

Healthy Versus Unhealthy Conflict

Scenario:

Mark is an experienced Engineer, new to Cisco and to the project team. His Project Manager, Sally shares the project plan to help him understand his responsibilities and timelines on the project. As Mark reads the plan, he realizes, based on his previous project experience at another company, that there is a scope of improvement in the project plan that would help run the project faster without affecting the quality of the deliverables. Mark suggests changes to the project he believes will reduce the timeline without affecting the quality of the deliverables as this was his experience in a previous project in which the project manager and scrum leader were able to facilitate an agile project methodology without a hitch. Soon the discussion becomes a heated argument and Sally defends the project plan based on her tenure and experience with this client.

Note: *Feel free to ad lib for further effect.*

Interaction Between Mark and Sally

Sally: Mark, welcome to the team! As you may know, we have very tight deadlines and a demanding customer, but over the past six months, since I've taken over, our team has been able to establish credibility based on the results and outcomes. We followed a methodical plan that did not allow for mistakes and I'd like to walk through the project plan with you to highlight our timeline and your responsibilities.

Mark: I'm excited to join the team so let's take a look.

Sally: [After reviewing the plan in detail] ... Now that we have reviewed the project plan, do you have any questions for me?

Mark: I don't have any questions about the detail, but I would like to offer a recommendation. I was on a similar project in my previous company and we also had a tight deadline and a difficult customer. But we were able to shave off about one week in development by performing this task in parallel with another, so we were very creative in executing an agile methodology by going above and beyond the typical agile practices. Our customer was really impressed and based on the situation and project; this would work really well so why not do that here to help speed up delivery?

Sally: Mark, while I appreciate your bold recommendation the first day on the job, you should know that the project was already rolled out so I'll take that suggestion under advisement for the next go round.

Mark: But Sally, I respectfully disagree. We are in the first week of development and I challenge you to consider why not try to push the envelope? We received rave reviews for

our results by following this process in my previous project so why not try to be innovative and use my suggestion?

Sally: Mark, don't you think you are overstepping your boundary by coming in here and trying to make these changes to a plan that I am responsible for designing and delivering?

Mark: I thought when you hired me that you wanted me to bring new ideas and innovations to the team and apparently you don't value that.

Sally: Hey Mark, before you get on your high horse and start dictating ideas, let me just say that you don't know what it is like to deal with this particular client and having the client sign off on a project plan takes time and effort. So why don't you stick to what you know and leave the project schedule to me?

Questions

- Is this scenario an example of a conflict at the workplace? Why?
- Is this an example of a healthy or an unhealthy conflict?
- What was the intent with which Mark had approached his project manager?
- Would Mark likely make more recommendations based on this experience?