Module 10.3.c Collaborator Team

Conflict management styles do not solve conflict. Once you develop an understanding that differences of opinion are context specific, you can identify whether the persons involved are managing the conflict effectively. People have fifteen options when managing a conflict. When faced with a difference of opinion with others you choose from five management styles to settle the conflict. Your decision is usually predicated upon what style you are most comfortable with and have used many times in the past rather than the most effective style. Choosing the appropriate style is the major factor in whether the conflict is settled appropriately or not.   People are usually unaware that they are choosing a style that they are either under using, over using or appropriately using. If in the survey the person's score is lower than 50% then the person under used the style, over 50% over used the style, and if the score is 50% used the style appropriately.

Collaborating is both assertive and cooperative – the opposite of avoiding. Collaborating involves an attempt to work with the other person to find some solution that settles the most relevant concerns of both persons, but in many cases will not resolve all of the issues each person is concerned with. It means digging into an issue to identify the underlying concerns of the two individuals and to find an alternative that meets both sets of concerns. Collaborating between two persons might take the form of exploring a disagreement to learn from each other's insights, concluding to settle some condition that would otherwise have them competing for resources, or confronting and trying to find a creative solution to an interpersonal problem. Settlement not resolution is the major focus.

You may want to review what happens when you over use collaboration

Contributions: You are helpful in reaching win-win solutions that provide a long-term settlement to a conflict issue. You ask questions, listen to other points of view, and try to incorporate those viewpoints into a richer, shared understanding. In the process you aid open communication and learning. Often, you are able to find superior, high quality solutions to important issues. These solutions may be sources of creativity and innovation for your team. You help team members to air diverse points of view without putting anyone on the defensive.

Characteristics: You tend to see conflicts as problems to be solved, wanting quality decisions that truly settle specific issues. You believe in the power of consensus and in sharing information and understandings. You regard team members as allies and tend

to see people outside the team as potential allies. You build on others' ideas and listen well. You value innovation, open mindedness, learning, and consensus. You look for the value in what team members say and combine their values with your own insights to find win win solutions.

When Especially Helpful:

1. When conflicting concerns are too important for the team to compromise or sacrifice.
2. When the team needs innovative solutions on important issues.
3. When hard feelings within the team need to be worked through and settled.

Behaviors to Guard Against:

Overanalyzing: problem seeking when the answer is clear or the issue is unimportant
Risk sharing: diffusing accountability by having the team comes to consensus decisions that are the leader's responsibility.
Flailing

Reactions to Different Styles:
As a collaborator, you may appreciate the value of other styles when they clearly fit the situation and benefit the team. Likewise, people with different styles are likely to respect your contributions when they are clearly appropriate. However, both you and they may be sensitive to, even resent, some aspects of each other's styles.

In Teams:

Conflict Styles in Action:

Behavior and Different Types of Issues:

Agenda: searching for a topic of common interest - "We seem to be most interested in accomplishing all of our milestones, do you agree?"
Truth: Merging insights for deeper understanding "Sarah says she is only interested in getting the milestones accomplished if they meet her time management plan, so it may be necessary for others to spend more time on the project if her time is limited."
Goals: Taking both peoples goals into account "Let's see if we can address our time management issues and still stay within Sarah's time management plan."
Action: Looking for a win-win solution "What if we use our existing time management plan for reaching our milestones? This should work for all of us and we can make adjustments as we work on the project."

Conflict Styles in Action Behavior and Different Types of Issues in Teams:
As a Collaborator your perception of conflict and you team members' perceptions are relevant. When settling a conflict you will use your guiding principles and values and your team members will be doing the same. These perceptions, guiding principles and values could be an integral part of the conflict and each team member's perception could be different.

Intended Contributions to Team Effectiveness: Finding innovative win-win solutions - You help to reach win-win solutions that provide long-term resolution to conflict issues by using principled negotiation. You separate the people from the problem by acknowledging sensitive issues in a nonjudgmental manner and then listing the issues involved in the conflict and separating them into categories of what can be settled now and what needs to be discussed in the future, thus narrowing the conflict so it can be resolved. In this way you are able to incorporate diverse points of view into richer understandings and innovative decisions.

Appropriate Use of Collaborating:

For Team Effectiveness: Finding innovative win-win solutions. Collaborators help to reach win-win solutions that provide long-term resolution to conflict issues. You try to incorporate diverse points of view into richer understandings and innovative decisions.

Common Examples:

Benefits:

High quality decisions: Seeking innovative solutions that are better than each person's recommendations ("synergy").
Learning and communicating: Exchanging information openly; aiding communication and discovery.
Resolution and commitment: Working toward meeting both people's concerns fully so that conflict is resolved and people are committed to the decision.
Strengthening relationships: Building respect, liking and trusting; resolving problems in a relationship.

Costs:

Time and energy required: More time is needed to dig through issues; full concentration and creativity I required.
Psychological demands: Requires openness to new viewpoints, ideas, and challenges; can be psychologically demanding.
Possibility of offending: May involve working through sensitive issues; can make things worse and hurt feelings if unsuccessful.
Vulnerability risk: Others may try to exploit your openness and flexibility.

Deciding when to Collaborate: Recognize and build the conditions that enable collaboration

Try to collaborate on important issues
> When both parties are vital to an organization
> When you want to learn
> To merge insights from diverse perspectives
> When you need commitments to a decision
> To work through problems in a relationship

Behavioral skills for collaborating:

Setting the right tone when raising the issue:

> Picture the other person's concerns
> Use "we" language and avoid assigning blame
> Mention the benefits of a solution
> Ask if this is a good time

Identifying both people's underlying concerns:

> Recognize the differences between concerns and positions
> Don't jump to positions
> Clarify and shore your underlying concerns
> Help clarify the other people's underlying concerns

Stating the conflict as a mutual problem:

> Say "and" rather than "but"
> State the integrative problem "How can we do both?"

