

Reducing Conflict 70 Conflict Between Layers

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



Sometimes conflict can arise between the layers of an organization. This article will pick apart the root cause of this problem and offer some solutions. The perspective on issues and decisions is different depending on the layer where you are.

Let's take a specific example and describe the likely perspective of four different layers. The Quality Manager has decided to hold off on the introduction of a new product. There have been some quality issues in the first batches of the product. The origin appears to be poor quality of incoming material. There is a risk of loss of market share if defective product gets out.

View from the top layer

The president and VP of Marketing aren't thrilled with the decision to hold off. They have been touting the new product for several months. They expect that this product will greatly enhance the competitive position of the company. Any delay in introduction will hinder the anticipated competitive advantage. The company can prevent defective product from reaching customers by temporarily adding an inspection function to remove defects.

This approach protects the reputation of the organization while allowing the new product to get a toe hold in the market. The president orders the Quality Manager to release the product to manufacturing.

View from the middle layer

The Quality Manager is furious over the decision to release product for sale. There may be other issues not yet seen, and putting out defective product is too great a risk to the overall program. The Manufacturing Manager is unhappy as well. She quotes the famous Quality Guru, W. Edwards Deming that, *"You cannot inspect quality into a product."*

View from the Engineers

The engineers are concerned, because they realize the pressure on them to resolve the issue is going to increase. They would rather put more pressure on the suppliers to figure out the problem and correct it. Engineers and technicians have been spending too much time on the road working with the suppliers. The travel time causes neglect on critical work at home on other issues.

View from Production Supervisor

The production supervisor does not have the resources to inspect each unit of product before shipment. The problem requires special equipment and a lot of time to detect. He is going to need more people and equipment to try and stop defective product from escaping. On the other hand, he realizes the pressure on his crews for perfect product is going to increase.

How to proceed between layers

There is no one solution that is going to please all of the layers. The best approach is to have a meeting where all groups can give their perspective. Then the group needs to go back to their **core values** to determine the best course of action. Once they reach a compromise, then all groups have to support it.

Conclusion

It is easy to see how each group has a different perspective on the original problem. Sending vitriolic emails between the layers is not going to resolve the problem. By going back to the values, the organization can identify the most helpful action.

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of *The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals*, *Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online*, and *Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind*. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations.