

## CASE STUDY 6.2 The Bean Counter and the Cowboy

The morning project team meeting promised to be an interesting one. Tensions between the representatives from marketing, Susan Scott, and finance, Neil Schein, have been building for several weeks now—in fact, since the project team was formed. As the project manager, you have been aware that Susan and Neil do not see eye to eye, but you figured that over time they would begin to appreciate each other's perspective and start cooperating. So far, unfortunately, that has not happened. In fact, it seems that hardly a day goes by when you do not receive a complaint from one or the other regarding the other team member's behavior, lack of commitment or cooperation, or general shoddy performance.

As the team gathers for the regular project status meeting, you start with an update on the project tasks, any problems the team members are having, and their assessment of the project's performance to date. Before you get too far into the meeting Susan interrupts, saying, "John, I'm going to be out of town for the next 10 days visiting clients, so I can't make the status meetings either of the next two Fridays."

"That figures," Neil mutters loud enough for all to hear.

Susan whirls around. "I have another job around here, you know, and it involves selling. It may be convenient for you to drop everything and come to these meetings, but some of us have other responsibilities."

Neil shoots back, "That's been your excuse for missing half of the meetings so far. Just out of curiosity," he continues sarcastically, "how many more do you figure on blowing off while hanging out poolside on your little out-of-towners?"

Susan turns bright red. "I don't need to put up with that from you. You bean counters have no clue how this business works or who delivers value. You're so busy analyzing every penny that you have permanent eyestrain!"

"Maybe I could pay attention if I didn't have to constantly stay on the backs of you cowboys in sales," counters Neil. "I swear you would give our products away if it would let you make your quarterly numbers, even if it does drive us into the ground!"

You sit back, amazed, as the argument between Neil and Susan flares into full-scale hostility and threatens to spin out of control. The other team members are looking at you for your response. George, from engineering, has a funny expression on his face, as if to say, "Okay, you got us to this point. Now what are you going to do about it?"

"People," you rap on the table, "that's enough. We are done for today. I want to meet with Susan and Neil in my office in a half hour."

As everyone files out, you lean back in your seat and consider how you are going to handle this problem.

## Questions

1. Was the argument today between Neil and Susan the true conflict or a symptom? What evidence do you have to suggest it is merely a symptom of a larger problem?
2. Explain how differentiation plays a large role in the problems that exist between Susan and Neil.
3. Develop a conflict management procedure for your meeting in 30 minutes. Create a simple script to help you anticipate the comments you are likely to hear from both parties.
4. Which conflict resolution style is warranted in this case? Why? How might some of the other resolution approaches be inadequate in this situation?

(Pinto 233-234)

Pinto, Jeffrey K. *Project Management, 5th Edition*. Pearson, 20180110.