



Organizational conflict resolution

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Abstract

This paper represents an attempt to advance the understanding of organizational conflicts. The main purpose of this paper work is to identify different types, major causes of conflict and the methods used to solve workplace conflicts. Conflict is a disagreement. Conflicts develop in every workplace in today's business environment. It generally involves the clash of ideas, interests, or personalities. Wherever there is communication, there are conflicts and conflict management is inevitable job but also a challenge for every manager. People have various personalities, ideas, attitudes, needs. Those differences sometimes leads to conflict. If conflict remain unaddressed, they can have a negative influence on productivity and organizational agility. Conflict resolution is a necessary component of the workplace, and those in a leadership position must be skilled in conflict resolution techniques.

Key words: *causes; conflict; conflict resolution; organization*

1. INTRODUCTION

Conflict represents an indivisible part of life. Each of us possesses our own opinions, ideas and sets of beliefs. We have our own ways of looking at things and we act according to what we think is proper. Some people may view conflict as a negative, unfavourable situation, which must be avoided. At the other hand, some people may see it as a fact, which must involve management. Others think about conflict as an opportunity for personal growth. Since conflicts arise at all levels of the organization, in recent decades, their study has become a subject of interest to many practitioners and theorists. Because conflict is seemingly inevitable, evidently it is an imperativ for managers to be able to recognize the source of the conflict, to view it's constructive as well as destructive potential, to learn how to manage conflict and to apply conflict resolution technique in a practical way.

Until the '90s of the 19th century, the literature viewed conflict as counterproductive phenomenon. Theorists have proposed that organizational conflict can be constructive, under certain circumstances. However,

empirical studies have not confirmed the view of theorists. Over time, organizations have become less centralized and the workers were connected and dependent on the work of each other. Since then, the conflict in the workplace has become increasingly visible in organizations. As the organization became more decentralized structured, workers become dependent, and is responsibility for decision making increase [1,2]. These changes contributed to the emergence of new types of conflicts that can arise between different groups of workers. The workforce is also becoming more diverse. Among the employees in organizations, more were women, foreigners, ethnic minorities, people who come from different educational and cultural backgrounds. This diversity has inevitably led to the emergence of different types of conflicts in the workplace in relation to the period in which the organization had largely homogeneous workforce [3,4].

2. TYPES OF CONFLICT

In the literature there are many definitions of conflict and none of them unique. Generally, conflict represents a perceived disagreement of interest between individuals or groups. According to Coser [5] conflict is

a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, insure or eliminate the rivals. Also, it is defined from communication perspective as an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive opposed goals, scarce rewards and interference from other parties in achieving their goals [6].

On the basis of involvement, conflict can be classified into the following four types:

- **Interpersonal conflict** represents a conflict between two individuals - colleagues, employees and managers, or between the management and the executive director (CEO). People are different from one another, there are varied personalities which usually results to incompatible choices and opinions. Obviously, it is a natural case which can eventually help in personal growth or developing relationships with others. When interpersonal conflict gets too destructive, calling in a mediator would help so as to have it resolved.
- **Intrapersonal conflict** occurs within an individual, it comes from the people themselves. For example, intrapersonal or personal conflict could occur when the employee finds that he has to perform a task for which he is not enough competent. He becomes anxious, unsure of himself. The experience takes place in the person's mind. Hence, it is a type of conflict that is psychological involving the individual's thoughts, values, principles and emotions.
- **Intragroup conflict** happens among individuals within a team. The misunderstandings among these individuals lead to an intragroup conflict. It arises from interpersonal disagreements (e.g. team members have different personalities which may lead to tension) or differences in views and ideas (e.g. in a presentation, members of the team might find the notions presented by the one presiding to be erroneous due to their differences in opinion). Within a team, conflict can be helpful in coming up with decisions which will eventually allow them to reach their objectives as a team. However, if the degree of conflict disrupts harmony among the members, then some serious guidance from a different party will be needed for it to be settled.
- **Intergroup conflict** takes place when a misunderstanding arises among different teams within an organization. For instance, the sales department of an organization can come in conflict with the customer support department. This is due to the varied sets of goals and interests of these different groups. In addition, competition also contributes for intergroup conflict to arise. There are other factors which

fuel this type of conflict. Some of these factors may include a rivalry in resources or the boundaries set by a group to others which establishes their own identity as a team.

