

THE CONFLICT, ITS METHODS, AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract *The types of organizational conflict vary with different situations and relationship parties. Personal (intrapersonal) conflict relates to the individual itself, being the sole source of conflict occurring within the individual. It doesn't necessarily require the presence of other individuals. In some cases, the effects of this conflict may extend to others within or outside the organization when the individual's condition deteriorates, leading to unconscious behaviours that alter others' perceptions of them. Interpersonal conflict occurs between individuals and involves multiple parties. It can happen between a manager and their subordinates, between a manager and their deputy, or among groups of individuals due to differences in opinions and attitudes towards a specific phenomenon. This type of conflict can also occur between groups, involving various levels and encompassing a large group within the organization. Conflict might arise between different work units, departments, or organizations due to differences in viewpoints, fair resource distribution, or difficulties in defining responsibilities among different units, leading to conflict between these groups or organizations, known as 'inter-organizational conflict.' Due to the significance of this issue, we wanted to shed light on this phenomenon by focusing on its methods, tools, the reasons behind its occurrence within organizations, as well as its management strategies. Additionally, we will also focus on its effects, whether positive or negative.*

Keywords: conflict, conflict management strategies, competition, conflict resolution, conflict avoidance, effects and methods of conflict

1. Introduction

Conflict within organizations is considered a natural phenomenon, arising from the continuous social relationships built on interests, dominance, and profit margins. Conflicts form within organizations between individuals and groups. Therefore, the sociology of organization studies this phenomenon and presents sociological theories that explain conflict, its causes, and consequences.

As previously mentioned, conflict is a natural phenomenon with different methods, causes, and ways to address and mitigate its adverse effects. Conflict can be utilized within the bounds of competition to enhance organizational development and consequently improve performance within institutions.

2. Conflict management strategies

A. Competitive Approach (Assertive/Uncooperative)

This approach aims to dominate the other party by enhancing one's own interests at the expense of the other party's. It involves trying to achieve one's own interests regardless of the other party's. Competition as a conflict management style is about seeking complete control, where one party attempts to gain everything, often seen as a win/lose scenario. This approach relies on power, utilizing any available means to win over individuals to your side. Methods commonly used in this approach include argumentation, financial rewards, coercion, and exerting power.

Key uses of the competitive approach include (Jerry and Yezneski, 1999: 17):

- ✓ During emergencies when speed and decisive action are necessary.
- ✓ In situations requiring minor changes.

- ✓ After other methods have proven ineffective.
- ✓ In work relationships lacking mutual trust.

B. Accommodating or Yielding Approach (Non-Assertive/Cooperative).

In contrast to the competitive approach, this style focuses on achieving the other party's interests even at the expense of one's own. It involves being willing to give up one's position for the benefit of the other party. Some argue that adopting this accommodating approach by a management team does not necessarily indicate weakness, but rather, it reflects good management and quality leadership (Burlaud, Lemelin and other, 1999: 377).

Key uses of the accommodating approach include (Jerry and Yezneski, 1999: 17):

- ✓ When maintaining relationships is more critical for the individual.
- ✓ When demonstrating a level of generosity.
- ✓ When encouraging others to express their viewpoints.
- ✓ When wanting others to learn from their choices and actions.

C. Avoidance Approach (Non-Assertive/Uncooperative).

This approach involves neglecting both one's and the other party's interests by avoiding or sidestepping areas of conflict. Some individuals refuse to engage in conflicts that may arise within the organization. Such behavior may be described as avoidance behavior, where individuals refrain from involvement in any conflicting relationship or situation. This non-engagement can be observed through two main methods: withdrawal and non-action.

Key uses of the avoidance approach include:

- ✓ When others are better equipped to handle organizational conflict efficiently.
- ✓ When both parties consider the issue trivial.
- ✓ When the negative impact of the situation could be devastating or costly for both parties.
- ✓ When clarification of the position is needed.
- ✓ When both parties need time to cool down.

