



Leadership For Managing Customer Conflicts In Software Industry

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Abstract:

The Key for the software repeatable business, better customer satisfaction and customer delight lies with managing the customer in a better way without having conflicts with the customers. But during software project implementation, many conflicts are arising between customers and team members and vendor management. Conflicts with customers arising because of misunderstanding of customer's market requirements, not able to provide project metrics and important project documents like baselines and project plans on time as stated in the contract, lack of communication of team members during project discussions, lack of attrition management by vendors, vendor management not to provide onshore resources on time because of visa issues and non-payment of project bills/invoices by customers/sponsors. To resolve these conflicts, Project Managers should be in regular contact with customers, by publishing correct project baselines and project plans as stated in the contract on time. The present study has been conducted to understand the perception of customer related conflicts in various software industries located in Hyderabad and why conflicts are arising, leadership for conflict resolution and how these are interrelated with each other.

Keywords: Customer conflicts, Invoices, Project baseline/project plans, communication mechanisms, visa issues, on time delivery

1.Introduction

Conflicts between customers and team members and management takes place owing to several factors, but most common are personal perceptions and lack of communication of team members with customers during project discussions with customers. Continuous swift growth in the area of IT and software project management and Leadership field increasing the various customer conflicts arising between teams/management and customers in various forms of team's performance management, vendor management demanding good Leadership qualities in the Project Managers/Leaders to resolve these conflicts. Because of the new era of software offshore development, many customer conflicts are arising because of different barriers like offshore-onsite timing issues, limitation of resources, competition and differences in values, goals, attitudes, expectations, cross-cultural issues, Emotional & Face values, Group conflicts etc. When there are only differences of opinion between individuals about task-related matters, it can be construed as technical conflict rather than interpersonal conflict. Of course, technical and interpersonal conflicts may influence each other due to role-related pressures. It is often very difficult to establish whether a conflict between two parties is due to manifest rational factors, or it emanates from hidden personal factors.

Conflicts with customers sometimes arising during Software Project Management because of lack of Leadership qualities and the nature of Projects trying to address the needs and requirements of many stakeholders, misunderstanding of customer's market needs, necessity of obtaining onshore resources on time to complete the project as per contract, non availability of Project Baselines/Project Plans as per time specified by the customers, lack of communication/management of attrition of important resources in the project which is impacting project delivery, non-payment of Project Invoices on time by customers/sponsors. By properly managing the customer conflicts increases customer satisfaction and customer delight, which will give repeatable business to same vendor increases vendor's revenue growth and profits.

2.Review Of Literature

Ping-Kit Lam (1) et al., developed a system and process that enables clients and suppliers to assess their conflict management practices and identify improvement areas. It provides a platform for the collaborating parties to continually improve their conflict management and in turn NPD performance. Based on the hierarchy model of the factors, a self-assessment system and process, called PAIR, was established. The proposed self-

assessment system and process was developed and validated with six companies with positive results.

Wakefield, Robin L et al. (3), "A Model of Conflict, Leadership, and Performance in Virtual Teams",. Organizations in many different industries employ virtual teams in a variety of contexts, including research and development, customer support, software development, and product design. Many virtual teams are geographically and culturally dispersed in order to facilitate around-the-clock work and to allow the most qualified individuals to be assigned to a project team. As such dispersion increases, virtual teams tend to experience greater and more diverse conflict compared to co-located teams. Since the dynamics of virtual team leadership are not yet well understood, research that examines how team leaders alleviate threats to team cohesion and provide strategies for conflict resolution makes significant contributions to the literature. Our study uses a survey-based methodology to examine the perceptions of 159 virtual team members employed by a large U.S. telecommunications corporation and five Korean firms involved in construction, finance, business consulting, sales, and distribution. The study integrates the dynamic model of conflict in distributed teams with the behavioral complexity in leadership theory to investigate the roles that virtual team leaders must effectively employ to reduce various forms of virtual team conflict. Our findings indicate that communication technologies are effective in reducing task conflict; however, the team leader may also mitigate task conflict by assuming the role of monitor. Likewise, process conflict may be abated in the virtual team as the leader performs coordinator activities. An effective virtual team leader exhibits specific roles to manage different types of conflict and the leader's response to conflict plays an important part in virtual team success.

