



Aligned Expectations, Productive Conflict

Marketing/PR Network

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Content

- 1. Aligning Expectations (best practices)**
- 2. Conflicting Expectations (two sources of conflict)**
- 3. Conflicting Expectations (fixing conflict)**
- 4. Conflict Avoidance vs. Productive Conflict**
- 5. Exercise (to help teams embrace conflict)**

~57% of projects fail because of communication issues

“ While schedule and costs may always be with us as constraints on projects, conflict is centered on the underlying perspectives of the people involved and how they interact.”

Aligning Expectations: **Common Practices**

1. Identify stakeholders

- who they are and roles, responsibilities (!!!), interests, needs, and preferences
- determine how often, and in what way will you need to engage
- identify potential conflicts or risks

TOOLS: stakeholder analysis, power-interest grid, influence-impact matrix, RACI chart

2. Communicate project goals and outcomes

- why it's important, what it will deliver, how it will be measured, benefits
- set a communication plan: communicate clearly and consistently for shared vision and support

TOOLS: project charter, project plan, status reports, newsletters, presentations, meetings

3. Involve stakeholders in process as much as possible/appropriate

- solicit input and feedback, include in decisions, and/or provide regular updates
- involvement builds trust and rapport and ensures that expectations are met and aligned

TOOLS: surveys, interviews, focus groups, brainstorming sessions, prototypes, demos, etc.

4. Manage expectations and objectives

- monitor how well you are meeting expectations and address impactful changes
- active management ensures that project goals/outcomes align with expectations/objectives

TOOLS: change management, issue management, or risk management methods, or surveys

Aligning Expectations: **DSDM**

Dynamic Systems Development Methods (an agile project management methodology)

- 1. Understand roles and responsibilities** (e.g., sponsor, visionary, PM, solution developer, tester) and clarify/communicate them clearly and regularly throughout project
- 2. Involve stakeholders throughout the process** to build trust, rapport, and commitment.
- 3. Prioritize and negotiate requirements** with stakeholders to manage scope and quality.
- 4. Manage risks and issues:** Actively involve stakeholders in risk management process to reduce uncertainty and ensure expectations are met.
- 5. Adapt to changes:** Flexibly respond to stakeholder needs and adjust plans accordingly to ensure a project remains relevant, valuable, and aligned with expectations.
- 6. Celebrate success:** Acknowledge and appreciate the contribution and effort of each stakeholder group to foster a positive project culture and strengthen relationships.

