Introduction

Working with others is an unavoidable part of life that is impossible to perfect and at

times can feel less productive than working as an individual. But, when done right, teamwork

will always push a group far beyond the capabilities of one individual. To understand how to best

operate in team settings, it is first necessary to understand the typical pitfalls of such an

environment. Team members will rarely share the same exact perspectives as each other and may

consequently see a problem in completely different lights which makes it difficult to build

consensus among a group. Similarly, in discussing how to address a problem, team members will

often be reluctant to share their opinions out of fear of being wrong in the eyes of the group. This

often results in some members of the group freeloading as they know that others will likely pick

up their slack. Addressing these frequent problems often comes down to communication and

accountability. Throughout this essay I will discuss how to effectively communicate, negotiate,

and resolve conflict with team members to build better teams and grow as an individual.

Effective Communication

Effective communication is the foundation of any successful team. Without effective

communication, there is little team cohesion and direction. It becomes harder to accomplish tasks

and overall progress is stifled. There are countless different strategies for communicating with

others, and knowing what strategy to use is can become a strategy on its own. Understanding

your audience and knowing how the people you communicate with will best receive your

message is an important skill that can be incredibly valuable in professional environments. For

example, if you are communicating with a superior who you know is very busy and usually

direct in their communication, it may be best to get straight to the point and convey only the

relevant information to this person in a timely manner.

I have seen some great examples of effective communication while working with my

team this quarter. I find that our most productive meetings occur when everyone is involved in

some capacity. Sometimes, conversation can be dominated by one or two individuals, but when

everyone is engaged and speaking up, we are much more productive.

It is usually more beneficial to have one difficult conversation than it is to stay silent and

allow the other person’s actions or general inaction continue to bother you over time. The case

study “Give your colleague the rating he deserves–or the one he wants?”, shows the importance

of this sort of accountability. In this study, Nisha is clearly upset by Ben’s actions and knows that

he is not pulling his weight. After this experience with Ben, Nisha is torn when deciding how to

rate his performance. This creates a lot of stress for Nisha on top of the stress that she already

endured during the project (Mayo). If Nisha was more proactive in her communication with Ben

and talked with him earlier on, she may not have been put in this situation. Of course, this is not

a direct solution for the situation. Ben needs to figure out his own work problems, but being

more direct in communicating her feelings ahead of time could have helped both of them.

Some examples of ineffective communication within my group for this class usually

revolve around silence. Our divide and conquer strategy can be successful at times, but only

when we are all on the same page. There were times when it was unclear how another group

member’s work was going as they would not send updates to the group. I was guilty of this at

times too because I usually wait to send updates to my team members until I have completed

everything. To address this, I will be more proactive about informing my teammates on the task I

am working on, both in how the progress is going and what exactly I am doing.

Negotiation and conflict resolution

I believe that one of the best ways to approach negotiation and conflict resolution is

through listening. Coming into a conflict or negotiation with the goal of actively listening to the

other person can make it much easier to find common ground and reach an agreement. If a

person enters a negotiation or conflict and is only focused on convincing the other person of their

point of view, it will be much more difficult to reach a consensus. By making an effort to

understand the other person, you may gain a new perspective that you had not considered, and

you may realize that you share similar beliefs with the other person.

Additionally, I believe it is important to separate the person from the problem. Focusing

on the issues at hand rather than the person discussing them will help ensure that the

conversation remains civil and that people are discussing with their heads rather than their hearts.

This principle is extremely important in a work environment because personal relationships can

become damaged when people fail to separate problems from person.

One negotiating principle that continued to show up in my research was the importance

of finding common ground. An example of this principle exists in a 1991 collaboration between

Apple and IBM. Through negotiations, these two rivals teamed up to create a PowerPC that

could rival Microsoft (Steele). This partnership shows the power of finding common ground in

negotiations for a few different reasons. Apple and IBM were able to launch a successful

partnership due to the common rival that they shared in Microsoft. Although the exact details of

this negotiation are unknown, it is clear that the two tech giants found a shared interest in that

they wanted to compete with Microsoft’s PC.

The book, Product Management in Practice, discusses how PMs often wind up in the

crossroads of various teams saying, “it is inevitable that at some point you will find yourself

navigating a tangled web of unspoken resentment and unresolved conflict” (LeMay). PMs work

across many different teams and must find a way to prioritize certain features and strategies over

others. This inevitably results in conflict with some groups, making it essential that a PM knows

how to navigate these discussions effectively. In negotiating, a PM must be willing to make some

sacrifices towards their vision of the product to make a deal and convince other team members to

work with them.

One core principle that I value is honesty. This value is extremely impactful in

negotiating and resolving conflict. During a negotiation, future promises are often made. Failing

to go through with these promises completely undermines the entire negotiation and also your

credibility. Similarly, people will be much more willing to cooperate with you and find some

common ground if they take you for an honest person. Another core principle of mine is

empathy. Understanding someone else’s perspective and being able to recognize how the conflict

at hand will affect them is very important while negotiating.

Feedback Insights

Receiving feedback has helped me grow as a person in many different aspects of my life.

Sometimes I find it hard to hold myself accountable and recognize when I am not performing as

well as I could be. Getting honest feedback from others offers me additional motivation to be my

best self. Both positive and negative, I always prefer to receive some sort of feedback rather than

nothing at all. When I do not receive any feedback, I begin to question my own decisions.

Receiving feedback and acknowledging it is one thing, but truly contemplating it and making

committed efforts to improve based on this feedback is entirely different. I imagine that in order

to advance in my career to the place I want to be, I will need to make an effort to fully digest any

feedback that I receive. It is difficult to make real changes and not revert back to old habits

which makes it important to continue to revisit feedback over time.

When it comes to giving and receiving feedback, I believe it is important to keep a polite

tone. This is helpful in lessening the blow while giving some tough constructive feedback.

Similarly, a person receiving feedback, however difficult to hear, should be gracious that

someone is trying to help them improve. When giving feedback, it is also helpful to offer some

sort of positive affirmation to go along with it. This may not be necessary for everyone, but it can

help lessen the blow of tough feedback and keep people motivated and confident going forward.

Conclusion

Working in teams is challenging for a number of different reasons. Whether it is due to

differing personalities, visions, or overall understanding of a problem, there is rarely a

straightforward path towards finding success with your team. However, establishing strong

communication among team members is a reliable first step. Conflict is inevitable in team

environments which makes knowing how to navigate these situations and negotiate in an

effective manner highly important. There are many different ways to approach a negotiation. One

helpful theme is to focus on listening and trying to find common ground. Similarly, staying true

to guiding principles in my life such as honesty and empathy can help me find a productive

answer while staying true to myself. Communicating with others and working through conflicts

is not a perfect science which makes it important to be able to adapt to the situation and figure

out what approach is most suitable given the circumstances.

Works Cited

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