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Recourse to conflict management: Fostering an affirmative upshot

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Abstract

Disagreement of opinions or conflict, as we all know is an incongruity between co-workers, friends or parties exemplified by animosity and resentment. Undoubtedly in this era of cross-cultural management and communiqué, conflict has become an unvarying and inescapable constituent of any workplace that is usually fueled by the antagonism of one party to another. Occasionally, conflicts augment as employees avow their anxiety for an amplified allocation in organizational hierarchy, in terms of financial reward, endorsement, liberty, positive reception or approbation. At times the administration also involves itself in inter-office disagreement and there are moments when skirmish arises with trade unions, civil societies, government, NGOs and varied other assemblages, which ultimately lower the morale of personnel, intensifying an upsurge in malingering and shrinkage in efficiency.

It has been assessed through research that administrators spend at least twenty-five percent of their time resolving wide-ranging scuffles, which invariably disrupt the workplace productivity. Hence, in order to manage conflicts responsibly, we need to nurture a positive atmosphere in the office, which would not only escalate the output, but would also provide us an opportunity to get to appreciate an assorted ideology or plan of action, which could in due course of time lead to more reinforced affiliations.

No doubt, managing and deciphering fracas that arise in the workplace today is one of the biggest challenges for management professionals and government alike. As such, with the help of speckled evidences and conceptual data, this paper tries to argue that by training our minds to fruitfully disentangle a skirmish, we can turn a possibly disparaging condition into an occasion for ingenuity and boosted efficiency. It might be unwieldy to ones who are tenacious in their dogmas; but there are techniques for conflict resolution and this paper highlights those very approaches.

Keywords: Conflict, organization, resentment, positive atmosphere, boosted efficiency

Introduction

A conflict is a fight or dispute between people with contrasting requirements, thoughts, values, ideals, or objectives. An activity which takes place when conscious beings (individuals or groups) wish to carry out mutually inconsistent acts concerning their wants, needs or obligation (Nicholson, Michael, 1992) ^[6], conflict, especially in the organizational scenario is unavoidable; though, the consequences of clash are not preordained. In order to avoid this nonproductive domino effect, one should strive for constructive resolution which would ultimately lead to the development of a positive atmosphere in the organization. Hence, to be trained in the art of managing conflict is integral to the growth of any sector. Conflict management is the short or long-term management process which we all can use to resolve issues.

As such, this research paper tries to articulate the simple reality that when conflict is botched, it can harm the affiliation and advancement of an organization. But when handled in a considerate manner, conflict provides an opportunity for growth, which eventually intensifies the organizational serenity. This paper emphasizes the fact that by acquiring the proficiency we need for successful conflict resolution, we can endeavor to nurture an affirmative upshot in our working place.

Background

Numerous average and outsized business, trade unions, and government bureaus have some or the other forms of dispute resolution techniques, among which *negotiation*, *mediation* and *arbitration* - often called ADR or alternative dispute resolution-, are the most well-known. Often emphasis is put on rights-based complain procedures or regular face-to-face meeting across hierarchies. This may include processes like review boards and adjudication.

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Unfortunately, these mechanisms are utilized well after disputes have already escalated out of control. Shockingly, there are a number of studies that estimate that 30% to 40% of manager's daily activities are devoted to dealing with some form of conflict (Thomas and Schmit, 1976; Watson and Hoffman, 1996).

Many texts on business administration make reference to strategies used by individuals or small groups or organizations in the management of conflict. While there seems to be a broad-spectrum agreement to the research done on conflict management styles because a finite number of styles are generally identified (Blake and Mouton [1970] and Kilmann and Thomas [1975])^[3], this unity is lacking in the research concerning conflict management strategies.

Objectives

The goal of this research paper is to provide management students and corporate personnel with some conflict management techniques that can be beneficial both personally and professionally. The study believes that conflict is a natural phenomenon in a diverse society and practicing one's conflict management skills leads to more successful engagement in conflict with outcomes of relief, understanding, better communication, and greater efficiency. It also endeavors to acquaint people with some important conflict resolution skills and thereby to help individual and organizations alike, in building a more amiable atmosphere.

What is Conflict?

The word conflict has its origin in the Latin word *Conflicts*, which means "striking together with force". It implies incongruity, dissension, and friction among members of a group; interaction where words, emotions and actions "strike together" to produce disruptive effects. Conflict is a vibrant energy; it is an escalation of a disagreement, which is its common prerequisite, and is characterized by the existence of conflict behavior, in which the beings are actively trying to damage one another (Nicholson, Michael, 1992)^[6]. Initially, if not controlled, conflict may lead to scape-goating or other illogical or aggressive behavior.