D. Collaborative Approach (Assertive/Cooperative):

This approach involves individuals neglecting their own interests and the interests of others by avoiding or evading points of conflict. Some individuals may refuse to engage in conflicts that may arise in the organization, and based on this behavior, their conduct may be described as avoidance behavior, characterized by absence or disengagement from any relationship or conflict situation. This disengagement is manifested through two main methods (Burlaud, Lemelin and other, 1996: 376):

- ✓ Withdrawal method.
- ✓ Non-action or non-involvement in the conflict.

Among the most appropriate uses of this approach are: (Jerry and Yezneski, 1999:19):

- ✓ If others can handle organizational conflict more efficiently.
- ✓ If each party in the conflict considers the issue trivial.
- ✓ If the negative impact of the situation itself could be destructive or costly for both parties.
- ✓ If there is a need for clarification.
- ✓ If both parties need an opportunity to calm down.

In addition to these five approaches, there are other methods that may be added to them, and we will mention some of them when discussing conflict management strategies. These methods serve as important tools for implementing various conflict management strategies. Choosing the appropriate model or approach that suits each situation requires scientific study and careful analysis.

3. Organizational Conflict Management Strategies

The term "conflict management approach" refers to the method used to manage conflict or the strategy adopted by one of the active parties in dealing with conflict within the organization. Participants' behaviour is influenced by the desires, inclinations, values, and goals of the involved parties. Researchers in the field of organizational behaviour have studied the behaviour used in conflicts and classified it into various methods. One of the latest models developed for analyzing conflict management methods is the model proposed by Baker Shaker (Jarallah Al-Khashali, 2004: 07).

The ability to address and manage conflicts has become a vital skill exercised by prominent leaders in the organization. It has become necessary to develop this skill to the highest possible degree because most organizations are undergoing continuous changes at faster rates than in the past, in addition to rapid environmental changes.

This can be one of the catalysts for igniting conflicts. These organizations are based on the interaction between individuals who are diverse in their personalities, behaviours, and actions due to changes in their cultural and social composition. Consequently, these interactions may lead to disagreements, which may escalate into organizational conflicts. Therefore, it is essential to work on developing the ability to accept and understand different cultural values and to create positive interactions among them.

The concept of teamwork has witnessed growing interest alongside other concepts such as Total Quality Management. Hence, there is significant interest in building integrated and collaborative teamwork.

Given that organizational conflict has become inherent in complex organizations today, effective management should strive to efficiently manage organizational conflicts before they escalate and before their negative effects reflect on overall performance and organizational effectiveness.

P. Feiffer conducted a study titled "Conflict Analysis within Different Groups in the Organization," presenting various strategies for managing organizational conflicts. A- These strategies can be elucidated as follows:

A. Avoidance or Withdrawal Strategy: In this strategy, one or more parties in the conflict deliberately divert their focus from the conflict or withdraw from confronting the other party, meaning they overlook the causes of the conflict. This strategy may employ several methods that serve as tactics to avoid conflicts, including: (Daniel Feldmann, 1998, pp. 218-225):

- ✓ Neglect or Ignoring the Conflict.
- ✓ Physical Separation of the Parties, meaning keeping the conflicting groups apart.
- ✓ Limited Interaction, allowing the conflicting parties to interact in a restricted manner.
- ✓ Additionally, the Withdrawal or Retreat approach, which is a passive and conflict-relieving method that reduces tension.

B. Pacification Strategy: This strategy aims to soothe and calm the conflict by consoling the conflicting parties to calm them down, using persuasive language to restore healthy relationships between the conflicting parties. This strategy seeks to buy time until the emotions and reactions of the conflicting parties subside and the intensity of the conflicts decreases. During this time, secondary points of contention are settled, leaving the fundamental points either intact or diminished over time (DeCieri, Walters, 1991: 276).