There are two kinds of intragroup conflict [7]: task conflict and relationship conflict. Task conflict is a perception of divergence among group members or individuals about the content of their decisions, and involves differences in viewpoints, ideas and opinions. Examples of task conflict are conflicts about the distribution of resources, about procedures or guidelines, and about the interpretation of facts. Relationship conflict is a perception of interpersonal incompatibility, and includes annoyance and animosity among individuals. Examples of relationship conflict are disagreements about values, personal or family norms, or about personal taste

Intergroup conflict may occur between the various groups, and in particular between the various departments and divisions (sales, marketing, finance), between the syndicate and the management, or between the supplier who supplied the same organization. For example, classic conflict between departments is famous misunderstanding between marketing and finance departments - the first always need more money for advertising, and finance are considered to be superfluous. Suppliers are often in conflict with respect to products with quality.

On the basis of results, within an organization, conflict can be:

- Constructive or functional and
- Destructive or dysfunctional.

If conflicts are a threat to efficient operations, prevent progress and success of the organization, then they are destructive or dysfunctional. On the other hand, if conflicts are contributing to the success and prosperity of the organization, then we are talking about functional or structural conflict.

Functional conflict is conflict or tension within a group that leads to positive results. Conflict is constructive when it results in clarification of important problems and issues, results in solutions to problems, involves people in resolving issues important to them, causes authentic communication, helps release emotion, anxiety, and stress, builds cooperation among people through learning more about each other; joining in resolving the conflict, and helps individuals develop understanding and skills.

Destructive conflict. The basic features are: the inability of groups whose members are in conflict to find a solution to the problem or to find solutions that are of poorer quality, actors in the conflict are apathetic or increasingly aggressive and hostile towards each other, the energy is located at conflict and not in solution, making difficult to performing work tasks. These

conflicts should be, in any case, solved and eliminated, or they should be translated into constructive.

Pondy [8] considers that the conflict is a negative outcome of the cooperative organization system, which leads to performance degradation companies. Similarly, Mitroff and Emshoff [9] argue that conflicts inhibit the search for information in the decision making process. Blake and Mouton [10] propose a process model of conflict resolution. Confirming previous point of view of the human and organizational conflict, Rapoport [11] describes the conflict as irrational clash motivated by interpersonal aggression.

Also, the opinion of scholars about the negative nature of the conflict, confirmed some empirical studies. Wall and Nolan [12] have studied the conflict between 375 students in work oriented groups and proved that satisfaction was significantly lower in the high-conflict groups compared to the low-conflict group. Similarly, Pelled [13] argues that the conflict within teams reduces productivity. Gladstein's [14] study about sales teams also that intragroup conflict in teams leads to decrease in the level of performance and satisfaction in the workplace.

More recent empirical studies have begun to focus on the positive aspects of organizational conflict. Conflict is constructive, if employees perceive that the overall benefits outweigh the total costs. In order to compare benefits and costs brought by the conflict, it is necessary to do complex analysis. A recent study provides evidence of the positive impact of conflict resolution and management, at the long-term psychological development and health. Menon, Bharadwaj and Howell [15] carry out the research and give the first system access in terms of the antecedents and consequences of both types of conflicts in intraorganisational relationships. These authors believe that dysfunctional conflict in the decision-making process has a negative impact on the quality strategy and market performance, while constructive conflict improving both the quality of the strategy and performance. Characteristics of organizational design such as the degree of formalization of links between the different organizational departments and units, low barriers in communication and team spirit, leading to improvements in product performance, by improving functional conflict. On the other hand, centralization and high communication barriers reduce the performance of new products, increasing dysfunctional conflict.

3. CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Managers must know in which stage the conflict is, in order to resolve it. Conflict life cycle describes the dynamic nature of nature of conflict, including various conflict stages. As shown in Figure 1, the four stages of conflict are: antecedent cognitions, cognition and personalization, behaviour and outcome (increased or decreased value of team performance) [16].

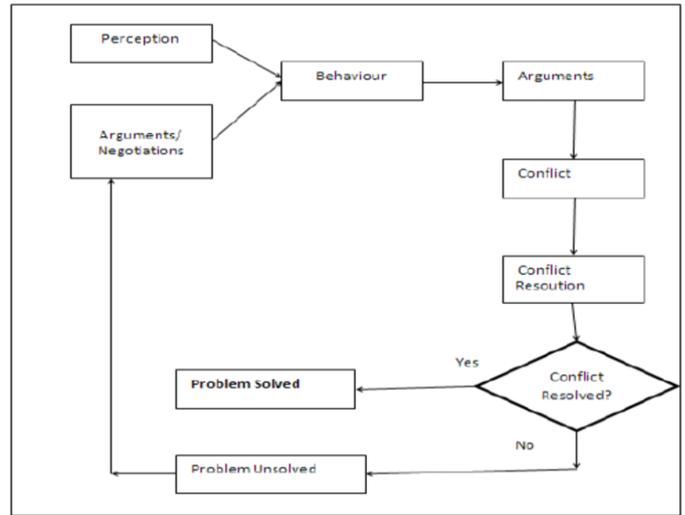


Figure 1. Conflict Life Cycle [17]

The negotiation process has four steps such as establish the issues and set the agenda, opening moves, raise the negotiation, and work out an agreement [16]. Conflicts bring out emotions and emotions play critical role in conflict.

Conflict management is not necessarily conflict resolution. Preferably, stimulation of conflict is often favorable to an organization, and in some cases even necessary for its growth or survival.

The most common causes of conflict in organizations are:

- Disagreement in different types of personalities
- Conflicting values systems
- unclear work assignments
- limited resources
- inadequate communication
- interdependent work duties
- unrealistic / confusing rules and norms
- pending / repressed previous clashes

Conflict resolution comprises two separate segments: conflict prevention and conflict resolution.

The definition of “conflict prevention” itself is not agreed upon among researchers. The different definitions indeed differ according to the aim of prevention, from reducing violence to resolving the incompatibility, the time perspective (using a short- or long-term view) and the means. Conflict prevention includes a series of measures in the organization so that destructive conflicts do not occur.

Preventing conflict is not the same as avoiding conflict. Preventing conflict means behaving and communicating in a way that averts needless conflicts.

Since each conflict situation is unique and dynamic, it is difficult to recommend the best conflict resolution approach

Some of factors that affect on choice of approach are [18]:

- Position of the involved participants
- Type and importance of conflict

- Time pressure and
- Relative importance on goals against relationship

There are three possible outcomes of conflict situations, which are

- "one gains, the other loses" (win - lost solution)
- "Both lost" (lost - lost solution)
- "Both received" (win - win solution)

Conflict situations are an important aspect of the workplace. A conflict is a situation when the interests, needs, goals or values of involved parties interfere with one another. A conflict is a common phenomenon in the workplace. Different stakeholders may have different priorities; conflicts may involve team members, departments, projects, organization and client, boss and subordinate, organization needs vs. personal needs. Often, a conflict is a result of perception. Conflict is not necessarily a bad thing. Often, a conflict presents opportunities for improvement. Therefore, it is important to understand and apply various conflict resolution techniques.

