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Conflict Management and Negotiation

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**Introduction**

Conflict is always the disagreement between two or more parties or individuals. It is an argument between individuals resulting from differences in the thinking processes, opinions, understanding, interests, and personalities requirements. Usually, a conflict breeds into abuse, anger, pointing fingers, hatred, and when it reaches climax, conflict may lead to fights and poor performance at the worksite. Many times, friends have become enemies, countries have gone to war because of just the conflict, and an example is a recent crash between Ukraine and Russia. Therefore, no matter how small it is, a conflict should always be controlled early enough before it grows bigger and causes significant effects.

Conflict is unavoidable, especially in areas where people come together for a common purpose like in companies, families, institutions, and any groups of people but it should be managed to minimize its consequences for the concerned parties. Conflicts may be of different types depending on the size of the organization and people’s relations.

Management of conflict is the practice of being able to identify and handle conflicts sensibly, fairly, and efficiently. Conflict management helps managers to achieve an optimum outcome in a situation where multiple parties have opposing interests. So, conflict management is the use of strategies to correct perceived differences in a positive manner and conflict may either be functional or dysfunctional. A dysfunctional conflict is destructive and leads to decreased productivity while a functional conflict may promote greater work effort and help work performance.

Conflict negotiation is the practice or a process of resolving a dispute or a conflict, by considering each party’s needs, and sufficiently addressing their interests so that they are satisfied with the outcomes (Professor E. Wertheim)

Conflict may be of many types, some of which are: task conflict, relationship conflict, and value conflict.

**Task conflict**: This one usually involves disputes relating to employees’ work assignments and may include issues like competition over scarce resources, how to divide up resources fairly, differences of opinion on procedures and policies, judgments and interpretation of facts. Task conflict may sound like a simple situation to deal with, but it may grow into complexity at the work site if not given attention. Task conflict should be identified immediately by the managers or reported by either party to mitigate the probable effects it may cause. This may be done by involving both parties through listening and asking questions and the manager repeating back what he has heard to confirm statements. Parties are more likely to adhere to the resolutions that they participated in their making.

**Relationship conflict:** Thisis a conflict resulting from either personality clashes, style, money, issuing negative remarks, or negative emotional interactions between two or more people. In companies, you find that people who normally don’t meet in real life are sometimes grouped to work together which may automatically spark poor relationships.

**Value conflict:** This occurs because of differences in identities and values; these may include differences in ethics, politics, work style, tribe, religion, education norms, and many other beliefs (Systems, Pollack Peacebuilding, 2021). For example, when employees come together to accomplish certain tasks on the project, they may find that they don’t have the same knowledge on how to perform duties to achieve the common goals and this may result in disagreeing on which the best approach to perform and achieve the goal is.

**Sources of conflict**

1. **Jurisdictional ambiguities:** Conflicts can arise especially when job boundaries and responsibilities are not clearly defined and located. Employees can easily disagree about who has the responsibility for tasks, schedules, and resources. A clear definition of roles and responsibilities for each member of the team is vital in minimizing conflicts in the workplace. It is the responsibility of the managers to clearly state what they expect of the team from the start to avoid confusion and frustrations. Things to explain to your employees include reporting schedules and formats, organizational culture, direct and indirect responsibilities.
2. **Power and status differences:** Power and status conflict happens when some employees assume power and influence over others or if an employee has been given powers unfairly or in a way that wasn’t transparent. Sometimes, conflict may develop when some employees engage in activities to increase their status at work.
3. **Scarce resources**: Resources may include money, supplies, people, or information. Often, organizational units compete for scarce or declining resources. This creates a situation where conflict is inevitable.
4. **Personality clashes:** Personality conflict occurs when two people simply do not get along or do not view things similarly (Tom Place, 2019). Personality tensions are caused by differences in personality, attitudes, values, and beliefs.
5. **Goal differences:** Conflict is likely to occur because people are not pursuing similar goals. Goal conflicts in individual work units are a natural part of any organization.
6. **Communication breakdown:** There may be some communication differences emanating from the differences people have in speaking and writing styles, hence deforming communication and affecting the way of expression, and changing the way people interpret communication.
7. **Bad habits at work:** Bad habits at work may agitate the relationship of employees and cause irritation that results in conflict. Such habits may include but are not limited to some employees coming late, failing to accomplish the assignments, breaking rules, and regulations. This may make others do the same thing that that’s a norm at your organization.