Brainstorming the solutions and picking the best one:
> Stay flexible
> Use tentative exploratory language
> Agree on the best solution

Being firm when necessary and flexible:
> Work with more rather than less information
> Develop multiple alternatives
> Create common goals
> Use humor
> Balance the power structure

Seek consensus with qualification

Collaborating in teams:
Uses:

1. Finding an integrative solution when both sets of concerns are too important to be compromised.
2. When your objective is to learn – e.g., testing your own assumptions, understanding the views of others.
3. To merge insights from people with different perspectives on a problem.
4. To gain commitment by incorporating other's concerns into a consensual decision.
5. To work through hard feelings which have been interfering with an interpersonal relationship.

If you scored High:

1. You may spend time discussing issues in depth that do not seem to deserve it? (Collaboration takes time and energy – perhaps the scarcest organizational resources. Trivial problems don't require optimal solutions, and not all personal differences need to be hashed out. The overuse of collaboration and consensual decision making sometimes represents a desire to minimize risk – by diffusing responsibility for a decision or by postponing action.)
2. Your collaborative behavior can fail to elicit collaborative responses from others. (The exploratory and tentative nature of some collaborative behavior may make it easy for others to disregard collaborative overtures; or the trust and openness may be taken advantage of. You may be missing some cues that would indicate the presence of defensiveness, strong feelings, impatience, competitiveness, or conflicting interests.)

If you scored Low:
1. Is it hard for you to see differences as opportunities for joint gain – as opportunities to learn or solve problems? (Although there are often threatening or unproductive aspects of conflict, indiscriminate pessimism can prevent you from seeing collaborative possibilities and thus deprive you of the mutual gains and satisfactions which accompany successful collaboration).
2. Are subordinates uncommitted to your decisions or policies? (Perhaps their own concerns are not being incorporated into those decisions or policies).

How Collaborators Interact amongst other Styles on a Team:

Competitors

How you may see others	How others may seem you
Others may seem to overlook win-win possibilities – being cynical and focused on their own goals rather than the team's	Your win-win assumptions may seem to rosy and utopian
Others may seem more interested in winning than in listening or learning – appearing close minded and defensive	You may seem naïve – e.g. overlooking real world conflicts or interest
Others may appear to focused on short-term gains at the expense of longer-term alliances	You can seem too trusting, open, and vulnerable to exploitation

Compromisers

How you may see others	How others may seem you
Others may seem shortsighted – favoring temporary settlements that don't really resolve issues	You may seem impractical – ignoring real world constraints that limit solutions
Others may appear to willing to settle for imperfect, less than optimal solutions	You may appear to be a perfectionist, seeking perfect rather than good enough solutions
Others may seem unimaginative or uncreative – seeking only middle ground	You may seem to overanalyze issues that don't require creative solutions

Avoiders

How you may see others	How others may seem you
Others may seem uninterested in getting to the bottom of team problems	You may seem prone to overly time-consuming discussions of issues
Others may appear to keep information to themselves- withholding useful data	You may appear intrusive – prying into matters and interrupting their work
Others may seem too pessimistic to seek solutions – allowing problems to continue and grow	You may appear too eager to open up dangerous and complex issues

Accommodators

How you may see others	How others may seem you
Others may seem to make unnecessary sacrifices – abandoning their concerns too quickly	You may appear too demanding – pushing the team to pursue win-win solutions
Others may seem to interfere with problem-solving smoothing issues over to keep pace	You may seem too confrontational – digging into issues that may cause hard feelings
Others may appear too protective – trying to keep the team in their comfort zone	You may seem to eager to use uncomfortable issues for the team – challenging conventional wisdom

Dealing constructively with other styles: Collaborators can build on their existing strengths if they can incorporate some key insights from other styles into their thinking. You can also reduce the cost of your accommodating by learning to address the special concerns of people with different dominant conflict styles.

With Competitors:

1. Recognize that some issues are win-lose, when openness would be inappropriate and could be exploited.
2. Learn to be firm with competitors when necessary, insisting that your concern needs to be satisfied – while staying flexible about the best way to satisfy that concern.
3. When you believe that a win-win solution is possible, explain why – show competitors how your concerns and their concerns are not incompatible.

With Compromisers

1. Recognize that some compromises can provide good-enough settlements on many issues when there are barriers to collaboration – e.g. when time is short and there is low trust.
2. Learn to use compromise as a backup on non-crucial issues when you can't find a win-win solution.
3. When you think a compromise settlement wouldn't be good enough, explain why – e.g. when the issue is too important.

With Avoiders

1. Recognize that minor conflict issues are not worth the time required for collaborative problem solving.
2. Learn to explicitly ask avoiders for their views on issues when the team needs that information.
3. Try to give avoiders advance notice and to set up convenient times for problem-solving discussions to ensure that they feel prepared and to minimize disruption to their schedules.

With Accommodators

1. Recognize that probing sensitive issues can embarrass or offend people, and be prepared to apologize when this happens.
2. Learn to ask people if they mind discussing sensitive issues – and to watch for signs that people are uncomfortable during the discussion.
3. When you feel it is necessary to raise a sensitive issue, explain why.

References

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