EECS 541 Computer Engineering Capstone

Conflict Resolution

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Conflict

• Conflict is a form of interaction among parties that differ in interest, perception, and preferences.

• Conflict arises from the clash of perceptions, goals, or values in an arena where people care about the outcome
Conflicts

• Conflicts are common and inevitable
  • team members have different backgrounds, personalities, and experiences
  • leading to different opinions, insights, and ideas
  • some conflicts may be hard to resolve, and may linger for a long time

• Conflicts are not necessarily disruptive or negative
  • may force discussions and better understanding on complex issues

• Conflicts should be resolved quickly and effectively
  • conflict resolution skills needs to be learned
  • needs interpersonal skills (in addition to technical expertise)

• Conflict management and resolution is critical to team harmony and productivity.
Conflict Causes – Examples

• Disagreements in the technical approach
• Intolerance for mistakes
• Lack of trust
• Differences in objectives and different understanding of productive work
• Disagreements about needs, goals, priorities, and interests
• Different cultures, values, attitudes, languages, and perceptions
• Team members failing to meet their assigned tasks on time or rigor
• Poor communication
• Lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities
Conflict Categories in a Team

- Design Decision
  - problems making project-related decisions, including goals, scope, tasks, etc.
- (Perception of) workload imbalance
  - some team members may be doing more or less work
- Capability deficiency
  - some team members may lack the necessary skills to complete the given task
- Personality
  - differing personalities may make it difficult to get along
- Miscommunication
  - failure to understand other members, failure to communicate and share information
Conflict Management Strategies -- Competition

• One party forces their own view concern despite resistance
  • forces one viewpoint over another
  • may involve aggressive, uncooperative and autocratic behavior

• Pros
  • can result in quick problem resolution
  • can increase individual authority and self-worth

• Cons
  • may cause animosity with other team members
  • may cause new conflicts later

• Results in a “win-lose” situation
  • but, may be the only option in certain cases for the project manager
Conflict Management Strategies – Compromise

• Both parties come to a mutually agreeable “compromise” by a give and take approach.

• Pros
  • may result in a less confrontational and quick resolution
  • can be a temporary “fix” until a better approach can be found

• Cons
  • both parties may feel unsatisfied later
  • not the best approach to building good relations between team members
  • requires enforcing the implementation of the “compromise” solution

• A win-lose or lose-lose situation may be created
  • more appropriate for minor or less important project issues
Conflict Management Strategies – Avoidance

• One party surrenders the issue to avoid negotiating/discussing the issue.
  • individual is unassertive and/or uncooperative

• Pros
  • may avoid heated discussions and further tension
  • allows other more important or higher-priority tasks to resume

• Cons
  • the winning party may view this as agreement to their opinion
  • may cause tension in peer-relationships if used often

• A lose-win situation is created
  • again more useful for trivial or less-important matters
Conflict Management Strategies – Smoothing

• Dealing with other party’s concerns before addressing your own
  • also called accommodation. The person may be unassertive and cooperative
  • used when one person is a domain expert or have a bigger vested interest

• Pros
  • can lead to improved relationships by deferring to the expert’s opinion
  • can help individual focus on and protect other areas

• Cons
  • one party may take advantage, and the other may face a loss in confidence
  • the winning party may feel that the other is being too condescending

• May create a win-lose situation
Conflict Management Strategies – Collaboration

- Conflicting parties discuss, work together, and reach agreement on a new idea that compiles both views
  - conflict may be more passive, and individuals are uncertain of the best approach and willing to discuss and resolve
  - individuals are assertive and cooperative

- Pros
  - less chance of future conflicts on this issue
  - leads to better mutual understanding and better team relationships
  - enforces collaborative climate in the team

- Cons
  - needs more commitment to solve the problem

- Only strategy that has a win-win resolution
Increasing Collaboration

• “XYZ” model of conflict resolution
  • describes conflict in terms of behavior, consequences, and responses:
  • when you do X (a behavior), Y (consequences) happen, and then I do Z (personal response)

• For example,
  • X = “When you are late to meetings”
  • Y = “decisions are being made without your input”
  • Z = “and my response is frustration and wanting to quit the team”

• Such discussions may help resolve conflicts.
Handling Deadlocks

• When conflict causes work to cease
  • ignoring the conflict is no longer an option

• Strategies
  • each group can debate from the other’s point of view to better understand all issues
  • try to find a common ground by analyzing both sides of the argument
  • debate each opinion. For less critical issues, toss a coin to move on.
Negotiation to Find Common Ground

• It is important to believe that there is a solution to the conflict
  • else, reaching once will be hard
  • negotiation can help find the common ground

• Story
  • father left 17 camels for this three sons
  • eldest son to get half of the 17 camels
  • middle son to get $\frac{1}{3}$rd camels
  • youngest to get $\frac{1}{9}$th of the camels
  • is division possible?
References

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