Ping-Kit Lam (2) et al., identified five conflict handling styles in new product development (NPD) from the context of buyer-supplier collaboration. The findings verified that a negative relationship exists between conflict intensity and NPD performance. Both the clients and suppliers should maintain a sustainable level of conflict and should enhance their conflict handling efforts and skills for effective conflict resolutions. Their results showed that cooperative styles (i.e. integrating and obliging) are effective and uncooperative styles (i.e. dominating and avoiding) are ineffective, whereas compromising is a neutral approach.

Leslie A. DeChurch (4) et al., in their paper in IJCM (International Journal of Conflict Management) on "maximizing the benefits of task conflict: the role of conflict management" discussed about Intra group conflicts and their research has shown that task

conflict can improve group outcomes, but it has not addressed how groups ensure that the positive aspects of task conflict are realized. This study examines the influence of group conflict management on group effectiveness, as well as the moderating role of group conflict management on task conflict—group outcome relationships. Results of a field survey of 96 business school project groups indicated that the use of agreeable conflict management in response to task conflict was associated with greater group satisfaction. Results examining group conflict management as a moderator showed that the relationship between task conflict and group performance was positive when conflict was actively managed and negative when it was passively managed. Similarly, task conflict improved group satisfaction when managed with agreeable behavior, and harmed satisfaction when neutral or disagreeable behaviors were used. Results from this work provide an important first look at how group conflict management behaviors directly impact group outcomes and affect task conflict-group outcome relationships.

Praytor, Edward (5) This article states that mediation is one form of dispute resolution that is particularly suited to resolving information technology disputes, especially because of the emphasis that it places on preserving the relationships of the parties involved. The timely resolution of disputes is another compelling reason to use mediation. According to the author, the types of disputes that arise in information technology include: software performance, quality, or function; hardware performance, quality, or function; project management performance; vendor liability to fix inherent defects in software; payment issues for software, hardware, or professional services; copyright and proprietary rights infringement. By its nature, mediation is extremely well suited to the resolution of technology disputes. In mediation, the emphasis is on preservation of the relationship between the parties. In those cases where the common interest of the parties is in successful projects or cooperative support of an information technology system, the resolution prognosis is excellent.

3.Need For The Study

To improve the customer satisfaction and delight and for on time delivery of the software project, project teams should work as a cohesive team in a friendly environment with less conflicts with customers and should work in a collaborative work environment with customers. To achieve this desired functionality there is a requirement to have an effective Leadership and customer conflict resolution processes should be in place to be implemented in the projects. To complete this process, we need to know what are the

important conflicts arising between customers and project team members and vendor management during project implementation and why they are arising during software project management and their Leadership and resolution methodologies and process should be clearly defined to minimize conflicts and hence creating good working environment to deliver the project which lessens customer conflicts.

4.Statement Of The Problem

This research emphasizes on the conflicts arising between customers and project members and vendor management while executing the software projects and related machinery required for the leadership team to resolve different conflicts with appropriate conflict resolution techniques.

5.Objectives Of The Study

- To know the most important factors influencing customer related conflicts during software project implementation to deliver the project on time within budget.
- To know the mode of factors impacting customer related conflicts and methodologies Leadership factors for resolution for success.
- To know whether on time presentation of project metrics as per contract can be considered as Leadership factor to resolve customer conflicts or not.
- To know Leadership factors and methodologies for resolving customer conflicts arising because of misunderstanding of customer's market needs.
- To know Leadership factors and methodologies for resolving customer conflicts arising because of communication of Team members during project discussions.
- To know Leadership factors and methodologies for resolving customer conflicts arising because of non availability of Project Baselines/Project Plans as per time specified by the customers.
- To know Leadership factors and methodologies for resolving customer conflicts arising because of lack of communication/management of attrition of important resources in the project which is impacting project delivery.
- To know resolution methodologies in resolving customer conflicts arising because of non-payment of Project Invoices on time by customers/sponsors.

- To know Leadership factors and methodologies for resolving customer conflicts arising because of vendor Mngt. not able to provide onshore resources because of Team member Visa Issues, which is effecting customer's delivery at onshore.

6.Research Methodology

Data collection made through electronically (through E-mails) and hardcopies circulation by a short questionnaire. After collecting the primary data, the interpretation done by using SPSS 19.0, relevant statistical tools are used to check the efficiency of the results.

7.Period Of The Study

The study conducted in May'12 - Sept'12 at different software organizations within Hyderabad city.

8.Sample & Sample Size

Sample Respondents are the Leadership Team, Project Managers, Account Managers, Group Leaders from various Software organizations in Hyderabad city. Questionnaires distributed 500 (350 Received) for above said respondents with in time period of 150 days.

