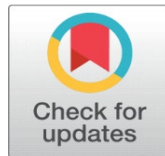


CONFLICT, ITS MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION

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ABSTRACT

Conflict is an inevitable aspect of human interaction, arising from diverse perceptions, goals, and values. This paper explores the multifaceted nature of conflict, encompassing both its origins and consequences within organizational settings. It emphasizes that conflicts often stem from incompatible goals and societal divisions, exacerbated by factors such as resource scarcity and identity differences. While conflicts can lead to negative emotions and hinder productivity, they also have the potential to spur innovation and foster collaboration when managed effectively.

This study delves into various dimensions of conflict management, highlighting strategies that mitigate detrimental impacts while harnessing constructive outcomes. By analyzing both functional and dysfunctional effects, it underscores the importance of proactive conflict resolution in fostering healthier organizational climates. Ultimately, this paper advocates for a nuanced understanding of conflict as a catalyst for organizational growth and resilience.

Keywords: Conflict, Conflict Management, Resolution, Organizational Behavior, Perception, Goals

1. INTRODUCTION

Conflict is a natural and an integral part of human life. It is an outcome of behaviours. Where ever there is an interaction there is a possibility of conflict. As conflict can arise in a variety of contexts, it can be challenging to define conflict. Conflicts can start out with material or economic issues, but they can escalate swiftly to include issues of identity.¹ The majority of complex conflicts involve multiple issues that are interrelated, such as basic human needs and resource availability. Value and power imbalances are the main causes of disputes, and misunderstanding and misperception are major factors in the development of antagonistic relationships. The essence of conflict seems to be disagreement, contradiction, or incompatibility. Conflict is the visible expression of negative feelings such as animosity, prejudice, hostility, aggression, competition, and poor communication. It also arises when two opposing organizations, individuals, or groups have conflicting interests. Conflict is defined as "a process that begins where one party perceives that another party has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect something that the first party cares about".² The definition highlights that the emotional aspect of conflict and emphasizes that it is more about perception than it is about hard,

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¹ M.P. Masoud, MA Cheraghi, M. Imanipour, Workplace Interpersonal Conflict in Prehospital Emergency: Concept Analysis, J Educ Health Promot. (2021) doi: 10.4103/jehp.jehp_213_21. PMID: 34761033; PMCID: PMC8552288.

² S.P. Robbins, *Essentials of Organizational Behavior*, (8th Edn, Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River 2005)

factual information and indicates that there are multiple parties are involved. Any circumstance in which there are opposing or antagonistic interactions between individuals or groups due to irreconcilable goals, attitudes, or feelings can also be referred to as conflict.

“Organizational conflict is defined as the behaviour intended to obstruct the achievement of some other person’s goals.” Conflict is consequently a product of incompatibility of goals and it originates from opposing behaviours and internal conflict in an organization is unavoidable. Any organizational structure's boundaries force different groups to fight for scarce resources, which are the root of this conflict³ Further, the simple act of categorizing people into "us" and "them" can by itself trigger conflict. This division occurs naturally when groups form, such as those with different roles within an organization, reinforcing the idea that conflict is unavoidable. Additionally, conflict is a social interaction process involving a competition for control over resources like money, status, power, and personal preferences. This concept relates to organizations because it says that, although conflict is a normal part of social interactions, it can still be handled within organisations.

Substantive issues of conflict can be related to a spectrum of contested objects (particularly, wealth, power, and prestige) and their circumstances of availability. In addition, motivations for the conflict may be founded on sentiments of deprivation, injustice, inequity, and frustration outside conflicting roles and positions. But some of the main sources of conflicts are information, miscommunication, resources, relationships, interests and needs, social and organizational structures, power, governance, denial or violation of rights, ideology and culture, identity and values.

Conflict has become a significant issue in the scope and structure of contemporary organizational setups, which depletes resources. Contrary to popular belief, conflict does not necessarily have negative impacts. In fact, conflict has frequently helped organizations by bringing to light issues that have persisted and by creating avenues for communication that aid in revealing trouble spots so that they may be addressed more effectively. *“The functional and dysfunctional effects of conflict are as under⁴:*

1) Functional Outcomes

- Conflict can encourage innovation, creation and growth
- Can lead to joint solutions to the common problems
- Enhances individual’s and group’s performance
- Leads to new approaches in dealing with individuals and groups

2) Dysfunctional Outcomes

- May create job stress, depression and dissatisfaction
- Lead to reduction in group and individual communication
- Can lead to a climate of distrust and suspicion
- Relationship damages may occur
- May cause impairment of performance in jobs
- Organisational commitment and loyalty can be adversely affected”

As a result, it is essential to effectively manage conflict by identifying its problems and creating an atmosphere that minimizes its negative effects while emphasizing its positive ones for the parties involved.

