

MANAGING CONFLICT AT WORKPLACE

“An eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind”

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Abstract:

The paper discuss the types and causes of conflicts arising in workplaces and how the management should employ reconciliation as conflict management, it also comprises best solution along with its caveats , and explain why it works best for solving conflicts in any organization.

Conflict management is the practice of recognizing and dealing with disputes in a rational, balanced and effective way. It is the process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing the positive aspects of conflict.

The aim of conflict management is to enhance learning and group outcomes, including effectiveness or performance in organizational setting

- **Need of conflict management**

- To bring effectiveness and performance in an organizational
- To increase employee morale
- Control turnover
- Regulate litigation

- **Light on a term Conflict**

"Conflict in an ever-present process in human relations"

By: Loomis and Loomis

“Conflict is the process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party”

"It is the interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities"

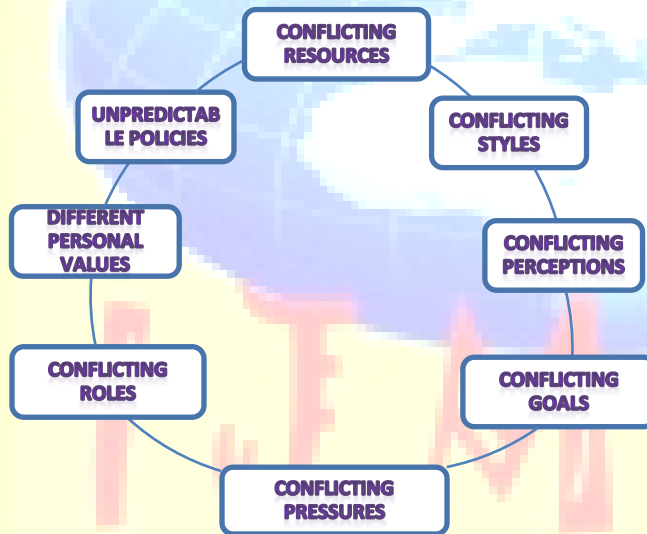
- **Causes of conflict**

"The fear of difference is dread of life itself"

Follett

According to psychologists Art Bell and Brett Hart, there are eight common causes of conflict in the workplace

The eight causes are:



1. Conflicting Resources

Employees need access to certain resources – whether these are office supplies, help from colleagues, or even a meeting room – to do jobs well. When more than one person or group needs access to a particular resource, this type of conflict can occur.

Prevention: use techniques such as **Win-Win Negotiation** or the **Influence Model** to reach a shared agreement.

One can also help team members overcome this cause of conflict by making sure that they have everything they need to do their jobs well. Teach **how to prioritize** their time and resources, as well as **how to negotiate** with one another to prevent this type of conflict.

If people start battling for a resource, sit both parties down to discuss openly why their needs are at odds. An open discussion about the problem can help each party see the other's perspective and become more **empathic** about their needs.

2. Conflicting Styles

Everyone works differently, according to his or her individual needs and personality. For instance, some people love the thrill of getting things done at the last minute, while others need the structure of strict deadlines to perform. However, when working styles clash, conflict can often occur.

Prevention: To prevent and manage this type of conflict in a team, consider people's working styles and natural **group roles** when one build a team.

One can also encourage people to take a personality test, such as the **Myers-Briggs Personality Test** . This can help them become more accepting of other people's styles of working, and be more flexible as a result.

3. Conflicting Perceptions

All of us see the world through our own lens, and differences in perceptions of events can cause conflict, particularly where one person knows something that the other person doesn't know, but doesn't realize this.

If the team members regularly engage in "turf wars" or gossip, it might have a problem with conflicting perceptions. Additionally, negative performance reviews or customer complaints can also result from this type of conflict.

Prevention: An effort should be made to eliminate this conflict by communicating openly with a team, even when one have to share bad news. The more information is share with the people, the less likely it is that they will come up with their own interpretations of events.

4. Conflicting Goals

Sometimes we have conflicting goals in our work. For instance, one of our managers might tell us that speed is most important goal with customers. Another manager might say that in-depth, high-quality service is the top priority. It's sometimes quite difficult to reconcile the two!

Prevention: Whenever one set goals for the team members, he should assure that those goals don't conflict with other goals set for that person, or set for other people.

5. Conflicting Pressures

Conflicting pressures are similar to conflicting goals; the only difference is that conflicting pressures usually involve urgent tasks, while conflicting goals typically involve projects with longer timelines.