9.The Study

This paper is an outcome of an analysis of responses received from 350 respondents who include Leadership Team, Project Managers, Account Managers and Group Leaders working in different software companies in Hyderabad city. They express their views about concept of conflicts between customers and project teams and related conflicts management in software industry. They express their views about customer conflicts arising because of conflicts with the customers and project team regarding on time presentation of project metrics as agreed in the contract, misunderstanding customer's market needs, communication of Team members during project discussions, non availability of Project Baselines and different Project Plans as per time specified by the customers, Attrition of important resources in the project, non-payment of Project Invoices on time by customers and conflicts arising because of vendor management not able to provide onshore resources because of Team member Visa Issues, which is effecting customer's delivery at onshore.

10. Study Statistical Analysis

10.1. Sample Justification and Reliability statistics

Sample taken is justified with the help of SPSS tool in order to determine the internal consistency. For reliability Coefficient values, it was suggested that 0.70 is the minimum requirement. Present study shows reliability value as .865 (Cronbach's alpha) suggests that present questionnaire may be considered as reliable for further studies.

		N	%
Cases	Valid	343	98.0
	Excluded ^a	7	2.0
	Total	350	100.0

Table 1: Case Processing Summary

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.865	7

Table 2: Reliability Statistics

10.2. Chi-Square Test

- Leadership for customer conflicts regarding on time presentation of project metrics as agreed in the contract. (METRICS)

Inference: The obtain chi-square value is equals 11.461 at 3 degrees of freedom, the significance value is less than 0.05 suggest that there is significant importance for on time presentation of project metrics as agreed in the contract in the conflict resolution process.

	TRUST
Chi-Square	11.461 ^a
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.032

Table 3: Test Statistics

- Leadership for customer conflicts because of misunderstanding customer's market needs (MRKTNEED)

	MRKTNEED
Chi-Square	8.523 ^a
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.041

Table 4 : Test Statistics

Inference: The obtain chi-square value is equals 8.523 at 2 degrees of freedom, the significance value is less than 0.05 suggest that there is significant importance to be given to resolve customer conflicts arising because of misunderstanding of customer's market needs by vendors.

- Leadership for customer conflicts regarding communication of Team members during project discussions (COMM)

	COMM
Chi-Square	5.628 ^a
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.023

Table 5: Test Statistics

Inference: The obtain chi-square value is equals 5.628 at 3 degrees of freedom, the significance value is less than 0.05 suggests that Leadership for communication of Team members during project discussions plays a vital role in resolving customer conflicts.

- Leadership for customer conflicts because of non availability of Project Documents (Baselines/Different Project Plans) as per time specified by the customers. (PROJDOCS)

	PROJDOCS
Chi-Square	13.932 ^a
Df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.126

Table 6: Test Statistics

Inference: The obtain chi-square value is equals 13.932 at 3 degrees of freedom, the significance value is greater than 0.05 suggest that there is no significant importance for Leadership for customer conflicts because of non availability of Project Documents as per time specified by the customers.

- Leadership for customer conflicts arising because of lack of communication/management of attrition of important resources in the project which is impacting project delivery. (ATTRITION)

	ATTRITION
Chi-Square	6.459 ^a
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.397

Table 7

Inference: The obtain chi-square value is equals 6.459 at 3 degrees of freedom, the significance value is grater than 0.05 suggest that there is no significant importance given Leadership for customer conflicts because of Attrition of important resources in the project in resolving customer conflicts.

- Leadership for customer conflicts because of non-payment of Project Invoices on time by customers/sponsors of the project.(INVOICES)

	INVOICES
Chi-Square	9.126 ^a
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.492

Table 8

Inference: The obtain chi-square value is equals 9.126 at 3 degrees of freedom, the significance value is greater than 0.05 suggests that there is no significant importance given for Leadership for customer conflicts because of non-payment of Project Invoices on time in resolving customer conflicts.

- Leadership for customer conflicts because of vendor Mngt. not able to provide onshore resources because of Team member Visa Issues, which is effecting customer's delivery at onshore.(ONSHORE)

	INVOICES
Chi-Square	11.263 ^a
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.036

Table 9

Inference: The obtain chi-square value is equals 11.263 at 3 degrees of freedom, the significance value is less than 0.05 suggests that there is significant importance given for Leadership for customer conflicts because of Mngt. not able to provide onshore resources because of Team member Visa Issues.

