Will they resolve their difference:- A Conflict Story

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Abstract: *The case study is about a conflict situation faced by a young software programmer at an information technology company. The case narrates the story of that programmer who faced the brunt of a conflict experienced by his team leader. The case provides an opportunity to look at the conflict handling styles of two individuals when the conflict is not at a felt stage. It also provides the student to look at the conflict at its different stages and help to analyse how the conflict evolves to its maturity.*

Keywords: Conflict, stages, perceived, tangible, felt

1. ABOUT SHIRISH

Shirish, an electronics engineer from a premier institute, had joined the IT industry with dreams of carving out a dream future for himself. He was a self-motivated and focussed individual who was willing to make personal sacrifices to climb the corporate ladder. After having joined a leading software development firm of the country, Shirish underwent a seven month long technical training at the company's expense. He cleared the training programme with exceptional grades and was very excited about what the future had in store for him. At the end of the soft skills part of the training module, Shirish was required to report to the Transformation Solutions Group which was based out of Chennai. The group was known for slow growth and limited learning opportunities. But being an optimistic person, Shirish decided to make the best out of the situation.

2. Search for Opportunity

He joined the Chennai office and reported to his manager, Samarthan, on the first day itself. Due to a scarcity of available projects, Shirish was asked to enrol for additional training sessions to hone his skills for any future requirements. For the next one month, Shirish diligently attended the training sessions and reported to Samarthan on a regular basis. Meanwhile Shirish's friend indicated that there was a resource requirement in his unit and Shirish fitted the role perfectly. It was a common practice in the organisation to look for opportunities outside one's unit if no work had been allocated in the parent unit. To be on the right side, Shirish informed Samarthan, who took it the right stride and even encouraged Shirish to look for opportunities in other units.

3. Appointment with Ravi

Shirish set up an appointment with Ravi who was a project manager in the Manufacturing vertical of the organisation. Ravi had a detailed discussion with Shirish about the project requirements and his responsibilities as a software developer in the team. Ravi found Shirish to be competent for the role and offered the position to him after a brief interview. The project was in line with Shirish's expectations and provided ample learning opportunities and promised a steady growth for his career in the organisation.
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4. Company's Policy

As per the company policy, Shirish was required to get a sign off approved from his current manger before moving on to a different unit. Since he was not allocated to any project, Shirish believed that getting Samarthan's approval for the unit transfer would not be a problem. Confident and happy, Shirish approached his manager for the approval but to his surprise Samarthan rejected the transfer on hearing Ravi's name. While rejecting the case, Samarthan mentioned that a big project was in the pipeline and hence he could not let a talented resource like Shirish to leave the team. Shirish didn't want to let go of this opportunity and hence decided to find out the real reason behind the problem.

5. Ravi and Samarthan's Conflict

Ravi and Samarthan's professional relationship started when they joined the company as trainees around 8 years ago. Both were talented and hardworking employees who steadily climbed the hierarchical levels of the company. Around a year back a new project with immense growth opportunities presented itself before the company. Ravi and Samarthan were the top contenders for the role of the Project Manager for this particular project. The deal seemed to be tipping towards Samarthan because of his superior technical skills and all seemed to be set. But at the final deciding moment, the delivery manager decided to award Ravi with the new responsibility. Most of the senior staff, including Samarthan, believed that Ravi had scored the project because of his good relations with the Delivery manager. Since that day Samarthan had developed a huge animosity against Ravi and looked for opportunities to create a difficult situation for him.

6. Brunt of Conflict

Shirish found himself sandwiched himself between the two Project Managers and their interpersonal conflicts. This project

presented a huge opportunity for Shirish and he started looking at possible solutions to the problem.

7. Discussion Question:
1. What is the process between Samarthan and Ravi can be best described?
2. What could be the reason for the potential opposition or incompatibility between Samarthan and Ravi?
3. Discuss the process in terms of Cognition and Personalization of the conflict.
4. What was the outcome of the Conflict?

8. Case Analyses

1. What is the process between Samarthan and Ravi can be best described?

The process between Samarthan and Ravi can be described as Conflict. Samarthan perceives Ravi was responsible for grabbing his Project manager opportunity of a particular project which he believed that had an immense growth opportunity. Samarthan could have perceived that he had a superior technical skills and he was more qualified for the project than Ravi. When the project went off from his hand, Samarthan could have believed that Ravi would have lobbied using his personal relationship and had prevented the project reaching him.

2. What could be the reason for the potential opposition or incompatibility between Samarthan and Ravi?

The conflict between Samarthan and Ravi are structural in nature. The prime reason could be the process of reward systems. Here reward system could be attributed to the awarding of the project to Ravi instead of Samarthan. There was an ambiguity prevailed in the decision to award the project. The criteria to choose between Ravi and Samarthan was not clear. Both were left with an anxiety who will be awarded of the project. The structure was very unclear how a project will be awarded.

3. Discuss the process in terms of Cognition and Personalization of the conflict.

The Structural ambiguity which was a root cause of this conflict process. There are two levels in the Cognition and Personalization stage. One which is at the perceived level which is not personalized and another is Felt level. In the felt level, individuals involved themselves emotionally. The case scenario can be inferred as the conflict process which was at the perceived level has moved to the Felt level. Samarthan by

not approving the deputation of Shirish to Ravi team, he has turned the conflict to a new level that may result in tension, hostility, anxiety among both the persons.

4. What was the outcome of the Conflict?

The conflict perceived by Samarthan has yielded a dysfunctional outcome. The outcome is the aftermath of the behaviour stage. Any behaviour which results in actions or reactions reveals the intention of the individuals involved in the conflict. It takes the conflict to the next stage. To further elaborate, the action and reaction dynamics between the conflicting individuals give rise two types of outcomes. The outcome may be functional or dysfunctional.

In the case scenario, the outcome of the conflict was dysfunctional nature; it appeared to be revengeful in nature and in one way affecting a subordinate's opportunity and ultimately affecting organization.

References

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Author Profile

Padhmanabhan. V is a faculty from Organizational Behavior and Human Resources Management Area of Goa Institute of Management. His subjects of interests are group and interpersonal process, Conflict Management, Power and Influence. He has completed his Ph. D which examines the process characteristics of Women's Self-help groups from Bharathiyar University in the year 2015.