**Conflict management styles**

No one solution will work in all situations. Each situation will be different, from the trigger of the conflict to the individuals affected. This is dependent on the manager's ability to identify conflict and apply the conflict management style that is called for in that specific situation.

 **Accommodating:** In this style, one of the parties will accept or choose to allow the other to win and get their way. It can be referred to as a win-lose style. This happens especially one of the parties does not care about the problem as the other party. This style may be the best choice to resolve a small conflict and move on to more important issues. This style is highly cooperative on the part of the resolver but can lead to resentment.

**Avoiding**: Avoiding means reducing conflict either by ignoring it or removing the conflicted parties. That means the team members in conflict can be removed from the workplaces where they are having a conflict, deadlines are pushed, or people are can be transferred to other departments.

This can be an effective conflict resolution style if there is a chance that a cool-down period would be helpful or if you need more time to consider your stance on the conflict itself. This may be good sincegiving people time to calm down can solve a surprising amount of issues but can make matters worse if used wrongly. Managers can seem incompetent if they overuse avoidance because employees will think that they are incapable of handling disputes.

**Compromising:** This is when both sides make concessions, so each party is somewhat satisfied but not entirely satisfied with the outcome. In a compromise, each party gives up some of what they want to move forward.  This style seeks to find the middle ground by asking both parties to concede some aspects of their desires so that a solution can be agreed upon. It is used when the project will benefit from both parties sacrificing some of their demands, grievances have been aired and there’s no other option but to compromise, opposing parties’ objectives have equal merit, conflict calls for a speedy resolution, even if fleeting and bargaining is an option. It is sometimes called loose-loose style.

**Competing**: This is the opposite of compromise and involves not giving in to others’ viewpoints or wants. One party remains rigid in what they think is the best way of handling the situation and does not back down until they get their way. This can be in situations where morals dictate that a specific course of action is taken when there is no time to try and find a different solution or when there is an unpopular decision to be made. It can resolve disputes quickly, but there is a high chance of morale and productivity being lessened. This style is not good to rely on entirely because handling conflicts by crushing any dissent will not lead to happy, productive employees, nor will it lead to finding the best solutions in most cases.

**Collaboration:** This style produces the best long-term results; at the same time, it is the most difficult and time-consuming to reach a consensus. Each party’s needs and wants are considered, and a win-win solution is found so that everyone is satisfied with the outcomes. This often involves all parties having a meeting, where together they discuss the conflict and negotiate a solution. This is used when it is vital to preserve the relationship between all parties or when the solution itself will have a significant impact.

**How to resolve conflict**

**Clarify what is the source of conflict**: It is important to know the cause of the conflict because it will not only make you understand how the problem came about but help you to get both parties to consent to what the dispute is. This can only be done by having both parties discuss what is not right with each other, this will help you to obtain enough information to facilitate the discussion leaning towards mutual understanding and having each side satisfied.

**Look for a private place to discuss:** It makes it easier for people to disclose their information and share the truth when the venue provides a conducive environment. Everyone must feel safe and be given enough time to express themselves when in such discussions and that’s when they can be able to have a constructive discussion.

**Listen actively**: By having both parties meet in a secure and private place, allow each of them an opportunity to air out their views and perceptions regarding the issue.  Each party must get equal time to express their observations and concerns without favouring the other and you as the modulator must encourage a positive and assertive approach while in the meeting. This can be done initially by listing down the meeting rules together with both parties, this encourages them to express their thoughts openly and honestly, hence providing a foundation for the identification of conflict causes and probable solutions.

**Investigate the situation:** After listening to the concerned parties, take time, and investigate the case. Do not prejudge or come up with a final verdict based on what you have. Dig deeper and find out more about the happenings, involved parties, the issues, and how people are feeling. Have an individual and confident conversation with those involved and listen keenly to ensure you comprehend their viewpoints. You can do so by summarizing their statements and replicating them back to them. Also, try finding any underlying conflict sources which may not be evident or noticeable at fast.