On the occasion of Women's Day this year, i.e. 8th of March, 2014, Kingfisher airline's women employees had written a contemptuous open letter to the UB Group chairman Vijay Mallya, calling him "unprofessional", "inhuman" and accused him of "betraying" the employees. The conflict between the employees and the management in the airline broke out because it has been alleged that the employees have survived without salaries for 18 months and were continuously kept in the dark by Mallya. In another instance of conflict between management and the employees in recent times, on 18 July, 2012, Maruti's Manesar plant was hit by violence as workers at one of its auto factories, due to the lack of intra-factory communication, attacked supervisors and started a fire that killed a company official and injured 100 managers, including two Japanese officials and nine policemen.

In Dec, 2004 after a manager allegedly hit a worker in Honda Factory (HMSI) in Gurgaon, nearly all the workers in the factory reacted by going on strike in June, 2005. Immediately, the management replied by officially sacking 1,000 workers and locking out the strikers. It ended with the employers giving into many of the workers' demands, but in this gruesome conflict, the company lost about 1.2 billion

Rupees. On the other hand, fraternal rivalry is also old in the history of organizational conflict, and Indian businesses are hardly impervious to such quarrels. For example, firms controlled by business families such as the Chhabrias, the Nandas, the Mafatlals, the Ambanis and others have seen battles for control of power and wealth. But often these conflicts have improved efficiencies of the organizations concerned. When two or more parties are in conflict, the performance and cohesion of each party is likely to improve. In a conflict situation, an opponent's position is evaluated negatively, and group allegiance is strongly toughened, leading to increased group effort and consistency.

In any case, conflict is actually a circumstance in which people perceive a threat to their comfort. When conflict is negative or dysfunctional, attempts at resolution/s are necessary.

Types of Conflict

There are three types of conflict in the organization-*task, process and relationship* (Graves, Kelly, 2005)^[2]. *Task conflict* connotes the content and aim of the work and it arises among members of team and affects the goals and tasks they are striving to achieve. Then there is *process conflict*, which is related to how the work gets done. This form of conflict centers around, the process, procedures or methods used to reach goal. One person might like to plan much in advance while others might like to lunge in head-over-heels. *Relationship conflicts* focus on interpersonal relationship. They are directly between people and may be over roles style, wherewithal or even individuality.

On a broader scale, conflict is classified into the following four kinds, which is explicit in Table 1.

Table 1: Different Types of conflicts

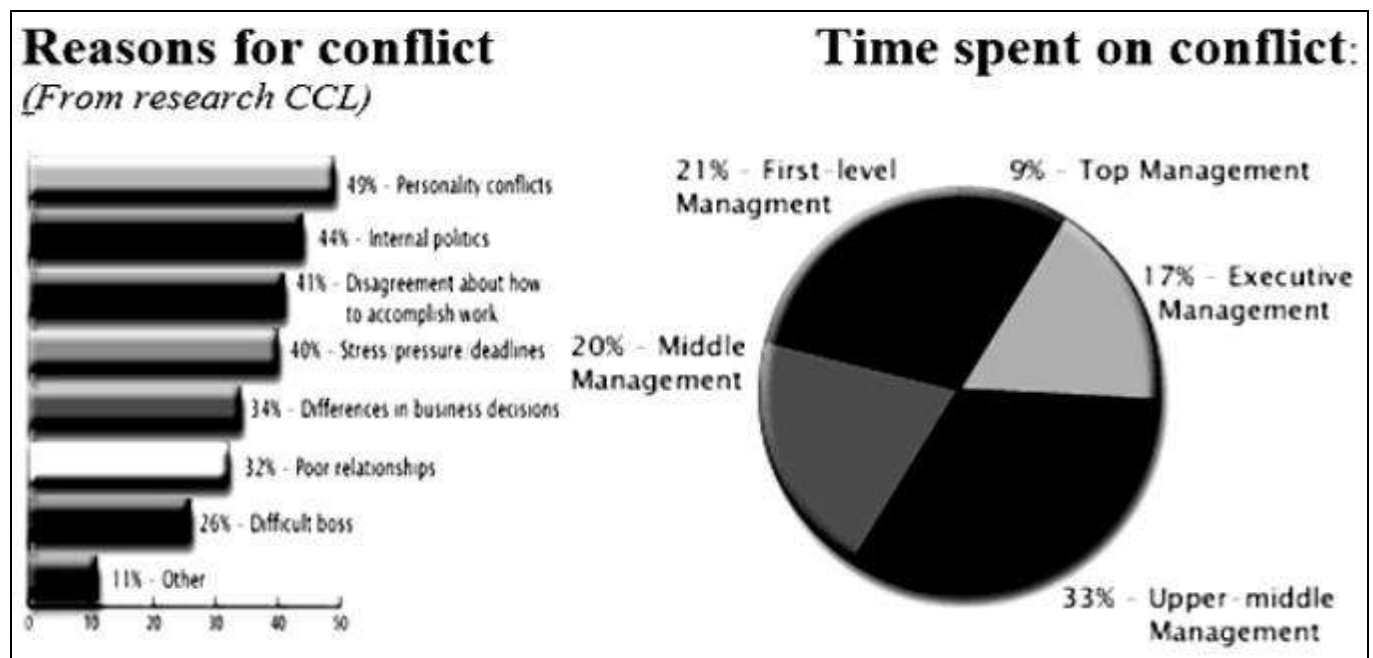


Source: Forester, John, and David Stitzel. "Beyond Neutrality: The Possibilities of Activist Mediation in Public Sector Conflicts." *Negotiation Journal* (1989)