2. TYPES OF CONFLICTS

Conflict can be classified into following categories i.e. intra-personal, inter-personal, inter- group and intra-group and are discussed below.⁵

- **Intrapersonal Conflict:** Intrapersonal conflict occurs within an individual, manifesting as internal struggles between competing desires, beliefs, values, or goals. This type of conflict often arises when a person faces

³ Dr. Digvijaysinh Thakore, Conflict and Conflict Management, IOSR Journal of Business and Management 8(6) 7-16, (2013)

⁴ Augustus Kwaidah, Conflict Management, https://www.academia.edu/15873495/CONFLICT_MANAGEMENT_revised_Final_Research_paper_1_

⁵ Types of Conflict. Authored by: Freedom Learning Group, available at <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/wm-organizationalbehavior/chapter/types-of-conflict/>

difficult decisions, experiences self-doubt, or grapples with conflicting emotions. Intrapersonal conflict can significantly impact one's mental and emotional well-being, as unresolved tensions may hinder personal growth and self-acceptance. Addressing these internal struggles involves self-reflection, mindfulness, and sometimes seeking external support, allowing individuals to clarify their values and make more informed choices. Ultimately, effectively managing intrapersonal conflict can lead to greater self-awareness, resilience, and a more harmonious sense of self.

- **Interpersonal Conflict:** When two or more persons who must communicate have different goals, values, and communication styles, it can lead to disagreement and interpersonal conflict. These disputes are extremely personal because they are between people. These conflicts can manifest in various contexts, such as personal relationships, workplace dynamics, or social interactions, often resulting from misunderstandings, miscommunication, or competing interests. The emotional aspects of interpersonal conflict can intensify the situation, as feelings such as frustration, anger, or hurt may cloud judgment and hinder effective communication. Addressing interpersonal conflict requires active listening, empathy, and a willingness to engage in constructive dialogue, allowing parties to express their concerns and seek common ground. By navigating these conflicts with care, individuals can not only resolve disputes but also strengthen their relationships and develop better interpersonal skills for the future.
- **Intragroup Conflict:** Intragroup conflict occurs within a group or team, arising from differences in opinions, goals, or interpersonal relationships among its members. This type of conflict can stem from a variety of sources, including competition for resources, diverse working styles, or misunderstandings about roles and responsibilities. While intragroup conflict can lead to tension and reduced collaboration, it can also serve as a catalyst for innovation and improvement when managed effectively. By encouraging open communication and fostering an environment of trust, groups can address conflicts constructively, allowing members to express their views and work toward common objectives. Ultimately, when handled well, intragroup conflict can enhance group dynamics, leading to stronger relationships and more creative problem-solving as members learn to navigate their differences.
- **Intergroup Conflict:** Intergroup conflict is the disagreement between groups both inside and outside of an organization about various issues. Conflicts that arise between two groups within the same organization are also considered to be intergroup conflicts. Disputes with others who are on the same peer level come into one of two categories: horizontal conflict or vertical conflict, which involves a manager or subordinate.

3. STAGES OF CONFLICT DEVELOPMENT⁶

Usually, conflict happens at ever-increasing intensities. Problems are easier to handle in the early phase of the conflict and answers are discovered more rapidly. In the early phases, people may easily resolve their conflicts with little trouble. But if the conflict has escalated to extreme hostility and seriousness, external assistance may be required from an outside source in order to mediate a settlement with the parties. Different stages of the conflict are as under: -

- 1) **Discomfort Stage:** This is the first stage when it is realised that there exists a problem. The discomfort stage in the stages of conflict development marks the initial signs of unease within a relationship or group dynamic. During this phase, individuals may begin to feel dissatisfied or frustrated due to unresolved issues, differing expectations, or unmet needs, but they may not yet openly acknowledge the conflict. This discomfort can manifest as subtle changes in behaviour, such as decreased communication, reluctance to collaborate, or passive-aggressive interactions. In this stage, people strive for objective solutions in a cooperative manner. Recognizing and addressing the discomfort at this stage is crucial, as it often serves as a precursor to more significant conflict if left unexamined. By fostering open dialogue and encouraging members to express their feelings and concerns, groups can prevent the escalation of tensions and create a more constructive environment.