This strategy can be implemented through a range of interaction methods, including (Nakhlah and others, 2111: 44):

- ✓ Mitigation Approach: This involves minimizing the significance of differences between the conflicting parties and highlighting similarities and common interests.
- ✓ Settlement or Conciliation Approach: This is achieved by utilizing interpersonal skills to influence the conflicting parties to move towards finding compromise solutions acceptable to all parties.

C. Power Utilization Strategy: The objective of this strategy is to manage organizational conflicts as quickly as possible after identifying their real sources. It involves resorting to power to resolve conflicts. This strategy is used when there is no common ground that can be used as a basis for dialogue and agreement, or when the conflicting parties are uncooperative.

In this strategy, two primary approaches can be relied upon (Mohammed Qasim Al-Qaryouti, 2114: 261):

- ✓ **High-Level Authority Intervention:** This involves the intervention of a higher-ranking official in a stronger position, where the latter intervenes to order the conflicting parties to end the conflict, or else punishment will be used. The conflicting parties may be removed from their positions and assigned to other roles, or even more severe forms of punishment may be applied.
- ✓ **Political Maneuvering:** Conflicts are typically dealt with using this approach by redistributing power between the conflicting parties.

This strategy often takes less time than other strategies, but it may leave negative effects on individuals due to disregarding their objections to various situations. Conflicts managed or addressed using this strategy may resurface, surprising the organization's management with new conflicts. Therefore, this strategy should only be used in managing organizational conflicts when all other methods and strategies have failed.

D. Confrontation Strategy: This strategy is one of the conflict management strategies in organizations. It involves managing existing conflicts and resolving the situation by relying on an understanding of the real causes of the conflict. This is achieved by presenting facts among different parties or sides of the conflict, analyzing them, and attempting to identify the common interests of the conflicting parties. The strategy focuses on using organizational communication patterns between workers and employees, exchanging perspectives, sharing ideas, and emphasizing the organization's higher goals through regular meetings or gatherings. (Musa Al-Lawzi, 1999: 99).

This strategy is implemented through a set of methods or tactics used as confrontation approaches, including (DeCieri and Wall:1996: 280).

- ✓ **Employee Exchange:** Increasing communication and understanding between different groups by exchanging workers and employees for a period of time (job rotation). Those who have been changed to work in other positions or roles will become familiar with other groups and convey their impressions and ideas about them to their original groups. The purpose of this method is to understand and absorb the function of the other party.
- ✓ **Common Higher Goals:** These are extremely important goals that require conflicting individuals to focus their attention on them to ensure the organization's survival and continuity. When it comes to the survival and continuity of the organization, conflicts become trivial or irrelevant altogether (Al-Qurayuti, 2002: 260).
- ✓ **Formal Confrontational Meetings for Problem Solving:** This method aims to provide these groups with the opportunity to present their viewpoints and discuss differences. Discussions in these meetings focus on identifying and analyzing problems and finding various possible solutions.

In addition to these methods, there are other strategies such as:

- ✓ **Alliance Strategy:** Cooperation among all parties to achieve common ideas and bridge multiple perspectives.

Redesigning the Organizational Structure: This involves reducing overlapping tasks between different groups and clearly defining the levels of work for each group.

However, some researchers and thinkers interested in organizational behavior consider these strategies insufficient for effectively managing organizational conflicts. Therefore, they add other strategies, such as:

- ✓ **Mediation Strategy:** This strategy relies on the use of a neutral third party with influence and impact on the conflicting parties. The mediator can play a role in settling and managing conflicts by mediating between the conflicting parties (Afifi and Al-Geneini, 2002: 335).
- ✓ **Negotiation Strategy:** This strategy involves direct engagement between parties to study points of disagreement carefully and make efforts among all to find solutions to each issue and settle existing conflicts. (Beard and Pastor, 2000: 193) It is used when conflicts have led to losses for various parties (Ghani and Hilal, 2001: 119).
- ✓ **Arbitration Strategy:** This strategy is resorted to after exhausting the efforts of all parties involved in the conflict and after various previous strategies have failed to find a settlement. (Beard and Pastor: 183-183) Arbitration involves a set of measures and means to settle conflicts, usually carried out by an official body delegated by the conflicting parties to avoid specialized courts. The decisions of this body are binding on the parties involved in the conflict.