**Determine ways to meet the common goal:** You must have a common objective, which is resolving the issue and ensuring it does not reappear. Also, knowing different stages of conflict will help you to deal with the problem efficiently because you will be provided with vast ideas to meet the common goal. Sit with both parties and discuss the process of managing and resolving the problem. This includes everyone brainstorming the ways that can be followed to resolve conflict and finally agree on the best solutions.

**Evaluate how things are going:** Never assume that the issue has been finally resolved but continue to keep an eye on the situation and evaluate how well the solution is working. If the problem reappears it may be necessary to take further action (PeopleHum, n.d.)

**Decide preventative strategies:** You must think of strategies to prevent the conflict to happen again. Having mitigation measures in place will help you ensure that the employees are working together to meet the organizational goals.

Conflict may be rated as big, medium, or small. However, it should be known that even a small conflict can grow bigger if given a favourable environment. Mitigation measures and strategies must be put in place to thorough deal with any conflict that arises to cut down the cost of conflict.

The cost of conflict is a tool used to calculate the price of conflict to humans. This is ideally done not only to examine the extent of cost in terms of the deaths, casualties, and economic costs borne by the people involved but also the social, developmental, environmental, and strategic costs of conflict. The costs of conflict are generally unrecognized, and, in most cases, organizations have met such costs unknowingly because they don’t give priority to developing and maintaining effective conflict management. It is handy for organizations to measure and analyze the economic and broader development costs of conflict.

**Effects of conflict**

Effects of conflict can be looked at as bad and good or positive effects. The effects that result in the improvement of skills and performance, adoption of new behaviours, and spur creativity are good, and the opposite is true for those effects that result in negative impact.

**Negative effects of conflicts**

**Low production:** Frequent occurrence of conflict in an organization may cause its workers to spend a lot of time focussing on conflict and its consequences than on the project tasks which need to be accomplished to achieve goals. This can eventually result in low production, hence failure to accomplish tasks to achieve the intended goals. In most cases when cases of low production are not controlled, the organization loses its stakeholders which may include donors and suppliers.

**Conflict can turn into violence:** If not controlled, conflict may grow bigger and turn into serious violence at work. Fights may erupt and cause damages to the company property and equipment, injuries and sometimes death. The organization may lose sums of money especially when conflict results in legal problems.

**Poor health:** Conflict at workplaces can cause members to become aggressive if the situation is not controlled early enough or if the manager is not skilled enough to handle conflict enough. Conflict can grow and cause stress and substantially affects an employee's life with the loss of appetite, lack of sleep, and headaches that may result in mental health.

**Employee turnover effects:** The company may eventually lose skilled employees due to the increasing effects of conflict. Employees may resort to terminating their contracts and cease to be members of the company. In such a scenario, the company may incur costs to hire, recruit and train new people to replace the outgoing ones.

**Positive effects**

**Promote decision-making:** Conflicts must be resolved for the smooth running of the organization. Also, sharing emotional conflict is helpful since decision-makers are always sensitive to the needs of the people who are affected by the decisions and most decisions involve some emotional component as well (Vatsa, 2020). Having a dialogue with the concerned parties enables you to identify the problem and ideas for solutions. Therefore, any decision made at any level must consider the conflicting needs of the individuals who are affected by the decisions, and hence conflict resolution is a part of the decision-making process. The skills and leadership qualities determine how best the conflicts are resolved.

**Cooperation:** Conflict between groups or individuals may bring about group unity since conflict resolution involves group dialogue and awareness of the norms of the organization. These may provide the employees with vast knowledge about working while relating well with others in grout settings.

**Encourages creativity to solve problems:** Conflict is always seen by many people with a negative attitude, but it should be noted that conflict can as well be an opportunity for finding creative solutions to solve problems. Conflict can inspire members to brainstorm ideas while examining problems from various perspectives. Organizational conflict may lead to several questions for both parties having the issue. Such questions can lead to new ideas and step forward in thinking that can benefit individuals, departments, and organizations. When there is no conflict, nothing changes. There is no need to question or challenge the status quo. Conflict represents an opportunity to reconsider, which can lead to breakthrough thinking.