⁶ Tremolada, Gary, *Understanding 5 Levels of Conflict*, (May 29 2015), available at <https://frontlinemanagementexperts.wordpress.com/2015/05/29/understanding-5-levels-of-conflict/>

for resolving underlying issues. Ultimately, effectively managing the discomfort stage can pave the way for healthier relationships and more effective conflict resolution down the line.

- 2) **Incident Stage:** It is the next level of escalation. Small events and incidents occur in this stage. Even though these incidents are small and of themselves, they have a negative connotation, and the parties are transitioning from a mild sense of tension to mistrust. At this point, things are usually said or done that create an impression that there is a problem. The parties could become agitated with one another. They alternate between collaboration and rivalry. Despite their shared interests, their personal desires take precedence over counter-part. Information is handled in a way that only supports one's own claim. Convincing or comprehending the other side involves applying reasoning and comprehension. Each side makes every effort at this point to avoid displaying weakness. The urge to walk away from the debate intensifies until one of the sides takes a stand that causes the conflict to worsen.
- 3) **Misunderstanding Stage:** If the conflict is not dealt with or is avoided, it can escalate to the next stage i.e. the misunderstanding stage. At this point, the issue most likely stems from misunderstandings. There could be misunderstandings regarding past happenings and people might give those incidents incorrect meanings. Facts may not be clearly conveyed and may be concealed. To mitigate the risk of escalation, it's essential for those involved to engage in open and honest communication, clarifying intentions and seeking to understand differing viewpoints. By addressing misunderstandings early on, individuals can foster greater empathy, rebuild trust, and create a pathway toward resolution, transforming potential conflict into a constructive dialogue that enhances relationship.
- 4) **Tension Stage:** This stage represents a critical turning point where underlying discomfort evolves into more pronounced conflict. In this stage, frustrations are expressed more openly by the individual(s) which leads to hostility, misunderstandings and confrontations. Mistrust permeates with every move taken by the opposite parties and there is negligible or no trust in the relationships. Both the parties are adamant in their stand and hold stubborn point of views which further harbour animosity for one another. All parties are now concerned that there might not be another opportunity to reach a reasonable and amicable solution. Stated differently, they give up trying to reach a just conclusion. All reasoning is directed toward action, taking the place of pointless and uncomfortable discussions. Paradoxically, neither side is willing to give up and both believe they can persuade the other to change. At this point, it's critical to use effective conflict management techniques like active listening and open communication to defuse tensions and promote understanding. People can strive toward settlement and re-establish a sense of partnership by addressing the tension before it worsens, which will ultimately turn conflict into a chance for personal development and better relationships.
- 5) **Crisis Stage:** This is the stage where the parties become openly hostile and the situation is more intense. Managing the immediate threats, keeping the dispute under control, and laying the groundwork for a long-term solution through compromise and communication are the main objectives throughout the crisis stage. Negotiation, mediation, or taking firm action to defuse the situation are frequently necessary at this crucial stage. It can be required to use tactics like diplomacy, or even outside interventions to get the opposing parties back to the negotiating table and avoid unfavourable consequences.

4. CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND ITS RESOLUTION

*"Conflict management can be defined as the process of dealing with (perceived) incompatibilities or disagreements arising from, for example, diverging opinions, objectives, and needs. Effective conflict management techniques limit or prevent negative effects of conflict, while enhancing potential beneficial effects, without necessarily solving the conflict."*⁷ To deal and manage with the conflicts and manage them effectively appropriate strategies are to be used which are discussed below in the paper.

⁷ Frank R.C. de Wit, Conflict Management, Oxford Bibliographies, (2016), <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199846740/obo-9780199846740-0105.xml>, DOI: 10.1093/obo/9780199846740-0105

5. STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING CONFLICTS⁸

Katie Shonk in the article “5 Conflict Resolution Strategies” has highlighted the proven conflict resolution strategies which are analysed and interpreted after a research on negotiation and conflicts. The five strategies are as under: -

