

Work Place Conflicts Result &Consequences

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Abstract:

In today's business environment, workplace conflict is a significant issue. Research in the conflict management discipline says that conflict in the workplace is on the rise and will continue to go up; however, many leaders and managers are not fully aware of structures and processes available to manage it. In today competitive scenario every employee wants a healthy working atmosphere in the organization. Conflict exists throughout environments of all kinds. In the workplace, no matter how much you attempt to avoid it, if you work with people the chances are that you will have to deal with conflict at some point. To create a better working environment Conflict management has received increasing attention, as there is a shift in attitude towards conflict in the organizations during the last two decades. Workplace conflict is an inevitable phenomenon of organizational life. This study critically analyzed the types and sources of conflict at four levels: intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, and intergroup; with relation to different organizational phenomena. Costs of the conflict to all parties (employee, organization and customers) in qualitative and qualitative terms are analyzed. The consequences of conflict are also summarized. It was concluded that conflict should be studied using more content rich and diversified methods like in-depth interviews, case studies (phenomenological studies), and focused group discussions as well as through longitudinal studies. Because on survey based studies are not sufficient to get the holistic picture of workplace conflict. Future directions are also discussed.

Keywords: Conflict, Interpersonal Conflict, Conflict Sources, Conflict Costs.

Introduction:

Workplace conflict is a specific type of conflict that occurs in workplaces. The conflicts that arise in workplaces may be shaped by the unique aspects of this environment, including the long hours many people spend at their workplace, the hierarchical structure of the organization. Workplace conflict is an omnipresent organizational phenomenon. It is a major theme of occupational/ social psychology and organizational behavior (De Dreu, 2008). A group of organizational researchers (for example Watson & Haffman, 1996; Wall & Callister, 1995; Thomas & Schmidt, 1976; Rizzo, House & Lirtzman, 1970) opined that conflict is terrible, damaging and destructive to organization and to employees as well. It plunders the quality of group decision making; reduces creativity and innovation, mess up team success, reduces trust among employees (Jehn, 1994, 1995; & Amason, 1996). It was tagged as disturbing force (Waltson, 1969). Therefore, in their opinion, conflict should be eradicated. The other group of researchers (for review Tjosvold, 1998) argued that conflict may be constructive and beneficial. It can contribute significantly to organization efficiency (Tjosvold, 1986a, 1986b, 2003; & De Deru & Van de Veliert, 2001). Harmonious, peaceful, cooperative groups are prone to become static, indifferent and non-responsive to changes, creativity and innovation (De Deru & Van de Veliert, 2001). Riaz & Junaid (Forthcoming) concluded that workplace conflict is neither all together bad nor beneficial rather its nature, parties involved, circumstances, and other related variables decide that either it is productive or counterproductive.

Conflict” is inevitable when there is a human factor. Conflict management has received increasing attention in the organizational literature during the last two decades because of a shift in attitudes toward conflict in organizations. The traditional view of conflict as something harmful has changed to a view that sees conflict as a reality of organizational life. Conflict exists throughout environments of all kinds. In the workplace, no matter how much you attempt to avoid it, if you work with people the chances are you will have to deal with conflict at some point. People coming from different viewpoints and experiences, and having different perceptions, are not going to agree all the time. Conflict in the workplace just seems to be a fact of life. The fact that conflict exists, however, is not necessarily a bad thing: As long as it is resolved effectively, it can lead to personal and professional growth. In many cases, effective conflict resolution skills can make the difference between positive and negative outcomes. However, if conflict is not handled effectively, the results can be damaging. Conflicting goals can quickly turn into personal dislike. Teamwork breaks down. Talent is wasted as people disengage from their work.

Types of work place conflicts

Substantive versus affective conflict

The overarching hierarchy of conflict starts with a distinction between substantive (also called performance, task, issue, or active) conflict and affective (also called relationship) conflict. If one could make a distinction between good and bad conflict, substantive would be good and affective conflict would be bad.^[ambiguous] Substantive and affective conflict are related (De Drue and Weingart, 2003).