Ultimately, using one or more of these strategies helps the organization avoid many problems that may escalate. Therefore, it preserves its growth, development, and continuity in the business world. Failure to address and manage conflicts positively will lead to the organization's fragmentation, negatively affecting its activities and functions, reducing individuals' motivation to work, weakening performance and efficiency, and increasing costs or declining revenue as a result.

2. Enhancing innovation and creativity: Effective organizational conflict opens up new horizons for management by encouraging subordinates to come up with new things that may include ideas, solutions, products, services, or methods. This fosters innovative thinking and the development of new ideas, making the organization more adaptable to its surroundings.

- ✓ **Conflict as a form of communication:** Resolving conflicts may create new and permanent avenues for communication, deepening trust, providing information, and facilitating its flow. Inadequate communication channels within an organization can lead to contradictory decisions and misunderstandings, often serving as a significant cause of conflict. Thus, managing conflict effectively can lead to improved communication between all members of the organization, enhancing coordination and trust.
- ✓ **Meeting psychological needs:** Conflict may provide an opportunity to satisfy the psychological needs of some individuals, especially those with aggressive tendencies. By using motivational techniques, management can leverage organizational conflict to recognize and reward departments, sections, or individuals with outstanding production, efficiency, or innovation, thus channeling their aggression positively for the benefit of the organization.
- ✓ **Fostering constructive competition:** Conflict can foster healthy competition among parties involved, leading to the development of alternative and improved work methods, problem-solving approaches, and strategies. It encourages individuals to question, discuss, review values, beliefs, and work, promoting personal and organizational growth through constructive competition (Al-Haniti and Faleh, 1993: 32).
- ✓ **Building experience for conflict resolution:** The occurrence and recurrence of personal conflicts allow management to identify their causes and patterns, gaining valuable experience for resolving conflicts effectively in the future. This accumulated experience contributes to the continuous improvement of conflict resolution processes within the organization, fostering a healthier organizational climate (Mehdi, Susan; Mohamed, Waheeba; Hussam, Ismail, 2000: 230).

- ✓ **Generating new ideas and behaviors:** Disagreement fosters new ideas that work to replace undesirable behavior with behavior acceptable to all. Each individual in the group adopts an approach aimed at gaining the greatest satisfaction from the group, resulting in the generation of new ideas due to their differing opinions and proposals. This leads them to replace their undesirable behaviors with ones that satisfy everyone (Al-Kharb and Mohammed, 2006:119).
- ✓ **Enhancing group cohesion in conflict with other groups:** When in conflict with other groups, the internal conflicts within a group can aid in developing its internal cohesion. The personal conflicts within a group can transform into a unified force to confront other groups, thereby strengthening the group's internal cohesion.
- ✓ **Fostering mutual satisfaction between leaders and subordinates within departments:** Effectively managing and addressing conflicts can result in a mutual sense of satisfaction between leaders and subordinates within departments. Positive conflict management and resolution can lead to a sense of fairness in the management's actions toward all parties involved, thereby enhancing mutual trust between leaders and subordinates, which positively impacts the organization as a whole (Adib and Mohammed, 1994: 94).
- ✓ **Generating additional energy for individuals:** Even if the outcomes are not constructive, conflict can awaken and motivate individuals. Positive organizational conflict stimulates parties involved and provides them with energy and capabilities for action, fostering a competitive atmosphere. Senior management can harness this energy from conflict and channel it into a positive force, transforming it into benefits and positive outcomes for the organization and its members (Refai, Basyouni and Ali, 2004: 484).
- ✓ **Key factor in organizational survival and change:** Positive organizational conflict helps organizations avoid problems and, therefore, evolve and survive. It facilitates adjustments in management objectives, policies, or any element of organizational work to adapt to changing environmental conditions. Conflict stimulates organizational change by prompting modifications in organizational goals, policies, management methods, and areas of activity, enabling adaptation and response to environmental changes.
- ✓ **Tendency towards autocratic leadership:** In situations of severe conflict and when threats are perceived, democratic leadership methods become less attractive and accepted. Members of the group prefer strong and decisive leadership capable of issuing orders, making decisions, and handling difficult situations (Johns, 1984: 445).
- ✓ **Increasing commitment to organizational goals and discussing conflicting viewpoints:** Open dialogue and allowing the discussion of conflicting viewpoints result in the flow of new ideas and constructive opinions from conflicting parties. This leads to the identification of multiple solution alternatives, creating a climate of self-confidence among different managerial levels and boosting their morale. It fosters a sense of management's concern for discussing proposals and different viewpoints, encouraging them to present constructive suggestions that lead to commitment to the organization's goals (Dris, Thabit; Al-Mursi, Gamal, 2004: 496).
- ✓ **Improving decision quality:** Sometimes, conflict leads to better decision quality compared to decisions made under normal circumstances due to competition and rivalry. Organizational conflict fosters positive competition among parties involved, resulting in new opinions and proposals. It develops their capabilities and creates innovative and renewing initiatives aimed at developing the organization in its various activities.
- ✓ **Increasing productivity and work growth:** Proper management of organizational conflict transforms the energy generated by conflict into a positive force, rather than a negative one. The goal is not to eliminate conflict but to leverage it to convert this

