Effective Leadership and Communication or Ongoing Conflict at Work?

Corporate Advice

By **Caryn Walsh**

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UNDERSTANDING EMPLOYEES
SOCIAL MEDIA
DRIVING DIALOGUE
MANAGING CHANGE
ENGAGING
PERSUADING
INFORMING
ENTERTAINING

1940 1950 1960 1970 1980 1990 2000 2010...

Source: Melcrum, 2012

Three common issues exist in modern day Organisations – ineffective leadership, inadequate communication down the line and ongoing workplace conflict.

One often results in the other and together, they create organisations that are not as effective as they could be.

What workplace conflict occurs time after time?

Misunderstanding others, not listening well, personal agendas (a regular) and talking about people negatively are listed as some of the top reasons why good relationships at work suffer and conflict hangs around the office.

It happens in many organisations and at all levels, and when it does, productivity suffers.

Unhappy people make unhappy workplaces which in turn, affect the bottom line.

Common Causes of Workplace Conflict

There are various, with the most common being a lack of role clarity, unrealistic task expectations, unclear processes, systems and deadlines, power games, territorialism (this is my turf), unmet needs, no tolerance of diversity, the lack of effective communication and ineffective leadership styles that demoralise, not motivate, the people.
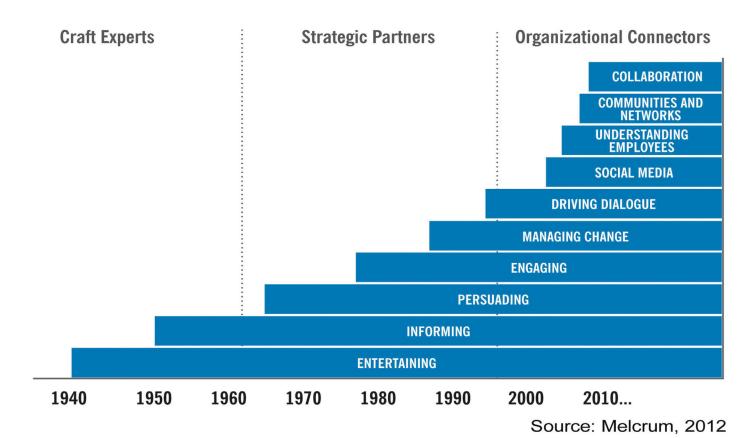
Typically, a workplace manager spends 25 per cent - 40 per cent of their time dealing with workplace conflict.

Conflict at work increases when issues are not addressed, frustration grows over time, people start to pull away from each other (not uniting to solve problems they face) and slowly, productivity is affected and profitability is reduced.

Statistics

• 60 per cent - 80 per cent of all Organisational workplace difficulties stem from strained relationships between employees

• Typically, a workplace manager spends 25 per cent - 40 per cent of their time dealing with workplace conflict. That amounts to two days each week. (Washington Business Journal, 2005)

• Ninety-six days each year of the manager's time is spent focusing on dealing with workplace conflict. How much money does that equate to?

• The cost of replacing an employee is high. Ernst & Young reports the cost of losing and replacing an employee may be as high as 150 per cent of the de per cent parting employee's annual salary. This includes the manager's time in spent in training new employees (Workforce.com).

• Two-thirds of both men and women say work has a significant impact on their stress levels, and one in four has called in sick or taken a 'mental health day' because of work stress. (American Psychological Association, 2004)

• One-fourth of employees view their jobs as the number one stressor in their lives (North-Western National Life).

Workplace Bullying – The Silent Epidemic

Workplace bullying is the 'silent' epidemic in organisations, which has significant impact on the victim, the people around them and productivity overall.

The intentional, repeated behaviour directed at an employee or group to embarrass, humiliate or undermine, there are no losers in bullying – for the victim, the bully or the organisation.

Everybody loses. Bullying is an outcome of a power and blame culture that has been allowed to grow over time.

Specific workplace bullying and harassment for Fiji could not be obtained at the time of writing this article, but consider the information below as representative of any organisation, regardless of where it is.

No person being bullied can ever reach their potential or be highly performing in their role.

Core communication skills

Core skills in effective organisational communication include active listening, empathy (compassion), standing your ground calmly (assertive), willingness to solve the issue, looking for solutions to problems, being respectful and acting in an emotionally intelligent manner.

It also helps to have a keen sense of humour and not be over-sensitive.

According to *Conflictinworkplace.com*:

When organisations make it a priority to train employees in communication and listening skills, building trust, teambuilding, and conflict resolution skills, less unresolved conflicts will occur.

When employees feel their concerns are heard by management, job satisfaction and productivity increases which goes right to an organisation's bottom line.

Leaders - eight ways to create workplace harmony

1. If you are a leader, be the role model who leads your people to greatness.

Learn how to communicate well and connect with your people.

2. Create a culture of harmony and accepting diversity by ensuring you and all your people accept differences.

Set up organisation-wide training in communication skills and resolving conflict regularly.

3. Do not let conflict grow. Encourage your people to deal with issues as they arise.

4. Show interest in your people. They all have lives outside of the workplace. Take an active interest in what their interests are.

5. Introduce a 'zero tolerance to bullying' workplace policy and create processes to deal with this behavior when it arises.

6. Be optimistic in everything you do and create a 'can do' attitude in your workplace.

7. Be approachable and manage your emotions well at all times.

8. Choose a leader (local or international) whom you admire. Model your behavior on theirs.

Action Plan

Do an 'environmental scan' of your workplace.

How well do you think it scores overall regarding communication and resolving conflict?

Strategies

Over the next six months, what two strategies can you implement in your team/organisation to improve communication at work?

What difference are you going to make to your Organisation's ongoing commitment to reduce conflict?

Conclusion

When there is little co-operation and collaboration at work, there is a domino effect – customer service is reduced, increasing individual and team stress occurs and people are unhappy - all negatively impactful the effectiveness of an organisation.

Modern day leaders must focus on creating Organisations that have a 'can do' culture, where communication is expressed with clarity and empathy and where employees want to come to work and be happy each day.

According to author of 'Leading Change', Jeff Kotter:

"The best performing organisations I know that operate in highly competitive industries have executives who spend most of their time leading, not managing employees, and who spent time talking to them, listening to them and engaging with them every day.

With proper leadership at the top, Organisations work well. Anything is possible.

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Workplace bullying and violence

Mental disorder claims that involve harassment or bullying

1 in 3 women   **1 in 5** men

almost **20%** of workers say they have experienced discomfort due to sexual humour

22% of workers report being physically assaulted or threatened by patients or clients

39% mental disorder claims caused by harassment, bullying or exposure to violence

37% of workers report being sworn in or yelled at in the workplace

11% of workers experienced unfair treatment due to gender

mental stress claims
15% result from exposure to occupational violence
26% made by workers aged 20-27 years were from exposure to workplace violence
31% made by workers under 20 years were from exposure to workplace violence

All statistics for the violence/bullying infographic have been sourced from the below SWA reports: Safe Work Australia's National Data Set for Work-related mental disorders profile

safe work australia

Source: https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/infographic-workplace-bullying-and-violence#picModal