First, we have *Interpersonal conflict* which refers to disagreement between two individuals. This occurs typically due to how people are different from one another. Second is the *Intrapersonal* conflict, which occurs within an individual. The experience takes place in the person's mind. Third we have *intragroup* conflict, which is a type of conflict that happens among individuals within a team. The incompatibilities and misunderstandings among these individuals lead to an intra-group conflict. Finally, the *intergroup* conflict takes place when a misunderstanding arises among different teams within an organization.

Origin and Causes of Conflict

Table 2: Causes for conflicts and time spent on it



Source: <http://www.hr-adrservices.com/>

The different causes of conflicts are as follows

Breakdown in Communication: If a department requires information from another department in order to do its job, and the second department does not respond to the request for information, a conflict can arise.

Cognitive disequilibrium: It arises when a person of one ethical or social system finds that in the new environment, his or her own system does not work, and that many cultural values are in conflict or contradictory.

Misunderstanding the Information: Internal conflict can sometimes arise as the result of a plain misunderstanding. If someone misreads information, that can trigger a series of conflicts.

Lack of Accountability: Organizational conflict might arise due to lack of accountability. If something has gone wrong, and no one is willing to take responsibility, this lack of accountability can start to permeate throughout the entire company until the issue is resolved.

Managerial Expectations: It is the profession of an employee to meet the expectations of his manager, but if

those expectations are not comprehended, conflict can arise.

Conflict Management

The term conflict management refers to processes and programs that teach individuals concepts and skills for preventing, managing, and resolving conflicts amiably. Conflict management is the practice of being able to identify and handle conflicts sensibly, fairly, and efficiently. Conflict management is something that companies and managers need to deal with. Conflict significantly affects employee morale, turnover, and litigation, which affects the prosperity of a company, either constructively or destructively (Lang, 2009) ^[4]. Turnover can cost a company 200% of the employee's annual salary (Maccabeus & Shudder, 2011). Since conflicts in a business are a natural part of the workplace, it is important that there are people who understand conflicts and know how to resolve them.

Methods of Conflict Resolution

Nicholson notes that a conflict is resolved when the inconsistency between wishes and actions of parties is resolved. The following Table 1.3 recounts in details the methods for conflict resolution.

Table 3: Comparison of conflict-handling styles

Approach	Objective	Your posture	Supporting rationale	Likely outcome
I. Collaborating	Solve the problem together	"This is my position, What is yours?" "I am committed to finding the best possible solution." "What Do the facts suggest?"	The positions of both parties are equally important (though not necessarily equally valid). Equal emphasis should be placed on the quality, outcome and fairness of the decision making process.	The problem is most likely to be resolved. Also, both parties are committed to the solution and satisfied that they have been treated fairly.
II. Accommodating	Don't upset the other person	"How can I help you feel good about this encounter?" My position isn't so important that it is worth risking bad feelings between us.	"Maintaining harmonious relationships should be our top priority."	Other person is likely to take advantage.

III. Competing	Get your way	"I know what's right" Don't question my judgment or authority."	It is better to risk causing a few hard feelings than to abandon an issue you are committed to.	You feel vindicated, but other party feels defeated and possibly humiliated.
IV. Avoiding	Avoid having to deal with conflict	"I'm neutral to this issue." Let me think about it." "That's someone else's problem."	Disagreements are inherently bad because they create tension.	Interpersonal problems don't get resolved, causing long-term frustration manifested in many ways.
V. Compromising	Reach an agreement quickly	"Let's search for a solution we can both live with so we can get on our work."	Prolonged conflicts alienate people from their work and engender bitter feelings.	The participants become conditioned to seek expedient rather than effective solutions.

Source: Conservation Extension Manual for Mid-Level Technicians, Local Development Training Academy, Kathmandu, Nepal. pp. 113-119.

How to Cultivate a Positive Atmosphere in the Organization as a Recourse to Conflict Management?

A positive atmosphere in the organization can be cultivated by supporting individualistic thinking or favoring individual competition. Individualistic thinking can be initiated in the group by including some group members who can freely express their views, which can encourage and stimulate others to do the same. Competition between individuals can be enhanced by acknowledging the better performers. Today's managers should be able to see emerging conflicts and take appropriate pre-emptive action. The manager should understand the causes creating conflict, the outcome of conflict, and various methods by which conflict can be managed. With this understanding, the she/he should evolve an approach for resolving conflicts before their disruptive repercussions have an impact on output and ingenuity.

Conclusion

Avoiding conflict is often the easiest way to deal with it. It does not however make it go away but rather pushes it underground, only to have it resurface in a new form. By actively resolving conflict when it occurs, we can create a more positive work environment for everyone.

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