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Interpersonal Conflict: A Substantial Factor to Organizational Failure

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Abstract

Interpersonal conflict is conflict that occurs between two or more individuals that work together in groups or teams. This is a conflict that occurs between two or more individuals. Many individual differences lead to interpersonal conflict, including personalities, culture, attitudes, values, perceptions, and the other differences. Conflict arises due to a variety of factors. Individual differences in goals, expectations, values, proposed courses of action, and suggestions about how to best handle a situation are unavoidable. Moreover, identifying the factors which cause conflict in any organization is considered the main stage in the process of conflict management. The management of interpersonal conflict involves changes in the attitudes, behavior, and organization structure, so that the organizational members can work with each other effectively for attaining their individual and/or joint goals. The management of interpersonal conflict essentially involves teaching organizational members the styles of handling interpersonal conflict to deal with different situations effectively and setting up appropriate mechanisms so that unresolved issues are dealt with properly. The researcher recommends other scholars to identify the other factors of organizational conflict, such as identifying a list of factors causing intrapersonal conflict.

Keywords: conflict, interpersonal conflict, sources of conflict

Introduction

The conflict comprises a series of human affective states such as: anxiety, hostility, resistance, open aggression, as well as the types of opposition and antagonistic interaction, including competition.

Whether conflict within an organization is focused as desirable or not, the fact is that conflict exists and is usual culture. As human beings interact in organizations, differing values and situations create tension relationship. Conflict is viewed as a situation in which two or more individuals operating within a unit appear to be incompatible (Chuang & Tzy-Ning, 2003). Jehn and Bendersky (2003) described conflict as perceived incompatibilities or discrepant views among the parties involved.

Authors writing on organizational behavior call conflict within organizations 'organizational conflict' (OC) which can take on any of several different forms, including intrapersonal,

interpersonal, intergroup and inter-organizational conflicts. It can be noted that the prefix 'inter' means "between," whereas the prefix 'intra' means "within" (Elmagri, & Eaton, 2011).

Also, research in interpersonal conflict management has a rich tradition from both western and Asian perspectives (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2006). Many interpersonal conflict studies are based on Blake and Mouton's (1964) dual concern model. This model was theorized on the basis of the degree of the influence of self-other orientation in interpersonal conflict management, and posited five styles of integrating, compromising, obliging, dominating, and avoiding based on self-other orientations. To illustrate, integrating is a strategy involving a high self and other orientation, while avoiding is a strategy involving a low self and other orientation. Compromising is a strategy involving a medium degree of self and other orientation. Dominating is a strategy involving a high self-orientation whereas obliging is with high other-orientation.

For many years, conflict management researchers tried to determine how conflict could be reduced, eliminated and resolved in organizations. The implicit assumption was that conflict was detrimental to the organization and that it would be beneficial to reduce or eliminate conflict. More recently, researchers have asked questions that may be more useful: when, and under what circumstances, is conflict detrimental and when and under what circumstances does it benefit the organization? Thus, conflict is not assumed to be good or bad but rather it is recognized as a factor that can be both. The impetus then becomes attempting to manage conflict in a way that will ameliorate or eliminate its destructive effects while capitalizing on and enhancing its constructive effects (Williams, 2011).

According above, this study is tried to familiar interpersonal conflict, sources of conflict, and ways to overcome conflict in workplace.

Interpersonal conflict

The conflicts may be intrapersonal or interpersonal. The intrapersonal conflicts are attributed only to those who participate in the project (conflicts of values, of priorities etc). The interpersonal conflicts or the social conflicts are conflicts that manifest between people which are involved in the project or between different groups of interest. The interpersonal conflict is the process through which a person or a department frustrates another from obtaining the wanted result. The observation of this kind of conflict it is very important even from the beginning in order to be stopped, and for this a good specialist has certain clues which he can use discreetly (Nistorescu, 2006).