For example: We often have to depend on our colleagues to get our work done. However, what happens when we need a report from our colleague by noon, and he's already preparing a different report for someone else by that same deadline?

Prevention: If one suspects that people are experiencing conflict because of clashing short-term objectives, reschedule tasks and deadlines to relieve the pressure.

6. Conflicting Roles

Conflicting roles are similar to conflicting perceptions. One team member may view a task as his or her responsibility or territory. But when someone else comes in to take over that task, conflict occurs.

For example: Sometimes we have to perform a task that's outside our normal role or responsibilities. If this causes us to step into someone else's "territory," then conflict and power struggles can occur. The same can happen in reverse – sometimes we may feel that a particular task should be completed by someone else.

Prevention: If it is suspected that team members are experiencing conflict over their roles, explain why these tasks or projects are assigned to each person. The explanation could go a long way toward remedying the pressure.

7. Different Personal Values

When our work conflicts with our personal values different Personal Value, conflict can quickly arise.

For example: Imagine that our boss has just asked to perform a task that conflicts with our ethical standards. Shall we do as our boss asks, or refuse? If refuse, will we lose our boss's trust, or even our job?

Prevention: To avoid this in a team, practice **ethical leadership** i.e. try not to ask a team to do anything that clashes with their values.

8. Unpredictable Policies

When rules and policies change at work and we don't communicate that change clearly to our team, confusion and conflict can occur.

In addition, if one fails to apply workplace policies consistently with members of your team, the disparity in treatment can also become a source of dissension.

Prevention: When rules and policies change, make sure that these are communicated exactly what will be done differently and, more importantly, why the policy is changing. When people understand **why the rules are there** , they're far more likely to accept the change.

Once the rules are in place, strive to enforce them fairly and consistently.

- **Types of Conflicts**

1. Conflict within the individual:

Conflict within an individual arises when a person has to choose between two equally desirable alternatives or between two equally undesirable goals.

The conflict within the individual is usually value related, where role playing expected of the individual does not conform to the values and beliefs held by the individual.

For example: A police officer may be invited to his brother's wedding where he may find that some guests are using drugs which are against the law. It may cause conflict in his mind as to which role he should play – as of a brother or as of a police officer.

2. Interpersonal Conflict:

Interpersonal conflict involves conflict between two or more individuals and is probably the most common and most recognized conflict. This may involve conflict between two managers who are competing for limited capital and manpower resources.

This conflict can become further acute when the scarce resources cannot be shared and must be obtained.

For example: Similarly, if there are two equally deserving professors and they are both up for promotion, but only one of them can be promoted because of budget and positional constraints, and then this could result in interpersonal conflict between the two professors.

Another type of interpersonal conflict can relate to disagreements over goals and objectives of the organization. For example, some members of a board of directors of an organization may want to have dress code while others may find this proposal useless thus causing interpersonal conflict among the members of the board.

In addition to conflicts over the nature and substance of goals and objectives, the conflicts can also arise over the means for achieving these goals and objectives.

For example, two marketing managers may argue as to which promotional methods would result in higher sales. These conflicts become highlighted when they are based upon opinions rather than facts. Facts are generally indisputable, resulting in agreements. Opinions are highly personal and subjective and may provide for disagreements and criticism.

3. Conflict between the individual and the group:

All formal groups and informal groups have established certain norms of behavior and operational standards which all members are expected to adhere to. This type of conflict is between the manager and a group of subordinates or between the leader and the followers. A manager may take a disciplinary action against a member of the group causing conflict with the group and this may result in reduced productivity. An individual member may want to remain within the group for social needs but may disagree with the group goals and the methods to achieve such goals.

For example if a group is going on strike for some reasons, some members of the group may not agree with these reasons or simply may not be economically able to afford to go on strike, thus causing conflict with the group.

4. Intergroup conflict:

An organization is an interlocking network of groups, departments, sections or work teams. The intergroup conflicts are not so much personal in nature as they are due to factors inherent in the organizational structure.

One of the most common conflicts is between the line and the staff members of the organization. The line managers may resent their dependence on staff for information and recommendations. The staff may resent their inability to implement directly their own decisions and recommendations. This interdependence causes intergroup conflict. These inter-unit conflicts can also be caused by inconsistent rewards and differing performance criteria for different units and groups

For example: sales people who depend upon their commission as a reward for their efforts may promise their customers certain quantity of the product and delivery times which the production department may find impossible to meet thus causing conflict between the two units.

Similarly, intergroup conflict may arise between day shift workers and night shift workers who might blame each other for anything that goes wrong from missing tools to maintenance problems.

