wisdom (ability to use your knowledge and experience to make good decisions and judgments)

MA = Mental Age

CA = Chronological Age

The real question is, "What will you do when your emotions are triggered?" How you behave in those situations is largely the result of your programming (Habits). The effectiveness of a conflict management training program is certainly dependent on the program's ability to transfer the right skills. But perhaps to an even greater degree, the program's effectiveness hinges on its ability to change an individual's old programming (Habits).

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Conflict management is about teamwork, respect, flexibility, collaboration and negotiation. Effective conflict management training programs teach people to step back and consider outcomes from the perspective of team objectives. Too often, coworkers find themselves arguing about petty issues; and if they aren't careful, these interactions can trigger

waves of defensiveness and hostility. The best conflict negotiators lead conversations toward team goals, team interests and opportunities for achieving win-win solutions.

The best training programs provide participants with tools and a framework for conflict resolution, with concrete steps they can follow to avoid the common pitfalls that lead to communication breakdowns and conflict avoidance

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE SKILLS

Emotional intelligence skills can be divided into four categories: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management. Within each category is a set of skills that, when coupled with conflict resolution tools and techniques, will yield great results. But these skills have to be learned, practiced and internalized if they are to be successful. Effective emotional intelligence training programs must not only teach people about these skills; they must also help them learn to master those skills.

Self-Awareness:

When strong negative emotions are triggered, the limbic system within the brain is immediately activated, obstructing of the executive functions of the brain and putting the individual in a potentially volatile, reactive state. High-EQ people recognize this and have learned to neutralize their internal, automatic reactions. They proceed with caution, keeping their reactions in check. Low-EQ people,

on the other hand, become externally focused on the person or situation that has “caused” the problem they face, and thus allow their reactions to “hijack” their behavior.

Self-Management:

High-EQ people have the ability to slow down and visualize outcomes. Instead of letting reactions dictate behaviour, they can explore possible strategies to achieve the outcomes they want. Their energy is focused on slowing down and suppressing the urge of the emotional brain to react, while making conscious choices about what to do. Self-management is the skill set that enables you to exert conscious control over your behaviour in a situation where your reactions could sabotage the outcome you want to achieve.

Social Awareness:

Low-EQ people tend to make false assumptions in the heat of emotion. They often assume that there is a negative intent behind the behaviour of others, usually as a form of projection. In general, when emotions are triggered they assume the worst, and their assumptions fuel the fire of their reactive behaviour. High-EQ people, on the other hand, tune in to others; they establish empathy and look for positive intentions behind negative behaviour. Instead of reacting negatively to “bad” behaviour, they seek to respond to the other person’s positive intentions and to lead them toward behaviours that better express those intentions.

Relationship Management:

Low-EQ people often lose their perspective of time when they are emotionally charged. Despite whatever ongoing relationship they may have with someone, when negative emotional reactions are triggered they are likely to react in the heat of the moment, with destructive behaviour that undermines their future relationship with that person. High-EQ people remain cognizant of the fact that how they interact in the present determines the quality of their relationships in the future. Keeping this broader perspective during conflict helps them to focus on self-awareness, self-management and social awareness, resisting the impulse to react negatively to the other person and thereby sabotage their relationship with them.

Learning Emotional Intelligence vs. Learning about Emotional Intelligence

Most emotional intelligence training classes are good at explaining what emotional intelligence is. Few of these classes actually result in raising the EQs of the participants, however. Emotional Intelligence training should be the cornerstone of any comprehensive conflict-management training program, and must

result in reprogramming participants for high-EQ behaviors.

EQ Improvement Skills to Include in Emotional Intelligence Training Classes

- **Shifting Your Position**

Because our eyes are fixed in the front of our heads we normally don’t see ourselves. Self-awareness during conflict includes being able to see how the other people involved in the conflict perceive you. In training, people are asked to have empathy, but how do you see the situation through someone else’s eyes? Other people see your body language and tone of voice and interpret these signals through their own perceptual filters. To understand how another person is feeling, you need to get a sense of how they are seeing you.