In the other word, interpersonal conflict is conflict that occurs between two or more individuals that work together in groups or teams (Wood et al., 2003). This is a conflict that occurs between two or more individuals. Many individual differences lead to interpersonal conflict, including personalities, culture, attitudes, values, perceptions, and the other differences (Elsayed-Elkhouly, 1996).

Personality conflict refers to very strong differences in motives, values or styles in dealing with people that are not resolvable. For example, if both parties in a relationship have a high need for power and both want to be dominant in the relationship, there is no way for both to be satisfied, and a power struggle ensues. Common tactics used in interpersonal power struggles include the exaggerated use of rewards and punishments, deception and evasion, threats and

emotional blackmail, and flattery or ingratiation. Unresolved power conflict usually recycles and escalates to the point of relationship breakdown and termination (Fisher, 2000).

Interpersonal conflict may include rude behavior but, unlike workplace incivility, interpersonal conflict would also include instances of respectful yet contentious disagreement. As noted, interpersonal conflict has long been considered a stressful job demand and as such it should positively influence job strain according to the demands-control model. That is, in the demands-control model, ''work load demands, conflicts or other stressors. . .place the individual in a motivated or energized state of 'stress','' and unless the individual can somehow take action to cope with the stressor, the unreleased energy induced by job stressors will manifest itself internally, producing distress and strain (Ilies, et al., 2011).

Jehn"s (1995) typology of interpersonal conflict includes task and relationship conflict. This view of interpersonal conflict proposes that both types of interpersonal conflict are distinct, based on the differing conceptual relationships that each is expected to have with outcomes. However, the two types of conflict perceptions may be interrelated, such that a group with many relationship conflicts may also have a high number of task conflicts and vice versa.

Task and relationship conflict can also share some conceptual overlap, as each type of conflict may affect the other. Task conflict may turn into relationship conflict if perceived as a personal disagreement. Misattributions about viewpoints or opinions could lead an individual to assume that his or her competence is being challenged and relationship conflict might result (Williams, 2011).

Sources of conflict

Conflict arises due to a variety of factors. Individual differences in goals, expectations, values, proposed courses of action, and suggestions about how to best handle a situation are unavoidable. When we add to these differences the unease arising out of a business' future, conflict often increases (Walker, 1986, p137-149).

Baron (1990; see also Mack & Snyder, 1957), after reviewing a number of recent definitions of conflict, concluded that although definitions are not identical, they overlap with respect to the following elements:

1. Conflict includes *opposing interests* between individuals or groups in a zero-sum situation;

2. Such opposed interests must be *recognized* for conflict to exist;

3. Conflict involves *beliefs*, by each side, that the other will thwart (or has already thwarted) its interests;

4. Conflict is a *process*; it develops out of existing relationships between individuals or groups and reflects their past interactions and the contexts in which these took place; and

5. *Actions* by one or both sides do, in fact, produce thwarting of others' goals (p. 199).

One of the early theorists on conflict, Daniel Katz (1965), created a typology that distinguishes three main sources of conflict: economic, value, and power.

- **Economic conflict** involves competing motives to attain scarce resources. Each party wants to get the most that it can, and the behavior and emotions of each party are directed toward maximizing its gain. Union and management conflict often has as one of its sources the incompatible goals of how to slice up the "economic pie".

- **Value conflict** involves incompatibility in ways of life, ideologies – the preferences, principles and practices that people believe in. International conflict (e.g., the Cold War) often has a strong value component, wherein each side asserts the rightness and superiority of its way of life and its political-economic system.
- **Power conflict** occurs when each party wishes to maintain or maximize the amount of influence that it exerts in the relationship and the social setting. It is impossible for one party to be stronger without the other being weaker, at least in terms of direct influence over each other. Thus, a power struggle ensues which usually ends in a victory and defeat, or in a "stand-off" with a continuing state of tension. Power conflicts can occur between individuals, between groups or between nations, whenever one or both parties choose to take a power approach to the relationship. Power also enters into all conflict since the parties are attempting to control each other (Fisher, 2000).