		Metrics	Mrktneed	Comm	Projdocs	Attrition	Invoices	Onshore
METRICS	Pearson Correlation	1	.364	-.573**	.378	.487*	.578	.378
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.191	.006	.476	.048	.034	.473
	N	350	350	350	350	350	350	350
MRKTNEED	Pearson	.578*	1	.145	.819	-.132	.089	.086
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.086		.317	.842	.738	.238	.472
	N	350	350	350	350	350	350	350
COMM	Pearson	.822	.426	1	.215	-.834	.813	.132
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.243		.324	.403	.345	.325
	N	350	350	350	350	350	350	350
PROJDOCS	Pearson	.639	.132	.853	1	-.031	-.214	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.635	.742	.326		.263	.673	
	N	350	350	350	350	350	350	350

ATTRITIO N	Pearson	-.367**	.122	-.276	-.023	1	.329	-.054
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.034	.289	.057	.743		.642	.713
	N	350	350	350	350	350	350	350
INVOICES	Pearson	-.025	.067	.063	-.024	.32	1	-.072
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.542	.318	.526	.646	.653		.456
	N	350	350	350	350	350	350	350
ONSHORE	Pearson	.196**	.897	.325	.068	-.327	.082	.052
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.89	.265	.027	.345	.638	.727	.836
	N	350	350	350	350	350	350	350

Table 9: CORRELATIONS

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

First let us look at the correlation of all variables with each other. The correlation table is shown above the values in there correlation values are standardize and range from 0 to 1(+ve to -ve). All the variables on time presentation of project metrics as agreed in the contract, misunderstanding customer's market needs, communication of team members during project discussions, non availability of Baseline and other project documents as per time specified by the customers and Mngt. not able to provide onshore resources because of Team member Visa Issues, which is effecting customer's delivery are positively correlated where as attrition of important resources in the project, non-payment of Project Invoices on time are negatively correlate with each other. If they are of independent with each other and we may to use this table to predict dependent variable. As we will see later our regression ends up eliminating some of them independent variable, because all of seven are not required, do not add any value to the regression model.

11. Regression

Model	Variables Entered	Method
1	METRICS MRKTNEED COMM PROJDOCS ATTRITION INVOICES ONSHORE	Enter

*Table 10: Variables Entered/Removed
All requested variables entered.*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.550	.303	.280	.939

*Table 11: Model Summary
Predictors: (Constant), MRKTNEED, COMM, PROJDOCS, ATTRITION, INVOICES, ONSHORE*

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	128.297	11	11.663	13.239	.000 ^a
	Residual	295.138	335	.881		
	Total	423.435	346			

*Table 12 :ANOVA^b
Predictors: (Constant), MRKTNEED, COMM, PROJDOCS, ATTRITION, INVOICES, ONSHORE.*

b. Dependent Variable: METRICS

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.043	.507		-.084	.039
	MRKTNEED	-.114	.053	.112	2.132	.034
	COMM	.365	.060	.325	6.104	.000
	PROJDOCS	.020	.067	.016	.300	.765
	ATTRITION	.295	.078	.218	3.798	.000
	INVOICES	-.025	.082	.017	.309	.757
	ONSHORE	.118	.094	.070	1.244	.214

Table 13: Coefficients^a

Dependent Variable: METRICS

$$\text{MRKTNEED} = -0.043 - .114(\text{MRKTNEED}) + .365(\text{COMM}) + .020(\text{PROJDOCS}) \\ + .295(\text{ATTRITION}) - .025(\text{INVOICES}) + .118(\text{ONSHORE})$$

Before we look at the equation however we need to look at the statistical significance of there model and the R^2 value the analysis of variance (ANOVA) table which are given above the last column indicate 0.039 the model is statically significant that 95% confidence level.

The above equation indicate that on time presentation of project metrics positively depends on communication of Team members during project discussions, non availability of Project Baselines and different Project Plans as per time specified by the customers, Attrition of important resources in the project, vendor management not able to provide onshore resources because of Team member Visa Issues, which is effecting customer's delivery at onshore where as misunderstanding customer's market needs, non-payment of Project Invoices on time are negatively impacted.