- **Monitoring Your Emotional Triggers**

We have each had a lifetime to observe what happens when our emotions get triggered during conflict. Your reactions may include anger, defensiveness, blaming, attacking, stonewalling, yelling, clamming up or shutting down, in varying degrees or combinations; our reactions are as individual as we are. Any of these or other resourceful reactions can derail what might otherwise have been a conflict-resolving conversation. So what triggers these reactions in you? Only you can answer. If you can identify and monitor your triggers during a conflict interaction or dialogue, you have a much better chance of keeping the triggers from being unconsciously pulled.

The other side of trigger-awareness is learning to avoid other peoples’ triggers. With a little awareness, you can usually quite easily identify the emotional triggers of the people you work and live with. By attuning your awareness and conscious intentions during conflict, you can avoid pulling those triggers in the person you are having a conflict with, and work around those trigger-zones to negotiate win-win agreements.

Monitoring & Managing Your State

Conflict resolution training generally focuses on cognitive skills and techniques for leading a discussion toward a win-win agreement. But this assumes that you are able to maintain a resourceful state during the dialogue, which may or may not be the case. Your state, at any moment during conflict, includes your state of mind, your emotional state and your physiological state. We might describe resourceful states with adjectives such as happy, enthusiastic, energetic, confident, focused or calm. But these adjectives just scratch the surface. Your state at any moment is about

your mood, your neurology, your biochemistry, and your subjective experience on many levels.

When you are in a resourceful state, it's easy to work with a difficult person. But when you go into an unresourceful state, the difficult person instantly becomes far more difficult to handle. When your triggers are pulled, you may unconsciously shift into an unresourceful state - something we might describe as upset, stressed out, offended, fearful, hurt, angry, hostile, irritated, resentful, indignant or shut-down.

The other side of state management is the social-awareness exercise of monitoring the other person's state. This is how you develop awareness of other people's triggers, and how you can learn to avoid them.

Reframing Perceptions

When you are trying to resolve a conflict and the situation comes to seem hopeless, what you have is a framing problem. Your frame of reference has a dramatic effect on your attitude, your creativity and your confidence in success. We tend to unconsciously frame people, situations and conflicts; that is, we size them up. "This person is impossible to work with" is a way of framing the person - a way that may very well make it impossible, at least for you, to work with them.

Reframing is one of the most powerful skills that can be taught in an emotional intelligence training class. Reframing is the cognitive process of changing your frame of reference. Reframing a half-empty glass as half-full, in effect, changes your attitude about the situation. You can successfully frame any problem as an opportunity by expanding your frame to bring new possibilities into clear focus. By reframing conflict with a co-worker as an opportunity to build better teamwork with that person, you can find the motivation to initiate a conversation rather than avoid the conflict as unworkable.

Emotionally-intelligent conflict managers use reframing as an effective tool to help other people see conflict differently. By reframing a hostile conflict into an opportunity to improve work processes, you can transform a meeting from a gripe session into a productive teamwork assembly.

Monitoring & Managing Your Connections

Most conflict management techniques tend to focus on the content of the communication. But what is often more important to managing conflict is the connection (or lack of connection) between the people involved. What does the interaction feel like? Does it feel like a problem-solving and teamwork-building dialogue - or does it in truth come off more like hostility? Are we connecting with each other, or

does it feel like a series of attacks and counter-attacks between us?

A great working definition for effective communication during conflict is: "The effectiveness of your communication is measured by the response you get." When you aren't getting the response you want from another person, there is a tendency to react with the attitude that it is the other person's fault. High-EQ people do a far better job in managing the connection and the experience during a potentially difficult conversation.

- **Reflective Listening**

Listening is a critical conflict management skill, but when strong emotions are triggered, most people lose their capacity to really listen. You may have noticed your own tendency to use what should be listening time as a time to decide on what you will say as soon as the other person stops talking. In reflective listening, you do just the opposite. You consciously focus on the other person, their intentions and their perceptions.