energy and ideas from conflicting parties into benefits and positive outcomes for the organization and its members. Among the positive effects of conflict is alerting managers to evaluate work policies and procedures, motivating individuals to demonstrate their abilities and convince management of their capabilities. In other words, conflict can be utilized as long as it is controlled and directed in the right direction to be a constructive factor rather than a destructive one.

2. Negative Effects of Conflict:

A. On the Individual Level within the Group:

- ✓ Feelings of frustration and inadequacy: Individuals may feel frustrated due to their inability to satisfy a need, emotion, or achieve a goal despite their efforts. This frustration can lead to anger, ultimately damaging the individual's psyche and motivation, potentially leading them to leave the organization (Mustafa and Ahmed, 2000: 441).
- ✓ **Consumption of management effort and time:** Conflict can consume the effort and time of management in addressing it rather than benefiting from it in productive activities.
- ✓ Impeding cooperative work within the organization: Conflict can hinder collaborative work within the organization. (Mehdi and Waheb, 2000: 232)
- ✓ **Erosion of trust and confidence:** Conflict can lead to a lack of trust and confidence among employees, widening the gap between conflicting parties within the organization.
- ✓ **Dominance of personal interests over common goals:** Conflict may prioritize personal interests over organizational goals (Madhoun and Al-Jazrawi, 1995: 197)
- ✓ Manipulation of information and dissemination of malicious rumors: Individuals may resort to distorting and spreading rumors to harm the other party, ultimately damaging the organization.

On the Group Level:

- ✓ **Shift from participative to authoritative leadership styles:** Conflict between groups may lead leaders to shift from participative to authoritative leadership styles, reducing employee morale.
- ✓ **Increased hostility towards opposing groups:** Competing groups may view each other as enemies, fostering hostility and undermining professionalism and ethics (Idris, Thabit and Al-Marisi, 2002: 497).
- ✓ **Weakened communication between groups:** Conflict may weaken communication between groups, affecting decision-making quality and customer satisfaction levels (Idris, Thabit and Al-Marisi, 2002: 498).
- ✓ **Intensive monitoring of other groups' activities:** Conflict may lead to increased monitoring of other groups' activities, often with a negative bias (Idris, and Al-Marisi, 2002: 498).
- ✓ **Extreme focus on individual interests over organizational goals:** Conflict can drive each party to prioritize their interests over the organization's overall goals, leading to decreased productivity, dissatisfaction, negativity, and reduced cooperation, possibly resulting in organizational strikes (Idris, Thabit and Al-Marisi, 2002: 498).

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