Substantive conflict involves disagreements among group members about the content of the tasks being performed or the performance itself (DeChurch & Marks, 2001; Jehn, 1995). This type of conflict occurs when two or more social entities disagree on the recognition and solution to a task problem, including differences in viewpoints, ideas, and opinions (Jehn, 1995; Rahim, 2002). *Affective* conflict deals with interpersonal relationships or incompatibilities not directly related to achieving the group's function (Behfar, Peterson, Mannix, & Trochim, 2008; Amason, 1996; Guetzhof & Gyr, 1954; Jehn, 1992; Pinkley, 1990; Priem & Price, 1991)

Both substantive and affective conflict are negatively related to team member satisfaction and team performance (De Drue and Weingart, 2003). Contradicting this, 20% (5 of 25) of the studies used showed a positive correlation between substantive conflict and task performance.

Organizational and interpersonal conflict

Organizational conflict, whether it be substantive or affective, can be divided into *intraorganisational* and *interorganisational*.

Interorganisational conflict occurs between two or more organizations (Rahim, 2002), for example, when different businesses compete against one another.

Intraorganisational conflict is conflict within an organization, and can be further classified based on scope (e.g. department, work team, individual).

Other classifications are *interpersonal*, *intragroup* and *intergroup* conflict.

Interpersonal conflict refers to conflict between two or more individuals (not representing the group they are a part of). Interpersonal conflict is divided into intragroup and intergroup conflict. Intragroup personal

conflict occurs between members of the same group. Intergroup personal conflict occurs between groups (Rahim, 2002).

Causes of Conflict in the Workplace and How to Overcome It

Conflict has a bad reputation. Most often, conflict is associated with raised voices, heated debates, and high frustration. While these associations are sometimes accurate, it is important to consider the benefit of conflict: creativity. The famous adage, “two heads are better than one” is precisely about the advantages of conflict, for it assumes that two minds will have separate perspectives, experiences, and ideas. Diversity and communication are hallmarks of a great team, and the occasional root of clashes in the office. Conflict is a good thing; it’s our response that makes conflict either a creative or destructive process. Here are a few common causes of conflict in the workplace, and some suggestions of how to navigate the occasional storm:

1. Personality Differences

The workplace brings together a wide array of personalities. In the myriad of different backgrounds, genders, cultures, political and religious beliefs, there are countless opportunities for ruffled feathers. The best cure is communication. Whether the issue involves an offense to core values or simply the irritation of pet peeves, it is important to establish boundaries immediately. Too often, people avoid difficult conversations in hopes that a problem will just go away, which of course it rarely does. By addressing an issue promptly, it improves the chances for a peaceful resolution and common understanding. But if it’s put on the back burner, emotions may surface when anger levels are high, and increase the chances of an unproductive, high volume blowout.

2. Non-Compliance with Rules and Policies

whether you are pestered by another’s disregard for company policy, or are rebelling against a rule yourself, non-compliance is a common gateway to office conflict. Rules are usually in place for a reason; so whichever side of a policy dispute you may find yourself, you should be clear about why a rule is in place, and what the consequences are for slip-ups. If agreement cannot be reached between differing parties or the rules themselves, it may be a good idea to look for a helpful mediator to resolve the issue. Just remember to keep the focus on the issue, not the person.

3. Misunderstandings

Botched communication is one of the top reasons for conflict in and out of the office. A great way to proactively decrease the potential for crossed wires is to employ effective listening techniques: give full attention, be genuinely interested, catch non-verbal messages, paraphrase, and collaborate. Keeping thorough records of communications can be a safety net when dealing with frequent mis-communicators.

4. Competition

Sometimes quotas and incentives can make it easy to forget the big picture. We stop seeing others as team members and start to see them as competitors. Healthy competition is a good motivator, but sometimes it inspires anti-productive behavior and unsavory results. The best defense in a highly competitive environment is managing your own emotions. Accept what emotions arise and deal with them positively. Tired of always coming in second or third? Start focusing on competing with yourself rather than others. Remember that one person's success is good for the team on a whole.

5. Office romance

Office romances can be a cause of workplace conflict. 96 percent of human resource professionals and 80 percent of executives said workplace romances are dangerous because they can lead to conflict within the organization. Public displays of affection can make co-workers uncomfortable and accusations of favoritism may occur, especially if it is a supervisor-subordinate relationship. If the relationship goes awry, one party may seek to exact revenge on the other.

6. Passive aggressive behavior

Passive aggressive behavior is a common response from workers and managers which is particularly noxious to team unity and productivity. In workers, it can lead to sabotage of projects and the creation of a hostile environment. In managers, it can end up stifling a team's creativity. De Angelis says "It would actually make perfect sense that those promoted to leadership positions might often be those who on the surface appear to be agreeable, diplomatic and supportive, yet who are actually dishonest, backstabbing saboteurs behind the scenes. In brief, to respond to this kind of hostile behavior, people need to control performance expectations, parcel out important tasks so there are several responsible people involved, and re-check frequently to see how much delay the passive aggressive worker can generate before the team leader stops him."