In the literature, the most frequently mentioned ways of resolving conflicts are the following: [19,20]

Threats and coercion - The methods used by the party to the conflict which thinks it is stronger. This is not an efficient way to solve conflicts because it often escalates and intensifies the conflict situation. Even it bring a solution, it is temporary, because the party that is forced to discounts can not be permanently satisfied with the decision. This way of solving conflicts usually applied group leader or team, who prefer non-cooperation and competition. In the process of resolving conflicts, they use formal authority, threat and power

Collaboration – also known as problem confronting or problem solving. Collaboration involves an attempt to work with the other person to find a win-win solution to the problem in hand - the one that most satisfies the concerns of both parties. The win-win approach sees conflict resolution as an opportunity to come to a mutually beneficial result. It includes identifying the underlying concerns of the opponents and finding an alternative which meets each party's concerns. Collaboration involves a high degree of understanding for the parties that are in conflict. The success of this style depends on numerous abilities of the participants of the conflict, and is based on openness and trust between all the parties in resolving the conflict. Collaboration and cooperation is a style, a desirable, since it gives the best effects.

Compromise - a way of solving the conflict, which is a product of equal influence of managers cooperation and confidence. The essence of the compromise is the fact that both sides gain something and lose something. Compromise often fails and does not represent the optimal solution to the conflict. Strong side in the conflict difficult to agree to a compromise.

Compromising looks for an expedient and mutually acceptable solution which partially satisfies both parties.

Avoiding or ignoring - also known as withdrawing. This is when a person does not pursue her/his own concerns or those of the opponent. He/she does not address the conflict, sidesteps, postpones or simply withdraws. There are different ways of avoiding conflict such as denial, flight, suspension, and relinquishment [16]. Devils Advocacy (DA) is one technique used to resolve conflicts in group decision making in projects

This style of resolving conflicts usually apply managers of low level of self-confidence and cooperativeness. Only in the case of low-intensity conflict, this way of resolving the conflict may be applicable.

Smoothing - Also known as accommodating. Smoothing is accommodating the concerns of other people first of all, rather than one's own concerns. This style is a combination of cooperation and lack of confidence of managers and executives It doesn't give a sufficient level of influence on the way and the effects of conflict resolution. On the other hand, allows a high degree of integration manager in the team.

Debate - is a precondition for solving the conflict. The main problem with this method of conflict resolution is that the two rival parties have a negative emotional charge, and it often happens that neither side is prepared to enter into the discussion. Discussion as a way of resolving the conflict can be successful only if one party understands the position and interests of the other party and impartial evaluate arguments validity.

Introduction judges - the most efficient way of solving the case of a destructive conflict. The judge is not affected by the conflict, can impartially and objectively examine the cause of the conflict. There are no negative emotional charge towards the judge. The judge has a duty to assess and communicate the benefits of both proposals.

People use avoiding and compromising more frequently than any other conflict resolution technique; followed by confronting, accommodating and smoothing.

Similar to the previous, Thomas and Kilmann [21] have developed a popular framework that include five styles of handling conflict: competing, collaborating, avoiding, accommodating, and compromising, which is shown in Figure 2.

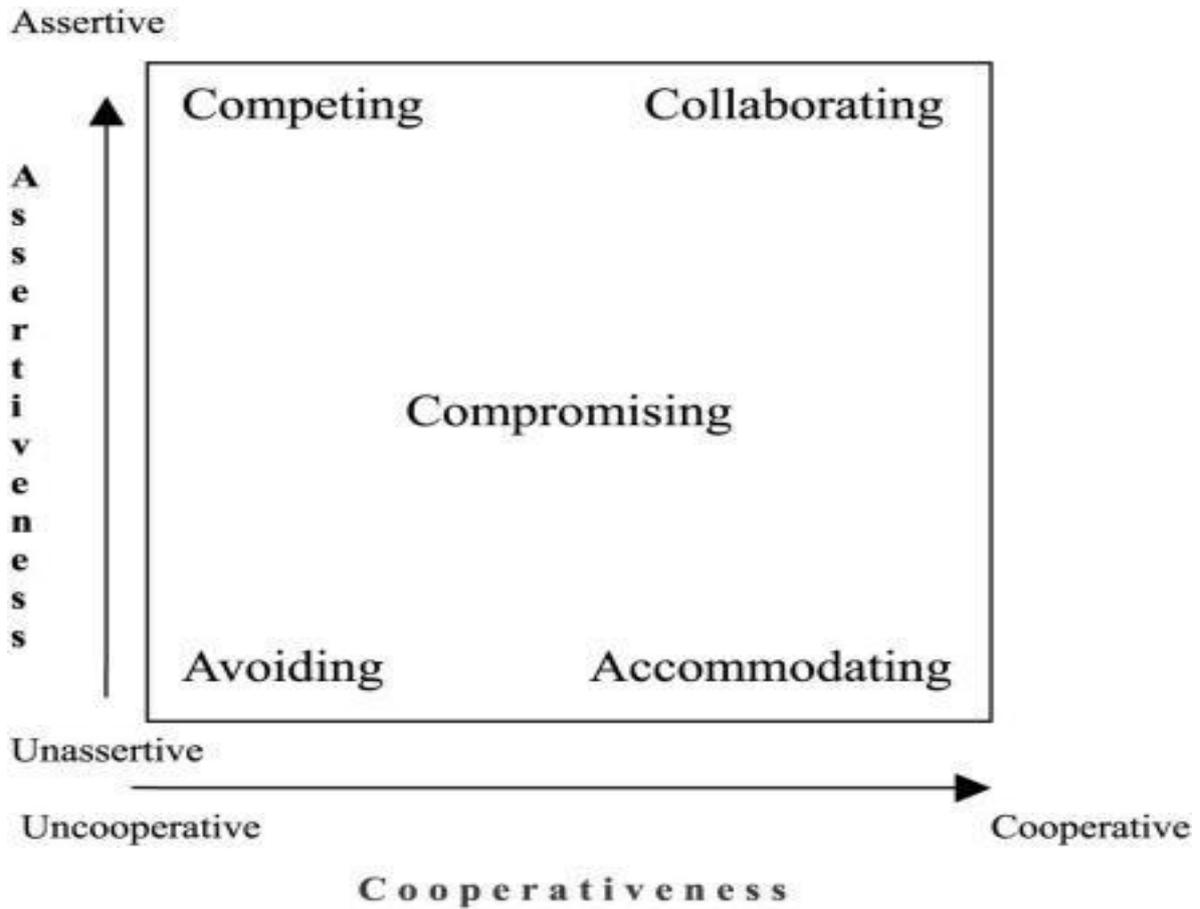


Figure 2. Two- dimensional conflict handling model [22]

4. CONCLUSION

The workforce of the 21st century is dealing with rapid changes and increased competition across industries. Such changes place stress on management and workers, increasing the possibility for workplace conflict and deviant behaviors at work.

Conflict is an inevitable component of human activity. Organizations are faced with external and internal sources of conflict. Within organizations, conflict may vary from small daily divergence at the work to large union clashes. Unproductive conflict strategies can result in high stress, high turnover rates, that can lastly sabotage the overall health of the organization [23,24]. As the workforce becomes increasingly diversified, it becomes more and more important for managers to understand the conflict resolution attitudes, regardless the source of conflict is external or internal. There is no single conflict resolution technique that can be applied to all types of conflict. Managers must find the suitable technique for any conflict which arises within organization. Effective conflict management, however, requires that styles of handling conflict be defined and measured and that those styles most conducive to positive outcomes be supported and encouraged.

Conflict is a major cause of staff turnover and costs within an organization. Good management practices

can help to avoid unnecessary conflict and deal with inevitable conflict in an effective and professional way. Developing a conflict resolution process can reduce staff turnover and save your business time, money and unnecessary damage.

It is important to know how to see conflict and when to seize the opportunity within the conflict before healthy tension turns into overly disruptive chaos.

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