

## ENTERPRISE

# Some ideas to defuse turf wars



### Negotiation strategies

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David Wilkins is founder and CEO of a fast-growing technology product and services firm. The company has a number of high profile clients and expects sales to exceed \$15 million this year. There is a very good market for its products and services and it is in the enviable position of not having to be overly concerned with external competition. Internal competition, however, is fierce as the various departments struggle over resources, funding, ownership, recognition and visibility.

This phenomenon is ubiquitous in corporations. Tensions between sales and marketing are common; turf wars between marketing and engineering are regular occurrences; engineering and R&D are often at odds with one another; and various product teams vie frequently for priority and resources.

Consider two competing product teams in a large corporation. Each team believes it is developing a product that will boost revenue and increase market share for their company; each believes that its product will become the flagship product; each believes that budget and resources should be allocated to its product; and each believes that its product deserves priority. As these two teams expend energy and effort in competing with one another, deadlines will be missed, products will be delayed, costs will increase, use of resources will be inefficient and morale will erode. The customers will be left frustrated and disappointed as deliverables and commitments are not met.

Here's an approach to help manage these turf wars and to turn conflict into collaboration:

#### Understanding objectives

The first step in managing turf wars is to facilitate dialogue between the relevant teams. Each team needs to understand what is important to them and to the other team(s) and what each really cares about. When we facilitate this kind of dialogue, we draw adjacent columns on a flip chart with each column representing a team. As the dialogue evolves, we record the objectives of each team/in full view. This allows the teams to see and comprehend each other's objectives and it is helpful as they recognize that there are not only competing interests, but shared ones too. In addition, the process itself begins to build a collaborative atmosphere.

#### Recognize personal objectives

Typically each team will clearly articulate its corporate objectives such as revenue increases, market share and customer satisfaction. Personal objectives such as team and individual recognition, visibility in the organization, funding for future projects and ambitions for career advance will usually be left unspoken. The reason for this is a perception that expressing personal interests appears self-serving in a workplace where the best interests of the corporation are considered paramount.

The second step in managing turf wars is to foster an environment that encourages not only open exchange and discussion of corporate objectives but personal objectives too. These should also be captured on the flip chart together with the corporate objectives. Once personal objectives are exposed, they too can be addressed and resolved rather than be an undercurrent of competing interests which obstructs collaboration.

#### Seek to align objectives

By this time in the process, there ought to have been some rigorous dialogue around corporate and personal objectives, and the teams should have a better understanding of each others' needs. The third step in managing turf wars is to brainstorm ideas for aligning the teams' objectives in ways that satisfy all of the needs.

It is important that not only are the teams' corporate objectives aligned, but their personal ones too.

In our product team example above, they may find ways of integrating their products that provide significant value add for their customers or they may collaborate on components or features common to both products. They may work with the marketing department to do a joint marketing campaign. A more efficient use and allocation of resources could be devised between them. A means for both teams to achieve recognition and visibility (personal objectives) might be negotiated.

Once agreement on the alignment of the teams' objectives has been reached, it is useful to document those agreements in a charter of collaboration. This solidifies the relationship and diminishes the chance of misunderstandings to occur later.

By jointly seeking creative ideas for aligning their objectives and meeting their needs, they will successfully turn potential conflict into collaboration.

#### Communicate

It is a common misperception that effective communication is necessary only when problems arise. Actually the converse is true: problems arise when effective communication is not happening. Open communication on a regular basis between the teams should be encouraged for collaboration to be ongoing. It allows for concerns and problems to be jointly addressed before assuming crisis proportions.

Turf wars will always be a reality of corporate life and these steps will go a long way in helping to turn those potentially destructive situations into productive collaboration.

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