The Cost of Conflict

Conflict is defined as a difference of wants, needs, or expectations. The workplace is filled with people who have differences of wants, needs, and expectations. So, of course, conflicts will occur. These conflicts can be an asset to the organization. They may be opportunities for creativity, collaboration, and improvement.

But conflict can also be costly to an organization. The trouble isn't necessarily the fact that conflict exists. It's how we deal with those conflicts or what happens when they aren't resolved. The impact of conflict in the workplace can be devastating - to the parties involved, to colleagues and teams, to clients, and to the business as a whole. Some of the results of unresolved conflict in the workplace include:

- Stress, frustration, and anxiety
- Loss of sleep
- Strained relationships
- Grievances and litigation
- Presenteeism
- Employee turnover
- Loss of productivity
- Increased client complaints
- Absenteeism
- Sabotage
- Injury and accidents
- Disability claims
- Sick leave

Costs Associated with Conflict in the Workplace

Conflict in the workplace decreases efficiency and productivity, and that means lost profit. Taking a broad view of a conflict and considering both hard costs (like lost inventory) and soft costs (like team morale) helps you determine whether it's time to step in. You may find some benefit to giving a conflict time to work out on its own, but you won't know whether you're doing the right thing without investigating to see whether your strategy has an impact on your teams' productivity and the bottom line.

Hard costs associated with unresolved conflict

Hard costs are measurable costs that can be deducted from your financial statements. Though they're tangible and usually easy to find and add up, managers often overlook them in the midst of conflict.

- **Wasted time:** Time is money, and if people are avoiding one another and delaying outcomes, there's a cost to that.

Pay attention to the number of hours being wasted in a day or week and consider whether you can afford to wait this out.

- **Lost workdays:** If you're expecting people who are in conflict (or who are surrounded by conflict) to work without resolution, they may be taking sick days just to avoid the stress.
- **Reduced productivity:** When you have to work on a project with someone you're not getting along with, the job takes longer and the final product is affected.
- **Performance and quality:** Even if you don't notice a marked drop in productivity, you'll probably notice a diminished quality in the work that's being delivered.
- **Healthcare costs associated with stress:** Some workplace stressors may not be avoidable, but allowing the stress of unresolved conflict to continue only adds to the pressures your employees may already face.
- **Sabotage and theft:** If employees reach a point where they feel no one cares about a situation, it's not all that unusual for sabotage and theft to ensue.
- **Turnover:** Regardless of the size of your organization, there's a dollar amount associated with the cost of hiring, processing, and training every new employee.
- **Termination packages:** Unresolved conflict can lead to a termination package that's more costly to the company than if someone stays or leaves on good terms.
- **Legal costs:** If a lawsuit is filed, you'll spend money on legal fees and wages for all the employees who are addressing the court case, not to mention that the money you pay out isn't going toward productivity or more sales.

Soft costs associated with unresolved conflict

Soft costs, on the surface, are those things that may not seem measurable or easily assigned a specific dollar amount, but they still affect your bottom line.

- **Morale:** People are likely aware of an ongoing conflict, and this awareness can affect morale on all levels.
- **Decreased customer service:** Taking care of employees who interact with customers keeps clients satisfied.
- **Reputation:** Word gets around fast when people find a great enterprise that really values its employees. Disgruntled employees' comments can scare off a future valued employee and potential customers.
- **Loss of skilled employees:** Retaining skilled employees keeps production high and training time to a minimum.

Cost of Conflict to the Organization

Mismanaged conflict affects productivity (Cram and MacWilliams, 2009). Different studies mentioned different proportion of time wasted in managing conflicts e.g. up to 20 percent (Thomas and Schmidt, 1976); 42 percent (Watson and Hoffman, 1996). While according to a large study of 5000 employees in European and North American countries, carried out by an international psychology consultants in collaboration with UK based The Charter Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD), work time wasted in dealing poorly managed conflicts ranges from 0.9 hours to 3.3 hours per week (CIPD, 2008 as cited in Riaz, 2010). Mishandled conflict affects employees' health and wellbeing, which in turn results in *absenteeism*. It is a habitual pattern of absence from duty or obligation (Johns, 2007). A high correlation exists among absenteeism, job stress and needing a break from fighting with colleagues (CFLSRI, 1998). Workplace conflict may also create a tendency of *presenteeism*. It means showing up at work while ill or otherwise not completely fit for work. Due to presenteeism productivity declines (Dana, 2001). Cost of absenteeism to organization is well researched, occupational medicine begun to suggest that work lost due to presenteeism is only the visible tip of an iceberg and that the hidden cost of presenteeism may be much greater" (Buss, 2009). Researchers, who studied exit interview data on voluntary turn over, reported that unresolved conflict is a influential factor in at least 50 percent of all such departures and that, it costs about 150 percent of one trained employee's salary to replace him or her (Duxbury and Higgins, 2003). While according to