Additionally, according to the literature, there are innumerable origins of organizational dispute and each produces its own variety of effects. In general, there are six major sources: (i) the interpersonal disagreements that arise when one person is experiencing individual stress; (ii) the problems resulting from role conflict, a condition that occurs when there is a clash over one's role in the organization; (iii) the power struggles that pit persons and groups against one another to achieve their own selfish objectives; (iv) the misunderstandings and disagreements from differentiation*,* i.e., the clashes that arise because people approach common problems from very different orientations; (v) the interdependence requirements for

collaboration which, if not extensive and balanced between the parties, cause communication and interaction breakdowns which, in turn, if critical, lead to more intensive conflicts; and (vi) the external pressures from forces outside the enterprise that breed internal pressures as the system seeks to adapt but not to disrupt its internal order (Hotepo, et al., 2010).

The researcher prefers to incorporate all these various factors in a list which can be organized into two broad categories: *personal factors* and *organizational factors*.

Personal factors: which arise from differences among individuals. They can be divided into:

• *Individual differences:* everyone thinks, feels, looks, or acts alike, and some people simply rub us the wrong way, and we cannot necessarily explain why, personality differences can also cause conflict as well as different values and beliefs;

• *Threats to status:* the social rank of a person in a group is very important to many people in any organization. Therefore, when they feel that they will lose their status, they become a powerful driving force and struggle to maintain a desired image;

• *lack of trust:* every continuing relationship requires some degree of trust that opens up boundaries, provides opportunities in which to act, and enriches the entire social fabric of an organization;

• *Incivility*: workplace incivility occurs when employees fail to exhibit concern and regard for others or - worse yet--disrespect each other on the job. Lack of consideration can appear in many forms, including brusque greetings, sarcasm, failure to return borrowed supplies, selfishness, showing up late for appointments, untidiness, noise (such as playing a radio loudly (Elmagri, & Eaton, 2011).

Organizational factors: those stem from nature of the organization and the way in which work is organized. They can be divided into:

• *Limitation of resources:* all organizations have limited resources and attempt to find the most efficient way to divide the resources and accomplish tasks. One study found that competition for limited resources often leads to negative conflict;

• *Unfair treatment:* Some organizations have a strong status difference between managers and non-managers (employees). For example, managers have flexible schedules, personal telephone calls allowed at work, and longer lunch hours which are not available to other employees. This may lead to resentment and conflict;

• *Role ambiguity:* when an individual does not have adequate information on the nature of the work required of him in the organization or when he has a lack of determined competences or lack of defined responsibilities. This may lead him into conflict with others;

•*Role incompatibility*: in this situation conflict occur when an individual finds himself do more one role which include incompatible goals;

• *Organizational change:* with the pace of technological, political and social change increasing and the marketplace hurtling toward a global economy. Organizational changes will be over-present and then conflict will exist;

• *Contradiction of goals:* out of necessity, organization members frequently pursue goals that are somewhat different from one another and they are sometimes incompatible or contradiction, thus setting the stage for potential conflicts;

• *Information deficiency:* This source of conflict results from communication breakdown in the organization. It may be that the two employees in conflict are using different information or that one or both have misinformation. This source of conflict is not emotionally charged and after corrected, there is little resentment;

• *Environmental stress:* it is more likely that conflicts will occur in environments that are characterized by a lack of resources, by downsizing, competitve pressures, or by high degrees of uncertainty (Elmagri, & Eaton, 2011).

In another study, it has been found appropriate to classify conflict on the basis of these sources for proper understanding of its nature and implications. Following is a brief description of this classification:

 1. Affective Conflict- This occurs when two interacting social entities, while trying to solve a problem together, become aware that their feelings and emotions regarding some or all the issues are incompatible

2. Substantive Conflict- This occurs when two or more organizational members disagree on their task or content issues

3. Conflict of Interest- This is defined as an inconsistency between two parties in their preferences for the allocation of a scarce resource. This type of conflict occurs "when each party, sharing the same understanding of the situation, prefers a different and somewhat incompatible solution to a problem involving either a distribution of scarce resources between them or a decision to share the work of solving it"

4. Conflict of Values- This occurs when two social entities differ in their values or ideologies on certain issues

5. Goal Conflict- This occurs when a preferred outcome or an end-state of two social entities is inconsistent. In rare cases "it may involve divergent preferences over all of the decision outcomes, constituting a zero-sum game"

6. Realistic versus Nonrealistic Conflict- The former refers to incompatibilities that have rational content (i.e., tasks, goals, values, and means and ends). Nonrealistic conflict occurs as a result of a party's need for releasing tension and expressing hostility, ignorance, or error.