- 1) *“Recognising that all of us have biased fairness perceptions”*: In most conflicts, both sides believe they are right (and the other is wrong) because they are unable to see beyond their own perspectives. According to studies by “Carnegie Mellon University professors Linda Babcock and George Loewenstein and their colleagues, egocentrism—the propensity to find it difficult to perceive a situation from another person's perspective—biases our perception of what would constitute a fair conflict settlement”. When two or more parties are engaged in a fight, they need to try to set aside their ideas of self-serving justice. To do this, they may work together with a mediator to help them comprehend one other's points of view, or they could hire an appraiser or another neutral third party to provide their opinion of the “facts.”
- 2) *“Avoid escalating tensions with threats and provocative moves”*: When someone feels ignored or steamrolled, they frequently try to get the other person's attention by threatening to take the disagreement to court or by attempting to damage the other person's reputation. Though attention-grabbing strategies like threats and take-it-or-leave-it offers are often incorrect, litigation has its place and time. Due to the innate human tendency to treat others as one would like to be treated, people frequently respond to threats in kind. This can exacerbate conflict and start a vicious cycle. One should make sure that they have tried every alternative conflict resolution strategy before threatening someone.
- 3) *“Overcome an “us versus them” mentality”*: Although social connections foster devotion and solid interpersonal bonds, they can also breed mistrust and animosity toward those who belong to other groups. Groups that are at odds with one another, frequently misinterpret one another's viewpoints and perceive one another's opinions as being more radical than they actually are. Whether coping with disagreement as a group or at an individual level, one may overcome the temptation to demonize the other side by looking for an identity or objective you share. One should start with conflict resolution efforts by emphasizing that both the parties want to come to a just and long-lasting agreement. Look for and talk about the things that the disagreeing parties have in common. The dispute resolution approach should be more likely to be cooperative and fruitful the more common points and connections one can find.
- 4) *“Look beneath the surface to identify deeper issues”*: The most profound disagreements have seemed to associate with money for example insurance labour disputes about employee wages, family disputes about assets, etc. Since money is a limited resource, these disagreements usually boil down to one party winning and the other losing. However, disagreements over money frequently involve deeper causes of conflict, like the sense of being ignored or disrespected. It is considered appropriate that when a money dispute arises, one may consider putting that conversation on hold and the parties should talk and discuss each other's deeper worries by having meaningful conversations and trying to make a bond by understanding and emphasising with each other's deeper issues. This conflict management strategy is likely to strengthen the relationship and add new interests to the table, expanding the pie of value to be divided in the process.
- 5) *“Separate sacred from pseudo-sacred issues”*: Conflict management can be particularly intractable when core values that negotiators believe are sacred, or non-negotiable, are involved, such as their family bonds, religious beliefs, political views, or personal moral code. Consider the situation where two siblings are at odds over whether to sell the farm their parents passed away on. One of them is adamant that the land must stay in the family, while the other contends that the parents would have preferred it to be sold. In his book *“Bargaining with the Devil: When to Negotiate, When to Fight”*, Chair Robert Mnookin observes that when moral convictions and values are at risk, we often err on the side of not negotiating. However, Harvard Business School professor Max H. Bazerman points out that many of the topics that negotiators view as sacred are actually pseudo-sacred; that

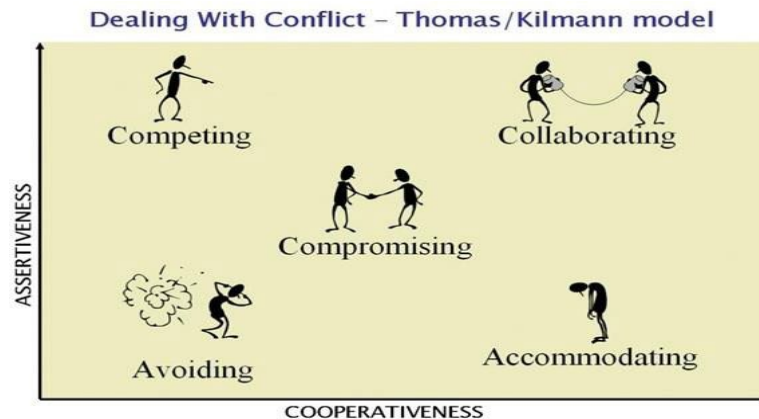
⁸ Katie Shonk, 5 Conflict Resolution Strategies, Harvard Program on Negotiation, Daily Blog, (September 19, 2024) available at <https://www.pon.harvard.edu/daily/conflict-resolution/conflict-resolution-strategies/>

is, the topics are merely off-limits in specific circumstances. Therefore, it is critical to carefully consider the potential benefits of a negotiation that would enable you to uphold your moral convictions. For instance, if a portion of the revenues are given to the parents' preferred charity, the sibling's objections to selling the family land may be lessened

6. CONFLICT-RESOLUTION BEHAVIOURS/STYLES⁹

Depending on the objectives of the opposing parties they may engage in a cooperation-focused or in an aggressive manner for resolution of their conflict. Two factors that affect how one responds to conflict are assertion and collaboration. Assertion is the act of confronting the other party, while collaboration is the act of trying to come up with a workable solution.