Dana (2001), conflict is the cause of 90 percent voluntary departures. The amount of theft by employees and damage in a company has a positive correlation with level of conflict in a company (Buss, 2009). Theft and damages costs 2 percent to a company of the staff total cost (Dana, 2001).

Cost of Conflict to the Employee

Mismanaged and unresolved conflict causes stress, reduces confidence levels, makes employees anxious, and frustrated. All these lead to lesser job satisfaction, humiliation, embarrassment, and stressed; these induce psychological and physical diseases. The consequences of such happenings disturbed employee's family and friend as well (cf. McClure, 2000). The consequences of such happenings disturb employee's family and friend as well (Buss, 2009) Employees involved in conflict, experience a break in their relations, and often feel alienated from each other, become self centered. They adopt avoiding behaviors, and may harm each other in many ways. Escalated conflict leads parties to shun contact, end communication, withheld information or provide wrong information (Cram and McWilliams, 2009; Buss, 2009; Hart, McDonald, and Rock, 2004 and CFLSRI, 1998). Presenteeism is also affecting employee negatively as this may harm employee's health, damage the quality of working life, and give impression of uselessness at work (Buss, 2009).

Cost of Conflict to the Customers

Cost due to mishandled conflict to customer is not researched in depth. One among few studies is of Buss (2009) which discussed it. According to him, workplace conflict affects the quality of product or service. In hyper competitive industries, negative consequences of conflict is considerable and it may tarnish the organization brand image and value positioning in the mind of customers. Most of these costs are hidden and are very difficult to quantify. However, there may be observable consequences like reduced motivation of staff leading to lower quality of products or service, or mistakes that can even threaten customer's health and hence results in legal suits and compensatory claims from customer (Buss, 2009; Riaz, 2010).

Consequences

Unresolved conflict in the workplace has been linked to miscommunication resulting from confusion or refusal to cooperate, quality problems, missed deadlines or delays, increased stress among employees, reduced creative collaboration and team problem solving, disruption to work flow, decreased customer satisfaction, distrust, split camps, and gossip. Conflict in the group need not lead to negative results, however. The presence of a dissenting member or subgroup often results in more penetration of the group's problem and more creative solutions. This is because disagreement forces the members to think harder in an attempt to cope with what may be valid objections to general group opinion. But the group must know

how to deal with differences that may arise. True interdependence among members leads automatically to conflict resolution in the group. Interdependence recognizes that differences will exist and that they can be helpful. Hence, members learn to accept ideas from dissenters (which does not imply agreeing with them), they learn to listen and to value openness, and they learn to share a mutual problem-solving attitude to ensure the exploration of all facets of a problem facing the group. Intergroup conflict between groups is a sometimes necessary, sometimes destructive, event that occurs at all levels and across all functions in organizations. Intergroup conflict may help generate creative tensions leading to more effective contributions to the organization's goals, such as competition between sales districts for the highest sales. Intergroup conflict is destructive when it alienates groups that should be working together, when it results in win-lose competition, and when it leads to compromises that represent less-than-optimum outcomes.

Conclusion:

The findings outlined above suggest that levels of conflict within the organisation were critically linked to the nature of the work process and also the composition of the work force. However, both these factors are inevitably intertwined with external socio-economic factors which influence the way in which workers are managed and the values and expectations of employees. The extent to which conflict is converted into concrete disputes in the form of employee grievances or disciplinary action depends on very different factors – with a given level of conflict, grievances are more likely where staff have the confidence and the long-term commitment to the organisation to make a formal complaint. Furthermore, adversarial management-union relationships will tend to lead to discontent being expressed through formal channels. In contrast, disciplinary action would appear to be largely a function of managerial responses to conflict and driven by production and competitive imperatives.

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