5. Inter-organizational conflict:

Conflict also occurs between organizations which are dependent upon each other in some way. This conflict may be between buyer organizations and supplier organizations about quantity, quality and delivery times of raw materials and other policy issues.

Such conflict could also be between unions and organizations employing their members, between government agencies that regulate certain organizations and the organizations that are affected by them.

● **Difference between disputes and conflict**

Disputes	Conflict
A dispute is a disagreement over a particular issue between two people or groups. A dispute is a short-term occurrence. A common disagreement at work might be who gets to work the best shift, for instance. If a dispute	Conflict results from continual disputes as the frustration level rises, according to the Beyond Intractability Project. If two workers continually dispute one another over their tasks, for example, they may begin to see each other as

arises over hours because employees get to choose them, management will resolve the dispute by assigning their shifts. The incident will not affect their work throughout the day, however.

stubborn, aggressive or hostile and develop a mutual dislike of one another. This can increase their disputes and eventually result in full-blown conflict over their work methods or a conflict on a personal level.

- **Conflict management**

Conflict management is the process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing the positive aspects of conflict. The aim of conflict management is to enhance learning and group outcomes, including effectiveness or performance in organizational setting (Rahim, 2002, p. 208). Properly managed conflict can improve group outcomes.

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.

- **Conflict Reconciliation**

Conflict triggers strong emotions and can result adversely like feelings, employee inefficacy, and discomfort. When handled in an unhealthy manner, it can cause irreparable rifts, acrimony, animosity and break-ups. But when conflict is resolved in an effective and healthy way, it increases understanding of one another, builds trust, and strengthens the relationship bonds.

- **Methods to Resolve conflict**

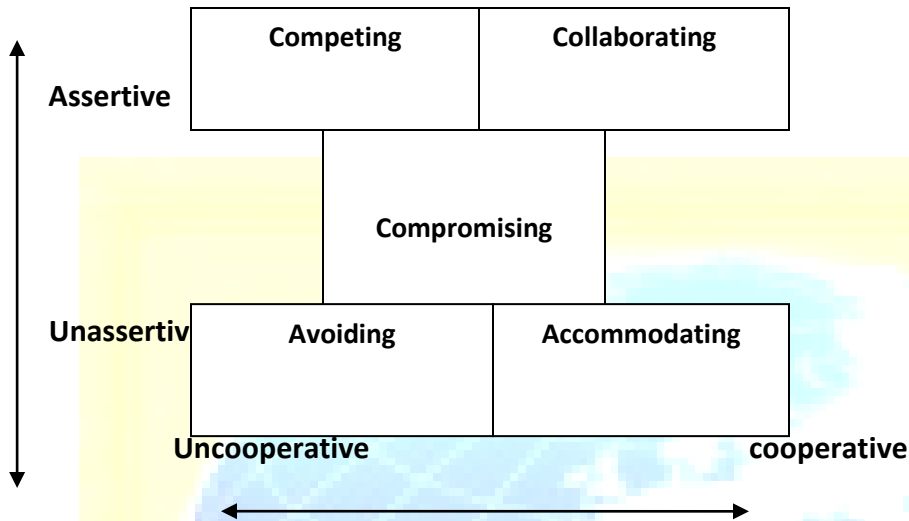
There are two ways of meeting difficulties: You alter the difficulties or you alter yourself meeting them.

Phyllis Bottome

The fact that conflict exists, however, is not necessarily a bad thing: As long as it is resolved effectively, it can lead to personal and professional growth.

In the 1970s Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann identified five main styles of dealing with conflict that vary in their degrees of cooperativeness and assertiveness. They argued that people

typically have a preferred conflict resolution style. However they also noted that different styles were most useful in different situations. Thomas and Kilmann's styles are as follows



1. **Collaborative style:** This style is useful when an organization need to bring together a variety of viewpoints to get the best solution. People tending towards a collaborative style try to meet the needs of all people involved. These people can be highly assertive but unlike the competitor, they cooperate effectively and acknowledge that everyone is important.

➤ **Possible advantages of collaborating**

- a) Leads to solving the actual problem
- b) Leads to a win-win outcome
- c) Reinforces mutual trust and respect
- d) Builds a foundation for effective collaboration in the future
- e) Shared responsibility of the outcome

➤ **Caveats of collaborating**

- a) Requires a commitment from all parties to look for a mutually acceptable solution
- b) May require more effort and more time than some other methods. A win-win solution may not be evident
- c) For the same reason, collaborating may not be practical when timing is crucial and a quick solution or fast response is required

d) Once one or more parties lose their trust in an opponent, the relationship falls back to other methods of conflict resolution.