12. Factor Analysis

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.736
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1.016E3
	df	66
	Sig.	.000

Table 14: KMO and Bartlett's Test

	Initial	Extraction
Q24	1.000	.462
Q43	1.000	.356
Q42	1.000	.665
Q41	1.000	.578
Q59	1.000	.481
Q60	1.000	.714
Q61	1.000	.615

Table 15: Communalities

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

	Component		
	1	2	3
METRICS	-.383	.515	.225
MRKTNEED	.586	.075	-.081
COMM	.730	.124	-.343
PROJDOCS	.692	.126	-.289
ATTRITION	.485	.127	.479
INVOICES	.713	.292	.346
ONSHORE	.655	.392	.179

Table 16: Component Matrix^a

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

3 components extracted.

	Component		
	1	2	3
METRICS	.542	-.399	.095
MRKTNEED	-.055	.510	.305
COMM	.004	.289	.205
PROJDOCS	.006	.436	.224
ATTRITION	-.083	.083	.684
INVOICES	.144	.356	.766
ONSHORE	.384	.624	.634

*Table 17: Rotated Component Matrix^a
Extraction Method: Principal Component
Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser
Normalization.*

13. Inference

Analysis by factor wise factor analysis the observation indicate the most successful leadership factors for customer conflicts and their resolution. Factor analysis is a data reduction method where collected data creating complexity for judging. The influencing factors are depend on Eigen values where the value is greater than or equal to 1. According to the above factor analysis the extracted factors are on time presentation of project metrics is highly influencing factor for Leadership Team/Project Managers to look into which decreases the customer conflicts and positively impacts the customer satisfaction of the project. Second influencing factor is “vendor management not able to provide onshore resources because of Team member Visa Issues, which is affecting customer’s delivery at onshore”. Vendor Management should understand the customer needs for deploying onshore resources by having visa ready associates as project team members such that at any point of time based on customer demand team members can travel and deploy the project on time. Third influencing factor is “misunderstanding customer’s market needs”. By properly understanding the customer’s market needs, vendor leadership team should come up with proper action plans to meet market demands, which will lessen the customer conflicts.

14.Results & Discussion

- On time presentation of Metrics by vendors is given importance by customers. Hence, vendor leadership team should focus on creation and governance model for presenting the metrics on Weekly/Monthly basis to customers.
- Respondents recommended that vendor management team should understand Customers market needs and act on them on timely manner.
- It was felt during this study by respondents that leadership team should have frequent discussions with customers on team members visa status and attrition of important project members and handover plan for new team members along with time lines will lessen the customer conflicts.
- Respondents felt during this study that customers should not stopping approvals for payment of project invoices which will impact the team member morale and deliverables, indirectly team member's appraisals. They suggested there should be a agreed upon mechanism between vendors and customers on payment of bills like mile stone based, monthly based etc.
- Communication of team members during project discussions with customers plays an important role in understanding the feedback from customers and getting on time approvals. If any team member lagging in communication or understanding customer's slant, they should be send for communication training plan to improve in that area.
- Leadership team and project managers should make sure that after getting all approvals from different stakeholders project baselines and other project documents should be placed in a centrally located server on a timely manner and access should be given to all important stake holders based on their role in the project.

15.Conclusion

Customer conflicts and resolution involves recognizing and managing the particular conflicts and resolving them very rationally to satisfy both conflicting parties. This is an essential part of building emotional intelligence, and nurturing relationships and customer satisfaction. Poorly handled customer conflicts can affect the vendor's repeatable business from same customers and decreases project team's morale and thereby impacting the on time delivery and company's image. To maintain competitive

advantage, there is a need that the entire organization to focus on developing Leadership qualities and conflict resolution strategies to quickly and effectively resolve customer conflicts, while building trust and commitment between team members and management and customers.

Conflicts with customers in the project can be incredibly destructive to good teamwork. Managed in the wrong way and with incorrect leadership styles, real and legitimate differences between customers and teams can quickly spiral out of control, resulting in situations where co-operation breaks down and the project/team's mission is threatened. This is particularly the case where the wrong Leadership styles and wrong approaches to conflict resolution methodologies are used. To calm these situations down, it helps to take a positive approach to conflict resolution, where discussion is courteous and non-confrontational, and the focus is on issues rather than on individuals. If this is done, then, as long as people listen carefully and explore facts, issues and possible solutions properly, customer conflicts between customers and teams/management can often be resolved very effectively.

16.Scope For Further Research

Further research can be carried out detailing about the effects on customer conflicts taking into consideration of other dimensions of the projects like Schedule and cost conflicts, human resources related conflicts, communication conflicts, customer complaints etc. on the project's conflicts while implementing/managing the software projects and how to manage and show leadership in the related conflicts in the software industry.

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