

Understanding and managing ego clashes at work-place

Dr. Kompal Wadhawan

Principal, Universal College of Education, Billopur, Lalru, Mohali, Punjab, India.

Abstract

When we put different kinds of elements in a pressure cooker, the pressure is evaded when the whistle blows otherwise the cooker will blast. In the same way, at work place the different elements here could be different people and the pressure cooker is office set up. Everyone has a different temperament and so in a closed and testing environment of any work place, egos will clash. This may lead to low productivity and unhappy workers. Such type of situations can be avoided with lots of diplomacy and tactics on the part of head or employers.

Keywords: Ego clash.

Introduction

Why do ego clashes happen?

Usually the clash of the ego does occur when the two people have the over-powering urge to be right. So this turns every argument and situation into a power clash. We spend most of our time in the office where we are constantly coordinating with colleagues, clients, superiors and others. If we take our personal conflicts with us to our respective work-places this further leads to jealousy, personality clashes, ego-problems and frustrations. As we all come from different backgrounds, religions, cultures, academic credentials, economic backgrounds and thus with different mindsets and. It has been observed that this mental framework has a direct impact on their individual performance which ultimately affects the organization as a whole. It's not an easy task to handle a difficult employee. Employees differ in their personalities and these differences influence the way they react to the external and internal pressures that exist in any organization. Most employees spend more than 50% of their waking hours at their workplace and its environment greatly influences their performance and their mental framework.

Ego clashes are nasty, destructive diseases that can harm work. We all experience at one time or another conflicts or ego clashes within the workplace with employees deliberately ignoring each other, talking over each other to colleagues and heads, as well as excluding juniors or colleagues from discussions and decisions when they really should be consulted. If conflict is left unresolved it can lead to ugly scenes of shouting matches between employees, or worse.

"Workplace ego clashes happen for various reasons," says Dr Lisa Matthewman, Principal Lecturer in Occupational and Organisational Psychology at the University of Westminster. "They can be the result of a conflict of personalities, professional jealousy or communication problems. Sometimes they happen when someone is trying to establish themselves as the alpha female or male."

Serious workplace ego clashes can be highly stressful and demoralising for colleagues who aren't directly involved. It can seriously disrupt productivity and efficiency, because people's energy, time and attention are taken up with conflict, not working productively as a team. If such clashes or conflicts are

left unresolved, the culture of an organisation can stagnate, this can harm creativity. In small set-ups, problems are often made worse because people usually need to work more closely together. When and where conflict arises, it is best to try and nip such issues in the bud at the earliest possible opportunity and it is important that owners and managers understand and appreciate why the conflict has arisen in the first place.

Sometimes organisational structure is such that it induces clashes among its workers. Modern workplace is full of demands, deadlines etc. There are employees who sustain and perform under pressure while there are employees who succumb to this rising pressure. Thus in an aggressive organization where the stress factors are already high, there are more chances of ego-clashes. If there is an alarming increase in workload, employees sometimes become disgruntled with their work and this is reflected in the quality of work. It also takes a toll on their health and becomes demoralizing for them. Adequate time and material resources should be present for employees to enable them to perform their work easily. This will help them not only perform to the best of their ability but also be proud of their achievements. To make an employee productive and efficient, it is important to equip them with the right tools. Ignoring the potential benefits of technology upgradation in the workplace may diminish the productivity and performance of employees.

Rationale

In an office environment there are times when small issues can arise and ego problems crop up. In such situations it is difficult to concentrate on work. When egos clash in the workplace, owners and heads cannot afford to ignore it because the work is likely to be the ultimate loser. At the end of the day there is always going to be clashes of ego and conflict within the workplace, but letting a minor difference of opinion or disagreement fester or escalate can prove highly destructive. So what is the best way to sort such problems out and why do they happen in the first place? We have set out below our top tips for ego-management, recognising and dealing with conflict and ego clashes within the workplace. This should hopefully help you identify, resolve and minimise the impact of any conflicts or clashes within the business.

