BESTEAMS Advanced Interpersonal Effectiveness Module

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BESTEAMS Module Implementation Plan (MIP)
Advanced Level Interpersonal Effectiveness Module

Topic: Conflict Negotiation in Engineering Project Teams

I. Introduction/Motivation for Module Instructor

This is one of three advanced level BESTEAMS teamwork training modules for engineering students and faculty members. The three modules address personal knowledge, interpersonal effectiveness, and project management in a team setting.

This module builds upon the Introductory and Intermediate level Interpersonal Effectiveness modules, which addressed team development/communications basics and conflict resolution, respectively. As discussed in the intermediate module, not all conflict is negative (Gido & Clements, 1999). Indeed, benefits of conflict may include: improving the group’s solution to the problem, enhanced productivity, organizational change, increased personal awareness, personal development, and team morale (Lesson 1, n.d.). Conflict can play a particularly significant role in teams, however, for one poorly managed interaction between two individuals may impact all team members. This module aims to provide students with knowledge that will allow them to identify damaging conflict and then use their negotiation skills to ensure team strength and project success.

What causes conflict? Gido and Clements (1999) offer seven sources of potential conflict:
- Work scope: How much, methods, and quality
- Resource assignments: Who will do what, uneven workload
- Schedule: Sequence of task completion, time available for specific tasks
- Cost: Who pays for cost overruns
- Priorities: Deciding between other class assignments and team project
- Organizational issues: Amount of paperwork, poor communication, too few meetings
- Personal differences: Prejudices or differences in values and attitudes

The ability to identify existing and potential conflicts within a team is a vital skill for team members to possess. Though often the leader is responsible for moving teams beyond conflict, collaborative leadership (as discussed in the Advanced Personal Knowledge module) depends on all team members to take responsibility for the successes and the failures of the team (Duffield & McCuen, 2000). Thus, teaching conflict negotiation techniques to all team members is critical for ensuring project success.

Teaching teams how to manage conflict is also important for the retention of women and minorities in the engineering fields. Colbeck, Cabrera and Terenzini (2000) argue that increasing students’ understanding of their capabilities (also known as self-efficacy) enhances student performance and persistence. Subsequently, training students to recognize their own conflict negotiation abilities will help them contextualize team conflict as well as work to solve it. By teaching conflict negotiation, instructors are deliberately structuring group interactions so that all team members may participate in leadership roles and increase their understanding of team problem-solving.

Expected Outcomes of the Module

As a result of implementing this module, it is expected that students will experience multiple positive outcomes that will enhance their interpersonal effectiveness, with consequent improvement of their team skills.
Module Part I (slides 1-23)
Students will:
• Gain insight into understanding conflicts that affect the team process
• Gain insight into how to handle team conflicts, including when third-party intervention is necessary
• Gain insight into how to improve communication through deeper exposure to ways of listening

Module Part II (slides 24-32)
Students will:
• Gain insight into methods which will develop negotiation skills
• Gain insight into how to listen proactively and reactively

II. Delivery Plan Part A: 50 Minute Class Option

A. Introduce the module and objectives of the lesson (slides 1-2). The instructor should use this time to clarify why the lesson is being taught. This process appeals to Divergers, who learn by asking the question, “why?”

B. Define conflict (slide 3). Many students may be reluctant to call an interaction a “conflict” if team members are not yet angry at each other. This definition encourages students to consider different types of conflict, including those types that may not trigger extreme emotional responses. Assimilators will like this slide, for it provides them with an expert opinion with which to begin the lesson.

C. Discuss students’ experiences with conflict on teams (slide 4). Depending on the class size, there are many ways to have students complete the activity. For small classes, breaking students into their project teams may be desirable, while it may be easier for large classes to raise their hands to offer information to the instructor. Alternately, students may spend a short period of time writing the answer down for themselves. This activity will appeal to many of the students, for it allows Accommodators to integrate their experiences with the lesson, Convergers to integrate theory and practice, and Divergers to be innovative. Assimilators may be less comfortable with certain implementation methods, for they generally prefer working alone.

D. Why conflict management (slide 5). This slide follows logically from the previous one, which Assimilators—with their preference for linear thinking—will appreciate. Depending on instructor preference, this slide may be delivered as a short brainstorming session or as a brief moment of lecture.

E. Provide summary of Intermediate Interpersonal Effectiveness module (slides 6-8). If students are unfamiliar with the previous BESTEAMS material, these slides provide them with important context for understanding the forthcoming module. That module focused on identifying the conflict resolution style that exists between two team members (the XYZ Collaborative Model).

F. Understanding team conflict (slide 9-11). Though conflict often begins between two individuals, it may escalate and negatively impact the functioning of the team itself. In many cases, this can compromise the team project and result in unfinished projects or dissatisfaction with the team experience. Learning how to resolve these conflicts
strengthens the individuals and the team. Diversers will appreciate an explanation of why a module on conflict negotiation on teams is necessary.

G. “Solutions to conflict” activity (slide 12). This exercise asks students to analyze their previously identified conflict using the three categories outlined: Attitudes, behaviors, and structural. Analyzing the problem by identifying symptoms of the conflict can direct team members in determining the level of intervention necessary.

H. Lecture on conflict negotiation (slides 13-23). This lecture provides a framework so that students may learn to identify when peer interventions (as discussed in Intermediate Interpersonal Effectiveness) may not be sufficient to solve the conflict.

1. Interventions (slide 13-14). Interventions may become necessary when team members identify conflicts. Interventions may be initiated by members within the team, or external stakeholders (i.e., instructor, customer, etc.). An external intervention usually takes the form of negotiation, arbitration, or the imposition of a ruling from a higher authority. Teams should be encouraged to manage their own peer-led interventions before bringing in external parties to air their dirty laundry. See the Intermediate Interpersonal Effectiveness for a good peer-to-peer conflict resolution model.

2. Third party intervention (slides 15). If the conflict continues or all team interaction stops, this is a sign of deadlock. Deadlock is characterized by the end of peer-to-peer conflict resolution due to entrenchment of the parties (that is, they do not see a collaborative resolution and feel justified in their positions). This is where third-party intervention is required. Negotiation is the preferred technique because it has the most team member involvement. If negotiation fails, there are other techniques available that usually involve the instructor: arbitration (where the arbiter hears both sides and crafts an equitable solution that the parties agree to) and ruling from a higher authority (where the authority-figure resolves the conflict by making a decision that is imposed).

3. Negotiation (slides 16-20). Negotiation is the solution to conflict that allows for the most team member interaction and the growth of individual team members. Although we often assume only an instructor can negotiate, this is not true. The negotiator can be a respected or skilled team member not already entrenched in the conflict. If the absence of such a person, the team should go to the next higher figure (e.g., teaching assistant, the professor, the dean, etc.).

When negotiating, there are certain behaviors expected of all parties. These are outlined on slide 18. Someone has to take the lead to enforce the successful negotiating principles (slide 19). The negotiator should be prepared to address the challenges that may arise (slide 20).

4. When negotiation fails (slide 21). If negotiation is unsuccessful, the team needs to move to another type of intervention (arbitration and external ruling). Both of these require bringing in a higher authority beyond those in the current negotiation (often the instructor).

5. Moving forward after conflict (slide 22). After the conflict and intervention, the team must decide the future. This is true whether the intervention was successful
or not, but becomes particularly critical when the end result was not satisfactory for all team members. As a team, it must be decided: How should the project move forward? Do project milestones and timelines need to be adjusted? Were there certain people that helped cause this problem? How should they be managed in the future? This process helps all team members become clear on changed behavior and work expectations.

I. Summary (slide 23). The last slide summarizes some of the main points in this module. The instructor is reminded to take classroom characteristics into consideration when summarizing the value of this module, identifying individualized learning points for his or her particular class.

III. Teaching to the Learning Styles

A. Quadrant 1 (Divergers): Driven to learn by asking the question “why?” (In this case, “why is this information important to me?”)

Introduce the module and objectives: Divergers appreciate beginning with the “big picture” view, for it allows them to understand other perspectives and shows them why the information is important to the class.

B. Quadrant 2 (Assimilators): Driven to learn by asking the question “what?” (In this case, “what is conflict negotiation?”)

Defining conflict: Assimilators often prefer a traditional classroom environment which utilizes linear instruction and grounded theory. Because they like to organize and test ideas, starting with a common framework will help them more clearly conceptualize the upcoming lesson.

Lecture on negotiation: Assimilators appreciate this lecture because it provides a linear overview of the theory involved with negotiation. As the instructor lectures, it also allows them to analyze the information and consider how to use it, without being forced to implement it immediately.

C. Quadrant 3 (Convergers): Driven to learn by asking the question “how?” (In this case, “how can this material help me better understand myself or my abilities?”)

“Solutions to conflict” activity: Convergers prefer to experiment with new ideas and make decisions. (Note: Most engineers are convergers). Subsequently, this activity which asks them to practice with the new material helps them integrate theory and practice in a logical way.

D. Quadrant 4 (Accommodators): Driven to learn by asking the question “what if?” (In this case, “what if I used this information about myself to my advantage on my team? What would I do or how would I act differently?”)

Identifying appropriate type of intervention and the players: Accommodators prefer this type of activity because it allows them to work to solve a problem, integrating their own understanding of the material with its application.
IV. **Delivery Plan B: 90 Minute Class Option**

A. Developing negotiation skills (slides 24-28). Effective communication is key to a successful negotiation, so the instructor may treat this topic with more detail by introducing particularly useful listening techniques (slides 24-25).

   1. Reactive listening (slide 26). This listening style is less helpful in the conflict negotiation setting and can lead to cycles of repetition of argument. Students enter the negotiation assuming certain facts not necessarily in evidence. If left unacknowledged, these can color the success of the intervention.

   2. Proactive listening (slide 27-28). This style is better suited to the negotiation process. It leads the team members to acknowledge fixed positions and appreciate movement away from them. Furthermore, members can consider what values they are projecting (are they worth it?).

B. Practicing reactive listening (slide 29).

C. Practicing proactive listening (slide 30).

D. Summary (31). This summary reinforces the value of listening in interventions, particularly negotiation.

V. **Class Adaptation Strategies**

A. *Size:* Depending on the class size, the exercises might be performed in small groups with only a few volunteering to report out to the instructor. It is important for the listening exercises that they are practiced in pairs, regardless of class size. The instructor might ask one pair to demonstrate the styles for the whole class.

B. *Content:* If the institution has an infrastructure for a particular negotiation process, this should be worked into the lesson. Students need to know what level of conflict is needed before they ask for outside intervention, and to whom they should turn.

C. *Classroom culture:* This lesson is particularly important for members of underrepresented groups because they must be full participants in any negotiation process, which may not come naturally. Also, third party negotiators must be sensitive of typical patterns of behavior demonstrated by any participant.

VI. **Follow-up Materials**

A. *Homework:* Assigning homework helps students internalize the lesson in ways that one lecture cannot. Options include a brief reading assignment (see References at the end of the MIP), or a short written response to the material covered.

B. *Report Writing:* Prompts may include: How is team conflict manifested and what are solutions to it? What components are necessary for effective conflict negotiation?
C. Exam or Quiz Item: Including a question that connects this material to students’ course grades is important, for this signals that the instructor finds the material worthwhile in the long-term (rather than as a solitary, unattached lecture).

VII. References