As per Thomas Kilman approach there are five possible forms of conflict handling behaviour, depending on the degree of each intention and they are as under:-



- 1) **Competition:** Competition is a win-lose method of resolving disputes. It is putting one's opinion forward at the possible price of another. Forcing or competing shows little regard for relationships and a great deal of care for one's own objectives. It is suitable, when handling issues if there are no disagreements. Additionally, it helps when decisions that are unpopular but important must be taken.
- 2) **Collaboration:** The aim of collaboration is to find a solution that may satisfy the opposing parties. It is based on being willing to stand up for one's own rights while accepting the validity of the other party's. In order to find the optimal answer, disagreements are openly expressed and alternatives are considered. Consequently, there is less confrontation and more cooperation with this approach. Collaboration is acceptable when all parties are willing to work together to discover a workable solution and desire to fix the issue. Since collaboration aims to meet the requirements of both parties, it is the most effective way to resolve disagreements. It is integrative and places a strong emphasis on relationships and personal objectives.
- 3) **Compromise:** Dealing with problems through compromise is typical, especially when the parties involved have relatively equal power and independent aims. It is predicated on the idea that relationships and personal objectives should both be taken into consideration while finding a middle ground to resolve a conflict. Both disputing sides have wins and losses during the compromise process.
- 4) **Avoidance:** The idea that conflict is undesirable and immoral is the foundation for avoidance. One should put it off or overlook it. The avoidance tactic is less confrontational and less cooperative. It is helpful in situations where the opposing party is unaccommodating due to inflexible attitudes or when problems are minor. Conflicting parties can take some time to cool down by avoiding open confrontation.
- 5) **Accommodation:** High cooperation and minimal antagonism are required for accommodation. It emphasizes similarities and downplays differences. Giving in can be a prudent move when one side acknowledges that the other is mistaken and has much to lose and little to gain. As such, they are prepared to accommodate the other party's wishes.

⁹ Reading Materials on Conflict Management, available at <https://www.fao.org/3/w7504e/w7504e07.htm>

7. METHODS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTIONS

The method for resolution of the conflict may broadly classified into categories:-

- 1) **Adversarial Conflict Resolution:** Parties to adversarial dispute resolution passionately defend their rights in light of "events in the past." The parties' relationship frequently deteriorates significantly as a result of adversarial conflict resolution. Litigation, arbitration, adjudication, complaint, and appeal are a few instances of adversarial conflict resolution. The adversarial mode of dispute resolution involves formal institutions like courts or arbitration centers and is a tight rule-bound method of settling disagreements. It approaches the disagreement from the standpoint of right or wrong. Litigation and arbitration are legally binding processes for resolving disputes in which a judge or arbitrator considers the evidence before making a ruling. While adversarial methods can lead to clear outcomes and enforceable decisions, they may also escalate tensions and create a win-lose scenario that leaves one party dissatisfied. This approach often prioritizes individual interests over collective solutions, potentially undermining relationships and future cooperation. Therefore, while adversarial conflict resolution can be effective in certain contexts, it is important to consider its impact on long-term dynamics and to explore alternative methods that foster dialogue and mutual understanding.
- 2) **Non-adversarial Conflict Resolution:** In non-adversarial conflict resolution, parties would attempt to reach a voluntary and amicable agreement to settle disputes and conflicts between them. A neutral third party assists the disputing parties in efficiently communicating and exploring their interests in a number of non-adversarial dispute resolution methods, including neutral evaluation, negotiation, consultation, conciliation, and mediation. Non-adversarial methods are less formal and are intended to resolve disputes peacefully. Non-adversarial techniques help participants comprehend one another's viewpoints and strive toward a consensus that pleases all parties by encouraging an open dialogue. This strategy not only ends the current conflict but also builds trust, fortifies bonds between people, and encourages a cooperative culture. In the end, non-adversarial conflict resolution is a useful tactic in both personal and professional contexts because it places an emphasis on enduring peace and the possibility of mutual development.

8. CONCLUSION

In personal, professional and community settings, effective conflict management is of utmost importance for fostering healthy relationships between the parties and promoting positive environment. By understanding and identifying the type of conflict and the stage at which conflict is, appropriate strategies can be used to mitigate the conflict. Strategies of effective listening open communication and collaboration at times conflict can be transformed into opportunities and growth. In case if the conflict cannot be managed or resolved amongst the parties, then non-adversarial methods should be opted first to resolve the conflict rather than straightaway opting for adversarial methods. Emphasizing empathy and mutual respect should always be taken into consideration as it helps in resolving immediate disputes and further builds a foundation for long-term cooperation and trust.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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