Conflicting Expectations: 2 Sources of Conflict

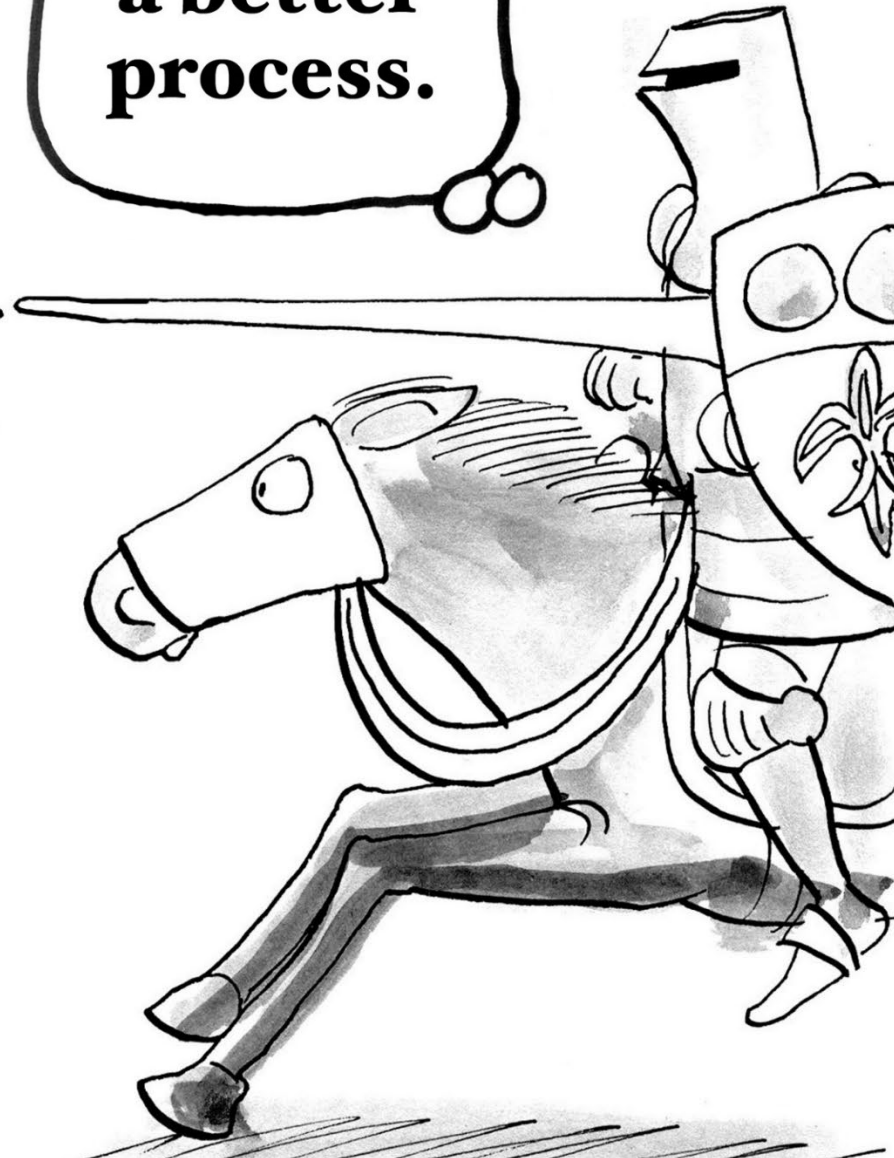
Lack of Trust

- Stakeholder expectations must be known to be met.
- Discovery of expectations requires a good relationship between stakeholders, project manager, and/or project team.
- Without that, stakeholders' true expectations cannot be known or managed.

Resistance to Change (...and **CHANGE** is at the heart of all projects)

1. Risk of change is seen as greater than the risk of standing still.
2. Feeling connected to other people who are identified with the old way.
3. No role models for the new activity.
4. Fear one lacks the competence to change.
5. Feeling overloaded and overwhelmed.
6. Healthy skepticism - want to be sure that new ideas are sound.
7. Fear of hidden agendas among would-be reformers.
8. Feeling that the proposed change threatens their notions of themselves.
9. Anticipating a loss of status or quality of life.
10. Genuine belief that the proposed change is a bad idea.

**We need
a better
process.**



Conflicting Expectations: **Fixing Conflict**

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Before You Begin: Build Trust

1. Go first: lead the relationship by example
2. Draw on relevant examples to illustrate a topic
3. Say what you mean
4. When you need help, ask for it.
5. Show interest and appreciation
6. Effective communication
 - (for example) Deliver on promises, update on change
 - (another example) Be predictable/clear

Conflicting Expectations: **Fixing Conflict**

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Before You Begin: Talk it Out:

1. Listen to the concerns of the relevant stakeholders.
2. Use these concerns to improve project planning (e.g., risk mitigation)
3. Clearly explain the reasons and urgency for change, and the impact if it is not accepted.

Clarifying /Aligning Expectations + Managing Conflict: **5 Recommendations**

1. Address Conflicts Early

Ignoring clues that indicate there are conflicts in expectations, while focusing on the actual work of the project, is not effective.

2. Uncover Motivations Behind the Stakeholders' Perspectives

“Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood.” Allowing stakeholders to express doubts enables understanding, trust, and alignment.

3. Involve Senior Management

Sometimes escalating concerns to senior management early can help avoid derailment.

4. Solicit Agreement to Objectives and Approach from Divergent Stakeholders/Groups

For project objectives to be agreed to, they must be clear and confirmed by all.

5. Use Multiple Routes and Forms of Communication

People communicate in many ways. Multiple methods of communication (verbally/written, in groups/individually) help teams confirm what they hear.

“When there is trust, conflict becomes nothing but the pursuit of truth, an attempt to find the **best possible answer.”**

Conflict Aversion: **What it Looks Like**

- 1. Everyone agrees with everyone else and holds back their true opinions, and risks and assumptions go unaddressed.**
- 2. People may not share conflicting information; silos get reinforced (and cross-pollination doesn't occur).**
- 3. Team members fail to make the difficult trade-offs required to prioritize, which can lead to overwhelming workloads and diluted resources.**
- 4. Team members talk about each other behind their backs.**
- 5.sometimes conflict avoidance is actually misdiagnosed **disengagement.****

Productive Conflict: **What it Looks Like**

- 1. Conflict can be productive when there's a solid sense of trust.**
- 2. People challenge and improve one-another's ideas and better ideas result.**
- 3. Productive Conflict avoids personal attacks, politics, and destructive fighting.**

LENCIONI'S CONFLICT CONTINUUM



Artificial harmony	Conflict continuum	Personal attacks
<p>On the one hand (left), many companies exhibit "artificial harmony".</p> <p>(conflict avoidance).</p>	<p>The optimal spot is just to the left of the middle,</p> <p>"...where a team is engaged in all the constructive conflict they could possibly have..."</p>	<p>On the right side, people can be downright nasty, constantly at each other's' throats.</p>

A Conflict Exercise: **Map Valuable Tensions**

1. Draw a circle.

2. Divide it into enough wedges to represent each role on your team.

3. For each role ask:

- What is the unique value of this role on the team? What should this person be paying attention to that no one else is? What would we miss if this role wasn't here?
- On which stakeholders is this role focused? Whom does it serve? Who defines success?
- What is the most common tension this role puts on team discussions? What one thing does the person in this role have to say that frequently makes others bristle.

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BSA