7. Institutionalized versus Non-institutionalized Conflict- The former is characterized by situations in which actors follow explicit rules, and display predictable behavior, and their relationship has continuity, as in the case of line–staff conflict or labor–management negotiations.

8. Retributive Conflict- This conflict is characterized by a situation where the conflicting entities feel the need for a drawn-out conflict to punish the opponent.

9. Misattributed Conflict- This relates to the incorrect assignment of causes (behaviors, parties, or issues) to conflict.

10. Displaced Conflict- This type of conflict occurs when the conflicting parties either direct their frustrations or hostilities to social entities who are not involved in conflict or argue over secondary, not major, issues (Rahim, 2001).

Overcome to conflict

Moreover, identifying the factors which cause conflict in any organization is considered the main stage in the process of conflict management. This idea has supported by many scholars like Robbins and Judge, 2008; Schermerhorn et al., 2005; Rahim, 2002 (Elmagri, M.I. and Eaton, D., 2011).

Conflict can be managed in different ways, some focusing on interpersonal relationships and others on structural changes. Robinson *et al (1974)* advocates that managing conflict toward constructive action is the best approach in resolving conflict in organization. When conflict arises, we need to be able to manage them properly, so that it becomes a positive force, rather than a negative force, which would threaten the individual or group.

Avoidance of the situation that causes the conflict is an example of an interpersonal approach (Robert & Jane, 1969).

Rahim (1986) noted that organizational conflict should be managed rather than resolved to enhance individual, group, and system wide effectiveness. The management of organizational conflict involves the diagnosis of and intervention in conflict at intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, and intergroup levels. A diagnosis should indicate whether there is need for intervention and the type of intervention needed. Intervention may be designed to attain and maintain a moderate amount of conflict at various levels and to enable the organizational members to learn the styles of handling interpersonal conflict so that the individual, group, and overall organizational effectiveness are enhanced.

The management of interpersonal conflict involves changes in the attitudes, behavior, and organization structure, so that the organizational members can work with each other effectively for attaining their individual and/or joint goals. The management of interpersonal conflict essentially involves teaching organizational members the styles of handling interpersonal conflict to deal with different situations effectively and setting up appropriate mechanisms so that unresolved issues are dealt with properly (Rahim, 2001).

Conclusion

Conflicts are part of human consciousness in all aspects of life. One cannot avoid conflict, whether at home, at the office, or when watching television news. The consequences of organizational conflict reach further today than ever before as the interface between work and home blurs and organizations experiment with flatter and more decentralized structures. In addition, the complexity of conflict increases as organizations become more open and diverse. Conflict is inevitable and even desirable: "To work in an organization is to be in conflict. To take advantage of joint work requires conflict management" (Tjosvold 2008: 19). Organizational conflicts are inevitable and studies show that about 20 percent of employee time is spent on managing conflicts (Rahim, 2000).

Pawlak (1998) suggests that conflict analysis and its resolutions has an important role in private, public and political organizations, as well as in judicial and work disputes, in military operations and many other institutions. The results from the study indicate that the major cause of organizational conflicts is lack of resources.

Finally, the researcher recommends other scholars to identify the other factors of organizational conflict, such as identifying a list of factors causing intrapersonal conflict. So, the following are recommended: Managers should develop diverse but appropriate strategies to resolve and manage conflicts; efforts should be made by the management to organize seminars/workshops on organizational conflict management from time to time for the employees.

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