2. **Avoiding style:** People tending towards this style seek to evade the conflict entirely. This style is typified by delegating controversial decisions, accepting default decisions, and not wanting to hurt anyone's feelings. It can be appropriate when victory is impossible, when the controversy is trivial, or when someone else is in a better position to solve the problem. However in many situations this is a weak and ineffective approach to take.

➤ **Possible advantages of Avoiding:**

- When the opponent is forcing / attempts aggression, one can choose to withdraw and postpone the response until they are in a more favorable circumstance than us to push back
- Withdrawing is a low stress approach when the conflict is short
- Gives the ability/time to focus on more important or more urgent issues instead
- Gives the time to better prepare and collect information before acting

➤ **Some caveats of Avoiding:**

- May lead to weakening or losing the position; not acting may be interpreted as an agreement. Using withdrawing strategies without negatively affecting one's own position requires certain skill and experience
- When multiple parties are involved, withdrawing may negatively affect the relationship with a party that expects the action

3. **Competitive style:** This style can be useful when there is an emergency and a decision needs to be made fast; when the decision is unpopular; or when defending against someone who is trying to exploit the situation selfishly. People who tend towards a competitive style take a firm stand, and know what they want. However it can leave people feeling bruised, unsatisfied and resentful when used in less urgent situations.

➤ **Possible advantages of Competitive style**

- a) May provide a quick resolution to a conflict
- b) Increases self-esteem and draws respect when firm resistance or actions were a response to an aggression or hostility

➤ **Caveats of Competitive style**

- a) May negatively affect the relationship with the opponent in the long run
- b) Cannot take advantage of the strong sides of the other side's position
- c) Taking this approach may require a lot of energy and be exhausting to some individuals

4. **Compromising style:** This is a traditional method and is a process of bargaining wherein the parties negotiate on the basis of give and take to arrive at some agreement. People who prefer a compromising style try to find a solution that will at least partially satisfy everyone. Everyone is expected to give up something and the compromiser himself or herself also expects to relinquish something.

Possible advantages of compromise

- Faster issue resolution. Compromising may be more practical when time is a factor
- Can provide a temporary solution while still looking for a win-win solution
- Lowers the levels of tension and stress resulting from the conflict

➤ **Caveats of using compromise:**

- May result in a situation when both parties are not satisfied with the outcome (a lose-lose situation)
- Does not contribute to building trust in the long run
- May require close monitoring and control to ensure the agreements are met

5. **Accommodating style:** Accommodation is the process of suppressing differences existing between parties to the conflict and emphasizing common interest. It is appropriate when the issues matter more to the other party, when peace is more valuable than winning. This style indicates a willingness to meet the needs of others at the expense of the person's own needs.

➤ **Possible advantages of Accommodating**

- In some cases it will help to protect more important interests while giving up on some less important ones
- Gives an opportunity to reassess the situation from a different angle

➤ **Caveats of Accommodating**

- There is a risk to be abused, i.e. the opponent may constantly try to take advantage of one's tendency toward accommodating. Therefore it is important to keep the right balance and this requires some skill.

- May negatively affect the confidence and ability to respond to an aggressive opponent
- It makes it more difficult to transition to a win-win solution in the future
- **A Conflict Resolution Process**

The resolution system an organization uses depend on the problems it deals with as well as its compatibility with other organizational structures. Procedure can vary on two dimensions:

- a) **Degree of formality**-high formality means explicit statements concerning appealable issues, steps to follow, and roles and responsibilities of parties
- b) **Degree of interdependence from management**-Are workers forced to complain to their superior, or does the system use people parties?

The most independent system would use an outside arbitrator, and may even provide independent legal counsel to employees.

Maccoby and Studder identify five steps for managing conflict.

Anticipate – Take time to obtain information that can lead to conflict.

Prevent – Develop strategies before the conflict occurs.

Identify – If it is interpersonal or procedural, move to quickly manage it.

Manage – Remember that conflict is emotional

Resolve – React, without blame, and learn through dialogue.

- **Conclusion**

Everyone in an organization needs to feel supported, understood and nurtured, but the ways in which these needs are met vary widely. Differing needs for feeling comfortable and safe create some of the most severe challenges in our personal and professional relationships. To conclude the article we can quote this famous quote

*“Conflict can and should be handled constructively; when it is, relationships benefit. Conflict avoidance is *not* the hallmark of a good relationship. On the contrary, it is a symptom of serious problems and of poor communication.”*

Harriet B. Braiker

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