**Improves Morale and Teamwork**: Usually, people think that conflict destroys teamwork but, in most cases, you will find that people are much happier when there's an open dialogue about the issues they're facing (Jayne Thompson, 2019). The team will feel there are heard when the managers attend to their conflicting needs. Managers should, therefore, know that conflicts that are not given attention are more likely to destroy the team’s relationship and that's because differences are given room to grow and worsen.

**Improve communication:** Conflict brings team members together which helps them to learn more about each other and get familiar with people's personalities. Knowing your teammates' communication styles, ethics and morals do not only give you the basis of how best to communicate well with them but also the ability to solve future problems.

**Brings reconciliation:** If conflict negotiation is done well, it leads to the reconciliation of the people, hence creating a conducive work environment for employees to enjoy their work. Employees who work happily are not only likely to stay longer but concentrate on their work which brings about maximum production and achieving the goals.

**Promotes respect and sharing of ideas:** As organization members work together to solve the conflict, they are more willing to share their opinions with the group. Conflict can also cause members to actively listen to each as they work to accomplish the organizations' goals.

The conflict has stages of how it starts, spreads, and up to when it can be resolved. Some of the conflict stages are :

**No conflict:** This is the stage when everyone seems to communicate well and work in harmony with others, but this may not last for long due to changes in the work environment. Therefore, having no conflict today does not necessarily mean that it will not arise at some point as time goes by. So, managers need to have skills in conflict negotiation and management to ably deal with conflict anytime it arises.

**Latent conflict:** In this stage, people may be in conflict without being aware that they are in conflict. People have different backgrounds, values, personalities, and needs, which can create situations where others don't agree with their thoughts or actions. There may be an inequality in the distribution of resources or power in the organization or country and people fear to openly express their grievances or the conflict is still small. Small conflicts should also be given attention as they can grow.

**Emergence of differences:** Thisis where the conflict starts to set in as the concerned parties understand that they have different ideas and opinions on a given topic. The differences cause dispute and tension which result in an unwillingness to listen and consider other points of view. And as a result, employees may find it increasingly difficult to maintain the status quo when they see a need for change.

**Perceived conflict:** This is when conflict arises even when there is no existence of latent conditions. It is the stage when one party realizes that there are misunderstandings related to either task assignments or the work environment. The misunderstandings can be resolved by good communication practices.

**Felt conflict:** Felt conflict is the stage when the conflict is not only perceived but felt and recognized. The party or an individual may be aware that he is in a serious argument with another party over some policy. However, this may not make one of these parties anxious and it may not affect either party. The personalization of conflict is the mechanism that causes many people to be concerned with dysfunctions of conflict. In other words, it makes them feel the conflict.

**Manifest conflict:** This is the stage when the two parties engage in behaviours that evoke responses from each other. Such responses are open aggression, apathy, sabotage, withdrawal, and perfect obedience to rules. Except for prison riots, political revolutions and extreme labour unrest, violence as a form of manifest conflict is rare. The motives for violence may remain but they tend to be expressed in less violent forms.

**Conflict aftermath:** This happens as the result of the conflict not being completely resolved making the unnoticed conditions to worsen and explode into a more serious problem until it is solved.The aftermath of a conflict can have positive or negative consequences for the organization depending upon how the conflict is resolved. If the conflict is genuinely resolved to the satisfaction of all participants, the basis for a more cooperative relationship may be laid; or the participants in their drive for a more ordered relationship may focus on latent conflicts not previously perceived and dealt with.

**Conclusion**

It is normal to have conflicts and they will ever occur in organizations of all sizes. However, managers should learn how to deal with these conflicts positively because they can be both productive and destructive for the organizations. In case of destructive conflicts, the management must be very attentive to such conflicts and get them dealt with so that they don’t destroy the work environment at the worksites of the organizations (Campbell, 2016)Productive conflicts can bring early problem identification and solutions, motivation, new ideas, creativity, and high production to the organization.

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