Your role in any conversation is to add value. There are times when you can do this by expressing your opinions or by adding the value of your knowledge and expertise. Other times, though, the value you add is in giving the other person the satisfying experience of feeling validated and of being heard. Reflective listening provides you with a means for helping the other person to express and clarify what she/he wants to say. Your role is to listen deeply, provide helpful cues and ask open-ended questions to coax the other person into clarifying or going deeper into their thinking.

During conflict, most people have a tendency to complain about what they don't like or don't want. This is the result of away-from thinking. The problem with away-from thinking, especially during conflict, is that it generally creates negative reactions and doesn't tend to move us toward a win-win solution. Toward thinking focuses on what you do want, rather than on what you don't. The best conflict negotiators are skilled in methods of reframing away-from thinking into toward thinking. Reflective listening is used not to interject your own ideas into the conversation, but rather to help the other person to express her/his ideas with clarity, but also in a way that moves us toward a solution that will satisfy their and your interests.

Raising the Collective Emotional Intelligence EQ of Your Organization

We generally think of EQ as being a measure of the emotional intelligence of an individual. But if you step back and look at the day-to-day practices of managers and employees, you will see a kind of collective emotional intelligence that characterizes

an organization. You can most easily see this in comparing one team to another. Some teams are clearly working with a higher collective EQ than others. We often use core value statements and mission statements to characterize our organizational culture, but a good mission statement can't make up for a low collective EQ.

Low-EQ managers and employees affect the behavior and morale of everyone they come into contact with. If your conflict management and emotional intelligence training programs can really result in raising individual EQs, the net effect will be to raise the collective emotional intelligence EQ of the entire organization.

It is the need of every organisation to have not only intelligent but emotionally intelligent workforce to sustain, survive, and grow and flourish.

REVIEW OF LITERATURES:

Emotional intelligence skills are emerging (Langley, 2000). These new ideas do not solely rely on IQ and technical abilities alone. People can become more effective participants through social interaction. The workplace is one of the environments in which people learn about behavior and emotions which take on a greater significance in organizational life. In a study of emotional intelligence and interpersonal relations.

Schutte's et al. (2001) found that people with higher emotional intelligence have higher empathetic perspective taking and self-monitoring in social situations, social skills, cooperation toward partners, levels of affection in relationships, marital satisfaction, and satisfaction in relationships.

Yu, Sardesai, Lu & Zhao, (2006) Conflict is a situation where there are at least two differing perspectives, which can lead to nonproductive results or can be beneficially resolved and lead to quality final products. Therefore, learning to resolve conflict is integral to high performance teams and profit achievements. According to past research, there are significant relationships between emotional intelligence and subordinates' styles of handling conflict with supervisors.

According to Goleman (1998), the five components of emotional intelligence are self-awareness, self-regulation, social skills, motivation and empathy. Self-awareness is associated with the ability to recognize one's internal state, resources, preference and intuitions, e.g., a supervisor is aware of which emotions he or she is experiencing.

Literature on organizational conflict shows that integrating style is positively associated with individual and organizational outcomes.

Burke (1970) suggested that, in general, a confrontation (integrating) style was related to the effective management of conflict, while forcing (dominating) and withdrawing (avoiding) were related to the ineffective management of conflict.

Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) indicated that a confrontation style dealing with intergroup conflict was used to a significantly greater degree in higher than lower performing organizations.

Goleman (1998) suggests that emotionally intelligent employees are better able to negotiate and effectively handle their conflicts with organizational members. A recent study shows that a supervisor's referent power base was positively associated with subordinates' problem solving strategy, which in turn, was positively associated with their job performance.

Rahim, Antonioni, & Psenicka, (2001): Referent power base was negatively associated with bargaining strategy, which in turn, was negatively but not significantly associated with job performance. Following this study, we are hypothesizing that a supervisor's motivation to enhance performance and goal attainment will encourage subordinates to use more problem solving strategy and less bargaining strategy in managing conflict.

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