- **Effective leadership and top-management:** A leader is the person who motivates his subordinates, instils confidence and evokes enthusiasm among them, with regard to their work. But if the same supervisor engages in aggressive and punitive behaviour, it results to harassment at the workplace.
 - **Communication:** conversations should be regular between employer, immediate boss and staff. Where issues can be raised informally and discussed openly, because awareness about any issues helps to resolve them early. Good communication is vital and nearly 70% of problems in the workplace relate to bad communication. Initiate a conversation with a positive approach after some time. Communication will put an end to ego conflicts. Make sure the conversation is smooth and calm throughout.
 - **Listen:** Even if employer or immediate boss holds regular discussions with staff, listen to their grievances and ensures them to take on board what is said, there are fewer chances for the clashes to erupt. Be a good listener when the other person is explaining his/her point of view.
 - **Don't be dismissive:** You do not want to create further resentment or issues between staff and management by taking knee jerk reactions to an issue raised. This will likely lead to staff not sharing issues and matters festering within the workplace.
 - **Remember, a difference in opinion is healthy:** Encourage and train staff on how to discuss problems and express opinions in a constructive and proactive manner to ensure an exchange of ideas as opposed to a slanging match.
 - **Be impartial:** Head/boss need to show they do not favour any particular member of staff due to a friendship or favouritism. Stand by what is right and oppose someone when they are wrong.
 - **Positive Attitude:** Ego clashes happen quite often in office premises due to difference of opinions. That doesn't mean good qualities of that person are to be ignored. Every person has a set of good qualities, which one tends to forget at the moment of clash.
 - **Be patient:** when the scenario is quite heated everyone should be asked to practice silence. Practicing silence and calming down can be difficult but it is not impossible. Even to meditate for a couple of minutes could be beneficial. This will calm down heated minds and after that problem and issues can be discussed openly
 - **Silence:** Try not to get involved in conflicting issues at the workplace. However, if you still find yourself trapped, then pull yourself away from the situation immediately. Maintain distance from that particular person for some time. You can talk it out later with them. A conversation at the same time will lead to ego clashes
 - **Stay Normal:** Don't stop socializing because of ego clashes. Be considerate and move on. Remember, you need to avoid clashes, not colleagues.
 - **Meeting Expectations:** Persons are different and so are expectations. Instead of talking about what you expect, ask the opposite person what he/she expects and how these conflicting issues can be sorted out.
 - **Appreciation-the greatest reward:** Start appreciating the hard work and dedication of your colleagues. Avoid criticism. It's fruitful to admire the efforts others have put together for some project. A little admiration and appreciation will surely work towards maintaining a healthy work environment. It works quite well and creates fewer problems
 - **Don't let down others:** Do not let anyone down even if you are at a higher position. Instead you can use your knowledge and experience as a tool to teach and train others.
 - **Respect others ideas:** Expressing your views, thoughts and ideas with freedom often works when you don't want ego clashes. However, ensure that you don't offend anyone and don't feel offended if someone's idea is better than yours. Respect the view point of each individual.
 - **Don't ignore the issues:** Don't ignore or procrastinate the issues hoping that all will go all right by its own. Allow persons involved to express their views and try to understand the issues from their point of views
 - **Inadequate responsibility:** This happens when two different workers are given incompatible roles at the same time. This lack of clarity in workers' objectives and expectations creates tension between the employees and results in ego-clashes.
 - **Clash of values:** Organization comprises of employees from various walks of life. They bring in their own set of values, ideas and principles which may not be received by everyone in the organization. This might result in some animosity and intolerance between individuals.
 - **Poor selection or pairing of team members:** Employees tied with a wrong partner proves detrimental to the overall health of the organization. A lion's share of their time will be consumed jostling against each other without any improvement in their overall performance. This leads to a situation wherein when something goes right everyone would like to take credit for it and when something goes wrong no one comes forward and accepts responsibility.
 - **Under-rated appraisals by management:** Badly-conducted appraisals can create lot of problems for the organization as well as its employees. If a hard working employee is under-rated, besides being unfair, it creates an inferiority complex in the mind of the employee while being over-rated may create egoism.
 - **Transparent system:** As far as institutional decisions are concerned, there should be transparency on the part of he heads. When employees are not informed about decisions they will make their own assumptions which can result in the spread of rumours. This can hurt the image of the organization and also destroy the trust in the management.
- In a nut shell five rules to follow for a happy practice:**
1. Listen to your staff.
 2. Take time out to make sure the workplace is a welcoming place and employees enjoy their job roles.
 3. Make valid contributions to each employee.
 4. Understand that we don't all get on. We are complex human beings.
 5. It's ok not to agree, but aim high for differences to be discussed quickly and resolved sensibly.
- By following these simple steps and listening to staff and encouraging open discussions where issues can be aired and

resolved, you can create a happier and more productive working environment that will only benefit the continued success and development of your business and you can create a happier and more productive working environment that will only benefit the continued success and development of your business.

References

1. Alper S, Tjosvold D, Law KS. Conflict management, efficacy, and performance in organizational teams. *Personnel Psychology*. 2000; 625-642.
2. Borisoff D, Victor DA. *Conflict management: A communication skills approach*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1989.
3. Nag A. 16 factors that leads to poor performance in the work- place, 2011.
4. Rahim MA, Bonoma TV. Managing organizational conflict: A model for diagnosis and intervention. *Psychological Reports*, 1979; 1323-1344.