

CASE STUDY 1: GOVERNMENT AGENCY

BACKGROUND + CONTEXT

This conflict concerned a departmental team of 12 people. The relationship between the team leader and the department manager was so damaged they only spoke to each other through third parties. The group was split into two warring factions – one group behind the team leader, the other siding with the department manager with a few members remaining neutral. There was perceived favoritism with respect to approval of leave, training and allowances. There had been no performance appraisals for two years, and two staff members had been on stress leave for five weeks.

Problems had been investigated, discussed and not solved to anyone's satisfaction by senior management for two years.

THE PROACTIVE RESPONSE

ProActive was invited to conduct a TJA Conference to try and get to the root of the problems, develop an action plan to remedy the situation, and to oversee implementation of the plan.

Prior to convening the actual day long conference, ProActive conducted voluntary interviews with each of the 12 team members. These interviews identified key underlying issues and the nature of the conflicts between various team members. The interviews revealed that all 12 team members were involved in the conflict to some extent.

Attendance at a TJA Conference is voluntary, with participants being invited but not compelled to attend. In this case, all 12 department members chose to attend the day long conference. Each team member participated fully by providing comments and perspectives.

It became evident that the main issues entrenched in this conflict were the leave approval procedures that had resulted in one member being given significantly more leave than others, the department manager's style of interacting with department members, and malicious gossip and emails.

By the end of the conference day a detailed agreement, signed by every team member, was reached. It included a commitment to provide individual staff needs analyses, training and coaching, a commitment that workplace policies would be re-distributed and re-signed by all staff, a commitment to conduct monthly one-on-one feedback sessions with staff, and finally, a review and formalization of the team leader and department manager responsibilities with performance measures defined.



THE RESULT

After all of the agreed upon steps were confirmed, every step was carried out by the team within six months. Individual needs training and coaching was fully implemented along with monthly one on one feedback sessions that were conducted on schedule for all staff. Workplace policies were received and re-signed by all staff in the department.

The impact was immediate. Not only were there no stress leaves taken in the first six months following the conference, overall staff turnover was sharply reduced, generating an estimated annual savings of \$160,000 for the organization.

As a direct result of the conference and the ensuing efforts, senior managers who had previously reported spending one day per week managing conflict, now spent two hours per week reviewing team performance and providing constructive feedback to the team manager.

PROACTIVE PRODUCTS USED IN THIS CASE

TJA Conferencing is a robust group process used to address workplace conflict and allows affected individuals to confront their difficulties and develop a specific action plan to overcome them. TJA Conferencing is not mediation, it is a structured three-stage process designed to turn conflict into cooperation.

